

Angels Redux  
by Joseph M. Felser, Ph.D.

As one of the most elegantly devastating criticisms ever levelled at the religious temperament, Nietzsche's (who else?) succinct diatribe in *The Gay Science* (1892) has few, if any, peers. He wrote:

As interpreters of our experiences.—One sort of honesty has been alien to all founders of religions and their kind: They have never made their experiences a matter of conscience for knowledge. "What did I really experience? What happened in me and around me at that time? Was my reason bright enough? Was my will opposed to all deceptions of the senses and bold in resisting the fantastic?" None of them has asked such questions, nor do any of our dear religious people ask them even now. On the contrary, they thirst after things that go against reason, and they do not wish to make it too hard for themselves to satisfy it. So they experience "miracles" and "rebirths" and hear the voices of little angels! But we, we others who thirst after reason, are determined to scrutinize our experiences as severely as a scientific experiment—hour after hour, day after day. We ourselves wish to be our experiments and guinea pigs.<sup>1</sup>

Were he alive today, I suspect that Nietzsche's reaction to certain recent developments in popular culture would be a combination of mordant glee (at being proved right) and gloomy resignation (again, at being proved right). For wherever one turns these days, an angel pops up: yet another book on angels on the shelves of the local Barnes and Noble; yet another television program in which someone claims to have been saved from doom by the timely intervention of an angelic host; yet another angelic gew-gaw in some or another catalogue devoted to 'spiritual' pursuits. There are angelwatch networks, angel tee-shirts, angel mugs, and so on, *ad nauseum*. But what does it all mean? What is the wider social and religious significance of the angel craze? And more to the point: What does the obsessive resurrection of the angel mean for the future development of the so-called New Age, which has largely—and perhaps rightly—seen itself as the font of innovative approaches to the realm of the spirit? That is to say, is the New Age—for all intents and purposes—bankrupt, kaput, finis, over and done?

I think not; but in order to clear the decks for a more systematic discussion of the problem, I first want to mention two rather obvious points. The first is that popular culture is so consciously market-driven today (especially in America) that the instant omnipresence of any

item or family of items—say, Pepsi cans with the Woodstock logo or Jurassic Park tee-shirts—is hardly worth remarking on. It is now the rule rather than the exception. Of course, unless one is prepared to take the position that the advertising juggernaut can actually create new desires rather than merely manipulate pre-existing ones, this sort of economic explanation fails to account for the apparently insatiable *demand* for things angelic. Not all public relations campaigns have 'legs', as they say in the advertising trade. (Just ask all those folks who invested heavily in Popeye merchandise a few years back.) Yet the craze for angels has been going on for several years—ever since the arrival of Sophy Burnham's *A Book of Angels* (1990)—and shows little sign of abating.

Which brings me to my second point—and also back to Nietzsche. For Nietzsche's reply essentially amounts to a shrug of the shoulders: What did you expect? That is to say, on his view it is of the very nature of the religious temperament ("all founders of religions and their kind") to yield to wishful thinking, and to prefer an irrationalist supernaturalism to an open, intellectually honest, critical self-examination of one's own experiences. With Nietzsche, then, we are talking not about an economic rule (as in our previous explanation), but rather a psychological one. In any event, once again we do not require any special explanations in order to account for 'angelmania'.

The problem with this response, however, is that it tells us nothing about the *particular* significance of the recrudescence of the angel idea and image. Nietzsche himself, of course, was an expert philologist and an astute historian of philosophy. And as Schopenhauer once said, it is in the disciplines of history, rather than in the natural sciences, in which "we see the mind occupied with quite individual things for their own sake."<sup>12</sup> For the scientist, then, only the repeatable is real—only that which can be verified through repeated experimentation (and what is thereby suggestive of universal laws of nature) has cognitive and ontological significance. So Nietzsche's suggestion amounts to a form of historical naturalism: Instead of asking how and why this specific thing has come about in this very time and place, he gives us a general recipe of human nature to apply in any and every circumstance of such-and-such a kind. This amounts to

saying, 'You're bound to find this sort of nonsense wherever you find religion'. But by telling us too much, he doesn't tell us near enough. (Pascal once said that too much clarity darkens.)

I take it, then, that my first task is to say something a bit more historically grounded about the religious significance of angels. What I offer below is no more than the crudest of sketches—an impressionistic scribble which is doubtless a creature of my own peculiar preoccupations and prejudices. But I offer this picture, for what it is worth, as an essential background or prologue to my subsequent comments on the contemporary meaning of the angel phenomenon. So here goes.

A short history of angels:  
from fate to freedom (human and divine)

As numerous commentators have observed, the idea of angels in general and that of the guardian angel in particular did not originate with Christianity or even with the Hebrews—though angels figure prominently in the mythologies of both of those traditions. If, however, we confine ourselves to those pre-Hebraic Mesopotamian cultures which provided the fertile soil for the Judeo-Christian (or, following Oswald Spengler, the Magian) tradition, the idea of angels can be traced back at least to Ancient Assyria (Babylonian and pre-Babylonian civilizations). In his classic study of this period, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (1964), Professor A. Leo Oppenheim of The University of Chicago describes the *lamassu* as, roughly, a guardian angel who is charged with protecting his or her ward within the constraints dictated by an impersonal structure, a fixed, deterministic cosmic order, which is to say, Fate (*istaru*). The *lamassu* was thus associated with the individual's *simtu*, the latter being the term used to denote one's individual share of fortune and misfortune. Thus, notes Oppenheim, "It is in the nature of the *simtu*, the individual 'share,' that its realization is a necessity, not a possibility."<sup>13</sup> In other words, the *lamassu* was essentially conceived of as the administrator of one's personal destiny.

One very interesting transformation of the guardian angel idea occurred in ancient Greece. Of course the Greeks believed that even the gods themselves are subject to Fate. Zeus

was no different, really, than Oedipus in this regard. Yet in Plato's presentation of Socrates' famed relationship to his guardian angel, or *daimon*, the accent is not on fate, but rather, on personal choice. In the *Apology*, Socrates says that he has enjoyed a relationship with his *daimon* since childhood, when it started speaking to him. The *daimon* does not issue commands, nor does it present Socrates with a revealed doctrine by which he should view the world or run his life. Rather, the *daimon* will advise or warn Socrates if he is about to embark upon a course of action that might in some way prove harmful to him; but it is up to Socrates to take the action, to do or forebear, and to accept the consequences. And given that Socrates says of himself in the *Crito* that he is "at all times . . . the kind of man who listens only to the argument that on reflection seems best to me,"<sup>4</sup> it is clear that, at least for Socrates, the *daimon* represents an experiential input into the rational process of reflection; which is to say, the *daimon* is a trusted aid (because its expertise has been experientially verified by Socrates himself), an adjunct to Socrates' exercise of his freedom of choice. Socrates' emphasis, in short, is on individual freedom, the acceptance of responsibility, and the increase of consciousness which is required in order to break free from the (largely unacknowledged) constraints of cultural conditioning and one's inherited traditions, as well as from the (sometimes comforting) illusion of cosmic necessity. Which is why Socrates refers to himself in the *Apology* as the gadfly, the awakener.<sup>5</sup>

It is altogether entertaining, then, to see a modern scientific rationalist like Bertrand Russell completely at a loss in dealing with Socrates and his *daimon*. For Russell, as for Nietzsche before him, religious experience and reason are mutually exclusive antagonists—and necessarily so. Thus in the treatment of Socrates to be found in his *History of Western Philosophy* (1945),<sup>6</sup> Russell notes that people who hear voices are typically classified as insane—though for obvious reasons he is reluctant to draw this conclusion in the case of Socrates. Is the *daimon* then merely Plato's literary device (Plato was, after all, originally a playwright), that is, a metaphor for Socrates' moral conscience? While Russell doesn't explicitly reject this equation of the voice of the *daimon* with the voice of conscience, it is clear that it

simply won't do on historical grounds. As Plato himself makes clear in the *Apology* and in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates' relationship to his *daimon*—and specifically, his willingness to teach others how to have similar experiences with their own inner guides—lay at the heart of the Athenian court's charge of impiety, upon which Socrates was ultimately convicted and sentenced to death. The great sage could hardly have died for a metaphor only subsequently invented by his pupil Plato. (By most historians' reckoning, the *Apology* was written some eleven years following Socrates' death in 399 B.C.E.).

Russell's predicament aside, the concept of the *daimon* underwent something of a transformation in Plato's own later thought. According to the consensus of philosophical historians, such early dialogues as the *Apology*, the *Euthyphro*, and the *Crito* almost certainly more closely approximate the actual views of the historical Socrates (who wrote no texts) than a dialogue like the *Phaedo* or the *Republic*, both of which belong to Plato's middle or mature period, by which time he had come to formulate his own distinctive philosophical positions—positions which were not always and in every way in accord with those of his mentor, Socrates. Now the Socrates of the *Apology* had declared that the highest wisdom is the recognition of one's own ignorance, and therefore that it is the height of *hubris* (and unreason) to claim definite and final knowledge of the ultimately mystery which is the universe. But whereas Socrates was willing to say, 'Who knows for sure?', Plato, in effect, subsequently replied '*I* do', as he set about the task of constructing a rather detailed metaphysical system. 'Wisdom' is thus tacitly redefined in Plato's later writings to mean 'the remembrance of that consciously forgotten, positive metaphysical knowledge which the soul loses upon coming into this world' (reminiscence or *anamnesis*: literally, loss of forgetfulness). The core of this system, of course, is the belief that this material world of separately existing material bodies which are constantly and unceasingly subject to change is but the imperfect copy of a realm of immaterial, imperishable, unchanging Forms or Ideas, such as Beauty, Piety, Justice, etc; the Form of Forms, or the ultimate structuring principle of the universe, being none other than what Plato called the Form of the Good: the most perfect, most real, most valuable thing in all the universe.

For Plato, then, there are essentially two radically separate worlds composed of two radically different, contingently related substances: the visible (material objects) and the invisible (Forms and individual souls). But what has any of this to do with angels?

In the *Symposium*, one of his later dialogues, Plato puts into the mouth of Diotima what amounts to a mythologized rendering of this essentially impersonal cosmic hierarchy; and it is here that the notion of the *daimon* makes its appearance, or should I say, reappearance. For now the *daimon* is depicted as serving as a kind of two-way intermediary between the mortal world of bodies-concealing-souls on the one hand, and the immortal world of divine spirits who occasionally interact with humans and may even incarnate in human form, on the other. The emphasis has thus shifted from the subjective to the objective, or from a given individual's (e.g., Socrates') personal experience of a *daimon* to the characteristic roles or functions served by the *daimon* within a cosmic framework or system. (It is no accident, I think, that Socrates' *daimon* remains nameless, whereas the medievals were preoccupied with naming and classifying the angels.) Diotima accordingly explains the function of the *daimon* as follows:

To interpret and convey messages to the gods from men and to men from the gods, prayers and sacrifices from the one, and commands and rewards from the other. Being of an intermediate nature, a spirit bridges the gap between them, and prevents the universe from falling into two separate halves. Through this class of being come all divination and the supernatural skill of priests in sacrifices and rites and spells and every kind of magic and wizardry. God does not deal directly with man; it is by means of spirits that all the intercourse and communication of gods with men, both in waking life and in sleep, is carried on. A man who possesses skill in such matters is a spiritual man, whereas a man whose skill is confined to some trade or handicraft is an earthly creature.<sup>7</sup>

(By the way, Plato here clarifies what must have been all too obvious to his Athenian contemporaries: Socrates was condemned to death for being a wizard, a witch—a shaman.)

The subtle transformation in the concept of the *daimon* wrought by Plato's dualistic, systematic, positive metaphysics—and in particular by his mythologized rendering of that system in the *Symposium*—was perhaps only subsequently clarified by Christianity, which, through the efforts of St. Augustine and other early Fathers of the Church, incorporated a good deal of

Platonism into the foundations of Christian theology. Christianity, of course, preserved the absolute ontological separation between the two worlds, now envisaged as the divide between the Creator (divine or supernatural substance) and his Creation (merely natural substance). Plato's ultimate reality, the Form of the Good, becomes personified as the Godhead. Also in the Christian system, angels serve as divine-human intermediaries in ontological, psychological, and practical senses; they are important links in 'the great chain of being'. Furthermore, whereas for Socrates, the *daimon* had essentially functioned as a tool used by individual human beings for the furtherance of their own personal freedom, angels in the theistic/Christian scheme primarily serve as evidence for and expressions of the *divine* freedom in creating and maintaining the world and its order—including of course, the human order. This is not, however, exactly a re-introduction of the pre-theistic notions of Fate and Destiny. Indeed, according to classical Christian doctrine, it was precisely God the Father's willingness to send his only begotten Son into the world, even to death on the cross, that defeated the destiny of the grave. Early Christianity had in fact presented itself as the agent of overcoming Fate (which is one reason why Augustine had expressed his dislike of the classical tragedies in his *Confessions*). The actions of angels in intervening in the natural order so as to rescue individuals from their plight and so forth is thus, in one sense, a prefiguration of the possibility of the individual's bodily resurrection at the time of the second coming. None of which would be possible in the absence of the initial and unique atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and his own subsequent resurrection. Such is the divine will.

It is therefore instructive to recall to mind that in the Old Testament story of Genesis, it was by divine fiat that angels served not as agents of healing, or as two-way intermediaries, but rather as the symbolic and literal force of separation between the divine and human realms. The cherubim placed by God at the gate of Eden with the flaming sword between them barred Adam and Eve from re-entering paradise once they had broken the divine rules of behavior. So once again, in the theistic tradition, the angel serves in one way or another as a reminder of our essential separation from the divine—whether this is read in an ontological sense, a

psychological sense, a moral sense, or in all three ways. The angel, that is to say, is an instrument, neither of human freedom and rationality, nor of an impersonally established, immutable cosmic order, but rather, of a personal God's inscrutable freedom to treat human beings however His Majesty chooses; whether with compassion (by providing opportunities for salvation, thus evoking our love), or with harsh retribution (by barring the path to eternal life and condemning us to pain and toil and death, thus evoking our fear). If this appears whimsical to us, so much the worse for us.

From angels past to angels present:  
the meaning of 'angelology' in the New Age

The historical schema I set out in the previous section is meant to be no more than suggestive of a possible history of ideas. Yet even by providing this rather crude adumbration, I think I have indicated why we must be extremely careful—and self-consciously aware—in our use of language. For it is not merely that the meaning of 'angel' changes at each of the three distinct stages of the development of the idea, but also that at each distinct stage or level of development, the term is embedded in a much wider conceptual and theoretical scheme; and further, that each such scheme embodies distinctly different, and in some cases mutually incompatible conceptions of the nature of human beings (including the nature of human freedom and destiny) and the ultimate nature of reality. (Not to mention quite different and perhaps equally opposed political arrangements for applying these types of insights at the social level. Socrates' individualist humanism-cum-mysticism invites democracy in some form, while the more hierarchical worldviews of Plato himself and orthodox theism naturally invite, shall we say, somewhat less democratic forms.) What, then, is the contemporary significance of the angelic revival?

For what it is worth, my own impression is that many of the works coming out, as well as a fair number of the reports of the experiencers themselves either imply or presuppose (tacitly or otherwise) an overall interpretation of human existence that is more or less in line with the generally theistic, if not specifically orthodox Christian, perspective. The underlying theme or

subtext of many of these accounts and presentations is grace in the classical sense: miraculous salvation from above, outside, beyond the individual self and beyond the constitutional capabilities of the merely human being, who is utterly incapable of achieving anything approaching enlightenment or salvation through the use of his or her own unaided human powers. We are weak; God is strong. We are miserable, loathsome, worms: evil, self-interested sinners; God is gracious, all-forgiving, all-good, etc. If I am not mistaken, these are some of the key messages that are being widely broadcast (or at least readily absorbed) even by erstwhile proponents of the New Age.

That is *not* to say that I am advocating some kind of blanket skeptical dismissal, à la Nietzsche, of the reports of those who claim to have had 'angelic' encounters or other such experiences. But I *do* think it is high time that we stop and take a very close and critical look at the *interpretations* of those experiences that are sometimes uncritically and perhaps even unconsciously attached to those experiences, either by the experiencers themselves or by those who have put themselves into the angel business. Much that gets by without further examination or elucidation in the angel literature could profit from the kind of interpretive studies that, for example, have been generated by the UFO phenomenon. Nor am I (necessarily) impugning anyone's motives. One doesn't have to become paranoid about Christian Trojan horses in order to believe that the field of 'angelology' could profit immensely by having its own Jacques Vallee and Keith Thompson.

It is, then, a certain hermeneutical naiveté which manifests itself as a literalism and a concomitant inability to switch back and forth from the experiential to the (self-)critical, reflective modes of consciousness that I believe is so dangerous, as well as so uncharacteristic of what have been the best efforts of those heretofore associated with the New Age. For example, in *The Center of the Cyclone* (1972), famed explorer of inner space John Lilly describes the kind of essential flexibility of consciousness I am talking about in relation to some of his early work with LSD in the flotation tank:

Before the trip, I didn't believe in these [alternative] universes or spaces, but *I defined*

*them as existing. During the LSD trip in the tank I then took on these beliefs as true. After the trip, I then disengaged and looked at what happened as a set of experiences, a set of consequences of the belief [author's italics].*<sup>8</sup>

Lilly's approach contains principles which apply well beyond the parameters of research with hallucinogens or flotation tanks. Again, the key is his ability to shift from from the intellectual/scientific mode of hypothesis and postulation, to the apparently direct experiential mode, and back again to a more intellectual perspective, albeit the second time around in a more philosophical vein, namely that of self-examination. And elsewhere in the same work, Lilly makes it clear that this philosophical activity is essentially open-ended: "*What one believes to be true, either is true or becomes true in one's mind, within limits to be determined experimentally and experientially. These limits are beliefs to be transcended*" [author's italics].<sup>9</sup>

What may have to be transcended in the area of angelology is the belief that the guardian is essentially separate from the guarded. While, as I noted above, this is an indelible axiom of theistic thinking, it is precisely the kind of assumption that has been challenged by those explorers of human consciousness who have asked us to re-consider the canard that human powers and the potentials of human consciousness are strictly, and perhaps even fatally, limited. Lilly himself encountered beings he referred to as 'guardians' during a crisis that developed into a spontaneous near-death experience; but his description of their connection to him suggests that any separateness that he experienced in relation to their existence may only have been apparent rather than ultimately real:

*Their magnificent deep powerful love overwhelms me . . . .If they came any closer, they would overwhelm me, and I would lose myself as a cognitive entity, merging with them. They further say that I separated them into two, because that is my way of perceiving them, but that in reality they are one . . . .[author's italics]*<sup>10</sup>

The Three Who are really One is the formula that, in the Christian view, applies only to the unique situation of the blessed Trinity: Father and Son bound together by the Holy Spirit of Love. Yet here Lilly invites us to consider whether this is in fact so, and whether such an

underlying unity—and therefore, by implication, whether the divinity that had previously been thought to be ontologically self-contained and isolated from us—is in fact ubiquitous.

A similar challenge has been offered in the past by New Age pioneer David Spangler, who also ably incarnates the dual functions of mystic and thinker with an uncommon degree of integrity. Fairly early on in his quest, Spangler had certain formidable and undeniably impressive experiencers channeling an entity which he initially experienced in a fairly conventional personified form, and which he called 'John'. At one point in the early 1980s, John provided Spangler with some amazingly accurate information about the future of the Soviet Union, basically forecasting the rise of a fellow named Gorbachev and the eventual collapse of the Soviet state. However, even this unquestionably dramatic example, which might be regarded by some as clear evidence of John's putatively independent nature, did not entirely resolve the issue for Spangler, who went on to suggest that even "though he [John] seems quite separate and distinct to me as a personality, [he] could be a disguised aspect of my own psyche . . . [of] my own intuition."<sup>11</sup> And in a key passage devoted to a discussion of the channeling phenomenon in general, but which could (and does) easily apply not only to the study of angels, but also to our systematic examination of the entire gamut of religious or spiritual experiences, Spangler writes:

A particular transmission or channeled message is less a discourse and more a metaphor, a play of imagery from the unconscious. It is more like poetry or storytelling. Channeling is like a controlled dream, a means by which symbols, imagery, and archetypes emerge into the realm of ordinary human awareness. Therefore, in my experience, channeled messages should be dealt with as one deals with dreams, as evocative images needing interpretation rather than as factual pronouncements needing acceptance and belief. The most effective response to a channeled message is not to ask if it is true or not but to ask what it evokes from you. . . . [For] there are problems of translation between those [inner] realms and ours. At the very least, there can be misplaced concreteness, the assumption that what is meant as a metaphor should be taken literally.<sup>12</sup>

In some instances, of course—as with the communication about Gorbachev—what is received may very well be or at least contain some rather straightforward factual information. But I take it that Spangler's point is that: (i) this is probably the exception rather than the rule; and (ii) the interpretation of the informational content shouldn't necessarily stop there, even in

such an instance, for the meaning may not be (and almost certainly isn't) exhausted by the literal reading. For example—although he doesn't pursue this himself—Spangler might have gone on to ask himself why he, in particular, at that specific moment in time, was the recipient of this bit of information. Did 'Gorbachev the reformer' or 'the collapse of an old empire' perhaps signal to Spangler the need to undertake an examination of certain of his own ingrained habits or outmoded ways of life? Did he unconsciously want to bring about a revolution of some more private or local sort? Or is there some other, hitherto unsuspected, psychological, sociological, or cosmic significance to these images and statements? Even Freud, who tended to be doctrinaire about such things, once said that no matter how thoroughly we think we have explored the meaning of a dream, there is always room for further interpretation and discovery. So if Spangler is correct in suggesting that we treat speech acts such as channeling essentially as controlled dreams, it follows that we need to retain a certain open-mindedness and cultivate a more or less staunch resistance to approaches infected with literalism.

How, then, do these observations apply to angels? After all, an angel suddenly appearing in order to rescue a climber about to fall to his death is hardly in the class of someone sitting calmly entranced in their living room, delivering some metaphysical doctrines. But I think the resemblance may be much closer than appears on first inspection. As I have already indicated, the common underlying issues are those that concern the nature and scope of human consciousness and personal identity; and that what is initially experienced or thought of as 'other' or separate may turn out, at some deeper level, not to be alien at all. In one form or another, this is the key mystical realization; and the New Age has always struck me as having a mystical core—which means a base that is resistant not only to scientific sorts of reductionism but also to the misplaced concreteness (literalism) characteristic of religious orthodoxies.

Allow me to supply a final example based on a recent personal experience. Just the other day, my fiancé Cynthia and I were in a garden shop looking over some potted plants. While Cynthia sometimes has a tendency to talk too softly (the result, no doubt, of being raised as the middle child in a household in which, as she says, it was appreciated that children would

be seen but not heard), I on the other hand come from a family in which hearing difficulties are commonplace. So I often find myself asking her to repeat something she has said: "Huh?" or "What?" is my usual shorthand for this request. Not surprisingly, then, as we were wandering about the chrysanthemums, she said something I didn't quite catch. However—and I can't underscore how strange this experience felt—instead of my usual "Huh?" or "What?", I found my voice saying instead something that sounded phonetically like "Tee?", but which I somehow at once knew to be spelled (in another language) *Tí*. I heard this come out—and it sounded so natural, it came so automatically—and yet I somehow also knew that *Tí?* meant "What?" or "Huh?" This was *not* a garbled or nonsense syllable—of this I was, for some strange reason, certain. But what language was this? And whatever possessed me to utter this mysterious word, so easily and so effortlessly? Nothing like this had ever happened to me before.

I couldn't imagine what language I had been speaking, yet I was convinced that I had uttered a real word. How could I go about checking this out? Perhaps I'd heard it before. Was this 'before' a reincarnational existence? The uncanny character of the episode (my use of the word "possessed" is deliberate and not lightly undertaken) might have been taken to suggest just such a possibility. But before I would jump to that conclusion, I knew I had to rule out some more mundane possibilities. I knew the language wasn't French, which I'd studied for my language requirement in graduate school, and which I had taken from my junior high school years through my first year as a college undergraduate. Was it perhaps ancient Greek, then? In my junior year of college (1978), I had taken a single semester of ancient Greek. And while the professor thought I had a natural aptitude for the language, I found it necessary to spend so many hours a day on the subject that I was falling behind in my other classes; so I wound up merely sitting in on the course as an auditor rather than taking it for official credit. In any case, I hadn't pursued my Greek studies, and it had been many years since I'd had any sustained exposure to the language.

At first opportunity, I dug out my Greek-English lexicon and looked up *Tí*. What I discovered astounded me. There was indeed such an entry, which read: *tí*: neut. of *tís*

(interrog.), which means—of course—'what'? Mystery solved. Or was it? The scientifically acceptable answer is that what I experienced can be explained as an instance of cryptomnesia (shades of Bridey Murphy). And yet, does this label really explain my particular experience? My competence in and familiarity with ancient Greek was nowhere near the same as with the French language; yet in all my years of working with French, I never found myself saying something in that language unless I deliberately (and typically painstakingly) decided to do so. Even translating on paper was a massive effort for me—hardly natural at all. The fact is, for an instant I thought and reacted in another language— one which I had studied only in a laborious and abortive fashion many, many years ago. So: Why this, why now, why in this way? Neither the spiritually sexy answer of 'spontaneous reincarnational memory' (which obviously in this case falls to Occam's razor), nor the easy reductionism of slapping on the classification of 'cryptomnesia' does my experience justice. At least not as far as I am concerned.

I am therefore left with questions rather than answers. And I think that this is how Spangler, Lilly and others would prefer it. I know I do. The trouble with angels is that in all too many cases, we are supplied with ready-made interpretations that smack of old-fashioned religious pabulum. The usual alternative—a dose of old-fashioned dogmatic scientific skepticism— is hardly more congenial in my book. Let us try to do better in the future. The only thing we have to lose is our wings.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 253.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Various Subjects," in *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1970), p. 222.

<sup>3</sup>A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 202.

<sup>4</sup>Plato, *Crito*, 46b, 3-4.

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<sup>5</sup>Plato, *Apology*, 30e-31a.

<sup>6</sup>Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), p. 90.

<sup>7</sup>Plato, *Symposium*, 203a-203b.

<sup>8</sup>John Lilly, *The Center of the Cyclone* (New York: Bantam, 1973), p. 47.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>11</sup>David Spangler, *Channeling in the New Age* (Issaquah, WA: Morningtown Press, 1988), p. 59.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.