Sri Aurobindo: An Integrated Theory of Individual and Historical Transformation

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INTRODUCTION

SRI AUROBINDO’S account of individual and historical progress presupposes the discipline of Integral Yoga, a hierarchical and evolutionary metaphysics, and a richly detailed vision of historical progress. Accordingly, this paper aims to establish that the significance of Sri Aurobindo’s Purna or Integral Yoga lies in its emphasis on social and historical dimensions of self-discipline; secondly, that this discipline is the instrument by which man is to ascend progressively from the physical through the mental and psychical to the Supramental levels of Reality; thirdly, that Sri Aurobindo’s theory of history, particularly his vision of an emerging Spiritual Age, is based on the assumption that history progresses according to a double movement—by man’s ascent to progressively higher levels of consciousness and by the descent of these levels into the lower levels. Throughout, Sri Aurobindo is working with three elements, each of which is the primary concern of a major work: Synthesis of Yoga treats the kinds of disciplines and their place in his synthetic or Integral Yoga; The Life Divine describes the levels of reality and the dynamic relation between them; and The Human Cycle develops a theory of historical progress based on Integral Yoga and the ascent to higher levels of consciousness.

After a brief introduction to Sri Aurobindo’s formation with respect to his yoga system, his metaphysics and conception of history, the remainder of the paper will develop each of these elements. Throughout, these three elements are developed in such a way as to enable the reader unfamiliar with Sri Aurobindo’s writings to perceive the coherence of his entire system on its own terms. In order to serve as an introduction for the accompanying articles on specific aspects
of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, metaphysics, and theory of history, this article includes an unusual amount of primary material, and is less concerned with the limitations than with the sources, coherence, and possible implications of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy.

The Formation of Political and Spiritual Ideas

While the validity of an idea cannot be determined on a biographical or historical basis alone,¹ Sri Aurobindo's ideas on yoga, existence, and evolution are rendered intelligible when placed in the personal and cultural contexts from which they derived. Of the many relevant episodes which affected Sri Aurobindo's growth, the most revealing was the year he spent in the Alipore Jail, 1908-09, while waiting trial for conspiracy. The particular emphasises which later characterized his yoga experience and its systematic articulation can be traced to his meditations during this year. Although the positive relation of socio-political and spiritual concerns predate his year in prison, this year in solitary confinement made it possible for Sri Aurobindo to advance and redirect his yoga. It also provided an opportunity for the kind of experimentation so essential for a spiritual seeker.² This same experimentation carried into all aspects of his life, and his approach to politics, literature, and philosophy.

Because of his yoga, Sri Aurobindo came to see the cause of Indian nationalism as more of a psychical than a political problem. As early as 1893 he argued that the Indians themselves were primarily to blame for the continuance of British oppression: "Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weakness, our cowardice, our purblind sentimentalism."³ This growing realization concerning the dependence of the political solution on spiritual re-generation, which was in evidence throughout his years in Baroda (1893-1904) prominent during his years of radical politics in Calcutta (1905-10), was crystallized in the Alipore Jail, when he interiorized the Gita's teaching of selfless action as the way of fulfilling his role in the divine economy. The significance of Sri Aurobindo's rendering of the political situation as a psychical and spiritual task is that it

² Cf. Satprem, *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1968), p. 18: "India wisely sends us back to the direct experience and to the methods of experience. Sri Aurobindo was soon to put into practice this fundamental lesson of experimental spirituality."
reveals a pattern, mindset, or \textit{Weltanschauung}. The pattern consists in a combination of spiritual discipline, intellectual reflection, and historical vision.

\textbf{Yoga, Philosophy, and History}

In Sri Aurobindo's life and thought, the spiritual and material are inextricably related; ultimately, nothing is secular. Even his metaphysical system issues from his intensely spiritual or yogic experience, and in turn supports his historical vision. In this respect, Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is a function of a wide range of spiritual and historical considerations, all of which serve as catalysts for the philosophic enterprise. By his own account, his philosophical system developed by his almost reluctant reflection (\textit{darsan}) on his personal experience (\textit{swadharma}—or inner law). As he wrote to his disciple, Dilip Kumar Roy:

Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher, although I have written philosophy, which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry—I was a poet and politician, not a philosopher! How I managed to do it and why? First, because Richard proposed to me to cooperate in a philosophical review—and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse: and then he had to go to the war and left me in the lurch with sixty-four pages a month of philosophy, all to be written by my lonely self! Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practicing Yoga daily, the philosophy was there automatically.\footnote{Quoted in R. R. Diwakar, \textit{Mahayogi Sri Aurobindo} (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1967), p. 174.}

In light of Sri Aurobindo's manifest success as a systematic and original metaphysician, his disclaimer may seem irrelevant, but as an indication of his philosophical style, purpose, and peculiar status as a philosopher, the above text is extremely important. Essentially, his philosophy, and indeed all of his work, is as much a testimony to silence as to thought: "There is nothing mind can do that cannot be better done in the mind's immobility and thought-free stillness."\footnote{Sri Aurobindo, \textit{The Hour of God} (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1964), p. 58. See also, Satprem, pp. 33 and 47.} Though apparently based on yogic silence, Sri Aurobindo's
philosophy is nevertheless a fully explicit and systematic account of reality (including the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects).

Furthermore, this entire enterprise is both generated by and addressed to the problems and possibilities of historical man. Although Sri Aurobindo would not approve of this criterion, the fact is that by the pragmatic test of consequences, his philosophy has already proven its significance and, by virtue of its potentially positive implications, it will have to be taken seriously by students of philosophy and culture everywhere.

It is this shared conviction that is behind the organization of the present Symposium.

I. INTEGRAL YOGA

Yoga and Yogas

Most of the definitions of yoga include the ideal of binding the self to a spiritual world (i.e., Purusha, Universal Self or Spirit) and the techniques of control by which this unification is achieved. Mircea Eliade, whose Yoga: Freedom and Immortality is unsurpassed as a study of classical Indian consciousness, defines yoga as:

The means of attaining to Being, the effectual technique for gaining liberation. This corpus of means constitutes Yoga properly speaking.6

This definition is most applicable to the classical Raja Yoga system expounded by the Patanjali in his Yoga-Sūtras sometime between the second century B.C. and the fourth century A.D. Similarly, the definitions of yoga in terms of abhyasa (increasing practice) and vairāgyam (non-attachment) are more characteristic of Patanjali’s system than of other yogas.7 An adequate conception of yoga—one capable, for example, of encompassing the yoga system of Sri Aurobindo—would have to include the four yogas vying for dominance in the Bhagavad-gītā: jñāna, the yoga of knowledge; karma, the yoga of action; bhakti, the yoga of devotion or love; and dhyāna, the yoga of contemplation.


The last of these is clearly less important than the first three, but there is scarcely any agreement on which of the three, if any, should be considered primary. Radhakrishnan, for example, explains that “all yoga is one and includes the different aspects of work, devotion and knowledge.”

Sri Aurobindo’s synthesis of yoga claims to incorporate yet transcend all of these yogas. His use of Hatha and Raja yogas can be summarily discussed but his use of the Gitā constitutes a major portion of his synthesis, and, indeed, of his entire philosophical system.

In his masterful study, *Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo explains the status of Hatha and Raja yogas:

On the whole, for an integral yoga the special methods of Rajayoga and Hathayoga may be useful at times in certain stages of the process, but are not indispensable. It is true that their principal aims must be included in the integrality of the Yoga; but they can be brought about by other means. For the methods of the integral yoga must be mainly spiritual, and dependence on physical methods or fixed psychic or psycho-physical processes on a large scale would be the substitution of a lower for a higher action.

Although Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga includes a hierarchical scheme of yogic ascent roughly comparable to the eight stages or limbs of Patanjali’s Raja Yoga, he significantly altered the metaphysical or ontological context in which these stages are realized. Whereas the Purusha (Spirit) of Patanjali’s system is a non-historical, atemporal basis for individual liberation, Purusha according to Sri Aurobindo is a dynamic principle or Universal Soul which ensouls prakriti (nature). In the following passage, Sri Aurobindo explains the dynamic re-

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relationship between Purusha and man, the key instrument in the evolution of consciousness:

The universal Purusha dwells in all these planes in a certain simultaneity and builds upon each of these principles a world or series of worlds with its beings who live in the nature of that principle. Man, the microcosm, has all these planes in his own being, ranged from his subconscious to his superconscient existence. By a developing power of Yoga he can become aware of these concealed worlds hidden from his physical, materialized mind and senses which know only the material world, and then he becomes aware that his material existence is not a thing apart and self-existent, as the material universe in which he lives is also not a thing apart and self-existent, but is a constant relation to the higher planes and acted on by their powers and beings... His most important capacity is that of developing the powers of the higher principles in himself, a greater power of life, a purer light of mind, the illumination of supermind, the infinite being, consciousness and delight of spirit. By an ascending movement he can develop his human imperfection towards that greater perfection.  

Thus, for Sri Aurobindo, yoga culminates in cosmic perfection. This creative evolution is possible on the one hand because of the individual’s own effort to become an effective instrument, and on the other because of the creative force of evolution itself. It is the latter point which decisively separates Sri Aurobindo’s yoga from classical yogas such as Patanjali’s. In effect, Sri Aurobindo’s system encompasses and transforms Patanjali as Hegel absorbs and transforms Marcus Aurelius and Spinoza. Sri Aurobindo and Hegel share the stoicism of Patanjali, Marcus, and Spinoza, but the defining factor in both philosophies is the processive quality of their ontology. For Sri Aurobindo, the dynamic quality of nature is Shakti, or Divine Power. Shakti’s activity, however, is dependent upon man’s cooperation or receptivity—in short, on the discipline and divine-human encounter described in the Gitā and extended in Sri Aurobindo’s own experience.

The Bhagavadgītā and Integral Yoga

Although Sri Aurobindo’s thought is largely based on the Gitā, his Integral Yoga system adds a historical emphasis which is not explicit in the Gitā: Integral Yoga includes the jñāna, karma, and bhakti yogas which comprise the teaching of the Gitā, but Sri Aurobindo adds to these a uniquely synthetic and historically oriented
yoga which he called the Yoga of Self-Perfection. Similarly, he supplements the *Gītā* with an emphasis on man's active participation in the process of divinizing human history. Both of these emphases are characteristic of Sri Aurobindo's lifelong commitments and aspirations. His life and work as a political revolutionary and as an accomplished yogi are well summarized by his description of the Yoga of Self-Perfection:

These three elements, a union with the supreme Divine, unity with the universal Self, and a supramental life action from this transcendent origin and through this universality, but still with the individual as the soul-channel and natural instrument, constitute the essence of the integral divine perfection of the human being.\(^\text{12}\)

It is the third of these elements which distinguishes Sri Aurobindo's yoga system and historical influence: whereas union with the supreme Divine and with the universal Self are advocated by many religious and philosophical traditions (including the Advaita Vedānta of Śāṅkara from which Sri Aurobindo is at pains to distinguish his own system), the cooperation between the individual and the "supramental life action" is an entirely new emphasis in any yogic tradition. According to this Yoga, the liberated individual is invited to call *Shakti*, the Divine Force, into his being and life, and thereby work for the transformation of nature.\(^\text{19}\) A true yogi, then, is one who, like Sri Aurobindo himself, identifies his own liberation with the liberation of the entire material world. So far from being an accident of *māyā* (the world of appearance), action for the yogi is the instrument of the Divine Power. To the extent that man has gained control of his body, mind, and soul—primarily in accordance with the dictates of the Integral Yoga system—he is thereby in cooperation with the Divine process:

The divine Shakti will fill us and preside over and take up all our inner activities, our outer life, our Yoga. . . . And as the crown of this process she will bring down the supramental light into the mental levels, change the stuff of mind into the stuff of supermind, transform all the lower energies into energies of her supermental nature and raise us into our being of gnosis.\(^\text{14}\)

Further analysis of this process requires an account of the metaphysical system within which it functions.

II. Theory of Reality

Evolution and Involution

In his excellent short study of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, S. K. Maitra explains: "The fundamental idea upon which the whole structure of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy rests is that Matter as well as Spirit is to be looked upon as real." Maitra rightly shows that the exclusive emphasis on spirit at the expense of matter, characteristic of Vedânta and other Indian philosophies, is as inadequate as the Western philosophies which completely ignore spiritual aspects of experience. According to Sri Aurobindo, the material and spiritual are equally necessary aspects, or movements: as Spirit—and because Spirit—descends into Matter, Matter ascends toward Spirit. The order of descent is as follows:

Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss; The Absolute)
Supermind (perfect unity and diversity; dynamic aspect of the Absolute)
Overmind (plane between the individual mind and Supermind)
Mind (from intellect through intuition and levels approaching Supermind)
Psyche or Soul (the inner or true self; the essential self)
Life (vital, organic level)
Matter (inconscient)

Similarly, evolution or ascent reproduces in the reverse order this process of descent. Due to the process of involution, each level is successively transformed—but neither destroyed nor negated—by the level immediately above it. In the following passage, Sri Aurobindo explains the entire scheme and man's place in it:

A spiritual evolution, an unfolding here of the Being within from birth to birth, of which man becomes the central instrument and human life at its highest offers the critical turning-point, is the link needed for the reconciliation of life and spirit; for it allows us to take into account the total nature of man and to recognize the legitimate place of his triple attraction, to earth, to heaven and to the supreme Reality. But a complete solution can be arrived at only on this basis that the lower consciousness of mind, life and body cannot arrive at its full meaning until it is taken up, restated, transformed by the light and power and joy of the higher spiritual consciousness, while the higher too does not stand in its full right

relation to the lower by mere rejection, but by this assumption and domina-
tion, this taking up of its unfulfilled values, this restatement and trans-
formation,—a spiritualizing and supramentalizing of the mental, vital and
physical nature.  

Thus, when the living or vital evolved from matter, matter was in
fact transformed by the dual process which produced the vital. Similarly,
the vital and physical levels were transformed when they gen-
erated the mental level; the singularly decisive leap from living body to
mind, from animal to human, is part of the continuous process of
transformations. According to Sri Aurobindo, the next leap, com-
parable in importance to that between vital and mental, will be from
mind to Supermind.

The gap which currently separates the mental and supermental
levels can only be bridged by the same combination of human effort
(yoga) and the divine involution. On the basis of his own experience,
Sri Aurobindo argues that the Supermind will descend as soon as
man has evolved to the point where he can utilize the Supramental
power in accordance with the needs of the entire evolutionary process.
In the meantime, a lower principle, Overmind, functions as a kind
of bridge or shuttle, comparable to Plato’s Demiurge, between the
mental and supermental levels of consciousness. The levels can now
be explained more systematically.

The Triple Transformation

Although he perceived that his own consciousness was achieving
levels clearly above the mental, Sri Aurobindo had no illusions about
a sudden or total transformation of the rest of humanity. In order
for the gulf between mind and Supermind to be bridged, there had
to take place what he called a triple transformation:

There must first be the psychic change, the conversion of our whole
present nature into a soul-instrumentation; on that or along with that
there must be the spiritual change, the descent of a higher Light, Knowledge,
Power, Force, Bliss, Purity into the whole being, even into the lowest
recesses of the life and body, even into the darkness of our subconscious;
last, there must supervene the supramental transmutation,—there must
take place as the crowning movement the ascent into the supermind and
transforming descent of the supramental Consciousness into our entire
being and nature.  

16 Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine (New York: India Library Society, 1965),
pp. 603-4.
17 Ibid., p. 793.
Essentially, the first transformation is effected in yoga—or the discipline of “psychic-change” by which the yogi becomes an instrument capable of receiving and expressing the psychic force above the mental.

This psychic change is the first prerequisite for the gradual ascent of the individual to higher spiritual levels, and the descent of the spiritual force into the individual. To the extent that the individual learns to control or perfect himself as an instrument, he thereby functions as a “willing servitor of the divine.”15 But while this will make the individual a great yogi, a great soul must contact the dynamic source available to a disciplined soul in this presently emerging Spiritual Age. This is the second transformation—the descent of the higher levels of Reality (Light, Knowledge, Power) into even the deepest recesses of the individual.

According to Sri Aurobindo’s own spiritual experience and systematic philosophy, the second transformation is due to the descent of the Overmind; he explains that this descent was first accomplished on his “Day of Siddhi” (day of spiritual accomplishment), November 24, 1926.19 From that day onward, Sri Aurobindo assured his disciples that the descent of the Supermind was a certainty because the descent of the Overmind would enable man to raise his consciousness to the Supermental level and thereby pull the Supermind into human history. Sri Aurobindo believed that the Mother of the Ashram would accomplish this extraordinary task, and in April, 1956 the Mother did indeed announce that “the manifestation of the Supermind upon earth is no longer a promise but a living fact, a reality. It is at work here, and one day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognize it.”20 In contrast to the Overmind which can transform only the individual who contacts it and pulls it into service, the Supermind can transform the entire natural order. Although Sri Aurobindo did not experience the descent of the Supermind into the earth atmosphere,21 he apparently did experience the Supermental in himself, and in any case he was sufficiently in contact with it (after the descent of the Overmind), that he was able to offer the following lengthy account of both the Overmind and the Supermind:

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15 This phrase is a key element in the Charter of Auroville, the Planetary City being built by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s disciples.  
19 See Nirodhanan, Correspondence (Pondicherry, 1969), pp. 61-63, and Diwakar, pp. 193-94.  
[The Overmind] can unite individual mind with cosmic mind on its highest plane, equate individual self with cosmic self and give to the nature an action of universality; but it cannot lead Mind beyond itself, and in this world of original Inconscience it cannot dynamize the Transcendence: for it is the Supermind alone that is the supreme self-determining truth-action and the direct power of manifestation of that Transcendence. If then the action of evolutionary Nature ended here, the Overmind, having carried the consciousness to the point of a vast illumined universality and an organized play of this wide and potent spiritual awareness of utter existence, force-consciousness and delight, could only go farther by an opening of the gates of the Spirit into the upper hemisphere and a will to enable the soul to depart out of its cosmic formation into Transcendence.

In the terrestrial evolution itself the overmind descent would not be able to transform wholly the Inconscient... 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, bringing into it the supreme law and light and dynamics of the spirit and penetrating with it and transforming the inconscience of the material basis. A last transition from Overmind to Supermind and a descent of Supermind must therefore intervene at this stage of evolutionary Nature.\textsuperscript{22}

This last transition was previsioned by Sri Aurobindo after 1926, and announced as a reality by the Mother in 1956. Echoing Sri Aurobindo's account, the Mother announced:

A New Light breaks upon the earth,
A New World is born,
All that were promised are fulfilled.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{III. Historical Vision}

\textit{Individualism and Collectivism}

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of history, which anticipates the philosophies or theologies of history developed by religious thinkers such as Bergson, Berdyaev, and Tillich, contends that historical progress is contingent upon the ideal blending of the spiritually advanced individual and a spiritually receptive society. The problem, however, has been that the ideals of the individual and society realized thus

\textsuperscript{21} Nirodbaran, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{22} The Life Divine, pp. 46-48.
\textsuperscript{23} Mitra, p. 23.
far have not been sufficiently compatible to advance the cause of historical evolution. By tracing the cycles (or stages) of history, Sri Aurobindo recounts man's persistent but unsuccessful effort to develop a viable and lasting relationship between the individual and the collective. The conclusion of this survey is that man will not attain the Spiritual Age until he has met the following conditions:

A change of this kind, the change from the mental and vital to the spiritual order of life, must necessarily be accomplished in the individual and in a great number of individuals before it can lay any effective hold upon the community. The Spirit in humanity discovers, develops, builds into form in the individual man: it is through the progressive and formative individual that it offers the discovery and the chance of a new self-creation to the mind of the race.

Therefore if the spiritual change of which we have been speaking is to be effected, it must unite two conditions which have to be simultaneously satisfied but are most difficult to bring together. There must be the individual and the individuals who are able to see, to develop, to re-create themselves in the image of the Spirit and to communicate both their idea and its power to the mass. And there must be at the same time a mass, a society, a communal mind or at least the constituents of a group-body, the possibility of a group-soul which is capable of receiving and effectively assimilating, ready to follow and effectively arrive, not compelled by its own inherent deficiencies, its defect of preparation to stop on the way or fall back before the decisive change is made.24

When these conditions were articulated by Sri Aurobindo between 1916-18, he was obviously confident that man was at that time on the verge of attaining the combination which would usher in the Spiritual Age. Given his heightened sense of his own destiny and of the divine sanction of his sadhana (spiritual discipline), he was undoubtedly convinced that he would be an instrument in the realization of these conditions. His experience of the descent of the Overmind and the formation of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram immediately after are obviously intended to serve as a basis for the emerging Spiritual Age. In metaphysical terms, the Ashram and Auroville (the planetary city conceived by the Mother in 1956, presently under construction near the Ashram in Pondicherry) should be interpreted as historical attempts to realize the levels of “Gnostic Being” and “The Divine Life” articulated in the last two chapters of The Life Divine. Both the Ashram and Auroville, in slightly different ways, are striving to realize the following three conditions of “The Divine Life”:

The complete single development of the human being in himself, the perfectibility of the individual, a full development of the collective being, the perfectibility of society, and more pragmatically restricted, the perfect or best possible relations of individual with individual and society and of community with community.  

The historical expression of “The Divine Life” brings Sri Aurobindo’s work to full circle: the marriage of yoga and politics during his years as a nationalist and his four decades of sādhanā at Pondicherry were all informed by the ideals of the Gītā rendered dynamic, integral, and evolutionary. That ideal is summarized in the following description of the gnostic being:

The gnostic being finds himself not only in his own fulfillment, which is the fulfillment of the Divine Being and Will in him, but in the fulfillment of others; his universal individuality effectuates itself in the movement of the All in all beings towards its greater becoming. He sees a divine working everywhere; what goes out from him into the sum of that divine working, from the inner Light, Will, Force that works in him, is his action. There is no separative ego in him to initiate anything; it is the Transcendent and Universal that moves out through his universalized individuality into the action of the universe. As he does not live for a separate ego, so too he does not live for the purpose of any collective ego; he lives in and for the Divine in himself, in and for the Divine in the collectivity, in and for the Divine in all beings. This universality in action, organized by the all-seeing Will in the sense of the realized oneness of all, is the law of his divine living.  

Obviously, not many individuals, or their respective societies, are presently capable of this universal (equal or non-attached) action, but if Sri Aurobindo’s experience, and his accounts of this experience, prove to be philosophically valid and historically viable, progress in this respect can be expected. Further, the historical implementation of Sri Aurobindo’s discipline, vision, and programs, both at Pondicherry and throughout the world, would seem to be hastening the emergence of the conditions requisite for the realization of the Spiritual Age. Now that man “can proceed by a conscious self-transformation,” the evolution toward individual and historical perfection can perhaps proceed at an accelerating pace.

25 The Life Divine, p. 927.
26 Ibid., p. 913.
27 Ibid., p. 585.
The Supermind in Sri Aurobindo’s Philosophy

Haridas Chaudhuri

PIVOTAL TO the integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is the concept of the supermind. It provides the basis for his contention that such apparent opposites as matter and mind, nature and spirit, world and God, the many and the One, are two inseparable poles of the same indivisible and all-comprehensive reality. It also enables him to affirm that normal sense-perception on the one hand and the most exalted supersensuous mystic experience on the other are two termini of the same wide spectrum of multi-colored human experience. And finally it shows him the way to the full integration of the social, economic, political, scientific, and technological values of life on the one hand and the esthetic, psychological, ethico-religious, and ontological values of existence on the other.

A brief analysis and evaluation of the manifold implications of the supermind is the main purport of this paper.

THE SUPERMIND AS INTEGRAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The supermind is integral consciousness. It is the awareness of Being in its integral fullness as distinguished from the mind’s sectional or fragmentary cognition. The mind perceives the world piecemeal, section by section, item by item. It sees mountains, rivers, forests, and oceans—earth, moon, sun, and the stars—all existing separately from one another. It perceives the present moment in isolation from the past and the future. It perceives time in separation from space, and space-time in separation from the observing mind. But the supermind comprehends all the seemingly isolated data of perception as inseparably interrelated parts of the same cosmic whole.

That is why the comprehensive world-view as inspired by the integral consciousness of Being is called integral philosophy. And the art of harmonious living in accord with the supramental vision of integral Being is known as integral or supermental yoga.
Whereas the mind is dualistic or dichotomous in its thinking, the supermind is nondual and nondichotomous in its comprehension. In trying to grasp the nature of the universe, the mind creates such dichotomies as mind and matter, nature and spirit, and the like. As a consequence, the continuity of the universe is broken. Intuitively aware of this fact, the mind then proceeds logically or dialectically to reconstruct that unity with the aid of all manner of intellectual schemes or conceptual structures, known as metaphysical systems. But an intellectual scheme of unity is at best a very poor substitute for the undivided and indivisible wholeness of Being.

There are three reasons why the mind in the mode of conceptual understanding fails to fathom the indivisible mystery of Being. First, it is governed by the formal laws of Aristotelian logic. If nature is nature, and spirit is spirit, how can the twain meet? If world is world, and God is God, how can the gulf be bridged? Secondly, since the intellect itself is a finite product of the free creativity of Being, no wonder that it fails to rise above its own limitations, just as a man can hardly jump over his own shoulders. Thirdly, the subject-object dichotomy being ingrained in the intellect, it knows not how to transcend that dichotomy except by undergoing a radical transformation.

The supermind is nondichotomous, because it intuitively grasps the ultimate unifying principle of creative freedom (Mahāsakāli) which is one with Being. It is the self-light of Being itself dynamically present in man. So when man intuitively grasps the integral unity and fullness of Being, it is the power of Being itself brought to self-consciousness in man.

**The Supermind and Synoptic Vision**

Is the integral consciousness of the supermind the same as what Plato calls “synoptic vision”? There is indeed a striking similarity here, but also an important difference. Plato comprehends the universe as a whole in terms of eternal Ideas. The Idea of the Good which is the Idea of all Ideas is, for him, the ultimate unifying principle. But his logical idealism creates a new dichotomy—the dichotomy of facts and ideas, particulars and universals, existents and essences. Platonic philosophy furnishes no key to resolve this new dichotomy.

Hegel rolls all Platonic Ideas into one Absolute Idea by following the dialectical movement of categories. But since existence can hardly be derived from category, or idea or essence, whether conceived logically like Plato, or dialectically like Hegel, the dichotomy of actuality
and ideality, existence and essence, facticity and category, remains unresolved.

The supermind penetrates to the heart of Being and discovers the ultimate unifying principle of the universe in the free creativity of Being. It is out of the fullness of Being's creative freedom that both the actual and the ideal, particulars and universals, existents and essences, facts and values, emerge into being. Springing from the same dynamic source, they intermingle as inseparable facets of the same creative flux.

Is supralmental knowledge the same as Spinoza's vision of knowing things sub specie aeternitatis? Here again there is a striking similarity but not the relation of identity. Spinoza's ultimate principle is one infinite substance endowed with the parallel attributes of extension and thought. But substance-attribute is essentially a category of the human understanding. According to Immanuel Kant it is inherent in the a priori structure of the understanding. In the view of Bertrand Russell, it is derived from the structure of sentences composed of a subject and a predicate. "It is a transference to metaphysics of what is only a linguistic convenience." Whether an a priori form of perception or a structural form of language, the notion of substance-attribute is a human mode of apprehension. In other words, it is a logical or linguistic construct. So for Spinoza, God as the infinite substance is the logical ground of the universe just as the definition of a triangle is the logical ground of all its properties. The properties of a triangle are eternally inherent in its definition, but are essentially different from actual events or happenings in time. And the definition of a triangle has no potency to precipitate actual events in time. So also Spinoza's infinite substance has no potency to produce actual occurrences in the realm of existence.²

Spinoza's infinite substance can aptly be described as the lion's den to which all steps lead, but from which no steps return. It cannot account for change, movement, growth, evolution, generation of actual events, emergence of fresh novelties, performance of free actions. So Spinoza's knowledge sub specie aeternitatis provides us with a static picture of the universe in which manifoldness is an eternally determined structure logically inherent in the One.

Supralmental knowledge on the other hand is insight into the free boundless creativity of that nondual Being which is the indivisible

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unity of existence and essence. Change and evolution, growth and transformation, are the stuff of which existing things of the world of manifestation are made. Whereas existence implies a definite position in the space-time continuum, essences imply comprehensive features of empirical existents as apprehended by the human mind.

Sri Aurobindo distinguishes the supermind not only from the mind but also from what he calls the overmind. Whereas the mind is sectional or fragmentary consciousness, and the supermind is integral consciousness, the overmind is total or global consciousness. For instance, the overmind can grasp the material world as a whole, and appreciate the predominant role and function of matter as the basis and stuff of the material world, with such other values as life, mind, and spirit gradually evolving therein. But due to its lack of enduring experience and operative knowledge of the ultimate unifying principle of the universe, namely Being-Energy, it cannot eliminate the discords and divisions, the conflicts and contradictions of the material world. The supermind as the creative and transforming knowledge of unity-in-diversity can alone eliminate them and transform matter into a flawless and transparent medium of manifestation of the glories of Being.

The Supermind and Transcendent Wisdom

Is supramental knowledge the same as the transcendent wisdom of the Buddha and Śaṅkara?

The wisdom of the Buddha consists in the realization of the absolute Void or Nonbeing or Emptiness (Śūnyatā) as the ultimate ground of the universe. The wisdom of Śaṅkara consists in the realization of the absolutely indeterminate, attributeless Being (Nirguna Brahmaṇa) as the ultimate ground. In final analysis, both indeterminate Being and nameless Nonbeing mean the same thing. There is no determination distinguishing the one from the other. So the conclusion is irresistibly borne in upon us that the world of space, time, manifoldness, and evolution is more or less unreal. It is an unreal superimposition upon the indeterminate Being due to the operation of Ignorance (Avidyā), according to Śaṅkara. It is an evanescent, ephemeral phenomenon mysteriously appearing in the absolute Void, according to the Buddha. It is endowed only with some kind of conventional, pragmatic reality.

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SUPERMIND IN AUROBINDO

(supermind, satya, vyavahārik sattā), according to both. Hence asceticism or monasticism inspired by total renunciation of the world is the highest spiritual ideal of life, in the view of both.

Integral philosophy advocates a complete shift in outlook. Being is not only the ultimate ground of the universe. It is also the dynamic, creative ground of the universe. It is “that from which all creatures, are born, in which all abide, and into which all are dissolved again.”

So it is the all-originating, all-sustaining, and all-dissolving power base of the universe. It is indeed indefinable and indeterminable inasmuch as it is beyond all anthropomorphic images and forms, beyond all abstract categories and concepts of the human mind. But it is erroneous to suppose that Energy or Creativity is a mere concept or category of thought.

Buddha made the mistake of assuming that Being is a mere category or subjective mode of interpretation of the human mind. And so he laid stress upon Nonbeing, Void, or Emptiness (Śūnyatā) as the ultimate philosophical principle, as the ground of all that is.

Now, what does Nonbeing, Void, or Emptiness precisely mean? Does it mean a metaphysical zero, the absolute negation of all being? In that case it cannot function as the ultimate ground and source of the variegated universe.

Nonbeing, construed as the absolute negation of all being, is an obvious contradiction in terms. Every negation presupposes a positive basis of affirmation. When we say: “There is nothing in this room, it is empty,” we express our disappointment at not seeing any furniture or person in the room. But this disappointed declaration of ‘nothing’ presupposes our perception of the room with an enclosed volume of space or space-time full of smoke and smell, oxygen and carbon dioxide, ants and rats, etc.

Does Nonbeing mean the absolute negation of all concepts? That also is self-contradictory. As soon as we use the word Nonbeing, we are expressing a concept. Since the concept has a mode of being of its own, we are dealing here also with a particular type of being. So absolute Nonbeing is again revealed as a flagrant contradiction in terms. Human language and thought cannot get along without con-

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principle, but a functional difference that distinguishes the human type of existence or energy-configuration.

At the heart of human consciousness is also to be detected another remarkable ability—the ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood, beauty and ugliness, good and evil, God and devil. This ability for spiritual discernment, accompanied by the spirit of love and devotion directed to intrinsic values, is the essence of the human soul. But the soul, or what Sri Aurobindo calls the psychic being, is not a separate and discontinuous metaphysical principle. It represents a qualitative and functional difference that imparts unique value and importance to the human type of existence.

It follows that what originally appeared as the dualities of existence, such as matter and mind, body and soul, are revealed, in ultimate analysis, as different grades of manifestation of the same creative energy of evolution. The distinctions involved here are certainly not unreal, false, or illusory. They are very real and significant. But to be sure, they do not constitute any division, separation, or fissure in the heart of Being. They do not amount to any ontological discontinuity shattering the unity of Being. They truthfully represent qualitative and functional differences unfolding in the course of evolution to enrich life and to make the world so exciting and fascinating.

Be it noted that the aforesaid interpretation of the dualities of existence in terms of the evolutionary energy of Being is slightly different from that of Sri Aurobindo. Responsibility for this interpretation belongs to none other than the present writer. But it is believed that the above interpretation is a logical sequel to the basic position of integral nondualism. The essence of the latter consists in combining the undivided unity of Being-Energy with the acceptance of the value and reality of the world of multiplicity.

THE METAPHYSICS OF THE SUPERMIND

The supermind is not only the highest kind of knowledge available to man. In the writings of Sri Aurobindo, it also has metaphysical, mystical, and cosmological implications.

Sri Aurobindo maintains that the supermind is "the comprehensive truth-consciousness" of Being in its highest manifestation, namely, the Absolute Spirit or Supreme Person (Īśwara). Traditional Vedānta lays stress upon the triune essence of the Supreme Spirit such as existence (Sat), consciousness (Cit), and bliss (Ānanda)—Saccidānanda. The supermind as the vast truth-consciousness is the fourth intrinsic
characteristic of the Supreme.\textsuperscript{10} It is not only the fourth (turiya) from above, but also the fourth from below. It is above the cosmic triplicity of matter, life, and mind. It is the creative medium of manifestation of the infinite and eternal Spirit into the space-time world of matter, life, and mind. It is also the uplifting medium through which man can rise to attain comprehensive realization of the Supreme in its integral fullness, i.e. as the undivided unity of eternal perfection and perpetual evolution.

In medieval interpretations of the Vedānta, the supermind was ignored in metaphysical construction as well as in Yogic discipline. As a result, the organic and essential relationship between the infinite, eternal, indeterminable Spirit on the one hand and the space-time world of variation and evolution on the other was not adequately grasped. This gave rise to varying degrees of world-and-life-negating tendencies and the consequent exaltation of asceticism, monasticism, and mystical indifference to social, economic, scientific, and political values of existence.

Realization of the Supreme on the supramental level of consciousness corrects this onesidedness and inadequacy, and restores the balance of outlook. It throws light upon the meaning of the world-process and of human evolution as the unceasing medium of manifestation of endless possibilities inherent in the infinite Spirit.

At this point a critical inquiry might not be out of place. Is the supreme Being or infinite Spirit a substantive reality endowed with the essential attributes of consciousness, bliss, and supramental knowledge, and existing independently of, and prior to, the world process? If so, how do you know? What empirical or experiential evidence is there? Is not the notion of one infinite spiritual substance or all-knowing, all-blissful Existent a merely intellectual construction (buddhānirāṇa) transcending all authentic mystic realization whether in the mode of sāmādhi, nirvāna or cosmic consciousness? Is it not an unverifiable speculative hypothesis subject to challenge by other rival hypotheses which are nonetheless sympathetic to mystic experience?

The idea of Being as one Supreme Spiritual Substance is definitely inconsistent with the affirmation of Being as indeterminable. In this respect Buddha’s equation of indeterminable Being with Nonbeing or Emptiness is logically most consistent. The metaphysical notion of Being as one all-inclusive substantive Spirit militates against the anti-metaphysical mood of contemporary philosophy as well as radical

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., pp. 246, 291.
theology. Being as the ground of all beings can hardly be equated with any specific type of Being. Being as the all-encompassing medium of all existents can hardly itself be an existent.

Limitations of space would not permit us to go into any further elaboration of the above comments. Suffice it to say here that in the view of the present writer Existence-Consciousness-Bliss-Supermind (Saccidananda-Vijnana) is an excellent phenomenological description of man's most integral experience of Being-Energy, just as the "boundless blue sky" is a good phenomenological description of our perceptual experience of cloudless outer space. But it does not denote any infinite spiritual substance.

There can be no reasonable objection to the affirmation of the supermind as man's most profound spiritual potential. It is the cognition of Being in its integral fullness born of the total integration of human personality.

THE SUPERMIND AND MYSTICAL COSMOLOGY

According to Sri Aurobindo the material world (bhuh, anna) in which we live is not the only projection of the Supreme Spirit. There are broadly speaking, six other complete planes of existence or types of world as divergent manifestations of the Supreme. These are: the vital (bhuvah, prana), the mental (swah), the supramental (Mahas), the psychic (jana, ananda), the dynamic spiritual (tapas, cit), and the ontological (satya).11

In the material world (bhuh) in which we live, matter is the matrix of all existence and the nurse of all becoming. But other structural principles of Being such as life, mind, supermind, psyche, spiritual energy, and pure being are also present in matter from the very beginning in a state of involution. That is why in the course of evolution the other constituents of Being can become manifest and overtly operative as suitable empirical conditions present themselves.

Similarly, there are vital, mental, supramental, and other higher planes of existence-consciousness. In each of these planes the metaphysical principle corresponding to its name is predominantly active as both the foundation and the regulating agency. For instance, in the supramental world, the supermind is the foundation and overtly operative principle. Physical, vital, mental and other energies are

arranged and organized there in the light of the integral consciousness of the supermind.

Let us frankly admit that from the empirical standpoint the aforesaid theory of higher spirit-worlds is no more than a hypothesis which can hardly be proved conclusively. It is no doubt a hypothesis which can beautifully explain some yogic-mystical or occult experiences. But the same experiences are probably capable of being explained in other ways in terms of the known laws of nature without postulating any hierarchy of supra-physical spirit-worlds.

However, at the present state of our incomplete scientific knowledge it would certainly be wise to keep an unbiased and open mind, without slamming the door upon any possibility, however occult or mysterious. The doctrine of a hierarchy of spirit-worlds opens limitless new vistas of thought. They constitute fascinating new fields of research to which parapsychology and transpersonal psychology may direct their careful investigation. But a cautious approach would at this time posit them as emerging levels of consciousness man is capable of attaining on the fulfillment of certain conditions. There is no warrant for postulating such emerging levels of consciousness as eternally pre-existent supernatural planes sustained by a supernatural Deity.

THE SUPERMIND AS AN EVOLUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

In the view of integral philosophy, the supermind is not only a profound spiritual potential of man, but also a dynamic potential of the evolutionary impetus of Nature.

Rationalism holds that reason is the highest glory of man. But the last two great world wars and the increasing complication of international power politics ever since have shattered our rationalistic optimism. Existentialism is trying its best to come to terms with the absurd or irrational side of man. Psychoanalysis has disclosed the presence of the death instinct in man in all its naked ugliness.

But recent developments in depth psychology and parapsychology have revealed that in the depths of the human psyche dwell by side unsuspected powers of light—those of profound intuitive wisdom, extrasensory perception and egoless love—as well as the terrible powers of darkness and destruction. The rise of transpersonal psychology in our present day amounts to the discovery of a new frontier in our psychological knowledge. It acknowledges the importance of authentic mystic experiences and other value-experiences inspiring self-actualizing persons the world over. It is realized that without an understanding of what Abraham Maslow has called “peak experi-
ences," including the esthetic, the romantic, the ethico-religious, and the mystical, there is no possibility of gaining an adequate insight into the mystery of the human psyche in its creative richness. Such experiences transcend the subject-object dichotomy. They are not only mind-expanding, mind-changing, and creative, but also revelatory of new depths and dimensions of Being.

Empiricism affirms the Being of the world of sense-experience in which we live. Rationalism affirms the Being of the realm of Ideas which cast light upon the sensible world. Traditional mysticism affirms the ultimate reality of Being as the nameless, formless mystery, as the self-sufficient eternal. The significance of the supermind as integral consciousness is, as we have seen, that both the unchanging eternal and the evolutionary flux of time are equally real dimensions of the same integral Being. Thus the empirico-rational approach is harmoniously fused with the mystical orientation in the comprehensive outlook of integral philosophy.

In the view of integral philosophy, we stand today on the threshold of a new breakthrough in terrestrial evolution. Just as the fragmentary self-consciousness of the human mind one day evolved out of the matrix of animal consciousness, so the integral consciousness of the supermind looms large in the offing as the next emergent value in store for human evolution.

Confronted with the global problems of overpopulation, environmental pollution, possible atomic annihilation, the suicidal power play of international politics, etc., the collective consciousness of mankind is stirred to the depths. A process of anguished soul-searching and total churning of the human psyche is on. Out of this churning of the collective unconscious is likely to emerge a new planetary consciousness, the supermind, as a dynamic force in world affairs.

The integral consciousness of the supermind consists in the apprehension of diversity-in-unity sustained by the creative energy of nondual Being. So the new supramental age is likely to witness the founding of world unity without any violent regimentation of life and thought. It may herald the dawn of world peace without suppression of individual freedom and national self-determination.

The supermind, the unifying and transforming power of integral consciousness, is essential for the perfect integration of man's total being. As the creative energy of unitive Consciousness, it is also essential for the unification of the human race.