

A REPLY TO THE UNABOMBER MANIFESTO

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Prolog: Brilliant? or just deranged?

On September 19, 1995, a manifesto appeared in the Washington Post and the New York Times. It was published under duress. The author(s) claimed to have killed people and threatened to continue doing so if the Manifesto were not published. The newspapers consulted the FBI and were advised to publish it. It was hoped that some reader would recognize the style or the content and provide a clue to the identity of the long-sought, so-called Unabomber. Someone did. On January 2d, 1998, Theodor Kaczynski pleaded guilty in a Sacramento, California, court to numerous charges, including possessing and transporting explosive devices with intent to kill and maim, and murder and maiming. Seemingly overwhelming evidence indicated that Kaczynski was indeed the Unabomber, the infamous mail bomb terrorist, and the author of the Sept. 19th Manifesto.

It is not without second thoughts that I publish this reply to the Unabomber Manifesto, nor is it without significance that I waited until the case was solved. I composed the body of this reply in 1995 but did not wish to publish it until it was certain who the Unabomber was, what his further intentions were, and whether he was a member of some terrorist organization. It now seems clear that Kaczynski acted alone, and that therefore a reply to his Manifesto will not provoke any hostile actions from accomplices. Nonetheless, I still have misgivings about publishing a reply. As the pre-trial proceedings amply revealed, Kaczynski is a troubled man.

The newspapers persistently reported him as being "brilliant, but emotionally disturbed," some called him "delusional, paranoid, schizophrenic, and in deep denial". Even discounting the exaggeration to be expected from the media in such a celebrated case as this, I think it is beyond doubt that Kaczynski is deranged. The text of his Manifesto might lead one to that conclusion, quite apart from his murderous rampage and subsequent court-room behavior. I shall not debate the question whether "delusional, paranoid, schizophrenic, and in deep denial" should have qualified him as legally insane--that is to say, not legally responsible for his actions--, for the case ran its course without having to answer that question. Kaczynski's argument in the Manifesto is deeply flawed--from the Manifesto alone, no one would come to the conclusion that he was "brilliant." Intellectually, Kaczynski is a straw man; it requires no philosophical tour de force to pick his Manifesto to pieces. My misgivings about replying to it are simply this, that I do not wish to dignify it. In a certain sense, it does not deserve to be refuted. It is too incoherent to be refuted. It deserves to be swept into the dust bin of oblivion. It deserves to be ignored completely, and the sooner the better.

What finally persuaded me to publish this reply, despite my misgivings, is the realization that Kaczynski's point of view is an exaggerated version of something many other people also feel, but less intensely than he. His Manifesto touches a nerve. The nation is not at ease--suicide cults, successionist mercenary groups, and militant paramilitary organizations (e.g., the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers) are much more publicly visible, and unashamedly so, than previously--and it seems to me to be worthwhile to point out the incoherence of Kaczynski's position: perhaps it will stop someone who might be seduced into following him from crossing over the line from deranged ideas to indiscriminate violence.

Unfortunately, someone else was influenced: the case of the Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik, who slaughtered 77 people and injured 319 more (mostly children), is a reminder that flawed thinking can lead to violent action. Breivik, like Kaczynski, wrote a manifesto, and Breivik's borrowed much from Kaczynski's. Both believed that violence is justified to get a forum for political agendas. So, it seems appropriate to offer a rebuttal to that agenda in the hope that some future potential mass murderer will stop at publishing his tripe and not feel he has to overstep the line into violence.

A Reply to the Unabomber Manifesto
THOREAU REVISITED?

As the Kaczynski himself concedes, the Manifesto would probably not have been published had he submitted it, according to accepted custom, to the editors of any major newspaper or journal. It is rather too long, a bit too nutty, and much too tedious for serious, general-interest publications (such as the Washington Post or a certain well-known 'men's entertainment magazine'). The article was published under duress: the author had killed people and threatened to do so again if the article were not published. In a nation which prides itself on having a free press, such an incident does more than set a dangerous precedent for copycats in the future. What is worse, it taps a persistent strain of malaise already at large in the land and twists that malaise into paranoia.

The content of the Manifesto itself confirms this paranoia at every turn. The author spies conspiracies under every bush and behind every traffic sign. The Evil One is not Satan, Communism, the Mafia, or certain unnamed persons--the Evil One is government. Government in general, not this or that particular one. The author is an unabashed anarchist.

I readily grant that governments are not perfect; sometimes they make mistakes and errors of judgment. I readily grant that when governments go wrong, they usually go more seriously wrong than individuals do. At any rate, the potential for harm is usually greater. Nonetheless, when the American federal government goes wrong, in contrast to, for example, the Nazi government, it appears to be more often due to incompetence than to evil intent. But the author of the manifesto does not see it that way. He diagnoses a host of social ills in American society--indeed in all post-industrial societies--and traces all of them to what he sees as the pervasively evil influence of government, *any* government. It is a serious thesis which, at least superficially, resembles a respectable philosophical tradition: Thoreau, in "Civil Disobedience", wrote "I heartily accept the motto 'that government is best which governs least'; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which I also believe--'that government is best which governs not at all'." Rousseau declared that "man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains." The thesis deserves a serious reply.

The thesis of the Unabomber Manifesto is that technologized society is a Bad Thing because it denies people sufficient opportunity for a certain kind of psychological development, usually called a sense of achievement but which the Manifesto calls "the power process", thus leading to a widespread sense of powerlessness and purposelessness in our society. The various evils of modern society--violence, drug abuse, sexual perversion, greed, wife beating, the breakdown of traditional family values, and so on--are all, according to the author, caused by this one root problem. The exact mechanism of this is feebly sketched out in psychological terms: frustration leads to anger, frustrated anger leads to what the Manifesto calls "surrogate activities" (substitutes) or to violence, and so on. To what extent this thesis is merely unwittingly autobiographical, I leave to qualified psychiatrists; doubtless there will be studies of Kaczynski for years to come. I shall not reply to the sketchy mechanism of how this is supposed to work, but to the conceptual basis of the thesis itself, that technosociety is bad because it denies people a certain kind of psychological opportunity, namely the chance to develop "the power process." To quote the Manifesto itself, "We contend that the most important cause of social and psychological problems in modern society is the fact that people have insufficient opportunity to go through the power process in a normal way." (Unabomber Manifesto #58, 46)

What is this power process? The Manifesto defines one of the essential human needs as the tripartite need to: 1) posit goals for oneself, 2) exert effort to try to achieve those goals, and 3) actually to achieve some of them by such effort. In individuals, persistent failure to fulfill this need leads to lack of self-esteem, leftism, university professorships, and other such social ills (#10-30), according to the author. However, for the society at large, the same thing leads to economic success, since individuals are constantly admonished to sacrifice their needs to those of the community. This the author calls "oversocialization"--a Bad Thing--though this used to be a Good Thing and was called "The Protestant Work Ethic" or "altruism" or "civilization." As the Manifesto states, "in order to avoid serious psychological

problems, a human being needs goals whose attainment requires effort, and he must have a reasonable rate of success in attaining [them]." (#37) I shall not dispute that here; the question is, is that the crux of the biscuit? Is that where the shoe pinches? Is what is wrong with modern society the fact that it denies that? Is the American society particularly ruthless in denying people that?

In a long run of paragraphs titled "Sources of Social Problems" (beginning #45), the Manifesto states its case for the claim. 'The individual is powerless', 'more and more, people are hemmed in by rules and regulations', 'we have no control over our own security', and so on. This leads to frustration in the achievement of goals; it leads to such frustration, the Manifesto claims, that most people give up and just try to achieve what little they can: a bit of hedonism. But this is merely an artificial goal, a "surrogate activity." And so it leads to a sense of purposelessness--life becomes meaningless, because it is filled with trivial, ephemeral satisfactions, while the important goals remain unattainable.

Industrialized society, so the Manifesto claims, is a big alien Thing which imposes its rules upon us and sucks the life out of the individual by turning him into an unhappy cog in its soul-less machinery. Its means of accomplishing this are the destruction of the traditional family unit (#51-52) and the alienation of the fruits of his labor in the workplace (#65-66). How idyllic it all was in the pioneer days when a man's livelihood and security rested solely in his own hands! (#54, 69-70)

But, the Manifesto eventually concedes, "modern society is in certain respects extremely permissive. In matters that are irrelevant to the functioning of the system we can generally do what we please. We can believe in any religions we like (as long as it does not encourage behavior that is dangerous to the system). We can go to bed with anyone we like (as long as we practice "safe sex"). We can do anything we like as long as it is *unimportant*. But in all *important* matters the system tends increasingly to regulate our behavior." (#72) This paragraph is sheer dynamite--here the author betrays himself, for here he reveals what he thinks is important and what unimportant.

What he thinks is important is economic conditions (especially advertising and marketing) which mold consciousness like clay and make people buy things they don't want or need. Material conditions determine consciousness; if you want to raise consciousness, change the economy. Sounds like Marxism, doesn't it?

What he thinks is unimportant is religion and sexuality: namely, a man's relation to God (or the All or whatever you care to call it), and his relation to the person he loves most in the world. Unimportant!? Irrelevant!? These issues strike at the very heart of everyone's personal identity. These issues are the heart of freedom of expression, for a person expresses himself most intimately and most genuinely through his sexuality and his spirituality. Unimportant!? Irrelevant!? For such a cause, the French peasants and the American colonists rose up in defiance of Church and State and risked their lives, their loved ones, their honor, and their estates. Article *One* of the Bill of Rights states that "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or the free exercise thereof."--men fought and died for that article. There would have been no Manifesto on Sept. 19th, had they not. The author of the Manifesto had such 'irrelevancies' to thank for the fact that there is a free press for him to coerce. If he had sent his Manifesto to TASS in the bad old days of the Soviet Union, he would not have gotten it published. Unimportant!? Irrelevant!? Now we know where the author of the Manifesto stands on freedom of worship and freedom of the press--he would subvert them, if he could.

Sections 72 and 94-97 reveal another significant clue about the author's true political colors. Sections 72 and 94-7 deal with rights, and, specifically, they describe the rights we have, such as the right to freedom of worship, as "mere permissiveness" or as "bourgeois", not to be confused with what the author calls true freedom. I recall the reaction of the conservative establishment to the discovery of premarital sex by the Flower Power generation in the 1960s; their reaction to the new sexual freedom of the 60s was that it was "permissive"--a Bad Thing. It would appear that the author of the Manifesto thinks that freedom of worship is a Bad Thing, since he calls it "mere permissiveness" and deliberately puts it in the same category as sexual promiscuity ("go[ing] to bed with anyone we like" (#72)). Perhaps the author thinks there should be only one religion (or none at all), since having more than one constitutes "bourgeois permissiveness". Section 97 further denigrates all "bourgeois conceptions of freedom," such as the right to

choose one's occupation, the right to a fair and impartial trial, and freedom of the press, as merely serving the State's interests, not the individual's. Presumably, in the author's utopia, all such "bourgeois conceptions of freedom", as he calls them, would wither away along with the state and religion.

In case anyone's memory should need to be jogged at this point, what 19th century German philosopher espoused exactly those principles in virtually the same words? Answer: Karl Marx. What strange bedfellows the reactionary fringe have taken on board lately!

But let me return to the main thesis: is man markedly more powerless in modern society than in previous societies? Modern woman certainly is not. The modern woman is empowered in both kinds and degrees unthinkable in the pioneer days. That is not to say that a full and proper equality has been achieved--it has not--but the *means* to achieve it have been, by which I mean the vote. Universal suffrage is now taken for granted in industrialized nations. The pioneer days may have been idyllic for the pioneer, but they were not for his wife.

Technoman is markedly better educated than his pioneer forebears; he is, in fact, the most highly educated man in all history. Three hundred years ago, most people were illiterate; the few people who could read at all could read only aloud (reading silently to oneself is a modern invention) and the one book they had access to was the Bible. A nation hit a cultural peak if it produced a man who could not only read but write; one man of such stature as Goethe or Shakespeare in a century was about all the excitement a nation could stand. Nowadays, every schoolboy in Kentucky knows (or, at any rate, should do) things which Leonardo or Aristotle would have given their left arms to have been able to find out: the causes of seasons or diseases, for example, or how a heart works, or how to make a still. In an age in which to be informed is a pre-requisite to making informed decisions, it is no boast to say that technologized man is the most empowered man who ever lived. Far from being hemmed in by rules and regulations, doors are opening to him left, right and center; his only limits are the limits of his mind. Every county in the land has a public library. If anyone is too slothful to improve himself, it is a cop-out to blame society for preventing him from doing so.

The author often compares technosociety (with its rules and regulations) to primitive societies in order to demonstrate what a Bad Thing modern society is. It is an odd and largely meaningless pseudo-historical exercise. The correct comparison to draw is that between the society we are now and the one we were 200-300 years ago (i.e., in Europe). Men of courage and vision--Galileo, Leonardo, Goethe, for example--were forced to carry on their researches into astronomy and human anatomy in secret, for fear of religious persecution, torture, and execution. Astronomy and anatomy were heresy in those days. As late as the end of the 18th century, enlightened men such as Rousseau, d'Alembert, and Voltaire were forced to live in exile or within a few hours ride of neutral countries, because their views and scientific researches were at odds with the dogma of Church and State. Rules and regulations were not fewer and more benign then than now; if anything, they were worse. They were largely unwritten then, for one thing, and therefore subject to wholly arbitrary enforcement and interpretation. They were also under the control of people for whom the public never voted--namely, bishops and princes. The Industrial Revolution in England, and the French and American Constitutions, represented a massive empowerment of the common man, contrary to the claims of the Manifesto, for they codified rules and regulations and vested them in elected institutions, rather than in despots. Through those revolutions, rules and regulations ceased to be dictates imposed upon people by an alien Thing, and became instead the manner in which the people governed themselves. [See, for example, the recently published *Why Nations Fail*.]

The Manifesto further claims that the modern economic system robs man of his freedom (or the normal development of his power process, to use the author's own jargon). He claims that this is so because most people work for an employer (#65); apparently he imagines that in the pioneer days and in feudal times everyone was his own boss and was as happy as a clam at it. This again is pseudo-history. As far as early American agriculture is concerned, many people worked for plantation owners and were not happy as clams at it, no more so then than they would be now. The man who could eke out a living working alone on his own patch was a rarity--and he died young and exhausted. Sorry, no pastoral idyll there. Our true economic history has its roots, the same as our political history, in old Europe: in centuries of

feudalism. A man did what his father did, and a man's father did what *his* father before him had done. If your grandfather had been a serf (i.e., a farmer) or a blacksmith, you grew up to be one, too. There was no choice. You could not just move away to another village and get another job. If you were a serf, you were bound to the local baron's land and you were up to your ears in debt. If you were a blacksmith, you were a member of a guild, like it or not--another village had another guild and they weren't interested in letting strangers in. In those days, too, nearly everyone worked for an employer; it has been that way ever since one man had two coins and someone else had none. The difference was, in the old days, you couldn't choose which employer you worked for or what you did for him. Nowadays we take it for granted that every working man has a right to choose his place of residence, his profession, his employer, his union (or guild) if any, and to change any or all of them at will. The Industrial Revolution empowered the working man, rather than dis-empowered him. Of course people still have to work for a living--that isn't going to go away, but that is not an evil created by industrialized society.

Furthermore, child labor was routine in the bad old days. Unquestionably, the Industrial Revolution in Britain was no great improvement for children initially; but great strides have been made in the West in the last hundred years, in comparison to the continuing use of child labor (and slave labor) in Third World countries today. Technologized society not only empowered children, it empowered childhood. It created an idyllic period of roughly 15 years for children which was unknown and impossible elsewhere in the world until the second half of the 20th century.

Legally as well, children have been empowered by modern society. In previous centuries, it was considered within a father's prerogative to practice infanticide (especially against female infants, considered a 'liability') and to kill his grown sons if they disobeyed him. Now, suddenly, since the U.S. Supreme Court has overturned *Roe vs. Wade*, even a foetus has rights.

It is unclear to whom the author of the Manifesto was referring when he claimed that modern man is markedly more dis-empowered than his forebears, apart from himself. Evidently, it was not either women, or children, or farmers, or anyone who earns a wage or a salary, or anyone with an education or an interest in science or religion or publishing or art, or anyone who votes, or anyone whose ancestor was a slave, because all of those classes of people are markedly *more* empowered now than ever before in history, and they are so largely as a result of the institutions either created by or subsequently made possible by the Industrial Revolution, and the French and American Constitutions.

The big losers in the political and industrial developments of the last 200 years have been native peoples, and I am truly sorry. I wish it were otherwise. But the original Spanish/Catholic conquest of the New World was hardly kinder to the natives than technology has been more recently.

To return to the main thesis of the Manifesto, that modern man is unhappy because modern society dis-empowers him psychologically--the facts refute the claim. Objectively considered, women, children, blacks, farmers, etc., etc. have vastly more freedom today than in previous centuries (which is not to say that perfect equality has been achieved--it has not). Modern man is radically em-powered, not radically dis-empowered, by modern society. Why? Because he has *made* society so, in his own image. The principle of modern democracy is that the state shall govern only with the consent of the governed; that is the very concept of a self-empowered (re)public. Ancient Athenian democracy was not democracy by half.

The conceptual basis of the author's claim that modern society dis-empowers the citizen is the presupposition of a specific concept of freedom, namely that freedom is the freedom to do whatever you want whenever you want. Anything which limits that, e.g., a rule or regulation, is necessarily a Bad Thing (#114-115). According to this presupposition, pure freedom would require that there be no rules at all; as soon as one rule exists, your freedom is cut in half, as soon as two rules exist, it is cut in half again, and so on. The author cites the example of transportation (#127-128): pure freedom is walking: you go wherever you want whenever you want. A car represents a curtailment of freedom, not because of the machine itself, but because of the need for licenses and registration, stop lights and traffic laws, and so on: you can no longer go wherever you want because you have to drive where the road goes and you have to drive on the right side of the road and you have to stop at traffic lights, and so on. You are hemmed in by rules and regulations, so the author claims. Furthermore, the big bad system requires you to have a car, because

without one you can't get to work (more rules and regulations) and if you don't work you starve. Thus, according to the author, the system systematically deprives us of our freedom.

This is the sort of argument anarchists tend to make about social arrangements in general. Really thorough-going anarchists argue that no rule is valid unless all parties affected by it agree to it in advance. Just being born somewhere commits you to nothing.

But this is a faulty and incoherent concept of freedom. Doing whatever you want whenever you want is not freedom, but *wantonness, caprice*. If you ever met anyone who always did whatever he wanted whenever he wanted, without rhyme or reason, you would not say, "Oh, he's so *free*! I wish I could be like that!"--on the contrary, you'd say he was insane and run the other way.

The man we say is *free* is not he who lurches after transitory whims, but he who consistently realizes his long-term goals. The realization of long-term goals is possible only through disciplined effort and is absolutely subverted by always doing whatever you want whenever you want. Disciplined effort is a Good Thing, not a Bad Thing--and it is synonymous with doing things in a systematic and methodical way (which is not to say a rigid and mechanical way), the exact opposite of doing things in a capricious and haphazard way. Now what do we call it when someone does things in a systematic and methodical way? We say that he is following a rule. And when someone realizes his goals by disciplined, methodical effort, which is to say, by following a rule, he is free *because* he follows the rule, not despite it.

Let us consider an example: any painting by Leonardo da Vinci. He did not just splatter paint on the canvass any old which way he felt like--that would have produced rubbish. He went to slaughterhouses and morgues to study animal and human anatomy, methodically and systematically, scientifically (and he did so at considerable personal risk); he found out about muscles and tendons, how the skin ripples, and so on. He studied perspective and geometry; he studied how light reflects off of different surfaces (skin, wood, satin); he studied pigments, materials, and techniques--all by scientific experimentation. And *then* he painted, guided equally by his aesthetic vision and by his scientific training and discipline. He was guided by rules but not hemmed in by them; they alone give his work the precision, coherence, and realism which distinguish it from that of his lesser contemporaries. And yet, Leonardo's works were truly innovative, they broke free of the aesthetic canons of his day and helped initiate the Renaissance. Freedom and discipline are not antithetical, but complementary. Had Leonardo not taken the trouble to master his medium--to learn a lot of rules about perspective and materials and pigments and so on--he would not have been free to paint the Mona Lisa; on the contrary, he would have been incapable of it.

Similarly with rules of chess or grammar. Perhaps the author of the Manifesto resents the fact that there *are* rules of chess or grammar--perhaps he thinks that pure freedom of expression means that anyone may say whatever he feels like whenever he feels like it, without regard for grammar. Perhaps he feels that knights and pawns may be moved about however the mood strikes him, without regard for rules. But this is an incoherent notion of freedom: it would not produce freedom of expression, but schizoid word salad; not Fischer/Spasski, but random incoherence. Rules of grammar do not "hem us in;" they are a precondition for making any sense at all. They alone anchor our minds in reality and give our expressions coherence. The rules by which people agree to live together are similar; they give human relationships sense and coherence. You would not choose to live with people who disavowed all rules and always did whatever struck them at the moment.

The anarchist notion that only voluntary contracts are binding is not only impractical, it is impracticable. It is quite impossible to hold a new referendum on all the laws in the land every time someone reaches the age of majority. People are born into an already functioning system of laws and social customs; if they don't like it, they are free to try to change it by legal means, or to leave. But no society can be expected to cast everything into doubt again, each time someone has an 18th birthday.

Thus, the concept of freedom which the Manifesto argues has been taken from us by a big bad system is, in fact, incoherent--such freedom (no rules, no regulations, do whatever you feel like) never existed (except in a madhouse), so we never lost it. The author has been seduced by the myth of the pioneer days, when men were free from legislation. But he forgets that nomads, trappers, and pioneers were subject to a law more cruel and more relentless than any man-made tyranny: the law of the jungle, eat

or be eaten. If a trapper failed to catch enough rabbits or fish for a few days, he quickly weakened and fell prey to cold or predators (bears, lions, wolves). The pioneer family was utterly at the mercy of forces they could not predict, control, or vote for: fire and storm, flood and draught, illness and injury. It was a life free from legislation, but on no account free from the necessity for discipline and strict rules. Sub-zero temperatures forgive no lapse.

If our modern society enacts too much legislation, it is largely to try to correct the imbalance caused by so many people having become slack, if not outright criminal, in their personal conduct. The author pisses and moans about how big government hems us in with rules and regulations. But we saw a spectacular example of how well de-regulation works. President Reagan de-regulated the banking industry and the immediate result was a savings and loan catastrophe. Little old ladies' life savings were cleaned out and the taxpayer had to foot the bill to repay the loss. It was the biggest bank robbery of all time, and the banks committed it against the little guys. De-regulation? No thanks. We've seen it. It left a bad taste in our mouths, and our wallets a few billion dollars thinner.

However, the author of the Manifesto is correct in three other claims.

First, the author is correct that all is not well with America and that industrialized technology has a number of bad consequences which cannot be fixed by industrial or technological means (but only by responsible political ones).

The author is correct, second, that people's *feeling* of a sense of security, and by implication their feeling of their own freedom or empowerment, does not always accurately reflect their objective condition of security, freedom, or empowerment (#68). People may either radically overestimate or underestimate their objective conditions.

And third, the author is correct in asserting that many people nowadays do feel dis-empowered, unhappy, unfulfilled, and hemmed in by rules and regulations not of their own making. That is, many people are radically underestimating the objective conditions of their own freedom and empowerment. Many people are deluded into thinking that a big bad Something is oppressing them. Donald Trump in particular has tapped this vein of dissatisfaction in the American public.

The big bad Something is their own faulty perception of the objective conditions in which they live; conditions which they have, to a greater extent than any other people in history, themselves created. What hems them in is their own pessimism. What defeats them is defeatism. The sort of thing which makes them complaisant is a Manifesto which tells them that they are powerless pawns in an economic machine and blames their problems on an evil society. The sort of thing which defeats them is a Manifesto which touts half-baked pseudo-Marxist twaddle about economic conditions alienating people from their own "power process".

The error in this misperception is that people tend to mistake the magnitude of the social and political problems facing them (global warming, drug abuse, street violence, etc.), for restrictions of their personal freedoms, as if each person had to repair the ozone layer by himself. We need to stop seeing these phenomena as omens of a big bad oppressive Something which is out to get us; they are, in fact, *reflections of our own personal freedoms*, unthinkable and impossible to past generations, which we, to our discredit, use unwisely.

Americans have the right to keep and bear arms--a great freedom. But they have used it unwisely: America has civil war in the streets, the thugs outgun the police.

We have the right to work for whom we please, and to found our own companies and offer goods and services of our own devise--a great freedom compared to Communism. But we misuse it, we settle for too much sizzle, too little steak.

We have huge amounts of free time and spare cash--a great freedom compared to feudal, colonial, and plantation times. But Americans use these resources unwisely: they spend the equivalent of the national military budget on recreational drugs. Of course the economy is screwed up! What economy wouldn't be if the equivalent of its military budget were disappearing, in cash, into the black market?

We have the right to freedom of religion--a vast improvement over the Inquisition (it is estimated that nine million witches were burned or tortured to death during the Middle Ages; makes the holocaust

look like a picnic). But look what idols we put our faith in: ever weirder, ever more schismatical sects: Jim Joneses, religious theme parks (holy roller coasters!), a return to Fundamentalism, etc. A return to Fundamentalism bodes ill: the idea that only one religion is right and everybody else is wrong is the very thing that drove the first settlers to the New World, away from the persecutions in Europe.

We have the right to freedom of the press--a great freedom, unknown to people who endured a millennium of theocracy and forbidden books in old Europe. But some misuse it, distributing hate literature or coercing newspapers into printing neo-Nazi tripe, or spreading ludicrous lies about stolen elections.

These are not social ills imposed upon us by an anonymous evil society which oppresses us--oh no, America, this is *you* without the make-up and the frippery! You chose those social ills, for those so-called social ills *are* your freedoms twisted into a caricature of yourselves, warts and all.

Society has not stolen your liberty; you have willfully contorted it into grotesque and abusive forms.

It is false that Americans are unhappy because society is robbing them of their liberties. The contrary is true: more Americans nowadays have more free time and disposable cash to go more places and do more things than any other people have ever had at any time in history. If people are frittering that freedom away on perversions, violence, and drugs, it is not because society makes them do so, but because people have maimed their own sense of what is worthwhile in life. People have not lost their liberties; what is lost is a correct *perception* of those liberties in their current, grotesque and abusive, forms. What is necessary is not an American revolt, but to see how revolting Americans have become.

Liberty without responsibility is as odious as tyranny--America is teaching itself this lesson the hard way.

Implicit in the Manifesto is a call to arms to seize back lost liberties--Kaczynski's battle cry resonates among survivalists, mercenaries, militant supporters of Donald Trump, and other assorted anarchists. If, as the Manifesto claims, the psychology of Modern Leftism is masochistic, the psychology of the anarchic fringe is amply revealed by the Manifesto itself: it appeals to the sort of paranoid schizophrenic malcontents who imagine that a spot of paint on a road sign is a prelude to an invasion by helicopters from Brussels. It appeals to the sort of people drawn to QAnon's narrative. It is not necessary to refute such twaddle because it is based on a patently skewed interpretation of a patently skewed selection of pseudo-facts.

Nonetheless, the author's proposed solution needs to be addressed--in order to show how incoherent it is intellectually and how impossible and/or undesirable it would be in fact.

The author's solution is expressed in sections 134-136 and 140: reform of political institutions will not be enough (he cites the failure of past reforms to solve relatively simple problems such as drug trafficking and environmental pollution); a revolution will be necessary. Not a political one, but an *economic* one (#193) which smashes the industrial-technological system so that it can never be reconstructed. The author argues that the present economic system will falter soon anyway, due to the contradictions within it, thus giving people a chance to destroy it completely and put something better in its place. The author writes, "during the next several decades the industrial-technological system will be undergoing severe stresses due to economic and environmental problems, and especially due to problems of human behavior (alienation, rebellion, hostility, and a variety of social and psychological difficulties). We hope that the stresses through which the system is likely to pass will cause it to break down, or at least weaken it sufficiently so that a revolution occurs ..." (#134).

In case anyone's memory should need to be jogged at this point, what 19th century Leftist philosopher, whose initials are K.M., developed the idea of history as an economic process of resolving contradictions within the capitalist system, and declared "workers of the world unite--you have nothing to lose but your chains"? My, but the anarchic fringe is keeping strange bedfellows these days. One could accuse them of intellectual promiscuity (not a Good Thing).

Social justice is not high on anarchists' lists of objectives; wrecking the system is (#201). On a practical level, the plan of action is summarized in sections 166 and 181: inflame civil unrest and burn books. This, he says, will precipitate the revolution and get us on the right track sooner than if people try to reform the system gradually. I am reminded of the famously defiant words of an anarchist who had thrown

a bomb into the stock exchange; the judge demanded to know why he had killed innocent people and he replied that there are no innocent bourgeoisie. The author of the Manifesto appears to be of the same ilk.

The question is: how many people think this way and how well organized are they? If the answers are "many" and "very," then they amount to nothing less than Hitler's Brown Shirts from the 1930s. If the answer is "few," it still does not mean that we can safely ignore them, for, as Britain's experience with the IRA has demonstrated, a very small number of dedicated terrorists can drag a nation perilously close to the abyss.

Burn books? The author would burn only technical books, not all books, so he says. It would be interesting to know where he draws the line and what criterion he would apply in practice. Physics books and washing machine repair manuals are definitely technical--burn 'em. What about mathematics? Mathematics certainly looks technical, and a lot of modern physics is little more than mathematics. Probably the author (or the Brown Shirts) would burn mathematics books. What about logic? Logic looks awfully technical, and, as Bertrand Russell proved in his highly technical treatise *Principia Mathematica*, mathematics can be reduced to logic. Probably logic books would be burned, too. But you don't get far in philosophy without a sound training in logic, so they might as well consign Descartes and Plato to the flames along with Bertrand Russell. Come to think of it, can the revolution wait for the Brown Shirts to read each book in the library and decide whether or not it is technical? Probably that would be too much to ask of someone who just trashed a factory.

As Heinrich Heine said, who starts by burning books, ends by burning people.

In case anyone was wondering what is supposed to replace technology after the revolution, after the factories have been smashed, sections 183-184 clear up the point with admirable simplicity: it's *Back To Nature!* We'll return to being "peasants, herdsman, fishermen, and hunters"--just like the pioneer days. How romantic! Except that there is going to be a lot of rusty, broken junk lying around.

Yes, it's to be Thoreau's Walden revisited. But with three crucial differences. First, Thoreau was a pacifist; the author of the Manifesto is not. Thoreau went to jail for refusal to pay tax on the grounds that the revenue would be used for immoral ends (specifically, to procure weapons for an unjust war). The author of the Manifesto does not stand on such high moral ground--his hands are bloody.

Second, Thoreau did not claim that government should or could be done away with in one orgy of purifying destruction. What he said was: "That government is best which governs not at all; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. ... I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government." [*Civil Disobedience*] Men who kill people in order to coerce newspapers into publishing anarchist tripe are not yet responsible enough to live without government. They are merely thugs, not the genuine heirs of Thoreau.

And lastly, practical considerations show that a return to nature is no longer possible on a large scale. The pioneer life is a fragment of romanticized, peculiarly American, nostalgia, as knights and chivalry are to the English. Suppose, for the sake argument, that the prophesied revolution has occurred and that the industrial-technological economy has been shattered. Suppose that Americans return to a pioneer-type life; not a few hundred people in mercenary-defended communes, but three hundred million everywhere across the land. Electric power plants will have been shut down by then, so hundreds of millions of people would have to go back to cutting down trees to cook and keep warm; cement factories will have been torn down by then, so hundreds of millions of people would have to go back to cutting down trees for log cabins; great concentrations of people in cities will have become impossible to feed, so hundreds of millions of people would have to go back to felling forests to clear small farms. Oops, the Nature Boys just buggered their pastoral idyll.

Incidentally, there would be the problem of getting the Brown Shirts to simmer down again after they were done busting up factories and burning down libraries.

One can almost see how the plan would look sensible--to a paranoid schizophrenic misanthropic malcontent who feels impotent. Brilliant it is not.

Why are people susceptible to such intellectual gruel as the Unabomber Manifesto of Sept. 19?

And why now? What makes a nation suddenly suffer a collective crisis of faith and radically underestimate its own achievements and resources? What makes people imagine that they are so unhappy when they are surrounded by such plenty? Doubtless the answer is no less complicated than the great Melting Pot itself. But one obvious place to look is the very success of America during the previous century. It won two World Wars, led its allies in the defeat of both Fascism and Communism, invented the light bulb, walked on the moon, created the Information Revolution, ... Where do you go from the top of a 50-foot pole? America was always the great prophet of progress, and it's beginning to look as though it cannot keep that up forever. That is bound to be a disillusioning and painful comedown. A little national self-doubt and re-assessment is appropriate--just don't overdo it.

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