

# Alston Chase – “Who is Ted Kaczynski?”

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# Contents

Part 1	4
Part 2	11

“Harvard and the Unabomber: The Education of an American Terrorist” is a book by Alston Chase, former Chair of the Philosophy Department at Macalester University in Minnesota. After studying the life and experiences of Theodore Kaczynski, who came to be known as the Unabomber, Chase characterizes him as product of the post World War II angst. Our discussion on Kaczynski continued through two parts.

Alston Chase recommends “Pity of War,” by Nile Furgeson.

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# Part 1

**Barry:** Welcome to Radio Curious. I'm Barry Vogel. Harvard and the Unabomber. The education of an American terrorist is our topic today on Radio Curious. It's also the name of recent book written by Professor Austin Chase, who lives in rural Montana. In this book, based on the life and experience of Theodore Kaczynski, who came to be known as the Unabomber, Chase characterizes him as a product of post World War 2 angst, a genius level mathematician from an idealistic, bookish family. Who, while at Harvard University, was involved in questionable and possibly unethical psychological experiments supported by Harvard? Chase does not apologize for Kaczynski. Instead, he puts the crimes and the man behind them in context, examining the links between intelligence and evil and the forces that led Kaczynski to become a serial killer. I spoke with Alston Chase and asked him to begin by commenting on the Unabomber's manifesto.

**Chase:** First hit me when I read the manifesto. Before I knew the author. At that time, the FBI assumed that whoever wrote the manifesto was probably someone who was about in his 40s. When I read the manifesto in 95, my reaction was my gosh, this is right out of Harvard's Gen. Ed curriculum of the 1950s. And so I immediately suspected that the author, the Unabomber, was older than the FBI had been suspecting. And it turned out to be correct. What I meant by that is. During the 1940s and 50s, many, many colleges and universities around the country, not among them Harvard, but by far not only Harvard, had embraced a form of undergraduate curriculum called General Education, which required students to take certain. Courses mainly of a historical orientation in the history of Western civilization, the history of science, the history of literature. And so on, and that the curriculum, the curricula that existed was presented to students during the 1950s was by and large, very pessimistic. What I call the culture of despair, that with the students. Were immersed in and it's important to remember that the 1950s students were being taught by faculty members who had fought in World War 2. Or who had were certainly adults in World War 2 and had seen witnessed the horrors of that war and also of the bombings of atomic bombings, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

**Barry:** Well, what did this experience of that group of faculty members bring to their curriculum? The sense of despair that you describe?

**Chase:** And they were. Yes. Well, I think first of all sense of first of all. A. A real. Worry that technology was destroying could destroy civilization. A real worry that the machine, as it were, was taking over our lives.

**Barry:** Well, that's what the President Eisenhower said in his farewell speech.

**Chase:** That's very much the same thing. Yes. And so this was strong not only among the humanists in the faculty, but all faculties, but also many of the scientists as well, and people like Norman Weiner at MIT who had. Helped develop aiming devices for. Was one of the people whose works we read as an undergraduate at Harvard. I read as an undergraduate Harvard warning about the dangers of technology, so this was not this was broad scale across the curriculum, although of course the humanists tended to be most worried about it. They were. Also has some there. Also we immediately enter had entered after World War 2 into the cold. And the Cold War was very real and the and it seemed to suggest the imminent possibility of that. We could be plunged into World War 3. Which might end life on Earth as we know it.

**Barry:** I remember it rather rather well with a certain amount of fear.

**Chase:** Yes, that's right. And I remember that national magazines were were publishing these articles on how to build bomb shelters out of books. All the sort of thing.

**Barry:** How do you feel that this affected Ted Kaczynski? Or maybe that question is premature. Perhaps you should explain the psychological experiments in which he participated during his years at Harvard.

**Chase:** Fine, I I might mention one other aspect of the curriculum, though that is very important for understanding Ted Kaczynski, and that is that there there was a particular philosophy that was very popular among the faculty members at at that time and in philosophy, but also in other. Feels that what we could that was called often called logical positivism or emotivism, and it was the view that only scientific statements are meaningful. Only scientific statements can be rationally defended, that therefore mild judgments are ethical. Judgments are not rational and are merely subjective expressions of emotions. This was an idea that Kaczynski absorbed virtually word for word, as I've just spoken it and which he never, ever forgot so that much later in his life when he was bombing people and killing people, he would confess, he kept it a secret. Diary, which I. Which I quote from in my book. This was written in code or sometimes in Spanish. Sometimes a combination of Spanish in code, but in his diary he would confess to feeling guilty when he had killed or named someone, and then he'd immediately catch himself and say, oh, but I recognize that. That there is no morality and that moral feelings are merely subject. And then that but are not rational and therefore, if I feel this way, it's only because I've been brainwashed into feeling this way by society. And I if I exercise my willpower and use my brains, I I can recognize that there is no morality, and therefore there's nothing wrong with killing. So he would he would talk to himself this way and to assuage his guilt. Well, this is something that this is a philosophy that. We got. Right out of Harvard. In fact, I found it expressed by him in a in a sophomore philosophy essay.

**Barry:** And in an essay that he wrote.

**Chase:** That he wrote. And now that ties in with your question, because the other very important aspect of Kaczynski's life and the turning a that provided another factor that led to a turning point. Was that beginning with his sophomore year he entered, he became a subject of a three-year long experiment psychological experiment

conducted by a prestigious Harvard psychologist by the name of Henry A Murray. Now Professor Murray had been a Colonel, in the OSS, the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor of the CIA in during World War 2 and in in that position he had headed up a division that that tested. Applicants to the OSS to see whether they could, for example, withstand the third degree if they were captured and tortured by the enemy, and he he devised Professor marry devised tests to to determine whether how well a person could. Withstand the third degree.

**Barry:** Can you describe some of those tests for us?

**Chase:** Well, and at the OSS they. But they would tell a a a a candidate to come to this room at a certain time, and they would walk into the room and they would be put in a chair facing a very bright light. So they and with the light in their. Eyes. So they had to squint, and they couldn't really see their interrogators. And then the interrogators would. They wouldn't physically attack them, but they would verbally attack them and just try to shake them and they they were there, was they. They had developed a scenario that, let's say this person was supposedly found in a room where he wasn't supposed to be, or picking up some object. He was not supposed to have picked up and they would cross examine him as to and he would as to why he was there, why he picked this object up and then. The person had to think on his feet and or think that metaphorically speaking, think quickly and make up a story, and then the interrogators would try to break that story down.

**Barry:** Was so this is what happened to Kaczynski.

**Chase:** No. Well, that was the so-called. That was the start of professors Murray's so-called assessment method assessment method. But the what happened to Kosinski was actually worse, I think. Because shortly after the end of World War 2 in the late 40s, Professor Murray had returned to Harvard and he had decided to continue experimentations of the same kind. the intent was to put undergraduate subjects under intense stress. To see what would happen, to see whether he could, if you like, break them down. And this was initially done for the Department of the Navy and Professor Murray began those experiments in the in 1949 and ran a series of three-year experience experiments with different undergraduate groups, including the last of the series. And each series, by the way, each of the series was more elaborate than the last Kaczynski was in the last cohort, the cohort of experimental subjects that went through this in between 1959 and 1962, and it was by far the most. In Kaczynski's case, what they had they did was to. Tell the students to write a philosophy, an essay in which they would express their philosophy of life. And then they would be told that they were told that on a given day they could come to the annex, which is the building in which Professor Mary conducted his experiment and their debate, their philosophy of life with another undergraduate, and the history of philosophy. But in fact, they were being deceived. On the given day. The students at Kaczynski. Came to the annex. Was brought into her one with very, very bright lights. The shirt was taken and jacket was taken off and shoes and socks electrodes were attached to their wrist, chest, ankles that would measure their heart respiration rate. And blood pressure they were facing A1 way

mirror behind which team of psychologists were examined were watching him. They were their facial expressions were being captured by a hidden camera. And then rather than debate, another undergraduate such as themselves, they in walked someone that Murray called our trained accomplice. Who was a law school student who had been trained and instructed to attack the student? Not physically, but to ridicule him, to try to demean him, to bring him, raise him to anger, to cause self doubt. If you like to, really. Deconstruct his ego. And the then after this session the student would be asked to come back over a period of months and review and view over and over again these pictures of himself being raised to anger and humiliation and shame. And, you know every conceivable. Where the purpose really was to see how much they could take of this.

**Barry:** What kinds of records are available that you were able to review with regard to the test to which Kaczynski was subjected?

**Chase:** Well, first of all, I was able to view the records of all the other twenty. There were 22, including Kaczynski in this particular series of 59 to 62. I was able to view the records of. All but Kosinski, Harvard would not allow me to see the Kosinski file.

**Barry:** Why? Why wouldn't they?

**Chase:** Well, the reason they gave was that they they had were under contractual agreement to to not disclose the experimental subjects identity. And since I knew Kusinski had told me these individuals were identified in the in the data sets as they were called in the data on this experiment only by code name. And as Kaczynski had told me, what his code name? They, they said, well, they couldn't let me look at his files because I would be able to know who the person was. I I would know, because Kosinski had told me. But but they suggested that for that reason, they would not, actually. Let him. Let me look at his file. However, first I might add that Kaczynski told me this was confirmed. One of a couple of members of his defense team, the defense team had asked Harvard to turn over Kaczynski's data set, which would including the assessments made by Professor Mary and his other assistants and colleagues. Of the psyches of Kaczynski.

**Barry:** And where were you able to look at those?

**Chase:** And he was the amazing thing is the Harvard would not allow Kaczynski himself to look at them.

**Barry:** Even even during the course of his trial.

**Chase:** Even though his life was on at stake, Harvard would not allow the Harvard turned over the raw data. For the results from his the raw data when he answering questions, for example, he took the thematic apperception test or the AT as it's called, and he was allowed to. They were allowed to see his answers, but not the professors assessment of his answers. And of course the assessment. Would have been more valuable, certainly for the defense team.

**Barry:** But couldn't those answers be reassessed by a trained psychologist? At this point, looking back at it?

**Chase:** Yes. And in fact, that's what happened in one case. Kaczynski did eventually get a whole, as I say of the TAT, his answers to the TAT and following the child at his request, his attorney sent. His answers to an expert on the TAT, doctor Bertrand Koran at the Michigan State University. And asked that Doctor Koran, professor Quran. Grade or assess Kaczynski's answers and which in fact Koran was presented with the answers to all 22 subjects, and so that Quran did not know consensia's identities and so Koran scoring was a blind scoring. So he couldn't, he wasn't. He did not know who which of the 22 was Gaza. And doctor Koran gave evaluated the TAT as follows on a on a scale of zero to 10 with respect to schizophrenia. Where zero is absence, total absence and 10 is extreme. Kaczynski will receive a 0. On other mental health index, Kazinski received a two out of an A zero to 10 scale. So from that, which is perhaps the best information we have on Kaczynski's to mental health as a sophomore at Harvard. It would appear that he was at that time completely shamed.

**Barry:** And that is essentially what the psychiatrist who the judge at his trial in Sacramento determined.

**Chase:** Yes, well, the, the, the psychiatrist at this trial, the One doctor, Sally Johnson, who examined Kaczynski for the court, concluded that that. He there was a rather tentative conclusion, but that that he perhaps suffered from it was a paranoia paranoid. He was perhaps a latent paranoid schizophrenic, that is to say, he showed no overt symptoms at the time she interviewed him, but nevertheless she said that. She believed that perhaps that he was a latent paranoid schizophrenic because. She said he harbored delusional beliefs and abnormal lifestyle and what she had in mind was that he lived alone in a cabin in the in the Montana Wilds, which to those of us who live in who've done that, wouldn't see us being a sign of insanity. But perhaps the reverse and the other was his delusional beliefs were. Unabomber philosophy, as expressed in the manifesto and those were hardly delusional. They were ideas shared and concerns shared by millions of Americans. And, as I say, many, many of the Harvard faculty at the time. Kaczynski was a student. So.

**Barry:** Well, looking at Kaczynski's. Experience at Harvard and the philosophy of the general education that was taught at that time and the psychological experience. How would you describe or relate these as formative factors in causing him to do what he did?

**Chase:** Well, these are all elements in his life, and they're all no single one. Certainly it was the the. If you like made him do what he did in fact. But but if we look at the bigger picture, we just look again fitting pieces into a puzzle. We see. Here's a young man who was just turned 16 before he entered Harvard. Who had been pushed very hard academically by his parents and therefore lacked a lot of social skills, and who who harbored enormous anger at his parents for having pushed him so hard academically. And for having made him such that he feels they were to blame for making him such a loner. And then you put this into context of entering Harvard and encountering this pessimistic philosophy that's heavily laced with the notions of. Concerns about what technology was doing to civilization and then the positivism. There is no morality.



And then and then encountering in Professor Murray. Somebody who was indeed a Cold War warrior, Professor Murray had, although not a, not a Nix. Not one of the major players in the Cold War was nevertheless he had done work for the CIA, the Department of the Army, the Department of the Navy, the the. Kosinski experiments were done in part for the Navy Department. So in Professor Murray, he encountered. The system, if you like, Incarnate and the system was dedicated as Professor Murray indeed was dedicated to using behavioral psychology to transform people into better citizens, as as Murray defined better citizens. All of these things came certainly came together. Kaczynski, by the time he had graduated at Harvard, he by that time he had already begun to formulate his what would become the Unabomber philosophy?

**Barry:** But in that formational time, did he begin to formulate his concepts of killing people and his plan to do so?

**Chase:** No, he began having by his senior year at Harvard, Nightmares in, in which he would imagine himself leading people in the rebellions against the system, but not really. He had not really formulated a plan. To do that, as he said, to to Doctor Johnson, he at that time he was too inhibited. He was a good boy and he wanted to be good and he was. He saw himself as too as he put it himself. Later he thought of himself as having been too well brainwashed by society. Party and it had still accepted the Society societies norms of morality. So at Harvard he had not quite while he was an undergraduate, he had not quite reached that point. But shortly thereafter he did.

**Barry:** When you were preparing your book, how much time were you able to spend with Kaczynski?

**Chase:** Well, I immediately at the beginning of the trial I wrote him, but their letters this attorneys were not letting mail get through and he never saw my letters. But after he he was sentenced to by the Sacramento Court to life in prison without possibility of parole. May of 98. I wrote him again, this time to his new residence at the maximum security facility at Florence, Co. And we began corresponding. We corresponded for for about 14 or 15 months. The last letters we exchanged were in the fall of.

**Barry:** 99 did you ever meet with him?

**Chase:** No, I had at one point in the spring of 99. He had invited me down to meet with him, and I regret having. It was my fault. I at that time I there was a time when I couldn't. Do it. And I wish I had now looking back. But then in the fall of 99, I suggested that. He that we meet and he had just had just granted his only real interview, certainly the only interview to a mainline mainstream journalist and the previous month, and was very, very angry at. the way in which that journalist wrote or described the interview to readers. And so Kaczynski wrote me actually a very funny letter, actually, in which he said that he would never trust mainstream journalists again, and that he would only grant interviews to the most long haired, unwashed, scruffy bearded radicals.

**Barry:** And I guess that was.

**Chase:** It was the worst of that effect.

**Barry:** I guess that was not you.

**Chase:** Well, well, I guess I'm not bearded. I didn't think of myself as a mainstream journalist, but he did think of me as one.

**Barry:** Well, Professor Austin Chase, I want to thank you very much for joining us on radio. Curious and I'd like to talk with you in our next interview. About why some people act on their desires to kill other people. When many people think about it, but very few act and then talk about the Kaczynski trial and what happened. But before we close, I'd like to ask you now if you could tell us about an interesting book. That you've read lately.

**Chase:** Yes, I just finished a book by a Oxford professor by the name of Niall Ferguson called the pity of war. And it's a reexamination of World War One, and it makes you feel sick to read it, I must say, because Ferguson presents an overwhelming case that World War One was absolutely unnecessary. And it killed millions upon millions of people had changed. And of course, it ultimately set the stage for the rise of Hitler. So it was a major tragedy for the humanity for the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And as Professor Professor Ferguson makes clear, it didn't have to happen.

**Barry:** Professor Alston Chase, thank you very much for joining us on radio. Curious.

**Chase:** Well, thank you. It's been a delight to be with you.

**Barry:** Austin Chase is the author of Harvard and the Unabomber. The education of an American terrorist. The book. Which he finds most interesting is pity of war by Niall Ferguson. Copies of this and other editions of radio curious are available. There are over 750 archives on our website, radiocurious.org, and I'm honored to tell you that radio curious is now part of the collection at the Library of Congress. We appreciate your cards, ideas and letters, and do enjoy hearing from you. The e-mail is curious. At radiocurious.org. The postal address is 700 W Smith St. Ukiah, CA 95482. The phone is 707-621-5075. Ignacio Ayala is the assistant producer. I'm host and producer Barry Vogel. Thank you for listening.

## Part 2

**Barry:** Welcome to radio. Curious. I'm Barry Vogel. Let's continue our discussion with Professor Austin Chase about his book, Harvard and the Unabomber. The education of an American terrorist. In this book, based on the life and trial of Theodore Kaczynski, who came to be known as the Unabomber. Chase traces Kaczynski's education, life experiences and the trial itself. Professor Chase does not apologize for Kaczynski. Instead, he puts the crimes and the man behind them into a context, examining the links between intelligence and evil. And the forces that led Kaczynski to become a serial killer. I spoke with Professor Austin Chase, who lives in rural Montana. Hannah and I asked him to begin our second conversation by putting Ted Kaczynski in the time and place he thought appropriate.

**Chase:** I think the proper place might be his birth, May of 1942 and school in the Chicago area and high school in suburban Chicago, Evergreen Park. Very, very bright kid who did extremely well in school and although he was considered one of the studious types, the so-called briefcase boys, nevertheless had quite a few friends. He belonged to many different clubs, played a musical instrument that was a member of the chess club, was helped by the math teacher in the high school, was a tutor for the kids who were having trouble with math, was fairly popular, and had a little group of friends. But nevertheless, internally extremely unhappy because he just skipped 2 grades in school. He skipped the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. He dates that from the beginning of his problems in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. He's been given an IQ test and he scored 167 and at that point the teacher suggested that he be skipped into the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Parents went along with that so suddenly Kaczynski found himself the youngest in his class, and at that point he had fewer friends. Later on, he skipped his junior year in high school, so by the time he graduated he was definitely a kind of odd man out. His classmates were two years older and at the same time he began to develop his enormous anger towards his parents because he felt that they've been pushing him unreasonably hard academically ever since he took that IQ test in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. When he brought back a report card, according to him, bring back a report card with 4A's and a B plus, he'd get lectured on the B plus and his parents would say if you want to get into Harvard, you have to get straight A. And yet, at the same time, his mother in particular, Kaczynski said, was concerned what the other mothers might think of him, because he would seem to be a boy who studied too much and so she pushed him to have more friends and do more things socially. Well, this was a recipe for failure, of course. They were pushing him in two opposite directions. One hand play more and the other hand work more. From that point, he developed an enormous anger towards his parents, which

never went away, and when he got to Harvard, then at there he encountered the curriculum which was fused with what I call the culture of despair. Very pessimistic concerns about how technology might be destroying civilization, and the worry about World War 3. The possibility of this Cold War turning hot and then his encounter with the Professor Murray, the psychologist, and who was the quintessential Cold War warrior, and seemed to embody a lot of the things that in in terms of the Cold War and the threats to us through the use of the by government, by ecology as a tool for manipulating. Began to fit together in Kaczynski's mind, and so we had in, in essence, 2 streams converging here at Harvard, one stream was this psychological 1 mainly anger towards his. Parents and the other more of a philosophical theory which turned into anger against society, and he felt by this time he was beginning to feel the anger towards society because he himself had become so isolated. So it was a situation where he had been pushed so hard academically that he became socially isolated. And he blamed his parents for having made him into a person who didn't. A friend.

**Barry:** He did not have outstanding marks in mathematics and but for a strong letter of recommendation he would have not have gotten into the University of Michigan, where he was a teaching assistant.

**Chase:** That's absolutely right. However, at the University of Michigan, he did indeed flower as a mathematician, and he was considered by many of the his professors there, with whom I talked. As being the brightest student ever taught, he also solved some problems that some very, very bright mathematicians around the world had been working, trying unsuccessfully to solve for years. He did indeed flower as a mathematician, but it was in a field. But really tended to isolate him further. You could add that to another fact, that is to say, his social isolation. I think when you put all those things together and the Murray experiment, the effects of the Murray experiment into the mix, you have more than enough to make it understandable. But since his life was not like ours, and there were elements here that drove him. To one step more extreme to take one more or two more steps, more extreme than anyone else would take and steps that took him over the line. One must keep in mind that he resolved in 19 the fall of 1966. He first thought of becoming a bomber, but he took him 12 years. To screw up the courage to do it, if your courage is the right word it took, you might say 12 years rooting over this awful plan for him to get to the point of doing it and all of this time, these factors that I mentioned were playing on him and I think I cannot understand. The fact that he felt. His reason told him there is no morality if he acted on conscience, he was showing a weakness of will and a weakness of reason. That his reason, therefore. Gave him the license to unleash his anger.

**Barry:** Do you think that his appointments of of the reasons why he became who he was are significant alone? Or do you think had he not skipped the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and the junior grade in high school, would he have been someone different and not? Become the unabomb.

**Chase:** Well, I think he thinks so. I believe that. What makes Kaczynski different from and from us is one in the degree of his anger, and then secondly, the fact that

he nursed his anger rather than trying to find out other outlets, more constructive outlets for it, or attempted to resist his anger at Harvard. And he began to develop. His social theory, which seemed to explain his anger so that he was able to generalize his anger, his anger was no longer simply at his. Parents, his anger was at society as large, which he saw as developing in the direction that he had been instructed in the curriculum that the emphasis on technology and he as parents on pushing of him into mathematics, which would of course serve technology so that he was being made into the kind of. Person he disapproved of the kind of person who would, was a mathematician who would serve the technological society. What that enabled him to do because he was brighter than most people was to develop a very. Elaborate and fairly cogent theory about society, which seemed to justify his own personal anger. So the theory magnified the anger. It's like looking at something through a lens and then applying a zoom lens to it. The zoom lens brings everything closer and makes everything look. Bigger the theory took his anger on that and labeled him to take his anger and justify it to him himself as being something more than a merely a personal anger, but an anger at society, which he. Would feel justified in acting out against one of his friends at Harvard who also majored in math, had told me, and I quote him in the book, Napoleon Williams told me that within mathematicians tend to build the theories which are internally consistent. But may not have any connection with the real world. It's not uncommon for mathematicians at at least certain points in their life. To be living. In an intellectual cocoon, as it were not related to anything going on in the outside world, but then eventually mathematicians have to get on with life and do and some they'll marry. Or they will. Go into law or some other field and they will be. If you like, immersed or forced to come outside of their cocoon and join the rest of the. Human race. But Kaczynski did not, and part of the problem was that.

**Barry:** But Kaczynski did not.

**Chase:** He didn't like Williams when he graduated and went on to law school. Kaczynski didn't do that. Kosinski went into mathematics. He not only went into mathematics, he went in to a field. Where his work could only be appreciated by about eight people on Earth. So there was virtually nobody he could talk to about his work, his great achievements or. His intellectual concern?

**Barry:** Is this the beginning of the explanation as to why he acted out his anger by killing people where most people who are angry and have homicidal thoughts never get close to acting them out?

**Chase:** Right. Right. That's one of the reasons. One of the reasons was because he had a social theory about technology or technological society, which justified his anger and justified acting. That is, say, becoming a revolutionary. The other aspect again, it's an idea he picked up at Harvard, which played a huge role in in encouraging him to take the step that most people would never take of actually building bombs, intending to hurt or kill people. Was the theory the philosophical theory very popular at Harvard and in many college campuses among the faculty in the 1950s of the philosophy known as logical positivism? This was the doctrine that only scientific state-

ments are meaningful. Only statements which are empirically testable or verifiable are meaningful. And since moral or ethical judgments are not. Empirically or scientifically provable, they are meaningless. Our moral judgment is simply a subjective. Expression of emotion. This notion Kaczynski absorbed literally, virtually word for word, as I just said it, and in fact we can find, and I quote in my book examples of his own essay that he wrote for Professor Murray, the fall of his sophomore year, where he expresses the positivist. Theory in a very literal way, and then we see it again and again. First of all, he carried on a philosophical. Debate with his younger brother David for decades over this question, David would, in the letters to 10, would repeatedly accuse him of being a positivist. Then we do see also when Ted Kaczynski was bombing people and he kept these elaborate notes, Diaries in code and in his coded. Diaries, after one of his bombs had injured or killed someone he would confess, and of course he was writing it to himself, but he would confess as though he was ashamed of it, he'd say. I confess I'm feeling some guilt over what I did. And then immediately he would catch himself and say, oh, but I know that I shouldn't feel guilty because guilt is a merely A subjective emotion or or moral conscience is merely A subjective emotion, and without rational foundation.

**Barry:** Were you ever able to talk with Kaczynski about those passages?

**Chase:** No, because the ground rules he'd set up for my corresponding with him was not to discuss anything related to the trial or his crimes at all, because he was at that time. Hoping to get a new child we could talk on the philosophical level. In fact, our correspondence was perhaps largely philosophical, but not specifically related to these entries. In his Diaries, which were entries which had been submitted to the court by the prosecution. As evidence, and I might add that many of the passages that I quote in my book, I did not come by until considerably. Later, too late to discuss them with him anyway, but he wouldn't have discussed them with.

**Barry:** Let's talk about the trial and how it evolved and in your interpretations of it. But first, this week on Radio Curious, we're talking with Professor Alston Chase, who is a writer and an independent scholar. Specializing in intellectual history, he has a recent book called Harvard and the Unabomber. The education of an American terrorist. It it's the story of Ted Kaczynski. You're listening to radio. Curious. I'm Barry Vogel. Alston tell us about the trial and. How it evolved?

**Chase:** There's some number of paradoxes involved in the whole arrest and trial story #1 because before back in September of 95, when the Washington Post published the Unabomber Manifesto. But the authorship of the manifesto was not known. Many people and many of the national magazines were hailing the work as a work of genius, or at least expressing views shared by millions of people. And I remember one line. I think I quote in the book like. I think it was in Time magazine. The line was there's a little bit of the Unabomber in all of us. So at this time, before Kaczynski was known, his philosophy was hailed as at least a commonly compendium of commonly held beliefs and perhaps even the work of of genius. Then, in the spring of 96. Gusinsky was arrested and charged with being the Univar Armer and here he was, a Harvard

graduate, and suddenly this man, who was a Harvard graduate and I heard, did have a genius IQ within a short time, people were describing him as a nut. And his ideas are nutty. That transformation was. Largely a consequence of what happened shortly after his arrest in the first two years before he went to trial and part of it was the fact that the Kaczynski's brother and mother were very anxious to try to see that he would not get. Put to death for his crimes. The evidence was so overwhelming that his attorneys very quickly decided that the only way his life could be saved would be if they prepared a mental defect defense and suggest that he had behaved the way he had because he suffered from a mental defect. Kosinski, however, was. Adamantly opposed to that kind of defense because he wanted the world to take his ideas seriously. And he knew that if his ideas were paraded before the court as the ravings of a madman, that people would not take his ideas seriously. What happened in, in essence, was that, first of all, the Kaczynski family, David Kaczynski in particular, and his attorney, Tony Bisceglie, conducted a very effective. Campaign with the media to. Since the media that Ted was crazy, there was virtually no clinical evidence that was so, and the psychiatrist hired by the defense to make that claim and to argue in preparation for the trial, putting together depositions in which they stated that. In their view, Kosinski was a paranoid schizophrenic that these were based largely on the psychiatrist judgment of Kaczynski's writings. But here this is the enormous irony, the very writings that Time magazine in 1995 was hailing as stacks of not genius, at least commonplace ID. By 1997, the defense attorneys psychiatrists were claiming represented paranoid and delusional themes.

**Barry:** Yet the court appointed psychiatrist said that he was not paranoid or delusional.

**Chase:** That's right. They wanted to examine him, the defense attorneys said that Kosinski did not want them to examine him. The prosecution psychiatrists were very skeptical. They thought that probably Kaczynski would very much want them to examine him. As it turns out later, Kaczynski wrote in his appeal to the court that he was unaware that his own attorneys had turned down or had prevented the prosecution attorneys from speaking with him. And, he claims, had. Falsely stated that he had said that he did not want to be examined by the. So Kaczynski ultimately became extremely unhappy with the way in which his own attorneys were conducting the case until very late in the fall of 97. Consensually, apparently, and certainly, he claims, did not know that his attorneys were pursuing a mental defect defense. In spite of his wishes, so when the trial opened in early January, he. Claims to have been dumbfounded with a trial that was going to go ahead, in which his ideas would be in, in his view presented to the court as examples of the ravings of a madman. So at that point he wanted to either fire his defense team and hire a new one, or represent himself. It was very complicated. But basically, he was at this point looking for an alternative.

**Barry:** That was at the behest of his brother and mother to present him as a person with a mental defect.

**Chase:** It would be more accurate, I think, to say. That his own attorneys felt in good conscience that that was the only mental defect defense was the only one which would have saved Ted from the lethal injection needle, and that the family was desperate and understandably desperate to save their son and brother from the death penalty. In fairness. To them, they sincerely believe this, that Zedd was suffering from a mental.

**Barry:** Defect, but that's not the way it turned out. With his guilty plea.

**Chase:** No, what happened, ultimately, was that Kaczynski asked the court if he could represent himself. The Constitution seems to be clear on this point that if a person is judged competent, that that the accused has the constitutional right to direct his own defense. And showed. The judge therefore ordered a competency examination by a forensic psychiatrist who was acceptable to both the prosecution and defense attorneys. That psychiatrist was a doctor, Sally Johnson. She then examined Kaczynski and concluded that Kaczynski was mentally confident. Therefore. When the Court reconvened, everyone in the courtroom except the judge expected the judge to rule that, yes, Kaczynski could go ahead and represent himself. Instead, the judge astounded everyone by. Denying the request.

**Barry:** Why do you think that occurred?

**Chase:** There's a lot of speculation as to why it occurred. One of the clear reasons the judge denied the request was because he wanted a speedy trial and he thought that this would delay the trial and he accused Kaczynski of of asking for this. Request to represent himself merely out of a mischievous desire to proceed, to hold up and slow up everything and just cause problems. Certainly the judge was interested in having a speedy child. He knew that if Kaczynski were allowed to represent himself, that. Several months of work that had been done by the defense attorneys and all the pretrial preparation would have to be re. Done. And he didn't want that to go through that. There's been some speculation, for example, by William Finnegan and The New Yorker that some suspect that that judge was chastened by the experience of the Judge, Lance Ito in the OJ Simpson case. And Judge Burrell, the presiding judge in the Kaczynski case, had no desire. To have his courtroom turned into some kind of circus and he was afraid that that might happen, that has been a speculation. Others have speculated that virtually nobody wanted a show trial. That is to say, no one. And wanted to have a child that would be essentially a trial on Kaczynski's ideas. And yet that's precisely what Kosinski wanted. Whatever the case of the speculations on the on the judge Burrell's motives for doing this, who say his stated reasons were he thought that Kaczynski was not very serious about this, that he was just petitioning to represent himself. Caused trouble. Whatever the case by the judge ruling this way, it meant that the trial would go forward in which mental defect evidence would be admissible during the penalty phase of the trial. And Kaczynski found this so abhorrent and so much undermining his effort to convince the world of his truth of his philosophy, that he capitulated and agreed. He agreed to plead guilty to the crimes for which he was accused.



**Barry:** And pled guilty.

**Chase:** And be sentenced to life in prison rather than be put to death and without the possibility of parole. At that point, the family was relieved because at least he was not going to get the death penalty. His attorneys had achieved what? They felt was the maximum they could achieve, which was simply to see that he was not put to death consensia I felt he was put in an impossible situation, he expressed later. And I quote a letter he wrote to that effect.

**Barry:** What did he feel then about the resolution?

**Chase:** Well, he was extremely unhappy with it and as. He said he's.

**Barry:** What he had preferred death.

**Chase:** Yes, he said explicitly. He would have preferred death. He would have preferred a trial based on his ideas, which would most likely have been the outcome of which would most likely have been his being put to death, and he would perhaps preferred that he says to a life in prison. Michael Mello is a law professor at the Vermont Law School who's written a book on the trial comparing the trial of Ted Kaczynski with the trial of John Brown. And the man who raided Harpers Ferry back before the Civil War was arrested and he was an abolitionist, and John Brown was, and was, was attempting to to instigate a Ignite, a slave rebellion in the South. By invading this Armory at Harpers Ferry in Virginia. What was then Virginia, now West Virginia? Bell, by the way, had served in a small way with the Kaczynski defense team, and Melo was very unhappy and felt Kaczynski was rights were violated. By the way in which the trial played out or the non trial played. A view which I by the way share, but Melo pointed out that exactly the same situation up to a point existed with John Brown when Brown was arrested, his attorneys told him the only way he could escape the death penalty would be to plead insanity, but Brown refused to do so, knowing that if he pleaded. Insanity that there would be many people who would say his abolitionist ideas were merely the ravings of a madman, and it would undermine the cause of abolitionism. So Brown insisted on a trial which did not use a mental defect or insanity. And he was indeed found guilty and put to death. So Brown had at least his attorneys gave acceded to Brown's wishes, according to mellow, the attorneys for Kaczynski did not accede to Kaczynski's wishes and that of the same kind.

**Barry:** Well, Professor Austin Chase, I want to thank you for joining us again on radio. Curious. And before we close, maybe you're just did, but could you tell us about an interesting book that you've read lately?

**Chase:** I'm an eclectic reader. On this one's a book by a a couple of biologists at the Hampshire College, husband and wife. The last name is Coppinger titled Dogs and it's on the evolution of dogs and how they evolved from wolves applying very, very good. To a subject to which very little good science has been applied in the past, despite the fact that we all love dogs, it does. There doesn't seem to be much good and hard science on the evolution of dogs, and this book fills a I think, a very important gap.

**Barry:** Well, Professor Alston Chase, thank you very much for joining us on radio. Thank you. Austin Chase is the author of Harvard and the Unabomber. The education

of an American terrorist. The interesting book he recently read is *Dogs* by two professors named Coffinberger, from Hampshire College in Massachusetts. Copies of this and other editions of *radio curious* are available. There were over 750 archives on our website, [radiocurious.org](http://radiocurious.org), and I'm honored to tell you that *radio curious* is now part of the collection at the Library of Congress. We appreciate your cards, ideas and letters, and do enjoy hearing from you. E-mail is [curious@radiocurious.org](mailto:curious@radiocurious.org) the postal address is 700 W Smith St. Ukiah, CA 95482. The phone is 707-621-5075. Ignacio Ayala is the assistant producer. I'm host and producer Barry Vogel. Thank you for listening.

The Ted K Archive

A critique of his ideas & actions



Barry Vogel, Alston Chase  
Alston Chase – “Who is Ted Kaczynski?”  
July 1, 2003 & July 8, 2003

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