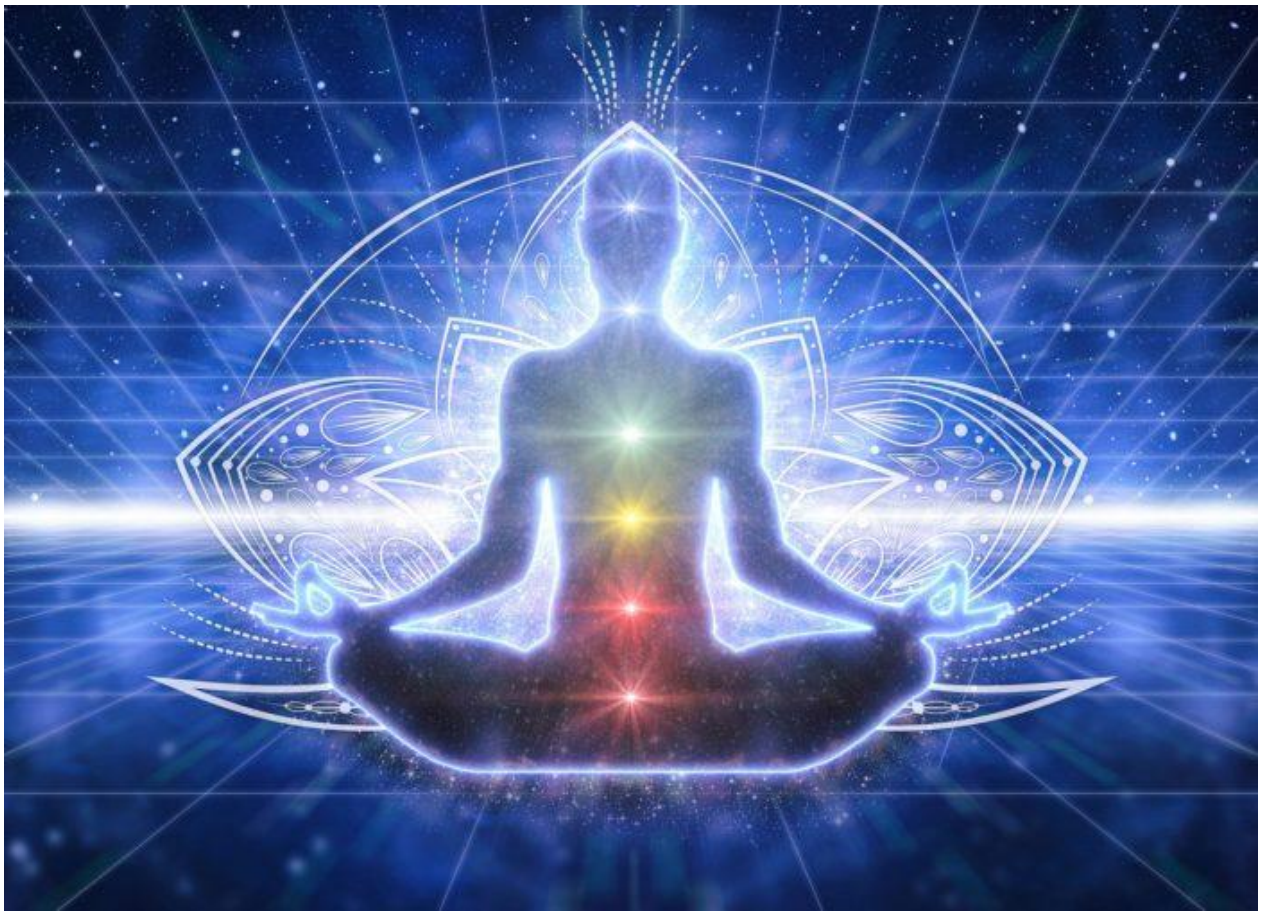
An Orgy Of Fatuity



Proponents of New Age thought believe in the darndest things. For many of us, their dogmatic indulgences are rather befuddling, if not dismaying. The range of nifty-sounding esoterica with which they are smitten is quite vast. What makes this all-the-more confounding is that each fanciful tid-bit is touted with unwavering confidence. Such (contrived) certitude makes one wonder: What are they seeing that the rest of us cannot?

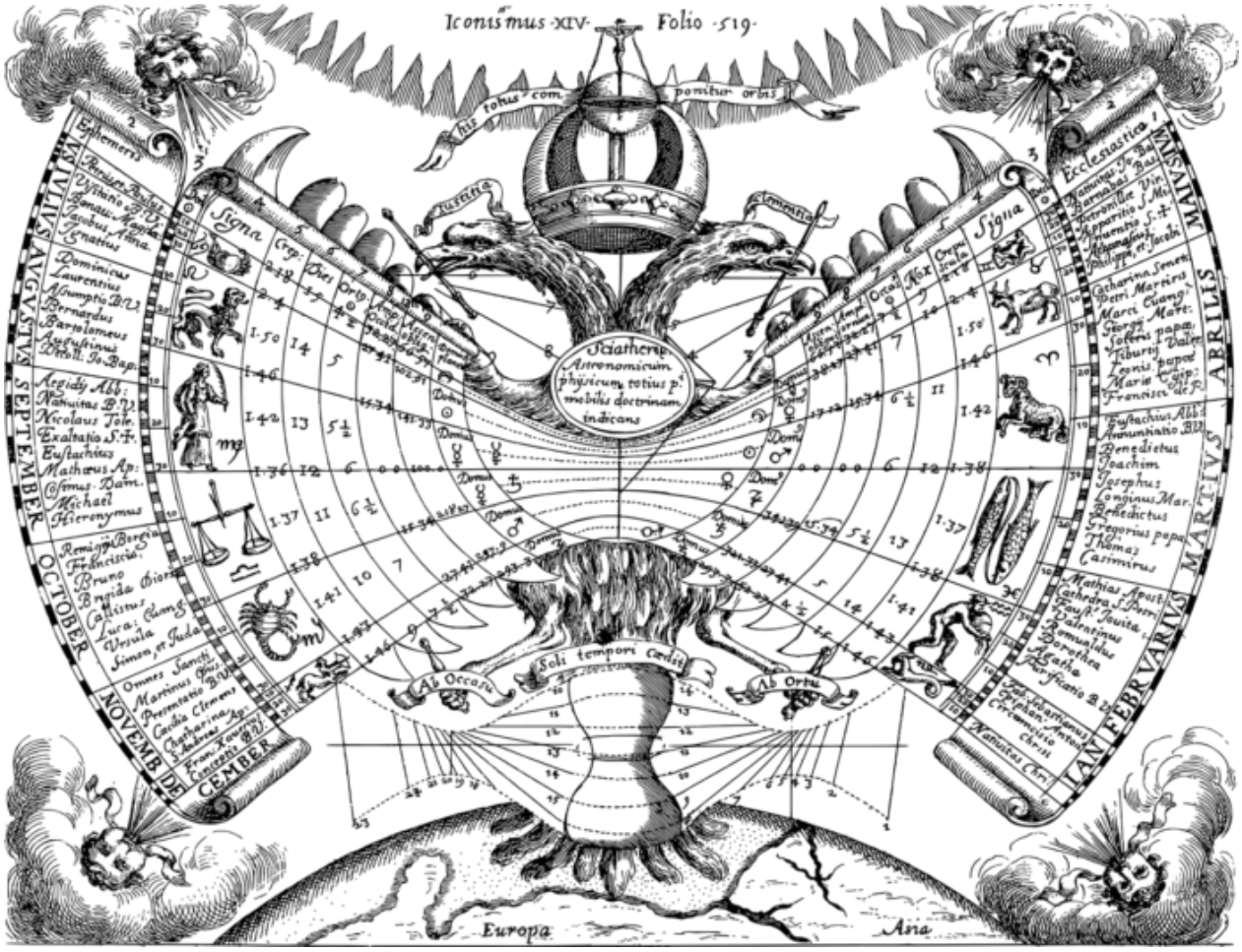
New Thought aficionados bridle at the suggestion that they have been entranced by artificially-flavored hogwash. What—to most level-headed people—is just a silly game is taken by them to be a very serious matter. They are, it seems, intoxicated by their own gimmickry. How so? Whether they are reading tarot cards or tea leaves, participants in this charade insist that they are tapping into “ancient wisdom”. A Toltec chant here, a Vedic mantra there…interspersed with the occasional affirmation lifted from an inspirational poster.

In the event we cross paths with them, how are we to identify such individuals? Credulity is the first sign that we are dealing with someone who is sipping—if not guzzling—the New Age Kool Aide. Whenever encountering a fantastical claim that strikes a nerve, rather than activate their cognitive faculties, they will swoon. After all, subjecting such material to a skosh of critical analysis would ruin the mood.

And so it goes: The connoisseur of New Age dogma is inclined to burble about the preternatural effects of serums and crystals with apodictic certainty; and blithely dismiss anyone who hesitates to validate their asseverations.

How is this mental orientation rationalized? Those who see themselves as spiritual maestros will claim to be fulfilling their destiny. The idea is to divine the inner workings of the cosmos via an extemporaneous repertoire of arcana; and propound it in beguiling ways. So far as they're concerned, they are simply aspiring to be their "higher selves"; and seeking to share these precious gems with the rest of us.

On any given day, some exponents of New Aga dogma can be found gargling Himalayan salts between juice cleanses. Others recite bromides about "wellness"… without really understanding anything about wellness. This makes perfect sense, as they are convinced of the hidden powers of "alternative medicine"; and can't image why the rest of us are still paying attention to, well, "medicine". For them, science is over-rated.



So what are we to make of all this? A variety of different things makes a New Thought aficionado's loins tingle. Some are inclined to light scented candles, strip naked, and cover themselves in peyote and/or peanut butter. This is ideally done during a full moon.

They are apt to engage in a wide array mantic artifice—from energy healing to aura readings. And they will insist you won't REALLY "get it" until you read something from Helena Blavatsky, Napoleon Hill, Esther Hicks, Ernest Holmes, Deepak Chopra, and/or Gary Zukav. Others simply spout vacuous verbiage—festooned with maudlin buzz-terms—to telegraph their ersatz sagacity. Most, though, are content to engage in ad hoc shenanigans—the sort of things that elicit an eyebrow raise from passers-by.

That this domain serves as a crucible for charlatanry becomes evident upon even cursory scrutiny. Yet, for so many so often, its fatuity is elided by a glossy veneer of ersatz mysticism. When they aren't doing sessions of past life regression therapy,

they will croon about the wonders of Reiki. Their testimonials are seen as iron-clad—like a religious zealot who swears to have witnessed the miracles that validate his favored theology.

Behold a gaggle of self-styled spiritual savants checking their astrology charts while sipping turmeric lattes. Some will opine about being tuned in to others' "frequencies"; and claim to be deeply aware of the "vibrations" surrounding random bystanders. (The most avid practitioners combine these buzz-words into the oleaginous locution, "vibrational frequencies".) They will go to a "sound bath" one day, and do some homeopathy the next. They will fashion themselves as wondrously "enlightened"—crooning about the latest New Age fad as they burn sage and recite their favorite mantra.

In observing such antics, we might bear in mind that we are dealing with the sort of people who have read "The Secret" one too many times; and thought it to be a work of genius. So after doing some chakra balancing, they will prattle on about having become "fully conscious" and ascended to a "higher plane". They will use words like "synchronicity" and "abundance" in peculiar ways. They will claim to engage in "remote healing"; and, when the mood strikes them, drink kombucha mixed with chlorella (or, for those who are extremely committed, puréed elephant labia).

These purported adepts make daffy claims even if they haven't the faintest clue what the words they're uttering might mean in regular discourse. But that's fine; because all that matters is that they COME OFF as spiritually edified. In this avocation, personal impressions are all that matter. Subjectivity is the final arbiter of legitimacy.

The trick is to hone a few skills in sophistry–like a slick car salesman. Once such acumen is achieved, every declaration will be sufficiently nebulous as to be unfalsifiable. This way, one can utter something magniloquent about "humanity" which has little substance, and yet come off as astoundingly philosophical. Consequently, epistemology is reduced to a round-robin of subjectivity; where personal impressions are the gold standard for credence. Inanity is construed as profundity. Caprice trumps critical deliberation; and whim becomes its own justification.

In this world, anecdotal evidence is the only evidence worth heeding; and pretense reigns supreme.

You too can partake in this overwrought pageant of malarkey. What follows are a dozen handy protocols that will enable you to bolster your street cred. Think of this as a New Thought aficionado's guidebook.

* * *

ONE: Break the ice with people by telling them that you're a light-worker. Note—with an expression of intrigue—that you can see their aura. Then offer to help them find their frequency. During the course of the conversation, sporadically allude to stellar constellations. Be sure to use a soft, soothing voice. Never break eye contact.

After a few minutes, inquire about their horoscope. When they tell you their zodiac sign, squint your eyes and gently nod while giving them a knowing glance…as if that single piece of information suddenly explained everything. Scratch your chin and wrinkle your brow as if in intense thought; utter something about the "imum coeli" of their fourth astrological "house"; then shake your head, let out a long sigh, and walk away.

TWO: Speak in riddles. The trick is to pretend to say something kinda-sorta-profound while saying nothing of substance. When in doubt, just ramble on about "energy" and "light". Make grandiose claims about ethereal things. Be enigmatic yet provocative. Use arcane terminology whenever possible. Ensure that each buzz-term is vague enough to be inscrutable; yet provocative enough to seem earth-shattering. Inscrutability makes you sound mysterious. (Helpful tip: Raise an eyebrow from time to time, especially when uttering a catchy platitude you heard from a motivational speaker.)

THREE: When encountering anyone who expresses the least bit of doubt, remind them that you were an Indigo child. Propose that someday, you both find some immaculate location with "energy vortices" so as to better help you channel energy…and thereby get in touch with "the sublime". Routinely assure bystanders that you are simply "creating sacred space" or "holding space" for them. Say something cryptic about Shambala. (Helpful tip: Don't refer to a meditation retreat as a "concentration camp".)

FOUR: Solemnly notify skeptics that they are emanating negative energy; and that you can't connect with them because they have a dark aura. Suggest they need a spirit guide. If they decline this generous offer, scoff at them for being out of touch with the universe. Plead that you are only seeking "harmony" or "bliss" or "unity"

or money. (Actually, don't openly say that last one.) Rave about "Goop" (not the Nazi from Liechtenstein, the online emporium founded by Gwyneth Paltrow). Be sure to make extravagant yet vague claims about a healthy lifestyle.

When pressed to elaborate, say something about "resonance" and "frequency". Then let out a long sigh, perform a perfunctory "anjali mudra", and nonchalantly wander away.

FIVE: Once in a while, mention something about a "higher source" and "one-ness". It doesn't matter that you aren't sure exactly what you mean when you invoke such terms. In fact, the more you pepper your statements with copious amounts of mysterious-sounding jargon, the more spiritually astute you'll appear to be. The trick is to pass your conceit off as sagacity. This can be done by feigning empathy to the point of being mawkish. Be proud of your humility. (Helpful tip: To get others to take your superstition seriously, simply call it "ancient wisdom".)

SIX: Talk about being a "light worker". Croon about the power of mind over matter; and how thought alone can create reality. Reference the "law of attraction". Be pedantic. Suggest to acquaintances that you meet up sometime to "do some intention together"; and possibly recite some affirmations. Hold forth on such things as "prana" and "freedom". If that doesn't work, switch to other buzz-terms like "satori" and "empowerment". Use a soothing voice; and be sure to take gratuitously long breaths between each sentence. Pregnant pauses convey a sense of erudition. Squint your eyes whenever uttering an esoteric term. Burn incense whenever possible.

SEVEN: Make arcane assertions about the pineal gland—alluding to energy fields and Astral planes. (Added bonus: Claim to engage in Astral projection in your spare time.) Sternly insist that we all need to seek higher levels of consciousness; and ensure our chakras are aligned properly. (Specify that this is especially important when Mercury is in retrograde; and that it works best during the spring / autumnal equinox.)

Every once in a while, fill the room with sage after reciting some ancient Toltec chants taken from a Don Miguel Ruiz Jr. book. Pontificate about the Age of Aquarius while sipping from a carafe of fermented llama semen. (When no llamas are available, alpacas will do.) As a last resort, guzzle a Venti hazelnut Ayahuasca with cinnamon sprinkles.

EIGHT: Assert that each person has his own “truth” / “reality”; and harumph at the insinuation that an objective Reality exists. The idea is to maintain a semblance of credibility by conveying a hefty dose of false confidence. In order to accomplish this feat, it is important to become well-versed in New Age lingo; and employ the latest phraseology at every opportunity–even when there isn’t an opportunity.

So when discussing pressing matters, ensure to always put a possessive pronoun before the words “truth” and “reality”. (Remember: “truth” is something each of us FEELS.) Make it clear that, per the “law of attraction”, we all create our “reality” by sheer force of will. Things happen, you see, because we “manifest” them with our MINDS. This is an effective way to ingratiate your audience, as encouraging people to “live your truth” makes you sound beneficent; and make them feel empowered.

Inform your audience that if they fail in their mind-over-matter hijinks, they have no one to blame but themselves. (As much as it doesn’t work, the “law of attraction” never fails. Because if it fails, it is everyone else’s fault.)

NINE: Carry yourself with a contrived air of mystique. Comportment is everything. This entails exuding both sanctimony and aloofness. Routinely wander around with a mien of contrived serenity. In order to veil the fact that you are a mountebank, make sure to project a glowing patina of solemn authority—a time-honored pretext that masks your cloying vapidity. The trick is to modulate your demeanor between smug and unctuous, depending on the sensibilities of your audience.

At the first sign of skepticism, simply state that you are still refining your “practice”; then look whimsically off into the distance. (Helpful tip: For extra shamanistic pretensions, get a tattoo incorporating either Classical Chinese or Deva-nagari script; and wear a robe. Bonus points for a tattoo that uses Sanskrit or Pali.)

TEN: Gush about Deepak Chopra as if he were fount of wisdom. Intermittently drop comments about astrological signs—being sure to specify a “rising” / “descending” [insert anything from the Zodiac, or possibly the name of a planet]. Say something enigmatic about the moon. Use the words “meditate” and “visualize” indiscriminately. For anyone who doesn’t take you seriously, explain that you are simply “raising the frequency”; and thereby helping others get in touch with the universe. Making passing reference to the Celestine Prophecy.

ELEVEN: Pretend karma exists. Include in your grandiloquent proclamations frequent mentions of “vibration” and “manifestation”. Justify everything you do by claiming that you are “manifesting” [insert anything desirable here; e.g. wealth,

health, romance, success, mirth, etc.] Refer to things that a guru told you while you were spending time at an ashram. (Harrumph when interlocutors mention that they haven't heard of the designated guru.) Say something about "bliss" and your "higher self". At every opportunity, ramble on about numerology and Kabbalah. (Oprah does it. Madonna does it. It must be real.)

TWELVE: Make it a point to overuse the Hindi word for "hello"—as if each time you say it, you've uttered some sort of divine incantation. This makes sense, as the most profound thing that ever escapes your mouth will be a simple greeting. And—for added effect—be sure to mention the Alila "Ventana" in Big Sur at some point in every conversation.

There you have it: A veritable "How To" manual for the spiritually-challenged everyman. Once you have mastered these techniques, you're well on your way to being a do-it-yourself shaman. Bear in mind, the more you cultivate such skills, the more you will impress those who are trying to present themselves as fellow travelers. Such reciprocal validation serves to reinforce the delusive thinking of everyone involved.

Postscript:

The abiding infatuation with New Thought serves to numb the critical faculties, inhibiting the ability to notice how daffy the beliefs truly are. It's like Novocaine for cognitive dissonance. Consequently, the boundary between mindfulness and mindlessness becomes blurred.

This is all made to seem wonderful, as reassurances of "joy" and "love" and "healing" are repeated, as the occasion warrants. Mysterious things are said about the "soul" or the "spirit" or the "higher self". Declarations are made about "being present". Referring to "energy" in arcane ways is a nice, added touch.

If one wants to up the rhetorical ante, one might say something outlandish about the "transpersonal" and the "quantum" world—ensuring the gibberish is peppered with scientific-sounding terminology. This often includes some bogus locutions (like "the law of attraction") and the mis-use of technical terms (like "manifestation" and "vibration").

And so it goes. New Agers eagerly delve into everything from telepathy and Astral projection to chakra balancing and energy healing—as if the beguiling array of gimmickry will deliver them from the need to engage in serious deliberation. Since the idea is to “live your own truth”, contending with Reality is seen as a handicap. Why bother, when farce is so much more enthralling?

Avid practitioners insist that they are devoted to humanity…even as they do virtually nothing to contribute to human society. So after the Tarot cards, the astrology charts, the kombucha, and all the sham products from Goop, where does one end up?

Immersing oneself in a New Age milieu can be exquisitely fun. We are invited to serve ourselves to a sumptuous feast of enticing dogmas–a steady diet of superstition that satiates our longing for meaning. We allow ourselves to be mesmerized, and want to see others come along for the ride.

But one can only don so many magical crystals and spend so much time tapping into the Astral realm. Eventually, one recognizes the perils of credulity.

The question remains: What is the appeal?

Participation in this orgy of fatuity is a way to mask a spiritual emptiness. Indeed, New Thought is similar to conventional religion in that it serves as a spiritual prosthesis. For those contending with existential beleaguerment, or even existential destitution, dogmatic indulgences can offer succor.

And for those suffering from existential vertigo, New Age tenets offer a sense of purpose. Anyone who happens to be disoriented is looking for something solid to hold onto. Generally speaking, people need some sort of rudder when they feel lost at sea. A life-raft when adrift in a storm. A beacon to light the way in the fog. The smorgasbord of tantalizing dogmas found in the New Age repertoire offers such things.

Existential despondency afflicts us all at one point or another. It makes sense, then, that many are groping around in the dark, fumbling here and there, searching in for a sturdy memetic balustrade to which they might cling. In lieu of the Abrahamic Faiths, alternate dogmatic systems will often do the trick. One need only select a semiotic scheme that suites one’s palate.

New Age rigamarole has a peculiar allure, as it enchants as much as it consoles. Like religion, it can provide solace, and even (false) hope. This isn't always a bad thing. There's definitely something to be said for maintaining a positive mental attitude. The key is for optimism to not become delusional. Positivity is healthy insofar as one remains grounded in Reality. There is no cosmic "law of attraction", only of cause and effect; as much as we might be tempted to engage in magical thinking.

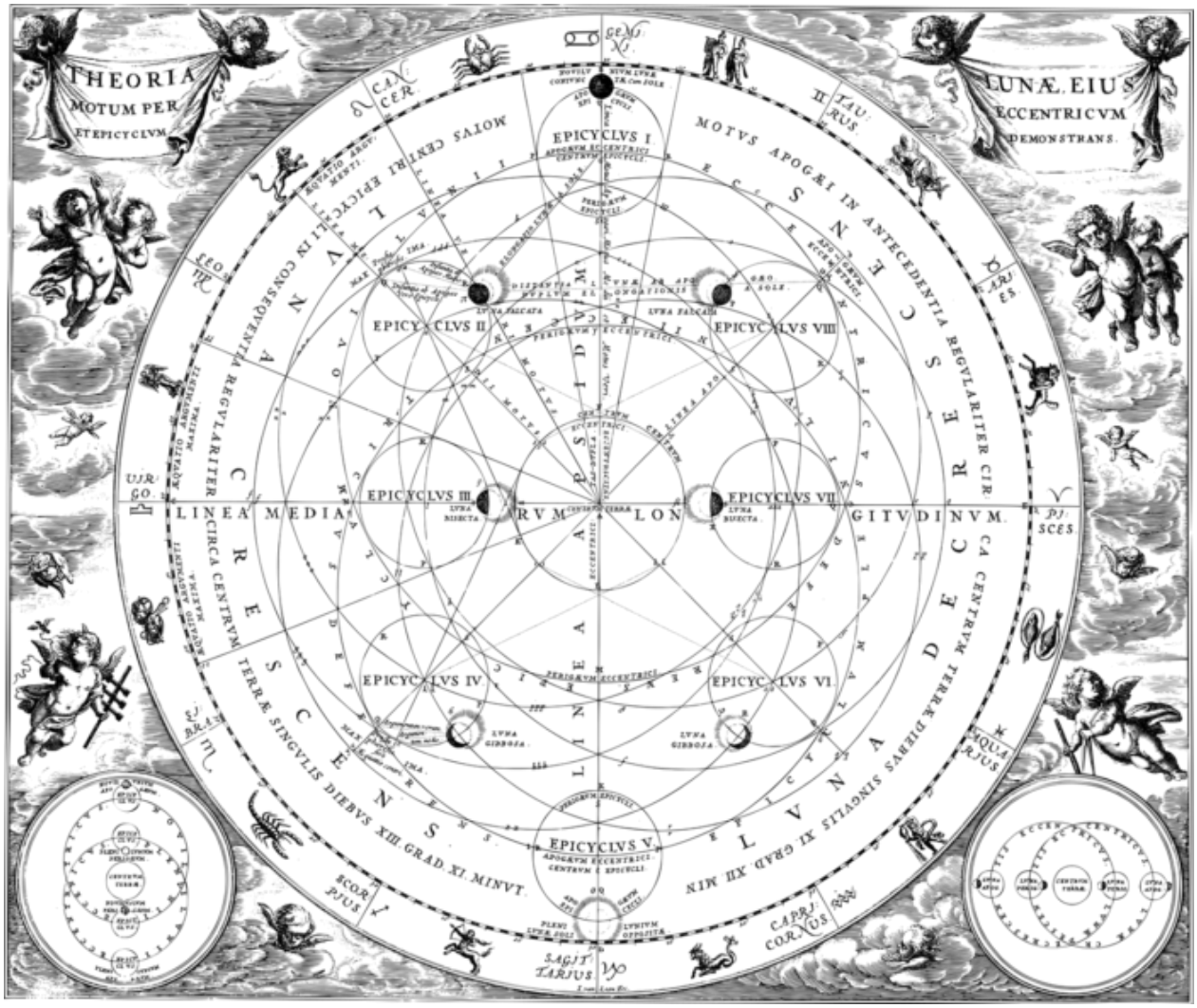
New Age movements also create a sense of community, a role that religious observance often plays. A shared experience holds significant appeal. This is one of the most touted accoutrements of traditional religion.

Another perk of being a New Thought aficionado is that it enables one to pretend to be philosophically profound without having to be philosophical in the least. One need on transplant Abrahamic theology with newfangled esoterica. This way, vacuous verbiage can be passed off as wise disquisition; and every whim can be celebrated as epiphany. Such ersatz sagacity is tremendously gratifying for everyone involved.

But there are limitations. After all, one can only saturate one's brain with the ramblings of Deepak Chopra for so long before one's prefrontal cortex begins to atrophy.

In the final analysis, New Age thinking exhibits all the hallmark traits of cultic thinking. Submission is passed off as liberation. Fascination is misconstrued as edification. And intellectual integrity is sacrificed on the alter of open-mindedness.

New Age thought resembles religiosity in other respects. It propagates more by proselytization than by education. Participants spread the word via evangelism, then end up wandering around in an intoxicating delirium—like fugitives from Reality. In the end, they soon discover: Being a free spirit is all well and good; but not when it leaves one's head in the clouds.


THEORIA
MOTVM PER
ET EPICYCLVM
LVNÆ. EIVS
ECCENTRICVM
DEMONSTRANS.
EPICYCLVS I
EPICYCLVS II
EPICYCLVS III
EPICYCLVS IV
EPICYCLVS V
EPICYCLVS VI
EPICYCLVS VII
EPICYCLVS VIII
MOTVS APOGÆI IN ANTECEDENTIA REGVLARITER CIR
CA CENTRVM TERRÆ DIEBVS SINGVLIS XI GRAD XII MIN
MOTVS CENTRI EPICYCLI IN CONSEQVENTIA REGVLARITER
CIRCA CENTRVM TERRÆ SINGVLIS DIEBVS XIII GRAD XI MINVT.
LINEA MEDIA
LONGITVDINVM.
LINEA APSIDVM
LINEA LVNÆ