

Jung and the New Age ~ A Study in Contrasts

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Jung's name has been associated with the New Age for about three decades, but now his alleged "influence" on this movement is being formally proposed and articulated. In New Age Spirituality, Duncan Ferguson argues that Jung has played a major role in the development of this popular spirituality,(1) and more recently in The New Age Movement sociologist Paul Heelas claims that Jung is one of "three key figures" (the others being Blavatsky and Gurdjieff) who is responsible for the existence of the movement.(2) In similar vein, Nevill Drury maintains that "Jung's impact on New Age thinking has been enormous, greater, perhaps, than many people realize."(3) Everywhere the claim is being made that the New Age movement is a product of Jungian interest, and today spiritually oriented therapists from a diverse range of fields all claim to be Jungian, or refer to Jung as their spiritual ancestor, scientific authority, inspiration, or source. Are these claims valid? How Jungian is the New Age? Having explored the similarities and differences between New Age spirituality and Jungian metapsychology, I find the New Age to be non-Jungian or even anti-Jungian in a number of important respects which will be considered here.

Jung clearly has several points in common with the New Age. Both Jung and the New Age agree that spiritual meaning is no longer synonymous with, and can no longer be contained by, the religious establishments and institutions of Western culture. Jung and the New Age are interested in exploring non-Christian, pre-Christian, or post-Christian sources of spiritual meaning; both are interested in gnosticism, alchemy, and Eastern contemplative traditions. Jung and the New Age look forward to the future with a degree of optimism, seeing a "spirit" that works through history heralding a future goal or ideal that has yet to be realised. Both look forward to a future vision that, perhaps paradoxically, teaches us how to live in the present. The present lives in anticipation of a "better" future, and for Jung the future ideal can be summed up in the word "wholeness," an ideal that he frequently contrasts with the Christian ethic of "perfection." The New Age, too, likes to privilege "wholeness" above "perfection," just as it emphasises the immanent God above a transcendent God.

It sometimes seems that New Age spirituality is simply Jungian psychology writ large, taking Jung's model to the outer world and dispensing his wisdom to the multitudes in need of spiritual direction. But of course what the New Age seems to be doing, and what it actually does, are very different things. The New Age is not a coherent religious philosophy and often appears to be driven more by commercial interests and market forces than by any particular philosophical position. It is broadly Jungian in its emphasis on the spiritual authority of individual experience (which Jung borrowed from Protestantism), on the need for religious and cultural transformation (which Jung derived from German Romanticism), and on the importance of unorthodox ways of achieving unity with the

Creator (which Jung borrowed from Gnosticism, Hermeticism, and Alchemy).

The value of the New Age is in how it challenges Western religious orthodoxy to arrive at new and culturally relevant interpretations of the human spirit. The New Age is a “cry of the heart” from the masses, a cry to make spirituality relevant to our times and emotionally related to individual human experience. It is a popular movement which reverses many of the attitudes, trends, and views that are found in traditional Western religion, especially views on the body, sexuality, nature, and desire. It is a movement which follows and extends an archetypal process which is based on the “feminine principle,” is compensatory to the patriarchal West, and has links with Romanticism, Gnosticism, Paganism, Naturalism, Nudism, and Occultism.

If the New Age appears Jungian it is not because it has used Jung, but because it draws its life from a particularly strong archetypal current that we might associate with Jung because he clearly mapped this psychospiritual territory. Jung was especially interested in the archetypal processes that were “compensatory” to the patriarchal West, so this brings him even closer to the interests of the New Age. However, Jung did not naively celebrate or idealise these compensatory currents in the Western psyche. He identified these currents and named them, but his response to them was always critical, detached, and ambivalent. Jung continually sought to integrate warring opposites and contradictory elements (such as Paganism and Christianity) into a larger whole, and he almost never championed one set of archetypal claims at the expense of another. Although Jung prophetically saw that “feminine” and “pagan” contents were on the rise in the Western psyche, he never advocated abandoning ourselves to these contents; on the contrary, he felt that the task of individuation involved resisting these collective forces and developing a critical response to them. Any collective movement which identifies with an archetypal process is, virtually by definition, not going to accord with Jungian taste, which is based on the ethics and aesthetics of individuation. Jung’s attack on what he called “identification with the collective psyche” is conveniently and deliberately ignored by all those New Age therapists, consultants, advocates, and shamans who like to freely celebrate and even “worship” the newly constellated archetypal contents. The pagan longings, gnostic impulses, and unorthodox spiritual strivings that have been repressed for hundreds of years in the West have been released after the collapse of Christendom’s authority, and now, without any inhibition at all, we find these contents paraded before us.

Although the New Age attempts to correct prevailing attitudes of Western secular and religious culture, a critical analysis shows the limitations of the New Age attitude and its divergence from a Jungian position particularly in three areas.

(1) From God to Gaia:
Spiritual Reenchantment in Western culture

The prevailing attitude in Western secular culture is that the ancient Gods are long dead, and, more recently, our Jewish-Christian God the Father has also died. There is no metaphysical or spiritual life, and the world has been emptied of religious meaning. Belief in the spiritual has been eradicated by secular education, and religion today is merely the province of the uneducated, the poor, or the

superstitious. The modern, progressive search is for social and personal liberation, and among the first things to be thrown out as we march toward freedom are subjugation to religious authority and obeisance to the sacred.

The prevailing attitude in Western religious culture is that traditional patriarchal religion is losing authority as the world grows more pagan, and as society becomes more permissive in its attitude toward desire, sexuality, and temporal satisfactions. As the Western superego weakens, allowing the more “natural” impulses to govern social life, the Church often considers that it has to strengthen its resolve and bolster the claims of the transcendental life. Hence the churches often appear beleaguered and reactionary, locked in a defensive situation and holding back the tides of change.

Attempting to correct these approaches, the New Age attitude is to move with the flow of the times, to admit the realm of desire and longing, to encourage the pagan movement of society, but to add to this movement a sacred or spiritual dimension. The New Age basically awards “spiritual blessing” to trends and attitudes that are already existent in Western culture: consumerism, hedonism, materialism, and narcissism. The New Age does not offer a critique of society, but simply mythologises and mystifies the things that already preoccupy us. So, in a Western society drenched in sex and obsessed with the body, the New Age proposes “sacred sex” and argues that the body is “the temple of the soul.” In a society governed by material desires and instant gratification, the New Age proposes a vitalistic belief in “green energy,” sees richness as a symbol of “spiritual wealth” (in a reversal of Judeo-Christian morality), and regards “deep relaxation” as a holy pursuit (reversing the Christian sanctification of work and toil). The New Age, like the secular mainstream, thumbs its nose at the authority of the Church, sees Puritanism as dreary and dull, and is not much interested in resurrecting our recently deceased God the Father.

The New Age is especially interested in the pagan deities of ancient times, the spirits of shamanistic cultures, and the divine figures of Eastern religions. Although diverse and polytheistic in its tastes, the dominant deity of the New Age is probably the Earth Goddess or the Mother Goddess, whether imaged as Gaia, Demeter, Cybele, Aphrodite, Astarte, or numerous other similar figures in various cultural and historical contexts. The New Age is profoundly unhistorical, universalist, and essentialist in its philosophical focus. Its slogan seems to be “any God(dess) will do,” so long as it is not the God we have suffered with for the last two thousand years of official religion. In ancient mythologies, the Earth Goddess never appears by herself, but is always featured with her consort, son-lover, or priest, and the same is true for her most recent appearance in the New Age. The Goddess’s consort usually symbolises her own fecundity and fertility, and so his phallic capacities are generally emphasised, as in such figures as Pan, Dionysus, Adonis, Tammuz, and especially Priapus. In the New Age, the son-lover or priest of the Earth Goddess is often celebrated in a composite figure who is sometimes called the “Green Man.” The Green Man symbolises the fecundity of the earth, the seasonal cycle of growth-death-rebirth, and the “unity” of all things natural and organic. If Christ is mentioned in the New Age, he is usually engaged only in his form as the Great Mother’s Son, as the dying and resurrecting year-god who is ritually mourned by his Mother and by the Holy Women at the foot of the cross. The New Age, that is to say, might adapt the Roman Catholic portrait of Christ to its own purposes, but it has no time at all for the Protestant and patriarchal Christ.

The New Age emphasises the redemptive and urgent mission of its religious vision. It aims to bring new enchantment and mystery into a world that has grown tired, depressed, and disenchanted. It seeks to rekindle the life of the spirit in a world that has become overly rational, cynical, disillusioned. It seeks to reawaken body awareness in a culture that has become too caught up in the head. Above all, the New Age has an ecological and world-saving imperative: to recover respect for earth, matter (derived from the Latin “mater,” meaning “mother”), physicality, and the biological environment in a time where patriarchal progress has perpetrated enormous damage (some of it irreversible) upon the biophysical web of life. The catch-cry is that only the Mother Goddess and her Green Man can save us from the plight of the patriarchal West. This new myth is found not only in ecophilosophy and ecospirituality, in deep ecology and ecological theology, but also in popular movies such as “Fern Gully,” in eco-cartoon and warrior shows such as “Captain Planet,” ecological pamphlets, activist literatures, and popular fictions. New Age ecological values and mythologies are also found in the public education system, environmental studies programs, green politics, the media, and entertainment. We are witnessing the rise of a powerful and archaic mythologem, a testimony to the fact that “myths” never die, and that in secular and “de-mysticized” cultures like ours myths not only survive but thrive — they are all the more powerful for not being regarded as “mythical.”

How would Jung respond to this aspect of the New Age? Jung died in 1961, some years before the New Age had gained international momentum, and before the ecological movement had been established (in Jung’s day it was referred to as “conservation,” and was usually the province of the politically conservative). However, he had foreseen the rise of paganism in the Western psyche,⁽³⁾ and he had in fact already identified this resurgent paganism as the archetypal source for twentieth-century fascism and national socialism.⁽⁵⁾

On religious matters, Jung was both Christian and New Age. Jung could see that the old, pre-Christian Gods and Goddesses were still alive, and often discovered in the psyche as the core nuclei of complexes and psychoneuroses. Jung was interested in the pre-Christian, the non-Christian, and the post-Christian, but unlike the New Age he was not anti-Christian. He did not suffer from anti-Christian prejudice, nor did he feel obliged, like James Hillman after him, to sing the praises of ancient Greece while denouncing the Jewish-Christian heritage. Jung was committed to the task of restoring the Christian God to cultural dignity and to human understanding. Jung could see that the one-sidedness of patriarchal religion and culture would necessarily constellate the awakening of compensatory matriarchal and feminine archetypal figures, but his response to these figures was ambivalent. On the one hand, we must encourage the archetypal feminine to present itself after centuries of neglect and repression. On the other hand, we can ill afford to allow the feminine to take “possession” of consciousness; it must be integrated and not allowed to dominate in a new, equally extreme and hence equally undesirable, one-sidedness.

Jung had a positive mother complex, and this inclined him to many of the matriarchal arts and sciences that had been “banned” by the patriarchy, but which were already becoming available to the public in Jung’s own day. Jung’s interest in astrology and divination is well known, and he virtually single-handedly recovered the ancient art of alchemy to modern scientific and psychological scrutiny. Jung was also ecological and romantically attached to landscape, earth, trees,

long before these attitudes became celebrated and entrenched in popular ecology. Perhaps more than Jung himself, his major follower Erich Neumann was steeped in the awareness that the archetypal feminine was about to displace and challenge the archetypal foundations of patriarchy, as we can see especially in his *The Great Mother* and *The Archetypal World* of Henry Moore. More recently, Jungian analyst Edward Whitmont has devoted an entire volume, *Return of the Goddess*, to the phenomenon of the awakening of the archetypal feminine and her phallic son-lover in the context of modernity and postmodernity.

Jung would agree with the New Age that if a major change in cultural attitude is to be effected, including a dramatic change of heart about humanity's relationship to the environment and the physical world, then archetypal support will have to be called upon to enable humanity to "feel differently" about the world. Social changes that operate purely from the rational level, such as a call to awaken moral conscience about the world, or a call to intensify ethical responsibility about the environment, will not be effective, because man's deeper emotions have not been activated or aroused. Jung was not a social positivist, did not believe in the fantasy that society is inevitably getting "better," but he was convinced of the power of myth and its ability to mobilise human actions and galvanise collective response. If a spiritual transformation can be sought, and a new perspective be developed that comes from reviving the ancient view that the earth is our "ancestral mother" or spiritual source, then so much the better for the future of the earth. I am sure Jung would feel that remythologization would have to accompany social revolution, and that returning Gaia, Demeter, or Aphrodite to living mythic status is a small price to pay for the survival of the world itself, its biodiversity, and its inhabitants

As mentioned, Jung would be critical if he felt that a new cult of Gaia, or the so-called Gaia Hypothesis, would come at the expense of God the Father, the masculine principle, and the animus. What would be the point, he would ask, of two thousand years or more of differentiation of the archetypal masculine, if we are prepared to throw it all out in a panic response to the plight of the world? Why must we head for a cultural enantiodromia (a running from one opposite extreme to another), when we have the opportunity to consider both sides of the archetypal spectrum? Why settle for a new one-sidedness when our deepest imperative, both to ourselves and to our culture, is to a struggle towards wholeness and unity? By all means bring on Gaia and bring back Demeter, but let us engage these archaic personalities in a meaningful dialogue with Christian spirituality and Western religion. While we are at it, let us also work toward a recovery of the lost feminine dimension within the Jewish-Christian God as well (as Sophia, Lillith, Mary, Wisdom, and Holy Spirit). But in tossing out our cultural bath-water, Jung would warn that throwing out the Baby Jesus as well would lead to full-blown repression of the masculine spirit, and to dangerous repercussions and consequences from the neglected or banished realm of the masculine.

(2) From Suffering to Bliss:

The New Addiction to Peak Experiences

The prevailing attitude in Western religious and philosophic traditions is that humanity is essentially tragic and life is synonymous with suffering. There is a pervasive pessimism about human value and

potential, which has arisen from the doctrine of original sin, the notion of humanity's fallenness and innate tendency toward self-serving egotism. Christian spirituality achieves its goal not by increasing the stature of the self, but by displacing the self altogether in favor of humility, emptying, and a kind of negative fulfillment, whereby the divine increases its fullness in direct proportion to the reduction of ego. In Western humanism, too, the self is felt to be inherently limited and flawed, and any attempt to overcome human limitation inevitably meets with satanic arrogance and moral inflation. Wisdom and spiritual direction does not reduce our suffering, but it makes it enduring and gives it higher meaning. The symbol for humanity's lot in the Western religious tradition is Christ on the cross.

The New Age attitude is that Western culture is too morbid and downbeat, and we need to change the script that we have about ourselves. The New Age replaces the Western sense of tragedy with an intense optimism about individual and social transformation. "A 'new' age is possible; human potential is limitless; its dynamics are beckoning and available. Emphasis on sin and evil, on redemption and conversion must yield to a world of 'original blessings' in a good creation." (5) Man need no longer crucify himself in the image of Christ; he can get off the cross, and celebrate his corporeal, fleshly existence and his capacity for entering into transformative dialogue with the divine.

The New Age man searches for highs, peak experiences, altered states of consciousness, and avoids lows, depressions and bleak pessimism. He looks for spirituality, for which read "devices and techniques that will connect me with the divine," and he often avoids or rejects established religions, for which read "those dogmatic structures that limit my individual freedom, inhibit spiritual expression, and diminish personal expectations of glory." Spirituality promises highs, but religion threatens with its emphasis on moral restrictions, social conscience, and ethical obligations. The New Age man wants the Goal (unity with the divine) without the Way (the discipline, ethics, and self-effacement that make such unity possible). He wants blissful union without the suffering of the cross, spiritual rebirth without having to first endure spiritual death. He is "hooked" on the sacred, addicted to spiritual techniques and practices, and his credo is: "Follow your bliss" (Joseph Campbell).

A Jungian response would be to doubt the authenticity of this so-called "spirituality" if it is merely designed to provide instant gratification for the ego. Jung would be suspicious of the marked separation of "spirituality" from "religion" if it is designed simply to separate "highs" from "lows," or light from shadow. Jung would see any unbounded optimism as a defense against darkness, especially given the tragic character of the twentieth century, and would support the Christian West in its emphasis on unavoidable suffering. According to Jung, suffering can never be escaped, but must be embraced and accepted as part of the human condition.

A major difference between Jung and the New Age concerns their discovery or "location" of the sacred. Despite the New Age rhetoric about the "immanence" of the divine and the "worldliness" of its spiritual vision, the New Age appears to be caught up in a typically Western transcendentalist interpretation of the spirit. The New Age tends to find its spiritual experiences "away" from life and "beyond" the ground of ordinary experience. It is attracted to the bizarre and the exotic, to the

extramundane and the shamanistic. A spiritual experience is a flight away from the real, and hence the importance of the word “high” to describe this popular spirituality. The New Age is not redemptive or transformative, and in this sense Christianity is a far more radical philosophy insofar as it attempts to engage and redeem the elements of this reality. Could it be that the New Age has inherited the otherworldliness of historical Gnosticism, with its impatience with the real and its metaphysical focus on a distant cosmos?

By contrast, Jung discovers spirituality in and through our human pathologies, not by transcending them. Jung maintains that for modern humanity “the Gods have become diseases,” and we meet our rejected and repressed sacredness at the center of diseases, at the core of psychoneuroses, and in the midst of mental anguish. Any collective movement that finds psychopathology morbid, dark, or unworthy of interest, is actually missing the spiritual opportunity of the time and does not deserve the name of “spirituality.” The New Age, from this Jungian position, works tirelessly to avoid any real encounter with the true sacred, preferring instead to follow some abstract, and entirely conventional, ego-ideal about what the sacred is like.

Jung would recognise in the New Age a fundamental confusion between the ego (personal self) and the soul (or the Self in the larger Jungian sense.) In true religious practice, it is the soul that finds release and liberation, for that is the immortal part of the person. Paradoxically, the salvation of the soul is at the same time a mortification of the ego, hence the formulation: “whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25). In the past, the necessary mortification of the ego has been confused with the mortification of the body, sexuality, and the feminine, and this arose largely from the split in the Western psyche between spirit and matter. But today, with our greater psychological knowledge, we get closer to the Christian mystery by seeing that it is the personal self, the ego, which must be displaced so that salvation might take place. In the New Age, there is no real separation between the personal self and the transpersonal soul, so the first stage in true religious awareness is not achieved; or rather, a religious process is conducted and at every point of this journey the spiritual life is contaminated with the desires and longings of the ego. In this way the spiritual journey is corrupted, and degenerates into an ego trip. As the soul is released from its bondage and is lifted into a greater reality, the ego wants to travel along with it, and the ecstasy of the spirit’s release is an ecstasy that the ego wants for itself.

In similar manner, the hungry New Age ego spies the grandeur and power of God, and it identifies with that power, viewing God as some “untapped supernatural resource” which can be utilised for the “expansion of human potential.” This is a wild and boundless Promethean fantasy, and the New Age actually believes in its heart of hearts that man can become God. As Shirley MacLaine, one of its popular exponents, proclaims: “I am God, I am God, I am God.”(6) With its early roots in the humanistic psychology movement, this wedds the optimism of Maslow and Rogers with the wildly esoteric claims of Blavatsky and Gurdjieff. In most of the popular literature, the New Age boasts about breaking conventional boundaries, realizing hidden potential, and aspiring to divine heights.

Jung would probably classify this as psychotic spirituality, a spirituality in which the ego has been grotesquely inflated to divine proportions. The secondary role of the ego has not been understood, and there is deep psychological and theological confusion about the meaning of life and the role of

humanity in serving the divine. The New Age man blasts his way into the spiritual realm, expecting to find bliss, but because he is so narcissistically wedded to the ego his experiences always meet with disappointment. The sacrifice of the ego to the divine that is so basic to religious experience does not and cannot occur, and hence it takes place unconsciously and involuntarily. Intellectually, the New Age man espouses a dreamy, heavenly philosophy, but in actual fact he is full of complaints and bitterness, because nothing appears to go right, other people appear bent on undermining or ruining him, and even his spiritual practice is criticised for being inadequate. The “loss of ego” that should be occurring consciously falls into the unconscious, and, like anything unconscious, is projected outward upon others and the world.

However, in New Age spirituality, not only does the loss of ego take place unconsciously, but the necessary development and building up of the ego occurs unconsciously as well. This is a different, but related, side to the tragic and undifferentiated fusion of ego and soul. The ego needs to separate from the soul in order to discover its own identity and life. The ego must actively embrace its own separateness and even risk “alienation” from the soul to come to itself. As Jung made clear, ego development is archetypally sanctioned, and any attempt to stifle this development must result in disaster. When asked about their spiritual practice, or why their lifestyle is so different from ordinary people, New Agers will often declare that they have “stomped on,” “trodden on,” or “dropped” the ordinary ego. What they mean by this is that the usual things associated with human development have been abandoned in favor of a lifestyle that is more pointedly related to the reality of the soul. However, the ego has not been “dropped”, and by definition cannot be dropped; it has merely been (con)fused with the life of the soul. This is the psychological background for the notorious problem of rampant egotism, emotionality, splits, and competitiveness that plague New Age groups, cults, sects, ashrams, clubs, societies and communes. Although all these groups work toward transcendence of ego in favor of soul, they are often destroyed by a secret, dark, and malignant egotism, which eats away at the high ideals and eventually causes the whole edifice to collapse, often with devastating consequences to society and to all concerned. What began with perfumes and chanting, ends up in the law courts and in police interviews: we pay an enormous price for repressing our ordinary impulses and our basic humanity.

The drives of the ego, especially the power drive and its push for identity and esteem, cannot be got rid of by an intellectual attitude which espouses focus on “higher” things. Although the conscious emphasis is on “openness” to the divine, merging with a higher will, and mystical “negative capability”, the power drive of the ego makes itself felt in the fixity and dogmatism with which these “expansive” goals are pursued. The devotees declare that they are “nothing” before the divine, or worthless before the charismatic teacher, but in the background there is fierce jockeying for privilege and special places, for power and influence within the group. Nor can the sexual drive be willed away by an incense-smelling devotion to ethereal and heavenly concerns. What is neglected or rejected comes back to visit us, and it usually comes back with considerable vengeance, so that the local New Age ashram can end up as a den of iniquity, busted by the police and featured on page three of the local newspaper. Although espousing the pathways of Eastern bliss and enlightenment, the tragic West finds its revenge in engulfing such naive groups in negativity and the return of the repressed.

Jung would agree with the New Age that the Christian West has become overly wedded to a downbeat and constitutional pessimism, a pessimism that scares many away from Christian practice. The transformative possibilities of self-development and individuation give rise to a certain degree of optimism, and a positive spirit that lifts us out of despair and misery. He would also agree that there is a greater need for self-knowledge in Western religion, and that we find far too much “blind faith” in Christianity, with too many people adopting beliefs and doctrines without testing these precepts against experience. We need spiritual exercises, contemplations, devices, wisdoms: the call from the pulpit to “believe” is not enough, nor is it appropriate any more. Jung condones much of the New Age spiritual apparatus; its emphasis on diversity and pluralism, on pre-Christian and post-Christian wisdoms, on meditation, introspection, and direct personal experience. However, unless the right attitude has been adopted, the apparatus and self-help technologies are worse than useless; they are positively dangerous. The New Age man would be better off closing his box of tricks, shutting down the suburban ashram, and going back to church or synagogue to learn the lessons of humility and modesty. There can be no genuine spiritual transformation at all unless the ego and the soul are firmly differentiated

The ego and the soul have both to be lived, expressed, celebrated, and enjoyed. We must live two lives simultaneously, and especially for all Westerners, as Jung warned, the life of the ego cannot be surreptitiously forgotten beneath the claims and passions of altered states of consciousness. Western man’s ego has been differentiated over many centuries, and no spiritual seminar or weekend meditation course will get rid of it successfully. The ego, our personal self, our mortality, our separateness from God, is the instrument of our suffering, but if this instrument is exploded in order to transcend suffering, we end up in more pain than ever before. Humbly, our suffering and incompleteness have to be accepted, and only then is some transcendence possible.

(3) From Dualism to Wholeness:

The Dissolution of Self Into a Primal Unity

"No one knows better the true meaning of distinction than they who have entered into unity." — Tauler

The prevailing attitude in Western religious and philosophic traditions is that the world of human experience is based on a series of dualities and binary oppositions, such as mind and body, masculine and feminine, intellect and emotion, civilized and primitive. The world is structured as a grid of opposing and competing forces, and typically one set in this grid of possibilities (such as masculinity, intellect, mind) is privileged above the opposite set. Western dualism, often designated as Cartesian dualism, can lead to a split moral and social universe, and these splits and inequalities have been vigorously challenged and often attacked by the leading liberational discourses of modernity.

The New Age attitude is to react strongly to the dualistic Western legacy by positing a contrasting cosmology of wholeness. For the New Age, the world is self-evidently “one,” all things are equal, and the “ten thousand things” of a complex reality are simply different aspects or facets of the one

true reality. The New Age famously borrows the Chinese symbol of the Tao or Yin and Yang, with the light and dark sides balanced in complete harmony, as its symbol for the “new” cosmology of wholeness. According to the New Age, the Western mind that perceives splits and divisions is merely projecting its own neurotic dividedness upon the unitary reality of the universe.

For the New Age — and here its attitude chimes in with certain prevailing attitudes in constructivism and postmodernity — splits, dualities, distinctions are merely fictive creations of an imperious, patriarchal, judging mind. The task of advanced consciousness is to see through these divisions, dissolving them and returning the world to its original oneness. The primary goal of New Age meditation and spiritual practice is to break down the barriers that so preoccupy the rational intellect (the busy, monkey mind), and to break through to the primal unity or wholeness. “All things are one” is a standard expression, and many people within this movement agree that to achieve this realization is to advance Western consciousness beyond its present condition.

The Jungian attitude at first glance would seem to be in full accord with the New Age and its rhetoric of wholeness, given Jung’s well-known preoccupation with unity, mandalas, and the Self as the “archetype of wholeness.” In its desire to replace Western dualism with a new holism, the New Age is almost axiomatically assumed to be following a “Jungian” direction.

However, Jung strongly contrasts two different kinds or models of wholeness. The first is what he calls “preconscious wholeness,” the wholeness of the primal and amorphous universe, an undifferentiated soup-like unity that exists prior to consciousness. In this primordial unity, the pairs of opposites are fused, not because they have been brought together in a greater wholeness, but because they have not yet been differentiated from each other. Everything is “one” because the “many,” and the conflicting pairs of opposites that constitute the many, have not yet been brought into existence. This wholeness is discovered in ancient mythologies that idealize an original “paradise” from which we have all fallen or departed. It is also discovered in certain kinds of mysticism, in otherworldly cosmologies, and in the dreams and fantasies of deeply regressed patients who find it difficult to accept the tensions and stresses of conscious existence. To exist in time and space is to be “torn in two,” to be divided, and to experience first-hand the archetypal quarrel between the binary oppositions that compose our psychic life. Jung identifies this original, preworldly wholeness with the archetype of the Great Mother, and those who seek the incestuous “return to the mother” are likely to idealize this primal condition. Neumann developed Jung’s hypothesis of the “great round” by designating this symbol the Uroboros, or tail-biting serpent.

By contrast, Jung posited, and championed, a second kind of wholeness in which the pairs of opposites, split apart by the advent of a polarizing and one-sided consciousness, have come together again in relative unity. This wholeness, he felt, is the goal and end-point (telos) of conscious realization. If the first wholeness can be paralleled with Eden or Paradise, the second, recovered wholeness can be compared with Blake’s New Jerusalem. If the first wholeness is infantile, and linked with Freud’s “oceanic feeling”, the second is a higher state of consciousness, governed not by the Mother but by the archetype of the Self. Jung and especially Neumann felt it was crucial to differentiate between these two kinds of wholeness, because while the original wholeness might represent the goal of an exhausted, weak consciousness which has given up the struggle of life, the

second wholeness represents a consciousness which is advancing the world soul (anima mundi) by refusing to allow the pairs of opposites to split apart. The whole point of a second kind of wholeness is that the integrity and identity of the opposites has been maintained and respected. Conscious wholeness is not a soup-like chaos but a clearly differentiated unity in which all basic differences and distinctions have been honored, lived, and reconciled: "Without the experience of the opposites there is no experience of wholeness." (7) Jung saw the Eastern mandala, a "magic circle" in which the integrity of life's forms, geometrical shapes, and sacred figures are preserved, as a symbol of the differentiated wholeness that he so admired.

My sense is that, contrary to popular opinion, Jung would consider the New Age wholeness to be almost worthless to the extent that it advocates the first, regressive kind of wholeness. New Age wholeness is amorphous, undifferentiated, and sentimental. It all too casually and glibly asserts the "unity" of everything, and it does this before the obvious disunity and dissimilarity of the opposites has been adequately experienced. The New Age advocates a return to the World Mother, and its craving for unity is the infant's craving for oneness with the mother. The New Age does not see itself as the inheritor of Western history or culture, and is not interested in "completing" that history, but merely in deleting it. Its demand for immediate quietude, its emphasis on deep relaxation, its impatience with the Judeo-Christian world and the struggle of the ages, represents not so much the culmination of tradition but the denial of Western tradition. The New Age does not affirm the past but wants to start over again, to build a brighter, less tragic future, and is tired of the clash of opposites that constitutes so much of our history.

According to Jung, humanity's task is to make conscious, and to bring into symbolic reconciliation, the strife and tension which is inherent in the fabric of the universe. The importance of "humanity" to "God" is that humanity can express, live, and hopefully transform the primal conflicting elements of which the Godhead is as it were "unconsciously" composed. Humanity brings the warring elements of God's nature, the sublime light and mysterious darkness, the masculinity and femininity, the lofty love and earthly eros, into a new kind of relatedness. If we abandon this task because it is too demanding, if we abandon the crucifixion which images our painful suffering upon the cross of oppositions, then we give up not only our human mission but also the divine's age-old search for itself.

Jung would argue that there can be no talk of wholeness until the darkness or "shadow" of human nature has been maturely accepted and integrated. Here is where the New Age betrays its infantilism and its phony "wholeness," because the dark side of human nature is almost systematically ignored. The New Age is in flight from darkness and the reality of evil, viewing darkness merely as the absence of light. In its craving for bliss and enjoyment, its emphasis on escape through transcendence, the New Age lacks the substance and the grounding in the real that would make an integration of darkness possible.

For Jung, the acceptance of darkness involves us in a major "next step" in the Western tradition. Whereas the New Age wants to destroy Christian morbidity, Jung wants to deepen the sense of darkness into a new image of divinity itself. "God fills us with evil as well as with good . . . and because he wants to become man, the uniting of his antinomy must take place in man. This involves

man in a new responsibility.”(8) The Christian era promoted an ethics of perfection in its emphasis upon the paradigmatic figure of Christ, but a genuine new or coming age will, for Jung, be based on an ethics of wholeness whose focus will be not Jesus but the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Ghost is a reconciliation of opposites and hence the answer to the suffering in the God-head which Christ personifies.”(9) A New Age of the Spirit, according to Jung, will feature not the second coming of a human Christ, but “the revelation of the Holy Ghost out of man himself.”(10) The Coming Age will not destroy Christianity and replace it with paganism (the New Age), but it will transcend historical Christianity by replacing the imitation of Christ with the living and direct experience of the Holy Spirit. Christ himself intimated (John 16: 7-13) that the Holy Spirit or Comforter would come after him, not only to shower the tongues of Pentecost upon his disciples, but to infuse all of humanity with the “spirit of truth.”

For Jung, therefore, a correct understanding of wholeness is essential not only for our personal psychological health, our moral and ethical well-being, and our human sense of life’s meaning, but it is the standard whereby we participate in the self-evolution of the divine. The wholeness of the human person in the struggle of individuation involves us simultaneously in the creation of a new ethic, a new psychological and cultural dispensation, and a new phase in our religious history. This is why Jung insists throughout his writings that we maintain the tension between the opposites and move forward; we must not relax the tension so that the opposites lose their definition and are returned to the primal uroboros. “Without opposition there is no flow of energy, no vitality. Lack of opposition brings life to a standstill wherever that lack reaches.”(11) Jung was not a New Age guru who preached deep relaxation and the dissolution of stress, but on the contrary he implored others to remain conscious of divisions, to tough it out, and to hold the opposites in dynamic relationship. Only then might the “transcendent function,” which in Jungian metapsychology would be the Comforter or Paraclete, come to our aid and make bearable the burden we are carrying.

On the positive side, Jung would possibly regard the New Age concern for wholeness as an archaic and incomplete prefiguration of a truly authentic future wholeness. When archetypes first appear in the collective psyche, they often present their unsavory and least developed side first, due to their long-standing immersion in the depths of the unconscious. Although conceptually the undifferentiated unity of the uroboros and the differentiated wholeness of the mandala are light years apart, at a psychological and experiential level the former could well be the harbinger of the later. This also means that the regressive “return to the mother” could also foreshadow or prefigure how we are to negotiate our “return to the Self” at a much higher level. The New Age “soft surrender” could represent both our desire to abort the human journey and an attempt at a wholeness that transcends the strife-torn realities of the modern era.

The New Age may hold the seeds of the future, but these seeds are rough, uncultivated, and in need of much refinement. Sensing these omens and this prophetic possibility, Jung would probably not be entirely dismissive of the New Age, but would concentrate his energies on finding elements in it that are worthy of credit and interest.

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Notes and References

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