Traditional and Contemporary Eco-Cosmologies within Western and Christian Indigenous Traditions;

Seeking Sustainability through recognition of Integral Interconnection

An Integral Cosmology => Universal Interconnection

“The universe is a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects”

Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story*

“We lose our souls if we lose the experience of the forest, the butterflies, the song of the birds, if we can’t see the stars at night.”

Thomas Berry
The Project of Modernity;  
An Age of 'Reduction and Separation'

Descartes' (1596-1650) philosophy sought certainty through rationality, based on an antagonistic dualism between the objective physical mechanical body & the entirely separate subjective mind/soul.

Amid the turmoil of the early 17th Century (war, turmoil, climate change) Descartes' thesis was a resounding success, and continues to be..

The Project of Modernity;  
Paradigm of Reduction and Separation

Promotes an Individualistic Consumerism via an Ideology of (infinite) Growth, the driving force behind the contemporary Crisis of Unsustainability, as manifested by:

- Climate change
- Biodiversity and cultural loss/extinction
- Increased globalised uniformity, over cultural/anthropegenic diversity
- Increased individualism/narcissism, over collective/community
- Increased anxiety, individually and societally
- Throwaway materialistic consumerism
- etc., etc..

The project of reductionist modernity, which has promised and delivered great power, control and goods to privileged purveyors, has been too smart for its own good.

Driven by left brained hubris, Uber-Smart Progress trumps accumulated Wisdom!
'It’s a throwaway culture': Aftermath of Electric Picnic site was 'as if a nuclear Holocaust just happened' buf.ly/2wHXgym

Electric Picnic Highlights Throwaway Society

Bengaluru's Bellandur lake catches fire again, toxic smoke over IT city's suburb

Bengaluru's Bellandur lake in news again. A fire broke out at this lake, considered to be one of the biggest in the city, on Thursday evening sending out huge cloud of toxic smoke causing panic among locals.
“If you become conscious of connections to everything, not just the immediate world before you, you will experience a much broader and more powerful sense of Being. Some Native Americans talk of being part of the web of life. They connect everything to everything and so develop a respect for everything as sacred.

...Spirituality leads to practices in daily living that reflect a sense of connectedness to the world. ...We have to recover the sense of sacredness of the world, even of the cosmos, that envelops us.’

John Ehrenfeld

(‘Flourishing: A Frank Conversation About Sustainability’, 2013, pp. 106-107)

Bsharre Grove (‘Cedars of God’), Lebanon

(Source: iwanderwhy.net)
1. **Spirituality**: promotes outward (transcendent) looking sense of **interconnection**.

2. If the natural world/humanity is treated as **Sacred** – desecration is ‘taboo’, thus cannot be internalised as an economic externality.

3. However, these are derided by the Western inspired societal **Paradigm of Separation and Reduction** which has driven a **Crisis of Unsustainability amid**:
   - globalized standardization;
   - loss of cultural/anthropegenic diversity (including indigenous wisdom/s);
   - techno-optimistic rationality;
   - growth based neo-liberal economic system (feeding individualistic consumerism and economic inequality).

**Reflection Points:**

Mount Athos, Greece
(Source: Tomisti, 2014)
A Dilemma Arises..

Traditional conceptions of the Sacred/Spirituality may perhaps be necessary for achieving authentic Sustainability (e.g. Ehrenfeld’s ‘Sustainability as Flourishing’).

However, the dominant Judeo-Christian worldview has cohered with the dominant societal paradigm which:

- Embraces Cartesian separation of material and numinous
- Anthropocentric emphasis on (individualistic) human salvation and dominion/control over nature
- Has pointed toward heaven (‘up there’) and thus away from earth (metaphysical antagonistic dualism)
- Guilty of a proselytizing colonialism

So, is there any HOPE for John Mohawk’s ‘re-indigenization of the world’, given dominant Western reductionist conceptions of Science and Religion?

Lynn White’s Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis (1967);

The greatest spiritual revolutionary in Western history, Saint Francis, proposed what he thought was an alternative Christian view of nature and man’s relation to it: he tried to substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man’s limitless rule of creation. He failed. Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. As. Hence we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.

Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not.
However, just as indigenous cultures can offer rich and diverse understandings and appreciation of our precious world, and a corresponding ethic of integral interconnection, neither is this lacking throughout Western Judeo-Christian traditions.

Strong counter-narratives have always existed ‘distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live’.

The Medieval (Pre Modern) World

Strong counter-narratives have always existed ‘distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live’.

¹ part of definition of indigenous peoples as agreed by the UN (with thanks to Gillian Watt, this conference)
‘I propose Francis as a patron saint for ecologists.’  
Lynn White (1967)

Canticle of the Creatures (Francis, 1224)
Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom you give us light.

...Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

...Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us.

The Ancient World

Strong counter-narratives have always existed ‘distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live’...
Heraclitus; a world of process, continuous change and agonistic complimentary opposites

“Men do not know how that which is drawn in different directions harmonises with itself. The harmonious structure of the world depends upon opposite tension like that of the bow and the lyre.”* 

*Heraclitus, Fragment 51, translated by John Burnet (1912)

The Early Modern World

Strong counter-narratives have always existed ‘distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live’..
Toulmin (1990) outlines what he calls the ‘first phase of Modernity’ (pre 1610) when (a religiously imbued) humanism flourished, tolerant of diversity, plurality and ambiguity, when ‘the lack of certainty [was] no error, let alone a sin’ (p.30).

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592); The only thing certain is that nothing is certain.

With the onset of the second phase of Modernity however, came a quest for (Cartesian) certainty: ‘general axioms were in, concrete diversity was out’ (p.34).

The Birth of Contemporary Environmentalism

Strong counter-narratives have always existed ‘distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live’.
‘The history of life on earth has been a history or *interactions* between living things and their surroundings.’

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962)

‘The Religious Humanism of Rachel Carson’


- Carson; born 1907, of strong *Calvinist* upbringing/background.
- American Calvinism imbued with Puritan-Protestant values but *nature* important, especially cultural significance of *wilderness*.
- As American wilderness overtaken by westward expansion/’progress’, Self-understanding as *Nature’s nation* and cultural associations with the *sacred*, *virtue*, *beauty*, *innocence* were challenged.
- Carson a product of *The Nature Study Movement*; part of progressive focus on education: to impart worldview of *modern science*, while simultaneously nurturing children’s *spiritual & ethical development*, while recognizing *limits* of *scientific endeavour*.
- Had support of intellectuals e.g. John Dewey (for whom *nature* study was *holistic science*, conveying the full moral import of relational wholeness in personal development).
The Contemporary World

Strong counter-narratives have always existed ‘distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live’.

Pope Francis: Laudato Si’ (2015)

‘Sometimes a book catalyzes thought into action. Uncle Tom’s Cabin did this, and so did Silent Spring. Like these works, Pope Francis’s Encyclical is a call to action that insists we embrace the moral dimensions of problems that have heretofore been viewed primarily as scientific, technological, and economic.’

Naomi Oreskes
(Prof of History of Science, Harvard U.)

‘Pope Francis’s encyclical, Laudato Si’, will ultimately be recognised as one of the most significant events in the modern environmental movement.’

Financial Times, 2 July 2015
“Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life. [who] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.

...[While] we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures.

...The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.

Laudato Si’: Franciscan Cartesian critique

“Laudato Si’: Integral Worldview => Interconnection

“It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected. It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion.

..We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision.

..What is needed is a politics which is far-sighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis.”

Laudato Si’: Integral Worldview => Interconnection
“..We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that ‘less is more’.

A consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today’s globalized economy, has a levelling effect on cultures, diminishing the immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity.

It is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. ..For them land is not a commodity but ..a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identify and values.”

“The master of oppositions, of bipolar tensions, as we might call them, is Guardini, who teaches us this path of unity in diversity. What’s happening today with fundamentalists? Fundamentalists lock themselves up in their own identity and don’t want to hear anything else.”

..We must not seek synthesis, because synthesis can destroy everything; we must tend towards the polyhedron, towards the unity that preserves all diversities, all identities. The master in this field – because I don’t want to commit and act of plagiarism – is Romano Gaurdini”

Pope Francis
The Path to Change: Thoughts on Politics and Society with Dominique Wolton
(Pan Macmillan, 2018) p.11-12

Romano Gaurdini, German-Italian Catholic priest, academic, philosopher and theologian (1885-1968)
Integral Worldviews from Western/Christian Tradition

**Alfred North Whitehead**
Philosopher & Mathematician (1861-1947)

**Pierre Teilhard de Chardin**
Jesuit Priest & Paleontologist (1881-1955)

**Ilia Delio**
Franciscan Sister and Theologian (b. 1955)

**John B. Cobb**
Methodist Theologian and Philosopher (b. 1925)

**Catherine Keller**
Christian Theologian (b. 1953)

**Thomas Berry**
Passionist Priest (1914-2009)

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Ilia Delio OSF (2007):

“*Christian responsibility, especially for the natural world, demands that we think of the earth, and the entire cosmos for that matter, as our home.*”

“We must realize our interconnectedness to creation. A new consciousness must call us to an active stance as ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ to the non-human creation. ...Can we recapture a sense of ‘Cosmic family?’”

“Sin is the refusal to participate in creation’s web of life. It describes the personal history of one who was created for communion and refuses it. [...] We must] realize that sinful actions are at the root of our present ecological crisis and thus our need for ongoing penance or conversion.”

*Ilia Delio, Franciscan sister, theologian (U. Villanova)*
Strong counter-narratives have always existed ‘distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live’..

Contemporary Science: An emerging Integrative ‘Complexity’ Paradigm (challenging ‘Reduction and Separation’)

Creativity in natural complex systems is a property, “so stunning, so overwhelming, so worthy of awe, gratitude, and respect, that it is God enough for many of us.”

Stuart Kauffman
Biologist, Complexity Scientist
The Local Indigenous World

Strong counter-narratives have always existed ‘distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live’.

Nano Nagle (1718 – 1784)
12 July Sharon Zayac OP Evolutionary Awareness: An Emerging Worldview

We are in the midst of a cosmic shift in understanding who we are as persons, as people of faith, and as a human species. What is this newly emerging consciousness? What does it teach us about who we are, how we are related to the whole, and how we image Holy Mystery? Using The Cosmic Story as our context, we find inspiration and hope as we explore and reflect upon its deeper meaning. For reflection and discovery, this session will have personal contemplative time.

Speaker: Sr. Sharon Zayac – a Dominican Sister in Springfield, Illinois – is Director of Jubilee Farm, her congregation’s 164-acre centre for ecology and spirituality located near Springfield, Illinois. A writer and lecturer, she speaks on many ecological topics, but her passion is sharing the Universe Story and its implications for life and faith. Her book – *Earth Spirituality: In the Catholic and Dominican Traditions* – focuses on evolutionary consciousness as an emerging worldview.
The Cosmic Walk

Cosmic Walk as a reflection using the image of a spiral to understand the order of our Universe, a Universe that is still evolving. After the Beginning or the Great Flaring Forth of the cosmos, Scientists now know that there are about a hundred thousand million galaxies in the universe. Learn about the birth of Planet Earth and much more. An evening of Awe!

Sunday, 30 October
21:00
Nano Place, (entrance through Evergreen Street)

Additional details required: email Info@nanonagleplace.ie or telephone 021-419-3580
Contact: Sister Emma Rooney

Journey of the Universe

The Journey of the Universe is a film that presents the epic story of the Cosmos, Earth and Human transformation. This work is written by Brian Swinimer and Evelyn Tucker. It is based on modern scientific and spiritual reflection.

Every Tuesday evening starting November 23, ending November 29
6:30 – 21:00
Nano Place, (entrance through Evergreen Street)

Additional details required: email Info@nanonagleplace.ie or telephone 021-419-3580
Contact: Sister Emma Rooney

Note is not available
### Consecutive paradigms/worldviews on reality, after Hedlund-de Witt (Byrne, 2016, p. 56)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materialistic</th>
<th>Seeks certainty/control</th>
<th>Recognises inherent Uncertainty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modern (Reductionist)</strong></td>
<td>Associated with: Reductionist</td>
<td>(Deconstructivist) Postmodern</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Science’; ‘Value free’</td>
<td>logic/rationality</td>
<td>Associated with: Deconstructivism, Scepticism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technocratic techno-optimism</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Constant decentralised change (in space and time)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeks revealed certainty through reason</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ineliminable Uncertainty, Nihilism</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Progress through:</strong> Reductionist Science</td>
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<tr>
<th>Beyond materialism (spiritual, transcendent, emergent)</th>
<th>Integrative (Interconnection)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Premodern (Traditional)</strong></td>
<td>Associated with: Singular, comprehensive view of universe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fixed hierarchical structure</td>
<td>Irreducible complexity; normativity (/values), Interconnectedness, recursivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irreducible mystery, Sacred</td>
<td>Process change and emergent evolution</td>
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<td><strong>Progress through:</strong> Interpretations &amp; Insights into the Unique, Divine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Created Order through mediated Scripture/Sacred texts</td>
<td><strong>Progress through:</strong> Integrative Science and Philosophy; Progress recognised as contingent, context dependent, emergent and qualitative (‘sustainability as flourishing’)</td>
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### Hope springs eternal!

(throughout) Western Science & Philosophy; persistence of Integrative (Indigenous) Cosmologies

- Plato
- Aristotle
- Heraclitus
- BC
- Galileo
- Descartes
- Newton
- Erasmus
- Montaigne
- Modern science; the ‘Scientific Method’, Reductionism; seeking certainty
- 1600
- Complexity theory; embraces uncertainty
- 1700
- Laplace
- Darwin
- 1800
- Hilbert
- Godel
- 1900
- Kuhn
- Ulanowicz
- Prigogine
- Morgen
- von Goethe
- 2000
- Dawkins
- Kauffman
- ‘sustainability as flourishing’

Based on Byrne (2017), drawn from Hedlund-de Witt’s Integrative Worldview Framework
Traditional and Contemporary Eco-Cosmologies within Western and Christian Indigenous Traditions;

Seeking Sustainability through recognition of Integral Interconnection

Edmond Byrne
School of Engineering / Sustainability in Society Research Group