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A Values-Centered Educational Journey Contribution to GTI Forum [The Pedagogy of Transition](#)

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The discussion on educating for a Great Transition is one that has been many years in the making within this group and beyond. I am grateful for the stimulating responses to the paper by [Stephen Sterling](#). With over four decades of teaching, I wonder about changes coming from within academia that are adequate to the multiple challenges we are facing. Yet I remain hopeful that the next generation will demand the changes and that many of these will come from creative alternative programs mentioned in these discussions, including Schumacher College.

One of the major problems I see is that science and humanities have moved further and further apart so that students are left with a largely meaningless worldview from reductionist science and from deconstructionist criticism. Their sense of purpose, conviviality, gratitude, and joy is sidetracked into careerism, materialism, sports, and partying.

There is more to be said about this, but I sense we are all struck by the levels of depression, anxiety, and suicide among our youth that are not addressed adequately by adding more mental health counselors. This was true before the pandemic and has only increased over this last year. Just witness the course of Laurie Santos here at Yale on "Happiness" that has attracted thousands of students and now millions in a Coursera online class. Something is deeply amiss.

In all of our discussions, we somehow avoid questions of deeper meaning and purpose, which are what we seek as humans to make life worthwhile. We have secularized the academy and sanitized pedagogy so that we have left out discussion of the juice that keeps us going. We keep spirituality and religion at a distance, or we park it in Divinity Schools that by and large have not yet adequately addressed the environmental and climate crisis.

It will take some time, if ever, to integrate perspectives of meaning into higher education. The allergy runs deep to considering this. After all, meaning can't be quantified, so is it really "useful"? This is one of the reasons that we created a multimedia project to respond to the deep alienation and search for belonging that is so widespread in our youth and beyond. This project, *Journey of the Universe*, is simply an offering into the challenges of our moment, inspired by Thomas Berry's suggestion in 1978 that we need a [new story](#). It is an effort at a new educational pedagogy and perspective integrating science and humanities.

Berry appreciated the "Great Transition" work, because he recognized it is calling for new principles and perspectives, policies and practices, for our shared planetary future. *Journey* is a small part of this transition on the level of cosmological principles and broad evolutionary perspectives to inspire practical policies and engaged practices.

Journey of the Universe is a [film](#), a [book](#), and a series of [conversations](#) with scientists and environmentalists that are also [podcasts](#). A [curriculum](#) for teachers is posted on the *Journey* [website](#) along with a [bibliography](#). These are being used by secondary school and college teachers across countries. For educators and for a broader public, there are also three [open online classes](#) on Coursera.

Journey of the Universe is a cosmology, although not just in the scientific sense of the study of the early universe. Rather, it is a cosmology in the sense of being an integrated story that explains where both humans and life forms have come from. All cultures have had such stories to give orientation and grounding for human life. We now have the capacity to tell a comprehensive story drawing on astronomy and physics to explain the emergence of galaxies and stars, geology and chemistry to understand the formation of Earth, biology and botany to trace life's evolution, and anthropology and history to see the rise of humans. *Journey* draws on all these disciplines as well as philosophy, religion, and the arts to narrate a story of evolution that is accessible to everyone.

Journey thus weaves science and humanities, along with the social sciences, in a new way that allows for a comprehensive sense of wonder, awe, and gratitude to arise. This approach expands the human perspective beyond an anthropocentric worldview to one that values life's complexity and sees the role of humans as critical to the further flourishing of the Earth community.

Therefore, *Journey* does not rely on reductionist scientism, which tends to see the universe and Earth as simply composed of mechanistic processes. *Journey*, however, recognizes that evolution is governed by natural laws discoverable by scientific methods and empirical observation. The self-organizing dynamics and emergent properties of evolutionary processes are part of the remarkable creativity of evolution, which humans are discovering.

Journey is thus told in a poetic manner while relying on our best knowledge from modern science. Scientific facts and poetic metaphors are interwoven so that viewers of the film or readers of the book can understand how they arose from these creative processes and participate in them. In this spirit, images and metaphors from the wisdom traditions of the world religions and philosophies are also woven into *Journey of the Universe*. Indeed, there are numerous affinities between the world religious and philosophical traditions and *Journey*.

Moreover, the work of the [Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology](#) is also a complement to *Journey of the Universe* as both these projects are concerned with our growing ecological crises. As such, they are trying to awaken humans to recognize our dependence on nature's remarkable intricacy and to find a way forward amidst the unraveling of ecosystems and social systems.

Our contemporary understanding of the universe and Earth, born out of science, is breaking through objective reductionist barriers into the vast reaches of human consciousness. Because we are meaning-making animals, it is inevitable that we would be asking, "What does this unfolding evolutionary process mean to us? How does deep time of a 13.8-billion-year-old universe decenter us and yet recenter us?" We find students hungry to reflect on these questions.

The hope with *Journey* is that by raising such questions we can navigate the shift from an anthropocentric worldview to an "anthropocosmic" worldview. Unrestrained anthropocentrism has encouraged humans to dominate nature whereas an "anthropocosmic" worldview can foster an alignment of humans within the life-giving process of Earth. Such alignment implies an energy transition to solar, wind, and geothermal power. It means building cities and communities within the contours of nature. It honors the power of biomimicry for sustainable technologies and ecosystems. It suggests raising food that is organic and healthy. It rests on the well-being of people and planet being interwoven.

The term anthropocosmic, then, suggests that our full identity as humans is not simply our family, local region, or nation state. Rather, as all earlier civilizations and indigenous peoples have understood in varied ways, we are cosmological beings who are profoundly connected to the unfolding of evolution in the galaxies and stars as well as to the biodiverse life forms on our planet. As indigenous peoples are saying, our cosmovision, namely our integrated cosmology, determines our cosmopolitics. Such a politics advocates for ecojustice—greater inclusivity, equity, and justice for humans and comprehensive care, conservation, and restoration for nature.

With our bifocal vision of science and humanities, we can see and appreciate the immensely complex processes—physical, chemical, geological, and biological—that gave rise to our blue green life-generating planet. From this standpoint, we may enhance the flourishing of life through conserving and preserving, renewing and restoring. May the Great Work within the Great Transition continue—within education and beyond!

About the Author



Mary Evelyn Tucker is a Senior Lecturer and Research Scholar at Yale University and co-directs the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale. Since 1997, she has been a Research Associate at the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies at Harvard. From 1997 to 2000, she served on the International Earth Charter Drafting Committee. She has authored and edited numerous books on Asian religions, the intersection between religion and ecology, and the work of Thomas Berry, and is the co-creator of a multi-media project called *Journey of the Universe*, which includes an Emmy award-winning film. She received her PhD from Columbia University in Japanese Confucianism.

About the Publication

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