

A PLATFORM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Spirituality without Religion

ADRIAN CAIRNS



QUG Pamphlet No.30

£3.30

About this pamphlet

Adrian Cairns' breath-takingly challenging pamphlet, *A Platform of Consciousness*, seizes inspiration from Frank Parkinson's belief - 'The leap that takes us from intellectual enquiry into the darkness of an unsuspected way of knowing is made from a platform of consciousness already built up by the intellect.'

Adrian Cairns is one of the most widely read and deeply questioning of contemporary Quaker universalists and in this, his third and most prophetic pamphlet in our series, he takes the boldest of leaps. A short anthology of quotations provides some of the struts and then six sections of radical and mind-expanding thinking provide the platform from which he shows us a dramatic vision of a new spirituality without religion.

'Consciousness, or awareness of our human situation as it really is, will provide the new vision and help guide us to that vision's accomplishment. The new philosophy of living taught from birth will provide a template of behaviour leading to the promised ideal: that will be the unity of the All and One fused through human experience as light and love and glory. Religions no doubt will survive to play a part in this vast social paradigm shift, but less and less will they represent any unique authority or be prime movers of ethical action.'

With us on his enquiry into the 'darkness of this unsuspected way of knowing' are a host of 21st Century investigators all working at the cutting edge of contemporary thought and chosen to provoke the reader. The Dalai Lama and Karen Singh jostle with Stanislas Grof and Steven Pinker, Don Cupitt and John Hick with David Lorimer and Israel Rosenfield. Together they explore both our inner worlds of subjective spiritual experience with the outer worlds of external reality beyond language, to play their roles in fashioning an exciting holistic compass for new destinations.

Adrian Cairns is not afraid to ask the really big questions and then to struggle for his own innovative answers. This is a pamphlet for those who can risk being re-awakened and want to be stimulated to turn to the sources that he draws upon, looking again at their life experiences and working out their own responses afresh.

About the Author

Adrian Cairns is an actor by profession although he is given little opportunity to pursue his craft these days. For 25 years he was Associate Principal at the internationally famous Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. He has also been a television announcer, interviewer and presenter. He has written all his life, keeping an occasional journal for nearly 60 years, and publishing a number of philosophical articles, and a book on *The Making of the Professional Actor* (1966). Adrian contributes regularly to the *Universalist* periodical and this is his third Q.U.G. pamphlet.

The Quaker Universalist Group

The Quaker Universalist Group is based on our understanding that spiritual awareness is accessible to everyone of any religion or none and that no one can claim to have a final revelation or monopoly of truth.

We acknowledge that such awareness may be expressed in many different ways. We delight in this diversity and warmly welcome both Quakers and non-Quakers to join us.

Each Quaker Universalist Pamphlet expresses the views of its author, which are not necessarily representative of the Q.U.G. as a whole.

Published 2001 by the Quaker Universalist Group,
71 Aberdeen Park, Highbury, London. N5 2AZ
Publications Editor : Alec Davison

ISBN 0 948232 46 3

Cover design by Susi Malawi

Printed by Itchen Printers Limited, Southampton

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Dedication : To Alec Davison who first suggested this pamphlet.

Foreword

What help is intellectual analysis to everyday living? If we actually achieve the much-vaunted Theory of Everything, and have a reliable 'model of the universe' to guide our philosophical speculations, will it make much difference to our lives beyond the vital equation being printed on a T-shirt? Well, perhaps yes, perhaps no: as individuals there will always remain doubts and choices to be made, however conclusive the main evidence. While we may understand the basic scientific principles of creation - how the earth was made, what makes biology tick - we will still be left with areas of mystery. The seeking for truth will remain all. There will be no final answers to the meaning of everything. But there will be common experience among all human beings. So, at the very least, we can attempt to articulate that platform of consciousness on which we stand together.

We may not entirely agree upon, and certainly not entirely understand, the nature of that awareness, but we may hope that in sharing an expression of it, a warm feeling may be engendered that we are seeking the same sort of enlightenment. We are not alone, but companions on a way which may well lead to a new orientation occurring for each of us, or what today is sometimes termed a 'paradigm-shift'. Moreover, in occurring for each individual, it becomes a new social paradigm-shift as well, whereby both the possibility and the necessity of a progressive evolution can be realised.

So we begin this essay by asking a few basic questions and offering a few personal responses. Only in the last section do we move to the global perspective and indicate where we can, or just might go from where we find ourselves; from that reasonably 'sure ground' of common experience towards a hopeful and consummated future.

Aldous Huxley defined the Perennial Philosophy as meaning :

the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine reality; and the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being ...

(The Perennial Philosophy, 1946, p.1.)

That is the ground upon which this Platform is built; with the understanding that, albeit perennial, like love itself, our spiritual life needs constant nourishment and renewal if it is not to atrophy in mindless repetition of past forms. If religion is unable sufficiently to renew itself for each generation then it has to be left like the broken Ozymandias in his antique desert land, while the divine Reality survives without it.

A short anthology of struts for the Platform

'There is no living transmission of anything that lives without a continual renaissance.' - *Henry Corbin*¹

'Use the light that dwells within you to regain your natural clarity of sight.' - *Lao Tzu*

'Sunlight's a thing that needs a window
Before it enter a dark room.
Windows don't happen.' - *R.S. Thomas*²

'Moments come, which come but rarely in history, when quite perceptibly one age draws to an end and another dawns; when we stand poised between a collapsing past and an indeterminate future...; when, in essence, to survive we need not merely a linear progression in thinking but a paradigm shift in consciousness.' - *Karen Singh*³

'Blessed are the solitary and the chosen, for you will find the Kingdom. For you are from it, and to it you will return.' - *Jesus*⁴

'Even though you tie a hundred knots
The string remains one.' - *Rumi*

'I believe deeply that we must find, all of us together, a new spirituality. This new concept ought to be elaborated alongside religions in such a way that all people of good will could adhere to it.' - *The Dalai Lama*

'The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. it should transcend personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity.' - *Einstein*

'As human knowledge has grown, it has also become plain that every religious story ever told about how we got here is quite simply wrong. This, finally, is what all religions have in common. They didn't get it right. To choose unbelief is to choose mind over dogma, to trust in our humanity instead of all these dangerous divinities.' - *Salman Rushdie*⁵

'The leap that takes us from intellectual enquiry into the darkness of an unsuspected way of knowing is made from a platform of consciousness already built up by the intellect.' - *Frank Parkinson*⁶

1. Some fundamental questions and a few answers

Every religion has its creation story, an account starting 'In the beginning', a mythological statement encompassing a kind of truth which is accessible by all its adherents whether simple and uneducated or knowledgeable and sophisticated. It is metaphysics through poetry and dramatic story-telling; and sometimes it may even echo racial memories and orally-transmitted history. When recorded, it is based in a cultural and linguistic form that served the time of its initiation and of its founder or founders. Quite often, the founder of a religion is only fully exploited and interpreted by his later followers. Creation myths are found world-wide in the history of the race, and have been extensively researched by scholars of mythology, religion and anthropology from Max Mueller to James Frazer, from Mircea Eliade to Joseph Campbell.

What the creation myths were doing was attempting to articulate answers to fundamental questions of philosophy. Our scientists and poets are still at it. Those questions ask everything about our experience of existence, and look for the meaning of our lives. How did the universe begin? Is life no more than the product of chance processes? Is there a superior cosmic intelligence (God) responsible for creation and evolution? Is the human race special because of its self-consciousness? - able to ask questions like Who am I? What am I? How must I behave? Is consciousness possible outside the physical brain? Are the natural laws of science ever likely to explain supra-natural mysteries? Can time and space ever be reconciled with concepts of eternity and infinity? Why does the conflict between good and evil seem both necessary and inevitable? Where does meaning come from? Is there anything absolute, or is everything relative? Variations on such questions are legion. How we answer them, either for ourselves or through willing allegiance to an explanation given by others, will determine much of who we are and how we behave.

I am going to suggest, here at the start, that all truth, as far as we can know it (and that's the point) is relative and experiential. There may be an objective 'way things are' out there; but as the Buddha said, it all starts in the mind. It has to be the individual mind and not a 'group' thing because we can never truly know the mind of another. We may think we know, through language and other communication, and we may be roughly right; but 'first hand actuality' is what it says - first hand. We are defined physically as being a sentient species, and those senses and our reactions to stimuli define the world around us (not forgetting Teilhard de Chardin's reversal of this when he defines us as 'spiritual beings having a human experience'). It is possible, I suppose, to infer a group reaction to common experience; everyone must more or less experience life as I do; but is this truly an objective truth 'outside'

my subjective apprehension of it, or does it remain only 'more or less' the truth? The only exact truth, for me, is what I and I alone experience; and that is ultimately relative to what and who I am. After that personal conviction comes the communal responsibility of living with others; of doing as we would be done by; and further, all those ethical, educational, political, economic and ecological issues which challenge every society, as well as the individuals who comprise it.

The prime starting-point on any platform of consciousness has to be the acknowledgment or denial of what John Hick has dubbed the Fifth Dimension of spirituality. With several others, I can only see the cosmos, however naively, and however by way of mere analogy, as a work of art, mathematically conceived, evolving through the passion of a supreme artist. In metaphysics, as in all else, the individual has to pay his or her money and make a choice. There can be no neutrality over this. Either one accepts or refuses to accept the likelihood of extra-material or supra-natural influence. Neatly representing this uncomfortable dichotomy is Radio 4's longstanding 'Thought for the Day' which seems to anger as many as it helps in starting their morning. It does this because it undoubtedly divides the religious sheep from the materialist goats. The two-and-a-half minute 'Thoughts' are never so non-divisive and effective as when they use only lay terms rather than specifically religious language and references.

Is there or isn't there a supreme artist, conveniently identified in the same anthropomorphic and shorthand way as 'God'? I don't know, but the analogy seems to stand. In the cautious concluding words of Stanislas Grof's seminal book, *The Cosmic Game*: 'The findings of transpersonal psychology and consciousness research strongly suggest that the universe might be a creation of superior cosmic intelligence, and consciousness an essential aspect of existence'⁷. Opposed to this viewpoint is the scientific materialism which has taken such a strong hold during the last two industrial centuries in the West. But in doing so, it has contradicted nearly all the civilized experience of human history where spiritual writings and conclusions are available to us.

To answer 'what is the cosmos?' with 'the work of an artist' is neither more nor less satisfactory than the 'how did it begin?' question being answered (for now) with the Big Bang theory. For the present, that theory pertains, but some physicists are still doubtful. The whole conceptual theory of requiring a 'beginning' and an 'ending' may be mistaken. Creation is an endless Process happening both 'in' and 'outside' Time; and it appears that it might have a circular nature where beginnings and endings always merge into the present. Concerning the Creation of the universe, Buddhist philosophy refers to the principle of 'Dependent Co-arising' in which all things are totally connected and dependent on what has gone before, cause and

effect without end or beginning. In fact, all things exist in a timeless universe of 'higher space', to which we will be referring later.

Then there is the even more fascinating question of 'why does the cosmos exist at all?' Hawking notes that one in passing but Einstein, as ever, goes one further, and comments 'what really interests me is whether God had any choice in the creation of the world.' It is conceivable, says Grof, that the cosmic drama is unfolding beyond the control of even Absolute Consciousness, and can provide genuine surprises - which is where the 'artist' simile fits. Surprises for whom? Surely not just for us? They must be for the artist 'himself' in the process of creation - genuine 'creative accidents' which can bring either pleasure or pain. Cabalistic texts suggest that 'God wished to overcome boredom ...'; and our human nature can empathize here. Imagine knowing all and everything for ever! Likewise, Rumi indicates that the point of the material universe is that 'God wished to behold God', that is, to make his 'hidden self' manifest. Moreover, in doing so, God certainly shows some evidence in Nature of playfulness, humour and self-delectation - all attributes which might be said to be avoiding boredom.

Physicist Fred Alan Wolf even suggests that the cosmic creative process (or God) may be 'addicted to the experience of matter', presumably via human consciousness, which might support the Anthropic principle and the special significance of humanity in the universe - however apparently miniscule our material presence and however arrogant that may sound. The great Eckhart had a phrase for it which gives pause to the arrogance: 'God's being is our becoming'.

The bland assumption in so much 'religious' thinking about 'the concept of God' being this and doing that, all in anthropomorphic terms, is an astonishing one. It looks like a kind of mass hypnosis; and yet, it 'stands' for an intuition in humankind that we do exist for a purpose. Then we have to start trying to work out what that purpose might be: why, in fact, are we here at all?

It seems reasonable if not proveable that there is more to life than a chance chemical process, born out of the primeval 'soup' with a little star-dust thrown in. Some high-profile contemporary biologists seem to think that this is precisely what put us here in the first place; but 'chance', thus interpreted, is a two-edged sword. It can cut the materialist's way, but it also cuts the way of spiritual intention. The odds on human life developing, given the exact circumstances required, were, I understand, incredibly remote⁸. A mere fraction of a degree here, or a molecular difference there, and the whole process could have failed. It might be said with Churchillian scorn: some chance!

The jury is still out on whether consciousness is brain-local or has a non-local dimensionality; but as to whether a reductionist science, or even a more expansive and quantum one, can ever come up with a satisfactory 'explanation', based in spatio-temporal laws, is doubtful. The 'answers' are simply not in the same mode of perception, and certainly cannot be laboratory-tested. For the same reason, there can be no material reconciliation between this world and any beyond the four dimensions of sentient experience; no reconciliation between time and eternity, between space and infinity. Such transcendence as may be possible, what we sometimes call 'a sixth sense', has been experientially reported but remains unproveable. Likewise, a 'fifth dimension' can be posited clearly as an 'explanation', but not proved. This is where 'faith' and 'convincement' enter the equation, in a mystical rather than a religious sense, but they have to remain subjective and individually located. As soon as they are 'fixed' or institutionalized for all, they lose their essential ineffability.

The nature of good and evil, and the inevitability and necessity of the latter, is one of the most difficult problems facing any philosopher. Matters of injustice and retribution are raised by it, begging questions about compassionate rehabilitation and of ultimate justice beyond the grave. Also the question 'where does meaning come from?' is equally difficult, for it inclines to take any answers beyond earthly logic, however 'reasonable' they may be in the context of a supra-natural model of creation where there is 'meaning' before and after death. Meaning can only relate for us to direct experience. Moreover, being subjective, we cannot prove in any cognitive sense that such meaning is important and significant. We are in the area of intuition and 'blind faith', and vulnerable to all material which claims to have the answer to 'meaningfulness'. Religions have mostly traded on this unproveable and unanswerable intuition that there must be more to life and living than mere reproduction and survival. The 'selfish gene' may satisfy some biologists, but for most of us, the experience of beauty, courage, love and compassion tells us otherwise.

Lastly, from the questions posed at the start, the undoubted relativity of all things as we humans can know them, including Truth itself, is a stumbling-block for most religious institutions where the whole point is to offer an established Absolute. The paradox is best expressed by the *Tao Te Ching*, and echoed by Wittgenstein in our own time: 'the Tao which can be spoken is not the true Tao' and 'whereof one cannot speak, one must be silent'. Which, of course, calls into question the whole weakness of language in discussing these fundamental questions.

2. Language and its shortcomings

Language is what differentiates us from all other sentient beings. In *The Descent of Man* in 1871, Darwin concluded that language is 'an instinctive tendency to acquire an art'; and today Steven Pinker sees it as being 'as innate to us as flying is to geese'⁹. There are, of course, 'languages' of gesture, music, mathematics and so on; but here we are solely concerned with it as a communication system based on an alphabet, words, sentences and grammar. It is the only general means we have through which to share ideas and rational discourse. Sometimes, when used by the great poets, philosophers and story-tellers, it can transport meaning to sublime heights. However, it has always also had severe limitations and drawbacks, never more so than in the present day.

The trouble with words is that they can be made to mean whatever you want them to mean (pace Humpty Dumpty), and quite often, they can unwittingly mean what you don't intend them to convey, especially in these times so sensitive to 'political correctness'. The whole syndrome of juggling with language becomes a matter of public ridicule with Bill Clinton's legalistic quibbling over what is or is not having sex: 'it depends what the meaning of "is" is.'¹⁰

Theology and philosophy are the worst subjects where language is concerned because they deal so often in abstract qualities and concepts, unverifiable except through personal experiential conviction. The famous use of 'the Word' at the start of John's Gospel is another case in point. 'In the beginning was the Word ...' is a translation from the Greek *logos*, meaning reason or discourse, and later expanded by Neo-Platonist philosophers to mean the cosmic creative principle itself, and to which Christian theologians attached the meaning of Jesus Christ himself as 'being with God in the beginning'. The linguistic circularity of it all can be dismaying.

The buzz-phrase today which encapsulates our distrust of language is 'spin-doctoring': that manipulation of words in the service of an agenda which has little to do with their actual meaning and sense, or, in that other classic linguistic substitution of our time, is 'being economical with the truth'. Politicians, lawyers, journalists - and yes, churchmen - are all notably expert at doing it. We are left to 'deconstruct' their words for ourselves, and to 'unpack' what their statements actually imply. Because of these shortcomings about language, it has become more necessary than ever to establish some sort of agreement as to the reference-points when we try to address those things which mean most to us in life. A new spiritual literacy is needed for all those in the world today who are seeking a language untainted with religious overtones and interpretations by which they can communicate with fellow-seekers about their most profound apprehensions. That is what is meant by

having 'a platform of consciousness' from which to proceed with such communications; and as it happens, just such a language has been 'found' by a leading 'religious writer' (his own label) to exist in the idioms of ordinary English speech.

Don Cupitt 'discovers', rather to his professional surprise, that 'ordinary language is the best radical theologian'¹¹. Where 'God' has now become a rather embarrassing shorthand for our deepest sense of ultimate 'meaning', 'life' and 'living' have taken over. Cupitt lists about 150 references which use the new 'in-word', from 'the sanctity of life' and 'the quality of life' to 'Such is life' and the harsh injunction to 'Get a life'. Even at funerals, where traditional religious language mostly still holds sway, it is now equally common to hear the highest praise given to the deceased expressed in such terms as he or she 'loved life' and 'lived life to the full'. Indeed, the new focus is on 'life now' rather than any possible hereafter. It is not an unexpected philosophy to hear in a materialistic age.

Cupitt himself, in several other books, is now strictly materialist. There is no other world than this one. When you die, that's it. If accused of throwing the spiritual baby out with the materialist bathwater, however acutely analysed for our times, he would probably reply (in Lloyd Geering's words) that there is no baby, only bathwater. We live in 'the outsideless world of language' and experience only a 'radical immanence'. Thus he cuts himself off from the long history of the Esoteric Tradition and individual experiential 'evidence' of the transcendental and supra-natural.

Where I concur with Cupitt is in his conclusion that philosophy is more of an art-form than a science. There is no scientific language possible with metaphysics, only perhaps quantum-leaps of the poet's imagination. Any new 'spiritual literacy' will have to acknowledge this 'uncertainty factor' (or what has been called the 'perhaps-ness' of all verbal claims to truth). In the final analysis, poetry, in whatever language or translation, from Rumi to Rilke, from Blake to Raine, from Eliot to Hughes, has proved the best that language can do in the realm of metaphysics.

With religion subsumed into philosophy as an art-form, once again personal experience becomes the ultimate arbiter of truth for each individual. We know what we know; but more crucially, we only know what we can know. It will be experientially different, not only for each person, but for different periods in that person's life and development. Language can only speak for and to each person's condition.

3. Basic spiritual belief as a necessary hypothesis.

It will be clear from what has been said so far that a spiritual dimension to human life, and indeed, to all material creation, is not only a probability but a necessary hypothesis. John Hick calls it the Fifth Dimension, and wisely concludes that 'we have to learn to live on a "need to know" basis, trusting the fifth or spiritual dimension of our own nature as it responds - in however fleeting and fragmentary ways - to the fifth dimension of the total reality around us'¹².

Existence may be 'simply just there', a 'contingent outflowing' for the pragmatic materialist, but the mystery of its very presence contains more than a convenient excuse for a proud and mostly selfish humanity to justify itself, individually and communally, as of some sort of importance, with a likelihood of survival in some fashion. Most Eastern religions have never had a problem with this. It is only the last three hundred years or so in the West, the ages of reason and enlightenment, with the meteoric rise of science and industry, and the communications and information explosion during the 20th century, which have dismissed the spiritual dimension with intellectual doubts, scriptural deconstruction and post-modernist nihilism. Although even the scientists are now suggesting that the infinite 'empty' space of the cosmos may be more of a plenum than a vacuum.

However, the spiritual vacuum so obviously created in the West has been filling up fast of late with many a doubtful 'New Age' substitute; although this would not apply to the unquestionable popularity of various Buddhist teachers who have 'colonized' the West, especially since the exodus of lamas from Tibet after the ruthless take-over by China in 1950. The importance of Eastern religious cultures filtering back into the West is that they have revived a consideration of the historic and now global significance of what is called the Esoteric Tradition - also called, as was mentioned in the Foreword, The Perennial Philosophy - which asserts that our true nature is divine.

To some it might still appear that the confrontation between religion and science remains a serious one. But the fact is that except for some extremists in the U.S. 'bible-belt', the so-called 'creationists', and a number of minority fundamentalist Christian sects, together with those dogma-protecting prelates who yearly look more foolish issuing their blinkered and backward-looking theology, the confrontation is no longer the serious metaphysical issue that it was in the famous Huxley/Wilberforce debate of 1860. Science and religion, it is now coming to be realized, are two different modes of knowing. It is only the most die-hard scientists who still cannot accept this, such as Lewis Wolpert, Richard Dawkins and Steve Jones - most often, it seems, they are biologists rather than physicists. Beloved by the media for their very intransigence, they make for 'good programme contention' opposed by

equally voluble Catholic converts like Ann Widdecombe or Christian academics like Keith Ward. The dichotomy only continues as an argument because both modes of thinking can be true to their own guiding evidence, without any admission of the other being equally cogent.

In the matter of recognizing a basic belief in the reality of a spiritual dimension alongside the limited materiality of sentient worldly experience, the critical role of consciousness has to be stressed. These are still early days in 'Consciousness Studies' as an academic discipline, with opinion sharply divided between the 'brain-function' materialists and those who allow for a wider 'nonlocation' of the experience. But both would probably agree that the phenomenal world is the creation of - or at least, the result of - consciousness; but more importantly, for those who allow the evidence for non-locality, consciousness has a transcendent nature which implies a greater reality beyond the spatio-temporal illusion (*maya*) that materiality is all there is. Until the entry of quantum physics into scientific thinking, scientists always felt themselves to be objective observers of a two-dimensional chessboard. Now they are obliged to play three-dimensional chess through being part of the game, which at all times has an uncertain and indeterminate outcome. This subjective element provides a worrying factor. No wonder some of them want to get back to the old ways, for their investigations have now become more of an art-form than a laboratory-tested and repeatable performance. This at least brings them closer, as we have suggested, to the cosmic process itself.

There is now a comprehensive and logically-consistent alternative to the understanding of existence formulated (at least until recently, and in most lay minds) by materialistic science. This alternative demands a re-orientation of the mind, a conversion to a more wholistic approach to what consciousness itself offers us. The renowned scientist, A.N.Whitehead, called it moving away from 'the fallacy of misplaced concreteness'; and the equally renowned Arthur Eddington reported that 'science is no longer disposed to identify reality with concreteness'; and in saying this, both were acknowledging what the Heart Sutra has told us for so long: that 'form is emptiness and emptiness is form'. The vacuum and the plenum are One.

The Buddhist 'emptiness', or in modern terminology, the 'virtual reality' world, does not mean any actual reduction of meaning and significance for our consciousness of it and of 'signs' which cross the dimensional barrier. Beauty is as beautiful and moving; compassion and admiration are not misplaced thereby; nor unconditional love and courage; and there is still a strong ethical constraint to be exercised against evil and the uncontrolled pursuit of egotistical goals. The relativity of all things is no justification for not caring about them; and however 'illusory' this world may ultimately be vis-a-vis a fifth dimension, we still have to live in it as being a 'real' place for us.

Whatever the criteria for this 'new system of values that is not based on conventional norms, precepts, commandments, and fear of punishment'¹³, or as we might say, this alternative mind-set, it is important that we act as best we can under the circumstances of everyday life, and that our decisions, personal and communal, are made under the influence of the new attitude. What is such a 'new attitude' likely to incur? Quite often it is paradoxical, or appears to be contrary to what is accepted still as 'normal'. As T.S.Eliot comments in *The Family Reunion* :

"In a world of fugitives
The person taking the opposite direction
Will appear to run away."

So it is not an easy option. It takes courage to swim against the tide. Indeed, the action itself, the 'doing', is only secondary. It has to stem from a prior conviction in 'being'. 'Being' precedes 'doing', and not the other way round as popular understanding has it. You want to be happy? The world says: do something about it. But that is mistaken. Simply be happy first, and what follows will be happy living, still subject to outer circumstances but less controlled by them. The thought comes from Neale Donald Walsch's *Conversations with God* trilogy¹⁴, where one of the concepts raised can be summarized as 'All states of mind reproduce themselves', or again as 'What you act as if you are, you become'.

Actors know all about that, but it cannot be faked. You have to sincerely believe in your actions, or their benefit is lost. Or in other words again: 'What you experience yourself having or doing will spring from your being - not lead you to it. ... You are who you think you are. You are your own thoughts about yourself made manifest'. Only there is a gap here (as with acting) between who you think you are and Who You Really Are. Walsch's capitals indicate what God knows you to be; but most people do not see themselves that way. Villains rarely think of themselves as villains (that is the best approach to acting them), because they have long since 'denied' and repressed their true selves. So what is being manifested by who they think they are is their distance from their truth. Others may see them for what they are; but they cannot see themselves that way without being consciously insincere, or else seeking to change; and as we have just noted, that means a 'change of mind-set', which in the old translation of *metanoia* meant 'to repent'.

Life is not a process of discovery, says Walsch, it is a process of creation. It is not so much a question of discovering truths as creating them for ourselves. We are doing this anyway, to be sure, consciously or not, by simply 'being'. The question is, as was observed about villains, whether we are being our true selves, or something other into which we have 'been forced' - perhaps by family, friends, employer or just life itself. It is your

purpose in life, Walsch further claims, 'to decide and to declare, to express and to experience Who You Really Are. This is the purpose of ALL of life'¹⁵.

This is all very reminiscent of what the Gurdjieff and Ouspensky groups call The Work - work on yourself, to 'wake up' and 'be aware' of why you are here. The Work has to be chosen and welcomed, despite all its hardships, and the difficulties that a recalcitrant human nature can put in the way. As was mentioned previously, whatever our attitude to it, we all have to live in this pluralist and dualistic material creation in which 'change' is the most certain order of the day; and in which cause and effect, the law of Process at the heart of all things, goes continuously back to the ubiquitous Big Bang.

4. Near Death Experiences, Reincarnation, Time, and Free-will

1999 saw many major Conferences with distinguished speakers in the field of metaphysics addressing subject matter that would have seemed very far-fetched only fifty years ago. To glance at the titles for only three of them: *'Otherworld Reality - Exploring the Ontological Status of Imaginal Consciousness'*, *'An East West Ars Moriendi - a guide for living and dying for the next millennium'*, and *'Beyond the Brain - Does Individual Identity Extend Beyond Birth and Death?'* Such serious interest shows a revival of questioning which has been 'officially' frowned upon for many years, indeed, centuries in the West.

The *'Beyond the Brain'* Conference, held at St. John's College, Cambridge, with a few under 300 attending, was typically significant. Organized by the Scientific and Medical Network together with the American Institute of Noetic Sciences, it gathered a pioneering group of world-class speakers to share their ideas, and to put forward diversely comprehensive frameworks of understanding concerning the nature and extent of any continuing sense of self. But as Chairman David Lorimer commented in his closing summary, 'Understanding transcends any intellectual framework ... growth of being is what counts.' Professor Ravi Ravindra had earlier said that 'Any true understanding always take place in a state of love'. Do we survive the brain? Have we lived before? Materialist models cannot accommodate such possibilities; and indeed, there was a not-unexpected 'division' apparent at the Conference between those who reasonably claim that there is no scientific evidence for aspects of consciousness transcending space and time, and those whose 'intuition' is convinced that a wider model is now necessary. As one speaker concluded (Professor Mark Woodhouse), just how much 'evidence' is needed before we start to act on a belief?

Certainty may not be available, but the indications from near-death and out-of-body experiences, the researches of Ian Stevenson into child-memory of previous lives, the records of the Alister Hardy Society, death-bed visions and hypnotic regression - all of these bring a mode of evidence which cannot be ignored. As to reincarnation, which implies a personal identity-survival, perhaps re-birth is the better term (preferred by the Buddhists), implying a fresh identity altogether. It is the factor common to all personal identities which concerns us here.

It was a sad moment in the early history of the Christian religion and Church when gnostic wisdom was rejected because it was too dangerous to the established power hierarchy. Valentinus (c.140), the gnostic teacher and poet, and his followers in the second century, argued, like Quakers today, that only one's own experience offers the ultimate criteria of truth; and that all who had received the secret knowledge (or *gnosis*) had gone beyond the

Church's teaching and transcended the authority of its priests¹⁶. Little wonder that Irenaeus and Tertullian rejected such heresy as subversive of the Church of Rome - as of course, it still is. Such a threat to social order, as it was seen, had to be stopped. Thus was sown a self-destructive seed whose poisonous inheritance is only now being inevitably reaped by that Church and the rest of 'official' Christianity.

One of the elements of gnostic teaching almost certainly known to Jesus, perhaps through the Essene sect, and no doubt originating via the caravan routes from India, was the belief in reincarnation, and the importance of cultivating 'good karma' in this life to ensure a fortunate rebirth. It seemed a fairly obvious observation that the creative processes in nature had a cyclic movement of birth, growth, decay and then revival in birth again. So why not human beings? If the ancient Egyptian concept of Judgement Day means anything at all today, and of the soul after death being 'weighed in the scales' for its activities in life, then clearly reincarnation gives an incentive to behave in an ethically-positive way, especially one that was helpful to others and ego-free. It was simply good karmic sense to 'love thy neighbour as thyself'. However, the whole idea of reincarnation remains a worrying one to the rationalist mind; and indeed, the popular mind when one recalls the media reaction to the Glenn Hoddle fiasco. There used to be a poster on Reading Railway Station which read 'Don't Count on Reincarnation!' I don't know what it was advertising, but it illustrated a common cultural reaction in the West.

Nevertheless, as we have just noted, there is now a considerable amount of new thinking and research in the West towards re-establishing a positive attitude about the likelihood of past lives, of racial memory, and a universal non-localized consciousness, or at the very least, a Jungian 'collective unconscious'. The evidence of out-of-body and near-death experiences (NDE's) offers intriguing support for a 'biological interface with an interconnected universe'; which suggests, in turn, that a whole new paradigm is necessary as the basis for consciousness studies. Writing about mystical experience and NDE's, a leading neuro-psychiatrist finds himself 'totally convinced that firstly universal consciousness is a unity, and secondly it is composed essentially of love and light'¹⁷. Another academic doctor comments that 'simply because religious experiences are brain based does not automatically lessen or demean their spiritual significance'¹⁸.

All of us have probably heard of how a drowning person may experience their whole life's scenario in 'a flash' that is outside normal time and space. All the pain and joy, experienced not only by oneself but also affecting those with whom one has interacted for better or worse, is, as it were simultaneously, known again. This is surely the reality behind the half-believed concept, already mentioned, of a Judgement Day. It is the assessment of both good and bad karma in the dimension where this matters; and the cautionary truth

must follow that it is actually with us now, in each succeeding moment of our behaviour. As was suggested above concerning Jesus's teaching, the golden moral precept of 'do unto others as you would be done by' is more than just a religious instruction: it is actually how the processing of a human life works. It is morality involving factual truth.

But as a fact which may be an uncomfortable one, it is also one alleviated by that essential 'love and light' mentioned by Peter Fenwick. Another writer of well-known books on NDE's, Kenneth Ring, notes that the justice of these life reviews 'is seemingly always tempered by a kind of mercy. There is never any condemnation - you are not judged. You are in the presence of a being who loves you unconditionally. You are treated with total compassion. You are already forgiven. You are only asked to look at your life, and to understand.'¹⁹ In other words, whatever you may have done, Judgement Day need not be so threatening as we thought in ancient times. With it, we are actually being put through a learning process; if reincarnated, it will be part of 'the kingdom from which we come' and which we mostly 'forget' in life; if we do not die but have an NDE - or even if we do not have that physically-dangerous experience - the learning process is still available to all, bidding us to act thereafter with that knowledge.

'Experiential confrontation with birth and death seems to result automatically in a spiritual opening and discovery of the mystical dimensions of the psyche and of existence'²⁰. Certainly, such experiences, especially the NDE, appear to strongly affect and change the attitudes of those who undergo them. From Fenwick's investigation of over 300 cases, seventy-two per cent said it had changed them, and especially with less fear of death; but fewer than half believed in personal survival after death. Various percentages claimed to be 'more psychically sensitive', 'more spiritual', a 'better person', and 'more socially conscious'²¹. The Tibetan teaching states that the quality of our preparation for death or the lack thereof will determine the nature of our next reincarnation. But more precisely, as Grof adds, 'When we believe that the critical dimension of our existence is consciousness and not matter, we will be concerned about the nature and quality of our experience of dying and death rather than a mechanical prolongation of life at all costs'²². The medical profession and the public at large have a long way to go yet before understanding, yet alone adopting, this attitude.

How does this concept of a mystical continuity relate to the age-old problem of evil? How could God, or any cosmic intelligence, 'allow' the Holocaust, or Lockerbie, or Dunblane, or the massive starvation in Africa, and so on throughout a long history of apparently compassionless disasters? The answer, of course, is that 'God' is not like a person to be blamed. We make the extraordinary assumption of a human intelligence with such questioning. Indeed, it might be said that human agencies were to blame in all the above

examples: and not any cosmic intelligence. 'Evil' is part of the cosmic process of materialization. In the metaphor of the 'cosmic drama' it is there to 'thicken the plot', as Ramakrishna put it. To blame 'the Universal Mind for the existence of evil in the world would be equally absurd as to sentence a movie director for the crimes or murders committed on the screen'²³. The destructive forces of evil can only truly be met by a heightening of human consciousness to cope with them. This does not mean that we can avoid the painful consequences of those forces, but they can be transmuted to some degree, or even transcended, by what Gurdjieff called 'intentional suffering'. It is basically a question of conscious attitude. Right living must always involve personal sacrifice. Such sacrifice is very often in order to be of service to other people. 'Is it not conceivable,' asks Grof, 'that by experiencing the pain that countless generations of people inflicted on each other in the course of human history, we are actually clearing the collective unconscious and contributing to a better planetary future?'²⁴ I believe it may be so.

We were mentioning above how there was no judgement in the instantaneous life review experience which can reportedly occur before death, and this would apply to even the most evil of lives. 'Even to Hitler's?' is a common response. Well, yes, even Hitler's, and all the other apparently shameless tyrants who have inflicted, directly or indirectly, untold suffering. For all that we may not be able to see it, the Quaker firm belief that 'there is that of God in everyone' should be adhered to as a fundamental truth. When Hitler was born he was not an evil power. His personal destiny was to play a particular role, and presumably to work out his subsequent karmic equation. Justice will be served one way or another; if not now, then later; if not in this life, then in another; and if 'now' is the totality of past and future as we shall later be hazarding, it makes no difference. Even an International Court cannot replace in retribution the inevitable balancing of cause and effect.

Folk wisdom has it that 'there is no such thing as a free lunch' - not for anyone. Everything has to be 'paid' for, and we all have karmic debts one way or another awaiting repayment. 'We are all sinners', and indeed, this is the early Christian Church's concept that we are all born with, or in, 'original sin'. However, personal karma remains rather like a game in which 'brownie-points' are earned for 'good living' or else subtracted for 'wrong living'; and when the points total is called in at death, we may well have to carry it forward with us to a new life. It is not a punishment for anything we have done. It is just the way the evolutionary 'cookie crumbles' out of our parents' genes and - so the Tibetan theory goes - out of our own choice of reincarnation from the state between death and rebirth, or the Bardo. There's nothing for it but to accept the 'equation' dealt out to us, and to get on with living as best we can. All of us are in the business of redeeming the past and creating the future.

This also raises another question as to who you are, both before birth

and after death, and then again before re-birth. Clearly we are not talking here about reincarnation of exactly the same person, in the sense of a personality having a specific biographical identity (although there is a theory, espoused by Nietzsche and Ouspensky among others, which asserts this - the so-called Theory of Eternal Recurrence). Rather, we are talking about the survival of an 'Essence' of the self (another Gurdjieffian term), which has an ego-free being of both individual and collective nature. It might be said to come out of the 'collective unconscious' as a conscious cipher. It is made up of 'that of God' given singular identity. Its true environment is among 'the things that are eternal' rather than their temporal manifestation (however many times repeated as 'life-time experience' in linear time). It is why we can sometimes get a strong feeling that 'we have been here before'. It is often seen in the innocent beauty of babies' and young children's eyes, looking freshly on the world before that world has had opportunity to pollute the innocence.

The reference to young children is particularly relevant because of the stringent scientific research carried out by an American doctor, Ian Stevenson, into the memories of previous lives. He has collected over 2,600 reports, from which he has published 65 detailed cases. He is rightly cautious, but his work appears to offer strong support for the idea of reincarnation. In his introduction to *Where Reincarnation and Biology Interact* (Praeger, 1997, p.9), Stevenson notes :

The cases of the children who claim to remember previous lives have four features that occur so regularly that I have presumed to call them "universal". These are: the early age of speaking about the previous life (between the ages of 2 and 4); the later age of ceasing to speak about the previous life (usually between the ages of 5 and 8); a high incidence of violent death in the previous life; and frequent mention of the mode of death in the previous life.

Akin to this compelling evidence for reincarnation is a strange concept which talks of a 'limited size' to the eternally-recurring body of humanity. It does not refer to any specific population statistics which naturally differ quite widely from time to time, but it does incur a certain 'rationing out' of energies involving 'awareness' and 'wisdom'. This might explain why the latter are so often hard-earned! A limited body of humanity could show how space in the 'other world' (or space in the fifth dimension) never actually becomes 'overcrowded' after aeons of time. Our normal notions of time and space and individuality do not apply, any more than the countless leaves of a million autumns 'overcrowd' the one Earth. The 'essential body of multi-racial humanity, like the myriad stars of the Milky Way, has a 'contained shape'. Depending upon how you look at the latter, it may be a disc, a spiral, a cigar-shape, or a Catherine-wheel. It moves within itself, like a single fountain. It

expands and contracts, like a heart-beat; and like humanity, it appears to breathe and live!

Before leaving this mystery, and the subject of reincarnation, it may be helpful to glance briefly at the parallel mystery of Time. A great deal has been written about this down the ages from Heraclitus to Hawking, and never more so with the millennium here. We cannot address such a rich anthology of thought in this pamphlet. It must suffice to offer the conclusion that Time is but one dimension, the fourth, or perhaps not a dimension at all, which appears to our human senses as a 'movement' or a forward-moving 'arrow'; something we either travel along with, remaining ourselves, or something which passes us by in our process of ageing, remaining itself. One or the other has to have a static quality for the movement to be evident; and clearly (to us) it is we who are doing the moving. Therefore, despite the denial of one of our leading philosophers, Roger Scruton²⁵, Time, it is suggested, whether it exists as a dimension or not, has the spatial quality of solidity. It can be moved about in, backwards or forwards; and apparently the mathematical equations of the physicists do not object to this. The equations work both ways.

The other three dimensions only exist by virtue of persisting solidly in time; and time itself only exists by persisting through further higher spatial dimensions of which it is a part. It has been suggested that there might be quite a few more. 'String theory' mentions ten and also twenty-six, of which twenty-two are bound up in a very small 'space' indeed, by our sensing. The quantum-process of mind can posit that we are not just part of the universe, we are the universe; and going right back to Sir James Jeans in 1930, it may be seen that 'the mysterious universe' is 'a great thought rather than a great machine'. However that may be, it is 'a riddle which we cannot solve, and the solution of which we could not stand'. Paul Tillich goes on: 'Time is our destiny. Time is our hope. Time is our despair. And time is the mirror in which we see eternity ... We could not even say "now" if eternity did not elevate that moment above the ever-passing time. Eternity is always present; and its presence is the cause of our having the present at all'²⁶. So, in other words, and in some mystical sense, it is all happening now; and as John Gribbin has so aptly put it 'Time is nature's way of stopping everything happening at once.'²⁷ Even if it does all happen at once for the drowning person. Paradox rules OK.

But the reality to be observed within this paradox is that in 'solid time' (or 'higher space') all directions are possible psychological directions, as in ordinary space they are possible bodily ones. Solid time is full of infinite possibilities - that is what our free-will ensures. Or in another hypothetical conception, it is full of infinite parallel universes, reliant for their actualization upon our free-will to think (i.e., to create) them. Even eternity itself has to start

from a myriad personal 'now's'. Our true future - our ascent into the scale of reality already concealed within us - lies not in the tomorrow of passing time but in the eternity that is now.

Our being is our truth; not so much in the Cartesian sense of *cogito ergo sum* as our being a microcosm of the whole. Or again in a slightly different terminology, our being is an 'holotropic' shard, the piece of a whole which carries with it, and always tends towards, the wholeness of the whole. It follows therefore that if we wish to change anything in the wholeness of existence we must begin by changing ourselves; which, in turn, means changing the mode in which we are conscious of ourselves in relation to the wholeness of reality (i.e., its spiritual as well as its material manifestation). But it is the element of time which gives an urgency to this requirement. There is an uncomfortable awareness today, at least in the West, that time may be running out. If we do not take some significantly corrective and rehabilitative measures now, our global environment may be so destabilised as to destroy us or come close to doing so. It is almost as if time (and with it, history) is moving faster and faster, 'condensing' towards an evolutionary leap in which our 'normal' materialist consciousness may be forced 'upwards' - out of the linear mode alone, and into a new 'normality' which apprehends naturally the inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of the total global creation.

By appreciating the solidity of all time and its essentially spiritual nature, we are obliged to respect the full significance of each 'timeless' moment. Like Blake, we will learn to 'hold Infinity in the palm of (our) hand, and Eternity in an Hour'. Everything that we think, say or do is measured and recorded at that intersection point between the timeless and the present. Whatever we choose to happen will happen, one way or another. But such free-will needs training to become habitual, like any other talent; and in this case, love and consciousness are the tutors. This is the truth which can set us free; and it is a freedom which carries with it an awesome responsibility.

5. What shall we teach the children?

The training of future generations has always been at the forefront of any plan to alter or maintain social *mores* concerning spiritual values. Manifestly, Church Schools, as well as the churches themselves, have largely failed to do this in any marked degree. There are exceptions, of course; there always are; but radical changes are clearly required.

In a paper delivered to an International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, organized by UNESCO in 1997, the Indian philosopher and statesman Karen Singh, indicated that 'one of the long-term measures needed is a paradigm shift in the traditional pattern of present-day education'. Unfortunately, there are few present signs of anything like such a paradigm shift, either in basic curricula and syllabi from educational bodies, or between religious leaders themselves concerning spiritual education. From the same Commission Report to UNESCO (p.19) comes the following :

People today have a dizzying feeling of being torn between a globalization whose manifestations they can see and sometimes have to endure, and their search for roots, reference points and a sense of belonging. ... Education has to face up to this problem now more than ever as a world society struggles painfully to be born: education is at the heart of both personal and community development; its mission is to enable each of us, without exception, to develop all our talents to the full and to realize our creative potential, including responsibility for our own lives and achievement of our personal aims.

As a starting point for all education, any collective agreement seems a long way off from Teilhard de Chardin's alert dictum that 'We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, but spiritual beings having a human existence'. As far as the major religions are concerned, Popes, Ayatollahs, Archbishops and Chief Rabbis are as far apart as ever they were in defending their exclusive claims. Nor do Ministries of Education anywhere, however empathetic, seem willing to tread on any theological toes by officially instituting a paradigm shift towards an integrated global inter-religious attitude concerning universal spiritual values, allowing diversity but denying exclusivity to any one religion.

However, this may be painting the picture with too much pessimism. There are signs that RE teaching is changing fast, although what to teach young children is, perhaps, less of a problem than what to teach adolescents. Educating young children in Primary School about life (after their literacy and numeracy basics!) has always been best done by telling them stories or teaching-parables, which correspond to their swiftly changing levels of understanding. But with teenagers it is different. They already know quite a lot

about the world surrounding them, both from their peers and especially from access to television and the internet. They need to be 'challenged' where they are in their feelings, observations and thoughts.

In this respect, from the chalk-face comes an example of RE teaching today which may or may not be typical, but is certainly very encouraging. Alison Williams, an RE teacher of some twenty years experience and currently working at a Comprehensive School in Oxfordshire, gave a glimpse of what goes on in the classroom at a workshop she gave for the purpose at the Sea of Faith Annual Conference in July, 1999. 'Pupils', she said, 'are encouraged to think and decide for themselves - so our main goal is to harness this creative energy and use it - guide it too, so our young people grow into thinking and responsible individuals...' That sounds marvellous, but is obviously not without its negative repercussions, both at home and in official 'religious' quarters. To avoid any accusations of humanist 'brainwashing', such a teacher has to remain strictly objective and neutral as to her own position and beliefs. The one question she cannot afford to answer in the classroom is 'But what do you think, Miss?'

Alison Williams sees religious education as a process of enlightenment, even leading ultimately to changes in behaviour. She charts the progression of such a teaching method as follows:

- Exploration of real 'life situations, stories and opinions - the common human experience;
leading to
- Acknowledging that these experiences connect with our own lives, raising questions of meaning;
leading to
- Exploring the issues and reflecting on them through active learning methods; using the insights of world faiths;
leading to
- Expressing our own reactions to these experiences and developing insights;
leading to
- Responding actively by recognizing our own beliefs and values - even leading to changes in behaviour.

This is seminal stuff (without a single mention of the word 'religion', or more specifically, Christianity) and exactly as it should be. It is, of course, basically philosophy and ethics under the guise of 'RE'. But the syllabus-makers, the accompanying booklets published as Teaching Aids, and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), all appear to concur, which again bodes well for the future. Or at least, it does so as long as certain head-teachers, school governors, and religious leaders do not object on the grounds of specific and personal agendas. In an increasingly multi-faith society, this liberal and objective approach, specifically encouraging young people to think

for themselves and arrive at their own allegiances (culturally or family-traditional or freshly-formed) can only be described as 'a good thing'.

Examples of what is meant by 'active learning methods' include students working in pairs ('for' and 'against' an issue) or in groups giving presentations; role-playing (such as a doctor and parent making the case for or against a 95% brain-dead child on a life-support system being kept alive) followed by class discussion; research and writing; imagining implications from Third World news-pictures; recording their own feelings and reactions to contemporary or historical events. The total aim behind all this is that at all times and 'in all lessons, students should listen/reason/empathise/express/evaluate/weigh up evidence and argument/and finally draw conclusions'.

How far a syllabus embodying these and similar methods, taught as a prior context for the usual fact-based curriculum, would actually influence the lives of a growing generation is impossible to predict. But anything it might achieve could have profound repercussions. This sort of thing used to be left to prayers starting the school day, and the odd sermon from the Head or a visiting priest, but even that is now considered as largely irrelevant to modern life, despite some sectarian objections. Nevertheless, as Alison Williams' report shows, the subject of metaphysics is returning as a vital factor in the regeneration of a spiritual education to offset the vacuum left by materialist attitudes; and hopefully, to ultimately reverse the arid and limiting consequences which have become increasingly obvious from the promulgation of such attitudes as the 'norm'.

Essentially, the urgent need in a progressive education is for it to be value-based before it is fact-based. The Eternal verities of Truth, Beauty and Goodness, with the concomitant personal qualities of honesty, integrity, courage and compassion must be seen as the prime context for any studies and acquirement of skills. The arts, of course, must be fully re-instated alongside the 'more practical' subjects, because they deal with values and 'quality of life' without which 'earning a living' can become very unfruitful. A puzzled and frustrated Peter Hall, writing in 1999, comments, 'Why should a government which says it is dedicated to education be indifferent to the arts? With the decline of religion, art becomes crucial to the health of a democracy. It helps society understand why it lives and how it lives. ... Nothing could enrich our children, our international standing, and our ability to govern ourselves so much as an enlightened patronage of the arts'²⁸. All this has been obvious for some time, of course, but somehow, it goes on being ignored, or at best, marginalised. Individual teachers are more often than not well aware of it, but feel they are fighting a losing battle against intransigent curriculum demands²⁹.

One of the main difficulties is that parents and legislators alike are

inclined to insist that the younger generation be taught what they were taught. They do not really want a new generation thinking for themselves and drawing their own conclusions. They would prefer to avoid questioning their own lives by having their children come to the same conclusions and views reached by themselves; and thus the same social problems are perpetuated³⁰. It requires an acknowledgment by both parents and governments 'to think it possible they may have been mistaken' in their previous stances over educational policy. The problems of the human race today, in global terms, and indeed the problems given by that race to the planet itself, are only solvable through suitable education, creating a value-based growth for new generations who, it must be hoped, will rise to have the necessary influence and power in their adulthood.

From the *Newsletter* (No.4, 1999) of World Goodwill, an international movement helping to mobilise the energy of goodwill and to build right human relations (in however partial a way), comes the following:

There are a number of educational institutions in existence today which try to bridge the conventional ways with visionary methods and objectives. For example, the Council for Global Education, the Robert Muller Schools, Montessori, Waldorf Education (Steiner), The Warren Wilson College, and Psychosynthesis in Education, among many others. These initiatives are committed to fostering in the young those principles which are the basis of spiritual living, and encourage an active sense of responsibility, kindness, helpfulness, and the exploration of free will.

As yet, these may be only seeds on the global scene, but they are to be warmly welcomed and cherished for their growth. Further, encouragement may be found from a report in *The Independent*, 4 July 2000, stating :

Religion - at least as an exam - is exploding in popularity among today's street-wise young people ... The numbers taking short-course GCSE's in religious education (RE) have increased 12 times in four years, say exam boards. ... Topics covered include euthanasia, abortion, pre-marital sex and co-habitation.

Traditional teachings about Christian doctrine such as life after death and the immortality of the soul are complemented by teaching about near-death experiences and the paranormal. Other topics include why the world's evils may lead people to question the existence of God, and atheist explanations of the world.

A spokesman for the Church of England ... said 'It's a grounding in religious and moral issues which encourages students to take decisions for themselves. The denominational points are for the churches to make. This does mean people are taking religion seriously'.

6. Global philosophy and practice.

More than one educational venture has had the vision of transforming the world through transforming the individual as we have just seen. Some mainstream schools are now expressing interest in expanding and enriching the present fragmented and partial approach shown in the National Curriculum to a more wholistic education; and especially where a value-based support for those creative and spiritual aspects of a student's learning experience is missing.

Such important transforming initiatives now have to be seen also in their global perspective, which is often governed by trans-national economics with today's interconnected and interdependent market forces. Nevertheless, their progress will still rely on what the Quaker historian, Rufus Jones, identified as those 'quiet processes and small circles in which vital and transforming events take place'³¹. Global practice starts with individuals who are convinced and committed to a global philosophy.

What might this mean for them? Most religions have plenty of suggestions as to the ideals of personal conduct. One of the clearest and best of them, in my view, is the Buddhist Eightfold Path. Many other guides to spiritual living come from Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Taoist, Hindu, Sikh, and other sources, including agnostic and humanist. You pay your money and take your choice. It is the universality of the interest and the individual follow-up which is important in the context of the global village. It is not certain that either the interest or the follow-up will bear fruit. Only a suitable educational curriculum might ensure it. But the ideal and its consummation are clear.

David Lorimer is currently engaged upon a study of what he calls 'empathetic resonance' which is directly related to the importance of a global philosophy being adopted by all nations, whatever their religious affiliations. It involves them in an expansion of consciousness which recognizes the human situation without qualification by gender, race, faith or economic standing. 'Empathetic resonance' is similar to Jung's synchronicity or meaningful coincidence, and to telepathy or 'feeling at a distance'. There are ample reported examples of such experiences which

point in the direction of a qualitative "field theory" of consciousness where communication is mediated by an empathetic connection of love. More profoundly, they imply a oneness or connectedness of consciousness at a deep level without which it would be impossible for us to experience empathetic resonance.³²

We are being told in the media that commercial mergers of giant businesses, such as that of America On Line with Time-Warner, announced

in January 2000, will eventually change the old traditions of civilized life as we know them. By this, the commentators mean the 'bricks and mortar' of civilized life such as shopping malls, bookshops, cinemas, and even schools and churches - almost everything that a home-based information technology can touch in the high street. The only exceptions will be the 'live' venues where individual physical participation is the main purpose, e.g., sports gymnasia and stadiums, tourist attractions, and theatres. But with all that is already available, or shortly will be, on the Internet to buy, sell, watch, send or receive - and even eventually to experience through interactive participation, albeit 'virtual' rather than 'live' - information technology is still not value-based. That is to say, it is not, nor cannot be 'connected' to individual consciousness and judgement. The old gap between what is knowledge and what is wisdom is as wide as ever. The essential difference between the live experience and the virtual reality experience remains distinct. Aldous Huxley's 'feelies' in *Brave New World* (1932) were ultimately a sterile, second-hand experience, standing in for real life; and now, nearly seventy years later, that is precisely what we are being offered more and more through our TV and VDU's plus 'mock-up' pubs, theme-parks, and other vicarious 'experiential' entertainments. It is a double distraction from 'reality' when one considers the illusion of everyday living compared to spiritual reality. However that may be, it is fortunate, healthy and hopeful that at least a number of young people in each new generation are not being so easily fooled or satisfied. As a mere phase in their education process, the charms of virtual or second-hand realities soon pale and pass, and the live experience is ardently sought - however foolishly and dangerously.

The trouble with the mystery of living and trying to get it right - both individually and socially - is, as Max Planck observed, that we are part of the mystery we are trying to solve. Leaving aside for the moment the ultimately vital factor of what we experience as 'unconditional love', at the heart of the mystery is what we have so far discovered about the brain, mind and consciousness; and in particular how this relates to our biological evolution and the development of language as a sophisticated means of communication. Language is always something more than information technology can precisely handle: feeling, stress, nuances and overtones, are not easily conveyed by computer. In other words, by its very nature and the limited extent of our current knowledge, living has to be more of an art-form than a science. As the scientist Gerald Edelman concluded, when our biological systems evolved into the physical world and 'that evolution resulted in language, the imaginable world became infinite', The solution to the mystery of consciousness can never be 'contained in a philosophical sentence, however profound'³³.

How are we to equate such uncertain philosophical ground with anything like determined practice based on it? As we said at the beginning, in the final

analysis everything - all truth - is experiential and relative. But that is not to say that we cannot be certain about what we know, even though we may not be able to persuade others of our certainty. Each must arrive at understanding for themselves: there is no other way. 'Experts' and 'specialists' do not come into it except as reference points; we are all 'specialists' at living, one way or another, and to one extent or another. This is because, as Frithjof Schuon, the Swiss philosopher, puts it:

We are inwardly connected with a Substance which is Being, Consciousness, and Life, and of which we are contingent and transitory modalities. Modern man is consequently unaware of being involved in a titanic drama in terms of which this world, seemingly so solid, is as tenuous as a spider's web.³⁴

Part of this web is today's ecological crisis, and our own responsibility for it is just another reflection of the inadequate levels reached so far in the matter of a general consciousness evolution. But there is also some hope, not so much from the lip-service of International Conferences as from the youngest generations who often seem close to reaching the necessary level of understanding about our environment to help save it when they get older and possibly influential. Green concerns and ethical investment choices can only help the ecological imperatives; and it has to be said that the current mode of capitalist exploitation of resources, together with the economic bottom-line of market forces determining everything, is doomed in the long-term. Where political and industrial power-games continue their short-term policies, it seems we cannot avoid the headlong rush to impending ecological and human disaster.

So what is to be done? Can a timeless spirituality offer any practical solution? Rex Ambler warns that

unless we can come together across long-established boundaries of religion and ideology we have little hope of resolving our common crises. We must find a discourse in which we can communicate both our global concerns and our spiritual insights, our questions and our answers. We need something like global theology³⁵.

By theology, Ambler does not appear to mean just the etymological sense of 'the study of God' but more as the search for spiritual meaning in all faiths as it affects our global situation. The search for such a panacea has also been the life-long quest of Hans Kung. Kung's formula for world peace is well-known: 'No survival without a world ethic - No world peace without peace between religions - No peace between religions without dialogue between religions'³⁶. The ethic he is searching for quite simply posits 'a minimum of

common values, norms and attitudes' - rather like the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights. Moreover, the inter-religious dialogue, like the Declaration, must apply and take place at all levels - with politicians, business people and scientists, as well as with the leaders of the faiths themselves and the laity everywhere of whatever persuasion. This may sound impossibly idealistic, yet so was what Ghandi preached and achieved. He showed what could be done on the international scene with inspired leadership. All this foreshadows the effort in this pamphlet to articulate, however briefly and inadequately, a platform of consciousness from which to begin to pursue the ideal of a new global philosophy, a clear metaphysical and ethical paradigm. But ultimately, I am very conscious that this is less a matter of intellectual analysis and more one of deep feeling and recognition among every individual, and thus all humanity, that, in Auden's uncompromising dictum, 'We must love one another - or die'.

The Dalai Lama would go along with that. 'Ethically wholesome actions', he says, 'arise naturally in the context of compassion'. Moreover, as a believer in religious pluralism, he sees ethics as 'based on universal rather than religious principles', which also goes along with Kung and the U.N. Charter. Religious belief matters much less than being a good human being, where 'our every act has a universal dimension'³⁷. Nevertheless, and despite the materialist rejection which exists in the West (and, of course, modern China), the fact remains that religion is still a motive force for a large majority of the six billion inhabitants of planet earth; and a fresh, more open attempt at inter-religious dialogue has become a vital necessity. So far, the fixity of dogma and cultural baggage in so-called Interfaith Groups is little more than a supermarket of faiths where each sets up its stall. In my experience, there is not much inter-listening done. Nor are mere 'interest groups' sufficient. As Karen Singh has said, inter-religious values must be built into our educational systems. Currently, the dangers for a younger generation are either the acceptance of a sterile hedonism (personal pleasure is the only criterion) or of a destructive religious and/or political fundamentalism (attachment to a holy or class war). Both these syndromes are daily in evidence from world news and media entertainment 'norms' on our television screens³⁸.

Inter-religious dialogue is not a question of trying to unify religions, but of identifying a synthesis of spiritual experience. It is certainly not to seek an eclectic, nor a syncretic religion. Rather it is to observe the mystical thread, the Perennial Philosophy, which runs through them all.

Now we need to return for a moment to look further at the nature of Time as relevant to being conscious. This is particularly important in view of contemporary discussion and, in some quarters, claims about Artificial Intelligence. A psychologist, Israel Rosenfield, has this to say:

Conscious perception is temporal: the continuity of consciousness derives from the correspondence which the brain establishes from moment to moment. Without this activity of connecting, we would merely perceive a sequence of unrelated stimuli from moment to unrelated moment, and we would be unable to transform this experience into knowledge and understanding of the world. This is why conscious human knowledge is so different from the "knowledge" that can be stored in a machine or in a computer. ... Computers never "understand" what they are doing.³⁹

The 'moment to separate moment' view of Time, rather than something which 'flows' of its own accord without any conscious 'plugging in' to it, has been made recently by physicist Julian Barbour. He maintains there is no such thing as Time because it is not 'joined up'; we do the joining through our consciousness of 'instants of time' which he calls 'configurations of the universe, unchanging Nows'. 'The instant is not in time, time is in the instant'⁴⁰. Professor Chris Clarke also claims there is no such thing as Time, quoting Heidegger: 'There is only one event'. This is echoed by Horace Regnart as 'All times are a unity'. None of this contradicts our earlier assertion about the 'solidity', or higher spatial stillness of Time. The Clarke and Regnart quotes come from an important article by Professor Kurt Dressler of Zurich who has also been thinking on similar lines when he asks whether Time is 'a Dimension of Consciousness or of Actual Reality?'⁴¹ His answer is that it 'might be best to think of time not as an objectively existing dimension of reality, but as of the limited way in which our normal waking state of consciousness can perceive the overwhelming whole of true reality in its timeless "all-presence" '. So, perhaps time is not exactly another dimension, the fourth; but more part of that 'unbroken wholeness' or 'all -presence' which reveals itself to our consciousness in temporal succession.

There is no absolute order from past to present to future. What we see as an orderly sequence of cause followed by effect, a rapidly moving observer may see in reverse order; for him effect precedes cause; our time for him runs backwards.⁴²

This observation concurs with Christopher Mayhew's reported experiences under LSD in the Fifties in which, among other things, he seemed to drink a cup of tea before he had poured it. The reference to 'a rapidly moving observer' comes via Einstein's relativity theory and his prediction that rapidly moving clocks appear to be slowed; and that two simultaneous events may occur at different times for a moving observer, and may even appear in reverse temporal order. The 'movement' in Mayhew's experience was haphazardly induced into the 'normal' time-field by an hallucinogenic drug. With this kind of timelessness and non-locality possible in human experience, what we think now might even 'change the outcome of

events that seem to have been definitely predetermined in the past'⁴³. Certainly Ouspensky thought as much (see *A New Model of the Universe*, Chapter XI). Dressler concludes:

Any question concerning a temporal or spatial "beyond" is empty and without meaning. In the beginning there is neither space nor time, but unity - nothing but unity, into which the infinitely rich manifold of our whole universe is enfolded. ... Who consciously lives in all-presence partakes in eternity and is aware of the timeless ground of her/his true being.

That really does sound rather like a last word on Time. Clearly, it is an illusion; yet as even Einstein felt obliged to concede - 'a most persistent one'. Having regard to that, we will attempt to get our feet back on earth with a final look at some practical applications of such a philosophy for a global future.

The Dalai Lama is a remarkable man whose wisdom spans East and West. In a New Millennium Message he outlined six points 'of great importance if we are to look forward to the future with some hope'⁴⁴. We have already touched on some of them, so I will them précis here:

- (1) We need to pay equal attention to our internal being as we already do to our external (or material) well-being. This would lead to a wholly new social mind-set on which the rest of the points here mostly rely.
- (2) We need to develop in our education what might be called 'secular ethics', that is, the basic human qualities of kindness, compassion, sincerity and honesty, leading to more altruism, caring, and responsibility for others.
- (3) We need to make the concept of non-violence a reality through working on internal disarmament as a precursor to external disarmament. Internal disarmament means 'ridding ourselves of all the negative emotions that result in violence'. External disarmament, step by step, will mean demilitarisation throughout the world, starting with nuclear weapons and the lucrative international arms trade. It will be a slow process requiring much courage and financial sacrifice. Human problems will remain, but a way must be found to resolve them through dialogue and discussion, not war and bloodshed.
- (4) We need to address inequality - the gap between the rich and the poor, both nationally and globally. It is, of course, a perennial political challenge (even Jesus said the poor will always be with us) but rather than seeking a 'final solution', it is the relative nature or extent of the gap which has to be administered. Together with lack of personal freedom, the economic gap is the source of so many global problems. Only an ethical response can alter the situation; and that is not currently high on any politician's agenda.
- (5) Environmental damage is growing seriously, and only preventative care can now avoid future calamities. The dramatic probabilities from global warming attract media attention, but more immediate action is required.

(6) The population explosion is equally serious and is a challenge which has to be met for the sake of future generations. Otherwise, natural resources of fresh water and food and energy will not be sufficient to go round, thus further exacerbating the gap between rich and poor.

Each of these points have been loudly and frequently proclaimed, and are obviously interconnected; but most governments are fearful of taking adequate action to expedite them, being nervous of such unpopular policies losing them their power-base. However, an increasing number of non-governmental organizations (NGO's) are gathering support in drawing attention to the urgency of the global situation. Like delicate spring-shoots, they are appearing underneath the old withered leaves of the *status quo* and promising to re-green the earth. That may be an idealistic and optimistic image, but it still might be a true one if we each wish to make it so.

Concerning the environment, the Worldwatch Institute notes 'that business leaders, politicians and individual entrepreneurs are now taking steps which show they recognize the importance of sustainability'⁴⁵. Also, places like the Brockwood Park Krishnamurti Education Centre recognize the importance 'for educators to be able to present to the enquiring minds and hearts of students the social, political and spiritual norms which respect traditional cultural wisdom, and yet are in keeping with the mood of the new global age'⁴⁶. Other organizations involved in a positive way include ones like Glocal 3000, a networking initiative to encourage the founding of centres of experimental living based on spiritual principles - called International Communities - in every country in the world⁴⁷; and Oasis TV in California which was founded in 1997 'to bring the tools and values of personal and planetary transformation to mainstream media'. These are only a handful of NGO's selected randomly, but they are indicative of future hope.

The point to remember in all this is that in the long run we create what we think. Even God would appear to have done much the same with the universe and life-forms. Even Genesis starts with God speaking; that is, the creative thought was made manifest in light and material dualism; and this saw the beginning of time and space as we know them, consonant with the Big Bang theory. Thought is an energy which can create matter; recognizing or being aware of something can create its being. Quantum physics has revealed this astonishing fact. Scientists - some scientists - are only just starting to come to terms with it as the creative principle. The choice is all. Free will is the key to the future as it has always been to the past. Our destiny is truly in our own hands if - and more vitally when - we choose to make it. The Buddha has always been right when he stated unequivocally that 'with our thoughts we make the world'.

Consciousness, or awareness of our human situation as it really is, will

provide the new vision and help guide us to that vision's accomplishment. The new philosophy of living taught from birth will provide a template of behaviour leading to the promised ideal: that will be the unity of the All and One fused through human experience as light and love and glory. Religions no doubt will survive to play a part in this vast social paradigm shift, but less and less will they represent any unique authority or be the prime movers of ethical action. The human family will *know*, without their help, why it is here and what it has to do. The theologies of the ancient world, then so seriously taken, are today no more important to us than a fascinating academic study; and so it will become eventually with the religions still active today. Their literature will always remain repositories of much wisdom, but as cultural institutions they will be no more relevant than much-loved children's stories which we have outgrown.

The human race will have matured in the art of being, and of being happy.



Postscript : Other Platforms.

The April 2001 issue of *Network*, the Scientific and Medical Network Review, published a *Manifesto for an Integral Science of Consciousness*, composed by the Network Science and Esoteric Knowledge Group. It is a significant document, and in the context of this pamphlet further illustrates how the time has come for 'questioning deeply held assumptions'. The Manifesto ends with five 'conclusions' :

We believe an immediate imperative confronting science is the open-minded investigation of consciousness and that a true understanding of the field demands a revolution within science.

We believe that an integral science of consciousness must draw upon the insights of both outer and inner views, on rigorous scientific experiments and on authentic spiritual experience that may radically transform the individual's self-understanding.

We believe that the implication of this consciousness revolution will be far-reaching in bringing together intuition and reason, wisdom and knowledge, inner and outer, subjective and objective.

We believe that an integral science of consciousness will lead to broader and deeper understanding of the nature of reality and the meaning of life.

We believe that the recognition of the unitive nature of life and consciousness has profound ethical implications that lead naturally to the formulation and application of a global ethic.

It is also worth noting that in 2001, the Wrekin Trust is sponsoring a new 'University of Spirit' in order 'to identify and integrate spiritual values in education'. Its purpose 'will include finding ways to bring the study and experience of spirituality, the transpersonal, values and ethics, concern for the planet and related issues into the educational system at all levels ...'

A Personal Afterword.

I began this essay by asking whether any intellectual analysis could be much help to everyday living. So what do all these thoughts and specific concepts do for me? Ah, well ... I am liable to be hoist on my own petard! Any claim will inevitably look immodest and arrogant, or wishful thinking, or an agenda more honoured in the breach than its realization. I believe in what I have written, but has it altered who I am and what I do? It is not for me to say because I cannot view my life as objectively as others. But subjectively - yes - I have been influenced in my responses and initiatives, and sometimes in small conscious efforts to control unseemly emotions and words; even, perhaps, to ask 'what love would do?' Such questioning at key moments of decision is an important aspect of increased awareness. Yet I have not attained any new or 'special' state of being. I don't feel any different, the 'essence' is the same even though the 'personality' may be slightly modified, and I certainly can't claim to be 'a better person'. And yet. There is a sort of certainty, of comfort, of lack of fear, of love of companionship, and of discourse for its own sake rather than winning any argument. Being 'helpful' rather than ignoring the problems or demands of others can become important; also compassion rather than criticism, for one never truly knows what has preceded an 'offensive' exhibition of ego. Some sort of service without rewards begins to matter a great deal; but one should not be 'thinking of' or considering these things for any reason beyond themselves. The left hand should not always have to know what the right hand is doing. 'Being' is for its own sake, and there is, indeed, a bliss in ignorance of any 'virtuous' motive. So I greet 'the day's demands' (as Goethe deemed each person's duty) rather than resenting them; and at my age - past the mid-seventies - each new day is a life-bonus, and a precious opportunity.

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