

MORAL SENSITIVITY, MORAL TRANSFORMATION, AND EVOLUTIONARY SCIENTIST DAVID LOYE:

AN INTRODUCTION

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Abstract

This article introduces the two major themes of this issue of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*: moral sensitivity and transformation, and honoring the late evolutionary systems scientist David Loye. The article shows how these two themes are integrally interconnected. Loye introduced the term “moral sensitivity” as well as the distinction between “partnership moral sensitivity” and “dominator moral insensitivity” or “moralism,” showing how the latter has been used to push us back to “strong-man” rule, violence, and injustice. He was the first to reclaim what he called “Darwin’s lost theory” based on Charles Darwin’s long-ignored writings about human evolution, including what Darwin called “the moral sense.” Quoting from some of Loye’s more than 30 published books as well as a sampling of articles, the article highlights his gift of bringing to life the people and times he wrote about, including the men and women he called “the great scientific explorers of the better world.” Colorful examples from his many writings illustrate how Loye advanced the study of human evolution through his offerings on moral sensitivity, clarifying much that is otherwise obscured, and showing his enormous contributions to a better understanding of our past, present, and the possibilities for our future. The article provides new terms and new ideas for building a more equitable, less violent, more sustainable future through the works of a man first known for his prize-winning book on the immorality of racism, whose later works focused on how we can create a future where we not only survive, but thrive.

Keywords: Morality; Moral Sensitivity; Partnership Moral Sensitivity; Dominator Moral Insensitivity; Understanding Evil; Rediscovering Goodness; Darwin’s Lost Theory; Human Evolution; Golden Rule; Selfish Genes; Interaction of Genes and Cultures

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The two themes of this issue of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies* are, first, the origins, nature, and implications of moral sensitivity and moral transformation, and second, honoring the groundbreaking contributions of the late evolutionary systems theorist and social psychologist David Loye (1925-2022). These two themes are integrally interconnected.

Loye tackled head-on the problem of how morality has been distorted to maintain injustice and violence. He introduced the term “moral sensitivity,” and contrasted “partnership moral sensitivity” with the “moral insensitivity” or “moralism” characteristic of domination-oriented cultures.

Loye refused to comply with the avoidance of the term “morality” that is still common in the academy. He realized that because morality has all too often been appropriated to push us back to more repressive and violent times of “strong-man” rule, it has largely been eschewed by many lay people and scientists, especially those who consider themselves liberal and/or humanist. He further recognized that one result of shunning the scientific study of morality has been the moral relativism found in much of post-modernism and some New Age writings, and that this relativism often ignores violations of human rights.

As a person, David Loye embodied and practiced the moral sensitivity he wrote about. For example, even in his later years when he could no longer drive, he always carried five and ten dollar-bills to give to homeless people standing at the side of the road (he was not a wealthy man). Moreover, whenever possible he not only gave them money, but also showed his empathy and caring by talking with them, recognizing and reaffirming their humanity and dignity.

Elsewhere in this issue of the journal is my personal tribute to David as a man and as my partner in life and work. Here I want to give some examples of the many books and articles David Loye wrote as a social and evolutionary scientist dedicated to advancing moral sensitivity and, with this, human evolution.

THE EVOLUTIONARY UNDERPINNINGS OF MORALITY

David Loye was a prolific writer, author of more than 30 books and many articles and chapters in scholarly publications. David's early books prefigured his focus on moral sensitivity. His *Healing of a Nation* (1971) won the prestigious Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for the best book on race relations, and while it did not focus on morality, it was an indictment of the immorality of racism. His next two books, *The Leadership Passion* (1977) and *The Knowable Future: A Psychology of Forecasting and Prophecy* (1978), centered on social psychology (David's doctoral field) and his interest in forecasting the future as well as creating a better future. His bestseller *The Sphinx and the Rainbow: Brain, Mind, and Future Vision* (1987), later re-published as *An Arrow Though Chaos: How We See into the Future* (2000), not only focused on scientific methods of prediction but also on precognition and other paranormal phenomena that have been well documented but are still not generally recognized by mainstream science. Then, already in his sixties, he began to write books with a central focus on moral sensitivity.

I want to start with Loye's book *The Glacier and the Flame I: Rediscovering Goodness* (2008), in which he confronted the common belief that humans are innately evil, and demolished it with evidence from scientific studies. For instance, in the chapter he called "The Moral World of the Newborn," he drew from research demonstrating that babies only 18 hours old are far more likely to respond to another baby's cry than to their own. Moreover, "between 18 and 24 months, the distress of another will impel them to action - patting the head, offering a toy, finding an adult to help the distressed child" (p. 41-42).

These studies show that empathy, a capacity fundamental to moral sensitivity, is expressed in our species almost from birth. As he wrote, studies show that "the infant is born already pre-programmed ... and that this process does not solely involve imitating the parent. It also involves the reinforcement of what is already there in the child" (2008, p. 44).

In *Rediscovering Goodness*, Loye also included evidence that Darwin shared this view. Indeed, a pioneering contribution of David Loye is that he was the first to bring attention to, as his book title calls it out, *Darwin's Lost Theory: Bridge to a Better World* (Loye, 2007c). In an unpublished revision to that book, he wrote:

This book ends the disastrous fiction of the Darwin of survival of the fittest and selfish genes and begins the story and theory of the Darwin of love and moral sensitivity as vital prime drivers for human evolution. Most of it is told here by himself, as he originally wrote it—in page after page ignored for over a century. I mainly update his story and theory in terms of the modern fields of science that corroborate, expand, and advance the “new” Darwin, including brain research, psychology, sociology, chaos and complexity theory, political and evolutionary systems science. (Loye, unpublished revision)

That Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871/2014) has been ignored for over a century is no accident. It has been ignored because what Darwin writes in that book contradicts assumptions that maintain the notion that humans are fundamentally selfish, indeed ruthless, and hence have to be rigidly controlled. As Loye said many times, Darwin has been used as an 800-pound gorilla to maintain traditions of domination. Yet, far from contending that we humans are just motivated by selfishness or innately flawed by “original sin,” Darwin prefigured what we today know from psychology and neuroscience: that whether or not people's genetic potentials are or are not expressed depends on the interaction of genes and experiences, which for humans are primarily shaped by the particular cultures we grow up in (Eisler & Fry, 2019; Loye, 2022).

Loye's reclamation of Darwin's writings in *The Descent of Man* about evolution at the human level is vital for our future. It is vital for understanding the pivotal role that culture plays in human beliefs and actions.

DARWIN'S LOST THEORY

Loye's discovery of this still largely ignored aspect of Darwin's theorizing started in the 1980s with a computer search of the 1871 edition of *The Descent of Man*. Using what was at the time a new research technology, Loye first searched 'survival of the fittest'—a phrase generally attributed to Darwin although it was actually introduced by social Darwinist Herbert Spencer, who became the much-quoted darling of the "robber barons" of early capitalism.

What Loye found is that Darwin only used the words "survival of the fittest" twice in *The Descent of Man*, and one of these two times was to apologize for ever using the term. Continued searching found that, by contrast, Darwin used the word love 95 times, even though the book's index only has two listings. Searching further, Loye found that Darwin referred to the moral sense 92 times (Loye, 2007). And that was just the beginning.

As Loye emphasized in his many books on what Darwin actually said about human evolution, he largely relied on Darwin's own words for evidence of this long-ignored theory. This evidence, as presented in Loye's *Darwin's Lost Theory* (2007c), begins with Darwin's notebooks, written when he was a young man just returned from his famous voyage to the Galapagos Islands where he accumulated much of the data for his later works. In these notebooks, Darwin already speculated that the moral sense begins with the sexual instincts, then the parental instincts, followed by the social instincts (Loye, 2007c).

Loye then carefully examined *The Descent of Man*, which Darwin wrote in his 60s. In that book Darwin made it clear that he was now going beyond his earlier book, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859), to write about evolution when it concerns our species. Not only that, as Loye detailed in one of his last books, *Rediscovering Darwin: The Rest of Darwin's Theory and Why We Need It Today* (2018), if one actually reads

what Darwin wrote, it is clear that he prefigured both chaos theory and self-organizing theory, recognizing that humans do not just ‘adapt’ to their natural environments but have a built-in capacity as organisms to change both themselves and their environments (Loye, 2018, pp. 13-28).

As Loye exhaustively documented, Darwin had a great deal to say about the evolution of morality. Darwin also presaged much of what we know today from science: that our more developed brain, including our frontal lobes, are integral to our capacity for moral sensitivity, including empathy, which Darwin called sympathy (Loye, 2007c). Here too Darwin distanced human evolution, including what he called our moral qualities, from that of pre-human species. In Darwin’s words:

Important as the struggle for existence has been and even still is, yet as far as the highest part of man’s nature is concerned there are other agencies more important. For the moral qualities are advanced, either directly or indirectly, much more through the effects of habit, the reasoning powers, instruction, religion, etc., than through natural selection. (Darwin, 1879/2014, p. 531).

MORALITY AND HUMAN EVOLUTION

As Loye extensively documented, Darwin has been drastically misinterpreted about the vital matters of human evolution and human morality. In *The Glacier and the Flame I* (2008), Loye says about what Darwin wrote in *The Descent of Man*:

[I]n the evolution of ‘the moral sense,’ first came the ‘sexual instinct,’ he tells us, then ‘parental instinct,’ ‘social instinct,’ and last emotion and reason. In other words, out of what from the beginning has obviously been the primary source of ongoing life and thereby primary source of evolution, first came sex. Next came the shaping impact of the parental love that emerged as the result of sex and having a new being to care for. Next, widening beyond the family, came the impact of the sociability that as a basic need links to one another all social

animals, ourselves included. Next, as from the seed grows the root, trunk, and finally the branching of the tree, came the development of the capacity in the higher mammals, including ourselves, to express emotion.

And next, vastly elaborated in us, came the power to grasp all of it in the most exciting of new ways—through development of the enormously fluid and far-ranging scope of human reason.

But as if this wasn't enough to be ignored for a century, he does not stop here. For at this point in his thinking, he jumped on into development of *mind* rising out of the biology of emotion and reason[.] (Loye, 2008, p. 66-67, emphasis in the original).

Going further, Loye continued:

In a parallel analysis, Darwin develops his case for how beyond biological evolution through *cognition*—i.e., through the cumulation of generation after generation of feeling and thinking—our cultural evolution unfolded. In keeping with the earlier implanting of our sexual, parental, and social instincts, through cultural evolution came the widening impact of our *caring* for others. Given our capacity for emotion and reason, this led to *reflection* on the consequences of one's behavior. That, in turn, led to the development of *language* to share and compare insights.

Then, with the global spread of the capacity for language—and the sharing of what seemed to better rather than worsen our situation on this planet—came the mind-binding impact of *habit*. (Loye, 2008, p. 67-68, emphasis in the original).

These quotes from Loye give us a sense of Darwin's thinking about the origins of the moral sense as a human predisposition that is then shaped by the cultures we create and live in. As Loye also showed, our cultures are shaped by the degree to which they

orient to the partnership or domination side of the partnership-domination social scale—or to use Loye’s metaphors, to the Flame or the Glacier. Again, to quote Loye’s words from *The Glacier and the Flame I* (2008) about what Darwin said,

All this—this Darwin so wholly different from how he has been portrayed tells us—would naturally lead to the golden rule, “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise” (Darwin, 1871/2014, p.107). Rather than being stuck with whatever natural selection, chance, or the ‘blind watchmaker’ happen to toss our way, instead we have the self-organizing and fully functional human being whose “conscience becomes the supreme judge and monitor” (Darwin, 1871/2014, p. 526).

Loye, 2008, p. 68

Loye did not, so to speak, throw the baby out with the bathwater; that is, he took note of the humane aspects of religion. He recognized that at the core of what he called progressive science and religion lies moral sensitivity. He wrote:

The more I ponder this double-powered core aspect of our being that Darwin labored so long to scientifically affirm, the more it looms as an insight for science and for humanity for which only the language of religion provides an adequate word.

That word is revelation. It is a foundational scientific revelation. It is the reaffirmation of the vision of Jesus and progressive avatars for other faiths. It is the grounding for scientific and spiritual evolution—and revolution.

Yet the point to keep in mind is that once again, as over and over again throughout the history of our species on this planet, we glimpse how through the lack of a morally-empowered understanding of what is being done to us, and by what and whom, the Glacier keeps snuffing out the Flame. (Loye, 2008, p. 68-69)

THE SCIENTISTS WHO STUDIED MORALITY

In his writings, Loye displayed another great gift: he was able to bring the people he wrote about to life. In addition to their research findings and ideas, as he did with Darwin, Loye's books provide vivid details of their lives as well as of the times when they wrote. For example, in *Darwin's Second Revolution* (Loye, 2010), we not only meet Darwin's closest disciple, the psychologist George John Romanes, but also others who, after Darwin's death, interpreted what Darwin wrote. We read of the agony of Romanes as he unsuccessfully fought against the narrow Neo-Darwinism that held sway in the late 19th century and of the strange life and varied ideas of Herbert Spencer, and are introduced to a wide cast of early post-Darwinian evolutionary thinkers.

In chapters Loye called "Weismann's Rats and Wallace's Spooks," "Kropotkin, Lonesome Prince and Happy Revolutionary," and "The Mindful Measure of Morgan, Baldwin, Osborn, and William James," we learn how some scholars tried to pick up and continue Darwin's thinking on the interaction of biology and culture, and how in the end these efforts failed. We also read colorful stories such as how a scandal in a house of prostitution ended Baldwin's U.S. career.

Then, contextualized in their time of Reaganomics and the Cold War, follow chapters on later socio-biologists and their successors. We meet W.D. Hamilton and Robert Trivers, whose ideas Loye summed up as "the wonder of selfishness for doing good in the world" (Loye, 2010, p. 89), and Richard Dawkins and his influential theory of selfish genes (Dawkins, 1978). We also meet evolutionary psychologists such as Leda Cosmides and John Toomey, who argued that learning and culture have little to do with human behavior, despite hundreds of studies indicating the opposite (Loye, 2010).

Another book on morality by Loye, *The River and the Star: The Lost Story of the Great Explorers of the Better World* (2007a), starts with Emanuel Kant, best known as a philosopher but credited by Loye as the first modern scholar to examine morality

from a scientific perspective. Here we read some accounts of Kant as a robotic, clock-bound, lonely man, and accounts by others of Kant as a bon-vivant who delighted in conversation and coffee-houses, accounts that are then sorted into different periods of Kant's life. We learn what happened when Kant explored the post-Enlightenment mind and morality in his famous *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). We learn little-known facts about Kant. For example, he "watched and commented with fascination on the American revolution;" that "within an increasingly authoritarian Prussia he fearlessly hailed the French Revolution with joy." Already in the 18th century Kant proposed what is today the United Nations; in his last booklet, published in 1795, Kant wrote about how to end wars (Loye, 2007a, pp 50-51).

The River and the Star goes on into the late 1700s and the early 1800s, the time of Goethe, Beethoven, and Napoleon, and the ideas and lives of people who tried to put moral sensitivity into practice. In a chapter called "The River Gamblers," we get to know socialist utopians, men and women like Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, Saint-Simon, Mother Anna, and Jemima Wilkinson.

One notable point about Loye's work is that, in contrast to other scholars, throughout this book as well as most of his other writings, he pays particular attention to the ideas, history, and lives of women. Accordingly, this encyclopedic book about "the great explorers of a better world" not only includes famous men like Emile Durkheim, Jean Piaget, Erich Fromm, and Lawrence Kohlberg, but also less well-known women such as Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Carol Gilligan, Jessie Bernard, and Jean Baker Miller, the mothers of much of what Loye called "partnership moral sensitivity."

PARTNERSHIP MORAL SENSITIVITY AND DOMINATOR MORAL INSENSITIVITY

As those familiar with my work know, I introduced the conceptual framework of the *partnership system* and the *domination or dominator system* as two basic alternatives for human social and ideological organization, each with its characteristic configuration (Eisler, 1987, 1995, 2007; Eisler & Fry, 2019). Loye expanded these

configurations to answer the essential question of how what is considered moral is socially constructed in very different ways to fit the requirements of societies orienting primarily to a partnership system and to a dominator or domination system.

The core dominator configuration—"strong-man" rule in both the family and the state; rigid male dominance and the ranking of "masculinity" over "femininity"; and a high degree of institutionalized social violence, ranging from child and wife beating to warfare—requires a morality of coercion to maintain rankings of domination. Therefore, domination-oriented social systems require a high degree of moral insensitivity or a lack of empathy, particularly for socially disempowered out-groups such as minorities, poor people, and women.

The partnership configuration—a more egalitarian political, economic, and family structure; a more equal partnership between the female and male forms of humanity and hence the valuing of "feminine" traits and activities such as caring, caregiving, and non-violence, in women, men, and everyone in between; and a low degree of institutionalized or built-in violence—can support far greater moral sensitivity. Simply put, moral insensitivity (and with it, abuse and violence) is not required to maintain rigid rankings of domination.

To better understand our past (which evidence now shows oriented more to the partnership configuration for millennia), our present mix of dominator and partnership elements, and the possibilities for a more equitable and sustainable partnership future, we must move beyond conventional social categories such as religious/secular, capitalist/socialist, rightist/leftist, Eastern/Western, and Southern/Northern. For one thing, there have been repressive, violent, and environmentally destructive regimes in every one of our conventional social categories, so none tells us what is needed for a less violent, more egalitarian and sustainable future. Not only that, these older social categories do not describe the whole social system. They pay scant attention to our formative family and other

intimate relations. And they marginalize nothing less than the majority of humanity: women and children.

Furthermore, as Loye's work shows, our old social categories came out of more rigid domination times, so they cannot help us make the critical distinction between dominator moral insensitivity and partnership moral sensitivity. In a subsequent book in the Glacier and the Flame series, *The Science of Evil: What Makes Us Good or Bad?* (2008), he carefully examined this distinction from a scientific as well as a religious and philosophical perspective, starting with the concept of evil.

Drawing from fields ranging from psychology and brain research through all the social sciences and biology and physics as well as systems science, he showed agreement in religion, philosophy, and science on a number of key dimensions of moral sensitivity and transformation. A notable example of this basic agreement is the Golden Rule of empathy for others, which, as Loye illustrates, also informs what he called progressive philosophy and science.

Shortly before his death, in "Evil, Concept of," a section in the *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*, he asked us to answer these fundamental questions for our time:

Is it evil to promote fossil fuels at a time of rising carbon and oceanic pollution leading to the melting of ice caps and endangering of future generations? Is it evil to ignore rising income inequality and the fact that even in a rich nation like the United States one-quarter of children live in poverty? Is it evil to provide false information to people, especially at a time of the Covid-19 pandemic? (Loye, 2022, p. 90)

LOYE'S LEGACY AND OUR EVOLUTIONARY CROSSROADS

Among the many works Loye wrote on moral sensitivity is *Measuring Evolution: A User's Guide to the Health and Wealth of Nations* (Loye, 2007b). There he outlined “The Global Sounding” as a measure tailored to decision-makers in government, politics, science, education, business, religion, philanthropy, and non-profit organizations.

Even Loye's fiction books often had moral messages, including two works for children (and the child in all of us) that he was particularly fond of: *The Parable of the Three Villages* (2012), and *Grandfather's Garden* (2019), a collection of whimsical stories that David wrote in his nineties, beautifully illustrated (as a coda to his long career as an artist) by A. Christopher Simon, also in his nineties.

Loye understood that we are at a juncture in human evolution that requires a rapid increase in global moral sensitizing, a step that requires going beyond a new scientific understanding of moral sensitivity to using science to help accelerate our prospects for global moral transformation, and with it, for partnership moral sensitivity. His books and articles are designed to meet this challenge, including an article in this journal, “Untangling Partnership and Domination Morality,” in which he wrote:

The Golden Rule of mutuality and partnership is at the core of the caring and compassionate elements of our religious and philosophical heritages. However, both religion and philosophy also contain elements that justify and even idealize relations of domination and exploitation. Examples include Biblical passages in which a punitive deity commands the killing of out-groups, and philosophical treatises such as those by Nietzsche, for whom the teachings of Jesus were ‘a slave morality’ that ‘real men’ ignore and despise. (Loye, 2014, p. 4).

There is much more I could say about the important legacy of David Loye. But I will close with his words expressing deep concern that we are at a crossroads in human evolution, where the need for partnership moral sensitivity is more urgent than ever. His prescience is illustrated by the quote from “Moral Transformation and the Future,” an article he wrote back in 1996 - he was so ahead of his time!

[W]hat I see for the future is a period of increasing distress and horror for humanity. The escalation of environmental collapse, the increase in terrorism including the devastation of the suitcase nuclear device, the widening of a socially devastating gap between rich and poor people and between rich and poor nations and regions, an increase in both violence and mental illness, the unchecked manufacture of weapons of increasingly subtle killing power: all this I see as not possible, or probable, but certain for a time of maximal transitional crunch lasting 30 to 50 years.

But, at the same time, I also see an enormous increase in everything now driving us towards moral and general health out of a 5000-year-long period of moral and general sickness. Chief among these forces is the drive of the environmental movement, the escalation of a yearning for peace, and the impact of the now unstoppable global women’s movement -- which centrally presses not only gender but racial equality on us, and which, in its insistence on the new balance of an equality of the sexes, provides the vital social thrust for a basic rebalancing of all else that is presently unbalanced in our personal, social and environmental worlds.

Bound up with all of this, there is also working within us the immense positive force of a resurgence of spirituality in new forms driving to free us of the destructive dominator religious systems baggage of the past. And, bound up with this, is something I feel more strongly with each year, but find little being written about it. I am convinced that the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, followed by the first evidence of impending environmental

disaster, activated something that was like a near-death experience within the 'global mind'. For the first time, everyone with the least bit of sensitivity and awareness was forced to face the hitherto inconceivable possibility of the extinction of our species, as well as all other life on earth.

I think that at some deep evolutionary level of guidance within the unconsciousness of ourselves, as well as within the social and environmental bodies enclosing us, this jolt has motivated a subtle but powerful escalation in the growth of a new kind of intelligence for the mass mind. That is, this is an intelligence that has previously existed among the few who have tried to arouse the many to action, but now it is swiftly spreading among the many—a form of intelligence that above all incorporates the moral dimension.

I see a prolonged time of increasing conflict between those who, out of fear and privilege, cling ever more ferociously to the past, and those who not only yearn for the better future, as in the past, but how now can taste this better future in the air - and who beyond this time of the crunch, given the drive of evolution in their direction, will in the end prevail.” (Loye, 1996, p. 60).

I fervently hope that David Loye was right in his conclusion that the thrust for a better future—the thrust of our innate moral sense, and its corollary, of moral sensitivity— will ultimately prevail. I believe it will, if we, together in partnership, make it so.

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