

**Antonella Riem Natale**

**Partnership Tapestries in Economics:**

**Riane Eisler's "The Real Wealth of Nations, Creating a Caring Economics".**

**San Francisco: Berret-Koehler. 2007. Pages: 318. Price: \$24.95 (hardcover).**

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The cover image of Riane Eisler's most recent book (*The Real Wealth of Nations, Creating a Caring Economics*, 2007), a beautiful reproduction of a bronze statue called *Family Group* (1944) by Henry Spencer Moore (1898-1986), perfectly gives form, body and substance to her continuing scholarly, human and spiritual research, spanning from our ancient past to our present and prospective possible future(s). A *family group*, man and woman sitting, at equal level and with equal postures, slightly turned one towards the other, embrace their two children. The mother gently holds the youngest in her lap, her right hand on the child's heart, the other, standing between the couple, rests his/her (the sex is unimportant and not characterised) elbow on his/her mother's knee, while the father holds him/her by the shoulder. This "group" could well represent a *Divine Family*, where finally both masculine and feminine powers and energies coalesce once again to create a harmonious life for themselves, their children and future generations.

The focus and scope of all of Eisler's work can be defined as profoundly humanistic in the most positive and comprehensive use of the word. Throughout the years she has covered many different fields of analysis, from history (and pre-history) to cultural, social and anthropological studies, education, and many other areas of interest, which often were present, in seed, in her seminal and fundamental study on our historical and "mythical" past (*The Chalice and the Blade*, 1987).

Eisler challenges the assumptions that have supported the practice of business and economic policy for the last two centuries, since Adam Smith's original *Wealth of Nations* (1937), and shows that both capitalism and socialism belong to the same "dominator" cultural paradigm. The "economy of partnership" or "caring economics" is also connected to much of the work done by women activists, such as, for example, the feminist environmentalist Vandana Shiva (2000). The real wealth of nations springs from our natural environment and the contributions of peoples on the planet: "Economics comes from *oikonomia*, the Greek word for managing the household – and a core component of households is caring and caregiving" (9). Eisler underlines that *natural* capital is fundamental for our wellbeing: "our challenge is to develop a caring economics where human needs and capacities are nurtured, or natural habitat is conserved, and our great potential for caring and creativity supported" (13). The six signposts of the caring economics Eisler presents are (22 ff.):

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1. a “full-spectrum economic map” - the household, unpaid, natural, and illegal economies, and the traditional market and government economies;
2. a set of cultural beliefs and institutions that value caring and care-giving, shifting from a domination to partnership paradigm;
3. caring economic rules, policies, and practices: we need business and government that meet basic human needs, direct technological developments that sustain life and consider effects on future generations;
4. inclusive and accurate economic indicators that reject benchmarks considering “wealth” every massive oil spill and every bomb used up in war;
5. partnerships economic and social structures: focus is on mutual benefit, responsibility and accountability;
6. an evolving economic theory of partnerism (Eisler’s word) founded on human interaction and recognizes the essential economic value of caring for ourselves, others and nature.

Eisler weaves environmental and feminist tapestries into a cohesive design; her economic theory is remindful of “traditional” lore expressing the Goddess’ ancient wisdom:

Among us, it is women who are responsible for *fostering* life. In our traditions, it is women who carry the seeds, both of our own future generations and of the plant life. It is women who plant and tend the gardens, and women who bear and raise the children. It is my right and duty, as a *woman and a mother and a grandmother*, to speak to you about these things, to bring our minds together on them. In making any law, our chiefs must always consider three things: the effect of their decision on peace; the effect on the natural world; and the effect on seven generations in the future. We believe that all lawmakers should be required to think this way, that all constitutions should contain these rules... we are a powerful people. We are the carriers of knowledge and ideas that the world needs today. We know how to live with this land: we have done so for thousands of years and have not suffered many of the changes of the Industrial Revolution, though we are being buffeted by the waves of its collapse.

([http://www.ratical.org/many\\_worlds/6Nations/](http://www.ratical.org/many_worlds/6Nations/) Presentation to the United Nations by Carol Jacobs, Cayuga Bear Clan Mother, 116-17).

In the same way, according to Eisler, and we agree, we must and can be *responsible*, capable of responding to our *Dharma*, a Sanskrit word which means: “behaving in alignment with the cosmic order and our spiritual path” (Gurumayi 2006, 137). We must foster life, ours and that of our descendants; we human beings must remember how to live in peace with ourselves and our

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planet, carefully measuring all our steps, for we are treading on the heads and hearts of the next seven generations: they are *The Real Wealth* of our Nations!

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