

Chapter Eleven

Mythology, Worldview, and Cosmology

Every culture, every people, every society must rediscover its own interior cosmology, must arrive at a coherent account of its being in the world, must be able to locate itself in a recognizable world and find for itself the organizing principle of its world.

—Pierre Pascallon¹

Just as culture as cultivation of the soul, the arts, humanities, and heritage of history can be traced back at ancient times, so can culture as mythology, worldview, and cosmology. This manifestation of culture—one of the most neglected but necessary manifestations of culture of all—is required more than ever since it is concerned with what constitutes the foundations and context of everything that exists in the universe: how things came into existence originally, how they function today, and the nature and meaning of culture and the whole in the broadest and most all-encompassing sense possible. Everything in the universe is included in this manifestation of culture in one form or another.

Whether culture is seen in this way, or any other all-encompassing way, it can be visualized as a gigantic tree with roots, trunks, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit. Metaphorically speaking, mythology, worldview, and cosmology constitute the roots; agricultural processes, industrial activities, economic and scientific systems, technological devices, political ideologies, social structures, behavioural practices, environmental elements, and so forth the trunk and branches; and values, value systems, ethical beliefs, intellectual, aesthetic, and humanistic endeavours, and religious, philosophical, and spiritual endeavours and ideals the leaves, flowers, and fruit.

In his book *The Paths of Culture: A General Ethnology*, Kaj Birket-Smith carries this tree metaphor concerning culture a step further when he states:

Culture is like a tree, a fabulous tree in which each branch is formed differently from its neighbour, each flower has its own color and fragrance, each fruit its special sweetness. This wealth and abundance has developed naturally. Each culture and each people bears its individual stamp; but the branches are all shoots of the same trunk and are fed by the same sap. If the branches are cut and detached from the trunk, the flowers wither. We are all members of the great society of mankind [humankind]; our national cultures are part of the culture of the whole world, which we must continue to build up.²

This metaphor of culture as a tree provides an effective way of thinking about and visualizing culture and cultures in general and the whole and wholes in particular. Not only does it deal with culture and cultures in holistic rather than partial or specialized terms—thereby focusing attention on culture and cultures’ all-embracing character and integrative and all-inclusive potential—but it highlights the fundamental relationships, connections, and interdependencies that exist between and among the component parts of culture and cultures. It also depicts culture and cultures as dynamic and living entities as well as organic systems—much like trees—that are constantly changing, evolving, mutating, and adapting over time, much as all living things do.

Having spent the first ten chapters of this book dealing with the trunks, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit of culture and cultures, it is time to deal with the most essential component of culture and cultures, namely the roots. While the roots cannot be seen because they are buried under the ground and therefore hidden from view, there is no doubt that they play the most important role of all in the nurturing, functioning, development, and flourishing of culture and cultures, much as they do for trees. As the old saying goes, “Look after the roots properly and everything else will take care of itself.”

Take mythology, myth, and myths as one of the best illustrations of this. The ancient peoples were very conscious of the mythological

dimensions of culture and cultures because they played the principal role in the growth and development of their lives and societies as complex, dynamic, and organic wholes. As a result, they created many sophisticated *cultural myths* to explain how the world and the universe came into existence in the first place, how things occurred in the world that they couldn't explain, how they became a group, tribe, community, society, or nation, what was most important to them, how they should live their lives and deal with the many challenges and problems that confronted them, how their burial services should be conducted, whether or not there was an afterlife, and what their ultimate purpose and destiny was. As Joseph Campbell, the well-known cultural scholar and expert on mythology, myth, and myths, put it, "the first function of a mythology—myths and mythic rituals, sacred songs and ceremonial dances—is to waken in the individual a sense of awe, wonder, and participation in the inscrutable mystery of being."³ And what is true for individuals is also true for groups, communities, tribes, societies, nations, and all other human collectives. For Campbell, mythology is "the song of the universe" and "the music of the spheres."

A whole series of cultural myths were created by the ancient peoples to explain the diverse experiences, mysteries, and phenomena they encountered. There were *supernatural creation myths* that explained how something could be created from nothing, especially through words, deeds, dreams, and even bodily secretions from some divine source or supernatural power, as well as *earth-driven creation myths* in which some sacred authority, such as a bird or an amphibian, cut through a primordial ocean and brought some substance up from the ocean floor such as sand, mud, or cinders that eventually became the foundation of life and the terrestrial world. There were also *emergence creation myths* in which progenitors passed through a series of different steps, stages, worlds, and metamorphoses until the present world was reached, including primordial beings who were dismembered to form creation, the splitting up and ordering of various entities such as the cracking of "cosmic eggs" that was required to create order out of chaos, and many others.

For centuries, most of these myths were based on superstitions of one type or another.

As ancient peoples in all parts of the world began to study the sky more systematically and carefully, earlier myths grounded in superstition began to give way to either myths based on astronomical observation on the one hand, or religions incorporating one or many gods on the other. Even in religions with many gods, one god generally was recognized as superior to the others, such as Zeus in Greek mythology. Gods usually had abilities far transcending those of human beings, such as the ability to create floods or hurl lightning bolts. But they also displayed many human characteristics as well, such as love, lust, hate, anger, and so on. It was often necessary to make sacrifices to the gods, including offering up animals or sometimes even humans, to gain the gods' favour.

Take early Greek mythology as an example. Not only did the Greek gods act like humans (albeit humans with superpowers), but they involved themselves in mortals' lives in ways that involved rewards and punishments, retributions and rituals, realities and divinations, and much more.

The Greeks created numerous myths to try to understand the way the world worked. Over time these myths grew more and more complex. Joseph Campbell, mentioned earlier, made us aware of the incredible power of myths and their role in making and shaping all the various cultures in the world in his popular book *The Power of Myth*.⁴ Ronald Wright elaborated on this when he said:

Most history, when it has been digested by a people, becomes myth.

Myth is an arrangement of the past, whether real or imagined, in patterns that resonate with a culture's deepest values and aspirations. Myths create and reinforce archetypes so taken for granted, so seemingly axiomatic, that they go unchallenged. Myths are so fraught with meaning that we live and die by them. They are the maps by which cultures navigate through time.⁵

Over time, other worldviews and cosmologies came into existence, ones that relied on natural processes as explanations of how the world worked, rather than the doings of gods. For instance, Plato concluded

that the earth was at the centre of the universe, with the sun, moon, planets, and stars circling around it.

Although a few ancient philosophers like Aristarchus of Samos argued that the earth revolved around the sun, not vice versa, such views made little headway in ancient times as they seemed to defy common sense and everyday observation. The earth-centred or *geocentric* view of the universe reached its pinnacle with the work in the second century A.D. of Claudius Ptolemy, who lived in Alexandria, Egypt. Ptolemy drew on centuries of research and observations by the ancient Greeks and Babylonians to put together a description of the universe with the earth at its centre that remained the dominant cosmology for more than 1400 years. The Ptolemaic system also asserted there were clear links between the nature of the external universe and human nature:

With regard to virtuous conduct in practical actions and character, this science [astronomy], above all things, could make men [women] see clearly; from the constancy, order, symmetry and calm which are associated with the divine, it makes its followers lovers of this divine beauty, accustoming them and reforming their natures, as it were, to a similar spiritual state.⁶

Though it held sway for nearly a millennium and a half, the Ptolemaic worldview eventually proved unable to accommodate increasingly precise and sophisticated observations of the motions of the heavenly bodies and in trying to do so became overly complex and implausible. In 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus, a Polish mathematician and astronomer, published a book asserting that the sun, not the earth, lay at the centre of the universe. The fact the earth makes one complete turn on its axis each day makes it look as though the sun revolves around the earth—but that is an illusion.

In the years after Copernicus advanced his notion of the *heliocentric* (sun-centred) universe, interest in astronomy intensified dramatically. Johannes Kepler, a seventeenth-century German scientist, arrived at laws governing planetary motion that still undergird our understanding of the workings of the solar system today.

The Italian astronomer Galileo was the first to systematically study the night sky with a telescope, in the process discovering mountains on the face of the moon, the four large satellites of Jupiter (they are still called the “Galilean satellites” today), and the phases of Venus, which served as convincing proof that the planets revolved around the sun and not the earth. Following in these scholars’ footsteps, Isaac Newton, an English mathematician, developed the theory of universal gravitation and the three basic laws of motion that form the foundations of the science of physics. Although early in the twentieth century Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity resulted in modifications in Newton’s theories, the differences between the physics of Newton and of Einstein only become apparent in what, by earthly standards, are unusual conditions involving extremely high velocities and masses. In everyday life, including the sending of spacecraft to the moon or other planets, Newton’s laws are entirely sufficient.

Just as the new ideas of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton supplanted earlier scientific views of the universe, so have many of the religious myths, theories, and beliefs concerning the existence of one God or many gods as well as their creation of the universe been challenged as well. Modern views of the origin of the universe date from the 1920s, when it first became clear that many large collections of stars (“galaxies”) existed beyond the boundaries of our home galaxy, the Milky Way, and that almost all of these distant galaxies were moving away from us into deep space. To try to explain this puzzling observation, the Belgian cosmologist and Catholic priest, Georges Lemaître, suggested that all the matter and energy of the universe was originally packed into a single dense particle—a “cosmic egg” or “primeval atom”—that for some reason suddenly exploded, giving rise to the expanding universe that we observe today.

In the century since Lemaître’s time, the so-called “Big Bang” theory of the creation of the universe has been refined and elaborated upon by generations of astronomers, cosmologists, and physicists, to the extent that its current iteration bears about as much resemblance to Lemaître’s original theory as does a late-model Tesla electric car to Henry Ford’s Model T. Although many challenges to the Big Bang theory have emerged over the decades, today it remains the most widely accepted scientific theory of the origins of the universe.

One might think that Lemaître would have found it difficult to carry out his scientific work given that he was a Catholic priest. However, he kept his scientific work quite separate from his religious beliefs, writing:

As far as I can see, such a theory remains entirely outside any metaphysical or religious question. It leaves the materialist free to deny any transcendental Being.... For the believer, it removes any attempt at familiarity with God.... It is consonant with Isaiah speaking of the hidden God, hidden even in the beginning of the universe.⁷

While separating the scientific and religious worldviews was not a problem for Lemaître, it has proved a problem—and a huge problem indeed—for many religions and religious institutions and leaders since that time. The pendulum has swung to the point that while the Big Bang theory is now taught in countless educational institutions throughout the world, religious ideas about the origins of the universe receive far less attention. This reflects an overall trend in western society in which science has taken on increased importance while religion is viewed as less important.

This is largely where matters stand at present, although an enormous amount of research continues in the fields of cosmology and astronomy today. The importance of this subject should not be ignored or dismissed. This is especially true with respect to worldview in general and worldviews in particular. Here is what Albert Schweitzer had to say about this subject:

Even as a student, I used to be struck by the fact that the history of thought was always presented as the history of philosophical systems, not as that of a struggle for a worldview....

Western thought has failed to realize the unsatisfactory nature of the results of its search for a securely based worldview of real value. [Philosophy] has become more and more involved in the discussion of secondary issues. It has lost touch with the elemental questions regarding life and the

world which it is man's [humanity's] task to pose and to solve, and has found satisfaction more and more in discussing problems of a purely academic nature and in a mere virtuosity of philosophical technique. It has become increasingly absorbed in side issues. Instead of genuine classical music it has frequently produced only chamber music, often excellent in its way, but not the real thing. And so this philosophy, which was occupied only in elucidating itself, instead of struggling to achieve a world-view grounded in thought and essential for life, has led us to a position where we are devoid of any world-view at all, and, as an inevitable consequence of this, any real civilization....

Our only possibility of progress lies in thorough comprehension of and immersion in the problem of world-view.⁸

Searching for an acceptable and authentic worldview should be given an extremely high priority going forward into the future, since it is of the utmost importance. At the individual level, every person is compelled to develop a personal worldview that includes thoughts about how the universe came into existence, how individuals function and position themselves in the world, how they should live their lives, and what life and living are really all about. As Anthony Wallace observed:

“World view” attends especially to the way a man [woman], in a particular society, sees himself [herself] in relation to all else. It is the properties of existence as distinguished from, and related to, the self. It is, in short, a man's [woman's] idea of the universe. It is that organization of ideas which answers to a man [woman] the questions: Where am I? Among what do I move? What are my relations to these things?⁹

Just as individuals are compelled to develop personal worldviews, so groups, societies, countries, cultures, and civilizations are also compelled to develop collective worldviews. This is particularly important in terms of people's cultures:

The culture of a people is, then, its total equipment of ideas and institutions and conventionalized activities.... The “world view” of a people ... is the way a people characteristically look outward upon the universe ... “world view” suggests how everything looks to a people, “*the designation of the existent as a whole*” ... “World view” may be used to include the forms of thought and the most comprehensive attitudes towards life.¹⁰

It is the all-encompassing potential and character of culture in this holistic sense that makes it very different from disciplines such as economics or political science, to name only two examples. Whereas most academic disciplines are specialized efforts to enhance human knowledge and understanding of the intimate nature and intricate workings of particular parts of the whole, culture is an all-encompassing, unifying discipline, one designed to enhance knowledge, understanding, and awareness of the structure and functioning of *the whole*, regardless of whether that whole is defined as all human beings, all living species, all interactions in the natural environment, or the entire universe.

This explains why culture and cultures are not just the roots, trunks, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit of the tree, but, also, organic and dynamic wholes composed of countless interrelated parts or elements taken collectively and in totality. The ultimate purpose is to see and understand culture and cultures as holistic entities, and therefore, among many other things, the “contexts” within which all the diverse component parts of culture and cultures as wholes are situated and can be analyzed, understood, explained, and discussed. In other words, culture and cultures are the multidisciplinary, theoretical, and practical containers that are required to house many different disciplines and fields, and therefore act as the unifying forces necessary to see, understand, and order reality.

The crucial importance of this point is amplified by the Canadian philosopher and cultural scholar Jerzy A. Wojciechowski:

Central to each culture are convictions about the universe and about man [people], about his [their] nature, his [their]

relation to the external world, his (their) place in the universe, the meaning of human life, the supreme values, and the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil.... The sum of these convictions forms in each case a unique and distinctive system, differing from culture to culture, even though some of its elements are similar in different cultures.¹¹

If this problem of creating and developing a personal and collective worldview through culture in general and cultures in particular is not taken seriously and fully into account, people will be compelled to accept or adopt other worldviews and cultures or have them thrust on them by other individuals, groups, institutions, governments, or cultures. The trouble with this is that “adopted,” “imposed,” “imported,” or “imitative” worldviews and cultures may be at odds with people’s own individual and collective worldview, perceptions, convictions, beliefs, aspirations, and needs, compelling them to accept things in life that they may not agree with or believe. Clearly it is in the best interests of all people, groups, cultures, and countries to examine their own individual and collective worldviews in detail and in depth, as well as to develop worldviews that are consistent with their own cultural needs, wants, circumstances, and requirements.

To progress further in this area, it is necessary to enter the highly complex but very evocative domain of cosmology. While mythologies, worldviews and cosmologies share certain aspects in common, they are not identical. Speaking generally, mythology, myths, worldview, and worldviews tend to be more concerned with describing and explaining specific situations, including peoples’ beliefs about the original creation and basic functioning of the world, their views on major problems, challenges, needs, and opportunities with respect to these matters, as well as their specific roles, responsibilities, and relationships in the world and the universe.

In contrast, cosmology and cosmologies tend to be more concerned with the substantially larger and vastly more complicated problem of trying to ascertain, understand, and explain the structure and evolution of the universe. This includes how the universe came into existence in the first place; evolved historically; functions today;

and how these matters are most effectively visualized, interpreted, understood, and explained. Some thinkers take an even broader view of cosmology to include such matters as the place of human beings in the universe, how groups, communities, and cultures should be structured, how geographical space is and should be occupied, and how relations should be conducted within and between countries, cultures, species, and the world and the universe at large.¹²

Interestingly, cosmology is derived from two Greek words: *kosmos* (meaning an ordered and harmonious whole) and *logos* (meaning the study of or discussion or discourse about a subject). *Cosmology*, then, concerns itself with discussion or discourse about the universe as a whole, including the logical principles underlying the workings of the universe as an ordered whole or, as the *Cambridge English Dictionary* puts it, “the universe considered as a system with an order and a pattern.” (As a side note, the word “cosmos” is also the name of a beautiful flower that grows in hot climates such as Greece and Mexico. It is a perfect circle in most cases with beautiful petals that are usually pink, red, or multi-coloured.)

And this is not all. Over the centuries, some scholars manifested a belief in what they called “the harmony of the spheres.” This belief was based on the conviction that the universe is governed by numerical proportions as well as the harmonious movement of the heavenly bodies, the sounds of which formed music when blended together. This idea was first put forward by the Greek philosopher Pythagoras in the sixth century B.C. It was also espoused by the early modern astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), who was convinced that the orbits of the planets followed a particular mathematical pattern and that each planet emitted a unique sound that, taken together, resulted in the “music of the spheres.” Although such ideas are no longer held by modern astronomers, it is undeniably true that precise yet complicated mathematical principles underlie the structure of the universe, including such constants as the speed of light in a vacuum and the fine-structure constant, which determines the strength of electromagnetic interactions. As well, a major breakthrough in modern cosmology came with the detection of the *cosmic background radiation*, a faint microwave signal which many astronomers believe to be the fading echo of the Big Bang itself. All in all, the more we

study the cosmos, the more we realize it is a harmonious, ordered, and regenerative whole.

Cosmology, then, is a discipline of crucial importance to people, groups, communities, countries, cultures, and civilizations in all parts of the world, as well as being connected to culture and cultures in a whole series of quintessential and dynamic ways. As Milton Munitz put it:

One of the characteristic, persistent, and irrepressible needs of the human mind is to have a cosmology. It consists in the interest in being able to describe and understand the large-scale global structure of the universe in which we live. An interest in cosmology ... is to be found in virtually every period and culture of recorded history.¹³

Unfortunately, cosmology is often confused with astronomy, with which it shares certain similarities. However, whereas astronomy is concerned with the nature and evolution of individual stars, planets, and galaxies in the universe, cosmology is concerned with the nature and evolution of the universe *as an ordered or structured whole*:

Cosmology is thus the all-embracing science, for it deals with the structure and evolution of the entire universe—everything that we now observe and that we can ever hope to observe in the future. Astronomy, by contrast, deals with the properties of individual objects, such as stars and galaxies.¹⁴

This concern with the organization, nature, functioning, and evolution of the universe as an ordered and structured whole makes cosmology, like culture, a holistic and integrative discipline or field of study rather than a partial and specialized one:

Cosmology is a joint enterprise by science, philosophy, religion, and the arts that seeks to gain understanding of what is unified and is fundamental. As a science, it is the study of the large-scale structure of the universe....

Cosmology is the one science in which specialization is

rather difficult. Its main aim is to assemble the cosmic jigsaw puzzle, not to study in detail any particular jigsaw piece. While all other scientists are pulling the universe apart into more detailed bits and pieces, the cosmologists endeavour to put the pieces together in order to see the picture on the jigsaw puzzle.... The cosmologists, unlike other scientists, take the broad view. *They are like the impressionistic painters who stand well back from their canvas in order not to see too much distracting detail ...*

We cannot study cosmology in the broadest terms unless we pay heed to the pageantry of world pictures that have shaped the history of the human race.¹⁵

It is the all-encompassing nature of cosmology and its intimate connection with culture in the holistic sense that makes it possible to talk about culture being the centrepiece of the world in the next age of human history. Not only are cosmology and culture concerned with seeing the world and the universe from an all-inclusive rather than partial or specialized perspective, but they make it possible to create theoretical and practical frameworks as well as evaluative and assessment mechanisms that are capable of comprehending, confronting, and coming to grips with present and future challenges, problems, and possibilities in the most all-encompassing sense, as well as developing effective, systematic, and impartial methods, techniques, approaches, and systems for dealing with such matters.

Several decades ago, the well-known environmentalist Barbara Ward said, “The chief environmental insight is that all things are linked; but if all things are linked, where is the thread which will lead us through the maze?” It is now clear that culture is this thread, particularly when it is seen and dealt with in the all-embracing, cosmological sense. Surely this explains why Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel laureate for literature, advocated seeing, understanding, and treating culture as *source*—the source from which all things in the world and the universe flow and to which all things return. It is only by travelling back to the source in this profound and all-encompassing cosmological and cultural sense that it will be possible to comprehend and deal with the most debilitating ecological,

economic, social, political, ethical, environmental, spiritual, and other problems that exist in the world today.

One of the most prominent contributors to the development of cosmology and culture in this profound, powerful, and all-encompassing sense was Thomas Berry. Not only was Berry well educated, experienced, and deeply involved in culture, cultures, cultural history, “cultural coding,” and other matters as an internationally renowned and celebrated cultural scholar and historian, but he was a world-famous theologian, Catholic priest, and what he himself called a “geologist,” or a person who is well versed in and very knowledgeable about the arts, sciences, religion, ecology, geology, and cosmology. Berry took a long-term and very expansive cultural and cosmological approach to the vast array of crucial problems related to human life on earth, as well as to community, solidarity, environmental and ecological sustainability, and the well-being of people, the planet, and the universe.

During the course of his life, Berry wrote numerous articles and many books on these matters, such as *The Dream of the Earth*, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, and *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. These books, and others, were predicated on Berry’s belief that the “traditional story” of the earth and the universe is outmoded and ineffective, largely because cosmology over the last few centuries has been grounded in the physical sciences, rather than in a much broader range of disciplines and such key matters as truth, beauty, adventure, art, and peace, as advocated by Alfred North Whitehead in books such as *Adventures of Ideas*, *Process and Reality*, and others.

This problem was addressed at length by Rémi Brague, author of *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought*:

The image of the world that emerged from physics after Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton is of a confluence of blind forces, where there is no place for consideration of the Good....

The world was no longer a whole, but a result of disparate forces. Cosmology gave way to cosmography—the stars, for example, no longer reflected the order of heaven, an ethical

model which one was to adapt oneself, but lacked any significance until some new theory might account for the facticity of their existence.¹⁶

As a result of such problems, Berry believed that it was time to create a new story of the universe based on understanding the profound role that culture, religion, ecology, the arts, and cosmology play in the creation, telling, and diffusion of that story. The key to this in Berry's opinion was to understand that "the universe is not a collection of objects, but rather a communion of subjects." This was of vital importance in coming to grips with the present and prospective problems confronting humanity, the world, and the universe, as well as making it possible for all species and not just the human species to flourish in the future. Many of Berry's thoughts on matters like this were stated in a book he co-authored with Brian Swimme entitled *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Age—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*.

Unlike many contemporary cosmologists who have tended to emphasize scientific views of the universe, Berry was a great believer that the arts had a crucial role to play in the development of this new story of the universe, working with science rather than separate from it. As David Schenck pointed out in his article, "Cosmology and Wisdom: The Great Teaching Work of Thomas Berry":

For Berry cosmology is at once science and poetry, and most fundamentally, a matter of vision and myth and epic. A geologist might then fairly be considered a visionary for the earth.

Thomas Berry, in addition to being our contemporary, is both behind us and ahead—a historian preserving the living core of wisdom traditions of human cultivation—and a visionary listening towards the future cultivation of human presence on and to the earth.

We need new means of cultivating ourselves if we are to live differently on the earth. Developing and telling the new story is one component of establishing such cultivation. But the grand sweep of the longed-for cultivation is found only

in Cosmology envisioned as the comprehensive presentation of the mystery of presence of the universe in myth, ritual and dream; in liturgy, poetry and music; in wisdom literature and renewed philosophies and theologies; and in the plastic arts of all kinds—painting, sculpture, architecture.¹⁷

In the development of his thoughts and ideas on these fundamental matters, Berry often teamed up with the evolutionary cosmologist Brian Swimme. Both scholars were strongly influenced in these matters by the thoughts and beliefs of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who believed that everything in the universe has a spiritual as well as a physical aspect. In consequence, all three scholars would probably have answered “yes” to the fundamental cosmological question raised for both science and religion by John F. Haught—author of *The Cosmic Adventure: Science, Religion, and the Quest for Purpose*—when he asked if “the evolutionary processes of nature have any purpose or meaning.” In a similar vein, Albert Einstein was once asked, “What is the most important question you can ask in life?” Einstein’s response was another question: “Is the universe a friendly place or not?” Without doubt, Berry, Swimme, de Chardin, and many others in the cosmological, cultural, and religious realms would likely assert that the universe is a “friendly place,” especially if humanity can make it not only an ordered and regenerative whole but also a harmonious whole in the future.

According to Angela T. Lydon, author of *Cosmology and Curriculum: A Vision for an Ecozoic Age*, “the very survival of the human community requires the creative articulation of a new mode of human presence within universal processes.” She went on to explain this in more detail by affirming her and Berry’s belief that it is not just the physical and material aspects of universal processes that must be considered, but also the metaphysical, philosophical, artistic, and aesthetic aspects:

What is needed is a meaning-filled story that sees humankind as part of cosmic processes. Such stories as narrated in ancient cultures, overflow in eventment and in celebration.... Dance, song, art, drama, and spoken narratives can make

explicit the bondedness and interdependence of all species.... The very survival of the human community requires the creative articulation of a new mode of human presence within universal processes.¹⁸

Since cosmological questions, like cultural questions, originate in the human mind and imagination, a related set of questions exists with which cosmology and culture are and must be concerned. These questions have to do with how human beings see and relate to the world. Milton Munitz confirmed the fundamental importance of cosmology and culture in this sense when he wrote:

We wish to know our “place,” where we fit in among all the other entities that make up the universe. What forces, powers, and causes brought us into existence and sustain us? What should be our goals, purposes, and values? Is there some cosmic design of which our lives are a part? Being able to answer these kinds of questions is one way of responding to what is frequently referred to as a search for the meaning of life?¹⁹

We would probably be wise to leave the last word on cosmology and the cosmic whole to ancient and contemporary scholars from India such as Thanu Padmanbhan, Swami Vivekananda, Rana P. B. Singh, and many others who have delved deeply into this matter. As Fritjof Capra points out in his book *The Tao of Physics*, at its most elementary level, traditional Indian philosophy is predicated on “an awareness of the unity and mutual interrelation of all things and events, the experience of all phenomena in the world as manifestations of a basic oneness. All things are seen as interdependent and inseparable parts of this cosmic whole, as different manifestations of the same ultimate reality.”²⁰

Here we have it then as far as the most all-encompassing manifestation of culture is concerned. Not only is it concerned with the universe as a whole in the broadest sense possible, but it is also concerned with the universe as a structured, ordered, and eventually harmonious whole. A new course must be charted—one that is set in

a long-term time frame and viewed from a cultural perspective. This is where culture in the cosmological sense comes to the fore. Without it we will be unable to come to grips with the many problems that threaten our world.²¹ Bringing the world as culture into existence and enabling it to flourish is a categorical imperative. It is to this matter that our attention is directed in the final chapter of this book.