

The pandeism of Alan Watts

Alan Watts was a British Anglican clergyman who later gave up his priesthood and became a popular spiritual teacher and writer. He never described himself as a pantheist or pandeist, but the ideas expressed in his writings indicate that he was close to being a pandeist. In one of his books he relates this parable, attempting to explain to a child what God is:

“God also likes to play hide-and-seek, but because there is nothing outside God, he has no one but himself to play with. But he gets over this difficulty by pretending that he is not himself. This is his way of hiding from himself. He pretends that he is you and I and all the people in the world, all the animals, all the plants, all the rocks, and all the stars. In this way he has strange and wonderful adventures, some of which are terrible and frightening. But these are just like bad dreams, for when he wakes up they will disappear. “Now when God plays hide and pretends that he is you and I, he does it so well that it takes him a long time to remember where and how he hid himself. But that’s the whole fun of it—just what he wanted to do. He doesn’t want to find himself too quickly, for that would spoil the game. That is why it is so difficult for you and me to find out that we are God in disguise, pretending not to be himself. But when the game has gone on long enough, all of us will wake up, stop pretending, and remember that we are all one single Self—the God who is all that there is and who lives for ever and ever. “Of course, you must remember that God isn’t shaped like a person. People have skins and there is always something outside our skins. If there weren’t, we wouldn’t know the difference between what is inside and outside our bodies. But God has no skin and no shape because there isn’t any outside to him. The inside and the outside of God are the same. And though I have been talking about God as ‘he’ and not ‘she,’ God isn’t a man or a woman. I didn’t say ‘it’ because we usually say ‘it’ for

things that aren't alive. "God is the Self of the world, but you can't see God for the same reason that, without a mirror, you can't see your own eyes, and you certainly can't bite your own teeth or look inside your head. Your self is that cleverly hidden because it is God hiding. "You may ask why God sometimes hides in the form of horrible people, or pretends to be people who suffer great disease and pain. Remember, first, that he isn't really doing this to anyone but himself. Remember, too, that in almost all the stories you enjoy there have to be bad people as well as good people, for the thrill of the tale is to find out how the good people will get the better of the bad. It's the same as when we play cards. At the beginning of the game we shuffle them all into a mess, which is like the bad things in the world, but the point of the game is to put the mess into good order, and the one who does it best is the winner. Then we shuffle the cards once more and play again, and so it goes with the world." (From *The Book on the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are* by Alan W. Watts).

Alan Keightley wrote of Alan Watts:

"Clark (1978) considered the entirety of Watts' theological works to be situated within a "monistic pantheism "."

"... by 1950, he was at odds with the church and the orthodox interpretation of its doctrines. Conservative Christian thinkers were claiming that his use of the perennial philosophy implied syncretism and pantheism."

<https://philpapers.org/rec/KEIAWT>

Miriam Levering wrote: "Alan Watts contributed very largely to the conversion of Western religion from sex-negative or sex-restrictive/regulative to sex-positive. Indeed, *Nature, Man and Woman* was first published in 1958

Most of his life he tried to conduct sex within marriage, but he welcomed the idea that socially unregulated sex was a form of sharing of something beautiful and good, and not morally reprehensible because no one is harmed. *Nature, Man and Woman*

is a book that, like Watts' other books in the 1950s, is written for an audience of educated, particularly theologically educated, readers who know and can appreciate a treatment of and critique of the history of Western theology and culture. Such readers were open to the idea that sex in Western culture was entirely too regulated, too much made a matter of morality, and conducted with too much hypocrisy. Watts introduced to a large audience the idea that sex could be done as a spiritual practice through which the sacred, profound unitive nature of reality could be experienced, and still be orgasmic and satisfying to both partners."

https://www.academia.edu/7605142/Levering_Alan_Watts_on_Nature_Gender_and_Sexuality