Love, Cosmic Holism, and Democratic World Law

Glen T. Martin

The urgent need for spiritual transformation on the Earth is directly linked to the urgent need for structural and institutional transformation. That is the most general thesis of my newest book One World Renaissance: Holistic Planetary Transformation Through a Global Social Contract. In the vast literature addressing our many interconnected planetary crises and our endangered future, there are two broad schools of thought that do not often intersect with one another. There are those who promote love and spiritual transformation as the key to addressing our planetary crises and there are others who insist that our global institutions such as neoliberal capitalism and militarized sovereign nation-states must be structurally transformed.

I argue that both are absolutely necessary and equally fundamental. We should be working for structural transformation of our violent and brutal world disorder and we should be simultaneously working to develop our potential for love and compassion towards all other people as well as all living creatures. The holism of our cosmos has been confirmed by astronomers, cosmologists, and quantum physicists throughout the past century. The implications of this holism have profound consequences for human life. But to really internalize this holism and make it operative in our lives we need love.

Strange as it may appear at first, we cannot rightly formulate an epistemology or theory of knowledge without reflecting on love as a component within human knowing. Knowledge cannot be intelligibly formulated as a human capacity without a concomitant consideration of human maturity, perfection, and liberation, and all of these include love. We may formulate a theory of truth as coherence, but proper perception of coherence itself requires love.

For the coherent universe is also a multidimensional universe, in which some of its dimensions are only accessible through a human holism that includes love. Human consciousness relates to the world as a whole, in which all its elements function together, ideally, in harmony. Love is fundamental to this relationship. Despite the fact that love has different senses and involves a number of related aspects of our lives, Indian sage Rabindranath Tagore points out that there is an important sense in which love is an end in itself:

When we find that that state of Nirvana preached by Buddha is through love, then we know for certain that Nirvana is the highest culmination of love. For love is an end in itself. Everything else raises the question “Why?” in our mind, and we require a reason for it. But when we say, “I love,” then there is no room for the “why”; it is the final answer in itself. (2011: 161-62)

Love can and should be a dimension of our knowing, for through it human consciousness can manifest the creative joy in simply being: knowing as ecstatic consciousness: “Inspired by the breath of the universe,” Tagore writes, “the heart, like a reed sings” (2011: 158). Love in its many dimensions expresses itself in wonder, seeks knowledge and understanding, joins together what is separated, and manifests itself in the simple joy in living, a joy that is often at the same time an intuitive awareness, what I have called an “integrative mysticism” (Martin 2005, Chap. 5).

In An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent, philosopher and scholar of world religions John Hick argues not only that the ultimate principle of the universe (which he calls the “Transcendent” or the “Real”) is love, but that the common worldwide criterion by which all the major religions recognize those who know the ultimate reality directly is love or compassion (agape or karuna). Hick quotes key passages from the scriptures of each of the world religions to illustrate this point. He argues that one of the ways that we know the ultimate principle, in addition to reason, direct experience, scriptural testimony, etc., is by seeing it manifested in the saints or holy persons of each of the religions: “Thus the ideal of love, compassion, generosity, mercy has always been a basic factor in the recognition of someone as an authentic mediator of the Real” (2004: 326).

The life of Mohammed, the life of Buddha, or the life of Jesus manifest the Real in human form and speak authentically about the Real to whomever they meet. God is love. The holism of God encompasses all: “inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me” (Matt. 25: 40). This holism of love need not be linked up with religion alone. Christian thinker José Miranda in his scholarly work Marx against the Marxists sees the work of Marx on behalf of the oppressed as the work of justice, which means that Marx affirms God because that recognition is necessarily embodied in someone who recognizes the “absolute moral imperative for justice” (1986: 191). To recognize a universal moral imperative for justice is itself a form of love.
Similarly, philosopher William Sadler in *Existence and Love: A New Approach to Existential Phenomenology* reviews Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology revealing universal structures of human intentionality: the swinging out of ourselves that is the basic mode of human being-in-the-world. Sadler studies a range of literature and psychology to demonstrate that one intentional structure of human existence is love, an insight that changes our conception of human life from the idea of an isolated ego and its development to the relation with others and the community: “From the perspective of love it becomes apparent that the main aim of human life is not to become oneself as an autonomous agent. Man’s existential goal is to transcend his singular self by becoming a person in relation with others. The basic existential structure within which a human being becomes a person is loving coexistence” (1969: 186).

For Sadler, the possibility of such love is part of the very structure of intentionality. Love and the imperative for justice are not subjective, contingent feelings experienced by certain human beings. They are fundamental, objective structures of our being-in-the-world. For Karl Marx, we are estranged from our essential nature, from our communal species being, and the overcoming of that estrangement would mean relationship, solidarity, and love (1972: 124-26).

Sadler insists that the intentional structure of love goes beyond even ethics, or, expressed differently, with Hick, we can assert that the ethical criterion is itself love, going beyond the more formal principles of ethics to the real point: not just proper behavior following abstract principles but compassion, solidarity, reconciliation, reunion, and reintegration. As Sadler concludes, the telos or goal of human life is “loving coexistence,” but loving coexistence transcends simply relating to other people in predominantly formal relationships to an attitude of living in community with other persons, creatures, nature, and the cosmos itself. Spiritual thinker Jiddu Krishnamurti describes this development as the purpose of education:

> It is only when you are constantly inquiring, constantly observing, constantly learning, that you find truth, God, or love; and you cannot inquire, observe, learn, you cannot be deeply aware, if you are afraid. So the function of education, surely, is to eradicate, inwardly as well as outwardly, this fear that destroys human thought, human relationship and love. (1964, pp. 12-13)

Fear binds us to ourselves or our ethnocentric group, blocking our openness to the deeper springs of inspiration. The function of education is not merely “formal” education but the perpetual process of learning and awakening that should be fundamental to every human life and a process of constant attention, constant mindfulness of one’s inner and outer environment, of the world-process and the miraculous cosmos. This passage is one of the rare places where Krishnamurti uses the word “God,” and it is not insignificant that he uses it in relation to love: “truth, God, or love.”

Fear arises from the sense of being an isolated atom threatened by external forces. The process of learning, and loving, for Krishnamurti, is the negation of fear. It is the swinging out of oneself in a deep attention that transcends even the subject-object split, that “state of silent alertness” in which “there is no division between the person who is aware and the object of which he is aware” (ibid. 203). As with Marx and Sadler, this is not merely a subjective idea, but an actualization of the holistic capacity for awareness that is the miracle of being human. The opening up of ourselves leads to “truth, God, or love,” suggesting that ultimate Reality is itself love. Indeed, some of the thinkers today who recognize the holism of the cosmos identify this holism as love.

Unsayability permeates everyday experience, and becomes ever more apparent with non-attached mindfulness, but the ever-growing and evolving self experiences progressively more meaningful forms of love in multiple dimensions. William Johnston writes of agape: “This is the love that is universal, that is going out to the Infinite, that is going out to all men and women, to enemy as well as to friend; it is a love that brings much human joy” (1981: 125). Cosmologist and spiritual thinker Ervin Laszlo identifies the quantum plenum of contemporary physics with “the Akashic Field” of classical Hinduism. The deep oneness of the plenum and the flowing out of the cosmos reciprocally embrace one another in the dynamic wholeness of reality. Laszlo affirms the absolute imperative to love emerging from this holism:

> What it takes is to recover the intuitive feeling that we are part of it, that we are connected. So I could say, coming right down to it: it takes love, the deep, embracing feeling of love. Love is the recognition that the other is not other.... I don’t see even the remotest possibility of creating a sustainable and flourishing world on this planet unless we embrace this embracing love..... But this has never happened for mankind as a whole. Yet now it must happen, because we have become a planetary species. We must extend the embracing love that members of families felt for each other to all people on the planet.... Utopia becomes a possibility at this juncture in our history. (2014: 79-80)

The flowing out of the cosmos from the divine core, itself holistic and still manifesting the primal unity, now experienced as process, order, and structure, perhaps can and should be called love. For theologian Paul Tillich the agape...
taught by Jesus is not an emotion, nor a purely human form of love. *Agape* is attributed by Jesus to the love between human beings, between humans and God, and between God and humans. For Tillich love is the “ontological principle” that unites all things (1967: 134). It is the principle of holism: the drive toward the reunion of the separated, the drive of the parts to unite in a higher whole of solidarity and reconciliation.

For Tillich the rituals and beliefs of religion are pointers to this existential experience, itself an ontological encounter, the living experience of love and the authenticity of faith as “ultimate concern.” To be human is to be a beacon for this two-fold nature of love. Perhaps this is why Jesus, drawing together two percepts from his Hebrew scriptures, links these aspects of rational love together in the great commandments of Matthew 22: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Theologian Michael von Brück writes: “Interior love of God and exterior love of neighbor are therefore two aspects of one love. The one cannot exist without the other” (1991: 104).

Each of us is an expression of the cosmic love that is focused like a laser beam in human consciousness, and it is only in the holistic realization of this fact (“You shall love the Lord your God.”) that we are capable of genuinely rational love for our neighbor as ourselves. We need to be conscious microcosms of the macrocosm, for this is the very condition of having *agape* for all, including ourselves. Not recognizing this is to live with a distorted, alienated, and severely limited form of consciousness.

And love of oneself is not in principle different from the *agape* for others. Others are “ends in themselves.” This basic Kantian formula of respect for “humanity” in myself and others remains the bedrock for holistic ethical reflection. Like myself, others are *temporal beings* whose fundamental *telos* is what philosopher Paul Ricoeur calls the “image of humanity” that emerges from our temporal process of growth and learning as an end of intrinsic worth both for myself and for the human project as a whole: “If humanity is what I esteem in another and in myself, I esteem myself as a thou for another…. I love myself as if what I loved were another” (1967: 188-89). Psychologist Erich Fromm expresses this principle of the holism of self and others in similar terms. One’s love, for Fromm, necessarily includes both self and others:

> From this it follows that my own self, in principle, is a much an object of my love as another person. The affirmation of my own life, happiness, growth, freedom, is rooted in the presence of the basic readiness of and ability for such an affirmation. If an individual has this readiness, he has it also toward himself; if he can only “love” others, he cannot love at all. (1941: 115)

Martin Buber declares that “man is the crystalized potentiality of existence…. That means that man’s action is unforeseeable in its nature and extent, and that even if he were peripheral to the cosmos in everything else, he remains the centre of all surprise in the world” (1972: 437-38). Holism and love are not some dreamy idealism incongruent with the reality of the human situation. They are, rather, a deep discernment of the truth of our situation, substantially confirmed by much of 20th century science and by our immense human potential as “the center of all surprise in the world.”

The minds of those who dominate in the power system of sovereign nation-states, the minds in the Pentagon and the militaries of the various countries, are literally alienated, that is out of touch with the reality of our situation. They are mostly operating under assumptions derived from the early-modern paradigm that have been entirely disproved by science and completely discredited by those who see the human situation clearly. The early modern paradigm gave us a cosmos that was atomistic, mechanistic, and deterministic, a world-view that implies the repudiation of ethics and compassion in favor of a so-called political and economic “realism.” The roots of both unrestrained capitalism and the system of militarized sovereign nation-states lie in this early-modern view of the world.

Holism provides us with these “new, unifying concepts of the universe and the social order” as well as “a new attitude toward ourselves.” It shows scientifically the absolute unity of the universe and the relative unities of all the dynamic fields within it, all interdependent and integrated as the processes of evolutionary and historical emergence continue. It shows our unique and central role as microcosms of the macrocosm. It makes possible a rebirth of the one world and spiritual unity of humankind envisioned by the ancient philosophers, saints, and founders of the great religions: Plato, Plotinus, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Baha’u’llah, Lord Krishna, Jesus, Moses, and Mohammed.

Alfred North Whitehead concludes that the actualization of love and harmony in the world by human creatures is internalized within “the consequent nature of God” and returns to us from God to influence the course of future events. For human beings, God is the “lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire,” and by no means simply an object of reason alone. Our symbolic notion of the Kingdom of God arises from this lure, informing human desire: “It dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love” (1978: 343):
For the kingdom of heaven is with us today…. What is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. By reason of this reciprocal relation, the love of the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world. (Ibid. 351)

Ethics, love, intuition, values, religion, and culture are not “merely subjective” reactions to an impartial “objective” reality. There is “great intelligence and purpose in the cosmos,” philosopher Jacob Needleman affirms, and that cosmic intelligence, purpose, and love are also embodied in us (1975: 119). As Spinoza declared in the 17th century, God “forms the essence of the human mind” (Ethics II, xi), and part of this essence is love. Our purposes are to create harmony, reconciliation, integration, respect for human rights and human dignity, the just rule of democratic world law, universal friendships, and loving relationships. In other words, a renaissance: one world reborn on a truly universal scale.

In the face of this imperative, it becomes clear that our global economic system of neoliberal capitalism and our global political anarchy of some 192, mostly militarized, sovereign nation-states derives from a set of assumptions and institutions over the lives of the people on Earth that actively militates against love, compassion, and affirmation of our unity in diversity on this planet. If we are truly one, then we must also be one economically (without absolute winners and losers) and politically (without militarized sovereign nations that recognize no enforceable law above themselves).

We must express our love for humanity, Earth, and for the astonishing divine-anthropic project of the Cosmos through system transformation encompassing us all. This means one law, one recognition of universal rights and duties for all. From 1968 to 1991, hundreds of world citizens from many countries worked together to write the Constitution for the Federation of Earth (cf. Martin 2010). The Earth Constitution concretizes the unity of humankind in legal, social, spiritual, and cultural forms. Its unity in diversity is the principle of love expressed in institutional form. It not only embodies the unity of love but fosters this spiritual awakening as well. In an important sense, we may say that democratic world law is the 21st century form of love.

There is a dialectic between the structural and the spiritual. Transformation in one area influences the other and vice-versa. As Fromm expresses this: “man reacts to changing external situations by changes in himself, and...these psychological factors in their turn help in molding the economic and social process” (1941: 297-98). To promote “a culture of peace” or an alternative lifestyle “off the grid” is not going to be sufficient as action, nor as a model for planetary transformation. “Another world is possible,” as the protest slogan truly proclaims. But it is only truly possible if humanity is united in a planetary community of law, justice, and reasonable economic equity, which is the 21st century form of love. The way we live our lives in the here and now is intimately and dialectically related to our eschatological possibilities for a transformed future.

And this is precisely why sovereign nation-states can never give us peace—they effectively recognize no law above themselves and reserve the right to “interpret” international laws as they see fit. And the U.N., as a treaty of such nations, has clearly failed to give us peace or prevent the collapsing of our environment. It has been colonized by both the power politics of sovereign nations and by globalized corporate capitalism. Sovereign nations are forever compromising with evil—the evil that they themselves dialectically generate. The present world anti-system perpetuates a never-ending cycle of violence and corruption. It militates against compassion, love, and the principle of unity in diversity.

Only the rule of democratic law, with representatives from all around the world debating the way into the future and how to deal with the multiplicity of our global crises, can give us the peace necessary for both sustainability and human flourishing. A federated Earth is the only practical step that can transform world economics and disarm the world’s power-crazed militarized nation-states, along with their allies the transnational corporations. A federated Earth binds humanity together into a planetary community for the first time, recognizing a common good and linking together the structural and spiritual aspects of our human condition.

The harmonious convergence of spiritual and structural transformation is seen in the work of philosopher Errol E. Harris who characterizes agape as “rational love” (1988: 162-64). The goal inherent in the emergent holistic upsurge of rational love, identified by him and others, can indeed be understood as working toward Kant’s “Kingdom of Ends” or the biblical vision of a Kingdom of God on Earth. But a necessary part of this process, Harris insists (2005), is the foundation of democratic world government. Only the concrete transformation of our global institutions can genuinely open up our higher human possibilities.

The practical organization of societies and communities that flows from the social nature of our humanity (inseparable from our unique individuality) is itself a product of emergent rational love, a step on the way to the reign of God on Earth. Just so is the overcoming of fragmentation and warring among the nation-state entities of Earth and joining them together under democratic world law, which would manifest a much higher level of rational love. I argue that
universal law is inherent in our common human nature. This is why reason, intuition, and love tell us clearly that the only legitimate form of government is non-military democratic government, founded on the equality, freedom, and dignity of all.

Those who live fully and maturely have no need to exploit or dominate others. They have no need to reify the capitalist economic system with the pretense that “these are the objective laws of economics and I am not responsible for living off the labor and misery of others.” Rational love tells us differently. We are morally responsible for both the economic-social order that allows us to live off the unpaid labor of others and the world’s disorder of sovereign nation-states that perpetuates endless wars and violence. Those who live from a mature holistic love also refuse to participate in the militarized madness that characterizes the fragmentation of our precious planet into some 192 substantially incommensurable political entities.

This alone can give us a world where the common good of social democracy and integrated harmony becomes the dominant motivation in every mature human life. And reason tells us clearly that ultimately the only legitimate form of democratic government itself is non-military democratic world government, since the holistic telos of rational love cannot be realized at the level of sovereign nation-states, nor can it be realized in an anarchic world without the rule of just and enforceable law. As Laszlo declares: “Utopia becomes a possibility at this critical juncture of our history.” As Buber insists: “Man is the crystalized potentiality of existence.” Reason, intuition, and love point forward to a social democratic federation for Earth, a basic precondition for a 21st century holistic renaissance. And the Constitution for the Federation of Earth becomes both a blueprint and an ideal around which we can organize our vision of a transformed future for the Earth and humanity.

Works Cited:


(Glen T. Martin is professor of philosophy and chair of Peace Studies at Radford University. He is President of the World Constitution and Parliament Association (WCPA) and a 2013 Laureate of the GUSI Peace Prize International.)