

“Journey of the Universe”

Response, Kathleen Dean Moore, author of *Wild Comfort* and Co-editor of *Moral Ground*

I have heard it said that even the most tragic and dreadful circumstances give rise to the conditions of their own healing. It may be that we are witnessing this tonight. In a time of terrible peril, here is a new story about who we are and what we must do. This is a great gift to us.

There are three great questions of the human condition: What is the world? What is the place of humans in the world? How, then, shall we live? Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker have taken on them all, from the cosmological to the ethical.

Tonight, I want to call attention to the profound moral significance of the *Journey’s* undertaking, to call attention to the fact that this story about the universe is also a story about who we are when we are at our best.

I believe that this is its central argument (if I may try to summarize the *Journey of the Universe* in one sentence): If this is the way the world is – beautiful, astonishing, mysterious, enfolding and unfolding, grand beyond words, wonderful beyond imagining – then, this is the way we ought to live in the world –with awe, with wonder, with gratitude and celebration, with respect, reverence, profound humanity, and caring.

From what is, we can learn what ought to be.

Some people say you can’t deduce an ought from an is, that you can’t reach a conclusion about what you ought to do, from factual premises, no matter how complete. But of course, you can. Of course, you can, if you are willing to affirm the missing premises, the unspoken moral convictions that link a story of the universe with a moral story. What are those premises?

--The conviction that it is wrong to take what we need for our comfortable, profligate lives, and leave a ransacked and dangerously unstable world behind.

--The conviction that, to let it all slip away, through indifference or recklessness or (god forbid) higher priorities, to let it all slip away – the billions of years it takes to grow the song in a frog and the purple stripe in the throat of a lily – that’s an abomination, not worthy of us as moral beings.

--The conviction that we have affirmative moral obligations to leave a world as rich in creative possibilities as our own – obligations based on justice, compassion, personal integrity, and reverence.

--And the conviction that our moral obligations trump every economic argument and every appeal to short-term advantage and corporate rights.

If we affirm these principles, and if we understand what Mary Evelyn and Brian have shown us, then we cannot fail to act to protect this beautiful Earth and still call ourselves moral beings.

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Mary Evelyn asked me to speak from the heart, and I will, but it's a broken heart that's talking here. But maybe that's as it should be, because maybe only a heart broken open is big enough to hold the import of the universe story.

Grief is essential, because it is a measure of the worth of what we stand to lose, and shame is a measure of what we have to ask of ourselves.

The Canadian songwriter Leonard Cohen said in an interview, "Yes, we live in a broken world, with broken hearts, but that's no excuse for anything. We have to sing a broken-hearted halleluiah.

That what this film is -- a beautiful, ringing halleluiah chorus for a broken time. It says, "Look! Just look at the astonishing fact of this universe and our participation in its creative unfurling. Hold that in your mind. Imagine! Rejoice."

The beauty and the healing of this story – the healing of the rifts in our lives and hearts – call us to what is best in ourselves. The film calls us to recover a sense of wonder and joyous astonishment. It calls us to humility. It calls us to a new intimacy, even with a universe of this grand a scale, to know, in this sacred story, that we belong here, part of the world's unfolding, like the leaves of the corn lily, or the crinkled wings of a dragonfly. It calls us, above all, to gratitude. That we are alive in the midst of all this life. That we are breathing, in the midst of all these breaths, the in and the out.

We didn't earn these gifts. If they were taken away, there is nothing we could do to get them back. They are gifts. So we are called to live our lives gladly – in full acknowledgment of the magnificence of the gifts of the universe.

If these aren't the virtues that will carry us forward, I don't know what will.

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