

## Human Potential and Evolutionary Love

by Adam Crabtree, CTR scholar and author

Over the past sixty years, we have witnessed the striking development of innovative means for spiritual exploration and development. These remarkably effective techniques were devised to actualize our spiritual, mental, and physical potentials. This is what was happening everywhere in the human potential movement, now so familiar to us. The ultimate goal of this movement was to discover ways to contribute to the advance of human evolution. When we study the history of this remarkable project, we can see that virtually all of these approaches involved the induction of some form of trance.



Image from the Hubble space telescope of radiation from a stellar burst ricocheting off dust particles.

In recent years, I have become increasingly aware of the central role love plays in the dynamics of human evolution. By this, I mean specifically what the great American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce called “evolutionary love,” which is an unconditional love, a well-wishing love, a love given without any reference to merit on the part of the loved one. It is a love that intends and supports the fullest possible development of the potentials of the loved one. Because the evolution of the universe in general and the humanity in particular consists in the gradual actualization of latent potentials, this love is rightly called “evolutionary love.” It is this love, its meaning, and its implications that will be the subject of my talk to the ITP folks at Falkirk on February 8, 2017.

Evolutionary love is a foundational principle of the universe. It is fully compatible with a vision of reality called evolutionary panentheism, which understands the evolution of the universe as the coming into being of the divine. Looked at from this perspective, evolutionary love arises from deus implicitus (unmanifested God), and is the driving force behind the coming into being of deus explicitus (manifested God).

Evolutionary/unconditional love is the love that is embedded in the universe as a whole and that drives its evolutionary advance. But it is also a love that we, as free agents, participate in through our acts of love of our fellow human beings and the whole world in which we are immersed. By the participatory exercise of this love, we become, as it were, tenders or shepherds of the evolution of the universe. This love is the subject of a book I have recently completed called *Evolutionary Love and the Ravages of Greed*, and also the theme of a series of talks I am undertaking. Evolutionary/unconditional love has powerful implications for our human interactions and our attitude towards the environment, and it holds a central position in all our decisions about how we act in the world in our everyday lives.

Charles Sanders Peirce first called our attention to evolutionary love in an article he wrote in 1893. Strangely enough, this particularly original, powerful, and evocative idea has been little explored since. He chose the Greek word *agape* to name this love, and called his view of evolution “*agapic*.” An exploration of *agapic* evolution and its implications for human loving is long overdue.

There are many words in all languages that have been used to name love. Peirce believed that the Evangelist John had come closest to grasping the deepest and truest nature of love, and took the word *agape* from John’s writings. Peirce distinguished *agape*, the selfless desire for the fullest fulfillment of the loved one, from *eros* the term preferred by the Greek platonic tradition. In contrast to *agape*, which desires only the enrichment of the loved one, *eros* is a love that desires the enrichment of the lover. Even though self-enhancement is a central feature, that does not diminish the significance of *eros*. *Eros* is still an important kind of love, since it is through pursuing our own growth that we accomplish our personal evolutionary fulfillment.

Almost all human love is a mixture of *agape* and *eros*. However, *agape* must be granted the place of primacy. When evolutionary/unconditional love (*agape*) is pushed aside in our interactions, there can be dire consequences, not the least of which is the development of an attitude of greed, in which self-involved concerns overrule concerns for the other. Here the natural desire for self-enrichment (*eros*) has become unrestrained hunger for wealth or power. Here *eros* has cut loose from its conscience, *agape*, and acts without constraint. The remedy for this unfortunate state of affairs, so evident in the world today, is the establishment of evolutionary/unconditional love in its proper place of eminence in the human community. This is best and most effectively accomplished through the establishment of communities of spiritual exploration and practice, such as that exemplified in ITP. Humanity exists in communities of various sizes and shapes, cultures nested within cultures, all the way from the family to the human race at large. Looked at from this perspective, each one of us exists as a dynamic node within our active collectivities, and as such we have the power to influence those collectivities. If each of us contributes to mobilizing the potential power of these communities in the service of love, the world can achieve its hoped for evolutionary advance.

But we are only in early stages of this great human project, and it is yet to be worked out in detail. It is not an easy task we have before us. I believe that it will not be accomplished through the impositions of policies from above, but will come about mainly through grass roots action from below—the grass roots of love, developed and carefully tended by communities of practice.