

Welcome to Turning Conscience Into Action, the Earth Charter podcast. Join Mirian Vilela, Earth Charter International Executive Director, in her fascinating conversations with great thinkers, scholars and activists from around the world who are working in the fields of sustainability, ethics, education and social transformation. Our purpose is to generate new insights on how to face current global challenges and inspire informed action.

So hello, I'm happy to welcome Brian Swimme, as our very special guest for today's conversation.

Brian is Professor Emeritus at California Institute of Integral Studies, where he taught for years evolutionary cosmology to graduate students in philosophy, cosmology, and consciousness. He's the author of many books of which I want to highlight the ones that I know the most and really like the universe is a green dragon that he published in 1984, the universe story, and his latest book called Cosmogenesis. We are going to talk about that. So Brian, thank you so much for joining us today. Great to be here.

So happy. So we have met, I was trying to recall, during a Earth Charter drafting committee back maybe in 1998 or 1990. So over 25 years ago. And since then, I have been following the work you have been doing, have been very inspired with the work you do. So I'm really very grateful for the opportunity to have this dialogue here with you. And especially because I know you have been advocating for ecological awareness, encouraging the readers of your books to recognize our connection and interconnection, not only with Earth, but with the broader universe, which is also something that is very linked with the worldview that is articulated in the Earth Charter.

So let's start. I would like to start by asking you to share with us or give us a brief comment on the work in collaboration you had with Thomas Berry. Thomas Berry is really my primary teacher. I began my professional life as a professor of mathematics and physics, but I was struggling because the Earth was so much and I didn't know what to do. And then I happened upon an article written by Thomas Berry that completely blew my mind because he said quite simply that science has discovered the evolution of the universe and of Earth and of humanity.

And this really is going to become a common creation story for the entire planet. And so that we're at a moment when humans are going to go beyond just being American or Brazilian or Chinese. And we're going to see ourselves in terms of this huge cosmic evolution. So that my life has changed forever when I read that. And then you met and you became working together and collaborating also, including writing some books, right? Right. So I had the opportunity. I was working with Matthew Fox and he said, would you like to bring anybody in for a course they could give or just a lecture?

And I said, well, I'd love to bring in Thomas Berry. And he said, go ahead, call him up. And I couldn't believe it because I sort of thought I would I would study Thomas Berry's works. But suddenly I had the authority to call him up. Oh, boy. And so that was in Chicago. And he flew out from New York to Chicago. And you know, it wasn't just me, everybody that listened to him felt how they were being transformed because he had

this powerful feeling for the the sacred dimension of our earth. And he conveyed it so deeply.

And then so I I went up to him and I was stuttering and I could barely talk. And I just asked him, could I come to New York and be around him? And he said, yes. And so yeah, and we ended up writing this book together, The Universe Story. So that yeah, that's my whole life really has been pursuing this idea that I first found with Thomas Berry. Beautiful, beautiful. So that encounter was around mid 80s? Early 80s. Early 80s. 81, 82. Yeah. Okay. So what are the key ideas we should know about the universe story?

You have written a book, a whole book about it, which was published in 92. So what are the key ideas we should know and why learning about that and understanding the universe story is so important for our times? Yeah, that is such an important question. I people have tried to summarize this universe story. And one of the here's one of the ways that it's not my way of doing it, but I love it. It's simply this. We have learned that we come from the stars. But that it's just it's just like one sentence, but it can change your whole life so that we have every culture's got stories about where we came from and so forth, and all of them are valuable in their own way.

But this news story coming out of science as empirical data. So the empirical data of realizing that the stars create the elements of our body. So that just if you just touch your skin, you're you're you're touching carbon atoms and phosphorus atoms and nitrogen atoms. Every one of them was constructed inside a star, which then blew up and sent all of its magical elements out into the universe. And then they condensed down into, in our case, the sun and earth. You know, it's we suddenly as we begin to take in this this amazing story, we start to realize that that we are we come out of the earth.

We we are the sun. We were we're not separate. We've been brought forth by all these amazing elements and forces. So I guess another another way of saying. What's the what's the important point of learning this? We discover that all of us are kin, we're cousins. I you can't say it too much. Every human is cousin to every other human. We're cousin with the apes, we're cousin with broccoli. We all come out of the same process. So the interconnectivity is so obvious. Once we get this universe story into our minds and bodies, I'm going to give you one more way of summarizing the whole universe story.

And this is my this is my favorite. The universe began with hydrogen atoms. And if you take a bunch of hydrogen atoms and leave them alone, 14 billion years, they come forth as butterflies, elephants and humans.

It's amazing. You don't need another miracle after that.

Yeah, so is that realization of where we come from or the consciousness of what is in us that should spark a new thinking, a new way of being in the world? Is that right? Exactly. Absolutely. Absolutely. We're we're in the midst of becoming yet a new kind of human being. We we've gone through these phases over time and we're in the midst of this new one where we're becoming planetary as this awareness enters into our our lives. Exactly. So you mean humans of 100 who lived 100, 200, 300 years ago didn't have that level of that kind of understanding and awareness?

Yeah, exactly. They had they had other things, but we we have discovered evolutionary time. And there are other kinds of time. There's there's the clock time, we all know. There's also the organic time of the seasons. These this was known throughout human history. But the idea. That we evolved is very, very recent. You know that one of the most intelligent humans in in in the United States history is Thomas Jefferson. Thomas Jefferson was president, but he he he also he was a scientist. He loved to learn things, but get this.

One of the reasons he promoted what we call the Louisiana purchase. So it's a big chunk of North America that that he wanted to annex to the United States. One of the reasons he was in favor of that is because he was convinced that we would find mastodons out there. Tyrannosaurus Rex. You see, it was it was even even somebody that smart. I didn't know. So we but we we're the generation that has this learned what evolutionary time is. And as that sinks in, we will be different humans. New consciousness will help us to be a different kind of humans.

New consciousness will help us be a different kind of human. Exactly. So when you publish that when you first wrote the universe story back in 1992, 20 years later or around that time, you published a book in a film called The Journey of the Universe, which you co-authored with Mary Edmund Tucker. And it will be interesting for us to hear from you. Within those 20 years of difference between the first, the universe story and the journey of the universe. What new perspectives we can find in the journey of the universe.

And again, why why and how do you think it can be used as an educational instrument, both the book and the film? The. The. The just I guess the concept. Of. Humanities relationship to the universe that. That grew over the 20 years and and so we make this statement is really this comes from. Mary Evelyn Tucker, you know, she and I collaborated, like you said, in making this, but but she came up with this way of of saying who the human is. It's it's and it and by the way. She's she will readily point out that she has been influenced profoundly by Asian traditions, the Chinese and Japanese.

And and so we make the statement in in the book and the film that humanity is the mind and heart of the universe. And first of all, wow, you know, I can praise this phrase because I didn't come up with that. I mean, it just puts you in a good mood. If you think about it, we're the mind and heart of the universe. Wow. And so the way the way I like to to teach that, I think this is the educational part. Is that there there have been very many definitions of what it means to be human over the centuries.

And the human is the rational animal. No, the human is the symbol maker. There all of these are are important, but at least in in Western philosophy, it it's rare to see the human defined in terms of the universe, in terms of the universe. So if unless we can begin to think of the human as a cosmological structure, we're failing to recognize the immense power that has been poured into humanity. And then so you have the question is, you know, it's the mind and heart, mind and heart of the universe.

So just let me just say a few words about the mind. What we've discovered about the universe is that it's expanding. And just one one conclusion that the expansion rate is exactly what it had to be in order for life and humanity to come forward. This astonished the scientists have discovered it. So it is really, really a big thing. And so that the universe

expanded out so that we could come for. And so then the universe, then you can consider the universe as suffused with mine. So the mind of the universe gave birth to the mind of the human that could become aware of the mind of the universe.

So it's this folds back on itself. But right now, so we and you see the kind of power we have as humans. Right now, the question is, what does it mean to be the heart of the universe? And that is that is our this fantastic endeavor that we are involved in. Those of us involved with the Earth Charter. This is a fantastic endeavor of bringing forth the heart of the universe in the form of human beings. So that's a long answer, but I get kind of excited about that. So these these two points you made, we are the mind and the heart of the universe.

And we come from the stars are certainly two things that stands out for me, at least in the film, the journey of the universe. But again, I think many people around the world cannot grasp what does it mean? Does the universe has a mind? Does the universe has a heart? Can we envision that? And again, how can we envision the stars being part of our skins? Can you expand a little bit more on that and how we can explain this to someone? What does it mean to be that we are the minds and the heart of the universe?

Let me let me start off with the we come from the stars, become the stars. So, you know, my wife, my wife teaches grade school and she would invite me in. And so I would I would I would teach the students the universe story. And and so I'd have them I'd have them sit in their their little desks and put on their seatbelt. You know, are you ready? We're going to take off. You know, get ready and we'd take a little fly off. And then I would tell them the story of how of how a star forms and then and how in the center of a star.

The elements are constructed. And I would talk about the elements being then dispersed. But like I say, the explosion of a star dispersed and gathering together in the earth. And I remember this this one little child, Billy. I was saying I was telling them, I said, do you see what this means? That the carbon atoms, the carbon, little tiny, tiny carbon atoms in your skin came from a star. And he was looking at me and he was like his eyes were like mesmerized and he lifted his hand up while he was looking at me and touched his skin.

It was like, wow. It took us it took us like thousands and thousands of years to make that discovery. And here he was a five year old and he was and he was entering into that view of the universe. So I can't be done. You see, I think it it really can be. And then to just to say something about the. Does the universe does the universe have a mind? No, no. The universe. Knows how to create life. Now, you have to put nose in quotation marks because it's a different kind of knowing. The universe, the dynamics, the universe, they know how to create life.

So I'm calling I call that cosmic intelligence. But this came, Mary, no, like this. This this whole notion came to me when I was in grad school. The professor was was explaining the our theory. For how galaxies formed. And then he stopped at the end of the several lectures. He said, he said, so we don't really know yet, but we'll eventually understand how galaxies formed. And I just thought about that. Here are some of the most intelligent humans on earth are trying to think about galaxies and understand them.

And so far they haven't figured it out. And yet the universe created all of those galaxies. Two trillion of them. So who is who is intelligent? The physicist who can't figure out how it's done or the universe that can do it? You see, so this is this is another understanding of mine, admittedly. But yes, I think the universe is suffused with a cosmic form of intelligence. So it's a beautiful way to illustrate how we should envision that. The universe is part of us. It is in us, right in our minds and in our heart.

And this helps us to expand this notion of our interconnectedness and connectedness with the large living world. That's not just we humans where we are, not even just limited to the planet Earth, but our connection with this large living world. It's conscious that it's not yet spread throughout. So again, a few years later, you wrote the Cosmo Genesis. That's your latest book. I understand that, right? So it's interesting because I look at it from a kind of a timeline. You had the first one in 92 and then 20 years later, something else.

And now around 2022, you published the Cosmo Genesis. And in there, you also address the importance of this notion of the expensive universe story and in our firms that we humans. We are cosmological beings. Yeah. Again, these are words or concepts that even expensive universe. Someone could ask, what does that has to do with my life? You know, like, okay, the universe is expensive. So what someone could ask? And then what is this idea of cosmological being? What do you mean by that? When we move, we're using energy.

And then you can ask, well, where did that energy come from? We know it comes from the food and the food ultimately got its energy from the sun. The sun. So that when we are eating, we're consuming energy from the sun. But then you ask, where did the sun get its energy? The sun got its energy from the collapse of a cloud down into a star. So the technical word for this is gravitational potential energy. The word is not important, but I'm just trying to convey the idea that we understand this very, very well.

So then the question is this, where did the cloud get its energy? It got its energy from the birth of the universe. The universe expanded out and so created all of these expansive clouds, all that energy in there. They collapsed down into the stars. One of them is the sun, which transmitted its energy to us. You see, so that every time we do anything, we are using. Energy that came from the birth of the universe. I mean, you know, that's, wow, that's who we are. And then, and then you start to look at, like, we've mentioned the elements of our body.

They come all the hydrogen. I mean, we have tons and tons of hydrogen atoms. They came from in the first within the first million years, all of those hydrogen atoms were constructed. And then we look at our, we look at our lungs, our lungs come from the fish, you know, the, there are brains. The vertebrate brain also came from the fish through the amphibians, through the sea. So that we, we have been put together by the creativity of the universe. Everything about us is a gift. When I was a child, I was walking by a tree near my house and there was a little owl, owl, hi, hi, I've never seen an owl before.

And, you know, I wanted to connect with it. And the only way I knew how to do that was to throw pine cones at it. It was way too high for me to reach, but you know, it was just, I wanted to be part of that little owl's life. And then I, when I went back home, my, I told

my father and he said, no, don't, don't throw it the owl, the owl lives right there. I'm sure there's a mate and a couple of little owls. And so, you know, it was on a pathway and every time I would ride by there, I would think of that little owl and when there was my mind, my consciousness expanded out to include the owl.

Well, the same thing can happen if you go out and look at the, at the stars and you realize that, that you come from those stars and they become, they become part of your life. Not that we're going to change them, but that we can appreciate them. And so this, like this bubble of consciousness expands out, includes the owl and the trees and even the stars. So that gives you a sense of what I mean by cosmological beings. And the great thing is, all of this pertains to every human. We're not limited by our nation states.

We're all cosmological beings. So these, this is also part of the new, what we can find as a special new features or thoughts that we can find in your new book, *Cosmogenesis*.

Yes. Yes, *Cosmogenesis* is, is an exploration of. The way in which we have been constructed by the universe and, and how here's a better phrase would be. I was really interested because I studied this my whole life. Like you said, well, 20 years later, another book, another 20 years, I kept at it my whole life. And I was looking at the evolution of animals and stars and everything to think of. And I realized I had left myself out. I didn't look at my own evolution. And so this is this *Cosmogenesis* is the story of how learning the account of cosmic evolution.

A deconstructed my mind. It deconstructed my consciousness and built, built a new mind and new consciousness. So I don't think I'm unique in this. I think people all around the planet are, are, are, are entering into this process of really giving birth to another kind of human being. And when our consciousness expand. Towards the direction of understanding and being conscious and conscious that we are cosmological beings. Something triggers and changes in, in, in how we relate and how, how we interact in the world.

Is that correct? Absolutely. Exactly. Yeah. So in this new book of yours, *Cosmogenesis*, you. You highlight to stress this idea of cosmological being that we are called cosmological beings and also the importance of being aware of that. And this is among others. The special new features or thoughts that we can find in this new book. Is that right? That's right. And maybe I just leave you with the, like, what's the core message? Here's the core message of the book. Going back to your, your, to go back.

It's like, you can experience this. Go outside at night and look at a star and then just reflect on this. A star is similar to what you're looking at. Gave birth to the elements that compose your body. And now.

Is aware. Of the star. As having composed the body. So that we, we are in that sense. We are the later development of the star. Becoming aware of itself. Thank you so much for helping us to. To expand our sense of awareness on that. So. You're known as one of the greatest. Evolutionary cosmologist thinkers. You know, of our times as I have heard.

So, but in a nutshell, what is this new evolutionary cosmology or evolutionary narrative and why we should pay attention to that? I know it's similar, but I'm just trying to get our audience to go deeper and deeper into this thinking.

Okay. Here would be one answer. If we study the evolutionary story, we understand what is unique about humans, what is unique. Now, I would like to point out before I go any further, that every species is unique. Every species is necessary and important.

I'm not saying that humans are superior. I'm simply saying that we actually have a unique power, just like the phytoplankton have a unique power. See, so now, the unique power that humans have is to fold back on ourselves, by which I mean we can reflect, we can reflect on who we are, what we are, what we're here for.

And we can do this because we've developed symbolic language. Now, every animal species has a language.

There are all kinds of languages out there. But symbolic language can be put into a form that endures through time. What this means is that you and I were born with a mind that is at least 200,000 years old, because humans can keep track of their discoveries and they hand them down to us. So we don't have to rediscover all of that. We're the only known species that does it. And so, you know, that's why we're so powerful. We have 200,000 years of experience.

No other animal can compete with that. But what it enables is us to see that humanity is something like a single organism. Now, this idea was first articulated by the French Jesuit and paleontologist Pierre Thayer Deschardin. He was the one that saw that the way in which we spread over the planet and the way in which we communicate is like building a nervous system. And we're in touch throughout the entire human realm. We're in touch in a way that isn't possible for other species.

So we are the mind of our planet, a very powerful planet. A very powerful planetary mind is emerging inside of us. And we, all of us, in one way or another, are involved with this. If you're working in the communications, just think of the communication technologies that have been developed. And if you're working in education, just think of how we're drawing upon all of the cultures of the planet now. And you see, the Earth Charter is an example of what humanity as a collective can do.

It can imagine a way into the future where all species are enhanced, not just the human. So a study of cosmic evolution could lead one to begin to see how our future is harmony and interconnection. And it gives a powerful sense of hope when we look at the evolutionary story. And we see it in terms of the rising of what Teilhard called the Noosphere. So here's another way of summarizing everything that we've been talking about.

Earth began as molten rock, the Geosphere. It led to life, which spread around the planet, the Biosphere. And now we're living in that moment when the Biosphere is bringing forth the Noosphere, this outer envelope of thought. So entering the Noosphere times. And as you said, when we look at the past, the history, the history of the Universe, it also helps

us to have an understanding and vision of the future, of the destiny, of the future, where we are heading.

Okay, let's go back to a book you wrote in the mid of the 80s. I think it was around the time you were beginning to work with Thomas Berry. The Universe is a Green Dragon.

It's certainly a beautiful book. For me, it's a book that I read many years ago, but it certainly sparked my interest and sensitivity. I would say sensitivity around these issues. It's a book that I think, through which it has helped to awaken our capacity to be in awe facing the beauty of planet Earth and the universe.

So I want to thank you for writing that book. We can see, is it right that it was sort of a conversation between you and Thomas Berry? Oh yes, yes, yes. So in it, you have written about humanity cosmic destiny. So this notion of destiny, where we are going to. And the importance of ecological awareness and our sense, deep sense of interconnection and connection with the universe. Can you reflect from the perspective of the key ideas that we can find in the universe? The universe is a green dragon that continues to be a book that I think everybody should read.

Just to be, to fall in love. It's a book that helps us to fall in love with our connection with the universe. I'd love to. I'd love to. It was, it was after spending a year talking to Thomas Berry. I realized that he had so much wisdom. I just thought the one, the one thing I could do with my life would be to capture it in a book and release it. So that, that's actually the where it all came from. So it's a dialogue between Thomas and myself. I didn't use my name. I was the Thomas and youth, you know, this two people in conversation, but one of the.

One of the most powerful notions in there that really came from Thomas Berry is this, this notion of. Attraction. He got, you know, he had a way of getting people to feel the cosmic dimension of things. So he would speak of attraction. He said attraction exists and at every level. And so it, we have, we have it at the level of stars and galaxies where we call it gravity. And so gravity is holding things together. You know, like these, these huge stars are circling each other because they're held together by gravity.

And then we also have it in terms of what is called a chemical affinity. So the molecules are attracted to one another. And then, and then we discover another level. In our consciousness, we discover attractions in our own lives. And we call this like fascination or interest or love or a lurement. And, and so I, I just found it so exciting to think that when we fall in love. It is a later development of the gravitational attraction that holds the universe together. And I, and I still get excited thinking about it because we feel it directly.

When we fall in love, it, we, for the most part, we, we feel the love and we're drawn to someone. We don't sit back and analyze it and arrive at a logical conclusion so that the, the, it doesn't have to be the attraction to a person. It can be an attraction to a vision. And we're talking about the noosphere and the future harmony of humanity that can so consume us that we can spend a lifetime responding to that attraction. And, and feel this cosmic dimension of our lives. So that I think a lurement is the one word I want to my gravestone.

Thank you. Yeah, that that book continues to be alive and certainly very relevant. I wish and invite all audience to go and find it and read and just reflect on what the universe is a green dragon tell us. And thank you for giving us a glimpse of that from this notion of the sense of attraction. So, let's end our conversation by talking about the Earth Charter, your thoughts on it. And we would like to hear what you think is the value of their first chatter to the current times, and how it relates to the work you have been doing in terms of expanding human consciousness with regards to our place in the universe.

And I see the Earth Charter as is as really as evidence of the next era of humanity. So I, I am, I, I've thought a lot about why we have so much destruction on the planet. Why, why, why, why did humans end up this way and, and by one, my one suggestion is that. We, we had a certain kind of ethics that was given to us by our ancestors now I want to go way back and our, our ancestors like be fruitful and multiply. Of course, people hear that phrase be fruitful multiplied and they say that comes from the Bible, but I'm going back further than that, that that's actually the, the law of of all mammalian species that we generate a surplus of offspring in order for natural selection to work out the wisdom of of an integrated community.

And, and so we early on early on and an indigenous peoples now there was there was an ability to live in harmony with the, the other entities other other organic themes.

But as we developed our power. We went beyond just being another mammalian species. And we became a geological force. Now this. I mean, we can go and look at the sacred scriptures, you know, of America or China or Brazil or anywhere. If you go back in time and look at our sacred scriptures. We don't talk about humanity becoming a geological force. And so the simple way of understanding what happened to us is that our power became so great, we became a planetary species, but our wisdom wisdom traditions didn't evolve enough to match the power.

We needed a planetary wisdom. And so we, I see in the Earth Charter as the it's a it's a recognition by humanity that we have. We have reached a place of profound influence of the planet. And now it's time for us to develop a planetary wisdom that matches this power. And the Earth Charter is, is the first and most important example of this and it's humanity taking responsibility for its planetary role. Well, thank you so much, Ryan and good luck. Thank you for joining us today. Great to be with you. Thank you.

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