# General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy

Part 1 of 12

Franklin Merrell-Wolff
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I feel moved to formulate a general discourse upon the subject of my philosophy in order to bring it together in a limited space and a general viewing of it. The material is spread out through a series of writings, lectures, and, of late, in the form of tapings that are not organized into a systematic whole. There are portions developed at one point and others at another point which would lend themselves into a systematic development. There is a position formulated here which, so far as I can determine by my perusal of the literature, is as a whole unique, although the parts of it, generally, are to be found scattered through the thought of other individuals both Western and Oriental. There may be even a question whether any part of it is entirely unique, but it would seem that some portions are indeed also unique.

Now, there is the fundamental question, why does any individual write a philosophy or otherwise formulate it? What is the justification for an effort dedicated to the formulation of a philosophy? The answer to this is fundamentally the same answer to the question as to why any individual should bother to produce a work of art, such as a symphony, a painting, a sculpture, a piece of architecture, a poem, or other literary creations, and also the reason why any individual goes to the trouble of trying to formulate some science. First of all, the motivation is not utilitarian in the narrow sense of the word, for entities who are content simply to seek the food, the drink, the warmth, the shelter that's necessary for the survival of a living organism, does not have the drive to produce either a work of art, a science, or a philosophy. The primary interest here is not utilitarian in the narrow sense. We may say that it is the inner drive or leading which tends toward some expression.

The motivation in the different forms whether artistic, philosophical, or scientific varies. In the case of the artist, it may be the desire to produce something that is beautiful, something that is satisfying to him as an artist; and there may be, in addition, the desire to communicate something which has risen up in his own consciousness that proved to be of value to him so that it may be available for others who might conceivable value it. The motivation, however, in the different cases is governed by different principles. In the case of the artist, the motivation may be that of simply producing beauty—beauty for its own sake without any ulterior motive. Here the end is not simply to secure the food, the drink, the air, the clothing, and the shelter that is necessary for the survival of a living organism. The motive, thus, is not utilitarian in that narrow sense. It is a motivation of producing a value for its own sake, very largely. But with the artist the motivation is most commonly beauty. For the philosopher and the scientist, since these two are essentially governed by the same motivation, it is the seeking of truth—truth for its own sake.

Now, why is it that the inner drive or the inner urge should take the form of art in some cases and the form of a science, or a philosophy, or a system of mathematics in

another. Here, I think, our answer is to be found by a consideration of individual psychology. Some individuals are naturally oriented to what is known as the "aesthesis," and if so, they naturally formulate themselves in some form of art. On the other hand there are those who are primarily and naturally oriented to the principle of logos, and to them the formulation would be inclined to take the form of a purely mathematical development, a scientific search, a philosophic statement. And I would say that is the underlying reason why any of these, artists or logoic people, seek to formulate, seek to express.

Over and above, there may be another motivation which is that of communication—to communicate to other centers of consciousness that which is important for oneself. For there may indeed be others who appreciate the beauty of a created symphony, a painting, a sculpture, an architectural structure, a poem, or a work of fiction; and on the other hand there may be those who would value a scientific determination such as that of Sir Isaac Newton in his *Principia*; and there may be those who seek to get the most general understanding of all, namely, that which is the objective of philosophical research and exposition. These, then, would be the reasons. Most fundamentally they transcend the limits of a mere utilitarianism.

The impulse to produce in this way is initially primarily one that belongs to the leisure which one may acquire that is not required for the essential functions of securing food, drink, clothing and shelter, and for the begetting of children which are the necessities if living organisms are to survive in this world. In fact there may come the time when one looks upon this purely utilitarian process and will ask the question, what is the use of it all? It seems on the surface to be an endless round of seeking that which is necessary for the preservation of the individual and the preservation of the species, which is repeated over and over again apparently endlessly. And to what end? To what does it lead? Why does this process continue? Is it meaningless or is there a purpose being fulfilled in it? And then, beyond this, there is the ubiquitous experience of suffering in this world. There is, as Buddha noted, the fact of illness, of hunger, of death. And why? Is suffering inevitable? Is the end of all simply pain? Or is this condition of suffering one that can be corrected? Is it a result of having fallen off the true path that should have been followed by living creatures? Is there such a thing as an escape? Or is there such a thing as a correction and a so organizing of life that it is no longer a path of suffering? These are questions which sooner or later come before the free inquiring intelligence. And the search for an answer can very well lead to a solution which leads to some philosophic statement.

In the terms of this most fundamental reason for a philosophic search, it would be quite reasonable to expect that the last man in a dying world would still find it necessary to attain a philosophic orientation; perhaps even most necessary under such circumstances, for without the basis or guiding modulus of a philosophic insight, the consequences of such a state might be an absolute despair. But with a sufficient orientation to wisdom and with the development of a sufficient understanding, the state of being the last individual in a dying world could be highly significant. Yes it is the seeking of significance that may be classed as the fundamental motivation in philosophic production.

But this is not the whole of the story. One may be deeply impressed with the "unsatisfactoriness" of life as it is now known in the world and may be moved to the

search that will lead to some resolution of that condition. And if the search has been successful for the individual, he might be moved to communicate the results of that search so that it might be of use to others. Here there would then be a motivation of a selfless compassion for others. In that we may recognize why the Great Buddha and the *Arhats* who followed him put forth such great effort to formulate a philosophy that defined a way whereby the resolution of the problem of suffering might be attained. To be sure, the path which leads to the influencing of other individuals may require forms other than that of the formulation of the word, or the expression of the logoic principle. There may be those means that appeal to others through the instrumentality of art, as I've indicated, which will act more effectively with some; but there are among the whole of human beings, those who are most influenced by a formulation of meaning and significance for the effecting of the resolution of their problems. It is for these two reasons: first, a formulation of a rational statement of a philosophy that is meaningful to myself; and second, the presentation of it so that it would be available to any other individual or individuals who might conceivably find it valuable for themselves.

This philosophy, which is the culminating fruit of a lifetime of thought, is neither exclusively Western in its orientation nor exclusively East Indian. There is something of the West and of East Indian thought contained within it. In general, it may be said that the essential substance of the thought is East Indian metaphysics, but that the form and the method is typically more Western, but this statement is only broadly true. There is also something of a typical Western subject matter within it, as well as something of an Eastern methodology which is apparent at times. But the general statement is true in a broad sense.

It is not typical in the West in this day to speak in metaphysical terms since the development of criticism has rendered the validity of metaphysical thought quite questionable; and this leads to a certain problem. As Dr. Jung has pointed out in his introductory psychological commentary to the *Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, the Eastern statement—by which we here mean the East Indian statement, for the Chinese philosophic point of view is not here considered—is typically metaphysical and philosophical in its method, whereas the Western thought in our day has developed an epistemological criticism and psychological criticism which Jung maintains is quite foreign to the Eastern mentality. I don't know that I would go that far, but certainly it is true that the metaphysical spirit is typically East Indian and the epistemological emphasis and the psychological emphasis are most strongly developed in the modern West; so that today if one disregarded the significance of these two disciplines in his presentation he would not be abreast of his times. So, then, since I have appreciated the validity of the criticism that has been produced in epistemology and in psychology as factors which cannot be disregarded, I have had to take into consideration the problems that belong to these particular disciplines; so that in that respect the method is Western.

Furthermore, there is a development in the West which is not to be found in the more ancient East, and that is the development of mathematics. To be sure, some of the early roots of mathematical conceptions have come to us from Indian thought, such as the subtle conception of zero, which stands for nothing and yet remains very significant. Yet on the whole, the great contribution to mathematics that we know today has been by the Greek mind and to a degree by the Arabian mind in the development of algebra, but most

of all in the very majestic and monumental development of what has been called by Spengler in his *Decline of the West* as Western civilization or culture. This is an element that becomes important in my own thought and in my own philosophic statement and thus again, not only in terms of the epistemological and the psychological element, but also in terms of the mathematical element, the formulation is quite different from that which would be found in purely Oriental texts.

Furthermore, as the race evolves in the refinements of its thought, there is a growth in conceptual style and conceptual forms with the result that old forms of conceptuality may become difficult to understand by the modern mind, with the result that if we are to convey the meaning intended by the ancients, we must face the task of a radical reformulation in terms of our modern conceptuality. To achieve this called for something of a struggle. There is manifestly an evolution in the thought as it is written down, or has been formulated in lectures, and on these tapes. Conceptions gradually become clearer until, finally, there seems to be an effective cross-understanding between our conceptuality and the Eastern vision. Therefore, in part, then, this philosophy may be viewed as an effort to effect some contribution to the meeting of East and West, in so far as the philosophic mind of India is concerned. That is by no means the whole of its purpose, but that is part of it.

But in this it does not stand, by any means, alone. The time has come when the East and the West, which were for long widely separated, have met and must come to a mutual understanding of each other in such a way that neither is destroyed in its essential cultural perspective by the other. Early figures who have brought to the West something of Eastern thought are men like Emerson and Schopenhauer. Emerson had contact with the *Bhagavad Gita*, it is said, and that exerted a considerable influence upon his thought. And Schopenhauer is said to have been the first to have made a correlation with Buddhism and brought it into some perspective that was such that the West could understand it. In fact, it may well be that it was the influence of Buddhism that led to the form which Schopenhauer's ethics took, which, as Spengler has pointed out, is not the inevitable expression of his metaphysics. And in our day we have the very valuable work of Northrop presented in his book entitled *The Meeting of East and West*. But in a deeper degree and in the form of action on the part of a representative of the Indian East, there is the work of the late Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo has produced a shelf of written material that renders much of Eastern thought much more accessible to the Western mind. There is in this work admirable dialectic, admirable philosophy; but there is this point to be noted in addition to the fact that this is an Oriental formulating himself in terms of a relatively Western conceptuality, that there is not strongly presented in his material a recognition of the problem of epistemological and psychological criticism. Nor is there any evidence that his contact with the Western mind included any substantial acquaintance with mathematics, and no one can know the Western mind, as it is essentially, as it is in its distinctive peculiarity, without a substantial acquaintance with pure mathematics, for the very genius of the West is here, in its constructive rather than its critical side, is most highly developed, for all of our technology as well as our most basic scientific thinking depends upon that modulus which is mathematics. Nonetheless, despite this, I regard the contribution of Sri Aurobindo as highly valuable, and I acknowledge that I have secured

great value from him, but that he has not, at the same time, I would say, because of the features which are left out, it is not an adequate crossing of the gulf between the East and the West. I hope that I have contributed something in this field and that has been, in fact, part of my purpose.

Naturally, those who have some acquaintance with the story of Western thought will have a better understanding of the conceptions which I employ than those who are largely ignorant of this story, for the philosophy which I have here produced implies the development from the sixth century B.C. in Greek thought up to the present day in which we have known the epistemological criticism of Immanuel Kant and psychological criticism especially as developed by Dr. Carl G. Jung. Conceptions which imply acquaintance with this background cannot be properly understood if one has only the ordinary naive point of view. In as much as the material is oriented to the needs of any who may be interested, and not simply to those who are acquainted with the story of Western philosophy, it perhaps would be well to produce a brief resume of what is implied in this historic development.

Reflection in the West, in the philosophic sense as contrasted to the mythological spirit of primitive religiosity, begins with a figure known as Thales who lived in the sixth century B.C. The step from the primitive orientation to the world which was here involved is this: man in his most primitive form developed myths which were not based upon a definite observation of nature as it is; it fact, it's difficult to determine how myths arise. But the myths are handed down to the peoples of a given early culture as fiats, as pure categorical statements, and these are accepted in the childhood of the race in much the way that an actual child accepts the statements of his parents and his teachers, secular and religious, without any critical discrimination; they are simply statements that are accepted. And if we go back into the memory of our earliest thinking, we, I think, will find that we merely project what we are taught without any discrimination. Indeed, it would appear that the ontogenetic development, in the psychical sense, reproduces the phylogenetic development of the race, in that psychical sense, just as well as in the physiological sense. And so if we go back to our own childhood and trace our own development of consciousness, we have a certain key to what is the form in which process of development took place in the race as a whole. In general then, we stand, in the childhood of the individual or the childhood of the race, on a level of sheer acceptance of that which is affirmed without any critical discrimination.

Now, this is not a fact true only of the past, for indeed, much of popular religiosity today is grounded solely upon categorical affirmation or denial without any critical evaluation. We accept statements such as this: that there is a certain book which is the word of God and start from that as the base of our thinking. This is very largely true, not of the scientific or philosophical communities, but of the general, popular type of thinking. The question, thus, is not put: why should we regard a particular book as the word of God? And there is no adequate answer to this; it is just so affirmed. He who begins to think may challenge this, may ask the question: how do you know that that is the word of God? And to this there seems to be, in traditional religious circles, no adequate answer. Man begins to be philosophical when he questions in this way: how do you know; what reason is there for believing so and so to be true; what reason is there to believe that there is such an entity as God; upon what evidence is that belief grounded?

In the history of Western man, this challenging of that which has been handed down in the form of myth and tradition begins with a Greek philosopher known as Thales. He proceeds to look upon nature as it is and speculates as to what may be the process by which it becomes, and projected certain interpretations. He said all comes from water. Now to us, with our present day sophistication in science, this seems like a very inadequate answer; but it must be remembered that there is a certain context in which Thales thought that's very different from the context which we have inherited. Actually, the step taken by him represented a monumental departure from that which had gone before, for he looked upon nature directly, without the veil between him and that nature which was involved in the inherited myths of the time, and he asked the question directly. It amounts to a change in attitude, a change which in the end led to what we know of science today with all of its monumental applications. This change of attitude was of supreme importance.

But the position of the early Greek thinkers was very similar to what we would call Materialism today, except that the contrast between matter and spirit had not yet emerged, so that Materialism in the modern sense of being a point of view that contrasts with a spiritual point of view did not then exist. The early thinkers took the appearances about them, namely, what we generally call nature, at face value as determinate existences to touch and sight or the senses in general. They were generally regarded as determinate objects in space and the interest lay in an interpretation of the processes by which they came forth. Water may very well have appealed to Thales for the reason that it is so important in connection with life. Water can become ice and, therefore, be like rock or earth, in the early determinations; and it can also easily become steam, and thus be a gas or like unto that which they called "air." And it's very necessary, indeed, for the maintenance of life in embodied form. To the early Greeks, the idea of an immaterial existence was completely foreign. Existence was, we might say, a determinate form in space and time, and only that. The Greek mind went far beyond that position as its thought matured and became relatively, highly sophisticated. There was in the later days of the post-Socratic thinkers a very great deviation from this early simplicity. But if we look at this earliest stage, I think we can see that it still is very commonly the attitude which the unsophisticated persons of our time take toward the world about: that is real which exists there tangibly in space and time.

Now, let us look at our own attitude as we first emerged into consciousness. Is it not true that in our childhood view before we became individually reflective that we saw the world about us as a real existence of things independent of us? It took a long time, something on the order of two thousand years, before there was a recognition of the fact that there is an important difference between the thing and the image. This makes an enormous difference. To understand the modern point of view, the point of view that one would find so strongly developed in the writings of Dr. Jung, you must bear in mind that we have reached the point where we realize that we are not dealing with things in and of themselves, but only with images which are psychological existences. The "thing" that we dealt with in our more primitive consciousness, as individuals as well as in the history of our race, seemed to be external actualities existent in themselves; but it was the work of Immanuel Kant which pointed out that there is a structure which our cognizing imposes upon the world about, so that we actually do not know the thing-in-itself as it is apart from our cognition.

Now, this is a great leap which we have taken and something of what is involved in this process may be suggested by an incident in the history of the science of psychology. It is in this history stated that there was an occasion when a certain astronomer had taken on an assistant; and in the observation of the transit of a certain star—perhaps in connection with a time determination—a transit through a telescope in which there is a series of parallel fine lines and when the star passes through the field of the telescope, or transit, a notation of the moment of passing the lines is noted, usually by the depression of a key which gives an electrically determined reading. Now, in the case of observations taken by the astronomer and his assistant, the latter being trained, there was a persistent difference in the time determination. In the end, the astronomer thought it was due to a failure in the action of the assistant; but, this was one of the factors that led to the recognition of the fact that in the process of observation the observing entity imposes certain limitations. In this case, it was what is known as "reaction time." When a stimulus is produced, it leaves, first, a sensory impression, which in this case would be on the organ of sight; a recognition is part of the mental process going on in the case of the observer. The recognition then leads to a judgment and decision to react. The decision to react proceeds from the brain to the finger that does the reacting upon the electric key. This, it is now known, takes time. The time is not large, usually a matter of only a few thousandths of a second—perhaps on the order of thirty or forty *sigma*, *sigma* being the Greek letter used to signify one one-thousandth of a second. And it is also determined that the typical reaction time of different individuals varies. Thus, it was not due to failure, necessarily, on the part of the assistant in his reacting, but simply to a difference in the reaction time on his part as compared to that of the astronomer. Actually his reaction may have been more accurate than that of the astronomer. This was one of the events that helped towards the emergence of what is known as experimental psychology—the earliest stages of the recognition that something in the observing individual places a restriction upon the observation. In other words, the entity is not to be disregarded in the determination of any fact; the determining entity has a character, functions according to certain laws: time is required for the recognition of a stimulus or signal; the judgment and decision to react takes time; the reaction is a signal carried along a nerve, which takes time; and then, finally, the muscular contraction in the case of the finger—all of which is a factor in determining fact. This was not known before and out of experiences of this sort the science or discipline of psychology was born.

Now, the important consideration here is one that was not known to the earliest thinkers. Knowledge of the effect of subjective process upon any determination of fact was not taken into account by the earliest Greek thinkers. They were, therefore, in the primitive stage of the developing of science. And it is only relatively within our own time that knowledge of these factors has become manifest. Something of this understanding begins to emerge with the development from Socrates through to Aristotle. By that time it had become evident that we have a structure in our cognition and the Greeks recognized two factors, namely, that of sense perception and the action of the understanding. Generally the Greeks rated the understanding, or the mental process which we call conceptuality, as of a higher order as compared to that of sense perception; but at any rate at this early stage there was a recognition of these two facets of cognition.

It is in a later day, far later, that we have in the development of Western philosophy the recognition that the cognizing function in the individual determines, in at

least some measure, that which is cognized. We cannot take the appearances before our sensory consciousness as being the reality-in-itself because it is, in part at least, constituted by the cognizing entity. This was the great contribution of Immanuel Kant to philosophic thought. In order to cross the gulf between the dogmatism that was arbitrary, in large measure, on the part of the rationalistic philosophers, namely, men like Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Christian Wolff, and the ultimate skepticism and even agnosticism that grew out of the development of the empiric or English school of thought consisting of John Locke, Bishop Berkeley, and David Hume, which eventuated in a position that we could only know the presentment before our senses without any knowledge of a law of relationship; it was in connection with this problem that Immanuel Kant made his great contribution. He did it by introducing this fundamental conception: that the cognizer brings a form which determines his cognition and that which we know, or think we know, is not nature as it is in itself out beyond us, but an appearance of that nature which is in part, at least, determined by our methods of cognition.

The total development is very complex, but we may say this, that Kant presented this idea: that first we have the forms of the transcendental aesthetic, namely, the forms which determine our sensuous perception. These forms are that which is called space and time. We see nature as spread out in space and time because those forms are presented or imposed by ourselves as cognizers. We cognize nature, or the thing-in-itself, under these forms. They are cognized in space and time. And we are not justified in saying that space and time are external facts. What the thing-in-itself is, we do not know because we cognize through restricting forms. There are also the forms of the understanding which involve judgment and reason, and that includes the whole of logic. Again, we can form conceptions of the world about only through these restricting forms. We do not know that the logic which we use is actually true of the thing-in-itself as it is apart from our cognition. We only know that that which we experience is conditioned by these forms of the transcendental aesthetic and the forms of the understanding. That, in a brief word, is the contribution of Immanuel Kant.

Now we emerge into a stage of philosophic maturity. Out of this has grown what is known as the idealistic or spiritually oriented philosophies—something which was totally foreign to the understanding of the pre-Socratic Greek thinkers, who in their day took the naive view which is characteristic, still, of most of us who are not philosophically and psychologically sophisticated. Consciousness then enters into the picture as a determinant. In a certain sense, we may say that the pre-Socratic philosophers were "unconscious" though this must be understood in a technical sense. No doubt they were conscious in the ordinary sense in which we are all aware when awake as contrasted to the state we are in when asleep, but they were not conscious of the action of this consciousness as a determinant in what they experienced. Today, he who is abreast of current thought knows that consciousness brings certain forms to our cognitions which are determinant as to what we actually experience.

Now, there are a number of other questions which arise at this point. As I said before, out of Kant there developed the German school of Idealism, or Spiritualism, in which the center of emphasis was placed upon the conscious factor as determinant with respect to the world we actually experience. But strictly speaking, the Idealists, or Spiritualists, were not so much oriented to consciousness as to the spiritual entity which

is conscious. Now, this bears upon my own contribution to thought in this respect, that my own position is akin to that of the Idealists, or Spiritualists, but, instead of the orientation being to a spirit that is conscious, the primary orientation is to the consciousness apart from a conscious self or an object before consciousness. It is because of this distinction that I have separated my own conception from that of traditional Idealism and called it Introceptualism.