

Mary Evelyn Tucker & John Grim at the
New School at Commonweal
A conversation with Michael Lerner
July 12, 2007

"Living Cosmologies: Nature and Spirit Converging"

Michael Lerner: John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, welcome to the New School.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Thank you, Michael.

John Grim: Hello, Michael.

Michael Lerner: You both are historians of religion who are now based at Yale University. You are both senior lecturers and scholars there teaching in the school of Forestry and Environmental Studies as well as the Divinity School and the department of Religious Studies, and you've had a really interesting career working at the interface of religion and the environment. And I want to start with you, Mary Evelyn. You recently edited a book of Thomas Berry's essays called *Evening Thoughts*. And for those of our listeners who don't know Thomas Berry, could you tell us who Thomas Berry is and what you regard as his central message for our time?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Well, it's wonderful to begin with Thomas Berry as our primary teacher and mentor and colleague, who married us, actually, twenty-nine years ago this month.

Michael Lerner: Oh, how wonderful!

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Yes. It's truly, truly wonderful, and we feel immensely blessed. We just came from visiting him this past weekend, and at 92 years old he's still going strong. And so that's great news for all of us who have been influenced by his vision really of the universe as a primary revelation of the sacred, you could say, and he has put us back in touch with the immense scale and depth and dimension of the universe as it has emerged over its almost 14 billion year evolutionary history, and he's given us also this sense of the earth as a numinous presence in that vast universe. And so that would be saying it in its simplest terms, but he's made us understand and feel this as story, and as story that gives us a grounding and direction and in fact an enthusiasm for life. That's probably the way to say it best – a real feeling for the beauty of life, for which we are now responsible.

Michael Lerner: And as I now understand Berry's work, he is a Catholic trained as a Catholic priest. Is that correct?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: He is. But also a cultural historian as a primary area.

Michael Lerner: And early on he studied Teilhard de Chardin in some depth, is that also right?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: That's exactly right. And maybe John wants to say something.

John Grim: Yes. Teilhard de Chardin has been a major influence on Thomas' thought and Thomas would identify that influence in relationship to the sense of story that Teilhard was one of the first, a geologist himself, and one of the first to really identify the universe story, the emergence of the universe story, that mythic dynamic that enabled us to reflect upon ourselves in a new way.

Michael Lerner: So, Chardin, I believe, was born in the 1880's and his primary book is the *Phenomenon of Man*. And in it, as I remember, he left the traditional interpretations of the book of Genesis in favor of a much broader interpretation which got him in some trouble with the Catholic church.

John Grim: There was some difficulty in Teilhard's life with regard to the modernist controversy at the turn of the century, and there was difficulty with many of the Vatican dimensions of the Catholic church, especially with regard to new Biblical scholarship, and Teilhard's address of evolution is one of his singular accomplishments. The whole religion and science dialogue harkens back to Teilhard in many ways.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Teilhard was really a mystical figure as well as a scientist who had this immense experience of what he called the divine milieu – the presence of the divine in the forces and the power of evolution itself and of matter and spirit evolving toward greater consciousness and greater complexity. And that's been an inspiration for Thomas Berry, for Brian Swimme, and certainly for ourselves as well.

Michael Lerner: But Thomas Berry ended up being not entirely uncritical of Chardin's work. He felt there were some ways in which Chardin was limited by his time. Could you describe what those are?

John Grim: I think that's helpful, Michael, to reflect on that, that Teilhard was a person of his times, and Thomas felt especially that Teilhard's emphasis on the human tended towards an anthropocentric or a human oriented emphasis and that Teilhard wasn't able to situate the human within the larger community of life in ways that would be helpful for us today, so in that sense Thomas Berry does help to provide a corrective to Teilhard. And it's an appreciative critique of Teilhard.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: And he was also very aware of Teilhard's over-optimism of building the earth and of a technological hopefulness that probably would meet with a lot of skepticism today. And another area of concern for all of us was that Teilhard was part of his times and wasn't as open to other world religions as we are these days, and certainly as Thomas Berry was, so even though he lived in China for many, many years, he had very little appreciation for the Confucian or Taoist or Buddhist traditions.

John Grim: I think it's interesting also, Michael, that this sense of cosmology is a jumping off place where Thomas Berry not only learned from Teilhard the sense of the emerging universe story, but also Thomas Berry saw within the religious traditions their attention to cosmology, or a creation story. And so his entry into the cultural study of religions brought him to the realization that cosmology is at the heart or the center of religious traditions.

Michael Lerner: And if we go more deeply into Berry's thinking a bit... at the end of the book *Mary Evelyn*, it wasn't clear to me whether this was Berry's work or yours; the first appendix describes twelve principles for understanding the universe. Is that Berry or is that you, or some combination of the two.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Well, you flatter me to think it would have been me, but it's very much Thomas Berry's. He came up with those twelve principles at least twenty years ago, along with his principles for earth jurisprudence, and so these are some of his trying to make simple and clear for people what the ideas of differentiation or subjectivity or communion, might be...

John Grim: I think it's also humorous and helpful to reflect that over the years as we worked with Thomas since the late '60's, these statements of principles such as the twelve principles, at one time they might have been ten, or nine, and then they were eleven, and I say humorous because Thomas himself did not bring these forth fully developed from the mind of Zeus, but rather they worked themselves out over time too, so he was revising and rethinking many of these ideas over the years.

Michael Lerner: So the first of them, just to give our listeners a sense of—I want to read it—“The universe, in its full extension in space and in its sequence in its transformation in time, is best understood as a story. A story known in the 20th century for the first time with scientific precision, through empirical observation. The greatest single need for the survival of the earth or of the human community in the 21st century is for an integral telling of the great story of the universe. This story must provide in our times what mythic stories of earlier times provided as the guiding and energizing sources of the human venture.”

So, that gives us just a sense of what you've both been reflecting on. That Berry had a sense both of the power of science enabling humanity to see the scientific story of the universe for the first time, and also at the same time, as I understand, he saw humanity as playing a very special role in the universe that we in a sense had been evolved by the creative force, whatever we call it, as the eyes and the understanding through which the creative force could see itself. Now, do I have that right? That's my own interpretation.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Yes, I think that's very, very well put. This sense of an inspiring and guiding force of the universe—His essay “The New Story” ends with this sense—If we can.... If the universe evolved and brought forth the galaxies and stars and planet and moved towards the earth and the emergence of life itself, that we can rely on these huge

vast cosmological forces for guidance into the future. And that's one of his great gifts to our present moment. That the human does have a special role, and that's why the ecological crisis needs this sense of a story to orient us in our great work for the planet and its survival.

John Grim: There are these provocative and challenging dimensions of this thought also, for example following from Teilhard, Thomas was very aware of Teilhard's reflection on the work of science by the scientist as a meditative act, so that in that sense a living cosmology—the scientist engaged with the world and wonder in the world, and yet Thomas would raise the question, that when science itself believed it was a cosmology, in other words, science standing in place of the world and its own theories and its own reflections replacing the world, Thomas found that very problematic, so it's very interesting to see the provocative and challenging nuances of this first principle.

Michael Lerner: So going on I'd like to read the fifth and sixth principles together. "Earth within the solar system is a self-emergent, self-propagating, self-nourishing, self-educating, self-governing, self-healing, and self-fulfilling community. All particular life systems must integrate their functioning within this larger complex of mutually-dependent earth systems." And then the sixth principle. "The human emerges within the life systems of earth as that being in whom the universe reflects on and celebrates itself in a special mode of conscious self-awareness. The human is genetically coded toward a further cultural coding invented by the human community with remarkable diversity in the various regions of earth."

So, in a sense, that sets up a conversation about an extraordinary piece of work that the two of you had at Harvard University, as co-directors of the forum on religion and ecology, where you organized ten conferences on world religions and ecology at the center for the study of world religions at Harvard, and edited ten volumes from these conferences. John, one of your special interests is indigenous traditions, and you wrote an essay on the website for the Forum on Religion and Ecology, which is an excellent website, about indigenous traditions and in a sense the challenge of understanding their wisdom because they aren't a religion, in the same sense, even the same broad sense, that the other nine traditions you looked at are.

John Grim: Yes. I often use the word "life-way" Michael to suggest that dimension of religion among indigenous traditions, and by this term life-way I am trying to get at an embracive approach that we tend to separate, say, economics and policy and governance or law apart from religion, but in the indigenous setting these are interwoven so that the religious and spiritual dynamics are interactive in all of these dimensions. Maybe the example that strikes me so poignantly today is the death yesterday of Corbin Harney, a major spokesperson for the Newe or Shoshone people of Nevada. And his decades-long effort to bring the nuclear armament issue and the testing sites in Nevada and the effect on his people—his tireless work over the decades to bring that issue in a spiritual and deeply religious way and all of the environmental issues, so he is also one of these teachers who have given so much over the years, and his passing is much mourned by his people and those involved in these larger issues, but that would be one example I would

think of someone whose religious impulse or their life-way impulse involved them in these larger issues.

Michael Lerner: I saw the notice of his death. He died of cancer, and I wonder if his cancer was related to the nuclear industry that was on their land.

John Grim: Yes. I'm not able to say clearly, but I'm interested, Michael, in the resonance of this type of question with the principle that you read from Thomas about the earth as primary healer. And I think that this is something that Corbin was very clear in trying to focus the question of the nuclear activity and the effect of nuclear radiation on all of us as also involving the earth, and our relationship to the earth, and he was raising deeper and broader questions even than his own health, but certainly related to his health too. The earth as primary healer.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Yeah, and Michael I think this is where your magnificent decades-long work at Commonweal has such a resonance with what Thomas has said in the quotes that you've given us and in the work that we're trying to do, because we do feel we're all part of a great, not just a great work, but a great healing that's at this moment in human history. As Thomas would say often, we can't have healthy people on a sick planet. And something like nuclear testing even in desert sites which are filled with various life forms clearly, and people who have lived there for millennia, that we need to remember that the poisoning of our earth and the pollution of our water and our air and our seas causing an extinction of life forms of fish and birds and this is where we began the environmental movement was Rachel Carson, and *The Silent Spring*, so we're at a new moment of understanding. How can we live in an extinction of species where we need to go forward and renew the earth, restore ecosystems, and restore the health of the planet, and again it's where your work and ours I think meet.

Michael Lerner: Thank you, and actually I don't know if you both know that Thomas Berry was out at Commonweal for two retreats many years ago, and so we were actually very honored to have him here at that time. Mary Evelyn, you have also both worked closely with Matthew Fox in the Bay Area and his tradition of creation spirituality. How do you see his contribution in this lineage that we're discussing?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Well I think Matt Fox, who has been also much influenced by Thomas Berry and of course has also worked closely with Brian Swimme has been a leader in this formation of creation spirituality drawing largely on the western traditions, especially Christianity and the indigenous traditions, and I think his sense very early on of original blessing of creation as a blessing, not as original sin, has been a signature image for the sense that Thomas would suggest of celebration as the purpose of the human in relation to these magnificent seasons—we've just gone through the solstice, and the high energy that summer induces in us I think is indicative of this powerful need to feel ourselves enveloped in the rhythms of the earth in the body of the earth in the animal and spirit presences of the earth. And Matt has helped to inspire this in many, many people in various parts of the U.S. and elsewhere. So, Matt and Brian Swimme have been very important colleagues in our work.

Michael Lerner: And Fox, as I understand, born in 1940, was originally a Catholic priest, and then in 1992 was dismissed from the Dominican Order, actually prior to that, very interestingly, he was forbidden to teach theology by Cardinal Ratzinger, who is now Pope Benedict XVI. Then in '92 he was dismissed from the Dominican Order and in '94 was ordained as an Episcopal priest, by Bishop William Swing, of the Episcopal Diocese of California, and I was very struck in reading that in 2005, while preparing for a presentation in Germany, Fox was moved to prepare 95 theses of his own which he had translated into German and on the weekend of Pentecost arranged to nail them to the door of Wittenburg Church where Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses in the 16th century. So, Fox in these theses was calling for a new reformation in Western Christianity and I assume that that reformation is very much along the lines of Thomas Berry's work.

John Grim: I sense there's a broad call among people who are awakening to this issue now towards an ecological reformation and I think that's very helpful, especially on the Protestant side of Christianity to find in that language and in the historical resonance of that period what happened in the Reformation to awaken a new religious understanding. I sense that Matt is a very good example of someone who is exploring this life-way dimension trying to see the original blessings of the cosmos that we live in and how that understanding and awakening to the cosmology begins to inform dimensions of our life that we've separated out or considered as totally different realms.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: And I think what is interesting is that within all of these traditions, that they are awakening to ecological crisis and struggling to respond to the death of life on the planet that a variety of approaches are emerging, even within Christianity. I attended a conference a couple of months ago at the Vatican on climate change where there is a very clear and keen concern about climate change from the point of view of the effect on the poor around the world and there is probably, I think, going to be an encyclical from this Pope, so, you know, he has conservative views on some things, but he actually has thought about the environment and is very open to it. And so we're hoping for an encyclical in that regard, but as well the Greek Orthodox Patriarch has (Bartholomew) has been a huge leader on these issues and has had symposiums entitled "Religion, Science and the Environment" especially focused on water and we've attended ones on the Baltic and Adriatic and in September we'll be going with him and other environmental leaders especially from Europe to the Arctic to highlight climate change there and he and the last Pope issued a statement in Venice at the end of the last Adriatic symposium, on the environment. All these statements are available up on the Forum on Religion and the Environment web site. And so while there's a great mixture, there's positive emergence and coming forward, I think, on these religions.

John Grim: Yes. In the World Religions and Ecology project that we've undertaken, also brings to mind the work of the Dalai Lama that he has also highlighted environmental issues significantly in so many of his addresses.

Michael Lerner: Yes, I was going to ask you both about the Dalai Lama because in some ways he seems to have captured, perhaps almost more than any other spiritual leader of

our time, the kind of tone that speaks to the non-religious as well as the religious, in terms of an inclusive spirituality that really so many people find compelling. What do you think it is about his message that so resonates across so many different communities of practice?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Well, I heard him first many, many years ago when I was at Columbia and there were other graduate students studying Tibetan Buddhism, and this was in the later '70's, and I've heard him a number of times since, and I think, as we all know, he carries some special sensibility in his person, of a depth of joy even in the midst of a very suffering world. And he seems to penetrate people's hearts with this sense of endurance and humor and levity and a mindfulness that's just astounding considering his own life's journey as I would discuss it with my students in my class on Buddhism – his journey across those Himalayan mountains out of Tibet to settle into Northern India and to establish Tibetan Buddhism there and where John and I also visited in the south of a Tibetan community near Bangalore, this endurance of the Tibetans with the leadership of the Dalai Lama to continue their culture and religion has been astounding, and I think immensely inspiring, but in the midst of all of that he has been so forward thinking about the environment, that I think this has been hugely inspirational to people, because Buddhism contains this magnificent sense of the sentience of life – of all life forms – and of course of the attachment of the humans to their own egos, natures, that we can embed ourselves in the changing and dynamic processes of nature. And that's his great gift to us.

John Grim: And this capacity also to manifest so much authenticity in the face of misperception – I recall at one gathering when two religious leaders – a Christian leader and the Dalai Lama were on the podium and the moderator gestured to the Christian and said, Well, now, you're a theist, and to the Dalai Lama, and now you're an atheist, and the misperception while the literal translation of the terms may be apparent, the misperception is to somehow label the Dalai Lama as someone who doesn't have that depth of compassion that he embodies and these types of misperceptions I find extend into our, say, reading of Islam also—rarely is Islam considered in this question of religion and ecology, but such an Islamicist as Seyyed Hussein Nasr raises such exquisite insights from the Islamic tradition into the human and relations between the human and the earth.

Michael Lerner: Yes, I'm glad that you raised the question of Islam, because it seems to me that in our time there's almost an obligation to raise up the beauty of that tradition in the west. And to speak to its equal dignity with all the other great traditions. And I'm often struck, I wonder if the two of you are, that one could argue that the future of the earth to a considerable degree is going to be determined by whether specifically the Abrahamic traditions can reestablish harmonium among themselves in understanding Spirit, or whether they will continue this extraordinarily destructive path on which they are now embarked. Have you both reflected on that question?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Well of course it's on the minds of so many of us as we look at the Middle East tensions and the war there and the Palestinian and Israeli situation, to say nothing of Iraq and Iran, and of course we have traveled in that region and we were in Iran in 2001 in the summer and in 2005 for a conference that the Iranian government

sponsored with the United Nations environment program on the environmental issues facing that region, and from our view that one of the great paths of inter-religious dialogue is to see the depth issue of the survival of the planet and the region on water issues and things along this line that will overcome the differences of these religions. Already there's cooperation on the Jordan River, for example, of these different religions. And that gives us a source of hope amid these immensely dispiriting conflicts.

Michael Lerner: John, do you want to add to that?

John Grim: Yes, I tend myself toward the somewhat historical issues and I'm reminded that in the colonial period—in the especially late 18th and 19th centuries, within Islam there was a very sharp criticism of its mystical or Sufi tradition. That the diminishment of Islam in relationship to the European colonial powers was laid at the feet of the mystical traditions of Sufism, and that much that was missed at that time was the deep embeddedness of this mystical tradition in the Koran itself, and I find now that with the emergence of the ecological voice within Islam, that it also is embedding itself in Koranic understanding. And this is very important for Islam, not only to have this basis, this fundamental understanding of living cosmologies within Islam as embedded within its own scripture, but then also to move into the natural world with a confidence that the natural world speaks to us about our own intelligence as well as the creative presence. And this in Islam I find is extremely important.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Yeah, and the Islam and Ecology volume is being translated into Arabic, into Farsi, and into Urdu and the work in Indonesia I think should also be remembered, the largest Islamic country in the world. The Imams there are who are working on this issue of the environment—this is below the radar screen—but still, I think, extremely effective work going on.

Michael Lerner: You both have been involved in clearly interfaith work. I don't know if you know the term that I've found has been useful to me—intrafaith work—have you heard anybody use that term?

John Grim: In the sense, Michael, of tradition reflecting upon itself?

Michael Lerner: No. Although that would be a logical explanation of it, but what it refers to rather is that it refers to not simply the sort of mutual understanding and tolerance of different faiths, but rather I was going John to your point about the mystical tradition, the Sufi tradition in Islam, that it seems to me that in almost every faith tradition, I am actually reminded, Mary Evelyn, that you spoke once at a gathering I was at of the different religions as pods of a single consciousness in some sense, and it seems to me that the mystics in all the traditions have sometimes been able to capture that awareness that there was an intrafaith as opposed to interfaith higher level or deeper level of awareness and while one finds that in all traditions, it seems to me that some traditions have been able to more easily make that explicit in their exoteric as well as their esoteric approach to life. So, for example, the Hindu tradition, I think of the Baha'i tradition, the Sufi's, the Quakers, the Universalists—it seems to me that those are among those who

have been able to explicitly acknowledge in effect that there's an underlying oneness, that there be many paths but there's a single truth. And I wonder, you're both historians of religion and I'm a real novice in this field, but can you reflect on the question of whether acknowledging that there is an underlying oneness is indeed easier theologically for some traditions than it is for others.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Well I think that's an extremely important point, and of course on some profound level we as humans seek that deep unity of things. We look for it in the natural world, we look for it in our own interior journeys, and I think that some of this is expressed by what's called the transcendental unity of religions; Fritjof Schoen and people such as Huston Smith and Seyyed Hussein Nasr have been very strong proponents of this unity of world religions. And clearly in the mystical traditions such as you've named and as John has referred to Sufis and others, there is this sense of a unity beyond difference and as experienced internally and so on, and I think that's very, very valuable, and important. It is, as well, and Thomas has always reminded us of this, that the differences are equally inspiring, and in fact noteworthy. You can say all paths may lead to one source and so on, but to celebrate these remarkable differences such as the traditions I study in east Asia of Confucianism and Taoism, and their celebration of the change in dynamic force within things and their understanding of Chi as that which fills the universe and fills the human—these are very different approaches and very much the Chi notion of vital force is a very unified idea of matter and spirit which is quite different from the western approach. So, yes, celebrating unity and so yes also experiencing and reflecting on diversity is our task right now.

John Grim: I'm very pleased that Mary Evelyn took the conversation toward east Asian traditions and Chi, and I want to encourage her to continue that perhaps in relation to the next question, but I wanted to bring to mind an interesting example that most of us just experienced in our reading together when we go for a walk or what not we'll take a piece of literature and reflect upon it, and we happened to pick up the Bhagavad-Gita and were reading some passages to one another and we raised the question to each other – how is it that a text in which the protagonist, Arjuna, is in the midst of a battlefield and he lays down his weapons and he resolves not to fight because these are his kinspeople, kinsmen, on the other side and we reflected to each other how is it that a text about war and in which Krishna calls to Arjuna to fight, to follow his Dharma, how is it that this text could be seen as the text of a unific vision and even a peaceful vision by Gandhi and by Thoreau, how is this possible? And I think your question, Michael, raises that issue that here is a tradition in which the call to Dharma or that deep commitment to one's life—what is the sincere life – when one takes – living cosmology that one is called to. It's a sense of the higher unity that once was that deep dharmic drive in the universe and how one is called to it, it's suddenly those acts of violence, those sense of involving one in ego – they become lesser drives, a lesser life, and one aspires to the higher life, so even a text which situates war can be a text leading to a higher mystical vision.

Michael Lerner: That's beautiful, and I love the idea. Did you tell me it was near your 39th anniversary? Did I hear that?

John and Mary Evelyn: 29th.

Michael Lerner: 29th. All right. I gave you an extra ten years. It's wonderful to me that on your 29th anniversary—by the way, my wife and I had our 24th anniversary this past week too, but it's wonderful that on your 29th anniversary you're taking walks together and choosing texts and reflecting on them together. I think that's such a lovely description of a life partnership. I would like to take you, Mary Evelyn, a little further into the Asian traditions. You recently published a book on Asian spirituality. Could you tell us a little about it?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Yes, well, John and you, Michael, are kind to draw that out. That was actually a 25-year journey. Most of our married life actually, for that book. But it comes out of this fascinating Japanese figure in the 17th Century. His name was Kaibara Ekken, and he was – the book is called *The Philosophy of Chi*, that Columbia published, but it's a translation of his wrestling with issues, of what we were actually just talking about, of unity and diversity, and he was trying to sort out the relationship of Chi which is translated many ways, but vital energy, material force – with another notion of principle, called Li, and he was trying to say that within Chi we see this expression of an organized reality – of a diversified reality and that's the Li, but this argument was very vital and very much discussed across east Asia from China to Korea and Japan, and there were three leading figures, and he is the leading figure in Japan of this discussion. He's actually called the Aristotle of Japan too, because he wanted to understand the form within matter itself, so that the veins of a leaf reveal to us the form or an acorn becoming an oak tree, it gives us that kind of inner form of things. He felt that to understand Chi and the relationship to principle was also a way of cultivating ourselves in relation to nature as we investigated the natural world which he did in whole botanical studies in plants and animals and fish and so on, this connected us to this vital force in reality, and therefore we weren't just withdrawing from nature into some kind of mystical inner essence, we were connecting to and experiencing that vital force in nature and through that contributing to sustainable societies – the Confucian effort was how do we create a flourishing, functioning, sustainable society that has education at the core and political harmony at the center as well. Confucianism has a lot to offer our times.

Michael Lerner: And Confucianism deeply interested Thomas Berry, if I remember correctly.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Exactly. Confucianism and the indigenous traditions were two of his very key inspirations. He, in fact, spent time in China with my professor [Thomas Berry] in '48-'49. And Thomas always felt that that unity described as heaven, earth, and human – that the humans completed these vast cosmological forces described as the ten thousand things or heaven and earth. And that the human has this special role within Confucianism not dissimilar to Teilhard, in fact, as the co-creator with these dynamic forces of the universe. And that's why the role of the human as establishing an engaged politics—an effective educational system—in harmonious societies where the guiding principle for Confucian literati, scholars, and officials—it's why it's one of the oldest continuing civilizations on the planet.

John Grim: And I recall an essay of Thomas' some years back *The Authenticity of Affectivity*, and I believe that essay was published also in the Confucian spirituality volumes that Mary Evelyn and John Berthrong jointly edited, and the use of those two terms from Confucian thought—authenticity of the deepest cosmological dimension in the human, authenticity, and then affectivity—our way of coming to know that deep authenticity. I am so struck by the emphasis in Thomas' reflections that it wasn't simply our rational intelligence that gave us our distinguishing human characteristic, but that deep affectivity, as if a way of coming to know was also imbedded in the senses. It wasn't embodied knowing, and although Thomas didn't pursue that dimension of his thinking that's become a signal of a pathway for my own thinking of late to try and draw out what it is that he was hinting at.

Michael Lerner: Yes, that idea of humanity—of each of us as co-creators with the great force in the universe is a striking one. I know that one finds it in Abraham Joshua Heschel's work, the great Jewish mystic scholar, and throughout mystical Judaism. I wonder, since you all have looked at so many traditions, is that sense of humanity as a co-creator with the great force in the universe of the creation—the ongoing creation—is that widespread or is that restricted to certain specific traditions?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Well I would say that the Confucian and the Taoists have the most highly developed sense of that and the Confucians speak of the human as the mind and heart of heaven and earth—that affective dimension that John just mentioned, but in the east Asian world this sense of mind and heart is one—it's not a dualistic understanding. And I think that that sense of co-creator comes as well from a very ancient idea from the book of history and the Confucian classics where the notion Heaven is one's father, Earth is one's mother, and one is a child of the universe. And therefore the notion of filial piety that's so deeply embedded in the east Asian world—the notion is one gives back reverence and care to all of creation because that has birthed us, that has given us life. It's a very, very powerful sense of the human as part of these processes and of heaven and earth as our parents, literally.

John Grim: One way that I think about the question you've asked, Michael, in regard to co-creativity is that in those religious traditions that reflect upon creativity in the context of creation, or of the world, of the cosmos—that they come to a sense of human knowledge as a source of creativity in relationship to the world, so that there's this interesting co-creativity – but I find it in indigenous tradition very clearly expressed that its not just spirits in the world, so that animism kind of explains that off the table then, but rather it's much more co-creativity, that there is something in the world in which human knowledge, this embodied knowledge can enter into creativity, and in some of the religious traditions—I think the Abrahamic traditions are more in this regard, that reflection upon existence brought those traditions to the creator as the source of creativity so that became a primary drive was to attribute to the creator ultimate creativity. And that the capacity of possibility for co-creatorship was diminished. And that human knowledge was seen as in relationship to this divine creativity.

Michael Lerner: Speaking of co-creativity, one of the themes we haven't touched on yet is eco-feminism. As you both know, the term is originally by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne, in 1974 and was hailed as the third wave of feminism. And one of the volumes from the Forum on Religion and Ecology which you both co-direct, is called *Eco-feminism, An Overview*, by Lois Ann Lorentzon and Heather Eaton who you mentioned as we chatted before we began, has been influenced by Thomas Berry. I noticed, at least in my brief reading in preparing for this conversation of Thomas Berry's work, I didn't see much reference to eco-feminism in his work. And I wonder if you could comment on the spiritual dimension of eco-feminism in relationship to Berry and your own thoughts about its particular contribution.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Well, Thomas has actually referred to the importance of the feminine, as has Teilhard in his work and his thinking, some of this will appear in the new volume of essays that we're editing of Thomas' work right now where for him the image of the earth mother is very profound—in fact, when I first met Thomas in about 1975 one of the very first books he urged me to read was called *The Earth Mother* by Erich Neumann about the symbolism of Mother Earth in the various world religions. And so Thomas has been influenced by this notion, and certainly we are deeply appreciative of the complex and varied contributions of eco-feminists, ranging from Caroline Merchant's extraordinary work on the death of nature showing the degradation of nature and the degradation of women as very parallel, to work such as Charlene Spretnak and Rosemary Ruther, and Sally MacFague, and many of these theologians have participated in the conference series and as I say were deeply resonant with their work. So I think that there's no question that this needs to be further highlighted and explored because more recent work of course is trying to say that not just an essentialism of nature or earth or women but it needs to be further complexified. And I think that's the development of womanist spirituality and others in this area.

Michael Lerner: So this connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature seems to be a central theme in eco-feminism. I wonder if anyone has extended that to think about, as you were suggesting, in a way, Mary Evelyn, the feminine within all of us male and female the degree to which our feminine side has suffered because of the domination of the global machine.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Well, I love that and I think that's absolutely true and I think it's one of the ways in which I value our relationship, John and mine, because I think he understands and is so close to the feminine qualities of life and power and passion of creativity in individuals and the universe and knows how to support that hugely. And so, I think it's nurturing our feminine side in this hugely patriarchal society I can say my experience in academia has been completely dominated by male ways of thinking and so on. So, we do suffer from this distortion of our world, and that has led to militarism and exploitation of the environment and abuse of women and so on. So, this is all part of a transformation that's taking place right now and how to keep alive the feminine in all of us is absolutely essential.

John Grim: And I'm struck, Michael, by your phrase "the global machine" which flows so easily from that objectifying of this living world around us, and our subsequent treatment of that world as objects for our use. That's become so embedded in our ways of relating to one another and to the world.

Michael Lerner: You know, one of the things I've noted as I've grown older is that I used to think of adults as sort of set in their ways and not changing, but I find that in my own inner life that the dynamic remains very, very strong, and I wanted to ask each of you as we come to a close starting with you, John, where are you personally in your inner journey right now? What are the texts or the traditions that you find yourself exploring and that are most alive for you as we speak today.

John Grim: I'm still very committed to the exploration of diverse indigenous traditions because of their rich creativity. I find that still as I prepare for the teaching of a course this semester at Yale on American Indian Religions and ecology, I find myself reading more in Alaskan Inuit peoples and in their relationship to American Indian peoples in the lower 48, and the richness of these traditions and their sense of reflection upon the dominant American tradition—I'm very intrigued by ways in which indigenous peoples have seen us in all of our nervous energy and these types of reflections call on me to assess this question of living cosmology.

Michael Lerner: And Mary Evelyn?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Well, it's a wonderful question, Michael, and I look forward to keeping in touch as our journeys interweave I trust. And I think one of the things I'm hoping for is to dive into the depths of things in the sense of journeying even further into the interior paths where the spirit rises up, especially for some writing that I'm eager to do that might express some of the things that we've been talking about here of how in these times of such sorrow and such loss can we sustain a hopeful way forward – a sense of the energies of the universe inspiring us and of thoughts for future generations of how they will live on a diminished planet. But in particular I'm hoping to evoke what I might speak about as maybe spiritual nature writing, or something along those lines that would be accessible way beyond academic or scholarly concerns but would speak to this resonance that we all feel as humans, in the face of glorious sunsets, or Bolinas weather patterns, and so on. So that's what I'm hoping to do and I hope it will be with a larger community of people and along those lines.

Michael Lerner: Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, thank you so much for joining us at the new school.

John Grim: It's been wonderful talking with you.

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Thank you, Michael, and we wish you all the best in your very, very important work for people and the planet.