A critique of Theodore Kaczynski from an excentric point of view

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Ideologically and religiously motivated terrorism is a problem of all ages and nations. When one wanders into informal circles after an act of terrorism has occurred, people are usually quick to dismiss the terrorist as someone suffering from a mental disorder or lacking humanity. These quick dismissals, although understandable, are counterproductive when one wants to understand what causes people to commit horrendous crimes in the name of an ideology or religion. In hopes of warding off future acts of terrorism the motives and deviant philosophies of the culprits should be closely regarded.

A way of interpreting these deviant philosophies might be found in *Levels of Organic Life and the Human* written by the German philosopher Helmuth Plessner in 1928.[1] He explains that the human has a unique excentric position relating to the way it interacts with its environment. This excentric positionality gives rise to three anthropological laws that help to understand the fundamental tensions in human existence. By using these laws, the origins of deviant philosophies will be traced to these tensions that lay at the core of every human.

In this thesis I will use Theodore Kaczynski and his works as an example of an ideologically motivated terrorist. Kaczynski is infamous for killing three people and injuring 23 others in an attempt to spark an anti-technological revolution with the use of homemade bombs.[2] Kaczynski was chosen as an example because he has written a number of works extensively articulating his motivations and philosophy, which is a rarity among terrorists. Another reason why Kaczynski fits Plessner's work well is because they both use 'biological man' as the starting point for their investigations.[3] Where Plessner tries to understand the human condition by comparing different forms of life varying in reflexivity, with the human having the most reflexive make-up[4], Kaczynski critiques modern technological society by comparing the life of the modern individual with that of one in a more primitive and natural society.[5] The fact that they both use a similar starting point for their philosophies but arrive at contrasting conclusions will make for a deeper comparison of their works.

The works of Plessner and Kaczynski will be combined to answer the question stated thusly:

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[1] Helmuth Plessner, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*, York City: Fordham University Press, 2019.

[2] David Johnston, *Judge Sentences Confessed Bomber to Four Life Terms*, The New York Times, 5th of May 1998.

[3] Although they both use 'biological man' as a starting point, their terminology is different. Plessner studies man in typological way, this why when discussing Plessner and what he considers to be fundamental and timeless traits to the human type, we speak of 'the human' and 'other humans'. Kaczynski, on the other hand, is mainly concerned with the corruption of man's life over time by society, which is why we speak of 'the individual' and 'individuals'.

[4] Plessner, *Levels*, 291.

[5] Theodore John Kaczynski, The Truth About Primitive Life: A Critique of Anarcho-primitivism, in *Technological Slavery: The Collected Writings of Theodore J. Kaczynski, a.k.a. "The Unabomber"*, edited by Theodore John Kaczynski. Port Townsend: Feral House, 2010.

Can Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology as described in Levels of Organic Life and the Human, and more specifically, his notion of excentric positionality and the three anthropological laws derived from it, help us to understand the ideologically motivated terrorism conducted by Theodore Kaczynski?

In order to answer this question, I will start this thesis, in the second chapter, by explaining the relevance of Plessner's life and works. Followed by a careful examination of the different ways life organises itself according to Plessner. The rest of the chapter will be spent on explaining how the excentric positionality of the human leads to fundamental tensions within itself.

In the third chapter the life, works and actions of Kaczynski will be examined. The motivation behind his actions will be looked into through the use of his most well-known works.

The fourth chapter consists of three parts where I will take a detailed look at one of the three anthropological laws defined by Plessner using the excentric positionality of the human. These laws will then be used to uncover the origins of Kaczynski's philosophy and actions as a way of criticizing them without resorting to cheap dismissals.

In the fifth and final chapter I will summarise the findings and provide an answer to the question stated above.

Chapter 2: Helmuth Plessner

2.1 Helmuth Plessner and the Levels of Organic Life and the Human.

Helmuth Plessner was born in 1892 in the German city of Wiesbaden. He pursued degrees in medicine, zoology and philosophy, after which he studied under the famous phenomenologists Edmund Husserl and Max Scheler.[1] In this time a great advancement in the human sciences took place that spawned an ever-increasing awareness of the subjectivity of human understanding. Following this trend, Plessner saw a need to construct a revised hermeneutics that was based on anthropology and included a model of the human from its setting in nature.[2]

He satisfied this need with his 1928 magnum opus *Levels of Organic Life and the Human* [*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*].[3] In this book he starts his quest towards the human condition by distinguishing what separates life from inanimate objects, looking at the way both relate to their environment. Plessner continues by distinguishing different levels [*Stufen*] of life by their positionality, meaning their relationship to the environment.[4] In the first stage of life, the question is asked whether the positionality of an organism is open or closed, meaning if it is directly or indirectly included in the environment. In the second stage of life, a distinction is made between a centric and an excentric positionality within the closed form of positionality. This relates, as we shall see, to whether the centre of the indirect relationship an organism has with its environment is connected to a point of view located outside the body of the organism.

Figure 1: Diagram of the levels of organic life[5]

In recent times *Levels of Organic Life and the Human* and Plessner's other works have enjoyed a renewed interest. Jos de Mul states that this is the case because the concepts described in Plessner's philosophical anthropology enable us to grasp the biological characteristics of the human condition and also add to the current debates in the

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[1] Jos de Mul, Artificial by Nature. In *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology: Perspectives and Prospects*, edited by Jos de Mul, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014, 12-13.

[2] Phillip Honenberger, *Eccentric Investigations of (Post-)Humanity*, Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 46(1), 2016, 58.

[3] De Mul, *Artificial*, 14.

[4] Karol Chrobak, *Helmuth Plessner's Philosophy of life*, Teoria, January 2015, 74.

[5] Adaption from a diagram in Chrobak, *Plessner*, 78.

Positionality — Open (Plant) / Closed
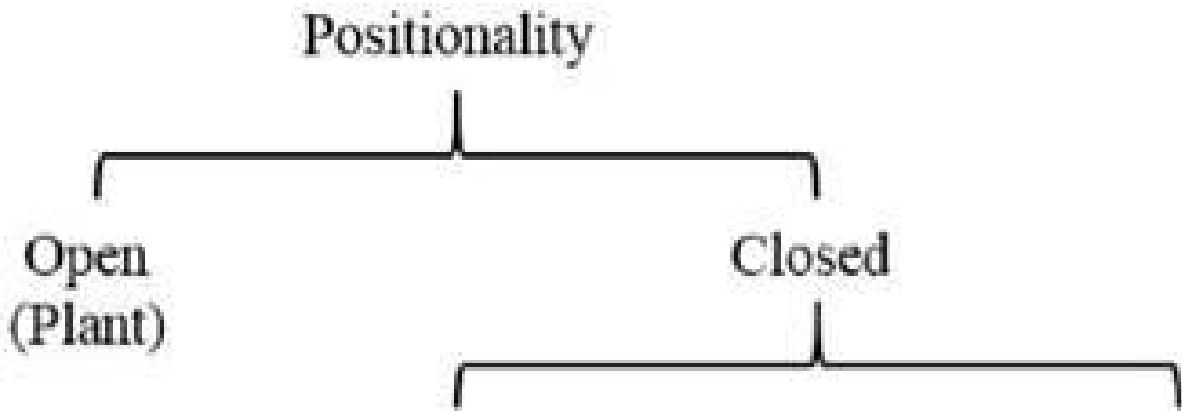
social sciences and humanities focused on the study of human life, culture and technology.[6] Phillip Honenberger adds that Plessner's work provides valuable conceptual tools that may help philosophers or social scientists conduct theoretical research into the phenomena of biology, culture and technology.[7] Following this sentiment, Plessner's conception of human life will be used to understand ideologically motivated terrorism. Plessner's view on technology will also be used to understand Kaczynski's terrorism specifically.

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[6] De Mul, *Artificial*, 11-12.

[7] Honenberger, *Investigations*, 60-61.

2.2 Life and positionality

2.2.1 The phenomenon of a living being

The first step in Plessner's road towards a conception of the human condition is discerning the phenomenon of a living being from inanimate phenomena. He goes about this by the use of a method defined by him as hermeneutic phenomenology, which studies phenomena in terms of their meaning.[1] Biologists might try to define life by the presence of biological features that describe physical properties of an organism. An example of this might be a metabolism manifesting itself physically in chloroplasts. The hermeneutic phenomenological method, on the other hand, seeks to define the assumptions inherent to the empirical research into the phenomena of living organisms. This is done by describing the way these organisms relate to their environment.

An inanimate object, according to Plessner, is separated from its environment and completely enclosed within itself by a contour. This contour is purely abstract and signifies the difference between an object and its environment. The environment is only able to interact with the contour of the object and not the object itself. For example, exposure to water may erode a rock. In this way it interacts with the contour of the rock and in doing so changes the contour of the object, or what is the object and what is the environment. It, however, never interacts with the rock as a whole object.

What distinguishes a living being from an inanimate object is that it is separated from its environment not just by a contour but also a boundary that is part of the body. This boundary not only separates the living being from the environment but also modifies the attitude of a living being towards its environment. It allows the living being to enter the environment and also the environment to enter the living being. We saw that when water comes into contact with a rock it only interacts with its contour, but when water comes into contact with a plant, we see that besides from a possible interaction with its contour,[2] a two-way interaction takes place, where the water is absorbed from the environment through the roots of the plant and becomes part of the living being and the excess water being part of the plant may enter the environment through transpiration.

In this way Plessner states the minimum condition for the manifestation of a living being to be the double aspectual character of its boundary.[3] Double aspectivity refers

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[1] Chrobak, *Plessner*, 68.

[2] A torrential rain might for example sever a leave from the plant.

[3] Chrobak, *Plessner*, 70

to the living being having a relationship to what is outside the boundary and what is within.[4] Whereas we do not need to consider the context of an inanimate object, because it can be reduced to the contents of its contour, the living being is characterised by the way it bounds itself to its environment. Plessner, therefore, continues by distinguishing the different levels of life by the way they interact with their environment. He calls this positionality.

2.2.2 Positionality

Plessner starts to distinguish levels of life by defining an open and closed positionality. Having an open or plant positionality means that the living being is directly included in its environment.[5] It is separated from its environment as bodily unit by the boundary but there is no regulation of what crosses the boundary. It is simply at the mercy of its environment, steered by it. An unbroken relationship exists between what is inside and outside the boundary.[6]

A living being with a closed positionality on the other hand is not only directly included in its environment but also holds a certain autonomy, it can respond to its environment.[7] It can do this because, unlike the plant, it is aware of its environment. This awareness is a result of the formation of a centre enclosed within its boundaries from which the living being mediates what crosses the boundary.[8] It is the mediated relationship it has with its environment, a certain distance it holds from the environment, that allows it to act autonomously. The living being not only is its body but also experiences its body from within the centre, meaning it has its body as well. The reflectivity towards its own corporality makes it then able to experience a dissonance between the current state of the body and its desired state, thus spawning needs within the living being. Because of its acquired autonomy, it can act on these needs and try to fulfil them in the environment. The environment is, however, never fully compatible with its needs, creating a fundamental dissatisfaction.[9]

Plessner goes on to further divide the closed positionality into a centric or animal positionality and an excentric or human positionality. In this division the centric positionality corresponds to the description of the closed positionality above. In higher animals the centre becomes better developed allowing a deepening of the inside of the boundary to occur.[10] No matter how developed this centre becomes the living being

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[4] De Mul, *Artificial*, 15.
[5] Chrobak, *Plessner*, 78.
[6] Phillip Honenberger, *Animality, Sociality, and Historicity in Helmuth Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*, International Journal of Philosophical Studies, 23(5), 2015, 713.
[7] Chrobak, *Plessner*, 79.
[8] De Mul, *Artificial*, 16.
[9] Chrobak, *Plessner*, 80.
[10] Honenberger, *Animality*, 715.

would still be unable to grasp that it has a centre.[11] It lives in the absolute present, only able to reflect on its own body and its environment, because it is not aware of the mediated relationship between the two. Plessner states on the animal: "It lives thus in its own body, whose natural place, the center of its existence, is hidden from it."[12]

A living being takes on an excentric positionality when it gains access to a point of reference outside of its centre. This point of view is suspended in a dimension beyond that of the living system and its environment, making the living being fully reflexive.[13] It will now not only be able to reflect on its body and environment, but also its living within a centre. Plessner states: "The human, as the living thing placed in the center of its existence, knows this center, experiences it, and therefore is beyond it."[14] This can be visualised using the figure below, where the grey rectangle represents the world and the blue circles represent living beings separated from the world by their boundaries. We see that the yellow centre in human positionality is tethered to a counterpoint suspended in nothingness, outside of the spatial and temporal dimensions that cannot be grasped by the plant and animal.
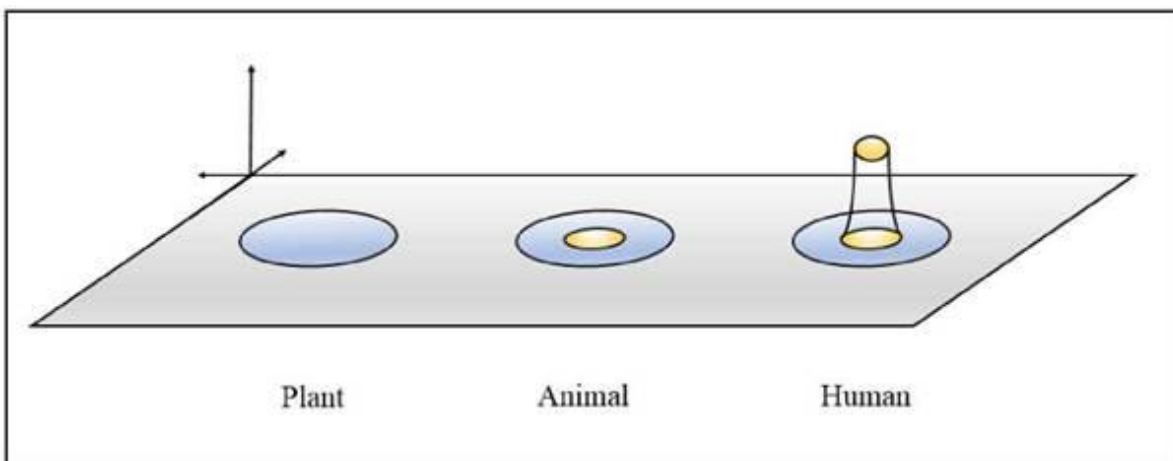

Figure 2: Visualisation of the positionalities[15]

In all physical aspects the human remains a centric being and is also able to live as such; being tied to the absolute present and might still experience without reflecting on itself.[16][17][18] So, just like the animal it is its body and experiences having a body from being within its centre. But because of its excentric point of reference it is, at the

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[11] Plessner, *Levels*, 290. (The page numbers for this work's references refer to the page numbers in the original text)

[12] Idem, 291.

[13] Idem, 290.

[14] Idem, 291.

[15] Three-dimensional interpretation of a two-dimensional image by Jos de Mul.

[16] Three-dimensional interpretation of a two-dimensional image by Jos de Mul.

[17] Plessner, *Levels*, 293.

[18] Honenberger, *Animality*, 716.

same time, outside of its body from where it can experience its body as an objective thing.[19] In short: "[The human] not only lives and experiences, but also experiences himself experiencing [*[Der Mensch] lebt und erlebt nicht nur, sondern er erlebt sein Erleben*]."[20]

[19] Plessner, *Levels*, 293.
[20] Idem, 292

2.3 Excentric positionality and its peculiarities

The threefold nature of the human makes that it lives in three worlds. The outer world can be considered to be the world as the animal may experience it, made up of space and time. The part of the human that occupies this world is its body. But because the human has a point of reference beyond itself it can experience its body both as a living centre of its experience of the world, as animals do, but also as a purely physical body, an objectified thing that occupies an arbitrary point in space and time among other things.[1] A similar thing occurs in the inner world, where the human as a centric being experiences the world from within its centre, creating an active mental reality. From its excentric point of reference, the human objectifies the inner world as the place that holds this mental reality and its own lived experiences. The shared world exists only from and is created by the excentric point of reference, from which the human considers its own position as a self-conscious 'I' to apply to a whole sphere of other humans.[2] In this world the human experiences itself actively as an 'I' and passively as one 'I' among many, or a 'We'. In a similar fashion to how in the outer world the human both is a body and has a body and to how in the inner world he both is and possesses the centre of its experiences, he is spirit or 'I' and has spirit as a part of a 'We'.

As a result of this fundamentally fractured existence of the human, it is subject to a number of radical tensions. It remains tied to its centric existence from which it follows that it is constantly in a state of dissatisfaction because the environment can never absolutely resolve the dissonance between the present and desired state of the body. As a centric being it, furthermore, experiences existence in the absolute present, immediately involved in nature. But at the same time, it realises from its excentric point of reference that seemingly immediate relations to the environment are always mediated because of the existence of boundaries, separating the living being from its environment. The excentric positionality further causes the human to be ever-suspended in nothingness, outside of space and time, without a home, which just like a more immediate relation with its environment, the human has to create itself. Plessner, in short, describes the human as being constitutive homeless [*konstitutiv heimatlos*].[3]

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[1] Idem, 294.
[2] Plessner, *Levels*, 302.
[3] Idem, 309.

The knowledge of this homelessness is the reason the human stands above the animal according to Plessner and why: "As an excentrically organized being, the human must *make himself into what he already is.*"[4]

It is based on these tensions that Plessner defines the three anthropological laws that explain how the human copes with its brokenness.[5] These laws will be discussed in chapter four and show how Kaczynski's ideology and terrorism was a way for him to deal with human brokenness. Before that, Kaczynski's ideology will be discussed in chapter three.

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[4] Idem, 309.
[5] Idem, 309.

Chapter 3: Theodore Kaczynski

3.1 Theodore Kaczynski and his works

Theodore John Kaczynski was born in 1942 in the American city of Chicago. He was considered to be a mathematics prodigy and achieved a doctorate in mathematics in 1967. After teaching and researching for a few years at the University of Michigan and the University of California, Berkeley, he resigned from his post as an assistant professor in the summer of 1969.[1] In 1971 he moved to Lincoln, Montana to live in an austere and remote cabin. He stated that he had been fascinated with escaping from civilization and living some place wild and untamed since he was a child. He also saw his scholarly positions in Mathematics as nothing more than a way to save money and buy a plot of land where he could live in this way.[2] Living in the wild he satisfied the needs for freedom and personal autonomy he held since he was a child.[3] Kaczynski describes other unexpected satisfactions: "In city life you tend to be turned inward, in a way. Your environment is crowded with irrelevant sights and sounds, and you get conditioned to block most of them out of your consciousness. In the woods you get so that your awareness is turned outward, toward your environment, hence you are much more conscious of what goes on around you."[4]

Originally his goal was to achieve complete self-sufficiency whilst living in the woods.[5] When he noticed the wild country shrinking around him and the closing-in of modern civilization, he decided to avert his attention to sabotaging and overthrowing technological society. Kaczynski now serves a life sentence at the supermax prison in Florence, Colorado for killing three people and injuring 23 others in a bombing campaign targeting people involved with modern technology.[6]

Kaczynski articulates his motivations and philosophy in two main works. The first being *Industrial Society and its Future* first published in The New York Times and The Washington post on the 19$^{\text{th}}$ of September 1995, after he demanded that this

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[1] Micheal Ray, *Ted Kaczynski*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019.

[2] Theodore John Kaczynski, An Interview with Ted, in *Technological Slavery: The Collected Writings of Theodore J. Kaczynski, a.k.a. "The Unabomber"*, edited by Theodore John Kaczynski. Port Townsend: Feral

[3] House, 2010, 394.

[4] Kaczynski, *Interview*, 395 & 405.

[5] Idem, 404.

[6] Johnston, *Bomber*.

manifesto be printed if he were to desist from terrorism.[7] This work highlights the negative impact living in a modern technological society has on the individual, after which it states the consequence of such a society on a larger scale and how one should go about dismantling it. This manifesto was published different times later on, of which the one published in the book *Technological Slavery: The Collected Writing of Theodore J. Kaczynski, a.k.a. "The Unabomber"* will be used, because this is the most accurate version according to Kaczynski himself.[8] The other works contained in this book will be used as well to illustrate some of Kaczynski's life and thought. His second and most recently published work is the book *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*.[9] Kaczynski himself states that: "[This work] represents the more-or-less final result of a lifetime of thought and reading..."[10] In the first two chapters of this book Kaczynski explains why modern technology cannot be controlled and threatens human existence in the long run. In the final two of four chapters Kaczynski defines certain rules and considerations an anti-technological revolution should adhere to.

A striking difference between his two main works is the role of violence. In *Anti-Tech Revolution* Kaczynski advises any revolutionary organisation hoping to take down modern technological society to abstain from conducting any illegal activities and makes no mention of violence.[11] Whereas he states in his first manifesto that modern technological society should be brought down at all costs: "As for the negative consequences of eliminating industrial society - well, you can't eat your cake and have it too. To gain one thing you have to sacrifice another."[12] He further states that "[this] revolution may or not make use of violence[.]"[13] In *Anti-Tech Revolution* he explains that illegal activities would be ineffective because the involvement of law-enforcement or intelligence agencies would greatly diminish the chance of a successful revolution.[14] It seems that his criticism of illegal activities and violence is purely practical and is not based on any moral considerations. He accepts that the destruction of modern technological society would bring vast amounts of hardship and suffering.[15]

Kaczynski did, furthermore, decide to act in a violent way himself, to draw attention to his deviant philosophy. One might state that he simply reacted to the closing-in of modern society on his way of life. Because of this he was not able to live completely self-sufficient, but he was able to live more than two decades in these woods, largely

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[7] Howard Kurtz, *Unabomber Manuscript is Published*, The Washington Post, 19th of September 1995.

[8] Theodore John Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How*, Scottsdale: Fitch & Madison Publishers, 2016, 4.

[9] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech*.

[10] Idem, 2.

[11] Idem, 170.

[12] Kaczynski, *Industrial*, 98

[13] Idem, 38.

[14] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech*, 169.

[15] Idem, 138.

the way he wanted, and he thoroughly enjoyed it.[16] Why would he risk this way of life by using violence to spread his philosophy? The rest of this chapter will be devoted to Kaczynski's anti-technological philosophy and the motivation behind it, which will be used in congruence with Plessner's anthropological laws in chapter four to answer this question.

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[16] Kaczynski, *Interview*, 405-406.

3.2 The negative impact of modern technology

Kaczynski critique of modern technological society can be roughly divided into two kinds. The first kind is concerned with the present negative impact of modern technology on the individual. This impact is mainly discussed in the first half of *Industrial Society and its Future*. The second kind is concerned with the negative impact of modern technology on the course and future of society at large. This kind of critique is discussed in the second half of *Industrial Society and its future* and the first two chapters of *Anti-Tech Revolution*. Below the discussion of Kaczynski's thought will be continued using this distinction.

3.2.1 Negative impact on the individual

Kaczynski starts by stating that individuals have a need, probably based in biology, for something he calls the power process.[1] This power process has four elements. These being goal, effort, attainment of goal and autonomy. He explains the significance of goals by using the example of a leisured aristocrat.[2] This aristocrat has an abundance of power at his disposal but no way to exercise it, this will leave him acutely bored or depressed. Kaczynski states that having power is not enough, one must have goals towards which one's power can be exercised. Kaczynski states that everyone has at least the goal of acquiring physical necessities such as food, water and shelter. When we look at the leisured aristocrat we see that these necessities were taken care of for him before he was even born. Because he does not have to exert any effort in the pursuit of this goal it will not give him any fulfilment. Kaczynski further states that if one is not able to attain his goal of acquiring physical necessities this will result in death, but the nonattainment of other goals results in frustration, which leads to low self-esteem. From this he concludes that all people need goals that require serious effort to attain and a reasonable rate of success in attaining these goals, if one were to avoid serious psychological problems.[3] Kaczynski goes on to state most people, but not all, need some sense of autonomy in the power process. This does not mean an

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[1] Kaczynski, *Industrial*, 47.
[2] Idem, 47.
[3] Idem, 47.

individual has to work alone, but that when he works in a small group at least he has to be able to assert some control.[4]

In primitive times all the goals set by people had to do with the acquirement of physical necessities. In modern technological society such goals are not required because of an abundance of physical necessities. An individual today is, furthermore, not able to acquire his physical necessities with autonomy. If someone would want to make a shelter, for example, he is forced to adhere to certain rules regarding where and how the building will be constructed, which ultimately requires the interference of many others. In this way we are hindered in our freedom to pursue psychical necessities in a satisfying way. Kaczynski states that because physical necessities are there in abundance, people invest their times in surrogate activities pursuing artificial goals to satisfy their need of the power process.[5] Kaczynski defines surrogate activities by asking the question: "If he had to devote most of his time and energy to satisfying his biological needs, and if that effort required him to use his physical and mental faculties in a varied and interesting way, would he feel seriously deprived because he did not attain [his artificial goal]?"[6] If the answer would be no, then the pursuit of the artificial goal would be a surrogate activity. Examples of other activities that Kaczynski does not consider to be surrogate, besides acquiring physical necessities, are love, sex and status. Kaczynski states that surrogate activities cannot give great fulfilment because they do not have an external goal, like physical necessities.[7] They cannot completely satisfy the need for the power process because of this. Kaczynski concludes that modern technology interferes with the need for the power process in all its four elements, which causes purposelessness and is, according to Kaczynski, the reason for social problems in modern society such as alienation.[8] Kaczynski describes more consequences: "When one does not have adequate opportunity to go through the power process the consequences are [...] boredom, demoralization, low self-esteem, inferiority feelings, defeatism, depression, anxiety, guilt, frustration, hostility, spouse or child abuse, insatiable hedonism, abnormal sexual behaviour, sleep disorders, eating disorders, etc."[9]

Kaczynski states that the primitive individual suffered from less stress and frustration because its need for the power process was intact, despite facing more acute dangers, resulting in a lower life expectancy.[10] An example he gives is about security. Primitive man was at a higher risk of disease and attacks by wild animals, but according to Kaczynski they could in some ways accept this as the nature of things.[11]

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[4] Idem, 50.

[5] Kaczynski, *Industrial*, 48.

[6] Idem, 48.

[7] Idem, 55-56.

[8] Idem, 55-56.

[9] Idem, 50.

[10] Idem, 50 & 56.

[11] Idem, 57.

Whereas for the modern individual the dangers he faces are man-made and imposed, for example economic problems or environmental pollution. The modern individual feels frustrated because these things are outside of its control, but "[the] differences, we argue, is that modern man has the sense (largely justified) that change is IMPOSED on him."[12]

Kaczynski lists several reasons why not everyone in modern society suffers from psychological problems, things such as getting 'hooked' on a surrogate activity or the identification with a large organisation. But he states that even if most people were satisfied in modern society, he would still oppose to that form of society because he considers it demeaning to fulfil one's needs through artificial goals instead of real goals.[13] He is of the opinion that when one is committed to survival, life is more purposeful, and activities have more variety and autonomy.[14]

3.2.2 Negative impact on the course of society

Kaczynski argues that if modern technological society is allowed to run its current course, it will lead to mass extinction.[15] In his argument he applies competition and natural selection to complex systems such as modern technological society. He starts his argumentation with the definition of a selfpropagating system. This kind of system promotes its own survival and propagation and may do the latter in two ways: By indefinitely increasing its own size and power or by giving rise to new systems with some of its own attributes.[16] He further states that natural selection favours self-propagating systems that pursue short term advantages over their competition with little regard for long-term consequences.[17] He illustrates this using an example of a forested region occupied by a few small, rival kingdoms. The kingdoms that clear the most land for agricultural purpose can sustain a larger population and in turn a larger army. A larger army would result in an immediate advantage over rivals, meaning that the kingdoms that recklessly deforest their land will be favoured by natural selection. In the long run the deforestation caused by the short-sighted kingdoms will result in an ecological disaster that destroys all kingdoms.

He goes on by stating that the maximum size of self-propagating systems is limited by the available means of transportation and communication.[18] In modern society technology has enabled quick transportation and almost instant communication, which results in self-propagating systems spanning the entire globe. He concludes: "With several [self-propagating] systems of global reach, armed with the colossal might of mod-

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[12] Idem, 53.

[13] Kaczynski, *Industrial*, 62.

[14] Kaczynski, *Interview*, 399 & 404-405.

[15] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech*, 48.

[16] Idem, 42.

[17] Idem, 44.

[18] Idem, 46.

ern technology and competition for immediate power while exercising no restraint from concern for long-term consequences, it is incredibly difficult to imagine that conditions on this planet will not be pushed far outside all earlier limits and battered around so erratically that for any of the Earth's more complex [self-propagating] systems, including complex biological organisms, the chances of survival will approach zero."[19] Even if one self-propagating system was able to securely seize a global monopoly, the resulting time of peace and no competition will only be temporary. New systems would evolve that through subtle and sophisticated ways are unable to be recognised or suppressed by the dominant global system until the new system is large enough to compete with it, "whereupon destructive competition on a global scale would resume."[20] Continuing in this way would thoroughly devastate the earth, destroying modern technological society in the process. Kaczynski states that therefore modern technological society has to be destroyed now in order to save a great deal of biological life.[21]

One might wonder why Kaczynski wants to destroy society and not just change its course. This is because he is of the opinion that the development of society can never be subject to rational human control. He supports this claim by looking at major developments in history and concludes that alterations to society always have undesired long-term effects.[22] He states this is because only shortterm or imprecise long-term predictions of the development of society can be made reliably. This is caused by the chaotic qualities that emerge in extremely complex systems such as the weather or, even more so, human society.[23] In this case society could still be rationally steered using precise sort-term predictions, but Kaczynski objects by stating that it would be doubtful for governments consisting of more than roughly half a dozen people to resolve their differences well enough to govern in a consistently rational way.[24] Kaczynski then concludes using historical evidence that even governments consisting of a single and theoretically absolute leader have only limited decision-making freedom.[25]

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[19] Idem, 48.

[20] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech*, 51.

[21] Idem, 68.

[22] Idem, 7-12.

[23] Idem, 15.

[24] Idem, 19.

[25] Idem, 21.

3.3 Kaczynski on technology

One seeming contradiction that arises if one becomes familiar with Kaczynski's work is the use of bombs and writing, those being technology, to promote his anti-technological philosophy. Kaczynski deals with this in both of his main works by arguing that it would be hopeless for revolutionaries to destroy modern technological society without at least some modern technology.[1] He states that it is important for revolutionaries to have technological competence because the outcome of an anti- technological revolution would depend heavily on technological manipulations.[2] Kaczsynki notes: "As time passes, it becomes less and less likely that revolutions in technologically advanced countries can be consummated by traditional methods; for example, by crowds of people taking the streets."[3] But besides using technology for revolutionary purposes, Kaczynski used technology in his everyday life as well, when living in the forest. A clear example of this is his use of a rifle when hunting.[4] It becomes clear that Kaczynski is not so much against technology as such, but against technology that hinders the power process. He does not necessarily want to return to a primitive society by destroying all technology, as he sees the many hardships that come along with such a way of living.[5] He is rather against modern technology that creates monotonous and purposeless lives by disturbing the need for the power process.

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[1] Kaczynski, *Industrial*, 103.

[2] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech*, 175.

[3] Idem, 175.

[4] Kaczynski, *Interview*, 400.

[5] Theodore John Kaczynski, The Truth About Primitive Life: A Critique of Anarcho-primitivism, in *Technological Slavery: The Collected Writings of Theodore J. Kaczynski, a.k.a. "The Unabomber"*, edited by Theodore John Kaczynski. Port Townsend: Feral House, 2010, 126-189.

Chapter 4: The anthropological laws

4.1: The law of natural artificiality

4.1.1: Natural artificiality according to Plessner

Whereas the animal exists directly and naturally without self-consciousness, the human is instilled with an expression of doubt by its excentricity.[1] Observing the fundamental nature of this expression Plessner states: "What should I do, how should I live, how can I cope with this existence, an expression which not even the most naive, unbroken, content, tradition-bound and close-to-nature era in human history has been able to elude."[2] The human not only lives like an animal from the centre of its positionality but is also aware of its being-positioned, rather than being fully absorbed in it like the animal. In this way being alive and being as such are separated in the human condition. As excentric being is no longer simply living the human must forge the meaning to its being, it must fashion what he is.[3] Because of this, the human cannot simply be natural like other living beings, it needs an artificial complement to act as a counterbalance to the excentric core of its being, in the hopes of shaping its own equilibrium. The human is in this way artificial by nature.[4] Plessner concludes that the ultimate meaning of artificial complements or technology is the creation of an equilibrium, the survival aspect is only secondary.

4.1.2: Application to Kaczynski

According to Kaczynski the human in modern society experiences a lack of fulfilment in its life due to the negative consequences of modern technology on the ability to fulfil of the power process.[5] He states that by destroying technological society and enabling people to go through this process, they will live fulfilled lives. It might be the case, however, that Kaczynski confuses this unfulfillment, that according to him has been caused by modern technology, with the fundamental expression of doubt present in the human as a result of its excentricity. If this were the case, resigning to a more natural way of live has no more than a fleeting impact on the soothing of this fulfilment or brokenness. It is actually technology that enables the human to temporarily sooth this

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[1] Plessner, *Levels*, 309-310.
[2] Idem, 309.
[3] Idem, 310.
[4] Idem, 310.
[5] Kaczynski, *Industrial*, 55-56.

brokenness by the creation of an artificial equilibrium. To illustrate this, one only has to look at the life of Kaczynski himself who decided to retreat to a life of natural simplicity. He states that this brought him immense fulfilment, but he abandoned this way of living nonetheless when his desire arose to confront the encroaching modern technological society.[6] He did this by pouring his creativity in the creation of artificial complements, his writings and the bombings, to satisfy his desire. It is evident from this that even when Kaczynski was living a fulfilling life and was able to utilize the power process to its fullest extent, new doubts and desires tinkled down from the suspended heights of his excentricity.

Kaczynski himself calls these goals that do not serve to advance the physical needs, like his anti- technological quest, artificial goals and states that they cannot create adequate fulfilment because they have no clear external goal. Plessner would state, however, that the product of these goals, being technology, serves to bring artificial equilibrium to human excentricity. When living austerely in nature Kaczynski would only use technology as a way of acquiring physical necessities without disturbing the power process, like using a rifle to hunt rabbits.[7] Kaczynski believes that is the only purpose of technology, because he sees the human as nothing more than a centric being, an animal driven by instinct, with certain needs that have to be fulfilled. He, therefore, argues logically that bringing the human back to a more natural way of life would fulfil these needs better, as it does for the animal. But he does not entertain the idea that the human might be positioned very differently in being. Plessner states: "[The knowledge of the human's own excentricity] is always tainted with the pain caused by the inability to achieve the naturalness of other living beings."[8] Kaczynski does not seem to be aware of the possibility that technology has a greater meaning than survival. In this way he seeks to destroy that which could temporality give fulfilment because he confuses it as the reason for unfulfillment.

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[6] Kaczynski, *Interview*, 404-405.

[7] Kaczynski, *Interview*, 400.

[8] Plessner, *Levels*, 310.

4.2: The law of mediated immediacy

4.2.1: Mediated immediacy according to Plessner

The only way in which an artificial creation produces enough force to create an equilibrium with the excentric positionality is when its inner weight is sufficient to detach itself form its origin, this being the creative action of the human.[1] Plessner explain that this inner weight is discovered when one performs a creative action, meaning the conversion of a possibility into an actuality. In the case of a gramophone, for example, Plessner states: "The gramophone was, as it were, ready to be invented when it was established that sound waves can be transformed mechanically-a state of affairs that was not brought by human activity."[2] The human, in this sense, merely becomes aware of a possibility in his interaction with things and finds a suitable manifestation for this possibility using creative action.

Plessner relates this bringing into actuality or expression back to the specific relationship the human has with its surroundings. Whereas the animal is purely centric and is not aware of the mediated nature of its relationship with the world and perceives it as direct, the human's excentricity allows it to become aware of the mediation involved in the seemingly direct relation it has with its surroundings.[3] This mediating link is necessary to perceive the outside world as if it were direct, which Plessner describes as a relation of mediated immediacy or indirect directness with the world. This mediated relationship is overcome with creative action to create an equilibrium, but in the process of actualisation the outcome of the human's creative pursuit is changed from its original goal, meaning that the human "in a certain sense never gets where he wants to go[.]"[4] There, however, remains a continuity between the intention or goal of the creative action and its fulfilment, which is why one can still speak of the attaining of one's aspirations. When the human becomes aware of the discrepancy between its goal and its outcome, the result changes from the embodiment of its striving to an alienated shell, an object of observation. Since the striving demands actualisation of

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[1] Idem, 311.
[2] Idem, 322.
[3] Plessner, *Levels*, 324.
[4] Idem, 337.

the goal and an actualised goal as a form cannot satisfy the striving, the human must partake in an endless string of creative action to maintain fulfilment.[5]

4.2.2: Application to Kaczynski

Plessner states that the actualisation of technology, as outcome of human creative action, must deviate in some ways from the creative intent, because it carries an inner weight. As a result, technology has unintended side-effects or unforeseen consequences. Kaczynski also describes the unforeseen, and mostly negative, consequences of technology but ascribes these to the complex and interconnected nature of modern technology which the individual is unable to fully grasp using its rational capabilities, but not as inherent to technological action.[6] Another crucial difference is that Plessner is mainly concerned with the unforeseen consequences of technology for the human and the effect of these consequences on the nature of human expressivity, whereas Kaczynski is concerned with the effect of the unforeseen consequences on society and the indirect effect that this technological society might have on individual human life and the ability to fulfil the power process. Although it may be easily proven that even the simplest technologies have unforeseen consequences,[7] it is important to note that the growing complexity of technology might mean that their unforeseen consequences have a larger impact, not just on the individual, but society as a whole. Kaczynski argues that a society infused with advanced and complex technology might suffer greatly under unforeseen consequences because of the coupled nature of its technological systems.[8] Kaczynski describes alienation and other physiological problems as one of these unforeseen consequences of technology that is mediated by society, a sentiment that is outlined by Jos de Mul when he states that "the technological modification of our positionality and the distribution and transformation of our [excentricity] might intensify the alienation that is inherent in the [excentric] life form and that constantly evokes our attempts to overcome this alienation."[9]

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[5] Idem, 338.

[6] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech*, 7-12.

[7] Whether the first spear was used to hunt an animal or murder man, one of the two usages might be seen as unintended.

[8] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech*, 49.

[9] Jos de Mul, Philosophical Anthropology 2.0. In *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology: Perspectives and Prospects*, edited by Jos de Mul, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014, 473.

4.3: The law of the utopian standpoint

4.3.1: The utopian standpoint according to Plessner

The first two laws establish that a system of artificial objects only temporarily sooths the constitutive rootlessness of the human. Plessner states that when the human experiences this rootlessness in its own being it becomes aware "of the absolute contingency of existence and thus to the idea of a ground of the world [*Weltgrund*], of necessary being resting in itself, of the absolute or God."[1] This certainty created by this awareness is only temporary too, if one is to be liberated from the uncertainties of excentric existence a leap of faith has to be made.[2] When one takes this leap and lands on the reality-transcending anchor of religion, the uncertainty of existence may be conquered by a sure answer outside of reality. This triumph over uncertainty only remains as long as blind faith is kept up. The religious anchor objectives the three worlds, making it stand individually as one world.[3] In this world the human becomes aware of its own individuality and realises that it is replaceable by all other humans as an individual and this replaceability "gives [it] the warrant and certainty of the contingency of his being or individuality."[4] Plessner states that the ambiguity that arises as a result of being both an individual and replaceable is one of the basic motives for social organisation, another being the artificiality and mediated nature of excentric existence. He further states that because social organisation is a way for the human to live a life filled with ambiguity, it has "an inalienable right of revolution if the forms of sociality destroy [its] own meaning, and revolution occurs when the utopian idea of the final destructibility of all sociality takes root."[5] He further argues that this latter idea is only a means of renewing society and withholds judgement on particular social and political ideas.

Plessner concludes by opposing culture and religion. Religion is an anchor that is created when a leap of faith is undertaken and creates a home for the rootless human. Culture is created in the shared excentric world of spirit using artificial objects to

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[1] Plessner, *Levels*, 341.
[2] Idem, 342.
[3] Idem, 343.
[4] Idem, 344.
[5] Idem, 345.

temporarily sooth and at the same time propel the human and its creations "away from itself and beyond itself."[6]

4.3.2: Application to Kaczynski

According to Plessner, the human's utopian standpoint makes that any promise of a solid ground or rooting is only fleeting or illusionary. The first two laws discuss how artificial complements create a temporary equilibrium in the human and the third law states that one is able to escape onto the solid ground of religion as long as belief is held.

Kaczynski argues that the current blind faith in technology and technological society that so called 'techies' possess "can be best explained as a religious phenomenon, to which we may give the name "Technianity.""[7] Kaczynski further argues that the escape towards this quasi-religious myth is a result of the anxieties these individuals hold about the future of technological society, whereas Plessner connects these anxieties or tensions to the human's excentricity. Kaczynski argues that there would be considerably less hardship in a society without modern technology and one might presume that as a result, there would be no need in these societies to escape into similar utopian illusions. This contradicts the findings of religious escapism in primitive societies at least thousands of years before the first steam engine puffed its white clouds. It seems that primitive individuals already had a longing for the certainty of religion long before the negative effects of modern technology could be felt, suggesting that Jos de Mul is right when he states that in current times technology has taken over the utopian role of religion.[8]

As stated previously, Kaczynski finds that current social organisation, as influenced by technology, leads to alienation. If we follow Plessner, we find that Kaczynski can justifiably make a claim on his inalienable right of revolution, because society hinders its primary purpose. Of course, having the right to revolt is something else than committing acts of violence as Kaczynski has done. One might explain these acts of violence by considering Kaczynski's vision of a mostly technology free society to be a utopia. Just as he ascribes blind faith to believers of purely positive technological progress, and maybe rightly so, Kaczynski's belief in a better world after modern technology has been destroyed might be seen as largely based on faith as well. Merely identifying Kaczynski's vision as utopian is not enough, however. There are other anti-technological thinkers that have not such committed acts of violence.

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[6] Plessner, *Levels*, 346

[7] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech*, 75.

[8] De Mul, *Anthropology*, 20.

One of those thinkers is Jacques Ellul, on who's work Kaczynski based large parts of his own philosophy on technology.[9] Kaczynski states that the crucial difference between his philosophy and that of Ellul is his practical position towards revolution. Kaczynski states that "[...] Ellul only dreams of a revolution that would result from a vaguely defined, spontaneous spiritual transformation of society[.] I on the other hand think it plausible that the preconditions for revolution may be developing in modern society, and I mean a real revolution, not fundamentally different in character from other revolutions that have occurred in the past."[10] One might argue based on this that the explanation for Kaczynski's violent acts may be found in his complete faith in his utopian vision. Whereas Ellul holds hope for a peaceful revolution most likely based on his Christian believes,[11] Kaczynski being an atheist and not bound to any other ideologies except his own,[12] holds only hope in the successful implantation of his utopia. Following this logic, it would make sense that Kaczynski would condemn violence in his revolutionary plans after he came to the conclusion that the use of violence would hinder the realisation of his vision. This does not mean, however, that everyone who surrenders him- or herself to a single ideology would necessarily run the risk of becoming violent. It simply means that when one surrenders one's self to a singular ideology seeking a drastic change in society, one would be likely to actualise this change at all costs except for those costs that threaten the survival of the ideology itself. As we see with Kaczynski who condemns the use of violence "because the involvement of law-enforcement or intelligence agencies would greatly diminish the chance of a successful revolution."[13]

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[9] Theodore John Kaczynski, Postscript to the Manifesto, in *Technological Slavery: The Collected Writings of Theodore J. Kaczynski, a.k.a. "The Unabomber"*, edited by Theodore John Kaczynski. Port Townsend: Feral House, 2010, 124.

[10] Kaczynski, *Postscript*, 125.

[11] *Jacques Ellul*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019.

[12] Kaczynski, *Interview*, 401-402.

[13] Kaczynski, *Anti-Tech*, 169.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this work I tried to uncover the motives behind the terrorism of Theodore Kaczynski by answering the question stated thusly:

Can Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology as described in Levels of Organic Life and the Human, and more specifically, his notion of excentric positionality and the three anthropological laws derived from it, help us to understand the ideologically motivated terrorism conducted by Theodore Kaczynski?

Plessner defines living beings according to the relationship they have with their environment, which he calls positionality. The human has an excentric positionality which makes it able to take up a point of reference outside of its centre. This point of view is suspended in a dimension beyond that of the living system and its environment, making the human fully reflexive. The human is therefore able to reflect on its body and environment, but also its living from within the centre of its body. The human remains tied to its animal or centric existence from which its experiences the absolute present. At the same time, it realises from its excentric point of reference that seemingly immediate relations to the environment are always mediated because of the existence of boundaries, separating the living being from its environment. The excentric positionality further causes the human to be ever-suspended in nothingness, without a home or sense of rootedness, which it has to create itself.

It is based on these tensions that Plessner defines three anthropological laws that explain how the human copes with its homelessness. The first law of natural artificiality determines that the human needs artificial complements to temporarily act as a counterbalance to the excentric core of its being. Plessner sees this as the most important purpose of technology, whereas Kaczynski thinks technology's only purpose is survival. It becomes clear from Kaczynski's own life in the wilderness and his apparent unfulfillment experienced there, that the destruction of modern technology will not bring a sense of ease to his life. This is because the distress that he attributes to the disruption of the power process by modern technology is caused by the fundamental homelessness of human existence.

The second law of mediated immediacy states that the artificial complements need to acquire their own weight for them to balance excentricity. This means that during the actualisation of the artificial complements the outcome of the human's creative pursuit is changed from the embodiment of the striving into an object of observation with unforeseen consequences. Since the striving demands actualisation of the goal and an actualised goal as a form cannot satisfy the striving, the human must partake in an endless string of creative action to maintain fulfilment. Kaczynski is of the opinion that the unforeseen consequences of technology are not inherent to creative action but a result of the complex and interconnected nature of modern technological systems. Kaczynski further warns for the negative unforeseen effects of modern technology such as alienation, a sentiment which is shared by Jos de Mul.

The third law of the utopian standpoint shows that instead of temporarily soothing excentric homelessness one may take a leap of faith and find certainty in religion. This certainty will, however, remain contested by the excentric point of reference. Kaczynski

argues that in current times some individuals have blind faith in technology because they seek to escape their anxieties about the future of technological society. It is more likely, however, that individuals escape the anxieties inherent to their excentricity. In this manner technology has taken over the utopian role from religion as Jos de Mul states. It becomes further evident that Kaczynski's vision of a society without modern technology is also based largely on blind faith. This blind faith in his anti-technological utopia and the disregard of any other ideologies or religion might explain Kaczynski's previous use of violence. When one holds blind and singular faith in the realisation of one's utopia every action towards this goal will be condoned as long as it does contradict or threaten the ideology on which this utopia is based.

From this it can be concluded that most anxieties and tensions on which Kaczynski bases his ideology are not negative consequences of modern technology but may be understood as a consequence of the excentric positionality. We may further conclude that the violence that Kaczynski committed in the name of this flawed ideology is a result of his blind and singular faith in its utopian vision.

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