

THE ESCHATOLOGY OF SRI AUROBINDO'S
EVOLUTIONARY DOCTRINE

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EVOLUTIONARY DOCTRINE

By

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PREFACE

The approach taken in this thesis is to review closely the evolutionary doctrine of Sri Aurobindo. The object of writing a thesis of this nature is to point out the attempt of Aurobindo to go beyond the East and the West with a new understanding of evolution and the meaning of man. This new understanding has been presented from the point of view of Aurobindo and his followers. I have concentrated on the development within his system of his eschaton, this eschaton being what Aurobindo calls the divine life. His system is an attempt at synthesis and as such it deserves attention by all who consider themselves students of religion.

I am deeply indebted to the suggestions and critical comments of Dr. J. G. Arapura. Also I wish to thank my wife Jeanie without whose assistance this thesis would not have been possible.

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FIGURE 1

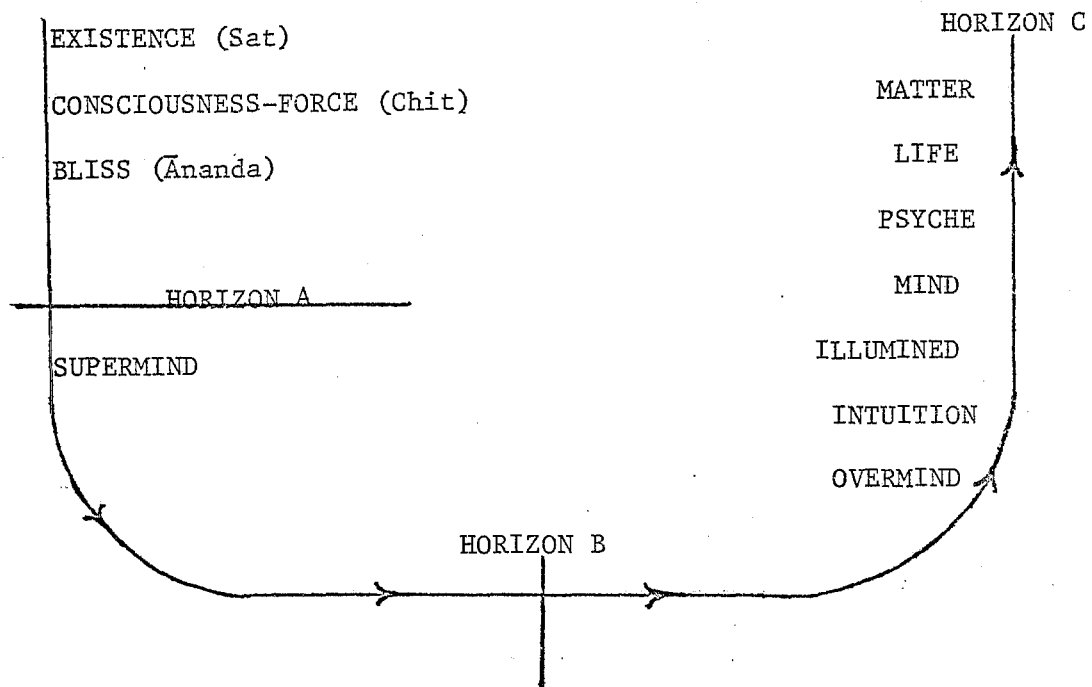


FIGURE 2

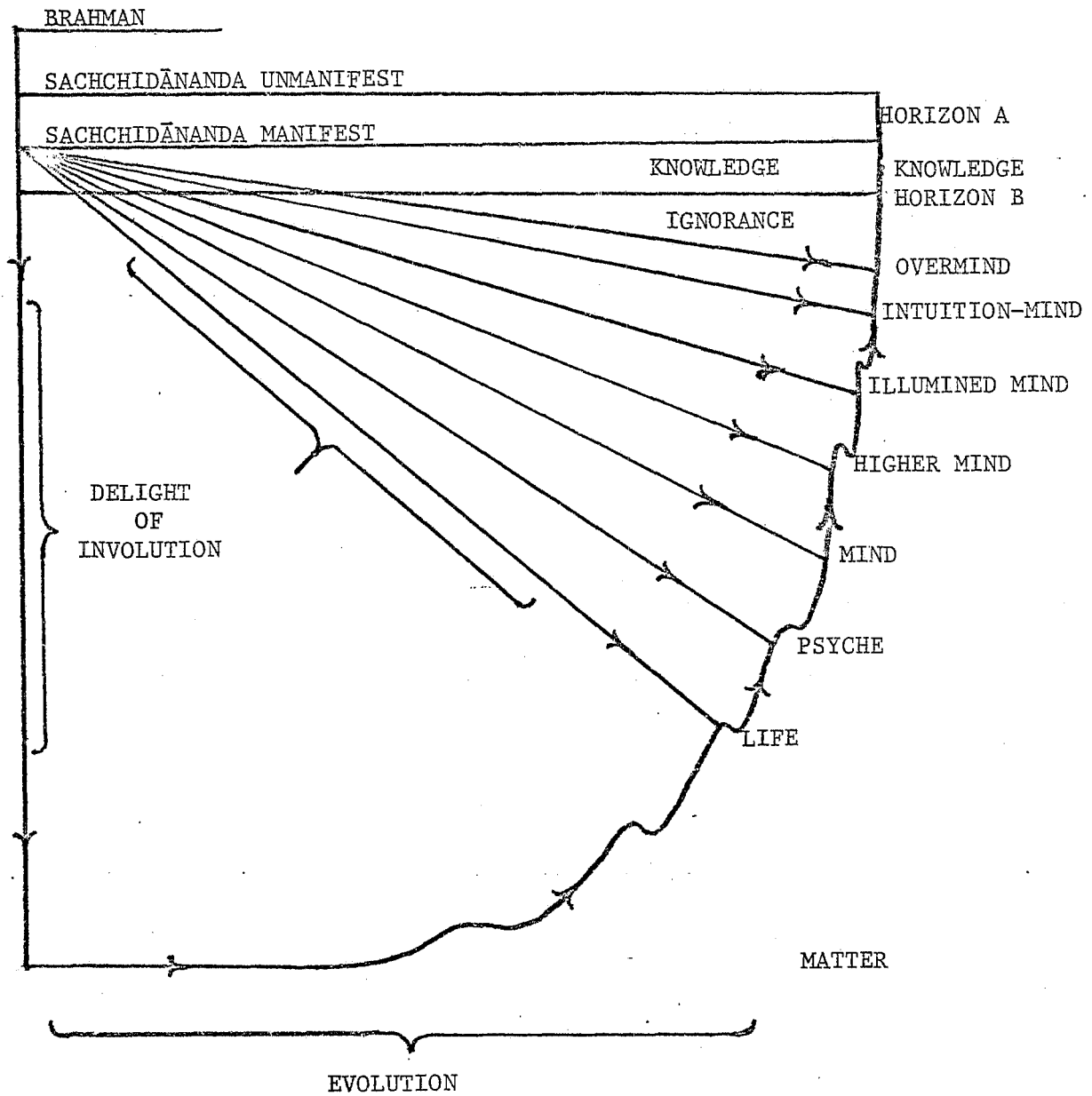
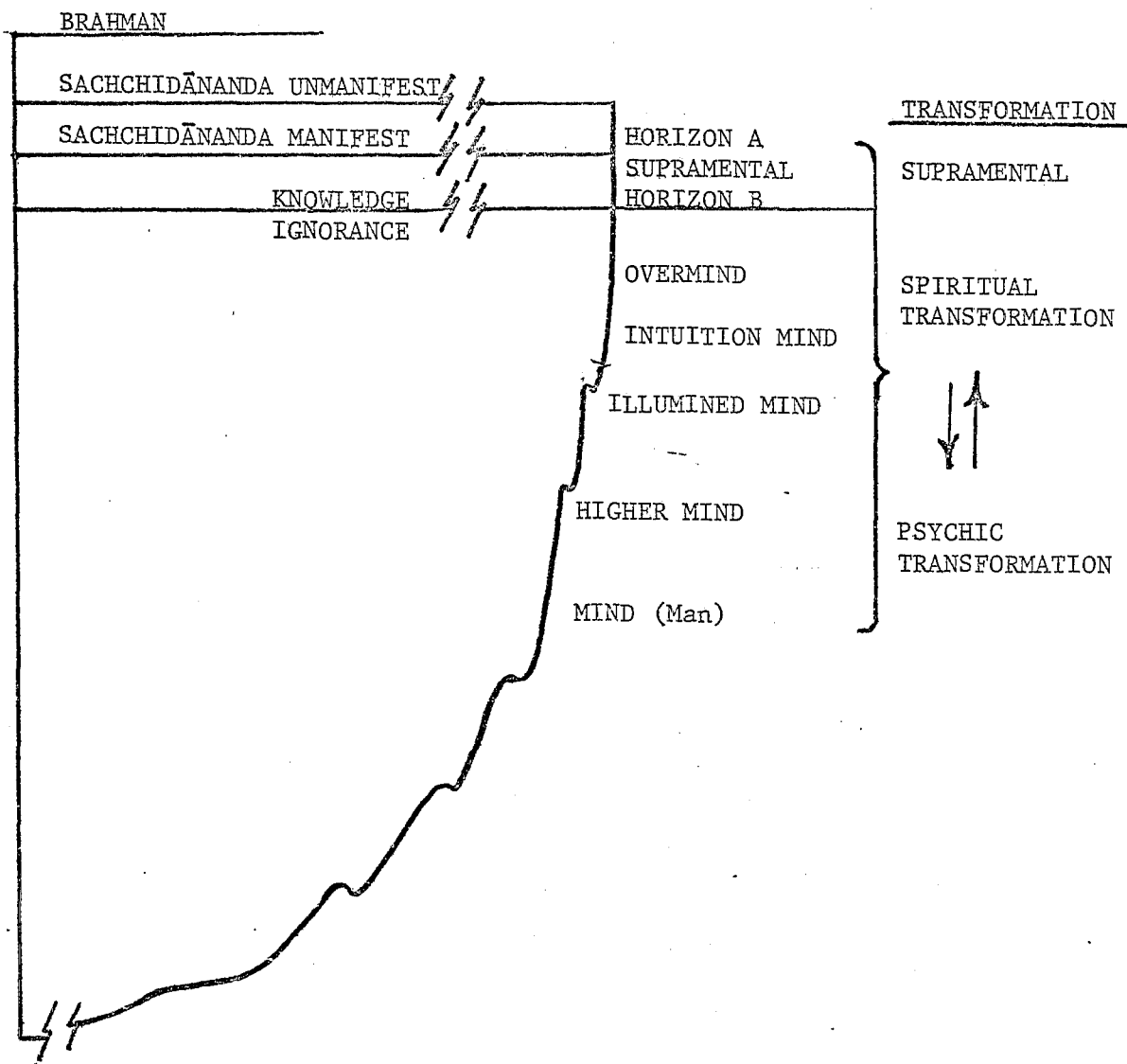


FIGURE 3



MAN'S EVOLUTIONARY TRANSFORMATION

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

A Philosophy of Integralism

Sri Aurobindo attempts to consolidate the philosophies of the West with Vedāntic philosophy in the East to produce an integral philosophic system. This integralist view disposes the mind toward a synthesis of ideas drawn from various sources with constant emphasis upon integral understanding. Aurobindo's integral philosophy is one which attempts to go beyond East and West in the sense of returning to the resources of consciousness to draw upon the rich storehouse of knowledge existing in consciousness in order to form a higher truth than has heretofore been realized. This higher truth is grounded in emergent evolution which raises everything to Sachchidānanda. The central concept of Aurobindo is the idea of emergent evolution. Within this subject-matter falls the ontological questions of man among which are: the question of the origin and end of man, the question of progressive process, and the question of being and its status as becoming or not becoming. Because of emergent evolution and the questions generated by it, this study is warranted.

Aurobindo sees man of the present day experiencing an estrangement in his existence. This estrangement exists because man's highest aspiration (divinity) is in disharmony with his placement in the world. He declares:

For all the problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony. They arise from the perception of an unsolved

discord and the instinct of an undiscovered agreement or unity. To rest content with an unsolved discord is possible for the practical and more animal part of man, but impossible for his fully awakened mind, and usually even his practical parts only escape from the general necessity either by shutting out the problem or by accepting a rough, utilitarian and unilluminated compromise.¹

Man then is in disharmony with his world and his nature. The existential interpretation of the estrangement is not the same in East and West.

Aurobindo calls these two differing interpretations a "double negation"; neither the West nor the East interprets this disharmony correctly in his opinion. In the West this negation is centered in the refusal of a materialist philosophy to recognize the ascetic aspect of man whereas the negation in the East is centered in the ascetic philosophy refusing to recognize the material aspect of man. Aurobindo states:

In Europe and in India, respectively, the negation of the materialist and the refusal of the ascetic have sought to assert themselves as the sole truth and to dominate the conception of Life.²

The materialist conceives of everything, including epistemology, as being grounded in matter, that is, objective existence. This view is only one extreme. It ignores the subjective aspect of man's existence. But in fact for Aurobindo the subjective and objective are so close that one cannot be understood without the other. Aurobindo holds that subjectivity and objectivity are not independent realities but are dependent on each other; they are the Being, through consciousness,

¹Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, (New York: India Library Society, 1949), p. 4.

²Ibid., pp. 10-11.

looking at itself as subject on the one hand and the same Being offering itself to itself as object.³ The materialist looks to the world of matter and finds his basis of existence in sensuous thought. The sensuous attitude of life is referred to by Aurobindo as the attitude of ego-centricity. This ego-centricity is an illusion, "In its extreme this claim of the individual to be the judge of everything is an egoistic illusion, a superstition of the physical mind, in the mass a gross and vulgar error."⁴ Man then cannot deny the reality of the subjective because if he denies reality to the evidence of a universal witness for subjective or for supraphysical objectivities, then there is no sufficient reason for him to concede reality to its evidence for physical objectivities; if the inner or supraphysical objects of consciousness are unreal, the objective universe also has a chance of being unreal. In each case Aurobindo calls for understanding, discrimination, and verification but the subjective must have another method of verification than that which is applied to the physical objective.⁵ Materialism is, according to itself, objective and scientific and Aurobindo considers this good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough; it is a partial truth, it is one pole of a polarity.

That is why the gospel of materialism, in spite of the dazzling triumphs of physical Science, proves itself always in the end a vain and helpless creed, and that too is why physical Science itself with all its achievements,

³Ibid., p. 578.

⁴Ibid., p. 579.

⁵Ibid., p. 579.

though it may accomplish comfort, can never achieve happiness and fullness of being for the human race.⁶

Historically materialism has decreased in the West because of a new concept of matter. As Collingwood states in his The Idea of Nature:

Materialism as the heir of Renaissance pantheism continued to live and thrive not only in the seventeenth century but throughout the eighteenth and even the nineteenth centuries, until it was finally destroyed by a new theory of matter which grew up in the late nineteenth century.⁷

This new theory of Newtonian matter has an important position within the history of philosophy because those philosophers who grounded their theories upon the old view of matter have been refuted by philosophers of the Newtonian theory of matter. The old theory of matter viewed the world as made up of atomic particles, indivisible and indestructible. This view dates back to the Atomists of Greece and was held as true up until the rise of the new theory. Lucretius, an Atomist, stated, "Material objects are of two kinds, atoms and compounds of atoms. The atoms themselves cannot be swamped by any force, for they are preserved by their absolute solidity."⁸ The atom then was impenetrable and could never occupy the same space as another atom. The paths of atoms in movement could collide which in turn would alter their movement. Each atom behaved as other atoms and were uniform in speed and size. On the other hand the new theory of matter is based upon Newton and modern physics and conceives of matter through the electron

⁶Ibid., p. 650.

⁷R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of Nature, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 104.

⁸Lucretius, The Nature of the Universe, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1951), p. 41.

theory which gives a pattern to each individual unit or electron. This dynamic pattern conceives of the electrons moving in a rhymical pattern. No particle of matter ever comes in contact with another because every particle is surrounded by a force field which is somewhat akin to an electromagnetic field. When two particles come together they bounce off each other or are attached to each other because of the force field. In the end the Newtonian theory has, according to Collingwood, put an end to the problems that existed in the old theory. He states, "Thus the modern theory of matter has solved all three dualisms on which I have laid stress: the dualism of impact and attraction, the dualism of ether and gross matter, and the dualism of physical quantity and chemical quality."⁹

The second negation, spiritualism or ascetic philosophy is the antithesis of materialism. This is the predominant mode of concern within the East. It is grounded in mind instead of matter. Mind is the only existing reality. Aurobindo can neither regard matter nor mind as the ground of being. He observes:

It is clear that a mind of the nature of our surface intelligence can be only a secondary power of existence. For it bears the stamp of incapacity and ignorance as a sign that it is derivative and not original creative; we see that it does not know or understand the objects it perceives, it has no automatic control of them; it has to acquire a laboriously built knowledge and controlling power. This initial incapacity could not be there if these objects were the mind's own structures, creation of its self-power.¹⁰

⁹ Collingwood, Idea of Nature, p. 151.

¹⁰ Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 575.

The mind therefore cannot be the ground and is a pole of a polarity. Regarding the end product of materialism and asceticism, Aurobindo says that a reconciliation of the polarities must come.

A Compromise is a bargain, a transaction of interests between two conflicting powers; it is not a true reconciliation. True reconciliation proceeds always by a mutual comprehension leading to some sort of intimate oneness. It is therefore through the utmost possible unification of Spirit and Matter that we shall best arrive at their reconciling truth and so at some strongest foundation for a reconciling practice in the inner life of the individual and his outer existence.¹¹

Either polarity by itself is incomplete; Aurobindo attempts a reconciliation through his integral system. This system relates to both the West and the East.

Relation to Western Philosophy

The relation of Aurobindo to Western philosophy can best be understood by a brief analysis of a few Western philosophers with whom Aurobindo was familiar. The first of these philosophers I will analyze is Hegel. As S. K. Maitra states:

Hegel perhaps comes nearer to him [Aurobindo] than any other philosopher either in the West or in the East. For it was he who laid before us the secret of the onward march of the Absolute Idea through the realms of Nature and History, treating these not as negations to be annulled or oppositions to be conquered, but as progressive stages in the evolution of the Absolute in Time.¹²

The whole of Hegel's philosophy conceives of a common identity between logic and metaphysics, which in turn sees a self-same identity

¹¹Ibid., p. 26.

¹²S. K. Maitra, Introduction to the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram), pp. 103-104.

between thought and being. This fact is evident in Hegel's statement that, "Logic coincides with Metaphysics." Hegel explains:

To speak of thought, of 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 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 a 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. . . . If thought is the constitutive substance of eternal things, it is also the universal substance of what is spiritual. . . . When it (thought) 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.¹³

Thought is then the basis of nature, i.e. thought is an unconscious form. But to be the basis does not mean for Hegel that it is the only reality for nature itself is real and exists independent of any mind. It is real in the sense of realitas (is a thing) but not in the sense of veritas (embodying what it professes to embody). As Collingwood states:

Now, according to Plato and Aristotle, all natural things are essentially things engaged in a process of becoming and this is because they are trying to become adequate embodiments of their own forms and never quite succeeding. In this sense everything in nature is to some extent unreal in the second sense of the word (i.e. veritas): not a mere appearance, still less an illusion, but something not altogether succeeding in being itself. Hegel accepts this Platonic-Aristotelian view of nature.¹⁴

¹³Hegel, Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences, Logic, trans. Wallace, p. 46.

¹⁴Collingwood, Idea of Nature, p. 124.

Thought or the Idea is the substance of the Spirit. It is the basis of thingness and holds an identity with Being. Being is Thought or the Absolute idea. Through Reason one arrives at the Absolute; this is the relation of reason to the Absolute. Hegel states:

The only thought which philosophy brings with it to the contemplation of History, is the simple conception of Reason; that reason is the Sovereign of the World; and the history of the world, therefore, presents us with a rational process. This conviction and intuition is a hypothesis in the domain of history as such. In that of philosophy it is no hypothesis. It is there proved by speculative cognition, that Reason--and this term may here suffice us, without investigation the relation sustained by the Universe to the Divine Being--is Substance, as well as Infinite Power; its own Infinite Material underlying all the natural and spiritual life which it originates, as also the Infinite Form--that which sets this material in motion. On the other hand, Reason is the substance of the Universe; viz., that by which and in which all reality has its being and subsistence.¹⁵

Therefore, for Hegel, what is reasonable is actual and what is actual is reasonable. This concept gives rise to the doctrine of Continuity. This doctrine sees the Universe as a whole without discontinuity and without what in logic is called the law of contradiction. In a world governed by reason and the principle of continuity there exists no room for absolute contradictions.

Contradiction, or the concrete form of it we are discussing, the opposition, does not displace the actual identity of a thing, but produces this identity in the form of a process in which the potentialities of things unfold. The law of identity by which traditional logic is guided implies the so-called law of contradiction. A equals A not only in so far as it is opposed to non-A, or, the identity of

¹⁵Hegel, The Philosophy of History, (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), p. 9.

A results from and contains the contradiction. A does not contradict an eternal non-A, Hegel holds, but a non-A that belongs to the very identity of A; in other words, A is self-contradictory.¹⁶

Therefore in the world of reality there is no such thing as contradiction. Instead the within of things contains a contradiction and this contradiction reacting with the thing gives rise to the dialectical process. The starting point of such a process can be given thus: Thesis: The Absolute is Pure Being without qualities. The contradiction within is that Pure Being without qualities is nothing; therefore the antithesis: The Absolute is Nothing. With the thesis and antithesis reacting we have the synthesis. Pure Being united with Not Being (No thing) is Becoming; the Absolute is Becoming, etc.

For Hegel, history is the process of Spirit becoming conscious of itself as freedom. Hegel states, "It must be observed at the outset, that the phenomenon we investigate--Universal History--belongs to the realm of Spirit."¹⁷ And further:

The destiny of the spiritual world, and--since this is the substantial World, while the physical remains subordinate to it, or in the language of speculation, has no truth as against the spiritual--the final cause of the world at large, we allege to be the consciousness of its own freedom on the part of Spirit, and ipso facto, the reality of that freedom.¹⁸

History then is the process of the spirit becoming itself. But this

¹⁶Herbert Marcuse, Reason and Revolution, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1941), p. 124.

¹⁷Hegel, Philosophy of History, p. 16.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 19.

becoming is not an evolution of nature because for Hegel Nature is a system of higher and lower organisms, the higher depending on the lower. Logically the higher organisms are posterior to the lower but this is not so temporally. Hegel denies the evolutionary theory which makes the higher develop in time out of the lower, holding that people who believe in this are mistaking a logical succession for a temporal one. History, in the other hand never repeats itself; its movements travel in spirals, and apparent repetitions are always differentiated by having acquired something new.¹⁹ For Hegel then the view of history is a grand view of the Spirit becoming itself through reason and reality but without the benefit of an evolution of nature because nature is basically cyclical whereas history is spiral. All this is held together by the principle of continuity and the rationality of continuity under thought

Aurobindo agrees with Hegel's conception of history as proceeding in spirals and Spirit becoming itself. He states, "It is true that the world's movement is not a straight line; there are cycles, there are spirals; but still it circles, not round the same point always, but round an ever advancing centre, and therefore it never returns exactly upon its old path and never goes really backward."²⁰ And further:

An involution of spirit in the Inconscience is the beginning; an evolution in the Ignorance with its play of the possibilities of a partial developing knowledge is the middle, and the cause of the anomalies of our present nature--our imperfections is the sign of a transitional state, a growth

¹⁹R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 114-115.

²⁰Aurobindo, Ideas and Progress, p. 25.

not yet completed, an effort that is finding its way; a consumation in a deployment of the spirit's self-knowledge and the self-power of its divine being and consciousness is the culmination.²¹

But he disagrees with Hegel's reliance upon the doctrine of "continuity". He states, "The human mind, which relies mainly on thought, conceives that to be the highest or the main process of knowledge, but in the spiritual order thought is a secondary and a not indispensable process."²² Aurobindo would take issue with Hegel at this point and posit instead the doctrine of "emergence". Aurobindo objects to continuity because for him Being is superior to thought and thought as it exists in the world is in a process of transformation. This transformation is based in emergent evolution which maintains a discontinuous view of reality. S. K. Maitra mentions the source of the discontinuous view in the East as being in the Purusa Sukta of the Rgveda:

Hymn XC

Purusha

A thousand heads hath Purusha, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet.

On every side pervading earth he fills a space ten fingers wide.

2.-This Purusha is all that yet hath been and all that is to be; The Lord of Immortality which waxes greater still by food.

3.-So mighty is his greatness; yea, greater than this is Purusha. All creatures are one-fourth of him, three-fourths eternal life in heaven.

4.-With three-fourths Purusha went up: one-fourth of him again was here.

Thence he strode out to every side over what eats not and what eats.²³

²¹Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 607.

²²Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 839.

²³The Hymns of the Rgveda, trans. by Ralph T. H. Griffith, (India: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1963), Vol. II, pp. 517-518.

This verse is explained by Maitra accordingly:

—[The first verse] clearly shows that the world cannot be equated with the Purusha, for there is a discontinuity between the two. The whole of the Purusha 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 Purusha is in our world, the rest of him being in the region of the skies.²⁴

This emergent view holds that the world continues to exist because of the successive emergence of higher and higher consciousness into it. The divine descends into the world to become an Avatāra who brings all creation to a higher stage on the ascent to perfection. This doctrine does not completely negate the view of continuity but places alongside it the principle of emergence. In this way thought forms an intricate part in the whole plan of evolution because thought itself evolves into higher consciousness.

In Aurobindo's view the world evolution is not continuous but requires divine descent to move it upward toward perfection. This divine descent is commented on by Aurobindo:

The Avatar may descend as a great spiritual teacher and saviour, the Christ, the Buddha, but always his work leads, after he has finished his earthly manifestation, to a profound and powerful change not only in the ethical, but in the social and outward life and ideals of the race. He may, on the other hand, descend as an incarnation of the divine life, the divine personality and power in its characteristic action, for a mission ostensibly social, ethical and political, as is represented in the story of Rama or Krishna; but always then this descent becomes

²⁴ S. K. Maitra, The Meeting of the East and the West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1968), p. 255.

in the soul of the race a permanent power for the inner living and the spiritual rebirth.²⁵

This movement upward has brought us to the present moment of evolution which is mind represented by man. Aurobindo holds that man must also evolve and move beyond himself.

Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious cooperation she wills to work out the superman, the god. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God? For if evolution is the progressive manifestation by Nature of that which slept or worked in her, involved, it is also the overt realisation of that which she secretly is. . . . If it be true that Spirit is involved in Matter and apparent Nature is secret God, then the manifestation of the divine in himself and the realisation of God within and without are the highest and most legitimate aim possible to man upon earth.²⁶

In the movement beyond man, man will not be left by the wayside but will be perfected in his being. Emergent evolution is based upon the principle that lower forms of evolution will be transformed into more perfect forms. Thus with the ultimate descent of the divine and the raising of man to supramental consciousness all of nature is radically transformed:

To know, possess and be the divine being is an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilit [sic] or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realize the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant

²⁵ Sri Aurobindo, Essays on Gita, (New York: Sri Aurobindo Library, 1950), p. 154.

²⁶ Aurobindo, Life Divine, pp. 5-6.

mutation,--this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in Matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution.²⁷

The second philosopher of the West I will discuss is Bergson. Bergson begins his philosophy with the thesis of life and matter under the élan vital, an atomist view of matter, as Collingwood states:

Bergson's thought about life begins by firmly grasping the difference which marks it off from matter as understood by the physicist. There, everything that happens is the mere result of a cause already existing; matter and energy are constants, and all movements are predetermined and theoretically calculable: that is to say, there can never be anything really new; all future events are implied in any past event, or in Bergson's own phrase, *tout est donné*, the gates of the future are open; the process of change is a creative process, leading to the appearance of genuine novelties. There is a *prima facie* dualism within nature between a realm of matter and a realm of life.²⁸

This dualism is approached by Bergson by an epistemology which is also a dualism between Intellect and Intuition. The intellect, for Bergson, is a kind of instrument employed in the service of life and contains within itself certain limitations. The first limitation is that the intellect understands the world externally as a collection of entities in space and, because of this, language describes the world using spatial terminology. The second limitation is that the intellect deals with the world by the use of units or measurements. The third limitation is that it treats the world as if it were at bottom static.²⁹ Intuition, however, is a kind of intellectual sympathy as Bergson states, "By intuition is meant the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places

²⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁸ Collingwood, Idea of Nature, pp. 136-137.

²⁹ Henri Bergson, An Introduction to Metaphysics, (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955), pp. 10-11.

oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible."³⁰ Intuition then is something which gives us direct access to the within of an object. In fact, "There is no durable system [of philosophy] that is not, at least in some of its parts, vivified by intuition."³¹ The faculty of intuition is for Bergson "a priori"; it is contained within all durable systems of philosophy. But Bergson does not go on to explain the nature of intuition. Intuition gives us direct insight into the within of an object; it puts us at one with the object and the subject-object difference is overcome. Bergson begins with a view of intuition in An Introduction to Metaphysics which expands to a cosmic intuition. He states, "In this sense metaphysics (metaphysical intuition) has nothing in common with a generalization of facts, and never-the-less it might be defined as integral experience."³² Intuition, then, becomes a cosmic intuition which can integrate the whole of experience, in fact it becomes in the end the mystic's experience.

The driving force behind his philosophy is the élan vital. The élan vital is that force which rushes on, as a river in full flood, carrying all with it. It is the full realization of Heraclitus' phrase, "You cannot step twice into the same river; for fresh waters are ever-flowing in upon you."³³ The élan vital is motion; it is motion which can

³⁰Ibid., pp. 23-24.

³¹Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1964), p. 251.

³²Bergson, Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 62.

³³From J. Burnet, Early Greek Philosophy, (New York: World Pub. Co., 1930), p. 136.

be called becoming. As S. K. Maitra states:

Motion which we may also call Becoming, gives, in Bergson's view, the true picture of reality. This is pure Heraclitanism, or perhaps it is an even more radical form of the philosophy of Becoming than Heraclitanism, for Heraclitus admitted the existence of a universal law, which he called the Divine Law of Zeus.³⁴

As I have stated previously, Bergson regards the intellect as containing certain limitations. A look at the first limitation gives us his view of matter. He holds that the intellect understands the world externally as collections of entities, this is to say that the intellect regards the external as material compositions. But this understanding of the intellect is a limitation rather than the truth, for intuition gives us the truth. Therefore in Bergson's cosmology, matter is a figment of the intellect, useful perhaps but not true. The only existing reality then is the élan vital and its manifestations. The manifestation of the élan vital is creative evolution. Creative evolution is evolution in which there exists neither efficient cause for evolution nor a teleology. If there were an efficient cause, that cause would be the pushing force behind life, but life moves of itself because of life's élan vital. Against teleology Collingwood states:

Bergson puts this by saying that teleology is only mechanism turned upside down, un mecanisme au rebours. The process of the world is a vast extemporization; the vital force has no aim, no goal, no guiding lights outside it or guiding principle within; it is sheer force whose only inherent property is to flow, to push indefinitely onwards in any and every direction.³⁵

³⁴ Maitra, Meeting East and West, p. 82.

³⁵ Collingwood, Idea of Nature, p. 138.

Creative evolution then is a blind, ignorant becoming of the élan vital inherent in life. It has no future in the sense of teleology and man's future is to become one with the life force which means that man's becoming must be under the élan vital and regulated by it.

Aurobindo's first argument with Bergson is with regard to the concept that anything really new can emerge in evolution. This argument is centered in the difference between Bergson's creative evolution and Aurobindo's emergent evolution. The concept of creative evolution is a concept of blind drive conforming to the élan vital that life has within itself whereas Aurobindo's emergent evolution is spirit returning to itself under an ascent fostered by the Absolute. Emergent evolution has no blind drive but rather a telos to which it is moving. Aurobindo states:

Each grade of cosmic manifestation, each type of form that can house the indwelling spirit, is turned by rebirth into a means for the individual soul, the psychic entity, to manifest more and more of its concealed consciousness; each life becomes a step in a victory over Matter by a greater progression of consciousness in it which shall make eventually Matter itself a means for the full manifestation of the Spirit.³⁶

In creative evolution, anything new could be predicted in contrast with emergent evolution in which the descent of the Absolute into the process always brings new transformations in order that evolution can continue towards Spirit.

Differences exist also between the interpretation of the concept of intuition. Bergson posits a vague type of intuition in which man is given a type of metaphysical intuition. This is a vague type of

³⁶Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 736.

intuition because he grounds intuition on the dualities in his system. For Aurobindo Bergson's definition of intuition is lacking because of its dualistic basis. Aurobindo maintains no dualism within his philosophy and holds to a variety of different intensities of intuition, i.e. Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuition, Overmind and Supermind. Each of these types of intuition progress in value as they ascend the evolutionary ladder.

Thus Aurobindo finds in Bergson a system which man must go beyond. Bergson has just scratched the surface of an analysis of evolution and does not go deeply enough into it.

The third philosopher in the West whose philosophy is similar to Aurobindo's is Samuel Alexander. Alexander begins his philosophic system with what he considers is the only reality. This reality is Space-Time. Space-Time is conceived of as a system of motion which is the substance from which things or events are made and in which they are precipitated and crystallized. In face all finite beings are complexes of Space-Time. "The hypothesis is that the simplest being is Space-Time itself, and that material things are but modes of this one simple, finite complexis of Space-Time or motion, lowered with the qualities which are familar to us in sensible experience."³⁷ This system of Space-Time is based on modern physics: "The present day mathematical physics, in the work of Mindowaski, Einstein, and others

³⁷S. Alexander, Space, Time, and Deity, Vol. I, (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), p. 172.

has familiarized the conception of Space-Time as being independent and fundamental in the constitution of the universe."³⁸ The relationship of Space-Time to each other is such that time is not another dimension added to space but that it is equal to it in the sense that the dimensions of space depend upon corresponding aspects of time. Knowledge of Space-Time is intuitive in the sense that comprehension of sensation and thought are intuitive.³⁹

Alexander's philosophy of emergent evolution is a philosophy of complexification. The first emergent out of Space-Time is simple motion. Simple motion divides itself into different velocities which fall into different spaces or aspects of space. Thus finite motions manifest themselves and these give rise to different interpretations including size, shape, numbers, etc. Out of this complexification arises gross matter which is only a grouping of the qualities of matter along with secondary qualities of color, taste, temperature, etc. As complexification proceeds the beginnings of life appear and eventually life emerges, having within its makeup the ability of self-direction. Further evolution brings about the completely unique creation of mind. Alexander comments, "Mental process is therefore something new, a fresh creation, which despite the possibilities of resolving it into physiological terms means the presence of so specific a physiological constitution as to separate it from simpler vital processes."⁴⁰

³⁸K. C. Pati, "Sri Aurobindo and the Theory of Emergent Evolution", S. A. Circle, #13, 1957, p. 69.

³⁹S. Alexander, Space, Time, and Deity, Vol. II, p. 147.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 7.

Evolution takes place from lower stages upward and upon the basis of the lower stage.—Alexander explains;

Each new type of existence when it emerges is expressible completely or without residue in terms of the lower stage, and therefore indirectly in terms of the lower stage, and therefore indirectly in terms of all lower stages; mind in terms of living process, life in terms of physico-chemical process, sense-quality like color in terms of matter with its movement, matter itself in terms of motion.⁴¹

Thus all is ultimately reduced to Space-Time and evolution is the complexification of the less complex. Evolution leaves the lower and pushes toward its goal which is Deity. He states, "Deity is thus the next higher empirical quality to mind, which the universe is engaged in bringing to birth."⁴² Deity, then, will evolve from mind by complexification. This complexity is discussed by Alexander in three senses: Deity as being God or a god; Deity as the quality of divinity; and Deity as the next higher being or quality which emerges out of any level of existence.⁴³ Deity will be unique, as mind was unique, but it will not be spirit because spirit is not adequate terminology for Deity.

Deity is therefore, according to the pattern of the growth of things in time, not a mere enlargement of mind or spirit, but something which mere spirit subserves, and to which accordingly the conception of spirit as such is totally inadequate. Spirit, personality, mind, all these human or mental characters belong to God but not to his deity.⁴⁴

He goes on to say:

As actual, God does not possess the quality of deity but in the universe as tending to that quality. This nisus in the universe, though not present in sense, is yet

⁴¹Alexander, Space, Time, and Deity, Vol. I, p. 67.

⁴²Alexander, Space, Time, and Deity, Vol. II, p. 347.

⁴³Pati, "Emergent Evolution", pp. 70-71.

⁴⁴Alexander, Space, Time, and Deity, Vol. II, p. 349.

present to reflection upon experience. Only in this sense of straining towards deity can there be an infinite actual God.⁴⁵

God, then, for Alexander is not deity but something striving and evolving towards deity. The world is now in a process of becoming, a becoming towards deity. "God is the whole universe engaged in process towards the emergence of this new quality, and religion is the sentiment in us that we are drawn toward him, and caught in the movement of the world to a higher level of existence."⁴⁶ So then God is becoming deity as man is becoming deity and as emergent evolution proceeds upon lower forms, man is but a stepping stone to the next complexification which will be for man a deity.

Alexander's evolutionary theory is greatly similar to that of Aurobindo. Both are emergent theories, both speak of higher developing forms of consciousness, and both are open to the emergence of a higher consciousness than has yet been. However, there are differences between their respective theories. A difference arises between Aurobindo and Alexander in the idea of God. For Alexander God is the striving for deity but for Aurobindo, God will be the theandric personality of the superman who partakes and communes with the Absolute and all the manifestations of the Absolute. Aurobindo states:

That he sees himself everywhere and worships that as God is also true; but here too he has laid confusedly the groping hand of Ignorance on a truth--that his being and

⁴⁵Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 361.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 429.

the Being are one, that this is a partial reflection of that, and that to find his greater Self everywhere is to find God and to come near to the Reality in things, the Reality of all existence.⁴⁷

He comments further that:

A triune knowledge, the complete knowledge of God, the complete knowledge of himself, the complete knowledge of Nature, gives him his high goal; it assigns a vast and full sense to the labour and effort of humanity. The conscious unity of the three, God, soul and Nature, in his own consciousness is the sure foundation of his perfection and his realisation of all harmonies: this will be his highest and widest state, his status of a divine consciousness and a divine life and its initiation the starting-point for his entire evolution of his self-knowledge, world-knowledge, God-knowledge.⁴⁸

Another difference between their theories is the variance in their conceptions of emergent evolution. Aurobindo's emergent evolution brings all lower forms along with upper evolutionary movement:

An evolutionary process must be by the very terms of the problem to be solved a development, in some first established basic principle of being or substance, of something that that basic principle holds involved in itself or else admits from outside itself and modifies by the admission; for it must necessarily modify by its own law of nature all that enters into it and is not already part of its own nature.⁴⁹

Alexander's new being is built upon the lower forms and the lower beings are only stepping stones that remain static as the higher forms develop.

The absolute of each theory is basically different. Aurobindo begins with Brahman as Sachchidānanda whereas Alexander begins with Space-Time. This means that in the former the aspect of spirit is lacking. In fact this is the basic divergence between these two theories. As S. K. Maitra observes, "The real weakness of Alexander's

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 623.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 625.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 627.

theory of evolution. . . is the absence of any true spiritual principle underlying it."⁵⁰ In fact Alexander's view of evolution for Aurobindo is a materialistic view which must be corrected by spirit.

Relation to Eastern Philosophy

Aurobindo's placement in the philosophic tradition of the East is obvious. He feels that the philosophies of the East are polar as are the philosophies of the West. He states:

The real Monism, the true Advaita, is that which admits all things as the one Brahman and does not seek to bisect Its existence into two incompatible entities, and eternal Truth and an eternal Falsehood, Brahman and not Brahman, Self and non-Self, a real Seal and an unreal, yet perpetual Maya. If it be true that the Self⁵¹ alone exists, it must be also true that all is the Self.

So then Aurobindo places himself within the Advaita context of philosophic thought. This thought is represented classically in the East by the Vedānta system of Śāṅkara. Therefore I will first briefly review Śāṅkara's Advaita Vedānta.

The Advaita philosophy of Śāṅkara is the classic example of Eastern philosophy. This is a system of strict monism in which the ultimate reality is Brahman. This system seeks to find the foundation of knowledge by empirical means. This investigation leads to the conclusion that the knower of a thing is the only foundation on which one has a sure footing. The Self or Ātman which has knowledge is a

⁵⁰ Maitra, Meeting of East and West, p. 47.

⁵¹ Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 31.

subject rather than an object, thus knowledge is based on a subjective epistemology. The Self or Ātman is in this system equivalent to existence, consciousness, and bliss. This Ātman is not the ego-self of gross existence but is the universal Self which is also Brahman. An object is that which is opposed to the subject and is not abhaya (nonexistent) nor sunya (void) but that which is non-ultimate. The object is given substance by Brahman through creation which is Māyā or Advidyā.

This power cannot be called "being" (sat) for "being" is only Brahman; nor can it be called non-Being (asat) in the strict sense, for it at any rate produces the appearance of this world. It is in fact a principle of illusion; the undefinable cause owing to which there seems to exist a material world comprehending distinct individual existences. Being associated with this principle of illusion, Brahman is enabled to project the appearance of the world, in the same way as a magician is enabled by his incomprehensible magical power to produce illusory appearances of animate and inanimate beings.⁵²

Thus the world is not a participant or part of Brahman but is a by-product of Brahman's power. Brahman is the creator of the world, but this creation was one of sport and not purpose. As Śāṅkara comments:

Analogously, the activity of the Lord also may be supposed to be mere sport, proceeding from his own nature, without reference to any purpose. For on the ground neither of reason nor of Scripture can we construe any other purpose of the Lord. Nor can his nature be questioned. Although the creation of this world appears to us a weighty and difficult undertaking, it is mere play to the Lord, whose power is unlimited.⁵³

⁵²Śāṅkara, The Vedānta Sūtras of Bādarāyana, trans. G. Thibaut, (New York: Dover Pub., 1962), Part I, p. xxvi.

⁵³Ibid., p. 357.

Aurobindo regards Śankara as maintaining a type of dualism rather than adhering to strict monism. This is evident in the answer given to a question put to Aurobindo about his understanding of Śankara's philosophy. He replied:

They (defenders of Śankara) want to show that Śankara was not so savagely illusionist as he is represented--that he gave a certain temporary reality to the world, admitted Śakti, etc. But these--supposing he made them--are concessions inconsistent with the logic of his own philosophy which is that only the Brahman exists and the rest is ignorance and illusion. The rest has only a temporary and therefore an illusory reality in Maya. . . Now that the general turn is away from the rigorous Illusionism, many of the Advaitists seem to want to hedge and make Śankara hedge with them.⁵⁴

Aurobindo holds that Śankara maintains a system of Qualified Illusionism.⁵⁵

It is qualified illusionism because it affirms a qualified reality for Māyā even though calling it an ineffable mystery. Thus it is that Aurobindo maintains his own system of Advaitism which is monism rather than qualified illusionism. An analysis of this point will be included in the Fourth Chapter of this thesis. I will now proceed to look at the Sāṅkhya philosophic system.

The Sāṅkhya system begins with a duality of Prakṛti and Puruṣa, Prakṛti being the foundation upon which causation is based. Īśvara Krishna states:

Nature (Prakrit), the root [of material forms], is not produced. The Great One (Mahat *Buddhi or Intellect) and the rest [which spring from it] are seven [substances],

⁵⁴Sri Aurobindo, Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1953), pp. 161-162.

⁵⁵Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 407.

producing and produced. Sixteen are productions [only].
Soul is neither producing nor produced.⁵⁶

In explanation of the above quote J. Davies states;

Matter in its primal form (Prakṛiti) is eternal and self-existing. From it all things emanate, except Soul, which has an independent existence, and is eternal, both a parte anti and a parte post.⁵⁷

Prakṛti then is the first principle of the universe and is uncaused, independent, absolute, and beyond production or destruction. It is unmanifest except by its products, the three Gunas: Sattva (goodness and pleasure producing), Rajas (foulness and pain producing), and Tamas (darkness and inertia producing). These three Gunas exist in different degrees in everything and when one of the Gunas predominates over another, evolution begins. The second aspect, Purusa, is the soul, self, spirit existing as plurality, and the principle of pure consciousness. It is not body, sense, mind, ego, or intellect. It is, like prakṛti, uncaused, absolute, and beyond production or destruction. Thus this system maintains two absolute realities: Prakṛti which is the dynamic and ever-changing and Purusa or the soul which exists in the plural and is static.

Evolution (Sarga) in the Sāṅkhya system is cyclic rather than linear; it moves towards dissolution (Pralaya) in a cyclic order. There is no continuous progress in one direction. It is also teleological in the sense that Prakṛti evolves itself in order to serve Purusa's end.

⁵⁶The Sāṅkhya Kārikā of Īśwara Krishna, trans. John Davies, (Calcutta, India: Susil Gupta Ltd., 1881), p. 9.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 9.

This process begins with the first product of evolution which is called Mahat or the Great. This continues to manifest new products by altering the Guna's and their twenty-five principles under the dynamism of Prakṛti. Thus it is that in Sāṅkhya evolution arises from dissolution and returns to it ad infinitum. It is teleological because everything works to serve the Purusa.

Aurobindo's argument against Sāṅkhya is based in their understanding of Prakṛti and Purusa as the foundation of the world. Aurobindo maintains a monist foundation and he further maintains that this dualism will be overcome in evolution for he states:

All antinomy of the Purusha and the Prakriti, that curious division and unbalance of the Soul and Nature which afflicts the Ignorance, would be entirely removed; for the nature would be the outflowing of the self-force of the Person and the Person would be the outflowing of the supreme Nature, the supramental power of being of the Ishwara.⁵⁸

To maintain that Prakṛti and Purusa are the Absolute is a misunderstanding of the nature of Prakṛti and Purusa. Their real nature is that they are each a different type of manifestation from Sachchidānanda, the only reality.

Aurobindo agrees with Sāṅkhya that evolution is fact and that it is teleological. But he cannot agree with their view of evolution because it is grounded on the false assumption of dualism. In regard to telos and fulfillment he observes:

⁵⁸Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 889.

There is the central throne of cosmic knowledge looking out on her widest dominion; there the empire of oneself with the empire of one's world; there the life in the eternally consummate Being and the⁵⁹realisation of His divine nature in our human existence.

He also maintains that evolution is teleological and that it is in progress towards something which is more than dissolution. In fact for Aurobindo evolution is a progress of the spirit returning to itself, not a dissolution but supreme fulfillment.

⁵⁹Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 17.

CHAPTER 2 AUROBINDO'S EVOLUTIONARY METHODOLOGY

The Absolute

Aurobindo recognizes the great truth that the East has given to man; this truth is that the ultimate reality is Brahman. He holds that the Supreme Brahman is that which in Western metaphysics is called the Absolute but that Brahman is also the omnipresent Reality in which all that is relative exists as Brahman's form or movements. This Absolute is one which takes all relativities in its embrace. Brahman is the Consciousness that knows itself in all that exists, the Force that sustains the power of God, Titan, and Demon. He is the Force that acts in man and animal and the form and energies of Nature. He is the Ānanda which is the secret Bliss of existence and the ether of our being without which nothing could live. Brahman is the inner Soul in all who has taken a form in correspondence with each created form. "He is the Timeless and Time; He is Space and all that is in Space; He is Causality and the Cause and the Effect: He is the thinker and his thought, the warrior and his courage, the gambler and his dice-throw."¹ Brahman is the only existing reality and everything that exists participates in Him. Under this view of Brahman, Spirit and Matter are both real and, because they are both real, Aurobindo believes that his system goes beyond the

¹Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 294.

"double negation" of the West and the East. It goes beyond it because:

The affirmation of a divine life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base unless we recognize not only eternal Spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe, but accept Matter of which it is made, as a fit and noble material out of which He weaves constantly His garbs, Builds recurrently the unending series of His mansions.²

Nirguna and Saguna Brahman

The Eastern tradition conceives Brahman as showing Himself to man in one of two diverse manifestations. Aurobindo observes:

It is this essential indeterminability of the absolute that translated itself into our consciousness through the fundamental negating positives of our spiritual experience, the immobile immutable Self, the Nirguna Brahman, the Eternal without qualities, the pure featureless One Existence, the Impersonal, the Silence void of activities, the Non-being, the Ineffable and the Unknowable. On the other side it is the essence and source of all determinations, and this dynamic essentiality manifests to us through the fundamental affirming positives in which the Absolute equally meets us; for it is the Self that becomes all things, the Saguna Brahman, the Eternal with infinite qualities, the One who is the Many, the infinite Person who is the source and foundation of all persons and personalities, the Lord of creation, the World, the Master of all works and action; it is that which being known all is known; these affirmatives correspond to those negatives.³

Thus man has different understandings of the one reality, for Brahman is the unknowable, ineffable and yet the One who is many, the World. Even though Brahman manifests Himself in infinite ways as void or as Person, both these seeming polarities exist simultaneously. In fact the simultaneous existence is the true integral understanding of Brahman,

²Ibid., p. 8.

³Ibid., pp. 287-288.

the one Reality. In actuality the Reality is neither an eternal passivity of immobile Being nor is he an eternal activity of Being in movement. It is not an alternation in time between these two things. Neither passivity nor activity is the sole absolute truth of Brahman's reality. They are only true of Brahman in relation to the activities of Its consciousness. When man perceives the deployment of the conscious energy of Its being in the universal action, he speaks of It as the mobile active Brahman; when he perceives Its simultaneous reservation of the conscious energy of Its being kept back from action, he speaks of It as the immobile passive Brahman. Thus man speaks of Saguna and Nirguna, Kshara and Akshara. But in fact there is one reality and not two independent realities, one which is immobile and the other which is mobile.⁴

Sachchidānanda

All things are ultimately reducible to Brahman or the experience of Brahman.

The Unknowable knowing itself as Sachchidananda is the one supreme affirmation of Vedanta; it contains all the others or on it they depend. This is the one veritable experience that remains when all appearances have been accounted for negatively by the elimination of their shapes and coverings or positively by the reduction of their names and forms to the constant truth they contain.⁵

Ultimately then the progenitor and sustainer of all is Brahman manifesting Himself as Sachchidānanda, the triune unity within Brahman of Sat

⁴Ibid., p. 513.

⁵Ibid., p. 43.

or Existence, Chit or Consciousness, and Ānanda or Bliss and the power or force inherent in each manifestation.

Sat or Existence

As pure existence Brahman is unknowable to sense perception. He is unknowable because sense perception is a limited or conditioned knowledge. It is conditioned by the aspects of space, time, form, and motion. Man's apprehension of the world in motion is the same as Heraclitus' observations of the river which is being as becoming. For Aurobindo being as becoming is just man's intellectual understanding of reality although it is not ultimate truth. He comments, "The very conception of movement carries with it the potentiality of repose and betrays itself as an activity of some existence; the very idea of energy in action carries with it the idea of energy abstaining from action; and an absolute energy not in action is simply and purely absolute existence."⁶ So then Brahman is beyond becoming and movement. Brahman is the basis out of which becoming and movement are manifested. Brahman is the ontological base of existent beings. Aurobindo bases this concept in Vedāntic thought. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.7.1. states:

Non-being was this in the beginning; From it being arose.
Self-fashioned indeed out of itself, therefore it is named
'well-fashioned'.⁷

According to this passage, being arose or appeared from non-being. For

⁶Ibid., p. 71.

⁷Paul Deussen, The Philosophy of the Upanishads, (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), p. 128.

Aurobindo non-being or asat must not be interpreted as meaning non-existence or the negation of being because non-being is only a word. He states;

Non-being is only a word. When we examine the fact it represents, we can no longer be sure that absolute non-existence has any better chance than the infinite Self of being more than an ideative formation of the mind. We really mean by this Nothing something Beyond the last term to which we can reduce our purest conception and our most abstract or subtle experience of actual being as we know or conceive it while in this universe. This Nothing then is merely a something beyond positive conception. We erect a fiction of nothingness in order to overpass, by a method of total exclusion, all that we can know and consciously are. Actually when we examine the nihil of certain philosophies, we begin to perceive that it is a zero which is All or an indefinable Infinite which appears to the mind a blank, because mind grasps only finite constructions, but is in fact the only true Existence.⁸

Therefore Non-being and Being are not opposites; Being transcends such mental constructions as Non-being, the Absolute Brahman of Advaita as well as the Void or Zero of the Buddhists.

Knowledge of Brahman as pure Existence is impossible through sense-experience or thought, for as I have stated previously, man's understanding⁹ is conditioned by space and time, form and movement. The way man arrives at knowledge of Brahman as pure existence is through the Spirit and higher states of consciousness and intuition which are produced by evolution. Aurobindo comments:

⁸ Aurobindo, Life Divine, pp. 28-29.

⁹ See page 32.

It is undefinable and inconceivable by finite and defining Mind; it is ineffable by a mind-created speech; it is describable neither by our negations neti neti, nor for we cannot limit it by saying it is not this, it is not that nor by our affirmations, for we cannot fix it by saying it is this, it is that, iti iti. And yet, though in this way unknowable to us, it is not altogether and in every way unknowable; it is self-evident to itself and, although inexpressible, yet self-evident to a knowledge by identity of which the spiritual being in us must be capable; for that spiritual being is in its essence and its original and ultimate reality not other than this Supreme Existence.¹⁰

Unknowable then does not mean that Brahman is completely unknowable but that He is unknown and can be known through intuition. Aurobindo's use of intuition as being a higher form of knowledge is directly related to the Upaniṣads. R. S. Misra speaks of Aurobindo's use of intuition, "In this respect Sri Aurobindo agrees with the views of the Upanisadic sages and with Sankara, Ramanuja and other Vedantins. The Vedanta considers sense-experience and intellect as different sources of knowledge. But they can, according to it, give us only the knowledge of the empirical world and not of reality as such."¹¹ The real according to the Upaniṣads is that which eye, speech, and mind cannot grasp:

The Kena Upaniṣad 1.3 states:

The eye does not go there, nor speech nor mind. We do not know. We do not know, do not understand how anyone can teach it.¹²

¹⁰Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 292/

¹¹Ram Shankar Misra, The Integral Advaitism of Sri Aurobindo, (Banaras: Banaras Hindu University, 1957), p. 44.

¹²S. Radhakrishnan, The Principal Upaniṣads, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1953), p. 548. (na tatra cakṣur gacchati na vāg gacchati na manah na vidmo na vijānīmo yathaitad anuśiṣyāt.)

Kathā Upaniṣad 1.2.9 states:

Not be reasoning is this apprehension attainable, but
dearest, taught by another, it is well understood. Thou
hast obtained it, holding fast to truth. May we find,
Naciketas, an inquirer like thee.¹³

The ultimate reality cannot be understood objectively; it is understood subjectively and is recognized through intuition rather than the empirical world of sense perception. Aurobindo's knowledge is of the same nature as the Upaniṣads; it is intuitional and spiritual.

Chit or Consciousness Force

The second part of the trinity of Brahman is Chit or Consciousness Force. The word consciousness means the forces that are inherent in creation and existence. These forces in creation give rise to the subconscious, mental, and the superconscious through evolution. As was just stated these forces are inherent in existence and are related at their foundation, as Aurobindo observes, "Shiva and Kali, Brahman and Shakti 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 nonetheless and is not abolished, diminished, or in any way essentially altered."¹⁴ They exist in unity and are inseparable. They have equality in that one does not determine or direct the other. This is because "a Brahman compelled by Prakṛti is not Brahman but an inert

¹³Ibid., p. 611. (naiṣā tarkaṇa matir āpaneyā, proktānyenaiva
*sujñānya preṣṭha; yām tvam āpas satyadhritir batāsi; tvādr̥ṇ no bhūyān
naciketaḥ praṣṭā.)

¹⁴Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 78.

Infinite with an active content in it more powerful than the continent, a conscious holder of Force of whom his Force is the Master."¹⁵

Existence then is not compelled or determined by consciousness force but is in its activity a Conscious-Force which presents the workings of itself to itself as forms of itself. Because force for Aurobindo is only the action of one Conscious-Being, the results of its action can be nothing but forms of itself. Thus, Substance or Matter is only a form of Spirit.¹⁶

Absolute consciousness then is creative force which creates matter as a form of Spirit. Matter is spiritual in its essence and is created by Chit.

Absolute consciousness is in its nature absolute power; the nature of Chit is Shakti, Force or Shakti concentrated and energised for cognition or for action in a realising power effective or creative, the power of conscious being dwelling upon itself and bringing out, as it were, by the heat of its incubation the seed and development of all that is within it or, to use a language convenient to our minds, of all its truths and potentialities, has created the Universe.¹⁷

Chit Shakti not only has created the universe but is present in the universe in a latent form. It is even intuitively present in plants. Aurobindo maintains that the seekings and shrinkings of the plant, its pleasure and pain, sleep and wakefulness, are all movements of consciousness, but not of mentality. He comments, "There is then a submental, a vital consciousness which has precisely the initial

¹⁶Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 509.

reactions as the mental, but is different in the constitution of its self-experience, even as that which is superconscient is in the constitution of its self-experience different from the mental being."¹⁸ In fact Chit presents itself to us as a creative process, the ascent from matter to plants to mind. But as was implied above, consciousness is not synonymous with mentality. Consciousness is rather a self-aware force of existence of which mentality is a middle term; below mentality it sinks into vital and material movements which are for Aurobindo the subconscient; But in all it is one and the same thing which organizes itself differently.¹⁹

Aspects of Existence and Consciousness

The manifestations of Existence in the world occur in the three aspects of Ātman, Purusa, and Īshvara. These are Self, Conscious Being or Spirit, and God. Also the power of consciousness appears to us in three aspects. In the first it is the self-force of that consciousness conceptively creative of all things which is Māyā. In the second it is Prakriti which is Nature or force made dynamically executive and which works out all things under the witnessing eye of the Conscious Being. In the third it is the conscious power of the Divine Being or Shakti which is both conceptively and dynamically executive of all the divine workings. Together these three aspects and their powers base

¹⁸Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 83.

and comprise the whole of existence and all Nature and reconcile the apparent disparateness and incompatibility of the Transcendent, the cosmic universality and the disharmony of our individual existence. In fact the Absolute, cosmic Nature and ourselves are linked in oneness by this triune aspect of the one Reality.²⁰

The three aspects and their powers join to form the relation: Ātman-Māyā, Purusa-Prakriti, and Īshvara-Shakti. The first aspect and its power is Ātman-Māyā. Ātman is the cosmic self which expresses itself as transcendent of itself and individual-universal in a being. Māyā is the self-power (Ātma-Sakti) of the Ātman. Māyā in its original sense meant a comprehending and containing consciousness capable of embracing, measuring and limiting and is therefore formative; it is that which outlines, measures out, molds forms in the formless, psychologises and seems to make knowable the Unknowable, geometrises and seems to make measureable the limitless.²¹ The world exists as Māyā. Aurobindo sees the world as Māyā because it is not the essential truth of infinite existence, but a creation of self-conscious being. It is a creation not in the void, not a creation in nothing or out of nothing, but a creation in the eternal truth and out of the eternal Truth of Self-being. The world's continent, origin, and substance are the essential, real existence, its forms are mutable formations.²²

²⁰ Ibid., p. 295.

²¹ Ibid., p. 95.

²² Ibid., pp. 95-96.

It is by Maya that static truth of essential being becomes ordered truth of active being—or, to put it in more metaphysical language, out of the supreme being in which all is in each and each is in all for the play of existence with existence, consciousness with consciousness, force with force, delight with delight. This play of all in each and each in all is concealed at first from us by the mental play or the illusion of Maya which persuades each that he is in all but not all in him and that he is all as a separated being always inseparable one with the rest of existence.²³

It is the dynamic aspect of the Self of all selves which is the master of existence.

The second unity of the aspect with its power is Purusha-prakriti. Purusha is Being behind the world, it is calm and central. It supports Prakriti which is active becoming or the play of nature. Purusha is the ground upon which Prakriti builds. Aurobindo maintains that Prakriti or the executive Force becomes unaware of Purusha or the Conscious Being and holds him hidden within herself. But Prakriti slowly becomes aware of Purusha with the emergence of consciousness out of the Inconscience. Purusha consents to assume the apparent form of itself which Prakriti constructs for it and seems to become the Inconscient, i.e. the Physical Being, the vital being, the mental being. But in all these aspects it remains in reality itself.²⁴

The third unity is that of Īshvara-Shakti. The Īshvara is in Aurobindo's philosophy supracosmic as well as intracosmic. Īshvara is that which exceeds, inhabits, and supports all individuality. He is the supreme and universal Brahman who is the Absolute, the supreme

²³Ibid., p. 108.

²⁴Ibid., p. 318.

Self, the supreme Purusha. But he is not the personal God of popular religions, which is a being limited by his qualities, individual and separate from all others. All such personal gods are limited representations or names and divine personalities of the one Īshvara.²⁵ Shakti is cosmic, divine energy, the creative Consciousness-Force of universal reality, the universal energy which moves all, made individual. Together Īshvara-Shakti are the Lord and his power or his consort. It is the unity of the Divine-Self and Creator and the Divine Mother and Creatrix of the universe. It is Being and power of Being throughout the world which also transcends the world.

There three aspects and their powers taken together give a complete view of the relation of existence and consciousness force.

—The unity of these aspects in the universe shows itself as one Being and one Reality which, as Self, bases, supports, and informs the universe, as Purusha experiences the universe, as Īshvara wills, governs, and possesses the universe. Māyā, Prakriti, and Shakti create and keep the universe in motion.²⁶

Ānanda

The third part of the trinity of Brahman is Ānanda or Bliss.

This knowledge of Brahman as Ānanda is contained in the Taittirīya

Upaniṣad 3.6:

He knew that Brahman is bliss. For truly, beings here are born from bliss, when born, they live by bliss and into bliss, when departing, they enter.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., p. 318.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 322-323.

²⁷ Radhakrishnan, Upaniṣads, p. 557. (ānando brahmeti jyajānāt, ānandādd hy eve khalv imāni bhūtāni jāyante, ānandena jātāni jīvati,

Ānanda is the beatitude, the bliss of pure conscious existence and energy. It is the divine counterpart of the lower emotional and sensational being. It is the secret delight by which all things are created and sustained in existence. Ānanda in the world manifests itself in three ways: beauty, love, and delight in all things. It is the artist of creation who witnesses, experiences, and takes joy in creation. In lower consciousness it creates its opposites, the opposite of a sense of beauty being a sense of ugliness, of love and attraction being hate and repulsion, of delight in existence being pain and grief. Ānanda manifests itself in Being and in Becoming and is not limited. In other words the self-delight of Brahman is not limited by the possession of its absolute self-being. Its force of consciousness is capable of throwing itself into many forms and with an endless variation. Its self-delight is capable of movement, of variation, of revelling in the variety of forms. The object of the creative play of force is to enjoy its own self-movement and self-variation.²⁸

Together Sat, Chit, and Ānanda with their powers form Sachchidānanda which is, for man, the divine being.

This Divine being, Sachchidananda, is at once impersonal and personal; it is Existence and the origin and foundation of all truths, forces, powers, existences, but it is also the one transcendent Conscious Being and the All person of whom all conscious beings are the selves and personalities; for He is their highest Self and the universal indwelling Presence.²⁹

²⁷(cont.) ānandaṁ prayanty abhisamviśanti.)

²⁸Maitra, Introduction to Aurobindo, p. 131.

²⁹Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 590.

Involution or Creation

Sachchidānanda as the divine being is the creative power of the universe. Creation occurs when Brahman realizes his variations and potentials and actualizes himself in the creative plunge of delight. This is to say that delight is the "why" of creation. It implies that Brahman is absolute perfection and is complete in himself. The creation originates from delight or spontaneous joy. Just as the ecstatic dance of Shiva is an act of spontaneity, so is the act of creation. It is a creation from līlā rather than a creation from need or desire. Aurobindo holds that the Absolute is beyond stability and movement as it is beyond unity and multiplicity. In fact the absolute takes its place in the one and the stable and whirls around itself infinitely, inconceivable, and securely. World-existence is in fact the ecstatic dance of Shiva which multiplies the body of God numberlessly to the view. The sole reason for the dance is the joy of the dancing.³⁰ Brahman then, creates the world because of ecstatic bliss, not from reason. The whole of creation is the child's joy, the poet's joy, and the actor's joy of the soul of things eternally young, perpetually creating and recreating himself for the sheer bliss of the self-creation.

The question arises that if the world is the līlā of Brahman and is a manifestation out of the bliss of Brahman, where then does evil arise, for evil seems to man to be a contradiction of bliss? Evil

³⁰ Ibid., p. 74.

exists as that which is a negation of the extrinsic elections of things and hostility toward the welfare of anything. But if evil exists as a concrete, such as bliss, then one must posit a dualism of polarities. For Aurobindo this cannot be the case. He remarks that it is sometimes reasoned that as Truth and Good have their absolutes, so must falsehood and evil. Or if this is not the case, then both must be relative. As far as he is concerned, if Knowledge and Ignorance, Truth and Falsehood, Good and Evil exist only in relation to each other, then beyond this relationship they have no existence. But this he says is not the truth of the relation of these because Falsehood and Evil are, unlike Truth and Good, very clearly results of Ignorance and cannot exist where there is Knowledge. That is, they can have no existence in the Divine Being because they cannot be elements of the Supreme Nature.³¹ Evil, then, is a product of Ignorance and as such does not exist as having equality with good. In fact evil as pain of existence as opposed to pleasure of existence is the lesser case of man's existence. In reality the sum of the pleasure of existence far exceeds the sum of the pain of existence. Any appearances and individual cases to the contrary are not withstanding. Aurobindo holds that the normal state of nature, whether that be active or passive, surface or underlying, is pleasure of existence. Pain exists as a contrary occurrence which temporarily suspends or overlaps that normal state. But because pain is temporary the lesser sum of pain affects us more intensely and usually looms

³¹Ibid., pp. 532-533.

larger to man than the greater sum of pleasure. This is because the latter is normal, men do not treasure it and hardly even observe it unless it intensifies.³² Pain exists because man does not live in an ethical world.

The attempt of human thought to force an ethical meaning into the whole of Nature is one of those acts of wilful and obstinate self-confusion, 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 prevent him from arriving at real knowledge and complete sight.³³

Ethics is related to humanity but it is not an essential feature of nature, and because of its relation to humanity I will suspend the discussion of ethics for the moment. Thus it is that evil exists as part of Ignorance and relates specifically to humanity rather than nature.

In the Ānanda of involution of Sachchidānanda the divine plunges into the realm of Ignorance in order to create the world. This plunge into Ignorance is possible because of the ability of Absolute through Cit-Shakti to manifest self-variation, self-limitation, and self-absorption. The absolute places itself under limitation and performs Tapas in order to manifest the world. Aurobindo notes:

Tapas means literally heat, afterwards any kind of energism, askesis, austerity of conscious force acting upon itself or its object. The world was created by Tapas in the form, says the ancient image, of an egg, which being broken, again by Tapas, heat of incubation of conscious force, the Purusha emerged, Soul in Nature, like a bird from the egg.³⁴

³² Misra, Integral Advaitism, pp. 140-141.

³³ Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 33.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 509.

This performance of Tapas by the Absolute is the process of self-modification. The manifestation that arises from this activity presents itself as truth and untruth, knowledge and ignorance, etc. This involution is presented in Figure 1 page vi. This figure shows that Sachchidānanda descends or involutes from Sachchidānanda through Horizon A to Supermind on downwards into Mind, Psyche, Life, and Matter. The Supermind is absolute knowledge and power (Vidya). It is the knowledge of reality and the future and is in unity with Sachchidānanda. Because of the make-up of involution, Supermind passes from a stage of knowledge to a stage of ignorance (Horizon B) in its downward movement to Mind. Mind is Avidya and the manifestor of the world given to man. Involution moves on by a process of fragmentation which eventually reaches the level where fragmentation is complete and unity is lost. This last stage is matter and is a state of Inconscience (Horizon C). This last state of inconscience is the seeming complete loss of spirit. Aurobindo comments, "In the descent into the material plane of which our natural life is a product, the lapse culminates in a total inconscience out of which an involved Being and Consciousness have to emerge by a gradual evolution."³⁵

Thus far we have arrived at the final point of involution, namely inconscience. The inconscience is a trance-like state, a self-absorption which shows itself as darkness. In the inconscient the being

³⁵Ibid., p. 591.

of the infinite is there, though it seems to us rather like an infinite non-being by appearances or a self-oblivious intrinsic consciousness and force which exist in apparent non-Being. Because of energy of the Inconscient an ordered world is created in a trance of self-absorption. The inconscient force acts automatically and with an apparent blindness but still with the inevitability and power of the truth of Infinity.³⁶ The inconscience is, as just noted, a seeming and apparent non-being which acts with seeming blindness. But in actuality it is a starting point which gives the appearance of non-being. Aurobindo observes:

It has indeed to be accepted that an inconscient force, an inconscient substance are the starting point of the evolution, but it is a conscious Spirit and not an inconscient Being that is emerging in the evolution. The Inconscient and its primary works are penetrated by a succession of higher and higher powers of being and are made subject to Consciousness so that its obstructions to the evolution, its circles of restriction, are slowly broken, the Python coils of its obscurity shot through by the arrows of the Sun-God; so are the limitations of our material substance diminished until they can be transcended and mind, life and body can be transformed through a possession of them by the greater law of divine Consciousness, Energy, and Spirit.³⁷

The action of the transformation from matter to Spirit is a reverse of involution or fragmentation, it is reunion and an evolution. Therefore the ignorance is a state of purpose and of necessity. "The ignorance is a necessary, though quite subordinate term which the universal knowledge has imposed on itself that that movement might be possible,-- not a blunder and a fall, but a purposeful descent, not a curse, but a divine opportunity."³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., p. 311.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 593-594.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 527.

Evolution

Evolution is the inverse action of involution and is a conscious movement. A graphic presentation of the involution-evolution process is given in Figure 2 page vii. Sachchidānanda involutes into matter, evolution begins from the inconscience upward in the ignorance through life, psyche, mind, higher mind, overmind, to Horizon B at which point evolution passes from ignorance into knowledge. The evolution beyond mind will be dealt with in the following chapter of this thesis.

Progress and Telos

For Aurobindo the phenomenon of evolution includes a concept of progress and telos. The question of ends, aims, and goals is intrinsic in his consideration of progress. For Aurobindo progress means that each grade of cosmic manifestation is turned by the process of rebirth into a means for the individual soul or psychic entity to manifest more of its concealed consciousness. In fact each life becomes a step in a victory over Matter by a greater progression of consciousness in Matter which shall make Matter a means for the full manifestation of the spirit.³⁹ Progress then is the movement from matter through life and mind to spirit. The spirit then is the telos toward which evolution is progressing. Aurobindo states:

A manifestation of the greater powers of Existence till the whole being itself is manifest in the material world in terms of a higher, a spiritual creation, may be considered as

³⁹ Ibid., p. 736.

the teleology of the evolution. This teleology does not bring in any factor that does not belong to the totality, it proposes only the realisation of the totality in the past. There can be no objection to the admissions of a teleological factor in a part movement of the universal totality, if the purpose--not a purpose in the human sense, but the urge of an intrinsic truth necessity conscious in the will of the indwelling Spirit--is the perfect manifestation there of all the possibilities inherent in the total movement. All exists here no doubt, for the delight of existence, all is a game or Lila; but a game too carries within itself an object to be accomplished and without the fulfillment of that object would have no completeness of significance.⁴⁰

The grounding of teleology is in and upon Sachchidānanda as R. S. Misra notes, "The higher teleology in Sri Aurobindo's view consists in the supermind and Sachchidananda in the world of matter, life and mind and the consequent transformation of these principles by the light and power of the Spirit."⁴¹

The process of evolution is a non-continuous process requiring an intervention of the divine. S. K. Maitra writes, "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."⁴² This fact is represented in Figure 2 as the arrowed lines extending from the upper left to the various manifestations of Sachchidānanda from matter upwards. The movement of evolution is.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 743.

⁴¹Misra, Integral Advaitism, p. 363.

⁴²Maitra, Meeting of East and West, p. 257.

not a slow, steady, monotonous gradation but is a series of rapid and sudden outbursts. Aurobindo maintains that Nature prepares slowly behind the veil, working a little backwards, working a little forwards until one day she arrives at the combination of outward things which make it possible for her to throw her new idea into a realized formation. Then suddenly with violence the evolution moves on.⁴³ The intervention of the divine nature into evolution gives to us the conception of the development of an eschatology. This eschatology is the spiritual end of man within an evolutionary teleological cosmology. This end will be the fulfillment of the true being of man. It gives a linear view of the universe which has a divine telos. Aurobindo comments on the onward march of evolution from the lower to the Absolute without a return:

Earth-life is not a lapse into the mire of something undivine, vain and miserable, offered by some Power to itself as a spectacle or to the embodied soul as a thing to be suffered and then cast away from it: it is the scene of the evolutionary unfolding of the being which moves towards the revelation of a supreme spiritual light and power and joy and oneness, but includes in it also the manifold diversity of the self-achieving spirit.⁴⁴

Also Aurobindo, in commenting on the cycle of rebirth, speaks of the cyclical view of the universe as purposeless:

Not to return as speedily as may be to heavens where perfect light and joy are eternal or to the supracosmic bliss is the object of this cosmic cycle, nor merely to repeat a purposeless round in a long unsatisfactory groove of ignorance seeking for knowledge and never finding it perfectly,--in

⁴³Sri Aurobindo, Evolution, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1964), p. 8.

⁴⁴Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 606.

that case the ignorance would be either an inexplicable blunder of the all-conscient or a painful and purposeless necessity equally inexplicable,--but to realise the Ananda of the Self in other conditions than the supracosmic, in cosmic being, and to find its heaven of joy and light even in the opposition offered by the terms of an embodied material existence, by struggle therefore the joy of self-discovery, would seem to be the true object of the birth of the soul in the human body and of the labour of the human race in the series of its cycles.⁴⁵

This fact of the rejection of a cyclical view of the universe has been recognized by S. K. Maitra and R. S. Srivastava. Maitra comments, "Sir Aurobindo is definitely of opinion that the process of history is not cyclical. In fact, in his view, the cyclical view of evolution will make evolution a farce. . . ." ⁴⁶ Srivastava adds, "Sri Aurobindo's definite contribution to the theory of evolution is his cosmic view of it and secondly, his view of a steady ascent in evolution from the lowest to the highest stages. For him, evolution knows no lapse, it is a steady march to the ultimate goal, namely, the attainment of the Divine status. There is no place for regression, far less for dissolution, in his system."⁴⁷ Thus it is that Aurobindo has rejected a cyclical view of the universe and replaced it with a linear view with its culmination in a divinized world. Therefore because of his concept of divine intervention at each stage of evolution, there is working behind each movement a divine telos. This telos is to culminate in supramental gnostic being. Thus the final form of man is fostered and instituted by the

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 527.

⁴⁶S. K. Maitra, "Sri Aurobindo and Spengler: Comparison between the Integral and the Pluralistic Philosophy of History", from The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, ed. H. Chaudhuro and F. Spiegelberg, (London: George Allen, 1960), p. 78.

⁴⁷R. S. Srivastava, Sri Aurobindo and the Theories of Evolution, (Varanas :The Chowkhanbe Sanskrit Series Office, 1968), p. 418.

divine; this in turn gives to man an eschatological view of the future.

I will develop this further in the third chapter.

The Triple Process of Evolution

In evolution there are three processes that take place. These are widening, heightening, and integration. These processes widen, open, refine and adapt lower principles so that they are able to ascend to the higher stage. In a process of widening evolution increases organization, expression, and differentiation so that it is capable of evolving to a higher principle. The process of heightening is the ascent from grade to grade upwards. This is shown in the evolution of the principle of life out of matter. When the step in the evolution has taken place and the principle has reached a higher stage the process of integration taken place. This process is a mode of complexification of the less complex which alters the lower principle so that it ascends the evolutionary ladder as the new principle is manifested. Aurobindo comments, "A taking up of what has already been evolved into each higher grade as it is reached and a transformation more or less complete so as to admit of a total changed working of the whole being and nature, an integration, but be also part of the process, if the evolution is to be effective."⁴⁸ The effect of integration upon the lower principles is that when a higher principle evolves it returns to the lower principle to initiate as much as is possible through its power.

⁴⁸ Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 627.

This triple process is involved in the raising of all potentially higher principles out of their lower status to the divine. It is a radical change of the world of ignorance. "The end of this triple process must be a radical change of the action of the Ignorance into an action of Knowledge, of our basis of inconscience into a basis of complete consciousness,--a completeness which exists at present only in what is to us the superconscience."⁴⁹

An entire transformation of the lower to the highest stage cannot take place just by the action of the higher principle helping and transforming the lower because, when the higher principle returns into the lower to raise it up, it has a loss of power. Thus it cannot fully raise the lower and by returning to the lower it loses some of its own power. In fact an entire transformation can only take place when the full emergence of the law of the spirit takes place. This is the power of supermind or gnosis entering into Matter which must in turn evolve into higher Matter. This would change the mental into the supramental being; it would make the inconscient in man conscious and spiritualise his material substance; it would erect laws of gnostic consciousness in his whole evolutionary being and nature. Aurobindo notes that this transformation "must be the culminating emergence or, at least, that stage in the emergence which first decisively changes the Nature of the evolution by transforming its action of Ignorance and

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 627.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 629.

its basis of Inconscience."⁵⁰ So we see that with the coming of the supramental the complete transformation will emerge.

Matter

So it is then that matter as inconscient existence evolves by the processes of widening, heightening, and integration. But in essence matter is, at base, spirit in Aurobindo's thought. He states, "The two are one: Spirit is the soul and reality of that which we sense as Matter; Matter is a form and body of that which we realise as spirit."⁵¹ Matter is the involutioned power of the supermind and contains within itself the desire to return to the absolute. The reason for this is that at base matter is the ground upon which the spirit is to build. "Matter is substance itself, whether subtle or dense, mental or material. It is form and body of spirit and was created to be a basis for the self-expression of the Spirit."⁵² Matter is the first manifestation in Space and is the substance and stuff of the universe. In a description of the first witness of creation Aurobindo notes that we are met with dumb secrecy within which there is no hint of any principles of development other than a material world. He states:

A witness of creation, if there had been one conscious but uninstructed, would only have seen appearing out of a vast abyss of an apparent non-existence an Energy busy with the creation of Matter, a material world and material objects, organising the infinity of the Inconscient into the scheme of a boundless universe or a system of

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 629.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 222.

⁵²Ibid., p. 573.

countless universes that stretched around Him into Space without any certain end or limit, a tireless creation of nebulae and star-clusters and suns and planets, existing only for itself, without a sense in it, empty of cause or purpose.⁵³

But the immediate apparent is not the cause because working behind this creation is the desire for return to unity and wholeness. If the witness looked again after countless aeons he would have seen the outburst of life. "He would have seen a Nature concerned only with establishing this outburst of life. . . ."54

Life

Just as matter is a hidden form of the absolute so is life a hidden form. Life, however, is beyond the stage of matter and is a higher principle. Life, like matter, proceeds and evolves through the widening, heightening and integration process. As life evolves it passes through four stages of development. The first status of life is characterized by dumb inconscient drive. This drive is not free but controlled by the universal movement of which it is a part. The second status of life is desire. This desire is inherent in life and pushes it forward on the ladder of perfection. But this status is limited because its capacity cannot fully possess universality. The third status is that of love. This status seeks to possess and to be possessed, to receive and to give. Out of love the fourth status and perfection of life is realized. The fourth is a sign of perfection.

⁵³Ibid., p. 756.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 756.

It is conceived of as "the pure and full emergence of the original will, the illumined fulfillment of the intermediate desire, the high and deep satisfaction of the conscious interchange of Love by the unification of the state of the possessor and possessed in the divine unity of souls which is the foundation of the supramental existence."⁵⁵ Thus it is that life evolves upward to the next stage of evolution which is the psyche.

Psyche

The psyche is the inmost entity in man, it is the soul or inner being of man. At first this soul is weak and only after sufficient evolution can it take full, rightful place within the evolutionary framework of Aurobindo. The psychic being does not emerge full-grown and luminous but evolves and passes through a slow development. At first its figure of being may be indistinct and may remain weak and undeveloped for a long time, not impure but imperfect. This is slow because it rests its formation only on the power of soul which must work against Ignorance and Inconscience. Its appearance in fact is the sign of the emergence of Soul.⁵⁶ The psyche is that which is the permanent being in us. There are two forms of psychic being, an upper and a lower. The upper is Jivatman, which is our true being, and we become aware of it when higher knowledge comes. The lower is the psychic

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 201.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 796.

being which stands behind mind, body, and life. The Jivatman is above the manifestation of life and presides over life. The psychic being stands behind the manifestation in life and supports it.⁵⁷ This true soul secret in us is veiled but always alight.

. . .this veiled psychic entity is the flame of the Godhead always alight within us, inextinguishable even by that dense unconsciousness of any spiritual self within which obscures our outward nature. It is a flame born out of the Divine and luminous inhabitant of the Ignorance, grows in it till it is able to turn it towards the knowledge. It is the concealed Witness and Control, the hidden guide, the daemon of Socrates, the inner light or inner voice of the mystic. It is that which endures and is imperishable in us from birth to birth, untouched by death, decay or corruption, an indestructible spark of the Divine. Not the unborn Self or Atman, for the Self even is presiding over the existence of the individual is aware always of its universality and transcendence, it is yet its deputy in the forms of Nature, the individual soul, caitya purusa, supporting mind, life and body, standing behind the mental, the vital, ~~the subtle-physical being in us and watching and profiting~~ by their development and experience.⁵⁸

The soul is that which is the core of man, that which is the real of man and because it is the real it is that which is reborn. The belief in the birth of an ascending soul into human form and its rebirth, without which evolution cannot complete itself, rests on the basis of the progressive transit of the soul into higher and higher grades of the earthly existence. Once the human level has been reached, rebirth takes place, which is necessary for the growth of the soul. This is because one brief human life upon earth is insufficient for the

⁵⁷ Misra, Integral Advaitism, p. 303.

⁵⁸ Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 207.

evolutionary purpose.⁵⁹ Under the aspect of rebirth viewed under evolution life becomes a progressive ascending series for the unfolding of the Spirit. It acquires a supreme significance because with rebirth the way of the Spirit in its power is justified. Aurobindo sees rebirth as the sum of works of a large spiritual Will and Wisdom in which the human soul and the cosmic spirit look into each other's eyes with a noble and divine meaning.⁶⁰

Mind

The first instant of the coming of man into the world probably developed from a species or genus of animal being.⁶¹ This animal being was preparing for human birth through the activity of the spirit within, building upon the frame of matter and life and a lower and less evolved form of psyche. Human birth is a place at which the soul must arrive in a long succession of rebirths. In fact the soul has passed through the whole chain that life has strung in the physical universe on the basis of the body or the physical principle.⁶²

Man today is a complex creation. In fact he is the most complex creature that has been created. He is the richest in content of consciousness; he is the head of the earthly creation, but he does not exceed it. Even as other creatures so man too has his own native law or limits. Man has a special kind of nature, svabhava, svadharma,

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 709.

⁶⁰ Sri Aurobindo, The Problem of Rebirth, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1952), p. 52.

⁶¹ Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 746.

⁶² Ibid., p. 678.

within whose limits he can extend and develop.⁶³ Aurobindo observes:

. . . in Nature each of us has a principle and will of our own becoming; each soul is a force of self-consciousness that formulates an idea of the Divine in it and guides by that its action and evolution, its progressive self-finding, its constant varying self-expression, its apparently uncertain but secretly inevitable growth to fullness. That is our Swabhava, our own real nature; that is our truth of being which is finding now only a constant partial expression in our various becoming in the world. The law of action determined by this Swabhava is our right law of self-shaping, function, working, our Swadharma.⁶⁴

Man cannot however, go outside his limits because he is still evolving in ignorance and he must work in ignorance to go beyond it. Aurobindo states that, "Man has to work in the Ignorance, to learn under its conditions, to know it up to its farthest point so that he may arrive at its borders where it meets the Truth, touch its final lid of luminous obscuration and develop the faculties which enable him to overstep that powerful but really unsubstantial barrier."⁶⁵

In the process of overstepping ignorance man must go beyond the limitations of the physical mind because the physical or sense mind cannot understand supraphysical realities except when it is perfected.⁶⁶ In this process of perfection man gains a new knowledge. This new knowledge is given to man when he reaches the supramental. It is called the logic of the infinite and gives to man the knowledge of the logic of divine being. I will postpone discussion of this knowledge for the present.

⁶³Ibid., p. 749.

⁶⁴Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita, p. 476.

⁶⁵Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 437.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 579.

The human or higher mental phase of evolution has within itself three grades of human mind, to date. These are the physical man, the vital man and the intellectual. The lower phase of the human is the physical man or mind. The physical man is one who is an extrovert. He feels he is a creature of raw nature, made by nature and dependent upon it. For him there is no inner being or inner living.⁶⁷ This phase is the first stand of man because at present man still normally takes his first secure stand on the lowest sub-plane of the intelligence, the physical-mental. It can be called physical-mental because it depends for its evidence of fact and sense of reality on the physical brain, mind, and sense-organs. The physical man is he who attaches most importance to objective things and to his outer life; he has little subjective intensity or inner existence and subordinates whatever he has of it to the greater claims of exterior reality.⁶⁸ He represents most of the family of man.

The second and middle phase of the human is the vital man or mind. The nature of the vital man is adventurous, artistic, poetic, and champion of causes. The vital man is the man of desire, the kinetic individual who lays great stress on material existence. He strives for experience, longevity, life-power and life-affirmation. At his highest "he becomes the breaker of bonds, the seeker of new horizons, the disturber of the past and present in the interest of the future."⁶⁹

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 911.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 639.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 641.

The third and higher phase of the human is mind-plane of pure thought and intelligence in the mental world. These are the scientist, philosopher, intellectual creator, the idealist, and the dreamer. He lives in the mind and the things of the mind. As Aurobindo observes:

Thus to live in the mind and the things of the mind, to be an intelligence rather than a life and a body, is our highest position, short of spirituality, in the degrees of Nature. The mental man, the man of a self-dominating and self-formative mind and will conscious of an ideal and turned towards its realization, the high intellect, the thinker, the sage, less kinetic and immediately effective than the vital man. . . but as powerful and eventually even more powerful to open new vistas to the race, is the normal summit of Nature's evolutionary formation on the human plane.⁷⁰

This man of intelligence is not the highest in the evolutionary scheme. He is merely the point at which the man of the present has reached. But for us these three phases seem to be only psychological types that have just happened to develop. But Aurobindo assures us that this is not the case. They are the steps of man's evolution towards his own self-exceeding. I will now leave this mode of approach and the next phase of development for the moment to concentrate upon man's existence in the world of the present.

Man as he exists today is the driving force behind his own future evolution. But man is faced in this world with many problems that seem to be insurmountable. Man is estranged in his existence,

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 642.

he is out of harmony with his world and his nature. He is out of harmony because he is different from all that has preceded him on the evolutionary ladder. He is in disharmony with his nature because he has within his being the push of Sachchidānanda to exceed himself. Man is pushed forward because man, "not only turns his gaze downward towards what is around him when he has reached a higher level but upward towards what is above him and inward towards what is occult within him. In him not only the downward gaze of the universal Being in the evolution has become conscious, but its conscious upward and inward gaze also develops."⁷¹

Man is faced with the problem of right action or ethics because he is a free being. But this freedom is a limited one because even when the will of man is completely free it cannot act in isolated independence. This is because the individual being and nature are included in the universal Being and Nature and dependent on the all-overruling Transcendence.⁷² Man is under the power of his own becoming and it is this becoming that is forming the basis of future man. Because of his freedom he is an ethical being. The aim of ethics for the human is to prepare him for further evolution. The inmost aim of ethics is "to lessen and tame, purify and prepare to be fit instruments the vital and physical and lower mental life so that they may be transformed into notes of the higher mental and eventually the supramental harmony,

⁷¹Ibid., p. 638.

⁷²Ibid., p. 823.

but not to mutilate and destroy them."⁷³ In fact it is not only ethics but society, art, science, and religion which exist toward the furthering of man upward on the evolutionary steps.⁷⁴ But ethics for Aurobindo is temporary and a status of man that will be overcome in the coming evolution. Ethics, law and the standard, "has to be imposed on us now because there is in our natural being an opposite force of separateness, a possibility of antagonism, a force of discord, illwill, strife."⁷⁵ But in the further evolution ethics will not be needed because there could not be separate problems of an ethical conflict of good and evil because problems are the creations of mental ignorance. They cannot exist in a consciousness in which knowledge arises self-born and the act is born out of knowledge.⁷⁶

Thus as the problem of ethics ceases to be, just so the problem of evil ceases. Evil exists for man because he is still within the grip of Ignorance. Evil is the result of a spiritual ignorance which will disappear only by the growth of a spiritual consciousness and the light of spiritual knowledge. The estrangement of our being from others can only be assuaged by removing the division of our nature from the inner soul-reality.⁷⁷

For man to evolve upward within his own being and ascend through the three statuses, i.e. physical, vital, and intellectual of man he

⁷³Ibid., p. 637.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 612.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 885.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 884.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 562.

must be given the opportunity to do so. This opportunity is present in the action of rebirth and karma. Karma is the will of the spirit in action, the creation of will. What is in the will of being, expresses itself in Karma and consequence. That is when the will is limited in mind, Karma appears as a bondage and a limitation. But when it is infinite in spirit, Karma and consequence become "the joy of the creative spirit, the construction of the eternal mechanist, the world and drama of the eternal poet, the harmony of the eternal musician, the play of the eternal child."⁷⁸ Karma then is limited in its power over man. It is only a temporary state and exists as a process in the evolution of man. The misunderstanding of Karma and its power comes from the human who exists in ignorance. The human being is he who has the rule of reward and punishment as a social necessity. This was necessary in order to restrain harmful action against the community and encourage helpful action. But "to erect this human device into a general law of cosmic Nature or a law of the Supreme Being or the supreme law of existence is a procedure of doubtful value."⁷⁹ Besides, he comments, "It is not conceivable that the spirit within is an automaton in the hands of Karma, a slave in this life of its past actions; the truth must be less rigid and plastic."⁸⁰ The truth is that because of the exceedingly complex sum of the manifold experiences and many-sided actions of the

⁷⁸ Aurobindo, Problem of Rebirth, pp. 114-115.

⁷⁹ Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 724.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 720.

spirit in life Karma takes its place within the determining factors of material existence and ceases to be a single principle set against the spirit. In this way Karma has a place within the structure of rebirth.

As Aurobindo observes:

Rebirth is the continuity of that self-effectuation in the individual, the persistence of the thread; Karma is the process, a force, a work of energy and consequence in the material world, an inner and an outer will, an action and mental, moral, dynamic consequence in the soul evolution of which the material world is a question of the general and particular laws, the way in which karma works out and helps the purpose of the spirit in birth and life.⁸¹

The integral relationship of rebirth to Aurobindo's evolutionary framework has been pointed to earlier in this thesis. Suffice it to say that Aurobindo sees rebirth as a necessity for the furthering of human evolution. He remarks, "For the same reason that has made the human birth itself a culminating point of the past succession, the previous upward series,--it must be so by the very necessity of what it has to do by merely developing into humanity; it has still to develop that humanity into its higher possibilities."⁸² Rebirth is the negation of death, for the law of death applies to the outward, the transitory, material universe. For the soul, which is eternal, having once limited itself by concentration on the immediate world then experiences death and rebirth to seek its infinity. It seeks its infinity by adding moment to moment to store up Time-experience which is called its past.

⁸¹Aurobindo, Problem of Rebirth, p. 125.

⁸²Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 679.

Aurobindo states, "In that time it moves through successive fields, successive experiences or lives, successive accumulations of knowledge, capacity, enjoyment, and all this it holds in subconscious or super-conscious memory as its fund of past acquisition in Time."⁸³

The psyche is the most important part of man's personality for it is this part which will be able to evolve rapidly. In the inferior creature this part was not able to develop to the extent that it will in man. In fact Aurobindo points to a time when the soul entity will emerge from behind the veil of ignorance into the knowledge and become the full master of its own evolution. This means that the secret indwelling spirit, the God within, will emerge and undergo inner psychic changes that will give to creation a divine, spiritual existence.⁸⁴ For this creation to take place man must understand what has kept and hindered evolution up to this point. This knowledge can be gained by his own understanding of the logic of the infinite.

Logic of the Infinite

The logic of the infinite is the logic of the divine or supreme being. It is that law or reason by which the divine operates according to its own nature. It is beyond human reason and logic and for this reason usually appears to man as magic. But in actuality this magic is to finite reason the logic of the infinite. It is the reason which is

⁸³Ibid., p. 179.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 752.

contained in all the operations of the infinite. It is not mental or intellectual reason but spiritual and supramental. It is:

. . . a greater reason, a greater logic because it is more vast, subtle, complex in its operations: it comprehends all the data which our observation fails to seize, it deduces from them results which neither our deduction nor induction can anticipate, because our conclusions and inferences have a meagre foundation and are fallible and brittle.⁸⁵

This greater logic of the infinite gives to man the capabilities to understand partially the workings of the Absolute in evolution. The nature of the infinite can be realized only by the man who has attained supramental consciousness. But human material reason can glimpse this logic by trying to go beyond abstract nature. The more man goes beyond abstract nature the more he understands of this higher logic. This new logic supersedes all existing concepts of logic that man has realized up to the present. But Aurobindo does not want man to do away with present logic, he wants man to try to begin to understand the logic of the infinite. The reason why man is to keep present concepts of logic is because they are still necessary to deal with much of the world around us. However, man can begin to develop the higher logic in his mind and thus push evolution onward. The knowledge of the logic of the infinite is the knowledge of Sachchidānanda and its inherent power. This is knowledge of Ātman-Māyā, Purusha-Prakriti, Īshvara-Shakti. Aurobindo observes:

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 298.

If we look from this view point of a larger more plastic reason, taking account of the logic of the Infinite, at the difficulties which meet our intelligence when it tries to conceive the absolute and omnipresent Reality, we shall see that the whole difficulty is verbal and conceptual and not real.⁸⁶

Accordingly it is true that the make-up of the Absolute is beyond the conceptuality of the material world. We see that the Absolute, the Self, the Divine, the Spirit, the Being are one; the Transcendental is one, the Cosmic is one; but we see also that beings are many and each has a self, a spirit, a like yet different nature. And since the spirit and essence of things is one, we are obliged to admit that all these many must be that one.⁸⁷ He continues, "Again, we see that there is an infinite pure status and immobile silence of the Spirit; we see too that there is a boundless movement of the Spirit. a power, dynamic spiritual all-containing self-extension of the Infinite."⁸⁸ And again, "One conception of the Infinite is formlessness, but everywhere we see form and forms surrounding us and it can be and is affirmed of the Divine Being that he is at once Form and the Formless."⁸⁹ The one and the many, immobility and movement, formlessness and form are under the logic of the infinite different attributes or views of the Absolute Sachchidānanda and when man receives this knowledge he can look backward to the mystery of involution and look forward to the future of evolution and glimpse the cosmic spiritual evolution of the spirit becoming itself.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 301.

⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 303-304.

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 305-306.

⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 305-306.

In the knowledge of the logic of the infinite all of the past stages of involution-evolution can be better understood. The involution of Sachchidānanda by reason of delight descends into the realm of the inconscient. In the inconscient the appearance of the Absolute is in gross matter, this evolves slowly upward into the ignorance where each evolving life form receives a psyche. Evolution ascends to the mental principle which is man. Man then continues upward in the three stages of mind to reach the intellectual mind. This is the mind that begins to reach beyond itself and grows in the knowledge of the logic of the Infinite. Man grows in knowledge because he has begun to evolve beyond his spiritual status. The realization of man's spiritual status and his future evolution is in Aurobindo's view the truth behind man's spiritual evolution.

CHAPTER 3 VISION OF MAN AND THE FUTURE

Man's Transformation

Thus far in this inquiry into the evolutionary system of Sri Aurobindo we have ascended from the involution of Sachchidānanda into matter upward through evolution to man. Man, however, is in Aurobindo's system not the last and final stage of evolution. Man is the apparent culmination but not the ultimate summit. He is only a transitional being who stands at the turning point of the whole evolutionary movement.¹ Before man evolution was confined to the material and outer world; the turning point comes with the advent of man when evolution can become an inner or consciousness evolution. The process of this inner evolution is slow and painstaking in its own view but from the point of previous evolution it is rapid and less difficult. Furthermore man today has his existence in a world of bondage and to be fully free and follow his destiny man must undergo a radical transformation. He must be transformed in his whole personality. This radical change cannot arise from within but must be produced by the descent of the Absolute. The first change that will arise will be the conversion of man's present nature into a soul-instrumentation. In conjunction with the psychic change there must

¹Ibid., p. 360.

be a spiritual change bringing with it a descent of higher light, knowledge, power, force, bliss, and purity into the whole being of man, even into his lowest recesses and the darkness of his subconscious. When the psychic and spiritual changes occur they form a basis for the last change. This is the point at which the supramental must descend. The crowning movement in evolution is the ascent of man into the supermind and the transforming descent of the supermind consciousness into the entire being of man and nature.² The placement of these transformations within a system is represented by Figure 3 page viii. For these three changes to take place man must begin to bring about a change in himself. He can begin by trying to bridge the disharmony in his own being, and by this action bring himself closer to the Absolute. When man ascends from psychic to spiritual to supramental the breach between his being and the Absolute will no longer exist.

The first awareness of the psychic aspect of man's nature comes to him as a kind of awareness or comprehension of his soul being something different from his mind, life, or body. Man will feel the soul as a power in his life which is a sensible power. The psychic change is the first step up from man's level in evolution therefore the soul is not obvious to man's understanding. The soul is slowly known and eventually becomes better known by man which in turn raises man in the psychic transformation. Thus the psychic being within man evolves and passes through development and formation. The within of the psychic being finds

²Ibid., p. 793.

delight in life's experiences and can gather within itself the essence of these experiences so that life and mind can evolve through ignorance towards knowledge.

The preparation for man to understand and appreciate his true psychic being must begin with man understanding and appreciating himself. When the time is ripe for full understanding man will be ready, but before that time man must move through preparatory stages. The first stage is the growth of man's ego by his affirmation of himself as a unique individual. When he does this he will see what is beyond this step in his development. He affirms himself in ignorance in preparation for his advance towards Knowledge.³ The more ego-centered man is, the more his potential for future evolution. By developing his ego-centricity man will be forced to look beyond his existence. He will be driven onward to a time in the future, in this life or the next, when he will look beneath the surface of his ego to find meaning (the Absolute). Man will turn to psychology to aid him in his study for self-meaning. Psychology will help him to understand his ego, mind, life, and body. But he will find a physical explanation of his existence insufficient.⁴ He may be driven outside himself to Nature, to humanity, or to God. Whichever of these paths he takes, or he may take them all, he will be pushed to go beyond and understand himself. This will give to man his first feeling of the existence of his psyche. At this point the

³Ibid., p. 617.

⁴Ibid., p. 619.

beginning of "psychicisation" takes place. Psychicisation is, according to H. Chaudhary:

. . . psychic change of the lower nature, bringing right vision into the mind, right impulse and feeling into the vital, right movement and habit into the physical --all turned towards the Divine, all based on love, devotion and adoration--and finally the true vision and sense of the dynamic Divine (the Mother) everywhere in the world as well as in the heart.⁵

But even so this psychicisation is limited because it is in ignorance. Man must not stop at just an awareness of his psyche but must push on towards a new transformation which will be spiritual in nature. In this transformation man will become a spiritual psyche.

Man's second transformation is his experience of an inflow of spiritual experience: the experience of the Self, the Īshwara, and the divine Shakti. These give man the insight into cosmic consciousness, and the occult movement of the universe. Man is given a psychic sympathy, unity, and communication with nature and all kinds of beings.⁶ In this transformation the body, life, and mind of man will realize that their base is in spirit. Compared to the psychic transformation which was movement inward, the spiritual transformation is movement upward through ignorance. As Aurobindo observes:

For it [movement of evolution] proceeds by an awakening of the involved consciousness and force and its ascent from principle to principle, from grade to grade, from power to power of the secret Spirit, but this is not a free transference to a higher status. The law of action,

⁵Misra, Integral Advaitism, p. 304.

⁶Aurobindo, Life Divine, pp. 807-808.

the force of action of each grade or power in its emergence is determined, not by its own free, full and pure law of nature or vim of energy, but partly by the material organization provided for it and partly by its own status, achieved degree, accomplished fact of consciousness which it has been able to impose upon Matter.⁷

But even if it is just a development in ignorance it is a higher development than the psychic because the development of the psychic transformation has its beginning in a thought development where as the spiritual transformation begins in a development of being and consciousness. In other words spiritual transformation is growth and existence in the spirit. As man grows in spirit he becomes conscious of the truth of Sachchidānanda. Aurobindo states, "The fundamental truth of spiritual experience is one, everywhere it follows the same general lines and tendencies of awakening and growth into spiritual being; for these are the imperatives of the spiritual consciousness."⁸ This does not mean that just because man begins to grasp the experience of Sachchidānanda as one, all is reduced to one because the domain of pure spiritual realization can contain great diversity.

The spiritual transformation of man must give way to the next and highest transformation. Aurobindo tells us of this transformation built upon the psyche-spiritual change that will have taken place. He comments:

A highest spiritual transformation must intervene on the psychic or psycho-spiritual change; the psychic movement inward to the inner being, the Self of Divinity within

⁷Ibid., p. 629.

⁸Ibid., p. 789.

us, must be completed by an opening upward to a spiritual status or a higher existence. This can be done by our opening into what is above us, by an ascent of consciousness into the ranges of overmind and supermental nature in which the sense of self and spirit is ever unveiled and permanent and in which the self-luminous instrumentation of the self and spirit is not restricted or divided as in our mind-nature, life-nature, body-nature.⁹

Man must open himself to that which is descending to him to bring him to his consummation.

Man's Evolution

In union with the psychical and spiritual transformation of man the cosmic and outer aspect of man has continued its evolutionary progress towards fulfillment. This outer evolutionary movement is from mental upward through higher mind, illumined mind, intuition mind to overmind, which is the height of evolution in the ignorance. This movement is shown in Figure 2 page vii. These four grades of evolution beyond mental are grades of energy-substance of the spirit. That is, they are domains of being which are grades of spiritual substance and energy. They exist as fields which are levels of universal consciousness-force making up and organizing itself into higher status.

The first grade upward out of human mental intelligence is the higher mind. This grade has descended from the Overmind into the lower grades of evolution and its basic substance is, "a unitarian sense of being with a powerful multiple dynamisation capable of the formation of

⁹Ibid., p. 809.

a multitude of aspects of knowledge, ways of action, forms and significance of becoming, of all of which there is a spontaneous inherent knowledge."¹⁰

The higher mind has within itself two aspects, the aspect of cognition and the aspect of will. Cognition is thought-dominated consciousness. Aurobindo views it as a luminous thought-mind which is a mind that contains conceptual knowledge born by the spirit. It contains an all-awareness which originates from the original identity and carries the truths of that identity within itself. It is able to tap the resources of logic by moving beyond logic to the knowledge which pre-exists in the Absolute. It is a great totality of truth that is able to be known and experienced and it can if it chooses, engage itself in these forms of truth or combine forms to expand its knowledge. By this process it progresses to the next grade. But higher mind also includes the aspect of will. This aspect of will is that which "seeks to purify through knowledge, to deliver through knowledge, to create by the innate power of knowledge."¹¹ That which the will purifies, delivers, and creates is the new being, body, life, and power of thought through idea-force.¹² It wills this and by doing so, prepares the whole being for a superior truth of existence.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 835.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 836.

¹² idea-force: the word expressing the idea has the same power if it is surcharged with the spiritual force; that is the rationale of the Indian use of the Mantra. Ibid., p. 836.

The higher mind, the first grade in the ascending grades, is yet incomplete because it is an evolution in ignorance. It is not possible in the descent of the higher mind into ignorance to create the supermind. It is only possible to make a small change, which in turn may be influenced by another descent to attain a higher status. Thus the descent brings with it new potential and possibility for future movement upward in evolution.

The force greater than the first change is the second grade of Illumined Mind. In this grade mind ceases to be centered in thought and becomes centered in spiritual light. In conjunction with this there is the arrival of what Aurobindo terms "enthousiasmos". The centering of the mind in spiritual light gives to man a new process of knowledge, a process which is grounded in light but not light as man ordinarily conceives it. Aurobindo comments that with the descent and ascent of Illumined Mind:

A downpour of inwardly visible Light very usually envelops this action; for it must be noted that, contrary to our ordinary conceptions, light is not primarily a material creation and the sense of vision of light accompanying the inner illumination is not merely a subjective visual image or a symbolic phenomenon: light is primarily a spiritual manifestation of the Divine Reality illuminative and creative; material light is a subsequent representation or conversion¹³ of it into Matter for the purposes of the Material Energy.

Along with this descent of light comes enthousiasmos which is a greater power thrust of evolutionary development. This replaces the comparatively slow process of transformation of Higher mind with a rapid process. In

¹³Ibid., p. 839.

the illumined mind there would be total, dynamic fulfillment for the seer, the illumined mystic, just as in the higher mind there would be fulfillment of the spiritual sage and thinker. The first and second grades are partial fulfillments of evolution and must ascend to a third grade of mind.

The third grade is intuitive mind. This mind has as its basis intuition. This intuition is a power of consciousness closer to knowledge because it can look at something and identify its essence. But this identity is not to be confused with sight or conception as Aurobindo notes, "This close perception is more than sight, more than conception: it is the result of a penetrating and revealing touch which carries in it sight and conception as part of itself or as its natural consequence."¹⁴ This intuition is purer than that received in lower levels of evolution because in the lower levels intuition must be analyzed by reason whereas in higher evolution, intuition is pure and uncorrupted but still to be perfected. It must still be perfected because evolution is still moving through ignorance to knowledge. Even in the intuitive mind the possibility exists that its development may be hampered because it exists close to the supermind but not close enough to preclude the influx of hostile forces. These forces include the ignorance through which evolution is moving and the latent inconscience that still exists. Aurobindo observes, "The basis of Inconscience in our nature is too vast, deep and solid to

¹⁴Ibid., p. 841.

be altogether penetrated, turned into light, transformed by an inferior power of the Truth-nature.¹⁵

In its workings intuition has a fourfold power:

A power of revelatory truth-seeing, a power of inspiration or truth-hearing, a power of truth-touch or immediate seizing of significance, which is akin to the ordinary nature of its intervention in our mental intelligence, a power of true and automatic discrimination of the orderly and exact relation of truth to truth. . . .¹⁶

Thus intuition can perform actions of reason by a higher method than has yet been given. It has the power of changing the whole being of man into an intuitional mind which senses and experiences at a higher plane. It has power to integrate and it can push and be pulled upward to the fourth grade of mind which is called overmind.

The overmind's role is that of delegate for the supermind. It is the delegate who is working within ignorance to bring about evolutionary change. However, it cannot fully succeed because it has within its makeup limitations that preclude the possibility of its raising creation to its consummation. It is the highest power in the lower strata of evolution and because of this location it participates in knowledge more fully than any previous stage of evolution. The overmind is a bridge in the sense of its uniting the individual mind with cosmic mind. But its limitation comes because it cannot lead mind beyond itself, because for mind to go beyond itself the supramental must

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 844.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 843.

descend into it. Aurobindo states, "The liberation from this pull of the Inconscience and a secured basis for a continuous divine or gnostic evolution would only be achieved by a descent of the Supermind into the terrestrial formula. . . ."17

The Overmind is the culmination of the process of ego-rejection that began in the triple aspect of man's ascent. In the overmind the ego-centric attitudes are almost completely eliminated because thought originates more from above than from an individual body. Man participates in the universal knowledge to the extent that revelation is experienced as coming from the universal; man is in communion with the cosmic manifestations of consciousness, existence, and delight. The individual overmind has a great variety of choices, as Aurobindo observes, ". . . there can be many formulations of overmind consciousness and experience; for the overmind has a great plasticity and is a field of multiple possibilities."18 The overmind, as stated previously, is the last stage in the evolution in the ignorant. This fact is represented by Horizon B in Figure 2 on page vii. Horizon B is the line or point at which the Supermind descends into the overmind and brings it over the threshold to knowledge. Previous to this all of evolution was ascent out of the inconscience into ignorance. In the descent of the supermind into lower evolution all of evolution will be radically changed, a change both complex and intricate. With the descent evolution will

¹⁷Ibid., p. 848.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 845.

radically change to evolution in knowledge. Describing this radical change Aurobindo states:

This [evolution] would continue until the point [Horizon B] was reached at which overmind would begin itself to be transformed into supermind; the supramental consciousness and force would take up the transformation directly into its own hands, reveal to the terrestrial mind, life, bodily being, their own spiritual truth and divinity and, finally, pour into the whole nature the perfect knowledge, power, significance of the supramental existence. The soul would pass beyond the borders of the Ignorance and cross its original line of departure from the supreme knowledge: it would enter into the integrality of the supramental gnosis; the descent of the gnostic Light would effectuate a complete transformation of the Ignorance.¹⁹

Thus man would reach his destiny, which is gnostic being.

Gnostic Being

Gnostic or supramental being is that being which has crossed the evolutionary horizon into knowledge. Aurobindo maintains that with the gnostic change evolution crosses a line--Horizon B--beyond which a supreme and radical reversal of consciousness takes place. In this reversal the standards and forms of mental cognition no longer are sufficient for existence. Thus it is difficult for mental thought to try to understand or describe supramental nature.²⁰ Man's thought is based upon a consciousness of the finite whereas the gnostic consciousness is based on the infinite. The gnostic consciousness can view everything from the standpoint of the Absolute. In fact gnostic being is the impetus behind the act of involution which produces the spirit's return.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 848.

²⁰Ibid., p. 857.

to itself. Mental nature reaches for gnostic being because it senses this existence is veiled in itself. Supermind descends to each stage in evolution to give to that stage the necessary pull to ascend to the next stage. Aurobindo states, "[Supermind] can hold all knowledge in itself and yet put forward in formation only what is needed at each stage of an evolution; it formulated whatever is in accordance with the Divine Will in manifestation and the truth of the thing to be manifested."²¹ Just as mental beings take earth-nature up into themselves to change it so also gnostic-spiritual beings take up earth-nature that is ready for a new transformation. Thus the gnostic beings will form a race or community to augment their power so that they may draw up lower evolution. But before this can take place the veil between the inner being and surface-being must break down. When this has happened the process of the divine will be open to all to work toward a transformation of nature. The rule of the inconscience and ignorance will disappear forever and all will exist in the full light of divinity.

The advent of the supermind will usher in a race of gnostic beings. This race will be, "a hierarchy, a shining ladder of ascending degree and successive constituent formations of the Gnostic light and power in earth-nature. For the description of gnosis applies to all consciousness that is based upon Truth of being and not upon the Ignorance or Nescience."²² This race would not be a race conforming to single

²¹

Ibid., p. 859.

²²

Ibid., p. 860.

type molded in a fixed pattern. It would be a unity fulfilled in diversity. The basis of the individual gnostic being would be in the unity of the absolute, but his activity in the world would be uniquely differentiated from other gnostic individuals. Aurobindo holds that the key of the evolutionary movement is the individual. The individual is the one who first becomes aware of himself and is lead beyond himself to the one Absolute. The individual is the one who owes allegiance only to truth.²³

Supramental gnosis is in harmony with the divine and is centered in individual gnostic beings who are joined together in their essences. They are the beings who, "In the Self-existence of which supermind is the dynamic truth-consciousness, there can be no aim of being except to be, no aim of delight of being other than its delight, all is a self-existent and self-sufficient Eternity."²⁴ The gnostic life is an inner life in which there can be no contradiction between one individual's good and another's good. In fact ethics would no longer exist because the individual supramental being would act in conjunction with eternal truth rather than with systems imposed upon him from the outside. The gnostic individual exists in unity with his fellow beings because he has gone beyond the ego and completely understands his placement in the divine.

²³Ibid., p. 930.

²⁴Ibid., p. 870.

The gnostic supramental being is the summit of evolution, the consummation of spiritual return to itself. He is above death and is completely fulfilled. As Maitra states, "An earthly immortality! Here we have in fact, one of the most startling features of Sri Aurobindo's conception of Nature."²⁵ Even in immortality evolution in knowledge will continue. Aurobindo comments:

. . . there would be also at the summit, as the evolution in knowledge proceeded, individual beings who would ascend beyond a supermind formulation and reach from the highest height of supermind to the summits of unitarian self-realization in the body which must be the last and supreme state of the epiphany of the creation.²⁶

This state will be different from any conception that has yet been actualized. In fact it is beyond the West with its conception of superman and beyond the East with its conception of Avatar and Jivanmukta.

Superman

Superman is for Aurobindo another name for divine man. He states, "The animal is a living laboratory in which nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious cooperation she wills to work out the superman, the god."²⁷ The superman can be equated to supramental and gnostic beings and as such represents the culmination of Aurobindo's evolutionary doctrine. Aurobindo maintains that his

²⁵Maitra, Integral Philosophy, p. 399.

²⁶Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 862.

²⁷Ibid., p. 5.

conception of superman must not be confused with past and present
 ideas of supermanhood.²⁸

Aurobindo gives the honor of first casting the name "superman" to Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche is called the troubled, profound, half-luminous Hellenising Slav who never entirely understood his own message.²⁹ His superman represents the Titan or the "blond beast" whose arrival would not be an evolution but a reversion to an old strenuous barbarism. He is the antithesis of the Christian conception of the crucified God and is one who is beyond good and evil. In fact Nietzsche's conception is reserved for an elite group of men who will rule by brute force. This is the core of Aurobindo's attack on Nietzsche's superman. Aurobindo, on the other hand, views the superman as man turned into a perfect image of the Divine, thoroughly transfigured in every member of his being.³⁰

Turning from the superman concept in the West to the East, there are two types of beings with which Aurobindo's concept of the superman could be confused, the Avatār and the Jivanmukta.

The Avatār is he who has come to prepare the way for the next evolutionary step. Aurobindo comments, "The divine manifestation of a Christ, Krishna, Buddha in external humanity has for its inner truth the same manifestation of the eternal Avatar within our own inner humanity."³¹

²⁸ Ibid., p. 945.

²⁹ Sri Aurobindo, The Superman, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1960), p. 2.

³⁰ H. Chaudhury, "Sri Aurobindo's Vision of Supermanhood", S. A. Circle #1, (Bombay: Bazar Printing Press, 1944), p. 64.

³¹ Sri Aurobindo, Essays on Gita, p. 143.

In other words the avatār is he who works to usher in evolutionary change. He is a special manifestation, a divine birth from above, the Godhead descending into the form of an individual in the mystery of divine incarnation. He is different from the superman who is man integrally transformed into divinity. A superman is the divine man and not the divine as man. The Avatār and superman both represent the meeting of the human and the divine but the Avatār comes to lead evolution whereas the superman is the summit of evolution. H. Chaudhury commenting on the difference between them notes:

The principal function of the Avatar is to help evolution forward in its major crises, by bringing about a definite lift in the already attained level of consciousness. Ram-chandra was the Incarnation of Righteousness; he succeeded in establishing sattvic (ethical) consciousness on earth. Krishna was the Incarnation who constantly worked from the Overmental plane, and he succeeded in fixing the possibility of the Overmental consciousness on earth. The next Avatar would be the Incarnation of the Supermind. His primary function would be to bring down the Supermind, and make it a permanent ingredient of the earth-consciousness. He would come to carry forward evolution to a higher level, the level of Superman.³²

Thus the superman is that to which the Avatār is working and with the advent of the superman, divine man will exist in a community of beings.

The second concept I have mentioned is the type of being who is called the Jivanmukta. A Jivanmukta is one who has attained salvation while in this present life and has gained insight whereby no new Karma may accumulate on his being. The Jivanmukta is a citizen of two worlds. He exists in the phenomenal world and also is a liberated

³²Chaudhury, "Vision of Supermanhood". p. 77.

being who is above the world of reality. Thus it is that a superman is a Jivanmukta but the opposite, the Jivanmukta being a superman, is not the case. This is because, as Chaudhury states:

A Jivanmukta is one who succeeds in his life-time in exceeding the trammels of the physical, the vital and the mental, and in attaining the transcendental consciousness (paramarthic or turiya chetana). But having attained the transcendental consciousness, he makes no further attempt to assist the descent of the light and power of the supreme consciousness into the flux of evolution. Emancipated from the drive of desire, he stands outside the urge of evolution itself. Freed from the shakles of the body, he stops short of the supreme effort to turn the body, he stops short of the supreme effort to turn the body into a perfect image of the Divine or into a medium of the Spirit's manifestation in Matter. Enraptured by the ascending movement of the soul towards God, he fails to notice the descending movement of God towards self-objectification, and, as a consequence, misses the significance of the cosmic process.³³

The Jivanmukta is not the one who exceeds himself in evolution. He is not the superman because the superman is liberated in nature, not from it. With the supramental descent the coming of the new age will be ushered in.

The Eschaton

Evolution is proceeding to a telos, a divine telos which can be called an eschaton. Aurobindo makes this concept very clear throughout his book The Life Divine. As I have mentioned throughout this thesis, evolution is fostered and prompted at each stage of its evolution by power not only from the next higher stage but also from

³³Ibid., p. 71.

the supramental as an acting force of Sachchidānanda. Evolution in its essence is spirit returning to itself. In the beginning of mental development the Absolute comes to man as an Avatār who will push creation upward. Aurobindo, speaking of the nature of the Avatar writes:

. . . but like all in the divine world-activities a collective business, a work and the work for the race, to assist the human march, to hold it together in its great crisis, to break the forces of the downward gravitation when they grow too insistent, to uphold or restore the great dharma of the Godhead law in man's nature, to prepare even, however far off, the Kingdom of God, the victory of the seekers of right and perfection. . . .³⁴

Thus the Avatār is to bring immediate help to the human situation. He will help it over states of crisis so that it can continue to evolve.

Aurobindo maintains that man as he exists in the present and past has had intuitional experiences of the eschaton to come. He has seen the possibilities of perfecting man and society. He has had visions of the descent of Vishnu and the Gods to earth. He has talked of the reign of the saints, the city of God, and the new heaven and earth of the Apocalypse. But Aurobindo goes on to say that these intuitions have been lacking because they have not had the necessary knowledge for a transformation of this nature to take place. However, the possibility of this divine life gives us hope. He states, ". . . the mind of man has remained swinging between a bright future and a grey present certitude. But the grey certitude is not so certain as it looks and a divine life evolving or preparing in earth Nature need not be a chimeras."³⁵

³⁴Aurobindo, Gita, p. 142.

³⁵Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 434.

In fact the grey certitude is not certain at all because, "The supramental change is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of the earth-consciousness. . . ." ³⁶ With the coming of the supramental gnostic individual the eschaton will have arrived. The forces at work today make this inevitable because:

The dynamic side of the spiritual urge has not been absent, --the aspiration to a spiritual mastery and mutation of Nature, to a spiritual perfection of the being, a divinisation of the mind, the heart and the very body: there has ever been the dream or a psychic prevision of a fulfillment exceeding the individual transformation, a new earth and heaven, a city of God, a divine descent upon earth, a reign of the spirituality perfect, a kingdom of God not only within us but outside, in a collective human life. ³⁷

But even with the advent of the kingdom, evolution would not end but would become a more beautiful and glorious manifestation of the knowledge of the divine in which new vistas ever would unfold themselves to view. This is because the delight of the spirit is ever new and its forms are innumerable. It would be a constant miracle of the ever young infinite eternal. ³⁸

Aurobindo cannot go beyond the kingdom. Beyond this is what I have called Horizon A; it is unknowable to man and will only be known to the supramental gnostic individual. This is the reason Aurobindo places an or/if in his last paragraph of The Life Divine. He states, "[the spirit] would return to itself--or, if its end as an individual

³⁶ Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1965), p. 61.

³⁷ Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 753.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 947.

is to return into its Absolute, it could make that return also,--not through a frustration of life but through a spiritual completeness of itself in life."³⁹ Thus Aurobindo comes in the end to the Horizon A which man will someday in a higher stage of evolution, see as his future. Aurobindo leaves his reader with the knowledge that his evolutionary system is open, open to the fresh, new, and divine.

³⁹Ibid., p. 947.

CHAPTER 4 CONCEPTION OF MĀYĀ

Māyā

To understand more fully the system of Aurobindo and its movement from involution through evolution to spirit it is necessary that one understand his relation to his own tradition. This chapter will deal with Aurobindo's understanding of his tradition, specifically with reference to Māyā and Śankara.

The fundamental departure point of Aurobindo's understanding of Śankara is that he calls him a qualified illusionist.¹ He further maintains that Śankara's philosophy affirms a qualified reality of Māyā. That is, it has two orders of reality: one of pure being of Brahman which is absolute and eternal and a second of Brahman in Māyā which is phenomenal and temporal. He continues:

Here we get a reality for ourselves and the universe: for the individual self is really Brahman; it is Brahman who within the field of Maya seems phenomenally to be subjected to her as the individual and in the end releases the relative and phenomenal individual into his eternal and true being. In the temporal field of relativities our experience of the Brahman who has become all beings, the Eternal who has become universal and individual is also valid; it is indeed a middle step of the movement in Maya towards liberation from Maya. The universe too and its experiences are real for the consciousness in Time and that consciousness is real.²

¹Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 407.

²Ibid., p. 408.

The universe for Śankara is "unreal reality". Aurobindo argues against Śankara's Māyā-vada utilizing the classic examples of the rope and snake and pot and earth, etc. This then is Aurobindo's attack upon Śankara; but before I begin to review Aurobindo's understanding of Advaita it would be well to understand what Aurobindo means by Māyā. For Aurobindo the world, which consists of matter, life, psyche, and mind, is a progressive reality which will ultimately be raised to divinity. Māyā exists in degree in every stage of evolution according to the extent to which that stage is able to reveal the divine nature. The less it is able to do so, the more it participates in Māyā.³ In fact this participation is distinguished by Aurobindo into Lower and Higher Māyā.

Lower and Higher Māyā

The lower Māyā is that Māyā which man experiences in his everyday world. It is that which gives rise to disharmony, suffering and ignorance. But just because it is that, it has to be taken in and overcome:

The lower, present and deluding mental Maya has first to be embraced, then to be overcome; for it is God's play with division and darkness and limitation, desire and strife and suffering in which He subjects Himself to the Force that has come out of Himself and by her obscure suffers Himself to be obscured.⁴

Thus in the embracing one begins to understand that this lower Māyā is a veil over the true meaning of what man is. Lower Māyā must be

³Maitra, Meeting of East and West, p. 320.

⁴Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 108.

seen an "lower" and in relation to something which is higher, for even within lower Māyā the potential perfection of man exists. "The principle and power of perfection are there in the subconscious but wrapped up in the tegument or veil of the lower Maya, a mute premonition emerging as an unrealized ideal; in the superconscious they await, open, eternally realized, but still separated from us by the veil of our self-ignorance."⁵ The way to understand lower Māyā is to embrace it and in the process of this embrace, knowledge will begin to dawn. But as ignorance is the lower Māyā so also knowledge is the higher Māyā for knowledge also is only a stage in the evolutionary ascent. Aurobindo observes:

For there in the higher and divine Maya is the conscious knowledge, in its law and truth, of that which works in the subconscious by the lower Maya under the conditions of the Denial which seeks to become the Affirmation. For this lower Nature works out what is willed and known in that higher Nature. The Illusion-Power of the divine knowledge in the world which creates appearances is governed by the Truth-Power of the same knowledge which knows the truth behind the appearances and keeps ready for us the Affirmation towards which they are working. The partial and apparent Man here will find there the perfect and real Man capable of an entirely self-aware being by his full unity with that Self-existent who is the omniscient lord of His own cosmic evolution and procession.⁶

The difference between lower and higher Māyā is not a difference in fact but in degree. The lower Māyā shows itself as negation, disruption and difference. The higher Māyā shows itself as affirmation, reunion, and unity. But as the higher Māyā shows itself it also is only partial, for conscious knowledge, thought and mind, are transitional

⁵Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 199.

⁶Ibid., p. 196.

stages of the evolutionary ascent. Aurobindo states:

This distinction between the lower and the higher Maya is the link in thought and in cosmic Fact which the pessimistic and Illusionist philosophies miss or neglect. To them the mental Maya, or perhaps an Overmind, is the creatrix of the world, and a world created by mental Maya would indeed be an inexplicable paradox and a fixed yet floating nightmare of conscious existence which could neither be classed as an illusion nor as a reality. . . Mind is only one of His instruments in the descent and the ascent. It is an instrument of the descending creation, not the secret creatrix.--a transitional stage in the ascent, not our high original source and the consummate term of cosmic existence.⁷

Advaita Vedānta: Aurobindo and Śāṅkara

As I have shown in Chapter I (page 23) Aurobindo places himself in the Advaita Vedānta conception of philosophy. However, he disagrees with Śāṅkara specifically on the conception of Māyā and consequently with the rest of his philosophy. This is evident from his many references to Śāṅkara and the internal refutations contained in many quotes. He remarks:

World is Maya. World is not unreal in the sense that it has no sort of existence; for even if it were only a dream of the Self, still it would exist in It as a dream, real to It in the present even while ultimately unreal. Nor ought we to say that the world is unreal in the sense that it has no kind of eternal existence; for although particular worlds and particular forms may or do dissolve physically and return mentally from the consciousness of manifestation into the non-manifestation, yet Form in itself, World in itself are eternal.⁸

The reply of Advaitism to Aurobindo's contention that Śāṅkara is a qualified illusionist is that Aurobindo misunderstood Śāṅkara's

⁷Ibid., p. 109.

⁸Ibid., p. 95.

Māyā-vada. Śankara's Māyā-vada maintains that Brahman is the only reality. A follower of Śankara's Advaita position is G. R. Malkani, who in an article on Aurobindo's attack on Śankara, maintains that for Advaitism the world does not exist in time but just appears. In the beginning and end of time the world does not exist, but in middle it does appear to exist. It does not appear by itself but in relation of identity or tadatmya with its real ground or satva which is Brahman.

Malkani continues:

Brahman exists in all the three times--past, present, and future,--and the world only in the middle. Brahman is therefore its essence, or tatva. The world on the other hand, since it comes out of Brahman and disappears into Him, and since it has no independent being is only an illusory appearance and so unreal. Thus for Advaitism, Brahman is the only reality, and Brahman does not contain the world in any form or at any time. Even when the world appears, it appears falsely and illusorily, and it is not therefore really contained. Brahman is always pure and unmixed with the world. The world does not really exist in Him even in subtle form.⁹

Thus it is for this reason and others that Malkani disagrees with Aurobindo. He states, "In our opinion, Sri Aurobindo misses the entire sense of Maya-vada as it is understood in Advaitism."¹⁰

Aurobindo in his reply to this attack by Malkani would maintain that he understand better than Malkani the Advaitism of Śankara and for this reason has gone beyond it. Brahman for Śankara is static Being; therefore he holds the world to be illusion or Māyā. Aurobindo observes that this illusion is true but only tentative. He states:

⁹G. R. Malkani, "A Justification of Maya-vada and Sri Aurobindo's Theory of Creation", Reprint from The Philosophical Quarterly, (Jan. 1943), p. 109.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 29.

Therefore we accept the truth on which the philosophies of the supracosmic Absolute take their stand; Illusionism itself, even if we contest its ultimate conclusions, can still be accepted as the way in which the soul in mind, the mental being, has to see things in a spiritual-pragmatic experience when it cuts itself off from becoming in order to approach and enter into the Absolute. But also, since the becoming is real and is inevitable in the very self-power of the Infinite and Eternal, this too is not a complete philosophy of existence.¹¹

Śankara then is correct in his observation but only to a point. This point is in seeing only a partial truth, for if the theory of Māyā is carried out it causes more problems than it solves. Aurobindo states, "A theory of Maya in the sense of illusion or the unreality of cosmic existence creates more difficulties than it solves; it does not really solve the problem of existence, but rather renders it forever insoluble. For, whether Maya be an unreality or a non-real reality, the ultimate effects of the theory carry in them a devastating simplicity of nullification. Ourselves and the universe fade away into nothingness or else keep for a time only a truth which is little better than a fiction."¹²

Thus Aurobindo maintains that Śankara's Māyā-vada is correct in the first parts of evolution but in the evolution beyond finite mind it is an incorrect analysis of the Absolute. This is brought out by Aurobindo's analysis of the characteristics of Māyā.

¹¹Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 588.

¹²Ibid., p. 418.

Characteristics of Māyā

Aurobindo maintains that there are three essential characteristics of what he calls Māyā or Conscious-Force. The first characteristic is that of infinite self-variation. He comments:

As with the being of Brahman, so with its consciousness, Maya: it is not bound to a finite restriction of itself or to one state or law of its action; it can be many things simultaneously, have many coordinated movements which to the finite reason may seem contradictory; it is one but innumerable manifold, infinitely plastic, inexhaustibly adaptable.¹³

This is the aspect of Māyā which gives the appearance of confusion to finite reason. The second characteristic is that of self-limitation. "A second possibility of the Infinite Consciousness that must be admitted is its power of self-limitation or secondary self-formation into a subordinate movement within the integral illimitable consciousness and knowledge; for that is a necessary consequence of the power of self-determination of the Infinite."¹⁴ This aspect of Māyā gives the actuality of the Infinite Consciousness the ability of self-formation or limitation of the variation which is the first characteristic. The third aspect of Māyā or Infinite Consciousness is that of self-absorption.

But a third power or possibility of the Infinite consciousness can be admitted, its power of self-absorption, of plunging into itself, into a state in which self-awareness exists but not as knowledge and not as all-knowledge; the all would then be involved in pure self-awareness, and knowledge and the inner consciousness itself would be lost in pure being.¹⁵

¹³Ibid., p. 309.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 310.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 311.

Māyā contains the possibility of infinite self-variation, self-limitation, and self-absorption. All of these together constitute both lower and higher Māyā as viewed from the perspective of the Logic of the Infinite. (page 65)

Māyā then is only temporary and exists only while man sees differentiation in the world without relation to the divine, but when man attains the correct outlook then he can see Māyā for what it is.

For the Maya of Brahman is at once the magic and the logic of an infinitely variable Oneness; if, indeed, there were only a rigid monotone of limited oneness and sameness, there would be no place for reason and logic, for logic consists in the right perceptions of relations: the highest work of reason is to find the one substance, the one law, the cementing latent reality connecting and unifying the many, the different, the discordant and disparate. All universal existence moves between these two terms, a diversification of the One, a unification of the many and diverse, and that must be because the One and the Many are fundamental aspects of the Infinite.¹⁶

Māyā and Evolution

The relation of Māyā to Aurobindo's evolution has been implied in the preceding sections. We have seen the difference between Aurobindo's use of Māyā and his understanding of Śankara. Aurobindo equates his lower Māyā with Śankara's understanding and maintains that it is for this reason that Śankara fell, as it were, into qualified illusionism. But Aurobindo sees lower Māyā as a way which evolves into higher Māyā. It is to be worked through and when it is overcome one passes beyond it

¹⁶Ibid., p. 309.

to a new understanding. This new understanding constitutes higher Māyā. Māyā is made up of the essential characteristics which must be understood before one can further evolutionary development. Māyā itself is overcome by going through logical finite reason to the Logic of the Infinite and when this takes place one can see the One and Many under the conception of the infinite. This is another way of saying that the Absolute is both Being in the sense of One and Becoming in the sense of many. But only under this new logic can man understand it. This fact is recognized by R. S. Srivastava who states:

For Sri Aurobindo, Being which cannot become is not the Being of Saccidananda. The Being of Saccidananda is wider and deeper than that, and the logic upon which Sri Aurobindo rests his case is not the finite logic which makes an absolute distinction between Being and Becoming but in which Being and Becoming can both co-exist without any contradiction. . . Sri Aurobindo has made very clear that none of our logical categories are applicable, in the form in which we use them, to Saccidananda. His Being is certainly one which embraces Becoming. Both are, in fact, different poises of Saccidananda.¹⁷

The Logic of the Infinite gives understanding of the Infinite. This understanding is inherent in Aurobindo's whole system. With regard to the relation of world to the Infinite Aurobindo notes that in point of fact the Infinite does not create but rather manifests what it is in its own essence. The Absolute neither creates nor is it created but is Being becoming in form and movement what it is already insubstance and status.¹⁸ This understanding makes us aware of the Absolute as One.

¹⁷ R. S. Srivastava, Theories of Evolution, p. 332.

¹⁸ Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 302.

He continues, "We see that the Absolute, the Self, the Divine, the Spirit, the Being is One; the Transcendental is one, the Cosmic in one: but we see also that beings are many and each has a self, a spirit, a like yet different nature."¹⁹ Thus in the Logic of the Infinite, Māyā as ignorance and illusion is left behind and man sees that there is no opposition between Being and Becoming or the One and the Many.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 304.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION: ESCHATON AND DIVINIZATION

Fundamental Basis of Aurobindo's Evolution

In the preceeding pages I have presented Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary doctrine. This doctrine was briefly compared to some systems of Western and Eastern thought. Then I presented the special view that Aurobindo's evolutionary methodology entails. This is the view, as I stated in the Introduction, of going back to the resources of consciousness to draw upon the rich storehouse of knowledge existing in consciousness in order to form a higher truth than has heretofore been realized.

This truth which Aurobindo has recovered from the resources of consciousness is Saccidānanda or Infinite Oneness. This is the unity behind apparent division. He observes:

Apparent division can never erect itself into a real separateness; there is supporting and overriding it an indivisible unity which division itself cannot divide. This fundamental world-fact of ego and apparent division and their separative workings in the world existence is no denial of the Divine Nature of unity and indivisible being; they are the surface results of an infinite multiplicity which is a power of the infinite Oneness.¹

But because there is only an apparent division this is not to say that the world is not actual for it is only by affirming the world as actual

¹Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 362.

that one can arrive at the solution to the problems of existence.

A real solution of existence can only stand upon a truth that accounts for our existence and world-existence, reconciles their truth, their right relation and the truth of their relation to whatever transcendent Reality is the source of everything. But this implies some reality of individual and cosmos, some true relation of the One Existence and all existences, of relative experience and of the Absolute.²

This is in fact another way of affirming the necessity of the individual and his existence as being a part of a greater scheme that has yet to be unfolded. It is just because of the individual and his existence that true divinization can be taken up and fostered. For,

Earth-life is not a lapse into the mire of something undivine, vain and miserable, offered by some Power to itself as a spectacle or to the embodied soul as a thing to be suffered and then cast away from it: it is the scene of the evolutionary unfolding of the being which moves towards the revelation of a supreme spiritual light and power and joy and oneness, but includes in it also the manifold diversity of the self-achieving spirit.³

Also,

The immense importance of the individual being, 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.⁴

Aurobindo then arrives at his insight into the nature of man as the being who is becoming through evolution that which is inherent in himself, namely, infinite consciousness. He observes:

²Ibid., p. 419.

³Ibid., p. 606.

⁴Ibid., p. 673.

Therefore the only final goal possible is the emergence of the infinite consciousness in the individual; it is his recovery of the truth of himself by self-knowledge and by self-realisation, the truth of the Infinite in being, the Infinite in consciousness, the Infinite in delight repossessed as his own Self and Reality of which the finite is only a mask and an instrument for various expression.⁵

Thus we can see that the culmination of Aurobindo's evolution in an eschaton is present from involution which is the starting point of evolution, through matter to the summit of Spirit.⁶

Evolution

The conception of evolution in the West is closely associated with the character of language, for evolutionary theory uses a linear view of history. This is somewhat different from the character of language in the East. This different character of language has been commented on by Dr. J. G. Arapura. He states:

. . . the Hindu theory of how language expresses reality gives language a cyclic character, while the Western theory gives it a linear character. The distribution of the primary terms under the respective captions of "cyclic" and "linear" will make sense. Terms like Brahman, Atman, Maya, purusa, dharma, Vidya, nirvana, satyam, etc. will come under the cyclic; while terms like God, Being, World, person (man), order, thought, salvation, alethia, etc., will come under the linear.⁷

From this point of departure the East, as cyclic, expresses the concept of return to itself as opposed to the West which expresses the

⁵Ibid., p. 106.

⁶Ibid., p. 591.

⁷J. G. Arapura, "Language and Phenomena", Annual Proceedings of the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion, (June 1969), p. 19.

linear concept of history as progress. This concept of history as progress has arisen from Christianity. As K. Löwith observes:

True, modern historical consciousness has discarded the Christian faith in a central event of absolute relevance yet it maintains its logical antecedents and consequences, viz., the past as preparation and the future as consummation, thus reducing the history of salvation to the impersonal teleology of a progressive evolution in which every present stage is the fulfillment of past preparations. Transformed into a secular theory of progress, the scheme of the history of salvation could seem to be natural and demonstrable.⁸

Thus progressive evolution can be seen as a transformation of the history of Salvation. The history of salvation is centered in the teaching of Jesus. The teaching of Jesus was the teaching concerning the Kingdom of God, as N. Perrin states:

The central aspect of the teaching of Jesus was that concerning the Kingdom of God. Of this there can be no doubt and today no scholar does, in fact, doubt it. Jesus appeared as one who proclaimed the Kingdom; all else in his message and ministry serves a function in relation to that proclamation and derives its meaning from it.⁹

With reference to the synoptic tradition he observes:

According to the evidence of the synoptic tradition, therefore, Jesus may be said to use "kingdom of God" in two ways, both derived from the eschatological expectation which begins in prophecy and continues through apocalyptic: he uses it in reference to God's decisive intervention in history and human experience and he uses it in reference to that state secured for the redeemed by this intervention.¹⁰

Thus Jesus as the proclaimer of the Kingdom of God becomes the referent point of progressive evolution within the West.

⁸K. Löwith, Meaning in History, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 186.

⁹N. Perrin, Rediscovering the Teachings of Jesus, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967), p. 55.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 60.

Aurobindo maintains that his philosophic system goes beyond the East or the West. In fact, within his system he feels there is no essential difference between them. There are differences of course, but these are only the results of man's misunderstanding of the logic of the infinite. In commenting upon the phenomena of the Christ incarnation he observes:

This seems to be the inner doctrine of the Christian incarnation; in its Trinity the Father is above in this inner Heaven; the Son or Supreme Prakriti become Jiva of the Gita descends as the divine Man upon earth, in the mortal body; the Holy Spirit, pure Self, Brahmic consciousness is that which makes them one and that also in which they communicate; for we hear of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus and it is the same descent which brings down the powers of the higher consciousness into the simple humanity of the Apostles.¹¹

For Aurobindo Christ the Son is in unity with the Father and the Spirit; they are essentially one.

Aurobindo has been shown to speak of Gnostic Supramental Nature as the time of the new heaven and earth or the Kingdom of God. But this kingdom of his is based upon sources other than the Christian conception. Aurobindo bases his upon an evolutionary teleology grounded upon the Absolute or Sachchidānanda (page 48). Sachchidānanda is the basis of evolution and because of this Aurobindo maintains that the kingdom of God will be manifest as man's eschaton in an evolutionary ascent towards divine life.

¹¹ Aurobindo, Gita., p. 147.

Divine Life

The ultimate meaning and eschaton of man is to become divine. This is the central teaching of Sri Aurobindo as is evident from the title of his magnum opus The Life Divine. But it is not an end in the sense of destruction; it is rather the culmination point at which man will be fulfilled. The whole evolutionary theory of Aurobindo then is meaningless without man attaining his necessary summit. He does not preclude, however, the fact that man may be destroyed for he states:

Unless therefore the race is to fall by the wayside and leave the victory to other and new creations of the eager travailing Mother, it must aspire to this ascent, conducted indeed through love, mental illumination and the vital urge to possession and self-giving, but leading beyond to the supramental unity which transcends and fulfills them; in the founding of human life upon the supramental realisation of conscious unity with the One and with all in our being and in all its members humanity must seek its final goal and salvation. . . . ¹²

But as we have seen, he does not foresee this as man's end and it has been pointed out that this evolutionary movement upward is almost inevitable. (page 88)

Aurobindo sees the new heaven and earth as the outcome, just as he sees man's perfection of his body:

As an instrument the body would acquire a fullness of capacity, a totality of fitness for all uses which the inhabitant would demand of it far beyond anything now possible. Even it could become a revealing vessel of a supreme beauty and bliss,--casting the beauty of the light of the spirit suffusing and radiation from it as a lamp reflects and diffuses the luminosity of its indwelling flame, carrying in itself the beatitude of the spirit,

¹²Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 200.

its joy of the seeing mind, its joy of life and spiritual happiness, the joy of Matter released into a spiritual consciousness and thrilled with a constant ecstasy. This would be the total perfection of the spiritualised body.¹³

Nature, world, and man's divinization is then the intention of the involution of the Absolute into gross matter. This overview of creation and fulfillment is known by working through our present stages to the logic of the infinite.

But even with the attainment of this eschaton or end, man as the divine being will not be completed but will remain recognizable for,

The new type, the divine body, must continue the already developed evolutionary form; there must be a continuation from the type Nature has all along been developing, a continuity from the human to the divine body, no breaking away to something unrecognisable but a high sequel to what has already been achieved and in part perfected. The human body has in its parts and instruments that have been sufficiently evolved to serve the divine life; these have to survive in their form, though they must be still further perfected, their limitations of range and use removed, their liability to defect and malady and impairment eliminated, their capacities of cognition and dynamic action carried beyond the present limits.¹⁴

Thus Aurobindo's evolution is a view of the divine in man and in the world. It is an attempt to go beyond the problems that confront philosophy and religion with a new and fuller view of the questions regarding the meaning of man and his relation to the world and the Absolute.

¹³ Sri Aurobindo, The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1952), p. 33.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 72.

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