

# Ted Kaczynski's flirtations with the supernatural

# Contents

2001 Interview . . . . . 3  
1959 Autobiography . . . . . 3  
1979 Journal . . . . . 3  
Letter to David . . . . . 6  
1999 Interview . . . . . 7  
1978 Journal . . . . . 8  
1980 Journal . . . . . 8  
2001 Interview . . . . . 9  
Appendix: Invictus Poem . . . . . 9  
Sources . . . . . 10

## 2001 Interview

**BVD:** ... I remember reading that your parents were atheists, that you were raised in an atheistic home.

**TJK:** True.

**BVD:** Do you remember your parents ever talking about God? Did they ever say anything like "This is what some people believe...?"

**TJK:** Oh, they did a little bit. For example, if my mother were reading a book to me and something about God were in there, she would explain "Well, some people believe so-and-so, but we don't believe it." That sort of thing.

## 1959 Autobiography

My parents, though of Catholic backgrounds, are atheists, and, fortunately, never taught me to believe in God.

## 1979 Journal

A couple of months ago I came across a book in the Library titled "The Gellar Papers". It is about certain people, notably one Geller, who can supposedly bend metal, read people's thoughts, and stuff like that, under conditions that would seem to preclude any obvious explanation in terms of the known laws of physics. Of course, there is always a lot of that junk in the popular press, but what is remarkable about this book is that the papers in it are written by people who are represented as having prior backgrounds and excellent credentials in *the hard sciences*. Moreover, the papers are written in very temperate terms, and the authors give no obvious evidence of having an emotional attachment to "far-out" beliefs. I had always assumed that all this telepathy stuff was a lot of crap, and the undisciplined character of most of the stuff that is printed about "psychic" phenomena, flying saucers, astrology, Atlantis, etc., etc., certainly gives ample justification for the opinion that most of this is only believed by certain people because it satisfies their emotional needs.

However, since the physicists and other hard scientists responsible for the papers in this particular book seem to have no *prior* commitment to telepathy or other crackpot beliefs, I am forced to think again. Naturally, this is uncomfortable for me, since no one likes to change his habitual assumptions.

The book strongly suggests that, by application of will, certain individuals are able to mobilize some force not comprehended within the present knowledge of physics and chemistry. Such a suggestion must be viewed with great caution. Such a large part of human mental functioning can be explained in terms of physiology and neurology that

there are strong grounds for the supposition that *all* human mental functioning is based on physics and chemistry. (See, for example, *The Nervous System* by Peter Nathan.) Thus, one thinks of the following explanations for the book, which would not require anything outside the realm of physics as we now conceive it: (1) The book is a very cunning hoax (I have not gotten around to checking up to see whether the scientists really exist.) (2) The scientists writing the book fabricated the whole thing for reasons of their own such as money. (Fanley Mowat, formerly Canadian Government biologist, wrote book called "Never cry Wolf", which he represented as an account of his personal experiences in studying wolves, but according to wolf expert L. David Mech, Mowat's book is largely a fabrication, and gives a false picture of the wolf.) (3) The scientists writing these papers were not consciously dishonest, but their emotional needs caused them to give a highly distorted presentation. (4) The observed phenomena resulted from known physical forces combining or operating unknown ways to produce very remarkable effects.

However, none of these explanations seem likely. Of course, there is always the possibility of some explanation I haven't thought of. Still, this book has caused me to reluctantly accept the probability that there is some force operating of a kind that is not currently known to physics.

But experiments of the kind described in the book will probably lead some people to jump to unwarranted conclusions enough associations established by popular literature. It should be remembered that we know *only* what has been established by careful experiment, unverified reports being usually worthless. For instance,

(1) The careful experiments reported in the book provide no evidence for the existence of flying saucers, lost continents, precognition, re-incarnation, ghosts, or gods, or for the validity of the predictions of popular "psychics" reported in the newspapers. (Twice I wrote down predictions of astrologers in physics for the coming year, as reported in the newspapers; then I checked them again a year later. The rate of success of the predictions was so poor that I probably could have done better myself on the basis of common sense. On the other hand, if these "Geller papers" are on the level, it ought to make us give closer attention to other putative "psychic"-type phenomena, so as to see which ones actually have something to them.)

(2) These Geller papers do not provide evidence for a life after death. According to Peter Nathan's "The Nervous System" and other books on brain research, practically all the sensations, emotions, thoughts, memories, perceptions, etc. – in short, practically everything we experience, has been shown to be dependent on the functioning of certain parts of the brain. For instance, if one part of the brain is destroyed, certain memories are lost. If another part of the brain is destroyed, the patient permanently ceases to show any evidence of ever feeling angry. If still another part of the brain is destroyed, then the patient ceases to show any evidence of ever feeling any emotion whatever. And so forth.

The obvious conclusion is, that if my whole brain were destroyed, I would thereafter experience nothing whatever.

Still, it is true that, if the human mind is capable of mobilizing some force not currently known to physics, then this raises the possibility that some aspect or attribute of the mind might persist after destruction of the physical brain, since the physical brain (so far as we know) operates according to the laws of physics. However, the experiments reported in the "Geller papers" do not provide any evidence that such a thing actually happens.

The rather tenuous possibility raised by the Gellar papers that I might experience something after death makes me a little hopeful and a little uneasy. On the one hand, it would be nice if life in some form did not have to end, but on the other hand I am displeased by any possibility of being plunged into some experience that I can't predict, control, or rationally prepare for. On the whole, I would prefer to be absolutely certain that I would experience nothing after death. Of course, this feeling is somewhat colored by religious propaganda about heaven and hell, since I'm amoral and impenitent and would surely go to hell according to Christianity. Of course, I don't believe in that stuff, and "the Geller papers" gives no evidence or even suggestion in favor of it, but naturally (having read so much literature from earlier times which accepted traditional Christianity) I can't help being slightly affected emotionally by the fable of hell.

Well, in regard to any possibility of experience after death, the word is... courage! I am attracted to William Henley's famous poem, "Invictus," though I consider it a little too vainglorious. ...

(3) Probably one of the things that attracts many people to the belief in so-called "psychic" phenomena is this: They imagine that these things provide some kind of escape from the mechanistic view of the human mind that is indicated by scientific results, and they may also imagine that these phenomena promise some kind of free will, - ability to avoid control by "the system."

There is no reason to suppose that the "Geller papers" provide any evidence in favor of free will or a non-mechanistic view of human nature; nor do they indicate any limitations of the scientific method.

Science never claims to know everything. The business of science is, by useful, disciplined observation and experimentation, to construct formal, educative models of various aspects of human experience, that will enable human organization to predict and/or control certain aspects of human experiences.

Since past observation and experimentation is limited, scientific models must be continually revised and/or extended as our information comes to light. This does not mean older models are proven worthless. What it does mean is that older models are replaced by newer models that are either more accurate, or applicable over a wider range of conditions than the older models.

Thus, scientific models continually provide wider, more detailed, and more accurate pictures of reality. The classic example is the replacement of Newtonian mechanics with relativistic mechanics.

If the "Geller Papers" are on the level, then they seem to indicate that science is about to come to grips with some new force or some new class of phenomena. The

probable outcome I think is this: science will eventually bring under control these new phenomena, just as it has brought under control such formerly mysterious phenomena as electricity, radiation, etc. "Psychic" phenomena, if they exist, probably have their own laws, which science will come to understand. "Psychic" phenomena will then be "harnessed", and turned into tools of "the system", which tools will be used to control individuals, and also the physical world; just as science has turned other classes of phenomena into tools of the system.

Even if science is for any reason unable to analyse psychic phenomena, it still is probable that these phenomena will be turned tools of the system. Note that Geller is essentially a conformist and (apparently) uses his powers only for purposes approved by the system. If Geller-type powers turn out to have practical utility (as they probably will), then it is safe to assume that The System will organize programs for the following purposes: A. To determine the most efficient ways of utilizing psychic powers for the purposes of the system; B. To identify persons having psychic powers at the earliest possible age; C. To devise special programs for the training and socialization of persons having unusual psychic talents, so as to guaranty that they will use their powers "for the good of society" (i.e., for the purposes of the system) rather than for "irresponsible" (i.e., individualistic) purposes.

If the "Geller papers" are on the level, then it is quite possible that, thirty years from now, we may have government-employed psychics wandering around checking up on our thoughts to make sure we aren't planning to do anything illegal.

## Letter to David

By the way, I remember a few years ago you spoke to me about some woman psychologist whom you saw on television who claimed to have impressive evidence in favor of re-incarnation. You said she cited all kinds of impressive-sounding (alleged) facts. Well, a few years ago when I was back in Lombard there I found a book called *The Geller Papers* edited by some guy named Parati or something like that.

It was difficult not to take the book seriously because the papers (those I read, anyway) were by people in the "hard" sciences who claimed to have done experiments under controlled conditions with this guy Uri Geller, and they found he exhibited powers not explainable on the basis of known scientific principles. What was impressive was the fact that there was nothing sensationalistic about the papers and the authors seemed to take a very conservative attitude and made no flat assertions that Geller had any supernormal powers. So I was forced to take the book seriously, though I didn't like to do so. On the other hand, the thing just didn't seem right to me – it all just didn't seem to fit with things that are definitely known, are obvious and simple experiments that I thought ought to have been done. So I always meant to try to do some checking up to see if the book was on the level. But I didn't get around to it.

However, a few months ago I learned of an organization that goes by the initials CSICOP and publishes a periodical called "the Skeptical Inquirer" (formerly *the Zelectic*) devoted to exposing fraudulent occult and psychic - type stuff. So I wrote them asking about this Geller book. They wrote back referring me to some articles in back issues of their journal. So I ordered the 3 back issues in question (\$2000 altogether, ugh!) It seems that, investigated carefully, these Geller claims look much less impressive. In fact, at one point it was flatly asserted that Geller was a fraud. A very clever trickster. Their investigation of Geller and other psychic-type stuff generally seemed to be very careful and reasonable. On the other hand that pro-Geller book (so far as I read it) had also seemed reasonable and moreover I have learned that people sometimes publish gross distortions if not outright lies, or sound quite reasonable while doing it. Furthermore, some (not all) of the Skeptical Inquirer writers seemed to have an emotional bias *against* this psychic stuff just as strong as the emotional bias that some people have *for* it.

Of course, in a case like this where it is impractical to do one's own investigating, so that one has to take the word of one side or another as to the facts on which to base a judgement—how can one be sure who is distorting things and who is not? However, I opined that the antipsychic school is right. Naturally, my preferences may be influencing me here, but it does seem to me that all the psychic and occult stuff just doesn't fit in with the general pattern of definitely established facts, so that, in the absence of very solid evidence for psychic phenomena one would have to reject this. And since the evidence produced by the anti's is at any rate sufficient to deprive the evidence of the pros of a solidly convincing character, one would have to conclude that the antis are most likely right. Also, some of the statements about Geller, notably the statement that he has been "exposed as a fraud," would lay the writers open to a libel suit if Geller were on the level.

If you find all this occult bullshit disturbing and would like to read those 3 issues of the Skeptical Inquirer that I have, let me know and I will send them to you.

## 1999 Interview

"This is kind of personal," he begins by saying, and I ask if he wants me to turn off the tape. He says "no, I can tell you about it. While I was living in the woods I sort of invented some gods for myself" and he laughs. "Not that I believed in these things intellectually, but they were ideas that sort of corresponded with some of the feelings I had. I think the first one I invented was Grandfather Rabbit. You know the snowshoe rabbits were my main source of meat during the winters. I had spent a lot of time learning what they do and following their tracks all around before I could get close enough to shoot them. Sometimes you would track a rabbit around and around and then the tracks disappear. You can't figure out where that rabbit went and lose the trail.

I invented a myth for myself, that this was the Grandfather Rabbit, the grandfather who was responsible for the existence of all other rabbits. He was able to disappear, that is why you couldn't catch him and why you would never see him... Every time I shot a snowshoe rabbit, I would always say 'thank you Grandfather Rabbit.' After a while I acquired an urge to draw snowshoe rabbits. I sort of got involved with them to the extent that they would occupy a great deal of my thought. I actually did have a wooden object that, among other things, I carved a snowshoe rabbit in. I planned to do a better one, just for the snowshoe rabbits, but I never did get it done. There was another one that I sometimes called the Will 'o the Wisp, or the wings of the morning. That's when you go out in to the hills in the morning and you just feel drawn to go on and on and on and on, then you are following the wisp. That was another god that I invented for myself."

## 1978 Journal

Today I had a most joyous morning. I went up the gulch just to get nettles, at dawn; but the Wisp called me, so that I ended by going up on the ridge, in the mostly snow-free areas, by way of the old Gold Dollar mine. (Many times in the morning I just like to wander at random, following the "will of the wisp". When I get the urge to wander like that, I say to myself that "the wisp is calling me." Only a few days ago, it occurred to make a kind of spirit or demigod out of the wisp, as I did a few years ago out of the Grandfather Rabbit who I invented. Grandfather Rabbit, though he can appear and disappear at will, nevertheless has a definite form, being that of an unusually large snowshoe rabbit. The Wisp, on the other hand, has no form at all, being invisible; unless, just possibly, it might be glimpsed for a moment now and then out of the corner of the eye as a bit of thistledown or some such thing floating on the breeze. The Wisp is the that which makes you want to get out and move and wander and look listen, when you see the first pink clouds at dawn or when the early morning sunlight strikes the mountainsides or when the southwest wind starts blowing. I can't express how intensely I love these things. And the better I get to know these hills the better I love them. I never get tired of them.).

## 1980 Journal

...after getting 4 rabbits, I tracked down another one, took aim at its head, with my finger on the trigger just as if I were really going to kill it, then lowered the rifle and said to the rabbit: "Rabbit, I spare thy life. Give my regards to Grandfather Rabbit." This was not just the impulse of a moment. I tracked that rabbit with the definite intention of sparing it when I found it. It was a sort of way of expressing my feelings



about snowshoe hares; these animals having a special significance for me; also it is nice to think that I know the rabbits not only as a predator, but also as...is it too ridiculous to say, as a friend? I felt a kind of childish delight after performing this action - i.e., after sparing the rabbit. Later I shot a 5th...

## 2001 Interview

**TJK:** ... The rabbit is clipped through the head. Such a shot ordinarily kills the rabbit instantly, but the animal's hind legs usually kick violently for a few seconds so that it bounces around in the snow. When the rabbit stops kicking I walk up to it and see that it's quite dead. I say aloud "Thank you, Grandfather Rabbit"—Grandfather Rabbit is a kind of demigod I've invented who is the tutelary spirit of all the snowshoe rabbits. I stand for a few minutes looking around at the pure-white snow and the sunlight filtering through the pine trees. I take in the silence and the solitude. It's good to be here. ...

**BVD:** I respect and appreciate your thanking Grandfather Rabbit. I'm reminded of the real origins of the ritual or custom of saying grace before a meal: A solemn awareness of sacrifice, that all life gives itself so that other life may live...Do you believe in fate?

**TJK:** No.

**BVD:** Do you believe in God?

**TJK:** No. ...

## Appendix: Invictus Poem

BY WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.  
In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.  
Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul.

## Sources

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A critique of his ideas & actions.



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