

Thoreau never killed anyone

Ted Kaczynski

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Kaczynski answers letters asking him about his philosophy and the morality of the crimes he committed.

A. Unsorted Letters

A1. From Ted to [REDACTED] — May 25, 2003

Dear Mr. [REDACTED]

To answer your two questions:

1. Can an individual be happy participated in the workings of society? Undoubtedly. I feel sure that many Nazis and Communists in Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, and Mao's China achieved happiness by participating in the workings of their respective societies. See Manifesto, paragraph 83. But I would not *want* to be happy participating in the workings of an evil society that does evil things.

2. Did I find happiness by participating only minimally in society? Yes — with the following reservations. The word “happiness” is not very apt here because it is too vague, and also because it might convey the impression that the “happiness” I found was something fitting the conception of happiness that is current in the industrialized world today — a conception that I consider to be shallow. So I would prefer to say that I found tranquillity, peace of mind, and a sense that life was satisfying and worthwhile.

The only fly in the ointment was the continual and destructive encroachment of modern civilization. When such encroachment passes a certain point, one's tranquillity is broken and one feels a need to fight back.

Regarding “reverence for life”: Yes, I have reverence for life, understood as the totality of life on Earth. But death and killing are parts of the totality of life. They are necessary parts, because, without predators, prey species would multiply to the point where they would destroy their environment and themselves. Suppose that some species — say mice, for example — had become so numerous that it was a plague on the Earth. Would you then hesitate to kill a mouse? Now apply that to the human race, which has become a deadly-destructive plague — a plague to the Earth and a plague to itself. Under these circumstances I don't think there is any compelling need for reverence for human life.

If you find this disturbing, then you've got a problem, because there is a vast amount of killing of human beings in the world today.

Sincerely yours,
Ted Kaczynski

A2. From Ted to [REDACTED] — July 13, 2003

Dear Mr. [REDACTED]

I trust you received my note of May 25.

In your letter of July 4 you write, “In my opinion, the primary reason that the ideas presented in the Manifesto are not more widely read, discussed, and considered is the method by which they were brought to the public’s attention.”

You’re dead wrong. You write, “I continue to find the Manifesto extremely thought-provoking I find myself questioning my beliefs, my ideas, and rethinking my overall view of society and technology.” This strongly suggests that your first exposure to serious criticism of technology was through the Manifesto. But the Manifesto was not a new departure. Decades earlier, Jacques Ellul and Lewis Mumford, among others, had published highly respected critiques of technology...

A3. From [REDACTED] to Ted

I think you should have thought about your actions a little longer before you set off that bomb. Violence is never an acceptable answer. The Buddha teaches us that. ...

Letter Series B

B4. From [REDACTED] to Ted — 7/17/03

Dear Mr. Kaczynski,

I took a great interest in your Manifesto a year ago, my junior year at Indiana University where I'm now finishing a degree in philosophy. I've always felt compelled to contact you because you so eloquently voiced many of the concerns I have about our society today.

Although I can't bring myself to approve of your methods (perhaps because of my own self-doubt), I've never come across something as powerful and passionate as your writings. I suffer silently as I suppose many do in our society — burdened by the fact that I am constantly barraged by a system of values that is in direct contradiction with my concept of human dignity.

But I value my suffering — at the very least it is the sign of some shred of humanity still left in me. My question to you is at what point did you feel confident enough in your beliefs to take action against what you perceived to be wrong. When did you start realizing that it was not an injustice for you to do what you did, but rather a plea in defense of humanity? It doesn't even seem to be a question of debate to me anymore, but rather the best course of action. Any thoughts you have would be of great interest to me.

Sincerely, [REDACTED]

B2. From Ted to [REDACTED] — July 30, 2003

Dear Mr. [REDACTED]:

Thanks for your letter of July 17. It's a good letter, but I'll have to say that I found your statement that you "can't bring [your]self to approve of [my] methods" a bit tiresome, because I've heard the same refrain from so many other people. They all "like the writings but don't approve of the methods."

My answer to that is: If you don't like my methods, have you got any better ideas? Here are a couple of the "better ideas" that people have offered me:

- I should have made a movie about the technology problem. Great idea! Only — where would I get the equipment, the technical and artistic expertise, and the actors? ...

You write: “My question to you is at what point did you feel confident enough in your beliefs to take action against what you perceived to be wrong. When did you start realizing that it was not an injustice for you to do what you did, but rather a plea in defense of humanity?”

Well, if I were to ask you, “When did you start using heroin?”, the question would make no sense unless you had in fact used heroin. (I trust you have not.)

For the same reason, your question to me makes no sense. The question presupposes that I see human conflicts — or, at least, deadly human conflicts — in moral terms. Actually I think that the language of morality only obscures truth and that it is more productive to think in psychological terms. This doesn’t mean that I recognize no limits of a kind that you would call “moral”. I do indeed recognize such limits. To take a crude example, I would never knock down an inoffensive old lady and take her purse, even if I were sure I could get away with it; and certainly I would be appalled and disgusted if I saw anyone else do such a thing.

But if you were to ask me why I would be appalled at the abuse of an inoffensive old lady, and if I were to answer, “Because its morally wrong,” then my answer would serve only to close off inquiry into the significant sociological and psychological question, “Why are almost all people appalled at abuse of inoffensive old ladies.” This is an elementary example illustrating what I mean when I say that the language of morality obscures the truth.

You write: “It doesn’t even seem to be a question of debate to me anymore, but rather the best course of action.” What you mean by this is not entirely clear to me, but I’ll assume that it means that you would like to take some kind of practical action in regard to the technology problem and are wondering what kind of action to take.

As you might imagine, I’ve given a great deal of thought to the question of practical action that can be taken.

One kind of action is illegal, and I will say nothing about it, because if I appeared to be encouraging illegal activities this letter would not even be allowed to leave the prison. (In case you haven’t guessed, my incoming and outgoing mail is read by prison staff, so you should be careful what you write to me.)

The other kind of action would consist in efforts toward the formation of a legal, above-ground revolutionary movement. There already is a revolutionary movement of sorts that is concerned with the technology problem. This movement consists of the Green Anarchists, Earth First!ers, and related groups. However, I think this movement is ineffectual and that a different and better movement needs be formed.

For the moment, I’ll leave it there. But I would be interested to hear more about you and your thoughts. Sincerely yours,

Ted Kaczynski

P.S. My mail is somewhat unreliable. Letters occasionally disappear. So if you should write to me and get no answer, you can assume that either I didn’t get your letter, or I sent you an answer that you didn’t receive. — TJK

Letter Series C

C1. From [REDACTED] to Ted — January 11, 2005

Dear Theodore Kaczynski,

I'm currently reading your essay Industrial Society and it's Future. Do you think that, having taken completely legal steps to publish the document, it would have received near as much recognition? This essay has pointed out many dark facets of the left, that when examined appear to be completely accurate. Thank you for pointing these out.

A friend was telling me that (is this really any of our business?) in college you stopped caring about death, and could then do anything without fear. Do you still feel this way? I can only imagine how that would be.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

PS. what are your thoughts on the internet.

(Hope this question hasn't been asked too much)

C2. From Ted to [REDACTED] — January 25, 2005

Dear Mr. [REDACTED]

Thanks for your letter postmarked January 11. To answer your questions:

1. If "Industrial Society and Its Future" had been published legally, would it have received near as much recognition as it has?

I think definitely not. It's very difficult to get anything published by a major publishing company that can ensure its wide distribution. Furthermore, other authors have published books — some of them through major publishing companies — on the technology problem, and these books do not seem to have been as widely read as I.S.A.I.F.

2. A friend told you that "in college" I "stopped caring about death, and then could do anything without fear." You ask whether I still feel this way.

What your friend told you is only roughly accurate. Not when I was "in college" but at the start of my last year of graduate school I passed through a kind of crisis, after

which I felt that fear of consequences could never prevent me from doing anything that I really wanted to do. This doesn't mean that I'm indifferent to consequences. On the contrary, before taking any action I calculate the consequences carefully. And I may have fear of those consequences. But the difference is that, since the crisis, fear no longer keeps me boxed in. Though it may be difficult, I can break through the barrier of fear. And, yes, I still feel this way.

3. You ask what are my thoughts on the Internet.

Of course, I'm opposed to the technology — computers and so forth — that underlies the Internet. But, given that the technology exists, I think it's legitimate to use the Internet to spread ideas that help to undermine the technoindustrial system.

Sincerely yours,
Ted Kaczynski

D. Unsorted Letters

D1. From [REDACTED] to Ted — August 28, 2009

Dear [REDACTED]

Thanks for your undated letter postmarked August 19, 2009.

You write, “the death of innocent people served no purpose”, but I’m not aware that any *innocent* people died in Unabom attacks. Innocent or guilty, their deaths did serve a purpose. I suspect you fail to grasp the full seriousness of the situation with which modern technology confronts us. You might want to read Bill Joy, “Why the Future Doesn’t Need Us”, *Wired* magazine, April 2000, or Martin Rees, *Our Final Century*.

You write, “I understand telecommunication is not allowed.” Actually I can make three phone calls a month, and I can receive legal calls from attorneys.

You write, “you’re probably swamped with mail,” but I am not swamped with mail. I do spend a good deal of time on correspondence, but the reason is that many of the letters I write are long and need to be well thought out.

You write, “I hope you find forgiveness in your heart.” Forgiveness of whom for what?

You write, “If I could be of any assistance to you please let me know.” If you are referring to *legal* assistance, or even just to legal advice, I can indeed use some of that. Did you mean to offer me such assistance or advice?

Sincerely yours,
Ted Kaczynski

D2. Extract From Ted to [REDACTED]

... Feral House, Adam Parfrey, is an experienced publisher and he knows how to get books mentioned in the media so that people will know about them and buy them.

But Parfrey has not been able to get my book, *Technological Slavery*, mentioned in the media. The book is being “shut out”. The media refuse to mention it because they know that the book contains ideas that are dangerous to the system.

So you should start a campaign to make *Technological Slavery* well known in your area. Such a campaign could be successful and would be much more useful than a “free Ted Kaczynski” campaign.

I’d like to make a comment on your belief that deadly violence is unjustifiable.

Nonviolence is a luxury that can be enjoyed only by those who have police to protect them. There are people who would take all your food and leave you to starve, or who would even kill you just for the fun of it, if there were no police. So there are only 3 possibilities in this world: (I) You can live in an organized society with police protection; or (ii) you can use deadly violence to defend yourself; or (ii) you can die.

Ted Kaczynski

D3. Extract From Ted to [REDACTED]

... As to the morality of my actions, whether or not one believes there is such a thing as an “absolute” morality (whatever that means), it is a matter of empirical fact that every stable, organized society has a moral code that is designed primarily to facilitate the functioning of that society. If one is going to question the validity of a given form of society, then one must be prepared also to question the validity of the society’s moral code. If one questions the moral code of the present technological society, one *might* still conclude that my actions were immoral. But if one reaches that conclusion merely through an uncritical application of the present society’s moral code, then one demonstrates one’s unwillingness to question seriously the present society’s right to exist.

Again, thank you for your courtesy.

Sincerely yours, Ted Kaczynski

I have not received an answer to this — TJK 5/3/12

D4. From Ted to Professor [REDACTED] — September 7, 2011

Dear Professor [REDACTED]

Thank you for your letter of August 29, 2011, which I received yesterday. You note that you’re thinking of comparing me to Thoreau when you cover ISAIF in class, and I appreciate the fact that you’re giving me an opportunity to comment on that idea.

I don’t think the comparison between Thoreau and me is apt. You write: “[I]t strikes me that you and Thoreau were morally outraged by society and the putative evils it was perpetrating, and so both of you sought to extricate yourselves by relocating to remote areas.” But “moral outrage” does not accurately describe my motives. You can get some ideas of my real motives from *Technological Slavery*, pages 64 (P94), 261, 273–76, 374–75, 394–96. For my general view of morality, see *ibid.*, pages 234–245.

People tend to connect me with Thoreau because his name is the first that comes to mind whenever anyone mentions the idea of going off to live alone in the woods. It

has even been reported that I was “inspired” by Thoreau, but this is far from the truth. I read “Walden” and probably the “Essay on Civil Disobedience” when I was maybe 19 or 20 years old, [CROSSED OUT: and they were okay,] but I was not particularly impressed by them; nor have I ever had any special admiration for Thoreau.

Having read nothing by Thoreau for several decades, I don’t remember what he said about his motive for going to live in the woods. But, whatever he may have *said*, I seriously doubt that his real motive was moral outrage. J. Robert Oppenheimer once remarked: “One always has to worry that what people say of their motives is not adequate”;⁽¹⁾ and you’ll probably agree. Morality often serves as a justification for actions that really are quite differently motivated.

You also write: “[I]t is striking how differently things unfolded for the two of you, with Thoreau being held up as a hero and you being vilified in the popular press.” But the difference is hardly surprising, given that Thoreau never killed anyone and I did. Under the circumstances, it was only to be expected that the popular press would make highly negative *value-judgments* about me. What was disturbing was the number of distortions of *fact* and outright *falsehoods* that appeared, many doubtless the result merely of recklessness, but some clearly identifiable as calculated lies. I used to believe that the media did on the whole a fairly good job. I knew that they were often sensationalistic or biased, but I believed that they made a conscientious (even if not always successful) effort to be accurate as to facts. I learned how bad the media really were only after my arrest, when I was able to compare what journalists wrote with what I knew to be true from personal experience. This isn’t only *my* view of the media. To mention just one example: In describing his experiences with the media following his injury in a Unabom attack, David Gelernter wrote: “It must be the very first thing you learn in journalism school: Why do research when you can make things up?”⁽²⁾

The theory behind the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of the press is that the media are to help prevent excessive concentration of power by depriving the power structure of control over the distribution of information and ideas. Two hundred years ago the press probably did perform this function, though imperfectly. Today it’s doubtful that the media perform such a function at all. They seem rather to have become *agents* of the power structure.

The Media constitute only one of the elements of a modern representative democracy that perform in practice very differently from the way they are supposed to perform in theory... I’ve never had a course in political philosophy, and I wonder whether such courses take adequate account of the often very large gap between theory and practice in the functioning of political systems.

⁽¹⁾ Alice Kimball Smith and Charles Weiner (eds.) *Robert Oppenheimer: Letters and Recollections*, Stanford U. Press, 1995, page 316.

⁽²⁾ David Gelernter, *Drawing Life: Surviving the Unabomber*, The Free Press, 1997, page 51.

At the very end of your letter, you raise the question: What would Thoreau do today? I think it's safe to say that if Thoreau could have seen what modern society has become and where it is heading, he would have been horrified. But I wouldn't dare venture a guess as to what action he would have taken, if any.

Sincerely yours,
Ted Kaczynski

D5. Extract From Ted to [REDACTED]

You ask: "Did you ever think that they didn't really give you a chance to explain the reasons why you started the bombings? It was almost as if they were trying to make you look like a crazy person so no one would listen to what you wanted to say."

There was no "almost" about it! That was *exactly* why they tried to make me look like a crazy person! But they didn't succeed. I get letters from all over the world from people who *have* listened to what I wanted to say. I wanted my lawyers (who were appointed for my "defense" by the court, not chosen by me) to help me use the trial to promote my ideological attack on the technological system, but they insisted on portraying me, against my will, as insane. You will find something about this in *Technological Slavery*, pages 410–14.

You ask: "If you could go back, knowing what you know now, would you stay or run?" Certainly, I would run! I was prepared to run at any time. Under my bed I had — all packed and ready to take at a moment's notice — some very light equipment: a blanket, warm clothing, cooking pot, matches, and so forth. I had my rifle, and I had supplies of ammunition hidden at two different places in the mountains. But the government agents took me by surprise and grabbed me before I could do anything.

D6. Extract From Ted to [REDACTED] — February 1, 2014

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your letter postmarked January 13, 2014. You ask two questions, the second of which is:

"If you could recommend me a single book to read, apart from your own, which one would it be?"

You don't say which of my two books you have read — *Industrial Society and Its Future* alone, or *Technological Slavery*? Apart from those, I recommend that you read Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, Penguin Books, 2006. You won't like it. In fact, I'm sure you'll be horrified by it, and that's exactly why you should read it.

Your first question was:

“If you could go back, knowing what you do today, what would be the best path to follow?”

[CROSSED OUT: I made errors of detail but, in a general way,] Given the situation in which I found myself, the opportunities available to me, and my personal abilities or lack thereof, the best path *for me* to follow was — apart from errors of detail — the path I actually took.

But maybe you are asking me to suggest what would be the best path *for you* to follow. I can give you a very specific and concrete answer:

I suppose you can read and write Spanish. If ... [PAGE CUTS OFF]

[END OF DOCUMENT]

The Ted K Archive

Ted Kaczynski
Thoreau never killed anyone

documentcloud.org

www.thetedkarchive.com