

Overman and Unabomber

John Zerzan

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Born a hundred years apart, the lives of Friedrich Nietzsche and Theodore Kaczynski contain some important parallels. Both refused extremely promising academic careers: Nietzsche in philology, Kaczynski in mathematics. Each tried to make the most of a basically solitary existence. "Philosophy, as I have understood and lived it to this day, is a life voluntarily spent in ice and high mountains," said Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo*. For Kaczynski, the ice and high mountains were a more literal description, given his years in a cabin in the Montana Rockies.

Leslie Chamberlain (Nietzsche in Turin, London, 1996) summed up Nietzsche's experience as "Godless, jobless, wifeless and homeless." Kaczynski wandered less, but the characterization fits him very closely, too. Both were failures in relating to women, and uninterested in considering the condition of women in society. The two were both menaced at times by illness and impoverishment. Each was betrayed by his only sibling: Nietzsche by his sister Elizabeth, who tampered with his writings when he was helpless to prevent her; Kaczynski by his brother David, who fingered him for the FBI.

Nietzsche's central concept was the will to power. Kaczynski's big idea was the power process.

Both extolled strength and attacked pity: Nietzsche with his critique of Christianity as an unhealthy "slave morality," Kaczynski in terms of leftism as a dishonest projection of personal weakness.

Each developed, at base, a moral psychology, although Kaczynski is not limited to a psychology.

Nietzsche's analysis is contained within culture. His quest for a regeneration of the human spirit and the fulfillment of the individual is essentially aesthetic. Art, in many ways, replaced God for him. His post-Christian artistic vision is the measure of the Dionysian "revaluation of values." "What matters most... is always culture" (*Twilight of the Gods*).

There is no getting around Nietzsche's belief in hierarchy, his justification of rank and exploitation. Kaczynski's anarchist vision called for free community, decentralized to the point of face-to-face interaction.

Kaczynski, like Nietzsche, also desires virility over decadence, but saw that this can only be realized in terms of a social transformation. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche blamed "the democratization of Europe" for what he saw as a herd mentality. In *Industrial Society and Its Future*, Kaczynski recognized that a much deeper change than the political (not to mention the aesthetic) would be needed for the individual to be free and fulfilled. He understood the logic of industrialized life to be the obstacle, and called for its destruction. For him, how everyday life is experienced was a far more important factor than abstract values or aesthetic expression. Nietzsche and Kaczynski thus see the values crisis quite differently. Especially in the persona of Zarathustra, Nietzsche calls for personal redemption through an act of the will. Kaczynski does not overlook the context of the individual, the forces that frustrate his/her life at a basic level.

Nietzsche focused on German culture, e.g. the case of Wagner. Kaczynski examined the movement and consequences of an increasingly artificial and estranging global industrial order.

Nietzsche affirmed the free spirit in books such as *Human, All Too Human*, *Daybreak*, and *The Gay Science*, only to question the existence of free will in other texts. Kaczynski showed that individual autonomy is problematic in modern society, and that this problem is a function of that society.

Both Nietzsche and Kaczynski are seen as nihilists by many. The prevailing postmodern ethos elevates Nietzsche and ignores Kaczynski—largely because Nietzsche does not challenge society and Kaczynski does.

For postmodernism, the self is just a product, an outcome, nothing more than a surface effect. Nietzsche actually originated this stance (now also known as “the death of the subject”), which can be found in many of his writings. Kaczynski expressed a determinate autonomy and showed that the individual has not been extinguished. One can lament the end of the sovereign individual and lapse into postmodern passivity and cynicism, or diagnose the individual’s condition in society and challenge this condition, as Kaczynski did.

Freud’s *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, translated in the 1920s as *Civilization and Its Discontents*, reads more literally as “what makes us uncomfortable about culture.” Nietzsche never questioned culture itself. Kaczynski shed light on why industrialism, the ground of culture, must be overcome for health and freedom to exist.

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