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The Gift of Matri-arché, Mothering in the Beginning

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Happy Birthday Heide!

Thank you so much for inviting me to speak and for understanding my desire to stay extra safe and do it virtually.

Before I begin, I just want to acknowledge the date of Sept. 11, the attack on the World Trade Center in New York and the disastrous 20 years of vengeance on Iraq and Afghanistan that have followed it.

I believe many of us, perhaps most of us in this movement, have had a sense for a very long time that something was deeply wrong with the world as we knew it, and have therefore devoted much of our lives to understanding what the problem really is, and what must be done to change the situation and find workable alternatives. This motivation is not simply intellectual curiosity or a desire to achieve academic excellence. Rather I believe it is a desire to diagnose what is wrong, to understand it in depth and to propose the gift of a solution.

Heide's work is a prime example of success in this endeavor and is admirable and eminently 'political' because of it. Her courage in leaving the academic world (which she had admirably mastered) and going forward on her own, gives courage to other women to do the same. Her competence in taking on the whole ensemble of patriarchal ideology regarding matriarchy and her ability to pose matriarchy as the solution to the problem of the transformation of the brutal society of which we are a part, have opened a breach in the wall that has blocked women's alternative perspectives for centuries. This is particularly crucial at this time in history when history (his-story) may actually be ending. The destruction of Mother Earth is the matricide of the planetary matriarchal mother by gift plundering Patriarchal Capitalism. Women now need to lead everyone through that breach in the wall of patriarchal lies and establish an egalitarian society based on matriarchy and the values of the maternal gift economy.

I want to talk about a distinction Heide makes when she so valiantly defends the use of the word Matriarchy. She proposes Matri-arché, mothers (and mothering) at the beginning, not Patri-arché, fathers' power or fathers (and fathering) at the beginning. This distinction provides an overturning of the whole picture, and it regards both phylogenesis and ontogenesis, the development of the human species and the development of every life. The very fact of putting fathers at the beginning gives them part of the power that they wield over mothers and their children. It denies the obvious fact that from the womb onward, women, mothers, are at the beginning. Because it is false but nevertheless imposed as the definition of the human, the belief in Patri-arché contributes to patriarchy as domination.

As women many of us have been mothers and have practiced mothering. We have been the models of unilateral care that our own children have experienced. Because young children cannot

give back an equal exchange, mother care is a unilateral gift. Thus, the child's most important relational experience is that of being nurtured, that is, of being given-to unilaterally by the mother in the beginning. Although men can take on the role of motherer and some do, patriarchy has usually placed men in roles of authority, physical force, discipline, protection and 'bread winning', which are decidedly different from the detailed intimate caregiving roles that are necessary in mothering, where needs are expressed by one and attended to and satisfied by the other. All children receive the model of maternal gifting nurture if they survive. It is the beginning of the story, the pattern that we all receive.

Recently, in spite of its abstract patriarchal character, Western science has given us a new perspective on infancy with neurological studies of mothers and children. *Interpersonal neurobiology* (see particularly the work of Allan Schore) traces the influence of the mother's and the child's brains upon each other, which takes place during unilateral nurturing interactions of various kinds in the earliest years. There is no quid pro quo in the early economy during the time when the infant's brain is maturing, with more than 40,000 new neuron connections every second and while the brain is more than doubling in size during the first year. This is the period of epigenetic development, where only the neuron potentials that are stimulated by the child's life experience remain active, while those that are not activated are eliminated. Since the child's experience is primarily that of needing and of being cared for and given to by mothers, the neuron potentials that are activated will mainly have to do with giving and receiving care, which are also interactions that are emotionally charged because they are essential for survival. Interpersonal neurobiologist Daniel Siegel says that our relational experiences actually “sculpt our neuronal pathways”, and I deduce from this that it is the experience of being unilaterally mothered that first “sculpts our neural pathways”.

The epigenetics of early childhood gives us a biological mechanism that is influenced by social interaction, an ahistorical mechanism that allows historical variation. The genes that are transmitted to the child from the parents remain the same but they need activated by experience, so the ones that do remain have been activated. Now, as in prehistory and everywhere, the motherer(s) give to their vulnerable babies who receive the gifts unilaterally as they develop over a long period of time due to their late maturing bodies and brains. The specifics of this care, what, after milk, is fed to the child, how she is kept warm or cool, held, cleaned, and kept safe, vary with the social, historical and geographical areas in which the care takes place. The needs of the child elicit the nurturing gifts of the motherers and it is upon this that her survival depends and her emotional well-being is based. The neuron pathways are sculpted by these activities. I believe this is the basis of the gift interaction, which provides a nurturing logic or blueprint that underlies our human capacities including our ability to communicate, to form community and also gives us our faculty of language. This blueprint is a common underpinning of all society but remains in the foreground in matriarchies while it is overridden and distorted and exploited by patriarchy and capitalism.

Starting with mothers and mothering instead of fathers and fathering when we think about our species, provides a very different narrative about who we are and what we should do. The substitution of Patri-arché for Matri-arché does not allow us to see the beginning of the thread of the human story and therefore makes all our investigation of who we are inaccurate.

This causes us to be divided and conquered by our own false narrative. In fact, patriarchy and the market have created other storylines, false narratives that we have embraced and that have blinded us to who we really are as a species, giving us false and tendentious explanations instead, as Heide so brilliantly shows.

A particularly important false narrative today is the one proposed by Patriarchal Capitalism that makes it appear that the market creates value and that it is necessary for the distribution of goods in scarcity. Actually, capitalism creates the scarcity by channeling wealth through the military-industrial-propaganda complex. And the market system as a whole, takes from the maternal economy and those who practice it, who give to the market without knowing what it is they are doing. Unilateral gifts, though hidden and unrecognized as such, are given free to the capitalist as profit, made of surplus value to which unwaged domestic labor and nature services also contribute. Just to give you an idea of the amount, Ironmonger and Soupourmas using time-use criteria (2012) estimate the USA's 2011 Gross Household Product at 11.6 trillion dollars (as compared to a GDP of 13.3 trillion) while Costanza et al. (2014) evaluate the value of the Earth's 'ecosystem services' at some \$125 trillion compared to a worldwide GDP of \$75 trillion. If this is the case the market only exists because it is being nurtured by a sea of gifts from which it takes its sustenance.

Perhaps you will allow me a short excursus into patriarchal philosophy. When Kant proposes his categorical imperative *Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law*, what he does not realize is that we all already follow a universal pattern, though not patriarchal law, the pattern that is laid down epigenetically as we are being mothered in our earliest years. We usually do not recognize the maternal pattern or access it because it is overlaid by patriarchal logic and the logic of commodity exchange and because in the epoch of advanced, or shall I say, 'terminal' capitalism we do not usually have access to examples of matriarchal societies where mothering and its values are the general social pattern for all.

Heide has shown us the way out of this conundrum by the lifelong study of matriarchies she has provided in her books and by generously creating Akademie Hagia and the field of matriarchal studies to which others can adhere and contribute. By sharing her contacts, she has also brought many of us together with members of matriarchal communities and with indigenous scholars who have taken the commitment to join our Western academic world and so are able to interpret their cultures for us in terms we can understand.

If we can learn from Heide, from our own mothers and our own children and from our indigenous sisters and brothers, perhaps we can become again who we really are, an excellent matriarchal species, and then perhaps we will have a chance to successfully emerge from the dire planetary crisis that has been caused by patriarchy and capitalism.