

# The Philosophy of Environmental Revolution

Walden, the Unabomber, and Finding Existential Purpose in  
Nature

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## Abstract

The Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski shares a unique overlap in philosophy with beloved American author Henry David Thoreau. This paper analyzes Kaczynski's manifesto and message in comparison with ideas found in Thoreau's *Walden*. Both writers present the rise of industrialization in their contemporary periods as an urgent problem, and write the return to a more primitive life within nature as a solution for the existential anxieties brought upon by modernity. Also discussed are the ethics of their revolutionary actions, and environmental revolution as a whole.

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Following a series of parcel bombings that caused three deaths, 23 injuries, and the longest FBI investigation in history, Theodore Kaczynski's "Industrial Society and Its Future," commonly known as the "Unabomber Manifesto," was published in the *Washington Post*. It begins:

*The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race. They have greatly increased the life-expectancy of those of us who live in "advanced" countries, but they have destabilized society, have made life unfulfilling, have subjected human beings to indignities, have led to widespread psychological suffering (in the Third World to physical suffering as well) and have inflicted severe damage on the natural world. The continued development of technology will worsen the situation. It will certainly subject human beings to greater indignities and inflict greater damage on the natural world, it will probably lead to greater social disruption and psychological suffering, and it may lead to increased physical suffering even in "advanced" countries (Kaczynski Section 1).*

Kaczynski's message in the manifesto is clear: the advancement of technology has led to a brutal, dissociated state of existence for those living in developed countries where these technologies have become necessities for civilized life. We are alienated from our work, as automation and computers have created a disconnect between the worker and their products. Our every need, in work and leisure is served by technology, from transportation to toasting bread, and we have lost existential purpose in our inability to directly support ourselves without the aid of machines. With our lives controlled by industry and urbanization ever on the rise, fulfillment is impossible in the modern age.

In this paper, I will analyze Kaczynski's manifesto and message in comparison with ideas found in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Both writers present the rise of industrialization in their contemporaries as an urgent problem, and write the return to a more primitive life within nature as a solution for the existential anxieties brought upon by modernity. I will also discuss the ethics of their revolutionary actions in relation to their motivations and beliefs.

“Industrial Society” was published on the condition that Kaczynski would discontinue his package bombings, mostly conducted from his 10x12 foot cabin in Lincoln, Montana, where he lived for over 20 years without running water. Kaczynski had been targeting scientists, professors, universities, airports, and anywhere he deemed technology was progressing past its limit. He was given the name UNABOM by the FBI, short for University and Airport Bomber, which was altered to the more catchy “Unabomber” by the media. Kaczynski’s goals in his bombings are illustrated in the beginning of the manifesto: “We therefore advocate a revolution against the industrial system. This revolution may or may not make use of violence; it may be sudden or it may be a relatively gradual process spanning a few decades. We can’t predict any of that. But we do outline in a very general way the measures that those who hate the industrial system should take in order to prepare the way for a revolution against that form of society” (Kaczynski Section 4). His process was slow, and on a relatively small, individual scale compared to other American media-darling terrorists and serial killers like Ted Bundy or the Columbine shooters. However, the publication of his manifesto in major news outlets would allow Kaczynski’s word to spread far and wide across the country, and hypothetically incite the revolution he hoped would change the course of modern civilization.

Kaczynski became a country-wide media phenomenon during his reign of terror and after his arrest in 1996. The story of the crazed genius, making bombs from nothing in the middle of nowhere, has captivated the nation, spawning movies, novels, essays, and recently, a popular Netflix series titled “Manhunt: Unabomber.” Kaczynski has generally been portrayed as a highly intelligent, socially awkward, and driven man, with strong opinions and questionable goals, but there is always an underlying mania. The Unabomber, who wants to uproot the very fabric of contemporary society, cannot be seen as sane by the public. Despite his intelligence, or the potential validity of his ideas, Kaczynski must be shown as a madman.

133 years before Kaczynski’s first bomb exploded, Henry David Thoreau would move into his own small cabin in the secluded woods near Walden Pond. Thoreau was 27 years old, having recently graduated from Harvard, and was dissatisfied with city life during the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Thoreau had worked in his family’s factory, co-founded a grammar school with his brother, and tutored the Emerson children, but felt restless in his life and writing. His venture into nature would allow him to focus entirely on basic needs and personal development; a necessary escape from modern civilization. In the opening chapter to *Walden*, his magnum opus that he worked on during his stay at the cottage, Thoreau expresses his disgust with the life of labor in the city, where the working man works not for his necessities, but for unnecessary luxury. “Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind. With respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meagre life than the poor” (*Walden* 12). Thoreau believed that wisdom and purpose did not come from an excess of opulence, but from working to fulfill one’s basic needs. He

writes his stay at Walden Pond as a welcome escape from urban life, and cites the unprecedented positive impact of living in the wilderness.

Thoreau built the house himself on Ralph Waldo Emerson's land, just surpassing \$28 in expenses (about \$958 in 2020) (Thoreau 40). He managed to sustain himself through his garden and the nearby water source, occasionally eating meat as well. Eventually, he would return to his hometown of Concord, where he lived as a writer and environmental and political philosopher until his death in 1862 at age 44.

The similarities between Thoreau and Kaczynski's lifestyles and philosophy cannot be overlooked. Both argued for the benefits and preservation of nature; both were disenchanted with the ever-industrializing civilizations of their respective contemporaries, and of course, both wrote their key works in a tiny shack in the middle of the woods. Though *Walden* and Thoreau are not mentioned in "Industrial Society," certain sections of the manifesto are strikingly similar to Thoreau's works. The most important takeaway from the writings of Thoreau and Kaczynski is the idea of nature, and primitive life in the wilderness, as a sort of cure for the existential woes brought upon by modern civilization, specifically anxiety created by capital-driven society. Though the extent to which they argue for this thesis is different, the conclusion remains the same: the overbearing materialism and lack of direct fulfillment through work and everyday life in capitalistic society have led to an existential nightmare for those living under such circumstances.

However, Thoreau is one of the most distinguished American writers, and *Walden* is widely regarded as a cornerstone of American literature, while Kaczynski lives out his eight life sentences in a supermax prison, without the possibility of parole. Both men believed in the importance of life within nature, but the actions they took in relation to their ideals drastically differ. Kaczynski took the approach of violence, and encouraged others to do so in his manifesto. He believed that his way of life had to be adopted by the world, and that the consequences would be drastic if his message fell upon deaf ears. Thoreau's opinions on nature and technology are more personal. Towards the beginning of *Walden*, he comments on the concept of pushing his lifestyle choices on others:

*One young man of my acquaintance, who has inherited some acres, told me that he thought he should live as I did, if he had the means. I would not have anyone adopt my mode of living on any account; for, beside that before he has fairly learned it, I may have found out another for myself, I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue his own way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead (Thoreau 58).*

Thoreau lived in the woods for two years before returning to civilized society, and during this stint he visited local towns and spent time with his neighbors. Kaczynski

lived a far more solitary and secluded life, with fewer amenities and for a much longer period of time. While Thoreau comments on the beauty of his time at Walden Pond, his larger wish in *Walden* is for the reader to forge their own path, no matter how separate it may be from society's dictation. The differences between the two thinker's actions when contrasted with the similarities between their ideas of nature invites the question: can complete harmony with the wilderness truly be seen as a remedy to existential angst, and if so, to what extent must one go to convince the masses of this truth? While Thoreau and Kaczynski present a primitive life within nature as a solution to existential crises, the reality of living in a universe without inherent meaning extends outside of civilized society, and follows the thinker into the woods. However, such existential sorrows have been deeply heightened by capitalist modernity, and action must be taken in order for humanity to stray from its current path of suffering and industrial oppression.

## Capitalism and Existential Angst

First, I will delve into the idea of a theoretical "cure" for existential anxiety, and to do so, the state of alienation and depression that Kaczynski and Thoreau discuss must be defined in more broad, philosophical terms. In *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, famed French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre defines the key concept that Christian and Atheist existentialists share in their view of existential philosophy: "What they have in common is that they think that existence precedes essence, or, if you prefer, that subjectivity must be the starting point" (Marino 450). Sartre goes on to write "Man is nothing but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of existentialism" (Marino 452). If the existence of man, his creation and formation as an individual, precedes his essence, or what gives him purpose and makes him unique to other creatures, then there is no objective truth to man's journey in life. There is no fixed higher meaning in life to work towards, or balance one's existence around.

For many, the lack of a higher purpose is a daunting proposition. With nothing guaranteed to provide meaning in life, one is entirely responsible for their own fate in the universe. This seemingly unfortunate position, coupled with our frighteningly short lifespans, has caused humans to create various escapes from the reality of their mortality. In *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker argues that the fear of death is the primary driving force behind all of humanity's actions and anxiety. The awareness that we will inevitably cease to exist is too much to cope with, so we must invent realities in which this is not the case. Becker discusses the idea of the religious or cultural "hero," who is courageous enough to confront death directly, manages to elude it entirely, or comes back to life, like Jesus (Becker 11-12). Humans have thrown themselves behind these heroes in worship, hoping that they too will be able to cope with their mortality in epic sacrifice, giving their death, and thus their life, meaning. The idea of living in a world where there is no inherent meaning and death is inevitable is too much to

bear. Becker would likely designate Kaczynski and Thoreau's vision of nature as such a coping mechanism—a way of inventing meaning within the wilderness to distract from the morbid reality of existence.

Much of Becker's philosophy crosses over with German philosopher Martin Heidegger's ideas of death and its importance, and Heidegger is cited several times in *The Denial of Death*. Heidegger writes of a distraught, passive emotional state called Angst, which stems from the inability to properly recognize and comprehend one's death. While we may believe death to be an inescapable truth, we do not fully acknowledge it as "the ownmost nonrelational, certain, and, as such, indefinite and not to be bypassed possibility..." (Marino 428). Death is completely personal and nonrelational: no one else can experience your death. It is certain and indefinite, as it will happen to every person, and can happen at any time. Every person knows death exists, but they are unable to, or force themselves not to engage with Heidegger's full definition. Instead, we attempt to ignore our fear of death completely, or create a reality in which death is not so paramount: living life pretending that death is only experienced by others. We do not accept death as completely certain or inevitable, because we do not recognize that we can die at any time, in any state, regardless of our way of life.

To Becker and Heidegger, existential anxiety is tied into the human condition. The fear of death is present for all, from essentially the dawn of time, and is the major cause of existential angst. Thoreau and Kaczynski offer a more contemporary, anti-capitalist perspective on the matter, believing that capitalism and its symptoms, namely industrialization, are the root of existential misery. Their feelings of uselessness and alienation stem from lack of fulfillment in modern life and labor. Kaczynski elaborates on his ideas in section 33 of his manifesto: "Human beings have a need (probably based in biology) for something that we will call the power process. This is closely related to the need for power (which is widely recognized) but is not quite the same thing. The power process has four elements. The three most clearcut of these we call goal, effort and attainment of goal" (Kaczynski section 33). He goes on to explain that important goals, if not attained, result in death, such as food, water, and shelter, whereas non important goals, if not attained, result in "defeatism, low self-esteem or depression" (Kaczynski sections 35-36). In Kaczynski's "power process" model, the Industrial Revolution has created a vacuum for essential goals. Survival related goals have become obsolete for many in industrialized countries, as life expectancies rise with the creation of new technologies. Though the average standard of living may not be objectively high in western developed countries, most have access to food, water, and shelter. Kaczynski acknowledges this, but argues that without striving towards essential goals, life loses meaning: "in order to avoid serious psychological problems, a human being needs goals whose attainment requires effort, and he must have a reasonable rate of success in attaining his goals" (Kaczynski 37).

Of course, humans still have goals within modernity, but these goals are all either focused directly on capital, or surrogate goals created to distract from the boredom of leisure. Kaczynski employs a distinctly anti-capitalist viewpoint in his discussion of the

pursuit of wealth in modern civilization: “In modern industrial society only minimal effort is necessary to satisfy one’s physical needs. It is enough to go through a training program to acquire some petty technical skill, then come to work on time and exert the very modest effort needed to hold a job. The only requirements are a moderate amount of intelligence and, most of all, simple OBEDIENCE” (Kaczynski 40). He goes on to discuss the separation of humans from their work, simply existing as cogs without autonomy, serving the industrial machine instead of their own direct needs. There is a complete disconnect between product and labor, as we only work for capital as opposed to essential needs. Modern labor is just a “surrogate activity,” not fulfilling the power process. “People who are deeply involved in surrogate activities are never satisfied, never at rest. Thus the money-maker constantly strives for more and more wealth...Many people who pursue surrogate activities will say that they get far more fulfillment from these activities than they do from the “mundane” business of satisfying their biological needs, but that is because in our society the effort needed to satisfy the biological needs has been reduced to triviality” (Kaczynski 41). The existence of a monetary system at all removes our autonomy, and the freedom to pursue our own goals. “It is said that we live in a free society because we have a certain number of constitutionally guaranteed rights. But these are not as important as they seem. The degree of personal freedom that exists in a society is determined more by the economic and technological structure of the society than by its laws or its form of government” (Kaczynski section 95). We are theoretically free to do as we please, but in capitalist society, one can only support themselves through capital, forcing us to commit to unfulfilling, meaningless labor in order to survive.

In his untitled economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844, Karl Marx claims a similar concept of alienation through labor, as the worker is entirely disconnected from the work they do. Though capital is supposedly generated, so little is returned to the worker that the work is rendered meaningless. The worker does not work to create things for themselves, satisfying essential goals, but to create value for their capitalist overlords. They do not raise their own cattle, or sow their own fields, they produce nothing that substantially impacts their lives. This aligns with Kaczynski’s idea of modern labor not leading to fulfillment. Marx also writes: “The *devaluation* of the world of men is in direct proportion to the *increasing value* of the world of things,” further backing the claim that industrialization and suffering have a causational relationship (Marx, Estranged Labor). However, it is important to note the differences in Marx and Kaczynski’s overall philosophy. Kaczynski is focused on individual autonomy: humans will find fulfillment through completing goals necessary for their own biological needs. Marx’s goal was broad political revolution, with people working together to support one another. Still, their critiques of capitalism are strikingly similar.

If Kaczynski and Marx are correct, then finding existential gratification in industrial society is impossible. While Marx does not explicitly advocate for a halt to industrialism, his major issues with labor in capitalist society still fall in-line with Kaczynski’s ideas. In the Kaczynski framework, work is not stimulating, and our other goals, such

as hobbies or research, are merely distractions. The only way for Kaczynski's power process, which is wired into human biology, to be fulfilled, is for the primary goals in one's life to be necessary for one's survival. Here we find Kaczynski's explanation for his retreat into the Montana wilderness. When focused on finding clean water, hunting and trapping game, and foraging for food, there is little time for leisure, and one is forced to work on only survival. To Kaczynski, this leaves no room to doubt one's place in a seemingly meaningless universe, and is the key to a proper lifestyle.

Thoreau is the middle ground between Kaczynski and Marx. He agrees with Kaczynski on labor within industrial civilization detracting from necessary biological goals, which are more gratifying, but also recognizes the value of socialization. During his stay at the cabin, Thoreau spent time with neighbors, visited nearby towns, and even brought his mother in Concord his dirty laundry to wash. Though he loved solitude, Thoreau welcomed company as well: "I think that I love society as much as most, and am ready to fasten myself like a bloodsucker for the time to any full-blooded man that comes my way" (Thoreau 116). Of course, Thoreau also returned to civilization after only two years in the woods, despite all of his critiques in *Walden*. However, Thoreau's motivations are still in-line with Kaczynski's: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" (Thoreau 75). Thoreau was similarly dissatisfied with his industrializing contemporary to Kaczynski, and went into nature to focus completely on only what was necessary for survival, hoping for a remedy to his distress. On labor, Thoreau writes:

*Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to be anything but a machine (Thoreau 6).*

Thoreau's ideas of man lacking autonomy and completely detached from proper goals are similar to Kaczynski's power process. Humans live for the advancement of technology and capital, as opposed to their own philosophical advancement. However, Thoreau advocates for solitude in order for private contemplation while Kaczynski believes more in complete focus on work.

Despite their crossovers with Marxist thought, Thoreau and Kaczynski obviously cannot

be classified as Marxists. Marx would rather a working class communal takeover of the means of production, whereas Kaczynski and Thoreau would prefer to abandon the means entirely, favoring individualism. Kaczynski spends the entire first section

of the manifesto, following the introduction, criticizing modern leftism: “The leftist is anti-individualistic, pro-collectivist. He wants society to solve everyone’s problems for them, satisfy everyone’s needs for them, take care of them. He is not the sort of person who has an inner sense of confidence in his ability to solve his own problems and satisfy his own needs. The leftist is antagonistic to the concept of competition because, deep inside, he feels like a loser” (Kaczynski section 16). Later, he explicitly states that he is not rebelling against any form of government, but society’s development as a whole: “The kind of revolution we have in mind will not necessarily involve an armed uprising against any government. It may or may not involve physical violence, but it will not be a POLITICAL revolution. Its focus will be on technology and economics, not politics” (Kaczynski 192). Thoreau also believed in the value of individual merit over government, which he outlines in his essay “Civil Disobedience.” “Government shows thus how successfully men can be imposed on, even impose on themselves, for their own advantage...Yet this government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way. *It* does not keep the country free. *It* does not educate. The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done someone more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way” (Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience,” 280). Thoreau despised his contemporary government, and does state that a revolution is warranted, but he does not state the specific form of government he is working towards outside of one that does not abuse its power for imperialist measures, and does not allow slavery. Thus, Thoreau cannot be explicitly classified as a Marxist, despite many shared beliefs with Marx. It is unlikely that he ever read Marx’s works (Salt).

Rather, Thoreau and Kaczynski fall into the network of what Robert Sayre and Michael Lowy refer to as the Romantic anti-capitalist, in their essay “Figures of Romantic AntiCapitalism.” The authors discuss Romantic writers during the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and the new wave of Romantic thinkers created by the dawn of modernity. Thoreau and Kaczynski hold a Romantic attachment to nature and its pleasures. To the Romantic, nature has the existential power to grant fulfillment to those who live with it harmoniously. “There is also a very essential Romantic component in certain large-scale social movements like ecology, pacifism and the anti-nuclear coalitions, which have changed the political map of the country. The Romantic longing for a harmonious relationship between man and nature is one of the main driving forces of such movements, and one of the main tenets of their counter-culture (Sayre and Lowy 42). Industrialization and capitalism have severed the bond between humans and nature, as forests are torn down to make way for factories, and the Romantic believes that this bond is key to the prosperity of humankind.

In the Romantic anti-capitalist framework, modernity and capitalism are chiefly responsible for the suffering of humankind, and the existential meaninglessness that comes with industry. This contrasts Becker and Heidegger’s view of existential angst as a default predisposition for human existence. Kaczynski argues that the lack of agency

created by industrial society causes existential angst, as opposed to it being inherent to human life.

*It is true that primitive man is powerless against some of the things that threaten him; disease for example. But he can accept the risk of disease stoically. It is part of the nature of things, it is no one's fault, unless it is the fault of some imaginary, impersonal demon.*

*But threats to the modern individual tend to be MAN-MADE. They are not the results of chance but are IMPOSED on him by other persons whose decisions he, as an individual, is unable to influence. Consequently he feels frustrated, humiliated and angry (Kaczynski section 69).*

Kaczynski firmly believes that primitive man lacked depression in the face of a life without certain meaning, and that returning to a primitive life and abandoning technological progress will save humankind from further existential crises. Thoreau is not as confident in this claim, but still professes the profound positive impact his journey in the woods had on him: "...if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagines, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours" (Thoreau 267). He encourages the reader to find ways of life outside of the norm, and to search for greater meaning, and is much more optimistic than Kaczynski. Still, he clearly views capitalism and industry as a key cause to existential sorrow. In opposition, Heidegger writes: "Death is a possibility of being that Da-sein (being) always has to take upon itself. With death, Da-sein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-of-being. In this possibility, Da-sein is concerned about its being-in-the-world absolutely" (Marino, Heidegger 415). Death is the ultimate possibility of existence, overtaking all worldly things. Until we recognize death as inevitable, our every action goes into either actively attempting to ignore and avoid death. Death exists regardless of the level of industrialization in society, it exists regardless of the existence of capital. To the existentialist, there is no decided inherent meaning to life. Kaczynski and Thoreau see harmony with nature as a way to instill meaning and give life purpose, and capitalism as a force looking to destroy this harmony. Heidegger argues that existential crises will always exist as our primary existential problem is death.

## Nature's Validity as an Existential Solution

Without a specific higher guiding force, there is nothing and no one outside of ourselves and our will that can make life worth living. However, this does not render life completely absurd and meaningless. The existentialists reproach such a pessimistic and nihilistic opinion on the subject. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Simone de Beauvoir, another French philosopher and one of Sartre's close friends and lovers, states "The

notion of ambiguity must not be confused with that of absurdity. To declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given a meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won” (Marino, de Beauvoir 540). While existentialists have been painted as absurdists, who see life as completely meaningless, existentialism is in reality an optimistic philosophy. To the existentialist, though the meaning of life is not fixed, it is our constant search for answers in regard to our purpose and existence that gives life its meaning. Though we may not know the reason for our existence, our lives are validated in that we can make the most of them through our own efforts. To Kaczynski, and to an extent, Thoreau, this meant journeying into nature to find preoccupation with survival, but to other existential philosophers, simply recognizing life as lacking inherent meaning, and then adding one’s own is enough to prevent existential anxiety.

Heidegger wrote that death had complete control over the lives of those who attempted to downplay or ignore its certainty. However, he also offers a solution to the issue of Angst: “Anticipation reveals to Da-sein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility to be itself, primarily unsupported by concern taking care of things, but to be itself in passionate anxious freedom toward death which is free of the illusions of the they, factual, and certain of itself” (Marino, Heidegger 439). To completely acknowledge and anticipate death, in its ownmost, nonrelational, certain, indefinite and not to be bypassed nature, is to find freedom in life. In other words, recognizing the morbidity of existence, and our inability to change it, allows us to live our lives to the fullest. This can be done even without living a primitive life in the woods as Kaczynski would suggest.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus expands on the optimism of existentialism. He discusses the hero, Sisyphus who has been condemned to roll a rock up a hill for all eternity, never reaching the top. Sisyphus is a metaphor for the human condition: we persist through existence though we can never find out true meaning. However, we still have agency over how we consider life, despite there being no higher power to tell us what is right from wrong. “If there is a personal fate, there is no higher destiny, or at least there is but one which he concludes is inevitable and despicable. For the rest, he knows himself to be the master of his days” (Marino, Camus 640). One’s search for meaning and fulfillment takes precedence over any theoretical fixed meaning. Camus concludes his essay with these words: “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (Marino, Camus 640). Happiness and existentialism are not at all juxtaposed, and one can find satisfaction in life even when it lacks inherent meaning.

With Sartre, de Beauvoir, Heidegger, and Camus’ words in mind, Kaczynski’s ideas begin to appear flawed. After all, if one can simply find happiness by recognizing their death, and that their existence precedes essence, then why journey into nature at all? Of course, the task is not so simple, and the majority of suffering individuals who Kaczynski brings up have not read the great existential philosophers. Kaczynski’s ideas fall under the realm of existentialism, though his advice is more specific. By devoting

oneself completely to nature and survival, one is creating their own purpose in the universe. However, nature cannot be seen as the ultimate cure- all to existentialist woes. The issue of one's self worth in a vast world has certainly been present since the dawn of humankind. Focusing entirely on survival allows one to mostly avoid this crisis, but it does not completely save the soul. I picture a caveman, fulfilled after spending his day hunting mammoths and building fires from scratch, sitting down to finally rest, only to be stricken with thoughts of helplessness in a meaningless life. There will always be downtime, and thus there will always be existential dread. One must go further than living in nature, and confront these issues in an existential manner: by recognizing that creating one's own purpose is completely valid and justified in the pursuit of happiness.

Thoreau, though extremely grateful for his time spent with nature, understood the existentialist thought process. He knew that it was not nature entirely that gave him meaning, but his search for new purpose itself, hence why he encourages the reader to take their own path. Life in the woods can be seen as an excellent escape from the hardship of modern society, and even as a method of finding existential purpose, but it is but one method. In her conclusion to "The Ethics of Ambiguity," de Beauvoir writes:

*Let men attach value to words, forms, colors, mathematical theorems, physical laws, and athletic prowess; let them accord value to one another in love and friendship, and the objects, the events, and the men immediately have this value; they have it absolutely. It is possible that a man may refuse to love anything on earth; he will prove this refusal and he will carry it out by suicide. If he lives, the reason is that, whatever he may say, there still remains in him some attachment to existence; his life will be commensurate with this attachment; it will justify itself to the extent that it genuinely justifies the world (Marino, de Beauvoir 568).*

So long as we keep living, and keep loving our lives, and continue to search for happiness in all things, our life has meaning. There is more to purpose than moving to the woods, and nature cannot be seen as the definitive and singular cure for existential anxiety.

However, nature's benefits still cannot be overstated. Heidegger himself often found solace in the wilderness, and believed that the rise of technology was warping our view of nature into something only for our own technological benefit. "...Heidegger draws attention to technology's place in bringing about our decline by constricting our experience of things as they are. He argues that we now view nature, and increasingly human beings too, only technologically—that is, we see nature and people only as raw material for technical operation," writes Mark Blitz in his essay "Understanding Heidegger on Technology" (Blitz 63). Heidegger is not alone in this regard, joined by Camus, Nietzsche, and numerous others in appreciation for nature and solitude. Camus wrote extensively on his trips to his native country of Algeria, and the beauty he saw

in its arid landscapes and beaches. Though nature may not be an automatic cure to existential dread, it can provide a space where one feels in harmony with the natural world, and offers a solitude unmatched by any way of life in civilization. At the end of the chapter “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” Thoreau writes:

*Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born. The intellect is a cleaver; it discerns and rifts its way into the secret of things. I do not wish to be any more busy with my hands than is necessary (Thoreau 81).*

Though only our confrontation and acceptance of the world with inherent meaning can truly give us purpose, in nature can we find an escape from the realities of modernity and a space to freely contemplate our existence. There is a truth to both Kaczynski and Thoreau’s words when they defend the wholesomeness of a life within the wilderness

## The Problem of Revolution

If we are to trust Kaczynski, Thoreau, and the existentialists on the value of nature, a dark problem arises. The rise of industry and technology, which disconnects humans from nature and causes environmental destruction, now poses both a physical (global warming) and existential threat. Though I have established that nature is not entirely necessary for one to find existential fulfillment, the wilderness still holds immense value as a diversion from alienated life under capitalism. If communion with nature can lead to increased fulfillment on any level, then the forces acting to destroy it must be annihilated.

It is at the crossroads of revolutionary action where Kaczynski and Thoreau primarily divert paths. Their environmentalist philosophies remain similar, but the actions the two thinkers took in regard to their beliefs differ immensely. In her short story “Cabin Cabin,” told from the point of view of Kaczynski’s cabin after his arrest, author Joy Williams critiques Thoreau’s efforts from the cottage’s perspective:

*“Henry could be silly. Too, Nature, was a business for Henry, an occupation, and his cabin-in-the-woods experiment has become one of the most overinflated of American myths. Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts, was a simulated wilderness even back in 1845. The cabin was in view of the public road and its scribbling occupant had a constant stream of visitors. It wasn’t as though he had nothing but a farting pond for company. And he*

*lived there for only two years before returning to the gabby salons of town”*  
(Williams 65-66).

The cabin character calls Thoreau a sellout, not committed enough to truly understand Kaczynski's vision of nature, and thus not willing to fight for it. Truthfully, Thoreau did not fight for the preservation of nature the way that Kaczynski did. He killed not a single person for the environmental revolution, choosing to write his frustrations instead of mailing them.

However, Thoreau was no stranger to the idea of revolution. In “Civil Disobedience,” he recalls being arrested and imprisoned for not paying taxes, protesting against slavery and the United States' involvement in the Mexican-American War. His refusal to contribute to a system he found unjust is rebellion in and of itself, and he encourages others to do the same: “If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible” (Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience” 290). Thoreau also had a vision of his ideal political utopia: “I please myself with imagining a State at least which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor; which even would not think it inconsistent with its own repose if a few were to live aloof from *it*...” (Thoreau, Civil Disobedience 301-302). He was an abolitionist and anti-imperialist, and wrote many essays on the topics, hoping to help sway Americans to the right side of history.

Kaczynski's revolution is apolitical. All people are subject to suffering under industry, thus that problem must be eradicated before anything else. He would refer to Thoreau's ideas as “reforms” rather than revolutionary:

*By the first principle (of revolution), generally speaking an attempt at social reform either acts in the direction in which the society is developing anyway (so that it merely accelerates a change that would have occurred in any case) or else it has only a transitory effect, so that the society soon slips back into its old groove. To make a lasting change in the direction of development of any important aspect of a society, reform is insufficient and revolution is required. (A revolution does not necessarily involve an armed uprising or the overthrow of a government.) By the second principle, a revolution never changes only one aspect of a society, it changes the whole society; and by the third principle changes occur that were never expected or desired by the revolutionaries. By the fourth principle, when revolutionaries or utopians set up a new kind of society, it never works out as planned (Kaczynski section 108).*

Kaczynski's concept of revolution is highly broad, but the primary point is that it requires complete societal change from the basis of what that society is built upon. In this case, change from modern society's routes in capitalism and industry.

Though Thoreau believed in the harms of industrialization, he does not speak to what can be done on a revolutionary level to stop the rise of industry. He only discusses how the individual can find peace by avoiding new technologies. However, he was fervent in fighting for the social issues of his time, protesting, lecturing, and of course, writing (Friedrich 55). Paul Friedrich outlines Thoreau's political efforts in his essay "Walden's Political Thoreau," commending the value Thoreau's writing had on pushing forward the abolitionist movement. And yet, Thoreau's writing was not enough to stop the industrial revolution, and the situation has worsened to an extreme degree. Technology has advanced far further than Thoreau could have imagined, and life within civilized society has almost completely eclipsed rural life in America.

So the question remains, if one is certain that a problem is plaguing society, causing existential misery, to what degree must one go to fight against this problem? Was Thoreau's writing enough, or is Kaczynski's radical action more appropriate? De Beauvoir discusses the relation between an end (in Kaczynski's case the complete abandonment of industrial society, and in Thoreau's case a political utopia in which technological progress has stopped and he is free to do as he pleases) and its means.

De Beauvoir uses the U.S.S.R. as her key example when considering sacrifices for a theoretical greater good. "The opponent of the U.S.S.R. is making use of a fallacy when, emphasizing the part of criminal violence assumed by Stalinist politics, he neglects to confront it with the ends pursued" (Marino, de Beauvoir 556). Though there was mass violence caused in order to create the powerhouse nation of the U.S.S.R., the ends imagined were a peaceful and equal state for all. Conversely, de Beauvoir states to unconditionally defend the actions of the U.S.S.R. because of the just nature of its ends, is also a logical fallacy (Marino, de Beauvoir 557). As there is no objective truth to the universe, there is no objective, mathematical equation to balance violence in the name of a cause. "We challenge every condemnation as well as every a priori justification of the violence practised with a view to a valid end" (Marino, de Beauvoir 558). One must be in constant consideration of every action they take to justify an end, and must be in constant consideration of whether that end is just. If you believe your way of life to be beneficial to all, you must reevaluate this belief with each sacrifice made. One can never give in to the idea that a goal is necessary regardless of means, or that the means completely invalidate the goal.

With de Beauvoir's frame of engagement and sacrifice in pursuit of revolution, Kaczynski and Thoreau's actions take shape more clearly. Thoreau, with his broader political leanings, was less convinced of the complete, overbearing power of nature. "I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one" (Thoreau 266). He cared enough to profess his love for nature in writing, and discuss it amongst friends and visitors, but Thoreau was not interested in upheaving the routes of society, or the sacrifices that would come with such a task. Kaczynski had no life outside of the woods. To him, that was the only solution, and society had to know for its own benefit. Thoreau was certain that the woods had a positive impact on his mental well being,

and wanted to spread his message. Kaczynski was certain that the woods were the only way humanity could ever find salvation. Each man did their best to measure how important their task was, and thus considered the sacrifices that needed to be made. Though Kaczynski's actions appear absurd, even psychotic, one must imagine how much they would sacrifice if they felt all humans were suffering from deep existential anxiety, and they had the power to change things.

In "License to Kill: Contesting the Legitimacy of Green Violence," author Robert Fletcher cites Derrick Jensen, an environmental extremist with similar opinions on violence to Kaczynski. "Non-violent approaches to addressing these issues, Jensen maintains, have been largely ineffective thus far. He therefore asserts that more aggressive measures are necessary in order to counter the illegitimate violence inflicted by modern civilisation on the rest of the planet" (Fletcher 151). This calls back to Thoreau's argument for abstaining from taxes: the violence we cause is nothing in comparison to the violence *they* cause. Kaczynski believed he had the answer to human suffering, and went to extreme lengths to publish his manifesto and notify others. To abstain from action would be to allow this suffering to continue, and he could never do more damage than his enemy, industrial society, had done. In his conclusion, Fletcher writes:

*Contemporary green violence may entail, therefore, a qualitative transformation in the nature of state's involvement in environmental action. If the object of biopower is a national population, then the violent killing of perceived threats can be legitimated on the argument that these threats are not themselves part of the population being protected. When the object of biopower becomes life as a whole, on the other hand, killing must indeed be justified by invoking an extraordinary 'exception' (Agamben 1998) to normal biopolitical governance, as Lunstrum (2017) contends" (Fletcher 154).*

Kaczynski felt that the object of biopower, in his case industrialization, was threatening life itself, and thus was able to justify his violent actions. We will never be able to mathematically deduce whether his actions were too much, or whether Thoreau's actions were too little, but we must be in constant consideration of why what they did had to be done, if they should have done more or less. There is no objectively right answer to the matter of terrorism versus journaling, as the end goals are completely separate. The answer to the question of "what must be done" in regard to anti-capitalist environmental revolution, is that one must first consider how truly important the revolution is in making the world a better place, and act from there, continuing this consideration with every new action. The only objective truth is that both Kaczynski and Thoreau must be taken seriously as thinkers when engaging with their projects, and that their warnings on nature and industry should be heeded. Williams ends her story with these words on Kaczynski: "His previous lawyers had arranged for a psychiatric examination without his consent, an examination that concluded that he was fit

to stand trial even though he was a ‘sickie,’ or in more psychologically precise terms, a paranoid schizophrenic awash in delusions—the worst one being that technology is the vehicle by which people are destroying themselves and the world. What? It’s not true?” (Williams 67). Of course, it is true. Modernity and its fallouts could very well lead to the end of civilization, and it is the individual’s duty to determine to what degree they will take action.

Thoreau is long dead, and Kaczynski will sit in a jail cell for the rest of his life, likely not much longer. “Industrial Society and its Future” has not had its desired impact yet, and more than likely never will. Similarly, *Walden*, though beloved by contemporary critics and taught at schools around the world, has been unable to halt the rise of industry. However, broader social impact cannot always be determined, and the number of individuals moved by Kaczynski or Thoreau’s writing, who may someday be spurred into action, cannot be measured. There are, of course, an ever growing number of environmentalists and eco-fascists among the younger generations. In his book *Poetry of the Revolution*, Martin Fuchner analyzes the purpose of the manifesto:

*This desire for openness and manifestation is central to the manifesto, defining its creative practice, as Raymond Williams might put it, of articulating what has been hitherto unarticulated. Foregrounding this creative practice is at odds with most theories premised on the determining function of history or modes of production. Manifestos need to be recognized not only as symptoms and indices of social formations, as superstructure, but also as moments of actual or attempted intervention, perhaps even as instances of the superstructure altering the base. Whether or not individual manifestos actually accomplish their ambitious goals—some altered history far beyond their wildest dreams—matters less than the literary, poetic, and rhetorical strategies they developed for the single purpose of changing the world. The history of successive manifestos is thus also a history of the futures these manifestos sought to predict, prefigure, and realize (Fuchner 3).*

Within Fuchner’s framework I choose to view *Walden* as a manifesto of a slightly separate category than “Industrial Society.” In *Walden*, a disaffected young Thoreau attempts to convince his reader to abandon society’s vision of a proper life and lead their own adventure to achieve fulfillment. “...If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours” (Thoreau 267). It is absolutely a moment of attempted intervention, as Thoreau wants to dissuade his reader from falling into the trap of industrial civilization. Unlike “Industrial Society,” the intent is more broad, but neither manifesto has specific instructions. The reader of these two texts can evaluate whether it is capitalism that has brought upon the scourge of existential woe, or take the side of Heidegger and the other existentialists in seeing the value in nature,

but recognizing existential angst as a greater battle. Upon finishing, the reader has to make the existential choice to act. They must decide themselves what is worth fighting for, and how much they must fight for it. *Walden* and “Industrial Society and Its Future” serve their purpose as manifestos: they establish the indisputable problem of industrial modernity and offer a solution. Thoreau suggests going against the grain of society, with living life in the woods as a prime example, and Kaczynski advocates for full revolution against the industrial system. Now that they are gone, only the reader can carry on their legacy, just as only the reader can establish their own purpose in life.

Kaczynski calls his revolution apolitical, but I disagree. His connections with Marx overlap both in critique of capitalism and demand for change. With major corporations behind the vast majority of environmental damage and carbon emissions, and large state governments enforcing imperialist horrors and class disparity, the mass uprising Kaczynski envisions is distinctly political. A complete return to primitive life may not be necessary for existential freedom, but capitalism remains the major cause of alienation and dissatisfaction in Western contemporary society, and must be dealt with as such. Violent measures should be avoided until absolutely necessary, and in the case of revolt against modernity, which has enslaved humanity in the chains of capitalist labor and left the Earth on the brink of devastation, violence is warranted. This violence must not target only the individual scientist, seen in Kaczynski’s methods, but the structures of capitalism themselves: corporations and governments. When these structures are toppled, the individual will regain control and dignity, and nature’s glory will be restored. Only then can we truly embark on the path towards enchantment and existential freedom.

## Author’s Note

I purposefully chose to omit the experiments done on Kaczynski at Harvard. In an essay analyzing his texts, I believe bringing up that portion of his history would only serve to diminish his points in an unfair manner. There is a place to discuss his supposed madness, but his major points in the manifesto must be taken seriously.

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