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## Alan Watts and secular competence in religious praxis

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### ABSTRACT

Alan Watts' philosophy of religion makes a claim for secular competence in religious praxis. The argument appears as paradoxical as a Zen koan: religion is a secular affair, for both the value and actuality of faith are lost when held faithfully, but reborn in the necessity of acting on insecure foundations that life demands. The premise is that believing can either assist a believer in dealing with facts of living, or hide them from the believer's attention. In the latter the believer is less likely to prosper. I posit that religion, as Watts uses the term, represents the binding of interpretation within and as living being, put to work as a furthering of the coordination of organism and environment. As such, religion is a process of biosemiotic ontology, an entailment of the function of sign use. As persons, religion is that process by which what we believe becomes what we do and thus who we are. Watts warns us not to bind-perception-into-action speciously, that is, not to do religion merely as an arbitrary metaphysical heritage. He also reminds us that religion cannot safely be ignored, and schools us to do it well, i.e., to submit it to skeptical analyses.

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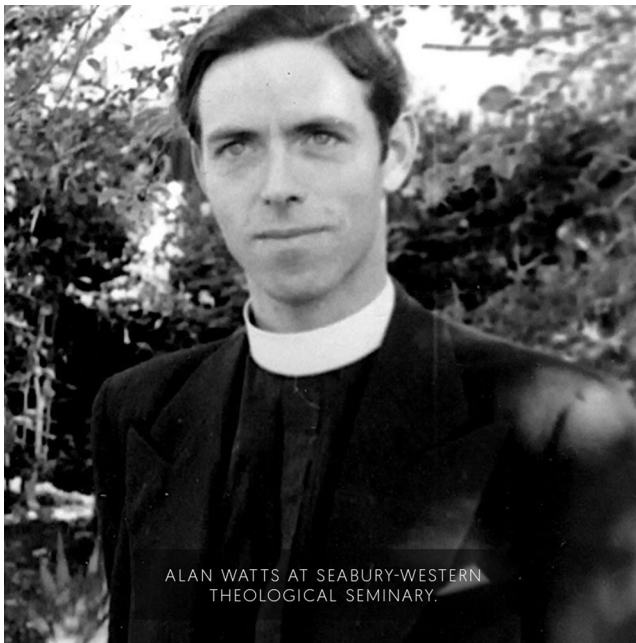
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### Introduction: the secular Watts

Over the course of the last few centuries, religion has rightly developed a rather frightening reputation: not just this religion or that, but religion itself, the practice wherein sets of ritual and practice – related to some set of metaphysical *and* historical truth claims – take on social significance and are institutionalized within some society. This seems a consequence of the notion, argued by folks on all sides of the issue, that religion is about Faith in X, wherein faith is commonly capitalized, even psychologized (even by those who reject the notion that religion has value) and where X stands for some presumed metaphysical absolute (generally but not necessarily psychologized as 'God'). And thus, the default position is that religion is about Faith in God. When expressed with little or no self-reflection, this readily becomes the common claim *my God is bigger than your god* (which is to say: *I'm better than you*). But even in its more sophisticated variants, the religious impulse commonly results in a rampant and virulent egoism – an expression

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Photo, early 1940s, used by permission of Mark Watts.

of presumed and superior autonomy that tends to posit 'God' in the image of whoever is doing the positing. By way of contrast, Alan Watts argues with striking regularity that all such 'Gods' are simply absurd, as is all such 'Faith' as well as every 'I' that has ever clung either to its gods, its faith, or itself. Moreover, for Watts, none of this has anything to do with any proper practice of religion.

Alan Watts can rightly be read as having made a single long argument that, however common all this may be, it represents religion *poorly done*, which can be contrasted with religion done well. The difference has nothing to do with technics of perfecting the reiteration of historically and socially contrived rituals and practices, nor has it to do with presumed metaphysical warrants of certitude; rather, religion is a matter of the real-world consequence of interpretation. A religion is a set of beliefs, attitude, and practice, yet doing religion well is not about these but about how well these serve in grasping life. Religion is the systematic and methodological study (i.e. rereading or *relegere*) so as to better bind together (for the purpose of some action, or *relegare*) possibility, interaction, and consequence, into a functional whole. In this sense, competence at religion can be subjected to the rigors of falsification. Watts has shown us a clear path towards exactly this sense of doing religion well.

My own argument builds on Watts, though I argue that the path Watts blazed is more readily distinguished by removing from consideration the entirety of metaphysics, and treating religion as a 'merely' secular matter of a living thing interpreting the world of which it partakes so as to go on living (Ostdiek, 2015). From this view, one does religion well when believing is folded into biology (writ large) to become a matter of living well, when the process by which what we believe/perceive becomes how we behave and thus who we are, is subjected to the scrutiny of science and philosophy – and not

merely captive to the vagaries of natural selection. In short, we can learn to do religion well by grasping the religious philosophy of Alan Watts purely as a secular affair, and a subset of biological semiotics.

In this, I seek to reduce the man's propositions to the compost of profundity, such that they may in deed 'serve as a possible ferment of new growths or a nucleus of new crystallization' (James, 2008, p. 41), that is, open possibility through interaction and consequence. Any competent reading of Alan Watts would demonstrate that Watts seemed to find not *something more*, but rather, some process *greater* – more whole – than *just* secular and semiotic transcending/believing/doing into being. But a closer reading may well find in that greater wholeness a natural process. From both the secular view of religion and Watts' own arguments, the idea of some 'transcendental world' is as absurd and dangerous as that of a transcendental self. It runs contrary to the value brought by doing religion well and contradicts the 'know-how' Watts brings to issues of living together (not only with each other, but with the entirety of our environment which Watts identifies as our *soul*).

I read in Watts both methodological *and* philosophical naturalism, that is, an epistemology grounded in recognition that unfalsifiable 'proofs' are necessarily invalid *as well as* an anti-metaphysical ontology, which is the presumption that all that exists is natural. From this view, should evidence be found for the existence of ghosts, for example, we would not have discovered something supernatural but would have expanded our grasp of natural phenomena. Yet Watts does, on occasion, appear to succumb to the naturalist fallacy, which is the presumption that 'nature' is, by the fact of its being, pleasant, desirable, and morally good. For example, the paeon Watts (1951) paints in extolling the 'wisdom of the body' (p. 56) of women giving birth in the fields and returning immediately to work blithely dismisses the harsh reality of unnecessarily high rates of maternal and infant mortality therein engendered. This sort of error fuels (what I perceive to be) a misreading of the larger argument that informs Watts' secular/semiotic view of the function of religion, and his reasoning therefore.

I argue that the unique value Watts brings to the discussions of religion is commonly lost in the contemplation of Watts' own believing, and that Watts knew that this was likely, and sought (with mixed success) to counter it within his *weltanschauung*. Think of how Watts (1966/1989) describes the relationship between body and soul. The existent self is the body, and the 'essential Self' the soul; sounds familiar enough. And yet: 'the soul is not in the body, but the body in the soul, and the soul is the entire network of relationships and processes which make up your environment, and apart from which you are nothing' (p. 69). Watts clearly saw that the soul, that presumed transcendental 'essence' of a person, is semiotic artifice, a historically contrived habituation of relatedness, and a consequence of a body minding its situation, which includes the other minding bodies that it encounters therein. No god, no soul, no ego or will is needed: to unite body and soul is to unite a self with the actual world, *with* as well as within an ecosystem. This is, not to put too fine a point on it, a matter of biological selection: to fail to come to terms with and within one's situation is to cease to exist. The likelihood of death increases (I would argue exponentially) with the degree of dislocation. As William James argued with respect to the so-called mind-body problem, nothing is needed to unite that which cannot be separated. And yet managing this union well does take doing, and skill, and self-reflection, for it is no neo-Platonic romanticism: instruction can help, and this Watts offers.

## The doing of religion: the pragmatic Watts

Religion, in my view, consists of a single function of a neo-Peircean triad (Ostdiek, 2015). As with all such triads, its existence is an aspect of two other functions: there is no doing of religion sans minding of the world – and of our mindings along with and within it. This forms an epistemic triad: religion depicts the channeling of interpretation via the propensity to action which is belief; philosophy, testing an interpretant (as an object of thought) against itself for readability and consistency in sign usage; and science, testing it against some actual circumstance. As with all such triads, each function can be/has been ideationally, methodologically, and socially distinguished, as each bears consequence independent of the others; thus, we have *religion* as both process and object (of/as both social/epistemic and social/psychological phenomena). But each function remains an integral of the whole, and together they depict/are how what a living thing believes/becomes what it knows and how it behaves and thence what (or who) ‘it’ ‘is’ – in countless reiterations of novel believing, novel behaving, and novel selfing.

The object of a Peircean triad is its consequence, the habit formation that both is and results from the intertwining function of the three-part whole. The object/consequence of this triad is the psychosomatic mapping that is the continuity/habituation of the process by which a living organism finds food and shelter, avoids predation, generates knowledge necessary to its survival, and generally lives. Human religion is of the same kind as non-human religion, except that our species-specific knack of skeptical doubt has opened species-specific possibilities with equally species-specific complications. The loss of animal faith (Santayana, 1923/1955) opened a vast niche, range upon range of potential *habituation* – and peril. Should we, in this process, fail to succeed in our form of believing, should we retreat from the responsibility engendered by the freedom we have gained through our unique semiotic ability, we will lose our humanity. While all living things do religion – channel interpretation by acting on believed perception to thereby reconstruct both themselves and the world – we have seen no other species that *can* do religion as powerfully, or as badly, as we. And there is no going back; what we have lost is lost. The only question is whether or not we succeed. As I read Watts, I see not only a call for secular competence in religious praxis, but also a highly useful (i.e. true) method by which this can be accomplished.

In the simplest terms, we do religion well when we allow the believing we use to make sense in (and out of) life to work in concert with our philosophizing and sciencing – when what we believe into being is reconstructed by coherence and correspondence with and within our actual circumstances (which, of course, includes the virtual circumstances of past mappings). We do religion badly when we do not. Moreover, religion is *useful* (true) in furthering living *only* when done well, when bound successfully within its naturally existing triad. Here I presume upon two pragmatic notions, both well known to Watts. First, ‘truth’ has not two, but three criteria: coherence, correspondence, and use: ‘A theory which is utilized receives the highest possible certificate of truth’ (Wright, 2000, p. 51). Second, that ‘truth’ is not to be confused with being, but consists of pointing (with varying degrees of success) at being (see, e.g., James, 1911/1997, p. 44). And thus we (and Watts) are incapable of ontologically distinguishing religious ‘truths’ from those of reality – as distinguished by science and philosophy. And yet, for the purpose of study, we can safely ignore both of the other two legs of this process, as well as its implications

to biological evolution, so as to focus on the ongoing object of human religion, which is the human self.

But Watts (1951), a critic may well contend, rejects the very idea of the self and finds a variety of ways to argue that 'one has no self to love' (p. 133); thus, the idea that religion is that process by which a self is formed rightly appears to contradict Watts. A more astute reader would reject this critique. The seeming contradiction is resolved with further reference to James. Consciousness, James (1912/2008) tells us, 'is the name of a nonentity'. By this, James means 'only to deny that the word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function' (p. 2). With complete disregard to the degree of self-reflection (self-awareness) it may or may not have achieved, the self is no simple assemblage of 'stuff' – material/technical and/or psychological/spiritual. But it is a function, a turning of the function circle of biosemiotics (e.g. Kull, Emmeche, & Hoffmeyer, 2011), an 'unjointed' union of self and non-self into a forever-incomplete (yet *potentially* coherent) whole (James, 1890/2007, p. 239). This organic unity of the living thing and its surrounds infuses Watts' notion of religion, shapes it, and gives purpose to all the various snakes and ladders commonly identified as 'religious' phenomena. But, Watts warns us, clinging to some notional 'transcendental' *thing* impedes this process, gums up the (semiotic) circle of life, and erodes the ability of the living thing to live.

It is as James (1907/2003) argued: 'Metaphysics has usually followed a very primitive kind of quest' that searches for a 'power-bringing word or name' by which 'the universe's PRINCIPLE' can be safely corralled, controlled, and put to work (so you don't have to). Within this more traditional approach towards religion, 'You can rest' once you possess such 'solving names' – 'God', 'Matter', 'Reason', 'the Absolute', 'Energy' (pp. 31, 32) are all such. And it is as Watts (1951) described: 'Religion, as most of us have known it, has quite obviously tried to make sense out of life by fixation'. Both men describe a particular dysfunction of our species-specific means of binding the potential into being through moment upon moment of transaction, which consists of 'confusing the intelligible with the fixed' (p. 43).

James (1997) did not, as some have presumed, think that *this* sort of 'rest' is valid; this sort of rest is no respite in the struggle for life, it is escapism from it. Moreover, it is an escapism that cannot end well. He differentiated the moral holiday allowed by pluralism and the rejection of the Absolute (as a solving name or 'PRINCIPLE' but also as an ontological fact) from one taken in the face of belief in it. The former '*can only be* provisional breathing-spells, intended to refresh us for the morrow's fight' (p. 28, italics added). It represents 'chilling' – a momentary enjoyment of the entangling of life without regard to the larger weight of the world. Absolutism (including that of the Self) has more capacity for generating moral holidays; it can even grant absolute moral holidays (e.g. by informing a rationalization for excusing one's self from responsibility for harmful action, such as when the conditions of a slave 'became worse when his master underwent a religious conversion that allowed him to justify slavery as the punishment of the children of Ham' [Weinberg, 2003, p. 242]). But the latter is of use *only* to 'an incurably sick soul' while the former, the necessarily provisional holiday, is of general use in finding the strength to live with the insecurity that life, and wisdom, demands.

Watts treats the Self as the principle impediment to the *movement* that is the great stream that is life, while simultaneously rejoicing in the alchemy of the soul – which, as

we have seen, is not a Self, but the 'essence' of the fact/relating/process by which the living thing lives. Watts sets the Self against the soul, and dismisses the former in favor of the later. The soul, in Watts' terminology, cannot serve as a 'solving name' as it represents/is a process (specifically, that process by which specifiable sets of relations exist). Both James and Watts agree that to treat the self (i.e. the 'mind') as a transcendental 'thing' – as some metaphysical 'stuff' with agency and consequence that informs and solves the riddles of my 'I' – is to 'freeze', to 'fix' (to make unchanging) a process that cannot be stopped without ending. For Watts and James alike, to 'fix' a self is to destroy it. The self cannot be 'fixed' as a 'Self' (nor, for that matter, can 'Matter!'), and the attempt necessarily damages the living thing.

It remains the case that James (1956) did write of religion 'in the supernaturalist sense' as Faith in X, where X is an 'unseen order' which is sought as 'the true significance of our present mundane life' and the causal agent of, and explanation for 'riddles of the natural order' (p. 51) – i.e. James analyzed 'religion' in the sense of common usage. But James (2003) also argued: 'Believe that life is worth living, and your very belief will help create the fact' (p. 240). This is the sense in which Watts (1970, p. 78) describes his concern with religion as following the tradition of William James – that of psychology. For myself, I believe/act on the notion/belief that Watts acted upon/believed in the truth/usefulness of the heritage of radical empiricism and pragmatism. This informs my turn to James and Peirce to further Watts' call for secular competence in religious praxis. For a pragmatist, however, the real test lies not in the sourcing, but the doing.

Thus, we return to the notion of religion as a neo-Peircean triad: Peirce found many ways to argue that everything that is real – that reality itself – comes in threes. His cenopythagorean ontology presents the basic categories of existence, which can be summarized as: possibility, interaction, and consequence. The first is identified with sentience: living things generate possibility out of mere probability; the second is the means by which both possibilities and probabilities succeed or fail; the third is simultaneously all objects of existence and the means by which possibilities and probabilities come to be. Moreover, the generation of possibility is necessarily semiotic – it involves a 'read' or interpretation of a situation. And the interpretation makes the interpretant, not the other way around. Finally, each of these processes cannot exist independently of the others, thus it is not a triangle of causation, but a three-legged stool of being. (This is an all too brief summary of Peirce's cenopythagorean ontology, which I develop in the context of religion in Ostdiek [2015], and in terms of degeneracy in Firstness, i.e. the lack or loss of minding/possibility that is or tends towards non-life, in Ostdiek [2014].)

In this way, the secular function of religion is necessarily ongoing; it results in the formation of 'a' self that continues 'selfing' (that continues its existence) only by furthering the reciprocation (transaction) between 'not-I' and 'I' by which both life and 'I' exists. This can be impeded by all sorts of nominally 'religious' notions, not the least of which includes belief in the actual existence of a transcendental or supernatural Self. Religious success, in the sense of Watts, is a matter of kenotic praxis; it necessitates that we get over ourselves so as to allow the I to breathe in not-I. But this kenosis is understood in the light of Peirce's cenopythagorean ontology, rather than Christian neo-Platonism (built on the presumed existence of an 'essence' of every person, or indivisible 'soul'). Thus, I find there is no contradiction between speaking of religion as that process that both is and informs the existence of subjectivity, by which that human-specific form of

subjectivity (or 'I') comes to be, and Watts' argument that a 'religious' (supernaturalist) belief in the 'self' is an impediment to competence in religious praxis.

### **Moral competence as successful 'religioning': the art of living with Alan Watts**

The argument that morality necessarily involves some supernatural instruction is as hoary as it is prevalent within contemporary society, and it is blatantly incoherent. As Watts (1951) amply demonstrates, Divine Command Theory (DCT; whether the blunt claim that morality is whatever this or that god says or does, or the more abstracted, circular, and equally absurd argument that morality is a necessary quality of, and exists through the presence of some presumed *ens necessarium*) cannot serve as morality because the very presence of such a command negates the need for (and thus the presence of) a competence in the 'art of living together' (p. 119) – a competence that can only be established in the here and now. The extent to which DCT is allowed to define morality is the extent to which morality ceases to exist – no matter the validity of the command. The argument is compelling: invite a black man to dinner 'to be unprejudiced' (p. 132) and you have shown the world (i.e. your own 'soul') that you do, in fact, see the man as 'a black' rather than as a man. (That is, if you invited him to fulfill such a command, and thereby be 'moral'.)

Not only is DCT antithetical to moral competence, it positively exemplifies religious incompetence. Although Watts' concept of creative morality is structured on the first proposition, it also demonstrates the second (see Watts, 1951, pp. 119–133). Moreover, as with his notion of the soul and the self, Watts' solution to moral dilemmas involves a turn to the secular.

I extrapolate three propositions. First, Watts addresses morality independent of religion. Morality is a distinct phenomenon that neither depends on nor correlates with religiosity (in the traditional sense of metaphysically warranted ritual and practice, theology and apologetics). One need not join a church or believe in 'God' to be moral – to the contrary, doing so commonly interferes with the maturation of one's moral being. That morality evolves with society, that the 'Commands' supposedly authored by 'God' tend to mimic those that prevail within any particular culture, and that a morality must creatively resist codification if it is to stand as a morality, all demonstrate that the only necessary basis of morality is a secular, as opposed to divine, society. However, this proposition can grant no validity to any particular set of moral behaviors; it presents a view of morality that is necessary but not sufficient to establish the validity of *any particular* moral system. That a society has settled on some particular morality is, by itself, no more authoritative than if some 'god' had settled it. This proposition is not sufficient to establish that the behavior thereby engendered is moral (leads to well-being).

Second, Watts (1951) holds to the notion that 'objective' moral standards do exist – bound not to any metaphysical presupposition, but to the properties of a specific situation and definable in terms of possibility, interaction, and habit (object) discoverable therein. Presupposing *only* the most basic ontogenetic agreement (there exists a physical universe that contains living beings), Watts defines morality as 'the art of living together' (p. 119). What is moral is that which leads towards greater success at resolving problems that arise when living things live together. This entails the existence of 'rules, or rather techniques' (p. 119) that inform and are this or that method of living. In light of the previous discussion

of religion, *the moral* is that set of techniques that best serves this ongoing process we call life. Morality, then, is a matter of *shared* well-being. In any given interaction, there exists a set of behaviors that better furthers the situation in terms of successfully binding the various constituents into a greater and more integral wholeness.

This superior set of behaviors exists whether or not people agree on it, whether or not it is known or even knowable; and it exists bound to the situation. What is moral is behavior that furthers the entanglement of the bank of life, and serves the integrity that is life (see Darwin, 1859/1946, p. 429). Watts offers an expansion of Leopold's (1949) land ethic ('A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise' [pp. 224–225]), cast in the language of traditional religion, the rhetoric of metaphysics, and the realm of human psychosomatic experience and intentionality. Yet for all that, for Watts, the ground of morality remains secular, and the secular sufficient to establish 'objective'/true morality. I add the caveat that Watts might well have objected to my use of 'objective' – but not, I contend, to the usage to which I attach this word/symbol. And depending on the exact nature of the objection, I might well agree with him. I say 'objective' as a sop to Cerberus – may there come an age when such contortions no longer pertain. This points to how the second proposition lacks necessity. 'Objects' are habits of interaction (distinctly perceived) that (with varying degrees of success) 'lock' probability (in the case of non-living things) and/or possibility (plus probability in that of living things) into specifiable, potentially knowable 'things' (Ostdiek, 2014).

Were these two propositions the sum of Watts' view of morality – tied as it is to his view of religion – then we could rightfully assign the entire conversation to the category of 'so what'. Neither proposition can, by itself, soundly claim both sufficiency and necessity. But the entanglement of life is no mere assemblage of parts; it is in the emergence (genesis) of an autonomous agent capable of assisting the living of the parts even as it lives by their living. It may be a biological organism – the ecosystem of living things that is a living body. It may also be post-biological – symbolic 'life' such as a culture, an ideology, or a psychology, which are, similarly, ecosystems of interactions of habit and possibility (Ostdiek, 2016). This is the third proposition I extrapolate from Watts (1951): belief (acceptance of, and a willingness to act in accord with) that the 'great stream' that is life represents a very real synechism (or radical continuity) of living things (see pp. 39–54). Within and between living things, there exists no sharp divide, thus 'the real man, the organism-in-relation-to-the-universe *is* this unconscious motivation. And because he *is* it, he is not being moved by it' (p. 128).

The first proposition is granted sufficiency, and the second necessity; combined they posit a view that is a 'not determined but consistent' 'flow' of events. Combined – not 'placed' in relation to each other but grasped as relation each to each other within the 'third' of synechism – these three propositions present a view of life that is self-organizing, self-generating, and self-defining. It defies the logic – even the possibility – of an appeal to a moral agent or cause outside this flow as a source of validation. As we have already seen, Watts positively demolishes this notion of Divine Command Theory of morality; what we now see is that this also serves to establish the validity of secular morality as well as secular meter for religious praxis.

In practical terms, DCT justifies an artificial 'freezing' of some specific interpretation of morality so that practitioners can then hold some particular set of customs and



conventions sacrosanct, immune to challenge or adaptation and absolute in their being (Watts, 1951, p. 43). This presents three dangers. First, DCT necessarily results in deep moral indifference. With DCT, we are not moral agents, but dogs who avoid peeing on the carpet, sans comprehension or responsibility, in obedience to our master's wishes. (It matters not whether this is out of anxiety over the loss of their master's love, fear of punishment, or some incognizable doggie thought.) Second, DCT allows us to justify pretty much anything as 'moral' – and for 'just following orders' to become the standard by which we determine right and wrong (where following orders is always right, no matter the situation). And third, DCT eliminates any necessity for the process by which believing is channeled into being, that is, it ends the need for religion (as anything other than 'just following orders'). With DCT, the shaping of the stream is magical, rather than geographical; that is to say, it is an ungraspable nothing. To accept DCT as descriptive of the cause (shaper) of morality and the praxis of religion as worshipful recognition of the agent (being) of that morality is to leave nothing for either religion or morality to do. It is to leave them with no consequence. For a radical empiricist such as Watts, there is no difference between a thing with no consequence and a thing with no existence. In contrast, by placing the source of religion and morality within the give and take of life, Watts subjects them to selection and change. The resulting insecurity is real, but so is the resulting consequence (actuality).

### **Conclusion: the complete insecurity of Alan Watts**

Unlike the general lot of animal life, humanity negotiates truth claims with the world. In so doing, humans devise all sorts of claims to fit all sorts of situations – generally for one's own benefit, individually and en masse. This is lubricated with rituals and practices, obligatory actions and formalized responses, which serve to tell us who we are, where we belong, and what we ought to do – again, individually and en masse. Moreover, these 'things' exist only as we continue to reproduce them, thereby subjecting them to variation and selection. And so, all our belongings, our beings, and our doings necessarily begin to fail whenever a self begins to hold itself at odds with its other self (which is simultaneously the world in which that self has arisen and its 'essence' or *soul*). This is to say, our negotiations of truth claims are less likely to succeed when, whether through fear, arrogance, or any motive whatsoever, we fail to actually negotiate. (It is as Watts argued, that a motivated self is a determined self – and thereby less likely to succeed as a self.)

This is only exacerbated by our tendency to place 'religion' apart from the world. To make a truth claim based solely upon the channeling of belief, with no recourse to testing that claim (for either coherence or correspondence), is to rely solely on usage to determine the claim. This animal faith consists of leaping willy-nilly into the crucible of natural selection. It is to cast one's self into Darwin's Jungle, with no means of defense (or offense) but prayer. The doing of religion in the traditional sense of the word can offer only the illusion of security; and life has a way of exposing such conceit. To the extent that it is done well, the doing of religion as binding interpretation within biotic and post-biotic phenomena necessarily suffers selective pressure. This religion – the religion that Watts espouses – exposes itself to falsification and consequence, not only in use but also coherence and correspondence (i.e. not only in terms of the magisterium of religion, but also those of philosophy and science).

No small part of the truth (usefulness) and beauty (blend of contrast and coherence) that Watts brings to any discussion of religion is found in his pragmatic and secular approach. His skill with words and ideas is such that even those who hold most closely to metaphysical sentimentalism can easily fail to notice just how thoroughly he disabuses them of their irrational and emotionally self-serving truth claims. The gentleness of his method belies the steel of his logic. Even his direst warnings are informed by warm-hearted colloquialisms that sound endearingly familiar to all but the sickest of souls. This, I hold, is key to a successful critique (use) of the truth (pointing towards actual consequence) that Watts offers, however commonly it may be lost by those who seek in Watts an escape from the struggle for life.

As a matter of course, Watts *did* find something *more*, some process *greater* than just all this transcending/believing/doing into being, but this *more* is no less and no more than recognition that 'life only avails, not the having lived' (Emerson, 1841/1934). It is a call for secular competence in religious praxis, for believing to subordinate itself to the bindings that living demands of us – which very much include the doings of science and philosophy. It is a call for greater success at forming more viable habits through opening possibility and reciprocating transaction, which form novel habits, which open further possibilities. So long as life exists, the doing of religion never ends. Watts calls on each of us and all of us to do religion well, and thereby cease our absurd (unthinking, irrational, sentimental) habit of disjoining thee from me, and us from them, as well as of thee and me from us, and so on. In all this, Watts may rightly be read as having rejected any and all claims of metaphysical certitude, and accepted secular competence in religious praxis as the means and the measure of living successfully in this necessarily shared and insecure world.

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