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Original research paper**PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN AND THE PHENOMENON OF
MAN****Abstract:**

Aware that it is very difficult in one text to review and critically to analyse the entire thought of such a philosopher, Catholic theologian, paleontologist, cultural anthropologist and humanist as Chardin, the author tries to, at least to mention and critically commented on only a few important aspects, parts and dimensions of his polydimensional and transdiscursive thought. Chardin's discourse is complex and multi-layered. It exceeds the boundaries of special philosophical sciences and disciplines and in its comprehensive holistic systematicity maximally relativizes and makes transparent the border between spiritual/humanistic and natural/biological sciences. At the end of the short review of Chardin, the author presents several critical reviews of his works, which, until today, despite the increased interest in them, unfortunately still remain relatively unknown to the wider philosophical and intellectual public. The text is supported by quoted and referenced philosophical and other professional literature in foreign languages and Macedonian.

Keywords: *evolution, hominization, wholeness, cosmos, psychism, consciousness, spirit, Catholicism, progressivism*

*The need to discover something absolute
in everything has been the basis of my inner life
since childhood. (Underlined by – D.S.)
(Pierre Teilhard de Chardin)*

It is not difficult to discover in these words of Chardin the great influence of G.W.F. Hegel and his philosophy of the absolute spirit, but therefore it is very difficult in one paper to review and critically analyse the entire thought of such a philosopher, theologian, paleontologist and cultural anthropologist and humanist as Chardin. So, we will be satisfied if we manage to mention only a few important aspects, parts and dimensions of his multidimensional and trans discursive thought, which exceeds the boundaries of special philosophical sciences and disciplines, and which in its all-encompassing holistic systematicity maximally relativizes and makes transparent the boundary between the spiritual/humanistic and the natural sciences. At the end of our short paper on Chardin, we will also present several critical reviews of his works, which, until today, unfortunately, remain relatively unknown.

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Even though *The Phenomenon of Man* (*Le Phénomène humain*) is his most famous work, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881 – 1955) is above all one of the most prominent paleontologists of the 20th century. It is known that he, together with the Chinese Pei Wan Chung, reconstructed the synanthropus, i.e., the remains of one of the oldest forms of primitive man, which were found near Beijing. Although specialist oriented, Chardin was well aware of the benefits of modern science, such as Einstein's theory of relativity, Heisenberg's and Bohr's theory of causality, etc. His characteristic is the breadth of scientific and philosophical research interest and the synthetic worldview on the cosmos, the living world and man, with a constant living tendency towards knowing the totality/wholeness of events and processes, and the principles according to which they take place. But Chardin does not consider these processes only quantitatively, but also as historical growth and development of always new and qualitatively different, higher, "better" and more perfect feet of the bio-socio-cultural evolution of the world and man, that is, as continuous and constant general laws of the directions of development, and which are as such – absolute. (Similar to Hegel!)

Of course, that as a believer and member of the Jesuit order Chardin already had a ready and fixed answer to the philosophical questions and dilemmas about the origin of the world, the origin of man and the general processes of the development of the cosmos in the teaching of the church and its dogmas. But he saw early that those ecclesiastical and dogmatic answers were not in accordance with the spirit of modern science and its discoveries, and that the conservative parts of the church were coming into conflict with the general theoretical-philosophical conclusions, beginning with Darwin, through Marx, all the way to Einstein. (Darwin, 2018) So, as early as 1921, he would state that "Catholics are deconcentrated when it is shown to them that the laws of providence are broken down into various forms of determinism, but also of coincidences; or - that beneath our most developed spiritual powers are hidden

very complex material structures; or - when it will be shown to them that the Christian religion also has its roots in the natural religious development of human consciousness; or - that the genesis of the human body presupposes a huge sequence of previous organic development". (Chardin, 1965:61; Pavićević, 1979:253-254)

To put it figuratively: Chardin is at the same time a devoted believer in God, but also mentally and emotionally tightly bound to the reality of the earth. Researching in the field of natural sciences, especially in paleontology, Charden comes to the realization of the correctness of the evolutionist picture of the world, which the church refused to accept for a long time. He comes to the conviction that man himself is a product of the overall natural evolution, and that he had to appear at different times at different points on the globe. "With such polygenism, he comes into conflict with the monogenism advocated by the church, i.e., with the teaching of the Bible about the origin of the human race from one pair (Adam and Eve), and which the church insists on because of the teaching about the origin and nature of sin." (Pavićević, 1979:254)

So, the church and the heads of the Jesuit order were not ready to accept this and some other teachings of Chardin, and even took measures to limit the spread of Chardin's thought. Already in 1926 Chardin was deprived of his professorship at the Catholic Institute in Paris; in 1927 he was not given permission to print his work *The Divine Milieu* (*Le milieu divin*); in 1938, he was forbidden to publish the work *Human Energy* (*L'énergie humaine*); in 1944, the ecclesiastical censorship rejected his main work, *The Phenomenon of Man* (*Le Phénomène humain*), which would not be published until after his death, in 1958; he was constantly pressured and asked to stop doing philosophy, and in 1948 he was forbidden to accept the professorship at the *College de France*; in 1955, shortly before he died, he was not allowed to participate in the International Congress of Paleontologists. "Until his death, apart from some technical texts, his work was known only in roneotyped fragments that circulated under hand." (Garaudy, 1960:200) In fact, what some authorities find disturbing is that Chardin succeeded in "constructing a synthetic and global view" of the cosmos and man, which is a great success for each individual human mind, and which is the result of his "enormous knowledge of special spheres of reality, and the great sense of synthesis and perception of the essential backbones of real processes". (Pavićević, 1979:255)

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In the next part of our paper, we will try to present more analytically and in more detail the way in which Chardin bases his main idea about man - namely the idea of hominization of the world - as an immanent goal of the cosmos. Namely, he starts from very specific views of the developmental stages of physical and organic nature, looking for in them elements directed towards the production of man - hominization. (Chardin, 1979: 16-17)

What has been the longest and most resistant to a natural-evolutionist idea of the genesis of man based on previous, subhuman, and prehuman stages of development of the living world, is the phenomenon of spirituality, or the phenomenon of human consciousness. The theological, dogmatic philosophy has always attributed to the spirit a supernatural and preternatural, divine origin, a kind of predestination (*praedestinatio*), or in the modern language of Immanuel Kant, transcendental. This theological science was developed by St. Aurelius Augustine, and that as God's will and decision. According to it, some people are predestined for eternal salvation, and others are condemned to eternal damnation for which they themselves are guilty. On the other hand, materialists have always considered matter to be primary. What Chardin is trying to do is not to raise the question of some kind of "primacy", but to understand the material and the spiritual as two sides of one and the same reality, although sometimes he also speaks of the "primacy of the spirit". This, in turn, is a remnant of the idealistic philosophical reflection (according to some religious consciousness), which the spirit from outside brings/internalizes into the matter, i.e., in the human body.

If we start from the ancient ontological dualism (Zarathustra, Plato, Aristotle) and arrive at the well-known modern Cartesian (Descartes) dualism, then the question remains unsolved: how can one influence the other? According to Chardin, this is an apparent problem, because it arises only when the idea of the whole is neglected; only when the whole is to be derived from one of its "parts", one side, one form of fulfilment, manifestation and emergence. The whole is still one and only reality, according to Chardin, and in it the material and the spiritual are unseparated and inseparable. Every form of matter necessarily arises in some form of internal organization, and therefore some spirituality; everything that exists has an "inside" and an "outside". We can call the first side spirituality and the other carnality. From this relationship of the physical as external and the psychic as internal, it becomes clear what the content of the evolution, the development of the world can consist of. Evolution is, and can be, only the emergence and realization of ever higher levels of vitality and awareness (psychism), with a simultaneous increasing complexity of the external, physical. (Chardin, 1979: 242; Pavićević, 1979:258; Muhic, 1994; Davcev, 2010)

However, the fact that evolution exists requires us to accept some other theoretical principles and assumptions. The first is that for a conceptual understanding of the world, the geometric-quantitative concepts of the infinitely large and the infinitely small are not enough, but that we should also accept the qualitative concept of infinite as an infinitely complex connecting. The second is that time is, as a "space of formation", an essential dimension of the world, and given that time is infinite, we have the cosmos, which is in such gigantic perpetual formation, which is simultaneously so wonderful (marvelousness) that we cannot even imagine it. On the other hand, when it comes to the notion of time, one must not forget that evolution is irreversible, unrepeatable. The

third assumption concerns the different types of determinism and spontaneity in events. The strict Laplacian determinism is no longer considered adequate even in the field of physical phenomena, let alone in the organic world, in which spontaneity plays an increasingly important role in the emergence of the new. The fourth assumption refers to the law of entropy, which tends to establish a state of equilibrium in the world and thereby stop movement and development, and which is opposed by the law of differentiation, complication and complexity. (Chardin, 1996: 23-26)

We see that the growth of complexity is the first and most important feature of the evolution process, which, of course, must not be understood as a quantitative increase, but, above all, as something qualitative, complex, and something is complex if it contains more elements that are mutually closely and multidimensional related. Chardin states that "the world is not spatially built on two infinities (as is often said); it is built on *three* (at least three) infinities. The infinite small and the infinite big, no doubt. But also infinitely complex..." (Chardin, 1996: 26) At the same time, evolvability as increasing complexity also means increasing centrality of assemblies of elements. When the entire world of living beings is perceived, it becomes clear that the degree of evolvability can be measured by the degree of centrality, i.e., by the degree of governance from one centre. This becomes clear when one sees that the degree of evolvability of all living beings (the biosphere) can be measured by the degree of centrality or governance from a single centre. The evolution of a living being is at a higher level if its nervous system is more developed as a central and governing system. On the other hand, centeredness is a measure of the development of the nervous system itself, which manifests itself as greater concentration in the head, i.e., in the brain. This centeredness, or "law of cephalization", can be passed from one type of living beings to another, layer by layer, in an upward line, reaching the human brain as the highest step in the development of the living world, or biogenesis. (Chardin, 1979: 37-51; Onimus, 1996: 125-157; Pavićević, 1979: 259-260) And biogenesis is the result of geogenesis, as geogenesis arose from cosmogenesis, where some planets managed to create conditions for life, and this life, i.e., these living beings, led to the emergence of higher and higher levels of spirituality (psychism). (Chardin, 1956: 26)

According to Chardin's basic idea, we must assume the existence of the psychism in a rudimentary form wherever there is a connection of the elements in organized assemblies, which, in turn, exist, according to Chardin, already in the core of the matter itself. "Spiritual cultivation (or conscious 'centeredness') and material synthesis (or complexity) represent only two related sides or parts of one and the same phenomenon." (Chardin, 1979: 39; Pavićević, 1979: 259)

So, evolution is not just a law of the organic world, Chardin concludes, but a universal process and law. It is directed to ever higher and greater steps of life and consciousness (psychism) so that the phenomenon of human consciousness is the culminating point of all prior and previous cosmic development, which means that man is a conscious evolution of the world. But

that cosmic evolution is not finished, it does not stop, but continues to take place, to last (*durée*), according to Chardin, but now with a significant contribution and a key/decisive role of man. In the processes of that evolution, above all biological, which flows continuously, and which is mostly under its influence, man is on the way to take on the role of generator/creator in the most essential sense of the word, namely the role that has been attributed to nature in history so far or to supernatural forces, namely gods and deities. (Onimus, 1996: 125-157; Pavićević, 1979: 259-260)

With the appearance/phenomenon of man, evolution enters an essential new phase of development; the emergence of man is an essentially and revolutionary new event, a new phenomenon, compared to the phenomena of the rest of the living world, as well as compared to the rest of inorganic matter. If until the appearance of man, every progress in the evolution of the living world meant at the same time the closure of life in certain specialized forms that have limited and stereotyped means and methods of subsistence, man is a conscious and cultural being that creates, produces, perfects means/tools for work (tool making animal). He infinitely varies and multiplies, the modalities of his actions and engagements, and unites all the efforts and benefits of a multitude of individuals in one work, one product. And in that connection and accumulation of human benefits (hominization) there are unimagined opportunities for further development and progress of the human spirit and cosmic expansion of consciousness, or, as it is, together with the Russian/Soviet scientist Vladimir Vernadsky, Chardin calls it – “noosphere”. Man is a cultivated being still in the stage of infancy, and before him, Chardin predicts, lie hundreds of millions of years of further development, based on common efforts, a united human spirit (*gens una sumus*), and already achieved and reached gains and common cultural heritage. With the discovery and experimentation with human genes (genetic engineering), Chardin already predicted 70 years ago the possibility of creating a new wave of organisms (today we call them GMO), a neo-life, induced and produced artificially, whose part today we can also consider artificial intelligence. This, due to its importance, forces us to repeat the statement that we have already stated before: man is about to assume the role of generator/creator in the most essential sense of the word, namely the role that in history has been attributed to nature or supernatural forces, namely of the gods and deities. (Pavićević, 1979: 259-260)

It is precisely this statement and optimistic prediction that most worries thinkers like Hans Jonas, Erich Fromm, Noam Chomsky, and who, among a number of others, are sceptical and doubtful about predicting the “bright” future of human civilization and culture, especially the western. Their “prophecies” and anticipatory and heuristic predictions turned out to be correct, because we see that today we are already living the negative utopia, or dystopia, which they, and several other philosophers and writers like them, correctly predicted back then, namely as a deep crisis, even a self-destructive end, of the technological, rationalistic and “soulless” civilization.

So, the question arises, is that further evolution of man or the noosphere cosmically guaranteed as positive and propulsive?! Chardin thinks that this question can be answered affirmatively on the basis of the previous stages of cosmic evolution which developed in the direction of higher and higher levels of organization, vitality and consciousness, and therefore there is no reason to assume the possibility of any radical, negative turn, a breach and a state of disintegration. If this process so far has been directed towards higher and higher levels of psychism and spirituality, individuation, personalization and perfection, it must be capable of continuing to move in the same direction, i.e., to open a horizon that is unlimited further and in which spirituality can realize new levels. So, Chardin believes in the possibility of unlimited and infinite technological progress of man and the cosmos, which means in the possibility of always new and different, qualitatively better stages of the development of the human world, biosphere, and the cosmos as a whole. Unlike him, some of his contemporaries, which we have already mentioned, are much more sceptical and critical regarding the possibility of realizing such utopian perspectives. So, definitely, Chardin is a cosmic optimist. (Onimus, 1996: 205-208, 125-157; Pavićević, 1979: 261)

However, Chardin is also aware that dangers exist and that they come and originate above all from man himself, because as a conscious nature, man is simultaneously a subject who stands above nature; it can advance it, but also threaten it, self-destruct its further survival and development, which is evident with the appearance, among other things, of atomic energy, i.e., the atomic bomb. So, together with Sartre, already in the 50s, Chardin will state that the survival of man depends less and less on nature itself, and more and more on the human decision and determination to continue to live and survive, which means that man/humanity itself is RESPONSIBLE for its life and death. (Pavićević, 1979: 261)

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Indeed, I doubt that there is a more decisive moment for a thinking being than when he discovers... that he is not a lost part in cosmic solitude, but that the universal will to live converges upon him and becomes hominized in him. (Underlined by – D.S.)

(Chardin, 1979: 256)

We have reached a simultaneously sublime and tragic historical moment, in which the history of mankind, which began a million years ago, may come to an end. If humanity is to survive, then it will not survive by the force

of biological evolution alone, but by a human decision - as Teilhard de Chardin so beautifully put it – which, on the common front, counts as needed those who believe that the Universe is still progressing and that our task is to contribute to that progress. (Underlined by – D.S.)

(Skledar, 1984: 89)

At the beginning of our paper, we already mentioned that before his death, Chardin was known only in narrower academic circles, and that in roneotyped fragments that circulated under hand, as pointed out by Roger Garaudy. (Garaudy, 1960: 200) So, in the third part of our lecture, we will very briefly list those reviews of his work that appeared after his death, sometime in the 60s and 70s of the last century, and that mostly among philosophers and scientists, and much less among theologians.

In France, as we have already said, the first to speak positively about him was the French philosopher Roger Garaudy, but who did not refer so much to his philosophy and science of infinitely progressive cosmic optimism, but to the reaction of the Catholic Church, whose Holy Office in 1957 already made a decision/anathema which read: “The books of Father Teilhard de Chardin should be withdrawn from seminary libraries and religious institutions; they should not be sold in Catholic bookstores and should not be translated into foreign languages.” (Garaudy, 1960: 200) Later, a number of other French philosophers write positively about Chardin, among whom we will mention Lionel Cohn and Jean Onimus, whom we often quote in this paper. (Cohn, 1975; Onimus, 1996)

Contrary to Garaudy, exactly this infinitely progressive conception (cosmic optimism) of Chardin would certainly be challenged by, among others, Hans Jonas and Erich Fromm, whom I have already mentioned. (Jonas, 1984; Fromm, 1991) We can add Amy Allen and her postcolonial feministic critics, in which the progress is proclaimed as an “imperial” notion. (Allen, 2016)

We continue with a series of philosophers, primarily ethicists and bioethicists, who respond positively to his theological-philosophical conception of the future of humanity, including a series of philosophers from the former Yugoslavia. Above all, there is the famous Serbian philosopher and ethicist VukoPavićević, whom we often quote in this lecture. Pavićević believes that Chardin’s conception/paradigm is, in principle, acceptable, but only as a universal philosophical, humanistic theory of what is generally human, and not only as a Christian religion that will continue to insist on its uniqueness and exclusivity. Namely, Chardin’s “Christocentrism” very much reminds/resembles Hegel and his “Europocentrism”, states Pavićević, and Hegel “proclaimed Christianity as an absolute religion”. (Pavićević1979: 265) This statement of Pavićević is especially important today when we see that we live

in a world that is multi-confessional, multipolar and multicultural. Another Serbian philosopher, Mirko Aćimović, in the context of the ontology of nature, despite some minor remarks, believes that Chardin gives a successful “presentation of the cosmogenesis of hominization, from progeny to religious consciousness.” (Aćimović, 2009: 291-293) Croatian philosophers Danko Grlić and Nikola Skledar write positively about Chardin, already in the early 70s/80s of the last century. Grlić shares Garaudy’s opinion that Chardin provided a good basis for a “fruitful dialogue between Christian thought and Marxism”, and we have already quoted Skledar, so there is no need to repeat it. (Grlić, 1973: 464; Skledar, 1984: 89)

Finally, the most positive reception for Chardin comes from the Russian-Ukrainian biologist/geneticist, bioethicist and culturologist Theodosius Dobzhansky, who hails Chardin’s synthetic theory of evolution - despite considering it only a Catholic position - as an “inspiring and magnificent vision”, and which also affects his theory of the evolution of humanity. (Dobžanski, 1982: 13)

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