Spiritualities of Life

Front cover image: Lucy Raverat, *Flying the Kite*.

Lucy Rawlinson, who paints under her maiden name, is a dear old friend. A person with a profound spiritual sensibility, *Flying the Kite* captures the magic of expressive freedom; of harmony. Viewing Ingleborough from the farmhouse where she and her family used to live, not far from our own family home, the painting captures the 'presence' of nature as well. I'm sure Lucy would appreciate the words of the Lonsdale hermit – 'To all blessed with true insight, he ['the mere man of craggy limestone'] is nothing less than a real personality, a creature with a soul'. In the spirit of Lucy, a hermit who has rejected the clamour of life distorted by the lures of the capitalistic mainstream:

> I often seek his quiet company and take advantage of his noble patience. How can I estimate in words or numbers the calm that he has breathed down upon me from his ancient heights when the stirring voices of the far away multitudes have broken through to my seclusion and tempted me from my loneliness into the thick of human conflict? Or how can I describe the benediction of contentment he has bestowed upon me when thoughts of foolish ambition and of the plaudits of crowds have risen to make me restless? He is a being full of speechfulness, full of experience, full of romance, full of history... a living influence. (H. M. White, 1904, *Old Ingleborough*. Ingleton: J. Brookes, pp. 6–7)

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Spiritualities of Life

New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism

Paul Heelas

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In memory of my teachers, E. E. Evans-Pritchard,
Rodney Needham and Ninian Smart,
and my old friends, Malcolm Crick and Ursula Lister

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Preface

I was extremely fortunate to have been born in 1946. This has meant that I have witnessed, and in measure experienced, the unfolding of spiritualities of life from the time I came of age during that great 'inner era' known as the sixties. My awareness of what has come to be called the 'New Age' dawned whilst I was studying at Oxford. I was more a participant than an observer. Since moving to the Yorkshire Dales, I have also been fortunate to live so close to the homeland of the English Romantics, the Lake District. Students who I taught at Lancaster University during the later 1970s and the 1980s helped keep me abreast of developments: the way in which Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh's movement sustained the 'sixties' after the decline of the counter-culture in the West (Thompson and Heelas, 1986), and the seminar spirituality which flourished at this time, thereby contributing to my research on 'alternative spiritualities' during the period. From 1997, I have been much preoccupied with what has come to be called the 'Kendal Project' – a project which has helped take me into the realm of wellbeing spirituality. During the last decade or so, I have also been studying spiritualities of life overseas – first Dacca, then Kampala, currently Islamabad and environs. All settings where 'wellbeing' is frequently a *much* more fundamental issue than in most western settings.

During this long period of looking at the New Age, I have had three experiences which will be with me until the day I die. In the spirit of Aldous Huxley, a trip to remoter realms whilst listening to the Pink Floyd during an open air festival; 'participant' observation of a 100 or so hour long Exegesis seminar; and a sudden realization concerning the significance of the term 'life' whilst waiting at Schiphol airport. Academically useful experiences – but not as useful as having had the fortune to live through the 'working out' of what Charles Taylor (1991) calls the 'massive subjective turn of modern culture' (p. 26): a turn which is very much bound up with the growth of subjective wellbeing culture, including wellbeing spirituality.

This book completes a trilogy with Blackwell Publishing on the topic of alternative spiritualities. The first volume, *The New Age Movement*, was

published in 1996. Much of it dwelt on seminar spirituality, studied during the 1980s. The second volume, co-authored with Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*, was published in 2005. It contains a fair amount on the wellbeing spirituality which has become increasingly popular since the early 1990s. Neither of these two volumes was of an especially 'evaluative' nature; and neither paid much attention to the matter of consumption. Attending to these matters, *Spiritualities of Life* is significantly different from what has gone before. Furthermore, account has had to be taken of the consideration that the key word has ever more become 'life', in measure supplanting 'self'. I have also felt that it is now time to spread my wings, to turn more controversial.

Consumption, it is often said, dominates life. Subjective wellbeing culture – in the form of shopping to satisfy desire – is widely held to be a primary, perhaps *the* primary, exemplification of consumer culture. My interest in consumption derives from the consideration that New Age spiritualities of life have come to make their mark within various realms of the culture of subjective wellbeing. Accordingly, much of what follows is a critical assessment, written through the lens of consumption.

During the heyday of the Lancaster University Centre for the Study of Cultural Values, the early 1990s were devoted to the interdisciplinary study of aspects of consumer society and selfhood. Edited by Russell Keat, Nigel Whiteley and Nicholas Abercrombie, *The Authority of the Consumer* (1994) was perhaps the most significant outcome. The volume explores an apparently radical shift of authority, away from the provider or producer, towards the recipient or consumer. Judging the value and meaning of the activities involved in this shift, judging the character of the social relations at stake, the volume contributes to the debate between those who decry the commercialization, populism and loss of integrity associated with the apparent shift of authority, and those who commend the shift on the grounds of its anti-elitism, empowerment and democratization. Stimulated by the intellectual creativity of the Centre for the Study of Cultural Values, I tried my hand at writing an essay – 'The Limits of Consumption and the Post-modern "Religion" of the New Age' – which appeared in *The Authority of the Consumer*. The buzz of the time, however, was rather overwhelming. As a consequence, the essay left me with a series of questions: questions which have been nagging me ever since; questions which are now tackled to the best of my ability.

Profound thanks are due to the inspiration of the 'core' team of the Centre during the early 1990s, Nicholas Abercrombie, Russell Keat, Scott Lash, Celia Lury, Paul Morris, John Urry and Nigel Whiteley. More recently, I owe a great deal to conversations and correspondence with Colin Campbell – whose writings on consumer culture and spirituality are surely of the highest order. Steve Bruce – the Gordon Brown of the social scientific assembly north of the Border – has been as invaluable as ever, his no-nonsense arguments providing the perfect foil to what I hope are equally effective

counter-arguments. My wife, Mia Haglund Heelas, has been even more invaluable. Having experienced holistic activities, she emphatically outdoes Steve Bruce on the forthrightness front: simply consumeristic, ineffectual, money-making 'nonsense', as she recently concluded after staying in that hotbed of holistic activities, Bangkok. Discussion with the National Cancer Research Institute's Psychosocial Oncology Spirituality Subgroup has proved exceptionally helpful, as have detailed comments provided by one of the readers of the manuscript of the present volume and the first-rate copy-editor, Jack Messenger. I also greatly appreciate insights provided by my daughter, Elissa Standen, friends and colleagues Dick Houtman, Gordon Lynch, Stefania Palmisano, Elizabeth Walton and Scott Taylor, and – as ever – my students, some of whom are referred to in what follows. A great debt is owed to Steve and Zeba Rasmussen, guides *par excellence* in Pakistan. At Lancaster University, I must acknowledge my gratitude to colleagues and personal friends Gavin Hyman and Deborah Sawyer for having helped keep me sane during a most difficult time at work, a time when I also benefitted from close friends Bobby and Besty Ben, and GP Bill Hall. Born in the sacred city of Kanchipuram, our 12-year-old son, Sebastian Heelas, has been of great significance: not only by being so patient whilst I have worked away in Islamabad, but also for being such an enthusiastic student of culture, stimulating my concern for inner-life universalism and freedom, and for telling me more about the slogans of wellbeing culture.

What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me; no, nor women neither . . . (*Hamlet*, Act II, Sc. II)

It is in reverence for life that knowledge passes over into experience . . . My life bears its meaning in itself. And this meaning is found in living out the highest and most worthy idea which my will-to-live can furnish . . . the idea of reverence for life. Henceforth I attribute real value to my own life and to all the will-to-live which surrounds me; I cling to an activist way of life and I create real values. (Albert Schweitzer, 1966, p. 261)

Like the ocean is your god-self;
It remains for ever undefiled.
And like the ether it lifts but the winged.
Even the sun is your god-self;
It knows not the ways of the mole nor seeks it
the holes of the serpent.
But your god-self dwells not alone in your being . . .
He who defines his conduct by ethics
imprisons his song-bird in a cage.
(Kahlil Gibran, 1976, pp. 46, 90)

. . . an . . . explosion in cultural consciousness – the fusion of people not with one another, but with material. Modernism has done much to unseat the humanist tradition . . . The demise of romanticism . . . (Kenneth J. Gergen, 2000, pp. xix, 227)

He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that. (John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, 1859)

Introduction

Of all conceivable forms of enlightenment the worst is what . . . people call the Inner Light. Of all horrible religions the most horrible is the worship of the god within . . . That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones . . . The mere pursuit of health always leads to something unhealthy. (G. K. Chesterton, 1909, pp. 136, 138)

I believe that art therapy saved my life by giving me the opportunity to get in touch with my authentic self. This part of me is now allowed to have a life. The part that existed before was a highly developed false self . . . [Art therapy] was a process of gathering – my grief, my desolate childhood, my feminine qualities, divinity. They were brought to my centre, later I mixed with a pulse of light and leaps of joy. (Julie, with breast cancer, cited by Connell, 2001, p. 105)

. . . a spiritual stew. (Christopher Lasch, 1987, p. 80)

All life is sacred, interdependent and growing to fulfil its potential.
Love, Support and Protect all beings.
Connect. Grow. Serve. (William Bloom, www.williambloom.com)

There's only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving and that's your own self. (Aldous Huxley, *Time Must Have a Stop,* 1944)

Surprisingly, a recent survey finds that 37 per cent of the British sample agree with the statement, 'I believe that God is something within each person, rather than something out there'. Whatever might be made of this – and some will express disbelief – the finding serves to direct attention to inner forms of the sacred. More specifically, it serves to direct attention to looking at *spirituality* within *life*. Not the life of a transcendent theistic God, but the life embedded within the here and now. A life, it is said, which can only make a 'true' difference when it is experienced by the self. And a life which

is very much to do with the free expression, and thus development, of what it is to be 'truly' human. Such is the subject matter of this volume. So to the big question of the volume: what, if any, are the capacities of New Age spiritualities of life to make a positive difference to individual, social or cultural life?

The significance of this question derives from the nature of modernity. In the contemporary west, powerful forces are at work. Life is becoming ever more regulated by legal, quasi-legal or economically justified procedures, rules, systems. David Boyle (2000) writes of 'the tyranny of numbers'. As has frequently been argued, the sacrifices to be paid for the positivistic rule of reason are considerable. The freedom of the expressive self to live 'out' its own life by exercising experimentation is stifled. The affect/ive is disempowered. Quality of life suffers by virtue of the stresses generated by the culture of targets. The instrumentalization of relationships for the sake of economic utility threatens the integrity and possibilities of personal relationships, not least 'being trusting'. Spontaneity – well! It might well seem that life is becoming more and more akin to the antlike life of Dubai, that most capitalistic of places, with money, security, comfort, wellbeing galore for the better off, but with a deep, *boring* vacuity when it comes to self-expression, creativity, that great Romantic theme of learning through 'bitter' experience. From atop a skyscraper in Dubai, the flow of gleaming Mercedes revolving around the gleaming malls really does look like a series of columns, manifesting those perquisites for control – barren purity, officiated mundanity and self-mendacity.

Human flourishing is at stake. And I have to admit that as a libertarian humanist, with a liberal Quaker background, I look with horror at the ways in which life is becoming ever more restricted. *The expressive self undergoing the suffocating squeeze*. The ability of modernity to 'kill the spirit', as Kieran Flanagan (2007, p. 1) puts it. What makes things worse is that the value of expressivistic-cum-humanistic values is increased in the face of opposition. The possibility of becoming institutionalized aside, one never values freedom so much as when one is in prison. Analogously, one never values 'human' aspects of life – time to ponder, the opportunity to *be* oneself, the possibility of living as a free spirit – so much as when one feels oneself *under* the systems of capitalistic or quasi-capitalistic modernity; the experiences of engulfment, of invasion; the sense of the doors clanking shut to exclude 'life'. What provides hope, though, is that by enhancing the value of the values it excludes, capitalism fuels its own opposition. Furthermore, without capitalism or similar 'spanners in the works', values like freedom and equality would presumably lose their significance: now on the grounds that to be free and equal all the time means that freedom and equality cease to matter. (A reason, incidentally, why the utopian is 'no where'.)

Emphasizing autonomous expressivity, emphasizing the 'unbounded self' (Wexler, 2000, p. 2), New Age spiritualities of life appear to be opposed

to the restrictive, the regulatory, those impositions of external sources of authority which are served by formal rules and regulations. So to the political dimension of this volume. Quite simply, are New Age spiritualities of life up to the task of responding to the 'iron cages' so widespread within mainstream society and culture, with their strongly positivistic, that is measurable and 'narrow', criteria of what it is be a 'successful' human? Do we find significant responses to what Guy Debord (1995, p. 26) calls 'the world of the spectacle', 'the world of the commodity ruling over all lived experience'? Do we find a form of the sacrality of the 'bare life' able to resist the sociocultural inscriptions explored in Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1998)? In the spirit of Richard Sennett (2008), do we find 'crafts of life', cultivating human flourishing, 'making' it happen, in the face of mainstream forces as they move ever closer to the deeply pessimistic appraisal of modernity provided by Weber in the closing pages of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1985)? Do we find a *counter-balance* to the fact that life is ever more threatened by the ever-increasing ability of capitalist, quasi-capitalist and other organizations (including state education) to implement the idea that a (variously) specialized, boxed or *bounded* self is the prerequisite for renumerative progress?

A great deal hangs on the extent to which New Age spiritualities of life are privatized or consumerized. The common assumption among academics is that the internalized authority which is such a pronounced feature of New Age understanding is used to consume. Here we find 'the self for itself'. Here we find intake for the sake of what it *brings* to what lies within. Here we find those 'living a life turned in on itself where people ignore the consequences of their actions', as the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, puts it in a succinct formulation (Leake, 2006, p. 1). Here we find people intent on capturing their dreams by way of commodities.

If autonomy is exercised to consume in a self-absorbing *fashion*, the response to positivistic iron-cage tendencies is going to be minimal, if not non-existent. If Zygmunt Bauman is right with the theme of his book, *Consuming Life* (2007), life is used up, engorged, for the sake of capitalistic consumer culture. New Age spiritualities of life are an integral tool of capitalism. If all those who treat New Age spiritualities of life as a form of *junk* capitalism – providing tacky forms of 'interior decoration', handling the suffocating squeeze by contributing to the great engorgement – are right, their 'revolutionary' capacity is obviously zilch.

Alternatively, the argument is that 'life' is 'consumed' and 'consuming'. From this perspective, inner-life spirituality is drawn upon, that is 'consumed' in the sense of 'used' and put to work, to cultivate what it is to *be* alive. To explore what it is to live beyond the narrow horizons of that utilitarian individualism which focuses the self on the quantifiable externals of life. And at least for some, inner-life spirituality takes one over (that is, is 'consuming'). Rather than the emphasis lying with the 'good life' of

materialistic utilitarianism, the emphasis lies with the 'good life' of expressivistic humanism.

Reflections on Shirley MacLaine: Possibilities

'It all starts with self', writes Shirley MacLaine (1988, p. 5). With this proclamation in mind, we can ask questions of the kind:

- To what *extent* do the fruits of the New Age spiritualities of life *stay* locked within the self alone, remaining in and of the self itself?
- To the extent that these spiritualities stay within the self itself, what kind of self is at stake?
- Is this a privatized self devoting itself to its 'intray' to develop 'exceptional interiors', with New Age spiritualities of life largely – if not entirely – serving to encourage the self-indulgence of narcissistically or sybaritically pleasuring the self? Or is this a self devoted to the interior spiritual quest?
- Is the 'starting point' relational rather than atomistic? Epistemologically solipsistic or learning through others? Or both?
- To what extent do New Age spiritualities of life take a relational, *engaged* form, participants working from their 'grassroots', ignoring the private-public distinction to contribute to the world about them?
- If contributions to the world are in evidence, are iron-cage tendencies addressed head on? Are contributions found in connection with ways of life – perhaps through downsizing or early retirement – which circumvent the 'bounding' of the capitalistic mainstream?
- Most fundamentally, are New Age spiritualities of life best thought of as a component of the enlightenment trajectory of modernity in capitalistic mode, or the romantic, expressivist strand? Or, with logical options in mind, both?

Questions of this variety direct our attention to the greatest of the issues raised by inner-life spirituality.[1] For if New Age spiritualities of life simply encourage what many regard to be the primary 'sin' of capitalism, namely consumptive self-interest, we have an increasingly popular form of the sacred, one which is increasingly rivalling the sway of Christianity in western settings and which could well be doing more harm than good. On the other hand, if the 'spirituality' of spiritualities of life lives up to its promise, not least addressing the deleterious consequences of consumer-producer capitalism, it provides an avenue for 'true' human flourishing.

Do we side with Chesterton and Lasch or with Julie, Bloom and Huxley? To scorn or to praise – or some combination of both evaluations?

Introducing Inner-Life Spirituality

Spiritualities of life today, on which I focus, typically take a holistic, life-affirming form. Whether it be yoga in Chennai or yoga in San Francisco, aikido in Islamabad or aikido in Birkenhead, one will encounter the theme that what matters is delving within oneself to experience the primary source of the sacred, namely that which emanates from the 'meta-empirical' depths of life in the here-and-now (Hanegraaff, 1999, p. 152; see also Robertson, 1972, p. 47, on the 'superempirical'). And it is also highly likely that one will encounter the theme that experiential contact with inner-life spirituality enables it to 'flow' through other aspects of one's being to integrate, 'harmonize' or 'balance' oneself; to draw one's mind, body and spirit into a whole by way of the sacralization of the body-cum-subjective life; to find self-fulfilment by way of the craft of life; to enable 'natural' spirituality to 'fill' the unique life rather than letting it 'drain away' by using up life for the sake of the consumptive.

With the possible exception of a few countries like Somalia (although indigenous healers there could very well be working with inner-life forces), holistic activities are now found across the nations of the globe. In western settings, mind-body-spirituality *activities*, in the hands of *spiritual practitioners* – which is what is concentrated on in this volume – have grown fairly rapidly, especially during and since the counter-cultural sixties. In some western countries, inner-life 'beliefs' have almost certainly become more popular than beliefs in the theistic personal God of traditional Christianity.

A Beneficial Development

Needless to say, many participants and believers are delighted with what is underway. As an experiential spirituality, nothing less than the transformation of the quality of personal, subjective life lies to hand. As an expressive spirituality, rather than ending with the self itself, inner-spirituality is held to (greatly) enhance the quality of personal relationships, one's creativity and self-responsibility whilst being with others. And as a humanistic, egalitarian spirituality, rather than a secular form of humanism, concern is expressed for human wellbeing in *all* its aspects. The inner-life is held to contribute to what Martha Nussbaum (1997) calls 'the cultivation of humanity' – the liberation of 'the mind from the bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world'; people who 'recognize the worth of human life wherever it occurs' (pp. 8–9). The jobs are clear; for participants, so is the efficacy of the work.

No wonder that considerable numbers of the medical profession in various western countries have been attracted by what inner-life spirituality is seen to offer when caring and quality of life matters are to hand. No wonder that

CAM (Complementary and Alternative Medicine), where mind-body-*spirituality* is often in evidence, has become so popular. No wonder that inner-life spirituality is proving increasingly attractive to primary school teachers in the UK and elsewhere, with the child-centred approach emphasizing the 'whole' of the individual pupil. No wonder that inner-life spirituality is proving increasingly attractive to secondary school teachers in the UK, the importance it attaches to the shared spiritual life of all humans serving as a way of addressing multiculturalism. No wonder that inner-life spirituality is a growing presence within the domain of paid employment, among other things being taken to contribute to the self-work ethic. No wonder that this kind of spirituality has been deemed worthy of government support in the UK and elsewhere, President Musharraf of Pakistan, for instance, lending his official backing, as Patron-in-chief, to an inner-life orientated Sufi organization, the National Council of Sufism, primarily designed to combat the exclusivistic with the inclusivistic.

Whether it be the personal life of subjective experience, the personal life of the 'familiar' world of daily activities, or the cultivation of humanity, it seems as though holistic spirituality has a great deal to offer.[2] We might well want to conclude that if it continues to become more popular, it will provide a worthy successor to Christianity in western settings; and, in the longer term, to exclusivistic, iron-cage forms of Islam (for example) in countries like Pakistan. Indeed, among other reasons, the ability of spiritualities of life to handle both the unique and the universal could mean that it will provide a *more* worthy successor: quite probably the best hope for the future of the sacred in a world where the cry 'Only Connect' is likely to become more and more urgent – not least to combat the divisive Truths of numerous forms of religious tradition.

A Deleterious Development

Turning to the other side of the coin, New Age spiritualities of life have long been subject to criticism. Think of Chesterton. Providing a very brief history of the main tools which have been used to beat New Age spiritualities during the last few decades, forty years ago talk was of the acid-riddled hippies of the counter-culture, twenty-five years ago of the brainwashed participants of fascistic enlightenment seminars; today, talk is of the consumption of mind-body-spirit dross. Of all the controversies surrounding contemporary inner-life spiritualities, by far and away the most significant within the academy and beyond revolves around the criticism that the great majority (or virtually all) of provisions and activities serve as consumer products. The refrain is that the key product of the New Age is experience. 'Spiritual' experiences, if that is what they can be called, are taken to be consumed, used, for the sake of enhancing hedonistic experiences – broadly on a par with a pampering session at a mind-body spa, or reading pulp fiction.

Putting it vividly, only the self can consume – by and for itself. One cannot consume for others. When individuals consume, they, and they alone, absorb or use what is on offer, the experiences belonging to their private, interior, life. Especially when people consume for the sake of their own pleasure rather than out of necessity, 'the pursuit of happiness' only too readily results in 'the *dead end* of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self' (Lasch, 1980, p. xv; my emphasis). The joys, wonders, experiences of one's own essence – that is, one's own 'spirituality' – might themselves be consumed. In answer to one of the questions raised earlier – namely, to what extent do New Age spiritualities of life stay locked into the self, itself? – the short answer is that this is where they remain. And in answer to another question – to the extent that these spiritualities stay with the self itself, what kind of self is at stake? – the answer is equally obvious. We are in the land of the self-indulgent self; the self consumed by worldly provisions. We are in the land of those rational-choice and post-modernist theorists who, in Stephen Hunt's (2002, p. 42) summary, see spirituality as 'partak[ing] of the consumer ethic'. We are in the land of the 'I am what I am – and I want more from the material world'. We are in the land of Burger King's 'Get the Urge, Get to Burger King'; of the 'Have it Your Way'.

Whatever value or usefulness New Age spiritualities of life might possess – as a way forward, perhaps as a force for good in the longer-term future – is ravaged, dissipated by consumption. Worse, we shall see, it can be argued that these spiritualities contribute to the very thing that they proclaim, in egalitarian mode, to be combating: elitist, show-off, indulgent, excessive capitalism, the wealthier affirming their difference from the less well-off; exploiting their position in life to fuel experiences of deprivation. Except for successful capitalists, spiritualities of life do much more harm than good.

Comparison

The beneficial and deleterious ways in which holistic spiritualities of life are understood and appraised are poles apart. On the one hand, we find a person-centred, expressivistic, humanistic, universalistic spirituality. We find a spirituality praised by participants for the ways in which it stimulates the flourishing of what it is to be human; a spirituality credited with the power to heal 'dis-ease', to enhance wellbeing or 'wellness'; a spirituality which professionals seek to introduce or encourage within the mainstream realms of education, health and the capitalist workplace (etc.); a spirituality deemed worthy of governmental support; a spirituality which provides a 'politics' of values to bring about a better world in which to live.

On the other hand, we find capitalist-driven gratification of desire, the pleasuring of the self, self-indulgence, if not sheer greed. Rather than contributing to the quality of life for increasing numbers of people, the growth of New Age spiritualities makes things worse. Increasingly, purveyors dress

their products and services with spirituality to make 'The Promise'. Their aim is to stimulate demand by titillating hopes and desires. Playing on the 'consumer emotions' of the individual – of the '*I'll* only be happy when *I* have experienced this . . . ' variety – the end result is Lasch's dead end. Prompted by provisions and services to dwell on the state of play and requirements of their pleasure zone, the more that individuals take in (or are taken in *by*) what is on offer, the more privatized or selfish they become, perhaps to the extent of treating even 'close' relationships in the mode of instrumental self-gratification. Consequently, the less likely they are to contribute to the wellbeing of those around them during their daily lives, let alone to engage in 'direct' political action more generally.

Introducing the Argument

What is to be made of this clash of understanding and evaluation? What is to be made of the argument that consumerism is alive and well, if not rampant, within the sphere of inner-life spirituality? To the degree that the language of consumption is rejected by participants, do the 'implied' meanings of these spiritualities, their nature, form or function, nevertheless justify the application of the language? It would be rash in the extreme to reject the claim that the growth of New Age spiritualities of life *can* contribute to self-indulgence and other forms of consumption. It would also be rash to reject the claim that the purveyors of 'spiritually' significant products or services 'sell out' in the context of consumer culture, with some having 'sold out' to it. However, there are good grounds for concluding that attempts to 'reduce' spiritualities of life more or less *in toto* – which is what some critics do – is to neglect the irreducible.

Recent years have seen the publication of a number of volumes, articles and Ph.D. theses written in the spirit of Christopher Lasch. That is to say, the emphasis lies with the 'nothing (much) more than hedonistic consumption' point of view. It is time for a response: one which is not driven by purist ideas of what counts as true, that is world-rejecting, spirituality; one which does not derive from particular versions of what counts as political activism (those to the left arguing that the turn within deflects from 'real', that is secular, activism); and, for that matter, one which is not driven by the doctrines, fear or envy of the Christian establishment (see Ward, 2006). To counter the sledge-hammer approach of so much of what has become the 'reduction' to consumption orthodoxy of many critics, as well as to generate debate, I attempt to dislodge some familiar arguments. It is time to rectify the balance against the polemical, rhetorical and – it has to be said – the frequently ill-informed.[3]

In *The Politics of Experience* (1967), R. D. Laing writes:

> Our behaviour is a function of our experience. We act according to the way we see things . . . If our experience is destroyed, we have lost our own selves. (p. 2)

In *The Art of Happiness* (1998) the Dalai Lama speaks the language of highly egalitarian, humanistic, expressive, 'loving kindness' spirituality, arguing for what he calls '*basic spirituality*': 'the basic human qualities of goodness, kindness, compassion, caring' (p. 258; his emphasis). As the Dalai Lama continues,

> as long as we are human beings, as long as we are members of the human family, *all* of us really need these basic human values. Without these, human existence remains very hard, very dry. As a result, none of us can be a happy person, our whole family will suffer, society will be more troubled. So, it becomes clear that cultivating these kinds of basic spiritual values becomes crucial. (p. 258; his emphasis)

Drawing on Laing and the Dalai Lama, it is virtually a truism that the ways in which people experience, understand and value themselves, those around them and those further abroad, has huge significance for how they act in the world. And as anthropologists, for example, have demonstrated, to have new experiences, to acquire new understandings, to change values during the ritual process – exemplified by *rites de passage* – frequently has profound significance for life.[4] Leaving exploration of the 'changes' which *might* occur during the 'ritual process' of participation in holistic, mind-body spirituality until later in this book, the important point for now is that the values of the Dalai Lama's 'basic spirituality' (and of course his list is not exhaustive) are widely abroad within spiritualities of life. For introductory purposes, it suffices to say that participation *can* serve to make a *difference* to the ways people live 'out' their lives.

My main intention is to argue the case for 'spiritual' significance or reality, arguing in turn that the growth of New Age spiritualities of life is by no means entirely 'eaten up' by the bodies-cum-psychologies of consumers. That instead, 'ethical demands' are frequently experienced as emanating from within. Adopting a term from Isaiah Berlin's *Against the Current* (2001) – an analysis of those precursors of contemporary spiritualities of life, the Romantics – I argue as forcefully as possible that holistic, face-to-face activities (in particular) can facilitate a 'current' of meaningful experiences. These flow through the lives of participants to infuse their outlook on life and their values. Flowing through those who have, in measure, moved *beyond* the allures of consumer culture; those who are cultivating basic spirituality rather than merely using their activities to gratify their consumptive emotions; those who aim to 'Grow into Life' (an apt expression!), as a psychodrama group which has met in Lancaster calls itself; those who seek 'to bring the daily activities of our lives into a more health-promoting way', as a leaflet circulated by a Kendal practitioner of the Alexander Technique and Reflexology puts it; those who seek what 'The Headless Way' has to offer, according to a promotional flyer – 'See Who you really are. Our self-concept affects our behaviour, so an expanded sense of self has important implications for our lives.'

A Personal Bias?

To engage with the 'reduction' to consumption thesis by drawing attention to its defects, and to do this by referring to the 'spiritual' significance or reality of holistic activities, could easily be taken to mean that I am defending spiritualities of life.[5] It can then be inferred that my defence is due to the fact that I am committed to what they have to offer. It can thus be concluded that I am biased in favour of these spiritualities. And indeed Steve Bruce (2006, p. 42) writes that I am one of those who is 'sympathetic to New Age spirituality'.

In one sense, Bruce understates his case. As will become perfectly apparent, I am deeply committed to the beneficial *efficacy* of inclusivistic (albeit tension-laden) humanistic values – the same values which are sacralized by so many New Age spiritualities of life. In another sense, though, Bruce's observation has to be qualified. I am equally committed to basing as many interpretations and judgements as possible, most especially those to do with beneficial efficacy, on publicly accessible evidence. Given the absence of publicly available empirical evidence for inner-life spirituality itself, I am certainly not committed to the unscholarly exercise of couching inquiry in terms of the presumed ontological-cum-experiential truth of what lies deep within. As reported by participants, the 'spiritual' significance of holistic activities is, of course, another matter. For it is then an aspect of ethnographic reality.

Furthermore, on the point of evidence and efficacy, it should be born in mind that it is not as though I am making things easy for myself. For some time now, I have argued that the provisions and activities of holistic spiritualities of life in measure belong to subjective wellbeing culture.[6] Writes David Cohen (2000) in an article on a course at the University of Alberta which attends to Oprah Winfrey, *The Oprah Magazine* 'maintains that one can and s*hould feel better about oneself* – ''This magazine is about helping you *become more of who you are*,'' says Winfrey's introductory note' (my emphases). With the emphasis on quality experiences for the (relatively) well-to-do, subjective wellbeing culture in its purchasing, high-street mode is often seen as epitomizing the self-indulgent aspect of consumer culture; a bourgeois bastardization of that great theme of the *fin-de-siècle* Decadents, critical fascination with insatiability and the quest for sensual gratification at all costs. To argue, as I do in this volume, that holistic, mind-body-spirituality activities *also* have much to do with a subjectivized rendering of the ethic of humanity – which in effect is what the Dalai Lama is referring to – flies in the face of what readily come to mind when one thinks of quality of life purchasing culture: luxuries for the spoilt.

More Controversies

Hopefully, this volume is controversial. Given that it intersects with several debates within various quarters of the academy, it should be.

Thinking of the (ill-named) sociology of *religion* (for spirituality should now be included), the sometimes heated debate is between those who emphasize the market, self-interest and preferences and those who emphasize the continuing significance of the 'Durkheimian' sacred as an authoritative order. Including New Age spirituality under the rubric of religion, Stephen Hunt (2002) writes, 'if there is any one theme which unites sociologists in the area today then it is the matter of choice and consumption in the field of religion' (p. 210). True, not all the sociologists he has in mind are united in the importance they ascribe to self-indulgent consumption. However, his generalization stands – which means that I have to argue against the consensus: among other strategies, by adopting a modified Durkheimian approach.

A related point of controversy concerns the growing tendency for secularization theorists to explain away the growth of New Age spiritualities of life by arguing that activities (and beliefs?) have much more to do with the ends of individualistic, secular or psychological consumption than with anything over and above that which is 'taken in' to satisfy preferences.

Within that important field of cultural studies, namely the investigation of the consumer, consumer culture and consumption, the debate between those who envisage the consumer as a passive, decentred, saturated, more-or-less conformist, opiated victim of the formations and stratagems of capitalism, and those who emphasize the libertarian, emancipatory role of consumer activities and autonomous self-expression, is as hotly contested as ever. The debate between those who are negative – sometimes exceedingly so – about what consumer culture has to offer, and those who emphasize creative, 'meaning-making' aspects, cannot be ignored in what follows. Even when mind-body-spirituality activities or provisions are consumeristic, they could be enabling more than the passive consumption of 'mere' pleasure.

Controversy is fuelled by virtue of the fact that the topic of consumption more or less inevitably raises issues to do with elitism. For Graham Ward (2006), 'rather than functioning as an integrating factor in the life of a society', religion – especially what he calls 'spiritualism' – is well on the way to becoming 'self-help as self-grooming', providing forms of 'custom-made eclecticism that proffer a pop transcendence and pamper to the need for "good vibrations"' (p. 185). Ward might be partially correct. Before making assessments of this variety, however, it is worth taking a close look at the evidence. It is only too easy to make disparaging judgements of New Age provisions or services, dismissing them as consumer garbage. (I wonder what Ward would have to say about *Enhancing Your Mind Body Spirit* magazine, each £2.99 issue complete with 'Course Equipment' such as an amethyst crystal, advertised on TV in Britain over the last few years during the Christmas period?) Indeed, it could well be argued that there is a long tradition, going back to Weber (for example) with his category of the *virtuosi*, which parallels the kind of cultural elitism exemplified, more generally, by the likes of Nancy Mitford. My own 'bias' is to value

respect – not just as a value, but because of the importance of ethnographic accuracy.

It might be easy to poke fun at the £2.99 pack. It might be easy to ridicule the adaptation of the 'Tao' as in 'With Tao Tile Imports it's not merely about seeing – it's about experiencing our range'. It might be tempting to dismiss 'Aromatherapist Glenda Taylor, founder of Cariad essential oils' when she tells journalist Jacqui Ripley (2002) that the oil 'sooths frayed emotions, calms nerves and lifts the spirits' (p. 311). It might be easy to laugh at the '6,000 square ft Roman Spa, complete with marble columns and floors, offering all kinds of herbal baths and therapy' (*CTS Magazine*, 1991, p. 3) which has been built in Norway. It is equally easy to note that, 'These days, you can get hold of green-tea bags infused with ancient wisdom and £80 tracksuit bottoms with the Buddha writ large in self embroidery' (Ives, 2007). It might be very easy indeed to ridicule Tony Blair for drinking from a personalized 'name' mug which begins, 'Anthony, your refined inner voice drives your thoughts and deeds'. But let us first look closely at what the £2.99 pack, for instance, contains: whether 'eastern' themes have been recontextualized to incorporate *significant* values; whether there is spiritually informed advice about how to become a better person, both for one's own sake and for the sake of others. Let us also first hear what purchasers have to say. Their judgements ('Oh, I realized it was complete junk and chucked it' or 'eye opening') can then inform academic assessments. Despite the postmodern sensibility – the value attached to 'little things', the importance of 'valuing the other', the egalitarian ethos – the (supposedly) refined tastes of the scholar only too readily (I shall argue) translate into summary devaluation: especially when ignorance of anything other than surface *appearances* is involved. The inspirational, the auratic, need not be limited to Wagner. Basically, I'm anti-elitist, my adherence to cultural democracy entailing equal adherence to ethnographic contextualization – and vice versa.

Probably, there is also a degree of disrespectful elitism – together with self-interested protectionism – at work among those (often high-ranking) medical professionals like Nobel prizewinner for medicine Sir James Black who dismiss CAM as ineffectual tosh. The counter-argument is that CAM provisions and activities, including the spiritually informed, are best seen as a major aspect of subjective wellbeing culture, the popularity of CAM helping demonstrate its success in enhancing the quality of life.

On his deathbed, blind and unable to speak, Aldous Huxley made a written request to his wife, Laura Huxley, for an intramuscular injection of 100 mg of LSD. He died peacefully a few hours after the injection. A form of escapism, akin to the role played by soma which he had so sharply criticized in *Brave New World*? A CAM-like intake to 'ease' his 'final journey' and render it 'a more conscious experience', as Susan Blackmore (2006) would have it? An ecstatic experience, with the expectation of providing experiential ratification of his understanding of *The Tibetan Book of the*

Dead? Or simply a final act of consumption, with hedonistic under- or overtones? Although the 'simply' hedonistic is (highly) unlikely, I doubt that we will ever know. But in the contemporary world, we are at least in the position to explore the significance of consumption, as intake, at first hand: to do our best to put our prejudices aside to explore what is taking place before reporting – or judging – whether it is edifying or demeaning; a force for the better or for the worse.

Other points of controversy are raised as we proceed. One, though, deserves immediate note. It concerns the ethic of humanity, an ethic which revolves around the values ascribed to the 'golden triangle' of life, equality and freedom, an ethic which is dominant in western cultures, and an ethic which is central to spiritualities of life. The ethic is also highly controversial. It has been subjected to what can only be described as savage criticism, proclamations of the 'death of the human' or of 'humanity' itself serving to reject its very foundations. Sacralized within spiritualities of life, to argue that the growth of these spiritualities can contribute to personal and multicultural relationality therefore entails defending the ethic. Fortunately, help is to hand – provided, for example, by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (1993), Nussbaum (1997, 2000, 2007), Sen (2005, 2006) and Sarbani Sen (2007).

A Brief Guide to this Book

The first chapter provides an overview of contemporary mind-body spirituality, introducing the reader to main characteristics and how this form of spirituality differs from others. To ground the contemporary, as well as to illustrate basic themes and their variations, it includes a fair amount of historical contextualization. Evidence of recent growth is looked at in the second chapter, attention being paid to the nature of wellbeing spirituality today, including how it appears in various sociocultural settings in the West.

Focusing on activities, the central section of the volume concentrates on the 'consuming growth' debate. The most important argument employed by secularization theorists to handle the growth of New Age spiritualities of life is to interpret them as engulfed by the psychologies of consumption, including secular consumer culture. What is growing is consumed, used (up), to the extent that significantly spiritual growth (especially values experienced as spiritually informed) is unimportant, or virtually absent. Having gone further into the contours of the debate in the third chapter, the fourth serves to introduce the reader to the language of consumption. At the same time, I draw attention to how the key senses of this language have been, or can be, applied to tease out consumeristic aspects of New Age spiritualities of life. Notwithstanding the presence of consumeristic aspects, however, the remaining chapters of the central section provide a battery of arguments designed to reveal the limitations of the 'reduction' to consumption approach, especially when the approach takes the form of *in toto*, or virtually

in toto, blanket coverage. The arguments take into consideration the fact that the commodities and holistic mind-body-spirituality activities of broadly conceived subjective wellbeing culture are more likely to be consumeristic in some contexts (upmarket stores, for instance) than others (terminal life-care in many hospices).

In the concluding section, attention is turned to what inner-life activity can contribute to a 'politics' of the 'good life'; to a politics which explores avenues, ways of life, which are not reducible to the 'spiritual' consummation of consumer capitalism; to a politics which might not have much to do with Timothy Leary's *The Politics of Ecstasy* (1970) of the counter-cultural sixties, but which nevertheless shares with it an expressivistic, humanistic, value-laden alternative, response to, if not stand against, the 'high road' of capitalism, specifically in the mode of 'excessive' consumption.[7] A *Politics Beyond Excess*. The argument is that spiritualities of life, today, inform a more subtle, whilst more effective, 'counter-culture' – better, 'counter-current' – than that of 35 or so years ago; ways of living which are 'normal', familiar, everyday, yet able to make a difference. Having discussed this in connection with western settings, the Epilogue introduces an international perspective. It raises the question as to whether the growth of inner-life spirituality in countries like Pakistan or India can serve as a 'counter' to the excesses of individualistic, self-centred, discriminatory consumer capitalism. It raises the matter of how spiritualities of life can function 'in their own right' – that is significantly beyond consumption – to play a crucial, universalistic or inclusivistic role in combating divisive, dangerous exclusivism. To combat those Truth-driven 'us-them' mentalities which, in Marxist vein, owe a great deal to capitalism, not least inequalities generated by the lust for consumption among wealthy elites.

To what extent has inner-life spirituality resisted sliding into self-absorbed consumption? Readers looking for a comprehensive and determinate assessment of the extent to which New Age spiritualities of life are bound up with the dynamics and values of consumption – or not – will be disappointed. Apart from the fact that the research agenda stretches well into the future, I argue that it is highly unlikely that any particular activity or provision is *either* an act of consumption *or* not. My answer to the question 'When is an act of consumption?' is that acts (or indeed natural 'events' like fires, triggered by spontaneous combustion, consuming forests) are *never* simply a matter of consumption. Aldous Huxley might have consumed LSD; but given his life, it would be foolhardy to limit attention to the ingestion itself.

In Short

At a time when the incidence of Christian practice (gauged by church attendance) and belief (gauged by 'personal God' survey data) is collapsing in many European countries, as well as elsewhere, the question is whether

the incontestable growth of holistic, mind-body spirituality activities (publications, etc.) is primarily to do with the engorgement of capitalism or the development of a valuable, perhaps invaluable, ultimate resource. Rather than activities collapsing into the secularities of self-centred emotions and feelings to dissipate the *significance* and *distinctiveness* of growth, are we witnessing the flowering of the 'practically spiritual'? A flowering of that Romantic trajectory of modernity which is provided by spiritual practitioners whose practices bring spirituality to life, inspiring participants to live a life of good practice? A flowering which is only *sometimes* 'practically spiritual' in the sense of being 'not quite' the 'real thing'?

Two Provisos

With 200,000-plus separate mind-body-spirituality activities run by spiritual practitioners taking place in Great Britain today, with the figure for the world going into the millions, it is inevitable that the present volume is of a somewhat tentative nature. Although I have been studying and researching New Age spiritualities of life for some 35 years (longer, if one includes sixties experiences), it is simply impossible to keep up with all that has developed. And though it is wonderful learn from colleagues in a number of countries, they, too, are faced with the challenge of keeping abreast with what is appearing or developing. There is certainly a wealth of things to research, a wealth which is increasing virtually everywhere. We researchers hardly have time to draw our breath. In the field of readership studies, for instance, very little is known about the role of texts written out of the 'sacred' (inspirational? helping place 'issues' in perspective? titillation? 'authoritative'?). We do not even know, for example, the approximate percentage of New Agers who are pacifists, who opposed the invasion of Iraq. With so many gaps in the evidence, I have sometimes felt that I have been ploughing a rather uncertain furrow. My consolation is that the more insecure, less certain passages of the volume will nevertheless set something of a research agenda: of value to those non-committed academics who are intent on exploring whether the 'balance' can be rectified by seeing what New Age spiritualities of life have to offer – rather than simply indulging in criticism.

Some of the content of this book is certainly rather less well informed than would be the case if there were more researchers in the field: not just in Britain, but more importantly in countries like Pakistan. I am *reasonably* confident, however, that the rather 'utopian' (as some might see it) account of New Age spiritualities of life is just that – reasonable. Inevitably, the portrayal, the generalizations made in what follows, are open to the criticism, 'But *x* is not like this' or '*y* differs in the following ways . . . '. I just pray that I am reasonably accurate – that is, accurate enough to encourage the search for greater accuracy. I am fully aware – indeed, hoping – that what follows

will be criticized, especially on the basis of better ethnographic evidence. There are too many provisos of the 'it is highly likely. . . ' kind for my taste. On the other hand, the relative paucity of relevant information cuts both ways. Just as I sometimes flounder for evidence, so – presumably – do those who advocate the 'reduction' to consumption interpretation. Hopefully, it is easier to undermine the generalizations of the 'deleterious' camp than vice versa.

Although contemporary aspects of capitalism play an important role in this book, the topic of spirituality and commodified production for the market is not dwelt on to the extent that it deserves. To do justice to this enormous topic, involving the diverse ways in which inner-life spirituality is put to work within the context of economic productivity, would require another volume.

Starting with the Self to 'Big Designs'

One of the characters of Ian McEwan's *Black Dogs* reflects:

> Everyone has to take responsibility for his own life and attempt to improve it, spiritually in the first instance . . . Without a revolution of the inner life, however slow, all our big designs are worthless. The work we have to do is within ourselves if we are ever going to be at peace – the good that flows from it will shape our societies in an unprogrammed, unforeseen way, under the control of no single group or set of people or set of ideas.

The emotionally dead aside, we all know the difference that activities (from sleep to tennis) can make to subjective life; we all know the difference that subjectivities can make to our daily lives – our routine tasks, our work, our relationships; generally speaking, we appreciate the value of empathy, of understanding others; generally speaking, we enjoy having a sense of purpose or hope and the driving force which goes with looking to the future; we all value the cultivation of companionship, of love, of learning about ourselves with others, of coming to terms with problems; to some degree or another we all appreciate the ways in which self-expression can contribute to the lives of others – reciprocally, what our own lives owe to others; a great many of us seek to become more fully human – not by filling life up with material commodities or trivia, but by affirming and 'extending' life with and 'through' other people in 'postmaterialist' vein.[8] On common-sense grounds alone, finding ways of being calmer, or more focused, can make a great contribution to the art of life. Maybe this does not have to do with 'a *revolution* of the inner life'. But this is the kind of subjective-life territory where inner-life spiritualities get to work. Improving life for oneself, and therefore for others. The nurse who has problems at work; who joins a tai chi group; who returns to work to contribute more 'life' to the ward.

In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1978), Kant wrote:

> The cynic's purism and the hermit's mortification of the flesh, without *social good-living*, are distorted interpretations of virtue and do not make virtue attractive; rather, being forsaken by the Graces, they can *make no claim on humanity*. (p. 191; my emphases)

In not dissimilar vein, Julian Huxley, in his *Religion Without Revelation* (1941), argues, 'any religion which stresses the need for propitiating an external Power will be diverted away from the more essential task of *using* and organizing the spirituality forces that lie within each individual' (p. vii; my emphasis). Without for one moment wishing to imply that Kant and Huxley belong to the camp of spiritualities of life (although scientistic Huxley sometimes veers perilously close), the thrust of mind-body spirituality is very much towards practical application; their spiritual realities are very much to do with 'social good-living'. At least from the perspective of the great majority of spiritual practitioners, and many of their participants, it is all about spiritually suffused, expressivistic, humanistic, wellbeing 'flow'.

In *The New Age Movement* (1996a) I wrote, 'The New Age is ''of'' the self in that it facilitates celebration of what it is to be and to become; and is ''for'' the self in that by differing from much of the mainstream, it is positioned to handle identity problems generated by conventional forms of life' (pp. 173–4). Developments since the 1980s, when most of the research for *The New Age Movement* was carried out, mean that I am no longer so happy with the terms 'celebration' and 'identity problems'. Developments also mean that I now greatly prefer the formulation 'a spirituality ''of'' and ''for'' what it is to live out of life'. Fundamentally, we are looking at a spirituality 'of' and 'for' *being* truly human: 'of' because it is experienced and understood to emanate from the depths of subjective life, if not life itself; 'for' because of its practicality – its (apparent) ability to make a positive difference to subjective life and the life around us: as well as elsewhere.

The point (or criticism) is often made that one of the most significant differences between New Age spiritualities of life and many forms of traditional religion is that the former don't make much of a difference – when, as we know only too well, the latter can readily implement or support 'big designs'. Whether taken individually or collectively, New Age spiritualities of life, it is argued, are too superficial, too insubstantial, too vague, too inward looking, too selfish, and – of course – too consumerized, too much 'of' and 'for' the pleasures or luxuries of secular consumption, to be other than inconsequential, ineffectual. Casual and largely irrelevant to important matters, they lack 'impact'.

However, if participant testimonies, the spiritual meaningful realities of their activities, the literature they read, the work they do (for example)

is anything to go by, spiritualities of life *are* able to make a *real* difference. As experienced and valued, 'spiritual power' or 'force' (as Comte called it in quasi-secular mode) *works*. Such is my central argument. The greatest challenge, though, is arguing the case when so much difference is of a qualitative nature. As anyone who has read Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* might well appreciate, 'quality' is a tricky matter – certainly not one readily tackled quantitatively. Quality, though is not invisible.

But what of humanity? It is frequently claimed that 'the aim' of the New Age is to 'change oneself rather than change the world' (the point is made here by Nadia Garnoussi, 2005, p. 197). Even if sceptics grant that inner-life spirituality can serve to inform the life of the self together with a politics of ethics, with values-cum-experiences serving as a (relatively) gentle current within more personal, familiar, localized settings, it might well be objected that spiritualities of life, today, show little of the political clout of, say, the counter-cultural sixties. As a universalistic spirituality of humanity, one would expect to see New Agers regularly protesting outside the American Embassy (etc.), to protest against the situation in Iraq – as counter-culturalists did against the war in Vietnam. One might expect to see more effort being put into working from the self, and the 'local' or familiar where the self spends much of life, to the far away.[9] Or is this unfair? The matter is returned to later – including the significance of inner-life humanism as a force of (and for) good, able to work wonders. So too is the consideration that there is sound evidence that as nations become increasingly wealthy, democratic, ethic of humanity values tend to become increasingly significant, as do expressivist values, as does inclusivistic, humanistic spirituality: or is this last a mask for the possessive, consuming individualism of the wealthy in countries like Pakistan or India? Not so much commodity worship, but the 'worship' of their own experiences?

More harm than good or more good than harm? That is the question. Given the decline of traditional religion in western settings (and the damage it can do elsewhere), given the growth of the inner-life spirituality 'replacement', the stakes are high. A genuine attempt to incorporate more spiritual values and practices within the mainstream in order to 'transform' it, or mumbo-jumbo – Christopher Lasch's (1987) 'spiritual stew', 'lacking any intrinsic value'? Who is right – Chesterton or Julie? Or are both somehow making valid points? Is it in order that humanistic spirituality is being developed within the mainstream of institutions in England, with 'nursing spirituality' being developed, with the government agency Ofsted inspecting spiritual development in schools? In short, what, if any, is the significance beyond consumption – especially in the world 'beyond' the self, where the inner-life could have a critical role to play in contributing to the harmonization of the cultures of the globe?