

A hermeneutical reading of *The Universe Story*  
towards the configuration of the human in the text

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Niamh Brennan



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For Leah Gillespie,  
who reminds me daily of the gift of life  
and the beauty, joy and power of a love so freely given.

## Abstract

This thesis undertakes a hermeneutical reading of *The Universe Story* through the lens of Paul Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutics, while drawing too on environmental hermeneutics, to determine the configuration of the human in the text.

Ricoeur argues that narrative plays a primary role in the manner in which a subject comes to self-understanding. He viewed the hermeneutical task as being to assist human understanding through an investigation of 'what happened' in the text so that a life may be refigured, and his narrative hermeneutics offers a model by which to undertake a critical textual analysis. In this model 'prefiguration' begins the explanation of the narrative and relates to the pre-history of the story told. This incorporates an analysis of the traditions, histories and thinkers who influenced the narrative, both explicitly and implicitly. 'Configuration' refers to the arrangement of events in the narrative and involves an exploration of language, structure and style and how these contribute to the meaning of the narrative. The third, 're-figuration', is the self-understanding that can come when the world of the reader 'fuses' in imagination with the 'world of the text', but that is always guided by the text itself.

Since its publication in 1992 *The Universe Story* has generated a large body of secondary work in literature, music and the arts. Despite this it has been very little analysed and the world that it proposes, in addition to who the human is in this world, remains unexplored. This study focuses specifically on the human of the text. It explores the way in which the narrative is both prefigured and configured, and the meanings associated with the human released by this configuration. The narrative discloses the human as located within a time-developmental universe both utterly dependent on and shaped by Earth and cosmological processes while simultaneously responsible for the inauguration of an 'ecological era'.

## Summary

*The Universe Story* is a text written in 1992 by Passionist priest Thomas Berry and mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme. It recounts the history and development of the universe, based on data from the physical sciences but told in mythological and narrative form. This study, rooted in the narrative hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, but drawing too on approaches in environmental hermeneutics and environmental philosophy, undertakes a hermeneutical reading of the text to determine the configuration of the human in the text and the meaning associated with her. Hermeneutics here referring to both a methodology for the human sciences and the way in which questions of relationship between language and life, and meaning and truth are explored.

Ricoeur viewed understanding as a structure of our ‘being-in-the-world’ and so to understand a narrative is to understand a world that the reader can appropriate and inhabit. This in turn can lead to action and practice in the way that it influences a life. In tracing the development of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics from an analysis of symbol to that of narrative (chapter one), a number of interpretative steps in his approach to textual analysis were identified. These include the tripartite model of mimesis which moves from prefiguration (mimesis<sub>1</sub>) to configuration (mimesis<sub>2</sub>) and finally to refiguration (mimesis<sub>3</sub>). Pre-figuration refers to the pre-narrative features of action and is the pre-history of the story told which gives it a background and ties it to a larger whole; configuration refers to the way in which the narrative is constructed and includes such elements as emplotment and style; and refiguration, which is the final step in Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation, refers to the reorganisation or transfiguration of a life and takes place in the reader. This thesis focuses on the pre-figurative and configurative aspects of the narrative. Ricoeur viewed the hermeneutical task as being to assist human understanding through an investigation of ‘what happened’ in the text so that a life might be refigured. Configuration, in particular, being the step that facilitates reception. This includes an examination of discourse and language and the manner in which meaning is transferred in the narrative. Through this concrete process of examination, the world in front of the text is revealed, the world that inspires the refiguration of a life. As a narrative with a self-declared ecological agenda, the relation of the human to the other-than-human of the text is foundational to its meaning, and any transformation that may take place in the reader becomes contingent on the manner in which the human is narrated. To enlighten Ricoeur’s approach and assist in explanation of the contribution the language makes to the text, I use the lens of environmental hermeneutics while drawing too on figurative discourse, in particular the language of the

sacred. This too imposes limits on the meanings that are revealed and underscores hermeneutics as a philosophy of finitude.

The elements of pre-figuration examined in chapter two include the explicit intellectual and personal history and implicit adoption of traditions out of which the narrative arises. *The Universe Story* is located in relation to other cosmic narratives such as ‘Big History’ and the ‘Epic of Evolution’ noting both commonalities and differences between them, their reception and critiques. In addition, it focuses on key ideas and thinkers who influenced Thomas Berry and re-traces the development of the narrative in relation to these thinkers. Chapter three focuses on the configuration of the narrative. This is the production of the narrative and includes the language, structure and style of narration. This analytical process allows identification of the ‘point of view’ of the work, in addition to possible meanings of the narrative that are implicit in the authors’ style. It is style which brings together event and meaning and is the manner in which the authors’ viewpoint is expressed. These levels of analysis disclose the reference of the text, what Ricoeur names as the proposed ‘world of the text’.

The final step of analysis is an examination of the configuration of the human in this ‘world of the text’ and undertaken in chapter four. This analysis was undertaken on the basis that this configuration is responsible for inspiring the re-figuration of a life and that such refiguration is always guided by the text itself. This configuration places the human within a ‘personalised’ universe where she is both dependent on cosmological and planetary processes for her existence and shaped by these same processes yet responsible too for the inauguration of a new ecological era. While neglecting human to human relations, *The Universe Story* locates the human as a species among other species and identifies the human as that species through which the universe comes to consciousness and as the bridge between infinity and finiteness. It finally presents the human as a species, that is still ‘developing’ and emphasises the need for a development of subjectivity.

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## Introduction

*The Universe Story*<sup>1</sup> although in many ways initiating a new genre in scientific narrative, is the fruit of a line of thinking that weaves scholarship from the natural and social sciences, philosophy, theology and the humanities. Although primarily known as *The Universe Story* from the classic text written by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme in 1992, this text also belongs to and has been instrumental in initiating a larger project of related work and social movements, and is often referred to as the ‘new cosmology’ or ‘the new story’. Such has been the impact of this narrative that since its publication it has generated its own large body of secondary literature, as well as related works in music and other art forms. The narrative has been the subject of such works as *Earth Story, Sacred Story*<sup>2</sup>; *The Holy Web: Church and the New Universe Story*<sup>3</sup>; *Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology Is Transforming Spiritual Life*<sup>4</sup>; and *Love letter to the Milky Way, a Book of Poems*<sup>5</sup> to name but some examples. It has also been the subject of artworks such as the “New Universe Story Watercolors and Writings”<sup>6</sup> and “Resilience Project Series”<sup>7</sup> as well as inspiring musical pieces; *Peter Mayer sings the Great Story*<sup>8</sup> and Sam Guarnaccia’s Oratorio named “Emergent Universe”<sup>9</sup>. In addition, it has been responsible for inspiring communities to combine an ecological ethic with a form of spirituality through practices in agriculture, education and commitment to

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<sup>1</sup>Swimme, Brian & Berry, Thomas. *The Universe Story, From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era. A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994

<sup>2</sup>Conlon, James. *Earth Story, Sacred Story*. New London, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 1994

<sup>3</sup>Wessels, Cletus. *The Holy Web: Church and the New Universe Story*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2004

<sup>4</sup>Cannato, Judy. *Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology is Transforming Spiritual Life*. Sorin Books, 2010

<sup>5</sup>Dellinger, Drew. *Love letter to the Milky Way, a Book of Poems*. California: Poets for Global Justice Press, 2007

<sup>6</sup>Coelho, Mary, 2014. “New Universe Story Watercolors and Writings”, <http://newuniversestory.com>, last accessed 28 October 2020

<sup>7</sup>Weidner, Melanie, 2012 “Resilience Project” inspired by Brian Swimme’s Powers of the Universe, <https://listenforjoy.com/pages/projects-resilience>, last accessed 27 November 2020

<sup>8</sup>Mayer, Peter. *Peter Mayer sings the Great Story*. C.D for music.

<sup>9</sup>For more information on the Oratorio, its inspiration, content and venues where it has been performed please see Guarnaccia’s website. Guarnaccia, Sam, 2021 “Sam Guarnaccia”, [www.samguarnaccia.com](http://www.samguarnaccia.com), last accessed 25 January 2021

ecologically sustainable living<sup>10</sup>. There are several websites<sup>11</sup> dedicated to its dissemination as well as Kindergarten curriculum based upon ‘the story’<sup>12</sup> and increasingly common, there have been many ways in which communities and individuals translate key aspects of this narrative into ritual<sup>13</sup>. One of the texts written in the lineage of *The Universe Story* entitled *Journey of the Universe* is now an Emmy award winning film documentary<sup>14</sup>. This documentary was released by ‘The Forum on Religion and Ecology’<sup>15</sup>, an internationally focused multi-religious project based at Yale University in Connecticut, U.S.A. Its co-founders, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, were both students of Thomas Berry and the Forum has edited a number of Berry’s books indicating their close involvement and commitment to the continuation of his work, including *The Universe Story*<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Genesis Farm, New Jersey, U.S. A ([www.genesisfarm.org](http://www.genesisfarm.org)); Green Mountain Monastery in Greensboro, Vermont, U.S.A ([www.greenmountainmonastery.org](http://www.greenmountainmonastery.org)); An Tairseach, Wicklow, Ireland; ([www.ecocentrewicklow.ie](http://www.ecocentrewicklow.ie)); The Archer Mountain Community, Queensland, Australia ([www.thearcher.org.au](http://www.thearcher.org.au)); Center for Ecological Living and Learning in the Philippines, ([www.cellsilang.weebly](http://www.cellsilang.weebly)). Also informative is Taylor, McFarland Sarah. *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2007 which documents Berry’s influence on women religious who have based their ministries on reformed environmental practices.

<sup>11</sup>Morgan, Jennifer, 2021. “Deep Time Journey Network”, <https://dtnetwork.org> last accessed 25 January; Swimme, Brian, 2003. “Center for the Story of the Universe”, <https://storyoftheuniverse.org>, last accessed 28 October 2020

<sup>12</sup>Edwards, Jean. *Earth as Teacher, Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. C.D. received directly from author. Cf. <https://deeptimejourney.org/people/jeanedwards/> for more information.

<sup>13</sup>One of the most common rituals developed from *The Universe Story* is ‘the cosmic walk’. The cosmic walk is a symbolic walking ritual aimed at making the story as depicted in the narrative more accessible. It was developed by Dominican Sister, Miriam Therese MacGillis who was a student of Thomas Berry. It is frequently used in different ceremonies in addition to many religious congregations and ecology centres building a ‘cosmic walk’ on their grounds. Some examples of this being the Nano Nagle Centre in Ballygriffin Co. Cork belonging to the Presentation Sisters([www.nanonagleplace.ie](http://www.nanonagleplace.ie)); the Solas Bhríde Christian Spirituality Centre in Kildare town belonging to the Brigidine Sisters ([www.solasbhríde.ie](http://www.solasbhríde.ie)); and the Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre in Co. Waterford belonging to the Christian Brothers ([www.edmundrice.ie](http://www.edmundrice.ie)) to name but some. There is also a page and a group on the website ‘Deep Time Journey Network’ (DTJN) specifically dedicated to exploring *The Universe Story* through ritual.

<sup>14</sup>Swimme, Brian & Tucker, Mary Evelyn. “Journey of the Universe”, [www.journeyoftheuniverse.org](http://www.journeyoftheuniverse.org) , last accessed 28/10/2020. See section 2.2.1 for more information on *Journey of the Universe*

<sup>15</sup>Grim and Tucker write in an overview of ‘The Forum on Religion and Ecology’ that the forum “is engaged in exploring religious worldviews, texts, and ethics in order to broaden understanding of the complex nature of current environmental concerns.” [http://fore.yale.edu/files/Forum\\_Overview\\_8-14-18.pdf](http://fore.yale.edu/files/Forum_Overview_8-14-18.pdf), last accessed 25 January 2020.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Berry’s books edited by ‘The Forum on Religion and Ecology’ are Berry, Thomas. *The Sacred Universe. Earth, Spirituality and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. Tucker, Mary Evelyn (ed.) New York: Columbia University Press, 2009; Berry, Thomas. *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*. Maryknoll New York: Orbis, 2009; Berry, Thomas. *Evening Thoughts. Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 2006; Berry, Thomas. *The Great Work. Our Way into the Future*. New York: Bell Tower, 1999. The Forum names Thomas Berry as a seminal influence. [http://fore.yale.edu/files/Forum\\_History.pdf](http://fore.yale.edu/files/Forum_History.pdf), last accessed 7 March 2019.

Despite its capacity to be transformative, the narrative has been very little received or analysed in academic circles. It has recently been examined in conjunction with a number of other cosmic narratives in terms of ‘scientific mythmaking’<sup>17</sup> and more specifically in relation to some of the singular theological questions that arise from it<sup>18</sup>. The merits of using myth as a strategy for narrating science, in that it is a tool for bringing elaborate theories about the cosmos to non-scientific audiences, have been previously documented<sup>19</sup>. Conversely, Menning and Keller state that ‘science’ too is a story-telling strategy for giving credibility to cosmic narratives, while myth is used as a strategy to invoke an ethical response, and argue that this blended approach is evident in *Journey of the Universe*<sup>20</sup>. The focus of their paper, however, is on the medium of film and incorporates a comparative analysis with Carl Sagan’s television series, *Cosmos*<sup>21</sup>. The possibility of science as being a starting point for the ‘re-invention of nature’ has also been documented. Here I am referring to William Grassie who argues for modern science as a cultural system and through his development of a ‘social-biophysical’ hermeneutic that enables nature to be viewed and interacted with as an active agent, reconstructs science as part of a “cultural-evolutionary transformation in human behaviour and thought”<sup>22</sup>. Grassie gives *The Universe Story* as an example of such a re-mythologisation of science that seeks to re-invent human thought and behaviour and argues that through the framework of his newly developed hermeneutic, that *The Universe Story* is rescued from modernist anthropomorphisms of nature and

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Sideris, Lisa. *Consecrating Science. Wonder, knowledge and the Natural World*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017; Sideris, Lisa. “To know the story is to love it: Scientific Mythmaking and the Longing for Cosmic Connection” in *Methodological Challenges in Nature-Culture and Environmental History Research*. Thorpe, Jocelyn, Rutherford, Stephanie & L. Anders Sandberg, L. Anders, (ed.’s) New York: Routledge, 2016, pp200-213

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Wessels, Cletus. *Jesus in the New Universe Story*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003; Haight, John. *The New Cosmic Story. Inside our Awakening Universe*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017

<sup>19</sup> Dillingham, Theodore. *The Uses of Myth for Scientific Education. The case of Cosmology and Mythology*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2001 for positive analysis. Cf. Sideris, Lisa. *Consecrating Science. Wonder, Knowledge and the Natural World*; Larson, Brendan. “The Role of Scientism in Myth-making for the Anthropocene” in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, vol.2. 2015, pp185-191 for more nuanced conclusions.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Menning, Nancy & Keller, Luke. “Narrating Science and Religion. Storytelling Strategies in Journey of the Universe” in *Diegesis*. 5.2, 2016, pp21-34

<sup>21</sup>Druyan, Anne & Soter, Steven (Dir.) *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*. Cosmos Studios. [Host Carl Sagan]. 1980

<sup>22</sup> Grassie, William. *Re-inventing Nature: Science Narratives as Myths for an Endangered Planet*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Temple University, 1994, p9. Grassie, too draws on Ricoeur’s dialectic of explanation and understanding but only as the foundation for establishing his own ‘biophysical’ heremeneutic that then interprets the content and culture of science and how this relates to nature and society.

postmodernist critiques “of the oppressive universalization of particular cultures through naturalization.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the possibility of cosmic narrations based on a scientific understanding of Earth as serving as a common creation story among different religions, has also been documented. Here, Knitter argues that “our scientific understanding of the earth” can serve as this common creation story. In order to avoid this ‘story’ becoming another meta-narrative, Knitter suggests religions must first approach Earth as an ethical story rather than a creation story, through taking up the challenges of an Earth in ecological peril. This shared praxis, he argues, can then become the ground for inter-religious dialogue and Knitter’s focus here is on ethics rather than narrative<sup>24</sup>.

This thesis begins neither with science, myth or nature, but specifically with the narrative itself, and the manner in which this particular narrative functions. This is done through an examination of the dynamics of configuration operative within the text that mediate between the pre-figurative and re-figurative experience.

For French philosopher and hermeneut Paul Ricoeur, narrative is one of the primary ways the human person makes meaning. In arguing this, Ricoeur builds on Aristotle’s *Poetics* and in particular Aristotle’s use of mimesis<sup>25</sup>. Narrative, Ricoeur argues, acts as a crossroad between the three senses of mimesis. These are: pre-figuration (mimesis<sub>1</sub>); configuration (mimesis<sub>2</sub>) and finally; refiguration (mimesis<sub>3</sub>). Pre-figuration refers to the pre-narrative features of action which makes action ‘readable’; configuration refers to emplotment and the ways in which events are artfully organised; while refiguration occurs in the reader and constitutes an “active re-organization of our [their] being-in-the-world”<sup>26</sup>. Thus, fundamentally for Ricoeur, there is a refiguring of the practical field of the reader on receiving the narrative.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p242

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Knitter, Paul F. “A Common creation Story? Inter-religious dialogue and ecology” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*.no.37, 3-4 Summer-Fall, 2000, pp285-300:285

<sup>25</sup>The term ‘mimesis’ has a long history as a literary-theoretical concept. Aristotle defined narrative as ‘mimesis praxeos’ the imitation of an action (cf. Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative. Volume 1*. McLaughlin, Kathleen & Pellauer, David (ed’s and trans.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, pXI). Auerbach later used ‘mimesis’ to describe the representation of reality (cf Auerbach Erich. *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trask, William R. (trans.) Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1953). For this work it is Ricoeur’s tripartite model of the term more fully explained in ‘Chapter one: A hermeneutic towards self-understanding through the mediation of narrative’ which will be used.

<sup>26</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. Hahn, Lewis E. (ed.). Illinois: Open Court, 1995, pp3-53:42



According to Ricoeur, ‘understanding’ is a structure of our being-in-the-world, and so to interpret a narrative, is to interpret a world that the reader can inhabit and appropriate. Ricoeur referred to this as the ‘world of the text’<sup>27</sup>. This world is activated in reading and becomes praxis in the way that it influences a life. Crucially for Ricoeur, hermeneutics focuses on the text but always too the human person, the hermeneutical task being, he argued, to assist human understanding through an investigation of ‘what happened’ in the text in order for a life to be refigured<sup>28</sup>.

The refiguration of a life, according to Ricoeur, is not based singularly on the reading experience but is also determined “by the formal characteristics of the text itself.”<sup>29</sup> For Ricoeur there is never a ‘closed horizon’ nor a definitive interpretation of a text. This does not equally mean that any particular text can be read in an endless number of ways. Rather, as Catherine Caulfield reminds us, “the refiguration of a text is always limited, or guided, by the text itself.”<sup>30</sup> Caulfield goes on to argue that phenomenological philosophical hermeneutics provides “an appropriate theoretical framework on which to construct an examination of the articulation between literature and the world of the lived” in that it explores the relationship between discourse and action<sup>31</sup>. Central to this is the manner in which the meaning of the text is transmitted.

*The Universe Story* has most commonly been labelled as “scientific myth-making”<sup>32</sup> or similarly as a “mythic re-invention of nature”<sup>33</sup>. While both these descriptions are applicable to this narrative, neither addresses the question of who the human is, specifically in relation to the universe and nature, in this narrative. As a

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<sup>27</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation” in *From text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*. Blamey, Kathleen & Thompson, John B. (ed’s and trans.) London: The Athlone Press, 1991, pp75-88:86

<sup>28</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*. Wood, D. (ed.) Routledge, London: Routledge, 1991, pp20-33

<sup>29</sup>Caulfield, Catherine Lynne. *Hermeneutics of Written Texts: Religious Discourse in Mexican Literature*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. University of Toronto, 2000, p29. Caulfield’s hypothesis is that the novel is “as an aspiration to lucid knowledge” (pi) and she applies Ricoeur’s three-fold mimesis, in addition to literary critic, Mario J. Valdes four stages of operation of literary criticism, to examine three contemporary Mexican novels and their relation to the world of action. Caulfield includes the re-figurative experience by examining her own response, and other commentaries, to the text. This thesis excludes the re-figurative aspect, focusing on the prefigurative and configurative aspects of the narrative. This is to specifically determine the proposed world of the text in all its facets through a particular focus on language and style and how this relates to reality and contributes to the creation of meaning within the text.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p29

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p209

<sup>32</sup>Sideris, Lisa. “To know the story is to love it: Scientific Mythmaking and the Longing for Cosmic Connection” in *Methodological Challenges in Nature-Culture and Environmental History Research*.

<sup>33</sup>Grassie, William. *Re-inventing Nature: Science Narratives as Myths for an Endangered Planet*.

transformative narrative, the way in which the human is presented in the narrative, is foundational to any description of transformation that may occur in the reader. This lacuna in studies of *The Universe Story* is the impetus of this study and in addressing it, this thesis investigates the configuration of the human in the text. It aims to determine the formal characteristics of the human and involves the process of examining the ‘fixed’ world of the narrative and the human within that world. In focusing on the prefigurative and configurative aspects of the narrative, it examines the sources of external references of *The Universe Story*. This includes: the narrators, Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, although primarily focused on Berry; implicit and explicit influences on the narrative; the text’s relation to other cosmic narratives; the language and style used in the construction of the narrative and what this reveals of the world of the text. This is the concrete process by which the narrative mediates between “the prefiguration of the practical field and its refiguration through the reception of the work”<sup>34</sup>. Through this concrete process of examination, the world in front of the text is revealed, the world that inspires the refiguration of a life. In doing this, the thesis elaborates a theoretical reflection on the way the narrative refers to the world of action.

As a narrative with an ecological agenda, declared from the beginning by its authors, the relation of the human to nature and to the other-than-human within the text is foundational to its meaning. In order to determine these relations, I turn to environmental hermeneutics where David Utsler argues that environments, because they are understood in language are “a meaningful locus of interpretation”<sup>35</sup>. Utsler names Ricoeur’s hermeneutics as providing a model for informing the way we interpret the environment, and of equal importance, our relationship with it. Furthermore, seeing nature as a text, and in the case of *The Universe Story*, in its choice of presenting nature as a text, “allows us to reconcile and weave together the various narratives through which we interpret nature”<sup>36</sup>. The ‘Book of Nature’ Clingerman argues, is an assemblage of models and metaphors with tensions and contradictions, although presented as a unity, that “allows us to find meaning and integrate discordant perspectives”<sup>37</sup>. ‘Reading’ nature is not the same as nature itself although it offers a

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<sup>34</sup>Caulfield, Catherine Lynne. *Hermeneutics of Written Texts: Religious Discourse in Mexican Literature*.

<sup>35</sup>Utsler, David. “Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics as a Model for Environmental Philosophy” in *Philosophy Today*; Summer 2009; 53, 2; ProQuest Central, pp173 - 178:173

<sup>36</sup>Clingerman, Forest. “Reading the Book of Nature: A hermeneutical account of Nature for Philosophical Theology” in *Worldviews*, 13, 2009, pp72-91:78

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p78

framework through which to think and experience nature. This recognition of the relationship between thought and being points to the role narrative plays in interpretation while enabling us to re-narrate and enrich what Clingerman names as our “impoverished” views of nature<sup>38</sup>. Environmental philosopher, Val Plumwood, has argued for the need to reconceive nature and human identity in “less polarized and disembodied ways”<sup>39</sup>. The application of Plumwood’s thought to *The Universe Story*, specifically in relation to the environment and conceptualisations of the self, further enables assessment of the configuration of the human in the narrative, particularly in relation to its environmental concerns.

Through the categories of pre-figuration and configuration this thesis then is an investigation of ‘what is happening’ in *The Universe Story*. What is the world that it proposes? In what way does it bring this world to language? These steps of explanation then prepare the way for an examination of: who is the human of this world?

The thesis in addressing these questions is laid out in four chapters. Chapter one, ‘A hermeneutic towards self-understanding through the mediation of narrative’ introduces the thesis’ approach in hermeneutics. This is rooted in the concerns that are at play in the development of the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, specifically, from his focus on the symbol to that of the narrative. Hermeneutics refers to both a methodology for the human sciences and the way in which questions of relationship between language and life, and meaning and truth are explored. Ricoeur was particularly concerned with subjectivity and the role that the narrative played in mediating self-understanding. Central to this, is the role that figurative discourse plays in contributing to the meaning of a text. In his dialectical approach, Ricoeur offers a way towards understanding while maintaining the critical epistemological function of hermeneutics. To augment Ricoeur’s approach and assist in explanation of the ‘world of the text’, the reference that is revealed by the narrative, this thesis also draws on approaches in environmental hermeneutics. Environmental hermeneutics extends the principles of interpretation to include interpretation of all environments, and in particular, human relations to Earth and to the other than human.

Chapter two, ‘The pre-figuration of *The Universe Story*: an analysis of content, history and development’ begins the first step in the explanatory process through a

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<sup>38</sup>ibid., p77

<sup>39</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London: Routledge, 1993, p5

focus on the external references of the text. It is through the objectification of the tradition and the historical context out of which the narrative arises that the explanation process is initially made possible. This will be divided into two parts. The first part - 'A description of language and content of *The Universe Story*' - focuses on the content and discourse of the narrative. It also addresses the primary critiques put to cosmic narratives including *The Universe Story*. The second part - 'The history and development of *The Universe Story*' - traces the key ideas and influences behind the narrative, with a special focus on the cultural historian Thomas Berry, who was one of the primary advocates of this 'new cosmology' and whose teachings continue to resonate in the areas of ecology and religious studies.

Chapter three, 'The configuration of *The Universe Story*: an analysis of language, structure and style' examines the way in which the narrative is configured. This is the process through which hermeneutics "reveals itself as philosophy of the interpretation of meaning"<sup>40</sup>. In doing this, the narrative will be examined as both an historical text and a figurative text. Historical in that the manner in which the narrative recounts 'events that actually happened' will be examined. Figurative, in this instance, will include an examination of the metaphors, symbolism and language used in the narrative, with a particular focus on the effective use of figurative language in describing the sacred, and how this contributes to the meaning of the narrative, and the meaning subsequently attributed to the human. In light of its being 'a story of origins', the narrative will also be read in parallel with Ricoeur's essay on creation, 'Thinking Creation'<sup>41</sup>. These identifications of what Ricoeur designates as 'the sense' of the narrative will then enable an identification of the reference of the narrative, what Ricoeur names the 'proposed world of the text'.

Plumwood argues that a central contributory factor in the underlying causes of the environmental crisis is how the human is conceptualised in relation to Earth and the other than human. Western philosophy, she argues, has traditionally conceptualised the human as discontinuous and separate to nature. As a narrative written in response to a growing ecological crisis, the human, particularly in relation to Earth and the other than

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<sup>40</sup>Wierciński, Andrzej. "Hermeneutic Conversion: Through Phenomenology back to Hermeneutics" in *Between Description and Interpretation. The Hermeneutic turn in Phenomenology*. Wierciński, A (ed.), pp xiii-xxiv: xiii

<sup>41</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Thinking Creation" in Ricoeur, Paul & LaCocque André. *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*. Pellauer, David (trans.), Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp31-67

human, becomes instructive in the way that she is configured in relation to these. The fourth and final chapter, chapter four, ‘The configuration of the human’ specifically focuses on who is the human of *The Universe Story*. It begins with an outline of Plumwood’s critique of what she terms ‘human/nature dualism’ and her call for the reconceptualisation of both the self and humanity. This will be followed by a presentation of Ricoeur’s ‘hermeneutics of the self’. Both of these analyses, in tandem with the prefigurative and configurative aspects of the narrative, will then be applied to the narrative in identifying the configuration of the human and the philosophical and theological implications of this configuration.

Since its publication in 1992, the impact of *The Universe Story* has continued to grow, inspiring interpretations and re-interpretations in its dissemination. This study aims to contribute to analysing how narrative approaches can initiate any such refigurations, in the case of this narrative, through its focus on the human of the text and the meaning that is given her. It aims to characterise the universe as it is presented in the narrative and to locate the human in relation to that universe, Earth and the other than human. Thus, as described by Ricoeur, the hermeneutical task of this work, will be to identify the prefigurative and the configurative aspects of the narrative, specifically towards the configuration of the human in the text. The dynamics of configuration of a narrative, in Ricoeur’s view, is a means of explanation through which to understand “the dynamics of transfiguration proper to the work”<sup>42</sup>. In addition, this study will assess whether the approach of *The Universe Story* is strengthened or weakened in relation to its own explicit project from this re-reading. This in itself incorporates an evaluation of this approach through what is revealed about the narrative in its application, that is, does it finally enable us ‘to explain more and thus to understand better’<sup>43</sup> the human in the narrative of *The Universe Story*?

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<sup>42</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*. p27

<sup>43</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. pp3-53:31



# Chapter one. A hermeneutic towards self-understanding through the mediation of narrative

## Introduction

This study undertakes a reading of *The Universe Story* primarily rooted in the approach of French philosopher and hermeneut, Paul Ricoeur, who sought to combine a method of critique with a method of openness in interpretation and reading, thus eschewing the methodological binary of sympathy versus judgement and historical objectivity versus subjective response<sup>44</sup>. Ricoeur viewed narrative as constituting the intersection between the mimetic arc of pre-figuration, configuration and re-figuration. Ricoeur understood refiguration as taking place in the reader through the reorganisation of their ‘being-in-the-world’ by “following the invitation of the text...to become the reader of oneself.”<sup>45</sup> The text is thus linked to action and hermeneutics to self-understanding that is mediated by signs, symbols and narrative. In examining both the configuration of the world of the text and specifically the configuration of the human in the text, this thesis presents in detail, a theoretical reflection on the human of the narrative and how this refers to the world of action.

There are a number of reasons why a hermeneutical approach is most relevant to this investigation. The first is to explain and understand the authors’ context and intent. *The Universe Story* is, I will argue, through its interpretation of the universe, itself an interpretation of ‘being’, and hermeneutics has latterly through the work of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur been forced through questions of understanding towards questions of being<sup>46</sup>. This first objective is achieved through an investigation of the underlying cosmologies, metaphysical assumptions, theologies and values carried and endorsed by *The Universe Story*. In investigating the construction of the narrative and explicating the world it creates, there exists a dialectic between situation-understanding-interpretation in how the narrative of *The Universe Story* describes the universe, and the configuration of the human within that universe. For Ricoeur this dialectic of

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<sup>44</sup>Wierciński, Andrzej. (ed.) *Between Suspicion and Sympathy. Paul Ricoeur’s Unstable Equilibrium*. International Institute for Hermeneutics, Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2003

<sup>45</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. pp3-53:42

<sup>46</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on language, action and interpretation* Thompson, John B. (ed. and trans.). U.K: Cambridge University Press, 1981

understanding and explanation unfolds at the level of the text, and this (the text) constitutes the primary concern of hermeneutics, and this thesis<sup>47</sup>. Secondly, hermeneutics can assist understanding, primarily self-understanding but also our understanding of the world and of ourselves within a world. This self-understanding is contingent on how the human is presented in the text. As a narrative with environmental concerns, this thesis will identify the formal characteristics of the human mediated through the fixed world of the text, drawing here particularly on environmental hermeneutics which explicitly extends principles of interpretation to the natural world and examines the way in which our hermeneutical consciousness informs our relationship with the environment.

In their paper “Affected by Nature: A Hermeneutical Transformation of Environmental Ethics”<sup>48</sup>, De Tavernier and Van den Noortgaete see a hermeneutical dynamic at work in the construction of environmental identity through this process of repeated interpretation. This hermeneutical approach of relating the outer environment to the identity of the self, can, they state, help to bridge the value-action gap between attitudes and behaviour. This gap between knowing what courses of action works and enacting them, they argue, helps to explore why cognitive approaches to changes in behaviour are not always effective. Ricoeur argues that narrative can engender engagement that re-orient self-identity. Personal and emotional engagement are key in refiguration occurring and arise from the world of the text which is configured through the language, style and structure of the narrative. This is the means through which the transfer of meaning takes place. In terms of engendering pro-environmental behaviour, Utsler identifies a Ricoeurian dialectic between self and nature that can contribute to a self-understanding in relation to the environment and the development of an “environmental identity”. Hermeneutics plays a role in this process of repeated interpretation and the narrative and identity that it forms.

In this chapter, I will present the hermeneutical approaches that I will draw on in this thesis, beginning with an overview of philosophical hermeneutics and the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, followed by the narrative hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. I will then present Ricoeur’s mediation of a hermeneutics of tradition and suspicion followed by his articulation of the narrative function through the aspects of history and fiction;

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<sup>47</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, p30

<sup>48</sup>De Tavernier, J & Van den Noortgaete F. “Affected by Nature: A Hermeneutical Transformation of Environmental Ethics” in *Zygon*, vol.49, no.3, Sept 2014, pp572-592



second order reference and the three-fold mimesis. Central here too is Ricoeur's understanding of the role that figurative discourse plays in narrative and so this section includes an analysis of myth, metaphor and the use of language, with a particular focus on religious language and the language of the sacred. This step in his hermeneutics is a reminder that religious language has been shaped by demythologisation, and this in turn, impacts on any attempt to articulate in language what is interpreted as an experience of the sacred. Ricoeur addresses this challenge as a tension between a phenomenology of the sacred and a hermeneutic of proclamation. Ricoeur's five traits of the phenomenology of the sacred will be applied to *The Universe Story* in chapter three. I will then introduce relevant aspects of Ricoeur's concept of narrative as both contributing to and being constitutive of self-understanding. This chapter ends with a focus on environmental hermeneutics which expands the aim and scope of philosophical hermeneutics and environmental philosophy to include the interpretation of all environments, and the way in which this interpretation can impact on conceptions of the self, analysis which will be applied in examining the world of the text in chapter three and the human of that world in chapter four.

## 1.1 Philosophical Hermeneutics

It is the hermeneutics of German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer which signals the development of hermeneutics in the twentieth century<sup>49</sup>. In his work Gadamer builds on the historicity of Wilhelm Dilthey, the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and the ontology of Martin Heidegger, culminating in a unique hermeneutical description in his work *Truth and Method*<sup>50</sup>. Gadamer was concerned with what Ricoeur terms 'alienating distanciation'<sup>51</sup>. According to Gadamer, it is by setting things at a distance (distanciation) that makes possible the objectivity of the human sciences,

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<sup>49</sup>Although it is Friedrich Schleiermacher (who Gadamer most likely misunderstood through the work of Dilthey) who is often referred to as the 'father' of hermeneutics. Mueller-Vollmer Kurt. *The Hermeneutics Reader*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1992

<sup>50</sup>Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1975

<sup>51</sup>For a more detailed account of Ricoeur's presentation and critique on Gadamer's *Truth and Method* please see "Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology" in Ricoeur, Paul. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, action and interpretation*. pp 62-100 and "Hermeneutical Logic" in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2. Pellauer, David (trans.) Cambridge, U.K: Polity Press, 2013, pp65-111

but in doing so, destroys a primordial relation of 'belonging to' (so that we are opposed as subjects (knower) and objects to be known) without which there is no relation to the object<sup>52</sup>. Ricoeur states how this antinomy can be understood as a continuation of the struggle between Romanticism and the Enlightenment. Through his concept of historicity, Wilhelm Dilthey sought to achieve a methodological basis for the human sciences. He proposed two epistemologies, explanation for the sciences, and understanding for the humanities, but argued for a method equal to that of science for the humanities. He was criticised for maintaining subjectivity as the ultimate point of reference and so returning to a Romantic interpretation. With Heidegger, the separation of subject and object was subordinated to both having a fundamental relation of belonging *in* a world, and so rather than search for what constitutes an object or a subject, the debate was moved to an ontological inquiry whereby the nature of being itself is investigated. Ricoeur argues that Gadamer furthers this debate with his introduction of language and historical consciousness<sup>53</sup>. Ricoeur himself further progressed the debate with his proposition of understanding through explanation which will be presented in section 1.3.2.

In his classic text, Gadamer pursues this debate between distanciation and the experience of belonging through the spheres of aesthetics, history and language. Gadamer defines the hermeneutic phenomenon specifically with regards to art and history as "an experience of truth that not only needs to be justified philosophically but which is itself a way of doing philosophy"<sup>54</sup>. The hermeneutics which Gadamer developed was not a methodology for the human sciences but an attempt to understand what the human sciences are and how they connect to one's experience of the world. It was a reflection on the conditions necessary for understanding to occur and so can be received as a theory of knowledge.

Gadamer's approach is often referred to as a hermeneutics of tradition in that he countered the enlightenment 'prejudice against prejudice' and sought to rehabilitate it, along (with defending) the concepts of tradition and authority, into our historical understanding of ourselves. This *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* which Ricoeur translated as 'consciousness exposed to the effects of history' or 'consciousness of

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. p70

<sup>54</sup>Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. p xxiii

historical efficacy'<sup>55</sup> emphasises how tradition, authority and prejudice, according to Gadamer, are the necessary pre-conditions by which we understand. They are components of understanding which have been transmitted historically and which determine our attitudes, behaviour and education situating human beings historically. In this concept Gadamer sought to demonstrate the historicity of each individual. He emphasised how we 'belong to history' before we belong to 'ourselves', thus history precedes us and frames our time bound reflections<sup>56</sup> and so our consciousness is unavoidably exposed to the effects of history<sup>57</sup>.

In the text, Gadamer argued that understanding is a process, something which happens to us rather than through us. He argues that understanding is not the result of technical or methodological means of investigation but is rather a disclosure of truth. Since truth is a disclosure it cannot be attained through explanation alone and because of this, for Gadamer, in seeking to understand, we discount method. Understanding, Gadamer explained as "genuine experience, i.e. an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth"<sup>58</sup> and so precedes the methodological application of a science. Understanding, however, is not merely a subjective action but something which happens *to* the reader. Gadamer likened it to an event whereby something is experienced by the reader, who, placed within her historical tradition fuses this, her present hermeneutical situation, with the text to be understood. This event Gadamer referred to as a 'fusion of horizons', 'the horizon' being "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point"<sup>59</sup>.

Moreover, Gadamer explained understanding as being concerned with the process of the coming into being of meaning and so the mark of understanding is a deeper *self*-understanding<sup>60</sup>. This locates hermeneutics, for Gadamer, within the realm of practical philosophy. According to Gadamer, philosophy functions in that through it "the person as thinker, renders an account to her/himself of her/his thought"<sup>61</sup>. This is an on-going experience that one conducts throughout one's lifetime. Philosophy exists

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<sup>55</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. p70

<sup>56</sup>Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, p445

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, p269

<sup>60</sup>Jeanrond, W. *Texts and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986, p12

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p9

to fulfill this task “of self-understanding on the part of human beings with regard to themselves”<sup>62</sup> in that it reflects on the human experience which is then directed towards an assumed universally shared understanding “which is the hermeneutical experience.”<sup>63</sup> Gadamer stressed the linguistic nature of human intelligibility in relation to the world with language being the centre through which our mediation of understanding occurs<sup>64</sup>. Thus, for Gadamer hermeneutics “extends as far as the potentiality for speech of intellectual beings may conceivably reach”<sup>65</sup> and so contained an irreducible universality. According to Gadamer, the way in which we experience each other, the world, our own existence and historical traditions constitutes a hermeneutic universe and confers on hermeneutics a universality<sup>66</sup> in its concern to understand “the universe of understanding.”<sup>67</sup>

## 1.2 Limits to a Hermeneutical Approach

There are limitations to a hermeneutical approach, the first being that there is no general hermeneutics as such, only disparate and often opposing theories concerning interpretation. One such view holds the task of hermeneutics to be the restoration of a meaning which is presented to the interpreter in the form of a text. This is often referred to as a hermeneutics of tradition<sup>68</sup>. A converse view holds that the task of hermeneutics is to demystify a hidden meaning in the text which is presented in the form of disguise. This is known as a hermeneutics of suspicion and was principally devised to determine the hidden interests implicit in a text which distort communication and conceal the

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p11

<sup>65</sup>Gadamer, “Replik” in *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik* as cited in Jeanrond, W. in *Texts and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking*. p11

<sup>66</sup>In his essay “Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology” Ricoeur offers three different meanings of universality. These are: its claim to knowledge in that hermeneutics has the same scope as science as science is founded on an “experience of the world which precedes and envelops the knowledge and the power of science”; its prior consensus “which founds the possibility of aesthetic, historical and lingual relations”; and language itself. “Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. p70

<sup>67</sup>Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. p xiv

<sup>68</sup>Cf. Shapiro, Gary & Sica, Alan (ed.'s) *Hermeneutics. Questions and Prospects*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1984, and Mueller-Vollmer Kurt. *The Hermeneutics Reader*. For a comprehensive introduction to hermeneutics.

exercise of both violence and domination. According to Ricoeur, this latter hermeneutical approach has characterized the work of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud<sup>69</sup>.

Coupled with these differing approaches in what one looks for in interpreting a text, Mueller-Vollmer describes in his detailed description of the German tradition of hermeneutics, how the very term hermeneutics has come to denote a concern which is shared by philosophy, sociology, history, theology, psychology, literary criticism and the humanities at large. As a result of crossing such a range of disciplines, hermeneutics can have ambiguous and often contradictory connotations. For some it is a twentieth century philosophy, for others a theology, for others a literary tool for the interpretation of texts<sup>70</sup>. Mueller-Vollmer cautions against the adoption of hermeneutics as a “vogueish term as if we were dealing with a new movement or intellectual trend”<sup>71</sup> which provides a new vocabulary in addition to a new methodology. According to Mueller-Vollmer, Gadamer and students of philosophical hermeneutics, insist that hermeneutics is not about the creation or validation of specific methodologies but is both a “historical concept and the name for an ongoing concern in the human sciences”<sup>72</sup> which should be discouraged as being understood and popularised as a new paradigm. Sica and Shapiro also caution against the looseness of understanding that exists towards the term hermeneutics. They differ slightly from Mueller-Vollmer in that they argue hermeneutics *is* more exemplar of a movement or tendency but reiterate its inadequacy as a rigorous philosophical method. Following Gadamer, they argue for hermeneutics as a philosophical activity or praxis and claim its aim is to “make understanding meaningful for life and thought”<sup>73</sup>. Dismissed thus as a methodology and rigorous philosophy on the one hand and as a movement on the other, it is difficult to locate the discipline of hermeneutics. Mueller-Vollmer contends that hermeneutics would best be conceived as a logic of the humanities and human sciences owing to the fact that hermeneutics inevitably leads back to questions of epistemology, which in turn undermines any purely pragmatic methodology of the humanities. Furthermore,

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<sup>69</sup>Thompson, John B. “Paul Ricoeur and hermeneutic phenomenology” in *Critical Hermeneutics. A study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp36-70:46

<sup>70</sup>Mueller-Vollmer Kurt. *The Hermeneutics Reader*. This book is useful as a companion source reader to Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*. It presents pieces by Schleiermacher, Droysen, Husserl, Heidegger and Bultmann and other principal sources in the German tradition.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, px

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, px

<sup>73</sup>Shapiro, Gary & Sica, Alan (ed.) *Hermeneutics. Questions and Prospects*. p4

Vollmer adds that the history of hermeneutic thought itself is in need of a hermeneutics as “history of the human and cultural sciences has become problematical during the past half century”<sup>74</sup> as it has been eclipsed by ever changing ‘new’ trends, movements and approaches that re-interpret (Vollmer writes ‘usurp’ ‘absorb’) from their own point of view. This observation by Vollmer highlights how hermeneutics although involved in the theory of correct interpretation remains susceptible itself to distortions of communication.

A third criticism which may be addressed to hermeneutic philosophy and which again pertains to its lack of rigour as a philosophical discipline, is that having established the pre-scientific ontological basis of the human sciences, hermeneutics still has not succeeded in addressing the ‘critical epistemological function’ which concepts such as understanding and interpretation as used in the human sciences arguably should also fulfill. It highlights general concerns about the theory and practice of interpretation rather than offering determinate criteria for the process and achievement of understanding<sup>75</sup>. Thus, there remains a gap between the ontological and epistemological function of hermeneutics, so while the humanities can enable us to understand they do not provide a sufficient explanation of how such understanding was reached. It is this seeming ‘gap’ that Ricoeur sought to overcome in his work and which I will refer to in further detail below.

Although again arguably only a limitation in how the notion of limitation is conceived and in how the task of philosophy is conceived, Ricoeur argues that in recognition of its dimension of historical efficacy, in that its epistemological emphasis and its foundation of scientific inquiry or inquiry into the human sciences “does not escape the historical consciousness of those who live and make history”<sup>76</sup>, a philosophy of hermeneutics must recognise itself as a philosophy of finitude. There can be no totalising overview, no privileged position from which to examine the effects of history and thus our historical being is that “which never passes into self-knowledge.”<sup>77</sup> The result of this, is that hermeneutics can only ever illuminate *particular* aspects of understanding, those aspects whose attention it is focused on. It is bound by its own intentionality and by default must ignore all that this excludes. The understanding, self

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<sup>74</sup>Mueller-Vollmer Kurt. *The Hermeneutics Reader*. p47

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Hermeneutical Logic?” in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2. p74

<sup>77</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. p74

or otherwise, it leads to, can only be a partial understanding, confined temporally and historically and so with hermeneutics there can be no objectifying nor subjectifying closure. This dimension of hermeneutics is articulated as a commitment by Ricoeur, when he writes how the vow which is essential to hermeneutics is a “radical non-mastery and non-self transparency of the conditions of all discourse.”<sup>78</sup>

Connected to this is the point that if hermeneutics is concerned with questions of meaning, it cannot escape its own history, the history of metaphysics. This is so as the ‘structure of anticipation’<sup>79</sup> from which we interrogate being and the meaning of being is provided by the history of metaphysics and not that of the history of the historians. Therefore, a hermeneutics of hermeneutics is necessary which makes explicit the presuppositions at work in its own history of thought. Hermeneutics, whether understood and used as a historical concept, a methodology or a philosophical praxis is not unproblematic or without contestation. This necessitates a clear and focused articulation of the manner in which it is used and towards what ends.

### 1.3 Paul Ricoeur: a hermeneutics between suspicion and sympathy<sup>80</sup>

In a career spanning over seventy years, Paul Ricoeur has brought his thinking to bear on an extraordinary diverse and broad range of subjects<sup>81</sup>. This thinking has

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<sup>78</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Hermeneutical Logic?” in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2. p99

<sup>79</sup>The ‘structure of anticipation’ is equivalent to a fore-structure which conditions our understanding. Ricoeur describes how it was articulated by Gadamer who enquired into the fact that Heidegger, through his concept of *Dasein*, derives the structure of understanding which is circular, from the temporality of *Dasein*, thus the ‘privileged experience’ becomes not the history provided by historians but rather the history of the question of the meaning of being provided by Western metaphysics. Ricoeur, Paul. “Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology” in *Hermeneutics and the human sciences*. pp63-101

<sup>80</sup>I am indebted to Andrzej Wierciński for this title. It is the title of a volume of essays of over fifty contributors reflecting on aspects of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics: selfhood, narrative, the symbol and ideology to name just some of the topics. The volume was produced by the International Institute for Hermeneutics. I borrow this title as it locates Ricoeur’s distinct characteristic as a dialectical philosopher who sought to critically analyse while maintaining an openness to reading sympathetically. In the introduction Wierciński quotes Ricoeur as saying “Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigor, vow of obedience.” Wierciński, Andrzej. “The Heterogeneity of Thinking: Paul Ricoeur, The believing philosopher and the philosophizing believer” in Wierciński, Andrzej. (ed.) *Between Suspicion and Sympathy. Paul Ricoeur’s Unstable Equilibrium* pp xv-xxxiv:xi. Ricoeur citation from Ricoeur, Paul. *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. 1970, p27

<sup>81</sup>Such topics include the history of philosophy, literary criticism, metaphysics, ethics, religion, structuralism, psychoanalysis and semiotics to name some. For an extensive account of Ricoeur’s

been characterised by a movement between two poles, a Biblical pole and a critical pole. This twofold reference, Ricoeur names as the relation between conviction and critique, illustrating his view that philosophy is not purely critical but itself belongs to an order of conviction, while religious conviction can also possess an internal critical dimension<sup>82</sup>. This is a duality that Ricoeur claims has lasted throughout his entire career and is indicative of his dialectical style of philosophy which sought to identify commonalities in seemingly opposing ideas and traditions. One of the disciplines within which Ricoeur contributed largely was the area of hermeneutical phenomenology. Hermeneutical phenomenology can be regarded as the synthesis of hermeneutics, whose history includes the work of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, with that of phenomenology which arises largely from the investigations of Edmund Husserl<sup>83</sup>. The key figures in this synthesis were Heidegger and Gadamer and most recently, Ricoeur. Although there is a continual development in Ricoeur's work, where in general a succeeding work confronts something that had escaped the previous work, for the purpose of this research, my engagement with Ricoeur will be primarily based on his hermeneutics, and figurative language in particular, the development of which led to his work on narrative, and how both of these, Ricoeur argues, attend to self-understanding.

In this section, I will present the relevant aspects of Ricoeur's hermeneutics for this study. I will first present how he developed his understanding of the task and reach of hermeneutics. Ricoeur's hermeneutics sought to maintain the critical moment of the human sciences and thus its methodology. This is done by Ricoeur, I will argue, under two considerations. These are 1) understanding through explanation and 2) the text as paradigmatic of the relationship between explanation and understanding. This section is chiefly based on three of Ricoeur's essays. These are: "Hermeneutical Logic?", "Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology" and "The hermeneutical function of distanciation"<sup>84</sup>.

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intellectual journey and bibliography, please see Hahn, Lewis E. (ed.) *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* in addition to Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* / Paul Ricoeur. Blamey, Kathleen (trans.) U.K: Polity Press. 1998.

<sup>82</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* / Paul Ricoeur. p139

<sup>83</sup>Thompson, John B. *Critical Hermeneutics. A study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p36

<sup>84</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Hermeneutical Logic?" in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2. pp65-111. This essay was originally presented as a lecture to the Institut international de philosophie in 1978; "Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology" in *Hermeneutics and the human sciences*; "The



### 1.3.1 From the symbol to the text. The development of Ricoeur's hermeneutics

Ricoeur developed his concept of what he considered to be the task of hermeneutics, from that which was concerned with the interpretation of symbols, to that which was primarily concerned with interpretation of the text. In his first major work 'Philosophy of the Will,'<sup>85</sup> Ricoeur began what he would later term 'the graft of hermeneutics onto phenomenology' whereby he considered phenomenology to be "the unsurpassable presupposition of hermeneutics."<sup>86</sup> Phenomenology and hermeneutics, he argues, are conjoined through the concept of intentionality, description of the intended object being necessarily an interpretive description. Ricoeur argues how just as all consciousness is consciousness of something, all interpretation is interpretation of something<sup>87</sup>. Furthermore, Ricoeur states how every question concerning any being in phenomenology is a question about the sense of that being. The choice of sense, he argues is also the general presupposition of all hermeneutics as it is a manner in which experience is expressed. Thus, hermeneutics moves back to 'a state of phenomenology' where intentionality reveals a consciousness turned toward sense, before returning to itself, or, being-for-itself, in reflection. In placing sense at a distance from 'the lived', distanciation can be understood as a dimension of phenomenology<sup>88</sup>. According to Ricoeur if phenomenology begins when "we interrupt living in order to signify it"<sup>89</sup>, hermeneutics extends this gesture of distanciation into the historical and human

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hermeneutical function of distanciation" in *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*. Blamey, Kathleen & Thompson, John B. (ed's and trans.) London: The Athlone Press, 1991, p75-88

<sup>85</sup>The Philosophy of the Will, Ricoeur's first major work consists of two volumes. The first: *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* and the second: *Finitude and Guilt* which appears in two parts -*Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil*.

<sup>86</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p36

<sup>87</sup>Wierciński, A. "Hermeneutic Conversion: Through Phenomenology back to Hermeneutics" in *Between Description and Interpretation. The Hermeneutic turn in Phenomenology*. Wierciński, A (ed.) Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2005, pp xiii-xxiv: xix

<sup>88</sup>Venema notes that 'distanciation' is the key concept which distinguishes Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics. In his essay "Who am I to others" he quotes Ricoeur as saying "the theme of distanciation gives me the opportunity to mark my personal contribution to the hermeneutical-phenomenological school; it is quite clearly characterized by the role I assign to critical distance in all the operations of thought belonging to interpretation." Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, p xiii-xvi, cited in Venema, Henry Isaac, "Who am I to others?" in *Between Suspicion and Sympathy Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*. (Wierciński Andrzej) (ed.) pp172-191:178

<sup>89</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p36

sciences. Hermeneutics begins when not content to belong to the historical world and its transmission of tradition, it interrupts “the relation of belonging in order to signify it.”<sup>90</sup>

With this hermeneutic graft on to phenomenology, Ricoeur introduced into reflexive philosophy<sup>91</sup>, the interpretation of symbols and myths which are transmitted by a culture and whose consideration in interpretation became known as ‘the long detour’. Ricoeur suggests three dimensions of symbolism as being present in every “authentic symbol.”<sup>92</sup> These are the cosmic whereby Ricoeur argues that humanity first reads the sacred *onto* aspects of the world such as the sun, the moon, the stars. These ‘cosmic realities’ refer back to manifestations of the sacred, to hierophanies “where the sacred is shown in a fragment of the cosmos, which, in return, loses its concrete limits, gets charged with innumerable meanings”<sup>93</sup>. This does not infer, Ricoeur states, that symbols in their cosmic dimension are anterior to language but rather before they give rise to thought, that they give rise to speech. Ricoeur writes how “the symbolic *manifestation* as a *thing* is a matrix of symbolic meanings as words”<sup>94</sup>.

The second dimension is the oneiric dimension. This is the aspect associated with what Ricoeur names as dream production. According to Ricoeur we would not be able to comprehend how “symbols can signify the bond between the being of man and total being if we opposed to one another the hierophanies described by the phenomenology of religion and the dream productions described by Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis.”<sup>95</sup> This is so, he argues, as it is in dreams that the “symbolisms of humanity” pass from the cosmic to the ‘psychic’ function. Ricoeur states how to manifest the sacred onto the cosmos and to manifest it *in* the psyche, amount to the same thing. He writes “Cosmos and Psyche are the

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid. p36

<sup>91</sup>Coming from a tradition of reflexive philosophy and acknowledging his debt to fellow French philosopher, Jean Nabert, Ricoeur defines a reflexive philosophy as one which concerns “the possibility of self-understanding as the subject of operations of knowing, willing, evaluating, etc. Reflexion [sic] is that act of turning back upon itself by which a subject grasps, in a moment of intellectual clarity and moral responsibility, the unifying principle of the operations among which it is dispersed and forgets itself as subject.” (Ricoeur, Paul. “On Interpretation” in *Philosophy in France Today*. Montefiore Alan (ed.) 1983, p.188 cited in Blamey, Kathleen, “From the ego to the self: A philosophical itinerary” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, pp571-603:587). Blamey further clarifies that it is a subject-oriented philosophy “in the subject’s act of turning back upon itself” (p602) but also a ‘reflective philosophy’ in the sense of contemplation and meditation which includes the reference to self-reference.

<sup>92</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *The Symbolism of Evil*. (Translated by Buchanan Emerson). Boston: Beacon Press,1967, p10

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p10-11

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p11

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p12

two poles of the same expressivity; I express myself in expressing the world; I explore my own sacrality in deciphering that of the world.”<sup>96</sup>

The third dimension is that of poetic imagination which complements the double “expressivity” of psychic and cosmic. Ricoeur states that the poetic image is closer to a word than to a portrait and quotes French philosopher M. Bachelard as describing how it “puts us at the origin of the speaking being; it becomes a new being of our language.”<sup>97</sup> He argues that the poetic symbol is expression in its nascent form. It is the point where not yet being stabilised by myth or ritual, language emerges to express the symbol.

This long detour through the world of symbol frees the conscious subject from Husserl’s idealist view of interpretation and in her effort towards self-understanding, places upon her the task of deciphering the empire of signs and symbols deposited in culture and literary traditions. Thus, Ricoeur’s first definition of hermeneutics was conceived as “a deciphering of symbols, themselves understood as expressions containing double meanings: the literal, usual common meaning guiding the unveiling of the second meaning, the one actually aimed at by the symbol through the first”<sup>98</sup>. This, Ricoeur conceived of as an amplifying interpretation in that it was attentive to the surplus of meaning included in the symbol and which reflection was to uncover. The symbol functions as a mediation between experience and reflection on that experience. With this symbolic mediation Ricoeur argued how reflection (which was to be integrated in self-understanding) incorporated some of the history of culture. With this emphasis on the mediating function of symbols, Ricoeur formulated his well-known aphorism that ‘the symbol gives rise to thought’.

Ricoeur was later to develop this definition of hermeneutics through the dialectic of explanation and understanding, with he argued, the text being the level where this conflict played out. In this way Ricoeur’s scope of hermeneutics was expanded from the interpretation of symbols to that of the level of the text. As the text is ‘fixed in writing’, it is possible to objectify it, and so impose an explanatory phase in understanding by analysing it through structuralist approaches. Henceforth, the major concern for interpretation and the primary theme of hermeneutics, Ricoeur defined as “the dialectic between explanation and understanding unfolding on the level of the text

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p13

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p17

as the unit of discourse greater than the sentence.”<sup>99</sup> This development of hermeneutics enabled Ricoeur to formulate what he described as his motto of hermeneutics – [to] “explain more in order to understand better”<sup>100</sup>, where critically in this sense, understanding referred to self-understanding. This dialectic of explanation and understanding is so critical to Ricoeur’s thought that my next section will focus exclusively on it.

### 1.3.2 The notion of understanding through explanation as a central theme of Ricoeur’s work

Interpretation is the development of understanding. According to Ricoeur to understand something *as* something is to interpret it. This interpretation then gets “articulated in a discourse that determines and makes explicit the articulations of a situation and an understanding that were initially bound to a more fundamental level than such discourse.”<sup>101</sup> Thus for Ricoeur the event is more fundamental than the discourse. According to Ricoeur it is the misunderstanding, that our understanding begins with discourse, which “place[s] oneself within an *apophatic logos*”<sup>102</sup> that hermeneutics reacts against. He argues that language itself does not constitute a world, rather it is being that is partially expressed in language and experiences that are shared through language. In this way it is being that remains a primary philosophical question and must be addressed before epistemology can be considered. For Ricoeur “the first setting for any articulation [of interpretation] is being-in-the-world itself.”<sup>103</sup> It is the relation between our situation, our understanding, our interpretation as well as discourse “that underlies every investigation at a purely propositional level.”<sup>104</sup> Pellauer expands on this point of Ricoeur’s when he argues that for Ricoeur, while philosophy maintains an autonomy it is:

always dependent on something that precedes it which it never fully absorbs or exhausts. Philosophy does have its autonomy in that it chooses its starting point,

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p30

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p31

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p67

<sup>102</sup>Ibid. Italics original

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

the question from which it begins. But this question already is situated and motivated by something problematic outside of – and prior to – all philosophy: the non-philosophical or perhaps life, being or reality. Philosophy arises therefore in response to this non-philosophical reality that precedes it, seeking to make it intelligible in ways that are adequate to what is at issue concerning our experience of it.<sup>105</sup>

Ricoeur sought to preserve the independence of philosophy which he argues is not inseparable to a discipline or disciplines and as such its fate does not lie, in what Ricoeur terms as provoking methodological divisions. Rather, he argues that the fate of philosophy is bound to its capacity “to subordinate the very idea of method to a more fundamental conception of our truth-relation to things and to beings”<sup>106</sup>. In granting that this sets limits to what philosophy can achieve, Ricoeur claims that it also implies that philosophical questions can always be re-opened. Epistemological questions in analytical philosophy, by their construction of knowing subject and object to be known, he argued, are subordinate to ontological questions. This is so as “before history has an object and a method, we are historical.”<sup>107</sup> Thus, Ricoeur argues, before we can assume any epistemological claims they must first be recognised as located in the situation where they arise and which contributes to our understanding, in short our history and our pre-understanding which constitutes part of our being.

On the other hand, Ricoeur was also determined to maintain the critical, epistemological dimension of the human sciences. In doing this, he adjusted Gadamer’s approach, which in following Dilthey, arguably dichotomised understanding and explanation. Ricoeur adjusted this to include a hermeneutics of suspicion, whereby he argued, it was deemed necessary to approach tradition from where we derive, often unconsciously, our implicit and pre-judging value system, critically<sup>108</sup>. He sought to overcome the dichotomy of Gadamer’s Truth ‘or’ Method. In contrast to Gadamer who rejected a fixed methodology in ascertaining truth, Ricoeur wished to maintain the methodology that leads one to understand, arguing that the relation of truth to method was not necessarily one of mutual exclusion or opposition. Thus, Ricoeur argued how there was an epistemological, as well as an ontological, component to hermeneutics.

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<sup>105</sup>Pellauer, David. *Ricoeur. A Guide for the Perplexed*. NY: Continuum, 2007, p5

<sup>106</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Explanation and Understanding” in *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*. pp125-143:126

<sup>107</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Hermeneutical Logic?” in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2., p68

<sup>108</sup>Jeanrond, W. *Theological Hermeneutics. Development and Significance*. London: SCM, London, 1994

In addressing the epistemological claim that hermeneutic philosophy must ask of itself, he claims it is analytic “in that it proceeds by making distinctions, determinations and finding relationships.”<sup>109</sup> He pronounces it an existential analytic which articulates quasi-categories such as being-in-the-world, situation and understanding. These quasi-categories (existentials) Ricoeur states are to ontology what categories in analytic philosophy “are to things”<sup>110</sup>. Ricoeur states how the distinction between ‘existentials’ and ‘categories’ is based on an ontological distinction between “different modes of being: the being we are – Dasein, which alone exists – and “things” which are things either present-to-hand or ready-to-hand.”<sup>111</sup> This distinction between different modes of being comes to language as a categorical difference. In this way, Ricoeur claims hermeneutics cannot avoid the Kantian question of the conditions of possibility of its own discourse, and this offers a foundation for a critical and explanatory process.

Ricoeur terms as historical categories, the concepts of historical efficacy, the rehabilitation of prejudice and the fusion of horizons put forward by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*. Ricoeur also identifies these concepts as points of mediation or explanation between hermeneutics and the human sciences. These categories constitute for Ricoeur a space through which something can be objectified. It can hold the value of a historical object without severing the ontological foundation.

In addressing the rehabilitation of prejudice, Ricoeur states that it does not signify submission to every tradition but acknowledges pre-understanding as a necessary condition for historical transmission. Tradition has authority because of the knowledge it transmits, and this authority is based on recognition of that. This is the “tradition starting from which we inquire”<sup>112</sup>, that which makes inquiry possible. Ricoeur goes on to argue how this does not demand the sacrifice of reason and uses Gadamer’s idea of ‘application’ to illustrate how the preservation of a cultural heritage does not happen uncritically but rather through application which contributes to understanding. Application thus operates in a similar vein to how verification operates in a scientific hypothesis. Ricoeur states how “the art of understanding is not complete

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<sup>109</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Hermeneutical Logic?” in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2, p69

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p69

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p69

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p76

without a critical actualization of meaning in the conditions of a new cultural situation”<sup>113</sup>. Between preservation of tradition and innovation, lies application.

Connected to this point is the concept of ‘historical efficacy’ which Ricoeur further identifies as a critical moment. This he states is the “consciousness of being borne by traditions that makes possible the exercise of a historical methodology at the level of the human and social sciences.”<sup>114</sup> Effective history has its counterpart in what Ricoeur names ‘historical distance’<sup>115</sup>. Distance Ricoeur states is both a fact, and a methodology. A fact in that history is removed from us and a methodology in that it is possible to take a distance from something. Effective history is, Ricoeur explains, efficacy at a distance. This can create the illusion that we are no longer complicit with the past but the past as objectified becomes abstract leading to an alienating distanciation. While careful to maintain the alterity of the past, Ricoeur states that we are unable to break with the contingency of the past or the effect it has upon us. The historian is unable to remove herself from the history she is undertaking to investigate but rather she belongs to it.

In addressing the ‘fusion of horizons’, Ricoeur argues that this concept attests that although history is effective, that we are not slaves to the past. It is the idea of a fusion of horizons which “completes and corrects that of a situation”<sup>116</sup>. Ricoeur identifies language as the critical moment here. If it is possible to enter into another’s point of view it is possible because “a prior agreement about the thing itself leads inquiry to an actual agreement” but this prior agreement “cannot be transformed into objective knowledge that would abolish the alterity of points of view”<sup>117</sup>. As historical beings there can be no totalising overview or view from above which enables us to grasp the effect of history upon us and this thus prevents any pass into absolute knowledge. While the fusion of horizons signifies the refusal of any objectifying closure it also signifies the ability to dialect from a prior understanding about ‘the thing’, which indicates that transfer to another culture or point of view is always possible. It does not imply an already given agreement but infers “questions and

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<sup>113</sup>ibid.

<sup>114</sup>ibid., p72

<sup>115</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Hermeneutical Logic?” in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2.

<sup>116</sup>ibid., p74

<sup>117</sup>ibid., p75

answers.”<sup>118</sup> According to Ricoeur, it is the epistemology of hermeneutics<sup>119</sup> which “leads to this art of dialogue”<sup>120</sup>. This dialogical approach of question and answer necessarily leads to explanation and “marks the inclusion of the critical moment of the question into the hermeneutics of understanding carried by the language-based community”<sup>121</sup>. For a text, this critical question is to be interpreted as language.

For Ricoeur, interpretation must thus include a process of both explanation and understanding. He describes it thus:

the moment of understanding is characterized by an intuitive, overall insight into what is in question in this field, through an anticipation of meaning that touches on divination, marked by a commitment on the part of the knowing subject. The moment of explanation, on the other hand, is marked by the predominance of analysis, the subordination of a particular case to rules, laws, or structures, and by the setting at a distance of the object under study in relation to an independent subject. What was most important to me, was not to separate understanding from explanation... Interpretation, for me, consists precisely in the alternating of the phases of understanding and those of explanation along a unique “hermeneutical arc.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>According to Ricoeur the epistemological status of hermeneutics crystallised in the debate regarding its claim to universality. This is the debate between the critique of ideology and hermeneutics, exemplified by that between Habermas and Gadamer, and encapsulated by claims to universality on both sides. Ricoeur summarises it as a hermeneutics that sets itself up as a meta-critique and a critical philosophy that sets itself up as a meta-hermeneutic. For a detailed representation of the argument of either side followed by Ricoeur’s mediation please see Ricoeur’s essay “Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. p63-100:80

<sup>120</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Hermeneutical Logic?” in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2. p77

<sup>121</sup>Ibid.

<sup>122</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “The problem of hermeneutics” in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2. Pellauer, David (trans.) Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013 pp1-45:9. (This essay brings together four lectures given by Paul Ricoeur at a seminar titled “Unitinerariofilosofico: seminario con Paul Ricoeur” at the Instituto Stensen in Florence, Italy, held on May 19-21, 1988. Ricoeur agreed that the text be translated into Italian and published but it did not appear until after his death.) Ricoeur broadened Gadamer’s conception of the hermeneutical circle to one where the “circle is between my mode of being - beyond the knowledge which I may have of it - and the mode opened up and disclosed by the text through the world of the work” and so the hermeneutical circle is displaced from a “subjectivistic level to an ontological level” in that understanding is not a projection of the reader’s prejudices and beliefs into the work but occurs by allowing the work and the world of the work, to enlarge the self-understanding of the reader. This postulates a ‘common horizon’ and relation between the being of the self and the being that is opened up by the text. It assumes a familiarity in order that the reception and appropriation of the text can occur. Ricoeur, Paul. “Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics” in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2, p61. cf. Venema, Henry, Isaac. ‘Who am I to Others?’ in Wierciński, Andrzej.(ed.) *Between Suspicion and Sympathy. Paul Ricoeur’s Unstable Equilibrium*. pp172-191



Hence, it is not a case of choosing either truth/understanding - and renouncing the objectivity of the human sciences, or choosing explanation/method - and losing the ontological experience but rather retaining method to analytically develop understanding and so prevent that which is to be understood from ideological distortion<sup>123</sup>. Explanation was a means to understanding. For Ricoeur to explain more was to understand better what had already been pre-understood. Explanation thus acts as a mediator between two points of understanding namely pre-understanding and a fuller understanding. Thus, ontology and epistemology are not rivals in Ricoeur's approach. He writes:

understanding and explanation are not opposed to each other as two methods. Strictly speaking only explanation is methodical. Understanding is the non-methodical moment that precedes, accompanies, and closes explanation. In this sense, understanding envelops explanation. In return, explanation analytically develops understanding. This is the projection on the epistemological plane of a deeper lying implication, on the ontological plane, between the belonging of our being to beings and to being, and the distanciation that makes possible all objectification, explanation and critique.<sup>124</sup>

Explanation enables understanding through an added critical dimension, a dimension which demands that we give an account of ourselves and the criteria we have chosen which enable us to give this account. In this dialogue of explanation and understanding the appropriation of one can alter the boundaries of the other, all the while increasing our knowledge of that which we seek to know. For Ricoeur hermeneutics is not anti-epistemology but rather it reflects on the non-epistemological conditions of epistemology and addresses how these might be incorporated into our epistemologies towards an improvement of our human understanding.

### 1.3.3 The text as paradigmatic of the relationship between understanding and explanation

The importance Ricoeur attached to the text and its capacity to inform our self-understanding but also as a primary example of the hermeneutical task of interpretation

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<sup>123</sup>Jeanrond, W. *Theological Hermeneutics*. p9

<sup>124</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Hermeneutical Logic?" in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2

cannot be overstated. He offers the text in his essay “The hermeneutical function of distancing”<sup>125</sup> as the paradigm of “communication in and through distance”<sup>126</sup>. In his essay on “Hermeneutics and the critique of Ideology”<sup>127</sup> Ricoeur reverts to the text as an example of where the dialectic between alienating distancing and the experience of belonging takes place whereby the text constitutes “the most fundamental condition for the recognition of a critical instance at the heart of interpretation.”<sup>128</sup> In “Hermeneutical Logic”<sup>129</sup> Ricoeur offers the text as a domain where the articulation between understanding and explanation can be thematised and made explicit. These three essays, although addressing different topics overlap in that Ricoeur presents the instance or event of the text in a similar way, as that which is paradigmatic of the relationship between understanding and explanation. Drawing from these three essays, I will now present Ricoeur’s argument for this.

The text, due in no small part to the fact that it is ‘fixed’ in writing, Ricoeur argues, is autonomous. This autonomy is threefold. Firstly, the text is autonomous of the author’s intention, secondly, it is autonomous of the cultural and sociological conditions within which it was produced and thirdly, it is autonomous with regard to its original audience. In this way the text becomes decontextualised. The author, the original audience and the sociological conditions within which it had been born, have been transcended and so the text, Ricoeur states, has been ‘emancipated’. It is this emancipation which constitutes the critical moment for interpretation. It is also the passage through which explanation must proceed. Thus, this emancipation and distancing of the text from the present moment challenge the dominance of ontology. Distancing is not what understanding must overcome, rather it is what mediates and conditions understanding. Through the interpretation of the text we witness distancing, as mentioned above, as both a fact and as the explanatory process or method through which the text can travel.

Ricoeur offers a structuralist analysis as an example of an explanatory device in interpreting a text. He regards structuralism (although offering a robust critique of it<sup>130</sup>)

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<sup>125</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “The hermeneutical function of distancing” in *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, p76

<sup>127</sup>Ricoeur Paul. “Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, p91

<sup>129</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Hermeneutical Logic?” in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2

<sup>130</sup>Thompson states that Ricoeur criticises structuralism on the basis that it excludes: the act of speaking (a free creation of new expression); history (the process by which human beings produce themselves);

as stage one of the process of interpretation between what he terms a naïve or surface interpretation and a critical or depth interpretation. This ensures, in Ricoeur's view, that the text to be understood is not confused with something felt but is identifiable as a reference which is released by this explanation<sup>131</sup>.

Thompson argues that reference is key for Ricoeur but criticises him for failing to "explain how one succeeds or fails to refer, under what conditions a successful reference occurs and what counts as the referent on any particular occasion."<sup>132</sup>

Thompson goes on to argue that "it is not obvious for instance, that a text as such may be said to refer, as distinct from the particular expressions within it, and this obscurity is especially acute in the case of human action which Ricoeur conceptualises on the model of the text"<sup>133</sup>. Nor, Thompson continues, is it apparent that 'truth' can be predicated by a text and states that Ricoeur regards the truth of a text "as the world which it unfolds"<sup>134</sup>.

According to Thompson, Ricoeur's account fails to specify what qualifies as a successful reference and in what way this reference relates to truth. He argues that in his method Ricoeur transcends such restrictions of a 'preconceived object domain' by returning to questions of being over epistemology but in doing this there is little room left to debate on "which being is thereby disclosed"<sup>135</sup>. There are two points to address here. The first is the difficulty of reference and the manner in which it can ever be objective, and the second, connected to the first, is truth as the disclosure of being. In his hermeneutical circle of understanding-interpretation-understanding, Ricoeur forecloses any possibility of final or fixed truth. Rather my 'being-in-the-world' is continuously re-submitted for critical interpretation and reflection through the long detour. This has less to do with epistemology, as Thompson notes, and more with the "appropriation of the effort to exist"<sup>136</sup> and highlights Ricoeur's concern with subjectivity which underpinned much of his philosophy. What is more critical is the manner in which this reference can be associated with the world of human action. The

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and the fundamental intention of language which is to say something about something. Thompson, John B. *Critical Hermeneutics. A study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas*. p48

<sup>131</sup>Thompson, John B. "Paul Ricoeur and hermeneutic phenomenology" in *Critical Hermeneutics. A study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas*. pp36-70

<sup>132</sup>*ibid.*, p192.

<sup>133</sup>*ibid.*, p192

<sup>134</sup>*ibid.*, p195

<sup>135</sup>*ibid.*, p193

<sup>136</sup>*ibid.*, p54

limits of such a theoretical approach become clear when we endeavour to explicitly relate the text to action in the world. Ricoeur has argued that application is not a supplement to hermeneutics but rather is “one body with “understanding” and “explication”<sup>137</sup>. This is the tendency of hermeneutics to be self-referential which prevents it from becoming an objective science in the type of positivism. This is also the point at which hermeneutics can be said to relate to action in that understanding and explanation “without application are not interpretation”<sup>138</sup>. To prevent hermeneutics becoming a ‘discourse about discourse’ it can be approached by the norms, signals and signs that articulate the field of action. In this manner, Ricoeur argues for the use of all relevant explanatory devices that enable a technical use of the word interpretation. This does not, however, address the theoretical foundation on which Ricoeur’s approach is based and the manner in which its application is dependent on this theoretical foundation. Koenig too observes that in Ricoeur’s approach, the poetic image, and in this instance, the reference or ‘world of the text’ places us at the origin of speaking being and involves an “increment to consciousness” which goes beyond Ricoeur’s narrative theory<sup>139</sup>. This, she argues, needs more than Ricoeur’s theory to explain it, specifically in the contributions (images for Koenig) the language makes to the meaning of the text. To enlighten Ricoeur’s theory and assist explanation, I have approached the investigation of these meanings through an exploration of figurative discourse and the lens of environmental hermeneutics, aware that this too imposes limits on the meanings that are revealed and underscores hermeneutics as a philosophy of finitude.

The second point is the relationship between truth and reality. The reference of a text, Ricoeur argues, is the manner in which it relates to reality. This, I argue, for Ricoeur, is not reality in any objective or idealist sense of the word but can be understood as that which constitutes us and we are constituted by. This includes culture,

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<sup>137</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Pastoral Praxeology, Hermeneutics, and Identity” in *Figuring the Sacred. Religion, Narrative and Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, pp303-314:304

<sup>138</sup>*ibid.*, p304

<sup>139</sup>Koenig, Elisabeth. *The Book of Showing of Julian of Norwich: A Test-case for Paul Ricoeur’s Theories of Metaphor and Imagination*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Columbia University, 1984, p216 Accessed online. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses: A & I. Accessed 11/05/2020 In her thesis, Koenig applies Ricoeur’s theory of the productivity of both the imagination and the text, to Julian’s *Book of Showings*, which reveals that the images of that text are productive in the meaning of the text. She then puts Ricoeur’s theory in tension with psychoanalysis and argues that this gives a more complete picture of the place of imagination in religious understanding than either theory could accomplish alone. This thesis focuses only on the productivity of the text, specifically through its use of language while extending its hermeneutic to environments to provide, in this instance, a more complete picture of ‘the world of the text’.

history, symbols and texts. Such a reference only becomes a 'world' when it "performs for the spectator or the reader the work of refiguration"<sup>140</sup>. Although Ricoeur offers a method which can reveal this reference and the proposed 'world of the text', the transformative act of refiguration, he argues, touches on 'divination' and Ricoeur's theory of interpretation although outlining possibilities of how this may occur (see section 1.6) can never definitively and finally articulate it. The result of this is that Ricoeur's approach while enunciating a concrete process within which to interrogate a text, is always confined by its theoretical limitations and the difficulty of bridging in any empirical sense, the theory-action gap. This stated, his theory of interpretation does offer a number of explanatory steps in order to qualify this reference which serves to avoid misappropriation, or a purely subjective account of any given text, and is the focus of the following sections.

#### 1.3.3.1 The 'objectifying' function of distanciation

Ricoeur sees the text as the paradigm of distanciation which illustrates what Ricoeur terms as the 'positive' and 'productive' function of distanciation, as it testifies to the distanciation that is "at the heart of the historicity of human experience."<sup>141</sup> It is communication in and through distance. We are thus prepared "to discover a relation between *objectification* and *interpretation* which is much less dichotomous"<sup>142</sup>. It is, it could be argued, distanciation which makes communication necessary.

The first distanciation to be considered according to Ricoeur, is the distance between the saying and the said. This Ricoeur argues, refers to how language actualised in discourse, surpasses itself as system and is realised as event. Thus, there is a distance introduced between the words that are uttered and the discourse that they constitute. A second type of distanciation occurs when discourse surpasses itself as event and becomes meaning. Ricoeur states how henceforth, "explanation is the obligatory path of understanding"<sup>143</sup> through the objectification of discourse as a structured work. According to Ricoeur, hermeneutics is the art of discerning the discourse in the work but that "this discourse is only given in and through the structures of the work"<sup>144</sup>.The

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<sup>140</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* / Paul Ricoeur. p176

<sup>141</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "The hermeneutical function of distanciation" in *From text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II.*, p76

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p84

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p82

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., p83

third sort of distancing the hermeneutic experience must incorporate is the distancing of the real from itself. This is the distance that fiction and poetry introduce to our apprehension of reality. It is where everyday life is re-described and re-presented as possibility or the 'power-to-be'.

In examining the text, Ricoeur argues how hermeneutics in seeking to overcome these distanciations must appeal to both language and discourse for two reasons. The first is that language is realised through discourse; and the second is the realisation of discourse as a structured work. This section will present Ricoeur's analysis of discourse and its relation to language.

### 1.3.3.2 The relation of language to discourse

Ricoeur defines discourse as “someone says something to someone about something in accordance with rules.”<sup>145</sup> It is primarily an event in that “something happens when someone speaks.”<sup>146</sup> This event is an example of a primary distanciation and can be understood, Ricoeur argues, as a dialectic between event and meaning. It is the linguistics of the sentence which underlie this meaning. In illustrating that language is realised as discourse or event, Ricoeur makes four points. These are: (1) that discourse is realised temporally whereas language is abstract insofar as it is ‘out of time’; (2) language has no subject and cannot refer to itself, while discourse is self-referential and always refers back to the reader; (3) discourse refers to something which it describes, represents or expresses. In this way Ricoeur notes, discourse is always about something. Language on the other hand has no world in the same way that it has no time. Finally, (4) language provides the codes for communication but it is through discourse that messages are exchanged. In this way, discourse always entails an ‘other’. Ricoeur then elaborates on the connection between language and discourse when stating how language surpasses itself as a system when it becomes actualised in discourse as an event. Furthermore, discourse through the process of understanding, then surpasses itself as event and becomes meaning. Discourse thus is realised as event but understood as meaning. This is what Ricoeur refers to as the intentionality of language, a characteristic where the event is subordinate to the meaning.

There are further points offered by Ricoeur concerning discourse which need to be taken into account. The first is that discourse, through the medium of text, constitutes a work. It is a work in that it is characterised by composition (it contains a sequence longer than a sentence); there is a form of codification applied to the composition which renders it a specific genre; and it contains an individual style. Furthermore, these categories are categories of production and labour rendering discourse according to Ricoeur, a praxis or technē. This work is underlined by style which gives to the work a unique configuration. It is the notion of style which draws together the aspects of event and meaning. Style is what Ricoeur refers to as “the

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<sup>145</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p22

<sup>146</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “The hermeneutical function of distanciation” in *From text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*. p77

irrational moment of taking a stand.”<sup>147</sup> It occurs in a structured experience but is marked by possibilities and indeterminacies. It is a particular viewpoint expressed in a work and so designates its author. Ricoeur argues that the notion of work acts as a mediation between “the irrationality of the event and the rationality of the meaning”<sup>148</sup>. He writes that “to grasp a work as an event is to grasp the relation between the situation and the project in the process of restructuration.”<sup>149</sup> The author thus becomes “the artisan of a work of language.”<sup>150</sup>

In recognising discourse in this objectified way as containing characteristics of organisation, structure, and style, the hermeneut is enabled to travel the route through explanation in order to discern the discourse in the work, a discourse which is “only given in and through the structures of the work.”<sup>151</sup> Thus, Ricoeur summarises his criteria for textuality and the steps to his understanding of the function of the narrative as: language realised as discourse; discourse as a structured work; the work of discourse as the projection of a world and finally; the text or the narrative as the mediation for self-understanding.

#### 1.4 ‘The narrative as the text par excellence’. How does the narrative function in Ricoeur’s narrative discourse?

Ricoeur extended his philosophical investigation from that of the symbol, to include the notion of the text which he considered to be the large unit of discourse, to that of the narrative which he considered to be “the text par excellence”<sup>152</sup>. In his essay entitled “The Narrative Function”, borrowing from Wittgenstein’s vocabulary, Ricoeur writes “if narrating constitutes a unique “language-game,” and if “a language-game is

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<sup>147</sup>Ibid., p81

<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., p82

<sup>151</sup>Ibid.

<sup>152</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. In recounting the course of his own work, Ricoeur states “I placed at the forefront the notion of the text, considered the large unit of discourse. To be sure, the myth was itself already a text in relation to the symbol. The poem was also a text in relation to the metaphor. The narrative would a few years later, be the text par excellence.” (p29)



part of an activity or form of life”, then the question is, to what form of life does narrative discourse taken as a whole refer? Answering this is what I call inquiring into narrative's function.”<sup>153</sup> In his three volume work *Time and Narrative*<sup>154</sup> Ricoeur argues how one of the functions of the narrative is to articulate time in a manner that makes it intelligible to human experience. Distinct from that of narrative form or narrative structure, Ricoeur argues how the narrative function is directed toward the idea that “narrating is a speech act that points outside of itself, toward a reworking of the practical field of the one who receives it”<sup>155</sup>. Time, in this instance, becomes the referent of the narrative in that it is the temporal dimension of the practical field of the reader which becomes affected. Furthermore, through a plot “goals, causes, and chance are brought together within the temporal unity of a whole and complete action”<sup>156</sup> and form a totality which becomes intelligible to the reader. In his essay “Life in quest of Narrative”, Ricoeur summarises this relationship between the narrative, the world and the reader and the role that hermeneutics plays within this. As it is pertinent to this study, in terms of the status Ricoeur affords to the text, but also as a methodological approach, I will re-produce the paragraph in full. Ricoeur writes:

A text...is a mediation between man and the world, between man and man, between man and himself; the mediation between man and the world is what we call referentiality; the mediation between men, communicability; the mediation between man and himself, self-understanding. A literary work contains these three dimensions: referentiality, communicability and self-understanding. The hermeneutical problem begins, then, where linguistics leaves off. It attempts to discover new features of referentiality which are not descriptive, features of communicability which are not utilitarian, and features of reflexivity which are not narcissistic, as these are engendered by the literary work. In a word, hermeneutics is placed at the point of intersection of the (internal) configuration of the work and the (external) refiguration of life.<sup>157</sup>

Ricoeur argues that narrative discourse is found in both history and fiction and these share a common narrative structure. In turn, both history and fiction contribute to the description and re-description of our historical condition. This is accomplished

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<sup>153</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “The Narrative Function” in *Semeia*, 13, 1978, p178. This essay was later published in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*

<sup>154</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative. Volume 1.* (McLaughlin, Kathleen & Pellauer, David, translators). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984

<sup>155</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p41

<sup>156</sup>Ricoeur, Paul *Time and Narrative. Volume 1*.pix

<sup>157</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*. Wood, D. (ed.) London: Routledge 1992, pp22-33:27

through the notion of emplotment. Ricoeur draws out this point in *Time and Narrative* when he writes how “Emplotment, too, engenders a mixed intelligibility between what has been called the point, theme, or thought of a story, and the intuitive presentation of circumstances, characters, episodes, and changes of fortune that make up the denouement. In this way, we may speak of a schematism of the narrative function...this schematism, in turn, is constituted within a history that has all the characteristics of a tradition”.<sup>158</sup> It is this which emphasises the relationship of narrative to time, with tradition enabling this relationship.

In this section I will look at Ricoeur’s approach to narrative discourse and how the narrative functions under the three headings of history and fiction, second-order reference and the three-fold mimesis. History and fiction, according to Ricoeur, overlap in that they both out of necessity revert to the narrative form in their telling. They also overlap in their claims to truth and how they reference reality<sup>159</sup>. Second-order reference, Ricoeur argues is what is released when the first-order reference of descriptive or ordinary language is suspended. This second order reference which is generally produced through poetic, metaphorical or figurative language serves to re-describe reality. Lastly the three-fold mimesis, Ricoeur states, is the structure the narrative must take in order to function. The text, according to Ricoeur is divided into three dimensions of mimesis: mimesis<sub>1</sub>, mimesis<sub>2</sub> and mimesis<sub>3</sub> which serve to pre-figure, configure and refigure the text respectively. Each of these processes, Ricoeur argues, is foundational for the way in which a narrative functions.

#### 1.4.1 The role of history and fiction in the narrative function

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<sup>158</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 1, p68

<sup>159</sup>In *Memory, History and Forgetting*, Ricoeur picks up the question of history as a narrative form of discourse and critiques how history and fiction were not distinguished sufficiently in *Time and Narrative*. Between time and narrative, what he terms as “the primary fastening’, memory, was missing. This question of memory is raised in *Memory, History and Forgetting*. Through the notion of memory Ricoeur differentiates history from fiction more explicitly. While the operative intentionality of imagination (relating to fiction) designates the image which is absent as unreal, the operative intentionality of memory (relating to history) is of the image which is absent as that which ‘has been’, as prior. There has been an ‘event’ in history, something has occurred, and how do we represent that occurrence in a manner that provides equal recognition to all involved. Thus, in this work Ricoeur argues that the claims to truth in both forms of narrative differ and in principle are set in opposition. Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History and Forgetting*. (Blamey, Kathleen, & Pellauer, David, translators) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004

In his essay, “The Narrative Function”<sup>160</sup>, Ricoeur sketches a general theory of narrative discourse which includes both historical and fictional narrative. According to Ricoeur both narratives share a common form, that of storytelling and that of narrating the events of the past which involves distanciation. This essay is particularly relevant in relation to *The Universe Story* as it uses a narrative form in its recounting of the physical origins of the universe disclosed by the natural sciences, and that this recounting also includes mythic elements (myth at this stage of the investigation having the cursory meaning of a story which claims to represent reality). In this formula, the historical and the fictional narrative appear to be mixed.

Ricoeur examines the correlation between historical and fictional narrative by using the aspects of sense and reference. Sense refers to the structure of the narrative, what Ricoeur states as a “common way of ordering sentences in a discursive manner”<sup>161</sup> while reference refers to how narratives refer to ‘reality’, with all the difficulties Ricoeur notes that arise with usage of this word<sup>162</sup>. In terms of sense, Ricoeur begins by arguing that narratives combine two dimensions although in various proportions, these being a chronological and a non-chronological dimension. The chronological dimension, according to Ricoeur, refers to the ‘episodic dimension’ of a narrative. The narrative, however, never just consists of “piling episodes on top of one another”<sup>163</sup> but “construes significant wholes out of scattered events”<sup>164</sup>. This construal refers to the non-chronological dimension and consists of the configuration of the narrative. It is the ‘grasping together’ of successive events. It is this complex structure of sequence and pattern within narrative, which implies “that the humblest narrative is always more than a chronological series of events and that, in turn, the configurational dimension cannot overcome the episodic dimension without suppressing the narrative structure itself.”<sup>165</sup> This episodic dimension is acknowledged in the act of being able to follow the story through the contingencies which affect its development. It raises such questions as ‘what happened next?’ The non-chronological aspect or the configurational aspect subsumes these parts into a whole in the form of a reflective judgement on events in

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<sup>160</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “The Narrative Function” in *Semeia*. p178

<sup>161</sup>Ibid.

<sup>162</sup>Please see section 1.3.3 for Thompson’s critique of Ricoeur’s use of reference and this thesis’ response.

<sup>163</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “The Narrative Function” in *Semeia*. p183

<sup>164</sup>Ibid.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., p184

both the reader and the teller. It contains what Ricoeur terms a 'point of view' and thus illustrates the way in which both dimensions of chronological and non-chronological, in the narrative form, are inextricably intertwined. This is what elsewhere Ricoeur refers to as "the art of emplotment"<sup>166</sup> whereby an episode receives its definition from its contribution to the development of the plot or 'the whole'. In such a way is a story or history made.

In examining reference in narrative discourse, Ricoeur argues that the unity of reference must correspond to the unity of sense and so making a further correlation between history and narrativity, Ricoeur notes how the term history means both 'what actually happened' and the report of those same happenings. He writes that there is a "certain mutual involvement of telling (or writing) history and being in history, of doing history and in more general terms being historical. In other words, the form of life of which the speaking of narrative is a part, is our historical condition itself."<sup>167</sup> What Ricoeur is referring to here is how we cannot escape our historical condition. It is always implicated in our being. Ricoeur states in *Time and Narrative* how "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organised after the manner of a narrative; narrative in turn is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal existence"<sup>168</sup>. In our human experience of life there are episodes or events and the narrative orders and interprets them, making them into a history and giving them sense and intelligibility.

In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur argues that every human experience has a temporal character and that the world unfolded by narrative is always a temporal world. Narrative itself is meaningful because it enables us to grasp the temporal aspects of our lived experience. In the work, Ricoeur addresses two philosophically historic concepts of time, that of time as subjective (using Book II of Augustine's confessions) and that of time as objective (using Aristotle's *Poetics*). Ricoeur argues how historical time connects these two concepts of time through that of 'a human time' which is the time 'that we are' and requires the present as a reference point. One of the ways we express historical time is through narrative. In the narrative the dialectic of having been, making present and coming to be are brought together to offer the understanding of 'within-

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<sup>166</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Toward a Narrative Theology. It's Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties" in *Figuring the Sacred*. pp236-248:239

<sup>167</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "The Narrative Function" in *Semeia*. p187

<sup>168</sup>Ricoeur, Paul, *Time and Narrative, Vol 1*. p3

time-ness' and time as a unity. Through narration, time can be understood in a practical and meaningful way and brings together cosmic (objective time) and lived experience (subjective time)<sup>169</sup>.

It is interesting here to focus on the question raised by Canadian philosopher John Beatty in his article "What are Narratives good for?" In the article Beatty poses the question of what is the 'point' of the narrative and what is the point of 'narrating' it?<sup>170</sup> thus succinctly highlighting the two levels at work in a narrative, that of the plot and that of the interests (which may be hidden) in narrating the plot<sup>171</sup>. Ricoeur writes in *Time and Narrative* how in a narrative "the entire plot can be translated into one "thought," which is nothing other than its "point" or "theme""<sup>172</sup>. However, as Beatty recognises, the point of the narrative and the point of narrating the narrative need not be the same. In acknowledgement of this, as argued previously, maintaining the explanatory process of how understanding occurs was a critical element of Ricoeur's philosophy. Ricoeur argued that as a form, narrative texts are not different to other texts and that no text is free from ideological distortion. Thus, Ricoeur argues that one task of hermeneutics is "to reconstruct the set of operations by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their acting"<sup>173</sup>.

#### 1.4.2 The role of second-order reference in the narrative function

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<sup>169</sup>Later in reflecting on his own work in *Critique and Conviction*, Ricoeur states how "there will always be two readings of time: a cosmological reading and a psychological reading, a time of the world and a time of the soul. And that time escapes the claim of unification." For Ricoeur, world time or cosmic time is structured after the manner in which the world is produced, not after the production of the narrative which ensures that the subject can never designate the meaning of time. Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* / Paul Ricoeur. p88

<sup>170</sup>Beatty's essay focuses on what merits being narrated and argues that narratives are good at representing contingency but also alluding to possibilities and "tracing one path through a maze of alternative possibilities" Beatty, John. "What are Narratives Good for" in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 58, 2016, p33-40:33

<sup>171</sup>I use Habermas' term 'interests' here taken from Ricoeur's essay on "The Critique of Ideology". In this essay Ricoeur identifies three basic interests which Habermas has developed and which, according to Habermas, distort human communication. These interests are (1) the technical or instrumental interest (2) the practical interest and (3) the interest of emancipation.

<sup>172</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative. Vol. 1.* p67

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., p53

The second point of interest in Ricoeur's narrative theory is that of second-order reference or discourse which refers to a reference to reality that is released when a first order reference is suspended. This second order reference Ricoeur refers to as the epistemological status of intelligibility displayed by the configurational act of emplotment and which Ricoeur argues has "more kinship with practical wisdom or moral judgement than with theoretical reason"<sup>174</sup>. This is because it opens a discourse which has the capacity to teach and to convey meanings which can share a certain universality and allow it to be connected to ethics. This is where 'history' and 'literature' depart. History claims to address itself "to events which actually happened"<sup>175</sup> through the use of documents and archives while fiction feels no need to provide evidence of that type, inaugurating a difference in truth claims between the two genres. Ricoeur writes that:

the suppression of a first order reference—which following convention, we have called the "description" of the world—is the condition of the possibility of a second order reference which we are here calling the redescription of the world. A literary work, it seems to me, is not a work without reference, but a work with a split reference, i.e., a work whose ultimate reference has as its condition a suspension of the referential claim of conventional language.<sup>176</sup>

Through a second-order reference, fiction introduces a distancing from the real itself into our apprehension of reality and with this Ricoeur argues "new possibilities of being-in-the-world are opened up within every-day reality"<sup>177</sup>. By suspending a first-order reference, claims on reality are loosened, and the second order reference introduces an altered 'state' of being or perception of being. Pellauer interprets this to mean:

His point is that the vast majority of poetic texts do refer to the world, though not the world accessible to thoroughgoing positivism and aestheticism, but the world now refigured under the tutelage of the imaginary and the possible. Poetic language does intend reality – it is not a language unto itself divorced from any referential function – but its power of reference is the power to set forth novel ontologies that

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<sup>174</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Toward a Narrative Theology. Its Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties" in *Figuring the Sacred*. p239

<sup>175</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "The Narrative Function" in *Semeia*. p187

<sup>176</sup>*Ibid.*, p194

<sup>177</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Philosophy and Religious Language" in *Figuring the Sacred*. pp35-47:43

disorient readers in order to reorient them by way of an ever-expanding vision of the whole.<sup>178</sup>

For Ricoeur, both historical and fictional narrative refer to human action but they do so with regards to different referential claims. It is only historical narrative which can announce a ‘truth-claim’ while fictional narrative appropriates a referential claim to re-describe reality according to the symbols of fiction. At the same time, Ricoeur concurs with Aristotle, in that poetry has the capacity to teach and to convey meanings. In configuring a plot, action is made understandable and ‘typical’ and this “typification of the story allows poetry to be connected with this other kind of intelligibility, that of ethics, which Aristotle called *phronesis*”<sup>179</sup>. History describes being, but fiction it could be argued has a greater task in that in re-describing being it *intends* being. It is this link between narrative intelligibility and Aristotle’s *phronesis*<sup>180</sup> which indicate that the knowledge conveyed through poetics is not that of science or theory but that of practice. Ricoeur writes how “it is poetry that shows us how shifts in fortune...are nurtured by actual practice...it is through our acquaintance with types of emplotment that we learn how to link excellence and happiness.”<sup>181</sup> Aristotle, according to Ricoeur, argued that poetry opened us to the universal, these universals Ricoeur states are not philosophical universals but poetic in that “they can be characterized by the double opposition of the possible to the actual and the general to the particular.”<sup>182</sup> A universal is, Aristotle states, something that a certain kind of person will “say or do either probably or necessarily”<sup>183</sup>. The possible and the general are to be found, Ricoeur informs us, in the organisation of events, thus it is the plot which has to be typical and the connection between events intelligible. This is the universality that is derived from the ordering of events, as the structure of the action of the plot rests on the internal connections of the action to the plot and not external accidents. These internal

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<sup>178</sup>Pellauer, David. *Ricoeur. A Guide for the Perplexed*. p8

<sup>179</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Toward a Narrative Theology. Its Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p239

<sup>180</sup>In *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, Ricoeur elaborates on Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis*. In the chapter which focuses on Emplotment (*muthos*) he argues that for Aristotle the internal connection of the plot is not chronological (as in time being represented as a coherent whole) rather it is logical. However, the term ‘logic’ is not used. Ricoeur argues that what is at stake is an intelligibility which is appropriate for “the field of praxis, not that of *theoria*, and therefore one neighbouring on *phronēsis*”, *phronēsis* being the intelligent use of action. (Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. vol. 1. p40)

<sup>181</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Toward a Narrative Theology. Its Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p240

<sup>182</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1. p40

<sup>183</sup>Aristotle’s *Poetics* (51b9) cited in Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, vol.1. p40

connections are the beginning of the universalisation which is related to practical wisdom, ethics and politics. Ricoeur writes “to make up a plot is already to make the intelligible spring from the accidental, the universal from the singular, the necessary or the probable from the episodic.”<sup>184</sup>

History, on the other hand, aims to be an account of actual events that have taken place. In spite of this, Ricoeur argues that “the historicity of human experience can be brought to language only as narrativity and that this narrativity itself requires no less than the intersecting interplay of the two narrative modes”<sup>185</sup>. Thus, for Ricoeur the ‘language-game’ of how we tell our history is involved in “the reality that is told”<sup>186</sup>. Ricoeur concludes by saying that “because history is tied to the contingent it misses the essential, whereas poetry, not being the slave of the real event, can address itself directly to the universal”<sup>187</sup>. Thus, for Ricoeur both narratives intersect and while history opens us to the possible, “the ‘true’ stories of the past expose the potentialities of the present”<sup>188</sup>, fiction brings us back to the essential as both share the common reference of “the fundamentally historical and temporal character of human existence”<sup>189</sup>. In identifying what is memorable and valuable from the past and so merits being passed on, the historian suspends her own position in order to enter into another epoché. In doing so there begins a dialectic between what is past and what is near, and what is foreign and what is familiar, which rules the ‘objective’ viewpoint of the historian. Thus, the recognition of values in the past, which may be different to the present, opens up “the real to the possible” and history becomes in a manner of speaking a field in which imaginative variations are built on from the present and the actual. Fiction, on the other hand, through its mimetic function redirects us to what Ricoeur names “the core of the actual world of action”<sup>190</sup>. Thus, fiction both opens us to new possibilities of being and imagines consequences of that being.

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<sup>184</sup>Ibid., p41

<sup>185</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “The Narrative Function” in *Semeia*. p195

<sup>186</sup>Ibid.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., p198

<sup>188</sup>Ibid.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid.

<sup>190</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “The Narrative Function” in *Semeia*. p198



### 1.4.3 The contribution of three senses of Mimesis to the narrative

In *Time and Narrative*<sup>191</sup> Ricoeur builds on Aristotle's *Poetics* and in particular his use of *muthos* [plot] and *mimesis* [imitation/representation] in conceptualising narrative. Aristotle defined narrative as *mimesis praxeos* or "the imitation of an action"<sup>192</sup>. Ricoeur adopts Aristotle's use of the word *mimesis* when he writes "plot... is the *mimesis* of an action"<sup>193</sup> and describes the mimetic function of the narrative as posing a problem parallel to that of metaphorical reference. Ricoeur then distinguishes between three senses of the term 'mimesis'. The first (*mimesis*<sub>1</sub>) refers to the "familiar pre-understanding we have of the order of action"<sup>194</sup>. This is the pre-figurative or pre-narrative order of action, that which symbolic mediation has made readable in language and action, for example, the use of such terms as project, intention or motive. It refers to the structural character of action and the symbolic interaction which collectively constitutes a "relation of "intersignification" that gives rise to our "practical understanding".<sup>195</sup> Kharmandar describes how these symbols can be conceived as "culture-specific or contextualized determinants."<sup>196</sup> To understand a story, Ricoeur argues, is to understand the language of 'doing something' as well as the cultural tradition that proceeds plot types. This also includes the temporal character of action and the fact that we are, as Ricoeur states, 'with-in time' which necessitates features that are irreducible to time as linear. This part of the mimetic process "constructs the 'emplotment' that imitates human action... the structures, symbolic content and temporal lived experience still necessitate presupposing a construction that could put them into a well-framed whole."<sup>197</sup>

*Mimesis*<sub>2</sub> is the sense of configurative disorientation, what Ricoeur describes as "an entry into the realm of poetic composition"<sup>198</sup>. This Ricoeur declares as the kingdom of fiction, or the 'as if' and of which emplotment is the paradigm. Thus, to imitate or to represent action, one must first understand what human action is - its

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<sup>191</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative, Vol 1*.

<sup>192</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Life in Quest of Narrative" in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*. p28

<sup>193</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative, Vol 1*. p xi

<sup>194</sup>Ibid.

<sup>195</sup>Kharmandar, Mohammad, Ali. "Ricoeur's extended hermeneutic translation theory. Metaphysics, Narrative, Ethics, Politics" in *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies*, Vol 6, No 1, 2015. pp73-93:82

<sup>196</sup>Ibid.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid.

<sup>198</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative. Vol 1*. pxi

semantics, its symbolic system and its temporality. It is upon pre-understanding (mimesis<sub>1</sub>) that a plot is constructed. Ricoeur defines emplotment as “the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession”<sup>199</sup>. The plot brings concordance to our discordant human temporal experience by arranging events into a whole that is now made intelligible. It is emplotment which constitutes the creative centre of the narrative. In *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur links Aristotle’s notion of mimesis and muthos. He does not equate the imitation of action (mimesis) with that of the organisation of events (muthos) but argues that the prevalent sense of mimesis “is the one instituted by its being joined to muthos”<sup>200</sup>. He states that “Imitating or representing is a mimetic activity inasmuch as it produces something, namely the organization of events by emplotment”<sup>201</sup>. This is the creative imitation by which a plot is produced and which Ricoeur states engenders a break which opens the space for fiction. In turn, a character or an event receives their definition by the way in which they contribute to the plot. In *Critique and Conviction*, Ricoeur makes a comparison between metaphor and emplotment. He posits the question of how do we create meaning in speaking, and answers it by stating, that “we create it by placing together incongruous semantic fields – this is metaphor – or by constructing a plot – this is narrative.”<sup>202</sup>

Lastly, mimesis<sub>3</sub> is the refigurative sense of the narrative, “a new configuration by means of this poetic refiguring of the pre-understood order of action”<sup>203</sup>. Ricoeur writes “to understand the story is to understand how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion, which, far from being foreseeable, must finally be acceptable, as congruent with the episodes brought together by the story.”<sup>204</sup> In this sense, the understanding of the story marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader. It is the act of reading which joins mimesis<sub>3</sub> to mimesis<sub>2</sub>, with mimesis<sub>2</sub> playing a mediating function between mimesis<sub>1</sub> and mimesis<sub>3</sub>. Fodor describes this process of reading, as understood by Ricoeur, very precisely when he states how it leads the text “*from one side to the other*; indeed it transfigures, by its configuring power,

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<sup>199</sup>Ibid., p65

<sup>200</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative. Vol 1.* p45

<sup>201</sup>Ibid., p35

<sup>202</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay / Paul Ricoeur.* p81

<sup>203</sup>Ibid.

<sup>204</sup>Ibid., p67

the one side *into* the other”.<sup>205</sup> It is this re-figuration of the text which is completed in the reader and which has the capacity to transfigure the experience of the reader. Ricoeur is emphatic that refiguration does not mean the reproduction of reality but refers to the restructuring of the world of the reader. He states that the very significance of a narrative consists in the “*intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader.*”<sup>206</sup> Thus, if as Ricoeur argues, hermeneutics is concerned with the operations by which a work becomes a work so that it is understood and received by a reader whose experience – and action - is transformed in reading it, hermeneutics must make the long detour beginning with what can be established as pre-understood, into the operations of the text and the specific ways in which it is configured<sup>207</sup>. For a textual analysis, this re-figurative sense is the point at which the three-fold mimesis is confronted with its hermeneutical limits. This is so, as refiguration, although occasioned through the narrative, occurs outside the narrative in the reader. Ricoeur does, however, develop his theory to argue for the way in which narrative can be transformative in self-understanding. This will be examined in section 1.6.

## 1.5 The role of figurative discourse in narrative

As this study focuses on the operations of the narrative through its pre-figurative and configurative aspects, I turn now to Ricoeur’s work on figurative discourse and in particular that of myth, metaphor and symbol, its relationship with second-order reference, and the role this assumes in the narrative. I will begin by outlining how Ricoeur’s analysis of figurative discourse is a juncture at which his writings in philosophy and religion overlap. Figurative discourse, Ricoeur states, is the language used to speak about symbols. The symbol is a sign, signifying something beyond itself

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<sup>205</sup>Fodor, James. *Christian Hermeneutics. Paul Ricoeur and the Refiguring of Theology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. p190. Fodor’s ‘Christian Hermeneutics’ is not uncontested, one of the criticisms being that his view is a creative anti-realist view whereby our existence is determined by our linguistic activities therefore not a Christian hermeneutic at all (cf. Davis Richard. “James Fodor’s Christian Theory of Truth: is it Christian?” *Heythrop Journal*. Oct 2000, Vol. 41, Issue 4. pp 436-448 - for one such example). I employ him here for his precise interpretation of mimesis while acknowledging his debt to the first part of the quote from *Time and Narrative. Vol. 1*. p46

<sup>206</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*. p26 Italics original

<sup>207</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay / Paul Ricoeur*. p173

but ultimately rooted in life. It retains a primary or literal meaning because it is bound to the configurations of the cosmos. Such figurative uses of language as myth, metaphor and religious language are resistant to analysis through a model of symbolic logic, as according to Ricoeur, they carry a “double-meaning” structure and yet are not bound as strictly to life as a symbol is. Figurative discourse, Ricoeur argues, contains a surplus of meaning which makes use of the ambiguity of symbols. It is the language used to speak about symbols and in this way, it can be considered as what Ricoeur names a ‘semantic innovation’ in that it says something for the first time<sup>208</sup>. This is the level, Ricoeur argues, where initiatives are taken and which “governs the transformations that takes place on the deeper levels”<sup>209</sup>. Crucially for this investigation, figurative language is functional in the surplus of meaning that a narrative may produce.

### 1.5.1 Figurative discourse at the boundary of Ricoeur’s philosophical and religious writing

Ricoeur has made contributions in the related fields of history of religion, philosophy of religion, theology, practical theology and biblical studies. In *Figuring the Sacred*, his most representative articles in religion have been systematically collected in chronological and thematic fashion by editor Mark Wallace<sup>210</sup>. Wallace describes Ricoeur’s writings on religion in their development from the “use of discourse analysis for understanding religious language, to his subsequent concern with the role of narrative in the study of biblical genres, to his more recent inquiries into models of personal identity and the relevance of continental philosophers such as Rosenzweig and Levinas to the contemporary task of theological reflection.”<sup>211</sup>

These writings, Wallace suggests, are always closely related to the general philosophical enquiries that occupied him. Central to these was the journey to selfhood which Ricoeur argued was made possible by the willingness of the subject to receive “new-ways of being through its interactions with the text-worlds of literature, myth and religion”<sup>212</sup>. In *The Symbolism of Evil*<sup>213</sup>, Ricoeur turns his attention to an interpretation

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<sup>208</sup>Pellauer, David. *Ricoeur. A Guide for the Perplexed*. p67

<sup>209</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Interpretive Narrative” in *Figuring the Sacred*. pp181-199:188

<sup>210</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Figuring the Sacred*.

<sup>211</sup>Wallace, Mark I. “Introduction to Figuring the Sacred” in *Figuring the Sacred*. pp1-32:15

<sup>212</sup>*Ibid.*, p2

<sup>213</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *The Symbolism of Evil*.

of the symbols and myths that surround the concept of evil. In doing this he brings religious studies to what Wallace names as “the threshold of a new methodology”, as hermeneutical rather than a dogmatic or purely philosophical discipline<sup>214</sup>. Religious symbolism, he states, cannot be studied through a direct rational analysis of human culture and history, as it contains a surplus of meaning that is only available “to the theorist who values the efficacy of mythical literatures”<sup>215</sup>. Wallace argues that a recurrent theme in Ricoeur’s philosophy was “the power of religious language to metamorphize the world of the reader by opening up new possibilities of being-in-the-world”<sup>216</sup>.

Ricoeur’s narrative turn, and in particular the power of second order reference and figurative language to disclose new possibilities of being, led him to understand both non-religious and religious fictions as potentially revelatory. In this sense ‘revelation’ for Ricoeur is performative and not propositional. It becomes “an event of new meaning between text and interpreter, rather than a body of received doctrines under the control of a particular magisterium”<sup>217</sup>. Wallace argues that for Ricoeur, a response to the question of ‘who am I?’ is founded on a “recovery of the sacred by taking up residence in the worlds of mythopoetic literature, such as the Bible”<sup>218</sup>. Wallace highlights the connection Ricoeur makes between the disciplines of theological interpretation and biblical interpretation which operate within the same space, as theology, he claims, is at root a hermeneutical exercise. He states that Ricoeur argues for “the re-invigoration of theological discourse on the basis of biblical hermeneutics”<sup>219</sup>. In using narrative for theological reflection, Wallace argues that Ricoeur might be placed on the fringes of narrative theology, although Ricoeur cautions against one construal of reality above others, arguing that all forms of literature have the potential to re-figure a life. Furthermore, Ricoeur argues that religion should be

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<sup>214</sup>After *The Symbolism of Evil* and one book length project on the study of religion (Cf. Ricoeur, Paul. “Biblical Hermeneutics” in *Semeia* 4, 1975, pp29-148), Ricoeur’s religious writings consisted mainly of regional applications of his thought to religious studies. (Cf. “On the Exegesis of Genesis 1:1-2:4a” in *Exégèse et herméneutique: Parole de Dieu*. Xavier Léon Dufour (ed.). Paris: Seuil, 1971; “Naming God” in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 34, 1979. pp215-227; “Love and Justice” in *Radical Pluralism and Truth: David Tracy and the Hermeneutics of Religion*. Jeanrond, Werner, G. & Rilke, Jennifer L. (ed.’s) New York: Crossroad, 1991, pp187-202 for some examples.)

<sup>215</sup>Wallace, Mark I. “Introduction to Figuring the Sacred” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p5

<sup>216</sup>Ibid., p15

<sup>217</sup>Wallace, Mark I. “Introduction to Figuring the Sacred” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p8

<sup>218</sup>Ibid., p2

<sup>219</sup>Ibid., p24

understood “on its own terms” and not reduced to explanatory schemes that do not account for the self-understanding of the religious community<sup>220</sup>.

Although applying his hermeneutical method to his analysis of religious writings, Ricoeur sought to maintain the distinction between theology and philosophy, stating that there is no religious subtext to his philosophical writing, although in later life, mostly in interviews, Ricoeur did expound on the connection between the two, arguing that such distinctions cannot be maintained in a definitive manner<sup>221</sup>. He did not, however, wish such ‘autonomous’ philosophical writings as *Oneself as Another* to be accused of cryptotheology, nor as Wallace argues, “theology founded on biblical faith to ground itself on any cryptophilosophy”<sup>222</sup>. This is exemplified by his exclusion of the two final Gifford lectures from *Oneself as Another*. The book is based on this lecture series and these two lectures contain the most explicit religious content of that series of lectures<sup>223</sup>. Despite his own protestations, Ricoeur has been criticised for including a religious content in his philosophy and blurring the boundaries between the disciplines. Venema maintains that Ricoeur’s philosophy is motivated by his Christian Faith and cannot be isolated from this faith<sup>224</sup>. Similarly, Bourgeois argues that while Ricoeur’s reflection on religious symbols and their meaning is not problematic in terms of a philosophical task, Ricoeur does more than this by “letting assumed religious content slip into the philosophical hermeneutic situation of his philosophical fore-comprehension. Thus, religious content is not simply looked at but assumed.”<sup>225</sup> Ricoeur himself acknowledged the tension between ‘critique’ and ‘conviction’ in his philosophy labelling it a ‘controlled schizophrenia’<sup>226</sup>.

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<sup>220</sup>ibid.

<sup>221</sup>Gschwandtner, Christina M. “Paul Ricoeur and the Relationship between Philosophy and Religion in Contemporary French Phenomenology” in *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies*, Vol 3, No 2, 2012. p9

<sup>222</sup>Wallace, Mark I. “Introduction to Figuring the Sacred” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p14

<sup>223</sup>These lectures were titled “The self in the mirror of scripture” and “The mandated self” and belong to the biblical hermeneutics outlined in *From Text to Action*. Ricoeur, Paul, *Oneself as Another*. (Blamey, Kathleen, trans.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. p23

<sup>224</sup>Venema, Henry Isaac. “The Source of Ricoeur’s Double Allegiance” in *A Passion for the Possible: Thinking with Paul Ricoeur*. Treanor, Brian & Venema, Henry Isaac (ed.’s) New York: Fordham University Press, 2010, pp62-67:63

<sup>225</sup>Bourgeois, Patrick L. “Hermeneutic Phenomenology at the Boundary of Reason: Meaningful graft or subversive deviation” in *Between Description and Interpretation. The Hermeneutic turn in Phenomenology*. Wierciński, A (ed.) pp71-82:75

<sup>226</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* / Paul Ricoeur.

Kenny has usefully traced the shifts in Ricoeur's thinking in relation to the question of boundaries between these two disciplines. He identifies three stages in Ricoeur's career where Ricoeur located the boundary between philosophy and religion differently<sup>227</sup>. In his early work lasting until 1970, Kenny describes this boundary as more fluid where Ricoeur was unconcerned that his philosophical project would be seen as too much under religious influence. However, in his second stage (lasting from the 1970s to the late 1980s) where Ricoeur was recognised as a major philosophical thinker, and especially in response to his critics, there was a more strict division which saw Ricoeur pursue his themes with a greater philosophical rigour. This period, Kenny points out, was when Ricoeur wrote most of his papers on textual hermeneutics and is the area of his work that is best known today. In retirement, where Kenny argues Ricoeur has less to prove, he again brought the two discourses together, whereby Kenny argues that Ricoeur exhibited a much greater openness to theology "and a relaxing of the methodical strictness that previously governed his comments on religious themes"<sup>228</sup>.

For the purpose of this work that draws on Ricoeur's approach in hermeneutics and specifically narrative, but also on Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics applied to religious texts<sup>229</sup>, I argue that Ricoeur's theory of figurative discourse and the way in which it contributes to self-understanding, in addition to his call for polycentrism in interpretation, can be equally applied from a religious or a philosophical standpoint while also acknowledging that the lens used changes what is brought into focus and so necessarily calls for a transparency in location. In this study the narrative of *The Universe Story* will be examined in the manner in which it contributes to both philosophical, theological and environmental reflection.

### 1.5.2 Myth, metaphor and the surplus of meaning in figurative language

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<sup>227</sup>Kenny, Peter. "Conviction, Critique, and Christian Theology: Some Reflections on Reading Ricoeur" in *Memory, Narrativity, Self and the Challenge to Think God: The Reception within Theology of the Recent Work of Paul Ricœur*. Junker-Kenny, Maureen & Kenny, Peter (ed.'s) New Brunswick & London: Transaction Publishers, 2004. pp92-116.

<sup>228</sup>Ibid., p93. This is exemplified, Kenny argues, by Ricoeur's book co-written with André LaCocque entitled *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*. I will draw on an essay from this book in chapter three.

<sup>229</sup>See section 3.3: Thinking *The Universe Story* as a creation narrative which uses the essay "Thinking Creation" taken from *Thinking Biblically*.

Ricoeur argues that myth is built on symbolism and illustrates this relationship when he writes how “I shall regard myths as a species of symbols, as symbols developed in the form of narrations.”<sup>230</sup> Myth, Ricoeur understood as being a narrative form developed upon the symbolic form, and in terms of the meaning the history of religions have given to myth Ricoeur describes it as:

not a false explanation by means of images and fables, but a traditional narration which relates to events that happened at the beginning of time and which has the purpose of providing grounds for the ritual actions of men of today and, in a general manner, establishing all the forms of action and thought by which man understands himself in his world. For us, moderns, a myth is *only* a myth because we can no longer connect that time with the time of history as we write it...this is why the myth can no longer be an explanation; to exclude its etiological intention is the theme of all necessary demythologization. But in losing its explanatory pretensions the myth reveals its exploratory significance and its contribution to understanding...that is to say, its power of discovering and revealing the bond between man and what he considers sacred.<sup>231</sup>

The expressive power of the myth lies in the presence of symbols within it. Explicitly referring to ‘the Fall’, but applicable to myth in general and especially in terms of *The Universe Story*, Ricoeur defines the function of the myth as “to be a means of stretching out in the form of a succession of events the paradox of the superimposition of the historical upon the original.”<sup>232</sup> Myth narrates. It constitutes the first transition from experience to language. According to Ricoeur, myths incorporate our fragmentary human experience into narratives of origin. In telling how the world began, the myth tells how the human condition came about. It provides order because of its cosmological interpretation and through its explanatory schemes<sup>233</sup>. Pellauer argues that Ricoeur suggests myths do three things. They “embrace humanity in one ideal history; they narrate a movement from beginning to end that adds an orientation, character and tension to our experience; and they try to get at the enigma of human existence.”<sup>234</sup> Pellauer goes on to argue, that for Ricoeur, “myth has an ontological bearing in that it points to a connection between our essential reality and our actual historical existence in terms of something like a concrete temporal universal truth.”<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>230</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *The Symbolism of Evil*. p18

<sup>231</sup>Ibid., p5

<sup>232</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p17

<sup>233</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology” in *Figuring the Sacred*.pp249-261:251

<sup>234</sup>Pellauer, David. *Ricoeur. A Guide for the Perplexed*. p39

<sup>235</sup>Ibid.



Thus Ricoeur upholds the metaphysical and ontological function of the myth while maintaining that myths can hold a 'truth' because "of their claim to *assert* something about reality."<sup>236</sup>

Although having a similar function, myth and metaphor are not the same. I introduce metaphor now as a demonstration of the form of symbolic and figurative language onto which the myth is grafted. Ricoeur draws a continuation between his two works *The Rule of Metaphor*<sup>237</sup> and *Time and Narrative*<sup>238</sup> under the question, as partially quoted above, of "how do we create meaning in speaking?"<sup>239</sup> He answers this by stating that meaning is created through metaphor by "placing together incongruous semantic fields" and through narrative by constructing a plot so that "there is a certain homogeneity of the two subjects, under the sign of semantic innovation."<sup>240</sup> As a figure of speech, metaphor, Ricoeur argues, constitutes a displacement whereby its explanation is rooted in substitution and so there is an extension of meaning to its words. Ricoeur states that the metaphor "is the most brilliant illustration of the power of language to create meaning by the means of unexpected comparisons, thanks to which a new semantic relevance suddenly emerges."<sup>241</sup> Ricoeur describes, and I will reproduce in full, the relationship between metaphor and myth and highlights their overlapping role:

the passage to the *hermeneutic* point of view corresponds to the change of level that moves from the sentence to discourse properly speaking (poem, narrative, essay etc.) A new problematic emerges in connection with this point of view: the issue is no longer the *form* of metaphor as a word-focused figure of speech, nor even just the *sense* of metaphor as a founding of a new semantic pertinence, but the *reference* of the metaphorical statement of the power to 're-describe' reality. The most fundamental support of this transition from semantics to hermeneutics is to be found in the connection in all discourse between sense, which is its internal organization, and reference, which is its power to refer to a reality outside of language. Accordingly, metaphor presents itself as a strategy of discourse that, while preserving

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<sup>236</sup>Ibid., p12

<sup>237</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor. Multi-disciplinary studies of the creation of meaning in language*. (Czerny, Robert, McLaughlin, Kathleen & Costello, John, translators) Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977

<sup>238</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative, Vol. 1*

<sup>239</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* / Paul Ricoeur, p81

<sup>240</sup>Ibid.

<sup>241</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p27

and developing the creative power of language, preserves and develops the *heuristic* power wielded by *fiction*.<sup>242</sup>

Here Ricoeur is raising the question to what extent and in what form does discourse relate to reality? This question is applicable at the level of metaphor and also at the level of myth. The metaphor takes the word as its unit of reference while the myth takes the narrative and in turn narrative is specifically grafted, as Ricoeur states, onto symbolic form. Ricoeur argues that metaphor is the rhetorical process “by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality...the metaphorical ‘is’ at once signifies both ‘is not’ and ‘is like’. If this is really so, we are allowed to speak of metaphorical truth, but in an equally ‘tensive’ sense of the word ‘truth’.”<sup>243</sup> Metaphor works with existing language but in introducing a ‘twist’ or a new semantic innovation, creates new meaning. In doing this it enables the reader to ‘see’ things in a different manner. Metaphor in this sense, like poetry and fiction, intends reality and points to possibilities of being in the world by reconfiguring and conceptualising the world in a previously unimagined and undescribed way. Ricoeur argues that there is something semantically new stated in these ‘new relations’ or metaphorical configurations and the metaphor is the principle through which meaning is transferred.

Thus, for my analysis of *The Universe Story*, and in applying these insights from Ricoeur, I will examine the use of metaphor as a form of figurative language in *The Universe Story* which contributes towards the transfer of meaning in addition to the construction of the myth, itself designating an origin story and an explanation of the human condition.

### 1.5.3 Religious language and the language of the sacred

Another form of figurative language that Ricoeur speaks of is religious language. In his essay “Philosophy and Religious Language”, Ricoeur makes three assumptions which he deems necessary for a philosophical inquiry into religious faith

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<sup>242</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor. Multi-disciplinary studies of the creation of meaning in language*. p6. Italics original.

<sup>243</sup>*Ibid.*, p7

as expressed in language<sup>244</sup>. He argues first that “whatever ultimately may be the nature of the so-called religious experience, it comes to language, it is articulated in a language, and the most appropriate place to interpret it on its own terms is to enquire into its linguistic expression.”<sup>245</sup> It is through the language that is used that we can begin to determine whether an experience that is expressed claims to be a religious one.

Secondly, he argues that this kind of discourse, religious discourse, says something that is not said in other discourses (among Ricoeur’s examples of other discourses are ordinary, scientific or poetic). This particular discourse is meaningful for the community of faith because they use it for their self-understanding and as a means of communication to others who are exterior to the community. The third assumption is that, not only does this discourse claim to be meaningful but it also claims to be true. It asserts a truth claim and because of this truth claim enters into metaphysics whereby philosophy is implied. Ricoeur writes that “philosophy is confronted by a mode of discourse that displays claims both to meaningfulness and to fulfillment such that new dimensions of reality and truth are disclosed, and that a new formulation of truth is required”<sup>246</sup>. He then uses a philosophical hermeneutic to clarify each of these assumptions. Hermeneutics differs from linguistic analysis in that its first task is to “identify these ordinary modes of discourse through which the religious faith of a community comes to language.”<sup>247</sup> Rather than refer to literary genres, Ricoeur speaks of ‘modes of discourse’ as these genres are more than means of classification but are in fact instruments in the production of discourse. In the introduction to *Figuring the Sacred*, Wallace claims that Ricoeur argues for:

the premier value of mythopoetic forms of expression, rather than purely philosophical or theological modes of discourse, for understanding the meaning of human being in a world charged with the presence and absence of the sacred. The relative superiority of myth over philosophy – or “fiction” over “reason” – is manifest in the power of religious creation stories to uncover the structural disparity in human beings between their fractured nature and their destinies as integrated selves. This disparity can be imagined only indirectly on the basis of mythical imagery; it cannot be studied directly through a rationalist analysis of human history and culture.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>244</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Philosophy and Religious Language” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p35

<sup>245</sup>Ibid.

<sup>246</sup>Ibid., p36

<sup>247</sup>Ibid., p37

<sup>248</sup>Wallace, Mark I. “Introduction to Figuring the Sacred” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p4&5

Religious studies in this sense, becomes with Ricoeur, as argued above, “a new methodology as a hermeneutical, rather than a strictly philosophical or dogmatic discipline. Religious studies is a public inquiry into the meaning of symbolic discourses.”<sup>249</sup> Religious discourse is one way in which the myth and the symbol are interpreted both resisting logical analysis but appealing to a surplus of understanding and meaning which cannot be accessed through rationalist analysis of human history and culture alone. It speaks to that which is discordant in human experience, our experience of temporality and our experience of reality, and through metaphor seeks to make them concordant. It incorporates myth to assist human understanding in a way that ordinary rationale cannot, through representing both what it perceives the world to be and what the world is asking of our human lives. However, it still, regardless of experience, must be brought to language. It is the language that is used which conveys on the experience that of belonging to a religious discourse. Thus, religious discourse requires an analysis of language, myth and symbols.

Ricoeur further identifies three criteria of language which when met can be understood as religious. He writes that: “I recognise them as religious if I find three criteria in them: the anteriority of a founding word, the mediation of writing and the history of interpretation.”<sup>250</sup> It is the notions of the anteriority of a founding word, the exteriority of writing, and the superiority of the cultural and historical tradition which Ricoeur states are constitutive of the manner “in which I am preceded in the world of meaning”.<sup>251</sup> This refers to the manner in which we are born into a tradition and the way in which this tradition provides a ready-made world of meaning. Finally, Ricoeur speaks of faith as an experience that is always mediated by the language that articulates it and he links it to self-understanding in the face of the text. Faith, he argues “is the attitude of one who accepts being interpreted at the same time that he or she interprets the world of the text”<sup>252</sup>. This is the relation between situation-understanding-interpretation that unfolds at the level of the text in the world that it proposes and in how self-understanding is mediated through that world. This relation between the world

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<sup>249</sup>Ibid., p4

<sup>250</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay / Paul Ricoeur.* p146

<sup>251</sup>Ibid., p170

<sup>252</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Philosophy and Religious Language” in *Figuring the Sacred.* p46

and specifically in how the human is configured in that world will be taken up in chapter four.

#### 1.5.4 A phenomenology of the sacred in tension with a hermeneutic of proclamation

There is another aspect of Ricoeur's hermeneutics which is relevant to *The Universe Story*. This is Ricoeur's treatment of the tension between the hermeneutics of religious language as has been shaped by the question of demythologisation in recent biblical theology, and the phenomenology of the sacred arising out of the comparative history of religions. A mediation of this polarity is the focus of his essay "Manifestation and Proclamation"<sup>253</sup>. While Ricoeur draws on Mircea Eliade<sup>254</sup> (who also influenced Berry) in his organisation of the phenomenology of the sacred, he argues that Eliade focuses primarily on primordial traditions and does not attend to 'the proclamation' in those religions founded on 'revealed scripture'. In doing this, Ricoeur argues that Eliade neglects the 'equally powerful hermeneutic' of scriptural texts to disclose new ways of being and to challenge the established order of the sacred universe. The essay is relevant to an analysis of *The Universe Story* because of its emphasise on the sacred dimensions of its narrative history. In the essay Ricoeur presents 'a phenomenology of manifestation' which is organised around five traits of the sacred. He then presents those traits of a hermeneutic of proclamation that are destructive of the sacred. Lastly, he seeks a mediation between both positions. As *The Universe Story* can be ruled out as a narrative kerygma, this being understood as referring to the preaching of the Christian gospel, it is the first and last part of the essay which are instructive towards a reading of *The Universe Story*.

##### 1.5.4.1 Five traits of a phenomenology of the sacred

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<sup>253</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Manifestation and Proclamation" in *Figuring the Sacred*.pp48-67

<sup>254</sup>Eliade's work *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*. London: Harcourt, 1959 and its contribution to a phenomenology of the sacred will be examined in greater detail in section 3.2.2

The first trait of a phenomenology of the sacred, Ricoeur states, as being brought to light by Rudolf Otto<sup>255</sup>. This is the sacred as being experienced as awesome, powerful and overwhelming. According to Ricoeur, the numinous element of the sacred is not firstly associated with language, even if it may become so. Ricoeur argues that to speak of ‘power’ is in fact to speak of something other than ‘speech’. This he states “is a power that does not pass over completely into articulation since it is the experience of efficacy par excellence”<sup>256</sup>.

The second trait is connected to the notion of hierophany. Although we cannot describe the sacred as such, we can describe how the sacred manifests so “anything by which the sacred shows itself is a hierophany”<sup>257</sup>. This phenomenology of the sacred is possible, Ricoeur states, because these manifestations have “a form, a structure, an articulation”<sup>258</sup>. Ricoeur states how this manifestation is not originally a verbal one and that there is no privilege conferred on speech. The sacred can manifest itself in trees or rocks that the believer venerates and so in cultural forms of behaviour. On this point, Ricoeur notes that the fact that a tree (or a rock) can manifest the sacred means that “this profane reality becomes something other than itself while still remaining itself”<sup>259</sup>. This relates to the amplitude of the field of hierophanies but also how it belongs to an aesthetic level of experience (in the Kantian sense) and not a verbal one. Ricoeur writes that “what is most remarkable about the phenomenology of the sacred is that it can be described as a manner of inhabiting space and time”<sup>260</sup>. We speak of ‘sacred space’ and ‘sacred time’ Ricoeur states, in order to indicate the fact that space is not homogenous but delimited and oriented around a ‘midpoint’. Ricoeur returns to Kant’s ‘Critique of Judgement’ in order to express the space-time constitution philosophically. He states that Kant related aesthetic ideas to the productive imagination that Ricoeur cites Kant as writing “gives us more to think about”. This is so because “the capacity to determine an object by a concept is surpassed by the capacity to present the ideas of our reason in images”<sup>261</sup>. Ricoeur argues that the sacred is in the same position in relation to its manifestations, as the ideas of our reason are in relation to their presentation “in the

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<sup>255</sup>This idea was brought to light in Otto’s work *The Idea of the Holy*. USA: Oxford University Press, 1958 which will also be examined in section 3.2.2

<sup>256</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Manifestation and Proclamation” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p49

<sup>257</sup>Ibid.

<sup>258</sup>Ibid.

<sup>259</sup>Ibid.

<sup>260</sup>Ibid., p50

<sup>261</sup>Ibid.

products of the imagination”<sup>262</sup>. In other words, the sacred, according to Ricoeur, and borrowing an expression from philosopher and theologian Henri Corbin, opens a space of manifestation which is imaginary rather than logical in nature.

A third trait of the sacred which is less relevant to this study, so suffice just to mention it, is the connection between ritual and the symbolism of the sacred. The sacred, Ricoeur states does not just reveal itself only in signs which are to be contemplated but also in behaviour. The ritual is a mode of acting, a way in which “to do something with this power or powers.”<sup>263</sup>

The fourth trait moves us into the distance between manifestation and proclamation. This concerns the role of nature and Ricoeur paraphrases Eliade in articulating the sacred “as a function of certain great cosmic polarities”<sup>264</sup>. The symbolism of the sky represents the Most High and in general that of divine transcendence, and to this are attached images of ascension such as mountains and ladders. This symbolism refers back to divine immanence which is manifest in the hierophanies of life which Ricoeur states ‘relieves’ the inaccessibility of the divine. The proximity of the gods, he argues, is attested to in the “fertility of the soil, vegetative exuberance, the prosperity of the flocks and the fecundity of the maternal womb.”<sup>265</sup> Nowhere else, Ricoeur states, can we witness the “point of rupture”<sup>266</sup> in the battle between the sacredness of nature and theologies of the word so clearly. Furthermore, nowhere else is the solidarity between natural powers and the sacred so attested to.

Ricoeur elaborates on the sacredness of nature and states that the sacred power of nature is first attested to by the fact that it is both threatened and uncertain. This illustrates the dramatic nature of the sacred. The universe emerged from chaos. Nature speaks of the depth “from which its order has emerged and toward which chaos it may always regress.”<sup>267</sup> The symbol of the tree of life represents the fundamental sacrality of life. The symbolism of Mother Earth who is fecund and gives life remains so powerful that Ricoeur argues it has marked all of religious humankind. However, within this sacred universe, the symbolism used is a bound symbolism. A metaphor is a free association or invention of discourse, but a symbol is bound to the configuration of the

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<sup>262</sup>ibid.

<sup>263</sup>ibid., p51

<sup>264</sup>ibid., p52

<sup>265</sup>ibid.

<sup>266</sup>ibid.

<sup>267</sup>ibid.

cosmos. Thus, symbolism only becomes significant when it is borne “by the sacred valences of the elements themselves”<sup>268</sup>. We might say that water symbolises potential, but it is ‘we’ who speak about potential. However, it is the ‘epiphanies’ of water itself that bind this statement. It is the appearance of the water and therefore the appearance of the sacred in and through it. Ricoeur writes which I will reproduce in full as it pertains to the aim of *The Universe Story* that:

that A creation story is necessary if symbolism is to come to language, but the myth  
the recounts it returns in a way to nature through the symbolism of the ritual where  
in element becomes immediately ritualized...the sacredness of nature shows itself  
Its symbolically saying itself. And the showing founds the saying, not vice versa.  
Its sacrality is immediate or it does not exist.<sup>269</sup>

Thus, Ricoeur summarises the four traits of the phenomenology of the sacred in the following way: the antecedence of the powerful over its meaning; the aesthetic (spatial-temporal) manifestation; the correlation between myth and ritual; and the bound character of natural symbolism. Each of these traits concern the relation of discourse to the sacred universe.

The fifth trait Ricoeur argues sums up the previous four. This is what Ricoeur terms as the ‘logic of meaning’ in the ‘sacred’ universe. The above traits, Ricoeur argues, attest that in a ‘sacred universe’ the capacity for saying is founded on the capacity of the cosmos to signify something other than itself. In this way the logic of meaning proceeds from the structure of the universe itself and therefore its law is a law of correspondences. These correspondences Ricoeur lists as: the correspondence between creation *illo tempore* and the order of natural appearances and human action; the correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm. Ricoeur gives the example of the hierogamy of Earth and sky agreeing with the union of male and female; the correspondence between the furrowed Earth and the female genital organ, the entrails of the Earth and the maternal womb, sun and eye, semen and seed grain, burial and death of grain, birth and springtime; the correspondence between the body, the house and the cosmos.

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<sup>268</sup>Ibid., p53

<sup>269</sup>Ibid., p54



#### 1.5.4.2 Mediation between the 'logic of meaning' in the 'sacred universe' and the 'logic of meaning' in proclamatory discourse

In a hermeneutic of proclamation Ricoeur argues that the 'word' outweighs the numinous. In fact, the 'word', Ricoeur argues, breaks away from the numinous and becomes its own version of sacredness. Hierophanies are replaced with theologies and while there are still sacred spaces and times, the ethical has priority over the aesthetic. As regards ritual, in the Hebraic faith this ritualisation is not founded on the correlation between myth and ritual, rather on a historical vector which runs through the time of repetition. The sacredness of nature withdraws, Ricoeur argues, before the element of the Word, before the ethical element and before the historical element. There is created a new 'logic of meaning' that is directly opposed to the logic of correspondences of the 'sacred universe'. Ricoeur argues that religious language uses 'limit-expressions' to open up our experiences which are themselves limit-experiences. Ricoeur gives the example of the parable as redescribing experience in the 'extreme'. He poses the question in the same essay of what is specific to religious language as regards to poetic forms of language? The difference, he responds, depends on the logic of correspondences in the sacred universe, thus we must return to the most originary, pre-theological level of religious discourse possible. Here Ricoeur provides the examples of parables, proverbs and sayings. In all these forms of discourse Ricoeur argues how the logic of meaning:

depends on the use of limit-expressions that bring about the rupturing of ordinary speech. This act of rupturing the ordinary is what I oppose to the logic of meaning of the sacred universe founded as it is on the correspondence of the macrocosmos and the microcosmos, of humankind, its dwelling place, and the universe, of our mother and the earth. The universe of the sacred, we said, is internally "bound." The paradoxical universe of the parable, the proverb, and the eschatological saying, on the contrary, is a "burst" or an "exploded" universe.<sup>270</sup>

Such use of language includes paradox and hyperbole to bring about an 'intensification' which 'abuse' the 'change of fate'. This intensification implies its own logic of meaning which dislocates the imagination in that it turns it away from a vision which is a

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<sup>270</sup>Ibid., p60

continuous sequence and by dis-orienting us, re-orienting us. These limit-expressions are ‘indexes’ pointed in the direction of ‘limit-experiences’. Religious language, Ricoeur writes, “uses limit-expressions only to open up our very experience, to make it explode in the direction of experiences that themselves are limit-experiences”<sup>271</sup>. In re-describing reality these discourses intend the ‘extreme’ and are touched by the demand for ‘something more’.

Ricoeur forcefully asks can we desacralise the world stripping it of its symbolism and ritual, its originary orientation, its significance without “completely degrading humankind into a utensil, without ceaselessly giving ourselves up to a manipulation that finds its conclusion in the liquidation of useless or worn-out people...are we not on the verge of a renaissance of the sacred, at least if humankind itself is not to die?”<sup>272</sup> According to Ricoeur, all discourse is touched by the demand ‘for something more’ which is hinted at in the parable, the proverb and the saying. Ricoeur claims in his mediation between a phenomenology of the sacred and the kerygmatic that “humanity is simply not possible without the sacred”<sup>273</sup>. The word, he argues, breaks away from the numinous. There would be no hermeneutic, he states, if there were no proclamation but there would be no proclamation if the ‘word’ were not powerful enough to set forth the new being it proclaims. The ‘word’ then takes over the function of the numinous and is addressed to us and constitutes us rather than it being us who articulate it. The ‘word’ translating the values ‘tremendum’ and ‘fascinatum’ into obedience and fervor and articulating what Ricoeur names as the religious attitude of absolute dependence. This, he states, is the essential relation of humankind to the sacred which is transformed into speech and thus reaffirmed while also being surpassed by that speech. Ricoeur completes the essay with the following words:

In truth without the support and renewing power of the sacred cosmos and the sacredness of vital nature, the word itself becomes abstract and cerebral. Only the incarnation of the ancient symbolism ceaselessly reinterpreted gives this word something to say, not only to our understanding and will but also to our imagination and our heart; in short to the whole human being.

Must we not confess therefore, that the hope to see faith in the word outlive the religion of the sacred is really vain and that the end of the word as well as the

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<sup>271</sup>Ibid., p61

<sup>272</sup>Ibid., p64

<sup>273</sup>Ibid.

hearing of the word is bound to some new birth of the sacred and its symbolism,  
beyond its death...?<sup>274</sup>

It is this very argument which returns us to *The Universe Story*. It cannot be imposed as belonging to Berry or Swimme but it can be tested against the sacred as presented in *The Universe Story*. It is worth recalling that *The Universe Story* presents in narrative form the universe itself as a hierophany and seeks to evoke an aspect of the religious attitude of ‘utter dependence’. With this association, I will argue it wishes to influence the way in which the natural world is both interpreted and experienced.

## 1.6 Ricoeur’s concept of self-understanding as a philosophical function and as a narrative function

Before I address self-understanding it is necessary to clarify Ricoeur’s concept of the world of the text. Ricoeur viewed the interpretation of the text as more than the psychological biography of the author (authorial intention) and more too than the psycho-sociology of its reception (culture, tradition, ideology). If that which is to be interpreted is no longer the authorial intention nor the structure of the text, what remains to be interpreted Ricoeur argues is “the type of being-in-the-world unfolded *in front of the text*”.<sup>275</sup> In this way understanding according to Ricoeur becomes a structure of our being-in-the-world, a projection “of our ownmost possibilities at the very heart of the situations in which we find ourselves”.<sup>276</sup> To interpret a text is to interpret the proposed world of the text, a world that the reader could inhabit and appropriate. This, Ricoeur names as the world in front of the text, a world which is activated in reading and becomes praxis in how it influences a life.

Crucially for Ricoeur there always exists a return to the person in that the text serves self-understanding. Ricoeur argues that the hermeneutical task then is an attempt to assist human understanding through an investigation of ‘what happened’ in order for a life to be ‘refigured’. It belongs simultaneously to the real world i.e the world as

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<sup>274</sup>Ibid., p67

<sup>275</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation” in *From text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*. p86

<sup>276</sup>Ibid.

described, and to the world of the imaginary i.e the world as imagined. Between the real world and the imaginary world, text and imagination, lies the world of action of the reader<sup>277</sup>. Through appropriation of the possibilities imagined by the text the task of discovering and becoming a self are performed. Discovered, in that there begins an exegesis of the narratives that have shaped one's life and becoming in that these narratives can be re-interpreted. For this reason, Ricoeur argues that the narrative is one of the primary ways in which the human makes meaning. This section will examine Ricoeur's view of narrative as being contributive to the way in which a self understands.

Wallace argues for Ricoeur that "the journey to selfhood commences with the exegesis of the imaginary symbols and stories constitutive of one's cultural inheritance, in order to equip the subject to become an integrated self by means of appropriating these symbols and stories as her own."<sup>278</sup> Ricoeur himself famously expresses it thus: the symbol gives rise to thought and then thought returns to the symbol. He writes "what would we know of love and hate, of moral feeling, and in general, of all that we call the self if these had not been brought to language and articulated by literature?"<sup>279</sup> Self-understanding is a constant re-working of the hermeneutical circle, an increase from naïve (self/world) understanding to depth (self/world) understanding. Hence for Ricoeur, it is the result of philosophy rather than the starting point.

### 1.6.1 The role of narrative identity in Ricoeur's formulation of personal identity as a dialectic between selfhood as 'ipse-idem'

According to Ricoeur, a 'life' remains at the level of a biological phenomenon until it has been interpreted. Life is a story in search of a narrative, and he borrows from

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<sup>277</sup>Ricoeur. "Life in Quest of Narrative" in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*. p26

<sup>278</sup>Wallace, Mark I. "The irony of selfhood in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy" in *Between Suspicion and Sympathy, Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*. (Wierciński Andrzej) (ed.) pp161-171:161

<sup>279</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation" in *From text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*. p87. In his introduction to Ricoeur's *Figuring the Sacred* Wallace states that the unifying theme underlying Ricoeur's writing is "the role of figurative texts in the formation of human subjectivity." (Wallace, Mark I. Introduction in *Ricoeur, Paul. Figuring the Sacred. Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, pp1-32:14)

Socrates the argument that an examined life is a life that is *recounted*<sup>280</sup>. It is this quest for personal identity which facilitates the continuation of the potential story and the actual story for which we take responsibility. Personal identity necessitates taking into account the temporal aspect of human existence. Ricoeur makes the case that one way in which to do this is through narrative identity.

Without narration, Ricoeur argues, personal identity would remain an antinomy between action and permanency in time, both of which contribute to personal identity. In what seems to be a limited notion of that which comprises a person's lived experience, Ricoeur states that 'action'<sup>281</sup> and 'suffering' constitute the structure of one's lived experience, and permanency in time is that which remains identifiable throughout a person's life. Identity in this sense then is a practical category and belongs, Ricoeur states, to phronetic understanding (practical wisdom) rather than theoretical understanding. To state the identity of an individual is to answer the question "who did this?", "who is the agent?" This is done by designating someone with a name.

Ricoeur asks what justifies taking the subject of an action who is designated by her name as being the same from birth to death? To answer this question of 'who', according to Ricoeur, is to recount the story of a life. He writes that "The story told tells about the action of the "who". And the identity of this "who" therefore itself must be a narrative identity."<sup>282</sup> It functions in that someone in a narrative speaks about herself and in doing so simultaneously articulates her conception of herself and provides unity to her actions. This 'subject' Ricoeur argues must be identical with herself through her changing states or else is reduced to "nothing more than a substantialist illusion."<sup>283</sup> To

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<sup>280</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Life in Quest of Narrative" in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*. p31. In *Time and Narrative Vol. 3.*, Ricoeur writes that "the self of self-knowledge is the fruit of an examined life, to recall Socrates' phrase in the Apology. And an examined life is, in large part, one purged, one clarified by the cathartic effects of the narratives, be they historical or fictional, conveyed by our culture. So self-constancy refers to a self instructed by the works of a culture that it has applied to itself." (Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative. Vol. 3.* (Blamey, Kathleen & Pellauer, David, translators), Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985. p249) However with his concept of *ipse* and *idem*, in *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur will differentiate between the self who is constant and the self who changes in the notion of sameness and selfhood. Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself As Another*

<sup>281</sup>Ricoeur argues how action projects a 'mode of being' in the world and so needs to be interpreted. It can be read as 'a text' in that it may be objectified in a way that contains three forms of distanciation – the action becomes distanciated from the actor and becomes an event of its own; this event divorced from the intentions of the actor takes on its own meaning; the action transcends its social conditions. For an insightful critique of Ricoeur's discourse on action, please see Thompson, John B. "Paul Ricoeur and hermeneutic phenomenology" in *Critical Hermeneutics. A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas*. pp36-70

<sup>282</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative. Vol. 3.* p246

<sup>283</sup>Ibid.

address this problem Ricoeur introduces his much applied notion of identity as “the sense of oneself as self-same [soi-même]”<sup>284</sup> (*ipse*) which is proposed as an alternative to identity understood as being only that which is the same (*idem*). *Idem* identity Ricoeur identifies as permanence in time and biologically relates to structures such as the genetic code or fingerprints of a person, while at a psychological level it is displayed as character. It refers to what is a distinctive mark in a person, which allows for their re-identification as being the same individual over time. *Iipse* identity refers to self-constancy (which cannot be inscribed, as character is, within the feature of something in general, i.e., *what* is described, but only in the dimension of *who* is described) and in terms of permanence in time can refer to keeping one’s word. Ricoeur elaborates on the aspects involved in this *ipse* identity when he describes it as “making a promise. I shall hold firm, even if I change; it is an identity that is willed, sustained, one that proclaims itself despite change.”<sup>285</sup> Identity for Ricoeur consists of a dialectic between these two poles of sameness which are not reducible to a single concept of sameness. He argues that the difference between *idem* and *ipse*, is the difference between that of a formal (or substantial) identity and that of a narrative identity. He writes that unlike “the abstract identity of the Same, this narrative identity, constitutive of self-constancy, can include change and mutability, within the cohesion of one lifetime. The subject then appears both as a reader and the writer of its own life.”<sup>286</sup>

A narrative identity, as one which is recounted, includes the attestation by the self of herself. In doing so, a person ties together multiple events and through her narration attests that she is the same one who has undergone such events. In *Oneself as Another*<sup>287</sup> Ricoeur makes the observation that when we compare two of Rembrandt’s self-portraits we can see that it is not the sameness of the body that constitutes its

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<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* / Paul Ricoeur. p89

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.* In “Life in Quest of Narrative”, Ricoeur appears to qualify this claim. In this instance (taken from T&N3) Ricoeur’s statement can be interpreted as referring to the narrative mode. The subject reads the events of her life and through configuration lends interpretation to these events, thus making her ‘the reader’ and ‘the writer’ of her life. She becomes the ‘writer’ through her interpretation. This position is adjusted in the latter essay (published in 1992 some seven years after T&N3) where Ricoeur writes “We can become our own narrator, in imitation of these narrative voices, without being able to become the author.” (p32) For Ricoeur, we are born into a history and a tradition neither of which we have written. Therefore one’s life is the constant reinterpretation of that which has already partially constituted them. This is in keeping with Ricoeur’s disavowal of ‘immediate subjectivity’. (Ricoeur, Paul. *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*. pp20-33.)

<sup>287</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*. This text will be drawn on in greater detail in chapter four.

selfhood but rather its belonging to someone who is capable of declaring himself as the one whose body it is. Rembrandt's selfhood, according to this example, exists in his ability to represent through objectification that of which he is the subject and to be able to identify that it is he.

According to Ricoeur we are constantly re-interpreting "the narrative identity that constitutes us" in light of the various narratives and symbols presented by our culture. This entails attempting to discover and not simply to impose from outside the narrative identity that we are. This relationship between event and narrative is expressed succinctly in "Life in Quest of Narrative:

Our life when then embraced in a single glance, appears to us as the field of a constructive activity, borrowed from narrative understanding, by which we attempt to discover and not simply to impose from outside the narrative identity which constitutes us. I am stressing the expression 'narrative identity' for what we call subjectivity is neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution. This is precisely the sort of identity which narrative composition alone can create through its dynamism.<sup>288</sup>

In this way, Ricoeur goes on to argue how our "self-understanding presents the same features of traditionality as the understanding of a literary work."<sup>289</sup> He states how it is possible to apply to our self-understanding the interplay of sedimentation and innovation which is at work in every tradition. Tradition Ricoeur designates, not as "the inert transmission of a lifeless residue"<sup>290</sup> but as the living transmission of an innovation. These traditions enable us to interpret and understand in the first instance. However, they themselves already stem from an earlier innovation and so can always be reactivated "by a return to the most creative moments of poetic composition."<sup>291</sup> Through this interpretation we become the narrator of our own story assuming roles and applying plots which we have received from our heritage and culture. In this way Ricoeur re-iterates how the 'subject' is never a transparent subject nor an immediate given but continues to interpret, understand and constitute herself *through* narrative. It is narrative he claims which frees us from an ego whose insistence on immediate subjectivity, is in danger of becoming "narcissitic, egoistic and stingy."<sup>292</sup> It does this by mediating between these two poles of sheer change and absolute identity. He writes "In

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<sup>288</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Life in Quest of Narrative" in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*. p32

<sup>289</sup>Ibid.

<sup>290</sup>Ibid., p24

<sup>291</sup>Ibid.

<sup>292</sup>Ibid., p33

place of an ego enamoured of itself arises a self instructed by cultural symbols, the first among which are the narratives handed down in our literary tradition. And these narratives give us a unity which is not substantial but narrative.”<sup>293</sup> Narrative thus becomes one of the primary means towards self-understanding and will be instructive when we consider the various decisions to narrate cosmic history.

Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity is not uncontested. In his paper “Narrative Identity and Social Networking Sites” Romele puts forward an implicit criticism made by feminist philosopher Judith Butler by way of the approach of Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero. According to Romele, Butler criticises the authenticity and authority of the narrative subject. She argues that “the narrative authority of the ‘I’ must give way to the perspective and temporality of a set of norms that contest the singularity of my story”<sup>294</sup> which takes place when the self is exposed to others, and thus encounters a fundamental normativity which she argues is indifferent to my singularity. She states that “if no narrative of oneself can take place without an interlocutory structure, then the story will be complete only when it will be expropriated from all that is mine”<sup>295</sup>. This has the effect of rendering the concept of a narrative identity as one that is constituted externally. I argue that ‘narrative identity’ maintains its authority through its reflective dimension, in that the subject of operations grasps herself in these operations, including the realisation of norms that may impose on her, and constructs a plot/identity around them, a plot and identity which this same subject is ‘free’ to continuously re-interpret in spite of this fundamental normativity (and which is further addressed below). A more valid criticism, I argue, is made by Romele himself when he criticises Ricoeur’s monomediality and wonders what place there is in his theory for other forms of expression such as, for example, dance, painting, music and cinema. These ‘non-textual’ elements, Romele argues, today contribute more “to the transmission of knowledge and to the construction of the self”<sup>296</sup> than does the narrative. While acknowledging this important challenge to Ricoeur’s theory and how identity is mediated - and expressed – particularly through changing mediums of communication, this question is left aside here as this work specifically focuses on the narrative of *The Universe Story* and how this narrative mediates self-understanding.

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<sup>293</sup>Ibid., p33

<sup>294</sup>Romele, Alberto. “Narrative Identity and Social Networking Sites” in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricoeur Studies*, Vol 4, No 2, 2013. pp.108-122:111

<sup>295</sup>Ibid., p111

<sup>296</sup>Ibid., p115



### 1.6.2 Two components of subjectivity identifiable in narrative identity

According to Ricoeur, narrative identity acts as a bridge over the schism between phenomenological time (time as experienced) and cosmological time (time as objectified). It also, Ricoeur states, mediates between opposing conceptions of the ego, examples given being Descartes's exalted ego and Nietzsche's humiliated ego<sup>297</sup>. Through the mediation of symbols and narratives to be interpreted, the immediate ego is exchanged for a self who is 'instructed'.

Thus, it could be argued that for Ricoeur, subjectivity combines two central components. The first is the need to traverse from one's direct consciousness or immediate subjectivity to what is 'outside' of or 'other' to that subjectivity, and which mediates between this subjectivity and an understanding of it<sup>298</sup>. The second is to reflect on or seek to grasp that self as it exists in the world. This critically incorporates distanciation through reflection, while returning to the belonging that is lost in distanciation, through appropriation of that reflection by the subject in its self-understanding. Thus, Ricoeur's subject, while a reflecting conscious subject is not dominated by consciousness alone. Indeed, Ricoeur argues that the mind can never hold itself in its totality but only knows itself through "the scores it plays, formed by the different actions it undertakes."<sup>299</sup> Through the creative work of interpretation the self is constituted by the world yet remains capable of following after itself as *a life* and not, Ricoeur stresses, as a consciousness. This is significant for Ricoeur as he believed that "the meaning of consciousness lies outside of itself."<sup>300</sup> Ricoeur takes action and the

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<sup>297</sup>In *The Conflict of Interpretations* Ricoeur offers what he terms "the wounded cogito". This he defines as "a cogito which posits but does not possess itself, a cogito which understands its primordial truth only in and through the avowal of inadequation, the illusion, the fakery of immediate consciousness." Ricoeur, Paul. *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*. (McLaughlin, Kathleen, translator) Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007, p242

<sup>298</sup>It is these mediations which Ricoeur states interpose between "the questioning philosophical subject and the everyday subject who is questioned." So, while one is always a subject, Ricoeur appeared to differentiate between a naïve subjectivity and a depth subjectivity, just as he did with understanding. (Ricoeur, Paul. "Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p23)

<sup>299</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* / Paul Ricoeur. p75

<sup>300</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "The Text as Dynamic Identity" in *Identity of the Literary Text*. Valdés, Mario J. & Miller, Owen (ed.'s.) Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1985, p17. Cited in Venema, Henry Isaac, "Who am I to

interpretation of that action into account leading to a reflection on how the subject understands herself as being in a world.

We return now to what I suggest is the second component of Ricoeur's subjectivity. This is the way in which the subject of thinking can not only think on itself but can "always try to correct herself in her activity with respect to the products of that activity."<sup>301</sup> The conscious act of being able to grasp ourselves in our actions – and correct them – was central to Ricoeur's notion of subjectivity and it is this dimension of subjectivity which incorporates responsibility. In "Life in Quest of Narrative" he differentiates briefly between a human life and animal life to illustrate this point. He writes "human life differs widely from animal life, and, with all the more reason, from mineral existence. We understand what action and passion are through our competence to use in a meaningful way the entire network of expressions and concepts that are offered to us by natural languages in order to distinguish between *action* and mere physical *movement* and psychophysiological *behaviour*."<sup>302</sup> It is this ability to think upon our actions which latterly moves Ricoeur towards his 'little ethics' which is documented in *Oneself as Another* and where subjectivity becomes tied to a moral identity. The ascription of an action to an agent now involves moral accountability in its identity. Haker describes how this moral accountability has two sides: imputability and responsibility<sup>303</sup>. The first is the *identification* of a self where imputability is the central idea. The second is the *concept* of a self where responsibility is the central idea. She elaborates how the connection between narrative identity and moral identity in *Oneself as Another* is created through the adoption of the concept of time, just as personal identity holds a temporal aspect which is also mediated through narrative identity. She writes that it is the taking on of the responsibility "for the consequences of an action as responsibility with respect to the future, responsibility for the past "which affects us without its being entirely our work but what we take as ours (OA 293), and responsibility in the present."<sup>304</sup> This moral identity based on narrative identity locates

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others?" in *Between Suspicion and Sympathy, Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*. (Wierciński Andrzej) (ed.) p179

<sup>301</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* / Paul Ricoeur. p74

<sup>302</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Life in Quest of Narrative" in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*. p28. Italics original.

<sup>303</sup>Haker, Hille. "Narrative and Moral Identity in the Work of Paul Ricoeur" in *Memory, Narrativity, Self and the Challenge to think God*. pp134-152

<sup>304</sup>Ibid., p150. Haker states that in *Oneself as Another*, as moral identity is based on narrative identity, Ricoeur defines the relationship between ethics and aesthetics. It is moral identity which is capable of

the subject as being in a world where she is accountable and responsible but a world where the subject is no longer able to position herself as unaffected by that which is traditionally understood as objective, nor as being the immediate measure of meaning but being in a dialectical relation as equally responsible to that which is other<sup>305</sup>.

### 1.6.3 Can the 'self' and the 'subject' be understood as equivalent in Ricoeur's work?

It has been argued, notably by Brennan, that Ricoeur does not view the 'subject' and the 'self' as one and the same and that the 'hermeneutics of the self'<sup>306</sup> introduced in *Oneself as Another* is not a reform or a continuation of his work on subjectivity but rather is a critical engagement with Descartes' *Second Meditation*. Brennan argues that there are three considerations in Ricoeur's work from the mid to the late 1980s onwards which suggest this is so. These are, she states: his plan to use a nominalised omnipersnal reflexive pronoun instead of the singular subjective pronoun 'I'<sup>307</sup>; his "declared" intention to break with the "philosophies of the subject" and finally; in his suggestion that the "hermeneutics of the self" will differ from the "philosophies of the subject."<sup>308</sup>

Brennan argues that it is Ricoeur's concept of 'attestation' which offers the strongest challenge to the equation of the 'self' and the 'subject'. Borrowing from

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identifying the "seriousness" of existential life from the "game" of the aesthetic life of fiction. Any attempt to resolve ethical existence into aesthetic existence fails because of the necessity of responsibility which Haker states Ricoeur has anchored into his hermeneutics of the self.

<sup>305</sup>In his intellectual autobiography, Ricoeur describes this moral accountability to the Other as "a counterpart to the proud initiative that was the distinctive mark of a speaking, acting and self-narrating subject." (Ricoeur, Paul. "Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p48)

<sup>306</sup> I will return to Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of the self' as presented in *Oneself as Another* in greater detail in chapter four 'The configuration of the human in *The Universe Story*'. For this section, it is to highlight the emphasis Ricoeur placed on self-understanding.

<sup>307</sup>Brennan points out that in *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur uses the grammar of a number of European languages to oppose 'I' and 'self' to emphasis that they do not signify the same thing. In nominalising the reflexive pronoun self, his topic becomes 'the self' which can function as "the indirect object of another noun." In doing this Ricoeur's intention, Brennan quotes him as stating, was "to indicate the primacy of reflective mediation over the immediate positing of the subject" (Brennan, Eileen. "Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self." In *Tropos. Journal of Hermeneutics and Philosophical Criticism*. 2015, 2, VIII. p.8-10) Copy received directly from author.) Ricoeur cited in Brennan and taken from *Oneself as Another*. p1

<sup>308</sup>Brennan, Eileen. "Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self." In *Tropos*. p1

philosopher Jean Greisch<sup>309</sup>, she argues that with Ricoeur's notion of attestation the ontological commitments, defined by Brennan as "the kind of entities that must exist in order for the theory to be true"<sup>310</sup> are re-cast as human actions. The demand, she states, that Ricoeur's attestation places on the world is not that certain entities exist but "that certain actions or kinds of actions can be performed."<sup>311</sup> With this concept of attestation, Ricoeur moves us beyond discourses on the subject to an unfamiliar space "where "selfhood" no longer means the quality that constitutes one's individuality but a "mode" of "existing"<sup>312</sup> which Brennan argues echoes Heidegger's being-in-the-world. Brennan quotes from *Oneself as Another* where Ricoeur states "It remains that the concept...of being-in-the-world is expressed in numerous ways, and that it is together that oneself, care, and being-in-the-world are to be determined."<sup>313</sup> Thus Brennan argues how at this juncture 'selfhood' for Ricoeur becomes a way of being in the world that is not reducible to the features of individuality. Here we can make the connection with Haker above, who argued that through his 'little ethics' Ricoeur's self is identifiable in her mode as both a capable and a responsible actor.

While acknowledging the distinction Brennan makes between the subject and the self, it could also be argued that the two entities are not entirely separate categories for Ricoeur. Rather, I would suggest that they have an ambiguous relation which blurs their distinction in that it is through subjectivity that one arrives at selfhood. This can be argued through Ricoeur's statement of how subjectivity does not constitute the primary category of understanding but must be lost to itself as origin before it can be recovered. He states in his intellectual autobiography that "the egoistic I must recede if the self – the work of reading – is to be born... a strong equivalence between reflection and the term "self" was suggested..."<sup>314</sup> It is this detour by way of objectification which differentiates between an immediate ego and a reflective ego. This, Ricoeur argues, is done through the distancing of 'otherness' including all the implications of the other as possessing her own body, as being another, as having another history and the other as 'conscience'. Thus, Ricoeur states how "the self could return home only at the end of a

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<sup>309</sup>Greisch, Jean. Paul Ricoeur. *L'itinérance du sens*. Grenoble: Editions Jérôme Millon. Cited in Brennan, Eileen. "Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self" In *Tropos* p21

<sup>310</sup>Brennan, Eileen. "Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self." In *Tropos*. p23

<sup>311</sup>*Ibid.*, p23

<sup>312</sup>*Ibid.*, p24

<sup>313</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another* cited in Brennan Eileen. "Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self" in *Tropos*. p24

<sup>314</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p48

long journey. And it is “as another” that the self returned.”<sup>315</sup> In either instance, it is clear that both the subject and the self whether taken as distinct or equivalents are not constitutive of consciousness alone, but are constituted by that which they are conscious of, and formed by that to which they attest and the narratives used in this attestation. Ricoeur has elsewhere argued that interpretation is never complete but a life-long task which suggests that one’s self-understanding can never be definitively concluded. This would equally suggest that the self can never *finally* return home and so could arguably condemn Ricoeur’s self to a ‘belonging’ that is never fully owned or completed.

In terms of this work however, both conceptions of ‘self’ are relevant to *The Universe Story*. The human being within the text of *The Universe Story* is, the narrative claims, the universe come to consciousness. The narrative uses the term subjectivity to convey the way in which humans express this consciousness.

## 1.7 Environmental hermeneutics: an expansion of philosophical hermeneutics to interpretations of the environment

Up to this point I have detailed Ricoeur’s narrative hermeneutics and the manner in which narrative opens up new possibilities of worlds and being-in-the-world, which can transform a reader’s self-understanding. Ricoeur’s theory, although outlining the function of narrative, requires additional tools to explain the meaning that the use of language contributes to the narrative. As one of the aims of this thesis is to characterise the human of the narrative, specifically as a narrative that re-interprets human identity in relation to Earth and the larger universe, I turn now to environmental hermeneutics to assist in explanation of the configurative aspect of the narrative, and the meanings that may be associated with it, particularly in relation to the human of the narrative and its relationship to the environment. In its extension of principles of interpretation to the environment, environmental hermeneutics attends to the manner in which relationships to nature are interpreted and understood, in particular human relations to the other-than-human.

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<sup>315</sup>Ibid.

In *Interpreting Nature: The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*<sup>316</sup>, Clingerman *et al* examine some of the ways in which interpretation takes place in human relationship to the environment. The authors argue that philosophical hermeneutics recommends itself to the topic of the environment because it offers a “unique reflection on the human mediation of the meaning of environments”<sup>317</sup> while hermeneutics contributes to the understanding of the practical implications of these environments. They go on to state that facts of nature are given meaning through the way in which they are interpreted. This is not to deny the possibility of facts but that there is a need for mediation between “the interpretive task of connecting fact and meaning”<sup>318</sup> in that ‘bare facts’ are always contextualised by individual and social relations that involve value and meaning.

In his paper “Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics as a Model for Environmental Philosophy”<sup>319</sup>, Utsler documents the development from environmental philosophy to environmental hermeneutics. He argues that environmental philosophy is better understood as an environmental ethics. In addition, phenomenologists who have turned to the environment have begun to speak of an eco-phenomenology as a way of giving descriptions to environmental experiences. According to Utsler, an eco-phenomenology points to an eco-hermeneutic, which Utsler broadens further to speak of an environmental hermeneutic that includes interpretation of any environs. Utsler observes how environmental philosophy as a distinct branch of philosophy has only appeared in the last generation and goes on to argue that environmental philosophy is “the logical place for an “expanding hermeneutics” to turn”<sup>320</sup>. This is so, because the claim of hermeneutics to universality is based on the proposition that all experience is mediated through language, and environmental experience also calls for interpretation. Language, Utsler argues, is related “to “the ontological condition of being-in-the-world” and we bring experience to language; thus we can infer that the encounter with environments - natural, cultural and so on - is likewise expressed (or understood) in language, making

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<sup>316</sup>Clingerman, Forrest, Treanor, Brian, Drenthen, Martin & Utsler, David. *Interpreting Nature: The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014. Accessed online, ProQuest Ebook Central, accessed 21 June 2020.

<sup>317</sup>*Ibid.*, p2

<sup>318</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>319</sup>Utsler, David. “Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics as a Model for Environmental Philosophy” in *Philosophy Today*; Summer 2009; 53, 2; ProQuest Central. pp173-178

<sup>320</sup>*Ibid.*, p173

them a meaningful locus of interpretation”<sup>321</sup>. He singles out Ricoeur’s hermeneutics and in particular his, what Utsler terms, ‘hermeneutic principle’ of distancing, both of reader and writer from the text, in addition to his hermeneutics of the self, as providing a model for various environmental discourses, and in particular environmental philosophy. According to Utsler, these provide a strong analytical framework to examine the manner in which we construe the environment and our relationship with it. Environmental philosophy, Utsler argues “requires that it be interdisciplinary in its scope and approach” and the philosophy of “Paul Ricoeur is uniquely suited to cross disciplinary borders”<sup>322</sup>. Bell too argues that aspects of Ricoeur’s work are important to environmental philosophy as they “provide[s] a rich ground for reformulating and readdressing these questions”, in particular, the question of how selfhood and identity “relate to different conceptions of the environment?”<sup>323</sup>

In their introduction to the scope and purpose of environmental hermeneutics, Clingerman *et al* offer five different and often overlapping approaches to environmental hermeneutics which I will reproduce here. These are: environmental hermeneutics is the extension of principles of interpretation to any environment - natural, built, social and cultural; it is the interpretation of actual encounters of or within environments; it refers to a form of nature writing that the authors state is a more personalised account of the previous category and provide examples of Henry David Thoreau and John Muir. Just as nature writing is an interpretation of nature by the author it is also the interpretive act of the reader of said texts and; environmental hermeneutics also investigates accounts from the many disciplines that are concerned with environments. There can be geological, economical and agricultural interpretations, among others, and environmental hermeneutics’ focus is to critically mediate between these disciplines; lastly, environmental hermeneutics is defined as a philosophical stance that understands “how the inevitability of what Gadamer called our “hermeneutical consciousness” informs our relationship with environments”<sup>324</sup> and thus is concerned with the ontological framework that facilitates such interpretations.

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<sup>321</sup>ibid.

<sup>322</sup>ibid., p177

<sup>323</sup>Bell, Nathan. “Environmental Hermeneutics with and for Others: Ricoeur’s Ethics and the Ecological Self” in *Interpreting Nature: The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*. pp141-159:141

<sup>324</sup>Clingerman, Forrest, Treanor, Brian, Drenthen, Martin & Utsler, David. “Introduction” in *Interpreting Nature: The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*.p4

Bell argues that environmental identity, sense of self and the ‘good life’ (in terms of ethics) are all hermeneutically interrelated<sup>325</sup>. He argues that to understand the world differently involves understanding the self differently. In terms of the environment and our relation to it, Bell states that “it is a new self-understanding that causes a reinterpretation of the world in which we live”<sup>326</sup>. The text of a nature writer makes references to nature in a way that “creates a world in which nature is recognized and has significance and value”<sup>327</sup>. On reading this text, the reader’s horizon becomes enlarged and her sense of self in relation to nature changed, although Bell acknowledges that this can be sympathetic or critical. Through such texts however, a means is provided of examining the self-nature relationship. Central to the self-nature relationship is the self and other-than-human self, whereby Bell argues interpretation is at the heart of our ethical encounters with these others. In relation to this, Bannon argues that Plumwood’s contribution to environmental philosophy shows that environmental philosophy is not only a sub-field of ethics, he argues, but rather how “resolving the “environmental crisis” calls for the reevaluation of many concepts at the very heart of the western philosophical project”<sup>328</sup>. Plumwood specifically focuses on the dualism of the reason/nature dichotomy which she states affects most Western philosophical notions of human identity (and will be examined more critically in chapter four). In light of this, Plumwood argues for the need to reconceptualise the human in relation to nature and also, nature itself. As a narrative that undertakes both of these tasks, the merits and weaknesses of the configuration of the human in relation to nature will also be examined in chapter four.

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<sup>325</sup>Bell, Nathan. “Environmental Hermeneutics with and for Others: Ricoeur’s Ethics and the Ecological Self.” In *Interpreting Nature: The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*.

<sup>326</sup>*Ibid.*, p145

<sup>327</sup>*Ibid.*, p146

<sup>328</sup>Bannon, Bryan. “Developing Val Plumwood’s Dialogical Ethical Ontology and Its Consequences for a Place-based Ethic.” In *Ethics and the Environment*. 14(2) 2009, pp39-55:40



## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have put forward the methodological framework for this work which is a hermeneutical approach drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur and latterly on environmental philosophy and environmental hermeneutics. The aim of the thesis is to identify the proposed ‘world of the text’ and specifically the configuration and meaning of the human within this world. I argue that Ricoeur’s hermeneutics is characterised by his maintaining a critical epistemological function in order to prevent ideological or other misappropriation of a text in understanding. Ricoeur argued that understanding need not be sacrificed to method nor explanation compromised by understanding. Ricoeur identifies three points of mediation where this concept of distanciation can be applied. These three points of mediation are pre-understanding, historical efficacy and the fusion of horizons where communication happens in and through this distance and not despite it.

Secondly, I argue that Ricoeur identified the text as paradigmatic of this relationship between understanding and explanation. The text as fixed in writing is autonomous and so an example where a critical instance through these three categories can be opened up as a means towards explanation. Narrative, Ricoeur named as the text par excellence. Through the mimetic arc of prefiguration, configuration and refiguration, the narrative acts as a mediation between person and person/communicability; person and the world/referentiality, and what Ricoeur named as the final category in a theory of interpretation, that of self-understanding, person and herself.

There are thus a number of identifiable steps in undertaking a hermeneutical analysis of a text. The first is prefiguration (*mimesis*<sub>1</sub>). This “prehistory of the story is what binds it to a larger whole and gives it a background...told stories therefore have to emerge from this background.”<sup>329</sup> In tandem with this are the aspects of “the presupposed structural, symbolic and temporal character of the world of action”<sup>330</sup>. Thus, the first step involves an identification of the prefiguration and background of the story. This includes the history and tradition from which the narrative consciously and

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<sup>329</sup>Ricoeur, Paul *Time and Narrative*. Vol 1.p75

<sup>330</sup>Helenius, Timo. “As If” and the Surplus of Being in Ricoeur’s Poetics” in *Études Ricoeuriennes/RicoeurStudies*. Ricoeur Studies, Vol 3, No 2, 2012, pp149-170:149

unconsciously emerges and those external references of the text influential in its configuration.

From its pre-figurative anchoring, configuration in turn “provides a certain readability, which in turn, facilitates reception”<sup>331</sup>. Thus, the second step is to identify the way in which the narrative is configured. An analysis of the way in which a narrative is configured and meaning is transferred, must also include an examination of discourse. Ricoeur identifies figurative discourse to include myth, metaphor and religious language. According to Ricoeur such figurative discourse facilitates the release of a second-order reference by suspending a first-order reference. This is the power of figurative language to redescribe reality and is associated with *phronesis* in that it intends being rather than simply describing being. The language used in the text and the manner in which the narrative is constructed through symbol and metaphor is instructive in how the meaning of the narrative is conveyed.

The third step and final category in a theory of interpretation, according to Ricoeur, is self-understanding. This is refiguration or mimesis<sub>3</sub>. Ricoeur names this as one of the functions of narrative. For Ricoeur, narrative identity acts as a bridge between action and permanency in time. This is an identity that can incorporate both immutability and change. The narrative opens up possibilities of being in the world and begins to re-describe the world. The reader’s life becomes refigured when the horizon of the world proposed by the narrative ‘fuses’ with her ownmost possibilities of being-in-the-world. In the step of refiguration, Ricoeur outlines his theory on the manner in which a narrative can lead to an adjustment in self-understanding and the active re-organisation of a reader’s life because of this adjustment.

As a narrative with environmental concerns, the configuration and characterisation of the human within the universe, I argue, are key to the meaning that is produced in the text and to any self-understanding that may occur in the reader. Through the pre-figurative and configurative analysis of the narrative, the world of the text is revealed. This prepares the way for an investigation of the human of that world. Here I draw on an environmental hermeneutic in determining the relationship of the human with the other-than-human in the narrative, in addition to Earth and the larger universe, whereby Bell argues interpretation is at the heart of the way we encounter others. Narrative plays a role in this; in that it can create a world where nature is

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<sup>331</sup>Ibid., p150

validated and given significance or equally its opposite. Central to this is the conceptualisation of self and the conceptualisation of nature and the manner in which both relate.

The next chapter focuses on the narrative of *The Universe Story* through an investigation of the pre-figurative aspects of the text. This is done through an analysis of the content, historical tradition and development of the text.

## Chapter two. The pre-figuration of *The Universe Story*: content, history and development

### Introduction

This chapter turns to the narrative in question, *The Universe Story*. It can be argued that the narrative approach by which the authors of *The Universe Story* undertake their interpretation of the universe is both phenomenological and hermeneutical. Phenomenological in that its intention is turned towards the natural world and the cosmos and the way in which this reality impacts on human experience; and hermeneutical in that the text interrupts ‘the relation of belonging’ in order to signify it. In his essay “Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology”<sup>332</sup> Ricoeur identifies three points of mediation or explanation between hermeneutics and the human sciences. These are pre-understanding, historical efficacy and the fusion of horizons<sup>333</sup>. Each of these act as a moment of explanation towards ‘better’ understanding because they each identify a space through which something can be objectified, and through this a critical distance introduced which makes explanation possible without losing the ontological relation.

In *Time and Narrative*<sup>334</sup> Ricoeur addresses the three-fold mimesis (pre-figuration, configuration and re-figuration) the text takes in order to function. Mimesis<sub>1</sub> refers to the pre-figurative or pre-narrative order of understanding which makes the understanding of a story possible. It is the “mediation between men, communicability”<sup>335</sup>. It specifically refers to the symbolic mediation of the order of action or the language of ‘doing something’ and makes such terms as ‘intention’ and ‘motive’ readable in action. In this there is an identifiable parallel with that of pre-understanding and historical efficacy. Mimesis<sub>2</sub>, the act of configuration refers to emplotment, the way in which events are arranged into an intelligible whole. Included in this, the manner in which events are configured, is the language and form used to narrate. In his essay “The hermeneutical function of distancing” which describes the

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<sup>332</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology” in *Paul Ricoeur. Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. pp63-100

<sup>333</sup>Ibid., p91-94

<sup>334</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative, Vol 1*.

<sup>335</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*. p27

text as the paradigm of distanciation, Ricoeur refers to this as style or techné<sup>336</sup>. It is the work or the production of the author. Style draws together events and meaning. Mimesis<sub>3</sub> refers to the way in which the narrative is refigured and marks the intersection of the world of the reader and the world of the text and can be associated with ‘the fusion of horizons’: the horizon of the reader and the horizon of the text. This is not an automatic process for Ricoeur in that we are not slaves to the past. Rather he identifies language as the critical moment here. It is language which enables us to enter into the point of view of another, it is a form of ‘prior agreement about the thing’ that can lead to inquiry and actual agreement. In this way, any refiguration that may occur is guided by the text itself.

This chapter begins with the element of prefiguration as its guide. It focuses on some of the external sources of reference of the narrative. In doing this, the chapter will be divided into two parts. The first part ‘A description of language and content of *The Universe Story*’ focuses on language realised as discourse, in that “someone says something to someone about something”<sup>337</sup> whereby language is realised as an event. It begins by clarifying key terms and concepts relevant to the analysis of the narrative of *The Universe Story*. This will be followed by a description of the content of *The Universe Story*. *The Universe Story* is then located in the context of some of the principal cosmic narrative genres, namely, the ‘epic of evolution’ and ‘big history’, followed by an analysis of the main criticisms levelled at such narratives with specific focus on how these apply to *The Universe Story*. This analysis in turn raises issues that will be the focus of the second part of this chapter: the history and tradition from which *The Universe Story* arises.

This second section begins by charting both the history and the development of *The Universe Story*. It examines therefore the ‘prejudice’ or ‘pre-judgement’ that is at work in the narrative. This uncovers the pre-understanding or the tradition which makes enquiry possible<sup>338</sup>. Historical efficacy (the effects of history upon us), Ricoeur argues, has historical distance as its counterpart. Ricoeur argues that distance is both a fact and a method. It is a fact in that history is removed from us and a methodology in that it is possible to take a distance from something<sup>339</sup>. There are two points for consideration

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<sup>336</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “The hermeneutical function of distanciation” in *From text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*. p82

<sup>337</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p22

<sup>338</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Hermeneutical Logic?” in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2. pp73-75

<sup>339</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Hermeneutical Logic?” in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2., p76

here. The first is historical efficacy which is linked to the tradition from which the narrative arises, in this case we examine the implicit ‘effects of history’ on the authors. The second aspect is historical distance and examines what distance does *The Universe Story* reflect from those traditions out of which it arises. This is evident in those thinkers and ideas who shaped Thomas Berry and his interpretation of the universe. The implicit effects of history, in particular on Berry, will be traced in this part but also the ways in which Berry explicitly re-interprets and is innovative in relation to this tradition in *The Universe Story*. In this light, this second part will begin with tracing Berry’s intellectual history and the thinkers and ideas which most influenced and pre-occupied him, including the way in which he understood and employed the term ‘spirituality’. Berry’s move from a scientific cosmology to what he termed a ‘cosmology of religion’ will then be examined.

This will be followed by an introduction to the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and four of his foundational ideas, three of which are implicit in *The Universe Story*, namely cosmo-genesis, complexity-consciousness and love-energy, followed by those ideas which were shared by Teilhard and Berry and which Berry develops and presents in *The Universe Story*. These involve, I argue, three shared concepts, although articulated differently by each thinker. I will name them here only and they are: a metaphysics of the future; plurality, unity and energy or what Berry names differentiation, subjectivity and communion and lastly; the idea of a time-developmental universe arriving at self-reflective consciousness.

## 2.1. Part One: A description of language and content of *The Universe Story*

In this section, I will present the key concepts and ideas associated with *The Universe story*, followed by a summary of the narrative itself. I will then present an overview of other ‘cosmic narratives’ and locate where *The Universe Story* lies in relation to them, followed by an analysis of the major critiques addressed to these narratives and specifically, *The Universe Story*. First, however I will begin with a clarification of key concepts and terms pertinent to the narrative starting with the origins of teleological thinking that began with Aristotle. I will then present debates in relation to teleology in biology, followed by a presentation of the anthropic principle.

This is necessary due to the fact that teleological questions arise, implicitly and explicitly in narrations of cosmic history. So too do variations of the anthropic principle. I will also examine the term ‘spirituality’ which is a significant theme and term of *The Universe Story*.

### 2.1.1 Strong and weak teleology with a focus on Aristotle and biology

In his *Physics*, Aristotle understands teleology as the explanation of something by ‘final cause’. This is “something’s end” or “what it is for”<sup>340</sup>. It can be termed as something’s purpose. For Aristotle, the nature of a thing, Cahn argues, is that for the sake of which it exists. According to Aristotle, ‘simple’ bodies, animals and plants exist by nature in that they have an internal principle of motion. Motion in this instance refers to movement but also to a change of state or quality. Nature for Aristotle is the source of being moved or at rest. Thus, as Russell paraphrases, things have a nature for Aristotle “if they have an internal principle of this kind. The phrase ‘according to nature’ applies to these things and their essential attributes...nature is in form rather than in matter; what is potentially flesh or bone has not yet acquired its own nature, and a thing is more what it is when it has attained to fulfilment. The whole point of view seems to be suggested by biology: the acorn is ‘potentially’ an oak.”<sup>341</sup>

It is form which gives substance to matter. Form for Aristotle consists of the essence and primary substance of a ‘thing’. Matter without form exists only as potentiality. It is by acquiring form that things increase in actuality. Form provides unity to a section of matter and this unity is teleological as it makes of the matter ‘one thing’ with a unity of purpose. This view will become pertinent to the definition of spirituality in *The Universe Story* when it is discussed later.

Michael Ruse describes teleology as trying to understand things in terms of future planning. He states that for a teleological explanation to be coherent “Someone thought about what might happen and built accordingly (the future reference comes

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<sup>340</sup>Cahn, Steven M. (ed.) “Aristotle” in *Classics of Western Philosophy*. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1995, pp233-274:245

<sup>341</sup>Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy and its connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. London: Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1961, p215

because someone thought about it).”<sup>342</sup> This is best understood, he argues, as a form of intelligent design and is in contrast with an explanation which begins with causes that actually exist such as ‘proximate’ or ‘efficient’ causes<sup>343</sup>. Such teleological explanation invariably leads back to questions of a designer and other such creation/creator deductions.

In addition to the idea of intelligent design, there is another common teleological explanation. This other teleological explanation Ruse describes as “some kind of special force that is future directed. It may not be a thinking force but it seeks out phenomena or events in the future. The idea here is rather like the goal directed system you get in rockets.”<sup>344</sup> This implies that there are ‘vital forces’ within the universe and nature. Henri Bergson, who influenced Teilhard<sup>345</sup> greatly, was one such philosopher who subscribed to this view. Bergson argued that evolution was best explained as a creative force or power which he names the *élan vital* or the ‘vital or life impulse’<sup>346</sup>.

While some biologists and philosophers of science argue that teleological notions are unavoidable in biology, others are divided on whether the Darwinian account of natural selection eliminates teleology from biology<sup>347</sup>. These arguments are generally centred on the terminology of ‘function’ and ‘design’. In biology, every process or phenomena in living organisms requires a functional or physiological explanation as well as an evolutionary explanation. Functional explanations address the underlying mechanisms of how processes work and in doing so answer the ‘how’ question. On the other hand, evolutionary explanations answer the ‘why’ question which in general relates to adaptation of organisms in order to survive<sup>348</sup>. A strong teleology would thus suggest a creator or imply a willed directedness in nature: a

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<sup>342</sup>Ruse, Michael. “Evolutionary biology and the question of teleology” in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, pp100-106:101, [www.elsevier.com/locate/shpsc](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/shpsc), last accessed 11 October 2017

<sup>343</sup>ibid.

<sup>344</sup>ibid.

<sup>345</sup>Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a Jesuit priest and palaeontologist who had huge influence on Thomas Berry’s writings. He will be discussed in more detail in section 2.8 below

<sup>346</sup> Isaacs, Mark. “Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and the Quest for an Interface between Science and Religion” in *Journal of Unification Studies*, Vol X, 2009, pp141-171

<sup>347</sup>Allen, Colin & Neal, Jacob, “Teleological Notions in Biology” in *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2004 Edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/smr2004/entries/teleology-biology/> last accessed June 2018

<sup>348</sup>Cheng Wai Yep. “Causal and teleological explanations in biology” in *Journal of Biological Education*. Society of Biology, Autumn 2009, Vol. 43 Issue 4. pp149-151.



purposeful design. A weak teleology, which imbues a description with direction suggests that it is not an internal logic in the universe but ‘the natural course of events’ which leads to increasing complexity. Ruse, in his description of the latter, writes that “it is the inevitability of the drunkard falling into the gutter.”<sup>349</sup> This suggests that it is not necessarily selection-driven processes which lead to greater complexity, rather, merely a course of events, that is, it is not that there are no physical causes but that there is no direction in nature. This is referred to as the zero-force evolutionary law and is formulated as follows: “In any evolutionary system in which there is variation and heredity, in the absence of natural selection, other forces, and constraints, acting on diversity and complexity, diversity and complexity will increase on average”[sic]<sup>350</sup>. This argues that over time, more ‘pieces’ are produced and more ‘things happen’ which inevitably leads to greater diversity and complexity.

Ruse also argues that in Darwinism, a naturalistic account of the evolution of organisms is provided whereby any teleology is subsumed by mechanism. This mechanism through natural selection leads to change, and a particular kind of change. Ruse writes that “organisms will develop end-directed features like hands and eyes, what biologists call “adaptations”. There will be an appearance of design, without need of vital forces or direct intervention by a designer. Blind mechanical law can do everything.”<sup>351</sup>

Darwin’s theory of natural selection argues that population pressures lead to a struggle for existence and reproduction. The traits of those who are successful in this struggle tend to be different than those that are unsuccessful and it is these differences that matter. Therefore, given sufficient time there will be a natural “form of selection.” This does not, however, eliminate the concepts of selection and choice from this theory and highlights the difficulty in speaking about biology without the use of such ‘purposeful’ language. There is no satisfactory answer given mechanism, Ruse concludes, as to why humans emerged in the way that we did, but according to Ruse, notwithstanding that, teleology is not acceptable in modern science.

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<sup>349</sup>Ruse, Michael. “Evolutionary biology and the question of teleology” in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*. p105

<sup>350</sup>McShea, D. & Brandon R. “Biology’s first law: The tendency for diversity and complexity to increase in evolutionary systems” cited in Ruse, Michael. “Evolutionary biology and the question of teleology” in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*. p105

<sup>351</sup>Ruse, Michael. “Evolutionary biology and the question of teleology” in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*. p101

In his 2012 book, *Mind and Cosmos*, Thomas Nagel also investigates the validity of a teleological explanation in a universe where valuing appears and is recognised. He raises the teleological hypothesis:

The teleological hypothesis is that these things may be determined not merely by value-free chemistry and physics but also by something else, namely a cosmic predisposition to the formation of life, consciousness, and the value that is inseparable to them... And once there are beings who can respond to value, the rather different teleology of intentional action becomes part of the historical picture, resulting in the creation of new value. The universe has become not only conscious and aware of itself but capable in some respects of choosing its path into the future – though all three, the consciousness, the knowledge, and the choice, are dispersed over a vast crowd of beings, acting both individually and collectively.<sup>352</sup>

Here, Nagel is adding consciousness, value and choice to the mechanism and re-introducing a forward reference into the universe that is, through these three ‘capable of choosing its path’. In this he counters Ruse’s argument. Ruse argues that evolutionists want teleology but they cannot have it<sup>353</sup>. Teleological explanations, he argues contradict an understanding of evolution by mechanism. On the other hand, Nagel argues, to be able to judge and to value, transcends a mechanism, in that it involves “consciousness, intentionality, meaning, purpose, thought.”<sup>354</sup> These are not material things and so the physical sciences cannot, he writes, help us in understanding what they are. Nagel argues that this is not a return to a teleology of design or a designer, a closet theism. He retains his atheistic stance. He calls, rather, for an approach that lies somewhere between theism and materialism and writes “would an alternative secular conception be possible that acknowledged mind and all that it implies, not as the expression of divine intention but as a fundamental principle of nature along with physical law? Could it take the form of a unified conception of the natural order, even if it tries to accommodate a richer set of materials than the austere elements of mathematical physics?”<sup>355</sup>

An explanation of ultimate reality must include both those aspects which are physical and those that are not, such as Nagel mentions. The debate stands between those in Ruse’s camp who would excise all teleology from biology and those on

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<sup>352</sup>Nagel, Thomas. *Mind and Cosmos. Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinism Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p123

<sup>353</sup>Ruse, Michael. “Evolutionary biology and the question of teleology” in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*. p105

<sup>354</sup>Nagel, Thomas. *Mind and Cosmos*. p13

<sup>355</sup>Ibid., p22

Nagel's side who argue for the incorporation of 'mind' and all that this implies into descriptions of reality, including evolutionary biology, while acknowledging the danger of moving uncritically into a strong teleology that implies a 'designer'. This relates to *The Universe Story* and its attempts to produce such an explanation of reality. Such explanations invariably lead to teleologies although the degree of teleology and whether it infers a creator or not, differs. The description of biology and physics presented in this narrative and the levels of teleology it does or does not hold will be examined in chapter three and four in the way in which the narrative is configured.

### 2.1.2 The anthropic principle

The anthropic principle is a concept in both science and philosophy which asserts that our human ability to observe, examine and describe the universe, indicates that the universe had to be exactly the way it is in terms of physical structures and evolutionary time-scales, in order that intelligent life could emerge. It observes that the universe is, with remarkable precision, 'just fit' for life. Although such thinking has a long history in Western philosophy and theology which often viewed the human as the aim and goal of the universe, and creation, the anthropic principle was first coined 'scientifically' in 1974 by physicist Brandon Carter. Carter formulated it to explain the "surprisingly ordered structure of the physical world."<sup>356</sup> It was based on biology and not on fundamental physics.

There are two versions of this principle, the strong and the weak. The strong anthropic principle argues that "the existence of intelligent beings has in some way been built into the direction of the universe's development all along. We did not simply happen to come to be out of a multitude of possibilities, eventuating by chance"<sup>357</sup>. This 'strong' approach infers that human life is an aim, or at minimum, a direction of the universe. There are too many improbable coincidences that could allow the emergence of life to 'chance' or natural selection. Rather, Mooney argues that "the laws of nature now appear to be constituted by a massive series of coincidences of enormous statistical improbability"<sup>358</sup> which suggest some kind of directionality. Accordance with the

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<sup>356</sup>Mooney, Christopher. "The Anthropic Principle in Cosmology and Theology" in *Horizons*, 21/1, 1994, pp105-29:106, footnote 3

<sup>357</sup>*Ibid.*, p107

<sup>358</sup>*Ibid.*, p106

strong anthropic principle does not necessarily infer a God or an intelligent designer but could equally refer to a creative force within the universe or indeed something else yet to be described in naturalistic or materialistic terms.

On the other hand, the weak anthropic principle argues that because we exist, that the universe must contain those properties that enable intelligent life to evolve. The fact that there is life in the universe necessitates the type of universe that can produce that life. It does not imply a telos *towards* life. As we can observe the universe, it must contain those possibilities which make such observance possible. It must also be noted that it is a principle that no testable predictions can be currently derived from, which makes its scientific claims tenuous and lends weight to the weak side of this argument<sup>359</sup>.

The principle offered a means of relating physical phenomena to mind and remarks on how the structures of the universe are so very fine-tuned and precise, for intelligent life<sup>360</sup>. It becomes relevant here in that *The Universe Story* is concerned with such questions as the relation of the human species, marked by its ability towards consciousness, and the way in which it fits in the universe. *The Universe Story* claims that the property of mind is a property of the universe entire. Thus, while the narrative clearly has an anthropic concern it is to be determined whether it is an over-riding concern or whether it is the inevitable concern of any cosmic narrative of how to write the human into this history. This will be drawn out in chapter three and four.

### 2.1.3 Spirituality: a working definition

There have been, and continue to be, many efforts to explicate and define the term ‘spirituality’. This section highlights some overlaps in spirituality studies which will assist when we come to address the way in which the term is used in the writings of Thomas Berry and what it signifies in *The Universe Story*.

The word spirit in English is derived from the Latin word ‘spiritus’ which means breath or air and is a translation of the original Greek term, *pnuema*. In its most

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<sup>359</sup>Wilson, Patrick A. “Carter on Anthropic Principle Predictions” in *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*. 45(1), pp241-253

<sup>360</sup>For a comprehensive list of examples of such fine-tuning, please see Leslie, John. “Anthropic Principle, World Ensemble, Design” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 19, No. 2 (Apr., 1982), pp141-151

basic understanding, it is associated with that which ‘gives life’ or ‘animates’<sup>361</sup>. In contrast to the etymology of the word itself, Schneiders describes spirituality as “the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence towards the horizon of ultimate value one perceives”<sup>362</sup>. Others such as Sheldrake similarly argue that spirituality involves a quest for meaning which is associated with a self-reflective existence and so is native to everyone and not just those who identify as religious<sup>363</sup>.

There are common elements which can be identified in studies on spirituality. The first is the association with meaning or purpose in one’s life and relates spirituality to the passions<sup>364</sup>. This suggests that spirituality is an inherent dimension of the human person. This dimension is then actualised in relationships. The second is that spirituality entails a way of life and so is linked to ethical behaviour modelled in terms of the right or the good. The third is that this purpose is established in relation to what is understood to be ‘transcendent’ or ‘ultimate’. This understanding of transcendence provides the theoretical framework or foundation towards which that meaning or purpose is directed<sup>365</sup>.

Schneider’s framework for understanding contemporary spirituality within the academy is also useful. She also argues that spirituality has three main referents. These are described as: a fundamental dimension of the human being; the lived experience which actualises that dimension and; the academic discipline which studies experience<sup>366</sup>. As noted, Schneider’s ‘transcendence’ refers to self-transcendence or ‘ultimate value’.

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<sup>361</sup>Collins, Kenneth J. “What is Spirituality?’ Historical and Methodological Considerations” in *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 31 no 1 Spr,1996, pp76-94

<sup>362</sup>Schneiders, Sandra. “Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*. Holder, Arthur (ed.), Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005, pp15-33:16

<sup>363</sup>Sheldrake, Philip. *Spirituality: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012

<sup>364</sup>Carey expands on this connection between spirituality and the passions. He writes that the ‘inward turn’ of spirituality is constituted by “recognition of the absolute centrality of our passionate responses and patterns of thought for our ability to lead flourishing, ethical, lives; and, second, by sustained attention to that inner life in order to bring about positive change.” Carey, Jeremiah. “Spiritual but not religious’?: On the nature of spirituality and its relation to religion” in the *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* (2018) 83, pp261–269:264

<sup>365</sup>Cf. Carey, Jeremiah. “Spiritual but not religious’? On the nature of spirituality and its relation to religion” in the *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* and O’Sullivan, Michael. MA in Applied Spirituality Class Notes. 2018 for a more comprehensive analysis of the term ‘spirituality’.

<sup>366</sup>Schneiders, Sandra. “Spirituality in the Academy” in *Modern Christian Spirituality: Methodological and Historical Essays*. (Hanson, Bradley C., ed.) Atlanta Georgia: Scholar’s Press, 1990

Understood this way, the term spirituality includes interpretations of experience as happening at some level of transcendence, ranging from transcendence of the limits of one's own body (in speech for example) to transcendence understood as being larger than one's own life. It also carries with it an indication of a response to that interpreted experience. Collins describes this aspect well when he writes that "human beings are capable of receiving a call, an address from a transcendent "subject" whether that subject be understood as God, nature, an undifferentiated unity or as an aesthetic experience"<sup>367</sup>. Included in this is 'a thriving' to live a life that is meaningful and so at a practical interpretation, spirituality also pertains to values and ethics.

## 2.2 A summary of *The Universe Story*

Based on Ricoeur's criteria of a narrative hermeneutics described in chapter one, this section will present a brief description of the narrative in order to investigate what the narrative is saying. This is step one in the process of explanation, the identification of the discourse in the work i.e. what the narrative describes and represents.

*The Universe Story* is the result of a decade long collaboration between Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme which was completed in 1992 as a response to the ecological crisis. In its introductory pages, the authors' write that a new narrative is needed which brings to light the insights of human history and the history of the universe. The narrative then attempts to develop a narrative representation in chronological form, of the events as currently understood in natural science of how the universe and its components came to be. The authors claim it is a 'story' about the universe. The book also aims to make this 'new story' accessible to non-scientists and so it is written in a non-technical style. In the book four main points are emphasised. These are that the universe is not a fixed, mechanistic object but that it continues to develop and evolve and as such we live in a context of cosmogenesis and not a static one-time creation event or 'genesis'; that the universe, Earth, life and the human are deeply interconnected, so much so that "this story of the Earth is also the story of the human"<sup>368</sup>; that the human species is the universe become conscious of itself in our ability for self-reflection; and finally that human activities need to be brought 'into

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<sup>367</sup>Collins, Kenneth J. "What is Spirituality?" in *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, p85

<sup>368</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p3

alignment<sup>369</sup> with the planet so that we can begin to live in ‘mutually enhancing’ relationship<sup>370</sup>. Underpinning all this is a lyrical celebration of the beauty, grandeur and mystery of the universe.

The book also narrates both the achievements and challenges of the human story, including the development of human culture. The narrative states that in spite of this development, that there has been a simultaneous degradation of Earth and her systems through human activity, and now the human species in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century faces an unprecedented planetary crisis. This is not, however, the point the narrative concludes on<sup>371</sup>, nor is it a point that is overstated in the text.

Rather, the final chapter of the book is entitled ‘The Ecozoic Era’ where the authors admit their intention in telling this epic narrative of evolution is to help “provide a response to the present and guidance for the future.”<sup>372</sup> The authors claim that only ‘a mythic vision’ can do this as science has hitherto dealt with objects and this has led to the current objectification of Earth. Story, on the other hand, according to Swimme and Berry, deals with subjects and so affords an interior experience to those who relate it and to those who it relates about. As we are in the terminal phase of the Cenozoic<sup>373</sup>, our response to the planetary crisis, the text claims, is the most urgent moral issue of our time and requires transformative action in human thinking and behaviour. This involves, they argue, awakening a consciousness of the sacred dimension of Earth and all who live on her<sup>374</sup>.

According to Swimme and Berry, we have within our ability, to continue in our modern industrial mind-set or to evoke the next phase in the universe story, the Ecozoic era, which seeks ultimately “to bring the human activities on the earth into alignment with the other forces functioning throughout the planet so that a creative balance will be achieved.”<sup>375</sup> This, the text argues, is an ‘aligning’ of our human community within the

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<sup>369</sup>The concept of ‘alignment’ in the narrative can be read as an integration or coordination of the human with the natural world, see p256-257. Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*

<sup>370</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p3

<sup>371</sup>The narrative ends with an epilogue entitled ‘Celebration’ highlighting that the overall tone of the text, despite questionable and destructive human behaviour is one that encourages positivity towards the future.

<sup>372</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p241

<sup>373</sup>The Cenozoic, from 66 million years ago to the present, is the third of the three Phanerozoic geological eras. It follows the Paleozoic (from 544 to 245mya) and the Mesozoic era (252 to 65mya). <https://www.britannica.com/science/Cenozoic-Era>, last accessed July 2019

<sup>374</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p250

<sup>375</sup>Ibid., p261

larger Earth community which in turn means changing radically the systems which support our human community, namely, our education system, our governing system, our economic system, our jurisprudence and our religious systems. Each of these, Swimme and Berry state, must begin to recognise its “prototype and primary resource in the integral functioning of the earth community” and to begin to view the Earth itself as the “primary economic reality, the primary educator, the primary governance, the primary technologist, the primary healer, the primary presence of the sacred, the primary moral value.”<sup>376</sup> Berry calls for ‘re-inventing the human at the species level’ so that we may live in balanced relationship with the entire Earth community. This, according to Berry, is how we begin to establish the Ecozoic era.

The text also offers a negative alternative future to the Ecozoic which it names as the Technozoic era. The Technozoic does not get its own chapter in the narrative but is presented in contrast with the Ecozoic and relates to a “plundering industrial society” where currently the text argues, the corporate establishment with its economic control, is dedicated to. The future, the text states, will be worked out between the tensions of those committed to the Technozoic and to the exploitation of Earth as a resource and those committed to the Ecozoic<sup>377</sup>.

### 2.2.1 *Journey of the Universe*

In 2011, Brian Swimme<sup>378</sup> co-wrote *Journey of the Universe* with Mary Evelyn Tucker<sup>379</sup> which was published by Yale University Press. In addition to the book, there

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<sup>376</sup>ibid., p255

<sup>377</sup>ibid., p250

<sup>378</sup>Brian Swimme co-authored *The Universe Story* with Berry. He is in many ways, Berry’s protégée, adding to Berry’s knowledge his own scientific knowledge as a mathematical cosmologist. Swimme received his PhD from Oregon University in 1978 on Singularity Theory. He studied for a number of years under Thomas Berry at the Riverdale Research Center where Berry introduced him to the works of Teilhard. Both of these men have been major influences on Swimme and his work, which seeks to facilitate an integration of the sciences and the humanities. He is the author of a number of books including *The Universe is a Green Dragon. A Cosmic Creation Story*. Vermont: Bear & Company, 1984 and *Hidden Heart of the Cosmos. Humanity and the New Story*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999. In the wake of Berry’s death, he continues to lecture and propose what he calls a ‘new cosmology’ for humanity and in 2011 co-wrote *Journey of the Universe* with Mary Evelyn Tucker. In light of Berry’s influence on Swimme and Swimme’s commitment to Berry’s teachings, it is Berry’s influences and history only that will be traced in the second part of this chapter.

<sup>379</sup>Mary Evelyn Tucker is a Senior Lecturer and Research Scholar at Yale University where she has appointments in the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies as well as the Divinity School and the Department of Religious Studies. She was a student of Thomas Berry and is committed to the teaching of his thought. She co-wrote *Journey of the Universe* with Brian Swimme and co-founded The Forum of Religion and Ecology with her husband John Grim at Yale University.



was also an Emmy award winning documentary film produced which is “the first telling of the story in film form”<sup>380</sup> and features Brian Swimme in the role of narrator, along with a series of filmed conversations featuring scientists, environmentalists and educators, and a website which provides educational curriculum. It is now also available as a series of massive open online courses (MOOCs) offered through Yale University through the online learning platform, Coursera.

This multimedia project identifies itself as in the lineage of *The Universe Story* and endeavours to communicate this recounting of the development of the universe from its beginnings to the present day. It mixes empirical science with insights from ‘wisdom traditions’ to interpret meaning on the different events in time. The authors acknowledge their debt to Thomas Berry and their clear attempt to continue his work. The book is less dense than *The Universe Story* and arguably written in a more accessible style. Due to its greater dissemination, it has attracted acclaim, but also criticism, in popular and academic circles. Since both *Journey of the Universe* and *The Universe Story* deal with related content, maintain the same style, explicitly hold the same aim and share an author, both authors additionally being students of Berry, I apply where relevant, those critiques made of *Journey to The Universe Story*.

### 2.3 Locating *The Universe Story* within contemporary cosmic narratives

There have been other notable narrations of a unified history which includes universe, Earth and human. This ‘unified history’ is often referred to as ‘the epic of evolution’ or ‘big history’<sup>381</sup>. This section will present an overview of these projects and locate the narrative of *The Universe Story* within these genres by association of form, content and motivation while also suggesting where each may differ. It is not a comparative analysis since this thesis is specifically focused on *The Universe Story*. Rather its purpose is to highlight the recent turn to cosmic narratives and to locate *The Universe Story* in relation to that turn.

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<sup>380</sup>Tucker, Mary Evelyn. ‘Journey of the Universe: The Lineage of a New Story.’ Available on the Journey of the Universe website [www.journeyoftheuniverse.org](http://www.journeyoftheuniverse.org), last accessed August 2019

<sup>381</sup>Cf. Sideris, Lisa. *Consecrating Science. Wonder, knowledge and the Natural World*; and Christian, David “The Return of Universal History” in *History and Theory*, Theme Issue 49, December 2010, pp6-27:18

Professor of Religious Studies and outspoken critic of *The Universe Story*, Lisa H. Sideris, coined the phrase the ‘New Genesis’ to describe those ‘movements’ that proffer “a new, common creation story based upon our understanding of cosmogenesis. All are engaged in a process of religiopoiesis, of crafting a new religion grounded in a myth that explains our origins and destiny.”<sup>382</sup> Under this umbrella of the ‘New Genesis’ she includes the ‘epic of evolution’, ‘big history’ and the Universe Story<sup>383</sup>. Although there are commonalities, Sideris has been accused of conflating and misrepresenting these ‘projects’ as one singular ‘movement’<sup>384</sup>. Among those involved in ‘cosmic narration’ Sideris names: Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim<sup>385</sup>. Alongside these she includes historian David Christian, astrophysicist Eric Chaisson, biologist Ursula Goodenough, scientist Connie Barlow and her husband, Christian minister Michael Dowd. Sideris does pay some attention to the difference such a cross section of people and approaches may contain by acknowledging the different impact each of their narratives have on different disciplines. When she refers to ‘new cosmology’, she states that she is dealing with thinkers and projects that have an impact on the discipline of “religious studies (rather than, say history) and within the subfields of religion and ecology and religion and nature”<sup>386</sup>. She also points out that (contra to the ‘new cosmology’) some of those she names take their influence more from entomologist and socio-biologist E.O Wilson and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins rather than religious traditions. These ‘writers’

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<sup>382</sup>Sideris, Lisa. ‘Science as Sacred Myth. Ecospirituality in the Anthropocene Age.’ in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2015, pp136-152:137, footnote 2. Mickey cites philosopher Seagall who criticises Sideris because of the “broad scope of her project, which takes on so many disparate accounts of evolutionary narratives”. According to Mickey such a large scope “prevented the kind of detailed attention (what some call “close reading”) that *Journey of the Universe* in fact deserves.” Mickey goes on to state that “thinking of [JOTU] it primarily in a comparative context with those other narratives fails to do justice to its conceptual and stylistic specificities.” (Mickey, Sam. “A Postcritical Journey: Between Religion and Evolution.” Unpublished paper. Draft submitted to the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 2018, p18. Copy received directly from author). The commonalities and differences between these three projects will be drawn out in this part of the chapter, while the second part of the chapter involves this ‘close reading’ of *The Universe Story* that Mickey espouses.

<sup>383</sup>Sideris’ spelling, as she includes other texts and projects under the umbrella of the Universe Story and does not confine it to Berry and Swimme’s text.

<sup>384</sup>Cf. Mickey, Sam. “A Postcritical Journey: Between Religion and Evolution”; and Callicott, J. Baird. “Science as Myth (Whether Sacred or Not), Science as Prism” in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. 9.2 ,2015, pp154-168:155

<sup>385</sup>John Grim is Senior Lecturer and Research Scholar at Yale University and co-founder and coordinator of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale with Mary Evelyn Tucker. They are both series editors of “World Religions and Ecology” from Harvard Divinity School’s Center for the Study of World Religions. Grim, as Mary Evelyn, is a former student of Berry’s.

<sup>386</sup>Sideris, Lisa H. *Consecrating Science. Wonder, knowledge and the Natural World*. p4

are influenced by “an evolutionary paradigm [and] tend to invoke the phrase “Epic of Evolution””<sup>387</sup> while those inspired by ‘Big Bang cosmology’, she states, refer to a ‘journey’ or a ‘story’ of the universe.

J Baird Callicott offers his own differentiation of these bodies of work. Baird divides this body into two trajectories by virtue of their spatial and temporal distinction. The first he names the new/universe/big story. Thomas Berry, according to Baird remains the intellectual ancestor of this group with Swimme, Tucker, Grim and Chaisson as his descendants<sup>388</sup>. These are grouped together by Baird as their narrative deals in a time scale of billions of years and spatially in light years. The ‘epic of evolution’, by contrast, deals in a time scale of millions of years and appears to focus on organic evolution. Its intellectual ancestors, Baird names as, Wilson and Dawkins, while its contemporary proponents are Barlow, Dowd, Goodenough and Rue. Baird suggests that Wilson and Dawkins had no encounter or engagement with Berry, while Wilson has little involvement with his ‘own descendants’ and Dawkins none. Chronology could be a factor in this instance. *The Universe Story* published in 1992 pre-dates most, if not all attempts at either ‘big history’ or evolutionary epics and while Wilson suggested an ‘epic of evolution’ in 1978 he had not then formulated one<sup>389</sup>. It is notable however, that in its bibliography, *The Universe Story* references Wilson under its section on ‘Plants and Animals’ in particular his book on *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*<sup>390</sup>. They also cite two other of his works in the section on ‘The Ecozoic Era’, *Biophilia*<sup>391</sup> and *Biodiversity*<sup>392</sup>, indicating that Swimme and Berry were not only aware of Wilson but were also indebted in some way to his work.

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<sup>387</sup>Ibid.

<sup>388</sup>Callicott, J. Baird “Science as Myth (Whether Sacred or Not), Science as Prism” in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. pp155

<sup>389</sup>Hesketh who specialises in the relationship between history, science and religion notes that *The Universe Story* “is one of the first metanarratives published of the full-blown evolutionary epic genre” Hesketh, Ian. “The story of big history” in *History of the Present* Vol. 4, No. 2, Fall 2014, pp171-202:185

<sup>390</sup>Wilson, E.O. *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975

<sup>391</sup>Wilson, E.O. *Biophilia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984. In the comment beside this, Swimme and Berry write “A superb biologist deals with the human presence to the planet Earth in all the magnificence of its living forms.” (*The Universe Story*. p294) Eric Chaisson’s book *The life Era: Cosmic Selection and Conscious Evolution* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987) is referred to in the section ‘Primordial Flaring Forth’. Swimme and Berry interpret Chaisson’s text with enthusiasm and write of it as “an astrophysicist’s brilliant popular account of the three macrotransitions of the universe: energy to matter, matter to life, life to mind” (ibid., p285)

<sup>392</sup>Wilson, E.O. *Biodiversity*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1988. After this title, Swimme and Berry comment on the text that it is “a collection of over fifty essays on biodiversity and its role in the integral functioning of the Earth by distinguished scholars.” (*The Universe Story*. p294)

While acknowledging Baird's effort at distinction between the groups, it is still a misleading classification, since Dowd and Barlow also deal in timescales that are billions of light years and situate their own 'great story' in cosmic evolution<sup>393</sup>. The notable point is that Baird, contra to Sideris, argues that "these individuals are indeed individual thinkers, and to characterize them as a 'movement' rhetorically assimilates their diverse but not unrelated individual intellectual projects to an ideologically unified political project."<sup>394</sup> Thus while there are overlaps, as identified by Sideris, there are also distinctions which can be related to sources and commitments from different disciplines such as Wilson's materialism and Christian's faith in an uncontested universal history.

One connection Baird offers, and worth noting, is the caveat he places on his own contribution to this discussion, in stating that, "I myself am a proponent of the religionization of science"<sup>395</sup> suggesting that Sideris' claim that each work is involved in the mythopoiesis or religiopoiesis of science as a general understanding of both camps is accurate. Not only accurate but by Baird's account, laudable. For Sideris such a mythologisation of science is to be resisted, as she argues, it devalues everyday experiences and encounters with the natural world. Whether this is a necessary consequence of such an approach and whether experience of the natural world and science that is narrated can exist side by side will be examined in section 2.4.2

### 2.3.1 The epic of evolution

The phrase 'the epic of evolution'<sup>396</sup> is generally received as being coined in 1978 by E.O Wilson<sup>397</sup>. Its features, as described by Megill, entail telling the entire history of the cosmos and humankind through the medium of a coherent narrative. Human history in the epic is rooted in biology but also connected to the evolution of the

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<sup>393</sup>Cf. Barlow and Dowd's website [www.thegreatstory.org](http://www.thegreatstory.org), last accessed 26 January, 2021

<sup>394</sup>Callicott, J. Baird. "Science as Myth (Whether Sacred or Not), Science as Prism" in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, p155

<sup>395</sup>Ibid., p155

<sup>396</sup>Although the phrase is most commonly associated with Wilson, it is also frequently associated with astrophysicist Eric Chaisson, whose book *Epic of Evolution, Seven ages of the Cosmos*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005 explores cosmic evolution which makes a clear distinction between the two 'groups' further challenging.

<sup>397</sup>In his more recent work, Wilson appears to be more concerned with philosophical questions, although always through his particular scientific lens. Cf. *The meaning of Human Existence*, New York: Liveright Publication Company, 2014 and *The Origins of Creativity*, New York: Liveright Publication Company 2017

physical universe since its beginnings and the events of the narrative “constitute a process and not simply a collection of discontinuous happenings”<sup>398</sup>. Wilson has argued in *On Human Nature*<sup>399</sup> that this ‘epic of evolution’ is a myth arising from a commitment to scientific naturalism which he suggests has the capacity to explain ‘traditional religion’ as a wholly material phenomenon<sup>400</sup>. However, while scientific naturalism can give a ‘correct’ account of the world, it has what Wilson calls a ‘spiritual weakness’ in that it lacks the ‘primal source of power’ and ‘emotional strength’ that religion arguably holds, although he does not specify or describe what this power is. He does, however, maintain that this ‘power’ of religion is based on biology and so remains a material aspect of existence. Thus, while Wilson concludes from this that theology will become defunct, ‘religion’ he predicts will remain as a vital force. He states that “the mythopoeic requirements of the mind must somehow be met by scientific materialism so as to enforce our superb energies”<sup>401</sup>. In his assertion that humans need myth, Wilson seems to collapse his understanding of the individual operations and functions of both religion and myth. Nor does he analyse the type of ‘superb energy’ that myth has the potential to activate. Rather his emphasis is on using the ‘power of religion’ to the services of telling this scientific epic. This can be done he claims through ‘the evolutionary epic’ which is the recasting of science as a poetic narrative or vision which will serve as a secular myth that he argues will come to replace religious myth. It is, according to Wilson, “the best myth we will ever have”<sup>402</sup>.

Megill contests Wilson on the view that such an epic, by virtue of its aim, can actually take the physical and biological only as foundational to how the world is. By suggesting an ‘overall coherence’ or an ‘embedded rationality’ to the narrative, Megill argues, that despite Wilson’s commitment to materialism, there is an underlying ‘idealism’ inherent in the narrative which he argues depends upon metaphysical

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<sup>398</sup>Megill, Allan. “Theological presuppositions of the evolutionary epic: From Robert Chambers to E.O Wilson” in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 58, 2016, pp24-32:24

<sup>399</sup>Wilson, E.O. *On Human Nature*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004

<sup>400</sup>Wilson offers a definition of his understanding of myth when he writes “the evolutionary epic is mythology in the sense that the laws it adduces here and now are believed but can never be definitely proved to form a cause-and-effect continuum from physics to the social sciences” (ibid. p 192). This is a weak interpretation of myth in that it appears to be a simple association of myth with ‘belief’ rather than incorporating the complexity of both the form and function of myth such as analysed by both Eliade and later, Ricoeur.

<sup>401</sup>Wilson, E.O. *On Human Nature*. p 201.

<sup>402</sup>Wilson, E.O. *On Human Nature*. 2004, p201

assumptions<sup>403</sup>, metaphysical<sup>404</sup> in this instance referring to Wilson's attempt to characterise existence as a whole, which point to an idealism (or mind) inadvertently having a place in that characterisation. Coherence, Megill argues, must be grounded in something. He argues that "the very possibility of an evolutionary epic moving coherently from the nebula (or the Big Bang) to human society *depends* on idealism. How, indeed, could one maintain the notion that there is a coherent process at work in the natural world without attributing purpose *either* to nebulae, solar winds, meteor showers, movements of the earth's crust, microbes, genes and so on *or* to some sort of idea or spirit subtending or permeating those material realities?"<sup>405</sup>

Despite this criticism, Wilson's materialism, in this work at least, remained the guiding model. There are, however, other 'evangelists' of the 'epic of evolution' who are more equivocal in their approach. Michael Dowd and Loyal Rue being two who explicitly link the evolutionary epic to religion<sup>406</sup>. In the case of Rue, religion in this sense is to be understood as religious naturalism<sup>407</sup>, while Dowd's context is that of a Christian minister. Ursula Goodenough in her work *The Sacred Depths of Nature* accepts a covenant with 'mystery' that she feels no desire to investigate, is also

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<sup>403</sup>Megill emphasises the different meanings that 'idealism' carries such as ethical idealism, ontological idealism and utopianism while defining his use of idealism as "the view that some sort of divine or quasi-divine intention, purpose or (speaking generally) idea is embedded within the universe." Megill clarifies that to say that there is a divine purpose is not the same as saying that there is an embedded rationality and vice versa Megill, Allan. "Theological presuppositions of the evolutionary epic: From Robert Chambers to E.O Wilson" in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*.p25

<sup>404</sup>In using the term 'metaphysics' it must be noted that it can mean several different things ranging from attempting to 'characterise existence as a whole'; an exploration of the 'suprasensible' beyond the world of experience; establishing 'first principles' as a foundation for 'knowledge'; or even compiling an inventory of "what sort of things ultimately...there are". Flew, Anthony. *A Dictionary of Philosophy*. London: Pan Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1979, p229

<sup>405</sup>Megill, Allan. "Theological presuppositions of the evolutionary epic: From Robert Chambers to E.O Wilson" in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* p29

<sup>406</sup>Cf. Dowd, Michael. *Thank God for evolution. How the Marriage of Science and Religion will Transform Your Life and Our World*. San Francisco: Council Oak Books, 2007; and Rue, Loyal. *Everybody's Story. Wising up to the Epic of Evolution*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999

<sup>407</sup>Leidenhag states that religious naturalism combines two beliefs: "The first belief is that nature is all there is. There is no "ontologically distinct and superior realm (such as God, soul, or heaven) to ground, explain, or give meaning to this world" (Stone, 2008, p. 1). Moreover, the natural sciences are the only or at least most reliable source of knowledge about the world. The first belief is usually referred to as *naturalism*. The second belief is that nature, or at least some part of nature, can provide religious meaning, purpose, and value analogous to that of traditional religion". He notes however that 'religious naturalism' is not a unified view but covers a variety of beliefs and perspectives. Leidenhag M. "Religious naturalism: The current debate." *Philosophy Compass*. 2018; 13:e12510.p1

ambiguous in this regard<sup>408</sup>. Religion in the case of these thinkers can be associated with a religious naturalism as it neglects the long intellectual tradition and history of religion across a wide range of fields and focuses rather on science and nature.

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<sup>408</sup>Goodenough writes that “the word God is often used to name this mystery...Deism spoils my covenant with Mystery” (Goodenough, Ursula. *The Sacred Depths of Nature*. New York: Oxford University Press.1998, p12)

### 2.3.2 Big History

‘Big history’ makes the claim that it is perhaps not science but history that will provide the framework for an evolutionary account of everything<sup>409</sup>. Positioning itself from a different starting point, that of the humanities rather than the sciences, big historians claim that “science has now become more historically based, from evolutionary biology and geology to astrophysics and climatology. These developments enable big historians to integrate human history within the historical narratives that are already a well-established and central component of these historical sciences.”<sup>410</sup> These large-scale histories, leading ‘big history’ proponent David Christian tells us, are facilitated through the mid-twentieth century revolution in chronometrics which make it possible to do “prehistory, palaeontology, geology, and even cosmology with the sort of chronometric precision previously confined to the study of human civilizations”<sup>411</sup>. As a result of this chronometric revolution ‘big history’ is based on empirical and inductive scientific and historical work.

Hesketh identifies some of the events which make this ‘big history’ narrative possible. These are the Big Bang theory in physics contributing to ‘a beginning’ and a history of the universe, plate tectonics and the Gaia hypothesis for Earth history, and natural selection for the evolution of life<sup>412</sup>. These enable the production of a cohesive and universal telling of the history of the universe. What remains to be told and what ‘big history’ contributes through its ‘grand, unifying theory’, Hesketh informs us, is a paradigm of human history within this larger history.

### 2.3.3 Commonalities of the projects

There are a number of identifiable overlaps in content between the two projects, among these: a universe that complexifies as it develops, in this narrative referred to as ‘cosmogogenesis’; the proponents’ belief in ‘collective knowledge’; identifiable patterns in history; as well as an attempt to collapse the divide between the humanities and the

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<sup>409</sup>Scholars associated with ‘Big history’ are most notably historian David Christian whose book *Maps of Time*. Los Angeles, Ca. by University of California Press, was published in 2004; Spier, Fred. *Big History and the Future of Humanity*. U.K: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010; and Brown, Cynthia Stokes. *Big History. From the Big Bang to the Present*. New York: The New Press, 2007

<sup>410</sup>Hesketh, Ian. “The story of big history” in *History of the Present*. p172

<sup>411</sup>Christian, David. “The Return of Universal History” in *History and Theory*. p18

<sup>412</sup>Hesketh, Ian. “The story of big history” in *History of the Present*. p178



sciences. In this manner, both the ‘epic of evolution’ and ‘big history’ aim to provide what Christian terms a “less fragmented vision of reality”<sup>413</sup> in order to supply a ‘map’ through ‘modern knowledge’<sup>414</sup>. Megill comments that behind these narratives are offered a “set of methodological prescriptions that they hope will transform the entire territory of research in the human sciences...their methodological concern, as manifested in Wilson’s *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (1998), has a closer affinity with parts of nineteenth century positivism”<sup>415</sup>.

However, seeking to provide a unity of knowledge while it might suggest a hierarchical scale, is not the same as stating that there is only one type of knowledge and one method of acquiring it. The narrative of the ‘epic of evolution’ is built on the natural sciences and the story that is told is largely a ‘science story’. The possibility of such a narrative being recounted becomes dependent on the scientific methodologies which garnered such information in the first instance and so expressively becomes the foundation on which the narrative is constructed. However, a scientific narrative of the cosmos, in order to be a narrative becomes reliant on history and the organisation of past events in a manner in which they can be grasped and understood. Thus, both disciplines draw from the other in order to provide a greater intelligibility to their project.

While the mix of science and history is evident, a further commonality can be identified by virtue of form. It is not science, history or a particular discipline that connects these academics and scholars, but rather their commitment to communicate through narrative. The particular form of narrative that both camps claim is that of myth. In doing so, they are locating knowledge beyond the discipline of science or history and into a realm that includes value, ethics and morality.

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<sup>413</sup>Christian, David. ‘The Return of Universal History’ in *History and Theory*. p25

<sup>414</sup>Christian is committed to the teaching of this history so that “history and literature and biology and cosmology are not separate intellectual islands, but parts of a single, global, and interdisciplinary attempt to explain our world”Ibid., p25. With the intention of achieving this, Bill Gates (in collaboration with Christian) has funded the ‘Big History Project’ which aims to provide a framework for what they term ‘all knowledge’ by telling the history of the universe, [www.bighistoryproject.com](http://www.bighistoryproject.com), last accessed 25 January 2021

<sup>415</sup>Ibid., p31. Consilience is a unified theory of knowledge that seeks to unify the science and the humanities and explain ‘everything’. It assumes that there is a general underlying unity between these two disciplines. In Wilson’s hands this explanation ‘of everything’ is based on scientific understanding, leading Sideris to refer to it as ‘crass reductionism’. Baird refutes this and defends this pursuit for knowledge stating how knowledge in ecology can be challenged by knowledge in thermodynamics causing such knowledge to be reexamined and refined. Cf. Callicott, J. Baird “Science as Myth (Whether Sacred or Not), Science as Prism”; Sideris, Lisa. *Consecrating Science. Wonder, Knowledge and the Natural World*.

‘Big history’ in its attestation of the human need for an existence that is meaningful, like Wilson, invokes the form of myth as a means through which meaning can be established and disseminated. As a ‘modern creation myth’ David Christian tells us that ‘big history’ seeks to become more valuable than history proper “by fulfilling “our deep spiritual, psychic, and social need”<sup>416</sup> which is only done through a grand narrative which explains our place in existence. This could be, as Hesketh points out, that there is no inherent meaning in the science told and it is only in the telling of such histories that meaning is imposed<sup>417</sup>. ‘Big history’, Hesketh argues, is driven by a clear moral framework, otherwise he states, it would be an epic which would “have to end with the inevitability of heat death, an ending that would perhaps be just as alienating and meaningless as the fragmented and specialized histories that big history seeks to replace”<sup>418</sup>. Hesketh articulates the form ‘big history’ takes as being both moral and aesthetic, “moral in the sense that the authors were calling attention to the deeper meanings of scientific advances that would bear on human self-understanding; and aesthetic in the sense that what was being promoted was a universal story of science, one united by an extended theory of evolution able to reconcile science with human experience.”<sup>419</sup> Hesketh argues that if we focus on the way ‘big history’ is told, the motivation to transform self-understanding becomes clear.

Megill also attests to this point by stating that all calls for synthesis are “attempts to impose an interpretation. But surely the interpretation needs to be argued for as such – not grounded on a story of the world that is itself ungrounded”<sup>420</sup>. Here Megill is arguing that the interpretation ‘as it is’ needs to be stated and not couched in a narrative of the universe that is used to provide validation of this interpretation, even though the account of such a narrative is itself up for debate. Sideris also accuses these narratives of not being transparent and writes of Rue that “his ostensible celebration of nature’s wonder and value is an artful, strategic ploy” to adopt a biocentric framework which Sideris claims that he himself believes to be illusory<sup>421</sup>; while Hesketh contends

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<sup>416</sup>David Christian. *Maps of Time*. Cited in Hesketh, Ian in “The story of big history” in *History of the Present*. p181.

<sup>417</sup>Hesketh, Ian. “The story of big history” in *History of the Present*. p193

<sup>418</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>419</sup>*Ibid.*, p182

<sup>420</sup>Megill, Allan. “Theological presuppositions of the evolutionary epic: From Robert Chambers to E.O Wilson” in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*. p30

<sup>421</sup>Sideris, Lisa H. *Consecrating Science. Wonder, Knowledge and the Natural World*. p89

that Wilson uses what he terms as “the often hidden literary dimension of history”<sup>422</sup> to serve his larger ecological and sociobiological agenda.

A further commonality described by Hesketh and connected to the above point, is that the ‘full-blown evolutionary epic’ narrative typically does not end with present circumstances but at a point in the future. He argues that the narrative achieves closure by “moralising” about the prediction of possible future scenarios. These scenarios depend on human action in the present. Hesketh names this as a ‘call to action’ to create a future that is ecologically viable and cites Wilson who likens this conclusion to a “Methodist altar call”<sup>423</sup>.

The narratives are constructed in such a way that the reader becomes a participant in the story and according to Hesketh is “made to feel it and care deeply about it” and so the conclusion aims to direct that feeling towards a collective agency. The conclusion he states, “becomes a moment of responsibility—a place for the reader to come forward and co-create”.<sup>424</sup> This observation can also be made in *The Universe Story*. Swimme and Berry conclude their narrative by stating that it “provides a response to the present and guidance for the future.”<sup>425</sup> This indicates the manner in which the narrative seeks to embed the reader within the story. How effective this is depends on the way in which the human is configured in the narrative. In chapter three and four, analysis will draw out the way in which the narrative is configured and why this might appeal to the human desire to act.

## 2.4 Primary critiques of *The Universe Story*

This section investigates the most common critiques put to *The Universe Story* and those narratives that articulate a cosmic history. Among these are: our experience of the universe requires mediation by instrument; that the mythologisation of science devalues experience of the natural world; and that such stories involve a suppression of the ‘other’. These criticisms form part of a larger criticism in general, that of the ‘meta-

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<sup>422</sup>Hesketh, Ian. “The story of big history” in *History of the Present*. p188

<sup>423</sup>Wilson, E.O. cited in Hesketh, Ian in “The story of big history” in *History of the Present*. p186. Wilson quote taken from an interview with Connie Barlow in *Green Space, Green Time. The way of science*. New York: Springer science & business media: New York, 1997

<sup>424</sup>Ibid., p186

<sup>425</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p241

narrative'<sup>426</sup>. The question of meta-narrative will be addressed here in relation to the way in which it contributes to these named criticisms, as well as in chapter three, section 3.1.2.

#### 2.4.1 The way in which we experience the universe is limited and requires mediation by instrument and technology

In her essay “To know the story is to love it: Scientific Mythmaking and the Longing for Cosmic Connection”<sup>427</sup> Sideris is critical of these ‘panoramic’ narratives that collapse conventional boundaries between natural history and human history and attempt to evoke a ‘species-consciousness’. She states that by offering this presentation of the human as a species, collective entity or global agent, that those involved are trying to create “a ‘phenomenology’ of ourselves in the Anthropocene; an affective, aesthetic or experiential identification with the human-as-species, its particular forms of agency and its emergence in deep time.”<sup>428</sup> This is problematic, Sideris states, for two reasons. The first is that we have very little, if any, direct experience of the universe. According to Sideris the whole ‘cosmic encounter’ requires mediation by instruments and is largely impossible without them. We may be captivated by celestial objects, she states, but we have very little ‘experience’ of them. This attempt to ‘phenomenologise’ the universe may provoke a realisation but that is where it meets its limit. She argues that “we never experience the *beginning of the universe* or our *emergence as a species* or the *continued unfolding into the future* of the cosmos. We directly experience a star-filled sky but not “how stars are formed, how far away they are” or that “we are looking

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<sup>426</sup>In his work, *The Postmodern Condition. A report on Knowledge*. (Theory and History of Literature, Vol.10. (Godzich, Wlad & Schulte-Sasse, Jochen) (ed’s) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard defines the term ‘modern’ as designating “any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse ... making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative... I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives.” (p. xiii–xxiv.) Two such meta-narratives or ‘major myths’ identified by Lyotard which he argues have both shaped and legitimised Western discourse are the myth of Liberation (that history tells the story of progress towards equality and freedom) which Lyotard associates with politics; and the myth of Truth (that tells the story that ‘truth’ is objective and can be verified) which is associated with science. Lyotard argues that ‘grand narratives’ are bound up in the production but also the legitimation of knowledge (pp. 27–36).

<sup>427</sup>Sideris, Lisa. “To know the story is to love it: Scientific Mythmaking and the Longing for Cosmic Connection” in *Methodological Challenges in Nature-Culture and Environmental History Research*. pp. 200–213

<sup>428</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 202

million or billions of years into the past”<sup>429</sup>. This, Sideris writes, undermines our directly accessible experience of the natural world as a world that we can sense, to a secondary and abstract ‘experience’ of the universe mediated mainly through information and instrument. Sideris writes that this cosmic scale can be inspiring but it is not where we “find or make meaning in our day to day lives.”<sup>430</sup> She goes on to argue that if these narratives are aiming to foster a deeper sense of connection to the natural world, then it is more appropriate “to attend to something far more local than the cosmic scale, for as David Abram notes the “sensuous world is always local, and it is never merely a human world.”<sup>431</sup>

Sideris is not incorrect in her assertion that we have very little to no experience of the universe per se. Nor do we have any unmediated sensory experience of it. While Sideris admits that “it is problematic to assert that our sensory experiences constitute an unmediated encounter with nature”<sup>432</sup>, what remains unexplored in her argument is the way in which the meaning that is derived, or has the potential to be derived from, a direct and sensory experience of Earth is mediated. There are two points, not unrelated, to address here. The first is that of experience and the second is that of mediation. As Sideris notes “much hinges on the word experience for these stories address problems and objects that are not readily apprehended by humans”<sup>433</sup>. Sideris does, however, give examples of our directly accessible sensory experience of the natural world such as a “summer rainstorm’ or “autumn leaves underfoot”<sup>434</sup>. She does not offer any insight into her understanding of these experiences, only names them as examples. If understanding, as Gadamer states, is concerned with the process of the coming into being of meaning, then neither does Sideris elaborate on the different meanings that these experiences may hold. A summer rainstorm may be vivifying for one person and for another an inconvenience that causes them to get wet. Similarly, autumn leaves underfoot might reflect the fresh, crispness of that season for one person, while for

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<sup>429</sup>Ibid., p206. In parentheses, Sideris is citing author and teacher of ‘Big History’ Neal Wolfe’s essay “The case for awe in teaching big history” in *Teaching Big History*. Sime, R. B., Behmand, M. & Burke, T. (ed.s) Berkeley/Los Angeles, California: University of Ca. Press, 2014, pp 336-342. Italics Sideris’ own.

<sup>430</sup>Ibid., p211

<sup>431</sup>Ibid.

<sup>432</sup>Sideris, Lisa. ‘Science as Sacred Myth. Ecospirituality in the Anthropocene Age.’ in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2015, pp136-152:147

<sup>433</sup>Sideris, Lisa. “To know the story is to love it: Scientific Mythmaking and the Longing for Cosmic Connection” *Methodological Challenges in Nature-Culture and Environmental History Research*. p201

<sup>434</sup>Ibid.

another, they are to be avoided so as not to slip. The meaning of such experiences is bound to the manner in which we understand them. This in turn is bound to how they are interpreted.

From the standpoint of environmental hermeneutics, “the world that humans inhabit is always already interpreted and infused with meanings”<sup>435</sup>. As Drenthen points out “meanings of nature come into play as soon as *we* start articulating our relationship with the world”<sup>436</sup>. Through our articulation a space that is neutral becomes a meaningful place. The meaning does not exist independent to my understanding of it and yet as Clingerman, Utsler and Drenthen argue “there is no reason to think that meanings exist only in our minds”<sup>437</sup>. The process of interpretation is one of responding to an experience of meaning rather than construction. It is dialogical. Hermeneutics comes into play with the various conflicts of interpretation in order to find an appropriate interpretation. Our experience of the universe is always mediated, technologically or otherwise. From a hermeneutical perspective this does not mean that it cannot hold understanding or meaning for us, rather, what it means to us becomes effective as soon as we begin, as Drenthen argues, to speak about our relationship with it.

As stated in section 1.3.1 Ricoeur argues that phenomenology is the “unsurpassable presupposition of hermeneutics” and that phenomenology and hermeneutics are conjoined by intentionality. While we cannot have a direct sensory experience of the universe, we can turn our consciousness towards it and begin to interpret it, especially in relation to its sense. Turning our consciousness towards the universe in order to create environmental action can seem paradoxical, as Sideris has stated, but what is relevant here is the form which this takes. In the case of *The Universe Story*, it is the narrative form that is used to direct our consciousness. This brings us to the second point, the way in which the experience is interpreted and how this interpretation is mediated no longer by instrument and technology but by language.

Sideris writes of the mediation of experience through language in a particular discourse for a particular reader, namely scholarly language for an academic reader. *The Universe Story* is also mediated through language although of a mythic and figurative

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<sup>435</sup>Drenthen, Martin. “Environmental Hermeneutics and the Meaning of Nature” in *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*. M. Gardiner, Stephen M. & Thompson, Allen (ed.’s). Oxford University Press, 2017, pp162-174:162

<sup>436</sup>Ibid., p6. Italics original.

<sup>437</sup>Ibid., p9

style. The particularities of this style will be addressed in chapter three. The concern here is the manner in which the universe, both by Sideris and Swimme and Berry, is brought to language, and the relation of this language to reality. In their act of narration, Swimme and Berry interpret the cosmos. As a narrative, the interpretation relies on the reader's imagination to contribute to the creation of meaning. Through the metaphoric and figurative process, a world is opened up that the reader does not experience through the bodily senses, but in another sense of the word experience. In her work on Ricoeur's theory of metaphor and imagination, Koenig lays out the manner in which Ricoeur expounds the role of the imagination in the appropriation of meaning. Imagination is the procedure for providing images to a concept. She explicates that "Imagination offers its specific mediation when a new signification emerges from the ruins of literal predication"<sup>438</sup>. Through this mediative act the world of the text is appropriated by the reader and becomes a meaningful world. It is experienced to the extent that the reader can imagine herself inhabiting it and through which possibilities of being are opened to her. In *The Universe Story*, Berry and Swimme appeal to the imagination to offer an experience of that which they term 'the universe'. Using narrative to articulate our human relationship with the universe, they direct the reader's consciousness to a universe they interpret as imbued with meaning. In offering this 'world' to the reader's imagination, the reader's understanding of and relationship with the universe has the potential to become re-figured and with this refiguration, the potential for environmental action.

#### 2.4.2 Mythologisation of science devalues every day experiences of the natural world

A primary objection by Sideris in relation to what she terms as cosmic narratives, is that these narratives encourage awe and wonder at science and 'expert knowledge' as that which is 'most real', over direct engagement and sensory experience of the world. There is also the paradox, brought to light by Sideris, that if the aim of cosmic narratives is to foster connection with nature, then perhaps nature and its connection to our lived and sensed experience should be the place to begin, and not the cosmos at large. Elsewhere, Sideris has argued that such a cosmic perspective,

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<sup>438</sup>Koenig, Elisabeth. *The Book of Showings of Julian of Norwich: A test-case for Paul Ricoeur's Theories of Metaphor and Imagination*. p86

specifically focussing on ‘cosmic consciousness’ through the notion of the noo-sphere, is the wrong move for those who care about the future of the Earth. This is so, she argues, as it fosters disregard for bodily limits and the ecological limits of Earth<sup>439</sup>. In relation to ‘expert knowledge’, Sideris’ objection here is mainly levelled at Richard Dawkins and E.O. Wilson, whom she states, “promote a mythopoeic rendering of scientific information as a robust and superior rival to religion.”<sup>440</sup>The crux of the problem for Sideris, is in how scientific and religious worldviews are understood. According to Sideris, for some scholars in her discipline of religious environmental ethics<sup>441</sup>, a disenchanted natural world rooted in mechanistic, scientific and technological worldviews, has led to environmental degradation, whereas now, the ‘New Genesis’ movement understand scientific worldviews as “the primary vehicles for *restoring* enchantment, wonder, meaning and value to the natural world”<sup>442</sup>. Sideris quotes Dowd and Barlow’s following remarks about Dawkin’s book *The Magic of Reality* (2011) as an illustration of this. Dowd and Barlow commend the book as a “way of valuing science, the scientific method, and the entire scientific worldwide endeavour, as providing our best map of what’s real and what’s important”<sup>443</sup>. She also gives the example of composer John Boswell’s song ‘The Symphony of Science’ that sets music to words from scientists. In this Dawkins ‘sings’ the following lines as the refrain: “There is real poetry in the real world/science is the poetry of reality”. Sideris argues that valuing science is clearly a priority but questions what has “all this to do with valuing nature and inculcating environmental ethics?”<sup>444</sup> Sideris’ argument is that science asks us to look ‘behind the scenes’ and beyond the senses to a domain of reality that is promoted as being somehow more real. But science, she rightly states, is not the same as nature and to study science is not the same as to experience nature. She goes on to argue that the privileging of scientific reality places environmental values on tenuous ground as it estranges us, not only from what is real, but also what we experience as

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<sup>439</sup>Sideris, Lisa. “Biosphere, Noosphere, and the Anthropocene: Earth’s Perilous Prospects in a Cosmic Context” in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. 11.4, 2017, pp399-419

<sup>440</sup>Sideris, Lisa. “Science as Sacred Myth. Ecospirituality in the Anthropocene Age” in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. vol. 9, no. 2, 2015, pp136-152:136

<sup>441</sup>Sideris refers the reader to the works of Merchant, C. *The Death of Nature*, New York: HarperCollins, 1980 and to Griffin, D.R. (ed.). 1998. *The Re-enchantment of Science*. Albany: State University of NY Press.1998

<sup>442</sup>Sideris, Lisa. “Science as Sacred Myth. Ecospirituality in the Anthropocene Age” in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. p137

<sup>443</sup>Ibid., p145

<sup>444</sup>Ibid., p145



“meaningful and beautiful”<sup>445</sup>. Sideris develops her point further with reference to Abram, who has argued that “relegating our ordinary experience of the world to a secondary, derivative realm increases our reliance on experts to inform us of what is real and true about the world, what is worthy of our wondering response”<sup>446</sup>. This abstract reality of information is unlikely, Sideris states, to ignite the passion or values needed towards concern for the environment. Furthermore, the broad narration of cosmic events does not necessarily encourage positive response or meaningful connection to local places. The ‘story’ does not situate us ‘in place’, Sideris argues, but ‘in space’<sup>447</sup>.

There are two points to respond to here. The first is that of ‘expert knowledge’ and the second is the devaluation of experiences of the natural world. Sideris has identified scientific knowledge as increasingly becoming “the possession of an elite priesthood”<sup>448</sup> whereby it is not the information being uncovered but rather the scientist who becomes “the final object of reverie.”<sup>449</sup> She is joined in her concern by others including Abram but also Zakariya. Zakariya focuses his attention not on the experts but on those who tell the story. He writes “The heroes of the universal story are the authors who are at work writing it, both because their own emergence is a pivotal event in that universal tale and because of the power they represent themselves as having in authoring and relating it. A power to tell a story of and for all.”<sup>450</sup> In these narratives, Zakariya further argues, it is the scientist and the human mind that is the ultimate hero. He writes that “humanity is the author of the story that in some sense is meant to stand outside itself. Indeed, the story does not generally emphasize the fact of our telling it, but simply goes about being told, even (paradoxically enough) as it shows humanity/scientists in the act of its composition...to dismiss the author threatens to dismiss the tale”<sup>451</sup>. It is, as Zakariya points out, a story that is an argument for the body

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<sup>445</sup>Ibid., p147

<sup>446</sup>Ibid., p147

<sup>447</sup>Ibid., p148

<sup>448</sup>Sideris, Lisa H. *Consecrating Science. Wonder, knowledge and the Natural World*. p75

<sup>449</sup>Ibid., p44

<sup>450</sup>Zakariya, Naseer Basem. *Towards a Final Story: Time, Myth and the Origins of the Universe*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Harvard University, 2010, p229. Accessed online. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses: A & I. Accessed 7 May 2020

<sup>451</sup>Ibid., p230-231

of knowledge it forms, and as both Megill and Sideris argue, not always a transparent argument<sup>452</sup>.

In *The Universe Story* the human is central to the narrative and christened with the title of ‘the self-reflective consciousness of the universe’, and so the story becomes not about the universe, as Zakariya has emphasised, but about this particular self-reflective consciousness, which is the universe come to consciousness in human consciousness. Swimme and Berry applaud the achievement of the discovery of this ‘story’ in the chapter entitled ‘The Modern Revelation’, and while much of the narrative describes a universe that is pre-human, the human is fundamental to the story ‘becoming’ the universe as it ‘turns back on’ and reflects on itself. In this instance, the act of dismissing both the scientist and the narrators of this story is untenable, as without the scientist, according to the narrative, we could not know the story, and without the human who narrates, we might never learn of the story, in addition to the need for such a story being made redundant.

In addition to science, Swimme and Berry draw on many other disciplines and modes of knowledge in their narrative including poetry, myth and philosophy. Furthermore, their own different disciplines (Swimme as a mathematical cosmologist and Berry as a cultural historian) testifies to their desire for bringing into dialogue empirical scientific information with other forms of knowledge and communication. It must also be noted, that they render their telling in a self-conscious manner, aware of its limitations from the outset in stating that they offer “this brief narrative in the hope that others will fill in what is missing, correct what is improperly presented, and deepen our understanding of the ongoing story”<sup>453</sup>. That said, *The Universe Story* is a result of discoveries in the sciences and the work of those scientists that have ‘brought us’ this story. And so the question remains, why choose narrative to mediate it? This brings me to the first point raised on whether this kind of mythologisation of science devalues experience of the natural world. In terms of the examples provided by Sideris above, there can be little doubt that science is presented as harbouring ‘ultimate reality’, in relation to *The Universe Story* however, this criticism becomes more nuanced. As a narrative and not a science textbook, the question must be reframed as to whether figurative narratives devalue experience including any sensory experience? In his essay

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<sup>452</sup>See section 2.3.3

<sup>453</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p5

‘Narrative and Nature: Appreciating and Understanding the Nonhuman World’, Treanor cites Jack Turner who argues that experiencing nature indirectly through narrative gives us only “a semblance of the real thing, an abstraction” which also serves to influence the way in which we appreciate nature, positively and negatively<sup>454</sup>. Turner, as Sideris, appeals for “gross contact” with the natural world. This form of “intimate personal experience” is essential, he states, for both knowing and valuing it. The drawback to such an immediate approach, however, is that there are parts of nature that some people will never experience first-hand. Treanor gives the example that if saving the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge depends on loving it through gross contact, then it will be lost. Treanor develops his argument to claim that there is evidence that “secondhand narrative accounts *can* bring people to value things”<sup>455</sup>. Narrative as a mediated experience, although in many ways offering less, also Treanor argues, has other benefits in that it can enable us ‘to see’ things differently and changes the ‘who’ that we are through the appropriation of a narrative identity. Treanor cites Richard Kearney who states that while narrative is vicarious that it is “experience nonetheless; and one more real sometimes than that permitted in so-called reality”<sup>456</sup>. The power of narrative, for Treanor, lies in Ricoeur’s assertion that narrative has the ability to re-figure lives. He goes on to argue that “We miss in the moment of experience (i.e., in actual experience) what we find, in retrospect, to be essential about the experience (i.e., as we retell the story of what we experience to others or to ourselves).”<sup>457</sup> He concludes that narrative can play an essential part in stimulating our love and thus value for nature. There are however, some who argue, including Holmes Royston, that the imaginative approach should be tempered by science as science provides the “definitive interpretation of phenomena”<sup>458</sup> in that it corrects aesthetic falsehoods that can often, according to Marcia Eaton whom Treanor cites, sentimentalise or demonise nature<sup>459</sup>. Treanor contests this by arguing that there is no such thing as pure or raw, unsullied data, which makes science itself just one interpretation of the world. Nor he states, is science our most basic or principal interpretation but that we are generally brought to it through a

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<sup>454</sup>Treanor, Brian. “Narrative and Nature: Appreciating and Understanding the Nonhuman World” in *Interpreting Nature. The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*. pp181-200:182

<sup>455</sup>*Ibid.*, p183. Italics original

<sup>456</sup>*Ibid.*, p187

<sup>457</sup>*Ibid.*, p188

<sup>458</sup>*Ibid.*, p189

<sup>459</sup>*Ibid.*, p190

non-scientific experience, narrative or empirical. A cognitive approach to truth is limited and providing people with facts does not equate with people understanding them. Rather this is done through addressing someone's worldview which Treanor states is "fundamentally narrative"<sup>460</sup>. While our narratives are what Treanor terms 'hopelessly anthropocentric' they are useful in that they can open us to "other nonhuman experiences and worlds"<sup>461</sup>.

Sideris argues that in providing a "cosmological context in which environmental values can take root and flourish. A shared belief of many within the movement is that knowing the scientific story is virtually sufficient to generate the desired values and sense of connection."<sup>462</sup> In terms of *The Universe Story* as a cosmic narrative that consciously uses myth in its narration, a scientific story alone is clearly not considered sufficient to generate connection. The text is couched in figurative and poetic language so that it is not only information that is provided but 'a world' that is offered to the reader. When referring to the accompanying education materials of *Journey of the Universe*, materials that document various environmental efforts as the practical application of the story, Sideris asks, "it remains unclear why the story of the universe is necessary in order to ground the environmental concerns and forms of activism highlighted in these local vignettes. Are we to infer that these efforts are somehow insufficient without the Universe Story as their cosmological grounding?"<sup>463</sup>. If on reading *Journey of the Universe* readers were moved to action, it is within the boundaries of the *Journey of the Universe* project to highlight these ways. It is more difficult, however, to make an explicit connection between the narrative and such action beyond a person's own testimony. The point then is not whether such efforts are insufficient without grounding in a particular viewpoint - as clearly, they are not - but to highlight, as the *Journey of the Universe* project wishes to do, the power of narrative to effect change. In terms of *The Universe Story*, it is not 'merely' a story that Swimme and Berry are offering but a cosmology, a worldview that attempts to re-narrate what Clingerman names as our impoverished views of nature<sup>464</sup> and within which, humanity

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<sup>460</sup>Ibid., p196

<sup>461</sup>Ibid., p197

<sup>462</sup>Sideris, Lisa. "Science as Sacred Myth. Ecospirituality in the Anthropocene Age" in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. p145

<sup>463</sup>Ibid., p148

<sup>464</sup>Clingerman, Forest. "Reading the Book of Nature: A hermeneutical account of Nature for Philosophical Theology" in *Worldviews*. p78

can re-think and re-frame its self-understanding. This was based on Berry's conviction that "human communities operate within narratives or stories that provide the macro-context for the personal and communal self-understanding"<sup>465</sup> and so, by Berry's argument, form the motivation for their actions. Central to this worldview, and as argued by Plumwood, to the larger ecological task, is the re-conceptualisation of the human and the development of "a relational account of self" with nature and the other than human<sup>466</sup>. Through its configuration, the narrative of *The Universe Story* is, I argue, is an example of just such an attempt at re-conceptualisation. The manner in which this is done, and how effective it is, will be addressed in chapter four.

### 2.4.3 Suppression of the 'Other' and negation of differences between people

*The Universe Story* is criticised for purporting to contain a universal truth that serves to suppress the other and leads to a less diverse and vibrant world. Ashley criticises *The Universe Story*'s 'privileged' authority that is "(2a)...authorized by science, and (2b) transcends particular cultural and religious differences around the globe; because of this narrativity, authority, and universality"<sup>467</sup> and so, by implication, calls for other stories to be re-positioned and re-interpreted in light of it. Larson regrets the "loss of socioecological, experiential knowledge"<sup>468</sup> which contributes, he states, to our environmental destruction, and with Sideris, concludes that with this universal story "our shared world becomes a less vibrant and diverse place"<sup>469</sup>, where critically, we may lose "living models of sustainable human-nature interaction."<sup>470</sup> Furthermore, Sideris argues that what she terms as the 'scaled-up species version' of humanity

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<sup>465</sup>Eaton, Heather. "Feminist or Functional Cosmology? Ecofeminist Musings on Thomas Berry's Functional Cosmology" in *Ecotheology 5 and 6*, 1998–99, pp73-94:77

<sup>466</sup>Plumwood, Val. "Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism" in *Hypatia* vol. 6, no. 1, Spring, 1991, pp3-27. Plumwood's work provides a feminist critique of the domination of nature and links environmental philosophy to the critique of reason and rationalist philosophy. Her focus is on the 'dualist dynamic' of reason/nature that still exists in environmental philosophy and is, she argues, responsible for "the western construction of human identity as 'outside' nature". See also Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1993, p2

<sup>467</sup>Ashley, Matthew, J. "Reading the Universe Story Theologically: The Contribution of a Biblical Narrative Imagination" in *Theological Studies*, 2010, 71, pp870-902:885

<sup>468</sup>Larson, Brendon M.H. "The Role of Scientism in Myth-making for the Anthropocene" in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. C9.2,2015, pp185-191

<sup>469</sup>Ibid., p185

<sup>470</sup>Ibid., p186

negates important differences between people and their cultures and in particular their contribution to the global crisis in the form of their global footprint. A given individual's imprint, she reminds us, will vary depending on where she is born. According to Sideris, there are many different stories which we can and ought to tell about what it means to be human. Depending on where we direct our focus there will also be a variety of meanings and messages from these stories, many of which she argues are incommensurable with a 'one story for all' version of a human species<sup>471</sup>. Similarly, eco-feminists Eaton and Godfrey have documented that *The Universe Story* does not deal with agency nor does it sufficiently recognise the socio-economic, legal and political relations of humans to each other, including but not limited to the oppression of women and the structural foundations of poverty, or indeed how this story relates to their struggle for existence<sup>472</sup>. Not only that, but as Grassie points out, Swimme and Berry do not critically reflect on their own locatedness within their narrative nor on "the potential for unintended consequences in their work."<sup>473</sup>

These are all relevant critiques of *The Universe Story* and point to a fundamental and glaring omission in what is a cosmic history but also essentially a human history. As Eaton points out, any study of the ecological crisis "must include an analysis of the social, cultural, economic and political institutions that are responsible for the devastation. Though Berry and ecofeminists agree that the ecological crisis is foundationally one of the hegemonic ideology, an aerial view is not enough."<sup>474</sup> *The Universe Story* is just such an aerial view, and while not a study in the academic sense of the word, the ecological crisis is its central concern although not always an explicit one. Bypassing the entanglement of culture and ideology and how these have, and continue to shape human history, and more recently Earth history, places a significant question mark on how serious this narrative should be taken, both in terms of its ability to present an accurate history, and as a narrative that can speak to the ecological crisis. Eaton has written in the same paper of how Berry's proposal "is directed towards Euro-

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<sup>471</sup>Sideris, Lisa. "To know the story is to love it: Scientific Mythmaking and the Longing for Cosmic Connection" *Methodological Challenges in Nature-Culture and Environmental History Research*. p210

<sup>472</sup>Cf. Godfrey, C. Pheobe. "Ecofeminist Cosmology in Practice: Genesis Farm and the Embodiment of Sustainable Solutions" in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*. Vol. 19, no.2, 2008, pp96-114; and Eaton, Heather. "Feminist or Functional Cosmology? Ecofeminist Musings on Thomas Berry's Functional Cosmology" in *Ecotheology 5 and 6*, 1998-99, pp73-94

<sup>473</sup>Grassie, William John. *Reinventing Nature: Science Narratives as Myths for an Endangered Planet*. p270

<sup>474</sup>Eaton, Heather. "Feminist or Functional Cosmology? Ecofeminist Musings on Thomas Berry's Functional Cosmology" in *Ecotheology*, p92

western cultures precisely because he considers these to be the most dangerous force on the planet.”<sup>475</sup> While Eaton is correct in this<sup>476</sup>, the assumption contained within it, is that the reader is already aware of this dominant hegemony, in addition to its pitfalls. In reading Berry’s other works such as *The Great Work* and *The Dream of the Earth*, culture and ideology are addressed in the manner in which they have contributed to environmental degradation. However, if one comes to *The Universe Story* unfamiliar with Berry’s perspective, they will not be made wiser upon reading this narrative. In fact, as Sideris points out, *The Universe Story* has been interpreted by Star Ark enthusiasts as “the perfect cosmological accompaniment to an interstellar agenda that views life on Earth as passé”<sup>477</sup> and is in direct contrast to Berry’s aim of establishing a mutually enhancing Earth community<sup>478</sup>. Chiotti who contributed to Star Ark’s<sup>479</sup> manifesto credits *The Universe Story* for encouraging interstellar travel in that it points out that Earth is becoming uninhabitable for humans. If we align ourselves with the cosmology of *The Universe Story*, he argues, “it will be possible to discover the inspiration, wisdom, and meaning necessary to free ourselves from Earth’s gravitational embrace and explore the far-reaching depths of the universe”<sup>480</sup>. Such an interpretation of *The Universe Story*, one that Sideris claims is quite convincing, is made possible by the very negligence of any engaged social, cultural and political analysis. The achievements and catastrophes of human history are secondary to the primary concern of the narrative, that of telling the universe’s story; and an over-emphasis on the ‘cosmological’ dimensions of the human, that as Star Ark seeks to do, and Sideris has claimed, situates us in space and not ‘in place’ whereby all that directly and accessibly concerns us, can be seen to be undermined.

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<sup>475</sup>Ibid., p73

<sup>476</sup>Much of Berry’s writing explicitly focuses on North America and the issues that pertain to that continent, issues that are also applicable to the Euro-West. cf. “The North American Continent”; “The Corporation Story”; “The Petroleum Interval” in *The Great Work* and “The American College in the Ecological Age”; “Christian Spirituality and the American Experience” in *The Dream of the Earth* and “The World of Wonder” in *The Sacred Universe* for examples.

<sup>477</sup>Sideris, Lisa. “Biosphere, Noosphere and the Anthropocene: Earth’s perilous Prospects in a Cosmic Context” in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. p413

<sup>478</sup>In his essay “The Great Work” Berry writes that “The Great Work now...is to carry out the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner.” *The Great Work*. pp1-32:3

<sup>479</sup>*Star Ark. A Living, Self-Sustaining Spaceship* (Armstrong, Rachel, ed. Springer-Praxis Books, 2016) is a book of essays that ponders the question of space travel. Star Ark is envisioned as a self-sustaining and multi-generational spaceship that humanity can live on as an alternative to earth. Armstrong takes the view that the cosmos itself is an ecosystem.

<sup>480</sup>Chiotti cited in Sideris, Lisa. “Biosphere, Noosphere and the Anthropocene: Earth’s perilous Prospects in a Cosmic Context” in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. p414

The second assumption given the first, is that with this awareness it will be clear now how we ought to act. The path from facts to values and from values to action as has been pointed out by Larson, Van den Noortgaete and De Tavernier is not a straight line but far more complex<sup>481</sup>. While *Journey of the Universe* does provide examples of ‘practical application’ in their educational resources, *The Universe Story* does not offer any explicit or practical ways in which to enhance the Earth community nor to identify or challenge the hegemony. This makes it difficult to argue convincingly for it as a proposal. Aside from the rather vague concept of aligning human activities with Earth activities and given the fact that these ‘Earth activities’ are not clearly outlined, and contrary to their claim to offer “guidance for the future” there is no explicit guidance offered in the text. If *The Universe Story* is directed at Euro-western cultures (the most dangerous) it does not outline in sufficient detail the dangers that some cultural systems and behaviours exhibit over others. This attempt at egalitarianism hides the power structures that allow such a story to be produced in a certain culture at a certain time, and even if unwittingly done, attests through its universal story to the knowledge and the power of those who tell it. The failure to address such complexities of social relations in addition to its failure to deal with the reality of suffering in any depth plays into the conception and indeed characterisation of *The Universe Story* as upbeat, and as Ashley argues, could have the more adverse effect of undermining the severity of the ecological response and the urgency needed in responding to it<sup>482</sup>. Given Berry’s occupation with, and commitment to, environmental issues, this begs the question of why this particular form of narrative. What is achieved by it, given its sacrifice of such fundamental analysis of how the dominant paradigm actually functions? If Berry is hoping to create a ‘new and functional cosmology’ without providing the knowledge of how existing social-ecological relations actually interact, how effective is his own cosmology likely to be? In her analysis of Western environmental philosophy Plumwood argues that hierarchies in society have been considered to be irrelevant to analysis of the destruction of nature. She argues that if the critiques of the domination of humans by other humans, the domination of nature, and the domination of non-humans are not reconciled it is because, and here, Plumwood is addressing deep

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<sup>481</sup> Cf. Larson, Brendon M.H., “The Role of Scientism in Myth-making for the Anthropocene” in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. p187; and De Tavernier, J & Van den Noortgaete F. “Affected by Nature: A Hermeneutical Transformation of Environmental Ethics” in *Zygon*

<sup>482</sup> Ashley, J Matthew. “Reading the Universe Story Theologically: The Contribution of a Biblical Narrative Imagination” in *Theological Studies*. p887



ecology<sup>483</sup> but which as a criticism is also applicable to *The Universe Story*, it does not “understand that human relations to non-humans are as political as human relations to other humans”<sup>484</sup>. Such a-political analysis fails, Plumwood states, “to provide a framework for change which can look beyond the individual”<sup>485</sup> and so remains both individualist and psychologistic, i.e. it neglects factors beyond psychology. In choosing the narrative form, Swimme and Berry do indeed side-step the provision of a framework for change and focus on the individual, who in this instance is the reader. In doing this, the authors, it can only be assumed, chose not to engage in a political analysis or for that matter, agenda. They offer a story, albeit one that subsumes human to human relations to human to Earth relations, and one where their own locatedness and privilege allows them to take such a stance. The question of why this narrative approach was taken, in light of the fact that its effect is dependent on, and limited to, its reader, will be examined in Part Two. The consequences of such an approach will also be taken up in chapter four: The configuration of the human in *The Universe Story*.

## 2.5 Part two: The history and development of *The Universe Story*

Although Hesketh places *The Universe Story* within the genre of ‘big history’ as does Sideris albeit under the different title of ‘New Cosmology’, there is a distinction worth mentioning which arguably differentiates *The Universe Story*. This is its metaphysical assumptions and the religious undertone of the text which Berry is largely responsible for. Its aim, it claims, is a ‘resacralisation’ of the world. It can be further differentiated from ‘big history’ and the ‘epic of evolution’ in its claim that the universe is as much a physical as a psychic reality, psychic being interpreted by Swimme and Berry as spiritual<sup>486</sup>. While the ‘epic of evolution’ (in Wilson’s case, although not so in Barlow’s and Dowd’s) is committed to a solely material explanation of the universe,

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<sup>483</sup>The term ‘deep ecology’ was coined by philosopher and naturalist Arne Naess to advocate the need for environmentalism to go beyond the instrumental view of nature as a resource and to critically reflect on the worldviews that underline environmental practice and ideas. It rejects the anthropocentric image of ‘man-in-environment’ in favour of a “relational, total field image.” It claims intrinsic values for all organisms and nature as a whole and seeks an identification of the human self with the natural world. Cf. Naess, Arne. “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary,” in *Inquiry* 16, 1973, pp95–100:96

<sup>484</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. p17

<sup>485</sup>Ibid., p17

<sup>486</sup>See section 2.9.3

*The Universe Story* is determined to highlight the non-material aspect of the universe and the need for a ‘spiritual’ development in the human.

These points and others will be drawn out here in the second part of this presentation on the pre-figuration of the narrative. This is the second step of explanation which acts Ricoeur argues, as a mediator between pre-understanding and a fuller understanding of the narrative. This part identifies the history, development and tradition from which *The Universe Story* arises, including explicit and implicit sources and possible commitments of the narrative and its authors. It focuses specifically on the influences and history of Thomas Berry, rather than Brian Swimme, as Swimme was a pupil of Berry and substantially shaped by Berry’s ideas<sup>487</sup>. These will predominantly include Pierre Teilhard de Chardin but also refer to Giambattista Vico and Thomas Aquinas since all three had significant influence on Thomas Berry and on this narrative. It then introduces the key ideas of Teilhard followed by those ideas explicitly shared by both thinkers and which Berry incorporated into *The Universe Story*.

### 2.5.1 Key influences on the thought of Thomas Berry

Thomas Berry (1914-2009) was a Catholic priest and member of the Passionist Order. He was also a cultural historian and later came to see himself as a historian of Earth, coining the neologism ‘geologian’ to describe himself. Thomas Berry scholar, Heather Eaton writes that if it were possible to categorise Berry’s discipline that it would be “cultural histories of religions, with facets of phenomenology and anthropology of religions. But these categories do not encompass Berry’s consideration of religions either in his early or later phases of understanding.”<sup>488</sup> In order to understand what brought Berry to *The Universe Story* it is necessary to trace his intellectual history and for this section on Berry’s life, I am indebted to the book *The*

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<sup>487</sup>Swimme writes the foreword to Sarah Appleton-Weber’s translation of Teilhard’s *The Human Phenomenon*. In it he states that after working as a professor of mathematics and physics, he went on a search for ‘wisdom’ and was directed to Thomas Berry. In the foreword to Berry’s *Dream of the Earth*, Swimme writes that “these essays of Thomas Berry are like the invention of the eye with which to see the Earth. They are the remodeling of the ear with which to hear the Earth.”(pvii) This is an example of how deeply Berry’s ideas affected Swimme’s thinking, so much so that they would indelibly shape his own teaching and work. Berry, Thomas. *The Dream of the Earth*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988

<sup>488</sup>Eaton, Heather. “Metamorphosis. A Cosmology of Religions in an Ecological Age” in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*. Eaton, Heather (ed.) USA: Lexington Books, 2014, pp149-171:152

*Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*<sup>489</sup> which is a series of essays produced by former students of Berry in 2014 including Grim and Tucker and edited by Eaton<sup>490</sup>.

Berry began his career as a historian of Western intellectual history and completed his doctoral thesis on Giambattista Vico's philosophy of nature at the Catholic University of America, Washington D.C. in 1951. Vico published his work "The New Science of the Nature of the Nations" in 1725 after twenty years of research. In his work Grim argues:

Vico sets out to establish principles which provide insight into the entire sweep of human history. His ages are the core of these historical principles which indicate the sequence of irreversible developments into which the "wise poets" of societies imagine themselves and their social institutions. Moreover, when a society moves into the next age there occurs a concomitant change throughout the institutions of that society.<sup>491</sup>

Vico sought to establish a more 'scientific' way of reading history by the study of nations and human institutions, and their causation, and to show that "providence was at work not only in sacred history but also in "profane" history. Consequently, pattern and order are operative and discernible in history."<sup>492</sup> Vico also speculated how it was through the poetic wisdom of individuals that institutions were founded and through these institutions which they created, humans imagined themselves into their historical uniqueness<sup>493</sup>. In this way as noted by Dalton, knowledge, according to Vico, contained

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<sup>489</sup>Eaton, Heather (ed.) *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*. USA: Lexington Books, 2014

<sup>490</sup>Ibid. To offer in one list, a very broad scope of thinkers who influenced Berry's work, I borrow from footnote 3 to Heather Eaton's essay "Metamorphosis. A Cosmology of Religion". Here Eaton writes that "Berry was influenced by western thinkers: the works of Thomas Aquinas, Dante Alighieri, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade, Christopher Dawson and Carl Jung, Clifford Geertz, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Paul Tillich and Emile Durkheim. From South Asian thought, he studied the Vedas and Upanishads, the Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita and the writings of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, Aurobindo Ghose and Mohammed Iqbal. From East Asia the classics attributed to Confucius, and Mencius, as well as Ch'ang Tsai (Zhang Zai) and the poetry of Tao Ch'en, Li Po and Tu Fu. He learned Latin, Italian, Spanish, German, Chinese, Sanskrit and Pali. In addition, Berry studied and collaborated with several indigenous peoples in North America, and with the T'boli tribal peoples of the Philippines. He also studied and quotes social scientists (G. Vico, Karl Marx) evolutionary scientists (Charles Darwin), natural scientists (Rachel Carson, E.O. Wilson), nature writers (Henry David Thoreau, John Muir), and poets, economists, and historians". p170

<sup>491</sup>Grim, John. "Time, History and Historian's in Thomas Berry's Vision" in *CrossCurrents*, Summer/Fall Vol. 1987, p235

<sup>492</sup>Tucker, Evelyn. "Thomas Berry and the New Story. An Introduction to the Work of Thomas Berry" in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*. pp1-15:2

<sup>493</sup>Grim, John. "Time, History and Historian's in Thomas Berry's Vision" in *CrossCurrents*.

an element of “self-introspection of the human mind”<sup>494</sup> which was related, Vico argued, to tradition, the arts and human history and contrasted with the Cartesian emphasis on rationalism to the neglect of these. From Vico’s thought, Berry gained two major insights: ‘the age of nations’ and the ‘barbarism of reflection’.

### 2.5.2 The age of nations and the barbarism of reflection

In his ‘New Science’ Vico writes about human history in three ages. These are the age of Gods, the age of Heroes and the age of Men. In this sense he characterised history as a developing process where each age was marked by a different mode of human consciousness, namely sensation, imagination and intellect<sup>495</sup>. Berry, influenced by Vico, would later present his history of the universe through a periodisation of time. He divided the universe into four major time phases – the Galactic phase, Earth phase, Life phase and Consciousness phase. In this fourth stage he locates human history and in turn divides it into four major ages, these being; the tribal shamanic, the classical civilisation, the scientific technological and the coming ecological or ecozoic age<sup>496</sup>.

In the term ‘barbarism of reflection’, Vico is referring to those periods of human history which are marked by disintegration and where the established institutions are “unable to sustain the poetic wisdom and imagination that established them.”<sup>497</sup> At these times, the nations fall into a second barbarism until providence through poetic wisdom allows a new age of the ‘true religion’ to be generated again. Notwithstanding the validity of Vico’s philosophy of history or his characterisation of success and failure, nevertheless Berry borrows from his analysis. Berry argues that we are in the midst of a cultural pathology of alienation and destruction of Earth and calls on such capacities as dreams, imagination and poetic wisdom to address this. These are needed, Berry argues, because our religious, educational and legal institutions are no longer providing the guidance needed. We are currently, according to Berry ‘in between

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<sup>494</sup>Dalton, Anne Marie. “The Great Work in a Sacred Universe – The Role of Science in Berry’s Visionary Proposal” in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*. pp173-193:175

<sup>495</sup>Hope, Marjorie & Young, James. “Thomas Berry and a New Creation Story” in *The Christian Century*. August 16-23, 1989. See also Tucker, Evelyn “Thomas Berry and the New Story. An Introduction to the Work of Thomas Berry” *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*. pp1-15.

<sup>496</sup>Berry, Thomas. “Twelve Principles for Understanding the Universe and the Role of the Human in the Universe Process” in *CrossCurrents*, 37 no 2 – 3, Sum - Fall 1987, pp216-217.

<sup>497</sup>Grim, John. “Time, History and Historian’s in Thomas Berry’s Vision” in *CrossCurrents*. p235

stories<sup>498</sup>, at the end of the Cenozoic era, and in a time of major transformation. It is out of this context and its concurrent needs, that Berry (and Swimme) present *The Universe Story*.

### 2.5.3 Asian religions with a particular focus on Confucianism

A second major influence on Berry was his study of Asian religions<sup>499</sup>. He studied in China for a year from 1948 to 1949 where he met the Asian scholar Theodore de Bary, who later with Berry founded the 'Asian Thought and Religion' Seminar at Columbia. Berry was particularly interested in not only the history of Asian religions but also their spirituality. He authored two books, one on *Buddhism*<sup>500</sup> in 1966 and the other on *Religions of India*<sup>501</sup> in 1971. In particular, Berry understood Confucianism to be a very comprehensive system where "the main principle of Confucian thought is that the human is integral with the Earth and the entire universe. That this is compatible with modern cosmology is evident from the observations in contemporary physics that the universe is integral with itself throughout the vast extent in space and throughout its sequence of transformations in time."<sup>502</sup> In Confucianism, through the practice of ch'eng (personal authenticity) which in turn was achieved through the practice of the traditional virtues of the Confucian tradition, these being: jen (humanity), I (righteousness), li (proper behaviour), chih (knowledge), and hsin (loyalty), one began to cultivate one's moral nature and began to transform oneself<sup>503</sup>. In transforming oneself, one began to effect transformation in society and also in the larger cosmos. In

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<sup>498</sup>Berry, Thomas. "The New Story" in *The Dream of the Earth*. pp123-137

<sup>499</sup>Berry was also influenced by indigenous religious traditions, particularly Native American, and recognised in them interior resources which enabled their continued survival in the face of prolonged and systematic degradation, in addition to admiring the way in which indigenous people did not separate themselves from 'the numinous reality in the natural world'. Berry saw this recognition of the sacred in the natural world as being a central component of addressing the ecological crisis (cf. Berry, Thomas. "The Historical Role of the American Indian" in *Dream of the Earth*, pp180-193; "The Fourfold Wisdom" in *The Great Work. Our Way into the Future*. New York: Bell Tower, 1999, pp176-195; and Grim, John. "Thomas Berry and Indigenous Thought. First Nations and Communion with the Natural World." in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*. pp123-147:130

<sup>500</sup>Berry, Thomas. *Buddhism*. New York: Hawthorne Books, 1966

<sup>501</sup>Berry, Thomas. *Religions of India. Hinduism, Yoga, Buddhism*. New York: Bruce-Macmillan, 1971

<sup>502</sup>Tucker, Mary Evelyn. "The Influence of Confucianism on Thomas Berry's Work" in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*. pp65-79:67

<sup>503</sup>Berry, Thomas. "Authenticity in Confucian Spirituality", Riverdale papers, Bronx, New York: Riverdale Center for Religious Research. No date. Copy obtained at Genesis Farm, New Jersey. Much of Berry's written work has been collected in the Riverdale papers including some fifty articles, speeches and presentations.

this way one's deeper identity as forming a third with heaven and Earth was both recognised and realised<sup>504</sup>. This, according to Mary Evelyn Tucker, was the primary aim of Thomas Berry's life and work, to assist in the realisation of this identity so that the human began to form "one body with Heaven and Earth and thus assist the transforming and nourishing powers of the cosmos and Earth."<sup>505</sup>

In The Riverdale paper entitled "Affectivity in Classical Confucian Tradition"<sup>506</sup>, Thomas Berry writes about the Confucian emphasis on the affective life of man. The paper is informative as it provides insight into how much Berry wove this thinking into his own work. The paper is in many ways a parsing of Confucian writings that concern "the human community in its various forms"<sup>507</sup>. Berry describes, with very little analysis, how emphasis on the "feeling, emotional" aspect of life was considered of primary importance in sustaining humanity in its existence. He states that in classical Confucianism "a mutual attraction of things for each other functions at all levels of reality...Confucianism saw the interplay of cosmic forces as a single set of intercommunicating and mutually compenetrating [sic] realities"<sup>508</sup>. Berry states that because of the intensity with which the Chinese experienced this "feeling communion with the real"<sup>509</sup>, they sought to 'perfect' the human by increasing this "sympathetic presence" of all things to each other. He notes that almost every essay written about life in the Confucian tradition sets it within this framework of the intercommunion of heaven, Earth and the human, and derives its principles from these same sources. In describing this framework, he writes that:

The cosmos is the macrophase of man; man, the microphase of the cosmos. The cosmos is encompassed in the human, the human in the cosmos. Each discovers itself in the other. But the final concern is with the common bond of the truly real which is found in the mutual attraction which pervades the multiplicity of things, and established this multiplicity as an order, as a cosmos. This highest ontological attraction of things to each other in the Confucian tradition can be indicated quite simply by the word "Communion"<sup>510</sup>.

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

<sup>505</sup>Tucker, Mary Evelyn. "The Influence of Confucianism on Thomas Berry's Work" in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*. p76

<sup>506</sup>Berry, Thomas. "Affectivity in Classical Confucian Tradition". Riverdale papers, Bronx, New York: Riverdale Center for Religious Research. No date. copy obtained at Genesis Farm, New Jersey.

<sup>507</sup>Berry, Thomas. "Affectivity in Classical Confucian Tradition". p2

<sup>508</sup>Ibid., p1

<sup>509</sup>Ibid., p2

<sup>510</sup>Ibid., p3

In this context, Berry informs us, the cosmos becomes the larger dimension of the human person and that it is in this, their macrophase, that humanity forms a third with Heaven and Earth. Within this larger context, Berry further identifies in classical Confucianism, several other communities within which the human lives her life. These are, and I will only name them here: the supreme community of Heaven, Earth and man [sic]; the pan-human political community; the friendship community; the family community; and the personal community of man [sic] within himself. According to Berry, in Confucianism all of these communities are founded on “the bonds of affection” that humanity bear towards one another. The discussion of the ‘affective life’ best takes place then within the differentiation and communication of these communities. In the first community of heaven, Earth and the human, the Confucian teaching indicates that as a ‘Third in the Trinity’ Confucianism perceives humanity, and here Berry cites the Book of Ritual<sup>511</sup>, as “the understanding heart of Heaven and earth”<sup>512</sup>. The function of humanity therefore is “to provide that affectionate quality as well as the human mode of consciousness that perfects the trinitarian community achieved on this ultimate plane of being”<sup>513</sup>. The second community, the pan-human community of Earth, and here Berry cites the Book of History, was one to which, according to Berry, Confucian thinkers devoted a lot of attention, especially in its cultivation. This community he informs us is the “special object of affection from Heaven itself which cares for the human community directly through the natural world”<sup>514</sup>. Berry continues his explanation through the friendship and family community, and finally “the community of the individual person with himself [sic]”<sup>515</sup>. Because the full development of an authentic self was the basic requirement for the development of all these other communities, all being inter-related, dependent and fulfilled in the other, Confucianism especially emphasises cultivation of the “human

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<sup>511</sup>There are five Classics and four Books in Confucianism. The five classics consist of the Book of Odes, Book of Documents (also called the Book of History), Book of Changes, Book of Rites, and the Spring and Autumn Annals, and are associated with classic Confucianism. (Nylan, Michael. *The Five "Confucian" Classics*. Yale University Press, 2001.) The Four Books are comprised of the Doctrine of the Mean (or maintaining Perfect Balance), the Great Learning, Mencius, and the Analects, and are associated with neo-Confucianism. Gardner, Daniel K. *The Four Books. The basic teachings of the later Confucian tradition*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007

<sup>512</sup>Berry, Thomas. “Affectivity in Classical Confucian Tradition”. p5

<sup>513</sup>Ibid.

<sup>514</sup>Ibid.

<sup>515</sup>Ibid., p17

heart and its most interior tendencies”<sup>516</sup>. Confucianism understood the answer to ‘barbarism’ not as a violent social effort but in the development of humanity and their capacity for “establishing a mutual presence with others”<sup>517</sup>. Berry finishes the paper with the observation that one of the most distinctive aspects of the Confucian tradition is this development of the human quality of life. This contains, Berry writes, the most exciting experience available to the human, that being, “the discovery of the distinctive modality of his own existence and the manner in which...he brings to the entire universe of existence his own special transforming presence”<sup>518</sup>. Thus, Berry concludes, and cites again the Book of Ritual, that within the Confucian tradition there are two commands on the individual. The first is self-identity as human; and the second is communion with the larger society and the universe. Self-identity and presence to others eventually become one, as communion is the process of discovery whereby the human discovers their larger self within the universal community.

Berry’s Asian influences also extended to the Neo-Confucian Zhou Dunyi and the Hindu Sri Aurobindo, the study of whom contributed to his attempts to overcome the dualism of spirit and matter that he perceived in much of Western thought, and to reclaim a psychic and spiritual dimension to the universe. Berry wrote in “Traditional Religions in the Modern World” of “what is important is the attainment of a conscious realization of the spiritual nature of human development.”<sup>519</sup> In this Berry was articulating his belief that it is not material improvement or progress which develops the human, but a development of the human spirit and the need for this to be recognised. Chapters three and four will examine the way in which this claim is implicit in *The Universe Story*.

#### 2.5.4 St. Thomas Aquinas: A named influence of Berry

A fourth and significant influence on Berry was the medieval scholar and theologian Thomas Aquinas, whose name Berry took on ordination, his birth name being William Nathan. Berry was particularly influenced by Aquinas’ position on diversity in nature where he explores the concept of divine goodness. Berry regularly

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<sup>516</sup>Ibid., p19

<sup>517</sup>Ibid., p20

<sup>518</sup>Ibid., p22

<sup>519</sup>Berry, Thomas. “Traditional Religion in the Modern World” in *The Sacred Universe. Earth, Spirituality and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. pp3-17:15



quotes Aquinas and praises his efforts to defend the intrinsic goodness and reality of the natural world<sup>520</sup>. He admired Aquinas' understanding that "the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness and represents it better than any single being whatsoever (Aquinas, ST, Q.47, Art.1)"<sup>521</sup>. This would later contribute to Berry's naming of diversity as a value within the universal order of things. Berry also admired the way in which Aquinas reworked Aristotle's view of how "abstract concepts depended on individual existing material"<sup>522</sup> implying thus that all creatures participated in reality and so affirming the worth of the material world.

Although Aquinas was a large influence on Berry and formative in his thinking, this influence was selective and Berry should not be considered a Thomist<sup>523</sup>. In "The New Story" Berry writes about the transmission of values that can assist young people in identifying themselves in time and space. This was easier, he states, when Earth was seen as an image of the 'eternal Logos'<sup>524</sup>, and in just such a world, Berry claims, "Saint Thomas could compose his masterful presentation of Christian thought"<sup>525</sup>. Berry argues, however, that a new way of understanding values is required, one that is commensurate with our current scientific knowledge. George cites Scheid as identifying Berry as someone who took up "aspects of his [Aquinas's] work or expanded into new directions to address ecological concerns"<sup>526</sup>. Such new directions, as George points out, lead Berry to diametrically opposed conclusions to Aquinas on fundamental issues such as God, human nature and the universe. Central to these differences was the notion of divine transcendence. Aquinas viewed God as "separate from the world but not separated from it"<sup>527</sup> and so upheld the view of God as transcendent. For Aquinas, God was present to all creatures, this however does not make those creatures divine, as

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<sup>520</sup>Cf. "The University", pp72-85:77 and "The Fourfold Wisdom" pp176-195:189&191, in *The Great Work*; "The New Story", pp123-137:129&136, "Patriarchy: A New Interpretation of History" pp138-162:151; "The Dream of the Earth", pp194-215:198 in *The Dream of the Earth* for some examples, although not an exhaustive list, of Berry's references to Aquinas.

<sup>521</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas cited by Berry, Thomas. "The University" in *The Great Work*. pp72-85:77

<sup>522</sup>Grim, John. "Exploring Thomas Berry's Historical Vision" in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*. pp17-46:34

<sup>523</sup>George, Marie. "Is Eco-theologian Thomas Berry a Thomist?" in *Scientia et Fides*, 7, 1, 2019, pp47-71

<sup>524</sup>Here Berry is referring to what he names as "the world of the *Timaeus*" referring to Plato's account of the formation of the universe. Berry, Thomas. "The New Story" in *The Dream of the Earth*. p136

<sup>525</sup>Berry, Thomas. *The New Story*. p136

<sup>526</sup>Scheid, Daniel P. 2011. "Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Thomistic Tradition, and the Cosmic Common Good." In *Green Discipleship*, edited by Tobias L. Winright, pp129-147:144. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic cited in George, Marie. "Is Eco-theologian Thomas Berry a Thomist?" in *Scientia et Fides*. p48

<sup>527</sup>Ibid., p60

divinity pertains only to God himself. Berry, in contrast, viewed the divine as immanent in the world<sup>528</sup>. In addition, Berry does not attribute ‘sacredness’ primarily to God as Aquinas does, but first and foremost to the universe. A transcendent divine, Berry argued, “tends to desacralize the phenomenal world...[and] to treat the phenomenal world with something less than the reverence paid it by those cultures in which there is a sacred dimension to trees, to rivers, and to the whole of creation.”<sup>529</sup> A further consequence of this difference in view is the question of what it is that makes humans ‘holy’. For Aquinas, George argues, it is “due to God dwelling in them through grace”<sup>530</sup>, while for Berry, “the earth is a very special sacred community. Humans become sacred by participating in this larger sacred community”<sup>531</sup>. Such discontinuities between humans and the natural world, Berry argued, legitimises an understanding of the natural world and ‘non-rational’ beings as instruments. Aquinas, according to George, would regard Berry’s distinction between beings in nature as instruments or ‘subjects’ as a false dichotomy. For Aquinas, a non-rational being is neither merely an instrument nor a person. In awareness of such a dichotomy and seeking to overcome it, Berry introduces his notion of the universe as a ‘communion of subjects’ although as George points out, Berry never coherently articulates what exactly he intends by ‘subject’.

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<sup>528</sup>Ibid.

<sup>529</sup>Berry, Thomas. 2006. *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*. Tucker, Mary Evelyn (ed.). San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, p25

<sup>530</sup>George, Marie. “Is Eco-theologian Thomas Berry a Thomist?” in *Scientia et Fides*. p62

<sup>531</sup>Berry, Thomas & Clarke, Thomas. *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth*. Stephen Dunn, Stephen & Lonergan, Anne (ed.’s) Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991, p43 cited in George, Marie. “Is Eco-theologian Thomas Berry a Thomist?” in *Scientia et Fides*. p63

## 2.6 How the term 'spirituality' is used in Thomas Berry's writings

Spirituality and the understanding that the universe has a spiritual/psychic dimension is central to Berry's cosmology and thought. According to O'Hara if this view is rejected by his reader "then much of Berry's vision for a reformation of human culture and an entrance into an Ecozoic era fails to materialize."<sup>532</sup> Berry has written that we can no longer live in a 'spiritually adequate' manner within our earlier religious traditions as informed by their spatial model of the cosmos. This is so, he argues, because the current knowledge of the universe as emergent and irreversible is, according to Berry, the most significant religious, spiritual and scientific event since the emergence of complex civilisations five thousand years ago<sup>533</sup>. In response to this belief, much of Berry's writing calls for a 'new spirituality'<sup>534</sup> which is situated within the context of the functioning of the Earth's bio-systems. His concern is that spirituality be understood as an aspect of the natural world although he does not clarify whether this spirituality is limited to the natural world or transcends the natural world. His focus begins with what the physical sciences are teaching about the universe, information he argues which cannot be set aside. Berry argues for the need to interpret the evolutionary process itself. He states that "if interpreted properly, the scientific venture could even be one of the most significant spiritual disciplines of these times."<sup>535</sup> Berry believed that such an interpretation could engender a spirituality which he identified as ecological. While Berry appears to distinguish between religion and spirituality, he does not do so in a systematic manner, nor does he provide a definition of the way in which he uses either term. This section will examine some of the context within which Berry used the term. This is an attempt to clarify his conceptual framework and will have implications

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<sup>532</sup>O'Hara, Dennis Patrick. *The Implications of Thomas Berry's Cosmology for an understanding of the Spiritual Dimension of Human Health*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. St. Michael's College, Toronto, 1998, p192. Accessed online. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses: A & I. Accessed 2 June 2020

<sup>533</sup>Berry, Thomas. *The Sacred Universe*.

<sup>534</sup>An example of what Berry means by this 'new spirituality' is provided when he juxtaposes his understanding of a contemporary spirituality with the spirituality he believes needs to be reached. He writes "We need to move from a spirituality of alienation from the natural world to a spirituality of intimacy with the natural world, from a spirituality of the divine as revealed in the written scriptures to a spirituality of the divine as revealed in the visible world about us, from a spirituality concerned with justice only for humans to a spirituality of justice for the devastated Earth community." Berry, Thomas. "An Ecologically Sensitive Spirituality" in *The Sacred Universe*. pp129-138:133

<sup>535</sup>Berry, Thomas. "The Cosmology of Religions" in *The Sacred Universe*. pp117-129:120

when examining *The Universe Story*, *The Universe Story* being Berry's first attempt, with Swimme, to re-interpret the evolutionary process through the narrative form.

### 2.6.1 Spirituality as a dimension of being and as a mode of being

As is characteristic of his style, Berry is unspecific about what he means by the term spirituality. In light of this, the first point to consider is Berry's use of the term and the way in which he employs it. In his essay "The Spirituality of the Earth"<sup>536</sup> Berry argues that to speak of 'spirituality' is to speak of a quality of the Earth itself and not just a human quality. He argues that if there is no spirituality in Earth then there is no spirituality in the human, Earth being, he declares, our origin, nourishment, healer, educator and that which fulfills us. 'Spirituality' is, he states, a dimension of the universe itself and so a dimension of reality<sup>537</sup>. In this, Berry is attempting to expand the way in which the concept of spirituality is understood and applied, being traditionally associated with the human to a quality or dimension which Berry is arguing is applicable to all of Earth. It is his attempt to counter a dualist understanding of spirit and matter in addition to an understanding of the human as being discontinuous and independent of Earth, what Berry elsewhere names an 'addendum'.

In the same essay "The Spirituality of the Earth"<sup>538</sup> Berry also writes that "Ultimately, spirituality is a mode of being in which not only the divine and the human commune with each other but through which we discover ourselves in the universe and the universe discovers itself in us."<sup>539</sup> This has three aspects. The first aspect, he claims, is as a dimension of all existence (as referred to above). The second aspect of spirituality, and here we may be seeing the influence of Confucianism on Berry is as 'a mode of being'. Spirituality is not limited to a theoretical concept but is that which is *expressed* in being as *a way* of being. It has a dimension of practical application. The third aspect and this follows from the first two, is that of communion, as both a means

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<sup>536</sup>Berry, Thomas. "The Spirituality of Earth" in *The Sacred Universe*. pp69-87:75

<sup>537</sup>Berry claims this in principle number three of his 'Twelve Principles for understanding the Universe and the Role of the Human in the Universe Process.' Principle number three states: "From its beginning the Universe is a psychic as well as a physical reality." As will be discussed below Berry uses spirit interchangeably with psyche. These principles were named by Berry in a lecture given in 1984 (location unknown). The lecture is available on the Thomas Berry website <http://thomasberry.org/publications-and-media/thomas-berry-the-twelve-principles>. They were also laterally published in *CrossCurrents*, 37 no 2-3, Sum - Fall 1987, p216-217

<sup>538</sup>Berry, Thomas. "The Spirituality of Earth" in *The Sacred Universe*. pp69-87

<sup>539</sup>*Ibid.*, p74

by which we commune with the divine but also as a way in which the divine communicates with us, in addition to what results from that communion. From these examples the first observation we can make is that in Berry's use of the term spirituality, it is both an aspect of being and a mode of being. When this aspect of being is no longer easily differentiated from a mode of being, we are left to infer that we have entered into 'deep communion' what elsewhere Berry names as 'intimate presence' with the universe and where we discover the universe in our own being and the universe is 'revealed' through our own being. In this articulation we can again identify the Confucian influence on Berry's thought. The language of discovery used here also suggests that Berry makes a strong identification between the human and the universe.

### 2.6.2 Spirituality as that which facilitates and constitutes relationship between beings

The second aspect which needs to be considered is Berry's understanding of the term spirituality in relation to what he takes to be cognate terms. Berry variously identifies and uses interchangeably the term spirituality with that of 'subjectivity', of 'self', of 'identity', of 'psyche' and "the numinous maternal principle from which all life emerges."<sup>540</sup> The following paragraph taken from his essay "Loneliness and Presence" is informative in what it reveals about his understanding of spirituality and for this purpose I will reproduce it in full:

Recovery of Western civilization from its present addiction to use, as our primary relation to each other and to the world about us, must begin with the discovery of the world within, the world of the *psyche* as designated by the Greeks, a word translated by the term *anima* in the Latin world or by the term *soul* in the English world...the term animal will forever indicate an *ensouled* being. This interior world of the psyche – the anima, the soul, the spirit, or the mind – provides the basis for that interior presence that we experience with each other throughout the world of the living. Simply in their physical dimensions, things cannot occupy the same space while remaining their individual selves. This mutual indwelling in the same psychic space is a distinctive capacity of the transmateral dimension of any living being...this capacity for indwelling each other, while remaining distinct from each other, is a capacity of soul or mind or the realm of the psyche. In this integral realm of both the inner and the outer realms is where we discover our fulfilment.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>540</sup>Ibid., p75

<sup>541</sup>Berry, Thomas. "Loneliness and Presence" in *Evening Thoughts. Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*. pp33-42:40

As stated, Berry uses the terms psyche, soul, spirit, mind and consciousness interchangeably. This is a strong example of the way in which he mixed terms. In relation to his understanding of spirituality, it is the phrase ‘interior world’ and ‘interior presence’ that are instructive here. This ‘interior world’ of the human, but not only the human, is what enables us to be connected, and arguably from this quote, is also that which maintains connection even though we appear to be distinct from each other physically.

Berry’s use of the term ‘mutual indwelling’ offers further insight also. Berry applies his understanding of the possibility of ‘mutual indwelling’ occurring between the entire “world of the living” and interprets it as a spiritual dimension of reality. This ability to ‘mutually indwell’ which Berry also refers to as the ability to be “intimately present”<sup>542</sup>, is according to Berry a capacity that is trans-material<sup>543</sup>. It traverses the physical distinction and seeming separation between beings through the capacity of the emotions and the cognitive and thus connects them; while simultaneously being that which enables experience of physicality distinct to one’s own. Berry states that both ‘to know’ and ‘to be known’ “are activities of this inner form not of the outer structure of things.”<sup>544</sup> It is that which is a necessary condition in order to be present to others (an aspect of being) in addition to being the awareness of a dimension of reality while not being separate to that which is physical can be understood as being distinct from it (an expression of being).

The importance Berry attached to the establishment of such a mode of presence cannot be over-emphasised. As early as 1974 he wrote that “Humanity is stunned by its own achievements; even while conquering space, it is not communing with the universe. This art of communion is a spiritual skill. To create such a skill, to teach such a discipline, are primary tasks of contemporary spirituality”<sup>545</sup>. Grim and Tucker also identify this correlation between spirituality, intimacy and communion in Berry’s writings. They state that for Berry “the interiority of matter itself, namely the subjectivity of all things, is that which allows for communion and reciprocity”<sup>546</sup>.

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<sup>542</sup>Cf. Berry, Thomas. “Loneliness and Presence” in *Evening Thoughts. Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*

<sup>543</sup>Ibid., p41

<sup>544</sup>Ibid., p41

<sup>545</sup>Berry, Thomas. “Contemporary Spirituality: The Journey of the Human Community” in *CrossCurrents*, Summer/Fall 1974, p175

<sup>546</sup>Grim & Tucker. “Introduction to Spirituality of Earth” in *Thomas Berry. Selected Writings on the Earth Community*. pp28-29

There is one further dimension to Berry's understanding of spirituality. This again relates to expression. Spirituality, because of the importance Berry attached to it in the future evolution of Earth, contains a 'creative impulse'. In addition to providing a unitive form, spirituality enables a being to move beyond its established form and even in a manner to transcend it. In light of this, Berry's understanding of spirituality can be understood to have a very strong correlation with subjectivity as it is that which enables unique expression while also being that which unites and facilitates mutual indwelling<sup>547</sup>. Spirituality is Berry's word for expressing the nature of existence which is not opposite to the material but integrated with the material. As Aquinas and Aristotle before him, Berry understands the 'spirit' as that which gives form to matter and 'spirituality' as the way in which the material form comes to be expressed in a unique and particular way.

## 2.7 From scientific cosmology to creation narrative

Grim and Tucker argue that one of Berry's principal preoccupations was the way in which world religions might contribute to meeting the ecological challenges that the world currently faces<sup>548</sup>. This involved an assessment of how such a crisis came to be as well as what is needed to happen in order for it to be countered. In Berry's view, the transformation in human consciousness and behaviour that is needed to address these challenges cannot be achieved independently by science or religion but required the integration of the two. Although his approach can be broad and sweeping and prone to generalisations which make it difficult to analyse, his understanding of religion and the way in which religions function is central to his thought<sup>549</sup>. Berry drew on a number of fields of knowledge such as the history of religions, cultural developments, psychology and developments in science to build his arguments. Eaton argues that

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<sup>547</sup>Cf. Berry, Thomas. "Creative Energy" in *The Dream of the Earth*. pp24-35

<sup>548</sup>Grim & Tucker. (ed.'s). "Introduction to Religions Awaken to the Universe" in *Thomas Berry. Selected Writings on the Earth Community*.pp64-84

<sup>549</sup>Eaton states that Berry, trained as a historian of religions, had studied "countless historical texts, in several languages and from many traditions, such that he could present broad themes, specific topics, and prominent persons demonstrating an expansive sense of religiosity" (Eaton, Heather. "Metamorphoses. A Cosmology of Religions in an Ecological Age" in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*. p150)

Berry resisted the insider/outsider categorisation of religion arguing that neither approach allows a comprehensive understanding of religion. She writes that Berry “acknowledged the ambiguity of the term ‘religion’, often suggesting that there is no basis for ‘religion’ as a separate entity outside of existential patterns, psychic orientations and cultural expressions. He saw patterns among these experiences, as well as across traditions”<sup>550</sup>. Thus, Berry was less concerned about religion as a way of worship or a code of conduct than the way in which it spoke to what he identified as ‘the human condition’. Eaton states that:

For Berry, the central point is that there is an intense interaction between what we now call ‘religion’ and the following: ‘the human condition’ and its internal and external pressures; the animating and orienting experiences and associated ideation processes; and the cultural history and context. Berry’s main interest was how ‘religions’ developed from particular depth experiences of existential intensity and strain. This encompassed the historical process as to how the specific religious and cultural milieu would orient the psychic and social structures of the related civilizations.<sup>551</sup>

The religious and spiritual traditions of humankind, Berry argued, “emerged out of confrontation with terror. These traditions are not the ephemeral activities of weak souls with little of that basic courage required to deal with fundamental life issues. These spiritual traditions represent humanity’s ultimate confrontation with chaos, with incoherence, with destruction, with the absurd”<sup>552</sup>. Eaton offers some of these experiences as ‘trans-human awareness, salvation, revelation, sacrifice, re-birth, virtues’ but argues, that although Berry saw these as themes of human experience, that they are not necessarily contained in all religions nor equivalent in their content. Eaton goes on to argue, that for Berry, religions themselves in their teachings or practices were never the starting point but rather these ‘core human experiences’ “out of which the particular religious consciousness, sensibility or spirituality arose.”<sup>553</sup> She cites Berry as saying that religion takes its origin “in the deep mysteries of what we see, hear, touch, taste and savor.”<sup>554</sup> Religion functions for Berry, in that it provides the interpretative categories for such experiences and existential themes. In doing this, it provides a

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<sup>550</sup>Ibid., p153

<sup>551</sup>Ibid., p153

<sup>552</sup>Berry, Thomas. “Spiritual Traditions and the Human Community” in *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2009, pp1-7:1

<sup>553</sup>Eaton, Heather. “Metamorphoses. A Cosmology of Religions in an Ecological Age” in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*.p152

<sup>554</sup>Ibid.



framework through which to illuminate these experiences and to provide meaning for existence. Each religion in his view illuminated a particular aspect of humanity. In addition to this, religion served to orient what Berry termed as ‘psychic energy’ through its mythological and symbolic form<sup>555</sup>. Like Teilhard, Berry firmly believed that religion was central to the formation and rise of consciousness<sup>556</sup> although Berry’s particular interest was in the ways that this consciousness played out in society and cultures and more recently, on the planet.

### 2.7.1 Berry’s call for a ‘Cosmology of Religion’

In his writings Berry consistently argued for the importance of the role religion plays in forming a society and a people. He maintained that a ‘religious consciousness’ was needed in addressing the ecological crisis. The task of what he called ‘the third mediation’, a reconciliation between the human community and the Earth community, was not just an economic or a political task, but rather Berry saw it primarily as a religious and a spiritual task. He argued that only “religious forces can move human consciousness at the depth needed. Only religious forces can sustain the effort that will be required over the long period of time during which adjustment must be made. Only religion can measure the magnitude of what we are about.”<sup>557</sup> Although vague in what he understood as ‘religious forces’ it is clear that Berry saw the challenge to the religions as being twofold. The first challenge is to recognise that religions have

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<sup>555</sup>Berry explains ‘psychic energy’ as an interior energy. He identifies it with “the source that has brought the universe through the centuries”. It can best be understood as non-material. In his essay “The Dynamics of the Earth” Berry lists a number of things which are of, and he argues, increase, psychic energy. These are “understanding, joy, spiritual insight, music and the arts”. (Berry, Thomas “The Dynamics of the Future” in *The Great Work*, pp166-175:171.) It is a concept adopted and re-interpreted from Teilhard’s concept of the ‘zest for life’. Teilhard’s ‘zest for life’ is the will ‘to live’ and ‘to love’ life. In *Spirit of Fire*, King links it to an act of faith. She cites Teilhard: “What is most vitally necessary to the thinking earth is a faith – and a great faith – and ever more faith. To know that we are not prisoners. To know that there is a way out, that there is air, and light, and love, somewhere, beyond the reach of death...That, if we are not to perish smothered in the very stuff of our being, is what we must at all costs secure. And it is there that we find what I may well be so bold as to call the *evolutionary role* of religions.” (De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. *Activation of Energy*. London: Collins, 1970, p238. Cited in King, Ursula. *Spirit of Fire*. p190). Both Teilhard and Berry viewed the evolutionary ‘story’ of the universe as having the potential to ‘activate’ this energy. Berry however extends Teilhard’s idea of the need for religions to incorporate teaching on evolution to one where the role of religion starts with the re-identification of the human within the cosmic order.

<sup>556</sup>Delio, Ilia. “Is Natural Law “Unnatural?” Exploring God and Nature Through Teilhard’s Organic Theology” in *Theology and Science*, 15:3, pp276-288

<sup>557</sup>Berry, Thomas, “The Third Mediation” in *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*. pp8-13:11

historically had a cosmological dimension in that they have been “symbolic systems”<sup>558</sup> which provided the narrative of where we have come from and who we are. The second is for religions to respond to the scientific cosmology “regarding the unfolding of the universe and earth.”<sup>559</sup>

In light of this, Berry argued for the need to move from a theology of religion, understood as the study of the nature of God and systematically developed religious belief systems, and an anthropology of religion, understood as a comparative study of religious beliefs and practices among different tribes and societies, to what he names as a ‘cosmology of religion’ where the natural world and indeed the universe, will be read as if a scriptural text. Berry lends theological weight to his argument by recalling Aquinas’ statement that divine revelation comes through two scriptures – the scripture of the natural world and the scripture of the book<sup>560</sup>. He writes that in earlier times “our religious inquiry was theological: it was organised around questions concerned with the existence and nature of God and the relations of creatures to God. Later, our religious concerns were largely anthropological, ministerial and spiritual, organised around such studies as the sociology and psychology of religion and the history of religions.”<sup>561</sup> These religious concerns, Berry argues, need to embrace concerns that are cosmological. According to Berry we are being led to a cosmological dimension of religion by “our efforts at academic understanding and for practical issues of physical survival on a planet severely diminished”<sup>562</sup>. He describes a cosmology of religion as being “much more sensitive to the universe as the primary religious mode of being and to ourselves being religious through our participation in the religion of the universe”<sup>563</sup> emphasising his desire to re-locate the human in a process which in its entirety, he argues, is to be considered sacred. This process is the universe in its sequence of transformations, which Berry argued, carries within it the “comprehensive meaning of the phenomenal world”<sup>564</sup>. According to Berry, to consider the universe in its religious dimension requires that “we speak of the religious aspect of the original flaming forth

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<sup>558</sup>Grim & Tucker. (ed.’s) “Introduction to Religions Awaken to the Universe” in *Thomas Berry. Selected Writings on the Earth Community*. p65

<sup>559</sup>Ibid.

<sup>560</sup>Cf. Berry, Thomas. “Religion in the Ecozoic Era” in *The Sacred Universe*, pp88-100:99 and Berry Thomas. “The University” pp72-85 and “The Fourfold Wisdom” pp176-195 in *The Great Work*.

<sup>561</sup>Berry, Thomas “Religion in the Ecozoic Era” in *The Sacred Universe*. pp88-100:99

<sup>562</sup>Berry, Thomas. “The Cosmology of Religions” in *The Sacred Universe*. pp117-128

<sup>563</sup>Berry, Thomas, “Religion in the Ecozoic Era” in *The Sacred Universe*. pp88-100:99

<sup>564</sup>Berry, Thomas. “The Cosmology of Religions” in *The Sacred Universe*. pp117-128

of the universe, the religious role of the elements, and the religious functioning of the Earth and all its components.”<sup>565</sup> He argued that all human occupation and professions are expressions of the universe and its functioning, and this Berry believed, to be especially true in the religions<sup>566</sup>. Berry’s cosmology of religion might be more appropriately named and easily understood as ‘a religious cosmology’, however his insistence on the cosmological dimension unfolding the religious dimension indicates his repeated desire to begin with the universe itself, and his underlying belief that a re-enchantment of the cosmos will facilitate a renewed religious consciousness<sup>567</sup>.

In the scientific cosmology of the Big Bang, Berry identified a potential narrative of origins which could, he argued, imbue people with a religious consciousness towards the natural world. This includes both a renewed consciousness of nature, in addition to a religious sensibility towards our connection to nature. For Berry, a consciousness turned towards nature reveals nature’s sacred and spiritual dimensions which in turn facilitates our religious sensibility. The potential for Berry lay not just in the scientific data but in our capacity to understand its significance and its implications. Eaton describes how Berry was critical of the cultural values which permeate Euro-western science, two examples of this being, the belief that the human is transcendent to the natural world and the belief in achievement of an age where “human life would surmount the restrictions which characterize the human condition”<sup>568</sup>. He was also critical of the framework of interpretation which prevents realising the immense implications of such data, it being divided into either that of the humanities or that of the sciences<sup>569</sup>. Berry wished to re-insert the question of meaning into science. He claims that theology when at its highest intellectual development “was integrated

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<sup>565</sup>Ibid., p121

<sup>566</sup>Berry draws attention to the relationship of the scientist to his research of the universe and writes that the ‘attraction’ of the scientist towards knowledge of the universe is one of the fascinating aspects of the universe itself. Berry then offers an interpretation for this when he states that “if there is such a thing as human intelligence, then it has emerged out of the universe, and, in its functioning, it must in some manner be ordered toward the universe. The primary study of human intelligence might be designated as universe study or, in a term derived from the Greek, cosmology.” For Berry ‘intelligence’ comes from the universe and efforts ‘to know’ are a function and result of this intelligence. (Berry, Thomas. “The Epic of Evolution” in *Evening Thoughts. Reflecting on the Earth as Sacred Community*. pp113-125:114)

<sup>567</sup>Berry, Thomas. “The Gaia Hypothesis: Its Religious Implications” in *The Sacred Universe*, pp103-116:114

<sup>568</sup>Eaton, Heather. “Feminist or Functional Cosmology? Ecofeminist Musings on Thomas Berry’s Functional Cosmology” in *Ecotheology 5 and 6*, 1998–99, pp73-94:81

<sup>569</sup>Ibid.

with physics and metaphysics and cosmology as these were handed down through the Aristotelian tradition. This was the great work of Thomas Aquinas, to restructure all Christian thought within a cosmological perception.”<sup>570</sup> In the Big Bang description of the universe, Berry saw a ‘story’ with a “mythic, narrative dimension that lifts this story [of the universe] out of a prosaic study of data to a holistic spiritual vision.”<sup>571</sup>

Berry also argued that the question of how a religion psychically and emotionally orients a people or a culture is insufficiently considered in both religious studies and theology<sup>572</sup>. His own view was that, according to Eaton, if religion is to be transformed through an encounter with this new revelation from the physical sciences, it will be in creative and vital ways that will “open a new imaginative range, and awaken human consciousness to new depths of reality...[based on] other scriptures that shape awareness and provide reference points for religious edicts. These are the cosmic scriptures, the scriptures of history, the written scriptures, and the scriptures written in the structures of our being. Together these give meaning to Berry’s term a cosmology of religions.”<sup>573</sup> Thus much of Berry’s work is an attempt to highlight the need for a creation narrative *within* a cosmological framework. It is his attempt to return to ‘the whole’ both religiously and cosmologically through a new context of reality vis a vis the empirical data of an evolutionary universe; and to offer a spiritual vision which builds on ‘wisdom traditions’<sup>574</sup> as well as scientific data which is capable of re-igniting reverence for the natural world, in addition to generating psychic energy and spiritual resources equal to the challenges of the day<sup>575</sup>.

#### 2.7.1.1. The role of myth in activating ‘numinous experience’

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<sup>570</sup>Berry, Thomas. “The Epic of Evolution” in *Evening Thoughts*. p116

<sup>571</sup>Berry, Thomas. “Religion in the Twenty-First Century” in *The Sacred Universe*. p86

<sup>572</sup>Eaton, Heather “Metamorphoses. A Cosmology of Religions in an Ecological Age” in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*.

<sup>573</sup>*Ibid.*, p162-163

<sup>574</sup>Berry often used ‘wisdom traditions’ to refer to traditional religions.

<sup>575</sup>Eaton also claims that Berry sought this new story as a way in which to unify religions. She writes that “This story would become the macro-phase context of most religious traditions, where, according to Berry, the traditions would be understood as dimensions of each other. The traditions, whose deep spiritual insights ‘originate in an interior depth, . . . as revelatory of the ultimate mystery whence all things emerge into being’, must move into this larger context of interpretation in order to maintain their ultimate values and orientation towards reality yet also assist in the transformation to an ecological era.” (Eaton, Heather. *Feminist or Functional Cosmology? Ecofeminist Musings on Thomas Berry’s Functional Cosmology* in *Ecotheology*)

Eaton argues that Berry was interested in the mythic aspects of cultural narratives as myth through its archetypal symbols carried “revelations of the deepest realities of the universe.”<sup>576</sup> Berry saw myth as originating in the “numinous dimensions of the universe” and that which was “intuited in the deep psychic structures”<sup>577</sup> of the human. It was his conviction that communities work within myth and narratives which provide a macro-context for their personal and communal self-understanding. In this manner, Berry was deeply influenced by both Carl Jung and Mircea Eliade. He borrowed from Jung the notion of archetypal psychic structures and used it to support his position that “the human psyche has been structured from ancient primal experiences of the awesome powers of the universe, prior to the differentiation between the unconscious and conscious”<sup>578</sup>. With Eliade, Berry argued that it is increasingly difficult to experience the sacred within the structures of the cosmos. He argued for a retrieval of the numinous experience of the universe which is best accomplished through myth. Myth, Berry argued, connects the paradigmatic structure of the human psyche to the human context as experienced within a culture. Berry’s understanding of the power of symbolism becomes informative at this point. He writes that:

New insight into the function of myth and symbol in our lives has taken place in a variety of disciplines. Those who have penetrated deepest into the human psyche, whether in psychological analysis, in philosophical or religious studies, or in the various spiritualities, now recognize the powerful and even determining role in human affairs that is played by these ways of knowing beyond the method of rational analysis. Only in this context can the great paradoxes of reality be dealt with effectively. Only here does ultimate meaning find expression. Only in this way is it possible to set up those needed spiritual disciplines upon which the future of man depends in such an urgent manner.<sup>579</sup>

Berry argued that symbolism speaks to the imaginative and ideation function of religion and is necessary in activating and orienting the psychic energy needed to correspond to our contemporary era. However, Berry also believed that religious symbols emerged from different eras and ages where there were different existential challenges and concerns. As such the ‘imagination’ and ‘ideation’ structures of these religions do not

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<sup>576</sup>Ibid., p77

<sup>577</sup>Ibid., p77

<sup>578</sup>Ibid., p78, footnote:27

<sup>579</sup>Berry, Thomas. “Contemporary Spirituality: The Journey of the Human Community” in *CrossCurrents*. p176

correspond to the contemporary era and do not illuminate such numinous experiences of the universe<sup>580</sup>. In light of this, Berry argued for a new religious consciousness with a symbolism founded on “scientific inquiry into the structure of the universe and the sequence of transformations that have brought the universe, the planet Earth and all its living creatures into being.”<sup>581</sup> Such a symbolism is required in order to retrieve and reactive the sacred and numinous experience of the universe already existent in the human psyche. The importance Berry placed on symbolism and the role it plays in articulating the sacred becomes apparent here. This, for Berry, contributes to the way in which the numinous comes to be recognised. Thus, Berry calls for a reinterpretation and articulation of symbolism that is commensurate with contemporary information and challenges.

## 2.8 The ideas of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in the development of *The Universe Story*

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881 - 1955), whose work serves as a classic reference point for the development of *The Universe Story*, was a French Catholic priest, member of the Jesuit order and by profession, a palaeontologist. In his lifetime, Teilhard wrote more than two hundred scholarly palaeontological and geological articles<sup>582</sup>. He was also involved in the practical side of science, having been involved in excavations and fieldwork in India, Burma, Spain, Africa and China, where Teilhard played an important role in the discovery of *Sinanthropus pekinensis* (Peking man) in 1929. What distinguishes him is how he laterally interpreted and presented his scientific studies and research by combining them with a form of metaphysics<sup>583</sup>. Teilhard was greatly influenced by French philosopher Henri Bergson’s book *Creative Evolution* in which Bergson described evolution as “truly creative, like the work of an artist” and

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<sup>580</sup>Eaton, Heather. “Metamorphosis. A Cosmology of Religion” in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*. p157

<sup>581</sup>Berry, Thomas. “Religion in the Twenty-first Century” in *The Sacred Universe*. p86

<sup>582</sup>Hefner in ‘The HarperCollins Encyclopaedia of Catholicism’ 1995 cited in Isaacs, Mark. “Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and the Quest for an Interface between Science and Religion” in *Journal of Unification Studies*. Vol X, 2009, pp141-171:145

<sup>583</sup>Scott, Callum D., “The Evolutionary Thought of Teilhard de Chardin: Meanderings at the Limits of Science and Metaphysic” in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 141, November 2011, pp81-100

driven by a vital impulse<sup>584</sup>. This vital impulse Bergson believed to “be of God, if not God Himself”<sup>585</sup> and so Bergson’s theory of evolution, because it contained God in a central and creative role, appealed more to Teilhard than did Darwin’s theory of natural selection which progressed through survival of the most fit and as such was more materialist<sup>586</sup>. Through Bergson’s influence Teilhard began to see the universe as ‘dynamic’ and although he differed from Bergson in that Bergson saw the cosmos as originating from one source and diverging in different directions, Teilhard viewed the cosmos as in a process of evolution which was ultimately convergent in Christ<sup>587</sup>. This insight was to define his thinking. He wrote in *Heart of Matter* that Bergson’s book illuminated what had been building in him between “the cult of Matter, the cult of Life, and the cult of Energy. All three found a potential outlet and synthesis in a World which had suddenly acquired a new dimension and had thereby moved from the fragmented state of static Cosmos to the organic state and dignity of Cosmogensis.”<sup>588</sup> Teilhard’s life was marked by his veneration of matter, his veneration of God and his veneration of life in the biological sense of life. Bergson’s creative evolution allowed him to bring these three aspects together. This was so, as an evolution that is understood as creative unified the spiritual and material components of the world. This would later be named by Teilhard as cosmogenesis and is developed most comprehensively in *The Human Phenomenon*<sup>589</sup>.

### 2.8.1 *The Human Phenomenon*: Teilhard’s scientific and religious based anthropology

Teilhard’s thought is significant for a number of reasons, not least for his views on technology, energy and what we now term globalisation<sup>590</sup> but for the purpose of this

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<sup>584</sup>Russell (1946) cited in Isaacs, Mark. “Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and the Quest for an Interface between Science and Religion” in *Journal of Unification Studies*. p149

<sup>585</sup>ibid.

<sup>586</sup>ibid.

<sup>587</sup>King, Ursula. *Spirit of Fire. The Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin*, New York: Orbis Books, 1996

<sup>588</sup>De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. *The Heart of Matter*. London: Collins, 1978, p25

<sup>589</sup>De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*. Appleton-Weber, Sarah (ed.). Great Britain: Sussex Academic Press, 2003

<sup>590</sup>Cf. Delio’s paper on “Transhumanism or Ultrahumanism? Teilhard de Chardin on Technology, Religion and Evolution” in *Theology and Science*, vol. 10, issue 2, 2012. Delio discusses Teilhard’s view of technology as a positive step in the evolutionary process and compares Teilhard’s similar, although ultimately contrasting views, on ‘ultrahumanity’ with AI transhumanism. Delio, Ilia. “Transhumanism or

thesis, it is the ideas he presents in *The Human Phenomenon* in relation to life in the universe, and in particular, human life that are most relevant. In *The Human Phenomenon*, Teilhard presents the evolutionary process through what he names as its Pre-life, Life, Thought and Super-life phases. This is an attempt, according to King, to show “the human being in its relation to humankind, and humankind in relation to life and life in relation to the Universe.”<sup>591</sup> The ‘Pre-life’ section deals with elementary matter and its composites, as well as energy and how this matter through energy (energy for Teilhard containing a spiritual component)<sup>592</sup> evolves. The ‘Life’ section focuses on the emergence of life,<sup>593</sup> and the ‘Thought’ section on the emergence of thought<sup>594</sup>. The final section ‘Super-life’ is explicitly teleological and presents Teilhard’s vision of where the universe ‘is going’. This Teilhard names as ‘the Omega point’. Here Teilhard presents his view of how the human can develop in an increasingly loving and more personal way to converge with the end-point of Omega. Omega, was for Teilhard the endpoint of the universe when he postulates human consciousness will eventually grow into a ‘super-consciousness’ and merge with this Omega point. Ilia Delio describes the Omega point as the future fullness of the entire evolutionary process<sup>595</sup>. Teilhard was unequivocal in that this Omega point was Christ.

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Ultrahumanism? Teilhard de Chardin on Technology, Religion and Evolution.” See also Teilhard’s thoughts on the possibilities of love as an energy source already existent in the human in his work *Human Energy*. Great Britain: Collins, 1962

<sup>591</sup>King, Ursula. *Spirit of Fire*. p174

<sup>592</sup>These two aspects of energy (material and spiritual) what Teilhard named as radial and tangential will be examined in section 2.8.1.3 below.

<sup>593</sup>This section is divided into three chapters and addresses: The Appearance of Life; The Expansion of Life; and Mother Earth. The ‘Thought’ section is divided into The Birth of Thought; The Deployment of the Noosphere; and The Modern Earth.

<sup>594</sup>While never referring to his theological, scientific or philosophical understanding of the universe as that of ‘emergence’, the seeds of what is now termed ‘the emergent paradigm’ can be detected in Teilhard’s thought. Harris writes that the concept of an emergent universe is that which entails the view that nature “in its matter and laws, displays a tendency towards increasing complexity [whereby]...elements combine and generate new properties, and degrees and principles of internal organisation”. ‘Emergence’ Harris goes on to argue is an interdisciplinary paradigm as it intersects between science and the philosophy of science while having implications for science and religion. Harris, Paul A. “Time and Emergence in the Evolutionary Epic, Naturalistic Theology, and J.T Fraser’s Hierarchical Theory of Time.” In *KronoScope* 12:2 (2012) pp147-158:148. Gordon D. Kaufman describes it as when “new realities, not reducible to previous stages of evolution, have appeared.” Kaufman, Gordon D. “A Religious Interpretation of Emergence. Creativity as God” In *Zygon*, vol. 42, no. 4, December 2007, pp 915-928:916

<sup>595</sup>Ilia Delio. “Transhumanism or Ultrahumanism? Teilhard de Chardin on Technology, Religion and Evolution” in *Theology and Science*.



He states that “Christian dogma culminates in this final vision – exactly and so clearly the Omega point.”<sup>596</sup>

*The Human Phenomenon* is Teilhard’s attempt after years of scientific study to locate the human being within the emerging knowledge of an evolving cosmos. He presents humanity (and our challenge) thus:

Humanity, the spirit of the Earth, the synthesis of the individual and peoples, the paradoxical reconciliation of the element and the whole, of unity and multitude – for all these things, said to be so utopian, yet which are so biologically necessary, to actually take place in the world, is not all we need to do, to imagine that our power of loving develops until it embraces the totality of men and women and of the Earth?<sup>597</sup>

Teilhard presents the human being as the very convergence of the universe with itself, where the smallest physical particles contain a spiritual or psychic element. He argued that it will be in the human that the universe will be united, peoples and individuals, the single element and the whole creation and this, according to Teilhard, will be realised when we reach our potential for love which transcends solely personal relationships and reaches out to embrace the entirety.

The book also presents three of Teilhard’s ideas that contribute significantly in shaping the philosophy and context of *The Universe Story*. These are Cosmogogenesis, the Law of Complexity Consciousness and Love- energy. The epilogue to the book is titled ‘The Christian Phenomenon’ where Teilhard briefly, but fundamentally, integrates his views on Christianity with his cosmic perspective.

#### 2.8.1.1 Cosmogogenesis in the thought of Teilhard

Teilhard’s characterisation of an evolving universe was of tremendous significance to his thought. That matter itself was in a state of becoming and development, was “like an unsatisfied hunger, like a promise held out to me, like a summons to be answered.”<sup>598</sup> This for Teilhard, was the movement from understanding the nature of reality as in a static state to one of continuous emergence, a dynamic universe. For Teilhard, a universe in ‘cosmogogenesis’, integrated in a convincing way his

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<sup>596</sup>De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*. p211

<sup>597</sup>De Chardin, Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*. p189

<sup>598</sup>De Chardin, Teilhard. *The Heart of Matter*. p25 cited in King, Ursula. *Spirit of Fire*. p38

intuitive love of matter with his intrinsic recognition of spirit. In this process, spirit and matter could now be seen to be two aspects of the same reality. Indeed, Clifford observes that for Teilhard evolution began to represent a theological category<sup>599</sup>. Through a universe in cosmogenesis where we eventually witness the emergence of thought and love, we are, for Teilhard (and most specifically for Teilhard in the human) witnessing spirit emerge *from* matter. Thus, the universe in its state of cosmogenesis resulted in what Teilhard referred to as the law of complexity-consciousness.

#### 2.8.1.2. Complexity-consciousness as a teleological component of cosmo-genesis

For Teilhard, the more complex biologically an organism is in its form, the more intense forms of interiority that are associated with it. Interiority in this sense means subjectivity or what Teilhard referred to as the ‘inside of things’ which he further elaborates on as “inside, consciousness and spontaneity are three expressions of one and the same thing”<sup>600</sup>. This also includes how “consciousness is taken in its broadest sense to designate every kind of psyche from the most rudimentary forms of interior perception conceivable to the human phenomenon of reflective consciousness.”<sup>601</sup> Consciousness, psyche and spontaneity in the human are for Teilhard synonymous with the ‘psyche’ or the ‘spirit’ of the universe. Teilhard’s view was that, as life has evolved, it has become progressively more complex, beginning with the single cell organism right up to the multi-cellular organisms to eventually the animal and human organisms, which are self-organising and self-governing, and specifically in the human organism, self-reflective. Teilhard defines reflection as “the power acquired by a consciousness of turning in on itself and taking possession of itself as an object endowed with its own particular consistency and value: no longer only to know something – but to know

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<sup>599</sup>Clifford, Anne M. “Creation” in *Systematic Theology. Roman Catholic Perspectives*. Schüssler Fiorenza, Francis & Galvin, John P. (ed.’s) Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011, pp195-248:229. Clifford makes a notable criticism of Teilhard’s merging of evolutionary theory and theology. She states that since the inception of process theology, the works of Teilhard have been frequently drawn on. A criticism that Clifford puts to process theology and equally applicable to Teilhard is that it can tend to harmonise its religious truths with the dominant spirit of the culture. As a result of this a progressive development where progress is equated with ‘right’ or ‘good’ becomes its ontological basis. This is to state, according to Clifford, that theology in continuity with evolutionary theory “too easily promotes an optimistic view about historical progress and about the rational and moral perfectability of humanity”, an optimism Clifford argues that does not stand up to the test of human experience.

<sup>600</sup>De Chardin, Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*. p25

<sup>601</sup>Ibid.

itself; no longer only to know, but to know that it knows.”<sup>602</sup> For Teilhard the human being exhibits this power in that the human has both the capacity to subjectify but also, arguably, to objectify herself. Although consciousness and radial energy<sup>603</sup> exist in all organisms, Teilhard viewed it as less developed in the earlier and more simply designed organisms. Teilhard’s point was that as life evolves it complexifies and with this complexification comes a corresponding increase in interiority. This he argued is evident in the human being, one of the last species to arrive on Earth and the only species, that as of now we are able to ascertain, who has self-reflective consciousness. For Teilhard, consciousness is the very essence of life which is growing and being passed on collectively, and evolution as it continues is leading to increased consciousness which will ultimately, in Teilhard’s view, join humanity with God in the Omega point. In describing this increase in consciousness Teilhard writes:

in the course of the ages quite obviously something is irreversibly accumulating (even in the absence of any measurable variation of skull or brain) and being transmitted, at least collectively, through education....Now this “something” whether a material construction or construct of beauty, system of thought or system of action, always ends up translating itself into an increase of consciousness – consciousness, in turn, as we know now, being nothing less than the substance and blood of life as it evolves.<sup>604</sup>

The human being, for Teilhard was central to evolution. As part of the process the human essentially arises *out* of the process but with the capacity for reflection and the power of consciousness Teilhard believed humanity held a particular significance, in that we can also, in some manner, stand apart from the process<sup>605</sup> and examine it. In the human, according to Teilhard, the universe is at its most unified and deepest expression.

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<sup>602</sup>Ibid., p110. Here Teilhard also uses the phrase ‘turns in on itself’ and ‘taking possession of itself’ to define his understanding of reflection. It is not inconceivable that Teilhard was also influenced by the philosophy of Jean Nabert (1881-1960) being both a contemporary and a fellow country man. It could be put forward, especially in light of this definition, that whereas Ricoeur restricted Nabert’s influence to his philosophy in the form of what came to be known as hermeneutical phenomenology through the process of a philosophy of reflection, Teilhard used it for the development of his religious anthropology. It could quite equally be argued however, that both Teilhard and Nabert were merely products of the philosophical milieu in France at the time and were unaware of each other’s work. Either way, it remains an interesting connection between Teilhard and Ricoeur if only through the similarity of the sources of their ideas.

<sup>603</sup>See section 2.8.1.3 below for a presentation of radial energy.

<sup>604</sup>De Chardin, Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*. p121

<sup>605</sup>This would be critiqued by Berry who did not believe that the human could be in any way discontinuous with the evolutionary process. Rather Berry consistently emphasised the human as ‘a part’ of the process shaped by the process and participating in the process. Berry, Thomas. “Teilhard in the ecological Age” in *Teilhard Studies*, no.7, Anima Press, American Teilhard Association, Fall 1982

This idea of a universe developing towards increased interiority, exemplified in Teilhard's understanding of the human, would be later taken up by Berry.

### 2.8.1.3 Love-energy as a teleological component of cosmo-genesis

Teilhard believed there is a relationship and a correlation between one's deepest expression of oneself (or one's subjectivity) and one's 'activating the energies of love'. Teilhard referred to 'love-energy' as the affinity of one being for another and an overall property of life. He writes "if some internal propensity to unite did not exist, even in the molecule...it would be impossible for love to appear higher up in ourselves"<sup>606</sup>. He further writes "love is nothing more or less than the direct or indirect trace marked in the heart of the element by the psychic convergence of the universe itself."<sup>607</sup> For Teilhard, evolution had a direction and a purpose. The world was evolving towards deeper unification in love, and this, the universe's desire to unite through life and in particular love, underpinned everything. It was for Teilhard a universal force unequalled; it was also, he argued, how the world would find completion in the Omega point.

In this manner love was central to Teilhard's thought. It is love according to Teilhard that draws elements together even at a very basic level of unification and this unification, he wrote, further 'builds' the universe. As described by Delio "He spoke of love as a cosmological force and by this he meant an attractive force of energy deeply intrinsic to cosmic life...Cosmological and biological evolution is marked by an increase in complexity and consciousness, and love is the energy of relatedness by which consciousness rises."<sup>608</sup>

Teilhard distinguished between two different types of what he called 'energy' in the universe. These were tangential energy and radial energy. Tangential energy is the physical attraction which draws elements together and radial energy which is psychic energy, is that which draws the element forward "in the direction of an ever more

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<sup>606</sup>De Chardin, Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*. p188

<sup>607</sup>Ibid.

<sup>608</sup>Delio Ilia. "Teilhard's Deep Catholicity and Conscious Evolution". A paper presented at *Living Cosmology. Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe Conference*. Yale University, November 7-9, 2014, p1. Paper available on *Journey* website. Published in *Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe (Ecology and Justice)*. Grim & Tucker. (ed.'s) Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2016

complex and centred state.”<sup>609</sup> Tangential energy is that which complexifies the ‘stuff’ of the universe, while radial energy is that which unites, deepens or relates, thus causing that ‘stuff’ to evolve in an ever increasing interior depth of unification. Delio explains this further when she writes “Love draws together and unites and, in uniting, generates something new. Because of the primacy of love-energy, reality is intrinsically relational; “being” is “being with another” in a way that is open to more being and more union. Evolution is the movement toward more being and consciousness; that is greater awareness of the whole and deeper connection to the whole.”<sup>610</sup>

#### 2.8.1.4 The Christian Phenomenon

The epilogue to *The Human Phenomenon* is titled “The Christian Phenomenon”. It provides a brief overview of Teilhard’s Christology and emphasises how central the person of Christ is to his ideas. Having previously argued in the text for a personalising universe, Teilhard completes his work in stating that ‘the Christian phenomenon’ provides confirmation “of a universe that is dominated by energies of a personal kind”<sup>611</sup>. This is shown through, he argues: its creed; the value of its existence; and the power of its growth. Christianity, Teilhard argues, is characterised by personalisation and universalism. The kingdom of God can be recognised as a large family but it is also, he states an “enormous biological operation: that of redemptive Incarnation”<sup>612</sup> where the world through its growing consciousness is unified in Christ who gathers and transforms everything before the final act of “rejoining the divine focal point”<sup>613</sup> of God. In this perfect synthesis, according to Teilhard, there will only be God and the universe will be complete, what Teilhard names as a “higher form of “pantheism”<sup>614</sup>. In relation to the value of existence, here Teilhard refers to both the quantitative value of Christianity, i.e. its breadth and movement, but also to its qualitative value, which he names as Christian love. According to Teilhard, Christian love is a new state of consciousness. This is so he argues as Christian love preaches a “genuine universal

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<sup>609</sup>De Chardin, Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*. p30

<sup>610</sup>Delio, Ilia. “Teilhard’s Deep Catholicity and Conscious Evolution”. A paper presented at *Living Cosmology. Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe Conference*, p3-4

<sup>611</sup>De Chardin, Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*. P210

<sup>612</sup>Ibid., p211

<sup>613</sup>Ibid.

<sup>614</sup>Ibid.

love”<sup>615</sup> that has shown itself “to be psychologically possible and operational in practice” and that can extend to one’s neighbor but also to the infinite and the intangible. Teilhard’s final point, that of the ‘power of growth’ refers to how the “Christian is now beginning to realize that evolution simply provides a magnificent way of belonging and giving oneself more to God” and that evolution can re-vitalise Christian perspectives. The Christian Phenomenon, Teilhard states, is the counterproof that confirms the presence up ahead of the Omega Point.

These first three aspects of Teilhard’s thought were picked up and developed by Berry and are central to an understanding of *The Universe Story*. Teilhard’s Christology was not. This illustrates the way in which Berry was selective in his use of Teilhard’s vision, reasons for which, will be addressed in chapter three and four.

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<sup>615</sup>Ibid., p213

## 2.9 Teilhard's influence on Berry and Key Ideas of both thinkers

Teilhard's influence on Berry cannot be overstated, although Berry did offer a critique of him<sup>616</sup> and, as stated, was selective in what he brought forward of his vision. In this section I will look at the intellectual similarities between Teilhard and Berry and to interpret between Teilhard's and those of Berry, in relation to specifically: a metaphysics of the future; plurality, unity and energy, named by Berry as differentiation, subjectivity and communion and; a time-developmental universe arriving at self-reflective consciousness.

### 2.9.1 A metaphysics of the future

Both Berry and Teilhard were presenting a grand synthesis of the universe. Teilhard in *The Human Phenomenon* and Berry with Swimme in *The Universe Story*. During the "Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe" conference held at Yale in November 2014, theologian John Haught presented a paper entitled 'Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Nagel, and Journey of the Universe'. In it he presents 'A Metaphysics of the Future' or an 'Anticipatory Vision'<sup>617</sup>. This term of Haught's seeks to situate the entirety of the cosmic story "within the setting of a worldview that identifies what is really real, fully intelligible, ideally good and maximally beautiful with what is coming from the future, rather than basing the reality of emergent phenomena solely on what is or what has been."<sup>618</sup> Such a context would

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<sup>616</sup>Berry was critical of Teilhard's ecological stance, and felt that Teilhard did not extend his view to include the other than human community but remained singularly anthropocentric. He was also critical of Teilhard's seeming commitment and optimism in 'building the Earth' with ever new and continuing discoveries in science and technology. Berry extended this through his emphasis on the ecological degradation as a result of these same technologies. In addition, Berry was also critical of Teilhard's limited engagement with other traditions in light of the substantial amount of time he spent exposed to them. Tucker, Mary Evelyn. "Thomas Berry and the New Story" in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry*. p10

<sup>617</sup>Haught acknowledges in his paper that he does not have the space to develop in detail his concept of 'a metaphysics of the future'. His aim in the paper is to distinguish the 'anticipatory vision', sketched here, from the backward looking perspectives of evolutionary materialism and analytic science as well as 'other-worldly' metaphysical philosophies and theologies. Haught, John. "Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Nagel and Journey of the Universe". A paper presented at *Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe Conference*, Yale University, November 7-9, 2014. Paper available on *Journey* website. Later published in *Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe (Ecology and Justice)*.

<sup>618</sup>*Ibid.*, p8

include what is yet to be in the future. The fullest way to understand the world, Haught argues, and the ‘true’ meaning of its beauty, intelligence, value and goodness “is to turn our attention toward the future, putting on the habit of hope.”<sup>619</sup> Hope according to Haught is not just a virtue in this sense but an epistemological necessity. This is so, he argues, as because we do not know the future, we must turn our mind and hearts “toward the domain of fuller being arising uncertainly on the horizon of the “up ahead”<sup>620</sup>.

Haught states how ‘a metaphysics of the future’ contrasts with a metaphysics of the past, which is the worldview most widely used by most philosophers and material scientists whereby the world, life and consciousness are “made intelligible by reducing them analytically to the lifeless and mindless physical units that inhabited the remote cosmic past.”<sup>621</sup> In stating this, Haught does not acknowledge that without the reductionist science of physics so much would remain uncharted. His point is rather to emphasise that a metaphysics of the past is not sufficient to explain a cosmos that produces consciousness, nor is it sufficient to explain the part that consciousness does at present and will, he predicts, play in the future of the cosmos. Furthermore, Haught states that an “otherworldly Platonic metaphysics may give us a sense of the imperishability of being, but it uproots us from the flow of cosmic time.”<sup>622</sup> Haught is here arguing that Platonic physics detracts from an understanding of our being embedded in the world and affected by its history. According to Haught, only after incorporating our metaphysics of the past (which Haught argues does immerse us in the flow of time and includes cosmic history as well as human history), with a significant look towards the future and what may be to come, can we begin to seek to explain this universe. Although in the essay Haught makes the assumption that ‘fuller being’ is a possibility both in terms of a concept and in terms of its achievement, he makes a relevant argument in how *Journey* (and *The Universe Story* by association) and cosmic narrations in general might allow “no sharp breaks physically and historically”<sup>623</sup> between the early depiction of the universe to the eventual arrival of mind. This, he suggests, is by setting such narrations within this framework of a ‘metaphysics of the future’.

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<sup>619</sup> Ibid.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., p9

<sup>622</sup> Ibid., p12

<sup>623</sup> Ibid., p7



According to Haught any causal narrative of the cosmos must contain a satisfactory account of the eventual production of thought. A universe that is mind-producing, as Nagel affirms, leads to teleological questions. Endowing the universe with even the smallest aspect of teleology, Haught argues, opens it to a theological interpretation (exemplifying Ruse’s fear and moving Haught uncritically from teleology to theology). He argues that while *Journey* is neither exclusively a theological nor a philosophical work and refrains from dealing with such metaphysical questions, that it cannot avoid both the metaphysical and theological implications such a narrative invites. Haught posits the question of “how can theology be avoided if the universe is biased from the start toward the making of mind?”<sup>624</sup> Furthermore, Haught writes that “If the cosmos is a story, analysis alone cannot tell us what the story is about. Instead, we have to follow the story as it moves forward. If the universe is a drama still unfolding, after all, how can we grasp its intelligibility without watching where it is going”<sup>625</sup> As Haught rightly points out “stories are always tacitly carried along by one metaphysical vision or another, so at some point, as we reflect on a story’s meaning or intelligibility—as we are doing here with the cosmic story—we need to make its implicit metaphysics explicit. In the case of *Journey*, the implied worldview must be wide enough to encompass not only the “objective” discoveries of natural science but also the anticipatory character of conscious subjectivity.”<sup>626</sup>

Both Teilhard and Berry worked within a framework of a ‘metaphysics of the future’. Haught states that because Teilhard was a geologist and not a philosopher that he was never ‘successful’ in articulating this ‘anticipatory vision’. Taken formally within the context of philosophy and theology, this may prove to be the case. Taken in the context of his Roman Catholic faith, his vision, I argue, was very clear. Delio writes that “His faith led him to posit Christ, the future fullness of the whole evolutionary process, as the “centrating principle”, the “pleroma” and “Omega point” where the individual and collective adventure of humanity finds its end and fulfilment, and where the consummation of the world and “the incarnation of God” converge.”<sup>627</sup> She further notes that for Teilhard, “the future of evolution is “the mysterious synthesis

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<sup>624</sup>Ibid., p4

<sup>625</sup>Ibid., p11

<sup>626</sup>Ibid., p8

<sup>627</sup>De Chardin, Pierre. Teilhard *Les Directions de l’Avenir* (1973) cited in Ilia Delio. “Transhumanism or Ultrahumanism? Teilhard de Chardin on Technology, Religion and Evolution”, in *Theology and Science*, p155.

of the uncreated and the created – the grand completion of the universe in God.”<sup>628</sup> With Delio, I interpret Teilhard’s vision as a complete one, where the material (including Earth) may come to an end but humanity is transformed into a ‘super-humanity’ and ‘super-consciousness’ in the Omega point of Christ<sup>629</sup>. Teilhard argued unfalteringly in this vision of the future and humanity’s ability to attain it. Indeed, he wrote of how “The future is more beautiful than all the pasts.”<sup>630</sup> Berry’s vision, on the other hand, does not extend towards the end of the world, in fact both men differed dramatically in this sense. Teilhard, on the one hand, foresaw the end of the material world and the death of the planet where the spirit is detached from its material matrix. For Teilhard, Earth would ultimately be transcended and left behind by spirit. Berry’s vision, in contrast, is one where the planet is flourishing in one mutually enhancing Earth community. Berry called this vision of the future ‘the Ecozoic’. It will be achieved he states when we will have recognised the sacred and spiritual depths contained in the material of the world and we begin to live and honour these depths accordingly. Berry’s vision seeks to reclaim and honour the spirit that he argued is present in every mode of being in the world, this same spirit that Teilhard identified as being an integral reality with the physical reality. Unlike Teilhard, Berry seemed more aware of the very real obstacles which could prevent the realisation of his vision and so his vision is arguably less teleological. Indeed, in *The Universe Story*, with Swimme, he offers an alternative vision and outcome to the Ecozoic. This he terms as ‘the technozoic’ and is described in *The Universe Story* as “a future of increased exploitation of Earth as resource, all for the benefit of humans”<sup>631</sup>. Berry maintained that in order for the Ecozoic to be achieved, what was required was not only a halt to the destruction of the planet but the significantly more challenging work to “alter the mode of consciousness that is responsible for such deadly activities.”<sup>632</sup> In this way, consciousness for Berry played a hugely determining role in the future of Earth. What was more complex in his ideas is the way in which he implicated consciousness and physical development. This idea will be explored in more detail in chapter three.

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<sup>628</sup>Ibid., p155

<sup>629</sup>De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*.

<sup>630</sup>De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. *Making of A Mind*. UK: Harper & Row, 1965, p306

<sup>631</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p15

<sup>632</sup>Ibid., p251

## 2.9.2 Plurality, unity and energy – differentiation, subjectivity and communion

In *The Human Phenomenon* Teilhard writes that “plurality, unity and energy are the three aspects of matter.”<sup>633</sup> By plurality Teilhard meant that the same atoms which compose the universe also combine to create different forms within the universe such as sand and rain for example. Teilhard writes “matter degrades endlessly.”<sup>634</sup> The use of the word ‘degrade’ in this instance is not a value judgement but a descriptive statement: matter breaks down into its most basic components. Even in their degraded state, Teilhard claims that these atoms are united in domain through their co-extensiveness with that of every other atom while also having a collective unity which makes them mutually interdependent. The final aspect of matter that Teilhard presents is energy and Teilhard defines energy as “the measure of what is transferred from one atom to another in the process of their transformations.”<sup>635</sup> Teilhard states that although these three aspects are present in matter that they cannot be split apart and studied independently from the rest, just as the universe cannot be split apart in its physical reality. The universe, he states, constitutes “a system, a totum, and a quantum: a system in its multiplicity – a totum in its unity – a quantum in its energy”.<sup>636</sup> A system because it is held together and functions as an organised whole by the interconnection of its parts. A totum because “woven in a single piece according to a process that is one and the same, but that never repeats itself from point to point, the stuff of the universe fits only one description: structurally it forms a whole.”<sup>637</sup> A quantum in its energy because “the whole must express itself in a global capacity for action whose partial resultant, moreover, we find in each one of us”<sup>638</sup>, that is, in each particle is held a quantum of energy that is contained in the whole.

Berry re-interprets this classification of Teilhard’s in his articulation of what he termed the governing principle of the universe as presented in his books *Dream of the Earth, The Universe Story* and in other writings. This principle, according to Berry, is that the universe shows itself in three modalities which he names as: differentiation, subjectivity and communion. According to Berry this is a summary of the universe as a whole and it is these three principles that “have controlled the entire evolutionary

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<sup>633</sup>De Chardin, Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*. p12

<sup>634</sup>Ibid.

<sup>635</sup>Ibid., p13

<sup>636</sup>Ibid., p14

<sup>637</sup>Ibid., p15

<sup>638</sup>Ibid., p16

process”<sup>639</sup>. Differentiation holds as the primordial expression of the universe. It states that there are no two things the same within the universe, that the universe moves towards diversity (plurality/system); subjectivity is the interiority of every being (energy/quantum), that which accords us our difference and as noted in section 2.6.1 ‘Spirituality as a dimension of being and as a mode of being’ has a strong correlation with spirituality and lastly; communion, the relatedness of each reality of the universe with every other reality in the universe (unity/totum)<sup>640</sup>.

In other writings, Berry names this principle as the cosmological model of the Trinity<sup>641</sup>. This cosmological model is drawn from his understanding that the universe presents itself in these three modalities of differentiation, interiority and communion. In this model, Berry states that the Father is presented as the principle of differentiation; the Son as “the icon, the word, the principle of inner articulation”<sup>642</sup> or interiority; and the Holy Spirit as the principle of communion, the “bonding force holding all things together in a creative, compassionate embrace.” The Father is He who divides himself, the Son is He who brings life into being and the Holy Spirit is that which holds all in communion. This thinking Berry argues can be recognised in Aquinas who wrote that “in all creatures is found the trace of the Trinity.”<sup>643</sup> It is worth producing the entire sentence from Aquinas as cited by Berry here in order to emphasis his influence on Berry’s identification of this cosmological principle of Interiority, Differentiation and Communion. The sentence reads:

in all creatures there is found the trace of the Trinity, inasmuch as in every creature are found some things which are necessarily reduced to the divine Persons as to their cause. For every creature subsists in its own being, and has a form, whereby it is determined to a species, and has relation to something else. Therefore as it is a created substance, it represents the cause and principle; and so in that manner it shows the Person of the Father, Who is the “principle from no principle.” According as it has a form and species, it represents the Word as the form of the thing made by art is from the conception of the craftsman. According as it has relation of order, it represents the Holy Ghost, inasmuch as He is love, because the order of the effect to something else is from the will of the Creator.<sup>644</sup>

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<sup>639</sup>Berry, Thomas. “The Ecological Age” in *The Dream of the Earth*.pp36-49:44

<sup>640</sup>Ibid., p45

<sup>641</sup>Berry, Thomas. “The Role of the Church in the Twenty-first Century” in *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*. Maryknoll New York: Orbis, 2009, pp46-58

<sup>642</sup>Ibid., p56

<sup>643</sup>Thomas Aquinas cited by Berry in “The Wisdom of the Cross’ in *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*.pp82-95:86.

<sup>644</sup>Ibid., p86-87

Berry re-interprets this as the fundamental order and manner in which the universe came into being and the way in which it is sustained in that order. It is unclear to what extent Aquinas influenced Teilhard's naming of the three aspects of matter. This principle, however has had a significant impact on the way in which Berry views the role of spirituality and subjectivity in the universe. It also has an impact in how he views the relation between the universal and the particular and the human relation to and within the universe. Berry also states that it can provide Christians with a new way of understanding the Trinity in light of new information from the physical sciences into the functioning of the universe<sup>645</sup>.

### 2.9.3 A time-developmental universe arriving at self-reflective consciousness

Consciousness and in particular human self-reflective consciousness was a central element of Teilhard's thought, as mentioned above. He viewed it as an extraordinarily significant development in the universe which he believed bestowed on humanity a particular significance. He uses Julian Huxley's phrase of how the human is "nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself."<sup>646</sup> The human "is that point of emergence in nature at which this deep cosmic evolution culminates and declares itself."<sup>647</sup> Using the words 'declares itself' is powerful in that it illustrates the strong anthropic principle in Teilhard's thought. It also conveys on the evolutionary process a 'desire' to be acknowledged and to be known. This in Teilhard's view is achieved through human consciousness. Thomas Berry was also deeply attentive to the ways in which consciousness works in the world. Although never as explicit as Teilhard was in his writings on it, it was a constant underlying theme and in particular the way it shaped human action. According to Berry, our consciousness is shaped by our stories and when our stories fail, we become alienated and as a result, destructive<sup>648</sup>. At such times, Berry

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<sup>645</sup>Ibid.

<sup>646</sup>Delio, Iliia. "Teilhard's Deep Catholicity and Conscious Evolution". *Living Cosmology. Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe Conference*, p5

<sup>647</sup>Ibid., p5

<sup>648</sup>Alienation is a theme that recurs in Berry's writings. While Teilhard was concerned with the effect of apathy on people and wished to cultivate a 'zest for life' through the activation of spiritual energy, Berry was concerned with alienation. He has written in *The Sacred Universe*, that alienation is the oldest and most universal human experience. Berry claims it as part of the human condition and he relates it to

argues, while also suggesting that the present is such a time, there needs to be a re-shaping and change of consciousness which he argued is achieved by story<sup>649</sup>.

Related to this is how both Teilhard and Berry viewed the universe as being as much a psychic (spirit/mind) reality as a physical reality. Berry shared Teilhard's conceptualisation of the universe itself as sacred, revealing and manifesting the divine and that this sacred psychic, spiritual dimension cannot be separated from its physical dimension<sup>650</sup>.

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"the difficulty of discovering our personal identity and our proper place in the universe." Berry, Thomas. "Alienation" in *The Sacred Universe*. pp35-48:35

<sup>649</sup>Berry, Thomas. "The New Story" in *The Dream of the Earth*. pp123-137

<sup>650</sup>In his essay "The Earth Community" published in *The Dream of the Earth*, Berry states that when we destroy "living forms of this planet" the first consequence is that we destroy modes of divine presence" illustrating his view that the universe, and Earth, are the primary manifestation of the divine. pp6-12:11

## Conclusion

This chapter recounted the pre-figurative aspects of *The Universe Story*. In doing this it was divided into two parts. The first part began with the clarification of key concepts relevant to the narrative including teleology, the anthropic principle and spirituality. These concepts are relevant to cosmic narratives in general, and specifically to *The Universe Story*, in the way in which the emergence and identity of the human being is narrated within a larger contextualising history. In locating these concepts in their varying degrees within the narrative we are able to establish the way in which the narrative does or does not infer a creator as well as the significance that is assigned to the human within the cosmos, analysis that will be continued in the next two chapters. This was followed by a presentation of the content of the narrative, *The Universe Story*, locating it in relation to other genres in cosmic narration such as ‘the epic of evolution’ and ‘big history’. Although there are overlaps and some parallels between these cosmic narratives, *The Universe Story* is distinct from both these movements in light of its emphasis on reality as containing a spiritual as well as a material dimension. This section also examined the primary critiques that are made of *The Universe Story*. Included in this is the potential for the mythologisation of science to devalue everyday experiences of the natural world, in addition to experience of the universe requiring mediation either by instrument or technology. In its narrative form, *The Universe Story* offers another form of experience to that of sensory experience through its creation of a proposed ‘world’. It interprets the universe as imbued with meaning and offers this world to the reader’s imagination with the possibility of refiguring the reader’s life. *The Universe Story* is also correctly criticised for its suppression of the ‘Other’ and its omission of any cultural, social or political analysis. In focusing on the cosmic and in particular the overarching cosmological context of the human, *The Universe Story* ignores much of the human story and fails to critique those cultural worldviews and practices that contribute to environmental degradation and to oppression between humans. This ‘one story fits all’ is also, unwittingly, a testament to the authors own privileged locatedness in being able to narrate it. It also suggests that *The Universe Story* is not offering a framework for change, be it cultural, political or even environmental, which is further emphasised in the omission of any explicit guidelines in the narrative of how one ought to act, but rather *The Universe Story* appears to be focused on the effect of the narrative on the individual, specifically its reader.

The analysis then moved to the second element of pre-figuration: the history and development of *The Universe Story*, namely the history, tradition and influences of its authors. In tracing Berry's intellectual journey, Vico's influence on historical ages in addition to his conviction for the need for a wisdom that is poetic, can be identified in Berry's writings. So too can Berry's engagement with Asian thought and the incorporation of classical Confucian ideas of the status between the human and the cosmos into his thinking. All of these factors had an influence on Berry's primary preoccupation which was with religion, and the experiences from which religions arise, in addition to how religions might now contribute to the ecological crisis. Berry saw the function of religion as providing interpretive categories to understand the human condition and playing a central role in the formation of consciousness. Traditional religions, he argued, have yet to incorporate the new knowledge of a time-developmental universe into their systems of thought, and so have been, as yet, unable to respond with any cultural depth to the ecological crisis<sup>651</sup>. Simultaneously, Berry viewed the human-Earth reconciliation as primarily a religious task and identified the need for the development of a renewed religious consciousness in addressing it. He stressed the need for religions to move from anthropological and theological concerns to what he named as a 'cosmology of religion' where the universe itself will be read like a sacred script. While the concept of spirituality was also central to Berry's writings, he never provided a definition of his understanding of it. This analysis revealed that Berry understood spirituality as both a way of being in the world and an intrinsic aspect of being. It is that which both facilitates and constitutes relationship and can be most simply understood as the 'communion' which binds all together, while affording a creative dimension to each being. These points again reveal Berry's tradition of Christian thought, including his strong Trinitarian thinking, which *The Universe Story* is heir to.

Teilhard de Chardin also influenced Berry greatly. Teilhard brought scientific discovery together with a concern for its implication for the human being and his own Christian faith. His work *The Human Phenomenon* in many ways, paved the way for *The Universe Story*. Three key ideas and commitments that both men shared, although articulated differently, are: an anticipatory vision gained from the fact that they both

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<sup>651</sup>Berry, Thomas. "The Cosmology of Religions" in *The Sacred Universe*. pp117-128:70. Later in the same essay Berry identifies these traditional religions as Christianity, Judaism and Islam.



believed the historical universe is incomplete and that hope lies in a yet to be materialised future; that the universe is structured through the three aspects of interiority, differentiation and communion; that the universe develops through time and that the universe (and matter) has a spiritual component. Teilhard provided a big vision, a grand synthesis of the human within the universe and Thomas Berry with the addition of the knowledge of physics provided by Brian Swimme, put it into narrative form, with each of these ideas operative in *The Universe Story*. Berry was also influenced by Aquinas from whom Berry takes the idea of ‘differentiation’ while also being influenced by his efforts in defending the intrinsic goodness of the natural world. Although Berry was influenced by both Teilhard and Aquinas, he is selective in what he brings forward of their thought. He does not include Teilhard’s Christology nor does he ultimately maintain the same views as Aquinas on God, the universe and the human. Rather, Berry chooses particular aspects of their thought to enrich his own project, that of the resacralisation of Earth. This distancing takes on more import when taken into consideration with Berry’s views on spirituality and religion.

In examining these elements of pre-figuration in *The Universe Story* we observe Berry’s strong association of symbol, story and religion. Each of these, in overlapping ways, constituting the way a person understands herself in a world. Myth for Berry activates the deep structures Berry believed to be operative in the human psyche. In doing so it releases a ‘psychic energy’ which both sustains and orients people. This suggests that for Berry, story is never story for its own sake but is linked to an understanding of ‘being-in-the-world’ as well as having an epistemological and ethical function. As Grassie and others have pointed out, that while *The Universe Story* as a mythologisation of science is effective as a myth for social transformation, especially for an endangered planet, the analysis of these pre-figurative aspects illustrates that Berry’s motivation is not primarily the social but the personal. It challenges the idea that *The Universe Story* is a literary fiction, an aesthetic work or indeed a cosmic narrative for the sake of narrating the cosmic. Nor is it simply a mythic rendering of science. Rather this analysis highlights Berry’s commitment to the role and function of religion in orienting a society, even while he neglects central components of his own tradition, reasons for which will be examined in the following chapter. He uses the narrative not towards social transformation but with the possibility of transformation of the individual person, with the hope perhaps, that such individual transformation will lead to broader social transformation, as in Confucianism where in transforming

oneself, one effects transformation in society and also in the larger cosmos. In this Berry was articulating his belief that it is not material improvement or progress which develops the human, but a development of the human subject, whereby Berry uses subjectivity interchangeably with spirit. This strong religious bent of the narrative further suggests a deeper motivation than 'only' addressing the ecological crisis. It is rather an appeal to the 'deep psychic structures' of the human in order to generate the 'psychic energy' and religious consciousness needed, Berry argued, to address contemporary human challenges, including alienation and enervation, in addition to the ecological crisis. The manner in which Swimme and Berry do this and specifically the world that they propose will be examined in the following chapter.

## Chapter three. The configuration of *The Universe Story*: an analysis of language, structure and style

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I identified the pre-figurative aspects of *The Universe Story*. This step was to identify and analyse external sources of reference of the narrative and is the first step in the explanatory process of the narrative. I began by clarifying key terms and concepts operative in *The Universe Story*, followed by the content of the narrative and then located it in the context of other genres which also narrate a cosmic history, while also documenting the primary critiques associated with such narratives. In the second part of that chapter, I identified key aspects of the tradition from which the narrative emerged, including Berry's particular historical context and intellectual history, in addition to the key ideas and thinkers who explicitly influenced *The Universe Story*. This pre-figurative step of the process revealed the strong religious bent of the narrative, and Swimme and Berry's particular focus on transformation of the person.

This chapter examines the way in which *The Universe Story* is configured and the manner in which the plot is constructed. This concrete process allows identification of the 'point of view' of the work, in addition to possible meanings of the narrative that are implicit in the authors' style. It primarily includes an identification of the language and structure of the narrative. It is style, Ricoeur states, which brings together event and meaning and is the means through which the author's viewpoint is expressed<sup>652</sup>. This is achieved through the language that is used and relates to the power of figurative language to re-describe reality and its role in the transfer of meaning. The analysis is divided into two parts. The first part involves examining the content of the text, i.e. what the text is saying about the universe (somebody says something to someone about something<sup>653</sup>). This is done through an analysis of content and language, expanding on what was partially begun in chapter two with a description of the content of the narrative, and continued here through an investigation of the structure and configuration

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<sup>652</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "The hermeneutical function of distanciation" in *From text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*. p81

<sup>653</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p22

of the narrative (sense). Through this first level analysis, we are led to a second level analysis, that of the style or *technē* at work in the narrative, although there is not a definitive distinction between these two levels of analysis - content and discourse. The language that we use in narration is involved in the reality that is told and so discourse is not something superimposed by the narrator and that can be explicitly separated or independently identified but is incorporated into the very strategy by which the narrative is articulated<sup>654</sup>. The second part of this exploration will identify the reference of the narrative through analysis of the language, style and structure of the text.

This returns me to Ricoeur's account of philosophy as a response to a non-philosophical reality that precedes it, which Ricoeur terms as 'Life' or 'Being'. Ricoeur's concern was that philosophy not get tied to a singular method but that it maintain the capacity to subordinate method in order to reach what Ricoeur names as a more fundamental conception of our 'truth-relation' to beings and to Being. In this sense, philosophy should serve not simply as a methodology for a rational analysis but also as a guide towards a reflective subjectivity<sup>655</sup>. It is in this vein that Ricoeur leaves open fundamental philosophical questions, questions which can never be exhausted but demand to be revisited because of the ever changing nature of our knowledge of the world and of human being in the world. These incorporate not only epistemological questions of what can we know about the world, but as of equal import, what can we know of our 'self' as in and part of this world. By definition of not being tied to one strict methodological approach, hermeneutics is free to pursue such questions. Hermeneutics invites philosophical questions not in a strictly analytic sense but in that it re-opens questions, particularly through narrative discourse, about the relationship between language and life, reference and reality and meaning and truth, and that in our understanding of these relations, our self is shaped<sup>656</sup>. Ricoeur has argued that there are modes of thought other than those based, for example he states, on Greek, Cartesian or Kantian thought. Literary genres, in particular biblical narrative, being such a mode of

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<sup>654</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Interpretive Narrative" in *Figuring the Sacred. Religion, Narrative and Imagination*. p181

<sup>655</sup>Looking back on his work and career Ricoeur writes that "it is indeed the fate of human subjectivity that is at stake throughout the whole of my work." His later philosophical works were directed towards an ethical understanding of human action and behaviour. Ricoeur, Paul. "Reply to G.B. Madison" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. pp93-95:95

<sup>656</sup>Fodor, James. *Christian Hermeneutics. Paul Ricoeur and the Refiguring of Theology*. Aware of the difficulties associated with Fodor's 'Christian Hermeneutics' (as articulated in chapter one, footnote 162) I use it here for the succinct articulation Fodor highlights between language and life, reference and reality and meaning and truth.

thought which gives “rise to philosophical thinking.”<sup>657</sup> The narrative of *The Universe Story* by its subject matter gives rise to such philosophical and theological thinking as concerns the structure and being of the world, and the role and place of the human within that world. Through the investigation of the sense and reference of the narrative, this chapter seeks to determine where the text lies on such fundamental questions which are identified as the sense and reference of the narrative is explained.

The chapter will first focus on the way in which *The Universe Story* can be read as a historical narrative, focusing on the change from an understanding of the universe that was static and spatial to one that develops through time. This section will also focus on the way Swimme and Berry narrate this history of the universe to create meaning and to orient the reader towards a possible future. In the second section, the way in which the narrative employs figurative language to express the sacred will also be examined. This refers to the authors’ style or *techné*. The narrative draws on metaphor and symbolism to designate the universe of the text as a sacred universe. This in turn proffers a surplus of meaning in the narrative and establishes a new ‘logic of meaning’ between the human and the cosmos.

The narrative will then be examined as a ‘creation story’. This will be done in light of Ricoeur’s essay “Thinking Creation”<sup>658</sup>. Ricoeur’s essay is insightful here in the manner in which he interprets creation narratives in their approach to the ‘origin’ and the theological implications of this for understanding the relationship between the ‘creator’ and the ‘creation’. These three components of structure, language and theological and philosophical implications lead to an identifiable reference of the narrative, in other words, the proposed world of the text.

### 3.1 *The Universe Story* as an historical narrative

*The Universe Story* sets out to recount what it terms as the ‘time-developmental’ story of the universe through reciting in chronological sequence the major events documented by the natural sciences of the universe’s origins and development. Swimme and Berry begin the narrative with a prologue entitled ‘The Story’ where the first

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<sup>657</sup>Ricoeur, Paul & LaCocque André. “Preface” in *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*. (Pellauer, David trans.) Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998, ppix-xix: xv

<sup>658</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Thinking Creation” in Ricoeur, Paul & LaCocque André. *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*.pp31-67

sentence takes the reader back to the beginning of the universe, measured in human years. They write “fifteen billion years ago, in a great flash, the universe flared forth into being”<sup>659</sup> and thus provide the reader with a chronological age of the universe while simultaneously giving the universe a history<sup>660</sup>. They then provide an account of the different ‘happenings’ (galactic, solar, Earth, life, human) in the universe in a sequential time-frame. The chapters are presented in a narrative form, as in story-telling, but additionally the historical and chronological emphasis is underscored in an appendix at the back of the book which contains what the authors term ‘a universe timeline’, and which in report form, links dates to events. This time-line corresponds to the sequence of chapters in the narrative. Thus, while Swimme and Berry narrate their interpretation of the universe, they are also presenting their account of the development of the universe as historically accurate and rooting their chronology of the universe in the empirically verifiable models of the natural sciences. In this manner the narrative understands itself to be addressing events ‘that actually happened’. This it could be argued is the first ‘truth claim’ of the narrative and lays the foundation for the way in which the authors will present ‘the reality’ of the universe<sup>661</sup>.

To confirm their historical account, Swimme and Berry include a description of the era-defining discoveries of the last five hundred years, including those of Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein and Neils Bohr and how these discoveries have impacted on the current understanding of the physical universe. This allows the authors to trace the current understanding of the development of the universe in the physical sciences. In what is possibly a further means of verification of their narrative, the text incorporates many and various empirical details such as “carbon is composed of six protons, six neutrons, and six electrons, and was assembled in the centers of stars...but carbon forms less than a millionth of the planet Earth”<sup>662</sup>, or geological phrases and terminology such as “the Phanerozoic eon has three eras: the Paleozoic, from 570 to 245 million years ago; the Mesozoic, from 245 to 67 million years ago: and the Cenozoic, from 67 million years ago to the present.”<sup>663</sup> In tandem with this history and science the narrative also calls on the names of Romantic poets and writers, Walt

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<sup>659</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p7

<sup>660</sup>Since the publication of *The Universe Story* in 1994, this age has been revised and it is now estimated that the Universe is 13.8 billion years old.

<sup>661</sup>See section 1.4.1

<sup>662</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p 37

<sup>663</sup>*Ibid.*, p115

Whitman and Emily Dickinson to name two, attributing their poetic sensibility to the “intricate creation of the Milky Way” and interpreting the feelings they articulated in their writings as “an evocation of being.”<sup>664</sup> In doing this the narrative involves different disciplines in the narration, such as chemistry, geography, and literature, but begins to liberally re-interpret the foundation of these disciplines by linking human capacity and attributes to that beyond the individual who expresses them, in this specific example to the galaxies<sup>665</sup>.

Ricoeur presents three levels for writing history. These are: documentary history which possesses criteria of verification; explanatory history (which includes the roles of sociological and economical forces) and; poetic – the great plot constructions forming the self-understanding of a nation through its founding narrative<sup>666</sup>. *The Universe Story* includes these three aspects such as scientific criteria of verification as illustrated above. In addition to this it provides a glossary of scientific terms as well as an extensive bibliography for each chapter. In the glossary it defines such terms, for example, as ‘amino acids’, ‘cellular cytoplasm’, ‘DNA’, ‘entropy’, and ‘phenotype’. It secondly explains how the construction of civilisations, and specifically nations, have combined to contribute to the current environmental condition of the planet, although it does this to a much lesser degree, and in a more broad and generalised way than it describes these empirical forces and their various consequences<sup>667</sup>. Finally, it aims through its ‘great plot construction’ towards an adjustment of self-understanding. This self-understanding extends from the individual human being part of a nation to include the human as being first and foremost a part and participant in the planetary system, as well as the universe as a totality. There are drawbacks to each of these approaches in writing history. As these limitations have been addressed in chapter two, section 2.4, I will only re-name them here. They are: the privileging of scientific knowledge over other forms of knowledge; the inadequate representation of human socio-economic

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<sup>664</sup>Ibid., p40

<sup>665</sup>This is indicative of the style of Berry who frequently mixed disciplines. Eaton argues that although Berry was versed in several disciplines that his work is not in any one conventional form. Berry himself described his writing genre as “being that of interpretative historical essays” while Eaton adds that others “may depict it more akin to poetry, mythology or story-telling.” Eaton, Heather. “Feminist or Functional Cosmology? Ecofeminist Musings on Thomas Berry’s Functional Cosmology” in *Ecotheology*, p73

<sup>666</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* / Paul Ricoeur. p85

<sup>667</sup>See chapter eleven and twelve in *The Universe Story: “Rise of Nations”* and “The Modern Revelation”.

relations to each other and how these effect the planet; and the ‘one –story fits all’ problems of narrative.

I return only to Sideris’ argument on the ‘experience’ or cosmic encounter, as this is related to the historical aspect of the narrative, and is dependent on how the universe and Earth are conceptualised. In her argument that we have no direct experience of the universe, Sideris is making a clear division between the universe and the natural world. In *The Universe Story*, this division appears not to be present. It is not experience of a universe that is separate to Earth that Swimme and Berry are advocating, but an experience of the universe through the natural world. In *The Universe Story*, the universe is presented as the ‘ultimate context of being’ while Earth is presented as a particular aspect of that being. The narrative calls for such an ‘intimacy of relatedness’ with the “various natural phenomena whereby the universe functions, especially to the sequence of the seasons, to the rain and the wind, to the thunder and lightning and surging of the sea, to the stars.”<sup>668</sup> Here we witness the narrative presenting the ‘natural phenomena’ of Earth as a manner in which the universe functions. To experience the Earth, in this narrative, is to experience the universe, an experience of the whole through its part. This is connected to the historical aspect of the narrative which presents the universe as developing through time, and the formation of Earth as a continuity of that development in time. These are phenomena which can be experienced directly through Earth without mediation by instrument. In their narrative, Berry and Swimme highlight the connection between larger physical forces and the chemical and biological forces of Earth which allows them to interpret these experience as of ‘the universe’.

### 3.1.1 From a spatial to a temporal awareness of the universe

As the narrative itself states, it is an explicit aim of *The Universe Story* to engage the reader in the realisation of the historical, or to use the phrase of the text, the ‘time-developmental’ aspect of the universe. Swimme and Berry claim that “the most significant change in the twentieth century is our passage from a sense of cosmos to a sense of cosmo-genesis...where time is experienced as an evolutionary sequence of

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<sup>668</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.pp244-245



irreversible transformations.”<sup>669</sup> One of the insights that Berry drew in this movement from a spatial to a temporal understanding of the universe, was that humans form a single community with all other living beings that exist on Earth. The other was that “the universe story, the Earth story, the life story, and the human story – all are a single story. Even though the story can be told in a diversity of ways, its continuity is indisputable.”<sup>670</sup> There is therefore, he consistently argued, no ‘radical discontinuity’ between the human order of reality and the non-human order of reality. This he states is how we must best read our present historical situation. It is this understanding of the universe as evolutionary as opposed to Newtonian - a static and fixed universe - that the authors are specifically seeking to convey. It is their explicit intention to illustrate that we are historic beings and that we are bound into the history of the universe just as much as we are bound into our own human history. Emergence is a word that is used repeatedly to express how the authors narrate that connection backwards. They write that “this story incorporates the human into the irreversible historical sequence of transformations”<sup>671</sup> and firmly situate the human within the process of an unfolding universe.

It is interesting to assess this claim by Swimme and Berry in light of Ricoeur’s insights on the correlation between time and narrative. Ricoeur elaborates on two readings of time, a cosmological reading which he terms a ‘time of the world’ and a psychological reading which is a ‘time of the soul’. According to Ricoeur, time escapes this unification of our individual experience with this larger cosmic time. As humans we have no dominion over it, practically or conceptually. As a result of this, time, Ricoeur argues, can only be grasped through narration and becomes “the referent of the narrative, whereas the function of the narrative is to articulate time in such a way as to give it the form of human experience.”<sup>672</sup> Ricoeur argues that “the very idea of narrative function, as distinct from that of form or narrative structure, was already directed toward the idea that narrating is a speech act that points outside of itself, toward a re-working of the practical field of the one who receives it. That it is the *temporal* dimension of this practical field which is affected.”<sup>673</sup> For Ricoeur the very function of

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<sup>669</sup>Ibid., p2-3

<sup>670</sup>Berry, Thomas. “The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth” in *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*, pp 35-45:41

<sup>671</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p238

<sup>672</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p40

<sup>673</sup>Ibid., p41, italics my own.

the narrative is to make time human. He states that “if there is no one to recount the history of the universe since the Big Bang, if there is no narration of great cosmological events, there is no time. In this way I make narration the distinctive criterion separating psychical time from cosmological time. It is by this feature that time is snatched from physics.”<sup>674</sup>

In *The Universe Story*, presented as a chronologically accurate representation of the development of the universe, the narrative functions in this very way. The narrative attempts to connect cosmological/physical time with historical time and through narration to make time intelligible in order to create a cosmological context for the human. This highlights human dependence on preceding events and the independence of these events from both the human being and human understanding. It aims to locate the human within the cosmos. Time, in particular cosmic time, is a central issue of the narrative. The universe is repeatedly described as an emergent self-organising process, “a cosmic process expressing itself in a continuing sequence of irreversible transformations”<sup>675</sup> where “each event is woven together with all others in the fabric of the space-time continuum.”<sup>676</sup> Time becomes what marks the emergence or creation of a new universe structure or transformation. Time, connected to events, also becomes, the narrative informs us, that which is irreversible and non-repeatable in the existing world order. In *Journey of the Universe* this is explicitly stated when Swimme and Tucker write “We are beginning to understand time as a measure of creative emergence...time in a cosmological sense, is the creativity of the universe itself. There was a time for bringing forth hydrogen atoms. There was a time for bringing forth the galaxies.”<sup>677</sup> This creativity, the narrative claims, is fundamentally the creativity of the universe, but the narrative states, is a dimension of all beings since the same creativity which drew the universe into existence is present in each being as they are part of this universe. This emphasis placed on the vast expanse of cosmic time and the markedly recent arrival of the human was not to confine human significance to what Sideris terms the ‘scaled-up species level’, but rather, it can be argued, to facilitate an appropriation of that creativity within individuals through this new narration of time. In *The Universe Story* the human becomes the bearer of a larger historical and cosmic time. Grim states that in

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<sup>674</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* / Paul Ricoeur. p87

<sup>675</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p226

<sup>676</sup>Ibid., p21

<sup>677</sup>Swimme & Tucker. *Journey of the Universe*. p109

this regard Berry was influenced by Augustine's notion of building future time through an awareness of the past. In the case of Berry, time becomes 'contained' within the human. Grim writes that:

By entering into these profound meditations on time within ourselves, we are able to intuit the close interrelationship of cultural and genetic impulses. These primal, fecund and unconscious forces erupt into human society on the level of dream or vision revelation whose interpretation requires activation of human imagination and intuition. Thus, Augustine's remarkable achievement of integrating individual self-awareness into larger cosmic processes remains a significant influence in Berry's thought.<sup>678</sup>

Berry in his essay "Spiritual Traditions and the Human Community" remarks that "the new cosmological story...is a story of development, of time that needs to be validated from within."<sup>679</sup> This validation from 'within' he links to the recognition of the spiritual dynamic he believed to be inherent in cosmic processes and which the narrative also links to creativity in the human. Thus, in the narrative we witness an attempt to unify the time of the world with the time of the 'soul', by implicating the time of the 'soul', and thus the human life, in the physical development of the world in time. This point will become important in the analysis of the configuration of the human in chapter four.

### 3.1.2 Swimme and Berry's use of narrative to create meaning in history

Ricoeur argues that narrative resists any ambition to "bring about a totalization of history entirely permeable to the light of concepts, and recapitulated in the eternal present of absolute knowledge."<sup>680</sup> Furthermore, narrative, Ricoeur states, is an inadequate medium for thinking about history, even if the differences between history and fiction are exceeded by the manner in which they interweave in narrative structure. He writes that the presupposition of Kant, introduced in his essays on the philosophy of history, is to think of "history in the sense of a collective singular...without it, there would only be different human species and finally different races. To think of history as one is to posit the equivalence between three ideas: one time, one humanity, and one

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<sup>678</sup>Grim, John. "Time, History, Historians in Thomas Berry's work" in *CrossCurrents*, p231

<sup>679</sup>Berry, Thomas. 'Spiritual Traditions and the Human Community' in *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*. p6

<sup>680</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 3. p255

history.”<sup>681</sup> Narrative identity, Ricoeur argues, is that of a person or a character including collective entities (Ricoeur provides the example of Biblical Israel and the Jewish people) who are afforded the status of quasi-characters. In this manner Ricoeur argues that the notion of plot gives precedence to the plural over the collective singular. Therefore, Ricoeur argues that “there is no plot of all plots capable of equaling the idea of one humanity and one history.”<sup>682</sup>

It is for just such a reason that Ashley criticises the approach of *The Universe Story*. *The Universe Story*, he claims, recasts a history of origins as a “universe story.”<sup>683</sup> Ashley poses the question: what kinds of techniques or readings are necessary for a “Christian theological presentation and interpretation of natural history?”<sup>684</sup> and furthermore “what parameters should govern the reading of the universe’s *history*, its *story*?”<sup>685</sup>. Ashley claims that *The Universe Story* is the most prominent example of theological genres which attempt to read the history of the universe, in terms of both science and religion, but he argues that there are serious flaws in how this is done. While Ashley acknowledges that developments in science do require us to rethink how we tell our stories of origin, and that the narrative genre is best placed for articulating our human experience in and of time, he raises a number of criticisms of what he terms the “omnicompetent plot structure”<sup>686</sup> of *The Universe Story*. Among these criticisms, according to Ashley, is that *The Universe Story* suppresses the memory of past suffering and therefore avoids the question of suffering. In addition, the equanimity that Ashley identifies in the narrative, he argues, saps the urgency from the environmental concerns the book hopes to address. According to Ashley the text needs other genres to interrupt its telling so it does not collapse into a “triumphant metanarrative.”<sup>687</sup> In terms of meta-narrative, there is a question to be addressed here in relation to definition. Swimme and Berry, it must be noted, retain the word ‘story’ in the title of their account. This leaves

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<sup>681</sup>Ibid., p258

<sup>682</sup>Ibid., p259. Although admitting that it is thinking of ‘a different order’, to illustrate this point Ricoeur provides the example of how there are four Gospels to recount what he terms “the event held to be the turning point of history in the confession of the early Christian church.” This prevents, Ricoeur argues, any theological thinking which would proceed on the foundation of “a univocal superplot.” (Ibid., p332, footnote no.15)

<sup>683</sup>Ashley, J Matthew. “Reading the Universe Story Theologically: The Contribution of a Biblical Narrative Imagination” in *Theological Studies*. p902

<sup>684</sup>Ibid., p871

<sup>685</sup>Ibid.

<sup>686</sup>Ibid., p887

<sup>687</sup>Ibid., p890

the way open for a narrative that need not necessarily be tied to a singularly all-encompassing and potentially dominating narrative framework but instead a cosmic history told consciously, for re-interpretation. This self-conscious interpretation is further expressed when, in acknowledging the limits of such a narrative, Swimme and Berry call on others to fill in what they themselves cannot<sup>688</sup>. Tucker and Swimme have also stressed the ‘story’ component of their work, *Journey of the Universe*, stating that it is *a* story and not *the* story of the universe, adding that their intention is not to have it universally accepted. Sideris argues however, that by adopting such disclaimers they keep certain criticisms at bay while distancing themselves from what Sideris claims as the story’s rationale as advocated by Berry, that being, that there is only one story<sup>689</sup>. This suggests that the authors are aware of the negative implications associated with the meta-narrative, and indicates their attempts to avoid such associations even while falling into meta-narrative thinking with their claim of ‘one story’, although Berry more so than Tucker. To name their narrative as a ‘story’, and acknowledge its limitations, is not the same as testifying to (or criticising) the structures that allow this privileged perspective to be told (as argued in section 2.4.3.) or why indeed it is this story that should be told, and being transparent, as Megill encourages, in their interpretation.

*The Universe Story* although stated by the authors as mythical in its style, is, as we have identified, and Ashley has argued, historical in its claim. The emphasis of the narrative is on the development of the universe through time and the identification of the ‘role of the human’ within the universe. Grim states that for Berry, history was both a mode for analysis and synthesis which “provided grounding in an ever-changing reality”<sup>690</sup> within which there was included an awareness of the spiritual dimension of existence. In the same article Grim quotes Berry as saying:

The history of humanity cannot be set aside; the spiritual developments, the ancient symbols cannot be ignored.[Hu]mankind must simply become conscious of the deeper and more universal forces at work in its own development. Spirituality is not something that an individual or a school of thought thinks up under some inner pressures for isolation from the vulgar ways of the world into some esoteric realm of interiority. It is rather something of utmost profundity that mystery of

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<sup>688</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p 5.

<sup>689</sup>Sideris, Lisa. “Science as Sacred Myth. Ecospirituality in the Anthropocene Age” in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, p152, footnote 17

<sup>690</sup>Berry, Thomas. “Contemporary Spirituality: The Journey of the Human Community” (1974) cited in Grim John. “Thomas Berry and Indigenous Thought – First Nations and Communion with the Natural World” in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth*. pp123-147:130.

participation expressed in the total way of life, formerly of single cultures, but now of the human community. The discovery of man must include discovery of that high spirituality which has so far supported and directed the human venture. This spirituality imposes itself, just as the inner creative powers of the self impose the poetic vision that cannot be refused by the poet or the artist. It is not a future possibility but a present reality; even though it is little understood, it is already widely experienced.<sup>691</sup>

Grim argues that for Berry, history is not a process which merely describes what happens but is a way in which to recall the numinous in present reality. As Vico, Berry sought to show that providence was at work, not just in sacred time but in profane time and that in fact there was no difference between the two. Berry's commitment therefore, and I argue the commitment of *The Universe Story* understood in this way, is not a history of the meaning of chronological events in the sense that Ricoeur might understand it, nor an over-arching meta-narrative legitimising and privileging the sciences as Ashley might describe it, but can be interpreted as Swimme and Berry's attempt to create meaning through narrative, this meaning being derived from the spirituality that Berry understood as supporting and directing the human venture, a spirituality he claims which 'imposes itself'. Humankind, Berry writes "gets its meaning and value from the symbolic narrative within which it lives"<sup>692</sup>. *The Universe Story* reimagines existence as a single journey of matter and mind that highlights the interconnectedness of all things. Furthermore, matter comes to consciousness 'of itself' in the human and so "begins in a new way to guide itself on into the future"<sup>693</sup>. This is done, in this particular instance, through the medium of narrative which through its capacity to teach connects to other modes of intelligibility such as practical wisdom.

### 3.1.3 The productive re-interpretation of history to 'image' ourselves into the future

Ricoeur is cognisant of the inscrutability of time and the difficulty of trying 'to think time'. Time, he says reveals itself when we attempt to constitute it as belonging "to a constituted order always already presupposed by the work of constitution"<sup>694</sup>. It is not, however, our thinking which fails, Ricoeur states, but rather the impulse "that

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<sup>691</sup>Ibid., p130

<sup>692</sup>Berry, Thomas. "Contemporary Spirituality: The Journey of the Human Community" in *CrossCurrents*, p180

<sup>693</sup>Ibid.

<sup>694</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 3. p261

impels our thinking to posit itself as the master of meaning. Thinking encounters this failure... when time, escaping our will to mastery, surges forth on the side of what, in one way or another, is the true master of meaning.”<sup>695</sup> Time remains inscrutable and that which cannot in any meaningful sense ‘be thought’ and narrative meets its limits in trying to refigure it. This does not however abolish the attempt to do so, but rather calls for it. This Ricoeur connects to historical consciousness and its concomitant ‘interest in anticipation’ which allows us to “believe that heritages from the past can yet be re-interpreted.”<sup>696</sup> This ‘interest in anticipation’, he argues, is already at work both in prior and contemporary practices of communication and so is in continuity with those anticipations which are buried in tradition itself. The acknowledgement of the mystery of time is not a prohibition which is directed against language but rather “gives rise to the exigence to think more and to speak differently.”<sup>697</sup> The reaffirmation of the limits of validity of historical consciousness requires that individuals and the communities to which they belong search for their respective narrative identities. In this manner narrative consists not in resolving such tensions of time but in making them productive.

As stated, Grim writes that the recurring theme in Berry’s writing was the search for meaning in history. According to Grim, Berry emphasised in his teaching that it was possible to find in every culture’s oral history and written texts, scrutiny around the meaning of time. For Berry the term ‘history’ contains a component which is derived from a Biblical sense of sacred purpose in temporal events. Grim states that Berry’s writings contain features of periodisation comparable to those found in the Bible, that bring, a coherence and meaning in history, along with what Grim terms the “exhortatory quality of visionary experiences.”<sup>698</sup> In this manner Berry used his historical telling as an explanation for the conditions of the present and as an orientation towards the future, re-interpreting the narrative identity which Ricoeur claims constitutes us. This was not to make the human the master of meaning, I argue, but a response to that which Ricoeur identifies as needing to think, speak and act differently. In the case of Berry this is called for by recognition that the planet has been ecologically devastated by human activity and so, he argued, what is necessary is to ‘re-

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<sup>695</sup>Ibid.

<sup>696</sup>Ibid., p258

<sup>697</sup>Ibid., p261

<sup>698</sup>Grim, John. “Time, History, Historians in Thomas Berry’s work” in *CrossCurrents*, p226

invent the human'<sup>699</sup>. This re-invention Berry believed could only occur through the stories we tell about who and what we are and the identity that we adopt through these stories<sup>700</sup>. The challenge of history, for Berry, was to be able to image ourselves into new roles demanded by the times we live in and the stories we tell about ourselves. In doing this he both drew on and extended Teilhard's thinking. This connection can be seen when we read in *The Human Phenomenon*:

In every age human beings have believed themselves to be at a 'turning point of history.' And as part of a rising spiral, to some extent they have been right. But at certain moments this impression of transformation is felt much more strongly – and is particularly justified. And it is not exaggerating the importance of our contemporary existences in the least for us to say that there is a fundamental change of course for the world under way in us, and it threatens to crush us... This Earth, billowing with factories, throbbing with enterprise, vibrating with hundreds of new radiations – this great organism ultimately only lives because of and for the sake of a new soul. Beneath the change of age there must lie a change of thought. Yet where are we to look for and locate this kind of renewing subtle alteration, which without appreciably modifying our body has made new beings of us? Nowhere else but in a new intuition that totally alters the physiognomy of the universe in which we move – in other words, in an *awakening*.<sup>701</sup>

Grim interprets Teilhard's "new soul," "change of thought," and "awakening" to contain the germs of the historical perspective which was to be developed by Berry.

Furthermore, he points out the 'tensional nature' of the revelatory event which has the potential to "crush" those who acknowledge it as much as to transform them. Grim argues that in his articulation of the tensional character of awakening, Berry evokes

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<sup>699</sup>Berry writes repeatedly about the need to 're-invent the human'. In an appendix to *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth* he states how the ecological crisis we presently face is beyond the comprehension of our present 'cultural traditions'. As a result of this Berry suggests the need to go beyond existing traditions in order that we may 'give shape' to ourselves. This ability to 'give shape' to ourselves he describes as a fundamental aspect of the human. The 're-invention' of the human Berry declares as the historical mission of our time, elsewhere described by him as 'our great work'. Berry states in this appendix how this work is "to reinvent the human, at the species level, with critical reflection, within the community of life systems, in a time-developmental context, by means of story, and shared dream experience." Berry, Thomas. Appendix to *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*. p117

<sup>700</sup>On this point Eaton states that while there are substantial theories which support the idea that story-telling was the means through which early humans sought to comprehend the world, she suggests that whether human awareness is essentially in narrative form is debatable and argues that Berry does not defend his presupposition in any depth. Eaton, Heather, "Feminist or Functional Cosmology? Ecofeminist Musings on Thomas Berry's Functional Cosmology" in *Ecotheology*, 5 and 6, pp73-94:78, footnote 29

<sup>701</sup>De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*. p148-149



mythic ‘forces’ and ‘sensitivities’. In this manner, Grim argues “Berry gives creative historical analysis to the new cosmology that Teilhard called for.”<sup>702</sup>

### 3.2 The use of figurative language to re-describe the reality of the universe in *The Universe Story*

According to Ricoeur, figurative discourse is the language used to speak about symbols. As demonstrated in the section on ‘The role of figurative discourse in narrative’ such language includes the use of metaphor and symbol<sup>703</sup>. For Ricoeur, figurative language can also be considered as language that says something for the first time and can be a new source of meaning operating at the poetic function of narrative in that it re-describes reality. Ricoeur argues that the myth is grafted onto figurative language, of which symbols and metaphor are an example, and writes that the expressive power of myth lies in the presence of symbols within it. Ricoeur differentiates between a symbolism which is already bound to the configurations of the cosmos and metaphor which is a free association made through language.

One of the significant ways in which *The Universe Story* is configured is through its use of symbolism and metaphor. In the narrative the authors are overt about their style of narration, claiming the status of myth for their ‘story’. They equate the function of their narrative to the myths that are said to have functioned in more traditional societies, stating that “this story is the only way of providing in our times, what the mythic stories of the universe provided for tribal people and for the earlier classical civilizations.”<sup>704</sup> Swimme and Berry describe their account of reality as “best presented in narrative; scientific in its data, mythic in its form.”<sup>705</sup> More than this they claim for it a revelatory status similar to that which ‘founds’ cultures<sup>706</sup>. They explicitly associate meaning with story, informing the reader that we are living in the ‘exciting moment’ when they state our “new meaning, our new story is taking

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<sup>702</sup>Grim, John. “Time, History, Historians in Thomas Berry’s work” in *CrossCurrents*, p237

<sup>703</sup>See section 1.5

<sup>704</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p3

<sup>705</sup>Ibid., p229

<sup>706</sup>They write that “it [*The Universe Story*] compares only with those revelatory narratives on which the various cultures of the world were founded in past ages.” Ibid., p238

shape”<sup>707</sup>. As Ricoeur has argued, meaning is created by constructing a plot and this is achieved through the configuration of events. This is the manner in which the ‘point of view’ of the authors comes into play.

As the narrative already acknowledges its mythic form, this section investigates: what this mythological form constructed through figurative discourse contributes to the narrative; what surplus of meaning is generated through its use of metaphor and symbolism; and what this infers about the reality that is being presented in the narrative. It primarily focuses on the way in which the sacred is constructed in *The Universe Story*. An exploration of the construction of the sacred is an exploration of configuration particularly in the form of language. In doing this, I will first present a phenomenology of the sacred, focusing on the seminal works of Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade. This will be followed by an examination of the way in which this experience is brought to language, in addition to the effective use of such language. This is necessary in relation to *The Universe Story* precisely in its advocacy for a return to the numinous experience prior to its succession by ‘the word’, as well as its conviction that such a return is possible. As argued by Sideris, *The Universe Story* is also founded on a word, the word of science that is also mediated and has a history. Those who narrate this story Sideris has named as “an elite priesthood”<sup>708</sup> while the hero of these stories according to Zakariya is the scientist and those who mediate the larger universe for and to us<sup>709</sup>. Tellingly, the language of science is not the only mode of discourse used in the narration of *The Universe Story*.

Clingerman argues that nature is different from the conceptual frameworks we use to describe it and yet we cannot either experience or think nature outside of these frameworks. He advocates for a re-opening of ‘the book of nature’ as something to be read with its own textuality and an infinite number of possible interpretations which reveal the “depth of our experience of the natural world”<sup>710</sup>. Clingerman suggests that nature approached as a book or indeed ‘a spiritual book’ is necessary as our current views of nature “are impoverished and must be enriched through a recognition of the

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<sup>707</sup>Ibid.

<sup>708</sup>Sideris, Lisa H. *Consecrating Science. Wonder, knowledge and the Natural World*. p75

<sup>709</sup>Zakariya, Naseer Baseem. *Towards a Final Story: Time, Myth and the Origins of the Universe*. p230-231

<sup>710</sup>Clingerman, Forrest. “Reading the Book of Nature: A Hermeneutical Account of Nature for Philosophical Theology” in *Worldviews*, 13, 2009, pp72-91:73

relationship between thought and being”<sup>711</sup>. He argues that nature as a ‘spiritual book’ is predicated on a “more multivalent view of nature, which is neither reductionistic nor materialistic”<sup>712</sup>. To read nature as a spiritual book is one thing but to bring this experience to language as a text is another. Clingerman cautions on the importance in recognising the limitations and insurmountable finitude in putting our interpretation of nature to words. ‘The book’ he states is not the same as nature itself, rather it offers a framework through which to experience “the diversity of the subject of this book - nature itself - in a myriad of ways”<sup>713</sup>.

In their use of figurative language Swimme and Berry undertake their own hermeneutic of the universe. This is not primarily to bring scientific discovery to light but, I argue, to present ‘a sacred universe’ that has the potential to shape both our understanding of what it means to be human, in addition to what and how we perceive the universe to be. The objective at this point is not to explore the validity of Swimme and Berry’s interpretation but to determine the way in which this interpretation is brought to language in the way that it is and why. Here environmental hermeneutics meets figurative language. As argued in Chapter one, environmental hermeneutics can be a form of nature writing that documents an interpretation of nature by the author. Finally, this section examines how all these factors contribute to the ‘logic of meaning’ within the narrative.

### 3.2.1 A phenomenology of the sacred based on the writings of Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade

While this was addressed in chapter one from the perspective of Ricoeur, this section will begin with ways in which the sacred has been delineated by scholars, specifically focusing on the influential, if much commented on works of Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade. This is not to conflate both thinkers but to re-describe ideas of the sacred and how it has been represented as manifesting. Before describing these works in brief, I will first address a number of common criticisms. First among them is that

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<sup>711</sup>Ibid., p77

<sup>712</sup>Ibid., p77

<sup>713</sup>Ibid., p78

Eliade has been criticised for being essentialist and theological in his work<sup>714</sup>. His arrival at universal structures while investigating particular religious manifestations comes, Allen argues, by “highly subjective, uncritical generalisations.”<sup>715</sup> In addition, a phenomenology of religion such as Otto’s and Eliade’s, in positing the sacred as *sui generis*, has also been criticised because it begins with an *a priori* assumption that is “not based upon defensible research but functions as an ideological legitimation to preserve an elite’s control”<sup>716</sup>. Other criticisms include it being an apologetics for the theology of its practitioners with the aim of establishing “the superiority of Christianity”<sup>717</sup>, while more condemn its lack of “conceptual clarity and methodological rigour”<sup>718</sup>. Such criticisms are the result of interpreting the religious experience as being irreducible to explanation in terms of any particular aspect of society, culture or thought, but rather Otto’s and Eliade’s insistence that it must be described on its own terms.

Blum offers a convincing correction to this by renouncing the irreducible religious essence, and the assumption that religion is autonomous from history, while simultaneously arguing that a phenomenology of religion, such as Eliade espoused, is necessary to the study of religion, precisely because of the unique dimension it brings. This, he states, is the “interpretation of the meaning of religion from the perspective of religious experience and consciousness.”<sup>719</sup> Phenomenology also has an advantage, according to Manoussakis, in that it resists the temptation to define religion by means of a concept. He argues that to speak of ‘a phenomenology of religion’ is in fact an error, as this would only make sense “if we knew what religion is, which concept, object, moment, or event can qualify as belonging to religion.”<sup>720</sup> Rather, Manoussakis argues, that all phenomena must be admitted to a ‘phenomenology of religion’ as the exclusion

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<sup>714</sup>Cf. Studstill, Randall. ‘Eliade, Phenomenology, and the Sacred’ in *Religious Studies*. June, 2000, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp177-194

<sup>715</sup>Cf. Allen who suggests a tentative defense of Eliade’s approach based on his philosophical phenomenological method. Allen, Douglas. “Mircea Eliade’s Phenomenological Analysis of Religious Experience” in *The Journal of Religion*, April 1972, vol. 52, no.2, pp170-186:185

<sup>716</sup>Ryba, Thomas. “The Phenomenology of Religion” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*. Seagal, Robert A. (ed.) John Wiley & Sons Publishing, pp91-121:115. Accessed online Proquest Ebook central, last accessed 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020

<sup>717</sup>Ibid., p115

<sup>718</sup>Blum, Jason N. “Retrieving Phenomenology of Religion as a Method for Religious Studies” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. December 2012, Vol. 80, No. 4, pp1025-1048:1026

<sup>719</sup>Ibid., p1026

<sup>720</sup>Manoussakis, John Panteleimon. “Sacred Addictions: On the Phenomenology of Religious Experience” in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. Vol.33, No 1, 2019, pp41-55:43

of some over others cannot be justified. The relevance of Otto and Eliade's approach for this work, is their insistence that the religious experience must be inquired into on its own terms and the common traits that emerge from the description of such an experience. In relation to *The Universe Story*, one of the ways in which to do this is through the language and configuration of the narrative, the religious experience as argued by Ricoeur, being necessarily brought to language. I therefore present relevant aspects of Otto and Eliade's approaches and their particular descriptions of a phenomenology of the sacred, in order to augment Ricoeur's classification of the five traits of a phenomenology of the sacred which draws on both Otto and Eliade, and which will be used as an analytical tool in determining the way in which the sacred is constructed in *The Universe Story*. This has further relevance in that Eliade, and his theory of myth, was a significant influence on Berry's thinking.

Both Eliade and Otto viewed the sacred, not only as existential, but something trans-historical and static. Both begin with experience, and in particular with the religious experience of a universal and transcendent dimension that they name as sacred. In his work, *The Idea of the Holy*<sup>721</sup>, Otto argues that the divine reality is disclosed directly in feelings. These feelings are the content of a numinous experience which is only latterly rationalised in conceptual and articulate terms. This was the "something that the religious feeling is a feeling of."<sup>722</sup> With the word 'numinous' Otto introduces a term to "stand for 'the holy' minus its moral factor...minus its 'rational' aspect"<sup>723</sup>. It is a state of mind and a category that is unique and irreducible. Otto's numinous is 'wholly other' and he is criticised for upholding a theistic dualism<sup>724</sup>. To experience this wholly other is to experience a feeling of dependence, what Otto terms as creature-feeling or creature-consciousness whereby the numinous is felt as objective and outside of the self. The well-documented determinate affective state of such an experience Otto names *mysterium tremendum*<sup>725</sup>. Although what is expressed in the word, Otto states, is negative "what is meant is something absolutely and intensely

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<sup>721</sup>Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy*. USA: Oxford University Press, 1958

<sup>722</sup>Turk, Mladen. "Naturalistic Foundations of the Idea of the Holy. Darwinian Roots of Rudolf Otto's Theology" in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*. Summer 2013, vol. 12, issue 35, pp248-263

<sup>723</sup>Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy*. p6

<sup>724</sup>Ware, Owen. "Rudolf Otto's Idea of the Holy. A Re-appraisal" in *Heythrop Journal*, XLVIII, 2007, pp48-60

<sup>725</sup>Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy*. p12

positive. This pure positive we can experience in feelings...in so far as it arouses them actually in our hearts”<sup>726</sup>. The first of these is that of awe-fulness which is similar to fear, more than fear proper. It causes one ‘to shudder’ and sets free the creature-feeling described by Otto as that of “personal nothingness and submergence”<sup>727</sup> before the numinous. The second is that of ‘over-poweringness’ in the face of ‘might’ or ‘power’. The third is the element of energy or urgency and this interestingly, according to Otto, is the factor more than any that has prompted opposition to the philosophic God of rational speculation. Otto claims that it is clothed in symbolic expressions such as “vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, excitement, activity, impetus”<sup>728</sup>. This non-rational “numinous fact” he argues, is later schematised by rational concepts and yields the category of ‘the holy’. Thus MacKenna points out that ‘holiness’, for Otto, “ ‘contains a clear overplus of meaning’ which the rational faculty cannot decipher”<sup>729</sup>, as this deeper essence of religion, namely the numinous, cannot be comprehended. MacKenna argues that although numinous experiences can be awesome that they will be of little spiritual value “unless they help to trigger a symbolic process which enables us to transcend the overwhelming and destructive energies of the numen”<sup>730</sup>. Otto does not, however, explain how such a transition occurs from the numinous experience of *mysterium tremendum* to the holy experience of faith.

As Otto, Eliade too insists on the irreducibility of the sacred. It is something he argues, that must be understood on its own terms. Eliade however is not concerned with the relation between the rational and the non-rational elements of religion but “the *sacred in its entirety*. The first possible definition of the sacred is that it is *the opposite of the profane*.”<sup>731</sup> Eliade describes the sacred as being the equivalent to a power and as saturated with being. It is, he states, “pre-eminently the real, at once power, efficacy, the source of life and fecundity.”<sup>732</sup> For Eliade, the sacred is never unmediated but always revealed through something natural, profane or historical<sup>733</sup>. The sacred can be

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<sup>726</sup>Ibid., p13

<sup>727</sup>Ibid., p17

<sup>728</sup>Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy*. p23

<sup>729</sup>MacKenna, Christopher. “From the Numinous to the Sacred” in *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 2009, 54, pp 167–182:169

<sup>730</sup>Ibid.

<sup>731</sup>Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*. London: Harcourt Books, 1959, p10 italics original.

<sup>732</sup>Ibid., p28

<sup>733</sup>Allen, Douglas. “Mircea Eliade’s Phenomenological Analysis of Religious Experience” in *The Journal of Religion*, p179

manifest in any object and by which the object becomes something more than it is while still remaining the same. Eliade designates this manifestation as a hierophany that interrupts profane space and time and reveals a transcendent reality. Here symbolism makes possible the perception of the profane as sacred. Allen cites Eliade as asserting that “the principal function of religion” is to render human existence “open” to a “superhuman” world of “transcendent” values.”<sup>734</sup> *Homo religiosus*, Eliade argues, thirsts for being and so can only live in a sacred world. It is only in a sacred world that he “participates in being, that he [sic] has a real existence”<sup>735</sup>. Through religious symbolism, *Homo religiosus* is opened to the world and this “enables religious man to know himself in knowing the world – and this knowledge is precious to him because...it pertains to being.”<sup>736</sup> After this rupture of the sacred and the profane, *Homo religiosus* longs to live permanently in the sacred and this choice is expressed in her intentionality towards meaningful communication and action with that which is sacred.

### 3.2.2 Establishing the ‘sacredness’ of the universe of the text

In this section, I draw on Ricoeur’s five traits for a phenomenology of the sacred as articulated in “Manifestation and Proclamation”<sup>737</sup>. These are: the sacred is experienced as awesome and powerful; the sacred shows itself as a hierophany which has a form and structure and so belongs to an aesthetic level of experience; the sacred reveals itself in behaviour through ritual, which Ricoeur describes as a mode of acting, and a way in which to ‘do something’ with this sacred power; the sacred is attested to in the role and power of nature, and finally; the logic of meaning which is drawn from the previous four traits and proceeds from the structure of the universe itself<sup>738</sup>. These traits highlight the non-linguistic element of the sacred and attest to an inscription of the sacred “in a level of experience beneath that of language”<sup>739</sup>. *The Universe Story* in intending to designate all as sacred, is thus confronted with the paradox of proclaiming that which is non-linguistic, and of bringing to language that which is experienced as

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<sup>734</sup>Ibid., p178

<sup>735</sup>Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*. p64

<sup>736</sup>Ibid., p167

<sup>737</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Manifestation and Proclamation” in *Figuring the Sacred*.pp48-67

<sup>738</sup>See section 1.5.2

<sup>739</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Manifestation and Proclamation” in *Figuring the Sacred*.p50

powerful, awesome and overwhelming and which according to Ricoeur “does not pass completely into articulation”<sup>740</sup>.

Ricoeur’s first trait is drawn from Otto’s concept of *mysterium tremendum*. This begins not with a description of the numinous but with a description of the feelings evoked on experience of the numinous. The sacred, Ricoeur states, is experienced as “awesome, as powerful, as overwhelming”<sup>741</sup>. The protagonist of *The Universe Story* is the universe itself, a protagonist that the narrative tells us, created, but is also part of, all that it creates. This produces a challenge in narrating how the universe produces such feeling in others, if others are constitutive of the universe, and relates to the way in which the narrative presents the reality of the universe, which will be taken up in the section “Thinking Creation” below. This notwithstanding, there are two ways that Swimme and Berry attempt to convey the *mysterium tremendum*. The first is their own enthused and reverent response to the universe, as encapsulated by their narrative. The other is the way in which, through their use of language, they endeavour to simulate a similar affect in their reader. When referring to the beginning of the universe, the authors use such phrases as “primordial energy blazed”<sup>742</sup> or refer to “the power” that brought forth the universe that is also “a condition of every moment of the universe”<sup>743</sup> including, we are told, the present moment. As no human was present when the universe came into existence, this power could not be experienced then. It can however, they inform us, be experienced now.

In chapter nine, “Neolithic Village” the authors refer to the development in language as being one of the most significant aspects of the Neolithic period. This period, they state, established “more of the power words in the languages of the planet than any other period”<sup>744</sup>. In describing these “primordial power-words”, Swimme and Berry write that they are words that took on their “form and meaning at that moment of total intimacy of humans with the natural world and with the deepest immersion of the human in the mysteries of existence”<sup>745</sup>. This they narrate as a revelatory moment when the archetypal symbols communicated to the human were activated for the first time,

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<sup>740</sup>Ibid., p49

<sup>741</sup>Ibid., p49

<sup>742</sup>Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p7

<sup>743</sup>Ibid., p17

<sup>744</sup>Ibid., p178

<sup>745</sup>Ibid., p178



and when rituals were established whereby the human entered into and participated in the cosmological order. As Ashley<sup>746</sup> points out however, the narrative gives no concrete example of such power-words, only states that this is ‘a moment’ which as reader we are invited to assume is one of ‘total intimacy with the natural world’ and which we return to constantly “in our efforts to understand the true meaning of the words that we use, words that determine our most profound sense of reality and value”<sup>747</sup>. Ashley interprets the emergence of urban culture in the narrative as a “fall” as the narrative implies a move from total intimacy to less intimacy<sup>748</sup>. This is convincing but may be better understood, I argue, as a difference in language. Rather than speak in terms of fall and redemption, some thirteen lines later Swimme and Berry write that “every perfection imposes limitations. Liberation in one aspect implies bonding in another”<sup>749</sup>. This language underscores the authors’ emphasis on the ‘wholeness’ and ‘singular event’ that they refer to as the universe. In addition, and here the complexity of their project is highlighted, the ability to return to this moment of total intimacy is also emphasised. This is achieved, they argue, in re-examining our language and its meanings. Swimme and Berry repeatedly appeal for a return to experience and a return to intimacy with the natural world. When we position this in light of their above statement about words, it is not the experience of total intimacy that is unreachable but our language that needs ever more refinement in order to capture such an experience. Elsewhere, Swimme and Berry have written about the limits of our current “human-centered dictionary”<sup>750</sup> and how a more symbolic language is needed. However, as Otto and Ricoeur argue, and what Swimme and Berry either choose to ignore or believe is attainable, this numinous element of the sacred is a trait that is pre-linguistic, mainly encapsulated in feelings and experience and while it might later be brought to language, it initially implies a ‘power’ that is other than that which can be rendered in speech.

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<sup>746</sup>Ashley, J Matthew. “Reading the Universe Story Theologically: The Contribution of a Biblical Narrative Imagination” in *Theological Studies*, p881

<sup>747</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p178

<sup>748</sup>Ashley, J M. “Reading the Universe Story Theologically: The Contribution of a Biblical Narrative Imagination” in *Theological Studies*, p881

<sup>749</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p178

<sup>750</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p258 In the text Swimme and Berry argue for an ‘Earth-centred language’ that recognises the languages of the “multitude of beings”. They state that humans are becoming more sensitive to the non-human modes of communication of the world and write that “all the more substantive words in the language are undergoing a transformation, words such as *society, good and evil, freedom, justice, literacy, progress*. All these words need to be extended to include the various beings of the natural world, their freedoms, their rights, their share in the functioning of the Earth”. Italics original.

Although arguably unable to create the experience of such a power with language, the narrative can direct the reader's attention to the possibility of such an experience and places where it may be sought.

In case the reader is not yet overwhelmed, Swimme and Berry instruct on the feelings that the experience of this power in the universe "must" evoke. They state that "from the beginning [the universe] has its mysterious self-organizing power that, if experienced in any serious manner, must evoke an even greater sense of awe than that evoked in earlier times at the experience of the dawn breaking over the horizon, the lightning storms crashing over the hills, or the night sounds of the tropical forests"<sup>751</sup>. This they tell us can be experienced through "the story that is told here...for it is out of this story that all these phenomena have emerged"<sup>752</sup>. Here, unwittingly, the story as Sideris has argued, has become the revelation and the narrators as a consequence, those to be admired. Swimme and Berry's attempt to reproduce the irreducible and non-linguistic element of the sacred, that of which the religious experience is an experience of, cannot surmount the obstacle of language and its component of distancing that necessarily involves mediation and interpretation. Although they name this element as 'power' and expressively draw the reader's attention to it as something that is present and can be experienced, the naming of it does not make it so. Without the use of categories it becomes ephemeral and weakened, a thing that the narrative points too without explanation rather than something that the narrative reveals or makes intelligible, and the *mysterium tremendum* as being the very root of religious feeling in its daunting 'awefulness' and 'majesty' remains untranslated. This could be construed as an intentional attempt to transcend religious particularity but the tradition and background from which the narrative emerges cannot be transcended and Berry and Swimme's own history and tradition perhaps even unconsciously re-appear in its pages. The fact of the narrative is testament to the power structures that enable such a telling. *The Universe Story* does not overcome the privilege of its own position but is the result of it, in that the founding word is that of the sciences and the cultural and historical tradition that precedes *The Universe Story* in its meaning is necessarily Euro-centric and patriarchal. Although it praises other cultures, peoples and ways of being and regrets "the loss of cultural variety and the rise of monocultural and monolingual regions that

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<sup>751</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p238

<sup>752</sup>*Ibid.*, p238

are an immense and irretrievable cultural impoverishment”<sup>753</sup>, it does not involve them in its telling. This begs the question of the narrative: whose universe story?

Despite the narrative’s inability to reproduce this aspect of the sacred, the narrative’s charged language does bring to life the element of energy or urgency that Otto argued comprises part of the *mysterium tremendum*. This non-rational element Otto describes in terms of ‘wrath’ albeit a wrath Otto tells us that is unconcerned with moral qualities. Rather it is a “force that knows not stint nor stay, which is urgent, active, compelling and alive”<sup>754</sup> and which Otto describes as being “gravely disturbing’ to those who only recognise gentleness, love and goodness in the divine nature”<sup>755</sup>. Swimme and Berry repeatedly highlight the energy of the universe. They speak about “frenzied particles”, “the primeval fireball’, supernovas “that matched a billion stars in luminosity and spewed stellar materials throughout the galaxy” or the “charged” early planets that “boiled”<sup>756</sup>. The authors tell us that the creativity and fecundity of the universe “identifies with the deepest energy of the universe as its primary expression”<sup>757</sup>. In the epilogue “Celebration” the reader is invited to celebrate existence, an existence of “color and sound but especially in movement, in flight through the air and swimming through the sea [and]...the pathos of both living and dying, of consuming and being consumed”<sup>758</sup>. The universe they narrate is creative and dynamic, an unfolding of wild, unfettered energy that is its vital source, and is undergoing a process of cosmogenesis which compels it forward. It is not solely a benign or gentle energy but also destructive as witnessed in the cataclysmic events narrated in the text<sup>759</sup> and as described unequivocally in the sentence as “that originating and annihilating power that is the marrow of the universe”<sup>760</sup>.

While naming the source of the universe as numinous in words such as “numinous fire”<sup>761</sup> the narrative is not explicit in defining the numinous. It is that, which Swimme and Berry tell us, is “too subtle, too overwhelming and too mysterious”

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<sup>753</sup>Ibid., p178

<sup>754</sup>Otto, R. *The Idea of the Holy*. p24

<sup>755</sup>Ibid., p19

<sup>756</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p7

<sup>757</sup>Ibid., p175

<sup>758</sup>Ibid., p263

<sup>759</sup> Such examples provided in the text are: the supernova explosion (chapter 3); the destruction of the Archean eon (chapter 5); the mutation of the prokaryotic cells ‘Viking’ and ‘Engla’ (chapter 6)

<sup>760</sup>Ibid., p20

<sup>761</sup>Ibid., p23

to be ever definitively captured<sup>762</sup>. They do however with the concept of a hierophany describe how it manifests. Eliade has stated that the sacred and the profane “are two modes of being in the world”<sup>763</sup> and that the sacred is equivalent to a power or to “reality. The sacred is saturated with *being*.”<sup>764</sup> The religious person, he argues “deeply desires to be, to participate in reality, to be saturated with power”<sup>765</sup> and attempts to dwell in a sacred universe by making the world sacred through sanctifying space and time, nature and the cosmos, and her own human existence. In this narrative, it is the universe entire that becomes a manifestation of the sacred, a hierophany, and refers to Ricoeur’s second trait that the sacred shows itself as a hierophany that has a form and structure, and belongs to the aesthetic level of experience. This presentation of the universe as sacred belongs to the ‘aesthetic’ level of experience in that it can be described as inhabiting time and space. In *The Universe Story* the beginning of the universe signifies the beginning of time and space and so the sacred begins to take on “a form, a structure, an articulation”<sup>766</sup> which the narrative states is further expressed as the universe develops and increases in its physical complexity. The universe in the narrative becomes a space of manifestation which opens up the imagination to a myriad of interpretations of the sacred through these inhabitations and in doing so ‘gives us more to think about’. What is crucial in the idea of a hierophany is the way in which a ‘profane reality’ becomes ‘something other’ than itself. The universe in the narrative becomes transformed into something ‘super-real’ while simultaneously the authors emphasise its active role in ordinary reality. Super-real in this instance refers to that which Ricoeur terms as ‘saturated with efficacy’. It is saturated with being, with power and energy. A power and energy that the human, the narrative informs us, participates in. The phrase used in *The Universe Story* to describe the human, is that of the universe come to consciousness. On a superficial reading this immediately indicates that the human is not separate to, but a significant part of the universe, with a specific role. The narrative presents consciousness as something that has developed until it reaches this “special mode” of self-awareness in the human. From the approach of environmental hermeneutics, Clingerman has argued for the idea of emplacement as a complement to Ricoeur’s concept of ‘emplotment’. ‘Emplacement’ he argues approaches the

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<sup>762</sup>Ibid., p5

<sup>763</sup>Eliade, M. *The Sacred and the Profane*. p14 Italics original.

<sup>764</sup>Ibid., p12. Italics original.

<sup>765</sup>Ibid., p13

<sup>766</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Manifestation and Proclamation” in *Figuring the Sacred*.p49

environment as a way in which to understand oneself, and he connects it to narrative identity. In reading ‘the book of nature’, Clingerman states, we also encounter the world of our own existence and in turn our emplacement within nature is how we understand the narrative of nature<sup>767</sup>. Clingerman is metaphorically referring to nature as a text. In *The Universe Story*, the text narrates nature. The emplotment of the human is the place that we are given in the story, our ‘emplacement’ in the universe, and as argued, is central to the telling of the story. In the narrative the authors construct a universe that the human belongs to and is part of. The narrative describes how that same power that brought forth the universe is present in the reader and so humanity assumes what Eliade names as “a humanity that has a transhuman, transcendent model”<sup>768</sup>. Such a model invites the reader to regard herself as ‘made’ by history, in this instance not just human history but sacred history and is offered as the model towards which to attain to. As central to this story, the human then takes their place at the very centre of what is considered ‘most real’. It is a cosmically structured and constructed feeling that seeks to transcend ancestry, tradition and culture with all the limitations and consequences of such an approach, and is essentially that of belonging to a place, in this instance, a universe. In doing this, the narrative ‘opens’ the human life. Eliade has argued that the life of *Homo religiosus* “has an additional dimension; it is not merely human, it is the same time cosmic, since it is a transhuman structure. It could be termed an open existence, for it is not strictly confined to man’s mode of being”<sup>769</sup>. *The Universe Story* explicitly identifies the human with the cosmos and in doing so places humanity in such a structure and so to live, in this narrative, is not to live merely as the individual one is, but to participate in the universe in its wholeness.

Ricoeur argues that the sacredness of nature shows itself by symbolically saying itself. It is this ‘showing’ that founds the ‘saying’ and relates to Ricoeur’s third trait, that of the tie between the symbolism of the sacred and ritual. Berry and Swimme echo this in their assertion that this “entire range of natural phenomena impinged on human consciousness...with a wonder that easily turned into ritual celebration. The transition

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<sup>767</sup>Clingerman, Forrest. “Reading the Book of Nature: A Hermeneutical Account of Nature for Philosophical Theology” in *Worldviews*.p83

<sup>768</sup>Eliade, M. *The Sacred and the Profane*. p99

<sup>769</sup>Ibid., p166

moments of the cosmological order evoked awe and reverence and invited participation”<sup>770</sup>.

There is also a parallel with Ricoeur’s fourth trait, the role of nature. In *The Universe Story*, nature becomes the way in which the cosmological process is revealed. Eliade has argued that for *Homo religiosus*, nature is never only natural but it is also “fraught with a religious value”<sup>771</sup> and so in contemplation of the world the many modes of the sacred are uncovered. Swimme and Berry write “That all this was related to danger, to the struggle for survival, to death provided the challenge and excitement that is itself, perhaps, an imperative deep within the entire cosmological process”<sup>772</sup>. The sacred power of nature is attested to by the very fact that it is threatened and uncertain. Nature, Ricoeur states, “speaks of the depths from which its order has emerged and toward which chaos it may always regress.”<sup>773</sup> The symbolism of nature is bound to the cosmos but this symbolism is only significant “when borne by the sacred valences themselves”<sup>774</sup>. This bound symbolism and the order it assumes, which underscores the entire narrative and is accentuated by the authors’ call for ‘alignment’, is evident in the manner in which the narrative describes the emergence of life: “life was evoked by Earth’s dynamics, ignited by lightning. Not from a single branch of lightning, but a planetwide lightning storm stinging the oceans for millions of years...these ordering patterns hide until the material structures and free energy of the region reach that particular complexity and intensity capable of drawing such patterns forth”<sup>775</sup>. Life, the narrative states, can emerge because there are ordering patterns in the world which despite the violence and instability of conditions, can and continue to, overcome those ‘chaotic depths’. This, in the narrative, makes the universe ordered and life, blessed.

### 3.2.3 The role of symbolism in designating the universe as sacred in *The Universe Story*

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<sup>770</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p153

<sup>771</sup>Eliade, M. *The Sacred and the Profane*. p116

<sup>772</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p153

<sup>773</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Manifestation and Proclamation” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p53

<sup>774</sup>Ibid.

<sup>775</sup>Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p87

As Eliade has argued, symbolism plays a determining role in the religious life of humanity in highlighting a particular structure of the sacred, the sacred understood as the fullest manifestation of being. It is through symbols that the world for *Homo religiosus* becomes ‘transparent’. Symbols ‘open’ the world to the universal awakening the individual from her own particular situation to the general. Eliade writes that “symbols awaken individual experience and transmute it into a spiritual act, into metaphysical comprehension of the world...for by understanding the symbol, he [sic] succeeds in living the universal.”<sup>776</sup> Ricoeur, who draws on Eliade’s approach, also develops his own approach to symbolism. As argued in chapter one, any authentic symbol, he writes, has three dimensions: the cosmic, the oneiric and the poetic<sup>777</sup>. In *The Universe Story*, the universe is ‘reality’ but it is also the primary symbol, a symbol which points beyond itself and yet is always already bound. This is its double meaning and comes to light when we apply Ricoeur’s three dimensions of symbolism to the universe of the narrative. The first dimension is the cosmic and is the way in which the sacred is read onto the universe. For *Homo religiosus*, Eliade states, the sacred is revealed in the very structure of the cosmos. The world by its nature is not a ‘chaos’ but a cosmos and this cosmos “as a whole is an organism at once *real, living, and sacred*; it simultaneously reveals the modalities of being and of sacrality”<sup>778</sup>. In *The Universe Story* the universe is interpreted as the primary manifestation of the sacred, the result of a power that brought forth “all the energy that would ever exist”<sup>779</sup>. The narrative tells the reader that “out of quantum chaos, the great power of the Flaring Forth established its fundamental laws and its first stable foundation”<sup>780</sup>. The authors elaborate on the precision required for such stability and write that “the rate of spatial emergence reveals a primordial elegance. Had space unfurled in a more retarded fashion, the expanding universe would have collapsed...if space had emerged more rapidly, equally disastrous results would have followed”<sup>781</sup>. These first pages describing the beginning of the universe set the context for a cosmos, in the sense used by Eliade, and the underlying precision and order towards unity that the narrative interprets is contained therein.

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<sup>776</sup>Eliade, M. *The Sacred and the Profane*. p212

<sup>777</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *The Symbolism of Evil*. pp10-13

<sup>778</sup>Eliade, M. *The Sacred and the Profane*. p117 Italics original

<sup>779</sup>This relation of this power to the universe will be examined in more detail below.

<sup>780</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p31

<sup>781</sup>Ibid., p18

The second dimension is that of the oneiric and is most clearly exemplified by the declaration in the narrative that “dreams refer to the unborn, to the darkly felt inclinations towards a new world. A not-yet world.”<sup>782</sup> The authors argue that dreams are a phenomena of the universe itself when they write that “What we are calling dreams is referred to with the phrase *quantum tendencies* in the theory of quantum mechanics.”<sup>783</sup> At this point it is pertinent to recall Ricoeur’s view on the role of the symbol. Ricoeur argues that symbols can signify the bond between ‘total being’ and the being of man [sic]<sup>784</sup>. Furthermore, it is in dreams that the symbols of humanity pass from the cosmos to the psyche, the cosmos and the psyche being, he argued, two poles of the same expressivity. In relation to the narrative of *The Universe Story*, the universe represents ‘total being’, and in the narrative the universe comes to consciousness through the human, thus connecting the human psyche and the universe in an intrinsically integrated manner. The human in this instance becomes symbolic as the *expressive* psyche of the universe. Thus dreams, intuition and imagination are afforded some manner of epistemological significance in the narrative and are also a manner in which the cosmos ‘relates’ to humanity.

The third dimension connects the previous two and it is that of poetic imagination. It is the fact of trying to express the symbol, the symbol being, Ricoeur states, expression in its nascent form. Swimme and Berry, in this narrative, present their understanding of the universe as sacred – in all the linguistic forms known to them – poetic, ordinary, religious and scientific in order to bring their understanding of this sacred reality of the universe ‘to birth’. By ‘pouring language back into the universe’ the text seeks to re-designate the universe. It is interesting the emphasis Ricoeur places on poetic imagination in seeking to express the symbol - the symbol not yet being stabilised into myth or ritual. In *The Universe Story*, the authors are grafting a myth on to this symbolic reading of the universe in order to configure the symbolic process. It is this symbolic process revealed through the myth that both reveals the individuals fractured state and enables transcendence through integration in the whole. The capacity of poetics to influence and describe reality is not only an emphasis of Ricoeur but clearly too of Swimme and Berry<sup>785</sup>. For Berry at least, this can be interpreted as a

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<sup>782</sup>Ibid., p53

<sup>783</sup>Ibid.

<sup>784</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *The Symbolism of Evil*. p12

<sup>785</sup>In his “Intellectual Autobiography” Ricoeur states that poetic language reveals values which he claims are inaccessible to “ordinary, direct, or literal language”. He writes that “Poetry...makes us see what



‘poetic wisdom’ such as Vico deemed necessary in order to rise a nation from their barbarism of reflection. Such a poetic is effective in that it does not merely describe being but in opening up possibilities, intends being. In their use of symbolism to present the world as sacred, Swimme and Berry are consecrating the world<sup>786</sup>. This is interesting when we refer back to their desire to designate the universe as sacred prior to its interpretation, and paradoxically, the part played by mediation in such a designation and why such a mediation may be necessary. It implies that our experience of the world is influenced by the manner in which we choose both to recognise and name it. By consecrating it, it becomes consecrated for us. In choosing not to consecrate it, does it remain a profane reality? This returns us to Ricoeur’s first trait of the experience of the sacred as ‘awesome’. Berry holds a similar position in his view that religions arise from “confrontation with terror”<sup>787</sup> and suggests that our human experience of the natural world is initially one of being overwhelmed. *The Universe Story* is his attempt to bring such an experience to language and the choice of language and symbolism used reveal attempts to consecrate it, despite whether such an initial experience is understood as sacred. The universe narrated in *The Universe Story* is one that is charged with a numinous energy and power, and within whose structures, the authors inform the reader, is to be found the meaning of our human existence.

Ricoeur argues that all these traits of a phenomenology of manifestation of the sacred attest to the fact that in a sacred universe that the capacity for saying “is founded on the capacity of the cosmos to signify something other than itself”<sup>788</sup>. The ‘logic of meaning’ of such a sacred universe proceeds thus from the structure of the sacred universe. Its law, he states, is a law of correspondences. In *The Universe Story*, the law of correspondences is not as explicit as Ricoeur’s named correspondences. There are, however, two clear identifications. These are 1) between the cosmos (creation *illo tempore*) and the order of natural appearances and human action and 2) the macrocosm and the microcosm. These laws of correspondences can be argued from the narrative’s constant call for the need to ‘align’ human activity with cosmic activity. This

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prose does not detect, in this sense, analogy is not simply a feature of language considered in its internal structures, but a feature of the relation of language to the world.” (Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. p28)

<sup>786</sup>Ricoeur claims in “Manifestation and Proclamation” (in *Figuring the Sacred*, p51) that “To see the world as sacred is at the same time to make it sacred, to consecrate it”.

<sup>787</sup>Berry, Thomas. “Spiritual Traditions and the Human Community” in *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*, p1

<sup>788</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Manifestation and Proclamation” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p54

correspondence, between the beginning of time and macrocosmic entities with the human enterprise, are articulated in such sentences as “numinous fire became, over fifteen billion years of creativity, the here and now...it was this very scientific enterprise that articulated the connections between the existence of life forms seeking a way to live a worthwhile life, and the dynamics at the beginning of time.”<sup>789</sup> The human process, the narrative informs us, only takes place within the larger cosmological process. Human life and human activity correspond to cosmic processes of birth, death and regeneration. This law of correspondence is emphasised by Swimme and Berry in a particular way when they state that “the well-being of the Earth is primary. Human well-being is derivative.”<sup>790</sup> In this narrative human existence is dependent upon the existence of Earth and the ‘laws’ of human existence are the same ‘laws’ that bind us to Earth and Earth to the larger cosmos.

In order to identify the logic of meaning in *The Universe Story*, it is necessary to turn to its use of metaphor. *The Universe Story* is an attempt to present, through narrative, the universe itself as a hierophany. This is the point where we can witness the tension between the non-linguistic element of a phenomenology of manifestation and that which is inscribed in language. As a symbol the universe is bound internally to the reality that it symbolises. As metaphor, reality is re-described and the universe of the metaphor becomes an exploded universe. This section will present the way in which metaphor and language are used in the narrative to rupture ordinary meaning and the logic of meaning that is intended by the narrative through this.

The root metaphor of *The Universe Story* is that the natural world, as the universe, both in its indivisibility and in its particularities, is presented as a ‘subject’. This primary metaphor engenders and organises other dominant metaphors within the narrative such as matter as thinking, acting and loving, and the way in which the cosmos ‘comes to life’. The next sections will examine such metaphors and the interpretations that can be associated with them under the headings of: the universe as the principal actor and primary ‘meaning-event’; the universe as a communion of subjects; matter as ‘acting’ and ‘thinking’ and; matter as ‘loving’, all of which contribute to the construction of the reality of the text.

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<sup>789</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p23

<sup>790</sup>Ibid., p243

### 3.2.3.1 The universe as the principal actor and primary 'meaning-event'

According to Ricoeur, the difference between religious language with regard to poetic language “depends entirely on the logic of correspondences in the sacred universe”<sup>791</sup>. Such a discourse must be understood on its own terms as it makes claims to meaningfulness and to truth. A hermeneutical philosophy thus considers “the most pretheological, level of religious discourse possible”<sup>792</sup>, what Ricoeur refers to elsewhere as “the most originary expressions of a community of faith”<sup>793</sup>. These expressions do not primarily contain theological statements but expressions embedded in parables, narratives, proverbs and wisdom sayings. As a narrative, we are limited to the metaphor and symbols of the narrative and what is expressed therein. I have stated that the root metaphor of the narrative is that this ‘living’ universe is a subject and that it is the primary actor in the narrative. As the fundamental metaphor it acts too as the most originary expression of the narrative. When we examine this expression with Ricoeur, its surplus of meaning becomes apparent. Ricoeur states that in biblical language “God” “is the religious name for being”<sup>794</sup> but the word ‘God’, he argues says more in that it presupposes the total sum of discourses involved in its telling. Ricoeur goes on to argue that “to understand the word “God” is to follow the direction of the meaning of the word. By the direction of the meaning I mean its double power to gather all the significations that issue from the partial discourses and to open up a horizon that escapes from the closure of discourse.”<sup>795</sup> While I do not believe Berry and Swimme are interpreting the universe as God, the point here is that in the narrative, through analysis of the structures and functioning of the universe, a new dimension of reality is revealed. It is the universe which to use Ricoeur’s phrase acts as if the ‘God-referent’ would in that it draws together the varied discourses at work within the text: narration, wisdom, science, poetry and is both their coordinator and “the index of their incompleteness, the point at which something escapes them”<sup>796</sup>. Ricoeur states how the

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<sup>791</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Manifestation and Proclamation” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p58

<sup>792</sup>Ibid., p58

<sup>793</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Philosophy and Religious Language” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p37

<sup>794</sup>Ibid., p45

<sup>795</sup>Ibid., p46

<sup>796</sup>Ibid., p45

name 'God' has "become bound up with the meaning-event"<sup>797</sup> and argues that "in its meaning is contained the notion of its relation to us as gracious and of our relation to it as "ultimately concerned" and as fully "recognizant" of it"<sup>798</sup>. The meaning-event of this narrative is the existence of a universe that is developing physically and spiritually through time, and the place and part of the human being within this universe.

Throughout the narrative it is the universe which is presented as acting, the universe which is presented as communicating, the universe which is presented as the being that the human is dependent on. Berry and Swimme go so far as to argue that it is the universe that is the larger dimension of our own individual being. It is, according to the narrative, the source and the context of our lives, in addition to being 'at work' within our lives.

### 3.2.3.2 The universe as 'a communion of subjects'

In *The Universe Story* the universe is described as a "communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects"<sup>799</sup>. Every being is given the label of subject although in the narrative, it is a limited and broad sweeping articulation of subjectivity, avoiding any explicit discussion of what 'to be' a subject actually is. The first point to note is that subjectivity is linked to spirituality. While Berry is unspecific about what he understands as subjectivity, he regularly uses the term interchangeably with spirituality. Spirituality as already discussed in section 2.6 being understood by Berry as that which 'facilitates and constitutes relationship between beings'<sup>800</sup>. In *The Universe Story*, the term subjectivity is also used interchangeably with autopoiesis. In the narrative autopoiesis is presented as a teleology and is "the tendency in all things toward fulfillment of their inner nature."<sup>801</sup> The narrative claims that this tendency is operative in all dimensions of being and goes on to re-interpret this principle in the language of physics as a kind of potentiality, "the quantum tendencies that hover within any physical situation", in the language of cybernetics as 'order', the "autopoiesis of a coherent system" and in biology as "the epigenetic pathways folded into a particular

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<sup>797</sup>Ibid., p46

<sup>798</sup>Ibid.

<sup>799</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p243

<sup>800</sup>See section 2.6

<sup>801</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p53

ontogeny.”<sup>802</sup> These tendencies, aimed at the fulfillment of potential of that particular being, are according to the narrative, the ‘subjectivity’ of a being. The authors make interesting remarks in relation to how they understand the term autopoiesis. They write that:

the self that is referred to by autopoiesis is not visible to the eye. Only its effects can be discerned. The self or identity of a tree or an elephant or a human is a reality immediately recognized by intelligence, even if invisible to senses. The unifying principle of an organism as a mode of being of the organism is integral with but distinct from the entire range of physical components of the organism. It is the source of its spontaneity, its self-manifesting power...autopoiesis refers to the power each thing has to participate directly in the cosmos-creating endeavour...autopoiesis points to the interior dimension of things.<sup>803</sup>

According to Grassie, this principle of autopoiesis is the vehicle that allows Swimme and Berry to by-pass the dualism between mind and matter<sup>804</sup>. In talking about a self that is discernible in its effect and not only its physical being, the whole is made greater than the sum of its parts. Subjectivity is thus to be understood in the narrative not as consciousness or materialism but as that aspect which integrates them. In addition to its unificatory function it is also that which enables identification of an organism and from which the capacity to fulfill one’s potential arises. Presented this way it is better understood as a form of Aristotelian teleology not confined to biology. Berry and Swimme develop this when they state that “Even the simplest atom cannot be understood by considering only its physical structure or the outer world of external relationships with other things.”<sup>805</sup> In this manner an implicit association between autopoiesis/subjectivity and Berry’s understanding of spirituality can be identified in the narrative. Each ‘subject’ in this narrative has the ability to commune and to relate and to participate by expression.

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<sup>802</sup>ibid.

<sup>803</sup>ibid., p75

<sup>804</sup>Grassie, William John. *Reinventing Nature: Science Narratives as Myths for an Endangered Planet*. p183

<sup>805</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p75

### 3.2.3.3 Matter as ‘acting’ and ‘thinking’

From the introduction onwards, the universe is both the locating context as well as the principal actor in this narrative. It is in many ways ‘the hero’ of the story. In the first chapter Swimme and Berry write that “Always and everywhere, it is the universe that holds all things together and is the primary activating power in every activity”<sup>806</sup> thereby establishing the idea of the universe as pervasive, acting and integrated.

The galaxies, stars, bacteria, protons and eukaryotes are also presented as actors in the narrative although dependent on the prior initiative of the universe. No distinction in ability to act is made in the narrative between the ability of the galaxies (a macro-cosmic structure) and the ability of the eukaryotes (a micro-cosmic structure). In describing the creation of atoms, the authors write that it is “an event initiated by the universe, and completed by the mysterious emergent being we call hydrogen, a new identity that has the power to seal a proton and an electron into a seamless community.”<sup>807</sup> In this example the universe maintains its status as the ultimate creative and powerful entity but is now described as a power with the ability to engender beings with their own powers of acting.

As if to underscore the value of every created entity, the narrative assigns names to both macro and micro bodies. The first living cell is referred to as Aries, Vikengla is the first eukaryotic cell and Tiamat<sup>808</sup> the second-generation star who “knit together wonders in its fiery belly and then sacrificed itself, carving its body up in a supernova explosion that dispersed this new elemental power in all directions.”<sup>809</sup> Although personification of being occurs in many other myths such as the Babylonian myths<sup>810</sup> which feature Tiamat, the metaphorical language is notable here for two reasons. The first is in the way it knowingly personifies the elements of the universe through assigning them names and agency. The message here is that anything and everything in

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<sup>806</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p27

<sup>807</sup>Ibid., p29

<sup>808</sup>It is notable that the name Tiamat is taken from the Babylonian creation myth Enuma Elish. Tiamat in this myth is the goddess of the sea and of chaos. The conflict between the gods Tiamat and Marduk, where Tiamat is slain results in the creation of heaven and Earth.

<sup>809</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p8

<sup>810</sup>One example being “The epic of Gilgamesh.” In this narrative the sun is presented as the god Shamash, the wind or air as the god Enlil, the sky as the goddess Anu. A further example is when Humbaba is slain, his seven auras of awesomeness are dispensed to the marshes, the mountains, the desert, the rivers and the lions. For a concise translation of the Babylonian myths please see Hazelton, Fran. *Three Kings of Warka. Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh. Myths from Mesopotamia*. London: The Enheduanna Society, 2012

existence has worth. The second is in its assignment of intention or willed action to these entities. Tiamat makes a ‘sacrifice’, a term itself laden with meaning, in her supernova explosion. In this example, Tiamat through her death plays her part as an active agent and enables the larger cosmic process to continue.

It is precisely through the use of such poetic language that *The Universe Story* begins to generate a surplus of meaning and matter from its cosmic structures down to its fundamental components is presented as having a ‘subjectivity’ with all of its associate connotations such as agency, an ability to organise and possession of an interiority or psyche. In this way the notion of subject which belongs traditionally to the human person in anthropology is extended to all entities that constitute the universe. However, if matter is presented as acting, the question remains how capable an actor matter is. Equating agency with subjectivity can be problematic as agency can also be causal and not only intentional, in addition to the fact that agency can be exhibited by beings that are not capable of intentionality<sup>811</sup>. This suggests that agency need not include the self-reflectiveness that is associated with the human ability to think oneself an object in the world and correct oneself in its action. Nor indeed is a ‘spirituality’ requisite for an agent, spirituality in this narrative being connected to subjectivity. On the other hand, as a metaphor in a narrative that is ecologically motivated, assigning a subjective dimension to matter is an affirmation of the value of the material world in and of itself. This same material world is implicitly presented as containing a spiritual and interconnected dimension. In doing this the narrative is arguably seeking to overcome two dualisms. The first is to break with the Cartesian thinking that the human is a subject and the world and all else are objects. The second is to challenge the view that spirit is both separate from and superior to the natural world, views which are received as being environmentally problematic<sup>812</sup>.

Berry and Swimme, rather, locate the individual in all that is around us. They emphasise that the outer physical environment shapes not only our spirituality and

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<sup>811</sup>Cf. Stapleton M., Froese T. “The Enactive Philosophy of Embodiment: From Biological Foundations of Agency to the Phenomenology of Subjectivity” in García-Valdecasas M., Murillo J., Barrett N. (eds) *Biology and Subjectivity. Historical-Analytical Studies on Nature, Mind and Action*. vol 2., 2016, Springer, for an overview of agency and its difference from subjectivity in biology and see Allen, Amy. “Power, Subjectivity, and Agency: Between Arendt and Foucault” in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 10:2, pp131-149, 2002 for an account of subjectivity and agency in the social sciences specifically focusing on the differences and similarities between Foucault and Arendt.

<sup>812</sup>Cf. Plumwood, Val. *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, pp222-23. See also: Berry, Thomas. *The Great Work and Dream of the Earth*.

imagination but also our intellect. In this, the existence of a space of objectification is difficult to discern. At other times in the narrative, reality can be interpreted Romantically and the subject becomes the principal agent who determines that reality. This is evident in how the narrative presents knowledge. Swimme and Berry write in the text that “knowledge represents a particular relationship we establish in the world”<sup>813</sup>. Knowledge is not understood in a subject/object format but relationally, emphasising Swimme and Berry’s primary descriptive commitment to be that of ‘belonging to’ and ‘in’ a world and so the nature of being itself, which they describe as ‘a communion of subjects’. It appears contradictory then, that the unique ‘role’ assigned by the narrative to the human, is the ability to ‘reflect’ and the ability for consciousness. It could equally be argued that the narrative is rallying for an understanding of consciousness that is material based. Unfortunately, this is never made clear in the narrative. As a result of this, the narrative which seeks to promote a ‘unified’ reality, lacks clarification in its distinctions. However, its narrative aim must not be forgotten and the narrative succeeds in reimagining and inviting the reader in to a reality that from its beginnings is unified but distinct and that works as ‘a communion’ constituted by thinking and acting subjects.

#### 3.2.3.4 Matter as ‘loving’

When describing the emergence of life, the first multicellular organism arises when two single celled organisms ‘merge’. These two cells are named as Tristan and Iseult and are the descendants of Sappho. In this description which I will present in full, their forming is presented as:

These special cells of Sappho, call them Iseult and Tristan...were cast into the marine adventure...so that an act she had never experienced...would begin to take place - Tristan entering her cell wholly....this act that they had entered upon so rashly would lead to both of their deaths; or perhaps we should say to their rebirth, in a new form. Tristan’s tumultuous entrance is followed by the dissolution of his cell membrane, and its absorption into Iseult’s cytoplasm. Now Tristan’s naked DNA is free to advance upon her own...The new couple quickly creates a molecular membrane that curtains them away from the rest of the cell.<sup>814</sup>

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<sup>813</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p74

<sup>814</sup>*Ibid.*, p107



There are a number of layers of reference in this paragraph alone. Firstly, the name Sappho, the Greek lyric poet who lived circa 640BC and was latterly celebrated as a symbol of female homosexuality<sup>815</sup>, is given to the eukaryotic cell who produced these cells alone, i.e. without being fertilised. This might be significant in itself but not for this study. Secondly, the offspring of Sappho are given the names Tristan and Iseult after the medieval folk-tale about two tragic lovers who are separated in life but united in death<sup>816</sup>. In the development of multicellularism, the paragraph draws on the symbolism associated with such names and stories and evokes all that those names suggest such as love, desire, death, hope and eternal pledges. It also has erotic overtones containing words such as ‘naked’ and ‘tumultuous entrance’ and the reader is left with the image of a sexual encounter between subjects having occurred. This is not accidental as this is named as the beginning of meiotic sexual reproduction in the narrative. The imagery used bestows on this event a poetic sensibility and rationale which could be construed as containing insights into the most bewildering aspect of the human condition (one of the functions of myth according to Ricoeur) that of emotion, desire and love, in that it subtly locates these as pre-dating the human and present in the universe for some eleven billion years.

When we consider Teilhard’s influence on Berry this is not a surprising development of the narrative. In *The Human Phenomenon*<sup>817</sup>, Teilhard develops his teleological concept of the presence of an energy of love in the universe. He states that “driven by forces of love, the fragments of the world are seeking one another so the world may come to be.”<sup>818</sup> In this narrative of Iseult and Tristan what otherwise is described in scientific terms as the beginning of the multicellular organism, has in Swimme and Berry’s hands been transformed into a love story. It is the ‘love’ between Iseult and Tristan which enables the development of life. ‘Love’ identified as far back as the emergence of the multi-cellular organism some 3.5 billion years ago becomes in *The Universe Story* a significant shaping feature of the universe and a defining element of its teleology.

Elsewhere in the narrative, existence is termed “a singular gift”<sup>819</sup> while the authors claim that “this principle of fecundity and this nurturing quality” can now be

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<sup>815</sup>Salem Press Biographical Encyclopedia, January, 2017, p3

<sup>816</sup>Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th Edition

<sup>817</sup>De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*.

<sup>818</sup> Ibid., p188

<sup>819</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p1

identified with “the grand curvature of the universe”<sup>820</sup> and so the universe is not only fecund but nurturing and thus the image of the universe as benevolent is implied although how this benevolence extends beyond the nurturing of existence remains unclear in the narrative. The gravitational interaction becomes a ‘bond’, a “primordial attracting power permeating the universe”<sup>821</sup> which can also be associated with the metaphor of a ‘loving’ universe. In another example the cyano-bacterium named Prospero in the text “not only survived, it *invented* respiration”<sup>822</sup> illustrating again the qualities of intention, purpose and creativity that the narrative ascribes even to basic organisms and natural processes.

It is notable that in his same work, *The Human Phenomenon*, Teilhard writes about ‘the personalising universe’ which is achieved in the Omega point. This he describes at one stage as a “grouping in which the personalization of the whole and the elementary personalizations reach their maximum simultaneously, and without blending, under the influence of a supremely autonomous focal point of union.”<sup>823</sup> Swimme and Berry through the use of metaphor have narrated such a reality of the universe where even elements are personalised. This personalisation also contains a teleological component, again not biological, as through ‘deeper personalisation’ in Berry’s notion of ‘intimate presence’, we achieve the Ecozoic.

### 3.2.3.5 A summary of ‘the logic of meaning’ in *The Universe Story*

In this text, Swimme and Berry are using narrative to point to a sacred referent, this being the universe. The universe in the narrative, as the principal actor and primary meaning event is a loving, thinking and active entity that draws together all the discourses at work in the narrative while also being the point of their incompleteness. It brings forth ‘subjects’, themselves loving, thinking and acting and is presented as developing towards a more profound and explicit articulation of love and consciousness, as illustrated in the narrative through the arrival of ever more forms of life, of mammals and especially, in the human. Thus, the narrative comes to signify something more than the physical universe. It contains a surplus of meaning in how it

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<sup>820</sup> Ibid., p220

<sup>821</sup> Ibid., p25

<sup>822</sup> Ibid., p98

<sup>823</sup> De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*. p187

can be received, in offering an interpretation of human experience of the natural world, an experience that is simultaneously cosmic and an experience of the divine.

In addition, the narrative claims that all beings live as ‘subjects’ and ‘in communion’, while the human is assigned the part of the universe become conscious of itself<sup>824</sup>. This is a ‘limit-expression’ of the narrative in that it appeals to the human desire for ‘something more’<sup>825</sup> connecting the being of the human in a new way with ‘total being’. This limit-expression also makes the human central to the universe (and the narrative) and claims that the role of the human is that of “enabling the Earth and the universe entire to reflect on and to celebrate themselves, and the deep mysteries they bear within them, in a special mode of conscious self-awareness.”<sup>826</sup>In doing this, it offers what Eliade terms as a transhuman, transcendent structure of the human life, whereby, by virtue of one’s existence, one participates in the cosmic structure and where the bond between humanity and total being is signified.

This redescription of reality highlights nature as an intentional agent who exists in her own right. What is noteworthy is not that this is just another personification of nature or the universe but that it is within the very structures, laws and functioning of the universe, that meaning is to be found, suggesting Berry and Swimme’s commitment to a strong teleology within the universe and calling to mind Berry’s ‘spiritual impulse’ that ‘imposes’ itself and is ‘directive’<sup>827</sup>. It is a claim that cannot be made by a scientific discourse nor a historical discourse alone for two reasons. First it is not an empirical claim, although rooted in an empirical model. And second it highlights that the empirical sciences are still looking for a model that encompasses both the physical world and what the natural sciences refer to as consciousness or mind, and which includes the ability to value and to create meaning, which as Nagel has argued, are foundational to the human life.

Swimme and Berry claim the universe as sacred but they also want the reader to recognise it as sacred. They write “For what is at stake is not simply an economic resource, it is the meaning of existence itself. Ultimately it is the survival of the world of the sacred. Once this is gone the world of meaning truly dissolves into ashes.”<sup>828</sup>

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<sup>824</sup>See section 2.2

<sup>825</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Manifestation and Proclamation” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p51

<sup>826</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p1

<sup>827</sup> Berry, Thomas. “Contemporary Spirituality: The Journey of the Human Community” in *CrossCurrents*, p130

<sup>828</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p250

This is emphasised too by Ricoeur when he writes that “humanity is simply not possible without the sacred.”<sup>829</sup> Ricoeur’s argument is a response to the demythologisation arising from the ‘scientific-technological ideology’ which he argues has resulted in a retreat of the sacred, while Berry and Swimme’s is a response to the ecological crisis. With language, symbol and myth, Berry and Swimme present a reality which is ‘in itself’ a sacred reality. The narrative presents ‘a cosmos’ that is ordered to overcome chaotic depths. It is the sacred ever more manifest and experienced, in a universe that is developing towards increased love and consciousness which bestows meaning on existence, and is the meaning inherent in this narrative.

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<sup>829</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Manifestation and Proclamation” in *Figuring the Sacred*. p64

### 3.3 Thinking *The Universe Story* as a creation narrative.

Although *The Universe Story* can be read as a physical cosmology, its categories are too mixed for it to stand as a physical cosmology alone. The manner in which the plot is configured, its aim of re-sacralisation and the creation of meaning, its desire to orient the reader to the future, its association of nature with the divine, in addition to Berry's call for a 'cosmology of religion', all taken together make it reasonable to argue that *The Universe Story* is better understood as a creation story than merely a story of physical origins<sup>830</sup>. If it is a creation story then the way in which it presents the creation affects the ontology that it sets forth, this being the power of second order reference. For this reason, this section will focus on reading *The Universe Story* in light of Paul Ricoeur's essay "Thinking creation". This essay is taken from the volume *Thinking Biblically*<sup>831</sup> which explores the relationship between exegesis and philosophy. This will help to determine what theological influences Swimme and Berry are perhaps implicitly or even accidentally proposing<sup>832</sup>.

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<sup>830</sup>In their article "Thomas Berry and a new creation story" Hope and Young claim Berry as stating "Christians need a new cosmology, a new creation story". (Hope, Marjorie & Young, James. "Thomas Berry and a new creation story" in *The Christian Century*, August 16-23, 1989, pp750-753). While Berry evidently calls for a 'new story', it is not a story he advocates for Christians alone. Rather his story is directed towards Euro western culture and to all religions while emphasising the particular need for this new story within the Christian tradition. Please see Eaton, Heather. "Feminist or Functional Cosmology? Ecofeminist Musings on Thomas Berry's Functional Cosmology" in *Ecotheology*, p73

<sup>831</sup>Ricoeur, Paul & LaCocque André. *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*. This book is the result of a collaboration between exegete André LaCocque a specialist in the Hebrew Bible and Ricoeur, a hermeneutic philosopher, where both authors comment on the same texts taken from the Hebrew Bible. The work seeks to refute the apparent antinomy between exegesis and philosophy - the production of the text and its reception - claiming that the exegete does not overlook the role of reading in the text (thought to be the concern of the philosopher) while the philosopher does not ignore the originality of the texts found within the biblical corpus. The "Thinking Creation" essay was not introduced in 'chapter one: a hermeneutic towards self-understanding through the mediation of narrative' as this chapter focuses on presenting a general overview of Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutics, while this essay is more specific to a section of Ricoeur's work that looks at biblical narrative.

<sup>832</sup>Guess notes in her MA thesis "*Anthropocentrism in Ecological Theology with Reference to the Works of Charles Birch, Sallie McFague and Thomas Berry*" submitted to the Melbourne College of Divinity, 2005, that Berry's work has been affirmed by ecological theologians such as Sally McFague (cf. *The Body of God. An Ecological Theology*. London: SCM, 1993) and Anthony Kelly (cf. *An Expanding Theology. Faith in a World of Connections*. Newton NSW: Dwyer 1993) but equally criticised by theologians who criticise 'green spirituality' such as Robert Whelan. Whelan describes Berry's work *Befriending the Earth* written with Thomas Clarke as 'one of the strangest outpourings of an ordained Christian minister' (cf. *The cross and the rainforest. A Critique of Radical Green Spirituality*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996, p 31). Despite such mixed reaction, Guess goes on to argue a point relevant to this investigation, that being, that while Berry does bracket discussion on God, Jesus Christ, theology and the Bible, that he does develop theological ideas and that his work "is infused with a profound sense of the divine"

There are two further points which highlight the necessity of such a thought experiment. The first is that Berry has often been cited as a theologian and in particular an eco-theologian. In his article ‘Types of Ecotheology’<sup>833</sup> Peter Scott refers to a typology of ecotheology put forward by ecological philosopher Max Oelschlaeger. In this, Oelschlaeger classifies Berry’s approach as indicative of the ‘radical’ approach to caring for creation. This is so, as Berry according to Oelschlaeger, maintains the view that ‘postbiblical creation stories based on scientific narrative are imperative for the survival of Judeo-Christian culture’<sup>834</sup>. While this interpretation is congruent, Scott does contest Oelschlaeger’s typology on the basis that it focuses on the pragmatic interpretation of creation stories rather than their metaphysical interpretations. This refers to their implication for ethics and not for implying a creator. He argues that the ‘truth’ and ‘justification’ of these positions are not under discussion by Oelschlaeger only in terms of how they contribute to what Scott names as an ‘ecologically civil theology’. Berry is clearly advocating care for creation but is less clear in how he sees the relationship of the creation with the creator. Furthermore, in their book *Ecotheology and the Practice of Hope*<sup>835</sup>, published more than a decade after Scott’s article, Anne Marie Dalton and Henry C. Simmons also name Berry as an ecological theologian and as someone who began to proclaim the ecological crisis as the defining one for the coming era as early as the 1970s, and as attempting to formulate a theological response to it.

The second point is that a form of religious naturalism has come to be associated with cosmic narratives<sup>836</sup>. For instance, Loyal Rue argues that religions are mythic traditions. These mythic traditions offer narrative accounts of cosmology and morality,

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(p126). This section is to investigate the way in which these ‘theological ideas’ take shape and are narrated in *The Universe Story*. (Thesis copy attained directly from author, p126, footnote 742)

<sup>833</sup>Scott, Peter. “Types of Ecotheology” in *Ecotheology* 4, 1998, pp8-19.

<sup>834</sup> Ibid., p11

<sup>835</sup> Dalton, Anne Marie & Simmons, Henry C. *Ecotheology and the Practice of Hope*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010

<sup>836</sup>Cf. Sideris, Lisa. “Science as Sacred Myth. Ecospirituality in the Anthropocene Age.” in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. ‘Epic of evolution’ proponent Ursula Goodenough defines religious naturalism thus: “A religious naturalist is a naturalist who has adopted the Epic as a core narrative and goes on to explore its religious potential, developing interpretive, spiritual, and moral or ethical responses to the story... religious naturalists do not elect to use God-language yet still embrace religion. Some may use the word God as a personification of natural reality, or to connote the unknown and perhaps unknowable substrate of order (e.g. “God as the Ground of Being”) or to connote a large and important concept within the natural world (e.g. “God is Love” or “God is Creativity”)”<sup>836</sup> Its foundation she states is nature and not scripture. Goodenough, Ursula. “Who is a Religious Naturalist?” in *Theology and Science*, 15:3, pp231-234:233

the joining of which is achieved by a *root metaphor*. Such root metaphors are “God,” “Nature,” and the “Dharma.” ...Rue argues that traditional myths have lost power due to the “creeping non-realism” produced by (a) modern science and (b) religious diversity.”<sup>837</sup> Rue’s response to this non-realist erosion is to offer nature “as humanity’s sacred object”<sup>838</sup>. Swimme and Berry too offer nature as sacred, differentiating however, in their emphasis on nature as a subject rather than an object and taking their root metaphor and primary symbol in the narrative as ‘the universe’.

I will begin this section with a short overview of “Thinking Creation”. In the essay Ricoeur thinks through the bond that “unites the primordial history and dated (or datable) history”<sup>839</sup> and traces the relationship between a doctrine of creation and one of salvation. The essay is divided into three sections: Separation, The Foundation, and Trajectories: Thinking Creation. I will first present the way in which Ricoeur argues that a primordial history is a separated history. This will be followed by his argument that primordial events inaugurate history. Their relation is established by the way in which ‘the beginning’ or ‘the origin’ is described. The essay will be used to analyse what the description of the origin in *The Universe Story* tells the reader. This has implications for how the creation is ‘to be read’ and so the following sections will focus on the meaning associated with the ‘precedence’ of the origin in *The Universe Story* and how this in turn affects the status of being a ‘creature’. In telling how the world began, the creation narrative explains how the human condition came about and through its cosmological interpretation provides explanatory schemes and thus the theoretical foundations towards which purpose is directed<sup>840</sup>.

### 3.3.1 How does *The Universe Story* ‘think creation’?

In ‘Thinking Creation’ Ricoeur begins by making a distinction between pre-history (primordial history) and dated or dateable history. The relation between primordial and dated history, Ricoeur terms the relation of precedence, a relation which does not refer to chronological anteriority. That is, there is a separation between

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<sup>837</sup>Rue cited in Leidenhag, Mikael, “Religious Naturalism: The current debate” in *Philosophy Compass*. 2018;13: e12510, p5

<sup>838</sup> Ibid.

<sup>839</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Thinking Creation” in *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*. p32

<sup>840</sup>Cf. Carey, Jeremiah. “Spiritual but not religious’? On the nature of spirituality and its relation to religion” in *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, p206

primordial history and historical time in that primordial events cannot be coordinated in temporal succession with those of historical time and yet they are not unrelated. As Ricoeur expresses it “the beginning does not belong to the sequence of things recounted; on the other hand, it inaugurates and grounds this sequence.”<sup>841</sup> All cosmological, biological and anthropological inquiry proceed as if there is a clear and homogenous sequence yet are always also “pointing back toward a beginning that I shall later say is ungraspable”<sup>842</sup>. The essay focuses specifically on Genesis but it is relevant for a number of reasons, which will become apparent below, to this work.

Ricoeur divides the theme of separation into three categories: “separation between the creator and the creature, separation of the human within what is created, separation of evil humans from their goodly creature depths”<sup>843</sup>. There is a distinction between the creature and the Creator, in that if the world signifies something it is that the creature is not the Creator. In withdrawing himself “God set up in exteriority a nature that henceforth exists, if not for itself, at least in itself”<sup>844</sup>. In this instance creation ‘in itself’ is creation without reflection due to the lack of “any witnesses who could internalize it or its meaning” while creation ‘for itself’ comes about, Ricoeur states, with the creation of humanity who could reflect upon the creation<sup>845</sup>. The first meaning of having been created, Ricoeur states, is to exist as a distinct work.

As regards separation of the human within what is created, this entails, Ricoeur argues, responsibility towards oneself and towards others. In recognition of this responsibility, Ricoeur emphasises that “Guilty and punished, humanity is not cursed.”<sup>846</sup> Ricoeur therefore completes this section with a short discussion on the question of evil which I will not reproduce here except to refer to two relevant points. The first being that in order to understand the gap that remains between separation and condemnation, the story of the creation of humans and that of their dereliction must be read in light of each other<sup>847</sup>. In this way, Ricoeur argues that “humans do not stop being creatures, and, as such, good creatures. The same fundamental capacities that

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<sup>841</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Thinking Creation” in *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*. p38

<sup>842</sup>*Ibid.*, p33

<sup>843</sup>*Ibid.*, p46

<sup>844</sup>*Ibid.*, p39

<sup>845</sup>*Ibid.*, p40

<sup>846</sup>*Ibid.*, p39

<sup>847</sup>Here Ricoeur is referring to the narrative of the expulsion from Eden. The expulsion from Eden ends the proximity in separation between the Creator and the creature. In Eden humanity lived in proximity to God “in a garden planted by God” (*ibid.*, p 44). With humanity’s expulsion, the primordial history from now on unfolds ‘outside Eden’.



make up human beings' humanity remain, albeit as affected with a negative sign."<sup>848</sup>  
The second is that Ricoeur relates finitude to language, in this particular story of Genesis to the serpent, whereby suspicion is opened and "a fault line is introduced into the most fundamental condition of language, namely the relation of trust, what linguists call the sincerity clause"<sup>849</sup>. This points to the manner in which speech and the language of the one who speaks is tied to the 'truthfulness' and the 'psychological state' of the speaker especially concerning the propositional content of a sentence. It indicates the limits of language in its susceptibility to manipulation in describing reality.

In his second section 'The Foundation' Ricoeur focuses on the non-linear way in which primordial events inaugurate history. He writes:

It is never a question of a Creation *ex nihilo*, the beginning is not unique by definition, and a first event cannot be represented by a point on a line. These events have a temporal thickness that calls for the unfolding of a narrative...thus an initial sense can be attached to the notion of a founding event, namely, that in it is expressed what we can call the energy of beginning. What circulates among all the beginnings, thanks to the relation of intersignification, and thanks to the circular relation brought about by the initial events, is the initiating, inaugural, founding power of a beginning...added to it is the idea of a continuation, of something following, that allows us to say that the founding event begins a history.<sup>850</sup>

Ricoeur differentiates between 'to begin' and 'to continue'. The beginning, which is a promise and the demand of a continuation, can never be grasped. Thus, in order to recognise 'the beginning', Ricoeur offers two ways. The first is 'after the fact', in that the continuation of the creation attests to a beginning. This approach, of starting from the present and reading history backwards, is an approach that is shared by the scientist, the historian, the anthropologist, the biologist and the cosmologist. This approach makes sense of the "kinship" between the 'mythic' point of view and the scientific point of view and it clarifies the dialectic between beginning and continuing, thus "we do not speak of beginning except after the fact of continuing."<sup>851</sup>

The second way to speak about the beginning is through 'projecting the origins' and is according to Ricoeur the only way to make sense of the parallel between what the

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<sup>848</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. "Thinking Creation" in *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*. p45

<sup>849</sup> Ibid., p42

<sup>850</sup> Ibid., p49

<sup>851</sup> Ibid., p51

narrator of creation stories<sup>852</sup> and the scientist seek to do. This is to assume a beginning as ‘always already there’. In doing this “the narratives about the origins exercise their inaugural and foundational function only by positing events “after which” there is a subsequent history.”<sup>853</sup> In this way there are two points of ‘starting from which’. One is of an origin asking to be spoken of, the second is of a narrator who from her own experience attempts to represent the beginning through the model that is known to her and pertinent to this study therefore is his claim that:

the one speaks of the origin in an emphatic, preemptory, kerygmatic fashion, the other seeks it and, at the limit, leads to the admission that the origin is ungraspable. This latter movement starts from a present, self-centered awareness, seeking its own beginnings: the former starts from the beginning itself, which decenters consciousness and imposes itself as being there already before consciousness starts to look for it. The religious presupposition here is that the origin itself speaks in letting itself be spoken of.<sup>854</sup>

These points raise two issues which are notable as being applicable to narratives of creation and will be tested now in relation to *The Universe Story*. *The Universe Story* as we have stated attempts to provide a time-developmental account of the chronological development of the universe. It does this, not solely through historical documents and scientific models but also through the use of figurative language.

In the next section I explore the supposition that although *The Universe Story* does not explicitly use the language of creation or creator it does infer a creator in addition to emphasising the sacredness of the world. In this section through an examination of the way in which it speaks about the origin we are provided with insight into the way in which it signifies the universe.

### 3.3.1.1 What the description of the ‘origin’ in the narrative tells the reader

In chapter one entitled ‘Primordial Flaring Forth’ Swimme and Berry write that an “Originating power brought forth a universe. All the energy that would ever exist in

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<sup>852</sup>Ricoeur uses the term biblical narrator interchangeably with the narrator of creation stories. In this instance I use narrator of creation stories as it takes the emphasis from Biblical narrative while retaining the relevancy of the point Ricoeur makes.

<sup>853</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Thinking Creation” in *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*. p52

<sup>854</sup>*Ibid.*, p54

the entire course of time erupted as a single quantum – a singular gift – existence.”<sup>855</sup> In this opening sentence we witness the way in which the narrative speaks about the origin of the universe. It is evident from this that *The Universe Story* adopts the approach of ‘always already there’ beginning from the origin itself. The narrative does not attempt to redescribe this power in detail except to identify it and to name it as ‘originating’. This, according to the text, is the power which set the universe in motion. It is a founding event, primordial and ungraspable, which begins a subsequent history. Thus, *The Universe Story* ‘projects its origins’ and in doing so reveals the tradition of its authors<sup>856</sup>.

This power that “brings forth the universe is not itself an event in time, nor a position in space, but is rather the very matrix out of which the conditions arise that enable temporal events to occur in space.”<sup>857</sup> This power is what makes a universe possible. The text does not say ‘creates’ a universe but implies that without which a universe could not exist. The narrative claims further how this power “evoked the cosmic seed”<sup>858</sup> thus distinguishing how the seed of the universe before it develops, is still not equivalent to this power, rather this power is what generates the seed. This infers that it holds a responsibility for the emergence of the universe. Later the narrative will state how an “originating power gave birth to the universe”<sup>859</sup>. All of these terms, gave birth, bring forth, emerge from, suggest a creative act<sup>860</sup>. This creative act, devoid of any description or explanation of the characteristics of its creator can be associated with that power at the beginning, whose own beginning the narrative does not speculate on. In this there is a separation identifiable between the foundation of this stated primordial energy and the universe it produces. Furthermore, it is that originating power or energy which ‘powers’ all, that the narrative identifies as the founding event of the

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<sup>855</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p17

<sup>856</sup>Ricoeur observes “how does one form the very idea of an origin if it was not already familiar “from the myths, hymns, and wisdom writings that, for him, are already there and that speak of a human condition and a cosmic situation that themselves were already there before they were recounted?” Ricoeur, Paul. “Thinking Creation” in *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*. p52. It is worth recalling that Thomas Berry was a Catholic priest and member of the Passionist order.

<sup>857</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p17

<sup>858</sup>*ibid.*, p31

<sup>859</sup>*ibid.*, p17

<sup>860</sup>It is interesting to note that in *Journey of the Universe* there is no mention of this ‘originating power’. This narrative rather begins with the sentences “Let’s begin at the very beginning. How did it all start? ...it appears there really was a beginning. Some scientists refer to this as the Big Bang” Swimme & Tucker. *Journey of the Universe*, p 5. The exclusion of this ‘power’ possibly illustrates that while Berry is a seminal influence on *JOTU*, that he is not the primary influence. It also points to the way in which narratives develop.

universe as it expresses the energy of ‘a’ beginning which sets into motion the idea of continuation and begins a history, in this instance the history of the universe. In light of this, it can be read in the narrative that the universe in its most minimal form as seed was created. It began through the creative act of something other than itself.

If we follow Ricoeur’s point to its end, it can also be argued that *The Universe Story* presents this origin as speaking itself in letting itself be spoken. The development of the universe is traced through the narrative to a point where the authors write “even our most recent modes of scientific understanding of this immense story are themselves the latest phase of the story. It is the story become conscious of itself in human intelligence”<sup>861</sup> or “we have a capacity for understanding and responding to the story that the universe tells of itself.”<sup>862</sup> The narrative is emphasising how the origin is spoken first through the way in which the universe develops and through the myriad of beings within the universe who, according to the narrative, each tell the story and thus speak of the origin so that the universe, in this narrative, has come to exist ‘for itself’.

In presenting an origin who speaks in letting itself be spoken and which exists as an inaugurating event separate from that which it inaugurates, it is clear that the narrative cannot be considered as simply a naturalist account of reality but has identified a dimension that is transcendent of the physical world. However, the narrative refrains from explicitly applying a theistic interpretation to this transcendent power. The authors refusal to interpret or give definition to this ‘something more’ combined with their circumvention of any definition of the term ‘divine’ raises questions about what they wish to avoid or conversely to achieve through this. This could be read as the desire of the authors to let the natural world speak for itself which suggests the basic commitment of religious naturalism and even a natural theology meant here in the sense that Manning describes it as “the operations of human intellect and the ways the world seems to be to us as we encounter it are not merely self-contained but rather tell us something, however imprecise, uncertain, and incomplete about ultimate reality, or, God.”<sup>863</sup> It could likewise be interpreted to mean that the authors implicitly take for

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<sup>861</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p237

<sup>862</sup>Ibid., p251

<sup>863</sup>Manning, Russell Re. “Natural Theology Reconsidered (Again)” in *Theology and Science*, 15:3, 2017 pp289-301:290. This is a concise and informed discussion on the history and position that natural theology occupies. I include natural theology here as ecotheology according to Guess can be understood as a natural theology “to the extent that it is patterned by current scientific understandings of the

granted that naturalism in itself is insufficient to satisfy the cognitive, moral and religious longing of the human, hence the implicit space for a horizon that can never be grasped<sup>864</sup>. It could further be read as an example of the criticism levelled at religious naturalists by Charley D. Hardwick in that because their philosophical and theological terms are unclear, religious naturalists risk “nostalgically reintroducing terms from the very tradition the retreat from which led them into naturalism to start with”<sup>865</sup>. Berry, as a historian of religion and a Catholic priest could not be validly accused of being unaware of the complexity of such terms or ideas, as much as his own employment of them eludes their nuances and history. Another possibility is to make ‘the story’ more widely appealing, in particular towards those who claim no faith or religion, or indeed for non-Christian religions, which would assist the narratives environmental concerns and motivation.

I argue that it is not the implication of a ‘creator’ that Swimme and Berry are predominantly concerned with, as Oelschlaeger’s typification of Berry suggests, and as their decision to avoid any description of this ‘power’ attests to. Rather the narrative points to a panentheistic model whose value lies in the connection it maintains between ‘that’ which is transcendent and the world<sup>866</sup>. Such a model Main argues is a

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world. Yet as well as being ‘natural,’ it is also ‘theological’ because it is grounded in the texts which have provided the cornerstones of Christian thought and traditions in both pre-Modern and Modern times.” (Guess, Deborah. ‘The theistic naturalism of Arthur Peacocke as a framework for ecological theology’ in *Phronema*, p66.). *The Universe Story* is certainly grounded in the natural world and while being influenced by some of Christian thought such as Teilhard and Aquinas, it is contestable the extent to which the narrative is grounded in Christian texts.

<sup>864</sup>Cf. John Haught’s paper “Is Nature Enough? No” for an interesting discussion on this. Haught writes that there are three reasons why nature (as proposed by religious naturalism) can never, by itself, be satisfactory to the human quest for knowledge, meaning and fulfilment. He gives three reasons in the form of human ‘needs’ for this. These are: human spiritual needs; the mind’s need for deep explanation, and the perennial human search for truth. Haught, John F. “Is Nature Enough? No” in *Zygon*, vol. 38, no. 4, December 2003, pp769-782.

<sup>865</sup>Hardwick, Charley D. “Religious Naturalism Today” in *Zygon*, p116

<sup>866</sup>There is a long history associated with the term “panentheism” with some arguing that the concept first begins implicitly in the philosophy of Plato with his concept of the Forms as pure and unchanging and the world as changing and in motion. From Plato to Schelling various philosophers (including Spinoza) developed ideas that are similar to the themes of contemporary panentheism whose specific issue is God’s relationship with the world (Culp, John, “Panentheism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/panentheism> last accessed 28th August 2020. In the past two centuries, a large body of panentheistic thought has developed particularly in the Christian tradition in response to scientific thought (cf. Arthur Peacocke & Philip Clayton, 2004) William Rowe defines pantheism and panentheism very simply thus : “Pantheism is the view that God is wholly within the universe and the universe is wholly within God, so that God and the universe are coextensive...Panentheism, agrees with pantheism that the universe is within God, but denies that God is limited to the universe.”(Rowe, W “Does panentheism reduce to pantheism? A response to Craig” in

metaphysical alternative to “disenchantment and its epistemological implication”<sup>867</sup>. This is underscored by Berry’s desire to return to experience, and in particular the experience of ‘sacredness’ which he argued imbued hope and gratitude<sup>868</sup>. I recall here Berry’s views that religion move from a theological and anthropological focus to a cosmological focus where the universe, and nature, will be read as a sacred text. Such an experience, according to Berry, historically pre-dates our religions and their concepts and any ready-made world of meaning. *The Universe Story* celebrates the glory of the cosmos. To evoke such an experience, in the narrative, the natural world, as the universe, is re-imagined through the use of metaphor and ancient symbolism and provides this opaque ‘origin’ with ‘something to say’ however obliquely to the human being. This leaves open the mystery of the possibility of a creator and highlights that the narrative is not only interested in immanence but makes space for and encourages such interpretations of a ‘more’. In this purposeful ambiguity, Berry and Swimme are offering a broader canvas from which to draw our concepts, ideas and understanding of ‘God’, spirituality and sacredness. And yet in preserving such terms as sacred and divine the function and commitment of these same terms as traditionally expressed through religion, are also maintained. This need not necessarily be a limitation of the narrative but serves as an example of the fore-structure of tradition and prejudice as constituting the continuity that is requisite to our understanding<sup>869</sup>.

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*the International Journal of Philosophy and Religion*. 2007, pp61-67:65) Pantheism at its most general may be understood as the view that God is identical with the cosmos. Panentheism however maintains the distinction between God and the world while recognising God’s inter-relatedness and being in the world. Some thinkers view panentheism as an alternative to classical theism with philosophical idealism and the concept of evolution as its source while others such as Göcke argue that it is not an attractive alternative as it argues that the world necessarily exists rather than being contingent as classical theism (Göcke, B.P. Panentheism and classical theism. *SOPHIA* 52, 61–75 (2013). Mullins argues that attempts to demarcate panentheism from theism and pantheism fail and questions its viability as a position at all (Mullins, R.T. The Difficulty with Demarcating Panentheism. *SOPHIA* 55, 325–346 (2016).

<sup>867</sup>Main, Roderick. “Panentheism and the undoing of disenchantment” in *Zygon*, vol. 52, no. 4, December 2017. Roderick states that ‘disenchantment’ relates to the rationalisation and intellectualisation that characterises the modern world. Roderick cites Weber as stating that while such an approach to reality frees people from illusion and promotes extraordinary scientific and economic advances, it also results in disengagement, abstraction, alienation and the problem of meaning. While Berry does not write explicitly about ‘disenchantment’, he too argues this point. A common theme in his writing is that even with our increasing scientific knowledge of the universe, it has simultaneously “lost for us its mystical dimensions” (“The Universe as Divine Manifestation” in *The Sacred Universe* pp141-151:149) Much of Berry’s work is an attempt to evoke this mystical aspect of Earth and to re-enchant the human with the natural world. (cf. Berry’s essays: “Alienation”, “The Dream of the Earth” and “The Sacred Universe”).

<sup>868</sup>Berry, Thomas. *The Sacred Universe*.

<sup>869</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Hermeneutical Logic?” in *Hermeneutics. Writings and Lectures*. Vol. 2., p76

In the third and final section entitled ‘Trajectories: Thinking Creation?’ Ricoeur poses two questions which will be posed again here to the narrative of *The Universe Story*. These are, firstly, what does the status of creature signify, and secondly, in brief and succinctly here, “the meaning of the idea of precedence?”<sup>870</sup> This analysis will also contribute in evaluating the configuration of the human in the following chapter.

### 3.3.2. The status of reality as a ‘creature’ in the universe

The second of Ricoeur’s questions to be posed is the status of reality (cosmic or human) as a creature. What does the creation signify? Creation is not the equivalent of a physical cosmology. To say creation is to say more than the universe, as it involves God, the world and humankind and the relationship between them. Rather the notion of creation involves questions of order, cosmic justice and theodicy, justice and salvation<sup>871</sup>. While Ricoeur argues that the doctrine of creation is linked to salvation, both doctrines require distinct treatments. While creation may remain the ‘surrounding horizon’ of the theological field, it cannot encompass it, as the theological field he argues cannot be totalised. In relation to justice, Ricoeur argues that “the injustice of the world constitutes such a massive fact that the presumed tie between the idea of justice and that of creation loses almost all its pertinence.”<sup>872</sup> According to Ricoeur we no longer know “how to think the “justice of God” both as a structure of the Creation of the world and as a demand organizing the practical field, that is, the field of human activity.”<sup>873</sup> With this in view, this next section will limit itself to the examination of the model of creation that is presented in the narrative of *The Universe Story*. This will be done through focusing on Ricoeur’s second question, what is the meaning of precedence and by posing another question to the text, that of the relationship of the particular to the universe.

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<sup>870</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Thinking Creation” in *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*. p55

<sup>871</sup>There are different operative models of creation. Ricoeur drawing on Claus Westermann identifies four typologies for creation. These are: creation by generation, creation through combat, creation by fabrication and creation through a word. Each of these presents different ways of envisaging the Creator and the created. Ricoeur, Paul. “Thinking Creation” in *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*. p37

<sup>872</sup>Ibid., p61. According to Ricoeur, creation, justice and salvation must be spoken about in terms of different modes of thought.

<sup>873</sup>Ibid., p60

### 3.3.2.1 The meaning of the 'idea of precedence' of the 'originating power' to the universe it has created

The 'originating power' of the text gave birth to the universe. Elsewhere Swimme and Berry state that "If in the future, stars would blaze and lizards would blink in their light, these actions would be powered by the same numinous energy that flared forth at the dawn of time."<sup>874</sup> The authors imply that this power is separate from the universe, in that it precedes it and is its cause, but it is also immanent within the universe as being the condition for every moment. Thus, we have a 'power' which 'creates' a 'universe'. As pre-existing this universe, the narrative lets us deduce that this power is 'beyond' or 'more than' the universe. It is also this power which to quote Swimme and Berry 'powers' the universe from the different actions of stars blazing to lizards blinking. Hence, we have a power, which is 'numinous' and 'divine' and transcends the universe while simultaneously 'animating' it. From this we can propose that the universe in the narrative is a created world elicited by a divine and numinous power and at the same time that this power is immanent in the world whether that power is understood as originating power or universe power.

This seems to re-state the classical dialectic between immanence and transcendence in philosophical theology. It is more likely however to be drawing on Berry's engagement with Confucianism and its idea of immanent transcendence. Indeed, in his essay "The Dream of the Earth" Berry coined the word 'inscendence' which appears to collate both terms<sup>875</sup>. Immanent transcendence stresses the immanence of the divine, the 'in-dwelling of God' in this world while maintaining that there simultaneously exists a being or realm beyond the sensible world. It denotes a process, a movement within the creative process of life itself, but it also denotes 'something' which makes this process possible. In Confucianism it is understood as Dao. Dao is above the forms (i.e. it is metaphysical), and thus not a visible or perceivable thing making it transcendent. On the other hand, it can only be put into practice through definite things (i.e. through physical forms); thus, it is immanent. Rošker argues that in

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<sup>874</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p17

<sup>875</sup>In this essay Berry writes that "we must invent, or reinvent a sustainable human culture by a descent into our pre-rational, our instinctive, resources...what is needed is not transcendence but "inscendence", not the brain but the gene". Berry believed that through such "special psychic resources" an awakening to the "numinous powers ever present in the phenomenal world about us" takes place. Berry, Thomas. "The Dream of the Earth" in *The Dream of the Earth*, pp208-211



the Daoist system, Dao is both the source of all existence and simultaneously incorporates each particular appearance<sup>876</sup>. In addition to the Confucian influence, the idea of immanent transcendence in a secular form has also been used within environmental ethics to appeal to ‘something larger’ than a human life which need not be a metaphysical or a theistic commitment. Maintenay argues that the division between ‘supernatural transcendence’ and ‘immanent transcendence’ is not always clear cut and identifies Berry as “a good example of someone who challenges this division.”<sup>877</sup>

There are two further sentences which provide insight. One of these sentences is contained in the epilogue and written after a number of paragraphs describing how some cultures and traditions recognise an underlying unity in the world. These paragraphs culminate in a sentence which describes the Christian mystic tradition and Neoplatonism of Greek philosophy as teaching of this unity too. The sentence reads and I will reproduce it in full:

because of their unity of origin all things are bound together in the intimacy of “friendship,” the intimacy that justifies the use of the word “universe” to indicate that the diversity of things exists not in separation but in a comprehensive unity whereby all things are bonded together in inseparable and everlasting unity.<sup>878</sup>

This is a description of the universe which depicts reality as a unified whole initiated from a single source. The words ‘inseparable’ and ‘everlasting’ are notable. The second sentence, also in the epilogue, reads:

The emergent universe can be considered as a continued elaboration of this sequence of existence and extinction, the pressing toward expanded modes of being and ever more intimate presence of things to each other... Whatever be the more practical purposes of existence it appears that celebration is omnipresent, not simply in the individual modes of its expression but in the grandeur of the entire cosmic process.<sup>879</sup>

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<sup>876</sup>Rošker, Jana S. “The Subject’s New Clothes: Immanent Transcendence and the Moral Self in the Modern Confucian Discourses” in *Asian Philosophy*, 2014, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp346–362:348

<sup>877</sup>Maintenay, André. “A Notion of “Immanent Transcendence” and Its Feasibility in Environmental Ethics” in *Worldviews* 15, 2011, pp268-290 Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2011

<sup>878</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p266

<sup>879</sup>Ibid., p264

This is a statement about the purpose – ‘expanded modes of being’ - and meaning – ‘celebration’<sup>880</sup> – assigned by the narrative to the universe. In these sentences, we are presented with a depiction of the universe as a single entity from a single origin, which manifests itself in a diversity of beings, but in a diversity that is held together by this unity. Each being we are told, is inseparable from this unity and this unity is everlasting. The text narrates that this is a universe which ‘presses towards’. In the phrase ‘presses towards’ there is a strong teleology implied which is directed as the text states ‘towards’ something. The text describes that which the universe ‘presses toward’ as ‘expanded modes of being’.

Thus, this phrase can be understood in two ways. As an expanse in different physical forms of being, and so as an increase in diversity. Or as an expansion of the concept of being itself, to include this physical expansion of being and all else that the universe manifests, and hence the way in which one conceptualises one’s own being. This second understanding of expansion of being can be deduced from the phrase that follows, which states ‘ever more intimate presence of things to each other’. As in chapter two ‘intimate presence’ is less a physical manifestation than a ‘spiritual’ one. According to the narrative ‘things’ by virtue of the unity of the universe are already part of a unity, this unity being the universe entire. The word ‘presence’ enters a concept of awareness of these ‘things’ towards each other and the word ‘intimacy’ that of a deep intercommunion. Thus, our awareness and appreciation of the unity of this whole which is expressed in ever increasing diverse modes, expands. This realisation of ‘intimate presence’ results in the celebration of beings of each other and of the entire process, which Swimme and Berry argue is one of the purposes of the universe.

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<sup>880</sup>In their Introduction to the text, the authors make that claim that “Earth seems to be a reality that is developing with the simple aim of celebrating the joy of existence” thus immediately setting the tone for their narrative as one of delight (p3) and encouraging the reader to participate in this manner. Sideris (2017) has criticised *Journey of the Universe* which is written in this same tone as being ‘problematically upbeat’ due to the very severity of the ecological crisis. This criticism is arguably based on two assumptions. The first is that it is feelings of gravity or urgency that lead to a change in human behaviour and that make this criticism itself problematic. The second is that *The Universe Story* downplays the planetary crisis. This second assumption is a more reasonable critique of the text. There are, as this thesis shows, many aspects of the narrative which are drawn out and highlighted over and above the current condition of the planet. While Mickey argues against Sideris that indeed *Journey of the Universe* is “happy and optimistic” (Mickey, Sam. “A Postcritical Journey: Between Religion and Evolution”, p16) referring to its ‘cheeky joy’ as a positive element of the narrative, these adjectives can only tentatively be applied to *The Universe Story*. The overall tone of *The Universe Story* is one of reverence and gravitas towards the ‘universe’ and what it signifies in the text.

In this way the universe of the narrative through its expansion of being is ‘pressing towards’ increased diversity of being and deeper intimacy between beings, and with its emphasis on a single source, a recognition of our inseparability. At this point I would like to again note how increased diversity of being would lend itself to an interpretation that is related to physical development of the universe, while deeper intimacy in the narrative to be a spiritual development of the universe. Here again I would like to highlight the influence of Teilhard at work. For Teilhard, “Being is not mere existence but existence toward the more— reflected in the process of evolution. We are inevitably making our way to a completely new concept of being.”<sup>881</sup>

### 3.3.2.2 The paradox of ‘time as eternity’ and ‘time as developing’ within the narrative

Ricoeur argues that “the world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world”<sup>882</sup>. In *The Universe Story* time is presented simultaneously as being both complete and unfolding. In one instance time is presented as an indivisible whole. This, as quoted above, is its “everlasting”<sup>883</sup> unity. The narrative states how “no part of the present can be isolated from any other part of the present or the past or the future.”<sup>884</sup> The narrative explains the notion of the future existing in the present through such examples as the evolution of Cenozoic mammals: “their movement into their future evolution began with commitment to a vision – a vision strongly felt but seen as if fleetingly and in darkness...no vision of itself in the future, and yet the future pressed into its experience of the moment: “here is a way to live. Here is a path worth risking everything for.”<sup>885</sup> This sentence demonstrates the authors’ belief that the future is not emerging passively nor distantly, but acts in the present. It is an example of time’s indivisibility.

This concept of time’s indivisibility becomes more comprehensible when compared with Teilhard’s and Haught’s metaphysics of the future. As argued in chapter two, a metaphysics of the future incorporates a metaphysics of the past in seeking to

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<sup>881</sup> Delio Iliia. “Is Natural Law “Unnatural?” Exploring God and Nature Through Teilhard’s Organic Theology” in *Theology and Science*, p282

<sup>882</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative. Vol 1*, p3

<sup>883</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p266

<sup>884</sup>Ibid., p29

<sup>885</sup>Ibid., p138

explain the universe, but also includes looking to the future as necessary in this explanation. It is an anticipatory vision that seeks to situate the entire universe in its indivisibility: past, present and future. Delio writes that for Teilhard “In an evolutionary universe which is incomplete and open to the future, the principle of life is not supported from below but from the future. The God who is in evolution cannot be a God who creates from behind but must be ahead, the power of the future.”<sup>886</sup> This power of the future must be felt in the present or else would remain ineffective, blurring traditional understandings of time, as the narrative has suggested. A connection can also be made here with the meaning inherent in the narrative of the precedence of the origin. Ricoeur notes in *Time and Narrative* how in Augustine’s proposition of eternity’s transcendence of time, there is established an opposition between a subsisting present (a present without past or future) and a human present which suffers from “the ‘distension’ between a present of the past, which is memory and a present of the future, which is expectation, and the present of the present, which is intuition or attention.”<sup>887</sup> In the narrative the origin of time and space holds time and space within itself. In this way it stands outside of time and space and so can be understood as eternal and so indivisible. Furthermore, the universe as manifesting time and space is also that which facilitates the development of time and space, and so can be interpreted as having a unified quality. In another instance time is presented as incomplete in the narrative in that the universe is not physically finished but continues to develop and continues to evolve. It is still ‘pressing towards’ completion or wholeness. Hence on one side we have a conceptually unified and completed whole and on the other, a physical world which remains unfinished. There are two aspects at work here. The first is the meaning of the origin which stands outside of time and thus is eternal or unaffected by time, and the second is that of the time of the narrative.

Ricoeur argues that every story that is told contains two types of time. One is a discrete succession of a series of incidents which is theoretically indefinite as we can always continue to ask ‘and then what happened?’ The other aspect of time is the “integration, culmination and closure owing to which the story receives a particular configuration”<sup>888</sup>. As such the narrated story is both a temporal totality and a mediation

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<sup>886</sup>Delio, Iliia. “Is Natural Law “Unnatural?” Exploring God and Nature through Teilhard’s Organic Theology” in *Theology and Science*, p283

<sup>887</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. “Thinking Creation” p64. Ricoeur writes extensively on Augustine’s concept of time in *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*.

<sup>888</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*. p22

between time as duration and time as passage. Ricoeur refers to this as discordant concordance or of concordant discordance<sup>889</sup>. It is the plot according to Ricoeur which mediates these aspects of time specifically “between the multiple incidents and unified story; the primacy of concordance over discordance; and, finally, the competition between succession and configuration.”<sup>890</sup> However in *The Universe Story* it is discordance that takes place over concordance. There is no closure to the story but rather it ends with the present historical, geographical and social moment of human/Earth history. The future although imaged in the Ecozoic remains uncertain. This uncertainty shows the risks ahead for the physical survival of planet Earth, the other than human species and the human species itself. The text declares that “In the future the entire complex of life systems of the planet will be influenced by the human in a comprehensive manner.”<sup>891</sup> Thus there is no conclusion offered in the narrative, no enduring time, only something of ‘a wake-up call’ to our current ecological phase. Although the events of the development of the universe are configured and integrated, the narrative does not provide us with a temporal totality but rather lands firmly in the lap – and actions - of the human in a ‘to-be-continued’ scenario. As a creation story, it focuses on what Scott refers to as ‘the pragmatic interpretation’ and its implications for ethics.

Cosmic narratives, as Hesketh has pointed out, tend to end with moralising about future scenarios. *The Universe Story* offers ‘a choice ahead’: the Technozoic (increased exploitation of Earth) and the Ecozoic (a flourishing planet and Earth community) although its emphasis is firmly and optimistically on the Ecozoic. And yet, the universe in the narrative is also referred to as an everlasting unity. If this is so, then we must ask what part of the universe is complete or what is the unity that is everlasting? Clearly from the text, not the physical/material aspect but that which precedes it. Furthermore, the human, as part of this physical universe also appears to be ‘incomplete’ and in development and is called by the narrative to enter into a new

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<sup>889</sup>Ricoeur provides a very clear explanation of his use of concordance and discordance in *Oneself as Another*. Concordance he writes is “the principle of order that presides over what Aristotle calls “the arrangement of facts.” Discordance he explains as “the reversals of fortune that make the plot an ordered transformation from an initial situation to a terminal situation.” Identity at the level of emplotment, Ricoeur describes as a competition between the demand for concordance and the acknowledgement of discordances which threaten this identity. Configuration is the “art of composition” which mediates between them. (Ricoeur, *P Oneself as Another*.p141)

<sup>890</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*.p22

<sup>891</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p247

period of creativity and to become a “mutually enhancing human presence upon the Earth”<sup>892</sup>. In the epilogue the narrative states “without entrancement within this new context of existence it is unlikely that the human community will have the psychic energy needed for the renewal of the Earth.”<sup>893</sup> This psychic energy, the narrative declares, comes from direct communion between the human and the natural world.

Time, as presented in this narrative is an interplay between ‘the everlasting unity’ of the universe epitomised in the originating power as that which endures, and the material or physical aspect of the universe, that which passes away. Thus, there is a way in which one aspect of time can help to create the other. Specifically, in the case of *The Universe Story*, it is that of the concept of the universe as manifesting a transcendent and numinous power, which can guide or influence what the human will physically manifest next. This is familiar territory in theological and philosophical debates where the spiritual is given precedence over the physical and where eternity or salvation can be achieved if we, the human, begin to act in a certain way. It would appear that this again enters a dualism into the narrative which I do not think the authors intend. Indeed, in his many other works, Berry has argued against this dualism, stating how the outer environment affects the inner environment of the individual and how these two aspects of environment and interiority are inextricably linked<sup>894</sup>.

And yet this gap persists, in how can that which is complete incorporate that which *remains* to be completed - without being completed - in its inclusion? How too does this narrative differ from the Christian notions of eschatology? Both narratives have salvation in view, although *The Universe Story* extends its salvation to all forms of the physical present. Earlier I wrote of how the aim of the universe is increased diversity of being – which we claimed was a physical development – and greater intimacy of beings – which we claimed was a spiritual development. It seems to be the case in this narrative of how the spiritual development of the human is the condition necessary for the physical development needed to continue the Earth and the human story within this larger universe story. Salvation, in this instance becomes about an awareness and appreciation of the physical present in all its diversity and a recognition of the sacred or psychic element of that physical present. This is based on Berry’s

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<sup>892</sup>Ibid., p250

<sup>893</sup>Ibid., p268

<sup>894</sup> In *The Universe Story*, it is explicitly stated that “the inner depths of each being in the universe are activated by the surrounding universe” (p41). For a more detailed explanation of this concept please see Berry, Thomas. *The Sacred Universe*.

conviction that nature has its own healing powers and technologies. It does not require human technology or ‘fixing’. On the contrary, Guess argues that “Berry is strongly non-interventionist: the Earth can be healed only by humankind staying out of the way of natural processes”<sup>895</sup>, thus what is more urgent for Berry is developing our ability to observe and to be present, ‘in communion’ with the natural world in its functioning. As an ecological approach this contains a large level of risk. It assumes that it is possible for humanity to ‘stay out of the way’ of natural processes when there is growing evidence that shows we are deeply and now irreversibly involved in biological processes<sup>896</sup>. In addition, the time needed to develop our ability to observe and be present may be greater than the time left for action in a rapidly deteriorating environment. In other words, it may be too late for Berry’s approach to be effective.

The next point which builds on these two points and further illustrates the reference of the narrative, is the role that the narrative attributes to the human. This consists of two parts. The first is the role which is implicitly referred to in the narrative, as ensuring the material or physical survival of Earth and our own species and which was spoken of above. The second is explicitly stated in the text where the narrative describes the human as that being in which the *universe* comes to conscious self-awareness. In this manner, it is not the human independently who is a self-conscious creature, rather it is the universe which has come to consciousness *through* the human. This is an important distinction. The narrative describes how the universe through time develops this capacity of consciousness until it develops in the human to such an extent that it is “the special capacity of the human to enable the universe and the planet Earth to reflect on and to celebrate, not simply the present moment, but the total historical process that enables this moment to be what it is.”<sup>897</sup> This is one result of human consciousness, the ability to reflect and to celebrate. The other result, according to the narrative, is that the human is able to “refashion and use parts of its exterior environment as instruments in achieving its own ends.”<sup>898</sup> Thus, there is an ambiguity

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<sup>895</sup>Guess, Deborah. “*Anthropocentrism in Ecological Theology with Reference to the Works of Charles Birch, Sallie McFague and Thomas Berry.*” p120

<sup>896</sup> C.f. Current debates around the term ‘Anthropocene’ that argue humans have impacted on geological processes to such an extent that earth has entered a new epoch of Geological Time Scale called the Anthropocene, in particular Zalasiewicz, Jan, Waters, Colin, Summerhayes, Colin & Williams, Mark. “The Anthropocene” in *Geology Today*, Vol. 34, No. 5, September–October 2018; Haff, PK. “Being human in the Anthropocene” in *The Anthropocene Review*, 2017, Vol. 4(2) 103-109

<sup>897</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p267

<sup>898</sup>Ibid., p143

inherent in the human as presented in the narrative. The human is, in one manner, a manifestation of the universe, an instrument through which the universe reflects on itself. In another manner, according to the narrative, the human is that being who contains the power to affect the future of Earth and other species, but because, according to the text, does not recognise herself as part of Earth, is destructive towards that which the text claims constitutes it - which begs two questions – if the universe in a remarkable feat comes to consciousness in the human, how can it be so self-destructive? And what constitutes the relationship between the human and the universe? These questions will be taken up in my next chapter.

There is another central issue to be taken into account in dealing with creation and this is the way in which the originating energy relates in the universe. In keeping with the narrative's particular use of language I will examine this under the concept of the relationship of the particular to the universal.

### 3.3.3 The relationship of the particular to the universal

In the narrative, we are told that the universe acts in an integral manner because it is an indivisible whole. Swimme and Berry state that “all interactions are different manifestations of primordial universe activity”<sup>899</sup>. They give further examples from empirical science when they interpret “the strong nuclear interaction is the universe acting; the gravitational interaction is the universe acting; the thermodynamic dynamism toward entropy is the universe acting”<sup>900</sup>. As regards the type of world it proposes, we can say that in this narrative the universe is presented as a single entity, but an entity, which acts in and through particular subjects. The use of subject here is important as it connotes a level of agency and autonomy. This does not make these beings separate to the universe but rather implies, according to the narrative, that there are many centres of creativity within the universe. The narrative states that “the universe arises into being as spontaneities governed by the primordial orderings of diversity, self-manifestation, and mutuality. These orderings are real in that they are

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<sup>899</sup>ibid., p29

<sup>900</sup>ibid., p26



efficacious in shaping the occurrences of events and thereby establishing the overriding meaning of the universe.”<sup>901</sup>

The narrative elaborates on this sentence and ‘the primordial orderings’ of diversity, self-manifestation and mutuality by describing these three ‘powers’ that “shape life”<sup>902</sup> in different words as chance, necessity and conscious choice. According to the narrative, chance refers to genetic mutation which the text states is one of the opaque dimensions of evolution in that it is a “process having no fixed goal, but a process of creativity haunted by a sense of direction, by the vaguest hint of the more fertile way.”<sup>903</sup> This is the dimension that the narrative also refers to as “the wild freedom to wander, to grope, to change spontaneously.”<sup>904</sup> Necessity refers to natural selection or the differential survival of the most fit within a particular population and, according to the narrative, it is the power of life and death “to sculpt diversity in a creative fashion”<sup>905</sup>. Conscious choice or niche creation, the narrative tells us refers to the self-organising dynamics that can be interpreted as “manifestations of memory, of discernment...of a basic irreducible intelligence.”<sup>906</sup> The narrative declares these three powers as an illustration of the creativity at the root of the universe and further describes them as being examples of differentiation (mutation), subjectivity (conscious choice) and communion (natural selection). It could be argued thus that although the universe is presented as a whole, as one entity, that this whole is characterised by its different beings. Beings are further characterised by their ability to act which in turn affects the whole. In this way there is an element of freedom involved in the functioning of the universe in this narrative in that beings are free to wander, to grope and to change. This would seem to indicate that there is a point where control of this venture is subsumed by the beings that form it, where the parts become greater than the sum. However, these are the same ‘beings’ or ‘parts’ that are connected to the originating power mentioned previously. They are, the narrative informs us, that power in action. This raises two points. The first is how in the narrative, the particular is understood as an expression of the universal. Swimme and Berry describe such particularities as “the

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<sup>901</sup>ibid., p72

<sup>902</sup>ibid., p128

<sup>903</sup>ibid., p127

<sup>904</sup>ibid.

<sup>905</sup>ibid.

<sup>906</sup>ibid., p132

awesome qualities of phenomenal existence.”<sup>907</sup> Elsewhere they refer to the universe as a ‘cosmic liturgy’ of celebration and further describe this relation of the particular and the universal thus:

This awesome aspect of the universe is found in qualitatively different modes of expression throughout the entire cosmic order but especially on the planet earth. There is no being that does not participate in this experience and mirror it forth in some way unique to itself and yet in a bonded relationship with the more comprehensive unity of the universe itself.<sup>908</sup> Thus, according to the narrative, the particular is particular because of its expression. Its expression mirrors what must already be part of the universe but can only be mirrored through that particular being. This is a clear reference to Aquinas who declared in the *Summa Theologica* that divine goodness could not be represented by one creature but required a diversity of creatures<sup>909</sup>. Such is also the case in the universe of this narrative. It is presented as a ‘cosmic liturgy’ of diversity each revealing something of the nature of the whole. Teilhard too took this model and according to Delio turned “revelation and nature into a complementarity of wholeness, expanding religion so that it better reflects God’s revelation.”<sup>910</sup>

More recently, debates in religious naturalism have also grappled with the challenges that contemporary science poses to traditional understandings of God. Religious naturalists seek to articulate a position between a secular/scientific worldview which rejects meaning in nature, and a supernatural worldview which posits meaning as external to the natural order<sup>911</sup>. According to Leidenhag, Gordon Kaufman argues that an evolutionary view of the universe does not match the idea of a creator God as this implies “a view of a conscious being that brought the world into existence”<sup>912</sup> while evolution, he states, indicates that mind comes after the fact of matter, although this is contestable. Kaufman argues that traditional Christian views of God are too anthropocentric and that they obscure ecological ways of thinking about our place in the world. Instead, he argues for God as the “serendipitous creativity of the universe” a

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<sup>907</sup>Ibid., p264

<sup>908</sup>Ibid.

<sup>909</sup> Berry, Thomas. “Economics as a Religious Issue” in *The Dream of the Earth*. pp70-88:79

<sup>910</sup>Delio, Iliia. “Is Natural Law “Unnatural?” Exploring God and Nature through Teilhard’s Organic Theology” in *Theology and Science*, p276

<sup>911</sup> Leidenhag, Mikael. “Religious Naturalism. The Current Debate” in *Philosophy Compass*. 2018, p2

<sup>912</sup>Kaufman, G. D. (2007). “A religious interpretation of emergence: Creativity as God” in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, 42, pp915:928:917 cited in Leidenhag, Mikael. “Religious Naturalism. The Current Debate” in *Philosophy Compass*.p2

view that is not incompatible with *The Universe Story*. However, Kaufman's approach differs from both Teilhard and Berry in that while Teilhard and Berry attempt to 'personalise' the universe, Kaufman on the other hand wished to remove all anthropomorphic understandings of God from creation. Kaufman writes that "God as the religious name for the profound mystery of creativity—the mystery of the emergence, in and through evolutionary and other originative processes, of novelty in the world... to imagine God, not as a quasi-personal Creator apart from and other than the universe but simply as creativity - the creativity in the Big Bang, in cosmic and biological evolution, and in human sociocultural life."<sup>913</sup> The idea of 'God as creativity' in the convergence of science (in particular quantum physics) and religion seems to be gaining traction as more is learned about the universe<sup>914</sup>. However, while creativity is also a central aspect of *The Universe Story*, it differs in that it is a creativity that is contextualised. Creativity in *The Universe Story* is linked to the expression of subjectivity which in turn is linked to spirituality and so creativity in *The Universe Story* becomes a 'spiritual impulse'. In this manner it is the expression or result of something that precedes it. In addition, *The Universe Story* further differs in how it stresses that creativity adds to a pre-existent unity through its continued emphasis on community. Creativity as itself and for itself cannot in this narrative stand alone, rather it is evoked by an interiority whose function is to build the whole and whose source is the same source as the numinous origins of the universe. It must be noted that *The Universe Story* was written some ten years or more before these ideas began to occupy a place in debates on religious naturalism and it in many ways pre-empts them, through presenting nature and the universe as sacred, and its insistence that meaning is to be found within the natural order.

### 3.3.3.1 To what end does the narrative maintain the distinction between the particular and the universal?

The second point which follows from the first, is that if the particular is an expression of the universe, why maintain the distinction between them? In the narrative, the authors write that "the universe brings forth new centers of creativity into this world

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<sup>913</sup>Kaufman, Gordon D. "A Religious Interpretation of Emergence: Creativity as God" in *Zygon*, p916

<sup>914</sup>Cf. Leidenhag, Mikael. "Religious Naturalism. The Current Debate"; Peters, Ted. "Naturalisms: Scientific? Religious? Theological"; and Hardwick, Charley, D. "Religious Naturalism Today".

of established relationships and long-honoured traditions. Potentially infinite desire finds itself within a woven fabric of finite energy.”<sup>915</sup> It would appear in the narrative that subjectivity also understood as self-expression is a value for Swimme and Berry. This subjectivity is expressed through creativity. If the ‘purpose’ of the universe is ‘expanded modes of being’, then the elaboration of the universal through the particular is reason enough to maintain the distinction. The particular becomes the way in which the universe achieves diversity. The universe, the narrative states, evokes beings which act in new ways with “new modes of power.”<sup>916</sup> The narrative declares that the universe is a story filled with drama, tragedy and beauty. It is, according to this narrative, through the distinction of the particular that this drama unfolds. A tale told to itself. The life span of particular beings plays out with creativity and destruction, “elegance and ruin”<sup>917</sup> and is what, according to the authors, makes the story both dramatic and beautiful. These life spans take place within the universe and in their extinction or death, the narrative tells us, are never enough to detract from the power or the inherent unity of the universal, which is the universe itself.

The returns us to the previous point of spiritual and physical development. The narrative indicates that an awareness of our inseparability and interconnection enables us to enter “into the larger community of life” and to ‘make choices’ which will enhance this entire community. This raises the ambiguity of the concept of freedom in the narrative. While the narrative does confer autonomy and subjectivity on its subjects, it is a subjectivity and autonomy that is ultimately affected by the over-riding power of the whole.

### 3.4 *The Universe Story*: A Cosmology of Religion?

In light of its use of figurative and religious language, its engagement with metaphysics and its status as a creation story, the question can be asked of whether Berry and Swimme are attempting to outline a new religion in *The Universe Story*? Its emphasis on the precedence of the originating power suggests a monism, while its separation to the creation further suggests the sacred as a ‘Wholly Other’. And yet the

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<sup>915</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p54

<sup>916</sup>*Ibid.*, p34

<sup>917</sup>*Ibid.*, p47

narrative deliberately avoids theological categories in its interpretation. Its use of symbolism and religious language do suggest, however, that the narrative is offering a developed conceptual framework within which to begin to think about ideas of the sacred and the divine in light of contemporary scientific discovery. So too does the symbolism employed in the narrative highlight a particular structure of being with traces of a theological tradition it borrows from, even as it tries to avoid it.

In addressing the two poles of the religious, these being demythologisation and the phenomenology of the sacred, Ricoeur argues that “the emergence of the word from the numinous is, in my opinion, the primordial trait that rules all the other differences between the two poles of the religious”<sup>918</sup>. He states that in particular the Judeo-Christian tradition entered this polarity into the religious sphere and it is misunderstood “if we purely and simply identify the religious and the sacred”<sup>919</sup>. Here Ricoeur differs from Eliade, whom Ricoeur states, keeps this polarity within “the sphere of the sacred as a divergence that does not really affect or alter the profound unity of the universe”<sup>920</sup>. For Ricoeur however, Christianity is involved in demythologisation that is in fact “part of the kerygma itself and that can be documented by the exegesis of the New Testament”<sup>921</sup> and that does affect the unity of a sacred universe. Christianity’s response to desacralisation and the destruction of the mythic universe under scientific ideology is, he argues, “to carry it out as a task of faith”<sup>922</sup> so that it accompanies the decline of the sacred in a ‘positive manner’. Ricoeur seeks a mediation between ‘the word’ and the sacred, arguing that hearing the word is now bound to a re-birth of the sacred and its symbolism.

It would be acceptable, at first glance, to class *The Universe Story*, as Sideris has argued, as involved in religiopoiesis. However, this only makes sense if, as Ricoeur states, we identify the religious with the sacred. While there are many reasons to claim *The Universe Story* as religious, including its language, there are also a number of reasons to refute this. The first is that in the narrative it is not a theophany of “the Name” that is being held up, but a hierophany with all the overflow of meaning

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<sup>918</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Manifestation and Proclamation” in *Figuring the Sacred*.p56

<sup>919</sup>Ibid., p55

<sup>920</sup>Ibid., p55

<sup>921</sup>Ibid., p62

<sup>922</sup>Ibid., p62 For a more detailed account of this, see Ricoeur’s “Essays on Biblical Interpretation” preface to Bultmann’s *Jesus, mythologie et demythologisation* (McCormick, Peter, trans.) Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1968

associated with this. An overflow of meaning that appeals to the productive imagination of the reader with no closed or fixed horizon. In addition, the narrative is primarily aesthetic over ethical, although Grassie might dispute this given his argument that Swimme and Berry's commitments in writing the text are primarily ethical<sup>923</sup>. This granted, the manner in which such ethical commitments are presented (Grassie gives the example of parables<sup>924</sup>) still necessitates an interpretation. The text's aesthetic is built on the fact that the narrative is a description of time and space. This time and space is a manifestation of an unfolding and developing universe. The different events that interrupt and transform this time and space are interpreted as cosmological moments of grace<sup>925</sup> that Berry named as "special sacred moments of transformation"<sup>926</sup>. The narrative contains no instruction or doctrine or explicit ethical commandments. Here 'the word' gets no privilege and the sacredness of nature does not retreat before it, but is what the narrative continuously calls the reader's consciousness to. It takes centre stage. The authors plea is for attention to the experience rather than its description, attention to the non-philosophical reality that precedes philosophy, and the non-rational numinous 'fact' before it becomes schematised. If as Berry argues, it is experience of the sacred through nature that creates the religious consciousness, he is calling us back to the numinous before it is overtaken by the 'word'. If also, as Ricoeur argues, when 'the word' takes over the function of the numinous, it is addressed to us, rather than it being us who articulate it<sup>927</sup>, it can be argued that *The Universe Story* seeks to challenge this inherited world of meaning in urging us to return to the starting point from which the religious consciousness emerges, and to re-orient the manner, and towards what, this religious consciousness is directed. If we concur too, with Sideris, that 'the word' in this instance can be that of science, it too, although privileged, is tempered with insights and observations from other disciplines. The narrative consistently draws the reader's attention back to the wonders of the natural world, to poetry, art, literature and other forms of the humanities.

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<sup>923</sup>Grassie, William John. *Reinventing Nature: Science Narratives as Myths for an Endangered Planet*. p257

<sup>924</sup>Ibid., p175 Grassie argues that Swimme and Berry offer "evolutionary parables" that are meant to offer guidance to humans at this moment of evolutionary crisis. He gives one such example as the discourse on carbon.

<sup>925</sup>Berry, Thomas. *Selected Writings on the Earth Community*. p147

<sup>926</sup>Ibid., p147

<sup>927</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Manifestation and Proclamation" in *Figuring the Sacred*. p65

It is difficult to make a definitive distinction on whether Swimme and Berry are offering the reader a way in which to think nature or a way in which to think God, and perhaps this was the aim all along, to return to the numinous experience and to re-evaluate it, and our own relation to language and to being, and how these inter-relate. The power of creation stories, as argued by Pellauer, lies in their mythic imagery and symbolic structure that re-connects “the structural disparity in human beings”<sup>928</sup> to an integrated self. As Eliade has argued, in understanding the symbolism, individual experience is transformed into a metaphysical understanding of the world and the individual becomes connected to the universal. *The Universe Story* offers an interpretation of a numinous experience, and with it an interpretation of the meaning of being that is integrated with the larger cosmos. However, such a numinous experience is arguably reduced in being brought to language as it is that which can never be fully articulated, just as Berry and Swimme acknowledge that this universe ‘story’ can never be ‘fully’ told. The *mysterium tremendum* remains opaque, something that is hinted at but never completely translated. The narrative calls for a re-examination of our language to express and understand this experience but language is only, as Ricoeur argued, realised as discourse. On its own it remains abstract and without reference.

This would indicate that *The Universe Story* while not explicitly outlining a religion is offering a new structure of being, significantly one that is symbolic, within which to re-think ways of being and acting in the world, whether this applies to religion or philosophy. Their representation of a sacred universe can challenge metaphysical and theological conceptions in relation to the divine/Earth/human relation, and indeed the self and other relation, but the nature of the project, in encouraging numinous experience over articulation, means that to build a philosophy or a religion on the narrative, is in some way, and paradoxically, to undermine the message of the narrative and points to the limitations and contradictions of such an approach.

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<sup>928</sup>Pellauer, David. “Introduction” to *Figuring the Sacred*. p5

## Conclusion: The proposed world of the text: the reference of *The Universe Story*

This chapter has focused on the way in which the narrative of *The Universe Story* is configured (mimesis<sub>2</sub>) through an examination of the sense and reference of the text. Sense refers to the structure of the narrative. The sense of this narrative can be deemed as both historical and figurative. It is historical in that it presents a chronological account of the development of the universe through time, through a telling of the major scientific events which influenced the contemporary scientific view. Swimme and Berry root this history in the empirical models bolstered by both a timeline and an appendix which they include in the narrative. Through this the authors seek to establish the veracity of their account in that the narrative addresses itself to events ‘that actually happened’ and this initiates a claim to truth.

*The Universe Story* remarks its wish to enable the reader to move from a spatial awareness of the universe to that of a universe which develops through time. One of the implications of this temporality, according to the narrative, is that humans have formed and do form a single community with all living beings and that the story of the universe, including Earth and the human story, is a single story. As is the function of narrative, according to Ricoeur, *The Universe Story* attempts to ‘make time human’ by locating the human within a cosmological context. Time, in this narrative is connected to creative events. In linking time to creativity, time also becomes ‘contained’ within the human and so as Berry argues, is validated from ‘within’. Thus Ricoeur’s ‘time of the world’ becomes connected to the ‘time of the soul’<sup>929</sup> and the human life implicated in the physical development of the cosmos. This is Berry and Swimme’s way to ascribe meaning to history. For Berry, history was a mode of analysis and synthesis and a way to recall the spiritual principle, which Berry saw operative in history, and which he described as supporting and guiding the human venture. *The Universe Story* draws on history as a way in which the human can re-imagine herself ‘into the future’, a way to ‘re-invent the human’ through appropriation of this narrative identity.

The narrative moves into figurative waters through its use of symbol and metaphor in its telling of this history. Figurative language operates at the level of the

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<sup>929</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* / Paul Ricoeur. p88



poetic function of language in that it re-describes reality, by saying something for the first time, thus creating a new source of meaning. The narrative emphasises the sacred dimension of the universe's history and through its use of symbolism speaks to the imaginative and ideation function of religion. Its attempts at 'resacralisation' of the world were examined through Ricoeur's five traits of a phenomenology of the sacred. The 'logic of meaning' as the fifth trait summarises the previous four and relates to the way in which the capacity 'to say' something about the universe is founded on the capacity of the universe to signify something other than itself. In the narrative, the universe is the primary symbol, the ultimate hierophany and the sacred is attested to through the power and role of the universe and nature. The universe is symbolically configured as the primary meaning-event that draws all the discourses at work in the narrative together and is also the point where something escapes them. It is a 'cosmos' that is ordered to overcome its chaotic depths and witnessed through the precision of events in time and the emergence of life. Furthermore, not only nature, but matter in its smallest components is presented as a 'subject' (although always an attenuated subjectivity) with the ability to act and to think and to love. Humanity is provided a transhuman and transcendent model as 'the universe' come to consciousness in human consciousness, signifying the bond between human being and 'total being'. This limit-expression of the text ruptures the ordinary by opening the human to an experience of the extreme<sup>930</sup>. Although *The Universe Story* offers an interpretation of a numinous experience, the *mysterium tremendum* is never fully translated in the text. Rather, the authors call for a refinement and re-examination of our language to be able to express this experience, ignoring the initial non-linguistic element of the sacred, spoken of by Ricoeur and Otto, and highlighting the paradox of their own project which seeks to bring such a non-linguistic experience to language.

In this narrative, subjectivity is also linked to 'spirituality', which is interpreted as the unifying principle of an organism as well as the creative and expressive aspect of a being. Love and desire are presented as present in the universe since the development of the multi-cellular organisms. Thus, by pouring language back into the world the narrative offers a universe replete with subjective beings, capable of love and desire and

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<sup>930</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. "Manifestation and Proclamation" in *Figuring the Sacred*. p60

expressing 'spirit'. The teleology of the universe is presented as having its foundations in love and moving towards more love and 'increased subjectivity'<sup>931</sup>.

*The Universe Story* is not a creation narrative in the theological sense, although I argue that it can be read as a 'creation story' and analysed it with Ricoeur's essay 'Thinking Creation'. This essay is instructive in that it distinguishes between 'a beginning' or origin and the history that follows. This illustrated that the world proposed by the narrative, through its reference to a transcendent power which brought the universe into being, and the separation of the foundation of this power and the universe it produces, leaves a space for a horizon that cannot be grasped. The narrative, however, refrains from the use of terms such as creation and creator or indeed any use of theologically explicit language. With Ricoeur's essay, we were able to determine that it is 'a world' which projects its origins and 'speaks itself' in letting itself be spoken. The narrative has the hallmarks of a panentheism despite the fact that it provides no description or explanation of that which is transcendent. This model in light of Berry's engagement with Confucianism can be read as a model of immanent transcendence. With the implication of a transcendent power, the narrative appeals to 'something more'. The narrative replaces theology with a hierophany, the universe itself, giving priority to the aesthetic over the ethical and emphasising Swimme and Berry's desire to re-enchant their reader with the natural world and even existence itself.

The purpose of the universe, it is claimed in the narrative, is to engender 'expanded modes of being' and 'deeper intimacy'. The narrative is ambiguous in its representation of the universe as a unified whole and its relation to its composite parts: the human paradoxically being presented as an incomplete part of that complete whole on the one hand and the universe become conscious of itself on the other. As a narrative seeking to promote unity it can lack consistency when dealing with the distinctions that it relies on so much to give it definition. This 'muddiness' Hardwick criticised as possibly being a regression to a tradition it has sought to escape but without the language or concepts to do so<sup>932</sup>. It could also be a deliberate refraining from any definitive naming or conceptual demarcation in order to offer an overflow of meaning to the productive imagination of the reader with no closed horizon but rather placing her at the root of the spoken word and making her a determinant in what the meaning is.

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<sup>931</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. pp53-61

<sup>932</sup>Hardwick, Charley D. "Religious Naturalism Today" in *Zygon*, p116

In summary, the world proposed by this narrative is a world of celebration that is moving towards ‘infinite’ diversity, ‘deepest’ subjectivity and ‘intimate’ communion. The universe is a sacred manifestation of the divine, and this world, with all its destruction and violence, creativity and beauty is what is to be celebrated and sacralised. Underneath this celebration however, it is a narrative that is primarily concerned with development, the physical development of the universe – and more directly Earth - and consequently, the development of the human who is ambivalently presented in the text as an evolutionary ‘instrument’<sup>933</sup>. What is implicitly conveyed is that the ongoing creative development of the human will affect the physical development of the Earth. Thus the ‘human’ and the significance attached to her, as presented in this world of the text, requires further investigation. This will be taken up in the next chapter: The configuration of the ‘human’ in *The Universe Story*.

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<sup>933</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p143

## Chapter four. The configuration of the 'human' in *The Universe Story*

### Introduction

Chapter two of this work focused on the pre-figuration of the narrative by identifying the tradition from which the narrative emerged. It traced both the commonalities and differences between *The Universe Story* and other cosmic narrations, while also considering the major critiques of *The Universe Story*. As an additional step in the narrative's pre-figuration, Berry's intellectual history and key influences were also traced, noting which influences and ideas were carried into *The Universe Story* and which were omitted. Chapter three examined the configuration of the narrative through an analysis of the structure, language and style of the text. This revealed the 'point of view' of the authors and possible meanings of the narrative. Its particular focus was on the construction of the sacred and so it examined the relationship between language and the sacred especially through the effective use of figurative language. This revealed the sense and the reference of the narrative which then disclosed the proposed world of the text.

This pre-figurative and configurative analysis revealed that the narrative does not primarily aim at providing a framework for social, economic or political transformation, rather, the authors' focus appears to be transformation of the human person. With this emphasis on the person, the narrative is not only an interpretation of the universe but of equal import, an interpretation of the human within, and as part of the universe. If we trace Berry's development to *The Universe Story*, it would appear that his conviction lay in the power of story and the symbolism it carried, to both appeal to and activate what he termed as the 'deeper parts' of the human psyche. His call for a development of human subjectivity and spirituality, as expressed through creativity, testify to his belief that the response to the ecological crisis does not just involve gaining a new knowledge based on explanation of the world, but must be in how we, as

subjects, understand the world. His identification of a ‘new story’<sup>934</sup> from which to contextualise that development further illustrate this conviction. Berry writes that:

A recovery of meaning involves the recovery of the sacred. But this requires our own self-recovery, our return to the depths of our own being; we must somehow manage the whole of existence in terms of the interior dynamics of our being and the authenticity of our deeper self.

The adjustment to be made for Berry is in the incorporation of the understanding that we are part of a 13 billion year time-developmental universe into our understanding of our self. Eaton observes that for Berry “our self-understanding depends on our grasp of the history and dynamics of the universe and all its subsequent processes out of which we emerged.”<sup>935</sup> For Berry, story is the means by which this is done. This conviction is evident in such sentences as “we must begin where everything begins in human affairs – with the basic story, our narrative of how things came to be.”<sup>936</sup>

The narrative of *The Universe Story* presents the universe as sacred and the manifestation of a mysterious and transcendent ‘originating power’. This universe, the narrative declares, is a unity and is at work in all the activities of the beings that constitute the universe. The narrative claims that the universe is fundamentally creative and celebratory and that its purpose is twofold, increased diversity of beings and deeper intimacy between beings<sup>937</sup>. Furthermore, according to Swimme and Berry, this universe is continuously developing, both physically and spiritually where spiritual development impacts on physical development and the physical aspects of the universe impact on the spiritual development of the human. What is ambiguous within the narrative is the identity that is assigned to the human. The narrative does assign an explicit role to the human, that of ‘enabling the universe to reflect and to celebrate in conscious self-awareness’ along with an additional implicit role of ensuring the physical survival of our own species and the sustainment of the conditions needed to foster life on Earth<sup>938</sup>. In the narrative, the human is primarily presented as the universe come to consciousness – and yet there is an ambiguity inherent in this too and already

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<sup>934</sup>Berry, Thomas. “The New Story” in *The Dream of the Earth*.pp123-137

<sup>935</sup>Eaton, Heather. “Metamorphosis. A Cosmology of Religions in an Ecological Age” in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*.p159

<sup>936</sup>Berry, Thomas. “The New Story” in *The Dream of the Earth*.p124

<sup>937</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p264

<sup>938</sup>Ibid., pp2-15

identified in chapter three<sup>939</sup>. If the human is a manifestation of the universe (the universe being a manifestation of that originating power), how can humanity's culpability be understood in relation to current destructive events?

As a narrative that aims at transformation of the human person, particularly as Berry stated, in terms of how we understand the world, the way in which the human is presented in the narrative is contingent to any transformation that might occur. This chapter specifically focuses on the configuration of the human in the narrative in identifying the formal characteristics of the human, in particular the relation of the human with the other-than human in the text. Here, to enlighten Ricoeur's narrative theory and assist in explanation of how the human is configured, I draw on the work of Plumwood in order to examine interpretations of the human, particularly in relation to nature. Plumwood argued for nature, and the other-than-human, to be recognised as intentional and communicative agents. She emphasised that central to an environmental ethic is the development of a "relational self". This, she states, contains two aspects: the reconceptualisation of the human and the reconceptualisation of the self.

I will begin this chapter by introducing Plumwood's thought, outlining her call for a re-conceptualisation of the self and the human, analysis which will then be applied throughout the chapter. This will be followed by a presentation of Ricoeur's concept of selfhood from his work *Oneself as Another*, which will also be applied to the configuration of the self in *The Universe Story*, specifically under the themes of: constructed through emplotment; in relation to the 'other'; and embedded in perceptions of the world. This, in turn, will be followed by the way in which the human is configured within the narrative under the headings of: the human as species; the human as a species that is developing; the human as mediator between absolute identity and sheer change, and time as objectified and time as experienced; and the development of subjectivity as a critical aspect in human development.

## 4.1 Val Plumwood and reconceptualising the human self

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<sup>939</sup>See section 3.3.2.2

In her work, Plumwood links environmental philosophy and in particular environmental ethics, to a critique of reason and rationalist philosophy. She argues that current streams of environmental philosophy (she mentions in particular those based on ethics<sup>940</sup> and those based on deep ecology), do not have an adequate historical analysis and so rely implicitly on past rationalist-inspired accounts of the self, which she argues are part of the environmental problem<sup>941</sup>. Plumwood focuses her critique on the notion of dualism and states that elements of the reason/nature dualism remain unresolved in modern philosophical approaches to reason and human identity. She argues that Western culture has viewed the human/nature relation as just such a dualism and that this “explains many of the problematic features of the west’s treatment of nature which underlie the environmental crisis, especially the western construction of human identity as ‘outside’ nature”<sup>942</sup>. Linking her critique to feminist and post-colonial critiques, she states that racism, colonialism and sexism have taken their conceptual strength from casting racial, ethnic and sexual difference as nearer to the animal body and by association, as a sphere of inferiority. Plumwood observes that to be “defined as ‘nature’ in this context is to be defined as passive, as non-agent and non-subject, as the ‘environment’ or invisible background against which the ‘foreground’ achievements of reason or culture...take place”<sup>943</sup>. Such a Cartesian framework, Plumwood argues, has stripped nature of its intentional and mind-like qualities that make an ethical response to it possible. Breaking this dualism, she states, involves “reexamining and reconceptualizing the concept of the human, and also the concept of the contrasting class of nature”<sup>944</sup>. There are two necessary parts to this restructuring of the human in relation to nature, she states. These are the re-conceptualisation of humanity and the re-conceptualisation of the human self.

Plumwood argues that environmental philosophy has not engaged with the feminist critiques of the rationalist tradition in ethics, and so continues to employ assumptions from this tradition which are damaging, and often embedded in a rationalist philosophical framework that is biased from a gender and nature perspective.

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<sup>940</sup>Plumwood focuses on Paul Taylor's book *Respect for Nature* and Tom Regan's book *The Case for Animal Rights*

<sup>941</sup>Plumwood, Val. “Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism” in *Hypatia*.pp3-27

<sup>942</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*.p2

<sup>943</sup>Ibid., p4

<sup>944</sup>Plumwood, Val. “Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism” in *Hypatia*.p17

She specifically focuses on those positions that qualify as ‘deep ecology’ and argues that while these have been successful in broadening the environmental ethics framework to include questions about the human self and continuity and discontinuity from nature, that there are problems in how this is done, particularly in its effacement of difference. According to Plumwood, “Deep ecology locates the key problem area in human-nature relations in the separation of humans and nature, and it provides a solution for this in terms of the "identification" of self with nature. “Identification" is usually left deliberately vague, and corresponding accounts of self are various and shifting and not always compatible.”<sup>945</sup> Furthermore in choosing ‘identification’ as their focus point, deep ecologists focus on the “individual psychic act rather than a political practise, yielding a theory which emphasises personal transformation and ignores social structure”<sup>946</sup>. Plumwood identifies three conceptions of the self in deep ecology. These are: the indistinguishability account; the expanded Self and; the transcended or transpersonal self. While Plumwood’s focus is specifically on deep ecology, her analysis of conceptions of the self is also applicable to *The Universe Story*, bearing as it does environmental concerns and which through narrative, constructs a human identity in relation to nature.

The indistinguishability account of the self is one that rejects boundaries between nature and the self and where the universe is understood to be a seamless whole<sup>947</sup>. Plumwood criticises this approach on the basis that when one has realised that one is indistinguishable from the universe (she gives John Seed’s example of the rainforest<sup>948</sup>) that its needs will become one’s own. However, she argues, there is nothing to guarantee that this is what will happen and states that the “question of just whose response counts for both of us has important political implications”<sup>949</sup>. There is an arrogance in this, Plumwood continues, in that it fails to respect boundaries and acknowledge difference which could lead to an imposition of self.

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<sup>945</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*.p12

<sup>946</sup>*Ibid.*, p17

<sup>947</sup>Here Plumwood refers to the works of: Fox, Warwick “Deep ecology: a new philosophy of our time?” in *Ecologist*, 1984, 14, pp194-299; Macy, Joanna. “Awakening to the Ecological Self” in Plant, Judith (ed.) *Healing the Wounds*, Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1989; Naess, Arne. “The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement” in *Inquiry*, 16, pp95-100, 1973

<sup>948</sup>Cf. [www.johnseed.net](http://www.johnseed.net) for information on John Seed’s environmental work and thought.

<sup>949</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*.p178



The second account is of the expanded Self<sup>950</sup>. The expanded Self is “where ‘identification’ is used equivocally to mean *both* ‘identity’ and something like ‘sympathy’ or ‘empathy’, identification with other beings leads to an expanded self which encompasses all those we sympathise with”<sup>951</sup>. According to Plumwood, an expanded Self does not critique egoism but is both an enlargement and an extension of ego. She states that the motivation for this account is “to allow for a wider set of concerns while continuing to allow the self to operate on the fuel of self-interest”<sup>952</sup>. In this account others are recognised only by the way in which they are incorporated into the self and their difference is denied.

The third account of self, that Plumwood identifies, is the transcended or transpersonal self<sup>953</sup>. This is where one is said to transcend the ‘self’ and the personal ego and strives for “impartial identification with all particulars, the cosmos, discarding our identifications with our own particular concerns, personal emotions and attachments”<sup>954</sup>. Plumwood refers to this as the deep ecology version of ‘universalisation’. This is problematic for feminists, Plumwood states, and cites Carol Gilligan in arguing that “it breeds moral blindness or indifference – a failure to discern or respond to need”<sup>955</sup>. Rather, Plumwood argues that there are local and specific responsibilities of care and in ‘inferiorising’ emotional, particular and kin-based attachments, that this account of self is just another variant on the superiority of reason. Here, Treanor argues against Plumwood in that if our ecological future depends on emotional and kin-based attachments, then much of nature will be lost. While not denying the attachment to place, Treanor views narrative as an experience, although vicarious, which can inculcate value in people for places they have never and might never be<sup>956</sup>.

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<sup>950</sup>Here again Plumwood refers to the work of Naess, Macy and Warwick although drawing on later works of Naess and Fox. Cf. Naess, Arne “Identification as a source of deep ecological attitudes” in Tobias, M. (ed.), *Deep Ecology*. San Diego, CA: Avant Books, 1985 & Fox, Warwick. “Approaching deep ecology: a response to Richard Sylvan’s critique of deep ecology” in *Environmental Studies*, Occasional paper 20, Hobart: Centre for Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania.

<sup>951</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. p179 Italics original  
<sup>952</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>953</sup>Here Plumwood only refers to Fox and specifically to “The deep ecology-ecofeminism debate and its parallels” in *Environmental Ethics*, 11, pp5-25, 1989 and; *Towards a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*, Boston, MA: Shambala, 1990

<sup>954</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London & New York: Routledge, 1993, p181  
<sup>955</sup>*ibid.*, p181

<sup>956</sup>Treanor, Brian. “Narrative and Nature: Appreciating and Understanding the Nonhuman World” in *Interpreting Nature. The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*. pp181-200

Plumwood proposes the idea of the ‘mutual self’ as offering an alternative account of human relations to nature that “breaks down self/other dualism and provides a model for relations of care, friendship and respect for nature...and for the ecological self”<sup>957</sup>. Plumwood goes on to argue that the domination of human groups and nature are linked not only by the exclusions of rationalism and the logical structure of dualism but also by “the dynamics of self-other relationship which flows from these”<sup>958</sup>. She borrows from psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin’s metaphor of ‘the dance of interaction’. This dance of interaction, Plumwood argues, is the basis for the formation of the self through mutuality in that it involves recognition of the other as alike but different. In such a scenario the individual is both active participant and determinant in their relationship with others. Such reciprocity and mutuality require the existence of others who are distinct. According to Plumwood, we can relate to Earth others in terms of mutual exchange and transformation. Recognition of Earth others requires “such a dialectical movement to recognise both kinship and difference, that is mutuality.”<sup>959</sup> Thus, what Plumwood names as an ecological self, must be able to account for the otherness of nature but also nature’s continuity with the human self.

Plumwood’s argument is that the two components of a relational self and intrinsic value are “essential theoretical complements of a virtue account of ecological selfhood”<sup>960</sup> while acknowledging that they do not “delineate the precise content of that relationship, except as one of essential and non-instrumental concern”<sup>961</sup>. She states that some of the more specific virtues which have emerged from the deep ecology-ecofeminism debate<sup>962</sup> and which might be drawn on for a reconstruction of human identity in relation to nature are: openness to the other; generosity, recognition of relations of dependency, and responsibility<sup>963</sup>. While Plumwood ascribes mind-like qualities to nature and takes nature to be autonomous on this basis, her account of the

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<sup>957</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*.p142

<sup>958</sup>*Ibid.*, p143

<sup>959</sup>*Ibid.*, p157

<sup>960</sup>*Ibid.*, p185

<sup>961</sup>*Ibid.*, p185

<sup>962</sup>Cf. Diehm, Christian. “Arne Naess, Val Plumwood, and Deep Ecological Subjectivity. A Contribution to the Deep Ecology-ecofeminism debate” in *Ethics and the Environment*, 7 (1), 2002. This debate centres around the eco-feminist critique that deep ecology focuses on the issue of anthropocentrism rather than male-centredness and does not critically dismantle anthropocentrism in relation to gender, essentialism and dualism and how these contribute to environmental destruction. (cf. Sallah, Ariel. The Ecofeminism/Deep Ecology Debate in *Environmental Ethics*. Volume 14, Issue 3, Fall 1992, pp 195-216)

<sup>963</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*.p185

other-than-human and their agency is unpacked, although it remains a given in her work. In her later work *The Ecological Crisis of Reason*, she states that “The important thing is communicability, respecting others as agents and choosers and as potentially communicative subjects, which is part of treating them as subjects proper, the other crucial ingredient being intentional recognition”<sup>964</sup>.

While Bannon defends Plumwood’s analysis of the role of Western reason in the environmental crisis and her ‘dialogical ethical ontology’, he argues that Plumwood does not go far enough in overcoming the crisis of rationality which she describes. He argues that the view of nature as a being needs to be abandoned in favor of a view of nature as a nexus of relations or “the Event,”...rather than Plumwood’s own definition of the “sphere of the non-human”<sup>965</sup>, which Bannon argues, is an oppositional definition of nature. Furthermore her view of nature, to use Bannon’s term, as ‘teleological’, with its own projects and ends, is itself embedded in the type of rationality she seeks to escape, in that attributing certain properties to nature does not alter “how nature is initially defined”<sup>966</sup> and so her definition of nature remains substantive, in addition to “the oppressive ends that have historically been justified by teleological views.”<sup>967</sup> In extending Plumwood’s thought, Bannon argues for a ‘relational ontology’ whereby nature is understood as an “ensemble of relations and not as a substantial domain”<sup>968</sup> although Bannon does recognise Plumwood’s influence on his own work and his attempt to continue it. In addition, Hawkins argues that Plumwood’s ‘ecological rationality’ could be further enhanced by “the presentation of visual images (or, short of that, articulating very clear mental images) [that] may be helpful in countering our culture’s biosphere-denying, rationalistic overattention to language, classical logic, and numerical abstraction”<sup>969</sup>. This he argues would integrate both ‘left’ and ‘right’ brain thinking as opposed to the focus on left-brain which is more cerebral, and Hawkins argues, more clinical and abstract, and which contributes to disassociations from nature.

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<sup>964</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Environmental Culture. The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. p193

<sup>965</sup>Bannon, Bryan. “Developing Val Plumwood’s Dialogical Ethical Ontology and its Consequences for a Place-based ethic” in *Ethics & The Environment*. 14(2) 2009, p40

<sup>966</sup>*Ibid.*, p40

<sup>967</sup>*Ibid.*, p46

<sup>968</sup>*Ibid.*, p48

<sup>969</sup>Hawkins, Ronnie. “Extending Plumwood’s Critique of Rationalism through Imagery and Metaphor” in *Ethics & The Environment*, 14(2)2009, p104

Plumwood proposes a politics of solidarity<sup>970</sup>, itself contested<sup>971</sup>, which she argues is different from a politics of unity as emphasised by deep ecology. We must be sensitive she states “to the difference between positioning oneself with the other and positioning oneself as the other”<sup>972</sup>. This concept of political solidarity, Mallory states, is to “navigate the fluid boundary between sameness and difference”<sup>973</sup>.

Plumwood’s approach remains pertinent to this thesis precisely for her focus on the way in which the self is understood and defined in relation to nature. This is significant, as Bell argues, because of the way in which selfhood and identity relate to differing conceptions of the environment and “how we think about ourselves in relation to nature is the source of our actions in relation to nature—environmental identity is the source of environmental action”<sup>974</sup>. Although Plumwood’s focus is on environmental ethics and specifically deep ecology, I apply her analysis to *The Universe Story* in order to determine the human self that is configured in the text. This relies less on the language of the text and more on the structure of configuration of the human in relation to the other.

## 4.2 Ricoeur’s ‘hermeneutics of the self’ with emphasis on *Oneself as Another*

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<sup>970</sup>Mallory explains Plumwood’s concept of political solidarity stating that “political solidarity with the more-than-human world is a relation in which one can imaginatively draw parallels between, for example, systems of slavery, women’s oppression, and animal oppression (all phenomena Plumwood cites), and the way in which in some cultures...humans are positioned as oppressors of the more-than-human world” .It is, she cites Plumwood, a concept that is based on an “intellectual and emotional grasp of the parallels in the logic of the One and the Other”. Mallory, Chaone. “Val Plumwood and Ecofeminist Political Solidarity. Standing with the Natural Other” in *Ethics & The Environment*. 14(2) 2009, pp3-21:8

<sup>971</sup>Mallory cites feminist political philosopher Sally Scholz who argues that humans cannot be in political solidarity with the other-than-human world because “the more-than-human world lacks the requisite cognitive and deliberative capacities to engage in political choice and action” (Ibid., p6). Mallory does however read Scholz’s work sympathetically and argues that her thinking offers insight into the concept of political solidarity which can help to think through Plumwood’s ideas on the relationality between humans and other-than- human, and in particular the ethical problem of dealing with difference.

<sup>972</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Environmental Culture. The Ecological Crisis of Reason*.p202

<sup>973</sup>Mallory, Chaone. “Val Plumwood and Ecofeminist Political Solidarity. Standing with the Natural Other” in *Ethics & The Environment*, 14(2) 2009, pp3-21:9

<sup>974</sup>Bell, Nathan. “Environmental Hermeneutics with and for Others: Ricoeur’s Ethics and the Ecological Self.” In *Interpreting Nature: The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*.p142

This section investigates the way in which the self is configured in *The Universe Story* through the application of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self. In his work *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur sets out his 'hermeneutics of the self' and states how this work attends to the question of narrative identity raised in the conclusion to *Time and Narrative*. Ricoeur argues that there are three features of his hermeneutical approach, namely: the detour of reflection by way of analysis; the dialectic of selfhood and sameness; and finally the dialectic of selfhood and otherness<sup>975</sup>. These three features are given an interrogative form by means of the question "who?" that is, who is speaking? Who is acting? Who is recounting about himself or herself? The answer to the question 'who' Ricoeur argues is 'the self'<sup>976</sup>. Personal identity is a dialectic between identity as *ipse* and identity as *idem*. *Ipse* identity refers to self-constancy while *idem* identity refers to permanency in time<sup>977</sup>. Ricoeur states that narrative acts as a bridge between them. In this way narrative identity is made philosophically explicit through the grid of this distinction<sup>978</sup>.

In order to assess the configuration of the human within *The Universe Story* there are three themes in Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self which can be applied to examine how the self is constructed. These are: the construction of self through emplotment; the relation of 'self' and 'other'; and the 'world as horizon of self'<sup>979</sup>.

#### 4.2.1 The Construction of self through Emplotment

In *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur illustrates how narrative theory and in particular narrative identity, through the dialectic between sameness and selfhood and thus the relation between action theory and moral theory, is a major contribution to the constitution of the self. He argues that through emplotment, the interconnection of particular events are integrated with a permanence in time in what would ordinarily seem to be contrary to sameness, e.g. diversity, variability, discontinuity and instability. The notion of emplotment when moved from the action to the characters produces a

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<sup>975</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*.p16

<sup>976</sup>*ibid*.

<sup>977</sup>See section 1.6.1

<sup>978</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay / Paul Ricoeur*.p89

<sup>979</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*.pp140-152

dialectic of sameness and selfhood and so “the identity of the character is constructed in connection with that of the plot”<sup>980</sup> where one identity is derived from the other.

In *The Universe Story*, planets, stars and the elements of the periodic table are presented as characters and as agents at work in the story, and so ‘Hydrogen’ and ‘Helium’ and ‘Earth’ and the ‘Sun’, among others, create the plot in relation with other characters. When the human emerges in chapter seven, the authors have already established the main character as the universe itself. This acts on a macrophase level and gives an underlying permanency and sameness to all subsequent events, as that which, as quoted in the narrative “holds all things together and is the primary activating power in every activity.”<sup>981</sup> And so human identity is derived (applying Berry’s term) from this in much the same way as Rembrandt’s self-portrait. It is the creation of ‘the other’ by the ‘self’ but so deeply bound up in that ‘self’, that as Ricoeur notes, “one passes into the other”<sup>982</sup>. Thus, the human receives a specific identity by virtue of the plot (in this case, the universe become conscious of itself) and the events of the plot are given continuity and sameness by human articulation of them so that each ‘identity’ is constructed through the existence of the other and in this narrative at least, each seeming to exist for the other.

Ricoeur goes on to note “would the question of what matters arise if there were no one to whom the question of identity mattered?”<sup>983</sup> Such questions as ‘identity’ and ‘meaning’, in as far as we are able to determine, are human questions and from these questions are determined the criteria of what is valued and what is important. As Plumwood and others have argued, when that which is valued extends only to human existence there have been deleterious ecological consequences. Swimme and Berry argue that Earth and the other than human species, have been and continue to be devalued by the human community and this lack of value is evident in our human behaviour and action towards the planet and other species<sup>984</sup>. It is for this reason that in

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<sup>980</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*.p141

<sup>981</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p27

<sup>982</sup>Ricoeur writes that “the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other”. Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*.p3

<sup>983</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*.p138

<sup>984</sup>In reference to this Swimme and Berry write of human treatment “of the nonhuman world as object for exploitation rather than as subject to be communed with” (p.244). In their use of the word ‘object’ and ‘subject’ the text is insisting that the human does not value the nonhuman world as existing in its own right but only in the manner in which it can serve the human. This ‘treatment’ enabled by a value system that excludes the natural world, the text describes as having moved from the “simple physical

*The Universe Story*, Swimme and Berry, as Plumwood argued for, seek to extend an intrinsic value to all beings and not just human beings, specifically through their notion of subjectivity. The fact that it is the human who has the capacity to value, and to recognise and weigh these values, highlights however the notable distinction between the human self and the other than human subject in the narrative.

In addressing the issue of the body in identity, Ricoeur writes that in literary fiction:

Characters in plays and novels are humans like us who think, speak, act, and suffer as we do. Insofar as the body as one's own is a dimension of oneself, the imaginative variations around the corporeal condition are variations on the self and its selfhood. Furthermore, in virtue of the mediating function of the body as one's own in the structure of being in the world, the feature of selfhood belonging to corporeality is extended to that of the world as it is inhabited corporeally. This feature defines the terrestrial condition as such and gives to the Earth the existential signification attributed to it in various ways by Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger. The Earth here is something different, and something more, than a planet: it is the mythical name of our corporeal anchoring in the world.<sup>985</sup>

Ricoeur argues that in literary fiction, unlike technological fiction (such as science fiction), our corporeal condition remains an existential invariant. It is the necessary condition for persons to act. He states how this is indispensable on an ontological plane because it prevents the capacity for imputation being assigned arbitrarily to persons and so, Ricoeur states, an imaginative variant which respects "the corporeal and terrestrial condition as an invariant" has more in common with the moral principle of imputation.

This is interesting in light of *The Universe Story* for two reasons. The first is that for Ricoeur, the self on the plane of corporeality was always the human self and this self was always embodied<sup>986</sup>. *The Universe Story* honours this corporeal condition but also introduces a variation of it, which it could be argued, at the same time paradoxically violates it. In the narrative, the universe, as opposed to simply Earth, is presented as being the space the human inhabits, it is the structure of its being. *The Universe Story* makes the case for interpreting our corporeality not just as the human

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assault on the planet through our petrochemical industries, to questionable manipulation of the genetic constitution of the living beings of the planet by our genetic engineering, to the radioactive wasting of the planet through our nuclear industries." Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p247

<sup>985</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*.p150

<sup>986</sup>Brennan, Eileen. "Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self" in *Tropos*. p19

body or indeed Earth but as the entire universe. This, the narrative states, makes up our body in a very physical sense. Swimme and Berry write that “such a supernova explosion of the star Tiamat gave birth to our own existence...that most of the atoms in our body were created by Tiamat”<sup>987</sup> and thus suggest that it is the universe which we inhabit corporeally although Earth is where we have our most immediate experience. The narrative states how the possibility of our bodies and the elements that compose them begin to be formed when the elements themselves are formed. So to apply Ricoeur’s statement, that embodiment is an aspect of the self, to the plot of *The Universe Story*, we are corporeally anchored some twelve to thirteen billion years ago in the depths of the universe itself. This point is made more explicit in *Journey of the Universe* when Swimme and Tucker write “the stars are our ancestors. Out of them everything comes forth.”<sup>988</sup> Through presenting corporeality in such a manner they engage in what Ricoeur names as an imaginative variation on the self. The ‘universe’ then becomes something more than just a ‘universe’, it becomes, to borrow a phrase from Ricoeur, the mythical name of our corporeal anchoring. Berry, in comparison, borrows from Confucianism, calling this the macrophase dimension of our self<sup>989</sup>. This inter-corporeal relationship, Utsler argues, is a way in which to speak of nature as both one’s self and other than self. It is a way to understand the self so that it cannot be thought of without the other of the natural world, in this narrative extended to the universe<sup>990</sup>. In this manner *The Universe Story* advances an ontological conception of truth over that of epistemology in that understanding, in *The Universe Story*, becomes a structure of our being-in-the-world. To understand *The Universe Story*, is to understand one’s self as part of and participant in a cosmos.

The second point is the capacity for imputation, corporeality being a necessary aspect in order to impute actions to persons. It is at this point that we can witness how in *The Universe Story* the notion of ‘self’ becomes ambiguous. As identified in the previous chapter the term ‘subject’ is not confined to the human but extended to include all beings. This is however a weak designation of subjectivity including only the ability to act, to love and in some feeble manner, to desire or to will. It is principally associated with expression which is enabled by the unifying and organising principle of a being

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<sup>987</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p49

<sup>988</sup>Swimme & Tucker. *Journey of the Universe*.p29

<sup>989</sup>Berry, Thomas. “Affectivity in Classical Confucian Tradition”. p3

<sup>990</sup>Utsler, David. “Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics as a Model for Environmental Philosophy” in *Philosophy Today*.p175



which the narrative implies as ‘spiritual’. Whether the narrative understands this subjectivity as equating with selfhood, it does not state. Elsewhere I have argued that Ricoeur conceivably differentiates between subjectivity and the self. The subject for Ricoeur must embark on the long detour through the symbols and narratives of its culture in order to attain self-understanding and to become an integrated self. By his criteria, it is only the human in the narrative that can be considered as a ‘subject’ and indeed a ‘self’.

The characters of *The Universe Story* are not only human, but planets, stars, elements and all of the ‘beings’ that constitute the universe. While the category of ‘thinking’ is not definitively attributed to these characters, subjectivity, interiority and a ‘self-organising’ principle is. More relevantly, there is a level of agency attributed to all these characters. In one instance the narrative states that it is the universe always and everywhere who is acting, while in the next it claims this capacity for all the other characters in the narrative, thus where and with whom an action begins becomes difficult to distinguish. The narrative, as has been argued previously, is a response to the current ecological crisis, however because of its difficulty in imputing actions (is it the universe, or is it the stars, or is it the human who definitively acts?) its ability to be an ethical guide is weakened. It becomes difficult to designate who is acting, and by implication, who is the one responsible. One could also adopt the view that as the universe is the primary actor in this drama, as the narrative suggests, then there is very little that the human can do which will not finally be determined by this all-encompassing universe.

In this ambiguity of self, both Plumwood’s accounts of the indistinguishable and expanded Self can be identified. In *The Universe Story* the entire universe becomes the human body, dissolving boundaries between the self and the other and making it difficult to demarcate between separate selves. In this, Plumwood argues that “the entire dynamic of interaction takes place within the self, rather than between the self and the external other”<sup>991</sup> such that the other is appropriated by the self. Such a portrayal of self, according to Plumwood, does the ‘wrong thing’ in that in dissolving the human/nature dualism completely, the origins involved in this opposition remain unanalysed and this ‘merging’ becomes ineffective as an environmental ethic because of the fact that the alterity of the other is reduced. Rather, it is the human who speaks on behalf of the

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<sup>991</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*.p175

cosmos, and just whose needs are articulated becomes problematic, as evident in such responses to *The Universe Story* as *Star Ark*<sup>992</sup>.

According to Plumwood, this account of self, which draws, she states, on “various eastern religious positions”<sup>993</sup> and makes a “good religious or spiritual garnish for a main political recipe which eschews radical critique” matches in its depth a social analysis which advocates for the resolution of social inequality “through acts of individual unselfishness”<sup>994</sup>. Although here Plumwood is referring to politics more than a description of reality, her point is applicable in both instances. This account of self because of its denial of difference remains superficial, and is for Plumwood, profoundly ineffective. Here again we witness the shortcomings of *The Universe Story*, not so much in its apolitical stance but in the voices and stories of all those neglected in its telling. Berry evidentially disagrees with Plumwood and thinks that transformation is possible through the individual or why else write this narrative? But the question then becomes, transformation of what? For Plumwood reason itself and the way in which it has contributed to the oppressive structures of dualism. The liberation of nature being as much her agenda as that of the liberation of women. For Berry however, it would seem to be solely a transformation of the human person.

This account of self could also be argued for as exemplary of Plumwood’s expanded Self, the Self that identifies with the universe in its entirety. Plumwood acknowledges that both accounts of the indistinguishable and the expanded Self often vacillate due to the slipperiness in meaning of ‘identification’. The expanded Self according to Plumwood does not question or critique egoism but allows for an extension of it. It allows she argues “for a wider set of concerns while continuing to allow the self to operate on the fuel of self-interest”<sup>995</sup>. Hornborg too cautions against such approaches which appear to equate the self with the universe. He quotes German philosopher Hans Jonas who, like Plumwood, argues against this, but interestingly does so from an opposing perspective, and states that this identification structures the human subject “as no longer a part of anything but the universe”<sup>996</sup>. According to Hornborg,

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<sup>992</sup>See section 2.4.3

<sup>993</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. p17

<sup>994</sup>Ibid., p17

<sup>995</sup>Ibid., p179

<sup>996</sup>Hornborg, Alf. “From animal masters to ecosystem services: Exchange, personhood and human ecology” in *Imagining Nature. Practices of Cosmology and Identity*. Roepstorff, A., Nils Bubandt, N & Kull, K. (ed.’s) Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2003, pp97-116:111

such an identification with an ‘abstract cosmos’, ironically leads to, and not away from alienation. It is, he states “one thing to posit an abstract, spiritual embeddedness in the world, another to practice embeddedness as concrete, bodily experience.”<sup>997</sup> Sideris is equally critical of this approach, but like Plumwood, focuses on its anthropocentric nature. She writes that “There is a certain irony here. Our exhaustive journey through the vast and numinous universe, through the whole riveting drama of our planet's evolution, finally leads us back to profound admiration of...ourselves.”<sup>998</sup>

The aim of *The Universe Story* to expand human identification with the other than human including Earth and the wider universe is difficult to contest. In several of Berry's writings, he refers to ‘the small self’ which refers to my individual self, and ‘the large self’ which refers to my universe self, and in one example states that “We have our individual self, our biological self, our Earth self, and our universe self. It is through attraction to the larger modes of our self that we are drawn so powerfully toward our experience of Earth... We seek this for the expansion of our being even more than for the physical thrill”<sup>999</sup> - a clear example of Plumwood's expanded Self. In *The Universe Story* the human is described as the universe come to consciousness. In such a description the human becomes the universe while the universe becomes revealed through human consciousness. This is both an equivalence and a clear expansion of the human self to all that has existed and is beyond this individual human. Taking Plumwood's critique, this is to engage the self in wider concerns than the individual although done from the stand-point of self-interest, and so continues to subscribe to the belief that human nature is egoistic and that the alternative to this is self-sacrifice, in that the only way to obtain human interest in nature is by extending our own self-interests. The danger of this is that “Others are recognised morally only to the extent that they are incorporated into the self and their difference denied”<sup>1000</sup>. While the boundaries between self and other, both corporeally and otherwise, are blurred in *The Universe Story*, it is difficult to argue for the narrative's denial of difference. Its emphasis on subjectivity and autopoiesis in fulfilling one's ‘inner nature’, and the

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<sup>997</sup>Ibid., p112

<sup>998</sup>Sideris, Lisa. “Science as Sacred Myth. Ecospirituality in the Anthropocene Age” in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. p149

<sup>999</sup>Berry, Thomas. “The Gaia Hypothesis: Its Religious Implications” in *The Sacred Universe*. Pp103-116:114. See also Berry, Thomas. “The Earth Story” in *The Great Work*. pp21-32, and Berry, Thomas. “The New Story” in *Dream of The Earth*, pp123-137 for examples of Berry's identification of the universe with the self.

<sup>1000</sup>Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. p180

necessity for expression of this nature, indicate that difference in beings is a value in the narrative. The difficulty in its presentation is that it is only the human who appears to have the ability to value such diversity, even to value at all, and this has the inadvertent effect, as Plumwood has argued, of perpetuating the superiority of reason and mind, and so the human, over nature.

I argue that such an identification of the human self with the universe and ‘all things’ is not a negation of concrete and embodied personhood, as Hornborg cautions against, nor is it a form of narcissism, as Sideris cautions against, or merely to perpetuate the ego as Plumwood argues. Rather it can be read through Ricoeur as an attempt to mediate between Descartes’s self that is exalted and Nietzsche’s self that is humiliated<sup>1001</sup>. It is a self that is constituted by the world but firmly a self who reflects a unique consciousness of that world, particular to that being. It is an embodied and an embedded self and so a self who is necessarily practical as well as responsible. The association of the self with the universe is not towards admiration of the human but admiration for the cosmological process which produced among others, the human, a process the narrative repeatedly insists that the human is dependent on. Recognition of this dependence can engender a feeling of humility and gratitude toward these others who constitute one’s own self and who assist and maintain one’s own self in existence. It is not an ‘abstract cosmos’ in that these others too are given a personhood and so increase the reader’s affection and ability to relate to them as subject to subject. Neither is this self of *The Universe Story* Ricoeur’s ‘wounded cogito’<sup>1002</sup>. It does not begin from a position of brokenness. Rather it is a self that is developing towards a fuller understanding of their own embeddedness in the process.

#### 4.2.2 The relation of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’

In *Oneself as Another* it is important to note Ricoeur’s use of the word ‘self’. He writes “*to say self is not to say myself* [italic originals]. To be sure, mineness is implied in a certain manner in selfhood, but the passage from selfhood to mineness is marked by

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<sup>1001</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*. pp4-23. In this work see section 1.6.2

<sup>1002</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*. p242

the clause “in each case”...the self...is in each case mine.”<sup>1003</sup> It is the ‘in each case’ that Ricoeur refers to as “the unexpressed reference to others.”<sup>1004</sup> In the narrative of *The Universe Story* all the characters, as identified above, can in some manner be understood as ‘other’ in that they are differentiated in form to me the reader, as human. There is also the argument, made above, that all the characters can be understood as being presented as ‘subjects’ and yet the narrative also calls on all these ‘characters’ as composing our corporeality. This is where analysis becomes more difficult. Can the whole universe presented as *my* body in its temporal, spatial and physical dimension, contain that which is ‘other’ to me and if so, what are the criteria that account for this distinction of an ‘other subject’ within myself?

Correlatively, in the narrative, Swimme and Berry write that the universe, in the human, turns back on itself and begins to reflect on itself. It is a very particular phrase ‘turned back on itself’<sup>1005</sup> which suggests a level of distancing between the human who reflects on the universe and the universe that is reflected upon, a distancing which is later collapsed in the claim that it is the universe who is reflecting. Interestingly, Ricoeur himself uses the phrase “turning back upon itself”<sup>1006</sup> to describe the act of subjective reflection. Ricoeur’s examination of the other, illustrates the way in which the self through the other is forced to turn back on him/herself and thus because of this objective recognition invited to act ethically. If the entire universe in the narrative of *The Universe Story* ‘turns back on itself’, in light of Ricoeur’s argument, the question may be put to the text of who is the ‘other’ which ‘forces’ the universe to do this? One possible response to this question, would be the ‘originating power’ which while being immanent to the universe, as established, transcends it. Without any explanation of this power, it is difficult to understand the manner in which this need to ‘turn back’ is employed, whether, for example, it is in terms of worship, recognition or fear. Another possible explanation of ‘turning back’ is towards Earth where the ‘turning back’ takes on an ethical dimension as we are faced with the consequences of our behaviour. In his “Intellectual Autobiography”, Ricoeur makes a relevant comment on what he names as the ‘call to conscience’. This he argues is “the ultimate expression of

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<sup>1003</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*. p181. This “in each case” is a clause which Ricoeur adopts from Heidegger who added it to his positing of ‘mineness’. Ricoeur explains that for Heidegger the self is ‘in each case’ mine. This Ricoeur interprets as a reference to others.

<sup>1004</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1005</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p143

<sup>1006</sup>See chapter One, footnote 48 for full citation.

otherness that haunts selfhood! Does it come from a person who is other whom I can still “envisage” from my ancestors, from a dead God or from a living God...with this aporia of the Other, not only does philosophical discourse seem to me to reach its term but...the relation between the arguments of philosophy and its non-philosophical sources.”<sup>1007</sup> Ricoeur is arguing here that the source of the call to conscience, or the voice of the other can never be firmly established. It is in this ‘call’ that philosophy meets its limits, through confrontation once again with the non-philosophical reality that precedes it.

In its insistence on ‘turning back’ through its “power of consciousness”<sup>1008</sup> *The Universe Story* does not extinguish this ‘call’. It maintains an alterity in spite of our embeddedness, a responsibility born of the capacity for reflection and the ability to apprehend this alterity. However, the form that this alterity takes in the narrative is not narrated. This could be to allow the reader the possibility and imaginative privilege of defining it herself. It could also be a further example of the limits of conceptual language to develop an account of reality, as the narrative claims we are receiving from the sciences, where there is distinction that is also irreducible alterity, within a world that is presented as a unified whole. These relations between self and other will be further examined under ‘The self as constituted by the other’ and ‘The self as attesting’.

#### 4.2.2.1 The ‘self’ as constituted by the ‘other’

In *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur refers to reflexive experience through the concept of self-esteem when he claims that “I cannot myself have self-esteem unless I esteem others *as myself*. “As myself” means that you too are capable of starting something in the world, of acting for a reason, of hierarchizing your priorities...of holding yourself in esteem as I hold myself in esteem”<sup>1009</sup>. The equivalence of ‘you too’ and ‘as myself’ Ricoeur states, rest on a trust which is an extension of the attestation “by reason of which” I believe I can do something and that I have worth. There are two points here. The first is the division of self from myself and the second is attestation.

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<sup>1007</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*.p53

<sup>1008</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p143

<sup>1009</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*.p193

The division of self from ‘myself’ is significant for this work not only as stated earlier in that it allows a distancing between the ‘I’ who posits and the self who reflects through the detour of analysis, but specifically in this instance through the recognition of others whereby the ‘other’ serves to validate *myself* in terms of possession of my experience, but also to partially constitute the very experience that I come to possess. Using the clause of ‘in each case’ Ricoeur states that it is on the basis of each case that “my own possession of my experiences is distributed, as it were, to all the other grammatical persons.”<sup>1010</sup> It is through my encounter with the other that my experience is constituted, and so possession of my experience, although arguably distinct from the experience, is in some way dependent on those who have constituted it. ‘Otherness’ Ricoeur states is not added on to the self from ‘outside’ of it, rather he writes how “it belongs instead to the tenor of meaning and to the ontological constitution of selfhood.”<sup>1011</sup>

Not only does ‘the other’ contribute to the constitution of the ‘self’, it also Ricoeur argues, calls the self to responsibility. Ricoeur observes that the self is worthy of esteem not by its accomplishments but fundamentally by reason of its capacities. Capacity in this sense is expanded from the physical level of ‘I can’, that is, being-able-to-do, to the ethical level of being-able-to-judge. Between capacities and their realisation is the mediating role of others<sup>1012</sup>. It is this mediating role of others which Ricoeur states Aristotle celebrates in his treatise on *philia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. While friendship borders on justice in that it has a basis in giving and receiving, Ricoeur argues that friendship is not justice, as justice appears only at the level of institutions while friendship is what governs interpersonal relations. From Aristotle however Ricoeur retains “the ethics of reciprocity, of sharing, of living together”<sup>1013</sup>.

In the instance of *The Universe Story* the theme of friendship is not applicable to the relations between the actors, as friendship is a human-to-human relation for

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<sup>1010</sup>ibid., p181

<sup>1011</sup>ibid., p317

<sup>1012</sup>It is important to note that for Ricoeur, in *Oneself as Another* the other is always the human other as the person is always the human person. However, in his “Intellectual Autobiography”, Ricoeur writes about the other in such a way as to allow us to extend the concept of other from ‘human other’ to include ‘other than human’. He writes “The idea of otherness had been enriched by several harmonics...the other as possessing his or her own body...the other as another – the other that figures as interlocutor on the plane of discourse and as protagonist or antagonist on the plane of interaction, finally as the bearer of another history than my own within the intertwining of the narratives of life.” Ricoeur, Paul. “Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*.p48

<sup>1013</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*.p87

Ricoeur. However, the mediating role of ‘the other’, and the reciprocity this entails, as well as the self-reflexive capacity of the human to be able to judge whereby this judgement is finally exercised, are applicable. Ricoeur writes how “Otherness, therefore, repossesses the rights that philautia appeared to eclipse. It is in connection with the notions of capacity and realization[sic] – that is, finally of power and act – that a place is made for lack and, through the mediation of lack, for others.”<sup>1014</sup> ‘The other’ activates the need to differentiate between power and action and so it is not the action that is deemed worthy but whether it is an action that is ethical or not. ‘The other’ mediates between capacity and realisation. Ricoeur introduces the notion of solicitude between the self and the other and argues that the “self is “summoned to responsibility” by the other”<sup>1015</sup>. Solicitude, Ricoeur argues, adds a dimension of value to the other whereby the other is irreplaceable in our esteem. He states how “it is in experiencing the irreparable loss of the loved other that we learn, through the transfer of the other onto ourselves, the irreplaceable character of our own life.”<sup>1016</sup>

Ricoeur explains this concept further by using Levinas’ reversal of the statement “no other-than-self without a self” to “no self without another who summons it to responsibility.”<sup>1017</sup> Ricoeur was critical of Levinas’ ‘Other’ however, as he viewed it as representing a break or closure which resulted in a state “of separation, that makes otherness the equivalent of radical exteriority.”<sup>1018</sup> Ricoeur was more concerned with the opening up of the self to the other. Through encounter with the other, with their suffering and the feelings they awake in us, we are made aware of our responsibilities. It is in the acceptance of responsibility towards the other that we attest to the self. Ricoeur states “the other constitutes me as responsible, that is, as capable of responding. In this way, the word of the other comes to be placed at the origin of my acts.”<sup>1019</sup>

In his formulation of an environmental ethic, Bell poses the question of whether or not Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self can “move specifically beyond human environmental concerns? To what extent could one say that a nonhuman other recognizes one’s esteem, and to what extent could one say that a nonhuman other has

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<sup>1014</sup>ibid., p182

<sup>1015</sup>ibid., p189

<sup>1016</sup>ibid., p193

<sup>1017</sup>ibid., p187

<sup>1018</sup>ibid., p336

<sup>1019</sup>ibid., p336



esteem?”<sup>1020</sup> The answer to this, he suggests, is rather than focusing on the ability of esteem in the other-than-human to regard instead “some kind of agency as the boundary for reciprocation...we might be able to say that the animal other is a self; not that the animal other is a self in the same way a human is, but that, insofar as the animal has some kind of agency, it is a kind of other self. The reciprocity with the animal other, including its agency or selfhood, is an interpretive measure.”<sup>1021</sup> Bell goes on to argue that “Between my interpretation of my self and my interpretation of the animal other I see an other self, and I respond when this other calls me to responsibility.”<sup>1022</sup> In such an instance, responsibility becomes dependent on our interpretation of the other. Plumwood too argues that it is our “willingness and ability to recognise the other as a potentially intentional being [which] tells us whether we are open to potentially rich forms of interaction and relationship which have an ethical dimension”<sup>1023</sup>. Ironically, for both Plumwood and Bell, the emphasis on such an ethical response taking place rests within the self, both in her openness to the other and her realisation of the need for such an ethic. In both instances, Plumwood and Bell highlight the role that interpretation of the other plays, and suggest that recognition of the other as a communicating agent is sufficient in generating an ethical response.

Utsler seeks what might be a more mediative approach and argues for Ricoeur’s ‘hermeneutics of the self’ as a way in which to mediate the self and other than self of nature, by not privileging either, but in interpreting “the type of being-in-the-world unfolded in front of the text”<sup>1024</sup> in this instance, text meaning nature. He states that while also beginning with personal identity that this overcomes the anthropocentric/eco-centric binary in that it does not oppose self and other but is dialectical and so “would actually require a creative tension between both [self and other] to develop what I call environmental identity – i.e self-understanding in relation to the environment”<sup>1025</sup>. In doing this Utsler expands Ricoeur’s approach to include the other of the environment.

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<sup>1020</sup>Bell, Nathan. “Environmental Hermeneutics with and for Others: Ricoeur’s Ethics and the Ecological Self.” In *Interpreting Nature: The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*.p148

<sup>1021</sup>Ibid., p148

<sup>1022</sup>Ibid., p150-151

<sup>1023</sup>Plumwood, Val. “Environmental Culture. The ecological crisis of reason” (p181) cited in Bell, Nathan. “Environmental Hermeneutics with and for Others: Ricoeur’s Ethics and the Ecological Self” in *Interpreting Nature: The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*.p150

<sup>1024</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. From Text to Action, essays in hermeneutics. p86 cited in Utsler, David. “Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics as a Model for Environmental Philosophy” in *Philosophy Today*.p173

<sup>1025</sup>Utsler, David. “Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics as a Model for Environmental Philosophy” in *Philosophy Today*.p174

In *The Universe Story*, the other than human, not only animal but stars, elements and cells, are interpreted as agents. This interpretation further attributes a level of consciousness and emotion to these entities, and refers to them as ‘subjects’. This leads me to the second point on ‘attestation.’

#### 4.2.2.2 The self as attesting

I attest that I can act, furthermore that I can act *for a reason*; that I can evaluate; that I can esteem. This attestation is extended to claim that you can act; you can act for a reason; and that you can evaluate. Ricoeur argues that this extension of attestation is based on trust that you can do these things. It is a trust he states “in the power to say, in the power to do, in the power to recognise oneself as a character in a narrative”<sup>1026</sup>. It contains ‘power to’ which is potentiality, with ‘I do’ which is actuality. Ricoeur defines attestation as “*the assurance of being oneself acting and suffering*”<sup>1027</sup> so that attestation is always attestation of self. It is, he states, ultimately selfhood that we attest to “in its difference with respect to *sameness* and in its dialectical relation with *otherness*.”<sup>1028</sup> We trust (to use Ricoeur’s word which he interchanges with credence<sup>1029</sup>) we exist in a mode of selfhood *through* attestation. Attestation bears witness to the circle of reflection and analysis whereby reflection is mediated by linguistic analysis. This analysis presupposes something that is beyond the self. Ricoeur states how language expresses being. The being it expresses, Ricoeur continues, has to do with the self. And here we are confronted with the debate, as identified by Utsler, between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. Utsler states that “The very thing that we do in environmental philosophy – reflect on the natural environment – is to distance ourselves from the pre-reflective experience of the natural world. We also speak of being a part of nature, but seem to contradict this notion by referring to the impact of human interference with the environment as if nature is something other than human.”<sup>1030</sup> While Utsler argues that Ricoeur’s account of distanciation provides a way to mediate

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<sup>1026</sup> *ibid.*, p22 italics original.

<sup>1027</sup> *ibid.*, p22 italics original.

<sup>1028</sup> *ibid.*, p302

<sup>1029</sup> *ibid.*, p22

<sup>1030</sup> Utsler, David. “Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics as a Model for Environmental Philosophy” in *Philosophy Today*. p176

between these tensions inherent in environmental experience and environmental philosophy, I will address the way in which this tension is confronted in the narrative of *The Universe Story* through the way in which the relation of self and other is constructed. These are that the other is partially constitutive of the self, and the self as attesting.

I will begin with the former as it was touched on in chapter three. In the narrative the universe is presented as a ‘communion of subjects’. Other and self in this way are totally implicated. This is as much to do with the evolutionary biology which underpins the narrative in its physical description<sup>1031</sup>, as it has to do with the narrative’s inference that the development of the human is dependent on *recognition* of our inter-relatedness with Earth and the natural world. Thus, in the narrative the ‘other’ is presented as a very firm constitution of the ‘self’. It is the feature of attestation which calls into question the ‘self’ as presented in *The Universe Story*. Ricoeur’s self attests through language. The detour of analysis that is made through reflection is to objectify myself, to transcend for example my biological and physical limitations and to examine myself as if I existed independently of the one who is doing the examining. This is the ‘otherness’ of self. It is also that which in many ways validates the self, allowing to it qualities that I can both identify and claim, even influence. It is an example of how the human subject can think of herself as an object, ‘grasp herself in her existence’ and bring her experience to language.

In *The Universe Story* it is unclear to what level this ability to attest is attributed to all beings. In section 3.2.3.2, there is a subjectivity attributed to all beings. It is through subjectivity that one ‘returns’ to the self. This returns us to Brennan’s argument made in chapter one, where she claims through the ontological commitments of attestation, selfhood becomes for Ricoeur a ‘mode of existing’ in the world which relates more to how certain kinds of actions can be performed than to the existence of certain entities. However, Ricoeur argues that the two features of selfhood

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<sup>1031</sup>In the chapter ‘Plants and Animals’, Swimme and Berry provide an example of natural selection. They write that the horse and the bison come from a common ancestor but are now different forms of life. In an explanation for this they write that “one of the primordial ancestors of the bison made a profoundly important choice: when faced with an enemy it would charge head-on. The horse’s *ur*-ancestor made a drastically different choice...These decisions immediately created two different worlds...In a biologically meaningful sense, the world that the horse inhabits wears the face of the horse...the horse’s world has taken the horse into account in varying degrees. For instance, the grasses of the plains have evolved in response to the horse’s dentition and patterns of grazing” (Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p136-137)

distinguished by actuality and potential point to an underlying unity to human action. He writes that “if there is a being of the self – this is in conjunction with a ground starting from which the self can be said to be acting.”<sup>1032</sup> The self is not only that which is attested to but it is also the potential to act. This marks the distinction between *ipse* and *idem*. This, Ricoeur states, involves *two* modes of being. How then are these two modes of being - the being of the self and being-in-the-world connected? In answer to this Ricoeur chooses to use Spinoza’s concept of *conatus* over Heidegger’s idea of ‘Presence’ as the nexus between being ‘oneself’ and ‘being-in-the-world’. *Conatus* Ricoeur argues is “the effort to persevere in being”<sup>1033</sup> and he affords it priority over consciousness<sup>1034</sup>. This is helpful in terms of applying the concept of attestation to the narrative. The human is one mode of being, that being who attests. The universe is the world wherein she has her being and out of which she acts. It is the structure of being within which it is possible for her to arise. This is a second mode of being. In her mode of selfhood, through attestation, is expressed her ‘effort to be’. This is her effort to ‘be in the world’. This ‘effort to be’ implies responsibility because she can act but also grasp herself in her actions and correct them.

This notion of selfhood, at once so particular and so communal differs substantially from the ‘other than human’ beings of the narrative of *The Universe Story*. Primarily this is so as their existence, even though afforded agency and intentionality, is not presented as needing ‘effort’. There is, as far as can be currently claimed, not the ‘conscious’ gap between potentiality and actuality that Swimme and Berry describe as present in the human in the other than human beings of the narrative. This, we are left to infer, is due to human consciousness. While, as Plumwood points out, this affords a superiority to reason in the narrative, it also, I argue, has the implicit effect of designating the human as that being yet to come to completion. This hint of ‘incompleteness’ does not seem to be associated with the other characters of the narrative. As a possible explanation for this discrepancy, the narrative describes the

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<sup>1032</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*. p308

<sup>1033</sup> *Ibid.*, p316

<sup>1034</sup>In the earlier chapter of the same work, chapter seven ‘The Self and the Ethical Aim’, Ricoeur laments how Aristotle does not provide a means for understanding why he states that “the intellect is the ipse...of man” or that man is closest to himself. In response to this lacuna, Ricoeur offers his own partial answer which states “the self is structured by the desire for its own existence.” (*Oneself as Another*, p188) Here we witness these two modes of being, the desire to continue in existence through the self, and that which precedes the existence of the self and is the condition necessary for the ‘self’ to exist.

human as that creature with a “lack of specialised functioning...whereas the nonhuman life forms receive their guidance almost completely through their genetic coding, the human is genetically coded toward further transgenetic cultural codings, which in their specific forms are invented by human communities themselves in the various modes of expression.”<sup>1035</sup> This allusion to incompleteness further highlights that while the fact of its relationality may make the human self of *The Universe Story* an ecological and even a mutual self, there is a surplus in this human self, a remainder. This surplus, as the call to alterity, in addition to transcendence of experience, ensures a space for ‘mystery’ in the human, mystery simply because it is not narrated. Here I recall Ricoeur and his argument that the sacred opens a space of manifestation that is imaginary rather than logical in nature and so, what fills this un-narrated space, is offered to the imagination of the reader.

The narrative further states that we are ‘genetically mandated’ to think, although we do have a choice in how and what we think and the way in which we apply our thinking. This introduces the question of freedom into human existence, the fact that we are free to choose how ‘to be’. It is a very different notion of ‘selfhood’ to the other than human forms who are not associated with this level of freedom. The genetic coding of fish means they must swim, of birds, they must fly, of trees that they must blossom. These other species, Swimme and Berry claim, are “locked within its[their] own perfections.”<sup>1036</sup> But not so the human, distinguished by its genetic freedom exercised through its consciousness and behaviour. This is not merely a difference of function, but arguably a difference of power – the power to think and to act freely. For this reason, the self of the human differs to the subject of the ‘other than human’ of the narrative. This is so, as that which constitutes a ‘self’ is the very attribute which makes one human and as distinguishable from other creatures. And yet this human freedom is a freedom that is constrained, not by divine law but by natural laws. The narrative fingers human destruction as the result of human freedom ‘unrestrained’ and repeatedly calls for the need for human activity to be aligned with the Earth process. The irony in this is that even with the ability to both think and act, that consciously or unconsciously, it is a human freedom that is limited and when over-run, has consequences. I write unconsciously as the narrative suggests that we have not yet fully understood our

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<sup>1035</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p159

<sup>1036</sup>*ibid.*, p157

limitations and so continue to behave as we do. The result of violating these limitations, the narrative informs us, is a diminishment of the human condition and the human experience<sup>1037</sup>.

Although subjectivity and interiority, and a level of consciousness associated with these, are attributed to the other beings of the narrative, it can be further argued that this subjectivity varies in degree and what the narrative refers to as ‘depth’. This difference in ‘depth’ and what it facilitates is highlighted in *Journey of the Universe* when Tucker and Swimme argue that “With the emergence of the human, the universe created a space where depth of feelings could be concentrated and wondered over.”<sup>1038</sup> Both *The Universe Story* and *Journey of the Universe* infer that it is the human, through its capacity for symbolic consciousness, which brings ‘depth’ to the universe. In claiming this, the texts imply that the human feels more and experiences more. It highlights how the concept of attestation stands as the gap between our experience of the world, and our understanding of the experience of the ‘other’ of us. We may never know how the ‘other’ attests. Nor can we know what becomes of its interiority or subjectivity and why such a dimension is necessary if it cannot be acted out with the same freedom that the human has, or indeed if it cannot be ‘deepened’ through experience. As humans we remain both products and prisoners of our own symbolic consciousness which does not extend to the other than human world. Thus, selfhood which is so entangled with attestation and expression in the narrative necessarily remains an anthropological concept. It is an effort to understand the world ‘on our own terms.’ In light of the aim of the narrative, this need not be a negative feature. Although the question stands to be answered, how else are we to represent ‘the other’ if not from our own perspective? And should attempts to do so be abandoned if we can never move from this finite perspective?

#### 4.2.3 World as horizon of Self

The final point, which is related to the above points, is the ‘world as the horizon of the self’. For Ricoeur, to interpret is to be able to inhabit the world of the text, as a reader to be able to conceptualize and imagine *myself* as part of that world<sup>1039</sup>. In his ‘hermeneutics of the self’ the relation between selfhood and world becomes explicit in

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<sup>1037</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.pp247-252

<sup>1038</sup>Swimme & Tucker. *Journey of the Universe*. p87

<sup>1039</sup>Ricoeur Paul. “Life in quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*.pp22-33

the final chapter when, as Brennan has argued, Ricoeur returns to an inquiry where being-in-the-world, the self and care are to be determined together. He writes:

Only a being that is a self is *in* the world; correlatively, the world in which this being is, is not the sum of beings composing the universe of subsisting things or things ready-to-hand. The being of the self presupposes the totality of a world that is the horizon of its thinking, acting, feeling – in short, of its care.<sup>1040</sup>

These two strands of identity of the self – being in the world and Care - call in to focus the relationship of the self with and in the world, and are, I would argue, what the narrative configuration of the human in *The Universe Story* rests on. The first is our capacity as beings to question our being, what Berry and Swimme refer to as our self-reflective consciousness, and the second, that the ‘being’ of the self is presupposed by a world that both constitutes, and is constituted by that which she cares about. Ricoeur goes on to say that the being of the world is the “necessary correlate to the being of the self. There is no world without a self who finds itself in it and acts in it; there is no self without a world that is practicable in some fashion.”<sup>1041</sup> Furthermore, both the world and the other than self “affects the understanding of the self by itself [and] marks, precisely, the difference between the *ego* that posits itself and the *self* that recognizes itself only through these very affections.”<sup>1042</sup>

The relation of a ‘self’ in the world has its origins in how one cares and dwells in its environment. The self attests to its own identity by its ability to think, act, feel and care in relation to the other. The other as previously noted is that which calls the self to responsibility in the world, the way in which he/she is activated. What we see or claim as our ‘being’, the horizon of our thinking, acting, feeling is what we will care for. This, as we have illustrated, can be another person, it can be Earth in its corporeality, but it can also, as Plumwood and Bell argue, be any ‘other’ which activates us or calls us to responsibility. *The Universe Story* offers the entire universe as our dwelling place. It highlights its activity and presence in our everyday lives so that we might include it in the horizon of our thinking, acting and care. Additionally, it offers all the beings that

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<sup>1040</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*. p310

<sup>1041</sup>*Ibid.*, p311

<sup>1042</sup>*Ibid.*

constitute the universe as subjects and agents with the capacity of both affecting and effecting us and as constituting part of that which forms our 'self'.

Ricoeur argues that the events of one's life must be gathered together in order to be understood as a whole. This he describes as the narrative unity of a life. However, it is impossible to do this as one's conception, as well as one's birth (the beginning of the narrative) belong to the memories of others in the same way that one's death is a memory belonging to those who survive. In this way unity of life is difficult to achieve unless through the medium of narrative. Ricoeur observes that by "narrating a life of which I am not the author as to existence, I make myself its co-author as to its meaning"<sup>1043</sup>. Haker develops Ricoeur's point when she states "the self cannot free itself from its self-entanglement"<sup>1044</sup>, and neither can the other. Access takes place by beginning the dialogue, that is, by way of the common entanglement in the mode of storytelling, or in the mode of bodily expression as "simple" narration"<sup>1045</sup>. *The Universe Story* emphasises this 'entanglement in stories' through its notion of interconnection, and in its notion of 'universe' gathers together Earth, stars, prokaryotes and eukaryotes, plants and animals, (and in a more immediate way seemingly opposing discourses), all of these things that constitute a universe and that dwell in so much as each takes its form, function and self from their relationship with the 'other'. This 'life' or this 'larger self' is narrated by humans. It is these same humans who bestow on this larger enterprise, and within it, the meaning of the events and indeed the meaning of the human life. In expanding our own human story to take place within a larger cosmological story, *The Universe Story* emphasises the inter-dependence and inter-relatedness of human existence on all of those myriad of 'others'. This, I argue, is the narratives attempt to re-create what Ricoeur names as the "religious attitude" of "absolute dependence" and as he argues, the "essential relation of humankind to the sacred"<sup>1046</sup>.

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<sup>1043</sup> Ibid., p162

<sup>1044</sup> Here Haker is referring to Wilhelm Schapp's theory of being 'entangled in stories' which according to Haker claims "neither a theory of epistemology, nor of behaviour, nor of anthropology can be properly constructed independently of the human being's entanglement in stories". See Haker, H. "Narrative and Moral Identity in the Work of Paul Ricoeur" in *Memory, Narrativity, Self and the Challenge to think God. The reception within theology of the recent work of Paul Ricoeur*. pp134-152:138.

<sup>1045</sup> Ibid., p140

<sup>1046</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. "Manifestation and Proclamation" in *Figuring the Scared*. p65



### 4.3 The human as configured in *The Universe Story*

In *The Universe Story* there are three notable ways in which Swimme and Berry describe the human. The first is the human as ‘a mode of being’ and this is applicable at an individual level as well as at a collective level. The second is the human as ‘species’, and the third is the human species as a ‘developing’ species. These descriptions are all involved with each other but for the purpose of clarification, I will examine them here under the headings of ‘the human as species’ and ‘the human as a species that is developing’ as this relates to the human in its ‘mode of being’. There are two significant implications of this for the way in which the human is configured in the narrative. These are ‘the human as mediator between absolute identity and sheer change; and between time as objectified and time as experienced’ and ‘the development of subjectivity as the central aspect of human development’.

#### 4.3.1 The human as species

The first manner in which the narrative speaks about the human is as the human as a species among species. This level of thinking is necessary, Swimme and Berry argue, as part of the characterisation of the envisaged Ecozoic era and for thinking the ‘human story’ within the ‘larger life story’ of Earth. They write “we will never come to appreciate the full significance of human adjustment in this new biological era until we begin to think of the human as a species among species”<sup>1047</sup>. Thus, the transformation the narrative calls for requires our identification of ourselves as one species among many species. It can only be assumed that this identification, as belonging to a species, is to emphasis our biological nature as a specific organism among others on the planet and once again our dependence and interconnection with other species and Earth itself.

#### 4.3.2 The human as a species that is ‘developing’

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<sup>1047</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p259

When describing ‘human emergence’ in the narrative, Swimme and Berry write that “at birth the human was only imperfectly human...a long acculturation period was needed for arriving at a truly human maturity”<sup>1048</sup>. In this statement, the authors, in the lineage of Teilhard, apply their teleological model that as the human evolves she is becoming more developed. This could account for the ambiguity within the narrative of the human as a destructive force even while she is a form of the universe. She is a form, the narrative implies, that has not yet reached full maturity. What is interesting is the way in which this evolution is linked to the human ‘mode of being’, this mode of being relating to that of the ‘effort to exist’. Tellingly the authors’ write that “if death were not the condition of life; then the whole of existence might tend toward the trivial...such a mediocre existence cannot be permitted by the very structure and functioning of the universe. Yet such a mediocre mode of being is precisely what has been invented in the terminal phases of the Cenozoic.”<sup>1049</sup> Although Swimme and Berry are describing our ‘effort to exist’ as mediocre, when they describe this mode of being in the following paragraph, it is more appropriately understood as destructive. In explanation of this ‘mediocrity’ they write:

we have discovered the power to protect ourselves from the elements, to produce food in enormous quantity and transport it anywhere in the world, to communicate instantly throughout the planet, even to delay death by artificial contrivances. With all this knowledge and corresponding skills, we have created a human controlled, less threatening world, a world deprived of the great natural challenges of the past...

This new world of automobiles, highways, parking lots, shopping malls, power stations, nuclear-weapons plants, factory farms, chemical plants: this new world of hundred storey buildings, endless traffic, turbulent populations, megacities, decaying apartments, has become an affliction perhaps greater than the more natural human condition it seeks to replace. We live in a chemically saturated world. It is not a life-giving situation. If not deadly it is degraded. Humans now live amid limitless junk beyond any known capacity for creative use. Our vision is impaired by the pollution in the atmosphere. We no longer see the stars with the clarity that once existed.<sup>1050</sup>

This is a stark take on contemporary human civilisations and living. What is interesting however, is the hope held by Swimme and Berry that there is a way to move from this

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<sup>1048</sup> *ibid.*, p158

<sup>1049</sup> *ibid.*, p248

<sup>1050</sup> *ibid.*, p249

‘degraded’ existence into a “more creative mode of being”<sup>1051</sup>. It is notable the way in which they claim this is done. In *The Universe Story*, one only reaches a “completely *human* mode of being”<sup>1052</sup> when one identifies with all existence. This can be considered as when our mode of being in the world need not necessarily be differentiated from that other mode of being: that from which being arises or the ‘structure of being’. They write in the final page of the narrative that “our individual being apart from the wider community of being is emptiness. Our individual self finds its most complete realization within our family self, our community self, our species self, our earthly self, and eventually our universe self.”<sup>1053</sup> This involves, the authors state, the need to “alter the mode of consciousness”<sup>1054</sup> of the human, reinterpreting this development as a spiritual development which then has the ability to affect behaviour.

In *The Universe Story*, it is Berry’s concept of the universe self that is espoused, and as argued above, can be identified with both Plumwood’s identification of an indistinguishable self and an expanded Self, although containing differences. This, according to the narrative, is when one attains a completely ‘human mode of being’ by identifying with ‘all’ things. It is not coincidental that in Berry’s understanding that this is the point in Confucianism at which one can begin to affect transformation in society and in the cosmos<sup>1055</sup>, indicating a possible reason in Berry’s choosing narrative for his project. For both Ricoeur and Berry, the understanding and interpretation of one’s selfhood is a task continuously undertaken. It involves ‘the long detour’. However, whereas Ricoeur emphasises our historicity and others such as Plumwood, that we are culturally, politically, socially and economically embedded, Berry’s ‘developed’ self seems to be a-historical and directed towards a ‘unification’ which does not bear the imprint of human history. It is a journey for Berry from the individual self towards the universe self, a journey which Berry also insists paradoxically is a ‘return to the depths of our own being’ in order to “achieve a final communion with that ultimate reality whence all things come into being.”<sup>1056</sup> It is within the human person that transformation takes place, and where the possibility of ‘final’ communion with ‘ultimate reality’ has

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<sup>1051</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1052</sup> *Ibid.*, p198. Emphasis my own.

<sup>1053</sup> *Ibid.*, p268

<sup>1054</sup> *Ibid.*, p251

<sup>1055</sup> Berry, Thomas. “*Authenticity in Confucian Spirituality*”. Riverdale papers, copy obtained at Genesis Farm.

<sup>1056</sup> Berry, Thomas. “Contemporary Spirituality: The Journey of the Human Community” in *CrossCurrents*. p175

the potential to be achieved. The ‘long detour’ for Berry in his task of selfhood, thus consists not as a journey through the symbols and narratives that constitute us, but as a journey from my own being through Earth in its natural formations. It is a journey that Utsler might describe as beginning with environmental experience returning only after to an environmental philosophy. For Berry however, and *The Universe Story*, it is primarily an experience of the sacred manifest in the natural world only to return to my own being awakened and transformed by these numinous experiences, not in search of a philosophy, but in a feeling of communion and connectedness with all that which constitutes these experiences.

For Berry and Swimme, such an identification of self with the universe, or to use Berry’s own words, ‘final communion’, is I argue, the articulation in narrative form, of Teilhard’s concept of ‘more being’ which implies a greater awareness and deeper connection to the whole. Teilhard wrote in *The Future of Man* that ‘it is not wellbeing but a hunger for more-being which, of psychological necessity, can alone preserve the thinking Earth from the *taedium vitae*.’<sup>1057</sup> This ‘more being’ is an increase in consciousness or spiritual energy. Teilhard differentiated ‘more being’ from ‘well-being’ by saying that materialism can bring about well-being but spirituality and an increase in psychic energy or consciousness brings about ‘more being’. What remains paradoxical and undermines this concept is how in *The Universe Story* ‘more being’ seems to be achieved through the ‘individual self’, as Plumwood’s critique of both the indistinguishable and expanded Self highlights. This is the manner in which the validity of the ‘other’ is dependent on the way in which it is incorporated into *my* self. In their focus on the person, this is a view that Swimme and Berry clearly subscribe to. The effect of such an approach towards transformation remains to be seen although there is growing research that testifies to the role that emotions play in ethical and moral development<sup>1058</sup>. While this does not necessarily detract from the narrative, it does highlight the difficulty involved in maintaining a significance to individual beings while simultaneously emphasising our belonging to a whole, in addition to highlighting the tension between environmental experience and environmental philosophy, a tension that

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<sup>1057</sup> De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. *The Future of Man*. (Denny, Norman. Trans.) New York: Harper & Row, 1964, p31 *Taedium vitae* is translated as ‘apathy of life’.

<sup>1058</sup> Cf. Van den Noortgaete, Francis & De Tavernier, Johan. “Affected by Nature: A Hermeneutical Transformation of Environmental Ethics” in *Zygon*, vol. 49, no.3 September, 2014 and Smith, Mick. “On ‘Being’ Moved by Nature: Geography, Emotion and Environmental Ethics” in *Emotional Geographies*. (Davidson, Joyce and Bond, Liz) (ed’s). Taylor and Francis Group, 2005, pp219-230

encapsulates the difficulty of how to locate the human in nature. It is in such seeming dichotomies however, that the capability to narrate identity can mediate, particularly between unyielding substantiality and the dynamic movement of life.

#### 4.3.3 The human as mediator between absolute identity and sheer change; and time as objectified and time as experienced

Ricoeur argues that narrative identity mediates between absolute identity and sheer change in addition to time as objectified (cosmological time or time of the world) and time as experienced (phenomenological time or time of the soul). It is through this framework, that I will now examine the configuration of the human as it is narrated in the text.

In the narrative, beginning with that which is absolute identity, this being for Ricoeur a static givenness, it could be argued that this is the universe itself who ‘always and everywhere’ holds all things together and is the ‘comprehensive and everlasting unity’ that binds all things together. This absolute identity could equally be argued for as that ‘numinous originating power’ that brought the universe into existence making the universe utterly given. Paradoxically, sheer change on the other hand can also be applied to the universe as it is a universe that does not remain ‘the same’ but that develops and evolves through time. For this reason, it seems more accordant to understand ‘absolute identity’ in terms of the originating power, as it is that which is also termed in the narrative as that ‘unifying principle’ and it is that which is necessary – and given – in order to exist.

Connected to this is the other aspect which narrative identity mediates between, that being time as objectified and time as experienced, thus there is an overlap between these two dialectics. We experience the movement and development of our own life but we do not experience the universe in its evolutionary time-frame. Time, *The Universe Story* states, begins with the universe and so time as a concept becomes equated with the universe. However, to experience the ‘numinous origins’, from whence Berry states the universe emerged is then to experience ‘time’ in its objectified dimension, this being ‘absolute identity’. Furthermore, to create and contribute to the universe is also to connect one’s own experience of time with time considered as an abstraction.

In *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur develops his theme of the capable person whereby the question of the capable person is determined by responding to the question of who can act, who can speak, who can impute actions to herself? Only the human in *The Universe Story* can respond in the affirmative to these three questions. Ricoeur states that the question of the narrative also appears here again as that which “posits the relation to time; the relation both of the speaking subject and of the acting subject, but whose temporality is thematised by the narrative”<sup>1059</sup>. The first point to highlight in terms of configuration then, is that it is the human who narrates in this text. It is the human, in this narrative, who connects phenomenological and cosmic time, and it is the human, presented through Swimme and Berry’s configuration, who embodies in a seemingly non-contradictory manner, the concept of a universe that is constantly changing with that dimension of the universe that never changes. It is the human who attests to her own identity and who narrates herself.

In the narrative the phrase ‘the universe is a single event’ suggests that there is a narrative comprehensibility to the universe, the ability Ricoeur states “to make one story out of the multiple incidents.”<sup>1060</sup> While this may be possible in terms of literary fiction, according to Ricoeur, it remains an impossible historical task due to the effects of history upon us. I use it here to highlight the implicit role assigned to the human by the narrative, that of narrator, not just of this ‘story’ but also as narrator *for* the universe, in that the human gives language and expression to the universe<sup>1061</sup>. It is, the narrative claims, through human knowledge that we, the generation receiving this information from science, are learning about the universe. It is through human endeavour and capacity, the narrative tells us, that we are learning that the same elements that make up the stars make up our own human body; that the molecules that make up all organisms are these same molecules put together in different patterns. The human is discovering the universe and documenting what is found and in doing so, the narrative claims, we are also discovering our very own selves. The authors state that “scientific knowledge is essentially self-knowledge, where self is taken as referring to

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<sup>1059</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay / Paul Ricoeur*.p89

<sup>1060</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*.p21

<sup>1061</sup>Berry has argued that such creative works as Shakespeare’s sonnets, Mozart’s *Magic Flute* and Dante’s *Divine Comedy* are a human response to the mystery and splendour of the world. They are evoked from the human, what might be termed in *Universe Story* terms as a ‘spiritual’ expression, to the world that we find ourselves in. Berry, Thomas. “The Dream of the Earth” in *The Dream of the Earth*.p197

the complex multiform system of the Universe”<sup>1062</sup>. The universe, and specifically the story of the universe, is according to Berry and Swimme “the comprehensive context of our human understanding of ourselves.”<sup>1063</sup>

As narrator of the text the human can establish herself as both a prophetic voice and a voice that re-interprets the past. This could be argued as a limitation of *The Universe Story*, in that it straddles disciplines and mixes categories so that any epistemological claim it seeks to make can be assigned as poetic and imaginative variation. And yet as Ricoeur argues, narrative has simultaneously a significant power in that it can redescribe reality and in doing so both *intend* the world and transfigure the world of its reader. Taken in this context, the means of expressing it through the plot of *The Universe Story* would appear to serve its function. It implies through its use of the human as narrator that there is a way in which we as humans determine both the meaning and possible outcome of this ‘story’. Thus, while relocating the human as one species in a vast universe as cosmology and biology have always done, it restores the human to a most crucial place, that being, the one who brings the universe to consciousness and to knowledge.

The authors at the beginning present Earth as having “through its human element entered conscious self-awareness of the patterns of seeds, and seasons, and the primordial rhythms of the universe.”<sup>1064</sup> This is emphasised further in the book when Swimme and Berry argue that a new power was unleashed in the human “a power of consciousness whereby Earth, and the universe as a whole, turned back and reflected on itself.”<sup>1065</sup> In the ‘human element’ of the universe, according to the narrative, the ‘universe begins to think on itself’. Just as the human person can arguably think of him or herself in an objectified way in that we can think about our actions, our intentions, our desires, even our own thoughts, in the human, the narrative claims, the universe develops the power to reflect on itself as an object whereby such questions are asked, and often answered, as to what the universe is composed of, how old it is, does it have a purpose. What is confusing here is how the narrative claims it is the universe reflecting on itself *as a whole* and yet this is done through the human which the narrative consistently argues is only *a part*. While lamenting the way in which all language has

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<sup>1062</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p39

<sup>1063</sup>*Ibid.*, p237

<sup>1064</sup>*Ibid.*, p11

<sup>1065</sup>*Ibid.*, p143

been reduced to a univocal, human language so that we do not hear the voices of the natural world, the narrative illustrates perhaps inadvertently, both the irony and helplessness of such a statement, by making the human as narrator of this story, the master of meaning as to all of existence.

Berry claims that history is governed by overarching moments which relate the human venture to the destiny of the universe. He lists some of the ‘Great Works’ of the past: the classical Greek world with its understanding of the human mind, or the Great Work of Israel in articulating a new experience of the divine. Berry writes that “the Great Work of a people is the work of all the people. No-one is exempt. Each of us has our individual life pattern and responsibilities. Yet beyond these concerns each person in and through their personal work assists in the Great Work. Personal work needs to be aligned with the Great Work.”<sup>1066</sup> Here again, Berry subordinates the individual to the whole. An individual life must become ‘aligned’ to the greater historical moment that occurs in one’s life-time. In the case of *The Universe Story*, the great work is identified as bringing the Ecozoic era into being<sup>1067</sup> and it would appear from the narrative that the people currently being tasked with this role is the Euro-West and those who are bringing this scientific story to us. Sideris has described scientific knowledge as increasingly becoming “the possession of an elite priesthood”<sup>1068</sup> whereby it is not the information being uncovered but rather the scientist who becomes “the final object of reverie.”<sup>1069</sup> One is left wondering if those who see the world as a material resource are afforded the title of ‘the universe become conscious of itself’. It also implies that there are those who need to be ‘awakened’ to this new ‘role’ of the human, assigned by the narrative, and there are those who take it upon themselves to be responsible for this awakening. On the other hand, the narrative’s use of symbolism and metaphor and the fact that this is not a text book of the Big Bang theory, point to a conviction of the authors in the power of story to teach, and the validity of forms of knowledge other than that of empirical science. Thus, the physical sciences may be what the narrative builds on, if only to point to a world that they imply is larger than science.

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<sup>1066</sup>Berry, Thomas. “The Great Work” in *The Great Work*.p10

<sup>1067</sup>See The Great Work in *The Earth Charter* available to view at [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org)

<sup>1068</sup>Sideris, Lisa H. *Consecrating Science. Wonder, knowledge and the Natural World*.p75

<sup>1069</sup>*Ibid.*, p44



#### 4.3.4 The development of subjectivity as a critical aspect in human development

I return now to a central aspect of the configuration of the human in the text. I return to it here in terms of human subjectivity and the part the narrative implies that this plays in evolution, not solely human evolution but according to Swimme and Berry the evolution of Earth<sup>1070</sup>. While the human is generally referred to throughout as ‘a species’ and so in the collective, this aspect of subjectivity belongs to the individual. In chapter two, I articulated one of Thomas Berry’s principles of the universe, which is a development of Teilhard’s insight on the three aspects of matter, namely, Plurality, Unity and Energy from *The Human Phenomenon*<sup>1071</sup>. This principle according to Berry is that the universe shows itself in three modalities, these being differentiation, subjectivity and communion. In *The Universe Story* this is renamed as the Cosmogentic Principle. It is fundamental to an understanding of the way in which the universe functions in this narrative and a re-interpretation and application of Berry’s Trinitarian thinking to science.

In *The Universe Story*, having already recounted humanity as part of a cosmogenesis, Swimme and Berry develop from this a principle they call the Cosmogentic Principle. Einstein’s Cosmological Principle holds that the distribution of matter in the universe is homogenous when viewed on a large enough scale<sup>1072</sup>. Swimme and Berry express this in terms of time and history and so restate this principle as the Cosmogentic Principle “which further assumes that the dynamics of development are basically the same throughout the universe.”<sup>1073</sup> Swimme and Berry interpret the Cosmogentic Principle as characterised by differentiation, autopoiesis and communion, here subjectivity is given the name autopoiesis. According to Swimme and Berry, cosmogenesis is ordered by differentiation (particularities), structured by autopoiesis (self-creating) and organised by communion (inter-relatedness) and that

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<sup>1070</sup>The text offers some synonyms for subjectivity as autopoiesis, “self-manifestation, sentience, self-organization, dynamic centers of experience, presence, identity, inner principle of being, voice, interiority.” (Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p72)

<sup>1071</sup>De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard. *The Human Phenomenon*.

<sup>1072</sup>Einstein’s Cosmological Principle states that in the large scale universe ‘all places are alike’. A simple explanation of this is wherever you go in the universe or whatever direction you look in, you will see galaxies, leading to the view that there is a certain uniformity to the large-scale universe. It is a principle rather than an empirical statement because we can only know it from one perspective, our own Earth-based perspective. Duncan, Todd & Tyler Craig. *Your Cosmic Context. An Introduction to Modern Cosmology*. California: Pearson Addison-Wesley, 2009, pp199-200

<sup>1073</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p67

“these three terms refer to the governing themes and the basal intentionality of all existence.”<sup>1074</sup> The authors then provide examples of this principle. It is necessary to reproduce one of these examples here as it illustrates the part played by subjectivity (as well as emphasising connectedness which demonstrates what the authors term the micro and macro phase of the universe) and what they wish to achieve with this language.

Swimme and Berry state that the physical sciences tell us, in so far as they can with any certainty that the universe began as a single point, a dense concentration of energy and matter. This is interpreted in the narrative as the universe re-creating itself anew through each event. The authors express it thus “Our Sun emerged into being out of the creativity of so many millions of former beings.”<sup>1075</sup> The universe, as they present it, working in communion with what it has already created, creates our particular sun. The sun through its subjectivity and self-organising capacity enters into a bonded relationship with Earth, which then as a result ‘creates’ life<sup>1076</sup> (through the capture of the chlorophyll molecule for example), further differentiating the universe. The macrophase dimension of the universe they apply to the forces that ‘give rise’ to the sun and the microphase dimension of the universe is reserved for that which ‘gives rise’ to life. Expressed in another way, according to Swimme and Berry, we can say that the sun did not create itself, it is the ‘creation’ of the universe entire, a combination of events and beings. However, it is what the narrative terms ‘the unique relationship’ of the ‘bonded’ sun and Earth which creates life. In Brian Swimme’s film series *Canticle to the Cosmos*<sup>1077</sup>, in the lecture named ‘The Fundamental Order of the Universe’, which is another name used by Swimme to express the principle of interiority, differentiation and communion, Swimme gives further illustration of this principle through his example of the oak tree. The oak tree, he states, exists through a combination of universal activity – the sun, the rain, gravity and the soil working in ‘communion’, in relationship. But it is the oak tree *itself* which produces the acorn. According to Swimme, the creation of the acorn is an expression of the ‘subjectivity’ of

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<sup>1074</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*. p71

<sup>1075</sup>Here the authors are referring to the first and second generation stars, density waves, gravitational powers, the elements. The text bestows on what might ordinarily be termed as ‘objects’ a sense of subjectivity and personhood as argued in the previous chapter, hence the use of the word ‘beings’.

<sup>1076</sup>Brian Swimme notes poetically in his dvd series ‘Canticle to the Cosmos’ that there is no human life on Earth that is not dependent on this bonded relationship between Earth and sun, no line of poetry, no human gesture, no act of love. I mention it as an example of the power of metaphor to re-describe reality and the implicit aim of Swimme to extend our sense of connection even beyond Earth to the sun.

<sup>1077</sup>Swimme, Brian. *Canticle to the Cosmos*.1990

the oak tree, its self-organisation. The oak tree is an autonomous center of creation and in its act of creation it further differentiates the universe. The existence of the oak tree, its journey into being, is an example of the macrophase aspect of the universe. The oak tree's creation of an acorn is an example of the microphase aspect. Again, expressed in another way, the oak tree does not create itself but it does create the acorn. And so Swimme argues, we witness in the universe a large scale power (the macrophase dimension of the universe itself) which evokes or creates beings with their own modes of power (microphase dimension). This inter-related macrophase and microphase differentiation of powers can be understood as Berry's small self and large self, small being our own microphase dimension and large being the macrophase dimension. There are a series of considerations that accompany this principle of Berry and Swimme's. What is relevant for this section is the way in which Berry and Swimme employ the term 'subjectivity' as well as the significance they attach to it.

At this point in terms of subjectivity, it is important to state that the narrative through the principle of differentiation claims that the universe in its creation never repeats itself so that "each being and each moment announcing its thrilling news: I am fresh. To understand the universe you must understand me."<sup>1078</sup> In this instance then to 'contribute' to the cosmos, is to create something new and particular. This is the manner in which subjectivity becomes in *The Universe Story* a most significant aspect of being. Berry writes that "with subjectivity is associated the numinous quality that has traditionally been associated with every reality of the universe"<sup>1079</sup> and claims that there has been an increase in subjectivity as the universe has evolved, a clear reference to Teilhard's idea of complexity-consciousness. Whether such a claim can be justified is uncertain. For the purpose of this research, I will focus only on Berry and Swimme's view that one's (human) subjectivity and by association, spirituality can be developed.

It is notable in the narrative, the manner in which Berry and Swimme claim we can 'increase our subjectivity'. This is achieved by establishing 'an intimate presence' with the universe. Being 'intimately present' to the world according to Berry shapes our interior world and 'awakens our personal identity', forming us in our thoughts and our imagination and thus contributing to our self- understanding. It is for Berry when we

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<sup>1078</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p75

<sup>1079</sup>Berry, Thomas. "The Ecological Age" in *The Dream of the Earth*.p45

experience the world and are transformed by it<sup>1080</sup>. Intimate presence leads to an increase in consciousness and becomes the means towards Teilhard's concept of 'more being'.

While Ricoeur looked to the text and the symbol for such a transformation of the self, Berry looks to the wider physical world. According to Berry we are alienated from what he refers to as 'primordial experience' where we now have the *interpretation* of the universe without the experience of the universe. Berry gives examples of such experiences as, "begin[ing] to view the change of the seasons: The springtime awakening of the land as the daisies bloom in the meadows and the dogwood tree puts forth its frail white blossoms...the terrifying moments when summer storms break."<sup>1081</sup> The comforts of our modern industrialist life style, he argues, such as electric light, increased urbanisation and city living, noise pollution and technological distraction have reduced what Berry names as these 'wondrous moments' of our lives. Berry claims that "in the civilization that we have contrived for ourselves...not only do we miss the dance of life on the planet, but we also fail to see this dance in the universe in which our planet Earth floats – the sun, the stars of the zodiac, the Milky Way galaxy."<sup>1082</sup> It would seem that Berry and Swimme are aiming for a return to that 'non-philosophical reality' which precedes language, concepts and tradition. They are advocating an experience of the natural world rather than an interpretation, notwithstanding the fact that this advocacy is mediated through their own interpretation. When examined with Ricoeur, their attempt at this is interesting for a number of reasons. The first is the way in which the narrative differentiates between interpretation and experience. For Ricoeur such a distinction in the human is impossible as all experience comes to language in order to be expressed and shared. This involves interpreting through the language and categories that are already known to us and so must be interpretations. However, Utsler in drawing on and attempting to expand Ricoeur's hermeneutics, argues for a critical hermeneutics that "considers the conditions within which we interpret the environment while at the same time seeks to

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<sup>1080</sup>For a more comprehensive explanation of Berry's 'Intimate Presence' cf. Berry, Thomas. "Human Presence" in *The Dream of the Earth*. pp 13-23 and Berry, Thomas. "Loneliness and Presence" in *Evening Thoughts*, pp33-42

<sup>1081</sup>Berry, Thomas. "The World of Wonder" in *The Sacred Universe*.pp170-177:175

<sup>1082</sup>*Ibid.*, p141

uncover distortions”<sup>1083</sup>. In light of this, while we cannot as Ricoeur ever emphasises, escape the effects of history upon us, we can re-interpret the past and be innovative in the transmission of our tradition. So too can we re-examine our interpretations of the environment and be innovative in addressing their traditionally anthropocentric focus. This innovation is evident in Berry’s application of his own historical tradition to his interpretation of the Big Bang theory. Berry’s historical consciousness is evident too in how he stumbles in his use of traditional concepts to formulate new categories in this interpretation. Equally problematic is Berry’s presentation of a universe that is a-contextual as if existing outside of political, economic and social frameworks. The universe, Swimme and Berry after all claim, is the only text without a context. This is ironic given *The Universe Story’s* emphasis on narrative and how it is narrative that helps us to orient or ‘contextualise’ ourselves. Swimme and Berry appear to argue that there is experience that goes beneath language without qualifying the manner in which it is through their own articulation that this ‘pre-linguistic experience’ is brought to light. In many ways, all those aspects that Ricoeur specifically links to the person such as language, action and suffering seem to be somewhat underplayed and even undermined by this narrative and point to a self that is arguably less ‘categorically’ human, although this has much to do with the narrative’s attempts to relate, what Ricoeur terms as, two modes of being. The narrative’s presentation of the human as ‘a form’ of the universe or the consciousness of the universe also seems under developed and vague. Furthermore, it could be argued that the call for the development of individual subjectivity which will contribute to a collective evolution seems self-indulgent especially in light of the narrative’s subordination of the individual to the whole, and yet the narrative remains insistent as to its importance.

We cannot escape the effects of history upon us. Nor can we undo the cultural achievements and failures that have led to this point in the history of being, among them our destiny as symbolic and linguistic beings. This narrative through its use of symbolism as identified in the section on ‘The Logic of Meaning’ points to a reality in the universe, and equally within the human, as a species and as an individual, that is given precedence over human history and cultural achievements. It is a reality the narrative proclaims as prior to and greater than that gathered through consciousness,

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<sup>1083</sup>Utsler, David. “Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics as a Model for Environmental Philosophy” in *Philosophy Today*.p177

including language and even symbolism. The story of the universe, Berry states, is a story that needs to be validated from within, a 'self-recovery', contained in the *realisation* of our unity with all things and the spiritual nature of our existence. Berry and Swimme emphasise the human need to urgently develop this aspect of ourselves in order to enable us to enter into "the subjective depths of things, to understand both the qualitative differences and the multivalent aspects of every reality"<sup>1084</sup>. In resisting the intellectual division of spirit and matter, combined with the acknowledgement of a universe that has physically developed through time, the correlation of a spirit that is also developing through time need not seem so implausible. The rise of such disciplines as psychoanalysis, psychology and consciousness studies attest to the growing interest in the interiority of the human subject. While not without critics, Berry and Swimme's identification of the ecological crisis as being a crisis in spirituality and furthermore, consciousness of that spirituality, is indeed a reasonable assertion. Emphasis on deepening one's subjectivity, associated as it is with spirituality, through recognition of that 'unifying principle' which holds all together and is present in all things must surely impact on the way in which one relates and behaves. Such an emphasis on our interconnectedness could enable a move beyond world-views that encourage separation and engender objectification and exploitation. Furthermore, it is clear in the narrative that subjectivity is the means through which we articulate and express ourselves. Increased knowledge of ourselves in addition to acknowledgement of a divine presence within us could have the consequence of influencing those expressions that we commit ourselves to in the living out of our lives.

While the narrative is emphatic in seeking to assign equality and sacredness to all beings and Benjamin's 'dance of interaction' is evident in how the narrative presents the inter-relatedness and reciprocity between beings, it remains difficult to overlook the unique and privileged role that it deliberately assigns to the human. And while Plumwood's two components of an ecological self are also in abundance, these being reciprocity and mutuality between beings and recognition of the other as distinct, in this narrative, it is always an ecological self that is determined and defined by the human. Bannon criticised Plumwood for being unable to overcome the very rationality she criticises. So too, *The Universe Story* is unable to overcome its own situatedness, and in its concept of subjectivity, the human contains that 'something extra'. Here however, I

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<sup>1084</sup>Swimme & Berry. *The Universe Story*.p258

echo Hawkins who argued that Plumwood's 'ecological rationality' might be enhanced by visual images. *The Universe Story* is constructed on symbolism and imagery and relies on the aesthetic to activate the productive imagination, presenting as Ricoeur argued, the ideas of our reason in images and putting us at the root of the spoken word. Although un-narrated, it is not beyond the bounds of this narrative to imagine that such depth of subjectivity and capacity of expression, although unattested to, lies present in the other. The narrative places the onus on the reader to develop her own capacity in order to be sensitive to the expression of such depth of subjectivity in others.

The story told by *The Universe Story* could have been made more affective if it had incorporated the idea of the self as a necessarily moral self into the text in addition to those critiques put forward by eco-feminist and post-modernist philosophy such as Godfrey and Plumwood<sup>1085</sup>. The subjectivity of *The Universe Story* as a spiritual, self-creating and 'cosmos-creating' principle could be dismissed as a 'feel-good' factor for the human, linking the individual into something greater than her own existence while simultaneously validating her own existence. Here we can return to the criticism of Ashley who argued that it is just this sort of representation of the world which saps from the environmental urgency the text wishes to engender. This is the sense that there is a benevolent over-riding purpose which will guide the universe into the future<sup>1086</sup>. This very principle leaves open the question of the worth of a subject's 'acts' in addition to the necessity of such acts and could be argued as reducing any substantial subjectivity to one which when examined could appear as tokenistic. It could also however, have the opposite effect of contextualising a human life and providing meaning, however brief, through the importance attributed to the actions undertaken in

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<sup>1085</sup>Cf. Godfrey, C. Pheobe. "Ecofeminist Cosmology in Practice: Genesis Farm and the Embodiment of Sustainable Solutions" in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*; Eaton, Heather. *Feminist or Functional Cosmology? Ecofeminist Musings on Thomas Berry's Functional Cosmology.* *Ecotheology 5 and 6*; Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*.

<sup>1086</sup>In Berry's essay "The New Story", we can see this idea clearly elaborated in the final paragraph when Berry writes: "If the dynamics of the universe from the beginning shaped the course of the heavens, lighted the sun, and formed the earth, if this same dynamism brought forth the continents and seas and atmosphere, if it awakened life in the primordial cell and then brought us into being and guided us safely through the turbulent centuries, there is reason to believe that this same guiding process is precisely what has awakened in us our present understanding of ourselves and our relation to this stupendous process. Sensitized to such guidance from the very structure and functioning of the universe, we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture." Berry, Thomas. "The New Story" in *The Dream of the Earth*. p137. It is not unreasonable after such a sentence to pose the question of why under such a powerful guiding force, there is call for a human 'great work'. Berry's argument is that we are not 'sensitized' to such guidance, thus the 'Great Work' is partially in becoming sensitized. For Berry the way of doing this, is through the development of subjectivity.

that human life. Read in this manner, and I argue, the manner in which the narrative was intended- as evidenced in its presentation of the human as mediator between cosmological time and phenomenological time, in addition to the human as mediator between absolute identity and change -a human life takes on significance beyond its own biological lifespan. It is at once unique and simultaneously a participant in a sacred cosmic communion that is unfolding. Furthermore, the nature of this unfolding relies to a degree on the depth of its subjectivity, a subjectivity that it remains within the human's capacity to develop. That which is 'transcendent', the narrative implies, is also immediately present. In this human life an opportunity is provided to contribute to that which is seeking to come to fullness, in this narrative, that being Earth in terms of the Ecozoic but also the human herself and her potential for communion with 'ultimate reality'. This is not, I argue, merely a version of the strong anthropic principle<sup>1087</sup> but rather an attempt to give the human 'a place' and a 'meaning' within the universe and to counter the alienating distanciation of the objectivity of the physical sciences. The human is not just a physical fact but belongs to the evolutionary process in its entirety, the body of the universe is the body of the human, knowledge of the universe is self-knowledge, while also, as that being who has come to consciousness, the human is given a specific role of articulating the subjective and spiritual depths of the universe.

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<sup>1087</sup>See section 2.1.2



## Conclusion: The human of *The Universe Story*

Plumwood argues that one of the problems underlying the environmental crisis is the Western construction of human identity as ‘outside’ of nature. She states that environmental philosophy must first address this nature/reason dualism in order to make an ethical response to nature possible. This involves reconceptualising notions of the self in relation to nature and reconceptualising the human in relation to nature. She calls for an ‘ecological’ or relational self which will account for the otherness of self while also accounting for nature’s continuity with the self. As a narrative with a named ecological agenda, in addition to its implicit aim of transformation of the reader, the manner in which the human is configured in *The Universe Story* becomes central to the world that is proposed by the text and foundational to any transformation that may occur. In light of this, this chapter examined the manner in which the self and the human are configured in the narrative.

Narrative, and in particular narrative identity, Ricoeur argues, acts as a bridge between phenomenological time and cosmological time, and between a totally given identity and sheer change. Absolute identity in *The Universe Story* becomes associated with the originating power as the unifying principle. To create is to connect one’s own experience of time with time as objectified. In this text, it is the human who is the narrator, and in this role, the human who connects the time of the world and the time of the ‘soul’, while also embodying that which is absolute with that in constant change. In this manner, the human is presented as the ‘bridge between’ infinity and finiteness and becomes a narrative articulation of Berry’s desire that the human be recognised as forming one third with ‘heaven’ and Earth. As narrator the human brings this universe story to language, not just the ‘story’ but also the narrative implies, the reality of the universe itself. In this narrative the human is presented as being no less than the universe in human form.

The narrative is a clear attempt to to re-imagine “the structure of [our] being-in-the-world”<sup>1088</sup> within the context of scientific knowledge of our universe. Within this structure of being, the human is presented as the small self to the large self of the universe, an idea Swimme and Berry describe in language as a microphase dimension to a macrophase structure. A creation of the ‘other’ by the self. ‘Other’ and self are totally

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<sup>1088</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, Vol 1.p60

implicated in the narrative with the ‘other’ partially constituting the ‘self’, and the universe entire presented as being ‘the body’ of the individual human, the human being the present culmination of a sequence of events. In such a presentation, as Plumwood has criticised, the validity of the other is dependent on how it is incorporated into the self which reduces the alterity of the other while allowing the self to continue to operate from self-interest. This blurring of boundaries between selves makes it difficult to impute actions as well as leaving possible causes of the ecological crisis unanalysed, and so as Sideris has also argued, hinders the narrative’s ability to serve as an ethical guide.

In the narrative, the human is presented as the universe come to consciousness, and as the human discovers the universe, the narrative claims we are also discovering ourselves; scientific knowledge being self-knowledge. Indeed, it is through consciousness, the narrative states, that we begin to attain a realisation of the unified nature of our existence. Thus, there is an interesting turn in this representation of the human whereby the universe itself becomes dependent on the human for any knowledge or description of what it is. And yet, who does this unity matter to and who does this knowledge of unity change, the universe or the human? Furthermore, it is the human, the narrative declares, who is revealing the journey that the universe has undergone since its beginnings, and in this way the human who brings continuity, permanence and recognition to this universe adventure. It is the human in this narrative who attests to life, it is the human who is conscious of it and declares it. All this given however, it is a human who is less categorically human and where all the human aspects of language, suffering and action are underplayed. This is a result of the narrative’s attempt to highlight the cosmic dimension of the human through attempting to relate two differing modes of being, the being of the self and being-in-the-world.

While the narrative emphasises our inter-relatedness and the reciprocity and mutuality central to Plumwood’s ecological self, in addition to the intrinsic value of each being, there is a surplus in the human self of this narrative evident in its self-reflective consciousness, and *The Universe Story* never quite overcomes its own situatedness<sup>1089</sup>. It does not avoid anthropomorphisms and I would suggest that it does not wish to do so, but rather it aims to present through its style a ‘personalised’ universe. Rather than interpret this only as a strong anthropic principle, I argue that its

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<sup>1089</sup>See section 2.4.3

purpose is to re-locate the human within the cosmos, validating the human life and bestowing a position of ‘belonging’ to the human, a response to the ‘alienating distanciation’ of the objectivity of the physical sciences.

Utsler has emphasised the tension between environmental philosophy and the pre-reflective experience of the natural world and while Berry and Swimme consistently emphasise experience over articulation, their ultimate concern, I argue, is not to enlighten environmental philosophy. Rather, it is to encourage what Ricoeur refers to as the ‘task of subjectivity’, even if Berry takes a notably different starting point from Ricoeur. For Berry this task begins with experience of the natural world wherein he argues, the sacred is manifest. These numinous experiences enable one to identify with the entire order of things, and to achieve a ‘final communion with ultimate reality’. The other aspect necessary for the task of subjectivity, according to the narrative, is in light of these experiences, to identify the being that I am through a ‘return to my own depths’ and furthermore to articulate and to express it. This “inner capacity for manifestation”<sup>1090</sup> is named as a principle of the universe. This is the way in which, according to the narrative, the universe becomes diversified. Thus, if we recall the purpose that Berry and Swimme assign to the universe - increased diversity of beings and deeper intimacy between beings - and the meaning assigned to the universe - that of celebration - it can be concluded that a ‘developed’ human will create, be more intimately present and joyful.

In chapter three I argued that in *The Universe Story*, there is no completion or finish to the narrative, but it is the human who must complete the story. It is the human who observes the very notion of time in relation to the universe and the human who develops notions of the future and salvation and who provides continuity to the story. However, in presenting the human as the small self to the universe’s large self, or a microphase aspect to a macrophase entity, it becomes apparent that in this narrative regardless of the fate of the human or the planet, that the individual human self can never be extinguished but is incorporated into the life of this larger structure on death. Thus, the universe as conceptualised here, provides a configuration for the human life, raising it from a biological expanse of time, geographically and spatially located, and re-contextualising it as part of that ‘everlasting unity’ that the narrative describes as the universe. In this manner, although the physical body of the individual ‘dies’, there is an

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<sup>1090</sup>Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, Vol 1.p75

element of that individual that never does, once again illustrating the indebtedness to the Christian context of its writers.

Furthermore, each self is presented as containing that 'numinous energy' which brought the universe into being and which the narrative states permeates the universe. The universe although operating as a whole, expresses itself through the particular 'self', and thus in this narrative, the human becomes a contributing creator, within and to the world. However, this ability to 'create' is understood within the narrative as being subordinate to the ability of the whole. The point the narrative wishes to make here is that the creator is not outside the world, not only transcendent but also active within human action and present within human experiences. This bestows a divinity on the here and now and sacralises the world and existence, in itself and for itself. It is a narrative where existence is a gift and where to have lived, is to have housed and to have expressed, however briefly and however limited, the eternal presence of an enduring and sacred origin.



## Conclusion

This thesis examined the text of *The Universe Story* through a hermeneutical lens primarily based on the narrative hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, while also drawing on approaches in environmental philosophy and environmental hermeneutics, to determine the configuration of the human in the narrative, specifically in her relation to Earth and the wider universe.

*The Universe Story* has been instrumental in generating several social and ecological movements and a considerable body of secondary literature. In light of its transformative potential, the primary focus of this study was to establish the configuration of the human in the text, based on the view that the manner in which the human is presented in the text is central to any transformation that might occur in the reader. The way in which a subject comes to self-understanding was a central aspect of Ricoeur's philosophy, with narrative, he argued, being one of the primary ways a person makes meaning. Through appropriation of the possibilities that are offered through the narrative, the task of becoming a self is performed. Ricoeur argues that understanding is a structure of our 'being-in-the-world', and so to interpret a narrative, is for the reader to interpret a world that she can inhabit and appropriate. This is the 'world of the text'. This study began from the question of 'what happened in the text' in order for a life to be refigured, and examined the pre-figurative and configurative aspects of the narrative that mediate between the pre-figurative and re-figurative experience, and lead to an active reorganisation of 'being in the world'. The re-figurative experience is bounded by the text itself and philosophical hermeneutics provides a theoretical framework within which to examine this fixed world of the text.

The study began with tracing the development of the most relevant aspects of Ricoeur's hermeneutics (chapter one). Ricoeur was concerned to maintain the critical and epistemological moment of the human sciences and he sought to maintain a critique while preserving an openness in reading. His early definition of the hermeneutical task was to decipher the double meaning contained in symbols: the literal meaning of the symbol, and the meaning that the symbol 'aimed at', which was guided by this literal meaning<sup>1091</sup>. Through the dialectic of explanation and understanding, Ricoeur developed his hermeneutics, whereby he saw the text as being the level where this

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<sup>1091</sup>See section 1.3.1

dialectic played out, and the narrative he considered as the text par excellence<sup>1092</sup>. Thus, while any text is open to interpretation, the interpretation is also guided by the text itself. Building on Gadamer, Ricoeur identified three historical categories which could be used as points of mediation between explanation and understanding in interpretation. These he named as historical consciousness, the rehabilitation of prejudice, and the fusion of horizons<sup>1093</sup> and are a space in the human sciences where something can be objectified and held at a distance without losing its ontological relation. This also indicates that there can be no objectifying closure and there always remains the ability for ongoing dialogue. We are, Ricoeur states, not slaves to the past and this is evident in our ability to re-interpret our traditions<sup>1094</sup>. These spaces of objectification wherein Ricoeur's concept of distanciation is performed were determined as the first set of criteria by which a narrative could be analysed. Thus, the narrative can be approached from these points of historical consciousness and pre-understanding not as barriers to understanding but as constituting aspects of the text that can be objectified and consciously examined. The pre-judice and historical effects of the narrative were examined in chapter two and the fusion of horizons (cognizant that in this study, it is not the fusion that is addressed but the particular "vantage point" of the text) approached through the 'common understanding concerning the thing', in this instance, language, was addressed in chapter three.

The second approach of interpretation applied to *The Universe Story* and borrowed mainly from *Time and Narrative*<sup>1095</sup> is the concept of the mimetic arc. This three-fold mimesis refers to: (mimesis<sub>1</sub>) prefiguration, (mimesis<sub>2</sub>) configuration, and finally; (mimesis<sub>3</sub>) refiguration. The categories of prefiguration and configuration make distinctions, determinations and find relationships which speak to the epistemological or explanatory dimension of hermeneutics. They are the concrete process that makes objectification and examination of the narrative possible and it is the configurative aspect, in particular, that facilitates reception<sup>1096</sup>. In *The Universe Story* written as a response to the ecological crisis, the relation of the human to nature and to the other-than-human within the narrative is foundational to the world that it proposes. The focus of this study remains on the narrative and turns to an examination of the contributions

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<sup>1092</sup>See section 1.4

<sup>1093</sup>See section 1.3.2

<sup>1094</sup>See section 1.3.2

<sup>1095</sup>Ricoeur, Paul *Time and Narrative. Volume 1* (McLaughlin, Kathleen & Pellauer, David trans.)

<sup>1096</sup>See section 1.4.2

that the symbolism and language used in the narrative contribute to the transfer of its meaning and the meaning that is given to the human. As an additional tool in analysing the human in its relation to Earth and the other than human in the text, I draw on a hermeneutic that extends principles of interpretation to the environment, and specifically focuses on interpretations of these human relations and their environmental implications. Utsler extends the observation that our encounter with cultural environments is expressed through language, to the interpretation of natural environments. This makes all environments, and not just texts, meaningful centres of interpretation, and relates these interpretations to our ontological understanding of our 'being in the world'. Our 'hermeneutical consciousness' informs our relationship with these environments in that how we understand the world and how we understand the self are hermeneutically inter-related, and so to understand the world differently implies understanding the self differently.

The first step of the analysis was undertaken in chapter two, which identified the pre-figurative aspects from which *The Universe Story* emerged, including those thinkers and ideas who shaped Thomas Berry as well as an analysis of the content, and appraisal of the primary critiques of the text. The second step was an examination of the way in which the narrative was configured which is the central focus of chapter three. This included an examination of the language and form that the narrative takes, what Ricoeur refers to as the 'sense' of the narrative. It explores the *techné* or the style of the authors. From this first level analysis of language, structure and style, we are led to the next level. This is the reference of the text which reveals the proposed world of the text<sup>1097</sup>.

The final step of analysis was an examination of the configuration of the human in this world of the text and undertaken in chapter four. For Ricoeur understanding is a structure of our being-in-the-world and so to understand a text is to understand the world proposed by the text, a world that one could appropriate and inhabit. This is relevant to the question of how narrative plays a vital role in the development of the self, with narrative identity as the poetic or imaginative resolution to the hermeneutical circle. As a text that re-narrates human identity in relation to Earth and indeed the wider universe, the configuration of the human in the narrative is central to any self-understanding that might occur. This analysis was undertaken on the basis that this configuration is responsible for inspiring the re-figuration of a life and that such

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<sup>1097</sup>See section 1.5



refiguration is always guided by the text itself. In identifying the fixed and formal characteristics of the human, the thesis offers a theoretical reflection on the relationship between language and life and event and meaning through presenting the human revealed in the narrative in its theological, philosophical and environmental implications.

Through analysis of the prefigurative aspects of the narrative, including its external references, this study revealed a number of things which are not immediately transparent on a first reading of *The Universe Story* but need to be made explicit, not least the influences on the thought of Thomas Berry. Principally among these influences were particular aspects of the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Aquinas, although Berry was selective in what he brought forward of their thought into *The Universe Story*. Berry notably excludes Teilhard's Christology which was both a central aspect of Teilhard's thought and *The Human Phenomenon*. Although he cites Aquinas as his authority, he leaves aside Thomas' concept of divine transcendence while incorporating his idea of differentiation in creation into *The Universe Story*, as a key element in the universe he narrates. Berry did not confine himself solely to Christian thought but was significantly influenced by the Confucian tradition and the manner in which that tradition understands the human, particularly in its view of the human as integral with Earth and the universe entire, in addition to its emphasis on cultivation of the human person. Berry also drew on and later interpreted through the work of historian Giambattista Vico in identifying ages and patterns in history. As a cultural historian and a historian of religions, Berry brought all these influences to bear on what can be recognised as one of his primary concerns: the role and function of religion in contemporary society<sup>1098</sup>. He interpreted religion as a shared and fundamental dimension of human existence. Berry argued it functions to provide the interpretive framework and categories to express and understand core human experiences. Religion, in what Berry termed its ideation and imaginative function<sup>1099</sup>, through its mythological and symbolic structures is foundational to the way in which human consciousness is shaped and in the 'activation of energy' which he understood as an interior energy associated with the numinous 'source' of the universe<sup>1100</sup>. It was Berry's concern that current traditional religions in their symbolic representations do not correspond to the

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<sup>1098</sup>See section 2.7

<sup>1099</sup>See section 2.7

<sup>1100</sup>See section 2.7

contemporary era and so lack the ability to provide comprehensive categories or to speak effectively to contemporary issues, one such issue being the ecological crisis. Thus, the challenge to religions he argued was twofold. The first is to recognise that religions have always historically had a ‘cosmological’ dimension in that they provided the narrative of where we have come from and who we are. The second challenge for religions is to respond to the information from the physical sciences about the unfolding of the universe.

Berry emphasised the need for a reintegration of the sacred and the spiritual with the scientific. To interpret the evolutionary process, he stated, is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Consequently, Berry called for what he named as a ‘cosmology of religion’ which situates religion in the larger canvas of the universe and its processes and gives priority to what the physical sciences are revealing about the universe. These insights are for Berry sacred information that reveals the universe in a way that he names as its ‘religious dimensions’. He viewed the need for a ‘cosmology of religion’ as a greater need than a theology of religion or an anthropology of religion<sup>1101</sup>. It was Berry’s conviction that a focus on a ‘cosmology of religion’ could re-orient religious consciousness to address the ecological crisis.

This chapter also locates *The Universe Story* among other cosmic narratives, specifically the ‘epic of evolution’ and ‘big history’ and documents the major critiques of such narrations, among them the potential for the mythologisation of science to devalue everyday experiences of the world, in addition to its suppression of the ‘other’. While acknowledging that ‘expert knowledge’ of science is often privileged over direct experience of the natural world in these narratives, that through the medium of narrative *The Universe Story* offers another sense of the word ‘experience’. It does this through the creation of a ‘world’ which can affect the reader’s thought and action. It also found that in its omission of any cultural, political or social analysis, *The Universe Story* silences the voice of the other and omits much of the diversity and the suffering of the human story. In doing this it fails to make comment on or to critique those cultural worldviews and practices that contribute to environmental degradation and to oppression. While this suggests that *The Universe Story* is not offering a framework for social or political change, but rather its focus is on the effect of the narrative on the

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<sup>1101</sup>See section 2.7.1

individual person, it simultaneously places a question mark over the effectiveness of such an approach.

The second step used in explanation of the narrative was the way in which the text is configured (chapter three) and enables identification of the ‘point of view’ of the work in addition to the possible meanings inherent in the authors’ style particularly in their use of figurative language. The text could be understood to be both historical and figurative. It makes a claim to be historical in that it chronologically depicts the major events that have occurred since the beginning of the universe 13.8 billion years ago and includes empirically verifiable scientific facts as well as a timeline and a glossary of terms. Such an understanding of the universe was important, Berry believed, as it illustrates that the human forms a single community with all of life and thus the story of the universe becomes too, the story of the human. This in turn illustrates for Berry, that there is no discontinuity between the human and the natural world and he uses his interpretation of the discoveries of evolutionary science to relocate the human person in time and space and to counter the ‘dislocated’ human.

What is more subtle and revealed only through the application of Ricoeur’s concept of the function of time in narrative, is the way in which the narrative contextualises and implicates the human in the universe. The narrative unifies cosmological time and phenomenological time by implicating the human life in the physical development of the universe in time. By locating the human within this larger and ‘ungraspable’ cosmological context, the narrative, as Ricoeur argues, functions in that it ‘makes time human’<sup>1102</sup>. In this narrative the human becomes the bearer of a larger cosmic time. Time is thus contained in the human, and Berry argues, needs to be ‘validated from within’. This I would suggest is one of the aspects of what Berry calls the ‘spiritual dynamic’ in the universe. The ongoing creativity in the universe and especially the creativity in the human is a facet of what he calls spirituality. Connected to this is the fact that for Berry, history was both a mode of analysis and synthesis, which recognised the presence and operation in time of a ‘spirituality that imposes itself’<sup>1103</sup>. This spirituality in Berry’s view supported and directed the human venture. History was a means through which to recall this numinous presence at work in the world and therefore a way of building the future through an awareness of the past.

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<sup>1102</sup>See section 1.4

<sup>1103</sup>See section 3.1.2

Through its use of language, specifically symbolism and metaphor and the manner in which these contribute to the meaning of the text, the narrative begins to re-describe reality with the connotations of phronesis and the ‘intention of being’ associated with this task<sup>1104</sup>. Reality is interpreted as a sacred universe which manifests the divine. The universe itself becomes the primary symbol of the text, the ultimate hierophany. The universe is presented as a communion of subjects, and matter as thinking, acting and loving in a myriad of forms and in a particular and unique form in the human. In light of Berry’s concern with the imaginative function of religion, *The Universe Story* is replete with symbolism. This symbolism seeks to re-designate the world and the sacred comes to manifest in a space that is imaginary more than logical giving us ‘more to think about’ and expanding the revelatory dimension of religion and traditional concepts of sacredness. The universe itself becomes the sacred referent of the narrative and although always already a bound symbolism, points to ‘something more’ than itself. In Berry and Swimme’s hands it becomes a manifestation of the divine or the ‘numinous origins’ or ‘ultimate mystery’ although the *mysterium tremendum* at the root of the numinous experience remains opaque and never fully translated within the narrative. This could be argued for as an attempt to transcend religious particularity although Berry struggles to escape his own tradition. The human too becomes symbolic as the expressive psyche of the universe, a universe that speaks, thinks and loves in the human. This is one implication of the figurative language employed in the narrative, its redescription of a universe imbued with sacredness, implicating the human as a significant aspect of this sacredness while maintaining the promise of ‘something more’.

The other connected aspect, can be approached under Haught’s ‘metaphysics of the future’<sup>1105</sup>. Through this symbolic system grafted on to the cosmos, *The Universe Story* attempts to integrate a spiritual vision with the natural world. It appears to be an aim of the narrative rather than avoiding anthropomorphisms, to in fact encourage them, through presenting a ‘personalised’ universe with love at the foundation of its teleology. Teilhard envisaged the universe as moving towards ‘deeper’ spiritualisation, ‘amorisation’ and consciousness and identified love as an energy whose roots were no less than cosmic. *The Universe Story* too presents a universe that is growing in

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<sup>1104</sup>See section 1.5

<sup>1105</sup>See section 2.9.1

consciousness and love and in the narrative love begins as far back as 3.5 billion years ago in the forming of the multi-cellular organism. In this manner, as Teilhard, we are presented with a universe as becoming more loving, more conscious and finally, more spiritual.

In several ways *The Universe Story* can qualify as a 'creation narrative' despite the authors reluctance to use the language of Creation. Neither Swimme nor Berry were theologians and the narrative explicitly avoids the use of theological terms. It does however include reference to a power that 'gave birth' to the universe. This power appears to be 'separate' in its foundation to the universe it produces, a transcendent entity. This suggests that *The Universe Story* has some commonalities with pantheisms or at least a form of immanent transcendence, retaining as it does this appeal 'to something more'. Swimme and Berry name the purpose of the universe as 'expanded modes of being' and 'deeper intimacy' and assign the meaning of the universe as that of celebration. However, the narrative is weak in the way it formulates reality as a unified whole and its attempt to articulate the relationship of that whole to its particular parts. This is particularly evident when it comes to its presentation of the emergence and role of the human and points, as Hardwick suggests, to the regression to a tradition it sought to escape but without the concepts or language to do so<sup>1106</sup>. Although Berry called for a 'cosmology of religion' *The Universe Story*, I argue, is not outlining a new religion but rather offering a new 'structure-of-being' within which to re-think ways of being and acting in the world, although ambiguous on whether it is offering the reader a new way in which to think of God or a new way in which to think of nature. Its emphasis is on the numinous experience that the narrative claims possible in encounters with the natural world. The 'experience' is emphasised over its articulation while the narrative paradoxically calls for a refinement of our language so that it can better express this experience. It is the sacred, Berry argues, ever more manifest in the natural world that evokes the religious consciousness and so a return to numinous experience can arguably re-orient the way in which our religious consciousness is understood, articulated and directed.

The two steps of pre-figurative and configurative analysis enabled the determination and analysis of the world that is offered by *The Universe Story*. These steps provided the groundwork from which to determine the manner in which the

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<sup>1106</sup>See section 3.3.1.1

human is configured in the narrative and the meaning that is associated with her as part of this world and documented in chapter four. To assist this explanation, the analysis also draws on Plumwood's arguments for re-conceptualising the self in relation to the environment.

It is firstly the human in this narrative who acts as narrator and it is the human that forms the bridge between the time of the world and the time of the 'soul', between identity as absolute and identity as sheer change<sup>1107</sup>. Consequently, in the narrative, the human acts as a bridge between the infinite and the finite. Thomas Berry here borrows from Confucianism, using the anthropocosmic image of the human as forming one body with heaven and Earth. As was demonstrated in chapter two, Tucker identifies the principal aim of Berry's work as assisting in the realisation of this identity and in *The Universe Story*, this identity is narrated. The entire universe is interpreted as the body of the human and the human is presented as the universe come to consciousness. It is the human who attests to life, and more largely to the universe. It is the human who brings depth and articulation to the universe. However, although *The Universe Story* emphasises our inter-relatedness and through its notion of subjectivity assigns a value to all beings (two components of Plumwood's ecological self), there is a 'surplus' in the human of this text most evident in its 'conscious self-awareness'. Furthermore, the validity of the 'other' becomes dependent on how it is recognised and incorporated in to my 'self' and *The Universe Story* never quite overcomes its own privileged locatedness and the power structures that enable such a 'universe story' to be told<sup>1108</sup>. In addition, the blurring of boundaries between selves makes it difficult to definitively impute actions and so weakens the narratives ability to be an ethical guide<sup>1109</sup>.

There are, as stated, discrepancies in the narrative in its attempt at articulation of distinctions within the presentation of reality as a unified whole. One of these is the inherent ambiguity in the human as 'developing' within an 'everlasting unity'<sup>1110</sup>. The human is presented in the narrative as 'incomplete' and in a process of development. This development is achieved through 'intimate presence' with the natural world wherein the sacred is manifest and recognised, in addition to the unique expression of one's subjectivity through creativity.

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<sup>1107</sup>See section 4.3.3

<sup>1108</sup> See section 2.4.3

<sup>1109</sup> See section 4.2.1

<sup>1110</sup>See section 4.3.3

Although there is no completion to ‘the story’, in its concept of the human as a microphase dimension to the macrophase that is the universe, the universe provides a configuration to the individual human life, raising it from a biological expanse of time and re-contextualising it as part of that ‘ever-lasting unity’. In addition, each ‘self’, including the human of the narrative is a container of the numinous energy, the narrative describes as having brought the universe into existence and that permeates the world. There are two consequences to this in the narrative. The first is the task of expressing this energy and the second is that it bestows a sacredness and a divinity on the here and now. This underlines the narrative’s view that existence is a gift and to exist is both to house and to dwell among that which is sacred.

Thomas Berry has written that ‘it is all a question of story’. We are in trouble he laments because we do not have a story. We need a new story, he argues, that will provide the context “in which life [can] function in a meaningful manner.”<sup>1111</sup> No community, he goes on to claim, can exist without a unifying story. Paul Ricoeur makes the claim that “life can be understood only through the stories that we tell about it, then an *examined* life, in the sense of the word as we have borrowed it from Socrates, is a life *recounted*”<sup>1112</sup>. This is achieved by the unity provided by narrative and the way in which it can hold together seemingly dichotomous events and concepts. Both thinkers’ commitment to narrative is striking, although from different approaches. Ricoeur analysed the function and purpose of narrative, Berry rather accepted the power of narrative unquestioningly and used it to propose a new human understanding within an evolving cosmos. In applying Ricoeur’s criteria to Berry and Swimme’s narrative, the layers of this identity can be unpeeled and its source revealed as bring born not primarily from a commitment to science, but from a commitment to the power and necessity of religion and the sacred in human life. Equally, it is a commitment to the non-material ‘unifying’ and ‘creative’ principle in existence. The human in this narrative is as much a spiritual being as a physical being, and one’s life, as the whole evolutionary journey that is narrated in the text, is presented as a sacred unfolding of a numinous energy that the text chooses not to describe but leaves open as a space for mystery and contemplation, and perhaps more significantly, as an energy that can be

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<sup>1111</sup>Berry, Thomas. “The New Story” in *The Dream of the Earth*.pp123-137

<sup>1112</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*.p31

immediately experienced. If the ecological crisis is claimed as a motivating factor in writing the narrative, it is this, the numinous experience, that the reader's consciousness is consistently drawn to, an experience that is directly available, the authors tell us, in the natural world. An experience that when attended to can enable a 'final communion' and assist not only in personal transformation in the form of 'intimate presence' but eventually, the narrative suggests, in cosmic transformation. Although the form of such cosmic transformation is not explicitly narrated, it is also suggested that this would manifest as a contribution to the depth, love and spirit of this universe. Does such a revelation add anything to the aim of *The Universe Story* beyond illustrating its deeper motivation? I argue that it does. The narrative can be revealed as more conceptually full the more it is explained. It gives a history to the ideas and in doing so illuminates and enlarges Swimme and Berry's project which although clearly aims at improving human/Earth relations particularly in how we view Earth and ourselves in relation to it, is just as equally concerned with subjectivity, in the text associated with spirituality, what it is, how to experience it, how to express it and crucially how to develop it. The narrative 'gives rise to thought' which without analysis is easily missed, such as the very notion of the human occupying a 'role' within the universe or indeed the human as mediating between infinity and finiteness or even the question of how to engage with the subjective dimension of the other than human species. Conversely, it highlights areas in which the narrative is weak, the concept of 'distinction in unity' being one example. It highlights too, the narrative as an example of the tension that exists between experience and reflection on that experience, and the role that mediation and language has to play in its articulation, a tension that is encapsulated in the human being and how to locate her in nature.

The power of narrative to mediate our understanding was a fundamental conviction in the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. *The Universe Story* is an example come to life of this conviction. It is also an example of the power of symbol and language, so unique to our species, to give shape to our understanding, in addition to being an example of how such tools can continue to provide us with the means of imagining and re-imagining ourselves into the future and of reconstituting our relationships with reality, language and meaning, something that both Berry and Ricoeur were convinced of. This study illustrates the function of narrative in mediating self-understanding, the role that symbolism plays in this and the significance of symbolism in shaping consciousness and in particular religious consciousness. It returns to Berry's question of



how a religion emotionally and psychically orients its people. It is a critical question holding a contemporary urgency which the narrative of *The Universe Story* when read with the hermeneutics of Ricoeur goes some way towards answering.

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