

The end

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I've been thinking a lot about how to end this book. Most books on social or ecological problems end one or more of four ways, each of which has its own problems.

The first is to end the book by suggesting that the solution to the problems described in the book is simply to limit one's personal participation in the destructive system, either by reducing one's consumption or walking away.

I'm not a huge fan of this approach, primarily since it does essentially nothing to stop the horrors. One can certainly feel better about oneself for having stopped or slowed one's participation, and there are some cases where for purely moral reasons one shouldn't participate (I don't, for example, visit zoos, and I don't use pornography). But reduction of participation, or even withdrawal, does not create social change. I'm under no illusions, for example, that me not going to zoos is going to shut down that multi-billion dollar entertainment industry, and I'm under no illusions that me not using porn is going to shut down that hundred-billion dollar industry.

And honestly, it boggles my mind that so many books and essays conclude by suggesting 'simple living' as a solution to planetary murder. That response is incommensurate with the threat. If aliens came from outer space and were vacuuming up the oceans, heating up the planet, bathing the world in endocrine disruptors – murdering the planet – I'd hope our response would be more than to reduce, re-use and recycle. I mean, does anyone really think that bicycling to work or composting would have stopped Hitler, or ended chattel slavery in the United States? And similarly, although one individual male not raping or beating women is a good thing, I can't imagine anyone thinking that that alone will stop men's violence against women. We have to do more.

There are no personal solutions to social problems.

Another way books on social and especially ecological problems sometimes end is by suggesting a form of acceptance of, or accommodation to, the horror

of it all, as we work our way through Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's famous stages of grief and acceptance – so we can maintain a sort of inner peace as the world crumbles around us. I've even seen books that present the murder of the planet as an opportunity for spiritual growth and enlightenment.

But any sort of spiritual growth that doesn't lead us to fight for life on this planet and to fight for the end of rape isn't spiritual growth. It's simply yet another excuse for inaction. It's simply using the tragedy as a resource, in this case a spiritual resource.

And again, there are no personal solutions to social problems.

A third option is to provide a checklist of actions for readers to do to solve the problems – things like call a representative, vote, donate to or volunteer at this or that organization, be nice to people, and so on.

My response to this one's a bit more complicated. My work is about sparking a resistance movement to stop this culture from killing the planet, and to stop it from committing atrocities against women. And that resistance movement doesn't happen on its own. We need to work to help bring it into being. And we all know there is more than enough work to be done. So yes, I want for people to act and I want to make a call to action.

My concern is two-fold. The first is that the suggestions made in so many books and essays and especially movies are still nearly always incommensurate with the threats. A great example is Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*. For 90 minutes he discussed how dangerous global warming is (and, it ends up, way understated it). Then his solutions? Inflate your tires, change your light bulbs. Nothing about questioning corporate power (of course). Nothing about questioning a growth economy. Nothing about power at all. Likewise with *Food, Inc.* They did a great job of exposing corporate control of our food supply, and then one of their solutions was to buy organic yogurt produced by a major corporation and sold at Walmart.

Really?

So I'd want for my suggestions to be more meaningful than consumer and personal choices.

Yet again, there are no personal solutions to social problems.

And I always hesitate to make specific suggestions to people I don't know, precisely because I don't know them. How do I know what another person's strengths are, or weaknesses? How do I know what that person loves to do?

When people I don't know ask what they should do to protect the Earth, I always respond by asking them a series of questions.

First, what do you love? Whatever it is, it's under assault. Defend it. Do you remember my dear friend Charlotte Watson, the woman who asks every man she sees what it will take for men to stop beating on women? It would be arrogant and absurd for me to suggest she stop that work and instead try to defend salmon, or prairie dogs. She's defending what she loves. That is sufficient. It's more than sufficient. It's wonderful.

Everyone loves some place or some creature. Everyone has some atrocity they yearn and burn to end. So do it.

The good thing about everything being so messed up is that no matter where you look there's good work to be done.

So I don't think I should end by telling people to work on rape crisis hot lines or file timber sale appeals or blow up dams or chain themselves to trees or kick rapists in the nuts (although I would encourage all of those). Each of these actions may be important, but I don't know where people's passions lie. I don't know what you, the reader, love enough to fight for.

The next question I ask is: What are your gifts, and how can you use them in the service of the land, of women, of other victims of this culture?

Over the years a fair number of people have said to me: "You've written all these books. Don't you think it's time you stopped writing and started organizing?"

These people have obviously never seen my workspace: I can't even organize my pens, much less a group of people. Most of my organizational schemas could charitably be described as 'geologic,' not only because stuff sits on the floor for a long time, but also because I can tell how long ago I piled something there by how many layers of other detritus are on top of it.

Also, organizers have to talk to people, and I'm an extreme introvert. Years ago I volunteered to help an environmental organization with a phone tree. We were supposed to call members of the organization to invite them to an upcoming dinner. I spent the entire evening sitting with a phone in my hand, dialling the first six digits of a phone number, before freezing and hanging up the phone. I was terrified. I cannot make cold calls, even to invite people to a free meal. Another day I volunteered to take information to neighbourhoods and hang packets on people's doorknobs. Three of us were in my group. I stood on the sidewalk while the other two walked to the doors. Again, I was terrified I might have to talk to a stranger.

On the other hand, I know people who can easily leaflet outside a Walmart, and who easily and joyfully talk to strangers.

I would be the world's worst organizer.

Another example: I mentioned above I write terrible press releases. I've written them, agonized hours over precise wording and handed them over to people at the organization who needed them. Their response was always the same: they'd smile weakly, thank me for trying, sit down at a computer and bang out a much better press release in ten minutes. Having me write terrible press releases is not the best use of my talents, whatever they may be.

The point is that I can't tell people what to do because I don't know what are their gifts. Some people have a gift for accounting, and I know for a fact that many small organizations are starved for accountants: they need someone to help them navigate the maze of 501(c)3 requirements. Some people have gifts for working with computers. These can be some of the most important members of organizations, even if the organizations are working on non-tech issues like giraffe preservation or stopping the trafficking in women.

So, the directive I would be comfortable giving is: find out what are your gifts, and then use them.

Another way to say all this is to ask: What are the largest, most pressing problems you can help to solve using the gifts that are unique to you in all the universe?

Whatever your gifts are, the struggle needs them.

Here's the third question I always ask people who want me to tell them what to do: What do you get off on doing?

I love the earthiness of the phrase "get off on doing" as opposed to "What do you love to do?" The latter leads to answers like, "I love long walks on the beach, moonlit nights in the forest, snuggles by the fireplace." But we're talking about creating a resistance movement, not a personals ad.

What do you get off on doing?

Several years ago I was hanging out with a wetlands specialist with whom I was trying to protect a piece of forest. He would dig in the soil, rub it between his fingertips, then compare the colour of the soil to a chart. Certain colours indicated wetlands, which have more legal protection than non-wetlands.

As he was doing this, I asked him, "Do you get off on doing this?"

He said, "Oh, yeah! This is my second favourite thing to do in the world, after playing with my dogs."

I said, "This is really great, since I wouldn't enjoy doing this."

Likewise I worked with an attorney to help protect that same forest. Her assistance came with the condition that I help her write some of the court documents.

It ends up I have no more talent at writing court documents than I do press releases.

I asked her if she likes writing this shit.

She laughed and said she loves it.

I don't get off on any of that. On the other hand, I do get off on trying to articulate the relationship between, for example, perceived entitlement, exploitation and atrocity.

I have condemned myself to a life of homework.

People sometimes ask how I keep from burning out. The answer for me is in these questions. When you are defending what or whom you love; when you are using the gifts that are unique to you in all the universe in the service of those you love; and when you get off on what you are doing, where does getting burned out enter the equation? That's like getting burned out on playing, or burned out on making love.

I shared this section with my friend the wonderful activist and writer Max Wilbert. He said, "Sometimes we just have to do the difficult work simply because no one else is going to do it. Sometimes activism is just plain hard work. We started trying to protect Thacker Pass in Nevada from a proposed lithium mine by occupying the land in the middle of the winter. It was cold and miserable, but someone had to do it, and we decided it would be us. Often we just do what needs to be done."

He's absolutely right.

The fourth typical ending I've seen in books on social or ecological problems – and I have to admit I'm more or less always guilty of all four of these – consists of, having spent the book describing in great detail the horrors we face, then expressing with as much optimism and sincerity as one can muster a vague hope that somehow good will triumph over evil, and that somehow this

culture won't kill the planet and that somehow rape culture will be stopped.

Note the passive voice.

But given that every biological indicator is going in the wrong direction, given that this culture has been able to pollute every part of the planet, given that it violates even the deepest folds of the oceans, given that both male and human supremacism are not only not going away but are in ascendancy, not only is a vague hope insufficient – especially given what's at stake – but I see no evidence it's warranted.

Things are bad. And they're going to get worse.

And after that they'll get a whole lot worse.

Unless it's stopped, this culture will kill everything on the planet. Unless they're stopped, men in patriarchy will violate their way to the end of all that is.

And neither simple living, spiritual enlightenment, discrete actions by themselves, nor vague hopes will stop 10,000 years of social momentum. The ending to this book needs, I think, to reflect all that.

I don't know if I can do it. Just like I don't know if we can stop the murder of the planet.

But I do know that, as Lierre Keith has often said, "If there is anyone alive in a hundred years, they're going to ask what the fuck was wrong with us that we didn't fight like hell when the world was going down."

I know that life on this beautiful wonderful planet is at stake, and it's time for us to fight harder than we ever thought possible. It's time for every last one of us to pick up whatever tools or weapons or gifts that we have, and to use them, and to keep using them till our very last breath on this planet we call home.