

Presenter's Notes for "Giving Context to our Historical Moment: Thomas Berry's Instructions for Reinventing the Four Institutions Governing Human Affairs"

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The purpose of my project for the Center for Ecozoic Societies is to determine what specific instructions Thomas offers for reinventing the four core institutions that govern human affairs for the emerging Ecozoic. For this, I did a closer re-reading of his three most influential works: *The Dream of the Earth*, *The Universe Story* and *The Great Work*. The theme that emerged is that, in spite of how radical a shift Thomas seems to be urging our species to undertake, at least when it comes to the structures of organized religion, government and the university, his instructions suggest more of an evolution than a revolution. He says quite clearly that existing institutions can be retooled; they need not be done away with so we can start from scratch. The only one of the core institutions that he suggests a more fundamental reshaping of is the corporations—as, in their present form, they are the chief plunderers of the planet and the chief progenitors of our entrancement with what he called the “demonic dream.”

First, a little about me and how I came to know Thomas...

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My dad got very involved in environmental issues after moving to Greensboro in 1986. He was part of the successful push to start the city's municipal recycling program in the early 1990s and worked to fight sprawl-inducing highway and water projects.

Somebody he met in one of the local environmental groups suggested he connect with Thomas, and he did and brought me along for what became regular lunchtime visits with him once or twice a month.

Eventually, he came to act as a personal professor and learning guide, giving me broad reading assignments and, as he could do like nobody else, giving me an encompassing context in which to view what I was learning in history, literature and science.

I was moved by the depth of his analysis and of his spiritual sense of the unity of all things.

This photo shows him at my high school graduation in 2004, 10 years ago this month.

I continued to join him for lunch on a regular basis right up until his death five years ago, which happened just after I moved to Washington, DC. I returned to Greensboro to give a eulogy at his funeral.

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This word best encapsulates the gist of what Thomas sought to convey to his students and his audiences.

Virtually any question you asked Thomas, his answer would draw on lessons from history, science or world religions. His critique of the dominant modern notion of human progress was based in these vast intellectual repositories.

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Thomas repeatedly emphasized just what a cataclysmic historical event the Bubonic Plague was

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Thomas cites Disney World as the living embodiment of this perverted ideal: “a nonthreatening world of fabricated imitations, or caricatures of the universe and all its living manifestations” and “an artificial world where nothing is left of the original spontaneities of nature.”

Thomas calls this entrancing myth “as pure a superstition as was ever professed by humans.”

The myth of linear “progress” that drives Western civilization thrives by disguising itself as something inevitable, as rational behavior, as the only way to satisfy everyone’s needs and desires with no real alternative, and even as a sacred task.

A thought that came to me yesterday during Allysyn’s talk is that perhaps a way to begin to chip away at the techno-industrial mythology is by exposing and ridiculing its absurdities. Because, in the Ecozoic Era, when children are told that people used to think they were on a separate plane from the rest of creation, they’ll laugh and say “that’s ridiculous.” One example of an attempt at such illustration of the true nature of the present industrial economy is the Story of Stuff Project. Their video explains the process that feeds the consumer culture, and the waste it creates, in a way that just makes clear its absurdity.

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People tend to glom most “radical” strains of thought on ecological matters as wanting humans to be treated not as a unique being, but as just one of many animals sharing the earth. Thomas’s philosophy, however, does set humans apart as “the being in which the universe reflects upon itself.” Humans’ uniqueness comes from our capacity to reflect on, exalt, and serve as steward and protector of the Earth community. Instead of being uniquely apart from the rest of the living world, we have a unique role within that world.

Thomas also diverges from the mainstream of science by reading into the pattern of Earth and life’s evolution a purposeful creative force seeking greater diversity, complexity and individuality of each being, while binding it all together in communion. The particular creative tension between forces that the universe achieves drives its quest to enrich and better know itself through greater complexity. The universe, Thomas says, is not simply cosmos, but also cosmogenesis: an ongoing creative process.

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As beings grow, multiply, and come into contact with one another, they will tend to express a multitude of separate identities (differentiation), act upon their own inner guidance and express self-organizing dynamics (subjectivity), and form enduring relationships with all other beings with which they interact that shape their form and function (communion). The fact that nearly all people, and many animals, would consider being confined somewhere where they are unable to interact with anyone or anything to be torture exemplifies how important communion is to life.

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We need learn to be humble and filled with gratitude towards the forces and web of life that sustains us, and we also need to learn to better recognize and respond to our inner spontaneities.

Thomas defines “cosmology” as the framework in which we understand our relationship to the universe—a framework that should show us the proper roles of science and religion within it. As Thomas said to me many times, “science cannot tell us how to use science” and that it and organized religion become destructively self-important in the absence of a guiding cosmology.

We draw our inspiration from the wild and untamed, which is the wellspring of creativity. The key to reorienting our guiding mythology is to incorporate a sense of the sacred dimensions of the natural world into our “cultural coding” under a “functional cosmology.”

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One of Thomas’s strongest, pithiest sayings. His sense of the needed cosmology leads him to a few conclusions about how to rebuild the foundations of these institutions, but he leaves it to us and future generations to figure out the rest.

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The church’s liturgy was once based on seasonal renewal cycles

“Emphasis on the verbal revelation to neglect the manifestation of the divine in the natural world,”

Thomas admonishes in *The Great Work*, “is to mistake the entire revelatory process.” The church has erred in emphasizing “redemption processes to the neglect of creation processes.”

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Recognizing our kinship with all life entails accepting evolution.

Thomas fails to fully consider how difficult it will be both to convince religious fundamentalists to accept the scientific story of how everything came to be, and to convince scientists to consider the spiritual aspect of the Universe.

He also fails to discuss how atheists, agnostics and humanists are to be “brought into the fold” and work in concert with people of faith on the tremendous species-wide project of detoxifying ourselves from the demonic dream and laying a foundation for the Ecozoic Era. There are many who disavow the existence of a spiritual realm, acknowledging the existence only of matter and mind, who nevertheless

are hard-core ecologists and realize the dangers inherent in the Western industrialist mindset. Somehow they will need to be made part of the Ecozoic project, in spite of not subscribing to the spiritual aspects of the work.

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Thomas argues that the supreme fallacy in the principles on which most modern nation-states are founded is that nonhumans are excluded from enjoying rights, thus giving humans the absolute right to do what we want with nonhumans, treating them as property and resources to be used to human ends. This is ultimately self-destructive, he maintains, as it is the community of living and nonliving beings that gives us physical, psychic and spiritual sustenance.

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There seems to be a tension between these two ideas. Is a river, for example, both part of the commons and a being with rights.

Are there cases when an individual's rights must be violated in order to preserve or improve the community's well-being? Is it possible to truly respect the rights of all individuals?

Thomas seems to subscribe to a more relativist notion of rights, rather than an absolutist one. But the idea of beings having rights presupposes that humans should conduct ourselves based on the proposition that other beings have inherent value based on their existing and expressing themselves, rather than humans acting out of a sense of kindness or moral obligation on our part, or acting in our species' broader self-interest.

In other words, other beings have value independent of human judgment, determined simply by their existence. But nature's balance seems to require the sacrifice of certain rights for the good of others or of the community, so this value is not absolute. For example, all animals must kill—either plants or other animals—to have food. This denies their prey the right to be.

Thus, I posit that Thomas would err on the side of the integrity of a community, of an ecosystem, or of a species taking precedence over the absolute right of each member of the community, ecosystem or species to live, to have a suitable place to live, and to fulfill the role assigned by the niche it has made in the community.

Thomas himself had no qualms about eating meat. He is more concerned with human actions that impair or negate other beings' ability to function in a more permanent or substantial manner, such as poisoning them or their surroundings than the simple act of a human killing an animal to eat.

Therefore, he would probably say that the rights of other beings are not meaningfully violated as long as humans take simply what they need for food, clothing, shelter, etc. in a way that doesn't disturb a species' survival or an ecosystem's ability to renew itself and continue to function and flourish.

Thomas's notion of rights is more cosmological, whereas most modern rights theories are tied to the individual, with the degree of an individual's rights being based on the degree to which the individual is capable of suffering or of experiencing harm done to it.

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Viewing rights in a cosmological sense seems to imply viewing them in a more relativistic sense. The modern notion of rights, being inherently tied to the individual, leads to arguments that the greater good is served by denying an individual something that is considered to be a right generally not holding up in court.

Thomas says “The Great Commons of the planet Earth” should be “shared in proportion to need among all members of the Earth community.” It is obvious that some redefinition of human needs will be required. People who are accustomed to all the modern conveniences have trouble conceiving of life without them; thus these “creature comforts” tend to rise to the level of need rather than simply desire. That is why those working to attract more people to be a part of the Ecozoic transition must be careful to present it as providing for a richer and more meaningful life, and then to convince people that the fulfillment we think we get from the consumption of resources that makes for our Western lifestyles is an empty promise.

Attention must also be given to how to conceive of the needs of nonhumans, and to what extent are humans obligated to actively help other creatures meet their needs, rather than simply avoiding actions that interfere with them meeting their own needs.

“The basic elements of personal security and personal property would be protected, although the sense of ownership would be a limited personal relation to property, which would demand use according to the well-being of the property and the well-being of the community, along with the well-being of the individual owner.”

Thomas doesn't seem to go along with the ecologists who call for doing away with the idea of private property. He seems to accept that, because the idea of private property is so ingrained in the Western mindset, retaining it in a limited form, rather than replace it with a strictly communitarian ethic, offers the more feasible path forward.

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A deep human flaw is that we have macrophase power but only a microphase sense of ethics and responsibility, and even that is generally limited to how we treat other humans. Thomas urges us to consider our responsibility to maintain the integrity of the entire Earth process and all its interrelated components.

Thomas defines a bioregion as “an identifiable geographical area of interacting life systems that is relatively self-sustaining in the ever-renewing processes of nature” and as a “self-propagating, self-nourishing, self-educating, self-governing, self-healing and self-fulfilling community.” To redraw the lines separating government jurisdictions—counties, states, nations, etc—to align with bioregion boundaries would be a monumental task fraught with differing interpretations.

It would be incumbent upon each person to learn, through being taught in school or independently, about the geography, fungi, plants and animals in their bioregion and their interactions in order to

establish a suitable way of life within this community. Beyond insisting that bioregion-states be governed in a biocentric, rather than anthropocentric, manner, he does not offer specific instructions for how to govern them. Perhaps he intends to leave it up to the population of each bioregion and its leaders to figure this out for themselves, being guided by their enhanced understanding of their unique habitat's biological, geological and hydrological dynamics.

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Much of my career has been devoted to improving transportation, which is one of few areas in which Thomas offers more specific instructions: "A bioregional roadway will allow walking, bicycling and horseback riding, and would accommodate animal-drawn carriages. The tyranny of the automobile can no longer be accepted."

Automobile dependence is indeed untenable, even if cars are renewably-fueled, because of the sheer amount of land devoted to roads and parking lots in an auto-centric society. But it is strange that Thomas would emphasize the use of horses and animal-drawn carriages and not mention much more energy-efficient and as land-efficient electrified railroads.

Despite their historical role as enablers of resource exploitation, humans have yet to devise a technology capable of moving larger quantities of people and goods efficiently using only electricity, which can be produced from renewable sources such as solar and wind. Railroads do this using minimal land compared to highways and airports. To minimize steep gradients, they tend to be built in harmony with the land's contours.

Robust passenger train service fosters the development of dense, walkable communities around stations that make a car unnecessary for most travel. And, aside from walking and cycling (both of which generally require paths to be cleared), train travel gives one a unique and intimate view of landscapes through which the train passes, and lends itself to socializing amongst passengers, thus aiding social cohesion of disparate populations.

I see railroads as a fine example of an industrial technology that can be adapted to play a benign role in the Ecozoic Era. Being reliant on railroads for the longer-distance movement of people and goods—beyond the range within which our feet or bicycles can carry us—forces a healthy discipline. The unfettered ability to go as far as we want when we want that automobiles and trucks provide leads to a hyper-inflated sense of the possible, which thus leads to sprawling development patterns that gobble up land and fuel. And while the automobile isolates people inside their own moving steel fortresses, the train brings its passengers together in ways that buses and airplanes do not, fostering a more egalitarian sensibility.

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The US Constitution "represents the height of good aspects of the modern world, but it's also a deadly document," Thomas says. "It is deadly to give humans such exaltation, such freedom to own property and do with it whatever they want. The government can't stop them. Nothing can stop them."

So the US Constitution must change, but will simply amending it be sufficient? Thomas seems open to this approach, but to infuse the document with a sense of humans' more humble place in the Earth community, when it thoroughly exalts the human in its current state, will require a great deal of amending.

Thomas repeatedly holds up the United Nations' 1982 World Charter for Nature as a model, so those working to reshape government for the Ecozoic Era at least have a foundation to work from. However, we're still fighting merely to establish that corporations are not people and money is not speech. We should all get behind the effort to amend the Constitution to undo the doctrine of corporate personhood.

"Big corporations require big government—unless the people are willing to accept the corporations as the government," Thomas admonishes. Not only is government necessary to limit the power of corporations, it also provides the basic conditions in which corporations can perform and operate: "almost every industry has come into being and survives with support from public lands and public funds."

Finally, Thomas seems firmly aligned with the current media reform movement being led by groups like Free Press. They seek safeguards for the neutrality of content across Internet service providers and rules that protect community-serving journalism and local voices, and ensure that those with viewpoints opposed to those of the corporate overlords have space on the airwaves. This cause, fortunately, has the US Constitution and American traditions on its side. "The commercial-industrial control of the media can be considered among the most effective forces thwarting and remedial action to save the disintegrating planet," Thomas writes.

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"The corporations have taken possession of human consciousness in order to evoke the deepest of psychic compulsions towards limitless consumption," Thomas puts it succinctly. They entice us with promises of a "Wonderland" achieved through "the ever-increasing exploitation of the Earth through our amazing technologies" and "consumption of products that have been taken violently from the Earth or that react violently with the Earth."

The United States of America is the first nation-state in which large corporations became the dominant organizing principle of the economy, thus coming to a position of influence over the decisions made by an at least structurally, if not functionally, democratic government.

The elements fueling corporations' ability to become so massive are modern communications technologies and, above all, cheap and abundant petroleum. So when petroleum inevitably becomes too scarce and expensive to be widely used, corporations will be unable to maintain supply chains as wide as they currently have. Thomas adheres to E.F. Schumacher's "small is beautiful" philosophy, but he does not directly address the inevitability of a return to smaller-scale economies as petroleum dries up as a cheap, plentiful commodity.

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In the early days of the American republic, companies were chartered to fulfill a limited, public purpose, such as constructing a bridge or canal. Upon the completion of the designated project, the firm would fold. But towards the middle of the 19th century, firms came to be chartered for broader, unlimited purposes. Nevertheless, it remains the case that no company can legally do business without a charter from the state where it is headquartered. So when it all comes down, governments do have the power of “life and death” over corporate “bodies.” If a corporation abuses the public trust or acts in a way that is detrimental to people and/or the planet, the state government ought to revoke its charter.

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Through their power to finance campaigns for elected office, corporations come to treat government the same way they do "natural resources" and labor: something to be manipulated in a manner that results in the greatest profit. They milk subsidies out of government but otherwise want very little government. They ally themselves with right-wing groups championing the cause of personal liberty and small government, convincing the rank-and-file of these groups that “big government” is a greater threat to individuals’ well-being than the consolidation of wealth and political power in the hands of fewer and fewer corporations and very rich individuals.

Part of the solution lies in establishing think tanks to write an effective counter-narrative to that pushed by the corporate-funded libertarian ones.

Somehow, the body politic in functionally democratic countries has to be animated and able to see through the corporate propaganda machine.

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Thomas declares that “opposition between the industrial-commercial entrepreneur and the ecologist can be considered as both the central human issue and the central Earth issue of the twenty-first century.” But I don’t see these as being diametric opposites, and I think there are such people as green entrepreneurs. I don’t see the leaders of most of the major corporations today as being entrepreneurs, but rather oligarchs. So perhaps the word “entrepreneur” in Thomas’s declaration is better replaced with “oligarch.”

The term entrepreneur, to me, connotes a smaller-scale businessperson who is experimenting with novel ways to make money while providing a good or service that he or she sees there being a demand for. Yes, some entrepreneurs see their business grow and become large corporations, or be acquired by or absorbed into large corporations. We should seek a framework in which successful entrepreneurs do not strive to become oligarchs.

There are a significant number of entrepreneurs, especially amongst my generation, dubbed the Millennials, who are starting business that offer an ecologically beneficial product or service, or who seek to demonstrate that business can be done in a way that is ecologically sound and treats workers and consumers fairly and ethically. There is a growing movement of B Corporations or triple bottom line

business: the three “bottom lines” being people, planet and profit. Green America is a national organization that works to nurture and promote ethical and sustainable businesses.

The theory, at least, is that no responsible business should pursue one of these bottom lines at the expense of the others, and that each bottom line is of equal importance. B Corporation leaders see themselves as both entrepreneurs and ecologists. And a band of triple bottom line entrepreneurs may be necessary to weaken the oligarchs by providing goods and services to serve as alternatives to those made by large corporations.

Critics say that the triple bottom line concept is a form of greenwashing and that these businesses are only doing small favors to people and the planet while primarily seeking profit. Regardless of how some self-described triple-bottom-line businesses may be acting in practice now, I hold that the triple bottom line idea offers a valuable framework in which business managers can consider all the consequences of their affairs.

Given that Thomas insists that corporations will continue to exist, any concept that trains corporate leaders to think in terms of the contexts in which they operate or instills the idea that other considerations are as important as turning a profit is one that should be developed in bringing about the Ecozoic Era. Thus, corporations can become a more benign presence while still serving as an effective organizing principle for providing for people’s material needs. I submit that the B Corporation offers a model for the kind of corporation that would exist in the Ecozoic Era: primarily on a small, local scale as an integral component and servant of its human and biological community.

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He touts the idea of “living machines” as a seed for a viable form of industry, and says our technologies should defend us against nature’s destructive forces without themselves being destructive.

Principles on which these can be modeled include:

- That no being nurtures itself—thus every process’s waste should become food or fuel for another
- “The well-being of the soil and the plants that grow there” is paramount
- The sun is the primary power source, so solar energy technologies must be scaled up.
- “Nature abhors uniformity,” so we have to refine our idea of “economies of scale” and the thinking that sees efficiency and cost savings in monocultures and mass production.
- The economy must function in accord with a newfound human intimacy with all other modes of being and deep awe and reverence for the depths of the universe’s mystery. We achieve intimacy with the earth processes by subjecting ourselves to nature's violent and dynamic aspects, not by romanticizing only its pleasant side.

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In the Ecozoic Era’s organic economy, Thomas says, businesses would see the limitations imposed by nature as "strengthening discipline" rather than obstacles to be overcome. Economic cycles of production, use and deposition would be in line with the ever-renewing cycles of nature, with every

waste product becoming useful food or fuel for another organism or process. Thomas suggests that all existing political and economic institutions will continue, but will function in ways that enhance one another, the community, ecosystems and the planet.

Capitalism is simply a tool, and tools can be used for beneficial ends as easily as they can be for malicious ones. The trouble is that capitalism has come to be seen as an ideology in and of itself, and as such has become destructive. What is missing is an overarching, cosmology-based set of norms and expectations that both governments and individual consumers enforce. With such a context in place to guide the use of the tool that is capitalism, it can exist and serve a useful purpose. Entrepreneurs should be able to acquire wealth in the pursuit of providing assets (goods and services) in an ecologically beneficial way. The guiding laws and set of norms will prevent the creation and acquisition of wealth from being seen as the be-all end-all purpose of business—the fallacy at the root of the modern corporate structure.

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Perhaps the national government would grow to a point where it reins in the mega-corporations, then shrink to serve limited functions of overseeing migration and commerce between states and regions, and providing for basic standards of exchange and a larger-scale transportation and infrastructure network, as the centers of power reorganize along bioregional lines. Nonprofits would seem to have a central role in the “re-education” effort: many universities and academies are themselves nonprofits. They are also effective means of organizing people for collective action through a legal body that is freed from the obligation to turn a profit for shareholders.

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It is difficult to overstate Thomas’s emphasis on education. Currently, “our concern for the natural world is one of utility or as an object to satisfy intellectual curiosity or aesthetic feeling.” Because of this alienation, humanity “has lost its own meaning.”

“Education,” he writes, “is the activation of the possibilities of the planet [necessarily through] human intelligence and the entire range of human activities.”

Human education is thus part of Earth's self-education, because humans are “the psychic component of the earth in its most complete expression.” It is how we pass on our cultural coding, which does for humans what genetic coding does for all other species. Education relies on the humanistic traditions because “[science] has been unable to understand the significance of its own achievements. As a consequence, the cultural coding could not be established in an integral form; education remained dependent on its earlier structures for its humanistic meaning.” Or, put more succinctly, “science doesn't tell us how to use science.”

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Coming to know the true story of the Universe's unfolding since the Great Flaring Forth is "the greatest religious, moral and spiritual event that has taken place in these centuries," as it has helped the Universe to get to know itself in an entirely new and much deeper way. It is the story that gives context and meaning to our lives. This story, as scientific inquiry has revealed it to us, must become the basis for all curricula in all subjects in schools, colleges and universities: "Our greatest single need is to accept this story of the universe as we now know this as our sacred story." To this end, I think Neil deGrasse Tyson's current program Cosmos is very much on the right track, and I have heard that Dr. Tyson is familiar with Thomas Berry's ideas.

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Ecology, Thomas says, becomes the foundation for all courses, programs and professions. Ecological economics, for example, is the only true and viable form of economics, as the human economy is a subset of the Earth economy and must be considered as such, instead of as a regime that humans impose on the Earth. We must accept and embrace the Universe Story as our story.

Universities, together with religious institutions that also embrace the Universe Story—thus integrating scientific understanding into theology—must lead the transformation to the Ecozoic Era. This is in part because only the university retains a significant degree of independence from the influence of corporations and their mode of thinking. It is also because the university is the institution that houses the body scientific knowledge, and the one that gives scientists the space and means to pursue knowledge and understanding for own sake instead of having to justify its exploitative utility to a corporate funder (which, sadly, occurs too often in today's universities). This freedom that the university enjoys is necessary, and puts in in position to guide the human community out of the terminal Cenozoic Era.

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Thomas envisions schools and universities becoming place where the universe reflects on itself through the full creative expression of human intelligence. Art, music, literature, and poetry classes, he declares, should be at least as important, if not more so, as the "hard" sciences and social sciences. Perhaps the artistic and the investigative, the creative and the analytical halves of the education sphere will come to better align with the structure of the human brain and join together. In such a re-conceived educational model, artistic expression of concepts taught in a science class, for example, would be not at all unusual. In such a system, it would become difficult to judge students' performance objectively and compare one student to others based on uniform metrics. School and class sizes would necessarily become smaller, and teachers would guide students individually to discover their place in the cosmological order and the Earth community. School would teach students about their bioregion, its history and functioning, and to know, on multiple levels, all the beings they share their home area with. It would give students the tools needed to live and thrive in an ecologically integral way and guide them in acting on their inner spontaneities.

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Education is more than formal schooling. It is perhaps the primary activity that makes us human. It is a pervasive life experience, something we do throughout our lives. Yet formal schooling is necessary to provide the integrating context for each person's own learning journey. Students, Thomas says, should feel involved in a major historical and personal process.

If the purpose of school were presented in this way from the get-go, as part of a great unfolding mythological journey, perhaps fewer young people would rebel against teachers and school authorities, and truancy and dropout rates would cease to be problems.

Sadly, in too many schools, anything beyond what is necessary to allow the student to function as part of the industrial economy is treated as secondary, "elective" or "extracurricular." Such schools, therefore, do not activate the student in the full wholeness of his or her being.

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"What is needed ... is the completion of the story of the physical dimensions of the universe by an account of the numinous and psychic dimensions of the universe." Through this dialectic give-and-take between science, religion and humanities, spurred by the constantly growing and evolving body of knowledge and understanding that each possesses, humanity may come to develop a new cosmology: an overarching sense of the nature of the universe that gives context to scientific, religious and humanitarian enterprises. The lack of cosmology as the overarching context leaves all three trivialized.

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"We do not presently have a terminology suited to a serious consideration of the earth," he writes. We must start by redefining existing words, such as "progress" and "profit," that have been laden with hypernatural meaning in the context of our collective entrancement with the "demonic dream." Moving away from this, the intellectual basis for the present industrial society, we will be like addicts going through withdrawal. But somehow, and it is difficult to fathom how this process will look as the creation of a language takes place over centuries, a new language must come about. The new language would be less explicitly human and more earthly, most likely with more words for natural phenomena and their interactions, and a vocabulary broader than "beautiful," "sublime," "awesome," "fearsome" or "mysterious" to describe the way the Universe, its elements and their powers lay themselves before us. English and other Western languages are useful for dissecting and describing specific parts of things, but not so good at naming and explaining wholenesses and interrelatedness.

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It should guide students into replacing their entrancement with technology with enchantment by the rush of waves, the flights of birds, the power of thunderstorms, the beauty and endurance of trees, the ways of wild animals, etc. Then let them think about and imagine what life would be like if humans

immersed themselves in and truly celebrated these processes. “The feel for life, the skills for creative interaction with the earth process,” Thomas indicates, “these have been suppressed over a series of generations.” This would provide the basis for a viable alternative to the “demonic dream.” This mystique, Thomas says, must be associated with three commitments: to the earth as an irreversible process, to the Ecozoic Era as the only viable form of the millennial ideal, and to a sense of progress that includes the natural as well as the human world.

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- Four archetypes:

Great Mother - maternal principle inherent in universe

Tree of Life - interconnectedness of life and common ancestry

Hero's journey - seeing one's life journey as a microcosm of the Universe Story

Death/Rebirth - New life always springs from death in life's constant transformation

- Present the Universe's unfolding prior to human emergence so that student gets a sense of what it took to make him or her possible
- Understand the great classical cultures' contributions to human development
- Study development of science and technology, leading to an awareness of how this all came to be and understanding of the power that now rests in human hands
- Ecozoic Era course would serve to reestablish the human in its context, heal the damage done, foster a renewing economic order, and finally to identify values to inspire the renewed civilizational energy needed to forge the Ecozoic Era. Earth economics would emphasize the concept of externalities, or of “the tragedy of the commons.” These concepts get at the idea that environmentally detrimental actions tend to come back to bite those who take part in them, and the real costs they impose are borne by others not party to the transaction. But the course would go beyond that, to first teaching how the Earth economy reuses and conserves matter and energy, then exploring ways that human technologies can fit into or mimic these processes.

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Catastrophic moments are also creative moments. This is one of many profound insights Thomas has discerned as his mind melded deep study of so many aspects of Earth and human history. As we face the most catastrophic time in Earth's history, Thomas calls upon people to heed the wisdoms of four groups, teachings that have been either forgotten or perverted as we Westerners have disconnected ourselves from our roots:

- Indigenous peoples, women, classical traditions, and science
- We need to blend all four of these wisdoms as we start to tell the new story that will give us the context to cope with the enveloping consequences of industrial civilization's excesses and build a resilient human framework that is integrated with the dynamics and ever-renewing processes of nature.

- Thomas saw patterns that nobody else saw before, and they led him to some amazing conclusions, but also some deeply troubling ones.
- The general lack of specific instructions in Thomas's writings is perhaps partially intentional: he opened a door and began to lay a path towards a civilizational trajectory that leads away from destruction and towards celebration and fulfillment. But he left it to succeeding generations to lay different paths that diverge from the main path, the way a tree's branches diverge from its trunk. For we all must branch out and flower in our own way, but we are all rooted to the same trunk from which we, and ultimately every other being, originated. While Thomas began to depict what the next branch might look like, more importantly, he helped us to see the trunk and appreciate the whole of the still-growing tree.
- I'll conclude with this quote from *The Dream of the Earth* that offers a hopeful note for the reconciliation of our technology and industry with the demands and limits of the planet: "The purpose of all our science, technology, industry, manufacturing, commerce, and finance is celebration, planetary celebration. ... The final norm of judgment concerning the success or failure of our technologies is the extent to which they enable us to participate more fully in this grand festival."