

I

Narcissism in Full Bloom

*Mirror, mirror on the wall
 Who is the fairest of them all?*

Who can forget the look of murderous rage distorting the face of the Wicked Queen in Walt Disney's remarkable animation of the classic fairy tale "Snow White" when she looks in the mirror after asking this question in her daily ritual of reassurance and, instead of her own face, sees reflected the image of the even more beautiful Snow White? The popularity of this fairy tale reflects the universality of a theme central to political psychology: the narcissistic ruler clinging to power who is threatened by pretenders to the throne. Reflecting the ruler's underlying insecurity, Arthur Feiner,¹ in an especially insightful contribution to the volume *Narcissism and the Interpersonal Self*, mischievously notes and archly asks in his parenthetical to the epigraph that introduces both his and this chapter, "Maybe, it's you, oh beautiful queen, but Madam, why do you think you need to ask?"²

A fatal example of this dynamic is reflected in the life of serial bomber Theodore Kaczynski. The target of one of the FBI's most costly investigations, Kaczynski became known to that agency as UNABOM (*UNiversity and Airline BOMber*), and, until his identity was eventually discovered, he was popularly known as the Unabomber. Intellectually precocious and mathematically gifted but a social isolate because of his obvious intellectual gifts and peculiar interpersonal style, Kaczynski skipped several grades in school, which served to isolate him further from his peers. His passage through school was characterized by a major imbalance between prodigious intellectual gifts and a major deficit in interpersonal skills. He has been described as a mathematical genius and an emotional cripple. At age 10, he took with him on a family camping vacation a book entitled *Romping through Mathematics from Addition to Calculus*.

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In high school, Kaczynski experimented with explosives, and he was regarded by his peers as alien, a nerd, and was ignored. He was teased and isolated. According to media interviews with classmates, “He wasn’t in our world. He was in his own world.” “He was never seen as a person. He was seen as a *walking brain*.”

Kaczynski graduated high school at 15 and entered Harvard at the age of 16, where he majored in mathematics. There, he was considered a “wonk.” On the one occasion when he attempted to ask a young woman out on a date, it was so clumsily done that he was rejected out of hand.

In 1962, he began graduate studies in mathematics at the University of Michigan, receiving his doctorate in 1967 and winning the prize for the outstanding dissertation. One teacher said that only two or three people in the world were capable of understanding the concepts he was exploring. Interestingly – and tellingly – an unusual feature of his dissertation was the absence of any acknowledgment of the role of mentors.

In 1967, he became an assistant professor of mathematics at the University of California at Berkeley. At the time, Berkeley was in the midst of social ferment and student activism, but Kaczynski did not seem to notice, remaining totally preoccupied with his mathematics. He seemed to be on the fast track to tenure, publishing several important articles. He was considered gifted but was totally unavailable to his students, and he resigned abruptly in 1969, at the age of 26.

After living for several years with his family, who supported him financially, in the summer of 1971, he moved into a remote cabin in Montana, one without electricity or running water, to lead an ascetic, schizoid lifestyle. There, he apparently became increasingly obsessed with the desecration of the wilderness by the encroachment of modern society. Totally isolated, he had withdrawn into himself, and the manifesto on which he privately labored was his attempt to make sense of a world from which he was increasingly alienated. He had made his own personal struggle the basis of an ideology that he was going to force on society.

As revealed later, in what came to be known as the “Unabomber Manifesto,” a 50-page essay on *Industrial Society and Its Future*, Kaczynski came to see the need to bring down the techno-industrial system and believed that violent collapse was the only way to accomplish this. The industrial system, as he saw it, was “robbing individuals of their autonomy, reducing their rapport with nature, and becoming increasingly remote from the natural pattern of human behavior.”³ Nothing less than a revolution against technology was called for.

In 1978, Kaczynski’s lethal psychological development led to the creation of his first homemade bomb, sent to a materials engineering professor at Northwestern University. Over the next 17 years, he made a series of increasingly sophisticated bombs that killed 3 Americans and injured 24 more.

But, until 1995, there was no written message designed to inflict terror on the public, no ideological motivation expressed. He was the primary and most important audience for his own disordered thoughts and deeds. He thus was

not a terrorist, seeking to inflict terror on a broader audience through violence or the threat of violence designed to accomplish a religious, ideological, or political goal through fear or intimidation. There was no sense-making message accompanying these missives. Until 1995, Kaczynski was not a terrorist – he was a serial bomber, successfully eluding authorities as he carried on his deadly, but private, campaign.

I summarized my understanding of Kaczynski in the political personality profile I prepared at the request of *The Washington Post* in June 1995, after Kaczynski's 35,000-word manifesto was delivered to its offices.^{a,4} Like the Wicked Queen in *Snow White*, each day, Theodore Kaczynski looked into his metaphorical mirror (he did not have one in his remote cabin) and asked,

Mirror, mirror on the wall
 Who is the most dangerous serial bomber of them all?

His most important audience was himself. And each day, like the Wicked Queen, he was reassured to see his own image and hear the answer, “You are, Unabomber.” How he exulted in outwitting the authorities in his serial bomb spree! The tenor of the notes accompanying his bombs conveyed a mocking arrogance, a superiority over the FBI, which he tauntingly characterized as incompetent. “How superior I am,” he seemed to convey, “being able to thwart the entire law enforcement establishment! How powerful I am!”

Kaczynski sent no bombs between 1987 and 1993. In considering this hiatus, the FBI speculated that perhaps UNABOM was burning out. But with the explosive event of February 26, 1993 – grim augury of September 11, 2001 – this was all to change.

On February 26, 1993, the first World Trade Center attack occurred when a truck bomb was detonated below the North Tower. A 1,500-pound fertilizer bomb was intended to knock the North Tower into the South Tower, bringing them both down and killing thousands of people. Had it been placed closer to the World Trade Center's concrete foundation, the plan might have succeeded. As it was, it killed 6 people and injured 1,042.

The attack was all too quickly forgotten by the American people, armed as they were with their characteristic sense of denial that “It can't happen here.” But it was not ignored by the Unabomber. It seems likely that Kaczynski was challenged by the World Trade Center bombing and needed to act to regain his position as the most feared bomber in the land because, in June 1993, he resumed his letter bomb campaign.

But a date of even greater significance for the Unabomber was April 19, 1995, the day of the massive explosion of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in

^{a,4} The profile was prepared as background information to assist *The Washington Post* in its decision on whether to publish Kaczynski's manifesto. The profile was later published in *Psychiatric Times* after Kaczynski's identity was revealed.

Oklahoma City, causing the loss of 168 lives, including 19 children, and injuring more than 680. Three hundred twenty-four buildings within a 16-block radius were severely damaged or destroyed, causing more than \$652 million in damages. Timothy McVeigh was arrested within 90 minutes of the explosion and identified as the prime suspect on April 20. And on April 20, when Theodore Kaczynski asked his customary question of the mirror,

Mirror, mirror on the wall
 Who's the most dangerous bomber of them all?

the devastating answer came back: "Timothy McVeigh."

The third week in April 1995 was a week of prodigious activity for the Unabomber, a week that marked a major departure from his previous pattern. On April 24, the president of the California Forestry Association was killed opening a mail bomb. That same day, the Unabomber wrote a letter to the *New York Times* indicating that if it or another "respectable" periodical would publish his manifesto, he would desist from terrorism. This was taking the academic dictum "publish or perish" to a new level. Demonstrating a precise turn of mind, in his letter, he distinguished between terrorism and sabotage, characterizing terrorism as "actions motivated by a desire to influence the development of a society and intended to cause injury or death to human beings." In contrast, sabotage was characterized as "similarly motivated actions intended to destroy property without injuring human beings." The Unabomber clarified that "the promise we offer is to desist from terrorism. We reserve the right to engage in sabotage."⁵

ANDERS BREIVIK OF NORWAY: FOLLOWING THE PATH OF THE UNABOMBER

The Unabomber Manifesto was to be the basis for "2083: A European Declaration of Independence," a rambling 1,500-page document posted online by Anders Breivik just before he carried out his murderous rampage on July 2011.

On Friday, July 22, 2011, 32-year-old Anders Behring Breivik, disguised as a policeman, coldly and calculatedly perpetrated a deadly attack in Oslo by detonating a bomb outside the Norwegian prime minister's office, killing 8 and wounding 26. He then carried out a murderous rampage at a political youth camp on Utoya Island organized by the youth division of the ruling Norwegian Labor Party, killing 69.

Breivik preceded the bloody twin attacks by publishing online hours earlier a rambling 1,500-page manifesto focusing on the year, entitled "2083: A European Declaration of Independence." The author identified 2083 as the date when the author believed a European civil war would end with the execution of cultural Marxists and the deportation of Muslims (2083 is the 200th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx). According to the Norwegian anti-Islamic citizen journalist website *Document.no*, to which Breivik frequently

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contributed, “large parts of the Manifesto are copied directly from ‘Unabomber’ Ted Kaczynski’s own manifesto, with minor changes such as replacement of the word ‘leftist’ by the phrase ‘cultural Marxist’ or ‘multi-culturalist.’”⁶ Detailing the plagiarism, Kristen Wyatt, writing in the *Huffington Post*, compares, as an example, this passage from the Unabomber’s manifesto in which he lambasts leftist “feelings of inferiority” with an almost identical passage in Breivik’s manifesto: “One of the most widespread manifestations of the craziness of our world is leftism, so a discussion of the psychology of leftism can serve as an introduction to the discussion of the problems of modern society in general.” Breivik wrote: “One of the most widespread manifestations of the craziness of our world is multiculturalism, so a discussion of the psychology of multiculturalism can serve as an introduction to the problems of Western Europe in general.”⁷ There are numerous passages in which Breivik substitutes “multi-culturalism” or “cultural Marxism” for “leftism.” In addition, Breivik’s manifesto had a section entitled “Documenting EU’s Deliberate Strategy to Islamise Europe.”

The manifesto begins with an entry for April/May 2002, in which Breivik identifies himself as a Knight Templar. In particular, he claims to have been “ordained as the 8th Justiciar Knight for the PCCTS, Knights Templar Europe,” the “resistance movement” that, in other parts of his manifesto, he claims was established to combat the “Islamisation” of Europe. “Our primary objective is to develop PCCTS, Knights Templar, into becoming the foremost conservative revolutionary movement in Western Europe [in] the next few decades.”⁸ Breivik saw himself as “the point of the spear” of Christian resistance against the Islamisation of Europe and indicated that there were tens of thousands throughout Europe to whose feelings he was giving voice. Breivik criticized his government for permitting “thousands of Muslims to stream in each year through the asylum, institutions or family connections in Norway.”⁹ He saw himself as protecting Christian European values against Muslims, Marxists, and multi-culturalists, and, in effect, anyone different. The editor of the website on which the manifesto was posted, Hans Rustad, surmised that Breivik hoped the document would become “an organ of a cultural conservative revival.”¹⁰

The event had long been prepared for: in his manifesto, Breivik indicated that he had undertaken a period of fund-raising between 2002 and 2006. He spent 2006–2008 researching and writing his manifesto, then moved into the next phase. In July 2010, Breivik wrote that he had “successfully finished the armor acquisition phase.”¹¹

Breivik’s father, a diplomat, divorced Breivik’s mother when his son was one year old. There was little contact between father and son in the intervening years – an annual visit – but the relationship broke down completely when Anders was a teenager and was arrested for spray-painting graffiti. There had been no contact since. When Breivik was four, social welfare workers considered removing Breivik from his home because of his disturbed behavior. As a boy, he was quiet but friendly, but was the victim of bullying.

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In his writing, Breivik extrapolates from his own experiences and deplores the decline of the family: “To truly reverse the decline of the family, the momentum must be carried forward to confront the current matriarchal policies that have institutionalized ‘broken family’ policies. Our current system produces broken families and prevents traditional norms based on discipline.” He goes on to decry the feminization of boys by a dominant maternal influence. “I do not approve of the super-liberal, matriarchal upbringing as it completely lacked discipline and has contributed to feminizing me to a certain degree.” According to a boyhood friend, Breivik did not have any girlfriends and never dated. Interestingly, although his father in many ways abandoned him early in life and had very little contact with his son, it was his mother who Breivik blamed. He extends the lessons from his childhood to all of Western Europe, insisting that the father/patriarch must be given considerably more influence because this is the only way to ensure the survival of the nuclear family and enhance family integrity: “This matriarchal supremacy within the modern households must cease to exist.” After this diatribe, remarkably, he then says: “I consider myself privileged and I feel I have had a privileged upbringing. . . . I haven’t really had any negative experiences in my childhood in any way.”

As a teenager, Breivik exercised compulsively and took steroids to aid his bodybuilding efforts. He expressed no apparent interest in the world of politics at that time. It was apparently in his late 20s that Breivik turned to right-wing extremism, joining a neo-Nazi group. In his first statement after his 2011 arrest, Breivik, through his lawyer, stated that the attacks were “atrocious, but necessary”¹² to defeat liberal immigration policies and the spread of Islam. The court-appointed psychiatrists found that Breivik was suffering from paranoid schizophrenia and recommended that he be confined to a mental hospital.

At his February 6 preliminary hearing, Breivik was visibly upset with this diagnosis, denying that he was mentally ill and instead asserting that he should be awarded a medal of valor for his heroic leadership against the Islamisation of Christian Europe. At the hearing, he claimed that his bombing attack in Oslo and subsequent murderous rampage at the Norwegian Labor Party youth camp were designed as a “preventive attack on traitors,”¹³ and he pleaded self-defense on behalf of his culture. The Labor-led government, which he blamed for the “deconstruction of Norwegian culture,” was also blamed for promoting the “Islamic colonization of Norway.” “Ethnic Norwegians will become the minority in ten years. Indigenous people subject to genocide have the right to defend themselves,” he claimed. It should be noted that both his parents supported the policies of the Norwegian Labor Party, the object of his violent attack.

That he was held to be criminally insane angered Breivik. His self-designated narcissistic title as 8th Justiciar Knight for the PCCTS, Knights Templar Europe was far grander than the broken, isolated life he was leading. By labeling him criminally insane, Breivik was denied the compensatory grandiose reality he had created. Instead, his dreams of glory were identified as a delusional psychotic

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symptom. He was angered by the psychiatric diagnosis because it had deprived his murderous acts of meaning.

On April 10, 2012, a second forensic psychiatric assessment report made at the request of the family of his victims was released, contradicting the initial assessment that he was suffering from paranoid schizophrenia and finding him sane. During the investigation, it emerged that Breivik had considered detonating a bomb in the square next to Oslo City Hall during the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize ceremony for Barack Obama. Because of security, the attack would have been largely symbolic, but, with hundreds of millions watching, he believed it would have been a perfect way to promote his anti-Islamic message and ensure his international prominence as a leader of the crusade to preserve Christian Europe.

In his mind's eye or, perhaps more accurately, in his grandiose mind's "I," Breivik was a hero, deserving of a medal for his dramatic leadership role in calling international attention to the dangers of the Islamisation of Europe. In fact, investigations found no evidence of a group or organization supporting Breivik; instead, he apparently was acting entirely on his own, despite claiming that he represented tens of thousands of Christian Europeans. His legions of followers existed entirely in his mind. His paranoid delusion of grandeur – that he headed the Knights Templar Europe in their resistance against the Muslim invasion – was far grander than his bleak reality.

Breivik was relieved that he had been declared sane by the second forensic psychiatric team. In a letter he sent to the Norwegian tabloid *Verdens Gang*, he declared that to be sent to a psychiatric ward would be a "fate worse than death. . . . To send a political activist to an asylum is more sadistic and more evil than killing him."¹⁴ Now, he said, he would have his day in court, where the two contradictory evaluations would both be entered into evidence, and he could use the legal platform to again proclaim his grandiose self-assigned role in protecting Christian Europe against Muslim colonization.

In his statement at the original November 2011 hearing, Breivik portrayed himself as a resistance leader, as "the commander" of a Norwegian resistance movement before the judge cut him off. Forensic psychiatrist James L. Knoll IV¹⁵ characterized Breivik as a "pseudo-commando." Citing Park Dietz's 1986 article, "Mass, Serial, and Sensational Homicides," he observed that the term "pseudo-commando" was first used to describe the type of mass murderer who plans his actions "after long deliberation" and who kills indiscriminately in public during the daytime. Such individuals have the intent to die "in a blaze of glory" and have made no escape plans. These individuals are "injustice collectors" who are driven by strong feelings of anger against the system and seek revenge.¹⁶ They then externalize their self-hatred and identify an external enemy who must be destroyed. In the process, the fragmented self has been reassembled as an exalted avenger, leader of a collective quest for revenge.

This was true of both Breivik and Kaczynski: in addition to their strong paranoid traits, they also possessed powerful narcissistic traits, especially

grandiosity. Their individual internal distress had been transformed into a grand crusade of which they were leaders, and, in carrying out this now exalted revenge mission, they sought honor and came to believe that their violent acts would bring them fame and glory. Knoll observes that, after his capture, Breivik requested that he be evaluated by Japanese forensic specialists because “the Japanese understand the concept of honor better than the Europeans.”¹⁷

Breivik had for the most part withdrawn from society into the dark crevices of his mind. His estranged father declared that “I couldn’t believe my eyes. It was totally paralyzing, and I couldn’t really understand it... He must live in another world.”¹⁸ He indicated that, with the exception of one phone call, he had had no contact with his son since 1995. “I don’t feel like his father. How could he just stand there and kill so many people and just seem to think that what he did was OK? He should have taken his own life too. That’s what he should have done. . . . I will have to live with this shame for the rest of my life. People will always link me with him,” he bitterly declared.

On August 24, convicted of killing 77 victims, Breivik was sentenced to 21 years in prison. Showing not an iota of remorse, Breivik apologized to Christian militants, expressing regret that he had not killed more. He entered court on the 24th making a fascist salute, his right fist clenched, and smiled when the verdict was announced.

If Breivik had for the most part withdrawn from the world around him, Kaczynski had totally withdrawn, having essentially no contact with other human beings since 1971 and living in a remote cabin in Montana, with no power or heat. He had withdrawn into himself, leaving behind what he believed to be a hostile rejecting world. He was not simply paranoid: he felt socially persecuted by a world into which he did not fit because of his own social peculiarities. More profound than rejection, he was simply ignored. But his violent actions ensured that the world would ignore him no longer.

FREUD’S EARLY CONCEPT OF PSYCHOSIS AS TOTAL NARCISSISTIC WITHDRAWAL INTO THE SELF

As Sigmund Freud conceptualized it in his libido theory, in individuals like Kaczynski and Breivik, the psychological energy invested in the world of people, the world of objects, is redirected and totally absorbed into the self. In the Greek myth of Narcissus, the source of Freud’s clinical term *narcissism*, the youth Narcissus becomes totally transfixed by the beautiful image of himself reflected in the still waters of a pond. Besotted with (self) love, he cannot tear his eyes away:

Am I the lover
Or beloved? Then why make love? Since I
Am what I long for, then my riches are
So great they make me poor.

(Ovid, AD 8)

There is a total loss of boundaries between the world and the self: the individual so self-absorbed becomes his own entire universe. Freud¹⁹ considers the psychology of the totally self-absorbed person, the patient with schizophrenia, who

seems really to have withdrawn his libido from people, and things in the external world without replacing them by others in fantasy. ... The question arises: What happens to the libido which has been withdrawn from external objects in schizophrenia? The megalomania of these states points the way. ... The libido that has been withdrawn from the external world has been directed to the ego, and thus gives rise to an attitude which may be called *narcissism*.²⁰

In his classic analysis of the paranoid illness of the distinguished jurist Daniel Paul Schreber, Freud characterized Schreber as being “under the influence of visions” that, in Schreber’s own words, “were partly of a terrifying character but partly too of an indescribable grandeur.”²¹ Convinced of “the imminence of a great catastrophe,” as his paranoid illness peaked, he came to believe that this catastrophe had occurred and that he was the only man left alive, thus projecting his own psychological disintegration onto the entire world. He then developed the restitutive delusion that God had given him the mission of saving the world from annihilation and recreating Eden, a delusion of messianic grandiosity of cosmic scope, an expression of the ultimate narcissism.²²

It is the breakdown of the narcissistic defensive armor that leads to psychosis. The feeling of lack of control, of being overwhelmed by powerful emotions is overwhelming. Grotstein²³ has likened this inner turmoil to the black holes in the universe hypothesized by astrophysicists. In the physical universe, these black holes, so called because they emit no light, have such extraordinary density and such powerful gravity that they swallow up everything in their paths. Grotstein, who characterizes man as “meaning-obsessed,” describes the terror of experiencing psychological disintegration of the self as a psychological black hole. It is dissolution into nothingness, into a state of meaninglessness. So overwhelming is this terror of meaningless that man is impelled to make meaning, to create compensatory delusions, as Schreber did.

It is almost a hydraulic model that Freud employs as an analogy in characterizing increasing narcissism, the physical model of a U-shaped tube: as the libido is withdrawn from the world of objects, it flows into the self. Like Narcissus, in withdrawing from the external world, the narcissist is so consumed with self-love that there is no psychological energy left to love or connect with others. This explains the failure of empathy characteristically observed in narcissistic persons. Love, in this way of thinking, as Freud would have it, is a zero-sum game. Neat! But wrong.^b For, as numerous

^b The psychohistorian Peter Loewenberg (1988) has observed the importance of the evolutionary shift from libidinal-drive theory, Freud’s earliest formulations, to ego psychological and object relations paradigms in applying psychoanalysis to history and biography.

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psychoanalytic scholars have taken pains to point out, self-love is a requisite for love of others.^c

The relationship between Ted Kaczynski's paranoid world and that of narcissism is not readily apparent. After all, Kaczynski was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic and is now confined to a hospital for the criminally insane. The disparity between his prodigious intellectual gifts and his interpersonal peculiarities led some to raise the question of whether he did not suffer from Asperger's syndrome, considered part of the autistic spectrum. But even though there are genetic and psychobiological roots to Kaczynski's psychotic illness, nevertheless, the resultant disordered thoughts and feelings are organized in the mind.

Paranoid feelings of narcissistic grandiosity and persecution are intended to overcome an inner sense of inferiority, unworthiness, and unlovability. What could be more important, after all, than to be the center of a plot, in contrast to the ignominy of being ignored and insignificant? Thus, paranoia can be considered a primitive form of narcissistic pathology. The narcissistic triad consists of (1) narcissistic entitlement, which inevitably leads to (2) disappointment and disillusionment, which in turn produces (3) retaliatory rage due to the rejection of the "entitlement." This rage is strongly associated with the frustration of narcissistic entitlement and insatiable narcissistic needs.²⁴ We discuss narcissistic rage in greater detail in Chapter 2.

A clinical example may be helpful to illustrate the compensatory value of paranoia, referred to as the "restitutive" function of delusions. During my service in the National Institute of Mental Health unit in Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C., I was responsible for clinically evaluating the so-called White House cases, those individuals who tried to break into the White House, the symbol of ultimate power to the powerless, to determine whether their acts were the product of mental illness and, if so, if the patient should be confined in a locked or an open ward.

An unemployed man was apprehended by the U.S. Secret Service when he tried to gain access to the White House by driving his white pickup truck through the White House gates – a direct approach to be sure – and he was sent to Saint E's for evaluation. From social services, we learned that he had been fired the day before as a dishwasher (which takes a certain amount of application). In our

^c In his 1947 *Man for Himself*, Erich Fromm observes that "Selfishness and self-love, far from being identical, are actually opposite . . . the selfish person does not love himself too much, but too little; in fact he hates himself . . . it is true that selfish persons are incapable of loving others, for they are not capable of loving themselves either" (p. 131). Thus, the selfish person, the self-absorbed person, does not love himself too much but too little! Indeed, the façade of self-love masks what is truly underneath – self-hatred.

Narcissism can be viewed as a pattern of defense of the fragile self. The pathology of narcissism is tied up with the pathology of the self, especially with the regulation of self-esteem (Bacciagaluppi, 1993). Freud characterized narcissism as a quality of "perfection" (1914, p. 94). Anything that threatens that perfection must be defended against at all costs, which is the theme of Arnold Rothstein's 1980 *The Narcissistic Pursuit of Perfection*.