

A Response To The Power Process Concept

What are we actually lacking?

Son of Waru

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Kaczynski, in defining all activities external to mere survival as surrogate, haphazardly erases the potential for beauty, goodness, and love from the world.

Only Ever Freedom-James Ellis

The extreme of Kaczynski is that he was so reactive as seeing it everywhere, in all prescribed social roles, and it was the inevitable result of plenty

Anonymous Comment

Ted suggests that people who are depressed or unhappy are such because of disruption of the power process. He argues we all need to have a goal, to put in effort, and to attain the goal, and depending on the individual, a certain amount of autonomy. He argues that in order to be truly fulfilled, one must attain their biological or physical needs through the power process. Because of modern society, these needs are either too easy or too hard. So people engage in what he calls “surrogate activities” to go through the power process. These are any activities which only give fulfilment, and do not give us our biological or physical needs.

This is one of Kaczynski’s core concepts. But this concept has been put into question, and even from his inner circle, mainly, Ultimo Reducto. Reducto, while a follower, has critiqued Ted on a number of occasions, including labelling his movement under the anti tech banner, the naming of the power process, as well as some of the freedoms stated in the manifesto, which humans have never really had.

In regards to the power process and surrogate activities, he has this to say¹.

I could express perhaps some disagreements, doubts or criticisms to Kaczynski’s way of formulating the power process theory regarding some secondary details of it, like e.g., the name used by him to refer to the important purposes and goals that the artificial goals of surrogate activities substitute for. He called them “real goals” (or sometimes “practical/important/purposeful activities”), but this polysemic “real” is quite confusing. And regarding to the undefined “practical”, “important” or “purposeful”, what is practical, important or purposeful and what is not? How we determine them? Which are the criteria to define them? Admittedly, I don’t know well how to call them to avoid any confusion. In fact, every adjective that I can figure out has its problems too.

¹ A bit more on Reducto’s critique. “In fact any attainable goal is ‘real’, in the sense of ‘true’, ‘existent’ or ‘feasible’. ‘Many mixed surrogate activities are undeniably practical and/or important according to some criteria or in some contexts. Kaczynski hasn’t defined explicitly such criteria or contexts, and he should have. And obviously all of them are purposeful -every activity have a purpose or goal, by definition; it is the first step or element of any activity, mentioned above. The purpose can seem either preposterous or crucial to us, but it exists. What is the criterion to tell which purpose worthwhile which not? He doesn’t tell it us clearly, leaving it susceptible of subjective, sundry and even incompatible interpretations”

It's very important for me to bring up the fact that Ted is *not against* surrogate activities. This is because there is a disproportionate amount of people who use the concept as a tool to attack those who enjoy surrogate activities.

In a letter to David Skrbina in Technological Slavery he states

Third point (surrogate activities). I've never said that surrogate activities "must be abandoned." Also, the line between surrogate activities and purposeful activities often is not easy to draw. See ISAIF, §§40, 84, 90. And surrogate activities are not peculiar to modern society.

In any case, I don't see that anything would be accomplished by attacking surrogate activities. But I think that the concept of surrogate activity is important for an understanding of the psychology of modern man

These people seem to not understand that in Ted's view, pretty much everything which is not gaining our biological needs is a "surrogate activity". Anything that is not eating, sleeping, sex (excessive sex is a surrogate activity however) and the like is a "surrogate activity".

Now in regards to Ultimo Reducto, his critique of the concept shows one of the flaws of the power process. The fact that "real goals" are not actually defined properly. It leads to confusion and different interpretations.

According to Ted "real goals" are practical and important. But what is practical and important?

From what I can gather, to Ted, these mean gaining our basic, biological needs such as food, shelter, love and strangely, revenge.

Revenge is not a “real” goal

I am skeptical that revenge is a “real goal” and provides genuine fulfilment. If I remember correctly from my History classes, during the Middle Ages, whenever an individual was killed, it was common for the victims family to attack the killers family in revenge. Then they would attack the other family and so forth. These family feuds would continue for generations until eventually one of the families would stop or they’d come to a truce. Perhaps Ted believes this is the system degrading dignity, I believe that these feuds led to such misery and grief that they were phased out naturally.

Recently I found an essay on the Ted K Archive from George Orwell, talking about how Jews tried to get revenge on the Nazis¹.

As we approached the group, the little Jew seemed to be working himself up into a state of excitement.

‘That’s the real swine!’ he said, and suddenly he lashed out with his heavy army boot and caught the prostrate man a fearful kick right on the bulge of one of his deformed feet.

‘Get up, you swine!’ he shouted as the man started out of sleep, and then repeated something of the kind in German. The prisoner scrambled to his feet and stood clumsily to attention.

He was a ‘real’ Nazi: his party number indicated that he had been a member since the very early days, and he had held a post corresponding to a General in the political branch of the S.S. It could be taken as quite certain that he had had charge of concentration camps and had presided over tortures and hangings. In short, he represented everything that we had been fighting against during the past five years.

Meanwhile, I was studying his appearance. Quite apart from the scrubby, unfed, unshaven look that a newly captured man generally has, he was a disgusting specimen. But he did not look brutal or in any way frightening: merely neurotic and, in a low way, intellectual. His pale, shifty eyes were deformed by powerful spectacles. He could have been an unfrocked clergyman, an actor ruined by drink, or a spiritualist medium.

And yet everything that the Jew was telling me of his history could have been true, and probably was true! So the Nazi torturer of one’s imagination,

¹ Fifty Orwell Essays - Revenge is Sour (1945)

the monstrous figure against whom one had struggled for so many years, dwindled to this pitiful wretch, whose obvious need was not for punishment, but for some kind of psychological treatment.

He explains why he believes revenge like this is ultimately futile

It is absurd to blame any German or Austrian Jew for getting his own back on the Nazis. Heaven knows what scores this particular man may have had to wipe out; very likely his whole family had been murdered; and after all, even a wanton kick to a prisoner is a very tiny thing compared with the outrages committed by the Hitler régime. But what this scene, and much else that I saw in Germany, brought home to me was that the whole idea of revenge and punishment is a childish daydream. Properly speaking, there is no such thing as revenge. Revenge is an act which you want to commit when you are powerless and because you are powerless: as soon as the sense of impotence is removed, the desire evaporates also.

Who would not have jumped for joy, in 1940, at the thought of seeing S.S. officers kicked and humiliated? But when the thing becomes possible, it is merely pathetic and disgusting

In so far as the big public in this country is responsible for the monstrous peace settlement now being forced on Germany, it is because of a failure to see in advance that punishing an enemy brings no satisfaction. We acquiesce in crimes like the expulsion of all Germans from East Prussia—crimes which in some cases we could not prevent but might at least have protested against—because the Germans had angered and frightened us, and therefore we were certain that when they were down we should feel no pity for them. We persist in these policies, or let others persist in them on our behalf, because of a vague feeling that, having set out to punish Germany, we ought to go ahead and do it. Actually there is little acute hatred of Germany left in this country, and even less, I should expect to find, in the army of occupation. Only the minority of sadists, who must have their ‘atrocities’ from one source or another, take a keen interest in the hunting-down of war criminals and quislings

After the war, a paramilitary organization, Nakam, attempted to kill 6 million Germans as revenge for the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust, a “nation for a nation”. Abba Kovner, leader of Nakam, claimed to have proposed Plan B (an attempt to poison SS prisoners) to future Israeli president Chaim Weizmann which was refused. Many others refused on the grounds that it would not bring back the 6 million Jews killed and was nothing more than empty desires.

There are plenty of examples that show revenge, for the most part, is not fulfilling. So I conclude that I think revenge, *at most*, is a “real” goal when against a superior foe, but a surrogate activity in any other example.

Ted has proposed an act of revenge for those “responsible”. First off, who is responsible? Who exactly is to be punished? By Teds very logic, the system is autonomous and outside of human control. Secondly, such “revenge” is nothing but empty desires and a surrogate activity that will not be fulfilling, unless, as Orwell says they are *sadists*. Its akin to the Jewish plot to kill 6 million Germans. It does nothing. It only adds to the suffering.

I’m lead to believe that Ted states revenge is a “real” goal because he *personally* finds revenge fulfilling. But as we have seen, it can very well be a surrogate activity. This shows a further issue in that one cannot be certain if Ted is being genuine with “real” goals and that he doesn’t include goals he personally thinks are real.

Regardless, the issue with revenge shows the issues in regards to defining “real goals” and “surrogate activities”

Are surrogate activities artificial?

I will move on to Ted's claim that people do surrogate activities because they cannot attain these "real" goals.

He believes surrogate activities never truly fulfil us because people never stop doing them.

He argues that while living in his cabin, completing the power process by getting his basic needs was enough and he was content with sitting around doing nothing for long periods.

But if the idea that going through the power process attaining such needs was enough, why did cavemen paint on cave walls? Why did people tell campfire stories? Why do African tribal societies engage in wrestling tournaments? Why do they engage in these activities if they achieve basic needs through the power process.

Is it not true that we never stop gaining our biological needs? Hunter gatherers collect food, or water, then go ahead and collect it again and again and again. They only satisfy us for a period of time. Someone will engage in a surrogate activity and stop when they are satisfied. Hunter gatherers will get food and water, but eventually will desire for them again, much like surrogate activities.

As it turns out, Ted *did* surrogate activities while in his cabin, chiefly reading and writing. He defends himself claiming "*what writing I did was mostly in my diary and was not for pleasure but for the purpose of recording my experiences so that I would never lose the memory of them*" and whenever reading, it was "*purposeful reading*". But are they still not surrogate activities? Again, muddying the water with what is real and what isn't.

And the reading he did was not always "purposeful". One look at Ted's possessions shows he read fiction¹. So yes, he did surrogate activities².

There was also no logical reason for Ted to live in his cabin when food and essentials were abundant in society. The only reason is because he wanted the fulfilment from living that way. So that must constitute a surrogate activity.

Even if he didn't do surrogate activities, the fact our primitive ancestors did it, in an environment that is apparently our biologically natural environment, with the power process being fulfilled with "real" goals shows that surrogate activities are not artificial or fake and that people do in fact need them. Animals show examples of

¹ Ted Kaczynski's Seized Possessions

² In his manifesto, he says that not all surrogate activities are done only for fulfilment. They can be for prestige or another goal, but they are still surrogate activities

surrogate behaviour in the wild. For example, dolphins play catch using a pufferfish, where in biting the pufferfish, the dolphins in fact become drugged³. Lemurs do a similar activity, biting millipedes in order to use their toxins as an insecticide, but also to send them into a trance like state⁴. Of course some of these activities are used for training for life and death struggles. But primitive man painted on walls, which has no benefit whatsoever in regards to survival or training. So its clear pure surrogate activities, purely for enjoyment, are natural.

If we are talking biologically, surrogate activities are done in order to gain fulfilment. Why do we need fulfilment? To be happy and to feel content. One cannot be psychologically healthy if they are not happy all the time. So surrogate activities are to gain the psychological need for happiness, therefore, are a real goal.

If the power process concept, in Ted's view, is correct, then surely agricultural society would have lead us to the problems on the scale of which they are now.

One must exert themselves in gaining necessities according to Ted, in a way which is interesting and varied. In agricultural society, one only needs to plant crops, and wait. Or they could go to a market town and buy food there. Or if they owned animals, wait. Of course, there is more to it than that, same as there is more to today's society than what Ted describes. But this is only to show that if Ted was correct, our problems would be far greater today than they are⁵.

³ Dolphins Play Catch with a Pufferfish! | Spy In The Wild | BBC Earth

⁴ Lemurs get high | Spy in the Wild - BBC

⁵ In fact its sounds like hunter gatherers enjoyed activities that were more akin to games and surrogate activities more and my argument about the power process seriously affecting agricultural society possibly being true. "[T]he following from Holmberg's account of the Siriono is worth noting: 'They are relatively apathetic to work (tába tába), which includes such distasteful tasks as housebuilding, gathering firewood, clearing, planting, and tilling of fields. In quite a different class, however, are such pleasant occupations as hunting (gwáta gwáta) and collecting (déka déka, 'to look for'), which are regarded more as diversions than as work'".

What is the power process really?

Nevertheless, we still have the issue of psychological problems. Crowding, as stated by Ted cannot be too big an issue, as cities existed before and never had the issues up to the level we have now.

While the power process in Ted's terms is flawed, confusing and not easily definable, it seems very likely that the power process is based on some level of truth. Ted understands that some of his concepts do indeed need work

I wrote: "Freedom means being in control...of the life-and-death issues of one's existence: food, clothing, shelter and defense against whatever threats there may be in one's environment. Freedom means having power...to control the circumstances of one's own life." But obviously people have never had such control to more than a limited extent. They have not, for example, been able to control bad weather, which in certain circumstances can lead to starvation. So what kind and degree of control do people really need? At a minimum they need to be free of "interference, manipulation or supervision ... from any large organization," as stated in the first sentence of paragraph 94. But if the second and third sentences meant no more than that, they would be redundant. So there is a problem here in need of a solution. I'm not going to try to solve it now, however. For the present let it suffice to say that ISAIF is by no means a final and definitive statement in the field that it covers. Maybe some day I or someone else will be able to offer a clearer and more accurate treatment of the same topics

Unfortunately, no one has really offered a clearer treatment, as far as I'm aware. Ted's movement is based on a concept which Ted himself admits has issues. It's built on a house of cards.

Here I will attempt to put forth my own view on the issue.

I think surrogate activities do exist, however to a lesser extent. They are not for fulfilment, but for pure pleasure. Fulfilment means ones self is fulfilled. Pleasure means just that, pleasure. Pleasure on its own cannot truly fulfil a person. But again, *these activities are perfectly natural* as I believe I have shown above. Since science, philosophy and such have goals beyond just pleasure, I do not consider them surrogate activities. In fact, ironically, the books which Ted was reading which he called "purposeful reading" was historical, and scientific works. But these activities are surrogate activities according to his logic. No reading about history or the sort can be purposeful. Many

of his concepts and ideas have come from psychologists, scientists and the like. This is a big contradiction. So I conclude that most science, history, philosophy and the like are not surrogate activities as they may fulfill a psychological need that everyone has to some extent.

I believe the problem in regards to the power process, that Ted is trying to state, is that we lack a certain amount of self sufficiency. In fact Ted explains clearly why he felt fulfilled by living the way he did in an interview in the late 90s.

There is nothing more satisfying than the **fulfilment** and self-confidence that this kind of **self reliance** brings. In connection with this, one loses most of one's fear of death.

This explains why the need for the power process is different with every individual. For a certain type of people in today society, they do not get the feeling of self sufficiency they need.

It explains why now, psychological problems are more prevalent, and why people have become more pessimistic over the past few decades. What I believe has made this problem bigger than before is welfare or big government. Many people are now reliant on the system for their income to keep living. They do not feel in control of their lives and are at the mercy of councils or such. And because going into a job, may eliminate some of this welfare, and these jobs pay less, they feel stuck. Someone who works in a working class job may get the power process due to working for their income and so are satisfied enough by the hand to mouth existence that feeds for themselves and if they do have such, their family.

Nevertheless, people are still at the mercy of big organisations. These organisations over the past few decades have frustrated the public in failing to give them what they desire. For example, immigration is high, causing frustration with those who were promised a decrease.

Institutions have always been there in human history. The elders in primitive society were likely the authority on religious matters, as well as other matters. Hunter gatherers still had a social structure and a hierarchy. Smaller than ours, but still there.

Ted's view of freedom, freedom from organised society is impossible because even in primitive societies there are hierarchies, therefore a very small organised society. It is possible that individuals opposed to the elders decisions were cast aside, or frustrated by their refusal.

The problem today is that large organisations are too big and too powerful. Normally, if one wanted to change society, they pressured the system into giving change. Now, it is incredibly hard for any real change to take place. People become frustrated and disillusioned.

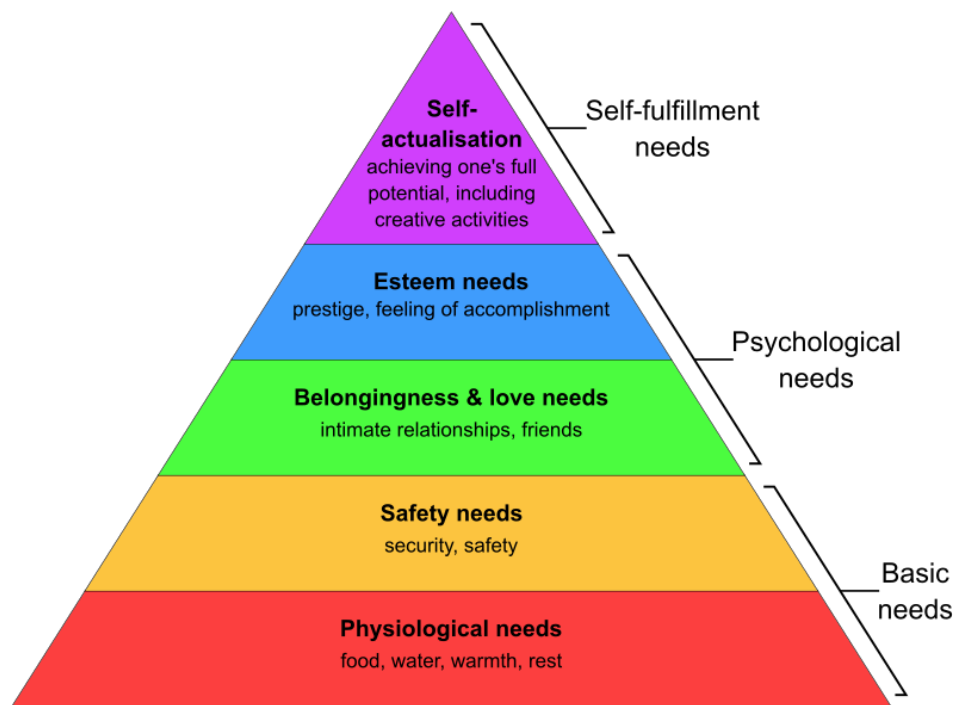
One of the societies Ted mentioned in his manifesto as an ideal, was the American Frontier. The Frontier, more so the Wild West, interestingly, started *during* the Industrial Revolution. It seems Ted is interested in such a society as it allows for people

to move freely and to choose where to live and to start a life there. As in they can make important life changing decisions without much interference. But is this not what modern society allows? Many Africans move to the US to chase the American dream and to live a better life than they would in Africa. Maybe it was the desire to create a land in their own image with their own laws and customs?

It seems as though people need to have the chance to have an influence on where their society/tribe/nation is going. Because big organisations are now stubbornly ignoring the population, it is causing stress and frustration within the public. This leads to learned helplessness in regards to politics. Their size only leads to more of this issue than smaller organisations.

Because companies are so large that they eat up smaller ones, the natural climb up the social ladder that capitalism allows, no longer happens. It is very hard now to come from nothing to become successful. So the goal of achieving societal success has become too hard. This causes people to question what they are doing, and whether the work they are doing is really worth it. They continue to work, frustrated by their lack of progress. The issue continues unless something breaks it. What this something is, I do not know, however, what this something is *must* be found, whether from me or someone else, to explain how to get out of such a situation for those currently struggling.

I will now talk about Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which in my opinion, goes into much greater detail about what humans need than the power process. In case you don't know, he uses a pyramid. At the bottom are basic needs. At the top are self fulfilment needs. If one gains most of such needs, he attains transcendence.



Maslows Hierarchy of needs

In Maslow's hierarchy, psychological needs (which make up the bottom) are things such as food, water, warmth, security and safety.

A sense of belonging, love and friends, prestige, prove that a social order/society/civilisation are necessary.

Without these, esteem becomes very hard to gain.

Self actualization shows that surrogate activities, creating things or competition are necessary.

But if one fails to get these things, it leads to psychological issues.

For example, if one engages in surrogate activities (in the logic of gaining pleasure) too much, without their certain amount of self sufficiency, they suffer from psychological issues.

If one is self sufficient, but does not have any time for hobbies, personal pursuits, or days with family or friends, they feel as though they are missing out. Perhaps this explains why hunter gatherers made technology to make their lives easier and more convenient.

In conclusion, what people need more is a sense of self reliance. A sense that they themselves are looking after themselves. With this self reliance comes self confidence and the belief that you can tackle problems. One of the main thoughts with depressed people is the thought that they are a burden on society, that they are a failure. One of the best remedies for depression is exercise¹. This may be due to the depressed person becoming more conscious about their physical health and so improving their self reliance. This gives them confidence they desperately need, and starts them on the journey to recovery.

¹ I mean depression as in the depression that can be curable by changing ones lifestyle, not the major depression which requires more serious cures.

How The Power Process Is Disrupted

To end, I will state down the main issues today in regards to the power process.

1. A lack of a certain amount of self sufficiency, which affects a certain amount of the human population currently.
2. Frustration due to large organisations failing in fulfilling what they promised.
3. Large organisations being too large and powerful
4. Climbing the social ladder has become too difficult.
5. Too many laws where the state interferes, rather than letting people settle issues on their own.

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