

## ABUSE

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*-Anticiv.net Collective*

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We are going to fight them and impose our will on them and we will capture or . . . kill them until we have imposed law and order on this country. We dominate the scene and we will continue to impose our will on this country.

*Paul Bremer, U.S. Administrator of occupied Iraq*<sup>159</sup>

Something very unpleasant is being let loose in Iraq. Just this week, a company commander in the U.S. 1st Infantry Division in the north of the country admitted that, in order to elicit information about the guerrillas who are killing American troops, it was necessary to “instill fear” in the local villagers. An Iraqi interpreter working for the Americans had just taken an old lady from her home to frighten her daughters and granddaughters into believing that she was being arrested.

A battalion commander in the same area put the point even more baldly. “With a heavy dose of fear and violence, and a lot of money for projects, I think we can convince these people that we are here to help them,” he said. He was speaking from a village that his men had surrounded with barbed wire, upon which was a sign, stating: “This fence is here for your protection. Do not approach or try to cross, or you will be shot.”

*Robert Fisk*<sup>160</sup>

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The other day, Dear Abby listed warning signs of potential abusers, saying, (in all caps, no less), “IF YOUR PARTNER SHOWS THESE SIGNS, IT’S TIME TO GET OUT.” I followed her citation to the Projects for Victims of Family Violence, and was intrigued by what I saw. I was especially intrigued by the final sentence of the Projects’ introduction: “Initially the batterer will try to explain his behavior as signs of love and concern, and a woman may be flattered at first. As time goes on, the behaviors become more severe and

serve to dominate the woman.”<sup>161</sup> This reminded me of something Robert Jay Lifton wrote in his extraordinary book *The Nazi Doctors*, about how before you can commit any mass atrocity, you must convince yourself that what you’re doing is not in fact harmful but instead beneficial, so that, for example, Nazis weren’t in their own minds committing genocide and mass murder, but instead purifying the “Aryan race.” Of course we see the same on a daily basis, as we the civilized do not enslave the poor or indigenous but civilize them, and we do not destroy the natural world but instead develop natural resources. And I thought about this on a personal level: how very rare it is for someone to do something because he or she is a jerk. I know when I’ve treated people poorly, I’ve nearly always had my actions fully rationalized beforehand, and I’ve generally believed my rationalizations. That’s one of the beautiful things about denial: by definition you don’t know you’re in it. Now, my own transgressions have been frankly pretty minor—a few hurt feelings here or there—but I’ve wondered about something of much greater consequence ever since I was a child: did my father believe the lies he told us about his own violence? Did he really think he was beating my brother because of where my brother parked the car? Or more seriously yet, did he really believe himself a day later when he denied the violence altogether? Similarly, do those in power believe their own lies? In their heart of hearts (presuming they still have them) do the scientists for the National Science Foundation really believe there’s no connection between sonic blasts louder than nuclear explosions and the deaths of nearby whales? Do the National Academy of Sciences biostatisticians really believe there’s no connection between a lack of water in the Klamath and dead salmon? Does anyone really believe industrial civilization isn’t killing the planet?

Now, to the list. I’ve greatly shortened (and in some cases modified) the Projects’ commentary, and although women sometimes do beat men (and certainly in this culture—where all of us are more or less crazy—women commit their fair share of emotional abuse, too), physical violence runs overwhelmingly enough from male to female to cause me to use the masculine pronoun for batterers. Nonetheless, if your partner is a woman and fits these characteristics, you, too, would be wise to follow Dear Abby’s all caps advice.

The list begins with jealousy: Although the abuser says jealousy is a sign of love, it's instead a sign of insecurity and possessiveness. He'll question you about whom you talk to, accuse you of flirting, be jealous of time spent with family, friends, or children. He may call constantly or visit unexpectedly, prevent you from going to work because "you might meet someone," check the mileage on your car.

This leads to the second sign, controlling behavior: At first, the batterer will say he's concerned for your safety, your need to use time well, or your need to make good decisions. He'll be angry if you're "late" returning from the store or an appointment, will question you closely about where you went, whom you talked to. He may eventually not let you make personal decisions about your house or clothing; he may keep your money or even make you ask permission to leave the room or house.

The third characteristic is quick involvement. He comes on strong—"I've never felt loved like this by anyone"—and pressures you for an exclusive commitment almost immediately.

The pressure is because of the fourth characteristic: he needs someone desperately because he's very dependent, soon enough depending on you for all his needs, expecting you to be the perfect wife, mother, lover, friend. He then projects this dependence back onto you in an attempt to increase his control, saying, "If you love me, I'm all you need; you're all I need." You're supposed to take care of everything for him emotionally and in the home.

Because of his dependence he'll try to isolate you from all resources. If you have male friends, you're a "whore." If you have female friends you're a lesbian. If you're close to your family, you're "tied to the apron strings." He'll accuse people who support you of "causing trouble." He may want to live in the country without a phone, he may not let you use a car, and may try to keep you from working or going to school.

The sixth characteristic is that he blames others for his problems. If he's not successful in life, someone must be out to get him. If he makes a mistake, you must have upset him, kept him from concentrating. It's your fault his life isn't perfect.

And it's your fault he's not happy. It's your fault he's angry. "You make me angry when you don't do what I say." If he has to harm you, then, that, too, is your fault: you,

after all, made him mad. And you certainly don't want to do that.

He gets upset easily. He's hypersensitive. The slightest setbacks are personal attacks.

He's often cruel, or at the very least insensitive to the pain and suffering of nonhuman animals, and also to children. He may beat them because they are incapable of doing what he wants: for example, he may whip a two-year-old for wetting a diaper.

He may conflate sex and violence. This may be under the guise of playfulness, wanting to act out fantasies that you're helpless, which serves the vital purpose of letting you know that rape excites him. Or he may simply drop the guise.

The next warning sign is that he may perceive and actualize rigid sex roles. You're supposed to stay at home and serve him. You must obey him, in great measure because women are inferior, less intelligent, unable to be whole without men.

He may verbally abuse you, saying cruel, hurtful, degrading things. He may run down your accomplishments, and may attempt to convince you that you cannot function without him. This abuse may come when you're surprised or vulnerable: he may, for example, wake you up in order to abuse you.

Sudden mood swings are another warning signal. He can be nice one minute, and explosively violent the next, which means of course he was never really nice to begin with.

You should watch out if he has a history of battering. He may acknowledge he hit women in the past, but will aver they made him do it. You may hear from ex-partners that he's abusive. It's crucial to note that battering isn't situational: if he beat someone else, he'll very likely beat you, no matter how perfect you try to be.

You should be very wary if he uses threats of violence to control you. "I'll slap your mouth off," or "I'll kill you," or "I'll break your neck." A batterer may attempt to convince you all men threaten partners, but this isn't true. He may also attempt to convince you you're responsible for his threats: he wouldn't threaten you if you didn't make him do it.

He may break or strike objects. There are two variants of this behavior: one is the

destruction of beloved objects as punishment. The other is for him to violently strike or throw things to scare you.

The last characteristic on the Projects' list is the use of any force during an argument: holding you down, physically restraining you from leaving the room, pushing you, shoving you, forcing you to listen to him.

Now, I found this list very interesting in its own right, and given the rate at which women are abused (just in this country, a woman is beaten by her partner every ten seconds), it's also very important. But I found it even more interesting because it was immediately clear to me that these warning signs also apply to our culture as a whole. Let's go through them again.

Jealousy. The God of this culture has always been jealous. Time and again in the Bible we read, "I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me,"<sup>162</sup> or "Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth."<sup>163</sup> God today is just as jealous, whether he goes by the name of Science, Capitalism, or Civilization. Science is as monotheistic as Christianity, moreso really, since Science doesn't even have to say it's jealous: we've so internalized its hegemony that many of us believe the only way we can know anything about the world is through science: Science is Truth. Capitalism is so jealous it couldn't even allow the existence of the Soviet version of itself (they're both state-subsidized command economies,<sup>164</sup> the biggest differences being: a) the merging under the Soviet system of state and corporate bureaucracies into one huge bureaucracy that was even more inefficient and wasteful than the "capitalist" system of functionally separate bureaucracies working for the unified goal of production; and b) the Soviet Parliament was dominated by different factions of the Communist Party with more than 90 percent of the votes going to this party, while the American Congress is dominated by different factions of the Capitalist Party, with more than 90 percent of the votes going to *this* party). Civilization is just as jealous as science and capitalism, systematically disallowing anyone from perceiving the world in nonutilitarian terms, that is, perceiving

the world not in terms of slavery, that is, not in terms of addiction, that is, perceiving the world relationally. Lots of so-called free thinkers like to comment on the tens of millions of people who have been killed because they refused to worship Christianity's God of Love—because God is after all a jealous God—but even they rarely mention the hundreds of millions of (indigenous and other) people who have been killed because they refused to worship Civilization's God of production, a God just as jealous as the Christian God, a God deeply devoted to the conversion of the living to the dead.

Control. I've thought for a couple of days now about what to put in this paragraph. I considered talking about the public school systems, which have as their primary function the breaking of children's wills—getting them to sit in one place for hours, days, weeks, months, years on end, wishing their lives away—in preparation for their lives as wage slaves. Then I thought about advertising, and more broadly television, and how through our entire lives we're manipulated by distant others who do not have our best interests at heart. I thought of the words of economist Paul Baran, "The real problem is . . . whether an economic and social order should be tolerated in which the individual, from the very cradle on, is so shaped, molded, and 'adjusted' as to become an easy prey of profit-greedy capitalist enterprise and a smoothly functioning object of capitalist exploitation and degradation."<sup>165</sup> But then I thought maybe I should write about face-recognition software, and of the implantation of ID chips first into pets, then into people. I thought of the words of a 1996 U.S. Air Force Scientific Advisory Board Report: "One can envision the development of electromagnetic energy sources, the output of which can be pulsed, shaped, and focused, that can couple with the human body in a fashion that will allow one to prevent voluntary muscular movements, control emotions (and thus actions), produce sleep, transmit suggestions, interfere with both short-term and long-term memory, produce an experience set, and delete an experience set. This will open the door for the development of some novel capabilities that can be used in armed conflict, in terrorist-hostage situations, and in training."<sup>166</sup> Of course one no longer needs to envision these sorts of weapons: many are already operational. I thought of the Joint Vision 20/20 Statement and the goal of "full-spectrum domination." I thought of the so-called Homeland Security Act of 2002, passed by the U.S. Senate by a vote of 90 to 9, that, in

the words of even the conservative writer William Safire, means, “Every purchase you make with a credit card, every magazine subscription you buy and medical prescription you fill, every Web site you visit and e-mail you send or receive, every academic grade you receive, every bank deposit you make, every trip you book and every event you attend—all these transactions and communications will go into what the Defense Department describes as ‘a virtual, centralized grand database.’ To this computerized dossier on your private life from commercial sources, add every piece of information that government has about you—passport application, driver’s license and bridge toll records, judicial and divorce records, complaints from nosy neighbors to the F.B.I., your lifetime paper trail plus the latest hidden camera surveillance— and you have the supersnoop’s dream: a ‘Total Information Awareness’ about every U.S. citizen.”<sup>167</sup> I thought of science, which has as its ultimate (and proximate) goal the conversion of the wild and wildly unpredictable natural world into something orderly, predictable, and controllable. There are simply too many examples of our culture’s basis in the need for control for me to choose. You choose.

Quick involvement: I’m not sure how much quicker you can get than the choice offered to so many Indians as they were tied to stakes, piles of wood around their feet, of Christianity or Death. One Indian asked in response: If he converted to Christianity would he go to heaven? And if so, would there be other Christians there? When he found the answer to both questions was yes, he said he’d rather burn to death.

But there’s something else about quickness. Civilization has only been on this continent a few hundred years. There are many parts of this continent, such as where I live, that became subject to civilization far more recently. Yet in this extremely short time this culture has committed us and the landscape to this technologized path, in so doing shredding the natural fabric of this continent, enslaving, terrorizing, and/or eradicating its nonhuman inhabitants, and giving its human residents the choice of civilization or death. Another way to say this is that prior to the arrival of civilization humans lived on this continent for at the very least ten thousand years, and probably much longer, and could drink with confidence from rivers and streams everywhere. After this culture’s short time here, not only has it toxified streams and groundwater, but even mother’s breast milk.

That's an extraordinary and extraordinarily quick commitment to this technologized way of being (or rather non-being). Here's another way to say this: these days the decision to enslave or kill a river by putting in a dam is generally made in the several years it takes to write an Environmental Impact Statement and get funding. The process might drag on a decade or two at most. But such a decision, if it is to be made at all, should be made only after generations of observation: how can you possibly know what is best for any part of the land unless you interact with it long enough to learn its rhythms? For example, four days ago hooded mergansers landed on the pond outside my window. They stayed two days, and have now been gone two. They did this last year, only they arrived one day earlier, left one day earlier, and then came back a few days later and stayed a week. Will they come back next year? I don't know; I haven't been here long enough. And last year there were many rough-skinned newts living in the pond. I saw them almost every day. The mergansers ate some (rough-skinned newts are one of the most poisonous creatures around, but mergansers don't seem to mind). This year I haven't seen so many newts. Is that because of the mergansers, because of me, or because of something else entirely that I would only understand if I lived here long enough to start to know the place? I panicked two years ago because there weren't as many tadpoles as there had been the year before. Was the population collapsing? Well, the next year the frogs were quieter because there were fewer returning yearlings, and I was even more worried. But these new males must have been especially virile, the females especially fertile, because there were once again lots of fat babies. Many of these tadpoles, however, were eaten by roving packs of backstriders, far more than were eaten in the prior two years. Should I worry? The point is that I have no idea, and I can have no idea till I've been here enough years, even generations, to begin to know what is normal, expected, desirable. In the meantime, I'm a fool if I do something grossly destructive.

Were we not abusive to the land, to each other, to ourselves, we would sit back and see what the landscape gives willingly, what it wants us to have, what it wants from us, what it needs from us. That's what you do in relationships, if you're not abusive.

But we are abusive, so in the blink of a mountain's eye we have forced this continent (and the world) into an abusive relationship. The good news is that the planet



seems to be in the process of getting rid of the relationship.

Dependency. One of the advantages of not having to import resources is that you need depend on neither the resources' owners nor on the violence necessary to eradicate these owners and take what's theirs. One of the advantages of not owning slaves is that you need not depend on them for either your "comforts or elegancies" or even the necessities of life. We have at this point become dependent on oil, on dammed rivers, on this exploitative way of being (or, once again, non-being). Without it many of us would die, most all of us would lose our identities.

Of course everyone is dependent. One of the great conceits of this way of life is to pretend we're independent of our landbases, and indeed of our bodies: that clean streams (or clean breastmilk) and intact forests are luxuries. We pretend we can destroy the world and live on it. We can poison our bodies and live in them. This is insane. The Tolowa were dependent on the salmon, huckleberries, deer, clams, and so on who surrounded them. But these others, too, were dependent on the Tolowa and on each other, as happens in any long-term relationship.

I've spent a few days trying to figure out the differences between these forms of dependency: the parasitic dependency between master and slave, between addict and addiction on one hand, and the very real dependency on which all life is based on the other. Sure, in some cases the difference is obvious: the dependence is one-way. The natural world gets nothing out of our enslavement of it, or at least nothing that helps it (dioxin doesn't count). While chattel slaves generally receive food, clothing, and shelter, chances are good they could derive these without literally slaving away their lives. But in other cases the differences become more subtle. My students at the prison by all means gained something from drugs, else they would not have voluntarily taken them. Adults in abusive relationships obviously gain something from the relationships—or at least perceive they gain something from them—else they would walk away. But what? The backgrounds of many of my students are not exactly filled with love but rather the sort of extreme abuse that makes even my father seem a delight. Many were raised under conditions also of race and class oppression. For them perhaps these drugs neutralize, as they say, oppressive reality. But it goes even deeper: I know that many indigenous

peoples the world over ritually (and for the most part very infrequently) use mind-altering practices or substances in order to gain insight. What is the relationship, if any, between my students' use of drugs and this mind-altering by indigenous peoples? I don't know. And so far as abusive relationships, I know that in my own family, my mother was convinced (by my father, and by society) that she had no other options, that to leave the person who was abusing her would be to suffer greatly. It would be to lose her children, and possibly her life. In exchange for suffering this physical and emotional abuse, however, she did get to live in a nice house. But there's something more.

All last week two words have kept coming to mind: toxic mimicry.

I used to believe that civilization is a culture of parodies. Rape is a parody of sex. Civilized wars are parodies of indigenous warfare, which is a relatively nonlethal and exhilarating form of play,<sup>168</sup> meaning civilized warfare is a parody of play. Abusive relationships are a parody of love. Cities are parodies of communities, and citizenship is a parody of being a member of a functioning community. Science—with its basis in prediction and extreme control—is a parody of the delight that comes from being able to predict and meet the needs or desires of one's friends and neighbors (this one came clear to me the other day on seeing my dogs' joy at guessing whether I was going to turn left or right on a walk, and feeling my own joy at guessing the same for them). This culture's recreational use of altered states is a parody of their traditional uses. Each of these parodies takes the form yet ignores the soul and intent of that which is being parodied.

But recently a friend convinced me that's not entirely accurate: the parody doesn't ignore the intent, but perverts and attempts to destroy it.<sup>169</sup> Rape is a toxic mimic of sex. War is a toxic mimic of play. The bond between slave owner and slave is a toxic mimic of marriage. Heck, marriage is a toxic mimic of marriage, of a real partnership in which all parties help all others to be more fully themselves.

I like the phrase toxic mimic, but it didn't quite help me uncover the relationship between these types of dependency. I asked my mom.

She gave me the answer in one word: "Identity."

Really," I said. I had no idea what she was talking about.

"Abusers have no identity of their own."

I was going to ask what she meant, but I suddenly remembered a conversation I'd had years before with Catherine Keller, a feminist theologian and philosopher, and author of *From A Broken Web*. We'd been talking about how abuse communicates itself from generation to generation, and about what that abuse—on both personal and social levels—does to who we are. She talked about how not all cultures have been based on domination, then spoke of the rise of this culture, and the effects of this rise: “Within a group in which warrior males are coming to the fore and dominating the tribe or village, everyone in the group will begin to develop a sort of self that is different from that of earlier peoples, a self that reflects the defenses the society itself configures. . . . Another way to put this is that if people are trying to control you, it will be very difficult for you—in part because of your fear—to maintain an openness to them or to others. Quite often the pain you received you will then pass on to other people. Over and over we see the causing of pain—destructiveness and abuse—flowing out of a prior woundedness. We're left with an incredibly defensive fabric of selves that have emerged from this paradigm of dominance. And because the people who embody the defensive persona will dominate these societies, this kind of self-damaging and community-destroying and ecology-killing defensiveness tends to proliferate cancerously.”

I'd asked her what she meant by defensiveness.

She'd responded, “Alan Watts said one of the prime hallucinations of Western culture—and I would add of the paradigm of dominance—is the belief that who you are is a skin-encapsulated ego. And just as the skin defends you from the dangers of the physical world, the ego defends you from the dangers of the psychic world. That leads to what I have termed the separative self. The etymology of the word separate is very revealing. It comes from the combination of the Latin for “self,” *se*, meaning “on one's own,” and *parare*, “to prepare.” For this culture it is separation which prepares the way for selfhood.”

This all made me think of my relationship with my mom. I live very close to her—three-eighths of a mile—and will live near her for the rest of her life. Part of this has to do with health problems on both my and her parts—I have Crohn's disease, she has vision problems—part of it has to do with the fact that she is family, and part of it has to

do with the fact that I like her company. She presumably likes mine as well. Through my twenties and early thirties I took a lot of flak for this arrangement from some of my white acquaintances—never friends—who told me I was suffering from what they called separation anxiety, and that in order to grow up and become fully myself, I should move far away. I didn't really understand this, because I have a life of my own (as does she), and because the arrangement—at the time we lived probably five miles apart—works well for both of us on both practical and emotional levels, and because I knew that for all of human existence—save the last hundred years—it was expected that elders would live with or near one or more of their children. It's been a sudden shift. It struck me as significant that none of my indigenous or third world friends have ever found the arrangement anything but expected. In fact, when I'd tell my white acquaintances that part of the reason we can live so close is that I'm very clear about saying no to the things I don't want to do for her—for example, I dislike going to the grocery store so I don't usually take her—they'd nod and tell me what good boundaries I have. When I've told my indigenous or third world friends this same thing, they've looked at me, pained and disgusted, then asked, “With her vision problems, how does she get to the grocery store?”

Catherine continued, “There are many problems with the belief that separation prepares the way for self-hood, not the least of which is that it doesn't match reality. We know that on a physical level one is not ‘on one's own,’ that we have to breathe and eat and excrete, and that even on a molecular scale our boundaries are permeable. The same is true psychically. Life feeds off life, Whitehead says, and if we cut ourselves off from the way we psychically feed each other, the texture of our lives becomes very thin and flat. When we live in a state of defense, there is no moment-to-moment feeding from the richness of the endless relations in which we exist.

“For the system of dominance to perpetuate itself there must be clear rewards for those who manage to maintain a state of disconnection. People must be trained and initiated into that state, and they must be rewarded with a sense of dignity, indeed of manhood, if they are able to maintain a sense of self-control—as opposed to being present to their experience—and a sense of control over their surroundings, which would include as many people as possible.

“When you have a society organized so those at the top benefit from the labor of the majority, you have some strong incentives to develop the kind of selfhood that gets you there. The only kind of selfhood that gets you there is the kind of selfhood that allows you to numb your empathies. To maintain the system of dominance, it’s crucial that the elite learns this empathic numbness, akin to what Robert Jay Lifton calls ‘psychic numbing,’ so its members can control and when necessary torture and kill without being undone. If its members are incapable of numbing, or if they have not been trained properly, the system of domination will collapse.”

That’s one of the reasons, she said, that civilization so often co-opts movements opposing domination. “Society as we know it may well need,” she continued, “to live off of the energy of alternative movements. It needs to suck our blood in order to feed itself, in part because a system of domination will always be undernourished.”

“How so?”

“Once we unplug from our vital connections—connections more like the fiber of what we call nature where there aren’t barriers between the relationships of things to each other—once we unplug from the way everything branches into everything, and instead pursue the goals of civilization as we know it, the energy source has to come from somewhere else. To some extent it can come from sucking the labor of the poor, and to some extent it can come from exploiting the bodies of animals and people treated like animals. The exploiting of the bodies of women gives a lot of energy. But the parasitism of the dominant culture is endless, because once you cut yourself off from the free flow of mutually permeable life you have to get your life back somehow, artificially.”

I came back to the conversation with my mom, and heard her say, “That was part of your father’s problem. He had no solid identity of his own, which was one reason he was so violent. Because he wasn’t secure in his own identity, in order to exist, he needed for those around him to constantly mirror him. When you or I or your siblings didn’t match his projections—when we showed any spark of being who we actually were, thus forcing him to confront some other person as someone different than himself—he became terrified, or at least he would have become terrified if he would have allowed himself to feel that. But to become terrified was too scary, and so he flew into a rage.”

I just looked at her. I'd never heard this analysis before. It was very good. I was thinking also that if my publisher were present he would probably be tearing his hair out at her penchant for making parenthetical comments, just as he does with mine.

She continued, "His lack of a secure identity is also why he was so rigid. If you're not comfortable with who you are, you have to force others to confront you only on your own terms. Anything else is once again too scary. If you're comfortable with who you are, however, it becomes no problem to let others be their own selves around you: you have faith that whoever they are and whatever they do, you will be able to respond appropriately. You can be fluid and respond differently to different people, depending on what they need from you. He couldn't do that."

This same thing happens on a larger scale, of course. Deadened inside, we call the world itself dead, then surround ourselves with the bodies of those we've killed. We set up cityscapes where we see no free and wild beings. We see concrete, steel, asphalt. Even the trees in cities are in cages. Everything mirrors our own confinement. Everything mirrors our own internal deadness.

"One more thing," my mother said. "This lack of an identity is one of the reasons so many abusers kill their partners when their partners try to leave. They're not only losing their partners (and punching bags) but their identities as well."

That's also one of the reasons this culture must kill all non-civilized peoples, both human and nonhuman: in order to preclude the possibility of our escape.

Which brings us to the next category: abusers isolate their victims from other resources. I'm typing these words sitting in a manufactured chair staring at a manufactured computer screen, listening to the hum of a manufactured computer fan. To my left are manufactured shelves of manufactured books, written by human beings. Civilized, literate human beings who write in English (languages, many of them indigenous, are being destroyed as quickly as all other forms of diversity, and to as disastrous an effect: the language you speak influences what you can say, which influences what you can think, which influences what you can perceive, which influences what you can experience, which influences how you act, which influences who you are, which influences what you can say, and so on). To my right a window leads to the

darkened outside and reflects back to me my uncombed dark hair surrounding the blur of my own face. I'm wearing mass-produced clothes, and mass-produced slippers. I do, however, have a cat on my lap. All sensory inputs save the cat originate in civilized humans, and even the cat is domesticated.

Stop. Think about it. Every sensation I have comes from one source: civilization. When you finish this paragraph, put down the book for a few moments, and check out your own surroundings. What can you see, hear, smell, feel, taste that does not originate in or is mediated by civilized human beings? Singing frogs on a Sounds of Nature CD don't count.

This is all very strange. Stranger still—and extraordinarily revealing of the degree to which we've not only accepted but reified this artificially imposed isolation, turned our insanity into a perceived good—is the way we've made a fetish and religion (and science, for that matter, as well as business) of attempting to define ourselves as separate from—different from, isolated from, in opposition to—the rest of nature. Abusers merely isolate victims from other resources. Far moreso even than this, civilization isolates all of us—ideologically and physically—from the source of all life.

We do not believe trees have anything to say to us (nor even that they can speak at all), nor stars, nor coyotes, nor even our dreams. We have been convinced—and this is the primary difference between western and indigenous philosophies—that the world is silent save civilized humans.

One of the most common and necessary steps taken by an abuser in order to control a victim is to monopolize the victim's perception. That is one reason abusers cut off victims from family and friends: so that in time victims will have no standard other than the abusers' by which to judge the abusers' worldviews and behavior. Abusive behavior—behavior that would otherwise seem extraordinarily bizarre (how crazy is it to rape one's own child? How crazy is it to toxify the air you breathe?)—can then become in the victim's mind (and even more sadly, heart) normalized. No outside influence must be allowed to break the spell. There can be only one way to perceive and to be in the world, and that is the abuser's way. If the abuser is able to mediate all information that reaches the victim, the victim will no longer be able to conceptualize that there is any other way

to be. At this point the abuser will have achieved more or less total control.

This is, of course, the point we have reached as a culture. Civilization has achieved a completely unprecedented and nearly perfect monopolization of our perception, at least for those of us in the industrialized world. Fortunately, however, there do still exist people—mainly the poor, people from nonindustrialized nations, and the indigenous—who still have primary connections to the physical world. And fortunately, also, the physical world still exists, and all of us can at the very least reach out to touch trees still standing in steel and concrete cages. And we can see plants poking up through sidewalks, breaking cement barriers that keep them from feeling the sun. I would hope we can learn from these plants and break through these concrete and perceptual barriers.

The sixth characteristic is that abusers blame others for their problems. To make the jump to the cultural level it would be easy to simply list the ways our culture does this, and leave it at that. The capitalist media blames spotted owls and humans who love them for job losses in the timber industry, yet (surprise, surprise) ignores the greater number of jobs lost in the same industry to automation and raw log exports (as well as the cut-and-run nature of the industry). Politicians and other timber industry propagandists blame natural forests and environmentalists for fires, yet ignore the fact that logging is a significant cause of fires, and further, that fires burn hotter and more destructively in cutover forests and tree plantations than they do in natural forests. They ignore further the regenerative role fire plays in forests. We who care about the planet would be wise to not ignore this lesson about the destructive/regenerative powers of fire but learn it, and apply it when appropriate to the perceptual and physical barriers that monopolize our perception and that are killing the planet.

More blame: the bigot blames poor Mexicans when his employer's plant closes and moves to Mexico. The owner blames market conditions or damn unions for leaving him no choice but to move the plant. Go back in time and we have Israel's rulers, speaking through their God, blaming Canaanites because Israelites didn't want to follow "God's" (wink, wink) rules. Move forward and we have Crusaders blaming women for lack of success on the battlefield (sex, especially with an infidel, evidently displeases "God"). Then we have settlers blaming Indians for not giving up their land without a fight



(as John Wayne later said, “I don’t feel we did wrong in taking this great country away from them. There were great numbers of people who needed new land, and the Indians were selfishly trying to keep it for themselves”). Hitler and the Nazis blamed Communists and Jews for everything from world wars to defective dentures. Americans agreed at least so far as the Communists. Now it’s terrorists who keep us from the Promised Land of Perpetual Peace and Prosperity™ (brought to you by ExxonMobil). There is always someone (else) to blame.

Something interesting happens when you combine an abuser’s propensity to blame with the monopolization of the victim’s perception: the victim comes to agree with the abuser, that all problems are actually the victim’s fault. The wife tries tirelessly to make the perfect meal and if she’s beaten it’s because she’s not a good enough cook, which means not a good enough wife, which means not a good enough person. Of course it’s not because her husband is violent, abusive, insane. The child tries to perfectly clean the dishes, and violence comes to her because she is too sloppy. The teen tries to park the car in the right place— or rather not in the ever-shifting wrong place—so as to not be beaten. In an attempt to maintain control in a situation that is grievously out of control and that can never be in control so long as victims stay within the perceptual box created for them by their abuser, victims conspire with their abusers to focus on alterations of their own behavior in futile attempts to placate the abuser or at least delay or mitigate the inevitable violence, or at the very least shift this violence to another victim. Even worse than this self-focus being a mere tactic, it becomes a way of being (or rather non-being) in the world, such that victims come to know the fault is their own. Instead of stopping the abuse by any means necessary, they join with the abuser in doing violence to themselves.

They forget that assigning “blame” in this sense is a toxic mimic of the necessary task of assigning appropriate and accurate responsibility for the violence done to them, and doing something about it.

These same patterns are replicated on the larger social scale, at least among those who have been sufficiently enculturated. This is probably not the case among the primary victims of our culture, of course: those who remain free of civilization’s perceptual box. I’m reasonably certain salmon, swordfish, and hammerhead sharks do not find themselves

paralyzed by spasms of self-blame for their plight—What could I do differently to placate these people? If only I were a better fish they would not hate me—but instead know precisely who is killing them. The same can be said for the indigenous. You can't get much clearer than Sitting Bull, who said, when forced to speak at a celebration of the completion of a railroad through what had been his people's land: "I hate you. I hate you. I hate all the white people. You are thieves and liars. You have taken away our land and made us outcasts, so I hate you." It's important to note, by the way, that the white translator did not speak these words, but instead the "friendly, courteous speech he had prepared."<sup>170</sup>

And that's the problem.

Those of us whose vision has been defined by civilization, whose personalities have been formed and deformed in this particular crucible of violence, sometimes, like victims of childhood abuse, fail to adequately and accurately assign responsibility for the violence we suffer or witness, instead transforming raw impulses to assign responsibility—"You have taken our land and made us outcasts, so I hate you"—into friendly, courteous speech: some environmentalists even give training in "verbal nonviolence" so activists will be certain to not say "Fuck you" to police putting them, in copspeak, into "pain compliance holds," that is, torturing them. Abused children—and I know this from experience—generally are unable to face the fact that they have almost no power to stop the violence done to them and to those they love. As a consequence of this—and this dovetails nicely, or more accurately horrifically, with abusers blaming others for their own problems as well as abusers monopolizing victims' perceptions—victims often internalize too much responsibility, which in this case means any responsibility at all, for the violence they suffer or see. I must have done something wrong, or my father would not hit me. I must be a slut or a temptress, and I must want him to do this to me—I know this because he tells me all of this—or he would not visit me at night. This allows these children to pretend they have at least some power to halt or slow violence done to them, however illusory all evidence shows this power to be. That illusion can in fact be crucial to emotional survival. Of course when they're no longer children, the illusion becomes absurd and harmful.

Similarly, many of us trying to stop the destructiveness of this culture—and I know this not only from my own experience but from having worked with and talked to hundreds or even thousands of other activists—are routinely struck by the near-complete ineffectiveness of our work on any but the most symbolic levels. By almost any measure, our work especially as environmental activists is an appalling failure. Just today I spoke with a friend who for the past ten months has been sitting in an ancient redwood in Humboldt County, just south of here, in an attempt to keep the tree and the forest of which it is a part from being cut. Pacific Lumber is deforesting that watershed, as it is deforesting much of the state, and will eventually get to the tree in which she now lives. Previous cutting by this corporation has caused such severe flooding that local residents' homes have been destroyed. Some have put their homes on stilts. Once-pristine water supplies now resemble chocolate milk garnished with sticks, spiked with herbicides and diesel fuel. Years ago, in response to citizen outrage, the state's North Coast Region Water Quality Control Board—appointed by the governor, who is deeply beholden to big timber corporations—put together a scientific panel to study the problem, which is nearly always a good way to delay action while allowing primary destruction to continue. But the panel surprised the Board by unanimously declaring that cutting needs to be drastically reduced now, not only to protect local human residents, but for critically imperiled coho salmon and many other species. The Board's decision? You guessed it: ignore the citizens it purports to serve, ignore the scientific team it assembled, ignore everything but the "needs" of this grossly destructive corporation. This is democracy in action. This is the severing of reality from politics (or really, there's nothing to sever, since they've always been separated). This is the dismemberment of the planet. This is breathtakingly and obscenely routine.

The best and most courageous and most sincere of our efforts are never sufficient to the task of stopping those who would destroy.

Years ago, I wrote, "Every morning when I wake up I ask myself whether I should write or blow up a dam." I wrote this because no matter how hard activists work, no matter how hard I work, no matter how much scientists study, none of it really seems to help. Politicians and businesspeople lie, delay, and simply continue their destructive

behavior, backed by the full power of the state. And the salmon die. I said back then, and I say now, that it's a cozy relationship for all of us but the salmon. Every morning I still make the decision to write, and every morning I think more and more I'm making the wrong damn decision. The salmon are in far worse shape now than when I first wrote that line.

I am ashamed of that.

We are watching their extinction.

I am ashamed of that as well.

To mask our powerlessness in the face of this destruction, many of us fall into the same pattern as those abused children, and for much the same reason. We internalize too much responsibility. This allows us activists to pretend we have at least some power to halt or slow violence done to us and to those we love, however illusory, once again, all evidence inevitably shows this power to be. And don't give me a lecture about how if we weren't doing this work the destruction would proceed even more quickly: of course that's the case, and of course we need to keep fighting these rearguard actions—I would never suggest other-wise—but do you realize how pathetic it is that all of our “victories” are temporary and defensive, and all of our losses permanent and offensive? I can't speak for you, but I want more than to simply stave off destruction of this or that wild place for a year or two: I want to take the offensive, to beat back those who would destroy, to reclaim what is wild and free and natural, to let it recover on its own: I want to stop in their tracks the destroyers, and I want to make them incapable of inflicting further damage. To want any less is to countenance the ultimate destruction of the planet.

But we all settle for less, and to make ourselves feel the tiniest bit less impotent we turn the focus inward. We are the problem. I use toilet paper, so I am responsible for deforestation. I drive a car, so I am responsible for global warming. Never mind that I did not create the systems that cause these. I did not create industrial forestry. I did not create an oil economy. Civilization was destroying life on this planet before I was born, and will do the same—unless I and others, including the natural world, stop it—after I die.

If I were to die tomorrow, deforestation would continue unabated. In fact, as I've shown in another book,<sup>171</sup> demand does not even drive the timber industry: overcapacity

of very expensive pulp and paper mills (as well as, of course, this culture's death urge) determines in great measure how many trees are cut. Similarly, if I were to die, car culture would not slow in the slightest.

Yes, it's vital to make lifestyle choices to mitigate damage caused by being a member of industrial civilization, but to assign primary responsibility to oneself, and to focus primarily on making oneself better, is an immense copout, an abrogation of responsibility. With all the world at stake, it is self-indulgent, self-righteous, and self-important. It is also nearly ubiquitous. And it serves the interests of those in power by keeping our focus off them.

I do this all the time. We're killing the planet, I say. Well, no, I'm not, but thank you for thinking me so powerful. Because I take hot showers, I'm responsible for drawing down aquifers. Well, no. More than 90 percent of the water used by humans is used by agriculture and industry. The remaining 10 percent is split between municipalities (got to keep those golf courses green) and actual living breathing humans. We're deforesting 214,000 acres per day, an area larger than New York City. Well, no, I'm not. Sure, I consume some wood and paper, but I didn't make the system.

Here's the real story: If I want to stop deforestation, I need to dismantle the system responsible.

Just yesterday I caught myself taking on nonsensical responsibility. I was finishing a book with George Draffan about causes of worldwide deforestation. For one hundred and fifty pages we laid out explicitly and undeniably that this culture has been deforesting every place it touches at an ever-increasing pace for some six thousand years, and that current deforestation is driven by a massively corrupt system of interlocked governments and corporations backed, as always, by plenty of soldiers and cops with guns. (But you knew that already, didn't you?) Yet at the end, I found myself pleading with readers to drive the deforesters out of our own hearts and minds. I wrote, "We will not stop destroying forests until we have dealt with the urge to destroy and consume that hides in our hearts and minds and bodies." I cut the line. It's a fine first step—emphasis on first—because we surely cannot stop the destruction until we perceive it as destruction and not as "progress," or "developing natural resources," or even "inevitable," or "the way things

are.” But what about driving deforesters out of forests altogether? That is the real point. Anything less is far worse than just a waste of everyone’s time: it paves the way for further destruction.

I recently saw an excellent articulation of the dangers of identifying with those who are killing the planet. It was in a “Derrick Jensen discussion group” on the internet. When I first heard of the group’s existence, I was of course, flattered. People everywhere discussing me! Every guy’s dream! My head swelled. Before this happened, I wasn’t even convinced I would log on to discuss me. But I did. I followed the posts. My head swelled even more. I thought I’d give them a thrill, and posted something unpublished elsewhere. I considered the excitement they’d surely feel at this honor, and imagined how excited I’d have been when I was younger had the rock groups UFO or Spirit made some song accessible to only a few of us. I probably would have stayed up late that night listening to it over and over, and considering how special I was. Fortunately the response on the discussion group was more sedate. A few people wrote, “Nice essay.” That’s about it. Then they went back to discussing whatever they’d been discussing before. My head returned to normal size.

Now to the articulation I just read. A woman had commented that “We are going to go to war in Iraq.” A man commented on her use of we, not realizing she was being ironic. His misunderstanding doesn’t lessen the importance of his comments: “I find that many people (including myself when I’m not paying attention) slip into using the term ‘we’ when referring to actions of the U.S. government. I agree with Derrick’s assertion that the government (I would say all governments) is a government of occupation, just as this culture is a culture of occupation. Though I’m coerced into participating in the system (by paying taxes, working, spending money in the economy) I do not consider myself one of the decision-makers. My choices are false choices, and my voice is not ‘represented’ by the government. A friend was wearing a great button the other day: ‘U.S. out of North America.’”

He continued, “Those in power want us to associate ourselves with them, make us part of the ‘we’ so we become inseparable from them. This way they cannot be challenged, questioned, or overthrown without attacking ourselves. This is the ultimate

goal of nationalism, to fuse an entire nation into agreement with the leaders so no action, no matter how obscene, is questioned. Perhaps this is why when I bring up faults in the government, capitalism, the techno-industrial complex, or the culture as a whole, many people get extremely defensive, as if I'd just insulted their mother. The more we allow those in power to convince us we are to blame for their actions, the more we are unable to separate what we do from what we are forced to do or what rulers do in our name. The more all of this happens, the more power they gain and the more difficult any form of dissent becomes."<sup>172</sup>

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The phone rings. I answer. It's a friend. She asks, "How much longer do you think we're going to be in Afghanistan?"

She can't see this, but I look around, look outside at the redwood trees. I respond, "We're in Afghanistan? I thought we were in northern California."

Silence on the phone. A sigh, and finally she says, "How much longer do you think our troops are going to be in Afghanistan?"

I say, "I've got troops? Really? Will they do whatever I tell them? If I tell them to take out the dams on the Columbia River will they do that?"

More silence, until she says, "This is why I only call you every few weeks. I'll be in touch."

\* \* \*

We are no longer children. It is dangerous to us and to others to maintain the illusion that we are responsible for the destruction, an illusion that may have been appropriate when we were powerless. But we are not.

I remember the decision I made in my mid-twenties to pursue my life as a writer. I was scared to do this. I did not have sufficient self-confidence, I thought, to follow my dreams. I traced this lack of confidence to the abuse I'd suffered as a child. Part of my

father's modus operandi—and I recognized this while very young—was that any time any one of us children (or our mother) revealed that something was important to us, one of three things would happen: he might use that thing as a form of payment for cooperation in his sexual abuse (I was interested in the Civil War as a child, and we took long trips to see battlefields, but at what cost?); he might use the promise of this thing to build up hopes so he could watch our faces as he dashed them; or he might simply destroy the thing itself in front of our eyes. I learned to not express my dreams.

I recognized in my mid-twenties that because of this abuse, I would have the best excuse in the entire world to not follow my dreams of becoming a writer. Who could blame me after what I'd been through? Mere emotional survival was triumph enough.

The choice quickly came to this: I could go the rest of my life with an airtight excuse for not doing what I wanted; or I could go the rest of my life doing what I wanted. It took me only a few months to decide which it would be.

\* \* \*

As a consequence of the belief that violence done to us is our own fault—or sometimes more simply because we do not want to be violated—we often become self-policing. I write this on an airplane flying home from giving talks. A friend took me to the airport. As we pulled into the parking lot we saw a uniformed man whose job it is, evidently, to search every car that enters.

I said, "I can't believe this."

"Do you want to not go in?"

I thought of the words I'd been told years before by a police officer when I'd commented that drivers licenses are in essence government "identity papers" we're "asked" to produce at least as often as people were in those old black-and-white movies of resistance against Nazis. He didn't appreciate my film reference, and told me, "If you don't like it, don't drive."

I also considered the checkpoints and travel limits heroes always faced in those movies, and the absolute necessity of such restrictions under repressive regimes. I thought



of the comment I'd received more recently when I'd complained as an "airport security agent" put her fingers against the skin of my lower belly beneath the waistband of my pants. I'd asked her what she was doing.

She'd responded, "This is for your safety and the safety of others."

"You putting your hand inside my pants doesn't make anyone safer."

She'd said, "Flying is a privilege, not a right. If you don't like it, stay home."

I'd begun to disagree, and she'd motioned to a nearby cop. I'd had a plane to catch, and so I'd had a choice: I could make a scene, or I could get the hell out of Austin, Texas. I got the hell out of Austin, Texas.

Back at the airport parking lot, my friend said, "Let's just go ahead and park. Let them search the car. We have nothing to hide."

We looked at each other, shook our heads, and laughed.

This laughter kept us from cursing.

I'm not sure that's such a good thing.

\* \* \*

I don't mean to suggest we should override every fear. I'm not sure we should override any fear. Fears should at least be listened to, whether or not we act on them. But I did not want to live a life based on fear. To live a life following my heart was important enough to me that I was willing to move into, through, and beyond this fear to my life on the other side.

There are certainly other fears I've not afforded the energy to move through. Because when I was a child there were beatings associated with water skiing and rapes associated with alcohol, to this day I carry powerful fears of both. But neither of those is particularly worth the effort to work my way through: I can happily live a life without water skiing or alcohol. I was not willing to live a life without my heart.

We can ask the same questions on the cultural level. Are we willing to live a life without clean air, clean water, wild animals: a livable planet? For what, precisely, will we face down our own fears?

We have the best excuse in the world to not act. The momentum of civilization is fierce. The acculturation deep. Those in power will imprison us if we effectively resist. Or they will torture us. Or they will kill us. There are so many of them, and they have weapons. They have the law. And many of them—probably in the final analysis nearly all of them—have no scruples, else they would never support the current system in the first place. Because of all this, there really is nothing we can do. We may as well admit that.

But the question becomes: would you rather have the best excuse in the world, or would you rather have a world?

\* \* \*

Here, once again, is the real story. Our self-assessed culpability for participating in the deathly system called civilization masks (and is a toxic mimic of) our infinitely greater sin. Sure, I use toilet paper. So what? That doesn't make me as culpable as the CEO of Weyerhaeuser, and to think it does grants a great gift to those in power by getting the focus off them and onto us.

For what, then, are we culpable? Well, for something far greater than one person's work as a technical writer and another's as a busboy. Something far greater than my work writing books to be made of the pulped flesh of trees. Something far greater than using toilet paper or driving cars or living in homes made of formaldehyde-laden plywood. For all of those things we can be forgiven, because we did not create the system, and because our choices have been systematically eliminated (those in power kill the great runs of salmon, and then we feel guilty when we buy food at the grocery store? How dumb is that?). But we cannot and will not be forgiven for not breaking down the system that creates these problems, for not driving deforesters out of forests, for not driving polluters away from land and water and air, for not driving moneylenders from the temple that is our only home. We are culpable because we allow those in power to continue to destroy the planet. Yes, I know we are more or less constantly enjoined to use only inclusive rhetoric, but when will we all realize that war has already been declared upon the natural world, and upon all of us, and that this war has been declared by those in power? We

must stop them with any means necessary. For not doing that we are infinitely more culpable than most of us—myself definitely included— will ever be able to comprehend.

\* \* \*

To be clear: I am not culpable for deforestation because I use toilet paper. I am culpable for deforestation because I use toilet paper and I do not keep up my end of the predator-prey bargain. If I consume the flesh of another I am responsible for the continuation of its community. If I use toilet paper, or any other wood or paper products, it is my responsibility to use any means necessary to ensure the continued health of natural forest communities. It is my responsibility to use any means necessary to stop industrial forestry.

\* \* \*

The next characteristic of abusers is that they get upset easily. They're hypersensitive, and the slightest setback is seen as a personal attack. Much of the reason for this has to do with the fourth premise of this book, that violence in our culture flows only one way. This is true not only for violence, but for all control, all initiative. Those on top are allowed to have control and initiative. Those below must have them only insofar as control and initiative make them more effective proxies of those above.

Any breach of this etiquette must be dealt with swiftly, surely, and completely, so the hierarchy can remain seamless, safely unacknowledged, hidden from the possibility of change by either victim or perpetrator. That this is as true on the larger social scale as it is on the more personal or familial should be obvious, but I'll provide a couple of quick examples. Just last night I spoke with a group of students from San Marcos High School in Santa Barbara, California. The kids were delightful, intelligent, passionate, and defiant. One told me she had asked the school's administration for permission to put up posters containing these words from the Declaration of Independence: "That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends [Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of

Happiness], it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it.” Far from rewarding her interest in history and politics (Who says kids these days don’t know important historical documents?), administrators not only denied her request, but threatened her with “forced transfer” to another school should she post them anyway.

She asked my advice.

I suggested that since her request had already identified her to authorities, other students should put up the posters. Another student objected to this, saying that many students had already been threatened with expulsion.

“Why?”

She answered that they’d planned a one-period walkout to protest a school policy of administrators giving students’ names and phone numbers to military recruiters. Teachers had infiltrated the organization planning the walkout, she’d said, under the guise of being advisors. When students rejected the teachers’ advice to limit their protest to writing letters for the administration to ignore, teachers and administrators stood as one, telling students they’d be expelled if they walked out of any classes.

I told these kids I was proud of them, and that I was glad they had at such a young age experienced participatory democracy in action.

I wish I’d have told them another idea I had for the posters, but this didn’t occur to me until much later: that they form alliances with students at other schools, so that other students put up posters of resistance at this school, and these students put them up elsewhere. Not only would this lessen the easy power of the administrators to harm those who speak out, but more importantly it would begin to make networks of organized resistance, cadres for the revolution we so desperately need.

No matter what they felt in their hearts, the teachers had probably been in a very bad position. My understanding of the school climate was that had they not gone along with this silencing of dissent, they could have lost their jobs. That’s one of the ways the system works. If I complain about a woman in a uniform putting her hand in my pants, I miss my flight, and possibly get arrested. If these teachers do not stifle dissent, they possibly get fired.

This statement of course does not excuse their actions, but merely helps us

understand them. Or maybe they had their actions fully rationalized, as presumably did the administrators.

The slightest real dissent—that not confined to places, times, and means designed or approved by those in power—must be perceived by those in power as an attack on the legitimacy of their rule.

Probably because it is.

It's a wondrous thing to get up off your knees, to stand again (or for the first time) on your hind legs, to say "Fuck you"—classes in "verbal nonviolence" notwithstanding—or to say "You have no right," or "No" to those in power, to choose where, when, and how you will express yourself, where, when, and how you will fight back, where, when, and how you will defend what and whom you love against those who exploit and destroy them.

You should try it some time. It's really fun.

\* \* \*

The next characteristic is that abusers are at least insensate to the pain of children and nonhumans. Bringing this to the larger cultural level requires, I think, only one word: vivisection. Okay, another: zoos. A couple more: factory farms. Okay, a few more: we're killing the planet. Correction: they're killing the planet, and they clearly do not hear the screams.

Do you?

\* \* \*

Abusers often conflate sex and violence. Rates of rape—so common as to be essentially normalized in the culture—make clear the conflation of sex and violence on the social level. Many films make it clear, too. So do many relationships. One can also say those magic words: breast augmentation surgery. Just yesterday I heard of a new fad in plastic surgery: reshaping the vulva to make it more visually pleasing, whatever that means

(what about the notion that if you love a woman you will find her vulva beautiful, simply because it is hers?).

Really, though, this cultural conflation of sex and violence can be reduced to one word: fuck. It's an extraordinary comment on this culture that the same word that means make love to also means do great violence to.

\* \* \*

Abusers often actualize rigid sex roles. That this is true on the larger cultural level hardly needs remarking, and goes far beyond the stereotypically masculine values that dominate the culture. It also goes beyond the homophobia that's based on a fear of anything that confuses those rigid sex roles.

I've been thinking a lot lately about the seeming scientific obsession to artificially create or modify life, and also the obsession to search for life in outer space. It has always seemed profoundly absurd and immoral to me that billions of dollars are spent trying to discover life on other planets as trillions more are spent to eradicate life on this one. Were scientists to discover cute furry creatures on Mars with floppy ears and wriggly noses, Nobel prizes would soon be forthcoming (for the scientists, not the floppy-eared Martians). Yet when scientists on the real world see real creatures just like these, they reach for hair spray to put in the creatures' eyes for Draize tests (of course, the scientists would also leap to exploit the Martian bunnies faster than you can say Huntington Life Sciences).

Similarly, it makes no sense to me that we (read they) keep trying to recreate the "miracle of life" in laboratories as we (read they) daily the destroy the plenitude—we're learning it's not an infinitude—of miracles that surround us all.

But now I get it. It's those rigid sex roles combined with a devaluing of the feminine and a really bad case of womb envy, all topped with a heaping of sour grapes, boiling down to the fact that women have babies and men don't. If women are identified primarily or exclusively—rigidly—by their roles as creators of life, and if women are perceived as inferior (meaning whatever women do, men do better) then men, so as to not

perceive themselves as less powerful than the women for whom they feel contempt, must figure out not only how to destroy the natural life they despise, but how to create some sort of life of their own.