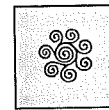


from Creativity by  
Matthew Fox, 2002

{one}

who are we as  
a species?



Our planet, so under the control of and almost at the mercy of humans, finds itself at a crossroads.

It is a time for getting to the essence of things, for withdrawing from the deluge of distractions that so often make up our existence. It is time to ask the basic questions again:

- Who are we?
- Why are we here?
- How are we doing?
- Is the path we are on as a species a healthy one for ourselves, our planet, and our children's children's children's children to come?
- If our path is not a healthy one, what are we doing about it? What can we do about it?

- What constitutes our authentic strength as a species?
- What constitutes our gravest dangers as a species?

I wish to explore these questions in the chapters that follow. I will be as direct as I can be. We are all too busy to beat around the bush on matters as important as those that face us today—issues of our collective extinction as a species and issues that raise the awesome questions of the ongoing extinction of species other than our own. Scientific observers tell us that we are going through the greatest extinction spasm in the last sixty-five million years of this planet. That is amazing. It is scary. And, above all, it is us!

Our species and its technological culture are more responsible for this extinction spasm than any other single cause. It is our wastes, our release of carbon dioxide through automobiles and fossil fuels, that are warming the planet, causing the end of species like the polar bear whose young cannot grow to maturity on ice floes any longer because the ice floes are melting too rapidly. It is our factories and cattle farms that are poisoning rivers, soil, forests, and air, and thereby bringing about so much death. Ours has become a necrophiliac civilization. We have become death-bringers. Was it always this way? Was that why we were brought into existence? What can we do about this sad situation?

Let us begin by addressing the age-old question: Who are we? by first looking at who we are not.

## WHO WE ARE NOT

Judging from the trouble our species causes one another and the planet, it would seem we don't know ourselves awfully well. A good way to approach a serious effort at self-understanding is to first treat the negative (the *via negativa*). If we are not sure of who we are, we might at least begin with *who we are not*. This is an especially important methodology to enact when we live in a culture whose media and advertisers and users of the media, such as politicians, corporations, and sports entertainers, are constantly busy telling us who *they think* we are or ought to be. By naming who we are not, we are circling around to explore who we are, and we are clarifying and distinguishing our reality from those who would foist a particular version of reality upon us. We are undergoing a process of clarification that can lead up to a working definition of who we really are.

### 1. *We Are Not Consumers*

For the vast majority of our time on earth, our species did not buy its food or its clothing or its shelter or its education or its medical healing. We chased down our food, skinned rabbits and deer and buffalo for clothing, found caves and built shelters of buffalo hides attached to tree trunks, and carved limbs and even buffalo bones, and sought out plants that heal. Our elders told the important stories around campfires, healers studied plants for their powers and chanted to the heavens for theirs. In short, for 98 percent of our exis-

tence as hunter-gatherers, we did not consume. We created. Ten thousand years ago, in a creative discovery that has proven to be a mixed blessing indeed, we started to plant things. We no longer imitated the prairie in the way it seeded itself patiently each year: We hurried the process along and chose to do our own planting. We called this “agriculture.” Agriculture was not a moment of “pure progress” for humankind. It looked like a good deal—we could choose our diets no matter what the game were doing in our neighborhoods; we could stay home more and wander less; we could even have some people do the seeding and growing while others gathered in villages and then cities and were fed by the growers. But we paid a great price for this.

Wes Jackson of the Land Institute feels that we have been doing farming wrong for ten thousand years. The mistakes made ten thousand years ago have become much more exaggerated in recent times with the addition of technological breakthroughs. The soil has suffered terribly. With sowing and harvesting come erosion. There is only so much soil. As our population expanded and even exploded, the food needs were so pressing that we did almost anything to get more food from the soil: pesticides, fertilizers, machinery, agribusiness—all this has developed to satisfy the consumer. It has rendered the consumer often passive and uncreative at growing the food we need and quite oblivious to where food comes from. It has taught us to take food for granted. Those who have the money to buy it, that is. And those who don't? Those who do not qualify as consumers, because they can-

not buy or charge to credit cards, are very often left without food and the other basics. The world is divided between the consumers and the nonconsumers, who are being inducted into being wanna-be consumers.

A similar story could be told about the clothes on our backs (and those that stuff and fill our overflowing closets). There was a time when we made our clothes—chased down the skins and hides and later grew the cotton or harvested the silk and sewed and stitched and wove and wove.

Are we here to be consumers? Is consuming the essence of who we are? It would seem not. For most of our existence we were makers, not consumers; we were hunters and gatherers, not consumers. We made our clothes, shelter, and education.

## 2. *We Are Not Addicts*

Addiction is everywhere in our culture. Addiction is about habits that take us over, that “dictate” (the same word as “addiction”) to us what we ought to be eating or doing or relating to. The very nature of much of our advertising industry is to render us addictive. Much of our most highly advertised products, such as cigarettes, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, cereals, coffee, etc., contain ingredients that are addictive, such as nicotine, cocaine (Coca-Cola and coffee), sugar (Coca-Cola and other soft drinks and many cereals). Fats (as in potato chips) and salt—that our palates find appealing—are addictive-forming. Powerful forces are making huge profits by getting us addicted. Of course there is also alcohol and its

addictive-forming possibilities. And drugs. And sex. And work. And co-dependent relationships. And religion. And money. And power.

We are a species and indeed a civilization very prone to dictatorships, that is, to addiction. It is as if we want to turn our power over to others. To lay back and let others have power over us. The thirteenth-century theologian Thomas Aquinas defined "greed" as a "quest for the infinite." Is a quest for the infinite not behind every addiction? Isn't addiction, by definition, never having enough? Always wanting another hit? Does greed play a profound role in every addiction? Do greed and addiction take us over as individuals and as a society at the same time?

I propose that most addictions come from our surrendering our own real powers, that is, our powers of creativity. We get a temporary "high" from a shot of some external stimulus, be it nicotine or sugar, speed or acid, sex or more money, entertainment or television—and that is our sad substitute for the joy and ecstasy of creativity and creation. If we were creative, would we be so addicted? If we are addicted, can we be creative? Creativity may be the authentic experience of the infinite. If that is so—and we will explore this more later in this book—then creativity would seem to be the medicine for addiction. Creativity, unlike addiction which is always an external referent, is an interior one. It comes from the inside out. It comes from a very different place than does addiction. An *addictive society* does not en-

courage creativity and is, in fact, terrified of it. Instead of creativity, couchpotatoitis.

### 3. *We Are Not Passive Couch Potatoes*

It is not the essence of the human to be passive. We are players. We are actors on many stages. We initiate contacts, ideas, movements, inventions, babies, institutions, sport, exercise, relationships of all kinds. We are curious, we are yearning to wonder, we are longing to be amazed, we are eager to grow, to learn, to be excited, to be enthusiastic, to be expressive. In short, to be *alive*.

Passivity is a sign of sickness, of weakness, of dying. That time will come for all of us. Why hasten the moment? Why not live fully first? Why surrender to others our sacred time, our sacred powers, to act and express ourselves? My own experience is that when I am depressed, I want to watch television. Television occupies my mind, cutting it off from problems that beset me. That is one of its seductive accomplishments. Of course, at its best, television can occasionally educate us, inform us, refresh us, and even gather us as a community. A good example of the latter is the gathering of artists who donated their music to heal the nation after the devastating blow to New York City when the WTC was attacked.

But television addiction is invariably vicarious living or it is helping us to numb some pain in our daily lives. We do not have to become couch potatoes when we watch TV.

That happens as part of the addictive process. We can *choose* not to be addicted to TV. We can choose to create ourselves without it, to spend our leisure time doing other things—riding a bike, hiking, running, reading, listening to music, dancing, conversing, writing poetry, painting, meditating, gardening, learning. Creativity may be the opposite of couchpotatoitis.

#### 4. *We Are Not Boring*

To be boring is to be uninteresting. We are not an uninteresting species. Indeed, the more we learn of our history, the more interesting we become to ourselves. To be among indigenous peoples as they make preparations for a powwow or a sundance, for a sweat lodge or a communal meal, is anything but uninteresting. The costumes, the headdresses, the music, the drum, the songs sung and chanted, the foods gathered and cooked, the teaching that goes on with the young and not so young, the adjustments when it is raining, when hot rocks for the sweat lodges grow cold, when heat overtakes the participants—what is boring about any of that?

Our music, our art, our dance, our theater, our ritual, our love-making—what is boring about that? The architecture in our cities, the awesome buildings that defy gravity, the bridges that connect cities as they span the waters, the traffic patterns that amazingly work so that everyone finds their way home at night, the sewers and water lines and gas lines underneath our cities, the wildness of the myriad of

peoples walking in the city streets, all with their places to go to or from, the churches and mosques and synagogues that depict our yearning for Spirit and a wholeness we feel estranged from, the good works of people dedicated to the sick, the hungry, the dying, the forgotten, the lonely, the imprisoned—we are not a boring species. Say what you will.

Even our wars, our planning for wars, our sick desire to take war to the heavens and call it defense—even our capacity for folly and for self-delusion—are evidences that we are not boring. Our crimes, our devastation of beautiful and healthy habitats for other species to live in and who provide our minds with wonder and beauty—even our crimes are evidence that we are not a boring species. Dangerous? Yes. Boring? No.

#### 5. *We Need Not Be Bored*

A boring or uninteresting people are a bored people. But people who are interesting and do interesting things and give birth to interesting realities are not bored. If we are alive and interacting with all the marvel of daily existence, if we are learning how others, living and deceased, related to the marvel of existence, then we will not be bored. We will not be reduced to a state of disequilibrium or depression wherein we cannot move, wherein we have no energy to “begin new things” (Thomas Aquinas’s definition of “acedia,” the capital sin of boredom or sloth or ennui at living).

As we learn more about our story as a species and how we came to be over a fourteen-billion-year period of amaz-

ing goings-on in the universe, we realize how uninteresting and how very special existence is. We get renewed and awakened and amazed and alert to ask: What can I contribute? What did the universe have in mind in spending fourteen billion years of work to bring me and the likes of me to be here?

At these times we are asking truths about who we are and what our purpose is for being here. We are no longer taking our existence for granted—nor are we taking our ancestors for granted. These ancestors, we are learning, include the original fireball, the hydrogen and helium atoms that it gave birth to, the galaxies that birthed the supernovas that birthed the stars that birthed the earth that birthed the waters and the continents and the plants and the animals and the ozone and the sun and the moon and the seeds and the trees and flowers—all of which were necessary for our presence to occur.

No one who lives in our world and is at all aware of where we come from can ever be bored—or boring—again. Being awake is the opposite of being bored. Or boring. Buddha's name means "the awakened one." He and countless other spiritual figures invite us to come awake. To resist boredom. To resist taking for granted.

#### 6. *We Are Not Cogs in a Machine*

The modern era that has dominated our civilization for the past three hundred years, and which has in great part taken over the planet with its inventions and its ideas, left us with the notion that the universe is a machine, that our bodies are

machines, that the earth and sky are machines. If God existed, God was a tender of the machine, the man with the oil can to keep the machinery of the universe running.

But if we live in a machine, then we are mere cogs in it, mere pieces that just happened to show up. Our main duty is to shut up and obey—obey the economic machine, the political machine, the military machine, the religious machine, the educational machine. To live inside a machine is scary business. Fear takes over. Anxiety increases. Numbness multiplies. Meaninglessness becomes more widespread than meaning. Coldness dominates. Sterility reigns. Creativity dies. Passivity becomes a virtue.

Machines are cold and very large. They have an agenda all their own. We can only shrink our souls down and learn to obey and get out of its way. Creativity gets stifled. It must be discouraged. Who wants to upset the machine? To get it angry? Or even to get noticed by it? We want to get out of its way, shrink from its attention, hide in a corner, look for its benign side. Living in a machine universe may be the ultimate expression of a dysfunctional relationship. There is no mutuality there.

Maybe this is why dysfunctional relationships have so swollen in numbers during this industrial age from which we are emerging with our souls barely intact. Indeed, emerging with not having a clue what "soul" even means anymore. Emerging but having lost so many of our relationships with the beauty and power of species all around us. Emerging lonely and lost, disempowered and depressed, sad and set up

for an infinite variety of addictions. But emerging all the same, because somehow inside all of us, and in spite of toxic teachings we have inherited, there lies deep within a creative force that wants to give life and taste life in abundance.

### 7. *We Are Not Lazy*

Our species is not lazy. We are not without energy. It only seems that we are at times. But this is because of "acedia," it is because we get taken over by forces that strip us of our excitement and our appreciation for living. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel says that humankind will perish not from lack of information but from lack of appreciation. How right he is! When gratitude reigns, energy reigns. When thankfulness is real, praise happens. Praise is never lazy. Praise extends itself, sacrifices, gives away. Praise is effusive; it goes out to others.

At the heart of all creativity there lies praise, there lies a hidden "thank you," a yearning to return blessing for blessing. This is how the great psychologist Otto Rank defines the artist: "one who wants to leave behind a gift." Why would one be intent on leaving a gift behind if one had not intuited that life, for all of its woe and troubles, is essentially praiseworthy and deserving of our gratitude?

Gratitude is the ultimate enabler. Gratitude moves us from apparent laziness to heroic giving. Never underestimate the power of gratitude. It can move mountains. It can build great things. It can arouse us to action. That is why gratitude is the ultimate prayer, as Meister Eckhart tells us

when he says: "If the only prayer you say in your whole life is 'thank you,' that would suffice." It suffices to get us moving, get us giving birth, get us creating.

### 8. *We Are Not Destroyers*

Finally, it must be said that, while humankind does destroy, it is not of our essence to do so. We often choose to destroy, but destruction is a *choice*.

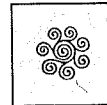
The essence of our nature is to give birth, not to destroy. To create. We see this in the love of mother and child and in the love of artist for his or her art. The dilemma is that the very powers we possess for creativity can just as easily become employed to destroy with. Consider the twentieth-century's preoccupation with weaponry and war. From nuclear warheads to nuclear submarines to carry them, from gas in the wartime trenches to gas ovens—we have used our amazing imaginations to imagine how to kill more efficiently. Consider the chemicals we have invented that are seeping into soil and waters everywhere and that have not been tested for their destructive aftereffects. I do not observe that any other animals we know of are destroyers. They may kill another species, but they do not destroy whole habitats of other species. There seems to be a balance in the rest of nature that gets out of control with humans. Why is this so?

The answer, I am convinced, has to do with what is most unique in our species. It is our powerful, almost God-like, imaginations. It is our creativity itself that lies at the essence

of our humanity. This creativity is so powerful that with it we can create or destroy. Like the Scriptures say: "I put before you life and death. Choose life." What is before us is the power of creativity—it is a life-and-death power. What is also before us is choice: It is a daily choice, an everyday choice, one that arises in all our relations from parenting to grandparenting, from work worlds to educational ones, from religion to economics, business, politics, and citizenship in all its forms. It affects what we eat and what we throw away; how we live and what we choose to say no to. This is the power of creativity. Creativity may be the nearest one-word definition we possess for the essence of our humanity, for the true meaning of soul.

{two}

## creativity, our true nature



In caves in Africa, high above the shores of the Indian Ocean, scientists have recently discovered artifacts dating to seventy-seven thousand years ago. These findings indicate that human culture as we know it began in Africa, not in Europe; and it began about forty thousand years earlier than we had previously figured. Anatomically modern humans began in Africa at least one hundred thirty thousand years ago, but it is by their artifacts and art work that archaeologists determine how human these beings were. It is of our very nature to make artifacts. It is of our very nature to create.

St. Paul writes about knowing our "true nature." That is what we are trying to articulate here. Having examined our false nature above, our illusory or mistaken ideas of our nature, we can ask: Who are we truly?



I propose that when all is said and done, *our true nature is our creativity*. Psychologist Rollo May concurs when he says: "The creative process must be explored not as the product of sickness, but as representing the highest degree of emotional health, as the expression of the normal people in the act of actualization of themselves."

When the Bible declares that we are made in the "image and likeness" of the Creator, it is affirming that creativity is at our core just as it lies at the core of the Creator of all things. Not only the Bible but other traditions also celebrate our nearness to the creative powers of Divinity. The Sufi mystic Hafiz declares:

*All the talents of God are within you.  
How could this be otherwise  
When your soul  
derived from His genes!*

An ancient Mesoamerican poet tells us that God dwells in the heart of the artist and the artist draws God out of his or her heart when the artist is at work.

We are creators at our very core. Only creating can make us happy, for in creating we tap into the deepest powers of self and universe and the Divine Self. We become co-creators, that is, we create *with* the other forces of society, universe, and the Godself when we commit to creativity.

But what is creativity? We might begin with what we learned from the previous chapter. Going through the list of

names for our *illusory* natures, we might understand creativity, our true nature, as being the opposite. Who are we then? We are makers and fabricators, we are free, we are active, we are interesting, we are interested and curious, we are part of a vast creative universe, we are energetic and alive, we are creators and co-creators.

Scholars of evolutionary history are telling us that today biological evolution is being overwhelmed by cultural evolution. The human species, which evolves by culture more than by slow-moving biological change, is overwhelming the planet. All the more reason to examine that element that makes human culture so amazingly rich and fast-moving: human creativity.

British scientist Peter Russell comments on how profoundly human culture is overwhelming biological evolution. "Our mind and hands represent a new source of 'newness,' putting at Nature's disposal a fundamentally new mechanism of evolution." What now most affects our development is no longer "our genes but our ideas." With ideas and the creativity to put them into action, we can turn space into a home away from home, we can turn places of 120-degree heat into dwelling places through air conditioning, we can live under the sea for months at a time, we can turn arctic places into cozy, insulated homes. This means we are speeding up evolution profoundly, since it would take thousands of years for biological changes in our skin or metabolism to adapt to such diverse climates.

Russell goes on to say that our technological creations

“are also part of evolution. . . . Now, with the appearance of *Homo sapiens*, a new form of evolution has become possible. It is our minds and hands that are doing the molding, reorganizing matter into new structures and creating new capacities.” Human creativity is affecting evolution like never before. We are integral to it, we are speeding it up on this planet, we are a force to be reckoned with—for good or for ill. “Mind has now become the dominant creative force on this planet,” Russell warns us and he offers examples such as the following:

- The solar cell, by converting the sun’s energy directly into electricity, “represents a totally new method of capturing the sun’s energy.” He sees this “as significant a breakthrough as the development of photosynthesis itself, some three billion years ago.”
- “Radar allows us to ‘see’ new ranges of frequencies—a development as significant as the evolution of the eye.”
- Through nuclear physics we discover how to create new chemical compounds. The last time this happened was with the supernova explosion over five billion years ago.

If it is true that “mind has now become the dominant creative force on this planet,” then it is more important than ever to examine our powers of creativity and learn to discipline them.

Scientist Brian Swimme uses the following story to remind us of how ancient and how necessary for survival is our creativity. When our ancestors discovered fire back in the savannahs of Africa over a million years ago, they set out on a great journey. When they arrived at the place we now call EuroAsia, the ice age broke out. There they were, fresh from the heat of Africa, forced to live in caves for seven hundred thousand years. Did they give up? Did they fall into masochism and say, “Woe is we!”? No. They got to work. They put their imaginations to work. They learned how to prepare hides, sew warm outfits, hunt animals for food and clothing, and how to tell tales around the campfire and entertain themselves. In short, this is where our creativity came to birth.

I draw two important lessons from this story. First is how strong our ancestors were. There are few adaptations that we are being asked to make today that are as profound as the adaptation from the heat of the African savannahs to the ice age. A second lesson I conclude is the realization of how basic our creativity is to our survival. Creativity and imagination are not frosting on a cake: They are integral to our sustainability. They are survival mechanisms. They are of the essence of who we are. They constitute our deepest empowerment.

{three}

## where does creativity come from?



If creativity is as close to the essence of our being human as we are saying, then an important question to ask is the following: Where does creativity come from? How old is it—how long has it been around? What are its origins? When we can address these questions, we might be able to address how best to tap into creativity, how best to discipline and utilize it. In this chapter, we will offer three answers to the question: “Where does creativity come from?” One answer does not exclude the others. All may be working together in harmony within us and around us.

### 1. Creativity Comes from the Universe Itself

I recently asked Dr. Apela Colorado, an Oneida woman and director of the program in Recovering the Indigenous Mind

at Naropa University and the University of Creation Spirituality, this question: “Where do you think creativity comes from?” Her answer was as follows: “We greet the sun every morning—the sun’s rising is where creativity begins. Look to the moon and the stars for guidance from above—all this contains the story of our creativity.”

The fact that she immediately guided me to the universe for the origin of our human imagination and creativity is very wise. Creativity is not a human invention or a human power isolated from the other powers of the universe. Quite the opposite. First came the universe’s power of creativity; only very lately did humans arrive on the scene with theirs. The modern view of the world did not endorse this notion of the omnipresence of creativity in the universe. The universe, as we have seen, was considered to be dead, inert, and machinelike. But the ancient peoples, the premoderns, never saw it that way. Neither does today’s science.

Consider, for example, how the worship of the goddess was an honoring of the creative principle that permeated the universe and how this honoring undergirded a culture that was peace-oriented and not war-oriented. Marija Gimbutas reports that “the Goddess in all her manifestations was a symbol of the unity of all life in Nature. Her power was in water and stone, in tomb and cave, in animals and birds, snakes and fish, hills, trees, and flowers. Hence the holistic and mythopoeic perception of the sacredness and mystery of all there is on Earth.” To honor creativity is to sow the seeds of peace in human hearts and in culture. Thomas

Berry believes that these early cultures identified "maternal nurturance as the primordial creating, sustaining, and fulfilling power of the universe. Mutual nurturance is presented as the primary bonding of each component of the universe with the other components. This experience of the universe as originating in and sustained by a primordial originating and nurturing principle imminent in the universe itself finds expression in the figure of the Goddess in the late Paleolithic Period and in the Neolithic Period in the New East.

"This goddess figure presided over this period as a world of meaning, of security, of creativity in all its forms. This was not a matriarchy, nor was it a social program. It was a comprehensive cosmology of a creative and nurturing principle independent of any associated male figure." The lesson learned in this period of human history was clear: Creativity derived from the goddess and was present throughout nature and found within things in an immanent way. It was found within humans as well as within the rest of nature.

Today's science is also instructing us in the origins of creativity and finding that the whole universe is permeated with the power of change and birth. Physicist Brian Swimme summarizes the findings of science in this way: "If you let hydrogen gas alone for 13 billion years it will become giraffes, rose bushes and humans." This is another way of saying that everything has within itself the power of creativity, the power of giving birth, the power of surprising us (and presumably itself as well). One might say that hydrogen gas has the goddess busy creating within it.

Just how prevalent are the powers of creativity in the universe according to today's science? Thomas Berry sees creativity as intrinsic to the very process of evolution. "The emergent process, as noted by the geneticist Theodore Dobzhansky, is neither random nor determined but creative. Just as in the human order, creativity is neither a rational deductive process nor the irrational wandering of the undisciplined mind but the emergence of beauty as mysterious as the blossoming of a field of daisies out of the dark Earth." Furthermore, the creativity of the evolutionary process "follows the general pattern of all creativity."

Sri Aurobindo believes that "the supreme creative stimulus" occurs in the great ages of literature worldwide when there is a "pouring of a new and greater self-vision of man and Nature and existence" into humanity, one that expands the human soul and mind. With a new creation story, a new "creative stimulus" has indeed arrived, one that can expand our souls and minds.

Berry recognizes that at the heart of the earth community there lies a creativity that is nothing short of wild. "The community itself and each of its members has ultimately a wild component, a creative spontaneity that is its deepest reality, its most profound mystery." This wildness is found in the human imagination as well. All artists undergo it. The quest for survival and the quest for food arise in creatures and elicit their wildness. Surely New York City, a human creation, is a wild habitat. Spirit is everywhere. One needs to be alert not to miss the action, and one needs to be able to

withdraw and turn off the senses, too, in order to return with energy to the streets each day. Wisdom and compassion are not enemies. They are poles of a common axis. We need, the artist needs, both.

With spontaneity comes wildness—both emanate from deep within creatures. Berry comments: “Wildness we might consider as the root of the authentic spontaneities of any being. It is that wellspring of creativity whence comes the instinctive activities that enable all living beings to obtain their food, to find shelter, to bring forth their young: to sing and dance and fly through the air and swim through the depths of the sea. This is the same inner tendency that evokes the insight of the poet, the skill of the artist and the power of the shaman.”

Berry believes that a tension exists between wildness and discipline and that we can see that tension, so necessary for creativity, playing itself out in the earth system itself. Among the planets we know, an excess of discipline suppressed the wildness of Mars and resulted in very little life there; the excess of wildness suppressed the discipline of Jupiter, so very little was birthed there either. Berry says: “Only Earth held a creative balance between the turbulence and the discipline that are necessary for creativity.” On a more universal scale, the universe itself established “a creative disequilibrium expressed in the curvature of space that was sufficiently closed to establish an abiding order in the universe and sufficiently open to enable the wild creative process to continue.” Therefore, the very curvature of space

guarantees creativity, one more evidence of the great bias the universe holds in favor of creativity.

There is music and poetry in the universe itself—surely we hear it on planet earth. I am writing this chapter at a friend’s house in San Francisco near the ocean. During a lunch break, I walked along the cliffs overlooking the bay and the Golden Gate Bridge amidst blooming flowers, singing birds, buzzing insects, singing winds, rushing waves. Who can deny the music and song, the color and shadow, the shape and richness that nature makes? Creativity begins here. We humans are latecomers to the scene. We bring a heightened imagination with powers to get things done quickly. But we should know our place and whence our amazing powers derive from.

The universe, Berry insists, is “the primary artist,” and it brings into being “all our knowledge and our artistic and cultural achievements.” For this reason the universe deserves to be called an “intellect-producing, aesthetic-producing, and intimacy-producing process.” Were we to cut ourselves off from nature or so desecrate nature that its multiple forms of imagination and creativity were seriously diminished, we would be robbing our own imagination of its most valuable resource. As Berry puts it: “In every phase of our imaginative, aesthetic, and emotional lives we are profoundly dependent on this larger context of the surrounding world. There is no inner life without outer experience. The tragedy in the elimination of the primordial forests is not the economic but the soul-loss that is involved. For we are depriv-

ing our imagination, our emotions, and even our intellect of that overwhelming experience communicated by the wilderness." It is not just that the universe is the *origin* of our imaginations and creativity but that we depend in an ongoing way on its capacity to arouse us to give birth. The communion between the creativity of the universe and our own creativity is profound and continuous. We need to be constantly prodded and provoked by the beauty and aesthetics of the world around us.

Nature is so committed to creativity that it "abhors uniformity." The world-as-machine metaphor that dominated the modern era got us to think and act in uniform and standardized processes as machines do. But this is not the way of the natural world. Nature is biased in favor of diversity. And creativity is itself an act of diversity, as Berry reminds us: "Nature not only produces species diversity but also individual diversity. Nature produces individuals. No two days are the same, no two snowflakes, no two flowers, trees, or any other of the infinite number of life-forms."

Poet-farmer Wendell Berry writes how for his mentor, William Carlos Williams, "a poem was never merely an object of art; it was not a specialist's product. He spoke of poetry as the life force, not a 'creative act' but one of the acts of the creation, a part of the sum of

*All that which makes the pear ripen  
Or the poet's line  
Come true!"*

By comparing the poet's line to a pear ripening, Williams is placing *all* human creativity within its proper context: the ongoing creation of the world and, indeed, the universe.