

BOOK STUDY & ACTION GROUP GUIDE
WITH DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

FOR

THE REAL WEALTH OF NATIONS:
CREATING A CARING ECONOMY

BY RIANE EISLER

For more information, visit
<http://realwealthpdx.wordpress.com>

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

In Spring, 2007 Riane Eisler, internationally renowned author, social activist and attorney, came to Portland, Oregon to speak about her new book, *The Real Wealth of Nations; Creating a Caring Economics* at the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly. Marcia Meyers, a local activist and member of Unitarians for a Just Economic Community, began at that time to collect names of persons attending Riane's presentation at the GA and also at her reading in Portland's Powell's books. Many were drawn to hear Riane because of her earlier and best known work, *The Chalice and the Blade*, about the dynamics of partnership and domination. For many women this work about past cultures --which honored men and women equally-- and their contrast to our patriarchal society today gave voice to a deep understanding that a better way is possible.

Through this project we hope that book groups will bring people together first for meaningful conversation and then as an inspiration for action. Women and men who have read *The Real Wealth of Nations* will be able to discuss the ideas Riane Eisler has set forth about a new economic map -- one that gives true value to the work of caring while assessing the real cost of policies that do not support children and families or that destroy our natural world. From conversations that begin in book groups we hope partnerships will form to identify and take action on work that needs local attention. We have attempted to list many of the wonderful grass-roots initiatives of caring and sharing that are already happening in Portland. We hope that the participants in this project will work together to take on action projects to add to this list.

A core group of women have met through summer 2007 to create this discussion guide (which remains a work in progress) and the website/blog: <http://realwealthpdx.wordpress.com> where more resources are assembled. We did this work with hope and excitement that by starting conversations, we can begin to tell new stories about what is possible, and through partnership we can together create an economic system of caring and sharing that will sustain us.

-- Hafidha Sofia Acuay, Judy Bennett, Andrea Drury,
Kimberly Ford, Celeste Howard, Marcia Meyers, and Pat Osborn

BOOK STUDY GROUPS

Organizing your Book Group; the role of the Book Group Facilitator*

This guide is designed for book groups meeting four times in a two hour format. The sections of this guide are aligned with a division of the book into four sections:

Session 1 : Introduction through Chapter 3; pages 1 - 68

Session 2: Chapters 4, 5 and 6; pages 69 - 138

Session 3: Chapters 7 and 8; pages 139 - 185

Session 4: Chapters 9 and 10; pages 187 - 235

In each section we have provided whole group discussion questions as well as questions for dyads (discussion in pairs). It is unlikely that your group will have time to ask all the questions, so we encourage you to decide as a group which questions will produce the best discussion. You can also create your own questions.

SIZE OF THE GROUP: Any group of 3 or over can make up a book group. There is no limit on size - it depends on your comfort level - just so the discussion allows everyone to speak. The dyad questions will be very useful in large groups to allow all to participate; in small groups they can be used as whole group questions.

ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR: We are looking to the facilitator to get the book group started. This involves setting a time and place for meeting and then inviting participants. We have flyers to help in publicity, or you can invite people from your networks in the community. We also have people who are looking for a book group to join.

There are several tasks involved in facilitating the book group. These can be done by one person, or shared among several people, or the roles can be rotated:

- Be a timekeeper; start and end on time
- Make sure ground rules for discussion are respected
- Make sure everyone has a chance to talk
- Don't allow anyone to monopolize the conversation.

AT YOUR FIRST MEETING: take time to introduce all participants to each other and agree on practices for ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak

and that in your discussion all views are respected. (See www.effectivemeetings.com for ideas of ground rules)

SESSION FORMAT: The way you structure your meetings is up to you and your group participants to decide. Decide how you will divide the time between a welcome activity, large group and dyad discussion, a debrief, and closing.

- **Welcome:** We suggest that you start with some sort of welcoming exercise that helps participants center such as several minutes of silence or lighting a candle.
- **Discussion:** For large group discussion, decide how many questions of each type you would like to ask, and how much time should be used for each. Large group discussion can be conducted by going around the circle to allow participants to express their views, or through a “popcorn” style which allows people to speak when they are ready. Dyad questions can take some of the discussion time depending on the size and wishes of the group. For dyads the group should break into pairs. Instead of dialogue, each person should be given uninterrupted time to answer each question, and the other member of the pair should listen actively. A timekeeper is necessary to announce the time segments (usually 5 minutes per person), with an announcement when 30 seconds remain for speaker 1’s time, and when it is time to change speakers.
- **Debrief:** Use this time (20 minutes suggested) to summarize some of the major ideas of the discussion. You may wish to assign someone to record these ideas, and then at the next session, if they are posted they can serve to focus attention and add continuity between sessions.
- **Closing:** End with words of appreciation, announcement of the next meeting time and place, and moments of silence/ blowing out the candle.

SESSION FOUR: Many of the questions in session four are designed to move the discussion toward ideas for working together on action projects for the future. The planning committee for this project will want to know of the special interests of members of your book group.

*Many of these ideas are taken from “*The Great Turning* by David Korten; Discussion Guide: Notes to Facilitators” There are also ideas from *The Partnership Way*, by Riane Eisler and David Loye.

SESSION ONE:

INTRODUCTION & CHAPTERS ONE, TWO AND THREE: REASONS TO CARE WE NEED A NEW ECONOMICS ECONOMICS THROUGH A WIDER LENS IT PAYS TO CARE – IN DOLLARS & CENTS

"Together we can build a new economic system that promotes creativity and generosity rather than greed and destructiveness." Riane Eisler

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

(Introduction)

1. What aspects of our social and natural context are not taken into account by our current economic systems?
2. In "The Wealth of Nations" Adam Smith focuses on "the market" as the best mechanism for producing and distributing the necessities of life. He neglects to include the life sustaining activities that take place in households and in nature. How has this incomplete model effected women's identities and their emotional, economic and social security as well as the security of communities and of nature?

(Chapter 1)

3. Old economic systems ignore some of the basic facts about human existence - those pertaining to the crucial importance of caring and care-giving for all economic activities -- and thus make these facts economically invisible. Eisler states that we need a new approach to economics in which supporting caring or even talking about caring is no longer taboo. Do you agree with her assertion and if so what ways do you see of helping to create and support this new economics?
4. Why could the household and the natural world be considered the core sectors of a realistic economic model?
5. Eisler states, "In our time, when high technology guided by values such as conquest, exploitation, and domination threaten our very survival, we need economic inventions driven by an ethos of caring.

We need a caring revolution!" Do you see this happening and if so where and how?

6. We pay a plumber \$60 an hr to fix our pipes, yet we pay an average of \$10 to someone to care for our children. This is only one example of the "systematic devaluation of the activities that contribute the most to human welfare and development" (p. 15). As a society, how do we justify the devaluation of caregiving activities? Do you agree or disagree?

(Chapter 2)

The Domination System: trust is scarce and tension is high. The system is held together by fear and force.

The Partnership System: human well being and development are valued and protected as is the life support system of nature. The partnership system supports mutually respectful caring relations.

7. There are attempts being made to replace the current economic indicators of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with Quality of Life (QL) indicators. What do the traditional models leave out? What do they include that are actually unhealthy and hurtful to humans and nature? What are some of the advantages of this new way of measuring economics?

For example, GDP include activities that harm and take life, such as making cigarettes and the medical and funeral bills from smoking them, but doesn't include as economically productive the work of caring for people, starting in childhood, without which there would be no economy. We're told we can't quantify the value of these activities, but this is not so: Swiss government surveys, for example, found that if the unpaid work in households (mostly the "women's work" of caregiving) were counted it would be 70 percent of the reported Swiss GDP. What do you think we can do about this in our own communities?

8. Robert Ornstein writes, " Language provides an almost unconsciously agreed on set of categories for experience, and allows the speakers of the language to ignore experiences excluded by the common category system." To bring about systemic change we need categories that don't leave out critical parts of society. What categories do you think need to be included to create a more caring economics and how can we help to encourage the inclusion of these categories?

9. How is a hierarchy of actualization different from a hierarchy of domination?

(Chapter 3)

10. Why don't more companies offer child care and other family-support services when studies show that such practices yield economic benefits such as higher productivity? What actions can a community take to encourage family-supportive working environments?
11. Some companies have made the transition from traditional employer-employee relationships to a new orientation; and within that orientation is a spectrum, from adopting one or more employee-caring practices to transforming its entire corporate policy to an employee-caring culture. How do you suppose such changes come about? Are they employee-driven (grass-roots) or are they driven from the leaders of the company (top-down)?

Examples are:

- On site child care
- Back up child care services
- Child care subsidies
- Paid parental leave
- Telecommuting and flexible work schedules
- Employee wellness programs
- Participatory management
- Profit sharing

12. "From a purely financial cost-benefit perspective, investing in high quality care for children is one of the best investments a nation can make." (page 56). What forces are working in our nation against this kind of thinking?

DYAD QUESTIONS (FOR PAIRS)

(Introduction)

13. Eisler states that much of her life has been a quest. Thinking about you own life can you identify a similar search? What has been your quest?
14. Eisler speaks of creating economic structures, practices and policies in ways that maximize our positive potential and minimize our negative ones. What aspects of your personal life are you consciously working to maximize? What aspects are you working to minimize?

(Chapter 1- 3)

15. On pages 22 and 23 Eisler offers six areas for building a foundation of a Caring Economic System. She contends that progress in any one of these areas drives progress in the others. To which area do you feel yourself drawn? Which of these six areas speaks to you?
16. In looking at the health of your household - spiritual, emotional, physical - what acts, purchases, connections in the last week have been most important for the well being of you household members? To what extent do these acts/purchases, connections contain a measure of caring?
17. If you have had children and worked, what were your experiences in obtaining child care and what effect did this have on your employment?
18. What experiences have you had with a different management styles in employment or other work? If you have experienced participatory management, how did it affect you commitment to the group?

American workers on average make more money than their European counterparts; however, Americans generally pay for services such as health care, child care, and pre-school education, whereas in many areas of Europe these are publicly provided. When you look at your own situation in this regard, would you be better off with a more socialistic government?

SESSION TWO:

CHAPTERS FOUR, FIVE AND SIX: CONNECTING THE DOTS THE ECONOMICS OF DOMINATION THE ECONOMIC DOUBLE STANDARD

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- 1 Eisler's (and others') study through the Center for Partnership Studies shows that the status of women in a culture can actually be a better predictor of general quality of life than gross domestic product (page 88-89). How would the United States fit this model: does the status of

women reflect the general quality of life in the U.S. more than the GDP does?

- 2 What are the costs to a society when it gives less value to the lives and work of the female than to the male half of the species?
- 3 What social groups in American life fall close to the partnership end of the partnership/domination continuum? What is it about these groups that make people feel comfortable or uncomfortable in them? What social groups fall close to the domination end of the continuum? What is it that makes people feel comfortable or uncomfortable in these groups?
- 4 What would it take to move the American economic system toward the Scandinavian model, with government-supported child care, universal health care, paid parental leave, and environmentally sound industrial practices? How do American media manage to make this model appear unacceptable? What would happen if we begin to substitute caring policies for socialism when people say universal healthcare or high quality early childhood education are socialist – and hence not appropriate for Americans?
- 5 The U.S. form of government was explicitly based on Athenian democracy, where only free men who owned property could vote. Yet we think of our democracy as “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” Why?
- 6 What signs have you seen that more businesses are recognizing the value of caring for their employees and encouraging input from employees? Is this trend more marked in certain kinds of businesses? In businesses of a certain size?
- 7 In what ways does the U.S. economic system produce “artificial scarcity” so that the motivation to work and to buy will maintain itself?
- 8 Were you surprised that the majority of the world’s poor and hungry are female? Why do you think this is not common knowledge?
- 9 What were your reactions to the information in The Real Wealth of Nations showing that both inside households and in social expenditures the amount of money designated for women and children is much lower than that for activities primarily involving or affecting men?

DYAD QUESTIONS (FOR PAIRS)

- 10 Imagine yourself in Riane Eisler's position when a human rights activist refused to include women's rights – even issues such as “honor killings” and genital mutilation -- in his activities because he was too busy working on life and death issues such as torture and assassination. (page 75). How can you effectively counter this point of view?
- 11 Discuss your reactions to this statement by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902): “The world has never yet seen a truly great and virtuous nation, because in the degradation of women the very fountains of life are poisoned at the source.” (page 73)
- 12 Would U.S. citizens accept higher tax rates if they brought excellent early childhood education, good nutrition and health care for all families, and an effective social safety net?
- 13 Does male concern about a child's biological fatherhood still affect a child's well-being in America? Are there other concerns that might deflect attention away from her actual well-being?
- 14 Do you have friends in Scandinavian countries who report experiences supporting or disputing the attractive picture that Eisler presents? Have you looked at the United Nations Human Development Reports and the World Economic Forum's assessments of life and economic efficiency in these nations?
- 15 If your mother or grandmother was a stay-at-home mom, did she receive an allowance large enough for her to spend money on herself? If so, did she often use any of it for “discretionary spending”? Did anyone at that time see her allowance as deserved pay for valuable work? If not, why not?
- 16 What surprised you in Eisler's discussion of Athenian home life? Did any of it sound like what we are told today about home life in Muslim countries?
- 17 What might explain the fact that the U.S. poverty rate for older women is almost twice the poverty rate for older men, even though we have had Social Security for decades?

SESSION THREE

CHAPTERS SEVEN AND EIGHT: THE ECONOMICS OF PARTNERSHIP TECHNOLOGY, WORK, AND THE POSTINDUSTRIAL ERA

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What have you been taught about alternative economic models to socialism and capitalism? Have you ever seen alternatives in action?
2. What social institutions might be affected by an economy that was concerned with taking care of more than material needs? What social institutions might arise from this model?
3. What are your thoughts on the concept of “time dollars” (pg 155)?
4. What are examples of “externalization” (pg 160) that you have seen in your local community?
5. How would you explain to someone who has never read this book why economics should be concerned with work that “encourages productivity and creativity?”

DYAD QUESTIONS (FOR PAIRS)

6. In Chapter 7, Eisler writes, “the vast majority of people were poor, and as they had been taught to do, accepted poverty as their inevitable lot” (pg 139). When, in your life, did you first realize that the ways things “were” economically was not necessarily how it had to be?
7. According to Eisler, economist Hazel Henderson “writes that the market ‘cannibalizes’ these contributions, and that the entire economic edifice rests on them” (pg 154). What value would you attach to household work?
8. Is it possible for a caring leader to head an uncaring corporation? Why? (pg 156)

9. The Gray Goo catastrophe (173) aside, how do prospects of an increasingly technological and automated world make you feel?
10. What can individuals and collectives do to turn social and economic policies away from a principle of domination?

SESSION FOUR:

CHAPTERS NINE AND TEN: WHO WE ARE AND WHERE WE ARE WE NEED A NEW ECONOMICS ECONOMICS THROUGH A WIDER LENS

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What other stories have you heard about people like Ryan Hreljac and Clara Hall? People who reached out to help total strangers? (Here in Portland) Why do you think people do these things?
2. What are the new fairy tales or stories being told to children these days? Do all these stories that reflect a partnership society, caring & sharing, creativity, etc.? Have you also run into some new ones that reinforce the dominator society?
3. How are teachers and parents handling bullies these days?
4. Can you see the current administration of the U.S. in terms of a "push back to domination" being made in response to an earlier "thrust toward partnership"? (pp. 201-202) What's happening in Portland that you would characterize as a "thrust toward partnership"?
5. What is happening worldwide that is pushing us back toward the domination system, and conversely, toward a partnership future?
6. What incentives are in place for companies to be more responsible locally? Nationally?
7. List several ways we could show policymakers and the public the benefits of investing in human development. What are the costs of not doing this?

DYAD QUESTIONS (FOR PAIRS)

8. Without thinking too hard about it, what would you do – or what are you doing already – to help others? If you're not doing something, what stops you? Now, list a few things that you could do to get past these barriers.
9. Where do you see/observe the domination system being played out -- in your life, in Portland, in Oregon, in the United States? How about the partnership system?
10. What are the social and economic costs we're incurring now by continuing to live in a society that still orients heavily to the domination system? Which issue would you want to work on if you could?
11. Riane says we are making progress turning from a dominator society to a partnership society, even in fact of the regressive push. On a scale from 1 to 10, 1 being the dominator model and 10 being the partnership model, where do you think Portland lies? Where does your relationship with your spouse or a close friend lie?
12. Where are you on the "awareness - action" continuum? Are you still feeling helpless and overwhelmed, or have you moved into action mode? What are you doing at a personal level, the neighborhood level, the city level?
13. How do we (can we, are we) build a political movement to pressure policymakers to make these changes? or change the policymakers?
14. How will you start using the words "caring," "sharing," and "partnership economics" in your everyday conversations?
15. How can you help people see the connection between "women's issues" and the resistance to the movement to a more caring and equitable world?
16. How do you think you can raise awareness to what Eisler calls connecting the dots – between what is considered normal and moral in gender and parent-child relations and economic structures, policies, and practices?
17. Name examples in the Portland area of shifts in the economic rules. For example:
 - a. the anti-big box stores movements

- b. fewer tax credits to entice businesses to locate here
- c. our urban growth boundary
- d. mass transit and transit-oriented development

18. What do you think of pushing the envelope further, to work for paid parental leave, caregiver tax credits, and other measures Eisler writes about that give visibility and value to the work of caring and caregiving in ways that put food on the table and a roof of people's heads?

19. How do you plan to engage men as well as women in working for a caring economics?