

Evolutionary Love and the Ravages of Greed

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Foreword and Chapter One excerpt

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FOREWORD

Philosophy, when just escaping from its golden pupa-skin, mythology, proclaimed the great evolutionary agency of the universe to be Love.

—Charles Sanders Peirce¹

This quotation of Charles Sanders Peirce is drawn from his little treatise “Evolutionary love,” written for *The Monist* in 1893. In this brief work, Peirce introduced an original and provocative view of the nature of evolution, one that would not only shock those working in the rapidly developing field of evolutionary biology, but also have far reaching implications for our understanding of the nature of human beings and the meaning of human life.

Here Peirce proposes a remarkably inspiring view of the evolution of human beings and the cosmos itself. Peirce’s notion of evolution had, by the time he wrote these words, gone beyond that of his contemporary, Charles Darwin. For Peirce, evolution was not merely a biological matter. On the basis of a profound metaphysical view of reality derived from a scientifically grounded empiricism, he held that *everything evolves*. Further, he held that human beings have a unique position in nature, being able to consciously contribute to their own evolutionary advance through participation in the love that is the universal driver of the evolutionary process. He called this universal divine source and force “evolutionary love.”

Charles Peirce (1839-1914) is considered by many to be among the greatest of American philosophers. Max Fisch, renown scholar and historian of American thought, wrote this:

Who is the most original and most versatile intellect that the Americas have so far produced? The answer “Charles S. Peirce is uncontested, because any second would be so far behind as not to be worth nominating. Mathematician, astronomer, chemist, geodesist, surveyor, cartographer, metrologist, spectroscopist, engineer, inventor; psychologist, philologist, lexicographer,

historian of science, mathematical economist, lifelong student of medicine; book reviewer, dramatist, actor, short story writer; phenomenologist, semiotician, logician, rhetorician, and metaphysician[.] He was, for a few examples, the first modern experimental psychologist in the Americas, the first metrologist to use a wave-length of light as a unit of measure, the inventor of the quincuncial projection of the sphere, the first known conceiver of the design and theory of an electric switching-circuit computer, and the founder of “the economy of research.” He is the only system-building philosopher in the Americas who has been both competent and productive in logic, in mathematics, and in a wide range of sciences. If he has had any equals in that respect in the entire history of philosophy, they do not number more than two.²

Peirce’s originality fascinated me and enticed me to undertake the study of his work many years ago. He does not have the easy facility with language possessed by his life-long friend William James, but the challenge in reading him is not so much the verbal awkwardness that sometimes shows itself, but the uniqueness of his perspective and the originality of his approach to envisioning the fundamental nature of the reality in which we find ourselves immersed. I have discovered, however, that the task of reading Peirce is well worth the effort, and the concept of evolutionary love is one example of the brilliant gems to be found there.

Peirce was considered a child prodigy from an early age. He was the son of Harvard mathematics professor, Benjamin Peirce. His family’s living room was frequented by some of the most brilliant minds of the time, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, as well as Henry James Sr. and his sons Henry Jr. and William. He received a degree in chemistry and was a brilliant scientist, engineer, astronomer, and inventor and constructor of scientific instruments. Mathematics and logic were his lifelong interests. He is broadly acknowledged as the father of modern semiotics. He brought all his interests together in the development of a uniquely powerful metaphysical system, from which his ideas about evolution and evolutionary love emerged. Although plagued by a combination of physiological and emotional ailments, he did not let them prevent him from continuing to develop his rich architectonic understanding of reality, from his youth to the time of his death.

From the rich array of original ideas to be found in Peirce’s writings, I focus on one in this book: his notion of evolutionary love. Like so many of his seminal thoughts, he left this one largely undeveloped³. In this book, I intend to explore its consequences and draw out its implications, principally those that relate to human decisions and actions.

PART ONE: THE PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE

PREFACE

In this book, I propose a view of love that may be crystalized in three statements:

- There are two loves that form the foundation for both cosmic and human evolution: benevolent love and the love of desire.
- Our dealings with each other and the world involve a mix these two loves. If our actions are to honor the fundamental nature of things, benevolent love must be given primacy over the love of desire in our moral choices.
- If that primacy is violated, and the love of desire dominates, the result is a greed for power or wealth that corrupts basic values and blocks the great project of humankind: the promotion of evolutionary advance and the discovery of truth.

CHAPTER 1: LOVE

What is love? For an idea that commands so much popular attention, the meaning of love surprisingly unexamined. English has just one word for love. Greek has several, but in modern English these variations have either been considered merely technical, or else, in popular consciousness, forgotten entirely.

From practicing as a psychotherapist for many years, I have come to see that many people suffer from emotional problems made worse by their inability to develop a clear picture of love. The word is used in so many different, even contradictory, ways. This can be devastating because “love” is so often used in emotionally momentous situations, and from its utterance there often follows a multitude of highly charged associations.

When Margaret says to Jonathan, “I love you,” and Jonathan says, “I love you too, Margaret,” they bask in the glow of a new relationship and feel ecstatic with young love. But, unbeknown to them, what Margaret means and what Johnathan means might be very different things, signifying two very different sets of expectations of each other. It may take them years to unpack the multilayered feelings associated with those powerful declarations, and they may be in for many surprises on the way.

Unfortunately, few who write about love offer significant tools for grappling with the ambiguities in our uses of the term. Even skilled novelists can fail in their attempts to portray the misunderstandings and heartache that the language of love entails.

In this book, I intend to deal with love as a foundational aspect of reality. Love is much more than a psychological state. It is a force, one that operates on all levels of nature, both human and cosmic. Our understanding of love has far reaching implications, not merely for human life, but also for grasping the fundamental nature of the world in which we live. Caught up as we are in our own personal experiences of loving and being loved, it may be difficult to see it this way. Nevertheless, we sense that love is much more than a constellation of feelings, even if just how that may be true is not evident.

Agape

In the treatise quoted above, Peirce used the Greek word “agape” when referring to evolutionary love. Agape is an ancient word, and he believed that the term as used in the New Testament, especially the Gospel of John, offers a novel and revolutionary interpretation of love in its deepest meaning: the benevolent and unconditional desire for the fullest possible realization of the potentials, or latent capacities, of the loved one. Peirce believed that the exploration of agape, thus understood, holds the key to understanding the nature of cosmic evolution and the purpose of human life.

Evolutionary love has many dimensions, and I will be describing them in this book. For the sake of clarity, I have decided to follow Peirce's lead and use the word *agape* to designate evolutionary love in all its aspects. Looked at from various perspectives, I see agape as:

1. *Evolutionary love*: the elementary driver of evolution, both cosmic and human.
2. *Benevolent love*: a human emotion and intention that wishes well to all.
3. *Unconditional love*: an attitude characterized by the recognition that loved ones are free and self-determining, a gift given without preconditions, without merit, and without expectations for future actions.
4. *Empathic love*: a sentiment of oneness with others and a feeling of commonality with all, which is the basis for relationships, personal and communal, and is expressed in feelings of compassion.
5. *Non-possessive love*: an attitude of non-interference in regard to the life decisions of others.
6. *Respectful love*: an appreciation of others in all their uniqueness, in their rich potentials (both realized and unrealized), and in their unfathomable depths as creatures rooted in the mysterious ground of nature.

Evolutionary love is fundamentally *benevolent*. It consists in an abundance of good will directed to the love one. It is a well-wishing love. The well that it wishes is the fullest possible evolutionary advance for the beloved and its most complete fulfillment.

Although evolutionary love arises from the ineffable wellspring of the universe, it is also something that we human beings experience subjectively. It is *instinctual* in us as intelligent individual manifestations of the one primal source of love. We experience the objects of our love—other people and the environment in which we are immersed—as separate from us. But we and they are actually part of a great continuum of being that includes everything in the manifesting cosmos. Through agape we experience a sympathy with every existing thing and the desire that all reach their greatest possible fulfillment.

When someone is loved agapically, that person finds no justification for the love and, if reflective, is taken aback. The love given is *unmerited*. It is a mysterious gift, received without warrant, and as such may be called a “grace.” The loved one has the feeling of being loved not because of what he or she is here and now, but for latent potentials waiting to be actualized.

Agape is *unconditional*. Agapic love is not given on some precondition that has been met by the loved one. Agape is given precisely when the loved one has *not* achieved what it can achieve, and by the very exercise of agape, the lover seeks to support the conditions needed for the realization of those potentials. Agape is also unconditional in that it is *not given in view of what the loved one will do in consequence of being loved*. There are no strings attached. It is not given on the condition that loved ones will do what the lover wants them to do. Agape desires that loved ones *freely* determine their own future and make their own decisions

about their actions. The lover has no say about in what their fulfillment consists in and what their actions should be. So agapic lovers are not taken by surprise when, in the course of events, loved ones decide to take actions the lover disapproves of and cannot ascribe to. It is important to understand that agape does not require the lover to *approve* actions taken by loved ones; both lover and loved one remain *free* to make their own moral judgments.

By virtue of arising from a common source, the very wellsprings of the universe, every existing thing is continuous with every other existing thing. This shows itself in the experience of empathy, an instinctive care and concern for all of creation. In human relations, this *empathic love* is felt as *compassion*.

The agapic lover does not want to *possess* the loved object, in the sense of taking ownership of it. The act of possession would immediately disrespect the love one, for it would interfere with the free and full realization of the loved one's potentials, of those possibilities for growth that are waiting to be brought into existence in the future. Felix Murchadha illustrates this by talking about his experience of loving a wonderful painting:

I do not simply like it or appreciate its qualities or enjoy looking at it. To love a painting is to say more than this. It does not mean I wish to possess it. I want of course to have access to it, but in loving it I don't believe I could possess it—it remains beyond me, outside my grasp.⁵

By possessing a love object, the lover would interfere with it and block its ability to freely develop into whatever it will be. In the case of this example, a work of art develops or “grows” in the sense that it is a living reality that continually draws from its roots in the depths of nature and powerfully affects the person who encounters it. As a work of art, it has an evolutionary life of its own that must be acknowledged.⁶

Agape has *respect* for the loved one. The respect is not based merely on the accomplishments of the loved one, but on the potentials that are yet to be realized. Of course, the agapic lover may have some ideas, of a general kind, about the sort of outcomes those potentials may produce (the potentials of an infant, for instance, are not likely to resemble in any way those of an acorn). Nevertheless, the motivation for agape is not to bring about *specific forms* of actualization.

If love is so fundamental, why are we constantly confronted by hatred and greed in the doings of the world around us? And why should it be that we must struggle to fan the sparks of this love we find within in order to approach the world with loving sentiments? We need to find out about these things by looking more deeply into what love is and how it operates in our personal and social lives, and enters into our moral decisions. To do that we must next look at another form of love—eros.

Eros

For Peirce, Christian agape had replaced the Greek philosophers' *eros* as the ground of being. Eros was the term employed in the Platonic philosophical tradition to describe the love that leads the individual to the attainment of divine qualities of perfection. It was used to describe the desire for spiritual growth of all kinds and believed to provide the highest motivations for human moral choices. It was seen as the passionate desire that connects human beings with each other and the world around. In Peirce's view, although superseded by agape, eros still has an essential role to play, albeit secondary, in the process of cosmic and human evolution.

Eros regards the loved one as valuable and wants to be enriched by that value. Eros is at the service of the lover and his/her destiny. Eros is the love that seeks to be enhanced by the loved one. It is a love in the which the lover is motivated by desire for the beauty it sees in the loved one, and experiences a longing to take that beauty on board. In this way, the eros-driven lover is seeking the means to evolve, to grow through opportunities for engagement which the loved one presents to it.

Eros is the desire for enrichment by the love object. This meaning of eros is the one I use throughout this book. In Western culture, eros has come to be equated with sexual feelings and sexual encounters. That is NOT the meaning of eros in this book. Rather I define eros in the much broader terms that originate in the Platonic tradition of philosophy. In that tradition, sex is only one manifestation of the eros. The full meaning of the term, and the one I intend in this book, sees eros as the love of desire, the longing of the lover to be enhanced though the encounter with a love object that embodies something of *value* for the lover, something the lover wants to take in and be enriched by. This use of the term eros is adequate to the task of developing a full understanding of the fundamental nature of love. The limited meaning which equates eros with sex is inadequate for accomplishing that task. I make a point of this, because in our culture the sexual overtones of eros are so engrained that it takes a special effort to put them aside and engage in the exploration intended here.

Enrichment through eros can come in many forms. We can be enriched physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. *Physically* we are enriched by food, exercise, and body-enhancing activities. We can be enriched *emotionally* through our interactions with people in a variety of relationships with us, from the casual to the most intimate. This enrichment can involve an enhancement of mood, increase of confidence, growth in optimism, or joy in living. *Mental enrichment* occurs in learning situations that make us better informed, more skilled, or wiser. *Spiritual enrichment* puts us in touch with a broader and deeper sense of the beauty that shine forth in everything, and with the meaning of the world and human life.

If I attend a lecture by a philosopher that I admire, I hope to be enriched by him. I hope to become stimulated by his ideas, deepened in my grasp of the scope of the problems of philosophy, confirmed in certain tentative philosophical ideas that I am developing.

Insofar as I have these expectations, what I experience is an eros-driven love, I seek to be enhanced by this person and, in a process, become a better philosopher and a better person.

At a party, a young woman meets a charismatic, successful businessman. She feels drawn to him because of his energy, the feeling of power and confidence that radiates from him. He feels drawn to get to talk to him, to get to know him, perhaps to establish a connection that could lead to interesting and lucrative employment. She hopes to enrich her life through the growth of confidence that such employment could very well bring her, to say nothing of the financial reward. She experiences feelings of eros in regard to this person, and has hopes that the potential association with him will move her forward on her evolutionary path.

Enrichment through eros contributes to our personal growth and fulfillment. The different forms of enrichment come in our interactions with others, and, as we shall see, even in encounters with the rest of the natural world in which we dwell. In the love-drive of eros, we feel an urge, a *compulsion* to evolve, to grow, to become what we can. For that reason, we *actively seek out* eros-encounters of all kinds. This desire for enrichment can be felt as a kind of hunger that longs for satisfaction. The hunger and seeking out is natural and crucial to our evolutionary growth. However, experience tells us that in the process of trying to satisfy that hunger, we can lose perspective on the effects of the actions we carry out to that end. The desire for enrichment through eros may reach an intensity that clouds our understanding of the implications of those actions for the loved one with which we are engaged.

Particularly in eros-encounters with other people, we need to maintain an appropriate awareness of what we are doing. Personal eros-driven love seeks a *response* and can involve a certain objectivization of the loved one. In personal relationships, reciprocity on the part of the loved one is sought, and as long as the lover does not seek to possess (in the sense of own or control), the love object remains intact and free.

Agape and Eros

So, in our lives we experience two fundamentally distinct kinds of love: (1) agape, an appreciative and selfless love of other people or things for their own sake and (2) eros, a love that seeks the lover's personal enrichment by the loved one. Agapic love is a benevolent and unconditional love that is only concerned with the development and fulfillment of the loved one. Eros-driven love desires interaction with loved ones for their ability to fulfill the lover. Agape is unselfish, self-less; eros is self-serving. Agape is characterized by overflowing abundance; eros by need. Agape is ecological; eros is utilitarian.

Agape is self-less. This is true not merely because it does not seek self-enhancement, but also because agape does not originate in one's *self*. It is cosmic in origin, and while we can participate in it and channel it, we cannot take credit for it. We do not produce agape, but have the privilege of being points of its conscious manifestation in the world. In this way, we are agents in both cosmic and human evolution.

Although agape is the fundamental driver of evolution, eros does play a crucial, though ancillary, role in the evolutionary process. Agape supports evolution in the universe, eros is the means through which, on a concrete level, that evolution takes place. Through eros-driven encounters, lovers experience greater and greater fulfillment of their potentials and move forward on their evolutionary path.

Eros is selfish, not because it involves a narrow egotism, but because its function in human beings is to be the mechanism or means by which we build and grow our *selves*. We seek encounters that will advance our evolution as persons. Eros creates a hunger for opportunities to develop our potentials and capacities and become what we can be.

The distinction between agape and eros is critical to any full understanding of the human experience of love. I intend to explore that distinction throughout this book.

Moral Choices

The interplay of agape and eros suffuses the whole of human moral life. It is my view that all the troubles that occur in relationships between individuals, between individuals and their surrounding worlds, and between groups and their social environments, arise from the flawed interplay of these two loves. I believe that the devastating lack of respect and destructiveness we see in the world today is due to the lack of balance between them. Both kinds of loving are essential to the growth and evolution of the world, but only when they are in balance can the environment in which we live, both personal and social, prosper. In today's world both environments are in danger.

The example of the love of friendship may usefully illustrate the combined presence of the two loves in human interactions. I love a friend because of the valuable contributions that my contacts with him introduce into my life. He likes me and this enhances my feelings of confidence and self-worth. He is interesting and intelligent, and his friendship gives me the opportunity to deepen my understanding of the world and life. In his actions, he exemplifies many virtues and I emulate him and desire to be like him, to become virtuous myself. He speaks honestly to me about his impressions of me, and this makes me think seriously about what I am like and improve, making me stronger and more authentic in my actions and more successful in social encounters. Also, he can make me laugh and feel greater joy in living. These are all reasons I seek out my friend, to grow and develop my potentials on many levels. These are the *elements of eros* in my love for my friend.

But I also feel sentiments of agapic love toward my friend. I frequently find myself feeling delight in his personal growth. I wish him well in all his undertakings. I support him in his projects. I see the many ways he has evolved in his intellectual, emotional, and spiritual life, and desire that he continue to become more and more the person he wants to be. These are the *agapic elements* of my love for my friend.

Principle of the Primacy of Agape

Virtually all love relationships involve a combination of the eros and the agape. In our moral decisions, that is, our decisions about what actions we will take, we must reach a balance between the two. The balance is achieved by the application of the following principle: *In all human choices, agape has primacy over eros-driven love.* This principle is based on two things. First, agapic love is the primal force behind all evolution, while eros-driven love is the mechanism by which evolution works itself out through concrete interactions within the world. Second, in human affairs, eros-driven love is concerned with the growth of the *lover* and, as such, has no internal constraints. Left to its own devices, it may continue to seek its enrichment and, if unrestrained, can become devouring of the love object to the point of destroying it. Eros, in its bare essence, has no restraining element. In this sense, it is without tension; it is pure desire to be enriched. Agape provides the natural restraining influence on eros needed to ensure that the loved one is not harmed. Put another way, *agape is the conscience of eros.*

The principle of the primacy of the agapic may also be discussed in terms of how agape affects the lover. What, if anything, does the lover gain? The lover's gain comes through being affected by the evocative power in the depth of the loved one. Rather than engaging with surface qualities, the lover encounters an *excess* in the loved one, a surplus, a *more* that puts the lover in touch with the depths of nature in which the loved one is rooted, and thereby creates a feeling of awe in response to the loved one. When the lover is affected in that way, he or she engages with something transcendent, something which arises from a reality beyond both lover and loved one. This experience creates a unique feeling of pleasure. Nevertheless, that pleasure is not the *motive* for conferring agapic love, but a fortunate consequence of it.

In human affairs, agape and eros exist in constant interplay. Moral decisions involve determining how to apply the principle of the primacy of agapic love in a world where eros is continually active. Moral decisions made according to the principle of the primacy of agape are not necessarily simple and, in some cases, may be reached only with great difficulty. All moral decisions are challenging because of the immense complexity of real-life circumstances.

Rarely are concrete love feelings simply agape or simply eros. The description of my eros-driven desire for enrichment by my admired philosopher is not without elements of agape. I appreciate the man and want him to go on developing as a philosopher and as a man, becoming ever more of what he can be through his life experiences. The young woman who was enamored of the charismatic businessman may soon notice feelings of benevolence toward him beyond her own eros-driven hopes for advancement, and feel

encouraging of his successes and personal growth. These mixtures of love elements are likely to lead to actions of certain kinds, and therefore evoke moral decisions.

Human actions, consciously considered and freely chosen, are the heart of the moral life. Applying the principle of the primacy of agape over eros is a test of moral courage. We all have moments of weakness, when, in the face of strong eros-driven desire, we knowingly choose an action that does not adequately respect the right of the loved one to develop in the way he or she could and fulfill their personal potential. A decision of this kind must be considered a moral failure. But it is a much greater moral failure, even a *perversion*, when, in feeding our own eros-driven need, we actively desire to *prevent* the person's growth and consciously *want* to destroy a possibility available to the person affected. That is to practice the opposite of agapic love, a failing that is considerably more difficult to forgive oneself for.

It is my contention that when the principle of the primacy of agapic love is reversed, when eros is in the ascendancy, greed and hunger for power take over. Unfortunately, this reversal is accepted and even elevated as the ideal in large sectors of today's world. I will be saying much more about that, but for now it is necessarily to look more deeply at the nature of love.

Sounding the Depth of Love

We must not underestimate the power and richness of love. When we attempt to talk about it, we need to use approaches that are adequate to the task. For that reason, I want to take a moment to look at how we perceive objects of our experience, and how we arrive at conclusions about them, and how that affects the practice of love.

Looking More Deeply

One thing we know for certain is that *what we believe* affects how we act. In fact, *belief* may be defined as *an opinion on which a person is prepared to act*. That is why it is so important to explore what we believe about love.

As human beings, we naturally search for foundational explanations concerning all of reality: the fundamental nature of things, the origin of the world, the basic constitution of human beings, the meaning of human existence, and the goals of human interactions. In searching for answers, we begin with our experience. We have to; it is all we have available. William James says of the infant's encounter with the world, "*the baby, assailed by eyes, ears, nose, skin, and entrails at once, feels it all as one great blooming, buzzing confusion.*"⁷ His point is that raw experience comes to us completely undifferentiated, and that through applying our attention to certain aspects of that experience and ignoring others, we pick out combinations that we isolate as "things" and provide with names:

Out of this aboriginal sensible muchness attention carves out objects, which conception then names and identifies forever—in the sky ‘constellations,’ on the earth ‘beach,’ ‘sea,’ ‘cliff,’ ‘bushes,’ ‘grass.’ Out of time we cut ‘days’ and ‘nights,’ ‘summers’ and ‘winters.’ We say what each part of the sensible continuum is, and all the abstracted whats are concepts. The intellectual life of man consists almost wholly in his substitution of a conceptual order for the practical order in which his experience originally comes.⁸

“Carving out” and naming objects occurs because of our ability to *focus* our attention. We start doing this from the moment we are born. It becomes second nature to us, and we do not realize that we are doing it. Without focusing, without paying attention to something and ignoring the rest, and without individuating objects, we would simply perceive the world as impenetrable chaos and be unable to carry out a practical life. As time passes we come to believe the world to be made up of a bunch of preexisting objects that we “find” there, like rocks lying in a field, and we lose track of the part we have played in cutting them out of the “sensible muchness” in the first place. In this sense, the objects of our experience are not pre-existing things but the result of structures we impose. This is not to say there are no “things” with their own unity but to point out what a large role our interest plays in setting up the world we experience and making use of it.

As we, as a race, grow more sophisticated in our searching, we carve out objects of experience that, for practical reasons and to extend our knowledge, we give much closer attention and consider *unique areas of investigation*. A farmer, for instance, is constantly scanning the data of his daily experience to better understand how to successfully raise his crops. We all carve out such areas of investigation from the plenum of experience to put ourselves in a better position to discover, in a systematic and methodical fashion, important information about the area in which we are interested. We spend a great deal of energy gathering data from within the designated region, for which reason I call these areas *data domains*. The data domain of a farmer differs from that of a school teacher or a carpenter. Elements of these experiences may overlap, but each reads their environment from a different perspective and interprets the data they notice according to their differing practical concerns. Then each applies their perspective to the data to form explanatory theories that give a useful picture of how to deal with their data domain. So, a data domain *theory* explains the data from a particular area of investigation. Theories arrived at through an examination of a domain of experience are necessarily limited, since they are devised to apply to a limited domain and arise from applying a limited perspective to the presenting data.

Looked at from a broader perspective, we notice that there is something arbitrary about the domains that we, in this particular culture and at this moment of history, have made the object of systematic investigation. Things could well have been carved up in a different way, and in fact the carving and recarving continues in the present, so that the boundaries of our data domains are constantly shifting. This is most obvious in the history of the development of the sciences. In our culture, where we have worked out what we call the *scientific method* to carry out our investigations, we have produced *Ascientifically@* identifiable disciplines of special study, such as physics, biology, sociology, astronomy, and geology, each with its own domain data. However, this is not enough for us. We want to look more deeply and probe the greater depths of our world.

As William James points out, we instinctively seek

*The principles of explanation that underlie all things without exception, the elements common to gods and men and animals and stones, the first whence and the last whither, of the whole cosmic procession, the conditions of all knowing, and the most general rules of human action—these furnish the problems commonly deemed philosophic par excellence.*⁹

So, willy-nilly, we are *philosophers*. Whether we recognize it or not, we all take up positions on the ultimate issues as we go through life. We may not realize that on a deep, largely unconscious level, we have adopted a stance on these matters, until we are shocked into the realization of that fact when we find ourselves reacting sharply to someone expressing a view opposite to that we have adopted. So, whether consciously or unconsciously, we are always asking the big Why—the ultimate Why. We feel an *instinct* to ask why, and then ask the why of why. Why does this thing move when I push it? Why do power lines hum? Why am I lonely? Why do I have sympathy for others? Why do I seek the truth? Why do I ask so many questions? We answer these Why questions with some explanation, a *theory* that accounts for what we experience. If we take the next step and ask what is the reality behind all our theories, we are asking the ultimate Why, the question of our understanding of the entire cosmos and its history.

In the course of our lives of wondering, we hit upon answers to our Why questions. Some of these answers prove their worth, while others, after time and, upon further reflection, are discarded. We naturally find ourselves making judgments about which explanations work and which do not, and from these we form the basis of some implicit, but for us, compelling, *metaphysical* vision of the nature of reality. That vision is a hard-won system of beliefs that have survived our winnowing process—the last beliefs standing. For people with inquiring minds, their beliefs continue to evolve if they are alive. It is natural to keep on asking Why to the very end. But this is not to say that our ongoing questioning is comfortable. To be a philosopher, and by this, I mean a person who makes a particular point of asking fundamental questions, brings discomfort. It necessarily involves the insecurity of having to constantly re-examine the answers so far attained.

The person who cannot stand that insecurity, who values tranquility of mind above every other consideration, who, for that reason, refuses to give up cherished convictions in the face of new information, who maintains at all cost the safety and the comfort of preserving and protecting petrified beliefs—that person, as Peirce says, “blocks the way of inquiry,”¹⁰ and betrays both science and philosophy. That person shuns and fears the great project of humankind *to collectively work towards the truth*. I personally believe that project is, in fact, well underway. But our collective inquiry is severely hampered when there is reluctance to face *all* the realities that we encounter. To be true to this task we must face every one of what James called the “stubborn facts” of reality, those that will not give way no matter how uncomfortable they make us feel. The result of the failure to face them is a mind-numbing collective inertia. The phobia for the new and dread of revision tends to dominate in the world of science, religion, education, and politics today. The effects of this state of affairs on human interactions are devastating. For, as I mentioned at the

beginning of this discussion of looking deeper into things, if there is one thing we can count on, it is that our beliefs affect our moral choices. *Our beliefs about love are central to our personal and social moral lives,* and if we hope to make the world a place where love thrives, we need to make strenuous efforts to continually re-energize our search for truth, both individually and collectively. So, now I would like to look at the attitude of inquiry we need to espouse in order to have some hope of success.

Looking Afresh

The first thing is to be aware of how easily we can jump to conclusions about what we are experiencing. We tend to want to securely formulate our explanations about our experiences as soon as possible, so we can have that matter settled and move on. Unfortunately, this will mean being satisfied with pre-judgments—judgments made before all the facts of experience are in. This is where the word “prejudice” comes from. Prejudices of this kind distort our perception of reality and skew our judgments about what are “facts.” These prejudices constitute straight-jackets to our thinking about what is real and what our perceptions mean.

The principal sources of such prejudgments are: 1) authoritative pronouncements from those who have influence on our thinking, and 2) hidden cultural influences, arising from the smaller groups of which we are a part, such as the family or local religious groups, ethnic enclaves, as well as the larger culture, such as, in my case, North American culture. From birth, my culture inculcates standards for living: values, rules about conducting relationships with others, rules of conduct stating what is acceptable and unacceptable when abroad in society, rituals, fashions, fads, and so forth. These influences are propagated through personal encounters, group experiences, and particularly through the various print and electronic media that have come to form the fabric of everyday life. These prejudices can be particularly pernicious when they operate out of sight, in social dark places where innuendo, rumor, and gossip thrive.

The difficulty in becoming aware of how cultural beliefs operate in our lives is magnified by the fact that they have become so broadly accepted, so taken for granted, that our ability to critically identify them is impeded.

The Evisceration of Reality

The human mind is a marvelous thing. It gives us access to an experience of reality that is astonishing. We can both *feel* reality and move toward *understanding* it. However, that ability to understand is closely tied to the ability to make *abstractions: putting aside certain aspects of what we feel in an immediate way about reality*, and focusing on just one aspect or perspective on what we feel. This is how we form abstractions and productively apply them. The ability to make abstractions has given us great gifts, not the least of which is science with all its attendant benefits. But it can also pull us away from the *feeling* of reality in its richness, to such an extent that we can lose sight of the inexhaustible profundity of the world and people.

William James expressed this powerfully when he wrote:

Hence the unsatisfactoriness of all our speculations. On the one hand, so far as they retain any multiplicity in their terms, they fail to get us out of the empirical sand-heap world; on the other, so far as they eliminate multiplicity the practical man despises their empty barrenness. The most they can say is that the elements of the world are such and such, and that each is identical with itself wherever found; but the question Where is it found? the practical man is left to answer by his own wit. Which, of all the essences, shall here and now be held the essence of this concrete thing, the fundamental philosophy never attempts to decide. We are thus led to the conclusion that the simple classification of things is, on the one hand, the best possible theoretic philosophy, but is, on the other, a most miserable and inadequate substitute for the fullness of the truth. It is a monstrous abridgment of life, which, like all abridgments is got by the absolute loss and casting out of real matter. This is why so few human beings truly care for philosophy...The entire man, who feels all needs by turns, will take nothing as an equivalent for life but the fullness of living itself...he will never carry the philosophic yoke upon his shoulders, and when tired of the grey monotony of her problems and insipid spaciousness of her results, will always escape gleefully into the teeming and dramatic richness of the concrete world.¹¹

If we are going to understand love, the richest and deepest of our experiences, we must be aware that love, like any other reality, can be eviscerated and our understanding of it dumbed down by formulating abstractions about it. That would be a great misfortune. So, I want to look a little more closely at how to avoid that. It is important to be vigilant about our own hidden prejudices in our perception of and judgments about reality. For in every case they amount to abstractions that have removed, blocked out, or distorted “real matter,” as James says. When they operate in us excessively, we are the ones who suffer from this evisceration of reality, this denaturing of nature.

Solutions Adequate to the Facts of Experience

One view of reality prevails in our broader culture today. It says everything is physical to the core and that all explanations of reality simply involve determining the complex physical mechanisms that nature has evolved to create the world we see around us and experience within. This position has been variously called deterministic materialism and physicalism. It is a view that derives from that great and powerful abstraction we developed some centuries ago and named “science.” This view has in more modern times become intimately tied in with Newtonian physics. More recently deep cracks and gaping holes in this view of reality have appeared and been increasingly remarked on. It has been the subject of serious criticism from several of the more exacting phenomenologies of our time, from some recent critical philosophical schools, and, now, from science itself in the form of quantum mechanics, which has, in a breathtakingly rapid move, replaced Newtonian physics.

This is not the place to explore the rich veins of philosophical and scientific literature relating to this issue. I would just mention a recent book that I have had something to do with, called *Beyond Physicalism*, edited by Ed Kelly and offering a thorough discussion of the weaknesses of deterministic materialism and initiating an exploration of alternate explanations of the fundamental nature of reality.

The basic mistake that accounts for the existence of dead-end approaches to the understanding of the nature of the world and human experience is what I described above as a rush to judgment, a premature formulation of an explanation or vision of reality that excludes the fullness of the facts that force themselves on us from every side. I would also like to reiterate that the solution to this defect in method is the establishment of a truly uncompromising *phenomenology*. A phenomenology is a method that can be applied to our perceptions to exclude, as far as possible, all prejudgments and hidden distortions in our encounters with the realities that present themselves to us. Only an uncompromising phenomenology, one that weeps us clean of unrecognized prejudices, will allow the formulation of *an adequate understanding of the nature of the reality in which we are immersed*.

In regard to love, how could an adequate sense of its nature and function ever be reached by an approach that is satisfied to say that all reality is simply the result of bits of physical material bumping up against each other in fields of force? If one espouses physicalism, then the fact of love, a profound reality experienced by all people, must be judged unreal and explained as a delusion we construct about something that is merely matter in motion. In that mechanistic framework, the ancient vision of love as a fundamental principle in the very existence of the universe will be looked at as absurd. If the badly flawed and failed phenomenology of physicalism is uncritically accepted, then there is absolutely nothing meaningful that can be said about love, except to describe the process by which the material brain constructs such a delusion.

That is not my view, and I venture to say that there is a growing body of opinion that is similarly dissatisfied with such a view. If we were to adopt this inadequate and failed picture of things, we would be utterly helpless to discuss the personal and social ills that plague the world today—much less propose actions that might remedy those problems. Instead of that dead-end approach, it is sensible to spend our energies seeking the most stringent of phenomenologies and the most fearless and broadly inclusive ways of dealing with the facts of experience to work out a substantial and pragmatically sound vision of the world. Those who include, in their understanding of their experience, a conviction of deep wholeness that involves a sense of *direction* and *meaning* in reality,¹² rightly demand something that goes beyond the empty abstractions of physicalism, something more adequate to the facts.

Evolution and Choices

I evolve, and my choices play a key role in that evolution. My actions are done for *reasons* or *purposes*. Even though some might doubt that there is meaning or purpose in the universe as a whole, at least I know that I make choices for reasons that relate to my development and growth. I evolve through the growth of self that occurs as I activate my capacities. My self evolves over my whole lifetime, and the alterations that occur during that time are such that I hardly know how I can consider myself the same person from beginning to end. How do I know I am the same, that I have continuity of identity? The changes in my self can be so radical that I may be hard pressed to make out what the continuous elements might be. Even possessing the same memories over the years is not a guarantee of continuity, for memories fade, and in some unusual cases disappear altogether. Yet I retain the conviction that, despite all that, I preserve a fundamental identity throughout.

To undertake this investigation, we must tackle the problem of the “I.” On one hand, the nature of my “I” seems simple and self-evident. I say “I” all the time, so surely, I must know what it means. However, the truth is that the “I,” my “I” in particular, remains one of the most elusive realities of our experience.

Peirce’s approaches the “I” and personal identity in the following way. In his scheme of things, to be a person is to be guided by goals, to make decisions to accomplish purposes. A person must possess the power to act, and Peirce identifies that power with the “I”: “*The leading part of the meaning which we express by “I” is the idea of an unrestrained cause of some future events, ...the power of voluntary action.*”¹³ That seems to me to hit the mark about our actual experience of the “I” in making moral decisions. The “I”, which has the power of voluntary action and is the cause of future events, has the responsibility for the choices made regarding those actions. When I use the word “I,” I mean to refer to some specific and undeniable aspects of my experience, namely, 1) that my experiences are mine; I own them, 2) that my voluntary actions are mine, I freely create them, 3) that I have a unique position in the world and a unique perspective on the world, unlike any other.

When we talk about our conscious participation in our own evolution, we are talking about the functions of the “I,” we are talking about moral actions consciously chosen. But we are also talking about choices made on the unconscious level of our psyche. The evidence is overwhelming that we have unconscious or subconscious personal centers that are capable of not only making decisions, but also seeing that those decisions are carried out.¹⁴ This makes the issue of determining the nature of personal responsibility in moral decisions a complex one. When we look to unconscious motivation as well as conscious motivation, we must apply subtle, and, in some cases, controversial analyses of moral intent. Add to that, the fact that the personal unconscious has multiple levels of depth, we must admit we are dealing with considerable complexity.

Putting aside for the moment the difficulty involved in examining unconscious input into our moral decisions, I would like to concentrate on *consciously chosen moral actions*. In this it seems that the mystery of the “I”, mentioned above, confronts us at every point. “I” have certain unique perspectives on my experience. “I” take actions based on those perspectives. “I” am responsible for my actions. My “I” does not evolve. It remains unchanged throughout. The part that evolves I call, following William James, my *me*, my empirical self, that which is the locus of all those changing attributes that I call mine, that aspect of myself that involves. “I” do not evolve, but I have responsibility for the evolution of my “self,” my “me.” What drives my “I”, so to speak, in carrying out this task? It must be agape, the driver of *all evolution*.

When I find myself in a situation that calls for action, I am *compelled* to make a concrete decision about what to do. That compulsion is irresistible, in the sense that if I decide to do nothing, that very decision is a response. The feeling of compulsion to make decisions is founded on my very nature as a human being. If I am alive and conscious, I cannot escape it. In this compulsion, I feel the embedded urge to move, to grow, to evolve. I feel the push of cosmic *agape*. My decision is not directionless, however. Its direction is toward self-enrichment and toward the evolutionary advance of my self, my *me*. My growth is in the direction of realization of my potentials, of becoming more and more of what I can be. Here I feel the urge of *eros*.

But do my decisions *always* involve some degree of eros? Do I ever experience a purely “self-less” agapic momentum? Maybe not. But perhaps there *are* times which I feel the urge to act that involves no discernable motive of self-enrichment, when I “forget myself” and take actions for the benefit of the other alone, when the feeling is simply to promote that other, to further its development. Here there is no desire to build up my personal self, and my “I” becomes an intentional agent of world evolution, an agent of cosmic agape.

Love of Oneself

Human beings are in a unique position when it comes to the practice of agape. As creatures that participate in the universal force of agape, as agents of unconditional, benevolent love, we feel the urge to *love* every existent evolving being. On the other hand, as creatures who are immersed in this world and evolving in it, we experience *being loved* agapically. So, we can be either an agent of agape or its beneficiary. However, as far as we know we are the only creatures who can love *ourselves* agapically, who can be both agents of agape and recipients of agape *in one act of love*. We find ourselves in two positions simultaneously: the agapic lover and the agapically loved. This is what it means to love oneself.

In terms of the previous discussion of the “I” and the “me,” in loving oneself, the “I” loves the “me.” My “I” wishes success and fullness of realization for my “me.” My “me” is my evolving, growing, changing self that engages the world and people through eros, seeking for opportunities for enrichment in that

engagement. The eros operative in my *me* hungers for the fulfillment of my potentials, the realization of my as yet unknown possibilities. It is this active self as an expression of eros, my “me,” that is loved by my “I.”

There are spiritual traditions that denigrate loving oneself as destructive and immoral. They tend to claim that we must identify only with the agapic force in nature and throw off eros. This is impossible, because eros-driven activity, *as I have defined it*, is essential to the existence and evolution of our world. We must all seek the occasions of growth that will move us forward in the development of our latent capacities. There is no other way. Seen from this perspective, self-love is a virtue. Self-neglect is no virtue; it is a failure of agapic love.

There are also individuals who, perhaps because of their psychodynamic history, have a difficult time loving themselves. Peirce insisted that agapic love does not involve “self- sacrifice.”¹⁵ In fact, we are *required* to exercise agapic love toward ourselves. We cannot exclude any creature—including ourselves—from that love. This can be a liberating thought for those who are caught in the throes of self-denigration or self-rejection.

Each person is the author of his or her evolutionary advance, which is fueled by eros. We have the *duty* to look after our own growth and fulfilment. As individual persons, we, and no one else, can perform that duty. Agape desires our fulfilment and supports us in that duty. Rather than viewing that duty is somehow objectionable, agape emphasizes its central role in evolutionary growth.

Evolution

Agape is the foundation for evolution. That is why Peirce called agape *evolutionary love*. Evolutionary love leaves the object of love free to choose its own evolutionary path—it imposes no specific goal on the love object, but supports the process by which it makes its *own* choices. The love object remains free, while evolutionary love gently urges it towards its own unique fulfillment. Evolutionary love is not imparted based on merit and it attaches no strings or conditions to its support. The evolutionary lover is without expectation and demands nothing for itself. It is fully unconditional love.

After Darwin made his discoveries relating to biological evolution in *The Origin of the Species*, published in 1859, many began to apply his principles to other areas, including human culture and social norms. Peirce, however, went further and insisted that evolution is not limited to the biological or sociological, but is a primal characteristic of all that exists. *Everything* evolves.

And everything evolves in a *direction*. Peirce said that “*evolution is nothing more or less than the working out of a definite end*,”¹⁶ and that any general evolutionary theory has to account for that fact. Not that it is possible to show precisely what that direction is. Nevertheless, it can be said that the world is becoming increasingly definite. I believe that over eons of time the universe is working itself toward some future

goal. This occurs through the gradual actualization of the potentials that exists within it. At the beginning of the world, before anything yet existed, there was *nothing*—not a pure nothingness, but a nothingness teeming with potential or possibilities. Over the ages since that beginning, those potentials have been gradually activated, become real existing things which are in constant change, evolving.

In the coming into being of the cosmos, *potential*, the completely indeterminate, becomes determinate *possibilities*, and then emerges as an *existent thing*. The gradual actualization of potential and the fulfillment of possibilities, is what evolution is all about.

An acorn already has a certain determinateness, a set of possibilities that make it fit to become an oak tree, and not a white pine.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the varieties of possible existing specific oak trees that can come from this particular acorn are unlimited and depend on many factors. For example, the actualization of the possibilities in an existent tree may be affected by the environment in which it finds itself, so that growing into a tree in a time of prolonged drought, may lead to a stunted oak tree.

Agapic love provides the direction for the evolutionary process at work in the cosmos. That overarching goal of the cosmos, felt by every evolving thing is: to realize its potential to the greatest possible extent. This encompassing goal gently draws the evolving being forward and at the same time leaves it free to make its own choices about the means it will use to forward its growth. It is important to note that Peirce did not believe that the goal of evolution as a whole was set out beforehand by God or the Absolute. He believed that the direction of evolutionary change, both immediate and in the long run, is provided by the evolving entities themselves, who constantly infuse the element of free, spontaneous choice into the process.

It should come as no surprise that the notion of telos or goal is central. It is central in Peirce's philosophy in terms of what defines mind. Mind is what acts with purpose, moves in the direction of a goal. In other words, mind is equated with life, and life has movement under a telos as its essential nature. Without an overall telos, there is no mind, no life, and no possibility of evolution. Without an overall telos, nothing can be said to develop into anything of real value. The universe progresses by movement toward a desired outcome; it moves forward under the guidance of purposes. But it is important to add to this a crucial idea relating to evolutionary progress. The universe moves forward by means of small goal-driven increments. Each existing thing is constantly setting goals for the next moment of existence, adopting a *telos*, a goal, that then lures it forward to the form it will take at the next moment. These teloi, only partially determined by the present circumstances of the existent thing, lead on to a new moment, at which point a new goal is chosen, and the process continues. Not being fully determined by present conditions, the outcome reveals an element of *cosmic freedom* at work in the continually evolving goals. The scenario of constantly evolving streams of goals is what Peirce called *developmental teleology*.¹⁸ This means that the universe is a flow of shifting mini-goals, which at the same time is working out an active *overall* advance converging on an ideal goal in the distant future, the fulfillment of the universe.

Because this universe has a beginning from which all things that we know of today and that will come into being in the future form a continuum, everything is connected to everything else. It is because of this connectedness that Peirce spoke of a sympathy that pervades all existing things, a sympathy through which all things “sense” everything else, not through what we call the six senses, but through a more basic and vaguer contact sensing. All of creation has this sympathy, but human beings have the special capacity to become conscious of the feeling of sympathy, to come to an understanding of the nature of reality, and to make that understanding, at least partially, conscious.