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# Book Reviews by qpooqpoo

# Review of “The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town, 1922-1945” (Jul 13 2023)

*The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town, 1922-1945*  
by William Sheridan Allan  
Brattleboro, Vermont: Echo Point Books, 2014.

*No higher being will come to save us,*

*No God, no Kaiser, nor Tribune.*

*If we want freedom from our misery,*

*We'll get it only by ourselves.*<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, the Nazis are not to be admired for their silly ideology. To them, humans were merely cogs in the social machine. Their quest to mold society according to their vision through force—to pluck the weeds so as to make the perfect garden—was just a repeat of what civilizations have tried and failed to do from the dawn of history. It was doomed from the start, just as is every attempt to rationally plan and control the development of a society. Nevertheless, the Nazis were astonishingly effective in their *single, clear, and concrete* short-term goal of attaining ultimate political power in Germany, and their experience can offer some useful lessons to those committed to ending the industrial system in order to save humanity and wild nature. This title is a good place to start. Its main takeaways can fall under four categories:

- (i) The Nazi’s profit-driven organizational model;
- (ii) The Nazi’s use of hierarchy and discipline;
- (iii) The internal culture of the Nazi party, including its composition; and,
- (iv) The cultural environment surrounding the Nazi party.

(i) The Nazi organization operated like a business, or, more precisely, a pyramid scheme. Within the pyramid, the local group was the most basic unit, operating in

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<sup>1</sup> German Socialist version of the International, reproduced as an epigraph to Chapter 6. (p. 69).

towns and counties. The next step up, the regional offices (known as “Gau”), oversaw the local groups, who in turn were overseen by the Nazi national headquarters in Munich. The Gau would supply material and directive to a local group that the local group would pay for out of funds collected from membership dues and organized events and other fundraising in its locale. Cash in advance was the rule for everything that the local group received in return from the Gau—from printed propaganda material to speaker’s fees. While each Nazi-party member had to pay dues each month, it was the local group that was in charge of collecting them. Roughly one third of the dues could be retained by the local group. The rest had to be turned over to the Gau, which in turn had to give over half of what it received to the national Nazi-party headquarters. The requirement of making these fixed monthly remittances kept every level in the Nazi party “keenly interested in accurate membership records.”<sup>2</sup>

Nazis who missed three payments were automatically expelled from the party. New members also had to pay an initiation fee (which could be waived and would vary depending on income) as well as be assessed periodically for campaign contributions. There were also collections for a whole host of projects—elections, newspaper printings, fund-raising of various kinds exacted by regional and national leadership.<sup>3</sup> Individual party members couldn’t personally profit from the party’s income. However, the expectation was that the competition for status and rank within the hierarchy would return the investment of individual members by granting them positions within the government, or else other satisfying or lucrative favors within the new system once the Nazi’s came to power.<sup>4</sup>

The main source of income came from mass meetings: from the admissions tickets for, and the donations taken during or after, a party event. These were primarily political speeches by trained and able Nazi speakers (but would often be supplemented by or could include other performances and activities). Therefore, the local group became very conscious of the quality of its meetings and its speakers—especially their entertainment value. The key to the whole system “was the method of adapting mass meetings, with appropriate speakers, to local interests and concerns. Because what worked was immediately measurable in terms of attendance and contributions, effective themes and speakers were repeated while ineffective activities could be discarded.” (p. 82). There was thus constant feedback for what kinds of activities worked best. This became a self-reinforcing system and allowed for a great degree of autonomy among the various group leaders: “Local groups were given almost complete freedom of action as long as they produced money, members, and votes.” (p. 82). The Nazis kept close

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<sup>2</sup> Page 79.

<sup>3</sup> “[M]embers of the Nazi party were exploited for all they could bear.” (p. 80).

<sup>4</sup> “Although the local leaders did not personally get to keep the profits generated from meetings and other sources, profits meant that funds were then available to be applied locally for further recruiting activity, and the leader who was successful in building backing for Nazism could expect promotion within the Nazi hierarchy.” (p. 81)

track of whoever came to their meetings and afterward worked hard to get such people to join, contribute to, or to at least vote for, the NSDAP (p. 78).

(ii) Much like a franchise corporation sets the rules and priorities of the franchisees, the Gau's propaganda department formulated exact rules on how to run the meetings: "with a checklist for everything from the advertising to the use of the SA (Stormtroopers). There was even a model script with the actual words to be used at all points in the meeting plus blank spaces for the name of the town, the speaker, etc." (p. 81); "There were guidelines and pamphlets for door-to-door campaigning, slides and films, leaflets to pass out at meetings or stuff into mailboxes, posters for billboards...and gummed stickers to be pasted onto walls. ...advice on how to compose personal invitations to 'discussion evenings' and even a breakdown of the expected costs for staging a mass march." (p. 81).

The more the local group held profitable meetings and recruited members, the more propaganda materials and other resources it could obtain to buy new materials to recruit new members and supporters.

(iii) The Nazi movement was a middle-class movement. Most were middle-class and had business experience. They were not usually lower- or working-class. This translated into a remarkable competitive advantage over the Nazi's political rivals, in particular the Social Democrats (SDP), whose roots were primarily working-class. The skill and energy of the Nazis appeared mysterious at a distance but became understandable once you looked at the local level.

The "NSDAP [Nazi party] was the first mass movement of the middle class... [they] understood how to keep account ledgers... were familiar with fundraising, inter-office memos, equipment leasing, etc." (p. 143). As a result of this pre-existing orderliness, frugality, disciplined task-solving and industriousness, Nazi solutions were often "ingenious, flexible" (p. 78), while exhibiting "vigor and thoroughness" (p. 202).

By virtue of their superior organizational efficiency, the Nazis had the potential to outwork their opposition, and this was a potential they vigorously realized: it appears, in the period from 1929-1932, that they simply were more hard-working, putting on more meetings, organizing more marches and more events, than the opposition.

(iv) (A) The Nazi's could get away with more violence and intimidation:

In the 1920s and 1930s, the world was a far freer place, on an individual day-to-day basis, than it is today, simply by virtue of the relative technical primitiveness of the society of that time. This greater freedom was reflected by the higher degree of individual-on-individual violence and roughness. It would be reasonable to say that their society was thus more "dynamic" in the sense that, by virtue of this greater freedom, individual associations could crop up and evolve with a far greater degree of vigor and autonomy than they can today. In addition to this natural proclivity to more violence and roughness, the specific political turmoil of the period—especially from 1929-1932—led to such a high frequency of political violence that the violence simply became normalized within the culture. Added to this, of course, was the fact that many of the Nazi's were veterans of WWI and were already accustomed to a

great deal of violence themselves. They were also far more disciplined, tough, and conditioned to respect hierarchy than the average person today. Most of these cultural attributes were likely common to the great revolutionaries throughout history, and its implications for a revolution by modern individuals against the industrial system needs further exploration. It is obviously a far more difficult task for a modern revolutionary movement operating within an advanced industrial setting to establish the culture of fear and intimidation that surrounded the Nazis.

By 1932, political violence “was becoming a permanent institution... Between July 1 and July 20 there were 461 political riots in Prussia in which eighty-two people were killed and over four hundred seriously injured.” (p. 119). Exchanges of taunts and insults became a daily occurrence. Scuffles and fights increased in frequency—and they could often be brutal.

Prison terms were extremely light: for assault with a deadly weapon, prison sentences ranged from two to six months. (p. 121). “[T]he courts were generally lenient... so that hotheads on both sides were encouraged.” (p. 146). This stands in stark contrast to advanced industrial societies today, where individual-on-individual violence is, and must be, ruthlessly suppressed for the sake of the smooth and orderly functioning of the industrial system.

(B) The Nazis provided what their society wanted:

Most people wanted radical answers, and they were tired of eternal political strife. They wanted hard, sharp, clear leadership: “When politics becomes a matter of vilification and innuendo, then eventually people feel repugnance for the whole process. It is the beginning of a yearning for a strong man who will rise above petty and partisan groups.” (p. 90).

The Nazi’s “presented the appearance of a unified, purposeful, and vigorous alternative.” (p. 86). The people also wanted complete answers. The Nazis provided a holistic worldview that stood completely apart from the contemporary society and promised a brighter future. “The SPD [Social Democrats] emphasized the evils of Nazism but had no alternative program... It...could not promise a better future.” (p. 145).

People need to be impressed by pageantry and controversy. The Nazi’s provided this, both for their inherent propaganda value, but also to satisfy the yearnings of the population for entertainment and escapism during the dark economic times.

The Nazis “drew the tortured masses into the mammoth meetings where one could submerge oneself in the sense of participating in a dynamic and all-encompassing movement geared toward radical action in fulfillment of every need.” (p. 134).

(C) The Nazis established themselves as the most radical group.

The Nazis “had established themselves as both respectable and radical.” The Nazis “appeared vigorous, determined and, above all, ready to use radical means...” (p. 92) [emphasis added]. The Nazis had “stolen the banner of radicalism.” (p. 145) [emphasis added].

“The Nazis had to prove... that they were willing to use the power apparatus in a ruthless and effective way.... The initial investment of terror would multiply itself

through rumor and social reinforcement until opposition would be looked upon as wholly futile.” (p. 184).

The Nazis were consistently portrayed in local media as violent and vicious.

(D) The Nazis exploited pre-existing hatreds.

The Nazis exploited the pre-existing social hatred of the Socialists.<sup>5</sup> In the same way, anti-tech revolutionaries can point out that contemporary leftists are simply agents of the technological system, attempting to force the system’s morality and conditioning down everyone’s throat in order to grow the system more efficiently. In doing so, anti-techers may be able to redirect strong pre-existing animosities and social currents against the techno-industrial system itself.

The Social Democrats of the Weimar era can plausibly be analogized to today’s leftist mob—Antifa, SJWs, BLM, etc.—and more broadly speaking, the perceived oppression of institutionalized political correctness. Popular opinion in Germany at the time was that the Social Democrats were simply not serious revolutionaries. Maybe this perspective is paralleled by many people today who view leftist activism as largely a “play-act” (also: “Live Action Role Playing” or “LARPing”); collective non-rational outbursts of frustration that ironically enhance the status quo rather than undermine it.

Interestingly, anti-Semitism was largely absent in Northeim and was not promoted. Undoubtedly it was exploited throughout Germany in other locales, but the culture of Northeim, the specific town studied in this book, did not lend itself to this. This stands as a good example for the adaptability and self-correcting nature of the Nazi propaganda system.

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<sup>5</sup> Most of the middle class at the time were “bitterly opposed to the Socialists.” (p. 296).



# Review of “The Party’s Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies” (Jul 15 2023)

*The Party’s Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies*  
by Richard Heinberg  
Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2005.

”The analysis needed today must take into account ecological principles, energy-resource constraints, population pressure, and the historical dynamics of complex societies.”<sup>1</sup>

This book hasn’t aged well. Many people will remember the time when ”peak oil” was a thing. It had its hay-day in the first decade of the 21st century: a group of scholars, amateur researchers and writers converged in a ”movement” over their belief that industrial society was nearing collapse or sharp decline because of depleting oil (or access to oil), to which industrial society was overwhelmingly and inexorably dependent. Industrial society was running head-on into *limits* they told everyone—specifically ecological and technological limits (the amount of remaining geologic oil, and the ability to efficiently access that oil), and it would soon begin its death throes as all aspects of the industrial system that were dependent on cheap and abundant fossil fuel energy would begin to shut down; the cost/benefit ratio of oil extraction would no longer make it worth the effort. However, the ”movement” has died out: Peak oilists still exist, but they’re hard pressed to give interviews. Most of the ”institutes” and organizations they founded have floundered or else cease to exist; many of them won’t comment on the matter at all. Many have shifted focus to environmental damage and ecological limits in general. Others still cling to the notion, but the decisive moment is shifted further out into the future: they’ll still tell you it’s *near*; pushed off into some vague future. So, what happened? In short: technology continued to advance. Namely, the peak oilists based their notions on a faulty understanding of technology and its inter-relation with society at large. They did this partly out of naïveté about the fundamental nature

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<sup>1</sup> Pages 208-209. With respect to this analysis, this book fails where Theodore Kaczynski’s *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How* succeeds.

of the techno-industrial system, and partly due to unconscious desires—born of legitimate ecological concerns over the destruction of wild Nature—that the industrial system should soon collapse.<sup>2</sup>

Both the discovery and the rate of extraction of oil are greatly dependent on technology. *Technology is the independent variable.* A single quote illustrates how Heinberg overlooks this fact:

”As we have to drill deeper to find oil, and as we have to move into more difficult and expensive areas in which to operate, the ratio of [energy] profit to energy expended declines.”<sup>3</sup>

This outlook is typical of peak oilists. It’s their most significant commonality:

”Technology cannot change the geology of the reservoir, but technology (in particular horizontal drilling) can help to produce faster, but no more... ”<sup>4</sup>

This perspective seriously overlooks the way in which technology changes the efficiency of energy extraction through time, and the way energy demand changes along with increased technological efficiency in general. Demand evolves due to changes in the efficiency of the industrial system’s use of this energy. This changing demand due to changing efficiency in oil use corresponds with changing efficiency in oil extraction—*the technological system is an integrated whole and the systems that allow for more efficient use are interconnected with the systems that allow for more efficient expansion.* The net result is that the total price to profit ratio of oil extraction can more or less remain the same *provided* that the technological system is able to continually advance in efficiency. In this respect, while it may certainly run hard up against limits that threaten its expansion into, and transformation of, the natural world (and indeed it is currently experiencing serious social and environmental problems threatening serious

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<sup>2</sup> This seems to be the case especially for Richard Heinberg and John Michael Greer. Whether or not peak oil leads to collapse, it still promises a radical transformation of society that opens the way to the realization of social dreams. For Heinberg, this seems to be a moment of crisis where advanced society is forced to adopt more ”sustainable” ways of life. For Greer, who follows a mystic tradition, the dream is a return to a more primitive experience. The oil era is just a historical blip, they told us: The horrific destruction of the environment, the soulcrushing modern wage-slavery, the spiritual emptiness, the depression, anxiety, and purposelessness of the modern experience—these are all manifestations of humanity’s temporary experiment with fossil fuels, which was on its way out. There would be great chaos and suffering in the near term, but when the dust had settled, the earth at least could relax, and humans could be free.” “[I]n the post-petroleum world, humankind will discover a way of living that is more psychologically fulfilling as well as more ecologically sustainable than the one we have known during the industrial age.” Page 5 [Emphasis added].

<sup>3</sup> Page 127.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Laherrere, as quoted by Michael Lynch, ”What Ever Happened to Peak Oil?” Forbes Magazine, June 29, 2018. Online at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelyllynch/2018/06/29/what-ever-happened-to-peak-oil/?sh=6896cb59731a>

destabilization), there is no reason to believe it will hit serious barriers as abruptly as the peak oilists believe.

To better visualize this process, let's take a look at some specific examples. The more efficient the industrial system becomes in extracting a resource, the quicker it moves to extract that resource. The search, extraction, storing, processing, and transportation of oil—the entire cycle from ground to gas-station pump—becomes more efficient as efficiency within the entire system increases. There are opportunities for efficiency in all areas, including areas which are as yet unknown, even radical and novel techniques allowing subtler and more profound capacities. These are, among other things: improved techniques of radar and 3D mapping, machine learning, artificial intelligence, robotics, nanotechnology, techniques of chemical processing, techniques in engineering (more fuel-efficient engines and improved transmissions, more efficient logistics and supply chain mapping and coordination, computer-aided navigation), etc., etc. All the while, human behavior and human resources continue to be more efficiently regulated as the technological system advances, as with techniques of surveillance, behavioral conditioning, organization, education and propaganda, etc. As the technological system has grown, it has allowed for the more efficient extraction of oil and its more efficient use—maintaining a level of energy availability which is stable enough for the system's continued growth.

There is enough oil and coal in the ground—simply in existence—to supply enough energy at current usage rates for many hundreds of years. This is bad enough for the people who rightfully understand that the industrial system must soon collapse if there is to be anything left of the planet, let alone human freedom and dignity. Nevertheless, we must also keep in mind that this process is not limited to one set of natural resources. Providence didn't simply declare that oil, coal, uranium, etc., would be the only raw materials to confer energy to industrial society. As the technological system grows, there is no reason to believe that this trend of resource discovery and extraction won't continue, and there won't be other—as yet inconceivable—“resources” of the earth that can be utilized for energy.

The greatest concern is that this process of transformation of the earth and humans should continue unabated, such that nothing in the natural and wild world is left free of technological disruption. The sum total of all the competing and interacting systems artificially exploiting more and more resources is already devastating for nature and humanity, in the future it will be catastrophic. As described by Kaczynski in *Anti-Tech Revolution*, Chapter Two:

”Like biological organisms, the world's leading human self-prop [self-propagating] systems exploit every opportunity, utilize every resource, and invade every corner where they can find anything that will be of use to them in their endless search for power. And as technology advances, more and more of what formerly seemed useless turns out to be useful after all,

so that more and more resources are extracted, more and more corners are invaded... ”<sup>5</sup>

The peak oilists’ failure to fully appreciate the technology problem is likely due in part to psychological denial, and partly due to education and propaganda (in the technological system, thinking about technology itself is for obvious reasons discouraged; the thinking itself is perverted or the focus on technology is distracted or diverted). But their failure to appreciate the technology problem is also a predictable side-effect of certain historical ideological currents. While the industrial system was still in its infancy, during the period of Adam Smith and, later, Karl Marx, it appeared as though technology had at its disposal unlimited resources. At the very least, most people didn’t bother to think seriously about long-term implications for resources. Thus, we have the ”cornucopian” mindset:

”For decades most economists have been united in proclaiming that resources are effectively infinite... humanity is growing a measurably brighter future with each passing year as it reproduces, transforms its environment, invents new technologies, and consumes resources.” (p. 134).

But as the industrial system advanced well into the 20th century, and its negative ecological effects became widely known, we began to hear:

” ... from ecologists, petroleum geologists, climatologists, and other scientists who tell us that resources are limited, that the earth’s carrying capacity for humans is finite, and that the biosphere on which we depend cannot continue to absorb the rapidly expanding stream of wastes from industrial civilization.” (p.134).

Thus, a particular mental construct developed, which ultimately formed the rough intellectual framework for ”environmentalism,” that being: technological civilization is a phenomenon *apart* from nature and is pushing up hard against it. Technological civilization had to learn to live in harmony with nature, or else nature would be destroyed, and take with it civilization, much like a parasite killing its host. Because destroying technological civilization to save nature was never considered, the goal was to ”plan,” ”organize,” ”control” civilization, such that it lived in ”harmony,” or ”balance,” or ”sustainability” with nature.<sup>6</sup> But this perspective overlooks a crucial point: technology *transforms* wild nature to suite its needs, always. Technological civilization need not

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<sup>5</sup> Theodore Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech Revolution*, Scottsdale, AZ: Fitch & Madison Publishers, 2016, p. 59. For a more systematic account of this process, refer to pp. 60-64 therein.

<sup>6</sup> And thus we come to the present paradigm or world view, which in this case is best reflected by the ”founder” of peak oil itself, the geologist Marion King Hubbert: ”The world’s present industrial civilization is handicapped by the coexistence of two universal, overlapping, and incompatible intellectual systems: the accumulated knowledge of the last four centuries of the properties and interrelationships of

necessarily run hard up against natural limits, because the technology itself has the capacity to bend and alter these limits; *to transform nature and society* in such a way that the transformed society can continue to be sustained (at least in the short term) by a transformed environment. Running out of oil? Adapt by transforming more of wild nature and controlling more human behavior: more desert ecosystems converted into solar farms, more and more corners and crevices of the earth's crust invaded and exploited by more efficient extraction, more natural bio-matter is farmed and converted to "biofuel," more education and propaganda conditioning humans to act and think more efficiently and to adapt to the new technological environment etc. etc. The old paradigm thus fails to consider the evolutionary dynamics of the industrial system, and the nature in which it transforms wild nature to suit its ends.

Our current social system (determined by our level of technology) provides the mechanism by which this adaptation can most efficiently take place (currently, the free-market economy and price signals, but perhaps a more efficient system for technological growth and adaptation will evolve to supersede it).

Unfortunately, the full realization of this process, and what it implies for continued technological growth, is still lost on (or ignored by) the vast majority of environmentalists: In their minds, either the day of doom continually recedes beyond the horizon, or industrial civilization is truly making progress on the promise of living in harmony with nature. Thus, the old paradigm is maintained. A systematic awareness of the techno-social system and how it evolves and interacts with nature and society is bypassed.<sup>7</sup>

It may happen that the industrial system runs up against serious difficulties and it begins to break down. *But it is not certain that these difficulties won't be resolved* before human society is so transformed that no freedom or dignity remain, and all wild

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matter and energy; and the associated monetary culture which has evolved from folkways of prehistoric origin." (p. 99).

This is astonishingly naïve! But it's also typical of the mental framework that scientists and technicians continue to maintain to this day. The "properties and interrelationships of matter and energy," namely, the accumulating knowledge and advancing practice of science and technology are deeply dependent on, and interrelated with, "the associated monetary system." Hubbert and his scientific peers can't simply decouple science and technology from society. It's easy to see why they do: they can happily continue on with their "surrogate activities," pursuing their careers, their fulfillment, their excitement and their status and prestige, while conveniently disavowing any of the unintended, detrimental developments which inevitably result from technology's advance. By artificially separating the practice of science from society, they can render their convenient little scapegoats ("Capitalism," "politicians," the "monetary system" etc.) and continue on their merry way advancing technology.

<sup>7</sup> A good illustration of this is the way some peak oilists have swung away from the idea of "peak oil" supply and to embrace the notion of "peak oil" demand. In this case, alternative "green" energies are thought to be on track to mitigate or negate demand for fossil fuels. (Joe Romm, "Peak Oil Returns: Why Demand will Likely Peak by 2030," Think Progress, Feb. 22, 2016. Online at: <https://thinkprogress.org/peak-oil-returns-why-demand-will-likely-peakby-2030-86d6621c119c/#.r7czlo353>.) This is also incredibly naïve. As long as oil still can still give a net energy return on investment superior to alternatives, it will continue to be used by the entire system.

nature ceases to exist—what remaining “nature” that exists being fully subordinated by the system as just another resource. The more challenges the industrial system faces, the more it will work to push through those challenges to maintain itself, even if that means it has to sacrifice more of Nature and humanity. It is already driving like mad to “transition” into a “sustainable” system away from fossil fuels, and the more it’s threatened by natural obstacles, the more vicious and extreme its attempt at transition will become. Those of us who understand that the industrial system is a colossal evil that cannot be reformed can’t afford to sit around and hope that it breaks down in the face of natural hurdles. We must do our best to force it to collapse sooner rather than later, so that wild Nature can recover.

Facing the problem of technology head-on, and being rational in our calculus, is psychologically painful. It would be (relatively) more comforting to think that the natural world would soon impose hard limits on the growth of the industrial system, such that the latter would be forced to either seriously contract or collapse. Unfortunately, an honest and *accurate* appraisal of the *facts* doesn’t provide for this notion. As Heinberg himself unwittingly offers: “It is self-delusional to dwell on hopeful images of the future merely to distract ourselves from facing unpleasant truths or to avoid having to take difficult actions.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Page 274.

# Review of “Factfulness: Ten Reasons We’re Wrong About The World—And Why Things Are Better Than You Think” (Oct 17 2023)

*Factfulness: Ten Reasons We’re Wrong About The World—And Why Things Are Better Than You Think*

by Hans Rosling

New York, NY: Flatiron Books, 2018.

“[T]he technoindustrial system simply defines the term “high standard of living” to mean the kind of living that the system itself provides, and the system then “discovers” that the standard of living is high and increasing. But to me and to many, many other people a high material standard of living consists not in cars, television sets, computers, or fancy houses, but in open spaces, forests, wild plants and animals, and clear-flowing streams. As measured by that criterion our material standard of living is falling rapidly.”

—Theodore Kaczynski<sup>1</sup>

“People constantly and intuitively refer to their worldview when thinking, guessing, or learning about the world. So if your worldview is wrong, then you will systematically make wrong guesses.”

—Hans Rosling<sup>2</sup>

One of the most dangerous aspects of the technological system is its capacity to pervert our ability to think clearly about it. Propaganda, education, various organizational conditioning—all of these evolve among competing systems in a technological

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore John Kaczynski, *Technological Slavery*, Vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition, Scottsdale, AZ: Fitch & Madison Publishers, 2019, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Rosling, *Factfulness*, p. 13

world. Systems that best manage behavior by conditioning members to have beliefs and attitudes most conducive to technical efficiency are the systems that expand in their power, and at the expense of less manipulative systems. The totality of this process results in many intelligent and well-meaning individuals who utterly fail to appreciate the full implications of a particular social system. (This is one of the reasons why astute scholars of social revolutions throughout history observe that revolutions are rarely seen coming, but after they do happen, they seem obvious and reasonable in hindsight.)<sup>3</sup> The most pathetic victims of this process are those scholars in the humanities who enthusiastically defend the techno-industrial system.

Hans Rosling was a member of the global technocratic elite, the pro-progress business, governmental, and academic class committed to global “development.”<sup>4</sup> He grew up in mid-20th century Europe, an environment steeped in the belief in progress. He holds this worldview, but it’s clearly failing: the industrial system has entered a period of severe social and environmental crisis and most people have grown hopelessly pessimistic.<sup>5</sup> The system must act quickly to reprogram people’s attitudes lest they turn to disruptive and damaging ideas or are seduced by alternative ideologies. Enter *Factfulness*, the epitome of the latest wave of pro-technology propaganda to hit bookshelves. They all follow the same formula: marshalling a seemingly endless parade of data, together with the testimony of countless experts and institutions, to “prove” that technological progress is indeed making the world “better.” This propaganda is designed to be self-aggrandizing and self-reinforcing.

The argument is in the title: People today feel as though the world is getting worse because they have the wrong *facts*, and this is a bad thing. If people think the situation is getting worse, they may lose hope in the institutions that are promoting technological growth and “development.” But the facts don’t show the world getting worse, Mr. Rosling tells us. It is “objectively” getting better. His job is to correct everyone’s wrong impressions with his “objective” facts. There’s just one catch: Rosling and the techno-cheerleaders set the standards by which to measure improvements, and these standards are based on values that are so deeply entrenched in our technological culture through generations of education and propaganda that they’re now simply taken for granted: they are axioms. But they can no longer be. People are rightly anxious about the future as a result of rapid and uncontrollable effects of technology upon their societies and the natural world. They know that this developing “Brave New

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<sup>3</sup> “Indeed, it becomes possible to explain the origins of a revolution in such detail that its onset seems, in retrospect, inevitable. Yet at the same time, when revolutions do occur, they usually come as a complete shock to everyone...” Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2014, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Out of people in 30 countries polled by Rosling, 50% or more felt that the world is getting worse. (p. 50). “I meet many such [pessimistic] people, who tell me they have lost all hope for humanity.” (p. 69).

<sup>5</sup> “When people wrongly believe that nothing is improving, they may conclude that nothing we have tried so far is working and lose confidence in measures that actually work.” (p. 69).



World” Rosling and his friends are ushering in is terrifyingly evil. But because they’ve been so inundated in technological cultures their whole lives, few of these people can even conceive that these negative developments are *caused* by technological growth *itself*. Rosling’s argument is directed toward this narrow vision, giving himself and his readers the (relatively) comforting things *they think* they want to hear: People are disturbed by a *lack* of technological growth throughout the world, and not from the full implications of technological growth itself. This is a rather brilliant sleight of hand, as it deflects attention from the full social, psychological, and environmental implications of technological growth, and back onto the positive assumptions readers retain from their prior conditioning. Technology itself is thus safely guarded against scrutiny, supplanted by distractions. The problem is, to make this trick work, Rosling is forced to commit glaring errors and omissions. He has to cherry-pick data that support his worldview, downplay the negatives, and exaggerate positives.

To wit, he paints a ridiculous caricature of less-industrialized ways of life that relies on what can only be willful ignorance of current anthropological knowledge. And, as with all pro-progress worldviews, he conveniently overlooks the wide range of pre-industrial lifestyles. He focuses on low-income sedentary cultures while ignoring pastoralists, nomads, and primitive hunter-gatherers. We’ve come a long way from Thomas Hobbes’s ill-informed “nasty, brutish, and short” view, but the supposedly “objective” Rosling ignores these facts. According to him, life before modern technology was “misery and deprivation” (p. 31), a “bad old times” (p. 90) spent in “dreadful conditions” (p. 22), but thanks to modern technology, “almost everybody has escaped *hell*... billions of people have escaped misery and become consumers and producers on the world market...” (p. 53). “[W]e humans have always struggled hard to make our families survive, and finally we are succeeding” (p. 55) with “fundamental improvements” due to the “secret silent miracle of human progress.” (p. 51). Some lower-industrialized cultures may be severely lacking relative to “advanced” and “developed” societies today, even by non-technological standards, but to then conclude that on the whole these developed societies are unquestionably better places to live than in all pre-industrial societies throughout history is extremely myopic. For if we consider the freedom and happiness of people, and the sustainability and integrity of their environments, then the situation changes dramatically.

”The Pirahãs show no evidence of depression, chronic fatigue, extreme anxiety, panic attacks, or other psychological ailments common in many industrialized societies.” ...

”I have never heard a Pirahã say that he or she is worried. In fact, so far as I can tell, the Pirahãs have no word for worry in their language. One group of visitors to the Pirahãs, psychologists from the Massachusetts Institute

of Technology's Brain and Cognitive Science Department, commented that the Pirahãs appeared to be the happiest people they had ever seen.”<sup>6</sup>

“The Mbuti ”were a people who had found in the forest something that made their life more than just worth living, something that made it, with all its hardships and problems and tragedies, a wonderful thing full of joy and happiness and free of care.”<sup>7</sup>

This is just to barely scratch the surface. There are hundreds of examples in the historical record showing true primitive living to be far different from the one-sided cartoon parody Rosling portrays.

Furthermore, his low-income definition apparently only includes people living within or on the edges of industrial civilization. He fails to consider people who have lived completely independently of industrial society. In 1800, the majority of people lived in “extreme poverty,” according to Rosling, and the picture he paints is of all of humanity living like modern Indian slum dwellers. But his definition of “poverty” apparently includes a way of life that is simply not integrated into the global economic system. This would include all self-sufficient aspects of living, including low-tech agricultural/pastoral systems of bartering and hunting and gathering. If you grow your own food locally, fetch water from a local spring, and hunt wild-game, if you live in any way low-tech no matter how satisfying and sustainable life is, then you are living in “hell” according to Rosling, and the technological system must “save” you. This is ridiculous of course, and it flies in the face of the intense satisfaction—the freedom, dignity, personal fulfillment, and environmental balance—that most of these cultures provide.

It gets worse. According to the author, by 2100 the world population will reach 11 billion, an increase of 3.4 billion people from our current population of 7.6 billion. To put that into perspective, this is more than the populations of India and China combined (currently 2.8 billion). How the author conceives of giving 11 billion people on earth the same material living standards as the most “developed” nations is quietly left ambiguous. Technology will have the answer he assures us—somehow: “We must put our efforts into inventing new technologies that will enable 11 billion to live the life that we should expect all of them to strive for.” (p. 221). Here we’ve crossed over into the realm of fantasy. Rosling blithely glides over the fact that our current world situation—with just a fraction of 7.6 billion people living in fully “developed” or “level 4” categories—has caused *colossal* damage to the natural world, and now threatens catastrophic, unmitigated existential risks to life on the planet not just now, but *into the future, forever*. When people express to Rosling their fear of overpopulation, for many it’s not only the overcrowding, per se, that is their concern. What concerns them is the cost to the planet of the sum total of maintaining all of these new people at a certain material “standard.”

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Everett, *Don't Sleep There Are Snakes*, New York, NY: Random House, 2009, p. 278.

<sup>7</sup> Colin Turnbull, *The Forest People*, New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1962 p. 26.

Assuming that Rosling and his peers were able to fit 11 billion on the earth, all living like middle-class Swedes, it would undoubtedly come at a tremendous cost. Everything has a cost, after all, and willfully blinding oneself from the costs doesn't make them go away. The worldwide population would have to be ruthlessly regimented, regulated, and ordered so as to be "sustainable", because 11 billion tech-enabled humans living *under-regulated* lives would entail disaster. This would mean the complete end of anything resembling human freedom—far and away worse than what we already see in "developed" countries—and it would require omnipresent global control and management. *Wilderness* and *wild country* will have been destroyed to make way for the massive industrial and agricultural infrastructure needed to support the population. And this is to say nothing about the tremendous and absolutely appalling misery in "advanced" countries: the depression, anxiety, loneliness, suicide, stress, and frustration<sup>8</sup> which have been consistently shown to grow in pace with economic and technological development. The situation here is truly abysmal. But, of course, to Rosling these are simply temporary "problems" which only more technology and development can "solve."<sup>9</sup> This is because Rosling and his circle will be there to "manage" everything, to "treat" everyone, for the "benefit of humanity" of course. With such people shaping perception and attitudes we are unfortunately barreling full speed ahead toward this nightmare vision every day.

All of the supposed improvements Rosling cites, and all of the graphs detailing upward trajectories, are simply reflections of the growth of the techno-industrial system. Each metric might reflect a positive trend in its own right, but it can't be viewed in pure isolation. The world is comprised of interconnected forces—causes and effects. If you dig deeper into Mr. Rosling's isolated "improvements" and take the entire system into account, you find much more disturbing trends. Take the decline in violence as an example: Of course Rosling, as a member of the technological elite, would laud non-violence as one of the most important moral codes. Violence most threatens to disrupt the orderly, efficient functioning of the modern social machine he worships. For technology to progress smoothly, violence must be monopolized by the industrial system and individual-on-individual violence must be ruthlessly suppressed and replaced with a docile, meek, obedient population. To Rosling, the general trend toward less violence "is the most beautiful trend there is" (p. 114). "The world was once mostly

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<sup>8</sup> The evidence is overwhelming. Here we only cite: Joseph, Soumya, "Depression, anxiety rising among U.S. college students," *Reuters*, Aug. 29, 2019, online at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-mental-undergrads/depression-anxiety-rising-among-us-college-students-idUSKCN1VJ25Z>; Tavernise, Sebrina, "U.S. Suicide Rate Surges to a 30-Year High," *New York Times*, April 22, 2016, online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/22/health/us-suicide-rate-surges-to-a-30-year-high.html>

<sup>9</sup> The solutions proposed are either total insults to human dignity, or further expand the power of the industrial system at the expense of human freedom and autonomy (e.g., ref. to Kaczynski, "Industrial Society and Its Future," ¶ 145). Amid a bevy of crises caused by prior and present technology, the faith that these progress-cheerleaders demonstrate is truly astounding: pushing readers to share their wild faith that the looming technologies to come will not heap upon us infinitely more problems, but only solve those as yet recognized and unresolved.

barbaric and now it is mostly not” (p. 113). First, the world only *seems* less barbaric on an individual level, but horrific violence is undertaken by organizations that, if not destroying each other in military confrontation (because their weapons are too powerful) are laying waste to the world in ruthless economic competition for survival. Non-violence is required among individuals who operate within and are dependent on these organizations, and individuals must sublimate their individual conflicts for the smooth functioning of their organizations—becoming obedient cells in vast social organisms. Second, all of this comes at a tremendous cost to individual freedom: maintaining this order requires the individual to suppress and internalize his natural hostilities and submit to regimens of education, propaganda, psychological coercion, highly-regulated and monitored living, all to a level far beyond what he has been psychologically and physically adapted to—and therefore this loss of freedom results in great misery and suffering on part of the individual, to say nothing of the costs to human dignity. But this is all lost on Rosling because...

For the technocratic class, freedom is only conceived as being those meaningless and unimportant freedoms that have no practical effect. Real freedom for individuals would threaten the smooth orderly functioning of the technoindustrial system, because the system needs humans (for now) who must operate as orderly, docile, obedient gears in the social body. “The ultimate goal is to have the freedom to do what we want.” (p. 64) says Rosling. But what exactly is this “freedom” and what can and can’t we do exactly? “Thank you, industrialization, thank you steel mill, thank you power station, thank you chemical-processing industry, for giving us the time to read books.” (p. 220). In other words, fritter away your time in leisure and pleasure-seeking. For books, Rosling would sacrifice Nature and allow the currently known consequences of industrialization, steel manufacture, electric power generation and distribution, and industrial chemical production. Of course, humans need more than media and leisure to live full, rich, and joyful lives. People need to be in control of the practical life-and-death circumstances of their lives and the numerous psycho-social maladies of our era prove that there is no sanitized replacement for such important, intrinsically fulfilling work.<sup>10</sup>

“A fact-based world-view is more comfortable. It creates less stress and hopelessness than the dramatic worldview, simply because the dramatic one is so negative and terrifying.” (p. 255). Having an errant interpretation of facts which suits your worldview accomplishes this as well. Diverging from your worldview is terrifying. And Rosling and his colleagues<sup>11</sup> are engaged in this self-delusion. It would be bad enough if these Rosling types were simply deluded buffoons, but unfortunately Rosling hints at something in his work that’s far more dangerous and insidious: If people don’t understand that the “facts” Rosling presents are good, it’s because of something wrong with their brains, he tells us. “Why do so many people’s brains systematically misinterpret the

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<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed treatment of this problem, see, e.g., Kaczynski, “Industrial Society and Its Future,” ¶¶ 33-38; *Technological Slavery*, Vol. 1 (2019), pp. 151-55, 258, 293-94.

<sup>11</sup> What we’ve said here about Rosling applies more-or-less equally to Steven Pinker, Matt Ridley, and Bill Gates among others.

state of the world? ...illusions don't happen in our eyes, they happen in our brains. They are systematic misinterpretations...most people are deluded..." (p. 14) One can imagine a future where the technological system will seek to "treat" people who draw the "wrong" interpretations of data—meaning interpretations that are threatening or harmful to the system—with various psychological or biological techniques. Having the wrong worldview (e.g., that a worsening state of Nature and human freedom is inextricably tied to technological advancement) becomes "delusional," a pathological "sickness" to be "cured." Rosling's compatriots would of course deny that doing something like that would be justified (*currently*). But such an arrangement is logically consistent with the direction of industrial society, and not unprecedented. History shows that time and time again powerful people will resort to such barbarity if they feel their power or their worldviews are being seriously tested. And they tend to act not with grudging regret, but with sincere righteousness.

The Ted K Archive

A critique of his ideas & actions



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