

- for contemporary youth' (p. 281); Heelas and Rachael Kohn (1986) look at various aspects of the role played by experience.
- 7 Other useful accounts of the social psychological processes under consideration include those provided by Roger Brown (1986), Robert Baron and Donn Byrne (1984), Elaine Hatfield et al. (1994), Paul Atkinson et al. (1983) and Paul Paulus (ed.) (1989).
 - 8 Eileen Barker (1984), albeit addressing very different material (the theistic Unification Church), has written the most sustained critique of the brain-washing thesis to date.
 - 9 On the role played by Zen meditation in 'constructing transcultural reality', see David Preston (1988).
 - 10 Donald Baer and Stephanie Stolz (1978), for example, explore the functioning of est in terms of 'behavior analysis'. The psychotherapeutic effectiveness of New Age events, it can also be argued, is not limited to those which draw on western therapies. If, for example, Lévi-Strauss (1968) is correct in that traditional shamanism is psychologically (etc.) effective, then presumably the same could well apply to the New Age rendering.

8

The Future

If you do not get it from yourself, where will you go for it?
(Zen poem)

. . . the moral force of the ideal of authenticity . . . Morality has, in a sense, a voice within.

(Charles Taylor 1991, pp. 17, 26)

The countercultural version [of the expressive revolution], with its exclusive emphasis on pure expressiveness and pure love and glorification of the totally autonomous self, seems to me to be definitely not viable as a cultural and social phenomenon.

(Talcott Parsons, 1978 p. 320)

The cults represent in the American phrase, 'the religion of your choice', the highly privatized preference that reduces religion to the significance of pushpin, poetry, or popcorn.

(Bryan Wilson, 1979, p. 96)

Can the New Age Movement lead us out of our troubled times? Should it do so? Many have no hesitation in being sceptical, cynical, or derisory. Probably the main litany of (published) complaints comes from Christians, in particular those of a more conservative bent. For them, the New Age is heretical, contravening what are taken to be fundamental Christian tenets. More generally, there are all those who point to the (supposed) absurdness of New Age beliefs. How, they ask, can one possibly be *responsible* for the birth of one's parents? Or again, how can it be supposed that nature is in a state of harmony when there is so much violence (dolphins killing porpoises) and destruction (earthquakes)?

Another important source of complaint comes from those who see the New Age as having 'sold out' to individualistic consumer

culture. Some argue that it has come to epitomize the worst aspects of modernity, namely its (supposed) self-absorption, narcissism, selfishness and permissiveness; its way of putting the self first and foremost. The (supposed) Self-ethic is here seen as serving to facilitate ego-trips, New Age reliance on the 'inner voice' or 'intuition' actually serving to articulate and legitimate selfish desires. And instead of bright, well-educated younger people seeking to become leaders of society, and so moving into positions where they can 'really' make a difference, the criticism is that their 'politics' is of a privatized kind; a mere 'politics' of indulgent experience. Then there are those – including New Agers themselves – who object to the way in which inner spirituality has been put to work for the purposes of outer prosperity. In addition, whilst on the subject of wealth creation, there is also the objection that many New Agers charge (apparently) considerable sums of money for their services. (This last is the most common criticism that I have encountered whilst teaching.) And finally, there are those who object to the way in which New Agers treat the fruits of the past, Zen or Native American Indian teachings – for example – (supposedly) being trivialized and commercialized. New Agers are seen as engaging in cultural imperialism or theft, raiding long-standing spiritual teachings and practices: selecting what they want, ignoring anything which is too demanding, speeding things up ('Enlightenment' in 100 hours); and arriving at something which is user-friendly.²

Not all these criticisms – and of course there are others – can be adjudicated from the academic point of view. Fundamentalistic Christians might be right; so might New Agers. It might be ridiculous to suppose that Self-spirituality can be instrumentalized for reasons of prosperity; or it might not. It could be the case that the idea of being responsible for the birth or one's parents is an absurdity; or it could be correct. The academic, public frame of reference simply does not allow us to examine such matters. What we can do, however, is place the New Age in a broader cultural context, a context which might serve to give critics some cause for reflection. Those who are scathing of the prosperity wing, for example, should at least bear in mind that an equivalent spirituality is widely held in India. (My favourite example concerns Athma Gnana Sabhai, which announces 'Spiritual Enlightenment, Indestructible Affluence'.) Those who criticize the amount charged by some New Agers – for example those providing management trainings – should perhaps note that they are generally paid at the market rate. And, it can be added, those objecting to the

more confrontational methods found in some New Age circles should bear in mind the harshness of, say, some Zen masters. It can, of course, be argued that two wrongs do not make a right. Nevertheless, the broader context at least shows that there is nothing strange about spiritual paths to prosperity or strict, unsettling, disquieting spiritual disciplines, or, for that matter, the very idea of the God within.

Some criticisms, however, are open to academic scrutiny. Consider first, in this regard, the claim that New Age provisions are frequently used as a means of pleasuring the self. No doubt numbers do indeed treat (certain) provisions as spiritual Disneyland; as yet another consumer delight. But evidence – discussed in earlier chapters – also suggests that this must be countered by the fact that many turn to the New Age because they are seeking to handle serious problems, to do with their sense of identity or their emotional and physical well-being. Or, second, consider the related criticism, namely that New Agers are basically concerned with healing and perfecting themselves, rather than with the community or other aspects of public life. Here, I think, critics have got a stronger case. Many New Agers, it is true, do more than merely attempt to transcend problems with life in the mainstream by concentrating on transforming themselves as individuals. Pagans work to heal the earth; eco-warriors take direct action; a number of New Agers have set up schools, communities, or ecologically-sound businesses; others practise healing; many recycle. However, given the widespread New Age assumption that everything which is human or natural is interconnected, one would expect New Agers to be doing more to improve or 'transform' the quality of life at large. You and I are essentially one; and we are both at one with nature. So my concern is for 'you' as for 'myself', and for both of 'us' as for 'nature' (see Tipton, 1983).³

As things stand, however, there are fewer New Age schools than one might expect; fewer New Age businesses or farms and small-holdings; fewer communes, of the Findhorn variety, attempting to find better ways of living daily life. And, it can be noted, only 30 per cent of the respondents to Stuart Rose's questionnaire – committed New Agers who are therefore most likely to be involved – state affiliation with one (or more) of the New Social Movements. With notable exceptions, New Agers do not often go out into the community, working with the poor, the elderly, or the violent. There is less *engagement* with the realities or consequences of modernity than might be expected, the only great exception in the west being the role the Age of Aquarius – together with the counter-culture as

a whole – played in ending the Vietnam war. There is, in fact, much to support the view that the majority of New Agers turn to what is on offer – predominantly on a part-time (weekend, etc.) basis – to transform their *own* lives.⁴

Another, potentially more serious criticism, concerns the claim that the New Age harms people. Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman (1982), for example, state that 'cults' may have created an extraordinary new kind of mental illness' (p. 86); and Elizabeth Tylden opines that New Age groups are 'capable of producing changes in the brain as intense as those caused by LSD or cannabis', the result of 'hallucinations' and 'dissociation' being 'extremely difficult to switch off' (cited by Thompson, 1994). It must immediately be stated that some New Age activities – especially, it would appear, those of a more confrontational or 'Gurdjieffian' nature – are capable of triggering or otherwise inducing harmful consequences. Thus Leonard Glass, Michael Kirsch and Frederick Parris (1977) report that 'Five patients, only one of whom had a history of psychiatric disturbance, developed grandiosity, paranoia, uncontrollable mood swings, and delusions' after taking est (p. 245; and see Kirsch and Glass, 1977). Furthermore, it has to be stated that those running 'harsher' activities are often well aware of their potential to damage certain kinds of people. Thus Robert D'Aubigny, one of the Directors of the Exegesis Programme, publically acknowledged in 1983 (the seminar closed in 1984) that it was 'dangerous for people who have an unstable personality' (BBC2 Newnight, 1983), and had earlier set up a screening process to address the problem.

However, the great weight of available evidence strongly suggests that New Age activities – including the more confrontational – do *considerably* more good than harm. Summarizing a study carried out by Robert Ornstein and associates, based on a 680-item questionnaire answered by 1,204 est graduates, Peter Finkelstein et al. (1982) state that 'most respondents reported positive changes since est training with regard to a wide variety of variables, including perceived physical health, drug use, alcohol consumption, cigarette and marijuana smoking, work satisfaction and meaningfulness of life' (p. 523). Summarizing another study of est, this time carried out by Hosford and associates with 263 inmates of a federal prison, before and after findings show 'lower Hysteria and Schizophrenia scores and increased scores on scales of Ego Strength and Social Status' (p. 526); and 'Comparison of post-test [returns] ... revealed that inmates completing est training were significantly more healthy than controls on scales of Psychasthenia, Conscious Anxiety, Ego Strength, Causality, and Dependency'

(ibid.). Furthermore, and bearing in mind Finkelstein et al.'s observation that 'If pathologic defenses increase the likelihood of harm from est training, then psychiatric patients attending est should be especially at risk' (p. 529), it is noteworthy that a study shows that 'Of 163 patients with psychiatric hospitalizations prior to the training, 152 were considered to be improved' (p. 529).⁵

Finkelstein et al. conclude that 'There is no proof that est causes psychiatric disorders' (p. 530). On the positive side, a great deal more evidence could be supplied to back up the point that New Agers generally experience themselves to have benefited from their engagements. Involvement is taken to be good for the person. Participants might complain that particular activities fail to live up to their billing or are 'not for them'; but I have yet to meet *anyone* (other than a couple of academic researchers) who has failed to experience positive change with regard to at least some of the things with which they have been involved. Furthermore, it is by no means uncommon for people to be attracted to the New Age because of their perception of those of their friends, relatives or workmates who have already participated. In my study of Exegesis, for instance, virtually all of those (50) people taking the seminar did so because they approved of the changes in those friends, relatives and workmates who had taken the seminar and wanted to become like them (see Heelas, 1987).⁶

New Agers, one might say, often 'glow'. Psychological or psychiatric breakdowns there might be, but my confident guess-estimate – in part based on a finding reported by Finkelstein et al. (1982), namely that only some '0.6 or 0.8' per cent est graduates have (self-reported) 'nervous breakdowns' following the training (p. 529) – is that the percentage is lower than the percentage of students who have to go to University health centres whilst taking Finals.

In the hands of the Self

A great worry about the role which the New Age envisages itself performing for the future of the planet concerns the efficacy of Self-spirituality. In large measure, it will be recalled, the New Age is detraditionalized ('traditions', when drawn upon, being taken to function at the experiential level). The New Age is also anti-authoritarian in other regards. By and large charismatic authority is rejected; numbers even reject the authority of 'belief', including 'belief' in particular values. Essentially, authority *has* to come from

the Self/the Self in attunement with the natural/spiritual order as a whole, this realm also serving as the source of those other attributes which are crucial for living a transformed life – including love, responsibility, creativity, energy, and power.

Now to the crucial points. If indeed there is an inner spiritual realm, it might be supposed that the dawning of the New Age is in good hands. It provides that guidance, that authoritative ethicality, necessary for life run without traditions; it provides that creativity, energy, power, love, responsibility (and so on) required for utopian times. However, as most New Agers unhappily acknowledge, the Self is only too subject to vicissitudes. That is to say, it is widely supposed that the ego, with its psychology of attachment, is continually striving to assert and reassert itself. And when it does, the Self ceases to function. New Agers are thus engaged in a perpetual struggle, combating the 'pull' of the ego by practising disciplines to make contact with the Self itself. Depending on the state of play of this struggle, the Self – assuming it exists – is in control; or, conversely, the ego is in command. Successful activity in everyday life thus depends on how the Self-ego contest is resolved at any particular moment. In sum, the New Age is not – in its own terms – securely and permanently grounded. There is the continual likelihood of the ego reasserting itself and disrupting the utopian life – at least until the time dawns, if this is conceivable, when egos are no longer constructed.⁷

What then of the possibility, equally likely from the point of view of the academic, that the inner spiritual realm does not exist? In the absence of all that is provided by Self-spirituality, the successful operation of 'New Age' forms of life must now be attributed to the operation of authority structures (for otherwise, without external, or cultural guidance, there would be anarchical chaos). But such authority structures, perhaps internalized as 'conscience', are precisely what the New Age is not meant to be about. Supposedly detraditionalized, it actually has to rely on established 'voices' in order to function satisfactorily. On this view, then, the 'New Age' works – when it does – because it is no longer New Age.⁸

New Agers might think that they are listening to their inner voices or are drawing upon their intuitive wisdom; in practice, however, they are listening to internalized renderings – by way of socialization – of what they have read about the Buddha or Gurdjieff. New Agers might think that Erhard serves as a context-setting, providing the environment to enable trainees to arrive at their own truths; in reality Erhard is serving as a powerful authority figure. New Agers might think that they are arriving

at their own values; in practice they are adopting those which have become *established* as a set of variations on the theme of Self-spirituality. Supposedly inner-directed truth acquisition is, in fact, routinized. Indeed, the New Age corpus – on this account – might be thought of as a tradition, people coming to decisions as to what to value and how to act by way of reliance on the voices of all those who have become enshrined in what amounts to an – unacknowledged – canon, comprised, for example, of books by and about the teachers.⁹

Consider the possibilities when a New Age community functions smoothly. It could be because (a) Selves are alive, well, and fully operational; (b) covert or not-so-covert authority structures are in operation; (c) conversion by way of intensive socialization has ensured that everybody believes in much the same things; (d) or that, for some other reason, everyone shares values and assumptions. Only the first of these options amounts to a 'truly' New Age community. The remainder concern functional systems which involve ego-operations and external voices of authority.

Before turning – only too briefly – to look at the efficacy of several New Age practices, it remains to stress that the New Age is good at (at least) two things. First, it *can* make a positive difference to everyday life, this in the sense of improving the quality of personal life (the 'glow effect'). And second, the New Age *can* be highly effective in communicating and fuelling commitment to *values*. I personally think that many of these are good, indeed excellent values: to do with nature, humankindness (there are no 'strangers' in the New Age), equality (egalitarianism being an aspect of New Age perennialism), authenticity, love, co-operation, responsibility, forgiveness ('it's only their egos') and so on. But more to the point, for present purposes, values – if put into practice – can make a difference to the world. Serving as 'institutions', values have very considerable functional capacities. Whether acquired by way of Self-spirituality or by way of socialization, the fact remains that those New Agers whose own lives are *informed* by the values under consideration are in a good position to work to change what they take to be the failures of conventional modernity.

Communities

Auroville, just to the north-west of Pondicherry, southern India, was founded by The Mother, who stated her 'dream':

There should be somewhere upon earth, a place that no nation could

claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of good will, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the Supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord, harmony . . . (cited by G. Alain, 1992, p. 1; my emphasis)

Or, more briefly, the community states that it is all about 'Administration by the higher consciousness' (*ibid.*, p. 13). Unfortunately – for there is surely a great deal to commend about The Mother's 'dream' – things have not worked out well. Auroville today has only some 1,000 inhabitants, as opposed to the 50,000 planned in the dream; the central government of India has had to be brought in to settle anything but concord; today, whilst circumstances have improved, there is a distinct feeling of disquiet and separation, different nationalities having their own ways of life within the enclave.

This experiment in a community beyond tradition has not worked as well as expected. But at least Auroville still exists: which is more than can be said about virtually all the communes which sprang up during the 1960s Age of Aquarius. And if some of Carol Riddell's (1991) observations are anything to go by, one of the great survivors, namely Findhorn, has owed much of its longevity to the operations of relatively implicit – and supra-Self – authority regimes rather than to the 'wisdom' of collective 'attunement'. Needless to say, we cannot rule out the possibility that 'to thine own Self-cum-humanity be true', *spiritually*-informed and 'democratic' collective life could work; but the track record to date is not impressive. Those communities which do work – such as the Manjushri Institute – do so because there are clear rules and regulations; clear authority structures, enabling those who experience themselves as (relatively) enlightened to be in the *position* to assist in dealing with the ego-temptations of those considered to be lower on scale of what it is to be a spiritual being. Perhaps progress towards the New Age requires the disciplines of supra-individual authority: a point returned to when we discuss Charles Taylor's treatment of the 'ethic of authenticity'.¹⁰

Healing

It would be unwise in the extreme to be drawn into the task of assessing the efficacy of New Age healing. This is a highly complex and controversial topic; and to deal with it in anything approaching an adequate fashion would require another volume. Clearly, however, we cannot rule out the possibility that an inner spiritual realm can be called into play, to prevent illness and to

cure. And it could also be the case that New Agers are correct when they explain away failure, for example attributing it to the healer and/or the dis-eased not being in adequate contact with their natural Selfhood. Bearing in mind the promises that are made on behalf of inner spirituality, however, it looks as though it is indeed difficult to make authentic and long-standing contact with the spiritual realm (assuming it exists). This in turn suggests that New Age healing is a precarious undertaking. For even supposing that the spiritual realm exists, it would appear to be the case – given the apparent paucity of miraculous cures – that many healers are not making the right judgements; and that many seeking to be healed are unable to transcend those disequilibriums or blocks which are causing sickness.

On the clearly beneficial side, though, a great deal shows that New Age healing practices can generate positive *experiences of the self*. A few years ago, a New Age student broke down in class whilst we were discussing healing. She told us that her boyfriend had just died of cancer. Rejecting conventional treatment towards the end, the couple had decided to turn to the New Age. He died serene, without having lost his faith in what New Age practices were about. For what they were doing was to alter his entire experience of approaching death. And neither, it might be added, did my student lose faith. (The rest of the families involved, however, were appalled at the turn to inner spirituality.) To give another example, a film shown on television about a Rajneesh ashram, Medina, contains footage of a sannyasin dying. He meditates; he experiences Bhagwan with him; the community and his girlfriend are with him; he dies in tranquility. True, as Rosalind Coward (1990), among others, points out, the emphasis on self-responsibility can lead to distress (for example, feeling guilty on the grounds that one has caused one's cancer by not handling one's ego properly). But available evidence suggests that this is outweighed by experienced benefits.¹¹

Matters of prosperity

What are we to make of New Age understanding of the quest for prosperity? Is it possible that the practices are as wonderful as they appear? The issue of productivity is addressed by considering the role which could be played by (1) magical power, (2) inner-directed wisdom, (3) transformed character, and (4), work ethics.

(1) *Magical power*: productive or counter-productive? There is no hard evidence, from the scientific point of view, that magic

'actually' works. It might serve, however, to encourage practitioners to focus on what they really want, this helping to motivate them to work – in a conventional sense – in order to obtain their goals. Conversely, however, it could well be the case that those relying heavily on magical practices are less likely to make an economic impact. They are deflected from doing what is 'actually' required.

(2) *Inner-directed wisdom*. I do not know of any evidence which shows that business benefits from being informed by judgements which come from within. What evidence there is suggests that recourse to 'inner wisdom' is not a good way to proceed. The fate of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International provides an excellent illustration of failure. Radically de-institutionalized – to let inner spirituality run affairs – there is little doubt that its de-institutionalized nature played a major role in its demise. Surrounded by wealth, without conventional monitoring systems, managers could only too readily find their egos coming back into prominence (see Heelas, 1992b). More generally, could it be the case that other commercial failures can be attributed to the fact that some New Age management trainings are associated with a 'can do' – and therefore too hasty – way of proceeding?¹²

(3) *Transformed character*. It is highly likely that more skilful management trainings (and perhaps the less skilful) make a difference to self-understanding. Trained-up managers might well see themselves as more empowered, more responsible, more creative, more focused, more energetic, more inclined to set goals and so on. Such changes in self-understanding and experience, I think it is fair to say, typically translate into action. A 'spiritually' informed version of the enterprising self can be constructed. Certainly many companies think that trainings providing this variety of character are worth investing in.

(4) *Work ethics*. Research suggests that the 'Self-work ethic' can be highly efficacious in motivating employees. The basic idea informing the New Age work ethic, we have seen, is that work is valued as a spiritual discipline. By working, one works on oneself. Accordingly, one works well. Evidence from Programmes Ltd. strongly suggests that this ethic has played a crucial role in ensuring that a highly unlikely workforce is prepared to work exceedingly hard, at a most unlikely task (given their backgrounds and interests), making a great success of selling over the phone (see Heelas, 1991, 1992a, 1995; on est as a business, and other aspects of the ethic, see Tipton, 1982, 1988). Under certain circumstances (involving more structured forms of transformed business than

those which prevailed at BCCI), New Age businesses can produce the goods. Somewhat more generally, it is also quite conceivable New Age teachings to do with the sanctification of capitalism can serve to enhance the quality of life of employees as well as their commitment.

Of particular note, it will be recalled, those with counter-cultural interests – who might otherwise be inclined to be critical – are provided with justifications for working in the mainstream (see Tipton, 1983). Their guilt is diminished. Furthermore, New Age practices, aimed at 'bringing life back to work', might well serve to ease various problems. Involving a sense of tension between, on the one hand, the quest for personal authenticity and expression, and, on the other, the disciplined demands of the workplace, bringing 'life' back to the company can be expected to alleviate disquiet if not heal the tension.

To mention an additional matter concerning the efficacy of prosperity teachings and practices, to the extent that they contribute to capitalistic modernity – including consumer culture – one has to question their role in the future of the planet. It is surely dangerous to suppose, as do certain prosperity New Agers, that the earth is infinitely 'abundant'. For beliefs of this kind deflect attention away from the quest of finding modes of production – and consumption – more suited to the longer term 'economics' of the planet.

Teachers

Leaving to one side what might inspire them, there is absolutely no doubt that the key figures of the New Age – the gurus, trainers, masters, facilitators – are typically highly skilled. (If they were not, in a competitive market and with a discerning clientele, they would lose their trade.) The point is difficult to demonstrate in writing (although see Luke Rhinehart's brilliant *The Book of est* (1976)). You have to be there; or perhaps, watch ethnographic films. So I will content myself by reporting that when I observed an Exegesis seminar in 1984, I witnessed the most extraordinarily skilful pedagogy. Within a few hours of the seminar commencing, the trainer – Kim Coe – had the trainees working enthusiastically with her to change their lives. Those taking the seminar were rapidly transformed from being a perfectly normal sample of the population to a group doing and saying things entirely – one has got to assume – 'out of character'.

At the same time, however, New Age teachers are not immune from the lures of the ego. Some of the greatest have fallen. New

Agers frequently explaining this by saying that even the Selves of Enlightened beings cannot continually keep them safe from the assaults of their egos. To dwell on just one example, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh reported having experienced Enlightenment in 1953, adopting the designation 'Bhagwan' (meaning 'God self-realized' or 'the Blessed One') in 1971. Yet later in his life, especially whilst resident with his sannyasins in Oregon during the earlier 1980s, events took place which make it extremely difficult to suppose that Bhagwan was acting out of 'his' spirituality, if indeed he ever had. Among other things, this teacher of freedom – telling his sannyasins, for example, that 'You cannot have any fixed attitudes, fixed ideas' – allowed the commune to develop into what he himself came to describe as 'a concentration camp' (cited by Thompson and Heelas, 1986, pp. 111, 114). Apparently having taken refuge in the pleasures of laughing gas, it is not surprising that Bhagwan appears – in New Age eyes – to have succumbed to his ego.¹³

Looking to the future

What has the New Age got to offer with regard to the future of the planet? As we have seen, the New Age is capable of enhancing the quality of the lives of those participating; and for many, the New Age is one of new meanings and experiences. But so far as can be established from available information, it does not score especially well when it comes down to *well-informed* practices. At the same time, however, it must be emphasized that new experiences and meanings not infrequently translate into 'better' activities concerning the well-being of life on Earth: greater exercise of Self-responsibility; greater attention to the cares of the environment; greater concern with avoiding making a mess of one's own life as well as those around you; more enthusiasm and focus at work; greater tranquility whilst sick or dying; more honesty in relationships; and living positively in terms of brotherhood, sisterhood, and humanity.

The great problem is that the more the New Age seeks liberation from traditions, rules, codes, even beliefs, the more it emphasizes freedom, the greater the amount of work which has to be done by Self-spirituality (assuming this exists). Life beyond dogma or belief might be fine; but to rely on the Self, we have seen, is a precarious undertaking: at any given moment, there is always the possibility that what one takes to be the voice within is actually

ego-prompted. Perhaps the reason why the New Age is at its best in enabling individuals to transform the quality of their lives and, apparently, at its worst in bringing about a transformed 'institutional' order of schools, communities and workplaces is that the latter are collectivities. Collectives have to be organized. Given the powers of the ego, and without rules, regulations, codes of conduct, this is not easy to do.

Tolstoy, Charles Taylor and The Prince of Wales

Perhaps, then, the solution for the future lies with a 'structured Self-ethic'. Tolstoy sought to reconcile the pupil's maximum freedom with the teacher's duty to communicate what Tolstoy believed to be eternal truths; for teaching to be somehow both 'learner-centred' and 'curriculum-centred' (see Murphy, 1992). More recently, Charles Taylor (1991) has sought a similar reconciliation. His starting point is with what he calls 'a powerful moral ideal' (p. 15). As it is summarized,

everyone has a right to develop their own form of life, grounded on their own sense of what is really important or of value. People are called upon to be true to themselves and to seek their own self-fulfilment. What this consists of, each must, in the last instance, determine for him- or herself. No one else can or should try to dictate its contents. (p. 14)

Taylor accepts that this 'individualism of self-fulfilment' (ibid.) 'has taken trivialized and self-indulgent forms', including – it can be noted – those to do with 'exotic spirituality' (p. 15). He also accepts that 'the culture of self-fulfilment has led many people to lose sight of concerns that transcend them' (ibid.). But unlike all those who argue against this ethicality, Taylor wants to save the essentially 'powerful moral ideal' that is operative.

The trick, then, is to find a way of saving what is good whilst avoiding what is bad. And this Taylor endeavours to do by embedding the ethic in that which lies beyond the individual:

I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter. But to bracket out history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity, everything but what I find in myself, would be to eliminate all candidates for what matters. Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order *matters* crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands. (pp. 40–1)

Accordingly, 'we ought to be trying to persuade people that self-fulfilment, so far from excluding unconditional relationships and moral demands beyond the self, actually requires these in some form' (pp. 72-3; my emphasis).

This communitarian, traditionalized rendering of the ethic of authenticity, however valuable, has one unfortunate consequence: little is left of the 'powerful moral ideal' with which Taylor began. Initially, for example, there is the 'voice within' and the value attached to 'self-determining freedom'; whilst somewhat later in the volume there are the 'unconditional relationships'. Attempts to traditionalize or structure the ethic of authenticity thus entails that it has to pay a considerable price. What exactly is left of the ethic is unclear: perhaps being true to oneself when that self is itself part and parcel of various kinds of unconditional relationships?

The relevance of all this to the New Age is obvious. The more that the New Age tries to 'persuade' participants along the lines argued by Taylor, the weaker the (sacralized) ethic of authenticity which lies at its heart. It might become more securely organized, communal or 'solid' in the process, but the Self-ethic is correspondingly undermined. For New Agers, 'unconditional relationships' must come by way of their own experience, not by way of persuasion. And conversely, the more that the New Age is detraditionalized or otherwise anti-authoritarian, the more likely it is that it that participants take advantage of their freedom to lapse into 'trivialized and self-indulgent' versions of supposed Self-spirituality, and the more difficult (it appears) is it to live the communal life.

The great challenge for the future, I think, is for the New Age to find ways of ensuring that it minimizes the trivialized and self-indulgent whilst at the same time not becoming too traditionalized or hierarchically authoritative. However difficult it might be to carry out the kind of programme proposed by Taylor, it seems to me that the authority, authenticity and expressivity of the person (if not the Self) must somehow be married with (appropriate) authority coming from without. The ego - at least if New Agers (and others!) are to be believed - is simply too powerful to expect people to be able to 'true to themselves' in some sort of deinstitutionalized vacuum.

Whatever the steps which New Agers take to 'balance' internal and external voices of authority, however, it is highly unlikely that tensions - evident in the New Age today - will go away. Wiccans, for example, will continue to create their own rituals and discern the esoteric significance of magical texts by using

their intuitions whilst at the same time faithfully following the formulae of specified rituals and their associated texts; members of particular movements will continue to talk of their freedom, whilst apparently obeying the commands of their masters. But this kind of tension - between autonomous, expressive personhood and that which derives from without - is precisely what will ensure that the New Age sustains its vitality.¹⁴

Finally, how does The Prince of Wales fit into the picture? Whereas the traditional ultimately prevails in Taylor's attempt to marry what lies within with what lies without, the situation is now reversed. On first sight, one might assume The Prince is a straightforward traditionalist. In one speech, for instance, he states that 'If you destroy the past or consistently deny its relevance to the present, man eventually loses his soul and his roots' (reported by Newland, 1989). However, as the following summary of an address delivered at the inauguration of the Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture serves to indicate, the traditional is treated in an unconventional fashion: 'the architecture he hopes to see taught and explored in the Institute "is not so much a traditional architecture, which resembles or apes the past, but rather a kind of architecture whose forms, plans and materials are based on human feeling"' (reported by Christopher Lockwood, 1992). Given that architecture, as The Prince (1989) puts it, 'has always been the outward expression of an inner aspiration' (p. 156), the job of the architect is to learn from the past by deploying one's own sensibility to discern (supposedly) timeless aesthetics rather than simply mimicking the details of previous work. Indeed, as he makes clear in his address, 'spirit' should be restored to its rightful place in the education of the architect, spirit being described as 'that overwhelming experience or awareness of a oneness with the natural world', an experience which 'steals upon you and floods your whole being despite your best logical intentions' (as reported by Lockwood, 1992).

Mediated by way of one's spiritually-informed experience, traditions thereby lose their (traditional) authoritative standing. Their significance or value being discerned by 'intuition', or what one 'finds in oneself', means that traditions are operating in an internalized, experiential fashion. And so we are back with the danger noted by Charles Taylor, namely that the loss of transcendent - over-and-above the self - traditions can readily result in the 'trivialized and self-indulgent'. To only accept the past, when it appears to ring true in one's own experience, is not necessarily to learn from the past; for it could involve simply using the past

to indulge in what one merely wants to hear. In sum, and in their different ways, Charles Taylor and the Prince of Wales show how difficult it is to 'marry' the operation of that which comes from 'within' and that which comes from without.

Authority and safety

Utopianism, with too much authority and of the wrong kind, has obtained a bad reputation during this century. Is the New Age likely to spawn fanatical, totalitarian, if not fascist and racist, movements? Movements of this kind are most likely to appear when a skilful leader sets up (or helps establish) a dynamic which enables his or her followers to perceive the outside world as evil and threatening. With strong boundaries between what lies without and what lies within, followers become convinced that their spiritual purity is threatened by the external realm. Since this purity is essential for their salvation – either in this world, the next, or both – something must be done about the source of danger. One response is mass suicide, handling the source of danger by moving to the spiritual realm. Another is to attack the source of danger.

There are several examples of this kind of dynamic being set in motion in New Age circles. However, New Age teachings should serve to ensure that developments of this kind remain few and far between in the future. New Agers, by and large, attach much too much importance to their freedom to be attracted to closed groups run by domineering authority figures. And perhaps even more importantly, New Agers, with their perennialized values and assumptions, do not take kindly to the idea that the world is divided into those who are evil and those who are saved. In contrast to exclusivistic religiosity, which, as history shows, can result in the most terrible outcomes, inclusivistic faith – for all people are seen as essentially spiritual – serves as a powerful counter-measure to the 'us v. them' mentality. And this must auger well for the future role of New Age utopianism.¹⁵

'Terminal faith' and the technologization of spirituality

Looking more into the future, what else is there to predict? Currently, the New Age is not postmodern. To make that claim is to essentialize modernity, contradicting the non-essentializing outlook of the (supposed) postmodern condition, and, by treating modernity as one thing, failing to recognize that the New Age is a perpetuation – thinking of perhaps the most pertinent of cultural

trajectories – of the counter-Enlightenment Romantic Movement. Furthermore, it can be argued that the great shift in our sensibilities, our forms of life, is only now getting off the ground.¹⁶

This 'getting off the ground' – which might well soon lead to a genuinely postmodern condition – has to do with the extremely rapid development of computers and computer-related technologies. One reads that the next generation of supercomputers will be 200 million times faster than today's home computers; one reads of single electron chips performing calculations; one reads of plans to insert silicon chips into people's heads so that they can plug directly into the information highway; and – an immediate turning point this – one reads that the first virtual reality head-sets for the home (CyberMaxx and Virtual iO) were launched at the European Computer Trade Show in London on 26 March 1995.

Until recently, the New Age has used technology largely to monitor participants' states of being. Scientology's 'E meter' provides a good illustration. (At least in earlier days, the technology was pretty crude, tin cans being used to – supposedly – transmit signals from hands to the meter itself.) Today, however, increasing numbers are taking advantage of technological progress to enhance the efficacy of what perhaps the New Age is best at doing: transporting people into other realms; enchanting them; introducing new experiences.

Michael Deering, head of a research team at Sun Micro Systems, a California computer company examining commercial applications, has recently claimed that 'You can duplicate any human emotion or recreate any human experience with technology' (cited by Levy and Rayment, 1995). Not far away, in Beverly Hills, Timothy Leary (now 74) is a spokesman for digital technology. The computer has replaced his 1960s faith in LSD as a way of transforming consciousness. The expression 'terminal faith', taken from the title of an article by Mark Taylor (1996) on the topic, captures the matter exactly. The New Age now offers things like Mystic Vision's 'Virtual Reality Experiences', promising an 'enlightening adventure through the divine levels of the Celestial Kingdom', or Mind Explorer's equipment which, it is promised, serves to ensure that 'the brainwave state is gently transformed from everyday "beta" through "alpha" to meditative "theta"'.¹⁷

Most arrestingly, however, the terminal is being put to use to provide the electricity to run the computers which themselves play a key role in orchestrating experience. We are in the world of the zippie (Zen Inspired Pronoia – or Pagan – Professionals),

or, more simply, the techno-shaman. The job is to use (extensively) computerized resources to take participants out of their egos. Digitalized music, computer-generated light and vision displays, virtual reality equipment (in the chill-out areas) – together, sometimes, with increasingly experience-determinate drugs – are brought to bear. As Douglas Rushkoff (1994) writes:

The DJs consider themselves the technoshamans of the evening. Their object is to bring the participants into a technoshamanic trance, much in the way the ancient shamans brought members of their tribes into similar states of consciousness. A DJ named Marcus speaks for the group: 'There's a sequence. You build people up, you take 'em back down. It can be brilliant. Some DJs will get people tweaking into a real animal thing, and others might get into this smooth flow where everyone gets into an equilibrium with each other. But the goal is to hit that magical experience that everyone will talk about afterwards.' (pp. 161–2)

This is, of course, the 60s – but with technological resources which were more or less unheard of then. As someone who works at Megatripolis (London) says, 'We're now living in an age where science meets magic'. And, it might be added, where science and magic meet in the territory of the natural (Rushkoff's book is entitled *Cyberia*). Bearing in mind the argument (in the last chapter) that spiritually significant experience can be constructed, what is now happening is clearly a potent brew. The right music, the right drug, the right pulse, the right virtuals, the right technoshaman orchestrating the technologies of experience – and you have the 'magical moment', indeed, the 'terminal faith'.¹⁷

On the whole, however, the New Age has not yet really taken on board many of the available technologies. And it also has to be said that certain technologies – for instance virtual reality equipment – are currently rather ineffectual. However, it is entirely beyond question that such equipment will rapidly improve in quality: an increase in effectiveness which can only enhance the prospects of bringing about a new world – at least in experience. And this will be a world where the impact of experience beyond everyday reality will surely be powerful enough to lead participants into realms ill-established in our predominantly down-to-earth, empiricist, rationalistic, modernity.

Wisdom

Another prediction is that New Age teachings provide wisdom for the future. Whether or not teachings are wise is, for most people,

ultimately a matter of individual judgement. If I may introduce a personal note, however, one of the great virtues of the New Age is surely its perennialized worldview. In contrast to that exclusivism ('We are the saved; you are not, you are below us') so often found in association with traditionalized forms of religion, the teaching is profoundly inclusivistic. We are all essentially one; all religions point to the same truth; the globe is a whole; unity prevails within diversity. At a time of Balkanizing tendencies, the more who hold the viewpoint of spiritually-informed humanism, the better. (Certainly that was what many thought during the 1960s, when the anti-American Vietnamese were 'brothers'.) And at a time when environmental problems loom large, it is also the case that the more who feel deep affinity with nature, the better.¹⁸

An additional virtue of New Age teachings is that they often illuminate the 'human condition', at least that 'condition' as it exists for many in the contemporary west. In particular, much of what the New Age has to say about the functioning of the ego seems to be at least 'culturally-cum-psychologically true'. The great majority of the population – myself included – is surely locked into harmful and destructive habits or psychological routines; is 'limited' by the need to posture or impress; is afflicted by a distorted emotional life. Often drawing on the extraordinarily rich eastern analyses of ego-operations, what is taught in this regard should engage attention.

As for the solution, the shift to inner spirituality: one can only hope that this is wise. But minimally, it is an excellent idea to be optimistic about *human* potential. There is no need to remain as we are; we can become better beings. (Who would want to deny this?) And this is what the New Age, in its sacralized code, spells out for our futures. Optimism – even if it might be sustained on invalid grounds – is not a bad message for our, indeed any, times. 'Enjoy Life (this is not a rehearsal)', it says on my key ring from India. Celebrate the self – although not in a 'me, me, me' fashion – is what we can learn to value and experience from the best that the New Age has to offer.

The New Age provides vehicles for participants to explore what it is to be alive. The vehicles – rituals, claims, assumptions – might be ill-grounded. But this does not prevent them from serving to fire the imagination. Shirley MacLaine might well be wrong in holding a radicalized view of responsibility (supposing that she is responsible for the birth of her parents, for example), but she has nevertheless clearly attended to the matter of what it is to be responsible. New Agers might never be able to be all *that* liberated

and expressive; but the goals of freedom and creativity can serve to open up new approaches to life. Living entirely in terms of the Self-ethic might be an impossibility, but the attempt to live an authentic life can lead one away from pretence and manipulation. Rituals to energize nature might not work, but the rituals can serve to develop a sense of appreciation of what nature has to offer. Spiritual therapies might not be spiritual, but they can open up new perspectives and possibilities with regard to what it is to be a person. Work might not serve as a spiritual discipline, but the meaning of work can be transformed if it is as regarded as such, becoming considerably more rewarding in the process. Cyberia might not have any ontological standing, but the skilful technoshaman can 'open the doors of perception' to re-enchant the world and reveal that there is more to life – in particular, intense feelings of solidarity and communion – than are to be found in the work-a-day world.

Establishing the future

A recent story in the British press concerned a smallish village with a fundamentalistic church and a New Age shop/centre. (The story was about friction between the two.) These two contrasting wings of the religious realm, one emphasizing the authority of the transcendent, the other the authority of the monistic, are almost certainly faring better than what lies in between, most specifically liberal Christianity. Certainly it is more than likely that these two forms of religiosity would not have been juxtaposed in the village say some twenty years ago.

Many commentators have noted the (relative) vitality of more uncompromising, authoritative and exclusivistic forms of Christianity. Far fewer have dwelt on the fact that the New Age is considerably more popular than it was – say – during the 1950s, having enjoyed specific periods of growth during the 1960s and since the later 1980s. Essentially, growth is bound up with those cultural momenta – traced in chapter 6 – which favour the adoption of Self-spirituality. Together with the fact that technological advances will surely have much to contribute, it is thus highly likely that the New Age has a promising future.

But if it is not to become increasingly middle-aged – and then retired – younger people have to be attracted. As we have seen, there are clear signs of this happening – the hunch being that this growth will continue. More generally, it is also likely that the end of the millennium will encourage various kinds of 'new age'

thinking, this serving to stimulate interest. Probably the only thing which could dampen growing interest concerns adverse coverage by the media, especially given that the media will be able to capitalize on the fact that the New Age Movement will never be entirely perfect. However, it must also be born in mind that a surprising amount of media coverage is positive – perhaps reflecting the fact that those who provide such reports are themselves sympathetic.

Conclusion

The New Age shows what 'religion' looks like when it is organized in terms of what is taken to be the authority of the Self. Arguably, for judgements are involved, there is much that is commendable: values such as authenticity and humankindness; positive experiences; renewal of identities; right forms of livelihood; the optimism, the celebratory outlook, the re-enchantment of life. The great challenge, however, is posed by the authority of the consumer. As New Agers themselves acknowledge, the ego is powerful. And the (relatively) detraditionalized nature of the New Age means that participants are not disciplined by those kinds of duties, disciplines, commandments, and moral codes which are spelt out in theistic religiosity. It is thus only too easy for people to use the New Age, taking advantage of its provisions and its emphasis on freedom to satisfy their egos rather than 'working' to change themselves.¹⁹

As leading New Agers unhappily admit, many already use the New Age in a 'what is in it for me?' fashion. Whether a spirituality based on the – experienced – authority of the Self, whilst requiring the exercise of *disciplines*, will increasingly be supplanted by one catering for the needs of the hedonistic consumer, remains to be seen. But to close on a personal note: I, for one, hope not.

Notes

- 1 The most formidable Christian critic is the Pope (1994), stating, 'We cannot delude ourselves that this [the so-called New Age] will lead toward a renewal of religion. It is only a new way of practising gnosticism – that attitude of the spirit that, in the name of a profound knowledge of God, results in distorting His Word and replacing it with purely human words' (p. 90). For a forceful critique from the point of view of Christianity, see Constance Cumbey (1983). Monica Sjoo (1992) approaches the matter from the point of view of feminism, claiming that 'There is an utter lack of, and concern for, feminist values or recognition of the Goddess in the New Age movement' (p. 169).

- 2 The most formidable cultural critic with regard to the supposedly self-centred nature of the New Age and the closely associated therapeutic culture is Christopher Lasch (see, for example, 1987); see also Peter Marin (1975), Philip Rieff (1985) writing of 'our invincible ignorance of anything higher than the self' (p. ix) and Edwin Schur (1977). New Ager Ken Wilber (1987), together with Theodore Roszak (1993), are interesting on the topic. Dick Anthony et al.'s *Spiritual Choices* (1987) is a sustained critique of New Age teachings which incorporate outer prosperity. (But compare the highly esteemed Indian spiritual leader, Swami Chintmayananda, being one of those who does not teach that it is necessary to detach oneself from all worldly pleasures to attain salvation.) As for the amounts earned by some movements, Richard Behar (1986) reports that Scientology had assets worth \$400 million as of 1986; and est - thinking in terms of 1991 prices (when it would appear to have generated an income of some \$440 million during the period 1971-1991). (See also Tipton (1988) on est as a business.)
- 3 On the matter of 'spiritual Disneyland' and consuming religion, see Heelas (1994a, 1996c); see also James Beckford (1992) and David Lyon (1993).
- 4 Regarding the reasons for the (relative) lack of engagement with attempts to improve the sociocultural, one is that - as New Agers have told me - is that 'outer revolution' is only possible once the 'inner' one has been carried out - and that takes time. (See also Rubin, 1976, p. 91.) A related reason, now in the words of Donald Stone (1976), is that 'Rather than taking direct action to change the political structures or setting up an exemplary counterculture, members of these [Human Potential] groups seek to transcend the oppressiveness of culture by transforming themselves as individuals' (p. 93). One does not have to change the mainstream if, by way of detachment, one can (positively) transform one's experience of it. As Ehrhard says, 'The way it is, is enough. Who you are is enough. The only thing you have to do is be' (cited by Tipton, 1982, p. 224; my emphasis).
- 5 Analysis of MMPI questionnaire returns (of the 50 people who had taken the Exegesis seminar held during 1984, together with all but a few of the 165 workers at Programmes) shows *no* pathologies. Regarding another controversial movement, Scientology, Michael Ross (1988) reports, 'Results ... consistently suggest that there are no measurable negative associations (and some benefits) from membership in Scientology', the point being made that 'The disastrous consequences and ego disintegration reported by some authors for members of the Church of Scientology cannot be demonstrated in this sample. In fact, quite the opposite result was consistently found, with statistically significant improvement in social ease and goal directed behavior being apparent' (pp. 634-5). Research on Ananda Cooperative Village, as summarized by James Richardson (1985), provides results which 'do not suggest personality disorders or major psychopathologies' (p. 213).
- 6 Dan Wakefield (1994) states that '16 independent studies have reported a high rate of satisfaction' with regard to est graduates, continuing, 'Public-opinion analyst Daniel Yankelovich expressed "surprise" over the results of his own investigation, which reported that "more than seven out of ten participants found The Landmark Forum to be one of their life's most rewarding experiences"' (p. 24); see also Luke Rhinehart (1976, pp. 234-40). James Richardson (1985c) surveys a number of studies of different

- movements, concluding that 'life in the new religions is often therapeutic instead of harmful' (p. 221). See also Brock Kilbourne (1983) and his claim that the data surveyed 'tended to support a "therapeutic" view of some cult affiliation' (p. 380), Ted Nordquist (1978) and Anne-Sofie Rosen (1980). Countless participant testimonies could also be provided: to illustrate, think of the San Francisco State professor who took est and 'felt a surge of life' or an American actress, also having taken est, who reports 'it was the most powerful growth experience I ever had'.
- 7 Traditionalized ethics, it can be noted, work whether or not there is a truly existing religious realm. All that matters is that people believe or respect religious beliefs. The situation is not the same with detraditionalized monistic ethicality. Whether or not it works ultimately hangs on whether there is an inner realm, serving to inform practices and life in general.
- 8 Concerning anarchical chaos, Clifford Geertz (1975) writes, 'Undirected by culture patterns - organized systems of significant symbols - man's behavior would be virtually ungovernable, a mere chaos of pointless acts and exploding emotions, his experience virtually shapeless. Culture, the accumulated totality of such patterns, is not just an ornament of human existence but ... an essential condition for it' (p. 46).
- 9 Rachael Kohn (1991) provides a robust critique along these lines, arguing that 'where radical subjectivism is encouraged among followers, radical authority will be exerted by their leader' (p. 136). For further discussion, see Heelas (1982, 1996c).
- 10 For more on the exercise of authority at Findhorn, see Andrew Rigby and Bryan Turner (1972). Lewis Carter (1990) provides a fascinating account of how Bhagwan's ranch in Oregon, Rajneeshpuram, operated. In the absence of a shared belief system, he argues, members were forced to use three mechanisms for controlling behaviour, namely arbitrary charismatic authority, personal confrontation, and banishment from the group. They also controlled themselves by demonizing the outside world of Oregon, uniting in the face of a common 'red-neck' enemy.
- 11 See also Tony Walter (1993) on 'death in the New Age'.
- 12 Given the number of factors which can influence business efficacy, it goes without saying that it is often difficult to pinpoint the exact role played by belief in, if not the actual operation of, what lies within.
- 13 On other masters who appear to have run into difficulties, see Don Lattin (1991), Arthur Johnson (1992), and Dan Wakefield (1994) on Werner Ehrhard; Mick Brown (1995) on Sogyal Rinpoche (author of *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*).
- 14 New Agers attempt to resolve this basic tension, by claiming - typically - that they only obey those commands and rules which are required to effect liberation (see, for example, Tipton, 1982, chapter 4, on 'rule egoism'). But it can also be argued that such commands and rules actually serve as disciplines which instill beliefs and values. Although the matter requires much more research, it is highly unlikely that the New Age is as antinomian as its discourses might suggest. For more discussion, with reference to the Rajneesh movement (including the nature of context-setting), see Thompson and Heelas (1986, chapter 6).
- 15 For more on a New Age movement which - for a time - went wrong, see Thompson and Heelas (1986) on what happened at Rajneeshpuram, when Bhagwan's retreat into silence was associated with developments of a very

- non-New Age variety. See also Lewis Carter (1990).
- 16 The case for the New Age as postmodern is well put by David Lyon (1993). I have argued against this view (1996c), whilst also accepting – perhaps ill-advisably in retrospect – that it is valid for some aspects of what is going on (1993, 1994a). Lars Johansson (1994) usefully discusses the New Age as a synthesis of the premodern, modern and postmodern.
- 17 An excellent example of going beyond the ego is provided by participants at Cyberseed (Brixton), chanting ‘We will no longer tolerate individuality. We have no personality, and we don’t want any personality’. The aim at this club, writes Imogen Edwards-Jones (1993) is to ‘present a vision where man, music and machine contrive to be one’ (p. 12). On zippies, see Mark Jolly (1994); on the general rave scene, see Steve Redhead (1993); on the shaman and rock music, see Rogan Taylor (1985); Andrew Ross (1991) discusses the counter-culture in connection with technology. See also Nicholas Saunders (1995) on Ecstasy and Spirituality.
- 18 I have attempted a defence of humanistic values, against the deconstructors and others, elsewhere (Heelas (1996b).
- 19 For further discussion of detraditionalization and ‘consuming religion’, see Heelas (1994a).

Appendix 1: Characterizations of the New Age

William Bloom’s (1992) excellent formulation runs as follows:

- All life – all existence – is the manifestation of Spirit, of the Unknowable, of that supreme consciousness known by many different names in many different cultures.
- The purpose and dynamic of all existence is to bring Love, Wisdom, Enlightenment . . . into full manifestation.
- All religions are the expression of this same inner reality.
- All life, as we perceive it with the five human senses or with scientific instruments, is only the outer veil of an invisible, inner and causal reality.
- Similarly, human beings are twofold creatures – with: (i) an outer temporary personality; and (ii) a multi-dimensional inner being (soul or higher self).
- The outer personality is limited and tends towards love.
- The purpose of the incarnation of the inner being is to bring the vibrations of the outer personality into a resonance of love.
- All souls in incarnation are free to choose their own spiritual path.
- Our spiritual teachers are those whose souls are liberated from the need to incarnate and who express unconditional love, wisdom and enlightenment. Some of these great beings are well-known and have inspired the world religions. Some are unknown and work invisibly.
- All life, in all its different forms and states, is interconnected