

Negation Theory as a Cause of Delusion

The Case of the Unabomber

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ABSTRACT: The case of the Unabomber is examined as a test of the authors' theory of negation, which is based on four steps: (1) negation, (2) persecutory ideation, (3) attachment to a transcendental source, and (4) evangelism/martyrdom. The Unabomber sent bombs that killed three persons and injured others, and became a cause celebre in the 1990s when he threatened to blow up an airliner in flight if his 36,000 word manifesto was not published in a leading periodical. Eventually captured and tried, he refused an insanity defense but accepted a sentence of life imprisonment without possibility of parole. The authors' theory is a phenomenological model which encourages an intensive analysis of observations of behavior, with the goal of abstracting dimensions that serve to integrate the observations, codify them, and bind them into a unitary system.

KEY WORDS: delusions; psychodiagnosis; theory of psychopathology; terrorism.

Negation theory is the authors' name for an explanation of a delusional disorder, such as paranoia. It is composed of four steps: (1) negation, (2) persecutory ideation, (3) attachment to a transcendental idea, and (4) evangelism/martyrdom. We believe these steps tend to be sequential, linear steps, one occurring after the other, but this may not always be the case.

In previous articles (Zuk, 1989; Zuk & Zuk, 1992, 1995, 1998) we applied negation theory to cases of prominent individuals no longer living who had been diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic, or with a closely related disorder. In this article we focus on Ted Kaczynski, still living although confined, who became a cause celebre in the 1990s when he threatened to blow up an airliner in flight if a 36,000 word manifesto he had written, damning industrialization and technology, and their agents was not published in a leading periodical. Over a 17- year period, Ted, by mailing letter bombs, killed three persons and injured numerous others. When captured he refused an insanity defense, having been diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic (Graysmith, 1996), tried to serve as his own counsel, but finally accepted a plea bargain in which he was to serve a life term in prison without possibility of parole. Ted's ploy to publish his manifesto worked: a leading newspaper did publish it.

Our effort in this study is to take an entirely different case from those we have previously examined of individuals diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic, and then attempt to fit their mental disturbance to the 4-point theory we call negation theory. We have focused on the problem of delusional states or ideation over approximately a dozen years because we believe that delusion is a fundamental constituent of several severe mental disorders, as well as one in itself, and that it well may be that at one time or another nearly everyone "suffers" from delusional ideation because it is a derivative of a perfectly normal human activity, that is, belief, which we believe is akin to or a subset of human intelligence, and necessary to human development. We are in perfect agreement with the first sentence of the recent article by Applebaum, Robbins, and Roth (1999, p. 1939) that, "Delusions are the quintessential symptoms of psychotic disorders." That statement perfectly captures our commitment to the problem over the past dozen years.

NEGATION THEORY

Definitions

Previously we have defined negation theory, but have not called it such. Here we will refer to it as a theory, which is a statement of cause and effect presuming that one leads directly to another and with a degree of predictability that exceeds what could be claimed as chance. Negation theory defined here will differ slightly from previous versions, but we do not believe there is a serious divergency in the revision:

Negation: The first and principal element of the theory, negation refers to a wrenching turnabout in the lifestyle of an individual, not necessarily predictable, but where the individual undertakes an activity that may be entirely at odds with what the individual has done before, and which may be of extraordinary surprise to those that know the individual. As regards Kaczynski, we think there was a violent turnabout in his life, probably not starting at about 30 years of age but much before, which caused him to turn his back on all of the reward that had been given to him as a result of his superb intelligence in mathematics.

Negation may be intrapersonal or interpersonal. The intrapersonal type is exemplified by Freud's (1911) concept of projection, restated later by H. S. Sullivan (1953) as "paranoid transformation," in which an unacceptable part of the Self is displaced to another, where the other is tagged as a persecutor and the victim is terrorized and retaliates. The retaliation may be severe, incurring danger to the victim or others. The other form of negation is interpersonal: the victim is the subject of a loss, rejection, disappointment caused by outsiders, particularly parents or family. The belief that one is being persecuted is the same, as is the wish to retaliate for unfairness.

Attachment to a Transcendental Source

In a state of despair, the individual turns to a source that may bring comfort, and we call that the transcendental source—nature, the cosmos, religion, and so on. The individual surrenders personal responsibility to the transcendental source. The source dictates the behavior of the person; the person is the servant, the agent.

Evangelism/Martyrdom

An obligation of the source is that the individual spread, so to speak, the gospel to the world. In Ted's case, it would be the manifesto. The widest public must be reached, and any means to reach the widest public is held to be legitimate because of the importance of the message for mankind. Thus one can threaten life and not be personally responsible, in essence, because the end justifies the means. If the person fails in the mission to convert the world to the message of the transcendental source, then punishment is expected and even desired as a sign of loyalty to the transcendental. If the punishment is death, so much the better: the individual stands a chance of becoming acclaimed as a martyr, one who for a just cause suffered the ultimate penalty.

An odd example of martyrdom is found in what happened to Adolph Eichmann, the Nazi responsible for the massacre of Jews and others in prison camp during World War II. Eichmann, while in captivity in Israel in the early 1960s, maintained a diary, excerpts of which were published in the Los Angeles Times newspaper on March 1, 2000, in which he claimed (1) not to have been an anti-Semite, (2) to have been sickened by the sights and smells of death, and (3) to have been a bureaucrat (nothing more) in the extermination of Jews and others; that is, one merely serving the will of others of a higher station or calling. One is required to think hard about Eichmann's mental status during the time he served the Nazi regime and later, and also of the power of any dictatorship to cause its disciples to engage in acts often associated with mental disorder, such as the delusional state including paranoid schizophrenia.

ABOUT THE UNABOMBER

Ted's Career: Early Years, Criminal Activity and Manifesto, Capture, and Punishment

Ted Kaczynski was born in Chicago on May 22, 1942, of workingclass parents, Polish-Catholic in origin. His early years were uneventful except for the fact that his teachers considered him a bright student, but somewhat withdrawn and shy. Upon graduation from high school in Chicago he was recommended for a scholarship at college, and obtained one that took him to Harvard. At Harvard he completed the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree, and was awarded an additional scholarship for graduate study. He graduated with a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree from the University of Michigan. His area was mathematics, and he quickly obtained an appointment at the University of California, Berkeley, in the Department of Mathematics. This was in the period of the late 1960s when UC Berkeley, normally politically active, was in a period of intense political turmoil due to the war in Vietnam. His teaching career at Berkeley did not get off to a great start: students graded him poorly. But according to report of his departmental chairman, he was due for reappointment for a second year. Unexpectedly, in the fall of 1969, Ted wrote a letter of resignation to the chairman which offered no explanation and which took the chairman by surprise.

In 1971 Ted moved from Berkeley to a location near Lincoln, Montana which is approximately 60 miles from Helena, probably the state's major city. Temporarily he held odd jobs in the area, but quit each with the explanation the he was being exploited. Ted maintained written communication with his younger brother, David, throughout this period. David shared certain characteristics with Ted: Both were shy and withdrawn, but intellectually capable. David moved to a rural community in the state of Texas, but life there proved unsatisfactory and eventually he returned to his home in Chicago and married a childhood sweetheart. Later on he qualified for a degree as a social worker.

Ted returned home from Montana briefly in the mid-1970s, hoping apparently to heal any wounds he inflicted on those still living, but things did not go very well. He returned to Montana, writing that he was angry with his family, including David, and never wanted to see them again. In Montana he had built a makeshift cabin in the woods near Lincoln, and bicycled into the town for supplies. Generally people there considered him friendly and appealing, but Ted became, as recorded in his later discovered diaries, increasingly bitter and discontent. It was in the late 1970s that Ted began his career as a mailer of bombs to persons he associated with the deterioration of

society due to industrialization and technology. He traveled to Sacramento, California, to mail the bombs.

The first death recorded was in 1985, the victim an owner of a computer rental store. From that time over a period of nearly 17 years, Ted mailed bombs, which exploded killing a total of three persons and injuring others. In 1994 and 1995 he killed two persons; that is, he became increasingly skillful at this activity.

While the authorities were alarmed and eagerly sought his capture they were unsuccessful until in the 1990s when the wife of his brother, David, noticed a resemblance between the notice that Ted sent out and material she had read from Ted to David and other family members. She called this to David's attention, but David's immediate reaction was to dismiss the resemblance. David's wife persisted (Douglas & Olshaker, 1996), and he finally made contact with a private investigator, who conducted an intensive investigation of the brother. The investigator concluded that there was a high likelihood that Ted and the Unabomber were the same and that, if David refused to report his brother that he, the investigator, had an obligation to do so. David agonized, but finally decided to inform the authorities.

Ted was arrested and brought to Sacramento to face a grand jury which, in June 1996, handed down a ten-count indictment against him. Trial began in November 1997, after a lengthy period of discovery. Ted was a difficult defendant. He refused an insanity defense, despite the insistence of his attorneys. He became angry with them for their insistence, asking the court if he could defend himself. For a time he was allowed to do so, but then the judge became less sympathetic and demanded that Ted undergo a psychiatric examination that was extensive. The examination resulted in a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia with significant delusional ideation. Eventually his lawyers intervened to obtain a plea agreement by which Ted would serve a life sentence in prison without possibility of parole for his crimes. Initially Ted accepted the plea bargain, but sometime in late 1998 or early 1999 he filed a motion to have it dismissed. He wanted another trial to prove that he was not responsible. Of course the alternative— meaning if another trial were granted, would show him at cause for the death of others and could mean the imposition of a death penalty in California.

We believe the case of Kaczynski supports negation theory. At approximately age 30 he turned his back on the world he knew which had rewarded him substantially since young manhood. He fled that world, and we would term that flight a significant negation, even while we cannot identify all of the elements that might have contributed to it. He isolated himself in the wilderness. We assume that in his flight he felt threatened and there was an element of persecution. When he undertook to kill by constructing mail bombs, we understand by that that he had already entered a delusional state. He was certainly a danger to others, and proved it. He also felt he had a "message" he had to share with the world, and composed a 36,000 word statement damning the industrial and technological world, and certain of its agents. It seems reasonable that he assumed the message was one that was legitimate, somewhat messianic, one that would have the support and endorsement of a deity. If it became necessary to threaten

the destruction of individuals in pursuit of his messianic mission, he probably felt he had an entitlement. If in the course of his effort to inform the world he would be captured and perhaps put to death for murder, he was prepared because his demise would promote a presumed wish to become a martyr.

DISCUSSION

One of the puzzles presenting the therapist treating the delusional is why normal logic and reasoning have little or no positive effect. We think the reason for this is provided by negation theory: Each argument proposed is opposed by a number of others comprising the theory. The victim is thus shielded from ordinary logic and reason.

We believe that a psychiatric disturbance such as delusional disorder is a derivative of a perfectly normal human function; namely, the capacity of the human to believe what he or she cannot perceive directly, but is told to believe as true by others who are significant to the person. Belief in humans is a function probably akin to intelligence; it is an essential learning mechanism. But that which ordinarily serves the individual so well as a principal basis for learning how to function in daily life, may, under certain circumstances, cause serious dysfunction, and one of these we consider to be delusional disorder.

Although the standard psychiatric nomenclature—the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-IV—(American Psychiatric Association, 1994), cites a small incidence for delusional disorder—that is, the state where psychiatric treatment is needed, it seems to us that delusional ideation is quite probably a universal phenomenon affecting at one time or another everyone. Ordinarily the ideation is short-lived, relatively harmless to the individual, family, or co-workers, and recedes from the forefront of consciousness.

We have avoided personal recommendation regarding treatment of delusional disorder because we agree with the treatment proposals offered by Sir Martin Roth (1989): Little or no interpretation or confrontation; support, and sympathy for the person regardless of the specifics of the delusion, without specific endorsement; and the intelligent use of psychotropics to reduce the hypervigilance and high anxiety that tend to characterize these patients.

In closing we wish to bring attention to the interesting definitional changes that have occurred in various editions of the DSM with respect to delusion. In DSM-III (1980), the definition included the term “paranoia” and also “critical false belief.” In DSM-III-R (1987), “paranoia” was retained, but “critical false belief” dropped out. In DSM-IV (1994) both “paranoia” and “critical false belief” were removed. The types of delusional disorder were reduced to the bare minimum of description: persecutory, grandiose erotomantic, jealous, and somatic. From a historical point of view, we do not wish to omit the contributions of several—but by no means all—who contributed to the psychodiagnosis of the delusion: Kraepelin (1909-1915), Jaspers (1913), and

Strauss (1969), and encourage readers to acquaint themselves with their contributions that focused on the descriptive or reductionistic level.

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