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UNTANGLING PARTNERSHIP AND DOMINATION MORALITY

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Abstract

Riane Eisler's (1987) cultural transformation theory is an effective framework for understanding many of the constructs that shape society. This article uses Eisler's theory to explain the formation of morality and the construction of conscience. It contrasts partnership morality and domination morality, and describes the factors that shape our tendency to embrace one or the other. The article helps us understand that we have a choice, and invites us to choose partnership morality.

Keywords: conscience; Darwin; domination; evolution; Moral Gap; morality; partnership; psychology

We live in a time when the question of what is right and what is wrong is increasingly urgent—and muddled. At one extreme are some religious fundamentalists reinstating barbaric punishments for disobedience to what they consider divinely commanded standards, such as the self-proclaimed "Islamic caliphate" currently terrorizing parts of Iraq and Syria. At the other extreme are some post-modernists claiming that there are no moral standards—that everything is relative. In between is a diverse hodgepodge lacking agreement on a moral compass.

This article outlines a moral compass based on the fundamental difference between morality as culturally constructed in the context of the partnership model and that of the domination model of social organization, as described in Riane Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade* and other works (Eisler, 1987, 1995, 2007). *The Glacier and the Flame* (Loye, 2004d), a work on moral transformation, describes the struggle between

partnership morality (the Flame) and domination morality (the Glacier) in the construction of conscience and human and environmental relations.

The Glacier versus the Flame in Human Evolution

What determines whether we are morally motivated by selfishness or altruism? Contrary to what has become known as the "selfish gene" theory of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, the developmental studies of Baldwin (Richards, 1987), Piaget (1965), Kohlberg (1984), Gilligan (1982), and scores of others, as well as my own social impact studies (Loye, 2007d, 2010), show that fixation on selfishness as the primary if not the sole motivator for evolution is scientifically unsound as well as socially, economically, and politically devastating.

Maturation, circumstances, family life, child-raising styles, culture, personality, ideology—all these factors can be involved in moral evolution. But neither pre-human nor human motivations are based exclusively on either selfishness or altruism. Being motivated by selfishness does not rule out also being motivated by altruism. Both motivations can be, and usually are, involved. What matters is which motivation prevails.

Of particular interest is Darwin's thinking on the evolution of morality, first recorded in private notebooks following his return from the voyage of the *Beagle* (Gruber and Barrett, 1974), and later in *The Descent of Man (*Darwin, 1879/2004), the book he wrote on *human* evolution after his famous *Origin of Species.* Darwin wrote, "Society could not go on except for the moral sense, any more than a hive of Bees without their instincts" (Gruber and Barrett, 1974: 390).

From ideas contained in Darwin's early notebooks, he developed his full theory of the moral sense. Here is the key quote from his General Summary and Conclusion in *The Descent of Man*:

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, 1879/2004: 531).

The Emergence of Morality

The emergence of our human species was a quantum leap in biological evolution. In *The Descent of Man,* Darwin wrote extensively of the emergence of empathy, caring, love, and the roots of the moral sense in a vast range of species that evolved prior to ours (Loye, 2014a, 2007b). But with the vast expansion of intelligence and the capacity for caring and moral sensitivity at our species level came the crucial shift from biological to cultural evolution. That is, while the grounding reality for humans is biological, our emergent reality is cultural, and morality is a key part of that emergent reality.

Darwin called selfishness "a base principle" accounting for "the low morality of savages" (Darwin, 1879/2004, p. 101-2). In sharp contrast was the drive of the moral sense, a primary shaper of the emergent reality. Darwin frequently cites the Golden Rule as an example of cultural evolution as a shaper of the emergent reality. In terms of the moral transformation theory I develop in *The Glacier and the Flame* (Loye, 2014b, 2014d), both motives operate: the grounding reality and the emergent reality.

In the emergence of the Golden Rule, we see a universal guide to the good life expressed in most of the world's regions, sub-cultures, and religions, as well as in the Categorical Imperative of the scientist-philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose work was a pivotal inspiration for Darwin (Loye, 2007a). Variously expressed, the root idea is always the same: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This is the basic thrust of the Flame, and of the partnership as opposed to the domination model of society.

In contrast to the Flame is the Glacier model of morality. Out of fear, shame, cunning, distrust, and pent-up hostility inherent in domination systems has arisen what I call the Brass Rule: Do it unto others before they do it unto you (Loye, 2014b). 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 (Kaufman, 1975).

Figure 1 contrasts salient features of these two very different conceptions of morality.

Figure 1. Evolutionary Dimensions of Partnership and Domination Morality	
Partnership Morality	**Domination Morality**
Moral sensitivity	Moral insensitivity
An emergent characteristic of both biological and cultural evolution.	A grounding characteristic of biological evolution on which cultural evolution has fixated during the domination or patriarchal era.
In tune with the emergent tendency for evolution.	Fixated on the grounding level for evolution, or on a departure from the emergent tendency for evolution.
Evolutionary progression	Evolutionary deviation and regression
Operates according to *The Descent of Man* (second half of Darwin's theory, focusing on human evolution).	Operates according to the *Origin of Species* (first half of Darwin's theory, focusing on pre-human evolution).
Driven by altruism more than by selfishness.	Driven by selfishness.
Expressed by the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."	Expressed by the Brass Rule: "Do it unto others before they do it unto you."

The Glacier and the Flame in the Construction of Conscience

In Figure 1 we see the evolutionary grounding for a more gentle, persistent, and essentially simple moral voice—the voice, in effect, of a partnership-oriented moral

sensitivity and morality. In sharp contrast is the voice of domination moral insensitivity and ostensible morality conforming to what we may call the progressive versus regressive development of the world's religions, which Figure 2 illustrates.

Figure 2. Religious Systems Dimensions of Partnership and Domination Morality	
Partnership Morality	**Domination Morality**
Morality as a function of the relation of beloved children to a loving and caring deity.	Morality as a function of the relation of deviant children to a vengeful and wrathful deity.
Religious belief in life as emanating from an "original blessing."	Religious belief in life as mired in the consequences of "original sin."
Feeling of responsibility for others.	Pride in being the holiest and mightiest, i.e., on top in a dog-eat-dog world.
A morality in keeping with the moral expectancy shaping the evolving nature of our species.	An ostensibly supernatural morality designed to legitimize fixation at a lower level or a departure from the moral expectancy shaping the evolving nature of our species.
Expressed by the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."	Expressed by the Brass Rule: "Do it unto others before they do it unto you."

A Moral Gap

These figures illustrate the sharp separation into "two worlds" constituting a Moral Gap in the sacred literature of religions and the writings of philosophy. On one hand is the construction of conscience through moral sensitizing, on the other the construction of conscience through moral de-sensitizing. On one hand is the single voice of partnership moral sensitivity, on the other the confusion of the mix of domination moral insensitivity that speaks with no single voice, but rather hammers at us with all the contradictions that have made so much of our history a nightmare, and so much of our minds a tangle of confusion and rage.

How do these differences in conscience arise? A grounding perception in moral transformation theory is that if we look back we can see how our lives evolved through the interaction of two kinds of formative experiences. For many of us, there

were certain favorable, even wonderful times, during which we were involved in the kind of experience that brings a glow to photographs of certain people and places. If we think back carefully, we are likely to find that at the core of the experience was a moral system embodied in a certain person, family, school, church, business, organization, or other entity. I think, for example, of a grandmother, grandfather, teacher, a minister of my teen years, a certain friend of later times.

But there also were and are other times when we find ourselves struggling with people, or within a family, school, church, business, et cetera, in which moral sensitivity was and is routinely blunted, discouraged, or evaded as a matter of economic, political, and educational domination system necessities.

Four Kinds of Domination Moralities

If we closely examine the nature of domination moral insensitivity, we find that its brutalizing impact is shaped by at least four kinds of domination moralities: the archetypal domination morality, the ad hoc domination morality, the self-defensive morality, and the domination-hybrid morality.

Archetypal morality

The "archetypal" is the original model for domination morality. Its purpose is to excuse, advance, and strengthen the structure of domination systems. Best known to many of us through parts of the *Quran* and the Old Testament of the *Bible* that justify domination, this morality is characteristically centered in the archetype of a male deity and his male earthly representatives, whom one is to placate and be subservient to.

Ad hoc morality

Far more widespread, yet seldom noted because they are not identified for what they are, are the "ad hoc" domination moralities. This is the category for the home-grown moralities of those who are driven to dominate and exploit others, offering an excuse or cover story for their activities. For example, helping seniors find more security was

the excuse used by Charles Keating and other scam artists to justify the fraud involved in the multi-billion-dollar savings-and-loan scandals of the late 1980s in America. Another example of ad hoc moralities is the righteous avowal of the need to end corruption and build character and self-reliance that is used to justify the gutting of social support for all but the most wealthy and powerful.

Self-defense morality and domination-hybrid morality
Self-defense morality is closely related to ad hoc morality, and serves to justify unconscionable actions. Domination-hybrid morality is also closely related to ad hoc morality; it muddies the waters, covering up moral insensitivity with a veneer of moral sensitivity to assuage an otherwise guilty conscience.

The Glacier and the Flame in the Construction of Sexual Morality
As demonstrated in archeological and mythological records detailed by Eisler and others (Mellaart, 1967; Gimbutas, 1991; Kramer, 1998), the social construction of gender and sexual relations changed radically during a period of great disequilibrium in our prehistory when the direction in the mainstream of cultural evolution underwent a major shift. From cultures oriented more to the partnership model of social and economic equality, gender partnership, and low levels of violence, we saw a shift to brutal domination cultures of rigid rankings, rigid male dominance, and a high degree of institutionalized and even idealized violence.

In the prehistoric transformation to a culture of domination vividly brought to life by Eisler in *The Chalice and the Blade* (1987) and *Sacred Pleasure* (1995), we see the emergence of rules for relationships between the sexes in which the female half of humanity was essentially made the property of the male half. These are the dysfunctional rules many people are leaving behind today. But they still affect our psyches and our lives. As Eisler details in *Sacred Pleasure (1995)*, sexuality in domination systems is distorted by two primary mechanisms: the vilification of sexuality, especially female sexuality, and the constant linking of sexual arousal with domination or submission and/or violence.

As Darwin noted earlier, and I detail in *Rediscovering Goodness* (Loye, 2014b), sex seems to have been the most fundamental device for driving an organism out of itself to seek fulfillment in the intimate sharing of pleasure and later also love for another, which in turn helped spawn the wondrous diversity out of which all life has been built. Yet many religions that arose after the shift to a domination system view sex and woman as impure (for example, this dogma was a centerpiece of medieval Christianity). The effects of this view still linger, in the injunction in some Buddhist sects that a priest may not shake hands with a woman lest he be "polluted" (Eisler, 1995), the avoidance by some Muslim men of shaking hands with women, and the custom in some Christian churches, both Catholic and Protestant, of designating areas of worship space in which women do not walk. By contrast, a striking feature of partnership-oriented prehistoric cultures is the abundance of symbols and artifacts expressing a view of sex, not as evil, but rather as part of the sacred. (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Sexual/Emotional Dimensions of Partnership and Domination Morality	
Partnership Morality	**Domination Morality**
Sacred	Profane
Good	Bad
Pleasure-oriented	Pain-oriented
Sex sanctioned as mutual pleasure; sexual ethic of mutual respect.	Sex demoted but at the same time promoted as the sadomasochistic relation of dominator to dominated.

Modern examples of the view that sex is not evil include the works of Havelock Ellis, who regarded sexuality as natural and positive, and Margaret Sanger, who championed the cause of birth control. At the core of these examples is what Eisler terms "the real sexual revolution" (1995), in which, after a lapse of thousands of years, consciousness of the goodness rather than the badness of sex and pleasure is being sanctioned by progressive religious as well as secular counselors.

Indeed, as Eisler explains in depth in *Sacred Pleasure* (1995), a major difference between partnership- and domination-oriented societies is the degree to which they rely on pain or pleasure to maintain social systems. So it should not surprise us that

domination moralities of both East and West still support the claim that sex is a dirty, lower, animal function.

In addition, the archetypal domination moralities serve to reinforce what Eisler (1995) calls the "erotization of domination and violence" by linking sex with violence as well as with domination and submission. For example, religious missionaries well into modern times propagated the teaching that the only permissible sexual position is the man above/woman below position (which accordingly came to be known as the "missionary position").

Then, like the riffs of jazz on a basic theme, the "ad hoc" moralities go to work. "She made me do it by painting herself up with lipstick and wearing that short dress," the rapist tells the judge. Or we hear, "They really mean yes when they say no." All this is justification for the pathology of rape, wife battering, sexual slavery, child abuse, child pornography, and ultimately even murder.

The Glacier and the Flame in the Construction of Economic, Political, and Environmental Morality

On the partnership side is a morality grounded in a belief that wealth is meant to be shared. (See Figure 4). *The Chalice and the Blade* (Eisler, 1987) provides abundant sources that demonstrate that the principle of shared wealth seems to have been a distinguishing feature of a long span of our early cultural evolution, stretching well into Neolithic or early farming times. Millennia later, this principle was a central theme of early Christianity.

Indeed, if we look behind seemingly radical historical differences, it is evident that in the economic ramifications of early Christianity expressed by Jesus (Wink, 1999), by Adam Smith (Heilbroner and Malone, 1987) in his widely ignored vision of the requirement of morality in capitalism, and by Marx and Engels (Tucker, 1978) in their originating vision of the moral implications of communism, all shared the vision of wealth to be widely shared.

In further thinking of economists ranging from John Stuart Mill (Mill, 2007) in the 19th Century to Gunnar Myrdal (Myrdal, 1958), John Kenneth Galbraith (Galbraith, 1998), Robert Reich (2012), and Paul Krugman (2012) in the 20th and 21st Centuries, the principle of shared wealth is the moral orientation that lies at the heart of what is sometimes classified as "liberal" economics in the United States.

Figure 4. Economic Dimensions of Partnership and Domination Morality	
Partnership Morality	**Domination Morality**
Grounded in a belief in an economy of abundance to be widely shared.	Grounded in a belief in an economy of scarcity and the "natural" seizure and hoarding of wealth by the few amid widespread poverty and misery.
Found in high-synergy societies, and social and work groups with a "syphon system" economy spreading wealth to all.	Found in low-synergy societies, and social and work groups with a "funnel system" economy routing wealth to the top.
Recognition of interdependence and mutuality of purpose by both employer and employee.	Exploitation of employee by employer.

Sharing and caring is also the moral orientation of Eisler's "caring economics" and "partnerism" in *The Real Wealth of Nations (2007)*, as well as of the spread-the-wealth economics of the "syphon system" that anthropologist Ruth Benedict (Benedict, 1992) found in high-synergy tribal societies.

But at the other end of the spectrum, we find again the impact of the Moral Gap. In contrast to the economic positives of Eisler's and Benedict's work, we see how both religious and secular moralities were—and still are—used to justify a belief in top-down control in both the family and the state or tribe. We see seizure and hoarding of wealth by the few amid widespread poverty and misery. We see how those holding ad hoc moralities believe that such disparities are the sacred nature of things as they are meant to be. "If it weren't for me there would be nothing to trickle down," those on top of domination economic hierarchies tell themselves and others.

Political Morality

Over the ages, beneath a variety of surfaces, we find the counter-posing of two basic political systems governed by the Moral Gap. On one hand are systems requiring the valuing of equality, freedom, democracy, and caring for others. On the other hand are systems requiring the valuing of—and hence the manufacturing of moralities to justify—inequality, control, slavery, authoritarianism, and the coercion of others.

As Eisler (1987, 2007) shows, this second set of systems, the politics of domination, is our heritage from earlier, more authoritarian times, and is inextricably interconnected with the power dynamics of domination families in which men control both women and children as their naturally or divinely ordained right. These family politics, she notes, are a training ground for equating difference—starting with the difference between men and women—with dominating or being dominated, as well as for learning to accept coercion and violence as a means of imposing one's will on others.

In other words, what is considered normal and moral in family relations becomes the unconscious model for all relations. So a political morality of partnership has to start with what children observe and experience in their families. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5. Political Dimensions of Partnership and Domination Morality	
Partnership Morality	**Domination Morality**
Equality	Inequality
Freedom	Control
Democracy	Authoritarianism
Caring	Coercion

Environmental Morality

The Moral Gap also provides insights into our current environmental crisis, which is driven by our destruction of the delicately balanced relationships of the multi-millions of plant and animal species whereby life itself—including ours—is sustained. Once

again, much of the picture is of partnership morality pitted against domination morality. (See Figure 6.)

Here again we find the continuity connecting past, present, and future. On one hand is a morality that recognizes the interconnection of life on our planet; on the other is the domination of nature as our divinely ordained right.

Figure 6. Environmental Dimensions of Partnership and Domination Morality	
Partnership Morality	**Domination Morality**
Earth imaged as our home, as a living organism of which we are each a part.	Earth objectified and seen as a resource to be dominated.
Harmony with nature.	Conquest of nature.

A Psychology of Moral Madness

As we dig beneath the surface to the underlying nature, structure, and consequences of the Moral Gap, we see that our moral choices have led us to more and more devastating consequences. We see a world in which what passes for normal is often bizarre and horrifying, as domination moral insensitivity, which still largely governs "business as usual," brings out the worst in us.

Up to this point, we have examined this mix of domination and partnership moralities by identifying them in their extreme or "pure" manifestations. The next challenge in healing the deep sickness of the Moral Gap is to focus on that place where *both* the domination and the partnership thrusts work *within* and *upon* us.

On one side of the Gap we have looked at the single voice of partnership morality; on the other side are the multiple voices of the archetypal, ad hoc, self-defensive, and dominator-hybrid moralities. In one part of our minds we hear the single voice of the partnership ethos, which ostensibly drives us. But from another part of our minds rise the multiple voices of the domination ethos which so often override the other.

For example, we may tell ourselves that we have arrived with flowers for a sick relative to make her happy, or that we are hiring more workers to make the load easier to bear for the workers we already employ. However, the operational reality may be that we seek our relative's fortune, or that, as in the case of many corporate acquisitions, we are planning to replace the old workers with new workers at less pay as soon as the new ones have learned the ropes from the old ones.

In other words, what we all too often see is a split-level, hybrid morality. Like plywood, we have a surface layer of attractive partnership moral sensitivity that is laminated to a latent layer of a very *un*attractive domination moral *in*sensitivity. Everywhere we look, in television, in newspapers, at work, or within our own families, we can see the operation and consequences of this split-level or domination-hybrid morality. As a psychologist, I am particularly sensitive to what is happening when this hybrid morality pushes us beyond the limits of both intelligence and sanity. (See Figure 7.)

Figure 7. Social/Psychiatric Dimensions of Partnership and Domination Morality	
Partnership Morality	**Domination Morality**
The integrated morality of authenticity and maturity.	The split-level morality of the domination-hybrid consciousness.
Reduces the gap between the ideal and the real.	Bulldozes a gap between the real and the ideal.
Integrity in child-raising.	Placing the child in double-bind situations.
Childhood of expectancy and reliability of love.	Childhood of expectancy of uncertainty, indifference, and/or brutality.
Adulthood of love and the democratic personality.	Adulthood of hatred, hostility, and the authoritarian, psychopathic, sociopathic, or borderline personality.
A requirement for personal, social, environmental, and general systems structural health.	A cause of personal, social, environmental, and general systems structural sickness.

At the core of many studies—including still generally overlooked observations by Darwin—is the insight that madness can be a consequence of being overwhelmed by

the agony of the gap between the ideal and the real. It is the tension between the gentle or joyful pull of what could be and should be, and the slap in the face of what currently exists, that can drive us toward neurosis—the type of emotional illness in which we can still function, but with our effectiveness and energy drained by fear and anxiety.

The corrosive tension between the real and the ideal that lies at the heart of the split-level domination-hybrid morality can become so severe in some cases that it contributes to psychosis. In neurosis we remain reasonably grounded in the existing reality. But in psychosis the agony of the gap between the pain, injustice, and overwhelming confusion of what currently exists and our vision of the clarity and ideality of a better world can drive us to depart from a grounding in reality.

For example, in schizophrenia, in response to the pain of hypersensitivity to the horror of reality, individuals escape into a private fantasy that often lies behind the protective screen of weird gestures, incessant babble, and laughter of hebephrenia, or the complete shut-down of catatonia. A striking insight into these origins of schizophrenia was the perception by anthropologist Gregory Bateson of the operation of the *double bind* (Nelson, 1994). It works this way. The child is told by the parent that he or she is loved—or at least, particularly with witnesses present whom the parent wants to impress, the child is given that impression. This very special attention, this show of ostensible caring, speaks with haunting force to the enormous hunger for love within all of us. It awakens the hope and possibly even the expectation that love may now fill the great emptiness in the unloving household. But simultaneously—or sufficiently close in time to cause the damage—by the chill of a snub, by belittling the child, by a withering look, by ridicule or verbal attack or blows ranging to brutal beatings, the parent, who also carries the load of this kind of double bind characteristic of domination families, wholly contradicts this impression. The expectancy is shattered, the hope is devastated, and the child is left in a state of confusion and uncertainty.

As this see-saw, rip tide, ping-ponging of the psyche goes on, the child's self-esteem is destroyed, and in reaction, the child builds up an enormous underlying hostility toward the parent. But with this fundamental shattering of personal security comes the painful dependency of the unfulfilled seeking fulfillment. An increasingly sick attachment to this ambivalent and unreliable parental power figure—this once god or goddess from whom we issued, whom now secretly we both love and hate intensely— can grow within us. This sticky attachment can be devastating to the ability to form a separate identity independent of the damaging power figure.

What I describe has been revealed again and again by studies of the childhoods of pivotal figures at the core of domination systems (Miller, 1983). It is part of the portrait of psychopathy, sociopathy, and antisocial personality disorder. Other studies reveal more about the psychological dynamics of domination systems: how those so impaired by lack of love, ambivalence, or brutality can be driven for the rest of their lives to seek to unload an overwhelming hatred on others (Nelson, 1994).

Along the turbulence of the domination channel, this stream of raw, searing need and pain roars out to devastate our larger world. And so, from the domination-hybrid morality and consciousness come severe consequences afflicting our lives and our planet.

Moral Choice

In the tension between partnership and domination morality we see the contradictions that have plagued much of our history and our psyches. However, working through evolution to reach its greatest power within us is our ability to override even the worst of early experiential reality to shape the future to the highest rather than the lowest ends.

At this critical time in our planetary history, when environmentally and in all other regards we face the worst of ends, we must respond to the evolutionary insistence of moral choice—that is, of partnership moral sensitivity rather than domination moral

insensitivity. We must move more rapidly, and in much greater numbers, and with a much deeper and wider understanding and commitment, to respond to the evolutionary insistence of moral choice—that is, of partnership instead of domination morality.

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