

The Chalice & The Blade

Riane Eisler

+/- 200 pages (+/- 100,000 words) + appendix

1987, Harper Collins

Less than compelling--I think that sums it up.

Requisite disclaimer: I only spent about an hour (maybe less) with the book, so others might come away with a fuller appreciation of Eisler's theory. But truthfully, I think an hour is all it should take.

The Chalice stands for the female spirit, the way of the Goddess, a nurturing cooperative ideology, and a thing called gynarchy. The Blade stands for the male spirit, the way of the warrior, a competitive domineering ideology, and all that is bad in the world. I hope you got that. Man=bad. Women=good. Pretty simple I'd say.

Now, I'm not going to go through Eisler's concepts or examples one by one (cause let's face it, at an hour I barely noticed them, much less absorbed them), but I will mention the first great big glaring error, which I noticed in her thesis, and that would be how she thinks the world was a peaceful place 5,000 years ago. Who know, maybe she thought it was 6,000 years ago? Maybe 25,000? The point is, Eisler thinks that at some point in the past humans weren't busy killing each other. I don't know, I wasn't there, maybe the world was some sort of great big Garden of Eden, but I got to tell you, every last primitive culture that I've read about has its problems with rape, murder, and theft.

But listen, rather than being negative and simply shooting down Eisler's thesis, let me give you one of my own to take its place (for you to do with as you like). Here we go. War is an inevitable aspect of the human condition. Even if you start with a society that does away with theft because it has communal property, does away with murder because everybody is happy (and/or is doing drugs), and does away with rape because everyone is doing it with everyone else (and so rape becomes sort of

improbable)--what you get real quick from all of this is overpopulation. I mean, we are talking rampant teenage pregnancy, right? So, even if we started with a mythical Garden of Eden, at some point (give it a hundred years) you are going to increase the population of your island, world, universe, and/or hippy-witch free-love reserve to the point of bursting. At some point, there ain't going to be enough food for everyone. The result? War. Humans get that way--irrational, quick to anger, and hyper-violent--when they haven't eaten in days (or weeks) because the land's been sucked clean, and sooner or later a free for all is going to start.

OK. Fair enough. It's not the most well thought out thesis in all creation, but there it is. War was not invented 5,000 years ago by some militant macho he-man, it's been with us since we first climbed down out of the trees. Watch a troop of monkeys for a year, they know all about murder. So, the premise that the world was a peaceful happy place full of joy 6,000 odd years ago is complete rot.

Maybe you don't agree with me, and if so, perhaps The Chalice & The Blade will make more sense to you than it did to me. But if you believe (like I do) that warfare was not invented sometime after pottery, agriculture, and bronze working, then the rest of Riane Eisler's book is sort of... anticlimactic as it is based on a stupid premise: that 5,000 odd years ago the female Goddess was usurped by a dominant male ideology, and if only we could undo that change, the world would be a better place.

Well, guess what? If you could do away with murder, rape, and theft, the world would be a better place, but oddly (and here's the kicker), a modern Andocratic Dominator Society (her words, not mine) has less of all of those than your typical hunter gather tribe. Don't believe me, go hang out with the New Guinean head hunters of the late 18th Century, those guys were psychos--and although they had that agriculture thing down, they'd never heard of pottery, bronze, or any of that other new fangled crap, but they didn't need it because ignorance (and/or hate) is eternal.

{I think it's safe to say I never was the intended audience for her book. As likely, fans of her book are not the intended audience of this review. Either way, at an hour, I'm likely to have gotten almost everything about the book wrong.}

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