

God After Darwin

4. Evolution and a Metaphysics of the Future

August 13, 2006
9 to 9:50 am in the Parlor
All are welcome!

St. John in the Wilderness

Almighty and everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order, its atoms, worlds, and galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of your creation, we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Book of Common Prayer, p. 827

J o h n F. H a u g h t



God After Darwin

A Theology of Evolution

God After Darwin. A Theology of Evolution.

John F. Haught,
Westview

Press, 2000.

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Background image on the
PowerPoint slides is
taken from the cover art
of *God After Darwin*

John F. Haught
**Responses to
101 Questions
on God and
Evolution**



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Evolution.**

John F. Haught,
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John F. Haught is the Landegger Distinguished Professor of Theology at Georgetown University, and Director of the Georgetown Center for the Study of Science and Religion.

Photos captured from the on-line interview with Dr. Haught at: <http://MeaningOfLife.tv>

The background is a collage of three distinct images. At the top, a DNA double helix is rendered in a light blue and green color scheme. In the bottom left corner, a close-up of a human hand is visible, with fingers slightly spread. On the right side, there is a bouquet of flowers, including purple and pink blooms, tied with a white ribbon. The overall background color is a dark, muted blue.

Review

Review

What Evolution Tells Us

✚ The modern theory of evolution (= the “**neo-Darwinian Synthesis**”) says that the great diversity of life can be *naturally* explained by the combination of **chance, law, and deep time**:

- 1. **Chance**: accidental, chance events or contingencies:
 - a genetic mutation that lead to new characteristics in an organism
 - a natural disaster that changes the environment that an organism must adapt to
- 2. **Law**: the deterministic laws of **natural selection** (nature “selects” as survivors organism who best adapt to the environment; all others perish), chemistry, and physics
- 3. **Deep Time**: enormous depths of time

Review

What Evolution Tells Us

✚ Evolution tells us human beings are the result of billions of years of a meandering, haphazard process of “**natural selection**,” a journey marked by untold pain and suffering, loss, waste, and in the end, extinction for most species.

- More than 99% of all species born in the crucible of evolution have died out under the relentless jackboot of natural selection.

Review

Why Might God Create In Such a Way?

- ✠ In our second session, we asked why might God choose to create in such a way?
- ✠ Why might God create a world characterized by the meandering, wasteful, painful path of evolution?

Review

Why Might God Create In Such a Way?

✝ We suggested that the answer lies in a fundamental, eternal characteristic of God: God is **self-emptying (=kenosis)** **suffering love**.

Review

God's Self-Emptying Love

- ✠ Love needs an “Other” that is not oneself to love. Without an “Other” who is *independent* of oneself, love cannot be actualized.
- ✠ God's **self-emptying, self-giving love** is manifest in:
 - allowing creation to come into being **independent** of God's self – to be “Other” than God – and
 - endowing that creation with the ability to **evolve** = to be “**self-creative and self-ordering** (= **autopoiesis**).
- ✠ Such a universe is really the only kind of universe that could be the product of love – for love desires the **independence** of the “Other.”

Review

What Evolution Tells Us

- ✚ Evolution also tells us that all life comes from a common ancestor, which itself arose from lifeless matter.
- ✚ Rather than having **our origin** from an ineffable sacred source of all being and meaning, it seems that **our origin**, deep in the past, is from the lowliest “level of being,” from mere mineral and liquid.

Review

The Collapse of Great Chain of Being

- ✚ Last week we asked: How then can we believe we are special, made in the “image and likeness of God”?
- ✚ Evolution seems to have “collapsed” – or even “reversed” – the “Great Chain of Being”
 - God
 - Angels
 - Human Beings, made in the “image and likeness” of God
 - Animals
 - Plants
 - At the lowest “level” of being: inanimate things like minerals and liquids

Review

God as the Source of “Information”

- ✚ We suggested that we are still special, made in God’s image and likeness, and the “how” might lie in imagining God as the ultimate source of the novel “informational patterns” available to evolution.
- Why, after all, is there a hierarchy of order, structure, arrangement, pattern, coherence, complexity – instead of simply an amorphous chaos? Why are there “things” instead of “no-things”?
 - **“Information”** = the pattern or the “recipe” for ordering of entities (atoms, molecules, cells, genes...) into a more complex form or arrangement.
 - **“Information”** is clearly a major part of nature – take away “Information,” and you dissolve ourselves, and everything else in the world, into an amorphous scattering of particles, into “no-thing”

Review

God as the Source of “Information”

‡ As God allows the universe, “Other” than God, to “be itself” and evolve, to be self-creative, God is the source, the origin of the possible “informational patterns” that the universe actualizes as it evolves and produces increasingly more complex forms and structures – including life and consciousness and ourselves.

Today

✝ Today we want to more fully explore the relationship between God and creation, between:

- **This universe**, allowed by God out of self-emptying love to “be itself,” to be “Other” than God, to be self-creative and self-ordering; and
- **The “God of evolution,”** who showers the universe with love, and is its source of possibility and “information” as it evolves

Today

✚ Questions we will try to address:

- Is evolution a process going anywhere? Is there a “direction” to evolution? And if there is a direction, *why* is there a direction?
- How might we understand why the universe “happens” to be blessed with just the right amount of:
 - **Chance** and contingency
 - **Law**, necessity, and regularity
 - Deep **time**to allow evolution take place?
- Why is God “hidden” to all the probing tools of science?



Teilhard de Chardin

Teilhard de Chardin

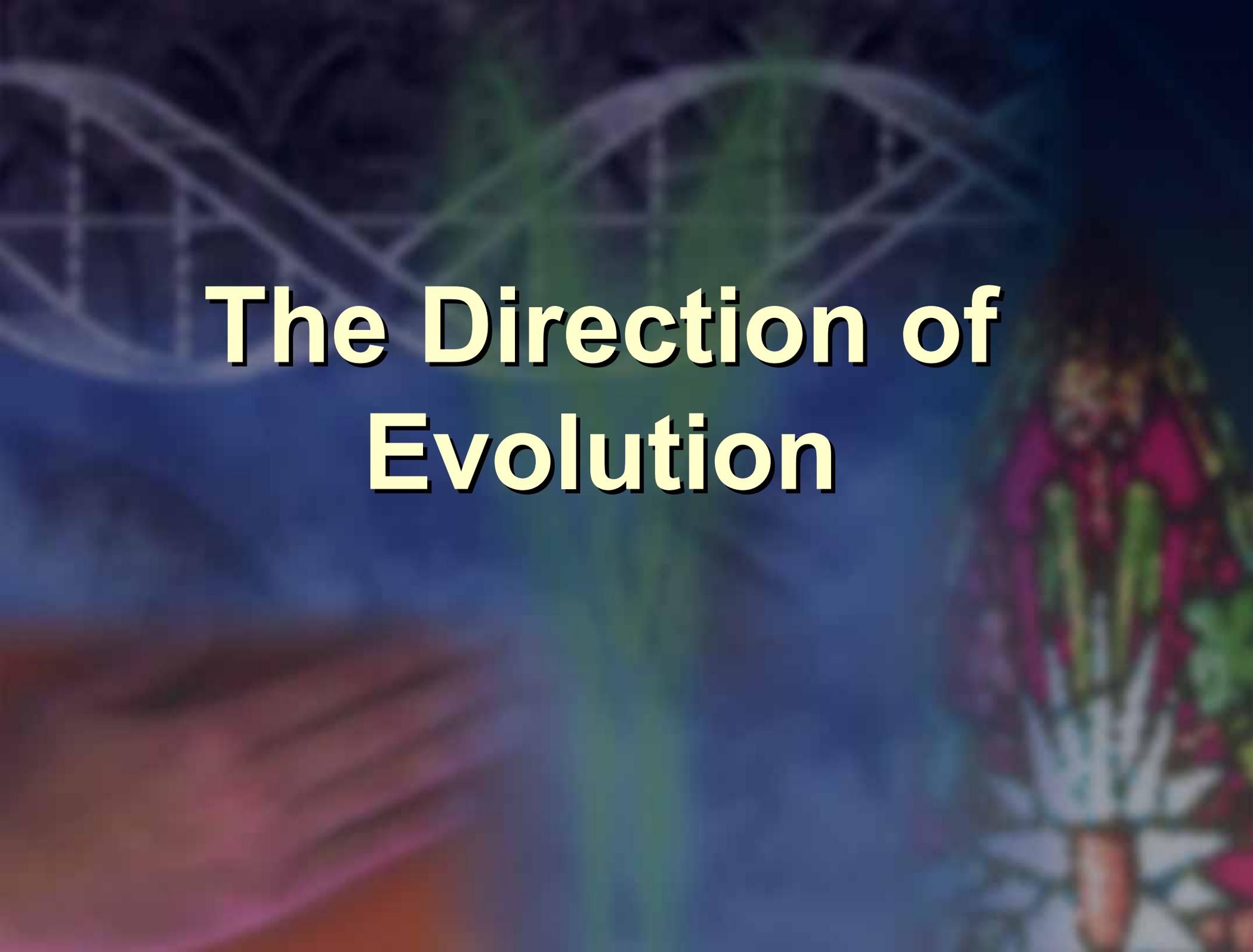
- ✚ The religious thinker who, more than any one else, has more deeply explored how evolution should impact our views of God and creation is **Teilhard de Chardin** (b. 1881, d. 1955)
- ✚ Many of the concepts we will discuss today derive from de Chardin.
- ✚ De Chardin was a French Jesuit priest, ordained in 1911.
- ✚ He was a scientist who worked in geology and paleontology.

Teilhard de Chardin

- ✚ During World War I, he worked as a stretcher-bearer and won the Legion of Honor for his courage in battle.
- ✚ His more important work is *Le Phenonmene humain* (1955); translated *The Human Phenomenon*.
 - Written in the 1920's and 1930's, his Jesuit superiors forbade its publication, as well as his other writings on evolution and faith, until after his death.
- ✚ After the war, he was sent to China to work on geological expeditions.

Teilhard de Chardin

- ✠ 1946: returned to France, and his Jesuit superiors, again disturbed by the novelty of his ideas, denied him a teaching position that he sought at the College de Frances.
- ✠ He moved then to the United States, continuing his work in paleontology and archaeology.
- ✠ He died in New York City on Easter Sunday, 1955, largely unknown.

The background is a composite image. At the top, a DNA double helix is visible in shades of blue and green. Below it, a globe of the Earth is shown in a similar color palette. On the right side, there is a vibrant, colorful plant with purple, pink, and green hues. The overall background is a mix of these elements, creating a scientific and naturalistic theme.

The Direction of Evolution

The Direction of Evolution

† To de Chardin, and to many others, there is a clear “direction” in evolution.

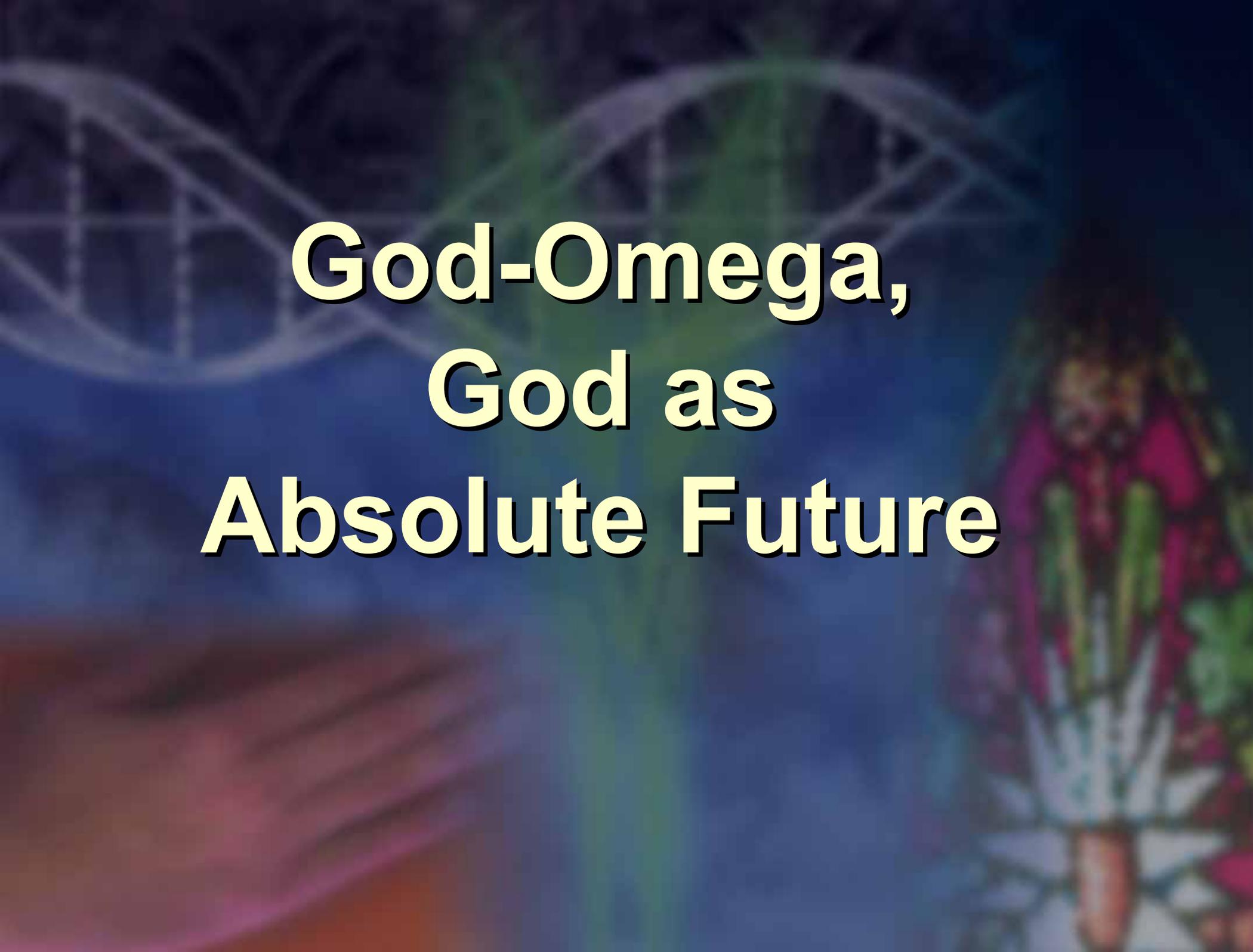
† The universe has clearly moved in a direction of increasing organized complexity

- Preatomic → atomic → molecular
unicellular → multicellular → vertebrates →
primate phases → human beings and mind

The Direction of Evolution

† De Chardin identified the movement in evolution of:

- 1. Sphere of Matter (**Geosphere**) →
- 2. Sphere of Life (**Biosphere**) →
- 3. Sphere of “Mind” (**Noosphere**)

The background is a complex, multi-colored abstract composition. It features a grid-like pattern of thin lines in shades of blue and green, overlaid on a darker, textured background. On the right side, there is a vertical, stylized figure or structure in shades of purple, pink, and green, resembling a plant or a person in a robe. The overall color palette is dominated by blues, purples, and greens, with some warmer tones at the bottom.

**God-Omega,
God as
Absolute Future**

God-Omega

Metaphysics

- ✚ **Metaphysics** = the general vision of reality one holds to be true.
- ✚ In our “personal metaphysics,” where do we imagine God to be in relation to the world?
- ✚ We know that God is not trapped in space and time.
 - St. Augustine: the world was made *with time*, and not *in time*.

God-Omega

Metaphysics of the Eternally Present

- ✚ The predominant and traditional view in religious thought might be called a “**metaphysics of *esse* (= being)**”, or “**metaphysics of the eternally present**”:
- God resides in a timeless present, “up above” us
 - The perfection of “being” has been already realized, existing not here on Earth, but in the fixed divine realm, “above” creation, untouched by time.

God-Omega

Metaphysics of the Eternally Present

- † One consequence of this traditional “metaphysics of the eternally present” is that since the perfection of being already exists “up above us,” everything that happens in evolution is just more “meaningless straying from a timeless perfection”
 - There can be no meaningful “new creation,” since the *perfection* of being *already exists* “above us.”

God-Omega

Metaphysics of the Past

- ✚ Another “metaphysics” we can identify might be called a “**metaphysics of the past**”
- The “metaphysics” of scientific materialists (like Daniel Dennett and Stanley Dawkins) who say that everything that happens in evolution has already been determined **in the past** from the properties and initial conditions of the quark soup of the Big Bang.

God-Omega

Metaphysics of the Future

- ✠ de Chardin felt that the traditional view of God and creation, the “metaphysics of the eternally present,” was *inadequate* for the reality of evolution.
- Evolution requires a divine source located **not** in the past, or “up above” in a timeless present, but “**up ahead,**” in the future.
 - We should think of God as residing “in the future.”
 - God is “the transcendent future horizon that draws an entire universe, and not just human history, toward an unfathomable fulfillment yet to be realized.” (Haught)

God-Omega

Metaphysics of the Future

- ✚ de Chardin said evolution requires that God become for us “less Alpha than **Omega**.”
- ✚ God, residing “up ahead,” in the future, is the ultimate force of attraction (= **God-Omega**) for the universe, drawing the universe towards intensification of complexity and new creation.
- ✚ God, residing in the future (“**God-Omega**”), lures the universe to God’s self, and this is the ultimate reason there is evolution and a direction to evolution.

God-Omega

Metaphysics of the Future

- ✠ de Chardin's **metaphysics of the future**, of God residing "up ahead," in the future, of God as **Omega**, is a concept echoed by many modern theologians:
- The biblical view of God is that of a God of **promise** and **hope**. Or as German theologian Jurgen Motmann puts it, the primary biblical view of God is "**future**"
 - Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner, (considered by many the greatest Roman Catholic theologian of the 20th century) wrote of God as "**Absolute Future.**"
 - Lutheran theologians Wolfhard Pannenberg and Ted Peters write of God as the "**Power of the Future**"

God-Omega

Metaphysics of the Future

- ✚ Haught admits this idea of God as residing “up ahead,” in the future, is confusing, uncomfortable, “hard to swallow.”
 - The future, after all, is not yet “real”
 - The past and present had or have “being.” But the future does not yet “exist.” So how can God “exist” there?
 - The future is “that which is to come,” “the sphere of the not-yet,” “not yet being”
- ✚ The problem, Haught suggests, is in part our passionate allegiance to the “explanatory primacy of the causal past” and our desire to box God into a similar causal chain – which we must abandon.

God-Omega

Metaphysics of the Future

- ✚ God is not trapped in space-time, but comes to us
 - from the “future,”
 - from “the sphere of the not-yet,” of “not-yet-being,”
 - from the “realm of possibility and potentiality,”
 - from “that which might come / is to come”
- ✚ and God sustains the world continually at:
 - the cusp of where the future meets the present,
 - the threshold between “not-yet” and “now”
- ✚ where God offers to Creation possibility, novel informational patterns and orderings, as it evolves, self-creates and self-orders itself, something “Other” than God;
- ✚ and God lures, persuades, but does not force Creation towards God’s vision of Creation’s fulfillment and completion.

God-Omega

The Hidden God

‡ Science cannot detect God because God comes to us quietly *not* from the causal past or present where science turns its gimlet eye, but *from the future*.

- It is also a reflection of God's "divine humility, letting the universe "be itself," be "Other" than God, letting it be self-creative and self-ordering without God being domineering or "in your face."

God-Omega

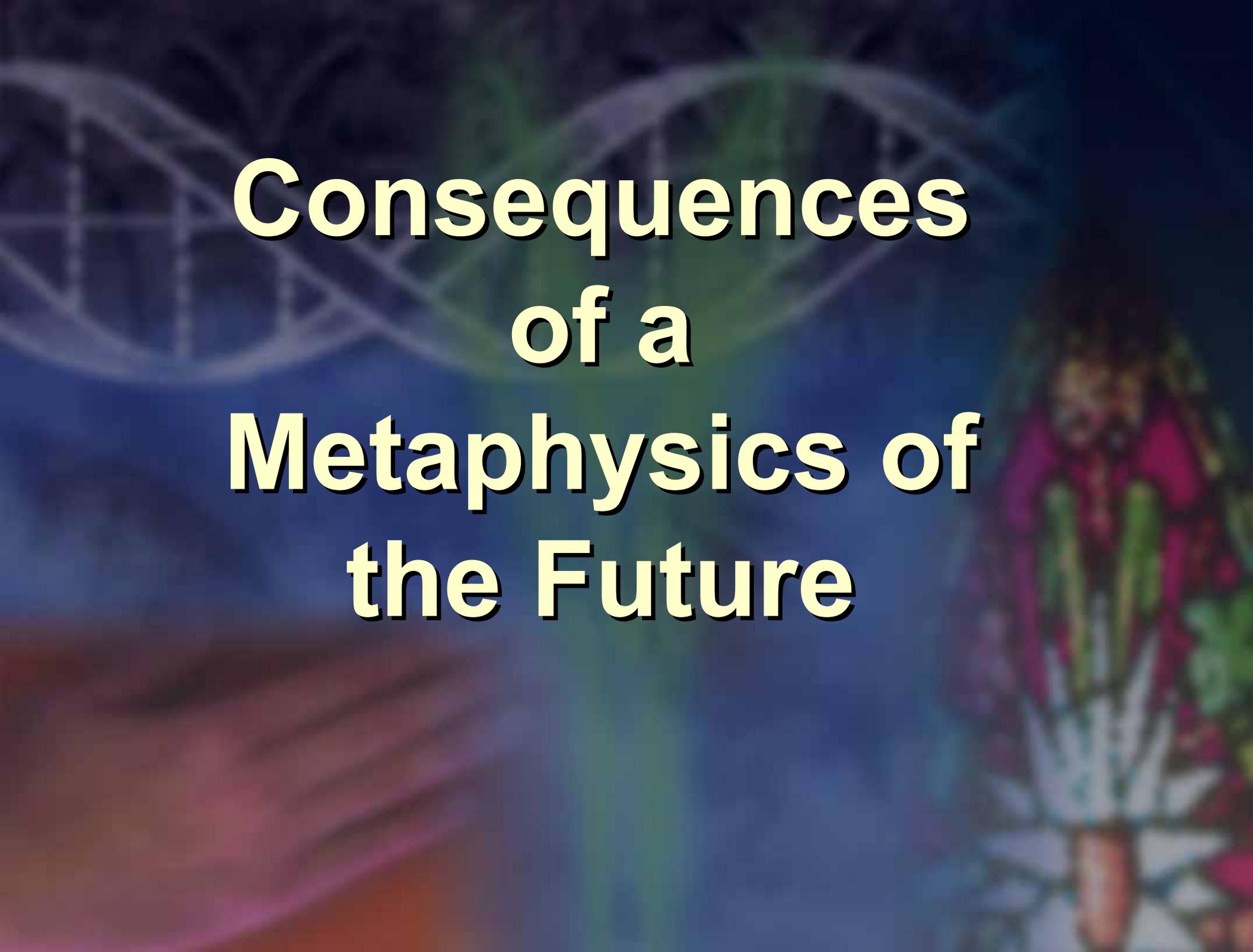
The Biblical God of Hope and Promise

- ✠ This location of God in the future, a “metaphysics of the future,” is a view that resonates with the spirituality and intuition of how the biblical God of hope and promise relates to the world.
- ✠ the “very heart of authentic faith consists of the **total orientation of consciousness toward the coming of God, the ultimately real**” (Haught)

God-Omega

The Biblical God of Hope and Promise

✝ “...the most distinctive and precious contribution of biblical religion to human life and consciousness is its impression that **reality is shaped by promise**, a notion that naturally brings the horizon of futurity into view. By urging us to ‘wait upon the Lord,’ to live in trust and hope, the biblical vision inevitably **locates the fullness of being in an arena that we can locate only ‘up ahead’** and not ‘up above’ in a timeless heaven of total perfection, nor behind us in the fixed routines of past physical causation.” (Haught)



**Consequences
of a
Metaphysics of
the Future**

Consequences

New Creation

- ✠ One consequence of abandoning the traditional “metaphysics of the eternally present” and its view that the perfection of being already has been realized, is that the “new creation” occurring in evolution is truly “new,” enormously and profoundly meaningful for both heaven and earth!
- ✠ The perfection of being, the completion of God’s vision for “being” and creation *has not yet happened*, is still “in process,” – and we are part of the process.

Consequences

Chance, Law, Deep Time

‡ A “metaphysics of the future” also helps account for the three qualities:

- **Chance**
- **Law**
- **Time**

that are the “raw ingredients” of biological evolution

Consequences

Chance

† Chance or Contingency

- “Chance” or “contingency:” Events that *appear biologically* as random, accidental, or chance occurrences (such as genetic mutations)
- Theologically, such events are signals of nature’s fundamental openness to **new creation**.
 - If there were no such events, then nature’s regularity and laws would freeze the cosmos into an eternal sameness.

Consequences

Chance

† Chance or Contingency

- These events may not “in the fullness of reality,” be truly “accidental:”
 - In a “metaphysics of the future,” creation is still ongoing, and therefore “being” or “reality” is still “under construction.”
 - In such an unfinished world, some things that may now appear unintelligible (and hence termed “accidental,” or “random”), will ultimately, as creation nears completion, become intelligible, and no longer appear “accidental” or as products of “chance.”

Consequences

Law

† Lawfulness

- Some degree of regularity or “lawfulness” – such as evolution’s “law of natural selection” or the law of physics – is *necessary* for the emergence of novelty, for “new creation” and “new being.”
 - If there was no regularity, no order at all, then there would be nothing “definite” or “durable” enough to be transformed or changed!

Consequences

Law

† Lawfulness

- “A world open to the future without also possessing the reliability of lawful ‘necessity’ would be as unimaginable as one devoid of contingency. Nature's lawfulness and predictability are needed to keep natural processes continuous enough to avoid decaying into utter caprice.” (Haught)

Consequences

Time

† Deep Time

- Evolution's need for irreversible time is also given, Haught feels, its most satisfying explanation by a "metaphysics of the future."
- The "arrival of the future" is what allows each present moment to sink into a fixed past, and allow new moments to take its place.
- God, meeting creation from the future, at the cusp of "now" and "not-yet," gives an open universe possibilities to actualize. The past is the "residue" of universe's "actualizations" from that realm of future possibility and potentiality wherein resides God.