

Partnership Relating: the basis of a healthy society

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For those of us who care about the future, our goal should be to contribute to evolving ‘a world that works’ – a world that is ecologically sustainable and humane. If we are to evolve a truly humane democracy and a global civilisation that is ecologically sustainable, partnership thinking must become the norm. The partnership style must be built into the fabric of our institutions, become a conscious part of how we educate young people, and be the ground of every day relationships.

Riane Eisler, in her powerful *The Chalice and the Blade*, points out that there are two primary ways of organizing social relationships: *partnership* or *dominator*.

Partnership relating is oriented towards the wellbeing of the community, as well as being mindful of one’s own self interest. Partnership values find expression in democracy, in the caring aspects of organised religion, and in the growing concern to protect ecological systems. The archetypal form is a mother working for the wellbeing of each member of her family.

Dominator relating uses force and intimidation to establish one’s own advantage over others at the expense of the community. It is orientated more towards conquering than towards collaborating.

Partnership and *dominator* are two contrasting approaches to life that operate on every level of human endeavor. In families, some parents treat their children with respect and negotiate mutually satisfying solutions with them. Others boss their children. Even in martial arts we find the contrast between partnership and dominator styles. If you are skilful enough in Aikido, one of the ‘yielding’ martial arts, you can actually take care of your opponent while pinning them. In Karate the aim is to destroy your opponent by force.

The distinction applies to global economics as well. John Maynard Keynes’ (1919) is suggested that the Allies not extract extensive reparations from Germany after World War I. This was an example of partnership thinking. It was not accepted. Instead heavy reparations were demanded of Germany – an expression of dominator thinking. It can be argued that the ensuing financial/social distress contributed to the rise of Hitler and to World War IIⁱ. In contrast, Secretary of State George Marshall’s suggestion that Germany and the rest of Europe be given money to rebuild after World War II was accepted, thus contributing to 50 years of peace in Europe.

So everywhere we see this distinction in styles. It operates fractally at every level from personal relationships to global governance.

I hold that it is people with dominator values that are driving both our ecological and social deterioration. If this is true, then the fate of the world depends on partnership

values ultimately directing policy. To bring this about we ourselves must learn to embody partnership values, and become the kind of people who can contribute effectively to evolving a world that works. We can do this by training in disciplines such as the Feldenkrais Method of Body Education, Conflict Resolution, Parent Effectiveness Training, Aikido and interactive creativityⁱⁱ. We learn how to work respectfully with minds different than our own, rather than imposing on others.

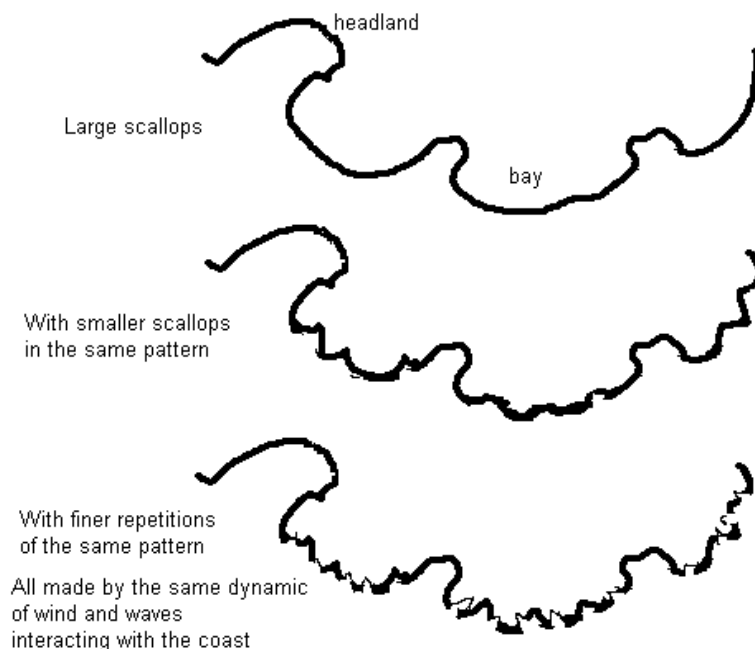
However, something more is also needed. While democratic institutions make it possible for government to operate for community well being, it is obvious that they often serve dominator interests. So if we want to bring about a world that works, we must develop a 'big picture' understanding of the world, and identify leverage points for long term positive change, and for exerting political influence. I go into this more thoroughly in my *Orienting to Creating a Viable Future*ⁱⁱⁱ. Here I am looking at psychological issues that underpin our quest to evolve a world that works.

Fractals

Now let's take a larger look at dominator patterns. We will use a thinking tool called 'fractals'. Thinking in terms of fractals enables us to understand large-scale dynamics, which may initially seem difficult to grasp, by understanding local situations that operate in the same way. Thus an experienced sailor once told me that the same principles that apply to sailing a simple sunfish also apply to sailing an ocean-going yacht.

A fractal is a pattern that appears similar at different scales of magnification. This means that if we look at the large-scale outline of a fractal pattern, or at the fine detail of the pattern, what we see will look quite similar.

An example of a natural fractal is the sequence of scalloped bays of a seacoast. You may have a succession of very large bays. Within each bay you will find similar but smaller scalloped beaches between headlands, and along individual beaches you will find yet smaller scallops of the same shape.



The important thing about such natural fractals is that *they are made by one dynamic process*. The same process of wind, waves and current interacting with the land produces the smaller scallops on the beaches as well as the large scallop of the great bay itself.

Fractal processes operate both in the human nervous system and in the way the nervous system operates on the larger environment. Thinking in terms of fractals enables us to recognize multiple effects stemming from one underlying process, despite their outward dissimilarity. We will use this now to look at how dominator patterns operate at different scales.

How dominator patterns operate at different scales

Here is a three-tiered example that shows a relationship between the dynamics of women with eating disorders, the racial distribution in Washington, DC, and the way the United States has historically controlled Central American countries economically. While at first sight these may seem to be very different, you will see that there is an underlying dynamic that produces similar results in each of these examples.

Marion Woodman is a Jungian analyst whose practice included a number of highly successful business and professional women with eating disorders. Woodman observed that there was a common structure to their eating disorders^{iv}. She described this as a conflict between their *Athena* self and their *Medusa* self. Here's how it works.

Athena, as you may know, was the goddess of warriors in ancient Greece. The myth has it that she sprang fully armed from her father Zeus' head. Do you believe it? No doubt the story had a purpose. In the more ancient stories about Athena she was honoured as a goddess of wisdom, weaving and practical arts. In other words, she was a goddess representing competent females. So this new story about Athena's birth seems to be an example of male mythmakers hijacking and twisting an old story for their own purposes: to assert and reinforce male dominance.

Woodman's female clients were women who had taken on male qualities in order to make it in a man's world. They had identified with Athena, and hence with men. Consequently they were at war with their feminine nature, which Woodman symbolizes as Medusa. Perhaps you have heard of Medusa as well? The woman with a thousand snakes coming out of her hair... She was reputedly so ugly that no man could look at her directly without being frozen in horror. Why was Medusa so ugly? It is easy: hate distorts. Medusa represents the dishonoured and denied feminine. Woodman's clients hated their own feminine side – which would have been at variance with some male values – and consequently their feminine side turned ugly and nasty. They covered the distress of this by compulsive over-eating and vomiting.

Woodman helped her clients by giving them support in getting in touch with their bodies – with their own authentic feelings and sensations – and through this learning to accept their feminine nature. They healed their splits by owning and honouring the feminine side of themselves. No doubt the journey was not easy.

Our theme is fractals – patterns that appear similar at different scales of magnification, and which are formed by the same dynamic processes. The dynamic process at work here is

male dominance control, which distorts the natural feminine (and other aspects of nature, including the best qualities of our male nature as well). Identifying with male dominance control produced in Woodman's clients a polarity, with their Athena part dominant and successful, and their Medusa part angry and distorted. Can we find another example of this pattern, produced by the same dynamic, at another level of magnification? Yes: Washington DC will serve very well.

Radiating from the centre of Washington DC is a "white corridor" – a section of the city that is predominantly white middle to upper class. I lived there for a time, so I know it well. Surrounding the rest of the capital is a black slum. Walk ten minutes past the Supreme Court building and you are in danger land – not that it is necessarily always dangerous, it is just that many of the people who live there are miserable, and some of the young men get angry from time to time. And why not? The system has been stacked against them since the time their great grandmothers were slaves. Athena - Medusa at another level.

Looking larger, we see the same sort of pattern in the relationship between America and Central America, where dominator control exerted for the sake of raw materials keeps the local people impoverished. The general pattern is dominator control on top, misery below.

Even though it may seem to be a big jump from eating disorders to a black ghetto, or from eating disorders to military interventions to protect the commercial interests of the United Fruit Company in Nicaragua, they are all structurally related manifestations of the same dynamic process.

The mode of dominator thinking, without the constraints of community or compassion that would make our world more humane, not only produces misery for large numbers of “disadvantaged” people, it has brought us to a point where our planetary ecological systems are imperiled. Rather than husbanding the living resources of the earth, we pollute and destroy. Our perception of this (which I call *future fear*) creates a dilemma which may prove to be constructive. We will either change so that the partnership values of community wellbeing set the tone for policy and decision-making in Western democracies, or we will suffer as the combination of environmental destruction and social deterioration destroys the basis of our current wellbeing.

Training to develop partnership thinking skills

If we are to evolve a world that works, then I submit that partnership values rather than dominator values must set the tone. Do you agree or disagree?

Partnership thinking is not easy. It is far more sophisticated than most dominator thinking. It involves looking outside our own framework and understanding minds different than our own. We use systems thinking to integrate the interlinked complexities of reality into our thinking and behaviour, rather than trying to impose our will regardless of what else is going on. We ‘work with’ other people, including their interests as well as our own.

Presumably everybody has the capacity for both partnership thinking and dominator thinking. I think those of us who actually had loving parents are more likely to

spontaneously be partnership thinkers, because we are less prone to the anger and aggressiveness that extreme dominators embody. And, despite whatever difficulties they may have experienced in childhood, some people seem to have a partnership temperament anyway.

But most of us have been trained in dominator thinking. Dominator thinking permeates our educational system (which is command-and-control), the organization of most businesses and the typical ways of relating shown in movies and on television. Therefore many of us expect, without consciously realising it, to either assume a power position or to take a subservient role. Either way, to a great degree we lack the sophisticated skills necessary for partnership relating.

Therefore, if we are to actually embody partnership thinking skills, we must train to develop them. Most of the personal growth disciplines, except hard style martial arts, embody partnership values. So they are natural vehicles for training people in partnership thinking. Since all of them improve personal performance, and make us feel better, it is personally valuable for people to engage in personal growth disciplines.

Not everybody is willing to engage in personal growth, of course. Some people are not attracted to personal exploration; they would rather spend their time in other ways. Some, perhaps, are frightened because they may touch emotionally sensitive parts of themselves. And perhaps some people avoid personal growth disciplines because they are seen to be outside the bounds of mainstream acceptability.

I suggest that personal growth disciplines *should* become mainstream, and should publicly funded as an important part of public policy for evolving social well-being. They offer hopeful new possibilities at this critical juncture in the evolution of human civilisation. I will describe some of the approaches that are especially valuable for developing partnership thinking skills.

The Feldenkrais method of body education

We start by considering the seminal work of Moshe Feldenkrais. Moshe Feldenkrais was an Israeli physicist and judo expert whose life was dedicated to finding ways to improve human performance.

Feldenkrais' approach is based on the understanding that in humans all skilled behaviour is learned. Indeed, we are self-taught. We can observe the process in young children. You've seen toddlers pull themselves upright, teeter for a moment, and then fall – only to pull themselves up and do it again. They are working out how to coordinate the balancing mechanism in their inner ear with their legs. Later they will move to walking (what a thrill!), skipping and running. Each stage of development from crawling to pole vaulting involves a more sophisticated use of the nervous system, which we work out by trial and error. Verbal instruction has very little to do with the process. .

The fact that we are self-taught, rather than preprogrammed in our behaviour, means that we can invent new uses for our nervous systems, including music and skilled surgery. It also means that we can work out *inefficient* ways of doing things. Strain and excess effort are often indications of poor neurological organisation.

However, with the right technique, sometimes rapid improvements are possible. Feldenkrais devised a way to teach people how to *combine accurate self observation with intelligent exploration of alternatives in order to improve their own functioning*. We have the capacity to observe and improve our own behaviour. This, I submit, is tremendously important – all the more so since most people do not know how to do it.

Feldenkrais group lessons, called Awareness Through Movement, teach people the process of self-improvement through self-awareness. In pace ATM lessons are a bit like yoga. But inwardly they are quite different. Instead of attempting to stretch muscles, as is done in yoga, Feldenkrais movements stop at the first sense of resistance to the movement. That is, the student is instructed to move just where it is easy, and to stop just at the point where the process of stretching would start. By approaching that point, backing off, and approaching it again several times, student may find that the range of movement gets larger without any effort because something in the nervous system develops a more refined appreciation of how to do the movement. This refined appreciation registers in consciousness as increased awareness of that part of the body.

Alternatively, the student may be asked to do a movement on one side of the body, and then compare doing same movement on the other side of the body. Often one side is more free, and the other side more constricted in the movement. The next step is to create the same sense of constriction on the ‘good’ side. Of course to do this student must become precisely aware of how she creates the constriction. She then releases the constriction on the good side, and completes the sequence by doing the movement on the less good side, but this time also releasing the constriction. Often it works. *By becoming aware of what we are doing that makes the problem, we can change the pattern.*

Doing a series of Awareness Through Movement lessons has benefits that you might not expect from what might appear to be an ‘exercise’ program. First, it is training in what I call *reality based thinking*. Many people have theories about good posture and how their body is ‘supposed’ to be. To the degree that people try to adapt themselves to such postural ideals, they are alienated from the reality of their own body and being. This is like an economist having a theory about how the economy works that has no connection to the ecological reality that is the underlying basis of all economies. Doing ATM lessons enables people to shift their allegiance from such ideals to the actuality of their own body and its needs. They stop imposing their will on their body (an expression of dominator thinking), and instead sense how their body wants to move. With this shift they will spontaneously take much better care of their bodies. This has which has positive implications for public health.

This can be regarded as a constructive form of self love. It is also training in self responsibility; we learn how use our awareness to take care of ourselves.

The body works as a whole, with every part from toes to head contributing to all large movements. A watchmaker, for fine control, may immobilise most of his body except for his forearm and hand. But for martial arts, swimming and the ordinary activities of life every part of the body is involved. If one part, such as the movement of the shoulder blade, is restricted in our awareness, other parts, such as the arms and even the hips may be restricted. Not that we won't be able to move them. But our movement

will tend to induce muscular strain that will ultimately lead to problems. So by slowing down and attending to our movement, as we do in Awareness Through Movement classes, we discover how mobilising one part of the body enables more distant parts to move more freely. Everything is connected.

Thus *we are learning systems thinking through the body*. We shift from thinking of the parts of our body as though they are isolated and disconnected to seeing that the body works as an integrated whole. Once we understand this through our own experience we are less likely to give credence to simplistic descriptions of how the external world works. Instead, we look for larger patterns of connection among multiple interrelating factors. This has implications for a well functioning democracy and social policy.

By doing Awareness Through Movement we are also learning what might be called *the proactive attitude* – the attitude of responding to difficulties by seeking ways to make the system work better, rather than complaining or being resigned to the situation. The proactive attitude underlies the whole process of functional thinking, where we use astute observation to determine precisely how the difficulty is created, find a point of improvement that will help the whole system work better, and devise some means of actually making the improvement.

This method of functional thinking can be applied to improving any skilled behaviour.

Therefore I believe that it should be widely taught. If we are going to evolve a world that works, then individually and collectively we must improve our functioning in many respects. Doing Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement lessons trains people in core processes of self-development that have implications far beyond improving body use.

Creativity training develops partnership thinking skills

Creativity training is another route to developing partnership thinking skills. Training in interactive creativity methods such as improvisational acting^{vvi} and Synectics^{vii} develops our capacity to work with minds different than our own. They also teach creative thinking skills, of course, which we need for evolving a world that works.

Fear and intimidation inhibit creativity. Play, on the other hand, readily takes us past unnecessary inhibitions, and can indeed inspire us. Play adds juice and freedom to our thinking. Therefore I like to teach creative thinking skills through games. I use improvisational acting games that give people greater access to what I call the *productive unconscious*. Where do interesting new ideas come from? They well up from some part of the mind that is outside normal conscious awareness. When they pop into our mind unexpectedly the productive unconscious has been doing its work. Synectics, one of the world's most powerful problem-solving techniques, takes advantage of this.

Synectics is modelled on the thought processes of professional inventors. It enables small groups to combine their collective wealth of knowledge, experience and imagination to develop fresh approaches to problems and opportunities. Synectics®

also teaches us how to encourage and develop the fledgling ideas of others, rather than attacking them or competing with them.

Both improvisational acting and Synectics work because participants accept and build on what their partners offer. We do not block. Nor do we impose our ideas on the flow, although we may express ideas and opinions strongly. We work with what our partners are doing, while maintaining our own centre. Thus training in these disciplines is training in partnership thinking skills.

On a larger scale, techniques such as Future Searches and stakeholder consultation provide vehicles for the divergent interests of people in extended groups to be taken into account in decision-making. Experience shows that taking into account a diversity of viewpoints, while mentally challenging, typically produces outcomes that are far better than any one individual would have come up with – despite the old joke that a camel is a horse designed by a committee.

Improving emotional functioning

Psychologically, our adult self should be in command of our own house. But occasionally people experience feelings that do not seem to make sense in the present day context. These often come from younger parts of the self. While some of our irrational feelings may be related to deep issues that need skilled psychotherapeutic help, others can be dealt with by ourselves if we have the right techniques.

There are excellent methods people can use to sort out their own inner issues, and thus improve their functioning. These should be widely taught as a kind of psychological first aid, so that people have the tools to take responsibility for their own emotional well being.

For example, *Option Process* is an excellent technique for sorting out the irrational roots of our surface upsets. The process starts with a surface ‘occasion of upset’, such as feeling uncomfortable about asking for a well deserved raise. One asks a series of questions that gently but rapidly lead to the core of the issue. Resolution occurs when one reaches a belief that is so inconsistent with present day reality that one can only laugh at it. Indeed, many people do laugh out loud when they hit this level. A short version of it might be ‘If I ask my boss for a raise, I am afraid he will reject me, and then I will die.’ This belief is ludicrous in present day reality. It was not so ludicrous when we were very young and completely dependent on parental acceptance for our well-being.

During Option Process training people typically work in pairs under the guidance of an experienced facilitator. Such training increases each participant’s capacity to work creatively and constructively with minds different than their own – partnership thinking. Once people have learned the technique they can then apply it privately to issues that may arise for them. Barry Kaufmann's *To Love Is To Be Happy With* is a manual that describes how to do Option Process.

An important part of creativity training is learning to work with spontaneous visual imagery. This is helpful for getting ideas and solving real world problems. But visual imagery can also be used to heal emotionally disturbed parts of ourselves. Imagery

seems to engage levels in the psyche that are too deep to be readily accessed by words. *The St Frances Process* describes an effective way to do this^{viii}.

By working with imagery we can reach very young levels in our psyche that still need love and attention. There are also ways of using imagery and words to get guidance from a part of our psyche that seems to be wiser than our conscious ego.

These psychological approaches train us in ways of working cooperatively with our own unconscious – partnership relating.

I also recommend Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) as a do-it-yourself method of resolving emotional issues. EFT is a method on tapping on acupressure points with your fingers. It was discovered by accident that just by tapping with our fingers on a few acupressure points we can resolve emotional upsets of all sorts – sometimes with astonishing rapidity. You can download the manual for free^{ix} and try it on some minor issue to start with. EFT is completely safe, you cannot overstimulate yourself by tapping on acupressure points. The method is quite astonishing, and I have found it extremely effective.

For completeness, it is worth noting that Western civilization has high levels of child abuse, sexual abuse and domestic violence. Psychohistorian Lloyd deMause points out that our rage in reaction to abuse, for those of us who experienced it, establish a psychological basis for people's willingness, even eagerness to go to war. The good news is that to a significant extent parenting has been getting better, so that a new class of relatively healthier people is emerging.

So if we were to identify one point of improvement for evolving a healthy society, the most important in the long run would be to invest as many resources as possible in giving young mothers support in learning to control their own anger and violence, and in following their nurturing caring impulses. Obviously an economic system that forces mothers to work is inconsistent with this, and in practice fathers as well as mothers should give abundant parental attention to their children.

Teaching partnership thinking skills directly

Both Conflict Resolution and Parent Effectiveness Training teach partnership thinking skills directly. Conflict Resolution, as you probably know, teaches how to shift from an adversarial stance to a win-win stance, and maximise the value for both parties.

Parent Effectiveness Training teaches parents how to negotiate respectfully with their children, clarifying the real needs and interests of both parties. Children raised in this way not only absorb partnership thinking from their parents, they also grow up feeling loved and respected.

All in all, there are quite a few personal growth disciplines that enable people to combine personal improvement with developing more general partnership thinking skills. People do not need to train in all of them. There are core skills that are more or less common to all of them, so developing competence in any one of these disciplines serves to develop these core skills.

Summary

For those of us who care about the future, our goal should be to contribute to evolving ‘a world that works’ – a world that is ecologically sustainable and humane. If we are to evolve a truly humane democracy and a global civilisation that is ecologically sustainable, partnership thinking must become the norm. The partnership style must be built into the fabric of our institutions, become a conscious part of how we educate young people, and be the ground of every day relationships.

ⁱ Polanyi, Karl *The Great Transformation* 1944

ⁱⁱ Gaines, Andrew *Creative Conversations – Where ideas spark fresh ideas and exciting new insights emerge* <http://tinyurl.com/cte4r2>

ⁱⁱⁱ Orienting: <http://sbi11.sitesell.com/cgi-bin/sbi/buildpage.pl#SIG>

^{iv} Woodman, Marion *Addiction to Perfection : The Still Unravished Bride* 1982

^v Spolin, Viola *Improvisation for the Theater* 1963

^{vi} Johnston, Kieth. *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* 1979

^{vii} Prince, George *The Practice of Creativity* 1970

^{viii} St Frances Process: <http://sbi11.sitesell.com/cgi-bin/sbi/buildpage.pl#SIG>

^{ix} EFT: www.emofree.com