

## ABUSERS

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*-Anticiv.net Collective*

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Violence against women and violence against the Earth, legitimated and promoted by both patriarchal religion and science, are interconnected assaults rooted in the eroticization of domination. The gynocidal culture's image of woman as object and victim is paralleled by contemporary representations that continually show the Earth as a toy, machine, or violated object, as well as by the religious and scientific ideology that legitimates the possession, contamination, and destruction of Mother Earth.

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We have been too kind to those who are killing the planet.

We have been inexcusably, unforgivably, insanely kind.

I understand now. For years I have been asking whether abusers believe their lies, and I'm finally comfortable with an answer.

This understanding came in great measure because I finally stopped focusing on the lies and their purveyors and I began to focus on the abusers' actions. I realized, following Lundy Bancroft, that to try to answer the question of whether the abusers believe their lies is to remain under the abusers' spell, to "look off in the wrong direction," to allow myself to be distracted so I "won't notice where the real action is." To remain focused on that question is exactly what abusers want.

Bancroft helped me realize some very important things. He writes specifically about abusers, emphasizing perpetrators of domestic violence, but what he says applies as well to this whole culture of abuse, and to perpetrators of the larger scale abuse I've been writing about.

His central thesis seems to be that the primary problem is not that abusers particularly "lose control" or that they are particularly prone to "flying into a rage," but instead that they feel entitled to exploit, will do anything in order to exploit, and will

exploit precisely as much as they can get away with.

Bancroft excels at exploding misconceptions. When a woman stated that her abusive partner Michael loses control and breaks things in a rage, only to feel remorse afterwards, Bancroft asked whether the things that were broken were Michael's or hers. She answered, "I'm amazed that I've never thought of this, but he only breaks my stuff. I can't think of one thing he's smashed that belonged to him." Bancroft asked who cleans up. She does. He responded, "Michael's behavior isn't nearly as berserk as it looks. And if he really felt so remorseful, he'd help clean up."<sup>65</sup>

I remember a time my father was berating and beating my teenaged sister, and her boyfriend showed up an hour early for their date. My father immediately ceased calling her a slut, dropped his hands to his sides, smiled, and walked to greet her boyfriend as if nothing had happened. His rage was not out of control, but something he was able to turn on and off like a light switch.

Or picture this. My father hits my mother. He has hit her many times before.

But this time she slips into another room, calls the police. She comes back out. My father hits her again and again. He is interrupted by the doorbell. He points one finger at her, runs his other hand through his hair, walks to the door, opens it. There are two policemen. My father is cool, calm, as though nothing has happened. My mother is frantic, frightened, having just been beaten. The cops sympathize with my father for living with someone so emotional—they also sympathize because their allegiance already runs to the abuser (see, for example, the arrest rates for rapists in Humboldt County)—and they leave. The door closes. My father resumes beating my mother. His rage, once again, could be turned on and off.

My mother can perhaps be forgiven for her naïveté in relying on authorities to assist her. She was, after all, nineteen years old, with two children and pregnant with a third. But at this point, especially on the larger scale, the rest of us should not be so naïve.

Abusers are not out of control. They are very much in control. I never understood that till I read Bancroft's book.

Similarly, I speak of this culture's destructive urge, and how those in power destroy those things they cannot control. I have written of clearcuts, of devastated oceans,

of murdered poor and extirpated species. But corporations and those who run them do not flail willy-nilly at everything around them. Like Michael, they do not destroy what belongs to them. And of course they do not clean up their messes, no matter how much remorse they may feign, and no matter how much they may claim to have moved beyond petroleum, or into new forestry, or whatever other words they may wish to throw around.

Bancroft asks the abusers he works with what are the limits of their violence. He might say, “You called her a fucking whore, you grabbed the phone out of her hand and whipped it across the room, and then you gave her a shove and she fell down. There she was at your feet, where it would have been easy to kick her in the head. Now, you have just finished telling me that you didn’t kick her. What stopped you?” His point is not so much the question as the answer. He says the abusers “can always give ... a reason.”<sup>66</sup> Some of the reasons: “I wouldn’t want to cause her a serious injury.” “I realized one of the children was watching.” “I was afraid someone would call the police.” “I could kill her if I did that.” “The fight was getting loud, and I was afraid neighbors would hear.” The most frequent response is, “Jesus, I wouldn’t do that. I would never do something like that to her.” Only twice in fifteen years has Bancroft heard the answer, “I don’t know.”<sup>67</sup>

His point is that when abusers are committing their atrocities, they remain acutely aware of the following questions, “Am I doing something that other people could find out about, so it could make me look bad?”<sup>68</sup> “Am I doing something that could get me in legal trouble? Could I hurt myself? Am I doing anything that I myself consider too cruel, gross, or violent?”<sup>69</sup>

These questions are asked word-for-word in corporate boardrooms. I spoke at length a few years ago with a former corporate lawyer who recovered her conscience, quit, and began working against the corporations. “The people who run these corporations,” she said, “know exactly what they’re doing. They know they’re killing people. They know they’re destroying rivers. They know they’re lying. And they know they’re making a lot of money in the process.”

Bancroft continues, “A critical insight seeped into me from working with my first few dozen clients. An abuser almost never does anything that he himself considers

morally unacceptable. He may hide what he does because he thinks other people would disagree with it, but he feels justified inside. I can't remember a client who ever said to me: 'There's no way I can defend what I did. It was just totally wrong.' He invariably has a reason that he considers good enough. In short, an abuser's core problem is that he has a distorted sense of right and wrong."<sup>70</sup>

This is true on the larger social scale. Clearly, a culture killing the planet has a distorted sense of right and wrong. Clearly a police department that arrests tree-sitters yet neither deforesters nor rapists has a distorted sense of right and wrong.

Bancroft asks his clients whether they ever call their mothers a bitch. When they say they don't, he asks why they feel justified to call their partners that. His answer is that "the abuser's problem lies above all in his belief that controlling or abusing his female partner is justifiable."<sup>71</sup>

Once again, the connections to the larger cultural level should be obvious. In some ways this is a restatement of premise four, but it's different enough and important enough to become the nineteenth premise of this book: The culture's problem lies above all in the belief that controlling and abusing the natural world is justifiable.

It all comes down to perceived entitlement. As Bancroft states, "Entitlement is the abuser's belief that he has a special status and that it provides him with exclusive rights and privileges that do not apply to his partner. The attitudes that drive abuse can largely be summarized by this one word."<sup>72</sup>

This same attitude applies on the larger social scale. Of course humans are a special species, to whom a wise and omnipotent God has granted the exclusive rights and privileges of dominion over this planet that is here for us to use. And of course even if you subscribe to the religion of Science instead of Christianity, humans' special intelligence and abilities grant us exclusive rights and privileges to work our will on the world that is here for us to use. And of course among humans, the civilized are especially special, because we are such a high stage of social and cultural development, with especially exclusive rights and privileges to use the world as we see fit. And of course among civilized humans, those who run the show are even more special, and so on.

The flattering belief that one is entitled to exploit those around him is a major

reason abusers so rarely stop their abuse. Although this is, according to Bancroft, “rarely mentioned in discussions of abuse,” it “is actually one of the most important dynamics: the benefits that an abuser gets that make his behavior desirable to him. In what ways is abusiveness rewarding? How does this destructive pattern get reinforced?”<sup>73</sup>

He also states, “When you are left feeling hurt or confused after a confrontation with your controlling partner, ask yourself: What was he trying to get out of what he just did? What is the ultimate benefit to him? Thinking through these questions can help you clear your head and identify his tactics.”<sup>74</sup>

My father tells my sister to do the dishes. She complains that she has never seen him do them. He stares at her. She does them. He points out a place she missed on a plate. He hits her. Never again will she suggest he do dishes, unless she is willing to accept the consequences.

My father wants sex. My mother tells him no. He stares at her. He pouts. Later that day he hits her because of something unrelated. But this happens again later that week, and again the next week, and the week after, until finally she makes the connection. Never again will she tell him no, unless she is willing to accept the consequences.

As Bancroft writes, “Over time, the man grows attached to his ballooning collection of comforts and privileges.”<sup>75</sup>

This takes us right back to William Harper’s 1837 defense of slavery: “The coercion of Slavery alone is adequate to form man to habits of labour. Without it, there can be no accumulation of property, no providence for the future, no taste for comforts or elegancies, which are the characteristics and essentials of civilization.”<sup>76</sup>

On the larger scale, too, each time we are left confused or hurt by the lies or other tactics of those in power—as ExxonMobil changes the climate, as Boise Cascade deforests, as Monsanto poisons the world, as BP lies about its practices, as politicians lie about everything—we need to ask Bancroft’s questions: What are those in power trying to get out of what they just did? What is the ultimate benefit to them?

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One of the bad things about abusers as compared to other sorts of addicts is that at least substance abusers sometimes “hit bottom,” where their lives become painful enough to break through their denial. No such luck with those who abuse others.

Bancroft states that partner abuse “is not especially self-destructive, although it is profoundly destructive to others. A man can abuse women for twenty or thirty years and still have a stable job or a professional career, keep his finances in good order, and remain popular with his friends and relatives. His self-esteem, his ability to sleep at night, his self-confidence, his physical health, all tend to hold just as steady as they would for a nonabusive man. One of the great sources of pain in the life of an abused woman is her sense of isolation and frustration because no one else seems to notice that anything is awry in her partner. Her life and her freedom may slide down the tubes because of what he is doing to her mind, but his life usually doesn’t.”<sup>77</sup>

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Many Indians have asked these questions about the civilized. I have asked these same questions about CEOs, corporate journalists, politicians. How do these people sleep at night?

Soundly, in comfortable beds, in 5,000 square foot homes, behind gates, with private security systems, thank you very much.

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It is others who lose sleep over their activities.

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Within an abusive family dynamic, everything—and I mean everything—is aimed toward protecting the abuser from the physical and emotional consequences of his actions. All

members are enculturated to identify more closely with the family structure and its abusive dynamics than with their own well-being and the well-being of their loved ones and other victims. Because the dynamic is set up to foster the well-being of the perpetrator, every action, then, by every member of the family—and more to the point every member's every thought and non-thought and feeling and non-feeling and way of being and not-being—has as its goal the protection of the abuser's well-being. This “well-being” is a particular sort, devoid of relationship and accompanying emotions, heavy on the kind of external rewards abusers reap because of their abuse (and of course precisely the kind of external rewards emphasized by a grotesquely materialistic culture), and most especially focused on allowing the perpetrator to avoid confronting his own painful emotions, including the pain he inflicts, the pain he received as a child (and adult) that caused him to separate from his own emotions (to identify not with himself but with an abuser and an abusive dynamic), and the pain of living in an abusive dynamic where rewards gained through abuse never quite compensate for the emptiness of living a “life” devoid of real relationship.

In my book *A Language Older Than Words* I detailed, among other things, the importance of amnesia or selective memory to the survival of abused children. If you are powerless to prevent yourself from being harmed or to defend yourself in any way, it serves no purpose to consciously remember the atrocities. In fact it can be lifesaving to read and then identify more closely with the perpetrator's emotions and state of being than one's own. After all, the child's emotions don't matter, but the child needs to be capable at all times of reading and if possible placating the powerful adult's emotions. But I did not mention the function this induced amnesia serves for the perpetrator: it allows him to confront neither the emotional consequences nor the emotional motivations for his abusive behavior.

Everyone at every moment acts to protect the abuser. Think about it in your own life. How many times has someone abused you and you did whatever was necessary to make sure the other person did not feel bad? What did you do to take care of the other person? Here is a story a woman just told me. She was sitting in a bar with her sisters, drinking Coca Cola. A man struck up a superficial conversation with her. Soon she

walked into the bathroom. When she emerged from her stall, he was waiting for her. She asked what he was doing. He forced her against the wall, pushed his hips hard into her. She somehow slipped from his grasp, and returned to the main room. He followed. He remained within ten feet of her. She stayed for another hour. Now here's the point: Not only did she not make a scene, but she did not even leave. Even as she was slipping away from his attempted rape and all through the next hour she was thinking, I don't want to hurt his feelings.

I cannot tell you how many times I have similarly betrayed myself to protect an abuser.

Years ago, in the midst of one of those abusive relationships I mentioned earlier, a friend was counseling me through the latest incident of abuse. At one point I said, "I don't think she meant to hurt me. Here's what I think she was thinking—"

My friend cut me off: "If I was interested in what she was thinking, I would talk to her. But I'm not, so I won't. I'm interested in what you were thinking, and feeling."

I didn't have an answer. I had no idea. I was too busy taking care of the other person's feelings.

To care about another, to have compassion for another, is beautiful and life-affirming. To care about and have compassion for another who is abusing you is a toxic mimic of real compassion, and is one of the obscenities spawned by a culture of abuse.

The same thing happens all the time on the larger scale. I also cannot tell you how many times I have been told that I must have compassion for CEOs, who are human too, and who once were children. We must never hurt their feelings, nor especially their person. We must always be polite to those who are killing us. If we insist on using any hint of violence, we are told, if we absolutely must kill them back, we must kill them only with kindness. This is supposed to somehow be effective at something. But the only one it helps is the perpetrator.

Bancroft states that one of the most common forms of support for abusers is the person "who says to the abused woman: 'You should show him some compassion even if he has done bad things. Don't forget that he's a human being, too.'" Bancroft continues, "I have almost never worked with an abused woman who overlooked her partner's



humanity. The problem is the reverse: He forgets her humanity. Acknowledging his abusiveness and speaking forcefully and honestly about how he has hurt her is indispensable to her recovery. It is the abuser's perspective that she is being mean to him by speaking bluntly about the damage he has done. To suggest to her that his need for compassion should come before her right to live free from abuse is consistent with the abuser's outlook. I have repeatedly seen the tendency among friends and acquaintances of an abused woman to feel that it is their responsibility to make sure that she realizes what a good person he really is inside—in other words, to stay focused on his needs rather than her own, which is a mistake.”<sup>78</sup>

We have all been trained to identify more closely with the abusive personal and social dynamics we call civilization than with our own life and the lives of those around us, including the landbase. People will do anything—go to any absurd length—to hide the abuse from themselves and everyone around them. Everything about this culture—and I mean everything—from its absurd “entertainment” to its equally absurd “philosophy” to its politics to its science to its interspecies relations to its intrahuman relations is all about protecting the abusive dynamics.

R. D. Laing named three rules that govern abusive family dynamics, that allow the family to not acknowledge the abuse:

Rule A: Don't.

Rule A.1: Rule A does not exist.

Rule A.2: Never discuss the existence or nonexistence of rules A, A.1, or A.2.<sup>79</sup>

These rules hold true for the culture. We see them every day in every way, from the most intimate to the most global. This culture collectively and most of its members individually will give up the world before they'll give up this abusive structure.

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A few years ago I asked the great thinker and writer Thomas Berry what transformation would be required for us to have a sustainable sense of self (and by extension a sustainable culture).

He responded, “We have to get beyond the artificial division we’ve created between the human community and the rest of planet. There is only one community, and it lives and dies as a unit. Any harm done to the natural world diminishes the human world, because the human world depends on the natural world not only for its physical supplies but for its psychic development and fulfillment. This is most important, because people talk about the need to destroy the natural world in order to advance the human world. Well, anything that diminishes the wonder and fulfillment we receive from the natural world spoils the human enterprise. We may get a pile of possessions, but it won’t mean much if we can’t go to the mountains or the seacoast, or enjoy the songs of birds or the sights and scents of flowers. What does it do to our children when they cannot enjoy such things?”

He continued, “In back of this, and really what I’m concerned with, is the question of how we experience the universe. My proposal—and this is why a cosmological worldview is so important—is that a cosmological order is what might be called the great liturgy. The human project is validated by ritual insertion into the cosmological order. Our job is to participate in the great hymn of praise that is existence.”

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This culture won’t change on its own. The demands it makes on the natural world and on the humans it exploits won’t diminish until the culture is destroyed. As Bancroft writes, “An abusive man expects catering, and the more positive attention he receives, the more he demands. He never reaches a point where he is satisfied, where he has been given enough. Rather he gets used to the luxurious treatment he is receiving and soon escalates his demands.”<sup>80</sup>

The same is true on the larger scale, as no comforts or elegancies, no feeling of power over another, no accumulation of property can make up for a failure to participate in the great liturgy. It’s an attempt to use increasing amounts of emptiness to plug a great void (or, as R.D. Laing wrote, “How do you plug a void plugging a void?”<sup>81</sup>). It’s an attempt to cure loneliness through power. But loneliness can only be cured through

relationship,<sup>82</sup> and relationship is precisely what exploitation and abuse destroy.

There can be no compromise with the insatiable. They'll ask, then negotiate, then demand, their threat of violence informing all interactions, and in the end they'll take. But that will not be the end, because they'll not be satisfied. They'll begin again, by asking, then negotiating, then demanding, then taking. And then they'll ask, negotiate, demand, take, until there's nothing left. And yet they'll keep on pushing.

Because Bancroft's book is in some ways self-help, he puts all this slightly differently: "Objectification is a critical reason why an abuser tends to get worse over time. As his conscience adapts to one level of cruelty—or violence—he builds to the next. By depersonalizing his partner, the abuser protects himself from the natural human emotions of guilt and empathy, so that he can sleep at night with a clear conscience. He distances himself so far from her humanity that her feelings no longer count, or simply cease to exist. These walls tend to grow over time, so that after a few years in a relationship my clients can reach a point where they feel no more guilt over degrading or threatening their partners than you or I would feel after angrily kicking a stone in the driveway."<sup>83</sup>

Or perhaps he means that abusers would feel no more guilt over threatening their partners than civilized humans would feel blasting stones from a quarry, or damming a river, or deforesting a hillside.<sup>84</sup> Stones, rivers, trees, forests, their feelings, far beyond not counting, have within this culture long since ceased to exist.

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Thomas Berry said to me, "We have lost touch with the natural order of things. For example, which day of the workweek it is may be more important to many of us than the great transition moments in the seasonal cycles. And which hour of the day it is—will I get to work on time? Will I avoid rush hour traffic? Will I get to watch my favorite television program?—may be more important to us than the transitional moments in the diurnal cycles. We have forgotten the great spiritual import of these moments of transition. The dawn is mystical, a very special moment for the human to experience the

wonder and depth of fulfillment in the sacred. The same is true of nightfall. And it's true when we pass from consciousness to sleep, where our subconscious comes forward. That this is a special moment of intimacy is particularly apparent to children. They often know that the moment of falling asleep is the magic or mystical moment when there is a presence. Parents talk to their children in a very special way at this time. It's very tender, sensitive, quiet. It's the great transitional moment in our day-night cycle.

“There are magical moments in the yearly cycle, too. There is the winter solstice, the moment when the transformation takes place between a declining and ascending sun. It's a moment of death in nature, a moment when everything is reborn. We have lost touch with this intimate experience.

“In the springtime, humans are meant to wonder and to ceremonially observe succession, leading to the fulfillment of summer, and the beginning of the movement again toward death. At the harvest there is another time of gratitude and celebration. I think the Iroquois thanksgiving ceremony is one of the greatest festivals in the religious traditions of humankind. Different elements are remembered and thanked: the water, the rain, the wind, the fruitfulness of the earth, the trees. The Iroquois articulate fifteen or more specialized powers that humans need to commune with and be grateful for.

“All of this is cosmological. Such experience evokes a sense of wonder at the majesty of things. We participate in the world of the sacred, the world of mystery, the world of fulfillment. To recognize our fulfillment in these moments is to know what it is to be human.

“We can say the same for places as for moments. To be fully human is to fully experience the spectacular formations of the planet: particular mountains, particular rivers, certain rock structures.

“We no longer do this. We don't experience the natural world surrounding us. We deny ourselves our deepest delight by not participating in the dawn, the dusk, the solstice, the springtime.”

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Unfortunately, abusers don't particularly care about what they're losing. Bancroft writes

about this, too: “It is true that partner abusers lose intimacy because of their abuse, since true closeness and abuse are mutually exclusive. However, they rarely experience this as much of a loss. Either they find their intimacy through close emotional connections with friends or relatives, as many of my clients do, or they are people for whom intimacy is neither a goal nor a value (as is also true of many nonabusers). You can’t miss something that you aren’t interested in having.”<sup>85</sup>

This transposes easily to the larger scale with only a few substitutions. “It is true that the civilized lose intimacy with their landbase because of their exploitation of it, since true closeness and exploitation are mutually exclusive. However, they rarely experience this as much of a loss. Either they find their intimacy through close emotional connections [sic] with other humans, or they are people for whom intimacy with the land is neither a goal nor a value (as is true of nearly all of the civilized). You can’t miss something that you aren’t interested in having.”

I’ve heard many environmentalists state that if only they could get CEOs and politicians out of their boardrooms and legislative halls (or out of their pent-houses and vacation homes) long enough to breathe clean forest air and to feel duff beneath their feet, long enough to stop thinking about stock prices and start thinking about spotted owls, that the CEOs would undergo magical transformations and suddenly no longer want to destroy the homes of their new-found forest friends.

It ain’t gonna happen. This false hope ignores many things. It ignores the fact that when Europeans first encountered a wildly fecund North America, they were not entranced by it, they did not fall in love with it, they feared and hated it, and they began to dismantle it, a dismantling that continues its acceleration to this day. It ignores the fact that many loggers spend much of their adult lives in forests, claiming to love these forests they’re destroying. It ignores the fact that CEOs and politicians, like other abusers, are financially and socially well-rewarded for maintaining their disconnected state. It ignores the fact that if some individual does have an epiphany, he will simply be replaced and the destruction will continue apace. And most of all it ignores the fact that, as mentioned before, the culture’s problem lies in the belief that controlling and abusing the natural world is justifiable.

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Where does this leave us?

Well, if you agree with my thesis—which I think I’ve more than amply supported—that the motivations, dynamics, and damage of abuse play out not only in the bedrooms of little girls and boys, not only in the black eyes and bruised and torn vaginas of women, not only in the fragmented and fearful psyches of the traumatized, but also in blasted streams and dammed rivers, poisoned oceans and extirpated species, and in enslaved, domesticated, or destroyed humans (and nonhumans, and landscapes), then it means that asking, cajoling, or even sending lovingkindness™ to abusers is at best a waste of time. Bancroft again: “You cannot get an abuser to change by begging or pleading. The only abusers who change are the ones who become willing to accept the consequences of their actions.”<sup>86</sup> And yet again: “You cannot, I am sorry to say, get an abuser to work on himself by pleading, soothing, gently leading, getting friends to persuade him, or using any other nonconfrontational method. I have watched hundreds of women attempt such an approach without success. The way you can help him change is to demand that he do so, and settle for nothing less.”<sup>87</sup>

Let’s apply this on the larger scale: We cannot get large-scale abusers to stop exploiting others by pleading, soothing, gently leading, getting people to persuade them, or using any other nonconfrontational method. It won’t work.

But you knew that already.

Bancroft continues, “It is also impossible to persuade an abusive man to change by convincing him that he would benefit, because he perceives the benefits of controlling his partner as vastly outweighing the losses. This is part of why so many men initially take steps to change their abusive behavior but then return to their old ways. There is another reason why appealing to his self-interest doesn’t work. The abusive man’s belief that his own needs should come ahead of his partner’s is at the core of the problem. Therefore when anyone, including therapists, tells an abusive man that he should change because that’s what’s best for him, they are inadvertently feeding his selfish focus on

himself: You cannot simultaneously contribute to a problem and solve it.”<sup>88</sup>

Let’s once again explicitly make the connection to the larger scale. It is impossible to persuade the civilized to change by convincing them that they would benefit and simultaneously allowing them to remain within the framework and reward system of civilization, because the civilized perceive the benefits of controlling those around them (including humans and nonhumans; including the land, air, water; including genetic structures; including molecular structures) as vastly outweighing the losses. This is part of why so many of the civilized initially take steps—or at least mouth rhetoric and pretend to take steps—to change their abusive behavior but then return to their exploitative ways. There is another reason why appealing to the self-interest of the civilized doesn’t work (apart from the fact that the entire economic system, indeed all of civilization, is based on this limited and unsustainable sense of self which leads people to believe it’s in one’s self-interest to exploit others, indeed, which causes it to be, within this limited sense of self, actually in one’s self-interest to exploit others): the belief of the civilized that their own needs should come ahead of the landbase’s is at the core of the problem. Therefore when people, including activists, tell a civilized person—for example, a CEO or politician—that he should change because that’s what’s best for him, they are inadvertently feeding his selfish focus on himself: You cannot simultaneously contribute to a problem and solve it.

Let’s go one more time. Bancroft: “An abuser doesn’t change because he feels guilty or gets sober or finds God. He doesn’t change after seeing the fear in his children’s eyes or feeling them drift away from him. It doesn’t suddenly dawn on him that his partner deserves better treatment. Because of his self-focus, combined with the many rewards he gets from controlling you, an abuser changes only when he has to,<sup>89</sup> so the most important element in creating a context for change in an abuser is placing him in a situation where he has no other choice. Otherwise, it is highly unlikely that he will ever change his behavior.”<sup>90</sup>

Pay careful attention. No other choice.

No, really. Pay careful attention. No other choice.

No, now really pay attention. No other choice.

None.

Let's transpose this to the larger scale. Those who are killing the planet won't change because they feel guilty or drop their addiction to consumerism or find God, or Nature. They don't change after seeing the fear in factory farmed or vivisected animal's eyes (or in the eyes of the poor) or feeling wild creatures drift away from them. It doesn't suddenly dawn on them that the landbase deserves better treatment. Because of their self-focus, combined with the many rewards they get from controlling those around them, these abusers change only when they have to,<sup>91</sup> so the most important element in creating a context for change in those who are killing the planet is to place them in situations where they have no other choice. Otherwise, it is highly unlikely that they will ever change their behavior.

No other choice.

None.

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The answer that allowed me to move past the question of whether abusers believe their lies is this: it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all. What matters is stopping them.

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Last night I dreamt I was on a ship with thousands of other people. A few men gathered us into a huge ballroom. We knew, even though they never said a word, that they were going to kill us. We huddled against walls or crouched on the floor, waiting to die. The men had guns, but I wondered why we didn't rush them, didn't fight back. There was no way they could kill us all unless we chose not to fight, in which case we would all surely die. Yet there we stayed.

I got up. The men with guns didn't notice. The captives who huddled or crouched hissed at me to get back on the floor. I was endangering them, they said, by standing up. They'll notice us, they said, and get upset. Upset? I thought. They herded us here with



guns. They take us three at a time to another room. We hear gunshots. They come to get three more. And you're worried that I'll endanger us?

I wanted to fight but couldn't do it alone. I knew none of those on the floor would join me. They were all going to die. I made my way slowly to a door, then left the room, went down a hall, and emerged on the deck. A woman swam through the ocean toward the boat. She climbed the side. She was beautiful. She was nude. We didn't speak. We knew what we each had to do. We looked at each other for a moment before she leapt back into the ocean. I went room to room on the ship, searching for people who had not already entered the ballroom.

I half awoke, then lay there in the moonlight, slowly shifting focus from the dream and all it meant to a muffled sound above my head. The sound and its meaning became less fuzzy, then more clear, till I knew the sound was wings fluttering against glass. I sat up, turned around, reached up, and cupped a moth in my hands. I used my thumb to open a window and let it out. I went back to sleep, back to the dream.

The woman swam again to the ship, climbed aboard. She smiled. She had brought help. We were ready. We knew what we had to do. We knew what we wanted to do.

I woke up.