

Teilhard de Chardin's Theory of Spiritual Evolution¹

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The aim of this article is to present Teilhard's Law of Differentiating Unity and his central concepts of spirit, soul, energy, and complexity, and to show the metaphysical and logical schema on which Teilhard bases his philosophy. This is important not only for orientation to Teilhard's complex work, which includes 32 volumes written for various types of readers with terminology that is not completely unified, but also for its further development.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a Jesuit priest, paleontologist, and philosopher whose aim was to create a Christian theory of evolution, to bring Christian understanding of history in line with that of the scientific, evolutionary standpoint. From a philosophical perspective, he also wanted to create an integral science which would attempt to answer the question of how the human understands and responds to evolution since, according to Teilhard, humankind is “very far from being adult—very far from being fully created.”²

Qualitative Levels of Being

Although Teilhard's theory was strongly inspired by the scientific method, his approach is very different. The main distinction lies in the central hypothesis which underlies his theory. According to Teilhard, hypothesis is “the supreme spiritual act by which the dust of experiment takes form.”³ The hypothesis then determines the degree of importance of particular events and phenomena that our consciousness encounters. It influences how philosophers understand the main concepts of their systems and how scientists interpret their experimental data.

The underlying hypothesis of Teilhard's philosophy is based on the idea of “degrees of being.” This implies that it is possible to discern the intensity or depth of being and also to distinguish its unique qualities. Being is gradually deepened via evolution, or rather should logically be deepened, because at the human level, this process does not proceed automatically.

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² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Toward the Future*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harcourt, 1975), 102.

³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Vision of the Past*, trans. J.M. Cohen (London: Collins, 1966), 205.