

# Harvard and the Making of the Unabomber

A series of purposely brutalizing psychological experiments may have confirmed Theodore Kaczynski's still-forming belief in the evil of science while he was in college.

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June & September, 2000.

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Like many Harvard alumni, I sometimes wander the neighborhood when I return to Cambridge, reminiscing about the old days and musing on how different my life has been from what I hoped and expected then. On a trip there last fall I found myself a few blocks north of Harvard Yard, on Divinity Avenue. Near the end of this dead-end street sits the Peabody Museum—a giant Victorian structure attached to the Botanical Museum, where my mother had taken me as a young boy, in 1943, to view the spectacular exhibit of glass flowers. These left such a vivid impression that a decade later my recollection of them inspired me, then a senior in high school, to apply to Harvard.

This time my return was prompted not by nostalgia but by curiosity. No. 7 Divinity Avenue is a modern multi-story academic building today, housing the university's Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology. In 1959 a comfortable old house stood on the site. Known as the Annex, it served as a laboratory in which staff members of the Department of Social Relations conducted research on human subjects. There, from the fall of 1959 through the spring of 1962, Harvard psychologists, led by Henry A. Murray, conducted a disturbing and what would now be seen as ethically indefensible experiment on twenty-two undergraduates. To preserve the anonymity of these student guinea pigs, experimenters referred to individuals by code name only. One of these students, whom they dubbed "Lawful," was Theodore John Kaczynski, who would one day be known as the Unabomber, and who would later mail or deliver sixteen package bombs to scientists, academicians, and others over seventeen years, killing three people and injuring twenty-three.

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I had a special interest in Kaczynski. For many years he and I had lived parallel lives to some degree. Both of us had attended public high schools and had then gone on to Harvard, from which I graduated in 1957, he in 1962. At Harvard we took many of the same courses from the same professors. We were both graduate students and assistant professors in the 1960s. I studied at Oxford and received a Ph.D. in philosophy from Princeton before joining the faculty at Ohio State and later serving as chairman of the Department of Philosophy at Macalester College, in Minnesota. Kaczynski earned a Ph.D. in mathematics at the University of Michigan in 1967 and then joined the Berkeley Department of Mathematics as an instructor. In the early 1970s, at roughly the same time, we separately fled civilization to the Montana wilderness.

In 1971 Kaczynski moved to Great Falls, Montana; that summer he began building a cabin near the town of Lincoln, eighty miles southwest of Great Falls, on a lot he and his brother, David, had bought. In 1972 my wife and I bought an old homestead fifty-five miles south of Great Falls. Three years later we gave up our teaching jobs to live in Montana full-time. Our place had neither telephone nor electricity; it was ten miles from the nearest neighbor. In winter we were snowbound for months at a time.

In our desire to leave civilization Kaczynski and I were not alone. Many others sought a similar escape. What, I wondered, had driven Kaczynski into the wilderness,

and to murder? To what degree were his motives simply a more extreme form of the alienation that prompted so many of us to seek solace in the backwoods?

Most of us may believe we already know Ted Kaczynski. According to the conventional wisdom, Kaczynski, a brilliant former professor of mathematics turned Montana hermit and mail bomber, is, simply, mentally ill. He is a paranoid schizophrenic, and there is nothing more about him to interest us. But the conventional wisdom is mistaken. I came to discover that Kaczynski is neither the extreme loner he has been made out to be nor in any clinical sense mentally ill. He is an intellectual and a convicted murderer, and to understand the connections between these two facts we must revisit his time at Harvard.

I first heard of the Murray experiment from Kaczynski himself. We had begun corresponding in July of 1998, a couple of months after a federal court in Sacramento sentenced him to life without possibility of parole. Kaczynski, I quickly discovered, was an indefatigable correspondent. Sometimes his letters to me came so fast that it was difficult to answer one before the next arrived. The letters were written with great humor, intelligence, and care. And, I found, he was in his own way a charming correspondent. He has apparently carried on a similarly voluminous correspondence with many others, often developing close friendships with them through the mail. Kaczynski told me that the Henry A. Murray Research Center of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, although it released some raw data about him to his attorneys, had refused to share information about the Murray team's analysis of that data. Kaczynski hinted darkly that the Murray Center seemed to feel it had something to hide. One of his defense investigators, he said, reported that the center had told participating psychologists not to talk with his defense team.

After this intriguing start Kaczynski told me little more about the Murray experiment than what I could find in the published literature. Henry Murray's widow, Nina, was friendly and cooperative, but could provide few answers to my questions. Several of the research assistants I interviewed couldn't, or wouldn't, talk much about the study. Nor could the Murray Center be entirely forthcoming. After considering my application, its research committee approved my request to view the records of this experiment, the so-called data set, which referred to subjects by code names only. But because Kaczynski's alias was by then known to some journalists, I was not permitted to view his records.

Through research at the Murray Center and in the Harvard archives I found that, among its other purposes, Henry Murray's experiment was intended to measure how people react under stress. Murray subjected his unwitting students, including Kaczynski, to intensive interrogation—what Murray himself called “vehement, sweeping, and personally abusive” attacks, assaulting his subjects' egos and most-cherished ideals and beliefs.

My quest was specific—to determine what effects, if any, the experiment may have had on Kaczynski. This was a subset of a larger question: What effects had Harvard had on Kaczynski? In 1998, as he faced trial for murder, Kaczynski was examined by

Sally Johnson, a forensic psychiatrist with the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, at the order of a court. In her evaluation Johnson wrote that Kaczynski “has intertwined his two belief systems, that society is bad and he should rebel against it, and his intense anger at his family for his perceived injustices.” The Unabomber was created when these two belief systems converged. And it was at Harvard, Johnson suggested, that they first surfaced and met. She wrote,

During his college years he had fantasies of living a primitive life and fantasized himself as “an agitator, rousing mobs to frenzies of revolutionary violence.” He claims that during that time he started to think about breaking away from normal society.

It was at Harvard that Kaczynski first encountered the ideas about the evils of society that would provide a justification for and a focus to an anger he had felt since junior high school. It was at Harvard that he began to develop these ideas into his anti-technology ideology of revolution. It was at Harvard that Kaczynski began to have fantasies of revenge, began to dream of escaping into wilderness. And it was at Harvard, as far as can be determined, that he fixed on dualistic ideas of good and evil, and on a mathematical cognitive style that led him to think he could find absolute truth through the application of his own reason. Was the Unabomber—“the most intellectual serial killer the nation has ever produced,” as one criminologist has called him—born at Harvard?

## The Manifesto

The story of Kaczynski’s crimes began more than twenty-two years ago, but the chain of consequences they triggered has yet to run its course. Dubbed “the Unabomber” by the FBI because his early victims were associated with *universities* or *airlines*, Kaczynski conducted an increasingly lethal campaign of terrorism that began on May 26, 1978, when his first bomb slightly injured a Northwestern University public-safety officer, Terry Marker, and ended on April 24, 1995, when a bomb he had mailed killed the president of the California Forestry Association, Gilbert Murray. Yet until 1993 Kaczynski remained mute, and his intentions were entirely unknown.

By 1995 his explosives had taken a leap in sophistication; that year he suddenly became loquacious, writing letters to newspapers, magazines, targets, and a victim. Two years later *The Washington Post*, in conjunction with *The New York Times*, published copies of the 35,000-word essay that Kaczynski titled “Industrial Society and Its Future,” and which the press called “The Manifesto.”

Recognizing the manifesto as Kaczynski’s writing, his brother, David, turned Kaczynski in to the FBI, which arrested him at his Montana cabin on April 3, 1996. Later that year Kaczynski was removed to California to stand trial for, among other crimes, two Unabomber murders committed in that state. On January 8, 1998,

having failed to dissuade his attorneys from their intention of presenting an insanity defense, and having failed to persuade the presiding judge, Garland E. Burrell Jr., to allow him to choose a new attorney, Kaczynski asked the court for permission to represent himself. In response Burrell ordered Sally Johnson to examine Kaczynski, to determine if he was competent to direct his own defense. Johnson offered a “provisional” diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia, but she concluded that Kaczynski was nevertheless competent to represent himself. Burrell refused to allow it. Faced with the prospect of a humiliating trial in which his attorneys would portray him as insane and his philosophy as the ravings of a madman, Kaczynski capitulated: in exchange for the government’s agreement not to seek the death penalty, he pleaded guilty to thirteen federal bombing offenses that killed three men and seriously injured two others, and acknowledged responsibility for sixteen bombings from 1978 to 1995. On May 4, 1998, he was sentenced to life in prison without possibility of parole.

Driving these events from first bomb to plea bargain was Kaczynski’s strong desire to have his ideas—as described in the manifesto—taken seriously.

“The Industrial Revolution and its consequences,” Kaczynski’s manifesto begins, “have been a disaster for the human race.” They have led, it contends, to the growth of a technological system dependent on a social, economic, and political order that suppresses individual freedom and destroys nature. “The system does not and cannot exist to satisfy human needs. Instead, it is human behavior that has to be modified to fit the needs of the system.”

By forcing people to conform to machines rather than vice versa, the manifesto states, technology creates a sick society hostile to human potential. Because technology demands constant change, it destroys local, human-scale communities. Because it requires a high degree of social and economic organization, it encourages the growth of crowded and unlivable cities and of mega-states indifferent to the needs of citizens.

This evolution toward a civilization increasingly dominated by technology and the power structure serving technology, the manifesto argues, cannot be reversed on its own, because “technology is a more powerful social force than the aspiration for freedom,” and because “while technological progress as a whole continually narrows our sphere of freedom, each new technical advance considered by itself appears to be desirable.” Hence science and technology constitute “a mass power movement, and many scientists gratify their need for power through identification with this mass movement.” Therefore “the technophiles are taking us all on an utterly reckless ride into the unknown.”

Because human beings must conform to the machine,

our society tends to regard as a “sickness” any mode of thought or behavior that is inconvenient for the system, and this is plausible because when an individual doesn’t fit into the system it causes pain to the individual as well as problems for the system. Thus the manipulation of an individual to adjust him to the system is seen as a “cure” for a “sickness” and therefore as good.

This requirement, the manifesto continues, has given rise to a social infrastructure dedicated to modifying behavior. This infrastructure includes an array of government agencies with ever-expanding police powers, an out-of-control regulatory system that encourages the limitless multiplication of laws, an education establishment that stresses conformism, ubiquitous television networks whose fare is essentially an electronic form of Valium, and a medical and psychological establishment that promotes the indiscriminate use of mind-altering drugs. Since the system threatens humanity's survival and cannot be reformed, Kaczynski argued, it must be destroyed. Indeed, the system will probably collapse on its own, when the weight of human suffering it creates becomes unbearable. But the longer it persists, the more devastating will be the ultimate collapse. Hence "revolutionaries" like the Unabomber "by hastening the onset of the breakdown will be reducing the extent of the disaster."

"We have no illusions about the feasibility of creating a new, ideal form of society," Kaczynski wrote. "Our goal is only to destroy the existing form of society." But this movement does have a further goal. It is to protect "wild nature," which is the opposite of technology. Admittedly, "eliminating industrial society" may have some "negative consequences," but "well, you can't eat your cake and have it too."

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The Unabomber's manifesto was greeted in 1995 by many thoughtful people as a work of genius, or at least profundity, and as quite sane. In *The New York Times* the environmental writer Kirkpatrick Sale wrote that the Unabomber "is a rational man and his principal beliefs are, if hardly mainstream, entirely reasonable." In *The Nation* Sale declared that the manifesto's first sentence "is absolutely crucial for the American public to understand and ought to be on the forefront of the nation's political agenda." The science writer Robert Wright observed in *Time* magazine, "There's a little bit of the unabomber in most of us." An essay in *The New Yorker* by Cynthia Ozick described the Unabomber as America's "own Raskolnikov—the appealing, appalling, and disturbingly visionary murderer of 'Crime and Punishment,' Dostoyevsky's masterwork of 1866." Ozick called the Unabomber a "philosophical criminal of exceptional intelligence and humanitarian purpose, who is driven to commit murder out of an uncompromising idealism." Sites devoted to the Unabomber multiplied on the Internet—the Church of Euthanasia Freedom Club; Unapack, the Unabomber Political Action Committee; alt.fan.unabomber; Chuck's Unabomb Page; redacted.com; MetroActive; and Steve Hau's Rest Stop. The University of Colorado hosted a panel titled "The Unabomber Had a Point."

By 1997, however, when Kaczynski's trial opened, the view had shifted. Although psychiatrists for the prosecution continued to cite the manifesto as proof of Kaczynski's sanity, experts for the defense and many in the media now viewed it as a symptom and a product of severe mental illness. The document, they argued, revealed a paranoid mind. During the trial the press frequently quoted legal experts who attested to

Kaczynski's insanity. Gerald Lefcourt, then the president of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, said the defendant was "obviously disturbed." Donald Heller, a former federal prosecutor, said, "This guy is not playing with a full deck." The writer Maggie Scarf suggested in *The New Republic* that Kaczynski suffered from "Narcissistic Personality Disorder."

Michael Mello, a professor at Vermont Law School, is the author of *The United States of America vs. Theodore John Kaczynski*. He and William Finnegan, a writer for *The New Yorker*, have suggested that Kaczynski's brother, David, his mother, Wanda, and their lawyer, Tony Bisceglie, along with Kaczynski's defense attorneys, persuaded many in the media to portray Kaczynski as a paranoid schizophrenic. To a degree this is true. Anxious to save Kaczynski from execution, David and Wanda gave a succession of interviews from 1996 onward to *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *Sixty Minutes*, among other outlets, in which they sought to portray Kaczynski as mentally disturbed and pathologically antisocial since childhood. Meanwhile—against his wishes and without his knowledge, Kaczynski insists—his attorneys launched a mental-health defense for their client.

One psychology expert for the defense, Karen Bronk Froming, concluded that Kaczynski exhibited a "predisposition to schizophrenia." Another, David Vernon Foster, saw "a clear and consistent picture of schizophrenia, paranoid type." Still another, Xavier F. Amador, described Kaczynski as "typical of the hundreds of patients with schizophrenia." How did the experts reach their conclusions? Although objective tests alone suggested to Froming only that Kaczynski's answers were "consistent with" schizophrenia, she told Finnegan it was Kaczynski's writings—in particular his "anti-technology" views—that cemented this conclusion for her. Foster, who met with Kaczynski a few times but never formally examined him, cited his "delusional themes" as evidence of sickness. Amador, who never met Kaczynski at all, based his judgment on the "delusional beliefs" he detected in Kaczynski's writing. And Sally Johnson's provisional diagnosis—that Kaczynski suffered from "Paranoid Type" schizophrenia—was largely based on her conviction that he harbored "delusional beliefs" about the threats posed by technology. The experts also found evidence of Kaczynski's insanity in his refusal to accept their diagnoses or to help them reach those diagnoses.

Most claims of mental illness rested on the diagnoses of experts whose judgments, therefore, derived largely from their opinions of Kaczynski's philosophy and his personal habits—he was a recluse, a wild man in appearance, a slob of a housekeeper, a celibate—and from his refusal to admit he was ill. Thus Froming cited Kaczynski's "unawareness of his disease" as an indication of illness. Foster complained of the defendant's "symptom-based failure to cooperate fully with psychiatric evaluation." Amador said that the defendant suffered "from severe deficits in awareness of illness."

But Kaczynski was no more unkempt than many other people on our streets. His cabin was no messier than the offices of many college professors. The Montana wilds are filled with escapists like Kaczynski (and me). Celibacy and misanthropy are not diseases. Nor was Kaczynski really so much of a recluse. Any reporter could quickly



discover, as I did through interviews with scores of people who have known Kaczynski (classmates, teachers, neighbors), that he was not the extreme loner he has been made out to be. And, surely, a refusal to admit to being insane or to cooperate with people who are paid to pronounce one insane cannot be taken seriously as proof of insanity.

Why were the media and the public so ready to dismiss Kaczynski as crazy? Kaczynski kept voluminous journals, and in one entry, apparently from before the bombing started, he anticipated this question.

I intend to start killing people. If I am successful at this, it is possible that, when I am caught (not alive, I fervently hope!) there will be some speculation in the news media as to my motives for killing. ... If some speculation occurs, they are bound to make me out to be a sickie, and to ascribe to me motives of a sordid or "sick" type. Of course, the term "sick" in such a context represents a value judgment. ... the news media may have something to say about me when I am killed or caught. And they are bound to try to analyse my psychology and depict me as "sick." This powerful bias should be borne [in mind] in reading any attempts to analyse my psychology.

Michael Mello suggests that the public wished to see Kaczynski as insane because his ideas are too extreme for us to contemplate without discomfort. He challenges our most cherished beliefs. Mello writes,

The manifesto challenges the basic assumptions of virtually every interest group that was involved with the case: the lawyers, the mental health experts, the press and politics—both left and right. ... Kaczynski's defense team convinced the media and the public that Kaczynski was crazy, even in the absence of credible evidence ... [because] we needed to believe it. ... They decided that the Unabomber was mentally ill, and his ideas were mad. Then they forgot about the man and his ideas, and created a curative tale.

Mello is only half right. It is true that many believed Kaczynski was insane because they needed to believe it. But the truly disturbing aspect of Kaczynski and his ideas is not that they are so foreign but that they are so familiar. The manifesto is the work of neither a genius nor a maniac. Except for its call to violence, the ideas it expresses are perfectly ordinary and unoriginal, shared by many Americans. Its pessimism over the direction of civilization and its rejection of the modern world are shared especially with the country's most highly educated. The manifesto is, in other words, an academic—and popular— cliché. And if concepts that many of us unreflectively accept can lead a person to commit serial murder, what does that say about us? We need to see Kaczynski as exceptional—madman or genius—because the alternative is so much more frightening.

## ‘Exceedingly Stable’

No. 8 Prescott Street in Cambridge is a well-preserved three-story Victorian frame house, standing just outside Harvard Yard. Today it houses Harvard’s expository-writing program. But in September of 1958, when Ted Kaczynski, just sixteen, arrived at Harvard, 8 Prescott Street was a more unusual place, a sort of incubator. Earlier that year F. Skiddy von Stade Jr., Harvard’s dean of freshmen, had decided to use the house as living accommodations for the brightest, youngest freshmen. Von Stade’s well-intentioned idea was to provide these boys with a nurturing, intimate environment, so that they wouldn’t feel lost, as they might in the larger, less personal dorms. But in so doing he isolated the overly studious and less-mature boys from their classmates. He inadvertently created a ghetto for grinds, making social adjustment for them more, rather than less, difficult.

“I lived at Prescott Street that year too,” Michael Stucki told me recently. “And like Kaczynski, I was majoring in mathematics. Yet I swear I never ever even saw the guy.” Stucki, who recently retired after a career in computers, lived alone on the top floor, far from Kaczynski’s ground-floor room. In the unsocial society of 8 Prescott, that was a big distance. “It was not unusual to spend all one’s time in one’s room and then rush out the door to library or class,” Stucki said.

Francis Murphy, the Prescott Street proctor, was a graduate student who had studied for the Catholic priesthood, and to Kaczynski it seemed the house was intended to be run more like a monastery than a dorm. Whereas other freshmen lived in suites with one or two roommates, six of the sixteen students of Prescott Street, including Kaczynski, lived in single rooms. All but seven intended to major in a mathematical science. All but three came from high schools outside New England, and therefore knew few people in Massachusetts. They were, in Murphy’s words, “a serious, quiet bunch.”

Much has been made of Kaczynski’s being a “loner” and of his having been further isolated by Harvard’s famed snobbism. Snobbism was indeed pervasive at Harvard back then. A single false sartorial step could brand one an outcast. And Kaczynski looked shabby. He owned just two pairs of slacks and only a few shirts. Although he washed these each week in the coin-operated machine in the basement of the house next door to 8 Prescott, they became increasingly ragtag.

But it is a mistake to exaggerate Kaczynski’s isolation. Most public high schoolers at Harvard in those days, including Kaczynski, viewed the tweedy in-crowd as so many buttoned-down buffoons who did not realize how ridiculous they looked. And the evidence is that Kaczynski was neither exceptionally a loner nor, at least in his early years at Harvard, alienated from the school or his peers.

Harvard was a “tremendous thing for me,” Kaczynski wrote in an unpublished autobiography that he completed in 1998 and showed to me. “I got something that I had been needing all along without knowing it, namely, hard work requiring self-discipline

and strenuous exercise of my abilities. I threw myself into this. ... I thrived on it. ... Feeling the strength of my own will, I became enthusiastic about will power.”

Freshmen were required to participate in sports, so Kaczynski took up swimming and then wrestling. He played the trombone, as he had in high school, even joining the Harvard band (which he quit almost as soon as he learned that he would have to attend drill sessions). He played pickup basketball. He made a few friends. One of his housemates, Gerald Burns, remembers sitting with Kaczynski in an all-night cafeteria, arguing about the philosophy of Kant. After Kaczynski’s arrest Burns wrote to the anarchist journal *Fifth Estate* that Kaczynski “was as normal as I am now: it was [just] harder on him because he was much younger than his classmates.” And indeed, most reports of his teachers, his academic adviser, his housemaster, and the health-services staff suggest that Kaczynski was in his first year at Harvard entirely balanced, although tending to be a loner. The health-services doctor who interviewed Kaczynski as part of the medical examination Harvard required for all freshmen observed,

Good impression created. Attractive, mature for age, relaxed. ... Talks easily, fluently and pleasantly. ... likes people and gets on well with them. May have many acquaintances but makes his friends carefully. Prefers to be by himself part of the time at least. May be slightly shy. ... Essentially a practical and realistic planner and an efficient worker. ... Exceedingly stable, well integrated and feels secure within himself. Usually very adaptable. May have many achievements and satisfactions.

The doctor further described Kaczynski thus: “Pleasant young man who is below usual college entrance age. Apparently a good mathematician but seems to be gifted in this direction only. Plans not crystallized yet but this is to be expected at his age. Is slightly shy and retiring but not to any abnormal extent. Should be [a] steady worker.”

## The Roots of the Unabomber

In 1952, when Kaczynski was ten, his parents moved from Chicago to the suburban community of Evergreen Park—in order, they later explained to Ted, to provide him with a better class of friends. The community into which the Kaczynskis moved would soon be in turmoil. Evergreen Park was a mixed neighborhood of Irish, Italians, Czechs, and Poles who now felt themselves under siege by yet another group of new arrivals.

On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that segregated schooling was unconstitutional. To many people in Evergreen Park this was tantamount to a declaration of war. Even before the Court’s decision they had feared what they saw as black encroachment. African-American communities stood just next door, and black families came to town to shop and eat at Evergreen Park restaurants. Black teenagers hung around Evergreen Plaza.

This environment tended to isolate the Kaczynskis, who by several accounts were liberal on race matters. Aggravating their isolation was Evergreen Park's fragmented school system. Until 1955 the town had no public high school building, and students were bused to high schools in surrounding communities. Evergreen Park High School was not completed until 1955, and Ted Kaczynski, who became a member of the first class that spent all four years there, found himself in a school without cohesion or community, where few of the students knew one another. As Spencer Gilmore, a former science teacher, lamented, there was "no commonality in the student body." Howard Finkle, who was then a social-studies teacher, describes Evergreen Park in those years as a school for strangers. Soon the school was riven by cliques.

Despite this fractured environment, school administrators sought to push the students hard academically. "The fact to keep in mind about Evergreen Park," Kaczynski's algebra teacher, Paul Jenkins, told me, "is that Gene Howard [the principal of Evergreen Park High School at the time] enjoyed a big budget. He had combed the country for the best instructors he could find—folks who would be teaching junior college in most places. Yet most of the kids were incredibly naive. Some had never even been to downtown Chicago. The faculty was presenting them with ideas they'd never encountered before. Some hated the experience; others loved it. And it blew the minds of some, including perhaps Ted." The students, according to Finkle, were asked to read books ordinarily used by college undergraduates. The intellectually ambitious, like Kaczynski, adapted readily to these demands, but in a school where the most popular boys carried cigarette packs rolled up in the sleeves of their T-shirts, excelling at academics meant social exile. What pressures did Kaczynski face among his family? Ted Kaczynski insists that the Kaczynski home was an unhappy one and that his social isolation came about because his parents pushed him too hard academically. David and Wanda say that theirs was a happy and normal home but that Ted had shown signs of extreme alienation since childhood. When family members squabble, it is almost impossible for anyone—least of all an outsider—to know who is right. And the Kaczynskis are squabblers.

The letters and other materials Kaczynski sent me in the course of our correspondence—including his 1998 autobiography, containing quotations from doctors, teachers, and college advisers—naturally support his version. Unfortunately, however, I am limited in my ability to use these, because Kaczynski has continually changed his mind about the terms and conditions for the use of his autobiography and other documents. Nevertheless, most of the people I interviewed tended to support most of his claims. I offer my own interpretation of his family relations, which is supported by interviews and infused with knowledge of documents that Kaczynski sent to me.

Kaczynski's father, Theodore R. "Turk" Kaczynski, was a self-educated freethinker living in a conventionally Catholic working-class community. In his autobiography Kaczynski claims, and a close friend of Turk's confirms, that Wanda tended to be fearful that their family would be perceived as different. Although nonconformist, the

Kaczynskis wanted to be perceived as conforming. Thus, Kaczynski records, although the Kaczynskis were atheists, his parents instructed him to tell people they were Unitarians. The tension created by the family's efforts to look good to the neighbors increased significantly when, in the fifth grade, Kaczynski scored 167 on an IQ test. He skipped the sixth grade, leaving his friends behind to enter a new class as the smallest kid in the room.

From then on, according to Kaczynski and also according to others who knew the family, his parents valued his intellect as a trophy that gave the Kaczynskis special status. They began to push him to study, lecturing him if his report card showed any grade below an A. Meanwhile, Turk seemed—to Kaczynski, at least—to become increasingly cold, critical, and distant.

When Kaczynski was a sophomore, the Evergreen Park High School administration recommended that he skip his junior year. His band teacher and friend, James Oberto, remembers pleading with Kaczynski's father not to allow it. But Turk wouldn't listen. "Ted's success meant too much to him," Oberto says.

Two years younger than his classmates, and still small for his age, Kaczynski became even more of an outcast in school. There was "a gradual increasing amount of hostility I had to face from the other kids," Sally Johnson reports Kaczynski as admitting. "By the time I left high school, I was definitely regarded as a freak by a large segment of the student body."

Apparently caught between acrimony at home and rejection at school, Kaczynski countered with activity. He joined the chess, biology, German, and mathematics clubs. He collected coins. He read ravenously and widely, excelling in every field from drama and history to biology and mathematics. According to an account in *The Washington Post*, he explored the music of Bach, Vivaldi, and Gabrieli, studied music theory, and wrote musical compositions for a family trio—David on the trumpet, Turk at the piano, and himself on the trombone. He played duets with Oberto.

These achievements made Kaczynski a favorite of his teachers. Virtually all those with whom I talked who knew him well in those years saw him as studious and a member of the lowest-ranking high school clique—the so-called briefcase boys—but otherwise entirely normal. His physics teacher, Robert Rippey, described him to me as "honest, ethical, and sociable." His American-government teacher, Philip Pemberton, said he had many friends and indeed seemed to be their "ringleader." Paul Jenkins used Kaczynski as a kind of teaching assistant, to help students who were having trouble in math. School reports regularly gave him high marks for neatness, "respect for others," "courtesy," "respect for law and order," and "self-discipline." "No one was more lavish in praise of Kaczynski than Lois Skillen, his high school counselor. "Of all the youngsters I have worked with at the college level," she wrote to Harvard,

I believe Ted has one of the greatest contributions to make to society. He is reflective, sensitive, and deeply conscious of his responsibilities to society. ... His only drawback is a tendency to be rather quiet in his original

meetings with people, but most adults on our staff, and many people in the community who are mature find him easy to talk to, and very challenging intellectually. He has a number of friends among high school students, and seems to influence them to think more seriously.

Kaczynski was accepted by Harvard in the spring of 1958; he was not yet sixteen years old. One friend remembers urging Kaczynski's father not to let the boy go, arguing, "He's too young, too immature, and Harvard too impersonal." But again Turk wouldn't listen. "Ted's going to Harvard was an ego trip for him," the friend recalls.

## General Education and the Culture of Despair

All Harvard freshmen in the 1950s, including Kaczynski and me, were immersed in what the college described as "general education" and students called Gen Ed. This program of studies, which had been fully implemented by 1950, was part of a nationwide curricular reform that sought to inculcate a sense of "shared values" among undergraduates through instruction in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Unlike the usual departmental offerings, which focused on methodological issues within a discipline, Gen Ed courses were intended to be interdisciplinary, with material arranged for students historically (chronologically) rather than analytically. Required Gen Ed courses focused on science, literature, philosophy, history, and Western institutions. The undergraduate curriculum, therefore, was initially designed to be neatly divided into two categories, one general and one specialized, one emphasizing history and values, the other emphasizing the value-free methodologies employed by scholars in the various academic fields. This attempt at balance would give rise to a battle in the long war between humanism and positivism.

The Gen Ed curriculum was born of a lofty impulse: to establish in higher education—as President Harry Truman's Commission on Higher Education would later express it—"a code of behavior based on ethical principles consistent with democratic ideals." Harvard's president, James B. Conant, in his charge to the committee that would design Gen Ed, wrote,

Unless the educational process includes at each level of maturity some continuing contact with those fields in which value judgments are of prime importance, it must fall far short of the ideal. The student in high school, in college and in graduate school must be concerned, in part at least, with the words "right" and "wrong" in both the ethical and mathematical sense.

The committee's report, *General Education in a Free Society* (1945), was known, for the color of its cover, as the Redbook. The solution that the Redbook committee offered was a program of instruction that, in the words of the education historian Frederick Rudolph, called for "a submersion in tradition and heritage and some sense of

common bond strong enough to bring unbridled ego and ambition under control.” The Redbook’s program of reform caught the imagination of educators across the country. By the mid-1950s more than half the colleges in America were offering programs of general education modeled along the same lines.

Although at Harvard the name caught on, the philosophy behind it did not. Gen Ed was doomed from the start.

By 1950 the Harvard faculty was divided between those who, chastened by their experience in World War II and especially by the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, saw science and technology as a threat to Western values and even human survival and those—a majority—who saw science as a liberator from superstition and an avenue to progress. Both these views found their way into the Gen Ed curriculum. The dominant faction had little sympathy for the Redbook’s resolve to inculcate Judeo-Christian ethics. Because of the majority’s resistance, many Redbook-committee recommendations were never fully implemented. And those recommendations that were incorporated into the curriculum were quickly subverted by many of the people expected to teach it. These professors in fact emphasized the opposite of the lesson Conant intended. Rather than inculcate traditional values, they sought to undermine them. Soon “Thou shalt not utter a value judgment” became the mantra for Harvard freshmen, in dorm bull sessions as well as in term papers. Positivism triumphed.

Superficially, the positivist message appeared to be an optimistic one, concerning the perfectibility of science and the inevitability of progress. It taught that reason was a liberating force and faith mere superstition; the advance of science would eventually produce a complete understanding of nature. But positivism also taught that all the accumulated nonscientific knowledge of the past, including the great religions and philosophies, had been at best merely an expression of “cultural mores” and at worst nonsense; life had no purpose and morality no justification.

Even as positivism preached progress, therefore, it subliminally carried—quite in contradiction to the intent of Gen Ed’s framers—a more disturbing implication: that absolute reason leads to absolute despair. G. K. Chesterton wrote, “Imagination does not breed insanity. Exactly what does breed insanity is reason. Poets do not go mad ... mathematicians go mad.” Hence Gen Ed delivered to those of us who were undergraduates during this time a double whammy of pessimism. From the humanists we learned that science threatens civilization. From the scientists we learned that science cannot be stopped. Taken together, they implied that there was no hope. Gen Ed had created at Harvard a culture of despair. This culture of despair was not, of course, confined to Harvard—it was part of a more generalized phenomenon among intellectuals all over the Western world. But it existed at Harvard in a particularly concentrated form, and Harvard was the place where Kaczynski and I found ourselves.

Although I cannot say exactly what Kaczynski read, he must have absorbed a good measure of the Gen Ed readings that infused the intellectual and emotional climate on campus. Gen Ed courses in social science and philosophy quickly introduced us to the relativity of morals and the irrationality of religion. To establish that ethical standards

were merely expressions of Western cultural mores, we were assigned to read works by anthropologists such as Margaret Mead (*Coming of Age in Samoa*) and Ruth Benedict (*Patterns of Culture*). In Humanities 5, or “Ideas of Man and the World in Western Thought,” we read Sigmund Freud’s polemic against religious faith, *The Future of an Illusion*, which dismisses the belief that life has purpose as a mere expression of infantile desires and as confirming that “man is a creature of weak intelligence who is governed by his instinctual wishes.”

In expository writing we encountered Thorstein Veblen’s prediction that “so long as the machine process continues to hold its dominant place as a disciplinary factor in modern culture, so long must the spiritual and intellectual life of this cultural era maintain the character which the machine process gives it.” We read Norbert Wiener, who warned that unless human nature changes, the “new industrial revolution ... [makes it] practically certain that we shall have to face a decade or more of ruin and despair.”

And Lewis Mumford told us,

Western man has exhausted the dream of mechanical power which so long dominated his imagination. ... he can no longer let himself remain spell-bound in that dream: he must attach himself to more humane purposes than those he has given to the machine. We can no longer live, with the illusions of success, in a world given over to devitalized mechanisms, desocialized organisms, and depersonalized societies: a world that had lost its sense of the ultimate dignity of the person.

In “German R” (“Intermediate German With Review of Fundamentals”), which both Kaczynski and I took, we encountered a whole corpus of pessimistic writers, from Friedrich Nietzsche (“God is dead,” “Morality is the herd instinct of the individual,” “The thought of suicide is a great source of comfort”) to Oswald Spengler (“This machine-technics will end with the Faustian civilization and one day will lie in fragments, *forgotten*—our railways and steamships as dead as the Roman roads and the Chinese wall, our giant cities and skyscrapers in ruins like old Memphis and Babylon”).

In several courses we studied Joseph Conrad, who would later become one of Kaczynski’s favorite writers, and whose description of the villain in *Heart of Darkness* could have been applied to Kaczynski himself: “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz. ...” He was “a gifted creature. ... He was a universal genius.” Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*, a satire about bomb-wielding anarchists who declare war on science (and whose intentional irony Kaczynski may have missed), presages the Unabomber manifesto. “Science,” one of the plotters suggests, “is the sacrosanct fetish.”

All the damned professors are radicals at heart. Let them know that their great panjandrum has got to go, too. ... The demonstration must be against learning—science. ... The attack must have all the shocking senselessness of gratuitous blasphemy. ... I have always dreamed of a band of men absolute



in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves frankly the name of destroyers, and free from the taint of that resigned pessimism which rots the world. No pity for anything on earth, including themselves, and death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity—that's what I would have liked to see.

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What impact did this reading have on us? Speaking as a former college professor, I can say that most curricula have absolutely no effect on most students. But readings can have profound effects on some students, especially the brightest, most conscientious, and least mature. Certainly the intellectual climate generated by Gen Ed informed Kaczynski's developing views. The Unabomber philosophy bears a striking resemblance to many parts of Harvard's Gen Ed syllabus. Its anti-technology message and its despairing depiction of the sinister forces that lie beneath the surface of civilization, its emphasis on the alienation of the individual and on the threat that science poses to human values—all these were in the readings. And these kinds of ideas did not affect Kaczynski alone—they reached an entire generation, and beyond.

Gen Ed had more than an intellectual impact. According to a study of Harvard and Radcliffe undergraduates that included Kaczynski's class of 1962, conducted by William G. Perry Jr., the director of the university's Bureau of Study Counsel, the undergraduate curriculum had a profound impact on the emotions, the attitudes, and even the health of some students.

According to Perry, intellectual development for Harvard and Radcliffe undergraduates typically encompassed a progression from a simplistic, "dualistic" view of reality to an increasingly relativistic and "contingent" one. Entering freshmen tend to favor simple over complex solutions and to divide the world into truth and falsehood, good and bad, friend and foe. Yet in most of their college courses, especially in the social sciences and the humanities, they are taught that truth is relative. Most accept this, but a number cannot. They react against relativism by clinging more fiercely to an absolute view of the world. To some of these students, in Perry's words, "science and mathematics still seem to offer hope."

Nevertheless, Perry wrote, "regression into dualism" is not a happy development, for it "calls for an enemy." Dualists in a relativistic environment tend to see themselves as surrounded; they become increasingly lonely and alienated. This attitude "requires an equally absolutistic rejection of any 'establishment'" and "can call forth in its defense hate, projection, and denial of all distinctions but one," Perry wrote. "The tendency ... is toward paranoia."

As is evident in his writings, Kaczynski rejected the complexity and relativism he found in the humanities and the social sciences. He embraced both the dualistic cognitive style of mathematics and Gen Ed's anti-technology message. And perhaps most important, he absorbed the message of positivism, which demanded value-neutral

reasoning and preached that (as Kaczynski would later express it in his journal) “there was no logical justification for morality.”

After he graduated from Harvard, Kaczynski encountered a book by the French philosopher Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (1954). Its message was that mankind no longer saw technology as merely a tool but now pursued its advancement as an end in itself. Society served technology, not vice versa. Individuals were valued only insofar as they served this end. Their education and the structure of their institutions were shaped solely for the purpose of technological progress.

By the time he encountered Ellul, Kaczynski recalled in 1998, “I had already developed *at least* 50% of the ideas of that book on my own, and ... when I read the book for the first time, I was delighted, because I thought, ‘Here is someone who is saying what I have already been thinking.’”

## The Murray Experiment

Perhaps no figure at Harvard at this time better embodied the ongoing war between science and humanism than Henry A. “Harry” Murray, a professor in Harvard’s Department of Social Relations. A wealthy and blue-blooded New Yorker, Murray was both a scientist and a humanist, and he was one of Lewis Mumford’s best friends. He feared for the future of civilization in an age of nuclear weapons, and advocated implementing the agenda of the World Federalist Association, which called for a single world government. The atomic bomb, Murray wrote in a letter to Mumford, “is the logical & predictable result of the course we have been madly pursuing for a hundred years.” The choice now facing humanity, he added, was “One World or No World.” Yet unlike Mumford, Murray maintained a deep faith in science. He saw it as offering a solution by helping to transform the human personality. “The kind of behavior that is required by the present threat,” Murray wrote Mumford, “involves transformations of personality such as never occurred quickly in human history; one transformation being that of National Man into World Man.” Crucial to achieving this change was learning the secret of successful relationships between people, communities, and nations. And coming to understand these “unusually successful relations” was the object of Murray’s particular research: the interplay between two individuals, which he called the “dyad.”

The concept of the dyad was, in a sense, Murray’s attempt to build a bridge between psychology and sociology. Rather than follow Freud and Jung by identifying the individual as the fundamental atom in the psychological universe, Murray chose the dyad—the smallest *social* unit—and in this way sought to unite psychiatry, which studied the psyches of individuals, and sociology, which studied social relations. This kind of research, he apparently hoped, might (as he put it in a 1947 paper) promote “the survival and further evaluation of Modern Man,” by encouraging the emergence of the new “world man” and making world peace more likely.

Murray's interest in the dyad, however, may have been more than merely academic. The curiosity of this complex man appears to have been impelled by two motives—one idealistic and the other somewhat less so. He lent his talents to national aims during World War II. Forrest Robinson, the author of a 1992 biography of Murray, wrote that during this period he "flourished as a leader in the global crusade of good against evil." He was also an advocate of world government. Murray saw understanding the dyad, it seems, as a practical tool in the service of the great crusade in both its hot and cold phases. (He had long shown interest, for example, in the whole subject of brainwashing.) During the war Murray served in the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA, helping to develop psychological screening tests for applicants and (according to Timothy Leary) monitoring military experiments on brainwashing. In his book (1979), John Marks reported that General "Wild Bill" Donovan, the OSS director, "called in Harvard psychology professor Henry 'Harry' Murray" to devise a system for testing the suitability of applicants to the OSS. Murray and his colleagues "put together an assessment system ... [that] tested a recruit's ability to stand up under pressure, to be a leader, to hold liquor, to lie skillfully, and to read a person's character by the nature of his clothing. ... Murray's system became a fixture in the OSS."

One of the tests that Murray devised for the OSS was intended to determine how well applicants withstood interrogations. As he and his colleagues described it in their 1948 report "Selection of Personnel for Clandestine Operations—Assessment of Men,"

The candidate immediately went downstairs to the basement room. A voice from within commanded him to enter, and on complying he found himself facing a spotlight strong enough to blind him for a moment. The room was otherwise dark. Behind the spotlight sat a scarcely discernible board of inquisitors. ... The interrogator gruffly ordered the candidate to sit down. When he did so, he discovered that the chair in which he sat was so arranged that the full strength of the beam was focused directly on his face. ...

At first the questions were asked in a quiet, sympathetic, conciliatory manner, to invite confidence. ... After a few minutes, however, the examiner worked up to a crescendo in a dramatic fashion. ... When an inconsistency appeared, he raised his voice and lashed out at the candidate, often with sharp sarcasm. He might even roar, "You're a liar."

Even anticipation of this test was enough to cause some applicants to fall apart. The authors wrote that one person "insisted he could not go through with the test." They continued, "A little later the director ... found the candidate in his bedroom, sitting on the edge of his cot, sobbing."

Before the war Murray had been the director of the Harvard Psychological Clinic. After the war Murray returned to Harvard, where he continued to refine techniques of personality assessment. In 1948 he sent a grant application to the Rockefeller Foundation proposing "the development of a system of procedures for testing the suitability

of officer candidates for the navy.” By 1950 he had resumed studies on Harvard undergraduates that he had begun, in rudimentary form, before the war, titled “Multiform Assessments of Personality Development Among Gifted College Men.” The experiment in which Kaczynski participated was the last and most elaborate in the series. In their postwar form these experiments focused on stressful dyadic relations, designing confrontations akin to those mock interrogations he had helped to orchestrate for the OSS.

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It was the confluence of two streams of development that transformed Ted Kaczynski into the Unabomber. One stream was personal, fed by his anger toward his family and those who he felt had slighted or hurt him, in high school and college. The other derived from his philosophical critique of society and its institutions, and reflected the culture of despair he encountered at Harvard and later. The Murray experiment, containing both psychological and philosophical components, may well have fed both streams.

Gradually, while he was immersed in his Harvard readings and in the Murray experiment, Kaczynski began to put together a theory to explain his unhappiness and anger. Technology and science were destroying liberty and nature. The system, of which Harvard was a part, served technology, which in turn required conformism. By advertising, propaganda, and other techniques of behavior modification, this system sought to transform men into automatons, to serve the machine.

Thus did Kaczynski’s Harvard experiences shape his anger and legitimize his wrath. By the time he graduated, all the elements that would ultimately transform him into the Unabomber were in place—the ideas out of which he would construct a philosophy, the unhappiness, the feelings of complete isolation. Soon after, so, too, would be his commitment to killing. Embracing the value-neutral message of Harvard’s positivism—morality was nonrational—made him feel free to murder. Within four years of graduating from Harvard he would be firmly fixed in his life’s plan. According to an autobiography he wrote that chronicled his life until the age of twenty-seven, “I thought ‘I will kill, but I will make at least some effort to avoid detection, so that I can kill again.’” Both Kaczynski’s philosophy and his decision to go into the wilderness were set by the summer of 1966, after his fourth year as a graduate student at the University of Michigan (where, incidentally, students had rated him an above-average instructor). It was then, Sally Johnson wrote, that “he decided that he would do what he always wanted to do, to go to Canada to take off in the woods with a rifle and try to live off the country. ‘If it doesn’t work and if I can get back to civilization before I starve then I will come back here and kill someone I hate.’” This was also when he decided to accept the teaching position at Berkeley—not in order to launch an academic career but to earn a grubstake sufficient to support him in the wilderness.

In 1971 Kaczynski wrote an essay containing most of the ideas that later appeared in the manifesto. “In these pages,” it began, “it is argued that continued scientific and

technical progress will inevitably result in the extinction of individual liberty.” It was imperative that this juggernaut be stopped, Kaczynski went on. This could not be done by simply “popularizing a certain libertarian philosophy” unless “that philosophy is accompanied by a program of concrete action.”

At that time Kaczynski still had some hope of achieving his goals by peaceful means—by establishing “an organization dedicated to stopping federal aid to scientific research.” It would not be long before he decided this was fruitless. The same year, Johnson wrote, he was “thinking seriously about and planning to murder a scientist.” Meanwhile, he began to practice what radical environmentalists call “monkeywrenching”—sabotaging or stealing equipment and setting traps and stringing wires to harm intruders into his wilderness domain. Later in the 1970s he began experimenting with explosives. In 1978 he launched his campaign of terrorism with the bomb that injured Terry Marker.

## The Evils of Intelligence

Today Ted Kaczynski is serving four life terms in a maximum-security prison in Florence, Colorado. Out of sight, he is not out of play. His manifesto continues to be read at colleges around the country. Through letters, he maintains relations with many people he knew before his arrest. And although most Americans are morally repulsed by the Unabomber’s terrorism, many accept his anti-technology views and silently tolerate extremist actions on behalf of saving “wild nature.”

Kaczynski has attracted a large new following of admirers. Indeed, he has become an inspiration and a sort of leader in exile for the burgeoning “green anarchist” movement. In a letter to me Kaczynski made clear that he keeps in contact with other anarchists, including John Zerzan, the intellectual leader of a circle of anarchists in Eugene, Oregon, who was among the few people to visit Kaczynski while he was in jail in Sacramento, awaiting trial. According to *The Boston Globe*, Theresa Kintz, one of Zerzan’s fellow anarchists, was the first writer to whom Kaczynski granted an interview after his arrest. Writing for the London-based *Green Anarchist*, Kintz quoted Kaczynski as saying, “For those who realize the need to do away with the techno-industrial system, if you work for its collapse, in effect you are killing a lot of people.”

The *Los Angeles Times* has reported that last June, 200 of Zerzan’s comrades rioted in Eugene, smashing computers, breaking shop windows, throwing bricks at cars, and injuring eight police officers. According to the *Seattle Times*, followers of Zerzan’s also arrived in force at last December’s “Battle of Seattle,” at the World Trade Organization meeting, where they smashed shop windows, flattened tires, and dumped garbage cans on the street.

Kaczynski continues to comment approvingly on the violent exploits of environmental radicals. In a letter he wrote last year to the Denver television reporter Rick

Sallinger, he expressed his support for the Earth Liberation Front's arsons at the Vail ski resort—fires that destroyed more than \$12 million worth of property.

"I fully approve of [the arson]," he wrote Sallinger, "and I congratulate the people who carried it out." Kaczynski went on to commend an editorial in the *Earth First! Journal* by Kintz, who wrote, "The Earth Liberation Front's eco-sabotage of Vail constituted a political act of conscience perfectly in keeping with the sincere expression of the biocentric paradigm many Earth First!ers espouse." It is unlikely that Kaczynski will someday be a free man again, but it is not impossible. Although he pleaded guilty in January of 1998 to the Unabomber crimes, that outcome is currently under appeal. He claims that his attorneys deceived him and acted against his wishes by preparing a "mental defect" defense for him, and that by allowing this to happen, the court violated his Sixth Amendment right to direct his own defense. The Ninth Circuit Court has agreed to hear his appeal, and a new trial is a possibility.

Some, including me, believe that if Kaczynski does win a new trial, he will argue that his killings were necessary in order to save the world from a great evil—namely, technology. Most legal experts believe that this would be an unpersuasive and even suicidal defense strategy, leading directly to a guilty verdict and a sentence of death. But apparently Kaczynski would rather die a martyr for his ideas than live out his life in prison. At any rate, his essential point is correct: the Unabomber is not only a killer but a sane one. He is a terrorist, like Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, and Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, the World Trade Center bomber. And like them, he is evil. But what kind of evil?

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The real story of Ted Kaczynski is one of the nature of modern evil—evil that results from the corrosive powers of intellect itself, and its arrogant tendency to put ideas above common humanity. It stems from our capacity to conceive theories or philosophies that promote violence or murder in order to avert supposed injustices or catastrophes, to acquiesce in historical necessity, or to find the final solution to the world's problems—and by this process of abstraction to dehumanize our enemies. We become like Raskolnikov, in *Crime and Punishment*, who declares, "I did not kill a human being, but a principle!"

Guided by theories, philosophies, and ideologies, the worst mass killers of modern history transformed their victims into depersonalized abstractions, making them easier to kill. Much the way Stalin, citing Communist dogma, ordered the murder of millions of peasants toward "the elimination of the Kulaks as a class," so Kaczynski rationalized his murders as necessary to solve "the technology problem."

The conditions that produce violence continue to flourish. Despite their historically unprecedented affluence, many middle-class Americans, particularly the educated elite, are still gripped by despair. The education system continues to promote bleak visions of the future. Meanwhile, alienating ideologies, offering the false promise of quick solutions through violence, proliferate.

Although most Americans strongly condemn terrorist acts committed in the name of political agendas of which they do not approve, many turn a blind eye toward savagery done in the name of ideals they share. Indeed, many are reasonably comfortable with violence short of murder, as long as it's done for a cause they support. It was easy for Americans to unite in condemning the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombings, because few approved of the bombers' goals: the destruction of the state of Israel and of the U.S. government. But some conservatives seem to be untroubled by anti-abortion bombings or by the rise of armed militias, and some liberals consistently condone or ignore the proliferation of terrorism putatively committed on behalf of animals or the environment.

Not surprisingly, then, ideologically inspired violence has become increasingly commonplace—tolerated and sometimes even praised. Just after the bombing at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, *The Wall Street Journal* noted that terrorism “has become a part of life.”

According to the FBI, explosive and incendiary bombings doubled during the first four years of the 1990s. And although the number of such incidents has declined slightly since that time, certain kinds of “single-issue” terrorism—including acts committed on behalf of Kaczynski's cause of choice, “saving wild nature”—are becoming increasingly prominent. Last year the director of the FBI, Louis Freeh, told Congress, “The most recognizable single issue terrorists at the present time are those involved in the violent animal rights, anti-abortion, and environmental protection movements. ... the potential for destruction has increased as terrorists have turned toward large improvised explosive devices to inflict maximum damage.”

After concluding a ten-month investigation of this phenomenon, the *Portland Oregonian* reported last fall,

Escalating sabotage to save the environment has inflicted tens of millions of dollars in damage and placed lives at risk. ... Arsons, bombings and sabotage in the name of saving the environment and its creatures have swept the American West over the last two decades, and Oregon is increasingly the center of it. At least 100 major acts of such violence have occurred since 1980, causing \$42.8 million in damages.

The *Oregonian* found that “during the last four years alone, the West has been rocked by 33 substantial incidents, with damages reaching \$28.8 million.” And although “these crimes started nearly two decades ago—some seem clearly inspired by Edward Abbey's 1975 novel, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*—they have escalated dangerously, sometimes with the use of bombs, in the last six years.” No one other than Kaczynski's three victims has yet been murdered by a fanatical environmentalist, but investigators consider it merely a matter of time before someone else is killed for similar reasons. “I think we've come very close to that line,” one federal agent told the *Oregonian*, “and we will cross that line unless we deal with this problem.”

We may cross that line sooner than we think. In a September, 1998, letter to me, Kaczynski wrote,

I suspect that you underestimate the strength and depth of feeling against industrial civilization that has been developing in recent years. I've been surprised at some of the things that people have written to me. It looks to me as if our society is moving into a pre-revolutionary situation. (By that I don't mean a situation in which revolution is inevitable, but one in which it is a realistic possibility.) The majority of people are pessimistic or cynical about existing institutions, there is widespread alienation and directionlessness among young people. ... Perhaps all that is needed is to give these forces appropriate organization and direction.

Seen from that perspective, it might seem that the rest of society is only a few steps behind Kaczynski. When Henry Murray spoke of the need to create a new "World Man," this was not what he had in mind.



# Comments

## Readers Responses

Alston Chase (“Harvard and the Making of the Unabomber,” June *Atlantic*) relies on inaccurate information, quotation out of context, and sheer speculation to suggest not only that Henry Murray’s experiments had a sinister purpose but also that they were a “turning point” in the making of the Unabomber. Although he admits that there is no evidence that Murray used LSD in his research, Chase discusses Murray’s interest in Timothy Leary’s psilocybin research as if to establish guilt by association. In this connection he quotes Martin Lee and Bruce Schlain, the authors of *Acid Dreams*, who mistakenly refer to Murray as “chairman of the Department of Social Relations” at Harvard (although he had a role in its formation, Murray never served as chair of the department). Moreover, although Chase refers to Forrest Robinson’s biography of Murray, he overlooks Robinson’s discussions of Murray’s interest in “dyadic” interactions.

Chase’s suggestion that Murray’s dyadic studies may have had “a defense connection of some sort” lacks support (as he admits). However, he makes the suggestion seem plausible by tracing Murray’s “multiform assessment” procedures to his work with the OSS during World War II, without mentioning that the OSS procedures were based on Murray’s earlier work (see his classic 1938 book, *Explorations in Personality*). To support the suggestion that Murray’s studies “would have had considerable utility for the defense establishment,” perhaps as a means of “improv[ing] interrogation techniques,” Chase claims that Murray seemed “reluctant to divulge” the purpose of the studies and that he “sometimes ... suggested that his research might have no value at all.”

As an illustration, Chase quotes Murray out of context, noting that he once referred to his results as “nothing but raw data, meaningless as such” and asked, “*Cui bono?* ... the question is what meaning, what intellectual news, can be extracted from them?” In the article Chase quotes, however, it is very clear that Murray’s questions are rhetorical and that he sees his results as far from meaningless. The article (published in the *American Psychologist*, 1963) represents the text of Murray’s 1961 address as a recipient of the American Psychological Association’s Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award (hardly a context in which a researcher would dismiss his work as meaningless!). Before asking the rhetorical questions, Murray describes the purpose of his study, and in the remainder of the address he discusses several “methodological principles” and reports at length his analyses of the heart-rate data.

Chase not only misrepresents Murray's work; he also holds Murray responsible for not recognizing that Theodore Kaczynski "must certainly have been among the most vulnerable" of the subjects in the Harvard studies and suggests that Murray's experiment was a "turning point" in the creation of the Unabomber. Yet Chase has argued at length that Kaczynski was "entirely sane" at the beginning of the experiment, supporting his claims with the opinion of Bertram Karon, "a psychological-testing expert," who evaluated Kaczynski's Thematic Apperception Test from the time of the study, and with other opinions regarding Kaczynski's "maturity." He also "speculate[s] that some of the students (including Kaczynski) did it for the money" and quotes several other participants to illustrate the prevailing "attitudes of anger, nihilism, and alienation" among the students.

If Kaczynski was "entirely sane" and "mature" at the time of the experiment, and if the need for money and despairing attitudes were common among Murray's subjects, just how were Murray and his researchers to know that Kaczynski was "among the most vulnerable" of their subjects? Or, to put it differently, why didn't the rest of Murray's "youngest" and "poorest" subjects become serial murderers? Chase offers only speculations (such as those made after Kaczynski's arrest by a forensic psychologist and by his high school counselor) to support the suggestion that Murray's experiment was a turning point for Kaczynski. Although he mentions the possibility of a "dysfunctional family," he provides no information about other experiences that may have differentiated Kaczynski from his peers (who also experienced the Gen Ed curriculum and participated in Murray's research), contributing to his increasing distress at Harvard.

#### **Nicole B. Barenbaum**

Alston Chase grossly misrepresents the nature of Henry A. Murray's study of twenty-two undergraduates at Harvard College from 1959 to 1962.

I was a participant in the study, and I find nothing in Chase's lengthy cover story to substantiate a credible link between Murray's experiments and Kaczynski's murders. First, and most important, the test that Chase labels "the centerpiece of [the] undertaking" lasted only a couple of hours. The study as a whole was of more than 200 hours in duration. Most of the time — more than 99 percent, in point of fact — was spent in a relaxed manner talking with affable and compassionate researchers, performing Thematic Apperception Tests, writing personal narratives, and even dining with Murray and others at his home.

Chase's description of the session in which each of us was asked to defend his personal philosophy of life in no way corresponds with my memory of the event. He would have the reader emerge from his account horror-struck that an evil Murray and staff could have conducted a brutal assault on unwitting undergraduates. Some may have found the experience mildly discomforting, in that their cherished (and in my case, at least, sophomoric) philosophies were challenged in an aggressive manner quite foreign to them. But it was hardly an experience that would blight one for a week, let alone a life.

By seeding his story with mention of hallucinogenic drugs, stress tests done years earlier for the Office of Strategic Services in a completely different context, and traumatic experiments having no connection with Murray's, Chase manages to convey a sense of sinister intent that does grave injustice to one of the most compassionate, thoughtful men it has been my privilege to know. Kaczynski may have begun his descent into the abyss while he was an undergraduate, but it is improbable in the extreme that Henry Murray was an agent in that dark process.

**Richard G. Adams**

Alston Chase's essay is full of nonsense, some of it potentially damaging. The nonsense arises from his attempt to show that Theodore Kaczynski, a.k.a. the Unabomber, was "a brilliant but vulnerable boy" when he arrived at Harvard, in 1958, and a killer in all but deed when he left, four years later. Chase would have us believe that this grave transformation had two sources. First, it was brought on by Kaczynski's exposure to what is described as the "culture of despair," prevalent at the time "among intellectuals all over the Western world" but present in "a particularly concentrated form" in Harvard's undergraduate curriculum. Chase does little more to substantiate the existence of this corrupting intellectual climate than he does to account for Kaczynski's rather singular susceptibility to its influence. Were others similarly infected? Chase does not say. Nor does he offer evidence that Kaczynski was personally aware of the baleful effects of his Harvard education. Rather oddly, in light of the weight he attaches to the influence of educational experiences, Chase — "speaking as a former college professor" — allows that "most curricula have absolutely no effect on most students."

Chase called me on two occasions with questions about Henry Murray, and I answered them as fully and honestly as I could. He did not inquire about the use of drugs in experiments, nor did he ask me about possible ties to the CIA. I suspect he avoided such matters because he knew my responses would be discouraging. He was right. In two decades of research on the life and work of Murray, involving more than a hundred interviews with my subject and those who knew him, and touching frequently on intimate personal experiences, I heard absolutely nothing that so much as hinted at the malign suggestions set out in Alston Chase's strange article. Nothing.

**Forrest G. Robinson**

Although Alston Chase and I both graduated from Harvard College in 1957, his institution and mine must have been in different universes. As a product of a public school education, I found the Gen Ed program of studies to be both liberating and exhilarating. In our first two years we were required to take survey courses in the humanities, the social sciences, and — if we were not scientifically inclined — the natural sciences. I was exposed to the great literature, the history, and the philosophy of Western thought. In "Hum 2" the famed classicist John Finlay introduced us to great epics and novels (the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, *War and Peace*). I visited times of tumult and revolution (the Dark Ages, the rise of

capitalism from the ashes of feudalism, the Nazi and Russian revolutions) from original source material in Sam Beer's "Soc Sci 2." I remember the simplicity of Descartes's reducing all experience to "*Cogito, ergo sum.*" I read Hobbes, argued with Freud, and, yes, even struggled with Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Though not a science major, as a pre-med student I had a good grounding in the physical sciences.

Despite the evil influence of Gen Ed posited by Chase, and *my* immersion in the sciences, I did not conclude that "all the accumulated nonscientific knowledge of the past ... had been at best merely an expression of 'cultural mores' and at worst nonsense; life had no purpose and morality no justification" or that "even as positivism preached progress ... it subliminally carried ... a more disturbing implication: that absolute reason leads to absolute despair." Rather, the program opened my provincial, barely post-adolescent mind to a panoply of books, works of art and music, thought, and scientific method that we call, for lack of a better term, a liberal-arts education.

**Ronald Weintraub, M.D.**

Whatever the torments of Ted Kaczynski's childhood, or of Henry Murray's awful experiments, the notion that Harvard's curriculum was conducive to terrorism is ridiculous.

**Todd Gitlin**

## Chase's Reply

To Nicole Barenbaum: Although some tests given Ted Kaczynski do date back to *Explorations in Personality*, the "stressful dyadic proceeding" was not among them. Its first use at Harvard came after the war, as part of a study of members of the classes of 1951 and 1952. I suggested that Kaczynski was *immature* at the time of the experiment, not that he was mature. I did not suggest that the Murray experiment alone transformed Kaczynski into the Unabomber, and I never suggested a deterministic link between his youthful experiences and later crimes. As the Perry study that I cite makes clear, however, the Harvard educational experience did have an unfortunate effect on a significant number of undergraduates.

I'm glad that Richard Adams remembers Dr. Murray's experiment fondly. But as I wrote, people react differently to such experiences, and judging from the data sets, several had distinctly unpleasant memories of the Murray experiment. My primary intention in mentioning hallucinogenic drugs was to scotch the rumor that Murray may have given them to research subjects.

I am at a loss to understand why Forrest Robinson would say that I've done little to substantiate my claim that the Harvard undergraduate curriculum in the 1950s promoted a culture of despair, when my article devoted 2,000 words to supporting this contention. I also provided plenty of evidence (such as Kaczynski's family background,

immaturity, the Perry study, and the Unabomber's manifesto itself) that Harvard may have affected Kaczynski.

I am surprised that Professor Robinson should raise doubts about my interviews with him, especially since I never cited him on the points he mentions. I asked him both about Murray's use of LSD and about the funding of Murray's experiments. Robinson was, however, only one among many written and oral sources — some of which conflicted with his answers — on which I based my conclusions.

I, too, read the books that Ronald Weintraub mentions while I was at Harvard. But I'm surprised that he does not also recall encountering Dostoevski, Spengler, H. G. Wells, Mumford, Erich Fromm, Thorstein Veblen, Norman Cousins, Norbert Wiener, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus, among others — all of whom were represented in the curriculum then and many of whose works conveyed bleak views of the human condition or expressed fears that technology threatened civilization. The malaise to which I refer was not limited to Harvard. The Cold War climate of those times affected curricula across the country, creating both an increased reliance on technology and concerns that it would destroy human values and trigger a thermonuclear holocaust. Finally, if Dr. Weintraub has forgotten that positivism considers judgments of morality and religion meaningless, I urge him to reread A. J. Ayer's 1936 defense of positivism, *Language, Truth and Logic* (very popular among Harvard faculty members in the 1950s), which calls religious and ethical beliefs "pseudo-concepts."

The Ted K Archive

Alston Chase

Harvard and the Making of the Unabomber

A series of purposely brutalizing psychological experiments may have confirmed Theodore Kaczynski's still-forming belief in the evil of science while he was in college.

June & September, 2000.

Essay: <[theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2000/06/harvard-and-the-making-of-the-unabomber/378239](http://theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2000/06/harvard-and-the-making-of-the-unabomber/378239)>

& Letter responses: <[theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2000/09/letters/378379](http://theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2000/09/letters/378379)>.

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