Alan Watts: The Whole Thing Is Made Up

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video presentation by ***T&H – Inspiration & Motivation***
featuring a segment of an early radio talk by ***Alan Watts***
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A powerful and profound speech on life by Alan Watts.

Original Audio sourced from: "Alan Watts – Extended Seminars – Early Radio Talks – G. K. Chesterton "Things are as they are. Looking out into it the universe at night, we make no comparisons between right and wrong stars, nor between well and badly arranged constellations." – Alan Watts. (1915 – 1973)

Transcript prepared by Truth Comes to Light:

When you fully realize that to be surprised at everything is high wisdom, you get a new point of view towards the world, which gives you almost what could be called a child's vision of life.

When Jesus said: *"Unless you would be converted and become as a child, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven."* – to a child, the world is entirely new, and therefore all of it is extraordinary. And I hope most of you can remember how you saw things when you were about two years old, as the whole world being quite weird.

When you get used to things, you see a tree, and you say, "Oh,

well, that's a tree." We're used to trees. We know what trees are.

But if you can go back to your childhood, remember how it was when you first looked at the tree, and you saw the earth itself reaching up into the sky, extending itself in many branches and waving all these little flags at heaven.

Or when you looked at the sun as a child, you stared at the sun. It was marvelous. And the sun turned blue. And there was a feeling about everything of being essentially magical.

So there is a most extraordinary passage which occurs in one of the rarer books of [G.K.] Chesterton, called "The Colored Lands", where he makes this extraordinary remark. *"It is one thing to describe an interview with a gorgon or a griffin, a creature who does not exist. It is another thing to discover that the rhinoceros does exist, and then take pleasure in the fact that he looks as if he doesn't."*

And this is the key to this man's wisdom, that he could see all kinds of everyday things and events as if they were completely improbable and magical. And that he could describe the world as an extremely improbable object. This great globe of rock floating in space around a vast fire, covered with green hair, that ordinary people called grass, and containing all the extraordinarily odd objects on it.

And when he thought about this, he realized two things that are not ordinarily realized by religious people. He realized that the world created by God is a form of nonsense. And that one of the most important features of the divine mind is humor.

In one of his essays he says so often, *"When I have written the word cosmic, the printer makes a misprint and prints it comic."* But he said there is a certain unconscious wisdom in that. The cosmic is the comic.

Dante wrote the Divine Comedy, an account of earth, heaven, purgatory and hell. The Divine Comedy.

One finds, you see, that in ordinary people's religious attitudes there is a lack of both these things of nonsense and of humor. And therefore we have associated the word solemn, as when we celebrate in the Catholic Church, solemn high mass. Solemn. Solemn means, serious.

And one of the great things, one of the fundamental insights that is underlying all Chesterton's work, is that the attitude of heaven is not serious.

There's a famous passage in his book "Orthodoxy", where he says,

"Things like stones are subject to gravity. They are heavy, they are grave, they are serious. But in all things spiritual there is lightness and, therefore, a kind of frivolity. The angels fly because they take themselves lightly. And if that must be true of the angels, how much more true of the Lord of the angels?"

See, our trouble is, where we really get into difficulty in life, is that we expect everything to make sense. And then we get disappointed.

We expect, for example, that time is going to solve our problems. That is going to come a day in the future, when we will be finally satisfied. And so things make sense, we say of something, "It is sensible. It is satisfactory. It is good." Because we feel it has a future. It's going to get somewhere. And we're going to arrive.

Our whole education is programmed with the idea that there is a good time coming. When we are going to arrive, we're going to be there.

When you're a child, you see, you're not here yet. You're

treated as a merely probationary human being.

And they get you involved in the system where you go up step by step through the various grades. When you get out of college, you go up step by step through the various grades of business, or your profession or whatever it is, always with the thought that the thing is ahead of you.

See? It's going to make sense. And perhaps the universe doesn't work that way at all.

Maybe instead of that, this world is like music, where the goal of music is certainly not in the future.

You don't play a symphony in order to reach the end of the symphony, because then the best orchestra would be the one that played the fastest.

You don't dance in order to arrive at a particular place on the floor.

So Chesterton's view of the world is an essentially musical view, a dancing view of the world, in which the object of the creation is not some far-off divine event, which is the goal, but the object of the creation is the kind of musicality of it, the very nonsense of it, as it unfolds.

Now, in ordinary way of talking in the West, we would say that's terrible. Something that has no meaning is awful. "A meaningless life", you see, that we say about the most dreadful kind of life.

But Chesterton is trying to say that the meaningless universe, the nonsense universe is just great.

Just because it doesn't mean anything, it is because God Himself is dancing, is playing. He has a poem of God as a child, and He's playing with a windmill. And the fans of the windmill are the four great winds of heaven, the balls with which He's playing are the sun and moon.

And the whole idea, therefore, then, is that existence itself is a magical play, and is therefore nonsense, in the sense, the special sense of nonsense, that it is something going on which does not refer to anything except itself.

When we say nonsense, we are saying it for the delight of the words, and not for anything that they mean.

’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:

All mimsy were the borogoves,

And the mome raths outgrabe.”

In this kind of marvelous playing with the voice and with words, you have something nearer to the nature of reality than you do with statements that make formal sense. Because that’s the sense of the thing, fundamentally. Everything that’s going on is a sort of jazz.

Everything in the world—the flowers, the trees, the mountains—all going “ga-joo-de-doo, ga-joo-de-doo, ga-joo-de-doo, ga-joo-de-doo, ga-joo-de-doo, ga-joo-de-doo, ga-joo-de-doo, ga-joo-de-doo.”

“And we have piped you and you have not danced. We have mourned you and you have not wept. You won’t join the game because you human beings think you’re so special, and so serious, and you’ve got to make sense of it all.”

There isn’t any sense to it. Just join in, come on! Make “ba-joo-dee-dah, ba-joo-dee-dah, ba-joo-dee-dah” with the whole thing, and find you’ll be singing Alleluia with the angels.

Speech courtesy of alanwatts.org

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