

Revolution and Evolution

Part 2 of 3

Franklin Merrell-Wolff

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This will be a continuation on the subject of "Revolution and Evolution." In the last tape, I introduced the conception of revolution and evolution in a way that is different from the popular understanding. I treated revolution as a process connected with the rotation of a circle and evolution as development in a direction which could be represented by a straight line considered as a vector. I indicated that the actual empiric or concrete process of development was a resultant of the action of these two factors and suggested certain curves that could represent the actual development. The curves were the various members of the cycloid family and the familiar sine curve. Any of these curves conceivably could represent aspects of the total process which in its concrete fullness becomes very complex. No development in the concrete sense is straight line development; yet, nonetheless, a straight line may indicate the fundamental directedness of the development.

In my philosophy, it is conceived that the development may be viewed as a movement from a state of consciousness which is not conscious of itself to a state in which consciousness becomes fully self-conscious; or, in other terms, that the movement may be from an inchoate, indeterminate wholeness to a highly differentiated, articulate, integrated, and differentiated wholeness. This is a broad statement concerning not only social development but also individual development. The social line of development may be regarded as macrocosmic, and the individual development, microcosmic.

We also introduced psychological factors, such as the unfoldment of certain phases of a human being in one given incarnation with relative repression of those phases in a subsequent incarnation in which counter-phases were developed. This led into the tie-in with individual psychology, and particular reference was made here to the personal psychology of types developed by Carl G. Jung in which there is a recognition of two attitudes, namely, introversion and extraversion, and four functions, namely, thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition. And the point was made that a given function complex in a given attitude may predominantly characterize a particular individual or a given society involving the accentuation of certain values and the relative repression of other values which in turn lead to a development in which the repressed factors would take the ascendant position and the formerly ascendant factors would take a repressed condition either in a future incarnation of the individual or in a later state of the society.

Then, finally, we introduced the conception of two poles between which the development took place, namely, the pole of individualism and the pole of collectivism, and pointed out that there tends to be a movement in the history of society such that at given times one pole is emphasized and at other times the other pole is emphasized; and I

referred you to a statement by Aurobindo recognizing this fact.¹ There is an additional point made by Aurobindo that I did not note in the preceding tape and that is that that which he calls the Divine enters the world only through the individual.² I would speak of this in more general terms that would not necessarily imply an orientation to a theistic, a pantheistic, or a panentheistic orientation—the latter being that of the *Bhagavad Gita*—but in more general terms that could include these orientations along with the nontheistic orientation characteristic of the Buddhists, and use therefore the term *transcendent* which can be interpreted in either sense. Thus, the statement would be that the transcendent speaks to mankind in the world only through the individual; and, therefore, when we have a society so organized that the individual is highly repressed and the collective authority dominates exclusively, it is equivalent to a cutting off from communication with the transcendent. And in as much as I hold that this communication with the transcendent carries the promise of hope for mankind—and nothing else does—the cutting off of the possibility of such communication is the very worst thing that can happen in human experience; and that therefore it is more important that the individual should be emphasized than that the collectivity should be emphasized.

We also pointed out in the last tape that there is a lesser and a major accentuation of these two polarities—the less severe accentuation being that between individualism and socialism, and that the more extreme presentation was in the contrast between anarchism and communism. We developed, to some degree, the differences among the various collectivistic patterns, but did not develop the individualistic aspect before the close of the time and the balance of available tape upon that given reel. I might repeat the point made that there are different strengths of accentuation of the collectivistic pole. These could be represented by the standpoint of Henry George; of the simple socialism that would collectivize both land and the instruments of production, whereas, Henry George would, in effect, collectivize only land but otherwise permit capital; and communism would not only collectivize the land and the instruments of capitalistic production but also the objects of consumption. Here is a difference in emphasis in a given direction and one's feeling towards them may vary quite widely. One may accept a moderate kind of emphasis of collectivism and yet reject the more extreme forms of it.

On the other pole, we have that which is known as anarchism, and among those who are not students of the subject, there is considerable misunderstanding here. There is an anarchistic statement connected with the names of Proudhon and Bakunin that authorize the use of violent means to overthrow everything that is established, be it political, social, or religious institutions, and popularly this is the only form of anarchism that is known. Actually, I regard this as a manifestation that is either pathological or consciously criminal. It is my thesis that no violence is permissible in the effort to effect change, in as much as the change which is ultimately desirable must be in the direction of that which is rational and compassionate, and violent means cannot be used to effect this end since the end is resident in the means. The means will determine, even more than the end envisaged, the kind of resultant which will emerge. The violent form of anarchism

¹ Aurobindo Ghose, "The Inadequacy of the State Idea" in *The Ideal of Human Unity*, vol. 15 of the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 278-284

² Aurobindo Ghose, "The Group and the Individual," *ibid.*, 272-277.

does not express the real meaning of this social pole; it is the philosophic statement which was made by one whose proper name was Caspar Schmidt, but who used the *nom de plume* of Max Stirner. He did take a stand against all authoritarian institutions, but upon a philosophic ground, and in no case authorized the use of violence to accomplish this. His formula was as follows, “I derive all right and justification from myself alone; for I am entitled to everything which I have power to take or to do.”³

Now, this may arouse two very different feelings in the one who hears it, and those two feelings can be traced to a psychological conditioning in the individual. If it appears to one that this is an authorization of purely selfish self-aggrandizement, and nothing else, it would imply that such an individual thinks that man is inherently bad or evil and that only by the coercion of institutions, political or otherwise, is he saved from his badness. It can take a very different form; now I'll give you an example. Suppose someone takes this position—and he'll be asserting himself individualistically as strongly as anyone else in taking this position, but it is this: I seek that which will resolve the evils in this world. It appears to me that the resolution of that evil is by attaining Fundamental Realization. Therefore, I choose to put forth every effort I can to achieve that end, and that I recognize no authority whatsoever as capable of denying me that right. Then having successfully achieved that end, I choose to reject or renounce my individual enjoyment of that end and go forth to render it available to all other creatures. In other words, following the path indicated by *The Voice of the Silence* and the Kwan-Yin vow. But, this is my choice. This is not a social condition imposed upon me, a social regulation determined by political institution, religious institution, or and any social institution. It is my individual decision. This would define the course of action taken by the Great Buddha, and yet it would be the extreme expression of individualism and would become in the range of the terms of the dictum of Max Stirner. In other words, the accentuation of the individual has a very different effect in the two cases: first, where a man with criminal motivation asserts it; and the man with the highest altruistic motivation asserts it. Yet, in both cases, it is the exercise of the individual determination.

Now, the difference between these two positions can be illustrated by the view as to whether the orientation is to the ego or to the *Atman*. If the orientation in this formula is to the purely personal ego, it can become criminal, essentially; but if it is an orientation to the self as the *Atman*, and in view of the fact that the *Atman* is identical with the *Paramatman*, it can be the basis for the expression of the highest compassion imaginable. The distinction then between the collectivistic point of view and the individualistic point of view is not simply a moral one in which one would say that the sense of collectivism is a sense of humaneness and the sense of individualism is a sense of individual criminality, but on the contrary, it's a psychological difference. The very highest humaneness we know in this world has come from an individual that made the breakthrough to Enlightenment and then went forth to share its fruits with all creatures. That was a supreme individual act. It was not the achievement of any collectivity. That is a point of enormous importance and should be borne in mind in our evaluation of these tendencies. The collectivistic tendency may be motivated by a will to shirk responsibility—a will to

³ James Mark Baldwin, ed., *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, vol. 1 (New York, Macmillan Co., 1911), 45.

be supported by the collectivity and avoid the responsibility that goes with self-determination. It can be an expression of weakness and not simply of great social responsibility. We have, thus, principles of action, here, and of motivation that can orient to different poles quite apart from a moral evaluation. The motivation can in both cases be excellent or nefarious.

I hope I have made clear the fact that the difference between a collectivistic orientation and an individualistic orientation is not in the form of a strong moral sense, in one case, and the absence of a moral sense in the other, but rather it is a difference in the psychological orientation. It does, however, involve a difference in approach to the moral problem, and this is a point of considerable importance. In the collectivistic orientation, morality is conceived as the dictum of the collectivity, which is then imposed upon all individuals, or all members of the society. It is a case where the individual, in seeking to determine what is the right course for him, would not deal with the moral problem as an individual directly, but, rather, would seek what the collective judgment in the situation was, and then would regard conformance with that judgment as good and non-conformance as immoral or evil. Many lawyers have this orientation to morality—but not all. Those who do have this orientation would say there is no difference between legal conduct and morally good conduct. Goodness is conformity with the law. There is the opposed position which grows out of individual morality particularly, namely, to the effect that morality grows out of a philosophic approach to the problem of what is good conduct and what is bad conduct directly. It is thus viewed as primarily a philosophical problem or a spiritual problem, and the individualist would turn to the philosopher or to the spiritual leader—men like Buddha, Shankara, and Christ, or men like Plato and Immanuel Kant—to get the necessary aid for working out a resolution of a problem of conduct. One is something determined by the collectivity in its collective action which is then dictated by the collectivity to the individual. In the other case, we have individual reflection upon the problem and the working out of some solution. The difference, then, is a difference of approach to a moral problem, but not the difference of a moral orientation in one case, and an absence of a moral orientation in the other case. This point should be stressed, as there is a good deal of confusion with respect to this problem. One tends to be a collectivist if his feeling for the suffering of others is very strong indeed, and he has the sense of I being my brother's keeper. But in practice it leads to regimentation, determination by the collectivity which may be very extreme. Examples of extreme collective institutions are our prisons and our asylums, where the life is dictated by the collective authority almost completely. Dostoyevsky, in reporting his prison experience, stated that it was carried so far that the position one occupied when sleeping was dictated and was not a free selection of the individual. Now, there are individuals that like such a life, but many of us, I would say, would prefer death to existence under such conditions.

An example of the issue between the two points of view has been brought out in reflective ethics. I remember a case that was brought up in our study in the field of ethical theory in my academic days. In primitive societies very often the capacity to produce the necessities of life is so limited that the societies can support as non-producers only the children who have the function of continuing the society. They cannot support those who have become non-producers because of serious crippling or because of old-age. Often it has been the custom in such societies to dispose of the older people. One case, that came

from Africa, was a society in which it was the custom that when the parents of a certain male human being had reached the point of non-productivity, it was their moral duty to kill those parents. In the class in ethics, a case was considered where the son refused to perform this function because there was a stirring of a moral sense in him that led him to feel that this was not right. He became condemned by the society and even by his own parents. He had violated the code of the collectivity. But the professor pointed out that here was the beginning of a more sensitive moral sense. The son functioned as an individual in his development of a new code of conduct in that situation. Which was, then, the more humane point of view, that of the regimented practice of the collective judgment of the tribe, or the moral point of view emerging in the son? Sensitivity to the suffering of others is not restricted to the collectivist; it can be first brought forth by individual initiative, one who functions on a basis of individual self-determination. And as I pointed out, the humane spirit of Buddhism grows out of the dicta of an extremely humane individual. There is a difference in the form that moral orientation takes in the two forms respectively. In the collectivistic form, it is a prescribed code that comes from the collective body; in the individualistic orientation, it is a working out of a code by direct action upon or reflection upon the moral problem. Both orientations can be superior in the ethical sense, but there is a radical difference in the approach to the moral problem.

It is a popular practice today to designate the difference between the two types of society, namely, the collectivistic and that which is more or less oriented to individualism, as being in one case socialistic, in the other case capitalistic; this, however, is a misnomer. Capitalism arises at the moment that an individual uses a present energy to achieve a means or a resource which he applies to a future activity. Thus, at the moment when a human being, or even an animal, puts forth effort to pick up a stone to be applied later to a more efficient acquiring of an immediate utility, he has become a capitalist. Thus the sea otter, when he uses a stone to crack the shell of a clam on his chest, is functioning as a capitalist. Both the societies that are more or less individualistic and those which are collectivistic, in each case is capitalistic, as we know them today. In fact, in the cases of Russia and the United States, the capitalism is highly developed. The difference lies in the way capital formation is achieved. In the socialistic states, capital formation is by the coercion of taxation; whereas in a truly free economy, capital formation is by the restraint of thrift, the voluntary forgoing of the enjoyment of a present good in order that means may be developed for a greater future enjoyment of a good. The contrast between the two societies of Russia and the United States is not nearly as strong today as it would be to make the contrast between the present society of Russia and our society as it was in the nineteenth century; for, in point of fact, a great deal of our present capital formation is coercive through the instrument of taxation, and is at present becoming more and more so. At the present time, the disposal of the economic product of the society is 35 to 36 percent by the governmental agencies, and I have seen statements to the effect that it may grow to 50 percent in the not far distant future. But there probably would arrive a point where the incentive to voluntary capital formation would become completely undermined. I understand this has happened in the socialistic state of Sweden already at the 40 percent point of disposal of social good by the state.

Now, both societies are capitalistic, as I pointed out, in that they use a present effort to produce a tool which is employed in a future use. Money only comes into the

picture as a sort of bookkeeping device; the essence of capitalism is production by use of tools—the tools being accumulated by a present effort and a forgoing of the consumption of a present good in order that a hopefully greater good may be enjoyed in the future society. One would choose one or the other of these economies by the degree that he values the principle of freedom, in one case, and free selection, free choice, or values being cared for, in the other case, with a very real decline in the creative impulse in the latter case because of an exhaustion of motivation. This brings out the essence of the contrast. It is not capitalism versus socialism; it is freedom versus regimentation. It is individual assumption of responsibility in one case and collective dictation in the other case. There are people who prefer to be dictated to.

From what has been said in this and the preceding tape, it is evident that we can produce a correlation between individualism, on one side, and collectivism, on the other side, with respect to certain psychological qualities and certain states. The individualist is primarily oriented to the principle of freedom and reason; the collectivist to the principles of security and feeling. We have, thus, identified the two types as having peculiar psychologies; the difference is only subsequently to be viewed as one with respect to economics, and so forth—that is a derivative concern; the primary one is this psychological concern. It was pointed out that he who reasons more acutely than he feels tends to be an individualist and one who values freedom more than security; whereas, he who feels more acutely than he reasons tends to be a collectivist who is oriented primarily to security. This does not mean that there's an absence of the capacity to reason in the case of the collectivist or that the individualist attributes no value to security, but it is a matter of emphasis. For the individualist is the psychological type that so greatly values freedom that he would accept the risk of a degree of security, and the collectivist is so oriented to a feeling relationship that he would accept a degree of sacrifice of freedom in order to secure security. Two very different types of individuals are present, therefore, in these two orientations.

Now we come to the practical problem of how do these two orientations work out in practice in the total concrete political, social, and economic situation. Only in the simplest societies do we have management of the society by the total groups themselves. In other words, a management by all the people of a given group is possible only in small units, as in the case of township government in New England, the political side, or in the case of small individually owned or partnership owned businesses where the individual runs everything or the partnership works it out by mutual agreement. In large entities, a more complex principle is involved in government or in management. In the case of government, representatives of the total population actually carry out the government in practice; and in the case of large corporate entities which become necessary when the economic entity is large are owned by vast numbers of people, known as the stockholders, but actually run by a small group of selected individuals. Thus in practice the principle of selection becomes very important. I remember reading a copy of a letter by Thomas Jefferson to James Madison—two men in our early emergence as a nation who played a large and important role, but two men that represented different lines of emphasis, one the more democratic and the other the more aristocratic—but, in this letter from Jefferson to Madison, Jefferson acknowledged that the men who should run government should be selected from the natural *aristoi*, the men of superior ability and

character, and in that respect was in agreement with James Madison.⁴ But there was difference as to the method of selection. Jefferson, as everyone will remember, was the great proponent of popular or democratic selection. The same problem exists in connection with the government of corporate entities that run our economy, but the method of selection is different. In the case of the United States, we have a complex method for the selection of those who fill the different offices of our government which is an indirect or direct selection by the electorate with respect to candidates who present their case openly to each individual elector. In corporate government, we have a principle whereby a board of directors is selected by the stockholders, and this board of directors select those who actually manage or govern the economic entity. The two principles of selection lead to a different type of psychological type, in the broad sense, for the performance of the actual governance of these entities. And here is where I wish to develop a point which I think has often been neglected, namely, that this isolates, in a broad sense, a certain kind of mind that is distinctive in the two cases.

As the problem presented here is fairly complex, I shall postpone its elucidation to some future tape;⁵ but at the present time, I shall foreshadow certain conclusions that will be derived, namely, that the selection of those who govern the political entities in our country is relatively direct, popular selection; and the selection those who govern large corporate entities is by first the selection of a board of directors who in their turn exert their judgment in picking out managerial personnel. And the point I shall endeavor to show is that in the first case feeling judgment dominates in the selection, and in the case of the corporations, rational judgment tends to dominate in the selection. This, then, leads to a probability that the kind of man, or woman, who can make an appeal to the feelings of the electorate is the kind of individual who has the greatest probability of being selected, and there is no guarantee that the individual who is capable of this kind of appeal also is an individual of superior judgment or decision capacity in the field of management; whereas in the case of the method of selection as it exists in large corporations, tends to a dispassionate, rational judgment with respect to superior managerial talent. And as a result, in the former case of the political field, we tend to select men in whom the principle of feeling dominates and thinking is subordinate; whereas, in the case of corporate selection, we tend to select men in whom thinking judgment is dominant—and this leads to very different methods of approach to the handling of problems. This I shall develop more fully later, but this is something we should think about in our evaluation of the two methods of selection.

⁴ The reference to a letter of Jefferson's in *The Vertical Thought Movement* concerning the selection of elected representatives from the "natural *aristoi*" is as follows:

Even Thomas Jefferson, who is so commonly regarded as an outstanding representative of Leftist sentiment, would actually appear as a Rightist in the present setting, as revealed in the following quotation from a letter of his to John Adams:

"I agree with you that there is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents. The natural aristocracy I regard as the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trusts and the governments of society. May we not even say that that form of government is the best which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these natural *aristoi* into the offices of government?"

⁵ See the audio recording, "Revolution and Evolution," part 3.

There is another point which will be taken up later, namely, that is the problem of crowd psychology as was developed initially by Le Bon. This is a big factor in the action of electorates, in connection with large groups, and is a minor factor in individual action and in the interaction of very small groups. This will also be a factor we shall consider later in our evaluation of these different methods of selection, but as the subject is so large and the time has passed, I will close at this point.