The following essay would be a stunning accomplishment by a person of any age. It is even more remarkable that it is by Matthew David Segall, a man in his twenties. Matthew undertakes with aplomb the task of making sense of modern science and evolutionary theory in light of Whitehead’s philosophy and also a vision of the ecozoic. He defines his project as “my own attempt to re-construct the philosophical basis for a viable planetary civilization.”

Matthew gives me hope for the future. I don’t know of a finer young, ecozoic philosopher.

Here is his bio:


**Some Concepts in Matthew’s Essay**

In order to understand Matthews’ essay, you may helpful find this description of a few background concepts in Whitehead’s philosophy.

> Before I go on, if what follows here or in Matthew’s paper seems confusing, just think of the universe as a continually developing piece of jazz music made up of zillions of notes played by creative musicians seeking novelty, rich harmonies and beauty.
Whitehead’s cosmology does not begin with the large scale structures of the universe. Rather it begins with the smallest units of existence, the actual occasions, or drops of experience, of which the universe is composed. In his cosmology, each of these drops of experience comes into being through the influence of factors internal and external. His cosmology is “atomic” in the sense that the universe is composed of minute events that make up all there is, but not in the sense that each atomic event is a substance existing in its own right and having only external relations with other atoms. The existence of each event is its becoming (in Whitehead’s technical language, its “concrescence”). Each event has a subjective-creative aspect.

Events form societies. Societies exist but the events that make them up come into being and then perish. You can think of this like a person’s liver. It seems like an enduring object, but its cells are replaced every 150 days. You can also think of this like pixels on a TV screen. The pixels together make up the pictures (analogous to societies), but the pixels flash on and off. The atomic events, that is to say “actual occasions,” in Whitehead’s scheme are much smaller than cells or pixels, they exist at the tiniest possible scale. Also they don’t just flash on and off, they inherit from past events and project something new forward. Societies have synergistic characteristics not possible in any one event.

In the process of concrescence events reach a final form. This form is an expression of an eternal object. Eternal objects are all the ways that things can become actual in the world. They are squares, circles, colors, tones, feelings, and more. Whitehead took the idea of the forms from Plato and then changed them. Whitehead’s eternal objects don’t exist in an abstract world of forms, but rather in actualizing events. An eternal object is anything that can be abstracted from a particular experience and can recur again. For example, redness is in a specific event, but can recur in other events. Whitehead described eternal objects as “pure potentials for the specific determination of fact,” and “forms of definiteness.” There are potentials that have not been realized and those possibilities exist by virtue of the ordering of eternal objects in the primordial nature of God. Some have difficulty with Whitehead’s reference to the term God and prefer to think simply of the primordial order of the universe.

In understanding this myself I think of a piano. It has 66 notes, but the notes are not the strings—the strings give rise to the notes. The notes are harmonically related to each other, not because of the strings but because of the nature of the notes themselves. The notes exist as potentials apart from the strings of any piano. They only come into being, however, when the note is played on the strings. Without the harmonic order of the notes (again not something given by the strings), we wouldn’t have the possibilities of the music that we have. There are limitless possibilities for creativity on a piano, but only because there are 66 harmonically related notes (eternal objects) that can be played by the piano player striking the strings.

Thomas Berry points out that science can tell you how many times the strings vibrate, but it can’t hear the music. Both the vibrations of the string and the notes are “real,” but they are real in a different way. The notes and the effects they have are something real in themselves.
In much of modern philosophy, what is real is the vibration of the strings and the music is our subjective reception or interpretation of the vibrations. To think this what is what Whitehead calls the bi-furcation of nature. It separates the world into what is real and the human response which is subjective. Whitehead seeks to understand nature in a way that all that we experience—emotion, thought, beauty, feeling, compassion, are real in nature.

This is what Thomas Berry was about as well. He wrote on pages 32-33 of *The Great Work*:

To appreciate the numinous aspect of the universe as it is communicated in [the Earth] story, we need to understand that we ourselves activate one of the deepest dimensions of the universe. [That the] special intellectual, emotional, and imaginative capacities [we recognize in ourselves] have existed as dimensions of the universe from its beginning is clear since the universe is ever integral with itself in all its manifestations throughout its vast extension in space and throughout the sequence of its transformations in time. The human is neither an addendum to, nor an intrusion into the universe. We are quintessentially a dimension of the universe.

*And if all of the above or what is in Matthew’s paper seems confusing, just think of the universe as a continually developing piece of jazz music made up of zillions of notes played by creative musicians seeking novelty, rich harmonies and beauty. Then keep reading.*