

The 'Good' in Unabomber Manifesto

By Michael A. Weinstein

IT TOOK ME a long time to get serious about the Unabomber manifesto.

When it was first published in the Washington Post, I studiously ignored it. A tenured professor of political theory, I'm one of the "oversocialized social theorists" that the Unabomber mocks in the manifesto ("the theories are designed to serve the needs of the theorists more than the needs of any people who may be unlucky enough to live in a society on which the theories are imposed").

Political theorists are taught to be skeptical of thought that is current because it is backed by force. It took one of my students pushing the manifesto on me to get me to look at it, and a colleague pulling it out of cyberspace and thrusting it on me to get me to read it carefully.

The manifesto is the most profound work of social theory that I have read in the Clinton era, an incisive diagnosis of our times and, more importantly, a brilliant prognosis of our future that we ignore at the expense of our probity.

Almost everyone who accords the manifesto intellectual attention regards it as a defense of wilderness values and environmentalism. Unabomber suspect Theodore Kaczynski is viewed through the filters of Thoreau and mountain men. As the neo-Luddite theorist, Kirkpatrick Sale, points out, however, that the Unabomber's championing of "wild nature" is propaganda pitting a counter-myth of "nature" against the dominant myth of "technology."

The Unabomber announces that he doesn't believe in the "nature" myth, but suggests its propagation as a means of mobilizing popular support to dismantle the industrial system in case it begins to fall from its own contradictions.

The importance of the manifesto is



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Theodore Kaczynski

the prognosis promised in its title: "Industrial Society and its Future." As the Unabomber sees it, we have reached a decisive crossing point in history. Up until the 20th century, the devices and organizations that allow us to keep living — the technological life-support system — had to be adapted to the limitations of the human organism, which meant that they remained servants of their human makers and users. In the 20th century, human beings have developed a life-support system that is no longer limited by human genetic and social inheritance, but which can increasingly engineer better organisms than present-day humans to care for its survival.

If industrial society continues on its current course of genetic engineering, behavior modification and artificial in-

telligence, and it doesn't collapse through an environmental catastrophe, human beings "will no longer be a creation of nature, or of chance, or of God (depending on your religious or philosophical opinions), but a manufactured product."

The notion that the most probable future for the human race, barring calamities, is its replacement by synthesized organisms is not unique to the Unabomber, but is familiar in science fiction, dystopian literature, neo-Luddite writings and academic social theory. The difference with the Unabomber is the unblinking realism of his analysis.

Far from being the "romantic" that the wilderness school of Unabomber interpretation promotes, the Unabomber does not beat a retreat to "wild nature," nor does he take the equally utopian stance that we can pick and choose among "good" and "bad" technology. Instead, he suggests that if the transition to a synthesized species is troubled, there will be a chance to revert to pre-industrial, not primal, ways of living, in which freedom, at least, has a chance to exist.

The Unabomber poses harsh alternatives. Do we want to go more or less brutally into a hospice society where we are administered technologically while we wait for the androids to replace us, or do we fight to devolve to a pre-industrial society like the Roman Empire or medieval Europe in which most of us could not survive for long or in comfort? In any case, our jig is up.

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