

Introduction

Alan Watts and the Academic Enterprise

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As in some economies the rich keep getting richer and the poor poorer, so in the overspecialized disciplines of modern scholarship the learned get more learned and the ignorant get more ignorant—until the two classes can hardly talk to each other. I have dedicated my work to an attempt to bridge that gap.

—Alan Watts, 1975b, p. xx

This collection of academic essays by Alan Watts serves to commemorate the centenary of his birth on the Feast of the Epiphany—January 6—in 1915. Watts was born into a middle-class family at Rowan Tree Cottage, in the village of Chislehurst, located on the outskirts of London. He was raised in the Church of England, educated at elite Anglican preparatory academies—including King’s School in Canterbury (1928–1932)—and studied at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois (1941–1944). Receiving the Sacrament of Holy Orders on the Feast of the Ascension, May 18, 1944, Watts served as Episcopal priest, chaplain and theologian at Northwestern University (1944–1950), professor of comparative philosophy at the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco (1951–1957), and freelance philosopher (1958–1973), including visiting scholar at Harvard University (1962–1964). He held a Master of Sacred Theology degree from Seabury-Western Seminary (1948), an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity from the University of Vermont (1958), and was a Fellow of the Society for Arts, Religion, and Contemporary Culture.

Watts integrated his Anglo-Catholic religious formation with knowledge of Buddhism, Daoism, and Hinduism toward resolving problems of ontological estrangement in the twentieth-century West (Morgan, 2008). His 1947 book, *Behold the Spirit: A Study in the Necessity of Mystical Religion*, was hailed by Fr. Alan

Griffith Whitemore (1890–1960), superior of the Order of the Holy Cross and abbot of Holy Cross Monastery in West Park, New York, as “one of the most penetrating works that ever has come from the pen of an Anglican author” (as cited in Sadler, 1985, p. 2). In the 1950s, Watts’ vital counterpoints to capricious interpretations of Buddhist doctrine rendered him “the most influential figure to come out of the era of Beat Zen” (Coleman, 2001, p. 63). He subsequently offered innovative understandings of spiritual and religious consciousness amid the countercultural upheavals of the psychedelic 1960s (Roszak, 1969/1995), and was a formative influence within the “human potential movement”—the diverse association of psychotherapists and alternative education centers exploring groundbreaking approaches to psychological growth, personal insight, and creative expression in the 1960s and 1970s (Kripal, 2007). The death of Alan Watts, likely due to a combination of heart disease and work fatigue, occurred during his sleep on November 16 in 1973. It was the eve of the Feast of Saint Hugh, the patron saint of Watts’ first Anglican boarding school.

Note that two book-length biographies on Watts are available. Both are informative, if sometimes unreliable. The first, by Stuart (1976/1983), emphasizes Watts’ professional life but projects a rather cynical subtext (see Sadler’s 1976 review). The second, by Furlong (1986/2001), places greater emphasis on Watts’ personal life by capitalizing partly on salacious (but dubious) accounts of Watts’ first marriage and his reputation for alcoholic excess. Perhaps the fairest biographical considerations of Watts are brief essays by Gidlow (1972), Sadler (1974a, 1974b) and, most recently, Chadwick (2015). See also Watts’ (1973a) autobiography and, for a narrative account of Watts’ curriculum vitae, see Columbus and Rice (2012b, pp. 2–3).

POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE

A compilation of scholarly writings and lectures by Alan Watts may seem counterintuitive and counterfactual given his prominent and ubiquitous reputation as a nonacademic writer. Jackson’s (1984) review of Watts’ life and work, for example, concluded that his “most important public role is that of *popularizer* of Oriental religions to the West; it seems safe to say that no modern writer has exceeded his contributions here” (p. 99, italics added). Likewise, in the twenty-first century, Watts is remembered as “the principle popularizer of Zen Buddhism to American audiences in the 1950 and 1960s” (Kabil, 2012, p. 47) and “the great popularizer of Asian religions” (Seigler, 2010). Although “popularizing”—rendering information as accessible, comprehensible, and appreciable—is an activity professors engage regularly in college classrooms, the moniker may be the antonym of academic heft when applied to Watts. Jackson (1984) wrote:

Though no scholar, he had a wide acquaintance with Asian religious thought and, what is more important, a genius for explaining and

dramatizing the Eastern concepts. . . . No recent Western writer has more successfully presented Oriental religious conceptions to a wide audience or awakened so many readers to the relevance of such conceptions to twentieth-century life. (p. 99, italics added)

The popularizer soubriquet attached to Watts is further complicated with the addition of a “guru” appellation. Watts has been called “America’s guru” (Review, 1973, p. 117), “the guru of the Beat Generation” (Stuart, 1976/1983, p. 180), “guru to disenchanting youth” (Curti, 1980, p. 371), and “a guru to the counterculture of the fifties and sixties” (Ballantyne, 1989, p. 437). The two labels affixed to Watts may be conjoined in contemporary thinking, for example, “pop guru” (Oldmeadow, 2004, p. 259), “pop Zen guru” (Crocker, 2013, p. 1) and, stated more elaborately, “New Age guru famous for his popularizations of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy” (Zaretsky, 2015, p. 209). The combination of “popularizer” and “guru” tags on Alan Watts can imply or suggest a radical compromising of academic rigor. The *Dictionary of American Religious Biography* states: “There was a core of serious intention within his efforts to enhance greater understanding of Oriental religions, but Watts *succumbed to popularizing and became a guru* to various forms of counter-culture in the 1950s and 1960s” (Bowden, 1993, pp. 584–585, italics added). Versluis (2014) channels this stream of thought into the contemporary conversation by placing Watts within the category of “renegade religious figures” (p. 6) who ran afoul of traditional academic sensibilities. Watts instead became a “proto-guru,” that is to say, “one of the first celebrity spiritual advisors” (p. 87).

Given the “popular guru” motif running through discussions about Alan Watts during his lifetime and after his death, some scholars view his work as virtually antithetical to the academic enterprise. As Ponce (1987) suggested, Watts is “the religious philosopher whom everybody reads at night, but nobody seems to want to acknowledge during the day” (p. 241n6). In the daylight hours of academe his accessible and prolific discussions of abstruse subject matters are seen by certain lettered factions as lacking scholarly diligence and fine distinction. Adams (1958), for example, criticized Watts for abridging Buddhist tenets so as “to trifle with the simplicities of the half-educated” (p. 630). According to Braun (1961), “the more literate of the Zen aficionados admit that Watts is the Norman Vincent Peale of Zen” (p. 180). Prebish (1978) as well referred to Watts’ “somewhat amateurish attempt to explain Zen in the context of modern science and psychology” (p. 161). Others in the academy consider Watts’ literary accessibility as symptomatic of a superficial and pedestrian temperament: He was “not a deep or profound thinker” (Jackson, 1984, p. 99), “not a particularly original thinker” (Fuller, 2004, p. 190), and “his mystical experiences were quite mediocre and shallow” (Nordstrom & Pilgrim, 1980, p. 387).

In the years after his death, and due much to his popularity among wide-ranging audiences, Watts was mostly marginalized by those in higher education.

Nordstrom and Pilgrim (1980), for example, acknowledged as much in their scathing review of Watts' mystical philosophy:

Our critique of Watts' mysticism may well strike even the unsympathetic reader of his work as excessively harsh and perhaps even unbalanced. We are well aware of the fact that we have been severe with Watts in this review. At the same time, however, we are aware of the enormous contribution he has made in awakening people all over the world to the spiritual path, particularly in the area of Eastern philosophy and religion. We know as well that for many Watts is a holy man, who has been all but canonized in certain spiritual circles. It is precisely because of Watts' influence that we have been harsh. (p. 397)

Moreover, paradigmatic shifts and programmatic changes in various academic disciplines, including postcolonial studies and Buddhist studies, eventually rendered Watts' thinking as seriously suspect or largely irrelevant in the minds of many thinkers. Summarizing the ensuing reticence about Watts, D. L. Smith (2010) writes: "The current climate of academic opinion makes most readers reluctant to admit that they ever took him seriously" (p. 16). Additionally, Smith points out, "scholars still occasionally define themselves over and against him, using him as a cautionary example of just how wrong modern appropriations of Buddhism can be" (p. 35n5).

The discomfiture with Watts' academic marginalization remains palpable to some scholars in the present day. Philosophy professor Samir Chopra, for example, writes the following in his online blog dated September 24, 2014:

I have a confession to make: I enjoy reading Alan Watts' books. This simple statement of one of my reading pleasures, this revelation of one of my tastes in books and intellectual pursuits, shouldn't need to be a confession, a term that conjures up visions of sin and repentance and shame. But it is, a veritable coming out of the philosophical closet.

Chopra continues:

I am supposed to be "doing serious philosophy," reading and writing rigorous philosophy; the works of someone most commonly described as a "popularizer" do not appear to make the cut. Even worse, not only was Watts thus a panderer to the masses, but he wrote about supposedly dreamy, insubstantial, woolly headed, mystical philosophies. An analytical philosopher would be an idiot to read him. Keep it under wraps, son.

Adding to obfuscation of Watts' academic credibility is the personal recounting of his own educational story. Throughout his life Watts had rather tumultuous

relationships with formal institutions of learning. Readers familiar with Watts' (1973a) autobiography will know of (1) his traumatic 1922 exiling at the age of seven years from the blissful Rowan Tree Cottage to his first religious boarding school: "I felt myself given over to the care of maniacal bullies" (p. 105); (2) the botched scholarship exam in 1932 that blocked his chance of attending Trinity College at Oxford: "I failed to get a scholarship to Trinity because, as I was later told, I wrote the essay examination on Courage in the style of Nietzsche, having just read his *Zarathustra*. Some theologically occidental examiner must have been offended" (p. 118); (3) the advice of Marguerite Block, editor of the *Review of Religion*, who in 1940 counseled against Watts pursuing doctoral studies: "She said . . . it isn't worth it. I simply wouldn't waste your time with all that picayune, myopic-minded, long-drawn-out, mole-eyed academic ritual" (p. 175); (4) his abrupt resignations from Northwestern University and the Episcopal Church in 1950: "I chose the priesthood because it was the only formal role of Western society into which, at the time, I could even begin to fit. . . . But it was an ill-fitting suit of clothes" (p. 214); and (5) his 1957 resignation from the American Academy of Asian Studies where, as he later wrote, "I was as much out of place in the groves of academe as in the Church, . . . I was never, never going to be an organization man" (pp. 319–320).

Calling himself "an intellectual critic of the intellectual life" (p. 5), Watts (1973a) remained, in his maturity, intensely disparaging of the academic enterprise by viewing it as rather uninspiring, humorless, and too concerned with conventional rules and details. He observed: "You cannot maintain proper status in an American university without cultivated mediocrity. You must be academically 'sound,' which is to be preposterously and phenomenally dull" (p. 132). Further along in his autobiography, Watts referred to "the dubious objective of impressing the more dreary pandits of the American Oriental Society, the in-group of academic Orientalists who, as librarians, philological nitpickers, and scholarly drudges, dissolve all creative interest into acidulated pedantry" (p. 165). Though Jackson (1984) conjectured that Watts' "sensitivities were undoubtedly inflamed by . . . J. K. Shyrock's [1937] dismissal of *The Spirit of Zen* in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*" (p. 100n22; note also that Watts himself was a member of the Society), it may nevertheless seem unsurprising that Watts (1973a) dubbed himself a "philosophical entertainer" because, he wrote, "I have some difficulty in taking myself and my work *seriously*—or perhaps the right word is 'pompously'" (p. 252).

AIMS AND SCOPE: VALIDITY, RELIABILITY, NECESSITY

The preceding discussion calls into question the propriety of the present manuscript in three key ways. First is the question of validity: Does Alan Watts have a body of work that could reasonably and justifiably be called academic or scholarly? Watts' legacy includes a corpus that, while occasionally ignored or denied, contains learned writings published in scholastic journals and monographs, and

sophisticated presentations at professional conferences and symposia. Perhaps indicative of scholarly neglect of Watts, only three extant English-language books approach his work with academic rigor, including Keightley (1986), Branigan (1988), and Columbus and Rice (2012a). A fourth text, by Clark (1978), is a conservative defense of Christian theism vis-à-vis Watts' mystical philosophy. However, see Columbus (2015a) for a bibliographic resource of primarily academic articles and chapters on Watts' life and work plus a listing of Watts' major books, including posthumously published volumes.

Though sometimes forgotten, Watts' books were regularly and substantively reviewed in leading academic journals (see Appendix). Much of his work was recognized as ahead of its time and located at the forefront of emerging trends in Western intellectual and religious life (Columbus & Rice, 2012a). Heide (2013) notes likewise:

The perspicacity of Watts' thinking is jaw-dropping. He was the first person in the West to write seriously about Zen . . . the first to conduct a seminar at Esalen, and one of the first to propose linking Eastern philosophy with Western psychology. . . . [He anticipated] the now-prominent distinction between spiritual quest and religious affiliation. Ingesting psychedelics two years before Timothy Leary did, Watts became a principle spokesman for their spiritual value and even proposed that their use be protected constitutionally.

Watts wrote about the psychology of acceptance, one of the central issues in 21st-century cognitive behavioral psychotherapy as early as 1939. His *Nature, Man and Woman* (1958) was one of the earliest feminist critiques of Western religion, preceding most others by decades, as well as a forerunner to the modern environmental movement.

A conclusion to be drawn, in Heide's (2013) view, is that Watts was a more important and substantive thinker than is typically remembered, acknowledged, or appreciated by considerable numbers of academics. Psychologist Diane Gehart (2012) concurs with Heide. She considers Watts "an important but seldom recognized early contributor to the field of family therapy." Gehart writes:

In his landmark book, *Psychotherapy East and West*, Watts (1961) was the first to make a connection between the premises of systemic family therapy and Buddhism, both recognizing that the perceiver and the perceived cannot be considered separately: the perceiver is inherently connected to and influences the perceived and vice versa. Watts encouraged the practice of family therapy, in which the individual is addressed—not alone—but in the context of relationships, society, and as Watts encouraged, the cosmos. Furthermore, Watts saw in family therapy techniques parallel to Buddhist traditions of koans that aim to identify and dissolve life's double binds through paradox. (p. 22)

Richards (2003) makes a similar observation regarding psychedelic research:

When the man in the street, and even many mental health and religiously-trained professionals, hears the terms “entheogen” or “psychedelic drug,” the image that comes to mind seems to be a rebellious teenager in a tie-dyed T-shirt with rose-colored glasses about to do something crazy, or waiting in an emergency room for attention. Few know about, or recall, the profound value placed upon experiences catalyzed by these substances as reported by respected academicians in the past, such as . . . Alan Watts. (pp. 145–146)

The selection of materials for the present volume was accordingly informed by four overlapping criteria, including Watts’ (1) contributions to professional journals, monographs, and edited books, (2) papers presented at academic conferences and symposia, (3) works produced during periods of grant funding from the Franklin J. Matchette Foundation (1950) and Bollingen Foundation (1951–1953, 1962–1964), and (4) writings and lectures during his tenures at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary (1941–1944), Northwestern University (1944–1950), American Academy of Asian Studies (1951–1957), and Harvard University (1962–1964). The contents range from Watts’ first academic journal article, published in 1941, to essays written in 1973, his final year of life. The works include materials appearing in the *Review of Religion*; *Journal of Religious Thought*; *Philosophy East and West*; *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*; *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*; *New Politics*; *The Psychedelic Review*; *California Law Review*; *Existential Psychiatry*; *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*; *The Eastern Buddhist*; *Asian Study Monographs*; *Advent Papers*; and *Chicago Review*. Other offerings include conference and symposia presentations at Stanford University; University of California-San Francisco Medical Center; Central Washington State College; Society for the Arts, Religion, and Contemporary Culture; and Mount Saviour Monastery.

A second question, following from the first, implicates the issue of reliability: Does Watts’ thinking count as a dependable voice or relevant topic of conversation within contemporary academe? There is in the second decade of the twenty-first century an identifiable renaissance of interest in Alan Watts. His work is garnering renewed attention from emerging scholars and established thinkers in psychology, philosophy, religion, history, art and literary theory. This notice includes affirmative and critical considerations of Watts in relation to transcultural studies (Chen, 2013; Wang, 2009; Williams, 2014; Wolter, 2013); Beat culture (Coupe, 2010); counterculture (Bond, 2014; Greer, 2014; Harvey & Goff, 2005; Kripal, 2007; Lasar, 2000; Lumish, 2009; Oldmeadow, 2004; Sjogren, 2013); Christianity (Copan, 2009; Dart, 2004; Keightley, 2012; King, 2001; Masi, 2015; Peach, 2011); metaphysics (Justesen & Seidler, 2013); ethics and education (Patterson, 2007); religion and film (D. L. Smith, 2014); psychology of religion (Fuller, 2008; Hood, 2012; Woodhead, 2001); religious autobiography (Duggan, 2014; Gausted, 2001); embodied spirituality (Brannigan, 2012; Gordon,

2015; Levering, 2012; Ostdiek, 2015; Rice, 2012; Spallier, 2012); psychedelics (Cunningham, 2007; Dickins, 2012; Fadiman, 2011; Fuller, 2000; Krippner, 2012; Metzner, 2012; Shipley, 2013); modern Buddhism (Denning, 2005; Lopez, 2002; McMahan, 2008); Buddhism vis-à-vis art (Munroe, 2009; L. Smith, 2011); American culture (Coleman, 2001; Garrett-Farb, 2015; Greer, 2011; D. L. Smith, 2010); psychotherapy (Columbus, 2015a; McCowen, Reibel, & Micozzi, 2010, pp. 41–48; Puhakka, 2012), and postcolonial studies (Brown, 2009; Iwamura, 2011; Masatsugu, 2008); Daoism in the West (Clarke, 2000; Cohen, 2015; Huang, 2012; Miller, 2006); peace and conflict studies (Bennett, 2014, 2015); medical history (Pickering, 2011); political thought (Guerin, 2004); phenomenology and hermeneutics (Columbus, 2012); consciousness and human development (Atsina, 2002; Gordon, 2012; LaHood, 2008, 2010; Loechel, 2014; Messerly, 2015; Pope, 2012); organizational behavior (Anderson, 2012); pagan studies (Chase, 2011, 2015); and postmodernism (Hungerford, 2010, p. 44; Shipley, 2012).

The nascence of the twenty-first-century Wattsonian renaissance can be seen in such late twentieth-century works as Bartholomeusz (1998), Beidler (1994), Dunbar (1994), Helminiak, (1998, pp. 281–284), and Norrman (1999). While it is beyond the scope of this discussion to consider the above studies individually and in detail, they serve en masse to exemplify a growing body of scholarship acknowledging the current relevance—problematical and/or commendable—of Watts and his work. *In the Academy*, therefore, supplements contemporary and continuing scholarship on Alan Watts with 30 erudite offerings by Watts himself.

A third question begged from the preceding discussion concerns the issue of necessity: Is there a clear and present need for a comprehensive assemblage of Watts' academic works? *In the Academy* is organized with a view to the general arc of thinking by Watts due to prevailing disagreements concerning the developmental trajectory of his intellectual life. There are differing opinions concerning the degree of continuity versus change in comparison with his earlier and later works. One point of view is that Watts' later works were simply elaborative expressions of ideas, concepts, and categories acquired and developed early in his career (Ballantyne, 1989; Jackson, 1984; Snelling, 1987). "Surveying Watts' early writings," observed Jackson, "one is amazed at the degree to which he had already arrived at the basic ideas that he would elaborate on for the next thirty-five years. In many ways his books were to be so many variations on a limited number of themes" (p. 94). Yet Ruland (1975) described Watts' development as an "odyssey from Anglican theology, to meta-Catholic syncretism, and finally to his own version of an apophatic mysticism and Hindu pantheism" (p. 219).

Conversely, Nordstrom and Pilgrim (1980) treated the same corpus as a collection of disparate and inchoate materials hence critically implying an incomprehensible absence of trajectory: "In the works of Alan Watts one finds a bewildering array of self-ascribed epithets ranging all the way from guru, shaman, Christian theologian, and philosopher, to mystic, showman, sensualist, and

egotist” (p. 381). Some thinkers bypass the issue. Brannigan (1988), for example, emphasized a recurring theme—the transition of ego to Self—throughout the entirety Watts’ work. Suligoy (1975) totalized and reduced the entirety of Watts’ works down to a set of three propositions and various corollary statements. A contrasting observation made from a twenty-first-century vantage point is that Watts’ mature offerings were qualitatively and creatively different from his earlier output in terms of his approach to various topics, selection of content, methods of analysis, and modes of discussion (Columbus, 2012).

Assessments differ also concerning the apex of Watts’ thinking particularly with respect to when and how his philosophical vision was most vital and perceptive. Sadler (1974a, 1974b) points to the years from 1947 to 1958 when Watts was largely and readily associated with academic institutions. During this period, described by Sadler as Watts’ “vintage years,” he published six of his most influential books, including *Behold the Spirit: A Study in the Necessity of Mystical Religion* (1947) at the age of 32, *The Supreme Identity: An Essay on Oriental Metaphysic and the Christian Religion* (1950) at 35 years of age, *The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety* (1951b) at age 36, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (1953c) at age 38, *The Way of Zen* (1957) at age 42, and *Nature, Man and Woman* (1958b/1970b) at age 43. Sadler (1974a) notes: “Out of the very tension between institutional conventions and his free spirit came his best work” (p. 121).

Yet Jolicoeur (2000) expands the range of Watts’ “premiere periode” to include the years 1935 to 1958, and others point to Watts’ freelance period in later life. David L. Smith (2010), for example, identifies the span of years from 1958 to 1966 during which Watts published the already cited *Nature, Man and Woman* (1958b/1970b), as well as *This is IT, and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience* (1960), *Psychotherapy East and West* (1961), *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness* (1962a), *The Two Hands of God: The Myths of Polarity* (1963c), *Beyond Theology: The Art of Godmanship* (1964a), and *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are* (1966). The works produced by Watts during this phase of time, in Smith’s view, “constitute his finest and most characteristic achievements” (p. 21). A fourth assessment is offered by Oldmeadow (2004) who identifies four texts (Watts, 1953c, 1957, 1961, 1975b) interspersed among Watts’ total output reflecting “genuine scholarship . . . rigorous intellectual inquiry . . . [and] substance” (p. 262).

Finally, and as mentioned previously, Watts is commonly and popularly associated with Zen Buddhism. Yet of the 21 major books authored by Watts during his lifetime, including the posthumously published *Tao: The Watercourse Way* (1975b), only two texts—*The Spirit of Zen: A Way of Life, Work, and Art in the Far East* (1936) and *The Way of Zen* (1957)—concerned Buddhism per se. Most of his works focused on other topics or were much broader in scope, with various interdisciplinary emphases informing his particular subject matter. Thus in light of concerns about the arc, apex, and focus of Watts’ work, *In the*

Academy is structured thematically and ordered chronologically therein. The text provides a database for readers to gauge comparisons and contrasts of Watts' developmental trajectories reflected in and across a range of topics, including language and mysticism (Part 1), Buddhism and Zen (Part 2), Christianity (Part 3), comparative religion (Part 4), psychedelics (Part 5), and psychology and psychotherapy (Part 6).

THE WHOLE AND ITS PARTS

Taken in its entirety *In the Academy* offers a compelling survey of Watts' scholarly efforts in a variety of pedagogic disciplines. The word "entirety" is here used advisedly. The intention is not to totalize the Wattsian corpus nor to suggest a complete unification of his work. This book instead brings into focus a collection of essays that are frequently, though not always, marginalized due to Watts' ubiquitous reputation as a nonacademic writer. The relegation of his academic materials to the conversational periphery has been called "the taboo against knowing Alan Watts" (Columbus & Rice, 2012b, pp. 4–6). Often upstaging Watts' more learned offerings is a dualistic dialogue of idolatry and iconoclasm reverberating in and resounding through conversations about him. Here one set of voices articulates and recapitulates Watts' "popular guru" reputation while an iconoclastic and skeptical constituency undercuts the adulation by dismissal of him in summary fashion. *In the Academy* is thus an attempt to add tone and volume to some routinely muffled aspects of Alan Watts' life and work.

PART I: LANGUAGE AND MYSTICISM

The relation of language to mysticism is central to understanding Alan Watts' mystical philosophy, and so the topic serves as a useful point of departure toward subsequent sections of the text in hand. Moreover, the role of language in structuring, expressing, and understanding first-person mystical experience is an ongoing debate within psychology, philosophy, religion and other academic specialties (Dible, 2010; Hood, 2012; Tyson, 2013). Two components of the debate are relevant here. First is the *problem of religious language*, that is to say, the extent to which human linguistic forms limit, afford, or nullify veridical claims about God and mystical transcendence (Reed, 2007; White, 2010). Second is the *problem of pure consciousness*, in other words, the extent to which mystical experiences are universally recognized (Forman, 1990, 1998, 1999) or structured by culturally determined modes of communication (Katz, 1978, 1983, 1992). Though a full accounting of Watts' position on language, consciousness, and mysticism is beyond the scope of the present discussion—see Brannigan (1977, 1988), Recoulley (1986), and Keightley (1986) for extended coverage—it may be said here that Watts employed apophatic and cataphatic languages toward expressing and talking about mystical experience (Keightley, 2012). Watts, fur-

thermore, transitioned from a universal *philosophia perennis* early in his career (e.g., Watts, 1947, 1953c) to hermeneutical analyses of contextual horizons in the 1960s and beyond (e.g., Watts, 1966, 1975b; see Columbus, 2012).

The leadoff essay is a heretofore unpublished and unnamed piece written during Watts' 1950 sabbatical funded by the Franklin J. Matchette Foundation. Here it is assigned the title "On the Meaning and Relation of Absolute and Relative." Watts suggests that knowledge of what may be called "God" or "ultimate Reality" is discovered in the full embrace of finitude rather than struggling to flee the relative and finite world. Only through the most thorough acceptance of limitations and ignorance can one encounter the "mystery of the universe." Documents contained in the Franklin J. Matchette archive at the Wisconsin Historical Society indicate the piece was a work-for-hire modeled on Matchette's (1949) posthumously published *Outlines of a Metaphysics*. Early on, however, Watts radically departed from Matchette's vision, while adding supplementary pedagogic illustrations. In time, the project was terminated in favor of grant funding for *The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety* (Watts, 1951).

"The Negative Way" was published during Watts' first year at the American Academy of Asian Studies. It is a brief tutorial on the meaning of "negation" in the metaphysics of Vedanta and Buddhism vis-à-vis positive affirmations of God in Christianity. The article appeared in the journal of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, *Vedanta and the West* (Watts, 1951a). The journal described Watts' essay as follows:

Mr. Watts feels that a meeting of eastern and western religious viewpoints must rest upon a better understanding of their respective terminologies. He has attempted to help build such an understanding with his essay explaining the oriental custom of seeking to portray the infinite through negation. (In This Issue, 1951, n.p.)

"The Language of Metaphysical Experience: The Sense of Non-Sense" is a critical appraisal of logical philosophy's rejection of metaphysics as meaningless tautology. The essay was first presented at the 13th Conference on Science, Philosophy, and Religion held at Columbia University in 1952. (Watts also served as a discussant at the meeting. See Bryson, Finkelstein, Maciver, & Mckee, 1954.) Records of the Conference, established in 1940 and continuing until 1968, are housed at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. An archive note reads:

The conference constituted a response to the rise of totalitarianism in Europe. Its founding members [including Paul Tillich, Harold D. Lasswell, Franz Boas, Enrico Fermi, and Mortimer J. Adler] and their successors sought to create a framework for the preservation of democracy and intellectual freedom through the collaboration of

scholars from a wide variety of disciplines in the sciences and humanities. Conference members, many of whom blamed the development of “value-free” scholarship for the rise of European fascism, additionally hoped to synthesize traditional values and academic scholarship. (Historical Note, n.d.)

Watts’ essay was subsequently published in 1953(b) by the *Journal of Religious Thought*.

“On Philosophical Synthesis” was published in *Philosophy East and West* (Watts, 1953d) as part of an ongoing series of reflections by eminent thinkers of the day (e.g., John Dewey, William Ernest Hocking, George Santayana, and D. T. Suzuki) concerning the possibility and viability of intercultural philosophy. As Chatterjee noted in 1960:

The writers of these articles have not only expressed different but conflicting views. Some of them have held high hopes for a synthesis, or, at least for the significance of a synthesis between the philosophies of East and West. Others have contended that a synthesis between the two is impossible, and undesirable, too. (p. 99)

Watts’ essay concerns problems of commensurability between Western philosophies of logic, and Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism, suggesting the former cannot understand the latter without admitting “that philosophy is more than logic, more than verbalization, to the point where philosophy can include the transformation of the very processes of the mind.”

Concluding Part 1 is “Philosophy Beyond Words.” Here Watts registers critical reflections on philosophy as rationalism, and asserts that philosophers can renew their “basic wondering” through embodied engagement and “sensuous apprehension” of existence. The essay was written circa 1972 and published posthumously (Watts, 1975a) in *The Owl of Minerva: Philosophers on Philosophy*, a text surveying perspectives of 18 prominent philosophers, including Karl Popper, Gabriel Marcel, Brand Blanchard, W. V. Quine, A. J. Ayer, and Herbert Marcuse, concerning the nature and function of contemporary philosophy. Bon-tempo and Odell (1975) observe that Watts’ slant in this essay is less historical or pragmatic than it is reflective of an “activity approach to philosophy” as he objects to emphases placed by many academics on “philosophy as an intellectual activity” (p. 20).

PART 2: BUDDHISM AND ZEN

Alan Watts, along with D. T. Suzuki, is considered by historians of religion as a prime facilitator of Zen Buddhism for American culture in the twentieth century (Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck, 2009, p. 1048; Seager, 2013; Smith, 2010).

Watts began his studies of Zen in 1930 at the age of 15 while serving under the tutorage of a seminal figure of British and European Buddhism, Christmas (Toby) Humphreys (1901–1983). Humphreys established the Buddhist Lodge in 1924 as an auxiliary to the London office of the Theosophical Society, an esoteric religious group founded by Madame H. P. Blavatsky and Henry Steele Olcott in 1875. Humphreys later left the Theosophical Society, renamed the Lodge as the Buddhist Society, and remained president of the organization until his death. Guy (2000) notes that Humphreys, author of 15 books on Buddhism:

made an important early attempt to take the voluminous history of Buddhist teachings and put them in an accessible and coherent form. There may be better sources of this information today, but there weren't then, and Humphreys is an important transitional figure [in the movement of Buddhism from Asia to Europe]. (n.p.)

Under Humphreys' mentorship, Watts edited the Lodge's journal, *Buddhism in England* (now *The Middle Way*), from 1936 to 1938, and wrote *The Spirit of Zen* (1936). Watts (1973a) later acknowledged: "Even though I now remonstrate, mildly, against some of Toby's interpretations of Buddhism, I shall love him always as the man who really set my imagination going and put me on my whole way of life" (p. 88).

After settling in New York City in 1938, Watts came under the sway of two formative figures in American Buddhism, Sokei-an Sasaki and Ruth Fuller (Everett) Sasaki, about whom he (1973a) wrote: "Much of what I learned from Sokei-an and Ruth has so become part of me that I cannot now sort it out" (p. 168). Sokei-an Sasaki (1882–1945) was a Zen master in the Rinzai lineage of Shokaku Shaku and Soyen Shaku. He is recognized as the first Japanese Zen teacher to reside permanently in the United States. Sokei-an founded the Buddhist Society of America (now the First Zen Institute of America) in New York City in 1930 where he offered private face-to-face teaching, public talks, and translated important Buddhist texts into English, including the *Record of Rinzai*, *The Platform Sutra*, and the *Mumonkon* made available to Watts for his early writings on Zen. Milstead (2014) described Sokei-an as "a vibrantly wise and funny man who was eager to take on the challenges of bringing Buddha's ancient teachings on no-self, impermanence, and emptiness to the materialistic, noisy, self-centered people of the United States" (p. 213). Watts (1973a) experienced Sokei-an as a kindred spirit: "I felt that he was on the same team as I; that he bridged the spiritual and the earthy, and that he was as humorously earthy as he was spiritually awakened" (p. 168).

Ruth Fuller (Everett) Sasaki (1892–1967) was second wife of Sokei-an Sasaki, mother of Watts' first wife (Eleanor Everett), and primary patron of the First Zen Institute. Ruth studied briefly with D. T. Suzuki in 1930 and with Nanshinken Roshi at Kyoto's Nanzenji monastery in 1932. She met Sokei-an in

1933, began formal Zen studies with him in 1938, and they married in 1944. Ruth moved to Japan in 1949 for further Zen training, becoming in 1958 the first Westerner (and only woman) to be a priest of a Rinzai Zen Buddhist temple. Founder of the First Zen Institute of America in Japan, she was instrumental in facilitating translations of important Buddhist texts into English (Stirling, 2006). Her book, *Zen Dust*, coauthored with Isshu Miura, “remains the single-most important English-language introduction to koan study in the Japanese manner” (Ford, 2006, p. 70).

Watts published two major books on Zen Buddhism during his lifetime: *The Spirit of Zen* (1936) and *The Way of Zen* (1957). The former text, though often criticized as simply derivative of D. T. Suzuki’s work, was according to Humphreys (1994) “the first major attempt by a Westerner to write on the subject” (p. 15). The latter text was an important milestone for the field of Buddhist Studies in that Watts challenged D. T. Suzuki’s ahistorical narratives by locating Zen within a temporal-developmental trajectory (Hurvitz, 1958; McCarthy, 1957). Praised by Soto Zen teacher, Shunryu Suzuki, as “a great Bodhisattva” (Chadwick, 1999, p. 381), Watts’ writings and lectures framed the American conversation about Zen from the 1950s into the 1970s (Smith, 2010; Swearer, 1973). Yet the prominent status of Watts within twentieth-century American Buddhism is not without ambiguity and skepticism. Watts, for example, was criticized for not gaining firsthand experiences of Buddhism in Asia until 1961, *after* writing his major texts on Zen (Ballantyne, 1989; see Watts, 1973a, pp. 417–453, for a narrative account of his journeys to Japan). Also, the late Philip Kapleau (1912–2004), a teacher in the Sanbo Kyodan tradition of Zen, and Louis Nordstrom who continues teaching in the White Plum lineage of Hakuyu Taizan Maezumi, charged Watts with misinterpreting certain historical aspects of Zen Buddhism, and misjudging the value of *zazen* (Kapleau, 1966, pp. 21–22, 83–84; Nordstrom & Pilgrim, 1980). However, see Watts (1975b, p. 89n15) for a brief reply to Kapleau (1966), and see Columbus (1985) for a reply to Nordstrom and Pilgrim (1980).

In the twenty-first century, four perspectives on Watts in relation to Buddhism are noticeable. One critical view is that Watts’ writings are informed by idealized and stereotyped constructions of “the East” which compromise their ecological validity (Iwamura, 2011). Second is the view that Watts arrogated Buddhism and constructed a philosophical commodity for consumption by an American constituency alienated from Cold War politics (Matsatsugu, 2008). Third is that Watts was signaling an Occidentalism, that is to say, he converted extant Japanese appraisals of American rationalism and materialism into therapeutic critiques of Cold War culture in America (Brown, 2009). Finally, Watts is seen as proffering a “modern Buddhism” that is divergent from tradition, but congruent with the spiritual sensibilities of contemporary Western life (Lopez, 2002; McMahan, 2008). (A fifth perspective relating Buddhist practice to a psychedelic ethos is identified in Part 5.)

The six writings by Alan Watts here compiled under the rubric of Buddhism and Zen were published between 1941 and 1963. The initial essay is “The Problem of Faith and Works in Buddhism.” This 1941 article, written for Columbia University’s *Review of Religion*, was the first-ever academic journal article by Watts. The essay is an exploration of self-reliance (*jiriki*) and spiritual conviction (*tariki*) in their relationship to Enlightenment in Mahayana Buddhism. As Watts (1973a) recounted in his autobiography, the essay had “momentous consequences” as it presaged his perennialist approach to Christianity:

I saw that . . . Zen, Jodo Shinshu, and Christianity were all approaching the same point by different routes. It might thus be possible to develop a deeper and more intelligible form of Christianity which would, however, have to bypass that religion’s . . . claims [to exclusivity]. (p. 177)

The second writing, dedicated to Ruth Fuller Sasaki and simply titled “Zen,” is an introductory tutorial on (1) the historical background of Zen in Indian and Chinese religion, (2) the influence of Daoism on Buddhism, (3) the role of *mondo*, *zazen*, and *koans* in Zen practice, and (4) the cultural effects of Zen in Japan. The essay was an invited lecture to the Department of Religion at Beloit College in 1945, and subsequently revised and expanded in 1948 as a corrective update for *The Spirit of Zen* (1936). In a foreword to the essay, Watts (1948) noted his indebtedness to D. T. Suzuki and Sokei-an Sasaki for their English translations of Zen texts, and to Ruth Fuller Sasaki who provided and discussed with Watts various transcriptions of lectures by Sokei-an.

“The Way of Liberation in Zen Buddhism” was the first contribution to the short-lived *Asian Study Monographs* series, published by the American Academy of Asian Studies (AAAS) in 1955. Located at the intersection of Buddhism and psychology, the essay is an elucidation of how Zen practitioners resolve conflictual paradox into unity (nonduality). A preliminary to both *The Way of Zen* and *Psychotherapy East and West*, Watts wrote the essay in light of his consultations on Gregory Bateson’s double-bind communication research (see Pickering, 2011), publishing it one year *before* Bateson, Jackson, Haley, and Weakland (1956) published their classic essay, “Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia.” Watts’ monograph is yet another example in which he was one step ahead of the cutting-edge thinkers of his era. A review in *Manas* described the essay as “the kind of thinking that may result when psychological problems and questions are approached with philosophical conviction and commitment” (Study of the Mind, 1955).

Next is the famous 1958(a) *Chicago Review* essay on “Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen,” based on a series of lectures given by Watts at the University of Chicago in 1957. The article is a critical appraisal of problematic appropriations of Zen Buddhism in Judeo-Christian culture, and thus anticipates a genre of postmodern scholarship that deconstructs European and North American

approaches to Asian cultures and histories toward uncovering hidden assumptions and biases. Due to Mahoney's (1958) erroneous impression that Watts sided with the "squares," the essay was subsequently twice revised, first as a tract for Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books, then as chapter in *This is It, and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience* (Watts, 1960).

"Zen and Politics" is a 1962(c) commentary on political implications of Buddhist ethics. Published in *New Politics: A Journal of Socialist Thought*, this brief essay is a rebuttal to Braun's (1961) "The Politics of Zen." Braun argued that Zen Buddhism, including Watts' (1958, 1960) work, is a "mysticism that denies the reality of moral choice" and therefore supports problematic states of affairs "with dogmatic certainty" (p. 188), including, for example, World War II atrocities. Watts rejoins that Braun's is a fallacious argument that confuses categorically the moral ends of Christianity with the practice of Zen (see also, Braun's 1962 response). The debate foreshadows later controversies concerning the role of Zen in Japan during World War II. See, for example, Victoria (2003, 2006) and the reply by Sato (2008).

The final essay on Buddhism and Zen is Watts' 1963(b) "Prefatory Essay" written for a reissue of D. T. Suzuki's *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*. Suzuki, as is well-known, was a formative influence on Watts' early thinking about Zen. See, for example, Watts' (1967) reminiscence in the wake of Suzuki's death (see also, Watts' brief 1954 review of Suzuki's works). In the present essay, Watts identifies and elaborates consistencies between Mahayana Buddhism and certain strains of thought in twentieth-century science and philosophy. Beyond any consistencies, however, Watts suggests the main contribution of Mahayana Buddhism to Western culture is that, with committed Buddhist practice, one realizes "the compassion of one who knows that, in some way, all suffering is his own suffering, and all 'sentient beings' the disguises of his own inmost nature."

PART 3: CHRISTIANITY

Alan Watts' religious discernment and spiritual formation within the Church of England and the wider Anglican Communion are often overshadowed by his prevalent association with Zen Buddhism. Nurtured in a devout Anglo-Catholic family and educated at the kindergarten school of Saint Nicholas Church in Chislehurst (1921–1922), Saint Hugh's School in Bickley (1922–1928), and King's School at Canterbury (1928–1932), Watts "had been immersed in the Anglican tradition from birth until his late teens to a degree that is hardly imaginable today" (Keightley, 2012, p. 44; see Watts, 1973a, pp. 53–121, for autobiographical reflections on his Anglican upbringing). After relocating to New York City, Watts accepted spiritual direction from Fr. Grieg Taber at the Episcopal Church of Saint Mary the Virgin before enrolling at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois in 1941. Sans an undergraduate degree, Watts was admitted to the Seminary as a "special student" in the graduate school,

on the strength of his previous reading, research, and writing (e.g., Watts, 1936, 1937, 1940). After one year of class attendance, he spent his remaining two years of seminary engaging tutorials and independent study where, Watts (1973a) recounts, he:

combed through Patristics, reading Clement and Origen, the remains of the Gnostic writings, Saint Athanasius, Saint Irenaeus, Saint Gregory Nazianzus, Saint John of Damascus, and the apocryphal literature excluded from the New Testament. Then I went heavily into Russian theology—Solovyev, Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and the Hesychasts—and thereafter became fascinated with the architectural magnificence of Saint Thomas Aquinas and his modern interpreters, Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson.

There followed mystical and ascetic theology: almost all the classics from Saint Dionysius to Leon Bloy, as well as the historians and commentators, Bremond, Underhill, von Hugel. Inge, Dom Cuthbert Butler, Dom John Chapman, and Garrigou-Lagrange. (pp. 206–207)

Watts received the Sacrament of Holy Orders on the Feast of the Ascension, May 18, 1944, and subsequently obtained a master's degree in sacred theology from Seabury-Western in 1948. After his 1944 ordination and until his resignation from the Church in 1950, Watts served Bishop Wallace Conklin of Chicago as examining chaplain for candidates seeking Holy Orders, while also stationed as priest, theologian, and spiritual counselor at Canterbury House, located on the grounds of Northwestern University. Watts rapidly became a rising star on the Northwestern University campus. According to Ellwood (1997):

Canterbury House was the scene of nonstop bull sessions and unforgettable lectures in which Watts, as always, managed to make his listeners feel they were being let in on some wonderful cosmic secret. His Sunday liturgical enactments had the color of great theater and the mood of playful dance more than of courtly rite. (p. 169)

The signature accomplishments by Watts as priest and theologian are the publications of *Behold the Spirit* (1947) and *The Supreme Identity* (1950). The former text was lauded by reviewers for exposing neglect of Christian mysticism in mid-twentieth-century theological study and practice of Anglo-Catholicism and Protestantism (Akhilananda, 1948; Gowen, 1949; Steere, 1949). The latter text, considered by the *Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers* as “probably his most substantial work of scholarship and sustained, serious philosophical discourse” (Ellwood, 2005, p. 2539), was praised for its contributions to constructive dialogue between Christian and non-Christian religions (Keene, 1952; Morris, 1951; Waterhouse, 1953).

Part 3 of *In the Academy* contains four writings on Christianity published in the mid-1940s during Watts' tenure as an Episcopal priest. They were written prior to the publication of *Behold the Spirit* (1947) and are preliminary to that text as each essay concerns an aspect of mystical union between God and humanity. The initial offering is Watts' 1944 translation of "*Theologia Mystica*, being the treatise of Saint Dionysius pseudo-Areopagite on Mystical Theology, together with the first and fifth Epistles." "With few exceptions," Watts (1944) noted in a Foreword, the translation "follows the text given in Migne's *Patrologiae Graecae*, vol. 3. This text has been compared with the earliest version, by John Scotus Erigena, in Migne's *Patrologiae Latinae*, vol. 122." Published as a monograph by Holy Cross Press, Watts begins with an introductory tutorial on the apophatic approach to mysticism and mystical experience.

In "The Case for God," Watts establishes the premise that God is revealed in the world through evidence of the senses and reasoned argument. He suggests "it is not presumptuous to attempt to prove the existence of God by reason. It is, on the contrary, the duty of reason and the chief purpose for which this faculty is given us." Watts offers details of the five proofs of God as described by St. Thomas in *Summa Theologica*, and considers what the evidence for God suggests about God's nature. Three particularly significant facets of divine nature deduced from reason via human experience are identified: God is life, God is being, and God is love. The essay was published by Holy Cross Press in the *Roodcroft Papers* series in 1946(a).

Next is "The Meaning of Priesthood" in light of Anglo-Catholicism. The essay was published in 1946(c) in *Advent Papers*, a monograph series inaugurated in 1943 by Boston's Church of the Advent, with an editorial board including, most notably, philosopher John D. Wild, psychologist Gordon W. Allport, and theologians John B. Coburn and Adelaide T. Case. An advertisement in *The Living Church* describes the series as "designed to bring to our people the richness and depth of traditional Catholic Christianity as it has been preserved in our free and democratic Anglican Catholicism." Watts, the ad continues, "writes comprehensively though compactly of the priestly function—it's setting in the church's history and teaching, its work, its opportunities and privileges, and also its problems" (The Advent Papers, 1946, p. 5).

The final writing on Christianity is "The Christian Doctrine of Marriage." Watts suggests that "Holy Matrimony is the highest earthly analogy of that creative union of God and man, Christ and Church, which is the end and fulfillment of human life." First differentiating Agape love from erotic love, Watts then follows-up with practical applications of Agape love to three realms of marriage: body, mind, and spirit. The monograph was published in 1946(b) as a *Canterbury Club Tract* by the Episcopal Church at the University of Colorado-Boulder. Note that Watts, as an Anglican priest in 1946, was referring in this piece to marriages between men and women. See Watts (1979) for his later perspective on gay and lesbian relationships.

PART 4: COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Alan Watts was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Divinity from the University of Vermont in 1958 for “*scholarly contributions marking him as one of our country’s outstanding authorities on comparative religion*” (Dykhuizen & Borgmann, 1958, p. 1, italics added). Indeed, beyond his studies of Buddhism and Christianity per se, “comparative religion” may best echo the overarching tenor of Watts’ writings and lectures. His early comparative thinking was informed by a *philosophia perennis* with a priori assumptions that religion and spirituality transcend exoteric contingencies of culture and context toward esoteric and universal realms of mystical experience (Watts, 1947, 1950, 1951b, 1953c). As Watts (1973) explained in his autobiography, by adopting the approach of perennial philosophy “one could go behind the screen of literal dogma to the inner meaning of symbols, to the level at which Eckhart and Shankara, Saint Teresa and Ramakrishna, Saint Dionysius and Nagarjuna are talking the same language” (p. 180).

Watts’ early *philosophia perennis* was, no doubt, influenced in part by Christmas Humphrey’s theosophical leanings (Sutcliffe, 2007, p. 61) and, perhaps most notably, by the tutorage from 1934 to 1936 of Serbian philosopher Dimitrije Mitrinovic (1887–1953). A formative thinker in the pre–World War I Young Bosnia movement and subsequent New Europe Group and New Britain Movement (Rigby, 2006), Mitrinovic integrated mystical metaphysics and transformative political-social philosophy (Rutherford, 1987). Watts (1973a) especially recounts a discourse by Mitrinovic “in which he explained the complementation of the principle of unity and the principle of differentiation in the universe. . . . He showed me that acute differences positively manifest unity, and that you cannot have the one without the other” (p. 126). There is, in other words, “the mutual interdependence of all things and events (p. 126).

In the 1960s Watts transitioned away from perennial philosophy as a point of departure for comparative religion. Spurring the transition was a rising tide of relativistic thinking in academic discourse, including postmodernism and social constructionism, which challenged the veracity of absolutistic and universalistic epistemological claims. In this way of thinking, people are embedded in their particular situations—culture, history, gender, language, education, spiritual practice—which makes it difficult for them to entirely comprehend differing religious systems and texts without the distorting effects of bias and prejudice. Seeking to overcome the limited vision of contextualized knowledge, Watts (1963c, 1964a, 1966, 1975b) turned toward hermeneutical analyses exploring interconnections and disjunctions between localized narratives. Through this kind of interpretive study, one arrives at an expanded awareness and comprehension of perspectives via the dialectical rotation of differing vantage points.

Four texts are excellent examples of Watts’ hermeneutical turn in the 1960s and beyond. First is *Psychotherapy East and West* (Watts, 1961/1969) in which Watts engaged transcultural comparisons between (1) psychotherapy and

(2) Buddhism, Daoism, and Hinduism toward uncovering the “philosophical unconscious” of Western therapeutic systems (Columbus, 2015b). In *Beyond Theology* (1964) and *The Book* (1966), Watts employed hermeneutical rules of analysis to explore horizons of self and cosmos (Columbus, 2012). Watts’ final book, *Tao: The Watercourse Way* (1975), is an exploration of historical, cultural, and personal horizons vis-à-vis contemplative Daoism. Watts’ analysis is a historical hermeneutic in that he seeks to understand what the “far-off echoes” of fifth- and fourth-century B.C. Daoism mean to the contemporary state of affairs. The analysis is a cultural hermeneutic in that he seeks to “interpret and clarify the principles of *Lao-tzu*, *Chuang-tzu*, and *Lieh-tzu*” in relation to Euro-American thinking. The text also is a personal hermeneutic because, writes Watts, “I am . . . interested in how these ancient writings reverberate on the harp of my own brain, which has, of course, been tuned to the scales of Western culture” (p. xvi). Note, however, that Watts was roundly criticized by perennial philosophers for his transition to hermeneutics. Vis-à-vis *Beyond Theology*, for example, Perry (1972), rejoined:

Watts . . . sets forth the pattern of this transition in *Beyond Theology* . . . , a crazy pastiche of esoteric insights and false deductions, yet typically symptomatic of the ills to which so much of the pseudo-spiritual flesh of our times is heir. (p. 176)

The quartet of essays on comparative religion contained in Part 4 were initially presented at various symposia in the 1960s during Watts’ hermeneutic phase, and subsequently published in an assortment of academic venues. “Worship in Sacrament and Silence” was offered in 1964 at the third Symposium on Human Values, an annual conference hosted by Central Washington State College. The 1964 symposium theme centered on the meaning of worship. Juxtaposing Christian worship with Hindu epistemology, Watts explored various themes and variations on the sacred character of communal liturgy. The presentation was published (Watts, 1971b) in the symposia proceedings, *A College Looks at American Values, Vol. 1*, edited by E. H. Odell.

In “Western Mythology: Its Dissolution and Transformation,” Watts explores some experiential implications of paradigmatic transitions away from patriarchal-theistic myths of Judeo-Christianity toward Newtonian-mechanistic myths of natural science, and finally to quantum physics. The piece was presented at a 1968 symposium on “Myth and Dream” sponsored by the Society for the Arts, Religion, and Contemporary Culture, “a multi-disciplinary professional society which provides the occasion and the resources for bringing together persons from diverse professional backgrounds to consider basic issues of human conflict and community” (Society, 1970, p. 6). The essay was published (Watts, 1970b) in the symposium proceedings, edited by Joseph Campbell, titled *Myths, Dreams, and Religion*.