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THE CONCEPT OF MAN IN THE PHILOSOPHY
OF SRI AUROBINDO.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Arts in the University of Durham for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Herbert Patrick Sullivan, B.D.

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JUNE, 1960.

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PREFACE.

This study of the concept of Man in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo might easily have been entitled 'The Metaphysical System of Sri Aurobindo'; for to expound Sri Aurobindo's view of Man is, indeed, to expound his entire philosophical scheme since Man is at the very heart of his teachings about reality and constitutes their beginning and their end. We have attempted, therefore, in the pages which follow to do what Sri Aurobindo himself did not do, - namely, to construct a system. We quickly add, not to construct a philosophy, but a system. There is a cohesion and consistency throughout Sri Aurobindo's teachings about the nature of things which constitute these teachings as what we would call a 'cosmic view', - a 'Kosmosanschauung', - in which each of his thoughts and intuitions and 'truth-visions' has its own place and is related to all other aspects. There is not yet, however, a system, - surely not so in the Western philosophical sense, nor even in the classical Indian tradition of sutras and bhashyas. Sri Aurobindo was not in the first place a philosopher: he did not think like a philosopher; he did not express himself as a philosopher. He was a poet and a yogin and a mystic, and he expressed himself in poetry, in yoga and in mystical utterance. It is even said that not only had he read very little of Oriental and Western academical philosophy, but also he understood or was attracted by little of that which he read, - the writings of Kant being an example!

To say that he was not a philosopher and that he did not so

express himself is not to say that he lacked intellectual acumen and depth. Indeed, his magnus opus, The Life Divine, must surely be among the most profound literary productions of this century or of any other. Only after several readings does one begin to grasp the profundity of insight, the subtlety of expression, the intricate relationships between principles expressed therein. In the language of highest poetical and mystical quality Aurobindo presents as comprehensive a vision of reality as one could ever hope to find. But he presents it not as an explicit system. Always he takes his exposition of a principle, an intuition, a truth just so far and then stops, so as not to distort its 'non-rational' quality. Thus his language is highly symbolical and poetical; his deepest intuitions are intricately implicit in his expression. After some re-readings a passage, a sentence, a phrase, even a single word may suddenly 'open up' and disclose meanings and possible meanings which first readings had missed. Indeed in the process of writing this study we were obliged to alter completely entire sections because of such 'revelations'. We, therefore, cannot appreciate the facile dismissal of Sri Aurobindo's writings as having 'nothing in them' or as being 'fanciful', as two prominent scholars of our acquaintance have condemned them. We should suspect that these individuals would pass similar judgments on the writings of Plotinus or Eckhart!

Our task in this study has been to live with Aurobindo in his writings, to enter into their meanings as fully as our own

comprehension would permit, to lift meanings out and order them in a reasonably coherent fashion, expressing significant or illuminating parallels and contrasts with other Indian philosophies and traditions. At some points we have also made footnoted references to ancient and modern Western thought, but only where we considered such reference especially meaningful. Our primary concern has been with clear exposition and not with comparisons. It is far too easy and tempting a thing to make rapid and superficial comparisons between men and their ideas or between religions and their expressions, and while we appreciate the value of the comparative method judiciously used, we have attempted to respect the wise saying of a former teacher that 'one can't compare apples with oranges or bananas with pears simply because they are all fruits'. Often in 'comparative' studies one term is trimmed or shaped to correspond in appearance to the other, or else both terms of the comparison are modified and mutilated to agree together with some standard or judgment external to either or both. We have sought always to respect the uniqueness and integrity of Sri Aurobindo's basic intuitions and their expression, making comparisons only when we felt them to clarify Sri Aurobindo's meanings or to reveal significant relationships. Always, however, they have been intended as tentative comparisons and not as absolute equations or contrasts. As Aurobindo himself said: 'I do not think exact correlations can be traced between one system of spiritual and occult knowledge and another. All deal with the same material, but

there are differences of standpoint, differences of view-range, a divergence in the mental idea of what is seen and experienced, disparate pragmatic purposes and therefore a difference in the paths surveyed, cut out or followed; the systems vary, each constructs its own schema and techniques."⁽¹⁾

Our entire task, we must point out, was not a philosophical one as such but what we would call a phenomenological and hermeneutical one. Before engaging in a study of Indian philosophy, and specifically that of Sri Aurobindo, we had been trained in the history of religions, studying for a number of years under the late Professor Joachim Wach and then for a time under Professor Friedrich Heiler. The methodology of that discipline, as we were taught it, is a descriptive, comparative and typological one, the goal being to grasp the meanings of religious phenomena and to achieve an integral understanding of them. Thus what we have sought to do is to understand Sri Aurobindo. That is, we have not been concerned to prove or to disprove the 'rightness' or philosophical value of his teachings, to defend or advocate them, but to interpret them as best we could by way of a systematic exposition. We have had no speculative or normative purpose; we have passed no theological or philosophical judgments. Our only concern has been with meanings. To that end we have endeavoured to 'suspend' our own value judgments, - or at least to be aware of them, - and to enter into an empathetic relationship with Aurobindo's expressed thought.

(1) The Riddle of This World, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1951, p.4.

We realise, of course, that we have not been entirely successful; for one is never completely free from his philosophical pre-suppositions; he is always somehow 'existentially involved' in his data; he must always bring himself as experiencing person into the task of understanding. We are aware, for example, that we have experienced Sri Aurobindo from a Western and Western Christian perspective. But this fact does not in itself render our experience invalid, our interpretation inaccurate; for our experience and our interpretation have always been subject to correction by our data. The real difficulty which we encountered in our study was the nature of the materials themselves. Sri Aurobindo's writings are the expression of a degree or quality of religious experience which we confess we have never had, and his expression, - his words and use of words, - is often unclear to us because of the uniqueness of the experience behind them. Aurobindo himself was acutely aware of the difficulty of communicating his experience of reality. As he wrote to a disciple: "... people do not really understand what I write - they put their own constructions on it ... People do not understand what I write because the mind by itself cannot understand things that are beyond it."⁽¹⁾

Our task, therefore, has been one of expounding, of making explicit and ordered what is implicit, - meanings and relationships suggested and adumbrated in the thousands of pages and literally hundreds of thousands of words which Sri Aurobindo wrote during his lifetime. It has not been, we feel, an easy

(1) Letters of Sri Aurobindo, 4th Series, Sri Aurobindo Circle, Bombay, 1951, p.90-91.

task, and to the best of our knowledge it is not one before undertaken. There are, to be sure, a number of bits and pieces about Aurobindo's metaphysics, - articles and pamphlets and anthologies of essays of one sort or another, - but, for the most part, these deal with the matter so superficially or unsystematically as to be of little value to us. Most of the important work on Aurobindo's thought has been on his poetry and aesthetics, the practical aspects of his 'integral yoga' and his social-political thought. These are areas which for the purpose of the present study have been touched upon only incidentally as illustrating basic metaphysical and psychological concepts.

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There are any number of possible approaches to the concept of man, especially in the thought of such a literary and spiritual genius as Sri Aurobindo. For the purpose of this study we have had to restrict ourselves to mostly the metaphysical aspects of Aurobindo's view of man. In so doing we have had to enter into lengthy consideration of the nature of Ultimate Reality and of the universe; for apart from a complete understanding of these doctrines, Aurobindo's view of man is virtually unintelligible. Thus, after an introductory chapter giving the main issues and lines of our discussion, we have explored the origin of man in terms of Aurobindo's concept of God and the creation of the universe. Next we deal with the nature of man mainly in terms of the concept of individuality. Finally we consider the

destiny of man as Aurobindo envisaged it within the process of terrestrial evolution.

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Our study in the School of Oriental Studies in the University of Durham during the past four years was made possible entirely through the munificence of three individuals now departed whose lives were quietly and simply dedicated to the knowledge and love of God. May they have that full vision of Truth which during their lifetimes they so earnestly sought!

We are indebted to Professor T.W. Thacker, Director of the School of Oriental Studies, who four years ago invited us to Durham and since has provided for our welfare and work in countless ways; to I.J.C. Foster, M.A., Keeper of Oriental Books, Durham, for his great assistance in providing us with the materials we needed and to his staff, especially Mrs. A.M. Thompson, for their many kindnesses over the years; to the Spalding Trust, Oxford, for a fellowship grant which enabled us to travel to and study in India for a year; to Professors T.R.V. Murti and S.K. Maitra of Banaras Hindu University for many enriching hours of instruction; to the Secretary and inmates of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, for their courtesy and hospitality during our stay with them. Finally we here offer to Arabinda Basu, B.A., Spalding Lecturer in Indian Studies, our gratitude and homage for having been to us not only research supervisor, but guru and highly esteemed friend, without whose unflinching guidance, patience and encouragement over the years this study would not have been written.

NOTE: For the most part, - and except in quotations from and the titles of texts, - we have not used the diacritical marks in romanised Sanscrit words. Similarly we have underlined technical Sanscrit terms only when first introducing them into our discussion. Otherwise they appear without marks and without underlining since we feel that such marks and underlining to the general reader are distracting and to the Sanscritist are unnecessary.

INTRODUCTION

"The one question", Sri Aurobindo once wrote, "which through all its complexities is the sum of philosophy and to which all human enquiry comes round in the end, is the problem of ourselves, - why we are here and what we are, and what is behind and before and around us, and what we are to do with ourselves, our inner significances and our outer environment".⁽¹⁾

It is the ability to ask this one question, to enter into a quest for the meaning of existence, personal and social, which for Sri Aurobindo truly distinguishes man from all other conscious life on this planet; for man is not merely conscious, he is self-conscious.⁽²⁾ He is not just rational animal; he is scientific animal, philosophical animal, religious animal. To be fully self-conscious, to know himself fully and thereby to become himself fully - this is the activity and goal which gives to man his truest quality.⁽³⁾

Man is the beginning and the end of all of his investigations concerning the meaning of existence. The only proper approach to the problem of meaning is for Aurobindo from the standpoint of man, - of his knowledge, of his activities, of his aspirations. In a sense we may say that Sri Aurobindo assumes his own existence, the real existence of man, and on the basis

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- (1) The Problem of Rebirth, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1952, p.43.
 (2) The Human Cycle, Sri Aurobindo Library, New York, 1950, pp.69-70.
 (3) The Life Divine, Sri Aurobindo Library, New York, 1949, pp.908-909.

of that assumption proceeds to consider the possible remainder of existence, going inward and outward. The world which men knows and affirms he knows through himself and his longings and the shape of the world he cognises. This being so, then what is needed, says Aurobindo, is a world-view which from the standpoint of man will balance and harmonise all terms of human existence, an interpretation of the cosmos which would give cohesion and purpose and reality to an existence characterised by division and meaninglessness and often branded as illusory.

To begin we must distinguish three primary terms of our existence of which we are to a greater or lesser degree aware.⁽¹⁾ Firstly there is our own individual existence of which we are directly aware; secondly there is nature or cosmos which is indirectly known by the senses and mind and which comprises all other individual existences along with our own in a vast network of relationships and movements; thirdly there is an Unknown, an invisible Reality which we sense exists somehow as the ultimate cause and ground and force of all existence and this tertium quid we name God. It is possible to deny all three terms, and men have done so. But behind every denial is, Aurobindo declares, a quest for knowledge, an implicit need for achieving a unity of these three terms, even if it be done by affirming one and suppressing the other two, - that is, by regarding the individual as real and all else as fictions of the mind, or by affirming

(1) Life Divine, pp.612-616.

only nature and regarding the rest as productions of a natural energy, or finally, in the liāvāvada fashion, by affirming only the Absolute and condemning all the rest as illusions inexplicably produced by an eternal power of cosmic illusion, māyā.⁽¹⁾

There is, of course, a fourth possibility which is the achieving of a negative unity, a void, through the nihilistic denial of all three terms of human existence.⁽²⁾

All philosophies centre around these three terms of existence, and all must deal in some manner with each term, if only to deny it. For Aurobindo, however, the denial of any one or all of these terms is no solution to the problem of existence, the problem of meaning; no denial or exclusive affirmation can be finally satisfying, indisputable and definitive.⁽³⁾ Naturalistic atheism, for example, has always been short lived because it has never really satisfied the spiritual longing of man and his inner knowledge that there is a truth more final than the natural. Pushed to their conclusions naturalism and materialism arrive at a māyā, an illusionism, like that of spiritual monism; human existence finally possesses no significance or reality.⁽⁴⁾

Man knows that in himself he is insufficient; he knows that he is not the explanation of the cosmos and that his knowledge of the cosmos is itself very limited. He is more or less aware both in himself and in the visible cosmos of much which seems to lie beyond the purely physical or natural and which is

(1) Life Divine, p.613.

(2) Ibid., pp.508-509.

(3) Ibid., pp.613-614.

(4) Ibid., p.21.

unexplainable by even the unseen material forces. He is constantly discovering new dimensions of his physical and psychological existence. He views himself as a product of a cosmic evolution which first manifested matter and then life and then mind and which appears to be moving steadily on to some presently unseen goal of mental and very possibly 'supramental' existence. He is conscious of evil and pain and suffering and imperfection as well as of good and bliss and joy and perfection. What his intellect and intuition and feelings demand is some Being or Force which holds all cosmic forces together, some One which relates his existence and the universe in a harmony and a unity, some Infinite which gives ultimate significance and direction to all his experiences. Call it what he may, man needs and "must arrive at a Supreme, a Divine, a Cause, an Infinite and Eternal, a Permanent, a Perfection to which all tends and aspires, or an All to which everything perpetually and invisibly amounts and without which they could not be".⁽¹⁾

The experimental fact of man, - his existence, - is then, we may say, inescapable, and for Aurobindo this fact of man is inexplicable apart from the prior fact of the existence of an eternal and omnipotent creating force, of God. It would seem that for Sri Aurobindo the existence of God or Brahman does not need to be proved any more than the existence of the world and of the individual; for it is as much a datum, a 'givenness',

(1) Life Divine, p.614.

of human experience as is the universe and the individual being, though the quality of the experience of God is intuitive or spiritual.⁽¹⁾ But just as human existence is incomprehensible or at least lacking an enduring significance or reality apart from the divine existence, so Ultimate Reality cannot be fully understood apart from phenomenal reality; for in the actuality of the universe is disclosed to us essential truths of the nature of the Divine. The existence of the universe reveals the existence of a creating spiritual force, just as the constant human aspiration for Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Freedom, Immortality, - for the Divine, - witness to the impulse in nature to exceed itself and attain a perfection which it presently lacks.⁽²⁾ Sri Aurobindo unreservedly rejects the extreme positions of the materialist on the one hand and of the ascetic on the other. The materialist claims that a creating divine spirit is an illusion; the universe is the product solely of matter or 'energy'. The ascetic for his part affirms only spirit and rejects matter, the world, as unholy, dead and degrading. In their exclusive emphases both positions are wrong, and the disastrous effects of their doctrines can be observed in India where the stress upon 'spirituality' has meant "a great bankruptcy of life" and in Europe where the preoccupation with material power and possession has led to "an equal bankruptcy

(1) The Human Cycle, pp.144-145.

(2) Life Divine, p.3.

in the things of the Spirit".⁽¹⁾ What is needed is a view of existence which relates in an integral harmony the realms of matter and of the spirit. The Samkhya doctrine of an eternal dualism of pure spirit (purusha) and mechanical, unconscious nature or substance (prakriti) is accordingly entirely unacceptable to Aurobindo; for these two eternal principles "have nothing in common, not even their opposite modes of inertia".⁽²⁾ Even less acceptable to Sri Aurobindo would be Shankara's Mayavada doctrine of a static transcendent Self and an unreal universe; for here the antagonism between spirit and matter or nature is eliminated by the reduction of human existence to an illusion, a solution as unsatisfying to the human intellect as to human spiritual aspiration.

We have then three terms of existence, - the individual, the universe and an Ultimate Reality, - and apparently unreconcilable dualism between spirit and matter. It is the task of philosophy in general and of spiritual philosophy in particular to resolve this dualism and to relate harmoniously the three terms; however, the method which is employed in this task must not be solely an intellectual analysis and ratiocinative explanation of things but in the first place an 'intuitive seeing'.⁽³⁾

Again we must turn our attention to man to find a solution if there be one. As we have stated, man sees himself and his

(1) Life Divine, p.11.

(2) Ibid., p.9.

(3) Ibid., pp.781-783.

universe as the product of a process of evolution, and he feels within himself an urge and a thrust to exceed himself, to move on to an as yet unseen goal. This continuing process of evolution is, says Sri Aurobindo, a "progressive self-manifestation of Nature in man".⁽¹⁾ Already there has been evolved a bodily life which is the base and instrument for the presently evolving mental life. The mental life is no more the finished product of nature's self-manifestation, however, than was the bodily life; for man is more than an emotional and reasoning animal. He possesses an unconquerable impulse towards perfection, freedom, bliss and immortality. This impulse, according to Aurobindo, is "simply the imperative impulse by which Nature is seeking to evolve beyond mind, and appears to be as natural, true and just as the impulse towards life which she has planted in forms of matter or the impulse towards mind which she has planted in certain forms of life".⁽²⁾ Nature is, then, aiming at yet higher levels. There are to come, as modern science predicts, further developments in man. The present mental life with its intellect and emotions and sensitivities is perhaps but the preparatory ground for a higher life with more powerful faculties "which are yet to manifest and to take possession of the lower instrument, just as mind itself has so taken possession

(1) Synthesis of Yoga. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. 1955.
p. 8.

(2) Life Divine, p.5.

of the body that the physical being no longer lives only for its own satisfaction but provides the foundation and the materials for a superior activity".⁽¹⁾

The assertion that there is a higher than mental life has been, says Aurobindo, the very basis of Indian philosophy.⁽²⁾ Yoga teaches the existence of supramental faculties and states of consciousness which now for the normal individual are super-human and divine but which are attainable as the supreme goal of human existence. Thus Yoga may be regarded, as Swami Vivekananda once said, as "a means of compressing one's evolution into a single life or a few years or even a few months of bodily existence".⁽³⁾ Moreover, the belief that there is yet a higher stage of human evolution beyond mind is substantiated by a consideration of the nature and workings of mind itself. Aurobindo distinguishes three principal elements comprising mentality: thought, will and sensation.⁽⁴⁾ Thought is the 'attempt' of our mental consciousness to seize and possess the truth of its object, will the attempt to seize and use the potentiality of the object and sensation the attempt to seize and enjoy the object. All three functions are imperfectly carried out because mental consciousness is hampered by the conditions of its existence in life and matter. Just as matter had to bring into itself life and life had to bring into

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.8.

(2) Ibid., p.5.

(3) Ibid., p. 5.

(4) Kena Upanishad, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1952, pp.47-48.

itself mind in order to conquer or sufficiently to expand their respective limitations, so "mind also has to call in a new principle beyond itself, freer than itself and more powerful. In other words, mind does not exhaust the possibilities of consciousness and therefore cannot be its last and highest expression".⁽¹⁾ What is required for a total apprehension of truth, the utilization of potentialities and the full enjoyment of the pleasure of things is a consciousness which is greater and more powerful than that of mind. This deeper principle of consciousness is that towards which mind is moving and for which it aspires; it is, asserts Aurobindo, the goal of human evolution. The idea of such a goal, the existence of a consciousness greater than mind to which man aspires and which he must attain is, Aurobindo maintains, to be found in the Vedas, Buddhism, Christian Gnosticism and Sufism, as well as in modern Western philosophies such as those of the Neo-Platonists, Neo-Hegelians, Ouspensky, Bradley and others.⁽²⁾

The solution to the problem of the meaning of existence lies finally for Sri Aurobindo in a full understanding of that process of evolution which has produced the universe and has culminated thus far in the emergence of mind, of thinking man. Indeed, it may be said that the concept of evolution is the pivotal point for all of Aurobindo's thought. But what Aurobindo means by 'evolution' is something more than what materialism or

(1) Kena Upanishad, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1952, p.48.

(2) Riddle of This World, pp.26-27.

naturalistic philosophy intends. In the materialistic view of evolution each new emergent is the product of an inferior form which preceded it and the basis for a further possible form which will supersede it. Thus by a successive progression over aeons a universe emerges out of sidereal matter, an inhabitable planet emerges in an uninhabitable system, protoplasmic life emerges out of insentient and unconscious matter. More complex forms of life grow out of the less developed organisms: the fish from the insect; the biped and quadruped from the fish; man from the ape, the regulating principles of the progressive evolution of life being natural adaptation or selection, heredity and a struggle for the survival of the fittest. There have been, of course, modifications in this general scheme. For example, heredity is now understood in terms of the transmission of 'predispositions' rather than acquired characteristics and the idea of the struggle for life has been widely denied as having formed no essential part of Darwinian theory. For Aurobindo these modifications of the materialistic view of evolution are in effect concessions to a revived idealistic and moralistic quest for a principle of love in the process of life and have rendered the process of evolution much less material and mechanical.⁽¹⁾ But still the prevailing scientific view of evolution is that of a natural, mechanical, unbroken physical process.⁽²⁾ Having disregarded the idea of purpose, goal,

(1) Evolution, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1950, pp.4-5.

(2) Problem of Rebirth, p.27.

intelligent cause, *raison d'etre*, materialism pictures the universe as a great machine which has somehow just happened. This conception, Aurobindo maintains, is just the Samkhya position in which all the world is but a development out of indeterminate matter by natural force, except, of course, Samkhya has a silent cause of the process, - viz., the purusha, the observant soul or principle of pur consciousness.⁽¹⁾ For Aurobindo such a theory of evolution holds two major paradoxes. The first is simply that there can be an evolving (or evolved) universe characterized by "automatic deployment, combination and self-adaptation of means to end without any knowledge or intuition in the adaptation".⁽²⁾ The second paradox and the point at which, according to Sri Aurobindo, the materialistic theory of evolution fails to establish itself is that if life, mind and consciousness are produced out of matter by a natural force, then they cannot be really different from or independent of matter.⁽³⁾ This would mean a purely physical cause for all mental and spiritual phenomena. But is evolution really so exclusively biological or physical? If we consider the matter of the hereditary transmission of characteristics and variations, we see that transmitted are not just physical and biological features but also psychological or bio-psyhic and mental characters. The physical seed must, then, carry all these characteristics as well as the powers of consciousness which

(1) Evolution, p. 6.

(2) Ibid., Emphasis is ours.

(3) Evolution, p.6.

develop in the thinking and organised mentality of the new individual.

Moreover there is the great problem of explaining by a purely materialistic or physical theory of evolution the emergence of life in matter and of mind in life. Even if there are discovered chemical or physical conditions under which life can be stimulated to appear, this would prove nothing more than that these conditions are necessary or favourable ones for the appearance of life and not that life is a product of physical matter.⁽¹⁾ As for mind, how will it ever be proved, asks Aurobindo, "that love is a chemical product or that Plato's theory of ideas or Homer's Iliad or the cosmic consciousness of the Yogin was only a combination of physiological reactions or a complex of the changes of grey brain-matter or a flaming marvel of electrical discharges"⁽²⁾ There is here too vast a gulf between the thing to be explained and that which is used to explain it. Moreover there is a growing mass of psychical phenomena which are likely to defeat any attempt of the physical scientist to overcome the formidable difficulties facing his theory. It may be, of course, that psychic phenomena, like the experience of a supraphysical Ultimate Reality, will be dismissed a priori as fundamentally false or else as easily explicable by purely physical causes, - the assumption here being that only the material world and the experiences of this world are true, that

(1) Problem of Rebirth, p.29.

(2) Ibid., p.30.

any experiences of a supraphysical nature are either imagined, falsified or the subjective product of superstitious belief or the improper interpretation of physical events. No evidence can be accepted for an experienced fact, even if the fact be a supraphysical one, unless such evidence is 'objective' and 'physical'. "It should be evident", protests Aurobindo, "that this demand for physical valid proof of a supraphysical fact is irrational and illogical; it is an irrelevant attitude of the physical mind which assumes that only the objective and physical is fundamentally real and puts aside all else as merely subjective". (1)

The supraphysical cannot be simply dismissed; it must be investigated as thoroughly as possible by a method appropriate to it. One cannot apply a physical standard to the supraphysical or refuse to investigate it by a proper subjective method of enquiry, observation and verification on the grounds that such method will inevitably lead to error. Indeed, the probability of error and the introduction of the investigator's personality and subjectivity into his task are not absent from physical discoveries. Moreover, as Aurobindo declares, "to refuse to enquire upon any general ground preconceived and a priori is an obscurantism as prejudicial to the extension of knowledge as the religious obscurantism which opposed in Europe the extension of scientific discovery". (2)

(1) Life Divine, p.688.

(2) Ibid. p.580. Indeed, for Aurobindo supraphysical knowledge

Continuation of Footnote No. 2 on p.12.

is necessary for the completion of physical knowledge; for, in themselves, materialistic doctrines of knowledge are inadequate. In such an attitude Aurobindo would have a strong ally in the person of Karl Jaspers (see Von der Wahrheit, Munich, 1947, and Der Philosophische Glaube, Basel, 1948). Both Jaspers and Aurobindo would agree, we believe, that agnosticism and nihilism play a necessary transitional role in the quest after ultimate truths in that they reveal the precariousness of any attempt to construct a total interpretation of Reality within the confines of objective knowledge. Also they both would agree that science cannot provide a comprehensive and unified view of existence since the existing individual is always more than the sum total of what can be known about him objectively. Even if it were possible to construct a single, consistent system from the totality of our phenomenal knowledge derived from the natural and human sciences, the complex of meaning which is man could still not be fully contained in that system. Cognition of the phenomenal, objective world can never grasp that ultimate primal ground (Ursprung, Brahman) of our existence. The sciences, - even the human or social sciences such as psychology and sociology, - do not grasp the essential nature, the selfhood of man qua personal existence but rather they characterise aspects of him in terms of psychological, sociological and biological forces. But the self is more than any force or the totality of forces. Conceptual knowledge may throw some light on man's essential existence (what Jaspers calls Existenzerhellung, - 'lighting up existence'), but it can never directly illumine his self.

Even though materialistic doctrines of knowledge are inadequate, Aurobindo regards science and rationalistic materialism as having played an indispensable role in leading man to true knowledge. By its existence upon a chastened and disciplined intellect in dealing with natural phenomena it has saved us from much superstition and irrational dogma which in the past often impeded the advance of knowledge. As Aurobindo declares: "It is necessary that advancing knowledge should base herself on a clear, pure and disciplined intellect . . . It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness, - to its heights we can always reach, - when we keep our feet firmly on the physical." (Life Divine, pp.12-13.)

The principle of evolution is correct; its truth has been acknowledged in the most ancient of philosophies, East and West. The materialistic interpretation is, however, manifestly inaccurate. Whereas the ancient formulations of evolution were the result of philosophical intuition, the modern ideas are the product of scientific observation. Aurobindo believes that both formulations miss something of the full truth but the ancient idea got at the spirit of evolution while the modern theory is concerned only with the form and external machinery of the process.⁽¹⁾ We say that life emerges out of matter and mind out of life, but what does this really mean? Science approaches an explanation when it states that matter is the formulation of a primordial physical force or 'energy' and that life and mind too are characterised by the movements of energies. It is significant, says Aurobindo, that science is moving towards a monism consistent with an acceptance of multiplicity similar to that of the ancient Vedic idea of one essence with many forms or becomings.⁽²⁾ Indeed, modern science seems more and more to confirm, at least in the domain of matter, the view in the Upanishads of cosmic existence as the One which eternally becomes the many, a picture of reality which Aurobindo also finds in ancient Greek thought, especially in the philosophy of Heraclitus.⁽³⁾

(1) Problem of Rebirth, p.69.

(2) Life Divine, p.15.

(3) Heraclitus, Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1947.

But what is this One or energy which becomes or has many formulations? Is it just a natural, physical energy or force? Aurobindo's answer is that it cannot be; for the emergence of life and mind and 'spirit' cannot be satisfactorily accounted for if the sole evolving reality is something purely physical or material. According to Sri Aurobindo the only possible condition for the manifestation of mind out of matter is that a principle of mind, striving for manifestation, should have been somehow present in the force which constitutes physical forms.⁽¹⁾ If this force is merely some physical energy, then it would be difficult to find in its operations anything "which could explain the emergence of conscious sensation, which could constitute a will towards the evolution of thought or which could impose the necessity of such an evolution on inconscient physical substance"⁽²⁾. The origin of mind must lie not in the form of matter but in the force which works in and through matter. "The energy that creates the world can be nothing else than a will, and will is only consciousness applying itself to a work and a result".⁽³⁾ The force which creates the universe is consciousness evolving itself in multitudinous forms according to the variety of principles and possibilities it contains.

To such a declaration materialism would object that consciousness is a result of the physical organs (the brain, sense, nerves) and inseparable from them; before these organs

(1) Kena Upanshad, p.43.

(2) Ibid., pp.43-44.

(3) Life Divine, pp.15-16.

were developed, there was no consciousness. For Aurobindo this is an unwarranted, - or even unscientific, - and narrow understanding of consciousness. In the first place we are becoming increasingly aware of a number of levels of consciousness in human experience. What we understand as our normal waking consciousness is but a small part of our total conscious being. There are, for example, levels or states of consciousness which are 'unconscious' to our waking physical-mental awareness, and psychical researchers are evermore convincingly demonstrating the existence of a 'subliminal' mind or consciousness which, Aurobindo maintains, is "the greater part of ourselves and contains heights and profundities which no man has yet measured or fathomed".⁽¹⁾ Moreover, the capacity of our total consciousness far exceeds that of the physical organs. It is not the brain which produces and uses consciousness, but consciousness which uses the brain and has produced the physical organs during the course of its evolution. "Our physical organism no more causes or explains thought and consciousness than the construction of an engine causes or explains the motive-power of steam or electricity".⁽²⁾

Consciousness, therefore, is anterior to its physical instruments. This being so it is then not unreasonable to suppose, Aurobindo maintains, that consciousness, the creative force, is present in seemingly unconscient matter and life, in

(1) Life Divine, p. 80.

(2) Ibid., p.81.

submental conditions just as it is present in subliminal and superconscient states. ⁽¹⁾ For example, there is a vital consciousness in our cells and in our automatic vital functions which acts and reacts so that we go through purposeful movements and respond to attractions and repulsions of which our mind is not aware. In animals such a vital consciousness plays a greater role; in plants its presence is evidenced by reactions to stimuli and other forms of 'behaviour'. All this is then a submental. and, in these cases, vital consciousness. But does the range of consciousness cease with the plant? Is there not consciousness present, at least in an incipient state, in metal and earth and other 'lifeless' forms of matter? According to Sri Aurobindo, although it is immediately difficult to conceive, there is no reason to doubt a material consciousness. As he says, "the development of recent research and thought seems to point to a sort of obscure beginning of life and perhaps a sort of inert or suppressed consciousness in the metal and in the earth and in other 'inanimate' forms, or at least the first stuff of what becomes consciousness in us may be there". ⁽²⁾

Quite clearly the consciousness which Aurobindo considers to be the force or energy of creation is not merely mental; it is a consciousness of which mentality is but an aspect or form. The consciousness which creates the universe is cosmic, but more than that it is supracosmic. ⁽³⁾ It is what in Indian metaphysics

(1) Life Divine, pp.81-83.

(2) Ibid., p.81.

(3) Ibid., pp.22-23.

is called chit, - the eternal, divine pure consciousness. It is that pure consciousness in its dynamic or force (shakti) aspect which the Tantric philosophers have regarded as the 'stuff' of the world; it is that power which evolves itself as the world in forms of matter, life, mind and spirit; it is an intelligent, purposeful, self-knowing and all-knowing force. All that exists is a form and formulation of consciousness-force; everything is 'conscious'; though not necessarily mentally conscious, and filled with consciousness.⁽¹⁾ The force or energy which creates and constitutes the world from the neutron and proton to the unicellular organism and man himself is a conscious force or energy. It is the force of consciousness, chit, and is, in fact, consciousness itself; it is the eternal Spirit manifesting itself in the forms of nature.

Aurobindo's conception of evolution thus differs greatly from that of natural science and materialism in that Aurobindo regards the force which evolves the world and is the very stuff of that evolution as pure consciousness, - a supracosmic, supra-mental consciousness infinitely wider and deeper than mere mental consciousness. But there is another important manner already suggested in which Sri Aurobindo's understanding of evolution departs from the general scientific view. For him evolution implies involution; they are, indeed, two aspects or movements of a single process. How can life emerge out of matter unless it, - or its principle, - is already in matter or mind out of life

(1) The Letters of Sri Aurobindo, 1st Series, Sri Aurobindo Circle, Bombay, 1950, pp.101-104.

unless it is in some manner already present in vitalised matter? If it is so that consciousness or 'spirit' is the material and the force of evolution, then that pure consciousness must contain within it somehow all possibilities of existence; it must be the seed in which all forms are contained potentially. According to Aurobindo, we must suppose "that all that evolves already existed involved, passive or otherwise active, but in either case concealed from us in the shell of material Nature. The Spirit which manifests itself here in a body, must be involved from the beginning in the whole of matter and in every knot, formation and particle of matter; life, mind and whatever is above mind must be latent, inactive or concealed active powers in all the operations of material energy".⁽¹⁾ Of course such an interpretation of evolution is not original with Sri Aurobindo. He himself considers it to be central to the Upanishadic interpretation of existence⁽²⁾ and finds an early formulation of it in Western thought in the metaphysics of Heraclitus.⁽³⁾ It is, moreover, to be found in the Tantric philosophies.

The Sanscrit word for creation, sr̥ṣṭi, - meaning a loosing forth, a release of what is held in, - points already to this dual process of evolution-involution. Moreover, Aurobindo maintains, "the word evolution carries with it in its intrinsic sense, in the idea at its root the necessity of a previous

(1) Problem of Rebirth, p.73.

(2) Life Divine, p.15.

(3) Heraclitus, pp.28-33.

involution".⁽¹⁾ Evolution is not a self-creation or an ex nihilo creation; it is an unfolding, a loosing forth of existence contained implicitly in pure consciousness or spirit. All that has been manifested in the cosmic process and all that will be manifested in time to come is contained eternally within that eternal consciousness which is both the stuff and actuating force of creation. However, because evolution implies involution, not only is each principle manifested in the cosmic process originally contained in consciousness-force, but it contains involved within it all subsequent principles. Thus matter is manifested out of the cosmic consciousness-force in the form of a material universe, but this primordial matter has involved in it all the principles and powers of consciousness, mind and life, in that order, and will evolve out of itself all the principles and powers of life, mind and consciousness, in that ~~reversed~~ order. The actual dynamics of this dual process of the involution and evolution of consciousness, - or as Aurobindo also calls it, the descent and ascent of consciousness, - we shall examine in detail during the course of the discussion which follows. It is sufficient to point out here that for Aurobindo the cosmic process has, as it does not have for most of Indian metaphysics, a beginning and an end. The beginning is, so to speak, 'trans-historical' in that the creative process of involution-evolution has an eternal origination and character; it is prior to the actual manifestation of the physical universe.

(1) Problem of Rebirth, p.73.

The end of the process is in time or, rather, is the consummation of time. There is a goal, a telos, in the cosmic process, and that goal is the manifestation in the spacial-temporal universe of the Spirit itself. That is to say, man is thus far the highest point reached in evolution, but he, - or at least, he as he is now constituted as a mental being, - is not the last point; for there are contained within him greater possibilities of conscious existence, the highest being that of the divine consciousness itself. The goal of the process is that man manifest fully in his being the pure, eternal and infinite consciousness and that all his existence be thereby transformed, 'supramentalized' by this consciousness. As Aurobindo points out, "the animal is a living laboratory in which nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God? ... If it be true that Spirit is involved in matter and apparent nature is secret God, then the manifestation of the divine in himself and the realisation of God within and without are the highest and most legitimate aims possible to man upon earth".⁽¹⁾ There is then a point in time at which the creative process will reach its consummation in the full manifestation of consciousness, of the Divine, in a divine humanity, a life divine. The existence which we experience as characterised by change and an absence of finality, by

(1) Life Divine, pp.5-6.

multiplicity and division, is in its fullest reality a unitary and eternal process by which the One becomes many, infinite consciousness formulates itself infinitely and variously in a self-manifestation.

Does this eternal process point to the fact that there is ultimately only becoming and no being? Or, to ask the question another way, what is the ultimate character of the consciousness which manifests the universe out of itself? At first glance it would seem that in effect Sri Aurobindo's view of existence as the eternal self-unfolding of an infinite consciousness in finite temporal-spatial forms is not really much different from the Buddhist definition of existence as a beginningless and endless process of becoming, the universal force of which is karma, or from Nietzsche's idea of a universal Will which strives to realise itself in an endless becoming. About this Aurobindo is most clear: the eternal becoming which existence is has an eternal basis; it is not a groundless Will-to-Power but has its origination and goal in an eternal Being. Existence is unitary and identical precisely because there is in it that which does not change, which is constant and eternally itself. As Aurobindo says in speaking of Heraclitus' metaphysics, "there is an identity in things, in all existences, sarvabhūtāni, as well as a constant changing; there is a Being as well as a Becoming and by that we have an eternal and real existence as well as a temporary and apparent one, not merely a constant mutation but a constant

identical existence".⁽¹⁾ This Being is Brahman, Ultimate Reality; the many universal existences are becomings of the self-existent One.

Creation is then for Aurobindo a becoming of Being. The consciousness which is the stuff and force of universal existence, which formulates itself in manifold forms in a cosmic process of evolution, - this pure consciousness is pure being; it is the eternal, divine Spirit which, as the Mundaka Upanishad declares, "is all this universe".⁽²⁾ But Aurobindo does not believe as did Empedocles that "all is one which becomes many and then again goes back to oneness".⁽³⁾ The One, - pure consciousness, being, Brahman, - becomes all existences without losing its eternal nature and identity; the Infinite can never be exhausted by its finite creations and manifestations. By its consciousness force, its power of becoming, the Immutable "has become all existences".⁽⁴⁾

Divine consciousness, which is not other than divine being itself, contains within itself all possibilities of existence and expresses these possibilities in finite forms; the cosmic

(1) Heraclitus, p.19.

(2) Mundaka Upanishad, 2:1:10. Translated by Sri Aurobindo, Eight Upanishads, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1955. cf. Chandogya 3.14.6.

(3) Heraclitus, p.25.

(4) Isha Upanishad: 7 - sarvāṇi bhūtāni ātmaiva abhūt. The Isha Upanishad, translated with commentary by Sri Aurobindo, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1951.

creation is but the self-expression in time and space of the Spirit, - the one infinite conscious Being. "Therefore all things here are expression, form, energy, action of the Spirit; matter itself is but form of spirit, life but power of being of the spirit, mind but working of consciousness of the spirit".⁽¹⁾ The dualism of spirit and nature has an ultimate resolution, for nature is the self-expression of one, eternal spirit and is filled with that spirit; the three terms of existence, - the individual, the universe and Ultimate Reality, - are related in a unity of infinite and eternal being. Man is rooted in eternity and infinity. His existence is contained potentially, yet really in divine Consciousness; it is a possibility present already in the most minute particle of primordial energy or matter. In his being man contains the principles of all existence actual and possible; just as he exists 'germinally' in an electron, so the cosmos and the Divine exist in him. Man is not simply a mind in a living body; his true nature is greater than the surface appearance. He contains the Divine, and his objective is a divine life. "To fulfil God in life is man's manhood", asserts Aurobindo.⁽²⁾ "To know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilight or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish

(1) Problem of Rebirth, p.79

(2) Life Divine, p.37.

an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realise the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation, - this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in matter and the goal of nature in her terrestrial evolution".⁽¹⁾

(1) Life Divine, p.4.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURE OF ULTIMATE REALITY

Brahman is the sole reality, - "one only, without a second"⁽¹⁾. This declaration may be said to be the theme of all the Upanishads and the starting point for all systems of Vedantic philosophy. Brahman, the sole reality "in the beginning", is unitary being, described in the Upanishads as infinite and limitless.⁽²⁾ Such is its infinitude that even if the infinite is removed from it, it still remains infinite.⁽³⁾ Being infinite and limitless, it transcends all restrictions of time and space; it is ageless and deathless;⁽⁴⁾ it is "unborn and beyond all space";⁽⁵⁾ it is, as Yajnavalkya characterises it, "the Imperishable (akshara)" which can be described only negatively.⁽⁶⁾ As the ultimate ground of all beings and qualities, it is beyond all beings and qualities; it is primordial "Non-being" (asat)⁽⁷⁾ - not mere nothingness,

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- (1) Chandogya Upanishad 6:3. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1:4:1,2,17. Unless otherwise indicated quotations from the Upanishads are taken from the translation by R. Hume, The Thirteen Principle Upanishads, Oxford, 1922.
- (2) Brihadaranyaka 2:4:12. Taittiriya 2:1.
- (3) Brihadaranyaka 5:1. Cf. Atharva Veda X:8:29.
- (4) Chandogya 8:1:5.
- (5) Brihadaranyaka 4:4:20.
- (6) Brihadaranyaka 3:8:8.
- (7) Taittiriya 2.7.: "In the beginning all this was the Non-Being. It was thence that Being was born". (Translation by Aurobindo) 'Non-Being', asat, as used in the Upanishad and employed by Aurobindo means not ontological unreality, absolute nothingness, but, as Aurobindo puts it, "a something beyond positive conception" which like the Shunya or Void of Buddhism is an "all or an indefinable Infinite which appears to the mind a blank, because mind grasps only finite constructions, but is in fact the only true Existence". (Life Divine, p.29). Asat here used, or at least as interpreted by Aurobindo (Life Divine, p.507), does not refer, as it did for Shankara, to a primordial chaos or state of undifferentiated existence preceding the diversification into name and form which constitutes the sat nature of the ordered universal creation (See Shankara's Bhashya on the Brahma Sutras, 1.4.15.).

but nothing which can be described in finite terms. Brahman is unknowable to the mind of men and beyond the power of human speech: "There sight attains not, nor speech attains, nor the mind. We know not nor can we discern how one should teach of That; for it is other than the known and it is alone beyond the unknown . . ." (1) Finally all that can be said of Brahman is neti, neti, - "not this, not that"; in its essence Brahman is indefinable, indescribable, intellectually unknowable.

The Upanishads, however, did not leave their consideration of Brahman here with a sort of agnostic characterisation of an Ultimate Reality unknown and unknowable to man, ignoramus etignorabimus. In spite of their assertion of the inexpressibility of the Ultimate Reality in the terms of finite knowledge, "the Upanishads", says Aurobindo, "constantly declare that Brahman is the one true object of knowledge and the whole Scripture is in fact an attempt not perhaps to define, but at least in some sort to characterise and present an idea, and even a detailed idea, of the Brahman". (2) This attempt to characterise Brahman of which Aurobindo speaks is clearly seen in the description of the nature of Ultimate Reality as revealed in the universe; for if Brahman is the only reality, then the universe "which is obviously a manifestation of something permanent and eternal, must be a manifestation of Brahman and of nothing else, and if we know it completely, we do to a certain extent and in a certain

(1) Kena I:3. Translation by Sri Aurobindo in Eight Upanishads.

(2) "Philosophy of the Upanishads (II)", Advent, Vol. IX, Feb. 1952, p.20. Hereafter referred to as "Philosophy of the Upanishads (II)".

way know Him, not as an Absolute Existence, but under the conditions of phenomenal manifestation".⁽¹⁾ Thus we see in Yajñavalkya's famous 'Honey Doctrine'⁽²⁾ that Brahman is characterised as the soul (atman), the Immortal One, who pervades the earth, the waters, fire, wind, sun, the quarters of heaven, moon, lightening, thunder, space, law, truth, mankind and the soul, and, corresponding with these, pervades also the body, the semen, speech, breath, eye, ear, mind, heat in the individual, sound, space in the heart, virtuousness, truthfulness, the human being and the soul. Brahman is the atman, the conscious self within the individual and, pervading the whole universe of existences, the inner soul (antarātman) of all things.⁽³⁾ The self (atman) is the principal of consciousness in the body underlying all experiences of the individual⁽⁴⁾ and is the ground of the universe.⁽⁵⁾ Brahman is the self and spirit (purusha) of the universe;⁽⁶⁾ He is the one Reality which has become all existences and dwells in all existences: "all this is for habitation by the Lord";⁽⁷⁾ "all this is Brahman alone, all this magnificent universe";⁽⁸⁾ "verily this whole world

(1) "Philosophy of the Upanishads (II)", p.21.

(2) Brihadaranyaka 2:5.

(3) Chandogya 5:18:1-2, 6:9-16. Cf. Chandogya 7:26, Isha 6, Katha 5:9-13.

(4) Chandogya 8:12:4-5.

(5) Brihadaranyaka 1:4:1-5.

(6) Brihadaranyaka 2:5:1f.

(7) Isha 1. Translation by Aurobindo in Isha Upanishad.

(8) Lundaka 2:2:12. Translation by Aurobindo in Eight Upanishads.

is Brahman".⁽¹⁾ The Brahman revealed in the universe is immanent, pervading all existences, conscious and unconscious, as their reality.⁽²⁾ But Brahman is not merely a cosmic spirit or some kind of universal energy; though immanent in the universe, Brahman also transcends the universe. Aurobindo reflects the Upanishadic view when, in unqualifiably rejecting Pantheism, he states that the world and the Divine are not simply equatable as one and the same thing: "the world is an emanation; it depends upon something that manifests in it but is not limited by it; the Divine is not here alone; there is a Beyond, an eternal transcendence".⁽³⁾ Thus the Mundaka Upanishad declares that "He, the Divine, the formless Spirit, even He is the outward and the inward and He the Unborn; He is beyond life, beyond mind, luminous, supreme beyond the immutable".⁽⁴⁾ Brahman dwells in all things, says Yajñavalkya, as soul, inner controller (antaryāmin), the Immortal, and "yet is other than all things";⁽⁵⁾ Brahman is different from the universe of His creation as "the unseen Seer, the unheard Hearer, the unthought Thinker, the ununderstood Understander".⁽⁶⁾

Ultimate Reality, Brahman, in its essential nature is unknowable to the intellect, but through our individual being and through the names and forms of the universe we can approach the

(1) Chandogya 3:14:1. Cf. Brihadaranyaka 1:4:16.

(2) Taittiriya 2:6.

(3) Synthesis of Yoga, p.291.

(4) Mundaka 2:1:2. Translation by Aurobindo, op. cit.

(5) Brihadaranyaka 3:4,5,7.

(6) Brihadaranyaka 3:7:23.

realisation of the supreme Self that is Brahman, and by the realisation of the Self we come to a certain realisation also of this utter Absolute of which our true self is the essential form in our consciousness (svarūpa).⁽¹⁾ Because Ultimate Reality is absolute and infinite, it is in its essence indeterminable; it is beyond mind and speech and indescribable and unlimited by any and all negations and affirmations. Yet, as Aurobindo points out, "it is self-evident to itself and, although inexpressible, yet self-evident to a knowledge by identity of which the spiritual being in us must be capable; for that spiritual being is in its essence and its original and intimate reality not other than this Supreme Existence".⁽²⁾ What we discover in ourselves and through the names and forms of the universe are fundamental and real truths of Ultimate Reality which is in the universe and the individual as essential reality and yet is beyond. These truths are self-determinations of the indeterminable Absolute apprehended by our consciousness and presented to our conceptual cognition as the fundamental aspects in which we experience Brahman.⁽³⁾ Aurobindo very clearly maintains that these truths of Ultimate Reality, the determinations of the indeterminable, are not immediately apprehended by the intellect; such apprehension is a secondary process. They are first grasped either by a "spiritual experience", a supreme intuition or an inner knowledge

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, pp.338-339.

(2) Life Divine, p.292.

(3) Ibid., p.293.

by identity, or in what Aurobindo terms "a conception by a large and plastic idea", perhaps a mental or non-spiritual intuition.⁽¹⁾ Either way, these determinations are not constructions of the mind. What is needed is an intuitively metaphysical and poetical language in which to express the apprehended truths of Ultimate Reality. This is a point Aurobindo constantly emphasizes: our ordinary language, even the language of the most refined philosophical terms, is inadequate to express the fulness of our highest spiritual and intuitive experiences of the Divine. At best in metaphysical expression we must be content with "approximations by abstractions". For the most part our philosophical speech is bound to a mental logic, and when we attempt to speak of the Infinite in logical, finite terms, we often end up either with hopeless paradoxes and contradictions or with altogether meaningless descriptions. We cannot hope to grasp even glimpses of an infinite truth if we confine ourselves to conventional mental logic with its accustomed language and terms of procedure. As Aurobindo emphatically points out, "our way of knowing must be appropriate to that which is to be known".⁽²⁾ The ordinary language and logic of metaphysical thought is adequate for the intellect in its rational understanding of finite realities but not for knowing and speaking of the Infinite. "If it is to be of real service, the intellect must

(1) Life Divine, p.293.

(2) Ibid., p.293.

consent to pass out of the bounds of a finite logic and accustom itself to the logic of the Infinite".⁽¹⁾

The logic of the rational intellect is based upon and functions in accordance with a general law of contradiction, i.e. what is logical is non-contradictory; what is contradictory is illogical. That is to say, contradictory qualities or conditions cannot logically be predicated of one substance at the same time; something cannot logically both be and not be at the same time. Two opposing and conflicting affirmations cannot both be true. Thus mental logic struggles with a rational reconciliation of revealed aspects and terms of infinite Reality, - being and becoming, one and many, personality and impersonality, indeterminability and determinations, and so forth. This is so because our reason and mental consciousness are limited; they function in terms of a rather restricted experience of the finite operations of physical nature and establish on the basis of their circumscribed experience certain conceptions and general principles of reality, any departure from or contradiction of these principles being judged irrational, false or inexplicable. What is irrational, says Aurobindo, is "to suppose that a finite consciousness and reason can be a measure of the Infinite".⁽²⁾ We cannot legitimately apply laws of time, space and causality to a non-spatial, non-temporal and non-causal order, nor the laws

(1) Life Divine, p.293.

(2) Ibid., p.297.

of reason to the suprarational, nor rules of morality and moral distinctions of good and evil to that which transcends such distinctions. What is needed is a greater logic and reason which will comprehend all the data which our restricted observation fails to seize, an intuitive apprehension, a spiritual experience of reality in its unitariness. From a rational point of view what appears as contradiction in our experience of reality and Ultimate Reality may from an intuitive or non-rational or, better, a suprarational perspective be a single truth. As Aurobindo suggests, the great failing of Indian philosophy, - and, it could be said, of all philosophy, - is that the individual systems have apprehended or emphasized one aspect or dimension of an infinite Reality and Truth to the exclusion of others.⁽¹⁾

When, therefore, Aurobindo speaks about the self-determinations of the indeterminable Brahman, he is doing so from the standpoint of the 'logic of the Infinite'. For example, when he states that Brahman is impersonal and yet exhibits itself as the divine person and is the supreme person and all persons, he understands these terms as relative truths and not as absolute and mutually exclusive determinations; for, as he says, "the Absolute is beyond personality and beyond impersonality".⁽²⁾ Brahman "is the Person who takes on various personalities, who can have at the same time many personalities but is himself one, real, eternal".⁽³⁾ In other words, all determinations or

(1) Life Divine, pp.300-301.

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, p.339.

(3) Life Divine, p.319.

or representations though real do not in any manner detract from the transcendent, illimitable and indeterminable nature of Brahman.⁽¹⁾ Brahman in its essential nature transcends all determinations of itself, and yet its self-determinations are eternally true: it is beyond all distinction of unity and multiplicity, and yet it is eternally the One and the many; it is beyond all limitations and qualities and yet it contains and expresses all infinite qualities.⁽²⁾ To emphasize one term or determination of Ultimate Reality to the exclusion of others is for Aurobindo to state only a part of the total truth. Shankara insists on the absolute oneness and qualityless nature of Brahman as the ultimate spiritual truth; Ramanuja declares both the One and many to be real and Brahman to be characterised by all infinite qualities. Both assertions, Aurobindo would say are true or truths, but not all the Truth. "All truths, even those which seem to be in conflict, have their validity, but they need a reconciliation in some largest Truth which takes them into itself; all philosophies have their value, - if for nothing else then because they see the Self and the universe from a point of view of the spirit's experience of the many-sided manifestation and in doing so shed light on something that has to be known in the Infinite. All spiritual experiences are true, but they point towards some highest and widest reality which admits their truth and exceeds it".⁽³⁾ The fulness of Truth exceeds the

(1) Life Divine, pp.301-302.

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, p.339.

(3) Life Divine, p.421.

limits of logical and rational formulations. It can only be comprehended by the logic of the Infinite.⁽¹⁾

Two important facts emerge from Aurobindo's characterisation of the indeterminability of the Absolute and its self-determinations to our consciousness.⁽²⁾ Firstly Brahman is absolutely free. Just as it is not limited by its determinations, so it is not limited by its indeterminability. It is free to determine itself infinitely, and it is free from limitation by its own determinations, - and of course free from all external determinations of anything not itself, for no such non-Brahman exists or can come into being. Secondly, all determinations of the Absolute are eternally contained within its infinite essence. In other words, Brahman manifests what is in its being; all possible self-determinations and all manifested realities are eternally contained in its ultimate reality.

(1) Sir John Woodroffe (The World as Power, Ganesh & Co. Madras, 1957) makes a similar point about spiritual truth transcending mental logic when, in discussing Tantric philosophy, he says that "the highest truth is alogical". (p.49) "No logical argument will solve the problem [i.e. of the change and changelessness of Brahman as above the world and yet immanent in the world as its reality]. In spiritual experience the problem disappears. And so Shiva says in the Kularnava-Tantra (1-100), 'Some desire Dualism (Dvaita-vada), others Monism (Advaita-vada). Such however know not my Truth which is beyond both Monism and Dualism (Dvaitādvaita-vivarjita)'." (p. 50).

(2) Life Divine, p.302.

We now turn our attention to a consideration of those self-determinations of Brahman which Aurobindo asserts are present to our consciousness and seized by a spiritual experience or intuition. We do so, however, bearing in mind Aurobindo's warning of the "abundance of difficulties" which "all attempts to erect a logical system out of a perception of an illimitable Existence must necessarily create; for any such endeavour must either effect consistency by an arbitrary sectioning of the complex truth of things or else by its comprehensiveness become logically untenable".⁽¹⁾

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Parabrahman.

The Absolute in its primordial nature, - that is, prior (not temporally but conceptually) to all manifestation or determinations whatsoever, - is what Sri Aurobindo calls the Unknown. Of it nothing can be predicated, neither negations nor affirmations.⁽²⁾ Not only is it unmanifested and unconditioned, it is unimaginable.⁽³⁾ It is not definable by the highest conceptions, even that of Sachchidananda, - existence, consciousness, bliss, - which we are obliged to use.⁽⁴⁾ It is the ground and cause of all manifestation and is in its infinite nature illimitable, exceeding and comprehending formlessness and form, unity and multiplicity, immobility and mobility, and all

(1) Life Divine, pp.295-296.

(2) Ibid., p.292.

(3) "Philosophy of the Upanishads (II)", Advent, Vol. IX, April, 1952, p.90. Hereafter referred to as "Philosophy of the Upanishads (III)".

(4) Life Divine, p.341.

other conceivable terms, whether positive or negative.⁽¹⁾ However, as has already been stated, it determines itself to our consciousness, and these determinations are seized by intuition or in a spiritual experience. This original manifestation of the Unknown to our consciousness is what Aurobindo calls the Parabrahman which is "a luminous shadow of Its (i.e., the Unknown's) infinite inconceivable Being" produced by the Unknown in itself".⁽²⁾ Parabrahman is still the Unknown but the Unknown as realizable and realized in spiritual experience and by the intuition. It is still infinite and limitless, exceeding and comprehending all terms and conditions, but it has freely determined itself. The basic spiritual self-determinations or terms by which and through which we experience Parabrahman is Sachchidananda, existence-consciousness-bliss. The intuition or direct experience of an infinite and eternal existence (sat), consciousness (chit) and bliss or delight of existence (ananda) is according to Aurobindo "our fundamental cognition of the Absolute".⁽³⁾ It is also that which is the foundation of the Vedanta and the essence of its teachings; that the Unknown knows itself as Sachchidananda is "the one supreme affirmation of the Vedanta" which contains all other possible affirmations and upon

(1) Life Divine, p.425.

(2) "Philosophy of the Upanishads (III)", p.90.

(3) Life Divine, p.285.

which they depend. ⁽¹⁾ However, even though we have this "fundamental cognition of the Absolute" as Sachchidananda, we have not exhausted the infinitude of ultimate Truth; for, Aurobindo points out, Brahman, the Unknown, cannot really be defined "even by our largest conception of Sachchidananda". ⁽²⁾ That is to say, Sachchidananda is an eternal truth, an eternally real and true self-determination or manifestation of the Absolute to our consciousness, but it is not the fulness of the infinite truth. It is in the last analysis but a name of the Unknown, though perhaps the highest name we can know. ⁽³⁾ It seems that Aurobindo believes that there will ever be that Unknown or that nature of the Unknown of which we shall never have a complete mental experience or conception. ⁽⁴⁾ The Unknown must and does remain, - in its ultimate and infinite essentiality, - unknowable; if we think that we have captured the essence of its being in any conception, no matter how vast in scope, "then our thoughts sin against Its unknowableness". ⁽⁵⁾ Thus, says Aurobindo, the ancient Vedantins when they had arrived at the experience of Sachchidananda as the highest possible expression of Ultimate Reality to our consciousness went on to postulate a Non-Being

(1) Life Divine, p.43.

(2) Ibid., p.341.

(3) Aurobindo's declaration that Sachchidananda is itself finally only a name, - though, perhaps, the highest name, - of the Unknown is quite consistent with the position of the ancient Vedantins. See Max Müller, Life and Religion, ed. A. Granfel, Doubleday, New York, 1905, p.56f.

(4) Life Divine, p.34.

(5) Ibid., p.35.

(asat) beyond as an indication of the limitation of human knowledge.⁽¹⁾ However, what do we achieve, Aurobindo asks, in labeling the Unknown as Non-Being? This, too, like "Being" is finally only a word, "an ideative formation of the mind".⁽²⁾ It is really but a verbal sign pointing to something beyond our present conceptions or most abstract experiences of Ultimate Reality as we conceive or experience it while in this universe. "We erect a fiction of nothingness in order to overpass, by the method of total exclusion, all that we can know and consciously are".⁽³⁾ Non-Being, however, does not actually exclude Being; it is but the affirmation of the illimitable freedom of Being from all cosmic existence of which it is the base. Being and Non-Being are finally two complementary expressions of the unknowable nature of Ultimate Reality.⁽⁴⁾

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- (1) Life Divine., p.29. Cf. Taittiriya 2:7, Rig Veda 10:72:3-4. Aurobindo suggests that the Shunya, Non-being or Void, of Buddhism and the Tao of Taoist are similar expressions of the ultimate unknowableness of the Absolute and not of its non-existence. See Life Divine, pp.29, 35, 507; Letters 1st Series, p.99.
- (2) Ibid., p.38.
- (3) Ibid., p.29.
- (4) This same idea is expressed in one of Sri Ramakrishna's charming parables: "Once a sanyasin entered the temple of Jagannath. As he looked at the Holy Image he debated with himself whether God had a form or was formless. He passed with his staff from left and right to feel whether it touched the image. The staff touched nothing. He understood that there was no image before him; he concluded that God was formless. Next he passed the staff from right to left. It touched the image. The sanyasin understood that God had form. Then he realized that God has form, and again, is formless." Quoted in H. Zimmer, Philosophies of India, Edited by J. Campbell, Pantheon, New York, 1951, pp.560f.

Although beyond speech and conception and not exhausted in its infinite nature by any experience of mind, the Unknowable is yet known in its cosmic self-determinations as the ground, the source, the very being of all that is; it is present to our highest knowing, our spiritual experience, as the unexpressed and unmanifested Transcendent, as the cosmic spirit and universal Lord and as the true individual Self, immanent in us and every existence as the substance of our mortal existence, force of our force, source of our consciousness. (1)

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Sachchidananda.

The Unknown is made manifest to us in and through our existence as the Supreme, the Parabrahman, whose essential nature is that of existence-consciousness bliss, Sachchidananda. (2) This Supreme is experienced as an infinite bliss and self-conscious existence which is the source and ground of all existences, everywhere the same, in all things, in all times and beyond time and space. (3) Sachchidananda, however, is not existence plus consciousness plus bliss; it is a trinity of terms and powers of one supreme Being. (4) Existence, consciousness, bliss are not really separate entities, but they are apprehended as distinct and separate by our minds. (5) In themselves they constitute one Ultimate Reality which contains no distinctions or separations of its being: existence (sat) is

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.279.

(2) "Philosophy of the Upanishads (III)", p.90.

(3) Life Divine, p.43.

(4) Synthesis of Yoga, p.442.

(5) Ibid.

consciousness (chit) and consciousness is bliss (ananda).⁽¹⁾ Brahman as Sachchidananda is "an infinite indivisible existence; of that existence the essential nature or power is an infinite imperishable force of self-conscious being; and of that self-consciousness the essential nature or knowledge of itself is, again, an infinite inalienable delight of being".⁽²⁾ Ultimate Reality, according to Aurobindo, is not, therefore, just a pure existent, not just sat or pure being; it is a self-conscious existence whose essential nature is self-delight. Existence, consciousness, bliss are three terms of one reality, inseparable and ultimately indistinguishable.

This Sachchidananda nature of Brahman is then the "supreme truth-aspect" manifested to us.⁽³⁾ What we experience as phenomenal reality is but that Sachchidananda in forms of becoming. All existence, both universal and individual, is a manifestation of the divine existence. It is Sachchidananda, Brahman, which has involved itself in cosmic existence and evolves itself out of that existence in forms of matter, life and mind, and it is Brahman, Ultimate Reality, which in evolving itself in mind and life and body come to know itself in these forms.⁽⁴⁾ In other words, phenomenal existence is a process by which the Divine reveals itself to itself within the forms it has become; Brahman "becomes itself in the world by knowing itself; it knows itself by becoming itself."⁽⁵⁾ When we say that we experience or know

(1) Life Divine, p.118.

(2) Ibid., p.94.

(3) Ibid., p.293.

(4) Ibid., p.43

(5) Ibid.

the Divine in the universe, it is in actuality Brahman in us which having evolved itself in individual forms of material-vital-mental existence knows itself in all existence. Brahman is thus the knower, the known and the content of its knowledge; the divine Self in us knows itself in all phenomenal existence by identity.

Evolution, then, is the unveiling of conscious existence to itself. All that exists, the universe and the individual, is Brahman in form of self-manifestation. All forms of its manifestation are eternally contained within the infinite being of Brahman and realized by the force of its consciousness, impelled by the bliss of its existence.⁽¹⁾ Brahman is, therefore, in a sense the first, material, formal, efficient and final cause of phenomenal existence.⁽²⁾ It must be stressed, however, that Sri Aurobindo does not simply equate the universe with the Divine. For him Pantheism is an incomplete account of the truth of being in that "it misses and omits the supracosmic Reality".⁽³⁾ The Divine and the universe are one, but the Divine is more than the universe; it is transcendent. Brahman transcends all forms of the universe⁽⁴⁾ and is not restricted or exhausted by any or all of them.⁽⁵⁾ Yet, "the universe and the individual are the two essential appearances into which the Unknowable descends and through which it has to be approached",⁽⁶⁾ and the Unknowable

(1) Life Divine, p.587.

(2) Ibid., p.105.

(3) Ibid., p.589.

(4) Ibid., p.51.

(5) Ibid., p.43

(6) Ibid.

which knows itself and is known in and through the individual and the universe is Sachchidananda.

Aurobindo's view of reality is clearly an absolute monism in which all terms of existence, phenomenal and ultimate, are included and reconciled in an ultimate Being infinitely greater than all the possible and actual terms it comprehends. Moreover, this Being is not the static Brahman of the absolute monistic (Advaita) Vedanta.⁽¹⁾ Brahman for Aurobindo is both static and dynamic, both eternally passive and eternally creative, characterised by both being and becoming and by both transcendence and immanence, and yet it ultimately transcends even these terms which are not complementary aspects or statuses of its ultimately unknowable nature.

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Sat: Existence.

Brahman is sat, pure being, absolute existence. The existence of Brahman or God is pure since He alone is; there is nothing else which has an ultimate reality or any being independent of Him.⁽²⁾ Brahman is, in other words, self-existent. The world and the individual exist only as a manifestation of the power of Brahman and only in so far as their being is one with

(1) Aurobindo rejects the monism of the Shankara School of Advaita Vedanta as being inadequate. He regards his own position as "the real monism, the true Advaita", - i.e., "that which admits all things as the one Brahman and does not seek to bisect Its existence into two incompatible entities, an eternal Truth and an eternal falsehood, Brahman and not Brahman, Self and not-Self and an unreal, yet perpetual Maya. If it be true that the Self alone exists, it must be also true that all is the Self". Life Divine, p.31.

(2) "Philosophy of the Upanishads (II)", p.90.

that of Brahman. Even in the eternal existence of Brahman the spiritual reality of the universe and the individual "must in some way be present or implied, since otherwise there would be no possibility of their manifestation, or, manifested, they would have no significance".⁽¹⁾

God's existence is absolute since, because He alone is and nothing else exists apart from Him, He must necessarily exist in Himself, by Himself and for Himself.⁽²⁾ Brahman is thus self-sufficient. He exists in Himself and "not by virtue of the cosmos or of man".⁽³⁾ There can be neither a cause nor an object to God's existence, and since there is nothing external to God, He cannot increase or decrease as either would necessitate an external existence adding to or subtracting from Him. Moreover, God or Brahman is without parts, otherwise He would be subject to the laws of space. Nor can He change, for then He would be subject to the laws of time and causality. He transcends in His pure existence all concepts and categories of space, time and causality, which are themselves but the conditions He creates for His phenomenal manifestation.

God as pure self-sufficient self-existence is, thus, an infinite, timeless and spaceless stability (sthānu), - inactive, immutable, inexhaustible and unexpendable. But such a conception of pure existence is, as Aurobindo himself admits, one which goes

(1) Life Divine, p.615.

(2) "Philosophy of the Upanishads (III)", p.90.

(3) Life Divine, p.615.

beyond the senses and mind, beyond ordinary consciousness and normal experience. "All that our sense-experience tells us of, is form and movement. Forms exist but with an existence that is not pure, rather always mixed, combined, aggregated, relative".⁽¹⁾ It might be possible to get rid of precise forms, but it is not possible to get rid of motion, either motion of matter in space or motion of change in time. Thus, it may be argued, there is nothing which is stable; all is movement. The idea of the stable is finally only a fiction of mental consciousness, at best possessing a pragmatic value in that it enables us to deal practically with process and flux. Such is what the Buddhist metaphysicians declared in their revolt against the 'substance philosophy' of Brahmanism with its notion of an enduring, unchanging, omnipresent substance, *atman*.⁽²⁾ For Aurobindo, however, the movement which we experience is an infinite energy in a ceaseless reformulation of itself, and this energy has underlying it an existence, stable and immutable, of which the energy is an output and which like the energy is itself infinite. In language and a fashion redolent of Kant, Aurobindo argues that if we were to look at existence in itself "through the pure reason", then we would see time and space as "categories of our consciousness, conditions under which we arrange our perception of phenomenon".⁽³⁾ Looking at existence (*sat*) in itself, the

(1) Life Divine, p.64.

(2) See T.R.V. Murti, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1955, pp.10f., 70ff.

(3) Life Divine, p.71.

ding an sich, we find that time and space disappear, that any extension is not spatial but psychological extension and any duration is similarly not temporal but psychological duration. Duration and extension are but symbols which represent to the mind that which transcends the intellect, "an eternity which seems to us the same all-containing ever-new moment, an infinity which seems to us the same all-containing all-pervading point without magnitude."⁽¹⁾

Against this dismissal of motion, temporal and spatial, in favour of an eternal and infinite substantiality, it could be argued further that time and space disappear under scrutiny by the pure reason simply because the "existence in itself" which we claim to be looking at is nothing but a fiction of the intellect, something which we strive to erect into a conceptual reality. Aurobindo's answer would be emphatically in the negative. "There is", he adamantly insists, "something behind the phenomenon not only infinite, but indefinable."⁽²⁾

Moreover, the very idea of movement, Aurobindo claims, carries with it the potentiality of non-movement; movement is always an activity of an existence. Likewise energy in action has with it the idea of non-action, and energy not acting is but absolute existence.⁽³⁾

Thus there are two possible alternatives: either there is an indefinable pure existence behind movement in time and space, or there is an indefinable energy which, if it is without any

(1) Life Divine, p.71.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid., p.71. Emphasis ours.

stable base or cause, excludes any existence other than that which is an attribute of an eternal movement. This latter alternative, which according to Aurobindo is the Buddhistic doctrine, is unacceptable to the pure reason and must be rejected.⁽¹⁾ However, not only pure reason affirms a stable existence behind process; we can arrive at it without reasoning at all. By intuition we can see and by spiritual experience enter into "pure existence, eternal, infinite, indefinable, not affected by the succession of time, not involved in the extension of space, beyond form, quantity, quality, - Self only and Absolute".⁽²⁾ This is Brahman: pure existence exceeding all form, quantity and quality, - that into which form, quantity and quality pass "in such a way as to cease to be what we call form, quality, quantity and out of which they emerge as form, quality and quantity in the movement".⁽³⁾ What this seems to mean is that the conditions and appearances of the movement, of the process of becoming in time and space, in passing back into their source (pure existence) become something other than what they were in the movement, - something to which definitions of form, quality and quantity cannot be applied. The pure existence is, therefore, an Absolute which in its essentiality is unknowable by the intellect; there is nothing immediately present in our temporal-spatial experience which can be directly or simply equated with the pure existence.

(1) Life Divine, p.72.

(2) Ibid., p.74.

(3) Ibid., p.72.

This is, we should say, another way in which Aurobindo asserts the ultimate epistemological and ontological 'otherness' of the Godhead. The Absolute as pure existence is beyond time and space which constitute the field of the relative, and yet all things in this field in the movement, "contain, are contained in and are the Absolute".⁽¹⁾ As we have seen, according to Aurobindo time and space are the conditions for the manifestation of the timeless-spaceless pure existence, not per se, but through its self-energy, its consciousness-force. Thus Aurobindo rejects Pantheism for its equating of God with the world. God is in the world, and the world is in God and is God, but only as a becoming, not as pure being. Being is for Aurobindo always greater than becoming; becoming is an eternal truth of Being but not the whole truth. We can realise by intuition and experience that "becoming, change, succession are only a mode of our being and that there is that in us which is not involved at all in the becoming".⁽²⁾ Being is the fundamental reality, whereas becoming in the effectual reality, the dynamic working out of Being through its creative energy.⁽³⁾ In itself becoming is nothing and to consider becoming as sufficient to itself is a half-truth.⁽⁴⁾ Becoming is real only because through its self-energy, its conscious force of creativity, Being is present in and constitutive of becoming. But always Being, pure existence, is in itself greater than becoming, the movement. Thus form, quantity and

(1) Life Divine, p.72.

(2) Ibid., p.74.

(3) Ibid., pp.587-588.

(4) Ibid.

quality as we experience them in the temporal-spatial field are relative and not absolute terms of existence. In the absolute the conditions and appearances of becoming are, in so far as they exist, other than what they are to us in time and space.

These two fundamental facts, then, confront us: pure existence or Being and world-existence or becoming. Neither can be denied except at the cost of total truth. Stability and movement are, however, Aurobindo maintains, finally but psychological representations of the Absolute, just as are one and many or unity and multiplicity.⁽¹⁾ The Absolute is ultimately beyond all terms, a point Aurobindo never ceases to stress. We cannot, nor should we attempt to describe or think out the Absolute in itself. Rather our task, Aurobindo would say, is to seek to understand the nature of the movement or becoming in time and space in relation to the timeless and spaceless pure existence which Brahman is. This brings us to a consideration of the nature of God as pure consciousness, chit.

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Chit, Pure Consciousness.

Brahman or God is pure awareness, absolute consciousness, chit. Chit or pure consciousness must not be identified or confused with mental consciousness. Pure consciousness is a conception which transcends our modes of thought and knowledge.⁽²⁾ Mind does not exhaust the possibilities of consciousness; it is

(1) Life Divine, p.74.

(2) "Philosophy of Upanishads (III)", p.91.

but a single poised and very limited form of the vaster and deeper consciousness which is of the nature of divine Being.⁽¹⁾ When, therefore, Yajnavalkya asserted that the Brahman state is without consciousness, he meant, Aurobindo points out, only consciousness in the limited sense of mental consciousness.⁽²⁾ Even if it be said that the Brahman state is "beyond that", parāt param, it only means that it exceeds even the highest spiritual substratum of cosmic existence and consciousness, and not that it is a non-existence and a non-consciousness.⁽³⁾ Indeed, Brahman is supreme existence supremely aware of itself.

Two important features of Aurobindo's interpretation of chit or pure consciousness immediately stand out. Firstly, chit is not merely self-luminosity but self-consciousness, and, secondly, in its essence consciousness is purely subjective. Whereas for Shankara pure consciousness is distinctionless and merely self-luminous, for Aurobindo it is also a state and activity of pure self-awareness.⁽⁴⁾ Brahman is for Aurobindo, as it is for Ramanuja, self-conscious.⁽⁵⁾ To Shankara self-consciousness means a division of being into a subject, object and knowledge, and such a division cannot be admitted in the Brahman. For Aurobindo, however, the self-consciousness of Brahman is not knowledge of an object by a separate subject; it is rather an eternal self-awareness. In Brahman the knower,

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.443.

(2) Brihadaranyaka 3:8:8. Letters 1st Series, p.99.

(3) Ibid.

(4) See S. K. Saksena, The Nature of Consciousness in Hindu Philosophy, Benares, Nand Kishore & Bros., 1944, Chapter III.

(5) B. Kumarappa, The Hindu Conception of the Deity, Luzac, London, 1934, Part III, Ch. 1.

known and knowledge are identical and without distinction; there is no act of knowledge or need for knowledge.⁽¹⁾ Chit, pure consciousness, is purely and simply the self-awareness inherent in pure existence, sat, itself.⁽²⁾ God is eternally aware of Himself, without separation of His pure self-existence and pure self-awareness. This pure consciousness is therefore purely subjective. It is not as Ramanuja would have it another object among objects. "Being", says Aurobindo, "is self-evident to itself: it does not need to look at itself in order to know itself or learn that it is".⁽³⁾ Brahman is therefore the pure self-existence intrinsically aware of itself without any division or distinction of its being. Existence is consciousness and is inseparable from consciousness.⁽⁴⁾ In His transcendental reality God is absolute consciousness. His consciousness like His existence is self-contained and self-sufficient and since it is no different from His existence and His existence is one and simple without parts, His consciousness does not consist in a knowledge of one part of Himself by another or the whole by a part or parts by His whole.

This pure consciousness is not, however, something static; it is not only a state of self-contained self-awareness. The nature of consciousness is power, and "absolute consciousness is

(1) "Philosophy of Upanishads (III)", pp.91-92.

(2) Life Divine, p.487.

(3) Ibid.

(4) "Philosophy of Upanishads (III)", p.92.

in its nature absolute power".⁽¹⁾ This absolute power of pure consciousness is two-fold: state or power of self-awareness and state or power of creative self-force.⁽²⁾ Thus consciousness, - and the pure existence with which it is one, - has a double aspect: that of being immobile and quiescent, concentrated in pure self-awareness, and that of being dynamic and creative, expressive in its self-force. In either state, illuminative or effective, it is the one self-existence, Brahman, possessing itself, - whether in its static condition or in its dynamic movement of manifestation. Both states are equally real, so to speak, since both are but two aspects of a single consciousness, a single power of pure existence. Moreover it would seem that in the immobile state of pure consciousness and pure being, - i.e. the state of self-awareness, - the self-force of consciousness, chit-shakti or tapas, is no less present than it is in the 'active state' of consciousness, just as the self-awareness is always present in the force of consciousness directing its movements.⁽³⁾ The immobile state of pure consciousness is that in which force (shakti) is in an intensive mode of self-absorption, and the dynamic state is that in which force of consciousness is in a diffusive mode of self-extension.⁽⁴⁾ These are not alternating or exclusive modes of consciousness but eternally simultaneous

(1) Life Divine, p.500.

(2) Ibid., p.241.

(3) Ibid., pp.78-79, 311-312; also Isha Upanishad, p.75.

(4) Isha Upanishad, pp.75f.

states. Moreover, force of consciousness is not other than consciousness itself; it is the movement of consciousness within itself conceptually and executively creative of all things. The intensive mode of consciousness-force (i.e. force of consciousness, chit-shakti), that of self-absorption in pure self-awareness is proper to the pure and silent Brahman, whereas the diffusive mode of consciousness-force, that of self-extension, is proper to the active Brahman.⁽¹⁾ This second or diffusive mode is what we experience as the universe. The phenomenal world which we experience resolves itself into force, and this force is the self-force of the supreme conscious Being expressing through the energy of its consciousness its pure timeless and spaceless existence in terms and conditions of time and space. That is, Brahman or God as conscious being regards His pure existence and expresses in phenomenal forms by the force of His consciousness the infinite possibilities of existence of which He is conscious in His own being. Thus by means of His consciousness-force, chit-shakti, "it is Brahman that becomes, what He becomes is also the Brahman".⁽²⁾

Consciousness, chit, is everywhere present in existence as the very essence or 'stuff' of existence although there may be no overt operations or signs revealing, "even where it is withdrawn from objects and absorbed in pure existence or involved in

(1) Isha Upanishad, p.75.

(2) Ibid.

the appearance of non-existence. It is intrinsic in being, self-existent, not abolished by quiescence, by inaction, by veiling or covering, by inert absorption or involution; it is there in the being, even when its state seems to be dreamless sleep or a blind trance or an annulment of awareness or an absence".⁽¹⁾

The relationship between the passive and active states of consciousness, between self-awareness and force, in the process of creation can be further illustrated by Aurobindo's interpretation of the concept of tapas. "Tapas", says Aurobindo, "means literally heat, afterwards any kind of energism, askesis, austerity of conscious force acting upon itself or its object".⁽²⁾ It is "the pure energy of consciousness, free in its rest or in its action",⁽³⁾ a concentration of the power of consciousness present both in a passive state of self-awareness or an active state of self-force. It is the consciousness-force both in its self-being and in its self-becoming.⁽⁴⁾ It is the all-effective divine will present in the active and passive consciousness.⁽⁵⁾ Creation is the concentration of the power of consciousness (in the state of self-awareness) upon its self-being (sat), producing thereby an 'Idea' of existence which is then effectively realised by a concentration of the power of consciousness (in its diffusive mode of force).⁽⁶⁾ The passive consciousness and

(1) Life Divine, p.487.

(2) Ibid., p.509 footnote.

(3) Isha Upanishad, p.48.

(4) Synthesis of Yoga, p.48.

(5) Life Divine, pp.510-511.

(6) Isha Upanishad, p.84

the active consciousness of Brahman are not two things but one; "they are the same consciousness, the same energy, at one end in a state of self-reservation, at the other cast into a motion of self-giving and self-deploying".⁽¹⁾ Likewise there is not an active Brahman and a passive Brahman but only one Brahman, passive in a self-absorbed concentration of its consciousness-power, tapas or shakti, upon its being and active or creative in a deployment of that same concentration of power effectively supporting and realising in phenomenal existence the truths and potentialities of its being.

Consciousness is therefore the power of existence, and this power being not different from infinite existence (sat) is itself infinite.⁽²⁾ It is by this self-power, consciousness-force or chit-shakti, that pure existence while remaining in itself immutable and one manifests out of itself the phenomenal universe. In other words, chit or consciousness is a power not only of the self-knowledge of infinite existence but the expressive will of that existence as well. Creation is therefore according to Aurobindo the expression in time and space of the self-knowledge of timeless-spaceless existence. What consciousness beholds through its power of self-awareness it becomes through its power of expressive self-force.

Implied in this interpretation of the world manifestation is a rejection of the idea of a creation ex nihilo. As

(1) Life Divine, p. 512.

(2) Ibid., pp. 284-285.

Aurobindo says, "creation is not a making but a becoming in terms and forms of conscious existence."⁽¹⁾ It is, as the Sanscrit work for creation, *ṣṛṣṭi*, indicates, a loosing or bringing forth of that which already exists. Creation is the self-manifestation of divine existence through the projection of the force of its consciousness; it is "an ordered deploying of the infinite possibilities of the Infinite".⁽²⁾ Brahman as infinite consciousness regards the infinite existence which it also is, and what consciousness regards it formulates in phenomenal terms through a creative projection of its force. Every phenomenal form is the actualisation in time and space of a possibility of being supported by "a truth of being behind it, a reality in the Existent; for without that supporting truth there could not be any possibilities".⁽³⁾ Thus the immutable existencē, being, extends itself in a creative play of its consciousness; the One 'becomes' the many of phenomenal existence, though eternally the many are contained as infinite possibilities within the infinite One.

Everywhere and in everything in the movement consciousness is essentially the same, whole and self-contained. Even in the apparently 'unconscious' or 'inconscient' energy of primordial matter consciousness, *chit*, is there, though self-involved in its own force and form of its force. As Aurobindo points out,

(1) Isha Upanishad, p.39.

(2) Life Divine, p.285.

(3) Ibid., p.285.

"in reality it is still consciousness that works in the energy and determines the form and evolution of the form".⁽¹⁾ Throughout all of phenomenal existence there is no absence of consciousness in force and form. 'Unconsciousness', 'inconscience', 'subconsciousness', 'supraconsciousness', mental consciousness are all states of the one supreme consciousness, chit, variable in status, condition and operation.⁽²⁾

Conscious existence, Brahman, is essentially everywhere the same in the creative workings of its consciousness-force and dwells equally in all things; the intensity of the creative consciousness-force "is the same in the formation and upholding of a system of suns and the organisation of the life of an ant-hill . . . The form and manner and result of the force of action vary infinitely, but the eternal, primal, infinite energy is the same in all".⁽³⁾ All is existence, sat, because all is consciousness, chit, in its force. In all states and forms of its self-extension through its force of consciousness Brahman, the self-existence and all-existence, never ceases to be self-aware. Brahman is the reality or self of all things and is thus aware of Himself as and in all things. Just as He is intrinsically aware of Himself as self-existence, so He is aware of Himself as all-existence. In other words, Brahman is intrinsically aware of all that is because all that is, is

(1) Letters 1st Series, p.102.

(2) Ibid., pp.97-100.

(3) Life Divine, pp.68-69.

Himself, is contained in His being and expressed through His force of consciousness.⁽¹⁾

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Ananda, Delight.

Brahman or God is also pure bliss, absolute delight or ananda. Just as God is pure existence, sat, and pure consciousness, chit, so also He is pure delight, ananda, and just as existence is consciousness and cannot be separated from consciousness, so existence is bliss, and consciousness is bliss, and conscious existence cannot be separated from bliss.⁽²⁾ The three are one, indivisible and infinite Being, God. This delight is a self-delight of self-awareness and self-existence; the conscious self-existent blissful in its perfect being. Just as the essential nature of pure existence is consciousness, an infinite power of self-awareness and self-force, so the essential nature of self-consciousness is an infinite delight of being.⁽³⁾

Conscious existence and bliss according to Aurobindo are inseparable, even in the very finite existence and consciousness of life on the material plane.⁽⁴⁾ Even here and now conscious existence cannot endure without some pleasure of being. An existence totally devoid of pleasure, characterised only by blank absolute misery is one having annihilation, suicide, as its "necessary and immediate consequence".⁽⁵⁾ The will to live,

(1) Life Divine, p.487.

(2) "Philosophy of Upanishads (III)", p.93.

(3) Life Divine, p.132.

(4) "Philosophy of Upanishads (III)", p.93.

(5) Ibid.

the desire of conscious existence and self-preservation is itself fundamental, a formation of that essential and eternal pleasure of existence (ananda), and this will gives way to nothing except the will to live more fully which on the one side is the source of all personal ambition and aspiration and on the other of all love, self-sacrifice and self-conquest. "Even suicide", says Aurobindo, "is merely a frenzied revolt against limitation, a revolt not the less significant because it is without knowledge"⁽¹⁾. Religion, too, as the aspiration towards God, is the outcome and fulfilment of this fundamental force to live ever more fully, to expand separate and limited joy into the bliss of infinite existence.

The essence of conscious existence, therefore, is bliss.⁽²⁾ Brahman being infinite conscious existence, is infinite bliss, and this bliss is necessarily absolute in its nature. That is to say, it cannot be mixed or coexistent with pain or any other contrary; for pain is the result of limitation, of struggle and division, imperfection, whereas the absolute being of Brahman is unlimited, indivisible and perfect.⁽³⁾ "The absoluteness of conscious existence is illimitable bliss of conscious existence; the two are only different phases of the same thing".⁽⁴⁾ Thus Brahman's bliss of conscious existence is absolute.

Likewise is pure bliss absolute in regard to its object;

(1) "Philosophy of Upanishads, (III)", p.93.

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, p.445.

(3) "Philosophy of Upanishads (III)", pp.93-94.

(4) Life Divine, p.86.

for the subject of bliss is not different from the object of bliss. Bliss is inherent in God's existence and consciousness and can have no cause outside or within Him; for He alone is, self-existent and self-sufficient, without parts or division. Pure bliss, being of the nature of pure conscious existence, is, therefore, infinite, absolute, eternal and self-existent.

It is obvious that what Aurobindo calls bliss or delight is something infinitely higher than what we normally call 'pleasure'. Indêed, ananda or bliss is, according to Aurobindo, "the very essence of Brahman", "the supreme nature of the omnipresent".⁽¹⁾ Bliss or delight is, so to speak, the very foundation of the infinite conscious existence and its inner essence and quality. Existence, consciousness and force of consciousness are all resolvable to the single term of eternal bliss:⁽²⁾ "eternal and inalienable Bliss of Existence, Bliss of Consciousness, Bliss of Force or Will whether concentrated in itself and at rest or active and creative, this is God . . ."⁽³⁾ Bliss as "the very stuff of consciousness" is the result of that perfect harmony which exists between the two powers of consciousness, self-awareness and self-force, knowledge and will, whether in state of quiescence or of action.⁽⁴⁾

Ananda, bliss, is for Aurobindo "the true creative principle"⁽⁵⁾; it is "the sole cause, motive and object of

(1) Life Divine, p.878.

(2) Ibid., p.86.

(3) Ibid., p.132.

(4) Synthesis of Yoga, p.564.

(5) Ibid. p.577.

cosmic existence".⁽¹⁾ It is solely for delight of existence that Brahman, - perfect, absolute, lacking nothing and [uncompelled by its consciousness-force to create], free to create or not to create, - throws out its force of consciousness in the formulation of the universe.⁽²⁾ All comes from divine bliss and returns to divine bliss; ananda is superior to all principles of conscious existence and yet contains and eternally enjoys all principles.⁽³⁾ Thus the Upanishad declares: "From Ananda all existence are born, by Ananda they remain in being and increase, to Ananda they depart".⁽⁴⁾ Ananda, bliss or delight of being, is the "spiritual matrix" in which the manifestation of the many, of all spiritual and phenomenal existences, originates; it is that to which finally all souls return in their ascent to the Divine and in which they are merged, though not extinguished or abolished.⁽⁵⁾ As Aurobindo asserts, "all consciousness is of the bliss of the Infinite, all power is power of the bliss of the Infinite, all forms and activities are forms and activities of the bliss of the Infinite".⁽⁶⁾

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Brahman is, then, pure existence, pure consciousness, pure bliss, - Sachchidananda. This is the supreme divine nature manifested in and through universal and individual existence; it is the fundamental self-determination to our consciousness of

(1) Life Divine, p.132.
(2) Ibid., p.86.
(3) Ibid., pp.576-577.
(4) Ibid., p.95.
(5) Ibid., pp.878-879.
(6) Synthesis of Yoga, p.576.

the supracosmic Unknowable. Sachchidananda, therefore, does not exhaust the infinite truth of this eternal Reality, - no conceptual formulation can, - but it is that truth as it is seized by us in a supreme experience of intuition and spiritual experience and approximated, though poorly, in our intellectual expression. Within the limits of this intellectual formulation and the limitations of our intellects to comprehend ultimate things we can make some general statements about Brahman.

Firstly, Brahman is the one Reality which eternally becomes many. There is, in other words, no opposition between one and many or between Being and becoming. The One eternally contains the many; the many are the One in forms of manifestation. Likewise becoming is the dynamic aspect of Brahman, the creative self-manifestation of Being. It should be noted, however, that Aurobindo does not say that Brahman is the One which becomes many and then returns to oneness. Oneness and multiplicity are not alternative states of Ultimate Reality; the many never cease to be the One. All existences are in their substance and reality the one existence; becoming is the process of self-extension of Being in spatial-temporal modes. Being itself does not change; for in its self-extension it remains eternally what it is. The relationship between Being or Brahman and the forms of its becoming as phenomenal existence is not a simple pantheistic identity; the universe does not equal Brahman and vice versa. The relationship is one of singleness or sameness, - of non-duality or advaita in its strictest sense. Although we

have said that for Aurobindo Brahman is sat, being, it would perhaps be more true to say that sat is Brahman. In Aurobindo's analysis being is not really predicated of Brahman, but Brahman of being. So that it is not that Brahman is all - i.e., only Brahman is (and thus becoming is nothing, as the absolute monism of Shankara has it), - but that all is Brahman, - i.e., all that is, is Brahman, sarvam khalu idam brahma. Brahman is not separate but all; for its existence is pure (undifferentiated) and infinite. There is no 'this' or 'that' which is not Brahman, and conversely Brahman is not 'this' or 'that'. Brahman is esse absolutum, simpliciter nullo addito, to use Eckhart's characterisation of God; being is one, not numerically but in essence, and within the essential oneness of being all the multiplicity of becoming is eternally contained and realised, contained within the self-awareness of self-existence and realised through the activity of the all-creative expressive will or force of consciousness.

Secondly, Brahman in relation to the manifested universe is both immanent and transcendent. He is in all existences as their essential reality and above (i.e., greater than and containing) all existences as their source and ground. For Aurobindo this means that God is present as both the individual and the universal; He is both the individual existent and the cosmic totality and unity of all individuals, as well as being the unchanged, unmoving transcendent spirit. There are not three spirits or modes of being but one Spirit or being in three

mutually inclusive poises of its infinite consciousness. That is, since all is Brahman, - all that phenomenally exists is the production of the expressive force of the consciousness of Brahman "regarding itself variously, infinitely, innumerable and formulating what it regards",⁽¹⁾ - Brahman can and does know itself in any and all statuses or formulations of its consciousness, both conceptually and actually, as individual, universal and transcendent. Or, to put it another way, there is only one consciousness, chit, which is Brahman's power of self-awareness and self-manifestation. All that exists phenomenally is the formation of the force of that one consciousness. This consciousness-force (consciousness and its inherent self-force) which is the 'stuff' and energy of existence, both eternal and phenomenal, has three general forms or states: transcendent, universal and individual. Transcendent or supracosmic it is absolute and free in itself, whether passive in self-absorbed self-awareness or active in creative manifestation, beyond all time and space and all conceptual opposites of one and many or finitude and infinitude. Cosmic or universal it is consciousness-force supporting the manifested universe. Individual it is the inner reality of each individual and separate existence. Since divine existence (sat) is not different from divine consciousness (chit) which is its very essence, each poise of consciousness is a poise of being, such that there is the transcendent divine being, the supreme Soul (Purushottama) or self-existence, the universal divine being, the cosmic soul (atman) or all-existence,

(1) Isha Upanishad, p.38.

and the individual divine (jivatman).

Thus there are these three terms of one divine existence, three states of one divine consciousness. Brahman in relation to the manifested cosmos is at once the transcendent, the universal and the individual.⁽¹⁾ The universal particularizes itself in the individual, and the individual contains within itself all the generalities of the universal. Moreover the universal has immanent within itself and within everything it contains the divine transcendent. The cosmic being maintains itself by virtue of its full consciousness of its transcendent reality and realises itself in each individual existence. The transcendent, the universal and the individual are not, then, three mutually exclusive terms of existence but are three terms of one conscious existence (Sachchidananda), each term containing covertly or overtly the other two. The cosmic and the individual are, so to speak, controlled by the transcendent as the basis of its own phenomenal possibilities, and in these other two terms the transcendent possesses itself and is fully aware of itself.

What we experience as multiplicity and diversity would be for Aurobindo but the self-expressive or creative play of one invariable power of conscious being. Brahman can regard or experience itself triply as transcendent, as cosmic and as individual, just as the individual consciousness can exceed its limitations of separate existence and realise itself as universal

(1) Life Divine, pp. 342-349.

and again as transcendent of the universe. This is so because all existence is a unitarian consciousness, free and infinite, which must thus be capable of free and infinite self-variation.⁽¹⁾ The One is then fully aware of itself in each variation of its consciousness. However, the divine consciousness must also have the power of self-limitation whereby it can delimit its infinite nature in a cosmic existence and in finite centres of individual existence.⁽²⁾ Indeed, as Aurobindo points out, in order that there can be a cosmic manifestation at all the Infinite must somehow limit its action so as to have a basis for a given world or universe, and this necessitates a special determination of infinite consciousness to preside over the formation of this universe and the maintenance in it of its own order and harmony.⁽³⁾ Likewise there must be self-limitations of infinite consciousness to support and govern the manifestation of matter, life and mind in the universe and finally the formulation of individual conscious existences. There must be in each individual a special "contraction" or limitation of the infinite consciousness which is the soul of that individual governing his evolution in forms of conscious existence and creating the surface appearance of personality. Each individual soul or spiritual individuality is "an individual specialisation of a common universality or totality";⁽⁴⁾ each would be a manifestation of a particular truth

(1) Life Divine, p.309.

(2) Ibid. p.310.

(3) Ibid. Cf. concept of cosmic Purusha in Rig Veda X. 90.

(4) Ibid.

or self variation of the Infinite; each would be a different centre of the divine self-awareness, all centres, however, viewing the same universe from infinitely variable perspectives and in terms of individual differences of self-being. Finally the infinite consciousness must have an infinite power of self-absorption whereby the infinite consciousness, everywhere present and everywhere the same, can 'plunge' into its self-forms, its infinitely many self-variations.⁽¹⁾ On the transcendent level a total self-absorption of consciousness in its existence is a state of immobility, of silence; in the process of cosmic manifestation it is a state of 'inconscience', in which consciousness is so involved in the forms of its force that it appears to be absent. These three powers of divine consciousness, - self-variation, self-limitation or contraction and self-absorption, - constitute the creative, self-manifesting activity of Brahman. Consciousness regards itself (i.e. its existence, sat) variously, supports each variation of itself (each possibility of its self-existence) with an individual contraction of itself (the jivātman) and plunges into each variation so as to enjoy, concretise and govern the evolution of the possibilities which each contains; this is the manifestation of the universe.

In all of its states conscious existence is ever one and the same, - whether the transcendent self, the universal or cosmic self or the individual self. As Aurobindo declares, "oneness or sameness is everywhere, differentiation is everywhere".⁽²⁾

(1) Life Divine, p.311.

(2) Ibid., p.308.

The transcendent contains the universe and is one with it, just as the universe is one with the individual and contains it. "The individual is a centre of the whole universal consciousness; the universe is a form and definition which is occupied by the entire immanence of the Formless and Indefinable".⁽¹⁾ Thus in terms of our experiencing consciousness we can regard the Divine as a triune Godhead, being present as transcendent, cosmic and individual, - the one Divine in three terms of existence.⁽²⁾ "There is", says Aurobindo, "an essentiality of things, a commonality of things, an individuality of things; the commonality and individuality are true and eternal powers of the essentiality:

(1) Life Divine, p.38.

(2) Riddle of this World, pp.72-75. Aurobindo considers the distinction between the transcendental, the cosmic and the individual Divine to be "current in the esoteric tradition of the Catholic Church where it is the authorised (sic!) explanation of the Trinity, - Father, Son and Holy Ghost" (ibid., p.72). We do not know to what "esoteric tradition" Aurobindo is referring, but to the best of our knowledge there is no such "authorised explanation of the Trinity". Augustine would seem to reject such an interpretation when he says that the individual soul is in the image not of one Person in the Godhead but in the image of the whole Trinity. (De Trin., VII.12, VIII,4.) Likewise teaches St. Thomas Aquinas (Summa, Pars.I, Q.XLV, Art.VII). Even as esoteric a spiritual writer as Pseudo Dionysius while saying that the Godhead in its transcendent nature contains eternally all universality and all particularity as one and the same undifferentiated fact, yet says that the stream of universality and that of particularity emanates from the superessential and undifferentiated Godhead and does not involve the differentiation of Persons (De div. Nom. ChII, especially Sect. V.). And Meister Eckhart, though he speaks of the 'birth' of Christ in the individual soul and states that the soul is Christ, the second Person, yet is, we believe, teaching something more akin to Shankara than to Aurobindo: all creatures "as they are in themselves (quod sunt in et per se) are 'pure nothing' (purum nihil) - Esse est Deus. Hoc verum est de esse absoluto non de esse formaliter inhaerente."

(Quoted in R. Otto, Mysticism East and West, Meridian Books, New York, 1957, p.92).

that transcends them both, but the three together and not one by itself are the eternal terms of existence".⁽¹⁾ In these three terms the one Divine states its "developed self-existence".⁽²⁾ Essence and its phenomena are complementary; phenomena manifests essence. Likewise the finite is not a contradiction of the infinite but a circumstance; the individual is a self-expression of the universal and transcendent, a selection and concentration of the universal, one with the transcendent in nature and essence. The universal, the all, is in each individual and each in all, and the universal all is in the transcendent, God, and God in all. The transcendent, the cosmic being and the individual are three eternal states and powers of the one conscious existence.

Underlying these distinctions of the poises of Being is Aurobindo's fundamental proposition that Being is one but its oneness is infinite. That is to say, oneness contains within itself an infinite multiplicity or plurality of itself. Indeed, as Aurobindo points out, "it would not be the infinite Oneness if it were not capable of an infinite multiplicity".⁽³⁾ This does not mean, however, that the One is plural or is simply the sum of the many. Aurobindo expressly rejects this type of pluralism.⁽⁴⁾ For Him the One can be the infinite many because it exceeds all limitation and description by multiplicity, just as it exceeds all finite conceptual oneness.

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(1) Life Divine, p.344.

(2) Ibid., p.345.

(3) Ibid., p.304.

(4) Ibid.

Divine Personality.

From what has been said thus far it is clear that all apparent oppositions in characterisation of the divine nature such as one and many, infinite and finite, static and active, unqualified (nirguna) and qualified (saguna), being and becoming, are not contraries but fundamental complementaries. The same is true of the two terms impersonality and personality. Ultimate Reality is both personal and impersonal and yet beyond personality and impersonality.

The foundational self-determination of the Unknown, the Absolute, to our consciousness is, as we have seen, the trinity Sachchidananda. For Aurobindo Sachchidananda is an abstract definition or characterisation of the Divine; it is an impersonal state.⁽¹⁾ This is Brahman as transcendent, as nirguna or qualityless being, as the static, pure and silent Godhead, the Divine in its essentiality.⁽²⁾ However there is also the Godhead as it is in relation to the manifested universe of multiplicity; this is Brahman as the Divine with infinite qualities, the active and manifesting Lord of creation, the One who is many.

The impersonality of the pure Sachchidananda translates itself into the Person of the cosmic Lord and indwelling spirit. Each term of the impersonal Brahman, - sat, chit, ananda, - has in the manifestation of the universe and individual its own primal self-determinations which are original to the triune Ultimate Reality and together constitute the 'personality' of

(1) Isha Upanishad, pp.73-75.

(2) Life Divine, pp.287-288, 513.

God. (1) Thus love, joy and beauty are the fundamental cosmic determinates of ananda or pure bliss; knowledge and will or executive force are the determinates of chit or pure consciousness; self, conscious being or spirit and Lord are those of sat or pure existence. (2) Although it is ever the same triune Sachchidananda, - eternal and infinite self-existence, self-awareness, self-delight of being, - which pervades and supports the universe, this one reality, Brahman, we meet in these fundamental cosmic determinates, from which all other determinates, powers and possibilities of phenomenal existence are derived.

When Aurobindo, therefore, speaks of Brahman as being personal or having a divine personality, he seems really to mean by personality no more than the active nature of Brahman, the divine Being in relation to the cosmos. (3) Certainly he rejects what he understands to be the idea of a 'personal God' in 'European religions' who "is a Person in the human sense of the word, limited by His qualities though otherwise possessed of omnipotence and omniscience". (4) Such a view of divine personality, says Aurobindo, corresponds to the Indian religious ideas about the fierce Shiva or gracious Vishnu or terrible Kali and so on. Of course, such conceptions have a limited devotional value

(1) Life Divine, p.286. Isha Upanishad, pp.74-75.

(2) Ibid., p.286.

(3) Synthesis of Yoga, p.435.

(4) Ibid. Aurobindo is undoubtedly here referring to Western Christianity. Although popular conceptions of divine personality are of this naïve sort, this is hardly the theological understanding of the greater part of the Christian Church.

and can hardly be considered as more than very partial and relative descriptions of Ultimate Reality. The real meaning of divine personality is that God possesses infinite qualities but is not limited by them; He transcends all qualities and manifests Himself in various names and forms as He will in order to meet the needs of the individual soul. The personal God is not a person but the only real Person, the very ground and source of all personality.⁽¹⁾ Aurobindo distinguishes three "grades of approach" to the personal Divine: there is the ishta-devata, i.e. a particular form of manifestation of the Godhead (Shiva, Vishnu) selected by the individual according to his preferences; there is that in which God is the sole real Person or all-personality: and there is that approach in which personality and impersonality meet in the utter Godhead, in which the transcendent existence is also the Existent who, though transcending all definition of personality, yet is the essence of all personality.⁽²⁾ As Aurobindo points out in his commentary on the Isha Upanishad⁽³⁾, the difference in the Upanishad between divine impersonality and personality is the difference between calling the Divine 'That' or 'He', tat or sah. Although it is the same Divine who is beyond all terms, in its supreme state of being and self-absorbed consciousness, of infinite impersonality of self-possessing bliss and force, it is 'That'; in its active state of manifestation in

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, oo.435-436.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Isha Upanishad, pp.75-76.

in the individual soul-form and in the relationship between that form and its transcendent and universal self, it is 'He', the personal Divine.

Aurobindo rejects any idea of the personal being a lesser or 'inferior' state than the impersonal.⁽¹⁾ As has been indicated, - and this fact cannot be overstressed, - Aurobindo's 'system' is advaita or non-duality in its most rigorous sense. All that is, is Brahman; Brahman is all that is. Moreover, the divine nature is invariable; it is everywhere one and the same; there can be no degrees of its fulness or perfection of its essential being; it cannot be divided so that one thing is a formulation or state of sat and another of chit and a third of ananda or that one thing has more sat or chit or ananda than another.⁽²⁾ Sachchidananda is everywhere the same, one indivisible and invariable being. It is the same, one reality in its essence fully present in a speck of mud or in a planet, in an insect or a man. Though there is no difference quality of essence between insect and man, there is a difference in quality of existence in that man in his self-conscious existence is a more full manifestation of the divine essence.⁽³⁾ No form, however, can exhaust or no quality limit the Infinite, though each and all forms and each and all qualities are eternally contained in the Divine as the Divine and are thus eternally real.

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, pp.479ff.

(2) Life Divine, p.336.

(3) Ibid., pp.294, 344-345.

Thus Aurobindo asserts, "Sachchidananda is one in Himself in whatever status or whatever plane of existence".⁽¹⁾

Being and becoming, absolute and relative, nirguna and saguna, impersonality and personality are, therefore, complementary truths of one ultimate, non-dual reality. It could still be objected that being, infinitude, qualitylessness, impersonality are somehow 'higher' truths, somewhat more true than their complementaries; for isn't becoming really dependent upon being, the relative upon the absolute and impersonality prior to the appearance of personality as qualitylessness is to the appearance of qualities? Indeed doesn't Aurobindo make a distinction between being as the 'fundamental reality' and becoming as 'the effectual reality',⁽²⁾ and doesn't he state that the transcendent and supreme existence is not dependent upon or conditioned by the individual or by the universe?⁽³⁾ He does make these distinctions, but they are ones of modes of existence, so to speak, than of essence. Always the essential reality is the same, no matter what its state or formulation, containing all states and formulations. It is not, after all, that being ceases to be and translates itself completely into an alternative state of becoming or that impersonality develops into or unfolds personality. Aurobindo sees being contained in becoming and becoming in being, the one as the truth of the other. Personality doesn't replace

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.480.

(2) Life Divine, p.587.

(3) Synthesis of Yoga, p.338.

impersonality; Brahman doesn't cease to be impersonal. Personality is implied in impersonality and impersonality in personality; Brahman is the unqualified who contains all qualities and the qualified who is beyond all qualities. The impersonal Divine, Nirguna Brahman, and the personal Divine, Saguna Brahman, are, says Aurobindo, "equal and coexistent aspects of the Eternal. Impersonality can manifest with person subordinated to it as a mode of expression; but, equally person can be the reality with impersonality as a mode of its nature: both aspects of manifestation face each other in the infinite variety of conscious existence".⁽¹⁾ Brahman is always itself and supremely as the Unknown and Unmanifested beyond being and becoming, personality and impersonality.

The failure to grasp this truth of oneness, - of the infinite multiplicity of the One and the eternal unity of the many, - is shown, Aurobindo maintains, in the traditional Indian systems of philosophy and yoga in which oneness is considered to be more present in the unmanifested absolute than in the manifestation, more pure in the Impersonal than in the Personal, more complete in the Nirguna than in the Saguna, and so forth.⁽²⁾ Thus Samkhya and Advaita Vedanta of Shankara err in exclusively affirming as ultimately true and desirable a state of eternal immobility, the one (Samkhya) rejecting the world of manifestation as a sort of mistake caused by the association of the impersonal conscious soul with an unconscious mechanical nature and the

(1) Life Divine, p.258.

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, pp.327ff, 479.

other rejecting it as an illusory imposition upon the silent impersonal Brahman. Both these systems arise from the same, partial experience of reality, affirming being and deprecating or totally denying becoming.⁽¹⁾ In religion also, Aurobindo maintains, the failure to grasp the full truth of divine oneness is reflected on the one side by the "kinetic and emotional religions" which "are too much absorbed in some divine Personality and in the divine values of the finite" and on the other side by the quietistic religions which are preoccupied with total absorption in the silent Eternal and thus in effect deny the reality of the human soul and the divine personality.⁽²⁾

Divine personality is, then, as real and true as divine impersonality, for it is the one Brahman manifesting itself in and through the cosmos and the individual and at the same time holding itself back in an impersonal transcendence. The divine personality is the fundamental spiritual determinate of the impersonal transcendent in the cosmic process of creation. The one being, Brahman, we meet in the universe and in our relations with the universe as self-conscious soul or spirit and Lord, or to use the Sanskrit terms, as atman, purusha and ishwara. Similarly the power of consciousness appears to us in three fundamental aspects: maya, the conceptually creative self-force of consciousness; prakriti or nature, the dynamically executive force of consciousness; shakti, the power of consciousness which is both

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.460.

(2) Essays on the Gita, pp.300ff.

conceptually creative and dynamically executive.(1) Just as there is one existence variously manifested as atman, purusha and ishvara, - self, soul and Lord, - so there is one power of consciousness of this existence appearing in the divine manifestation as maya, prakriti and shakti. These distinctions, as all distinctions made within the one Ultimate Reality, are for Aurobindo only formal or functional and not essential; Sachchidananda is always what it is and nothing else. Thus there is some difficulty in speaking very precisely about the distinct meanings of these various terms; atman is really the same as purusha which is essentially no different from ishvara, and maya and prakriti are both shakti. The distinctions are finally only modal. Nonetheless, Aurobindo rightly admits that "to the analysis of the logical intellect it (this scheme of distinctions) offers an abundance of difficulties."(2) Bearing this in mind, we shall now briefly consider these cosmic determinates of the Indeterminable.

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Atman-Maya

Brahman with regard to the universe appears as the self, atman, of all existence, - transcendent, cosmic and individual.(3) Maya is the self-power, atma-shakti, of the atman.(4) Self or

(1) Life Divine, p.295.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid., p.313.

(4) Ibid.

atman is a fundamental aspect of Brahman but with a stress on its impersonality, and maya as the power of atman is thus experienced as an automatically operating force with the atman supporting and sustaining it but not involved in its working.(1) The atman is experienced as "eternal, unborn, unembodied, uninvolved in its workings."(2) It is Brahman subjectively experienced as the sustaining and immutable existence and core of reality of all that is in the universe.(3)

Aurobindo uses 'maya' in what he considers to be the original sense of this term as the infinite creative power of Brahman, rather than in its later derivative sense of a divine or undivine power of illusion by which the cosmos is manifested.(4) Maya, - the 'divine maya' as distinct from the maya of illusion, - is the power of infinite consciousness, chit, to form or formulate a multiplicity of existences out of its one infinite existence, sat.(5) It is the power whereby the one conceives or knows of itself as many. This knowing by Brahman of itself as many and the representing of the multiplicity of its being to its oneness is maya, the consciousness power of infinite self-variation, conceptual creation.

Purusha-Prakriti:

Purusha is atman "as originator, witness, support and lord

(1) Life Divine, p.314.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Isha Upanished, pp.53-54.

(4) Life Divine, pp.108-109.

(5) Ibid.

and enjoyer of the forms and works of nature."(1) Whereas with the self the stress is upon transcendence, with the purusha it is upon the universal-individual; thus the purusha is the atman as it is intimately connected with nature, prakriti.(2) It has a more personal aspect than has the transcendent atman and stands always as the sanctioner and enjoyer of universal nature. The duality of purusha-prakriti, conscious soul and nature, is for Aurobindo but a way of regarding the workings of the one spirit, the supreme self or atman.(3) This duality does not represent an essential division of conscious existence, but only a practical difference for the manifestation of the cosmos. Purusha is the spirit or self fully aware of the workings of its nature, its creative force, supporting and enjoying or suffering the consequences.(4) Prakriti, nature, is the power of the spirit, the force of consciousness realising through the divine powers of knowledge (jnana-shakti), will (iccha-shakti) and action (kriya-shakti) all possibilities of manifestation.(5) Prakriti is, thus, maya or self-power in process of actualising in time and space the conceptual creation; purusha is atman involved in this process of manifestation.

It should be noted that although Aurobindo is here using the terminology of the Samkhya system, he is not meaning exactly the

- (1) Life Divine, p.314.
- (2) Ibid., pp.314-315.
- (3) Synthesis of Yoga, p.716.
- (4) Ibid., p.246.
- (5) Ibid., p.717.

same things as does that system. According to Samkhya purusha and prakriti are eternally separated.⁽¹⁾ Prakriti in itself is a totally inert and non-conscious principle, primal matter or nature, and is the basis of all existence physical and psychical. It is a mechanical force of three constituents or gunas, - sattva or 'intelligence', rajas or activity and tamas or inertia, the psychological principles of pleasure, pain and indifference respectively. All determinate existence is contained in prakriti and consists of the three gunas in different proportions. When these three gunas are held in equipose, there is no manifestation of the world, but when the balance is disturbed, prakriti unfolds in an evolutionary process the twenty-six elements or tattvas of the world, shaped by a play of the gunas. The purusha, the conscious soul, is totally silent and peaceful. However, it forgets its true nature and identifies itself with the thinking, acting, feeling empirical individual, ego, evolved out of prakriti. Purusha becomes free by drawing back and disassociating itself from the actions of prakriti. There are many purushas but only one prakriti. Prakriti is the one field for the many souls who are completely independent of one another, each unique and separate whether in association with prakriti or free from it. This broadly is the Samkhya scheme.

Aurobindo agrees with Samkhya that there are many purushas, but only one prakriti. However for him these many purushas are essentially one. Moreover, he does not regard purusha and

(1) See The Sāṅkhya-Kārikā of Īśvara Kṛṣṇa, edited and translated by S.S. Suryanarayana Sastri, University of Madras, Madras, 1935.

prakriti as being eternally separate. They are eternally and ultimately one. Together they are the one Spirit in the process of manifesting out of His existence, sat, and through the agency of His consciousness-force, chit-tapas, the phenomenal universe.⁽¹⁾ As Aurobindo points out, it is only on the external side, so to speak, that prakriti gives the appearance of being an unconscious, mechanical energy of an evolutionary process seemingly governed by mere chance or laws of natural selection and material necessity; such is the materialistic view of evolution.⁽²⁾ This external view corresponds to the picture given by Samkhya of a prakriti which is the opposite of purusha. But on the other, the inner side, prakriti reveals herself as maya, the self-force, atma-shakti, of the supreme self, atma, executively creating out of the nameless and formless one Infinite a multiplicity of names and forms, the self-extension of the Divine in its self-force.⁽³⁾

Aurobindo actually distinguishes between two statuses of prakriti, a 'lower nature' and a 'higher nature'.⁽⁴⁾ The lower nature is prakriti as the manifested world of matter, life and mind, the force and substance of our external existence. The higher nature, para prakriti, is on the other hand "the infinite timeless conscious power of the self-existent Being out of which all existences in the cosmos are manifested and come out of timelessness into time."⁽⁵⁾ It is consciousness-force one with

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 717-721, Life Divine, p.316.

(2) Evolution, pp.1-13.

(3) Synthesis of Yoga, p.717, Life Divine, pp.305-307.

(4) See Essays on the Gita, Bk.II, Part I, Ch. 1.

(5) Ibid., p.238.

conscious being, the supreme self (atman) or soul (purusha). On this transcendent level prakriti is one with purusha as its will and executive power, "the integral conscious power of the supreme Being, chit-shakti",⁽¹⁾ the self-power of the supreme transcendent self, Brahman.⁽²⁾ When this power moves out of conscious existence, the manifestation takes place, and this manifestation is prakriti, the lower nature, formulating matter, life and mind. In the manifestation consciousness, conscious being, - purusha, - is still present but 'lost' or absorbed in the activities of force, prakriti, which is in a seemingly unconscious and mechanical manner constituting itself in the forms of phenomenal existence.⁽³⁾ All the while, however, prakriti or natural energy as the executive force of consciousness is working out the possibilities of conscious being, purusha, according to an eternally determined and original law of divine becoming, swabhava.⁽⁴⁾ Prakriti as the power of the soul, purusha, realises the potentialities of the soul in each and every individual existence and in the cosmic existence. In other words, prakriti is never really independent of or separate from purusha; it can only become what purusha is; it can only act according to the soul's law of becoming, its self-nature, swabhava.

(1) See Essays on the Gita. p.237.

(2) Ibid., p.309.

(3) Synthesis of Yoga, pp.513-514.

(4) Essays on Gita, pp.240-245.

This concept of the two natures Aurobindo finds in the Gita⁽¹⁾. Also in the Gita he finds what he calls the doctrine of the three purushas or rather the three-fold purusha.⁽²⁾ Conscious being or soul and its expressive self-force, purusha and prakriti, go always together, and whatever status consciousness-force assumes in its action, there will be a corresponding status of conscious being. Thus purusha is in its supreme status the eternal soul and spirit, the supreme conscious being, purushottama; it is the universal soul and spirit, akshara purusha, impersonal, inactive, standing back from the cosmic workings of its force, prakriti; it is the individual soul and spirit, kshara purusha, the jivatman dynamic in the action of its force, and even seemingly lost in its self-becoming.

These three purushas, - or three poises of purusha in its relations with prakriti, - are three states in which the self, atman, represents itself to our consciousness. We experience the self as individual, the kshara purusha acting in the workings of nature, as cosmic self, the akshara purusha standing above time, space and causality and detached from the cosmic action of prakriti, and as the transcendent self, the purushottama, "containing and enjoying both the stillness and the movement but conditioned and limited by neither of them."⁽³⁾ It seems, however, that the first realization we have of the self, atman, is as the akshara purusha.

(1) See Gita, Ch. VII: 1-14. Essays on Gita, Bk. II, Part I, Ch. 1

(2) Gita, Ch. XV. Essays on Gita Bk. II, Part I, Ch. 15.

(3) Isha Upanishad, pp. 55-56.

The experience of the akshara purusha is the experience of the self as impersonal, witnessing and inactive (akartaram), as free from and transcending the cosmic action, as the nirguna, silent and impersonal Brahman, beyond time, space and causality. (1)

The individual self, the kshara purusha or jivatman, directs the workings of prakriti in its individual movements. (2) The kshara purusha is that status of the spirit which is the basis for all individualisation in the universe. Indeed, it is the spiritual basis for the "manifold universal becoming". (3) Aurobindo characterises the kshara as the "meeting place of the play of oneness of the supreme soul and nature." (4) The jivatman is one "in essence of self and spirit" with the supreme purusha and "in power of self and spirit" is one with supreme prakriti.

In its purusha aspect the jivatman contains possibilities of individual conscious existence and in its prakriti aspect the power by which to realise these possibilities. Prakriti, the force of consciousness, is, we might say, deployed by the jivatman to actualise in an individual formulation of matter, life and mind the possibilities which it is or contains as purusha, conscious existence. The phenomenal existence of matter-life-mind is, then, the expressed nature (prakriti) of conscious being (purusha). The cosmos is the becoming of

(1) Essays on the Gita, pp.204-205., Synthesis of Yoga, pp.432-435.

(2) Karmayogin, p.59.

(3) Essays on the Gita, p.238f.

(4) Synthesis of Yoga, p.870.

Being through its power of self-expression; whatever exists phenomenally is eternally contained in divine being.

The importance of the kshara purusha, the jivatman, in Aurobindo's scheme of things is very great and marks a major difference between his understanding of purusha and that of Samkhya. The Samkhya's purusha is very much like Aurobindo's akshara purusha, the silent, immutable soul or cosmic self (atman) detached and unaffected by prakriti.. Of course, even here there is a difference in that this Samkhya purusha is multiple, whereas Aurobindo's akshara purusha is single, being the one supreme purusha in its relationship to the cosmic manifestation as the universal, impersonal self, nirguna Brahman. However, all the many Samkhya souls are all alike, and if there were just these many identical souls or just the akshara purusha, then, Aurobindo points out, "there would be no basis for different experience, no varying personality, every individual existence would be precisely like every other individual existence . . ."(1) The kshara purusha, then, is the basis of differentiation and the variety of experience, character and development of individual existences in the cosmos. The jivatman determines the development of each individual existence but does not conduct it. Prakriti as universal energy conducts the development according to the nature or swabhava, the self-existence and self-becoming, of each jivatman.(2)

(1) Ideal of the Karmayogin, p.60.

(2) Ebid., p.61.

Each jivatman is a portion or partial being of the self-existent One.⁽¹⁾ As such, each jivatman is the same in its essence and self-force as every other jivatman, but each is different in its swabhava, self-nature. Thus in the manifestation the universal variety of individual existences is possible.⁽²⁾ The jivatman is the true and eternal individual being or self of a particular individual existence in the manifestation. The jivatman itself, however, is not actually in the phenomenal world; it stands above it, so to speak, and directs the evolution of the individual existence by means of soul-projections of itself.⁽³⁾ These projections or representatives of the jivatman are present as purusha on all levels of the individual being, - body, vital, mind, - with an inner co-ordinating soul entity or 'psychic being'. Together these representatives of the jivatman, - the purusha in mind, life and body and the psychic being or chaitya purusha, - make up what Aurobindo calls the "true inner being" of the individual.⁽⁴⁾

The jivatman, then, "represents in nature the power of the supreme Spirit; he is in his personality that power; he brings out in an individual existence the potentialities of the soul of the universe."⁽⁵⁾ The jivatman is, thus, a partial being of the one supreme soul, purushottama, and one soul-form of the universal

(1) Essays on the Gita, p.406.

(2) Ibid., pp.205f, 240f.

(3) Letters, 1st Series, p.129f.

(4) Ibid., p.143f.

(5) Essays on the Gita, p.462.

soul and one soul-force of the universal nature. This individual spirit or self "exists and ever existed beyond in the Eternal, for it is itself everlasting, sanātana."(1) It is the eternal individual in no way essentially different or separate from the supreme purushottama. The supreme soul is not, of course, identical with the jivatman. The jivatman is but a partial manifestation, and all the multiplicity of jivatmans "in the universe or in numberless universes could not be in their becoming the integral Divine, but only a partial manifestation of the infinite One."(2)

The kshara purusha or jivatman is the supreme purusha as dynamic in the individual formulations of nature; the akshara purusha is the supreme purusha as the one cosmic self transcendent of the workings of the universal nature. Aurobindo seems to interpret the kshara poise as corresponding to the Samkhya's purusha when it reflects the workings of the three modes of nature and the akshara as being the Samkhya's purusha when the three modes or gunas are in a state of equilibrium and the purusha is completely disassociated from prakriti.(3) However, as we have seen, for Aurobindo prakriti and purusha are ultimately one, whereas for Samkhya they constitute an eternal dualism. Indeed, according to Aurobindo prakriti and purusha are never really separated; they cannot be, for they are ultimately and essentially the one spirit. As Aurobindo declares, "wherever there is prakriti,

(1) Essays on the Gita, p.397.

(2) Ibid., p.239.

(3) Ibid., pp.204-205.

there is purusha; wherever there is purusha, there is prakriti.⁽¹⁾ Prakriti and purusha are eternally united by ananda or bliss of being, "the eternal truth of the union of this conscious being and its conscious force whether absorbed in itself or else deployed in the inseparable duality of its two aspects."⁽²⁾ Moreover, prakriti is always subject to purusha. As the executive cosmic force prakriti acts for and according to the will and self-becoming of purusha who in turn accepts the forms created by prakriti and gives or withdraws its sanction to these workings. It is possible, however, says Aurobindo, for the soul in matter to become passive and accept all that prakriti imposes upon it, but as it rises in the scale of being the soul awakes to its sense of command over nature. Then there is an ordered regulation of the workings of cosmic force, instead of the previous seemingly mechanical and unconscious action.⁽³⁾ Likewise, Aurobindo points out, if in our ourselves the purusha is passive, not awake to its command over nature and accepting all that our nature imposes upon it, "then the soul in mind, life, body, - the mental, vital, physical being in us, - becomes subject to our nature, ruled by its formation, driven by its activities; that is the normal state of our ignorance."⁽⁴⁾ This normal state of ignorance corresponds to what Samkhya regards as the 'bondage' of the soul.

The ultimate relationship of purusha and prakriti is one of

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.139.

(2) Ibid, p.495.

(3) Ibid., pp.718-719.

(4) Life Divine, p.315.

full harmony in the purushottama, the supreme Person, in whom conscious being and conscious force are one. In the purushottama is the ultimate reconciliation of all the apparently contradictory aspects of our experience of reality.

This doctrine of the threefold purusha has immense importance for Aurobindo's view of Yoga. The goal of the sanyasin, says Aurobindo, is the realization of the akshara purusha, - the cosmic self, the eternal silence, the inactive-impersonal-nirguna Brahman - through "a complete renunciation of works and life, an ascetic seclusion, an ascetic inaction."⁽¹⁾ Indeed, the ascetic ideal is held by the traditional systems of Indian philosophy which, no matter whatever differences they may have,⁽²⁾ "all proceed on the belief or the perception that the Eternal and Absolute can only be or at least can only inhabit a pure transcendent state of non-cosmic existence or else a non-existence. . . All that is individual, all that is cosmic has to be austerely renounced by the seeker of the absolute truth."⁽³⁾ On the other side, there is the goal of some spiritual disciplines which through yogic practices seek to realize in the individual and in all cosmic existence the full presence of the immanent Divine, the kshara purusha, the active doer (karta), and to bring this soul in all to more or less complete control of nature.⁽⁴⁾ For Aurobindo both these goals are to be reached but then surpassed. As he points

(1) Essays on the Gita, p.396.

(2) Even the devotional schools, though they do not seek the impersonal Brahman, nonetheless embrace the ascetic life as necessary for attainment of spiritual realization.

(3) Synthesis of Yoga, pp.327,328.

(4) Essays on the Gita, p.398.

out, it is the supreme purusha, the purushottama, which has to be realised in both of its cosmic appearances, as kshara and as akshara, as both in all and above all.⁽¹⁾ "Liberation, immortality, " Aurobindo declares, "is to live in this unchangeably conscious eternal being of the Purushottama."⁽²⁾ To do this one "must cease to live according to the law of the lower nature."⁽³⁾ The embodied soul, the kshara purusha, must be liberated from the desires, troubling emotions, personal will and ignorance of the ego and must be merged with the impersonality and calm equanimity of the cosmic self, atman, akshara purusha. The higher goal, however, is the realisation of the Purushottama in which not only the dualism of the kshara and akshara purushas is transcended, but that of purusha and prakriti as well. Purushottama is the Godhead, the supreme Self and eternal divine Being who is also the self and soul of all creatures and becomes all these creatures by His prakriti. To that Godhead the individual purusha, the jivatman, must surrender himself. This, says Aurobindo, is the supreme secret and the teachings of the advaita of the Gita.⁽⁴⁾

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Ishwara-Shakti:

The third and final duality in which we experience Brahman in its relationship to the cosmos is that of ishwara-shakti, the Lord and His supreme power of conceptual and executive creation of which

(1) Isha Upanishad, p.56.

(2) Essays on the Gita, p.377.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid., pp.469-500.

He is the absolute ruler. As Aurobindo points out, "it is evident that whatever the posture taken or relation formed in any individual nodus of purusha-prakriti, the Being is in a fundamental cosmic relation lord or ruler of its nature."⁽¹⁾ It would seem that for Aurobindo there is no fundamental difference whatsoever but only a 'functional' difference between the three dualities of atman-maya, purusha-prakriti and ishwarā-shakti. They are but three dual determinations of one conscious existence and its creative force of consciousness. There is ever one, indivisible Godhead, Brahman, but we experience this one divine and eternal Being, - or, rather, it determines itself to our consciousness, - in three fundamental ways: as the individual-universal personal soul of each existence and executive nature (purusha-prakriti); as one universal and impersonal self or all-existence and its self-force by which it knows and conceptually formulates itself as many (atman-maya); and as the supreme Lord, master and creator of the universe and His inseparable power of creation (ishwara-shakti). Ishwarā-shakti is the one conscious existence and its conscious force in an inseparable union of bliss of being, at once intracosmic and supracosmic.⁽²⁾ Ishwara is the supreme person (purushottama) as absolute, fully self-conscious and active controller of His nature; the divine Being in its transcendent and cosmic consciousness and ruler of all its energies; the self (atman) of all existences and soul (purusha) in all

(1) Life Divine, p.317.

(2) Ibid., p.318.

individuals; the spirit in all and the enjoyed of all; in His being (sat) the Father of all and in His conscious force (chit-shakti) the divine Mother of existence. Thus seen, Aurobindo declares, the ishvara "becomes the most comprehensive of the aspects of the Reality, since here all are united in a single formulation . . . He is that which exceeds and inhabits and supports all individuality; He is the supreme and universal Brahman, the absolute, the supreme Self, the supreme Purusha."⁽¹⁾ For Aurobindo ishvara is, therefore, Parabrahman, - the eternal, ineffable, divine transcendent Being who, unlike Shankara's ishvara as saguna Brahman, is at once saguna and nirguna, passive and active, personal and impersonal, - the master of all being, sarva bhūta maheśvara. In regard to the impersonal, inactive cosmic self (atman, akshara purusha) it would appear, says Aurobindo, that conscious force, maya, is conceptually creating out of conscious being an infinite variety of forms and movements with the self merely giving passive consent and taking an impartial pleasure and "immobile delight of creative and mobile existence."⁽²⁾ Similarly in the relationship of purusha-prakriti it would seem that in the individual movements of the manifestation purusha is so immersed in the workings of prakriti that it has lost all control. In actuality, however, this conscious force, - maya, prakriti, shakti, - is the self-power of Being, - atman, purusha, ishvara, - and is always subject to His will and commands

(1) Life Divine, p.318.

(2) Ibid, p.321.

Nothing can be done by shakti without the permission and tacit sanction of conscious existence, ishvara.

In this supreme status, then, shakti is eternally united with ishvara, conscious force with conscious being. Here, Aurobindo points out, is "the mystery of the masculine and feminine cosmic principles whose play and interaction are necessary for all creation."⁽¹⁾ Whereas in that transcendent state which Aurobindo calls "the superconscient truth of the self-existence" ishvara and shakti are fused, the one implied in the other, in "the spiritual-pragmatic truth of the dynamism of the universe" they are no longer indistinguishably fused but, although still united, become active.⁽²⁾ In this cosmic activity of creating the universe the real work, so to speak, seems to fall to the shakti, although, as we have seen, she acts only the will and consent of her lord, ishwarā. It is she, nonetheless, who manifests herself and ishvara as a dual principle. That is to say, chit-shakti, conscious force, through its creative activity reveals the conscious being (Sachchidananda) of which it is the self-expressive and self-extensive power. The supreme Reality is ever one, but in the cosmic manifestation we experience the duality of the workings of the creative power of conscious existence and that conscious existence itself in its creative power. Through that power and by that power alone, ishvara acts; he does nothing except by her; his will is ever implicit in her

(1) Life Divine, p.322²

(2) Ibid.

workings, but it is she as conscious force who realises all things, holding all souls and beings within her as the executive nature(prakriti). "All exists and acts according to Nature, all is the consciousness-force manifesting and playing with the Being in millions of forms and movements into which she casts his existence."(1) Since what we are in our present evolved being is a formation of consciousness-force, the divine shakti, if we are to transcend our lower nature and rise to a higher state of being, we shall do so by the continued working within us of shakti. Thus "our surrender must be to the Divine Being through the Divine Mother."(2) It is shakti who manifests Brahman as nirguna and saguna, akshara and kshara, and it is through her that we are able to realise these two statuses of the one Supreme.(3) By a consecration of our wills, knowledge and love or devotion to the Lord through her we achieve a realisation first of the kshara purusha, - the individual divine, the self and soul of our being,- and then of the akshara purusha, - the one cosmic self and soul of the universe, - and finally of the Purushottama, the supreme self and soul, the ishvara who is both saguna and nirguna, immanent and transcendent, and in whom soul and nature are eternally one.

The concept of shakti plays, therefore, a major role in both Aurobindo's metaphysics and in his yoga, his concept of reality and techniques of liberation and union. Metaphysically the

(1) Life Divine, p.322

(2) Ibid.

(3) Letters, 4th Series, p.303.

concept of the shakti is for Aurobindo the most inclusive characterisation of the transcendent conscious force in its activity of cosmic manifestation, just as that of the ishvara is the most comprehensive characterisation of the transcendent conscious existence in relation to the manifestation. As ishvara includes within it the poise of the cosmic self (atman) and the universal-individual conscious spirit (purusha), so shakti comprises the conscious power of conceptual creation (maya) and of executive creation (prakriti). Indeed, maya is maya-shakti, and prakriti is prakriti-shakti.⁽¹⁾ Maya-shakti and prakriti-shakti are both powers of the one conscious force, chit-shakti in manifestation.⁽²⁾ As we have seen, the nature of consciousness is power, and this power, chit-shakti, is ever present whether in an intensive mode of self-absorption or in a diffusive mode of self-extension. It is in this latter mode that chit-shakti releases its many self-contained energies so as to manifest the infinite possibilities of existence formulated by divine consciousness. Force of consciousness, shakti, is not different or separate from consciousness (conscious existence) itself, ishvara.⁽³⁾

(1) See Isha Upanishad, pp.42, 71.

(2) Letters, 4th Series, p.306.

(3) Life Divine, p.322. See also Synthesis of Yoga, p.247, where Aurobindo points out the ishvara-shakti is not quite the same in terms of our experience as prakriti-purusha. Whereas prakriti-purusha are separate in their relation, ishvara-shakti contain one another. "Ishvara is purusha who contains prakriti and rules by the power of the shakti within him. Shakti is prakriti ensouled by purusha and acts by the will of the ishvara which is her own will and whose presence in her movement she carries always with her." To put it quite simply, ishvara is the purushottama who eternally contains within him his supreme power over which he has full control.

The supreme shakti, chit-shakti, Aurobindo also calls the adya-shakti, which as the original, highest shakti contains all other shaktis (i.e., aspects of itself as powers of being), - the primary ones being power of knowledge (jnana-shakti), power of will (iccha-shakti) and power of action (kriya-shakti).⁽¹⁾ These many energies of conscious force when released from the Divine, work together to manifest first conceptually in terms of self-knowledge and then executively in terms of will and action the cosmos and all existences therein. In so manifesting the many existences or many possibilities of conscious existence shakti reveals her own power and the ishvara as the divine dual principle of creation,⁽²⁾ - a duality making the cosmic manifestation possible.⁽³⁾ As the power of ishvara, shakti is the mediatrix between the One and the many. It is she who manifests the many individual selves or souls, the jivatmans, both as essential selves of the one self and as a form of herself as the supreme nature and power of the Divine in movement and action.⁽⁴⁾

This divine Mother of the universe appears under many forms in her workings.⁽⁵⁾ Her highest and original form, the form of the supreme Mother, is the Adya shakti,⁽⁶⁾ the supreme consciousness force of the Godhead. As adya shakti she manifests not only the supracosmic and intracosmic ishvara but all the many gods of human devotion and worship.⁽⁷⁾ These gods, it

(1) Life Divine, p.78.

(2) Ibid., p.322.

(3) Synthesis of Yoga, p.141.

(4) Ibid., pp.141-143, 869-870, 825-826.

(5) Letters, 4th Series, p.345.

(6) Ibid., p.344.

(7) Letters of Sri Aurobindo on the Mother, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1952, p.19.

would seem, are themselves but personalities (ishta-devata) of the one Divine. (1) Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma are all personalities of the Godhead, - model selves, we might say, of the Divine who appears to mean according to their peculiar needs and the dispositions of their minds and hearts. Each divine personality or representation of the Godhead revealed by shakti in her cosmic activities, - e.g. Shiva the destroyer, Vishnu the gracious preserver, Brahma the benevolent creator, - are, of course, only in a limited way true characterisations of the unlimited, infinite and eternal Godhead. (2)

Moreover, adya shakti, the supreme Mother, is Aditi of the Veda, (3) - the infinite consciousness-force, the 'Mother of the gods', who knowing the Supreme Reality, Tat Ekam, 'That One', contains and, indeed is the many gods (Rig Veda I.89.10). She eternally gives birth to the gods who are the moving spirits behind nature, both physical and psychological, fulfilling the purpose of the Supreme. As Aurobindo points out, "the Vedic deities are names, powers, personalities of the universal Godhead and they represent each some essential puissance of the Divine Being. They manifest the cosmos and are manifest in it". (4) Thus, for example, Agni, the most important of the Vedic gods born of Aditi, is in physical nature the principle and power of fire and heat and in psychological nature the principle and power of divine will in man (Rig I.1.1., I.1.5.); Indra is physically lightening and power of light and psychologically

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.658f.

(2) Ibid., p.435f.

(3) See On the Veda, Chs. XII-XIII, Part III: 'Doctrine of the Mystics'.

(4) Ibid., p.433.

power of divine illuminative intelligence (Rig. I.4.2-3); Surya is physically the sun and psychologically the power of divine intuition, inspiration and truth (Rig. I.50.10, I.22.6).

Aurobindo can, therefore, accept polytheism as true in that it reflects in its many deities the divine origins and processes of cosmic and human existence and gives a true, though limited picture of the one and inexhaustible Godhead in its relation with the cosmos and man.⁽¹⁾ The polytheistic religions, although 'less exalted' than monotheism, have been "more sensitive in their response to cosmic life" and have, therefore, "conceived of the existence of many divine personalities with a vague sense of an indefinable Divine behind, whose relations with the personal gods were not very clearly conceived".⁽²⁾

In addition to these divine personalities manifested by there are the divine vibhūtis or 'Heroes' of the human race who embody some special and great power of divine quality (e.g.,

(1) Such an attitude is, of course, consonant with the ancient dictum that "Reality is one; the wise know it by many names". Aurobindo's view is well reflected in the statement of L. Gardet and M.M. Anawati: "la vérité divine est une et simple; mais la nature de l'esprit humain est telle que nous ne pouvons saisir cette vérité que sous mode complexe. Cognita sunt in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis". Introduction à la théologie musulmane, Paris, Vrin, 1948, p.338.

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, p.665. This understanding of polytheism is very much like what Max Müller called 'henotheism', as distinguished from ordinary polytheism, - viz., many deities as separate individualities not limited by other deities and yet behind all a sense of one divine Being, all individual deities being finally but faces of manifestations, pratīka or persona, of the One. See M. Müller, The Vedānta Philosophy, S. Gupta Ltd., Calcutta, 1955, p.22f.

knowledge, love, strength, etc.). Each vibhuti or hero derives his special quality and energy from the Mother and has her force actively present in him. He is indeed created by her as an instrument of her will and workings in the world.⁽¹⁾ Finally the shakti is the agency for the ishvara's descent to earth in human form as an avatar or incarnation.⁽²⁾

Not only does the supreme Mother, adya shakti, manifest the many divine names or personalities of the ishvara, but she manifests in her cosmic activities her own many forms or personalities.⁽³⁾ As universal Mother, mahashakti, she stands above the cosmos, creating all existences and entering into them, supporting and conducting all processes. Mahashakti, universal nature, gives birth to the individual soul, the jivatman, manifesting it as a portion of herself out of her divine conscious existence.⁽⁴⁾ The mahashakti is the "cosmic soul and

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- (1) Letters on the Mother, pp. 17-24. Examples of vibhutis are Napoleon and Caesar.
- (2) Essays on the Gita, Bk. I: Ch. 16; Bk. II: Ch. 9. It should be noted that a vibhuti is not the same as an avatar. The avatar is "a divine birth from above, the eternal and universal Godhead descended into a form of individual humanity, ātmanamṣrjāmi, and conscious not only behind the veil but in the outward nature", whereas the vibhuti is an individual with a controlling divine quality but lacking the full divine power and consciousness. Shakti, the divine consciousness-power, manifests the avatar, as well as the vibhuti. In the avatar the shakti is fully present and the human receptacle is fully aware of her presence as the indwelling Godhead functioning through him.
- (3) Aurobindo gives a highly imaginative, - but we feel not very acceptable, - interpretation of the 'inner doctrine' of the Christian Trinity and Incarnation. The divine Son is the jivatman who comes forth from the Father, ishvara, born of the virgin Mother, shakti or para prakriti, united with the Father by the Holy Spirit, Brahman consciousness. Essays on the Gita, p.145.
- (4) Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1949, p.38.

personality of the transcendent Mother" (adya shakti) whose instructions she works out in the evolution of the universe.⁽¹⁾ Aurobindo warns that this universal Mother, mahashakti, is not to be identified with the lower nature, apara prakriti.⁽²⁾ What we commonly call nature "is only her most outward executive aspect".⁽³⁾ She sends down emanations of her various powers into the world to carry out her work. "These emanations are the many divine forms and personalities in which men have worshipped her under different names throughout the ages".⁽⁴⁾ By these powers she shapes minds and bodies for her vibhutis and for those of the ishvara, so as to manifest through human consciousnesses something of her power and presence. The four major powers or personalities of the mahashakti which Aurobindo cites are maheswari, mahakali, mahalakshmi, and mahasaraswati, with their divine qualities of wisdom, strength, harmony and perfection, respectively.⁽⁵⁾ Also, they are the powers available to the devotee of the Mother, the one who in his will and mind and devotion surrenders himself to her completely.⁽⁶⁾ Freeing himself from the passions and self-seeking desires of his ego and realising his true individuality in his spiritual self, the jivatman, the devotee offers himself as jivatman to the Divine through a total surrender to the Mother. Then she, as the divine consciousness-force, will work in him to bring him to the

(1) Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1949, p.38.

(2) Lights on Yoga, p.6.

(3) The Mother, p.40.

(4) Ibid., pp.44-45.

(5) Ibid., p.50f.

(6) Essays on the Gita, Bk.II: Ch.11.

perfection of the divine nature. (1)

For Aurobindo, therefore, the shakti is, so to speak, the divine creatrix of the universe and the mediatrix of all grace. It is through her and by her that all existence is manifested, maintained and perfected; through and by her all has come from the Divine and all returns to the Divine. In her supracosmic and intracosmic nature as the supreme consciousness-force she is the energy, the power of divine Being; out of that divine Being (Sachchidananda) she manifests the lord, ishvara, and herself as a dynamic duality. Only through shakti can ishvara act, and except by her he does nothing. (2) It may appear from all this that shakti is completely in control of ishvara, that he is totally subject to her. This understanding of the relationship Aurobindo decidedly rejects. Ishvara is ever the lord not only of all existence but also of his shakti. She is his instrument for the manifestation of the universe. Ishvara, conscious being, can never be subject to his self-force, shakti. On the contrary it is shakti who is ever subject to the will and consent of ishvara. (3) Brahman as ishvara or supracosmic lord has full freedom to manifest or not to manifest the power, shakti, which

(1) The Synthesis of Yoga, Part 4: Ch.17.

(2) There is a striking similarity between this concept of shakti as the eternal expressive energy or energies of divine Being and the idea of the uncreated energies of the Godhead found in the theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church. (See Vladimir Lossky, Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'église d'Orient, Paris, 1944, especially chapter 4.). God is one with three hypostasis, a trinity. This eternal trune Godhead has within

Footnote No. 2 continued from p.100.

its very nature an uncreated energy or self-force by which and through which the Godhead manifests itself. This energy, - actually, like shakti, many energies, - proceeds from the triune Godhead eternally, manifesting God beyond His essence. That is to say, God in His substance (i.e. sat) is immutable and immobile (just as Parabrahman in its pure existence), but in His energies He is ever proceeding from Himself. These energies are God Himself, but not in His essence. There is always that Unknown, that unmanifested and incommunicable essence which can be described only negatively, but equally there is always that manifestation of His nature through His self-force or energies. Thus Dionysius the Aeropagite contrasts the 'unions' with the 'distinctions' - i.e., the superessential nature of God in which He remains unmanifested as if in repose and the manifestations or processions in which everything which exists partakes and by which God is known. Dionysius's contrast of the two ways of knowledge of the Divine, the via negativa et positiva, is based on this real distinction between the unmanifest superessential nature and the self-revealing energies of God. Through the energies God communicates Himself while ever remaining inaccessible in His essential nature, distinguishes Himself while ever remaining single and becomes manifold while ever remaining one. These uncreated, eternally flowing energies are not dependent upon the existence of the universe for their manifesting action. Instead they create the universe and are present in all existences. Moreover, the Godhead is present undiminished in its energies, in every ray of its divinity, but the created world doesn't thereby become infinite or co-eternal with God. The manifestation of God through His energies is eternal, but the world is in time. Finally the creation, although freely effected by the divine energy, is depended upon an act of will of the triune Godhead. In the universe and in all beings, limited and changeable, which they create from nothing (ex nihilo), the energies abide and manifest the divine names, - Wisdom, Life, Power, Justice, Love, Being, God, - and bring all creatures to divine perfection, i.e. deification. The main difference between this general scheme of the divine energies and Aurobindo's interpretation of the shakti, - and granted, it is a great difference, - is that in Orthodox theology the creation of the world, although by the energies, is ex nihilo and de novo, whereas for Aurobindo it is a manifestation of principles and forms eternally contained in the superessential divine nature.

(3) Life Divine, p.321.

he eternally possesses as his supreme nature; the final will is eternally his. (1)

In his interpretation of the relationship between ishvara and shakti Aurobindo has, we believe, given the generally accepted Tantric position. However, Aurobindo strangely accuses the Tantric philosophy of having reduced ishvara, Shiva, to the status of "an inert Infinite with an active content in it more powerful than the continent, a conscious holder of Force of whom his Force is master". (2) Ishvara of the Tantrics, Aurobindo judges, is totally subject to shakti and compelled by her, lacking all will of manifestation, being at most "an Existence which is really nothing but Force, Force at rest or in movement, absolute Force perhaps, but not absolute Being". (3)

It is difficult to see upon what basis Aurobindo makes this severe criticism of Tantra. Very possibly he has in mind not the ancient Tantric philosophy but later developments, especially the Shakta Tantra in which Shakti is made the supreme principle and Shiva is totally subject to her. The traditional Tantric scheme

(1) Life Divine, p.302.

(2) Ibid. p.80.

(3) Ibid. This judgment by Aurobindo of Tantra is echoed by two commentators. See S.K. Maitra, The Meeting of East and West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1956, pp.64-65; and B.R. Chowdhury, "Sri Aurobindo and Tantra", Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual, 1942, pp.72-88. The latter elaborates Aurobindo's criticism by asserting, - erroneously, we believe, - that the Purushottama, "Paramashiva of Tantra is for ever absorbed in samadhi; he has not will of manifestation; it is Adya Shakti who is the cause of manifestation and withdrawal from manifestation of srishti and laya". p.79.

of the ishvara-shakti duality is, however, very little different from Aurobindo's. This is not to suggest that his metaphysics are simply a restatement of Tantra. On the contrary, the principle foundations of Aurobindo's thought are the Vedas and the Upanishads,⁽¹⁾ - in which, however, he himself finds the doctrine of the shakti as the divine power of knowing, willing, acting and enjoying. There are, thus, great similarities between the Tantra and Aurobindo's understanding of divine force and divine existence. Tantra declares, as does Aurobindo, that, - to use Aurobindo's own words, - "Force is inherent in Existence. Shiva in Kali, Brahman and Shakti are one and not two who are separable".⁽²⁾ Thus, in the words of Sir John Woodroffe, a foremost expositor of Tantra whose authority Aurobindo

(1) Aurobindo's view of the Veda and the Upanishads and the relationship between them is well given in the following statement: "The Veda possess the high spiritual substance of the Upanishads, but lacks their phraseology; it is an inspired knowledge as yet insufficiently equipped with intellectual and philosophical terms. We find a language of poets and illuminates to whom all experience is real, vivid, sensible, even concrete, not yet of thinkers and systematisers to whom the realities of the mind and soul have become abstractions. Yet a system, a doctrine there is; but its structure is supple, its terms are concrete, the cast of its thought is practical and experimental, but in the accomplished type of an old and sure experience, not of one that is crude and uncertain because yet in the making. Here we have the ancient psychological science and the art of spiritual living of which the Upanishads are the philosophical outcome and modification and Vedanta, Sankhya and Yoga the late intellectual result and logical dogma". (On the Veda, p.423.)

(2) Life Divine, p.78.

acknowledged, (1) Tantra asserts as its "fundamental doctrine that there is no Shiva without Shakti, no Shakti without Shiva". (2) Indeed, Shiva without Shakti is as dead. As Aurobindo himself points out, shakti or force is always present in existence, - Shiva, - whether in motion or at rest and is not in any way diminished, abolished or essentially altered. (3) Both Aurobindo and Tantra reject the Samkhya doctrine of an ultimate dualism between purusha and prakriti; For both see here two aspects of one eternal Reality, conscious force and conscious existence. (4) Likewise both reject the Mayavada doctrine of the Shankara School of Advaita which teaches that the world and the individual are illusions. Maya is instead for Aurobindo and Tantra the creative force of consciousness whereby the many existences are manifested out of the One. (5) According to both the manifestation of the cosmos is a process of involution-evolution achieved through the agency of the divine conscious force (the universal Mother or mahashakti). Consciousness, chit, is thus for both the 'stuff' of the universe and the very nature of pure existence, sat. (6) For both shakti is the one supreme power of consciousness, the one divine Mother, whose forms are many depending upon her modes of activity and planes of manifestation. (7)

(1) B.R. Chowdhury, op.cit., p.83, so asserts.

(2) Sir John Woodroffe, The World as Power, Ganesh & Co., Madras, 1957, p.46.

(3) Life Divine, pp.78-79.

(4) Woodroffe, op.cit., p.189f.

(5) Ibid., p.47.

(6) Woodroffe, Mahamaya, Ganesh & Co., Madras, 1954, pp.1-34.

(7) Woodroffe, The World as Power, p.190f.

As for Aurobindo's criticism that in Tantra ishvara, Brahman, is reduced to an "inert Infinite", that it has no will of manifestation and is compelled by shakti or force, that it is not an absolute Being but "an Existence which is really nothing but Force", it just be pointed out that the fundamental principle of Tantra that there is no Shiva without shakti nor shakti without Shiva means quite simply that Shiva and shakti are inseparable. Together they are one Ultimate Reality. For Tantra, as for Aurobindo, conscious existence is non-dual, advaita. (1)

- (1) The oneness or non-duality of reality is the fundamental metaphysical principle for Tantric philosophy whether Hindu or Buddhist. See S.B. Dasgupta, An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism, University of Calcutta, 1958, especially chapter 4; also H. de Glasenapp, Mystères Bouddhistes: doctrines et rites secrets du "Vehicule de Diamant", Payot, Paris, 1944, pp.75-80, 156-163. As Dasgupta points out, the fundamental metaphysical doctrine of Tantric Buddhism was advaya, - the non-duality of Reality, - and the central point of the sadhana was a principle of union, yuganaddha, i.e., "the unification of all duality in an absolute unity" (p.113) - a unity archetypically realised and exemplified in the union of Shunyata and karuna, pure consciousness and universal compassion (also termed prajna, wisdom, and upaya, means) in the Dharmakaya or Truth-Body of the Buddha and symbolised in the maithuna or kama-kala (conjugal union) of various male and female deities. All apparent division and phenomenal multiplicity is not ultimately true, for all meet in final oneness, a sovereign unity, and as Glasenapp puts it, "par rapport à cette souveraine unité, les phénomènes du monde composite et livré à d'incessantes transformations n'ont, qu'ils soient rien de réel". (p.76.)

For Tantra, as for Advaita Vedanta, the ontological problem of multiplicity and duality is ultimately an epistemological problem. See H.V. Guenther, Yuganaddha, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, Vol. III, Banaras, 1952. As Guenther points out, in Buddhism "samadhi has been attained when 'symbolic knowledge' is coupled with 'literal knowledge',

Continuation of Footnote No. (1) on p.105.

when life has been realised as an integral and indivisible whole". (p.143). The 'symbolic' or 'transcendental' knowledge (paramārthasatya) is that of the Void (shunyata) or non-duality. The 'literal' knowledge (samvrtisatya) is that of the non-Void (the duality of subject and object). The union of these two knowledges is enlightenment (bodhicitta). In samadhi these two knowledges do not exist separately but in a unity which comprehends and relates all seeming contradictions. This, then, is what the Sekoddeśatīkā means when it declares that "Reality is that against which there are no counter-arguments". (Guenther, op.cit., 143-144). Reality is the "unity of opposites" (yuganaddhākhyā), the Dharmakaya, the union of the Void and its manifestation.

Shiva is shakti, not has shakti, as Aurobindo seems to interpret Tantra. Pure being does not possess pure consciousness; it is pure consciousness. The nature of this pure consciousness is force, shakti, whether in motion or at rest. Moreover whatever this force accomplishes, whatever shakti does, all is according to the will and knowledge of ishvara, conscious existence. What is this will and knowledge after all but shakti herself: iccha-shakti and jnana-shakti. To say that Shiva has no will of manifestation, therefore, is to separate Shiva from shakti, which Tantra does not permit. As Woodroffe points out, "she (shakti) is not and cannot be some independent principle; for she is the power of Shiva, and power and power-holder (shaktiman) are one".⁽¹⁾ Shakti, we may say, is but a word, - a word used to speak of the divine Being's power of knowledge, will and action whereby the cosmos is manifested. Shiva-shakti is thus for Tantra "twin aspects of the one Reality in whom inhere both"⁽²⁾. Whatever shakti does is what Shiva, Brahman, wills; for shakti is Shiva's will. Brahman has no other will than his will, iccha-shakti; shakti or force of consciousness is his eternal 'truth-will' to become. Indeed, will-power is, in a sense, the becoming of Being itself.⁽³⁾ In Tantra, therefore, Brahman or Shiva very much has a will, and that will by which he manifests is his shakti. This is precisely what Aurobindo says as well.⁽⁴⁾ Indeed,

(1) Woodroffe, World as Power, p.190.

(2) Ibid., p.357.

(3) Ibid., p.231.

(4) Synthesis of Yoga, Part I: Ch.8.

Aurobindo himself might be accused of making Brahman subject to force with the declaration that ishvara can act only through and by shakti, and without shakti he can do nothing.⁽¹⁾ Also Aurobindo asserts, not differently from Tantra, that shakti is ishvara's will, that the supreme shakti (adya-shakti) contains this will as of one of her several powers (iccha-shakti) and that she "acts by the will of the Ishwara which is her own will".⁽²⁾ Here Shiva has just as much or just as little an independent will of manifestation as he has in Tantra: Shiva's will is his shakti through whom he manifests himself. Thus says Aurobindo, and thus says Tantra.

There are, however, some important differences between Tantra and Aurobindo, but they are not in the first instance specifically metaphysical. They are more matters of emphasis and of the techniques and final goals of the yoga sadhana. In both the yoga and metaphysics there is a difference of general emphasis. Whereas Tantra speaks at times almost exclusively of shakti, - as Woodroffe points out, however, only "for convenience, being careful to remember that shakti is but the power of Being and that the two are inseparable",⁽³⁾ - Aurobindo places fairly equal emphasis upon both aspects of the total Reality. The final object of the Tantric yoga is more than liberation (mukti) as it was for Samkhya Yoga; it seeks a universal enjoyment (bhukti) of the Divine itself. Aurobindo's yoga, on the other

(1) Life Divine, p.322.

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, p.247. Emphasis ours. Cf. Synthesis of Yoga, pp.716-717, Life Divine, p.78f.

(3) Woodroffe, World as Power, p.47.

hand, is in effect an aiding or hastening of the process of evolution in the individual. Man as mental being is not, according to Aurobindo, the final stage of evolution. There is yet higher levels of conscious existence contained within man, and through Yoga, through purification of the lower nature, the individual prepares himself for and thus makes possible the emergence from within and the descent from above of the fulness of consciousness. The final goal of Aurobindo's Yoga is, thus, the perfection of man, - all individuals, the entire race, - in all of his being, - body, life and mind, - through the full manifestation of the divine nature (Sachchidananda) in human nature.

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Both in his metaphysics and in the yoga which follows from it Aurobindo's efforts to synthesize the major systems are apparent. In relating to one another the three dualities of purusha-prakriti, atman-maya and ishvara-shakti as three mutually inclusive pairs of self-determinations of Sachchidananda, Aurobindo has sought to reconcile in a synthesis the systems of Samkhya, Vedanta and Tantra. In his 'Integral Yoga' this synthesis shows itself in a harmonization of the Vedanta and Samkhya path of knowledge or inana-marga, the Yoga path of works or karma-marga⁽¹⁾ and the Tantric path of devotion or bhakti-

(1) This is in terms of the Gita's scheme which distinguishes between the inana-yoga of Samkhya and the karmayoga of Yoga. Gita 3:3.

marga. Knowledge, works and love together form for Aurobindo one path to the Divine. (1)

- (1) It should be noted that although Aurobindo finds in the Gita a partial metaphysical synthesis of Samkhya and Vedanta and a synthesis of the three yogic paths (Essays on the Gita, p. 8f), his own distinct synthesis of metaphysics and yoga cannot be simply equated with that of the Gita. He himself admits at many points his indebtedness to the Gita, and he places a very high spiritual value on its teachings. However, he does not consider it necessary "to accept implicitly all the philosophy of the Gita." (Synthesis of Yoga, p.114 footnote) As he clearly points out, "our Yoga is not identical with the Yoga of the Gita although it contains all that is essential in the Gita's Yoga." (More Lights on Yoga, p.5) The final goal of the Gita's Yoga is an extra-cosmic one, - an escape from this world of misery - which Aurobindo rejects.

CHAPTER II

THE DIVINE CREATOR.

We have thus far considered the nature of Ultimate Reality, its transcendent unknowability, its self-determination to our consciousness as Sachchidananda and its relations with the cosmos and individuals as self and self-power, soul and nature, lord and energy. We have seen that all existences are eternally contained in the infinite pure existence of Brahman and realized in manifestation through a play of its pure consciousness-force upon its existence, formulating what it beholds. We have now to turn our attention to the details of the creative process whereby the world and man come into phenomenal existence.

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Supermind.

All that exists is Brahman, and Brahman is all that exists. All existence is eternally contained in potentia within the triune Godhead, Sachchidananda, and has been manifested out of Sachchidananda. This is so; however, as Aurobindo points out, Sachchidananda, Brahman, does not work directly, for "infinite consciousness in its infinite action can produce only infinite results".⁽¹⁾ That is to say, if Sachchidananda were simply to pour itself out, so to speak, the result would be not an ordered cosmos within the confines of space-time but an indefinite, infinite, undifferentiated chaos.⁽²⁾ Instead we actually have a cosmos reflecting

(1) Life Divine, p.108.

(2) Ibid., p.123.

an order, a process, a law, an idea. It is not adequate to pass off the universal creation as an 'abracadabra' act of a supreme Being, like a magician waving his hand. Even when we say, "God said, 'Let there be light'" we are assuming, Aurobindo asserts, that behind and in the divine command there is some conceptual act of divine consciousness, some idea about 'light' and its actual or possible existence, and behind and in the fulfilment of this command, - "and there was light", - there is some 'directing faculty', some active power corresponding to the conceptual power, which realizes 'light'.⁽¹⁾ Creation is, in brief, the product of a dual process of divine consciousness, conceptual and executive. Or, to put it another way, creation is two-fold, conceptual and executive within divine consciousness. This, of course, we have already seen in our discussion of maya and prakriti: maya, the power of consciousness conceptually creative of all things and prakriti, the power of consciousness executively creative of all things. These are the real powers of consciousness behind the world manifestation, but for Aurobindo the powers of consciousness do not work 'nakedly'. If they did, there would not be an ordered cosmos. There must be some agency of divine consciousness which sees at once and all together in a harmonious unity all possibilities of conscious existence, - some 'knowledge' or divine idea of cosmic becoming according to which the Infinite could finitize itself in an

(1) Life Divine, p.108.

ordered process. "If there were only infinite potentiality without any law or guiding truth and harmonious self-vision, without any predetermining Idea in the very seed of things cast out for evolution, the world could be nothing but a teeming, amorphous, confused uncertainty".⁽¹⁾

There must, in other words, be a divine, infinite intelligence which can conceive of the universe, formulate an Idea and through a purposeful directing of conscious force actualize the Idea in time and space. Infinite being in itself is a circumferenceless and centreless pure unity, in itself indivisible, without variation or extension.⁽²⁾ In order to act it needs a focusing point, a centre, a co-ordinating intelligence, a determining principle whereby it can formulate its infinite nature in finite terms. Indeed, Aurobindo asserts, if there were only the Infinite One, Sachchidananda, without such a finitising agency or principle of its consciousness, there could be no world.⁽³⁾ Moreover, existence (sat) is consciousness (chit) with no distinction between them, and conscious-existence is bliss (ananda) with no distinction between them. Yet when we speak of the One as Sachchidananda, we speak of three distinct entities united as a trinity. This is a process of mind which would be inadmissible for a pure unitarian consciousness. From the side of the One, so to speak, there is no trinity, and as there is not even this differentiation of a trinity, there could hardly be the distinctions of many existences constituting a real world. As Aurobindo points out, "indivisible consciousness is

(1) Life Divine, p.123.

(2) Ibid., p.129.

(3) Ibid., p.118.

undividing consciousness and cannot originate division and differentiation".⁽¹⁾ To stop here, however, would be to agree to the ~~Kayavadin~~'s position that a universe characterised by multiplicity is ultimately an illusion. According to Aurobindo to make this the final statement about the nature of divine consciousness is a reductio ad absurdum.⁽²⁾ There is no reason to suppose that unitarian consciousness (chit) is devoid of content and power. It has both content or knowledge of its own infinite existence and power or will to express that knowledge. Knowledge and will co-ordinated and in perfect harmony constitute the medium whereby the indivisible and self-concentrated Absolute, conscious existence, extends itself, manifesting a real universe of multiplicity according to its supreme purpose and supreme knowledge.⁽³⁾ This knowledge and will together constitute what Aurobindo calls the 'Supermind'.

The Supermind is, it would seem, the sole instrument of Brahman for its manifestation, not only as cosmos but as Sachchidananda as well. Thus, if there were no Supermind, we could have no knowledge of Ultimate Reality as Sachchidananda, for it would be totally undifferentiated and thus absolutely unknown and unknowable. Moreover, there would be no real world or individuals; at most there would be a cosmic illusion superimposed upon an unknown Reality. The Supermind is, we would say, in Aurobindo's view of things the indispensable principle for

(1) Life Divine, p.118.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid., pp.115-119.

relating and reconciling the phenomenal world of multiplicity and change on the one side with the changeless oneness of Ultimate Reality on the other side. It would seem that without the Supermind or some such intermediary term one would have in Aurobindo's opinion an unreconcilable opposition between an eternally immutable One and an eternally mutable many, an opposition otherwise resolved only the cancellation of one or the other of the opposites, such that one either finally denies the reality of the many and affirms the sole reality of the One or else affirms the reality of the many at the expense of denying the reality of the One. The first is the position of the Mayavadins, the second that of the Carvakas and the Sarvastivada Buddhists. With the existence of the Supermind, however, as the infinite intelligence of Brahman whereby it can conceptually and executively create the universe, Aurobindo preserves on the one hand the integrity of the One while on the other hand affirming the final reality of the many. By the agency of this finitizing intelligence, knowledge-will, the Infinite can manifest out of itself a real and ordered universe; it can become the many which it potentially is, without ceasing to be the One. Aurobindo maintains, therefore, that "the existence of the Supermind is a logical necessity arising directly from the position with which we have started".⁽¹⁾ If one grants that the fundamental reality of existence is spirit and not just mind or matter, then the existence of the Supermind is, Aurobindo believes, nothing

(1) Life Divine, 133.

irrationally mystical but is the necessary means whereby the Infinite organises its own manifestation in the universe. The Supermind is "the self-realising, self-determining, self-fulfilling power" of the consciousness of the Infinite.⁽¹⁾ It is the power of self-knowledge according to which and by means of which Brahman creates. Thus all creation has an order; for all is organised within the Supermind according to the self-truth of infinite Being and the possibilities of conscious existence which it contains, and all is created by the Supermind out of those possibilities.⁽²⁾

In a sense we may call Aurobindo's Supermind the second hypostasis of the Absolute, Sachchidananda being the first. As Aurobindo himself states, the Supermind is not other than Sachchidananda itself, "but Sachchidananda not resting in its pure infinite invariable consciousness, but proceeding out of this primal poise, or rather upon it as a base and in it as a continent, into a movement which is its form of energy and instrument of cosmic creation."⁽³⁾ The "primal poise" of Sachchidananda is evidently that primordial condition in which consciousness-force is in an intensive mode of self-absorption. Here infinite Being is in a state of total quiescence, its consciousness and power of consciousness withdrawn in its existence, - a state of samadhi, so to speak. Even in this

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.897.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Life Divine, p.134.

state of absorption, consciousness is not altogether inoperative; Being is ever self-conscious, ever aware of the infinite nature, - but aware of its infinite oneness and not yet of its infinite multiplicity. However, in this quiescent state there is already a concentration of the power of consciousness, tapas, upon its self-existence, producing thereby an Idea, - truth or knowledge, vijnana, - of its infinite Reality, of its infinite oneness as an infinite multiplicity.⁽¹⁾ The infinite consciousness becomes 'mobile', so to speak; it moves from a state of reflective self-awareness to a state of knowledge of its own infinite being. Brahman regards itself and forms in its consciousness an idea of its conscious existence, a knowledge of itself as many. This knowledge or idea which Brahman has of itself is, we have said, produced by infinite consciousness loving out from its self-absorption and regarding its own existence. It is this state of active consciousness which Aurobindo calls the Supermind or supramental consciousness. But this state of divine consciousness is "not only state of knowledge, but power of knowledge".⁽²⁾ That is, Supermind is the divine will as well as divine knowledge, will which follows from and yet is one with knowledge; for what Brahman knows, it wills. Knowledge and will are the two primary determinations of consciousness-force, inherent in its very nature.⁽³⁾ Consciousness which is originally a pure, unitarian

(1) Isha Upanishad, 84.

(2) Life Divine, p.115.

(3) Ibid., p.286.

self-awareness translates itself into a knowledge, an idea formulated by Being of its infinite multiplicity, and force of consciousness originally held in rest within consciousness now translates itself into a creative will. In actuality knowledge and will are but two aspects of the one pure power of existence, namely chit or pure consciousness, in its mode of self-extension.⁽³⁾ What chit sees, that becomes; what it sees is the truth, - knowledge or idea, - of its own being. The becoming of the truth of Being in time and space is the universe.⁽²⁾

Supermind is, thus, the state of consciousness as knowledge and expressive will; it is Sachchidananda "not indeed in its absolute self-existence, but in its action as the Lord and Creator of its own worlds".⁽³⁾ Supermind is the truth of that which we call God.⁽⁴⁾ The existence of the Supermind, Aurobindo asserts, is spoken of, though in a concealed manner, in the Rig Veda.⁽⁵⁾ There the many gods are but powers of the Supermind, "born in it, seated in it as in their proper home".⁽⁶⁾ The Vedic name for the Supermind is, says Aurobindo, rita-chit or 'truth-consciousness' "which means the consciousness of essential truth of being (satyam), or ordered truth of active being (ritam) and the vast self-awareness (brihat) in which alone this consciousness is possible".⁽⁷⁾

(1) Isha Upanishad, p.115.

(2) Ibid., p.38.

(3) Life Divine, p.123.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Ibid., p.116.

(6) Ibid.

(7) Life Divine, p.109 footnote.

Another inspiration for and source of Aurobindo's doctrine of the Supermind is undoubtedly to be found in his interpretation of the third verse of the Fourteenth Chapter of the Gita: "My womb is the Mahat Brahman; into that I cast the seed; thence spring all beings". The Mahat Brahman or womb of Brahman is the infinite Idea of Being, which is made pregnant by the idea-force (vijnana).⁽¹⁾ Consciousness-force dwelling in concentration upon its being produces out of it that Idea, truth or knowledge, of Being; this Idea filled with conscious force or will-power is the Supermind. The Idea which is, so to speak, the substance of the Supermind is, of course, of the nature of divine being, Sachchidananda; it is or contains all the infinite possibilities of existence, possibilities realized in the temporal-spatial universe by the idea-force (chit-shakti) or will.

Supermind is, therefore, the divine creative knowledge, gnosis or vijnana, truth of Being and force of Being.⁽²⁾ It contains all divine ideation and creates the universe according to its infinite knowledge of Being and by the force of that knowledge.⁽³⁾ It receives into its self as its substance all of the infinite existence-consciousness-bliss, organizes the infinite truths and principles of divine being and looses forth these truths and principles by its will-force in a universal harmony.⁽⁴⁾ The universe is the manifestation in time and space of the

(1) Essays on Gita, pp.379-381.

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, p.553.

(3) Ibid., pp.554-555.

(4) Ibid.

Supermind, - Sachchidananda in its infinite Idea and infinite conscious force of Idea, everywhere equally present and operative, realizing the universal and individual existences according to its eternal truth. It must be pointed out, however, that the physical universe as such is not directly manifested by the Supermind. Instead, the Supermind progressively evolves out of itself as descending planes of conscious existence the various principles which constitute the physical universe, the final one being that of substance or Matter in which are involved all the other principles. With the appearance of Matter there is the actualization of a temporal-spatial physical universe.

Aurobindo distinguishes his own philosophy from that of the noumenal and idealistic schools. According to the noumenalists the universe is the work of mind, thought or Idea, - such, however, that "Idea may be purely arbitrary and have no essential relation to any real Truth of existence; or such Truth, if it exists, may be regarded as a mere Absolute aloof from all relations and irreconcilable with a world of relations".⁽²⁾ Idealism does suppose a relation between a Truth behind and conceptive phenomena in front, but Aurobindo claims that he goes farther in idealism. That is, the Idea which is creative of the universe is Real-Idea, - "a power of conscious force expressive of real being, born out of real being and partaking of its nature".⁽³⁾ The world is not just a subjective conception in some universal or infinite mind;

(1) Life Divine, p.120.

(2) Ibid., p.109.

(3) Ibid.

it is an expression of possibilities of existence contained within the Real-Idea of infinite being and realized by the force of that Real-Idea. This Real-Idea is not mental thought or imagination; it is Ultimate Reality itself formulated in terms of its infinite possibilities of conscious existence by its consciousness force. (1)

Supermind is the infinite truth of conscious existence, eternally concentrated in quiescent self-awareness, eternally proceeding in creative self-knowledge; it is the self-extension of Brahman which contains and develops all principles, forces and forms of existence. The Supermind emerges out of Sachchidananda "as the Idea that is a reality, and it is that reality of the Idea which evolves itself, always by its own power and consciousness of itself, always self-conscious, always self-developing by the will inherent in the Idea, always self-realising by the knowledge ingrained in its very impulsion". (2) In creating the universe out of itself, the Supermind differentiates existence, consciousness and bliss as three distinct principles, establishing a trinity out of the indivisible unity of Brahman, and manifests in its actions the many and various self-determinations of conscious existence, - ishvara, atman, purusha, shakti, maya, prakriti. (3)

The Supermind may be regarded as the seed bed of the universe. (4) It is divine existence (the Mahat or womb, -

(1) Life Divine, p.121.

(2) Ibid., p.121.

(3) Ibid., p.120.

(4) Ibid., p.121.

i.e. the Real-Idea) as an infinitely multiple One pregnant with the infinitely many powers of consciousness. Here "all being is consciousness, and all consciousness is of being",⁽¹⁾ so that each of the infinitely many seeds contained within the Idea is a conscious power of existence, or, we may say, a power of conscious existence. Each seed is a possibility of existence in harmonious relation with all other possibilities.

Each seed is released and developed by the Supermind according to a particular law or truth of the Idea. Thus every existence by the seed within expresses some truth of Being, pre-determined and executed by the knowledge-force or will of the Supermind. Hence, each seed "is the Truth of its own being which this Self-Existence (Sachchidananda) sees in itself, the resultant of that seed of self-vision is the Truth of self-action, the natural law of development, formation and functioning which follows inevitably upon the self-vision and keeps to the processes involved in the original Truth".⁽²⁾ The Supermind or Truth-consciousness is, therefore, present everywhere in the universe as the directing and ordering self-knowledge by which the One manifests out of itself the harmonies of its infinite multiplicity.⁽³⁾ As we have seen, without this ordering self-knowledge there would not be a universe but a chaos, simply because the potentiality of conscious existence is infinite. What the Supermind creates or

(1) Life Divine, p.121.

(2) Ibid., p.120.

(3) Ibid., p.123.

releases into evolution are nothing other than forms and powers of itself.⁽¹⁾ Therefore in every form and power of itself the Supermind is present as the infinite knowledge and will of Reality, possessing not only a vision of the Truth and law of a particular potentiality, but an intrinsic awareness of the relation of that possibility to all others and of the harmonies possible between them. The law of the evolutive process is, then, not governed by chance but by a sort of divine necessity inherent in the very nature of things so that the universe was, is and will be what it must be; the development of each and every thing is the expression of its self-nature eternally pre-determined by the necessary truth of the Real Idea which each thing is essentially. As Aurobindo declares, "from the beginning the whole development is predetermined in its self-knowledge and at every moment in its self-working: it is what it must be at each moment by its own inherent Truth; it will be at the end that which was contained and intended in its seed".⁽²⁾

To say that the development is predetermined is not, however, to exclude what may be called 'a free play of possibilities'.⁽³⁾ Aurobindo would say, we believe, that the general nature and goal of an evolutionary movement is predetermined by the Truth inherent in it, but the manner in which the movement unfolds and the goal is actually attained is shaped by such factors as, for example, historical circumstance, natural and social forces, etc.. In

(1) Life Divine, p.123.

(2) Ibid., p.124.

(3) Ibid., pp.273f.

other words, the possibilities of cosmic existence are innumerable, and the actualization of any one possibility is conditioned by and dependent upon the free play of all the others.

Supermind is thus the alpha and omega of the process of manifestation; it is that from which all has originated and, as we shall see, it is that to which all shall inevitably return. It is the Logos,⁽¹⁾ the divine Word out of which all things are created and without which nothing is created.⁽²⁾ It is the divine Will and Wisdom, two aspects of one Power of Being which,

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.897.

(2) Kena Upanishad, Ch.V. The idea of the Logos or creative word is, of course, present in the Vedic doctrine of Vach or divine Speech as the creatrix of the worlds. As Max Müller points out (The Vedanta Philosophy, pp.77ff.) Vach or Speech could not have been conceived of simply as spoken language; for in a hymn of the Rig Veda Speech speaks of herself as a kind of Logos or primeval Wisdom, greater than the many gods, - indeed, supporting the various deities. This idea is even more evident in the Satapatha Brahmana (VII.1.2.9.) where it is declared, says Müller, that "all was made by Vach, and likewise that all that was made, was Vach". This, Müller suggests, is not unlike St. John's assertion that "All things were made by the Word, and without the Word was not anything made that was made". Again in the Satapatha (VI.1.1.9.) is a passage which, Müller maintains, can make sense if 'Brahman' is translated by 'Word' (Vach). Thus the passage would read: Prajapati, the Lord of all, "created first of all the Word (i.e. Brahman)" and from that all else proceeded. The Word, Vach, is the creative agency conceived and uttered within the divine consciousness, containing and manifesting all names and forms (namarupe) of the Divine.

In Western metaphysics a similar view of the divine creative Word, Logos, is found in the philosophy of John Scotus Erigena. The second hypostasis of the Trinity, the Son, is God's Wisdom (consciousness, chit) and this Wisdom is the power of the Father, God's being (sat), and the Holy Ghost is God's life (ananda). All that exists is created out of God by His Wisdom-power (consciousness-force) and in His image (Real-Idea, Truth of divine being) such that each thing consists of essence, power and operation. As Erigena

Continuation of footnote No. 2 on p.124.

says in his Patrologia Latina, CXXII (ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, trans. George Bosworth Burch in Early Medieval Philosophy, Columbia University Press, New York, 1951) "God does not know things because they are: they are because He knows them, and His knowledge of them is their essence. The Son: makes. That is, He divides the created essence into the eternal ideas, which are called the primordial causes because they cause and create all things. They are the forms of things, not the visible qualitative forms, but the intelligible substantial forms . . . These ideas, existing in the mind i.e. consciousness) of God contain the substance of all things . . . The substances of every creature is threefold; there is the essence of the thing, that is, God's knowledge of it, by which it is made to be; there is the eternal form of the thing, established among the primordial causes in the Word, by which it is defined to be what it is; and there is the particular thing, moving in time and subject to accidents, by which it is manifested.

"All things always were, in the Word of God, causally, in force and potency, beyond all places and times, beyond all forms and species known by senses and understanding, beyond all quality and quantity and other accidents by which the substance of any creature is understood to be, but not what it is". (Emphasis ours)

With these words of Erigena we feel Aurobindo would not hesitate to agree. All things in the phenomenal world have existed, as Erigena says, "in force and potency, beyond all places and times, etc.". Each individual existence exists eternally in the divine mind, the Supermind, as an idea or truth of the Idea, and the Idea does contain the 'substance' of each thing and all things: 1) the essence of a thing which is the divine knowledge of it as a self-truth of its one Being; 2) the form of a thing which is an individual deployment of conscious force in the Supermind; and 3) the shape and nature of the thing as existing in time and space.

we may say, is hidden eternally within the depths of the Godhead as Real-Idea of existence (sat) and Idea-force of consciousness (chit), but also eternally born of conscious existence by the force of pure delight of Being (ananda). This Will and Wisdom, the Logos, organizes the action of the infinite consciousness and determines all things, - matter, life, mind, all individual and universal existence, - out of itself as the Real-Idea of Being, according to the Truth of Being and the law of manifestation.⁽¹⁾ Or, to look at the Supermind from the standpoint of the Infinite, it is that hypostasis of divine conscious existence in which it knows itself as an infinitely multiple One and by the self-realizing, self-determining, self-fulfilling power (conscious force or will) of such knowledge manifests the infinite potentialities of its being in the universe. The silent Godhead becomes the creative God.⁽²⁾

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.896.

(2) It has been suggested by one commentator that in the concept of the Supermind Aurobindo's philosophy amounts to nothing more than "a fusion of the Vedantic conception of the Brahman with the Platonic conception of the Idea". (V.P. Varma, "The Political Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, Journal of the Bihar Research Society, Vol. XLII, Part 2, June, 1956, Patna, p.202 footnote.) With this judgment we cannot agree. Firstly it must be asked just what "Vedantic conception of the Brahman" is meant here. Surely it is not that of Shankara's Advaita, and little more could it be that of Vishistadvaita or Dvaita. As we have indicated, there are great similarities between Aurobindo's view of Ultimate Reality and that of Tantra in point of the manifestation of Brahman as the universe and the nature of reality. As we shall see presently, there is an even greater similarity between Aurobindo's general scheme of the evolution-involution of the One as many and that found in the Trika (Kashmir) system of Advaita Shaiva philosophy.

The identification or association of Aurobindo's conception of Idea with that of Plato is scarcely justified.

Continuation of footnote No. 2 on p. 126

Indeed, we would even guess that when Aurobindo claimed to go farther in idealism than does Idealism as a philosophical tradition (Life Divine, p.109), he had in mind Plato's notion of the Idea as much as any other. Platō's Ideas are values or universals which constitute for him ultimate realities; they are not, properly speaking, potentialities which become real when actualized in the phenomenal universe. They are static and lack the poises of generation or creation. If anything, Aurobindo's Real-Idea or Supermind bears more resemblance to the Stoic theory of the Logos or the hūis monogenes, - the one divine Logos, comprising all the logoi or creative thoughts of the Divine, - of Philo or St. John. Moreover there is a remarkable likeness between Aurobindo's Supermind and Plotinus's Nous. Each is the second hypostasis of the Absolute, the first being for Aurobindo Sachchidananda and for Plotinus the One or Good. In each case the Absolute is neuter, - i.e. Brahman and to hen, to agathon, - and unchanging, quiescent; the second hypostasis is the creative agency of the Absolute, emerging out of the Absolute as potentiality of Being and as self-knowledge of Being, through which and by which all is created (cf. Plotinus's doctrine of 'Contemplation', Enneads, III.8.4-5). The Supermind and Nous both contain all possibilities of Being as a unity, and these possibilities are let loose in the manifestation of the universe. The life of Supermind and Nous is characterised by an immediate knowledge of identity. Plotinus speaks of a third hypostasis, soul, which is not altogether unlike Aurobindo's jivatman since both stand above the manifestation, presiding over it and directing it from within by a 'projection' or representative of themselves, - viz., Plotinus's 'lower soul' and Aurobindo's chaitya purusha or psyche. The material universe as the activity of the soul is good and divine, and the material universe is a living, organic whole, reflecting the ideal universe of unity-in-diversity contained within Nous and Supermind. Nous and Supermind are thus both immanent and transcendent.

Of course, there are some major differences between the two. For example, matter for Plotinus is something evil or undivine whereas for Aurobindo it is not other than divine consciousness-force. Also, while for both Aurobindo and Plotinus the Soul is one, for Aurobindo this one Soul becomes many souls, the jivatmans. Moreover Plotinus's view of the method and final goal of the individual 'lower' soul's return to the Nous is quite different from Aurobindo's understanding of the transformation of the total individual being by the full manifestation of the Supermind. The main difference, however, does not lie, as S.K. Maitra seems to think, in the definition of the Godhead. (See S.K. Maitra, "Sri Aurobindo and Plotinus", Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual, No. 6, 1947).

Continuation of footnote 2 on p.127.

Maitra maintains that whereas Aurobindo's Absolute, Brahman, is consciousness, chit, Plotinus's One is without consciousness and is therefore inferior to Aurobindo's Brahman. This, we believe, is not so. What Plotinus says is that the One does not think; for thought is proper to mind and involves the distinction or duality of thought and object of thought. But the One is not a state of unconsciousness; it is an infinitely superior state to that of mind in that it possesses a "super-intellection" (vi.8.16), a "simple self-intuition" (vi.7.38-39) and an "immediate self-consciousness" (v.4.2.). The One does not possess knowledge of itself, - i.e. does not 'think', - as does Nous, but it possesses a self-luminous self-consciousness. The same can be said of Brahman and the Supermind in Aurobindo's scheme: Brahman-consciousness is a unitarian self-awareness; it does not possess the reflective thought or knowledge of itself which Supermind does, - or, rather, is.

It is abundantly clear that Aurobindo does not mean by the Supermind simply some cosmic or supracosmic version of the human mind. Although he does say that consciousness is one, this one consciousness has grades, and our mental consciousness is something vastly inferior to the supramental consciousness.⁽¹⁾ The mind is but an instrument of the Supermind in the manifestation of the universe.⁽²⁾ Aurobindo unreservedly rejects the idea that the universe could have been created by mind, even an infinite mind.⁽³⁾ "An infinite mind constituted in the terms of mentality as we know it could only create an infinite chaos, a vast clash of chance, accident, vicissitude wandering towards an indeterminate end after which it would be always tentatively groping and aspiring".⁽⁴⁾ Mind, as Aurobindo views it, can only reflect what already exists. It can, of course, construct in itself possible images of existence other than the already existing facts. That is, it can represent to itself phenomena which may be, but not which necessarily will be. In other words, mind is restricted in realizing its own inner creations; for it can never assure that what it formulates or predicts will be as formulated or predicted. An infinite mind of this sort could not achieve an ordered and real universe but could only struggle to work out its imaginations in a cosmos which would be neither real nor totally unreal, a cosmos lacking all basis of imperative truth.⁽⁵⁾ What mind would

(1) Letters, 1st Series, pp.100-104.

(2) Ibid., p.18.

(3) Life Divine, pp.109ff.

(4) Ibid., pp.110-111.

(5) Ibid. p.111.

be needed for the creation of a universe possessing order and reality, - a universe expressing an eternal truth of Being according to a predetermining will, - is an infinite mind of an omniscient and omnipotent sort, and, as Aurobindo points out, such a mind would not be mind at all but Supermind.⁽¹⁾

Supermind is, then, of an altogether different order of knowledge and power from that of mind. Mind sees parts but not the whole, the universal or infinite whole. It is instead an instrument of analysis and synthesis.⁽²⁾ It divides the totality of existence and considers the divisions and delimitations thereof as a whole. Moreover it analyses the whole into its parts and regards each part as a separate entity. Mind, says Aurobindo, "knows only its own analysis of the object and the idea it has formed of it by a synthesis of the separate parts and properties that it has seen".⁽³⁾ In addition the mind's conception of the universe is that of an unrelated diversity of events and objects, of instability and disharmony, of disintegration. The knowledge and action of the mind, therefore, is founded upon unity.⁽⁴⁾ While mind can function only from a given centre, Supermind, being of the nature of the infinite divine consciousness, acts universally, comprehending and pervading all. At once it regards each and all individual centres of conscious existence in the universe, - not, however, as mutually exclusive and

(1) Life Divine, p.111.

(2) Ibid., p.118.

(3) Ibid., p.119.

(4) Kena Upanishad, p.58.

separate entities but as terms of an infinite oneness of Being. Mind starts from the individual and proceeds to the universal and then to the transcendent; Supermind starts from the transcendent and sees the universal and the individual in relation to it as its formulas.⁽¹⁾ Again, mind acquires a partial knowledge, but Supermind possesses a whole knowledge; for living in the unity of infinite Being, it possesses all knowledge of Being. "Supermind starts from the whole and sees in it its parts and properties; it does not built up the knowledge of the whole by an increasing knowledge of the parts and properties; and even the whole is to it only a unity of sum, only a partial and inferior term of the higher unity of infinite essence".⁽²⁾

Supermind is greater than mind as the transcendent whole is greater than the individual part. Mind, however, is not really a 'part' of Supermind; it is one, - though at present the highest, - formulation of the supramental consciousness in the material universe. It is nothing but consciousness individualized in mutually exclusive centres, and the struggle of mind is the struggle of that individualized consciousness to exceed the limitations of its particular centres and to achieve a universal and transcendent knowledge and action, - i.e. to achieve the status of Supermind. Supermind, on the other hand, is that same, one infinite consciousness in its aspects of knowledge and will, organized for the conceptual and executive creation of the

(1) Kena Upanishad, p.58f.

(2) Ibid., p.59.

universe. The nature of the knowledge possessed by Supermind is a knowledge by identity, such that the knower, knowledge and the known are one.⁽¹⁾ The divine consciousness of infinite Being in this status of Supermind knows itself, and its knowledge is of itself as the infinite One and the infinite many. Mind, however, being restricted to an individual centre of action, makes a distinction between knower, knowledge and the known. Even when the individual regards himself, these mental distinctions are made; for without such distinctions, the mind cannot operate.⁽²⁾ Thus, the individual distinguishes between himself as knower and the known and the operation of his consciousness as the knowledge, when in reality all three are one existence and movement of consciousness. The mind can feel and reason out this truth but cannot make it the practical basis for its operations.⁽³⁾ The Supermind, however, always possesses and acts upon the truth of the unity of Being, - the unity of knower, knowledge and the known. Moreover the Supermind is directly Truth-conscious. That is, since it knows itself immediately, it knows all things; for all are only becomings of itself. Thus, it knows from within outward, so to speak, "each thing in the truth of itself and in its nature and in its relation to all other things".⁽⁴⁾

Another characteristic of the Supermind as Aurobindo conceives of it which clearly distinguishes it from mind is that in

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.898.

(2) Life Divine, p.127.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Synthesis of Yoga, p.912.

it will is not separated from knowledge. Aurobindo illustrates this feature by drawing an analogy of the relationship between the light-power of a fire and the substance of the fire itself and that between the idea-power of the Supermind and the substance of Supermind. Just as light-power is not different from the substance of the fire, so will, idea-power, is not different from the substance of the Supermind, of Being which works itself out as the Idea.⁽¹⁾ In our mentality the relationship between knowledge and will is quite different. We effectually differentiate idea from will, its means and the effect, the last two being regarded as external to ourselves, and thus neither we nor the idea nor the will in us is really self-effective. Supermind, on the other hand, does not suffer from such a paralyzing division.⁽²⁾ In the Supermind will and knowledge are intimately fused together, such that they are actually one movement of conscious existence's self-fulfilling self-experience. Here iccha-, jnana- and kriya-shakti, - power of will-knowledge-action, are one. In mind, on the other hand, will and knowledge are divided and often in conflict: we have an idea, perhaps of the 'right' or of intellectual knowledge but have no will to realize or express it, and possibly we even have a counterwill. Or we have will but no clear knowledge or idea or no co-ordination of will, of power of expression, with knowledge and intellectual experience etc..

(1) Life Divine, p.121.

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, p.904.

Supramental knowledge and will, however, are the one knowledge and will of the one Being and must be therefore absolute in themselves and in their relation to one another: knowledge wills; will knows, - or, will illumines itself and knowledge fulfills itself, together. This absolute nature of divine knowledge-will is, of course, reflected in Aurobindo's insistence that a thing in the process of manifestation is exactly what it is at any given point and not other by virtue of the indwelling of the eternal pre-determining Truth (i.e., Real-Idea) of that thing, which is the very nature of the thing itself. What the thing is in itself and at any point of its manifestation is not other than what that thing is eternally conceived to be; for what it is conceived to be, it is willed to be. Or, we may say, God eternally conceives the Truth, - i.e. He consciously perceives the Truth of His own eternal being and formulates this Truth in His consciousness, - and since it is the Truth of His own being, He eternally wills that it should be. Thus, if by way of illustration we may put it this simply, the Truth of a particular tree is in the Supermind of God the same Truth of that tree as manifested in the quad. Now that particular tree is not nor could have been other than what it is as an eternal Truth hic et nunc manifested, and because it is eternally true, it is hic et nunc manifested. Divine self-knowing and self-willing are absolutely one. Immediately we can see that for Aurobindo there cannot really be anything like chance operative in the world process. Knowledge, Truth of Being, is contained within will,

and will manifests what is known. Nothing is fortuitous; all and each thing is predetermined according to the self-effectuating Real-Idea. What we ordinarily call the law of Nature, Karma, Necessity and Fate would be for Aurobindo but the divine willing of divine Truth, - the self-fulfilling of supramental knowledge⁽¹⁾. However, if we grant, as we must in this scheme of things, the absolute nature of supramental knowledge and will as two aspects of one movement of divine consciousness, then we must assert that they cannot be contradicted by any other will or consciousness from either outside or within. Indeed, there could be no other will and consciousness external to the One, and all formations of knowledge and will in particular minds and collectivities of minds must be the operations of the one all-determining knowledge and will. This being so, how then to account for the self-evident clashing of wills and ideas in the world? Aurobindo's answer would be this: we experience a clash of ideas and wills and forces because we live in a particularized and divided existence and cannot see the whole and because of the free play of possibilities; the Supermind, on the other hand, envisages such clashes "as the conspiring elements of a pre-determined harmony which is always present to it because the totality of things is eternally subject to its gaze".⁽²⁾

These various characteristics of Supermind which distinguish

(1) See Synthesis of Yoga, pp.903f.

(2) Life Divine, p.135.

it from mind are descriptive of its ultimate nature and are, says Aurobindo, "the justification of the current religious notions of the omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence of the Divine Being"⁽¹⁾. God is omnipresent; for all forms of existence are but forms of His conscious being created out of His self-knowledge and manifested by His will. He is omniscient; for all things exist within His conscious being and are possessed immediately by Him, - known by Him as Himself. He is omnipotent because His creative self-knowledge and will are absolute. Thus to take our example of the tree in the Quad, the tree develops out of a seed in which it is already contained potentially. Now to the mind all is explained by this particular sequence which it calls cause-effect, a self-evident 'law of Nature'; the tree is explained by the seed, the seed by the tree. To Supermind this is only a partial truth. In actuality the seed and tree are both explained by the indwelling presence of the Supermind as the predetermining Real-Idea, - the directing, knowing, willing Truth-consciousness. Because the event of seed-tree exists in the Supermind and the Supermind in it, its law of development is nothing separate, but only an application of the universal law and truth of Nature. Its particular development is determined by its place in the development of the cosmos, and all this in turn is determined by the Supermind. Supermind pervading the seed and the tree and all objects is at once present in all, knowing all by its presence and controlling all

(1) Life Divine, p.122.

by its knowledge.⁽¹⁾ The notions of omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience are not, thus, irrational imaginings. They are, says Aurobindo, "perfectly rational and in no way contradict either the logic of a comprehensive philosophy or the indications of observation and experience."⁽²⁾ They become false when construed as indicating an unbridgeable gulf between God and man, Ultimate Reality and the world; for thereby a practical differentiation is elevated into an essential division.

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The Sevenfold Chord of Being.

Supermind is, therefore for Aurobindo the intermediary term between the unitary divine Being, Sachchidananda, and the manifested universe of matter-life-mind. It is, as we have characterised it, the seed-bed of conscious existence, the container into which is poured the infinite multiplicity of the one existence-consciousness-bliss and out of which is manifested mind-life-matter. The Supermind gathers all from the One and manifests that all as the many in the universe. There is, then, an ontological distinction between Supermind and Sachchidananda on the one hand and the world of manifestation on the other, - a distinction but not an essential difference. Supermind is always Sachchidananda, but Sachchidananda, as Aurobindo describes it, "moving out into a determinative self-knowledge which

(1) However, for Aurobindo as for Erigena, God knows things not because they exist; they exist because God knows them. That is, they are real ideas of His conscious existence.

(2) Life Divine, p.122.

perceives certain truths of itself and wills to realise them in a temporal and spatial extension of its own timeless and spaceless existence. Whatever is in its own being, takes form as self-knowledge, as Truth-Consciousness, as Real-Idea, and, that self-knowledge being also self-force, fulfills or realises itself inevitably in time and space".⁽¹⁾

Being, therefore is one. Sat-chit-ananda concentrates itself into Supermind, and Supermind, being not other than Sachchidananda, determines itself spatially and temporally in forms of mind-life-matter. There is one eternal infinite Being, - or there is simply and purely Being, - and seven distinguishable terms of that one Being. Or, as Aurobindo puts it, there is a "sevenfold chord of Being": sat-chit-ananda-Supermind-mind-life-matter.⁽²⁾ This sevenfold chord of Being represents, we may say, the line of manifestation of Brahman. In the beginning the Absolute, Parabrahman, is one with a triple aspect of existence-consciousness-bliss. Here these three are indistinguishable and inseparable. However, with the 'birth' of the Supermind within the divine consciousness these three aspects are differentiated as triune, though yet inseparable.⁽³⁾ At this point there are manifested the three higher principles of existence, consciousness-force and bliss and the intermediate term of Supermind in which these three are contained. The next phase of the manifestation of Brahman is the progressive loosing forth by Supermind

(1) Life Divine, p.134.

(2) See Ibid., Bk.I, Ch. XXVII.

(3) Ibid., p.135.

of the infinite potentialities of conscious existence. This constitutes the creation of the phenomenal universe, - the 'lower' manifestation' or the 'lower nature' (apara prakriti), - with its three principles of matter, life and mind.

We may distinguish here in Aurobindo's scheme of the universal manifestation a combining of two different concepts of the process of creation, - viz., one of a 'psychical' reproduction and the other of a substantial transformation or reproduction by the Divine of itself as the universe. The first process is technically called in Indian metaphysics ābhāsa (or ābhāšana) and the second pariṇāma. Abhāsa is the thinking and experiencing out, the "shining out", - by divine consciousness of its existence. Thus in Aurobindo's scheme Brahman experiences (perceives and conceives or knows) itself as an infinitely multiple One, as one-many, and this experiencing or knowing is at the same time an expressing or willing through the agency of Supermind.⁽¹⁾ The Parinama process is that by which Sachchidananda as Supermind transforms itself into mind, life and matter; "the Self-Being became all Becomings" - sarvāni bhūtāni ātmaiva abhūt, as the Isha Upanishad declares.⁽²⁾ The One becomes the many which are eternally contained within it as potentialities of its being, but

(1) In actuality this process of ābhāsa, as a process, is, one could say, not different from what in Advaita Vedanta is termed vivarta, - the 'whirling' or 'unrolling out', the appearing in diverse forms, of Brahman. The major difference, and, of course, a crucial one, - between ābhāsa and vivarta is that while for the former the appearances are real forms of the Divine, for the latter they are illusory, being superimposed upon the sole Reality, Brahman.

(2) Isha, 7. Isha Upanishad, p.65.

this real modification makes no difference to the essence of Being. As Aurobindo says, "this supreme Existence (Brahman) is not conditioned by the individual or by the universe".⁽¹⁾

In actuality abhasa and parinama are for Aurobindo one process; for the real transformation of Being is achieved through a subjective evolution, a 'thinking' and experiencing out within divine consciousness.⁽²⁾ However, Aurobindo is saved both from a sort of 'divine subjective idealism', - the universe being just an idea in the mind of God without any necessary relation to a truth of divine existence, - and from the illusionism to which the vivarta position inevitably leads; for he insists that the creative idea is a Real-Idea, that it is not other than divine existence itself so known and formulated by divine consciousness, - existence and consciousness being non-different. As Aurobindo declares, "this idea is not creative imagination, not something that constructs in the void, but light and power of eternal substance, truth-light full of truth-force; and it brings out what is latent in being, it does not create a fiction that never was in being".⁽³⁾

What God experiences is Himself; what He knows is Himself; what He becomes is Himself. The process of self-experiencing, self-knowing, self-becoming is eternal; the divine Being is

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.338.

(2) Aurobindo himself asserts that vivarta, the purely subjective evolution of the world, and pariñāma, the modification of transformation of Brahman into the world, were viewed in 'the ancient Vedanta' as a single process. See Isha Upanishad, pp.84-85.

(3) Synthesis of Yoga, p.553.

eternally determining itself, eternally moving out of itself in and as the Supermind. Ultimate Reality, in other words, is not a void. Even within the silence of the Godhead is an eternal activity, a communion between the trinity, Sachchidananda.⁽¹⁾ Existence eternally translates itself into substance, truth and reality, - satyam; consciousness into power of conceptive and executive knowledge, - jnanam; bliss into love, freedom, infinity, anantam.⁽²⁾ However, as Aurobindo observes, knowledge is incomplete without a knower and an object of knowledge; love is incomplete without a lover and an object of love; substance or reality is incomplete without a person cognizing and constituting it.⁽³⁾ Therefore, Brahman is the person of its own substance who is the lover loving its own being and the knower knowing its being. This eternal activity of the Brahman knowing and enjoying itself gives 'birth' to the Supermind. Indeed, we may even say that the second trinity of the Absolute, - namely, satyam-jnanam-anantam, truth (reality)-knowledge-infinity, - is the Supermind, the second hypostasis of the Absolute. The second trinity is, however, not essentially different from the first, - Sachchidananda, - but is merely its objective expression. As Aurobindo points out, "subjectivity and objectivity are not two independent realities, they depend upon each other; they are the Being, through consciousness, looking at itself as subject on the object and the same Being offering itself to its own consciousness

(1) Isha Upanishad, pp.74f.

(2) ^{See} "Philosophy of Upanishads (LII)",

(3) Isha Upanishad, p.75.

as object to subject".⁽¹⁾ It is only in our ordinary mentality that a functional dualism between subject and object is ignorantly interpreted as an absolute one.

The objectification of itself by Sachchidananda, - the moving out of itself as pure subject and becoming its own object, - this second hypostasis of the Absolute, is then the Supermind. It is founded by this objectification or self-knowing of conscious existence and is the dynamic self-knowledge of conscious existence which translates itself into the universe. At the same time it is the Supermind which "develops the triune principle of existence, consciousness and bliss out of their indivisible unity".⁽²⁾ In the Supermind these three exist distinctly, though inseparably, and the Supermind may bring forward one or the other, with the other two implicit or explicit in it, for the purpose of manifesting a particular set of principles and possibilities. Thus in the lower manifestation existence, consciousness-force and bliss appear separate, though always in their secret reality they are not.⁽³⁾ It is by this process of differentiation that the Supermind creates the universe, putting forth the many principles, forces and forms which each term of the all-constituent trinity, Sachchidananda, possesses.

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The Triple Status of Supermind.

This process of the differentiation of Being by which the

(1) Life Divine, p.578.

(2) Ibid., p.120.

(3) Lights on Yoga, pp.35-36.

Supermind creates the universe has, according to Aurobindo, three distinct stages. These three stages are actually three movements of the supramental consciousness which constitutes what Aurobindo terms the 'triple status of Supermind'. They are Supermind as 1) comprehending consciousness, as 2) apprehending consciousness and as 3) projecting consciousness.⁽¹⁾ These are not three separate consciousnesses but three poises or states of the one divine consciousness-force as the creating Supermind. Further, this triple status of the Supermind corresponds, we believe, to the three powers which Aurobindo ascribes to infinite consciousness, - viz., the power of infinite self-variation, the power of self-limitation or secondary self-formation and the power of self-absorption, of confining itself to a special status or to a cosmic or individual self-determination.⁽²⁾ We can trace the operation of these powers in the three poises of the Supermind.

The first is vijnana, the poise of Supermind as "an equal self-extension of Sachchidananda, all-comprehending, all-possessing, all-constituting".⁽³⁾ Two things must be noted about vijnana, the comprehending consciousness, this first status of Supermind. Firstly, it is not the pure unitarian consciousness chit; chit is Sachchidananda concentrated in itself in total self-absorbed self-awareness of its absolute oneness, without any kind of extension.⁽⁴⁾ Supermind, however, is Sachchidananda in an infinite self-extension, comprehending (vijnana) itself in all

(1) Life Divine, pp.135-138.

(2) Ibid., p.311.

(3) Ibid., p.135.

(4) Ibid.

and all in itself and all as itself. Secondly, in this first status the all which is comprehended as One is not yet the many. That is, Sachchidananda as the Supermind beholds and knows its multiple oneness, its unity-in-diversity; its knowledge is of unity with all contained within that unity, not yet individualized as many distinct and separate forms and powers. Vijnana is the status of Supermind in which divine consciousness conceives of (i.e. forms a Real-Idea of) its existence variously but regards all variations of itself as its one existence, not yet as many existences. Thus vijnana may be said to found the inalienable unity of things. (1)

In order for there to be an individualization of the all as many, - i.e., a manifestation of the diversities out of the unity as distinct and separate entities, - there must be an employment by divine consciousness of its power of self-delimitation or self-contraction, secondary self-formation. This is achieved in the second status of the Supermind which Aurobindo calls prajnana, the apprehending consciousness. (2) In this poise of Supermind divine consciousness stands back, so to speak, from the movement of names and forms which it contains and regards these many names and forms, - the many aspects of the Real-Idea, - separately and individually. By so apprehending them consciousness individualizes itself in self-concentrations following and supporting each individual play of its movement. There is not a loss of awareness of unity, however, since by its comprehending action consciousness would know itself as equally extended in its movement,

(1) Life Divine, p.135.

(2) Ibid., pp.130-131, 136-137.

but at the same time standing back and by an apprehending action it would regard the many forms and plays of the movement as distinct. It would thus know itself both as the one conscious self the same in all and as an individual concentration of conscious self following, inhabiting and supporting each individual name and form, each play of its self-contained movement. This is a state of pure divine ideation in which all names and forms of the divine conscious existence are not yet separate existences. The self-contraction or concentration of conscious self supporting each individual form or play of its total movement is what Aurobindo calls the jivatman, the individual divine "as distinguished from the universal divine or one all-constituting self".⁽¹⁾ Here the universal divine knows all the individual 'soul-forms', - names, forms, plays of the movement, - as itself and yet has a separate relation with each through its individual self-concentrations (the jivatmans) supporting each. The individual divine, the jivatman, on the other hand, sees its existence as a soul-form and soul-movement of the One, and yet by the comprehending action of divine consciousness (vijnana) knows itself as one not only with the universal but with all other individual soul-forms. If there were not this secondary poise of divine consciousness, the establishment of the individual self-concentration behind the many individual plays of its total movement, then, says Aurobindo, "the individual would always tend to lose itself in the universal".⁽²⁾

(1) Life Divine, p.136.

(2) Isha Upanishad, p.39.

Prajnana thus makes the fundamental division of conscious being which leads to all other divisions, - the division of the one self or purusha into many individual selves or purushas, the jivatmans. Of course, there has not been a loss of awareness of the unity of conscious existence. Here, too, it would seem, is the first operative division between purusha and prakriti, between conscious self and its play of consciousness, its consciousness-force which manifests its oneness as many. We must stress, however, that in the supramental consciousness these divisions of the one purusha into many purushas and of purusha and prakriti are only practical and not essential ones. Indeed, the jivatman is, as we have earlier stated, the meeting place of the dual aspect of the Divine, prakriti and purusha;⁽¹⁾ for it is at once in essence of being purusha or conscious self and in its individual existence a self-form of divine nature (para prakriti), an individual play or formation of the creative movement of consciousness (i.e. of consciousness-force) which contains all the principles, powers and forms of divine existence. Finally, here, too, in this second status of the Supermind a practical distinction has been established between knower, knowledge and the known, between enjoyer, enjoyment and the enjoyed, between ishvara or Lord and shakti or force and the workings of force, between atman or universal self and maya or self-force and the becomings of the self.⁽²⁾

The third status of the Supermind, the third movement of

(1) See Synthesis of Yoga, pp.875-888.

(2) Life Divine, p.130.

divine consciousness completes the process of self-differentiation of Sachchidananda. That status is sanjnana, the projection or self-absorption of the supporting individual concentration of consciousness into the individual form or play of its movement so as to become involved in it. There the divine consciousness experiences the unity of its being from the viewpoint of the individual and not, as in the second movement, from the viewpoint of the universal. Likewise, whereas in the first poise unity was the dominant experience and diversity or self-variation only a play of the unity, in this poise the dominant experience is that of the real diversity, from, however, the standpoint of the individual centre.⁽¹⁾ Here, as Aurobindo points out, conscious self, the Divine, "views and governs the relations of each soul-form of Himself with other soul-forms from the standpoint of will and knowledge appropriate to each particular form".⁽²⁾

There is created, then, in this third poise of Supermind a dualism between the individual divine, the jivatman, and the universal divine, the cosmic self or atman. There is not yet, however, a loss of the supramental knowledge or unity. For the individual divine, - or more precisely, the universal divine from an individual concentration of itself as jivatman, - knows itself as one centre of divine Being and its conscious power of self-creation.⁽³⁾ Though there is a practical duality, there is no metaphysical ignorance, no avidya, - no 'Fall', we may say, - for

(1) Life Divine, p.137.

(2) Ibid., p.153.

(3) Ibid., p.137.

the individual does not yet regard himself as an essentially independent and separate existence. Such ignorance or Fall does come, as we shall see, but later in the establishment of mind and not in the supramental plane. The three poises of Supermind are, we may say, three ways in which the one Divine through and in the Supermind knows and enjoys itself. (1) Always what is known and enjoyed is one and the same; the ways of knowing and enjoying are three. But these three ways of knowing and enjoying are, again, the product of a three-fold power of divine consciousness, - of self-variation, self-delimitation and self-absorption. Without this power of differentiation and contraction Sachchidananda could never finitize itself, - there could never be a temporal-spatial universe, - and without the

(1) Aurobindo regards these three simultaneous poises of the Supermind as the metaphysical basis for three possible realizations of the Divine (See Letters 1st Series, pp.35-45). The first poise is that of pure unity, non-duality. When this is experienced by our purified minds, there is a loss of all sense of individuality and there is only an awareness of the undivided one. The second poise is that of diversity-in-unity and unity-in-diversity, of one-in-many and many-in-one. When this poise is experienced, we are aware of a qualified non-duality. The third poise is that of a practical distinction and separation between the One and the distinct and separate many individuals. When we experience this poise, we are aware of a pluralism or dualism. These three experiences are, of course, equally real and true, but our mentality tends to emphasize one aspect or one experience and make of it the sole and whole truth. Thus there have been founded what Aurobindo calls "mutually destructive schools of philosophy", - viz., Advaita, Vishistadvaita and Dvaita, corresponding to the experience of unqualified non-duality, of qualified non-duality and of duality, - each of which claims absolute truth to the exclusion of the claims of the others. (Life Divine, pp.138-139). For Aurobindo all three teach the truth, but each only partially. What is needed is a comprehensive and integral experience of Reality in all three aspects at once.

Supermind there would be no centre, no organizing agency for the process of self-differentiation.

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If, then, this interpretation and characterization of what Aurobindo means by the Supermind is correct, we can see the immense, the crucial importance of it for his absolute monism or non-dualism. The Supermind founds the absolute unity of existence and manifests out of that unity and establishes upon it a real diversity of infinitely many individual existences. Yet never is the oneness abrogated; for the many are not but the One, the Infinite Being, in an infinite number of individual movements or plays of its consciousness within its self-existence. Always behind the multiple play of its consciousness is the one conscious self, both as universal soul and individual self-concentration, observing, supporting, directing the movements of its consciousness, - knowing itself as equally extended in the total movement and at the same time identifying itself with each individual play and form. Behind the Supermind, - indeed, containing the Supermind as a hypostasis of itself, - is Sachchidananda, pure unitarian consciousness self-absorbed in pure self-awareness, transcendent and silent.

The triple status of the Supermind, the three movements of divine consciousness within Supermind do not constitute the cosmic manifestation; they are the three phases of the process of differentiation of divine Being whereby the temporal-spatial manifestation is possible. The actual appearance of the universe

involves a descent of Supermind in terms of the many principles, forms and forces of Being which it contains. To that descent we must next turn our attention.

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CHAPTER III

THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE.

The manifestation of the phenomenal universe is, we have seen, a process of the loosing forth by Supermind of the forms, principles and powers of conscious existence which it has organised within itself. Or, to state the process another way, through the agency of the Supermind the three higher principles of Being, existence-consciousness-bliss, transform themselves into the three lower principles of mind-life-matter. Hereby is constituted the sevenfold chord of Being. The Supermind receives into itself as its own substance the eternal potentialities of sat-chit-ananda and manifests these potentialities in time and space as mind-life-matter, in that order of involutive descent. Overmind.

In the descent of consciousness creative of the universe mind is not, however, the first principle after the Supermind to be manifested. If it were, then, says Aurobindo, there would exist two great a gulf between the finite nature of mind and the infinite action of Supermind.⁽¹⁾ In actuality there are several levels or planes of consciousness intervening between these two. The first of these, - and probably the most important, - is what Aurobindo calls Overmind. He characterizes it metaphorically as "a sort of delegation from the Supermind which supports the

(1) Life Divine, pp.250-251.

present evolutionary universe in which we live here in matter".⁽¹⁾
It may also be described as a 'universal Mind', if it is understood that its mode of operation would be vaster and quality of knowledge immeasurably higher than that of our ordinary mentality.⁽²⁾
Aurobindo rejects the possibility that it is such a universal Mind or cosmic consciousness, rather than the Supermind, which is originally responsible for the creation of the universe. Such a universal Mind would not possess the transcendent fullness of knowledge, the supraconscious comprehension of the unity of Being, necessary for the founding of a real diversity-in-unity.⁽³⁾
On the other hand, the Supermind could not have simply acted by itself from the universal plane without any intermediary such as Overmind; for otherwise there would not be a world as we actually experience. A world created directly by the Supermind from a universal plane would be, says Aurobindo, one filled with supramental light and truth from the very beginning, devoid of all ignorance. Moreover there would not have been the dual process of the involution of consciousness-force in the form of inconscient matter and the evolution of consciousness-force out of matter into life and mind, which characterizes our actual world and makes it just the way it is.⁽⁴⁾

Overmind, therefore, is not the same as the Supermind,

(1) Letters, 1st Series, pp.105-106.

(2) Life Divine, pp.216f.

(3) Ibid., p.109.

(4) Letters, 1st Series, p.106.

although it is derived from the Supermind.⁽¹⁾ It is the first formulation of divine consciousness in its creative descent from Supermind and marks, as it were, the boundary between the higher half of the universe of Being, - sat-chit-ananda, - and the lower half, - mind-life-matter. The descent is in actuality the extension of that third status (samjnana) of the Supermind. Here consciousness in its individual concentrations supporting the many plays of its movement projects itself into the movement so as to differentiate and enjoy the many names and forms, the many aspects of the Real-Idea of its existence. As this action continues, the individual plays of the movement fall more and more apart from each other, and consciousness indwelling each play tends to lose a clear vision of the unity of its infinitely many centres, self-concentrations of itself. There thus appears the Overmind, - the level of consciousness where the perfect balance of the One and the many is disturbed and the emphasis begins to fall on the many.⁽²⁾ In Overmind is the origin of consciousness concentrating upon and projecting itself into the many plays of its movement, the one existence is divided into many existences, many godheads, the one consciousness into many independent forms of consciousness and knowledge, the one Real-Idea into its many aspects, the one conscious force into many forces, the one delight into many delights.⁽³⁾ This action of

(1) Letters, Fourth Series, p.193.

(2) Life Divine, p.256.

(3) Ibid., p.257.

division does not at the overmental plane, however, involve a fall from truth or knowledge; the Overmind has yet a vision by which it creates out of all the diverse principles and powers which it differentiates a harmonious universe. Thus, Aurobindo declares, "the Overmind is a creator of truths, not of illusions or falsehoods: what is worked out in any given overmental energism or movement is the truth of that aspect, power, idea, force, delight which is liberated into independent action, the truth of the consequences of its reality in that independence"⁽¹⁾. As the 'delegate' of the Supermind the Overmind creates the universe through the separation and combination of the infinite aspects and powers of the integral and indivisible unity of being, taking each aspect and power and giving to it an independent action in which it is able, so to speak, to work out its own world. At the same time Overmind holds all these independent and separate lines of creation together by its vision of unity imparted to it by Supermind. Thus its energy is an all-dynamism as well as separate dynamisms, and it may correctly be called "a sort of inferior Supermind".⁽²⁾ It may thus be said to mark the outer limits of the luminous action of the Supermind. Aurobindo uses the Upanishadic imagery in characterising the Overmind as the "Golden Lid" which covers the "face of Truth"; for it "keeps from us the full indivisible supramental Light".⁽³⁾ The Overmind receives, as it were, the truths of the Real-Idea

(1) Life Divine, p.259.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Letters, 1st Series, p.106.

possessed integrally by the Supermind, but by its creative power it divides and breaks up the Idea into its infinitely many separate aspects and powers, which it regards as distinctly and separatively individual, against, however, a background of unity. The Overmind is concerned primarily not with absolutes but with pragmatic truths of Reality, and its comprehension, we should say, is more global than integral as is that of the Supermind.

The Origin of Ignorance.

The power of the Overmind by which it separates and divides the principles and forces of the One into a real multiplicity for the purpose of the universal manifestation is what Aurobindo calls the "original cosmic maya".⁽¹⁾ As we earlier saw, maya, - the 'divine maya', - is the power of infinite consciousness conceptually creative of all things. This maya functions in and through the Supermind to formulate the Real-Idea, the Truth of diversity-in-unity, and thus comprehends both the One and the many. The awareness of the One, of unity, is vidya, - usually understood as 'knowledge', - and the awareness of the many is avidya, which, as Aurobindo points out, does not in the first instance mean 'ignorance' or 'nescience', as it is usually translated.⁽²⁾ The awareness of multiplicity, avidya, however,

(1) Life Divine, pp.260-261.

(2) Isha Upanishad, pp.91-93. Aurobindo would reject, we believe, Shankara's interpretation of avidya as metaphysical ignorance, - nescience which is beginningless (anādi) and which by clouding the human intelligence produces in the individual the illusion of phenomenal existence. This avidya must be removed if the individual is to attain

Continuation of Footnote No. 2 on p.155.

release from the bondage of multiplicity, of illusion. For Aurobindo avidya is ignorance only when it is divorced from vidya or knowledge of unity. Even then it is purely functional ignorance, - really an incomplete knowledge, - as opposed to metaphysical ignorance. That is to say, as ignorance it has a beginning and an end in the evolutive process. It is simply the manner in which the individual mind regards existence, lacking full awareness of unity (vidya). However, when this awareness of unity is gained through the growth of consciousness within the individual, then avidya is not destroyed or removed but transformed by vidya.

would be ignorance if separated from the awareness of unity, vidya. The truth of reality is that "multiplicity is implicit or explicit in unity. Without it the unity would be either a void of non-existence or a powerless, sterile limitation to the state of indiscriminate self-absorption or of blank repose"⁽¹⁾. On the other hand, unity is the fundamental fact without which multiplicity would be unreal, an illusion. In the Supermind both awareness are held together harmoniously as "the two aspects of maya, the formative self-conception of the Eternal".⁽²⁾ In the Overmind, however, this integrality of awareness of unity and multiplicity is absent.⁽³⁾ Thus, maya in the Supermind is a power conceptually creating all things as a unity, a One in diversity; in the Overmind it is a power conceptually realising all things as a multiplicity of separate existences. Here there is still an awareness of the essential truth of things, but there is not a sense of the absolute identity of unity and multiplicity. Overmind "lays emphasis on its divisional power of multiplicity and seeks to give each power of aspect its full chance to manifest, relying on the underlying oneness to prevent disharmony".⁽⁴⁾ By its maya, - a maya which Aurobindo characterises as "a sort of vidyā-avidyāmaī māyā",⁽⁵⁾ - Overmind establishes the predominance of avidya, an awareness of multiplicity, as opposed to the balance founded by the supramental

(1) Isha Upanishad, p.92.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Life Divine, p.256.

(4) Letters, 1st Series, p.108.

(5) Ibid., p.106.

maya. Aurobindo suggests that it is because the classical Indian systems did not distinguish between the two different levels of consciousness which he calls Supermind and Overmind that they ran into such confusion about the meaning of maya, - a power founding the multiplicity of things, - as the supreme creative power. (1)

By its maya, therefore, Overmind differentiates the One into a multiplicity of separate existences, thereby setting the stage for the cosmic manifestation and establishing the conditions for the inevitable and necessary appearance of universal ignorance, avidya, - an exclusive consciousness of multiplicity. As the descent, the apprehending and differentiating action of consciousness, continues the emphasis upon division and multiplicity increases. (2) Through its self-concentrations consciousness projects itself ever more into the plays of its movement, becoming lost in these plays of the names and forms of its being, growing self-forgetful of its ultimate oneness. Whereas in the Overmind consciousness does not completely forget the unity of its being even though functioning in and through its many individual centres, in mind it seems to lose its awareness of the oneness of its being and, having become so involved in each individual play of its movement, regards itself exclusively as an 'ego', an individual separate and distinct from all other individuals in a universe characterised by multiplicity. The

(1) Riddle of this World, p.5.

(2) Letters, 1st Series, p.108.

final point of the descent is reached with matter where consciousness is totally absorbed in form, in the principle of substance which its movement contains, that there appears only an in-conscience. (1) Ignorance which pervades the lower hemisphere of mind-life-matter is, therefore, a 'necessary evil', an inevitable and necessary feature of the process of cosmic manifestation. For without the dividing and separating action of the Overmind and more especially of Mind, there could not be the actualisation in time and space of the multiplicity, - i.e., there could not be the universe we experience.

Mind.

The appearance of Mind, then, marks the full entry of consciousness into ignorance. Mind continues and intensifies the dividing action of the overmental consciousness such that each individual aspect of the Real-Idea is regarded as the sole or chief truth, all other aspects or powers being considered as contradictory or subordinate. The depiecing of nature, prakriti, by mind, is done no longer against a background of an awareness of unity such as Overmind possessed. The maya of Mind is one of ignorance; for it is a power of division operating without an awareness of totality and oneness. By its maya Mind creates out of the one prakriti a multitude of exclusive forces and forms and views them as though they were separate entities. (2) It creates thereby a universe which is not an indivisible unity of many existences but an aggregation of what it regards as

(1) Life Divine, p.222.

(2) Ibid., p.151.

connected, intrinsically unrelated, separate and independent parts. In themselves the parts are real, but the appearance created and held by mind of only parts and of no essential unity, of a multitude of mutually exclusive centres, - is false.

Therefore Aurobindo calls the maya of Mind "the undivine maya"⁽¹⁾. It is this mental maya which in the Rig Veda⁽²⁾ is also called the 'undivine maya', - adevī māyā, - that power of ignorance (acitti or unconsciousness of truth, of unity) of limited knowledge, which creates illusions, false mental forms and appearances.⁽³⁾ This is distinguished from the 'divine maya' which is the power of knowledge (citti or consciousness of Truth) of the essential unity and oneness of things, of their self-law (swadharma) in their one origin and universality. This is the knowledge which the gods possess and on the basis of which they eternally act and create (devānām adabdhā vratāni).⁽⁴⁾ Aurobindo regards the neglecting or missing of this distinction between the two mayas as the root cause for the pessimistic and illusionistic philosophies (e.g. Shankara's Mayavada Advaita); for "to them the mental maya is the creatrix of the world, and a world created by mental maya would indeed be an inexplicable paradox and a fixed yet floating nightmare of conscious existence which could neither be classed as an illusion nor as a reality."⁽⁵⁾

(1) Life Divine, p.149.

(2) Ibid., pp.437f.

(3) Cf. Rig Veda IV, 2-11,14.

(4) Life Divine, pp.437-438.

(5) Ibid., p.109.

To say, however, that mind is an instrument of ignorance (avidya), of limited knowledge, is not, as far as Aurobindo is concerned, to say that it is actually an instrument of error and falsehood.⁽¹⁾ That is to say, ignorance is for Aurobindo not nescience, not a denial of knowledge but an unconsciousness (acitti) of the full knowledge. It is as in the Veda a knowledge based on the division of undivided Being, founded upon the fragmentary, the little, opposed to the opulent, vast and luminous completeness of things; it is a cognition which, according to the Vedic seers, "by the opportunity of its limitations is turned into falsehood and supported in that aspect by the Sons of Darkness and Division, enemies of the divine endeavour in man, the assailants, robbers, coverers of his light of knowledge".⁽²⁾ The ignorance of Mind is, to use again the Upanishad distinction, a knowledge of multiplicity (avidya) divorced from a knowledge of unity (vidya).⁽³⁾ Mind's ignorance is actually a misrepresentation of the Truth, not an absolute falsehood, but a misrepresentation which follows inevitably and necessarily from "an exclusive concentration of consciousness, an exclusive self-identification of the soul with a particular temporal and spatial

(1) Life Divine, p.262.

(2) Ibid., p.437. "The Sons of Darkness and Divisions" are the Dasyus referred to in the Vedas: cf. Rig Veda, III.34; V.14-4; V.34. Aurobindo rejects the historical interpretation of Vedas which presents the Dasyus as the dark aboriginal occupants of the land against whom the fair Aryan invaders fought in order to establish their culture. For Aurobindo the Vedas must first be understood psychologically and as the product of the highest spiritual, mystical experience. The Dasyus, therefore, represent cosmic forces of Darkness and Falsehood which oppose the establishment of Truth and Light and distort the spiritual vision of men. See On the Veda, Chs. III, XXI.

(3) Ibid., pp.438f.

action which is only a part of its own play of being" for the purpose of the cosmic manifestation.⁽¹⁾

Mind, as we are here speaking of it in the descent of consciousness, refers to a plane of conscious existence, to 'cosmic Mind'⁽²⁾ or Mind in general and not to individualised mind. Mind as we ordinarily speak of it in terms of human individuals is for Aurobindo a phenomenon which emerges in the evolutive ascent of consciousness out of matter to life and is determined in its individual nature by the soul, which is the principle or power of individualisation projected from the jivatman for the purpose of organising concrete, individual forms of physical life and embodied mentality. This cosmic Mind is, on the other hand, the final operation of the apprehending consciousness (sanjnana) of the Supermind.⁽³⁾ It is in a very real sense a surrogate and subordinant process of Supermind.⁽⁴⁾ It continues the Supermind's creative action of delimiting, of finitizing the Infinite. In its own action of depicting the indivisible unity of divine nature it is fulfilling its raison d'etre, its self-law, its proper office which is "to translate always infinity into the terms of the finite, to measure off, limit, depiece".⁽⁵⁾ Thus when Aurobindo characterises Mind as the "nodus of the great ignorance" or instrument and product of

(1) Life Divine, p.155.

(2) Ibid., p.262.

(3) Ibid., p.158

(4) Ibid., p.250.

(5) Ibid., p.152.

ignorance, he is not in any way imposing a negative value upon Mind. On the contrary, without Mind, just as without Overmind, there could not be an evolutionary universe such as we actually experience. It is only in the evolution of the individual being that this action of Mind to depiece and aggregate works in a negative fashion to produce error and falsehood.

Moreover, cosmic Mind is considered by Aurobindo to have certain features which the individualised mind does not. The operations of cosmic Mind are founded on Truth, even though it is "Truth deflected, mistaken and falsely conceived".⁽¹⁾ The Truth which it realises in its dividing actions is, though partial, still the Truth of real Being and not of a non-existence. Embodied mind, evolutionary mind, creates as much out of imagination as out of reality, although even then it must be admitted that the elements employed in the creations of its imaginations are derived from actual existents, though not necessarily in the order or form achieved in the imagination.⁽²⁾ Furthermore cosmic Mind possesses a certain harmony "if only of arranged accords and discords" and "an underlying dynamism of oneness" which evolutionary mind greatly lacks.⁽³⁾

Cosmic Mind, then, is the final action of Supermind in its process of demarcation and delimitation of the Infinite. In speaking of its functions we may say that just as Overmind took

(1) Life Divine, p.158.

(2) Ibid., pp.391-393.

(3) Ibid., p.260.

over the process of manifestation from Supermind, so cosmic Mind takes over from Overmind. It should be noted, however, that Aurobindo conceives of gradations of consciousness intervening between the Overmind and Mind.⁽¹⁾ There are three which he specifically names, - viz., Intuition, Illumined Mind and Higher Mind, in that order of descent. There is no doubt that Aurobindo regards these as real supraphysical planes of conscious existence, as real as that of Supermind or Overmind or cosmic Mind itself, and not merely as modes or methods of knowing or faculties and powers of knowing. As he himself points out, these planes "are domains of being, grades of the substance and energy of the spiritual being, fields of existence which are each a level of the universal consciousness-force constituting and organising itself into a higher status".⁽²⁾ Each plane of conscious existence is, however, a plane of knowledge of consciousness of Truth as well. The supramental plane is one of the integral supramental Truth. The quality or scope of knowledge on each of the descending planes from Overmind to Mind is characterised by an increasing loss of integrality. The truth of things contained in Overmind are transmitted to Intuition and from there to Illumined and Higher Mind and finally to Mind itself, but in the descent they lose more and more of their power and certitude and in Mind appear as little more than speculative ideas.⁽³⁾

(1) Life Divine, pp.250f.

(2) Ibid., p.834.

(3) Lights on Yoga, p.34.

Life.

The next principle and plane to be manifested in the descent of consciousness is Life. Aurobindo does not restrict the meaning of Life to merely the vital principle in animals and plants. It is rather "nothing else than the Force that builds and maintains and destroys forms in the world; it is Life that manifests itself in the form of the earth as much as in the plant that grows upon the earth and the animals that support their existence by devouring the life-force of the plant or of each other."⁽¹⁾ In other words, Life is the force of consciousness. In this force are contained in some form mental consciousness and nervous vitality.⁽²⁾ Thus the distinction which we normally make between life in animals and in plants is for Aurobindo not altogether a correct one; for in both forms is the one universal Life. Indeed it is possible to detect in the plant indications of nervous sensations and reactions which we usually associate with animals. The chief difference here is that in the plant there is an absence of mental consciousness of sensation which an animal, - a "higher animal" at least, - has. But, Aurobindo declares, "sensation is sensation whether mentally conscious or vitally sensitive and sensation is a form of consciousness".⁽³⁾ There must be, therefore, something in both forms of Life which is the same and that is, Aurobindo maintains, a subconscious mind".⁽⁴⁾ But what about forms of matter, the inorganic world

(1) Life Divine, p.164.

(2) Ibid., p.168.

(3) Ibid., p.169.

(4) Ibid., pp.169-170.

of metals, earth, chemical atoms, etc.? Even here there is possibly, says Aurobindo, a sort of rudimentary subconscious sense-mind, although there may not be a bodily agitation corresponding to the nervous response, but this absence makes no essential difference to the presence of vitality in metal than the absence of locomotion to the presence of vitality in plants. (1)

In every atom of Matter there is Life, conscious force with its aspects of will and desire, of attraction and repulsion, by which aggregations of atoms are constituted and destroyed. Life when looked at from the standpoint of the creative descent of consciousness is, then, the final operation of the force of consciousness, just as Mind is the final operation of Supermind. (2) Indeed, "as Mind is the final individualising operation of the all-comprehending and all-apprehending Supermind, the process by which its consciousness works individualised in each form from the standpoint proper to it and with the cosmic relations which proceed from the standpoint, so Life is the final operation by which the Force of Consciousness-Being acting through the all-possessing and all-creative Will of the universal Supermind maintains and energises, constitutes and reconstitutes individual forms and acts in them as the basis of all the activities of the soul thus embodied". (3)

Life, then, may be regarded as a form of the force of

(1) Life Divine, pp.169-170.

(2) Ibid., p.175.

(3) Ibid., p.175.

consciousness "intermediary and appropriate to the action of Mind on Matter",⁽¹⁾ It may even be said to be the energy of Mind when Mind creates out of the play of consciousness motions of force and forms of substance and relates itself to these motions and forms.⁽²⁾ Life is, in other words, instrumental to the creative action of Mind as force is to consciousness, as divine Will is to divine Knowledge. Moreover, just as Mind is not independent but has all of Supermind behind it and is Supermind in its final operations, so Life is not an independent movement but has all of the force of consciousness in its every working and is conscious force acting and existing in all created things.

Matter.

If force (Life) is inseparable from consciousness (Mind) of which it is the instrumental and creative energy, it is also inseparable from the forms which it contains and in which it is contained; for these forms are not other than formulations or plays of itself. Moreover, since this conscious force is the active nature of the one conscious being, its results, its self-formulations are but conceptive forms, real-ideas of that conscious being. As Aurobindo asserts, "existence is in its activity a conscious force which presents the workings of its force to its consciousness as forms of its own being".⁽³⁾ In the Overmind and then Mind consciousness differentiates and

(1) Life Divine, p.175.

(2) Ibid., pp.175-176.

(3) Ibid., p.216.

progressively 'concretizes' these forms by projecting itself into the plays of its movement, its force, through its many individual centres. It becomes thereby involved in its force, giving it the appearance of division and finally of an inconscient energy. By a further involution Mind phenomenally divides its Life-Force into atomic and sub-atomic units of energy which in their aggregation assume to our senses the appearance of substance, Matter. Thus by the action of Mind as the creative instrument of Supermind is produced a cosmic totality of concretized forms of conscious force, - a universe of Matter. Matter is, then, in its deepest essence energy. It is the form assumed by force (Life) due to the involution of consciousness (Mind). It is neither 'dead' nor unconscious. Indeed, Matter may be said to be essentially consciousness fallen asleep; it represents the lowest limit of self-concealment of Spirit, - of the involution of consciousness in the forms of its force, - and provides the basis of the physical universè and the starting point for the terrestrial evolution.

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This, then, is Aurobindo's view of the creation of the universe, - not really a creation in the sense of an ex nihilo or de novo production, but a manifestation of the eternal powers and principles of the one conscious existence. Descending through Supermind consciousness (chit) represents itself as Mind, force of consciousness (tapas) as Life, existence (sat) as substance or Matter. Bliss (ananda) represents itself as

psyche or individual soul,⁽¹⁾ that representative projection of the jivatman into the cosmic descent of consciousness at the nodus of Mind-Life and Matter for the purpose of the evolutive manifestation of an individual form of life and embodied mentality.

The seven or, if we include the psyche, eight terms differentiated in the manifestation of the universe, - sat-chit-ananda-Supermind-mind-life-psyche-matter, - are one Being. There is, then, no irreconcilable division between Spirit and Matter; they are but the two termini of a single continuum of Being. As Aurobindo points out, "Spirit is the soul and reality of that which we sense as Matter; Matter is a form and body of that which we realise as Spirit".⁽²⁾ The difference between Spirit and Matter is a purely conceptive, - spiritually, not mentally, - one which ends in a practical distinction, creating the descending series from Spirit through Mind to Matter and the ascending one from Matter through Mind to Spirit, with many gradations intervening between each level. The real oneness, the essential unity of Being is, however, not abrogated. Brahman is ever the cause, the supporting power, the indwelling principle and the sole material of the universe. Indeed, "all Matter as well as all Life, Mind and Supermind are only modes of the Brahman, the Eternal, the Spirit, Sachchidananda, who not only dwells in them all, but is all these things though no one of

(1) Life Divine, pp.202-203.

(2) Ibid., p.222.

them is His absolute being".⁽¹⁾

Time and Space.

According to Aurobindo time and space like other principles of the manifestation are purely conceptive, - spiritually or supramentally, not mentally. They are the conditions created by Brahman in His Supermind for His self-manifestation:⁽²⁾

they are constituted by "that one conscious Being viewing itself in extension, subjectively as time, objectively in space".⁽³⁾

Time and space are, of course, real principles of the physical universe, but our physical time and space is not the same as the supramental time and space. Or, rather, our mental experience of time and space is greatly different from that of the Supermind.⁽⁴⁾ Indeed, to the Supermind time and space are but modes of eternity and infinity,⁽⁵⁾ produced by a spiritual and not material extension,⁽⁶⁾ - a Time-Eternity and Space-Infinity to which we cannot apply our mental conceptions of time and space.⁽⁷⁾

The mind measures space by matter and time by event. It tends to see space as a static extension in which all things have a fixed order of position and movement; in other words, it regards space as something physical. Time is viewed as a mobile extension measured by movement and event, again as a

(1) Life Divine, p.223.

(2) Ibid., p.125.

(3) Ibid., p.124.

(4) Synthesis of Yoga, pp.103f.

(5) Life Divine, pp.502f.

(6) Ibid., pp.326f.

(7) Ibid., p.298.

purely physical time. This is in a sense an inevitable and necessary way in which the mind views its environment.⁽¹⁾ It is the basis for its experience of what is termed 'casuality', - viz., the change of circumstance in its temporal-spatial field such that it regards an antecedent state as producing a subsequent state or else the subsequent state to be the resultant of a previous action or condition.⁽²⁾ Here memory serves the mind in constructing links between past and present experiences of subjective awareness and of objective field, - and thereby prevents chaos and dissociation. In this regard memory may be looked upon as a poor substitute for a global and integral view of things and events.⁽³⁾

Time and space are 'born' as a result of the third movement of consciousness in the Supermind, - that action of apprehending consciousness which establishes the elements of an apparent division of Being. Here the infinity of the One is translated into an extension of conceptual time and space.⁽⁴⁾ Time and space are then in their true nature spiritual and subjective.⁽⁵⁾ To the Supermind time and space are two aspects of its universal force of consciousness. It has a knowledge of time in which past, present and future are one, an 'eternal present',⁽⁶⁾ and it regards space as a subjective and indivisible extension of

(1) Life Divine, pp.325 f.

(2) Ibid., pp.459f.

(3) Ibid., p.453.

(4) Ibid., p.153.

(5) Ibid., pp.327f.

(6) Synthesis of Yoga, p.1013.

itself.(1) Whereas "the mind sees only a given time and space and views many possibilities pell-mell as all more or less realisable in that time and space, the divine Supermind sees the whole extension of Time and Space and can embrace all the mind's possibilities and very many more not visible to the mind, but without any error, groping or confusion; for it perceives each potentiality in its proper force, essential necessity, right relation to the others and the time, place and circumstance both of its gradual and its ultimate realisation."(2)

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As we have seen, Aurobindo bases his own advaitic or 'non-dualistic' view of the creation of the universe upon the Vedas and Upanishads as he rather uniquely interprets them. There is, however, to be found in the Advaita Shiva Philosophy of Kashmir, - specifically called the Trika System, - a view of the cosmic manifestation not unlike that of Aurobindo.(3)

According to Trika Ultimately Reality is Paramashiva (the supreme Shiva), also designated Parameshvara (Supreme Lord) of Para Samvid (the Supreme Existence), who in regard to the universe is both transcendent and immanent. The nature of Ultimate Reality is pure consciousness, and as pure

(1) Life Divine, p.125.

(2) Ibid., p.126.

(3) We are indebted to the following sources: A. Basu, "Kashmir

Continuation of Footnote No. 3 on p.172.

Shaivism", Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1939, pp.79-97;
L.D. Barnett, "The Paramarthasara of Abhinava-Gupta", Journal of The Royal Asiatic Society, 1910, London, pp.707-747;
J.C. Chatterji, Kashmir Shaivism, Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, Vol. II, Fas. 1, Research Department, Kashmir State, Srinagar, 1914; S.K. Das, Shakti or Divine Power, University of Calcutta, 1934; Īśvara Pratvabhijñā Vimarśinī, trans. into English by K.C. Pandey, Bhāskarī, Vol. III, Princess of Wales Saraswati Bhavana Texts, No. 84, Lucknow, 1954; Le Paramārthasāra, trans. into French by L. Silburn, Publications de l'Institut de Civilisation Indienne, Fas. 5, Paris, 1957.

consciousness it (like Aurobindo's Brahman) is both self-luminous (prakāśamaya) and self-conscious (vimarśamaya). Its self-luminosity and self-consciousness are inseparable aspects of its one being as consciousness. However, as transcendent Reality it is considered in its prakasa aspect, - its silent state of pure illumination, - as Shiva; in its vimarsa aspect, - its dynamic state of self-consciousness, - it is regarded as Shakti. Shiva-shakti are, then, one Reality in two conceptual aspects; there can be no ontological difference or separation between them. The Trika stresses that it is only for the purpose of a clear understanding of the nature of Ultimate Reality that the conceptual distinctions of Shiva and Shakti and prakasa and vimarsa are made.

Shiva-shakti as one Ultimate Reality is, if we may employ Aurobindo's terms, consciousness-force, - one Reality whose essential nature is consciousness, whose active nature is force. In the transcendent state these two aspects, - Shiva and Shakti, consciousness and force, - are in perfect equilibrium (sāmarasya). This state or condition of equilibrium is Paramashiva, the Supreme Shiva.

Shakti is regarded as the 'female' principle of Reality by which all creation is possible and achieved. Shakti as vimarsa, power of consciousness, - or 'vibration' of prakasa, - is the means whereby Shiva becomes self-conscious, becomes aware of Himself as the one, all-comprehending 'I'. Shiva in Himself is merely self-luminous consciousness (prakasa); this is an

inactive, a passive state of consciousness shining out of itself by itself. Here considered as purely transcendent, Shiva is as though 'dead, śava. Shakti, - or, as she is also called, chaitanya, 'self-illumination', - is to Shiva as a mirror to a light. Shiva shines forth and sees himself reflected in Shakti; that is, he 'becomes' self-conscious, self-knowing. By his Shakti, his power of reflection, he manifests himself to himself.

The universe is the self-manifestation of Shiva achieved through his Shakti. He regards his nature reflected in her, and there emerges in him a sense of 'I' (aham-vimarsa), a primal reflection (bimba), - a Real-Idea, as Aurobindo would say, - of which everything in the universe is a secondary reflection or shadow (pratibimba, abhasa). Shiva reflecting himself in Shakti, which, we must stress, is not other than or outside Shiva, - is unaffected by the reflections, abhasas. They proceed from him as do thoughts, ideas or mental images from an individual, the difference being that in the case of Paramashiva the reflections or ideas which consciousness knows are forms of itself, - real ideas, reflections of Reality, - contained in its force, Shakti. There arises a sense not only of pure 'I' (aham), but of 'it' (idam), without which the sense of 'I' is not intelligible. Consciousness as 'Universal Mind' (aham) knows itself (idam), and thus Knower, Known and Knowledge are one Being, the distinctions being made possible by the force (Shakti) of consciousness, producing by its activity of reflection the idea

of 'I-it' in consciousness.

The technical terms vary, but the similarities between Trika and Aurobindo so far are quite apparent. A Real-Idea of its own existence is produced within consciousness by its force, which is always present though in two modes, - intensive in self-absorption and diffusive in self-extension. (The first mode corresponds to that transcendent state of equilibrium, Paramashiva, in which Shakti is inactive and Shiva is as though dead; the second mode is that in which Shakti becomes active, reflecting Shiva's self-nature.) The Real-Idea contained within consciousness-force is both a knowledge and will, or rather a knowledge which is will; consciousness (Shiva, purusha) and force (Shakti, prakriti) are here distinguished but not yet 'split'. All is one within the Supermind, the 'Universal Mind', which is consciousness dynamic in self-knowledge. In the Supermind, we may say, the sense of 'I-it' (aham-idam) is produced in consciousness by its force presenting itself to itself as subject which is its own object. The 'it', the Real-Idea which consciousness has of its existence is, in a sense, an ideal universe, which is manifested in time and space by conscious force, Shakti.

We can here give only the broad outline of the process of cosmic manifestation according to Trika. All manifestable objects, the ideal universe, are contained within Shakti. That is, the names and forms of Being are contained as possibilities

of existence within consciousness-force. By various modes of Shakti these objects, principles and possibilities of conscious existence, are manifested. There is first chit-shakti or power of self-awareness which leads to or actually entails a power of absolute bliss, ananda-shakti, an enjoyment of his being by Shiva. This delight and wonderment leads to a desire to create, a power of will to manifest the universe out of himself, iccha-shakti. The desire to create, the power of will, involves a power of an ordered knowledge of what to create and how to create it, jñana-shakti. Finally, power of will and knowledge lead to the power of action, kriya-shakti, and the actual creation or manifestation of the universe.

Creation is an 'opening out' (unmesha) of Shiva, which is at the same time an expansion of Shakti and a limitation or 'disappearance' (tirodhāna) of the absoluteness or infinitude of Shiva. That is, the universe is the self-extension in time and space of conscious existence, Shiva, in, through and as conscious force, Shakti; but in order so to manifest his being as a system of limited objects the infinite Shiva must finitize, delimit, 'contract' himself. By the process of contraction (sañkoca) or self-limitation (tirodhana) is achieved a progressive unfolding of principles or states of consciousness, - tattvas or 'evolutes'.

The first tattva is produced when Shakti moves out of her self-absorbed state in the Paramashiva and produces in Shiva an awareness of 'I'. This is Shiva-tattva in which chit-shakti

predominates. The second tattva, the Shakti-tattva, is produced when the 'I' has a sense of being and there arises the experience 'I am' with an accompanying experience of bliss; here the ananda-shakti predominates. The 'I am' experience requires the experience of 'it' to complete it. In the third tattva, the Sadashiva-tattva (also called Sadakhya) there develops the awareness 'I am this', with a stress on the 'I' but a complete identification of subject and object. Here the iccha-shakti predominates, giving rise to will to act, to create. The next tattva, the Ishwara-tattva, is that in which jnana-shakti predominates, and the stress falls on the 'this', the infinite possibilities of his own being which Shiva knows as contained in his Shakti. He knows these many possibilities which constitute the 'this' in his Shakti through corresponding 'individualizations' of himself, - self-contractions or jivatmans, as Aurobindo calls the individual centres of consciousness apprehending the many forms of its force. This atomicity (anutva) of Shiva's universality, - this self-contraction or limitation, - makes possible the differentiation and actualization of the many names and forms of his being reflected in his shakti. The fifth tattva, Sad-vidya or Shuddha-vidya, is the last of the supreme principles of universal subject-object experience. Here there is an equalization in stress, such as the 'I' and the 'this' are felt to be entirely identified with one another, although they can be clearly separated in thought. There is an experience of diversity-in-unity-and-identity (bhedābheda), of multiplicity

('this') which is an undivided unity ('I'). At this stage the 'I' becomes distinctly separate from the 'this' on the one hand, and on the other hand identifies itself with the 'this'. There is an action of thought in this separation and identification due to the prominence of kriya-shakti. At this point is achieved the realisation of the ideal universe, the 'this', the many names and forms of existence contained within his Shakti to which Shiva has related himself and with which he has identified himself.

Taken all together we may say that the third to the fifth tattvas, - viz., Sadashiva, Ishwara and Suddha-vidya tattvas, - approximate at least in function what Aurobindo means by the Supermind. They, like the Supermind, are founded upon a pure unitarian consciousness, an experience of 'I' in which there is no awareness of 'this', no ideation (the Shiva-tattva) and are, in a sense, produced by a delight of being (the Shakti-tattva in which ananda-shakti predominates). In the first poise of Supermind consciousness comprehends a diversity of names and forms as itself and in terms of itself, its 'I'; this corresponds to the Sadashiva-tattva in which the experience is 'I am this', with the stress on the 'I', the 'this' being only vague possibilities and not an actual multiplicity. In the second poise of Supermind consciousness apprehends through individual centres, - through a self-contraction or delimitation, - the 'this' as a multiplicity and is aware of itself as each form and in all forms; this corresponds to the Ishwara-tattva in which

the stress has fallen upon the 'this' as a multiplicity. In the third poise of Supermind consciousness through its individual centres, its contractions, indwells and identifies with the many plays of its force; this corresponds to the Shuddha-vidya-tattva in which there is an equalisation of stress resulting in a separation of 'I' and 'this' and an identification of 'I' with 'this'. As the third action continues, individualized (puruṣa) consciousness becomes increasingly absorbed in the plays of its force (prakṛiti) so that 1) it loses its integral self-awareness, 2) creates an atomicity of separate existences and 3) establishes a practical division between itself and its force, such that soul appears inert and subject to force and force appears inconscient.

All this, according to the Trika, is the result of Shiva's self-limitation, contraction. In the identification of the atomic Shiva with the 'this', with the many forms, he becomes phenomenally subject to time and space and suffers a limitation of interest, a limitation of consciousness and a limitation of power. This is the working of maya, the knowledge of difference which creates the dichotomy of subject and object. With the beginning of the working of maya Shiva is designated 'puruṣa'. Prakṛiti which comes into existence at the same time as puruṣa is the force which manifests the universe in all its principles down to matter. It is, in actuality, the 'this' side of the experience in the Shuddha-vidya tattva, just as puruṣa is the 'I'. It should be pointed out that, unlike Samkhya, Aurobindo

and Trika both regard the many purushas as ultimately one and one with prakriti.

As for Aurobindo, so for Trika the planes of existence which are manifested in the universe depend upon the relations between purusha and prakriti, upon purusha's experience of prakriti which contains all possibilities of conscious existence as forms of itself. Creation is, we may say, for both Aurobindo and Trika the self-experiencing of conscious existence, Brahman or Shiva, through the means of its self-power, conscious force or Shakti. The manifested universe is real because it is the real experience by Ultimate Reality of its own real existence. If divine consciousness were not self-consciousness as well as pure luminosity, - if there were no reflective power of self-knowing, no conscious force or Shakti, - then there could be no self-experience by the Divine, no manifestation of a real universe. In this case if a universe did exist, then it would have an illusory existence such as the Mayavadins conceive.

CHAPTER IV

THE EMERGENCE OF MAN

The creation of the physical universe is achieved, as we have seen, through a descent of consciousness beginning with Supermind and culminating with the appearance of Matter. In that descent there were manifested several cosmic planes of conscious existence, from the supramental to the material, in a dual process of evolution-involution, such that each manifested plane down to Matter contains within it the principles and powers of all the other planes. The appearance of life and mental existence in the physical universe is, then, due to the successive evolution out of Matter of principles of vitality and mentality involved in it. As Aurobindo puts it, "in a sense, the whole of creation may be said to be a movement between two involutions, Spirit in which all is involved and out of which all evolves downward to the other pole of Matter, Matter in which also all is involved and out of which all evolves upwards to the other pole of Spirit."⁽¹⁾

Matter, the physical universe, being, then, the last plane in order of descent is the first in order of ascent and contains within it the powers and principles of all the supra-physical planes above it. The evolution out of Matter of the principles of life and mind and of the gradations of mind to Overmind and Supermind proceeds, according to Aurobindo, "by the increasing

(1) Life Divine, p.120.

pressure of the supra-material planes on the material compelling it to deliver out of itself their principles and powers which might conceivably otherwise slept imprisoned in the rigidity of the material formula."⁽¹⁾

Life

The appearance of life in Matter is, therefore, due to a movement of descent, a pressure from the Life plane above to the life principle within inert Matter. Life emerges; Matter becomes vitalized. Life emerges, however, not all at once but in a series of gradations; thus we are able to distinguish elemental forms from complex forms of life and even more or less complex patterns of physical energies. Aurobindo speaks of three levels in the emergence of life out of Matter.⁽²⁾ The first is that in which it appears as a mechanical energy in forms of Matter with consciousness virtually non-apparent. The second is that in which that energy is capable of a response of nervous sensation though still submental, yet on the point of being what we would call a conscious response; this is plant life. The third level is that in which life develops conscious mentality in increasingly complex forms, beginning with mentally perceptible sensation which becomes the basis for the development of sense and intelligence. It is in the middle level that we have an idea of life as distinguished from matter and mind, but it is, of course, the same universal energy present on all levels.

(1) Life Divine, pp.237-238.

(2) Ibid., pp.172f.

At first glance there would seem to be great gaps in the movement of evolution from matter up to life and then to conscious life. Even in the evolution of physical forms there are 'missing links', but in the evolution of consciousness we are faced with what appears to be a transformation rather than a passage. There is such a real and radical difference between grades of life and conscious life that the evolutionary process appears characterised by discontinuity. As we rise in the evolutionary scale the gaps become deeper though less wide. If it is true as the Indian physicist, J.C. Bose, claims⁽¹⁾ that there are the rudiments of life reactions in metal, then these may be identical with the life reactions in plants. Still the difference between them is so great that the metal to us is inanimate whereas the plant, though not apparently conscious, is called a living thing. Again, the gulf between the highest plant and the lowest animal is clearly deeper; for it is the difference between the presence and the apparently total absence of mind. There is a profound transition here to conscious life. Between the highest animal and the most primitive man there is the difference of intellect and reflection, ideas, religious and ethical thought and feeling, conscious invention. According to Aurobindo the understanding of the real nature of these gaps and missing links is to be found in the workings of the inner force and not merely in the outer process of evolution.⁽²⁾ All

(1) Life Divine, pp.165-166.

(2) Ibid., p.633.

depends upon conscious force within material form fixing itself in a different principle of being and activity. "It is this stride from one principle of being to another quite different principle of being that creates the transitions, the furrows, the sharp lines of distance, and makes not all the difference, but still a radical characteristic difference between being and being in their nature."⁽¹⁾ It must be noted, however, that this ascent, the successive fixing in higher and higher principles, does not entail the abandonment of lower grades of being. Just as higher principles are already contained involved within a lower status of being, so the lower is taken up into the higher, evolved status. What is necessary in the transition from lower to higher is that there be a sufficient development or refinement of the lower so that the higher can manifest in it; then a pressure from some supraphysical plane effects a movement outwards and up from within the lower or the higher principle.⁽²⁾

Incapacity, Desire and Death

Desire and death are for Aurobindo the signs and products of the limitation of life due to its containment in matter and the divisions imposed upon it by such containment.⁽³⁾ Of course, the containment and parcelling of life in individual forms is an inevitable result of the necessary process by which Mind as the final action of Supermind divided the one existence and force and

(1) Life Divine, pp.633-634.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid., pp.223f, 117f.

achieved an atomicity. In this atomic creation, - the material universe, - life is present not as a whole, so to speak, but divided among the finite particles which, indeed, it constitutes as primordial physical energy. This is, as we have seen, the first level of life in its manifestation. As Aurobindo points out, "material substance is Being infinitely divided and seeking infinitely to aggregate itself; between these two impulses of infinite division and infinite aggregation the material existence of the universe is constituted."⁽¹⁾ Material substance is the mould assumed by life. In each atom life is present, an infinite force infinitely divided among its own forms. The aggregating of atoms in the formulation of greater masses represents the attempt of life to exceed the limitation of each form. There is a ceaseless struggle among each atom to exceed itself, an impulse of force to possess all force, of finitized life to regain its infinitude, but the force is limited by its form. Out of this struggle between limitation, incapacity and the impulse of self-enlargement and all-possession arises, according to Aurobindo, a vital desire which on higher levels translates itself into conscious desire, hunger, mutual devouring, the struggle to increase, expand, conquer, possess, - in general the struggle for permanence and survival of which the Darwinian theory speaks.⁽²⁾ Desire is a necessary device of nature whereby limited forces can increase their capacities and more complex forms of life can emerge. Without this impelling force of desire life might have

(1) Life Divine, p.179.

(2) Ibid., p.184.

fallen into the static inertia of mass, of form. Incapacity and desire are then inevitable and necessary aspects of evolution. On higher levels of psychical and mental life desire is a powerful intellectual and spiritual force in the individual and group. It is, however, a transformed desire, a desire for perfection, infinitude, immortality, unity and the bliss of the Infinite.⁽¹⁾

On the purely material or atomic level of life there is limitation and a resulting desire but not yet death. As Aurobindo points out, "the atom stands apart from all others even in its union with them, rejects death and dissolution under any ordinary force and is the physical type of the separative ego defining its existence against the principle of fusion in Nature."⁽²⁾ In other words, we experience in the inorganic world a permanence of individual elements; there is a process of combination, not by dissolution of the individual into the mass but by aggregation of separate particles, - e.g., a mass of an element such as uranium or lead may under force and certain other conditions disintegrate, but not dissolve to form a new mass. The individual atoms, unless 'smashed', persist and come together in new aggregations. When life reaches its second status, that which Aurobindo calls 'vitality'⁽³⁾, the individual unit, the vital ego, is subject to dissolution, to death. That

(1) Life Divine, p.180.

(2) Ibid., p.185.

(3) Ibid., p.186.

is, its constituents are broken up so as to provide the elements for the formation of other, new individual lives. Not only our physical bodies, but life-energy, passions, mental energies both during and after death enter into the life-existence of others.⁽¹⁾ Thus, Aurobindo maintains, "interchange, intermixture and fusion of being with being, is the very process of life, a law of its existence."⁽²⁾

There are, then, these two principles of life. On the one hand there is the will or need of the separate individual to preserve its entity and distinctiveness; on the other hand is the compulsion of Nature that the individual fuse itself with others. In atomic life the first principle predominates, and the creation of separate, stable forms is possible. By the aggregation of these individual forms there are produced more or less enduring composites which are the basis for vital and mental individualizations. However, on the second level, the individual form of vitality dissolves, and its elements are returned into the aggregate. It is only with the full emergence of mind in life that the two principles are harmonized. In a sense mental consciousness bridges the gap between the dissolution of the individual form of life and the persistence and continued individual existence of the atoms of which it is composed. Although the form and state of his vital-physical nature changes rapidly to a point of decay and death, the mental being is conscious of a

(1) Life Divine, p.186.

(2) Ibid.

continuity of form in temporal sequence. In the mass he becomes aware of a past and a future extending beyond the life of his particular physical existence. As an individual he is conscious of lives prior to his own which have created his own and of these succeeding individual lives which his existence is creating out of itself. Further, he is conscious of an aggregate life of which his is one stream of continuity. All of this process of continuity is subsumed in science under the category of "heredity!" The individual mental being is for Aurobindo "the nodus of the persistent individual and the persistent aggregate life; in him their union and harmony become possible."⁽¹⁾

Mind

The emergence of mind out of life in body is the result of the pressure from the supraphysical cosmic plane of Mind and the ascent of mental consciousness from out of a refined physical life. Mind transforms the physical life in which it is manifested; it modifies the quality of the individual form of physical vitality, changing subconscious will and desire into a force of love and desire for unity of being and infinitude of existence. However, consciousness in mind is not yet master of the act and form of its own force in which it was previously involved; for it is an individual and fragmentary consciousness, unaware of the universality of its being and activities.⁽²⁾

Consciousness as a mind in a body suffers from the limitations of its physical containment just as does life. In its attempts to

(1) Life Divine, p.187.

(2) Ibid., p.192.

embrace all knowledge and possess all truth and joy and love mind is diverted and perverted by deviations, grossness and error of the vital instincts and the obstruction of the material senses and the ignorance, inertia and divisions of matter. Just as life is subject to limitation, desire and death in its individual material forms, so mind is subject to error, doubt and pain and unrest of dissatisfaction. (1)

Mind, however, would not experience the pain and dissatisfaction it does, Aurobindo suggests, if it were completely ignorant, if it did not know or at least suspect the existence of an infinite consciousness and knowledge by which it lives surrounded. (2) Already the emerging consciousness in matter is aware first of its ignorance of the world in which it is and which it must know and master in order to be happy and then of the ultimate inadequacy and barrenness of this knowledge and of the insecurity and meagreness of power and happiness which it brings. It is aware also of an infinite consciousness and knowledge and truth it must attain in order to be completely free and infinitely happy. Likewise the vital sentience emerging in Matter feels pain and dissatisfaction because it is aware of an infinite power and immortal existence of which it is part and from which it is separated. From the beginning life is driven to seek infinity and immortality, to exceed the limitations of its existence, to struggle for persistence and self-preservation. When in man life becomes fully self-conscious, the struggle and

(1) Life Divine, p.226.

(2) Ibid.

pain become intense, the discord of the world about him too keenly felt to be accepted with contentment. Man tries in his sciences to master the worlds of matter and life and even of mind in which he lives, but here in his knowledge and technology he encounters his own limitations. By his religion and his spiritual disciplines he struggles to achieve a higher plane of consciousness, to exceed the finitude of his physical existence.⁽¹⁾ It is the very nature of man that he must seek to exceed himself, to attain the eternal and the infinite. As Aurobindo declares, man "is the first son of earth who becomes vaguely aware of God within him, of his immortality or of his need of immortality, and the knowledge is a whip that drives and a cross of crucifixion until he is able to turn it into a source of infinite light and joy and power."⁽²⁾

Ascent and Integration

As we have seen, in the evolutive ascent matter purifies and modifies itself, so to speak, and passes into life, and similarly life passes into mind. However, in passing into life Matter is not destroyed, nor is life destroyed in its passage to mind; rather they are transformed and integrated. Matter is vitalized by life, and life and Matter are both transformed by mind, - life into sentience and matter into the gray substance of the brain. Life and mind do not succeed in transforming matter all together however. They are unable to make it entirely alive or totally

(1) Life Divine, p.648.

(2) Ibid., p.227.

conscious. Therefore they are, as has been indicated, limited and modified in their own action by the inertia, immobility and inconstancy of the material substance which they are obliged to use for their instrumentation. There is, then, this dual aspect of the evolutive ascent: the new principle or power of existence which evolves accepts modification by the nature and law of the basic substance but in turn modifies that substance by its own power and law. As Aurobindo points out, "the law of action, the force of action of each grade or power in its emergence is determined, not by its own free, full and pure law of nature or vim of energy, but partly by the material organisation provided for it and partly by its own status, achieved degree, accomplished fact of consciousness which it has been able to impose upon Matter. Its effectivity is in some sort made up of a balance between the actual extent of this evolutionary emergence and the countervailing extent to which the emergent power is still enveloped, penetrated, diminished by the domination and continuing grip of the inconstancy."(1)

Individualization

We have thus far considered the emergence of life out of matter and the appearance of mental consciousness in living matter from the standpoint of the total process of evolution. We must now consider the manner in which evolving life and mind are organized in individual forms.

According to Aurobindo the whole of creation is an act of

(1) Life Divine, p.629.

the divine delight of being, ananda, - the Godhead enjoying the infinite possibilities of its existence. As we have seen, in the Supermind the Godhead 'individualizes' itself through concentrations or contractions of its illimitable consciousness apprehending, supporting, enjoying the many plays of its force, the many ideas of its being. All this is motivated by ananda. The individual divine, the jivatman, is, we may say, the self of the individual play of force which it supports, governs and enjoys and which thus constitutes its self-form or nature. It is the individual self which is a centre, a stance of the universal-transcendent Self, - atman, Purushottama.

Since the *raison d'etre* of the jivatman is in a sense the one Spirit's enjoyment of multiple self-existence, this enjoyment must include not only the delight of unvarying self-existence in eternity but the delight of varying self-expression in time, - the working out of the many plays of its consciousness-force, the many possibilities of its being. It is in and through the individual self, the jivatman, that the One enjoys such varying self-expression. However, the jivatman being essentially identical with the absolute Spirit transcends the process of the universal manifestation and the changes and movements of the terrestrial evolution. It requires, so to speak, a base in the manifestation for its individual, objective self-expression. This base it provides by a 'representative projection' of itself into the evolution; this representative is what Aurobindo calls

the psyche. The sole purpose of the psyche is to provide a unique mode in the form of an empirical individual, - i.e., an evolved individual being, - of the objective self-expression of the individual divine, the non-temporal transcendent self. The entire process of evolution, then, proceeds through the activity of the psyche, the soul in nature which, as an instrument and agent of the Supreme Self, progressively creates out of the cosmic planes of Mind, Life and Matter individual forms of life and embodied mentality so as to realize in the delight of self-expression the many possibilities of conscious existence ideated in the Supermind.

In the creative descent of consciousness the psyche is projected from the jivatman at the nodus of the cosmic planes of Mind-Life and Matter as a manifestation of the principle of delight, ananda.⁽¹⁾ It enters as it were into Matter, becoming enveloped by it. Though seemingly bound by nature, it is in its essential nature free, possessing a secret knowledge and force. It struggles against the inertia and solidity of Matter to manifest out of nature the possibilities which it contains. As Aurobindo declares, evolution "is a progressive self-manifestation of the Spirit in a material universe".⁽²⁾

The first production of the psyche or soul (purusha) in the physical universe is the formation of a body out of matter; for

(1) Life Divine, pp.242f.

(2) Ibid., p.629.

it is upon the basis of the separative form that the individual soul acts to manifest life, mind and spirit. The physical body is the foundation for the soul's relations with the One and with the universal and all other individuals. The assumption of a body by the soul is what we call birth.⁽¹⁾ In terms of evolution the birth of the psyche is not at first human. That is to say, the first bodies of the psyche are elementary forms of living matter and then in the course of evolution more complex forms. The psyche goes from birth to birth, from the habitation of elementary forms of life to the complex formation of mental life in man, progressively organizing the surface individual so as to experience the possibilities of nature, prakriti, and to express itself more and more overtly as the ruler and enjoyer of nature. The psyche is thus present in a plant as well as in an animal or in a man. Although the surface individual may be bird or beast, reptile or man, the soul within the particular natural existence is not characteristically man, reptile, bird or beast.⁽²⁾

In the process of birth and rebirth the psyche not only supports the evolution of natural existences but does itself evolve. At first in the plant and animal it is 'soul-essence', so to speak, which grows into a 'soul-individual' or, as Aurobindo calls it, the 'psychic-being' in man.⁽³⁾ "It is at first an undifferentiated power of the divine consciousness containing

(1) Life Divine, pp.674f.

(2) Letters First Series, pp.131-132.

(3) Ibid., pp.135ff.

all possibilities which have not yet taken form, but to which it is the function of evolution to give form."⁽¹⁾ As it evolves, the psyche expresses these possibilities in the surface individual of which it is the inner reality. Because of the soul's growth within, the surface individuals develop increasingly complex forms of nervous sentience and consciousness. When finally the soul has sufficiently grown, - has evolved a psychic-being, - the conscious animal becomes self-conscious man with conscious will and purposive drive towards a higher status of personalization and individualization. The soul-person within man uses the outer instruments of mind-life-body for its expression and grows by their experience of the world and universe. When the psychic-being itself has grown sufficiently, then it is capable of coming forward and dominating, freely using and finally transforming the mind, life and body. Aurobindo thus characterises the psyche as "that spark of the Divine Fire that grows behind the mind, vital and physical as the psychic-being until it is able to transform the prakriti of ignorance into the prakriti of knowledge."⁽²⁾

In terms of the psyche's increasingly overt expression in the surface individual we may say that the movement of evolution is the progressive regaining by the soul in nature of its full self-awareness until it emerges as the Self, the Lord and Ruler. We say 'regaining' of its self-awareness because, although in its

(1) Letters First Series, p.136.

(2) Letters Fourth Series, p.168.

essential nature the soul is ever free, nonetheless in the descent into Matter the soul becomes completely absorbed in the force of its workings; it is characterised by self-oblivion and self-ignorance.⁽¹⁾ At the level of Matter there is a domination of prakriti and the subjection of purusha. We may say that the soul does not know itself; if anything it knows the workings of prakriti in a poise in which Matter is the chief determinant of the relationship. With the emergence of life, the soul becomes aware of life or energy as determining forms and not forms determining the conditions of life.⁽²⁾ Finally with the evolution of mind the soul knows itself as other than form or force; it is aware of itself as reflectively conscious, as pure mentality not bound to force or form but determining and inhabiting them.⁽³⁾ In mind the soul has regained, so to speak, its self-awareness. However, it has not regained its self-awareness entirely; for it is limited by its material life. It still identifies itself, though not completely, with prakriti, with a mind in a living body. In order for the psyche to achieve total self-knowledge and thus total self-possession and power within the individual the psyche must go beyond mind. That is, the soul in the individual material being has evolved increasingly complex forms of nervous life and conscious mentality in order to regain self-awareness, - i.e. knowledge of its divine reality, -

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, pp.513f.

(2) Ibid., p.515.

(3) Ibid., p.518.

and thereby to grow and express itself in the individual. At the present stage of evolution the individual soul is a soul in mind, which at the present the highest clearly evolved state of conscious existence. It is dependent upon the rational mind for its spiritual knowledge and thus its growth and surface expression. Were the goal of soul-growth merely liberation from embodied existence, a sort of spiritual realization of and union with the Godhead, then a highly purified mind would be an adequate instrument for the soul. The soul in mind could achieve and, indeed, does achieve such release and union, as is evidenced by all the 'realized' individuals the world has had and as proclaimed by the teachings of religions and spiritual philosophies. For Aurobindo, however, the goal of the soul's journey in material existence is not just liberation but an integral self-knowledge, - i.e., supramental knowledge of divine existence, of Truth, - and thus a complete growth as a soul-personality and total expression here and now in the physical life of the individual. Mind alone, even the most purified mind, cannot serve the soul in achieving such knowledge and expression; for the mind is at best capable of a partial knowledge. As Aurobindo declares, "mind cannot possess the Infinite".⁽¹⁾ The soul needs a greater mind than the rational intellect. It must strive to evolve in the individual vaster grades of consciousness until it can finally in and through the individual acquire a full knowledge and thus full possession of the Godhead which is its

(1) Life Divine, p.151.

divine reality. As Aurobindo points out, "in proportion as the soul assumes its divine or spiritual being, it assumes also control of the movements of its nature."⁽¹⁾ As it gains in knowledge and power, the soul is able to reorganize the surface being of the individual, - his mind, life, body, - so as to express ever more fully its divine nature.

Soul Growth and the Gunas

Concomitant with the 'awakening' of the soul from the inconscience of Matter to the self-awareness of mind is the action of the three gunas, the three modes or attributes of nature, - *apara prakriti*, the lower nature of matter-life-mind.

The theory of the three gunas is, of course, central to the Sankhya and Yoga Philosophies.⁽²⁾ Aurobindo, however, giving

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p. 491.

(2) Sankhya Sutras of Pancasekha and other Ancient Sages, trans. and ed. by H. Aranya, S. Ghosh, Calcutta, 1934, Sutra X; Sankhyakārikā of Isvara Kṛṣṇa, trans. and ed. by S.S.S.Sastri, University of Madras, 1948, Karika XI-KIV, XXIII, XXV; Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, trans. by R. Prasada, Sacred Books of the Hindus, Vol. IV, Panini Office, Allahabad, 1912, Sutras I:16, II:15, II:19, IV:13, IV:32, IV:34. For excellent exposition and philosophical interpretation see R. Garbe, Die Sankhya-Philosophie, eine Darstellung des indischen Rationalismus, Leipzig, 1894, pp.209-220. See also S.N. Dasgupta, Yoga Philosophy, University of Calcutta, 1930, p.70. Dasgupta points out that none of the extant texts of Sankhya indicate the "inner reason" for the guna theory. The gunas refer to psychical modes or "feeling states". Sankhya, Dasgupta suggests, "took its inspiration from experience", - i.e., from the inner experience of external realities. Therefore, "in determining the relation between experience and reality, the Sankhya was probably inwardly guided by the same sort of axiom as the Buddhists, namely, that each diversity of experience or sensation presumes the existence of a corresponding diversity of realities or reals."(pp.76-77). These corresponding "reals" or gunas which constituted the external world were regarded by the

Continuation of Footnote No. 2 on p.198.

Sankhya metaphysicians as three primary feelings since "the cognition of all external objects is associated with some kind of feeling or other; this, they thought, could not be accounted for except on the theory that the external objects were also but the modifications of some primary feelings." (pp.84-85).

the theory a different emphasis of interpretation, has taken it over into his own thought. (1)

In the Sankhya-Yoga scheme the gunas are regarded as sort of ultimate substances (dravya) (2); for Aurobindo they are more especially qualitative powers of nature which have both a physical and a psychological side. Indeed Aurobindo declares that the gunas mean specifically the modes or qualities of nature. (3) In any spiritual conception of the universe, such as his, they must be regarded as qualitative rather than as quantitative modes "because the connecting medium between spirit and matter must be psyche or soul-power and the primary action psychological and qualitative". (4)

In the Sankhya philosophy these modes or qualities of nature are termed tamas, rajas and sattwa and are translated simply as 'mass', 'energy' and 'intelligence-stuff' or 'illumination', respectively. (5) Aurobindo, however, as we have stated, regards the gunas more as powers of nature with both psychological and physical aspects. In terms of the external action of force sattwa, rajas and tamas are respectively the powers of equilibrium, kinesis and inertia. (6) On the psychological side is the power of inconscience, obscurity, incapacity and inaction; rajas is the power of struggle and

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, pp.780ff.

(2) Dasgupta, op.cit., p.105.

(3) Essays on the Gita, p.380.

(4) Ibid., p.380.

(5) Dasgupta, op.cit., p.76.

(6) Essays on the Gita, p.281.

effort, passion and action; sattwa is the power of good, harmonising knowledge, happiness and light.⁽¹⁾ These three powers or qualities are inseparable and concomitant; they are present in each thing and every existence in the lower prakriti. The very process and dynamic form of nature is but the product of the interaction of these three powers.⁽²⁾

Although all three gunas are present at once, each plane of the lower prakriti has a predominant quality.⁽³⁾ In matter tamas, the principle or power of inertia and inconscience dominates, and here the soul, being absorbed in matter, in form, seems affected by tamas. In life rajas, the principle of energy and desire and struggle, dominates, and the soul here is affected by kinesis and a struggle out of inconscience towards harmonising knowledge. In mind, the principle of harmony and equilibrium, sattwa, dominates, and the soul here possesses knowledge and light. At one end of nature, therefore, is tamas, the power of inertia and ignorance in prakriti which obscures the knowledge and self-awareness of the soul; at the other end is sattwa, the power of harmony and equilibrium and light of knowledge in prakriti which enables the soul to see its essential nature more fully, though not entirely.

Thus, in each formulation of prakriti, - mind, life, body, - all three gunas are present but in an imbalance, such that on

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.267.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid., pp.782f.

the material plane tamas or inertia dominates, on the life plane rajas or energy dominates and on the mind plane sattwa or harmony dominates. Since the gunas are inextricably intertwined, matter is not devoid of an energy which is subconscient; life is not free from the death and decay imposing limitations of inertia nor devoid of the harmonising force of enlightenment; mind is crippled in its knowledge and enlightenment because of a sluggish inaction and a disconcerting force of passion and desire. (1)

In the human individual, as Aurobindo points out, what we call personality, the psychological nature of a man, is greatly a matter of the dominance of one or another of the gunas, determining on which plane of his being a man predominantly lives, - i.e., with which formulation of prakriti the purusha or soul within identifies and by which quality it is particularly affected. (2) No man, however, is cast in the mould of only one guna to the exclusion of the other two. (3) In every man, - in his mental character, reason, will and emotional being, - there is tamas which brings in ignorance, incapacity, a clinging to habitual motions and mechanical ideas, cowardice, baseness, sloth, insensibility, indifference, etc.. There is rajas which, without a sufficient element of sattwa present, brings in egoism, self-will, violence, prejudice, error,

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, pp.269f.

(2) Ibid., p.782.

(3) Ibid., p.784.

opinionation, pride, lust, greed, cruelty, etc.. There is sattwa which is the source of reason and balance, of disinterested truth-seeking, self-control, calm, love, sympathy, refinement, aesthetic and ethical sensitivities, etc.. The man in whom tamas dominates the total being is of the coarse, dull and ignorant type of human nature. A dominance of rajas produces a restless, kinetic man driven by passion, action and desire, such as the warrior or forceful man of action. The man in whom sattwa is dominant is one attached to the pursuit of truth, beauty and goodness, such as the philosopher, saint and sage. However, Aurobindo asserts, "these qualities are not constant in any man in the quantitative action of their force or in the combination of their elements; for they are variable and in a continual state of mutual impact, displacement and interaction".⁽¹⁾ Thus, "the wise are not always or wholly wise the intelligent are intelligent only in patches; the saint suppresses in himself many unsaintly movements and the evil are not entirely evil: the dullest has his unexpressed or unused and undeveloped capacities, the most timorous his movements or his way of courage, the helpless and the weakling a latent part of strength in his nature".⁽²⁾

For the soul in the body, the purusha in the lower prakriti, these three qualities or modes of nature are a cord of bondage, keeping it from complete self-awareness, total knowledge of its

(1) Essays on the Gita, p.384.

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, p.270.

essential nature as the one Spirit which is many. As the Gita declares, "The three gunas born of prakriti bind in the body the imperishable dweller in the body".⁽¹⁾ To be free, to be liberated from the lower nature and to live in the higher nature of Sachchidananda, to gain full self-awareness and full control of the lower nature, the purusha must rise above mind to the Supermind where the gunas have no effect.⁽²⁾

Evolution and Teleology.

It is abundantly clear that in Aurobindo's view of terrestrial existence the appearance of man is not the final end of the process of evolution. Man himself is but a "transitional being", standing at the turning point of the whole movement.⁽³⁾ There is something, some level of conscious existence beyond man, - or at least beyond man as he is now constituted. There is a greater and as yet unachieved goal towards which the evolutive process is moving. That goal is the full manifestation in time and space of the eternal and infinite Spirit which is the motivating force, substance and inner reality of the process. Such manifestation, according to Aurobindo, will be achieved in the appearance of a supramental race of beings.

Aurobindo appreciates that there are scientific, historical and metaphysical objections to the idea there is a teleological factor in evolution. In the first place it is possible even to

(1) Gita 14:5.

(2) Essays on Gita, p.381.

(3) Life Divine, p.630.

challenge the validity of the theory of evolution as an explanation of the process of terrestrial existence. Granting, however, that evolution is a true explanation, there is nothing from an exterior view to warrant the belief that man will develop into a higher being than what he is now. Even if one admits the actuality of a spiritual evolution and consents to the idea that an inner consciousness-force has manifested life after manifesting matter and mind after life, there is nothing to indicate that it will manifest something beyond mind, - a Supermind, a supramental being. Besides mind and Supermind belong to two different orders or hemispheres of being. Man as mind is the summit of the world which is a world of ignorance, of division and evil. If there is to be a perfection of man, it will have to be in another world, in a heaven of the Spirit. To seek the Spirit upon the earth, to seek a divine purpose and culmination of this seemingly chaotic process of nature and history is vanity and delusion. The world is a vale of tears. Only in a rejection of the world and the flesh can the soul achieve its beatification.

Such, says Aurobindo, are the teachings of the pessimist theory of the world which has filled the religions and philosophies of men.⁽¹⁾ There is universally present in religion that sort of 'spirituality' which degenerates into pessimism, teaching that the spirit is aloof and can be had

(1) Life Divine, pp.228ff; Human Cycle, pp.198ff.

only through a denial of the physical. Such religion cannot be a guide for life; it has no positive message either for human society or the individual since it kills social and individual effort, hope and aspiration for perfection in all aspects of earthly existence. Such spirituality of the 'other-world' sort takes the form of a religion of sorrow and suffering and austere mortification and leads to a sterile dichotomy of heaven and earth, spirit and flesh. Moreover, any sort of pessimism, whether religious or not, "becomes a force for the discouragement of life and cannot, therefore, be a true law and guide for life. All pessimism is to that extent a denial of the Spirit, of its fullness and power, an impatience with the ways of God in the world, an insufficient faith in the divine Wisdom and Will."(1)

However, apart from such gross pessimism and world-rejecting spirituality, it may still be objected that if a supramental being is to appear on earth, it certainly is not out of man that it will develop. If it were, then there would be some race or kind of human being that already has the material of the superman in it, just as the particular kind of animal which developed into the human being had within it the seeds and elements of human nature. There does not appear to be such a race. It would seem, instead, that man has reached the fullness of his evolution in mind; there is no sign of the

(1) Human Cycle, p.199.

supermind or superman. Just as no other animal type shows any signs of evolution beyond itself, so also man appears to have reached his full development. Indeed, it might even be said that "the idea of human progress itself is very probably an illusion, for there is no sign that man, once emerged from the animal stage, has radically progressed during his race history; at most he has advanced in knowledge of the physical world, in Science, in the handling of his surroundings, in his purely external and utilitarian use of the secret laws of nature".⁽¹⁾ Otherwise he appears to be what he always has been; he makes the same errors, manifests the same capacities and talents, achievements and frustrations. Progress, if any, has been in a circle, at best in a widening circle. Man today can hardly be said to be any wiser than the ancient thinkers or more spiritual than the ancient saints, more superior in arts and crafts than the ancient artisans and artists.

Indeed, - it may be objected, - rather than an ascent towards superhumanity, there has actually been a decline in the race. What we uncritically call our 'civilization' may be, to use Aurobindo's own characterization, a refined sort of barbarism.⁽²⁾ Science, intellectuality, education have lifted the race from the ignorance and physical preoccupations of the old barbarism but have deposited it in another kind of barbarism, - economic barbarism. Just as the ancient physical barbarism was solely

(1) Life Divine, p.741.

(2) See Human Cycle, Ch.VIII.

concerned with the body, its physical force and prowess, so the modern economic or vitalistic barbarism is almost exclusively concerned with the satisfaction of wants and desires and the accumulation of possessions. The ideal man today, Aurobindo points out, is not the cultured or noble or moral or religious or thoughtful man, but the "successful" man. "To the natural unredeemed economic man beauty is a thing otiose or a nuisance, art and poetry a frivolity or an ostentation and a means of advertisement. His idea of civilisation is comfort, his idea of morals social respectability, his idea of politics the encouragement of industry, the opening of markets, exploitation and trade following the flag, his idea of religion at best a pietistic formalism or the satisfaction of certain vitalistic emotions".⁽¹⁾

This may be the shape of modern economic civilisation, but what of human culture, - "the pursuit of the mental life for its own sake"?⁽²⁾ Doesn't the life of reason, of intelligence, the quest for truth, beauty and goodness increasingly characterise human society today? Isn't there the truly cultured man, as well as the partially and conventionally civilised man, the Philistine? It may be conceded that there are such cultured men, but they do not dominate human society. Our contemporary society is instead characterised by the life of the "sensational man who has got awakened to the necessity

(1) See Human Cycle, p.87.

(2) Ibid., p.91.

at least of some intelligent use of the higher faculties and is trying to be mentally active".⁽¹⁾ He is open to new ideas, reads poetry, thinks about ethical problems and problems of religion and society. The theatre, cinema and radio exist for him, as do poetry and art, newspapers and books. Commercialism, however, is the heart of our modern society. Education has not transformed sensational man; he still lives in a vital substratum and wants to be stimulated from above. As Aurobindo puts it, "he requires an army of writers to keep him mentally occupied and provide some sort of intellectual pabulum for him; he has a thirst for general information of all kinds which he does not care or has not time to coordinate or assimilate, for popularised scientific knowledge, for such new ideas as he can catch, provided they are put before him with force and brilliance, for mental sensations and excitation of many kinds, for ideals which he likes to think of as actuating his conduct and which do give it sometimes a certain colour . . . And the cultured, the intelligentsia find that they can get a hearing from him such as they never had from the pure Philistine, provided they can first stimulate or amuse him; their ideas have now a chance of getting executed such as they never had before. The result has been to cheapen thought and art and literature, to make talent and even genius run in the grooves of popular success, to put the writer and thinker and scientist very much in a

(1) Human Cycle, p.97.

position like that of the cultured Greek slave in a Roman household where he has to work for, please, amuse and instruct his master while keeping a careful eye on his tastes and preferences and repeating trickily the manner and the points that have caught his fancy".⁽¹⁾ If this be the true and final picture of human civilisation and culture, then there would seem to be no signs of a supramental race. Man must be the end of evolution, if there be such a process. The spiritual end of man envisaged by the pessimist theories of religion must be true, - the rejection of terrestrial existence and the escape into some heaven or Nirvana.

For Aurobindo this is, of course, not the final picture. To accept as total and final such a view of the historical-social evolution of man is to ignore the cosmic view of the process of human history. Indeed, the scientific, historical-social and metaphysical objections to a teleological factor in human and world evolution, though based in part on valid propositions, all present an incomplete and inconclusive view of human existence.

The scientific or materialist objection to teleology is based on the assumption that evolution is the work entirely of an inconscient energy. This, says Aurobindo, cannot hold, for there is too clearly present "an urge of inherent necessity producing the evolution of forms and in the forms a developing

(1) Human Cycle, pp. 98-99.

consciousness".⁽¹⁾ This urge may very well be regarded as the evolutionary will of conscious being progressively manifesting itself. "This is a teleological element and it is not irrational to admit it: for the conscious or even the inconscient nîsus arises from a truth of conscious being that has become dynamic and set out to fulfil itself in an automatic process of material nature; the teleology, the element of purpose in the nîsus is the translation of self-operative truth of Being into terms of self-effective will-power of that Being, and, if consciousness is there, such a will-power must also be there and the translation is normal and inevitable".⁽²⁾ The fundamental fact of evolution, then, is the self-fulfilling of the truth of Being by its own will and purpose.

As for the second objection, that which we have called the historical-social objection, - viz., that the human race as it is socially constituted in patterns of civilisation and culture does not reveal any movement towards a radically new or supramental nature, - this objection like the scientific suffers from an incompleteness of perspective and inconclusiveness of judgment. Aurobindo would say that we must look at the 'within' of human history, and in so doing we will see that there has been and is now a slow, but inevitable evolution of the human race in its social constitution. We can see, for example, that

(1) Life Divine, p.742.

(2) Ibid., p.743.

human society follows a sort of psychological cycle from what may be called a symbolic age to a typical age, then to a conventional, an individual and finally a subjective age.⁽¹⁾ The symbolic age of social evolution is one in which religious and spiritual ideas and ideals predominate, other elements of societal living such as the psychological, ethical, economic, are ordered and seen in terms of the spiritual. In the typical age psychological and ethical ideas and ideals predominate and all else, including the religious and spiritual, is ordered and expressed by the psychological and ethical. Here religion becomes a mystical sanction for the ethical-social ideal. The typical age passes into the conventional when the outward expressions of the ideals become more important than the ideals, when form is more emphasised than spirit. The form prevails and the spirit recedes and diminishes. The progression of these three stages or ages can be seen, Aurobindo asserts, in the caste system in India.⁽²⁾ First, in the symbolic age, chaturvarna, - the fourfold order of society, - reflected a spiritual order of men. Then in the typical age there developed a firm social order of castes based primarily upon temperament and psychic type. Finally, in the conventional age, this order

(1) Aurobindo acknowledges his indebtedness to Lamprecht for this classification of the psychological development of society, which, however, he interprets in his own distinctive fashion. Human Cycle, pp.4f.

(2) Human Cycle, pp.7-11.

became rigid and formalised; the inner meaning was replaced by an economic structure and purely social convention. The conventional age leads to the age of individualism, a revolt of reason and moral sense against the sterility and meaninglessness of the conventional institutions. Thus in Europe there were the Enlightenment and the Reformation, the growth of democracy, the triumph of Reason over ecclesiastical control and superstition, the emergence of physical science as a general standard of truth and the broad basis of social order. This rationalistic age of the individual is now drawing to an end, says Aurobindo, and we are entering upon the subjective age with a growing emphasis upon intuitional knowledge, deeper self-awareness, 'depth-psychology', a general aspiration towards self-consciousness and self-realisation. This is surely reflected in 'existential' philosophies and in 'modern art', - music, painting, literature. What this all means according to Aurobindo is that men and nations are discovering their souls; they are discovering, though they may not immediately recognise the fact, that "man is inwardly a soul and conscious power of the Divine. ⁽¹⁾ Man is discovering that he is more than a surface ego and that he is not only himself but one with all. He is surpassing his former rationalism and individualism, both singly and corporately. There are emerging strong forces of human universalism and unity which seek to overcome the old ideal of national separatism, as well as the

(1) Human Cycle, p.35.

ideal of an egoistic individual freedom and separate self-fulfilment. The age of subjectivism is an age of self-consciousness and self-realisation, a search for the Self. The goal of subjectivism is the discovery and full emergence in the individual and society of the true Self and the spiritual transformation of human existence.

The entire movement of social history is, then, the progressive manifestation of the soul in nature, both as individual soul and as the collective soul of society. History, like individual and racial evolution is for Aurobindo the activity of the soul in its acquisition of integral knowledge, - knowledge of the Godhead, of Truth, - and thus its growth and progressive expression in corporate life. The entry of human society into a subjective age points to the growth of the soul within men and its surpassing of the rational intellect as its instrument of spiritual knowledge. It is evolving in a sufficient number of individuals, so to speak, an intuitional awareness of reality so as to affect the total life and complexion of society. As greatly more individuals achieve this intuitional awareness as their normal consciousness, then human society will have full entered the subjective age, an age characterised by knowledge of the Truth of things, - though not yet total knowledge, - rather than by the ignorance and groping of the rational mind. The final age towards which society is moving is the spiritual age in which the soul will have grown so completely in knowledge and power so as to have taken control of

individual and corporate existence and thereby to have effected a total transformation of the individual and society by a descent and an inhabitation of the divine Spirit.

Thus, both physical or natural evolution and social or racial evolution point to a goal, a final purpose in the structure of terrestrial existence. The evidence cannot be easily dismissed. There remains, however, the metaphysical objection which for Aurobindo is the most serious.⁽¹⁾ This objection can be put in the following manner: "There is no teleological purpose in creation and there cannot be, for all is there in the Infinite: the Divine has nothing that he needs to gain or that he has not; if there is creation and manifestation, it is for the delight of creation, of manifestation, not for any purpose."⁽²⁾ Aurobindo, of course, accepts the proposition that ananda, delight, is the sole ultimate motivation for the manifestation of the universe. If the universe were originally an integral totality, then it could be argued that there is no purpose; for the universe would simply be, as a finished product of ananda with nothing to be gained or to be added to its fullness. The universe is not, however, such an integral totality or finished product. The manifestation of the powers of existence until the fullness of Being is manifest in the material universe in terms of a spiritual creation may be regarded as the teleology of evolution. In

(1) Life Divine, p.743.

(2) Ibid., p.737.

other words, the perfect and full manifestation in the material world of all the possibilities inherent in the total creative movement of the Spirit is the goal and purpose of evolution. As Aurobindo points out, "this teleology does not bring in any factor that does not belong to the totality; it proposes only the realisation of the totality in the part".(1)

There is, then, a purpose and a goal to the evolutionary process, - one greater than the formation of mental consciousness in a living body. In Aurobindo's view of terrestrial existence there has to be; for all the powers and principles of the supreme conscious existence, Sachchidananda, have been involved in the material universā and they must evolve out of it. The urge towards spirituality which man feels is but the driving of the Spirit within him to manifest itself. The whole of material, racial, social and individual history is the progressive manifestation of that Spirit concealed in conditions of time, space and form. The secret movement of evolution is the awakening of consciousness out of the inconscience of matter, the subconsciousness of vitality, the partial self-consciousness of mind to the full self-possession of Spirit, - the animal becoming man and man becoming superman. Aurobindo agrees in a sense with Nietzsche's idea that the real business of man is to become himself, to exceed himself, to develop out of his

(1) Life Divine, p.743.

present unsatisfactory manhood a supermanhood.⁽¹⁾ But for Aurobindo the Supermanhood to which man is evolving is something divine, something spiritual which, when realised, will mean total transformation from ignorance to Truth, from limitation to freedom, from death to immortality. In short, supermanhood means for Aurobindo 'divinization', not just of the soul or mind but of the life and the material being of man as well; it means a fulfilment not only of the individual, but of the collective human life. Man as he is now is, we have said, but a transitional being. "Either man must fulfil himself by satisfying the Divine within him or he must produce out of himself a new and greater being who will be more capable of satisfying it. He must either himself become a divine humanity or give place to Superman."⁽²⁾

Man, then, does already have within himself the seeds of his supermanhood. Evolution, we have seen, is the progressive self-manifestation of the Spirit in the material universe. This evolution is pre-determined in its course by the Real-Idea which indwells all existence as the creative Truth-consciousness, the Supermind. Man as a product of evolution has in his now imperfect nature the form of perfection to which he will, he must grow. His task is thus quite simply to be or become himself, his true self within, and to exceed by transformation

(1) Life Divine, p.610; Human Cycle, p.260.

(2) Life Divine, p.193.

his outer self of mind, life and body. Such transformation of the individual and of society is the way to the final goal of a divine life upon earth. As Aurobindo forcefully declares, "the ascent to the divine life is the human journey, the Work of works, the acceptable Sacrifice. This alone is man's real business in the world and the justification of his existence, without which he would be only an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects on a speck of surface mud and water which has managed to form itself amid the appalling immensities of the physical universe".⁽¹⁾

We must next turn our attention to the nature of the individual who is the subject of spiritual transformation and the inheritor of divine life.

(1) Life Divine, pp.42-43.

CHAPTER V.

The Nature of the Individual.

"Men", says Aurobindo, "do not know themselves and have not learned to distinguish the different parts of their being".⁽¹⁾ Very often man is regarded merely as a mind in a body which enjoys and suffers and otherwise experiences the world. By religion and spiritual philosophies he is also regarded as possessing a "soul" or spiritual selfhood of some sort. The individual human being, however, is not usually considered, nor does he so considers himself, in terms of his spiritual nature, whatever it may be, but as a unique and separate mental being with a peculiar temperament, personality, body, intellectual and emotional nature, - as a separate and distinct "I" or ego, free in decision and free in action. For Aurobindo this is a totally incomplete and inadequate characterisation of the individual, - a mind in a life in a body. Even to say that man possesses a soul is not enough nor even really correct. For man does not possess a soul: he is a soul, - a soul in a living, thinking body. What the individual ordinarily regards as his self is actually but one part and a really small part of his total being. Indeed, this self, - the self of mind, life and body, - is only the surface self. There is behind and beneath the surface a vaster subliminal or inner self, and above the

(1) Lights on Yoga, p.15.

evolution there is the true ontological nature of the individual self.

The Surface Self.

As surface selves we are a life-force acting and a mental consciousness sensing and thinking in a body. Of this surface self there are, we may say, broadly three interrelated aspects: a physical nature, a vital nature and a mental nature.

The physical nature comprises three levels.⁽¹⁾ Firstly, there is the body with its own consciousness from which and by which it acts without any mental will and even against the mental will, - a consciousness about which the surface mind knows very little. Next there is the physical-vital which is, as Aurobindo characterises it, "the vehicle of the nervous responses of our physical nature; it is the field and instrument of the smaller sensations, desires, reactions of all kinds to the impacts of the outer physical and gross material life".⁽²⁾ It is, in other words, the nervous part of the physical nature, the centre of habitual physical reactions, desires and greeds.⁽³⁾

The third level of the physical nature is the physical mind. It is actually that part of the mind which is connected with the physical and nervous organism through the brain and is concerned with the gross objects of sense.⁽⁴⁾ It is the most "materialised" part of the mind and in a sense may be regarded as the first formulation of the basic mental consciousness, chitta, in the body. The physical mind relies upon the physical

(1) Letters, 1st Series, pp.163ff.

(2) Ibid., pp.164-165.

(3) Letters, 4th Series, p.241.

(4) Ibid., p.236.

brain, the physical sense mind and sense organs. As the lowest subplane of our intelligence it functions in terms of matter and the material world, the body and bodily life and sense experience.

The individual who lives in this physical mind, - and, according to Aurobindo, this is the mental level on which we normally live,⁽¹⁾ - such an individual is one "who attaches most importance to objective things and to his outer life, has little intensity of the subjective or inner existence and subordinates whatever he has of it to the greater claims of exterior reality".⁽²⁾ This is the "physical man". In his mentality he is sceptical of supraphysical things and possesses a contempt for all that is abstract, imaginary and non-material. The physical mind is attached to the solidity of material things and thus embraces the traditional, the conventional and the habitual. It doubts everything that is not long established in form or immediately apprehensible by the physical senses. The actual objective and physical are alone accepted as "fact"; whatever is not actual, objective and physical is regarded as unreal or unrealised and unacceptable as fact until realised in a physical and objective. Such, says Aurobindo, is the mentality of physical science, though vastly extended; for "it has the same standard of reality, the objective, the physical actuality; its test of the real is possibility of verification by positive reason and objective evidence".⁽³⁾

(1) Life Divine, p.639.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid., p.372.

The vital nature of the surface self has four levels: lower, central, emotional and mental.⁽¹⁾ The lower vital is that part of the vital nature occupied with the feelings and desires which fill the greater part of daily life, e.g. food, desire, sexual desire, vanity, vital likes and dislikes, lust, envy and so forth. This lower vital part reaches down into the vital-physical or the nervous being which is very closely connected with the physical-vital.⁽²⁾ The central vital level is the area of stronger vital reactions and longings, e.g. ambition, pride, fear, desires and passions of various kinds. The emotional part is the seat of even stronger feelings, such as love and hatred, joy and sorrow. The vital mind is a mediator between the emotional vital and the mind proper.⁽³⁾ It is that part of the mind which puts into mental form and expression desires, feelings, emotions and ambitions. It is the creator of, for example, pure imaginations or dreams of greatness and happiness and fulfilment. In actuality the vital mind is an instrument of desire. Unlike the physical mind it is not satisfied with the actual but seeks always to extend the limits of experience for the satisfaction of desire, for enjoyment, for self-affirmation and aggrandisement. It possesses a passion for novelty and is, as Aurobindo characterises it, "a dealer in possibilities".⁽⁴⁾ Being unsatisfied with the physical and objective only, it seeks the subjective, the imaginative and a purely emotional satisfaction and pleasure. As Aurobindo

(1) Letters, 1st Series, pp.156f.

(2) Letters, 4th Series, p.241.

(3) More Lights on Yoga, p.24.

(4) Life Divine, pp.372-73.

points out, if there were not this mind in the individual and if there were only the first formulation of mental consciousness as a physical mind, then man would live virtually as an animal, seeking and desiring nothing beyond the purely material. (1) The individual who lives predominantly in the mentality is the "vital man", (2) - the kinetic individual, the man of force and action, of passion and emotion. This point of mind or plane of intelligence, - the vital mind, - is what we may call rajasic, just as the intelligence of the physical mind, attached as it is to the physical plane, is tamasic and that of mind proper, - pure thought and intelligence, - is sattvic. (3)

The mind nature of the surface individual may be considered in terms of the ancient Indian psychology as comprising four aspects which taken together are called antahkarana or the "inner instrument". These four aspects are chitta or the basic mental consciousness, manas or the sense mind, buddhi or the intelligence and ahankāra or the ego-sense. (4) Whereas the physical and vital natures taken together constitute the "gross

(1) Life Divine, p.373.

(2) Ibid., p.640.

(3) Ibid., pp.551f.

(4) Synthesis of Yoga, pp.739f. Whereas for Aurobindo chitta means basic consciousness, in the Samkhya psychology, - whose language and general scheme Aurobindo is here following, - chitta means the total antahkarana and not any specific part of it. (See Sāṃkhya Kārikā III, XXII; Sāṃkhya-Pravacana Sūtra I.61). In classical Yoga philosophy chitta is synonymous with the buddhi or mahat (Great Principle or intellect) of Samkhya (See Yoga Sūtra. Sutra 1, Vachaspati's gloss. Also Sutra 2: Yogaḥ chitta vṛitti nirodah.)

body" or "outer instrument", the antahkarana or "inner instrument", the conscious mentality, constitutes the "subtle body" of the individual, according to traditional psychology. (1)

Chitta is that universal, primal consciousness which evolves from the material inconscience and develops various grades of nervous sensation and conscious mentality from plant to animal and finally man. As it evolves, it accumulates, stores all manner of impressions, impacts, sensations, instincts, impulses. In man chitta is largely subconscious or subliminal to his waking consciousness, passively receiving and retaining the impacts of which mind is not aware or to which it is not attentive, storing these impacts in a vast reserve of passive subconscious memory upon which the mind as active memory can draw. At the same time the chitta mechanically and unpredictably sends these impacts and impressions into the surface consciousness. There they appear as mental fantasies or dreams. Also in response to the world's impacts from outside it throws up habitual reactions. Human emotions, for example, are, according to Aurobindo, waves of reaction and habitual response rising up from the partly conscient, partly subconscious chitta. (1)

All action of the mind or inner instrument, however, arises out of the chitta. It develops first in the animal and then more fully in man a sense-mind, manas. Manas is the activity

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.741.

of the chitta which makes up the totality of what we call sense. The senses of sight, sound, hearing, taste, touch are for Aurobindo properties of the mind and not of the body.⁽¹⁾ As he states, "sense is in fact the mental contact of the embodied consciousness with its surroundings".⁽²⁾ However, in our ordinary consciousness the sense-mind, manas, depends upon the physical organs and the nervous system for its knowledge and action. There is also an inner or subliminal manas which is not dependent upon the physical organs but has a direct contact with its object and with other minds. This direct contact, the receiving of sense impressions independently of the physical organs, is what we call the "sixth sense" and is more distinct in the lower creation since in man the physical senses and a higher intelligence are more dominant. In most individuals the activity of this inner manas remains unused or undeveloped. Occasionally it emerges to the surface in abnormal states such as clairvoyance, telepathy, etc.⁽³⁾ The ordinary human mind is a sense mind of the external sort, conditioned by the stored-up memories and habitual responses of the chitta and misled by the data of the sense. It is what may be called a sensational thought-mind in what it is a mentality almost entirely dependent upon the data of the senses than on the reason.⁽⁴⁾ This sensational thought-mind is in actuality "a first resulting

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.743.

(2) Ibid., p.758.

(3) Ibid., pp.743-744.

(4) Ibid., pp.758-

thought-element which accompanies the operations of animal life.⁽¹⁾ It is a power of mental consciousness developed out of the sense-mind which takes the sense data and turns them into perceptions and first ideas and which relates experiences and feels, thinks and wills on a sense basis. The sensational thought-mind is, according to Aurobindo, "common to all developed animal life and mentality".⁽²⁾

There is in man, however, a reason and will no longer involved in the sense-mind; this is the buddhi. As Aurobindo points out the "buddhi is a construction of conscious being which quite exceeds its beginnings in the basic chitta; it is the intelligence with its power of knowledge and will. It is in its nature thought-power and will-power of the Spirit turned into the lower form of a mental activity".⁽³⁾ The buddhi may be considered as the "thinking mind".⁽⁴⁾ Aurobindo distinguishes three gradations of the action of buddhi. First there is the understanding. The understanding is distinguishable from the sense-mind by a somewhat more developed thought process. Otherwise it does not really go beyond the data of the sense-mind, the emotions and the memories and responses of the subconscious mentality, the chitta. It confines its action to receiving, recording, interpreting and responding to the communications of the lower mentality. Beyond this elemental understanding is the reason. The reason, according to Aurobindo, "has for its action and aim an attempt to arrive at

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.758.

(2) Ibid., p.759.

(3) Ibid., p.749.

(4) Letters. 1st Series. p.161.

a plausible, sufficient, settled ordering of knowledge and will for the use of an intellectual conception of life".⁽¹⁾ The reason goes beyond the understanding in its process of selection, analysis and synthesis of the various responses and reactions of the mental, emotional and sensational faculties. As Aurobindo points out, "it is this reason which gives to our normal intellectual being our set aesthetic and ethical standards, our structures of opinions and our established norms of idea and purpose".⁽²⁾ Although it is more purely intellectual than the understanding and takes the primacy in all men possessing a developed understanding, it is nonetheless really pragmatic in its intention. It seeks to organise the inner and outer life of the individual in some intellectual structure and according to some rule so as to use it for the purposes of its rational will. Finally there is that highest part of the buddhi which is concerned with a disinterested pursuit of pure truth and right knowledge. This is the intelligence proper. It is able to transcend the vital desires and emotions, and reliance upon the senses much more than are the reason and understanding and to seek infinity, immortality and pure freedom. However, most individuals are unable to use this intelligence with any purity, and very often it becomes lost in its abstractions and ensnared in its own ideas and speculations. Nonetheless the developed intelligence, - and

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, pp.744ff.

(2) Ibid., p.745.

the entire buddhi as the mind of pure thought and intelligence, represents the summit of the individual's sattvic nature. The powers of intelligence and will of the buddhi are drawn from the Supermind, and, as Aurobindo points out, it is an intermediary between the Supermind and the physical life of the human mind evolved in body.⁽¹⁾

The purpose of the buddhi, so to speak, is to enable man to exceed the limitations of the sense-mind and sensational thought-mind and to control this lower mind, to raise its action into a higher plane of will and intelligence. However, the buddhi as it functions at the present level of human evolution is affected by a mixed and impure action. Even at its highest stage of functioning in the intelligence the buddhi is hampered by the lower mentality. But there is what Aurobindo calls the "higher buddhi" which is not so affected.⁽²⁾ This higher buddhi is really an intuitive mind which unlike the lower buddhi or intellect does not imperfectly seek truth and knowledge but already possesses it. As Aurobindo states, the higher buddhi "is not intelligence but vision, is not understanding but rather an over-standing in knowledge".⁽³⁾ This higher buddhi or intuitive mind receives pure forms of Truth from the cosmic plane of intuition above mind. However, the action of intuition in us is both imperfect and intermittent. It is not

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.745.

(2) Ibid., pp.354f.

(3) Ibid.

our normal mode of consciousness. Instead, we receive intuitions and inspirations from this supramental faculty in response to the thought and aspiration of a struggling intellect and heart. As a result the action of the intuition is not pure but affected by the needs of the heart and intellect. The intuitions we receive are seized by the lower buddhi of intellect and broken up by the understanding so as to fit in with our intellectual knowledge or by our heart so as to suit our emotional longings and preferences. (1)

It must be stressed that by intuition and intuitive mind, - that higher form of the buddhi which is the receptive channel of intuition in us, - Aurobindo does not mean what is ordinarily understood as intuition and intuitional reason. He explicitly points out that the true and authentic intuition which is a supramental faculty must be distinguished from "that power of involved reasoning that reaches its conclusion by a bound and does not need the ordinary steps of the logical mind". (2) This power of ordinary mental reason is one by which mind is able to "leap" in a supralogical fashion to an insight or discernment, rather than proceeding slowly and cautiously step by step according to logical reason. Such a rapid movement of mind has something of the quality of intuition about it and thus is easily mistaken for it. The true intuition, however, is not just a rapid functioning of the intellect; "it is in us a projecting blade, edge or point of a far-off supermind light entering into and modified by some intermediate truth-mind

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.355.

(2) Life Divine, p.842.

substance above us and, so modified, again entering into and very much blinded by our ordinary or ignorant mind substance".⁽¹⁾ The true intuition is, in other words, that cosmic consciousness or plane of consciousness which receives from the Supermind by way of the Overmind truths of the nature of things and transmits these truths to us as the higher buddhi or intuitive mind. The truth and knowledge which the intuition transmits is, thus, not the full gnosis of the Supermind nor even the broad vision of the Overmind but is truth and knowledge greatly reduced in force and vastness. Moreover, the transmission of intuitional truth is distorted, as we have indicated, by the reason, emotions and passions. Furthermore the intuitive mind in us is as yet poorly developed; it is dominated by the reason and restricted in its actions to particular purposes of mental will or knowledge. Nevertheless, the difference between a true intuition and a pseudo-intuition is vast. Whereas the latter is always subject to subsequent vetification or support by the senses and reason, the true intuition on the contrary carries its own guarantee of truth within it. Also, if it is a pure intuition, unmixed with sense perception and intellectual ideation, it can never be contradicted by experience. It may be verified by the senses and reason but is not dependent upon such verification. "For the true intuition proceeds from the self-existent truth of things and is secured by that self-existent truth and not by any indirect, derivatory or dependent method of arriving at knowledge".⁽²⁾

(1) Life Divine, p.252.

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, p.546.

Even though "a pure intuition is a rare occurrence in our mental activity"⁽¹⁾ because of the interventions of the rational intelligence, intuition does occupy an important place in our means of knowledge. Behind all our mental operations the intuition always stands veiled.⁽²⁾ It establishes a connection between mind and the higher levels of consciousness above it and provides a passage of communication and entry for mind into these supramental realms. Indeed, "intuition gives us that idea of something behind and beyond all that we know and seem to be which pursues man always in contradiction of his lower reason and all his normal experience and impels him to formulate that formless perception in the more positive ideas of God, Immortality, Heaven and the rest by which we strive to express it to the mind".⁽³⁾ The intuition is, therefore, able to give us the truth of reality, but because it is not yet organised in our surface being, it cannot present the truth in that articulated and ordered form which is demanded by our nature. Instead, working in us as it does in a subliminal fashion, the intuition is greatly dependent upon the reason for the surface expression of suprarational truth, and thus the force and purity of its truth-visions are lost. Intuitions become "mentalised" and thus subject to error and misinterpreta-

(1) Life Divine, p.252.

(2) Ibid., pp.64f.

(3) Ibid., p.64. Aurobindo regards religious beliefs as sort of "mentalised" intuitions. (See Life Divine pp.770f.)

Continuation of Footnote No. 3 on Page 231.

It was by an extension of that faculty of instinct and intuition already present in the animal that man first made his necessary discoveries of supraphysical reality. This was before he became dependent upon his senses and intellect. As his mental and life faculties developed, however, his original intuitive, instinctive and subliminal formations became subject to intellectualisation and overlaid with structures erected by a growing reason and mental intelligence. Thus in India there was an age of intuitive knowledge represented by the early Vedantic thinking of the Upanishads, but this gave way to an age of rational knowledge. (See Life Divine pp.65f.) Inspired scriptures made room for the subsequent metaphysical systems. At first the results of reasons were submitted to and tested by Sruti, inspired revelation, the earlier results of intuition embodied in scripture. In time, however, reason asserted its own supremacy, and there arose conflicting schools each of which claimed the Veda as authority and fought each other with its texts. "The unity of the first intuitional knowledge was thus broken up and the ingenuity of the logicians was always able to discover devices, methods of interpretation, standards of varying value by which inconvenient texts of the Scripture could be practically annulled and an entire freedom acquired for their metaphysical speculation". (Life Divine, p.67).

tion. They have no longer the nature of intuitions; for, as Aurobindo points out, "an intuition passed in judicial review by the reason ceases to be an intuition and can only have the authority of the reason for which there is no inner source of direct certitude".⁽¹⁾ Nevertheless, the intuition is there working behind the veil of the mind, presenting to our ordinary mental consciousness glimpses of suprarational truth and thus lifting the mind even more towards a greater light and force of knowledge. Moreover the intuition operates automatically in our consciousness to complete, validate and set in order our sense images of the external world in a way which, Aurobindo asserts, "immediately relates the image with the thing imaged and gets the tangible experience of the object, so that we are not merely regarding or reading a translation or sense-transcript of the reality but looking through the sense image to the reality".⁽²⁾

Mind, Intuition and Knowledge.

If our surface consciousness were always open to the action of intuition, then, Aurobindo maintains, error would not be possible.⁽³⁾ Our normal method of cognition would be a sort of truth-seeing, rather than the half-blind groping which characterises the rational mind. Intuition is, however, as we have already indicated, prior in the terrestrial evolution

(1) Life Divine, p.843.

(2) Ibid., p.385.

(3) Ibid., p.547.

of consciousness to the buddhi or thought-mind. At first in the nescient and helpless animal the secret conscious-force in nature sends up to its uninformed surface consciousness the minimum of intuition necessary for maintenance of its existence and the performance of the operations necessary for its life and survival. This is the animal's first source of knowledge. A second source is its surface contact with the external world. It is this contact which is the cause first of conscious sensation, then sense-perception and finally intelligence. In the course of the evolution of the surface consciousness intuition assumes less and less importance. Finally with the development of human intelligence intuition becomes less purely intuitive. That is, the animal basis of mind, - the instincts and vital intuition, - is mentalised, and even mental intuition becomes mixed and impure. With the intuition no longer freely functioning, error enters into perception and judgment: for the evolving surface consciousness, restricted in its action within a separate individual vital-physical form, has to acquire a knowledge by an indirect means which gives not even a fragmentary certitude.⁽¹⁾ It must rely greatly upon physical image and vital sensation, interpreted by sense and mind and turned into a corresponding mental idea or figure. Such ideas have to be related, and new knowledge fitted into the already acquired knowledge and experience. Thus, as Aurobindo points out, "at each step different possibilities of fact, significance,

(1) Life Divine, p.549.

judgment, interpretation, relation present themselves; some have to be tested and rejected, others accepted and confirmed: to shut out error is impossible without limiting the chances of the acquisition of knowledge".(1)

This acquisition of knowledge through a separate contact of subject with object is our ordinary mode of cognition. We rely mostly upon our senses and sensational thought-mind, upon manas, for our knowledge of the external world. This is what Aurobindo calls "wholly separate knowledge by indirect contact".(2) Three other "cognitive methods of Nature" which Aurobindo distinguishes are "a knowledge by identity, a knowledge by intimate direct contact, a knowledge by separative direct contact".(3) The third method is characterised by a separation of subject from object, though, unlike sense perception, with a direct contact or even partial identity. Such a method is employed when we regard in a detached manner our own subjective movements. This is ordinarily the method of our reason in observing, knowing and controlling the inner movements of consciousness. The second method, which involves a more intimate contact, is the method of the dynamic part of our mind when it associates itself with our sensations, desires and feelings. The first method, knowledge by identity, is what Aurobindo calls "the original and fundamental way of knowing" (4)

(1) Life Divine, p.549.

(2) Ibid., pp.470, 472f.

(3) Ibid., p.470.

(4) Ibid., p.469.

and is in its purest form "illustrated in the surface mind only by our direct awareness of our own essential existence: it is a knowledge empty of any other content than the pure fact of self and being; of nothing else in the world has our surface mind the same kind of awareness".⁽¹⁾

It is only by knowledge by identity that the truth of a thing can truly be known; for in identity there is a union of the consciousness of the subject with that of the object. This is the quality of knowledge proper to the supramental truth-consciousness where knower and the known, subject and object are one. Our mental knowledge, however, is mostly indirectly gained and thus faulty. We depend upon the data of the sense-mind, arranged and interpreted by the reason and understanding. Our mental knowledge is therefore a limited knowledge, a mixed knowledge-ignorance, but, as Aurobindo points out, "it could not be otherwise since our awareness of the world is born of a separative and surface observation with only an indirect means of cognition at its disposal".⁽²⁾ Our self-knowledge, though more direct, is nonetheless also stultified by a restriction to our surface being, to our ego and not to the real self or soul within, and by a dependence upon the intellect.

If we are to achieve a knowledge by identity, - real

(1) Life Divine, p.470.

(2) Ibid., p.474.

knowledge, the "true truth of things" rather than the "practical truth of relation", - then we must go beyond the senses and even the purified buddhi. At best the intellect will give only a fragmented knowledge. What is needed for the complete growth and self-possession of the soul within mind, life and body is an integral knowledge, which is, as Aurobindo points out, "supra-intellectual".⁽¹⁾ The buddhi, - understanding, reason, intellect, - is but an intermediary instrument of the soul. It cannot serve the soul in achieving its final object which is "to get to the highest and fullest truth of itself and of things ... and to an action and a status of being which shall be the result of or identical with that truth, the power of this greatest knowledge and the enjoyment of that greatest being and consciousness to which it opens".⁽²⁾ Thus what is necessary is that our present normal mental consciousness be replaced by supramental consciousness, that at first we go beyond reason to a fuller action in us of intuition, which, though not the supramental gnosis itself, is yet "a power of consciousness nearer and more intimate to the original knowledge by identity".⁽³⁾ Only a free and entire intuition, one unhampered by its action by the mind, would be able to grasp things by direct contact and to see their truth fully. However, the intuition can only express itself clearly and fully as the

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.359.

(2) Ibid., p.760.

(3) Life Divine, p.841.

normal consciousness of the individual to the degree that the surface ego is subdued and finally eliminated. For it is self-imprisonment in the surface ego which is, Aurobindo asserts, "the cause of our limited knowledge or ignorance ... Our self-ignorance and our world ignorance can only grow towards integral self-knowledge and integral world-knowledge in proportion as our limited ego and its half-blind consciousness open to a greater inner existence and consciousness and a true self-being and become aware too of the not-self outside it also as self, - on one side a Nature constituent of our own nature, on the other an Existence which is a boundless continuation of our own self-being".⁽¹⁾ Only by the breaking of the walk of the surface ego - consciousness, can we get beyond the circumscribed action of our senses and reason to the vaster and freer action of intuition, - beyond a fragmented knowledge by indirect contact to first a fuller knowledge by direct contact, and finally an integral knowledge by identity, both of our inner self, our soul, and of our outer world.

Ego and the Desire Soul.

What is this ego which is the cause of our ignorance or limited knowledge? It is, as we earlier indicated, the fourth part or aspect of the "inner instrument", the antahkarana, of the surface individual: citta or basic consciousness, manas or sense mind, buddhi or intelligence, ahankara or ego-sense.

The Ego.

According to Aurobindo ego is "only a practical

(1) Life Divine, p.475.

constitution of our consciousness devised to centralise the activities of Nature in us".⁽¹⁾ In itself it is nothing fundamentally real. It is but an instrument put forward by the buddhi in order to provide a centre for the experiences of the manas or sense mind. As Aurobindo characterises the ego, it is a sort of lynch-pin in the wheel of the mind which keeps the total movement together.⁽²⁾ The ego-sense is a perception of "I" as distinct and separate from "not-I", - a particular formation of mental, physical, vital experience distinguished from other formations, an individualisation of being in becoming. The surface ego-consciousness is the individual's first insistent self-experience, and with it he identifies himself mentally, vitally and physically.⁽³⁾ Indeed, it is at first in terms of the ego-sense that he regards himself as an individual at all.

The ego first makes its clear appearance in the rational and willing-mind, the discriminating intelligence or buddhi.⁽⁴⁾ In the animal the sense of ego, of individuality, would not, perhaps, be more than a somewhat vague realisation of continuity and identity and of separateness from others in time movement. At most it is a sort of subconscious ego. In man, however, the thought-mind basing itself upon the sense-mind and memory achieves a distinct idea of an ego, a persistent and self-identical individual which thinks, feels, remembers, senses and which

(1) Life Divine, p.332.

(2) Kena Upanishad, p.30.

(3) Life Divine, p.362.

(4) Ibid., pp.464f. Synthesis of Yoga, p.116.

remains the same whether it remembers or does not remember. We may say that the ego is the "organ" of consciousness by which the buddhi is able to relate both its external world of sense experience and its internal world of emotion and sensation, as well as the deeper instincts and impulses of the subconscious, to itself as the centre of discrimination and action. As the mind experiences its inner and outer worlds, the ego functions to organise, co-ordinate and integrate these experiences and to give them a sort of unity upon which the intelligence may operate. In the course of development of the intelligence the ego emerges even more fully as the co-ordinating and integrating centre of consciousness in the individual, the mind, identifying itself completely with the ego, comes to know itself only in terms of an "I" which is a particular body-life-mind complex, distinct and separate from other such complexes.

The ego, then, is, we may say, a device of nature by which the mental being becomes aware of himself, - not only of his acts and the occasions and objects of his activity, but of that which experiences them. At first it may seem as though the ego-sense were constituted by memory or dependent upon it. This, however, cannot be so; for memory only enters into our self-experience when that experience is related to successions of time such that the individual can say "I am", "I was" and "I shall be".⁽¹⁾ Memory is a device of the thought mind whereby

(1) Life Divine, pp.462ff. Kena Upanishad, p.31.

temporally defined states of self-becoming and self-experience are related and linked together. But memory in itself does not create the sense of "I", of an experiencing surface self. As Aurobindo points out, "the ego-sense is not a result of memory or built by memory, but is already and always there as a point of reference or as something in which the mind sense concentrates itself so as to have a co-ordinant centre stead of sprawling incoherently all over the field of experience; ego-memory reinforces this concentration and helps to maintain it, but does not constitute it".⁽¹⁾

Although the seat of the ego is in the buddhi or mind, the ego-sense is not restricted to the mind. It pervades all levels of the surface being.⁽²⁾ The individual identifies not only mind but also life and body with an "I", with the sense of separate existence, forming thereby what might be called a physical ego, a vital ego and a mental ego. These parts taken together as a functional unity constitute the ego-complex which emerges, it would seem, in that process of the individualisation of basic consciousness, citta, by which the human individual is formed.

Physical-consciousness is a sense of identification of one's being with a body, distinct and separate from all other bodies. At this level the individual consciousness identifies itself with the affections, sensations, needs and desires of

(1) Life Divine, p.464.

(2) Life Divine, p.550ff.

the body; the generalised awareness is that of being a body characterised by a succession of psycho-physical states.

On the level of the vital the ego-consciousness identifies itself fully with the vital nature, - with its sensual and sexual drives, with the full range of human emotions from vanity and petty anger to love and hatred, with the vital will to power and conquest and with the creative urges. The vital ego regards the body not much as an intrinsic aspect of its being as an instrument for the gratification of its urges. It is the principle and force of separate life-being affirming and defending itself in a world which is not-self to it.⁽¹⁾ The vital ego, - or ego in the vital nature, - seeks control and dominance of other individuals and things, needs possession of the world in order to assert itself, as well as the ideas, ideals, creeds and interests of the mind. If it is not strong enough to grasp and control, then it has to defend itself, its "I-ness" and "my-ness", against the encroachment of others. But when it is strong enough, then no means are too remote for the accomplishment of its ends, - whether it be the use of force and violence, falsehood or even the destruction of other life formations. The principle underlying the actions of the vital ego is always the same: the assertion, expansion and maintenance of the individual against all that may oppose, destroy or limit it. Everywhere and always the vital ego asserts itself,

(1) Life Divine, p.553.

introducing violence, oppression and suppression, aggression and intolerance of all that is not itself or is opposed to its satisfactions. (1)

On the level of mind the ego functions to achieve its own personal self-affirmation as mental-individual. (2) It uses the powers of mentality and intelligence, - observation, judgment and reason, - to achieve its ends. It views all existence from its standpoint; its structures and arranges truth according to its own preferences and convenience; it selects and rejects what it will of reality according to its own temperamental predilections and preferences. In one manner or another the mental ego exerts its distorting influences upon virtually all activities of the mind. Even when the mind strives for impersonality of reason and objectivity of judgment the ego is to some extent operative. The most vigilant and chaste intellect is not always aware of the prejudicial judgments it places upon the reality it confronts and of the little twists it gives to truth in its rational constructions. This is the fallibility of the mind: it is not fully an honest perceiver of the truth or a reliable reflector of reality. The less we are aware of our mental ego and of its influences the greater will be the unconscious or half-conscious distortions of truth. The reality and truth we apprehend will be greatly the truth and the reality we have constructed by prejudgment, temperamental choice, prefer-

(1) Life Divine, p.554.

(2) Ibid., pp.550f.

ence and prejudicial acceptance of "fact" and idea. Such is the effect of the ego-consciousness upon mental operations.

The ego, then, although most deeply rooted and fully self-conscious in the thinking mind, the buddhi, nonetheless pervades all levels and affects all aspects of the surface individual. It is not, however, the lasting truth of the individual; "it is only a formation of Nature, a mental form of thought-centralisation in the perceiving and discriminating mind, a vital form of the centralisation of feeling and sensation in our parts of life, a form of physical conscious reception centralising substance and function of substance in our bodies".⁽¹⁾ It is, in brief, a temporary and practical mode of individuality constructed by nature, prakriti, for the surface organisation of consciousness. It is nothing enduring and unchanging but rather is an ever-changing and developing synthesis of a limited range of individual conscious experience. However, Aurobindo asserts, behind the ego-sense and ego-individuality "there is a consciousness, a purusha, who is not determined or limited by this individualisation or by this synthesis but on the contrary determines, supports and yet exceeds it".⁽²⁾ The psyche or soul behind the body-life-mind complex devises the ego as an instrument of its own self-expression and as a locus of its experience of world being. Indeed, the ego is the mechanism whereby the psyche organises

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.245.

(2) Life Divine, p.332.

and utilises world-experience in terms of individuality. The sole purpose of the ego is the individualisation and centralisation of the surface consciousness;⁽¹⁾ it is the nucleus, so to speak, the point of concentration and cohesion around which the psyche organises the individual formations of substance, vitality and mentality. The ego, then, has no separate existence really but is only a sort of surface representative of the soul for the purpose of centralisation, - a temporary device or construction of which there will be no need once the soul within grows sufficiently to gain control of the outer instruments of body, life and mind.

Although temporary, the ego is nonetheless crucially important; it is, as Aurobindo declares, "indispensable to the evolution of the lower life",⁽²⁾ - i.e. of individual forms of body, life and mind. Without the ego or some such surface locus the individual would be unable to achieve stability and self-identity but instead would be lost in the subconscious and inconscient strata of lower nature and in the mass consciousness of the collectivity. The individual has to stand apart from the mass and affirm his separate reality in the totality; he has in his evolution to separate himself from the amorphous flow of universal elements. As Aurobindo points out, the emergence of life, the progress of mind, the growth of spirit, - even the mind and spirit of the collectivity, - all depend upon the individual, on his freedom and power to realise and express what is still unrealised in the mass, undeveloped in the

(1) Lights on Yoga, p.11.

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, p.871.

subconscient and unmanifested in the superconscient.⁽¹⁾ Unless the individual achieves a sufficiently strong individuality, he may be overpowered by the mass and become only a cell of the mass body, losing his inner direction and being dominated by the collective will and impulse. Evolution, not only biological but social and spiritual depends upon the individual; even the salvation or liberation and perfection of the collectivity can only come through the individuals who constitute it.⁽²⁾ Thus, the ego is the means invented by nature whereby "the individual might disengage himself from the inconscience or subconsciousness of the mass and become an independent living mind, life-power, soul, spirit, co-ordinating himself with the world around him but not drowned in it and separately inexistent and ineffective"⁽³⁾.

This, then, is the truth of the ego: it is a necessary but temporary construction of nature in the evolution of consciousness. But there is also an untruth of the ego. Men tend to perceive only this surface manifestation of their individuality and to consider their existence as defined solely by the ego-complex of mind, life and body. They live in ignorance of the truth of their real nature as a soul in a mind, life and body.

(1) Life Divine, pp.618ff.

(2) The importance of the individual for Aurobindo's metaphysics, and, as we shall see, for his political and social philosophy, cannot be overstressed. As he himself says, "individuality is as important a thing to the ways of the Spirit of existence as universality. The individual is that potent secret of its being upon which the universal stresses and leans and makes the knot of power of all its workings". (Problem of Rebirth, p.66).

(3) Life Divine, p.619.

They do not perceive that the apparent separative individuality of the ego is only a temporary surface movement and that behind the ego the "real individuality stretches out to unity with all things and upward to oneness with transcendent Divine Infinity"⁽¹⁾. They do not realise that the ego is a sort of pragmatic contrivance of nature, a false surface substitute of the secret soul which supports and holds together both self-experience and world-experience. As long as men live in this surface construction of an apparent separate and limited consciousness, of apparent division of being, they live in ignorance (avidya) of the unity of existence. From such ignorance comes error, falsehood and evil.⁽²⁾ It is only by going within, so to speak, that the individual can discover his true self and true individuality, and by discovering the self within himself he will discover the one self in all existence. This is integral knowledge, a knowledge by identity.⁽³⁾ With such knowledge of

(1) Life Divine, p.619.

(2) Ibid., pp.554ff.

(3) Gabriel Marcel propounds a similar idea of knowledge in what he terms "knowledge by participation". In knowledge of oneself which is the only true knowledge since it is knowledge of the knower, Descartes' cognito formulation is of no help since it is not related to the whole self of will, body, feelings, consciousness, but only to the ego as an organ of cognition. Descartes was concerned with a thinking subject standing over against a world of objects and not with the whole Self as contained in Being-Itself. As Marcel says, "Knowledge is contingent on a participation in being for which no epistemology can account because it continually presupposes it". (The Philosophy of Existence, Philosophical Library, New York, 1949, p.8). With such a view of the nature of knowledge we believe Aurobindo would fully agree since it is his contention that the real basis of all cognitive experience is consciousness of identity and by identity. (See Life Divine, pp.488f).

his true self the individual is able to exceed the barrier and limitations of the ego and to universalise his conscious existence.

According to Aurobindo, unless and until the individual overcomes and breaks down his ego, he will be imprisoned by it, suffering imperfection of both self-knowledge and world-knowledge, limitation of power and thus lack of fulfilment. As Aurobindo declares, "the fulfilment of the individual is not the utmost development of his egoistic intellect, vital force, physical well-being and the utmost satisfaction of his mental, emotional, physical cravings, but the flowering of the divine in him to its utmost capacity of wisdom, power, love and universality and through this flowering his utmost realisation of all the possible beauty and delight of existence".⁽¹⁾

Just as for the evolution of the lower life of the individual the presence and functioning of the ego-sense was indispensable, so for the evolution of the individual's higher life the elimination of the ego is indispensable.⁽²⁾ As long as the individual is not free from the ego-sense there can be no real freedom, no perfection and fulfilment of being.⁽³⁾ For the ego is, so to speak, the principal knot of bondage to limitation and ignorance. The ego, however, has a very firm hold on the individual. As we have seen, it pervades all levels of the

(1) Human Cycle, p.49.

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, p.871.

(3) Ibid., pp.773f.

individual's surface consciousness, controlling and determining not only the cognitive and volitional processes of the mind, but the movements, sensational responses and emotional reactions of the physical and the vital nature as well. Moreover, although the ego has its seat in the buddhi, it is in the vital being that it has most effective control upon the total person; for here it is fed and maintained by desire - prāna or life-energy.⁽¹⁾ This desire (prāna) and the ego Aurobindo characterises as the "two knots of human subjection to the lower nature".⁽²⁾

Desire and the Desire Soul.

"Desire", says Sri Aurobindo, "is the result of incompleteness, of insufficiency, of something that is not possessed or enjoyed and which the being seeks for possession or enjoyment".⁽³⁾ It is just such an incompleteness or insufficiency which seems to characterise man. He is finite, limited, - limited not only in his physical powers of growth and movement, but more especially in his powers of knowing, feeling and willing. He is a mind and soul chained to a body, a will groping in ignorance and a heart subject to selfishness. Yet there is constantly a struggle within his being, issuing from his very depths, to exceed every limitation. The motivating force behind this struggle is desire and the quality of desire is what the ancient Indian sages called prāna or life energy, "the substantial will and energy in the cosmos working out into determined form and action and conscious

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, pp.773ff.

(2) Ibid., p.116.

(3) Life Divine, p.686.

dynamis of being".⁽¹⁾ This life force is the energy present in all forms of substance, from the simplest particle to the most complex arrangement. In the animal it is active as nerve energy or 'vitality', energising matter into forms of life.⁽²⁾

In its original nature prana is nothing other than Consciousness-Force (Chit-Shakti) realising itself as life, vitalising its own forms of substantial existence.⁽³⁾ However, in the evolutive movement of life out of physical matter prana is characterised by a dynamic action, by an urge to exceed the restrictions and limitations of matter, - creating, maintaining, destroying, recreating - but always the motivation being to exceed, to expand.

In the mental animal prana as nerve energy is present in

(1) Life Divine, p.247. As Aurobindo points out, prana can mean simply "breath" as well as life or vitality in general. (See Kena Upanishad, pp.22f). In the Sankhya view of evolution prana is not a separate principle but only a product of the functioning of the eleven organs of the body (Sankhya Karikas, 29). Against this opinion Shankara (Bhashya on Brahma Sutras, 2:4:9) argues that there is a chief prana which is neither merely air or a product of the functioning of bodily organs but is Brahman itself (1:3:39). Likewise Ramanuja declares that the chief prana is the primordial life-force, Brahman, and is not to be confused with prana as "vital air" (Adhik. IX, Sut.24).

(2) Life Divine, p.173.

(3) Ibid.

both a physical and a psychical form.⁽¹⁾ Physical prana is the vital force producing the reactions of hunger, thirst, fatigue, health, disease and all other vital experiences of the body.⁽²⁾ Psychical prana is the life-energy working in support of the mental activities. Whereas the proper action of the psychic prana is the experience of "pure possession and enjoyment (bhoga)" - enjoyment of thought, will, action, contact, sensation, etc. - it instead serves to fill the mental being with vital craving which manifests itself in the form of desire.⁽³⁾ It is this desire, this sense of want, which issues from the awareness of limitation in the physical-vital being and which clouds the intelligence (buddhi) and sustains the ego. The mind becomes controlled by an egoistic desire for self-assertion and expansion and by a host of lusts, hungers and thirsts, both psychical and physical. The psychical prana distorts all pure enjoyment (bhoga) by turning it into an egoistic craving which affects all levels of the mind. "The psychic prana invades the sensational mind and brings into it the unquiet thirst of sensations, invades the dynamic mind with the lust of control,

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.397. Prana besides being an operation of chit-shakti as cosmic energy indwelling and supporting all creation has more specialised functions as the vital force of both the physical being and the psychic organs. Such, according to Deussen, seems also to be the ancient and classical view, (P. Deussen, Die Nachvedische Philosophie der Inder, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1920, pp.69ff).

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, pp.397f.

(3) Synthesis of Yoga, p.750.

having domination, success, fulfilment of every impulse, fills the emotional mind with the desire for the satisfaction of liking and disliking, for the wreaking of love and hate, brings the shrinkings and panics of fear and the strainings and disappointments of hope, imposes the tortures of grief and the brief fevers and excitements of joy, makes the intelligence and the intelligent will the accomplices of all these things and turns them in their own kind into deformed and lame instruments, the will into a will of craving and the intelligence into a partial, a stumbling and an eager pursuer of limited, impatient, militant prejudgment and opinion". (1)

In effect, the psychic prana is itself tied down to the physical life, subject to the limitations of the nervous force of the body. It thus seems to pull the mind down to the level of the body, there to be governed by the physical vitality and by a "limited life's instinct for possession and satisfaction". (2) Instead of the illumined intelligence of the buddhi ruling the lower physical and vital natures, the buddhi itself is subject to all the affections and afflictions of the body, from passion to fatigue, disorder and disease.

Our normal mentality is, therefore, predominantly a physical mentality; we think, will and act in terms of the body, its emotions, sentiments, hungers and lusts. Our lives are accord-

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.750.

(2) Synthesis of Yoga, p.749.

ingly characterised by disquiet (aśānti), discontent and sorrow (duhkha). Thus it may be rightly said that 'desire is the root of all sorrow'.⁽¹⁾

Desire does, however, have a limited role to play in evolution. It does sometimes produce a rajastic force, a vital will, to help man rise out of inertia which would otherwise inhibit action.⁽²⁾ But this is true only for certain intermediate ends. In order to go beyond these ends man needs a motivating force other than desire.

It is sometimes thought, however, that desire is a requisite condition for action; that when desire ceases, action ceases. This Aurobindo maintains, is manifestly not so; for much action even in our daily life is accomplished apart from any motivating desire. Just as Nature works by calm necessity and its inner laws, "even man constantly does work of various kinds by a spontaneous impulse, intuition, instinct or acts in obedience to a natural necessity and law of forces without either planning or the urge of a conscious vital volition or emotional desire".⁽³⁾

Indeed not infrequently an act is contrary to either intention or desire, issuing from a felt need or compulsion, a deeply seated impulse or the expression of some inner force or as the conscious pursuance of a higher principle. Desire,

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.750.

(2) Ibid., pp.306, 752. Life Divine, p.686.

(3) Ibid., p.305.

rather than being a creative force compelling us forward and out from ourselves, is a bond which ties us to our narrow egoistic movements. It is only when we are free from all desire that we are truly free and can truly create; ⁽¹⁾ for when we live in desire, we live in the bonds of death. ⁽²⁾

It is desire, therefore, which infects all levels of our consciousness and supports and expands the ego. But even when the enlightened intellect and the heart have realised the true nature of the ego as the source of their ills, they cannot easily rid themselves of it since the psychic prana with its force of desire continually renews the enduring strength of the ego. ⁽³⁾

- (1) Aurobindo would, we believe, agree with Krishnamurti's statement that the mind "is the instrument of sensation and desire, or rather that it is sensation and desire, and that it is mechanically caught up in routine ... Only then (when the hold of desire is broken) is it possible for the mind to be in that state of creativeness in which the new can always come into being ... Beyond the physical needs, any form of desire, - for greatness, for truth, for virtue, - becomes a psychological process by which the mind builds the idea of the 'me' and strengthens itself at the centre". (The First and Last Freedom, Gollancz, London, 1956, pp.102-103.)
- (2) The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (I.2.1.) accordingly characterises life as the hunger which is death. That is, life is pranic force and the nature of life or prana is hunger or desire which is never satiated, ever feeding itself physically and psychically upon its environment. The law of nature is, as Aurobindo points out, "what devours must also be devoured". (Life Divine, p.180). Thus in the physical world individual forms of life are subject to a mutual devouring, to final exhaustion and death.
- (3) Synthesis of Yoga, p.401.

Only when the mind is able to separate itself from association and identification with the sensations and emotions of the vital being will the hold of the ego be broken.

The psychic prana, the life force shaping our vital-mental being, fills the emotional centre (the 'heart') with the sensational desires of the vital, thus generating what Aurobindo calls a sensational 'desire-soul'.⁽¹⁾ It is this formation of the prana in the vital nature "which governs most men and which they mistake often for the real soul".⁽²⁾ This desire-soul affects and governs the consciousness of most men. It is "narrow, ignorant, limited, full of obscure desires, passions, cravings, revolts, pleasures and pains, transient joys and griefs, exultations and depression".⁽³⁾

The desire-soul is, according to Sri Aurobindo, quite distinct from the ego, though both have similar effects upon the individual's life and spiritual growth.⁽⁴⁾ The ego as the dominant force in the surface being is rooted in the buddhi or intelligence and pervades all levels of the body-mind complex. The desire-soul, on the other hand, is the production of prana in the vital being and is the centre in man of life working as

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.170.

(2) Letters, 1st Series, p.147.

(3) Lights on Yoga, p.20.

(4) Letters, 1st Series, p.148. Aurobindo makes a clear distinction between ego and desire-soul (see Synthesis of Yoga, pp.96, 199, 200-201). By desire-soul he evidently means generally the surface vital being of the individual, the vital passions and desires organised about the vital ego. Indeed he equates desire-soul with the life-force or prana itself (see Synthesis of Yoga, p.95, Letters, 1st Series, p.147).

"a movement of desire".⁽¹⁾ The desire-soul does, however, exert from its base in the vital its disquieting, disharmonious and perverting influences upon the physical and the mental as well. Indeed, it is, Sri Aurobindo says, "the obstinate knot of the ego", for it "refuses to relax the knot even when the intellect and the heart have discovered the cause of their ills and would be glad enough to remove it".⁽²⁾ All the mental faculties - basic consciousness (citta), sense-mind (manas), intelligence (buddhi), and ego-idea (ahamkara) - are affected by it.⁽³⁾ Finally, just as the ego is the integrating centre and governing principle of the surface consciousness, so the desire-soul may rightly be viewed as a "separative soul of ego", for "all its instincts are for a separative self-affirmation".⁽⁴⁾

This, then, is the nature of the surface individual: a body-life-mind complex dominated by an ego and possessing a desire-soul. But for Aurobindo this is not the totality of the human being. There is behind and above this surface construction a truer, more real nature of the individual. The outer world of man is a world of nature (prakriti) and ignorance (avidya) but the inner world is one of Spirit (purusha) and knowledge (vidya). Of the greater part of his individual being

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.200.

(2) Ibid., p.401.

(3) Ibid., p.739.

(4) Ibid., p.199.

man is ignorant. There are depths and heights of his nature of which, at best, he is but dimly aware. He normally identifies his individual existence with the ego-consciousness of the mind, but this mental consciousness, Aurobindo declares, "is only the human range which no more exhausts all the possible ranges of consciousness than human sight exhausts all the gradations of colour or human hearing all the gradations of sound, - for there is much above or below that is to man invisible and inaudible. So there are ranges of consciousness above and below the human range, with which the normal human has no contact ..."(1)

As we have seen, the individual is formed, so to speak, out of the cosmic planes of mind, life and matter. The meagre surface formulation of body-life-mind which we normally accept as the individual cannot possibly exhaust or express the fullness of the manifestation of these cosmic planes in the spatial-temporal evolution. Indeed, if the individual were only this surface nature and limited to the possibilities of the gross physical body, then, says Aurobindo, there would be very little room for a further evolution of man, and "the human being could not hope to accomplish anything essentially greater than his present achievement".(2) The ancient occult science, however, discovered, - as modern psychological and psychoanalytical

(1) Letters, 1st Series, p.98.

(2) Life Divine, p.238.

investigators are beginning to discover, ⁽¹⁾ - that the individual is much more than what appears on the surface, that the greater portion of the individual lies behind the limited ego-consciousness of the mental, vital and physical natures.

The Subliminal Individual.

For Aurobindo the outer triplicity of body, life and mind which constitutes the surface individual is but a reflection and representation of a true inner being. Man possesses, in other words, a dual nature; he has an inner mind, life, body and soul (psyche) as well as an outer or surface mind, life body and soul (desire-soul). His inner being, his true nature, is to the ordinary awareness a subconscious realm and is often erroneously termed inconscient or unconscious. In actuality the inner mind-life-body-soul of the individual is subliminal

(1) Aurobindo would basically agree with the declaration of Carl Jung that our ego consciousness "does not express the sum total of our human nature: it is and remains only a part". "Contributions to Analytical Psychology, translated by H.G. and C.F. Baynes, Kegan Paul and Co., London, 1945, p.93). The individual needs more than merely knowledge of his ego; for "the fullness of life requires more than just an ego; it demands spirit" (ibid. p.98). However, "most people confuse 'self-knowledge' with knowledge of their conscious ego personalities ... But the ego knows only its own contents, not the unconscious and its contents". (The Undiscovered Self, translated by R.F.C. Hull, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1958, pp.6-7). What is needed is knowledge of these vaster realms of consciousness.

As we said, we believe Aurobindo would basically agree with Jung. However, although Aurobindo considered the scientific investigation of human psychology necessary and valuable, he did have considerable criticism to make of modern psychological study and especially of psychoanalysis. Mostly his criticism was aimed at the tendency in psychology to take a partial truth (such as the importance of suppressed sexual complexes) and to exaggerate and generalise it to explain all of human behaviour. Also he felt that psychology and psycho-analysis lacked adequate knowledge and understanding of the subconscious and subliminal. (see Bases of Yoga, pp.114ff).

rather than subconscious. There is, indeed, a subconscious and an inconscient realm of individual human existence, but these are other than the subliminal proper. These various grades of consciousness must be clearly distinguished if we are properly to understand the nature of the individual beneath the surface, as it were. (1)

The Subconscious and Subliminal.

According to Aurobindo, "the subconscious is a concealed and unexpressed inarticulate consciousness which works below all our conscious physical activities". (2) On the one hand it must not be confused with inconscient proper which is the totally involved state of consciousness, the complete absorption of consciousness in form and force such that consciousness is concealed and apparently absent, as it is in matter. (3) The

(1) Aurobindo judges modern psychology and psychoanalysis to have an incomplete and imprecise understanding of the levels of consciousness in the individual. Freud, for example, did not, according to Aurobindo, know anything but "a few ill-lit corners" of the lower vital subconscious which "is no more than a restricted and very inferior portion of the subliminal whole". (Bases of Yoga, p.115). Because psychological science has not yet really distinguished the planes of consciousness, it inaccurately and inadequately lumps all the sub-waking-conscious levels together as the "subconscious" or "unconscious". Moreover, when it does touch the true subconscious, it attempts to explain all conscious behaviour and superconscious experience by this lower consciousness. Aurobindo strikingly poses his objection to this practice by pointing out that "the significance of the lotus is not to be found by analysing the secrets of the mud from which it grows here; its secret is to be found in the heavenly archetype of the lotus that blooms for ever in the light above". (ibid., pp.119-120-.)

(2) Letters, 1st Series, p.173.

(3) Life Divine, pp.262-264.

Inconscient is, as Aurobindo characterises it, the "nether soil and basis of our physical existence";⁽¹⁾ it is the stronghold of darkness and ignorance out of which all evolves.⁽²⁾ On the other hand the subconscious must not be confused with the sub-mental. The sub-mental is the consciousness which pervades our physical and vital natures and is the basis of our physical and vital actions and reactions, movements, impulses and desires. It is "a nervous and sensational dynamic mode of consciousness, a gradation of awareness different from the mind: it has its own separate reactions to contacts and is sensitive to them in its own power of feeling; it does not depend for that on the mind's perception and response".⁽³⁾

The true subconscious is neither the inconscient proper nor the submental. It is instead the inconscient on the point of becoming conscious, the "inconscient vibrating on the borders of consciousness".⁽⁴⁾ The subconscious lies between the inconscient, - suppressed, involved consciousness in which all is contained but nothing formulated or expressed, - and the conscious life, mind and body. It is, like all the other main parts of nature, universal as well as individual and constitutes the evolutionary basis for all individual existence. In the subconscious is stored the potentiality of all primitive reactions to life as well as the impressions of all past

(1) Life Divine, p.558.

(2) Ibid., pp.543-545.

(3) Ibid., p.499.

(4) Ibid.

experience which are manifested in dreams or rise to surface consciousness as mechanical repetitions and unconscious habits, in mental, vital and physical perturbations and as impulses and motivations whose origins are obscure to the mind. The subconscious is the basis of the individual's material being and the support of all that comes up in the physical nature.⁽¹⁾ It covers all the purely physical and vital elements of the body, unobserved and uncontrolled by the mind. It also covers most of the lowest workings of a submerged sense-mind.⁽²⁾ Into the subconscious goes all that is rejected from the surface mind and out of the subconscious arises every manner of disturbance. It is the main support of disease and death in the body and the stronghold of the ignorance. The operation of the subconscious upon the mind and body is, however, mostly automatic, uncalled for and involuntary since normally we have no direct knowledge of its workings and hence no control of it.⁽³⁾

Although its action is mechanical, irrational and repetitive, the subconscious is not really different from the surface mentality but only acting below the surface, not yet conscious and known to the waking man.⁽⁴⁾ The subliminal, on the other hand, is quite different from what we understand as our conscious mentality.⁽⁵⁾ The outer psycho-physical being of the

(1) Letters, 1st Series, pp.172-175.

(2) Life Divine, pp.654f.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid., pp.81-82.

(5) Ibid.

individual is characterised in its operations by the limitations of separative existence; the subliminal consciousness or self of the individual is characterised by the expansiveness of a universal existence. The subliminal is "a meeting-place of the consciousness that emerges from below by evolution and the consciousness that has descended from above for involution".⁽¹⁾

As we have seen, the person represents the individualisation of general or universal nature which on the one side comprises the universally involved consciousness of matter (inconscious) struggling to expression in life (the subconscious) and finally mind and on the other side the superior or supra-physical planes of matter, life and mind, opening on to the superconscious. All of this is compressed, as it were, into the evolutionary individual human being. What appears on the surface is but a selective pragmatic formation of the concealed

(1) Life Divine, p.382. There is a sense in which the subliminal may be taken to mean all of the "concealed" consciousness of the individual with a lower subconscious end and an upper superconscious end. (See Life Divine, pp.497f; Letters, 1st Series, pp.167f.) We are here using the term "subliminal", as Aurobindo most often does, to refer to that vast realm of consciousness behind but on a level with the outer mental, vital and physical natures. In this sense the subliminal is distinct from the subconscious which is consciousness lower than and inferior to the waking consciousness and from the superconscious which is consciousness higher than and superior to waking consciousness. Again, the subliminal may be called subconscious but only in the sense that it is normally concealed to our waking consciousness.

self and consciousness of the individual, which on the lower end encompasses the evolutionary subconscious and on the upper end opens on to the superconscious. (1) In between, so to speak, and on a level with the surface mental, vital and physical natures is the cosmic consciousness of the supraphysical planes, - a consciousness much wider and more luminous, more in possession of itself than the surface or waking consciousness. This is the true subliminal, we may say, as distinct from the subconscious which is but a lowest, obscure region of the inner self of the individual. It is this true subliminal, this luminous consciousness and self behind the surface consciousness and self, which constitutes the greater part of what is concealed in the individual and which largely provides the material for the surface being. As Aurobindo points out "our perceptions, our memories, our effectuations of will and intelligence are only a selection from its perceptions, memories, activities and relations of will and intelligence; our very ego is only a minor and superficial formulation of its self-consciousness and self-experience". (2) The subliminal being of the individual is, then, the origin of all that is not the formulation of evolving inconscient-subconscious (such as is the surface physical being) or of the naturally developed

(1) Life Divine, pp.496ff. It is, as Aurobindo puts it, "rather a secret intraconscious and circumconscious than a subconscious; for it envelops quite as much as it supports the outer nature". (Life Divine, p.500).

(2) Ibid., pp.497-498.

functionings of the surface consciousness or of a reaction of it to external impacts.⁽¹⁾ Even then the subliminal exercises a considerable influence upon these functionings, constructions and reactions.

This subliminal being or nature of the individual is what Aurobindo calls the "subliminal self"⁽²⁾, "inner being"⁽³⁾, "inner mental, inner vital, inner physical consciousness".⁽⁴⁾ The vast subliminal consciousness behind the surface constructions of mind, life, and body is for the individual an inner mind, life and subtle-material being organised and supported by an inner psychic-being, the true soul. This subliminal self which lies behind the normal conscious awareness is a realm of universal consciousness not limited by or dependent upon the material plane or physical world. The contact of the subliminal self with the universal is, unlike the surface being, not dependent upon the sense mind and senses; it is direct and full.⁽⁵⁾ It has a mentality which, though aware of the physical mind and organs and in large measure their cause or creator, is superior to the limitations of surface existence; it possesses not only the same capacities as the surface mind (memory, will, selective intelligence, self-consciousness), though in far greater measure and perfection, but also powers of direct knowledge, understanding and effective will which exceed those of the conscious self.⁽⁶⁾

(1) Life Divine, pp.382f.

(2) Ibid., p.382.

(3) Ibid., p.498.

(4) Letters, 1st Series, p.168.

(5) Ibid., p.383.

(6) Life Divine, p.500.

Likewise a subtle physical body of the subliminal is the real substance supporting the surface physical being, and an inner vital being is the unborn and undying life force behind the external form of life which is ignorantly taken as the real existence.⁽¹⁾ There is finally the subliminal psychic entity of which the outer desire-soul working in vital cravings and emotions is a distorted representative. This 'true soul' is "a pure power of light, love, joy and refined essence of being".⁽²⁾

Unlike the small egoistic existence of the external forms of our being, the subliminal is "our larger true individuality".⁽³⁾ This is so because it is in the subliminal that "our individuality is close to our universality, touches it, is in constant relation and commerce with it".⁽⁴⁾ The subliminal is open to and receives 'shocks' from universal Mind, Life and Matter which it in turn relates subtly, but powerfully to the surface nature, sometimes in dream consciousness (in which problems are solved or warnings, premonitions and indications about the future are given),⁽⁵⁾ sometimes in extraordinary psychological experiences of clairvoyance, telepathy and other forms of 'extra-sensory perception'.⁽⁶⁾

Often such supernormal phenomena are attributed to the subconscious or so-called 'unconscious'. To do so is, according

(1) Life Divine, p.203.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Ibid., p.381.

(6) Ibid., p.479.

to Aurobindo, quite inaccurate.⁽¹⁾ Of course, the subconscious is greatly responsible for our dreams, and it is true that that content of the subconscious which presents itself in dream forms as obscene, incoherent and inconsequential fantasy often contains, as has been correctly shown by psychological investigation, deeper meanings, e.g. pre-natal dispositions and impressions derived from a racial consciousness ('collective unconscious').⁽²⁾ Nonetheless the subconscious is "the antechamber of the inconscient"⁽³⁾, a realm of half consciousness and an obscure mind of habit (samkãras), of forms of morbidity and disease.⁽⁴⁾ The subliminal, on the other hand, is a realm of luminous consciousness open to the universal knowledge of a cosmic mind, the universal force of a cosmic life, the universal force-formation of cosmic matter and the universal delight of a cosmic soul.⁽⁵⁾ The subliminal consciousness is able to enter into a direct contact with other consciousness, to have knowledge immediately and accurately of other persons and objects, of the inner operations of the natural energies which operate upon the mind, body and personalities of men. So-called 'psychic phenomena', according to Aurobindo, "have ordinarily nothing to do with the psyche";⁽⁶⁾ they are actually the operations of the inner mind, life and body of the subliminal emerging in the

(1) Life Divine, p.497.

(2) Ibid., p.380.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid., p.654.

(5) Ibid., pp.203-204.

(6) Ibid., p.480.

surface consciousness.⁽¹⁾ Once the wall between the inner consciousness of the subliminal and the limited surface mind is removed, these extraordinary phenomena will constitute our normal mode of perception and knowledge.

The Soul

Supporting all parts of the individual's subliminal self is the psyche or soul. The psyche, as we earlier saw, is a representative projection into the evolution of the Jivatman, the eternal "central being" or self of the individual above the manifestation. The chief work of the psyche is to provide a basis in an evolutionary individual, - in temporal conditions, - for the objective self-expression of the self-differentiated, multiple Divine as individual Divine, i.e. Jivatman. Thus, Aurobindo calls the psyche "a spark of the Divine supporting all individual existence in Nature".⁽²⁾

Aurobindo distinguishes, we have seen, between psyche and psychic being. The psyche is, properly speaking, the soul, though it might more expressively be described as the "spark-soul" or even "soul-essence". "It is at first an undifferentiated power of the Divine Consciousness containing all

(1) Life Divine, p.480. Synthesis of Yoga, pp.1000f.

(2) Letters, 1st Series, pp.130-131. The word "psyche" as used by Aurobindo should not be confused with the current psychoanalytical concept, especially that of the Jungian school. The "psyche" as understood in Jung's complex psychology seems to have a rather ambiguous nature; for it not only comprises what the West understands by mind or soul (Seele) but also "the totality of all psychological processes, both conscious as well as unconscious" (Psychological types,

Continuation of footnote No. (2) on page 267.

translated by H.G. Baynes, Kegan Paul, London, 1923, p.588). Thus, Jung's psyche includes within itself two supplementary, though mutually opposed spheres, - the conscious and the unconscious. Moreover, the ego-complex arises as the integrating core of the individual in a process of centroversion of consciousness or "realisation" (Bewusstwerdung) and participates in both spheres (Bewusstes und Unbewusstes, Fischer Bücherei, 1957, pp.27f). It appears, however, that although the "collective unconsciousness" (kollektiven Unbewusstin) is prior to individuation, - the "birth of the ego", - it itself results "from the inherited possibility of psychical functioning in general, namely from the inherited brain structure" (Psychological types, p.616). Nonetheless the psychic processes may continue and function apart from biochemical processes, - i.e. the brain, - and thus are not bound to time and space (Wirklichkeit der Seele Rascher und Co., Zürich, 1934, pp.212ff). But how the Unconscious persists or what its ultimate status, or that of the individual psyche in relation to it is, is not made clear. For Aurobindo, on the other hand, the psyche is a ray of consciousness, Divine Spirit, self-existent as the inner reality and organising and integrating centre of each and every individual existence.

possibilities which have not yet taken form, but to which it is the function of evolution to give form".⁽¹⁾ This spark-soul or psyche is present in all living beings from the lowest to the highest; for the jivatman of which it is representative is the transcendent individual self of every evolving form of life, whether plant, tree, bird or man.⁽²⁾ In the formation of the human individual, - that is, in evolving the possibilities of conscious existence which it contains, - the psyche assumes the form of a psychic being or psychic individual or what Aurobindo calls the caitya puruṣa.⁽³⁾ Thus, whereas all living beings have a soul or psyche, only the human individual being has a soul individual or psychic being. Indeed, it is precisely because the psyche has grown or evolved into a psychic being that man makes his appearance in the evolution of nature, prakṛiti. It is the psyche or soul within nature who organises the individual forms of life and consciousness, expressing the possibilities which it contains and growing by the experience of the evolving surface individual until finally it comes to its own, so to speak, in man. The appearance of man points to the appearance in nature of the psychic being. However, the psychic being in man does not emerge fully grown. It must continue to grow until finally it no longer remains concealed in the subliminal but comes forward to take control of the individual being, replacing the ego as the true individual or "I". At such

(1) Letters, 1st Series, p.136.

(2) Ibid., pp.131f.

(3) Ibid., p.136.

a time it will experience the universe and express itself in the universe directly, rather than through and by the presently inadequate surface instruments of mind, life and body.

Rebirth and Soul Growth.

According to Aurobindo "rebirth is an indispensable machinery for the working out of a spiritual evolution; it is the only possible effective condition, the obvious dynamic process of such a manifestation in the material universe."⁽¹⁾ That is, if the process of terrestrial evolution is the free and purposeful play of divine Spirit progressively expressing the possibilities of its infinite conscious existence in the individual being by an evolutionary gradation and ascent, then the rebirth of the soul in the body is necessary and inevitable. If it is the psyche within which is the true individual of the existence and if the psyche has accepted birth in nature so as to express the Divine's delight of self-differentiation and self-experience, then rebirth of the psyche is the machinery, so to speak, whereby the One extended in universality affirms himself in individuality and reveals to himself as individual his own transcendence as the Eternal in whom all universal unity is founded. In other words, if the Spirit discloses its being through the growth of the

(1) Life Divine, p.672. Aurobindo rejects as "grotesque" the name of "transmigration" applied to the doctrine of rebirth. Likewise he finds the popular term "reincarnation" unacceptable. Instead he prefers "rebirth"; "for it renders the sense of the wide, colourless, but sufficient Sanskrit term, punarjanma, "again-birth", and commits us to nothing but the fundamental idea which is the essence and life of the doctrine" (Problem of Rebirth, pp.3-4).

individual consciousness, the conscious individual being, then rebirth is necessary for the evolution of the psyche, the true individual being.⁽¹⁾ The soul or psyche enters the inconscience of matter and out of it organises the evolving consciousness in increasingly complex forms, such that this evolving consciousness awakens to its own divine reality and the soul recovers its self-awareness. The psyche goes from life to life, growing in each existence until at the human stage it has evolved a psychic being which supports the individual evolution and develops a physical, a vital and a mental consciousness through which it experiences the world and expresses itself.⁽²⁾

Rebirth is, then, for Aurobindo an inevitable consequence of the relation between individuality and the purpose of the cosmic manifestation. Here everything depends upon the nature of the individual being who is reborn. The mere existence of a soul is in itself not sufficient ground for the acceptance of the doctrine of rebirth. There are, as Aurobindo recognises, religious and philosophical systems which accept the existence of the soul but not of soul evolution. For Aurobindo, however, such belief in a soul which has no past but has a future, which is created with the birth of a mortal body, and yet is itself immortal, - such belief is totally unacceptable. "It involves the difficulty of a creature beginning in time but enduring through all eternity, an immortal being dependent for its

(1) Problem of Rebirth, p.12.

(2) Letters, 2nd Series, pp.525f.

existence on an act of physical generation yet always and entirely unphysical and independent of the body which results from the generation."⁽¹⁾ Another belief about the soul closely allied to this one fares little better as far as Aurobindo is concerned: namely, that the soul is something pure and great which has fallen into material existence and that by its acts in the body it must redeem itself so that it may return to its heavenly home. The chief objection here is that one earthly life is hardly sufficient for such an immortal soul to achieve its return and that it must either perish(!) or be doomed to eternal perdition, - or else one must suppose that it has more existences than merely one.

As we have indicated, the inevitability and necessity of the doctrine of rebirth for Aurobindo follows from his unique view of the reincarnating individual, the psyche. Buddhism has always, we may suppose, in its orthodox forms taught rebirth. But for Buddhism rebirth is imperative because of karma, - the resultant and indestructible force of past actions which works itself out in future events. There is no soul; for there is no real identity to the individual. He is but an ever-changing flow of consciousness, a bundle of samskaras (fixed mental formations) which fall apart at the death of the body. There is a continuity to the states of consciousness but no real immortal soul passing from one body to another. It is karma which reincarnates, creating the constantly changing mentality and

(1) Problem of Rebirth, p.39.

physical forms that we are. The Advaita of the Mayavada, on the other hand, in its teaching of rebirth admitted the existence of a self, but this self is the one Self, Atman, which (according to Mayavada Advaita) cannot be many or multiple itself. Therefore, there cannot be any true individual, no real and eternal individual self, only the one, unborn and unmodified Self apart from the universe and unaffected by phenomenal existence. Birth, life, death, rebirth, all of individual and cosmic experience are in the last analysis naught but an illusion.

Aurobindo recognises that these are extreme views of rebirth and that there is an older view starting from the Upanishads which teaches the reality of both the world and of the individual who is in himself the Divine which has assumed name and form and which supports through the individual the experiences of life.⁽¹⁾ The individual goes from birth to birth because of the force of desire which is created and maintained by the mind ignorantly seeking things temporal rather than turning to knowledge of the eternal self. With end of desire and ignorance the Divine in the individual withdraws from the changing human personality and returns to its timeless, immutable and impersonal being. But even here, as Aurobindo points out, the reality of the individual is altogether temporal, lacking an enduring foundation. Moreover, the sole purpose of the cosmic manifestation seems to be the will of the Divine towards world-creation, and this will can operate without any device of rebirth and the desire of the individual

(1) Life Divine, pp.670ff.

individual maintaining it. In other words, for the purpose of world-creation the Divine could simply temporarily assume one individuality after another, without a necessary continuity between successive individuals. "The necessity for this purpose of an individualised consciousness persistently continuous, assuming name after name and form after form and moving between different planes backwards and forwards, is not apparent and, even as a possibility, does not strongly impose itself; still less is there any room for an evolutionary progress inevitably pursued from form to higher form such as must be supposed by a theory of rebirth that affirms the involution and evolution of the Spirit in Matter as the significant formula of our terrestrial existence". (1)

The vulgar conception of rebirth is that there is no birth of the soul, but rather a birth of a new body to be inhabited by the old personality: John Smith goes out of the old body today and tomorrow assumes a new body with a new name and in a new environment to continue his terrestrial experiences. Such a notion of the survival of personality is not what is meant by rebirth, at least for Aurobindo. (2) What we normally call

(1) Life Divine, pp.671-672.

(2) Problem of Rebirth, p.16, Life Divine, pp.726ff. Riddle of this World, pp.83ff. As Aurobindo says, the popular idea of rebirth is "that Titus Balbus is reborn again as John Smith, a man with the same personality, character, attainments as he had in his former life with the sole difference that he wears coat and trousers instead of a toga and speaks in cockney English instead of popular Latin. That is not the case. What would be the earthly use of repeating the same personality or character a million times from the beginning of time

Continuation of Footnote No. 2 on page 274.

till its end? The soul comes into birth for experience, for growth, for evolution till it can bring the Divine into Matter." (Riddle of this World, p.83).

personality is but a temporary surface formation of the spiritual individual, the psychic being, within. The outer personality is, says Aurobindo, "one step of the many steps of our evolutionary change and it serves its true purpose only when we pass beyond it to a further step leading nearer to a higher degree of consciousness and being".⁽¹⁾ It is the psychic being or soul personality which survives death, just as it pre-exists before death, and goes from birth to birth, evolving as it goes. In each new birth the psychic being constructs a new surface individual, a new personality, suitable for a new experience of the world and a new growth of its own being. The essential form of the past personalities may remain as one element or personality among many of the psychic, but it would remain behind in the subliminal contributing whatever was needed for the new formation. Indeed, all past personalities in their essence, - what Aurobindo calls their "divine element",⁽²⁾ - are present with the psychic in the subliminal, lending impetus and potentialities for future formations. As Aurobindo points out, "the greater the variety of formations that have existed in the past and can be utilised, the more rich and multitudinous the accumulated buildings of

(1) Life Divine, p.731. Aurobindo would agree with the Buddhist and Mayavada Advaita in denying an immutable, real existence to the individual's surface personality, the ego-complex. This is something built up of the ever changing states of mind, life and body, something insubstantial and impermanent, ceasing to exist as such with physical death.

(2) Riddle of this World, pp.85-86.

experience, the more their essential result of capacity for knowledge, power, action, character, manifold response to the universe can be brought forward and harmonised in the new birth, the more numerous the veiled personalities mental, vital, subtle-physical that combine to enrich the new personality on the surface, the greater and more opulent will be that personality and the nearer to the possible transition out of the completed mental stage of evolution to something beyond it".⁽¹⁾

Another feature of the vulgar conception of rebirth is the idea that rebirth is the moral and ethical machinery of the world. That is, rebirth is the means whereby God rewards the just and good and punishes the wicked and evil; for if the wicked of this life are not so punished in a future life and the good so rewarded, then there is reason to doubt God's wisdom and justice. So runs the ethical argument for rebirth. Even if God does not really exist, there still must be some sort of sanction for righteousness and explanation for the relative fortune and misfortune of men. The good man in this life who suffers misfortune must be doing so because he was wicked in his previous life. Similarly the prospering wicked man must have been good in his previous existence but will suffer for his present evil in the next life. And so it goes ad infinitum; all is explained and justified.

(1) Life Divine, p.728.

Aurobindo rejects such an interpretation with scorn: "the idea of the Law of the world as primarily a dispenser of rewards and punishments is cognate to the idea of the Supreme Being as a judge, "father" and school-master who is continually rewarding with lollipops his good boys and continually caning his naughty urchins".⁽¹⁾ There is, however, in this interpretation of rebirth a truth, - though badly distorted, - the truth of Karma. Karma and Rebirth.

According to Aurobindo, karma means fundamentally that all existence is but the workings of a universal energy, a building of all things by the action of that energy, - that all things are linked together indissolubly in a continuous chain of cause and effect, all cause and all effect being the working of energy.⁽²⁾ Two things must be stressed in this broad characterisation of karma. Firstly, although the universal energy or force is one, it works on several different though related levels: mental energy determines a mental effect and not a moral one; a physical energy determines the nature and effect of the physical consequence and does not translate itself into moral and mental energies. Moreover, all energies put forth by the individual are subject in their effects to the impact of the surrounding, universal circumstance, past, present and future. Secondly, this law of karma does not allow any room for chance.

(1) Problem of Rebirth, p.10.

(2) Ibid., pp.85ff.

As Aurobindo emphatically declares, "chance does not at all exist; it is only a word by which we cover and excuse our own ignorance".⁽¹⁾

As we have indicated, the popular interpretation of karma is one of a lex talionis, - an eye for an eye, - a tooth for a tooth. Aurobindo admits that the formula of good producing good and evil producing evil is true but not the whole truth.⁽²⁾ The good or evil in the individual may translate itself into a good or evil action with good or evil effects, and this outgoing power and effect ought to have an incoming reaction of equal power and effect. But things don't always or simply work out this way; there is no such simple correspondence. In the first place there are several different levels of "good" and "evil", although the moralist will not admit it. There is a "good" and "evil" of natural processes and of bodily life which is quite different from our mental, ethical ideas and ideals. The nature world whose first energy is the physical would be according to our ethical notions non-moral; for the forces of nature are not respecters of individuals. The rain falls and the sun shines on the just and the unjust alike. Nature has her own laws, laws of physical necessity to which our moral judgments cannot apply. Man's task in respect of nature is to live as much as possible in harmony with these laws or suffer the consequences, but also to exceed through soul growth the bondage to and limitations of

(1) Problem of Rebirth, p.88.

(2) Ibid., p.131.

his natural being.⁽¹⁾

In the physical world, therefore, the physical law applies, just as in the vital world the law of life applies. Here our moral canons and ethical formulae are not sufficient; here "the first principle is that each thing should observe the law of its own energy and each energy move in its own lines in the total scheme and fulfil its own function and make its own returns".⁽²⁾ In life, for example, the race goes to the swift and the battle to the strong and not necessarily to the moral and pious. Such is the law of vital karma.

Where, then, do moral and ethical principles come in? Man, since he is a mental being, - i.e. the evolutionary product of the mental self-expression of the soul, - must rise above the physical and the vital law of nature and live predominantly in the higher law of mental being, imposing it upon the physical-vital parts. This involves the perfection of mentality for its sake and for the sake of a higher evolution rather than merely for its utility in dealing with physical and life forces. Moral and ethical ideals evolve in the attempt of man to apply a mental rule or standard to his vital existence, when he no longer seeks in his mind merely pleasure and profit out of life.⁽³⁾ In a sense the idea of moral law represents the governing of life by reason and intelligence rather than by

(1) Problem of Rebirth, pp.151ff.

(2) Ibid., p.150.

(3) Ibid., pp.162ff.

vital impulse and intuition. Aurobindo admits the importance of such a rule of reason but points out that the mental idea of right and justice has gotten itself inextricably entangled with vital conceptions and demands, with vital notions of pleasure and profit: good means vital comfort, happiness, fortune, success, pleasure, etc., and evil means the opposites.⁽¹⁾ There is, of course, a "good" and an "evil" judged by the reason but these are properly moral values and not vital values and have a right to a moral and not a vital return; reward and punishment as the conditions for doing good and avoiding evil constitute a fundamentally immoral principle of action. A moral order there can and must be as the intelligent regulation of the individual's vital nature and for his relations on that level with his fellows. But moral right does not always have immediate or obvious effects and certainly do not always bring vital returns.

As man develops in his mental nature, he discovers that life and matter follow their own law, have their own karma, which is not in the rational sense moral, and that, although the mind must achieve mastery over the physical-vital, the karma of mind is of a different order and the return of its energies other than vital rewards and punishments. The mental being becomes truly ethical when it seeks good purely for the sake of good and shuns evil, not out of fear of punishment, but solely because the following of evil involves a degradation and a fall from his true

(1) Problem of Rebirth, pp.164ff.

nature. Here on the level of the mental nature we discover the truth of karma for men, - what Aurobindo terms "the higher law of karma" which is the law of man's spiritual evolution.⁽¹⁾

That law is that the true return (or "reward") to an ethically right output of energy is a growth within him of the soul, - of ethical, moral strength, love, compassion, truth, purity, justice; the return (or "punishment") to an act of evil, to the ethically wrong output of energy is retardation of soul growth and an obscuration and impoverishing and even a demolition of the upbuilding of the soul.

Karma is not, then, for Aurobindo just a mechanical law of antecedent and consequence, of cause and effect. Karma is action, and this means that there is a doer, a thing done and an active consequence. This involves a complex of mental, moral and physical workings. The driving force of the action is the idea and will of the individual, and thus the act and consequence are related to the idea and will, and there must be a moral and mental consequence to the individual which has the idea and will, this signifies firstly a continuity of act and consequence to the individual and therefore rebirth as the field of the working out of act and consequence. Secondly this signifies that the individual is morally responsible for all his actions and their consequences. It is the individual who

(1) Problem of Rebirth, pp.179ff.

formulates the idea and wills the action; it is he who is responsible for the consequence. But is it not true that, according to Aurobindo, it is nature, prakriti, which "forms the thought, imposes the will, imparts the impulse" in us?⁽¹⁾

Moreover, what freedom does the individual have in respect of the effects of both his present nature and of his environment? To these questions Aurobindo would answer that it is true that the individual qua surface being is a construction of prakriti and is subject to the workings of prakriti. But the individual is greatly more than a construction of prakriti; he is firstly and essentially a soul, purusha, which uses the construction of prakriti, - the individual physical, vital, mental natures, - for its own world-experience and objective self-expression. It is this inner, true individual, the purusha, who is free and responsible, who gives or withholds its sanctions to the action of prakriti, who can, when sufficiently evolved completely control the surface individual rather than its being controlled by nature. The outer mental, ego-will is not really or completely free because it is bound by its limited nature, subject to ignorance and the product of the universal energy. Karma as a law and process pertains only to nature, to prakriti, and not to spirit, to purusha. It governs our outer mind, life and body as a mechanism of nature, but it is always the soul within which freely determines its own evolution according to the cosmic will

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.245.

of the Spirit and uses karma as one process for that evolution.⁽¹⁾
As Aurobindo points out, "if a certain amount of results of past Karma is formulated in the present life, it must be with the consent of the psychic being which presides over the new formation of its earth-experience and assents not merely to an outward compulsory process, but to a secret Will and Guidance".⁽²⁾

As for the effects of the present nature of the individual, his "heredity", the soul may, if sufficiently strong or aroused, modify the surface construction according to its will and thus alter the individual's actions and their resulting consequences. There is always this spiritual freedom within the individual over nature and karma; the more the soul grows, the more the exercise of this freedom and control are seen in the individual's surface being. Similarly in regard to environment, the individual is not simply mechanically subject to its forces and effects. What matters, says Aurobindo, is not what heredity or environment makes of the individual but what the individual, - the true, soul individual, - makes of heredity and environment.

Always, then, the real meaning of freedom, karma and rebirth lies within the individual, in his spiritual being. It is for the growth of the individual being that the soul enters into rebirth and accepts or rejects the workings of nature. The joy and pain, grief and suffering, fortune and misfortune which the individual has are all parts of that soul experience and growth.

(1) Life Divine, pp.719ff.

(2) Ibid., p.720.

The soul may even choose or accept misfortune and suffering as helpful to its growth.⁽¹⁾ In any case, all births are births of the soul and, as Aurobindo says, "all birth is a progressive self-finding, a means of self-realisation".⁽²⁾

The Process of Rebirth.

It is the soul or psychic being, then, which goes from birth to birth for its own evolution. The body, life and mind of the individual are the instruments which the soul uses for its experience, expression and growth. They, being constructions of nature, are subject to nature's laws and forces, - to decay, disintegration, death. The soul or psychic being, being a force of Spirit, is immortal; it passes through death but does not itself die. From the standpoint of the soul's evolution death may be regarded as necessary since the soul "is not yet developed enough to go on growing in the same body without the need of change and the body itself is not sufficiently conscious"⁽³⁾.

When the body dies, the soul does not immediately go to a new birth in another body. There are, as we have seen, supraphysical cosmic planes or worlds, - spiritual, mental, vital, - which act constantly upon the physical universe by a sort of upward-drawing and downward-passing force from above to produce out of inconscient matter their own imprisoned principle of life, mind and spirit. Moreover, the subliminal self of the individual is built up out of these planes and is in an immediate touch with them, constantly receiving all manner of contacts,

(1) Life Divine, p.726.

(2) Problem of Rebirth, p.82.

(3) Letters, 2nd Series, p.523.

impressions and impacts. Upon the death of the body the soul passes through these various supraphysical planes to its own proper world there to rest until it is ready to assume its next birth. If there were only this physical universe, then rebirth of the soul as a part of the evolutionary process would mean a constant succession of transmigrations from one body to another; a new birth would immediately follow death without any interval. In such a case, says Aurobindo, "the soul would have no freedom from Matter; it would be perpetually bound to its instrument, the body, and dependent on it for the continuity of its manifested existence".⁽¹⁾

With death the material elements which make up the gross physical body dissolve, as it were, into the universal material stratum. The psychic being or soul passes out of the gross body in what Aurobindo calls the "subtle-body", - i.e. the case or sheath of the inner vital-mental nature composed of the subtle-physical substance which supports the outer physical form of the individual, - carrying mind and life with it.⁽²⁾ The soul journeys first to the cosmic life plane or world and then to the mental world, in each plane of existence goes through certain experiences resulting from its earthly existence and, after throwing off first its vital and then its mental personalities, the soul retires to its own plane.⁽³⁾ In the psychic plane the

(1) Life Divine, p.707.

(2) Ibid., p.710.

(3) Letters, 2nd Series, pp.529ff.

soul rests to assimilate the essence of its past life's experiences and to prepare for its next birth.⁽¹⁾ However, Aurobindo points out, the new birth of the soul is not simply an automatic continuation of the past, a repetition and development of the old surface personality or a taking up of the development exactly where it left off at death. Instead, "there is an assimilation, a discarding and strengthening and rearrangement of the old characters and motives, a new ordering of the developments of the past and a selection for the purposes of the future without which the new start cannot be fruitful or carry forward the evolution".⁽²⁾ As the soul passes through the various subtle-physical, vital and mental planes, it discards on each level the energies, vibrations and motives proper to each level. At the same time by assimilating and re-ordering the essence of personality and its physical, vital and mental experiences the soul itself grows and develops, - depending, of course, upon the quality of those past experiences, - and decides the character of its next terrestrial existence. After a period in the psychic world during which it assimilates the essence of its experience and develops thereby, the soul personality or psychic being returns to earth to make a new physical-vital-mental formation, - a new surface personality, - for a new world-experience and a new growth of its being.⁽³⁾ On its return to earth the psychic being selects from the cosmic

(1) Life Divine, pp.713f.

(2) Ibid., p.715.

(3) Letters, 2nd Series, pp.540ff.

mental, vital and subtle-physical planes the elements it needs for the new formation, a small portion of which is expressed on the surface, the rest remaining concealed as the subliminal self, - the inner mind, life and body supported by the psychic being.

The Soul in the Body.

The soul in the body is, as Aurobindo speaks of it, like a "little flame of godhead burning in the midst of a great darkness"⁽¹⁾. As the soul personality, the psychic being, evolves from birth to birth, its influence upon and expression in the surface being increases. However the total effect of the psychic being in the individual is vitiated by the dependence of the soul upon the imperfect instruments of the mind, life and body for its expression. The psychic being must constantly strive against the obscurity and confusion of the physical consciousness, the arrogance of mind and the disruptions of the vital nature. The workings of the soul are continually confounded by the falsehood, error and evil of the surface desire soul and the ego.⁽²⁾ Moreover, the influences of the psychic being rise to the surface clouded in purity and diminished in effect by the workings of the subliminal mental-vital-physical nature which it supports. In a very profound sense "the soul is subject to nature".⁽³⁾ Though in itself "free from stain and mixture",⁽⁴⁾ the psychic being in its surface expression is caught up in the ignorance of mind

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.174.

(2) Life Divine, pp.795f.

(3) Synthesis of Yoga, p.490.

(4) Life Divine, p.796.

and the emotions and sensations of the vital and physical parts. In fact so confused with the impermanent states of mind, life and body is the soul that its very existence seems at time to be an illusion. This, of course, is the conclusion reached by Buddhism and modern materialism: there is no undying and enduring soul, only ever-changing psycho~~mental~~ states and physical constitution of the individual. Mayavada concluded that both nature and the individual soul are finally unreal, illusory, and pointed to a realm in which all such illusion was extinct. Samkhya preserved the reality and integrity of the soul by declaring that the soul is passive and pure and only reflects the determinations of nature without being affected by them. For Aurobindo, however, although the soul is affected by its workings, its experience and expression, by the constructions and movements of nature, it nonetheless has a higher poise of consciousness in the jivatman in which it transcends the limitations of mind and subjection to nature. Moreover, as the soul, the psychic being, evolves and grows in self-awareness and power the more it will be free (svarāt) and progressively ruler of all parts of the individual (saṁrāt)

The Ontological Nature of the Individual Self.

We have thusfar considered the nature of the individual self in regard to the processes of terrestrial evolution both as a surface being of mind, life and body and as an evolving soul. The surface being we have seen is the construction of the inner soul-person, the psychic being, which in turn is the

representative in the evolution of the individual self, the jivatman, standing above the manifestation. Now we must turn our attention to the nature of the individual self in itself, so to speak, and apart from the evolution.

In its ontological nature the individual self is a pre-existent and super-terrestrial being which presides over the evolution of an individual existence but is itself unborn and eternal. In its essence the Jivatman or individual self is but a poise of the eternal and infinite Being (Sachchidananda), one with all other selves which are but the one Divine (Brahman) in Its supreme Nature (parā prakṛti) manifested as the Many.⁽¹⁾ The Many are the eternal selves of the Divine which in relation to the world of evolution (the lower nature, aparā prakṛti) appear as the Jivatmans, supporting the evolution of the natural existences, though not themselves in the evolution.⁽²⁾ Thus Aurobindo characterises the Jivatman as "a portion of the Divine Self".⁽³⁾

To Shankara this would have been an unacceptable characterisation of the relation between the Jiva (or Jivatman) and the Absolute, Brahman, - as unacceptable as Ramanuja's belief that the individual is but a part (aṁśa) of Ultimate Reality, a

(1) Letters, 4th Series, p.171; Letters, 1st Series, p.129; Life Divine, p.136.

(2) Letters, 1st Series, p.131f.

(3) Lights on Yoga, p.23.

qualified mode or form (viśeṣana) of Brahman.⁽¹⁾ In advaita absolutism the Jivā cannot be regarded in any sense as a part or portion or mode of the Divine, for the Divine is both without parts and without change.⁽²⁾

This characterisation of the Jivā as "an eternal portion" of the Divine by Aurobindo corresponds to the definition of Jivā in the Gita,⁽³⁾ but he considers it to be only a figurative expression.⁽⁴⁾ Moreover, Aurobindo maintains, it cannot be said that when the Gita declares that "it is an eternal portion of Me that becomes the Jivā in a world of Jivās", it is pronouncing the same view as the later doctrine of Ramanuja.⁽⁵⁾

(1) Thus Ramanuja says: "The individual soul is a part (aṁśa) of the highest self, as the light issuing from a luminous thing, such as fire or the sun, is a part of that body, or as the generic characteristics of a cow or a horse, and the white or black colours of things so coloured, are attributes and hence parts of the things in which those attributes inhere, or as the body is part of an embodied being. For by a part is meant that which constitutes one place (ekadeśa) of something; a distinguishing attribute (viśeṣana) is a part of the thing distinguished by that attribute (viśiṣṭavastu). Though the attribute and the substance stand to each other in the relation of part and whole, yet we observe them to differ in essential character". Sribhāṣya on Brahma Sūtra, ii. 3.45. See O. Lacombe, La Doctrine Morale et Métaphysique, Paris, 1938, pp.138f. de Ramanuja.

(2) Shankara's Commentary on Brahma Sūtra, i. 4.22.

(3) Gita, XV. 7.

(4) Lights on Yoga, p.27.

(5) Essays on the Gita, p.397.

Rather, it is only pointing to the fact "that there is an eternal, a real and not only an illusive principle of multiplicity in the spiritual being of the one divine Existence". (1)

Aurobindo, however, means by Jiva or Jivatman something other than what either Shankara or Ramanuja intended. Although all three translate Jiva as individual self, for Ramanuja and Shankara this self is the individual self in phenomenal existence, whether that existence be considered illusory or real; it is the "empirical self". For Aurobindo, on the other hand, the Jiva is both prior to and superior to phenomenal existence. It exists eternally as an unchanging and unevolving self or power of the Divine in Its supreme Nature (parā prakṛti). (2) In a sense the Jiva or Jivatman is a primordial and eternal truth of divine Being (Sat) apprehended by divine Consciousness (Chit). It is a truth of divine Being ever contained within the divine Consciousness as an infinite potentiality but non-differentiated within the Ultimate Reality (Sachchidananda) in its primal poise of pure, infinite, invariable Consciousness. Here there is only One Self (Paramatman), the supreme Brahman (Parabrahman). There is no actualisation of the One as the Many, as the individual Divine, until Consciousness (Chit) concentrates itself upon the infinite forms of its Being (Sat), realising itself as Many in its intrinsic unity of Being (Sachchidananda). For Aurobindo, therefore, the many Jivas are ever contained within the one

(1) Essays on the Gita, p.397.

(2) Letters, 1st Series, p.131.

supreme Self as real forms of its being and actualised in manifestation by an extension of its consciousness.⁽¹⁾ In a play of divine Consciousness upon the forms which it contains, the Divine manifests the multiplicity of its self-forms (the Jivas) in an infinite self-extension and diffusion. "In each name and form it would realise itself as the stable Conscious-Self, the same in all; but also it would realise itself as a concentration of Conscious-Self following and supporting the individual play of movement, - the same everywhere in soul-essence, but varying in soul-form".⁽²⁾ It is this individual Self-concentration of the supreme Divine, supporting the manifold soul-forms (svarūpa) manifested in the movement of Consciousness-Force (Chit-Shakti), which is the Jivatman, the individual Divine. Thus it is that the principle of individualisation is eternally contained within the Absolute itself. The Jivatman as the individual Divine is an eternal potentiality eternally actualised by Consciousness-Force (Chit-Shakti); as the individual Divine it is a power of conscious being contained within the Absolute and put forth from it.

This view of the Jiva stands in sharp contrast to that of both Shankara and Ramanuja. According to Shankara the Jiva has an existential or phenomenal reality but no ultimate or

(1) Life Divine, pp.134ff.

(2) Ibid., p.136.

ontological reality. (1) From the logical point of view the individual self is the only reality; for this self is the agent of all activity. (2) The Jiva is nonetheless a product of ignorance or aiñāna; it has no intrinsic reality. It is a super-imposition of aiñāna upon Atman, or pure Consciousness, and as such has an illusory existence. (3) It is real only in that

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- (1) As has been clearly shown by Deussen (Die Nachvedische Philosophie der Inder, Leipzig, 1920, 'Das Vedāntasystem', pp. 586-614), Śaṅkara had in effect two systems, distinct but not unrelated. There was the 'higher' system formed by an esoteric teaching (para vidya) in theology and eschatology combined with a metaphysical point of view (paramārtha-avastha) in cosmology and psychology. This metaphysical system centred around the principle of 'identity', i.e. the non-duality (advaita or Brahman: there is only Brahman, totally identified with Atman; there is no creation or existence of the world, no manifoldness, no individuality and transmigration of souls. Then there was a system of popular religion for those who could not attain to the higher level of identity. This second system was a compound of a lower or exoteric teaching in theology and eschatology and an empirical point of view (vyavahara-avastha) in cosmology and psychology and taught the creation of the world by Brahman as Isvara and the transmigration of souls made individual by virtue of the upadhis. Śaṅkara, however, doesn't himself always strictly observe the distinction between these two levels or view points, especially in his cosmology and psychology. As Deussen states: "Zum Nachteile der Klarheit und Konsequenz wird diese Zweiheit der standpunkte in Kosmologie und Psychologie nicht überall streng gewahrt. Das System stellt sich in allgemeinen auf den metaphysischen Standpunkt und vernachlässigt den empirischen, ohne doch demselben seine relative Berechtigung abzuspochen und absprechen zu können, weil er für die apara vidya der Eschatologie die unentbehrliche Voraussetzung ist." (pp. 593-594)
- (2) Brahma Sutra, i. I.4. See Rādhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, pp. 484-485.
- (3) Das Gupta, History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, pp. 474ff. Also O. Lacombe, L'Absolu selon le Vedānta, Annales du Musée Guimet, Tome 49, Paris, 1937, pp. 111f. Also P. Hacker, Vivarta: Studien zur Geschichte der illusionistischen Kosmologie und Erkenntnistheorie der Inder Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz, 1953, pp. 24f.

it is a necessary postulate of our empirical existence but unreal in its own nature and apart from its relationship with consciousness. Once the mental impurities (vyritti-adnānas) are destroyed and the pure light of Brahman manifested, then the Jiva as an ajñāna state vanishes as an illusion, a nothingness. The Jiva is an eidolon, a phantom (ābhāsa) of the Atman, like the reflection of the sun in water.⁽¹⁾ The idea of the 'division' (bheda) of the One into many souls depends on avidyā or ignorance.⁽²⁾

For Ramanuja the individual self, as well as the world, is real and eternal. The Jiva and the world exist distinct from Brahman and are related to Brahman as attributes and substance (viśeṣaṇa and viśeṣa). Although the Jiva is a mode of the Absolute, it is real, unique, and eternal, possesses self-consciousness and intelligence, is unchanging, without parts, imperceptible and atomic.⁽³⁾ However, because the Jiva is a mode or qualified form (viśeṣaṇa) of the Absolute, it differs in characteristics from it and is accordingly not one with it.⁽⁴⁾ The Jiva is a part (aṁśa) of the Divine, but since Brahman admits of no divisions, it is a part of Brahman only in the sense that "a distinguishing attribute (viśeṣaṇa) is a part of the thing distinguished by that attribute (viśiṣṭavastu). Though the attribute and the substance stand to each other in the relation of part and whole, yet we observe them to differ in essential

(1) Brahma Sūtra, 2. 3. 50.

(2) P. Deussen, System of the Vedānta, pp.301ff.

(3) Brahma Sūtra, ii. 2. 19-32, ii.3.18.

(4) Brahma Sūtra, ii. 3-45.

character".(1) The Jiva is the inseparable attribute (aparthaksiddha viśeṣaṇa) of Brahman as Sat or ultimate substance and an eternal part (aṁśa) of the vibhu or Reality which is a whole.(2)

According to Aurobindo the Jiva is not ultimately an illusion, a state of aīñāna to be removed upon the attainment of knowledge (vidyā). It is an eternally existing individualisation of the One Divine and thus is possessed of the self-luminous divine consciousness. Nor is there just one Jiva or Atman; there is an infinity of selves existing self-contained in the One divine Self (Paramatman). This is not the division (bheda) of the One into many souls which Shankara attributed to the illusion created by ignorance. Rather it is the One Divine eternally manifesting the many in a play of its consciousness upon the infinite range of possible forms inherent in its supreme nature (parā prakṛti) and supporting each so manifested form by a concentration of its Consciousness-Force. The Jiva is this specific individualisation of the supreme Divine which guides and upholds the differentiation of each self-form of the Absolute. The Jiva is in this sense a self-concentration and self-contraction of the one Consciousness-Self; it is the Infinite infinitely determining Itself, the individual Divine behind each and every of the infinite variety of divine self-expressions.

Shankara would have objected, however, that this position

(1) Brahma Sūtra, ii.3.45.

(2) See P.N. Srinivasachari, The Philosophy of Viśiṣṭadvaita, The Adyar Library, Adyar, 1946, pp.296f.

raises at least two immediate difficulties. Firstly the oneness of Brahman is reduced to a mere unity of many souls, and secondly the undetermined Brahman is here determined by its eternal manifestation of many souls. In answer to the first objection Aurobindo would say that the oneness of the Absolute is not a finite mathematical unit; it is a characterisation of one infinite Being which contains within itself infinite possibilities of Being. That is to say, the very nature (parā prakṛti) of the essential and infinite oneness of Brahman is that it is capable of an infinite multiplicity; "but that does not mean that the One is plural or can be limited or described as the sum of the Many: on the contrary, it can be the infinite Many because it exceeds all limitation or description by multiplicity and exceeds at the same time all limitation by finite conceptual oneness".⁽¹⁾ Here Aurobindo escapes the charge of establishing a pluralism; there is a 'spiritual plurality' but the many souls do not add up to the One nor do they constitute a cosmic totality. The infinite Many are eternally contained within the infinite One. 'One' and 'many' here used are not mathematical terms but expressions of Infinity. "Brahman is one, not numerically, but in essence".⁽²⁾

As for the second possible objection Aurobindo would reply

(1) Life Divine, p.304.

(2) Isha Upanishad, p.37.

that Brahman is never determined by Its eternal individualisation, i.e., the manifestation of the many souls; the non-dual essentiality (Ādwaita) of the Absolute is never modified. Truly, as Shankara insisted, only Brahman is. But, as Aurobindo declares, "That (Brahman) is identical, not single. It is identical always and everywhere in Time and Space as well as identical beyond Time and Space. Numerical oneness and multiplicity are equally valid terms of its essential unity".⁽¹⁾

The Many, therefore, may be called 'parts' of Brahman in the same sense that the waves are 'parts' of the sea.⁽²⁾ The truth here is that each wave is yet that very sea, the apparent diversities being those of frontal appearances caused by the sea's motion.⁽³⁾ Shankara, however, would not take exception to such an analogy; it does not really apply here, for the waves and the sea are objects of the senses but Brahman is not.⁽⁴⁾ The truth of Brahman, says Shankara, is that of non-duality (Ādwaita) but non-duality which is not both one and many at the same time. Ultimate Reality, Brahman, "is not a single principle which is reducible to many but it is one single principle which forever remains one without a second".⁽⁵⁾ Therefore, concludes Shankara, "to people who through want of experience have not this insight into things, there will always be difference and non-difference, even as in the case of the sea

(1) Isha Upanishad, p.38.

(2) Ibid, pp.37f.

(3) Ibid., p.38.

(4) Brahma Sūtra, 2.1.14.

(5) M.N.Sastri, A Study of Shankara, University of Calcutta, 1942, p.76.

and its waves, but in reality these differences are relative and not true!" (1) To such an argument Aurobindo would probably reply that the two terms, numerical oneness and multiplicity, are, like all other such terms, but representations in a divine Consciousness (Chit) which is capable of regarding ultimate Being variously, infinitely, and of formulating what it so regards. (2) This consciousness is not only a power of knowledge (i.e. of vijñāna or Real-Idea of divine Being, Sat) but also a power of expressive will, of formative representation. For Aurobindo the key to the understanding of the relationship of the Jivatman or individual self to Brahman is found in an understanding of the nature of this divine Consciousness.

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Whereas in our normal mental consciousness 'one' and 'many' are logically exclusive terms, in the divine Consciousness they represent only two possible modes of an infinite self-awareness. Brahman as one can conceive of itself as many, and as the divine Consciousness is not only conceptually creative but creatively executive, the act of conceiving and knowing is at once the fact of willing and becoming. Moreover, just as the one knows itself eternally as many, so the many Jivas know themselves as one with each other and with the one divine Self. In other words, each individual centre of the divine Consciousness, each Jiva, is that Consciousness and is one with that Consciousness in all and

(1) Brahma Sūtra, 2. 1.14.

(2) Isha Upanishad, p.38.

in the unity of all. The infinite and essential nature of Brahman as non-dual (Adwaita), 'one without a second', is, therefore preserved; for each Jiva and all Jivas are eternally the One in its manifold self-expression. Furthermore, although the principle of individualisation is contained eternally within the nature of Brahman, it is not obligatory for Brahman to individualise Itself; but the fact is that It does so eternally. From this point of view Brahman is eternally what It eternally becomes, and what is, is eternally Brahman. Whereas Shankara would say that only Brahman is, Aurobindo would express the same Adwaita truth perhaps more fully by saying that all that is is, Brahman. Thus, whereas for Shankara the sole reality of Brahman excludes the reality of the individual, as well as the world, as illusions and superimpositions upon reality (Brahman), for Aurobindo the infinite reality of Brahman includes the reality of both the individual and the world - as its self-manifestations.

It is on the matter of the identity of the Jiva and Brahman that Aurobindo is at variance with Ramanuja who, in speaking of the self as an attribute (viśeṣana) or mode of Brahman, declares the individual self to be eternally different from and not identifiable with God, just as an attribute is different from and not identifiable with its substance. But while Aurobindo would disagree with Ramanuja in the latter's denial of the essential and eternal oneness of the Jiva and Brahman, he would agree with Ramanuja against Shankara that the individual self is

real and not just an illusion. For Ramanuja and Aurobindo the distinction of a plurality of individual selves (Jivas) is not due to nescience (Avidya) and hence unreal. On the contrary they are eternally real. But, according to Aurobindo, the many Jivas are not simply modes or attributes of Brahman, as they are for Ramanuja; they are originally and eternally one with Brahman because they are self-manifestations of Brahman. The individual selves, the Jivatmans, are, therefore, both eternally real and distinct and eternally and essentially one with Brahman. They are real and distinct because they are the eternal and infinite individualisations of an eternal and infinite oneness. For the same reason they are essentially one with the Divine:
so'ham, tat tvam asi.

Ramanuja, however, objects that scriptural texts such as tat tvam asi, 'Thou art that', point not to identity of Brahman and the individual self. Instead, as in all cases of predication, what is predicated is a substance characterised by different attributes, such that the 'Thou' cannot be identified with the 'that'.⁽¹⁾ Extending the point, Ramanuja argues that Brahman is to the individual self (Jiva) as the soul is to the body. Each has its distinctive attributes but yet the body is under the control of the soul.⁽²⁾ In like manner the self is the body

(1) Śribhāṣya, trans. Thibaut, Sacred Books of the East, Vol.48, pp.363f. See B. Kumarappa, Hindu Conception of the Deity, Luzac, London, 1934, pp.249ff.

(2) Brahma Sūtra, i. I.31.

of Brahman which abides therein as Self and as its inner ruler.⁽¹⁾ This for Ramanuja would be the meaning of the Isha Upanishad's statement about seeing everywhere "the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self"⁽²⁾ or the declaration of the Gita, "I am the Self which abides within all things".⁽³⁾ Brahman is present in the Jiva as its Self and its ruler, just as the soul is present in the body as its self and its ruler.

At this point Aurobindo's view of the individual self, the Jivatman, stands distinctly apart from that of Ramanuja. The Jivatman is an eternal self-manifestation of the Divine, standing behind natural existence supporting their evolution but is itself non-evolved. The Jiva, according to Aurobindo, is Brahman as individual self. It cannot, therefore, be viewed either as an attribute of a divine substance or as the body of a divine Self. It is that "one without a second" and at the same time that One which is eternally Many. Between the Jiva and the Brahman, the individual divine and the transcendent divine, "there would be no essential difference but only a practical differentiation";⁽⁴⁾ the individual self is according to Aurobindo both distinct from and identical with the transcendent Divine.

Shankara and Ramanuja thus seem to be reconciled here. Moreover, the pluralistic doctrine (Dwaita) of Madhva that the individual selves are innumerable and are distinct from God, as

(1) Sribhasya, Thibaut, p.228ff.

(2) Isha Upanishad, Verse 6.

(3) Gita, X, 20.

(4) Life Divine, p.136.

well as from each other, would find a place in Aurobindo's definition of Jiva.⁽¹⁾ For Madhva the Jiva is distinct from God both in the world of bondage (samsāra) and in release (mokṣa)⁽²⁾ Although the Jiva, according to Aurobindo, does not enter directly into samsāra, it nonetheless is the central being behind the manifestation of individual being and as such is distinct from Brahman, the supreme Self, and all other Jivas.

According to Aurobindo, these three Vedantic definitions of the individual self, - i.e. Shankara's monism (Adwaita), Ramanuja's qualified non-duality (Vishishtadwaita) and Madhva's dualism (Dwaita) - are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather they represent aspects of the total truth of the nature of the individual self, the Jivatman. The Jiva is at the same time real, distinct from and one with the Divine. This is the truth contained in the triple consciousness of the Jiva whereby as an individual centre of the divine Consciousness it may view itself as completely one with divine Existence in pure identity (Adwaita), eternally one with It, yet different (Vishishtadwaita), or eternally different from It (Dwaita).⁽³⁾ In any case the individual self "can never regard himself as independent of some kind of Unity, for such a view would correspond to no conceivable

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- (1) The main difference between Madhva's and Ramanuja's views of individual souls is that while Ramanuja thinks the Jivas are similar in natural essence, Madhva considers them as totally distinct and different from God. See Radhakrishnan op.cit. Vol. II, p.738.
- (2) See H. von Glasenapp, Madhva's Philosophie des Vishnu-Glaubens, Schroeder, Bonn, 1923, pp.54-57, 76-80, 101f.
- (3) Aurobindo, Isha Upanishad, p.40.

truth in the universe or beyond it".⁽¹⁾

Each of these views, then, is for Aurobindo valid and no one completely true without the others. In a sense the existence of these three "mutually destructive schools of philosophy", each claiming to present the truth of the individual, points to the dangerous tendency to place an exclusive emphasis on one side or one aspect of the total spiritual experience.⁽²⁾ When it comes to characterising the soul's experience of the Divine Reality or even the nature of Reality in itself, we are like the proverbial blind men pronouncing on the nature of the elephant solely in terms of that one part of the animal which each had touched. So also we fall into the error of 'touching' only one or another aspect of Ultimate Reality - emphasising Its oneness to the exclusion of an 'illusory' Many or emphasising the play of the One in the Many, affirming both terms as eternally related in a qualified unity but failing to see their essential identity, or emphasising solely the difference without any experience of a "pure consciousness" which would exceed and abolish that difference. An integral view demands the inclusion of all possible modes of relationship between the individual and the Ultimate.

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According to Aurobindo, therefore, the Jivatman or individual self exists both potentially and actually within the

(1) Aurobindo, Isha Upanishad, p.40. By 'unity' Aurobindo must mean some kind of positive relationship and not necessarily union or identification; otherwise the dualistic position of Madhva would have to be totally rejected.

(2) Life Divine, p.138.

divine Consciousness (Chit) as a self-form (svarūpa) of the divine Being (Sat). It is this view of the individual self as an infinite and eternal self-form of Brahman, existing eternally in the supreme Nature of Brahman as pure Being-Consciousness-Bliss (Sachchidananda), which marks Aurobindo's definition of the Jiva as unique and radically different from the other Vedantic interpretations.

As a self-form of the Divine, the Jivatman possesses a consciousness which is pure and unlimited. It is thereby able to apprehend all of infinite truth and in its immutable existence to know itself as an eternal manifestation of the Absolute, a primordial self-expression and self-form of the Transcendence, of divine Sachchidananda. "In its every state or act of knowledge it would be aware of the Unknowable cognising itself by a form of variable self-knowledge; in its every state or act of power, will or force aware of the Transcendence possessing itself by a form of conscious power of being and knowledge; in its every state or act of delight, joy or love aware of the Transcendence embracing itself by a form of conscious self-enjoyment"⁽¹⁾. The Jiva, thus participates in the divine Nature (Sachchidananda) and is a self-expression of that divine Nature. It is eternally contained in the divine Nature as a potential self-form of divine Being (Sat), eternally actualised by a movement of divine Consciousness (Chit) apprehending and expressing it. Dwelling

(1) Life Divine, p.142.

eternally in the divine Nature and being a manifestation of that Nature, the Jivatman lives simultaneously in the two inseparable poles of the eternal existence of the Absolute as One and the Many and consciously experiences itself as the One Self who has eternally become the Many selves which It eternally is. The Jivatman is aware at once of the infinite self-concentration and the infinite self-extension and self-diffusion. It possesses that comprehensive self-knowledge of the triune nature of the Divine as eternally transcendent, universal and individual and of its own triune existence as that One Self becoming all existences, containing all existences and inhabiting all existences.⁽¹⁾ It knows and enjoys "that oneness of God with itself in its own individuality and with its other selves in the universality".⁽²⁾ Thus, says Aurobindo, "spiritual individuality means that each individual self or spirit is a centre of self-vision and all-vision; the circumstance - the boundless circumference, as we may say - of this vision may be the same for all, but the centre may be different, - not located as in a spatial point in a spatial circle, but a psychological centre related with others through a co-existence of the diversely conscious mind in the universal being".⁽³⁾

The Ultimate Nature of Individuality.⁽⁴⁾

As we have seen, the Jivatman is that eternal and unevolved

(1) Life Divine, p.144.

(2) Ibid., p.146.

(3) Ibid., p.310.

(4) We have here to repeat some of our previous points about the individual in his various aspects in order to consider this very important topic.

portion of the Divine which stands above the processes of evolution, directing and supporting the development of the individual being. It sends forth that "spark of the Divine", the psyche or soul-power, which develops through the evolution of matter, life and mind into the psychic being or soul-individual which stands behind and supports both the inner and outer mental, vital and physical natures. At this point, therefore, individuality is to be understood in terms of the concept of the 'central being' with its dual aspect: above, the jivatman - the true and eternal being or self; below, the psychic being - the true 'empirical' (i.e., 'evolved' or 'manifested') individual. "The Jivatman is above the manifestation in life and presides over it; the psychic being stands behind the manifestation in life and supports it".⁽¹⁾ The Jivatman, then, is the essential self of the individual which, as an 'eternal portion of the Divine', is prior to and stands above world manifestation. It is that which defines the empirical individual in his essence as individual - one, distinct, indivisible - and bestows upon him eternal reality and ultimate significance. All possible modes of unity are united within the Jivatman in its essential nature as Divine Being; all possible forms of manifestation (aparā prakṛti) are contained within it in its essential being as absolute potentiality. In the course of evolution the psychic being, caitya puruṣa, grows by spiritual experience to that force

(1) Lights on Yoga, p.24.

of consciousness whereby it overcomes the barriers and limitations of the fractionated ego-consciousness and attains the supra-mental consciousness of its true self, the Jivatman, transforming thereby not only mind but the vital and physical natures as well. In this full consciousness the psychic being becomes one with the Jivatman, and the individual knows himself as one with the One, the Divine.

But does the Jivatman constitute the final term in individuality? What is its relationship to the unmanifested Ultimate Reality, to the Absolute in Itself? According to Aurobindo, the Jivatman represents the "second poise of the Supermind" in which "the Divine Consciousness stands back in the idea from the movement which it contains, realising it by a sort of apprehending consciousness, following it, occupying and inhabiting its works, seeming to distribute itself in its forms".⁽¹⁾ The Jivatman is the individual Divine, a very real concentration of conscious Self which is the basis of the cosmic processes of evolution and involution - the becoming of the One as the Many, the manifestation of soul-essence in varying soul-forms. Moreover, in its essential nature the Jivatman itself neither changes nor evolves, for in its essence it is eternal and ultimate divine Spirit. But the Jivatman has a dual nature: in terms of its relation to the Absolute it is 'unlimited' in the divine essence; in terms of its relation to evolution-involution it is a 'self-

(1) Life Divine, p.136.

limiting' (or 'contraction') of the Divine as an eternal 'form' or 'projection' of consciousness-force (and this "knows itself as one centre of the multiple Divine, not as the Parameshwara"⁽¹⁾). This is not to say that there is any essential difference between the Absolute and the Jivatman, between the universal Divine and the individual Divine, "but only a practical differentiation".⁽²⁾ From the standpoint of the supramental consciousness of the Jivatman both aspects are comprehended, just as from the standpoint of the Absolute Consciousness the universal and individual significance of the Jivatman is comprehended. Thus, "the universal Divine would know all soul-forms as itself and yet establish a different relation with each separately and in each with all the others. The individual Divine would envisage its existence as a soul-form and soul-movement of the One and, while by the comprehending action of consciousness it would enjoy its unity with the One and with all soul-forms, it would also by a forward or frontal apprehending action support and enjoy its individual movement and its relations of a free difference in unity both with the One and with all its forms".⁽³⁾

Hence the Jivatman is an eternal form of Divine Consciousness-Force, existing individually in union with the One Universal and all other Divine soul-forms and manifesting itself through the psyche in the evolution of matter, life and mind and

(1) Lights on Yoga, p.25.

(2) Life Divine, p.136.

(3) Ibid.

in the psychic being. Thus it may be characterised as "the multiple Divine manifested here as the individual self or spirit of the created being".⁽¹⁾ The evolved psychic being is the true individual of evolution standing behind the shifting ego-formation, whereas the Jivatman is the true cosmic individual standing above the psychic being itself.

The Jivatman - the psychic being its representative in evolution - is, therefore, the individual self, one in essence with the transcendent Absolute but in the multiplicity of the One an individual self and centre of universal consciousness. However, metaphysically speaking, the Jivatman is not itself the ultimate term of individuality; for it is itself a projection of Divine Consciousness and an existent form of the Consciousness-Force. It is accordingly in the innermost nature of Divine Consciousness that the secret of individuality ultimately resides. All that we can ever point to as individuality, whether transcendent or cosmic or empirical has its ultimate basis and ground of being in the dynamic play of Absolute Consciousness. If it is true that "we human beings are phenomenally a particular form of consciousness",⁽²⁾ then apart from the active Force of Divine Consciousness - the willing of the Idea of the Many - there can be no phenomenal individuality. This means that in the pure, infinite and invariable Absolute Consciousness concentrated in itself as the immutable essence of

(1) Lights on Yoga, p.27.

(2) Life Divine, p.135.

pure Being - in the Godhead, the para avyктаḥ, the Supreme Unmanifest - there is no individualisation.

Does not this reduction to the nature of Ultimate Reality lead to the Illusionist position that finally there is no real individuality, that all which appears to be is, in the last analysis, unreal? According to Aurobindo the answer to this question must be 'No'. Firstly, the Absolute Itself - param brahma - though in its essential nature beyond all distinctions, including those of 'personal' and 'impersonal', is, nonetheless, the Transcendent, Infinite, Eternal Individual, fulfilling all the necessary terms of a definition of the individual: one, distinct, indivisible, uniting within itself all possible modes of unity - unity of intrinsic form, cause, purpose and action. Moreover, by virtue of the very ascription of oneness to the Absolute, there is pointed to, contrary to the Mayavada, a non-numerical unity, a dynamic nature of Ultimate Reality whereby the Many are contained and fulfilled in the One and the One contained and fulfilled in the Many. For the One and the Many are inseparable terms of Absolute Being. What this means is that even in the unmanifested and primordial nature of the Absolute, self-extension as the Many is an eternal - indeed, 'pre-eternal' - potentiality. The Idea of the Many is ever contained in the Consciousness of the One.

The ultimate nature of individuality for Aurobindo, hence, lies in the dynamic bipolarity of the One and the Many in the Unity of Consciousness and the play of Force or Will as self-

expressive self-knowledge. The unfolding or projection from Sachchidananda the Many is but the self-expression in manifold forms of the one Being itself; it is the infinite self-variation of infinite self-consciousness. The transcendent, the universal, and the evolved individual are in actuality three different, though equally real, poises or states of one Consciousness. The unbound and illimitable Absolute "is at once transcendental, universal and individual; it is the supreme supracosmic Being that is aware of itself as 'All-Being, as the Cosmic Self, as the consciousness-force of cosmic Nature, and at the same time experiences itself as the individual being and consciousness in all existences. The individual consciousness can see itself as limited and separate, but can also put off its limitations and know itself as universal and again as transcendent of the universe; this is because there is in all these states or positions or underlying them the same triune consciousness in a triple status. There is then no difficulty in the One thus seeing or experiencing itself triply, whether from above in the Transcendent Existence or from between in the Cosmic Self or from below in the individual conscious being".⁽¹⁾

This triune consciousness is exemplified in the supramental gnostic being, the individual who in the fullness of consciousness knows his individuality to be universal, "for he individualises the universe", and at the same time to be "divinely emergent

(1) Life Divine, p.309.

in a spiritual air of transcendent infinity, like a high cloud-surpassing summit; for he individualises the divine Transcendence".⁽¹⁾ The supramental being would be a fulfilling and harmonious unity of the three terms of existence: individual, universal, transcendent. Moreover, a race of such beings "would not be a race made according to a single type, moulded in a single fixed pattern; for the law of the supermind is unity fulfilled in diversity, and therefore there would be an infinite diversity in the manifestation of the gnostic consciousness although that consciousness would still be one in its basis, in its constitution, in its all-revealing and all-uniting order".⁽²⁾ There would not be a single type of individuality - not one mould, so to speak; rather each individual would be one centre of the Divine Consciousness in a triple poise. In the triune consciousness of the Supermind he would know himself to be a universalised personality and personal individual manifestation of the Absolute and at the same time one in being with the impersonal Brahman in which all personality disappears and there is only "the silent, immobile identity of the Jiva with the Atman".⁽³⁾ Finally, there would be the awareness of that Ultimate Reality beyond the personal and impersonal - the unmanifested Purushottama, ultimately reconciling all terms of existence in Itself. The truth of this triple knowledge is

(1) Life Divine, pp.863-64.

(2) Ibid., p.862.

(3) Essays on the Gita, p.477.

"thus formulated in the Upanishad, 'He who sees all existences in the Self', 'He who sees the Self in all existences', 'He in whom the Self has become all existence', - inclusion, indwelling and identity ..."(1)

Moreover, in mokṣa or liberation there are by virtue of the triune knowledge of Supermind not just one but various possible relationships with the Divine. In the liberating realisation by the soul-individual of itself as the One which is yet Many, the Jivanmukta "may plunge into the One and merge or hide itself in its bosom - that is the laya of the Adwaite; it may feel its oneness and yet as part of the Many that is One enjoy the Divine, that is the Dwaitadwaita liberation; it may lay stress on its Many aspect and be possessed by the Divine, the Visishtadwaita or go on playing with Krishna in the eternal Vrindavan, the Dwaita liberation. Or it may, even being liberated, remain in the Lila or manifestation or descend into it as often as it likes".(2)

(1) Life Divine, p.488.

(2) Lights on Yoga, pp.30-31.

CHAPTER VI.

The Destiny of Man.

We have thus far seen the divine origin of man and examined his nature; we must now consider his final destiny.

In the classical systems of Indian philosophy and in all of Indian religion the destiny of the individual is, in a word, liberation, release, - freedom, mukti. Release or liberation from samsāra, from phenomenal existence, from the eternal round of birth and death, is the end towards which virtually all traditional schools of Indian spirituality direct the individual. Mukti or liberation means to be eternally free from all fetters, from all that binds the individual, - no matter what his nature may ultimately be, - to phenomenal existence, to the imperfections, the ignorance, the illusion and the sorrow of the body, life and mind. In short, mukti is liberation from bondage.

Bondage has been variously conceived. It is the attachment of the mind to its objects or the being filled with desire of all kinds.⁽¹⁾ To regard the self as an object of perception, to have the sense of the true existence of objective reality or to have the false sense of the self in the non-self (such as the body),⁽²⁾ - all this is bondage. Bondage is the thirst for objects and the selfish craving (tañhā) for enjoyment. It is attachment to the body, ignorance of the true self⁽³⁾ and the possessing of that impurity (puḍgala) of mind which generates

(1) Cf. Maitri Upanishad, VI. 30, 34.

(2) Sāṅkhya Kārika I, II. Sāṅkhya-Pravacana Sūtras I.19.

(3) Gita XIII. 21.

empirical selfhood, the ego-sense. To attribute pleasure and pain, all qualities or sensations or experiences of body and mind to the pure, qualityless Self, Atman, is bondage. All this is bondage, and bondage is sorrow and pain (duhkha).

Liberation, then, is deliverance from bondage and suffering. It is the renunciation of all desire and craving. It is the destruction of ignorance concerning reality and the acquisition of discriminative knowledge about the non-identity of soul and nature.⁽¹⁾ It is the loss of the false individuality due to association with nature and identification with body. It is the attainment of identity with Brahman. To realise one's true nature, to become Brahman, to attain immortality, to transcend all or to achieve unity with all, - this is liberation.

These various conceptions of release or liberation (moksha) are to be seen in the doctrines of the great Vedanta philosophers. Shankara, for example, regards liberation as the attainment by the jiva of his own eternal nature.⁽²⁾ But this attainment is not the acquisition of any new or adventitious quality; it is the realisation of his complete identity with Brahman which is his eternal nature.⁽³⁾ Liberation is the becoming one with Brahman; however, since the identity of the Self or Soul with Brahman has eternally subsisted and has only been hidden by ignorance, illusion, liberation is really the awakening of

(1) Saṅkhya Kārika LXIV. Yoga Sūtras II.26.

(2) Brahma Sūtras 1.3.40; 3.4.1. Also Deussen, System of the Vedanta, Ch. XXXV.

(3) Brahma Sūtras, 4.4.1-2, 4.

consciousness to the fact of the identity of Self with Brahman. Liberation is the attainment of knowledge of what has eternally been. (1) It is not achieved through any sort of work or moral achievement, but through knowledge alone comes liberation (jñānaṃ mokṣaḥ), - knowledge of Brahman. (2) This knowledge is the immediate intuition (anubhava) of the identity of the Self with Brahman and, following upon this, the realisation of the illusoriness of plurality and individuality. The world and the jiva disappear in liberation. The disappearance of the jiva, however, does not mean for Shankara a disappearance into non-being, into void, - as he understands the Buddhist nirvana (niḥśeṣa nirvāna) to mean, - but a disappearance into Brahman which is being. (3) Brahman, - or Brahmahood, - and liberation are the same (brahma eva hi mukti-avasthā). (4) With Brahman-knowledge (Brahmajñāna) the jiva becomes released here and now in the body; he becomes a jivanmukta. (5)

For Ramanuja liberation from phenomenal existence, from pain, from rebirth is to be achieved by the acquisition of knowledge of Brahman. But such knowledge is not purely intuition; it is bhakti or devotion. (6) This redeeming knowledge is attainable only by those who observe right conduct: God demands virtuous living and grants liberation only to those who have whole-

(1) Brahma Sutras, 3.4.52.

(2) Ibid., 3.4.25-27.

(3) Ibid., 4.4.5-7.

(4) Deussen, op.cit. p.401.

(5) Brahma Sutras, 4.1.13.

(6) Śri Bhāṣya, 1.1.1.; 4.1.1.

hearted devotion.⁽¹⁾ The first step to right conduct, devotion and release is knowledge of one's essential nature. All evil follows from nescience whereby soul identifies itself with the body and thus pursues bodily ends; it is necessary then first to perceive the true Self as distinct from the body.⁽²⁾ The saving knowledge of Brahman which is the work of grace given to those who have true devotion is, contrary to Shankara, possible only to those who have prepared themselves through Vedic knowledge and sacrifice.⁽³⁾ Moreover, in liberation jivahood persists; the self-identity of the jiva remains. There is no disappearance of the jiva into Brahman, for there is no identity between Brahman and jiva; the two are eternally distinct.⁽⁴⁾ However, there is no liberation of the jiva while in the body, no jivanmukti, as there is for Shankara; for the body is the result of ignorance. Only when the body is gone can it be released from this ignorance.⁽⁵⁾ In liberation the individual self experiences its true nature which was previously obscured by nescience, and that true nature is one of freedom from sin, death, grief, hunger, thirst, desires, suffering.⁽⁶⁾ In addition it attains tādātmya or similarity of nature with Brahman; it enjoys the full and absolute bliss (ānanda) of the Divine.⁽⁷⁾

(1) See Kumarappa, Hindu Conception of the Deity, pp.284ff.

(2) Bhagavadītā Bhāṣya II.38. Śri Bhāṣya 3.3.52.

(3) Śri Bhāṣya 1.3.32.

(4) Ibid., p.4.21-22.

(5) Ibid., 1.1.4. Also O. Lacombe, L'Absolu selon le Védanta, pp.374f.

(6) Ibid., 4.4.3.

(7) Ibid., 1.3.7; 4.4.19.

It has total communion with God who is its Lord and Master and whose love and perfection it shares as its own essential nature. In liberation the jiva freed from evil and filled with love waits eternally upon God in the highest heavens. Here the jiva acquires a spiritual, non-material (āprakṛta) body through which it enjoys the bliss of association with the Divine. The jiva, therefore, though retaining its individuality in release and attaining unity or similarity in nature with Brahman, remains always dependent upon Brahman as its mode (prakāra). This is the true nature of the jiva which is manifested when nescience is destroyed, when the body is put off and knowledge gained: the jiva is equal to Brahman in purity, but, as a mere mode of Brahman, is dependent upon Brahman for the permanence of its manifested qualities (freedom, bliss, etc.).⁽¹⁾ The jiva is thus eternally atomic and finite, lacking the creative and ruling power of Brahman; Brahman is the inner Self of all jivas and omnipotent.⁽²⁾

For Madhva the jiva is an eternal, immaterial, purely spiritual being, and its bondage is its beginningless connection with matter.⁽³⁾ Liberation is release from nescience (which is a product of matter) from desire and works and thus from connection with material bodies and their organs.⁽⁴⁾ The means of

(1) Śri Bhāṣya, 1.4.21-22.

(2) Ibid., 4.4.14, 17.

(3) H. von Glasenapp, Madhva's Philosophie des Vishnu - Glaubens pp.54ff.

(4) Ibid., pp.76ff.

attaining miksha or release includes physical, moral and spiritual disciplines based on Upanishadic injunctions and comprises bodily purity, moral excellence, study of scripture and spiritual introspection.⁽¹⁾ As for Ramanuja, so for Madhva these disciplines and good works have their consummation in the highest devotion, bhakti, and meditation of the Divine (Vishnu)⁽²⁾. Those are liberated who have realised God, enjoy Him unceasingly and who having given up the material body, achieve a new luminous (supernatural, non-material) body and live in that body of light for ever.⁽³⁾ However, in liberation there is not, according to Madhva, either identity between Brahman and the jiva (as Shankara taught) or similarity (unity, tādātmya) between the two (as Ramanuja taught). The jiva and Brahman are eternally and totally different and distinct as creature and creator.⁽⁴⁾ The jiva ever retains its individuality and being freed from connection with matter enjoys spiritual bliss, there being differences in the enjoyment of the bliss of Brahman depending upon the peculiarity of each jiva.⁽⁵⁾

These three doctrines of mukti or liberation are representative of three main streams of Vedanta philosophy, - viz. Advaita or Non-Dualism (Shankara), Vishishtadvaita or Qualified Non-Dualism (Ramanuja) and Dvaita or Dualism (Madhva). Accord-

(1) Bhāṣya on Brahma Sutras, 3.2.41; 3.3.1; 3.3.43; 3.4.26; 3.4.37.

(2) Ibid., 3.3.54.

(3) Ibid., 4.4.10-15.

(4) Ibid., 2.3.23-50; 3.2.18.

(5) von Glasenapp, op.cit., pp.101ff.

ing to the first the jiva in its spiritual nature is totally identical with Brahman and in liberation disappears into Brahman which is the sole reality. In the second doctrine the jiva in liberation recovers its true nature which is one of similarity with Brahman, though it always retains its individuality and dependence upon Brahman. Finally, according to the third view, the nature of the jiva in liberation is neither one of identity and disappearance nor of similarity with Brahman but that of being eternally separate, distinct and different from Brahman, of being released from ignorant and painful association with matter and of enjoying the paradisaal bliss of the Divine in a supernatural, non-material body.

There is a fourth view of liberation different from these three in point of the soul's nature and relation with Brahman which is of considerable significance, - viz. that of Kashmir Shaivism.⁽¹⁾ According to Abhinavagupta, a foremost philosopher of this school, "mōksha is the manifestation of the Self's inherent Shakti after cutting through the fetters of ignorance"⁽²⁾. Liberation is not just pāsa-kṣaya and Sivatva-vojana, the destruction of the fetters which bind the soul and the restoration of Shivahood through divine grace, - as it is for the Saiva Siddhanta. It is more fully the "absolutisation" of the individual. The jiva does not simply become Shiva; he is Shiva, the pure "I" (aham) outside which there is nothing. He does not

(1) See A. Basu, "Kashmir Śaivism", op.cit. pp.92ff.

(2). Paramārthasāra, op.cit., 60.

disappear into Shiva or Brahman; he is Brahman. With the release of the shakti inherent in the individual there is the "recognition" by the jiva of its identity with all. All that is, is himself, and he knows all as himself. This is full liberation, true Shivahood, - the state of Paramaśiva, the Supreme Shiva, - not just deliverance from māyā, but total divinisation.

Liberation and transformation.

The above descriptions may be said to represent, - allowing, of course, for minor variations and modifications, - the essence of liberation for most schools of Indian spirituality. Liberation is goal of spiritual discipline, and in its broadest terms liberation means the transcending of the imperfections of nature and the sufferings of embodied existence and the entering into the peace and bliss of the Divine. For Aurobindo such a goal of liberation is true and desirable, - but only up to a point. There is a greater spiritual goal, and that is the goal of transformation. As he says in speaking of his own discipline, "the way of Yoga followed here has a different purpose from others, - for its aim is not only to rise out of the ordinary ignorant world-consciousness into the divine consciousness, but to bring the supramental power of that divine consciousness down into the ignorance of mind, life and body, to transform them, to manifest the Divine here and create a divine life in Matter".⁽¹⁾

It must be stressed that Aurobindo neither rejects nor devalues the ~~ex~~perience of Self-realisation, of liberation. On the

(1) Lights on Yoga, p.1.

contrary, it is a necessary experience but only as the first step to the goal of transformation. Mukti as generally understood, - as a release from ego-desire and the imperfections of the lower nature, - is for Aurobindo but an "instrumental liberation" leading to the greater mukti which is "an opening out of mortal limitation into the illimitable immortality of the Spirit".⁽¹⁾ Aurobindo's view of mukti is, we may say, the liberation of both the spirit and nature; it is, in a word, transformation. The soul must be freed from the ignorance and separativeness of the ego and desire into the calm of the universal Self, the Atman, there to enjoy in the bliss of the spirit his oneness with universal existence, with the timeless Divine, with all other beings. This is spiritual liberation, but there must also be the coming down of the divine consciousness, the Supermind, into imperfect nature so that it is brought to full perfection, is transformed from the undivine lower nature into the divine higher nature. These two liberations, - of spirit and nature, - from imperfection constitute for Aurobindo the full mukti, "integral liberation" and "integral perfection".⁽²⁾ Aurobindo's chief criticism of the "old Yogas", as he calls them, and of the Vedanta philosophies is that they abandon life, abandon the mental-vital-physical nature, for entry into a nirvana or heaven.⁽³⁾ They all, - even though some may admit

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.770.

(2) Ibid., pp.775-781.

(3) Letters, 4th Series, p.4.

the possibility of jivanmukti or release in the body, - finally seek some extra-terrestrial, supracosmic goal. All the traditional systems, says Aurobindo, "proceed on the belief or perception that the Eternal and Absolute can only be or at least can only inhabit a pure transcendent state of non-cosmic existence or else a non-existence. All cosmic existence or all that we call existence is a state of ignorance".⁽¹⁾ The traditional way of knowledge (jñāna-mārga) prescribes the successive rejection of the body, the life, the sense, the heart, the mind in order to attain knowledge of the Divine, Self-realisation. The Monist, set on the path of such an exclusive knowledge, has as his goal an entire extinction or immersion of the jiva in the Absolute. The Dualist or qualified Monist, set on a path of devotion (bhakti-mārga), seeks instead of the self-immersion of the Advaitin or self-extinction of the Buddhist a goal of absorption in the thought, love and enjoyment of the Supreme Lord. Both are for Aurobindo incomplete goals as stated. On the one hand, true knowledge is the "integral knowledge" which sees the individual, the universal and the transcendent as three manifesting powers of one divine essence and nature and which rejects or eliminates only ignorance and the effects of ignorance but seeks an "integral self-fulfillment" of body, life, senses, heart and mind in a divine transformation.⁽²⁾ On the other hand, devotion and action (karma) are complete as paths of realisation and

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.327.

(2) Ibid., pp.332f., 412.

liberation only when there is achieved an "essential and integral oneness with the Supreme", - when the seeker is one with the Divine will in mind, life and body and when lover and Beloved are unified and all difference is abolished in ecstasy of a divine oneness in which "there is the sole existence of the Beloved but no extinction or absorption of the lover".⁽¹⁾

The traditional goals of mukti are, then, according to Aurobindo, real and important but limited. The realisation of the Self and the impersonal Brahman is a valuable first step but transformation of nature, of the entire individual being, can only be achieved in the full manifestation of the divine ~~supra-~~supramental consciousness. If the goal of spiritual discipline were purely mukti, then, in a sense, the Supermind or the supramental manifestation would not be necessary; for the Self can be realised on any plane of conscious existence since the Self is everywhere.⁽²⁾ The Supermind is not necessary for the realisation of the Self, but it is necessary for the transformation of terrestrial life. Moreover, the realisation of the Self is not the same as the realisation of the Supermind; the two experiences are completely different in nature.⁽³⁾ The realisation of the Self, of Brahman or the Lord, is something which sages and yogis and seekers throughout the ages have done, but these "realised" souls have not been supramentalised.⁽⁴⁾ On the other hand, the

(1) Synthesis of Yoga, p.413.

(2) Letters, 1st Series, pp.30, 104f, 121f, 129f. More Lights on Yoga, pp.5f.

(3) Ibid., p.21.

(4) More Lights on Yoga, pp.11f.

spiritual realisation is a necessary preparation for and step towards the supramental.⁽¹⁾

Finally, unlike the traditional goal of self-realisation and mukti, the goal of supramental transformation is nothing supracosmic or purely for the sake of the individual but is something finally to be achieved by all beings here and now.⁽²⁾ Indeed, as Aurobindo points out, "this transformation cannot be done individually or in a solitary way only. No individual solitary transformation unconcerned with the work for the earth (which means more than any individual transformation) would be either possible or useful."⁽³⁾ However, this does not mean that all humanity will at once become transformed, supramentalised. On the contrary, the supramental consciousness will first manifest itself in a few who are prepared to receive it and then spread.⁽⁴⁾ The supramental principle will be established in the evolution by the descent of the Supermind from above,⁽⁵⁾ and fixed in the earth the supramental consciousness will "create a new race with the principle of the supramental consciousness governing the inner and outer individual and collective life."⁽⁶⁾ According to Aurobindo such a supramental transformation, a race of supramental beings "is

(1) Letters, 2nd Series, pp.47f. More Lights on Yoga, pp.8f.

(2) Letters, 1st Series, p.27.

(3) More Lights on Yoga, p.12.

(4) Letters, 1st Series, p.13.

(5) Ibid., p.16.

(6) More Lights on Yoga, p.13.

an inevitable necessity in the logic of things and is therefore sure."⁽¹⁾ That is, in the original creative descent of consciousness from Supermind consciousness became imprisoned in Matter but because of its own urge from within and the pressure from its higher statuses above, consciousness manifested itself out of Matter as life, then as mind. It is, therefore, "an inevitable necessity" that by internal thrust upwards and the descent from the higher planes above, mental consciousness will evolve into overmental and finally supramental consciousness. In short, consciousness has evolved mind, and it will evolve Overmind and Supermind. Just as matter and life were "mentalised" with the appearance of mind, so they will be supramentalised with the manifestation of the Supermind. Supramentalisation or transformation does not mean for Aurobindo any sort of "Sainthood", moral and ethical perfection, the acquisition of a transcendental (cinmaya) body or even the spiritual purification usually achieved by the "light of realisation" filling the mind or by psychic growth.⁽²⁾ Transformation means "a putting on of the spiritual consciousness, dynamic as well as static, in every part of the being down to the subconscious ... It means a bringing down of the divine consciousness into all these parts and the entire replacement of the present consciousness by that."⁽³⁾ This is the goal of transformation which, according to Aurobindo, has three statuses or lines: "psychicisation", an

(1) Letters, 1st Series, p.13. Also Letters, 2nd Series, pp.67ff.

(2) Ibid., pp.22ff.

(3) Letters, 2nd Series, pp.43-44.

ascent to the Supermind and the descent of the Supermind. (1)

Psychicisation.

As we have seen, the psyche or soul comes into the lower nature so as to accomplish the perfect manifestation of the Divine in its process of self-becoming, - in phenomenal existence. This it does on the basis of an individual existence which it evolves as the objective self-expression of the individual Divine, the jivatman or self above the terrestrial process. The outer being of the individual is formulated by the psyche as its means of world-experience and hence its growth and self-expression, - the expression of the Divine in nature and human nature. As evolution proceeds the psyche puts forward a psychic being, a soul personality, which evolving in and working from the subliminal part of the individual exercises an increasing control over the surface nature. The influence of the soul is manifested in a number of ways including, perhaps most obviously, "a certain sensitive feeling for all that is true and good and beautiful, fine and pure and noble, a response to it, a demand for it, a pressure on mind and life to accept and formulate it in our thought, feelings, conduct, character ... of the man who has not this element in him or does not respond at all to this urge, we say that he has no soul". (2)

The psychic being, as it grows, works more and more powerfully and openly to transform the surface nature and to

(1) Life Divine, pp.791ff.

(2) Ibid., p.795.

turn it in the direction of what is divine and luminous, towards the supramental goal of evolution. But it has always to strive against that double knot of Ignorance in the individual, the ego and desire-soul. The ego and desire-soul are always there, so to speak, holding the surface individual down in the Ignorance, clouding and vitiating the influences of the psychic being in its efforts to transform the lower nature so that it might continue its evolution, - its efforts to purify and perfect the lower nature so that it might receive the higher consciousness. If this psychic transformation or "psychicisation" were left solely to the action of evolution, then, Aurobindo declares, it would be a slow and long process; "it is only when man awakes to the knowledge of the soul and feels a need to bring it to the front and make it the master of his life and action that a quicker conscious method of evolution intervenes and a psychic transformation becomes possible."⁽¹⁾ The further evolution of man beyond mind, is, then, aided by the conscious effort of mind. Man is a mental being, and it is his mind which must lead his life and body. By the purification of mind and an imposition of a mentalised harmony upon the vital and physical natures the psychic being is enabled to effect a more sure surface control.

In order to emerge fully the psychic works to convert the surface instruments by achieving a direct contact on the surface with the Divine. It works in the mental nature to turn the

(1) Life Divine, p.797.

intellect and intuitional intelligence towards a supreme Truth, Good, Beauty, Purity, Bliss. The mind thus spiritualised becomes aware of "the formless Infinite and the nameless Absolute."⁽¹⁾

The mind rises to and realises the pure Existence which transcends all dualities of good or evil, true or false, beautiful or unbeautiful and experiences supreme oneness, infinity, eternity. "A spiritualised consciousness is achieved and the life falls quiet, the body ceases to meed and to clamour, the soul itself emerges into the spiritual silence."⁽²⁾ This, we may say, is the experience of moksha or nirvana, but it is not yet the integral transformation.

The psychic being also works through the heart, the emotions, to achieve a direct contact of the surface being with the Divine. Here the approach to the Divine is through adoration, and Ultimate Reality is apprehended no longer as the impersonal and static Self but as the supreme Personal Being. The emotions become spiritualised; a total self-giving to the Divine becomes imperative. If the devotee, the bhakta, unites his emotional nature with his psychic being and changes his life by purity and love for God and all existence into a thing of beauty, filled with divine light and good, he becomes a saint. Still this is not enough; a larger change is necessary for an integral transformation. "There must be a transmutation of the thinking mind and all the vital and physical parts of consciousness in

(1) Life Divine, p.802.

(2) Ibid.

their own character". (1)

The larger change will be partly achieved by a psychic conversion of the will along with that of the heart and mind. The psychicisation of the will proceeds by a gradual elimination of the ego-will and its motivating force of desire. By a consecration of the will to the Divine the ego finally effaces itself. The personal will surrendered to the greater divine Will becomes one with it. "A combination of all these three approaches, the approach of the mind, the approach of the will, the approach of the heart, creates a spiritual or psychic condition of the surface being and nature in which there is a larger and more complex openness to the psychic light within us and to the spiritual Self or the Ishwara, to the Reality now felt above and enveloping and penetrating us". (2)

The process of psychicisation, of psychic transformation, does not achieve its fullest force, however, until there is an actual "shift" in centre of consciousness from the surface to the subliminal. The wall between the outer and inner parts must be broken, and the individual must live in the psychic personality. This can be achieved most effectively, Aurobindo advises, by "a self-offering and surrender of ourselves and of our parts of nature to the Divine Being, the Ishwara." (3)

As the wall between the subliminal and outer nature falls away,

(1) Life Divine, p.803.

(2) Ibid., pp.803-804.

(3) Ibid., p.807.

the psychic being reveals itself as the true person of the individual, as the central being and inner controller upholding and governing the body, life and mind. The psychic being assumes complete control of the individual and completes the purification of every part of the being, - surface, subliminal and sub-conscious. As a result the individual is made ready for all kinds of spiritual experience which come freely to it. It experiences not only the Self, Ishwara and the divine Shakti, but cosmic consciousness, cosmic forces and the occult movements of universal nature. In addition it achieves a unity and inner communication with all other beings, supramental cognitions, a direct knowledge and sight of truth, a direct intuition of right will and action, a total rule and power of creation over the entire being.⁽¹⁾ All this change would still be on the physical, vital and mental level; it would be restricted, - no matter how enlarged the limits, - to an "inferior instrumentation". "A highest spiritual transformation must intervene on the psychic movement inward to the inner being, the Self or Divinity within us, must be completed by an opening upward to a spiritual status or a higher existence".⁽²⁾

The Ascent towards Supermind

The psychic change makes possible an ascent of consciousness in the individual to the ranges of the Overmind and Supermind where the sense of self and spirit is ever unveiled and abiding

(1) Life Divine., pp.807f.

(2) Ibid., p.809.

and where the power of self and spirit works freely and fully, not restricted or divided as in the lower nature of mind, life and body. The ascent to the higher levels of consciousness is necessary in order to prepare the lower nature for and to open it to the descent of the Supermind whereby is effected the full transformation. Unless the lower nature, even though psychically transformed, is firmly fixed in the states of conscious existence above mind, - viz. Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, - it will not be able to receive, respond to or assimilate the supreme force of the Supermind. These gradations of conscious existence above mind represent "a series of sublimations of consciousness", "a succession of self-transmutations at the summit of which lies the Supermind or Divine Gnosis".⁽¹⁾ They are all gnostic in their principle and power, - i.e. they are all based upon and are operations of the self-existent, supramental truth, knowledge. However, in line of ascent there is an ever greater power of consciousness, intensity of Light, instrumentality of force culminating in the Supermind,⁽²⁾ each ascending grade being a higher status of the substance and energy of the Spirit, consciousness-force. Thus by the ascent there is a heightening and widening of consciousness; a greater participation in the universal consciousness-force; each ascent to a new level means the taking up of all the lower levels, their integration and

(1) Life Divine, p.833.

(2) Letters, 2nd Series, pp.126f.

transformation by a superior power of Being. Finally, the psychically transformed nature is totally spiritualised and ready to receive into itself the full force of the supramental consciousness.

The first step of the ascent is into the Higher Mind. This level of consciousness or conscious existence is what Aurobindo calls "a luminous thought-mind, a mind of spirit-born conceptual knowledge".⁽¹⁾ The mind possesses, unlike ordinary mentality, a unitarian sense of being with the powers of forming a multitude of aspects of knowledge and ways of action. It is an "all-awareness" based on the original supermental identity which formulates and, by the self-power of the Real-Idea (Vijñāna) inherent in it, effectually realises all its formulations. This Higher Mind is the final stage of such cognition which emerges from the original spiritual identity before the beginning of the separative knowledge of mind, the foundation of the Ignorance.⁽²⁾

(1) Life Divine, p. 835.

(2) In his last writing, The Supramental Manifestation, Aurobindo spoke of a "Mind of Light" which is "the last of a series of descending planes of consciousness in which the Supermind veils itself by a self-chosen limitation or modification of its self-manifesting activities, but its essential character remains the same; there is in it an action of light, of truth, of knowledge in which inconscience, ignorance and error claim no place". (p.131). It is "a transitional passage by which we can pass from supermind and superhumanity to an illumined humanity. For the new humanity will be capable of at least a partly divinised way of seeing and living because it will live in the light and in knowledge and not in the obscuration of the Ignorance". (p.133). The Mind of Light represents "a transitional border" between Ignorance and knowledge. (p.134). It is the first plane of higher mentality which will evolve in response to the growing influence of the Supermind in the earth consciousness, and when fully developed, it will be the means by which the mass of humanity will receive some of the Light and Power of the first supramentalised beings.

Descending into the psychically transformed nature the Higher Mind would work in all parts, not only the mind but the heart, will, feelings, life, body, to modify their substance and characteristic actions from ignorance to knowledge, to purify and to charge the whole being with a new and superior consciousness. However, the Higher Mind, - nor the other higher forces of consciousness, - in its descent does not immediately work all-powerfully; for in the evolution in matter it has to inhabit a foreign and inferior medium and work upon it. It has to struggle to establish itself against the obscurations and influences of the Ignorance. The psychic transformation has greatly lessened the hold of the Ignorance on the being but has not destroyed it. Thus the power of the Higher Mind and its idea-force will be modified and diminished by its entrance into the lower nature. The psychic being, however, now the ruler of the lower nature, is able to use this higher mentality as the normal consciousness of the individual and thereby to grow through a greater self-experience and to further its transformation of the being. The power of the Higher Mind, therefore, "can make a first change, a modification that will capacitate a higher ascent and a more powerful descent and further prepare an integration of the being in a greater Force of consciousness and knowledge".⁽¹⁾

That "greater Force of consciousness and knowledge" is that of the Illumined Mind which descends into the being prepared by

(1) Life Divine, p.839.

the Higher Mind to receive it and which, like the powers of all the other grades, penetrates not only the thought and knowledge of the individual, but the substance of his entire being and consciousness, remoulding and wholly transmuting. Illumined Mind differs from Higher Mind in that it does not work primarily by thought, but by vision.⁽¹⁾ It fills the whole being with a greater inner force and power and with spiritual light, illuminative and creative. The thought mind is illumined with direct inner vision and inspiration; the heart and feelings are filled with spiritual light and energy; the life-force and life movements receive a spiritual urge and dynamis; the physical and vital being are infused with a power of spiritual sensation.⁽²⁾

Both the Higher Mind and Illumined Mind, however, derive the power of their respective actions of spiritual thought and sight from a third level, that of Intuition. The original Intuition, - as distinguished from mentalised intuition or intuition as it functions rather feebly in the "pre-psychicised" mind, - has a four-fold power.⁽³⁾ These are "a power of revelatory truth-seeing, a power of inspiration or truth-hearing, a power of truth-touch or immediate seizing of significance, which is akin to the ordinary nature of its intervention in our mental intelligence, a power of true and automatic discrimination of the orderly and exact relation of truth to truth."⁽⁴⁾ The

(1) Life Divine, p.839.

(2) Ibid., p.840.

(3) Ibid., p.843.

(4) Ibid.

pure Intuition, now undiminished in its total effect, can work in the illumined nature to change the whole consciousness of the individual, - physical, vital, mental, - into the "stuff" of intuition.

The next step of the ascent is into Overmind. The transformation of the individual by the Intuition is but a preparation for the great transformation to be wrought by the Overmind. Since the Overmind is a power of cosmic consciousness and knowledge, the ascent to and the descent of the Overmind cannot be wholly affected until the psychic transformation of the individual has been totally completed and there is no longer any predominance of the ego-sense, the mind having been universalised in its outlook.⁽¹⁾ When the overmental power pervades the being, there may no longer be any awareness of separate individuality, only cosmic existence, bliss and play of force. On the other hand, because there can be many formulations of overmind consciousness, there may be the sense of cosmic being, of a universal individual, - the sense of the universe in oneness or as oneness, an identification with the all.⁽²⁾ In the overmind experience the ego-individual ceases to be, and the psychic being of the evolution fully realises its oneness with the true individual self above the evolution, the Jivatman,⁽³⁾ "a being who is in his essence one with the supreme Self, one with the universe in

(1) Life Divine, p.844.

(2) Ibid., p.845.

(3) Letters, 1st Series, p.137.

extension and yet a cosmic centre and circumference of the specialised action of the Infinite."⁽¹⁾

The change effected by the ascent to and descent of the Overmind is the final step of the spiritual transformation; it is not yet the full, the integral and supramental manifestation and transformation. Rather, it is, as Aurobindo points out, "the highest possible status-dynamis of the spirit in the spiritual-mind plane."⁽²⁾ The Overmind takes up the actions of the three grades below it and brings them to their full power as well as adding to them a universal wideness of consciousness and force. But since it is a power, - though the highest power, - of the lower hemisphere,⁽³⁾ its action is based on a play of multiplicity, and its play, like that of mind, is a play of possibilities. Although it does not act in ignorance but in knowledge of the truth of these possibilities, it is still not a power of cosmic transcendence; it does not possess the integral truth and vision of unity of the Supermind. It cannot be, therefore, the final possibility of the spiritual evolution. The Overmind can unite individual consciousness with cosmic consciousness and lead the individual self to the cosmic self, but it cannot take consciousness and self beyond the cosmic to the transcendent. Only Supermind can do this. Moreover, Overmind cannot transform completely the inconscience and conquer the Ignorance.⁽⁴⁾ In each individual in whom it dwelled the Overmind

(1) Life Divine, p.845.

(2) Ibid., p.846.

(3) See above p.

(4) Life Divine, p.847.

would be able to transform the Ignorance into cosmic light and truth, but the basis of terrestrial nescience would yet remain and ever pose itself as a threat to the illumined individuals. Only a transition from Overmind to Supermind and a descent of Supermind into the earth consciousness would totally transform nature into supernature, destroy the Ignorance and transmute the Inconscience.

The Descent of Supermind.

The Supermind is not only above exerting a transforming influence upon the evolving terrestrial nature; it is also involved in that nature striving to emerge. The meeting of the two, the descending supramental force from above and the ascending supramental force from below, is the decisive point of evolution; it is the culmination, the fulfilment, the supramental manifestation and transformation. The Overmind would have been changed into Supermind, and the supramental consciousness and force would take up the work of transformation directly, disclosing to the terrestrial being its own spiritual truth and divinity and pouring into all of nature the perfection of the supramental existence. However, this highest transformation would not be effected all at once or in all at once. It would be gradual process, beginning, as has been indicated, with a few individuals. Through such individuals the supramental principle would be established in the earth consciousness and the process of terrestrial evolution and would be able to exert a global influence upon the human race. Once firmly established on its

own basis the supramental principle and its cosmic operation would be the foundation for the perfection of the Overmind and the other grades of spiritual Mind which would have descended in the evolution and emerged out of it. These higher states, - Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind, - would all have appeared in the evolution when the respective conditions and preparation for each had been fulfilled in specific individuals in whom they manifest and perfect themselves; for like Supermind each is not established at once or in all at once. In such a situation mind and mental humanity would still be there but as one step in the spiritual evolution with all the grades above mind formed in terrestrial existence and accessible to the embodied mental being, so that, as it became ready, it could ascend into the gnosis and be transformed into a supramental and spiritual being.⁽¹⁾ As more and more individuals enter the grades of spiritual Mind and Supermind, there would be established a race of gnostic beings.

The Gnostic Being.

With the descent of the Supermind into earth existence and its emergence from within nature there will be established, as has been indicated, a foundation for the perfection of the various gradation of consciousness previously descended. Hence there will be created a race of gnostic beings, - those individuals who have ascended by soul evolution into these higher states of conscious being now fixed in terrestrial existence.

(1) Life Divine, p.855.

As Aurobindo points out, "the description of gnosis applies to all consciousness that is based upon truth of being and not upon the Ignorance or Nescience."⁽¹⁾ Thus there would be for all beings ready to rise above mental life but not yet prepared for supramental existence a graded scale of consciousness from the Higher Mind to Overmind. Such beings would constitute a gnostic community in which there would be represented all levels and varieties of spiritual existence, all numbers perfecting themselves both individually and corporately and moving towards the supramental goal. This gnostic race would not be made according to a single type. That is, there would be an infinite diversity in the manifestation of the gnostic consciousness even though that consciousness would remain one in its basis; for the law of the Supermind upon this would be founded is unity fulfilled in diversity.⁽²⁾ Moreover, by the presence of the Supermind already established in the earth consciousness there would enter into human life a greater sympathy and understanding, a dominant principle of harmony in both individual and corporate existence. Also the entire movement of evolution would be modified to that instead of a constant struggle between the power of the Inconscience and the growth of Consciousness there would be a graded procession from lesser light to greater light.⁽³⁾

The supramental gnostic individual - the one who had

(1) Life Divine, p.860.

(2) Ibid., p.862.

(3) Ibid., p.860.

attained the supramental consciousness - as Aurobindo describes him," would be the consummation of the spiritual man; his whole way of being, thinking, living, acting would be governed by the power of a vast universal spirituality ... All his existence would be fused into oneness with the transcendent and universal Self and Spirit; all his actions would originate from and obey the supreme Self and Spirit's divine governance of Nature ... He would feel the presence of the Divine in every centre of his consciousness, in every vibration of his life-force, in every cell of his body ... All beings would be to him his own selves, all ways and powers of consciousness would be felt as the ways and powers of his own universality ... the gnostic individual would be in the world and of the world, but would also exceed it in his consciousness and live in his self of transcendence above it; he would be universal but free in the universe, individual but not limited by a separative individuality."⁽¹⁾ He would possess not only the supramental will but the supramental knowledge; idea and force would be one in him. His would be the power of spiritual creation and the experience of the creating bliss, ananda. His total nature - body, life, mind - would be perfected and supernaturalised. But the inconscient and sub-conscient basis of his physical existence would be transformed into a supporting superconscience by the supramental emergence. The body itself would be totally under the control of the soul

(1) Life Divine, p.863.

as an instrument and luminous mode of its self-expression, as will also the life and mind.⁽¹⁾ Even Matter itself will be transformed or, rather, its true nature as a self-energy of the Spirit, a form and substance of Brahman, will be revealed by the indwelling gnostic consciousness.⁽²⁾ The gnostic individual would be supremely a person, - not as ego and surface character but rather as the fully developed and unveiled psychic person, a soul, which would have no need of a surface expression, a mask or persona.⁽³⁾ He would be a soul person one with all other souls, an infinite and universal being revealing its eternal self in the form and expressive power of an individual and temporal self-manifestation but ever aware of its unlimited infinity and universality. In a community of gnostic beings there would be no problem of ethics and the conflict of good and evil. Indeed, as Aurobindo points out, there would be no problems of any sort, "for problems are the creations of mental ignorance seeking for knowledge and they cannot exist in a consciousness in which knowledge arises self-born and the act is self-born out of the knowledge, out of a pre-existent truth of being conscious and self-aware."⁽⁴⁾ With the destruction of ignorance and the absence of separative egoism there would no longer be any wrong will or falsehood, any error or evil. For it is the ego ruling in an ignorant nature, seeking vital

(1) Life Divine, pp.874ff.

(2) Ibid., pp.876f.

(3) Ibid., pp.882f.

(4) Ibid., p.884.

satisfactions, asserting its separative individuality and struggling against other separate self-affirming individuals which is the sustaining source of division and disharmony, of error and falsehood, of suffering and evil.⁽¹⁾ Ethics is, in a sense, a temporary construction of good in a nature which is afflicted with evil and falsehood by powers of ignorance.⁽²⁾

Ethics declares a law of love, of justice, of truth based on the idea of oneness, - the ideals of freedom, equality and brotherhood. These three ideals are, as Aurobindo calls them, "the three godheads of the soul".⁽³⁾ They can be only very imperfectly realised through the external machinery of a society ruled by the individual and communal ego. In such a society the ethical mind must declare "laws without number, difficult to observe, difficult to reconcile ... - the law, the standard has to be imposed on us now because there is in our natural beings an opposite force of separateness, a possibility of antagonism, a force of ill-will, strife".⁽⁴⁾ In human society such as it is now, dominated by egoism, the ideal of liberty leads to competitive individualism, equality leads to strife. When society pursues liberty, it is unable to achieve equality; when it pursues equality, it has to sacrifice liberty. As for the ideal of true brotherhood, fraternity, there is at best achieved an "association for the pursuit of common egoistic ends."⁽⁵⁾ In

(1) Life Divine, pp.550ff.

(2) Ibid., p.885.

(3) Ideal of Human Unity, p.314.

(4) Life Divine, p.885.

(5) Ideal of Human Unity, p.315.

the gnostic community, however, it is the soul not the ego, which dominates, - the soul which is a universal individual who is ever aware of oneness with all and expresses that oneness without need of law, of ethics, even in the finiteness of its temporal self-manifestation.

Such is the gnostic being and the gnostic community, - the culmination of the spiritual evolution, the evolution from the consciousness of the Ignorance into the consciousness of Sachchidananda. Before the full emergence of the gnostic being and gnostic community, however, there must be the firm establishment of spiritual man and a spiritual age of society, - the only basis for the evolution of the supramental gnosis and fulfilment. As Aurobindo characterises him, "the spiritual man is one who has discovered his soul: he has found his self and lives in that, is conscious of it, has joy of it; he needs nothing external for his completeness of existence".⁽¹⁾ The spiritual society is one in which man is regarded not merely as a mind, body and life, the individual not merely as a social unit nor his existence and his right to live and grow as merely founded upon his social value, his social work and function. Instead, man, the individual will be seen as a soul "who has to fulfil his own individual truth and law as well as his natural or his assigned part in the truth and law of the collective existence."⁽²⁾ In such a society there will be established "the ideal law of social

(1) Life Divine, p.871.

(2) Human Cycle, pp.25-26.

development:"⁽¹⁾ the individual perfects his individuality by free development from within, aiding and being aided by all others, harmonising his life with that of the social aggregate and contributing to the growth of the collective soul; the community perfects its corporate existence by a free development from within, aiding the individual and harmonising its life with the individual and the aggregate and with the free development of other communities and nations. Here there will be the free and full expression of those "godheads of the soul" - equality, liberty, brotherhood: freedom which is the freedom of self-development of the Divine in man; equality which is the recognition of the same soul in all men; brotherhood which is the founding of equal freedom of self-development upon the recognition of inner spiritual unity.⁽²⁾ Here will be true human unity, the ideal which society is now imperfectly and hesitatingly seeking to realise by political and administrative means in international organisations and systems. By such means, according to Aurobindo, there will be established at best a sort of mechanical unity, an outward unity, "because that is the inevitable final trend of the working of Nature in human society which makes for larger and yet larger aggregations and cannot fail to arrive at a total aggregation of mankind in a closer international system."⁽³⁾ It is only, however, in the

(1) Human Cycle, pp.68ff.

(2) Ideal of Human Unity, p.315.

(3) Ibid., p.316.

spiritual age that true human unity will be achieved, founded on what Aurobindo calls "a spiritual religion of humanity."⁽¹⁾ Such a religion is not just an intellectual and sentimental faith in humanity, a sort of "humanism" still based on egoism, nor a system of syncretistic universal religion but a living sense of human oneness in a divine Reality and the practice of human oneness in life, feeling and thought so as to realise upon earth a kingdom of the divine Spirit, the divine Life. This living sense of human oneness will reflect a growing "soul of humanity", the incarnation of the Divine in the corporate life of Man.

Towards such a spiritual age and true human unity we are, in Aurobindo's view, slowly but surely moving.⁽²⁾ As men turn from purely rational ideals to spiritual ideals, as society passes now from the rationalist age to an age of true subjectivism, of inner searching and living, so the individual will more and more discover his soul, his true self, and living in it in solidarity with all beings, so will his nature be transformed. This is the psychic transformation upon which follows that evolutive ascent of the soul into the higher ranges of conscious existence and the descent of the Spirit into his normal humanity. With this ascent and descent will be achieved the progressive transformation of this earthly nature and the spiritual reorganisation of life, - the spiritual age, - to be

(1) Ideal of Human Unity, p.322.

(2) Ibid., pp.309ff.

perfected in the supramental gnostic being and the divine life upon earth.

The Divine Life.

A divine life in a divine body is, then, for Aurobindo the goal of the individual, the fulfilment of the terrestrial evolution, - not mere liberation or salvation, not a heaven or a nirvana, but a reign of the Spirit in spiritual individuals in time and space. The divine life is a life of a totally transformed, a totally perfected nature, - not a disembodied existence of a soul but an existence in a supernaturalised body, not the extinction of all individuality and personality but the unveiling in transmuted nature of the infinite and universal individual and the true Person. A divine life in a divine body means immortality, a consciousness in all parts of the being - physical, vital, mental, - of essential identity with God, a full incarnation and manifestation of the Spirit in the living material being; it means the destruction of all desire, limitation and death, - a transmutation of the physical organism and all its vital and mental processes;⁽¹⁾ it means the divinisation of life, not a destruction of the human elements but their purification and perfection;⁽²⁾ - living integrally in the power, the knowledge, the bliss, the very being of the Godhead.

(1) The Supramental Manifestation, pp.35ff.

(2) Letters, 1st Series, p.89. Divinisation and immortality does not mean for Aurobindo that one would be obliged to keep the same body for all time. On the contrary the supramental being would be able to create for himself, as and if he desired, a new body, perhaps by a means other than the present physical method. (Letters, 1st Series, pp.31f.)

Epilogue.

Now that we have considered the destiny of man we are ready for a summary statement of Aurobindo's concept of man and an assessment of Aurobindo's uniqueness and significance in Indian thought. As we have seen man has his origin in infinity and eternity; he is born, so to speak, in the Godhead, comes out of it and returns to it. He is a self-manifestation of the Divine, a self-expression of the divine nature, a soul incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth. On the one hand he is in his natural being a product of cosmic evolution, - an evolution, however, which is not a mechanical or unconscious process or one ruled by chance but the dynamic movement of divine consciousness expressive of divine existence motivated by divine bliss of being. On the other hand he is in his spiritual reality an eternal self-form of the Divine. But his natural being and spiritual being are not ultimately separate or different; they are two aspects of the one Reality in play of consciousness-force manifesting its infinite potential multiplicity of soul-form and soul-movement. Man as evolutive being of body, life, mind and soul is, thus, expressive of that play; as individual natural being he is the surface formation of an evolving soul-person within nature. Therefore this surface formation, - the physical-vital-mental person or personality, - is not an end in itself but an instrument, as yet imperfect, of the soul. The soul is the real person, the true individual in the terrestrial

evolution, the representative of the individual self above the evolution. It is the soul in man and in men which must grow to its fulfilment, to its complete and luminous appearance in nature. To this end, to the unveiling of the godhead in man and to the spiritualisation of his life, individual and corporate, all human activity and association must be directed. As the soul grows in man and in societies, nature is transformed by the rule of the soul, and the individual being so transformed is open to an ascent into and a descent of the higher planes of conscious existence. With the descent of the Supermind, - the creative divine Truth-Consciousness, - and its full emergence from within nature there is achieved the consummation of evolution, the appearance of the true spiritual superman, the fulfilment of man's divinity, the life divine upon earth.

This, then, in summary is Aurobindo's concept of man, the centre of his metaphysics. From the standpoint of the history of religions Aurobindo must be judged, we believe, to occupy a unique and very significant place in Indian spirituality. This is true of him not only in terms of his extraordinary career as educationalist, political writer, 'revolutionary', poetic, mystic, philosopher, guru, but more especially in terms of the content of his spiritual teachings. On the one hand he achieved a broad but fully inclusive synthesis of the teachings of the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita and different traditions of Vedanta, as well as a corresponding synthesis of Yoga. On the other hand he brought to the traditional doctrines an interpretation rich

with insights gained from his classical Western training, his contact with modern science, his variegated social life and his intensive and extensive spiritual experiences.

In his definition of man and his view of terrestrial existence Aurobindo is unique in Indian philosophy in regarding cosmic history as a 'rectilinear' movement from a beginning, - albeit a 'transhistorical' beginning, - to an end, a telos, rather than as an endless cycle or series of cycles, an 'eternal return'. Moreover, this movement is purposeful in a most definite manner; there is a meaning, a clear purpose in the evolutive process, in cosmic existence, which is not merely that of a divine sport or game, a lila, or some vague divine urge or need to create. And it is man who stands at the centre of this purpose, - man not as he is now, a 'transitional being', but man as he is finally meant to be, a divine humanity. Again, unlike virtually all of traditional Indian philosophy, the final destiny of man is for Aurobindo nothing extracosmic, not a heaven or a nirvana, nor is it something purely individual; it is a fulfilment in time, in space, upon earth, and it is a fulfilment which is social, in the broadest sense of that word. In this regard Aurobindo rejects the traditional ascetic renunciation of life and the goal of release from the world and from matter as the fulfilment of the individual; life is to be lived and man is to be spiritualised in all parts of his being.

There are other points concerning the nature of man and his destiny which mark Aurobindo as unique among Indian philosophers, -

e.g., his concept of the jiva as the individual divine standing above the evolution and presiding over it as its objective self-expression, his interpretation of rebirth, karma and the freedom of the soul, his view of the evolution of society and social organisation as expressive of soul-growth, and so forth. No matter what final philosophical or theological judgment one may make of Aurobindo, his uniqueness and importance, we feel, can hardly be doubted. What the eventual and total effect of Aurobindo's thought upon religion and philosophy in India, - in the world, - will be only time will show, but, we should think, it will be considerable.

In closing our study it would, perhaps, not be out of place to give here one of Aurobindo's poetic compositions which in title and tone seems to us to express the central theme of his life and teachings: "Transformation"-

"I am no more a vassal of the flesh,
A slave to Nature and her leaden rule;
I am caught no more in the senses' narrow mesh.

My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight,
My body is God's happy living tool,
My spirit is a vast sun of deathless light."

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