
THE FRANKLIN MERRELL-WOLFF FELLOWSHIP NEWSLETTER

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The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship is a publicly supported, non-profit corporation whose mission is to educate the public about the twentieth-century American philosopher Franklin Merrell-Wolff through his writings, audio recordings, teachings, and life. Our activities include publishing and distributing his works, and the sponsorship of forums and events to study and discuss the life and work of Franklin Merrell-Wolff, as well as to explore the connection between Wolff's teachings and those of other traditions.

A Message from the Chair

Chuck Post

It has probably occurred to others as it has to me, that remarkable beings are attracted to other remarkable beings. And so it is in the example of Franklin Merrell-Wolff and the late Mike Schmitt. Talented in music and science, and already deep in philosophy, Mike found his way to Franklin.

John Flinn, known to our Fellowship as one very close to Franklin in his final years, was a good friend of Mike. His article herein is a touching tribute.

Mike introduced John to the work of Franklin, which leads me to the question: Have you introduced any of Franklin's work to others? What was the response? I've found that it really takes a certain readiness to "get it." I don't say this to demean those that do not; they may be better tuned to a different path or they may well be masters in other aspects of this adventure called life. But perhaps as Fellows we should try.

For those of us in the Northern Hemisphere, the sun is very low in the sky right now. But it is still there. And so it is with that other Light.

In this Issue

This issue starts with a tribute to Michael Schmitt, who passed just about one year ago. Mike was a long-time student of Franklin Merrell-Wolff and in the early 1980s he was single-handedly responsible for the distribution of many of Wolff's essays and other work in electronic format. It is fitting that this homage has been penned by John Flinn, a companion of Wolff who was first introduced to his work by Mr. Schmitt. (An interview of John can be found in the Fall 2014 issue of this newsletter.)

In January, we will begin posting more archival material on the Fellowship's website, beginning with items related to the various groups with which Franklin Merrell-Wolff was associated, each prefaced with an overview of the organization. Since Wolff was connected with one or another spiritual group throughout his life, it also seems appropriate to address the question of why such associations are important. We present some of Wolff's thoughts on this question here along with a suggestion of our own.

Finally, it seems that politics dominates our consciousness these days, a situation that Wolff warned could "obscure" the bearers of higher culture. This is not to say, however, that we should ignore the problem of government; indeed, Wolff spent much effort on this issue and noted that it is important that we all take an interest in the form of our society. We present some of his early thoughts on this topic and suggest that they serve as a good starting point for further reflection.

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A Remembrance of Michael Schmitt

by John Flinn

A bright star flared and blinked out last year, disappearing from the ponderable Universe, far beyond reach and sight, leaving a great void in my heart that quickly filled with grateful respect and love. Some little chips and shards of sorrow and grief in that brew, but that is the way of it.

When our paths first crossed in 1976, Mike Schmitt and I were both working the Parchman Farm, a couple of married blokes toiling our ways through life. I was just beginning the enquiry, feeling the possibility of a life oriented to knowing a probable something beyond.

At work, Mike was an engineer and what we now call an “IT-guy.” Off duty, he was a magician and a musician, a sorcerer dabbling in White Magic and the finest piano player west of Rubenstein. He had a beautiful baby grand on which he played the classics with effortless skill and grace. His library

was a great wall of shelves filled with books about science, mathematics, physics, history and mystery.

On my first visit, I borrowed a couple of books—one about ancient Britain, the other by Alan Watts. In short order, I became acquainted with the names of Liszt, Scriabin, Lilly, and Wolff. The first three were easy enough to get and I was ready, but this Wolff guy with his *Pathways Through to Space*—it was so dense, arcane and archaic. He used language in ways I’d never seen, and terms strange yet familiar.

Mike was a mentor and teacher. His friendship was a lantern that lit up the path I walked without knowing. He was a Georgia boy, growing up in the old South with a doting mother and an alcoholic and distant father; he started playing the piano round about the age of five or six. His teacher was a blind woman, married to a blind man. She gave lessons in

her home and, though completely without sight, she could “see” colors and knew when Mike wore his red shirt. She taught him to play as she did, in the dark, with eyes closed. He was a true master, and loved the music. He could play a Brahms piano concerto entirely from memory, weeping through most of the way. When I last saw him, he shared a new piece he was learning, another heavy classic. He was like Michelangelo, working on his rough stone until the end.



Franklin Merrell-Wolff and Mike Schmitt

We both found our ways to Lone Pine, and Franklin into our lives, only a couple of years after my introduction to *Pathways*. It seemed important to both of us to meet this man—call us “the Hardy Boys and the Gnostic of Mt. Whitney.”

Mike tuned Franklin’s piano and played for him. They had more than one good and deep conversation and we both looked to him as Guru. Mike was a serious student and wrote a book about Franklin and the New Physics.¹ With multiple degrees and a Masters in Electrical Engineering, Mike’s long career drew to a close in 2002 and he and his wife of many years retired to Sedona a couple of years later, in a lovely home in the heart

¹ *On the Philosophy of Franklin Merrell-Wolff and the “New Physics”* is available on the Fellowship’s website under the Forums/Member Contributions tab.

of Red Rock paradise. They both enjoyed and enriched the community, participating in local politics and being instrumental in the expansion of Sedona fire and emergency services.

They traveled occasionally and once had a trip to the Continent where, on a luxury cruise down the Blue Danube, he held all the passengers spellbound as he played a waltz on the captain’s white Steinway. Mike was invited to play in a synagogue and several churches in the Sedona area and, after the passing of his wife in 2014, he began playing for rest homes and senior care centers. With his piano, he inspired and gave comfort and joy to the aged, sick and dying. He spoke to me of how grateful and moved some of them were, and of how he felt the same.

Being not as tough as I, he couldn’t speak of such things without breaking up a little. Bring the conversation near to things of depth or beauty or divine import and he’d become tearful and trip through his words. Franklin’s longtime student and friend, Elmer Roeder, was like that. Near to the Fire, they were.

Our final time together was in Indian territory, just a few weeks before Mike died. It was a journey through ancient lands, with a fair wind moving us along. We reviewed the past, viewed the present and wondered about the future. A year later, here I sit in the future and he’s no longer present but somewhere in the Blue Beyond. His Moonlight Sonata now plays online, in the Ether, for all to hear.

I still remember his laughter, his voice, his wall of books. I could feel his joy and wonder upon his release from this world, pure and easy, and know that he glanced back for a moment to give me a nod. Now he’s merged with the One, “gone into the great mystery before me.”

My transcendental friend, my teacher. He shined brightly in his last years and lit many lives. He flowered and that thousandth petal opened up. His leaving, another teaching.

Editor's Note: If you would like to hear some of Mr. Schmitt's piano playing, the first link below will take you to his YouTube channel; the second link is to a video that John Flinn has posted to his own YouTube channel (and where you can also find a number of videos that feature Franklin Merrell-Wolff).

[Mike Schmitt's YouTube Channel](#)

[John Flinn Video](#)

The Importance of Group Work

In one way or another, Franklin Merrell-Wolff was connected with a formal religious or spiritual group throughout his life. His father was a Methodist minister, and so as a child he "had always automatically attended church and Sunday school."¹ While in college, Wolff became interested in Theosophy, and began to attend meetings of a local theosophical society. Later, when he decided to leave academia to embark on a spiritual quest, he first attempted to form his own commune only to end up at the parent organization of the group that he joined while a university student. After leaving that community, there followed a string of other associations until he and his first wife founded their own "assembly."

Here is what Wolff had to say about the importance of group work:

One may ask the question, why are there groups or entities such as the Temple of the People, or of the Theosophical Society . . . ? Why are there stories of the initiates at the time of Plato and of Pythagoras in our Western history? Why do we speak of Egyptian mysteries, as well as of Greek mysteries, and of the hidden teachings of the

Orient? In our ordinary approach to the subject of knowledge as given in our exoteric schools and universities, we think of knowledge as a common inheritance and that the problem is simply the training of individuals in the beginning so that they may acquire and understand this knowledge. But the mystic tradition which is handed down from the past involves something more; namely, that there is a kind of knowledge in the world which is not available to everybody, that indeed candidates for this knowledge may be subjected to many tests and trials and prove themselves as worthy, and usually the knowledge is given upon the basis of a pledge of secrecy. And one may ask why? There is one answer that is very easily found, and that is that much of this knowledge is of a sort that involves real power—and power that can be misused—and that therefore the custodians of this knowledge should be well-proven individuals in terms of their personal character and in terms of their discretion, so that this knowledge, which on one hand might be used for the edification and advance of humanity on one side, yet could be used by those with questionable motivation as a force for personal power and actually as serving the enslavement of humanity. Therefore, such knowledge should be handled with great care.²

One might argue that Wolff's life embodies another function of religious or spiritual group work—one emphasized by Blaise Pascal in connection with his famous wager. Pascal argued that belief in the existence of God could be justified on prudential grounds; that is, that it is in our best interest to believe in God whatever evidence we may have for the claim "God exists." Pascal also recognized, however, that even if one was convinced by his argument that it is not possible for

¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Autobiographical Material: The Feminine Side of My Experience," part 1 (Lone Pine, Calif.: May 19, 1982), audio recording, 1.

² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Autobiographical Material: My Academic Life and Embarking upon My Spiritual Quest" (Lone Pine, Calif.: March 1, 1982), audio recording, 10.

a non-believer to suddenly become a theist. In modern terms, this is to recognize that we cannot treat belief as an action: beliefs are not something that we have control over. Pascal's answer was to encourage non-believers convinced by his argument to go live among religious people. By doing so, he thought that habits of faith would take hold and that a belief in the existence of God would eventually come naturally.

How does Wolff's life fit this pattern? Although Wolff first became interested in Theosophy in college, he was not initially convinced:

Here was a way of thinking and valuing totally different from that which I found in the university. Nonetheless, I was intrigued, and so I returned again and became even more interested, and ultimately a regular attendant. . . . But I was not satisfied with the soundness of the thinking, and the result was that for three years I disputed the soundness of his position with the leader of the group; meanwhile, feeling that yet there was something here. It was a kind of thinking that was totally foreign with respect to that which I had found in the university. I knew the scientific soundness of university teaching. I knew mathematics and philosophy, or was experiencing it at that time, and yet here was something that seemed to make an appeal to another possibility. Ultimately, I was sufficiently interested to make a tentative association with the entity known as the Temple of the People. I became a member and attended its convention in 1912, just before I went for the year at Harvard. But I was not yet fully convinced that here was a door to truth; it was an intriguing possibility, but there were many elements that were not satisfactory.³

³ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "Autobiographical Material: A Recollection of My Early Life and Influences" (Lone Pine, Calif.: July 6, 1978), audio recording, 5.

Later, when he was set to embark upon a career in the academy, Wolff decided instead to set out in search of "another kind of Consciousness where alone, it seemed, [a] solution to the antinomies of the subject-object consciousness could be found."⁴ Although Wolff would on more than one occasion question this decision, he apparently recognized that an association with like-minded individuals would not only help to assuage these doubts, but would provide the right setting for finding this other "kind of Consciousness."

The Problem of Government

Franklin Merrell-Wolff was keenly interested in the problem of government and he thought that it was important that all of us grapple with matters political; indeed, he warned that:

It is a matter of vital importance for all, for the pure scientist and for the recluse, as well as for men engaged in more 'practical' affairs, just what form the future organization of society may assume. At this time it is no longer safe for any man to abstract himself from concern relative to political affairs. For in an age when politics assumes ascendancy, the bearers of the higher culture face the threat of obscurity.¹

For those of us experiencing despair with the current political state of the world, these words

⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy: A Personal Record of Transformation and a Discussion of Transcendental Consciousness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 91.

¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, "The Vertical Thought Movement" (Wolff Archive: Essays, ca. 1940), 115. In this essay Wolff advances a political agenda that he called the "The Vertical Thought Movement." Wolff wrote this manifesto in the wake of the 1940 United States presidential election, which saw the New Deal Movement run virtually unopposed. In response, Wolff proposed a new political association that he intended to be a "continuous crusade oriented to a principle and conviction which stands in contrapuntal relation to the Socialist Movement."

seem especially prescient, and lead us to the question of what we may do to avoid the “threat of obscurity.”

Wolff spent much effort on this problem, and one may find the fruit of this labor by pursuing the Wolff Archive on the Fellowship’s website. For example, under the Audio Recordings tab is a set of lectures labeled “Society and Politics”; there are also a number of essays that focus on this problem, the most important of which is “The Vertical Thought Movement” referenced in the footnote just above.

Here we present what Franklin Merrell-Wolff had to say about “The Problem of Government” in *Pathways Through to Space*. Although he concludes that he sees “no real hope in the governmental field,” the subsequent exertion he spent on the problem would seem to belie this statement. Perhaps the moral is that we all need to think more deeply about this problem, and Wolff’s thoughts below seem like a good place to start.

IN THESE DAYS when there is such a widespread ‘liquidation’ of old governmental forms and the substitution of new forms of extreme illiberality and brutality, one who is interested in the welfare of man can scarcely be indifferent to the problem of government. It is clear that thus far all our attempts in government on a large scale have fallen far short of a really satisfactory success. Otherwise there would not be so much of change and demand for changes.

For a government to be truly successful, it must maintain, in high degree in the social body, three principles, (1) Freedom, (2) Justice, and (3) Efficiency.* Now, none of the forms of government that we have tried so far have afforded enduring success in all three respects. The rule of kings and

aristocracies has at times worked reasonably well, but in recent as well as ancient, history we have seen very clearly how badly this form can fail when there is a decay of character and competency in the ruling classes. Under certain conditions, democracy does function fairly satisfactorily. These conditions seem to be the following:

1. That the unit of government is not so large as to be beyond the effective comprehension of the average voter.
2. That the intelligence and sense for responsibility in governmental affairs of the average voter is considerably above that of the average human being.
3. That the governmental problems are fairly simple.

In the modern large nations, with our extremely complex civilization and particularly where there is a considerable heterogeneity of population, these conditions are far from being fulfilled. The signs of the break-down of that form of democracy involving universal suffrage are painfully evident today. Democracy has become too dangerously inefficient, and thus this system is being replaced in an increasing degree by the dictatorial form of power wherein efficiency in certain directions is secured at the price of radical loss of freedom and justice.

It has certainly become clear that an excellent constitution is no guarantee of good government. For the government largely becomes what the ruling class makes it, within certain limits determined by the temperament and character of the people governed. In a government such as that of the United States, this ruling class actually is not the people, as it is supposed to be in theory. In practice it is the class of the professional politicians, who, in their turn, have been checked, balanced, and sometimes controlled by another class whose basis of power is economic. Now the professional politician is typically the kind of man who can command the vote of the average elector. Generally

* I do not name ‘Order’ among these for it seems that Order is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. Practically, we find Order to be vital for the highest possible realization of Freedom, Justice, and Efficiency, and consequently it is important in the pragmatic sense.

this is a sort of man who stands upon a distinctly inferior intellectual and moral level, though there are some brilliant exceptions. The result is that, though the American government is based upon an admirably designed form, it is today showing the signs of serious weakness that may become fatal. If the right kind of men, in sufficient numbers, could be selected for positions of authority and responsibility, this need not be the case. But with the intelligence and moral character of the average elector being what it is, and the common denominator of the whole being still a great deal lower, it is too much to hope that these positions will ever be filled, in sufficient numbers, with the men of requisite capacity and character. We do not have a lack of men with these qualifications, but for the larger part they are not popular with, or comprehensible to, the average voter. Hence, their services, when made available for governmental purposes, are much more commonly located in appointive than in elective positions. But final judgments in matters of policy rest with those who occupy elective offices.

It may well be that a dispassionate study of the history of the American government will show that the checking and control of the politicians by strong men who wield economic power has been more a factor serving the ends of stability and soundness in government than the reverse. Two factors tend to produce such a condition. In the first place, the only important field on the American scene where men of administrative talent could find opportunity for the exercise of their capacities has been in the business and financial worlds. On the whole, in America there are more men in the business field who manifest the caliber of statesmanship, in the true sense of the word, than there are in the political arena. In the second place, economic necessity, in the long run, requires of the men who achieve and hold economic power that they shall develop the kind of thinking which is characteristic of the engineer and scientist, in some measure at least. It is

a kind of thought based more upon fact in the objective sense than upon psychological prejudice. In contrast, the typical power of the politicians is psychological and thus capitalizes prejudice, superstition, etc., as instruments of popular appeal. They often win votes by promising something contrary to the laws of nature, and in the very fact that they are willing to make such impossible promises they reveal a dangerous defect of character. The result is that it may well prove to have been the restraint exercised by business and professional men of high character that has, on the whole, proved to be the most beneficent influence affecting practical American government.

It seems to be pretty definitely demonstrated that excellence of system is a far less important determinant in good government than the presence of wise men in the positions of power. The real problem of government is one not of mechanics but of wisdom. Thus the effective key to the solution of the generally chaotic condition of the world today is finding the men of sufficient wisdom and giving them power. This simply means that the crux of the problem of sound government lies in finding and placing sages at the center of power. The true Sage is a Man of Recognition and is, therefore, One who has transcended the temptations that the world has to offer.* At the same time, He brings to the problems of the world a more than worldly wisdom. There are Sages who, like Buddha, have an ancient understanding of government. Mankind can secure the leadership of such Men. But mankind must call for Them and recognize Their authority when They respond.

In the meantime, I see no real hope in the governmental field. Brief palliations there may be here and there, but no healing of the fundamental

* It is not suggested that all Sages are necessarily wise in the special field of government. There are different kinds of wisdom, and rarely, if ever, does any one individual attain the fullness of wisdom, in all directions, in a single embodiment. The Sages fitted for government are those who have unfolded the sense for the art of administration in an especial degree.

disease. It may be that conditions will have to continue to grow worse, that mass-man will try, as never before, to wield decision with respect to problems hopelessly beyond his comprehension, and that, when he has failed utterly, as he must fail, and is entangled in the impossible maze of his own construction, then in true humility he will call for help from Those who alone can give that help. In that day, and not before, the problem of government can be solved. For the inescapable fact is that the problem of practical government is too complex for mere subject-object consciousness, however highly developed. The perspective of the Higher Consciousness is an absolute requisite.²

A Quote from Franklin Merrell-Wolff

Now, just as awakening to cognitive capacity enormously enriches development in terms of sensation and affection, so also the Awakening to Higher Consciousness tremendously augments the capacity in the already partially unfolded inferior dimensions. The result is that the greater portion of the best in religion, morals, art, philosophy, science, etc., has come from the hands or lips of those Men who have had this Higher Awakening in at least some degree. Here is an effect that the man limited to three dimensions of consciousness can in some measure evaluate and appreciate, even though the Key Power is as yet beyond his understanding. In fact, two of the earmarks of the Illumined Man are afforded by an increase, amounting sometimes almost to a revolution, in the intellectual and affectional functions or dimensions. Now, an animal may well recognize that somehow man can excel it in its own field, as is revealed by the fact that man is a far more dangerous killer than the most predatory animal, but the animal has no idea of the key that gives

man that peculiar power. Likewise, ordinary subject-object conscious man, however much he may appreciate the superior excellence of the God-Conscious Man in the former's field, is utterly unconscious of, or blind to, the Key that unlocks the latter's Power. As has been repeated over and over again, man must Awake to understand this, and it is quite useless for him to try to circumscribe that Awakening by attempting to divine what It actually is. When something of It is suggested, as in the present case, by the use of an analogy or symbol, It is not being circumscribed in the sense involved in all effective definition. (From the journal entry "The Symbol of the Fourth Dimension" in *Pathways Through to Space*, reprinted in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff's Experience and Philosophy*, 132-3.)

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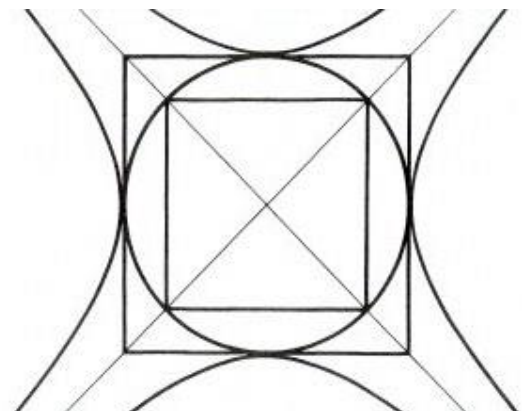
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² This excerpt is the journal entry titled "The Problem of Government" in *Pathways Through to Space*, reprinted in *Franklin Merrell-Wolff's Experience and Philosophy* (Albany, N. Y.: SUNY Press, 1994), 153-5.

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