

Becoming and Belonging: Spirituality in the Age of AI

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Saint Mark's Cathedral

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The Premise and Postulations

Humanity is in crisis, but it is not just a recent development

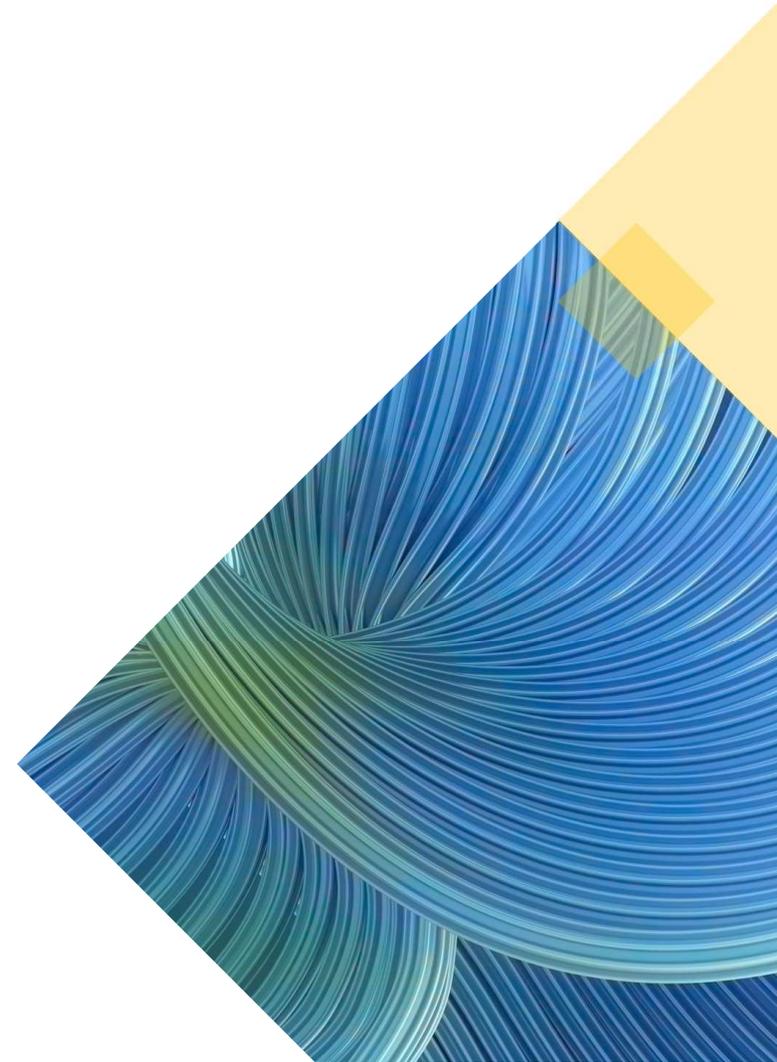
Our cosmology (understanding of the universe) is shifting

Teilhard: the more deeply we penetrate into matter, the more we are confounded by the interdependence of its parts (from Newtonian to post-Einsteinian worldview)

Consciousness is fundamental to matter, but not individual; must be interactive (interconnected) consciousness

Cybernetic loop: we create the tools, the tools create us

Religion is in an era of rebirth, needed to help make sense of this evolving world



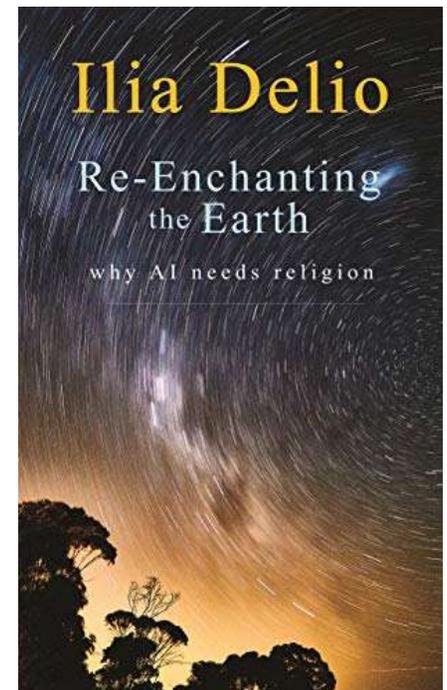
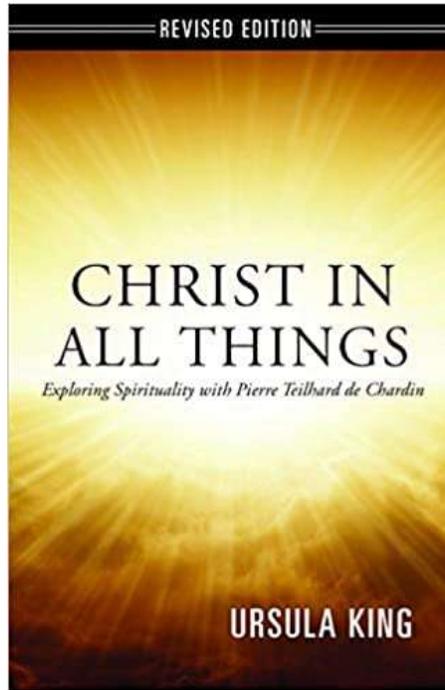
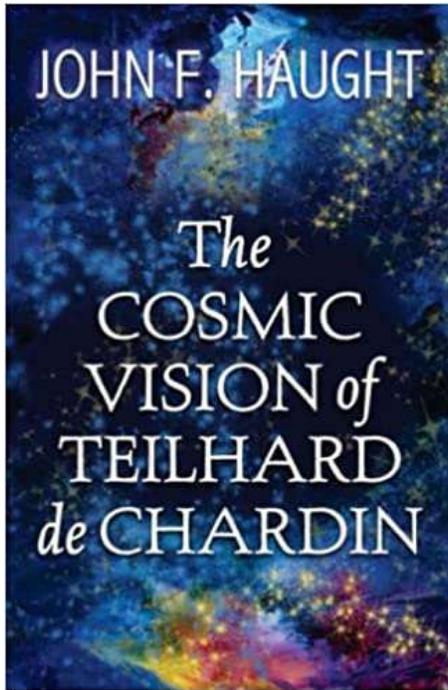


Ignore at our own peril



- *“If we cannot imagine that religion takes shape in technology, then we have eliminated the religious depth dimension of the most significant development in human becoming.”*

Philip Hefner, LST-Chicago



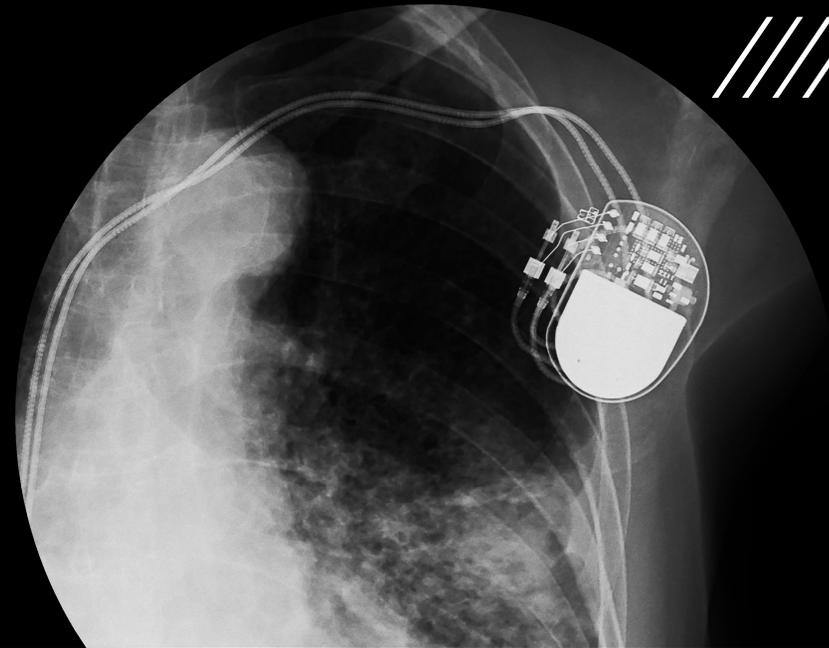
Selected Reading

Brief History of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- Turing's theory of computation—that a machine can use series of "0's" and "1's" to solve mathematical problems
- Term (AI) coined in 1956 at Dartmouth workshop—learning moves in checkers, algebra word problems, basic speech.
- Developed alongside advances in neurobiology, so focus became existential over time (relief from suffering, pursuit of happiness, immortality)
- The Age of Cyborgs (cybernetic organisms)

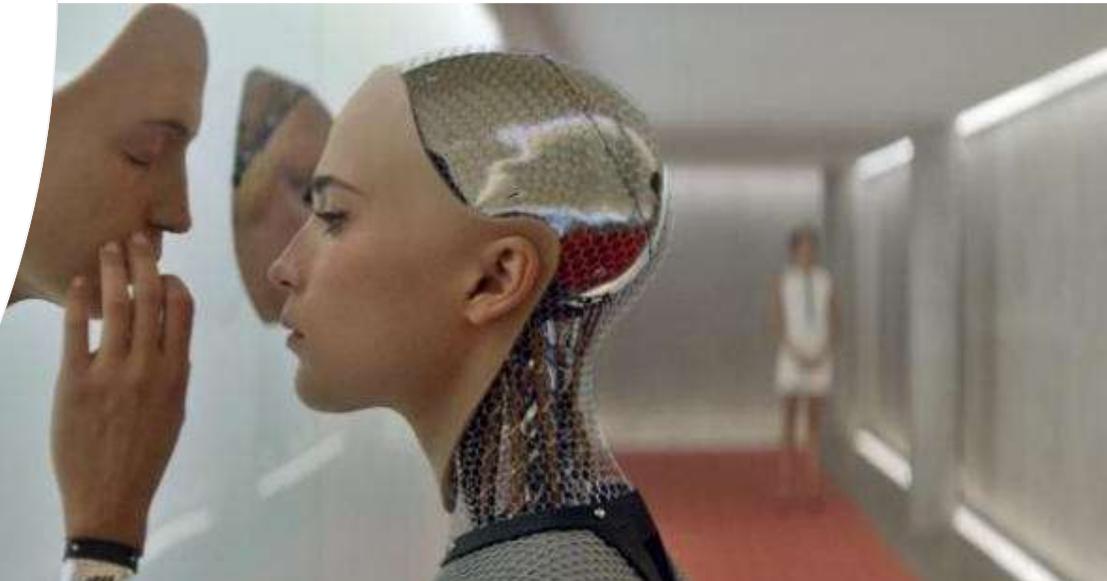


What are some ways
we use machines or
electronics in our
lives?



The Age of Cyborgs

- A cyborg is a human who has certain physiological processes aided or controlled by mechanical or electronic devices.
- A hybrid of biology and machine/animal/device.
- Blurring of boundaries (loss of universals, meta-narratives)
- Boundaries have meaning only for particular, locatable and embodied subjects.



CONSCIOUSNESS & RELIGION

PRE-AXIAL

Tribal
Mythic
Ritualistic
Communal

AXIAL

Autonomy
Transcendence
Freedom
Person

2ND AXIAL

Relatedness
Immanence
Ecological
Global Community

Beyond Axial Age Understanding and Biological Essentialism

The lines between the mechanical and biological are being increasingly erased

Changing how we think about ourselves in relation to the other (e.g., gender and identity).

Loss of sacred space and ritual (collapsed mystery)...something is/will fill the religious void in cyberspace

Ethical questions: purpose, goals, justice and equity



The Rebirth of Religion (and How We Got Here)

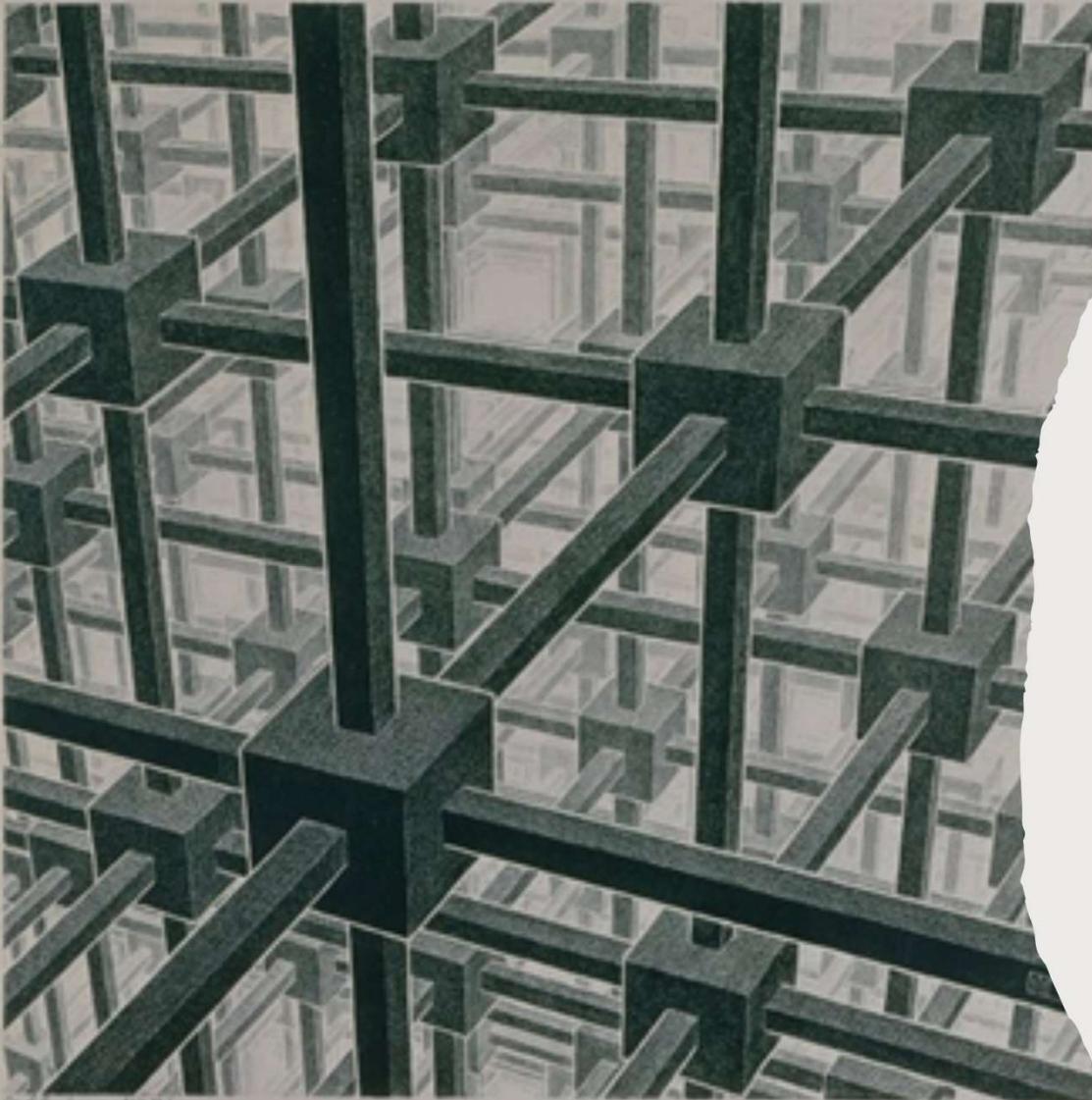
A people in crisis—polarization/tribalism, fight for/against the status quo, nostalgia, loss of meta-narrative and rituals that shape life

Connected cosmology: theology/science/religion not at odds (ancient and medieval)

15th C. —Copernicus, Galileo, et al.—heliocentrism (Cardinal Bellarmine in 1633 said this cannot be tolerated)—science and religion got separated

Cartesian “error”—body (machine) and soul (conscious self)—no spirit in the bodily realm



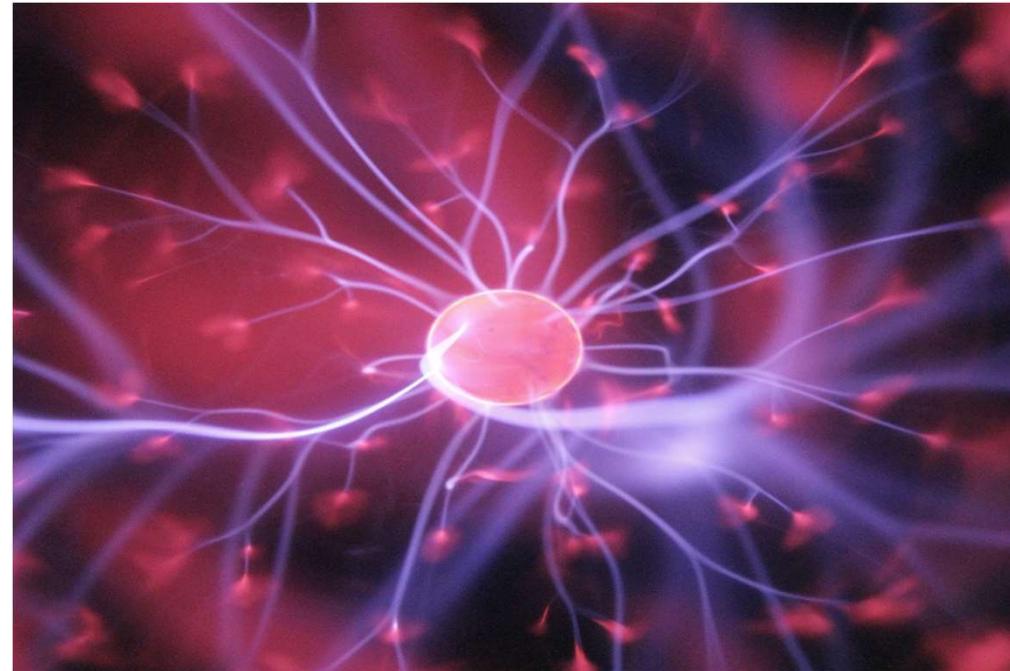
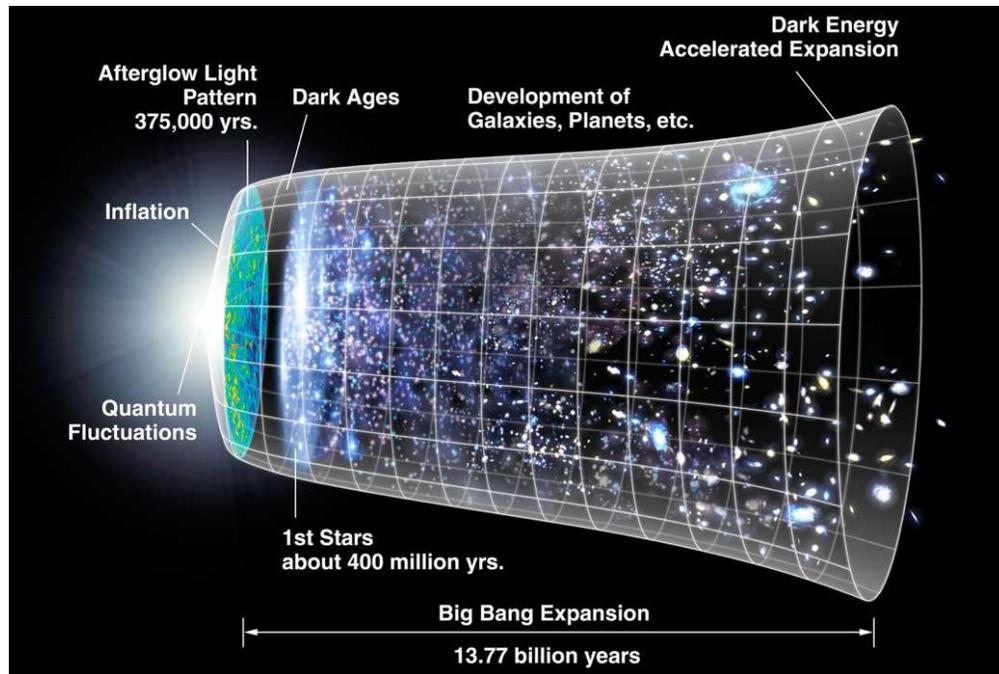


Newtonian world

- Mechanistic understanding of the world as machine
- Operated on laws and order
- People are cogs in the wheel
- Hierarchical, certain, predictable
- Control is highly valued
- Closed system

- Most of the world's religions developed as closed systems (Newtonian)

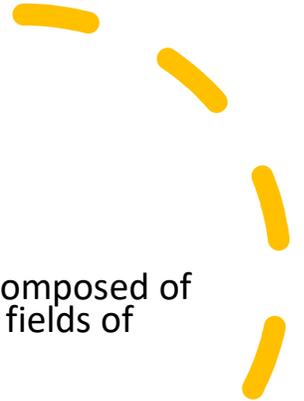
The Big Bang Cosmos and a World of Energy





Relational Holism

- If reality is nonlocal. . .then nature is not composed of material substances, but deeply entangled fields of energy.
- The nature of the universe is undivided wholeness.
- But constantly changing, evolving
- David Bohm: humans are part of the whole and we share in this cosmic process of interdependence
- Even our thoughts have effects on the whole



The Shift

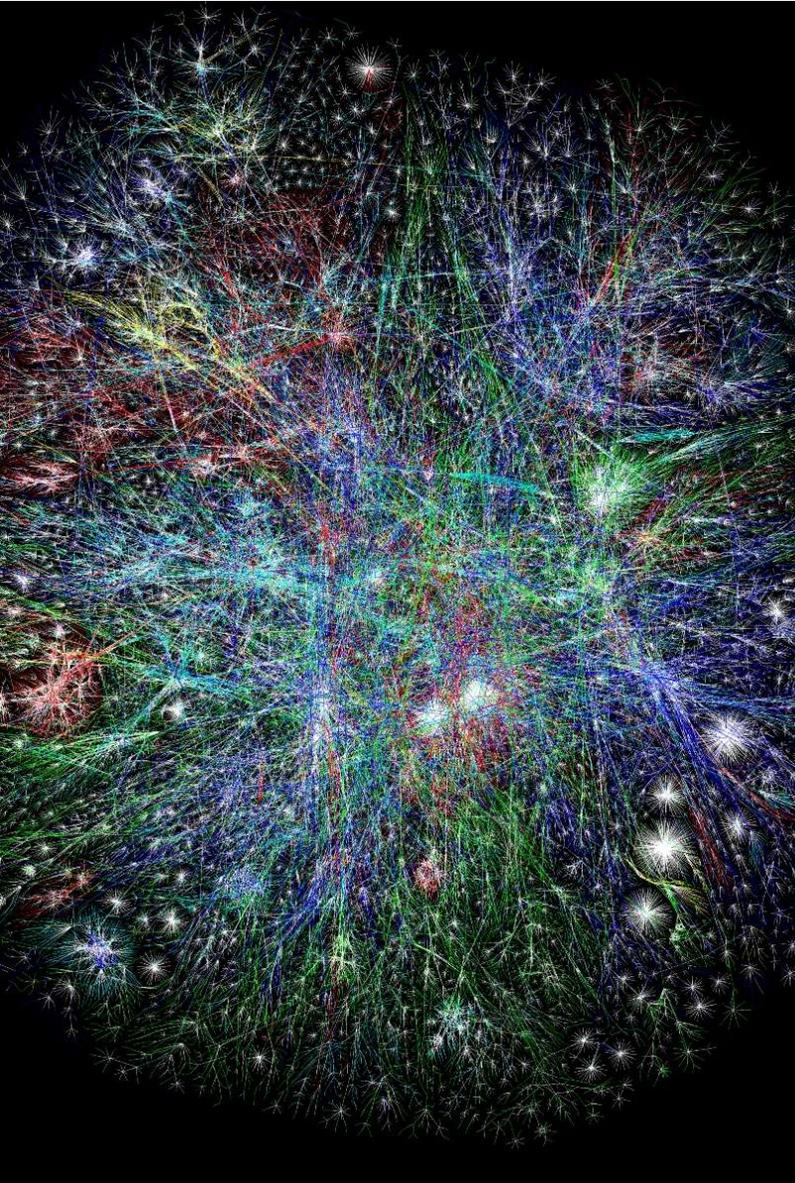
Newtonian

- Closed system
- Hierarchical
- Maintain order
- Goal-oriented
- Mechanistic
- individualistic

Post-Einsteinian

- Open system
- Bottom—up ordering
- Honors complexity
- Possibility-oriented
- Holistic
- Interconnected and participatory

The problem: The Church has not embraced the shift yet; neither has the educational system really



Breakout Groups

- Do you agree/disagree with the premise that the Church (and education) have largely held onto a Newtonian construct?
- What would be some manifestations of the Church operating as an open system with the dynamics of a post-Einsteinian worldview?

We are at a
crossroad...

“Religion will not regain its old power until it can face change **in the same spirit as does science**. Its principles may be eternal, but the expression of those principles requires continual development.”

Alfred North Whitehead



A Digression: The “Hard Problem” of Matter

- Bertrand Russell: “We know nothing about the intrinsic quality of physical events except when these are mental events that we directly experience...conscious experience is itself a form of physical stuff.”
- Max Planck: “Consciousness is fundamental. I regard matter as derivative from consciousness.”
- A.N. Whitehead: the first to see the radical implications of quantum physics. Wave theory shattered old concept of matter as spatial “body” in moment in time. Matter/energy interactions become “events” he called “happenings” or “becomings”
- Agency belongs to everything that is interacting
- Human agency is relocated in this new paradigm from self to interdependence

Two AI Trends

Transhuman – enhancement or perfection of the human person by means of technology; person in transition to something else.

Posthuman – reconfiguration of the human in relation to culture and environment; become an electronic complex.



Goals of Transhuman AI

A society that allows individuals to choose to use technology to live

- Longer
- Happier
- Smarter
- With More Control
- Even avoid death



Transhuman AI

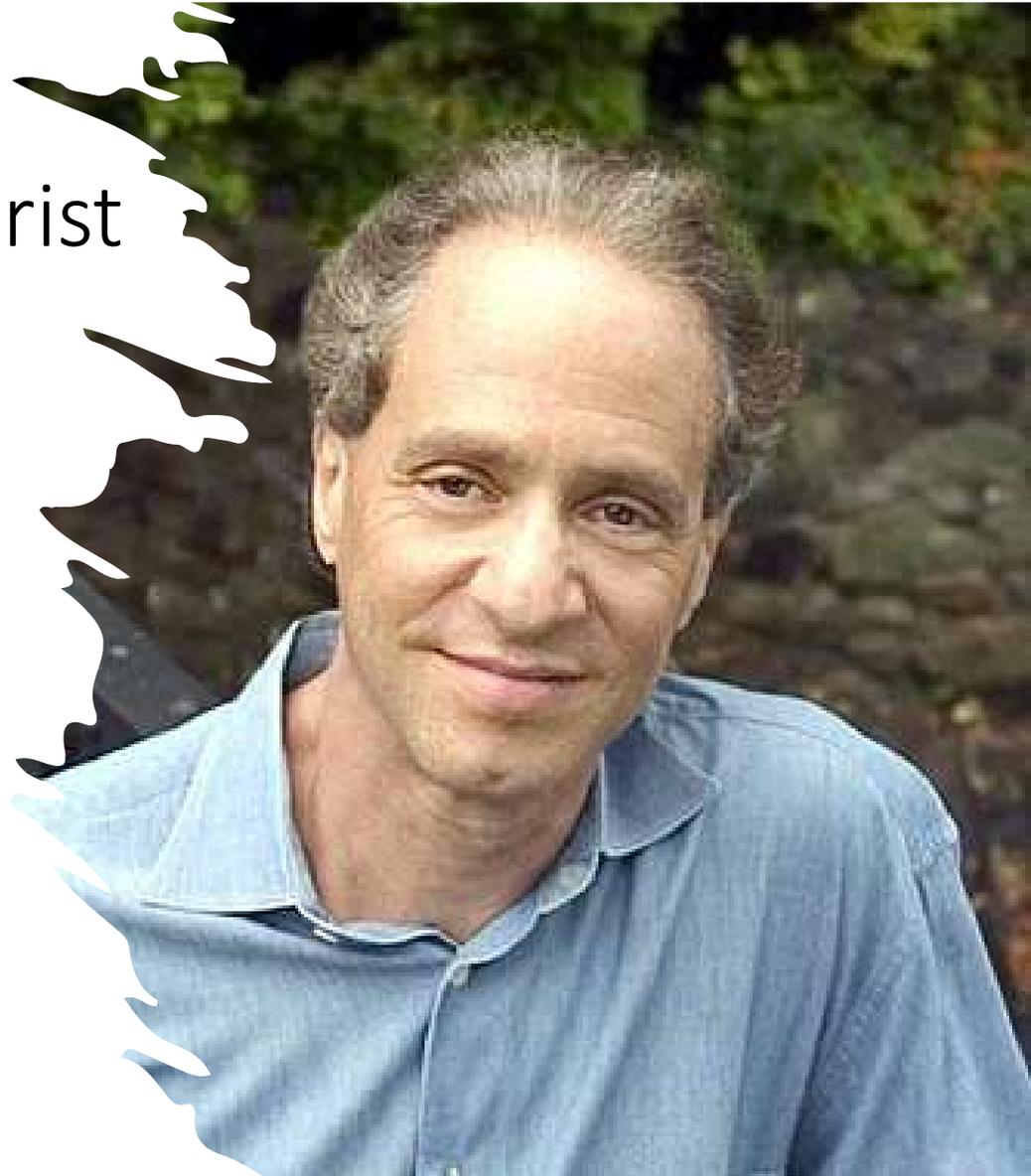
- The Technological Singularity: *the moment in time when machines become more intelligent than humans*
- Terry Grossman, M.D. (anti-aging specialist, marketer):

Therapeutic human cloning, stem cell therapies, synthetic organs, molecular nanotechnology, and the digital-cerebral interface may allow us to achieve immortality in this century. But keeping bionic transhumans alive until immortality is achieved may prove very expensive. And not everyone will want it. (published in 2001 on KurzweilAI.net)



Ray Kurzweil—Google futurist

- Predicts that by 2045 we will no longer be homo sapiens, but a new species of cyborgs with digital immortality (“techno sapiens”)
- Currently working on mapping brain in order to download entire neuro function and memory and eventually upload into new embodied existence—digital immortality
- Our avatars will become the means of “cybersalvation”
- Does God exist? He says, “not yet.”
- His hedge fund is “FatKat”





Transhuman AI: Potential Problems to Consider

- Expense will widen the gap between rich and poor (already happens in health care, etc.)
- Subverts “telos” of humanity—if everything can happen “now” then how do we understand the continuum of life and death?
- Functionally constrained to the subjective (individual) experience—
- Not ecologically sustainable

Posthuman AI

- Posthuman does not mean the end of humanity
- It signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human as an autonomous being exercising one's will through individual agency and choice
- Arises from a feminist philosophical understanding of the "interpersonal" or "hyperpersonal"
- The end of the liberal modern subject





Posthuman: Person with Embedded Electronics

- Human functionality expands because the cognitive system in which it dwells is expanding (embodied awareness)
- Not about leaving the body behind, but leaving the modern notion of autonomous self/subject behind
- Subjectivity is emergent rather than given, distributed rather than located solely in consciousness—social media shaping the posthuman world of hyperpersonalization
- Emerging from and integrated into a chaotic world rather than a position of mastery and control over it.

Potential Pitfalls for Posthuman AI

- Brutal irony—we are information overloaded, but we look to technology to deal with it (entertain us, numb us, divert us)
- We are losing the capacity to “think” without the technological aids
 - We live in the “shallows”—loss of grounding narratives, loss of “place”
 - Virtual nomads
 - More narcissistic
 - More oblivious
 - More apathetic (less compassionate)
 - Orient to violence
- If interiority and exteriority are no longer separate realities, questions of identity become huge!





Breakout groups

- How do you react to these two “schools” of AI—transhuman and posthuman? What are potential benefits of each? What are the ethical challenges?
- How do people of faith consider these developments within the context of faith?



Plenary
conversation



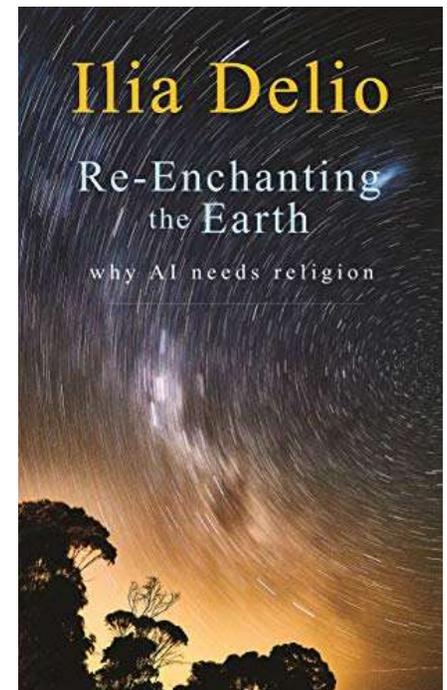
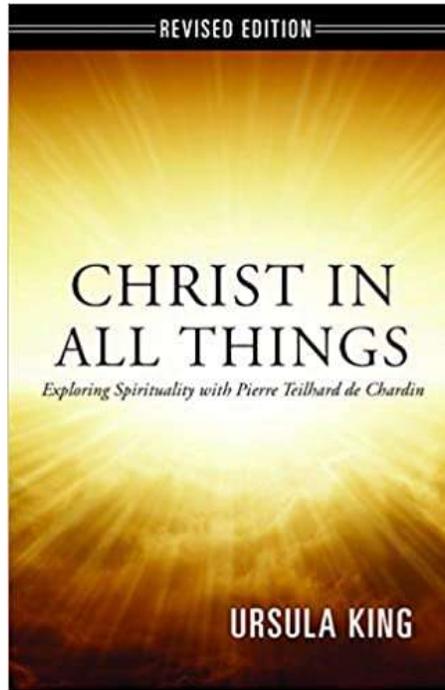
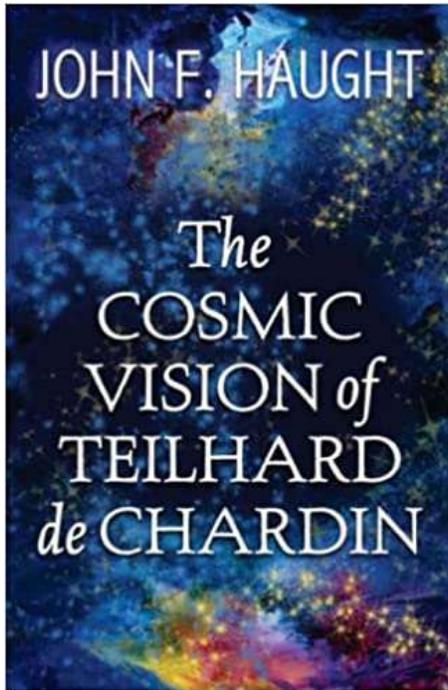
Another Approach

Ultrahumanism, Evolutionary Theology, and Consciousness



Next Week

- Review Contemporary Trajectories of AI— Posthuman and Transhuman
- Ethical challenges and opportunities
- A new/old cosmology of consciousness grounded in evolutionary theology (“we are God’s becoming”)— “Ultrahuman” Christic cosmology
- Ritual is the sacramental/symbolic act that “christifies” the world
- Contemplative effort as creative force of
- Consciousness is union with God



Selected Reading