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THE MEETING  
OF  
THE EAST AND THE WEST  
in  
Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy

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SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM  
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## DEDICATION

*Dedicated to the memory of my mother*

## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Friends and admirers of the late Dr. S. K. Maitra as well as students of comparative philosophy will be happy that this well-known book is being re-issued. None among the academic philosophers of India has done so much as Dr. Maitra to propagate the vision of Sri Aurobindo among philosophical circles in this country and abroad. His distinction lies in the fact that he has done this strictly as a philosopher and his studies of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy in relation to the systems of leading philosophers, ancient and modern, are a valuable contribution to comparative philosophy.

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Sri Aurobindo

## THE MEETING OF THE EAST AND THE WEST IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY\*

### DIFFERENCE IN THE RESPECTIVE OUTLOOKS OF EASTERN AND WESTERN PHILOSOPHY :

#### THE VALUE-CENTRIC OUTLOOK OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

AT the outset I must say that whenever in this essay I have used the word Eastern philosophy, I have meant Indian philosophy. The reason is partly a personal one, for I feel that I am not sufficiently familiar with Chinese or Japanese or Persian or Arabian or other non-Indian systems of philosophy in the East to be able to speak about them with confidence. Secondly, I feel that the scope of this essay will become unmanageably large if I am to discuss the standpoints of these various non-Indian systems of Eastern philosophy. So far as Indian systems of philosophy are concerned, I believe there is a fundamental unity running through them, which we may call the spirit of Indian philosophy, and this is different from what we may call the spirit of Western philosophy. Without being dogmatic, it is possible, in my opinion, to speak of certain common features of Indian philosophy which distinguish it from Western philosophy. I therefore agree with Dr.

\* Reprinted from *The Advent*, November 1951, February, April and August 1952.

Northrop who, in an article contributed to the volume *Radhakrishnan*,<sup>1</sup> states that the relation between Eastern and Western philosophy is properly expressed by the symbol  $E+W$ , and not by the equation  $E=W$ . In fact if the equation  $E=W$  were true, it would be hardly worthwhile for  $E$  to study  $W$  or *vice versa*. It is because  $E$  has got something to give  $W$  which  $W$  does not possess, and *vice versa*, that it is profitable for the East to understand the viewpoint of the West, and for the West to grasp the standpoint of the East.  $E+W$  therefore is the symbol for a healthy exchange of ideas between the East and the West, for the possibility of broadening the basis of philosophical thought by removing the isolation from which it suffers by reason of each of these currents of thought being confined within its own limits. The equation  $E=W$  would put a stop to all this.

But when we address ourselves to the task of discovering what constitutes the essence of Eastern, as distinguished from that of Western philosophy, we find ourselves in a difficulty, for as Prof. C. A. Moore, another contributor to the same volume, has pointed out, opinions have widely varied on this question. Perhaps on no philosophical question, except the fundamental one, "What is philosophy?" has opinion so varied as on this question. This, I think, however, is not a matter for regret, for it shows how important the problem is, and how it is indissolubly linked up with the life and culture of the Eastern and Western nations. From the very nature of the prob-

<sup>1</sup> Published by George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1951. Comparative studies in Philosophy in honour of his sixtieth birthday.

lem, unanimity of opinion on it cannot be expected. It would be a very sorry thing, indeed, if there were unanimity, for it would mean either that the problem had only been very superficially grasped, or, what is worse still, that philosophy in the East as well as in the West is a superficial thing which does not touch the multifarious chords of the national life of the Eastern and Western races. But if unanimity is not to be obtained, does it mean that we should refrain from giving our own views on the problem ? Because unanimity on what constitutes the subject-matter of philosophy is not forthcoming, does it mean that people should stop discussing the nature of philosophy ? It is only in problems the limits of which have been artificially fixed, that unanimity of this nature can be expected. In all matters which touch the very roots of the national life of a people unanimity is out of the question.

I think, therefore, we should not hesitate to express our views, on this question, even though our views may be challenged. Such a challenge, in fact, will be a very healthy sign, as it will be a proof of the interest which the problem has succeeded in creating. I have already expressed my views briefly in my book *The Spirit of Indian Philosophy*. What I propose to do here is to restate them with such amplifications as are necessary for the purposes of this essay. The first thing which I stated there—and that position I have maintained throughout that book—is that Indian philosophy is value-centric, that is to say, that it does not look upon Reality as a mere Existence but as Value. And I pointed out that this

appeared clearly from the statement of Maitreyī, the wife of Yājñavalkya, "What shall I do with that which does not give me immortality?", which occurred in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. The context makes it quite clear that it is not to be treated as a casual utterance of a woman but as a statement of a very important truth. Tagore in the essay *Prārthanā in Śāntiniketaṇa*, 1st series, has attached great importance to it. Yājñavalkya intended to renounce worldly life and go to the forest, and for this reason wanted to divide his material possessions between his two wives, Maitreyī and Kātyāyanī. As soon as Maitreyī came to know of this intention of her husband's she made the above remark. By this she wanted to convey the truth that the only thing which mattered, the only thing which could in the truest sense of the term be called real, was that which gave immortality. Reality, therefore, is to be judged in relation to the value which it confers, in this particular case, the value of immortality or salvation. The same idea is expressed in another Upaniṣad, namely, the *Chāndogya*, in the story of Sanatkumāra's instruction of Nārada. When Nārada approached Sanatkumāra for instruction relating to Brahman, he had already learnt all the sciences that had been cultivated in those days. The list of sciences which he had mastered is a very formidable one. The knowledge of even a fraction of them would be more than enough for any graduate of our universities. Yet Sanatkumāra had no hesitation in telling him that all that he had learnt was nothing but names. Nor was Nārada himself quite satisfied with

the knowledge which he had acquired, and that is why he had come to Sanatkumāra. The latter, therefore, imparted to him the knowledge of values which would take him to the other shore, that is, the shore beyond death. In the *Bhagavadgītā* the value-standpoint is more clearly present. All knowledge, all action, all religious devotion, all faith, in fact, everything which touches the roots of human life, is called a Yoga, that is, a way to union with God. There is perhaps no book in the entire realm of literature where the value-standpoint is so prominent as in the *Gītā*. The *Gītā* is a *Yogaśāstra*, or a Science of the attainment of Values, especially of the Supreme Value, namely, Union with God. Knowledge, action, devotion, faith—all are treated as so many ways of realizing values. The goal is the attainment of the Supreme Value, which is described as that “by attaining which nothing further is to be attained”. Difficulties which seem insurmountable from the point of view of logic are easily solved with the help of the conception of Yoga. It is in this way that the *Gītā* has been able to effect a wonderful reconciliation of the standpoints of *jñāna*, *karma* and *bhakti*. *Śrīmadbhāgavata* also similarly effects a complete reconciliation of the standpoints of *jñāna* (Knowledge of Universals), *vijñāna* (Knowledge of Particulars or Factual Knowledge), *vairāgya* (Renunciation,) *śraddhā* (Faith) and *bhakti* (Devotion) through instruction relating to Salvation (*mokṣa*), the highest Value.<sup>1</sup> Like the *Gītā*, it also has a value-centric outlook. At the conclusion of the instruction given to

<sup>1</sup> *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, XI. 19.13

Uddhava as recorded in this book, Lord Kṛṣṇa says that He is for him all the four *puruṣārthas* that is, the fundamental human values.<sup>1</sup>

It is needless to labour the point. It is sufficiently clear that the standpoint of Indian philosophy is value-centric. Even the heterodox systems of Indian philosophy, such as Buddhism and Jainism, do not differ from the orthodox systems on this point. The different systems no doubt differ widely as to what constitutes the chief value, but except in the case of the Cārvāka, which does not seem to have affected much the main currents of Indian thought, they all agree that for philosophy Reality is not mere Existence but Value, and that the chief concern of philosophy is to discover the Ultimate Value.

It cannot be too strongly emphasised, however, that the standpoint that Reality is Value asserts that Reality is *also* Existence. In fact, as I have said in my Presidential Address at the 23rd session of the Indian Philosophical Congress, held in Bombay in 1948, from the point of view of the philosophy of values, even Existence must be treated as a value. Indeed, it is a limiting value. It represents the ideal limit of the process of abstraction from content. To quote what I have said in that address : “But if existence is to be treated as a reality and not merely as a fiction, then it must be supposed to have some content. In fact, it presents the content which we call objectivity. It stands for that feature of reality which makes it independent of subjective feeling, perceiving, imagining and thinking. Nobody can deny that it is an

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, XI. 29.33.

important feature of reality. When we are told anything, the first thing which we ask is : Is it a mere fiction of an individual's imagination or has it got objectivity ? This question is the question about its existence. We may later on ask many other questions relating to its content, but this is the first question. It shows, therefore, how important this value of objectivity or existence is. In fact, it is the passport to the admission of anything to the city of philosophy. Whatever other values a thing may possess, unless it possesses this essential value of existence, it cannot enter the portals of philosophy. But the peculiarity of this value of existence is this, that although without it a thing cannot enter the domain of philosophy, with it it cannot remain long in it. Philosophy has no use for a thing which has only this one value of existence to show. It asks it quietly to move out, making room for others which have got more values to their credit.”<sup>1</sup> At least this is what Indian philosophy does. It has no use for a thing which has only existence to its credit. And this is the view which it expresses through the mouth of Maitreyī, “What shall I do with that which does not give me immortality ?”

But not only does the standpoint of the philosophy of Values assert that Reality is Existence, it also asserts that Reality is Consciousness. If Reality were unconscious, it could not be a value. Consciousness, in fact, is itself a value, just as we have seen existence itself is a value. It is what we may call the logical value. Every reality must

<sup>1</sup> *Whither Philosophy ?* My Presidential Address at the Indian Philosophical Congress, 1948, pp. 28-29.

possess three kinds of value, the value of existence or the value of objectivity, the value of consciousness or the logical value, and the value of bliss (*ānanda*) or the spiritual value. Bradley distinguished in all reality two aspects, the aspect of existence and the aspect of content, what he called respectively, the "that" and the "what". But he failed to distinguish in the content the two clearly separable elements, namely, the logical element and the value element. (To avoid all confusion, I want to point out that although, as shown above, even the logical element is also a value element, yet the value *per se* is the value of bliss or spiritual value, and therefore I have used the word *value* here, as well as in the rest of this essay, except when otherwise stated, in the sense of the spiritual value). If he had not done so, he would have made a tripartite division of the aspects of reality into an existential, logical and value aspect, as is done in Indian philosophy. He would have seen that every judgment, because it relates to reality, has a three-fold character. The judgment, for example, "This cloth is white", indicates not only an existence, expressed by the word 'this cloth' and a logical content, expressed by the word 'white', but also a value content which is not expressed, but which has to be understood, if the full meaning of the judgment is to be stated. The whiteness of the cloth has a value, both subjective and objective, that is to say, both for the person who makes the judgment and also those who hear it, although no explicit value predicate, like 'good' or 'bad' is used. Windelband, therefore, is not right when he says that there are some judgments

which are exclusively value judgments, and others where the value predication is entirely absent. There is no judgment which is entirely a value judgment, as there is no judgment where the value element is entirely lacking. We thus arrive at the standard Indian conception of Reality as *Saccidānanda*, *Sat* expressing the existential aspect, *Cit* the logical aspect, and *Ānanda* the value aspect.

If I am asked, what is the greatest single achievement of Indian philosophy ?, I will unhesitatingly point to this description of Reality as *Saccidānanda*. It is far in advance of any that Western philosophy has so far given us. It is the only correct description of it from the standpoint of Value. The philosophy of Values in the West has failed mainly because it has not been able to grasp the fundamental truth that if Reality is Value, it must also be Existence and Thought, and that Existence and Thought are also values. All value-philosophers in the West, with very rare exceptions, have fumbled and tumbled here. In fact, it is the great Serbonian bog where armies whole have sunk, and not merely value-philosophers. Somehow they have not been able to get rid of the usual Western obsession—as I shall point out presently—that Reality is Existence, and as they make a distinction between value and existence, they have come to the conclusion that Value is unreal. Can there be anything more absurd than this—this assertion by value-philosophers that value is unreal ? Yet Münsterberg has made it, Rickert has made it, Windelband has made it, three fathers or godfathers of this philosophy !

This description of reality as *Saccidānanda* is, more-

over, one of the oldest legacies of our Indian philosophy, for it goes back to the Upaniṣads. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (3.9.28) we have a statement which is very close to it, for there Brahman is described as *vijñānam ānandam Brahma*. In Taitt. Up. 2.1 also there is a close approximation to it in the form *satyam jñānam anantam*. Combining these two descriptions, we get the characterization of Brahman as *satyam jñānam anantam ānandam Brahma*, which we find in the *Sarvopaniṣatsāra*, and of which the abbreviated form (after dropping *anantam*) is *Saccidānanda*.

One of the most important consequences which follow from this conception of Reality as Value is the elimination of the distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy. This is not only a characteristic of all systems of Indian philosophy, but as Prof. C. A. Moore has pointed out in his article "Comparative Philosophies of Life" which he contributed to the volume "Philosophy—East and West", (published by the Princeton University Press in 1944,) it is the general standpoint of all Oriental philosophy. It is different from the mere assertion of the primacy of the practical over the theoretical. In the form in which this 'primacy' appears in Kant's philosophy, the practical is removed from the sphere of knowledge. I am sure our ancient sages would not touch this 'primacy' with a pair of tongs if it meant giving up knowledge, for knowledge was their most precious possession. What they have done is to identify knowledge with the practical.

There is, of course, a world of difference between

the practical as understood in the West, and the practical as understood in Indian philosophy. The practical means in the West the same as the pragmatic, that is to say, what enables a man to be effective, to succeed, to prosper in the world of everyday life. Indian philosophy has a contempt for the practical in this sense. For it, the practical means that which helps man to attain his supreme end, his final goal. To the West, this is the reverse of the practical, for it shows no concern for the world of the here and the now. The whole difference is a difference between the respective values which are esteemed. The West esteems what may be called the pragmatic values, whereas Indian philosophy fixes its gaze upon the ultimate values. The only rational course for pragmatism is—what shall I say? If I were a Bradleyan, I would say, to commit suicide. But not being a Bradleyan, I would say, to be transformed. Yes, pragmatism's destiny is to be transformed. It is a bastard born of the illegitimate union of teleology and rank empiricism. What gives it importance is its teleology. But its teleology unfortunately is the teleology of the swine. Improve its teleology, radically transform it, and then you will get to our Indian view of the practical. In fact, the Indian view is a purified and ennobled pragmatism—a pragmatism that has received its second birth, obtained its *dvijatva*, as we may call it, using the very significant terminology of our Indian social philosophy, by dropping its association with empiricism.

But the Indian view of the practical suffers from

one limitation : it takes into account only the individual—it has no cosmic reference. The salvation it speaks of is salvation only for the individual. It is not cosmic salvation. Not that in the history of Indian philosophy there has never been any reference to cosmic salvation. When the Buddha made his famous statement that he would not have *nirvāṇa* for himself unless the whole world got it, he of course pleaded for cosmic salvation. So, too, there are various hints, scattered over the ancient texts, especially the Upaniṣads, which point to cosmic salvation. For instance, the famous prayer in *Iś. Up.* 15 is an invocation to the Lord to lift the veil that hides the face of Truth, so that its full light may illumine the whole universe. The benefit spoken of here evidently accrues to the whole universe, and not merely to an individual. There are again some Vedantists who maintain the standpoint known as “*ekamuktau sarvamuktiḥ*”, the standpoint, namely, that as *avidyā* is one, if it is removed in the case of one individual, it is removed for all.<sup>1</sup> But although there have been instances where cosmic salvation has been hinted at, yet the general standpoint of Indian philosophy has been that of individual salvation. There is practical unanimity among the different schools of Indian thought on this point, although there is a wide divergence of opinion as to what constitutes salvation and also about the methods of obtaining it.

The standpoint of Indian philosophy, therefore, is on the whole individualistic on the question of salvation.

<sup>1</sup> See *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, chap. VIII, where this view is mentioned and refuted.

Western philosophy, although it does not speak of such a highly spiritual end as salvation, yet takes a universal or cosmic standpoint with regard to whatever end it puts forward as the goal of life. The hedonist end, for instance, of "the greatest good of the greatest number" may not be any spiritual end at all, but it has reference to the whole of mankind and not merely to an individual. On this point we really have to take our hats off to the West. The problem is to combine the Indian spiritual viewpoint with the cosmic standpoint of the West, and we shall see in the sequel how Sri Aurobindo has tackled it.

As is to be expected on account of its intimate connection with practical life, Yoga, as the practical method of obtaining salvation, occupies a very important place in all systems of Indian philosophy, though the methods of Yoga vary very widely from system to system. In fact, the relation between philosophy and yoga is conceived somewhat as follows : Philosophy discovers the final end or goal of man; having discovered it, it hands it over to Yoga that it may devise means of practically realizing it. The two therefore work in the closest co-operation with each other. And as Religion, from the point of view of personal realization, is nothing but Yoga, it follows that in Indian philosophy there is always a very close alliance between Religion and Philosophy. This is in fact one of the most remarkable features of Indian culture : it has never experienced any conflict between Philosophy and Religion. The main reason for this beautiful alliance is of course this : Religion has never tried to usurp the functions of Philosophy. The unfortunate conflict be-

tween the two in the West is due to the fact that Religion wanted to be all in all, that it not only laid down what values were to be pursued, but even what facts were to be accepted as true. This naturally brought Religion not only into conflict with Philosophy but also with Science.

Coming now to the problem of Evolution, we are afraid this problem has not received as much attention from Indian philosophy as it has from Western philosophy. The reason is mainly that Indian philosophy is primarily concerned with the fate of the individual. It is somewhat indifferent to the question of the fate of the world. The orthodox Vedānta of the Śāṅkara school treats the whole question as unreal. Even in the realistic systems the problem of Evolution has not received much consideration. The only exception is the Sāṅkhya, where it has received a very elaborate treatment. But even there, as remarked by Dr. Radhakrishnan,<sup>1</sup> the whole problem has been treated without any definite plan. It is not clear, for example, why the stages of evolution should be what they are, and what the connection between one stage and another is. There is a still more fundamental difficulty, pointed out by Dr. Dasgupta,<sup>2</sup> and that concerns the question why *prakṛti* should evolve at all, that is to say, why the state of equilibrium of the *guṇas* should be disturbed at all. The answer of the Sāṅkhya is that this is due to the transcendental

<sup>1</sup> Radhakrishnan : *Indian Philosophy*, (2nd Edn.) Vol. II p. 274. Published by George Allen and Unwin.

<sup>2</sup> S. N. Das Gupta : *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 247, 1st Edition. Published by the Cambridge University Press.

influence of the *puruṣas*, which influence means that there is an inherent teleology in the *guṇas* by virtue of which all their movements or modifications take place in such a way as to serve the purposes of the *puruṣas*. But, as has been pointed out by Śaṅkara,<sup>1</sup> it is difficult to understand how the *puruṣas* can have any purpose, for the Sāṅkhya has expressly declared that the *puruṣas* are *nirguṇa* and *niṣkriya*, attributeless and inert. Moreover, even supposing that the *puruṣas* can have any purpose, there is no reason to suppose that their purposes must necessarily be the same, unless there is a pre-established harmony among them, of which the Sāṅkhya says nothing. The position of the Yoga philosophy is better, for it attributes the disturbance of the equilibrium of the *guṇas* to the will of God. But God in the Yoga philosophy has no organic connection with the rest of the system. It is, in fact, a mere appendage, put in to answer some difficulties, and is a sort of *deus ex machina*, like the God of Berkeley or Leibniz. Coming back to the Sāṅkhya, even if we suppose that all the *puruṣas* wanted at least to have some experience, and that this is all that is needed to break the equilibrium of the *guṇas*, this will not explain the subsequent process of evolution, for the needs of the individual *puruṣas* differ widely, and the direction of evolution cannot really be the same for all. In the case of salvation the Sāṅkhya admits that the need of the emancipated individual is totally different from the needs of the others. That individual has obtained the requisite knowledge of the distinction between

<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara's Commentary on *Brahma Sūtras*, 2.2.6.

*puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, and his need therefore is that evolution should stop, while others require that it should go on. But in the case of the starting of evolution and its subsequent march, it is assumed that the needs of all the individuals point in the same direction. The truth is, there is no passage from absolute individual pluralism to cosmic unity.

Moreover, the Sāṅkhya, like the rest of the Indian systems of philosophy, believes in the cyclical view of the universe, that is, in the view that evolution is always succeeded by dissolution, and *vice versa*. Further, even during a period of evolution, there is the cycle of the four *yugas*, so that even during this period it is not all evolution, but there are ups and downs. But in a cyclical view of the universe, evolution becomes meaningless.

The Sāṅkhya attempt, therefore, to give a cosmic character to evolution has failed, because it has not been able to get rid of the cyclical view of the universe, according to which evolution and dissolution always follow each other in a cyclical order, and secondly, because, on account of its extremely individualistic standpoint, it views all problems of evolution from the standpoint of the interest of the individual. In contrast to this, the standpoint of Western philosophy is cosmic, though it suffers from the defect that it is not sufficiently spiritual. We shall see in the sequel how beautifully Sri Aurobindo has combined here also the spiritual outlook of Indian philosophy with the cosmic standpoint of the West.

THE STANDPOINT OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY IS  
EXISTENTIAL AND THEORETICAL, INTELLECTUAL,  
DYNAMIC AND COSMIC

Coming now to what we may call the spirit of Western philosophy, how are we to characterise it? Our task undoubtedly is not an easy one, in view of the fact that Western philosophy has had a long history and has undergone radical changes in the course of centuries. On account of this difficulty one very learned and very versatile scholar—I mean Prof. Moore of the Hawaii University—has declared that there is no special feature in Western philosophy which distinguishes it from Oriental philosophy. As I have already said in the beginning, it is impossible for me to accept this view. I believe that there is a great deal of truth in the famous saying of Fichte, namely, that what philosophy a man has depends upon what sort of man he is, so that unless we assume that all men all over the world are identical, there must be some differences in their temperaments and outlooks upon life, which are bound to be reflected in their philosophies. I therefore hold that we can speak of a spirit of Western philosophy which effectively distinguishes it from the spirit of Oriental philosophy. That spirit, I think, can best be discovered by noting the direction of evolution of Western thought. I have therefore to make an excursus into the history of Western philosophy which I propose to do on the same lines on which I made it in my Presidential Address already referred to, and using almost the same language.

The history of Western philosophy has been dominated by two main currents, which we may call respectively, *Sophia* or the knowledge of values, and *Scientia*, the knowledge of facts. The traditional founder of Western philosophy is Thales of Miletus, a slightly older contemporary of the Buddha, who looked outwards, towards Nature, for discovering the ultimate principle of the universe, and found it in water. Western philosophy thus began in Greece with *Scientia*, with the knowledge of facts. Other members of his school, known as the Ionian philosophers, took some other natural principle as the ultimate principle of the universe. A change was brought about by Anaximander who took a more abstract principle, namely, the Boundless, as the starting-point of his philosophy. From now onwards Greek philosophy became more and more fond of abstractions. The process reached its climax in two philosophers, Parmenides and Heraclitus, who, although they differed fundamentally about the nature of the ultimate principle, one looking upon it as Being and the other as Becoming, yet agreed in making the ultimate principle as abstract as possible. This process of abstract speculation continued in Pythagoras, who looked upon Number, as the symbol of measure and proportion, as the ultimate principle. In Pythagoras Greek philosophy had also its first touch of mysticism, which it acquired partly from the Orphic cult and partly from its contact with Eastern, especially Indian philosophy, for there can be no doubt that Pythagoras was greatly influenced by Buddhism and other trends of Indian thought.

After Pythagoras there was a return to the concrete standpoint of the Ionians, with this important difference that Greek philosophy had now become pluralistic, as contrasted with the monism of the early Ionians. In fact, in Empedocles, Anaxagoras and the Atomists, Greek philosophy was caught in a wave of pluralism. Anaxagoras, although he was essentially an atomist, yet introduced a principle fundamentally different from any that Greek philosophy had so far conceived and which was of far-reaching importance for the development of Greek philosophy. This was the principle of *Nous* or Mind which was unknown to Greek philosophy before him. But he could not make full use of this principle, and to the end it remained in his philosophy a *deus ex machina*, introduced for the purpose of explaining motion.

In fact, the credit of turning the centre of gravity of philosophy from Nature to Mind goes to Protagoras rather than to Anaxagoras. It was Protagoras who, with his doctrine *Man is the measure of all things*, made a revolutionary change in the outlook of Greek philosophy, which had hitherto been more or less a sort of natural speculation. By making man the centre of philosophic interest, he tuned the gaze of philosophy from outside within. From now on, Greek philosophy became increasingly occupied with man and his problems.

But Protagoras had a very poor conception of the nature of man. Man for him meant only the sensuous man, that part of man which expresses itself only in sensations and perceptions. A second revolution in

the conception of philosophy was therefore necessary, and this was led by Socrates. He pointed out that it was only the universal element in man which could be placed in the centre of philosophical interest. Philosophy thus became in the hands of Socrates the science of universal values as discovered by human reason. From now onwards, Greek philosophy became really a philo-sophia, that is, love of Sophia or knowledge of values. Plato as the complete Socratic inherited this universalistic bias of his master, but he inherited along with it the mysticism of the Pythagoreans, and therefore, Sophia meant with him not only the knowledge of values as gained by the intellect but also that obtained through intuition. Now the highest principle of Plato, the idea of good, is not a pure principle of reason but is something which transcends reason. In fact, as I have pointed out in the essay *Sri Aurobindo and Plato*, his discovery of the idea of good through intuition led to a conflict in his philosophy between reason and intuition. Plato had an intuition of the idea of good as the ultimate principle, and therefore he endowed it with the necessary dynamism to function as such. But his logic stood in his way. He had already made a divorce between the ultimate metaphysical realities and a Creator who is metaphysically a subordinate principle but is dynamically supreme. Hence the conflict between reason and intuition which Plato could not reconcile.

The successors of Plato maintained the standpoint of philosophy as Sophia set up by Socrates and Plato. Aristotle no doubt paid greater attention to facts than

either of them, but in one sense he was even more true to the ideal of Sophia than they, for he discovered even in facts an inherent teleology, which really meant that even facts were not mere facts but were also values. He was the first among Greek philosophers to introduce the idea of Evolution, based upon teleology, which in some respects anticipated the Hegelian conception of Evolution. Aristotle's successors, the Stoics, the Epicureans and the Sceptics, neglected the theoretical side of philosophy and concentrated their attention upon the practical side of it. This resulted in a complete divorce between facts and values, and philosophy became an aggressive science of values which showed a contempt for facts. This attitude was further accentuated in Plotinus who advocated a flight from the realm of facts to the domain of the Supreme Value, God.

Thus the characteristic note of Greek philosophy, when it was at the height of its glory, was Sophia or knowledge of values, although it began in the Milesian philosophers with a pure love of facts or Scientia. After the Greeks came the Romans. They had a totally different culture. They had hardly any philosophy of their own. They were imperialists bent upon extending their territories and subjugating different races and countries. They were therefore interested in developing such knowledge as helped them in their imperialistic designs. They were votaries, therefore, of Scientia rather than of Sophia, and the subjects to which they applied themselves were law and the science of government, the two sciences which were directly concerned with their imperialistic policies.

Imperialistic Rome thus clung to *Scientia*, and did not show much love for *Sophia*. So naturally we should have expected that with the dissolution of the Roman Empire there would be a revival of *Sophia* or the knowledge of values. But unfortunately, Imperialist Rome was succeeded by Imperialist Church, and the one was as destructive of the pursuit of values as the other. Under the rule of the Church both *Scientia* and *Sophia* suffered, for this rule was as destructive of the discovery of facts as it was of the pursuit of values.

Freedom from the imperialist legacy of Rome, therefore, only came after the decline of the power of the Church. This happened in the period known as the Renaissance. Its very name indicates clearly its essential characteristic. It was the period of the renaissance or revival of the Greek spirit. It gave therefore a tremendous push to the long-neglected pursuit of the knowledge of values. Hence we have again systems of philosophy, of which the keynote was the pursuit of values, of which the most important was that founded by Descartes and known as the Cartesian system. Descartes' "*Cogito ergo sum*" is man's discovery of his lost soul. This restoration to man of his lost consciousness of his self is a landmark in the cultural history of mankind. Descartes, therefore, may be said to have started a new epoch, and is consequently rightly called the father of modern philosophy. Unfortunately, Descartes, although he discovered for man his lost soul, could not let him remain long in it. His '*Cogito*' was merely an external appendage of his system, and the only use to which he put it was to extract

from it a criterion of truth, which he employed for proving the existence of God. This done, Descartes had no further need of the 'Cogito', and the rest of his system was a hopeless dualism of mind and body. This dualism he left as a legacy to his successors. Spinoza, the greatest of these, escaped the Cartesian dualism through his mysticism, which was his Oriental heritage. It was, in fact his *scientia intuitiva* and his *intellectual love of God* which saved his philosophy from the quandary in which Descartes had left speculative thought. But still there was a sharp cleavage between the two parts of his philosophy—that which was under the influence of Descartes and that which he obtained as part of his Oriental heritage. It is for this reason that John Caird in his book on Spinoza (Blackwood's Philosophical Classics) says that "the last word of Spinoza's philosophy is a direct contradiction of the first." No doubt it is a contradiction, but through this contradiction emerges the greatness of Spinoza, for it shows that when it is a question of choosing between fidelity to logic and loyalty to the essential values, he has never hesitated to choose the latter. Indeed, the very title of his chief philosophical work, "Ethics", shows how he has subordinated the purely ontological problem of being to the axiological problem of value.

Spinoza thus recovered for philosophy its ancient predilection for values. But this recovery did not last long, for there arose soon after him the empirical school of John Locke which culminated in the scepticism of David Hume. Philosophy again lost its essential character and

became a handmaid to science. It is true it partially recovered its lost position in Leibnitz, but Leibnitz's monadism, by over emphasizing the individual, reduced the universal values to a position of comparative inanity.

From now onwards, Western philosophy became the history of the conflict between two currents of thought, represented respectively, by love for facts and love for values. This conflict is going on even today. The important thing here is not which side has won in this conflict. Perhaps the truth is that no side has won any decisive victory over the other. We have, in fact, here realized Bergson's ideal, that is to say, we have put more philosophy into science and more science into philosophy. Those who say that the victory has been entirely on the side of science overlook the fact that science has felt very much the impact of philosophy, especially the idealistic philosophy of Germany of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The most important thing about this conflict is the need which is felt of a reorientation of philosophy, not only to meet the challenge of science, which, after all, is not a very great thing, but to re-establish human culture on a newer and sounder basis, that it may serve the needs of mankind better than the present civilization is doing. How the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo can help Western philosophy in this task, we shall presently show.

To return to our story of the adventures of Western philosophy : after Leibnitz came Kant. He answered the challenge of Hume, which was the challenge of science in those days, by showing that experience is not possible without an extra-experiential element, contributed by the

mind, working in it, to which he gave the name *a priori*. He showed that Hume's philosophy was destructive not only of all metaphysics, but also of all science. For it was the common demand of both science and metaphysics that there should be order and system in the universe. But from the standpoint of pure experience there could be no order or system in the universe. The world, from this point of view, would be a world of eternal flux, without any stability. On this point the Buddhists and Heraclitus had said the last word. Both science and philosophy gained very much by Kant's criticism of the standpoint of pure experience. Kant thus helped to place philosophy again on its old saddle by showing that even facts are facts because there are values working in them. But he gave a rude shock to philosophical consciousness when he declared that so far as knowledge was concerned, its value content was not in a position to give it access to the noumenal reality but only to the lower world of phenomenal reality. Indeed, it may be said of him that he gave with one hand what he took away with the other. It is true he gave to the moral life a status which he had not given to knowledge, but this was after all a poor consolation, for he made it clear that the values of moral life were not accessible to knowledge but could only be obtained by faith. And what was this faith? If faith meant with Kant a wider and richer consciousness than was possible in knowledge, one could have understood Kant's giving it a higher status. But faith in his philosophy was only another name for the purely analytical consciousness of the identity of self with self—a consciousness which, from the point

of view of content, is on a lower level than knowledge. The only redeeming feature of Kant's limitation of knowledge to empirical reality was this, that as for Kant knowledge meant only such knowledge as could be obtained with the help of the logical categories, it was a good thing that he did not give it access to the Ultimate Reality, for there are higher values than logical categories. His real mistake lay, in fact, not in giving this knowledge a lower status, but in not recognizing any other knowledge than this. Why should it be supposed that this is the only knowledge vouchsafed to man ? Kant, in fact, did great injustice to man in denying him any knowledge higher than this.

Hegel removed this defect of the Kantian philosophy and gave man unlimited possibilities of knowledge. He chalked out a gigantic scheme showing how knowledge could ascend by successive steps from the lowest knowledge, the knowledge of Being, to the highest, the knowledge of the Absolute. The whole scheme was based upon the principle of Continuity, which for Hegel was the principle of Reason. Hegel thus built a ladder of perfect continuity between the highest and the lowest principles. In fact, it was the most perfect picture of continuity that the human intellect had ever conceived.

Unfortunately, it did not satisfy the human mind. As I put it in my Bombay Address, "Could it give peace and consolation to human consciousness athirst for values ? The subsequent development of European thought after Hegel gives the answer to this question. There was an immediate revolt from the side of the consciousness of

values against this philosophy of absolute continuity. This is known as the romantic revolt against the Hegelian rationalism. The leader of this romantic revolt was Schopenhauer. His motto was : Anything but this hated reason with its principle of continuity. He did not care what his own principle was to be. Let it be anything; only it must not be this confounded reason. For this reason he chose the blind will as his principle...With this principle as his weapon he began to deal hard blows at the Hegelian structure. Soon he gathered round him other rebels who joined him in destroying the Hegelian structure. The mighty Hegelian structure was shaken; there were breaches in its walls here and there, but it did not fall. And why did it not fall ? Because, in spite of its seeming apathy towards values, it was more strongly entrenched in them than its rival systems. One good thing, however, came out of this attack by Schopenhauer and his fellow-romanticists. It showed the weak points of the Hegelian philosophy, judged from the standpoint of values. It revealed to the world that the principle of continuity with its apotheosis of continuity could not give a wholly satisfactory philosophy."

While all this civil war was going on in the land of philosophy proper between the advocates of reason and those of some other principle than reason which could satisfy better the human craving for values, the other side, namely, Science, did not remain a mere passive spectator. It had by this time acquired enormous prestige. It could show an unbroken record of

achievement. It was no wonder, then, that it began to make inroads into the realm of philosophy. It created a new philosophy, which we may call scientific philosophy, which tried to build a *Weltanschauung* on the foundation of physics and biology. The addition of a biological factor made it very popular, and it quickly replaced the previous empirical philosophy of John Stuart Mill in popular favour. But the addition of a biological factor made it deviate from its previous attachment to purely mechanical principles. Especially the doctrine of evolution, which formed such an important feature of scientific philosophy of the nineteenth century, is a wide departure from the principles of a purely mechanical philosophy and brings scientific philosophy somewhat close to the current idealistic philosophy. Thus there has been established since the middle of the nineteenth century a sort of rapprochement between science and philosophy. The process has been hastened by the appearance of pragmatism, which with its double face, one turned towards empiricism and the other towards teleology, has played admirably the rôle of an intermediary between science and philosophy.

The position, therefore, of Western philosophy at the present moment is that owing to the excessive growth of the intellectualistic element in it, which romanticism could not subdue, it has become predominantly logical, and also on account of the influence of science it has become existential or factual. But it has been able to maintain throughout its dynamic character. Its outlook was

never practical, except for a brief period in Greek philosophy, and in very recent years in pragmatism and some forms of the philosophy of values. So in remaining mainly theoretical, it has not deviated from its traditional standpoint. It has acquired a new tendency through its contact with the science of the latter part of the nineteenth century, which was characterised by a great development of the biological sciences. This is its evolutionary outlook. Of course it goes back to the days of Aristotle, but it was lost through the passage of centuries, till Hegel revived it in a new form and the scientific thought of the nineteenth century adopted it and handed it back again to philosophy. Evolutionary theories, therefore, are a very good example of the mutual interchange of ideas between science and philosophy. Be that as it may, the philosophical outlook today is distinctly evolutionary.

The main fight has been on the issue whether Reality is Existence or Reality is Value, the forces on either side being almost equally matched. On the whole, the advocates of Reality as Existence have proved stronger. This is conclusively proved by the fact that even philosophers of values, whose avowed object is to show that Value represents the ultimate nature of Reality, have accepted the view that Reality is Existence, and in order to maintain the difference of Value from Existence, have declared Value to be unreal. Another contest has been on the issue whether Reality is to be approached through the intellect or reason or through

some other channel, either infra-rational, like feeling or the will, or supra-rational or spiritual, like intuition. Western philosophy has stood solidly by the intellect or reason, and even though in Greek philosophy the ultrarational standpoint was put forward, as in Heraclitus, Pythagoras or Plato, the rational standpoint was never abandoned. It is only in recent years, since the romantic revolt against rationalism in the the early nineteenth century, that a serious attempt has been made to challenge the rational standpoint, but, as I have shown, the forces of romanticism have not been able to shake the rationalistic foundation of Western philosophy. The point on which there has been practically unanimity among Western thinkers, is the cosmic outlook of philosophy. The West has had throughout a cosmic outlook in philosophy and never thought it was the business of philosophy to deal with the problems of individual salvation or individual happiness. This is mainly due to the fact that its interests have been chiefly theoretical and not practical. But even when it has dealt with practical problems, it has dealt with them from the cosmic, and not from the individual standpoint.

To conclude this fairly long historical account of the philosophical outlook of the West, I would say that its main characteristics are : (1) that it is theoretical, rather than practical, (2) that it is existential, rather than axiological, (3) that it is intellectual or rational, rather than spiritual, (4) that it is cosmic, rather than individualistic, and (5) that it believes in change and

evolution, rather than in static constancy. As I have stated at the outset, I do not expect any general agreement, far less unanimity, on the question of the spirit of Eastern or Western philosophy, and what I have stated above must be taken as my personal view.

### HOW INDIAN AND WESTERN THOUGHT HAVE MET IN SRI AUROBINDO

Coming now to my main task, which is to show how Indian and Western thought have met in Sri Aurobindo, I have to make one preliminary remark, and that is, that this meeting is not a mere hand-shaking, but that there is a real synthesis of these two types of thought in him. There is even something more, a fulfilment of what each of them aims at but has not been able to realize. The West aims at a fuller realization of the evolutionary and cosmic character of its thought. But it is hampered by its intellectualism and its existential outlook. What it requires is the acceptance of a spiritual standpoint, leading to the abandonment of its existential outlook and a modification of its extreme intellectualism. Similarly, Indian thought is spiritual but individualistic and static. It must break its narrow walls of individualism and acquire a dynamic and cosmic character. Therein lies its fulfilment.

I may illustrate my remarks by citing the example of Plato. Plato is called the complete Greek. Why ? Because in him all the previous thought of the Greeks—the Socratic, the Protagorean, the Pythagorean, the Eleatic, the Heraclitean, etc.,—found not merely a synthesis but

a fulfilment. Plato was what Pythagoras and Heraclitus and Parmenides and Socrates wanted to be but could not be.

As the space at my disposal is limited, I shall content myself by showing how Sri Aurobindo fulfils this function by dealing with three main problems of his philosophy —(1) the problem of Evolution (2) the problem of Yoga and (3) the problem of the nature of Reality.

#### ILLUSTRATION FROM THE PROBLEM OF EVOLUTION

The idea of Evolution is certainly more prominent in Western than in Indian philosophy. Greek philosophy was full of it. In Heraclitus, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, among the pre-Socratic philosophers, evolution played a very important rôle, and among the post-Socratic thinkers, it was Aristotle who gave it great prominence. In Plato, although it was not given so much importance as in Aristotle, yet it did have a place in the antechamber of his philosophy, when he spoke of creation and dealt with natural philosophy, as in the "Timaeus". In Aristotle evolution was teleological; it was the gradual transformation of the potential into the actual.

In modern times the theory of evolution was one of the main contributions of nineteenth century philosophy, and was developed from very different view-points, from even totally opposed standpoints, as for instance, that of Darwin and Spencer, on the one hand, and Hegel on the other. The Darwin-Spencerian theory of evolution was perfectly naturalistic. From the spiritual point of view it

was perfectly neutral; that is to say, evolution was no index at all of spiritual development. In other words, it was not possible to say, from the mere fact that a thing was more highly evolved than another, that it was higher from the spiritual point of view. Spencer, however, most illogically claimed that the higher from the point of view of evolution must also be looked upon as higher from the point of view of the spirit. This was, in fact, his main contention in his ethical and sociological works, though he gave absolutely no convincing reason why we should accept this contention. In fact, the naturalistic theory of evolution makes it impossible to talk of any spiritual progress. Huxley in his book *Evolution and Ethics* has denounced as strongly as possible the claim of naturalistic evolution to be ethical. "Let us understand, once for all", so runs his strong indictment of this evolution, "that the ethical progress of society depends not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it". This indictment, coming as it does from a man who played an important part in the development of the doctrine of evolution, is of great value.

Opposed to this naturalistic view of evolution is the Hegelian conception of it. From the Hegelian standpoint all evolution is evolution of the spirit. Even the evolution of nature is no exception to it. But Hegel understands by the spirit nothing but the Idea, that is to say, Reason. And his whole scheme of evolution is based upon logic or dialectic. Evolution, from his point of view, is nothing else than the logical process of development of the Idea

or Reason. The stages in the evolutionary process are precisely the stages in the logical development of the Idea.

The Hegelian conception of evolution is no doubt a grand one. It is certainly an antidote to the naturalistic evolution of the Darwin-Spencerian brand. But it is not completely spiritual. It takes into account only one aspect or facet of spiritual life, and elevates it to the position of the sole spiritual element. Reason no doubt is an important stage in the development of the life of the spirit. It liberates it from the arbitrariness of sensations and perceptions, and gives it stability and order. But it itself creates a new kind of bondage—the bondage of stereotyped ways of looking at things—and therefore has got to be transcended in the interest of the higher spiritual life.

Sri Aurobindo takes with Hegel the spiritual view of evolution. In fact, evolution, which for him is the inverse of the process of creation and means the return of the Spirit to itself after its self-projection into the world, loses all its significance if it is not spiritual. Not only so, but for him a naturalistic evolution is a contradiction in terms. Evolution must be a movement towards a goal. If it is merely a mechanical movement without any purpose, then whatever else it may be, it cannot be called evolution. This is the lesson we learn from the system of Herbert Spencer. If evolution means merely the adaptation of the organism to a rigid physical universe, then there can be no talk of any moral or social evolution. Yet Herbert Spencer extended the idea of evolution to the social and moral domain. And how did he do it? By

surreptitiously substituting for a purely physical environment a social or moral environment. But this he had no right to do, for the environment contemplated by him and in relation to which he formulated his principle of evolution is purely physical, and there is no passage from this physical to a moral or social environment. But Herbert Spencer felt that with a purely physical environment there could be no talk of any progress, and as he was particularly anxious to prove that evolution meant progress, he cleverly substituted for the physical environment a moral and social one. This clearly proves that a mechanical evolution is a contradiction in terms.

Evolution thus must be a spiritual evolution or it is no evolution at all. So far Hegel is right. But from Sri Aurobindo's point of view Hegel is wrong in indentifying the Spirit with Reason. For him there are several rungs in the spiritual ladder which are higher than reason. A truly spiritual view of evolution must transcend reason. A scheme of evolution based upon pure logic cannot be the last word in evolution. Its defects are palpable. It ties consciousness for ever to one particular stage of it, namely, reason. It uses a principle which has emerged as a product of evolution as a measuring-rod for that evolution. Evolution has surprises in store for us. It is absurd to suppose that the whole course of it can be mapped out with the help of any form of consciousness that has already emerged. To suppose that such a thing is possible is tantamount to asserting that evolution cannot reach higher levels than what it has already attained. The course of evolution, as Bergson has pointed out in a brilliant

passage of his book *Creative Evolution*, is not like that of a shell fired from a cannon. You cannot trace its course, remaining yourself on the ground, with the help of the logical principle of continuity. You cannot form any idea of what the next higher level of evolution will be until it has actually emerged. Logic is absolutely helpless here. Hegel's great faith in the power of logic betrayed him.

The Western conception of evolution, however, does not end with Hegel. The great French philosopher Bergson has made his theory of evolution one of the main principles of his philosophy, and has dealt with it from a view point totally different alike from that of Darwin and Spencer, on the one hand, and that of Hegel, on the other. To distinguish effectively his view of evolution from that of the naturalists, he coined the word *Creative Evolution* to indicate his own standpoint. His great work *Creative Evolution* is perhaps the strongest indictment that exists in philosophical literature of the mechanical theory of evolution. Unfortunately Bergson has tried to demolish not only the mechanical but also the teleological view of evolution. This is really very unfortunate, for the rejection of all teleology is disastrous for Bergson's own philosophy. Bergson gives as an example of creative evolution the work of a painter. "The finished portrait", he says, "is explained by the features of the model, by the nature of the artist, by the colours spread on the palette; but, even with the knowledge of what explains it, no one, not even the artist, could have foreseen exactly what the portrait would be, for to predict it would have

been to produce it before it was actually produced—an absurd hypothesis which is its own refutation. Even so with regard to the moments of our life, of which we are the artisans. Each of them is a kind of creation. And just as the talent of the painter is formed or deformed—in any case, is modified—under the influence of the works he produces, so each of our states, at the moment of its issue, modifies our personality, being indeed the new form that we are just assuming.<sup>1</sup>

Now, as I have said elsewhere, “Do we see really any trace of creative activity in the description of a painter as given by him? What sort of creativity can a painter exhibit who, as Bergson depicted him, does not come to his work with any ideas about what he is going to do, but relies upon inspiration to give him the ideas as he proceeds with his work? What sort of talent does the artist exhibit who does not know how the work in which he is engaged will develop?”<sup>2</sup> In fact, a sourceless and aimless movement can in no sense be called creative. A flow that is not a flow towards anything, a movement that is not directed by any end, is unrelieved mechanism. In fact, what Bergson has given us is a temporal mechanism, in place of the spatial mechanism of the nineteenth century biologists. Here we have a fundamental difference between Bergson’s conception of evolution and that of Sri Aurobindo. Bergson’s conception is purely negative.

<sup>1</sup> Bergson : *Creative Evolution*. Authorised English Tr. by Mitchel, Macmillan. 1928. p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> See my third article on the Philosophy of Henri Bergson (“Review of Philosophy and Religion”, Oct. 1941).

He means by creativity simply the absence of all control, even the control by oneself. A creative act, however, does not mean one which is absolutely undetermined, but one which is the expression of a man's character, one in which the full force of one's personality is felt. The same thing is true when we pass from the individual to the cosmic plane. Creative or spiritual evolution is one in which every movement bears on its face the stamp of its spiritual origin, in which every step in the process reveals its spiritual source. This is the point which Sri Aurobindo has emphasized in his view of evolution. Evolution for him is a process, every step of which is directed by the spirit.

In fact, for Sri Aurobindo, Evolution means the Spirit's return unto itself. Just as in involution or creation it projects itself out of itself, so in evolution it comes back to itself. It is the home-coming of the Spirit. It comes back to itself in a manner which is just the reverse of that by which it went out of itself. The former process Sri Aurobindo calls also Ascent and the latter descent. Ascent or Evolution is only possible because there has been descent. Matter can evolve because there has been a descent of the Spirit into it. So is it with Life and Mind. Each of these can evolve because there has been a descent of the Spirit into it.

Sri Aurobindo also introduces into his theory of Evolution a new idea which is not found in any system, either ancient or modern. This is the idea of integration. Evolution is not merely an ascent from a lower to a higher state. It is also an integration of the higher with the lower ones. This means that when a higher principle emerges, it

descends into the lower ones causing a transformation of them. Thus when Mind emerges, not only does a new principle appear on the scene, but the lower principles of matter and life also undergo a transformation, so that they become different from what they were before the emergence of this new principle. Evolution, therefore, does not mean the isolated raising of any principle to a higher level, but an uplift and transformation of all the principles. We may therefore also call this principle the principle of solidarity.

As I have shown in the essay *Sri Aurobindo and Bergson*, Bergson also has spoken of the continuous swelling of the current of life as it proceeds, of the past living in the present and continuing in the future. He has also compared evolution to the continuous lengthening of an elastic body, to the continuous coiling of a rope. But these similes only point to the fact that evolution is a continuous process without any break. They do not indicate any transformation of the lower principles by the higher. In fact, there is no place for any distinction of lower and higher in Bergson's philosophy. The distinction between higher and lower can only be maintained if there is any goal of evolution, the higher being that which is nearer the goal, and the lower that which is more distant.

There is another principle involved in Sri Aurobindo's conception of evolution which also does not occur in Bergson or for the matter of that, in any Western philosopher. It is what he calls psychicization, that is to say, the opening out of the psychic being within. Within us

dwells a spark of Divinity, the *puruṣa* seated within our heart, what Sri Aurobindo calls the *caitya puruṣa*. Evolution means the development of this psychic being, in order that the pure Light from it may flood the whole of our surface life, mind and matter.

The fourth condition of evolution is the descent of the higher consciousness. At every transition from a lower to a higher level of evolution, as, for instance, in the transition from matter to life and from life to mind, there is needed in Sri Aurobindo's conception of evolution the descent of a higher consciousness from above. The most vital descent for which the whole universe is waiting at present is the descent of the Supermind. This will cause a radical change in the nature of the entire universe. There is no principle similar to this in Bergson's philosophy, though there is in the philosophy of Alexander, of which I shall now speak.

The Western philosopher whose theory of evolution comes closest to Sri Aurobindo's is S. Alexander. In his book *Space, Time and Deity* he has given us a theory of evolution which resembles in many respects Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution. Like Sri Aurobindo's, his is also a theory of emergent evolution. Like him he also talks of the emergence of higher and higher forms of consciousness. Like him he also gives hope of the emergence of a higher consciousness than has so far emerged. The general name which he gives to a consciousness higher than what has emerged at a particular stage of evolution is Deity. Thus when evolution is at the stage of matter, Deity represents the stage of life; when evo-

lution is at the stage of life, Deity means mind, and so on. So the consciousness higher than our present mental consciousness, which is yet to emerge, he calls 'our Deity', or simply Deity, when it is quite clear from the context that the reference is to a higher consciousness than mind.

So far there is great similarity between Sri Aurobindo's thought and Alexander's. But when we ask, what, in his view, is the nature of the Being possessing the quality Deity, in other words, what is the nature of God (for the Being possessing the quality Deity is called by him God) in his philosophy ?, we at once notice great differences between his views and those of Sri Aurobindo. At the very outset he makes it clear that God represents some Being totally different from man. He cannot in any sense be looked upon as a Higher Man or a Superman. Thus in a passage in his book *Space, Time and Deity* there occurs this very clear statement : "Instead of the shadowy quality of which we can only say that it is a higher quality than mind, God is made more vivid to us as a greater spirit; and we conceal the difference in kind of the divine and the human nature under magnified representations of human attributes. These are inevitably devices of our own weakness and our practical craving. *But, for philosophy, God's deity is not different from spirit in degree but in kind, as a novelty in the series of empirical qualities.*"<sup>1</sup>

The next question that arises is : What is the relation of God to the universe, including man ? Alexander's answer is that God is the whole world possessing the quality Deity. Of him, the whole world is the 'body'

<sup>1</sup> S. Alexander : *Space, Time and Deity*, p. 350.

and the 'deity' is the 'mind'. Lest it should be supposed that the deity animates the whole universe, Alexander is very careful to explain that God's deity, "though infinite, belongs to, or is lodged in, only a portion of the universe." Similarly, he says in another passage,<sup>1</sup> "Spirit, personality, mind, all these human or mental characters belong to God but not to his deity. They belong, as we must hold, not to his deity but to his 'body'."

From these extracts it is quite clear that when the higher consciousness, which Alexander calls 'deity', will emerge, man will not get any benefit, nor the rest of the lower creation constituted by life and matter. He will remain exactly where he is; perhaps his position will be worse, for as the deity of the lower creation, he is at present the directive principle of the universe, but when the higher deity will emerge, he will be relegated to the position of a mere body. Man's fate therefore is sealed. He has nothing to hope for from the emergence of the next higher consciousness. The being or beings (for Alexander sometimes speaks of a race of gods) who will emerge with this higher consciousness will stand related to man as the mind to the body. Man's history, therefore, will end with the emergence of this higher consciousness. A dark fate awaits him when for eternity he will have to remain, along with Space-Time and Matter, as an inert background for the new race of gods that will emerge with the higher consciousness. What a destiny for man ! Can he contemplate it with equanimity ? I think Nietzsche was more merciful to him when he

<sup>1</sup> S. Alexander : *Space, Time and Deity*, p. 349.

said that out of his ashes the new race of Supermen will emerge. Better far indeed that man died completely than that he should have to live for eternity as a dark background for a new race of beings !

In striking contrast to this is Sri Aurobindo's message. It is the destiny of man to receive the higher consciousness and to be transformed into the Divine Man, not to be crushed into a lifeless, soulless existence for eternity. The advent of the Higher Consciousness is an event of unspeakable joy not only for him but for the whole creation. The Higher Consciousness, in fact, is the *nava-jātaka*, the New-Born, to use an expression of Tagore's, whose advent brings universal joy to the entire creation. Joy is not the word for it; it is something infinitely greater and grander than joy. It is some kind of bliss, of which we have occasionally some faint glimmering in some of our highest ecstatic moods.

But halt ! there is something worse still. We have taken Alexander to mean that the quality deity is going to be realized in some being called God. But strictly speaking, from his standpoint, deity is an eternally realizing but unrealizable quality. As soon as it is realized in any being, that being becomes finite. God can therefore never be an actuality. As the matter is one of considerable importance, I quote his exact words : "We are now led to a qualification of the greatest importance. The picture which has been drawn of an infinite God is a concession to our figurative or mythological tendency and to the habit of the religious consciousness to embody its conception of God in an individual shape.... But the

infinite God is purely ideal or conceptual. The individual so sketched is not asserted to exist. As actual, God does not possess the quality of deity but is the universe as tending to that quality. The *nisus* in the universe, though not present to sense, is yet present to reflection upon experience. Only in the sense of straining towards deity can there be an infinite actual God. For, again following the lines of experience, we can see that if the quality of deity were actually attained in the empirical development of the world in Time, we should have not one infinite being possessng deity but many (at least potentially many) finite ones. Beyond these finite gods or angels there would be in turn a new empirical quality looming into view, which for them would be deity—that is would be for them what deity is for us.... If the possessor of deity were an existent individual he must be finite and not infinite. Thus there is no actual infinite being with the quality of deity; but there is an actual infinite, the whole universe, with a *nisus* to deity, and this is the God of the religious consciousness, though that consciousness habitually forecasts the divinity of its object as actually realized in an individual form.<sup>1</sup>

Thus God is not an actual existing Being possessing the quality deity, but only another name for the universe with a *nisus* to deity. Yet Alexander thinks that such a God can evoke religious emotion ! A non-existent God who is another name for a Space-Time ordained universe with a *nisus* to an infinite higher consciousness is supposed fit to be an object of religious worship ! What a

<sup>1</sup> S. Alexander : *Space, Time and Deity*, p. 361.

poor conception of religious consciousness ! It seems that Alexander has no objection, from the metaphysical point of view, to looking upon the Space-Time matrix as God. Only he thinks it will hurt our religious susceptibility if it is called God. As if religious susceptibility is not hurt by making a non-existent God who is an evolute of Space-Time an object of worship ! It would really have been much better if he had made Space-Time his God. The reasons which he has given for not doing so will not convince anybody. There is no doubt that it would have been more in consonance with his metaphysical principles if he had done so. For Space-Time is really his metaphysical Absolute. Everything else, including the successive deities, is an evolute of it. The whole scheme is materialistic. Really speaking, there is no place for any God in it. Not to speak of God, there is no place for any mind or even for life in it. How can Space-Time evolve and bring out of it something which never has been, nor can ever be in it, and whose nature is totally different from its nature ? Evolution must have a method. You cannot evolve a camel out of a stone. How can Space-Time, which is totally innocent of anything spiritual, develop a *nisus* towards deity ? The truth is, Alexander has most arbitrarily foisted upon his theory of evolution which in its structure is thoroughly materialistic, a spiritual principle that has absolutely no relation to it.

The thing is, Alexander does not start with any idea of what evolution is and what it sets out to achieve. Why does Space-Time evolve at all ? What is the inner spring

of this evolution ? How does it develop a *nisus* towards deity, unless deity is already concealed in it ? It is his failure to answer these questions that has marred his whole theory of evolution. It is, in fact, no better than the nineteenth century naturalistic theories of evolution which also similarly stated that somehow matter evolved into life, life into mind, and so on. The only point where Alexander's theory is superior to these naturalistic theories of evolution is in its definite assertion that mind is not the apex of the evolutionary process but that there are higher stages beyond mind.

Here the superiority of Sri Aurobindo's position is beyond question. He has not only answered the 'why' of evolution but also its 'how'. For him evolution is nothing else than the inverse of the process of creation. You cannot understand evolution without linking it to creation. It is because the Spirit has involved itself in matter, that matter can evolve into life, life representing something which has more of the spiritual element in it than matter. The same is true of the evolution of life into mind, and of mind into the Supermind. Evolution, in fact, is another name for the return of the Spirit to itself. The Spirit which out of its own sheer joy of self-expression (*līlā*) projected itself out of itself, reaching the farthest limit of such self-projection in matter, has to come back to itself. This coming back to itself is what is called evolution. It is clear, therefore, that the successive stages of evolution must represent a hierarchical order, the higher stages containing more of the essence of the Spirit than the lower ones. The process

cannot stop until the highest stage, which is nothing less than the Source from which the whole process started, namely, the Ultimate Reality or *saccidānanda* is reached. In this way Sri Aurobindo supplies the missing link in the theories of evolution of Alexander and others. Unless evolution is connected with creation, it loses all meaning. Creation is the movement downward from the Spirit, and evolution is the movement upward to the Spirit, made possible by the downward movement of the Spirit. In fact, the two really form one process. This clearly explains the *nisus* to deity which is an inexplicable mystery in Alexander's system. This explains also why the lower principles continue to evolve even after the emergence of the higher ones. Alexander supposes that the evolution of the lower principles stops with the emergence of the higher ones. Thus in his view the evolution of matter and life stops with the emergence of mind, that of mind stops with the emergence of deity, and so on. This is also the reason why he speaks of the entire lower creation, consisting of matter, life and mind, as forming the 'body' of the Higher Beings in whom deity emerges.

The real weakness of Alexander's theory of evolution—and indeed of all Western theories of evolution—is the absence of any true spiritual principle underlying it. His real Absolute is Space-Time. His God is a floating God that can neither be a metaphysical Absolute nor the God of religion. There is no place for any spiritual *nisus* in his theory of evolution. A Space-Time universe cannot develop any spiritual *nisus*. He has

deluded himself—and also his readers—into thinking that he has given us a spiritual view of evolution. In reality he has given us a purely materialistic view of it.

To conclude my survey of the Western theories of evolution : their main defect is that they are not sufficiently spiritual. They are cosmic. Their viewpoint is undoubtedly over-individual. But unfortunately, they are not sufficiently spiritual. The naturalistic evolutionary theories of the nineteenth century were frankly mechanical. But even the Hegelian view of evolution, in spite of its vaunted spirituality, is not sufficiently spiritual. For it identifies the Spirit with Reason. But reason does not represent the highest type of spirituality. There are several rungs in the spiritual ladder above reason. Consequently, a truly spiritual view must transcend reason. Bergson, again, in his anxiety to avoid mechanical rigidity, has gone to the extreme of eliminating all teleology from his theory of evolution. But this has reduced it to the position of that same dreaded mechanical evolution from which its express purpose was to give us deliverance. Alexander tried most arbitrarily to foist a *nisus* towards spirituality upon a completely materialistic universe in his theory of evolution. Thus what all these different theories of evolution in the West lacked was a proper spiritual element.

Coming now to the Indian systems of philosophy, as I have already said, the problem of Evolution does not interest them as much as it does Western philosophy.

The reason is twofold. In the first place, Indian philosophy is mainly interested in the destiny of the individual, and does not show much concern for the fate of the universe. Secondly, on account of the predominance of the cyclical view, Evolution becomes only a passing phase, since it is followed inevitably by *laya* or Dissolution, and that again by another Evolution, and so on. Cosmically, therefore, there is for Indian philosophy a Maypole dance of Evolution and Dissolution leading nowhere. While all this mechanical cosmic dance of Evolution and Dissolution goes on, the individual, if he obtains the right knowledge or performs the right kind of work or obtains Divine Grace, according to different schools of thought, obtains complete and permanent release from this world-dance, that is to say, for him there is complete and permanent cessation of this dance, what is called *ātyantika laya*. The characteristics of this *ātyantika laya*, from the point of view of knowledge, are very beautifully described in *Śrīmadbhāgavata* xii. 4. 31-34. Even the Sāṅkhya which is supposed to take evolution seriously, is not interested in it as a cosmic process but only so far as it relates to the interests of the *puruṣas* or individual souls. Śaṅkara in his commentary on *Brahma Sūtras*, *Adhyāya* 2, *Pāda* 2, *Sūtras* 1-10 has shown how absolutely illogical is the claim of the Sāṅkhya that an unconscious *prakṛti* evolves for the sake of the purposes of the *puruṣas*. In the first place the Sāṅkhya has no right to talk of the purposes of the *puruṣas*, for it takes the *puruṣas* to be absolutely *nirguṇa* and *niṣkriya*, that is attributeless

and inactive. How can inert and attributeless *puruṣas* have any purpose ? Secondly, the two purposes mentioned, that of enjoyment and that of salvation, are contradictory of each other. Thirdly, so far as the purpose of salvation is concerned, how can it be furthered by the evolution of *prakṛti* ? How can that which requires the complete cessation of movement be helped by the movement of *prakṛti* ? But the most smashing argument which he advances against the Sāṅkhya theory of evolution is that in the whole history of human experience there is no example of any unconscious substance without the agency of an intelligent being, constructing things which serve the purposes of conscious beings. Now to speak of the vast universe peopled by so many diverse beings, even such small things as a house, a bed, a seat or a playground, have never been known to be created by unconscious substances without the agency of conscious beings.<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara's criticism is fatal to all systems of unconscious or mechanical evolution, to the Sāṅkhya as much as to the modern Western representatives of it.

But, apart from this, the cyclical conception of the universe, which makes evolution and dissolution always follow each other, renders evolution absolutely meaningless. If evolution is to have any meaning, it must be

<sup>1</sup> Sankara's commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras*, 2.2.1.

गेहप्रासादशयनासनविहारभूम्यादयो हि लोके प्रज्ञावद्भिर्यथाकालं  
मुखदुःखप्राप्तिपरिहारयोग्या रचिता दृश्यन्ते . . . कथमचेतनं प्रधानं  
रचयेत् त्वाष्ट्रपाषाणादिष्वदृष्टत्वात् ।

conceived as a steady march to a higher goal. Moreover, it must have a cosmic character. If it is merely there to enable individuals to obtain salvation, and that, too, not by its continuance, but by its complete suppression, then it must be called an elaborate metaphysical joke.

Nowhere perhaps has Sri Aurobindo's genius shown itself to greater perfection than in his handling of the problem of evolution. He has accepted the cosmic view of evolution of the West but has rejected its mechanical character and replaced it by a spiritual evolution. Likewise he has rejected the cyclical view of the universe so dear to our country and the individualistic outlook of our theory of evolution, and substituted for it the cosmic and overpersonal outlook of the West. The result is an altogether new theory of evolution, unlike anything found either in the East or in the West. It bases itself upon the idea that the source of evolution being Saccidānanda himself, it cannot stop until the whole world is completely Divinised. No limited objective, such as the naturalistic ideal of a perfect adjustment between the organism and the environment or the realization of a kingdom of ends, which is Kant's social ideal, can be looked upon as the goal of evolution. The goal of evolution is nothing less than to reach Saccidānanda himself, from whom the whole world has originated. What the thinkers in our country ignored is the great truth that a Divinised man can only emerge in a Divinised world. The problem of salvation is intimately connected with that of evolution. In fact, evolution may be called a Cosmic Yoga. This brings me to the problem of Yoga.

## (2) ILLUSTRATION FROM THE PROBLEM OF YOGA

When we come to the problem of Yoga, the relative positions of the East and the West are reversed. In the problem of evolution it was the West which was leading. In the East, as we have just seen, there was not much interest in the problem. But it is just the reverse when we come to the problem of Yoga. Here the lead is definitely with the East. Not that the West has not shown any interest in it. To say this will be to ignore the valuable work of the Christian mystics of the Middle Ages who spent their whole lives in search of Divine Illumination. But on the whole the tradition of the West is against this. It is just the reverse, however, in our country. Here religion, philosophy, social customs all encourage the individual in seeking personal communion with God. Yoga or the method of raising individual consciousness to a higher level with a view to realizing the Divine, is universally acclaimed by all our cultural institutions as the supreme end of life. Of course, opinions have varied widely as to what the nature of Yoga is, but there is practical unanimity about the value of Yoga as a means to the attainment of the highest end of the individual. Whether the Yoga is a *Jñāna-Yoga* or a *Karma-Yoga* or a *Bhakti-Yoga*, the end is the realization by the individual of his personal salvation. Another thing which all the different Yogas emphasize is that the attainment of the object of Yoga is only possible through the suppression of the lower activities. The definition of Yoga given by Patañjali : "*yogaścittavṛttimirodhaḥ*" (Yoga is the suppression of

mental activity) emphasizes the need of the suppression of the lower forms of consciousness in order that the higher may emerge. The *Gītā*, although its standpoint is very different from that of Patañjali, yet looks upon Yoga as a means to the realization of individual salvation. It does not regard any particular method of Yoga as the only true method but gives certain general characteristics of all Yogas, which reduce themselves to one fundamental characteristic, namely, non-attachment to objects. It also stresses the fundamental object of all Yogas, which, according to it, is the union of the individual soul with God. But in spite of all these differences, it shares with the Yoga of Patañjali and others the view that Yoga is a method of obtaining individual salvation. It, however, does not accept the standpoint of Patañjali Yoga that yoga means the suppression of all mental activity. It is impossible for it, in view of its catholic outlook, to accept this standpoint. Instead of the suppression of mental activity, it enjoins the bringing of it under the control of the Self (*Gītā*, VI. 26). But it does not envisage the possibility of a transformation of it by the light of a higher consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo makes a revolutionary change in the conception of Yoga. He rejects the idea, to which all the previous thinkers have held fast, namely, that the object of Yoga is individual salvation. Against this view runs his clear declaration : "Our Yoga is not for ourselves but for humanity". Lest people should mistake this view for the Western brand of humanism, he adds : "Our Yoga is not for ourselves but for the Divine". As Sri Nolini Kanta

Gupta has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> there is no inconsistency in the two statements, but the two together bring out the full meaning of his Yoga. That is to say, his Yoga is for the expression of the Divine in humanity. Sri Aurobindo may also be called a humanist, but his humanism is totally different from the European brand of humanism of Comte and Mill. For Sri Aurobindo the goal of humanity is Divinity. Nothing short of the Divine status can really satisfy mankind. It is an insult to humanity to suggest, as the Western humanists do, that man can ever be satisfied with the picture of an ideal human society that they present to us. God forbid that mankind should ever descend so low as to accept it as its ultimate goal ! The aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is what may be called cosmic salvation, that is to say, the Divinization of the whole of mankind, leading ultimately to the Divinization of the whole universe, for even the physical universe must feel the thrill of a Divine life. Individual salvation, meaning freedom from the cycle of birth and death, is not for Sri Aurobindo a very great thing. Of far greater importance is a higher birth, a birth as a Divinized Being. Such a higher birth is envisaged in the famous verse of the *Isa Upaniṣad* :

“He who knows That as both in one, the Birth and the dissolution of Birth, by the dissolution crosses beyond death and by the Birth enjoys Immortality”<sup>2</sup> —(Sri Aurobindo's translation).

<sup>1</sup> Nolini Kanta Gupta, *The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*, 1st edn. p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> संभूतिञ्च विनाशञ्च यस्तद्वेदोभयं सह ।

विनाशेन मृत्युं तीर्त्वा सम्भूत्यामृतमश्नुते ॥

This verse, we may say in passing, is one of the most difficult in the whole range of the Upaniṣads and has proved a stumbling-block to generations of Indian scholars before Sri Aurobindo. Not one of them has been able to understand its meaning. If what they have understood to be its purport is to be taken seriously, then the sage or sages whose revelations are recorded in this Upaniṣad must be pronounced to be absolute fools. It was left to the genius of Sri Aurobindo to discover the hidden meaning of this verse, which had remained a mystery for so many ages. And the meaning which he has brought out is so clear and so much in consonance with the spirit of this Upaniṣads that there can be no doubt about the correctness of it. Now Sri Aurobindo interprets this verse as follows :

“...we are intended to realize immortality in the Birth. The self is uniform and undying and in itself always possesses immortality. It does not need to descend into *avidyā* and Birth to get that immortality of Non-Birth; for it possesses it always. It descends in order to realise and possess it as the individual Brahman in the play of world-existence. It accepts Birth and Death, assumes the ego and then dissolving the ego by the recovery of unity realises itself as the Lord, the One, and Birth as only a becoming of the Lord in mental and formal being; this becoming is now governed by the true sight of the Seer and, once this is done, becoming is no longer inconsistent with Being, birth becomes a means and not an obstacle to the enjoyment of immortality by the lord of this formal habitation. This is our proper course and

not to remain for ever in the chain of birth and death, nor to flee from birth into a pure non-becoming. The bondage does not consist in the physical act of becoming, but in the persistence of the ignorant sense of the separate ego. The Mind creates the chain and not the body.”<sup>1</sup>

Another radical change which Sri Aurobindo introduces into the conception of Yoga is that he rejects the older view and declares that it does not mean the suppression of the lower forms of consciousness. In fact, if the higher consciousness merely touches the higher parts of our being but does not illumine our mind or our vital parts or the physical side of our being, then there is no Yoga. Yoga means the transformation of the whole of our being, spiritual, mental, vital and physical, and unless this takes place, Yoga cannot be said to be complete. So far we have not spoken of our inner being, our *caitya puruṣa*, as Sri Aurobindo calls it. Yoga must touch this also. It must bring the higher light to play upon this inner being also and make the light of this inner being illumine our surface consciousness.

This process of transformation of individual consciousness has its significance not only for the individual life, but it has a cosmic significance also. In fact, for Sri Aurobindo its main significance is cosmic. It is the necessary preparation for the descent of the Higher Light from above. Unless the *ādhāra* or receptacle is made fit for its reception, the Higher Light from the Divine Source cannot descend. The function of individual Yoga is to prepare the *ādhāra* and prepare it for a cosmic pur-

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Iṣa Upaniṣad*, p. 119.

pose, namely, that the Divine Consciousness may descend in the form of Supermind into Earth-Consciousness. It must be remembered that the Divine Consciousness does not descend into a vacuum but only into human consciousness, from where it spreads to other parts of the world, till the whole universe is Divinised. This is why it is so necessary to prepare human consciousness so that it may become a fit receptacle for the Supermind. Unless this is done, the Supramental Consciousness will not descend. This is the function of the individual Yoga. But its aim is not the attainment of individual salvation but the Divinization of the whole universe. Individual Yoga, therefore, is only a prelude to Cosmic Yoga or the process of the Divinization of the entire universe. In Sri Aurobindo's conception of Yoga, therefore, the Western cosmic standpoint finds its fulfilment, along with our Indian spiritual outlook.

### (3) ILLUSTRATION FROM THE PROBLEM OF REALITY

I now come to the last part of my task, which is to show how the Western and Indian conceptions of Reality find their fulfilment in Sri Aurobindo.

There are two main standpoints with regard to the nature of Reality, namely, the existential and the axiological. The West, as I have already shown, has mainly favoured the existential, and India the axiological standpoint. From the existential point of view, the most essential characteristic of Reality is its objectivity, its independence of subjective sensations and feelings. The

axiological point of view, on the other hand, stresses the fact that Reality is Content or Value. The existential point of view is mainly theoretical, because it is not interested in the problems of practical life which are the problems of attaining content or value. The axiological standpoint, on the other hand, is chiefly interested in practical life; in fact, it converts the theoretical into the practical, because it sees no reality in a thing which does not possess a value. From its point of view, even knowledge is practical, for it also means acquiring a value.

There are other consequential differences. The existential standpoint aligns itself very much to the logical or intellectual standpoint because logic also takes an objective and impersonal standpoint. It also joins itself to the empirical standpoint, because the empirical standpoint is also objective, although it takes the perceptual and not the intellectual viewpoint. There has often been a quarrel between the advocates of the empirical and those of the intellectual standpoint, as happened in Europe in the controversy between Locke and the rationalists, but this is a quarrel between two members of the same order, for both the contending parties adopted the existential standpoint. The quarrel is different, however, between the rationalists and the romanticists, when the latter wanted to lead a revolt, from the side of Value, against the excessive intellectualism or logicism of Hegel. Although Hegel's standpoint itself was on the borderland between existentialism and axiologism, yet the romanticists were not satisfied, and even now the fight between the romanticists and the rationalists is going on. The

enormous growth of Science during the last few centuries has also added considerable strength to the existential standpoint. That is why the present philosophical position in the West is predominantly existential.

The highest conception of Reality which the genius of India could evolve was the conception of it as Saccid-ānanda. As I have already remarked, it is the greatest single achievement of Indian philosophy. It brings out clearly the relation between Existence and Value by showing that Existence itself is a Value. Likewise it shows that Reason also is a Value, being what we call the logical value. But value *per se* is of course the spiritual value, which is indicated by bliss, and this is revealed by intuition. From the point of view of the nature of consciousness through which these values are respectively obtained, we have here a hierarchical gradation from perception to reason and from reason to intuition.

For Sri Aurobindo what philosophy requires is a synthesis between the existential or objective, and the axiological or spiritual standpoint. As he has said,<sup>1</sup> "...the objective assumes value only as it has a relation to the soul; it is a field, an occasion, a means for the soul's progression in Time : the objective is created as a ground of manifestation for the subjective. The objective world is only an outward form of becoming of the spirit ; it is here a first form, a basis, but it is not the essential thing, the main truth of being. The subjective and objective are two necessary sides of the manifested reality and of equal value, and

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, pp. 539-540.

in the range of the objective itself the supraphysical object of consciousness has as much right to acceptance as the physical objectivity; it cannot be *a priori* set aside as a subjective delusion or hallucination."

The conception of Saccidānanda no doubt synthesizes these two standpoints. But it is important to understand the full significance of this conception. The usual mistake which has been committed by our thinkers is to take *cit*, the second component of this conception, as static consciousness, thereby making impossible a real self-projection of the Absolute. This is the origin of the *māyāvāda*. Not finding any means of reconciling the idea of a pure static consciousness going out of itself to create the world, the *māyāvādins* looked upon the whole creation as unreal. This difficulty is removed if *cit* or Consciousness is understood as meaning not Consciousness alone, but also *śakti* or Force. But it is necessary to bear in mind that this *śakti* is not a separate power, not something which has got a coercive force upon the Absolute, but is inherent in the nature of the Absolute itself. To quote Sri Aurobindo: "...Force is inherent in Existence. Śiva and Kālī, Brahman and Śakti are one and not two who are separable. Force inherent in existence may be at rest or it may be in motion, but when it is at rest, it exists none the less, and is not abolished, diminished or in any way essentially altered. But since Force is thus inherent in existence and it is the nature of Force to have this double or alternative possibility of rest and movement, that is to say, of self-concentration and self-diffusion

in Force, the question of the how of the movement, its possibility, initiating impulsion or impelling cause does not arise.”<sup>1</sup> The question of the ‘how’ of *śakti* being eliminated, there remains the question of its ‘why’. “Why should this possibility of a play of movement of Force translate itself at all? Why should not Force of Existence remain eternally concentrated in itself, infinite, free from all variation and formation?” Sri Aurobindo rejects the solution of the *māyāvādins* and the *tāntrikas* who assert that *saccidānanda* is subject to the control of Force, compelled by it and without option as to whether it will manifest in the universe or remain unmanifest. His *saccidānanda* is very different from this. As he puts it, “In a conscious existence which is absolute, independent of its formations, not determined by its works, we must suppose an inherent freedom to manifest or not to manifest the potentiality of movement. A Brahman compelled by *prakṛti* is not Brahman, but 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”. For Sri Aurobindo *saccidānanda* is the master of Force and not Force the master of *saccidānanda*. The superiority of Sri Aurobindo’s position here we realize very well, when we compare it, for example, with that of Kashmir Śaivism which is a pure form of monism. The manifestation of *Śiva* in the universe takes place in this philosophy through 36 *tattvas* or principles. The highest *tattva* is *Śivatattva*, which describes

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, 1939 edn., Vol. I, pp. 125-126.

the pure nature of *Śiva*, called *Paramaśiva*, before his manifestation in the universe. He manifests himself in the universe, in order that the ignorant individual souls may through his grace obtain union with him and thus be delivered for ever from the bondage of innumerable births and deaths. The next *tattva* is *Śaktitattva*, where it is stated that *Paramaśiva* manifests through a *śakti* in association with a pure *māyā* called *Suddhāmāyā*. From the *Śaktitattva* arises the *Sadāśiva-tattva* or the *Sadākhyatattva*, and from that the *Maheśvaratattva*, and so on. Once that manifestation of *Śiva* takes place, the whole process is under the control of *Śakti*, *Śiva* remaining absolutely inert. Thus in spite of its absolute monism, Kashmir Śaivism, has to accept the view that so far as his manifestation in the universe goes, *Śiva* is absolutely under the control of *Śakti*. The southern form of Śaivism, known as Śaivism of the *Śaiva Siddhānta*, does not differ from the Kashmir Śaivism on the nature of the thirty-six *tattvas*. Its differences lie elsewhere, chiefly in its view of salvation and the relation of the individual souls to *Śiva*, where it takes a standpoint closely akin to that of Ramanuja.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's standpoint, therefore, differs very much from that of Śaivism, either of the northern or of the southern form, on the question of the relation between the Absolute and its *Śakti*. Sri Birendra Kishore Roy-Chowdhury has pointed out this difference very

<sup>1</sup> Article *Śaivism* (Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics). See also Sūryanārāyaṇ Sastri's article on *The Philosophy of Śaivism (The Cultural Heritage of India, First Edition Vol. II)*.

tersely as follows : “*Paramaśiva* of *Tantra* is for ever absorbed in *samādhi*; he has no will of manifestation; it is *Ādyā Śakti* who is the cause of manifestation and withdrawal from manifestation, of *sṛṣṭi* and *laya*. But the *Puruṣottama* of Sri Aurobindo is not merely *Śiva* absorbed in the *samādhi* of *saccidānanda*, he has a cosmic will, the will of manifestation; he has an alert eye on all the play of *Ādyā Śakti*. Sri Aurobindo does not accept the corpse-like *Śiva* of the *Tāntrikas* who lies under the feet of *Śakti*; his *Śiva* is the ever-awake Godhead of the dual *Śiva-Durgā* of *Tantra*; the Divine Mother is the embodied will of that *Puruṣottama*”.<sup>1</sup>

#### CONCLUSION : SRI AUROBINDO AND FUTURE PHILOSOPHY

I conclude this rather long essay by pointing out that what Sri Aurobindo has given us is what I may call an outline of future philosophy. From what he has told us about what he has called future poetry, we can form an idea of what in his view future philosophy will be. The *mantra*, he has pointed out, represents the ideal towards which poetry is moving, but which poetry has yet to attain. Poetry is an incomplete *mantra*. The *mantra* differs from a verse in the fact that in it there is not only a realization of the ideal of beauty but there is something more. This something more it is difficult to describe, but we feel it none the less, rather

<sup>1</sup> Article on *Sri Aurobindo and the Tantra*, by B. K. Roy Chowdhury (Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual, 1942).

we intuit it. There is mingled with aesthetic satisfaction here a satisfaction of a deeper kind, a satisfaction which touches the very core of our being. There is a thrill, an upsurge of the whole consciousness, culminating in a readiness to surrender our whole being to the illimitable vastnesses that slowly open out before our gaze. It is something like this thrill which Faust must have felt, as described by Goethe, when, after contemplating the grandeur of Nature, he exclaimed, "Welch' Schauspiel ! abler ach ! ein Schauspiel nur !" ("What a show ! but alas, only a show !"). He called it a show, because he could not bring it into relationship with himself, so big was the gap between the grandeur and sublimity of Nature and the ugliness and meanness of the world of man. Sri K. D. Sethna<sup>1</sup> has tried to give some idea of the nature of this thrill, when he says, "The vision, the word, the vibration—all three must be intensities drawn from the Spirit's ether. But even more than the wide inwardness of the vision, the mighty yet intimate grip of the word, it is the rhythm that marks the *mantra*, bearing as it does the precise thrill of a Consciousness which is everlasting and unlimited. Without such a thrill there would be just a distant glimpse of the Promised Land in admirable poetry of its own kind but no sensation of the Spirit's vastnesses as though they were within us. For that sensation and the concrete insight it brings, the mind must surrender its tongue to the luminous Beyond

<sup>1</sup> Article on *Sri Aurobindo—Poet of Yoga* by Sri K. D. Sethna (Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual 1942, p. 217).

instead of essaying an imitation by means of its own heat and movement. To do this in any extensive measure calls for a patient and quiet aesthetic Yoga in tune with an actual practice of self-consecration to the Divine. Even then, what is achieved may not be the utter *mantra*, for there are fine gradations, each a power of the Spirit and the sheer top is a *mantric* miracle."

May we not say that just as what this writer calls an aesthetic yoga converts the poetic verse into a *mantra*, so there is a philosophic yoga which converts the philosophies with which we are familiar, into the ideal philosophy, the philosophy that is to be the future philosophy! An outline of this philosophic yoga Sri Aurobindo has given in his writings. This future philosophy will touch the whole of our being and not a part of it. It will not speak merely to our spirit or address our intellect or touch the sensuous part of life, but it will have contact with the whole of our personality. Is it too much to hope that the East and the West will join hands here and work it out on the lines so clearly indicated by Sri Aurobindo? That is the consummation which Sri Aurobindo desired, and that is the true message of his philosophy.

## II

### SRI AUROBINDO AND BERGSON\*

IF I am asked, Who is the most creative thinker of the present day in the East? I will unhesitatingly answer : Sri Aurobindo. If I am similarly asked, Who is the most dynamic thinker of the present day in the West, I will equally unhesitatingly answer : Bergson. A comparison between Sri Aurobindo and Bergson, therefore, is a very interesting study, as it will reveal the fundamental resemblances as well as differences between two thinkers of the greatest creative power of the present day, one in the East and another in the West, the more so, as these resemblances and differences are, to a great extent, as I shall presently show, typical of the resemblances and differences between Eastern and Western thought. I have, therefore, chosen this as the subject of the present paper which I intend to send as my humble contribution to this Birthday Book.

Sri Aurobindo decidedly belongs to the East, to our *Āryabhūmi*. Every page of his great work *The Life Divine* reveals this. This does not mean, however, that he is only an interpreter of our ancient thought. He is a seer with the same prophetic vision and the same explosive power of truth as the great sages of our land in the past, such as Manu or Yājñavalkya or Vyāsa. His place

\* Reprinted from *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1942.

is by the side of these great seers (*mantradrastārah*). And just as about Manu and Yājñavalkya and Vyāsa, there cannot be the least doubt that it is only our *Āryabhūmi* which could have produced them, so also about Sri Aurobindo nobody can have the least doubt that it is only the soil of India which could have produced him.

Not that Sri Aurobindo has had no contact with Western thought and culture. Those who know anything of his life are aware how steeped he was in the most formative period of his life in all that was best in Western civilization and culture, both ancient and modern. He is of all Indian—and not only Indian—thinkers the one for whom the ancient Greek philosophers are still living personalities and not merely subjects for historical research. Heraclitus, one of the most difficult thinkers of ancient Greece, has sprung into life in the little book which he has dedicated to the study of him. But if his contact with Greek philosophy is so real, no less real is his contact with modern Western thought. He is not in the habit of mentioning names, but as one reads his books, one cannot fail to notice how thorough is his grasp of the great Western philosophers of the present age, such as Kant, Hegel, Spencer and Bergson. He is also very well acquainted with the latest developments of scientific thought in the West.

When I say, therefore, that Sri Aurobindo belongs to our *Āryabhūmi*, the last thing which I have in mind is to underrate the influence of Western thought upon him. That influence is there, very clearly visible, but

Sri Aurobindo, a great creative genius as he is, has not allowed himself to be dominated by it. He has made full use of Western thought, but he has made use of it for the purpose of building up his own system which he has reared upon the solid foundations of our own culture with which he has a very direct and intimate contact through original sources.

Bergson is not so decidedly and pronouncedly a Western thinker as Sri Aurobindo is a thinker of the East. Yet the structure of his thought is Western, and even where he deviates from the traditional lines of Western thought, such deviations bear a Western rather than an Eastern stamp. Even his mysticism, even his faith in intuition and his abhorrence of purely intellectual constructions have a distinctly Western touch about them. They are indeed a natural reaction against the excesses of certain schools of thought which prevailed in Europe for several centuries. They are very different from the mysticism of an Eastern mystic. Even his intuition is very different from intuition as understood by Eastern thinkers. There is hardly any trace of Eastern influence upon Bergson's thought, though he differs in important respects fundamentally from the main trends of European thought of the present day.

But my object in this paper is not to show either how truly Indian Sri Aurobindo's thought is or how truly Western Bergson's philosophy is. My object is to make a comparative study of these two great creative thinkers of the present day, and I propose to do this under the following heads : (1) conception of intuition, (2) doctrine

of reality, and (3) theory of evolution and the conception of the destiny of man.

### CONCEPTION OF INTUITION

Of all modern philosophers of the West, Bergson has emphasized most strongly the standpoint of intuition. By intuition he means a direct approach to reality, as opposed to the round-about way of approaching it with the help of the intellect. He has defined intuition in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* as "a kind of intellectual sympathy by which we can enter into the heart of a thing and thereby coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible". This makes it quite clear that by intuition he means something which gives us direct access to the heart of a thing. This definition is to be understood by reference to the other and more usual kind of approach, the approach through the intellect or reason. So the contrast is between moving round an object, which is all that the intellect can do, and entering into the heart of it, which is the prerogative of intuition.

So far so good. But when we ask, what is that which has the power of entering into the heart of a thing ? then Bergson fails to give us a clear answer. It seems that he wants to take it for granted that we have a faculty called intuition which enables us to grasp reality in its inmost essence. But even if we assume that there is such a faculty, this does not remove our fundamental difficulties. For what we want to know above everything else is : What is the nature of this intuition ? It is no

consolation to us to be told repeatedly that it is an “intellectual sympathy”, an “intellectual auscultation”, for we want to know precisely how such an intellectual sympathy, such an intellectual auscultation is possible.

It is rather strange that Bergson who himself did not believe in the power of the intellect to give access to the heart of reality, should have spoken of an intellectual sympathy or an intellectual auscultation as the means of getting to the essence of reality. The stress is evidently upon the words, ‘sympathy’ and ‘auscultation’ rather than upon the word ‘intellect’. What Bergson means is that if we can have such an intimate sympathy as will make us feel ourselves one with the object we contemplate, then we can get to know it as it really is. This sort of intimate sympathy which Bergson is here contemplating is very similar to what in Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* is called *samāpatti*,<sup>1</sup> by which it is claimed it is possible to make oneself one with anything big or small. But *samāpatti* is not considered in the *Yoga Sūtras* competent to give full and perfect knowledge. It is only a stage—and that too, not the highest stage—in *samprajñāta-samādhi* cognitive trance. It has got to be superseded before

<sup>1</sup> See *Yoga Sūtras*, I, 41, and the concluding portion of *Vyāsa*’s commentary on it, where he says : ॐ

“तदेवमभिजातमणिकल्पस्य चेतसो ग्रहीतृग्रहणग्राह्येषु पुरुषेन्द्रियभूतेषु  
या तत्स्थितदञ्जनता, तेषु स्थितस्य तदाकारापत्तिः सा समापत्ति-  
रित्युच्यते ।”

‘This, then, is *samāpatti*, the mind showing itself like a transparent crystal, in the form of the object it comes in contact with, be it the knower, the knowable, or the act of knowledge’.

the highest form of cognitive trance, *ṛtambharā*, *prajñā* can emerge, when the knowledge of objects in their separateness is replaced by a cosmic consciousness where the individuality of objects disappears and a total consciousness emerges which reveals all objects all at once. But even this is not regarded as the highest condition by the *Yoga Sūtras*, for above it there is the *nirbīja-asamprajñāta-samādhi*, the seedless non-cognitive trance.

But apart from what Patanjali teaches us on the subject, is it not quite evident that a particular knowledge of any object falls far short of what may be called complete and perfect knowledge? It cannot even give adequate knowledge of the particular object with which it is concerned. Supposing it is possible for me to become one with a horse, shall I be able to know all that there is to be known about a horse? Does a horse know fully what a horse truly is? Does even a man know truly what he is? A knowledge of a thing, therefore, in its particularity does not even give us an adequate knowledge of that thing. Still less does it give us any knowledge of the totality of objects. Such knowledge, therefore, as we obtain by intellectual sympathy, even if it is sympathy of the most intimate form, gives us no knowledge which is metaphysically of any importance. It may at best give us some knowledge which is of help to us in the narrow pursuits of our worldly life, but it is certainly not competent to give us any knowledge which can satisfy the philosopher.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Bergson passes from this hopelessly inadequate conception of intuition,

with which he starts in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, to one which is infinitely higher. The last sentence with which he concludes this book is : "Metaphysics can therefore be defined as integral experience". If, therefore, intuition is the sole reliance of metaphysics, it follows that intuition must be integral experience. Here Bergson by one jump passes from an extremely narrow conception of intuition to one which is perfectly adequate. When we ask, however, how is this transition effected ? How can intuition which was originally the knowledge of particular things in their particularity, come to acquire this new significance of an all-comprehensive knowledge which breaks the bounds of individual objects and sees them all together as one harmonious, homogeneous whole ? We get no satisfactory answer from Bergson. Nor do we get any from him in his later works. In *Time and Free-Will* and *Creative Evolution*, for example, we are told that the knowledge of reality, as revealed by intuition, is that of a pure flow, of a spontaneous movement, to which Bergson has given the name Time. But this is as far from integral experience as anything possible can be. In pure flow there is no integration at all ; there is no cohesion at all between what goes before and what comes after. Bergson very proudly points out that in his philosophy the past never dies. But we may point out that the present also never lives in his philosophy, for life implies some stability and some cohesion.

Integral experience, therefore, is a completely detached and isolated island in Bergson's philosophy. And yet

it is a very vital part of his philosophy. It is vital, not in the sense that it is an essential link in a systematic whole, but it is vital in a very different sense. In fact, as I have pointed out elsewhere, much of the real philosophy of Bergson lies in the unsystematic part of it. It is vital, as showing the direction in which Bergson's mind moves. Bergson really felt the need of a cosmic intuition which could integrate the whole of experience into a harmonious whole. But he could not show how it was connected with the view of intuition previously formulated by him.

The connection was through the psychology of Bergson's mind rather than through any logical categories. This psychology worked in the following manner : He was dissatisfied with the intellect for two main reasons : firstly, because it gives too general a picture and does not pay sufficient attention to the individual details and secondly, because it is analytical, that is to say, it dissects every experience into an infinite number of different elements and then joins them together to form a sort of patched-up whole. This patched-up whole of the intellect is very different from the genuine whole of experience. Bergson, therefore, in the first part of his *Introduction to Metaphysics* drew our attention to the imperative need of knowing things in all their individual details and not merely in a general way. But he equally felt the need of a method by which it was possible to preserve the genuine whole of experience, instead of splitting it up into an infinity of parts loosely joined together by a general concept. And that is why

in the latter part of the same work he defined intuition as integral experience.

All the logical difficulties of Bergson's philosophy have their origin in this oscillation between these two views of intuition—the view of it as a knowledge of each particular thing in all its particularity, and secondly, as a knowledge of reality as a truly integrated whole. Naturally the gap between these two views is too wide to be bridged by any logic. Bergson attempted to bridge it with the help of the same intellect which he had so much despised. He was desperately in need of something which could impart some stability, some universality to the intuitions, and he could think of nothing else which could serve his purpose than the intellect. It was really a case of the drowning man catching at a straw. How this attempt to impart some fixity, some stability to intuitions with the help of the intellect was a disastrous failure I have shown very clearly elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

Bergson's swan song *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* gives another solution of the same problem. It is to cement the two views with the help of the mystic's experience. True intuition, Bergson now declares, is the mystic's experience. Such a solution, I may here note in passing, could only have suggested itself to a Bergson. He does not care if for the sake of truth he has to throw logic to the winds. In his previous attempts at a solution he made some show of logic. Now he takes complete leave of all logic. This shows clearly what Bergson really

<sup>1</sup> See my third article on *The Philosophy of Henri Bergson* ("Review of Philosophy and Religion", January, 1942).

is—a mystic. I think on the whole it was better that Bergson did take this bold step of taking the whole problem out of the hands of logic rather than follow the traditional way of sticking to conventional methods when such methods had proved hopelessly inadequate.

Whatever that might be, it is undoubtedly a bold step—and I may add, a characteristically Bergsonian step—when Bergson, instead of giving fresh arguments to link together the two views of intuition, gives us the prescription : “Go to a mystic if you want to know what intuition is”. But, unfortunately, this prescription does not help us much, for there are mystics and mystics. There are so many types of mysticism and so many grades within the same type, that the identification of intuition with the mystic’s experience does not really tell us anything. Bergson himself feels it, and therefore he makes a fairly elaborate attempt to show that all mystics have practically the same experience. In spite of this, however, he himself groups mystics under two broad classes : contemplative and active. I have dealt with the defects of this classification elsewhere, and I do not want to say anything here, beyond pointing out that these two groups, contemplative and active, do overlap and must overlap. A contemplative mystic, if his contemplation is of sufficient intensity and depth, cannot fail to be active. And an active mystic, with a living faith in his mission of love or of service, must himself have a grasp of truth through contemplation. If he does not possess the truth himself, how can he hand it over to others ? This classification also introduces a fundamental change in Bergson’s earlier conception of

intuition. If intuition is concerned only with knowledge, how can it become active, that is, practical ? Moreover, how can this active type of intuition be looked upon as higher than the contemplative type, where the pure disinterested pursuit of truth is alone present ? But I do not want to press this point further, as I have already dealt with it elsewhere.

This brief exposition of Bergson's views on intuition has brought into clear relief two things. The first is that Bergson approaches intuition from a negative, rather than from a positive point of view. For him the vital matter is that it should be something different from, and even opposed to, the intellect. He is therefore rather careless about what its positive character is to be. This is the root cause of the many oscillations which we find in his views on intuition. All these different views express different characteristics which are found wanting in the intellect. Secondly, and as a result of this negative attitude, Bergson does not pay attention to the different grades of intuition. That intuition can differ very much in degree, that there are all shades and grades of it, beginning from the lowest, which is little more than an extremely temporary flash of truth, limited very much in extent and duration as well as intensity, and ending in a steady and intense light revealing the fullness of truth, never occurs to him.

Here we see a fundamental difference between Sri Aurobindo's conception of intuition and that of Bergson. This difference is partly a difference between the Eastern and the Western view of intuition. The Eastern philosopher, much more than the Western, is familiar with

the vast range of intuitions and the wide gulf that separates one intuition from another. Be that as it may, Sri Aurobindo sees vast differences between one intuition and another. I must make my meaning clear. I am not thinking merely of that to which Sri Aurobindo has given the specific designation intuition, but I am thinking of the whole range of higher consciousness which he has described so thoroughly under the different titles, Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind and Supermind. All these higher levels of consciousness with the exception of the first, are intuitive, in the sense in which we understand the term 'intuition', that is, in the sense of a non-sensuous, direct experience. In the account which I give below of Sri Aurobindo's conception of intuition, this fact should be clearly borne in mind.

For Sri Aurobindo the value of intuition depends upon the source from which it emanates and upon the presence or absence of mental stuff that is found mixed with it. A non-sensuous experience, *qua* non-sensuous, has no value. Such an experience, far from being a communication from a higher region, may even be one from a lower plane, and Sri Aurobindo warns us particularly against such spurious intuitions.<sup>1</sup>

Bergson has huddled together all higher forms of consciousness under the single term 'intuition'. Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, has distinguished five levels of consciousness above the mental, namely, the Higher Mind, the Illumined Mind, Intuition, Over-

<sup>1</sup> Vide *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 998.

mind and Supermind. Each of these, with the exception of the first, is in a position to give us intuitions, but the values of these intuitions differ very considerably from one another. Those that emanate from the Illumined Mind and Intuition are full of mental stuff, and therefore, their value cannot be regarded as very great. Even those that emanate from the Overmind have got certain limitations ; for example, they may enable us to comprehend the whole universe under one aspect but fail to give us any knowledge of it under any other aspect.

There is, however, another aspect of the matter. Intuitive experience not only comes from above, but also from within. This is another feature of Sri Aurobindo's conception of intuition which distinguishes it from that of Bergson. Our psychic being (*caitya puruṣa*) is the representative within us of the Divine Principle and constantly sends light which penetrates our surface consciousness. It is thus another source of intuitive experience. But the value of this intuitive experience depends upon the stage of development of the psychic being, which itself depends upon what light it has received from the higher sources.

As regards the relative status of intuition and reason, Sri Aurobindo undoubtedly gives intuition a higher place than reason. For example, he says : "A consciousness that proceeds by sight, the consciousness of the seer, is a greater power for knowledge than the consciousness of the thinker. The perceptual power of the inner sight is greater and more direct than the

perceptual power of thought : it is a spiritual sense that seizes something of the substance of Truth and not only her figure ; but it outlines the figure also and at the same time catches the significance of the figure, and it can embody her with a fairer and a larger comprehension and power of totality than thought-conception can manage.”<sup>1</sup> But this does not mean that reason cannot occasionally come to the aid of intuition. In fact, Sri Aurobindo welcomes such aid from reason. For instance, he says, “Intuition is unable to give us the truth in that ordered and articulated form which our nature demands. Before it could effect any such completeness of direct knowledge in us, it would have to organise itself in our surface being and take possession there of the leading part. But in our surface being it is not the Intuition, it is the Reason which is organized and helps us to order our perceptions, thoughts and actions. Therefore, the age of intuitive knowledge, represented by the early Vedānta thinking of the Upaniṣads had to give place to the age of rational knowledge; inspired Scripture made room for metaphysical philosophy, even as afterwards metaphysical philosophy had to give place to experimental Science”.<sup>2</sup> But this must not lead us, as it has led a recent writer, to the conclusion that Sri Aurobindo looks upon intuition aided by reason as the highest form of knowledge. Nothing can be a greater mistake than this. The passage I have quoted from his book makes it quite clear that he

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, part II p. 945, 1939 edition. All the references in this book to *The Life Divine* are to the 1939 edition.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. I. p. 103.

wants this help from reason, because of the defects of mind-controlled intuition, the sort of intuition that has so far been vouchsafed to us. If intuition is freed from these defects, as it will be on the emergence of the Supermind, then no help from reason will be needed. And even when the defects of intuition are partially remedied with the help of reason, we have still to climb a great deal before we can reach that condition when we shall step out of ignorance into knowledge.

To sum up this part of my survey. For Sri Aurobindo there are various grades and types of intuition. The value of an intuition depends upon the source from which it originates. All intuitions that mankind has had so far, have suffered from this fundamental defect, that they are mind-controlled. All the defects of intuition—their flashy character, their particularity, their limited range, their lack of cohesion—are due to their being under the control of the mind. When they are under such control, some advantage may be derived by subjecting them to the rule of reason. But such help from reason cannot take us very far : it cannot enable us to reach a condition where ignorance will completely vanish. This consummation can only take place when the Supermind will descend into the Mind. Nor must we forget here the help which we receive from within, from our psychic being. It is the thousand-petalled lotus seated in our head which, when it opens up its petals, will cause a steady stream of light to flow into our surface consciousness.

## II. DOCTRINE OF REALITY

I now pass on to the respective attitudes towards reality of these two great thinkers. Bergson has seated his conception of reality as that of uninterrupted movement, unimpeded flow. In his *Time and Free-Will* he has identified it with Time, and in his *Creative Evolution* he has called it the *élan vital*, the vital urge which goes on rushing, like a river in full flood, carrying everything before it, unhampered by any boundaries.

As I have already indicated, his conception of reality is vitally connected with his theory of intuition. If intuition reveals to us things as in the making, and not things as already made, if it enables us to grasp life in its livingness and not life as matter for history, then it follows that the true picture of reality is that of free movement. It is because the intellectualist or scientific view of reality takes away from it all this movement and life, that Bergson is opposed to it.

What is required, therefore, is to give up the guidance of the intellect and understand motion as it really is. "Let us make an effort", says Bergson, "to perceive change as it is, in its natural indivisibility; we see that it is the substance itself of things, and that movement does not appear to us any more with the instability which would render it refractory to our thought, nor does substance exist with the immutability which would render it inaccessible to our experience."<sup>1</sup>

The central idea of this whole scheme is Motion. Motion,

<sup>1</sup> *La Perception du Changement*, p. 34.

which we may also call *Becoming*, gives, in Bergson's view, the true picture of reality. This is pure Heracliteanism, or perhaps it is an even more radical form of the philosophy of *Becoming* than Heracliteanism, for Heraclitus admitted the existence of a universal law, which he called the Divine Law of Zeus.

The one weak spot in this perfect scheme of *Becoming* is the presence of *Matter*. Bergson has been able neither to deny it nor to incorporate it fully into his system.

Let us first understand what the problem of *Matter* is, as understood by Bergson, and then we shall examine how far his attempt to tackle it is successful. Bergson feels that reality has two aspects : pure movement and retarded or reverse movement. Originally, of course, reality is pure flow. But it cannot continue so for ever. A time comes when its flow is retarded or reversed. That is the moment when *Matter* arises. *Matter*, therefore, is a derivative of Reality as pure flow.

After the origin of *Matter* a profound change occurs. Intuition, which has been so far the only faculty for understanding reality, has now to be supplemented by others for dealing with *Matter*. These are Intelligence and Instinct, whose function is a practical one, namely, that of dealing with *Matter* so that it may not suppress the current of life. Intelligence performs this function with the help of artificial tools, whereas instinct does it with the help of organic tools. The advantage of instinct is that it is more sure, while that of intelligence is that its range is practically unlimited. In what follows, I shall mainly speak of intelligence as the faculty that comes into being

with the advent of Matter, for its power is much greater and it exemplifies much better than instinct the fundamental features of a faculty which is generated for the sake of controlling Matter. Matter, itself a derivative of reality as pure flow, cannot claim to be an independent reality. But it has an important rôle assigned to it in the evolution of life, and therefore Bergson feels the necessity of positing the existence of Matter along with that of Life. But Bergson has not been able to give any logical justification for its existence. By what logic does he come to the conclusion that reality as pure flow cannot continue for ever, but must slow down ? Why should it slow down at all ? What can put any limit to its flow ? It cannot limit itself, for all limitation, according to Bergson, is external limitation. In fact, on Bergson's principles no self-limitation or self-determination is possible. Self-determination always means determination for the sake of something which is felt as a need of the self. When reality is conceived as pure flow which does not know why it flows or where it flows, any talk of self-determination is out of the question. Matter, therefore, if it is to limit the free flow of reality, can only do so by being an independent reality. But this would lead to dualism which, however, Bergson emphatically rejects.

Moreover, as I have pointed out elsewhere, if reality is conceived as a pure flow, not directed towards any goal, then the words 'movement' and 'reverse movement' lose all their meaning. If a movement is directed towards a goal, then another movement which takes it away from the goal, can be called a reverse movement. But where

there is no goal, how can there be any direction of movement, and consequently, how can there be any talk of a forward movement or a reverse movement ?

These defects of Bergson's theory of Matter are really the defects of his unqualified Heracliteanism. Bergson, in fact, with the help of his theory of Matter, attempted the impossible task of passing from Becoming to Being. No philosophy can do without a theory of Being. Even Heraclitus felt the need of accepting a principle of order, of stability, which he called the Divine Law of Zeus. Bergson wanted to out-Heraclitus Heraclitus. In the end, he tumbled headlong into the principle of Being in the shape of his theory of Matter. His philosophy, in fact, is the best illustration of the truth : *It is possible to pass from Being to Becoming, but not from Becoming to Being.*

Sri Aurobindo does not identify Reality either with Being or Becoming, but looks upon both of these as poises of Reality. In reality, the Absolute is beyond Being and Becoming. But as we cannot conceive the Absolute in itself, in its true condition, we must, he says, "accept the double fact, admit both *Śiva* and *Kālī* and seek to know what is this measureless Movement in Time and Space in regard to the timeless and spaceless pure Existence, one and stable, to which measure and measurelessness are inapplicable".<sup>1</sup> The most salient features of his theory of reality we may thus state in almost his own words as follows :

There is a Supreme Reality, eternal, absolute and infinite. Because it is absolute and infinite, it is in its essence

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. I, p. 119.

indeterminable and is indefinable and inconceivable by the finite mind. It is not describable either by negations (*neti neti*) or by affirmatives. Yet, although it is in this way unknowable to us, it is not altogether and absolutely unknowable : it is self-evident to itself and also to a knowledge of which the spiritual being in us is capable, for this spiritual being is in its essence and ultimate reality nothing but the Supreme Reality.

Although indeterminable to our mind, because of its absoluteness and infinite, yet this Supreme Reality manifests itself to our consciousness in the universe by real and fundamental truths of its being which transcend the universe and are the foundation upon which the universe rests. These truths present themselves to our intellectual knowledge as the fundamental aspects in which we see and experience the Infinite Reality.

The Supreme Reality or Brahman, as it manifests itself to our consciousness, is an eternal and absolute self-existence (*sat*), self-awareness and self-power (*cit-śakti*) and self-delight of being (*ānanda*). For this reason the Supreme Reality can best be called by the name *Saccid-ānanda*. Its self-existence appears to us in three forms : Self, Conscious Being or Spirit, and God or the Divine Being. Or, to use the more expressive terms of our own ancient philosophy, it manifests itself as *ātman*, *puruṣa* and *īśvara*. Similarly, its self-awareness or force of consciousness (briefly called, Consciousness-Force) appears in three forms : *māyā*, *prakṛti* and *śakti*. *Māyā* is the force of the Absolute Consciousness, conceptually creative of all things. *Prakṛti* is Nature or Force as dyna-

mically executive, working out all things under the supervision of the Supreme Spirit. *Śakti* is the conscious power of the Divine Being which is both conceptually creative and dynamically executive.

These three aspects and these powers embrace the whole of Existence and all Nature and, if viewed as a whole, reconcile all apparent contradictions, all apparent disparateness and incompatibility between the supra-cosmic transcendence, the cosmic universality and the separativeness of our individual existence. Taken by itself, the existence of the Absolute would be a contradiction of the relative universe, just as our own real existence would be a contradiction of the Absolute's sole incommunicable reality. But Brahman is at the same time omnipresent in all relativities; it is the Absolute governing, pervading, constituting all relativities.

How this is so, our logical reason is unable to grasp, and being unable to grasp, creates innumerable difficulties. There is the difficulty of understanding how the Indeterminable determines itself as both infinite and finite, how the One becomes an infinitely diversified multitude, how the Impersonal creates or supports an infinity of persons, and is itself also a Person. In despair, our logical reason gives up the chase and proclaims the universe to be an unmeaning jumble of phenomena. But "what is magic to our finite reason is the logic of the Infinite." The reason behind the seemingly meaningless processes is "a greater reason, a greater logic, because it is more vast, subtle, complex in its operations."

From this brief account of the nature of the Ultimate

Reality as given by Sri Aurobindo, we see that the co-existence of the One and the Many, of the static and the dynamic, of the infinite and the finite in the Absolute is not a juxtaposition of mutually exclusive opposites, but is natural and inevitable. No finite can exist in and by itself; it exists in the Infinite and by the Infinite. The Infinite is not merely an illimitable self-extension in Space and Time, but is also spaceless and timeless, a self-existent Indefinable and Illimitable, which can express itself equally in the infinitely great as well as in the infinitely small. It is for this reason that the *Gītā* says : “अविभक्तं च भूतेषु विभक्तमिव च स्थितम्”

The mathematics of the Infinite is beautifully expressed in a verse of the Upaniṣads : “पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते” ‘Subtract the infinite from the infinite, and the remainder is still the infinite’. The Infinite does not suffer any loss or diminution by becoming Many; it remains precisely the same One which it originally was.

Sri Aurobindo therefore says : “The *māyā* of Brahman is at once the magic and the logic of an infinitely variable oneness”.<sup>1</sup> This famous statement of his is an answer to Bergsonism as well as to Advaita Vedānta. The difficulties of both these types of philosophy are due to the failure to understand the logic of the *māyā* of Brahman. Its logic is magic to them, because it refuses to come under their narrow logical categories.

Its logic is the logic of the universal being of Brahman and the infinite intelligence of *māyā*. In order to understand it, we have to grasp certain fundamental powers or

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 70.

potentialities which we may equally describe as the powers or potentialities of the Infinite Reality or of its Consciousness-Force, for the Consciousness-Force is the Consciousness-Force of the Infinite Reality and has no existence apart from it. The first of these fundamental powers is the power of infinite self-variation. By virtue of it the Supreme Reality is not bound to one state or law of its action. It can be many things at one and the same time and have many different movements which to our finite reason may appear contradictory. Thus, for instance, it can be at once transcendental, universal and individual. That is to say, it can be at once (1) the supreme supra-conscious Being, aware of itself as the All-Being (*īśvara*), (2) the Cosmic Self (*ātman*), and (3) the individual being and consciousness in all existences (*puruṣa*).

A second power of the Infinite Consciousness is its power of self-limitation, that is to say, of self-formation into a subordinate movement within the framework of the Infinite Consciousness. This power is a necessary consequence of the power of self-variation. Each product of the self-variation of the Infinite Reality must be aware of its own self-truth and self-nature, that is, of its spiritual individuality. But apart from this individualizing self-limitation, there must be also a cosmic self-limitation, the creation of a universe moving in its own order and a holding back of all that is not needed for that movement. The setting up of Mind, Life or Matter as independent movements is also a product of this power of self-limitation.

There is a third power of the Infinite Consciousness,

namely, its power of self-absorption, of withdrawal into itself, of lapsing into absolute Silence—a state in which self-awareness exists but not as knowledge, a condition which the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* describes when it speaks of the Absolute as वृक्ष इव स्तब्धो दिवि तिष्ठत्येकः (“the One which remains silent like the tree”). This power has a luminous form as well as a dark form. In its luminous form it is called Supraconscience in the absolute sense. In its dark form it is called the Inconscient, for there also the being of the Infinite Reality is present, although on account of the appearance of inconscience, it seems to us an absolute non-Being. This power of self-absorption can explain how the *nirguṇa* can stand back from the *saguna*, absorbed in its own immobility, and also how consciousness can be aware of one field of being, while withholding the awareness of all the rest.

The logic of the Infinite Consciousness will also show the weakness of the Sāṅkhya position. The fundamental mistake of the Sāṅkhya lies in its dualism, in its detaching *puruṣa* from the movements of *prakṛti*. *Prakṛti* must be the *prakṛti* of *puruṣa*. Force must be the force of the Conscious Being; otherwise force loses all its dynamism. An unconscious Force developing into life and consciousness is a contradiction in terms. It can only develop that which is already in it. If there is a deposit of consciousness even in the Inconscient, even though it may not be manifest, then only can there be any evolution of the Inconscient into life and mind.

Detachment from *prakṛti* is no doubt necessary for the maintenance of the freedom of *puruṣa*, but it cannot

be automatic. It must be left to the *puruṣa* to seek it when it needs it. It is one of the fundamental powers of *puruṣa*, as we have just seen. The initiative is always with *puruṣa*, never with *prakṛti*. It is *puruṣa* which for its own purposes may choose to stand aside entirely from *prakṛti*; it is *puruṣa*, again, which by its power of self-variation may choose to play a more active role in the movements of *prakṛti*. In any case, *puruṣa* is the support and lord and enjoyer of *prakṛti*, and not merely a silent spectator of its play.

We have so far not discussed another essential component of the triune Reality, *saccidānanda*, namely, Bliss. In one sense, it is the most important of all the components, for it is that for which the other components are. It gives the reason for the world-process; it is the 'why' of creation. So also declared our ancient sages :

“आनन्दाद्धयेव खल्विमानि भूतानि जायन्ते । आनन्देन जातानि जीवन्ति ।  
आनन्दं प्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्ति ।” (Taitt. Up. III, 6).<sup>1</sup>

“को ह्येवान्यात्कः प्राप्यात् । यदेव आकाश आनन्दो न स्यात् ॥”  
(ibid, II, 7)<sup>2</sup>

The bliss of *saccidānanda* reveals itself in an infinite multiplicity of universes. Bliss, therefore, is an inherent

<sup>1</sup> English translation (Sri Aurobindo) : “For from Bliss alone, it appears, are these creations born and being born, they live by Bliss, and to Bliss they go hence and return”.

<sup>2</sup> English translation (Sri Aurobindo) : “For who could labour to draw in the breath or who could have strength to breathe it out, if there were not that Bliss in the heaven of his heart, the ether within his being ?”

characteristic of every finite being and of the whole world-process. We fail, however, to understand this, because of the presence of pain and evil in the universe which we consider to be incompatible with bliss. But this is due, as Sri Aurobindo has beautifully shown, to our taking a narrow and anthropomorphic view of things and missing the broader aspects of life. Take, for instance, pain. Much of what we call pain is due to a failure to adjust ourselves to a higher level of consciousness. It is a common religious experience that what was formerly regarded by a man before conversion or before the attainment of a higher spiritual level as pain is considered by him after such conversion or attainment of a higher spiritual consciousness to be the highest bliss. To the higher religious consciousness many thing which to the lower levels of consciousness are nothing but undiluted pain, appear in a new light and seem to be in the highest degree blissful. To us ordinary mortals, nothing is more painful than humiliation at the hands of our fellow-beings, but the great saint Kavira prayed to God that He might give him humiliation as a boon. From Sri Aurobindo's standpoint, such transformation is not only possible but is a necessary condition of evolution to a higher stage.

In fact, as he carefully points out, pleasure, pain and indifference, which are our normal response to our environment, are really an imperfect response of an incomplete self. They are the response of that limited part of ourselves which we call the waking consciousness. But that is not our whole self. Behind that there is the

vaster, profounder and truer region of the Supraconscient. If, therefore, "we can go back into ourselves and identify ourselves, not with our superficial experience but with that radiant penumbra of the Divine", our response to the contacts of the universe will be not pleasure, pain and indifference, but bliss.

Coming now to the problem of moral evil, the problem, Sri Aurobindo thinks, is an artificial one. It is because ethics deals with conditions of human life as we find them today, it is because it looks upon human institutions as they exist at present as something ultimate, that it too hastily pronounces whatever is not in keeping with them an evil. But ethics itself is a stage in human evolution and must give way to something higher than itself. This is also, I may note in passing, the view of the leading idealistic thinkers of the present day, such as Bradley and Bosanquet.

Here there is a curious agreement between Sri Aurobindo and Bergson. Bergson also believes that ethics, which deals with what he calls the standpoint of 'closed morality', has a narrow outlook and is totally incompetent to give us a true picture of the universe. It must be replaced by what he calls 'open morality' which is the morality of the mystic vision, which alone can give us a true love of humanity. But this open morality is really beyond the scope of what we call ethics, as it does not approach any problem with the help of reason but views it entirely with the aid of the mystic intuition.

In Bergson's philosophy, however, bliss has no place.

This is quite evident, since he has scrupulously excluded all end or purpose from the world-process, unless one is prepared to call the spontaneous evolution of the creative élan itself bliss. But the creative élan is neutral in quality and it is not possible therefore to call it bliss.

### III THEORY OF EVOLUTION AND CONCEPTION OF THE DESTINY OF MAN

I come now to the last part of my task. What are the respective attitudes of Sri Aurobindo and Bergson towards Evolution and the problem of the destiny of man ?

Of all philosophers of the present day in the West, Bergson has emphasised most strongly the hopelessness of the mechanical theory of evolution. His great work *Creative Evolution* is perhaps the most formidable challenge of that theory which exists in philosophical literature. It has torn into shreds all the arguments by which the mighty structure of that theory is supported.

It is unfortunate, however, that Bergson not only wanted to demolish mechanical evolution but he was equally anxious to destroy all kinds of teleological evolution. It is true that the ordinary view of teleological evolution puts forward narrow human ends which, of course, it is impossible for philosophy to accept without degrading evolution to the level of a purely anthropomorphic theory. But the remedy for this lies not in abandoning all teleology but in substituting a higher for a lower teleology.

I have shown elsewhere<sup>1</sup> how disastrous this rejection of all teleology has proved for Bergson's philosophy. It has taken away from his creative evolution all its creativity and has reduced it to that same dreaded mechanical evolution from which its express purpose was to give us deliverance. For what is spontaneous movement if it is not movement towards anything, what is creative evolution if it does not know what it is to create, what is self-generative action if it is not guided by any purpose? In what way is such movement and action different from the purely mechanical movement and action controlled by physical forces?

What Bergson forgets is that freedom is not a negative but a positive idea. To be free does not mean to be free from all control, but it means to be guided and controlled solely by oneself. A free act does not mean an act which is absolutely undetermined, but it means an act which is the expression of a man's character, an action in which the full force of one's personality is felt.

The same thing is true when we pass from the individual to the cosmic plane. Creative or spiritual evolution is one in which every movement bears on its face the stamp of its spiritual origin, in which every step in the process reveals its spiritual source. If it cannot do that, then it may be anything, but it cannot be creative evolution.

Here we have a fundamental difference between

<sup>1</sup> See my third article on *The Philosophy of Henri Bergson* "Review of Philosophy and Religion", January, 1942).

Bergson's theory of Evolution and that of Sri Aurobindo. Spiritual evolution does not mean for Sri Aurobindo merely self-generative movement, but it means an evolution in which every step in the process is directed by the spirit. The spirit is also not a mere silent witness of evolution, as it is in the Sāṅkhya philosophy, but it actively guides and directs every little movement of it.

Evolution, in fact, is the Spirit's return to itself. It is the inverse of that movement which is called involution or creation. Just as in involution the Spirit projects itself out of itself, so in evolution it comes back to itself. It comes back to itself in the reverse way to that in which it went out of itself in involution. The former process Sri Aurobindo also calls Ascent and the latter Descent. The order of involution, as stated by him is as follows : Existence, Consciousness-Force, Bliss, Supermind, Mind, Psyche (Or Soul), Life, Matter. The order of evolution will therefore be : Matter, Life, Psyche, Mind, Supermind, Bliss, Consciousness-Force, Existence. Ascent or Evolution is only possible because there has been Descent or Involution. Matter can evolve because there has been a descent of the Spirit into Matter. As with Matter, so also with Life, Soul and Mind. Each of these can evolve, because there has been an involution of the Spirit into it. We shall now be able to understand the meaning of Sri Aurobindo's definition of Evolution : "All evolution is in essence a heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest being so that it may be raised into the greater intensity of what is still un-

manifest, from matter into life, from life into mind, from the mind into the spirit."<sup>1</sup> This definition makes clear, firstly, that in all being or substance some part of the consciousness-force of the Spirit exists in the manifest form and the rest in the unmanifest form. If the whole of the consciousness-force of the Spirit were manifest in any being, that being would reach the summit of evolution, that is, would become identical with the Supreme Spirit, and there could not be any further evolution of it. If, again, no part of the consciousness-force of the Spirit were manifest in it, it could not evolve. Evolution, therefore, is possible only in the intermediate condition, that is to say, when part of the consciousness-force of the Spirit is manifest and the rest of it remains still unmanifest. Evolution means making more and more manifest the unmanifest consciousness-force that dwells in every being. It is therefore an ascent from a less manifest condition of the Consciousness-Force to a more manifest condition.

But evolution is not merely an ascent from a lower a to a higher state of being. It is also an integration of the higher with the lower states. This means that when a higher principle emerges, it descends into the lower ones and causes a transformation of them. Thus, when Mind emerges, not only does a new principle appear on the scene, but the lower principles of Matter and Life also undergo a transformation, so that they become different from what they were before the emergence of Mind. Evolution, therefore, does not

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol, II, Part II, p. 658.

mean the isolated raising of any principle to a higher level, but an uplift and transformation of all the principles. If, therefore, a true uplift of human nature is to take place, this cannot be effected by raising only a part of our being to a higher level, detaching it from the lower parts, but the lower parts must be transformed in the light of the higher, leading to a complete change of all the parts of our being. If mind alone receives the higher light without being able to transmit it to matter as well as the vital principle, there cannot occur a general uplift of the whole universe. This explains why, in spite of the fact that so many individuals in different lands have obtained personal salvation by detaching themselves from mind, life and matter, there has been no transformation yet of the whole world into a higher status.

The discovery of this principle of integration as a vital part of evolution is a wonderful stroke of genius of Sri Aurobindo. It at once gives a new significance to evolution which ceases henceforth to be regarded as a mere ascent from a lower to a higher level, and differentiates his theory of evolution from other theories, both ancient and modern. It is true Bergson has spoken also of the continuous swelling of the current of life as it proceeds, of the past living in the present and continuing in the future. It is true he has compared evolution to the continuous lengthening of an elastic body, to the continuous coiling of a rope. But these similes only point to the fact that evolution is a continuous process without any break or gap. They do not suggest

any transformation of the lower principles by the higher. In fact, there is no place for the distinction of lower and higher in Bergson's philosophy. If evolution has no goal towards which it is moving, then the distinction between lower and higher ceases to have any meaning. For this distinction can only be maintained if some principles are looked upon as being nearer the goal than others.

Herbert Spencer, again, has spoken of differentiation and integration as two essential components of the evolutionary process. But the integration of which he has spoken is merely the structural integration of the parts. There is no question here of any higher part by its emergence leading to a transformation of the lower parts. There is no arrangement of vertical layers at all : there is only a regrouping of what we may call the horizontal layers. Nowhere has Spencer stated that life as it emerges causes a transformation of matter, or mind when it appears leads to a complete change of the nature of matter and life. Not only has he not stated this, but he has not been able even to maintain perfect continuity of evolution in the transition from matter to life or from life to mind. He has left a veil of mystery surrounding each of these transitions, and so far as he has done this, his place is with the Emergent Evolutionists, although to do justice to him, it must be said that Spencer would have been the last man to bless the theory of emergent evolution.

There is a third principle involved in Sri Aurobindo's conception of evolution, and that is what he calls

psychicization, that is to say, the opening out of the psychic being within. Evolution is not only a movement upwards and a movement downwards, but it is also a movement inwards. This is also a novel feature in his theory of evolution. Within us dwells a spark of Divinity, the *puruṣa* seated within our heart, the *caitya puruṣa*. Evolution means the development of this psychic being, so that the pure light from it may flood the whole of our surface life, mind and matter. It is not enough to allow our surface consciousness to evolve ; what is vitally necessary is that this surface consciousness should be illumined by the light of the soul. But the soul in us does not emerge full-grown ; "it evolves, passes through a slow development and formation ; its figure of being may be at first indistinct and may afterwards remain for a long time weak and undeveloped, not impure but imperfect."

Sri Aurobindo, however, warns us that the awakening of the soul in us and the development of our psychic being cannot alone cause that total transformation of our nature which is the goal of evolution. That is only possible through the descent of the Supermind. This descent, however, it is not possible for us by our efforts to bring about, for it requires "the sanction of the Supreme from above." But what we can do is to prepare the field, so that when the Supermind descends, it may find the soil fit to receive it. It is precisely here that Yoga comes to our aid.

The descent of the Supermind will complete the transformation of Ignorance into Knowledge. But the

process of evolution will not stop there. Henceforth it will be through knowledge, and it will not stop till the culmination point of evolution is reached, that is, when the triune principle of Saccidānanda itself will emerge. But the descent of the Supermind causes the first radical change in the character of the universe, for which the whole world is waiting.

So much for cosmic evolution. But Sri Aurobindo also takes into account individual evolution. The individual plays a very important rôle in evolution. In the involution of the Spirit into matter, the self was lost. Evolution, therefore, must have for its object the recovery of the self. This recovery is possible through the conscious individual being; "it is in him that the evolving consciousness becomes organized and capable of awaking to its own Reality". "The immense importance of the individual being", says Sri Aurobindo, "which increases as he rises in the scale, is the most remarkable and significant fact of a universe which started without consciousness and without individuality in an undifferentiated Nescience. This importance can only be justified if the Self as individual is no less real than the Self as cosmic Being or Spirit and both are powers of the Eternal. It is only so that can be explained the necessity for the growth of the individual and his discovery of himself as a condition for the discovery of cosmic Self and Consciousness and of the supreme Reality"<sup>1</sup>. From this fact of the essential importance of the individual Sri Aurobindo draws the remarkable conclusion : *Rebirth*

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 704.

*is a necessity, an inevitable outcome of the root nature of our existence.*

The individual soul is the product of a plunge into self-oblivion by which the sense of identity with the universe is lost and a consciousness of separative difference comes into the forefront. The result is the formation of the body in which the individual soul becomes conscious of itself as a separate ego. This assumption of the body we call birth, and it is through it only that it can develop itself and maintain its relations with the Cosmic Spirit. It is also through it only that the individual can recover its unity with God and thus get rid of its separateness, its ego-consciousness. Birth, thus, is a necessity of the manifestation of the soul on the material plane. But this birth cannot be an isolated phenomenon, without a past that precedes it or a future that succeeds it. Such an isolated birth in the human body would be "a freak for which the nature and system of things have no place, a contrary violence which would break the rhythm of the Spirit's self-manifestation."<sup>1</sup> Birth, therefore, must be followed by rebirth, that by another rebirth and so on. This succession of births, however, will stop with the emergence of the Supermind, for then the isolation of the individual soul will come to an end and consequently, the need of maintaining continuous contact with the cosmic soul through a succession of births.

I now come to the final question. What is the destiny of man as envisaged respectively by Bergson and Sri

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 708.

Aurobindo ? The ultimate destiny of man, according to Bergson, is to be one with the life-current. As God in Bergson's philosophy is only another name for the life-current, we may say that the ultimate destiny of man is to be identical with God. But what does this identity with God mean ? Does it mean a mere pantheistic absorption ? If it does, then this destiny cannot kindle any enthusiasm in us, for what alone can satisfy us is the assurance that, retaining our individuality as men, we can still become Divine. Does Bergson give us this assurance ?

Let us examine more carefully what Bergson has to say on this point. In a remarkably fine passage of his book *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* Bergson, speaking of the mystic's love of humanity, says, "What it wants to do, with God's help, is to complete the creation of the human species and make of humanity what it would have straight away become, had it been able to assume its final shape without the assistance of man himself. Or to use words which mean, as we see, the same thing in different terms : its direction is exactly that of the vital impetus, it is this impetus itself, communicated in its entirety to exceptional men, who in their turn would fain impart it to all humanity, and by a living contradiction change into creative effort that created thing which is a species, and turn into movement what was, by definition, a stop",<sup>1</sup>

What are we to make of this passage ? Here Bergson says that the mystic's love of humanity has the power

<sup>1</sup> *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, pp. 200-201.

of doing what otherwise we should have regarded as an impossible thing, namely, converting the human species into the creative effort itself. Does this conversion however, which Bergson calls 'the secret of creation' leave man his individuality, allow him still to feel and think and know himself as man or does it remove all his separate consciousness and make him lose himself in the universal life-current ? Unfortunately, Bergson does not give us any indication which can justify us in thinking that he favours the first alternative.

It is true he conceives the life-current as love. But does this magic word succeed in converting an abstraction into a concrete reality ? But even if it does, it will not really meet our point. Even if the life-current is something concrete, man in becoming one with it would simply lose himself, as do the waters of the river when they fall into the ocean. Does Bergson give us any assurance that man would share a different fate ? Absolutely none.

In fact, what Bergson does is simply to identify, for the sake of the architectonic completeness of his system, the love of humanity with the creative élan. But the two things are completely different and their union is only effected by a *tour de force*. In the description given of the creative élan in his *Creative Evolution* and other works, there is no hint at all of the possibility of its being regarded as love. On the contrary, it is definitely identified with Time, which in its turn is defined as pure flow. If Bergson were really serious about looking upon love as the impelling force of the whole process of

evolution, he should have discarded completely all his earlier views of it, which identified it with Time, that is, with a pure flow. And if love is merely another name for unhampered movement, for unimpeded flow, we would much rather that Bergson never used this word at all than used it in this most perverted sense.

The really concrete end which Bergson places before us is the love of humanity. It is no doubt a great thing to look upon the whole human race as one, without making any distinction of creed, colour, sex, etc. Mankind, of course, is very far yet from attaining this ideal, as the present world only too forcibly reminds us. Bergson also has done great service by pointing out the hollowness of the claim that it is only by becoming national that people can become international. A complete change of outlook is necessary before love of humanity becomes a living reality. All this is true, but still it does not entitle us to say that Bergson has faith in a higher destiny of man. Nowhere does Bergson say that evolution must inevitably produce a higher type of man, a type of what we may call the Divine man, radically different from the type that has so far evolved. The ideal of humanity in Bergson is an ideal for the present race of mankind. This ideal has been practised and preached for centuries and centuries by various schools of religious and ethical thought all over the world; it does not require as its precondition any radical transformation of the nature of man.

Alexander has insisted more than Bergson upon the necessity of evolution producing a higher world-order,

radically different from the present. The present world, he says has developed only three principles, matter, life and mind. A fourth principle, higher than all these and radically different from them, is bound to emerge. It is an absolute necessity of evolution. This higher principle he calls deity, but the word is a general term, meaning only the next higher principle, for when the principle of matter had only emerged, deity was the principle of mind. "For any level of existence," says Alexander, "deity is the next higher empirical quality. It is therefore a variable quality, and as the world goes in time, deity changes with it."<sup>1</sup>

What, however, is *our* deity ? That is to say, what is the next higher level to that which we have attained ? Alexander cannot give us any idea of it ; the only thing which he can say is that it is not mind, and that it differs from mind not in degree but in kind. "We cannot tell", he says, "what is the nature of deity, of our deity, but we can be certain that it is not mind, or if we use the term spirit as equivalent to mind, deity is not spirit, but something different from it in kind".<sup>2</sup>

But the question which really concerns us here is whether he gives us any hope that man can possess this higher quality deity, or in other words, whether the Being which possesses the higher quality can be looked upon as a Higher Man or a Superman. Unfortunately, we have to answer this question in the negative. He very definitely asserts that God, the Being who possesses

<sup>1</sup> *Space, Time and Deity*, Vol. II, p. 348.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 349.

deity, is radically different from man. Thus, speaking of the attempt made by philosophers to treat God as a greater spirit and look upon the difference between the human and the divine as one of degree, he says, "Instead of the shadowy quality of which we can only say that it is a higher quality than mind, God is made more vivid to us as a greater spirit ; and we conceal the difference in kind of the divine and the human nature under magnified representations of human attributes. These are the inevitable devices of our weakness and our pictorial craving. But for philosophy, God's deity is not different from spirit in degree but in kind, as a novelty in the series of empirical qualities".<sup>1</sup>

Another thing which we notice is that the emergence of deity does cause a transformation of the earlier principles. The space-time matrix remains as before the steel frame within which the emergence takes place. Neither matter nor mind nor life becomes different from what they were before the emergence of the new principle. The whole universe, consisting of the space-time framework and the principles of matter, life and mind, becomes the body of God, the Being with the quality deity. "God," declares Alexander, "is the whole world possessing the quality of deity. Of such a being the whole would be the body and the deity the mind".<sup>2</sup> There cannot therefore be a transformation of man into something higher on the emergence of deity.

I need not refer to Nietzsche, for although he coined

<sup>1</sup> *Space, Time and Deity*, p. 350.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 353.

the word Superman and was the first in recent years to insist upon the imperative necessity of the present race of men being replaced by a stronger one, yet his conception of the Superman was the very reverse of the Divine man, for it was the conception of the Āsurika man, the man with the *āsurika* qualities, great physical strength, indomitable will, ruthlessness, etc. The emergence of such a man, far from indicating a higher level of evolution, is rather a distinct sign of a retrograde movement.

It is Sri Aurobindo who is *par excellence* the philosopher of the Superman, the thinker who has proclaimed more strongly than any other thinker, either living or dead, the absolute necessity of the emergence of a race of Divine Men. No philosopher in ancient or modern times has a higher conception of the destiny of man than he. No one has announced with greater conviction than he that man must exceed himself, that his destiny is not to be mere man but to be something infinitely higher.

What makes Sri Aurobindo think that man has this higher destiny ? It is, in one word, the discovery of the spirituality of man. "Man's urge towards spirituality is the inner driving of the spirit within him towards emergence, the insistence of the Consciousness-Force of the being towards the next step of its manifestation."<sup>1</sup> This 'urge towards spirituality' in man is therefore the sign that when the next decisive step in evolution will occur, as it will with the emergence of the Supermind, it will occur in man. The whole question is whether

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 843.

or not man is capable of rising above the level of mind. If he is incapable of rising above mentality, then the emergence of the Supermind must take place otherwise than in him. But if he is capable then man himself will reach the Supermind and pass into supermanhood. It is important to understand exactly what Sri Aurobindo means, for it is only too easy to misunderstand him. For one thing he does not mean any kind of humanism. In fact, humanism is not consistent with faith in the higher destiny of man. If the end of man is not to end as man, if his destiny is to rise to a higher state of being, then no point of view which cannot look beyond human needs and conditions can be said to be adequate. Moreover, there are vast regions of nature where the principle of humanism cannot be applied at all. "The attempt of human thought", says Sri Aurobindo, "to force an ethical meaning into the whole of nature is one of those pathetic attempts of the human being to read himself, his limited habitual human self into all things and judge them from the standpoint he has personally evolved, which most effectively prevents him from arriving at real knowledge and complete sight."<sup>1</sup> The motive force of evolution is not any ethical principle, but the urge of the Spirit towards self-expression. This urge is at first non-ethical, then infra-ethical, partly also anti-ethical, and it will be supra-ethical when evolution will reach a stage higher than the mental. Only at the present level of evolution, and that, too, with regard to a very limited part of the world is the ethical principle

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 144.

important. Sri Aurobindo, therefore, says "If, then, the ethical standpoint applies only to a temporary though all-important passage from one universality to another, we cannot apply it to the total solution of the problem of the universe, but can only admit it as one element in that solution. To do otherwise is to run into the peril of falsifying all the facts of the universe, all the meaning of the evolution behind and beyond us in order to suit a temporary outlook and a half-evolved view of the utility of thing. The world has three layers, infra-ethical, ethical and supra-ethical. We have to find that which is common to all ; for only so can we resolve the problem."<sup>1</sup>

I have now come to the end of my task. I have chosen for my comparative study two of the most volcanic thinkers of the present day, one from the West and one from the East. I could have chosen other Western philosophers for purposes of comparison, but my choice of Bergson was dictated by the circumstance that he is the most dynamic of the thinkers of the West of today. Bergson is perhaps one of the least systematic among the philosophers of the modern age. But system-building is not the thing we value most in a philosopher. What we value in him much more than this is his power to kindle thought, to give a new orientation, a new outlook. The greatest obstacle to the progress of philosophy is stagnation of thought, the habit of moving in fixed grooves, a false sense of respectability which makes people shrink from trying new methods. Bergson is the most uncompromising opponent of all false respectability in philosophy. For

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 147.

him the only thing that is respectable is the love of truth.

And an even more uncompromising opponent of all respectability and convention and an even greater volcanic thinker is Sri Aurobindo. It is not an accident that his great work *The Life Divine* has appeared at a time when the world is passing through a crisis the like of which it has not witnessed before. The tremendous enthusiasm with which the appearance of the book has been hailed all over the world proves this. The message of the book is exactly what the world needs today. It is the most thought-provoking and thought-shaking book that has appeared in this century. As it is studied more and more, more people will come under the influence of its vitalizing thought, and it will cause a slow and silent revolution in thought which will be extremely radical and far-reaching in its effects. For one of the effects will be the transfer of the leadership in philosophy from the West to India. Thanks to Sri Aurobindo, the leadership in philosophy, which India had enjoyed in the past and which she lost for some centuries, has come back to her. This in itself is a very great gain, but coupled with this is the far greater gain for the whole world, namely, the spiritualization of man, leading eventually to complete transformation of his nature. May India under the guidance of Sri Aurobindo, the prophet of the Superman, the hierophant of the New Age, fulfil again her God-appointed mission of leading the world from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, from death to the deathless !

### III

## SRI AUROBINDO AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL\*

NOWHERE is the merit of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy so apparent as in the manner in which he has handled the problem of evil which is perhaps the most baffling of all problems. I was considerably amused therefore when sometime ago a reviewer in the "Times Literary Supplement," in the course of his review of my book *An Introduction to Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy* remarked that the weakness of Sri Aurobindo was that he could not handle properly the problem of evil, and he went even to the length of suggesting that here he erred with the whole Hindu race.<sup>1</sup> I felt that no criticism could be more unjust than this, for one of the strongest points in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy was the way in which it handled the problem of evil.

\* Reprinted from *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1944.

<sup>1</sup> The Reviewer's exact words are : "The test of a thinker in the last analysis is the way in which he handles the problem of Evil. Aurobindo cannot be said to have succeeded where other philosophers have failed.... His chief limitation is that he does not realize the creative power of Ignorance; but here he errs with the whole Hindu race. Were there no mystery, life would lose all its savour. That is the last word of Western wisdom. Aurobindo and his countrymen cannot afford to neglect it." *Vide Times Literary Supplement*, Jan. 9, 1943.

SRI AUROBINDO STEERS CLEAR OF TWO EXTREME  
VIEWS OF EVIL

There are two extreme views of evil which, speaking in very general terms, we may say have been sponsored respectively by India and the West. The first extreme view, which found great favour in our country in ancient times, looked upon evil as unreal and as a product of ignorance. In this view, evil existed so long as ignorance presisted in individual consciousness ; with the lifting of the veil of ignorance evil would disappear. So long as this view ruled, the problem of evil could never acquire a cosmic status. For evil was regarded as a product of the operation of ignorance in individual consciousness, and consequently, it was felt that it would vanish with the appearance of true knowledge as dew did with the rising of the sun. The problem of evil, from this point of view, was also mainly a practical one. It was a problem of training the individual so that he might be in a position to receive the right knowledge. It was thus intimately connected with *yoga*, or rather, the solution of the problem was sought in *yoga*. On the whole, this was the standpoint of the Upaniṣads, and we find it very clearly stated in the following verse of the *Chândogyopaniṣad* (vii. 26.2) :

न पश्यो मृत्युं पश्यति न रोगं नोत दुःखताम् ।  
सर्वं ह पश्यः पश्यति सर्वमाप्नोति सर्वशः ॥

("The seer sees not death nor disease nor sorrow. He sees all and attains all entirely").

This verse makes it clear that evil persists only so long as the individual's consciousness is under the sway of ignorance. With the disappearance of ignorance, that is, when the individual becomes a seer, evil also melts away, and therefore, for the man who has the true vision, neither death nor disease nor sorrow has any existence. This is the usual standpoint of the Upaniṣads, but, as I have stated elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> the Upaniṣads also hint at what may be called cosmic salvation, that is to say, freedom of the whole world from evil.

In this standpoint there is no suggestion of the unreality of the world. On the contrary, the standpoint of the Upaniṣads may be said to be directly opposed to the view that the world is unreal. The idea of immanence of God in the world is what is chiefly stressed in the Upaniṣads, and this idea is a direct contradiction of the other idea, namely, that the world is unreal. That famous passage in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* (3.8.8-9), where Yājñavalkya, in answer to Gārgī's question: "Across what, pray, is space woven, warp and woof?", gives what may be called a teleological and moral proof of the existence of God, is a clear refutation of the view which became later stereotyped, namely, that the teaching of the Upaniṣad is the unreality or illusoriness of the world. After describing the Absolute in purely negative terms as 'not coarse, not fine, not short, not long, etc.', Yājñavalkya, in words which will ring in the ears of men as long as the human race will last, and the meaning

<sup>1</sup> Vide my third article on *The Philosophy of the Kathopaniṣad*, *The Vedānta Kefari*, Oct. 1943).

of which it is not possible to misunderstand, says : "Verily, O Gārgī, at the command of that Imperishable the sun and the moon stand apart. Verily, O Gārgī, at the command of that Imperishable the earth and the sky stand apart. Verily, O Gārgī, at the command of that Imperishable the moments, the hours, the days, the nights, the fortnights, the months, the seasons, and the years stand apart. Verily, O Gārgī, at the command of that Imperishable some rivers flow from the snowy mountains to the east, others to the west, in whatever direction each flows. Verily, O Gārgī, at the command of that Imperishable men praise those who give, the gods are desirous of a sacrificer, and the fathers (are desirous) of the Manes-sacrifice"<sup>1</sup>. This passage is as strong an affirmation of the reality of the world as anything possibly can be. In the next passage Yājñavalkya gives a hint as to where evil is to be sought : "Verily, O Gārgī, if one performs sacrifices and worship and undergoes austerities in this world for many thousands of years, but without knowing that Imperishable, limited indeed is that work of his. Verily, O Gārgī, he who departs from this world without knowing that Imperishable is pitiable. But, O Gārgī, he who departs from this world, knowing that Imperishable is a *Brāhmaṇa*."<sup>2</sup> The concluding portion of this famous utterance of Yājñavalkya "Verily, O Gārgī, that Imperishable is the unseen Seer, the unheard Hearer, the unthought

<sup>1</sup> Br. Up. 3. 8, 9, Hume's translation (*Vide Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads* pp. 118-119).

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 119.

Thinker, the un-understood Understander. Other than It there is naught that sees. Other than It there is naught that hears. Other than It there is naught that thinks. Other than It there is naught that understands. Across this Imperishable, O Gārgi, is space woven, warp and woof",<sup>1</sup> shows also how evil is to be removed. It is ignorance which prevents a man from understanding that the Imperishable is the only seer, the only hearer, the only understander, that is responsible for evil. Remove this ignorance, and evil will be removed automatically. In fact, there is no such thing as evil, for it is only a product of the individual's ignorance.

In this view, it should also be observed, there is no room for escapism. If the world is neither unreal nor evil, why should there be any talk of escape from the world? In fact, the illustrious speaker himself was a householder, as were also other sages and Rājarṣis mentioned in this, as well as in other Upaniṣads. Escapism was a later growth. It arose as a deduction from the essential unreality of the world. The Upaniṣads advocated escape from the passions, which is very different from escape from the world.

The other extreme view which Sri Aurobindo equally avoids is the one which has generally found favour in the West and which treats evil as a permanent feature of the world. Evil in this view is quite as real as good, and the problem of evil is the problem of the coexistence of two totally opposed orders, one of good and another of evil, in the same world. Usually, however, good is sup-

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 119.

posed to be the higher reality, and God is identified with it. This, however, makes the problem still more insoluble. It was bad enough when the problem was one of explaining the coexistence in the same world of two totally opposed realities. But it became much worse when philosophy was faced with the question how God, who was identified with good, could allow that which was the direct opposite of His nature to exist. In whatever way the problem was put, it was bound to clash with some aspect or other of God as good. Either it would challenge His omniscience or His benevolence. If His omniscience was somehow saved, His omnipotence or His benevolence would be jeopardised, and *vice versa*. For example, if it was suggested that God created evil, knowing it to be evil, this would no doubt save God's omniscience, but it would seriously call in question either His omnipotence or His benevolence. For it would mean either that He had no power to stop evil, which would amount to an admission that He is not omnipotent, or it would mean that God could have prevented evil if He wanted to, but did not do so, which would call in question His benevolence. If again, it was suggested that with the best of intentions He created the world, but could not foresee that it would turn out to be evil, this would directly challenge His omniscience.

The problem of evil thus presents innumerable difficulties to the philosophers of the West, as we see clearly from the very able discussion of it which we find in Martineau's *Study of Religion* or in Prof. Joad's book *God and Evil*. It is clear that the Western philo-

sophers have set before themselves an insoluble problem. If evil and good are regarded as equally real and as absolute contradictories, if all attempts at reduction of the one in terms of the other are unceremoniously rejected, then it is clear that we can never arrive at a unitary conception of the universe, and the sooner this is frankly acknowledged and the whole problem given up as absolutely hopeless, the better.

But this is not the whole of the matter. A great part—perhaps the most important part—of the difficulty of these Western philosophers lies in their conception of God and of His relation to the world. They have such a horror of pantheism that rather than fall into it, they would accentuate the difference between God and the world, so much so that God is left completely outside the world and His relation to the world becomes in consequence purely external. With such a purely external view of the relation between God and the world it is manifestly impossible to construct a unitary system, and all attempts in this direction, therefore, at the call of monism, leave too much evidence of ill-conceived and hasty work. Indeed, the essential weakness of the Western way of dealing with the problem of evil lies in its conceptions of God. Unless God's relations with the world become thoroughly immanent, there is no possibility of solving the problem of evil.

The usual answer to this criticism is what is contained in the statement of the reviewer in the "Times Literary Supplement": "Unless there is mystery, life would lose all its savour." Mystery for mystery, is there less mystery

in the Divine immanence in the world than in His transcendence? Rather there is more. It is certainly a much greater mystery that God out of pure self-delight should reproduce Himself in the universe than that the world should go on in its own way without the guidance of the Divine Light. The former is a true spiritual mystery, the latter at best the mystery of unexplained mechanical process.

WANTED AN 'UMWERTUNG ALLER WERTE' IN THE  
CONCEPTION OF EVIL

If the problem of evil, therefore, is to be tackled, it must be done by a revolutionary change in the methods so far employed. Such a change must come from an altogether new outlook, from an absolutely fresh standpoint. If, therefore, the problem of evil is not to remain one of the unsolved riddles of the world, it is imperatively necessary that we should give up the old outlook, whether of the East or of the West, and approach it with an absolutely fresh mind. Our own ancient view suffers from the defect that it does not take evil seriously. In the language of the reviewer in the "Times Literary Supplement", it 'ignores the creative power of ignorance'. Evil may, and indeed must, in the ultimate analysis, be reduced to good, but this does not mean that its presence in the world today can be ignored. In fact, if we look at the history of the problem in our country, the most curious thing which strikes us is the complete *volte face* which it has undergone in the course of centuries. Starting originally from

the standpoint of evil as an unreality, it turns a complete somersault, on account of its evil association with the doctrine of the illusoriness of the world, and becomes a problem in escapism. But escapism, far from being a necessary implication of the unreality of evil, is rather a direct contradiction of it. For if you want to escape from the world, do you not *ipso facto* admit it to be evil ? If there was no evil in the world, why should there arise any necessity at all of seeking escape from it ? Yet, curiously enough, the advocates of escapism still continued to do lip service to the original doctrine of the Upaniṣads, namely, that evil is unreal, although they had departed fundamentally from it.

The Western view, on the contrary, is a frank admission that evil is a permanent feature of the world. The Western philosopher, in fact, resents very strongly any attempt to whittle down evil. He is unnecessarily emphatic in declaring that there is evil in the world, for who is going to deny it ? At least not we. Why proclaim from the house-tops a very obvious fact ?

But granting that evil is a feature of the world today, that which the Western philosopher wants to affirm does not follow. It does not follow, that is to say, that because evil is a feature of the world *today*, therefore, it will remain a feature of it *for all time*. Here, in fact, is the crux of the whole situation. And there we need a radical transformation, an "*Umwertung aller Werte*", of our whole outlook.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF THIS "UMWERTUNG" IS EVOLUTION

And the principle which will effect this '*Umwertung*', which will cause this radical transformation of our approach to the problem of evil, is Evolution. It is the principle which will reveal to us the secret of the world-process. We may call it the message of Prajapati, the great message which not only human affairs, but all forces and events in Nature proclaim. And like that other great message of his, proclaimed by thunder, which has one meaning for gods, another for men and a third for devils<sup>1</sup>. it also has a triple meaning. For, as Sri Aurobindo views

<sup>1</sup> See Br. Up. 5, 2. I give below Hume's translation of it (*Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads* p. 150) :

"The threefold offspring of *Prajāpati*—gods, men and devils (asuras)—dwelt with their father *Prajāpati* as students of sacred knowledge (*brahmacarya*).

Having lived the life of a student of sacred knowledge, the gods said : 'Speak to us, sir'. To them he spoke this syllable 'Da' ('द') 'Did you understand ?' 'We did understand', said they. 'You said to us, 'Restrain yourselves" (*dāmyata*)'. 'Yes (Oh)', said he, 'You did understand'.

So then the men said to him : 'Speak to us, sir'. To them then he spoke this syllable 'Da', 'Did you understand ?' 'We did understand', said they 'you said to us, "Give (*datta*)"'. 'Yes (*Om*)', said he. 'You did understand'.

So then the devils said to him, 'Speak to us, sir' To them he spoke this syllable 'Da' 'Did you understand ?' "We did understand", said they, 'You said to us, 'Be Compassionate (*dayadhvam*)". 'Yes (*Om*)' said he. 'You did understand'.

This same thing does the divine voice here, thunder, repeat: 'Da ! Da ! Da ! that is, 'Restrain yourselves, Give, Be compassionate', One should praise this same triad : self-restraint, giving, compassion."

it, it means three things : widening, heightening and integration. I have explained these terms in my book, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*, and I cannot do better than quote what I have said there : "First of all it (evolution) means a widening of the field, providing greater room for the operation of each principle as it emerges; secondly, it means an ascent from grade to grade, from the lower to the higher; and thirdly, it means taking up within itself, as soon as it reaches a higher grade, all the previous lower grades and transforming them, so that at each step of the ascent, there is not merely an ascent to a higher principle, but a lifting up and transformation of all the lower grades. Integration thus implies a descent of the higher principle into all the lower ones; in fact, it is ascent through descent. Thus, when the principle of mind emerges, there is not merely the emergence of this principle, but a descent of it into all the lower ones, leading to an uplifting and transformation of matter and life, so that life and matter become different after the emergence of mind from what they were before its emergence."

This triple-faced principle of evolution is the central truth of the universe, and it is the failure to understand its nature and appreciate its value which is the chief cause of the inadequate handling of the problem of evil, both in our country and in the West. The most important thing about it is that it is a spiritual principle. It is in fact, the reverse of the process of creation. As creation is the self-involution of the Spirit in matter, life and mind, so evolution is the return of the Spirit back from matter,

life and mind unto itself. From this general nature of evolution it is clear that it will not stop until the whole world attains the status of the Absolute Spirit of Saccid-ānanda. It is therefore a contradiction in terms to speak of evolution and yet assert the eternal existence of evil. If evolution is a fact, then evil can never be a permanent feature of the world.

If we keep in mind these fundamental truths of evolution, we can easily see why our traditional way of handling the problem of evil failed. It failed, because it missed the fundamental drift of evolution, which was not the production of a few released souls, but the general uplift of the whole world, a transformation of it into a higher status. Towards this general uplift, towards this transformation into a higher status, this method of securing for the individual escape from evil did not contribute an iota. The world continued to grovel in darkness and ignorance, in spite of the presence of a few happy individuals who had obtained personal liberation by detaching themselves from it. This clearly shows that if man is to attain the status which he is destined to attain, the means to it must be very different from the traditional methods followed in our country.

The Western method of handling the problem of evil is also vitiated by the same neglect of the principle of evolution. The Western philosopher is satisfied that evil is a feature of the world today and from this he jumps to the conclusion that it will remain a feature of it eternally. In other words, he totally ignores the principle of evolution. If evolution is a fact, then the present low

condition of the world may not give us any indication of what the future may have in store for it. The present stage may be only a preliminary stage in the evolution of the world; there may be much higher stages of evolution which have yet to unfold themselves, and if we pass any judgment upon the nature of the world from what we see of it today, such a judgment must be pronounced premature and hasty. If it is retorted on behalf of the Western standpoint that it does not take into account the future at all, and that all that it says about the condition of the world refers, and is meant to refer, only to the present, then our answer will be that if you leave out the future, then you drop the most important part of the problem and deal only with what may be called its skeleton. The problem of problems is how the world is going to shape itself in the future, whether evil will still cling to it as it undoubtedly does today or whether there is the possibility of its being freed from the incubus of sin and suffering which is such a distressing feature of it at the present moment.

But it is not true that the Western thinker, in discussing the problem of evil, wants to confine himself to the present position of the world, leaving out the question of the future altogether. Take, for instance, the following passage from Prof. C. E. M. Joad's *God and Evil* (p. 236) :

"I have told in the third chapter how the new obstrusiveness of the fact of evil engendered the conviction that evil was a real and irreducible factor in the universe, and also how, paradoxically, the very fact of that convic-

tion brought with it the felt need for a God to assist in the struggle to overcome evil. Now the admission of the reality of evil entails the view that this is a moral universe, in the sense that it is a universe in which conflict, the conflict between good and evil, is fundamental and presumably continuous. To accept evil as a given fact, and not to seek to overcome it, is possible only in so far as one is oneself evil."

Does this passage show that the author wants to confine himself to the present state of the world ? What would in that case be his meaning in speaking of the struggle to overcome evil ? This struggle is undoubtedly an event that continues in the future. And what about the end of the struggle, the actual overcoming of evil ? That surely is something purely in the future.

### THE GENERAL PROBLEM OF EVIL AND THE SPECIAL PROBLEMS

From what we have said above, it is clear that from the point of view of evolution, evil is not a permanent factor of the world but arises at a certain stage of it when certain conditions prevail, and disappears when those conditions are no longer present. Evil, therefore, is a temporary and accidental characteristic of the world. The world as such is not evil. In the beginning the world was not evil, for in the darkness of Inconscience which then enveloped it, there could be no distinction between good and evil. In the end also there can be no evil. It is only in the middle stages of world-evolution that there is

the possibility of evil. The question for us, therefore, is: How does evil arise in the world ? This question reduces itself to the following : At what stage in the world-evolution does evil make its appearance ?

Before discussing this general question it will be better to deal first with the special problems which arise in connection with the different types of evil as they have been enumerated and recognized by a practically unbroken tradition. Two types of evil have been recognized from the beginning of philosophical speculation. These are physical evil or pain and moral evil or sin. We propose, therefore, to deal with these two special problems before we come to the discussion of the general problem of evil.

### THE PROBLEM OF PHYSICAL EVIL OR PAIN

The most acute manner in which the problem of evil makes itself felt is in the presence of pain or suffering. How can there be pain or suffering in a world which is God's world ? If God has created this suffering intentionally, then He is a wicked God. If, on the contrary, evil exists in the world in spite of God, then God cannot be said to be omnipotent. The whole question, however, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, has been vitiated by the circumstance that it treats God as something completely outside the world. Such a God, of course, who remains Himself completely free from suffering, if He permits His created beings to be tormented by it, would prove Himself to be a most cruel God, and therefore,

utterly unworthy of being called God. But what if God does not stand outside the world, but is *in* the world and *of* the world, so that the world is flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone ? We cannot then surely accuse Him of cruelty, but the question would still remain : Why or rather how (as we shall presently show, the question is one of 'how' rather than one of 'why') does God allow Himself to be involved in a world which is full of suffering ?

There is a further question involved in the problem of pain. A not inconsiderable part of our suffering is due to the fact that there is present in us a consciousness of a better state of things than we find at present, in consequence of which we have an acute sense of discontent with the world as we find it today. This discontent, which we may call Divine discontent, is a direct consequence of the spiritual character of evolution. It is a clear reminder to man that he is not destined to remain where he is, but that he has a higher destiny. It constitutes the mainspring of his evolution to higher stages. It, in fact, creates in him an aspiration after a higher state, which is an indispensably necessary condition of his advance to higher levels of evolution. Its presence, therefore, although it causes him acute discomfort, is the surest guarantee to him of his passing to a condition where evil will be a thing of the past.

Indeed, it will be a bad day for man if he loses this sense of dissatisfaction with the world. It is a mistake to think that the function of yoga is to deaden a man's sensibility. On the contrary, one of its chief effects is

to increase enormously his power of sensing evil. There is a passage in Vyāsa's commentary on the 15th *sūtra* of Chapter II of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, which beautifully describes the heightened sensibility of the yogin to evil. Vyāsa compares the yogin to the eye-ball and says that just as a thread of wool can give pain by mere contact when it touches the eye-ball but not when it touches other parts of the body, so the yogin feels pain when other people do not, for he is as tender as the eye-ball.

This has a very important bearing upon the problem of education. If the function of education is to help man to rise to a higher status, then it should not take away from him his feeling of dissatisfaction with the world. It is a totally wrong conception of education which will make a man lose his personality and accept the world at its face-value. Such an education will be the surest way of bringing man down to the level of beasts. True education, in fact, is education which will fit a man to rise from his present condition to a higher one, and ultimately to pass from the state of man to that of the Superman. Of course, it is not in the power of education, any more than it is in the power of yoga, to do this. In fact, the limits of education are the same as the limits of yoga. The only agency by which the transformation can be effected is the Grace of God. But education is the necessary preparation for the reception of the Divine Grace. Indeed, from this point of view, education is yoga and yoga is education.

It is not possible within the limits of this article to develop this view of education from the standpoint of the Superman. All that I can say is that it will revolutionise

our ideas of education. Too much stress is laid today upon making men goody goody citizens who will accept all the current standards of life, and too little importance is attached to the development of personality. The new standpoint of education will make a clean sweep of all these methods which aim at perpetuating a race of 'respectable' men and women.

I come now to another important point in connection with the problem of physical evil. Pain cannot be regarded as an absolute, any more than pleasure. What I mean is that pain and pleasure are the different ways in which the individual reacts to the contacts of the world. There is no invariable way, however, in which the individual responds to any particular contact. You cannot say : Given a certain amount of physical stimuli, it will *always* produce a fixed amount of pain or pleasure. Not only does it not produce the same quantity of the same feeling, but very often the same physical stimulus produces at different times feelings of opposite character. It is a very common experience that the same degree of heat and cold causes under different conditions feelings of the opposite quality. The degree of cold, for instance, which a man may find very exhilarating in his childhood may appear to him highly depressing in his old age. Training also has a great influence in changing pain into pleasure and *vice versa*. But the most important thing to observe here is that pleasure also cannot be regarded as an unmixed good, that is to say, as *ānanda* or Bliss. This is why the Epicureans did not look upon pleasure *qua* pleasure as a thing to be sought and wanted rather to have a life of perfect

balance free from the excitement of pleasure as well as the depression of pain. In fact, pleasure itself is an imperfect response to the contacts of the universe. If, therefore, pain presents a problem to us, equally so does pleasure.

### THE PROBLEM OF MORAL EVIL OR SIN

I now come to what is perhaps regarded as even more baffling than the problem of physical evil—I mean the problem of moral evil. Physical evil does not throw such a direct challenge to the idea of the world being the creation of an all-perfect God as moral evil does, for it is possible to minimise the evil of suffering. It is possible also to suggest that it is the result of evil deeds done in former lives. There are again some orders of ascetics that look upon pain and suffering as part of their *tapasyā*. But moral evil is a much more serious thing, and its existence is a far more serious challenge to God being regarded as the author of the world than anything possibly can be.

Yet Christian theists, like Martineau, have tried to whittle down its evil character by trying to show that it is an inevitable consequence of God's gift of freedom to man. This gift which is of inestimable value, carries, however, a sting in its tail. For it is on account of it that sin has arisen. But it is better, far better, that there should be sin than that man should lead a purely animal existence, for without freedom there would be nothing to distinguish man from an animal. Freedom

is man's privilege, freedom is man's glory, although it is also a great responsibility. By conferring freedom upon man God has honoured him as a moral being. Martineau is very eloquent on this point, and suggests that it is because God is holy, that He has done this, although by this He has opened the possibility of evil. "It is because He is holy", says Martineau, "and cannot be content with an unmoral world where all the perfection is given and none is earned, that He refuses to render guilt impossible and inward harmony mechanical : were He only benevolent, it would suffice to fill His creation with the joy of sentient existence ; but, being righteous too, He would have in His presence beings nearer to Himself, determining themselves by free preference to the life which He approves ; and preference there cannot be, unless the double path is open. To set up therefore an absolute barrier against the admission of wrong, is to arrest the system of things at the mere natural order, and detain life at the stage of a human menagerie, instead of letting it culminate in a moral society".<sup>1</sup> He is also very careful to point out that God cannot be held, except very remotely, responsible for the abuse, which man may make of his freedom. "Notwithstanding", he says, "the supreme causality of God, it is rigorously true that only in a very restricted sense can he be held the author of moral evil".<sup>2</sup>

This explanation of the origin of moral evil really comes to this, that we must not blame God, for has

<sup>1</sup> *A Study of Religion*, Vol. II, page 102.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 101.

He not given us freedom ? Because He has given us freedom, we ought to put up with all the evils which this has brought in its train. Supposing a father were to make a present of a gun to his young son, a mere boy of ten or twelve, and say "Look here, I am making you a very valuable gift. You may use it properly or you may not, but whatever use you make of it, it is, and will continue to be, a very valuable gift", and supposing as a result of his mishandling of this gift, the boy killed himself, would the father be exonerated from all blame, because he gave ; 'a very valuable gift' ? The explanation really means this, that the value of a thing is independent of the use that is made of it. The illustration we have given above shows the absurdity of this view. If men are constitutionally incapable of making a proper use of freedom, then the gift of freedom to them cannot be justified. It may of course be said that it is only by the method of trial and error that the right use of anything can be learnt, and that God, by making this gift of freedom to man, has done nothing but ask him to learn the use of it in the only way in which it can be learnt, namely, by the method of trial and error. But this explanation will not hold water, for Martineau does not believe that it will ever be possible for man to make a proper use of it. His whole theory of morality rests upon the possibility of man's making an improper use of it. If every man could become an expert in the use of the gift of freedom, then, from Martineau's point of view, there would be no morality, and consequently, the purpose of the gift would disappear. The gift, therefore,

serves its purpose only so long as it is possible to make a wrong use of it.

I do not call in question this view of morality. It is undoubtedly true that morality represents an imperfect stage of man's evolution. It is for this reason that Bradley called it an appearance of a higher reality. There are certain inherent limitations of morality which it can no more get rid of than a leopard can get rid of its spots. These limitations have been differently described by different philosophers. For Bradley the fundamental limitation of morality is that it starts with an impossible problem, namely, to make the ideal real, when the ideal can only remain an ideal so long as it is not real. In other words, the fundamental opposition between the real and the ideal, which is the basis of moral life, constitutes its most serious weakness. Because of this conflict which is inherent in the very nature of morality, Bradley called it an appearance.

But, as I have said above, I do not blame Martineau for holding this view of morality. Where he is wrong, however, is in not admitting that morality itself is imperfect. Paradoxical as it may seem, *morality is not free from evil*. It is not free from evil, because it is a partial view of truth and because it asserts this partial view as if it were a complete truth. In a complete view of truth the ideal and the real will not remain apart, as they do in morality. Martineau however, does not admit this imperfection of morality and seems to treat it as if it were complete in itself.

But where Martineau is most wrong is in his concep-

tion of God and His relation to man. His statement, "Notwithstanding the supreme causality of God, it is rigorously true that only in a very restricted sense can He be held the author of moral evil", does injustice to God as well as to man. It seems to suggest that God's interference with the different types of existence in the universe is inversely proportional to their importance in the scale of being. His interference is greatest in the physical universe; it is least in the case of man. To use a familiar analogy, to the physical universe He has given the status of a dependency, to man He has given Dominion status. Perhaps He does not want to enact any Statute of Westminster at present and give man the power to secede, but there is no doubt that He has conferred Dominion status upon him, and therefore, He can no more be held responsible for the acts of men than the Mother Country can be held responsible for the acts of those parts of the Empire that have attained Dominion status. This view, based upon political analogy, is fundamentally wrong. God's responsibility—I won't call it interference—is equally great in all components of the universe. The political analogy is false, because God's relation to the universe is not an external one, like that of the Mother Country to the different components of the Empire. The different types of existence are not external to God, but they are in God and God is in them, so that the relationship of God to the world is one of complete internality. As the *Gītā* puts it (vii. 7), "मयि सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव" "The whole world is strung upon Me, as gems upon a

string”)

This view also does very great injustice to man. It seems to suggest that God takes very little interest in man's affairs, as he has left him to manage them himself. Human affairs, far from being an object of indifference to God, are rather very dear to Him. It would indeed be a calamity if as the price of freedom, man was denied a close and personal contact with God.

Before I pass on to the next topic, I would like to make clear what I mean by saying that morality is not free from evil. It is not free from evil, firstly, in the sense that it is not a full expression of truth, since it hides a fundamental contradiction within itself, and secondly, because it treats a partial truth as if it were a whole truth. As we shall see presently, it is the self-assertiveness of partial truth that gives rise to evil. Its position, however, in the scale of values is very high. It is a fundamental necessity for the world as it is today. It would be sheer madness to discard it at the present stage of our evolution. It is not only a fundamental requirement of our life at the present moment, but it is through it that we can hope to attain higher stages of our being. Moral life is the best way of getting rid of egoism, that product of ignorance which, as we shall presently see, is the root-cause of all evil. As we ascend higher and higher in the scale of morality, we go on dropping steadily one form of egoism after another. Family life is the first halting-ground in the upward ascent of our moral life. Here we learn our first lesson in self-sacrifice, that is, in discarding our egoism. When we rise from this to corporate

life in the State we get further and further lessons in self-sacrifice. Each step in the ladder means a further step away from egoism. It is true that complete loss of egoism is not possible in morality, because it is not complete in itself. The successive stages in the development of moral life and the gradual manner in which we go on dropping one form of egoism after another, are very beautifully expressed in that well-known couplet in the *Mahābhārata* ((*Ādi Parvan*, Chap. 115, Verse 36) which contains the advice of Vidura and the Brahmins to Dhṛtarāṣṭra at the time of the birth of Duryodhana (which advice, unfortunately, the latter did not accept, with what disastrous results the *Mahābhārata* narrates), the advice being that he should discard that wicked son for the sake of the well-being of the family :

“त्यजेदेकं कुलस्यार्थे ग्रामस्यार्थे कुलं त्यजेत् ।  
ग्रामं जनपदस्यार्थे आत्मार्थे पृथिवीं त्यजेत् ॥”

(“One should sacrifice one (member) for the sake of the family, for the sake of the village the family should be sacrificed, for the sake of the country one should sacrifice the village, and for the sake of the soul, even the whole world is to be sacrificed”).

The successive stages in the process of discarding the ego, which represent successive rungs in the ladder of morality, are very clearly indicated here. They are one-self, one's family, one's village, one's country, and lastly, the world. The last stage depicted in this couplet transcends the stage of moral life, for moral life clings

to the earth ; it is of the earth, earthy. The couplet thus shows, in addition to the successive stages in the ascent of moral life, how moral life itself consummates itself in something higher, for “आत्मार्थे पृथिवीं त्यजेत्” really means : “Give up the whole of this moral life for the sake of the Soul.”

### THE GENERAL PROBLEM OF EVIL : IT IS A PROBLEM RELATING TO ‘HOW’ AND NOT TO ‘WHY’

I now come to our general problem : How does evil originate ? The problem, we must remember, is a problem relating to ‘how’ and not relating to ‘why’. In fact, in a problem like this, the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ are identical. This is the case with all ultimate questions. You may put a ‘why’ to all proximate questions : “Why does night succeed day ?” “Why do the seasons vary ?” “Why is it colder at the North Pole than at the Equator ?”, etc. Such questions we can ask and quite meaningfully ask. But if you go on asking questions like these, you find that you come ultimately to a point where the question turns back upon itself, or rather where the ‘why’ is changed into a ‘how’. It was the fashion at one time to indicate the relation between philosophy and science by saying that the full stops of science are the notes of interrogation of philosophy. This way of stating their relation, however, is only partially correct. For philosophy, in so far as it has to do with the ultimate questions, has to put all its fundamental problems in the form of ‘how’ and not in the form of ‘why’. Readers

of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* are well aware that Kant put his fundamental philosophical question in the form of a 'how' : 'How are synthetic judgements *a priori* possible ?' Vaihinger in his commentary on this famous book of Kant has made it quite clear that this is the only way in which Kant could have put the general problem of philosophy, for a 'why' in this case could have meant nothing but a 'how'.

It can easily be seen that such questions as 'Why did God create the world ?', 'Why did He create evil ?' are really questions relating to 'how' and not relating to 'why'. If you ask, 'Why did God create the world ?', what answer can be given except that He did create it ? The only problem for philosophy, therefore, is to show *how* he did create it. Any 'why' or purpose must be already contained in God and cannot point to anything beyond Him, and consequently, the 'why' reduces itself to a 'how'.

It is true, no doubt, that the Upaniṣads speak of various purposes which God had in creating the world. For example, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6, 2, which starts with 'Being only, my dear, this was in the beginning, one only, without a second,' and goes on, 'It thought, 'May I be many, may I grow forth', 'It sent forth fire', mentions such purposes as becoming many, growing forth, etc. So again in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1. 2. 1, it is said, "In the beginning, there was nothing whatsoever. This world was covered over with death, with hunger, for hunger is death. Then he made up his mind : 'Would that I had a self !,' This passage also refers to a purpose

which God had in creating, namely, the purpose of having a self. So too, *Br. Up.* 1. 2. 4, says : "He desired 'would that a second self of mine were produced !' ". Similarly, *Br.* 7. 2. 6. says : "He desired : 'Let me sacrifice forth with a greater sacrifice !' He exerted himself. He practised austerity". All these passages speak of different purposes, such as having a second self, sacrificing with a greater sacrifice. Many other passages may be quoted from other Upaniṣads which apparently seem to indicate the purposes which God had in creating the world.

But it should be remembered that these references to desire, meditation, etc., do not really show that there was any particular object which God had in creating. It is true that in the passage of the *Chāndogyopaniṣad* quoted above, it is stated that God desired to be Many. But can this really be treated as stating the object of creation ? The One wanted to be Many. By becoming Many, the One did not become what it was not, for the same *Upaniṣad* has made it very clear by such expressions as "सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म", "तत्त्वमसि" that there is no Many which is not One. So the desire to be Many cannot really be called a desire, in the sense in which we generally understand the word in the case of human beings, that is to say, in the sense of hankering after that which one has not got already. In fact, in the case of God there cannot be any desire at all. The *Gītā* explains this very clearly when Lord Kṛṣṇa says (III-22):

न मे पार्थास्ति कर्तव्यं त्रिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन ।

नानवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं वर्त एव च कर्मणि ॥

("O Pārtha ! in all the three worlds there is nothing that I have to accomplish. I have neither anything which is not attained by me nor anything which is to be attained, and yet I remain in action").

The words, 'he desired', 'he deliberated', etc. do not therefore indicate any purpose or object which is to be achieved.

What, in fact, these words mean is that creation is the product of a conscious act of a Conscious Being and not merely the product of an Unconscious *prakṛti*. The celebrated fifth *sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa—"ईक्षतेनशिब्दम्" the arch upon which the whole structure of the Vedānta rests—makes this point very clear. This *sūtra* clarifies the meaning of the previous *sūtras*. For instance, the second *sūtra* "जन्माद्यस्य यत इति" loses all its significance, unless it is understood in the light of this *sūtra*. For what is this 'यतः', what is the 'It' from which the whole world proceeds? Is it a Conscious Being or is it an Unconscious *prakṛti*? Unless this question is solved, merely saying "जन्माद्यस्य यत इति" has no significance. The fifth *sūtra*, therefore, wants to assert absolutely unequivocally that the 'It' understood in the previous *sūtra* is a Conscious Being and is not an Unconscious *pradhāna*. The world is the product of Consciousness, and not the chance play of unconscious forces.

But the object of the *sūtra* is simply to establish this fact of the supreme rôle of Consciousness in creation.

It is not to indicate the presence of any particular desire in the mind of God, it is not to establish any purpose which God had in creating. Any desire on the part of God, any purpose of His which remains unfulfilled and for the sake of which He has to create, is of course out of the question. This is very clear from the interpretation which Śaṅkar gives of this *sūtra*—an interpretation which emphasizes the origin of the world from a Conscious Being, but is silent about the purpose which that Being had in creating. Not only this, but he makes it very clear that the verb 'ईक्ष' in this *sūtra* is not to be understood to mean only this verb, but it must be supposed to include all verbs which have a cognate meaning, that is to say, all verbs which indicate conscious action.<sup>1</sup> Thus he says that the *Muṇḍaka* text "यः सर्वज्ञः" etc." is also to be taken as supporting the meaning of

<sup>1</sup> The text of Śaṅkara's commentary on this *sūtra* is as follows :  
 ईक्षतेरिति च धात्वर्थनिर्देशोऽभिप्रेतो यजतेरिति वत् न धातुनिर्देशः ।  
 तेन यः सर्वज्ञः सर्वविद् यस्य ज्ञानमयं तपस्तस्मादेतद् ब्रह्म नामरूप-  
 मन्नं च जायते इत्येवमादीन्यपि सर्वज्ञेश्वरकारणपराणि वाक्यानि  
 उदाहर्तव्यानि ।

This may be translated as follows :

"By 'seeing' (i.e., the verb 'seeing' exhibited in the *sūtra*) is not meant that particular verb only, but any verb which has a cognate sense; just as the verb 'to sacrifice' is used to denote any kind of offering. Therefore other passages also, whose purport it is to intimate that an all-knowing Lord is the cause of the world, are to be quoted here, as, for instance, Mu. Up. I, 1, 9, "From him who perceives all and who knows all, whose brooding consists of knowledge, from him is born that Brahman, name and form and food" (*Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 48).

this *sūtra*. This leaves no room for doubt that Śaṅkara takes “ईक्ष” in the general sense of the action of a Conscious Being, as opposed to the unconscious action of *pradhāna*, for the *Muṇḍaka* text speaks only of God’s *tapas* as ‘*jñānamaya*’, ‘enlightened by knowledge’, but not in the sense of desire or action with a definite purpose. This is further apparent from the fact that it describes the Creator as *sarvajña* and *sarvavit*, epithets which stress only the possession of knowledge.

I need not labour this point. It is quite clear that God could have no object in creating the world. Creation is a pure *Līlā*, an expression of His spontaneity. Sri Aurobindo has made this very clear. Thus he calls the whole of creation a *Līlā*, “the play, the child’s joy, the poet’s joy, the actor’s joy, the mechanician’s joy of the Soul of things eternally young, perpetually inexhaustible, creating and recreating Himself in Himself for the sheer bliss of that self-creation, of that self-representation—Himself the player, Himself the playground.”<sup>1</sup>

#### AT WHAT STAGE IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE WORLD, DOES EVIL MAKE ITS APPEARANCE ?

The problem of evil, therefore, is : How did evil originate in the world ? , not, Why did God create evil ? But, as we have already seen, this problem reduces itself to this : At what stage in the world’s evolution did evil make its appearance ? , for evil is

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. I, p. 155.

not a permanent feature of the world, but arises under certain conditions and disappears when those conditions vanish. It is only at certain stages in the world's evolution that evil is a feature of it; at other stages it is absent.

The world *qua* world is not evil. Plurality as such is not an evil, nor is movement. The one Consciousness-Force, for example, divides itself into three different forms, called respectively, *māyā*, *prakṛti* and *śakti*, and *Śakti* itself manifests in four different forms, namely, as *Maheśvarī*, *Mahākālī*, *Mahālakṣmī*, and *Mahāsarasvatī*. But none of these forms can be regarded as evil. Mere plurality, therefore, mere division of the One into the Many, cannot be treated as evil. As Sri Aurobindo puts it, "where there is oneness and complete mutuality of consciousness-force even in multiplicity and diversity, there truth of self-knowledge and mutual knowledge is automatic and error of self-ignorance and mutual ignorance is impossible".<sup>1</sup>

So again, he says, "So too where truth exists as a whole on a basis of self-aware oneness, falsehood cannot enter and evil is shut out by the exclusion of wrong consciousness and wrong will and their dynamisation of falsehood and error. As soon as separateness enters, these things also can enter; but even this simultaneity is not inevitable. If there is sufficient mutuality, even in the absence of an active sense of oneness, and if the separate beings do not transgress or deviate from their norms of limited knowledge, harmony and truth can

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, p. 467.

still be sovereign and evil will have no gate of entry".<sup>1</sup>

From these extracts it is clear that "when there is oneness and complete mutuality of consciousness-force", plurality and diversity cannot cause evil. So too, when 'truth exists as a whole on a basis of self-aware oneness,' evil cannot enter. It is only when there is a disturbance of this self-aware oneness, that evil can enter. This happens when the separate divisions in their self-assertiveness offer opposition to the unity of consciousness-force which created the divisions. Separateness alone cannot cause evil, but when separateness is combined with this kind of self-assertiveness, which we may call aggressive self-assertiveness, an *imperium in imperio* is set up, and it is then that we have the beginning of evil. The name which Sri Aurobindo has given to this aggressive self-assertiveness is Egoism.

Such being the origin of evil, it is evident that it cannot arise when evolution is proceeding on the purely material plane. For then in the darkness of Inconscience, there is no self-awareness, still less any self-assertiveness. In order that evil may originate, it is necessary that evolution should reach the vital plane. For it is first here that self-assertiveness develops, and may develop in such a way as to become aggressive. It is then when evolution has reached the vital stage that we can look for the origin of evil.

In order to understand how evil originates at this stage, we have to picture to ourselves the conditions of existence when life just emerges in the course of evolution

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, p. 467.

from matter. Such life finds itself surrounded on all sides by hostile material forces, and in order to maintain itself it is forced to assert itself against these hostile forces. In this way then is developed for the first time that self-assertiveness of life which grows into the aggressive type, which is called egoism. Egoism, therefore, arises out of the necessity which life feels of maintaining itself against hostile nature. With the emergence of a more developed form of consciousness, egoism becomes more strongly entrenched, for to the vital ego there is joined now the mental ego.

This is the normal way in which evil first makes its appearance. But there is also, according to Sri Aurobindo, another way in which evil enters the world. It is through the agency of beings representing forces of darkness who can act in a superphysical manner. "There are forces", says Sri Aurobindo, "and subliminal experience seems to show that there are supra-physical beings embodying those forces, that are attached in their root-nature to ignorance, to darkness of consciousness, to misuse of force, to perversity of delight, to all the causes and consequences of the thing that we call evil. These powers, beings or forces are active to impose their adverse constructions upon terrestrial creatures; eager to maintain their reign in the manifestation, they oppose the increase of light and truth and good and, still more, are antagonistic to the progress of the soul towards a divine consciousness and divine existence. It is this feature of existence that we see figured in the tradition of the conflict between the Powers of Light and Darkness,

Good and Evil, cosmic Harmony and cosmic Anarchy, a tradition universal in ancient myth and in religion and common to all systems of occult knowledge"<sup>1</sup>. This world, in fact, is the world of *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas*, *asuras* and *piśācas*. Belief in such a world is a very, very old one, and is found practically in all ancient religions. There seems also, thinks Sri Aurobindo, no logical objection to the acceptance of such a world unless "we cabin ourselves to the acceptance of material being as the only reality." If mind and life can have conscious being to embody them in physical form to act in a physical world, why should it be impossible for them to form conscious beings who are invisible to us but who can act upon beings in the physical world?

The origin of such a world can be explained in two ways. In the first place, we may treat it as a supra-physical extension of the physical world. Or its origin can be explained "by the coexistence of worlds of a descending involution, with parallel worlds of an ascending evolution, not precisely created by earth-existence, but created as an annexe to the descending world-order and a prepared support for the evolutionary terrestrial formation".<sup>2</sup>

This is perhaps how evil first entered the world, that is to say, as a direct result of the action of these beings, these invisible powers of darkness, upon terrestrial existence. But although these forces of darkness are very powerful, their existence can in no way be said to be a

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, pp. 468-469.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 475.

permanent feature of the universe. Their power may seem indeed to be immeasurable, but this should not lead us to think that evil is something absolute. For as Sri Aurobindo carefully explains, "the immeasurable is not a sign of absoluteness, for the absolute is not in itself a thing of magnitude ; it is beyond measure, not in the sole sense of vastness, but in the freedom of its essential being ; it can manifest itself in the infinitesimal as well as in the infinite".<sup>1</sup>

We thus see that by whichever gate evil may have entered, it cannot stay permanently in the world. It exists only when evolution is at the vital and mental stages, but disappears with the emergence of the higher stages.

### HOW CAN THE WORLD BE FREED FROM EVIL ?

Having shown that evil is only a temporary phase of the evolution of the world and not a permanent feature of it, we have prepared the ground for our final problem : How can the world be freed from evil ?

The solution of this problem is to be sought in a radical transformation of the world and not merely in the dawning of knowledge in individual consciousness. It must be remembered that our problem is a cosmic, and not an individual one. Even if some human beings obtain freedom from evil in their individual lives our problem remains exactly where it was. For what we are contemplating is a radical change in the nature

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. II, pt. I, p. 473.

of the world which will free it completely from the incubus of evil.

But how is this radical change to be effected ? Can it be effected by the slow process of evolution which is going on unceasingly ? No doubt within a certain range the continuous process of evolution, which is going on incessantly, can effect a lasting change. But the range of such a change is very limited ; it does not come to anything like the radical change we need. It has therefore to be supplemented by something else.

This something else is Divine Grace, the descent of the Divine Light in greater and greater intensity and purity. As I have said elsewhere, the world must be hooked on to something higher than itself if it is to be lifted out of its present rut. Grace is the name which we give to this 'something higher than itself', which is the essential condition of the radical change which alone can free the world from evil.

Prof. C.E.M. Joad in his book *God and Evil* sees also in Divine Grace the only solution of the problem of evil. But he puts evil first and then God's grace, as if God's grace only exists for the sake of the removal of evil. This is one of the worst cases of *hysteron proteron* that can be imagined. Evil becomes, in this view, the most fundamental reality and God's grace a subordinate one which is needed for the solution of the problem of evil, thus giving rise to an extreme form of occasionalism. The right view would be to reverse the relative positions of these. It is God's grace that is the ultimate reality, and in the light of this, evil is seen to be only a

temporary phenomenon which comes into being at a certain stage in the world's evolution and disappears when evolution reaches a higher stage.

But if Divine Grace is the sole agency by which the radical change in the nature of the world which will free it from evil can take place, must we conclude that human agency has nothing whatsoever to do in this matter? This would, in fact, be the true conclusion if the descent of Divine Grace did not require as its preliminary condition effort on the part of human beings to make themselves worthy of it. Grace does not descend unless there is an intense aspiration after it on the part of man.

It is necessary to have a clear idea of the relation between human effort and Divine Grace. No effort on the part of human being can force the Divine Grace to descend. Sri Aurobindo has expressed his views on this point in a manner which leaves no room for doubt. "The Mother's power", he says, "and not any human endeavour and *tapasyā* can alone rend the lid and tear the covering and shape the vessel and bring down into this world of obscurity and falsehood and death and suffering Truth and Light and Life divine and the Immortal's *ānanda*.<sup>1</sup> But that the Mother's power may descend and effect the radical change, "there is needed the call from below with a will to recognize and not deny the Light when it comes".

Grace, therefore, means, on the part of those who are to receive it that they are fit for it. Here comes the

<sup>1</sup> *The Mother*, p. 84.

question of yoga. Yoga is the method by which man can make himself fit for the reception of the Divine Light when it chooses to descend. There is, however, a great difference between Sri Aurobindo's conception of fitness and the traditional conception of it. Fitness, in Sri Aurobindo's view, does not mean, as it does in the traditional conception, complete detachment from the body, life and mind. Such detachment, far from making a man fit for the reception of Divine Grace, would rather render him unfit for it. For what is wanted is that he should receive it with the whole of his being. If the Divine Light illumines only a part of his being, then he cannot retain it, and he is bound to relapse into his former condition.

Fitness further means fitness for helping the world to rise to a higher status. Complete detachment from the body, life and mind would therefore render a man wholly unfit, for it would separate him completely from the world. It would, in fact, be an anti-spiritual move for it would be a move towards separation and isolation, while spirituality means just the opposite of this, that is to say, greater solidarity and integrality with the whole universe.

It would, however, be a mistake to look upon grace and self-effort as if they were antithetical to each other. Far from being antithetical, they are really two aspects of the same reality. That reality is the Divine Power descending into the world to make it what it is. Effort on the part of the individual to improve himself, to rise to a higher status of himself, is itself a manifestation

of the Divine Grace. For it is nothing else than an aspiration on the part of the individual after a higher realization of the Spirit than what he has already attained. It is, therefore, a fundamental implication of evolution. If it is true that the individual cannot by his own effort cause the Divine Grace to descend, it is equally true that his own effort to make himself worthy of it is itself due to the operation of the same principle which makes the descent of the Divine Grace inevitable. Therefore, as I have said elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> at each step in the evolutionary process the two things must go together. "There must be an intense craving on the part of the individual for a higher light from the Divine Source, and an actual descent, on the part of that Source, in a higher form. Thus world evolution goes on, rising step by step to higher and higher levels, each step conditioning higher activity on the part of individual beings to improve themselves, to make themselves worthy of receiving higher light, and being itself conditioned by higher and higher forms of Divine Descent, grace meeting self-effort and self-effort continuously being crowned by grace." This is the manner in which Evil disappears from the face of the world.

<sup>1</sup> *The Vedānta Kesari*, May 1944.

## IV

### IS SRI AUROBINDO A MYSTIC ?\*

I propose to discuss in this essay very briefly a question which has often been asked but the meaning of which, unfortunately, has seldom been properly understood. It is often, for instance, taken for granted that Sri Aurobindo is a mystic, for is he not a *yogin*, and what is yoga but a mystic way of approaching truth ? It is conveniently taken for granted that all yogas are essentially the same and that they all signify nothing but a mystic way of realizing truth. It is necessary, therefore, to understand what mysticism is, and what the yoga of Sri Aurobindo truly signifies.

#### WHAT IS MYSTICISM ?

In the article on mysticism in the "Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics" an attempt is made to distinguish between mysticism and the mystic experience, the former term being understood in the sense of a metaphysical doctrine of the soul's possible union with God. "First-hand, or mystical experience", the writer maintains, "is primarily a psychological question ; the doctrine of mysticism is essentially a metaphysical problem". When mysticism becomes a doctrine, then no doubt it becomes a metaphysical problem, but the question is

\* Reprinted from *The Advent*, August 1946.

whether it ever wants to become one.

At least Evelyn Underhill in her classic work on Mysticism does not think it ever can become a doctrine. "Mysticism", she declares in unequivocal terms, "is the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else, and the mystic is the person who attains to this union, not the person who talks about it. Not to *know about*, but to *Be*, is the mark of the real practitioner."<sup>1</sup> In another place she says, "To the great mystic the 'problem of the Absolute' presents itself in terms of life, not in terms of dialectic. He solves it in terms of life : by a change or growth of consciousness which—thanks to his peculiar genius—enables him to apprehend that twofold vision of Reality which eludes the perceptible powers of other men."<sup>2</sup> She further says, "Mysticism, then, is not an opinion : it is not a philosophy....It is the name of that organic process which involves the perfect consummation of the Love of God : the achievement here and now of the immortal heritage of man. Or, if you like it better—for this means exactly the same thing—it is the art of establishing his conscious relation with the Absolute."<sup>3</sup> She calls it "a certain type of mind" that has "always discerned the strait and narrow ways of going out towards the Absolute". "In religion, in pain, in beauty, and the ecstasy of artistic satisfaction—and not only in these, but in many other useless peculiarities of the empirical world and of

<sup>1</sup> *Mysticism*, 8th edition, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 97.

the perceiving consciousness—these persons insist that they recognize at any rate the fringe of the real. Down these three paths, as well as by many another secret way, they claim that news comes to the self concerning levels of reality which in their wholeness are inaccessible to the senses : worlds wondrous and immortal, whose existence is not conditioned by the ‘given’ world which those senses report.”<sup>1</sup>

What, however, is the method of mysticism ? Evelyn Underhill answers in one word : Love, “the business and method of Mysticism is Love”. This she explains as follows: “Having said this, however, we must add—as we did when speaking of the ‘heart’—that the word Love as applied to the mystics is to be understood in its deepest, fullest sense ; as the ultimate expression of the self’s most vital tendencies, not as the superficial affection or emotion often dignified by the name. Mystic Love is the offspring of the Celestial Venus ; the deep-seated desire and tendency of the soul towards its source. It is a condition of humble access, a life-movement of the self : more direct in its methods, more valid in its results—even in the hands of the least lettered of its adepts—than the most piercing intellectual vision of the greatest philosophic mind.”<sup>2</sup> In support of this statement, she quotes a beautiful passage from ‘An Epistle of Discretion’ in which the author (probably the same as the author of “The Cloud of Unknowing”, she thinks) says, “For silence is not God, nor speaking is not God ;

<sup>1</sup> *Mysticism*, 8th edition, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 101.

fasting is not God nor eating is not God; loneliness is not God, nor company is not God; nor yet any of all the other two such quantities. He is hid between them, and may not be found by any work of thy soul, but all only by love of thine heart. He may not be known by reason, He may not be gotten by thought, nor concluded by understanding; but He may be loved and chosen with the true lovely will of thine heart....Such a blind shot with the sharp dart of longing love may never fail of the prick, that which is God.”<sup>1</sup>

From these extracts two things stand out clearly; first, that mysticism, as Underhill understands it, relates to an experience which is intimately personal, and secondly, that it is not a reasoned or intellectual or dialectical approach to its object. This latter point she stresses so far as to say that mysticism is not concerned with knowing but with being: “Not to know about, but to Be, is the mark of the real practitioner.”<sup>2</sup> Here we find the chief weakness of mysticism—its separation of knowing from being. What is that being which is not knowing and what is that knowing which does not end in being? Moreover, knowledge is one whole. How can the rational part of it be completely separated from the intuitive part? If we examine her statements, we shall find that Evelyn Underhill herself is in difficulty here, for she calls mysticism the “science of union with the Absolute”. But how can there be science without knowledge? Moreover, how can there be science if the rational

<sup>1</sup> *Mysticism*, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 101-102.

element is completely eliminated ? Unless, therefore, we are prepared to accept the position that "the only final thing is personal experience—the personal exploration of the exalted and truth-loving soul"—we cannot say that a union with the Absolute, which is no knowledge but is only being, and which has no rational element in it but is purely intuitive, is final.

### SRI AUROBINDO'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS MYSTICISM

In the essay on *Sri Aurobindo and Bergson* I have fully discussed Sri Aurobindo's attitude towards intuition, and what I have said there applies to the position of the mystic, as set forth by Evelyn Underhill, for whom the only final thing is personal experience. As I have pointed out there, Sri Aurobindo has not much faith in intuitions *as we ordinarily have them*, for in the first place, they are flashy, and secondly, they contain a good deal of mental stuff. I lay stress upon the words "as we ordinarily have them", for the highest types of consciousness are also intuitive. The mere fact, therefore, that a certain consciousness is intuitive does not entitle it to be regarded as a revelation of the ultimate truth. There are various grades of consciousness which are all intuitive, but they have not all got the same value. For instance, all the grades of consciousness from the illumined mind to the supermind are intuitive but there is a vast difference in their respective values. The mystical experience, therefore, *qua* mystical, is not a very safe guide to follow in our quest for the ultimate truth and

for the complete union with Godhead which results from it.

The mystic method, therefore, fails in its object. The means it employs is not adequate to the end it has in view. So far as its end is concerned, namely, union with the Divine, there can be no question of its value. The only question is whether the means it employs can lead to this end. And Sri Aurobindo's answer is : No.

The reasons for the failure of the mystic method are many. But from Sri Aurobindo's standpoint they may be all put down to one thing, namely, failure to understand the nature of Yoga. How this is so, we shall now explain.

### SRI AUROBINDO'S CONCEPTION OF YOGA

In his great work *Synthesis of Yoga* Sri Aurobindo has given us an exhaustive account of the meaning and function of yoga.

The fundamental idea of this book is that yoga is the name of the process by which the Divine Śakti, after involving Itself in the world, returns to Itself. It is therefore the inner side of what, looked at from the side of its outward expression, we call evolution. If evolution is the march of the world from a lower to a higher status, yoga is the inner spring of this evolution. For at the root of the whole process of evolution, as Sri Aurobindo has fully explained in *The Life Divine*, lies the activity of the Divine Śakti. This activity consists in the return of that Śakti to Itself. It is the counterpart of the activity which is called creation or involution. Self-projection of the

Divine Śakti outwards requires as its necessary complement the return of the Śakti unto Itself. Yoga is the name for this return movement of the Divine Śakti.

It is clear from this that yoga is primarily and essentially the name of a Divine activity. Its use as a term indicating an activity of the human being is derivative and secondary. But its derivative and secondary sense must be in conformity with its original sense. In other words, yoga, when applied to individual activity, must mean an activity which is in consonance with the Divine activity. Now the individual can only be in complete consonance with the Divine when he surrenders himself to the latter. Yoga, therefore, in the sense of the yoga of the individual human being, means complete surrender to the Divine.

In this surrender lies the perfection of the individual. Yoga may therefore be said to be the way to individual perfection. This is how yoga is ordinarily understood. And it is supposed that this perfection is obtained by an individual effort. There is no harm in conceiving yoga in this way, provided we clearly remember that at the root of this individual lies the Divine activity, or rather that the individual activity is the channel through which flows the Divine activity.

But the channel for the flow of the Divine activity is not only the individual but also the universe. Yoga, therefore, is both individual and cosmic. We may say that Nature herself is performing yoga, just as we say that the individual is performing yoga. If we speak of the individual yoga, we must speak also of the cosmic

yoga. It will not do to indicate only the one and ignore the other.

It is here that mysticism errs. It speaks exclusively of the individual yoga and is quite silent about the cosmic yoga. It forgets that if the one is recognized, it is equally necessary to recognize the other. Not only so, but the one is linked with the other. But this is another of Sri Aurobindo's ideas concerning yoga, and we must now explain it.

### INTEGRAL YOGA

This idea, in fact, is that of integral yoga, as Sri Aurobindo calls it. It is the same as that which he has explained in great detail in *The Life Divine* in connection with his theory of evolution. And it cannot but be so, for yoga is nothing but evolution viewed from the inner side. Just as evolution means not only ascent from one stage to another, but the integration of the higher stage with the lower, so that when the higher stage is reached, the lower stage is not annulled but transformed so also yoga means not merely ascent from a lower to a higher consciousness, but an integration of the higher with the lower consciousness causing a transformation of the latter. It is here, on earth, in this life, in the body, that yoga is to be realized. Of course, when it is completely realized, this earth, this life, this body, will not remain what they are now, but they will be transformed and transmuted. Still they will be there, and there can be no talk of their annulment or destruction.

Sri Aurobindo makes this very clear in his *Synthesis of Yoga*. For instance, he says, "The Divine that we adore is not only a remote extracosmic Reality, but a half-veiled Manifestation, present and near to us here in the universe. Life is the field of a Divine manifestation not yet complete ; here, in life, on earth, in the body, *ihaiva*,—as the Upaniṣads insist—we have to unveil the Godhead; here we must make its transcendent greatness, light and sweetness real to our consciousness, here possess and, as far as may be, express it. Life then we must accept in our Yoga in order utterly to transmute it ; we are forbidden to shrink from the difficulties that this acceptance may add to our struggle."<sup>1</sup>

Yoga, therefore, means the integration of our whole personality, and not merely a part of it, such as our vital or mental consciousness. But secondly, it means the integration of ourselves with the world, the realization of our solidarity with the whole universe. This aspect of yoga also is stressed by Sri Aurobindo. Thus he says "It (Divine Shakti) achieves the cosmic consciousness and extends itself to be commensurate with the universe."<sup>2</sup>

Further, yoga means the integration of our surface-consciousness with the subliminal consciousness, the removal of the veil which hides our inner being, our *caitya puruṣa*, as Sri Aurobindo calls it, and letting its light flood the whole of our surface being, life, mind and matter, for this *caitya puruṣa* "is an ever-pure flame

<sup>1</sup> *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 165.

of the divinity of things, and nothing that comes to it, nothing that enters into our experience can pollute its purity or extinguish the flame."

This idea of integration is wanting in mysticism. It tries to jump straight to the heart of the Divine, it believes in the 'flight of the Alone to the Alone.' For it both the soul and God are alone. The soul has no real contact with the body, no contact with other souls, no contact with the world. Its sole endeavour is to fly away from the body, fly away from other souls, fly away from the world. It is by remaining completely isolated that it thinks of having union with God. This union it does not want to share with anything else, neither with the body, nor with other souls, nor with the world. Union becomes a sort of possession. It is altogether a monopolistic idea. The mystic, in fact, wants to have a monopoly of God. In this way he revives that very egoism which it was always his endeavour to overcome. Mysticism thus suffers shipwreck at the very start.

#### A FAMOUS STATEMENT

All that we have said about Sri Aurobindo's yoga is contained in a famous statement which occurs in his book, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, already referred to: "All yoga is in its nature a new birth; it is a birth out of the ordinary, the mentalized material life of man into a higher spiritual consciousness and a greater and diviner being."<sup>1</sup> This statement we can look upon as con-

<sup>1</sup> *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 21.

taining the essence of Sri Aurobindo's conception of yoga, as, in fact, *the* text of integral yoga. The first thing which it asserts is that yoga is a birth. It is not a dissolution, nor an absorption, nor a swooning away into the Divine, but it is a birth. That is to say, the human being retains his character as a human being, which means as a being with a body, life, soul and mind, and having a part to play in a world composed of other beings and a physical universe. Yoga does not etherealize or sublimates him, but preserves him as a human being. But if it is a birth, it is a new birth, a new life, different from the life which we human beings ordinarily live, which Sri Aurobindo calls "a mentalised material life."

What is the characteristic of the new birth ? Its characteristic is that it is a birth into a greater and more Divine existence, not a birth into an existence dominated by the mind. In this new birth, the body will be there, life will be there, the soul will be there, the mind will be there, but they will be there in a transformed and transmuted condition, for they will no longer be under the dominion of the mind but under that of a more divine principle. Birth, therefore, is nothing contemptible, provided it is into an existence ruled by a truly divine principle. The Divine Avatāra Himself takes birth, and by taking birth proves not only the Divinity of birth, but also the Divinity of man, for, as Sri Aurobindo has beautifully shown in his *Essays on the Gita*, the birth of the Avatāra in a human form means the rebirth of man into the Godhead. That birth, far from indicating any fall from Divinity, is on the contrary, the highest

form of Divine existence, is also the central idea of that famous verse of the *Īsopaniṣad* the meaning of which had been a puzzle until Sri Aurobindo discovered it and announced it in his famous book on this Upaniṣad. The verse is verse 14 and runs as follows :

“सम्भूतिञ्च विनाशञ्च यस्तद्वेदोभयं सह ।  
विनाशेन मृत्युं तीर्त्वा सम्भूत्याऽमृतमश्नुते ॥”

This is translated by Sri Aurobindo as follows : “He who knows That as both in one, the Birth and the dissolution of Birth, by the dissolution crosses beyond death and by the Birth enjoys Immortality”. And the meaning of this verse he has explained in the following way :

“The self is uniform and undying and in itself always possesses immortality. It does not need to descend into *avidyā* and Birth to get that immortality of Non-birth ; for it possesses it always. It descends in order to realize and possess it as the individual Brahman in the play of world-existence. It accepts Birth and Death, assumes the ego and then dissolving the ego by the recovery of unity realises itself as the Lord, the One, and Birth as only a becoming of the Lord in mental and formal being; this becoming is now governed by the true sight of the Seer, and once this is done, becoming is no longer inconsistent with Being, birth becomes a means and not an obstacle to the enjoyment of immortality by the lord of this formal habitation. This is our proper course and not to remain for ever in the chain of birth

and death, nor to flee into a pure non-being. The bondage does not consist in the physical act of becoming, but in the persistence of the ignorant sense of the separate ego. The mind creates the chain and not the body".<sup>1</sup>

The mystic, however, wants to flee from birth as if it was something unholy.

### THE CONCEPTION OF THE DIVINE YOGA IN THE BHAGAVADGITA

This idea of Sri Aurobindo's, of a Divine yoga, of which the individual and cosmic yogas are but different aspects, is also found in the *Bhagavadgītā*. The yoga of which the *Gītā* speaks is primarily and essentially the Divine yoga. This is quite clear from what Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the fourth chapter of the *Gītā*. In verse 9 He definitely speaks of His own birth and works as divine. In verse 6 He removes one great obstacle to the understanding of His Divine yoga by saying that His descent into the world does not mean any crippling of his Divinity. The next two verses which state the reason for His descent make it clear that this descent is not for any benefit to Himself but solely for the benefit of the world.<sup>2</sup> This is

<sup>1</sup> *Isha Upanishad*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>2</sup> In *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* the reason for the Divine Descent is said to be something incomprehensible to the human understanding, as appears from the following verse which occurs in Kuntī's prayer :

“न वेद कश्चिद्भगवन्श्चिकीर्षितं तवेहमानस्य नृणां विडम्बनम् ।

न यस्य कश्चिद्दयितोऽस्ति कर्हिचिद् द्वेष्यश्च यस्मिन् विषमा  
मतिर्नृणाम् ॥” १।८।२९

made still more clear in verse 14. The eternal character of yoga is proclaimed in the first verse, where it is called imperishable (*avyaya*). Naturally, Arjuna with his limited vision cannot grasp this, and therefore he has to be told in verse 5 that the Lord's descent is an eternal process, not limited to the present descent which is all that he has any knowledge of.

Individual yoga is definitely treated as a deduction from the principles of the Divine yoga. This is done in verses 14 and 15. The former verse gives the characteristic of the Divine yoga : न मे कर्मफले स्पृहा ("I have no desire for the fruit of action.") The consequence of this is : न मां कर्माणि लिम्पन्ति ("Actions do not affect me"). Human yoga must also follow the same principle if it is to be yoga. This is indicated by the particle '*evam*' in verse 15 : एवं ज्ञात्वा कृतं कर्म पूर्वैरपि मुमुक्षुभिः ("Knowing this, our forefathers, ever seeking salvation, performed actions"). That is to say, our forefathers performed actions, knowing from the Divine example that if they are performed without desire, they do not cause any bondage. This, then, is the characteristic of all yoga : it is absolutely disinterested, that is, free from all taint of desire for personal benefit. The followers of the path of the Vedas (*vedavādaratāḥ*) are very strongly condemned in the second chapter, because their actions are tainted by desire for personal advancement, and therefore do not come up to the level of yoga.

But it is not a mere negative teaching that the *Gītā* wants to propound here. It is not merely the dropping out of desires that is enjoined, but, the *Gītā*'s teaching is

eminently positive. It is to elevate the individual man to the level of the Divine man, to heighten and enlarge him till the barriers that separate him from God are removed. Sri Aurobindo lays very great stress upon this. "The rule given by the Gītā", he says, "is the rule for the master man, the superman, the divinised human being, the Best, not in the sense of any Nietzschean, any one-sided and lop-sided, any Olympic, Apollonian or Dionysian, any angelic or demoniac supermanhood, but in that of the man whose personality has been offered up into the being, nature and consciousness of the one transcendent and universal Divinity and by loss of the smaller self has found its greater self, has been divinised."<sup>1</sup>

The Divine yoga is the exemplar of the human yoga. It sets the standard which the latter is to follow. The latter, in fact, has value so far as it approximates to it. Sri Aurobindo makes this point very clear. He says, "In order to indicate more perfectly his meaning, the divine Teacher, the Avatāra gives his own example his own standard to Arjuna. 'I abide in the path of action', he seems to say, 'the path that all men follow ; thou too must abide in action. In the way I act, in that way thou too must act. I am above the necessity of works, for I have nothing to gain by them ; I am the Divine Who possess all things and all beings in the world and I am myself beyond the world as well as in it and I do not depend upon anything or anyone in all the three worlds for any object ; yet I act. This too must

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on the Gita*, First Series, p. 200.

be thy manner and spirit of working. I, the Divine, am the rule and the standard ; it is I who make the path in which men tread ; I am the way and the goal. But I do this largely, universally, visibly in part, but far more invisibly ; and men do not really know the way of my workings. Thou, when thou knowest and seest, when thou hast become the divinised man, must be the individual power of God, the human yet divine example, even as I am in my *avatāras*.'"<sup>1</sup>

We may say, in passing, that the conception of the Divine yoga applies only to God conceived as *puruṣottama* and not to God regarded only as the *aṁśara*. The Divine nature, Sri Aurobindo makes clear, "is not entirely and solely that of the *aṁśara*, the immobile, inactive, impersonal self ; for that by itself would lead the liberated man to actionless immobility. It is not characteristically that of the *aṁśara*, the multitudinous, the personal, the *puruṣa* self-subjected to *prakṛti* ; for that by itself would lead him back into subjection to his personality and to the lower nature and its qualities. It is the nature of the *puruṣottama* who holds both these together and by his supreme divinity reconciles them in a divine reconciliation which is the highest secret of his being, *rahasyam hyetad uttamam*".<sup>2</sup>

From what we have said above of the *Gītā's* conception of yoga, it will be evident that Sri Aurobindo is true to it, though he deviates considerably from our traditional conception of yoga, which is a growth of

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on the Gita*, First Series, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p 204.

later years and which is highly individualistic.

### SRI AUROBINDO AND PLOTINUS

Before we conclude, we wish to compare Sri Aurobindo's position with that of Plotinus, for Plotinus may be regarded as having set the standard for Western mysticism not only of the Middle Ages, but also of modern times.

The mysticism of Plotinus is quietistic and individualistic. In fact, Dean Inge, emphatically declares the mysticism of Plotinus and his Christian imitators to be "false Platonism and false mysticism."<sup>1</sup> Plotinus looks upon action as a shadow of contemplation suited only to weak-minded people. This view leads, as Dean Inge sarcastically puts it, "to the heartless doctrine, quite unworthy of the man, that public calamities are to the wise man only stage tragedies—or even stage comedies."<sup>2</sup> Its conception of ecstasy is based upon the idea of complete annihilation of the lower consciousness, thereby making it impossible for the mystic to maintain any relations with the world. Dean Inge, quoting from the *Enneads*, gives the following description of ecstasy : "The soul, when possessed by intense love of Him, divests herself of all form which she has, even of that which is derived from Intelligence ; for it is impossible, when in conscious possession of any other attribute, either to behold or to be harmonised with him. Thus

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Mysticism*, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

the soul must be neither good nor bad nor aught else, that she may receive Him only, Him alone, she alone.”<sup>1</sup> Whittaker, in describing Plotinus’ conception of the vision of the One, speaks also in similar terms : “The one is an object of apprehension not by knowledge, like other intelligibles, but by a presence which is more than knowledge. If we are to apprehend it, we must depart in no way from being one, but must stand away from knowledge and knowables, with their still remaining plurality. That which is the object of the vision is apart from no one, but is of all : yet so as being present not to be present except to those that are able and have prepared themselves to see it. As was said of matter, that it must be without the qualities of all things if it is to receive the impressions of all, so and much more so the soul must become unformed, if it is to contain nothing to hinder its being filled and shone upon by the first nature. The vision is properly no vision, for the seer no longer distinguishes himself from that which is seen—if indeed we are to speak of them as two and not as one—but, as it were, having become another and not himself, is one with that other as the centre of the soul touching the centre of all. While here, the soul cannot retain the vision, but it can retreat to it in alternation with the life of knowledge and virtue which is the preparation for it. ‘And this is the life of gods and of godlike and happy men, a deliverance from the other things here, a life untroubled

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Mysticism*, p. 97.

by the pleasures here, a flight of the alone to the alone'. ”<sup>1</sup>

“The flight of the alone to the alone”. These are the concluding words of the *Enneads* in Porphyry’s redaction. These also express very pithily the nature of Plotinus’ ecstasy. It is the complete denuding of the individual of everything that belongs to the individual, even the consciousness itself. It corresponds to the *nirbīja asamprajñāta-samādhi* of Patañjali. It is a state where consciousness itself vanishes. What meaning we are to attach to it, is of course another question. But there is no doubt that Plotinus, like Patañjali, very emphatically asserts this as the highest state.

Here we see the abstractionism or isolationism, which throughout characterizes Plotinus’ mysticism, reaching its climax. Not only by removing himself from the world, but also by removing himself from his consciousness, can the individual reach the highest state. The contrast here with the position of Sri Aurobindo is very striking. It is not by removing himself from his body, mind and even his consciousness, that the individual, in Sri Aurobindo’s view can reach the highest state, but it is by the fullest development of the body, mind and consciousness—a development in which their nature will undergo a complete transformation—that he can hope to attain this state. Moreover, it is not by removing himself from the world, but it is by carrying the world with him, that he can attain his goal. It is only in an enlightened and ennobled world that the highest type of individual can dwell. The divinized man is a citizen of a divinized

<sup>1</sup> *The Neo-Platonists*, p. 103.

world. If the world gropes in darkness, it is idle to expect the God-Man to emerge.

"To be in itself alone, however, and not in being, is to be a God."<sup>1</sup> Thus Plotinus describes the condition of being one with God. Sri Aurobindo also conceives God to be above Being. But this does not mean for him that God is in Himself alone. For He is above Being precisely because He is not in Himself alone. To conceive God as being in Himself alone is to take a limited view of Him. It is to mistake one poise of Him for His whole essence. This 'being in Himself' is only God in His self-absorption, what Sri Aurobindo has expressed by the very significant word *tapas*.

#### MYSTICISM MUST GIVE UP ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL ARISTOCRACY IN FAVOUR OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL DEMOCRACY

But the most striking difference between Plotinus and Christian mystics on the one hand, and Sri Aurobindo on the other, is that while the former always look upon the mystic consciousness as something out of the ordinary, as something that by its very nature will for ever remain different from the normal waking consciousness, Sri Aurobindo looks upon the difference between the two as a characteristic of the lower stages of evolution only. In the highest stage of evolution, when the Superman will emerge with Supernature, the difference between the mystic consciousness and the normal consciousness

<sup>1</sup> *Select Works of Plotinus*, edited by T. Taylor (Bohn's Philosophical Library), p. 322.

will disappear, for the normal consciousness will itself become the consciousness of complete union with God. At that stage, therefore, when complete union with God is realized, we shall have to transcend mysticism. We may therefore say that mysticism can only attain its goal by committing suicide. It is not by keeping the higher consciousness a close preserve of the select few that complete union with God can be realized, but by elevating mankind so that this higher consciousness may become its normal consciousness. The mystic outlook, consequently, which believes in keeping perpetually a gap between the mystic and the normal consciousness, will have to be transcended. The mystic, in fact, is a psychological aristocrat. He will have to give up his psychological aristocracy and accept a democratic psychological outlook. The goal of evolution is not to make union with God accessible to only a fortunate few, but to make it the common possession of all.

## V

### SRI AUROBINDO AND PLOTINUS\*

THE present essay is virtually a continuation of the previous one and I have to repeat here therefore some of the ideas that have found a place there, though from a slightly different point of view. But I will not confine myself to those topics which I have discussed in that essay, for mysticism is only one of the many strands which are found in the system of Plotinus.

There can be no denying, however, that mysticism *does* form one of the main features of his system, and I shall therefore have to start with this in my present study also, though, as I have already said, from a slightly different point of view, for my object is not to deal with mysticism *qua* mysticism, but only with its relation to philosophy.

#### PHILOSOPHY AND MYSTICISM

I start then with the relation between philosophy and mysticism, as viewed respectively by Plotinus and Sri Aurobindo. Here, however, there is an initial difficulty, for the term mysticism has been defined by different thinkers in different ways. Miss Evelyn Underhill, for example, whose views I have quoted in the previous essay, will not admit any connection between mysticism and

\* Reprinted from The Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual, 1947.

philosophy. "Mysticism is not an opinion, it is not a philosophy"—so runs her clear verdict. On the other hand, Dean Inge, who has written a classical work on the philosophy of Plotinus, is equally emphatic in declaring that mysticism is nothing but spiritual philosophy. I shall try to steer a middle course between these extreme views. Especially, I shall try to show from these extreme statements themselves how a middle view emerges, which, in fact, lies hidden behind them.

It is quite clear that if Miss Evelyn Underhill's view of mysticism is to be accepted, then it cannot be applied to the system of Plotinus. For if we look at the contents of the *Enneads*, we shall find that it is only in the last book, which deals with the Good or the One, that the guidance of philosophy is dropped and recourse is had to a kind of "vision" which alone is considered competent to lead us to our goal. But even the necessity for this is established philosophically, by showing the inadequacy of other ways of approaching the highest truth. The entire structure of the *Enneads* is philosophical, as will be evident from the table of contents given in T. Taylor's *Select Works of Plotinus*.<sup>1</sup> The topics discussed are all philosophical, and the method employed is throughout that of reason or logic. But in spite of this, the system of Plotinus has always been looked upon—and not without

<sup>1</sup> I am sorry the excellent translation of the whole of the *Enneads* by Stephen McKenna was not available to me at the time of writing this essay. All the quotations that I have made from the *Enneads* are therefore from Taylor's translation of selections from the *Enneads*, published under the title *Select Works of Plotinus* (Bohn's Philosophical Library, 2nd edn.)

justice—as mystical. And why? The reason is to be found in the object or purpose of the whole book. That purpose is what we find clearly stated in the last portion, and which is nothing else than the realization in individual life of the Good or the One. The philosophical structure is of value as the indispensable means to this realization. Or rather, as I shall presently explain, it has value as a scaffolding, for it has no direct connection with the realization and is to be discarded before the realization can emerge. Nevertheless philosophy is given an honoured place in his system, and it cannot certainly be said of him that he has any contempt for philosophy. There is no doubt that what Plotinus cares for is truth and not a mere experience, and in the realization of truth employs philosophy, so far as in his opinion philosophy can be usefully employed for this purpose. Dean Inge, therefore, is right when, taking his stand upon the system of Plotinus, he says,<sup>1</sup> “There are some students of mysticism who are content to investigate the subject as a branch of psychology. They examine and tabulate the states of mind described in mystical writings without raising the question what degree of intrinsic value or truth they possess. This is the right attitude for a scientific psychologist to take. But it is not the right attitude for one who wishes to understand the mystics. We cannot understand them as long as we confine ourselves within the limits which psychology, which is an abstract science, is obliged to accept”. But he certainly goes too far in his identification of mysticism with philosophy when he

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol. I p.4.

says, "Mysticism is a spiritual philosophy which demands the concurrent activity of thought, will and feeling." At any rate the system of Plotinus does not lend support to this statement. For it will not do to brush aside the fundamental difference between mysticism and philosophy, that unlike the former, the latter is not concerned with the question whether the truths it speaks of are actually realized by any individual in his life. Its approach to truth is always characterized by impersonality and objectivity. But for mysticism the personal realization of truth is the one thing that matters. This is why Miss Underhill says, "Not to *know about*, but to *Be*, is the mark of the real practitioner"—a statement which, though philosophically indefensible, yet marks the difference in the respective attitudes of philosophy and mysticism towards truth. Dean Inge himself unconsciously acknowledges this difference in their respective attitudes when he says<sup>1</sup> "It (mysticism) holds that only by the consecration of these faculties (thought, will and feeling) in the service of the same quest can a man become effectively what he is potentially, a partaker of the Divine nature and a denizen of the spiritual world." Surely it is no part of the task of philosophy to *make* any man "a partaker of the Divine nature and denizen of the spiritual world." So again, in another passage he says, "Mysticism has indeed been defined as 'an extension of the mind to God by means of the longing of love'; and there is nothing to quarrel with in this definition." But such an extension of the mind by the longing of love, no

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophy of Plotinus*, p. 5.

matter how important it may be for the mystic's realization, is something with which philosophy has no concern.

Whittaker in his book *The Neo Platonists* has indicated clearly this side of Plotinus' system, while admitting the general philosophical structure of it. For Whittaker the importance of philosophy for Plotinus is that it is the necessary preliminary discipline, the initial training that has to be gone through before the mystic's objective, namely, God-realization, can be attained. Thus, after showing that, like Spinoza, Plotinus also has indicated three grades of knowledge, he points out a difference. The difference is "that Plotinus conceives the highest kind of knowledge not as mathematical in form but as 'dialectical'. He next explains what Plotinus means by 'dialectic'. "By 'dialectic' he means, not a merely formal method, a mere 'organon', but a method of which the use, when once attained, gives along with the form of thought its content, which is true being. Before the learner can reach this stage, he must be disciplined in the other branches of liberal science. As with Plato, "dialectic is the crown of a philosophical education".<sup>1</sup> "But this is not all. The mystic has to proceed beyond dialectic, for his object is not to know but to "see", and "see", not with ordinary eyes, but with "the eyes of the soul". Now this sort of approach, Whittaker contends cannot be called a cognitive one. So, for Plotinus, at the final stage of the mystic's realization, even knowledge has to be transcended. Mind, therefore, if it is to arrive at this condition, will have to give up thinking and

<sup>1</sup> Whittaker *The Neo-Platonists* p. 101.

become completely passive. Thus, in a passage in the chapter *On the Good or the One* in the sixth book of the *Enneads*, while describing how the soul can fix itself in God, Plotinus says, "...it is not possible for the soul to perceive God, while it retains the impression of something else, and energises according to that impression. Nor, again, is it possible for the soul while occupied and detained by other things to be impressed with the form of something contrary to them. But as it is said of matter, that it ought to be void of all qualities, in order that it may receive the impressions of all things ; thus also, and in a much greater degree, it is necessary that the soul should become formless, in order that it may receive the impressions of all things. If, however, this be the case, it is requisite that the soul, dismissing all externals, should be entirely converted to its inmost recesses, and should not be called to anything external, but should be unintellective of all things..."<sup>1</sup> This condition, which is not a condition of knowledge and yet not one of ignorance, is the condition of the Absolute or the One, as Plotinus very explicitly states in the following passage : "Nor does the One possess intelligence, lest it should also possess difference ; nor motion. For it is prior to motion, and prior to intelligence. For what is there which it will intellectually perceive ? Shall we say itself ? Prior to intellection, therefore, it will be ignorant, and will be in want of intelligence in order that it may know itself, though it is sufficient to itself.

<sup>1</sup> *Select Works of Plotinus* (Bohn's Philosophical Library, 2nd edn.), p. 313.

It does not follow, however that because the One does not know itself, and does not intellectually perceive itself, there will be ignorance in it. For ignorance takes place when there is diversity, and when one thing is ignorant of another. That, however, which is *alone* neither knows anything, nor has anything of which it is ignorant".<sup>1</sup> This position, however, that the final stage of the mystic is one which is above cognition is not a new one for Indian philosophy, for the highest condition, as described in the *Yoga sūtras* of Patañjali, the condition of *nirbīja-asamprajñāta-samādhi*, is precisely this condition.

It is, however, opposed to the theory of foundational consciousness and to that theory's view of philosophy. For this theory a reality that is not conscious is absolutely unmeaning. I cannot do better than quote here from Prof. A. C. Mukherjee's book *The Nature of Self* which gives a very good exposition of the general standpoint of this theory: "In the foundational consciousness or the transcendental self...there can be no distinction between existence and knowledge; it is not only the presupposition of all distinctions, as Haldane rightly emphasizes, but it is equally the ground of the distinction we ordinarily make between knowing and being, or between an object and the knowledge of the object. This peculiar character of consciousness may be called its *absolute immediacy*; here, to know is to be, and to exist is to be known. This absolute immediacy of con-

<sup>1</sup> *Select Works of Plotinus* (Bohn's Philosophical Library, 2nd edn.,) p. 312.

sciousness is signified by the *advaita* thinkers when they describe the self as *aparokṣa* and *svaprakāśa*.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo not only emphasizes with the theory of foundational consciousness that all reality is consciousness, but he goes further and says that the measure of reality of anything is determined by the nature of consciousness that is revealed in it. The higher the position of anything in the scale of reality, the deeper and more unified is the consciousness that is revealed in it. His conclusion, therefore, is just the reverse of that of the Plotinus. The Absolute, far from being characterised by the total absence of consciousness, is, on the contrary, the Highest Consciousness. And the individual, if he is to attain union with the Absolute, must possess the broadest, deepest and most unified consciousness. Far from being a characteristic of a high soul, unconsciousness is the characteristic of being in the lowest stage of evolution. In fact, it is the characteristic of Matter in its grossest form. Evolution is from unconsciousness or nescience to Knowledge. The measure of perfection attained by any being at any stage of evolution is determined by the measure of success it has attained in conquering nescience and advancing towards knowledge. In fact, Plotinus, in advocating the shedding of all consciousness, is unconsciously preaching a return to the condition of gross Matter.

It is a consequence of his view just noted, namely, that it is only by shedding everything, even his consciousness, that the individual can attain union with

<sup>1</sup> A.C.Mukherjee : *The Nature of Self*, 2nd edn., pp. 251-52.

God, that Plotinus speaks of the highest condition as a "flight of the Alone to the Alone". For Sri Aurobindo it is just the opposite of this. In the first place, it is not a flight at all. The individual need not leave the world to attain salvation. Salvation, as our sages have said, is here and now. *Atra brahma samaśnute*. Secondly, it is not a process of shedding or dropping, but it is just the opposite of it, a process of gathering or acquiring. It is not by shedding all, but by gathering all and transmuting all, that the individual can become one with the All. It is further not by remaining alone, but by being in company with all, that he can attain this condition. Sri Aurobindo has expressed this very beautifully in a passage of his book *The Life Divine*. Thus, speaking of the Gnostic Being or the Superman who has evolved from ignorance into knowledge, he says, "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. In all workings of his force of Nature he would be aware of the workings of the Supreme World-Mother, the Supernature ; he would see his natural being as the becoming and manifestation of the power of the World-Mother. In this consciousness he would live and act in an entire transcendent freedom, a complete joy of the spirit, an entire identity with the cosmic self and a spontaneous sympathy with all in the universe. 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. . . . His own life and the world life would be to him like a perfect work of art ; it

would be as if the creation of a cosmic and spontaneous genius infallible in its working out of a multitudinous order. 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".<sup>1</sup> The same idea that the perfected individual is not an isolated individual but lives a common life with the whole universe, he further expresses in another passage of the same book: "The supramental being in his cosmic consciousness seeing and feeling all as himself would act in that sense; he would act in a universal awareness and a harmony of his individual self with the total self, of his individual will with the total will, of his individual action with the total action. For what we suffer from in our outer life and its reactions upon our inner life is the imperfection of our relations with the world, our ignorance of others, our disharmony with the whole of things, our inability to equate our demand on the world with the world's demand on us. There is a conflict—a conflict from which there seems to be no ultimate issue except an escape from both world and self—between our self-affirmation and a world on which we have to impose that affirmation, a world which seems to be too large for us and to pass indifferently over our soul, mind, life, body in the sweep of its course to its goal. The relation of our course and goal to the world's is unapparent to us, and to harmonise ourselves

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine* Vol. II, Part II pp. 1035-36.

with it we have either to enforce ourselves upon it and make it subservient to us or suppress ourselves and become subservient to it or else to compass a difficult balance between these two necessities of the relation between the individual personal destiny and the cosmic whole and its hidden purpose. But for the supramental being living in a cosmic consciousness the difficulty would not exist, since he has no ego ; his cosmic individuality would know the cosmic forces and their movement and their significance as part of himself, and the truth-consciousness in him would see the right relation at each step and find the dynamic right expression of that relation.”<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo also dissents from the view of the relation of philosophy to mysticism held by Plotinus. As we have already seen, although Plotinus looks upon philosophy as an indispensable preliminary discipline for the individual seeking union with God, yet it has no essential connection with the latter. In fact, its connection with it is very much like that of the scaffolding of a building to the building itself, for philosophy must suffer self-extinction before the mystic “vision” can emerge. For Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, far from suffering self-extinction, philosophy is consummated and perfected in that highest type of knowledge which he calls supramental knowledge. If this highest type of knowledge cannot be called philosophical, it is because it is more unitary and homogeneous than the latter, not because it is in any way opposed to it. Nor is this knowl-

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine* Vol. II, Part II pp. 1038-39.

edge opposed to sensuous knowledge. In fact, sensuous knowledge, philosophical knowledge and supramental knowledge are successive stages in the ascent of knowledge, by which the truths arrived at in the lower stages are not discarded or annulled in the higher stages but are completed and perfected in them. No truths in the lower stages of knowledge are, in fact, discarded in the higher, but they undergo a suitable transformation and transmutation. The logical structure upon which philosophy rests is not discarded, like the scaffolding of a building when the building is completed, but is suitably altered to make it a fit vehicle for the higher truth. At the stage which our evolution has reached at the present moment, the help of logic or reason is indispensable, for it is the only thing which we possess which enables us to synthesize our knowledge. Sri Aurobindo draws particular attention to this, when he says "Intuition is unable to give us the truth in that ordered and articulated form which our nature demands. Before it could effect any such completeness of direct knowledge in us, it would have to organize itself in our surface being and take possession there of the leading part. But in our surface being it is not the Intuition it is the Reason which is organized and helps us to order our perceptions, thoughts and actions".<sup>1</sup> In our enthusiasm for a more direct approach to truth than that afforded by reason, it will not do to forget the great service which reason has rendered. As I have said

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. I, p 103.

elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> if reason has its weakness, it is not because it systematises, but because it does not systematise sufficiently well. What is required therefore is not to discard reason, for to drop it means to abandon all order and connection in our knowledge, but to carry on the work of synthesis started by reason much further than it is possible for reason, with its limited powers, to do. This is the task which philosophy leaves to that higher knowledge, the supramental knowledge, to take up and perfect. Philosophical knowledge, therefore receives completion and does not suffer annihilation in supramental knowledge.

Further, Sri Aurobindo considers it a very narrow view of salvation to confine it to the individual's personal salvation. There is not a word in Plotinus which suggests that he envisages the salvation of the world or cosmic salvation. On the contrary, he takes it for granted that the world will remain as it is, weak and evil and degenerate, and because of this poor idea of the world's status, he advocates, like all other mystics, a severance of all connection with the world for the mystic who seeks union with God. For Sri Aurobindo, not only is it no solution of the problem of evil to obtain individual salvation by cutting oneself adrift from the rest of the world, but even that salvation which the individual seeks is not possible in a world which is groping in darkness. It is only a divinized world that can produce the divinized man. In the chapter on *The Gnostic Being* Sri Aurobindo

<sup>1</sup> See my article *The Nature and Function of Thought in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy* ("Advent", Nov. 1946).

has made it very clear that the emergence of the Gnostic Being or the Divine Man is only possible when Nature itself has been divinized, or to express it in the technical terms of the *Gītā*, when *aparā prakṛti* has been transformed into *parā prakṛti*. The only exception to this occurs in the case of the *avatāra*. The *avatāra*, of course, can only make his appearance in a world which is imperfect. It is only when the world is passing through a moral and spiritual crisis, when there is *dharmasya glāni*, as the *Gītā* puts it, that the *avatāra* takes his birth in this world and removes the crisis. But, as Sri Aurobindo has beautifully explained in his *Essays on the Gita*, the descent of God as *avatāra* is a special descent of His, having a special purpose, that purpose being to give an ocular demonstration to man that he can also become God without leaving his body. It is to teach him the great truth of "the birth of man into the Godhead, man rising into the divine nature and consciousness, *madbhāvam āgataḥ* ; it is the being born anew in a second birth of the soul." It is this which constitutes the real purpose of Avatārhood ; Avatārhood merely for the sake of *dharma* would in his opinion, "be an otiose phenomenon, since mere Right, mere justice or standards of virtue can always be upheld by the divine omnipotence through its ordinary means, by great men or great movements, by the life and work of sages and kings and religious teachers, without any actual incarnation". Save and except this appearance of Avatāra, which is a special Divine Descent for a special purpose, the appearance of the Divine Man is

### THE DOUBLE TRINITY IN PLOTINUS

I now come to the more philosophical parts of Plotinus' system. There are two fundamental Trinities in his philosophy. The first is the Trinity of Divine Principles : the Absolute, Spirit and Soul. The second is the Trinity of human principles : Spirit, Soul and Body. Dean Inge has tried to show that the triadic scheme was something forced upon Plotinus by the traditions of Greek philosophy. He mentions that even Aristotle denied the possibility of a fourth dimension on the ground that "all things are three and three is everywhere."<sup>1</sup> Be that as it may, there is the double triad in Plotinus—the higher and the lower.

There are two things which are to be observed in connection with this theory of the double triad. The first is that the second triad is a derivative of the first. This follows from his general principle that the lower is always derived from the higher. If we employ the terms 'upper hemisphere' and 'lower hemisphere', respectively, in connection with the first and the second triad, then we may say that the triad in the lower hemisphere is a derivative of the triad in the upper hemisphere, each principle in the lower hemisphere corresponding to a principle in the upper hemisphere. As Whittaker puts it, what is here is also there. The second thing to be observed here is that although the lower triad is a

<sup>1</sup> *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol. I. p. 122.

derivative of the upper one, it is a 'real' derivative and not a mere image of it. Plotinus is very explicit on this point. Thus, in a passage in the eleventh chapter of the *Enneads*, he says, "In the first place, therefore, it must be said that it is not proper to think that all things which are here are images of archetypes; or that the human soul is the image of soul itself, but that here also one soul differs from another in dignity. Perhaps, however, soul so far as it is here, is not soul itself. But since each (rational) soul has a real subsistence, as likewise have justice and temperance, there is also in our soul's true science and not images only, nor merely the similitudes of intelligibles, as in the sensible region. For true science, justice and temperance themselves exist here, though after another manner than in the intelligible world....But if among the natures which are said to be in the world, soul, and what soul contains are comprehended, then all such things are here as subsist there."<sup>1</sup>

Plotinus thus gives the world a reality-status much higher than that given by Plato. The question, however, arises: "Why should the Absolute create at all?" Plotinus' answer is that the most perfect and the first good cannot be the potency of all without the exercise of power. Here we see the advantage which Plotinus gets by conceiving the Absolute, like Plato, as the good. For here there is added to logical necessity an axiological need. The Absolute, therefore, creates, and the first thing which it creates is Spirit. As potency has now passed into actuality, Spirit must be taken to be all things

<sup>1</sup> *Select Works of Plotinus*, p. 195.

actual. In its very idea is involved the production of a world. What Plotinus means here is that potency without actual exercise of power is an abstraction which cannot be associated with the concrete nature of the Spirit. The supramundane Spirit, therefore, is not only the archetype of the visible world, but it is the actual creative power which is made manifest in the production of a world of diversity. But the actual projection into a world of diversified individuals is the work of another principle which is lower than the Spirit and is the actual link between the upper and the lower hemisphere. This is the principle called Soul. The peculiarity of Soul is that Time belongs to it, as eternity belongs to the Spirit, it is on account of this that it is the connecting link between the two hemispheres.

Coming now to the lower world, we find that the whole conception of it is governed by his theory of matter. Matter, for Plotinus, is the bare receptacle of forms, a subject which is the mere recipient of energy, without any energy of its own. Thus, in the fourth chapter of the second book of the *Enneads*, Plotinus indicates the nature of matter as follows : "All those who have spoken concerning what is called matter, and who have arrived at a conception of its nature, unanimously assert that it is a certain subject and receptacle of forms. They dissent, however, from each other in investigating what this subject nature is, and after what manner, and of what things, it is a recipient".<sup>1</sup> This definition makes matter a mere abstraction. As Dean Inge says "It (matter) is in fact a

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 22.

mere abstraction, a name for the bare receptacle of Forms; the subject of energy, as we should say, viewed by abstraction as separated from the energy which alone gives it being and reality".<sup>1</sup> It was for this reason that Aristotle denied the existence of pure matter without form.

In Plotinus, however, side by side with this abstraction called matter, which we may call absolute matter or pure matter, there is what may be called relative matter, that is, that which occupies the position of matter in relation to a higher principle. This is the new point of view from which Plotinus looks at matter, and it is one which is fraught with important consequences for his philosophy. This new point of view he introduces, when he says that although matter in itself as a bare abstraction may be a thing to be despised, yet it is not so, when viewed in relation to a higher principle: "In the first place, therefore, it must be said that the indefinite is not everywhere to be despised, nor that which in the conception of it is formless, if it applies itself to things which are prior to itself, and to the most excellent natures. For thus soul is naturally adapted to apply itself to intellect and reason, being formed by these, and brought to possess a more excellent nature".<sup>2</sup> What he means is that although matter in itself may be of no account, yet it acquires a significance as the receptacle of impressions from a higher source.

This relative view of matter completely changes the previous view of it as a mere abstraction. As Dean Inge

<sup>1</sup> Dean Inge : *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol I., p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> *Select Works of Plotinus*, p. 23.

puts it, "Matter is Matter only in relation to that which is next above it, and which gives it form, meaning and definite existence. Thus the same thing may be form (*eidos*) in relation to what is below it, and Matter in relation to what is above it. A thing is Matter in so far as it is acted upon by a higher principle. It is a purely relative term : every stage in the hierarchy of being, except the highest, is *hyle*, every stage except the lowest is *eidos*".

In this sense the whole of the lower Trinity is matter in relation to the higher. But this gives it not the status of a non-Being or nothing, but confers upon it a unique significance. For it shows that its proper rôle is to act as a receptacle for the impression it receives from above. It cannot improve itself but can improve with the help of the light it gets from the higher sources. Man, therefore, as a dweller in the lower hemisphere, is not shut out from the possibility of improvement. But his improvement consists in his ability to get rid of his egoism, which makes him think of himself as a complete self-contained unit. His chance of rising to a higher status, therefore, lies in surrender—surrender to the light which he constantly receives from above. To the extent to which he succeeds in removing his egoism and surrendering himself to the higher principles, to that extent lies the possibility of his improvement. Man by virtue of his possession of soul, is constantly in receipt of impressions from above. His proper rôle is to surrender himself to these, that they may effect a transformation of his nature.

It is true there is in Plotinus another view of matter which seems at first sight to contradict the view expounded

above. This is the view of it as evil. There are undoubtedly passages in which Plotinus seems to make matter the principle of evil. While he describes matter as 'absence of good', 'absolute poverty' etc., we also find him calling it 'the first evil'. This would be, however, to invest it with the positive characteristic of resistance to form, which is very different from the purely negative characteristic of absence of form, which is all that he has so far spoken of. Dean Inge has explained this apparent anomaly very nicely. In the first place, he says there is for Plotinus a perfect correspondence between the order of existence and the order of value. Matter, therefore, as the lowest in the scale of existence must be treated as the lowest in the scale of value. This is all that he means by calling it evil. But evil in Plotinus' view is itself absorbed in good. It cannot introduce a bipolarity of values, as that would destroy the monistic character of his philosophy. For Plotinus, therefore, as Dean Inge explains, "evil is only a defect of goodness, its appearance of positive malignity being valid only within the sphere of the moral struggle. According to this view, the *minus* signs disappear when we contemplate the world under the form of eternity. The latter is the solution to which Plotinus inclines...."<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, Dean Inge explains, when Plotinus ascribes a positive evil nature to matter, he is thinking of the materialist's matter, not the matter of his own philosophy. Zeller, therefore, is wrong in thinking that Plotinus follows the Neo-Pythagoreans and Philo, rather than Plato and

<sup>1</sup> *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol. I, pp. 133-34.

Aristotle, in making matter the principle of evil. "Against the few polemical passages which might seem to support this contention, must be set the whole tendency of his philosophy. He is careful to point out that though Matter in itself would be evil, if it could exist by itself, yet Matter as we know it has the promise of good. It is 'potentially all things'; its being consists in what it may become. It is the necessary condition of all good, in so far as it is a progress from potentiality to actuality. There can be no cosmos without form working on Matter. Matter is always the inferior element in that of which it forms a part, but there could be no greater misunderstanding of Plotinus than to suppose that it constitutes a bad world, set dualistically in opposition to the good world of Spirit and Soul."<sup>1</sup> Dean Inge further points out that there is in Plotinus' philosophy the conception of 'Divine Matter', which directly contradicts the view that matter in his philosophy is looked upon as evil. "There is such a thing as 'Divine Matter', which, in receiving its proper form, has a 'definite spiritual life', i.e. it is enriched and glorified by the Spirit which is infused into it, and which gives it a place within real Being. It is only on the lower levels of existence that Matter, even when it has received its form, remains a 'decked-out corpse'."<sup>2</sup>

Matter, therefore, (and consequently, the whole of the lower Trinity), is not for Plotinus an evil. It is a receptacle for the energy which emanates from the higher sphere. It is a necessary factor in every process, in every progress,

<sup>1</sup> *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, pp. 135-36.

we may say, for all things endeavour to rise in the scale of being. The inner spring of all movement, all progress, is receptivity to the impressions of forms, or, as we may call it, surrender, and this is symbolized by Matter.

SRI AUROBINDO'S CONCEPTION OF THE UPPER  
AND THE LOWER HEMISPHERES, COMPARED WITH  
PLOTINUS' VIEW OF THE DOUBLE TRINITY

There is considerable similarity between the account we have given above of Plotinus' view of the double Trinity and Sri Aurobindo's view of the upper and the lower hemisphere. This similarity is discoverable not only in the general structure of the two orders of principles but runs even into the details of these.

Like Plotinus, Sri Aurobindo also speaks of two orders of principles, one upper and one lower, of which the latter is the derivative of the former. He speaks of them in connection with his theory of creation or involution. For him creation is a self-projection of the Absolute, or Saccidānanda, as he calls it. This self-projection is a projection of Knowledge into Ignorance. The Absolute or Saccidānanda is the triune principle of Pure Being, Consciousness-Force and Bliss. But this triune principle can only project itself into a world of created beings through a principle which also, like itself, is a principle of Knowledge, and yet acts as an intermediary between it and the created world of finite beings. This intermediate principle he calls Supermind. Thus, there are four principles in the region of Knowledge, or in the

upper hemisphere, as he calls it, namely, Pure Being, Conscious-Force and Bliss, constituting the triune principle of Saccidānanda, and Supermind. These four principles in the upper hemisphere, through the process of involution, give rise to four principles in the lower hemisphere, namely, matter, life, soul and mind. Each principle in the lower hemisphere is a subordinate aspect of the corresponding principle in the upper hemisphere. Thus matter is a subordinate aspect of Pure Being. Life is similarly a subordinate power of Consciousness-Force, and soul a subordinate aspect of the Divine Principle of Bliss. So also mind is a subordinate aspect of Supermind.

The central idea of the double world-order of both Plotinus and Sri Aurobindo is that the higher world sets the standard for the lower. Whether it is called the world of Knowledge with Sri Aurobindo or the world of forms with Plotinus, the idea is the same, namely, that it represents the true Reality, of which the lower world is but a poor imitation. But however poor an imitation it may be the lower world is not a world of shadows but has a real status. Both Sri Aurobindo and Plotinus are very emphatic on this point.

Another feature which is common to both these philosophers is that status of the lower world is not a fixed and unchangeable one, but that it is capable of enormous improvement, depending upon its power to receive impressions from above. For Sri Aurobindo there is no limit to this power ; it is, in fact, the privilege of the lower world to go on ascending in the scale of

Being, till it attains the highest status, namely, that of the ultimate Reality. Sri Aurobindo, however, makes it clear that the real determining factor in the ascent of the world to higher stages is the Divine Will. Unless the Divine Will chooses to raise the world by descending into it in higher and higher forms, it cannot by itself raise itself. There is no such condition in Plotinus, for he nowhere says that the progress of the world has to wait till the forms choose to shine upon matter, for he takes it for granted that the forms always shed their light upon matter. But there is limitation of another kind in his system. It is due to the nature of the lower world. Here the form which illuminates matter is not pure form but is itself an image, and consequently, its illumination, is not enough to enable it to reach the higher levels of reality. It is only in the case of the human soul, 'which is a wanderer through all the fields of existence,' that he makes an exception, and gives it unlimited power, although in the lower world, to receive impressions from pure forms and thereby raise itself without limit. As between these two philosophers, therefore, we have to say that whereas Sri Aurobindo gives unlimited possibility to the entire lower world for rising to the Divine status, Plotinus gives such possibility only to the human soul. And although Sri Aurobindo makes the ascent to higher stages dependent upon the descent of the Divine Consciousness-Force into the world, this does not introduce any limitation to the upward march of the world, for the descent of the Divine Force is bound to take place, although the time and occasion of it cannot

be determined by us.

There is also considerable difference in the views of these two philosophers concerning the nature of the inner spring or drive that leads to the progress of the world. While Plotinus takes it to be the receptivity of matter to the impressions of the forms and makes the whole affair more or less mechanical, Sri Aurobindo points out the active cause of it, which is nothing else than the desire of the Spirit, which is already present in the lowest forms of existence, to return to itself. For him it is this desire to return home, this home-sickness, as I have elsewhere described it, which is the inner urge that leads to development and progress.

Moreover, in Plotinus' account of it, there is no reason why matter should care to receive the impressions of forms. Like Aristotle, he also seems to think that by calling matter potentiality and form actuality and looking upon every object in the world as a mixture of matter and form, he has indicated sufficiently clearly how matter must develop into form and how the lower forms of existence must develop into higher forms. But it is not clear how potentiality, by the mere fact of its being potentiality, should cry out for completion in actuality, for the potential, *qua* potential, lacks any inner drive. If it is said that the inner drive is supplied by the fact that every principle in the lower world is a mixture of form and matter and that it is the formal element that pushes towards development then, too, the difficulty arises that it applies only to composites, that is to those which are composed partly of matter and partly of form and

has no application to pure matter which is the starting-point of the scale in Plotinus' system. Secondly, if it is the formal element that by its activity drives matter towards evolution and progress, it is better to recognize this fact clearly and say that it is not matter seeking to be actual, but it is form crying out for form, that supplies the inner spring of movement and progress.

This is precisely what Sri Aurobindo has done. By saying that even matter is Spirit, he indicates that there is no order of existence where Spirit is entirely absent, and that it is the presence of Spirit, the active, dynamical principle, that is at the root of all development and progress. Moreover, by showing that evolution is the obverse phase of involution, he has indicated clearly why the presence of Spirit must inevitably lead to the progress of the world, for the world-process cannot stop until Spirit, which has involved itself in the world, returns to itself.

### PLOTINUS' THEORY OF EMANATIONS

No account of Plotinus' philosophy is complete which does not take note of his theory of Emanations. In fact, his theory of the double Trinity which we have just considered, is itself an offshoot of this theory.

The theory of Emanations is Plotinus' answer to the question : How did the created world arise out of the One or the Good ? It states that creation is of the nature of an overflow or outpouring, the peculiarity of which is that that which overflows or outpours does not

suffer any diminution or loss as a result of it. Plotinus also speaks of it as an irradiation, the metaphor being that of light and its radiation, for, in his view, light does not suffer any loss by reason of its diffusion over innumerable objects. Be that as it may, the first thing which he emphasizes is that the One or the Good does not suffer any loss by creating the world. The second thing which he emphasizes is the hierarchical order of created beings, according to which the created world is a graded world, in which the grade of any existence is determined by its nearness or remoteness from the primal source, namely, the One or the Good, it being one of the main features of his theory that that which directly emanates from the One has a higher grade than that which is an emanation from an emanation.

The only principle which emanates directly from the One is Spirit. This is therefore higher than all the other created principles and ranks only next to the One in the hierarchical order. From Spirit emanates the Soul, and the Soul therefore ranks third in the scale. From the Soul proceed all existences in the lower world.

The order of emanations is a purely logical and not a temporal order. For instance, Spirit does not precede the Soul in time or the Soul the lower existences. Moreover, it is determined by what he calls 'natural necessity' and not by voluntary choice. The whole scheme of emanations, in fact, is mechanical and does not exhibit, any purpose or design. The emanations, having no reference to time, have no connection with evolution either. There is no possibility, therefore, of any fresh

emanations taking place in the future. The series of emanations is over. It was over, in fact, before the beginning of time, and it is not possible for any fresh series to emanate.

Sri Aurobindo's conception of Divine Descent has an outward similarity with Plotinus' theory of Emanations. Like Plotinus, he also looks upon creation as the emergence from God of a hierarchically graded world, the emergents being of all grades of reality. But the whole conception of creation and the relation of the created world to God are totally different in his philosophy from what they are in the system of Plotinus. In fact, on account of this difference, his theory is a theory of descent and not one of emergence. Emergence is a neutral term, like occurrence or event, and fits in adequately with Plotinus' conception of creation, whereas descent is a term charged with positive significance. In calling creation a descent of God, Sri Aurobindo wants to emphasize its double significance. First, that the created world, even in its lowest levels, exhibits on its face the stamp of its Divine origin. Secondly, that it is a descent for the sake of ascent, so that the lowest order of existence has the promise and potency of reaching the Divine status.

Miss Evelyn Underhill in her book *An Introduction to Mysticism* has emphasized the fact that the theory of Emanations is opposed to the theory of Immanence, but that true mysticism must combine both. In other words, what she means is that each of these theories emphasize one aspect of truth, which it will not do for

mysticism to ignore. The theory of Emanations stresses the transcendence of the Absolute. It makes the ascent to the Absolute a long pilgrimage through a vast series of worlds, arranged vertically—a weary journey through an innumerable number of halting-places, culminating in the holy of holies, the throne of the One or God. The theory of Immanence, on the other hand, makes the Absolute already a dweller within—as the *Gītā* puts it, a dweller within the heart (*hṛddeśe Arjuna tiṣṭhati*)—and the progress to the Absolute is not a long passage through a series of vertically arranged worlds, but consists simply in the intensification of the inward light, so that its penetrating radiance may pierce through the thick walls that have been erected by ignorance and prejudice. Both these ways—the paths of *krama-mukti* and *sadyomukti*, as our ancient sages used to call them—the mystic, in Miss Underhill's view, must accept as paths to truth. In a beautiful passage, which I cannot resist the temptation of quoting here, she says that these two paths may be called the ways of approaching God as *Deus* and *Theos*, respectively: "A good map, then a good mystical philosophy, will leave room for both these ways of interpreting experience. It will mark the routes by which many different temperaments claim to have found their way to the same end. It will acknowledge both the aspects which the *patria splendida* Truth has appeared to its lovers; the aspects which have called forth the theories of emanation and immanence, and are enshrined in the Greek and Latin names of God. *Deus*, whose root means day, shining, the Tran-

scendent Light, and *Theos*, whose true meaning is supreme desire or prayer—the Inward Love—do not contradict, but complete each other. They form when taken together, an almost perfect definition of that Absolute which is the object of the mystic's desire : the Divine Love which, being born in the soul, spurs on that soul to union with the transcendent and absolute Light which is at once the source, the goal, the life of created beings".<sup>1</sup>

Accepting this test as a test not only for mysticism but for philosophy, let us see how the two philosophers stand in relation to each other. The test, we must remember, is the success with which the two conceptions of God—as *Deus* and as *Theos*, as Miss Underhill beautifully describes them—are blended. In Plotinus there is undoubtedly a perfect blending of them in the individual soul. The individual soul in his system no doubt realizes God both as the immanent principle working within and also as the transcendent Source which the individual can reach through a long progression through a series of stages. But is there in his system a similar realisation on the part of the rest of the universe ? We are afraid not. For the rest of the universe God in his system is only a transcendent principle, the Ultimate Source of all the emanations. It is true that Plotinus speaks of form influencing matter and helping it rise above its grossness, but such influence is not the influence of an agency working within, but that of one which is more or less external. It is only, therefore, if we adopt Miss Underhill's standpoint, according to

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Underhill : *An Introduction to Mysticism*, 8th edn., p. 124.

which individual realization is the only thing that counts, that this can be said to be a satisfactory combination of the two apparently contradictory aspects of Divinity.

In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, on the other hand, both these aspects of Divinity are kept in mind from the very beginning. Even in the lowest forms of matter the Absolute is present as an indwelling principle, pushing it continuously forward. The impulse towards self-improvement, towards fuller and fuller self-expression, comes therefore from within, and is in no way the result of any impact from outside. At the same time the progress is through a hierarchy of different grades of reality, the product of successive descents of the Absolute. It is not the individual alone who realizes this double aspect of Divinity, but the whole universe shares this realization. In fact, if it had been confined to the individual it could not have been properly spoken of as a true combination of the twofold aspect of God. Moreover, it would have meant a sundering of the individual from the universe which would have presented a new problem of transcendence. The only limitation which Sri Aurobindo places upon the cosmic realization of the double aspect of Divinity is the circumstance that it rests with the Divine Will to choose the time and occasion for the Divine Descent, without which this realization is impossible. But this is an inevitable consequence of the Divine transcendence.

PLOTINUS' CONCEPTION OF THE ABSOLUTE, COMPARED  
WITH THAT OF SRI AUROBINDO

I shall conclude this article by discussing briefly the conception of the Absolute, as held respectively by Plotinus and Sri Aurobindo. Plotinus calls the Absolute the One or the Good. By calling the One the Good, Plotinus, as we have seen, introduces the idea of value. But the effect of this is almost completely neutralized by the fact that he describes it in almost purely negative terms, and especially by the fact that he deprives it of all consciousness. For that which is purely negative, especially, that which is without consciousness, cannot certainly be called a value. Moreover, even when it is called good, such words as "it is good not in relation to itself, but what participates in it" take away from its value-character and reduce it to a mere existence. Nevertheless it must be acknowledged that Plotinus is not entirely unaware of the value-character of the Ultimate Reality. Such expressions as "as it is the Good above all goods, so, though without shape or form, it possesses beauty above beauty" show that he was not oblivious of the fact that it is a value.

Yet such scanty recognition of its value-character is totally drowned by other passages which characterize the Absolute in negative terms. In the chapter "On the Good or the One" (*Enneads*, Book 6, Chap.9) Plotinus, after showing that the One is not intellect, goes on saying, "Nor is it being, for being has the form of the One. But that is formless, and is even without intelligible

form. For the nature of *the One* being generative of all things, is not any one of them. Neither, therefore, is it a certain thing, nor a quality, nor a quantity, nor intellect, nor soul, nor that which is moved nor again that which stands still".<sup>1</sup>

But all these negative characterizations of the Absolute one could have put up with, for there are similar ones in the Upaniṣads also, had not another and a more startling one been joined to it, namely, that of a state where there is no consciousness. Whittaker has made an elaborate defence of Plotinus for taking away from the Absolute all positive characteristics, even the possession of consciousness. He has tried to show that in depriving the Absolute of all consciousness, Plotinus has not deviated from the Greek tradition. Thus criticising Zeller, he says, "Zeller indeed finds in the idea of a mental state beyond cognition a decisive break with the whole direction of classical thought, and makes Philo here the sole predecessor of Plotinus. But, we may ask, whence came the notion to Philo himself? The combination of the most complete "immanence" in one sense with absolute transcendence of Deity in another, does not seem native to Jewish religion, any more than the asceticism for which, in the Essenes, Zeller finds it necessary to recur to a Greek origin. Once get rid of the presupposition that Neo-Platonism sprang from a new contact with Eastern theosophy, and the solution is clear. To Philo and to Plotinus alike, the direct suggestion for the doctrine of "ecstasy" came from Plato.

<sup>1</sup> *Select Works of Plotinus*, 2nd edn., p. 305.

The germinal idea that there is a mode of apprehension above that of perfectly sane and sober mind appears already in more than one Platonic dialogue".<sup>1</sup> There is great confusion here. Plato has no doubt in many places spoken of "a mode of apprehension above that of perfectly sane and sober mind" but that is very different from supporting any state beyond cognition. But even supposing that this view of Plotinus, namely, that the ultimate condition is one beyond all cognition, finds support in Plato, what does it prove? Does it prove that the view is inherently sound?

A better defence of Plotinus we find in Dean Inge's book *The Philosophy of Plotinus*. In the first place, he says that it is wrong to think that ecstasy is an important part of the system of Plotinus. "The common impression about Plotinus, that ecstasy is an important part of his system, is erroneous; it has been thrust into the foreground in the same way in which Western critics of Buddhism have exaggerated the importance of Nirvāṇa in that religion. In both cases the doctrines have been widely misunderstood. Nirvāṇa does not mean annihilation after death, nor does the philosophy of Plotinus culminate (as Pfeleiderer supposes) in a 'convulsed state' which is the negation of reason and sanity." (*The Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol II, p.158.) It may be that philosophically ecstasy is not a very important thing in Plotinus, but it cannot be said that Plotinus treated it as unimportant. I quote below the last few sentences with which his book *Enneads* closes, which clearly show

<sup>1</sup> Whittaker : *The Neo-Platonists*, pp. 104-5.

that ecstasy was not a matter of unimportance for Plotinus, but on the contrary, one of supreme importance : "Running, however, in a contrary direction, it (the soul) will arrive not at another thing, but at itself. *To be in itself alone, however, and not in being, is to be in God.* For God also is something which is not essence, but beyond essence. Hence the soul when in this condition associates with him. He, therefore, who perceives himself to associate with God, will have himself the similitude of him. And if he passes from himself as an image to the archetype, he will then have the end of his progression. But when he falls from the vision of God, if he again excites the virtue which is in himself, and perceives himself perfectly adorned, he will again be elevated through virtue, proceeding to intellect and wisdom, and afterwards to the principle of things. *This, therefore, is the life of the Gods, and of divine and happy men, a liberation from all terrene concerns, a life unaccompanied with human pleasures, and a flight of the alone to the alone.*"<sup>1</sup> There are various other similar passages in the last chapter of *Enneads* which speak also of the mystic union of the soul with God.

Secondly, Dean Inge tries to make the state of extinction of consciousness, which accompanies the soul's union with God, appear as something quite natural, as, in fact, a normal and natural consequence of the ascent of the soul to the Absolute. Indeed, he makes it appear as an inevitable consequence of deliverance from individual life. "There is such a thing", he says,

<sup>1</sup> *Select Works of Plotinus*, p. 322.

“as a longing for deliverance from individual life itself, a craving for rest and peace in the bosom of the eternal and unchanging, even at the price of a cessation of consciousness.”<sup>1</sup> He then goes on to show that this cessation of consciousness is not annihilation, but merely the breaking down of the barriers which separate the individual from God. “It is not annihilation that the mystic desires—annihilation of anything that truly exists is inconceivable ; but the breaking down of the barriers which constitute *separate* existence. Unchanging life in the timeless All—this is what he desires and this the vision promises him. But when this is the ground of his yearning for the Absolute, he is not content with a momentary glimpse of the super-existent; he wishes to have done with temporal existence altogether....In this mood he is willing to accept what to many is the self-stultification of mysticism, that the self, in losing its environment, loses its content, and grasps zero instead of the infinite. All distinct consciousness is the consciousness of a not-self, of externality ; and this is just what he hopes to lose for ever.”<sup>2</sup>

This is no doubt a very good defence, couched in beautiful language, of the mystic's case. But the question remains : What is the content of the self when there is no consciousness ? And if it has no content, will it not be said to be grasping zero instead of the infinite ? For is not a contentless infinite a contradiction in terms ? The whole trouble to my mind arises

<sup>1</sup> Dean Inge : *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol. II, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, pp. 158-59.

from the mistaken view that "all distinct consciousness is the consciousness of a not-self, of externality". This description is true only of the lower stages of consciousness. As we ascend in the scale of consciousness, there is less and less of externality, until in the highest stage, the externality completely disappears, and in its place there emerges a perfectly unified consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo's approach to the Absolute is just the reverse of that described above. That is to say, it is a positive approach and not a negative one. The germinal idea of it, its *bijamantra*, as we may call it, is not shedding but *gathering*. The Absolute of Sri Aurobindo is an Absolute in richness and not in emptiness. In his scale of being the higher is always the richer, the fuller and the more concrete. The march of evolution for him is from the abstract to the concrete, from the individual to the collective, from the unharmonized to the harmonized.

Plotinus' whole scheme is too individualistic and isolationistic. He has ignored altogether the fundamental fact that the higher being is the being which lives not in isolation, but in complete unison with others. As Sri Aurobindo puts it, "For a total gnostic or divine living would include not only the individual life of the being but the life of others made one with the individual in a common uniting consciousness. Such a life must have for its main constituting power a spontaneous and innate, not a constructed, unity and harmony; this can come by a greater indentity of being and consciousness between individual and individual unified

in their spiritual substance, feeling themselves to be self and self of one self-existence, acting in a greater unitarian force of knowledge, a greater power of the being. There must be an inner and direct mutual knowledge based upon a consciousness of oneness and identity, a consciousness of each other's being, thought, feeling, inner and outer movements, a conscious communication of mind with mind, of heart with heart, a conscious impact of life upon life, a conscious interchange of forces of being with forces of being; in any absence or deficiency of these powers and their intimate light there could not be a real or complete unity or a real thought, and complete natural fitting of each individual's being, feeling, inner and outer movements with those of the individuals around him. A growing basis and structure of conscious unanimism, we might say, would be the character of this more evolved life".<sup>1</sup>

"A structure of conscious unanimism." Yes, that is how Sri Aurobindo conceives this highest condition. It is the direct antithesis of the separationist and isolationist view which looks upon it as consisting in total detachment from the world, which finds favour in Plotinus. And if Plotinus represents, as is generally supposed, the high watermark of mysticism, then we must say that there is a fundamental difference between mysticism and Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. But we can visualise another type of mysticism which is not content merely with assuring the individual of his personal salvation through union with God, but which gives the same

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, pp. 1139-40.

assurance to the whole universe. From the standpoint of such a mysticism, the universe is essentially one, and salvation has to wait until there is liberation for the whole universe. In this sense, Sri Aurobindo's philosophy may be called mysticism.

But there still remains one limitation. If mysticism means a philosophy which believes in the possibility of the individual or the universe by its own effort to raise itself to the Divine status, then Sri Aurobindo's philosophy cannot be called mysticism, for he does not believe it possible, without the active intervention of the Divine Will, for the individual or the universe to march to higher and higher levels and ultimately to reach the throne of the Almighty.

## VI

### SRI AUROBINDO AND NICOLAI HARTMANN

A COMPARATIVE study of the philosophies of Sri Aurobindo and Nicolai Hartmann is of great interest, as herein we see the characteristic difference of the Indian and the Western approach to the philosophy of values. This philosophy is steadily growing in importance in the West and bids fair to be the main type of philosophical thinking there. A comparison, therefore, of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy with the most progressive form of this type of Western thought is highly desirable. My task will be somewhat similar to that of Dickens in his *A Tale of Two Cities*, for I shall have to give a picture of two standpoints, one Indian, represented by Sri Aurobindo, and the other Western, represented by Hartmann, with this difference that I shall have to bring these pictures more closely into relation with each other than Dickens did his pictures of the two cities.

#### NICOLAI HARTMANN HAS INHERITED THE PLATONIC TRADITION OF THE THEORY OF VALUES

To start with Nicolai Hartmann. He has inherited the best and the most ancient Western tradition, the Platonic tradition of the philosophy of values. Not all philosophy of values is Platonic. But the Platonic

tradition is still the most powerful one in this philosophy. Münsterberg, Rickert, Stern, Windelband, Royce, Husserl, to mention only a few of the leading exponents of this philosophy today, are all more or less true to the Platonic tradition. But the man who has done the greatest service to this tradition and brought it the greatest honour and distinction is Nicolai Hartmann who, in his epoch-making three-volumed work on Ethics has re-established it on somewhat newer foundations.

What, however, is this Platonic tradition? What are its leading ideas? To my mind, they are mainly two. The first is that values represent a world of their own, a world of ideas, as Plato called it, or a world of ideas, as we would call it, detached from the world in which we live, though imparting to it all dignity and worth. The other is that these ideas are many, not one, which are independent of one another and co-ordinate in rank, so that they form a plural world of independent units.

To these two main ideas of this tradition, Plato himself added one more, namely, the Idea of Good, a picture of which he gave us in his *Republic*. The third idea really runs counter to the second, for it proposes to do that which the second refuses to do, namely, unite all the ideas under one common highest idea, viz., the Idea of Good. If I were to write an account of Plato's theory of ideas, I would certainly give this third idea a very important place, perhaps even put it at the head of the other two ideas. But I want to speak of the Platonic tradition of the philosophy of values, as it has been

handed down in history, and there unfortunately, it has not had much influence. Jowett says, "It is remarkable that although Plato speaks of the idea of good as the first principle of truth and being, it is nowhere mentioned in his writings except in this passage (of the *Republic*). Nor did it retain any hold upon the minds of his disciples in a later generation." (*The Dialogues of Plato*. Translated by Jowett, Third Edition, revised, Vol.III, p. xcvi). As he indicates, Plato himself is to blame for this, for he did not mention it except in some passages of the *Republic*.<sup>(1)</sup> and he certainly did not succeed in uniting it organically with the rest of his system, with the result that it is an isolated peak in his philosophy.

This is really a tragedy, for it has deprived this great conception of the influence which it would otherwise have had upon the development of the philosophy of values. Its influence has been felt in other directions. For instance, it has profoundly influenced Hegel and the neo-Hegelian philosophy of the nineteenth and the twentieth century. But this philosophy is mainly ontological and not axiological. It has taken out of Plato's philosophy his Idea of Good, rejecting the other parts which are not consistent with it. Axiological philosophy, on the other hand, based upon Plato's theory of ideas, has mostly bypassed the Idea of Good, and has, therefore, been pluralistic. Where, as in Münsterberg and Rickert, a monistic philosophy of values has been reared upon Platonic foundations, we find that on the top a Hegelian ontological dome has been put stealthily,<sup>(2)</sup> as no axiological dome could be found which would fit

the lower part of the building.

The Platonic tradition, therefore, of the philosophy of values is pluralistic. There is, firstly, the dualism of value and reality, and secondly, there is the pluralism of values. This tradition Hartmann, in common with others, has inherited, and on this inheritance as foundation he has reared a very fine philosophical structure.

The main features of this structure are, firstly, his view of helplessness of values in the matter of their realization, (3) secondly, his conception of the status of man, and thirdly, his dualism of values and disvalues. With each of these features I shall presently deal. But before I do so, I must turn to the other side of my task and give a picture of our ancient Indian tradition of the philosophy of values.

### THE ANCIENT INDIAN TRADITION OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF VALUES

That tradition is monistic and not pluralistic. Its foundations are laid in that famous passage of the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* which may be regarded as the source of the Indian philosophy of values, as it expresses, partly by means of explicit language and partly by means of imagery, for its thought is sometimes too deep for words, the essential ideas of that philosophy. I give below a translation of it.(4)

“There are, assuredly, two forms of Brahman : the formed and the formless, the mortal and the immortal, the limited (*sthita*) and the unlimited (*yat*), the actual

(*sat*) and the yon (*tyat*).

This is the formed (Brahman)—whatever is different from the wind and the atmosphere. This is mortal, this is limited, this is actual. The essence of this formed, mortal, limited, actual (Brahman) is yonder (sun) which gives forth heat, for that is the essence of the actual.

Now the formless (Brahman) is the wind and the atmosphere. This is immortal, this is unlimited, this is the yon. The essence of this unformed, immortal, unlimited, yonder (Brahman) is the Person in that sun-disc, for he is the essence of the yon.—Thus with reference to the divinities.

Now, with reference to the self:—

Just that is the formed (Brahman) which is different from breath (*prāṇa*) and from the space which is within the self (*ātman*). This is mortal, this is limited, this is actual. The essence of this formed, mortal, limited, actual (Brahman) is the eye, for it is the essence of the actual.

Now the formless (Brahman) is the breath and the space which is within the self. This is immortal, this is unlimited, this is the yon. The essence of this unformed, immortal, unlimited, yonder (Brahman) is this Person who is in the right eye, for he is the essence (*rasa*) of the yonder.

The form of this Person is like a saffron-coloured robe, like white wool, like the (purple) Indragopa beetle, like a flame of fire, like the (white) lotus-flower, like a sudden flash of lightning. Verily, like a sudden lightning flash is the glory of him who knows this.

Hence, now, there is the teaching 'Not this, not this' (*neti, neti*) for there is nothing higher than this, that he is thus. Now the designation for him is 'the Real of the Real'. Verily, breathing creatures are the real. He is their Real". (Br. Up. 2. 3.).

This passage, as we see, begins by distinguishing two aspects of Brahman—the formed and the formless, the mortal (*martya*) and the immortal (*amṛta*), the limited (*sthita*) and the unlimited (*yat*). It then goes on declaring the Real as the *rasa*, that is, the value or essence of both. It is the essence both of the formed and the formless, of the mortal and the immortal, of the limited and the unlimited. It is also called *neti, neti*, 'not this, not this', thereby showing that it is different from everything that is existent. Reality as Value must transcend all existents. It cannot, therefore, be identified with either the formed or the formless, the mortal or the immortal, the limited or the unlimited. But although it transcends both these contradictory categories, it is yet the *rasa* or value of both. This aspect of Reality as Value is further emphasized in the concluding portion of this passage, where it is called 'the Real of the real' (*satyasya satyam*). The negative characterization of reality as '*neti, neti*' is thereby shown to have for its purpose the positive characterization of it as 'the Real of the real'.

The expression *satyasya satyam*, 'the Real of the real' points to a second order or dimension of reality. If the existential aspect of reality is called the first order or dimension of it, then its value-aspect must be declared its second order or dimension. The passage of the *Bṛhad-*

*āranyakopaniṣad* brings out clearly the existence of this second dimension of reality. In *Kena* 1. 2 also, we find a similar indication of a dimension of reality over and above that of existence. Here the Ultimate Reality is described as 'the ear of the ear', 'the mind of the mind', 'the speech of speech', 'the breath of breath', thereby clearly indicating the presence of a second layer of reality underneath the first.

This emphasis on the different dimensions of reality, one of which is called existence, another value, is one of the main teachings of the Upaniṣads. This became crystallized in the later Upaniṣads in the form of the conception of Saccidānanda. The expression Saccidānanda is no doubt found only in the later Upaniṣads but an expression very similar to it is found in Br. Up. 3. 9. 28, where Brahman is called *vijñānam ānandam Brahma*. So also in Taitt. 2. it is called *satyam jñānam anantam*.

The conception of the Ultimate Reality as Saccidānanda is a wonderful triumph of philosophical speculation. It points out more clearly than anything else can do it, that existence, consciousness and value are not to be treated as mutually exclusive, but are to be looked upon as different components of the composite structure of Reality. It is the greatest gift of India to philosophy, and while it emphasizes the nature of Reality as Value, it does not fall into the hopeless dualism which unfortunately has marred the history of the philosophy of values in the West. The sheet-anchor of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy also is the conception of Saccidānanda. But before we

deal with it we have to return to Nikolai Hartmann's philosophy.

THE DEGRADATION OF THE CONCEPTION OF  
VALUE IN HARTMANN'S PHILOSOPHY THROUGH  
ITS ASSOCIATION WITH DUALISM

I have already pointed out the essential dualism in the Platonic tradition of the philosophy of values. Nowhere perhaps do we realize this more clearly than in the philosophy of Hartmann who is perhaps the most brilliant exponent of this tradition today.

Hartmann's philosophy of values is frankly dualistic. He makes no attempt to hide this fact; it appears clearly on every page of his great work on ethics. He seems, in fact, to revel in dualism. There is the dualism of value and reality and there is further the pluralism of values. But in addition, there is a third dualism, the dualism of value and disvalue, which is also equally fundamental for him.

First, as regards the dualism of value and reality, this dualism is a characteristic feature of Hartmann's theory of moral values. These values live, as it were, in a cloud-land, completely detached from the world of reality. So complete, in fact, is their isolation that they cannot bring themselves into contact with reality except through an external agency. This external agency is man.

This gives man a unique position. He is the sole intermediary between the world of values and the world of reality. It is he and he alone who has the power to

realize the values. If he chooses not to realize them, they have no chance of being realized. This invests him with a kind of semi-divinity. Although he has not got the power to create the values, it rests with him entirely whether they will emerge in the world of reality. He has, therefore, the power either to make or mar the world. In this precisely lies his freedom. Hartmann waxes eloquent on this : "He (the human agent) is not only a mirroring surface, something existing for himself in the real world and picturing the world's formations; he moulds, transforms and builds up; he is a world-creator in little. What he forms and builds up does not emanate from him himself, it is not his creation; it is something he has overheard from another world, to which he is responsively sensitive. But what he senses has no compulsion over him. It is only a good entrusted to him, the metaphysical import of which he feels as a claim laid upon him".<sup>(5)</sup>

In spite of all this eloquence, however, he has not been able to do justice, as we shall presently see, either to the values or to man.

#### HARTMANN'S THEORY OF VALUES REDUCES THEM TO A CONDITION OF UTTER IMPOTENCE

Hartmann's theory of values, which has for its keynote their ontological helplessness and utter dependence upon human agency, is not at all flattering either to the values or to man. Not to the values, for to refuse to give them the power to realize themselves is to reduce them to a

position of absolute impotence. Of what avail is their axiological superiority if it makes them absolutely dependent upon man for their realization ? It is absurd to suggest that this view invests them with great authority. Is it a sign of great authority to remain absolutely at the mercy of man for the chance of getting a footing in the world ? Moreover, if history has taught us anything, it is that authority, divested of power, is a sham. If Hartmann is not in a position to give the values anything better than this mockery of authority, the sooner he gives up the pretence of making value the ultimate principle of his philosophy, the better. A true philosophy of values must give them not only authority but also power. Hartmann is only deceiving himself if he thinks he has placed axiology above ontology. He has not; in spite of his pretensions to the contrary, ontology still holds the palm in his philosophy.

#### SRI AUROBINDO'S POSITION HERE COMPARED WITH THAT OF HARTMANN

This constitutes one of the main weaknesses of Hartmann's philosophy. For this, however, his bad legacy is mainly to blame—the dualism of value and reality with which the Platonic tradition of the philosophy of values is infested.

In striking contrast to this inane view of values which makes them the very picture of helplessness, we have Sri Aurobindo's conception of them which makes them really the ultimate metaphysical principles. Instead of

treating them as dependent upon the human will for their realization, he gives them the power to realize themselves whenever they choose to do so. It rests with them entirely how and when they will realize themselves. There is no external agency upon which they are dependent for their realization.

Further—and as a consequence of this fundamental difference in the conception of values—the realization of values means something essentially different from what it does in Hartmann's philosophy. It does not mean with Sri Aurobindo, as it does with Hartmann, the coming into existence of that which previously did not exist. It is not his position—and here he is true to the traditional Indian standpoint as we have already explained—that values are not real in themselves and have to *become* real. His position, on the contrary, is that values *are* real, real in themselves and eternally. Strictly speaking, therefore, it is wrong to speak of the realization of values. There is no harm, of course, in using the term, which has passed into philosophical currency in the West, provided we know exactly what it means, just as there is no harm in speaking of the sun rising or setting, though both these expressions are scientifically incorrect. It is well for us to remember, however, that this term in its literal sense is wrong. What happens when we speak of the realization of values is that values *descend* into the world. The world in fact has come into being and has attained its present status on account of such descent. From the point of view of values there is no realization, there is no descent. But from *our* point of view and from the point of view of

the world, there is realization. That is to say, we become more and more real, we come nearer and nearer to reality, as there is further and further descent of the values. Realization, therefore, means for us *ascent*, ascent to higher and higher grades of reality, and for the values it means *descent*, descent of more and more of themselves into us and into the world.

This being understood, we can easily understand how absurd it is to say that the realization of values depends upon us human beings. We realize only when the values choose to descend. It is we who are helpless here and not the values. They descend according to their own nature, by their own law. We cannot dictate to them when they will descend or how they will descend. What lies with us is to realize them *when* they descend. Our sole function is to keep ourselves ready for their descent, just as a householder has to keep his house ready for the reception of an honoured guest.

One change we have to make in the account we have given above of Sri Aurobindo's conception of the descent of values. We have spoken of values in the plural, but for Sri Aurobindo there is no plurality of values. There is for him one Value, which is also for him the one Reality. To this he gives the name Saccidānanda. It is the descent of this Saccidānanda in different forms—matter, life, mind, etc.—which gives us our different values, and it is the further descent of Saccidānanda in higher forms which will give us still higher values which have not emerged so far.

THE ABSOLUTE AS SACCIDĀNANDA : UNION OF EXISTENCE,  
CONSCIOUSNESS-FORCE AND VALUE

The pivot of his whole scheme is his conception of Saccidānanda. As I have already said, the central idea of Saccidānanda is the union of Existence, Consciousness and Value in the Absolute. It is India's challenge to the West. If the West has declared the union of Existence and Value impossible, India, through her conception of Saccidānanda, has shown how the problem can be solved.

Let us first take up Existence and Value. In what way are they combined in the Absolute ? What is meant by saying that Reality is at once Existence and Value ? Here we summon to our aid the great English philosopher Bradley. In his celebrated work *Appearance and Reality* he has characterised the two essentials of reality as existence and content, or in the technical phraseology of his, as the 'that' and the 'what'. The 'that' is the existential aspect and the 'what' the meaning or value aspect of reality. The full comprehension of reality must mean a comprehension of both these aspects. In feeling, he thinks, there is the presence of both but in a most inchoate form. In thought or reason there is a splitting of the two, and consequently, no adequate comprehension of reality. It is only in the higher intuition, which supervenes upon thought, that there is perfect union of the 'that' and the 'what', and consequently, a full comprehension of reality.

Without subscribing to Bradley's philosophy, there should be no hesitation in accepting the essential thing

which Bradley points out, namely, that reality is the union of existence and value. This is, in fact, the fundamental standpoint of the philosophy of values as understood in our country, and Bradley in pointing it out, has proved himself to be a true philosopher of values, although in the West he is not regarded as such.

What Bradley calls the 'what' of Reality, Sri Aurobindo, following the hoary tradition of our country, calls *Ānanda* or *Delight*.<sup>(6)</sup> This term expresses the value-aspect of Reality. If it is asked : What does Reality stand for ?, Sri Aurobindo's answer is : *Delight*. "*Delight is existence, Delight is the secret of creation, Delight is the root of birth, Delight is the cause of remaining in existence, Delight is the end of birth and that into which creation ceases*" :<sup>(7)</sup> In another passage he says, "*The self of things 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*".<sup>(8)</sup>

*Delight* being the content of the Absolute Reality, the extent and quality of *Delight* present at any stage of evolution precisely measure the value of that stage. What we call values are in fact nothing else than the different ways in which *Delight* has manifested itself. They are the successive emergents of *Delight*, the different forms which the descent of *Delight* has assumed. So far the chief emergents have been *Matter*, *Life*, *Soul* and *Mind*, and these, therefore, are the principal values which

are present in the world. But other and higher values are yet to emerge. Especially, the value of the Supermind is to emerge, which will cause a radical change in the status of the world.

From this point of view, evil is not the complete absence of Delight but only its presence in a limited or partial form. The world in its present state is undoubtedly partially evil, for Delight in its pure, unalloyed form is not present in it. But this means nothing more than that the evolution of the world has not yet reached its highest stage. Evil as a permanent feature of the world is denied by Sri Aurobindo, for it runs counter to his fundamental position that Reality is Delight.

We have so far not spoken of the second aspect of Reality, its aspect as Cit or Consciousness. But the possibility of the descent of Delight and its emergence in higher forms depend upon this second aspect. This aspect is really the dynamic or power aspect of Reality, and, therefore, Sri Aurobindo calls it Consciousness-Force. If Reality is not to remain an impotent Existence, then it is essential that it should be looked upon as Consciousness-Force. The double character of this component of Reality must always be borne in mind. Reality must first of all be understood as Consciousness. The fifth *sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa—"ईक्षतेनीशब्दम्" has settled this point once and for all. Even the so-called unconscious is itself a form of consciousness. Reality, therefore, is Consciousness. But in being Consciousness, it is also Power or Force. The nature of consciousness is to be dynamic, to move out of itself, to project itself out of itself, in other

words, to create. The second *sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa—जन्याप्त्ययत्न इति (“From whom the origin, etc. (of the world) takes place”)—indicates this essential creativity of Reality.

This second aspect of Reality is essential not only for the creation of the world but also for its evolution, for evolution is only the reverse side of the movement of creation. That activity by which the Real projects itself out of itself must cause it also to return to itself, and this second movement is what is called evolution. This movement may also be described as the successive emergence of higher and higher forms of Delight, that is to say, of higher and higher values. Without it there would be absolute stagnation in the world and no hope of any progress.

It is essential, therefore, to maintain all the three aspects of Reality. This is Sri Aurobindo's improvement upon Bradley.

## SECOND DEFECT OF HARTMANN'S THEORY OF VALUES: IT SHOWS AN INADEQUATE COMPREHENSION OF THE VALUE AND DESTINY OF MAN

Let us return to Hartmann. We have seen that the inherent weakness of his philosophy is to make values absolutely impotent and dependent entirely upon the human will for what is called their realization. On the face of it, it seems that if Hartmann has not been able to do justice to the values, he has at least done full justice to man. Hartmann himself believes it and is inordinately proud of it. For instance, he says, with regard to teleo-

logical metaphysics, which subordinates ontological to axiological determination<sup>(9)</sup> "This metaphysic of value, however impressive it may seem to us, nevertheless does violence to the problem of value, and ultimately, to ethics. Indeed, it is a failure to recognize man's place in the cosmos. If there be a universal and real teleology of values in the world, then all reality from beginning to end conforms to valuational principles and is based upon them as constitutive. But in that case values are ontological categories and, as such, are entirely actualized. And man with his sphere of action is altogether eliminated. He is superfluous. The values prevail without his consciousness of them and without his contributing to reality." In the same strain he speaks in another passage,<sup>(10)</sup> "...the cosmic insignificance of man is not the last word; besides the ontological there is still an axiological determination of the world, and in this man plays an integrating rôle. In this his insignificance is overborne—without a reintroduction of anthropocentric megalomania. Man, a vanishing quantity in the universe, is still in his own way stronger than it: he is the vehicle of a higher principle, he is the creator of a reality which possesses significance and value, he transmits to the real world a higher worth."

It is clear from these passages that Hartmann believes that it is one of the strong points of his philosophy that it maintains fully the worth and dignity of man. But is it really so? He has no doubt succeeded in giving great power to man, for it rests with him either to make or mar the world. But the possession of power by itself

does not connote any spiritual eminence. He gives us no indication that man will ever rise to a position when his power will be only a power for good. For him the power is always either for good or for evil. He cannot envisage a condition when the power to do evil will desert man.

He keeps man fixed at his present level. He has prepared a Procrustean bed for him which will forever destroy all his chances of real advancement. He does not think it will do any good to man to receive light from a Higher Source. Rather he thinks it will do him harm, for it will mean the annihilation of his freedom.

Yes, that is the fear which always haunts him—the fear of man losing his freedom. Rather than that man should lose his freedom, he should keep him for ever confined within the narrow circle of his moral life. He would shut out all Divine Grace from him lest it should rob him of his freedom.

If this is not fetishism, I do not know what fetishism is. Is freedom of such inestimable value that it is to be maintained at any cost? What is freedom worth if it means a divorce between God and man? If to maintain freedom we have to shut out Divine Grace, we would rather say: Save us from such freedom.

He makes a sharp contrast between the religious standpoint which sacrifices man and the world in which he lives in order to make room for Divine Grace, and the ethical standpoint which saves man and his freedom. "All genuine religion," he says,<sup>(11)</sup> "tends to look from our present existence to a 'better' world. The extreme

emphasis which has sometimes been laid upon this distinction, and which, after all, is only logical, reaches a point at which our mundane sphere has no value whatever of its own—is heard of only as a preparation for the other world. . . . Hence the demand that this world with its apparent values be sacrificed for the sake of that true existence and its values ; since no one can serve two masters. . . . Ethics has exactly the reverse tendency. It is wholly committed to this life. . . . From the ethical point of view, the tendency toward the Beyond is just as contrary to value as, from the religious point of view, is the tendency toward this world. It is a waste of moral energy and a diversion of it away from true values and their actualization, and on that account is not moral. . . . ”

The contrast between the two points of view is more striking in the case of salvation. “Salvation itself”—so runs his clear verdict—“is ethically contrary to value, quite irrespective of the fact that it is also ethically impossible. Yet, from the religious point of view, it is not only possible but is even the most important and valuable benefit which can accrue to man. Ethically it is a degradation of man ; religiously an elevation.”<sup>(12)</sup>

In this way he goes on, contrasting further and further the two standpoints, without even making an attempt to reconcile them. Not only so, but he believes that such an attempt is impossible. “Here,” he says “there is a radical and rigid contradiction, which spurns every compromise that one might suggest. By over-refined reconciliation one only obscures and falsifies the opposing

claims of God and man.”<sup>(13)</sup>

So it is his deliberate view that the claims of God and man cannot be reconciled. If human freedom and human personality are to be maintained, God is to be completely wiped out of the picture.

This view does great injustice to the moral life. It makes it, as it were an island, cut off, on the one hand, from Nature, and on the other, from God. Such an isolated position makes it impossible for the moral life to grow. It may retain no doubt its freedom, but this freedom will be only another name for stagnation.

But that to which it does the greatest injustice is man himself. This is perhaps the greatest tragedy of Hartmann's system, for, as we have seen, he strongly believes that he has enormously raised the status of man by making him a sort of semi-creator. In reality, far from raising his status, he has extremely lowered it, for he has shut him out completely from Divine Grace. The disjunction “Either God or Man” takes away man's most valued prerogative, namely, that of being the recipient of Divine Grace.

#### GOD IS THE FULFILMENT AND NOT THE NEGATION OF MAN

Against Hartmann's “God or Man”, Sri Aurobindo maintains the thesis *God in Man*. Man's freedom does not mean freedom to be damned, but freedom to be saved. And saved he is and saved he can be only by being linked with God. He is free, so far as he is near to God, not so far as he is removed from God. What Hartmann

calls freedom is, in Sri Aurobindo's vocabulary, called egoism, which he defines as the self-assertiveness of the finite and the particular. This self-assertiveness, in his view, is the root of all evil. As he puts it, "they (falsehood and evil) are circumstances or results that arise only at a certain stage when assertiveness culminates in opposition".<sup>(14)</sup> If freedom in the Hartmannian sense is to be looked upon as the prerogative of man, evil will become permanent for him, as there will be no possibility of his ever getting rid of it.

This, in Sri Aurobindo's view, means the negation of man, the destruction of all his hopes and aspirations, in a word, his complete effacement. For his hope and his aspiration—as also his privilege—is to be something more than mere man, to be a Divine Man or a Gnostic Being. Hartmann's conception of human freedom will for ever put an end to this aspiration and reduce man to a condition where he will be indistinguishable from a brute.

What a contrast this is to the picture of human destiny as revealed in the following prophetic words of Sri Aurobindo !

"If there is an evolution in material Nature and if it is an evolution of being with consciousness as its two key-terms and powers, this fullness of being, fullness of consciousness, fullness of life must be the goal of development towards which we are tending and which will manifest at an early or late stage of our destiny. The self, the spirit, the reality that is disclosing itself out of the first

inconscience of life and matter, would evolve its complete truth of being and consciousness in that life and matter. It would return to itself—or, if its end as an individual is to return into its Absolute, it could make that return also—not through a frustration of life but through a spiritual completion of itself in life. Our evolution in the Ignorance with its chequered joy and pain of self-discovery and world-discovery, its half fulfilments, its constant finding and missing, is only our first state. It must lead inevitably towards an evolution in the knowledge, a self-finding and self-unfoldment of the Spirit, a self-revelation of the Divinity in things in that true power of itself in Nature which is to us still a Supernature”..(16)

#### PROBLEM OF DISVALUE : COMPARISON OF THE VIEWS OF HARTMANN AND SRI AUROBINDO ON THIS PROBLEM

I now come to the last part of my task, namely, a comparison of the views of Hartmann and Sri Aurobindo on the problem of disvalue. One of the main features of Hartmann's theory of values is the sharp antithesis it makes between value and disvalue. But the question is : Can this antithesis be regarded as an essential feature of the philosophy of values ?

When I say 'good' I no doubt distinguish it from 'bad'. But do I thereby treat it as entirely different from the good, in other words, as the absolute antithesis of it ? In plain English, is it not possible to look upon the bad also as a kind of good ?

I venture to think it is. We must remember in the first

place that the distinction between value and disvalue is made on the plane of values, if we may say so, and not on any other plane. The disvalue, therefore, has a meaning only in this plane. It is a value, in fact, which runs counter to, or is opposed to the positive or constructive value. But the opposition is never absolute. The disvalues are never in a position to suppress the corresponding values. They seem only to indicate the present ontological weakness of the values, that is to say, their failure at present to force themselves into the world. But this failure is only temporary. Values have a coercive power. They are bound sooner or later to force ontological reality to receive them. The main weakness of Hartmann's philosophy, from Sri Aurobindo's point of view, lies in his failure to recognise this, in his supposition that values are permanently at the mercy of ontological reality.

But if we do not accept the ontological weakness of values as a permanent feature of them, the status of disvalues will undergo a complete change. They will then live only on sufferance. And evolution will mean a progressive elimination of them, or rather we should say, a progressive transformation, for disvalues will change their character, modify their attitude of hostility towards values and ultimately merge themselves in the latter.

Disvalues, in fact, serve only the purpose of reminding us of the imperfections of our present values, which means really the imperfections of our present stage of evolution. The values that have emerged so far are really not values, that is to say, not complete and perfect values, and that is why disvalues are present.

Disvalues, therefore, do not form a separate class by the side of the values. They owe their origin to the fact that the values that have emerged so far are not in the fullest sense values, and that, in consequence, part of their meaning is expressed through disvalues. Mind, for example, cannot be looked upon as a perfect value. It is only an incomplete expression of Delight. All the constructions of mind, therefore, are charged with opposition and contradiction. This opposition and contradiction, which we call a disvalue, is itself part of the content of the value called mind.

This, in brief, is the essential difference between Sri Aurobindo's position and that of Hartmann on the question of disvalues. For Sri Aurobindo disvalues are a temporary feature of the world. They are only a reminder to us that the present stage of the world's evolution is not the highest which it can attain, in other words, that evil, which is the general name for all disvalues, is bound to disappear, or rather, to be transformed into good. How this happens, from Sri Aurobindo's standpoint, I have already indicated in the essay *Sri Aurobindo and the problem of Evil*.

## REFERENCES

(1) While I say this I must admit that ideas similar to it occur elsewhere in Plato's writings, for example, in the remarkable passage in the *Symposium*, where Socrates narrates a talk he had with the wise woman Diotima, in the course of which the latter gave him an idea of Beauty

which resembles very much the idea of good.

(2) See my articles on *The Problem of Value* ("Review of Philosophy and Religion", Vol. I, No. 2 and Vol. II No. 1 (1930-31), where I have shown this very clearly.

(3) Whenever I shall speak of Hartmann's theory of values in this chapter I shall invariably refer to his theory of moral values, for it is here that the distinctive features of his theory are most evident.

(4) I have given R. E. Hume's translation as we find it at p. 97 of his *Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads* with a few changes here and there. For instance, the words '*sthitam*' and '*yat*', which he has translated as 'stationary' and 'moving' respectively, I have translated as 'limited' and 'unlimited'. Hume's translation retains no doubt the etymological meanings of these words, but it suffers from the defect that it makes *mūrta* the higher and *amūrta* the lower category, which is opposed to the general purport of the whole passage. I have, therefore, accepted Śaṅkara's interpretation of *sthitam* as '*paricchinna*', that is, 'limited', and *yat* as '*aparicchinna*', that is, 'unlimited'.

(5) *Ethics*, Vol. I, pp. 260-61

(6) The Sanskrit word *Ānanda* cannot be translated by the English word *pleasure*. 'Delight' is perhaps the nearest English equivalent.

(7) *The Life Divine*, 1939 Edn. Vol. I. p. 152.

(8) *ibid.*, p. 151.

(9) The meaning of this Sūtra may be expressed as follows : "On account of deliberation being attributed to the cause of the world, the Pradhāna cannot be identified with it, for it is against Scripture".

(10) *Ethics*, Vol. I, p. 242. Authorized English translation by Stanton Coit, Published by George Allen & Unwin.

(11) *ibid.*, p. 243.

(12) *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 262-263.

(13) *ibid.*, p. 273.

(14) *ibid.*, p. 266.

(15) *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 467.

(16) *ibid.*, Vol. II, Part II, pp. 1185-86.

## VII

### SRI AUROBINDO AND HEGEL \*

#### THOUGHT AND BEING ARE IDENTICAL

THERE are certain cryptic sayings which have changed the whole course of human thought. Such are the famous statements of the Upaniṣads, like *tat twam asi*, *sarvaṁ khalvidam Brahma*, *so'ham asmi*. A statement of Hegel which has created a similar revolution in human thought is his famous saying : Logic coincides with Metaphysics.

Upon this statement rests the whole of Hegel's philosophy. The identity of logic with metaphysics, which means the identity of thought and being, is the foundation upon which is erected the gigantic structure of the Hegelian system.

This famous statement occurs at p. 45 of his *Logic* (*Encyclopædia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Wallace's translation) which I shall refer to henceforward in this chapter simply as *Smaller Logic*, to distinguish it from his *Science of Logic*. In explaining what is meant by this statement, Hegel says,<sup>1</sup> "To speak of thought or objective thought as the heart and soul of the world, may seem to be ascribing consciousness to the things of nature. We feel a certain repugnance against making thought the inward function of things, especially as we speak of

\* Reprinted from Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual, 1946.

<sup>1</sup> *Smaller Logic*, p. 46.

thought as marking the divergence of man from nature. It would be necessary, therefore, if we use the term thought at all, to speak of nature as the system of unconscious thought, or, to use Schiller's expression, a petrified intelligence. And in order to prevent misconception, thought-form or thought-type should be substituted for the ambiguous term thought." He continues : "If thought is the constitutive substance of external things, it is also the universal substance of what is spiritual. In all human perception thought is present ; so too thought is the universal in all the acts of conception and recollection : in short, in every mental activity, in willing, wishing and the like. All these faculties are only further specialisations of thought. When it is presented in this light, thought has a different part to play from what it has if we speak of a faculty of thought, one among a crowd of other faculties, such as perception, conception and will, with which it stands on the same level. When it is seen to be the true universal of all that nature and mind contain, it extends its scope far beyond all these, and becomes the basis of everything. From this view of thought, in its objective meaning as *nous*, we may pass to consider the subjective sense of the term. We say first, Man is a being that thinks ; but we may say also at the same time, Man is a being that perceives and wills. Man is a thinker, and is universal ; but he is a thinker only because he feels his own universality..."

From these long quotations from his *Logic* two things stand out clearly. The first is that for Hegel thought is the constitutive principle of all objective reality.

This is evident from the fact that no department of this reality has been excluded from its scope. Hegel anticipates some difficulty on the part of his readers in accepting this position, and therefore hastens to add that in Nature thought is present in an unconscious form. But whether present in a conscious or unconscious form, thought is the constitutive principle of all objective reality. In fact, the difference between one reality and another from this point of view will be only one of degree and dependent upon the explicitness or implicitness of thought present in it. As we shall presently see, this puts its distinctive stamp upon the whole of the Hegelian philosophy.

The second thing that emerges from these quotations is that all consciousness, whether perceptual or conceptual or volitional, is reducible to thought. Thought is the ultimate form of all consciousness, all consciousness looked at from the point of view of subjective experience. Readers of Bradley's *Principles of Logic* or Bosanquet's *Logic or The Morphology of Knowledge* will have no difficulty in understanding this. Just as for Bradley and Bosanquet all explicit consciousness is a judgement, so for Hegel it is thought. Even implicit consciousness, that is, consciousness which struggles to be explicit but has not yet become so, is to be regarded as thought, thought in one of its earlier and implicit forms.

MC. TAGGART'S FAILURE TO GRASP THE TRUE MEANING  
OF HEGEL'S IDENTIFICATION OF THOUGHT AND BEING

In spite of Hegel's very definite and unambiguous language, as appears from the quotations we have given above, his commentators—even some of the best among them—have failed to grasp his true meaning. Mc. Taggart, for instance, whose interpretation of Hegel is considered one of the most authoritative, has given such a weak and halting interpretation of this identification of thought and being as has completely robbed it of its revolutionary character and given it quite a 'respectable' appearance. I crave the indulgence of the readers to quote *in extenso* from his book *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic* to prove my point. At p. 26 of this book he says, "It is beyond doubt that Hegel regarded his Logic as possessing, in some manner, ontological significance. But this may mean one of two very different things. It may mean only that the system rejects the Kantian thing-in-itself, and denies the existence of any reality except that which enters into experience, so that the results of a criticism of knowledge are valid of reality also. But it may mean that it endeavours to dispense with or transcend all *data* except the nature of thought itself, and to deduce from that nature the whole existing universe. The difference between these two positions is considerable. The first maintains that nothing is real but the reasonable, the second that reality is nothing but rationality. The first maintains that we can explain the world of sense, the second that we can explain

it away. The first merely confirms and carries further the process of rationalisation, of which all science and all finite knowledge consist ; the second differs entirely from science and finite knowledge, substituting a self-sufficient and absolute thought for thought which is relative and complementary to the *data* of sense. It is, I maintain, in the first of these senses, and the first only, that Hegel claims ontological validity for the results of the Logic..."

He, however, has a vague feeling that Hegel really goes much further than this. This is evident from what he says on the next page (p.27) : "It cannot be denied, however, that Hegel does more than is involved in the rejection of a thing-in-itself outside the laws of experience. Not only are his epistemological conclusions declared to have also ontological validity, but he certainly goes further and holds that, from the consideration of the existence of pure thought, we are able to deduce the existence of the worlds of Nature and Spirit. Is this equivalent to an admission that the worlds of Nature and Spirit can be reduced to or explained by, pure thought ?" And then he goes on to show that this is not the case. To prove this, he relies upon the fact that the dialectic process "is no less analytic of a given material than it is synthetic from a given premise, and owes its impulse as much to the perfect and concrete idea which is implicit in experience, as to the imperfect and abstract idea which is explicitly before the student. For if the idea is, when met with in reality, always perfect and concrete, it is no less true that it is, when met with

in reality, invariably, and of necessity, found in connection with sensuous intuition, without which even the relatively concrete idea which ends the Logic is itself an illegitimate abstraction. This being the case, it follows that, as each stage of the Logic insists on going forward to the next stage, so the completed logical idea insists on going forward and asserting the coexistence with itself of sensuous perception."

From these quotations it appears that, in Mc. Taggart's view, to say that reality means nothing but rationality implies explaining away the world of sense. This may be Mc. Taggart's view, but this is certainly not the view of Hegel. Hegelians should be grateful to him for his defence of Hegel against a serious charge, namely, that of doing away with the world of sense and substituting for it a world of pure thought. But this gratitude does not mean that they can accept his position, namely, that to say that reality is nothing but rationality means doing away with the world of sense. It does mean certainly the reduction of sensuous experience to thought, but it does not mean explaining it away. Hegel, in fact, maintains both these positions, namely, the reality of sensuous experience and its reduction to thought. The view which Hegel takes of sensuous experience may or may not be the correct one. But that is not the question we are discussing here. The question we are discussing is simply : What is Hegel's view of sensuous experience ? There is no doubt that Hegel has reduced sensuous experience to thought. But so has he reduced volition, intuition, faith, in fact, every conscious-

ness. He has reduced all these to thought, because thought is for him the basic or foundational consciousness. This is clear from the passages from his *Smaller Logic* which we have already quoted. "In all human perception," says Hegel, "thought is present; so too thought is the universal in all the acts of conception and recollection; in short, in all mental activity, in willing, wishing and the like. All these faculties are only further specialisations of thought." But although Hegel has reduced sensuous experience to thought, he has not negated it or explained it away. What he means is that it has nothing in it which is discontinuous with thought.

The root of Mc. Taggart's difficulty lies in his view that for Hegel nothing is real but the reasonable, but not reality is nothing but rationality. Now Hegel himself has referred in his *Smaller Logic* (p. 10) to the two statements he made in his preface to his *Philosophy of Law*, namely, (1) What is reasonable is actual, and (2) What is actual is reasonable. In connection with these statements he says, "The actuality of the rational stands opposed by the popular fancy that Ideas and ideals are nothing but chimeras, and philosophy a mere system of such phantasms. It is also opposed by the very different fancy that Ideas and ideals are something far too excellent to have actuality, or something too impotent to procure it for themselves. This divorce between idea and reality is especially dear to the analytic understanding which looks upon its own abstractions, dreams though they are, as something true and real, and prides itself upon the imperative 'ought', which it takes special pleasure in prescrib-

ing even on the field of politics....The object of philosophy is the Idea : and the Idea is not so impotent as merely to have a right or an obligation to exist without actually existing. The object of philosophy is an actuality of which those objects, social regulations and conditions, are only the superficial outside."<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt, therefore, that Hegel maintains both the propositions : The real is the rational, and the rational is the real. Caird has shown this very clearly at p. 185 of his small book on Hegel (Blackwood's Philosophical Classics), which is a veritable gem. He says, "In spite of the apparent contingency or external necessity by which things seem to be ruled, it has been shown that 'that only is real which is rational'; and in spite of the resistance which things present to what seems to be our highest aims and endeavours, it has been shown that 'that only is rational which is real'".

But why should it be supposed that these propositions mean any negation of sensuous experience ? Sensuous experience is real for Hegel because it also *is* thought. Sensuous experience and thought, in fact, are different grades of the same reality, the essential nature of which is expressed by thought. Hegel also says that thought which is unrelated to sensuous experience is an abstract thought, and as such, an incomplete thought. Do these things show that for Hegel sensuous experience is unreal ? In fact, it has never occurred to Hegel that to maintain the reality of an experience, we have to prove its independence of thought. That may be a very plausible

view of its reality, but it is not Hegel's view. For Hegel any idea of such independence is repugnant. He would call it not independence but isolation. And isolation for him is another name for fragmentariness, finitude, incompleteness, imperfection. The degree of reality, in fact, of any experience is for him measured by the quality of thought that is present in it. If any experience is absolutely unrelated to thought, then its degree of reality will be zero. But this is an impossibility, for there can be nothing which is outside of reality.

The fact of the matter is that Mc. Taggart has read his own view of reality into Hegel's philosophy. As he cannot conceive of any reality of sensuous experience without freedom from dependence upon thought, he makes Hegel also ascribe to sensuous experience independence of thought. What we see here is very similar to what Stirling has pointed out in his *Secret of Hegel* in connection with the interpretations of Hegel's philosophy by Schwegeler and others. Schwegeler, for example, has unduly accentuated the relation between Philosophy proper and the Empirical Sciences, and has all but rejected Hegel's identification of Philosophy and History. This, however, as Stirling points out<sup>1</sup>, gives a wrong idea of the Hegelian philosophy : "The identification of the historical with the logical evolution Schwegeler combats from the position of the contingency of the former. He says, 'This view is neither to be justified in its principle, nor made good historically. But they who were thoroughly on the standpoint of Hegel, would see that while the contingency (even that

<sup>1</sup> *Secret of Hegel*, Vol. II, p. 403.

of those who appear on the stage of History) is not denied, but, on the contrary, its relative necessity demonstrated, the *principle*, all being at bottom but an evolution of *Thought*, must be true, and must be capable of being actually discerned across the fluctuation of the Outward”’.

#### FOR HEGEL THE WORLD-VIEW OF THOUGHT IS ONE OF CONTINUITY

I need not make further quotations. It is perfectly clear that for Hegel Being is Thought and Thought is Being. What, however, is his conception of the nature of Thought? What is for him the essential feature of the World-view of Thought? Expressed in one word, it is : Continuity. The world of thought knows no gaps anywhere. As thought and reality are identical for him, this means also that reality has no gaps or discontinuities anywhere. This may be expressed in very various ways as that reality is perfectly consistent, that it is completely coherent, that it is a perfectly continuous whole, and so on. In fact, the words continuity, coherence and consistency mean the same thing, and may be treated as synonymous terms.

To establish this double truth (which is really the double phase of the same truth), namely, that thought is perfectly coherent and that reality has no gaps or discontinuities anywhere, is the main work of Hegel's logic. And it is for this reason that he has challenged the Law of Contradiction and its offshoot, the Law of Excluded Middle. But, as we shall presently see, this challenge is for the

purpose of a truer and stronger affirmation of the Law of Contradiction. If the Law of Contradiction, as it is ordinarily stated in the textbooks of logic, is to be accepted, then there will be enormous gaps in thought. At every step thought meets with contradictions, and if it is not in its power to overcome them, then it can never reach its goal, which is absolute reality. This, of course, does not matter, so long as thought is treated as it is done in formal logic, as abstract and artificial. But it is a serious matter, if it is taken, as it is done by Hegel, as a full and complete expression of reality. In that case, the inability of thought to overcome contradiction will really mean its inability to express reality. Looked at again, from the point of view of reality, if reality is supposed to be one continuous whole, then there cannot be any contradiction which it is not in the power of reality to overcome. In other words, in a world governed by the principle of continuity, there cannot be any room for absolute contradictories, like A and not-A. Such absolute contradictories exist only in the imagination of the formal logician, and have no place in the real world. The proper statement of the Law of Contradiction is, therefore, not as it is ordinarily done in textbooks of logic, where it is put in the form : A thing cannot be both A and not-A at the same time, but the proper statement must be of the form : In the real world there are no contradictories, like A and not-A, which are absolutely irreconcilable. Hegel, therefore, has banished all absolute contradictions from the real world. For him antitheses exist for the sake of a higher synthesis, negations for the purpose of establishing a higher affirmation.

When Kant in the chapter of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, called The Transcendental Dialectic, pointed out that as soon as thought wanted to say something about the ultimate reality, it found itself face to face with insoluble contradictions, and drew from it the conclusion that thought should never go beyond the region of the phenomenal world, he stated a fact correctly, but drew a very wrong conclusion. It was not because thought had to deal with the world of noumena that it became involved in contradiction, but it was the nature of thought to raise contradictions and to overcome them for the sake of arriving at a higher truth. Kant had hit upon a very important truth concerning the nature of thought, but unfortunately, he failed to grasp its true significance. The two contradictories which Kant found confronted thought at every step, are both imperfect expressions of truth, and it is only in their reconciliation that we reach a higher truth. Kant was also mistaken in thinking that these contradictories were insoluble. When a higher truth is reached in this way through the reconciliation of two contradictories, it must not be supposed that it is a permanent resting-place for thought. It is only a temporary halting-ground, for when the light of criticism falls upon it, it splits itself up, as before, into contradictories, and again the same necessity arises of a reconciliation. This is the inner story of the march of thought from truth to truth, till the highest Truth, the Absolute is reached. When it is viewed purely from the inner side, it represents what Hegel calls the dialectical process of thought. But it is the same process which, when viewed externally, that is,

as a process in time, we call History. Thus, we come to one of the main principles of the Hegelian philosophy, namely, that the dialectical process and the historical process are identical.

### BRADLEY'S ATTEMPT TO PLAY HEGEL AGAINST HEGEL

Before I pass on to deal with the challenge of this world-view of Hegel's, namely, the world-view of continuity, I have to mention one curious development of the principle of continuity which seeks to demolish with its help the great structure raised by Hegel. I refer to Bradley's attempt in his *Appearance and Reality* to prove that the very principle of continuity which is the life-breath of thought, proves its destruction. It is a very curious development of his philosophy, of which we were given no warning in his *Principles of Logic*. There we were told that thought could march from judgment to judgment in a triumphal procession and reach the citadel of the Absolute itself, without coming across any barriers at all. Here, for the first time, without any warning, thought is presented with an ultimatum : Either you stop marching further, or if you are consumed with a desire to trespass into regions where you are not entitled to go, you must drink the hemlock and commit suicide. A very strange ultimatum indeed ! And what did thought do to merit this fate ? Did it change the direction of its march, did it accept the guidance of any other principle than that of continuity or coherence ? Nothing of the kind. And yet at a certain point of its journey it is asked either to

retrace its steps or drink the hemlock.

After having been mentioned honourably in the despatches, if not awarded the Victoria Cross, it is now told bluntly that it does not know how to handle its gun, namely, its weapon of continuity or coherence. And what are the reasons which are given for this strange verdict ? These are stated as follows :<sup>1</sup> "Let us assume that existence is no longer different from truth, and let us see where this takes us. It takes us straight to thought's suicide. A system of content is going to swallow up our reality; but in our reality we have the fact of sensible experience, immediate presentation with its colouring of pleasure and pain. Now I presume there is no question of conjuring this fact away; but how is it to be exhibited as an element in a system of thought-content, is a problem not soluble. Thought is relational and discursive, and if it ceases to be this, it commits suicide, and yet, if it remains thus, how does it contain immediate presentation ?"

What are we to make of this paragraph ? It is quite clear that thought meets this fate, not because it does not know how to handle its own weapon, but because it does not know how to handle a weapon which it was never taught to handle. This new weapon is that of discontinuity. Thought is blamed for not being able to deal with a world which presents discordances or discontinuities. One such discordance is mentioned here, namely, the discordance between feeling and thought. In a world full of such discontinuities, how can thought, wedded as it is to the principle of continuity, succeed ? This is, in fact,

<sup>1</sup> *Appearance and Reality*, 2nd edn., revised, p. 170.

the sum and substance of this paragraph. Bradley therefore here has clearly shifted his ground in order to pronounce capital sentence upon thought. His world is no longer one which is ruled by the principle of continuity or coherence, but is one which is ruled, at least partially, by the principle of discontinuity. The charge against thought thus becomes frivolous. How can you blame thought, which is taught to deal with a world of perfect coherence, for its inability to handle a discontinuous world ?

And yet Bradley will not admit that he has changed his view of reality, which is no longer one of complete coherence, but where discontinuity has distinctly entered as an element. He still wants us to believe that he is still as great a devotee of the doctrine of coherence as he ever was. That the incapacity of thought lies in its inability to grasp a world of discontinuities and not in its failure to comprehend a perfectly consistent world, appears more clearly from the sentences which occur immediately after the ones we have quoted. "Let us suppose," says Bradley, "the impossible accomplished; let us imagine a harmonious system of ideal contents united by relations, and reflecting itself in self-conscious harmony. This is to be reality, all reality, and there is nothing outside it. The delights and pains of the flesh, the agonies and raptures of the soul, these are fragmentary meteors fallen from thought's harmonious system. But these burning experiences—how in any sense can they be mere pieces of thought's heaven ? For, if the fall is real, there is a world outside thought's region, and if the fall is apparent, then

human error itself is not included there. Heaven, in brief, must either not be heaven, or else not all reality. Without a metaphor, feeling belongs to perfect thought, or it does not. If it does not, there is at once a side of existence beyond thought. But if it does not belong, then thought is different from thought discursive and relational".<sup>1</sup>

If we do not allow ourselves to be hypnotised by the great beauty of these sentences but probe deep into their meaning, what is it that we find ? Do we not find clear evidence of what we have just said, namely, that Bradley has shifted his ground, and that his conception of reality, is no longer one of perfect coherence but one of discontinuity ? What these sentences, in fact, clearly assert is the presence of a big gulf between feeling and thought. They point therefore to a fundamental discontinuity in reality. What they state against thought really is that, adhering as thought does to the principle of coherence, it is impossible for it to grasp truly the nature of reality, which is partly discontinuous. To understand reality we have therefore to discard thought and take recourse to intuition. This, in fact, is the gist of his criticism of thought. But why does he not admit it ? Why does he try to delude us into thinking that, although his conception of reality is the same as that of Hegel, namely, that of a perfectly coherent whole, he has proved the inefficacy of thought and taken recourse to intuition for the purpose of understanding the true nature of reality ? As a matter of fact, he has discarded the Hegelian principle of Continuity and accepted that of Emergence.

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., pp. 170-71.

CHALLENGE TO HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY:  
THE WORLD-VIEW OF EMERGENT EVOLUTION

Bradley, therefore, has not been able to kill Hegel with his own weapon. There he has failed. But he has succeeded in another direction. He has been instrumental in introducing a principle which offers a direct challenge to the Hegelian philosophy. This is the principle of Emergence. The fight on the philosophical front is no longer between Mechanical Evolution and Teleological Evolution, but between Continuous Evolution and Emergent Evolution. Bergson's Creative Evolution is also a form of Emergent Evolution, because there lurk in his conception of creativity the ideas of surprise, uncertainty and incalculability. Bergson, in fact, has protested more violently than any other philosopher, either living or dead, against the conception of Evolution 'according to schedule'. There is no schedule in existence; all schedules exist to be broken. The world is a world of surprises, uncertainties, discontinuities. More or less the same thing has been said by Alexander and other champions of Emergent Evolution. Evolution for all of them is made possible by the emergence of the new, which must be treated as a fundamental departure from the old, and must in no sense be regarded as a deduction from, or a continuation of, the old.

Perennial philosophy in the West has held fast as its sheet-anchor to the principle of Continuity. Its last great champion was Hegel. But it is now fighting with its back to the wall. It has had its day, and it must now leave the

field to the new-comers as gracefully as possible. The phenomenal rise in recent years of the philosophy of values has further hastened its fall, for the philosophy of values is essentially a philosophy of emergence. But it is not from the West alone that the challenge to this philosophy has come. Far more powerful than the attack from the West is the attack that is launched against it from the East, for Sri Aurobindo champions a form of Emergent Evolution which constitutes a far greater challenge than any attack it has had so far to face in the West. To this we have now to come.

### THE CHALLENGE TO HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF CONTINUITY FROM THE EAST

Perhaps the earliest mention we have of the discontinuous view of reality is in the famous *puruṣa sūkta* of the *Rgveda*. It describes the *puruṣa* from whom the whole world originated, as follows :

सहस्रशीर्षा पुरुषः  
सहस्राक्षः सहस्रपात् ।  
स भूमिं विश्वतो वृत्वा-  
ऽत्यतिष्ठद्दशङ्गुलम् ॥ १ ॥

पुरुष एवेदं सर्वं  
यद् भूतं यच्च भव्यम् ।  
उतामृतत्वस्थेऽनो  
यदन्नेनातिरोहति ॥ २ ॥

एतावानस्य महिमा-  
ऽतो ज्यायांश्च पूरुषः ।  
पादोऽस्य विश्वा भूतानि  
त्रिपादस्यामृतं दिवि ॥ ३ ॥

त्रिपादूर्ध्वं उदैत्पुरुषः  
पादोऽस्येहाभवत्पुनः ।  
ततो विष्वङ् व्यक्रामत्  
साशनानशने अभि ॥ ४ ॥

These verses may be translated as follows (adopting, with slight changes, Peterson's translation) :

1. The *puruṣa* had a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet; he covered the earth on all sides, and stretched ten fingers' length beyond it.
2. He was all that is and all that will be; ruling over immortality, he was all that grows by food.
3. Such is his greatness, but greater than all his greatness is the *puruṣa* himself. This whole world is a fourth of him, three-fourths of him are immortal in the sky.
4. For with three-fourths the *puruṣa* went on high; but a fourth of him remained here, and then spread on all sides, over the living and lifeless world.

The first verse makes a most significant assertion : अत्यतिष्ठद्दशङ्गुलम् 'he exceeded the whole world by ten fingers'. This clearly shows that the world cannot be equated with the *puruṣa*, for there is a discontinuity between the two. The whole of the *puruṣa* is not melted into the world. This is rendered more explicit in the third and fourth verses, where it is said that only one-fourth of the *puruṣa* is in our world, the rest of him being in the region of the skies.

This is the foundation of the emergent view of evolution in our country. As the *puruṣa* does not melt Himself completely into the world, evolution of the world can only be through successive emergences of higher and higher consciousness from Him. These emergences are really descents of the Divine Consciousness. We

thus come to the doctrine of *Avatāra* which has been expounded in the fourth chapter of the *Gītā*. The *Gītā* speaks of a double current in evolution. The first, which is the normal current, does not require any Divine intervention, and can flow on smoothly of itself. But it cannot do so for very long. A time comes when it meets with obstacles which it is beyond its power to remove. It is then that Divine intervention steps in, removes the obstacles which blocked the progress of the world, and sets free the current of evolution. Such a crisis in the evolution of the world the *Gītā* calls धर्मस्य ग्लानिः, 'deterioration of Dharma', because it describes every process in terms of its spiritual significance. This direct intervention by God and the resulting emergence of a new consciousness are for the *Gītā* an absolute essential of world-evolution.

This is, in briefest terms, our Indian challenge to the doctrine of continuity. It does not reject *in toto* this doctrine, but it sets up, along with it, the principle of emergence, without which we cannot obtain a complete picture of evolution. Likewise it does not mean the elimination of thought from all effective share in the direction of the evolutionary process, but the setting of definite limits to its effectiveness, and the supplementation of it by other types of consciousness which are more at home in a discontinuous world.

## SRI AUROBINDO'S CONCEPTION OF EMERGENT EVOLUTION

For Sri Aurobindo the world does not evolve of itself in a continuous process, but it requires at every crucial stage of its evolution Divine intervention in the shape of a direct descent of the Divine Consciousness. No radical change in the stage of evolution is for him possible without such a Divine Descent. The lowest stage of Evolution is Matter. Matter cannot automatically raise itself into the next higher stage, Life, but Life can only emerge as a result of a fresh descent of the Divine Consciousness into the world. So again, Life cannot evolve of itself into the next higher stage of evolution, Mind, but the Divine Consciousness must descend in order to lift the world from the stage of Life to that of Mind. Matter, Life, Mind, therefore, are successive emergents, the appearance of which has been made possible by successive acts of Divine Descent. We are at present in the stage of evolution represented by Mind. We can no doubt advance to some extent with the help of Mind and the other principles that are at our disposal. But a fundamental and radical change in the character of ourselves and of our universe will not take place through any effort of ours, through any application that we can make of the principles that have already emerged, such as Matter, Life, Mind and Psyche or Soul. These can no doubt take us a little further on the road to progress, but they cannot take us very far. Their unaided efforts are inadequate to effect any radical change in the nature of man or of the world. That must wait for a further descent of the Divine Consciousness. The whole world,

in fact, is waiting for such a descent. Without it man's aspiration after a Divine state can never be fulfilled.

Does this view of Evolution cripple man and reduce thought to a nullity ? It shows no doubt that man cannot by his own efforts alone reach his destined goal. But this, far from crippling man, rather gives him unlimited possibilities of expansion. He has now, in addition to his own resources, the Infinite Power of God to help him rise higher and higher in the scale of evolution.

As for thought, it no doubt confines it within well-defined limits, but within these limits, it certainly makes it very effective. For instance, in the present stage of our evolution which is dominated by mind, thought, says Sri Aurobindo, is our chief organizing agency. I have already dealt with this point in an article of mine<sup>1</sup> and therefore, all that I would like to say here is that this crippling of thought, if at all it can be called so, is a consequence of the view of thought held by Hegel himself. For if, as Hegel strongly insisted, the world-view of thought is one of continuity, then it must naturally be incapable of understanding the world in the shaping of which the principle of emergence plays the most important part. The sweep and range of the principle of emergence are infinitely greater than that of the principle of continuity. Evolution on the lines of continuity is a very tame affair, compared with that based on the principle of emergence. Its dance is a marionette dance, not at all

<sup>1</sup> See my article *The nature and function of thought in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy* ("The Advent", Nov. 1945).

comparable to the world-shaking and world-shaping dance of Śiva which is envisaged by emergent evolution. Its chief defect is its self-centred isolation; it cuts us off from the spiritual forces which are but dimly perceived by us. It must give up this isolation and surrender to the Divine forces which are shaping the destiny of the world. It must realize that the course of the world is not something that can be calculated beforehand, for it is a world of "mysteries, prodigies, without end, without dimension," as Amiel says in his *Journal Intime*. To understand its nature we must break the enchanted circle that thought has created and come out in the open, "for the sheer joy of cutting ourselves adrift, for the sheer pleasure of running and moving" "छुटे याबार छुटे याबार चलवारइ आनदेते" as the poet has put it. Continuity can function very well in a ready-made world, but it can give no guidance in a world which is constantly springing surprises upon us.

I know Hegelians will challenge this position. They will swear that theirs is no block universe, but one which is capable of infinite expansion. No doubt their block universe is not the same as that of mechanical evolution. But from Sri Aurobindo's point of view, any conception of the world from the standpoint of any of the principles that have so far emerged, cannot be anything else than that of a block universe, for it shuts the door upon new world-views that will emerge with the emergence of principles which we only very dimly understand at present. What Sri Aurobindo will say to these ardent Hegelians will be something like this: 'No doubt you have worked wonders with the help of the few prin-

ciples that were at your disposal, but for God's sake, do not mortgage the future, for it is replete with possibilities, of which you cannot form the faintest idea.'

One thing, however, must be said here. If you adopt the Hegelian principle of continuity, there is no escape for you from thought. There Hegel is perfectly right. I have already shown how utterly Bradley has failed in his attempt to discard thought, while yet sticking to the Hegelian principle of continuity. It is only when you give up continuity and adopt the principle of emergence, that you can abandon thought and take recourse to some other principle, such as intuition.

SRI AUROBINDO'S PRINCIPLE OF EMERGENCE IS BASED  
NOT UPON THE IDEA OF THE SUICIDE OF THE LOWER  
PRINCIPLES BUT UPON THAT OF THEIR TRANS-  
FORMATION, WHICH WE MAY CALL A KIND  
OF REBIRTH

One thing we should always remember in connection with Sri Aurobindo's conception of emergent evolution. It is that, unlike Bradley's conception, it is based not upon the suicide of the lower principles, but upon their transformation. This transformation we may call a rebirth to indicate the radical nature of the change that will come upon them. When a higher principle emerges, the lower ones do not remain where they were before its emergence, but they are benefited by it. They, in fact, undergo a radical change, which is expressed by saying that they are transformed. The new principle brings about a total

change in the character of the world as it existed before its emergence.

This view of emergence, we may note, is different from Alexander's. In Alexander's scheme of emergent evolution there is no change of the old principles on the emergence of a new one. The old principles remain as they were before; only a new one joins them. For Sri Aurobindo, however, evolution does not mean merely addition of some new principles to those which are already existent, but it means that the old principles, by reason of the emergence of the new ones, change their character. Life, for instance, as it was before the emergence of Mind, is very different from Life as we know it today, dominated as it is by Mind. So again, he believes when the principle of Supermind will emerge, all the principles which are existent today, such as Matter, Life, Mind and Soul, will undergo a radical change. Even the physical universe will be very different from what it is at present, for it will cease to offer any resistance to the Spirit, but on the contrary, will work in perfect co-operation with it.

#### SRI AUROBINDO'S CONCEPTION OF THE ABSOLUTE, AS COMPARED WITH THAT OF HEGEL

I will conclude this brief comparative study of the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Hegel by dealing with their respective conceptions of the Absolute. The Absolute of Hegel is the Absolute of Thought, and the principle of thought, as I have already pointed out, is Continuity. It is therefore related to the finite world as the

more complete is related to the less complete, as the more perfect is related to the less perfect. In other words, the difference is one of degree. The Absolute contains no truth which is not to be found in the lower categories of thought, but it contains the truths of all of them in a higher or more complete form. So that, although it is true that nothing is to be found in the Absolute which is not to be found in the world of finite beings, it is equally true that everything which is found in the world of finite beings is present in the Absolute in its complete or perfect form. This will be clear from the following quotation from Hegel's *Smaller Logic*<sup>1</sup> : "To speak of the absolute idea may suggest the conception that we are at length reaching the right thing and the sum of the whole matter. It is certainly possible to indulge in a vast amount of senseless declamation about the idea absolute. But its true content is only the whole system of which we have been hitherto studying the development. It may also be said in this strain that the absolute idea is the universal, but the universal not merely as an abstract form to which the particular content is a stranger, but as the absolute form, into which all the categories, the whole fulness of the content it has given being to, have retired. The absolute idea may in this respect be compared to the old man who utters the same creed as the child, but for whom it is pregnant with the significance of a lifetime. Even if the child understands the truths of religion, he cannot but imagine them to be something outside of which lies the whole of life and the whole of the world. The same

<sup>1</sup> *Smaller Logic* (Wallace's translation), pp. 374-75.

may be said to be the case with human life as a whole and the occurrences with which it is fraught. All work is directed only to the aim or end; and when it is attained, people are surprised to find nothing else but just the very thing which they had wished for. The interest lies in the whole movement. When a man traces up the steps of this life, the end may appear to him very restricted; but in it the whole *decursus vitae* is comprehended. So too, the content of the absolute idea is the whole breadth of ground which has passed under our review up to this point."

From this passage it is clear that for Hegel the Absolute Idea is the fulfilment or completion of all the other categories. What these categories aimed at but could not realize, is realized in the Absolute Idea. The difference between it and the other categories he likens to the difference between the child's conception of religion and the old man's. The child views religion as something outside of its life and its world. This externality vanishes in the old man's view of it. Similarly, the externality which is present in the conception of reality as it finds expression in the lower categories, disappears in the Absolute Idea. Take, for instance, the category of causality. The cause-effect relationship is not a perfectly internal one. The cause is somewhat external to the effect, as the latter is external to the cause. But in the Absolute Idea this externality completely vanishes. It vanishes, because it is not external to the cause-effect relationship or to any other relationship that the categories may conceive, but these relationships find their fulfilment in it.

This is as far as we can proceed with the help of logic.

It takes us to the Absolute Idea which is the fulfilment and completion of the categories. But the Absolute Idea is still in the domain of the abstract. It is Reason which has not yet manifested itself. And by the same inner dialectic by which Being passes into non-Being, the Absolute Idea as a bare abstract idea must pass into its opposite, that is to say, into the Unconscious, as the first step towards concretisation. This is the stage of Nature, the first stage in the process of the concretisation of the logical Idea into actual reality. But the process which begins with Nature does not stop there. In Nature the Idea works unconsciously. From this stage of unconsciousness it gradually rises to higher and higher forms of consciousness in man. This is its passage from Nature to Spirit. The highest manifestation of the Spirit is Philosophy. Here the Idea which, in its need for concretisation, broke loose from itself, completely returns to itself. This philosophy, however, is not any philosophy that has been propounded by any man, living or dead (though the critics of Hegel wrongly say that this philosophy is Hegel's own philosophy), but it is the expression of the Spirit when it is truly free, that is, when it is in a position to overcome all externality. It is, in other words, the Absolute Spirit when it is really absolute, that is, when it has divested itself of all externality and has become completely internal. Art and Religion also are manifestations of the Absolute Spirit, but in both of them there is some externality, the content or matter being an inadequate expression of the form, which is nothing else than the consciousness of the Absolute.

What we find in all this conception of the Absolute is a gigantic development of the idea of continuity. There is continuity between one logical category and another, there is continuity between the logical categories and the Idea, and there is also continuity between the logical Idea and its manifestation in the universe. Taking the most general form of its manifestation in the world to be history, we may say that the main feature of Hegel's conception of the Absolute is the perfect continuity between logic and history. The real world follows in its evolution the same principles as are shown in logic in the development of thought.

An important point has been raised by Mure in his book *An Introduction to Hegel*. He maintains that Hegel's thought is not merely thought but also intuition. From this point of view, Hegel's Absolute will be not merely an Absolute of thought but also of intuition. Let us try to understand what Mure means by saying that Hegel's thought is not merely thought but also intuition. At pp. 114-115 of this book he says, "We have seen that Hegel restores to thought the intuitive factor in knowledge, the moment of immediate existence and individuality, which Kant had confined, at least in respect of human knowing, to passive sensibility. In thus denying the Kantian divorce between thinking and knowing, in thus giving a far more real meaning to that activity which Kant had continued to attribute to thought emasculated of its intuitional moment, Hegel in a sense returns to a position common to all Kant's greatest predecessors. In different forms the conception of intuitive thought is present equally

in Aristotle and in Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz. But none of these thinkers had, in Hegel's view, clearly grasped either (a) the general nature of intuition, or (b) its relation to discursion within the nature of thought itself.... As against these modern thinkers Hegel saw in the religious view of the world a form of experience less complete than philosophy. His conception of thought as intuitive is an effort to expand the Aristotelian *nous* and to surpass both the view of thought as illuminant and the idea of it as creative. At least in Aristotle and Descartes intuition tends to become wholly severed from discursion. We seem to be presented with a number of self-evident truths whose connection with the consequences supposed to follow from them thus becomes inexplicable. We are confronted with a dilemma : either inference is a tautologous *petitio principii* or it is an inconsequent leap to a fresh intuition. Hegel's conception of thought as dialectical is an attempt to solve this dilemma. His hope is to show that it arises from conceiving two moments of unity in abstract separation. Thought is intuitive, but so far *merely* immediate. It is discursive, but this *discursus* is its own activity of self-mediation. Moreover, this mediation is a self-development towards new immediacy which mediation enriches; a progress and yet a return upon itself. The whole activity, verbally expressed as if it were three temporary phases, is real only in the union of the first and second moment in the third".

From these long passages of his book, it appears that for Mure wherever there is immediate existence and individuality, we have clear evidence of the work of intuition

and not of thought, and because Hegel's thought embraces both, therefore it must be said to have in it an intuitive factor. Now what is to be noted in connection with Hegel's view of thought is that the same principle which guides thought in its discursive activity is precisely the one which makes it immediate and concrete. He does not think he is adding any new factor to thought when he makes it individual and immediate. The root of discursive thinking for Hegel is the maintenance of continuity. When, on the strength of a middle term, we join the major and minor terms in a syllogism, we do nothing but maintain the continuity of thought and avoid a hiatus. The same principle of continuity leads to concreteness and immediacy. Concreteness means that the universal is not detached from the particular, but maintains its continuity with the particular. So, again, immediacy means nothing but the continuity between thought and experience. Thought which is severed from actual experience is, from Hegel's point of view, an abstract thought, and as such, an incomplete thought. The same reason which makes Hegel say that opposites cannot break the unity of thought, induces him also to say that concreteness and immediacy cannot break the unity of thought. In fact, the main object of Hegel is to show that discursive thinking cannot remain confined within the limits of discursive thinking, but that it must develop into concrete and individual experience.

As I have already said, if intuition is to be a principle different from thought, it must be in a position to help us where thought fails to give us guidance. Such a posi-

tion arises when we try to grasp a discontinuous reality. There we realise the limitations of thought, for thought utterly fails to comprehend discontinuity. But where thought is in its element, as in the comprehension of continuity, it is absurd to thrust in intuition and say that it also grasps continuity as well as, if not better than, thought. Either the Absolute of Hegel is one of continuity or it is not. If it is, then thought alone can have access to its inner shrine. If it is not, then Hegel was absolutely mistaken in thinking that thought could give access to it.

For Sri Aurobindo the whole conception of the Absolute, as we find it in Hegel, is artificial. It is, in fact, a man-made Absolute, and differs from the real Absolute as an artificial flower differs from a genuine one. Hegel has constructed the Absolute with the help of the principle of thought which is available to man in his present consciousness. But any principle which is accessible to man at present, is a hopelessly inadequate one, and therefore, any attempt to construct the Absolute with its help is bound to fail. The principle of continuity, in the light of which Hegel understands the Absolute, is itself an abstract principle, and naturally its shortcomings must affect the conception of the Absolute based upon it.

The Absolute is not merely the present world or the present human consciousness raised to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  power, but it has in it features which have not yet manifested themselves anywhere in the universe. Only certain indications which we observe force us to the conclusion that the present state of the universe is not its final state, but that

it is bound to rise to higher and higher levels and eventually reach the Absolute. The chief of such indications is the presence in man of an aspiration—an aspiration after a condition immeasurably higher than the present one. This takes the form of a sort of Divine discontent, which is the chief characteristic of man, his refusal to be satisfied with anything that he gets. But this Divine discontent does not give us any idea as to what will give ultimate satisfaction to man.

The Absolute, in Sri Aurobindo's view, cannot be identified with any type of human consciousness that has so far emerged, neither with thought, nor with will or feeling or intuition. It is an altogether different consciousness from any of which we have knowledge. So, again, its content cannot be identified with any of the logical categories known to us. It is neither Being nor Becoming, nor Cause nor Substance. It is also not possible to describe the Absolute through pairs of contradictories, and call it both *sat* and *asat*, Limited and Unlimited, Phenomenal and Noumenal. Sri Aurobindo indicates this very clearly. Thus he says<sup>1</sup>, "On the one hand to Sachchidananda transcendent of the forms of the universe the dual terms themselves, even if so understood, can no longer be applicable. Transcendence transfigures; it does not reconcile, but rather transmutes opposites into something surpassing them that effaces their oppositions".

The Absolute, moreover, cannot, in his opinion, be called a mere fulfilment of human consciousness. Fulfilment refers to the realization of an object which is dis-

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. I, pp. 78-79.

tinctly apprehended. Thus we speak of the fulfilment of our desires, our wishes, our purposes. Here fulfilment has got a definite meaning; the object which we desire or wish or propose to realize we definitely know, and fulfilment means only the actual realization of this definitely conceived object. Here, in the case of the Absolute, however, it far transcends any object that we may desire or wish, or of which we have the faintest idea. How can it be said then to be a fulfilment of what we are or what we long to be ? Sri Aurobindo is very explicit on this point. Thus he says,<sup>1</sup> "At first, however, we must strive to relate the individual to the harmony of the totality. There it is necessary for us—otherwise there is no issue from the problem—to realize that the terms in which our present consciousness renders the values of the universe, though practically justified for the purposes of human experience and progress, are not the sole terms in which it is possible to render them and may not be the complete, the right, the ultimate formulas. Just as there may be sense-organs or formations of sense-capacity which see the physical world differently and it may well be better, because more completely, than our sense-organs and sense-capacity, so there may be other mental and supra-mental envisagings of the universe which surpass our own". To speak of the Absolute as only a fulfilment of what we are, would keep us more or less to our present level. It smacks too much of a block universe. Sri Aurobindo's idea of the Absolute is totally different from this. Not by any extension or expansion of our present nature, but by a radical trans-

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 79.

formation of it, can we reach the Absolute.

This brings in a new factor in the relation between ourselves and the Absolute. As Hegel views it, we can automatically reach the Absolute by ascending the steps of the ladder which he has placed between us and the Absolute. For Sri Aurobindo, however, no effort on our part can take us to the Absolute. It is for the Absolute to make a gesture; it is its Grace alone which can raise us to higher and higher levels, eventually placing us on its throne. Without such Divine Grace, there is no possibility of our getting anywhere near the Absolute. There is no trace of this conception of Grace in Hegel's philosophy.

## VIII

### SRI AUROBINDO AND PLATO\*

WHITEHEAD has said in a passage in his book *Process and Reality* that "the safest general characterization of European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato". This clearly proves the importance of Plato's philosophy as the source of all European philosophy. Although I am not in a position to accept this view in its entirety inasmuch as there are other factors than Plato's philosophy which have been responsible for the development of European philosophy, such as the influence of the Christian Church, the impact of the advance of science upon the entire cultural life of Europe, etc., yet it is undoubtedly true that one of the main formative elements in European philosophy is furnished by Platonism. Plato therefore may be looked upon as one of the most representative European philosophers, and thus a comparison between Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and that of Plato is of great interest.

## I

### THE BACKGROUND OF PLATO'S PHILOSOPHY

To understand Plato, it is necessary to have a clear idea of the spirit of Greek philosophy, of which Plato repre-

\* Reprinted from *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1950.

sents the optimum development. The Greek spirit was one of free inquiry, unfettered by tradition or dogma. The Greek mind first looked outwards, towards Nature, and tried to find therein some principle which could explain the entire phenomena of Nature. Thales, universally regarded as the founder of Greek philosophy, found such a principle in water. Other members of his school, known as the Ionian school, took some other natural principle, such as air, as the fundamental one. A change was made by Anaximander who took a more abstract principle, namely, the Boundless, as the starting-point, of his philosophy.

Greek philosophy thus far was synonymous with natural speculation, though Anaximander gave it a turn which took it into the realm of abstract speculation. From now onwards Greek philosophy became more and more fond of abstractions. This tendency reached its climax in two philosophers, Parmenides and Heraclitus, who although they differed fundamentally about the nature of the ultimate principle, one looking upon it as Being and the other as Becoming, yet made the ultimate principle the most abstract one that could be conceived. This process of abstract speculation continued in Pythagoras, who looked upon Number, as the symbol of measure and proportion, as the ultimate principle. But in Pythagoras Greek philosophy had its first touch of mysticism, which it acquired partly from the followers of the Orphic cult and partly from its contact with Eastern, specially Indian, philosophy, for there can be no doubt that Pythagoras was greatly influenced by Buddhism

and other Indian trends of thought. How important this fact is for understanding Plato we shall see presently.

After Pythagoras there was a reversion to the concrete, and in Empedocles, Anaxagoras and the Atomists, Greek philosophy returned to the original concrete standpoint of the early Ionians, with this very important difference, that it no longer regarded the ultimate principle as one but as many. Greek philosophy, in fact, in this period was caught in a wave of pluralism. But Anaxagoras, although he was essentially an atomist, yet introduced a principle fundamentally different from any that Greek philosophy had so far conceived and which was of far-reaching importance for the subsequent development of that philosophy. This was the principle of *Nous* or Mind which was totally unknown to Greek philosophy before him. It is true he could not make full use of this principle and it was only externally connected with the rest of his philosophy. In fact, it was in search of a principle that could explain motion, that he hit upon *Nous*. To the end it remained in his philosophy a *deus ex machina*.

In fact, the credit of turning the centre of gravity of philosophy from Nature to Mind or Consciousness goes to Protagoras, rather than to Anaxagoras. It was Protagoras who, with his doctrine *Man is the measure of all things*, made a revolutionary change in the outlook of Greek philosophy, which had hitherto been more or less a sort of natural speculation. By making man the centre of philosophical interest, he turned the gaze of philosophy from outside within. Henceforth Greek philosophy never departed from this fundamental standpoint. From now

on, man and his problems came to occupy the centre of Greek philosophy.

But Protagoras had a very poor conception of the nature of man. Man for him meant only the sensuous man, that part of man which expresses itself only in sensations and perceptions. Thus, although Protagoras was the author of the revolutionary change which gave Greek philosophy its characteristic note which it preserved till the end, yet he was also responsible for the most extreme form of subjectivism which acknowledged the reality of only the individual man's particular sensations and perceptions.

A second revolution therefore was necessary, and this was led by Socrates. He pointed out that it was only the universal element in man represented by his reason or intellect, that could be placed in the centre of philosophical interest. This, of course, gave an altogether new turn to Protagoras' *homo mensura* doctrine, and intellect or reason came to occupy the place which Protagoras had assigned to sensation and perception. Philosophy thus became in the hands of Socrates the science of the universal as discovered by human reason.

Plato as the true disciple of Socrates inherited this universalistic bias of his master, but he inherited along with it the tendencies of the previous philosophers, especially, the mysticism and love for number and measure of the Pythagorean and the fondness for the natural philosophy of the Ionians. Thus Plato became the complete Greek, uniting in himself the main tendencies of all the previous Greek thinkers. This no doubt accounts

for his many-sidedness, but it also accounts for the fact why it was so difficult for him to maintain a consistent philosophical standpoint throughout, being swayed alternately by the different tendencies. On the whole he followed the Socratic principle of reason, but it would be doing injustice to him if we were to treat him merely as a Socratic and ignore the Pythagorean and other elements in him. This, in fact, is the charm of Plato, the wonderful many-sidedness of his genius and even his failures—the gaps in his philosophy—are not without a charm of their own.

### MAIN FEATURES OF PLATO'S PHILOSOPHY

Plato's philosophy, thus, is extraordinarily many-sided, and even the enumeration of all its different features would take a good deal of space. In the short space at our disposal, therefore, we shall deal only with some of its main features. These, excluding from our consideration those which relate to his political philosophy (for we are not directly concerned with them), may be put under the following four heads: (1) his theory of ideas, (2) his theory of creation, (3) his conception of God, and (4) the idea of good. I will deal briefly with each of them in the following pages.

#### (1) PLATO'S THEORY OF IDEAS

The most important feature of Plato's philosophy is undoubtedly his doctrine of ideas. The ideas of Plato

are Universals, which alone are the ultimate realities for him. They are realities which are beyond sense and which are perceived by the mind alone when it is freed from the disturbing element of the body. They are unchangeable and invisible, and it is by participation in them that things are what they are. For instance, the beautiful is beautiful because it participates in the idea of beauty, the just is just because it participates in the idea of justice, and so on.

Whitehead believes that the ideas of Plato are the same as his (Whitehead's) "eternal objects", which he calls the pure potentials. But in Plato's view they are the ultimate realities and cannot be treated as potentials. It is not that they become real when they are actualized in the world of experience. But the world of experience has to show its credentials to them and is real precisely to the extent to which it succeeds in doing so. The 'actual entities' of Whitehead, in relation to which he calls the ideas pure potentials, are, from Plato's point of view, very poor stuff, as compared with them. Plato does not attach much importance to what we call the 'realization' or 'actualization' of the ideas. They do actualize themselves partly or fully in our world of experience, but whether they do so or not, they remain the ultimate realities. The reality of what Whitehead calls 'the actual entities' is in Plato's view far inferior to that of the ideas. Hartmann is right when he calls the ideas values, but he deviates from Plato when he attaches so much importance to the 'realization' of the ideas. In fact, he even goes further than Whitehead, for he calls ideas or values

non-real. This, as I have explained in the essay *Sri Aurobindo and Nicolai Hartmann* is of course the height of absurdity, for if the values have no reality, how can they be called values ?

How the world of experience or the world of finite objects participates in the ideas, Plato has not shown beyond pointing out that the world is a creation of God who creates it after the pattern of the ideas. This, of course, leaves a number of problems unsolved, as pointed out in the dialogue *Parmenides*. This dialogue also points out other difficulties in the theory of ideas.

Burnet in his "Platonism" holds the view that the theory of ideas is not Platonic but Socratic. Now this, we may venture to point out, is a historical question, and does not concern us here. Even if it can be proved conclusively (as it cannot) that Plato did not hold the theory of ideas but faithfully reproduced it in his dialogues as he heard it from his master's lips, even then we shall be justified in including it in our account of his philosophy, for what we mean by Plato's philosophy is the philosophy that is presented in the Dialogues. Plato never mentioned in the Dialogues what his own views were. What the historical Plato's views were, it is for the historian to find out. For us Plato's views mean what is presented in the Dialogues.

The chief defect to our mind of Plato's theory of ideas is his view of them as static, devoid of all power of self-generation or creation. Another great defect is his failure to bring any unity or order into the system of ideas. The ideas are nothing but spiritual atoms or monads, without

any connection among themselves. Only, in the *Republic*, he gives one idea, namely, the idea of good, the supreme place, but he expressly mentions that this idea is fundamentally different from the others. His calling it therefore the supreme idea does not help us in our problem, which is to arrange the ideas in a hierarchical order.

## (2) PLATO'S THEORY OF CREATION

I come now to Plato's theory of Creation. How does the world of plural beings come into existence? The problem of Creation has been in fact the stumbling-block in Greek philosophy. Anaxagoras solved it by postulating the existence of the Soul or Nous which, being not of the nature of material objects, could impart motion to them. Parmenides cut the Gordian knot by saying that there is no creation at all, for there is only the one immovable eternal Being. The difficulty is also one which we meet with in Plato, for, like Parmenides and unlike Heraclitus, he also takes his ideas to be without any power of becoming or generation. Unlike Parmenides, however, Plato does not deny creation but assumes the existence of a second principle outside of the ideas but dependent upon them for the plan or scheme of creation. This second principle Plato calls God or the Creator. Below I give an account of creation as it is described in the "Timaeus".

"Tim. Is the world created or uncreated?—that is the first question. Created, I reply, being visible and tangible and having a body, and therefore sensible, and if sensible,

then created, "and if created, made by a cause and that cause is *the ineffable father of all things, who had before him an eternal archetype* (italics mine). For to imagine that the archetype was created, would be blasphemy, seeing that the world is the noblest of creatures and God is the best of causes. And the world being thus created according to the eternal pattern is the copy of something, and we may assume that words are akin to the matter of what they speak.

Sim. Excellent, Timaeus. I like your manner of approaching the subject, proceed.

Tim. Why did the Creator create the world ? He was good and therefore not jealous, and being free from jealousy, he desired that all things should be like himself."<sup>1</sup>

There are various difficulties which arise in connection with this description of Creation. The most fundamental one, as Jowett points out, is this : In what relation does the archetype stand to the Creator himself ? since the idea or pattern of the world is not the thought of God, but a separate, self-existent nature, of which creation is the copy. Jowett gives his own reply to this question as follows : "We can only reply, (1) that to the mind of Plato subject and object were not yet distinguished; (2) that he supposes the process of creation to take place in accordance with his own theory of ideas; and as we cannot give a consistent account of the one, neither can we of the other. He means (3) to say that the creation of the world is not a material process of working with legs and arms but

<sup>1</sup> "Timaeus", 29-32, (Jowett's translation.)

ideal and intellectual; according to his own fine expression, 'the thought of God made the God that was to be'. He means (4) to draw an absolute distinction between the invisible or unchangeable which is or is the place of mind or being, and the world of sense or becoming which is visible or changing. He means (5) that the idea of the world is prior to the world, just as the other ideas are prior to sensible objects; and like them may be regarded as eternal and self-existent, and also, like the idea of good, may be viewed apart from the divine mind."

The chief thing which we are to notice in connection with this answer of Jowett's is that creation, according to Plato, is not a material process, not a matter of hands and feet, but is mainly ideal and intellectual. Because it is so, therefore, Plato speaks of the idea of creation existing prior to creation. He even goes so far as to say that the idea of God creates the God that is to be. Of course, the latter statement becomes unintelligible if God is to be looked upon as the Ultimate Reality. But evidently, that position is reserved for the ideas, and therefore, God must be content with the position of being a penultimate and not the ultimate reality.

There are various other difficulties in connection with the theory of creation as given in the "Timaeus" and evidently Jowett is not quite sure whether a solution of them is at all possible. That is why he says, "We must reply again that we cannot follow Plato in all his inconsistencies, but that the gaps of thought are probably more apparent to us than to him. He would perhaps have said that 'the first things are known only to God and to

him of men whom God loves.'”

These words are as clear an admission as possible that there are inconsistencies in Plato's philosophy which it is impossible to explain away. To our mind the main inconsistency lies in having a double set of creators—the ideas which are the ultimate creators and God. God evidently has not got the power to create without getting the patterns from the ideas, and the ideas cannot also create directly because they have no power of generation.

One difficulty which has exercised the minds of most Greek scholars is this : Does Plato believe in creation out of nothing, or does he assume the prior existence of matter in a chaotic state prior to creation ? There are some passages in the “*Timaeus*” where Plato speaks of the elements as moving in a disorderly manner before the work of creation starts. Jowett thinks that Plato does not attach much importance to this question. “The real creation began”, he says, “not with matter but with ideas”. It is the latter creation that Plato has in mind; Taylor is definitely of opinion that it is wrong to suppose that, according to Plato, there was a pre-existent chaos before the work of creation started. “If we look at the text of the “*Timaeus*”, he says, “we shall see that at any rate Plato does not mean to say that there ever was a *time* before God constructed the world, since he tells us, as Aristotle allows, that time and the world ‘began’ together, God in fact making both of them. Thus the language which seems to imply a primitive state of pure chaos cannot be meant seriously” (*Plato, the Man and His Work*, p. 443).

There are other questions which arise in connection with Plato's description of Creation in the "Timaeus". Does the entire creation of mortal and immortal beings proceed from God, or does the latter only proceed from Him. Plato definitely says that God created only immortal beings, the creation of mortal beings being delegated by Him to inferior powers. And the reason which Plato gives for this is that whatever is created by God is created in His image, and therefore if the world of mortal beings were created by Him, that world would be like the world of gods. Consequently, that world cannot be created by Him. This means that Plato does not want to hold God responsible for evil.

The world of mortal beings, including the world of man, is thus removed from the sphere of God's creation. This gives man a very inferior position. Man, in fact, is relegated to the background, the foreground being occupied by Nature and the gods. This constitutes, as we shall presently see, one of the main differences between Plato and Sri Aurobindo.

The seriousness of this disparagement of man in the "Timaeus" is to a great extent toned down by the fact that the "Timaeus" does not occupy the centre of Plato's system. As Jowett says, "A greater danger with modern interpreters of Plato is the tendency to regard the Timaeus as the centre of his system. We do not know how Plato would have arranged his own dialogues. But if he had arranged them, there are many indications that this is not the place he would have assigned to the Timaeus. We observe, first of all, that the dialogue is put in the

mouth of a Pythagorean philosopher, and not of Socrates. And this is required by dramatic propriety, for the investigation of nature was expressly renounced by Socrates in the *Phaedo*. Nor does Plato himself attribute any importance to his guesses at science. He is not at all absorbed by them as he is by the idea of good". He goes on : "We are led to regard the *Timaeus*, not as the centre or inmost shrine of the edifice, but as a detached building in a different style, framed, not after the Socratic, but after some Pythagorean model". This being so, not much importance is to be attached to the views expressed in this dialogue.

It must not be supposed, however, that it has not much philosophical value. Apart from the fact that creation is a fundamental philosophical problem, the manner in which the doctrine of ideas is presented in this dialogue is of considerable philosophical significance. It brings out the strength, as well as the weakness of the doctrine of ideas. Its strength lies in the fact that it treats the ideas or values as the central realities, in terms of which all other realities have to be expressed, whereas its weakness consists in the circumstance that it shows no way, except by a sort of *tour de force*, in which the ideas can be brought into contact with the world of human experience. As I shall show in the sequel, this constitutes another fundamental difference between Plato's philosophy and that of Sri Aurobindo.

## (3) PLATO'S CONCEPTION OF GOD

I now come to Plato's conception of God which I have dealt with incidentally in connection with the previous topic, for the problem of creation cannot be dissociated from that of God. The main question for us to consider is this : Is the God of Plato an idea ? We have seen that at least in the "Timaeus" He is not, for God is conceived as creating in accordance with a pattern which is fixed by the ideas. The ideas, moreover, are immobile, and have no power of creation or generation. Taylor in his *Plato, the Man and His Work* strongly emphasizes the fact that the God of the "Timaeus" is not a form but a soul. He says, "God and the forms are to be kept distinct in Plato for the simple reason that the activity of God in producing a world 'like' the forms is the one explanation Plato ever offers of the way in which the 'participation' of things in forms is effected. If God simply meant the same thing as the forms of a supreme form, it should remain a mystery why there should be anything but the forms, why there should be any becoming at all" (p. 442). Thus what the "Timaeus" offers us is the theistic conception of a personal God creating the world according to a design.

But there is another question which arises in connection with the nature of God, and that is the question that if God is not an idea, is He not subordinate to it ? There is no doubt that for Plato the ideas are the ultimate realities, and if God is not an idea, then certainly He cannot be regarded as the ultimate reality, whatever power He may

possess of creating things. In fact, the position of God here is very similar to that of *īśvara* in our Vedānta systems. If the ideas are static beings, so also is Brahman of the Advaita Vedānta, and if *īśvara* is the active, creative principle, it becomes so by shedding some of its reality, by becoming *māyāśavala* or *māyāviśiṣṭa*, exactly as the God of Plato becomes.

But there is one inherent contradiction in this conception of God. Plato has distinctly stated in the "Timaeus" that God created the world because He was good and free from jealousy. But if God is not an idea, how can He be said to be perfectly good ? Again, in one passage in the "Parmenides" (Parm. 134D) God alone is said to have absolute knowledge. Similarly, in a passage in the "Theaetetus", He is said to be absolute righteousness. Now how can God be absolutely righteous or absolutely good or have absolute knowledge, unless He is the same as the idea of righteousness or goodness or absolute knowledge ? In this respect our Vedānta systems are more logical. They distinctly admit that there is imperfection in *īśvara* on account of the presence of *māyā*. The matter acquires greater importance from the fact that Plato is very particular about the purity of the world that God creates. In all that God creates directly, namely, the worlds of immortal beings, there is absolutely no blemish of any kind. Not only so, but because in the world of mortal beings, to which man belongs, there is evil, therefore, Plato expressly declares that God does not create it but leaves the creation of it to inferior powers. This clearly proves that for Plato not only is God Himself

completely free from any imperfection, but anything that He creates is likewise also completely free from imperfection. And yet he maintains that God is not an idea but a soul. There are, however, some passages in the Dialogues (as, for instance, "Republic" x.597c) where Plato calls God the creator of ideas. In the passage of the *Republic* mentioned above, God is spoken of as the maker of the ideal bed, which is nothing else than the idea of the bed. Plato evidently oscillates here between two conceptions of God—God as a Creator who can create only after the pattern of the ideas, and God as the originator of the ideas. The logic of the theory of ideas requires that the ideas should maintain their supremacy and that even God should be made subordinate to them, but Plato's philosophical insight seemed to revolt against this and hence the oscillation, which is the first sign in him of a conflict between intuition and reason. Plato remained to the end true to the Greek spirit and never deserted the path of reason. No Greek philosopher of any eminence ever did so. Even Heraclitus, perhaps the most mystical among Greek philosophers, did not, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out in his brilliant monograph on this philosopher. But Plato did not also want to leave the guidance of intuition, and hence the conflict. This conflict deepened in his conception of the idea of good, to which I now pass.

#### (4) PLATO'S CONCEPTION OF THE IDEA OF GOOD

In the *Republic* Plato has given us a conception of the idea of good, which is so far above the other ideas dealt

with in the Dialogues, that it has proved a puzzle to Greek scholars. Here we see the advantage which a philosopher has over his interpreters. The philosopher gets an intuition of truth, like the poet, and notes it down. How he arrives at it, he does not know. If asked to show the logical steps by which that truth can be reached, he will in most cases fail, for he did not reach it by any logical process. You excuse that in a philosopher, but you do not excuse it in an interpreter. He *must* show the logical process which leads up to these peaks of intuition, or he is no good as an interpreter. Now the difficulty about the idea of good is that it is an idea and yet not an idea. It is so much more significant, so much more universal and yet so much more concrete than all the other ideas, that it looks more like a towering peak rising precipitously from the valley of the ideas than any continuation of it. The following passage from the "Republic" will give an idea of what the nature of it is :

"Soc. Now that which imparts truth to the known and the power of knowing to the knower is what I would have you term the idea of good, and this you will deem to be the cause of science and of truth in so far as the latter becomes the subject of knowledge; beautiful too, as are both truth and knowledge, you will be right in esteeming this other nature as more beautiful than either; and, as in the previous instance, light and sight may be truly said to be like the sun, and yet not to be the sun, so in this other sphere, science and truth may be deemed to be like the good, but not the good; the good has a place of honour much higher. What a wonder of beauty that must

be, which is the author of science and truth, and yet surpasses them in beauty; for you surely cannot mean to say that pleasure is the good ?”<sup>1</sup>

Plato further explains (through the mouth of Socrates) that although the good may be said to be not only the author of knowledge of all things known, but of their being and essence, yet the good is not essence but far exceeds essence in dignity and power.

From this account of the idea of good, there is no doubt that it represents Plato's highest conception of reality. This is clear from his description of it as “the author of science and truth, and yet surpasses them in beauty”. There are certain characteristics of it which deserve careful consideration. In the first place, as its name “idea of good” suggests, it is to be looked upon as a value and not merely as an existent. But it is not a mere ethical value but something much more universal than that, something in which the ethical value is merged as a smaller whole into a greater whole. No greater mistake can, I think, be committed than to regard it as an ethical value. It is a metaphysical value. Its being termed good only draws our attention to the fact that it is not a mere being in the sense of a mere existent; nor is it merely an essence, understanding by essence a logical essence. But it is the ultimate metaphysical value. It is something which, in the language of the *Gītā*, may be described as that “by obtaining which, no other gain is deemed higher”. We have, in fact, here one of the clearest and strongest affirmations of the philosophy of values ever found in

<sup>1</sup> “Republic”, 6, 509, Jowett's translation.

philosophical literature.

It is a trite remark that Plato here breaks his attitude of neutrality towards the different ideas. Plato does here something so very revolutionary that to describe it as merely doing this is saying nothing. It would, moreover, give a wrong idea of the change brought about by this new idea. It is not that Plato picks up here one idea from the list of ideas and gives it a pre-eminent position, but this idea was not present in his previous scheme of ideas. It is an altogether new idea, the like of which did not exist in his theory of ideas. Giving the topmost rank to this new idea, not existing before in his scheme of ideas, does not mean abandoning his attitude of neutrality towards the other ideas. So far as the ideas of which he treated before are concerned, his attitude remains as neutral as before. What really happens after the introduction of the idea of good is that the old theory of ideas is scrapped, scrapped except in name.

Taylor in his book *Plato, the Man and His Work* (pp. 288-289), has discussed the question whether the idea of good can be identified with God. I will give his views in his own words. He says, "We cannot answer this question correctly except by making a *distinctio* sometimes forgotten. If the question means 'is the Form of Good another name for the God recognized in the Platonic philosophy?', the answer must be definitely No, for the reason given by Burnet, that the good is a form, whereas God is not a form but a 'soul', the supremely good soul. ...But if we mean 'is the good spoken of in the Republic identical with what Christian divines and philosophers

have meant by God?', the answer must be modified. In one most important respect it is. The distinguishing characteristic of the 'Form of Good' is that it is the transcendent source of all the reality and intelligibility of everything other than itself. Thus it is exactly what is meant in Christian philosophy by the *ens realissimum*, and is rightly regarded as distinct from and transcendent of the whole system of its effects or manifestations.... In other language, it transcends the distinction, too often treated as absolute, between value and existence".

Now all this is no doubt technically true. The idea of good, being an idea, cannot be identified with God, for God is a soul and not an idea. We may, however, ask : What is a soul ? Now Taylor has given at p. 306 of the same book, quoting from Phaedrus (246a), the following definition of the soul : "The soul may thus be rigorously defined as 'that which moves itself'." So the question reduces itself to this : Does the idea of good as presented in the "Republic" possess any dynamism, or is it merely static ? It is true that Plato has treated all his other ideas as static. But the idea of good, as I have pointed out already, is a very different kind of idea, and we must not blindly attribute to it all the qualities or absence of qualities that characterise the other ideas. Now if we examine carefully the description of the nature of the idea of good which we quoted above, we find that the idea of good is described as "that which imparts truth to the known and the power of knowing to the knower". Again, it is called, "the cause of science and of truth", "the author of science and of truth". Now do not these expressions show that

the idea of good possesses dynamism and is not purely static as the other ideas are ? I admit that Plato has not expressly said that it possesses self-initiated motion, but the words "imparting truth" and "the cause of science and truth" undoubtedly give this idea the dynamical quality of projecting itself out of itself to give rise to truth. I shall explain presently why Plato is somewhat halting in his ascription of any dynamic quality to the idea of good.

Taylor further says that if by God is meant the God of the Christian divines and philosophers, then he has no objection to admitting that the Platonic idea of good is God. Now I would ask Taylor: Do the Christian divines and philosophers not insist upon God's possessing the power of self-initiated movement ? Are they content with an inane God who cannot create or generate ? If the idea of good cannot be Plato's God because it does not possess the power of moving itself, how can it be the Christian divines' God who also similarly insist upon God possessing the power of generating motion ?

To my mind the explanation of the halting character of Plato's ascription of a dynamic quality to the idea of good is quite obvious. Plato had a vision or intuition of the idea of good as the ultimate principle of the universe. As such he felt it clearly as endowed with the necessary dynamism to enable it to function as such. But then his logic stood in his way. He had already made a divorce between the ultimate metaphysical realities and a Creator who is metaphysically a subordinate principle but is dynamically supreme. His logic always clipped the wings of his metaphysical flights. He was, as it were, a prisoner

of his reason or logic. If he had been born in another country he would have thrown logic to the winds and given free play to his flights of metaphysical intuition, but being a true Greek, he could not do so and had to make a compromise with reason.

Jowett in his introduction to the "Republic" speaks thus of the idea of good : "The Idea of good is so called only in the Republic, but there are traces of it in other dialogues of Plato. It is *a cause as well as an idea* (italics mine), and from this point of view may be compared with the creator of the Timaeus, who out of his goodness created all things. It corresponds to a certain extent with the modern conception of a law of nature, or of a final cause, or of both in one, and in this regard may be connected with the measure and harmony of the Philebus. It is represented in the Symposium under the aspect of beauty, and is supposed to be attained there by stages of initiation, as here by regular gradations of knowledge. Viewed subjectively, it is the process or science of dialectic". In another passage he says, "This self-proving unity or idea of good is a mere vision of which no distinct explanation can be given, relative only to a particular stage in Greek philosophy."

From these quotations, one thing is quite clear, namely, that Jowett is not in a position to make up his mind as to how to characterize the idea of good. In one and the same sentence he calls it a cause and even compares it with the creator of the Timaeus, and then again describes it as an idea. I think Jowett is not to blame for this. Plato is himself not quite sure what it is. His intuition

and his logic are in conflict here. To the end of his days he could not shake himself free from the narrowness of the Eleatic or Megarian logic, much as he tried to criticise it in the "Parmenides" and the "Sophist". That logic could not give any dynamic character to the metaphysical ultimate. Motion, if it is to come at all, has to come from an inferior source. This accounts for Plato's not having a proper theory of Evolution. In fact, that is the chief weakness of Plato's philosophy. Here, as we shall presently see, Sri Aurobindo scores a distinct triumph over Plato. But where Plato's logic failed him, his intuition guided him. That is why in the idea of good he had a vision of a reality which could function as a true metaphysical ultimate, but his logic could not suggest the apparatus by which it could do so, and so this grand conception remained philosophically comparatively barren. It is not surprising, therefore, that Plato tried to examine critically the bases of the Megarian logic, which was his own logic, with a view to finding out whether any improvement could be effected in it, but as we know, beyond achieving its negative object, that is showing the inherent weakness of the Megarian logic, this critical examination did not lead to any positive result, and it was left to a philosopher who flourished two thousand years later, namely, Hegel, to construct a gigantic system of logic out of the materials furnished by Plato in the *Parmenides*.

It is not, however, entirely true to say that the barrenness of the idea of good is due entirely to the inadequacy of Plato's logic. It is also due, as we shall see presently, to the inadequacy of the idea of good itself.

## ESTIMATE OF PLATO'S PHILOSOPHY

From the account we have given above of some of the main features of Plato's philosophy, two things emerge clearly: First, the grandeur and nobility of its conception and the architectonic beauty of its construction. Starting from the idea of good it comprehends in its gigantic sweep the vast panorama of Nature and Man, not excluding even the region of the gods. It places before man certain grand ideals to be striven after : the ideal of the philosopher-king, the science of dialectic with its crowning phase, the knowledge of the idea of good, the ideal State, and so on. It stresses that aspect of reality which has to do with value, rather than with existence or being and gives a reorientation of the whole of human culture and the entire life of man from this point of view. It leaves us agape with wonder at the stupendousness of the task it has set before itself and the untiring energy and labour of thought that its great author has bestowed upon it.

But secondly, we are conscious also of the gaps which his philosophy has left, such as the gap between the ideas and the sensible world, the gap between the idea of good and the other ideas, the gap between the ideas and God, and the gap between the soul and the body. As Gomperz has said (*Greek Thinkers*, Vol. III, p. 262), if Plato is many-sided he is also equally one-sided, pursuing the path which he chooses with the utmost self-confidence, untroubled by difficulties that are often too patent. This is one of the reasons why there are so many gaps in his

philosophy. But I think the main reason is that Plato was a seer rather than a philosopher in the narrow sense of the word. He had a vision of truth which he described in the Dialogues. Like a true Greek, he, of course, always gave a rational foundation for his vision. But his reason could not keep pace with his intuition, and therefore there were big gaps in the rational structure which he erected for supporting his intuitions.

Paradoxical as it may sound, the real influence of Plato's philosophy is due to the fact that it was not a closed system. Everybody could find in it some new idea, some new inspiration. Realists, idealists, orthodox Churchmen, protestants in religion and philosophy, sceptics, materialists have all found in Plato a source of never-failing inspiration. Even Whitehead looks upon Plato as his philosophical father or godfather. In fact, I began this article with a quotation from Whitehead, in which he says that the whole of Western philosophy is nothing but so many foot-notes to Plato. This enormous influence Plato could never have acquired if his philosophy had been a closed system.

One thing I feel bound to say in the interest of truth and in justice to Plato on the subject of gaps in his philosophy. It is not true to say that Plato is not conscious of them. On the contrary, his philosophy is a series of revisions rendered necessary by the discovery of gaps in the earlier presentations of it. The most glaring example is the criticism of the doctrine of ideas which we find in the dialogue "Parmenides". So thorough and searching was the criticism that Überweg thought that the entire dialogue was

spurious. This view, of course, is absurd, as Jowett has pointed out in his introduction to his translation of this dialogue. Fortunately this view is not shared by modern Greek scholars. Burnet in his *Platonism* holds an even more radical view, for he looks upon the doctrine of ideas as not Platonic at all but Socratic. Of course, he holds his view not merely on the ground of the criticism of this doctrine in the "Parmenides", but also on other grounds. This view, however, he does not hold in his *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato*. We hold therefore with Jowett that the criticism of the doctrine of ideas is only an illustration of the fact that Plato's Philosophy has had a development and has undergone a continuous process of revision at his hands.

## II

### COMPARISON WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY : THE GREEK SPIRIT AND THE INDIAN SPIRIT

In comparing Plato with Sri Aurobindo, the first thing that strikes one is the difference between the Greek spirit and the Indian spirit. The Greek mind, as I have already pointed out, is at first directed outwards, and it is only at a later stage, that it is directed inwards. In fact, although Protagoras was the first to make this change, it was not before Socrates that the Greek mind was really turned inwards. But it never lost its original tendency, the tendency to look outwards. The result was that the purely idealistic approach, the approach from the stand-

point of consciousness, was never fully established in Greek philosophy and was always liable to be disturbed by the other mode of approach. This is the cause of the oscillation we have noticed in Plato between the idealistic and the naturalistic standpoint. This is also the reason why he could not interpret the grades of reality in terms of the grades of consciousness, and why in consequence, intuition and reason fell apart. All the gaps in Plato's philosophy may, in fact, be explained by the seesaw movement between the purely idealistic and the naturalistic outlook. His idealism appeared in the form of brilliant flashes of intuition, but his logic was coloured by his naturalism, and the gap between the two could not be bridged. The fault was not entirely that of his logic, it was also partly that of his intuitions, which, although they were brilliant, could not give a steady light.

The spirit of Indian philosophy is very different from this. It was from the beginning turned inwards. The highest reality was always conceived as Ātman or Self, and the duty of man was "to see, hear, think and contemplate it" (*ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥśrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyaḥ*). Knowing the reality within, the Indian mind discovered it also outside. This discovery was the discovery of the all-pervading character of Ātman: "*yadeveha tadamutra, yadamutra tadnviha*" ("what is here is also there; what is there is also here"). The interpretation of the universe, therefore, which the Indian seers gave was always from the standpoint of consciousness. The different grades of reality were explained in terms of the different grades of consciousness. Conscious-

ness at the level of intuition revealed one grade of reality, that at the level of reason another, and so on. There was thus no opposition between reality as seen through one grade of consciousness and that as envisaged by another grade. Not only that, but the highest consciousness, which may be called the supreme intuition, was conceived as uniting all the lower forms into one harmonious, homogeneous whole.

Sri Aurobindo, as a true descendant of our ancient sages, has kept true to this standpoint. He looks at the whole universe from the standpoint of the highest consciousness, which he calls *Saccidānanda*. Unlike the Greeks, who oscillated between the naturalistic and the idealistic interpretation of the universe, Sri Aurobindo looks upon the naturalistic interpretation itself as one that is made from the standpoint of consciousness at one stage of its evolution.

Paradoxical as it may sound, even the idealistic interpretation is made from the standpoint of the same level of consciousness. This level is what we call mental consciousness. Mind is incapable of framing a perfect synthesis, and therefore, all its constructions exhibit gaps or contradictions. Even the intuitions of Plato had not completely freed themselves from mental elements, and therefore, there was a clash between them and his logic or reason. How this standpoint enables Sri Aurobindo to steer clear of the difficulties of Plato's philosophy, I shall explain in the next paragraph.

*THE TRAGEDY OF PLATO :  
HOW SRI AUROBINDO AVOIDS IT*

Plato's philosophy, thus, is haunted by a sense of its incompleteness : its intuition and reason cannot be reconciled with each other. This is its great tragedy. It may be removed by lowering the intuitions, by doing away, for example, with the idea of good. This was the solution offered by Aristotle. He did away with the idea of good, the philosopher-king and all the other great ideals revealed by Plato's intuition. Or the remedy may be applied to logic by raising it so that it may be made a fit vehicle for the intuitions. This second method was that which was adopted by Hegel.

Sri Aurobindo's solution is totally different from either of these. He avoids Plato's tragedy not by lowering the intuitions, nor by raising the logic, but by still further raising the intuitions. His diagnosis of Plato's tragedy is that it is due to Plato's having imperfect intuitions. The intuitions that Plato had were intuitions of abstract truths, and therefore did not have the potency to project themselves out of themselves. The highest intuitions create their own logic and do not have to wait for logic to come up to their level. It is one of the cardinal principles of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy that intuitions differ very much in value. This is one of the main points of difference between Sri Aurobindo and most of those Western philosophers who also rely partly or wholly upon intuitions.

Whatever that may be, it is undoubtedly true, from

Sri Aurobindo's point of view, that Plato's intuitions were imperfect, as they were intuitions of abstract truth. His idea of good, grand as it is, is yet nothing but an abstraction. It is impossible with such a principle to have any kind of relationship with the world of sensible experience. It is dead before it is born, and it is useless to try to make it work by offering it a more suitable logic. The only remedy is to raise it to the position of a concrete universal.

PLATO'S PHILOSOPHY IS RATHER STATIC  
AND HAS NO THEORY OF EVOLUTION

One of the most serious defects in Plato's theory of ideas is that the ideas as he conceives them are absolutely static and have no power of generation or creation. It is only the souls that have got this power, and therefore God as the highest soul performs the functions of creation in his philosophy. One consequence of this static view of the ideas is that they cannot bring themselves into any sort of connection with the world of sense. The only way in which a connection is effected is through the agency of God. But the God of Plato is only an underdog, having the power to create only according to the pattern seen in the ideas. Thus the connection between the ideas and the world created by God is a somewhat remote one. In the case of the human world it is still more remote, for God does not create it directly but leaves it to the inferior powers. This gives the human world a much lower status than what it would have if it had direct connection with the ideas. Although it is supposed to participate in the

*ideas, such participation can only be very imperfect.*

*This defect we notice also in other systems of philosophy which take a similar static view of their ultimate principle. For instance, we notice it in the philosophy of Spinoza whose Substance or ultimate principle is also, like the ideas of Plato, static. There is no passage in Spinoza from Substance to the world of modes or finite beings, and he has therefore to fall back upon all sorts of devices, such as that of infinite modes, in order to bridge the gulf between the two. We notice it also in the philosophy of Hartmann who has borrowed his main ideas from Plato : the values of Hartmann cannot bring themselves directly into contact with the world.*

Another consequence of his static view of the ideas is that Plato has no theory of evolution. There is no goal or destination towards which the world may be said to be moving. Individual souls can, of course, improve themselves by education, and if they are sufficiently enlightened, they can, through instruction in dialectic, have even a vision of the idea of good, but there is nothing in Plato which gives us any indication of the whole world marching to a higher goal. On the contrary, the nature of the world has been determined beforehand by the manner of its creation, and consequently the possibility of such advance is ruled out. We shall discuss this question when dealing with the problem of evil.

EVOLUTION, HOWEVER, IS THE SOUL OF  
SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY

The contrast here with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is striking. His theory of evolution is the pivot round which the whole philosophy of Sri Aurobindo moves. Evolution is the movement which is the reverse of the movement of involution or creation. It is because of the descent of the Spirit into matter, life and mind, that these can ascend to the higher regions of the Spirit. Because the Spirit in creation has involved itself in matter, life and mind, therefore, matter, life and mind feel an impulse to rise to their Source. Evolution, thus, is a sort of homesickness of the Spirit. The Spirit has descended into the lowest particle of matter; therefore, matter seeks to evolve into something higher than itself, namely life. There is a descent of the Spirit into life and therefore, life seeks to rise to something higher than itself—mind. Similarly, there is a descent of the Spirit into mind, and consequently mind must ascend to something higher than itself, namely, Supermind. The highest principle so far evolved is mind. But evolution cannot stop with mind, for mind is not its last word. It must move further up and come to the next stage, namely, Supermind. There is no uncertainty about it : it is bound to do so by the necessity which is forced upon it by the process of involution or creation. But when it does so, there will be a radical change in the nature of the world, for with the emergence of Supermind the process of evolution becomes a process through knowledge, the previous process being through ignorance.

Such, in brief, is Sri Aurobindo's scheme of evolution. It is the most optimistic scheme ever conceived by the mind of man. What concerns us more particularly here, however, is the picture which it presents to us of the goal of human life and society. I cannot do better here than quote a passage from his recent book *The Human Cycle*, where it is set forth as clearly as possible :

"The true and full spiritual aim in society will regard man not as a mind, a life and a body, but as a soul incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth, not only in heavens beyond, which after all it need not have left if it had no divine business here in the world of physical, vital and mental nature. It will therefore regard the life, mind and body neither as ends in themselves, sufficient for their own satisfaction, nor as mortal members full of disease which have only to be dropped off for the rescued spirit to flee away into its own pure regions, but as first instruments of the soul, the yet imperfect instruments of an unseized diviner purpose. It will believe in their destiny and help them to believe in themselves, but for that very reason in their highest and not only in their lowest or lower possibilities. Their destiny will be, in its view, to spiritualise themselves so as to grow into visible members of the spirit, lucid means of its manifestation, themselves spiritual, illumined, more and more conscious and perfect. For, accepting the truth of man's soul as a thing entirely divine in its essence, it will accept also the possibility of his whole being becoming divine in spite of Nature's first patent contradictions of this possibility, her darkened denials of this

ultimate certitude, and even with these as a necessary earthly starting-point. And as it will regard man the individual, it will regard too man the collectivity as a soul-form of the Infinite, a collective soul myriadly embodied upon earth for a divine fulfilment in its manifold relations and its multitudinous activities. Therefore it will hold sacred all the different parts of man's life which correspond to the parts of his being, all his physical, vital, dynamic, emotional, aesthetic, ethical, intellectual, psychic evolution, and see in them instruments for a growth towards a diviner living. It will regard every human society, nation, people or other organic aggregate from the same standpoint, subsouls, as it were, means of a complex manifestation and self-fulfilment of the Spirit, the divine Reality, the conscious Infinite in man upon earth. The possible godhead of man because he is inwardly of one being with God will be its one solitary creed and dogma." (*The Human Cycle*, pp. 281-82)

#### THE PROBLEM OF EVIL : PLATO'S ATTITUDE CONTRASTED WITH THAT OF SRI AUROBINDO

Plato's philosophy, optimistic as its general tone is, regards evil as a permanent condition of human beings. Although for Plato there is no moral evil, for, like his master Socrates, he does not believe in wilful wrongdoing, yet he admits the existence of evil in the form of metaphysical evil or the presence of error and ignorance. Although man's will is not perverted, yet man's intellect is defective, and this defect is something which can never

be cured, so long as man's soul is chained to the body. And that is why, as he says in the "Phaedo", the philosopher longs to die. In the "Phaedrus" he says the soul is like a charioteer driving a pair of winged steeds.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the divine souls, both the steeds are good, but in the human soul one of the steeds is bad. This unruly steed caused the charioteer to see imperfectly at the time of the festival of souls, in which they visited the heaven above the heavens. So the soul lost her wings and fell to earth, and it then acquired an earthly body. It is this complex of body and soul which we call man.

From these accounts it appears that Plato looks upon evil as a necessary condition of human life on earth. The only chance for human beings to escape it is through rebirth. In the "Phaedrus" Plato says that on the manner in which he makes use of his life on earth depends a man's condition after death. And only in ten thousand years can the soul of man return to her primitive state except through a life of philosophy or a pure and noble love. In the "Timaeus", as I have already pointed out, Plato's attitude is still more uncompromising, for even the creation of mortal beings he leaves to inferior powers, as God can only create beings in His own image. This certainly leaves man in a permanently helpless condition so far as escape from evil is concerned.

The "Republic" apparently gives us the hope that at least the philosopher who is "the spectator of all time and all existence" and has knowledge of the idea of good,

<sup>1</sup> The similarity of this idea with that of Kath. 1.3.3-4 is too striking to escape notice.

is freed from all taint of evil. But the "Phaedo" expressly declares that it is the philosopher who particularly longs to die, for he realizes that so long as he is not freed from the body, there is no chance for him of escaping evil. This clearly shows that even the philosopher is not free from evil.

For Sri Aurobindo, on the contrary, evil is not a permanent feature of human society. There is evil, no doubt, at the present stage of human society. But its present stage is not the highest of which that society is capable. Evil is only a phase in the evolution of man. It arises at a certain stage of human evolution when certain conditions prevail and disappears with the disappearance of those conditions. The world as such is not evil. In the beginning when the world was enveloped by the darkness of inconscience there was no evil. So also in the end when the superman will emerge there will be no evil. It is only in the middle stage which represents where we are at present, that there is any evil.

The question which arises in connection with the problem of evil is : How does evil originate in this world ? The answer from Sri Aurobindo's standpoint I quote below as I have given it in this book in the essay *Sri Aurobindo and the Problem of Evil* :

"When truth exists as a whole on a basis of self-aware oneness, evil cannot enter. It is only when there is a disturbance of this self-aware oneness, that evil can enter. This happens when the separate divisions in their self-assertiveness offer opposition to the unity of consciousness-force which created the divisions. Separateness cannot cause evil, but when separateness is combined

with this kind of self-assertiveness, which we may call aggressive self-assertiveness, an *imperium in imperio*, is set up, and it is then that we have the beginning of evil. The name which Sri Aurobindo has given to this aggressive self-assertiveness is Egoism."

### CAN PLATO AND SRI AUROBINDO BE CALLED MYSTICS?

I come now to a question on which there have been considerable differences of opinion : Can Plato and Sri Aurobindo be regarded as mystics ? I have already dealt with the question whether Sri Aurobindo can be regarded as a mystic in a previous essay in this book. As I said there, Sri Aurobindo cannot be called a mystic simply because he takes the help of intuition as a means of discovery of the highest truth. The test is whether he employs it as the sole means of discovering truth. Judged by this test, I showed that Sri Aurobindo could not be regarded as a mystic, because he had never discarded reason and other lower levels of consciousness, but on the contrary, gave their due place to them. I even showed there that Plotinus could not be regarded as a full-fledged mystic, because it is only in the last part of the quest for truth that he relied upon intuition, the rest of his philosophical structure being based upon reason.

The same thing can be said of Plato. Although there is a good deal of the mystic element in his philosophy, as for instance, in his conception of the idea of good, yet he cannot be called a mystic. Platonism cannot be dubbed mysticism simply because it believed in intuition

as a source of truth. To show that it is mysticism it is necessary to prove that it relied upon intuition and upon no other source for the knowledge of truth. This, of course, it is impossible to prove, for Plato was a true disciple of Socrates, who asserted against Protagoras that it was not sensuous perception but reason which alone could reveal the truth.

There are undoubtedly traces of mysticism in Plato. As I have already said in connection with the background of Plato's philosophy, the influence of Pythagoras is very strong upon it. This influence in fact is one of the main sources of the mystic element in it. In the mystic symbolism of numbers which is found in the "Timaeus" we see a clear influence of Pythagorean mysticism. Not only that, but the entire description of creation from the mouth of a Pythagorean philosopher is in a deeply mystic vein. But it was not from Pythagoras alone that Plato derived the mystical trends in his philosophy. During the twelve years that he spent in travel after the death of Socrates, he visited Egypt, Italy and Sicily and possibly also some other countries, and it is quite possible that he not only came in contact with Orphic mystics but also with Oriental mysticism. Be that as it may, there are undoubted traces of mysticism in his writings. All his great conceptions, such as that of beauty in the "Symposium" or love in the "Phaedrus" or the idea of good in the "Republic" are the products of such mysticism. The "Phaedo" is through and through mystical. Its description of the body as a prison and the longing of the philosopher for release from the world of sense into

the bliss of the soul-life is deeply mystical. If we are to single out, however, one feature of Plato's philosophy which is more mystical than any other, it is his idea of good. The philosopher has a "vision" of this idea of good. It is something ineffable; in the words of our ancient sages, something from which "words come back with an unfulfilled mind". It is not the kind of reality as we ordinarily conceive, but something which absolutely transcends it. It is therefore somewhat surprising that Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison in his article "Mysticism" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition) refuses to recognize any mysticism not only in Plato but also in the entire Greek philosophy prior to Neo-Platonism. He dismisses the question of mysticism in Greek philosophy summarily by saying, "For opposite reasons, neither the Greek nor the Jewish mind lent itself readily to mysticism, the Greek, because of its clear and sunny naturalism; the Jewish, because of its rigid monotheism and its turn towards worldly realism and statutory observance". Greek philosophy cannot be summarily dismissed in this way as sunny naturalism: this description will certainly not fit the philosophy of Heraclitus or Pythagoras or Plato.

Plato's philosophy, therefore, undoubtedly shows a good deal of mystical tendency, but it would not be correct to characterize it as mysticism, for it does not believe that the mystic vision is the only way to truth. It has never lost its faith in reason, but has always been careful to join an elaborate rational structure to the supreme truths revealed by mystic vision. Of course, the joints have in many cases been rather weak, as I have

tried to point out, but this does not entitle us to say that Plato is a mystic.

Reverting to Sri Aurobindo, we find that mysticism does not touch merely the fringe of his philosophy, but that it has contact with the whole of his philosophy. But mysticism has undergone a complete transformation in his hands. It has shed its awful aloofness and mixes freely with other ways of approaching truth. In fact, from Sri Aurobindo's point of view, there is nothing mystic about mysticism.

It is a great mistake to treat mysticism as a sort of Pope or Dalai Lama living in isolated grandeur. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the mystic experience has value only when it is joined to other kinds of human experience. Detached from them it becomes a mere flash of intuition which quickly disappears without leaving any permanent mark. Such a mystic experience is hardly of any value. What is wanted is what I may call a process of acclimatisation of the mystic experience, that is to say, a process by which the mystic experience is brought into contact with reason and sensuous experience, and even something lower down the scale, namely, our vital experience. The mystic experience, if it is made to go through this process, is of course of great value, as it is the means of raising the lower forms of experience, the mental and the vital experience, to a higher level.

Another thing upon which great stress is laid by Sri Aurobindo is that there are various grades of mystic experience. All consciousness, in fact, above the level of the higher mind, such as the illumined mind, intuition,

the overmind and the supermind may be called mystic. But there is a vast difference, both in content and in value, between the consciousness which is just above the higher mind, and the supramental consciousness. It shows therefore only our ignorance of these different grades if we give the same name 'mystic' to all of them.

It is wrong to suppose that the mystic experience will always maintain its distance from normal human experience. For Sri Aurobindo a time is bound to come when the normal human experience will overtake it and even go beyond. Human consciousness is bound to evolve to something higher than what it is today. The result is that what we take to be supernormal today will be the normal state of human consciousness in the higher stages of its evolution. What we call mystic experience comes from a source slightly higher than our normal experience today. There are still higher forms of consciousness of which even our highest mystic experiences do not give us anything more than the faintest inkling. Our evolution is bound to take us one day to that stage where it will be possible for us to dwell permanently in that level of consciousness of which our present mystic experiences, even the best of them, give nothing more than the faintest glimmering. For Sri Aurobindo the problem of philosophy is to investigate the conditions under which such a possibility can arise. He is not interested in singing the virtues of the mystic experience as a freak consciousness unrelated to the rest of our experience. But that is precisely what interests the mystic. I have therefore always maintained that Sri Aurobindo is not a mystic.

## IX

### SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION OF THE FUTURE\*

An American professor whom I met in New York remarked to me, "What the world needs today is optimism and still more optimism". I replied, "Yes, if it is optimism of the right sort". This is a big 'if' for not all optimism is, from the philosophical point of view, of value. Indeed, pessimism is much better than many forms of optimism. There is, for instance, the optimism which was in vogue in the nineteenth century, chiefly under the influence of Darwin and Spencer, which believed in the progressive adjustment of the individual to his environment, leading ultimately to the annulment of all conflict between the two, as the goal of evolution. Now this adjustment, far from being a boon, may actually prove to be a curse. For the human individual must not accept his environment as something fixed and immutable but must look upon it as his prerogative to mould it for the sake of the realization of his ends. Far better than this sort of optimism is the pessimism which keeps before it a high ideal and feels disappointed because it sees no way of achieving it. The mere word 'optimism', therefore, does not produce a miracle. Whether a philosophy really gives us hope for a better world depends upon what we mean by 'better'.

\* Reprinted from *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1951.

The better need not necessarily mean the morally better. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is not optimistic in the sense that it gives us hope only of a better moral order of the universe. The source of his optimism is not moral but spiritual. The distinction between the two is the 'ass's bridge' in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. Unless one crosses it, one cannot get inside his philosophy. For Sri Aurobindo, in the interest of the higher spiritual life, even morality has to be—I won't say sacrificed, for there is no sacrifice of any principle in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy,—but—transcended. Morality represents the high watermark of our present civilization, which Sri Aurobindo calls mental civilization. But our present mental civilization is only a stage in our march towards a higher status, which, from Sri Aurobindo's standpoint, we may call our true status. So that the highest in our mental civilization is not high enough from the point of view of our ultimate destiny. It is mainly due to the influence of Kant, for whom even God was nothing but a moral postulate, that moral life has for some philosophers become synonymous with spiritual life. But a little reflection will show the absurdity of this view. For moral life rests upon a fundamental opposition. This opposition has been variously described as that between necessity and freedom or between the natural and the non-natural or between the ideal and the real. It is for this reason that Bradley looked upon the moral life as an appearance.

But it is not merely from the moral life that we should

distinguish the spiritual life. It has also to be distinguished from other forms of rationality. Hegel, for instance, although he did not fall into the error of identifying morality with spiritual life, yet made the mistake of identifying Reason with the Spirit. This was, from the philosophical point of view, almost as bad as the identification of morality with spirituality, for it meant the same sort of tying down of human progress to the conditions which are prevalent today. Reason is the most important characteristic of human civilization of the present day. To suppose that it will continue to be so for all time is to take an unduly narrow view of human progress. It is to deprive mankind of the possibility of rising to heights of which we can hardly form any idea at the present moment. This is a point on which Sri Aurobindo has laid very great stress. Indeed, one of the main lessons of his philosophy is that the future state of the world and of mankind must not be judged by any standard which is current today. New principles will be at work, the nature of which cannot be understood by any of the principles which are in vogue at present.

### THE THEORY OF CONTINUOUS EVOLUTION MUST YIELD PLACE TO THAT OF EMERGENT EVOLUTION

That we do not understand this simple thing is due to our habit of looking upon all evolution as continuous. That evolution may have surprises in store for us, that it may develop principles not understood by us in the present state of our knowledge, is a thing which we ignore

altogether. The idea of continuity is a product of our mental logic. To make that logic determine the nature of evolution, of which it itself is a product, is one of the worst examples of *petitio principii* imaginable. The very possibility of evolution precludes the idea of determining its nature by any preconceived logical scheme of the mind. Evolution will go on unfolding newer and newer truths which will be radically different from any truths so far evolved and which are not accessible to our logical understanding. To make logic all supreme is to strike at the very root of evolution. To the apostles of continuous evolution, therefore, Sri Aurobindo will give the following ultimatum: Either make your logic your All-Highest, and then cease to talk of evolution, or take your stand upon evolution and drop the idea of determining its nature by means of your logic.

Evolution, therefore, if it is to be evolution, must be emergent evolution. Continuous evolution, as we have just seen, is a contradiction in terms. But emergent evolution does not mean, as Nietzsche thought it did, that the new must rise out of the ashes of the old.<sup>1</sup> It is true Nietzsche himself failed miserably to give us a new order which could be said to arise out of the disappearance of the old, for his Superman had all the baser qualities of Man—his selfishness, his love of power, his intolerance, cruelty, etc. But he left as one of his legacies to posterity

<sup>1</sup> Also *Sprach Zarathustra*, Neuman's edition, p. 16: "What is great in Man is that he is a bridge and not an end; what is lovable in Man is that he is a transition and a fall". See also another passage of the same book, where Nietzsche says, "Man is something that must be overcome."

this cry of the emergence of the new through the complete disappearance of the old, and others who came after him took it up, so that this view that the new can only emerge on the complete disappearance of the old took deep root in the minds of those who advocated emergent evolution.

We have, in fact, to steer clear of both these extreme views—the Hegelian view of continuous evolution and the opposite view which asserts the emergence of the absolutely new. Evolution certainly means the emergence but the new does not arise by obliterating all its links with the old. Not only does it not wipe out the past, but it carries the entire past with it. Only, in the process it changes its nature, so that it may become a fit instrument for the new uses to which it may be put.

### THE REVOLUTIONARY CENTRISM OF SRI AUROBINDO

This is, in fact, Sri Aurobindo's middle path in the theory of evolution. He can indeed be called a *mādhya-mika* here. Not that this centrism is in any way inconsistent with his being a revolutionary. As I have said elsewhere, Sri Aurobindo is a revolutionary in everything. His centrism, in fact, is itself revolutionary. It breaks loose from all traditions—the tradition of his own country which looks upon progress as meaning a further development of the higher parts and shedding of the lower ones, and the traditions of the West which either view evolution as continuous by treating its later stages as the logical continuation of the preceding ones, or emergent by looking upon the later stages as arising through the

complete obliteration of the earlier ones. Sri Aurobindo, in fact, like that other great Centrist of his country—I mean the Buddha—is a revolutionary. I make no apology for saying that the Buddha was a revolutionary. He led a revolt not only against ritualism but also against all sorts of stereotyped modes of thinking and acting current in his day.

Sri Aurobindo's conception of evolution is indeed very highly original. The new idea which he has introduced is that of *transformation*. The old need not disappear, from this new standpoint, in order to give rise to the new, but it will continue in a transformed condition. Man need not shed his body, life and mind in order to pass into a higher condition, but these will continue to exist in a transformed condition when he reaches a higher status.

#### NO ROOM FOR ANY 'DON'T-TOUCH-ISM' IN PHILOSOPHY

We can also describe the fundamental change he has introduced in the conception of evolution by saying that for him there is no room for any 'don't-touch-ism' or untouchability in philosophy. We are accustomed to hear of untouchability in the social sphere. The world is sick of it : it is, in fact, one of the greatest blots on our present civilization. But if social untouchability is a curse, a far greater curse is philosophical untouchability. But unfortunately, it is as widely prevalent as the former, if not more so. I call every philosophy an example of philosophical untouchability if it affirms that any advance of

any principle is only possible through complete dissociation from all lower principles. Thus it is an instance of philosophical untouchability if any philosophical system asserts that life can only advance by cutting off all connection with matter, that mind can only advance by dissociating itself entirely from matter and life, that finally, man can only advance by removing himself from all contact with the baser principles of matter, life and mind.

Here lies one of the main features of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy: it is perhaps the greatest antidote that exists against all forms of philosophical untouchability. Even matter, which is the usual philosophical *pariah*, is, from its point of view, spiritual, and treated with respect. It declares unequivocally that no principle can advance without a simultaneous advance of all the principles that are below it. Either evolution is of all principles or it is of none. There cannot be any evolution of the higher principles if the lower ones remain where they are. This we may call *the principle of solidarity*, and it is one of the cardinal principles of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy.

In fact, it is because of the solidarity of the higher with the lower principles that we can speak of the evolution of the lower to the higher. There is no point in saying that man can evolve into the Divine if nothing that constitutes man, his physical body, the universe which surrounds him, his mental faculties, remains with him when he rises to this higher status. Man in that case will disappear to give rise to a higher species. This is not the picture of evolution that Sri Aurobindo gives us. A disembodied existence, spurning a body, mind and physical

environment, is not the picture of the future man that he presents to us. Whatever else the future man may be, he is for Sri Aurobindo not a disembodied existence. He will of course exhibit a higher consciousness, but that higher consciousness can only manifest itself in a covering where all the elements of our present covering, namely, a physical universe, a body, a vital organism, a mind, a soul are there, though, of course, in a transformed condition.

### THE REALITY AND DIVINITY OF THE WORLD

This, of course, means that the world, consisting of a physical universe, a body, life, mind and soul, is not a *Māyā* but a progressive reality, which ultimately becomes the same as the Divine. Between its ultimate status and its initial one, when it is just removed from complete nescience, there are various stages. In all these intermediate stages the world can be said to be partially real and partially unreal—real to the extent to which it is able to reveal the Divine nature, and unreal so far as it is not in a position to do so. This is the whole truth of the doctrine of *Māyā*. In any other sense the doctrine is false. If it is meant by this doctrine that the world is completely and utterly false, false in the beginning, middle and end, then the doctrine must be pronounced to be false. But it does convey a truth and a great truth, if it means that at any stage of evolution, short of the highest, it is not completely real, because there are higher stages for it to ascend. The full face of truth is certainly hidden from our gaze at present and will continue to be so, until that

great moment when the Divine will lift the lid which veils the Truth from our eyes, as the famous prayer in the *Īṣopaniṣad* so beautifully points out :

“हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् ।  
तत् त्वम् पूषन्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ॥”

(“The face of Truth is hidden by a golden lid. Do thou remove it, O Fosterer, for the law of Truth, for sight”.)

This famous prayer is an invocation to the Lord to lift the veil that hides the full face of Truth from our gaze. It is an admission that the world as it is at present and human consciousness at its present state are not in a position to reveal the full face of Truth. This, of course, is a truism of evolution. To say that the world is evolving, and at the same time to say that it has reached the acme of perfection, are, of course, two contradictory statements. Evolution means a passage from a lower to a higher perfection, the stage of perfection being measured by the quality of the truth that is revealed. Evolution means a progressive manifestation of truth in the world. We can put the whole matter therefore in the form of the following alternatives : Either affirm evolution and say that the world is partially imperfect at present, or deny evolution and assert that the world is perfect from the very beginning. There is a third alternative also, which goes against the possibility of evolution, and that is that the world is, and has been, and will always remain imperfect. This is the view which the *Māyāvāda* wants to express. It is

absolutely fatal to all conception of evolution, to all idea of human progress. The only door which it keeps open for any kind of hope is the assurance which it gives to the individual man of personal salvation by cutting himself adrift from the world.

This view, however, receives no support from our ancient Scriptures which hold a healthy view of the reality of the world. The verse of the *Īsopaniṣad* which we have quoted above, rightly viewed, lends no support to the view of the permanent unreality of the world. It only asserts that the present human consciousness, which is mind-dominated consciousness, is not in a position to reveal the full face of Truth, and it therefore invokes God to remove this limitation and reveal Truth as it ultimately and eternally is. We may note, in passing, that the expression 'हिरण्यमेतं पात्रेण' is very significant, as it shows in a striking manner the glamour which our mental civilization has for us. With a very subtle and yet very effective touch of irony which even G.B.S. might envy, it points out the vanity of the present so-called civilized man. The *Īsopaniṣad*, in fact, takes here the same standpoint with regard to the reality of the world which Sri Aurobindo does. It shows the hollowness of our present mental civilization, but at the same time gives us the hope that this civilization will, with Divine aid, yield to a still higher one. Man's destiny is not fulfilled until, with Divine help, the lid is lifted which hides from the human gaze the full light of Truth. The verses that follow make this more clear. It is emphatically declared for example, that man's ultimate condition is nothing less than to be one with the

Eternal : “योऽसावसौ पुरुषः सीऽहस्मि” (“What that Purusa is, that I am”). If man does not realize this, it is because of the veil which has been erected by our mental civilization. As soon as this veil is removed, as soon as the Supramental Light illumines human consciousness, man realizes that he is nothing else than God.

### SECTARIANISM AS A NECESSARY EVIL

It is really a pity that the demon of sectarianism has raised its head and twisted and perverted this simple yet grand truth of the Upaniṣads to serve the narrow interests of particular sects. But this is a development which, although we may very much regret it, is yet inevitable. And Sri Aurobindo has pointed this out very clearly. For instance, in a passage in the first volume of *The Life Divine*<sup>1</sup> he has pointed out that the great intuitive age of the Upaniṣads was bound to be followed by a rationalistic one. And the characteristic of the rationalistic age is to set up a half-truth as if it was the complete reality. Reason is an inferior power of the Supermind, and its function is to break the unity of intuitive apprehension into a number of diverse facets and then create a patched-up unity by accepting one of them and excluding the others. Thus, that the world is unreal is only a half-truth. To set it up as a complete truth is to do great violence to Truth itself. It completely suppresses the fact that there is the other half of this truth, without which it cannot claim to be

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, 1939 edition Vol. I, p. 103.

a complete truth, namely, that the world is unreal *at the present moment*, but that it has the potentiality of rising to the status of a complete and perfect reality.

Sectarianism, therefore, which is an offshoot of rationalism, however regrettable it may be in its effect upon human culture, is yet an inevitable necessity of human evolution. It has also its antidote in the opposite sectarianism, and in the clash of two opposed sectarian views, truth slowly emerges. So long as evolution is on the mental plane, this is the way in which progress is achieved. That is to say, there must be one extreme view sponsored by one sect or one school of philosophy, and another equally extreme view, sponsored by another sect or another school, and in the clash of these extreme views, a higher truth emerges. That is what the history of thought in our country as well as in the West has illustrated. In our country the clash of the views advocating, respectively, Jñāna, Karma and Bhakti has led to the unfolding of a higher truth, of which Bhakti, Karma and Jñāna are seen to be different facets. The best illustration of such an unfolding is to be found in the *Gītā* with its wonderful reconciliation of these three mutually conflicting views. In the West also philosophy has developed by a clash between the conflicting schools of empiricism and rationalism. The philosophy of Kant is one of the grandest examples of the reconciliation of the claims of both empiricism and rationalism. It was his great achievement to incorporate in his philosophy the truth of the Cartesian and Leibnitzian rationalism, as well as that which these schools of rationalism

ignored, and which it was the great work of David Hume to point out. In the earlier periods of European philosophy, in the philosophical systems of ancient Greece, we find a similar reconciliation between the Protagorean empiricism and the Socratic rationalism in the philosophy of Aristotle. This, in fact, is the story which philosophical thought in both the East and the West tells us. Everywhere thought has developed as a result of the impact of conflicting views.

#### BUT THIS IS NOT THE ONLY WAY IN WHICH EVOLUTION PROCEEDS

But it would be a mistake to suppose that evolution will always proceed on these lines. Not only that, but even in the past, it has not always proceeded in this way. There have been occasions when a direct intervention of the Divine in the shape of descent in human form, known as an Avatāra, has taken place. The Gītā has described very clearly the nature of this descent in the fourth chapter. The occasion for such a descent is the presence of obstacles that stand in the way of the evolution of the world—what the Gītā calls in its characteristic manner “धर्मस्य ग्लानिः” (“decline of dharma”)—and the object of the descent is to remove these obstacles and let evolution proceed in its usual way. The decline of Dharma is, of course, the chief obstacle in the way of evolution proceeding in its normal manner. But, as Sri Aurobindo points out, the upholding of Dharma is not the only object of the descent of the Avatāra, for

it is not in itself an all-sufficient object, but is only "the general condition of a higher aim and a more supreme and divine utility." The other object, Sri Aurobindo says, is to give man an ocular demonstration that he also can be divine, for the descent of God in human form means also "the birth of man into the Godhead." "The Divine", says Sri Aurobindo,<sup>1</sup> "works behind indeed and governs its special manifestation through this outer and imperfect consciousness and will, but is itself secret in the cavern, *guhāyām*, as the Veda puts it, or as the Gita expresses it, 'In the heart of all existences the Lord abides turning all existences as if mounted on a machine by Maya.' This secret working of the Lord hidden in the heart from the egoistic nature-consciousness through which he works, is God's universal method with creatures. Why then should we suppose that in any form he comes forward into the frontal, the phenomenal consciousness for a more direct and consciously divine action ? Obviously, if at all, then to break the veil between himself and humanity which man limited in his own nature could never lift." Sri Aurobindo further points out that the Gītā itself says the same thing. "That the Gītā contains as its kernel this second and and real object of the Avatārhood, is evident from the passage—अवजानन्ति मां मूढा मानुषीं तनुमाश्रितम्। परं भावमजानन्तो मम भूतमहेश्वरम् (ix.II)—by itself rightly considered ; but it becomes much clearer if we take it, not by itself,—always the wrong way to deal with the texts of the Gītā,—but in its right close connection with

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on the Gita*, 3rd Impression, 1937, First Series, p. 225.

other passages and with the whole teaching."

### THE DESCENT OF THE DIVINE AS SUPERMIND

What we have just described, the descent of God as Avatāra, is one form of the Divine descent. It is necessary when there are obstacles in the path of world evolution which it is beyond the power of man to remove. A direct intervention of God in such a crisis in the form of a Divine descent as Avatāra is necessary in order to remove the crisis and set the world on the path of evolution again, which was temporarily suspended due to the emergence of the crisis. But the descent of God as Avatāra does not lead to any permanent improvement of the world. The Avatāra comes with a very limited and temporary purpose. That purpose achieved, the Avatāra retires, and leaves the world to its ordinary process of evolution. It is not the purpose of the Avatāra to effect any radical transformation of the world. Take, for instance, the case of Lord Kṛṣṇa. His Avatārhood was not for the purpose of removing for ever from the world its load of sin. The time for that had not yet arrived. He had for his Avatārhood a much more limited purpose, namely, to remove the danger which threatened the progress of mankind in the form of a destructive war. That danger over, Lord Kṛṣṇa felt that his mission was over, and he therefore left the world to its own course and departed.

God chooses His own time and manner of descent, and it is not for us human beings to say why He chose

a particular time for a particular form of descent. But if we use our powers of thinking properly, it is not difficult for us to understand that at the time of the descent of God as Lord Kṛṣṇa, conditions were not such as required a radical transformation of the world. It is true that at that time there was raging a destructive war. But the resources of mental civilization had not yet been exhausted. Lord Kṛṣṇa therefore felt that once the world was saved from this crisis of a destructive war, it could be expected to go on in its own way without the need of any further Divine intervention, at least for several centuries. Evolution had not then proceeded far on the mental plane; in fact only the beginnings of mental civilization were then visible. The full resources of mind had yet to be tapped. The great scientific civilization had yet to come. The development of the resources of mind, therefore, could at that time be expected to lead to further progress. Not to speak of science, even the development of rationalism on a large scale had yet to take place. Philosophical thought was still too much under the influence of the original intuitive bias of the Vedic period to cut out an independent line of its own. The struggle between tradition and reason, which was the occasion for the advent of another Avatāra, namely, the Buddha, had not yet commenced, or at any rate had not yet assumed a critical form. A great deal of progress, therefore, could still be hoped for from the employment of the powers of mind. It was therefore premature to think of replacing mind by a higher truth and a greater dynamic consciousness.

The conditions of the present age are totally different from those which prevailed at the time of the advent of Lord Kṛṣṇa. It is not any particular critical situation from which the world needs to be saved now. But human civilization has now reached a stage where not one crisis but crisis after crisis is bound to occur unless some fundamental change is effected in the very structure of that civilization. For these crises are due to the essential weakness of mental civilization, and cannot therefore be got rid of by any further application of the resources of mind. The resources of mind, in fact, have all been exhausted. They have failed to produce any permanent improvement of the world. Not only that, but their very employment is the cause of the crises. If, therefore, any proof were needed of the necessity of the emergence of a higher dynamic Truth-Consciousness, here we have it. It is in the ocular demonstration that the greater the employment of the powers of mind, the greater and more disastrous the crises which are produced, that we have the clearest proof that it is mental civilization that is responsible for the ills from which the world is suffering today, and that consequently, no improvement, except of a very temporary kind, can be expected until the present civilization is replaced by one based upon a greater dynamism of Truth. Mind has proved its utter bankruptcy ; it can offer no solution of the crises through which the world is passing at the present moment. On the contrary, the more it tries to offer solutions, the greater the mess which it makes. This is very clearly illustrated in the work of the U.N.O.

That organization, ostensibly created to pave the way for permanent peace, was dead before it was born. It died the very moment its sponsors, the five Big Powers, decided to have the whip cord in their hands by the device of the veto. This veto is the great stumbling-block in the way of the U.N.O. functioning. With the veto the U.N.O. can never achieve anything, but without it the Big Powers felt that their position was not quite safe. The U.N.O. thus was born of suspicion and distrust. Is it to be wondered at, then, if its achievements have fallen far short of the great expectations with which it was started ?

I give this illustration of the U.N.O. as an example of the failure of all attempts made in the present framework of human civilization to effect a permanent improvement of human relations. It supports the contention of Sri Aurobindo that the only way in which such a permanent improvement can take place is by a radical transformation of human consciousness made possible by the descent of a higher consciousness, to which he has given the name Supermind. This descent of the Supermind will be very different from the descent of any Avatāra that has so far taken place. The Avatāra, as I have already pointed out, does not effect any permanent improvement of the world, whereas the advent of the Supermind will mean a radical and permanent change for the better in the universe. The Avatāra is an isolated Divine Being. His advent does not mean the divinization of other beings in the universe. But the advent of the Supermind leads slowly but surely to the emergence of

a race of Higher Beings, called Gnostic Beings. Not only that, but the entire universe, including even the physical universe, will be completely transformed, that is, will undergo a radical change in its nature. This is a consequence of the principle I have already stated as a fundamental principle of Sri Aurobindo's conception of evolution, namely, the principle of solidarity, according to which there cannot be any improvement in any higher principle without a simultaneous improvement of all the principles that are below it. The result is, that when there will be the descent of the Supermind into the Earth-Consciousness, there will arise not only a race of Divine Beings or Gnostic Beings, but that race of Higher Beings will function in a mental, vital and physical world radically different from the mental, vital and physical world in which we at present live. It is not that all this great change will take place immediately. Sri Aurobindo complains in one of his letters that many people have the erroneous idea that the Supermind immediately and completely transforms the world the moment it descends. To these impatient idealists who want an immediate and miraculous transformation, Sri Aurobindo points out that the supramental change, like every other change, is a gradual one. "My difficulty," he says, pointing to these impatient idealists, "is that you all seem to expect a kind of miraculous fairy-tale change and do not realize that it is a rapid and concentrated evolution which is the aim of my sādhanā and that there must be a process for it, a working of the higher in the lower and a dealing with all the necessary intervals

—not a sudden feat of creation by which everything is done on a given date. It is a supramental and not an irrational process”.<sup>1</sup> He makes this point further clear in another letter where he says, “But in its nature the descent (of the Supermind) is not something arbitrary and miraculous but a rapid evolutionary process compressed into a few years which proceeds by taking up the present nature into its Light and pouring its Truth into the inferior planes. That cannot be done in the whole world at a time, but is done, like all such processes, first through selected Ādhārs and then on a wider scale.”<sup>2</sup>

The descent of the Supermind is an inevitable necessity of evolution, but it may be delayed if human consciousness is not fit to receive it. Thus, in the same letter which we have quoted above, Sri Aurobindo says, “...if there is a general misunderstanding and resistance (not in all, but in many), that makes it difficult and the process more laborious, but it does not make it impossible, but if the circumstances were made more unfavourable by our being unable to concentrate enough on this thing of capital importance and having too much work to do of an irrelevant kind, the descent was likely to take longer than it would do otherwise. Certainly, when the Supramental does touch earth with a sufficient force to dig itself into the earth-consciousness, there will be no more chance of any success for the Āsuric Māyā. Progress might be slow at first, but progress would come ; it would quicken afterwards and with the supramental

<sup>1</sup> *Letters, Second Series*, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 83.

force here, there would be for you as for others the full speed and certitude."

### THE SUPERMIND AND SUPERMEN

Be that as it may, the descent of the supermind cannot be long delayed. Rather the time seems to be quite ripe for its advent. For the world is passing through a crisis, the like of which it never experienced before. It is a crisis in which the advent of the Supermind alone can save the world, for the present civilization needs a thorough overhauling, a root-and-branch work, a radical change, not merely cutting a Gordian knot, such as sufficed at the time of the battle of Kurukṣetra.

The advent of the Supermind will slowly but surely usher in a race of men imbued with the supramental consciousness, to whom Sri Aurobindo gives the designation Supermen or Gnostic Beings. As I have pointed out elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> the honour of being the first to introduce the name of Superman belongs to Nietzsche. But if the credit for being the first to use this name belongs to him, to him also belongs the discredit of lowering its nature and bringing it down to that of an Āsuric or Titanic man. This is clear from the list which he gives of the qualities of the Superman. In this list the qualities which figure most prominently are courage, the power to conquer and to rule, but the qualities which we value most, such as sympathy and benevolence, are expressly excluded from the list as not worthy of being ascribed to the Superman.

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy*, p. 139.

It is clear, therefore, that what Nietzsche means by a Superman is a Titan or Asura and not a god. It is quite otherwise, however, with Sri Aurobindo, whose Superman is the God-Man who excels man not in physical strength or in the power to rule and to conquer, but in things of the spirit. There is, however, this in common between Nietzsche and Sri Aurobindo that they both emphasize the fact that if the world is really to be raised to a higher level, it can only be done through a new and higher race of men and not through individual salvation of individual men. The path of individual salvation is the path favoured by a long tradition in our country. But Sri Aurobindo is decidedly of opinion that this path is not enough, as it cannot lead to a total transformation of nature, a radical change in the universe, which is, however, what we need. In spite of there having been so many emancipated souls, so many *jīvanmukta puruṣas*, the world is groping in the dark as much as before. It is clear, therefore, that the production of a few or even a large number of emancipated beings has not produced any permanent improvement of the world. What is necessary for its ideal, radical and permanent improvement is the descent of the Supermind into Earth-Consciousness.

The time, however, is fast approaching for this grand consummation. To quote Sri Aurobindo's stirring words:

"This at least is the highest hope, the possible destiny that opens out before the human view, and it is a possibility which the progress of the human mind seems on the way to redevelop. If the light that is being born

increases, if the number of individuals who seek to realize the possibility in themselves and in the world grows large and they get nearer the right way, then the Spirit who is here in man, now a concealed divinity, a developing light and power, will descend more fully as the Avatār of a yet unseen and unguessed Godhead from above into the soul of mankind and into the great individualities in whom the light and power are the strongest. There will then be fulfilled the change that will prepare the transition of human life from its present limits into those larger and purer horizons; the earthly evolution will have taken its great impetus upward and accomplished the revealing step in a divine progression of which the birth of thinking and aspiring man from the animal nature was only an obscure preparation and a far-off promise".<sup>1</sup>

## X

### SRI AUROBINDO AND GOETHE\*

(*A Comparison between "Faust" and "Savitri"*)

I HAVE so far compared Sri Aurobindo with several European philosophers, like Plato, Plotinus, Hegel, Bergson, Nicolai Hartmann, etc. In this essay I have chosen for comparison with him a great poet of the West, one of the greatest that the West has produced. My apology for making this departure is the appearance of Sri Aurobindo's great epic *Savitri*. My choice has fallen upon Goethe, the great literary genius of Europe, who is great not only as a poet but also as a thinker. And I have chosen also the greatest and most representative of Goethe's works, namely, "Faust", for comparison with Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*.

My choice of "Faust" has also been dictated by other reasons. As I shall show in the sequel, "Savitri" may be looked upon as the cosmic "Faust". Just as "Faust" represents the varying experiences of the individual soul not satisfied with the kind of knowledge it gets from books and seeking in magic and the wider experiences of life that which it cannot get in traditional learning, so "Savitri" represents the wonderful experiences of the collective human soul moving from world to world in search of that which will remove for ever inconscience and ignorance

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and their product, death, from Earth. What the one seeks in various earthly experiences, the other seeks in cosmic and supracosmic experiences. Both meet with success in the end. Faust is saved after being tossed heavily on the shore of life, King Aśwapati succeeds in getting from the Divine Mother the boon of a New Birth which will save Earth for ever from the incubus of inconscience and ignorance, symbolized by death.

## I

“FAUST” IS THE TRIVENĪ-SAṄGAMA OF THREE  
DISTINCT CURRENTS

To come to “Faust” first. It is the meeting-point, the Trivenī-saṅgama, as we may call it, of three distinct currents, which represent three distinct phases of the poet’s life. The dark current, the Yamunā, as I may call it, produced some of his best works in his early period, such as “Goetz von Berlichingen”, “Werther”, “Clavigo” and also the earlier portions of “Faust” itself. This phase of his life is considered by some shallow critics as the greatest in his life for from the point of view of pure art there is, in their opinion, nothing to beat the naturalness and spontaneity of his writings of this period. This phase is usually also called the romantic phase of his life. But I dissent very strongly from this view, for, as I have shown in my book *The Neo-romantic movement in Contemporary Philosophy*, romanticism is not that shallow view of reality which looks at it through the spectacles of sentiment and

passion, but it is a name for that wider and deeper view of it which comes from the realization that reality is a whole and cannot be identified with any part, however brilliant that part may be. To look upon reality as identical with the emotional and sentimental view of it, is certainly taking only a partial view of it, and cannot therefore be said to be the characteristic of romanticism.

The second current, what I may call the Gaṅgā,—is the pure white stream of classicism, whose waters he first tasted during his journey to Italy and which since then had a powerful influence upon him. His contact with Schiller was another factor which worked in the same direction. It was under the driving force of this current that some of his best works, like “Iphigenie”, “Tasso”, “Hermann und Dorothea”, were written. We may mention also “Egmont”, though much of it belonged to the “Sturm und Drang” period. “Wilhelm Meister”, like “Faust”, was the product of the meeting of different currents. It underwent, for example, such a great change as a result of the mixing of different currents from the first form of it as we have in “Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung”, that, as one critic remarked, it may be said of the hero of his novel, that “like Saul, the son of Kish, he had gone out to find his father’s asses, namely, the art of the theatre; what he did find was the kingdom of life”.<sup>1</sup>

The third current, to which we may give the name Sarasvatī, to keep to the metaphor of Trivenī-saṅgama,

<sup>1</sup> See J. G. Robertson, *Goethe and the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, 1912, p. 59.

is the invisible current which probably has flowed all through his life but whose presence is distinctly felt only during the last period of his literary career. Whatever may have been the original source of this current, there is no doubt that it has been fed greatly by contact with Oriental thought, especially, Persian mysticism, with which he became acquainted by reading a translation of Hafiz's works, and I may add, Upaniṣadic thought, with which also there is evidence he had considerable familiarity. This is a distinct current, not to be confused with the classical current. It has produced some of his best lyrical poems, not only in the collection, called West-östlicher Diwan, which, of course, as its very name shows, bears the impress of Sufism, but also outside this collection. Take, for instance, the beautiful poem *Eins und Alles*. Who can read its lines

Im Grenzenlosen sich zu finden,  
Wird gern der Einzelne verschwinden,  
Da löst sich aller überdruss;  
Statt heissem Wünschen, wildem Wollen,  
Statt läst'gem Fordern, strengem Sollen,  
Sich aufzugeben, ist Genuss.

("To find himself in the Boundless the individual will gladly lose himself. There all weariness comes to an end. Instead of burning desires and wild will, instead of burdensome obligations and stringent duties, to give oneself up is happiness"), without feeling the influence of Upaniṣadic thought upon them ?

The influence of this third current we see in the second part of "Faust" and especially in the Chorus Mysticus, which ends with the famous line "Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan" ("The Eternal-Feminine leads us on and upwards"). As I have pointed out in my booklet *Why Goethe appeals to the Indian Mind*, it is the failure to understand this third current which has made European critics of "Faust" speak disparagingly of this part. But it is the second part, with its glorious optimism and its recognition of an eternal principle of Love at the root of all world-process, leading it higher and higher, which has made "Faust" what it is, an immortal poem conveying an eternal message of hope to mankind.

The meeting of all these three currents in "Faust", due to the circumstance that it represents the development of Goethe's mind during a period of over sixty years, although from the point of view of art it is a disadvantage, for it offends against the rule of a fundamental unity, has the great advantage of making this drama a true representative of the development of Goethe's great personality, and what is of still greater value from the philosophical point of view, of giving a picture of the evolution of the concept of reality in human consciousness. Starting from the purely emotional approach and passing through the classical approach, where reality is represented as a distant ideal fit only for contemplation, the drama takes us to the third and final conception of reality as an ideal which represents not a far-off divine event, fit only to be looked at and silently contemplated, but as an ideal which is being progressively

realized in this world. The drama, however, has been divided by the poet into two parts, and this division from the point of view of the evolution of the consciousness of reality is very natural, the first part representing mainly the emotional approach to reality, with only a partial glimpse here and there of the rational view, and the second part representing the rational and the supra-rational view of reality. I propose to follow this division made by the poet and treat of the first and the second part of the drama separately.

### THE FIRST PART OF "FAUST"

As I have already said, the first part of "Faust" represents mainly the standpoint of the Sturm und Drang period. It expresses a dissatisfaction with knowledge acquired through books, the traditional knowledge, of which the universities are the purveyors, and a desire to obtain it at first hand by direct contact with reality. Intellectual approach is a very indirect approach, which takes away from reality all that truly constitutes it. In the first frenzy of this anti-intellectualism even magic is considered a better means of acquiring knowledge of reality than books, not to speak of feelings and emotions. The hero of the play, Dr. Faust, therefore decides in the very first scene of the first act to employ magic to unravel the secrets which bookish knowledge is constitutionally incapable of revealing. The first words of his with which the drama begins—

"I have studied now Philosophy  
 And Jurisprudence, Medicine—  
 And even alas ! Theology—  
 From end to end, with labour keen ;  
 And here, poor fool ! with all my lore  
 I stand no wiser than before."<sup>1</sup>

indicate very clearly his dissatisfaction with book knowledge. The lines which follow show the directions in which he seeks to discover that which he does not find in book knowledge. The first direction in which he seeks enlightenment is Nature, and we have in the first scene, immediately after Faust's opening speech condemning traditional knowledge imparted through books, some very beautiful lines addressed to the moon :

"O full and splendid Moon, whom I  
 Have, from this desk, seen climb the sky  
 So many a midnight—would thy glow  
 For the last time beheld my woe !  
 Ever thine eye, most mournful friend,  
 Over books and papers saw me bend ;  
 But would that I, on mountains grand,  
 Amid thy blessed light could stand,  
 With spirits through mountain-caverns hover,  
 Float in thy twilight the meadows over,

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Bayard Taylor's Translation. Publishers : Ward, Locke and Bowden, Ltd., 4th edn. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of "Faust" given in this essay are taken from her translation of this book.

And, freed from the fumes of love that swathe me,  
To health in thy dewy fountains bathe me !”

The second is magic, and we have, immediately following his words addressed to the moon, his rapturous praise of the Book of Magic :

“Ha ! what a sudden rapture leaps from this  
I view, through all my senses swiftly flowing !  
I feel a youthful, holy, vital bliss  
In every vein and fibre newly glowing.  
Was it a God, who traced the sign,  
With calm across my tumult stealing,  
My troubled heart to joy unsealing,  
With impulse, mystic and divine,  
The powers of Nature here, around my path  
revealing ?”

And the revelation which he gets of the macrocosm through magic is something wonderful :

“How each the whole its substance gives,  
Each in the other works and lives !  
Like the heavenly forces rising and descending,  
Their golden urns reciprocally leading,  
With wings that winnow blessing  
From Heaven through Earth I see them pressing,  
Filling the All with harmony unceasing !”

The rapturous joy he feels at the contemplation of the

sign of the macrocosm, as given in the Book of Magic, is suddenly interrupted by the thought that perhaps all is a mere show; and therefore he exclaims (I quote his words in the original German):

“Welch Schauspiel ! aber, ach ! ein Schauspiel nur !  
 Wo fass’ ich dich, unendliche Natur ?”  
 (“How grand a show ! but alas, a show alone,  
 Thee, boundless Nature, how make thee my own ?”)

It is due to our failure to make Nature our own that she remains a mere show to us. Make her our own through magic and through direct approach, and then she will reveal her whole secret to us.

The very first scene therefore introduces to us the love of Nature and the love of magic that are, in the view of Faust, to cure him of the obsession of book-learning from which he has been suffering so long. To these means of curing the defects of knowledge derived from books, Faust adds a third later, namely, love for the way of passion or the Dionysian path.

### LOVE OF NATURE

First, there is the love of Nature. Throughout his life Nature had a fascination for Goethe but it reaches its climax in the first part of “Faust”, which contains perhaps some of the most wonderful descriptions that exist in any literature of the beauty and sublimity of Nature.

I have already quoted the beautiful lines addressed to the moon which exhibit infatuation for Nature. And even more beautiful are those which occur in Faust's address to the Earth-Spirit, and I cannot resist the temptation of quoting them :

“Spirit sublime, thou gav'st me, gav'st me all  
For which I prayed. Not unto me in vain  
Hast thou thy countenance revealed in fire  
Thou gav'st me Nature as a kingdom grand,  
With power to feel and to enjoy it. Thou  
Not only cold, amazed acquaintance yield'st,  
But grantest, that in her profoundest breast  
I gaze, as in the bosom of a friend.  
The ranks of living creatures thou dost lead  
Before me, teaching me to know my brothers  
In air and water and the silent wood.  
And when the storm in forests roars and grinds,  
The gaint firs, in falling, neighbour boughs  
And neighbour trunks with crushing weight bear down,  
And falling, fill the hills with hollow thunders—  
Then to the cave secure thou ledest me,  
Then show'st me mine own self, and in my breast  
The deep, mysterious miracles unfold.  
And when the perfect moon before my gaze  
Comes up with soothing light, around me float  
From every precipice and thicket damp  
The silvery phantoms of the ages past  
And temper the austere delight of thought.”

These lines depict, as beautifully and as clearly as human language can depict, the majesty and divinity of Nature, as well as one's feeling of oneness with her. But more striking than these lines are the lines that follow, which show the striking contrast between the beauty and sublimity of Nature and the ugliness and wickedness of man. Faust suddenly awakes from the contemplation of Nature to the realization of the imperfection of man, and exclaims (I give these lines in the original German) :

“O dass dem Menschen nichts Vollkommenes wird  
Empfind' ich nun. Du gabst zu dieser Wonne  
Mir den Gefährten den ich schon nicht mehr  
Entbehren kann...”

(“That nothing can be perfect unto Man  
I now am conscious. With this ecstasy,  
Which brings me near and nearer to the gods,  
Thou gav'st the comrade, whom I now no more  
Can do without...”)

### LOVE OF MAGIC

More prominent perhaps than even the love of Nature is in this play the love of magic. Magic represents for Goethe the most dynamic as well as the most irrational element in the universe. It is also the most mysterious element. Its positive nature it is impossible to describe : all that we can say of it is that it is a most wonderful transforming factor. It can indeed transform the seemingly useless things into objects of great utility.

Goethe's preoccupation with magic dates back to a very early period of his life. We read in his biographies that he fell seriously ill in the summer of 1768, and that after suffering for several months he was eventually cured by an alchemist. After his recovery he took to a serious study of magic and read such works as Welling's "*Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum*", following them up with older works on magic by Paracelsus, Van Helmont and others. Magic first gave him the idea of a spiritualized nature, the conception of the universe as a living manifestation of divinity. Under the influence of magic he could see, as the beautiful lines we have already quoted from the first scene in the first part of "*Faust*" depict, the whole of Nature as a perfectly harmonized system, animated by a Divine Soul. It did for him, therefore, what suprarational experience has done for mystic philosophers. It supplied the necessary positive touch to his anti-intellectualistic trend which otherwise would have remained wholly negative. His proccupation with magic, however, did make a revolutionary change in his attitude towards it. He could not treat it as a wicked art; he rather felt it to be one of the noblest. This attitude had a wonderful effect upon his drama also. He could not look upon Faust as a wicked man because he indulged in magic. He rather felt that a true philosopher would have to be something of a magician if he were to reveal truths not accessible to book-learning. His contempt for bookish knowledge inclined him more and more towards magic.

## LOVE FOR THE WAY OF PASSION

So far we are on safe lines. It is possible to maintain that infatuation for nature and even love of magic are not incompatible with a spiritual life. But what about passion, the third string in the Sturm-und-Drang bow? Can it also be justified on moral and spiritual grounds? It must be borne in mind, as I have already said, that Goethe departed from the Faust legend in refusing to look upon his hero as a depraved soul. Faust, therefore, even when he is under the influence of passion, must not be looked upon as wicked or depraved. This presents a difficult problem for the interpreters of this drama. How difficult the problem is, we see in the circumstance that Calvin Thomas, the editor of Goethe's *Faust* in Heath's Modern Language Series, recognizes two Fausts, one, the first Faust, as he calls him, dissatisfied with book-learning and seeking in first hand contact with nature and in magic that which he could not find in the traditional learning imparted in the universities. The other is the second Faust, as he calls him, the Faust as he emerges after his pact with the devil Mephistopheles. This second Faust is a libertine who is responsible for the Gretchen tragedy. The two Fausts are totally different men. As he puts it, "There is no natural connection between an unsatisfied craving for knowledge and libertinism. 'I would fain be a god, but cannot, so I will be a Don Juan' is not good psychology, not a natural evolution of character, and in introducing it into *Faust* Goethe prepared difficulties for himself.... It may be added, too, that the difficulties just referred

to reside not so much in the mere fact that the professor becomes a sensualist as that, in so doing, he passes into a new world. The first Faust is the hero of a symbolical action, who has to do with magic books and Earth-spirits, but the second is the hero of a perfectly natural love-story. As we shall see further on, the early interlocking of two worlds in one and the same action was destined to make trouble"<sup>1</sup> Of course, for Goethe there could be no two Fausts, as suggested above. So we have to explain how the same Faust could play two distinctly separate rôles. The explanation of this is partly given by Goethe himself in Faust's address to the Earth-Spirit in the Forest and Cavern Scene. There, after saying, "I can now understand why nothing in man is perfect," he adds, "With this ecstasy, which brings me near and nearer to the gods, thou gav'st the comrade, whom I can no more do without; though, cold and scornful, he demeans me to myself, and with a breath, a word, transforms thy gifts to nothingness. Within my breast he fans a lawless fire, unwearied, for that fair and lovely form. Thus in desire I hasten to enjoyment, and in enjoyment pine to feel desire". These words show that the whole responsibility for changing the character of Faust is thrown upon Mephistopheles. There is further confirmation for this in the circumstance that in the scene in Auerbach's Cellar Faust looks bored, and therefore, Mephistopheles has to take him to a witch who administers a love-philtre to him to make him feel young. It is after the administration of this love-philtre that Faust's acquaintance with Gretchen takes place.

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* his Introduction to *Faust*, Part I, p. xliii.

Thus for the tragedy of Gretchen Mephistopheles and not Faust is responsible. Still Goethe never felt quite happy about the harmony and inner coherence of the different scenes in "Faust". In a letter to Schiller on the 6th December 1797, he wrote: "Pray keep to your *Wallenstein*. I shall probably go at my 'Faust' next, partly in order to be rid of this tragelaph, partly to prepare myself for a higher and serener mood, perhaps for *Tell*." Now his describing "Faust" as a tragelaph, that is, as a fantastic animal, is a clear indication that he was not quite happy about the congruity of the different scenes of the drama. In another letter, in reply to Schiller's remarks about the embarrassing magnitude of "Faust", etc., Goethe wrote: "As was natural, they coincide very well with my own plans and purposes, save that I shall take things somewhat more easily with this barbarous composition, and try to touch, rather than to satisfy, the highest demands", which clearly points to the fact that Goethe was not quite satisfied with "Faust" and felt that there were essential incongruities in it, which made him speak of it as a barbarous composition.

All these difficulties in the First Part point to one conclusion, namely, that the First Part is not complete in itself and imperatively demands a Second Part in order to complete itself. Without the second part, Goethe's main idea, namely, to show that Faust is not a depraved soul, as the Faust legends paint him, but is a noble soul going through all the storms and stresses of life, could not have been achieved. The Prologue in Heaven in the First Part itself makes it clear that the First Part must be

followed by the Second, for does not the Lord say in this Prologue, with regard to Faust, "Though still confused his service unto Me, I soon shall lead him to a clearer morning" ?

### THE SECOND PART OF "FAUST"

The opening scene in the Second Part presents Faust as a weary traveller seeking rest at nightfall. Fairies that personify the invigorating power of sleep watch over him during the night and make him forget the past and inspire him with courage for the future. Such a scene is necessary as the transition from the First to the Second Part. For the object of the second part is to take us to a 'higher and nobler plane'. Faust is to be cured of his sensuality and the thralldom of passion and is to be lifted to a higher life. The object of the drama would be incomplete if it were to show only the dark side of life. "Faust" is a great masterpiece because it gives a complete picture of life; this it does by showing not only the sorrows and sufferings of life, not only its weaknesses and foibles, but also how these are to be overcome and transformed into materials out of which can grow rapturous joy and the ecstasy of divine life. This is, in fact, where Goethe touches Sri Aurobindo. Goethe's drama represents on the individual plane the march of the human soul from its period of storm and stress to the final stage where in the embrace of Eternal Love it comes to its journey's end, just as Sri Aurobindo's great epic depicts the cosmic march of the human soul from world to world, till it reaches

its journey's end in planting on earth a world which knows no death. Many people who are disappointed with the second part because it lacks sufficient dramatic interest, miss its real significance. Lewes, for example,<sup>1</sup> says, with regard to the second part, "To those who love riddles, to those who love interpretations, the work is inexhaustible; to those who love beautiful verses, and glimpses of a deeply meditative mind, the work is, and always will be, attractive; but those who open it expecting a masterpiece will, I think, be perpetually disappointed. Some minds will be delighted with the allegorical Helena embracing Faust, and in the embrace leaving only her veil and vest behind, her body vanishing into thin air—typical of what must ever be the embrace of the defunct Classical with the living Romantic, the resuscitated Past with the actual Present—and in their delight at the recognition of the meaning, will write chapters of commentary. But the kiss of Gretchen is worth a thousand allegories." This criticism of Lewes' seems to me very shallow. In the first place, who says that the Helena scene is meant to depict "the embrace of the defunct Classical with the living Romantic"? It has no such object. Its purpose is to present an ideal of Beauty culled from classical sources. It was never meant that Helena would stay for ever with Faust. All the scenes in "Faust" are fleeting scenes, depicting the panoramic changes in the life-experiences of its hero. It would have been against the spirit of the drama if any scene had been of a permanent character. For then the hero would have lost his wager with the devil.

<sup>1</sup> Vide G. H. Lewes, *Life of Goethe*, 2nd edn. P. 553.

It was because he strove without ever being satisfied that he won the wager. Helena's departure is not because the classical cannot stay long with the romantic, but because all scenes, including the Helena scene, depict only the passing experiences of the hero, in none of which his soul can rest. Moreover, what shall we make of the last sentence, "But the kiss of Gretchen is worth a thousand allegories" ? "Faust" surely is not a love-story. Goethe had already given such stories in his earlier works. "Faust" was not meant to be a repetition of these works. Its object is something deeper and grander, for it is nothing else than to show the travails of the human soul in its march from one experience to another till it finds its resting-place in the embrace of Eternal Love. The love affair with Gretchen was never meant to be anything more than an episode. The kiss of Gretchen is no doubt real, but equally real (if not more so) is the ideal of Beauty represented by Helena. Both are part of the grand panorama presented by the experiences of the hero of the drama, and it cannot be maintained, except by a *tour de force*, that the one alone is real and the other merely a shadow.

A more serious criticism of the second part is that which is made on the score of its logic. It is said that Faust's 'final conclusion of wisdom', which he arrives at at the end, namely, that 'he only deserves freedom and life who is compelled to conquer them', is not the logical outcome of anything that precedes. There is no doubt that in the second part we see Faust resolved to 'strive ever onward to the highest existence', but there is

no progressive development of his towards this goal; he rather seems to reach it by a jump. Calvin Thomas has met this criticism very well. He admits the logical defect of the second part, pointed out by the critics, but says,<sup>1</sup> "Now this would be undeniably a very grave defect if *Faust* were a rigorous philosophic poem. But, let it be said again, such is not its nature. What fascinated Goethe at the outset was not a thesis in ethics, but a picture—the picture of a life-history. Fancying that he saw some resemblance between his own experiences and those of Doctor Faust, he transformed the wicked magician of the legend into a good man of high aspirations. Looking ahead, he saw the whole career of this man, and very naturally conceived him as arriving finally at that philosophy which he himself, Goethe, had arrived at after the subsidence of his youthful storm and stress. So he depicted his *Faustus moriturus* as a dreamer of the dream of human betterment, a believer in the goodness of life, an exemplar of the blessedness of devotion to Man. The picture lay finished in his mind at a comparatively early date. And then, when he came to fill in the preceding matter that should leap up to this philosophy, he found himself absorbed more and more in fantastic data of the legend, which were indeed rich enough in poetic possibilities, but did not belong to the ethical sphere of interest. The result is a certain lack of logical coherence,—a lack with

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* his Introduction to Goethe's *Faust*, Part II (Heath's Modern Language Series. Published by C. D. Heath & Co., Boston, New York, Chicago (1897), pp. lxxv-lxxvi. To this 'Introduction', I am also greatly indebted for the account I have given of the contents of the Acts in 'Faust', Part II.

which the reader must make his peace as best he can, but the existence of which it is folly to deny.... On the whole, it is the part of wisdom to make the most of what we have rather than to carp and gird because we have not something else. There are logical poems enough in the world, but only one Goethe's *Faust*."

"There are logical poems enough in the world, but only one Goethe's *Faust*." This sums up very beautifully the true significance of *Faust*. Goethe himself expressed it very much in the same way. In his talk with Eckermann on the subject,<sup>1</sup> he said : "People come to me and ask what idea I meant to embody in my *Faust*, as if I knew myself, and could inform them.... It would have been a fine thing, indeed, if I had strung so rich, varied, and highly diversified life as I have brought to view in *Faust* upon the slender string of one pervading idea. It was, in short, not in my line, as a poet, to strive to embody anything *abstract*. I received in my mind impressions, and those of a sensual, animated, charming, varied, hundredfold kind, just as a lively imagination presented them; and I had, as a poet, nothing more to do than artistically to round off and elaborate such views and impressions, and by means of a lively representation so to bring them forward that others might receive the same impression in hearing or reading my representation of them.... I am rather of the opinion, that the more incommensurable, and the more incomprehensible to the understanding, a

<sup>1</sup> *Vide Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*, English translation by John Oxenford Vol. II, pp. 415-16. Publishers : Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1850.

poetic production is, so much the better it is."

From these quotations it is clear that to look for absolute logical consistency in "Faust" is the best way to miss its meaning. The drama is the record of the personal experiences of its hero, which to some extent resemble those of its author. What it represents is the evolution of the personality of the hero and not the logical development of any abstract idea. That evolution has three main stages, as I have already pointed out, of which only the first is exhibited in the first part, the next two stages being shown in the second part. This gives the second part its importance.

SECOND PART OF "FAUST" :  
ACT I : THE IMPERIAL COURT

The first scene of the first act I have already described. Faust, after being lulled to sleep by good fairies, wakes up at dawn quite refreshed and in high spirits and enjoys the glories of the Alpine sunrise. He is then joined by Mephistopheles, against whom his old wrath has vanished, who proposes that they should visit the Emperor's court, to which he consents. They then repair to the Emperor's court, where an imperial cabinet meeting is being held. It is Shrove Tuesday, and the people are in gala dress in connection with a grand carnival masquerade. Meanwhile public affairs are in hopeless confusion, and the Emperor has to hurriedly summon a meeting of the State Council to consider the situation. Into this meeting Mephistopheles somehow makes his way and presents

himself to the Emperor as a candidate for the post of the court fool, and listens to the proceedings. After the ministers one after another have made their statements about the desperate condition of the State, the Emperor invites the new court fool to offer his suggestions for the improvement of the condition of the State. Mephistopheles says that the main trouble of the State is a financial one, but there is huge wealth in the shape of treasure buried underground by people who at various times had to flee on account of the invasion of foreign armies. All this huge buried wealth belongs to the Emperor. All that he has to do is to dig and take possession of it. The Emperor is pleased with the suggestion and is about to issue an order for starting digging operations, when it is pointed out that the time is not favourable. Meanwhile the Carnival starts and Mephistopheles cleverly devises for himself and Faust rôles which were not in the original programme, the rôles being those of magicians. In the midst of the Carnival, however, the Chancellor, at the suggestion of Mephistopheles, appears before the Emperor to get his signature for the issue of paper money. As a result of the issue of paper money the State is saved, and everybody is happy. The Emperor proceeds to a general distribution of paper money, and everybody, including the two magicians, becomes suddenly very rich.

Having been in this way saved from his financial worries, the Emperor next asks the two magicians to amuse him by conjuring up the shades of Paris and Helena. Faust readily agrees, but Mephistopheles points out various difficulties, the greatest of them being that it will be

necessary to go to the realm of the Mothers. Faust is dismayed, but he still undertakes alone the journey to the Mothers. At nightfall the citizens assemble in the Knight's Hall to witness the show. Faust emerges upon the scene with a tripod which he has purloined from the Mothers. From the smoke of the tripod Faust conjures up the apparition of Paris, who appears in a cloudlike form. The women are delighted with him, but the men find fault with him. Then Helena emerges, and the men are pleased, while the women find all manner of faults in her. In the meantime Faust falls madly in love with Helena and forgets that what he has before him is only a phantom he has himself conjured up and which he has been warned not to touch. The amorous pantomime of Paris and Helena is too much for him, and when Paris embraces Helena in the show, he cannot stand it, and he grasps at Helena and touches Paris with his magic key. An explosion occurs, and Faust falls senseless to the ground.

What is the significance of this scene and how is it related to the scenes that preceded it in the first part and the scenes that follow it in the second part? I have already indicated how it is related to the tragic scenes of the Gretchen episode. A radical change of surroundings was needed to revive the drooping spirits of Faust after the terrible tragedy of Gretchen. He must be taken to totally different surroundings and begin a new life. All his tragedies were due to his being too much preoccupied with himself. He must now be made to lead an objective existence, and what better place could there be for this than the Emperor's court? This scene, again, introduces

to us for the first time Helena, around whom revolve the next two scenes. It thus exhibits the second phase of the drama, the influence of classicism. Helena represents for Goethe all that is inspiring in the classical ideals, and therefore fittingly occupies the central place in the second part. In fact, there are two main themes in the second part—Helena and love for classicism, and secondly, the emancipation of Faust, bringing with it the idea of salvation through effort and struggle and Divine Love as the driving force behind the world-process, making such salvation possible.

## ACT II : SEARCH FOR HELENA

### CLASSICAL WALPURGIS-NIGHT : HOMUNCULUS

The second act is a preparation for the third act—the Helena act. Its theme is the search for Helena. The first act ends with Faust lying unconscious on the ground as a result of his embracing Helena. Mephistopheles does not know what to do with him or what the nature of his malady is. So he hurries with his patient to the laboratory of Dr. Wagner. Arriving at the laboratory, Mephistopheles finds a great experiment in progress, for Wagner is trying to produce a human being by chemical synthesis. His experiment has succeeded beyond all expectation, for a luminous manikin appears in Wagner's bottle. Intellectually this manikin—called the homunculus—is far superior to men, but he has not yet become a man, for he has no body. He would like

to break the glass bottle and commence existence, but he would not like to do so in the place where he finds himself and would like to wait till he found a better place. With his second sight he sees that Faust must be taken for recovery to the land of his dreams, the classical land of Greece. So the trio set out for Greece, Mephistopheles carrying on his shoulders the unconscious Faust. They land in Thessaly, and that too at the time of the Classical Walpurgis-Night, a grand gathering of classical ghosts which is held annually in Thessaly on the Pharsalian plain, where the armies of Caesar and Pompey fought. On landing above the Pharsalian plain, they find the whole place filled with an apparition of spectral tents of the ghosts of the two fighting armies. The three travellers then land on the battlefield. Faust recovers consciousness as soon as his feet touch classic soil. They separate, each following his own mission. The mission of Faust is of course to find Helena. For that purpose, he enquires first of the Sphinxes, who take him to Chiron. Chiron, out of compassion for his condition, takes him to the sibyl Manto, who agrees to help Faust realize his mission, saying, "To whom the Impossible is lure I love." Manto then asks Faust to descend with her down a dark passage, saying, "Rash one, advance ! there is joy for thee ! This dark way leads thee to Persephone." They then descend down the passage to Hades. What happens after that, and how Persephone's permission is obtained, and under what conditions, we are left to conjecture, for we see Faust next in the third act emerging as

## Prince of Arcadia.

What shall we say of the significance of this classical Walpurgis-Night scene? It cannot be dismissed as a mere poetic revivification of a legend. In the first place, it is a *classical* Walpurgis-Night, the stress being laid upon the word 'classical.' As I have already explained, classical art and classical ideals had a fascination for Goethe, and therefore the Walpurgis-Night took place on classic soil. The significance of this has already been explained. But the other importance of this scene lies in the magic part of it. All the arts of magic and thaumaturgy, necromancy and theomancy are here employed for furthering Faust's mission. There is further the mystery about the homunculus—a strange creation of the poet. What exactly it signifies it is difficult to say. Its origin in the scientist's laboratory suggests Goethe's great faith in the powers of science. But then its limitations, for it is a man and yet not a man since it has no body, and then the further circumstance, its coming into existence first as an aquatic animal, which will have to go through the long process of natural evolution before it can reach the status of man, seem to suggest the impossibility of man's overriding the laws of nature and set definite limits to the powers of science. But the total effect of magic and the creation of the homunculus is very little, for the Helena who is brought from Hades by the employment of all these means is not a full-blooded human being but a bloodless spectre, who does not also stay long on earth. The whole thing to my mind has a double significance. In the first place, it means want of

faith in any natural and normal evolution producing a transformation of the world, all transformation being the result of a violent intervention by a supernatural agency. Secondly, it connotes want of faith in the power of any supernatural agency also to produce a permanent transformation. On both these points Goethe's standpoint differs radically from that of Sri Aurobindo. It is only at the very end of the drama that Goethe departs from this standpoint and recognizes the power of Divine Love to effect a permanent transformation of the world. But this is to anticipate what I have to say in the sequel.

### THIRD ACT : THE HELENA EPISODE

Coming now to the third act, which, as I have already said, is the central act of the drama, Helena comes back from Hades with her maids and appears in front of her ancestral home, thinking that she is just coming from Troy. Her husband Menelaus, remaining himself on the sea-shore, has sent her ahead to make arrangements for offering a sacrifice to the gods. But no sooner has she entered the palace than she sees the horrible Phorkyas (Mephistopheles transformed into this horrible shape), who follows her and after narrating the incidents of Helena's past life, suddenly explains : "Queen, the offering art thou." The scene is extremely dramatic, and I cannot help reproducing it, as we find it in Mrs. Bayard Taylor's translation :

Helena : I ?

Phorkyas : And these.

Chorus : Ah, woe and sorrow !

Phorkyas : Thou shalt fall beneath the axe.

Helena : Fearful, yet foreboded ! I alas !

Phorkyas : There seemeth no escape.

Phorkyas, however, tells her of a way of escape. There is a northern prince who has built a palace during her long absence on the head waters of the Eurotas, and if she only gives her consent, she will be transferred with her maids to this palace. She does, and she with her maids is transferred by magic to the inner court of a medieval palace. Faust, who is the owner of the castle, now advances slowly, bringing with him the warder Lynceus in chains, whose life has become forfeit because he has failed to announce the approach of strangers. Faust, however, lays his case before Helena, who pardons him. Helena then asks her new protector to sit on the throne by her side. Their love-making, however, is rudely interrupted by the news conveyed by Phorkyas that Menelaus is marching with his army to recover his wife. On hearing this, Faust orders out his troops and makes preparations for meeting Menelaus, himself remaining in his Arcadian home with Helena. They have an issue, a boy, named Euphorion.

The next scene tells us of the antics of this boy Euphorion. Beginning as the very picture of buoyant, childish energy, he gradually becomes more and more reckless. A martial frenzy seizes him as he hears the roar of battle

—the battle between Menelaus and the vassals of Faust. In his anxiety to be at the scene of battle, he flies into the air and falls at the feet of Helena and Faust. With the death of Euphorion the tie that bound Helena to earth is broken and she disappears with her son, leaving her veil and her dress behind.

What are we to make of this act? Various interpretations have been given. One of them I have already examined, which lays stress upon Helena's disappearing, leaving only her dress and veil in the hands of Faust, thereby suggesting that there can be no union between the classical and the romantic, between the ancient past and the living present. To my mind, as I have already said, it illustrates two things : firstly, a love for the classical, and secondly, the impossibility of even remaining there permanently. Of course, no scene in this drama can introduce anything where Faust's soul can rest permanently, for in that case he will lose his wager with the devil. But apart from that, can we not see in this scene an admission that even the classical ideals cannot be looked upon as the last word in human culture, and that we have to go even beyond them if we are to reach our goal ? I will discuss this presently when I shall come to the closing scene of the last act.

#### FOURTH ACT : FAUST AS A DYKE-BUILDER

The fourth act depicts a scene totally different from that of Helena in the third act. Here there is no ideal of classical beauty to thrill our soul, but the theme is a

very prosaic one, being nothing else than an engineering project viz., the rescuing of the shoreland from the encroachments of the sea by the erection of a properly constructed sea-wall. On his aerial journey from Arcadia Faust has observed the waves beating on the shore, and this gives him the idea of rescuing the shoreland from the ravages of the sea.

The connection of the fourth act with the third which precedes, and the fifth act which succeeds it, is at first not clear, and has led many critics to look upon the entire second part of "Faust" as fantastic. But the connection is really very clear and is one which runs through the whole of the second part, being nothing else than the principle of work for work's sake, or, as Goethe has himself expressed it, "Die That is alles nicht der Ruhm" ("The deed is everything, and not fame"), which corresponds closely to the Gītā's ideal of disinterested action. It is the same as the idea of salvation through work, which is stated so clearly in the concluding scene of the fifth act. Calvin Thomas has expressed the connection very beautifully, and I cannot help quoting what he says on the subject:<sup>1</sup> "There is nothing in the third act which seems calculated to convert Faust suddenly into a dyke-builder a *la hollandaise*, nor is it clear that familiarity with the Greek spirit, whatever else it may do, especially disposes the mind to large works of engineering. Nevertheless this bit of motivation is an important part of Goethe's plot and must be taken for what it is worth. His thought was, no doubt, that the

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* his Introduction, already quoted, pp. xliii-xliv.

Greek joy of life and love of beauty were the best of antidotes for morbid preoccupation with one's self; and so Helena might properly enough be made the instrument of Faust's redemption through the turning of his mind away from himself in the direction of some large and useful activity. But it was not necessary that the specific form of this activity should itself go out of his relation to the Greek heroine. As a matter of fact, it seems to have grown out of Goethe's interest in the stone dykes of Venice". This then is the motive behind the representation of the engineering works which form the theme of the fourth act. Faust has to be redeemed against himself. This self-redemption of man through work is the main theme of the drama and finds full expression in the fifth and last act.

The other theme of the fourth act is the fight of the Emperor with his rival, who wanted to usurp the throne, in which the emperor won, thanks to Mephistopheles and his magic. This is also connected with the main theme, for if the Emperor had not won, there would have been no shoreland to reclaim and consequently, no engineering works.

#### FIFTH ACT : GOETHE'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

The fifth act carries the story of the fourth act to a finish. After reclaiming the shoreland by the erection of dykes, Faust became master of an extensive territory. There was, however, one aged couple, Philemon and Baucis, who still lived in their old hut and who refused to

sell it to Faust. This angered Faust, who felt miserable at this check to his ambition. He consented to Mephistopheles' suggestion that the old couple should be removed by force, little knowing that the devil would take advantage of his consent to burn their hut and kill them. As he gazed at the burning ruin, the smoke wafted from it took the form of four old women, Want, Debt, Distress and Worry. The first three could not get admittance into the rich man's house, but the fourth, Worry, entered through the key-hole. On her asking him if he knew her, he said, No, and in saying so, made a statement of his philosophy :

"A fool, who there his blinking eyes directeth,  
And o'er his clouds of peers a place expecteth !  
Firm let him stand, and look around him well !  
This World means something to the Capable.  
Why needs he through Eternity to wend ?  
He here acquires what he can apprehend.  
Thus let him wander down his earthly day."

"This world means something to the Capable"—this is how Goethe expresses his philosophy of life. Not for him is the philosophy of world-negation. His is the virile philosophy of one who has seen the best as well as the worst that the world can offer, and who still holds fast to it, never thinking of fleeing from it. This has some resemblance with the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, but the resemblance does not go beyond the fact that they are both 'yes' men, so far as the reality of the world

is concerned.

The other part of his philosophy is what we have already mentioned, namely, his faith in work. In the fourth act it did not go beyond the Kantian principle of "Duty for duty's sake". Here in the last act some new touches are given to it, in order to elevate it to the rank of a formula of salvation, and it is put into the mouth of the angels who carry the dead body of Faust. Goethe intended at first that in the last act there should be a trial scene, where Christ and Virgin Mary would try Faust for the many sins committed by him. But eventually he ruled it out as being against the spirit of the drama, for Faust had committed no other sin than that of going through all the terrible experiences of life, sometimes, as in the case of the Gretchen tragedy, by being led against his wiser judgment by the diabolical advice of a devil. Instead of a trial scene, thus we have now a scene where Faust is granted salvation. And he is granted salvation because he has striven and suffered. As the angels put it (I give the words in the original German) :

Gerettet ist das edle Glied  
 Der Geisterwelt von Bösen  
 Wer immer strebend sich bemüht  
 Den können wir erlösen.  
 Und hat an ihm die Liebe gar  
 Von oben Theil genommen,  
 Begegnet ihm die selige Schaar  
 Mit herzlichem Willkommen"

which we may translate literally as follows :

“Rescued is the noble member  
Of the spirit-world from Evil :  
Who, ever striving, exerts himself,  
Him can we redeem.  
And if he also participates  
In the love from on high,  
The Blessed Host will meet him  
With heartiest welcome”.

Goethe himself interprets these lines as follows :<sup>1</sup> “In these lines is contained the key to Faust’s salvation. In Faust himself there is an activity which becomes constantly higher and purer to the end, and from above there is eternal love coming to his aid. This harmonizes perfectly with our religious views, according to which, we cannot obtain heavenly bliss through our own strength alone, but with the assistance of divine grace.”

A new factor thus also enters here, namely, that of grace. One’s striving may prepare the ground for one’s salvation, but the actual salvation takes place through Divine Grace. One cannot claim salvation as of right : it is only Divine Grace that can give it. Sri Aurobindo also says this, but in a cosmic reference, when he mentions two conditions as essential for the deliverance of the world, namely, a call from below, and an assent from above.

This Divine Grace, which is another name for Divine

<sup>1</sup> *Conversations of Goethe*, already mentioned, Vol. II, p. 400.

Love, is called in the concluding lines of "Faust" the Eternal Feminine, which is the ultimate principle of Goethe's philosophy. I give below these concluding lines in the original German :

"Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichniss;  
 Das Unzulängliche hier wird's Ereigniss;  
 Das Unbeschreibliche hier ist's gethan;  
 Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan"

which may be literally translated as follows :

"All that is transitory is only a symbol;  
 The inadequate here becomes event;  
 The Indescribable, here it is done :  
 The Eternal-Feminine draws us on and upward"

The Eternal-Feminine is nothing but the Principle of Divine Love. It is the supra-rational element which rounds off the edges of abstract law and abstract justice as conceived by classicism. It is the principle which draws us on and upward, that which alone can effect a progressive evolution of the world. Mrs. Bayard Taylor in her translation of "Faust" explains its nature as follows:<sup>1</sup> "Love is the all-uplifting and all-redeeming power on Earth and in Heaven; and to Man it is revealed in its most pure and perfect form through Woman. Thus, in the transitory life of Earth it is only a symbol of the diviner being; the possibilities of Love, which Earth

<sup>1</sup> Published by Ward, Locke and Bowden, Limited, 4th edn., p. 636.

can never fulfil, become realities in the higher life which follows; the Spirit, which Woman interprets to us here, still draws us upward (as Margaret draws the soul of Faust) there."

## II

### COMPARISON WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S "SAVITRI"

Taking the two parts of "Faust" together, the final message of this great literary masterpiece is that there is an eternal principle of love running through the whole world-process, and that consequently, it is man's duty to go on striving, unmindful of the suffering that it may cause, buoyed up by the consciousness that the world is not unreal or evil and that the only correct attitude towards it is a heroic acceptance of it, with all its darkness and misery and sorrow. Faust had this spirit of heroic acceptance. As a man he was far from being a saint; his defects were palpable, his faults were glaring. But he was saved, because of his striving and because of his faith. A world-renouncing saint, in Goethe's view, would not have been saved, for salvation comes only to those who strive, who face misery and evil, not to those who flee from them. No doubt it is Divine Grace that confers salvation, but Divine Grace never comes to shirkers but only to those who strive heroically. That is why Divine Grace came to Faust, and that is why he was saved. He was saved because he never shirked his duty; he struggled and suffered, and therefore, he won. All his various expe-

riences, even the most tragic ones, proclaim with one voice that he heroically accepted the world as it is, with all its dreadful tragedies, and never thought of escaping from it.

Faust thus was an inverted Arjuna. Arjuna was certainly a better man than Faust, but he was a shirker. Faust was a worse man, but he was not a shirker. Both ran the race of life and both ultimately won. But Arjuna had to be bent back to the right frame of mind before he could succeed. His goodness came to nothing, because he was a shirker. Faust, on the other hand, in spite of his foolishness and his passion (I would not say, for reasons I have explained, his wickedness), obtained salvation because he was a sincere worker and a heroic fighter. Both the Gītā's and Goethe's are virile 'yes' philosophies.

So also is Sri Aurobindo's. It is one of the strongest affirmations—*Bejahungen*, as we may say, using the more expressive German word—of the world that the history of human thought has produced. Its message can be summed up in two words : earthly immortality, or, as the Kāthopaniṣad puts it, *atra brahma samaśnute*. Not for Sri Aurobindo is salvation for the weak-kneed and the faint-hearted who have no faith in the divinity of the world, for to deny the divinity of the world is for him tantamount to denying the existence of God. If God exists and has created the world, then his creation cannot be looked upon as undivine and unreal. At core it is divine, and the duty of human beings is to help the secret divinity working in matter and life and mind to come up to the surface and pierce the walls of ignorance and inconstancy

which prevent its full manifestation.

But my object in this article is not to show how Goethe the poet finds a response in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, but rather how Sri Aurobindo the poet greets Goethe the poet. I therefore take for the purpose of comparing these two great souls, the chief poetical work of the one—"Faust"—and the chief poetical work of the other—"Savitri".

Thanks to Sri Ambalal Balkrishna Puraniji's excellent monograph on "Savitri", published under the title "Savitri—an approach and a study" (Sri Aurobindo Karyalaya, Anand), my task has been made comparatively easy. It is a wonderfully clear exposition of the thought of this great epic, and I cannot thank him sufficiently for the great service he has rendered in making the most recondite thoughts of this most difficult poem accessible even to the most ordinary intelligence. I have made free use of this monograph, so free, in fact, that I am not conscious of borrowing his thoughts even when I express them almost in his language, for I have almost woven them into the fabric of my own thought. I must, however, also say that I have given in many places my independent interpretation of the verses of "Savitri".

With these prefatory remarks I proceed to my task. The theme of "Savitri" is nothing else than the eradication of inconscience and ignorance, the root causes of the World's imperfection. The most glaring symbol of this imperfection is Death. This is the most staggering fact about the world at present. It is a perpetual reminder to us of the unsatisfactory character of the stage of evolution

reached by us today. The world's great need, and therefore, its great desire, is to be freed from the incubus of death. But how is it possible ? It can only be effected by the descent into the world of a Supramental Being with a supramental consciousness. This descent can take place if there is a genuine aspiration for it on the part of human consciousness, as the poet says about Sāvitrī's birth, "A world's desire compelled her mortal birth". It is the persistent and whole-hearted desire of the world for the end of the rule of inconscience and ignorance and the dawning of knowledge that was responsible for the birth of Sāvitrī. And her birth synchronized with the eradication of death. Satyavān's death is decreed : the inconscience and ignorance which characterise the present state of the world cannot but land us in death. Satyavān's death merely points to the fact of the inevitability of death in the present condition of the world. But if death is an inevitable necessity of the present state of the world, the complete eradication of it is equally a necessary condition of the transfigured world in which knowledge and not ignorance and inconscience will reign. The resurrection of Satyavān, therefore, is an inevitable necessity of the new world, the transmuted and purified world that emerges on the dawning of knowledge with the birth of Sāvitrī.

This is the transfigured form in which the Mahābhārata legend of Sāvitrī and Satyavān appears in Sri Aurobindo's poem. Goethe also made many changes in the Faust legend, the most important being the transformation of the character of Faust from that of a wicked magician to

that of a man who, in spite of his good intentions is the victim of circumstances. But no change which he made in the Faust legend can be compared with the radical change made by Sri Aurobindo in the Mahābhārata legend. The old legend is entirely transformed in the hands of Sri Aurobindo. It is raised from the individual to the cosmic plane. It is no longer a story of the fortunes of a husband and a wife, but it becomes a story of the entire race of man and the whole universe. It acquires a cosmic, and not merely an individual significance.

Do we have anything like this in Goethe's "Faust" ? I am afraid not, though there is something faintly resembling it in the Helena scene in the second part of "Faust". I say advisedly "faintly resembling it", for as I shall explain presently, there is a vast difference between the radical change envisaged by Sri Aurobindo in the condition of the world through the birth of Sāvitrī and the change contemplated by Faust through the appearance of Helena. Helena, as we know, represents for Goethe the ideal of classical beauty. Faust's infatuation for Helena is not the passion of a young man for a beautiful girl, the Don Juan period of his career having ended with the Gretchen tragedy. He had, in fact, been lifted to a higher plane. His infatuation, therefore, will have to be traced to other causes. It appears to me, taking this scene in its relation to the previous one, the scene of the classical Walpurgis night and the journey through classical Hades, and also taking into account its connection with the scenes that follow, that there is here an indication of the necessity of the introduction of higher ideals from

classical sources to improve the tone of the present-day world. But in the first place, this improvement was of a very temporary nature, for Helena did not stay long, and therefore, it cannot be compared with the permanent change in the nature of the world which the birth of Sāvitrī signifies in Sri Aurobindo's epic. But even supposing there is a permanent improvement of the world contemplated in Helena's appearance in the third act of the second part of "Faust", can that be compared with the significance of the birth of Sāvitrī ? Can the reappearance of a vanished glory in the past be compared with the appearance of a new light that has never shone before on earth or in heaven ? We have only to put the question in this way to understand the fundamental difference between Helena's reappearance from classical Hades and Sāvitrī's birth. The latter signifies a new light, a new glory which the world has never witnessed before. Helena's appearance is only the resuscitation of a vanished past, glorious it may be, but having nothing of the untasted and unexperienced vast new fields of glory that are first revealed to the vision of man with the birth of Sāvitrī. There can really be no comparison between the two. The change brought about by the birth of Sāvitrī is indeed so radical that, as the poet puts it, the Divine Mother in spite of her willingness to effect it, could not do so before, as "death-bound hearts" were too weak to receive it :

"Then the divine afflatus, spent, withdrew,  
Unwanted, fading from the mortal's range.  
A sacred yearning lingered in its trace,

The worship of a Presence and a Power  
Too perfect to be held by death-bound hearts,  
The prescience of a marvellous birth to come.”<sup>1</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that even if Goethe had in mind some change in earthly life, it could never be anything so radical as that contemplated by Sri Aurobindo.

THE ROOT OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOETHE  
AND SRI AUROBINDO LIES IN THEIR RESPECTIVE  
CONCEPTIONS OF THE SUPERNATURAL

The root of their difference lies in their respective views on the nature of the supernatural. Whereas for Goethe the sole source of the supernatural is magic, Sri Aurobindo seeks it in other and higher sources. In fact, Sri Aurobindo has a poor conception of the power of magic. Magic, in his view, can produce some beings from the vital world, but these beings are mostly evil forces, and the invocation of them, far from helping men, is often a source of trouble to them. Thus he says in the chapter “The Order of the Worlds” in *The Life Divine*, “It seems even to be the fact that the vital worlds are the natural home of the Powers that most disturb human life; this is indeed logical, for it is through our vital being that they sway us and they must therefore be powers of a larger and more powerful life-existence....If we find them existing in these worlds of other mind and other life, even though not pervading it but only

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book I, Canto I, pp. 6-7.

occupying their separate province, we must either conclude that they have come into existence by a projection out of the inferior evolution, upward from below, by something in the subliminal parts of Nature bursting there into a larger formation of the evil created here, or that they were already created as part of a parallel gradation to the involutionary descent, a gradation forming a stair for evolutionary ascension towards Spirit just as the involutionary was a stair of the descent of the Spirit".<sup>1</sup> He further says of these vital worlds and the Powers that inhabit them:<sup>2</sup> "Some of these Beings, Powers or Forces are such that we think of them as divine ; they are luminous, benignant or powerfully helpful : there are others that are Titanic, gigantic or demoniac, inordinate Influences, instigators or creators often of vast and formidable inner upheavals or of actions that overpass the normal human measure."

It is really strange that Goethe could believe that with the help of such evil forces called up by magic, anything really great could be achieved. And in fact Faust could not achieve anything great with its help. The resuscitation of Helena from the underworld was only of short duration. She lived only for a brief period with Faust, retiring suddenly, leaving her veil and her dress behind.

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, pp. 744-45.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 736.

THE COSMIC OUTLOOK OF "SAVITRI" AS  
COMPARED WITH THE INDIVIDUALISTIC OUTLOOK OF  
"FAUST"

We thus see that although there are glimpses here and there of a cosmic standpoint in "Faust", its standpoint is on the whole individualistic. It cannot but be so, for the only supernatural agency in which Goethe had faith, namely, magic, is incapable of giving anything which is of value from the cosmic standpoint. It may add to Faust's experiences of life and in that way may be an additional claim to his obtaining salvation on the ground of his striving and suffering, but it cannot show the way in which the salvation of mankind is to be sought. This constitutes the main difference between the outlooks of "Savitri" and "Faust". "Savitri" gives the cosmic story of the emancipation of the world from the thralldom of inconscience and ignorance, "Faust" depicts the emancipation of its hero through faith in work done in a spirit of goodwill and self-effacement. "Savitri" may thus, as I have already said, be called a cosmic "Faust". Yes, these two great masterpieces of literature supplement each other. "Savitri" takes up the narrative of man's salvation from the point where "Faust" leaves it. "Faust" leaves it at the stage where the individual man, by facing all the problems of life heroically, buoyed by faith in the ultimate triumph of good over evil, obtains emancipation, "Savitri" carries the theme to the cosmic plane and shows how the forces against which man has to fight are the product of inconscience and ignorance,

and how the battle has to be fought on the cosmic plane if victory is to be obtained :

“The Ideal must be Nature’s common truth,  
The body illumined with the indwelling God,  
The heart and mind feel one with all that is,  
A conscious soul live in a conscious world.”<sup>1</sup>

By his own Yoga Ásvapati could “discern the super-human’s form”. But he was not content with that. What he wanted was that “the ideal he had glimpsed must be his home”. His own individual salvation was not enough for him. What he wanted was that

“A brighter heavenlier sun must soon illumine  
This dusk room with its dark internal stair,  
The infant soul in its small nursery school  
Mid objects meant for a lesson hardly learned  
Outgrow its early grammar of intellect  
And its imitation of Earth-Nature’s art,  
Its earthly dialect to God-language change,  
In living symbols study Reality  
And learn the logic of the Infinite”<sup>2</sup>

This is the picture of the world which he wants to bring down on earth. But what is the world as he finds it at present ? He describes it thus :

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book I, Canto V, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 70.

There are thrills of the flesh, but not the soul's  
desire.

Here even the highest rapture Time can give  
Is a mimicry of ungrasped beatitudes,  
A mutilated statue of ecstasy,  
A wounded happiness that cannot live,  
A brief felicity of mind or sense  
Thrown by the World-Power to her body-slave,  
Or a simulacrum of enforced delight  
In the seraglios of Ignorance.”<sup>1</sup>

The poet sums up more tersely the unsatisfactory condition of the present world. All that we have, he says, is nothing but

**“An old disvalued credit in Time’s bank,  
Imperfection’s cheque drawn on the Inconscient.”**

There is no doubt, therefore, that a vast gulf separates the world as it is and the world as it is to be, if it is to be free from the incubus of death, which is nothing else than the domination of ignorance. How is this gulf to

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book I, Canto V, p. 71.

be bridged ? It can only be done by an ascent of the soul of man to supernal heights, and secondly, by the descent of a Higher Divine Power, namely, the Supermind, into it.

“Savitri” therefore next narrates the ascent of the soul of man, represented by Ásvapati, to supernal heights, described by the poet in Books II and III. Book II describes the march of the soul through the worlds that have already evolved. These worlds may therefore be called “our worlds”, for they are the worlds which are still moving in ignorance, though their degrees of ignorance may vary greatly. They stretch from the world of Inconscience or gross matter to the world of the Overmind, the highest rung in the ladder of ignorance. These are also the worlds with which our earth-consciousness is more or less in contact. The other ascent is the ascent to supra-cosmic planes which have not yet evolved and with which, consequently, our earth-consciousness is not yet in touch. This is described in Book III, which is named *The Book of the Divine Mother*. The planes described here are the planes of Knowledge, and Ásvapati’s rôle here is that of a beggar, who begs the Divine Mother to let the light of these supra-cosmic planes descend into earth-consciousness in the form of the birth of a Supramental Being upon Earth. Unwilling at first to grant this prayer on the ground that Earth is not fit to receive such a gift, the Divine Mother ultimately granted his prayer, and thus Savitri was born.

THE TRAVELLER OF THE WORLDS : FIRST STAGE  
OF ASVAPATI'S JOURNEY

Ásvapati, as representative of the soul of man, must have to travel across the worlds as the first stage of the process by which the consummation wished for is to be achieved. His voyage is thus described :

“Alone he moved watched by the infinity  
Around him and the Unknowable above.  
All could be seen that shuns the mortal eye,  
All could be known the mind has never grasped ;  
All could be done no mortal will can dare.  
A limitless movement filled a limitless peace.  
In a profound existence beyond earth's  
Parent or kin to our ideas and dreams  
Where Space is a vast experiment of the soul,  
In a deep oneness of all things that are,  
The universe of the Unknown arose.”<sup>1</sup>

“Where Space is a vast experiment of the soul.” Combining this expression with what we have at the end of Canto I, “He broke into another Space and Time,” we come to perceive one thing which Sri Aurobindo has emphasized in all his works, namely, that Space and Time are necessary conditions of the existence of all created worlds, no matter how high they may be. In fact, creation may be looked upon as a vast experiment in Space and Time. Elsewhere in this poem, he has said,

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri* Book II, Canto I, p. 87.

"Life has lured the Eternal into Time." making it quite intelligible how Time (and by parity of reasoning, Space also) not only can, but *must* exist in all worlds. Puraniji, in his book on "Savitri", to which I have already referred, has done well in discussing this matter and answering the difficulties of those who cannot understand how the Timeless Eternal can also be a Time-Eternity. The question has been answered from the point of view of logic in "The Life Divine," where Sri Aurobindo has shown the fundamental difference between the logic which can comprehend the divine epiphany of *Saccidānanda*, which he calls the logic of the infinite, and our mental logic or the logic of the finite, which suffers from serious limitations.

But all this is by the way. It is not my object to enter into a discussion of these abstruse logical questions. Reverting to the journey of Áśvapati through the worlds we find a beautiful description of the new experiences which are vouchsafed to him. They are due to his integral vision which he has acquired by Yoga. This integral vision makes him see in matter, life, mind and all the other worlds which he visits, things which we ordinary human beings do not see. In fact, the entire epiphany of evolution reveals itself to his clarified vision. This is very charmingly described in the following lines :

"Here all experience was a single plan,  
The thousandfold expression of the One.  
All came at once into his single view ;  
Nothing escaped his vast intuitive sight,

Nothing drew near he could not feel as kin :  
He was one spirit with that immensity.”<sup>1</sup>

The proper perspective in which the integral vision of Aśvapati views everything is brought out more clearly in the lines quoted below :

“The voices of a thousand realms of Life  
Missioned to him her mighty messages.  
The heaven-hints that invade our earthly lives,  
The dire imaginations dreamed by Hell,  
Which if enacted and experienced here  
Our dulled capacity soon would cease to feel  
Or our mortal frailty could not long endure,  
Were set in their sublime proportions there.”<sup>2</sup>

It is very important to remember this ; otherwise we shall fail to grasp the significance of the descriptions that are given of the various worlds. These descriptions are descriptions of things as they appear to the integral vision. They are very different from descriptions of these things as they appear to our ordinary human consciousness.

Next Aśvapati’s discerning vision sees “a ladder of delivering ascent.” :

“A ladder of delivering ascent  
And rungs that Nature climbs to deity.

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book II, Canto I, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 88.



What is the driving force behind Ásvapati's march to higher and higher worlds ? It is the force of the Secret Spirit working within, which wants to go back to the Source from which It fell :

"A Seer within who knows the ordered plan  
Concealed behind our momentary steps,  
Inspires our ascent to viewless heights  
As once the abysmal leap to birth and life.  
His call had reached the Traveller in Time.  
Apart in an unfathomed loneliness,  
He travelled in his mute and single strength  
Bearing the burden of the world's desire."<sup>1</sup>

Such is the grand panorama of the successive created worlds through which Ásvapati marches. In the next fourteen cantos detailed descriptions are given of the kingdom of subtle matter, the glory and fall of life, the kingdom of the little life, the godheads of the little life, the kingdoms and godheads of the greater life, the descent into night, the world of falsehood, the mother of evil and the sons of darkness, the paradise of the life-gods, the kingdoms and godheads of the little mind, the kingdoms and godheads of the greater mind, the heavens of the ideal, the self of mind, the World-Soul, the kingdoms of the greater knowledge. These descriptions are unique in the history of human literature, for nowhere in human literature do we find such complete pictures of worlds taken, not from the angle of vision of our normal human

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book II, Canto I, p. 93.

intuition but from that of integral intuition. It is a pity limits of space prevent me from dealing with them, but one or two quotations from them I give below by way of illustration. Thus speaking of the limitations of reason, the poet says :

“For not by Reason was creation made  
And not by Reason can the Truth be seen  
Which through the veils of thought, the screens of  
sense

Hardly the spirit’s vision can descry  
Dimmed by the imperfections of its means :

Our reason only a toys’ artificer,  
A rule-maker in a strange stumbling game.

.....  
The world she has made is an interim report  
Of a traveller towards the half-found truth in things  
Moving twixt nescience and nescience.”<sup>1</sup>

“For the spirit is eternal and unmade  
And not by thinking was its greatness born,  
And not by thinking can its knowledge come.  
It knows itself and in itself it lives,  
It moves where no thought is nor any form.”<sup>2</sup>

Faust also will gladly endorse these views, but—and here there is a vast difference between his standpoint

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book II, Canto X, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, Book II, Canto XI, p. 237.

and that depicted in "Savitri"—in his anxiety to escape from Reason, he takes recourse to magic. Here he commits a great mistake. He is only saved, because his mistakes are honest mistakes, not proceeding from any perversity of character, and because he has striven hard and heroically faced all problems that presented themselves to him. But although he may individually be saved on account of his heroic qualities, his method is one that can never lead to world-salvation. Indeed it is better far to suffer from the snares and delusions of Reason than fly into the arms of magic.

THE FINAL STAGE OF ASVAPATI'S ASCENT:  
HE MEETS THE DIVINE MOTHER

I now come to the final stage of Ásvapati's journey—his meeting the Divine Mother. This is narrated in the Third Book of "Savitri". In the first canto of this Book, named "The Pursuit of the Unknowable", there is depicted the feeling of disappointment of Ásvapati with all that he saw in the vast panorama of the worlds that was spread out before him, as described in Book II :

"All is too little that the world can give :  
Its power and knowledge are the gifts of Time  
And cannot fill the spirit's sacred thirst."<sup>1</sup>

He therefore "turned to the Ineffable's timeless call".  
As a result of this,

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book III, Canto I, p. 277.

"A Being intimate and unnameable,  
 A wide compelling ecstasy and peace  
 Felt in himself and all and yet ungrasped,  
 Approached and faded from his soul's pursuit  
 As if for ever luring him beyond.  
 Near, it retreated; far it called him still.  
 Nothing could satisfy but its delight :  
 Its absence left the greatest actions dull,  
 Its presence made the smallest seem divine."<sup>1</sup>

Not only that, but even the order of the grand worlds that he had visited, faded into insignificance without its presence :

"Its presence made the smallest seem divine.  
 When it was there, the heart's abyss was filled;  
 But when the uplifting Deity withdrew,  
 Existence lost its aim in the Inane.  
 The order of the immemorial planes,  
 The godlike fullness of the instruments  
 Were turned to props for an impermanent scene."<sup>2</sup>

He realised therefore that the presence of such a deity was absolutely necessary if he was to have any taste of immortality. But he had no idea who this deity was :

"But who that mightiness was he knew not yet".

He had yet to know that this deity is no other than the Divine Mother. In the meantime he had a curious experience : he felt that he could not ascend further unless he could transform whatever he had of the earthly into something divine :

“Then to the ascent there came a mighty term :  
A height was reached where nothing made could live,  
A line where every hope and search must cease  
Neared some intolerant bare Reality,  
A zero formed pregnant with boundless change.  
On a dizzy verge where all disguises fail  
And human mind must abdicate in Light  
Or die like a moth in the naked blaze of Truth,”<sup>1</sup>

He had come to a situation where he had to make a tremendous choice. Either he should give up all hope of making any further ascent or he should transform himself completely :

“He stood compelled to a tremendous choice.  
All he had been and all towards which he grew  
Must now be left behind or else transform  
Into a self of That which has no name.”<sup>2</sup>

This experience he had because he could only know it as a big ‘It’, as a blank Infinity. Many people, even great sages, have been content to know it as a formless ‘It’.

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book III, Canto I, p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 278.

But Áśvapati was not content to know it thus. He was simply appalled at the vision of this blank, formless 'It', for

"There was no mind there with its need to know,  
 There was no heart there with its need to love.  
 All person perished in its namelessness.  
 There was no second, it had no partner or peer;  
 Only itself was real to itself.  
 A pure existence safe from thought and mood,  
 A consciousness of unshared immortal bliss,  
 It dwelt aloof in its bare infinite,  
 One and unique, unutterably sole."<sup>1</sup>

He was struck with awe by its sublimity and terrible aloofness, but his heart's craving was not satisfied, his aspiration remained unfulfilled. The next canto, named "The Adoration of the Divine Mother", gives full expression to his sense of dissatisfaction :

"O soul, it is too early to rejoice !  
 Thou hast reached the boundless silence of the Self,  
 Thou hast leaped into a glad divine abyss;  
 But where hast thou thrown self's mission and self's  
power ?  
 On what dead bank on the Eternal's road ?

.....  
 Only the everlasting No has neared  
 And stared into thy eyes and killed thy heart :

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, p. 280.

But where is the Lover's everlasting Yes,  
 And immortality in the secret heart,  
 The voice that chants to the creator Fire,  
 The symbol OM, the great assenting Word,  
 The bridge between the rapture and the calm,  
 The passion and the beauty of the Bride,  
 The chamber where the glorious enemies kiss,  
 The smile that saves, the golden peak of things ?"<sup>1</sup>

Luck, however, came to him, for the Presence he yearned for suddenly drew close :

"Even while he stood on being's naked edge  
 And all the passion and seeking of his soul  
 Faced their extinction in some featureless Vast,  
 The Presence he yearned for suddenly drew close.

.....  
 Someone came infinite and absolute.  
 A being of wisdom, power and delight,  
 Even as a mother draws her child to her arms,  
 Took to her breast Nature and world and soul."<sup>2</sup>

He felt now a yearning to draw her presence and her power into his heart and mind :

"Now other claims had hushed in him their cry :  
 Only he longed to draw her presence and power  
 Into his heart and mind and breathing frame;

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book III, Canto II, pp. 282-83.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 284.

Only he yearned to call for ever down  
 Her healing touch of love and truth and joy  
 Into the darkness of the suffering world.  
 His soul was freed and given to her alone."<sup>1</sup>

Now he addressed himself to a mightier task than any he had attempted so far. The task was nothing less than to bring the ineffable Light, which he had been privileged to see, down to this Earth. In this difficult task he found at first no encouragement from the Higher Sources.

"But from the appalling heights there stooped no voice;  
 The timeless lids were closed; no opening came."<sup>2</sup>

Not only that, but he felt a resistance even from the lower worlds :

"In the texture of our bound humanity  
 He felt the stark resistance huge and dumb  
 Of our inconscient and unseeing base,  
 The stubborn mute rejection in Life's depths,  
 The ignorant No in the origin of things."<sup>3</sup>

Even in himself he noticed a resistance, and therefore

"He tore desire up from its bleeding roots  
 And offered to the gods the vacant place.  
 Thus could he bear the touch immaculate."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book III, Canto II, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, Book III, Canto III, p. 288.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 288.    <sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 289.

In this way he could effect a radical transformation of his nature and make it fit for the great task he was attempting. The nature of the transformation is thus described :

“A last and mightiest transformation came.  
His soul was all in front like a great sea  
Flooding the mind and body with its waves;  
His being, spread to embrace the universe,  
United the within and the without  
To make of life a cosmic harmony,”<sup>1</sup>

The result of the transformation was that

“His mind answered to countless communing minds,  
His words were syllables of the cosmos’ speech,  
His life a field of the vast cosmic stir.”<sup>2</sup>

And then what he longed for happened: there was a stir above, a response from the divine Presence. This is described in the next Canto :

“Then suddenly there rose a sacred stir.  
Amid the lifeless silence of the Void  
In a solitude and an immensity  
A sound came quivering like a loved footfall  
Heard in the listening spaces of the soul;  
A touch perturbed his fibres with delight.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book III, Canto III, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, Book III, Canto IV, p. 303.

That Presence then spoke as follows to him :

“O Son of Strength who climbst creation’s peaks,  
No soul is thy companion in the light;  
Alone thou standest at the eternal doors.  
What thou hast won is thine, but ask no more.”<sup>1</sup>

She thus wanted to dissuade him from his purpose, and the reason why she did so is thus stated :

“Man is too weak to bear the Infinite’s weight.  
Truth born too soon might break the imperfect earth.”<sup>2</sup>

“Man is too weak to bear the Infinite’s weight.” Therefore, the time had not come for the Divine Descent to take place which would remove ignorance and inconscience once and for all from the world.

But he was not to be dissuaded from his purpose. He therefore addressed the Divine Mother thus :

“How shall I rest content with mortal days  
And the dull measure of terrestrial things,  
I who have seen behind the cosmic mask  
The glory and the beauty of thy face ?  
Hard is the doom to which thou bindst thy sons !  
How long shall our spirits battle with the Night  
And bear defeat and the brute yoke of Death,  
We who are vessels of a deathless Force

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, Book III, Canto IV, p. 304.

And builders of the godhead of the race ?”<sup>1</sup>

He not only spoke thus of the hard lot of the race of man subject to death, but made a fervent appeal to the Divine Mother to send to earth some living form of Hers :

“O radiant fountain of the world’s delight  
World-free and unattainable above,  
O Bliss who ever dwellest deep hid within  
While men seek thee outside and never find,  
Mystery and Muse with hieratic tongue,  
Incarnate the white passion of thy force,  
Mission to earth some living form of thee.”<sup>2</sup>

This fervent appeal had its desired effect. The Divine Mother relented, and in granting his desire, said thus to him :

“O strong forerunner, I have heard thy cry.  
One shall descend and break the iron Law,  
Change Nature’s doom by the lone Spirit’s power.  
A limitless Mind that can contain the world,  
A sweet and violent heart of ardent calms  
Moved by the passions of the gods shall come.

.....  
“She shall bear Wisdom in her voiceless bosom,  
Strength shall be with her like a conqueror’s sword  
And from her eyes the Eternal’s bliss shall gaze.

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, pp. 309-10.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 313.

A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour,  
A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;  
Nautre shall overleap her mortal step;  
Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will."<sup>1</sup>

Thus was Sāvitṛī born, whose birth synchronized with the conquest of inconstancy and ignorance, and with them Death, their most important symbol. Thus was salvation brought to the entire universe. How infinitely grand this view of salvation, as compared with the salvation vouchsafed to Faust !

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Book III, Canto IV, p. 314.

## XI

### SRI AUROBINDO AND WHITEHEAD\*

I HAVE been feeling for some time that the series of comparative studies in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy which I have made, in which I have brought it into relation with that of the leading philosophers of the West, cannot be said to be complete unless it includes a comparison of that philosophy with that of Whitehead, and that for several reasons. In the first place, Whitehead is perhaps the most systematic thinker in the West today, as Sri Aurobindo is in the East. System is the obsession of Whitehead, as originality is the obsession of Bergson. There is perhaps no important thinker in the West, from Heraclitus and Plato in ancient times, down to Bergson and Alexander in our days, from whom Whitehead has not drawn his ideas for building his system. In the second place, and as a consequence of his great love for system, his philosophy acquires a wonderful representative character. There is hardly any trend of Western thought which he has not tried to represent and incorporate in his philosophy. It will therefore be of great interest to compare his philosophy with that of Sri Aurobindo who is similarly a most representative thinker in the East. Thirdly, by virtue of his eminent position in both, he is not only a representative of Western philosophy but also of Western science, and this is a matter of great

\* Reprinted from the *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 1955.

importance from the standpoint of a comparative study, for it increases enormously his value as a representative of Western thought. Fourthly, he is a great votary of monism, as great perhaps as Sri Aurobindo, though in a sense very different from that in which Sri Aurobindo is a votary of it. And fifthly and lastly, he is, like Sri Aurobindo, a great exponent of the principle of evolution, and has, like the latter, made it one of the main pillars of his philosophical edifice. For all these various reasons, I feel that a comparative study of these two philosophies is highly desirable and will be a fit continuation of those I have so far made.

#### WHITEHEAD'S PHILOSOPHY OF ORGANISM

Whitehead calls his philosophy the philosophy of organism. Its main idea is that nothing in this world is isolated, but that everything is linked with everything. As he puts it in his characteristic manner, "everything is everywhere at all times". This, of course, reminds one of Leibnitz's view that every monad mirrors the whole world. Whitehead himself freely acknowledges this. Thus, he says : "It is evident that I can use Leibnitz's language, and say that every volume mirrors in itself every other volume in space".<sup>1</sup> But Whitehead totally dissociates himself from the Leibnitzian conception of monads as windowless. Far from being windowless, they are all windows. In fact, for Whitehead it is because they are

<sup>1</sup> *Science and the Modern World*, p. 81. Cambridge University Press, 1928.

all windows, that they can be mirrors of the world. Leibnitz joined the two parts of his theory of monads, namely, monadism and organicism, with the help of his theory of pre-established harmony, but Whitehead rejects with scorn any such theory, for it smacks of the theory of external relations, and all external relations are totally rejected by him. It is because the whole world is an organism that everything is related to everything. His philosophy in this respect rather resembles that of Hegel, though, as he says,<sup>1</sup> all that he has read of Hegel's writings is only one page. He admits, however, that he has been influenced by Hegel through his friends, Mc. Taggart and Haldane.<sup>2</sup> Be that as it may, there is no doubt that his philosophy resembles in important respects the philosophy of Hegel, though, as we shall presently see, there are also many points of difference. For one thing, he does not base his philosophy on the principle of thought, as Hegel does, and with the help of which Hegel could give us a picture of the world as an organic unity. Mr. Abu Sayeed Ayyub in his very lucid account of the philosophy of Whitehead in *History of Philosophy, Eastern and Western*<sup>3</sup> characterizes the difference between the Hegelian standpoint and that of Whitehead thus : "Whitehead's philosophy is above all a philosophy of process and growth in time, whereas for Hegel all development is only logical." After stating the difference

<sup>1</sup> *Essays in Science and Philosophy*, p. 88. Rider and Company, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, do.

<sup>3</sup> *History of Philosophy, Eastern and Western*, Vol. II, p. 370. George Allen & Unwin, 1953.

between their standpoints in this way, he ventures the remark, "This, however, was more a limitation of Hegel's time than of his thought, for matter as defined by the physicists of early nineteenth century was much too static to be really capable of any development. Hegel was naturally unable to conceive how this Newtonian matter could have produced life or mind". I am afraid he has paid too great a compliment to modern science in thinking that Hegel would have found in matter, as conceived by it, all that he put into thought as conceived by him.

Whitehead's peculiarity is that without being an idealist, he is a strong upholder of the theory of internal relations. He believes he has upset many apple-carts. One of the biggest is the idea that realism must necessarily be based upon a theory of external relations. The philosophy of organism in his opinion is the strongest proof that realism not only can be, but must be based upon a theory of internal relations.

#### WHITEHEAD'S THEORY OF PREHENSION

How this is so, Whitehead proceeds to show by means of his theory of prehension. The nature of this prehension he derives from a passage in Bacon's *Natural History*, which runs thus :

"It is certain that all bodies whatsoever, though they have no sense, yet they have perception...and whether the body be alterant or altered, evermore a perception

precedeth operation; for else all bodies would be alike one to another..."<sup>1</sup>

After quoting this passage, Whitehead proceeds to explain what Bacon means by perception, and his view is that this word in Bacon means *taking account* of the essential character of the thing perceived, whereas by sense he means cognition. This taking account, thus, is contrasted with sensing, and must mean doing so without express cognition. The word 'perception', however, as it is used in these days, "is shot through and through with the notion of cognitive apprehension", and therefore Whitehead coins the word 'prehension' to express what Bacon in the passage quoted above denotes by the word 'perception', that is to say, *uncognitive apprehension*. There may thus be a prehension, *here* in this place, of things which have a reference to *other* places.<sup>2</sup>

Prehension, therefore, means a kind of feeling by which things are grasped in their unity and not in their isolation. Our actual world for Whitehead is a world of prehending entities, that is, of entities which exist so far as they are related to one another. Such a view, therefore, is a total rejection of the Newtonian view of single location, that is, the view which looks upon each thing as existing only in one place at one time. It is also a rejection of all external relations, for the mutual relationship of the prehending entities is part of their very nature and cannot be separated from it.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted at p. 86 of *Science and the Modern World*.

<sup>2</sup> *Science and the Modern World*, p. 86.

Whitehead's theory of prehension is a challenge to idealism. It makes no reference to the mind or cognition and yet it claims to build up a wonderful synthesis in which the different events merge into one another and produce by their joint effort a concatenated whole, a world of organism. He sharply contrasts prehension with apprehension. It is definitely *not* apprehension, for there is here no element of cognition. It is, moreover, a purely natural process, and there is no mental element in it. Mind is a further development of this natural process. As we have said already, Whitehead is a strict monist. He vigorously opposes all dualism, or, as he calls it, "bifurcation theory". His is perhaps the greatest challenge thrown by realism to all forms of idealism. He knows the limitations of the ordinary types of realism : they all rest upon a dualistic or pluralistic basis. This is their greatest weakness, and that is why they could not make any effective stand against idealism, the strength of which lies in its monism. Do away with this weakness and show that realism is capable of building as unitary a system of philosophy as idealism can ever aspire to, and the battle against idealism will be won. This is the background of the theory of prehension. The name itself is a challenge. It is not to be confused with apprehension, which is a form of cognition. It is an all-out fight between realism, understood in the sense of naturalism, and idealism. As he has said<sup>1</sup> in defining his own attitude, "We have to search whether nature does not in its very being show itself as self-explanatory."

<sup>1</sup> *Science and the Modern World*, p. 115.

## WHITEHEAD AND ROMANTICISM

Whitehead is a whole-hogger. He is not afraid of stretching his theory of the interrelatedness of events to a point where lesser men would have hesitated to stretch it. He carries out in fact to its logical extreme the principle which he has enunciated, namely, that "everything is everywhere at all times." And this he has done from the purely naturalistic standpoint. Of course, so far as the explanation of all things from the naturalistic principle is concerned, others have done so before his time. For instance, nineteenth century materialists declared that the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile. But Whitehead has not done it in that way. He is an evolutionist. And evolution means not a static uniformity but a dynamic march to newer and newer developments. He cannot therefore in his enthusiasm for the naturalistic outlook reduce all higher processes to the dead level of one uniform process at the lowest level. As a matter of fact, he has taken the opposite course. He has shown how without deviating from the naturalistic order, evolution can have unlimited possibilities of growth, how the greatest revelations of poetry and art are but further illustrations of the essential characters of change, value, eternal objects, endurance, organism, interfusion which are present in the whole of nature. The romantic revolt against mechanism and dead uniformity is, in his view, the revolt of nature against these. It does not spring upon us any new principle which is not found in the rest of nature, but is the

same principle of nature which is at work even in the movements of the electrons and the behaviour of atoms. As he puts it,<sup>1</sup> "The literature of the nineteenth century, especially its English poetic literature, is a witness to the discord between the aesthetic intuitions of mankind and the mechanism of science. Shelley brings vividly before us the elusiveness of the eternal objects of sense as they haunt the change which infects underlying organisms. Wordsworth is the poet of nature as being the field of enduring permanences carrying within themselves a message of tremendous significance. The eternal objects are also for him,

The light that never was on sea or land.

But Shelley and Wordsworth emphatically bear witness that nature cannot be divorced from its aesthetic values ; and that these values arise from the cumulation, in some sense, of the brooding presence of the whole on to its various parts."

### WHITEHEAD'S CONCEPTION OF ETERNAL OBJECTS

So far we have dealt with Whitehead's conception of the world as a process, and we have seen how in the gigantic sweep of his philosophy of organism he has been able to do away with the great barriers which have so far separated different regions of experience and link them all into one harmonious, homogenous whole. But

<sup>1</sup> *Science and the Modern World*, p. 108.

the world is not only a world of process but one of stability or form also. In fact, events could not have been recognized as events if they had not something enduring in them. This factor of stability which process requires is contributed by what Whitehead calls "eternal objects." These "eternal objects" are universals which give form to the actual entities or events. But they can do so only by an act of ingression or penetration into the world of actual entities. These eternal objects are beyond space and time but through ingression they enter the world of space and time. Their position is somewhat similar to that of Plato's ideas which also come into the world of movement and change through participation in them of objects in that world. But there is this important difference between Plato's ideas and Whitehead's eternal objects, that unlike the former, they are not substantial realities. They are qualities or patterns of qualities which through ingression into events confer upon them stability and make it possible for them to be recognized.

I shall presently discuss the agency or machinery by which this ingression takes place. For the present I shall take for granted that somehow ingression has taken place and shall briefly discuss what happens as a result of it. In consequence of such ingression the eternal objects become the familiar objects of our everyday life. According to the character of the permanence exhibited by them, they can be grouped under four main types, namely percipient objects, sense-objects, perceptual objects and scientific objects. Limitations of space do not allow me to discuss these different types, and I shall

confine myself to giving the general characteristics of all such objects which distinguish them from events. Their general characteristic is thus stated by Whitehead :<sup>1</sup>

“Objects convey the permanences recognized in events and are recognized as self-identical amid different circumstances; that is to say, the same object is recognized as related to diverse events.”

Further characteristics of objects which distinguish them from events are thus described by Whitehead.<sup>2</sup> “...objects lack the fixedness of relations which events possess and thus time and space could never be the direct expression of their essential relations.” The chief cause of the confusion between objects and events lies in the erroneous view that an object can only be in one place at one time. Similarly, he says, it is an error to ascribe parts to objects, where ‘part’ means a spatial or temporal part. “The fundamental rule is,” he adds, “that events have parts and that—except in a derivative sense from their relations to events—objects have no parts. On the other hand, the same object can be found in different parts of space and time, and this cannot hold for events.”<sup>3</sup> The contrast between objects and events is so great that Whitehead uses two distinct words to indicate the difference in our perception of the two.

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Natural Science*, pp. 62-63, Cambridge University Press, 1925.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 66.

Thus he says we "apprehend" an event but "recognize" an object :<sup>1</sup>

Whitehead's whole theory of eternal objects is Platonic, as he has explained in a passage of his book *Process and Reality*,<sup>2</sup> where, speaking of his own philosophy of organism, he remarks, "In such a philosophy the actualities constituting the process of the world are conceived as exemplifying the ingression (or 'participation') of other things which constitute the potentialities of definiteness for any actual existence. The things which are temporal arise by their participation in things which are eternal."

The world of eternal objects is the region of possibility, just as the world of events is the region of actuality. The constant interaction between actuality and possibility is the pivot round which Whitehead's whole theory of evolution moves. Actuality is constantly moving towards possibility, whereas possibility always seeks actualization. This explains the need of their meeting which takes place through the ingression of the eternal objects into the world of events. We have now to find the agency by which this takes place.

### WHITEHEAD'S CONCEPTION OF GOD

The agency we are in search of is God, and we pass on therefore to Whitehead's conception of God. There are two Gods in his system—the primordial God and the

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Natural Science*, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> *Process and Reality*, p. 54.

consequent God. The primordial God is the ideal realization of the potentialities embodied in the eternal objects. The eternal objects are mere abstractions, and they require a process of ideal concretion in an actual, though non-temporal primordial God, before they can be ingressed into the temporal world of actual entities. Whitehead quotes here<sup>1</sup> Aristotle's principle that "apart from things that are actual, there is nothing—nothing either in fact or efficacy," from which he derives his own ontological principle, namely, that "everything is positively somewhere in actuality, and in potency everywhere". The ingression of the eternal objects into the temporal world of actual entities, therefore, requires a double process, namely, first, a concretion in the primordial God, by which they shed their abstract character. This concretion is ideal, because the primordial God, though actual, is not temporal. And secondly, there is the actual process of ingression, by which they shed their character as possibilities and become actualities in a temporal order. Thus we see that apart from God the eternal objects would never be able to actualize themselves in the temporal world, just as in Plato's system, apart from God the eternal ideas would never be in a position to bring themselves into connection with the world of space and time. As primordial, God is the unconditioned conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality.<sup>2</sup> But it is not possible for Him as primordial to have any actual realisation. That is

<sup>1</sup> *Process and Reality*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 486.

reserved for His other nature, the consequent nature, of which we shall speak presently. So also He has only "conceptual feelings" that is, feelings which have yet to be actualized, and totally lacks "physical feelings" or feelings that are actualized. And since conceptual feelings, apart from complex integration with physical feelings, are devoid of consciousness, He must be said to be unconscious.<sup>1</sup>

But God's nature is not exhausted by calling Him primordial; He has also another nature, which is His "consequent" nature. If He lacks physical feelings and consciousness at the primordial stage, He obtains them in His consequent nature, which is the completion of His primordial nature and means the transformation of conceptual feelings into physical feelings, of unconsciousness into consciousness. This takes place through the objectification of the world in God, which means the realisation of the actual world in His nature, its transformation through His wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

God does not create the world but saves it. He saves it by making it pass into the immediacy of His own life. As Whitehead puts it, "he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty and goodness."<sup>3</sup>

On account of the principle of relativity, God and the world act and react upon each other. By reason of this there is a polar relationship between the two. God's

<sup>1</sup> *Process and Reality*, do.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 488.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 490.

nature is completed by the individual and fluent satisfaction of finite entities, while the nature of the finite entities is completed by their conformity with the eternal order, which is the absolute 'wisdom' of God. On account of this polarity between God and the world, there arises a number of antitheses in their relationship, which Whitehead has set forth *seriatim*<sup>1</sup> as follows :

"It is as true to say that God is permanent and the world fluent, as that the world is permanent, and God fluent ;

"It is as true to say that God is one and the world is many, as that God is many, and the world is one." etc. etc.

### OBJECTIVE IMMORTALITY

There is another feature in Whitehead's philosophy, to which it is necessary to draw attention. It is what he calls the principle of objective immortality. The principle means that after each entity has obtained concrescence and has had subjective realization, it perishes. But it perishes in order to live in the other entities. This is an essential part of the principle of organic unity on which his philosophy of organism is based. The perishing of each individual entity in order to give rise to other entities is an essential part of the process of evolution. It is similar to Hegel's principle of "dying to live." It is very different from the Buddhistic doctrine of the momen-

<sup>1</sup> *Process and Reality*, p. 492.

tariness of things, for Whitehead does not conceive the actual entities as momentary. They have indeed sufficient duration, sufficient for the purpose of realizing the subjective ideals. The idea which is sought to be conveyed by objective immortality is that of the absolute interrelatedness of the world of actual entities, so much so that every entity may be said to be living in the other entities. The perishing of an entity, therefore, means only its loss of subjective immediacy; it does not mean its complete annihilation, for it continues to live in the other entities. Looked at from another point of view, as Mr. J. N. Mohanty has shown,<sup>1</sup> it means the immanence of the past and the present in the future. It represents the ideal of absolute continuity and mutuality of the actual entities.

#### WHITEHEAD'S CONCEPTION OF CREATIVITY

So far we have not dealt with the 'why' of evolution. Why does the world evolve at all? Why does God seek temporalization of his conceptual realisations? The answer to these questions is given in Whitehead's theory of Creativity. Creativity is the urge for novelty. In the case of the actual entities of the world, the urge is from the physical pole of enjoyment to the mental pole of appetition. In the case of God, it is just the reverse: it is the passage from the mental pole of appetition to the physical one of enjoyment. The nature of the

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* article "Whitehead's Philosophy of Process" ("The Philosophical Quarterly", Vol. XXIV, No. 2.)

urge, which is one for novelty, Whitehead explains thus : "Creativity is without a character of its own in exactly the same sense in which the Aristotelian 'matter' is without a character of its own. It is that ultimate notion of the highest generality at the base of actuality. It cannot be characterized, because all characters are more special than itself. But creativity is always found under conditions and described as conditioned. The non-temporal act of all-inclusive unfettered valuation is at once a creature of creativity and a condition for creativity. It shares this double character with all creatures."<sup>1</sup>

### SUMMARY

Such, in brief, is the general outline of the gigantic scheme of Cosmology unfolded by Whitehead. In its wide sweep it embraces practically all the different phases of Western thought as it has developed during the last two thousand and five hundred years. It has characteristics which it has borrowed from the Ionian philosophers, from the Eleatics, from Heraclitus, Pythagoras and the Atomists. Especially has it borrowed from the inexhaustible treasures of the philosophy of Plato to whom Whitehead has paid a unique tribute by saying that "the whole of Western philosophy is nothing but so many footnotes to Plato." In fact, as he himself has freely admitted, if there is any philosopher to whom he is indebted more than to anyone else, it is Plato. But this does not mean that he has not made use of the two great ideas of

<sup>1</sup> *Process and Reality*, p. 43.

Aristotle, the idea of teleology and the idea of evolution, or combining the two into one, the great idea of teleological evolution, from which all Western thought, except when it has stuck tenaciously to pure naturalism or pure empiricism, has received inspiration.

But this will give only a partial view of the gigantic synthetic scheme of Whitehead's philosophy. In the structure of his colossal scheme he has not forgotten to include the results of the latest scientific thought. Whitehead himself is a mathematician and a scientist of the first rank, and it would have been very strange if he had not incorporated these results in his philosophy. These therefore have found a place, and that too, not in the antechamber but in the very parlour of his philosophy.

The influences, therefore, which have shaped Whitehead's philosophy are extremely varied. But if we are to single out some for special mention, we may point out those of Plato, Aristotle, Leibnitz and modern science. The idea of teleological evolution is a direct importation from Aristotle, but it is grafted on a naturalism which he has borrowed from modern science.

It is natural that with materials obtained from such divers and often conflicting sources there should be some want of unity and harmony in his system, and it will be our task in the sequel to point these out, not in a spirit of destructive criticism but with a view to finding out how these can be avoided and how a really synthetic philosophy, which it was the aim of Whitehead to build, can be constructed with the help of materials collected from the rich treasures of human thought as it has developed

through the ages. This we shall do by bringing out one side of human thought which has not found entrance into his philosophy, namely, that which has developed in the East, and of which Sri Aurobindo represents its most dynamic and creative aspect.

#### COMPARISON WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY

A comparison of Whitehead's philosophy with that of Sri Aurobindo is therefore not only desirable but an absolute necessity if we are to find out the characteristic difference in system-making in the West and the East. Whitehead's is perhaps the greatest attempt at system-making that has been made in the West since the days of Hegel, and Sri Aurobindo's philosophy also is undoubtedly one of the greatest achievements in system-making in the East.

Whitehead's philosophy, however, is systematic, more from the point of view of what it has set out to achieve than from that of its actual achievements. For, as we shall presently show, the gaps in his system are too palpable, too numerous and too important to be ignored and what is of still greater significance, through these gaps one can see the characteristic shortcomings of Western thought when it tries to blend into a harmonious, homogeneous unity the empiricism of science, the rationalism of the perennial philosophy and the axiology which has run as a side-current along with it, without ever being able to acquire sovereign rights.

Be that as it may, a comparison of Whitehead's phi-

losophy with that of Sri Aurobindo reveals striking resemblances, as well as fundamental differences. The resemblances lie mainly in the importance which both these philosophers have attached to evolution. Perhaps Whitehead is the most outstanding evolutionary philosopher of the present day in the West, more evolutionary in his outlook than even Bergson or Alexander, and Sri Aurobindo—what shall I say of him ? To say that he is the most outstanding evolutionary philosopher in the East is saying nothing, for the East is not particularly distinguished for its love for evolution, but his place is among the greatest evolutionary philosophers either in the East or in the West. For both evolution is not merely one principle among many others which explain the world as it is and as it will be in the future, but it is the one principle round which have clustered all the other principles and without which they cannot be understood. From their thoroughgoing evolutionism follows also their absolute monism ; they are both equally opposed to all forms of dualism or “bifurcation theories,” as Whitehead prefers to call them. They are both neither Heracliteans nor Parmenideans, not devotees exclusively either of Being or of Becoming. In fact, for both of them the distinction between Being and Becoming is artificial and has been the bane of philosophical thinking and the cause of all the pitfalls that have marred the progress of philosophy, as the history of philosophy for the last five thousand years has only too clearly shown. It follows also from their adherence to the principle of evolution, that both are forward-looking

and not tied to what has happened in the past or to what is happening at present. A buoyant optimism characterizes both of them, and they both hate being dominated by stereotyped ways of thinking.

#### EVOLUTION FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE BEGINNING AND EVOLUTION FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE END

But when we examine their respective views of evolution, we find fundamental differences between the two. Whitehead's theory of evolution is naturalistic or from the standpoint of the beginning, whereas Sri Aurobindo's is spiritualistic or from the standpoint of the end. Whitehead's philosophy of organism is based upon a purely naturalistic principle, namely, what he calls prehension, a kind of feeling which is the inner spring or motive force of the entire world of process. It is a feeling which is present even in the movements of electrons, but it has the power of joining the separate and independent actual entities into an intimate unity, so intimate, indeed, that each lives in the others. In its higher reaches it embraces the complex aesthetic feelings of the poet and the artist. It is the one great unifying factor which, starting from the lowest forms of it in electrons and molecules, reaches out to the highly developed aesthetic emotions and sentiments and moves on further to the uncharted immensities of the future, spreading a network of events or actual entities so closely knit together as to form one organic whole. It presents a magnificent scheme of a perfectly interrelated world of actual entities, but it

cannot blind us to the fact that it is reared upon a purely naturalistic principle, something even more primitive than human feeling. The process of evolution, therefore, of Whitehead is basically of the same order as the evolution conceived by the evolutionists of the nineteenth century. It is clearly a case of evolution from the standpoint of the beginning. The higher processes are here all interpreted in terms of the lower, exactly as is done in the nineteenth century evolutionistic theories of Darwin, Spencer and others. It is a purely naturalistic theory of evolution.

In striking contrast to this is the evolution theory of Sri Aurobindo. Here the higher processes are the measuring-rod for the lower ones, and not the lower for the higher. The principle of evolution itself is derived from the nature of the highest principle, the Ultimate Reality. Natural processes find their meaning here in the spiritual ones, and all in the nature of the Ultimate Reality, of which, in fact, they are but imperfect expressions. The key to the understanding of the nature of evolution is not to be found in the processes of nature but is to be sought in the Ultimate Reality. Sri Aurobindo puts it very clearly thus<sup>1</sup>: "An original creative or evolutionary Power there must be, but, although Matter is the first substance, the original and ultimate Power is not an inconscient material Energy, for then life and consciousness would be absent, since Inconscience cannot evolve consciousness nor an inanimate Force evolve life. There must be, therefore, since Mind and Life are not that,

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, pp. 626-627, 1939 edn.

a secret Consciousness greater than Life Consciousness or Mind Consciousness, an Energy more essential than the material Energy. Since it is greater than Mind, it must be a supramental Consciousness-Force ; since it is a power of essential substance other than Matter, it must be the power of that which is the supreme essence and substance of all things, a power of the Spirit. There is a creative energy of Mind and a creative Life-Force, but they are instrumental and partial, not original and decisive....If there is to be an entire transformation, it can only be by the full emergence of the law of the spirit ; its power of supermind or gnosis must have entered into Matter and it must evolve in Matter". If it is said that matter as understood by Whitehead is not Inconscience as stated in this passage, but is something higher than that, that is no answer to the criticism of naturalism contained in this passage, for, as Sri Aurobindo has put very clearly in it, the principle which is at the root of evolution is something higher than life, something higher even than mind ; it is, in fact, nothing else than the "power of the Spirit".

Evolution, as stated clearly in the above passage taken from Sri Aurobindo's book, is the ascent of physical nature, life, mind, etc. to the Ultimate Reality, made possible by the circumstance that these lower principles are themselves expressions, in varying degrees of perfection, of the same Ultimate Reality. As inadequate expressions of the Ultimate Reality, there is an urge in them to complete and perfect themselves.

The above view of evolution agrees with that of Hegel,

in that both look at evolution from the standpoint of the end. But the end, as conceived by Hegel, is very different from the end as conceived by Sri Aurobindo. For Hegel it is a purely rational end, an end conceived by Thought. For Sri Aurobindo this end falls far short of the end as conceived by him, for Thought is not the Ultimate Reality, but there are various grades of reality above Thought which have to be climbed before the Ultimate Reality can be reached. No end, in fact, short of the Absolute, is competent to give an adequate account of the nature of evolution.

WHITEHEAD'S THEORY OF INGRESSION OF "ETERNAL  
OBJECTS", COMPARED WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S  
THEORY OF DIVINE DESCENT

I now come to Whitehead's theory of "eternal objects." This theory, as I have already shown, is needed to give stability and permanence to the world of process. Without such stability even the recognition of actual entities becomes impossible. All this is of course readily conceded. But the question is : What is the relation between the eternal objects and the fluent world of actual entities ? The eternal objects are supposed to lie outside the world of space and time. Yet they are absolutely essential to the world of actual entities. How is the connection between the two effected ? Whitehead here falls back upon the device of Plato. His "eternal objects", in fact, correspond to Plato's eternal ideas. Like the latter, they are extra-temporal, and extra-spatial. Yet they ingress

into the world of actual entities and confer upon it some permanence. How is this possible? In Plato's system the world of process, that is, the finite world, participates in the eternal ideas, and it is in this way that a connection is established between the two. Still, as Plato himself has shown in his dialogue *Parmenides*, the doctrine of participation bristles with difficulties. In Whitehead's case the difficulties are even greater. For Plato could at any rate claim some resemblance between the eternal ideas and the world of finite things on the ground that the latter was created by God in the pattern of the eternal ideas, but even this explanation is not possible for Whitehead. There is, in fact, no sort of previous relationship between the two. Yet the eternal objects ingress into the world of actual entities. One cannot therefore be blamed if one thinks that the ingression is a mystery in Whitehead's system<sup>1</sup>. Whitehead admits<sup>2</sup> that the relation between eternal objects and events is external and not internal, that is to say, there is no inherent necessity for the eternal objects to ingress into the world of events. One explanation which may be offered of the eternal objects ingressing into the world of events is through the agency of the primordial God as the conceptual realization of all potentiality. But the primordial God has no actuality<sup>3</sup> in the temporal world and is, moreover,

<sup>1</sup> I have in mind particularly Mr. Abu Sayeed Ayyub's taking to task a critic for saying that there is a dualism in Whitehead of events and eternal objects. See *History of Philosophy, Eastern and Western* Vol. II, p. 372. George Allen & Unwin, 1953.

<sup>2</sup> *Science and the Modern World*, p. 199.

<sup>3</sup> Whitehead calls the primordial God "an unlimited conceptual

unconscious and static. Such a God cannot be credited with the power of bringing the eternal objects into connection with the world of process. The only other alternative is to suppose that this connection is effected through the principle of Creativity. But this principle is merely an urge for novelty and is not competent to explain why the eternal objects should go out of their way to ingress into the world of events to give it permanence. In fact, as I shall show presently, the principle of Creativity is practically useless as an explanation of the 'why' of the evolutionary process.

Sri Aurobindo is in a much more favourable position here. For him the ingression of eternal objects really means the descent of Saccidānanda in higher and higher forms into the world. This descent is due to the inherent nature of the Absolute to manifest Itself in divers forms. Whitehead does not recognize any inherent necessity in the eternal objects to manifest themselves in the world of events. But for Sri Aurobindo this descent into the world is an inherent power of the Absolute. He won't call it a necessity, for there can be no necessity for the Absolute. But it is a free self-unfolding or self-expression of the Absolute, for which there is a very appropriate word in Sanskrit, namely, *līlā*. There is no English word which will convey its meaning exactly, but the one which comes nearest to it is *Sport*. It is out of pure sport that the Absolute or Saccidānanda, as Sri Aurobindo

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realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality", by which he means that such a God has only an ideal existence and no actuality with temporal world. See *Process and Reality*, p. 486.

calls it, projects Itself out of Itself. This self-projection is a self-limitation, and this is what we call Creation. But this self-projection is for the sake of coming back to Itself. This coming back to Itself or the home-return of the Absolute is what we call evolution. Creation and evolution, therefore, are two sides of the same process, made possible by the Absolute's free act of self-projection or descent. So far as the problem of evolution is concerned, which is what Whitehead is here considering, it means the return of the created world to its Source, namely, the Absolute. Evolution, therefore, means the ascent of the world from lower to higher and higher stages, and ultimately to the Highest stage, which is the Absolute or Saccidānanda Itself. Every ascent from a lower to a higher stage requires a fresh descent of the Absolute into the world. This corresponds to Whitehead's ingression of the eternal objects into the world of change. This descent is in a hierarchical order, that is to say, in higher and higher forms. In Whitehead there is nothing of this hierarchical order in the successive ingressions of the eternal objects. The order of which he speaks (though he calls it hierarchical)<sup>1</sup> is an order of complexity. Unlike Whitehead's ingression, therefore, the descent of the Absolute has nothing mysterious about it, as it follows from the very nature of the Absolute.

WHITEHEAD'S CONCEPTION OF GOD : COMPARISON  
WITH THAT OF SRI AUROBINDO

I now come to the most paradoxical part of Whitehead's philosophy, namely, that which concerns his conception of the two Gods. The very name "two Gods" causes a good deal of shock, especially in a system which has started by saying that it hates all kinds of dualism. But if we examine it, we find that there is nothing in it which can give us a shock, but that it is a very peculiar way of expressing the complex nature of God, which is at once possibility and actuality, being and becoming. It comes from the same feeling which prompted him to posit a set of eternal objects as a counterpoise to the absolute fluency of the world of process, the feeling, namely, that in a complete scheme there must be room alike for permanence and change. Nobody will join issue with Whitehead on this point, but the question is whether the way in which he has done this has served this purpose or whether it has served to complicate the matter by introducing elements which have created further difficulties of their own.

Let us see what he means by these two Gods. The primordial God he defines as follows: "Viewed as primordial, he (God) is the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of all potentiality".<sup>1</sup> What he means by this is, as I have already explained, that the primordial God is the ideal realization of all possibility represented by the eternal objects, and that

<sup>1</sup> *Process and Reality*, p. 486.

this ideal realization is the ground of the actual realization in the world of process. This he makes clear by the further statement<sup>1</sup> that "he (the primordial God) is the unconditioned actuality of conceptual feeling at the base of things". The primordial God thus has only an ideal existence which gives the abstract ideas the necessary concreteness which makes it possible for them to be ingressed into the world of events. This, in fact, is Whitehead's conception of God in His aspect as Being. In this aspect He is only ideal and has no actuality in the temporal world, being merely the locus of all possibility. He further makes it clear that the primordial God cannot be called the Creator by saying that "he is not *before* all creation but *with* all creation."<sup>2</sup> In fact, having repudiated the idea of Substance, it is not possible for him to speak of any creator of the world. Process itself is, according to him, an Ultimate Reality, and an Ultimate of an Ultimate is absurd. There can thus be no room for any Creator of the world of process. It is its own creator. All that it needs is direction, and this is supplied by God. That is why he says, "God does not create the world but saves it."<sup>3</sup> How far this is a tenable position we shall presently examine.

We see thus that to avoid the dreaded notion of Substance, Whitehead conceives the primordial God as the ideal ground of the conversion of possibilities into actualities but not its actual ground. How, however, can

<sup>1</sup> *Process and Reality*, do.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 486.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 490.

such an ideal ground convert possibilities into actualities ? Slightly changing what Kant said against the ontological argument, namely, that the thought of a hundred dollars will not put a hundred dollars into a beggar's pocket, we may say that merely putting possibilities and actualities side by side will not convert the former into the latter. The primordial God as conceived by Whitehead is thus useless as an agent for converting possibilities into actualities. Our only hope lies in the principle of Creativity. Can it provide the necessary dynamism which will effect this conversion ? We shall presently see that it also fails us.

But God in Whitehead's philosophy, in addition to being primordial, is consequent. The consequent God is the actualized God, that is, God so far as His potentialities have been actualized. He is confronted here with the world which represents the vast field of possibility that still remains to be actualized. To the actualized world God represents the vast field of possibility that still remains unactualized. To the fluent world or the world in the process of actualization, God represents the permanence that sets a limit to its fluency. There is thus relativity between God and the world, and this happens because they are both actual entities. But this relativity in this case takes the form of a relation of contrast. Why this is so, is thus explained by Whitehead<sup>1</sup> "In each actuality there are two concrescent poles of realization—'enjoyment' and 'appetition', that is, the 'physical' and the 'conceptual'. For God the conceptual is prior to the

<sup>1</sup> *Process and Reality*, p. 493.

physical, for the world the physical poles are prior to the conceptual poles". Thus God and the world are contrasted opposites, and in every respect God and the world move conversely to each other. Thus when the world is actualized, God is fluent, and when the world is fluent, God supplies the permanent element. Thus God and the world move, each supplying the other's deficiencies.

Whitehead waxes eloquent on this inverse relationship between God and the world. Thus, he says,<sup>1</sup> "He (God) saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life. It is the judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved. It is also the judgment of a wisdom which uses what in the temporal world is a mere wreckage....God's rôle is not the combat of productive force with productive force, of destructive force with destructive force; it lies in the patient operation of the overpowering rationality of his conceptual harmonization. He does not create the world but saves it."

What are we to make of this passage, as well as of the whole conception of a double God? We are familiar with the conception of a double God in the history of philosophy, as well as of religion. The Vedānta conception of Brahman and Īśvara, the Christian conception of God, the Father and God, the Son, and various other similar views in the history of philosophy and religion have of course made us quite familiar with the idea of a double God. What is new in Whitehead is the whole

<sup>1</sup> *Process and Reality*, p. 490.

conception of God and the world as acting and reacting upon each other, as also of God as One who can save but cannot create. What is exactly the significance of this conception ? It seems to me to be the *reductio ad absurdum* of the rejection of the notion of Substance. As we have seen, he has made a crusade against the notion of Substance as no other philosopher of modern times, with the exception of Bergson, has done. His philosophy, in fact, is one of the strongest indictments of the doctrine of substance that exist in the history of philosophy. And there is no doubt that herein lies his chief contribution to philosophical thought. But it is possible to carry it too far, and this is what we find in the present case. His postulation of two Gods, a primordial God who is the ideal locus of the eternal ideas, and a consequent God who is an evolving God and has a reciprocal relationship with the world, by virtue of which they act and react upon each other, shows this only too clearly. The complete reciprocity between the consequent God and the world makes the claims made on behalf of the former absurd. The consequent God is only a dancing partner of the world. The two dance together in perfect rhythm. Sometimes one partner comes to the front, sometimes the other. There is perfect give-and-take between the two. The one supplies the deficiencies of the other. When the world is one, God is many ; when the world is many, God is one, and so on. How can in such a case God be said to save the world ? As well may one say that the world saves God. Moreover, how can there be any question

of the world being saved ? Has the world in Whitehead's system any soul to be saved ? Has it evinced any desire to be saved ? Its only desire is for novelty, which is axiologically absolutely neutral. There are no objective values for the world to realize in Whitehead's philosophy. As Dr. J. N. Mohanty has pointed out in his article *Whitehead's Philosophy of Process*,<sup>1</sup> to which I have already referred, Whitehead's conception of value is purely subjective. Every individual actual entity gets subjective satisfaction, which is its value, but apart from these subjective values, there is no mention of any objective value.

To avoid the notion of a permanent substance, it is not necessary, as Sri Aurobindo has shown, to devise the elaborate scheme of a double God and other things as Whitehead has done, for then to avoid one evil you fall into a greater evil. What is necessary is to understand the true nature of Reality which cannot be exhausted by saying that it is permanent, any more than it can be by saying that it is changing. As Sri Aurobindo has put it,<sup>2</sup> "The pure existent is then a fact and no mere concept ; it is the fundamental reality. But, let us hasten to add, the movement, the energy, the becoming are also a fact, also a reality....We have therefore two fundamental facts of pure existence and of world-existence, a fact of Being, a fact of Becoming. To deny one or the other is easy ; to recognise the facts of consciousness and find out their relation is the true and fruitful wisdom."

<sup>1</sup> *Vide The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. I, p. 119, 1939 edn.

Sri Aurobindo further points out that stability and movement are only *our* ways of representing the Absolute, but the Absolute is beyond these. To quote his words : "The Absolute is beyond stability and movement as it is beyond unity and multiplicity. But it takes its eternal poise in the one and the stable and whirls round itself infinitely, inconceivably, securely in the moving and multitudinous. World-existence is the ecstatic dance of Śiva which multiplies the body of the God numberlessly to the view : it leaves that white substance precisely where and what it was, ever is and ever will be ; its sole absolute object is the joy of the dancing."<sup>1</sup>

The last sentence in the above passage which we have quoted from Sri Aurobindo makes his meaning quite clear. The dance which we call evolution is the dance of God alone ; it is not the joint dance of God and the world as Whitehead represents it to be. And in that dance the nature of God does not suffer any change. It is not true to say, as Whitehead does, that God goes on evolving with the evolution of the world, but evolution only exhibits different facets of the multiple nature of God.

Does this mean subscribing to the doctrine of Substance ? Well, what if it does ? Philosophy must have no phobia. A "reiphobia", if we may coin such a word, that is to say, a dread of the notion of Substance, is as bad as any other phobia. Philosophers must be in a position to face truth boldly, even if it means giving up some of their most cherished views. But it does

<sup>1</sup> *The Life Divine*, Vol. I, p. 119, 1939 edn.

*not* mean subscribing to the doctrine of Substance. The doctrine of Substance asserts that *only* the permanent is, and nothing else is. Where it is wrong is in denying the reality of change. But it cannot be denied that the permanent *is*. Whitehead himself has accepted this in his ontological principle, where he states that everything is somewhere in actuality. The first part of the doctrine of Substance is true and must be accepted. This is what Sri Aurobindo has done. The second part is false. The reality of change will have to be accepted along with the reality of the permanent. But the two must not be treated as two separate realities. Change must be related to the permanent as part of its nature. In other words, change is a manifestation of the nature of the permanent. But this manifestation cannot be said to change the nature of the permanent. The permanent cannot be said to evolve with the evolution of the changing. The permanent, remaining permanent, directs the evolution. This alone can give evolution any meaning. God and the world evolving together, therefore, has no meaning. God directs the whole course of evolution. In that way He can be said to save the world. But He cannot save the world if He Himself evolves. Nor can He save the world unless He Himself is its Creator.

This is why Sri Aurobindo links the problem of Evolution with that of Creation. Evolution cannot be understood unless it is viewed as the reverse side of Creation. Creation is the involution of the Absolute into the world, which means that even matter must show traces of its spiritual origin. Evolution is the reverse

process of the ascent of the universe, including matter, to its Source. The one is the necessary correlate of the other. In Whitehead there is neither any reference to creation nor any mention of any goal of evolution. It has neither a beginning nor an end, though Whitehead is very anxious to maintain a continuous thread running through the whole of evolution.

Let us see how far his principle of Continuity can supply the directive principle without which his theory of Evolution falls to pieces.

#### DOES WHITEHEAD'S PRINCIPLE OF CREATIVITY SUPPLY THE DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLE WHICH EVOLUTION REQUIRES ?

Whitehead has made some amends for the want of a guiding principle in his theory of evolution by giving us a principle of Creativity, which is really Whitehead's Ultimate. What, however, is the meaning of this principle, and how does it stand in relation to the other principles of his philosophy ? In his *Process and Reality*, he shows the necessity of the principle of Creativity, which he identifies with novelty. "Order", he says,<sup>1</sup> "is not sufficient. What is required is something much more complex. It is order entering upon novelty; so that the massiveness of order does not degenerate into mere repetition ; and so that the novelty is always reflected upon a background of system". Proceeding further, he points out<sup>2</sup>, that here is the paradox of the world :

<sup>1</sup> *Process and Reality*, p. 480.

<sup>2</sup> *Process and Reality*, p. 481.

"The world is thus faced by the paradox that, at least in its higher actualities, it craves for novelty and yet is haunted by terror at the loss of the past, with its familiarities and its loved ones. Part of the joy of the new years is the hope of the old round of the seasons, with their stable facts—of friendship, and love, and old association."

This creativity or novelty is the inner spring of the process of evolution, both at the lower and the higher stages. It is haunted by a dread, the vanishing of the past. But the vanishing of the past, although an evil, is still a necessary evil, for things have an abstractness, and the retention of them all will obstruct the passage of growth. A selection is therefore needed, in order that a new temporal order may emerge with less obstructive modes.

The whole account has been drawn with a good deal of very fine feeling, but it has been drawn from a too subjectivistic standpoint. The evil that is mentioned is only a subjective evil, the vanishing of the past in its original vividness. There is nothing said about the objective status of the changed world as a result of evolution. But one thing emerges clearly from this account, namely, that even from the subjective standpoint mere novelty is not enough to give satisfaction. From the objective standpoint it is still less satisfactory; except that, as described in the beautiful lines of Tennyson—

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

continuance of an order, however good it may be, for all time is an evil, and therefore, its replacement by a new order, irrespective of the character of this new order, is itself an advantage.

Mere novelty, therefore, has only a negative, and hardly any positive value. It is axiologically of neutral quality. It cannot serve therefore as a directive principle of evolution : it cannot supply the missing element in Whitehead's philosophy, namely, a goal of evolution.

In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy the dynamic element is not supplied by a mere urge for novelty but by the far more effective teleological idea of a definite goal of the entire process of evolution—a goal which takes it far beyond the limits of the finite. This idea, that the goal of evolution is to take the finite far into the region of the limitless Infinite, Sri Aurobindo has beautifully expressed in the following lines of "Savitri" :

There comes no close to the finite's boundlessness,  
There is no last certitude in which thought can pause  
And no terminus of the soul's experience.<sup>1</sup>

This goal is again linked up by him, as we have seen, with the question of the origin of the world. The nature of the goal of evolution is determined by the manner in which the world has originated. As the world has originated from God or Saccidānanda, so its goal is to return to Him, not in the sense of being merged in Him, losing all individuality, but in that of attaining the same status as His.

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri*, Part I, Book I, Canto IV, p. 64.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude : The value of Whitehead's philosophy lies in the thoroughness with which he has developed his philosophy of organism. Here his philosophy is far in advance of that of Leibnitz, though the latter served as a model for his own. Leibnitz's conception that every monad mirrors the universe is developed into a mighty philosophy, in which every particle of the universe is linked with every other particle in such a way that it brings up the whole universe at every moment, and in which the barriers which divide the past, the present and the future are overcome so completely that every moment brings with it the whole past and carries it forward to the illimitable future. Here he comes rather close to Hegel, who in the gigantic sweep of his Absolutist philosophy could bring the past, the present and the future into a complete organic unity with one another. But any direct influence of Hegel upon him cannot be thought of, because, as he has said in his book *Essays in Science and Philosophy*, to which I have already referred, he never read any of Hegel's works, except one page of one of his books, though he came in contact with his philosophy through his friends Haldane and MacTaggart and by reading books on Hegel's philosophy. Indeed, if we go through his philosophy, the impression that we get is that it is rather a counterblast to that of Hegel, and that if not consciously, yet unconsciously he has shown that when it comes to constructing a philosophy of organism, two can play at this game. From Sri Aurobindo's point of view, the

victory in this struggle is neither with him nor with Hegel, for both of them are equally committed to the principle of continuity, and though thought is a higher principle than the purely naturalistic one on which Whitehead has relied, yet from the spiritual point of view, thought is not competent to build any truly synthetic philosophy. A true theory of evolution is an emergent one. It must not treat life and mind as mere continuations of nature nor reduce all to a dead level of thought, but must acknowledge that there are successive and distinct stages in the onward march of the world to its original spiritual Source, which is what is called evolution.

Whitehead's naturalism, therefore, is a weak spot in his philosophy of organism and takes away a good deal from its value. But the greatest weakness that we find in his philosophy is that it is a structure that hangs in mid-air, having neither a foundation nor any roof. The whole difficulty here is caused by his repugnance of the notion of substance which has developed into a sort of phobia. He has even gone further than Bergson in his condemnation of this notion, for Bergson in his theory of intelligence has made some concessions to it, whereas Whitehead is not prepared to make any. Yet he feels the need of introducing some permanence in a world of flux, some stability in a universe of complete fluency. This need he has tried to meet with the help of a series of double principles, such as eternal objects and actual entities, primordial God and consequent God, etc., none of which is a substance but a combination of which can in his view play the rôle which in the older systems of

philosophy is assigned to the notion of substance. And finally he introduces an omnibus principle, called Creativity, as a sort of universal blanket to cover all the logical breaches that his philosophy has created.

Here Sri Aurobindo is in a better position. He has no horror of substance, and does not feel therefore the need of having a double set of principles, one ideal and one actual, to correct their mutual deficiencies. The philosophical tradition in our country has also helped him here, for that is rather in favour of fluent notions where substantiality does not exclude the idea of change. The result is that in his system permanence and change coexist in perfect harmony with each other in the same notion, and no need is felt of any special device for bringing them together. He has therefore been able to achieve with greater ease the objective which Whitehead placed before himself, and which he only partially succeeded in achieving, namely, that of bringing the idea of stability and movement together and on their joint foundation to rear a philosophy which is at once strong and flexible, which responds to the needs of a growing world without parting with any of its principles. And what is of still greater value, such a philosophy will give us an assurance that the future will not be a mere repetition of the past but that it will reveal undisclosed possibilities which we cannot even dream of. The philosophy of Whitehead gives us the hope that in this great work the West will fully co-operate with the East, and that in this way it will be possible to realize the dream of the poet—

And East and West without a breach,  
Mixt their dim lights like life and death,  
To broaden into boundless day.

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Essay No. 4

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