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Title: Chardin's Challenge to Secularists

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9/2/2009—In an essay in the book, *The Future of Man*, Teilhard de Chardin issued a challenge to secularists. In the essay, "The Grand Option", Chardin asked how we assess the future of humankind? He gave his alternatives, which he called "the human spiritual categories". The challenge to secularism is to contemplate reality with requisite seriousness. Chardin offers four choices. He believes that they define the basic possibilities. He also believes that to each choice, "there must necessarily correspond a universe of an especial kind." That is, only one choice is really true to the kind of universe there is. The first choice is in answer to the question whether the state of Being is good or evil. Is it better to be than not to be? Chardin calls this optimism or pessimism. Is the universe pointless? Is humankind going to get anywhere? If not, why not end things now? Although Chardin notes the modern temper toward meaninglessness, he does not take it seriously, given the growth and expansion of consciousness. There has been progress in the universe from inorganic to organic, to consciousness, to self-consciousness and so forth. This justifies optimism. The next question is, optimism of withdrawal or of evolution? Do we engage the world or refrain from engaging? Chardin chose engagement because of his faith in the spiritual value of matter. The final question is evolution toward divergence or convergence, plurality or unity? Chardin chose unity over against what could be called the capitalist cult of individualism (not Chardin's term). We do not perfect our creativity in opposition to others but in association with others. So, take your pick. Is the universe ordered or disordered? If ordered, is it exhausted or still young? If young, is it divergent or convergent? This is secularism, not religion. But it is a particular kind. It is hallowed secularism.