

Lessons for an Anti-Terror Community

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Photo by Lord Jim

Brothers David and Theodore Kaczynski each have a book in print just now. These are decidedly not meant as companion volumes, but they should be read as if they were. The terrorist method of choice today is remote inspiration, and our primary defense is the people who know those vulnerable souls for whom it recruits. Yet Americans struggle to grasp this situation. We find it hard to separate the faith from the killer in Muslim terrorists. We are loath to believe racist murders have family, friends, or community, so we think they are lone nut cases, not terrorists.

But then there is Ted Kaczynski – the Unabomber. He undertook an 18-year bombing campaign, but sprang from a family story that is fully intelligible to Americans. Intelligent, humanistic, hard working, Mid-Western, and devoted to education, the Kaczynskis are a familiar picture of the 1950's blue collar, American family. If a self-mobilizing terrorist can grow out of ideas and allegiances we know so well, our ability to credit the distinction between killer and the community around him will be sharpened. Furthermore, living in a rural cabin far more independently than Thoreau at Walden Pond, he was still not sufficiently immune to social connection for his crimes to escape the notice of his distant family. If people who cared about him, but rarely heard from

him, could detect and intervene in his case, we have proof that moral community is an effective defense we cannot afford to ignore, let alone abuse.

Ted's *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How* (Scottsdale, AZ: Fitch and Madison, 2016) renews and intensifies the call for violent pursuit of global anarchy he began with "Industrial Society and Its Future" (widely cited as "The Unabomber Manifesto"). David's *Every Last Tie* (Durham, NC and London, UK: Duke University, 2016) explores the painful saga of a family struggling with a close relative suffering great psychological distress, ending in violence. Reading them together provides useful lessons on the relationship between beliefs and violence. They also tell us something about self-recruiting terrorists and the most effective defense against them – the people who know them well.

Ted's hostility to technology belongs to a family of thinking very different from simple fear of automation and surveillance. Drawing upon authors such as Jacques Ellul, Ted sees technology as something closer to "technique" or "methodology." From this perspective, advertising, political campaign management, bureaucracy, public relations, and organized markets are all technologies.

Ted Kaczynski acknowledges his debt to Ellul (confirmed by David and, elsewhere, by Ellul's family who found Ted had written Ellul several times), and applied his thought in earlier work, but offers virtually nothing on it here. His first chapter is an intellectually solid critique of the notion that humans can attain full, rational control of society. He measures various authors against the standard of perfect control and musters historical examples of unpredictability and failure to control the future, asking if it is even slightly plausible that the social world would attain the certainty of mathematics. He cites chaos theory and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle as precluding complete predictability, and claims that anything less is doomed to failure. He mocks authors such as Jeremy Rifkin, Bill Ivey, Arne Naess, Chellis Glendinning, and Naomi Klein for believing society can be adequately organized and managed, or even improved. He attributes their failure to the dependence of intellectuals and the upper middle class on a worldview that supposes a high degree of large-scale social organization, and that envisions perfection of control as a solution to the problems of the world.

According to Ted, "It would be extremely difficult psychologically for such people to recognize that the only way to get off the road to disaster that we are now on would be through a total collapse of organized society and therefore a descent into chaos."

He rejects the notion that social organization might be desirable in the degree to which it prevents chaos. He has no interest in moderate views that see politics and administration and society as the (sometimes desperate) effort to muddle through, keep it together, share the challenges of life, uphold common principles, protect the weak, or cling to those one loves. Without mathematical perfection, he argues, internal disintegration of any system is inevitable, and only the catastrophic deserves attention, for it is the future.

In Chapter Two, however, it becomes evident that the author's focus on extremes hampers the consistency of his argument. Chapter One expects rational control of society to fail because of the inevitability of diversity and change within society. The second chapter posits a rather opposite view, that social evolution will ossify into a rigid solution for survival, which will fail against an ever changing environment. Inevitable environmental collapse is, again, assured. This argument ignores more sophisticated understandings of evolutionary systems and survival. Environmentally stable strategies, for instance, can include several stable patterns of genetics or behavior, giving the system inherent flexibility in the face of environmental change. Ted sees complexity as vulnerability and interdependent rigidity, ignoring the possibility of "loosely coupled" organization or redundancy as a protection against system flaws and novel threats. Instead, he asserts (without support) that systems have an inherent tendency to self-destruction, apparently now at the hands of their environment. Why, then, is anything done systematically in the first place, and how does one explain the attempts to sustain a systematic worldview in exactly the way that he describes in Chapter One?

His intent, as ever, is to speak to a revolutionary vanguard *in potentia*. The remainder of the book is largely tactical guidance to that would-be vanguard. Destruction of the technological system is the only goal, and alliances with other agendas should be avoided unless they can be exploited. Environmentalism, in particular, is cited as being vulnerable to infiltration and seizure from within. Luddite anarchy can succeed by having a clear agenda available when the system starts to unravel, and people will flock to a movement that will make that unraveling massively worse, apparently aiming to escape chaos by causing chaos. To an economic rationalist, this makes no sense. If disintegration is inevitable, why expend effort trying to make it happen? To a political psychologist, though, it is simple enough. The chaos you intend makes you feel powerful – for a moment or two.

Ted Kaczynski is unlikely to inspire the revolt he advocates. The value of this book is in its cautionary lessons to politically agitated individuals across the spectrum. First, "Anti-Tech Revolution" shows how a fine intellect and a first rate education are helpless against a fixed obsession. Ted's two arguments are contradictory, held together only by their intersection at the point of anarchic destruction. Totally lost is the opportunity to advance the value of Ellul's thinking as a constructive critique.

This is a terrible waste of a potent idea. Seeing social organization itself (not just its tools) as overly methodical is a powerful way to look beyond ordinary partisan understandings. For instance, the course of the 2016 presidential campaign was, in significant degree, a fight over and between social management techniques. Clinton led a state-of-the-art American style campaign machine, with numbers, models, coaching, and messaging, all too coldly calculated. The Republicans, outsourcing their ideological function to Fox News, had forged a Soviet style propaganda machine. Trump ran as the machine smasher, took control of the machine, and he won on exactly that. Now the right and the left both wonder if we should expect anarchy from above.

Ted's other lesson is about how to understand the rise of crowd violence. As self-recruited cadres of the right and left don comic book personae and hunt one another for street fights, few understand that Ted Kaczynski, murderer of innocents he remanufactured as symbols of technical control, is the godfather of "spoiler violence." During his trial, Ted allowed only one visitor, John Zerzan. Mr. Zerzan is the leading light of anarcho-primitivism, which Ted now dismisses as naïve and excessively idealistic. But then, Zerzan was moved to adopt "Industrial Society and Its Future" (aka, "The Unabomber Manifesto") as material for his anarchist pupils in Eugene, Oregon. They were the core group behind the first great disruption at a World Trade Organization meeting, turning a largely peaceful demonstration into the "The Battle of Seattle."

In a time when the protest culture has long since "eschewed globalizing metanarratives," demonstrations have become a festival of subgroups, with no thought or sympathy for self-discipline. Gone are the days when organized monitors wore armbands, and volunteered to be witnesses to whatever happens at a protest. Nowhere do demonstrations take advantage of the technologies now available to record or mark the spoilers. It is as if diversity demanded tolerance of the violent. But violence is not an "error" by demonstrators, or anger welling over. Discrediting moderation and amplifying conflict are the consciously intended goals of spoilers, regardless of the content under debate. For spoilers, chaos is virtue and principle is the enemy. For the rest of us, the spoilers are the enemy that pushes us to believe we are enemies of each other.

In contrast, David Kaczynski's "Every Last Tie," delivers a series of overlapping, nonlinear accounts of his family, largely drawn from previously published articles. Not so much a biography as a meditation, David explores what it is like to grow up in a family with someone full of promise and problems, and discover with great difficulty that person to be the paradigmatic self-recruited, lone wolf terrorist. There are many such stories nowadays but, yet again, this one is more accessible to a wide American audience than (for example) either white racist or Muslim instances of this phenomenon.

David's story is personal and familial but, even more, philosophical. More than seven years the younger, David opens with, "a brother shows you who you are – and who you are not." On one hand, he "never doubted my brother's fundamental loyalty and love." On the other, after the happier brother commented to Ted that they had "the best parents in the world," Ted replied, "You can't prove that." Family affection and loyalty were destined to be fraught.

To David, Ted was always emotionally vulnerable, and always struggling not to be. David was about eight the first time he was moved to ask, "What's wrong with Teddy?" His mother told him the story of Ted's long childhood hospitalization with a severe case of hives at the age of nine months, requiring therapy of many injections and minimal visitation by his parents. The story brought David to tears.

Ted's refuge was the family faith in education, and he was a brilliant student. Unfortunately, great academic success took him to Harvard at the age of 16, where he was a research subject in an experiment in consciously inflicted psychological trauma that would be rejected as unethical today. David's access to documents obtained by

his brother's defense team parallels the research of Alston Chase (Harvard and the Unabomber, New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2003), which connects the testing to the CIA's infamous MK Ultra program. From these descriptions, it appears (to me, anyway) that this particular project was designed to explore certain aspects of the "thought reform" (aka, "brainwashing") experiences of prisoners in post-revolutionary China. Ted later told his attorneys that this was the worst experience of his life. Among his complaints in a later, 23-page diatribe against his parents, he blamed them for pressing him to go to the larger university instead of Oberlin.

Another episode showed Ted's tenuous grip on emotional security fraying as he grew into outward success. When Ted was a professor of mathematics at Berkeley, he returned to Illinois to help his parents move from his childhood home to Iowa. As the moving men packed belongings, Ted followed his mother around demanding that she make them stop.

In David's telling, he shares much with Ted. Both brothers spent years living in profound isolation. Ted famously abided in a tarpaper cabin in Montana. David spent eight years in an underground dwelling in Texas. In his writing, David shows the same careful weighing of opposing points that Ted so systematically employs. Neither is emotionally frivolous, and both have struggled to express their more profound feelings. Ted once told a woman of his romantic interest by writing her a letter and asking her to read it while he waited. David fell in love with someone in high school, but married her decades later. He was ultimately shocked when his wife, Linda Patrik, proved to him with saved letters that, through years of hope or despair, he had never once written that he loved her.

Nevertheless, crucial differences are instructive, first of all in their writing. David wrestles with issues, and sometimes lets them remain without final answers. Ted demands certainty of the world and, not finding it, demands certainty for himself and from his reader. Objections are raised and given some detail, but only to be rejected. David has doubts. Ted has determination. David's tone is ever gentle, Ted's harsh.

This leads naturally to one of the most widely retold stories of their relationship. For a short while, Ted and David worked at the same company, where David had supervisory responsibilities. Ted showed a romantic interest in a fellow employee and, when rejected, he flooded her working environment with copies of a demeaning and profane limerick aimed at her – foreshadowing the internet trolls of today. David told him to stop, but Ted responded by putting a copy of the attack at David's workstation. David reported him, essentially having Ted fired.

In hindsight, it is easy to see this as a rehearsal for the much later decision by David and Linda, to contact the FBI about their suspicions, choosing principle over blood, if you will. Yes, but the lesson for today is not simply a story of one man's moral decision. Every terrorist, sniper, and anthrax poisoner, every dark site inhabitant, every mass shooter, every driver of murderous trucks through innocent throngs exists connected to other people, however tenuously. If that was true of Ted Kaczynski, it is true of

them all. He is proof of principle that even the most isolated killer is part of society – *our* society.

David gives us a vivid account of the Kaczynski family’s agony in turning to law enforcement. No one should underestimate this burden. David was best equipped to evaluate the possibility of his brother’s criminality, but so similar and so bound to Ted emotionally that he would never have thought of it unless Linda raised the question and pressed it. As they researched the Unabomber and Ted’s writings, evidence and analysis eventually changed the coloration of their mother’s injunction to David as a child, “you must never abandon your brother, because that’s what he fears the most.” Ted would surely regard the family decision as proof that he should have severed “every last tie” to his kin. Taking the matter to their mother, Wanda, was excruciating. But intervening was both the right thing, and the right thing to do for Ted.

David’s story teaches us what society should be thinking and doing about lone wolf and self-recruited terrorism. Conscience comes at a high personal price for the people we need to intervene for us with those they know or love. Imperious confidence in moral certainty is for the killers, not the fighters. What the Kaczynski family asked of society in return for their loyalty to our moral community was only that we spare Ted’s life. The government never made a legally binding promise, but misled David to believe they would not seek the death penalty. Then they did.

Holding out death as a legal threat, and trying to establish new federal authority may be understandable for a prosecution team. But the government’s betrayal of David goes down with a long string of spectacular warnings against trusting law enforcement. Executing George John Dasch for revealing a German spy team in the US during World War II would be one. Inviting an excruciating trial-by-media of Richard Jewell as a reward for protecting dozens from injury by the Millennium Park anti-abortion bomber would be another. If leading professionals can blunder this deeply, it just makes it that much harder for the public to resist the political manipulations of terrorists that want us to attack the people who could become a pool for recruits.

Regardless of the strategic considerations of the prosecutors, and regardless of the political value of looking tough, this is not how you treat moral heroes if you want and need to find more of them tomorrow. The most valuable weapon against remote recruitment and self-mobilization is the loyalty and good conscience of people who understand and know the troubled souls who are vulnerable to that path. Are we doing any better today?

In the case of US Muslims, American society has their loyalty in a degree vastly beyond what almost anyone will say publicly. Muslim terrorists in the US are largely self- or remotely recruited because of the great dearth of organizational opportunities in the American Muslim community. The vast majority of US mosques select their own clergy, either by general election or by vote of a hiring committee. When has anyone loudly said that Muslim democracy is a shield for America? And yet the wholesale banishment of radical clergy since 9-11 is striking. Though it may yet happen, up to now, even actual ISIS fighters, returned to the US, have not been persuaded to

undertake terrorist actions against America. Remote and self-recruitment seem to be the best ISIS can do here. The anti-Muslim rhetoric that runs florid in certain circles is a measure of our failure to understand the terms of the current political fight.

Equally, consider right wing terror. There have been no lynch parties or riots at American mosques. Violence from this quarter can find more social support, but the actual outrages are from those who are self-assigned from their marginal relations to the wider cult of haters. The racist who murdered black Christians with whom he had just prayed, and the Overland Park shooter who killed two Methodists and a Catholic at a synagogue and Jewish cultural center are kith and kin to the Muslim self-nominated killer.

In confronting terror, society has as much duty to avert the violence of another Anders Breivik as it has in preventing another pair of Tsarnaev brothers. The former slaughtered dozens of Norwegian Christians to express his hostility to Islam. In the case of the latter, the elder brother bullied his otherwise pot and video game distracted younger brother into bombing the Boston Marathon.

More recently, (one can no longer say, “most recently,” for the atrocities can now be expected to multiply before the writer can reach the reader), come shooting of Republican baseball players, and exchanges of deliberate vehicular homicide. Society needs a posture toward this wretchedness that proceeds from a sense of moral community greater than the partisanship of the hour. We are not getting it.

If we are honest with ourselves, violence is not automatically dismissed as illegitimate in our all too human minds. We know that, sometimes, violence is a cry of pain and rage. It can bring attention to real issues, crimes, and neglect. Other times, it asserts an alternative order – principled, but not on the principles currently in force. But the hallmark of terror is that it is a technique (as per Ellul) calculated to exploit our hope that there is some good explanation for even the most heinous deeds. The terrorist creates uncertainty about the prospect of catastrophic loss, and then offers himself and his agenda as the cure for his own disease.

To resist this we close our minds. We close them to block the temptation to escape uncertainty by accepting the justifications of the violent. But that is part of the technique. We close ourselves off and prepare for war against the target the terrorist has chosen for us. The legitimate value of “technique” as a critical view of modern life is obscured by Ted’s violence, but his violence still spreads. The Muslim faith is distorted, not revealed, by those who claim one must be a butcher to be true to it. So too is the grinding neglect and abuse of rural America hidden by white supremacist bloodshed. The violent lead us to attack the recruiting pool of their choice.

David Kaczynski helps us exactly here. Hating the haters is not an answer. Anything we can do to support any corner of our community that can detect and intervene for those growing prone to violence must be worth doing. At one point, the Kaczynski family tried to persuade Ted to seek therapy, but they were rebuffed. Later, David found in the records at trial that Ted had already sought clinical help. He imagined doing it by correspondence. He was told that he would have to find a way to travel a

considerable distance to the office, and that he would have to find some way to pay for his sessions. Both of these were more than he could manage.

We can do better than that, and we have been trying to do better than that. To cite one specific example, under the Affordable Care Act, mental health services finally received a decent inclusion in medical insurance. If this provision is now to be discarded, we are entitled to object on grounds of public safety and national security. There are no perfect defenses against terror and derangement, but if we know what fight we are in, we can see where to stand in it. Surely, for this struggle, we cannot justify disarming our community's mental health capacity any more than we could justify disbanding the police or the intelligence services.

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