

Evolutionary Love

by Christina Grote, ITPI Board Chair

I first heard the phrase “evolutionary love” at a workshop given by Adam Crabtree in 2012. This talk was Pam Kramer’s brainchild, her leap of faith as both Adam and the topic were unfamiliar to the ITP community. Adam is an author, practicing psychotherapist in Toronto and a member of The Esalen Center for Theory and Research’s Core of Discovery. At that talk and subsequent workshop, he explored the topic of evolutionary love, as presented by Charles Sanders Peirce in *The Monist*, written in 1893. Peirce is arguably one of America’s greatest philosophers although most Americans have never heard of him. Adam has continued to develop Peirce’s ideas and is currently working on a book on the topic.



Aikido Founder Morihei Ueshiba’s
Calligraphy for “Ai” (“love”)

The basic idea is this: that there is a telos, or purpose, that drives the universe’s evolutionary advance, that telos is behind humanity’s desire to continually self-surpass, and this driving force is nothing less than love, evolutionary or unconditional love. The terms are interchangeable according to Crabtree. Peirce preferred the term “agape” and this is the term that Crabtree uses in his writings.

Here is a working definition of evolutionary love based on Peirce’s writing:

“Evolutionary love is the heartfelt benevolent desire that everyone—ourselves, others, and all that exists in the universe—reaches their greatest possible fulfillment, whatever that may prove to be. This love is freely given, with no consideration of merit, with no strings attached, with no expectation of return, and it is a love that motivates supportive action in the one who loves.”

– Adam Crabtree and Julia Mossbridge

Michael Murphy has characterized it this way – *“Love something, watch it blossom.”*

There is a lot to unpack here. So a few points:

Note that this love is given to ourselves and everything in the universe. This includes the living and non-living, and even ideas. Peirce writes:

“Suppose, for example, that I have an idea that interests me. It is my creation. It is my creature; for...it is a little person. I love it; and I will sink myself into perfecting it. It is not by dealing out cold justice to the circle of my

ideas that I can make them grow, but by cherishing and tending them as I would the flowers in my garden. The philosophy we draw from John's gospel is that this is the way mind develops; and as for the cosmos, only so far as it yet is mind, and so have life, is it capable of further evolution. Love, recognizing germs of loveliness in the hateful, gradually warms it into life, and makes it lovely."

Evolutionary or unconditional love is by definition unconditional, so there is no judgment on the person or thing receiving love. It is not earned. It is freely given with no expectation that the loved one will behave in any particular way or live up to a particular vision that we have for them. We love with no expectation of the love being returned in any way or that our love will change the loved one according to our will. I think of it as soul level love, beyond personality. In human terms, we are all in the process of evolving and we must love at the deepest level no matter what the appearances are.

There are many examples of this type of love in spiritual traditions around the world. Consider the Golden Rule that appears in one form or another in every tradition – to love others as oneself. Peirce himself was inspired by the statement in the gospel of John that God is Love. If God, or the universal impulse furthering evolution, is love, then we can imagine that this love wants only the best for us. This is worth considering. During her talk at our conference last November, Julia Mossbridge, neuroscientist and member of the IONS science team, asked us to meditate on this question:

"What if we know that our highest good is wished for by the universe and the universe was proceeding according to this wish? What would we do? What powers would we have?"

This question reminds me of the question Einstein asked, saying this is the most important question a person *should* ask: "Is the universe friendly?"

If the universe wants our highest good, how do we reconcile this view with the pain and suffering in the world and that which we experience in our own lives? That the evolutionary process is messy? That a greater good is working its way through us and our circumstances that we may not be able to see at the time? What is your answer?

In his writing, Crabtree contrasts the notion of agape, unconditional love, with another kind of love, eros. Eros can be thought of as the way that apape works through the manifest world. Eros wishes to enrich itself through its relationship with another, and if eros becomes dominant over agape, love tips toward greed. Adam argues that in human interaction, agape must always be primary.

As ITP is informed by Aikido, brought to us by George Leonard sensei, our co-founder, I wanted to include the calligraphy above. I learned recently that the "Ai" in Aikido means love. So here we are, already in a practice



George Leonard practicing Aikido

of love. Peirce isn't the only one who has thought about love in evolutionary terms.

Here is a quote from aikido sensei Takashi Sasaki:

"In other words, love is the spirit of aiding the universe in its process of positive development, and the spirit extended to the objects of that development. In other words, this is because 'positive development of the universe' is 'the spirit of the universe', 'the spirit of the universe' is 'love'."

Here is OSensei, founder of Aikido, from his book *The Art of Peace*:

"All life is a manifestation of the spirit, the manifestation of love. And the Art of Peace is the purest form of that principle. A warrior is charged with bringing a halt to all contention and strife. Universal love functions in many forms; each manifestation should be allowed free expression. The Art of Peace is true democracy."

Sound familiar?