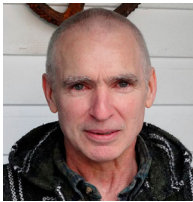


Guest Editor's Introduction

Special Theme Symposium: Alan Watts

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The 6 January 2015 marked Alan Watts' 100th birthday. Toward honoring the occasion and commemorating his life and work, *Self & Society's* editors authorized a literary symposium serving as an enduring memorial of Watts' centenary celebration. At the outset, in keeping with the transdisciplinary values of the Association for Humanistic Psychology in Britain together with the global nature of its journal, several thinkers situated across a range of pedagogic realms were invited to contribute original compositions on Watts appropriate to their fields of study. Added to the mix is a poem by Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Though Watts' expertise spanned the depth and breadth of philosophy and religion, for several reasons it seems most fitting that the symposium is published in a Humanistic Psychology journal.

First, Watts helped lead the humanistic revolution in psychology. Witness, for example, James B. Klee (1982) speaking to the American Psychological Association. Klee identified Watts among the crucial 'living strands' composing the newly woven Third Force fabric. Switching figurative allusions, Klee said that Watts circa 1970 was, along with D. T. Suzuki and J. Krishnamurti, one of the 'Titans' bringing wisdom traditions of Asia to bear on the personal pragmatics of humanistic psychological theory and research: 'Each stimulated an awareness essentially experiential in nature that went far beyond the intellectual purist' (p. 72). Of particular relevance were Watts' writings on Buddhism and Taoism, resonating deeply among younger humanistic psychologists. Klee wrote (1982):

Watts, via the persuasive quality of his clear style, sold Zen and Taoism in a way that is almost miraculous. The sheer intrinsic clarity in his writing just made certain aspects of oriental philosophy really sing Watts broke the ice, thawed our frozen aesthetic sensibilities and released our reactions to the message. Indeed, for many of us Watts made it our medium. (p. 72)

Supporting Klee's conclusion is the documentary film, *The Humanistic Revolution: Pioneers in Perspective* (Shostrom, 1971). There, Watts is among eight eminent thinkers profiled as trailblazers in the field, including such other luminaries as Abraham

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Maslow, Gardner Murphy, Carl Rogers, Rollo May, Paul Tillich, Fritz Perls and Viktor Frankl.

Secondly, I believe history shows Humanistic Psychology owing an incalculable debt of thanks to Watts' pioneering efforts. In the 1930s and 1940s, Watts was among the earliest and most innovative twentieth-century authors dialoging modern psychology and religions of Asia. Under Watts' leadership in the 1950s, the American Academy of Asian Studies (AAAS) – precursor to the California Institute of Integral Studies – became one of the first academic organizations offering courses and colloquia on psychological life beyond standard behaviorist, biological, and psychoanalytic paradigms. Likewise, *The Way of Zen* sparked the 'Zen boom' in America, and his *Nature, Man and Woman* was an early feminist appraisal of patriarchal religion with far-reaching influence on the deep ecology movement.

In the 1960s, *Psychotherapy East and West* broke new clinical-countercultural ground, and *The Joyous Cosmology* brought psychedelic experience to the intellectual fore. Moreover, Watts offered the first seminar on the grounds of the Esalen Institute in 1962, thus inaugurating the human potential movement. He subsequently expanded Gregory Bateson's double-bind theory to cosmic levels of analysis in *Beyond Theology* and *The Book on the Taboo against Knowing Who You Are*. The cosmic double-bind – that is to say, the inner compunction to live a meaningful life amidst a world depicted by scientific rationalism as devoid of spiritual purpose – is arguably the definitive existential quandary faced by contemporary humanity. Though Watts died in 1973, his writings and lectures have continuing resonance in twenty-first-century Humanistic Psychology (Columbus & Rice, 2012).

The symposium begins with Lawrence Ferlinghetti's 'Litany (for Alan Watts)'. Ken Cohen follows with his personal reminiscence of Watts' final summer of life in 1973. Next, Susan Gordon explores relations between the respective radical empiricisms of Watts and Francisco Varela's neurophenomenology; Christopher Chase maps Watts' contributions to twentieth-century American Paganism; and Juliet Bennett considers implications of Watts' 'dramatic model' of the universe for peace studies. In the final article, I offer the first of a two-part retrospective on *Psychotherapy East and West* (Part II is slated for a later issue of *Self & Society*). Concluding the symposium are two bibliographies; the first lists Watts' major books and the second cites key writings on Watts' life and work.

I want to thank the journal's editors, David Kalisch and Richard House, for their suggestions and guidance; several anonymous reviewers for their substantive input; and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Ken Cohen, Christopher Chase, Susan Gordon, and Juliet Bennett for generously contributing excellent writings. Thanks also to Jean-Claude van Itallie and the Shantigar Foundation for supporting my symposium editing and writing, and to Lisa Prolman's interlibrary loan staff at the Public Library of Greenfield, Massachusetts, for locating and acquiring necessary materials for the project.

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Psychology, Philosophy, and Religion, he holds a PhD in experimental psychology from the University of Tennessee, and an MA in Humanistic Psychology from the University of West Georgia.

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