

TEILHARD'S VISION OF THE WORLD AND MODERN COSMOLOGY

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Abstract. Some physical aspects of Teilhard's synthesis are focused upon and confronted with the recent achievements of physics and cosmology. The stuff of the universe, according to modern physical theories, has become something more similar to a structure of form than to inert pieces of material substratum. Directedness of time and history no longer seems to be an ontological *a priori* of any existence, but rather an outcome of finely tuned initial conditions. And the growth of complexity is now regarded as a process emerging out of physical laws rather than a foreign element in the body of physics. The question is considered of how these results affect Teilhard de Chardin's vision of the world.

INTRODUCTION

In Teilhard de Chardin's vision of the world one can distinguish two layers. Although closely interwoven with each other, they are clearly visible. The first layer consists in a very specific interpretation of scientific data; the second layer, of a certain mysticism that gives a peculiar atmosphere to Teilhard's work. He was a biologist, and there is no doubt that his vision of the world borrowed its main features from biology. However, no global vision of the world claiming to be based on or oriented toward the sciences, can avoid taking information from physics in general and from cosmology in particular.

To push anything back into the past [these are opening sentences of *The Phenomenon of Man*] is equivalent to reducing it to its simplest elements. Traced as far as possible in the direction of their origins, the last fibers of the human aggregate are lost to view and are merged in our eyes with the very stuff of the universe.¹

To deal with "the stuff of the universe" is, in Teilhard's opinion, the task of physics and cosmology.

The importance of the physical ingredient of Teilhard de Chardin's vision of the world is obvious. In fact, the entire first part of *The Phenomenon of Man* is devoted to contemplating the past of the universe "as it must appear to an observer standing on the advanced peak where evolution has placed us."² Since Teilhard's times this peak has grown higher, and today we see better the details of the world's history. It would be of great interest to compare critically our present understanding of the physical world with that which has entered Teilhard's way of seeing. This is precisely the aim of this essay. To make this goal practical, I shall focus on *The Phenomenon of Man*, referring only occasionally to other writings of Teilhard.

¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. B. Wall, (London: Collins-Fontana Books, 1974), 43.

² *Ibid.*, 39.