

Primitivists Love-Hate Relationship With Anthropologists

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My training has been in mathematics, and, while my opinion of the social consequences of scientific progress is highly negative, my personal mode of thinking is thoroughly scientific. I consider most (though not all) philosophy and religion to be humbug...

My acquaintance with [REDACTED] has been through correspondence over the last several months. My impression is that he is very bright and very well-read in his field of interest. Also that he is impetuous and undisciplined. These latter traits probably account, in part, for his lack of competence in analytical reasoning.

—Ted Kaczynski, Math Tutor

Introduction

There exists an interesting divide in both pro- & anti-tech circles, where some people’s politics start from the foundation that human nature is fairly rigid, i.e. we’re born with a range of desires and fairly predictable methods we’ll go about trying to satisfy those desires.

Plus, where some people’s politics start from the foundation that human nature is more flexible, i.e. that we’re born with a range of capabilities, we can learn to desire a wide range of activities, and we’re fairly adaptable in coming up with methods of satisfying those desires.

Here’s a quick table of authors on different sides of this divide:

	More Rigid Human Nature	More Flexible Human Nature
Pro-Tech & Radical Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Kropotkin 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noam Chomsky • Murray Bookchin • Camilla Power • Chris Knight • Jerome Lewis • Bruce Parry • Slavoj Zizek • Jaques Ellul • Lewis Mumford • David Graeber • Saul Newman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Foucault 	
Pro-Tech & Other Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robert Wright • Kristin Andrews 	
Anti-Tech & Radical Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Zerzan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julian Langer
Anti-Tech & Other Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ted Kaczynski 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bob Black

<p>Tech society can exist without stratified hierarchies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-Tech Radicals • Anti-Tech Vanguardists <p>Revolution of some form is justified, possible & desirable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-Tech Vanguardists • Anti-Tech Radicals 	<p>Yes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro-Tech Radicals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro-Tech Radicals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberals 	<p>No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberals
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So, researching how anti-tech people grapple with this divide is interesting for reflecting on how pro-tech people should ideally deal with it too.

In researching Ted Kaczynski fans I've found a few peculiar posts where primitivists seem to be enamored with the descriptive reality of some tribes having unique physical features or capabilities because it's useful to their environment. For example, feet that seem to curl more prominently making it easier to climb trees, or a tribe that can hold their breath underwater for a long time. I think a lot of these capabilities are often just learned skills within one's lifetime e.g. repeatedly climbing trees with a loop strapped around your ankles over a lifetime will have the effect of curling your feet.

So, they start out with this fascination with this descriptive difference and then begin to believe prescriptively that we should all be living as hunter-gatherers, regardless of the intellectual pursuits we'd miss out on.

I think also, many take comfort in believing that there's a simple answer to what lifestyle would give virtually everyone the most amount of purpose in life. Plus that we've only recently gotten off course due to our greed, but our genetic inability to work together will mean 'mother nature' slapping us back down to our correct evolutionary path as separately evolving hunter-gatherers.

Ted held a kind of illiberal ideal, in the sense of valuing 'heroic journeys' more than what's best for the average person.

Quoting Ted:

My guess, or at least my hope, is that certain inconvenient aspects of hunter-gatherer societies (e.g., male dominance, hard work) would turn off the leftists, the neurotics, and the lazies but that such societies, depicted realistically, would remain attractive to the kind of people who could be effective revolutionaries. ...

... each adult male can significantly participate in the important decisions, rather than having these decisions arbitrarily imposed by some vast system.

If a nomadic hunter-gatherer prefers he can wander off by himself, in which case he gets to make all his own decisions. (Example: According to Elizabeth Marshal Thomas's "Harmless People", the bushman Short Kwi spent most of his time off in the Veldt, away from the others, talking with him only his immediate dependents, Viz, his wife, daughter, and mother-in-law.)

...

So, obviously a pregnant woman wouldn't have as easy a time escaping a tyrannical tribe.

Finally, here are two long quotes that detail the divide in both pro- & anti-tech politics.

Here's a quote from *The Unabomber and the origins of anti-tech radicalism*:

Kaczynski's idea of maladaptation also differs in a crucial way from Ellul's. For Ellul, the mismatch between human beings and modern technology is socio-cultural. The problem with 'technique' is that it 'dissociates the sociological forms, destroys the moral framework,

desacralizes men and things, explodes social and religious taboos, and reduces the body social to a collection of individuals'.⁽¹⁾ Chase interprets Kaczynski too as a 'cultural primitivist', comparing him to the 'countless contemporary writers, from the Harvard social philosopher Lewis Mumford to Ellul himself, [who] warned that technological progress threatened the future of culture'.⁽²⁾ However, unlike the cultural and economic critics of technology whom he might have encountered at Harvard, Kaczynski is not particularly concerned with the breakdown of traditional communities or ways of life. Although he acknowledges that 'rapid change and the breakdown of communities have been widely recognized as sources of social problems', he 'do[es] not believe they are enough to account for the extent of the problems that are seen today'.⁽³⁾

If Ellul and Mumford are cultural primitivists, then Kaczynski is a 'bioprimitivist'. He argues that human beings are biologically maladapted to life in a technological society: 'We [i.e. FC] attribute the social and psychological problems of modern society to the fact that that society requires people to live under conditions radically different from those under which the human race evolved'.⁽⁴⁾ Over hundreds of thousands of years, 'natural selection has adapted the human race physically and psychologically' to a 'spectrum of [natural] environments'.⁽⁵⁾ But the Industrial Revolution has drastically altered these environments in the span of a few generations. Kaczynski thinks the mismatch between our hunter-gatherer genes and our technological environments is responsible for many common pathologies, including 'depression, anxiety, guilt, frustration, hostility, spouse or child abuse, insatiable hedonism, abnormal sexual behavior, sleep disorders, [and] eating disorders'.⁽⁶⁾ Whereas Ellul's idea of maladaptation is socio-cultural, Kaczynski's is evolutionary-psychological. The difference between Ellul and Kaczynski thus marks the distinction between cultural primitivism and bioprimitivism.

Kaczynski often couches his idea of maladaptation in his bespoke psychological terms, which have no parallels in Ellul's thought. He argues that human beings have an innate need for 'the power process': '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 his goals'.⁽⁷⁾ The goals that Kaczynski has in mind are basic, biological goals related to survival and reproduction. The power process is the process of using one's own physical and mental power to satisfy one's own biological needs.⁽⁸⁾

Since many people in modern society can obtain the necessities of life without serious effort, they try to satisfy their need for the power process through 'surrogate activities', or activities that are 'directed toward an artificial goal that people set up for themselves merely in order to have some goal to work toward'.⁽⁹⁾ These include hobbies, sports, art, and most importantly for Kaczynski, activism and science. However, 'for many people, maybe the majority, these artificial forms of the power process are insufficient'.⁽¹⁰⁾ Our maladaptation to the technological society thus results from the fact that this form of society cannot satisfy our biologically rooted psychological needs.

⁽¹⁾ Ellul, *The Technological Society*, op. cit., Ref. 10, p. 126.

⁽²⁾ Chase, *A Mind for Murder*, op. cit., Ref. 15, pp. 97–98. On neo-Luddism, see Steven E. Jones, *Against Technology: From the Luddites to Neo-Luddism* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁽³⁾ ISAIF ¶53.

⁽⁴⁾ ISAIF ¶46.

⁽⁵⁾ ISAIF ¶178.

⁽⁶⁾ ISAIF ¶44.

⁽⁷⁾ ISAIF ¶37.

⁽⁸⁾ ISAIF ¶40–41. See also Kaczynski, 'Reflections on Purposeful Work', 1978–1979, later parts 1981–83, Labadie Box 65.

⁽⁹⁾ ISAIF ¶39.

⁽¹⁰⁾ ISAIF ¶64.

In sum, Ellul's ideas constitute the core but by no means the whole of the Manifesto. Kaczynski's systemic understanding of technology, his idea of maladaptation, his critique of leftism, and many of his finer points are derived from *The Technological Society*. But Kaczynski modifies and supplements Ellul's ideas under the influence of evolutionary theory and modern psychology. In particular, the ideas of biological maladaptation, the power process, and surrogate activity are not derived from Ellul.¹

Here's a quote from the recently released book *The Invention of Good and Evil* by Hanno Sauer:

The shift from prehistoric small groups to pre-modern large-scale civilisations has almost always been a shift from communities with an egalitarian structure to social inequality and despotic rule.⁽¹¹⁾ The fact that we still live with extreme social inequalities in wealth, power and status seems to have been the inevitable price to pay for social evolution towards complex large societies. But was it truly inevitable? There are growing doubts about the oversimplified narrative that humans throughout the Pleistocene lived in scattered small groups organised in an egalitarian way.⁽¹²⁾

The anthropologist David Graeber and the archaeologist David Wengrow have warned against falling for the allure of these kinds of simplifications,⁽¹³⁾ and recent research shows that even back then, tens of thousands of years ago, there was a plethora of social structures that were more entrenched, larger and politically more unequal than previously assumed. The popular narrative of the shift from egalitarian tribal societies to large inegalitarian societies prepares us to accept that this shift – and the forms of social inequality and political domination that came with it – was inevitable and had no alternative. What appears to be a sober description of the historical course of events is actually an ideologically charged narrative designed to suffocate our political imagination.

In fact, according to Graeber and Wengrow, we humans have always lived in all kinds of conditions and, regardless of climate and group size, in all kinds of socio-political arrangements. We have always been conscious political actors who would not allow ourselves to be put in an 'evolutionary straitjacket';⁽¹⁴⁾ some micro-societies were familiar with strict hierarchies and despotic exploitation; and the inhabitants of some impressively large indigenous communities of North America with tens of thousands of members made fun of the lack of self-respect shown by the French and English who had just arrived in the New World, cowering in front of their social superiors and kissing their boots. Some societies were familiar with leaders or chiefs, but they were understood to have a serving role; other groups moved effortlessly – depending on the season – between radically divergent political structures, and were free masters of their own destinies during the summer months of abundance, but in the barren winter months would at any given time temporarily subject themselves to the necessary evil of a political sovereign.

The existence of different varieties of socialisation over the course of social evolution is not surprising. The real question is why we are stuck today: why do material inequality and political hierarchy seem to have no alternative, and feel non-negotiable to us? Graeber and

¹ The Unabomber and the origins of anti-tech radicalism

⁽¹¹⁾ Flannery, K. & Marcus, J. (2012). *The Creation of Inequality: How Our Prehistoric Ancestors Set the Stage for Monarchy, Slavery, and Empire*.

⁽¹²⁾ Singh, M. & Glowacki, L. (2022). Human social organization during the Late Pleistocene: Beyond the nomadic-egalitarian model. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 7(22).

⁽¹³⁾ Graeber, D. & Wengrow, D. (2021). *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

⁽¹⁴⁾ *Ibid.* p. 96.

Wengrow rightly point out that thinking about political alternatives is always worthwhile; what would we miss out on if we agreed with Francis Fukuyama that the liberal-democratic-capitalist compromise was the end of history, and the only remaining serious candidate in the competition of political systems?⁽¹⁵⁾

Yet even if we manage to throw a spanner in the works when it comes to simple stories of progression from small and equal to big and unequal, and show that human history has always been a history of intense political plasticity and social variability, in which we largely shaped our coexistence ourselves, could modern large societies really exist without inequality and domination? Perhaps this is precisely the reason why it seems as though we are stuck now: we really are stuck, and beyond returning to radically simpler forms of living – with their own particular blend of romance and harshness – it is very unlikely that developed societies can be organised without considerable socio-political stratification.²

² The Invention of Good and Evil

⁽¹⁵⁾ Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.

The Evolution of Ted's Anthropological Views

1953 — Ted becomes fascinated by Neanderthals

After being moved up a year in school, Ted found it more difficult to make strong friendships and so I think found an escape fantasy in books about Neanderthals living a primitive life. Quoting Ted:

Unquestionably there is no doubt that the reason I dropped out of the technological system is because I had read about other ways of life, in particular that of primitive peoples. When I was about eleven I remember going to the little local library in Evergreen Park, Illinois. They had a series of books published by the Smithsonian Institute that addressed various areas of science. Among other things, I read about anthropology in a book on human prehistory. I found it fascinating. After reading a few more books on the subject of Neanderthal man and so forth, I had this itch to read more. I started asking myself why and I came to the realization that what I really wanted was not to read another book, but that I just wanted to live that way.¹

Quoting Ted's 1979 Autobiography:

... As far as I can remember, the only 2 school subjects that interested me at all were chemistry (and I was interested in chemistry only for its relevance to explosives) and mathematics from the level of trigonometry up ...

... But there was one science that really did interest me strongly, namely, human paleontology. I found it fascinating to read about prehistoric men, their tools, and their way of life as it was conjectured to be by the anthropologists ...

... I suddenly realized that what I wanted was not just to read another book on cave men — I wanted to really live like a cave man. I wanted to live in a cave as a member of a small, isolated group, to run around in a wild landscape hunting Mammoths with a spear, and that sort of thing ...

... One summer when I was 15 or 16, in one of the prairies that still remained then, I threw a clod of earth at a bird. (The bird was bigger than a robin but smaller than a Franklin Grouse.) ... it "froze", and I walked up to it and just picked it up. As soon as I had it in my hand it began struggling violently. I held it in my hand for some time, and I soon began to experience warm, affectionate, pitying feelings for it. When I first threw the mud at the bird, I had hoped to kill it as an act of hunting, in accord my fantasies of primitive life. But now I was turning soft.

I thought, "How can I ever hope to experience a cave-man style life if I am too soft-hearted to kill game? For that kind of life I will have to be hard." So I forced myself to kill the bird by crushing it in my hand. I left the place feeling sick with pity for the unfortunate creature ...²

¹ Theresa Kintz's Interview with Ted Kaczynski

² Ted Kaczynski's 1979 Autobiography

1959–62 — Harvard anthropology classes may have affirmed Ted’s moral relativism

Quoting Ted:

... By the time I was, say, 12 years old, my system of morality had evolved into an abstract, artificial construction that could not possibly be applied in practice. I never told anyone about this system, since I knew they would never take it seriously ...

... After I had skipped 6th grade and began feeling a great deal of hostility toward many of my schoolmates, I developed a habit of trying to find ways of justifying my hatred in terms of my moral system ...

... One day when I was 13 years old, I was walking down the street and saw a girl. Something about her appearance antagonized me, and, from habit, I began looking for a way to justify hating her, within my logical system. But then I stopped and said to myself, “This is getting ridiculous. I’ll just chuck all this silly morality business and hate anybody I please. Since then I have never had any interest in or respect for morality, ethics, or anything of the sort ...

... nevertheless on an instinctive animal level I was still the slave of my early conditioning, so that I was very much afraid to act contrary to the precepts of authority ...³

I believe in nothing. Whereas I don’t even believe in the cult of nature-worshippers or wilderness-worshippers. (I am perfectly ready to litter in parts of the woods that are of no use to me—I often throw cans in logged-over areas or in places much frequented by people; I don’t find wilderness particularly healthy physically; I don’t hesitate to poach.)⁴

Quoting what Ted’s dorm proctor⁵ told his defense team investigators:

In 1958, the dean of freshmen, Dean [Skiddy] Von Stade, decided that as an experiment, all of the underage freshmen who were entering Harvard after only three years of high school, in addition to any freshmen who were noted as being particularly gifted, should be housed by themselves in 8 Prescott, away from all of the normal freshmen. The house was made up of 15 boys, including Ted, and the dorm proctor, Dr. Murphy.

Dr. Murphy had formerly been studying to be a Jesuit priest. Dean Von Stade chose Dr. Murphy to be the dorm proctor for 8 Prescott because he wanted the house to be run like a monastery ...⁶

Here’s a long quote from Alston Chase’s biography of Ted:

In the fall of 1959, Kaczynski moved into Eliot House, N-43. Located under the eaves at the top floor, it had once quartered the masters servants. Now it served as the stable where Harvard housed poorer scholarship students.

N-43 differed from most other undergraduate accommodations of the time. The typical suite, built in the 1930s during the era of gracious living, consisted of a living room, bath, and one or two bedrooms. It had been designed to encourage “gentlemen” to get to know one another

³ Ted Kaczynski’s 1979 Autobiography

⁴ Ted Kaczynski’s 1978–79 Journal

⁵ “Proctors are graduate students and administrators who live in the dorms with students and create an academic and social community for the 20 to 40 first-year students in their entryway.”

⁶ Truth Versus Lies

in genteel surroundings. N-43, by contrast, resembled a cheap hotel. It offered six tiny single rooms, each separately opening onto a narrow hall. No one in N-43 had a “roommate.” Each lived alone. It was Eliot’s ghetto.

During Kaczynski’s undergraduate years, Eliot House reflected the personality of its master, John Finley. A Harvard Ph.D. who had also studied in Athens and Berlin, Finley had been a co-author of the Redbook and was a leading authority on the poets, philosophers, and historians of ancient Greece. He taught one of the most popular courses at the college—Humanities 103, “The Great Age of Athens.” But Finley was also a snob who embodied both the Redbooks WASPish lament for the declining Judeo-Christian tradition and a patricians reverence for the gentleman-scholar. A graduate of Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, he believed in the Greek idea of *arete*, a concept from which we derive our word “aristocrat,” but originally meaning excellence in achievement. And Finley clearly favored those students he saw as intellectual and social aristocrats.

Eliot House mirrored Finley’s academic and social elitism. And although most Harvard houses in those days reflected the values of Boston Brahmin society (Elliott Perkins, the tall, balding master of my own house, Lowell, boasted an even more distinguished lineage), Eliot was more extreme. This house, noted a report of the Harvard Office of Research and Evaluation at about that time, “has long been called cold, snobbish, preppish, ‘the clubby house,’ and ‘the home of the pseudointellectual/All of these titles are, in a sense, true.” Indeed, most undergraduates themselves agreed with this verdict, the report added. Even Eliot House residents viewed it as “aristocratic” and “snobbish.” Residents of the other houses characterized the denizens of Eliot as “wealthy,” “aristocratic,” “snobbish,” “white shoe,” and “conservative.” As Kaczynski’s class yearbook, in 1962, noted:

“The member of Eliot House, the tale goes, is necessarily reserved and unfriendly with those he does not know very well; he is inordinately aware of his personal superiority, whether social, intellectual, or sartorial; he is totally apathetic to what goes on outside his own narrow sphere; he may well be insufferable, he is usually at least pretentious.”

Kaczynski’s impressions confirmed this image. The other Eliot House students, he wrote, were “unimaginative, conventional, suit-and-tie-wearing types,” and “uninteresting, not to say dull.” Years later, he would note in “Truth vs. Lies” that

there was a good deal of snobbery at Harvard... The house master, John Finley apparently was surrounded by an in-group or clique... The house master often treated me with insulting condescension... As a result, when my first attempts to make friends met with a cool reception, I just gave up and became solitary.

Thus, Harvard’s social environment, dominated by the values and fears of an elite in eclipse, merged with—and reinforced—an intellectual climate engendered by the Cold War and characterized by concerns about positivism and progress. The resulting mix was unusually potent.

Although I cannot say exactly what Kaczynski read, we took the same or closely similar courses in expository writing, German literature, deductive and inductive logic, Western literature and philosophy, and the history of Science, and I know what books he encountered there. Indeed, it would have been impossible for him not to have encountered—at the dining commons, evening bull sessions, and tutorials as well as in course readings—the ideas that infused students’ intellectual and emotional lives during this period.

The Gen Ed courses in social Science quickly introduced us to the relativity of morals and the irrationality of religion. To establish that ethical standards were merely expressions of Western cultural mores, we were assigned to read works by anthropologists such as Mar-

garet Mead (*Coming of Age in Samoa*), Edward Westermarck (*Ethical Relativity*), William Graham Sumner (*Folkways*), and Ruth Benedict (*Patterns of Culture*). We were introduced to logical positivism and emotivism through the works of A. J. Ayer (*Language, Truth and Logic*), Charles L. Stevenson (*Ethics and Language*), and countless other writers who had absorbed the messages of these doctrines.

In Humanities 5, or “Ideas of Man and the World in Western Thought” (also known as “Hum 5”), we read Freud’s polemic against religious faith, *The Future of an Illusion*, which dismisses the belief that life has purpose as a mere expression of infantile desires and as confirming that “man is a creature of weak intelligence who is governed by his instinctual wishes.”

A life without God, meaning, or value is a difficult one to live. Not surprisingly, therefore, our reading lists were heavily laced with the works of existentialist philosophers and novelists—best-selling writers in the 1950s—such as Camus and Sartre, who sought to come to terms with the conclusions of Science and thereby make sense of an existence Science revealed to be “absurd.”

In Hum 5, we read Karl Marx warn of “the intellectual desolation artificially produced by converting immature human beings into mere machines.” We read Camus’s observation in *The Myth of Sisyphus* that “The absurd is the essential concept and the first truth,” as well as Sartre’s bleak description of the human condition in *Being and Nothingness* that “I carry the weight of the world by myself alone without anything or any person being able to lighten it... I am abandoned in the world ... alone and without help, engaged in a world for which I bear the whole responsibility without being able, whatever I do, to tear myself away from this responsibility for an instant.”

In expository writing, we encountered Thorstein Veblen’s prediction that “so long as the machine process continues to hold its dominant place as a disciplinary factor in modern culture, so long must the spiritual and intellectual life of this cultural era maintain the character which the machine process gives it.” We discovered Erich Fromm, complaining how technology contributes to the “insignificance and powerlessness of the individual.” We read Norbert Wiener, developer at MIT of the new Computer mathematics known as cybernetics, who warned that unless human nature changes, the “new industrial revolution ... [makes it] practically certain that we shall have to face a decade or more of ruin and despair.”

At least Mead, Westermarck, Sumner, Benedict, Ayer, Stevenson, Veblen, Fromm, and Wiener were, comparatively speaking, among the Harvard curriculums optimists. They believed and even embraced the message of Science. From writers who rejected Science we heard even more powerful warnings of imminent cultural collapse. In *Modern Man Is Obsolete* (1945), we encountered Norman Cousins’s cautionary remarks about “the power of total destruction as potentially represented by modern Science... The full dimensions of the peril must be seen and recognized. Only then will man realize that the first order of business is the question of continued existence.”

In German R (“Intermediate German with Review of Fundamentals”), which both Kaczynski and I took, we encountered a whole corpus of pessimistic writers, from Nietzsche—“God is dead” ... “Morality is the herd instinct of the individual”... “The thought of suicide is a great source of comfort”—to Spengler—“This machine-technics will end with the Faustian civilization and one day will lie in fragments, forgotten—our railways and steamships as dead as the Roman roads and the Chinese wall, our giant cities and skyscrapers in ruins like old Memphis and Babylon.”

And no student could negotiate the Gen Ed curriculum without encountering the great Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky, whose works suffused both the humanities and the social Science curricula. In *Notes from Underground*, we met the distilled philosophy of

alienation in the person of the Underground man, himself a victim of a civilization that had lost all values, who for twenty years had lived alone in his apartment, seldom going out, nursing his anger and plotting revenge against society. In passages eerily similar to Kaczynski's journal entries twenty years later, the Underground man expostulated:

I am a sick man ... I am a spiteful man. I am a most unpleasant man... No hunchback, no dwarf could be more prone to resentment and offence than I... People who are able to wreak vengeance on an assailant, and in general to stand up for themselves—how do they do it? It can only be supposed that momentarily their whole being is possessed by a desire for revenge, and no other element is ... in them.

In *Crime and Punishment*, we read what could have been a description of Kaczynski's thoughts while living in his Montana cabin twenty-nine years later: "I did not kill a human being, but a principle!" And in several courses we read Joseph Conrad, who would later become one of Kaczynski's favorite writers, and whose novel, *The Secret Agent*, he would adopt as a virtual Unabomber manual.

Most ubiquitous of all in the Gen Ed curriculum were the writings of the social philosopher and historian Lewis Mumford, who observed in *The Conduct of Life* (1951) that "we have created an industrial order geared to automatism, where feeble-mindedness, native or acquired, is necessary for docile productivity in the factory; and where a pervasive neurosis is the final gift of the meaningless life that issues forth at the other end."

"The achievements of modern technology," Mumford wrote in *Science and Man* (1942),

have been part of a culture whose central theme was the seizure and exploitation of power.

It ... led to the ruthless exploitation of natural resources, the breakup of the natural balance of organisms, and the extermination of many valuable cultural traditions... The very illusion of moral progress that was fostered by the prevailing optimistic philosophy of the nineteenth century tended to conceal the vast hiatus between technological and social achievements.

Those who have put their faith in mechanical inventions and in the power theme have failed to see that only a modicum of our constant human needs is encompassed by the machine or included in the territory it conquers.

And in *The Condition of Man* (1944), Mumford concluded that

The last thirty years have been witnessing the active disintegration of Western civilization... Everywhere the machine holds the center and the personality has been pushed to the periphery Western man has exhausted the dream of mechanical power which so long dominated his imagination ... he can no longer let himself remain spellbound in that dream: He must attach himself to more humane purposes than those he has given to the machine. We can no longer live, with the illusions of success, in a world given over to devitalized mechanisms, de-socialized organisms, and depersonalized societies: a world that had lost its sense of the ultimate dignity of the person...

Along the way, some of us encountered Eugene O'Neill, several of whose plays, as we've seen, warned against the dangers of technology

"I'm thinkin' he wouldn't use the telegraph or telephone or radio," a character remarks in *Dynamo*, "for they're contraptions that belong to His archenemy Lucifer, the God of

Electricity.” And we pitied another O’Neill character, Yank Smith in *The Hairy Ape*, who finds that technological civilization has no place for him. Talking to a gorilla through the bars at the zoo, Smith asks: “Ain’t we both members of the same club— the Hairy Apes? ... I was lookin’ at de skyscrapers—Steel—and all de ships comin’ in, sailin’ out, all over de oith—and dy was Steel, too ... on’y I couldn’t get *in* it, see? I couldn’t belong to dat. It was over my head... Where do I fit in?”

Many undergraduates during that time would ask, “Where do I fit in?” Socially isolated by Harvards elitist contempt for popular culture and depressed by the metaphysical angst of the readings, some would become what a later dean of the faculty, Henry Rosovsky, dubbed “lumpenstudenten”—the undergraduate underclass that fell through the cracks without leaving a trace.

Finally, quoting one of Ted’s teachers:

Well, *somebody* had to have taught Ted Kaczynski freshman composition at Harvard. I remember thinking about that hapless teaching assistant as I read the turgid manifesto that the Unabomber published in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* before he was caught. “Plenty of interesting ideas here,” I might have written on his essay, had he handed in that tome in my class, “but connections among the ideas and to your sources seem to be missing. And have you considered the ethical implications of what you are asserting?” Like everyone else but the FBI and the Unabomber victims, I then put the whole business out of my mind.

But later, after an intense call from an FBI agent, I had to face the terrible fact: Kaczynski had been in my class, Gen Ed A, as we called it at Harvard in the fall of 1958, and I had had my chance to influence his thinking and writing. Oh, yes, the agent said, there was no question, he had been my student. What grade had I given him? I asked. That, it turned out, crazily enough, was classified information. No, I told the FBI, I couldn’t remember anything at all about him or his writing from that class over 40 years ago. I had no records. As I thought about my role in this story I began to shiver: at least I had not remained enough in his mind to receive one of his lethal mailings.

All I know for sure about that class, these reflective years after the FBI called, is what I asked my students to read. There on my shelf sit the texts we used: *Inquiry and Expression: A College Reader* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958) and *The Logic and Rhetoric of Exposition* (same publisher and date). Both of them were edited and written by the directors of Gen Ed A, Harold Martin and Richard Ohmann. What, I ask, as I leaf through their crumbling pages, did Ted Kaczynski take away from those readings?

My eye stops at the third group of readings under “Defining” in the textbook. Here are Plato and Aristotle defining virtue, followed by William James, the good American pragmatist arguing that virtue must be defined through action. Next comes Bertrand Russell’s evocative essay on “Science and Ethics,” which stresses the subjectivity of values: “All systems of ethics embody the desires of those who advocate them, but this fact is concealed in a mist of words.” The last reading in this section is from *Huckleberry Finn*, the powerful scene in which Huck lies to some slave hunters to save his father figure Jim, a terribly hard ethical choice for Mark Twain’s hero because all his training taught him that such an act would surely send him to hell.

My teaching copy of the book is thick with marginal notes, discussion questions, and underlinings. We spent plenty of class time discussing ethical behavior in that class. But I cannot remember just what topics I assigned for the weekly student essays. First-year students then

and now are ever-ready to question the givens of ethical behavior and to work out for themselves ways to make their mark on the world. Our job is to help them see these questions in a long and deep tradition of questioning. How did these questions intersect the troubles surely already bubbling in Kaczynski's mind?

The next section heavily marked by my youthful pencil is entitled "About Machines and Men" and as I reread I am struck by its timeliness as well as by echoes from the Unabomber manifesto. Friedrich Juenger writes in 1948 that machines bring poverty rather than abundance: "The consuming, devouring, gluttonous motion racing through time restlessly and insatiably, reveals that never stilled and never to be stilled hunger of the machine." Paul Ziff writes about "The Feelings of Robots," and A.

M. Turing (now known as the inventor of the computer) is represented by a 1950 essay on whether machines can think, a question he finally considers pointless, though I recall us debating it furiously. Turing is prophetic and optimistic: "Nevertheless I believe that at the end of the century the use of words and general educated opinion will have altered so much that one will be able to speak of machines thinking without expecting to be contradicted." It takes my breath away.

Other sections of the book appear to have had very little influence on Kaczynski's apparent later career. I see thickly annotated chapters on "Concrete and Abstract Language," "Stock Language and Jargon," and two entire sections on "The Economy of Style." Along with every teacher of first-year college writing then and now, I know I spent much time trying to trim away the high-flown verbosity and abstract language of my students. I wonder what I said to Kaczynski. I wonder what I wrote on his papers. I wonder what he took away from our reading and his writing. It is clear that he was not untouched by them.

Of course, thousands of students used these books—read and wrote about these essays—and only one became the Unabomber. We know much less than we should about what it is that twists minds into murderous behavior, what influences play and interplay in disturbed minds, how reading of any sort relates to behavior. Ideas of any kind are dangerous, but first-year college students must encounter ideas of all sorts if they are to enter upon a serious education.

And yet, like any teacher, I am in part defined by my former students. I'm proud of most them, savoring their accomplishments, particularly when they become published writers. I know that any one teacher has only a slight effect, but, as the old saying goes, we never know quite where the influence stops. Was there some point, some 40 years ago in that barren classroom in Cambridge, when I might have done or said something to change Kaczynski's direction? Or worse, was there a moment of callousness in response, or insensitivity to the ethical implications of the reading, that triggered murder in my student's troubled mind? Mercifully, I can never know the answer to that question, though I think I will be asking it for some time. All reading is dangerous and every student has possibilities we hardly imagine.⁷

Ted reflects on his scientific interests

Quoting a brief autobiographical sketch that Ted wrote in the fall of 1959, for Professor Henry Murray as part of the psychological study Ted participated in:

I was always academically and scientifically Inclined. My enthusiasm for various branches of science ran in this order: Paleontology, Astronomy, Nuclear Physics, Anthropology (physical

⁷ A Mind for Murder

anthropology mainly, which I am still interested in), and finally, and apparently for good, Mathematics... I've never been able to make up my mind what I want to be in later life; but it's always been something vaguely related to academic or scientific work. I never accepted anyone as a model to emulate. I can't think of any particular qualities I admired in people, but I always respected anyone who had some really outstanding ability, at anything at all.⁸

Neanderthal Homework

In a Harvard Uni. Anthropology undergraduate class paper, written around 1960, a young around 17-year-old Ted Kaczynski argued against the consensus classifications of various hominins by discussing the merits of different interpretations of various skull shapes:

- Neanderthal Man (partially typed-up copy)
- Neanderthal Man (photoscan of handwritten paper)

He also made a few analogies to races among 20th-century humans which I'm not sure would be encouraged today because of how race is a socially loaded concept that isn't easily reduced to 'these people that have more melanin than these people', but I could be wrong:

... Thus it is wrong to call Rhodesian-Sahara Man a "Neanderthal", or to make him a race of the same species, for two reasons: first, it would imply a close genetic relationship where the similarities are not sufficient to prove such a relationship; second, it would imply that Rhodesian Man fits in morphologically with the special Neanderthal group, while he does not; the differences are greater than any present-day racial differences. The term "Neanderthal" should be reserved for those fossils exhibiting a majority of the special characteristics of the European Neanderthals, as these form a natural grouping.

Here's the selection of books he was drawing from and referencing:

Boule and Vallois, *Fossil Men*, New York, 1957.

Gorjanović-Kramberger, *Der diluviale Mensch von Krapina in Kroatien — Studien über Entwicklungsmechanik des Primatskelettes* (edited by O. Walkhoff), Zweit Lieferung. Wiesbaden, 1906

Hooton, *Up From the Ape*, New York, 1959.

Howells, *Mankind in the Making*, New York, 1959.

Zeuner, *The Age of Neanderthal Man*, London, 1940

Hundert Jahre Neanderthaler, Gedenkbuch der Internationalen Neanderthal-Feier, Köln, Böhlau, 1958

I don't believe Ted would have been able to read German at this young age, so the German text was likely a quote within one of the other books.

Interestingly this book was edited by an early nazi scientist called Otto Walkhoff. Ted likely didn't know this, and he may have been the most intuitively anti-racist person in the world, but regardless, it's an interesting historical connection. So, I guess this makes it more likely Ted was drawing on a pseudoscience source.

⁸ Ted Kaczynski's 1959 Autobiography (Tabled Version).

Reading about Indiana Forest Indians

Quoting Ted:

After I entered Harvard University I took some courses in anthropology, which taught me more about primitive peoples and gave me an appetite to acquire some of the knowledge that enabled them to live in the wild. For example, I wished to have their knowledge of edible plants.⁹

I did a great deal of reading of first-hand accounts of Indiana Forest Indians as members of their tribes. Anthropologists accounts of primitives first to contact of descriptions of taboos, rituals, social customs, etc. This tells us no more about these societies than our own society. To know what it really feels like to live in a primitive society, we should need the accounts of those who have wholly or at least partly shared the goals of the members of that society, rather than viewing that society as an object of scientific curiosity. The accounts I read of men who lived with the Indians—including some who were captured in childhood and grew up as Indians – seem to indicate that many eastern forest groups had a very free and individualistic kind of life. At times the Indians would gather together in villages. At other times they would disperse at will in small groups, as for the winter hunt. Small groups of hunters might wander off into the forest for long periods, obeying only their own sweet will. These groups could break up and recombine with other groups. For instance, one white man who lived as an Indian for five years described how he spent a winter with only an old Indian far off in the forest with only one Indian for company. Once a solitary Indian of another tribe came into their camp and they gave him some meat... but I am digressing too far.¹⁰

Ted gets his best grade in Anthropology

Kaczynski graduated Harvard with a B.A. in mathematics in 1962. When he graduated, his GPA was 3.12, scoring B's in the History of Science, Humanities and Math, C in History and A's in Anthropology and Scandinavian (Stampfl, 2006).¹¹

1970s — Ted discusses primitive societies with his brother David

Quoting David:

More and more, Ted's intellectual interests shifted from mathematics to anthropology. He especially enjoyed reading about "primitive" tribes. Once, invoking his vision of an ideal society, he described to me hunter-gatherer communities based on reciprocity and trust—"You know ... like our family." If someone had told me that in another five years Ted would be writing letters of bitter recrimination to our parents, I would have been surprised, if not shocked. As late as the late 1970s, he invited me to join him in a quest for remote land in the Canadian wilderness where we could live together far from the bane of civilization. By

⁹ Excerpts from Letter to M.K. (1st Edition)

¹⁰ Ted Kaczynski's 1979 Autobiography

¹¹ The Mathematical Work of Ted Kaczynski

then, however, it was clear to me that I would be quite unhappy to let my life shrink to one relationship with my civilization-hating brother.

On my next visit home, Mom handed me a book—*This Stranger, My Son*, by Louise Wilson—and asked me to read it. Wilson’s book describes the journey of a mother seeking to understand and obtain help for her mentally ill son. She describes in painful detail her son’s distorted perceptions of the world; the psychiatrists’ inclination to blame the parents (particularly the mother); her own sense of guilt and shame; the unavailability of effective help; never knowing precisely where her son’s authentic self ended and where his intractable mental illness took over; her endless worry over her son’s problems and uncertain future; and, above all, the disintegration of her son’s peace and happiness.

When I finished reading the book, I handed it back to Mom and asked, “Mom, did you ask me to read this book because it reminded you of Ted?”

She was quiet for a moment. Then she said, “Well, parts of it really *did* make me think of your brother. Did you have the same feeling?” I could see the searching concern in her eyes. “Yes, well, there are some resemblances.”

When I was young, I tended to see Mom as the outlier. In contrast to Dad and Teddy (and me too, as a would-be member of a conventionally male club that prized rationality over feeling), Mom at times celebrated strong emotions.

My most vivid memory of this comes from a family vacation we took when I was in middle school. On a long drive to some forest camping spot in another state, Mom began to expound with enthusiasm on the classical Greek tragedies. She was fresh from reading Sophocles’s *Antigone*. Mom explained the drama’s plot, which entailed suicides, a sibling rivalry, an intense conflict between Antigone’s sense of justice and the law, and a blood bond stronger than life itself. I found the story inexplicable and troubling. Antigone’s irrational need to sacrifice her own life in defense of her dead brother’s honor seemed gratuitous, disproportional. It accomplished nothing; it only spread more misery. At every turn and twist of the story, I thought there surely could have been a way out of fate’s trap, if only the characters had had the foresight and sense to make rational choices.

I remember that Dad at some point lit a cigarette (one of the thousands that would eventually doom him) and Teddy rolled down his window and waved the smoke outside with exaggerated gestures. I wanted to do the same with *Antigone*.

How could Mom find nobility in such conflict and violence? Mom’s emotional exuberance clashed with my need for emotional stability, my grounding in what I regarded as reality.

How could following one’s principles lead to disaster? How could Antigone’s (or anyone’s) vital life force be converted into a death force?

I tried to be dismissive: Mom was a female given to emotional excess; the story took place a long, long time ago; it was, after all, *just* a story. What could it possibly have to do with us?

1975(?) — Ted writes to his favorite author — sociologist & philosopher Jaques Ellul

Evoking a similar sentiment to Karl Marx, Jaques Ellul, and even the characters in Frank Herbert's famous Dune novel,¹² Ted believed history needed to 'become unblocked'. Ted believed humanity was on a boring oppressive determinist track, however a future point in time may arrive when the unblocking of creativity will allow for the future to become uncertain.

Ted's manifesto was to a large extent a condensed American vernacular version of Ellul's *The Technological Society* which Ted zealously re-read and loved, but this book was meant to be read in tandem with *Autopsy of Revolution* which Ted really didn't like. He wrote to Ellul about the latter book in a way that I think showed he didn't fully understand how Ellul's arguments all tied together. As I think he simply read into the text what he wanted to be there and not what was actually written. Quoting Ted:¹³

In the section Aims of Revolution you say, "the issue is not technology per se, but the present structure of society." In the section Focus of Revolution, you say that the revolution must be "against the technological society not against technology." Further on, you indicate that we must "master technology". This seems to suggest the notion that we can have an advanced technology and still avoid the bad aspects of the technological society. If this is what you meant, then the idea is probably incorrect, and very dangerous.

Also, quoting Sean Fleming, a political science research fellow:¹⁴

I think what's interesting about the relationship between Kaczynski and Ellul is not just that Ellul influenced Kaczynski, but also that Ellul anticipated a lot of Kaczynski's arguments and tried to pre-empt them. He anticipated that someone much like Kaczynski would eventually come along and try to use his arguments to justify a violent revolution against technology. He tried to head that off in advance.

So, I think Ellul is a great person to read for both a critique of technological overconsumption and an antidote to the rigid position of Kaczynski.¹⁵

If we see technique as nothing but objects that can be useful (and we need to check whether they are indeed useful); and if we stop believing in technique for its own sake or that of society; and if we stop fearing technique, and treat it as one thing among many others, then we destroy the basis for the power technique has over humanity.

Finally, here's a long quote from Ted discussing natural selection and his desire to withdraw funding from scientific research:

Dear Professor Ellul

I greatly admire your books—those of them that I have had the opportunity to read—especially *The Technological Society*, which I have read through completely at least six times. However, the purpose of this letter is to make a number of comments—some of them negative—related to the idea of revolution that you put forward in *Autopsy of Revolution*. I apologize for writing to you in English rather than French, but my knowledge of French is very rudimentary, at best.

¹² How Dune destroys Determinism

¹³ Ted Kaczynski's Letter to Ellul

¹⁴ Kaczynski, Ellul, and the Future of Anti-Tech Radicalism with Sean Fleming

¹⁵ Perspectives on Our Age by Jacques Ellul & Willem H. Vanderburg

1. It appears to me that, as long as the technological society exists, the kind of revolution you advocate can never occur. I don't think I have to explain why—you could probably explain it better yourself than I could. But I would go further than you seem to, and may that such a revolution is beyond the bounds of reasonable possibility. (However, there *may* be other means of destroying the technological society. I shall make a suggestion along these lines later on.)

2. At the beginning of the section Focus of Revolution (Autopsy of Revolution, Chapter 5) you apparently refer to your revolution as an “explosion”. Presumably you mean that the technological society is to disintegrate suddenly and emotionally. But in this case it is probable that the technological society would be destroyed only for a very short time.

You can hardly be so hopeful as to suppose that everyone without exception, will participate in your revolution. There will surely remain a minority who are very willing to use technique for their own ends. In the chaos following revolution the antitechnical majority will be unable to act together effectively because they will be unorganized (destruction of organization in one of the main objective of your revolution). But the ideas of organization would remain, so would a good deal of material technique (machines, weapons, etc.) and some sophistication concerning propaganda and the like. Certain minorities would organize themselves and attempt to salvage as much of this technique is possible. The rest of the population (being unorganized) would be unable to control this, and the advantages of technique would eventually give power to the minorities who exploit the technique most effectively. Thus (within, say, a decade or two) some kind of technological society would be re-created. There is a process of natural selection (as we may call it) operating here. Technique always wins because (by definition) it is the most efficient system. The unorganized situation following a violent revolution would give free play to this natural selection.

3. This point about natural selection deserves further discussion. First, two examples.

(a) Why did agricultural societies supplant hunting and-gathering societies throughout the world? Certainly not because man chose agriculture as a preferable way of life: Hunting game and gathering wild vegetable foods involves interesting and varied work and leaves considerable leisure time; primitive agriculture typically requires a great deal of monotonous drudgery. The common notion of the primitive hunter as being constantly engaged in an unremitting struggle with the “hostile” forces of nature is nonsense. It is civilized man who sees nature as hostile: The hunter feels very much at home in his environment, and, as noted above, he generally has ample leisure time. In any case, I do not know of a single hunting-and-gathering culture that has voluntarily become agricultural when introduced to that way of life through contact with civilization. These people embrace agriculture only when the loss of their hunting grounds leaves them no other choice.

So why did agriculture triumph everywhere? The answer seems clear. Leaving aside the question of how the first agricultural societies arose, once such societies had come into being it was inevitable that they should spread over the whole world, simply because of their superior economic efficiency. Agriculture can support a vastly denser population than hunting and gathering can. Because an army of several hundred can always defeat a little band of ten or twenty hunters, it follows that whenever agriculturalists wanted land occupied by hunter-gatherers, they were in a position to ...

7. I would like to suggest a different approach to the problem of the technological society. I can foresee that at the outset you will strongly object to what I propose, but if you will take the trouble to continue reading, you may find that I mean something different from what you expect.

An organization should be formed having as its object the ending of all government financial assistance to scientific research (in the nation in which the organization is first formed, to start with). If successful in this, the organisation would then proceed to attack research support by universities and corporations. IN order to have any chance of success, this organisation would have to use propaganda and every other technical means for arousing public antagonism to scientific progress. For a start, the organization would try to get a small following; contributions of money from this small following hopefully would make it possible to obtain services of experts in such fields as advertising and public relations, which in turn would make it possible to obtain a larger following, and so forth. The propaganda would be directed at the average man (it seems unlikely that it would be possible to get the support of the more-or-less intellectual groups) and would attack not present technology, but technological progress. (Most persons would be frightened at any suggestion that they must give up those aspects of technology to which they have already become addicted, and it would be hopeless to ask them to refrain from buying that shiny new toy they see in the advertisement or in the shop window. But there is widespread cynicism, and even antagonism, toward many of the technological advances that are predicted for the future. Propaganda would have to build on this.) There is probably no hope of obtaining the general support of the class (journalists and so forth) which controls the bulk of propaganda in a “democratic” society; but, since this semi-intellectual class already harbors certain misgivings about technical progress, one would attempt to explain the motives of the organisation in terms acceptable to them, and this might succeed in gaining an ambivalent attitude on their part, rather than their uniform hostility to the proposed organization.

I will try to anticipate your objections to this proposal, and answer them.

Objection A. The objective of the proposed organisation is far too limited. Ending government support of technical progress would not end all progress (specifically in areas like administrative technique, etc.). Besides, an end to technical progress should only (at best) prevent the present situation from becoming worse. Our real objective must be to end the technological society, recover some kind of human values, and so forth.

ANSWER. These objections are correct if we consider only immediate consequences. But let us look further ahead.

By *formal* technical research I mean projects specifically organized for research purposes and conducted by teams of professional technicians. I do not have access to actual statistics, but I think that, in the United States at least, the majority of such research is directly or indirectly dependent on public funds.

If most formal research were halted, then: Progress would be nearly stopped in most areas of *material* technique (aeronautics, neurophysiology, biochemistry, computer science, etc.) and in wide areas of psychology. Progress would continue for a time in such areas as propaganda, business administration, and the less scientific areas of psychology, but it seems clear that, if formal research were stopped, there would be eventual stagnation in *all technical fields, because much progress in the less scientific areas of technique is dependent on progress in formal areas of technique is dependent on progress in formal technique (propaganda and radio, business administration and computers, education and experimental psychology), and because it appears that in any technique there is a point beyond which further progress is impossible without formally organized research. Note that it is the most advanced areas of technique that are not formal.

... if formal technical research were once stopped, we would see a gradual deterioration of technique—at least of *material* technique. If this deterioration continued for a sufficient length

of time, then (since the technological society cannot exist without its material techniques) the technological society would eventually die.

Note that the organization I have proposed *would not be attempting to re-create human values, to liberate man, or anything of the sort*. It would only be attempting to use (or misuse, if you prefer) technique (propaganda) in such a way as to cause the death of the technological society. (Compare it to driving an automobile over a cliff. You use the motive power of the automobile itself to destroy the automobile.)

BUT, if the technological society were once destroyed, then anything *might* become possible, such as recovery of human values, individual autonomy, or anything else. In your terminology, history would become unblocked.

Of course, it may not be entirely certain that the death of the technological society would follow from a stoppage of formal research; but it does seem very likely. Anyway, whatever you may think of the details of the above arguments, it seems hardly open to doubt that an end to government support of research would be a very powerful blow against the technological society, both materially and (especially) psychologically.

Objection B. A process of natural selection, as described in 2. above, would prevent the destruction of the technological society in any case.

ANSWER. In the very long run it seems probable (perhaps [CROSSED OUT TEXT] not certain) that technique must eventually triumph. In the shorter run this need not be so. The *goal* (attainable or not) of the proposal under consideration is a gradual rather than an explosive disintegration of the technological society. Present governments would remain in control so that minorities could not seize power as so often happens in violent revolution (see 2. above). Society would remain organized but (we hope) this organization would be decaying. After this decay passed a certain point, organized society would have to fall apart (after which the process of natural selection would set in). But it would be a long time before this point was reached, and by that time so much technique would have been lost that it might take centuries for it to be rebuilt.

Of course, all this is somewhat speculative. All I am doing is pointing out a *possible* (conjectural) route, the first milestone of which would be the end of government-supported research. If that milestone were once reached it would be time to re-examine the prospects and decide where to go from that point.¹⁶

1979 — ‘Hiding between the cracks of the Roman Empire’ Ideal

Quoting Ted’s 1979 Journal:

From things that I have written in some of my earlier notes, some people may assume that I tend to idealize hunting-and-gathering societies. This is not exactly true. Let me explain my view of these societies. They have the following good points:

Because a nomadic hunting-gathering society is more or less egalitarian and has very few members as compared to a modern society, each adult male can significantly participate in the important decisions, rather than having these decisions arbitrarily imposed by some vast system.

¹⁶ Ted Kaczynski’s Letter to Jacques Ellul

If a nomadic hunter-gatherer prefers he can wander off by himself, in which case he gets to make all his own decisions. (Example: According to Elizabeth Marshal Thomas’s “Harmless People”, the bushman Short Kwi spent most of his time off in the Veldt, away from the others, talking with him only his immediate dependents, viz, his wife, daughter, and mother-in-law.)

I suspect that this freedom would make serious rebellion a rare thing in nomadic hunting band. But, if a member of such a band does feel a need to rebel against or escape permanently from his group, he has a much better chance of success than a member of today’s world — encompassing technological society, simply because a hunting-gathering band is a very small and weak society, compared to modern societies. This, in fact, is the biggest reason for my preferring primitive to modern societies — small, weak society means individual is comparatively strong and significant; whereas individual in modern society is totally impotent and insignificant.

Some people imagine primitive hunters must be crude, bestial, or degraded. I have argued against this elsewhere. It can be argued that primitive hunters have more of what we call “noble” qualities than modern man. But, whether this “noble savage” idea has any truth to it or not, it is of minimal interest to me, because, to me, all of mankind (with possible rare individual exceptions) is contemptible. It is true that recently I’ve come to be more tolerant of human failings, but I am still strongly aware of these failings, and despise them, even though I may feel friendly toward certain individuals exhibiting those failings. The failings to which I principally refer are irrationality, unclear thinking, and inability to liberate oneself from values and assumptions that one has been trained to accept. Some people imagine that modern man are more liberated from the “official” value of their society than are men of traditional societies. To one like me, who is a social outsider, this is not so clear, since, to a real outsider, it is obvious that most of those who imagine themselves to be nonconformists are really slavish conformists. (Imagine people who believe in racial equality, sexual equality, nonviolence and the transcendent value of art and philosophy, describing themselves as nonconformists! Do they imagine that they invented these ideologies themselves?) However it may be that there really is more psychological freedom in today’s society than in a hunting society, because our society is transitional: traditional psychological controls are breaking down, while the far more effective psychological controls that technique is providing have not yet come close to being fully supplemented. I wouldn’t venture to say which kind of society offers more psychological freedom, not having any personal experience in a hunting society. Also, it is possible I may even be wrong in assuming that a hunting society provides more physical freedom, because, not having lived in such a society, I can’t be absolutely certain.

In any case, even the most primitive society carries in it the seeds of what I consider evil, since all societies have the potential for eventual “progress” toward civilization. Thus I am more inclined to wish that the human race would become extinct.

Now, considering hunting and gathering as an *economic* form — this I *do* idealize. By this I mean that I would rather make my living by hunting, gathering plant foods, and making my own clothing, implements, etc., than in any other way I can think of. Here I do have some personal experience to go on.¹⁷

The ‘small is beautiful’ / ‘desert from cities’ / ‘hide between the cracks of oppressive governments’ ideal motivates some people’s shift towards libertarian politics. It also leads to some bad politics, anthropology and history:

- Indigenous history: an antidote to the zomia theory? — IIAS

¹⁷ Ted Kaczynski’s journal in May of 1979

- To Zomia or not to Zomia — Savage Minds
- Chris Knight’s theory of human origins: an abridged account

1983 — Ted begins to spend more time reading in his cabin

Around the time Ted turned 40-years-old, Ted decided to cut contact with his parents, partly due to an incident in which he worried they might draw police attention to his local property destruction and national bombings.

Ted then committed himself to reading about how societies develop in order to think through what role he wanted to play as a terrorist and how he would articulate himself in messages to the media.

Quoting Ted:

The best place, to me, was the largest remnant of this plateau that dates from the tertiary age. It’s kind of rolling country, not flat, and when you get to the edge of it you find these ravines that cut very steeply in to cliff-like drop-offs and there was even a waterfall there. It was about a two days hike from my cabin. That was the best spot until the summer of 1983. That summer there were too many people around my cabin so I decided I needed some peace. I went back to the plateau and when I got there I found they had put a road right through the middle of it... [His voice trails off; he pauses, then continues,] You just can’t imagine how upset I was. It was from that point on I decided that, rather than trying to acquire further wilderness skills, I would work on getting back at the system. Revenge. That wasn’t the first time I ever did any monkeywrenching, but at that point, that sort of thing became a priority for me... I made a conscious effort to read things that were relevant to social issues, specifically the technological problem. For one thing, my concern was to understand how societies change, and for that purpose I read anthropology, history, a little bit of sociology and psychology, but mostly anthropology and history.¹⁸

In 2009 Ted answered the question; ‘How/when did you decide to bomb?’ by discussing a journal entry on August 14, 1983 where he re-committed himself to another series of bombings because of some environmental destruction he witnessed locally. However, Ted had already sent 7 bombs by this point and had set off in his car with the plan to murder a scientist before he ever even moved to Montana. So, I think journal entries like these have contributed to a mythology around Ted that he was an ‘academic savant who rejected society to live in the wild, and only struck back at technology because of its continued encroachment on his wilderness life’. But obviously, the timeframe for Ted feeling lost and first planning to kill started long before that.

I think this archetypal mythologising is a mirror image of Euro-American narratives of the ‘last wild Indian and the noble savage’. The ‘noble savage’ is admired for starting out a Wildman fighting a justified war against his oppressors and who then becomes someone who could teach the white man his wisdom; whereas Ted is perceived by some as having gone in the opposite direction, of being someone who had all the capabilities and drive to become well accomplished academically early on in life in advanced society, but who chose to reject society to ‘go into the wilds and fight a justified war’.

Regardless of the truth or usefulness of these noble savage stories, when we see people who even vaguely resemble them, they are often very emotionally impactful because it’s a striking reminder on such an intuitive level that this fight to preserve wildlife habitat and low-impact ways of living are being lost. How we have failed to organize well-thought-out and sufficient resistance to the powers that bring about this environmental destruction.

¹⁸ Theresa Kintz’s Interview with Ted Kaczynski

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I found an excellent review of two books that discuss anthropology's early beginnings as a field and the sad story of a displaced native Yahi man who was found emaciated with a tragic life story: Who is This Really About Anyway?; Ishi, Kroeber, and the Intertwining of California Indian and Anthropological Histories.

I've also found an interesting story that Ted sent his brother in 1986. The story is about an Oyata Indian child called Merejildo Grijalva who was kidnapped by Apache Indians, and who then went on to help the U.S. army in their desires to 'exterminate to a man' Apache Indians in 'retaliatory raids'.

It's a story you'd think most people would value for the lesson of the limited value of anger and revenge, so an odd choice of reading for Ted. However, it's a similar situation with Ted's favourite fiction books, he seemed to have taken a perverse pride in identifying with the villain such as in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. Perhaps he just dismissed the redemptive part of books where the character realises they were on the wrong track.

* * *

There is a small camp of anti-tech terrorists and their supporters who pride themselves on approving of indiscriminate violence even more than Ted, who call themselves eco-extremists (EEs). They admire Ishi because they perceive him as having had the 'dignity' to prefer spending time around his captors rather than other indigenous people, because EEs think Ishi was ashamed of other indigenous tribes for not having fought indiscriminately to the last man like his tribe did. However, I just find that such a tragically sad, self-destructive, macho, rigid and reductive philosophy.

The main essay in question here is called *Ishi and the War Against Civilization*.

The emotional logic seems to be: 'many Americans are racist and would like to wipe us out, I'll show them by not caring that it'll happen faster when I commit indiscriminate acts like killing the white man's babies, or taking pride in tribes of old killing babies.'

This is one of the rare points I would agree with Ted on; EEs feel disgust for modern society, so try to react against it by becoming its mirror opposite, but if being in opposite relationship to a thing becomes the most defining feature of your character, then you've just reduced your entire being to a similarly despicable loser in a game law enforcement would enjoy coming out the heroes.

I just think; give me DIY mechanical eco-revolutions like what the Coconut Revolution achieved any day, rather than blips in time where tribes decided to kill babies and then got genocided quicker, or school shooters who decided to identify with monkeys and so wanted to 'save' kids from having to grow up in diverse cultures.

Quoting Ted and one of Ted's fans' critique of this tendency:

The most important error that ITS commits is that they express, and therefore promote, an attitude of hopelessness about the possibility of eliminating the technological system. I do not have time to comment on historical examples in which tiny and seemingly insignificant groups, considered by most people as crazies, fools, or "romantics," finally managed, despite everything, to carry out successful revolutions.¹⁹

If your enemy is much stronger than you, then it makes sense to prod him with a stick to wear him out, but if you prod too hard too quickly then the enemy will stamp you out completely.²⁰

This has to be the most amusing part of the essay:

¹⁹ Ted Kaczynski on Individualists Tending to the Wild (ITS)

²⁰ A text dump on wildism

Eco-extremism will grow because people know that this is the endgame. Indeed, from Muslims to Christians to all sorts of other ideologies, apocalypse is in the air, and nothing can stop it.

So, not such an amazingly accurate analysis of the past, present and future. Ignorant of the amount of apocalyptic cults that flourished in the 60s which have been on the decline since. And failed to predict the withering away of the number of eco-extremist propagandists and attention.

1985(?) — Ted discusses African Pygmies with his brother David

Quoting Ted:

I doubt that the pygmies have any guilt, conscious or otherwise, about killing animals. Guilt is a conflict between what we're trained *not* to do and impulses that lead us to do it anyway. Apparently there is nothing in pygmy culture that leads them not to kill or inflict pain on animals. What the pygmies love and celebrate is their way of life, and they see no conflict between that and killing for meat; in fact, the hunting is an essential part of their way of life — they gotta eat. We tend to see a conflict there because we come from a world where there is a gross excess of people who even apart from hunting destroy the material world through their very presence in such numbers. But to the pygmies — until very recently anyway — there's been no need for "conservation". The forest is full of animals; with the pygmies primitive weapons and sparse population the question of exterminating the game never arises. The pygmies problem is to fill his belly. The civilized man can afford to feel sorry for wild animals because he can take his food for granted. Some psychologists claim that man is attracted to "death" as they call it. Certainly young men are attracted to action, violence, aggression, and that sort of thing. Note the amount of make-believe violence in the entertainment media — in spite of the fact that in our culture that sort of thing is considered bad and unwholesome and so forth. Since man has been a hunter for the last million years, it is possible that, like other predatory animals, he has some kind of a "killer instinct". It would thus seem that the pygmies are just acting like perfectly good predatory animals. Why should they feel sorry for their prey any more than a hawk, a fox, or a leopard does? On the other hand, when a modern "sport" goes out with a high-powered rifle, you have a different situation. Some obvious differences are: much less skill is required with a rifle than with primitive weapons; the "sport" does it for fun, not because he needs the meat; he is in a world where there are too many people and not enough wildlife, and a rifle makes it too easy to kill too many animals. Of course, the fish and game dept. will see to it that the animals don't get exterminated, but this entails "wildlife management" — manipulation of nature which to me is even worse than extermination. Beyond that, while the pygmy lives in the wilderness and belongs to it, the "sport" is an alien intruder whose presence is a kind of desecration. In a sense, the sport hunter is a masturbator: His hunting is not the "real thing" — it's not what hunting is for a primitive man — he is trying to satisfy an instinct in a debased and sordid way, just like when you rub your prick to crudely simulate what you really want, which is a love affair with a woman. Of course there's nothing wrong with jacking off to relieve yourself when you get horny — it's harmless. But — even apart from the question of depletion of wildlife — the presence of "sports" in the wilderness tends to spoil it for those who know better how to appreciate nature.

So, as I said, I see no reason why the pygmies should have any pity for the animals they kill — they gotta kill to eat anyway, so why make themselves uncomfortable by worrying about the animals pain? On the other hand, I did share your (and the author's) adverse reaction to the account of the pygmies callousness toward animals. For one thing — much as I hate to admit it — my feelings probably have been influenced by the attitudes prevalent in our society; for another thing — and this too is probably in some way related to the social background — I am more ready to put myself in the position of, and see things from the point of view of, another being, such as an animal; finally — and this does not derive from the social background — I see wild animals as “good guys”, the ones who are on my side, in contrast to civilization and its forces (the bad guys), hence I tend to identify with the wild animals. Certainly I would be much less prone to have pity for a domestic animal than for a wild one. I kill rabbits and so forth because I need the meat, but (now more than formerly — youth tends to be callous) I always regret that something alive and beautiful has been turned into just a piece of meat. (Though when you're hungry enough for meat, you don't worry too much about that.)

If you wanted, you could perhaps justify the pygmies this way: The pygmy kills without compunction or pity in order to eat. The pygmy too has to die some day, but he isn't afraid of that. Perhaps he'll be killed some day by a leopard or a buffalo, but he doesn't whine about it or ask the leopard or buffalo to have mercy on him. He is an animal like the others in the forest and he shares the hardships and dangers with the other animals. He lives in an amoral world. But it's a free world and I would say a much wholesome and fulfilling world than that of modern civilization. I do share your negative emotional reaction to the pygmies' ruthlessness, but I'm inclined to suspect that that reaction is perhaps a little decadent, and I don't see that anything would be improved much by the pygmy's vicariously sharing the sufferings of the animals he kills.

I mentioned the fact that the pygmies' world is an amoral one and that such a world may be a wholesome world than the moral one of civilization. Note that amorality does not exclude generous behavior toward others: human beings have impulses of love and loyalty to one another and these are animal impulses, not products of morality. By morality I mean feelings of guilt and shame that we are trained to associate with certain actions that our instinctive impulses would otherwise lead us to perform. Of course it's disagreeable to admit the extent to which we've been influenced by all that brainwashing—attitudes to which we are constantly exposed in school, in books, in the mass communicative media, etc. I hate to admit it, but — as I believe I mentioned to you once before — I would be incapable of premeditatedly committing a serious crime,²¹ and the reason for this is simply that I am subject to the same trained-in inhibitions as most other people. I couldn't commit a serious crime cause I'd be scared to — quite apart from the fear of getting caught. On an intellectual level I don't believe in any moral code. To what extent is our aversion to the pygmies ruthlessness simply the result of our having been brainwashed? Now the point I want to make is this: One of the principile justifications — or rather rationalizations — given for moral training is that it promotes human welfare — we are better off if we don't kill each other, steal from each other, etc. But what I would argue is that a strongly developed morality and system of inhibitions exacts a psychological price that is too much to pay for the added physical security. We would lead more fulfilling lives with less trained-in inhibitions even at the price of considerably less physical security. People who are habituated from childhood to a relatively unsafe mode of existence — such as primitive savages — don't seem to mind

²¹ Note from one of Ted's coded journals: “I recently wrote in a letter to my brother that the inhibitions that have been trained into me are too strong to permit me ever to commit a serious crime. This may surprise the reader considering some things reported in these notes, but motive is clear. I want to avoid any possible suspicion on my brothers part.”

it a bit. It doesn't make them feel insecure. As for the price of inhibitions, I've read in more than one place that there is an inverse relation between murder and suicide statistics. Countries that have a high murder rate tend to have a low suicide rate and countries with a low murder rate tend to have a high suicide rate. This seems to suggest that people who are too inhibited about expressing aggression pay a high psychological price — for every one who commits suicide there are provably a great many who are miserable but never quite get to the point of stringing themselves up. Primitives are probably not wholly free of morality, but they are undoubtedly far less clamped down by moral inhibitions than we are. One thing I've noted in reading about very primitive people is that in many cases there seems to be a great deal of squabbling and quarrelling among them. This used to repel me, because like other people of our sort of background I've been trained to hold in the feelings that give rise to quarrelling. We have to be trained to do that because our machine-like society would function very poorly if workers got into a shouting match with the boss or their fellow-workers every time they got pissed off about something. Our society requires order above all else: But I don't see why primitive societies should be regarded as worse than ours because of this quarelsomeness. Unquestionably the resentments and jealousy are present in our society — the only difference is that they are not usually expressed openly. They come out as snide remarks made behind someones back or in other pettiness, or (perhaps worse) they are just held in, where they fester. Probably the primitives do better to openly express their annoyances and resentments. Well, I could go on forever pursuing the ramifications of this — I could bring in personal loyalty among the Somalis, political corruption in Latin America ... but I guess I've rambled on long enough. Also, I did a sloppy job of expressing all this, but I don't want to spend forever writing this letter, so fuck it.²²

1988 — “Speaking in anthropological terms, my dominance ranking was very low”

After the suicide of his father and taking a break from building bombs for a while, Ted wrote a long autobiographical essay for a therapist before his appointment. At the outset of the essay Ted makes a peculiar reference to anthropology:

The problem, in brief, is that I am 46 years old and still a virgin — very much against my will. The story is as follows ...

... At the age of 10 I developed very strong feelings toward a pretty girl my own age — I don't think it's going too far to say I was in love with her... after I scored at the genius level on an I.Q. test, the guidance counselor decided that I should skip 6th grade. The result was disastrous. I was not accepted by the older kids with whom I was put. I skipped another grade in highschool; thus I was with kids who were two years older than I was. From the time I skipped a grade until I left highschool I was often the object of contemptuous remarks from the other boys. Speaking in anthropological terms, my dominance ranking was very low ...

... it was brought home to me that the other kids regarded me as a freak genius and not the kind of boy with whom any self-respecting girl would want to have a date ...

... Also during my adolescence my parents mistreated me severely... They developed a habit of screaming insults at me whenever they got annoyed -which they often did for trivial

²² Ted Kaczynski's Correspondence with his Brother David

reasons. Some examples of the type of abuse I had to take from them: “You’re immature”, “sick”, “emotionally disturbed”, “a creep”, “speak respectfully to your parents or we’ll you throw out of the house.” ...

... I had a tough inner core of self-esteem and self-confidence that came through undamaged. But my social self-confidence was pretty well destroyed

– I came to expect rejection from other people ...

... I had no opportunity in highschool to learn the customs governing the relations between the sexes — how to make dates, when one can kiss a girl, etc ...

... I often had (and still have) difficulty interpreting women’s behavior ...²³

Pre-1995 — The Littering Ape

In a Letter to the Editor Ted satirized conformist self-help pop-anthropology:

A number of anthropologically inclined individuals have in recent years gained fame and fortune by authoring books of the “Naked Ape” genre. These writers, by explaining human behavior in terms of territorial imperative, dominance rankings, and other instincts originating before the dawn of Paleolithic times, have succeeded in attaching an aura of romance to our most mundane actions. Nowadays, when a man makes love to his wife, he is no longer just a man making love to his wife; he is a muscular, aggressive cavemen enacting a savage rite inherited from the misty past. When a junior executive bosses a subordinate, he is proving his virility by reinforcing his position in the dominance hierarchy; and when he attends a business conference, he can envision himself and his associates as a pack of skin-clad Neanderthals [...] on their muscular haunches about a campfire, planning a hunt.

However, one aspect of human instinctual behavior, of particular importance in these pollution-conscious times, seems to have been overlooked. Despite extensive propaganda campaigns and the ubiquitous presence of very convenient waste receptacles, the authorities still have not succeeded in inducing people to stop littering. The reason is that they have not grasped the psychological and anthropological roots of the problem. Why *do* people litter?

Animals subject to the territorial imperative must have means of making out the bounds of their territories. With most animals, this is accomplished through deposition of excreta—which is why we see dogs going from one tree to another, leaving a calling card at each. Many wild animals do the same thing. As they have a keen sense of smell, they can readily recognize the signatures of other animals and so avoid trespassing. But man, depending basically on sight rather than on sense of smell, has had to find visual means of leaving his signature. We used to carve our initials on trees; but trees are scarce in our cities now, and we aren’t allowed to carve them up any more. So what do we do? We strew cigarette packages and gum wrappers. It’s our way of saying “Kilroy was here.”

The instinctual origins of the problem being clear, the solution becomes obvious. People refuse to deposit their litter on the trash receptacles because the receptacles *conceal* their litter. It is therefore an imperative condition of social progress that we erect posts (analogous to the “scent posts” of animals) provided with spikes or hooks on which litter can be impaled in such a manner as to be conspicuously displayed. When decorated to capacity, these posts can be carted off to the city dump, and the litter problem will be fully solved.

²³ Ted Kaczynski’s 1988 Autobiography

1995 — In Ted’s manifesto he attempted to popularize a positive view of primitive societies

This is a task that many leftist anthropologists had already been engaged in for a long time, though for different reasons. Many anthropologists want people to discover how; fairly egalitarianism social relationships found among hunter-gatherers made us happy, then for us to draw lessons from this by modifying our current social relationships. However, obviously Ted didn’t see this as possible in technologically advanced societies.

Kaczynski’s understanding of primitive societies was shaped by these same anthropologists though. Two works of anthropology that Ted cited in secret footnotes to the manifesto were; Elizabeth Marshall Thomas’s *The Harmless People* and Colin M. Turnbull’s *The Forest People*.²⁴

Quoting the manifesto:

183. But an ideology, in order to gain enthusiastic support, must have a positive ideal as well as a negative one; it must be *for* something as well as *against* something. The positive ideal that we propose is Nature. That is, *wild* nature: those aspects of the functioning of the Earth and its living things that are independent of human management and free of human interference and control. And with wild nature we include human nature, by which we mean those aspects of the functioning of the human individual that are not subject to regulation by organized society but are products of chance, or free will, or God (depending on your religious or philosophical opinions).

184. Nature makes a perfect counter-ideal to technology for several reasons. Nature (that which is outside the power of the system) is the opposite of technology (which seeks to expand indefinitely the power of the system). Most people will agree that nature is beautiful; certainly it has tremendous popular appeal. The radical environmentalists *already* hold an ideology that exalts nature and opposes technology.²⁵ It is not necessary for the sake of nature to set up some chimerical utopia or any new kind of social order. Nature takes care of itself: It was a spontaneous creation that existed long before any human society, and for countless centuries many different kinds of human societies coexisted with nature without doing it an excessive amount of damage. Only with the Industrial Revolution did the effect of human society on nature become really devastating. To relieve the pressure on nature it is not necessary to create any special kind of social system, it is only necessary to get rid of industrial society. Granted, this will not solve all problems. Industrial society has already done tremendous damage to nature and it will take a very long time for the scars to heal. Besides, even pre-industrial societies can do significant damage to nature. Nevertheless, getting rid of industrial society will accomplish a great deal. It will relieve the worst of the pressure on nature so that the scars can begin to heal. It will remove the capacity of organized society to keep increasing its control over nature (including human nature). Whatever kind of society may exist after the demise of the industrial system, it is certain that most people will live close to nature, because in the absence of advanced technology there is no other way that people can live. To feed themselves they must be peasants, or herdsmen, or fishermen, or hunters, etc. And, generally speaking, local autonomy should tend to increase, because lack of advanced technology and rapid communications will limit the capacity of governments or other large organizations to control local communities.⁽¹⁶⁾

²⁴ The Unabomber and the origins of anti-tech radicalism

²⁵ Industrial Society and Its Future (Latest Edition)

⁽¹⁶⁾ (¶ 184) A further advantage of nature as a counter-ideal to technology is that, in many people, nature inspires the kind of reverence that is associated with religion, so that nature could perhaps be idealized on a religious basis. It is true that in many societies religion has served as a support and justification for the established order, but it is also true that religion has often

In a letter to a friend Ted later clarified he was talking about idealizing nomadic hunter-gatherer societies:

I'm quite sure that it will be impossible to control post-revolution conditions, but I think you're quite right in saying that a "positive social vision" is necessary. However, the social ideal I would put forward is that of the nomadic hunting-and-gathering society.

... The nomadic hunting-and-gathering society recommends itself as a social ideal because it is at the opposite extreme of human culture from the technological society.

... a hunting-and-gathering existence will appear much more attractive than that offered by preindustrial civilization. Even many modern people enjoy hunting, fishing, and gathering wild fruits and nuts. I think few would enjoy such tasks as ploughing, hoeing, or threshing. And in civilized societies the majority of the population commonly have been exploited in one way or another by the upper classes: If they were not slaves or serfs, then they often were hired laborers or tenant-farmers subject to the domination of landowners. Preindustrial civilized societies often suffered from disastrous epidemics or famines, and the common people in many cases had poor nutrition. In contrast, hunter-gatherers, except in the far north, generally had good nutrition. Famines among them were probably rare. They were relatively little troubled by infectious diseases until such diseases were introduced among them by more "advanced" peoples. Slavery and well-developed social hierarchies could exist among *sedentary* hunter-gatherers, but (apart from the tendency of women to be in some degree subordinate to men), *nomadic* hunter-gatherer societies typically (not always) were characterized by social equality, and normally did not practice slavery. (Though I know of one exception: Apparently some Cree Indians who were probably hunter-gatherers did take slaves.)

... nomadic hunter-gatherer societies seem a great deal more attractive than preindustrial civilized ones.

... my hope, is that certain inconvenient aspects of hunter-gatherer societies (e.g., male dominance, hard work) would turn off the leftists, the neurotics, and the lazies but that such societies, depicted realistically, would remain attractive to the kind of people who could be effective revolutionaries.²⁶

* * *

Ted's manifesto elicited an interesting Time article response called *The evolution of despair* by Robert Wright which explored

the work of a growing group of scholars — evolutionary psychologists — who are anticipating the coming of a new field of 'mismatch theory', which would study maladies resulting from contrasts between the modern environment and the 'ancestral environment'.²⁷

²⁶ Ted Kaczynski's Letter Correspondence With David Skrbina

²⁷ Stone Age babies in cyberspace

provided a basis for rebellion. Thus it may be useful to introduce a religious element into the rebellion against technology, the more so because Western society today has no strong religious foundation. Religion nowadays either is used as cheap and transparent support for narrow, short-sighted selfishness (some conservatives use it this way), or even is cynically exploited to make easy money (by many evangelists), or has degenerated into crude irrationalism (fundamentalist Protestant sects, "cults"), or is simply stagnant (Catholicism, mainline Protestantism). The nearest thing to a strong, widespread, dynamic religion that the West has seen in recent times has been the quasi-religion of leftism, but leftism today is fragmented and has no clear, unified, inspiring goal. Thus there is a religious vacuum in our society that could perhaps be filled by a religion focused on nature in opposition to technology. But it would be a mistake to try to concoct artificially a religion to fill this role. Such an invented religion would probably be a failure. Take the "Gaia" religion for example. Do its adherents really believe in it or are they just play-acting? If they are just play-acting

Here's a short quote from the essay where Wright agrees with Ted on some of the potentially stress inducing aspects to modern life:

VCRs and microwave ovens have their virtues, but in the everyday course of our highly efficient lives, there are times when something seems deeply amiss. Whether burdened by an overwhelming flurry of daily commitments or stifled by a sense of social isolation (or, oddly, both); whether mired for hours in a sense of life's pointlessness or beset for days by unresolved anxiety; whether deprived by long workweeks from quality time with offspring or drowning in quantity time with them—whatever the source of stress, we at times get the feeling that modern life is not what we were designed for.

And it is not. The human mind — our emotions, our wants, our needs — evolved in an environment lacking, for example, cellular phones. And for that matter, regular phones, telegraphs, and even hieroglyphics — and cars and railroads and chariots ... Getting genes into the next generation was, for better or worse, the criterion by which the human mind was designed. Mental traits conducive to genetic proliferation are the traits that survived. They are what constitute our minds today; they are us, we are designed to steer genes through a technologically primitive social structure.²⁸

Also, here's a quote from a media critique that details what is missed out on in Wright's essay:

One way that TIME reduces the complexity of the human experience is through the rewording of the human condition in ways that simplify who we are. In an article on the prevalence of mental depression in the late 20th century, Wright (20th Century Blues) describes how mental health is a product of the genetic traits we inherit as individuals and the collective behaviors we learn as members of a social community that seeks to sustain itself...

Here, understanding what it means to be human is being reframed from a state-orientation to a traits-orientation. In terms of states, the human is seen as dynamic, responding to the relatively temporary, highly contextualized conditions of a situation. The first paragraph provides a long list of these types of conditions (“burdened by,” “stifled by,” “mired for hours in,” and “deprived by”). But understanding the human in terms of states (state-orientation) beings to be reframed to traits (trait-orientation) in the transition between the two paragraphs. The phrases “modern life is not what we're designed for” (¶2) and “the human mind evolved in an environment lacking” (¶3) simplify what the mind is about. Understanding the human is thereafter framed in terms of traits. Traits are context-free. All the experiences that stimulate the mind are stripped away. This second paragraph foregrounds mental traits (“Mental traits conducive to genetic proliferation are the traits that survived”) to explain why we experience stress, anxiety, and the like. That is, the mental traits we possess are not designed to handle the modern social complexities of life. In minimizing the ways in which humans are constructed by the external world, this view undermines the dynamic nature that defines the relationship between humans and their environment.²⁹

Personally, I do think this approach has limited value, as I favour a more folk-psychological way of studying the current maladies we face as a species.³⁰ Quoting myself:

²⁸ The Evolution of Despair

²⁹ Questioning the Role of Evolution in Understanding Ourselves

³⁰ Suggested reading: Do Apes Read Minds?; Toward a New Folk Psychology by Kristin Andrews

their religion will be a flop in the end. It is probably best not to try to introduce religion into the conflict of nature vs. technology unless you really believe in that religion yourself and find that it arouses a deep, strong, genuine response in many other people.

Everyone has different views as to what percentage of study in the hard sciences vs. soft sciences is the most productive balance for gaining new insights into human behaviour short term and long term. I lean heavily towards if we want to come to a fruitful understanding of what matters to us, our perspectives as agents in the world, we need to look to social science and the very complicated holistic social framework we build up through perceiving what others are thinking and modifying our actions accordingly.³¹

Post-1995 — Ted discusses what kind of education he valued

Quoting Ted:

If I started college again, what would I major in? If I had to do it all over again, I don't think I would go to college at all. I would just go to live in the mountains rather than wasting time on formal education. If I *did* go to college I wouldn't major in mathematics, but I'd probably take several math courses because they are good training in clear thinking. Say, three semesters of calculus, a semester of number theory, two semesters of modern algebra, a course in (mathematically rigorous) real analysis, a course in mathematical logic and one in axiomatic set theory. What I would major in, I don't know. Maybe computer science, but I would major in that only so that I could become a computer saboteur, i.e., one of those guys who invent destructive viruses and that sort of thing. Apart from that I'd probably take a lot of courses in the social "sciences" (note the quotation marks), especially history and cultural anthropology. The reason is that I'd like to know more about how and why societies function and develop as they do.³²

2001 — 'Morality & Revolution' Essay

Ted advocates a perspective on eugenics that many hunter-gatherers are forced to consider today through lack of material means to help disabled children live fulfilling, intellectually and emotionally stimulating lives. In doing so Ted attempts to draw more attention to a rare anthropological book that has yet to be fully translated into English:

Among many primitive peoples, deformed babies are killed at birth (see, e.g., Paul Schebesta, *Die Bambuti-Pygmäen vom Ituri*, I.Band, Institut Royal Colonial Belge, Brussels, 1938, page 138), and a similar practice apparently was widespread in the United States up to about the middle of the 20th century. "Babies who were born malformed or too small or just blue and not breathing well were listed [by doctors] as stillborn, placed out of sight and left to die." Autl Gawande, "The Score," *The New Yorker*, October 9, 2006, page 64. Nowadays any such practice would be regarded as shockingly immoral. But mental-health professionals who study the psychological problems of the disabled can tell us how severe these problems often are. True, even among the severely deformed — for example, those born without arms or legs — there may be occasional individuals who achieve satisfying lives. But most persons with such a degree of disability are condemned to lives of inferiority and helplessness, and to rear a baby with extreme deformities until it is old enough to be conscious of its own helplessness

³¹ My Virtue-Existentialist Ethics

³² Ted Kaczynski, Math Tutor

is usually an act of cruelty. In any given case, of course, it may be difficult to balance the likelihood that a deformed baby will lead a miserable existence, if reared, against the chance that it will achieve a worthwhile life. The point is, however, that the moral code of modern society does not permit such balancing. It *automatically* requires every baby to be reared, no matter how extreme its physical or mental disabilities, and no matter how remote the chances that its life can be anything but wretched. This is one of the most ruthless aspects of modern morality.

Ted desired a minimalist morality of our past where carefully constructed rules of social contract weren't as complex as they are today, so whereby under tribal morality a parent killing a baby born without one arm would not be a core morally black and white issue, or an issue of morality at all.

However, where the few rules of morality that would feel intuitively black and white to some tribes in the past wouldn't be black and white for modern societies today.

For example, a tribe member who attempted to claim a large area of the forest as his sole private property as a trade off for sharing his meat because he was such a good hunter and able to trade more of his meat to other members would simply not be allowed to come to pass.

However, today the accumulation of property enables some people to make money off their land for oil at the expense of the world through human-caused climate change.

2005 — Ted continues writing Letters to the Editor from prison

Ted made a German to English translations of a chapter of *Die Bambuti; Pygmäen vom Ituri*³³ (*The Bambuti; Pygmies of the Ituri*), after receiving the book as a gift from his girlfriend on the outside:

I received Schebesta's Vol. II as a Christmas gift this year [Dec, 2004] from my beloved lady, the schoolteacher whom I mentioned to you in an earlier letter. Two years ago I received Schebesta's Vol. I from her as a Christmas gift.³⁴

Ted wrote a letter response to a book review in the New York Review of Books, citing this yet to be fully translated German Anthropology text:

Letter to the Editors:

In "Survival of the Smallest" [*NYR*, March 10], István Deák writes on page 22: "In ancient Egypt, dwarfs were often venerated like gods." Deák here is discussing pathological dwarfs. However, Paul Schebesta, *Die Bambuti-Pygmäen vom Ituri* (Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge, 1938, Vol. 1, pp. 5–11), argues persuasively that the "god-dancers" venerated by the ancient Egyptians were not pathological dwarfs at all, but pygmies from the African rain forest. Schebesta cites, *inter alia*, a letter of the pharaoh Pepi II or Phiops II (Sixth Dynasty) which seems clearly to support this view.

Theodore John Kaczynski
Florence, Colorado³⁵

This got him some credit from the book reviewer:

³³ German to English translation of pages 198–205 of *Die Bambuti; Pygmäen vom Ituri* by Paul Schebesta, Vol. I, pages 198–205. October–December 1939. <doi.org/10.1525/aa.1939.41.4.02a00150>. Translation: <https://findingaids.lib.umich.edu/catalog/umich-scl-kaczynski_al_c2e285265572fdb5ca808ea3dbf711ad26801a14>

³⁴ Ted Kaczynski's Letter Correspondence With David Skrbina

³⁵ Survival of the Smallest & Responses

Theodore John Kaczynski cites an admirable scholar, the Austrian Catholic missionary Paul Schebesta, who, similar to other missionaries, devoted his life to the anthropology and culture of long-ignored peoples. He lived not only among the pygmies of Africa but also among those of southeastern Asia. Schebesta's scholarship is undeniable, ...³⁶

2006 — Ted publicly breaks with anarcho-primitivists over whether most tribal societies are naturally egalitarian

A vegan primitivist from Turkey wrote to Ted with a long list of questions. Ted responded with a detailed critique of how many primitivists idealize primitive life, arguing that the hierarchical relationships found between many tribal members is natural and therefore neutral or good.³⁷

I further agree that a revolution against modernity, and against civilization in general, is necessary. But you can't build an effective revolutionary movement out of soft-headed dreamers, lazies, and charlatans. You have to have tough-minded, realistic, practical people, and people of that kind don't need the anarchoprimitivists' mushy utopian myth.

Although both Ted and other primitivists idealize the material and cultural life of nomadic hunter-gatherers, Ted believed his idealisation of that way of life was more brutally honest than most:

I could go on and on citing concrete facts that show how ridiculous is the image of primitive peoples as non-competitive, vegetarian conservationists who had gender equality, respected the rights of animals, and didn't have to work for a living. But this letter is already too long, so the examples already given will have to suffice.

I don't mean to say that the hunting-and-gathering way of life was no better than modern life. On the contrary, I believe it was better beyond comparison. Many, perhaps most investigators who have studied hunter-gatherers have expressed their respect, their admiration, or even their envy of them. For example, Cashdan, page 21, refers to the hunting-and-gathering way of life as "highly successful." Coon, page XIX, refers to the "full and satisfactory lives" of hunter-gatherers. Turnbull, *Forest People*, page 26, writes:

[The Mbuti] were a people who had found in the forest something that made their life more than just worth living, something that made it, with all its hardships and problems and tragedies, a wonderful thing full of joy and happiness and free of care.

Schebesta writes, page 73:

How varied are the dangers, but also the joyous experiences on his hunting-excursions and countless journeys through the primeval forest! We of an unpoetic, mechanical age can have no more than an inkling of how deeply all of that touches the forest people in their mystical-magical thinking and shapes their attitude.

And on page 205:

The pygmies stand before us as one of the most natural of human races, as people who live exclusively in compliance with nature and without violation of their phys-

³⁶ Survival of the Smallest & Responses

³⁷ Ted Kaczynski. Letter to a Turkish Anarchist [Letter]. *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, No. 63. retrieved on June 9,

ical organism. Among their principal traits are an unusually sturdy naturalness and liveness, and an unparalleled cheerfulness and freedom from care. They are people whose lives pass in compliance with the laws of nature.

But obviously the reasons why primitive life was better than civilized life had nothing to do with gender equality, kindness to animals, non-competitiveness, or non-violence. Those values are the soft values of modern civilization. By projecting those values onto hunting-and-gathering societies, the GA Movement has created a myth of a primitive utopia that never existed in reality.³⁸

2008 — Some of Ted’s fans become even more pessimistic about hunter-gatherer life

Some of Ted’s fans attempted to distinguish themselves as having more pessimistic views of social life in primitive societies. Quoting one of these fans called Ultimo:

Differences regarding our anthropological stance. He is less “anthropologically pessimist” than me. For example, he has a better opinion about primitive humans than me. He also probably gives more importance to human real freedom or individual autonomy than me (for me it is very important too, but always less than the autonomy of wild non-human Nature –real human freedom is just a concrete case of the wildness of Nature taken as a whole; when real human freedom is compatible with the wildness of non-human Nature, it has to be taken into account; but if at some point it were not, it should be regarded as a minor concern, a secondary value-)...

For example, he is too fond of quoting, among others, the works of Colin Turnbull *The Forest People* and *Wayward Servants* and Elisabeth Marshall Thomas’ book *The Harmless People*, without questioning much their reliability. Turnbull is a leftist anthropologist the reliability of whose statements about Mbuti Pygmies have been questioned by later anthropologists, like Robert Edgerton (*Sick Societies*, Free Press, 1992, page 6). And something similar goes for Thomas (one should suspect of her romanticizing the Bushmen just from looking at the title of the book. See *ibid.* page 6). Certainly, Kaczynski has somewhat called into question Turnbull’s rigor in passing in “The Truth About Primitive Life”, but as far as I know, he has never called into question Thomas reliability. [At least not publicly. He occasionally said something, for example in a draft of a letter to F.B. (April 17, 2008) that he sent to me that somewhat questioned the reliability of Thomas, but in public he usually presents her work as a reliable reference.³⁹

Plus, here is the section of the letter Ultimo was referencing:

As for *The Harmless People*, Gonzalo thinks Elisabeth Marshall Thomas’s account is not to be trusted, because she is politically correct. I think Gonzalo goes too far in this respect, but I do have doubts about Mrs. Thomas. In the epilogue to the 1989 edition of *The Harmless People* she acknowledged that her observation that the Bushmen suppressed all forms of aggression was applicable only to the Bushmen whom she observed personally, and that among some other groups of bushmen there was a good deal of violence. In an article in

2009. Original link. Archived link.

³⁸ Ted Kaczynski’s Interview with a Turkish Primitivist

³⁹ Adapted Fragments of a Correspondence between Sean Fleming and Último Reducto

The New Yorker, 7/30/07, page 56, Ian Parker wrote: “‘The Harmless People’, as Elizabeth Marshall Thomas referred to [them]... , had turned out to have a murder rate higher than any American city.” Mrs. Thomas could have defended herself against this as she did in the epilogue to the 1989 edition of *The Harmless People*, but instead she answered with a letter to *The New Yorker* that reeked of political correctness: “[The Bushmen’s] energy was devoted to peace-keeping, cooperation, equality, and the elimination of jealousy, partnership, unity, and friendship.[Sic!]”. *The New Yorker*, 8/27/08, page 8. In her letter, Mrs. Thomas did *not* limit this to the Bushmen she had observed personally.⁴⁰

2010 — ‘Maybe I was too harsh on Anthropologists’

In Ted’s manifesto he was quite critical of many anthropologists:

Feelings of inferiority are characteristic of modern leftism as a whole, while oversocialization is characteristic only of a certain segment of modern leftism; but this segment is highly influential... Leftish anthropologists go to great lengths to avoid saying anything about primitive peoples that could conceivably be interpreted as negative. They want to replace the word “primitive” with “nonliterate.” They seem almost paranoid about anything that might suggest that any primitive culture is inferior to our own. (We do not mean to imply that primitive cultures *are* inferior to ours. We merely point out the hypersensitivity of leftish anthropologists.)

However later, he somewhat updated his views:

In “The Truth About Primitive Life” and in “The System’s Neatest Trick” I referred to the “politicization” of American anthropology, and I came down hard on politically correct anthropologists... My views on the politicization of anthropology were based on a number of books and articles I had seen and on some materials sent to me by a person who was doing graduate work in anthropology. My views were by no means based on a systematic survey or a thorough knowledge of recent anthropological literature.

One of my Spanish correspondents [Ultimo] argued that I was being unfair to anthropologists, and he backed up his argument by sending me copies of articles from anthropological journals; for example, Michael J. Shott, “On Recent Trends in the Anthropology of Foragers,” *Man* (N.S.), Vol. 27, No. 4, Dec., 1992, pages 843–871; and Raymond Hames, “The Ecologically Noble Savage Debate,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 36, 2007, pages 177–190.

The editor of *Isumatag* was right. As he showed me, I had greatly underestimated the number of American anthropologists who made a conscientious effort to present facts evenhandedly and without ideological bias. But even if my point about the politicization of anthropology was overstated, it still contained a significant element of truth. First, there are some anthropologists whose work is heavily politicized. (I discussed the case of Haviland on pages [145, 202–203] of this book.) Second, some of the anthropologists’ debates seem clearly to be politically motivated, even if the participants in these debates do strive to be honest and objective. Consider for example the article by Raymond Hames cited above, which reviews the anthropological controversy over whether primitive peoples were or were not good conservationists. Why should this question be the subject of so much debate among anthropologists? The reason, obviously, is that nowadays the problem of controlling the environmental dam-

⁴⁰ Ted Kaczynski’s Letter to Facundo Bermudez

age caused by industrial society is a hot political issue. Some anthropologists are tempted to cite primitive peoples as moral examples from whom we should learn to treat our environment with respect; other anthropologists perhaps would prefer to use primitives as negative examples in order to convince us that we should rely on modern methods to regulate our environment.

Until roughly the middle of the 20th century, industrial society was extremely self-confident. Apart from a very few dissenting voices, everyone assumed that “progress” was taking us all to a better and brighter future. Even the most rebellious members of society—the Marxists—believed that the injustices of capitalism represented only a temporary phase that we had to pass through in order to arrive at a world in which the benefits of “progress” would be shared equally by everyone. Because the superiority of modern society was taken for granted, it seldom occurred to anyone to draw comparisons between modern society and primitive ones, whether for the purpose of exalting modernity or for the purpose of denigrating it.

But since the mid-20th century, industrial society has been losing its self-confidence. Thinking people are increasingly affected by doubts about whether we are on the right road, and this has led many to question the value of modernity and to react against it by idealizing primitive societies. Other people, whose sense of security is threatened by the attack on modernity, defensively exaggerate the unattractive traits of primitive cultures while denying or ignoring their attractive traits. That is why some anthropological questions that once were purely academic are now politically loaded. I realize that the foregoing two paragraphs greatly simplify a complex situation, but I nevertheless insist that industrial society’s loss of self-confidence in the course of the 20th century is a real event.⁴¹

⁴¹ Afterthoughts to Technological Slavery

Misc. Referencing of Anthropology Books

2001

Quoting Ted:

You state that “Female infanticide, genital mutilation, forced prostitution, forced marriage, and widespread economic and legal discrimination are a fact of life in most of the world.”

There have been and no doubt still are cultures that practice female infanticide, but I would be very surprised if it were a frequent and accepted practice over most of the world. Excision cultures, and it still is in *some* parts of the *not* practiced over most of the Middle East, much less over most of the world.⁽¹⁷⁾ I’ve never heard of a traditional culture in which forced prostitution was an accepted practice. Maybe examples could be found, but they certainly would be the exception and not the rule. Forced marriage occurs, but it’s probably less common than you think. *Arranged* marriages are, or were, very widespread in traditional cultures, but one has to distinguish between arranged marriages and forced marriages. An arranged marriage is carried out under the supervision and control of the family as being a matter that affects the whole family and not just the prospective spouses. But it’s my understanding that the wishes of the prospective spouses commonly are taken into consideration and they usually are not forced to marry if either of them has a decided objection to the match. (Certainly there are exceptions, such as the Australian custom described above.) Furthermore, spirited individuals may often find ways of thwarting their families intentions with regard to marriage. To take an example from Elizabeth Marshall Thomas’s book *The Harmless People*, a Bushman fell in love with a beautiful girl and arranged with her parents to make her his wife. He took her back to his hut, but she refused to enter it and slept the night outside. In the morning she got up and walked back to her parents’ camp, and that was the end of the marriage. Even among the Australian Aborigines a young woman might avoid a forced marriage to an old man by eloping with her boyfriend — though in doing so she risked death if her and her boyfriend’s totems were such as to prohibit their marriage. (Aldo Massola, *The Aborigines of Southeastern Australia.)*

Economic and legal discrimination against women, in the sense in which I think you mean it, is a trait of societies in a state of transition from traditional to modern culture. In all traditional cultures, men and women had different roles. Through force of custom, the traditional differences in sex roles were carried over into the economic and legal arrangements of societies that were in the process of modernization, and the difference still persists in those societies that have not yet reached the advanced stage of modernization that exists in the West. But the economic and legal discrimination that exists in incompletely modernized countries is a very different phenomenon from the traditional differences in sex roles. You can disapprove of the traditional differences in sex roles if you like, but they still are not the same thing as the economic and legal discrimination that exists in the modern world.

⁽¹⁷⁾ I’ve read that older, traditional people where clitoridectomy is practiced, of both sexes, fail to understand why Westerners get so upset about it. Apparently it is the younger, Wester-influenced people who raise objections. I personally am repelled by the idea of clitoridectomy, but then, I’m a westerner.

But it is difficult to talk about women's roles in terms of generalities. One gets a much better picture by reading accounts of life in particular cultures. If you're sufficiently interested, you might want to read some of the books I've cited above, or such books as Angie Debe, *Geronimo*, Colin Turnbull, *Wayward Servants* and *The Forest People*, Louis Sarno, *Song From the Forest*, John D. Hunter, *Manners and Customs of the Indians ...* (etc, — long title), which will give you some inkling of what life was like for women in certain premodern societies.

My readings in history and anthropology have left me with the impression that, apart from extreme examples such as the Australian customs I've mentioned, women in traditional societies undisturbed by Western influence have not ordinarily been dissatisfied with their position as women. But it still seems that, on average, life in traditional societies was harder for women than for men. For one thing, women faced the dangers of childbirth without modern medicine to intervene if anything went wrong. For another thing, treatment of women that we would consider unfair, or at times abusive, was common in some of those societies.

Nevertheless — and I make this suggestion with difference since I'm not a woman, and can't blame you if you disagree with me vehemently — I venture to propose that the unfairness to women of many traditional cultures was less important than the conditions that modern society imposes on both sexes. Take yourself as an example. You are under medication for depression. Would you have been depressed if you had lived in a male-dominated traditional society? Maybe not. Reportedly, one anthropologist went to New Guinea to study depression there, but was unable to carry out his project because he couldn't find any depression. So it would seem that any unfairness to which women are subjected in New Guinea is not sufficient to make them depressed; whereas under modern conditions depression is very common.

But so far, for the most part, I've been discussing only *traditional* societies. Today, most of the world has been thrown into cultural disorder by the intrusion of industrial civilization. Societies outside the West may still retain many elements of their traditional cultures, but there are very few in any places left where traditional culture remains reasonably intact. In this disordered state of the world it is certain that, outside of the well-policed West, atrocities are far more common than they were at the hunting-and-gathering stage of human existence. I would guess that atrocities are more common now than they were in most of the older civilized societies too, but that is open to argument. It's not clear to me whether women are victims of atrocities to a greater extent than men are, but it may not matter anyway, since to a woman who is forced into prostitution it can't be much of a consolation that a man has been killed, mutilated, or enslaved.

If the existing system breaks down in the industrialized world, it seems safe to assume that the result will be massive social disorder. Presumably there will be atrocities. Whether women or men will suffer more is an open question, but, again, it may not matter much. However, I see no reason to assume that there would be a "worldwide backlash against Feminism."

You can take your choice: You can either desire a collapse of the existing system and accept the disastrous consequences that would ensue; or for the sake of present physical safety you can desire that the system should survive as long as possible, and reconcile yourself to letting technology take us wherever it will take us. You may feel that both alternatives are unacceptable, but I believe that there are no other choices: If the technological system survives at all, there will be no way of taming it, controlling it, or making it harmless.¹

¹ Ted Kaczynski's Letter Correspondence with August Hampton

2001

Quoting Ted:

You write, “Watching a documentary on a tribe of Amazon Indians, I found that their life was as ordered as any modern man’s... their day seemed as regimented as an office worker’s.”

You reached this conclusion on the basis of one documentary that you watched. I would say you were a bit hasty. I can’t comment on that particular tribe because I know nothing about it. You didn’t even say what tribe it was.

I wouldn’t necessarily say that the life of every primitive people is less regimented than ours is. Among the Aino (a sedentary hunting-and-gathering people who formerly occupied part of Japan), ritual obligations were so elaborate and pervasive that they imposed a heavy psychological burden, often leading to serious disorders.⁽¹⁸⁾

But unquestionably many primitive societies were far less regimented than ours is. Regarding the African Pygmies, see Colin Turnbull’s books on that subject,⁽¹⁹⁾ or Louis Sarno’s *Song from the Forest*. One who lived among the North American Indians early in the 19th century wrote that they consisted of “individuals who had been educated to prefer almost any sacrifice to that of personal liberty.... The Indians individually acknowledge no superior, nor are they subordinate to any government.... [I]n general, the warriors while in their villages are unyielding, exceedingly tenacious of their freedom, and live together in a state of equality, closely approximated to natural rights... [A]lthough [their governments] somewhat resemble the democratic form, still a majority cannot bind a minority to a compliance with any acts of its own.”⁽²⁰⁾

Of course, you have to understand that prior to the modern era freedom was not conceived, as it often is today, as the freedom to just fritter away one’s time in aimless, hedonistic pursuits. It was taken for granted that survival required effort and self-discipline. But there is a world of difference between the discipline that a small band of people imposes on itself in order to meet practical necessities, and discipline that is imposed from the outside by large organizations.

You write, “High infant-and child-mortality must affect women in these cultures with a level of angst about their children and their own lives that we can’t imagine.”

This is a good point. The anarcho-primitivists find it convenient to overlook the high infant-and child-mortality rate (typically around 50%) of most preindustrial societies, including Western society up to the 18th century. The basic answer to this is simply that you can’t have it both ways: If you want to escape the evils of industrial society, then you have to pay a price for it. However, it’s likely that the high infant-mortality rate was necessary to preserve the health of the species. Today, weak and sickly babies survive to pass on their defective genes.

How do primitive women feel about it? I don’t know whether anyone has ever taken the trouble to ask them. It’s presumably very painful to them (and their husbands) when one of their babies dies. But I doubt that they feel the extreme anxiety that you suggest. A study

⁽¹⁸⁾ Carleton S. Coon, *The Hunting Peoples*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1971, pages 372–73.

⁽¹⁹⁾ *The Forest People*, and *Wayward Servants*.

⁽²⁰⁾ John D. Hunter, *Manners and Customs of Several Indian Tribes Located West of the Mississippi*, Ross and Haines, Minneapolis, 1957, pages 52, 319–320. The authenticity of Hunter’s account has been questioned, but has been persuasively defended by Richard K. Drinnon, *White Savage: The Case of John Dunn Hunter*, Schocken Books, 1972. There are in any event plenty of other sources that refer to the freedom of primitive and barbarian peoples, e.g., E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, Oxford University Press, 1972, pages 5–6, 181–83.

of the Kalahari Bushmen found that they had very low levels of psychological stress,⁽²¹⁾ and I assume this included the women. When people see it as normal and expected that half their children should die during the first few years of life, they probably take it in stride and don't worry about it unduly.⁽²²⁾ The human race doubtless has had that high infant-and child-mortality rate for the last million years and is presumably adapted to it. For a woman to be tormented by constant anxiety about her children would be maladaptive, hence a tendency to such anxiety would probably be eliminated by natural selection.

Still, a 50% infant-mortality rate is no joke. It's one of the hard aspects of forgoing industrial civilization.

You ask, "Is it not possible that our culture's unhappiness stems from our lack of strong religious beliefs, not our industrial lifestyle?"

Undoubtedly *some* people are happier for having strong religious beliefs. On the other hand, I don't think that strong religious belief is a prerequisite for happiness. Whether religion is *usually* conducive to happiness is open to argument.

But the point I want to make here is that the decline of religion in modern society is not an *accident*. It is a *necessary result* of technical progress. There are several reasons for this, of which I will mention three.

First, as page 42 of *Mean*,⁽²³⁾ April 2001, puts it, "Every curtain science pulls away is another that God cannot hide behind." In other words, as science advances, it disproves more and more traditional religious beliefs and therefore undermines faith.

Second, the need for toleration is antagonistic to strong religious belief. Various features of modern society, such as easy long-distance transportation, make mixing of populations inevitable. Today, people of different ethnic groups and different religions have to live and work side by side. In order to avoid the disruptive conflicts to which religious hatred would give rise, society has to teach us to be tolerant.

But toleration entails a weakening of religious faith. If you unquestioningly believed that your own creed was absolutely right, then you would also have to believe that every creed that disagreed with it was absolutely wrong, and this would imply a certain level of intolerance. In order to believe that all religions are just as good as yours is, you have to have, deep in your heart, considerable uncertainty about the truth of your own religion.

Third, all of the great world religions teach us such virtues as reverence and self-restraint. But the economists tell us that our economic health depends on a high level of consumption. To get us to consume, advertisers must offer us endless pleasure, they must encourage unbridled hedonism, and this undermines religious qualities like reverence and self-restraint.²

2004

Quoting Ted:

² Extract from Letter to J.N.

⁽²¹⁾ Here I'm relying on my memory of something I read many years ago. I can't cite the source, and my memory is not infallible.

⁽²²⁾ "Only with difficulty could [Mbuti. mothers remember the number of their deceased children." Paul Schebesta, *Die Bambuti-Pygmäen vom Ituri*, I. Band, Institut Royal Colonial Belge, Brussels, 1938, page 112. This suggests that the loss of a child was less than a devastating experience for Mbuti women.

⁽²³⁾ *Mean* was an obscure magazine (now no longer published) for which J. N. was a writer.

Your colleague suggests that “things have *always* been bad for human society, and that we have no rational reason to expect anything better than simply staying one step ahead of death.” This is a highly pessimistic attitude, even a defeatist one, and on the basis of my readings about primitive societies I would be rather surprised if such an attitude had been current in any primitive society prior to the time when the society was damaged by the intrusion of civilization. But I actually agree that we have no rational reason to expect anything better than simply staying one step ahead of death—because simply staying one step ahead of death is just fine. We’ve been adapted by a couple of million years of evolution to a life in which our survival has depended on the success of our daily efforts—efforts that typically were strenuous and demanded considerable skill. Such efforts represented the perfect fulfillment of the power process, and, though the evidence admittedly is anecdotal, such evidence as I’ve encountered strongly suggests that people thrive best under rugged conditions in which their survival demands serious efforts—provided that their efforts are reasonably successful, and that they make those efforts as free and independent men and women, not under the demeaning conditions of servitude. A few examples:

W. A. Ferris, who lived in the Rocky Mountains as a fur trapper during the 1840s, wrote that the “Free Men” (hunters and trappers not connected with an organized fur-company)

“lead[] a venturesome and dangerous life, governed by no laws save their own wild impulses, and bound[] their desires and wishes to what their own good rifles and traps may serve them to procure.... [T]he toil, the danger, the loneliness, the deprivation of this condition of being, fraught with all its disadvantages, and replete with peril, is, they think, more than compensated by the lawless freedom, and the stirring excitement, incident to their situation and pursuits.... Yet so attached to [this way of life] do they become, that few ever leave it, and they deem themselves, nay are, ...far happier than the indwellers of towns and cities....”⁽²⁴⁾

Ferris reported that during his own rugged and dangerous life in the mountains he usually felt “resolute, cheerful, contented.”⁽²⁵⁾

Gontran de Poncins wrote of the Eskimos with whom he lived about 1939–1940:

“[T]he Eskimo is constantly on the march, driven by hunger...”⁽²⁶⁾

“[T]hese Eskimos afforded me decisive proof that happiness is a disposition of the spirit. Here was a people living in the most rigorous climate in the world,...haunted by famine...; shivering in their tents in the autumn, fighting the recurrent blizzard in the winter, toiling and moiling fifteen hours a day merely in order to get food and stay alive. ...[T]hey ought to have been melancholy men, men despondent and suicidal; instead, they were a cheerful people, always laughing, never weary of laughter.”⁽²⁷⁾

The 19th-century Argentine thinker Sarmiento wrote of the gaucho of his time:

“His moral character shows the effects of his habit of overcoming obstacles and the power of nature; he is strong, haughty, energetic...he is happy in the midst of

⁽²⁴⁾ Warren Angus Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, edited by Paul C. Phillips, pp. 40–41.

Concerning Notes 36, 41, and 43: These citations are from notes that I made many years ago, at a time when I was often careless about the completeness (though not about the accuracy) of bibliographical information that I recorded. I neglected to write down the dates of publication of the books cited here. So if you should consult different editions of these books than the ones I used, you may not find the words I’ve quoted on the pages that I’ve cited.

⁽²⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

⁽²⁶⁾ Gontran de Poncins, *Kabloona*, Time-Life Books, 1980, p. 78.

⁽²⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

his poverty and his privations, which are not such for him, who has never known greater enjoyments or desired anything higher...”⁽²⁸⁾

Sarmiento was not romanticizing the gaucho. On the contrary, he wanted to replace what he called the “barbarism” of the gaucho with “civilization.”

These examples are by no means exceptional. There’s plenty more in the literature that suggests that people thrive when they have to exert themselves in order to “stay one step ahead of death,” and I’ve encountered very little that indicates the opposite.

E. It would be instructive to compare the psychological state of primitive man with that of modern man, but such a comparison is difficult because, to my knowledge, there were hardly any systematic studies of psychological conditions in primitive societies prior to the time when the latter were disrupted by the intrusion of civilization. The evidence known to me is almost exclusively anecdotal and/or subjective.

Osborne Russell, who lived in the Rocky Mountains in the 1830s and 1840s, wrote:

“Here we found a few Snake Indians comprising 6 men 7 women and 8 or 10 children who were the only Inhabitants of this lonely and secluded spot. They were all neatly clothed in dressed deer and sheep skins of the best quality and seemed to be perfectly contented and happy. ...I almost wished I could spend the remainder of my days in a place like this where happiness and contentment seemed to reign in wild romantic splendor...”⁽²⁹⁾

Such impressions of very primitive peoples are not uncommon, and are worth noting. But they represent only superficial observations and almost certainly overlook interpersonal conflicts that would not be evident to a traveler merely passing through. Colin Turnbull, who studied the Mbuti pygmies of Africa thoroughly, found plenty of quarreling and fighting among them.⁽³⁰⁾ Nevertheless, his impression of their social and psychological life was on the whole very favorable; he apparently believed that hunter-gatherers were “untroubled by the various neuroses that accompany progress.”⁽³¹⁾ He also wrote that the Mbuti “were a people who had found in the forest something that made their life more than just worth living, something that made it, with all its hardships and problems and tragedies, a wonderful thing full of joy and happiness and free of care.”⁽³²⁾ Turnbull’s book *The Forest People* has been called “romantic,” but Schebesta, who studied the Mbuti a couple of decades earlier than Turnbull, and who as far as I know has never been accused of romanticism, expressed a similar opinion of the pygmies:

“How many and varied are the dangers, but also the joyous experiences, on their hunting excursions and their innumerable travels through the primeval forest!”⁽³³⁾

“Thus the pygmies stand before us as one of the most natural of human races, as people who live exclusively in accord with nature and without any violation of their organism. In this they show an unusually sturdy naturalness and heartiness, an unparalleled cheerfulness and freedom from care.”⁽³⁴⁾

⁽²⁸⁾ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Civilización y Barbarie*. Regrettably, I can’t give the page number. But the quotation should be accurate, since I copied it (i.e., I copied the Spanish original of it) years ago out of a book that quoted Sarmiento. However, I neglected to record the author or the title of the latter book.

⁽²⁹⁾ Osborne Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, Bison Books, p. 26.

⁽³⁰⁾ Colin M. Turnbull, *The Forest People and Wayward Servants*, passim.

⁽³¹⁾ Colin M. Turnbull, *The Mountain People*, p. 21.

⁽³²⁾ Colin M. Turnbull, *The Forest People*, Simon & Schuster, 1962, p. 26.

⁽³³⁾ Paul Schebesta, *Die Bambuti-Pygmäen vom Ituri*, Vol. I, Institut Royal Colonial Belge, 1938, p. 73. I have not had an opportunity to examine Vols. II and III of this work, which contain most of the ethnographic information.

⁽³⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

This “freedom from care,” or as we would say nowadays, freedom from stress, seems to have been generally characteristic of peoples at the hunting-and-gathering stage or not far beyond it. Poncins’s account makes evident the absence of psychological stress among the Eskimos with whom he lived:

“[The Eskimo] had proved himself stronger than the storm. Like the sailor at sea, he had met it tranquilly, it had left him unmoved. ...In mid-tempest this peasant of the Arctic, by his total impassivity, had lent me a little of his serenity of soul.”⁽³⁵⁾

“Of course he would not worry. He was an Eskimo.”⁽³⁶⁾

“[My Eskimos’] minds were at rest, and they slept the sleep of the unworried.”⁽³⁷⁾

In discussing the reasons why many whites during colonial times voluntarily chose to live with the Indians, the historian James Axtell quotes two white converts to Indian life who referred to “the absence [among the Indians] of those cares and corroding solitudes which so often prevail [among the whites].”⁽³⁸⁾ As we would put it, the absence of anxiety and stress. Axtell notes that while many whites chose to live as Indians, very few Indians made the transition in the opposite direction.⁽³⁹⁾ Information from other sources confirms the attractiveness of Indian life to many whites.⁽⁴⁰⁾

What I’ve just said about anxiety and stress probably applies to depression as well, though here I’m on shaky ground since I’ve encountered very little explicit information about depression in primitive societies. Robert Wright, without citing his source, states that “when a Western anthropologist tried to study depression among the Kaluli of New Guinea, he couldn’t find any.”⁽⁴¹⁾ Though Schebesta met thousands of Mbuti pygmies,⁽⁴²⁾ he heard of only one case of suicide among them, and he never found or heard of any case of mental illness (*Geisteskrankheit*), though he did find three persons who were either feeble-minded (*schwachsinnig*) or peculiar (*Sonderling*).⁽⁴³⁾

Even in classical (Greek & Roman) civilization, depression may have been rare:

“Harris illuminatingly comments on the virtual absence of reference to anything like depression in [classical] antiquity.”⁽⁴⁴⁾

Needless to say, stress and depression were not completely absent from every hunting-and-gathering society. Depression and suicide could occur among Poncins’s Eskimos, at least among the old people.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The Ainu (hunter-gatherers who were nearly sedentary)⁽⁴⁶⁾ suffered from such anxiety about following correct ritual procedure that it often led to serious psychological disorders.⁽⁴⁷⁾ ...³

³ Ted Kaczynski’s Letter Correspondence With David Skrbina

⁽³⁵⁾ Gontran de Poncins, *op. cit.*, pp. 212–213.

⁽³⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁽³⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁽³⁸⁾ James Axtell, *The Invasion Within*, Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 326–27.

⁽³⁹⁾ *Ibid.* also at various other places in the same book.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ E.g., Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*, Little, Brown and Company, 1917, Vol. II, p. 237; *The Old Regime in Canada*, same publisher, 1882, pp. 375–76.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Robert Wright, “The Evolution of Despair,” *Time* magazine, August 18, 1995.

⁽⁴²⁾ Paul Schebesta, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

⁽⁴³⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Catherine Edwards, “Look Back at Anger” (book review), *Times Literary Supplement*, August 23, 2002, p. 25. However, it seems to me that I recall stories from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* that could be understood as portraying depression.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Gontran de Poncins, *op. cit.*, pp. 169–175, 237.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Coon, *op. cit.*, pp. 72, 184.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 372–373.

2006

Ted defends women's utility as laborers within primitive societies.

Quoting Ted:

You write: "Let us not deceive ourselves about the real role of women." If you mean that motherhood is the only suitable role for women, then I disagree. Quite apart from child-rearing, women have always done very important, even indispensable work, and work that was often very hard physically or required great skill. To mention only a few examples: Among the Mbuti pygmies of Africa and exclusive of child-rearing, the women worked far more than the men, they provided the greater part of the food, they built the huts, and their work was often very hard. Among other things, they carried huge stacks of firewood into camp on their backs.⁽⁴⁸⁾ The women of hunting-and-gathering societies of warm climates usually provided the greater part of the food, whereas in cold countries the men provided the greater part through hunting.⁽⁴⁹⁾ But in cold countries the women produced the clothing,⁽⁵⁰⁾ which in such climates was indispensable, and in doing so the women of certain hunting-and-gathering societies showed extraordinary skill.⁽⁵¹⁾⁴

2008

Quoting Ted:

This chronic dissatisfaction and the sickly psychological condition of modern man are not normal and inevitable parts of human existence. We need not idealize the life of primitive peoples or conceal facts that are unpleasant from a modern point of view, such as the high rate of infant mortality or, in some cultures, a violent and warlike spirit. There is nevertheless reason to believe that primitive man was better satisfied with his way of life than modern man is and suffered much less from psychological problems than modern man does. For example, among hunting-and-gathering cultures, *before they were disrupted by the intrusion*

⁴ Excerpts from Letters to a German

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Paul Schebesta, *Die Bambuti-Pygmäen vom Ituri*, II. Band, I. Teil, Institut Royal Colonial Beige, Brussels, 1941, pages 11–21, 31, 142, 170.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Carleton S. Coon, *The Hunting Peoples*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston and Toronto, 1971, pages 72–73. Elizabeth Cashdan, "Hunters and Gatherers: Economic Behavior in Bands," in S. Plattner, *Economic Anthropology*, Stanford University Press, 1989, page 28.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Coon, *op. cit.*, page 48.

⁽⁵¹⁾ Gontran de Poncins, *Kabloon*, Time-Life Books, Alexandria, Virginia, USA, 1980, pages 14, 15, 124.

of industrial society, child abuse was almost nonexistent.⁽⁵²⁾ And there is evidence that in most of these cultures there was very little anxiety or nervous tension.⁽⁵³⁾

2020

Quoting Ted:

The so-called “democratic” countries in today’s world are in reality governed by political parties. In even the most democratic of these parties, decisions are made primarily by a limited inner circle of leaders⁽⁵⁴⁾ who pay only as much attention as they think expedient to the opinions of the rank and file. A close approximation to true democracy can exist only in societies organized on a very small scale, such as the nomadic bands of African pygmies.⁽⁵⁵⁾ In any modern, large-scale society, a political organization that attempts to maintain a truly democratic internal structure will condemn itself to impotence.⁵

⁵ Strategic Guidelines for an Anti-Tech Movement

⁽⁵²⁾ E.g.: Gontran de Poncins, *Kabloon*, Time-Life Books, Alexandria, Virginia, 1980, pages 32–33, 36, 157 (“no Eskimo has ever punished a child,” page 157); Allan R. Holmberg, *Nomads of the Long Bow: The Siriono of Eastern Bolivia*, The Natural History Press, New York, 1969, pages 204–05 (an unruly child is never beaten; children generally are allowed great latitude for physical expression of aggressive impulses against their parents, who are patient and long-suffering with them); John E. Pfeiffer, *The Emergence of Man*, Harper & Row, New York, 1969, page 317 (The Australian Aborigines practiced infanticide, but: “Nothing is denied to the children who are reared. Whenever they want food... they get it. Aborigine mothers rarely spank or otherwise punish their offspring, even under the most provoking circumstances.”)

On the other hand, the Mbuti of Africa did not hesitate to give their children hard slaps. Colin Turnbull, *The Forest People*, Simon And Schuster, 1962, pages 65, 129, 157. But this is the only example that I know of among hunting-and-gathering cultures of what by present standards could be considered child abuse. And I don’t think that it was abuse in the context of Mbuti culture, because the Mbuti had little hesitation about hitting one another and they often did hit one another, so that among them a blow did not have the same psychological significance that it has among us: a blow did not humiliate. Or so it seems to me on the basis of what I’ve read about the Mbuti.

⁽⁵³⁾ E.g., Gontran de Poncins, *op. cit.*, pages 212, 273, 292 (“their minds were at rest, and they slept the sleep of the unworried,” page 273; “Of course he would not worry. He was an Eskimo,” page 292). Still, there have existed hunting-and-gathering cultures in which anxiety was indeed a serious problem; for example, the Ainu of Japan. Carleton S. Coon, *The Hunting Peoples*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1971, pages 372–73.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ See Selznick, pp. 96–97, 288.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ See Schebesta, II. Band, I. Teil, p. 8; Turnbull, *Forest People*, pp. 110, 125, and *Wayward Servants*, pp. 27, 28, 42, 178–181, 183, 187, 228, 256, 274, 294, 300.

Ted's Anthropology Reading

This list includes reading material from his cabin collection, books he requested from librarians in Montana, books mentioned in his letters & books he referenced in his books written from prison, etc.

For the list of books found in Ted's cabin upon his arrest [click here](#).

For a wider selection of Ted's reading interests [click here](#).

- The Australian Aborigines — A. Elkin
- The Aborigines of South-Eastern Australia: As They Were — A. Massola
- The Arapaho — Alfred L. Kroeber
- Nomads of the Long Bow: The Siriono of Eastern Bolivia — Allan Holmberg
- Environment and Cultural Behavior — Andrew Vayda (ed.)
- The Hunting Peoples — Carleton Coon
- Indians of the United States — Clark Wissler
- Very Bad News — Clifford Geertz
- The Forest People — Colin Turnbull
- The Mbuti Pygmies: Change and Adaptation — Colin Turnbull
- The Mountain People — Colin Turnbull
- Wayward Servants: The Two Worlds of the African Pygmies — Colin Turnbull
- Civilización y Barbarie — Domingo Sarmiento
- Comments on Headland, Current Anthropology — Dominique Legros
- The Nuer; an ethnological study — E. Evans-Pritchard
- An Anthropological Approach to the Evaluation of Preschool Children Exposed to Pesticides in Mexico — Elizabeth A. Guillette
- Hunters and Gatherers: Economic Behavior in Bands — Elizabeth Cashdan
- The Harmless People — Elizabeth Thomas
- Dominant Mammal — Frank MacFarlane Burnet
- Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed — Jared Diamond
- The Emergence of Society — John E. Pfeiffer
- Manners and Customs of Several Indian Tribes — John Hunter

- The Emergence of Man — John Pfeiffer
- Nomads of South Persia — Little Brown
- Stone Age Economics — Marshall Sahlins
- Longevity Among Hunter-Gatherers — Michael Gurven and Hillard Kaplan
- On Recent Trends in the Anthropology of Foragers — Michael J. Shott
- Women and Men: Cultural Constructs of Gender — N. Bonvillain
- Pedro Martinez — Oscar Lewis
- Among Congo Pigmies — Paul Schebesta
- Die Bambuti-Pygmäen vom Ituri, Vol. 1 — Paul Schebesta
- Die Bambuti-Pygmäen vom Ituri, Vol. 2 — Paul Schebesta
- !Kung Bushman Subsistence — Richard B. Lee
- The Making of Mankind — Richard E. Leakey
- Economic Anthropology — Stuart Plattner (ed.)
- Revisionism in Ecological Anthropology — Thomas N. Headland
- My life with the Eskimos — Vilhjalmur Stefansson
- Cultural Anthropology — William A. Haviland

The Library of Unconventional Lives

Theo Slade
Primitivists Love-Hate Relationship With Anthropologists
2024

Secondary footnotes are from the source text being quoted.

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