

The Morality Wars

Introduction to Part 2 of *The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power*

by Joel Kramer & Diana Alstad

The greatest struggle on the planet today is for the minds of people. We call this struggle the morals wars because the conflict is about morality and its foundations. What this involves are basic assumptions on how to live and be, what proper action is, and also (most importantly) how problems are to be solved or not solved.

Morality (the accepted structure in a social order dealing with the way people should and do treat each other) is the glue that holds every society together. And underneath every moral order there is a foundation that justifies it. Whatever else this foundation is, it always involves a point of view about what reality is and isn't. At this time in history, the foundations of the old moral order are breaking down. When this occurs, two predictable and opposing forces accelerate the rift in the old order. They are

1) Powerful movements that attempt to reestablish the strength of the old moral order. The essential stance here is that our basic problems are a function of having strayed too far from the verities of old. The solution given is the necessity to return to them with even more fervor. The increase in popularity and strength of fundamentalist perspectives, worldwide, is the most obvious example of this.

2) The searching for and experimenting with different forms of human interaction. This involves a recognition that new ways to problem-solve are needed to deal with the planet-threatening dilemmas brought about by human abuse the old moral order has not been able to contain. Those in this camp would include as paramount issues all or most of the following: overpopulation; ecology and the portent of ecological suicide; the leveraging of the human capacity for violence to where it is species-threatening; the increase in discrepancy between haves and have-nots worldwide; the historic omission of half the species (women)

from the construction of the public forms of social power. (Many women theorists rightly argue that institutionalized power today is available to a woman only if she plays by the rules set down by men.) Within this point of view one hears from many different directions the need for a basic paradigm shift.

That this book aligns with the second perspective is obvious. A major thesis of these writings is that it is people's deep conditioning to want either to be or to obey an unchallengeable authority that is keeping the planet from the kind of intelligence needed in problem-solving. It is not within the scope of this book to present a new paradigm, although we do put forth the kind of shifts in perspective we think necessary to allow a new paradigm to emerge. Rather, the emphasis is decoding the authoritarianism within often hidden areas of the social order. Unless people can see clearly the water they are swimming in, there is no way to build a life raft that will float. Since much of the authoritarianism in the old structures and hence in our psyches and daily life is unconscious and veiled, it needs to be decoded and unmasked to free ourselves. Without this it will infiltrate any attempts at new solutions.

A problem with being on the side of the new is that it is more difficult to make pronouncements with the total surety that those who back the old moral order are able to assume. Anything really new lacks a history of articulation that lends strength and credibility to its insights. Those seeking new forms are usually splintered into many factions of somewhat differing points of view. Consequently, it is difficult to get the alignment that traditionalists can muster because they come from an established known that worked (to the extent that it did) for a long period (thousands of years). As a result the forces wanting to revive the old are more certain, self-righteous, and morally accusative; while the

forces seeking new solutions are often more tentative, sometimes apologetic, and often find themselves on the moral defensive.

The outcome of what we call the moral wars impacts nothing less than human survival. The old order brought us to where we are today. It is unraveling because it cannot deal with the forces it unleashed. If the old wins out, there is little likelihood we will survive as a species. The fact that the major overt agenda of the old order is not species survival, but rather personal salvation, is not insignificant.

History at this moment is being stretched, made taut by the opposing forces of the old and the new. It is in such times that a crack in history can

allow the new to flower. If humanity is to evolve into a viable relationship with itself and the planet, the moral wars cannot be taken lightly. In the past the tensions between old and new had the luxury of working themselves out in whatever time it took. Now, because there is an ecological time clock, the old can defeat the new merely by impeding the necessary changes--which means in the end, no one wins.

The conundrum humanity faces is this: We are on a sinking ship, but the only materials we have to build a ship that will float come from the ship itself. The problem is that we must tear down the old ship before it sinks, rebuilding it at the same time without destroying the needed parts.