

APPRECIATIVE ONTOLOGY of the NATURAL AND COSMIC WORLD



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Our way of thinking, feeling, and operating is always INFLUENCED by what we believe or assume, explicitly or implicitly, about what the natural and cosmic world is.

INTRODUCTION

The Appreciative Paradigm, like any paradigm in the social sciences, has an explicit or implicit vision of what the Natural and Cosmic World is, which we call the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World. But what is this vision that the Appreciative Ontology of the Appreciative Paradigm has of the Natural and Cosmic World? Is there any publication where we can find the answer to this question? Based on what I know, the answer is no. Therefore, in this essay, I will attempt to offer a first outline of what the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World is from the Appreciative Paradigm.

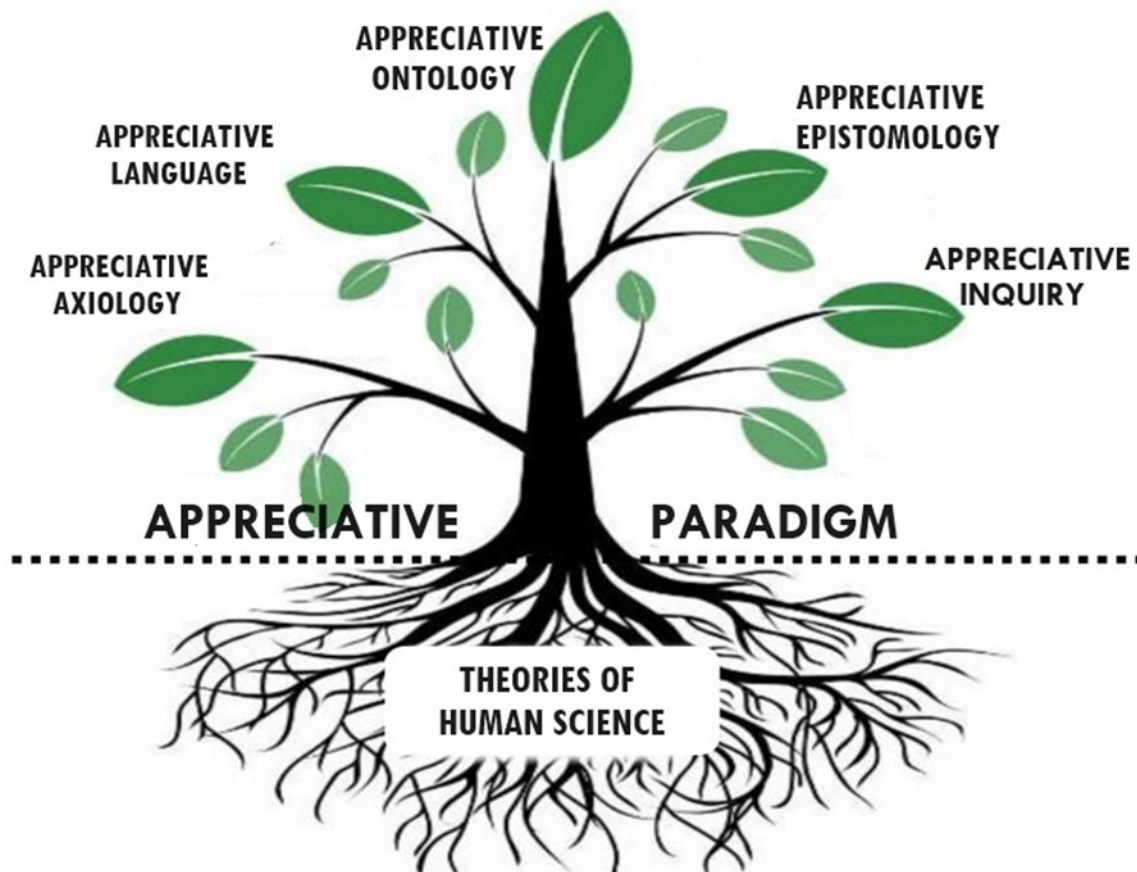
The objective of this essay, therefore, is to open a window to begin to see the Natural and Cosmic World from the Appreciative Paradigm. So, I invite you to join me in looking through this window to discover and delve into the identity of the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World: its origin and its fundamental characteristics and thus be able to differentiate it from the ontologies of other paradigms in the social sciences. To do this, these are the topics I will present: First, I offer a very brief summary of the new theoretical framework of what the Appreciative Paradigm is, which will allow us to understand in an organic way how the Appreciative Ontology is a component of the Appreciative Paradigm. Second, I define what the Appreciative Ontology is and its three components: 1) the Natural and Cosmic World, 2) the Organizational World, and 3) the Natural and Cosmic World. Third, I propose some reasons why I consider it important to discover and define what Appreciative Ontology is. Fourth, I present some of the theoretical and empirical bases of Appreciative Ontology. Fifth, I very briefly identify and develop what I consider to be the ten fundamental characteristics of the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World.

I. APPRECIATIVE PARADIGM AND ITS COMPONENTS

To understand what the Appreciative Ontology is, in all its depth and in an organic way, we need to see it as one of the components of the Appreciative Paradigm. For this, let us first see what the Appreciative Paradigm is. "The Appreciative Paradigm is a new way of seeing and understanding (Ontology), studying (Epistemology/Research), transforming (Intervention/Inquiry/Praxis), valuing (Axiology), and speaking (Language) about the human being and their behavior in the organizational and natural world in which they operate; which has been adopted by a community of scholars and practitioners globally because they find it more effective than other paradigms of social change, as demonstrated by the development and success achieved, both practically and theoretically, in the first 35 years of its existence" (Varona, 2023, p.15. 2024, p.14). The fundamental characteristics of each of these components of the Appreciative Paradigm are

developed in the essay: The Appreciative Paradigm: From Methodology to Paradigm (Varona, 2022). The Appreciative Paradigm. From Methodology to Paradigm (Varona 2023).

Figure 1
Components of the Appreciative Paradigm



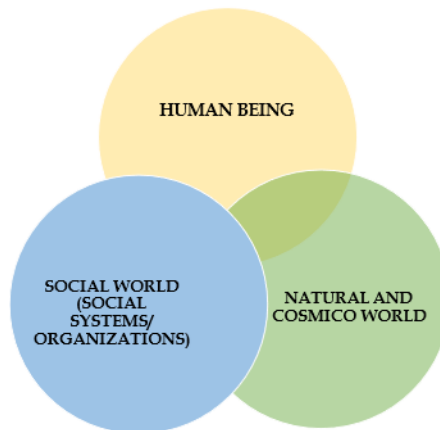
II. APPRECIATIVE ONTOLOGY AND ITS COMPONENTS

Ontology is the science that "deals with being in general and its transcendental properties." Some see it as a part of metaphysics, and others as part of philosophy. In the field of social sciences, we see ontology as a component of a paradigm, and it refers to the knowledge we have of humans, the social world, and the natural and cosmic world. This knowledge is created and formulated through the generation of theories that explain the nature of the Natural and Cosmic World and social phenomena, and how these relate to the natural and cosmic world. In the specific case of the Appreciative Paradigm, Appreciative Ontology refers to this new way of understanding the Natural and Cosmic World, the social world, and the natural and cosmic world. Therefore, the three components of Appreciative

Ontology are: 1) The Human Being, 2) The Social World (Social Systems/Organizations), and 3) The Natural and Cosmic World.

Figure 2

Components of Appreciative Ontology



III. APPRECIATIVE ONTOLOGY OF THE NATURAL AND COSMIC WORLD.

Let's now define what the third component is, that is, what is the Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World? This is a question that we do not ask ourselves as often as we should because we assume that we already know the answer. But the truth is that if we review history, we see that this question has been answered in many different ways, and each of those answers offers us a facet of the mystery and miracle that is the Natural and Cosmic World.

The vision we have of the Natural and Cosmic World from the Appreciative Ontology of the Appreciative Paradigm is perhaps one of the most revolutionary, inspiring, and original when compared to the vision held by the natural, physical, and cosmic sciences. The latter focus on understanding and explaining the material component of nature and the universe, its properties, and the laws that regulate it.

From the Appreciative Paradigm, we focus on discovering the interdependence that exists between the human being and the natural and cosmic world, but above all its spiritual and symbolic dimension, and the responsibility we have to care for it. The care of the Natural and Cosmic World is today one of the main focuses of attention and action of practitioners and theorists of the Appreciative Paradigm globally, led by David Cooperrider and Lindsey Godwin (Cooperrider and Godwin, 2023). This global initiative called "Our Earthshot Moment" has as its main purpose to put nature and planet Earth at the center of Appreciative Inquiry (Intervention/Appreciative Inquiry) and the Appreciative

Paradigm. But we also highlight some characteristics that have been forgotten or ignored by other philosophies or paradigms in the social sciences; characteristics that I will develop in the next section.

IV. FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE APPRECIATIVE ONTOLOGY OF THE NATURAL AND COSMIC WORLD.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the most important focal areas for the Appreciative Paradigm is discovering and deepening the relationship between the Human Being and the Natural and Cosmic World, and their commitment to the environment. It is from this deeply inspiring and transformative vision that I present the following 10 characteristics that I consider fundamental to the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World.

First, the natural and cosmic world is that the natural and cosmic world is a mystery that we cannot fully comprehend and that surprises and amazes us.

The natural and cosmic world, of which humans are a part and in which we live immersed, is a mystery that we cannot fully comprehend and that continually amazes us with its power, beauty, diversity, immensity, and generosity. There is always something that we cannot explain, which simultaneously inspires admiration and awe, such as when we ask ourselves: How was it created? When? Is it infinite? Is it still expanding? How long will it last? How did life originate and how does it evolve? But it also sometimes generates horror and fear in us due to its destructive forces, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, avalanches, etc.

Although the scientific view of the cosmos allows us to know something about its origins, composition, evolution, and immensity, there is still much that remains a mystery. This view of the natural and cosmic world as a mystery radically changes our relationship with it and with ourselves because when we see it this way, we can grasp our limits and also our capacities as the most wonderful beings of creation.

Second, the natural and cosmic world is a set of ordered, interconnected, and interdependent systems.

For the Appreciative Paradigm, the natural world, our planet Earth, and the universe in which it is immersed is "our common home," as Pope Francis calls it in his encyclical "Laudato Si" (2015). This common home is made up of a set of interdependent systems that we must discover and care for because, although it has the capacity to regenerate, it is susceptible to deterioration.

This vision of the interconnection and interdependence of the systems that make up the natural and cosmic world is fundamental to the Appreciative Paradigm because it reveals to us that what we are as human beings is only possible thanks to this interdependence we have with the natural and cosmic world. This should awaken in us attitudes of gratitude for everything we receive, such as the air we breathe and the food that nourishes us. But also a sense of responsibility, because it is fragile, and through our behaviors, we can either contribute to its care or destruction.

We must actively commit, not just theoretically, to the health of the planet and responsible coexistence with all forms of life that inhabit it, because we all have the same mother: the Earth, which is therefore a common good that we all must love and care for.

Third, the natural and cosmic world possesses an inexhaustible positive core of possibilities that we must discover and value.

Undoubtedly, the fundamental component of this positive core is the power to generate life in its multiple forms, which are constantly regenerating and evolving. The reproduction of life in all beings, but particularly in humans, is a miracle that we never cease to admire and understand. Another fundamental part of this positive core of the natural and cosmic world is all the natural resources that make life possible, such as solar energy, water, the air we breathe, the earth, and the wide variety of products it provides to sustain and enjoy our lives. All beings and life forms that inhabit our planet possess a genetic potential and an irresistible desire to strive for their full realization. Another fundamental component of this positive core of the natural and cosmic world that we must discover and value is the beauty that exists in the diversity of species and landscapes. We need to discover and develop the appreciative vision of the inexhaustible beauty of the natural and cosmic world to awaken the deepest emotions of wonder at the mystery they hold and allow ourselves to be transformed by them to discover what gives meaning to our lives. However, we need to activate and promote this appreciative vision of the inexhaustible positive core of nature and the cosmos because it is not automatic (Isanta, 2023, 2018). We must learn to discover, contemplate, and feel the beauty that exists in the natural and cosmic world in all its manifestations, from the most insignificant, like the beauty of a flower, to the grandest, like the beauty of a sunset.

Fourth, the natural and cosmic world is susceptible to deterioration due to human intervention.

Among the forms of deterioration that our natural and cosmic world is experiencing are the destruction of terrestrial, aquatic, and atmospheric ecosystems. The scientific data we have is truly alarming, and as proposed by the UN and the European Union, it is urgent to stop this destruction and restore damaged

ecosystems. To raise awareness on this topic, I recommend reading the article by Alexandra Farbiarz Mas, Environmental Scientific Communicator, titled: "Accepting Climate Grief to Address Eco-Anxiety." Farbiarz, 2024. Each of us also contributes to this deterioration of the natural and cosmic world with irresponsible behaviors such as consuming products that are harmful to the environment, consuming more than we need, not recycling, and not saving energy and water.

Fifth, everything that happens in the natural and cosmic world is punctual, cyclical, and ephemeral.

Natural phenomena such as rain, heat, cold, storms, and seasons occur punctually, meaning they happen at the moment when the factors that make them possible converge. They are also cyclical, meaning they repeat permanently, and ephemeral, meaning they have a limited duration. This constant condition of punctual, cyclical, and ephemeral change in the natural and cosmic world reminds us of what we are and how we should view and operate in response to everything we experience in our daily lives at personal, community, and global levels. As the saying attributed to the Mayan culture of Mesoamerica goes: "Everything in life passes and returns like the wind."

The implications of this appreciative vision of the natural and cosmic world are many, but I just want to highlight how this appreciative view invites us to live each natural phenomenon with deep admiration, gratitude, and trust, even in the most tragic moments we may experience. Because, as the popular saying confirms, "after the storm comes the calm." But it also invites us to accept and embrace each moment of our lives, live it to the fullest intensity, and see it as an opportunity to become better.

Table 3

APPRECIATIVE ONTOLOGY OF THE NATURAL AND COSMIC WORLD

The Natural and Cosmic World:

It is a mystery that we cannot comprehend and that surprises and amazes us	It is a set of ordered, interconnected, and interdependent systems	It possesses an inexhaustible positive core of possibilities that we must discover and appreciate	It is susceptible to deterioration due to human intervention
Everything that happens in it is montary, cyclical, and ephemeral	It is an inexhaustible source of creativity for human beings	It has been and continues to be an inexhaustible source of wisdom for human being.	The view we have of it is subjective, socially co-constructed, and dynamic.
	It has a spiritual and transcendent dimension that we have to discover and develop	It requires our effort and perseverance to be as we dreamed it would be.	



Sixth, the natural and cosmic world is an inexhaustible source of creativity for human beings.

The natural and cosmic world has been an inexhaustible source of inspiration and creativity for humans throughout the history of humanity. In nature, humans find not only inspiration but also the content, form, and matter that make human creativity possible in all its manifestations. Among the many examples we could cite, let's remember just a few, such as Gaudí, who found in plants the source of his inspiration to design the magnificent Sagrada Familia temple in Barcelona. The beauty in the diversity of nature in all its forms, colors, textures, sounds, phenomena, etc., has been and continues to be a source of inspiration for painters, music composers, writers, and more. Additionally, the discovery by humans of the properties of natural and cosmic elements and their laws has made possible the development of creativity in all fields of human activity, such as medicine, industry, technology, architecture, etc. If we want to be creative, we must turn to that inexhaustible source of creativity that is the natural and cosmic world.

Seventh, the natural and cosmic world was an inexhaustible source of wisdom for our ancestors and continues to be for us.

All civilizations and cultures of humanity have created and developed their cosmologies, that is, their visions of what the natural and cosmic world is and their relationship with it. For example, we have the cosmologies of the Mayan, Inca, Egyptian, Chinese, Japanese cultures, the indigenous cultures of Australia, Canada, the United States, etc. Each of these cultures has a fascinating vision of how they see the natural and cosmic world and how their relationship with it should be. This vision of the natural and cosmic world inspired and regulated their beliefs, ways of life, agricultural activities, etc. For example, the Mayan cosmology refers to the earth as "Mother Earth" and, therefore, they perform a ceremony to ask for permission before sowing. Nature and the cosmic world have also been inexhaustible sources of metaphors and popular sayings that encapsulate the wisdom generated by different cultures and our closest ancestors, such as our parents and grandparents. In my experience as a university professor, the greatest impact I have been able to have is when in my presentations or conversations, I used the metaphor that "my university is my garden" and when I told them that I learn fundamental life lessons there daily. For example: "You reap what you sow." "If you want to harvest what you sow, you have to take care of it." Using metaphors drawn from nature and applying them to our lives is the simplest and most powerful way we have to discover and value what we are, discover the potential within us, overcome our limitations, and commit to being better and creating a better world. We need to incorporate the wisdom that exists in the cosmologies of our ancestors' cultures, their sayings, metaphors, and rituals into our daily lives and the practice of our Appreciative Interventions/Inquiries.

Eighth, the vision we have of the natural and cosmic world is subjective, socially co-constructed, and dynamic.

The perception we have of the natural and cosmic world is something each human being constructs from the moment of birth through our relationships with other human beings and the natural and cosmic world in which we are immersed. Therefore, it is a perception that is both subjective and collective, constantly changing. Additionally, we form it mostly unconsciously and implicitly, and gradually, through communication and introspection, we make it conscious and explicit. When we say that the vision we have of the natural and cosmic world is subjective, we acknowledge that we can have different views of what the world is and what our obligations to it are. These are views we must accept and respect. But when we say it is socially co-constructed, we are affirming that these visions are subject to change and that humans have the power and freedom to choose among the many possible visions, the one that is most inspiring, constructive, and effective (Cooperrider and Godwin, 2023). This is the vision we strive to create through Appreciative Inquiry/Intervention.

Ninth, the natural and cosmic world has a spiritual and transcendent dimension that we must discover and develop.

From the Appreciative Paradigm, we value the spiritual and transcendent dimension of the Natural and Cosmic World as much as its material dimension because they are inseparable. This dimension allows us to generate deep mental and emotional relationships with immaterial realities and forces that transcend the physical dimension of our condition as human beings, which we name and relate to in various ways. The natural and cosmic world is the best therapeutic laboratory to find ourselves and discover the best that exists in and around us and to understand our limitations and overcome them. It is in these magical spaces of the natural and cosmic world where we can find the peace and freedom we long for, and the therapy that allows us to transform our fears, insecurities, misunderstandings, resentments, and frustrations into hope, excitement, security, and a commitment to be better. Nature teaches us to adapt to changing circumstances, to let ourselves be surprised by the unexpected, and to value it to learn from it. In the practice of Appreciative Inquiry/Intervention, we see how experiences lived in the magical spaces of nature are the most frequently shared and most transformative ones. We need to promote daily encounters with nature by walking in parks, tending to our gardens, flowers, and plants, and harvesting our vegetables and fruits. These daily encounters allow us to enjoy the beauty and generosity of nature, the blooming of a flower, the singing of birds, the freshness of dawn, etc., and remind us of what is important and what gives meaning to our lives. (Isanta, 2023, 2018). Let us bring the voice of nature and the cosmos into our lives and work.

Tenth, the care of the Natural and Cosmic World requires our effort and perseverance to make it as we dream.

Caring for our common home (Pope Francis, 2015) is a responsibility and a challenge for all of us. Everyone can contribute to the care of nature and the cosmic world in many effective ways that are within our reach. Caring for our Mother Earth is everyone's responsibility, not just that of large industries, companies, governments, etc. The impact of human negative action is evident in the quality of the air, the destruction of the Amazon, and the exploitation of material resources. Water scarcity is a tragedy for millions around the world. We cannot remain indifferent. On a personal and community level, there is much we can do by adopting more ecological lifestyles, such as creating and maintaining small gardens and orchards, moderating our consumption habits, recycling, reusing, saving energy and water, and participating in reforestation programs. We need to cultivate an ecological culture, which means promoting awareness and action in favor of environmental care and preservation. Individuals who adopt this culture seek to harmonize their actions with the natural environment, considering the consequences of their decisions on the ecosystem. We need to stay informed about the latest environmental, nature, and cosmic research. Our Appreciative Interventions must include environmental issues to educate people, organizations, companies, and businesses on how to care for our planet. As I previously mentioned, caring for the Natural and Cosmic World is a fundamental part of the Appreciative Paradigm. We must foster sustainable and respectful practices toward nature.

To discover and develop each of these 10 characteristics of the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World, we have Appreciative Inquiry/Intervention and other appreciative methodologies for social change. Additionally, these 10 characteristics of the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World are the pillars that underpin and guide the practice of Appreciative Intervention. I would like us to ask ourselves now: Do we keep these characteristics in mind when planning an Appreciative Intervention on the Natural and Cosmic World? How would this affect how we carry it out and the impact on the change we want to achieve?

V. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BASES OF THE APPRECIATIVE ONTOLOGY OF THE NATURAL AND COSMIC WORLD

5.1. Theoretical Bases of the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World.

The Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World from the Appreciative Paradigm, as I have indicated, has not yet been investigated and documented; however, this does not mean it does not exist. These theoretical bases are implicitly and unsystematically present in the multiple publications on what is

known in the English-speaking world as Appreciative Inquiry, since its creation in 1986 by David Cooperrider and many other authors, to this day (Cooperrider, 2021; Barrett and Fry, 2005; Subirana and Cooperrider, 2013; Isanta, 2023, 2018; Varona, 2020). The fundamental, though not the only, theoretical bases of the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World originate in the theory of Social Construction and how this theory conceives the nature of the Natural and Cosmic World. The fundamental principle of the Social Construction theory about the Natural and Cosmic World is that humans construct our vision of reality through the language we use, that is, the words we use in our social and work relationships. (Gergen and Gergen, 2004, pp.16-17). This theory also asserts that it is through language that we can generate different forms of dialogue that can lead us to co-construct new and different visions of the Natural and Cosmic World and the organizational, natural, and cosmic world.

5. 2. Empirical Bases of the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World.

The power of the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World is solidly and consistently confirmed by empirical evidence, meaning that based on personal, group, community experiences, and our global practice of Appreciative Inquiry/Intervention. Perhaps the most powerful empirical evidence we can present at this point about the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World is our own experience, through which we discover how the Natural and Cosmic World and its behavior is a mystery we cannot fully understand or control, which both amazes and disappoints us. This empirical evidence is also confirmed by the testimony of the majority of people who have participated in the process of an Appreciative Inquiry/Intervention on a personal, group, or organizational level, some of which are documented in numerous publications (books and published articles) and the shared testimony in global Appreciative Summits and meetings like the AI JAMS (annual virtual global meetings organized by the Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry: Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry and the publications in the IA Practitioner International Journal: IA Practitioner; and at the regional level, such as the webinars promoted throughout Ibero-America by the Ibero-American Network of Appreciative Paradigm Practitioners and Academics (RIPAPA). Regarding scientific evidence, obtained when using a scientific research method that generates an explanation or theory, there are also publications confirming it (Mandal, 2022; Varona, 2021).

VI. WHY IS IMPORTANT TO DISCOVER AND DEFINE THE APPRECIATIVE ONTOLOGY OF THE NATURAL AND COSMIC WORLD?

Every Appreciative Inquiry/Intervention and human activity of personal and social change is inspired and grounded in an ontology, meaning a vision, whether

conscious or not, explicit or implicit, of what the Natural and Cosmic World is. For example, the four core phases of the Appreciative Inquiry/Intervention methodology emerge when Cooperrider recognizes that in the Natural and Cosmic World: first, there is a positive core that we need to discover (Discover Phase); second, it has the ability to anticipate, visualize, and imagine a better future (Dream Phase); third, it can realize its dreams when we concretize them into values and specific action commitments (Design Phase); and fourth, it needs to keep its commitments alive by participating in motivation, education, and evaluation programs (Live Phase). Consequently, the practice of Appreciative Inquiry/Intervention must be inspired, grounded, and guided by the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World from the Appreciative Paradigm. It is from this vision that we must decide what we do, why we do it, how we do it, what we need to change, and most importantly, what we need to create to be more effective and coherent in our work as facilitators of personal and social change.

CONCLUSION

I hope that with this essay, I have succeeded in opening a window to start seeing the Natural and Cosmic World from the Appreciative Ontology of the Appreciative Paradigm. I hope that the invitation to accompany me in discovering it through this window has been an enriching and inspiring experience. I am aware that what I present in this essay falls far short of what is possible. Delving into what Appreciative Ontology is, is a task that falls to all academics and practitioners of the Appreciative Paradigm. Therefore, I want to conclude by inviting you to share your version and to walk together to build our vision of the Appreciative Ontology of the Natural and Cosmic World.

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