

Teilhard, Evolution, and Ecology

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Introduction

When Pierre Teilhard de Chardin died in 1955, the threat of an ecological crisis was not yet recognized as such by the human community. People were more concerned about a possible nuclear war. So it is not all that surprising that Teilhard's work contains hardly any explicit reference to the interference of human economic activity with ecological integrity and the consequent depletion and pollution of natural resources. However, one passage in *The Phenomenon of Man (Le Phénomène Humain)* clearly indicates his intuition that a crisis might be imminent:

As things are now going, it will not be long before we run full tilt into one another. Something will explode if we persist in trying to squeeze into our tumble-down huts the material and spiritual forces that are henceforward on the scale of the world.¹

Today, sixty years since his death, the world population has more than doubled to over seven billion people and the depletion and pollution of natural resources have more than quadrupled. Is this the explosion that Teilhard was alluding to? This paper emphasizes the implicit arguments in Teilhard's writings about evolution that are related to the issue of ecology.

Towards Ecological Consciousness

In the last few decades, awareness among government officials, the business community, and the general public regarding the environmental problems threatening Earth has been on the rise. This new consciousness challenges outmoded Newtonian, linear, and mechanistic models, reintroduces a call to humanity to respect the integrity of Earth's ecosystems and poses the existential question of survival. We have seen manifestations of public awareness, indicating that world leaders are beginning to address the issue in a new way. The existential question is entering palaces, cabinet rooms, boardrooms, and, last but not least, the ordinary living room. The birth of this consciousness can be seen as the beginning of an evolutionary step for humankind. Ecological consciousness may contribute to the development of an expanded worldview. It may lead to the reintroduction of spiritual and philosophical factors into political and entrepreneurial decision-making and it should then also affect human individuals and their lifestyles. These developments, if they are realized, will offer new potential for human growth and enrichment.²

¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1959), 239.

² See Jean-Louis Bobin, "Petit dialogue écologique," *Teilhard Aujourd'hui* 54 (June 2015); Jacques Masurel, "Le réchauffement climatique: une opportunité pour l'évolution," *Teilhard Aujourd'hui* 23 (September 2007); Witold Skwara, "Teilhard: précurseur d'une écologie intégrale?" *Teilhard Aujourd'hui* 31 (September 2009).