

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

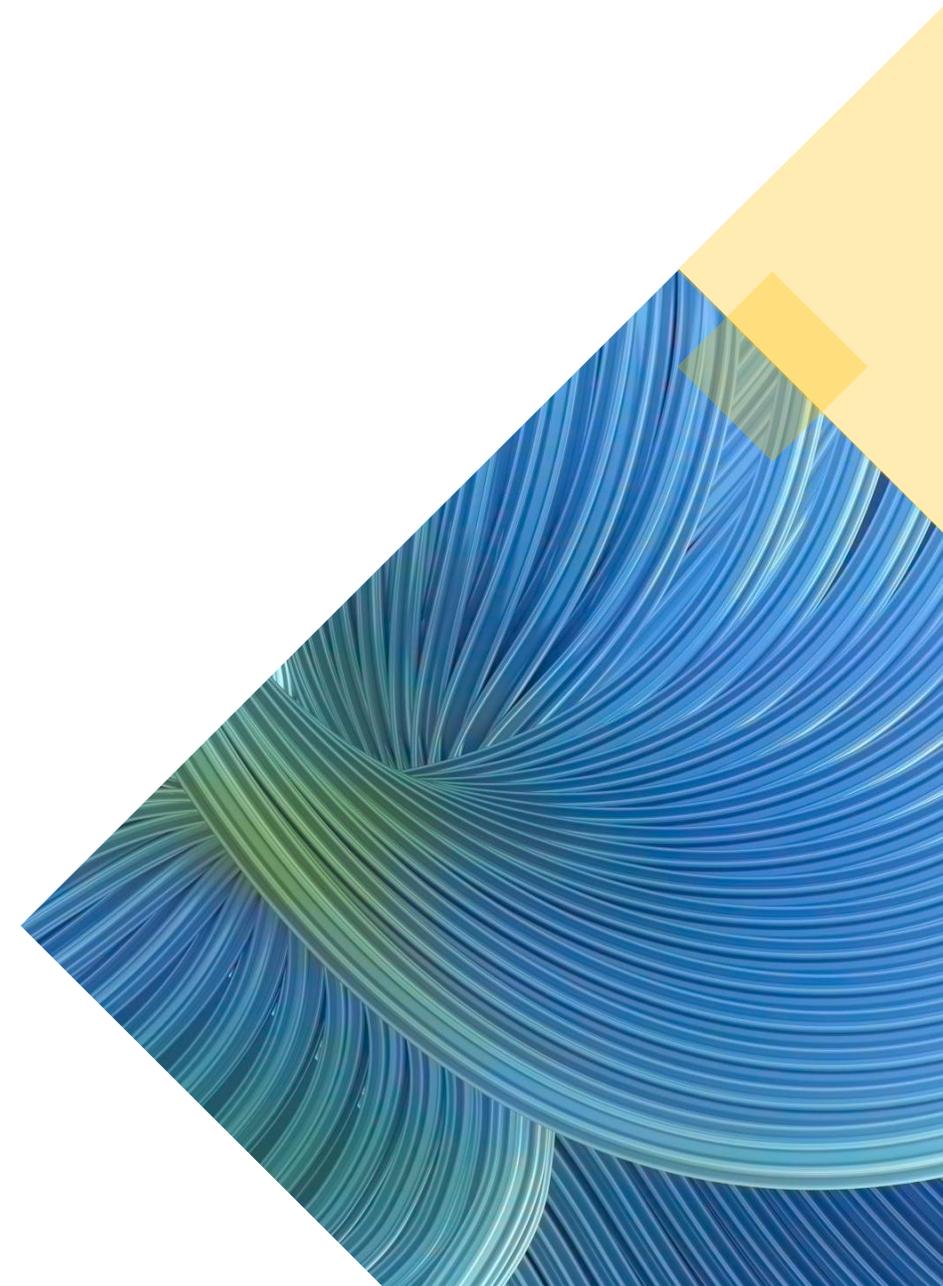
Our cosmology (understanding of the universe) is shifting

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 individualistic; 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



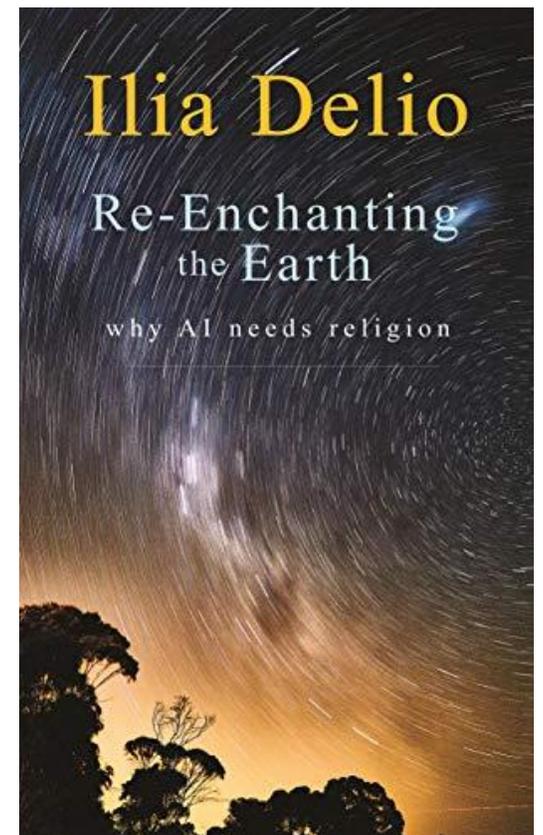
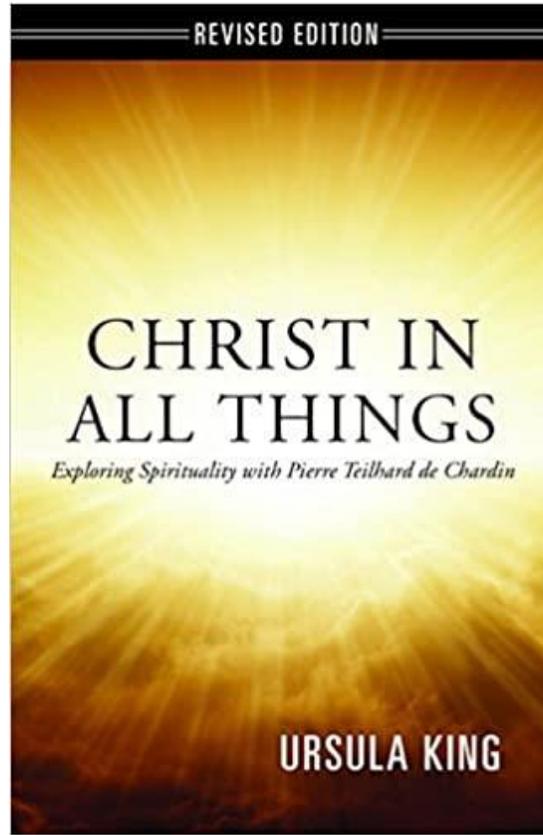
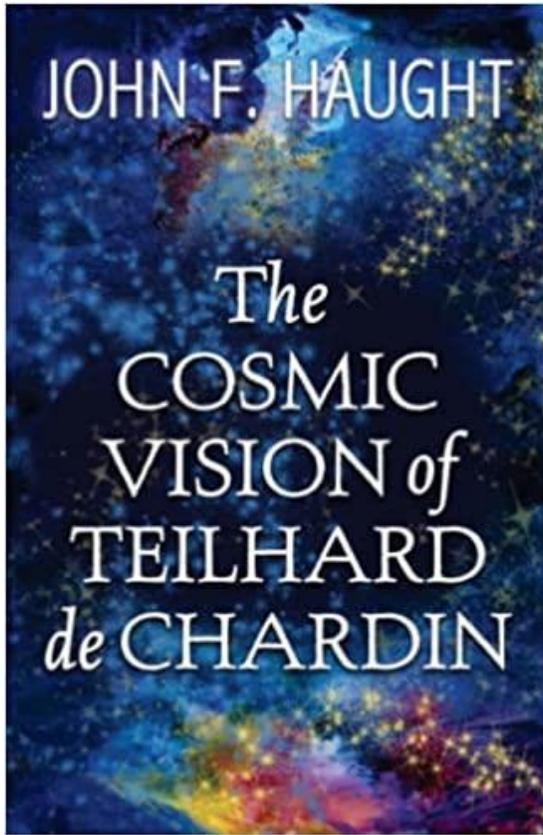


Ignore at our own peril



- *“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.”*

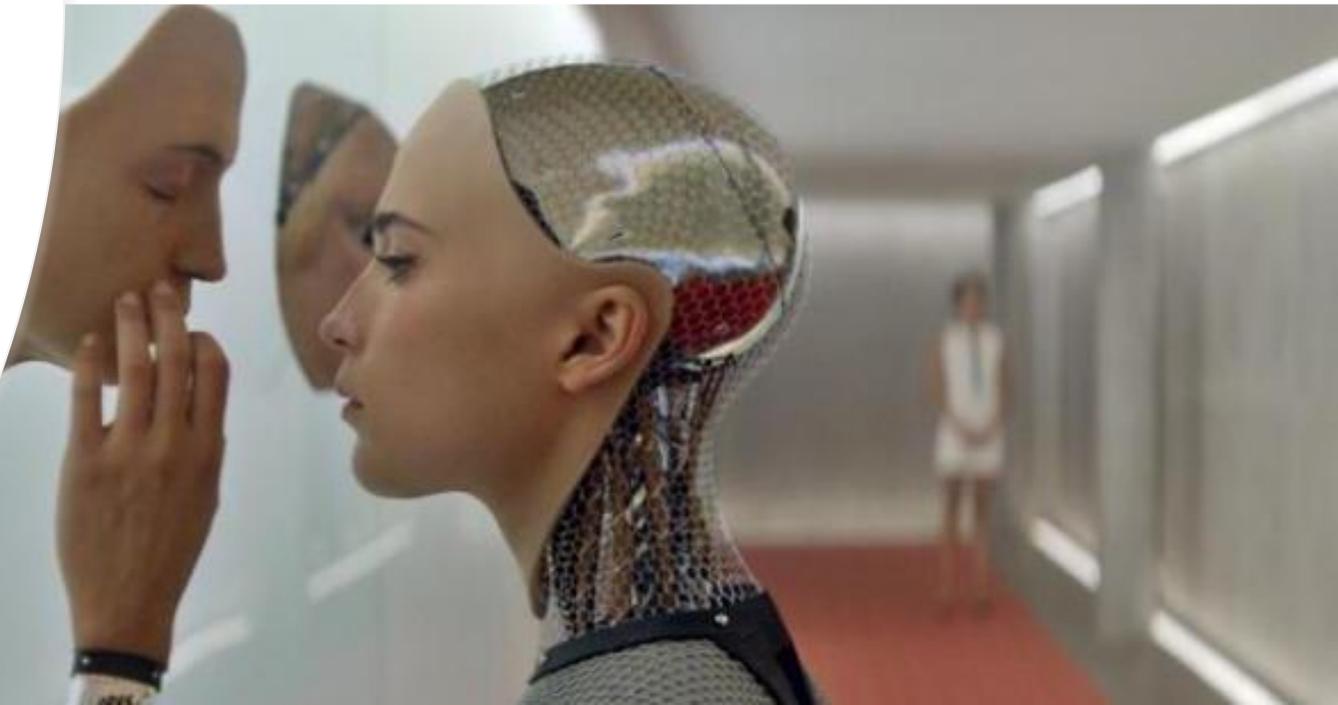
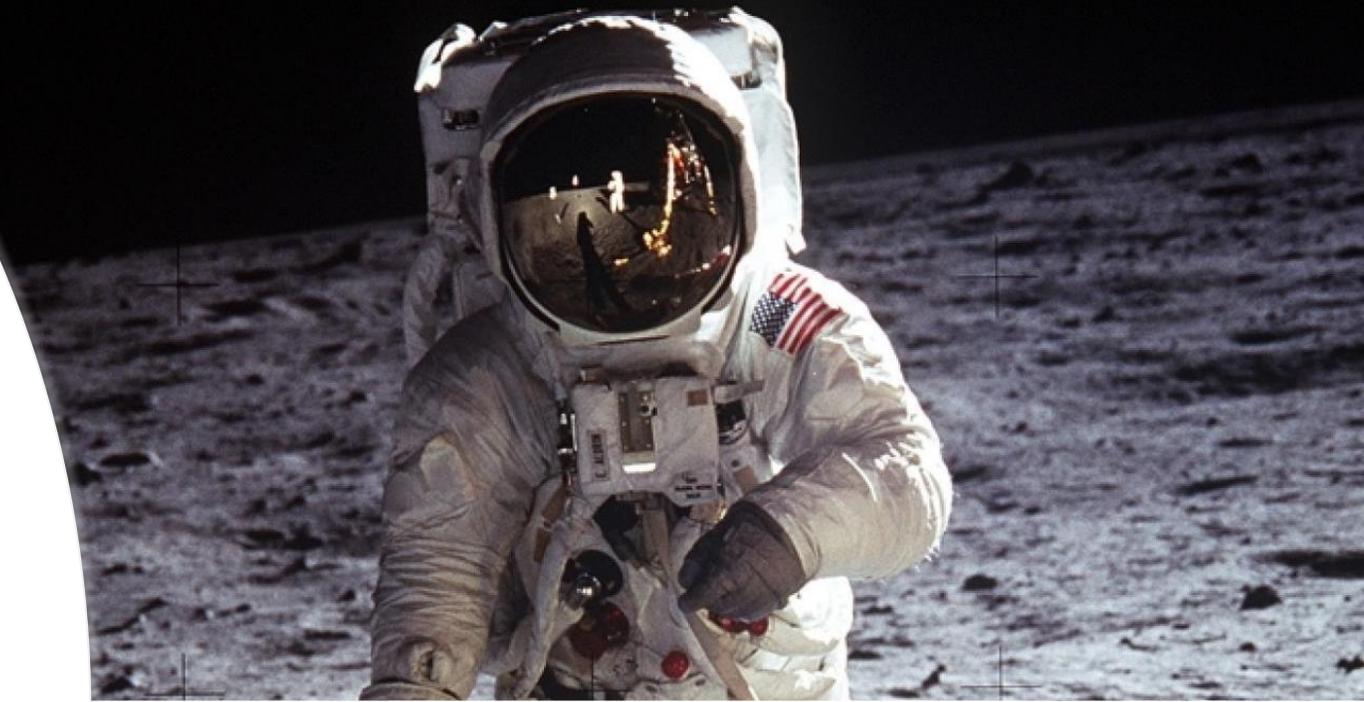
Philip Hefner, LST-Chicago



Selected Reading

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.





Relational Holism

- If reality is nonlocal. . .then nature is not composed of discrete building blocks of “matter”, but deeply entangled fields of energy.
- The nature of the universe is undivided wholeness.
- But constantly changing, evolving
- 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

We are at a
Crossroad...

Religion can be further relegated to the margins of the discourse around AI, and become increasingly irrelevant, OR

Religion can serve as a valuable contributor IF it is willing to change its cosmology (Christology)
, BUT

This is not about acceding to the driving forces of capitalist-driven AI development, RATHER

It is about claiming a more life-giving and dignified trajectory into the Future

Brett Robinson: *Appletopia*



Steve Jobs was visionary “prophet” who framed new transcendence (locus where physical and metaphysical meet)

He recast the narrative: what was modern loss of religious transcendence is renewed/replaced by technological transcendence

Apple products became imbued with sacred status

Mantra: tech reshapes consciousness by spurring creativity

Religious fervor: make the world a better place...

Two AI Trends

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

Goals to live longer, happier, healthier...to immortality—driven by desire for control

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

Goals to be more relational (hyper-personal) emerging in chaos, not controlling it





Transhumanism: Potential Problems to Consider

- Expense will widen the gap between rich and poor (already happens in health care, education, 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



Potential Pitfalls for Posthumanism

- 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

- What have been your ponderings since last week, or with this review?
- How does AI impact your understanding of the role of religion...in your life?
In the public discourse/global humanity?



Another Approach

Ultrahumanism, Evolutionary Theology, and Consciousness

Ultrahumanism

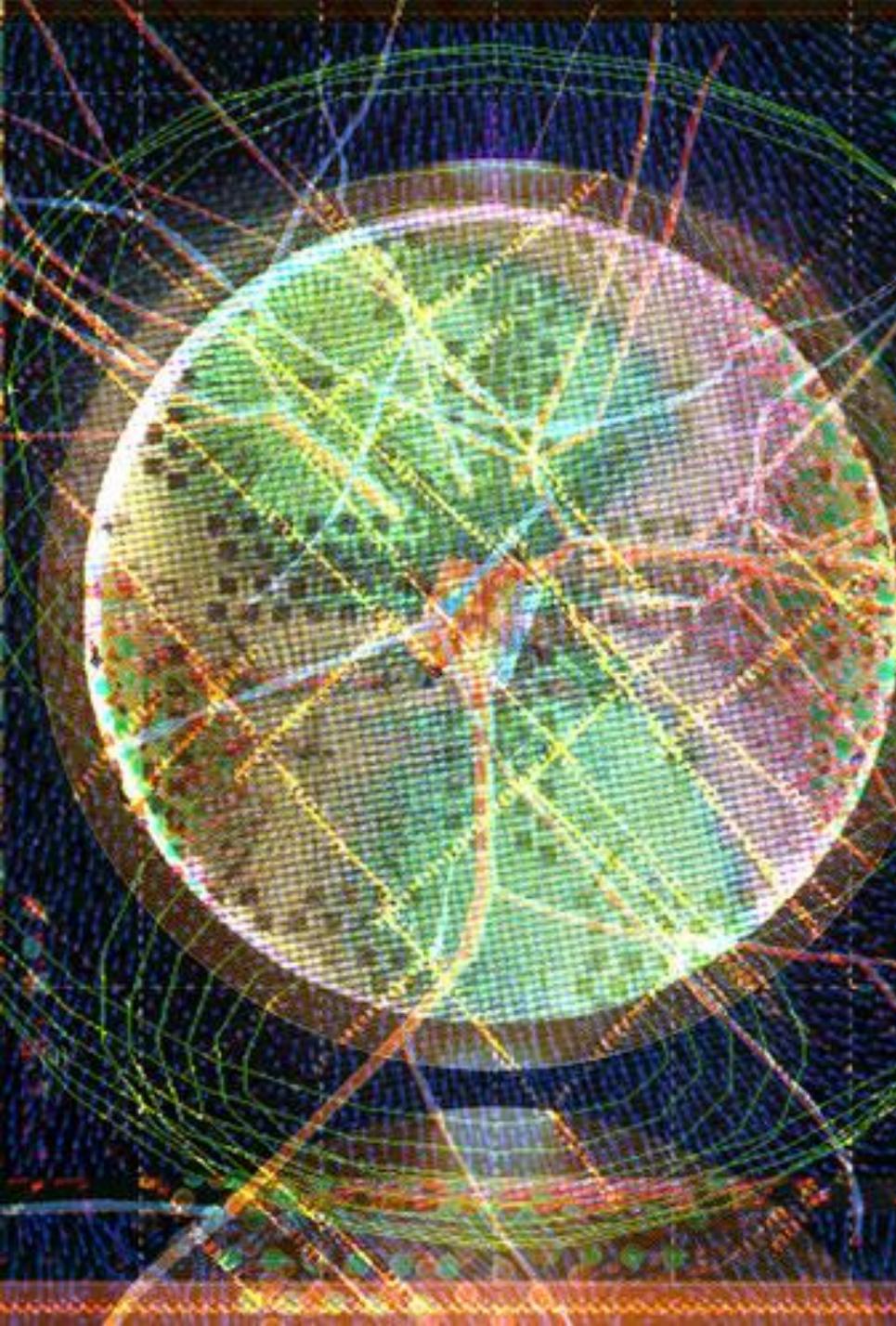
- Not about perfection of being through artificial means; rather,
- Invested with evolution toward *more being* through interconnectedness.
- “Materialism” can bring about *well being*
- *Spiritual awareness* and increasing *consciousness* brings about *more being*.





Matter and the “New Materialist” Ontology

- Not entities but relations
- Not agency, but the capacity to affect and be affected (entanglement)
- Materiality is more than matter—it involves a force (energy, relationality) that catalyzes matter to be creative, generative, even conscious.
- Inherently unpredictable because always evolving



Ultrahuman character

- The “ultrahuman” has consciousness of relational being and so seeks to advance that wholeness in love.
- Willingly participates in the noosphere—an emerging “global” spiritual energy, a growing consciousness, toward “more being.” (Perfection not the goal)
- Recognizes its unique existence only *through* the interconnected consciousness that transcends the boundaries we have historically and artificially set

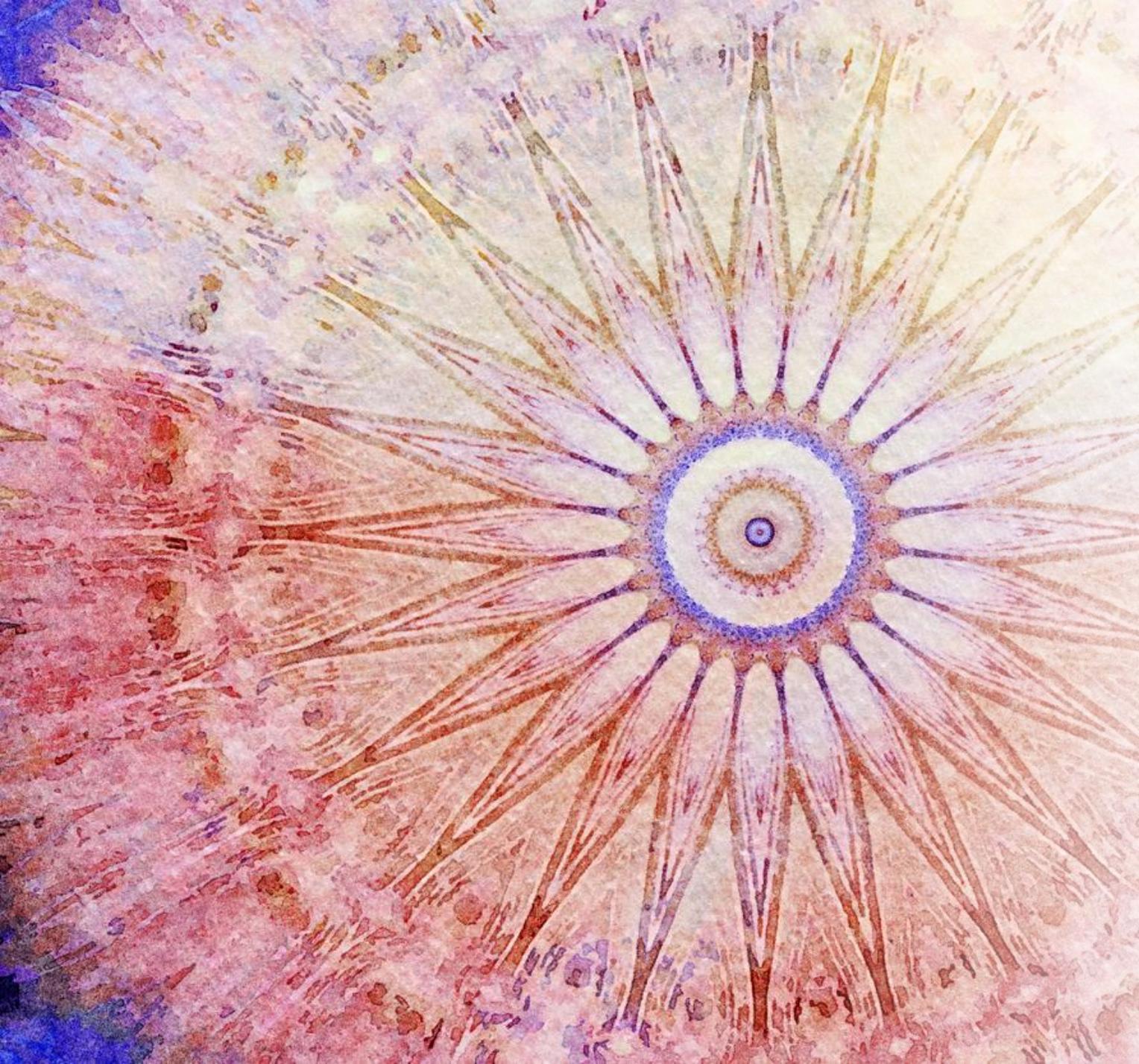
CREATIVE EVOLUTION



HENRI BERGSON

Rethinking Evolution

- Not survival of the fittest, but future-oriented, creative process.
- The central facets of evolution are:
 - Novelty
 - Creativity
 - Futurity
- Henri-Louis Bergson: “For a conscious being, to evolve is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.”



What does it mean to live in evolution?

- We are unfinished
- We are being created as we create
- Life emerges toward a future (drawn toward it?)
- Life evolves by creative power
- Each of us is a little fractal of the universe (consciousness)
- As life complexifies, consciousness increases (toward its future)

Consciousness is a Key Reality

- Teilhard: “There can be no single and coherent explanation of the totality of the cosmos if human consciousness is considered an erratic object in a disjointed world”.
- Teilhard: “Matter is the matrix of consciousness.”
- 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.”





What is Consciousness

- Consciousness is a fundamental quality of the cosmos, as fundamental as space, time and matter, or even more so, undergirding these properties.
- Consciousness, in a sense, precedes or grounds material forms; everything has consciousness; the mental occurs down to the lowest level of the physical world.
- Consciousness is the principal of life that is generative of “more being” (rather than perfect being which is often the aim of metaphysics)
- Evolution is the rise of consciousness



Teilhard's "Metaphysics of Union"

- The universe is still "becoming" (not perfected).
- The world comes into being and becomes new by a process of unification.
- True union differentiates. Unity means a differentiating, liberating, and personalizing communion.
- **The world rests on the future as its sole support.**
- Over time, we discover something new, more complex, and (eventually) more conscious is always taking shape "up ahead."



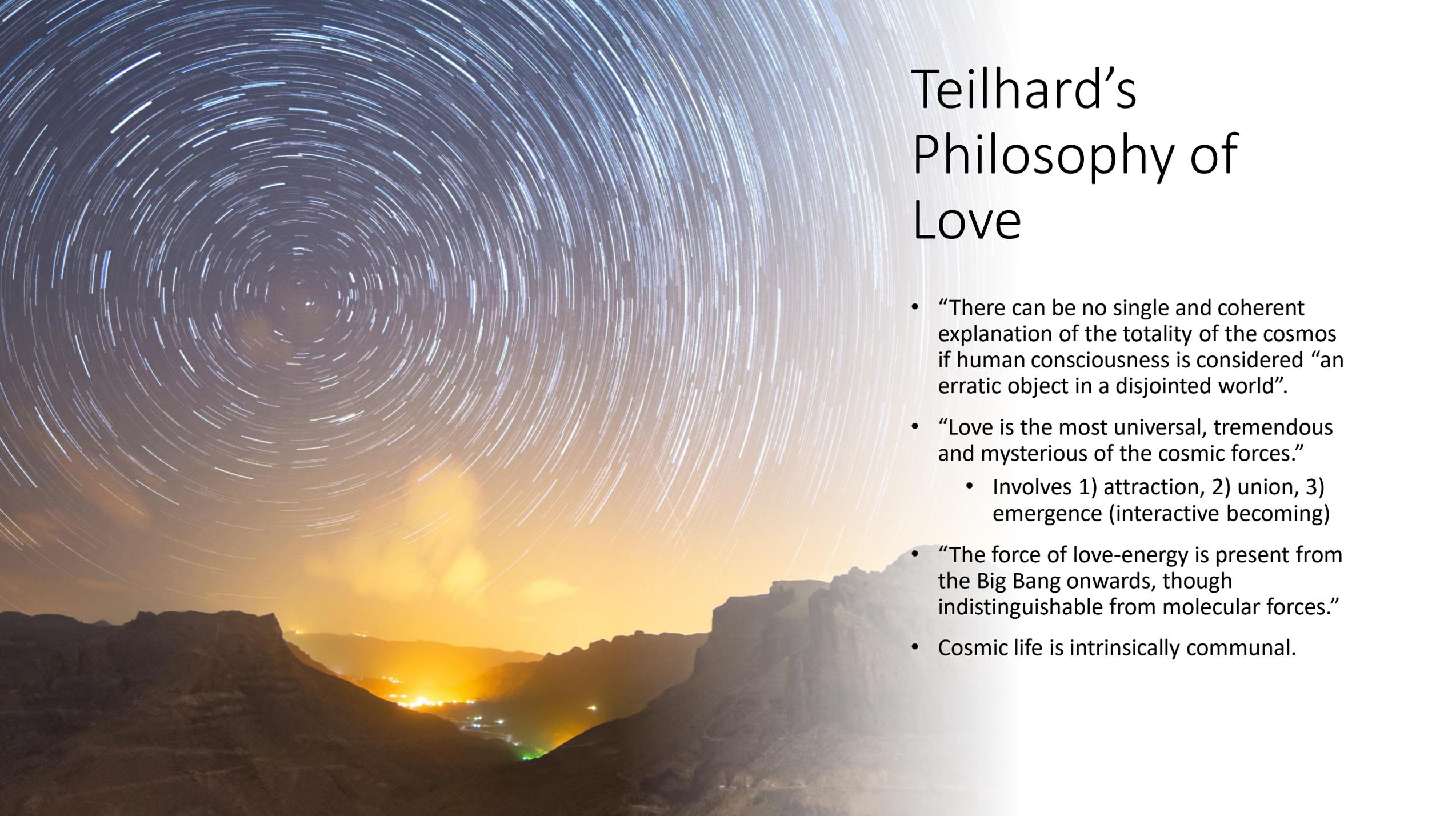
Teilhard's Evolutionary Theology

- Evolution is the enfolding process of God and matter through the energies of love
- Teilhard saw creative union as the integral core of creation which includes the mysteries of incarnation and redemption.
- Creative union is the union of God and creation in evolution in a unifying synthesis.
- Process theism: **God is complexity** (evolutionary unfolding) in which God is unified in openness to creation.
- God-world relationship = relational holism (complementary)

A black and white photograph of a hand holding a glowing orb of light. The hand is positioned on the left side of the frame, with the fingers slightly curled around the orb. The orb is bright and emits a soft glow, with some light rays visible. The background is dark and textured. A thick white curved line separates the image from the text on the right.

Christogenesis and Love

- Christogenesis: the conscious rising of Christ at the heart of materiality—the power of the *world to become personal* (interrelated convergence) through the power of love (with Christ as unifying center and goal)
- “To love is to discover and complete one’s self in someone other than oneself, an act impossible of general realization on Earth so long as each can see in the neighbor no more than a closed fragment following its own course through the world. It is precisely this state of isolation that will end if we begin to discover in each other not merely the elements of one and the same thing, but of a single [energy] in search of itself.” (The Future of Man, p. 95)



Teilhard's Philosophy of Love

- “There can be no single and coherent explanation of the totality of the cosmos if human consciousness is considered “an erratic object in a disjointed world”.
- “Love is the most universal, tremendous and mysterious of the cosmic forces.”
 - Involves 1) attraction, 2) union, 3) emergence (interactive becoming)
- “The force of love-energy is present from the Big Bang onwards, though indistinguishable from molecular forces.”
- Cosmic life is intrinsically communal.

Teilhard's Philosophy of Love

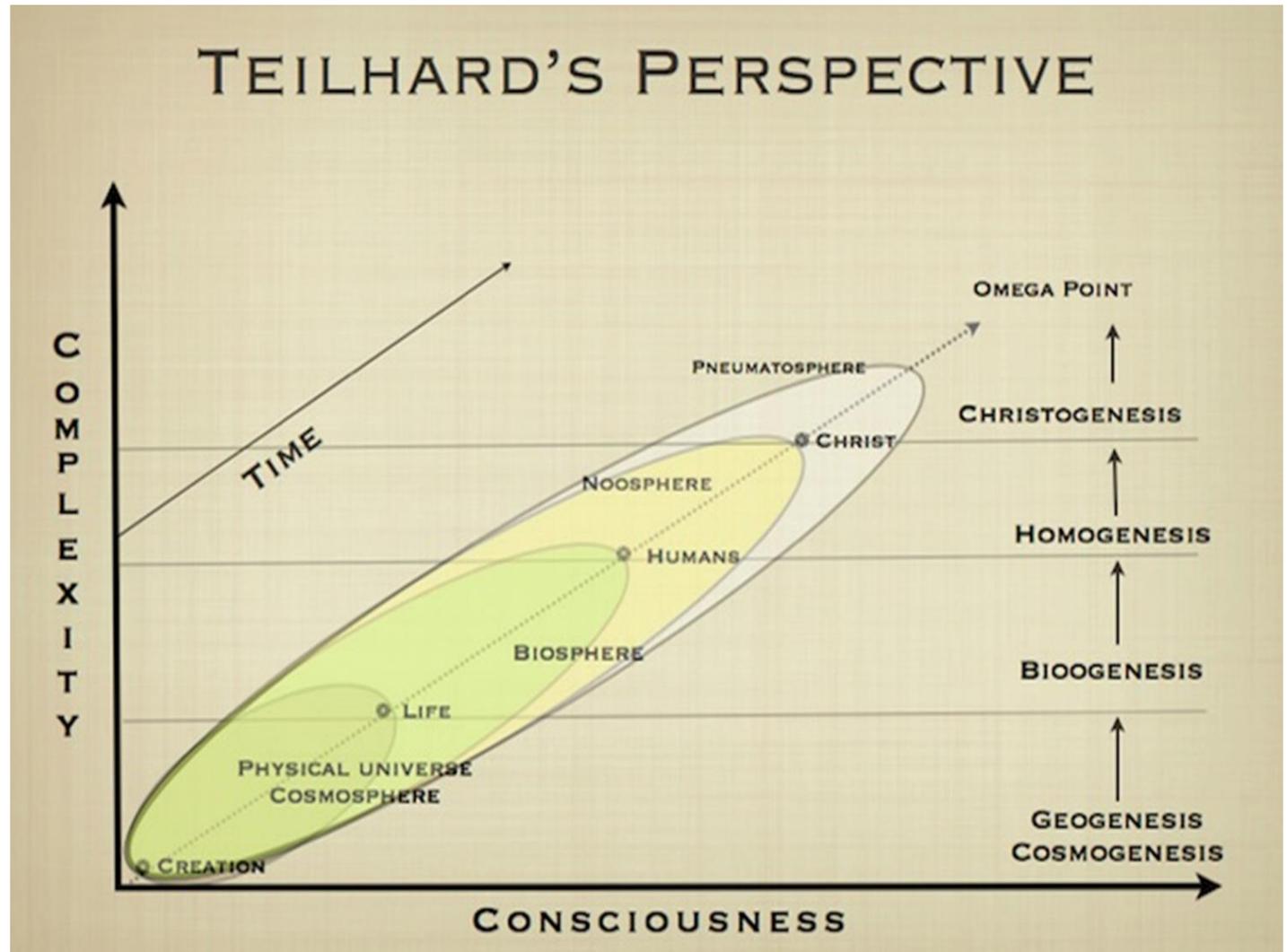
"To be" is "to be with."

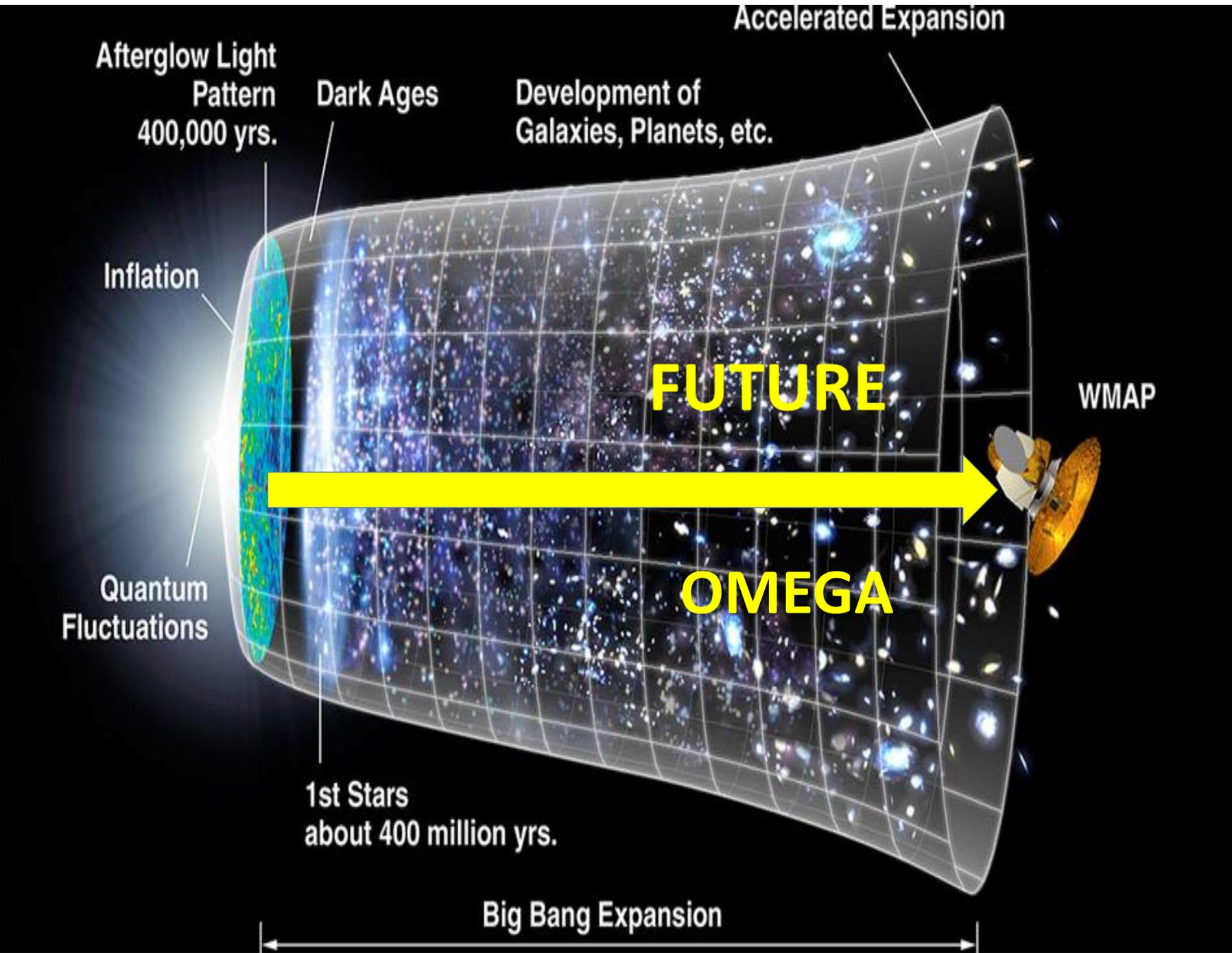
Reality is "being with another" or "interbeing."

I do not exist in order that I may possess; rather I exist in order that I may give of myself, for it is in giving that I attain myself.

Being must first be a "we" before it can become in "I."

Love as Core
Energy





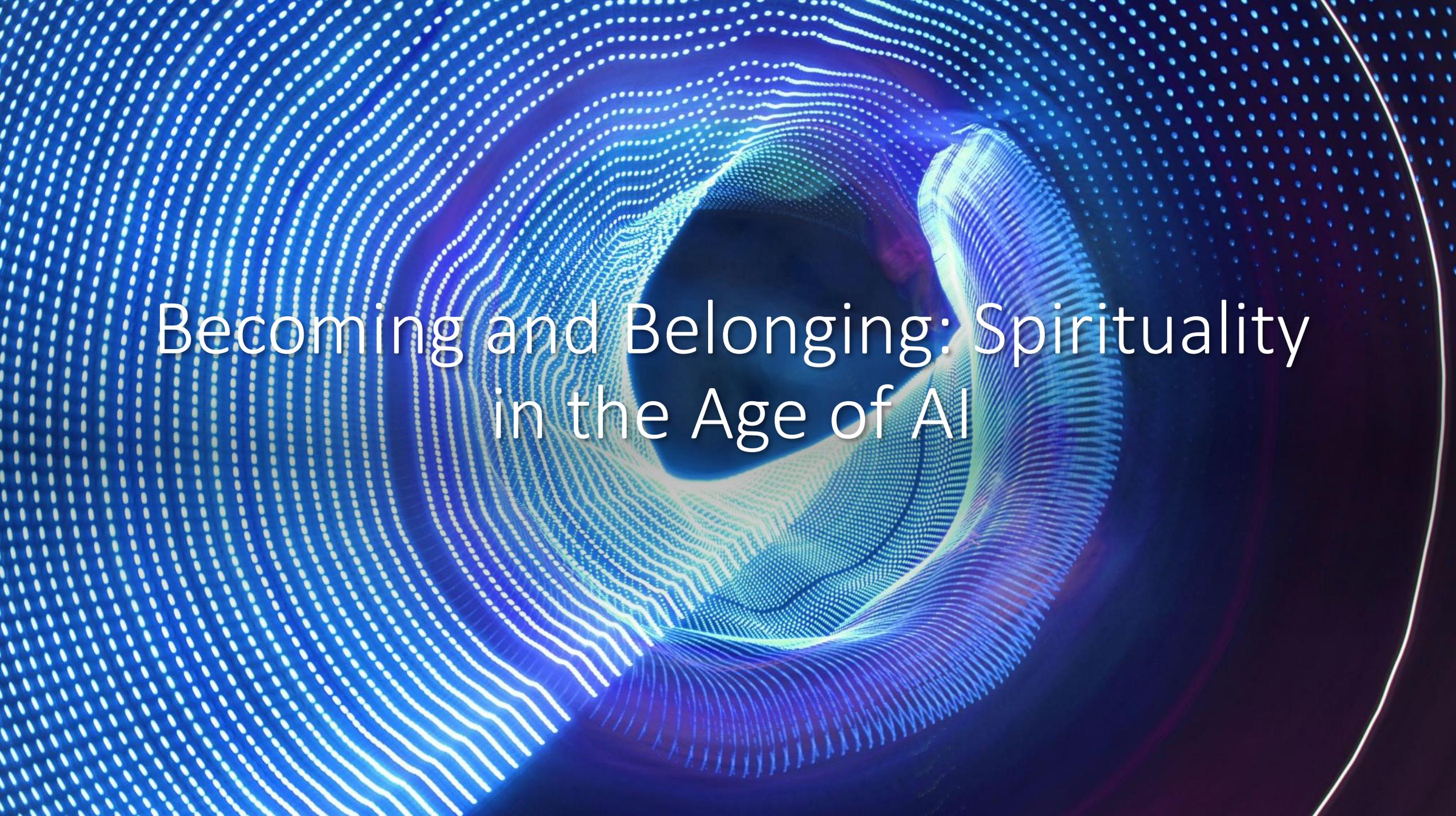
Pleroma & Process Theology

- Without creation, God would be lacking something—not of God's being, but of God's act of union (complementary)
- If creative union reflects God's nature, then God never creates an isolated or disconnected creation (transcendence?)
- Trinity—is relational, personal, self-communicative, and its essence is Love.
- Creation “completes” God by participating in the pleroma (“God is all in all”)
- We are God's “becoming” as we experience our “belonging” in God



Breakout Groups

- What strikes you about this development of religious thought—evolutionary theology, consciousness as participatory reality, futurity of love as unifying force of cosmos?
- Do you find this hopeful in the face of so many crises?



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