

The Cosmos as Cathedral

Worldviews and the
Language of Faith

Holy Trinity Adult Forum
February 4, 2007



The Medieval Model



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--IMPORTANCE

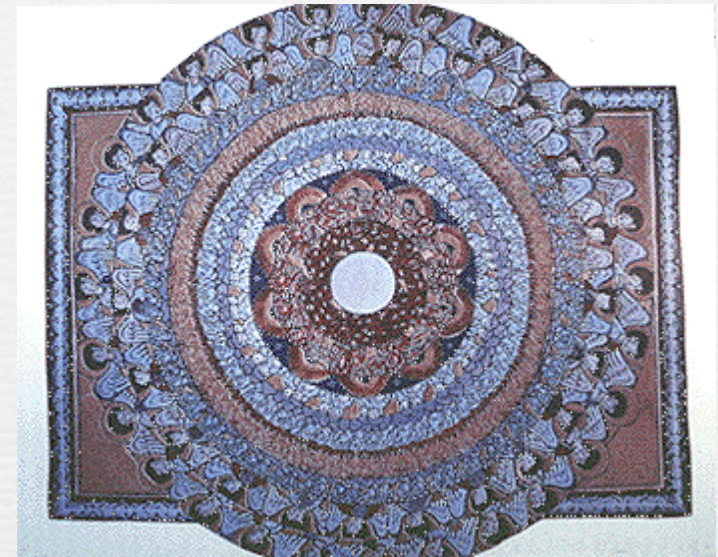
- Medieval model governed thought for over 1,000 years; late Antiquity to the end of the 17th century
- Profound influence on language & forms of Christian faith
- Undone in part by advances in the Renaissance
- 1572 was a watershed year

Models, old and new

The answers we get depend
on the questions we ask . . .

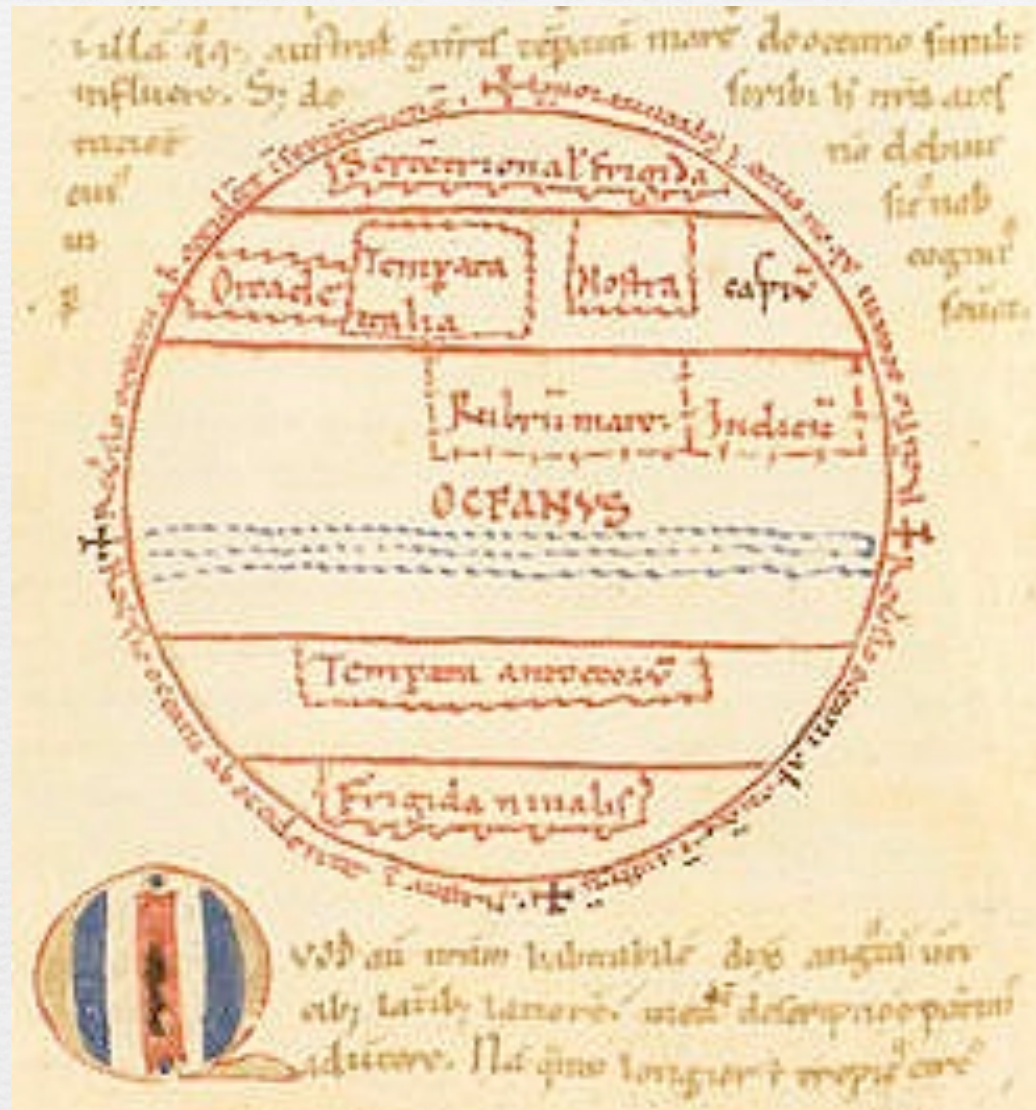
but

. . . the questions we ask depend
on the universe we envision.



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Myth 1: the Earth is flat



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- 12th century illustration from Macrobius's Commentary on the Dream of Scipio by Cicero
- temperate regions in both hemispheres, but inaccessible because of heat and ocean
- In *Inventing the Flat Earth: Columbus and Modern Historians*, Jeffrey Russell (professor of history at University of California, Santa Barbara) claims that the Flat Earth theory is a fable used to impugn pre-modern civilization, especially that of the Middle Ages in Europe. Today essentially all professional medievalists agree with Russell that the "medieval flat Earth" is a nineteenth-century fabrication, and that the few verifiable "flat Earthers" were the exception.
- www.answers.com/topic/flat-earth

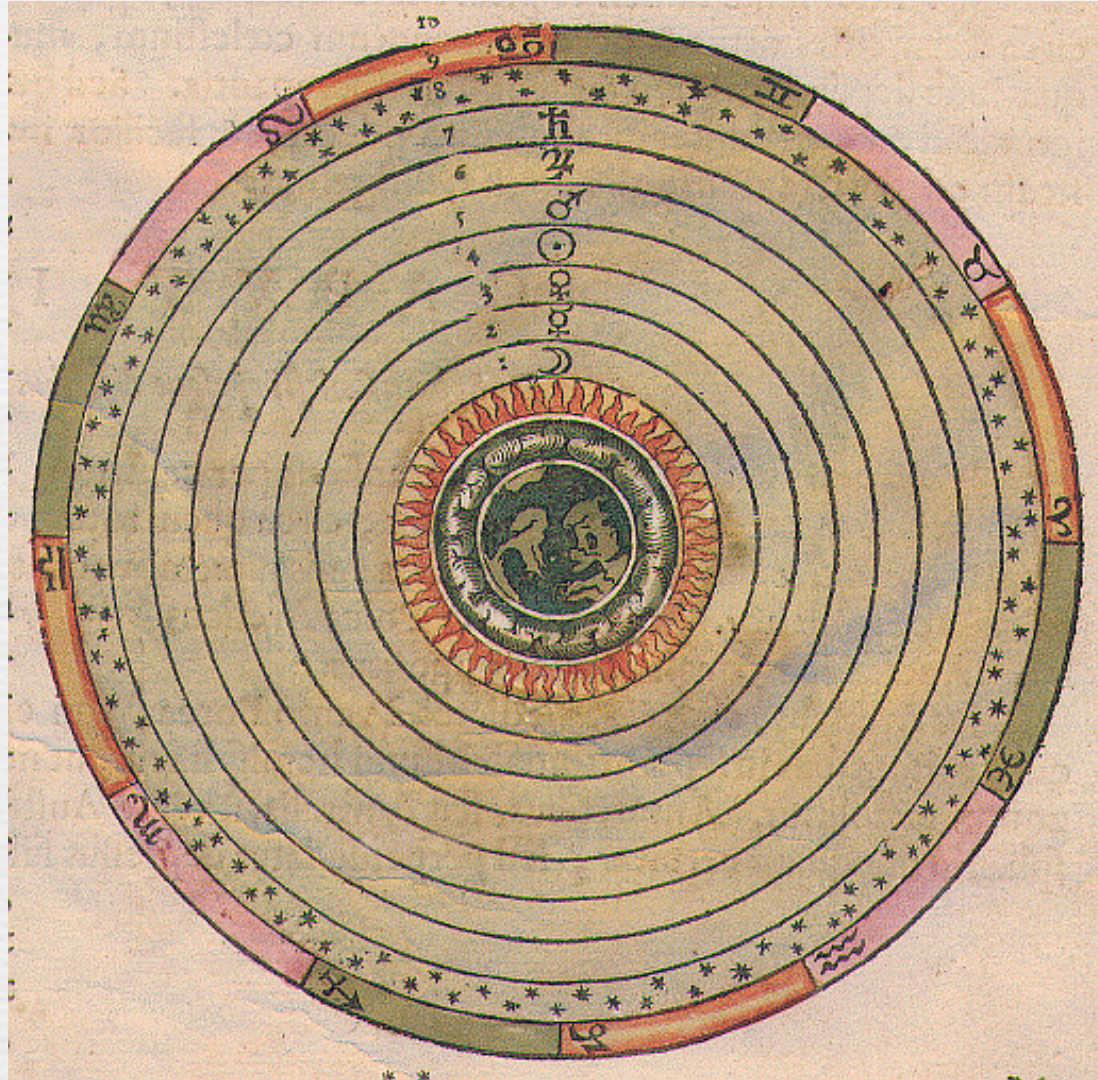
Myth 1: the Earth is flat



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- c. 1400: Dante & Vergil escape Lucifer by climbing UP his leg
- gravity is reversed
- Lewis: first 'science fiction effect' in literature
- Dante's Inferno, 14th century (British Library, add. ms. 19587, f.58a).
- medievalwriting.50megs.com/.../dante/flimage.htm

Myth 2: the Earth is the center



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- spherical earth lies in the middle
- above is a ring of fire
- concentric circles like Russian dolls
- www.astro.umontreal.ca/~paulchar/sp/images/

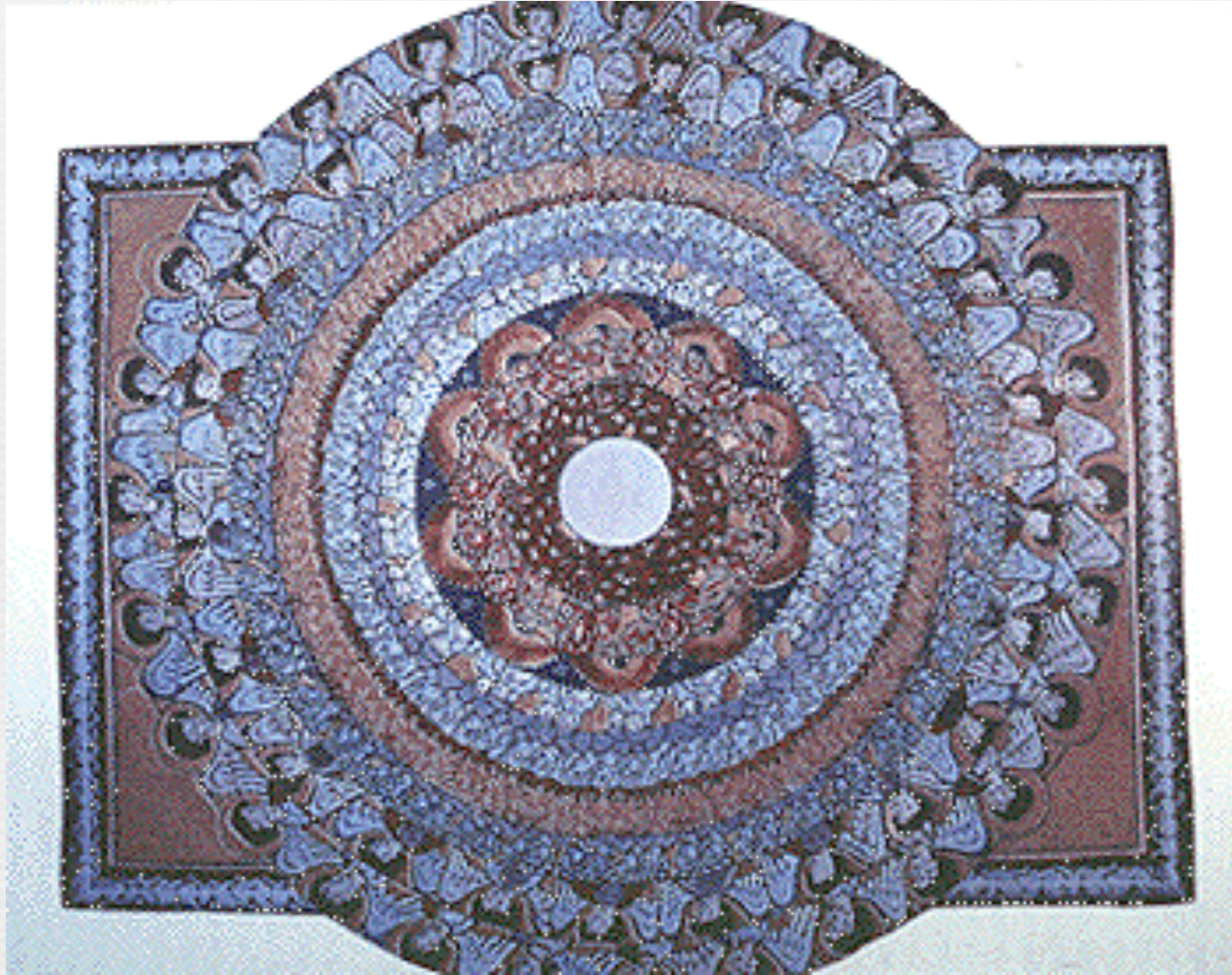
‘Everything not forbidden is compulsory’



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- Centaurus A (thought to contain a black hole)
- composite optical, X-ray and radio image from Hubble & others
- predicted by theory before any observational evidence
- answer to G is (a) particle physics and (b) T.H. White
- chandra.harvard.edu/photo/2002/0157/

Plenitude and the Triad: angels



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- pseudo-Dionysius' 9 orders of angels
- 'Seraphs, Cherubims & Thrones/...Dominions, Princedoms, Powers,/Virtues, Archangels, Angels' choirs'
- N is The Hymnal, 1982, #618 (John A.L. Riley)
- HILDEGARDE VON BINGEN. Nine Ranks of Angels
- www.dartmouth.edu/.../unit10/unit10.html

Origins of the Medieval Model



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--SOURCES: BOOKS, BOOKS, BOOKS!

-- Greek philosophers in Latin: some Plato (not the ones we know); Aristotle & his circle (not till 12th cent. did others become widespread, due to Arabic translations); Stoic philosophers (contemptus mundi)

--Late Latin Neo-Platonists and others: Macrobius' commentary on Cicero, Pseudo-Dionysius, Boethius (esp. Consolation of Philosophy)

--Book of Kells, c. 800 A.D., Trinity College, Dublin

--www.ub.ntnu.no/.../til_opplysning/to_nr9.html

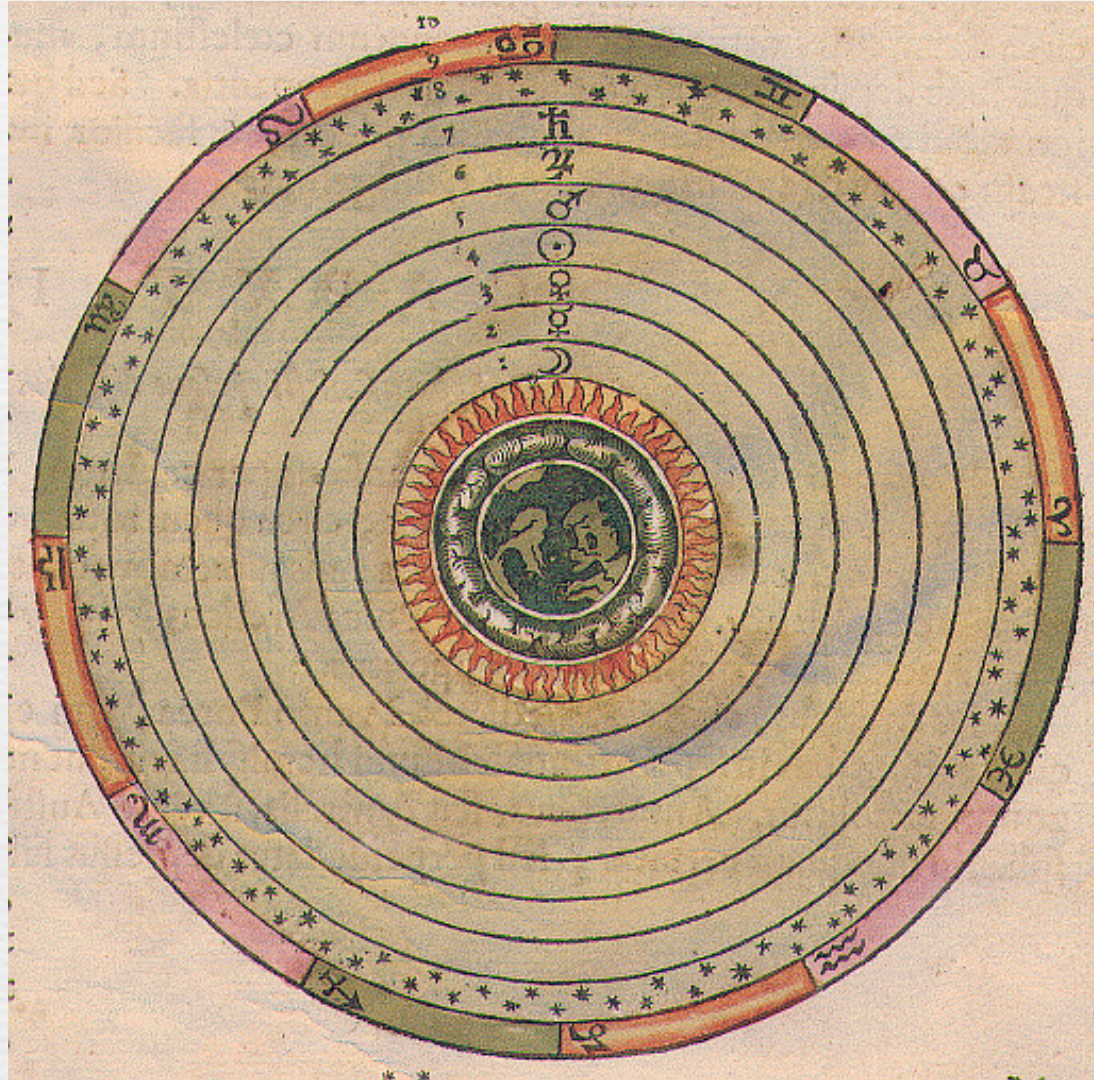
Why things move



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- Gary Larson cartoon
- Medieval 'kindly enclynynge' for our 'kindly stede' (Chaucer, House of Fame)
- Newtonian 'laws'
- Relativistic 'world lines'
- Quantum mechanical 'probabilities'
- what are the emotional consequences: strivings and desires; municipal traffic courts; drifting; chance?

The heavens



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- 'seven stars' above: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn
- fixed stars (the Empyrean)
- www.astro.umontreal.ca/~paulchar/sp/images/

The height of the cosmos



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- Salisbury Cathedral, 2002
- pressure of the 14th c. spire bows structure out; William Golding's 'The Spire'
- sense of verticality
- inadequacy of pictures to convey the vertigo
- difference between looking 'out' and looking 'up' at the heavens
- note curve

'Nature' and 'Sky'



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- Dante & Beatrice leave the Earth for the Moon
- Aristotle 'physis' vs. 'ouranos'
- birth, growth, decay, death vs. eternal unchanging realm
- no change or imperfection in the heavens
- D sublunary is John Donne
- Giovannio DI PAOLO (c. 1445): Dante leaving the Earth
- www.dartmouth.edu/.../unit10/unit10.html

Approaching God: the Primum Mobile



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- Dante & Beatrice approach the Prime Mover
- Aristotleian idea: unmoved mover, first cause
- F Eternal Ruler is Hymnal #617 (John Chadwick)
- Giovannio DI PAOLO (c. 1445): Primum Mobile
- www.dartmouth.edu/.../unit10/unit10.html

Approaching God: the Empyrean



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- Dante & Beatrice view the Celestial Rose
- Giovanni DI PAOLO (c. 1445): Cosmic Rose
- reversal of order of sensation: God in center, not circumference; we are outside
- 'shown by di Paolo as an actual rose, with nine angels and the Trinity"
- Lewis: 'revelry of insatiable love'
- www.dartmouth.edu/.../unit10/unit10.html

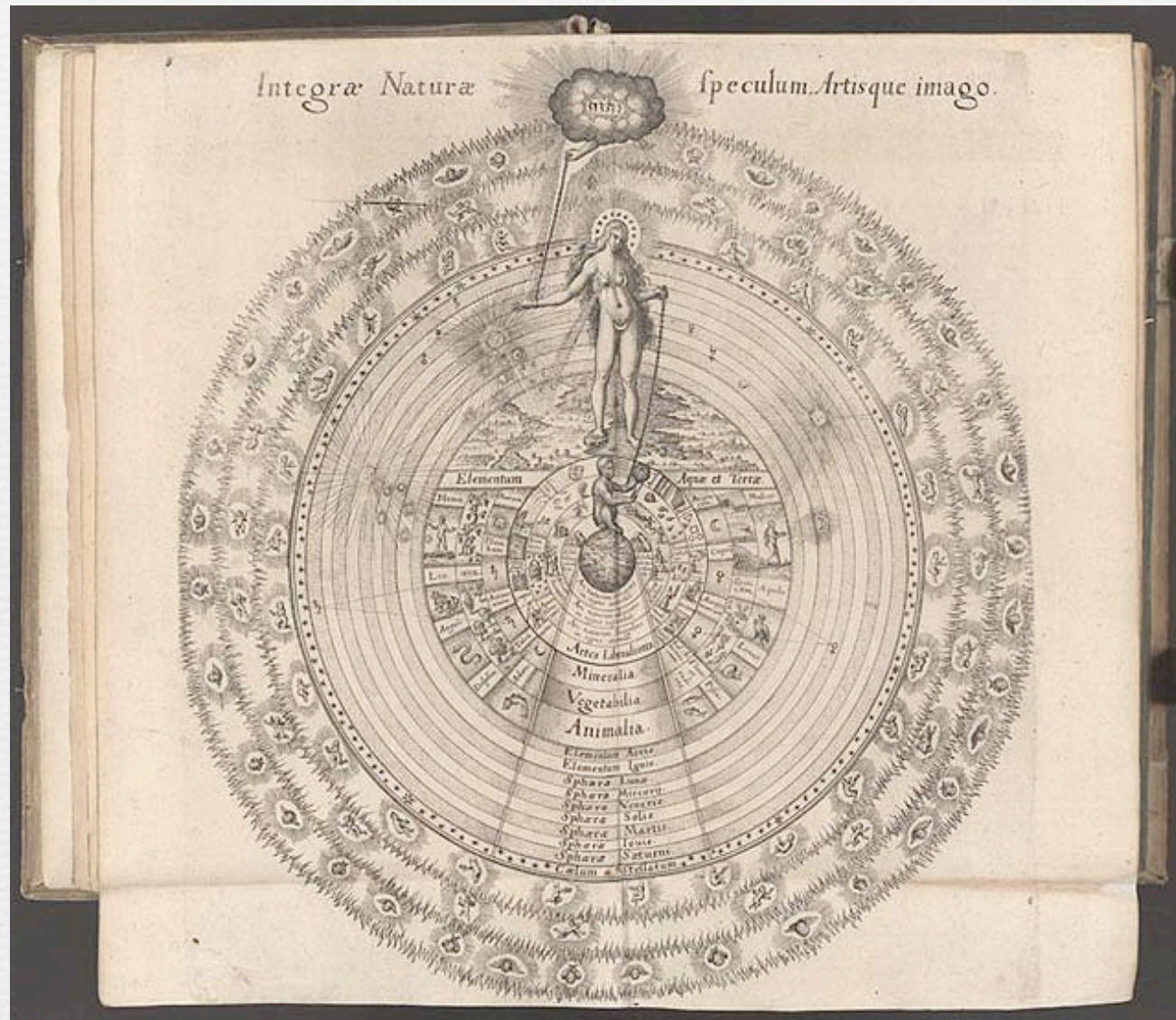
A finite and bounded cosmos



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- another view of the medieval system
- modern cosmologies may be finite or infinite; almost all are unbounded
- www.brogilbert.org/.../dante_canto27.HTM

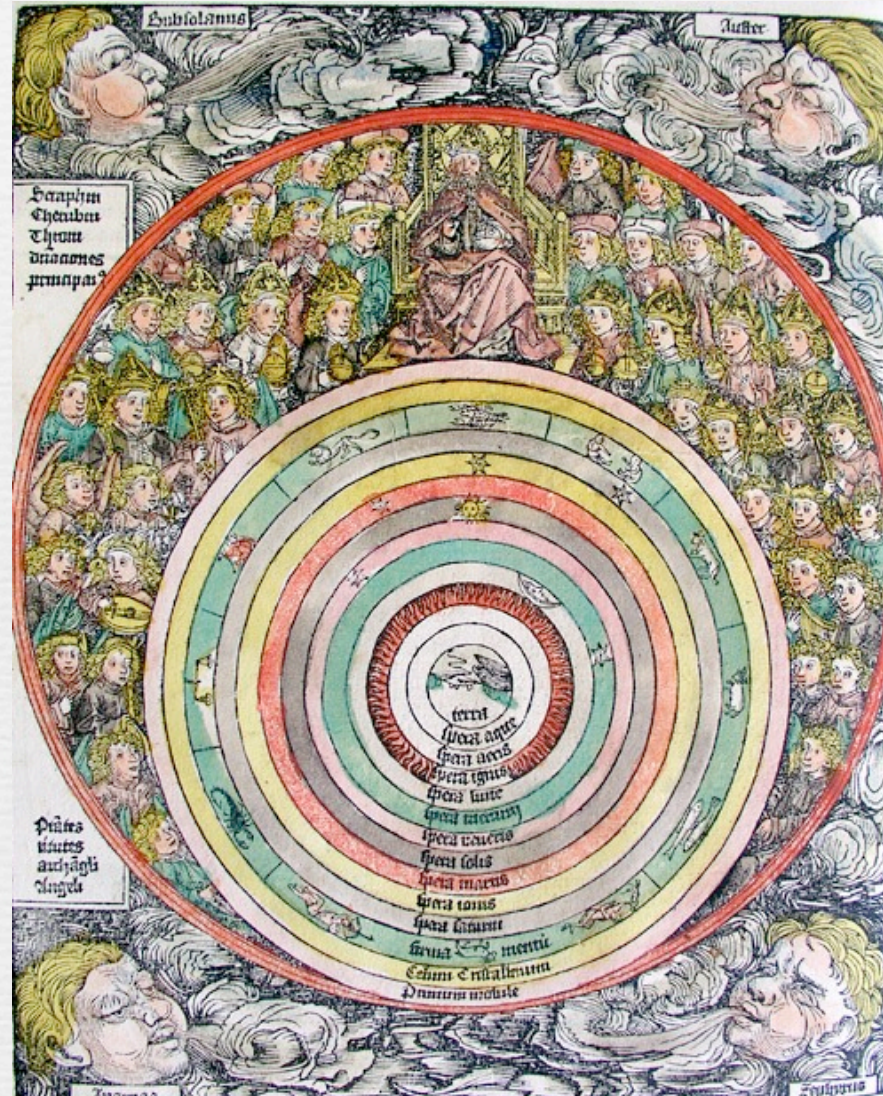
A hierarchical cosmos



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- the 'Great Chain of Being'
- Robert Fludd. *Urtriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technica historia, in duo volumina secundum cosmi differntiam diuisa*. Vol. 1 Enlarged version. Frankfurt: J. T. Bry, 1624
- Ulysses' speech on order
- etymologies of Lord & Lady
- www.loc.gov/exhibits/world/earth.html

A top-down cosmos



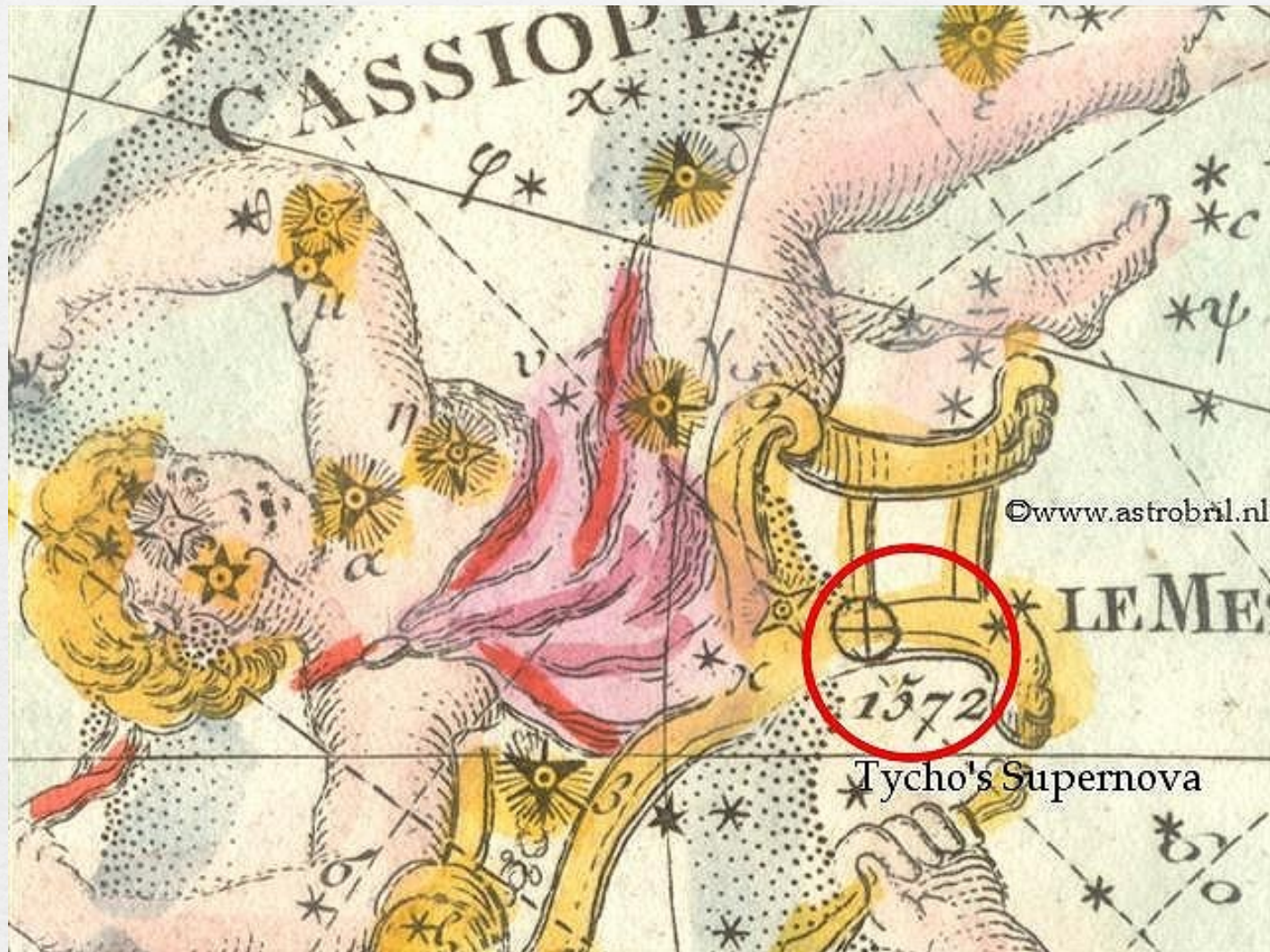
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--Nuremberg Chronicle, 1493

--Lewis: 'ladder'

--www.columbia.edu/.../nuremchron1493.html

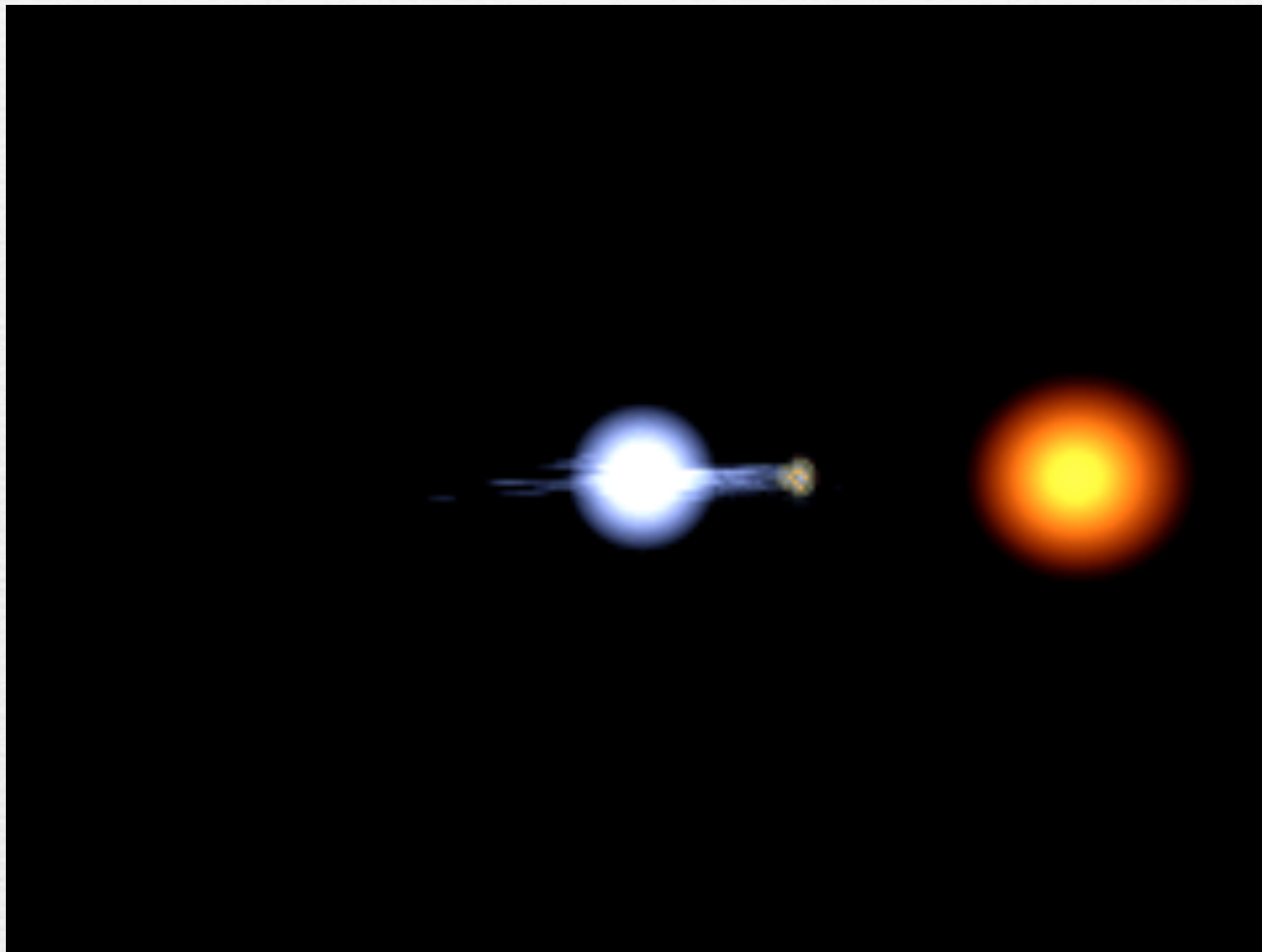
Tycho's nova of 1572



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- Atlas of Fortin, 1795
- Momentous event
- C 'Philosophy' is Donne; K 'silence' is Pascal
- www.astrobril.nl/FortinOther.html

Goodricke and Algol



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--John Goodricke, 1764-1786: deaf-mute astronomer who unravelled secret of Algol ('the Ghoul' in Arabic)

--E 'Entities' is Occam

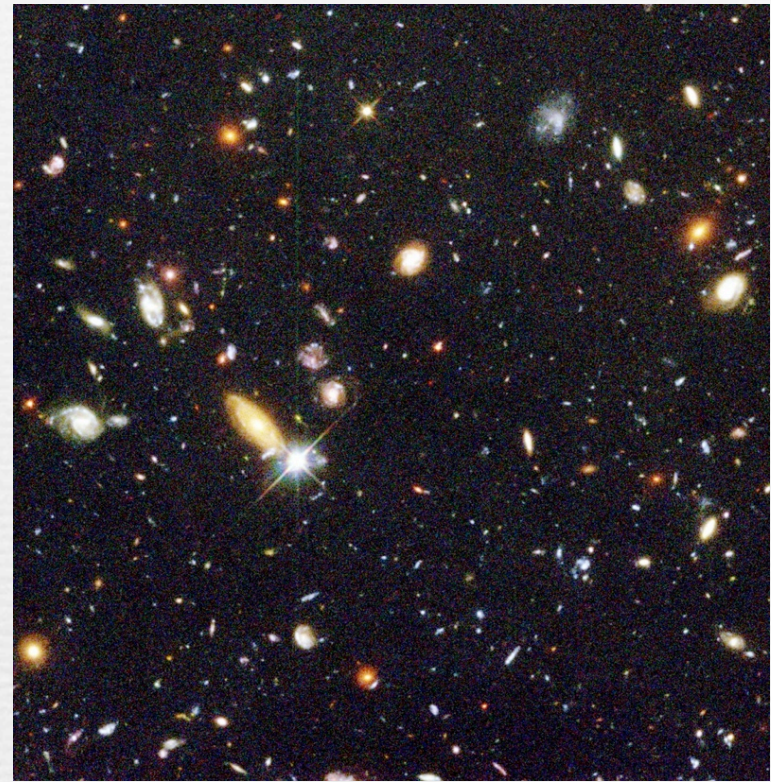
--J 'hypothesis' is Laplace; B 'disheveled' is Yeats

--B 'disheveled' is Yeats

--www.surveyor.in-berlin.de/.../Doppler-e.html

Models

God as the Architect
of the Universe . . .



. . .or the Universe as
our Architect?

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--H 'dice' is Einstein

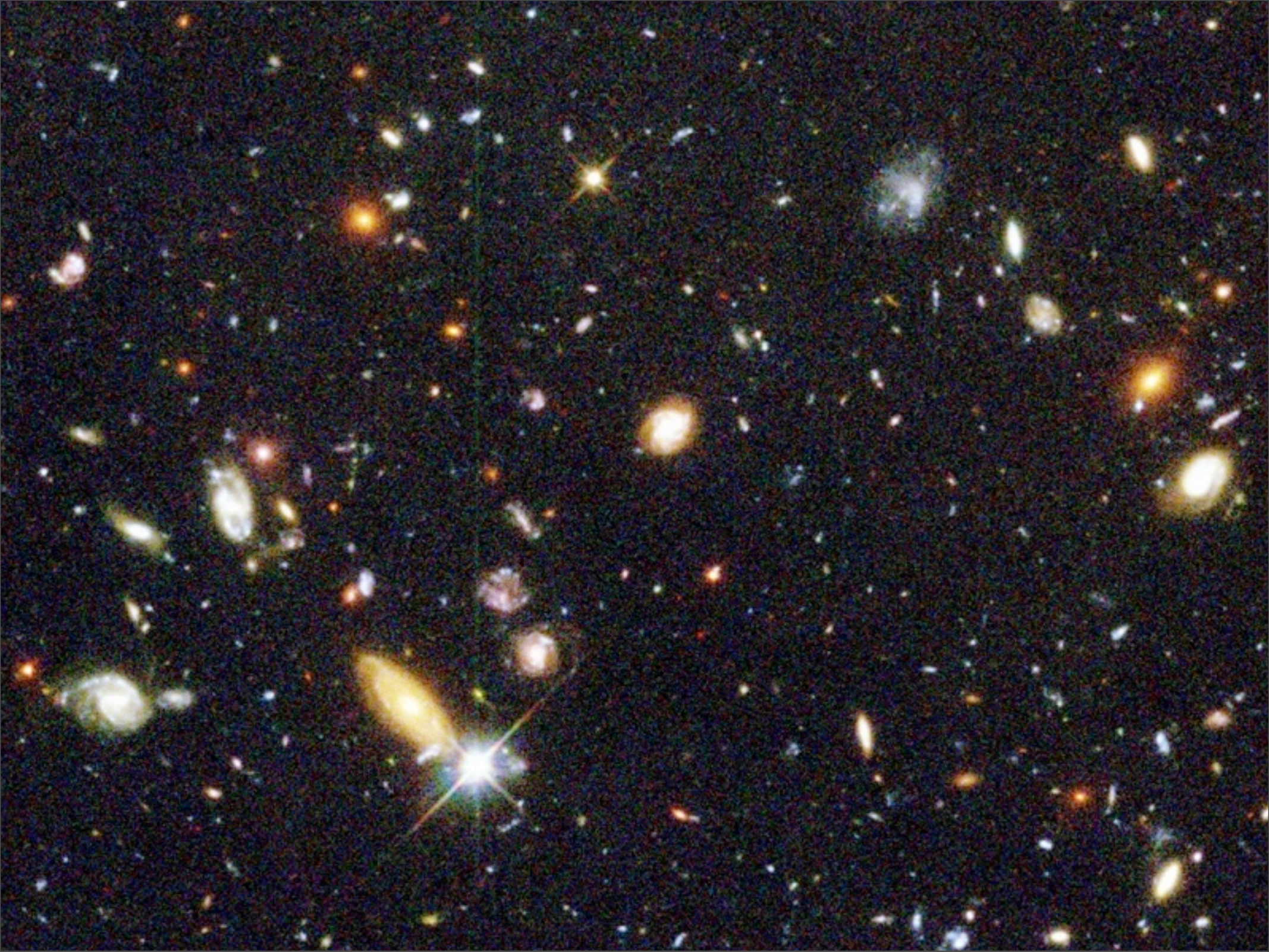
--M 'queerer' is Haldane (following Sir Arthur Eddington)

--God as the Architect of the Universe. French, mid-13th C. From the Bible moralisée, Codex Vindobonensis 2554, in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

--www.lhup.edu/~dsimanek/philosop/design.htm

--Hubble Deep Field image

--<http://www.firstpr.com.au/astrophysics/hubble-deep-field/Hubble-Deep-Field-1024-wide.bmp>



--Hubble Deep Field image

--<http://www.firstpr.com.au/astrophysics/hubble-deep-field/Hubble-Deep-Field-1024-wide.bmp>