

We Fight for Life

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08 October 2014

Non-industrial ways of life cannot support 7 billion people, that much is certain. But, given that there are currently 7 billion people on the planet, there seems to be a gaping hole in the Luddite argument that ending the industrial-technological system is the choice those who love wild nature ought to take. And if there is not a gaping hole, critics say, then Luddism must be misanthropic. No doubt, there have been some Luddites who were misanthropic, and proud of it.¹ But I have no interest in praising those who so easily advocate for the death of so many. What are we fighting for if not for life?

With some history and a bit of inductive logic it becomes clear the general direction humans are headed for should technological progress continue unabated. So far, industrial technology² has only augmented and modified humans and wild nature; it has not operated for nature or for humans. This is because a technological system has to regulate humans and nature in order to function.³ You can't have cars without laws governing cars and roads, without a coercive system of labor to get people to work in factories, or without a cultural climate that forces youngsters to study all day to become engineers. As the system gets more complex, this trend will only get worse. Rather than medicating human beings maladapted to life in a city, the industrial system will instead technologically augment human beings maladapted to life in space-or even just a highly technological city. The extremist vanguard of this future, the transhumanists, openly admit that this is the direction they want the human race to go.⁴ But as many science fiction authors have pointed out—and how odd that their futures are actually plausible now!—this could turn out to be a disaster.⁵

If industrial society does not collapse, either through some sort of disaster or some sort of revolution, humans will find themselves in one of the possible technological futures. And even if the future is a shiny transhumanist one, it will not be one filled with life. Transhumanism advocates for the destruction of life. Granted, there are no easy answers regarding the hard limits of what constitutes a human, but maybe that is not the right point of inquiry. It is clear that, human or not, there is something fundamentally unsettling about the idea of a person with an artificial brain. And

¹ Christopher Manes is probably the poster-boy of misanthropic ecology, having written “Why I am a Misanthrope” and having callously suggested that AIDS operates as a population control mechanism.

² I speak here of industrial technology. Of course, small technologies did, for the majority of human existence, serve human and wild interests.

³ Ted Kaczynski explains this well in the section “Restriction of Freedom is Unavoidable in Industrial Society” in *Industrial Society and Its Future*.

⁴ Anything by Ray Kurzweil is indicative of transhumanism's psychopathy.

⁵ Although the term “slaves to robots” conjures up images of the Matrix, a more subtle form of slavery is a real possibility in the future. When the technological system requires a vast amount of control in order to keep human behavior in check, we can imagine some sort of advanced, oblique methods of control being used—like predictive policing or control mechanisms in the propaganda industry. But it is much more likely that large amounts of humans will continue to act in such a way that requires physical coercion through police forces and militaries, and this will likely increase as these people lose any purpose modern life has left.

beyond the philosophical questions of humanness, there is concrete reality: history has made it clear that while sometimes technological progress brings what it promises, it *always* brings unintended consequences as well. For example, if the technological system continues unabated, it will eventually make the human body incapable of defending itself from disease. This will either be through the weakening of the human immune system, the creation of superbugs or runaway laboratory viruses, or both.⁶ If this happens, then at a certain point the human race will be dependent on machines just to survive. What kind of life is that? What kind of position does this put us in? No, the transhumanists do not fight for life, they fight for the machines. This was most clearly expressed by the founder of information science, Claude Shannon, when he said, “I visualize a time when we will be to robots what dogs are to humans, and I’m rooting for the machines.”⁷

With all this in mind, we can positively say that our most rational and ethical choice is certainly *not* continuing down the road of technological progress.

Much more likely than any of our possible futures is the collapse of the industrial system. Again, we can look to history for confirmation: every advanced civilization that has existed has disintegrated relatively soon after. Granted, this is not a very strong argument that our civilization will collapse, especially since civilization is a relatively new invention, but it becomes strong once we understand *why* these civilizations have fallen.

Joseph Tainter explained some of the factors that go into collapse:⁸ for one, when a complex society confronts a problem, it tends to pile on more bureaucracy and more complexity. For example, to fix the problem of the industrial pollution of waterways, technological society built a complex filtration and plumbing infrastructure. To fix the problem of waste in industrial cities, technological society introduced waste disposal departments. This trend eventually leads to diminishing returns on investments in

⁶ Already these things are happening. Anti-biotic resistance is one of the biggest problems of the twenty-first century. And while it is probably unlikely that a virus created in a scientific lab would get loose, it only takes one mistake for this to cause a major disaster, especially since many scientists have created viruses to which there is no known cure.

⁷ Ted Kaczynski gives a few more relevant quotes in “Answer to Some Comments Made in Green Anarchist”:

> Ralph E. Gomory, the former director of research for IBM who is now president of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.. .has a suggestion for mitigating science’s task: make the world more artificial. Artificial systems, Gomory states, tend to be more predictable than natural ones. For example, to simplify weather forecasting, engineers might encase the earth in a transparent dome. (*Scientific American*, August, 1994, page 22.)

> To lengthen our lives and improve our minds, we will need to change our bodies and brains.[W]e must imagine ways in which novel replacements for worn body parts might solve our problems of failing health.Eventually, using nanotechnology, we will entirely replace our brains.The sciences needed to enact this transition are already in the making. (Marvin Minsky, *Scientific American*, October, 1994, pages 109-113.)

⁸ *Collapse of Complex Societies*, Joseph Tainter

social complexity, which is to say the energy required to run a civilization becomes impossible to acquire.

Modern technological society has already passed the point of diminishing returns. Jason Godesky offers a great synthesis of information supporting this in his collection of essays, “Thirty Theses.”⁹ The most astonishing bit explains how industrial agriculture is far, far past the point of diminishing returns because of monoculture, peak oil, and the destruction of arable land. More basically, the energy industry itself is past the point of diminishing returns, largely because it requires massive machines and infrastructure requiring oil and coal in order to get oil and coal. Eventually, one (or more) of the areas will face crisis and put all of modern civilization at risk of collapse.¹⁰

Of course, a temporary extension on the lifetime of civilizations can be achieved through innovation, which is why industrial society has come to favor capitalism as its economic model. It is also why energy companies are moving toward so-called “green energy.” Should green energy become cheap enough to produce, it will lengthen the lifetime of civilization by at least a bit. This is why the left environmentalists are so dangerous: they are fighting for innovation that could possibly lead us to the undignifying technological futures described above (that is, if the technocrats find some more efficient energy source during the extra time green energy gives civilization). Worse, still, and this is the takeaway point, they could increase the strength of the technological system (by extending the amount of time it has to perfect its control mechanisms) so that when collapse happens, industrial society takes down the entire complex biosphere with it. Of course, until the very end these same environmentalists will proclaim that they are fighting for life because “billions of people would die if we end industrial society.” Never mind that *everyone* might die if we don’t.

Now, as I wrote the sentence above, I initially put “millions” instead of “billions.” It made my heart ache to change that single letter because I can’t even conceive of what this would look like. Now, there should be no mischaracterization: an end to industrial society probably wouldn’t be abrupt, and consequently neither would the population drop (after the initial drop). But these people are living beings and members of our own species. They might even be my family—or me. To be sure, we Luddites do not throw out the term “revolution” lightly.

At this point we should consider an underlying ethical question: if collapse is most likely and would cause a population drop anyway, then why would we work for that collapse, effectively assuming responsibility for it?

There are a few responses to this. For one, it is a reach to say that a revolutionary movement would be assuming responsibility for the deaths of all those people by initiating collapse when the technocrats are the ones who got us into this mess in the first place.¹¹ Secondly, the other side will be fighting for their technological future regard-

⁹ *Thirty Thesis*, “Thesis #15: We have passed the point of diminishing returns,” Jason Godesky

¹⁰ Michael Greer explains why this is in *How Civilizations Fall: A Theory of Catabolic Collapse*.

¹¹ Regardless of the irrationality of blaming revolutionaries, many people will do so if revolutionaries aren’t careful, and they should keep this in mind. They might be able to circumvent this by targeting

less of the consequences, and regardless of what the Luddites choose to do—and we’ve seen the possible outcomes if they are successful. If for no other reason, a revolutionary movement should at least exist to combat those psychopaths. Lastly, if a collapse will lead to the deaths of many people and continued technological progress will only lead to more people and more dependence on the system, then the only way to choose life is to choose collapse. The sooner the collapse, the less people die, the more likely it is that humans can live freely again.

All this is not to say that our sole concern should be to preserve as many lives as possible. The number of people living is irrelevant if they are living unsatisfactory, distressing lives. Furthermore, there are more important things than life, as any parents would attest to. But an unaided collapse would certainly be worse than if some people were consciously pushing for it with the interests of humans and the ecosphere in mind.

All things considered, it is clear that the best choice for us to make at this point—for our freedom and the survival of the ecosphere—is to instigate and solidify collapse. It is by making this choice that Luddites can truly say that they fight for life.

industries that will indirectly rather than directly affect people’s lives. For example, by targeting GMOs and the companies and labs that produce them, revolutionaries might be able to slow down food production, which will cause food riots. These food riots will wield a far greater amount of social power than the revolutionaries could ever hope to, especially if some groups are prepared to organize people in affected areas.

A critique of his ideas & actions.



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