

THE VERTICAL THOUGHT MOVEMENT OF FRANKLIN MERRELL-WOLFF

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Path to High Indifference

Franklin Merrell-Wolff was the son of Benjamin Wolff, a Californian clergyman originally hailing from Pennsylvania. He combined a piercing intellect with astonishing mathematical ability and a profound mystical insight with an extraordinary command of English. His nuanced style won him the admiration of literary critics in New York, London and Calcutta.

He was born Franklin Fowler Wolff on July 11, 1887 in Pasadena, California. He was the eldest of three children. He was raised in San Fernando. His father was a Methodist minister. Wolff Sr. was, besides, a pioneer in the California citrus growing business. Wolff was home-schooled by his mother, Grace, a New Yorker, until the age of nine. He early questioned Christian orthodoxy. After a period of atheism, he drifted in the direction of Asiatic mysticism. He blazed his own trail. He studied mathematics and philosophy in Harvard. While attending a seminar on metaphysics at Harvard in 1912-13, Wolff was struck by the idea that apart from reason and the five senses, there may be another mode of cognition.¹

Wolff felt that if this were so, it could lead to a deeper insight and even to transcendent wisdom. After leaving Harvard, he taught mathematics for a while at Stanford. Abandoning all thought of prosperity or preferment, he retired from the world and with Shankara as his guru, practiced *dhyana* and *nididhyasana*.² After twenty-five years of struggle, success came to him in August 1936. On August 7 that year, he broke through to the universal self. He resisted *Samadhi*. By not accepting Bliss on first offer, he opened himself up to further transformations in consciousness which followed after a break of thirty-three days. (This corresponds to Milarepa's wait of little over a month in passing from subjectivity to *Shunyata*.)

This new transformed consciousness, he symbolized in his book, *Pathways Through to Space*, as the High Indifference. It transcended *Nirvana* as completely as *Nirvana* transcended *sangsara*. It was a neutral type of Consciousness, transcending subjectivity as completely as objectivity. In it lay both *Nirvana* and *sangsara* as potentials. It blended with everything in manifestation, overreached all polarities and ever Beyond, never lost its transcendent status. In Mahayana, this is called *Shunyata* or *Bodhi* (Enlightenment).

Shankara and Franklin Merrell-Wolff

Shankara was a Brahmin philosopher who lived between 770 and 810 ACE. In his commentaries on the *Brahmasutras*, Shankara outlines the details of the Vedantic philosophy. Here the explanation is monistic and centered on the Universal Self. The perception of *sangsara* was simply the non-realization of the Self. Recognition reverses this. When the Self is held, *sangsara* is seen as an illusion.

When Wolff wrote *Pathways Through to Space*, being much influenced by Shankara's outlook, he did not regard the phenomenal process too seriously. Consequently, in this book, there is only a single chapter on "The Problem of Government." In this chapter, he defines successful government as the maintenance in the social body of three principles: 1) Freedom; 2) Justice; and 3) Efficiency. He notes the swing away from monarchy in the direction of mob rule and later dictatorship. For democracy to function satisfactorily, three

conditions have to be met: 1) the average voter should be able to comprehend the nature of the unit of government, which should not be too large; 2) the voting group should have both intelligence and a sense of responsibility; 3) governmental problems should be simple. In all this, Wolff seems to be following platonic principles.

In ancient Greece, democracy was fairly effective because it centered round the city-states. There was homogeneity of population. The helots were effectively disenfranchised. In modern nations, not only is civilization more complex, there is considerable heterogeneity of population. The exception seems to be China, which has never had a democratic constitution. Inefficiency of government led to dictatorships in Europe in the 1930s. Efficiency was achieved in certain directions at the cost of human rights violation. A variety of groups like the Jews, gypsies and so on were subject to horrendous treatment and finally to extermination.

United States Constitution

Excellent governmental principles and even a clearly defined constitution based on a separation of functions is no guarantee of good government. The factor usually ignored is the psychological temperament of the people. In the constitution of the United States of America, the ruling class is not the people as such but an off-marked professional political group. This group has divided itself into various political parties. George Washington belonged to no party. So far he has been the only exception to the rule. The difference between liberal and conservative poles of the same party may be greater than the difference between two acknowledged rival political groupings. Political parties sometimes unite what had been divided by the framers of the original document.

The American Founding Fathers had followed Montesquieu's principle of power arresting power. There has also been the play of the contingent and the unforeseen. Though incorporating a system of checks and balances, the admirably designed American system began to show weaknesses that might ultimately become fatal. There was also a certain development not foreseen or provided for by the protecting sentinels who had kick-started the constitutional process. This was the development of a business community wielding economic power and effectively checking and controlling the political blocs. They were able to achieve this by holding the purse strings and by throwing up business and financial tycoons who manifested the caliber of true statesmanship. They could run Washington by remote. As Burke once said of the East India Company, it threw up merchants with the foresight and skill of true statesmen while in the political field itself there were demagogues with the character and conception of peddlers. True statesmanship has been displayed by Wall Street more than presidential sidekicks housed in Pennsylvania Avenue.

Wolff says a kind of rational and scientific thinking is necessary in the economic field. Being more objective, it has acted as a check on psychological prejudice. The politician capitalizes on emotional predispositions, religious or racial differences. These may carry popular appeal but may result in a long-term shortfall. The financier or businessman is on the guard against these.

The presence of wise men in positions of power is more important than streamlining the system. In practice, this would mean trusting the guardian class and empowering them in the way Plato would have wished. A person like the Buddha or Eckhart can always depend on the perception of the higher consciousness. If this is absent, the solution will tend to be more Machiavellian than Buddhist or Platonic. The political class as exists world-wide today can, by no stretch of the imagination, be equated with Plato's guardians. In this business of counting votes instead of weighing them, mediocrity is likely to flourish. This is the crux of the problem. "One consequence," writes Wolff "follows at once, that true Democracy exists

only for God-realized Men. All others, being as yet bound to the relative or the subject-object world, do actually stand on a scaled ladder, marking the different stages of achieved development.”³ As we shall see, Wolff’s Vertical Thought Movement is a step in the right direction. It culminates in God-realization.

Politics and the Augean Stables

Politics is a low profession. It caters to all the worst instincts of the mob. Typically, a politician gains control of the electorate by the use of a psychological device which attunes to the emotional level of speaker and audience. There have been of course, a few honorable exceptions. Gibbon has described history as the study of the crimes, follies and misdemeanors of mankind. Government functions at an unspeakably abysmal ethical level. “Politics, as we have seen in historic development, corresponds to the worst elements of human nature. The ethic of politics has always been the ethic of Machiavellianism, except during the brief periods when the aristocratic sense of honor has been able to dominate the scene. The cleansing of politics is the Herculean labor of cleaning the Augean stables of the general social body. It is a particularly unpleasant task but unless it is accomplished, all the superior culture of mankind rests upon a rotten core . . . for modern social man, there is no more imperative task than the eradication of the Machiavellian ethic from politics, and the substitution of the ethic of honor and integrity. Comparatively, the modern capitalistic economy, with all its faults, is much cleaner . . .”⁴

Only the best of men live by a code of unshakeable integrity. These handfuls may not be social-minded at all. Only a person of character is worthy of trust. “Now,” admits Wolff, “there is something narrow and even ascetic about integrity. A man of integrity inevitably hates the lie and the careless attitude towards contradiction. The Machiavellian morality of the politician appears to him as composed of the worst scourgings from the depths of hell. Of all this the man of integrity is most intolerant, and so there is a sense in which we may call him narrow. Nonetheless, there is a dimension in which his life does develop though not in the sense of wide inclusiveness and expansion.”⁵ He is straight, correct and dislikes deviation from uprightness. The abstract philosopher and pure mathematician come under this definition. In India, it is admitted that a sage may not be a karma yogi and may be disinclined to intervene in social or political processes.

Within three years after his original Breakthrough, with war clouds threatening to engulf the USA, and England already being up to her neck in it, Wolff had to step down from his high pedestal and give a few practical suggestions for the centering of the U.S. Constitution. He had by now also shifted from *Nirvana* to *Shunyata*. This was neutral ground. He was no longer upholding Shankara’s take on the illusoriness of *sangsara*. He was moving more to the Kantian position of regarding the world process as phenomenal but not illusionary. Wolff saw immediately that after the presidential election of 1940, public opinion had swung more to the left than ever before. The New Deal legislation was completely leftist. The right had no articulate voice at all. It looked as though the American Constitution was being perverted.

Wolff has compared a completely leftist society to a one-armed man. If imbalance set in, society as a whole would fail. A repressed psychological function may find expression through the unconscious. In this “underworld of indirection,” no healthy society can flourish.⁶

The framers of the American Constitution saw the dangers inherent in a partially educated group divorced from abstract political thinking leading the nation. It would head in the direction of lopsidedness. It would sooner or later grind everything down to a chilling, valueless, appalling average, as has in fact happened in the USSR and socialist India. To counter this, they deliberately empowered the upper house or the Senate and tried to make it

the counterpart of the ancient Roman one. They gave the authority of judicial review to the Supreme Court. Judges held office for life. They could not be removed except by impeachment. They made the amendment of the Constitution a very slow and fiddly matter. “But the ingenuity of men,” regrets Wolff, “has proven quite capable of nullifying Constitutional safeguards even without employing the method of explicit amendment. Thus, though the founders envisaged the selection of the Chief Executive were the leading citizens of the various states, and not by the people as a whole, yet this Constitutional safeguard was nullified by the device of pledging the votes of the members of the Electoral College.”⁷

Scottish Enlightenment

“I agree with you,” said Thomas Jefferson in a letter to John Adams, “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.”⁸ Average Jones was thus put in his place though later events led to his apotheosization.

The influence of Scottish thinkers like Hume, Hutcheson, Ferguson, Campbell and Stewart is apparent in all this. The Scottish Enlightenment, while sharing the humanist and rationalist outlook of the European one, asserted the fundamental importance of human reason. It rejected authority, rationally unjustified. It was empirical, practical but not atheistic. The Scottish world view radically differed from the extravagant and cruel French one. Murder was not the way to any Utopia. The Scots believed that people, if left alone, are essentially virtuous—and, if given the tools, would finish the job. They would slowly work out what is best for themselves and society. This would happen by evolution, not revolution. The solutions to societal conundrums, argued the Scots, are held by mankind in general—not by any group purporting to represent the plebs. The best way to improve a country is for government to pass a few laws, and leave it to the people to work out the details. The Scottish position, widely disseminated from Canada to India to Australia, essentially affirms a faith in mankind. It is modest. It supports a non-interfering type of government, of which Wolff approves. The Scottish model flourished in the United States. In post-war Europe, a different model flopped, as cabals and planned economies sprang up everywhere. It is this ‘planning’ aspect which is apparent in the New Deal legislation. The right opposed it on the ground that it has abandoned the center, while setting off an impingement on personal liberties. It has imposed a leftist view on the American nation, justifying it on the ground of national unity in a time of troubles.

Wolff has questioned the idea of it being the duty of all Americans to unite against a common enemy. Such talk was much bruited about after the initiation of the New Deal. “The right to life,” he says, “of any human type, i.e., what it is because of nature, transcends the duties to States, which are, after all, merely conventional devices created by men. A call to unity on the basis of the left carries no obligation that the *rightist* is by moral duty bound to respect.” Here Wolff seems to be asserting a universality of moral judgments, following the Categorical Imperative of Kant. Duty, as such, is commitment to the moral law, not to any nation, political party or racial grouping. The left has subdued the right to such an extent that committed rightists became courtiers, kowtowing as per leftist direction. The net result of this development is pushing once again to the unconscious, rightist objections to the political orientations brought in by groups like the New Dealer one. Death, thinks Wolff, is preferable to a slavish relation to the left since this implies domination of quality by quantity, “which is sheer moral and spiritual prostitution.”⁹ “They are slaves who dare not be, in the right with two or three.”¹⁰

Mechanicalness of Mimesis

The right is the creative source of new values. It was from Hegelian dialectic that the perversion called communism rose. It held mankind in a sickening thrall for three-quarters of a century. Apart from spiritual masters like the Buddha or Christ, the progress of mankind in every sphere has been because of individual breakthroughs to some transcendent otherness and not by the wheeling movement of mass man. Toynbee, in fact, calls this mass imitation by the proletariat of a spiritual or intellectual breakthrough by a creative individual a kind of short-cut that might sometimes backfire. This happens because the mass movement focuses on the external trappings of a religion or a social movement, losing its inner essence. This process he terms *the mechanicalness of mimesis*. He cites it as a potent cause for the breakdown of civilizations. Mob leaders would be hopelessly incompetent to exercise judgments in zones where they have no insight or training. Wolff is well aware of these dangers.

Mechanicalness may also set in in the contact between advanced aspirants and Sir Mob. The contact itself has arisen out of ideas of *maitri* (friendship) and *karuna* (compassion). Then they might have to retreat into themselves to renew diminished 'verticality'. Horizontality is somewhat a check on verticality. After a tour of preaching some senior disciples, Jalaluddin Rumi returned to his *darbar*. Rumi had advised them to bathe and wear the new robes he provided and to sit down and listen for a few days to Sufi recitals. An onlooker queried, surely this is unnecessary in the case of these *Murids* who might be expected to know the texts. Rumi said, "About a day's riding from here, are the ruins of a magnificent building. Of the value and the geometrical proportions of that structure and its extraordinary beauty, there can be no doubt. However, because of the ravages of time and rough usage, some of the priceless glazed tiles have slipped and fallen. The doors have come off the hinges. A little attention is necessary to restore it to its ancient glory. Similar is the mental position of my close disciples."

The right is something more than conservatism. It carries a dynamic of its own. This passes unnoticed. It includes the creative daring of a Rockefeller or a Ford. Its counterpart can be seen in modern science, in the whole range from quantum dynamics to genetic engineering. The right is always closer to the fountain source of Wisdom. The Kingdom of Heaven cannot be taken by storm. Majority resolutions cannot push the plebs into *Nirvana*. A kind of commonplace status quo may be thus achieved. That's all. This the left will claim to be on par with individual creative achievement. The right has to affirm its position radically else its quiet voice will be muffled by the booming thunder of the left as the subtle strains of a sitar recital of Ravi Shankar can be crushed and drowned by the sheer noise of a jam session of a rock band.

Wolff introduced the Vertical Thought Movement as a crusade of the Radical Right. "It is the right acknowledging itself and becoming proud of its spiritual dignity, bowing before nothing within the visible world."¹¹ If this movement functions in the best possible way, it will increase the social influence of the right. The first objective of the movement is to give a correct formulation of the rightist attitude. The second is to corral together those who are temperamentally rightist. The third is the achieving of political recognition and influence in government. If it transforms itself into a political party it will be oriented to a philosophy and not mere electoral victory. It will be a crusading party. Its impetus will be revolutionary. This will lead to true centering.

The Vertical Thought Movement

The Vertical Thought Movement (VTM) is not sustained by political expediency or economic convenience. The attitude it fundamentally projects is philosophical and religious. These constitute the most fundamental grounds of differentiation between *right* and *left*. The right regards the zones of religion or philosophy as the most important in the whole range of human interest. The left grants primacy to economic factors and addresses the special concerns of minority groups. (Hitler's Nazi party, regarded by Wolff as essentially leftist, stressed the importance of the *volk* as against the individual.) The right sees economics, sociology and politics as incidental impingements, not even components. The VTM regards economics and politics as secondary.

The early settlers of America crossed the Atlantic in order to seek religious freedom. Since life centered around religion in New England, this has left an impress on American politics. In the nineteenth century, various working class immigrants, whose belly was their God, introduced coarser values into the American political process. In California, certain religious centers were developed because of the earlier occupation of that territory by Roman Catholic priests and laymen. The VTM affirms religious freedom, both institutional and direct individual experience. Rudolf Otto has suggested the word, 'luminosum' as the irreducible common denominator of all religions. This is a something so lofty that it overshadows the individual. This is the philosophic orientation of the VTM. In its ethical orientation, social good is ranked less than integrity and love of truth. In its psychological slant, the VTM is individualistic and appeals more to thought than to feeling. It is more introverted. Group activity is a spontaneous mode of life for the more extraverted feeling type. To the rightist, man as a social being is largely irrelevant. The great reality is Substance or God. "The Vertical Thought Movement views sociology as a derivative and not as the primary science. It maintains the primacy of the God-relationship, or the supremacy of the Transcendental Modulus, and then approaches the social problem from the vertical perspective."¹² To a leftist extrovert, horizontal social relationships are more important than vertical, intellectual movement. Thus rightists would regard mathematics and philosophy as more fundamental than sociology. Sociology has aspects whose roots sink into biology.

Monkey Business and Politics

Darwin and his followers studied ape characteristics as present in Homo Sapiens. A study of the psychological unconscious of man reveals at its depths a hidden Orangutan. Mystical recognition sees divinity residing in the depths of man. Man appears to have two aspects, one relative to God and the other to the ape. If the orientation is towards the Darwinian ape, it is leftist, if it is towards God, it is rightist. The extreme leftist is Godless; the VTM is oriented to God. When Nietzsche announced "God is dead" he was acknowledging that there was only the chimpanzee in the European subterranean unconscious, whose wild swings he tried to limit and whose mad, excited pranks he endeavored to transform into the military discipline of the blond beast and hoping ultimately for the emergence of the warrior super-duper man. Remarks of this kind are to be seen in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. The VTM feels God can be reborn in the hearts of man. In Indian mythology, Rama, the incarnate god, is faithfully served by the monkey chieftain, Hanuman. In this way, the demons were destroyed and the apes remolded in a divine cast. This was hard work for Rama, for the monkey business had gone a great distance.

To the rightist, thought is the commanding power, not the hand. The political orientation of the VTM places greater emphasis on aristocracy than democracy. The determining principle is rule by quality abstracted from quantity. Democracy tends to the

undervaluation of quality. Both wisdom and popularity if they walk hand in hand, would lead to genuine, stable government. Radical democracy is not really opposed to totalitarianism. All dictators possess more than a 60% popularity which secures their mandate. “The Vertical Thought Movement is radically opposed to totalitarianism and favors the increase of general, social and political power on the part of those men and women who are superior in the sense of knowledge, feeling, judgment, character and wisdom.”¹³ It affirms the right of wisdom to power and does not give obeisance to mere popularity. If democracy is rule by the many, aristocracy is rule by the best. The problem here would be a means of selecting the genuinely best. This cannot be done by popular vote as that is definitely leftist. Nor can we go by heredity (as in priestly descents) which is too much to the right. A via media has to be thought out.

This leads to the question of what is *right* and what is *left*? In his usual methodical fashion, Wolff treats this problem. He also casts light on the theory on micro-macrocosmic correspondence. This is as old as the Upanishads.

Left/Right Aphorisms

In *Vertical Thought Movement*, Chapter V: “Determination of Individual Alignment,” Wolff introduces certain new criteria to help an individual determine where he belongs. It would be too simplistic to base this classification on objective terms. This would ignore the private subjective orientation. Wolff, in his list of aphorisms, tries to define right and left positions from a number of angles. For instance, a rightist would want government in the hands of the best. He would prefer wisdom to democracy and money power to political power. On these issues, the leftist would emphasize the requirement of popularity. He would think democracy more valuable than wisdom. He would like political power to money power. He would want politicians to dominate business. The rightist would emphasize reasoned thought to broad human sympathy. He would like “the highly trained dispassionate and detached minds of superior judges on the Supreme Bench should wield the dominant power as compared to either the administrative or legislative arms.”¹⁴

In general, Americans have distrusted the tyranny of the majority. That is why the Supreme Court is as strong as it is. They would trust these learned individuals on the Bench to a charismatic and popular president. The left would go with the executive. When it comes to individual virtue, the rightist would emphasize truth over everything else. A leftist would think that a man should have a social sense first. He would trust a man of socially superior feelings even if guilty of self-contradiction and a casual illogical approach. One and God is a majority for the rightist. To the leftist, consensus of public opinion is the majority. Vox populi, vox Dei. The love of God is more important to the rightist than the love of man. To the leftist, it is the opposite. When there is conflict between logic and desire, a person oriented to the right thinks logic should rule. In such a conflict, a man of the left believes, desire or purpose should rule logic. To the rightist, a subjective intuition of transcendental reality, combined with strong assurance is more to be trusted than experience. To the leftist, single dimensional objective fact has greater reality value. The greatest values to a rightist are attained by awakening to otherworldliness. He gives mundane life a miss. To a rightist, purity is more valuable than tolerance. Psychological factors, he regards, are more potent in conditioning life. He thinks that government is best which governs least. A leftist wants state welfare schemes to regulate the lives of citizens. The VTM does not consider the above as formulating a formal program to action. They are designed simply to select those who belong psychologically to the movement. When differences rise between men it is often wise to compromise. But the view that compromise is always possible reflects extravert psychology.

Rightist oriented to:

Correctness
 Profundism
 Depth
 Vertical component
 Introversion
 Integrity
 Purity

Leftist oriented to:

Wishfulness
 Liberalism
 Breadth
 Horizontal component
 Extraversion
 Social-mindedness
 Tolerance

Rightist view of the leftist**Rightist oriented to:**

Correctness
 Profundism
 Depth
 Vertical component
 Introversion
 Integrity
 Purity

Leftist seems:

Inaccurate and careless
 Loose and shallow
 Superficial
 Without an orienting modulus
 The helpless slave of things
 Unreliable
 Not very clean (disposed to combine forces with political bosses)

Leftist view of the rightist**Leftist oriented to:**

Wishfulness
 Liberalism
 Breadth
 Horizontal component
 Extraversion
 Social-mindedness
 Tolerance

Rightist seems:

Selfish
 Narrow-minded
 Unprogressive
 Restricted horizon
 Timid
 Anti-social
 A Prig

The identification of complementary dualism of right and left with psychological attitudes like introversion and extraversion is a tricky business. There may be dissonance between a man's actions and his ways of thinking and valuing. The actions arise because of external pressures and past karma in which the inner person may or may not be included. The most extreme rightist is the Buddha who wishes to banish from the human mind, the desire for sentient existence itself. The leftists like Molotov or Lenin do not believe in God. There is no God in Buddhism either, which explains everything from the point of view of Pure Consciousness. Communism goes to dialectic materialism and irredeemable extinction and death.

The VTM is not addressed to the rightist alone. It recognizes that there are superlative values in both right and left. It is because the pull to the left has been so great in the last one-hundred years that a rightist corrective is introduced. Then society would be far better centered than ever.

British in India

Wolff has definitely stated that he prefers business power to political power. This is because there is less caprice in the judgments of tycoons than of dictators and tyrants. The only example of a multi-national actually entering the field of government is the rule of the Indian empire by the East India Company before the Mutiny. At first the Company was simply a commercial corporation turned revenue farmer and wedded to rupees, rupees and rupees. With the breakdown of the Mughal authority, the directors of the Company saw that they had become responsible for the protection and welfare of millions of Indians. The Company decided to stand forth as diwan. They forsook vain deals and played for their side. They transformed themselves from poachers to game-keepers. They raised an army to maintain peace in India. Adventurers were admitted only if they became English citizens.

In its heyday, the East India Company's fleet was bigger than the Royal Navy. There were more admirals in the Indian Ocean than in the Atlantic. The Company was under the management of a Board of Control and a Group of Directors. When, to the surprise of all, they applied for a loan of a million pounds, parliament granted it but introduced audits supervised by a senior MP. English public opinion wondered how, when the nabobs were amassing such great fortunes and buying up rotten boroughs by the dozen, John Company itself could go into decline. The Pitt's India Act followed. All senior officials of the Company in India were lined up and placed under scrutiny. Private trade was disallowed. Bribery was curtailed. Extravagant bonuses were withheld. The political and commercial branches were separated from each other. Cornwallis introduced a Permanent Revenue Settlement in Bengal. He also brought in the Cornwallis code. This prevented misuse of *dastaks*.¹⁵

In the decades that followed, the British went further and established colleges instructing Indian students in science and law and using the English language as medium. Scottish missionary efforts were prominent in the field of education. Macaulay drew up the Indian Penal Code. The Marquess of Hastings suppressed the Pindaris. Bentinck suppressed Sati, Thuggee Cult and female infanticide.¹⁶ Indian governors-general were drawn from the ranks of the British aristocracy. London began to regard the welfare of India as a sacred trust. They shook India out of her slumber and brought her into the industrial age.

Islam and Jihad

Of all the great religions, Islam appears to be the most democratic. No difference is made between Muslim and Muslim. There is no established clergy or hereditary priesthood. The dogmas are kept simple. Yet in the Islamic world, there is not a single nation which may be said to be a democracy. Somehow that religious equality is kept confined to the sphere of religion alone. While it may lead to *jihad*, it does not stray into the economic or political fields.¹⁷ Why is this so?

It seems to rest on the temperament of the Muslims. The average Muslim is not much interested in the problems of government. There is a kind of military thinking in Islam which makes every Muslim regard himself as a *jihadi* in an unending war against Shirk and Satan. A military type of mind accepts constraints which a civilian mind would eschew. However large the size of an army, it is better to have one commanding general. This commanding general is the Caliph. He represents the unity of Islam. This renders impossible any rule by committee at the top. The Caliph, unlike the president, holds office for life. Theoretically, this would be a combination of a democratic base tapering to an aristocracy and the rule by the wisest man in the community. This would correspond to the type of mix recommended by Wolff. The Muslims consider the first four caliphs, *Abu Bakr*, *Umar*, *Usman* and *Ali* as the lawful *khalifas* (*al Rashidin*). They were companions of the Prophet. The community

accepted their leadership. Their interpretation of law was final. Thereafter familial rule began.

The VTM seeks to achieve centering by redressing the balance between the right and the left. Since democracy is regarded as the panacea for all ills, the voice of the right generally goes unheard. An introvert withdraws into himself and never presents any case to the court of public opinion. That opinion itself rises from extraversion. This, in the long run, will lead to attitudes and responses being pushed into the unconscious. The unconscious will later spring surprises. These are not under rational control.

Wolff suggests a number of remedies by which quality may be granted some sort of parity with quantity. VTM seeks to give the rightist attitude a formulation. Its second objective is to establish a common, rightist front in a generally antagonistic leftist society. The third is increasing the rightist influence in practical government. Wolff wishes that appointments to the supreme judicial bench should be made on the principle of balance. This would mean that loose construction and strict constitutionalism shall find equal expression, there being four judges from either group with the Chief Justice of the United States holding the balance. As regards representation in legislative assemblies, right, left and center should have a one-third share each. The qualification is assessed by way of temperament and theoretical attitude. Seats are available only if the psychological and temperamental attitudes are met. This psychological classification would extend to primary groups. If there is a durable balance, secondary issues can be dealt with. How all this is to be achieved in practice, Wolff does not delineate.

In the twenty-first century world, because of American influence, the idea of democracy has taken root everywhere. The exceptions are the Islamic bloc and China and dependencies. In Islam, the norm is supplied by religion. In China, the norm is a racial one. The elaborate checks and balances suggested by progressive movements and writers, such as the ones considered above, fall far short of the homogeneity that the Koran and Beijing are able to impose. This would indicate that the matter would have to be treated at a psychological level. There is always the inertia of the previous stage which guides habitual thought energy. This is a very powerful force and cannot be easily stalled. It may push in either direction. It might lead to the Philosopher King or a tyrant. In many religious or special interest groups, emotion is far more powerful than logic. Whether it is possible at this stage to bring in an intellectual element upholding conceptual thinking, I leave it to the reader to judge.

Plato displays contempt for democracy in his *Dialogues*. Any decision taken by public consensus will be far inferior to the decision based on transcendent insight of a philosopher king or a guardian. Aristotle allows a certain amount of common sense to the plebs when thinking and acting as a group. In that kind of leftist setup, the group is definitely more intelligent than the individual or unit. Its limitation is it cannot deal with abstract or complicated problems. It can never show the way to salvation. If we accept the proposition that the end of the state is not mere life, rather a good quality of life, then the greatest impediment to Liberation is the tyranny of the majority. Aristotle accepts this. When things get out of hand, a monarch steps in to restore the balance. Wolff also feels that with the advance of learning and life becoming more complicated, problems will have to be addressed which mass man is hopelessly incompetent to solve. At this point, he says they must turn round to the great sages and humbly seek their guidance. It is not as though all sages have administrative ability or the finesse necessary for politics but some undoubtedly do. Apart from Plato and Spinoza, there is the example of the great Buddha himself.

This brings us to the final question: What does the spiritual seeker gain from all this? Indian philosophy has always emphasized the correspondence between inward spiritual penetration and external societal growth. Each influences the other. Ramana Maharishi says

“Disinterested action surrendered to the Lord purifies the mind and points the way to Salvation.” The karma of most entrants is bad. No direct enquiry into the Self is likely to succeed. The karmic imbalance has first to be redressed. The indicators of previous bad karma are lack of control over the senses, incapacity to deal with abstractions and extreme selfishness masquerading as a love of freedom. The psychic setup of any individual is based on the predominance of one or the other of the *gunas* and also his or her previous karma. This is the original, indubitable given. All maneuvers are within it.

Shankara says that *nididhyasana* will not succeed if the *vipaka* of previous karma is too bad. After the *vipaka* has disappeared either by endurance or by *nishkama karma*, then the knowledge will take hold. This is God’s inescapable law. That is why the candidate is asked to improve his motivation. Wolff says that the practice of virtue is of distinct importance for though knowledge is transcendent to all karmas; it is very difficult to move to enlightenment from a background of adverse karma. The Buddha used to cite the example of the parricide, Ajatasatru who is now suffering the torments of hell but will reemerge in a final incarnation as a Private Buddha.

A scheme of micro-macrocosmic correspondence will clarify the point. In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord sets his disciple Arjuna, the Herculean task of cleaning the Augean stables of Indian politics before embarking on *Atma Vidya*. As he progresses in his self-imposed task, his insight becomes clearer. He will get into touch with archetypes of the Collective Unconscious. Krishna himself is one such. Now he has far greater power to reach the goal of self-actualization. The Collective Unconscious is present both in the individual as in society. This is the zone of karma and has to be carefully traversed. This was what pushed Gandhi into his various *Satyagrahas*.

David R. Hawkins, a psychiatrist and a healer, has introduced a chart categorizing psychological and spiritual states of mind and behavior. It is somewhat thought-provoking. I give it here for what it’s worth. The courteous reader need not take the correspondences mentioned here too seriously. The general rule is victory over one dimension of consciousness will bestow a simultaneous control over external manifestation thereof. The difference between the individual and the collective is merged in the level called *mahat* or Cosmic Intelligence.

Map of Consciousness

<u>God View</u>	<u>Life View</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Log</u>	<u>Emotion</u>	<u>Process</u>
Self	Is	Enlightenment	700-1000	Ineffable	Pure Consciousness
All-Being	Perfect	Peace	600	Bliss	Illumination
One	Complete	Joy	540	Serenity	Transfiguration
Loving	Benign	Love	500	Reverence	Revelation
Wise	Meaningful	Reason	400	Understanding	Abstraction
Merciful	Harmonious	Acceptance	350	Forgiveness	Transcendence
Inspiring	Hopeful	Willingness	310	Optimism	Intention
Enabling	Satisfactory	Neutrality	250	Trust	Release
Permitting	Feasible	Courage	200	Affirmation	Empowerment
Indifferent	Demanding	Pride	175	Scorn	Inflation
Vengeful	Antagonistic	Anger	150	Hate	Aggression
Denying	Disappointing	Desire	125	Craving	Enslavement
Punitive	Frightening	Fear	100	Anxiety	Withdrawal
Disdainful	Tragic	Grief	75	Regret	Despondency
Condemning	Hopeless	Apathy	50	Despair	Abdication
Vindictive	Evil	Guilt	30	Blame	Destruction
Despising	Miserable	Shame	20	Humiliation	Elimination
-	-	Dead	0	-	-

Explanation and Assumptions: The third column is the core list of categories. Other columns relate to it. Hawkins claims that courage is the defining level at which spiritual growth begins. Winston Churchill used to say courage is the most important of these qualities for it guarantees the rest. In the Bhagavad Gita the Lord asks a dispirited Arjuna to take up his bow and ascend his chariot. Levels between shame and fear hold a person back. It is difficult for a *sadhaka* to move upward through the levels below 200 without assistance from a guru. People do not have to progress through the stages successively. They can bypass certain rungs in the ladder. Desire is the level of addiction, but also is the first positive phase in the development of multi-dimensional consciousness. *Rajas* is better than *tamas*. Desire can be directed towards introception. This largely overlaps Shankara's *nididhyasana*. Desire thwarted is anger. Adversity has its place in spiritual unfolding. It is a divine law that a spiritual seeker's forbearance will be tested. Adversity will generally be raised to the utmost level the aspirant can bear. Hence the reflective effect of adversity can be used as a gauge to assess the depth of a candidate's insight.

It would be seen that the *sadhana* is worked out in the outer social field up to a point. Then inwardness becomes more important. Above the plane of acceptance, reason begins to hold sway. Naropa used to say that in the *karma marga*, the aspirant has to wait for a helpful concatenation of external circumstances before *Nirvana* sets in. In higher levels where reason predominates, the external world can be ignored. One method is Shankara's, which is withdrawing completely from the world. Another is Wolff's, which seeks to transform the very field from which the *sadhana* has commenced.

Implicit in the VTM is a strong counter to the leftist tendency of horizontal expansion. In a roundabout way, this helps the dissemination of the *Buddhadharma*. The soul's ascent is vertical. Dialectic materialism, though imposed on many Buddhist lands has led to a reaction with the *Sangha* asserting that communism and other such doctrines seem fundamentally opposed to realization. While it has led to the ruthless suppression in Tibet of the Dalai Lama and his group, it has also brought a wider public into contact with the Dharma. Communism is one more manifestation of Caesar power. Caesar is powerless beyond the Styx. The soul is immortal. It cannot be regimented or destroyed. The river of death can be crossed only by the individual. By laying stress on the individual's freedom to develop his psyche, the VTM points the way to the Beyond.

Modern Bodhisattva

Wolff says, "As it appears to me, that which is needed is a seeking for the ultimate Attainment on the part of as many people as possible—Attainment which is the very Essence of the religious search. . . . Furthermore, the seeking of this Attainment is not simply for the sake of one's own individual Redemption but for the sake of the Redemption of humanity as a whole and, in addition, of all creatures whatsoever, however humble they may be. He who forgets his own Attainment, and his own Redemption, in seeking for the Attainment and Redemption of all creatures, is following the Path which is most certain to involve that very Attainment and Redemption for himself. The motive should always be the good of all creatures, not one's own private good."¹⁸

Here is as good a restatement of the *Bodhisattva's* Vow as any in modern times.

Notes

¹ Wolff relates an episode from this seminar as follows: “There was one brilliant young man there, a Scotsman, who was winding up his fourth year of graduate study, taking his degree, who wrote a paper of a kind of modified Vedanta, and was able to defend it against all criticism brought up by the members of the seminar, and that impressed me; but the thing that was born into my mind, that there must be another organ of cognition other than sense perception and conceptual cognition. . . . And from the standpoint of epistemology—and this you might say was an epistemological motivation for entering the yogic search, for I felt that if our two recognized organs, faculties, or functions of cognition are not the whole of our resources in cognition, then our philosophic view of the world must be incomplete, quite inadequate. So, therefore, it is very important to determine that there is such. Testimony from India, [and] from other sources, seems to indicate it to be true.” Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Extemporaneous Comments on Cognition as Unconditioned by Perspective” (Audio lecture recorded February 16, 1976).

² *Nididhyasana*: This word from the Vedanta largely overlaps Wolff’s ‘introception’. It is knowledge by identity. It has an immediacy that nothing can controvert. It is overwhelmingly real. Wolff writes, “The character of this phase of consciousness, as it has been represented in existent discussions and as revealed in my own contact with it is of the nature of immediate awareness of an existential content or value. This immediacy is of a far superior order as compared to that given through the senses, for the latter is dependent upon the instrumentality of sensuous organs and functions. As compared to experience through the senses, this rarer phase of consciousness gives a transcendent value immediately and renders possible the predication of its existence in a judgment without violating the fundamental principles laid down by Kant.” Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy*, p. 243. The Sanskrit words used are *svaprakasam* (self-effulgent) and *aprokshatvam* (immediate).

³ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *Pathways Through to Space*, chap. 62.

⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *Vertical Thought Movement*, p. 40.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁷ *Ibid*.

⁸ Monticello, October 28, 1813.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁰ From James Russell Lowell, “Stanzas on Freedom.”

¹¹ Wolff, *Vertical Thought Movement*, p. 6.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 28.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 38.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 43.

¹⁵ A dastak was a document issued by the Mughal government granting exemption from various taxes. The Company’s servants simply transferred the dastaks to themselves and misused them for private trade.

¹⁶ By Regulation XIV, Lord William Bentinck prohibited Sati, the inhuman custom of burning to death a widow along with her husband. The Thugs were ritual murderers who were worshippers of Kali and considered themselves above human justice. They had killed about a million people until Bentinck gave full support to Sleeman, who untangled the secret organization of the Thugs and brought them to justice. The movement was suppressed. Some Thugs became active, improving farmers. Edward VII met one of these reformed serial killers who had turned approver.

¹⁷ In the Koran, *jihad* has two aspects; the higher one is the control of the subconscious mind and the restraining of wild impulses. The lower is the outer *jihad*. By overemphasizing the latter, the fundamentalists have hijacked the Muslim bandwagon.

¹⁸ From Franklin Merrell-Wolff, Preface to *Pathways Through to Space*.