The Unabomber's Self-Propagation Theory

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Abstract

This paper provides a critical examination of Theodore Kaczynski's anti-technology ideology, arguing that although his core theory of "self-propagating systems" offers a logically compelling critique of technological society, it suffers from a fundamental epistemological flaw: it functions as a tautology that retrospectively labels successful entities without providing predictive or causal mechanisms, and it consequently leads to several paradoxes. In it, I attempt to demonstrate that this theoretical framework—which posits that natural selection among complex systems inevitably leads to global collapse—is not a synthetic a priori truth but a post-hoc description that cannot be falsified. I further argue that his theory as a whole is insufficiently supported by argumentation. In the final section, I provide a logical explanation of how one might scrutinize these ideas.

Introduction

Theodore John Kaczynski in his early childhood was an exceptionally gifted young individual who, from an early age, became fascinated with a hunter-gatherer lifestyle and would, with his brother David Kaczynski, spend much of his time reading various books and playing in the wilderness. Fast forward to the early 1960s, he would graduate from Harvard, then gain his PhD from the University of Michigan with an exceptional paper examining boundary functions and later go on to become an assistant professor of mathematics at Berkeley, where he would come to teach for about two years. However, his opposition to technology had already crystallized; as he later stated, "My last year at Harvard was the year when I definitely decided I was against technology."[1] He resigned from his teaching position at Berkeley and, before moving to the wilderness of Montana, set off in his car with a plan to murder a scientist.[2] In Montana, his radicalization intensified from a philosophical opposition into a vengeful hatred against technology after he became aware of the destruction of the forest. During this time he identified himself as the *Freedom Club*[3] and would come to be referred to by the FBI as the person behind various mail bombs in the Chicago Bay Area as the "Unabomber," a combination of "university and airline bomber," a name by which Kaczynski later came to become widely known. After a twenty-year campaign, in 1995, Ted Kaczynski would

[1] Theodore Kaczynski, *Unabomber in His Own Words* (Originally Titled: *The Lost Kaczynski Tapes*), 2020.
<www.thetedkarchive.com/library/oc1-unabomber-in-his-own-wordsoriginally-titled-the-lost-kaczynski-tapes-2020>

[2] Theo Slade, *Frequently Asked Questions About Ted Kaczynski,* 2023.
<www.thetedkarchive.com/library/frequently-asked-questions-aboutted-kaczynski#toc10>

[3] John H. Richardson, *Children of Ted: Two Decades After His Last Deadly Act of Ecoterrorism, The Unabomber Has Become an Unlikely Prophet to a New Generation of Acolytes,* New York Magazine, December 11, 2018.

send his manifesto, railing against modern technological society, to The New York Times and The Washington Post. He promised to desist from terrorism on condition that they publish his manifesto, so threatening continued violence they could have stopped if they didn't.[4] The FBI, after a close examination, would come to recommend to the news outlets to publish his manifesto in the hope that somebody would come to identify the paper. After the manifesto was fully printed in April 1995, it was read by members of Ted Kaczynski's very own family who would recognize his style of arguments and word choices and would later contact the police, which led to his arrest. After Ted Kaczynski's arrest, he would later be sentenced to life in prison for firstdegree murder and obstruction of properties and other misdemeanors. During this time he would come to hold various correspondences with other environmentalists and journalists and come to write other papers like *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*[5], which was rushed in 2016 due to copyright issues. In this work, he would come to perfect his argumentation and elaborate his reasoning on why we are approaching worldwide destruction and why technology must be stopped.

However, despite the ethical considerations of his means of propagating his ideas by means of violence, this is not a condemnation of Ted. All I'm doing here is examining his line of argumentation carefully. I think this is necessary because I think it's necessary to address his ideas on a more serious level—especially as those ideas are becoming increasingly mainstream, recently with the television series *Manhunt: Unabomber*[6] and the movie *Ted K*[7], and with the promised release of the next edition, I believe it is then necessary to take his ideas on a more serious level which has hereto not been done as extensively from a neutral standpoint. The only people I've been able to find who engaged in serious discussion with Ted Kaczynski himself were David Skrbina, who for a long time held a tight correspondence and contributed to *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*[8], and Ted's long-time Spanish correspondent, Ultimo, who has published a critique of *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How.* However, due to Ultimo steel-manning these ideas, I do not believe it is really a critique in a more serious manner.[9] Another reason is the ethical implication which his epistemology implies. Ted famously concluded after a long examination on what he calls the self-propagation theory that an objective revolution is necessary, which has serious ethical meanings in terms of the derived notions Ted would come to develop, which not only shows this

[4] *Excerpts from Letter by 'Terrorist Group', FC, Which Says It Sent Bombs,* The New York Times, April 26, 1995.

[5] Theodore Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How* (Fitch & Madison, 2016), 41–75.

[6] *Manhunt: Unabomber,* 2017.

[7] *Ted K,* 2021.

[8] David Skrbina, *The Metaphysics of Technology* (Routledge, 2015); David Skrbina, *A Revolutionary for Our Time,* 2010.
<www.thetedkarchive.com/library/david-skrbina-a-revolutionary-for-our-times>

[9] Ultimo, *Critique of Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How,* 2016.
<www.thetedkarchive.com/library/ultimo-reducto-a-critique-of-ted-kaczynski-s-anti-tech-revolution>

is a universal matter by the necessary response. Furthermore, I believe from a serious standpoint that Ted Kaczynski's ideas are worthy of discussion instead of condemning them by his acts of violence alone. It is clear that Ted spent a majority of his time carefully laying down his line of argumentation and developed these ideas over years while still being at Harvard until later moving to Montana, where he would come to spend even more time reading various critical authors like Jacques Ellul, whom he became obsessed with.[10] So I believe to condemn his actions because he was a madman is intellectual dishonesty and would likewise mean that we shouldn't take authors like Karl Marx and other political authors seriously.

His Core Argument

In our discussion of Ted Kaczynski's work, his most central concept is his theory of natural selection as it applies to what he calls "complex systems." He begins by introducing the concept of a "self-propagating system" (or "self-prop system" for short), which is a system that tends to promote its own survival and propagation. He states that a self-prop system does this by either 1) increasing its own size and power, or 2) giving rise to a new system that possesses its distinct traits.

Kaczynski shows that these systems are closely related to biological organisms, where groups of organisms can constitute self-prop systems—for example, a colony of ants or a pack of wolves. For humans, he concludes we see a similar pattern in nations, corporations, unions, political parties, and even distinct entities like subcultures.

He then establishes a relationship where any system, whether it propagates or not, is a functional part of a larger component. He calls these "subsystems" and "supersystems." For instance, an individual human is a member of a party, which is then organized into a larger political party.

Kaczynski begins his core thesis by stating that the principle of natural selection is present in any environment and can be demonstrated as follows:

> Those self-propagating systems having the traits that suit them to survive and propagate themselves tend to survive and propagate themselves better than other self-propagating systems.
>
> — *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*[11]

He provides examples to support this first logical step. For instance, kingdoms that clear the most land for agricultural use have a clear advantage because they can support a larger population than their rivals. This, in turn, means they can exercise greater

[10] Courtney Brogle, *Who Was Philosopher Jacques Ellul and How Did His Writing Influence 'Unabomber' Ted Kaczynski?,* Oxygen, February 28, 2020.
<www.oxygen.com/unabomber-tedkaczynski-influence-philosopher-jacques-ellul>

[11] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*, p. 43.

military power. Likewise, if a kingdom restrains itself from excessive forest clearing, it would be at a direct disadvantage and could be eliminated by a more powerful self-prop system. Consequently, the environment will become dominated by systems that maximize their immediate output. A system must often prioritize short-term goals for its immediate survival and competitive edge, even at the expense of long-term sustainability.

> Natural selection favors systems that maximize their immediate advantage. Long-term consequences (like environmental collapse) are irrelevant if they don't impact short-term propagation.
>
> — *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*[12]

Furthermore, with this emphasis on short-term advantage, he argues that any environment dominated by self-prop systems will favor specific traits that prove most effective at propagation over time. According to Kaczynski, we observe that natural selection, over a period, will favor the subsystems that prevail the most within the given opportunities of their supersystem.

This fierce competition optimizes itself by processing information. To operate with maximum advantage within a given environment, a system must receive a vast amount of inputs from a region. As technology advances, this region expands.

> Technological advancements in transportation and communication constantly expand the possible "playing field." Natural selection will inevitably produce SPSs that grow to the maximum possible size, leading to a world dominated by a few global super-systems (global corporations, superpowers).
>
> — *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*[13]

Moreover, Kaczynski suggests we are speaking of a singular "world-system," where everything on Earth is interconnected. This leads to his first conclusion: the global supersystem becomes so complex and interconnected that a failure in one subsystem can trigger a catastrophic chain reaction. Furthermore, the competition between global self-prop systems, armed with "super technology," pushes the Earth's systems beyond their limits, leading to the potential for a mass die-off.

The Epistemological Flaw

Kaczynski's core thesis is centrally logical, and it is difficult to deny his thought. He is certainly right in that we can speak of systems in terms of analysis. This approach

[12] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*, p. 42–46.
[13] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*, p. 47.

is common in sociology; most authors begin with an object and define the system in terms of that very object. A similar approach is seen with Ted Kaczynski, who identifies an object, i.e., a complex system, and then labels the surrounding network as the system. This approach is not new. French sociologist Hamon shows us by saying a system is an ensemble of parts or subsystems which interact in such a way that components tend to change slowly enough to be treated as constants. These can be called structures. However, Hamon, who is part of the general system theory, does this by identifying a series of feedback mechanisms and formal system properties which are independent of a given system's success, and by a state of variables and inputs, which are a set of measurable quantities (in this case, population) to describe a system at a given time.[14] He does this by establishing a close historical account of a given set of functions by emphasizing his research on the quantifiable leap, such as feedback loops. In contrast, Ted Kaczynski merely does this by loosely labeling a given period in terms of competition in which the best suited come to dominate over a period. This might seem like a powerful thing, but it quickly shows us its own flaws. While a thinker like Hamon can establish distinct laws, the self-prop theory can only establish itself through a formal apparatus of how this competition will unfold by merely pointing to power of some kind. This is a big problem because nowhere does his theory actually disprove itself; it cannot label anything in terms of why it lost or how it lost. For example, regarding his own example of a kingdom, if said kingdom adapts a means to an end, it is labeled as "advantageous," but if it doesn't, it is labeled as disadvantaged. We can label this a logical tautology, which can be formalized as follows:

Let *SPS(x)*	denote	x is a self-propagating system
Let *P(x)*	denote	x propagates itself

Then, from Kaczynski's own self-prop theory, P1 defines a self-propagating system as one that promotes its own survival and propagation

> The principle of natural selection is operative not only in biology, but in any environment in which self-propagating systems are present.
>
> — *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*[15]

P1 then states that natural selection favors those systems "having the traits that suit them to survive and propagate themselves." This might seem fine on the surface and it seems ted , but the theory does not commit itself to identifying which traits are best selected in an a priori manner. It can be formalized as: $SPS(x) \boxtimes P(x)$ This

[14] Philippe Hamon, *Introduction À La Théorie Des Systèmes*, Collection SUP, no. 22 (Presses Universitaires de France, 1974).

[15] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*, p. 43

means that if we classify x as a given self-prop system, then it must propagate itself in a given environment, and likewise, if x propagates itself, then we must label it as a self-propagating system. For observation, this can be illustrated as follows:

SPS(x)	***P(x)***	***SPS(x)* ⊠ *P(x)***	**Result**
T	T	T	Tautology holds
F	F	T	Tautology holds

An example of this Table 2 application's would be that we can make a logical observation of a company like Microsoft, which has persisted. Then we must classify it through this very label as a self-prop system, and we must then explain its persistence by identifying traits and labeling it as a self-propagating system. But traits are equated to survival and propagation as per P51. This means that natural selection favors systems by traits. We can define these traits as follows:

Let *T(x)*	denote	*x* has traits that suit it to survive

What this means in reality is that T(x) is directly inferred from P(x), as "survive and propagate" has the same distinct meanings. So we can conclude that if P(x) is observed to be true in a given situation, then T(x) would also be assumed true: T(x) $\rightarrow$ P(x), and if likewise P(x) is observed to be false, then we can also logically conclude that the selected trait failed, so T(x) would be false: P(x) $\rightarrow$ T(x).

Table 4: illustration of *T(x)* ⊠ *P(x)*

P(x)	***SPS(x)***	***T(x)***
T	T	T
F	F	F

This is further illustrated by observation: if we can conclude that a self-prop system has a certain advantageous trait, such as a strong brand or effective strategy, this would be assumed to be true because the self-prop theory would conclude based upon historical analysis that they did in fact have a successful trait. This means, in reality, however, that a given self-prop system SPS(x) and traits T(x) are merely labels for propagating P(x) and do not give us a causal independent factor that we can point to. An illustration of this could be: why didn't the Romans advocate steam power technology? What we observe is that since Rome didn't in fact develop steam power due to an inflexibility of their economy and various other dependent factors, such as a current flux for new productions, so we can establish:

Let *P(Rome)*	denote	Rome did not develop steam power

According to the theory, we can only state that because P(Rome) is false (Rome did not propagate steam technology), SPS(Rome) must be deemed false for that function, or the traits T(Rome) for adopting it must have been absent. This leads to a direct epistemological failure because the theory cannot point to a concrete, independent variable—an input or measurement—to explain why this was the case. Moreover if we suppose that a self-propagating system must pass a test of selection over a given period, a system that persists from time T1 to T2 has passed the test over the interval ΔT. A system that persists from T1 to T3 has passed the test over the interval 2ΔT, and so forth. Those systems that survive to the present are those that have passed the test of selection over every consecutive interval in their history. They have passed through a series of filters, each of which has allowed the passage only of those systems that were most fit to survive over those specific periods.

However, in this case the "test" is not defined by any independent measure of fitness, but solely by the outcome of propagation itself. The filter does not test for a specific trait like "resistance to disease" or "efficient metabolism"; it tests only for the continued ability to pass through the next filter. The theory, in its application, becomes a closed loop: a system is "fit" because it propagates, and it propagates because it is "fit." It can describe the path of the successful lineage, but it cannot identify the causal mechanisms that determined that path over another. It observes that the Roman system passed through the filter at the time of Hero of Alexandria, and thus was "fit" not to develop steam power, but it cannot specify what material, economic, or social property constituted that "fitness" beyond the observed outcome of non-development.

As Propositions 1 through 7 shows, the theory can merely observe systems compete and persist but for such to be truth it would need to establish synthetic a priori truth that adds new non-tautological knowledge to the topic. Instead, all it can do is show us that a certain system is successful merely because it is successful. It is then used to arrive at various a posteriori conclusions, like an application to the Fermi Paradox[16] which outlines the following: given the high probability of numerous planets harboring technologically advanced civilizations, we should have detected evidence of them by now.[17] Ted Kaczynski uses the self-prop theory to suggest that such civilizations may inevitably self-destruct. However, without new synthetic knowledge, any application built upon a tautology will merely be a one-sided argument, retrofitting a narrative to any conceivable observation. This filter method, devoid of independent variables, becomes a chameleonic justification for the status quo, whatever it may be. We can

[16] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*, p. 55.

[17] Milan M. Ćirković, *The Great Silence: Eternal Persistence or the Triumph of Noise?,* Journal of the British Interplanetary Society, no. 58 (2005): 43–50.

envision a series of such scenarios where the theory is malleable enough to explain diametrically opposed states of the world.

1. We observe no extra-terrestrial civilizations. The theory explains this by asserting they all failed the ultimate test of selection, having developed a self-destructive technology.

2. We discover a thriving, ancient civilization. The theory could then explain this by asserting it passed a more stringent test of selection, having developed internal mechanisms—perhaps a global authoritarian state—to suppress the short-term competitive dynamics that would have led to collapse.

3. We find archaeological evidence of a civilization that self-destructed.

In each of these thought experiments, we ultimately observe a state of the world that the theory can rationalize merely because it is the observed state. The "fitness" of a system is defined post-hoc by its survival, and its survival is then cited as proof of its fitness. Practical recommendations derived from such a framework are therefore built on sand since they are highly revisionist and unsupported by rigorous, falsifiable argumentation.

Paradoxes

To further emphasize the epistemological flaw, we must focus on Kaczynski's core error. While his observation that organizations and nations exhibit self-perpetuating behaviors is difficult to dismiss outright, and while he is certainly correct that we can analyze social structures through systemic competition—as many sociologists have done—a parallel can be seen with Rittel and Webber, who define a class of "wicked problems" as pervasive, continuing dilemmas between incompatible yet interdependent activities.[18] They establish a formal framework for understanding intractable social challenges that cannot be definitively solved. However, Rittel and Webber, operating within a robust tradition of planning and systems theory, achieve this by identifying specific structural properties—such as the absence of a definitive stopping rule or the lack of an enumerable set of potential solutions—which are independent of any single outcome.

In contrast, Kaczynski merely engages in loosely labeling historical periods through the lens of a singular, monolithic competition.[19] Calvin Pava describes the necessary dynamic as "continued interplay" rather than terminal resolution,[20] a concept Kaczynski

[18] Horst WJ Rittel and Melvin M Webber, *Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning*, Policy Sciences, vol. 4, no. 2 (1973): 155–69.

[19] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*, p. 43

[20] Calvin Pava, *Toward a Concept of Normative Incrementalism* (Doctoral dissertation, 1981).

fails to engage with. This is further emphasized by his neglect of normative incrementalism, which, through Pava's research, demonstrates that complex social systems adapt not through revolutionary overthrow, but through a structured process of "active systems adaptation through normative change"—a non-synoptic process involving open exchange, continuous action, and feedback.[21]

As we have established, Kaczynski's model equates survival with fitness and fitness with survival, possessing no conceptual mechanism to explain the observed capacity for iterative adaptation. This theoretical shortcoming is particularly devastating in light of Neuman's analysis in The Paradox of Mass Politics, which demonstrates that complex socio-political realities are frequently reduced to polarized schemata when their inherent ambiguities are improperly abstracted.[22] Veblen's institutional analysis further reinforces this, identifying social paradoxes as emerging from the ambiguous nature of sign behavior and ingrained social habits.[23] The self-propagation theory, reliant solely on competition metrics, lacks the semiotic sophistication to explain how societies develop cultural norms that mediate competitive dynamics. Consequently, it cannot explain why societies do not simply collapse when faced with the fundamental paradoxes that Veblen and others have documented as endemic to social organization. Thus, we are left with what Pava identified as the "illusion of 'us against the world'"—a cognitive distortion that precludes the cooperative engagement necessary for managing social paradoxes.[24]

Why doesn't Kaczynski account for these problems in his assessment of his self-propagation theory? One logical explanation could be that he believes his theory is still useful. We can see proof of this in his outline, where he seems aware of its theological implications as he calls this of an obvious tautology.[25]

However, when one reads *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*, one gets the sense that Kaczynski sees technological means to ends—which arise in an ethical vacuum—as more important than the ethical questions themselves. His self-propagation theory is a way to introduce a naturalistic approach by establishing a universal principle, which in reality is ad hoc in nature.

In contrast, Ted Kaczynski seems more invested in a personal philosophy that shares some traits with Stoicism, but with a critical divergence. There are definitely some ways Ted can be seen to be a stoic in the way that he pursues tranquillity to the exclusion of anything else. The bizarreness though is that the stoics see this tranquillity being enabled by a kind of retreating into oneself to be able to contemplate hard questions when you're faced with them. Not being swayed by one's environment. Whereas Ted's

[21] Pava, *Toward a Concept of Normative Incrementalism.*

[22] W. Russell Neuman, *The Paradox of Mass Politics: Knowledge and Opinion in the American Electorate* (Harvard University Press, 1986).

[23] Alan W. Dyer, *The Habit of Work: A Theoretical Exploration*, Journal of Economic Issues, vol. 18, no. 2 (1984): 487–94.

[24] Pava, *Toward a Concept of Normative Incrementalism.*

[25] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*, p. 43.

ideal was almost to blend his state of mind with wild habitat to the extent that there would be no inner monologue needed. He justified his violence by arguing that interpersonal violence is inevitable and often desirable as it is part of our nature and feels good to express.[26] Industrial society, he argued, racks up a great many more crimes which it would be desirable to answer with violence than if we were living in a hunter-gather society, yet the system prevents us from responding, leading to intense frustration.[27] He wrote: 'Wild country, freedom, and isolation from the system best. And if the system deprives me of these then I must strike back revengefully. But if I can strike back, then I can better enjoy nature partly ruined by the invasion of the system, because the invasion of the system no longer chokes me with frustrated anger, provided I can get some revenge.'[28] This frustration and desire for revenge, combined with his ideal of primitive freedom, led him to conclude that violence was a necessary response on both a personal and macro scale.

For Ted Kaczynski, the ethical questions are reduced to this deeply personal view in which freedom cannot be compromised. Since technological society touches every area of life, this is critically important. He relies on standards derived from empirical observations—via the self-propagation theory to reach his conclusions, yet he never produces a foundational argument to support these notions; they are simply assumed.

To successfully understand *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*, it would have been useful for the reader to know the a priori reasoning behind these conclusions. Nonetheless, we can only guess. In this case, it seems Ted valued freedom as the ultimate expression of naturalness. This might make sense, as from a very early age he became obsessed with the hunter-gatherer lifestyle and wanted to live as they did. Sadly, he is never explicit about the theoretical foundation for all of this. But nonetheless Kaczynski's own writings reveal a lifelong, personal obsession with the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, which he saw as the embodiment of autonomy. He describes how, even during his academic years, his primary focus was on immersing himself in the world of primitive societies:

> I always put my outdoor activities first... I did a great deal of reading of first-hand accounts of Indiana Forest Indians... The accounts I read of men who lived with the Indians... seem to indicate that many eastern forest groups had a very free and individualistic kind of life... Small groups of hunters might wander off into the forest for long periods, obeying only their own sweet will.
>
> — *1979 autobiography*[29]

[26] Theodore Kaczynski, *Why Did You Do It?,* 2005.
<www.thetedkarchive.com/library/ted-kaczynski-why-did-you-do-it>

[27] Theodore Kaczynski, *Kaczynski and His Lawyers,* 1998.
<www.thetedkarchive.com/library/ted-kaczynski-kaczynski-and-hislawyers>

[28] Theodore Kaczynski, *Ted Kaczynski's Journal in 1980–81,* 1980.
<www.thetedkarchive.com/library/ted-kaczynski-s-journal-in-1980-81>

[29] Theodore Kaczynski, *Autobiography,* 1979.

This early fixation on a life of radical freedom, governed only by one's "own sweet will," provided the foundational ideal for his later work. He later formalized this personal yearning into a theoretical concept while writing his manifesto during his time in Lincoln, Montana.

> I argue that the most important single maladaptation involved derives from the fact that our present circumstances deprive us of the opportunity to experience the power process properly. In other words, we lack freedom as the term is defined in ISAIF, §94.
>
> — *Letter to David Skrbina*[30]

However, his idealization was not without its own internal contradictions. As early as 1979, he had written in his journal:

> In any case, even the most primitive society carries in it the seeds of what I consider evil, since all societies have the potential for eventual "progress" toward civilization. Thus I am more inclined to wish that the human race would become extinct.
>
> Now, considering hunting and gathering as an economic form — this I do idealize. By this I mean that I would rather make my living by hunting, gathering plant foods, and making my own clothing, implements, etc., than in any other way I can think of. Here I do have some personal experience to go on.
>
> — *1979 journal*[31]

Thus, what begins as a romanticized personal ideal becomes the unargued cornerstone of his anti-technology philosophy. The "self-propagation theory" and his conclusions serve to rationalize this deeply held value, which was rooted less in formal logic than in his early obsession with a primitive way of life and a subsequent, profound nihilism.

<www.thetedkarchive.com/library/ted-kaczynski-ted-kaczynski-s-1979-autobiography>

[30] Theodore Kaczynski and David Skrbina, *Correspondence between Ted Kaczynski and David Skrbina,* 2004.

<www.thetedkarchive.com/library/ted-kaczynski-s-letter-correspondence-with-david-skrbina>

[31] Theodore Kaczynski, *Ted Kaczynski: An Early Attempt to Argue for Hunter-Gatherer Societies or Human Extermination,* 1979.

<www.thetedkarchive.com/library/ted-kaczynski-an-earlyattempt-to-argue-for-hunter-gatherer-societies-or-humanextermination>

Conclusion

I have in this paper sought to give a concrete examination of Ted Kaczynski's self-propagation theory from a logical and epistemological standpoint, as articulated in *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*. My central argument is that, despite its initial appearance of rigorous logic, his overarching theoretical framework constitutes a fundamental epistemological failure. This failure stems from its reliance on a tautological core, which ultimately collapses into an unsubstantiated Stoic-tinged ethical lens, where technology is axiomatically deemed bad and a primitive state is deemed good. Consequently, the entire worldview and ethical conclusions Kaczynski derives are, at best, highly questionable from a scientific standpoint and remain unsupported by robust, independent argumentation.

My challenge to Kaczynski's thesis is not merely an academic exercise in logic-chopping. It strikes at the very foundation of his project. If the self-propagation theory is not a synthetic a priori truth about the universe but a tautological description of observed outcomes, then its predictive and explanatory power is illusory. It cannot tell us why a system will succeed or fail beforehand; it can only label it as having or lacking "advantageous traits" after the fact. This renders the theory useless as a tool for formulating a reliable revolutionary strategy, as it offers no causal levers to pull, only post-hoc justifications for historical events. A revolution built on such a foundation is not guided by a scientific understanding of social dynamics but is rather a leap of faith, rationalized by a flawed model.

Furthermore, this epistemological shortcoming exposes the deep-seated contradiction in Kaczynski's work. He presents his argument as a cold, objective analysis of systemic inevitabilities, yet this analysis is ultimately in service of a pre-existing, deeply personal value: a romanticized ideal of absolute, "Stoic" freedom. The self-propagation theory functions as a naturalistic myth, a grand narrative designed to lend the air of scientific inevitability to what is, at its heart, a profound subjective yearning. The theory does not lead him to the conclusion that technology is bad; rather, his prior conviction that technology is bad leads him to construct a theory that appears to justify that conclusion on a systemic level.

My recommendation for future eco-radicals who find Kaczynski's diagnosis appealing is that they must subject his ideas to a far more rigorous standard than he himself provided. Before his polemical conclusions can be adopted as a basis for action, his followers must undertake one of two essential tasks. First, they could seek to rationalize his core premises on a serious philosophical level, moving beyond the Stoic-inspired romanticism to establish a robust, argued ethical foundation for why absolute, pre-technological freedom should be the supreme and non-negotiable value of human society. This would involve engaging with moral philosophy to defend this position against other compelling values like wellbeing, compassion, and the pursuit of knowledge, rather than simply assuming its primacy.

Alternatively, and more critically, they must demonstrate that his "self-propagation theory" can point to distinct, independent sociological factors that are causally prior to observed outcomes. The theory must be elevated from a tautological description of what did happen to a predictive model that can explain what will happen based on measurable inputs and variables—such as specific resource thresholds, quantifiable social cohesion metrics, or defined information-processing capacities. Until such a case has been seriously established through empirical sociological research, Kaczynski's work remains a provocative but unverified hypothesis, not a proven scientific basis for action.

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