

In Summary

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For the sake of clarity, I want to state here in summary form the four main points that I've tried to make in my writings.

1. Technological progress is carrying us to inevitable disaster. There may be physical disaster (for example, some form of environmental catastrophe), or there may be disaster in terms of human dignity (reduction of the human race to a degraded and servile condition). But disaster of one kind or another will certainly result from continued technological progress.

This is not an eccentric opinion. Among those frightened by the probable consequences of technological progress are Bill Joy, whose article "*Why the Future Doesn't Need Us*" is now famous, Martin Rees, author of the book *Our Final Hour*, and Richard A. Posner, author of *Catastrophe: Risk and Response*.¹ None of these three is by any stretch of the imagination radical or predisposed to find fault with the existing structure of society. Richard Posner is a conservative judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. Bill Joy is a well-known computer wizard, and Martin Rees is the Astronomer Royal of Britain. These last two men, having devoted their lives to technology, would hardly be likely to fear it without having good reason to do so.

Joy, Rees, and Posner are concerned mainly with physical disaster and with the possibility or indeed the likelihood that human beings will be supplanted by machines. The disaster that technological progress implies for human dignity has been discussed by men like Jacques Ellul and Lewis Mumford, whose books are widely read and respected. Neither man is considered to be out on the fringe or even close to it.

2. Only the collapse of modern technological civilization can avert disaster. Of course, the collapse of technological civilization will itself bring disaster. But the longer the technoindustrial system continues to expand, the worse will be the eventual disaster. A lesser disaster now will avert a greater one later.

The development of the technoindustrial system cannot be controlled, restrained, or guided, nor can its effects be moderated to any substantial degree. This, again, is not an eccentric opinion. Many writers, beginning with Karl Marx, have noted the fundamental importance of technology in determining the course of society's development. In effect, they have recognized that it is technology that rules society, not the other way around. Ellul especially has emphasized the autonomy of technology, i.e., the fact that modern technology has taken on a life of its own and is not subject to human control. Ellul, moreover, was not the first to formulate this conclusion. Already in 1934 the Mexican thinker Samuel Ramos² clearly stated the principle of technological autonomy, and this insight was adumbrated as early as the 1860s by Samuel Butler.³ Of course, no one questions the obvious fact that human individuals or groups can control technology in the sense that at a given point in time they can decide what to

¹ For information on these three works, see our List of Works Cited.

² Ramos, pp. 104-05.

³ Jones, p. 46.

do with a particular item of technology. What the principle of technological autonomy asserts is that the overall development of technology, and its long-term consequences for society, are not subject to human control. Hence, as long as modern technology continues to exist, there is little we can do to moderate its effects.

A corollary is that nothing short of the collapse of technological society can avert a greater disaster. Thus, if we want to defend ourselves against technology, the only action we can take that might prove effective is an effort to precipitate the collapse of technological society. Though this conclusion is an obvious consequence of the principle of technological autonomy, and though it possibly is implied by certain statements of Ellul, I know of no conventionally published writer who has explicitly recognized that our only way out is through the collapse of technological society. This seeming blindness to the obvious can only be explained as the result of timidity.

If we want to precipitate the collapse of technological society, then our goal is a revolutionary one under any reasonable definition of that term. What we are faced with, therefore, is a need for out-and-out revolution.

3. The political left is technological society's first line of defense against revolution. In fact, the left today serves as a kind of fire extinguisher that douses and quenches any nascent revolutionary movement. What do I mean by "the left"? If you think that racism, sexism, gay rights, animal rights, indigenous people's rights, and "social justice" in general are among the most important issues that the world currently faces, then you are a leftist as I use that term. If you don't like this application of the word "leftist," then you are free to designate the people I'm referring to by some other term. But, whatever you call them, the people who extinguish revolutionary movements are the people who are drawn indiscriminately to causes: racism, sexism, gay rights, animal rights, the environment, poverty, sweatshops, neocolonialism... it's all the same to them. These people constitute a subculture that has been labeled "the adversary culture."⁴ Whenever a movement of resistance begins to emerge, these leftists (or whatever you choose to call them) come swarming to it like flies to honey until they outnumber the original members of the movement, take it over, and turn it into just another leftist faction, thereby emasculating it. The history of "Earth First!" provides an elegant example of this process.⁵

4. What is needed is a new revolutionary movement, dedicated to the elimination of technological society, that will take measures to exclude all leftists, as well as the assorted neurotics, lazies, incompetents, charlatans, and persons deficient in self-control who are drawn to resistance movements in America today. Just what form a revolutionary movement should take remains open to discussion. What is clear is that, for a start, people who are serious about addressing the problem of technology must establish systematic contact with one another and a sense of common purpose; they must strictly separate themselves from the "adversary culture"; they must be

⁴ See Hollander as referenced in our List of Works Cited.

⁵ The process is ably documented by M.F. Lee (see List of Works Cited).

oriented toward practical action; and they must take as their goal nothing less than the dissolution of technological civilization.

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From the Forward to Technological Slavery

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