

How can we stop today's Unabombers going on killing sprees?

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Between 1978 and 1995, Ted Kaczynski, known as the “Unabomber” killed three people and injured over 20 more, with the objective of provoking the collapse of “modern” American society. Here, criminologist David Wilson argues that unless we have a properly funded health care system, where those with underlying personality disorders or other mental health issues can access treatment, we risk creating fertile ground for extremists to turn vulnerable people into terrorists.



Kaczynski, portrayed here by Paul Bettany in the film *Manhunt*, was a paranoid schizophrenic who took inspiration from a work by the French sociologist Jacques Ellul

Let's start with the necessary caveat. People who are mentally ill are much more likely to harm themselves than they are to be a danger to anyone else.

This truism is important to bear in mind, although the case that I'm going to discuss is indeed about a mentally ill person and the thin line that often exists between being able to manage successfully those with an underlying personality disorder in the community, and the tragic consequences that can occur when that line is breached.

This is challenging territory at the best of times. However, all of this is clearly aggravated by cuts in community mental health provision and a widespread belief that acknowledging a perpetrator's mental illness somehow absolves them of personal responsibility for the harm that they've caused.

This challenging context is also made more urgent now that we have evidence that so-called 'lone actor' terrorists with underlying mental health issues are being specifically recruited by terror groups.

A recent study in *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, for example, suggested that there was a relationship between depression, post traumatic stress disorder and violent extremism.

Ian Acheson, a senior advisor to the Counter Extremism Project, notes that terrorist gangs such as Al Qaeda or ISIS are deliberately seeking out people online who are vulnerable and suggestible to hateful ideologies.

"Their irrationality," Acheson claims, is "a blade to be sharpened by groomers".

This is a dangerous development.

Yet again the rarely discussed context for some of the most pressing issues that we face as a society is how enlightenment values which champion science over religion, knowledge over belief, and truth as demonstrable fact rather than mere opinion, have become ever more threatened in a "post-truth" world.

Take the case of Ted Kaczynski – the "Unabomber" – who died in prison in North Carolina last month.

Between 1978 to 1995 Kaczynski attacked academics, businessmen, random civilians, universities and airlines with homemade bombs. He also killed three people and injured over 20 more, all with the objective of provoking the collapse of "modern" society.

Kaczynski had gone to Harvard University at the age of 16 to study Mathematics and by 25 he was an assistant professor at Berkeley, before dropping out and living in a shack in rural Montana.

In his manifesto, published during his terror campaign by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and called "Industrial Society and Its Future", he railed against technology and industrialisation and claimed that the damage that had been caused to the environment and society was so great that the whole edifice of "modern life" should be destroyed.

Once again, it's all the Enlightenment's fault.

Kaczynski's manifesto is one of the most popular books on the list of Amazon's political thought category; TikTok has almost endless clips of industrial disasters interspersed with quotes from his essay; the phrase "Ted-pilled" has become common.

And, after his death, celebrities such as Tucker Carlson and Elon Musk praised what the Unabomber had written, whilst disassociating themselves from his violence.

Even so, it's clear that Kaczynski has his supporters.

In fact, nothing that Kaczynski wrote was original and much of what appears in the manifesto is taken from the French sociologist Jacques Ellul's 1954 book *The Technological Society*.

Kaczynski was in reality a plagiarist but also, more importantly, a paranoid schizophrenic – he heard voices, saw things that were not there, and believed that he was being persecuted.

In all likelihood he was also an anosognostic. In other words, he was so mentally ill that he couldn't understand that he wasn't being rational – a state that is common in some, although not all, people who are bipolar or schizophrenic.

So, what are we left with?

The first point to make is that we are left with a number of people who have been killed. The dead don't really care about the mental state of who it was that did them harm.

However, we should – for if we want to prevent other deaths from those who believe that they have some divine, or secular mission to kill and bring down “modern” society we need to ensure that we have a properly funded health care system where those with underlying personality disorders, or other mental health issues, can access the treatment that they need.

If we don't then we're simply creating, in Acheson's words, ever more blades that can be sharpened by those who seek to destroy all that makes our life worth living.

Let them continue and pretty soon we'll return to the days of hunter-gatherer societies and eating roots to cure disease.

The Ted K Archive

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<www.heraldscotland.com/politics/viewpoint/23655683.drove-unabomber-kill>

www.thetedkarchive.com