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# **The Technology Problem**

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The biggest problems of the twenty-first century are and will be technological problems. Consider the problems we have already faced in the past decade: antibiotic resistance, quickly spreading diseases due to transportation systems, mass surveillance, climate change, mass extinctions, invasive species, and so on. It is clear that the problems will continue as scientists, governments, and corporations push for even more invasive and destabilizing technologies like nanotechnology, genetic engineering, and advanced artificial intelligence. Some scientists are even considering utterly insane ideas like geo-engineering.

Clearly, a global discussion about these technologies is looming. As the ecological destruction caused by industrial ways of life becomes too catastrophic to ignore, the technocrats will witness a harsh backlash. Those who are placed firmly on the side of wild nature in this struggle will have to organize now if they are to be major voices in this impending conversation. Indeed, they have a duty to do so.

## **The industrial system is counter to freedom and wildness**

Wildness is the spirit of the wilderness and, indeed, of the entire ecosphere. Wild nature, like technology, is a system; but unlike technology, it arose spontaneously, and, unlike technology, it created us. It is to be respected, even regarded as sacred, if any living being wants to live within it and survive. Unfortunately, the industrial way of life is built on values that disrespect wild nature.

Consider the way technology has destroyed certain aspects of the wilderness in such a way that some areas can now only exist because of technological infrastructure. This is humiliating to the entire ecosystem of that area. Furthermore, because of the complexity of wild nature, a problem in one area often means a problem in many. When, for example, Europeans moved across America and over-hunted the beaver population, they heavily affected the cycles by which wild nature purified its streams and rivers for drinking. Industrial technology has exacerbated this problem with such severity that many humans, once free and dignified creatures of the wild, are largely dependent on industrial water-purifying systems.

The industrial way of life is incompatible with wild nature because, although entirely dependent on wild nature for its existence, it views nature as a resource to be exploited, and it ultimately wants to be autonomous from wild nature. At the moment, nature is a super-system of the industrial system; that is, the industrial system would not exist without oil, human labor, and so forth. Increasingly, however, technological progress is enabling a completely synthetic way of life to

be possible. Even now we can envision how this would look: Nanobots swarm through the city periodically to repair its infrastructure, food is printed, and human bodies are either completely gone or rendered irrelevant by intelligence technologies that can embody our consciousness.

But let's return to the present, since the present circumstances are bad enough.

Contrary to what contemporary environmentalists claim, we humans are not separate from nature, and we are not a cancer to the earth. We are a part of the system of wild nature, an integral part, and since it is the system we were adapted to for thousands of years, we still desire many things that are insufficiently provided for by the industrial system. For example, we have the biological and evolutionary need to seek out our own food. This is part of a larger desire to attain goals and power autonomously. In industrial society, however, we are dependent on large technological systems of food distribution to eat. We merely have to go to the supermarket and get food without any struggle at all.

But we are still left with the desire to attain goals autonomously. As a result, the techno-elite of our society construct artificial conflicts and even create artificial desires through advertising propaganda. If the industrial system didn't account for our unfulfilled desires, we would break it apart from psychological frustration. But are we not psychologically frustrated even with the artificial desires? At least some of us are, which indicates that the technological solution to a technological problem has, as it always does, created just another technological problem. It is likely that our increased social and psychological problems are a result of our life in an industrial world that is radically different from the world we were made to exist in. What an utterly humiliating existence.

## **Wildness can only be restored with a switch to non-industrial ways of life**

Few doubt that the industrial way of life as it exists today is counter to wild nature. (It is not necessarily counter to domesticated nature.) But, some people may assert, the industrial way of life can be changed so that it can be compatible with wild nature. This is an incorrect assertion because it ignores the fact that technology is not a tool like a hammer or a piece of charcoal. Technology is a system with its own values, chief among them being efficiency and artificiality.

Wild nature is neither artificial nor efficient, so, assuming it would remain a technological system if it did so, the industrial system would have to drop both of those values if it was to become compatible with wild nature. However, because technological systems are, like wild nature, incredibly complex, consisting of

many interdependent parts, a change in values at the current level of advancement would necessitate the complete collapse of the system.

A related argument is that some parts of technology are really good, like industrial medicine. But one could argue that industrial medicine isn't really all that great. It does cure some forms of cancer and provide the infrastructure to find more cures, but the number one cause of cancer is the industrial system of which it is a part. Furthermore, industrial medicine is also dependent on a number of other industries that are commonly accepted as being the "bad" parts of technology. For example, the pharmaceutical industry relies on the propaganda industry to advertise its medicines. However, I cannot argue with integrity that I do not like many aspects of industrial medicine. It is something I would be reluctant to give up.

But you cannot separate the good parts of technology from the bad. As stated earlier, it is a system that is so complex that you either take all of its central aspects or you take none. The question for contemporary generations, then, is whether the bad parts of technology outweigh the good or the other way around. I argue the former. Some of the benefits of industrial medicine is nothing compared to the list of problems at the beginning of this piece. One could argue that climate change alone is enough to abandon industrial society. It has the potential to decimate our home and freedom, and as a living creature placed firmly on the side of wild nature, I have a duty to protect both of those things.

If one decides that things are bad enough to work against the day, the logical next question would be, "When did things become bad enough to necessitate radical change?" Some people along a similar line of thought trace the problem back to agricultural technology, some even earlier than that. I am unwilling to claim, however, that the bad parts of non-industrial agricultural technology outweigh the good. I only assert that technology from shortly before the Industrial Revolution offers more bad than good.

A precise way of explaining this is differentiating between small-scale and organization-dependent technology. Small-scale technology is any technology that can be created and maintained by small communities. Organization-dependent technology is technology that requires large-scale organization, specialization, and division of labor. Until about two centuries before the Industrial Revolution, most technology was small-scale technology; but technology produced since the Industrial Revolution has mostly been organization-dependent. Since I am not against specific products of technology, per se, and I am more worried about the effects of the overall system, the problem as I see it is organization-dependent technology.

Computers are an example of organization-dependent technology. More than just a simple artifact, a computer is a system in your lap or on your desk, a product

of a vast network of techniques, all of them destructive of wildness. For example, at the cost of freedom, a large system of labor must exist so that people who normally wouldn't blow up the earth for metal ores will. There must necessarily be police and certain forms of governance to enforce this system of labor, again at the cost of freedom. Then the earth itself must be blown up, logged, mined, and moved around far beyond what is prudent. An enormous system of ecological destruction must exist for Internet server farms and the energy industry. And lastly, there must be a propaganda industry in place so that people will willingly accept—praise, even—their technological prison.

## **Ending the industrial way of life is conceivable**

A collapse of the current industrial system is desirable, but I also believe that it is conceivable. Here I will outline some consequences of a collapse, as well as general strategies to get from here to there.

First it must be stated that a collapse does not necessarily have to be violent, although it would definitely be sudden (in the historical sense). “Collapse” sounds very dramatic, but in the best-case scenario there would be a major shift in attitudes toward technology and nature, life sciences (albeit in a different form from today) would replace physics as the defining science of our culture, and the world would, through the non-use of mass transportation and communication technologies, break into smaller groups again. This would mean that only industrial society itself would collapse, and while large organizations would break along with it, small communities would potentially last past the end. However, that sort of thing is unlikely to happen. It is more likely that the collapse of industrial society will entail some nasty situations.

Regardless, technology will keep going down its current path unless a group of dedicated people placed firmly on the side of wild nature decides to take action. Therefore, the current task of anyone who wants to protect their wildness and freedom is to form or join a group with the same values. This group will have to develop more fully their ideas about technology, nature, wildness, and so forth.

From there, the group, which will not be more than a minority at any point until near or after the collapse of the industrial system, must develop strategies to gain social power and encourage conflicts that destabilize society. These conflicts must involve technology, nature, and the elite and the technocrats. They must also encourage the destabilization of industrial society rather than the reformation of it. Gender issues, for example, would only lead to reform, or else they would inspire technological solutions, such as using technology to eradicate the issue of gender, as some feminists have suggested recently.

Eventually the problems industrial society is causing for itself will hurt it tremendously, causing a period of high instability. If nothing else, climate change will do this. During this period, the dedicated minority in line with the values of wildness would have to push industrial society over the edge.

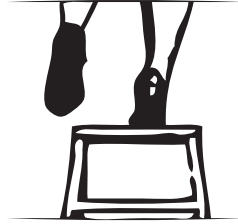
## Conclusion

I see three potential futures:

1. Industrial society collapses because of climate change, nuclear disaster, or so on, without the help of a dedicated minority. The lack of a dedicated minority suggests that the collapse will almost certainly be violent and terrible for a majority of people—it would at least be worse than if some people were consciously doing it with the interests of humans and the ecosphere in mind.
2. Industrial society collapses because a dedicated minority works to push it over the edge when it is weak from some sort of disaster.
3. Industrial society develops techniques to create completely synthetic environments that can operate autonomously of wild nature. Wild nature, inefficient and unneeded, is destroyed. Natural systems, including the human body, are either completely synthesized through nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, or genetic engineering (or a combination of all of them), or else they are heavily augmented by the same technologies. Maximum efficiency is achieved, so no component of the industrial system operates autonomously of it.

The conscious collapse described in #2 would not be all peaches and cream. Awful things would likely happen. But the question is not, for example, “Why should the dedicated minority decide who lives or dies by taking away industrial medicine?” Rather, the question is, “Why should the industrial system be allowed to go on when it will either take away our life or take away our freedom?”

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