

**The Philosophy of Religion –  
Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity**

by Rod Hemsell

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## **PREFACE**

In 2008 we started our lecture courses, and each year we have given a few, sometimes four or six, and sometimes one or two, not very many, and they have usually gone for twelve weeks. In this way we have accumulated many hours of lectures in a fairly short time, and these have all been recorded and are available on our University of Human Unity website <[www.universityofhumanunity.org](http://www.universityofhumanunity.org)>. Most of my lectures have also been published in booklet form, and some have been presented on the website as on-line courses. I began with the Philosophy of Evolution, and I have done two courses on this topic, which came to about 35 lectures all together. This project provided an opportunity for me to develop a course in an exploratory manner, week by week, researching an aspect of the topic and then presenting a lecture, without a lot of planning or preconceived ideas about it, and the outcome was quite fruitful. So that is the approach that was taken with the Philosophy of Religion. Nothing was written from the beginning, and the subject was researched week by week for the lectures that are presented here.<sup>1</sup>

Some of you may have heard of the philosopher and theologian Raimundo Pannikar, whose work I have studied for many years, and it will provide a background for this study. I met him at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 93, where I also made a presentation on *Savitri*. I spoke with him there and told him what I was doing with *Savitri*, and he seemed to be very pleased to hear it, although he did not attend the presentation. Anyway, he jumped up on the podium for his lecture and declared: I am a Christian, I am a Buddhist, I am a Hindu. And he was. He was a professor of philosophy at the University of California and also at Banaras Hindu University for many years, and was a Sanskrit scholar with several PhDs, and he was a Catholic priest.

I also studied philosophy and theology at a Catholic university, where I focused seriously on the work of Cardinal Newman, who will also be an important resource for our study. He was a brilliant writer in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century in England, first as an Anglican Bishop at Oxford, and later as a Cardinal in the Catholic church. He wrote a famous book about the development of Christian doctrine. And I have found that the 'Christian' in the title can be left out easily, because it is about the development of religious doctrine, and all of them follow the same pattern. Newman was also read by Sri Aurobindo when he was a student in England and this had an influence on his work, as we will see.

This past summer I spent several days in a workshop with Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche in America, and he is an outstanding scholar of Tibetan Buddhism and a powerful Buddhist teacher, who is another excellent resource for our study. In fact I have studied Buddhism since I was a student in the 60s, and I have a friend who is a Zen Buddhist priest and scholar, who also studies Sri Aurobindo, with whom I have had many discussions over the years. So, in my experience, there are many resources to draw from, in addition to the work of Sri Aurobindo which I have been studying closely since the 60s. The choice of this topic is therefore not an accident. It has been a long-term interest of mine.

But then there is the message given by the Mother in 1970 which indicated that it is important to study

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<sup>1</sup> The Philosophy of Religion course was presented in 12 lectures from Dec. 12, 2013 to Feb. 27, 2014, at Savitri Bhavan in Auroville. They have been transcribed and edited into this text of 10 lectures in which I have tried to reduce as much as possible the repetitious nature of a series of unscripted lectures, for which I apologize.

religions as part of “the historical study of the development of human consciousness, which should lead man toward his superior realization.”<sup>2</sup> And in the *Arya*, where Sri Aurobindo began the publication of his major works, we find the platform for that project stated by him as follows in the first volume in 1914: “The *Arya* is a review of pure philosophy. The object which it has set before itself is twofold: 1) a systematic study of the highest problems of existence; 2) the formation of a vast synthesis of knowledge harmonizing the diverse religious traditions of humanity, occidental as well as oriental. Its method will be that of a realism, at once rational and transcendental, a realism consisting in the unification of intellectual and scientific disciplines with those of intuitive experience.”<sup>3</sup>

It will be my guiding thought, therefore, that what the religions have created with respect to truth is of preeminent value. Truth can be found through certain processes that have been developed by, and are common to, religion. The history of religion, in fact, contains one of the richest resources of the human search for truth that is to be found. There are problems that we are all aware of with the formalization of ritual and the rigidity of doctrine in religion. But Newman and Pannikar both make the distinction between the existential awareness and the belief system that accrues to and expresses it. The belief system develops over time, through many different expressions, that existential awareness which was referred to by Sri Aurobindo as intuitive experience. The theory of the development of doctrine is that the original experience is powerful enough to renew itself through many voices and seers over long periods of time in history. And that is really what Sri Aurobindo's work is about, with respect to Hinduism.

We can easily focus on specific truths of religion and specific periods in the development of doctrine in the work of Sri Aurobindo. But it makes sense, in the philosophy of religion, to take into our scope of consideration universal truths, and to discover that they don't belong to just one or another tradition, or to only one voice or another. They are truths that are essential to the process of the development of human consciousness that should lead us toward our superior realization. As Sri Aurobindo put it in an essay in the second year of the *Arya*: “The effort involves a quest for the truth that underlies existence, and the fundamental law of its self-expression in the universe, the work of metaphysical philosophy and religious thought; the sounding and harmonizing of the psychological methods of discipline by which man purifies and perfects himself, the work of psychology, not as it is understood in Europe but the deeper practical psychology called in India Yoga; and the application of our ideas to the problems of man's social and collective life. Philosophy and religious thought must be the beginning and foundation of any such attempt, for they alone go behind appearances and processes to the truth of things.”<sup>4</sup>

With these assumptions and precepts in mind, then, let us launch this exploration of the philosophy of religion with a certain sense of justification and purpose, and with the hope that we can discover, or rediscover, and restate truths that can positively enhance, and perhaps even transform, the meaning and quality of our life.

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2 The complete text of the Mother's message – Auroville and the Religions, is reproduced below on page 8.

3 *Arya*, A Philosophical Review, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1914, Frontispiece

4 *Arya*, A Philosophical Review, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1915, “Our Ideal”, p. 8

## **The Philosophy of Religion – Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity**

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### 1. Introduction

The philosophy of religion will be an exploratory study, week by week for twelve weeks, with reference to some well-known texts on the subject, such as the works of Raimundo Pannikar, Cardinal Newman, Hegel, and of course Sri Aurobindo, and many others. And I have noticed a pattern in the many lecture courses presented for several years, that there tend to be two lectures that cover a particular topic, probably because there is often too much material to cover in one session. That will be the case tonight, because there are some things that need to be clarified or to be restated more fully from last week's introduction (summarized in the Preface). For example, in the quotation from the Mother about 'Auroville and the religions' which was read and discussed<sup>1</sup>, and which remains problematic, she said, "We want the truth. For most men (and women) it is what they want that they label 'truth'. The Aurovilians must want the truth, whatever it may be. ...Religions make up part of the history of mankind, and it is in this guise that they will be studied at Auroville, not as beliefs to which one ought or ought not to adhere, but as part of a process in the development of human consciousness which should lead man towards his superior realization. Programme: research through experience of the supreme truth; a life divine but no religions."

I am hoping in this course to move beyond the context of Auroville and to consider the philosophy of religion as such, which means the truth of religion, whatever it may be. But this statement of the Mother is our starting point, and I don't think that she was talking about the truth of political science or the truth of agronomy, but she was referring to the truth which, in the history of religions, has led man toward his supreme realization. As Sri Aurobindo stated in the *Essays on the Gita*, "There is undoubtedly a Truth, one and eternal, which we are seeking, from which all other truth derives, by the light of which all other truth finds its right place, explanation and relation to the scheme of knowledge. ...Just as the past syntheses have taken those which preceded them for their starting point, so also must that of the future. To be on firm ground the synthesis of future knowledge must proceed from what the great bodies of realized spiritual thought and experience of the past have given."<sup>2</sup> Now what are the great bodies of realized spiritual thought and experience of the past? They are exactly the religions. So we have a distinction to make right at the get-go between spiritual thought and experience, which Sri Aurobindo said was the whole purpose of the *Arya*, his monthly journal – to explore spiritual thought and experience, eastern and western, through comparative religion, – which he implied was also the purpose of writing *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, etc. And he referred to that knowledge as 'religious and philosophical knowledge and experience'. So what was the Mother speaking about when she said we want the truth whatever it may be, and that it is somehow to be found in the development of human consciousness that belongs in that history known as religion, but "no religions"?

In a course on the philosophy of religion, the idea is that we pursue the truth of religions. And I want it to be clear that this is something of preeminent value, and something that Sri Aurobindo dedicated his

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<sup>1</sup> See the full text of the Mother's message as the end note of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (2010 ed.), p. 4

entire career to. So it seems to me that this statement of the Mother, which some of us were duly baffled by when she gave it around 1970, is meant to be understood in a way that is perhaps not so apparent, and it might therefore be a little confusing or misleading. It might possibly be a kind of “koan”. For those who may not be familiar with the tradition of the koan, and to help us put this statement of the Mother in perspective, I would like to read a passage from Zen Buddhism, by Maezumi Roshi, a Zen master who taught in America in the 70s. This is a passage about “koan” and it is a koan. He comments on a commentary by Dogen Zenji who was a famous Zen master in the tradition of Buddhism, which is of course one of those “great bodies of realized thought and experience”.

“What is that rootless tree? Dogen Zenji says, 'the cypress tree in the garden'. Some of you must have heard about this koan, 'Joshu's cypress tree'. Anyway, that was Dogen's first answer, 'the rootless tree is the cypress tree in the garden'. And he said, 'If you don't understand, I pick up my staff and say, 'This is it, the alive rootless tree'. What does the rootless tree stand for? We can say all kinds of things, such as freedom, liberation, even we can say it's Nirvana – not sticking any place. Easy to say, but how hard it is. The cypress tree in the garden.

“A monk asks Joshu, 'What is the most important thing in Buddha's teaching? What is the primary teaching of the awakened?' And Joshu answers, 'That's what it is. The cypress tree in the garden.'

“And the monk asks further, 'No don't answer me with that sort of dichotomy, the subject object relationship. Don't show me dealing with the object.' The monk looks at trees in the yard as objects. That's all we do.

“Then Joshu said, 'I'm not showing you dealing with the object.' Then the monk asks the same question. 'What's the primary principle of the Buddhas? And Joshu says, 'The cypress tree in the garden'. And Dogen Zenji says, 'That's the rootless tree'. ”<sup>3</sup>

And that is Koan. It is a way of teaching through stories and sayings that are enigmatic. And yet they are not enigmatic. They are very easy to understand. So this saying of the Mother about religions is like many sayings of the Mother we pointed out last week: No exchange of money, No politics, No property. No marriage, No religion. If we look around us, what we see here are all of those things. And then we have to ask ourselves, 'What does it mean?' after being here all of this time, and hearing all of these things. And we can perhaps imagine that if the divine force were fully evolved and we were swimming in oneness, then we would know what those things mean. But the fact that we are not doing that, leaves us with all of those things. And we should not be too surprised about that. But we also need to be honest.

I was speaking to a couple of ladies my age – so they have been around for awhile – at La Terrace the other day, and I mentioned my course on the philosophy of religion and invited them to come tonight. One of them said something like, 'Oh yeah, that's about what we don't need anymore, right? We don't need religion anymore. They've produced these stories like Shiva and Parvati and Ganesh, and then they get turned into idols that people worship in temples. And that's what the history of religion teaches us. We obviously don't need that anymore.' Now, she is talking about what we don't need anymore, and I am talking about the philosophy of religion. And I am reading in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that these are things that we actually need very much. We need to know, intimately, those spiritual experiences and that philosophical knowledge that actually belongs in the history of consciousness via

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3 Taizan Maezumi, *Teaching of the Great Mountain* (2001), p. 9-10

those inspired teachings. And we need to be able to distinguish between what Pannikar calls the existential awareness of something divine, and the doctrines and beliefs that attach themselves to such experiences through the historical development of religions. We need to be able to make that distinction. And when we start trying to make the distinction we are pursuing a line of experience in the development of consciousness that is focused on finding the truth. We are no longer thinking about those aspects of religion that we don't need. But the mind has a perverse tendency to make a negative judgment about something like religion, which we no longer need, and then to fixate on a strong mental opinion that seems to make us feel important and self-justified. Then the people with such opinions can associate with others who have a similar opinion and engage in ideological debates with others of a different opinion, neither of which may have much to do with the underlying reality, or with the understanding that we are meant to have. In this way the ideological identity and self-importance take the place of the truth, 'whatever it may be'.

So, the rootless tree..., the idea of nirvana, and the idea of the rootless tree... these are profound spiritual ideas that have sustained civilizations and had transforming effects on generations of people. In *Savitri*, in fact, *nirvana* is one of the main topics that recurs frequently and it is an idea that Sri Aurobindo gives immeasurable importance. But that term can also easily be put into a highly opinionated debate in which it is dismissed altogether or considered to be something that we do not need, because after all we are here for *karmayoga*. And so on. And then we read in Sri Aurobindo's commentary on the Gita, where he speaks about 'the core doctrine that must be recovered', about how there are many interpretations in which the *karmayoga* of the Gita teaches primarily selfless service to the community. And he says nothing could be farther from the truth. Then he explains in great detail the meaning of *karmayoga*, and after a few paragraphs of logical explanation he breaks into a powerful inspired *sruti* about liberation from all *dharmas*, and says that this is actually what the Gita teaches. And this is also the true understanding of *nirvana*. When the conventional *dharmas*, and attachments to them, are emptied, what becomes possible is the experience of acting in the world as if one doesn't exist. It is no longer the person with its attachments and opinions, but the universal divine Self acting through the person as the emptied instrument. Now who in Auroville today is thinking about that?

This week I have had several occasions to meet with people who are very passionate about their work, and they actually do their work very well. For example, these particular people are organizing venues for workshops, and space and time and themes and schedules, which they do with great enthusiasm and sense of purpose. Several of these people and their groups have been organizing such venues, environments, and workshops for quite a long time and they manage their projects like little kingdoms that operate with a very clear idea of who they are and what they represent. All of that is great, and it is where we are, socially and economically. But what about the other dimension which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother often talk about: "The rejection of the mind's ideas, opinions, preferences, habits, constructions so that the true knowledge may find free room in a silent mind. And rejection of the vital nature's desires, demands, cravings, sensations, passions, selfishness, pride, arrogance, jealousy, envy... so that the true power and joy may pour from above into a calm, large, strong and consecrated vital being."

What we see here and everywhere, is that the society that has produced us, and the memes of our rational development, have us floating up and down in this sea of what we speak of in philosophy as our personal "narratives", those things that we believe we are, and the things we value and do and speak about all of the time, and that preoccupy us. That wave can tip up into something that is luminous and uplifting and liberating which we feel from time to time, but then for the most part we are floating between various lower levels, corresponding to the stomach and heart and practical mind, which we theorize and idealize and make sound really good. But there is that higher realm that actually

sees and feels a different world than the one we inhabit most of the time. In developmental psychology we have learned that we have moved beyond certain social and cultural levels such as magical religions and mythical heroic power structures, to a considerable degree, and the religions really don't mean what they used to mean at all. And we are now trying to move through and beyond the rational meme that our society has enabled us to be liberated from. We are trying to purify the scientific and technological formations that we now know are pretty destructive, and we are inspired to enter into the new integral meme. But we are constantly being pulled back down into the vital-rational, somewhere between the mythic and integral consciousness structures, and we are still arguing about how to do things right in those domains.

Auroville is a perfect example of this fluctuating movement, even here where we have the opportunity to move into the integral meme with relatively little resistance from established structures. We can listen to Auroville radio any week and hear many of the same points of view, pushing and pulling around the same issues that were there in similar forums in 1980. It's a rich and valuable learning experience but it still tends to get stuck for long periods of time. As the Mother seems to suggest, we ought to sometimes step out of that and have a look into those higher movements in the evolution of consciousness that have spiked throughout history. But the Mother is talking about a wave that finally settles in that domain of a more inspired, more liberated, less egoistic being. And not just how to be inspired by it, and study doctrines about it, and know that it is there, but how to Be in that domain. And Sri Aurobindo, of course, is writing the program, which we take to be the guideline for this course. As he put it in the *Essays on the Gita* around 1920:

“A mass of new material is flowing into us. We have not only to assimilate the influences of the great theistic religions of India and of the world, and a recovered sense of the meaning of Buddhism (*which I underline!*) but to take full account of the potent though limited revelations of modern knowledge and seeking (*and here he is not talking about technology and science, but those eternal truths, and he is referring to his contemporaries James and Bergson, whose work was amazingly inspired for its time, and very close to Sri Aurobindo*). And beyond that the remote and dateless past. (*Have we changed so much since 1920, and do we no longer need to assimilate that?*) That which seemed to be dead is returning upon us with an effulgence of many luminous secrets long lost to the consciousness of mankind but now breaking out again from behind the veil. All this points to a new, a very rich, a very vast synthesis, a fresh and widely embracing harmonization of our gains that is both an intellectual and spiritual necessity of the future. But just as the past syntheses have taken those which preceded them for their starting point, so also must that of the future, to be on firm ground, proceed from what the great bodies of realized spiritual thought and experience in the past have given.”<sup>4</sup>

And I underline especially what he has referred to as the recovered sense of the meaning of Buddhism. Because, not only has he spoken in the most powerful mantric language about *nirvana* in *Savitri*, but that aspect of Buddhism, the tantric transmission of spiritual knowledge, is going on today in a most lucid and effective way. I was recently in a workshop with Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, who is an outstanding scholar of Buddhism, but he is also a Lama and teacher, and he does the work. He calls it the Mother and says the Mother's force descends through the crown *chakra* into the heart center and into the physical body and transforms it. And he transmits it powerfully. This is part of a tantric tradition that Sri Aurobindo says is the synthesis of the future. *Tantra* has the elements, the techniques, the energy. But like all of the other traditions, we don't need the trappings, and rituals, and ceremonies. But what the relatively recent tantric schools are doing in the long history of Hinduism is making possible the reception of the higher Overmind planes by the life plane so that its energy can be

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4 Op cit, p. 10-11



integrated for the transformation of consciousness. That's what the Mother represents. The Mother is the divine Shakti. And the later writings of Sri Aurobindo are mainly about that. The earlier writings are mainly a restatement of *sutra* teachings, like the Upanishads, the Gita, and Raja Yoga. But then comes *Savitri*, and we will be going in that direction. But first I would like to mention some distinctions that Pannikar makes. In defining religion, he says, "Under the particular perspective that we may call religion, every human culture presents three elements: 1) a vision of man as he actually appears to be; 2) a certain more or less developed notion of the end or final station of man; and 3) the means of getting from the one to the other."<sup>5</sup> Now is that a fair definition? Can we accept it for our purposes in pursuing the philosophy of religion. A vision of man as he actually appears to be, which in Buddhism is called *dukham*, the condition of suffering. And *Savitri* is full of that, on almost every page, and on the opposite page 'a more or less developed notion of man as he can possibly become', and in between an elaboration of the means of going from the former to the latter. *Savitri* is really about that. And Pannikar is telling us that this is essentially what all the great religious traditions have essentially tried to do. And he goes into some detail about Buddhism and Christianity. He says, "This unfinished being is not to remain as he is but has to undergo a more or less radical transformation, in order to reach that state which Buddhism calls *nirvana* and Christianity calls *soteria*." *Soteria* means redemption, liberation from ego and all the poisons (defined by Buddhism and Christianity) – jealousy, anger, pride, desire. But then he makes an interesting distinction between those two. He says that in Buddhism *nirvana*, which is a universal ontological state of being, on the subjective side is *sunyata*, emptiness, and in Christianity *soteria* which is the forgiveness, redemption and resurrection at the end, on the subjective side is *pleroma*, the undefinable fullness of the divine being. You might know that in Buddhism *nirvana* is also often defined like that, the absolute emptiness which is bliss and contains the "sum of everything to be" as Sri Aurobindo says.

So, it seems to me that there is a path towards disclosing the aspects of religion that are pertinent to transformation, and Pannikar calls this the kind of interreligious dialogue that leads to an intrareligious dialogue whereby we examine in ourselves those things that represent how we actually are, and those things that represent how we could be or will be, and to what extent we practice the means from one to the other, and to what extent our community practices those means, and how that dialogue can lead to constant renewal. I think we could define a path through the history of religions in which we look for signs of this paradigm and examine how those elements can enhance that process of *metanoia*, of constant rebirth. Pannikar says, "If we accept the distinction between faith and belief," and he elaborates these terms, as do other philosophers of religion – he is referring to the ontological reality that we experience, which inspires faith, and the belief system that gets attached to it and becomes doctrine. He says, if we accept the distinction between those two there are then two possibilities. We can bracket our belief system long enough to look squarely at another way of describing the reality. But beyond that *epoche*, he says we can transcend completely our preferred belief system and concentrate on the *praxis*, the movement forward into the reality itself.

I agree with Pannikar's possibility of transcendence. This path takes more than an *epoche*. And one of the questions I have is to what extent does Sri Aurobindo in his mantric work provide an energy for that. Not the idea of it, not the definition of what we are and what we can be, but the real tantric movement, which is to move beyond the doctrines and theories to actually engage oneself with the *nirvana* and *soteria*; to actually go through the emptiness of *sunyata* and discover in it the *pleroma*, the fullness, the permanence, the radiance, the *shakti*. And then to keep that *shakti* in place, in relation to some center in ourselves, while walking back on the path and taking a stand. In existential philosophy this idea of taking a stand is crucial. But one must know where to stand and develop the balance to

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5 R. Pannikar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (1978), p.78,80,81

stand there, wherever that is, and get out of this opinionated, judgmental, rational, ethical flux. I would like to read a couple of pages of *Savitri* now, to see if we hear, according to the theory of *mantra*, something that gives us a direct sense of *sunyata*, and a direct sense of the radiance, the *pleroma*, completely outside of this analytical mind. Let us just listen.

(In the recorded version of this lecture, there follows a short commentary on *mantra*, and a reading from *Savitri*, Book 7, Canto 6, attached below, where the Buddhist and Christian ethos, and the spiritual states of *sunyata* and *pleroma*, are put in parallel at a crucial moment in the experience of Yoga, p. 536-538.)

## Auroville and the Religions

We want the Truth.

For most men, it is what they want that they label truth.

The Aurovilians must want the Truth whatever it may be.

Auroville is for those who want to live a life essentially divine but who renounce all religions whether they be ancient, modern, new or future.

It is only in experience that there can be knowledge of the Truth.

No one ought to speak of the Divine unless he has had experience of the Divine.

Get experience of the Divine, then alone will you have the right to speak of it.

The objective study of religions will be a part of the historical study of the development of human consciousness.

Religions make up part of the history of mankind and it is in this guise that they will be studied at Auroville – not as beliefs to which one ought or ought not to adhere, but as part of a process in the development of human consciousness which should lead man towards his superior realisation.

### PROGRAMME

Research through experience of the Supreme Truth

A life divine but

### NO RELIGIONS

Our research will not be a search effected by mystic means. It is in life itself that we wish to find the Divine. And it is through this discovery that life can really be transformed.

(Message, 19.05.70)

*The passage from Savitri, Book 7, Canto 6:*

Only her soul remained, its emptied stage,  
Awaiting the unknown eternal Will.  
Then from the heights a greater Voice came down,  
The Word that touches the heart and finds the soul,  
The voice of Light after the voice of Night:  
The cry of the Abyss drew Heaven's reply,  
A might of storm chased by the might of the Sun.  
"O soul, bare not thy kingdom to the foe;  
Consent to hide thy royalty of bliss  
Lest Time and Fate find out its avenues  
And beat with thunderous knock upon thy gates.  
Hide whilst thou canst thy treasure of separate self

Behind the luminous rampart of thy depths  
Till of a vaster empire it grows part.  
But not for self alone the Self is won:  
Content abide not with one conquered realm;  
Adventure all to make the whole world thine,  
To break into greater kingdoms turn thy force.  
Fear not to be nothing that thou mayst be all;  
Assent to the emptiness of the Supreme  
That all in thee may reach its absolute.  
Accept to be small and human on the earth,  
Interrupting thy new-born divinity,  
That man may find his utter self in God.  
If for thy own sake only thou hast come,  
An immortal spirit into the mortal's world,  
To found thy luminous kingdom in God's dark,  
In the Inconscient's realm one shining star,  
One door in the Ignorance opened upon light,  
Why hadst thou any need to come at all?  
Thou hast come down into a struggling world  
To aid a blind and suffering mortal race,  
To open to Light the eyes that could not see,  
To bring down bliss into the heart of grief,  
To make thy life a bridge twixt earth and heaven;  
If thou wouldst save the toiling universe,  
The vast universal suffering feel as thine:  
Thou must bear the sorrow that thou claimst to heal;  
The day-bringer must walk in darkest night.  
He who would save the world must share its pain.  
If he knows not grief, how shall he find grief's cure?  
If far he walks above mortality's head,  
How shall the mortal reach that too high path?  
If one of theirs they see scale heaven's peaks,  
Men then can hope to learn that titan climb.  
God must be born on earth and be as man  
That man being human may grow even as God.  
He who would save the world must be one with the world,  
All suffering things contain in his heart's space  
And bear the grief and joy of all that lives.  
His soul must be wider than the universe  
And feel eternity as its very stuff,  
Rejecting the moment's personality  
Know itself older than the birth of Time,  
Creation an incident in its consciousness,  
Arcturus and Belphegor grains of fire  
Circling in a corner of its boundless self,  
The world's destruction a small transient storm  
In the calm infinity it has become.  
If thou wouldst a little loosen the vast chain,  
Draw back from the world that the Idea has made,  
Thy mind's selection from the Infinite,  
Thy senses' gloss on the Infinitesimal's dance,

Then shalt thou know how the great bondage came.  
Banish all thought from thee and be God's void.  
Then shalt thou uncover the Unknowable  
And the Superconscient conscious grow on thy tops;  
Infinity's vision through thy gaze shall pierce;  
Thou shalt look into the eyes of the Unknown,  
Find the hid Truth in things seen null and false,  
Behind things known discover Mystery's rear.  
Thou shalt be one with God's bare reality  
And the miraculous world he has become  
And the diviner miracle still to be  
When Nature who is now unconscious God  
Translucent grows to the Eternal's light,  
Her seeing his sight, her walk his steps of power  
And life is filled with a spiritual joy  
And Matter is the Spirit's willing bride.  
Consent to be nothing and none, dissolve Time's work,  
Cast off thy mind, step back from form and name.  
Annul thyself that only God may be."

## 2. Faith and Sacrifice (Part 1)

What is sacrifice, in the philosophical and spiritual sense of the word? In temples in India it is very common for people to offer rice and bananas to the fire in a ceremony known as *arati*. And this is symbolic of offering oneself to the divine. In the more secular sense it implies that we give up something. We make sacrifices daily when we give up some things in order to accomplish other things. This is so normal that we don't attach much importance to it. We probably think that our choices are for a higher purpose or greater value than the things we sacrifice. In economics, for example, there is the prominent idea that we forego certain activities, gains or expenditures, whose value is the "opportunity cost" of whatever we choose to do, and it should generally not be greater than the benefit to be gained by the alternative that we choose. So we live in a world of such calculations. It is very normal in this world for us to make sacrifices in order to practice a profession, for example. And we may practice the profession for its own sake or for personal gain, medicine for example. This is a subject that was explored in depth by Plato in *The Republic* and by Aristotle in *The Politics*, and it is still a subject of debate in our society today. Whether we do something for the excellence that it achieves in society and life, versus doing something for personal and especially pecuniary gain, wealth, and power, were serious topics of debate for both Plato and Aristotle in their attempt to define the concept of "the good".

The terms that have been employed so far in our study of spirituality and the functions of religion, especially by Pannikar, such as *nirvana* and *sunyata* in Buddhism, and *soteria* and *pleroma* in Christianity, are methods and objects of liberation for the sake of which one renounces desires and attachments. These habitual human behaviors and experiences that are to be purified and rejected constitute the field of sacrifice. By renouncing them we avoid their consequences, such as fear, anger, jealousy, suffering – the emotions associated with desire and attachment. The idea behind this type of sacrifice is that there are ways of knowing and objects of knowledge other than those which characterize the preferences and habits of the practical mind, and the sense mind, and the vital drives and passions. These have objects that we are usually concerned with in our daily living. If we want to practice emptiness, purification, and liberation, we must reject those things. And this requires a strong

focus and determination on the part of the individual to make these sacrifices. But if one does it one experiences another kind of knowledge and truth of existence, called *nirvana* in Buddhism and Hinduism, which is not a negative or nihilistic state but 'that emptiness' which is the essence of everything. This idea is expressed by Sri Aurobindo when he says, in *Savitri*, "The Formless and the Formed were joined in her". And we will hear many such expressions in his writings.

Formlessness is the absolute emptiness of things. Form is what anything appears to be at a particular time, and in a sense is, which we are aware of through the sense mind. And in most of the bodies of spiritual knowledge we are told that this is not the truth. This is the ignorance. So what do we do? Why do we value what we value instead of what those teachings tell us is of real value? Sri Aurobindo has an interesting sort of tongue in cheek observation on this question in his commentary on the Kena Upanishad. He says, if we have to give up all the things we cherish in order to gain this knowledge, there must be a really good reason. And then he says, there is. It is immortality. You trade in the transitory moments that you pay so dearly for with suffering and illusion, for absolute delight and the truth of your self. So, do we believe that? Are we willing to do it?

Pannikar, commenting on the Buddhist and Christian ideas of liberation and becoming what we can be instead of what we are, says that "*Sunyavada* is not philosophical nihilism or metaphysical agnosticism, but a positive and concrete affirmation, one of the deepest human intuitions regarding the ultimate structure of reality. It says that everything, absolutely everything, that falls under the range of our experience – actual or possible – is void of that consistency with which we tend to embellish our contingency."<sup>1</sup> We tend to give everything a relative importance, depending on what we have or don't have, what we want or do not want, but this other truth of reality says that all of this is void "including our reason with which we express this idea... The 'other shore' in the recurring Buddhist metaphor is so totally transcendent that it does not exist; the very thought of it mystifies and negates it. *Nirvana* is *samsara* and *samsara* is *nirvana*."<sup>2</sup> Emptiness is what is, and what is, is emptiness, and in this mystery both are affirmed. This is a common statement in Buddhism, which we will hear elaborated later in a commentary on *Mahamudra* by the Dalai Lama, and we will read it in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of *The Life Divine*. Pannikar continues, "There is no way to go to the other shore because there is no bridge, not even another shore. This recognition is the highest wisdom, the *advaitic* or nondualistic intuition or the *prajnaparamita*." *Prajnaparamita* means the highest wisdom. There is no other shore, yet on the way we are going to encounter its total absence. "That is why only silence is the right attitude – not because the question has no answer, but because we realize the nonsense of the question itself, because there can be no questioning of the unquestionable. It would be a contradiction. Who can question the unquestionable? Thus, the ontic silence of the Buddha."

This thinking in Buddhism brings us to a realization of something indefinable, which is an essential nature of things that is formless, absolute formlessness, and yet everything exists in that reality. We heard this juxtaposition of *nirvana* and the Christian sacrifice last week in the reading from the Book of Yoga in *Savitri*. which is about how the absolute emptiness takes us into the *pleroma*, the absolute fullness that is the culmination of sacrifice and liberation in Christianity. One of the points I am trying to make here, and throughout these lectures, is that there is a language, called *sruti*, which conveys these supra-rational ideas perfectly, and we are not going to arrive at them by thinking about them philosophically. But philosophy is supposed to help us focus the mind on what is and what isn't reality. That is what philosophy does. But to know the reality is something else. So, another description of this paradoxical nature of the spiritual reality we are considering, and how it can be known, is presented by

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1 R. Pannikar (1978), p. 81

2 Ibid., p.82

Sri Aurobindo, in a strikingly revelatory passage from the same canto of *Savitri*, like this:

It faced her as some vast Nought's immensity,  
An endless No to all that seems to be,  
An endless Yes to things ever unconceived  
And all that is unimagined and unthought,  
An eternal zero or untotaled Aught,  
A spaceless and a placeless Infinite.  
Yet eternity and infinity seemed but words  
Vainly affixed by mind's incompetence  
To its stupendous lone reality.  
The world is but a spark-burst from its light,  
All moments flashes from its Timelessness,  
All objects glimmerings of the Bodiless  
That disappear from Mind when That is seen.  
It held, as if a shield before its face,  
A consciousness that saw without a seer,  
The Truth where knowledge is not nor knower nor known,  
The Love enamoured of its own delight  
In which the Lover is not nor the Beloved  
Bringing their personal passion into the Vast,  
The Force omnipotent in quietude,  
The Bliss that none can ever hope to taste.  
It cancelled the convincing cheat of self;  
A truth in nothingness was its mighty clue.  
If all existence could renounce to be  
And Being take refuge in Non-being's arms  
And Non-being could strike out its ciphered round,  
Some lustre of that Reality might appear.  
A formless liberation came on her.  
Once sepulchred alive in brain and flesh  
She had risen up from body, mind and life;  
She was no more a Person in a world,  
She had escaped into infinity.  
What once had been herself had disappeared;  
There was no frame of things, no figure of soul.  
A refugee from the domain of sense,  
Evading the necessity of thought,  
Delivered from Knowledge and from Ignorance  
And rescued from the true and the untrue,  
She shared the Superconscient's high retreat  
Beyond the self-born Word, the nude Idea,  
The first bare solid ground of consciousness;  
Beings were not there, existence had no place,  
There was no temptation of the joy to be.  
Unutterably effaced, no one and null,  
A vanishing vestige like a violet trace,  
A faint record merely of a self now past,  
She was a point in the unknowable.  
Only some last annulment now remained,  
Annihilation's vague indefinable step:

A memory of being still was there  
And kept her separate from nothingness:  
She was in That but still became not That.  
This shadow of herself so close to nought  
Could be again self's point d'appui to live,  
Return out of the Inconceivable  
And be what some mysterious vast might choose.  
Even as the Unknowable decreed,  
She might be nought or new-become the All,  
Or if the omnipotent Nihil took a shape  
Emerge as someone and redeem the world.<sup>3</sup>

There is this possibility, in the teachings of Buddhism and Christianity, that by sacrificing everything, one can emerge as the all and redeem the world. This is the idea of a radical transformation of consciousness that makes it possible to see and live the true value of everything, to give everything its true value, to live in a selfless state for the well-being of the whole, to achieve the Christian ideal of perfect charity and the Buddhist ideal of perfect compassion, without any sense of gain or loss. One's consciousness is focused only on the bodiless truth of which everything is an expression, the *pleroma*. The *pleroma* is the world of becoming in its reality as the 'other' that it expresses, which is immortal. Immortality means that. Everything is a temporal expression of that formless Self which will never be expressed because it is self-existent, eternal being. The divine emptiness which neither dies nor is born.

Last week we also read another poem of Sri Aurobindo called 'The Witness and the Wheel', which is about the duality of *purusa* and *prakriti*, Self and Nature, which I said we should try to retain in memory. If we want to understand these fundamental concepts in the philosophy of religion like sacrifice, immortality, liberation, redemption, self and nature and their difference and their union, we must focus on them and dwell in them. And that is a sacrifice, a positive one. It has as its reward immortality. But there is a price. Are we going to continue to be happily deluded, turning around in our petty temporal ideas of good and bad, right and wrong, this and that, or will we learn to see everything in relation to the Self which stands always behind, and take our stand in that Self. It doesn't hurt to read that poem 'The Witness and the Wheel', every day in fact; it's a *mantra*. One of things that we can hope to learn in this course in the philosophy of religion is that there is this other kind of speech known to all of the traditions, known in Greek as the *logos*, in Sanskrit the *sruti*, the word that emanates from the consciousness of the truth, and therefore carries that consciousness to the hearer. Sri Aurobindo is a *mantra guru* and he teaches us through this kind of speech. We just need to learn to hear it.

And there is this idea of the *nihil*, the absolute nothingness, about which he says, "The miraculous Nihil, origin of our souls/ And source and sum of the vast world's events". It is ever-present, self-existent, emptiness of being that is fullness of being, because it is formless, and the All. It is the Self. It's realizable. We are all expressions of that same Self, and it is beautiful, in you and in you and in everyone. It is beauty itself, absolute, formless, infinite. This is a Platonic idea. Beauty is a power of being and throughout the ages it expresses itself in all forms of art, and nature, and culture, but it is something in itself, undefinable, absolute beauty, the body of god, present in each of these minds and bodies and cells. Knowing that gives all of this much more value than it had when we were only conscious of its temporality and limits. Everything mortal will collapse and turn to dust, the living are already dead, says Krishna. But the divine is self-existent and immortal. When the rational mind recognizes that it is inadequate to understand the divine, that it can formulate a concept of God but it

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3 Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* (2007 ed.) , p. 547-549

can't know the absolute itself, - it often can't even really explain what it knows - but that there is another way of knowing, whereby the divine truth can be known directly, then the search begins for a way. And this is really the history of religion. And, as we shall see stated clearly and explicitly in the writings of Hegel, it is the central theme and purpose of the philosophy of religion. It is not just theory; it is also *praxis*.

Some of those who make the transition have this gift of speech, and they use language to convey realities that are beyond the rational mind. There is a small domain within the traditions where this is recognized. But not everyone can hear or see that kind of reality, and those who make those sacrifices are generally not the common people. So the mystics and seers create their secret orders, and they create structures that help other human beings adjust socially, and what is heard ultimately gets turned into doctrines and social structures and religions. The original inspiration is still there behind, and it's still inspiring. And yet, as Hegel points out in the history of Christianity, what the church becomes is an institution for promulgating laws. Social conventions, ideas of right and wrong, the justification of hierarchy, are things that are necessary for society to function, and the religions have generally imposed and supported these structures. We will consider this aspect of the history of religion in a later exploration of the origin of morality, to which the philosophy of Henri Bergson has made an important contribution.

Hegel says many interesting things about all of this that can help us define some of the basic concepts of religion, such as faith and sacrifice. In his famous lectures on the philosophy of religion, he says, for example, "In the practical domain we have an 'other' as object. (*All the things that we think, talk about, and do are 'objects'.*) In religion this object is God." Here Hegel is making the fundamental distinction that characterizes his philosophy, between the concepts that we frame subjectively, and the realities to which they refer. "Inasmuch as human beings look back upon themselves, this object is an 'other' for them, something lying beyond them. In the theoretical domain they do not reflect on this antithesis; what is there is this immediate unity, immediate knowledge, faith. In the theoretical domain they include themselves with this object. That is how we can express theoretical consciousness according to its result or its conclusions."<sup>4</sup> We are in that emptiness. We are temporal expressions of that absolute. We know it, as a concept, and we are different from it theoretically. We do not know *it*. This is our dilemma. How do we transform this rational consciousness of objects into a direct identity with the absolute divine beauty and power and truth which changes everything?

So Hegel says, - and this is really the point of today's exploration - "The *cultus* involves giving oneself this supreme, absolute enjoyment." He introduces into the history and philosophy of religion at this point an essential element which is always there, the element of experience. "There is feeling within it; I take part in it with my particular, subjective personality, knowing myself as this individual included in and with God, knowing myself within the truth (and I have my truth only in God), joining myself as myself in God together with myself." This is the action of the 'cultus'. Now Hegel explains that the first form of the cultus is devotion. "Devotion is not the mere faith that God is, but is present when the faith becomes vivid... when the subject is occupied with this content not merely in objective fashion but becomes immersed therein; the essential thing here is the fire and heat of devotion. The subject takes part in this way; it is subjectivity that possesses itself therein, that prays, speaks, passes through and beyond representations, knows itself and the object itself, and is concerned with its elevation. Devotion is the self-moving spirit..."<sup>5</sup> So, this is really spiritual practice. If you perform devotional practice, chant the *mantra*, sit quietly in the Ray, generate the *agni*, the *shakti*, then there is something going on

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4 Hegel, *Lectures on the philosophy of religion* (1988 ed.), p. 191

5 Ibid., p. 193



in you. And you have faith in that which is going on in you, it is tangible. It is not blind faith but active faith in the possibility of that which is going on in you to liberate you. And this dynamic faith is called *shraddha* in Sanskrit. You are engaged with a reality that gives you reason to believe that the beyond is here. And the fire that it generates is the fire of sacrifice.

“To the cultus belong the external forms through which the feeling of reconciliation is brought forth in an external and sensible manner, as for instance the fact that in the sacraments reconciliation is brought into feeling, into the here and now of the present and sensible consciousness; and all the manifold actions embraced under the heading of *sacrifice*. That very negation, about which our insight was that the subject rises above the finite and consciousness of the finite, is now consciously accomplished...” So, if you sacrifice your sensational, rational thought in the emptiness, through meditation, and you bring about that absolute stillness by a practice, then in that stillness you feel that the falsehood, poison, illusion has been negated. If you dwell in that presence, you have a sense of the infinite in that stillness. This is just one of the many practices, under the category of sacrifice, that Sri Aurobindo advocates. Silence the mind, silence the vital, enter into the stillness. And when you dwell in that, he says, you approximate the Brahman, because the Brahman is the absolute stillness of being, and it is ever-present, but we don't experience it because we experience the practical sensational mind all the time. But that self, soul, spirit, is there behind. And when we perform the sacrifice of stepping back into the stillness we are engaged in the action of faith.

Hegel then says, “Negation exists within devotion and even maintains an outward configuration by means of sacrifice. The subject renounces something or negates something in relation to itself. It has possessions and divests itself of them in order to demonstrate that it is in earnest. ...Thus from this negation or from the sacrifice one advances to enjoyment, to consciousness of having posited oneself in unity with God by means of the negation.” This is exactly what happens to Savitri in *The Book of Yoga*, and it is Sri Aurobindo's fundamental teaching in *Savitri*. Through the absolute negation one enters into the absolute *pleroma*. And then one can die consciously and pass through death to immortality.

Hegel then continues, “... through this purification of one's heart, one raises oneself up to the realm of the purely spiritual. This experience of nothingness can be a bare condition or single experience, or it can be thoroughly elaborated in one's life. If heart and will are earnestly and thoroughly cultivated for the universal and the true, then there is present what appears as *ethical life*. To that extent ethical life is the most genuine culture. But consciousness of the true, of the divine, of God, must be directly bound up with it.”<sup>6</sup> Then one can live selflessly for the welfare of all beings, because one has no more egoistic attachment to anything. Devotion-sacrifice-ethical life. What did Pannikar tell us? Religion always defines what we are and don't want to be, what we could be and will be, and how to move from one to the other. And according to Hegel it is more than that. He says, “That is philosophy”. This movement of the cultus is philosophy. It goes beyond the rational mind into identification with absolute spirit, and that brings about a transformation of consciousness and in the way one relates to the world. He calls it ethical being. It's what Plato called 'the Good'. Sri Aurobindo calls it Supermind. The all creative, all knowing, absolute good – Supermind. And we can reach it through this pattern of behavior: faith, devotion, sacrifice, elevation, union.

*(In the original presentation, this lecture was followed by a reading and commentary on a hymn to Agni in the Rg Veda and other poetry of Sri Aurobindo, a portion of which is reproduced below.)*

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6 Ibid., p. 194

## Faith and Sacrifice (Part 2)

Pannikar has distinguished between faith and belief. Belief is doctrine, faith is the pursuit of purification and transformation through contact with that which is beyond. And it is the “existential awareness” of that object. Now what is that object which we contact, and with which we identify through the “elevation” of consciousness defined by Hegel? It seems that it is pretty much always the same thing. We can give it many names. In the pursuit of the real meaning of faith or sacrifice or *praxis*, in the context of spiritual transformation, if we look at Sri Aurobindo's commentary on the Hymn to Agni, he says:

“Agni is the most important, the most universal of the Vedic gods. In the physical world he is the general devourer and enjoyer. He is also the purifier; when he devours and enjoys, then also he purifies. He is the fire that prepares and perfects; he is also the fire that assimilates and the heat of energy that forms. He is the heat of life and creates the sap, the *rasa* in things, the essence of their substantial being and the essence of their delight. He is equally the Will in Prana, the dynamic Life-energy, and in that energy performs the same functions.

If he is the Will in our nervous being and purifies it by action, he is also the Will in the mind and clarifies it by aspiration. When he enters into the intellect, he is drawing near to his divine birthplace and home. He leads the thoughts towards effective power; he leads the active energies towards light.”<sup>7</sup>

So, if we are burning our impurities by an act of sacrifice, like negating our obscure way of thinking or our desire for victory in the tournament, if we are tossing those things in the fire and feeling the joy of liberation as a result, then this is “*agni*”. This immortal, infinite, eternal power of being is expressing itself through our momentary enjoyment which comes as a result of an act of sacrifice. Now if we have studied the Upanishads we may think that this is “*prana*”, and here we see that *agni* is “the will in prana”. In Hindu tradition there are many words that mean the same thing, and each period of development has its own language for the same thing. Prana is the energy that creates the form of things, which it creates according to their essences which it contains. It contains the essences as a result of being an emanation of *agni*, and *agni* is an emanation of the divine *shakti*. So in Hindu cosmology we find the Brahman whose first emanation is the *pleroma*, the divine mind, or supermind, the *mahashakti*. From that emanation come all the gods that contain the essences which express the inexpressible Brahman. *Brahman (the Supreme Being)*, *shakti (the Divine Force)*, *deva (the god)*, and *sarvabhutani (the world of forms)*. The *daivic* is below the *atmic*, and the *adhibhuta* is below the *daivic* and contains all the elemental forms and qualities.

We want to get beyond the elemental forms of things to the *daivic* level of perception. We want to perceive the universal divine force in everything, which in the first place is *agni*. Everything is made of energy. He brings the flower from the bud and the fruit from the flower and from the death the new birth of the same thing. He is beyond time. He is the beginning and middle and end. For the god, being is the potential, actual and possible of things. However many changes a thing goes through in its temporal existence, its being is all of that. The word Being means what the becoming expresses. It is all

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7 Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda* (2004 ed), p. 277

the changes that take place in time and space in order for some being to become what it is. In Bergson's philosophy this is called its duration. Each thing that comes into existence has a duration and that duration is its intensity which is equal to its essence. It is the duration of the potential which is contained in the essence; it is atemporal. So *agni* in Hindu thinking is all of that. And the *pranic* field is the subtle energy that brings out the forms known through sensation, and it also brings about the development of the sensory apparatuses of consciousness in us that senses and perceives the forms.

This is what the Rg Veda is all about. When we generate the energy of aspiration we feel the heat of devotion and the enjoyment of the divinity. As the hymn expresses it in a mythological and mantric language, the intellect is a bridge between our mind and supermind. Our mind is just a lower range of supermind, and in between are intuitive mind and inspired mind and overmind, like a ladder that the *mahashati* extends down to us so that we do not remain lost.

Now we shall hear a hymn to *agni* which helps us understand better the meaning of these ideas because when they are transmitted mantrically we understand them more fully and directly than when we hear them conceptually. The hymns also help us learn to read *Savitri*, because they are excellent examples of the quantitative meter in which *Savitri* is written. Agni creates the gods for us. We will see and feel the presence of the gods – Mitra and Varuna and Savitri. We will learn to see and feel the presence of these overmind deities because of this word that we offer to Agni. By this invocation, we burn in this sacrifice; by this invocation and aspiration, our effort and energy and formulations of speech bring about a resonance with those entities and higher powers of consciousness. These are not simply ideas. We are sincerely asking how we shall give to these gods through our words. And that is the Vedic sacrifice.

### **Agni, the Illumined Will**

Rig Veda I.77<sup>8</sup>

1. How shall we give to Agni? For him what Word accepted by the Gods is spoken, for the lord of the brilliant flame? for him who in mortals, immortal, possessed of the Truth, priest of the oblation strongest for sacrifice, creates the gods?

2. He who in the sacrifices is the priest of the offering, full of peace, full of the Truth, him verily form in you by your surrenderings; when Agni manifests for the mortals the gods, he also has perception of them and by the mind offers to them the sacrifice.

3. For he is the will, he is the strength, he is the effecter of perfection, even as Mitra he becomes the charioteer of the Supreme. To him, the first, in the rich-offerings the people seeking the godhead utter the word, the Aryan people to the fulfiller.

4. May this strongest of the Powers and devourer of the destroyers manifest by his presence the Words and their understanding, and may they who in their extension are lords

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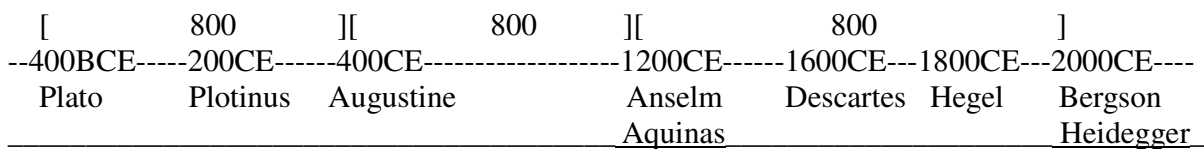
8 Ibid., p. 276

of plenitude brightest in energy pour forth their plenty and give their impulsion to the thought.

5. Thus has Agni possessed of the Truth been affirmed by the masters of light, the knower of the worlds by clarified minds. He shall foster in them the force of illumination, he too the plenty; he shall attain to increase and to harmony by his perceptions.

### 3. Faith and Sacrifice (Part 3)

The ideas that we have been exploring are those of faith and sacrifice in religion. The sources we have referred to and will be referring to in this discussion are primarily Pannikar, Hegel, Augustine, Plato, and Sri Aurobindo. If we look at the timeline, we see that Plato was 400 BCE and Augustine was 400 CE, and Hegel was 1800 CE, and there is an incredible correspondence between the ideas they express, as we will hear more and more clearly. And the time span between Plato and Augustine is 800 years, and between Augustine and Hegel 1400 years. And of course a similar line of inspired seers and thinkers can be drawn in the Indic tradition from the Upanishads to the Buddha to the schools of Vedanta, Sankhya and Yoga between 800 and 200 BCE, to the Puranas and the medieval schools of Tantra, Advaita and Madhyamaka from 200 to 1200 CE, another 2000 year development of closely connected understanding and teachings.



Whitehead  
Sri Aurobindo

One of the things that I observed in the study of the philosophy of evolution course which went on here for two years, is that there is a very close connection between philosophers of evolution from Aristotle to Sri Aurobindo, because of a certain consciousness that grasps the totality of things in a dynamic and direct way. I came to the conclusion after two years of lectures that this way of thinking is fundamentally the product of a right brain intuitive consciousness, but it is the intuitive consciousness in a mind that has a fully developed left brain thinking process in place, and what they are saying is not the left brain understanding. These philosophers of religion, like Augustine and Hegel and Bergson and Sri Aurobindo have a direct intuitive grasp of Being. They see Being in the sense of the way things are essentially. 'Being' means the essential reality of something. It has all of its temporal stages of becoming, which science is especially interested in, but that is a left brain knowing, which has been a very dominant way of thinking since 1800. But still there are highly inspired and creative thinkers during this modern scientific period, and the way they speak and the things they see and speak about are basically the same as Augustine and Plotinus and Plato. If I say nothing new is really being said, it is because the way all of these thinkers see and interpret existence is basically the same. Of course there are points of view and cultural styles and creative expressions that are unique and different. But what you see when you get behind those superficial differences, is a shared vision of reality. So I am beginning to see the same pattern in the philosophy of religion. And if this impression is correct, then

our pursuit of the truth of the philosophy of religion may be on the right track.

On the timeline above, we see that Anselm is about in the middle, and he marks, in a certain way, the transition from the more mystical cosmological and 'traditional' view of things to the analytical and scientific modern view. He was a very powerful thinker who influenced that transition in the development of Western thought and had an important influence on the thinking of Descartes and Hegel. He was born the son of a duke, became the abbot of a monastery in Normandy at a young age, and later was the Archbishop of Canterbury, during that period when the Catholic monasteries and cathedrals were important centers of learning throughout Europe. Hegel commented that the Roman church was largely responsible for promulgating laws. This happened to a certain extent because the monasteries were large communities of young men who came from all over Europe to study medicine and law and astronomy, sent by their rich merchant fathers to become the leaders of the renaissance. The cathedral schools became the first universities, where science started to flourish around 1400, and those large institutions of young men and priests who gathered from all over Europe to study had to be regulated by laws, which were then eventually adopted by kings and assimilated on a public scale by society. These are just historical facts that it may be interesting to note, but they show the powerful influence that religion and religious thinkers have had on the development of secular society. More importantly, the timeline conveys a continuity in the philosophy of religion, and therefore in the development of consciousness, that remarkably spans more than 2000 years.

In this course, we have begun thinking about sacrifice in the development of consciousness according to the philosophy of Hegel, and according to the more recent writings of Pannikar on the philosophy of religion and interreligious understanding. Tonight we will continue exploring this concept in some of the commentaries of Sri Aurobindo on the Gita. The philosophy of religion, as we will see in every resource that we study, is generally approached with reference to either scriptural authority, or the authority of reasoning, or through direct experience. And in Sri Aurobindo's writing we often see an argument laid out from each of these points of view – scripture, reason, and experience. We will see the same pattern in Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. He refers to scriptural sayings, which he gives the highest authority, then presents elaborate rational arguments to support the relevant doctrines, and finally he refers to his own experience and the experience of mystics and philosophers that he reveres. This is the pattern that we will see also in the commentaries of Sri Aurobindo.

We have heard already a great deal about the concept of sacrifice in terms of renunciation, and entering into the emptiness in order to purify oneself of attachment and desire. This is a common theme especially of Hindu and Buddhist scriptures. The inner renunciation of attachment and desire, and the dissolution of fears and anxieties that are associated with attachments to things, known as poisons, results in a state of consciousness known as emptiness, *sunyata*, in Buddhism. And in that emptiness, which is also referred to as wisdom, there is the element of compassion, because when you have dissolved those poisons and entered into the emptiness, which is also a fullness, you naturally have compassion for all beings. They are either in the liberated state, or in the state of illusion and suffering, and you naturally want to alleviate suffering, because you have achieved liberation from egoistic self-interest yourself. In Christianity we have seen that the same process is fundamental. By making yourself the son of God through suffering and charity and the giving up of worldly pursuits, you identify with the Christ through this movement of sacrifice. In the end you experience a rebirth into the fullness of being that is called *pleroma*. And for Hegel, this negation and elevation makes possible what he calls 'ethical action'. It becomes possible to live selflessly for the well-being of others.

In Sri Aurobindo's teaching we find that he constantly puts the two movements together – the negation and the affirmation, *sunyata* and *pleroma*. The renunciation, which is a negation of the aspects of mind,

life and body to which we are attached, and focusing on the emptiness, has as its result the opening of the liberated self to the *pleroma*, and the pouring in of the divine *shakti*. In Sanskrit this new consciousness that emerges is called *daivi prakriti* – the ability to see the divine in everything. The first requirement for that realization is *samata*, a perfect equality and detachment with respect to all sensations, emotions, ideas of right and wrong, and every kind of sensory impression. The importance of this perfect equality is stressed by both Hinduism and Buddhism. Through negation one achieves the prerequisite ability to not react under any circumstances to anything. That is the first transformation of consciousness. Perfect equality under all circumstances results in perfect peace, happiness, and sweetness. In Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, the fourfold psychological perfection, or *yoga siddhi*, that is practiced is *samata, shanti, sukham hasyam* – equality, peace, sweetness, joy. The other side of that practice, for the complete psychological perfection, is the *yoga siddhi* of *virya, shakti, daivi prakriti, shraddha*, strength of character, divine force, divine nature, faith. This faith – *shraddha*, is not blind faith but a powerful positive force that comes about through the active fullness of liberated energy – *shakti*, flowing through oneself.

Hegel defines this as the faith of sacrifice that generates the heat of devotion and the enjoyment of identity with the divine. Through negation, one no longer sees only the becoming of things in the world; one sees and experiences and knows the Being of things, which is eternal and divine. In this consciousness, human endeavors to practice disciplines such as art or medicine are understood to be the manifestations of universal principles such as beauty or health, which are eternal qualities and powers of divine being. For Sri Aurobindo, however, this universalization and elevation of consciousness is also a preliminary transformation which prepares us for the descent of the divine *shakti* into the purified and transformed human instrument. Then the action of the instrument becomes the action of the eternal divine *shakti*, and there is no longer a sense of personality or ego. That is the fully transformed consciousness. In his commentary on the Gita, Sri Aurobindo points out that, as in Buddhism, we are told that *nirvana* and *samsara* are the same, in the Gita of Hinduism we are told that *nirguna* and *saguna* Brahman are the same. Although these seem to be contradictory statements, they make perfectly good sense to a transformed consciousness that knows the world to be a manifestation of divine force.

Now let us first be sure that we understand these Sanskrit terms. *Nirvana* means the emptiness of being, and *samsara* is the world of impressions that we normally take for reality. In the activity of the three *gunas* or states of energy in nature, which is to say *tamo guna* which is inaction, *rajo guna* which is dynamic action, and *sattwa guna* which is the balance between them, everything is constantly changing from one state to another inside and outside of us. The aim of liberation is to bring about a state of consciousness in which the *gunas* don't strike us as what things really are, because we are in a state of equality and not affected by whether something else is in a state of dissolution or full blown action or beautiful calm balance. We know that those are just the transitory states of things, and we are equal in ourselves, liberated from the three *gunas*. This liberation is known in Sanskrit as *trigunyatitia*, a state in which we can see the essential being of things in all three of those phases of energy, just as we can see time, or the temporal aspect of things, as a continuum of potential, actual, and possible states, or the past, present, and future condition of something. We learn to see and experience reality with that continuous grasp of its totality, and we are not trapped by momentary impressions or attachments to something that happened yesterday that we would like to see repeated or avoided today. This sense of continuity is another *siddhi* that Sri Aurobindo speaks about, called *trikaladrishti*, which means seeing in the three times. One's consciousness can be always aware of the past, the present, and the future in terms of the potential, actual, and possible states of things, and then one's perception of things is different. And when one's perception of things becomes different, and one is liberated from the conventional world of sensation and perception, one can have an intuitive grasp of the whole of reality.

In this case, 'intuition' means a direct grasp of the potential in things, and at the same time the energy to help things realize their potential. This kind of perception has the quality of *trikaladrishti*, and it brings with it a powerful, practically unlimited, creative energy – *shakti*.

While I am reviewing terms commonly used in Hindu psychology and in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and Yoga, I will also mention again the idea of *sruti*. Sri Aurobindo has commented at length on the kind of language that transmits spiritual states of consciousness, which is known as *sruti*. It's the hearing and also the speaking, and the seeing that is simultaneous with the hearing, called *drishti*, and the remembrance, *smriti*, that what is being heard and seen is actually how it is. This intuitive consciousness, which is recognized throughout the corpus of Hindu scripture and philosophy, is possible because we have in us a kind of preconceptual understanding of things, without which we could not understand anything. If we think about 'justice' for example, we are poignantly aware of the most insignificant incremental occurrences of injustice all of the time around us. Plato makes this point in a very substantial way – that we couldn't possibly have evaluated enough instances of justice in our lives to make a rational judgment about such things, so we must have a kind of preconceptual innate awareness of such things as justice, which discriminates naturally between justice and injustice. And Augustine will point out that we have the same kind of preconceptual awareness of 'beauty'. When we encounter something that is just or unjust, beautiful or ugly, we know what it is because there is this innate understanding of the reality of justice and beauty, which are ideals. Now what are ideals? What we remember with the *smriti* is that there is an ideal origin of things, which in itself is just and beautiful and good. And when we hear the *sruti*, and we see the *drishti*, we remember the ideal original nature of the things that are being seen and understood and remembered. Like I said in the beginning of this lecture, about philosophers like Bergson and Whitehead and Hegel and Augustine, as well as the seers of Hindu traditions, it seems that they have entered into a state of consciousness in which they see things in terms of their being and universal principles. Then they explain the world as it actually is from the point of view of reality – process and reality. From time to time there are seers who have that ability, and what they see is basically the same thing that the others have seen. And they just speak about it a little differently. At times that speech reaches a clarity and power of inspiration known as *sruti*.

So, in his commentary on the idea of sacrifice in the Gita, Sri Aurobindo says, “The Brahman, or Divine, in the workings of Nature is born, as we may say, out of the *Akshara*, the infinite immutable self, *Purusha*, who stands above all the qualities of nature. The Brahman is one but self-displayed in two aspects, the immutable Being and the creator and originator of works in the mutable becoming, *atman*, *sarvabhutani*; it is the immobile omnipresent Soul of things and it is the spiritual principle of the mobile working of things, *Purusha* poised in himself and *Purusha* active in *Prakriti*; it is *aksara* and *ksara*. In both of these aspects the Divine Being, *Purushottama*, manifests himself in the universe; the immutable above all qualities is His poise of peace, self-possession, equality, *samam brahma*; from that proceeds His manifestation in the qualities of *Prakriti* and their universal workings; from the *Purusha* in *Prakriti*, from this Brahman with qualities, proceed all the works of the universal energy, *Karma*, in man and in all existences; from that work proceeds the principle of sacrifice.”<sup>1</sup> So, in this *sruti* of Sri Aurobindo, we finally get to the point of tonight's lecture. And as this is also the fundamental metaphysical philosophy of Hinduism, we will return to it periodically in order to be able to grasp it fully.

The idea of the Brahman and the dualities of *purusha* and *prakriti*, Self and Nature, as expressed here, is generally associated with the Upanishads, but was preceded in Indic tradition by the mystical

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1 Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (2010 ed.), p. 117

revelations of the gods in the Veda. 'The eater eating is eaten' is an expression of the idea of *agni*, the fire in everything which is consuming and creating and destroying continuously, the sacrificial flame, the eternal divine energy in the body/life/mind/spirit continuum of the world. And its source is Shakti, the original emanation of Brahman, who brings to birth the gods – Agni, Varuna, Mitra, Vayu, Indra, Savitri. Sri Aurobindo, in his synthesis of the Veda and Upanishads, interprets all of these Vedic gods as symbols of different levels of consciousness and the principles of manifestation. Agni is the principle or source of energy on the physical plane, Vayu is the principle or source of energy in the vital, Indra is the source of energy in the mind, which is just a higher organization of vital energy. And then there are Surya (the sun of truth) and Savitri (the inspired Word) who are the creative deities that bring the gods to birth in the temporal world. In his commentary on the Kena Upanishad, referring to these gods, Sri Aurobindo says the path, the way of transformation, is precisely to think correctly, and to think correctly is to see and know behind the forms of things their immutable principles, the gods. And it is only by negating the way the mind usually works that we can perceive those universal principles behind things. Only when we learn to see those universal principles as realities, can we know the Brahman, which is their supreme source. This requires sacrifice, negation of mortality, negation of illusion, entering into the immutable Self, and perceiving its higher divine energy in things. That's Yoga.

Now, in Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Gita he speaks about three levels of sacrifice in a specific way, which we shall hear. The Enjoyer of the sacrifice, the divine Being, he says, "may be known in an inferior action through the *devas*, the gods, the powers of the divine Soul in Nature and in the eternal interaction of these powers and the soul of man, mutually giving and receiving, mutually helping, increasing, raising each other's workings and satisfaction, a commerce in which man rises towards a growing fitness for the supreme good. He recognises that his life is a part of this divine action in Nature and not a thing separate and to be held and pursued for its own sake."<sup>2</sup>

We give ourselves to the light of Indra, for example, to improve our mentality. And if we are sincere and persistent and Indra accepts our sacrifice, then the light of a higher mind shines within us. This is the psychologizing of Vedic mythology, which is the basis of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and Yoga. All the Vedic powers or gods become powers of consciousness. Therefore the Mother could say, in a message that was distributed by the Ashram last year, 2013, "Agni is your psychic being, and you need to bring that pure divine energy forward in life."<sup>3</sup> So this energy of the gods in man can be known as sacrifice even on our inferior level of action. I think most of us are not yet aware of even this inferior level of sacrifice. We pursue things for their own sake all the time, and we forget about this universal divine action that manifests temporally through our drives and enjoyments. But that doesn't change the fact that those drives and enjoyments are sacrifices to universal divine forces. And if we start to enjoy those, instead of just enjoying the material fruits, we have made a step, spiritually, in the process of transformation of consciousness. This brings us to the second level of sacrifice.

"He regards his enjoyments and the satisfaction of his desires as the fruit of sacrifice and the gift of the gods in their divine universal workings and he ceases to pursue them in the false and evil spirit of sinful egoistic selfishness as if they were a good to be seized from life by his own unaided strength without return and without thankfulness. As this spirit increases in him, he subordinates his desires, becomes satisfied with sacrifice as the law of life and works, and is content with whatever remains over from the sacrifice, giving up all the rest freely as an offering in the great and beneficent interchange between his life and the world-life."<sup>4</sup>

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2 Ibid, p. 118

3 The Ashram message of Feb, 21, 2013 is reproduced at the end of this lecture.

4 Op cit., p. 118



This is the active negation of attachments and desires and the giving up of the ego's drives so that one experiences one's energies as sacrifice to the divine fire. And then the heat of devotion arises in the human being who performs this sacrifice to the higher self. Hegel said that. And according to this teaching of the Gita, whatever is left from the sacrifice is acceptable, good or bad, success or failure, and nothing is either particularly worth doing or not doing. The fruits of our action are all the same offering; it's all the one divine energy of sacrifice. Then, the third level, the highest good, comes into view. And this is the goal of living, for Plato and Augustine as well. It is common language in the philosophy of religion – the pursuit of the highest good.

“Whoever goes contrary to this law of action and pursues works and enjoyment for his own isolated personal self-interest, lives in vain; he misses the true meaning and aim and utility of living and the upward growth of the soul; he is not on the path which leads to the highest good. But *the highest* only comes when the sacrifice is no longer to the gods, but to the one all pervading Divine established in the sacrifice, of whom the gods are inferior forms and powers, and when he puts away the lower self that desires and enjoys and gives up his personal sense of being the worker to the true executrix of all works, Prakriti, and his personal sense of being the enjoyer to the Divine Purusha, the higher and universal Self who is the real enjoyer of the works of Prakriti. In that Self and not in any personal enjoyment he finds now his sole satisfaction, complete content, pure delight; he has nothing to gain by action or inaction, depends neither on gods nor men for anything, seeks no profit from any, for the self-delight is all-sufficient... his soul takes its poise not in the insecurity of Prakriti, but in the peace of the immutable Brahman, even while his actions continue in the movement of Prakriti.”<sup>5</sup>

That one from whom we struggled so hard to be detached – nature, *prakriti*, becomes the one with whom we are unified in the highest sacrifice, and this is the Tantric step above the Vedanta. The highest self is the one Self in all, who is actually enjoying in all of us all the time the fruits of the sacrifice that we make to the gods. And it is only when we realize this perfect poise of the soul, when we take this stand in the highest Self, that we can achieve the highest good. And as we shall see, in the philosophy of Plato and Augustine, as well as in Hegel, this is the aim of philosophy.

### **Text of the Message of the Mother distributed by the Ashram on Feb, 21, 2013**

“There is a sacred fire that burns in the heart and envelops the whole being: it is Agni, who illumines and purifies all. I kindle that fire in you each time that you ask me for some progress; but it destroys nothing except falsehood and obscurity.

It is Agni who prepares the immortal body. Establishing Agni in the body's cells is the first step towards physical transformation. It is the psychic being who will materialise and give this new body. Agni is that psychic being in us, the immortal in the mortal to change mortality into his self.”

### **The Witness and the Wheel**

Who art thou in the heart comrade of man who sitst  
August, watching his works, watching his joys and griefs,  
Unmoved, careless of pain, careless of death and fate?  
Witness, what hast thou seen watching this great blind world  
Moving helpless in Time, whirled on the Wheel in Space,

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5 Ibid., p. 118-119; the separation of *purusha* and *prakriti* is also conveyed in the short mantric poem titled 'The Witness and the Wheel', which is reproduced here from *Collected Poems* (1972 ed.), p.562.

That yet thou with thy vast Will biddest toil our hearts,  
Mystic,—for without thee nothing can last in Time?  
We too, when from the urge ceaseless of Nature turn  
Our souls, far from the breast casting her tool, desire,  
Grow like thee. In the front Nature still drives in vain  
The blind trail of our acts, passions and thoughts and hopes;  
Unmoved, calm, we look on, careless of death and fate,  
Of grief careless and joy,—signs of a surface script  
Without value or sense, steps of an aimless world.  
Something watches behind, Spirit or Self or Soul,  
Viewing Space and its toil, waiting the end of Time.  
Witness, who then art thou, one with thee who am I,  
Nameless, watching the Wheel whirl across Time and Space?

#### 4. The Concept of Spirit

The 'philosophy of religion', means the wisdom that belongs to religion, according to the genitive case. It could also mean the philosophy about religion, *ad religio*. The third possibility is philosophy for religion, in the sense of an agent. My interest is mostly in that wisdom which comes from religion. I am not intending to be an agent of religion, nor to encompass all of the intellectual critique of the subject as academics do. You know by now that I am not approaching the subject in an academic way. It is an exploration of what I am able to find, or to discover in the wisdom of religion. So far we have covered in great depth the concept of sacrifice, for example. And we have found evidence of a similar understanding of the term in Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity.

What we have read in Hegel's philosophy, I have found to be not only in consonance with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, but suggestive of a much deeper concept of Spirit than we might have expected from the father of phenomenology. Tonight I would like to pursue in depth his concept of absolute Spirit. In approaching the concept of Spirit, I find a quotation that we have heard from Hegel to be particularly illuminating, and it is also a good summary of his philosophy in general. (The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a landmark in the evolution of consciousness. If anyone is really interested in the evolution of consciousness, *extra religio*, I would strongly recommend reading this book. Anyone who has bothered to read *The Life Divine* would probably actually enjoy reading Hegel.)

So, Hegel writes, "If heart and will are earnestly and thoroughly cultivated for the universal and the true, then there is present what appears as *ethical life*. To that extent ethical life is the most genuine cultus. But consciousness of the true, of the divine, of God, must be directly bound up with it."<sup>1</sup> We must be conscious of the divine, in a direct, substantial way, in order to live the ethical life. That is what he just said. Because we are going to look back into Augustine at the very foundation of Christianity, and because Augustine looks back at Plato, we are looking here at 800 years between Plato and Augustine, 1400 years between Augustine and Hegel, and another 200 years until we see Bergson and Sri Aurobindo. And we will find that this fundamental idea of philosophy and religion has developed consistently, throughout this long period of time without much difference. It is somehow a fundamental perception and phenomenon of the human consciousness since rational thinking began. So we are looking back into the roots of that fundamental phenomenon of human consciousness today.

Hegel says, "To this extent philosophy too is a continual cultus; it has as its object the true, and the true

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<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the philosophy of religion* (1988 ed.), p. 194

in its highest shape as absolute spirit, as God. To know this true not only in its simple form as God, but also to know the rational in God's works – as produced by God and endowed with reason – that is philosophy.”<sup>2</sup> Now this idea that truth is absolute spirit and that this is the object of philosophy gets lost in the modern scientific age to some extent, and especially in the last fifty years or so of academic philosophy which has been dominated by mathematics and logic. And of course philosophy does many things. But still, there is a certain stream of philosophy, even in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, that concerns itself with absolute truth. To know the principle of intelligence in the universe is to know the truth, according to Hegel, and in Heidegger's philosophy for example this truth is Reason, the ground of Being. Through philosophy we cultivate a consciousness of the nature of intelligence, of order, of meaning, of purpose, and the realization that this is the essential nature of existence. The modern philosophy of evolution couldn't demonstrate more clearly the classical idea of Aristotle that everything in nature is for a purpose.

So then, Hegel says, “It is part of knowing the true that one should dismiss one's subjectivity, the subjective fancies of personal vanity, and concern oneself with the true purely in thought, conducting oneself solely in accordance with objective thought. This negation of one's specific subjectivity is an essential and necessary moment.”<sup>3</sup> This is a central tenet in Hinduism and Buddhism as well. In order to know the truth we must negate our subjectivity. But in German philosophy this is quite a reversal of Kant's point of view, which was that knowledge is only subjective, and the truth of things themselves cannot be known. And everything in philosophy that proceeds from the phenomenology of Hegel, and especially the more radical phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger, moves in the direction of a rejection of the conditioned frameworks of understanding, rational knowledge, towards a pure intuitive grasp of the truth of things as such. The idea of phenomenology, and the more recent movement of deconstruction in philosophy, is to step back from the constructed frameworks of knowledge, and by deconstructing them layer by layer, to leave standing what really is. If you are an evolutionary biologist or neuroscientist, for example, and you have not studied philosophy, then you are probably not going to grasp much about evolution, but you are going to have an enormous framework of information and evidence. If you add to that picture this kind of philosophical understanding, then you can become a philosopher of biology and perhaps grasp evolution as a whole. Konrad Lorenz seems to have been such a philosopher.

The negation of one's subjectivity, says Hegel, is an essential and necessary movement. And he has also suggested the idea that objective thought is capable of a direct grasp of the truth. In this idea we find a definition of objective thought that is not the one commonly held by most people. In fact Hegel's philosophy can be summed up in the distinction he makes between subjective thought and objective thought. It is said that every philosopher has one essential insight which all of their work is an effort to express, and we can see the truth of this statement in Hegel's philosophy. He goes to great pains to explain how it is possible to understand something conceptually on the basis of perception, experimentation, and analysis, and then to internalize that information in a way that brings back the object to itself, for itself and in itself. The object that is screened through all the efforts and layers of the subjective mind to understand something in terms of its own ideas, which most people think constitute the objects of knowledge, are not the object. It is the thing in itself, which Kant said we can't know, but which intuitive philosophy says we can know. And as I have said before, there have been strong intuitive philosophers throughout the history of philosophy, such as Bergson and Sri Aurobindo in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The real philosophers of evolution are therefore those who have developed the technique of grasping the whole movement of nature intuitively in its objective reality. Everything that

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2 Ibid

3 Ibid., p. 195

they write is then an effort to express that intuitive grasp of the whole, which they can do in book after book because they are attuned to that creativity of nature.

This way of thinking emerged first in the philosophy of Plato. And those 800 years between Plato and Augustine were very rich in the development of intuitive thinking about the whole. Then Plotinus came along about two hundred years after Christ and synthesized all the Platonic/Aristotelian understanding of those centuries and conveyed it in his school, where Augustine eventually came to be a student. And he was a giant in the history of thinking. That is why he is still studied today and had such an enormous influence on the development of Western thought. His Christianity built the bridge between classical Platonic/Greek thinking and modern European/Hegelian thinking, as I think we shall see in our exploration of the *City of God*. First of all, the idea of the cultus and the distinction given to it by Hegel is thoroughly developed by Augustine in his *City of God*, which is an enormous volume of more than a thousand pages in this English translation. In Chapter 10 we find many ideas that are especially important for our purposes. There he says, for example:

“What kind of observances of religion and devotion are we to believe that they (the philosophers) wish to see in us? Or, to put it more plainly: Is it their desire that we should offer ceremony and sacrifice, or consecrate with solemn ritual either our possessions or ourselves, to their god, who is also our god, and to him alone? Or do they claim those honours also for themselves? ...For this is the kind of worship which we owe to the Divinity, or, more precisely, the Deity. I cannot think of a suitable Latin term to express it in one word, and so I shall be inserting, where necessary, a Greek word to convey my meaning. *Latreia* is the word represented in our translations by 'service', wherever it is found in the scriptures. But the service due to man, the service referred to by the Apostle when he says that servants should be obedient to their masters, is called by a different word in Greek, whereas *latreia*, according to the usage of the writers who preserve for us the words of God, is always, or almost always, the word employed for the service which concerns the worship of God. The word 'cult' (cultus) by itself would not imply something due only to god. For we are said to 'cultivate' men when we continually pay respect to them either in our memory or by our presence. And this word is employed not only in respect of things which in a spirit of devout humility we regard as above us, but even of some things which are below us.”<sup>4</sup>

In modern language we frequently hear that in Christianity the priest or pastor performs a 'service'. It means the performance of the ritual of the sacraments usually. This is a concept that has its roots in very early Christianity and it corresponds to ritual practice offered to God. On the other hand we cultivate relationships of subservience, respect, cooperation, with men, which could be meant by 'cultus', and not necessarily service to God. And I am pointing this out in order to stress the importance of language in the cultivation of this kind of thinking. Augustine, then, clarifies all of this further. He says:

“The word religion (*religio*) would seem, to be sure, to signify more particularly the cult offered to God, rather than 'cult' in general; and that is why our translators have used it to render the Greek word *threskeia*. However, in Latin usage (and by that I do not mean in the speech of the illiterate, but even in the language of the highly educated) 'religion' is something which is displayed in human relationships, in the family (in the narrower and the wider sense) and between friends; and so the use of the word does not avoid ambiguity when the worship of God is in question. We have no right to affirm with confidence that 'religion' is confined to the worship of God, since it seems that this word has been detached from its normal meaning, in which it refers to to an attitude of respect in relations between a

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4 St. Augustine, *City of God* (1986 ed.), p. 374

man and his neighbour.”<sup>5</sup> So, if we don't know Latin, then we haven't read texts from that period which would enable us to make these distinctions. He informs us that the idea of religion, in 400 CE, had the meaning of respect or deference to superiors or family members, perhaps in the sense that we get of such relations in traditional Chinese, Confucian society. And in such societies people follow this order of respect 'religiously'. Augustine clarifies further:

“The word 'piety' (*eusebia* in Greek) is generally understood as referring particularly to the worship of God. But this word also is used of a dutiful attitude towards parents; while in popular speech it is constantly used in connection with acts of compassion – the reason for this being, in my opinion, that God especially commands the performance of such acts, and bears witness that they please him as much as sacrifices or even more than sacrifices.”<sup>6</sup> Augustine is trying here to define exactly what the duty or service is that we owe to the deity, and how it is different from other forms of respectful behavior. He eventually will get directly to the difference between the idea of sacrifice to the gods and the sacrifice we owe to the supreme spirit, which was a major preoccupation of his in three important chapters of the *City of God*, 8,9,10. There he is trying to speak specifically to this distinction, as well as to the distinction between knowledge of the divine and other kinds of knowledge, and also to what distinguishes the way we comport ourselves respectfully in society (in the city of man) and the way we comport ourselves to the divine (in the city of God).

These very interesting problems are closely connected to the statement we have read in Hegel about philosophy. According to Hegel, philosophy means the wisdom that comes from knowing the absolute spirit. Ethical life becomes possible when we know that, because that knowledge and the sacrifice it entails dissolves our egoism and vanity and selfishness. Then we become capable of the highest good. And Augustine says, similarly, “If wisdom is identical with God, by whom all things were made, as we are assured by divine authority and by divine truth, then the true philosopher is the lover of God. But the thing designated by the name is not found in all those who boast of the name.”<sup>7</sup> To clarify such distinctions, he says, “...we shall have to cross swords, not with the man in the street but with the philosophers. For that name means that they profess to be lovers of wisdom.” He will then set forth to clarify many of the terms of philosophy and religion extant in his day, as we shall see below. In his conclusion of the passage about such terms as religion, piety, and cultus that we have read, there is a particularly beautiful example of how his argumentative method led him to express this great corpus of Christian doctrine, but also to set the disputational tone of much of Christian discourse for centuries:

“There is, then, an attitude which is called in Greek *latreia* and is translated by the Latin *servitus*, meaning that service of the worship of God, or it may be called *threskeia* in Greek, but in Latin *religio*, the religion which binds us to God; or the Greeks may call it *theo-sebia*, which, in default of one equivalent word we may call 'worship of God'. What is expressed by those words is the worship we hold to be due only to him who is the true God, who transforms his worshipers into gods. ...To this God we owe our service – what in Greek is called *latreia* – whether in the various sacraments or in ourselves. For we are his temple, collectively, and as individuals. For he condescends to dwell in the union of all and in each person. He is as great in the individual as he is in the whole body of his worshipers, for he cannot be increased in bulk or diminished by partition. When we lift up our hearts to him, our heart is his altar. ...We burn the sweetest incense for him, when we are in his sight on fire with devout and holy love. We vow to him and offer to him the gifts he has given us, and the gift of ourselves. ...By our election of him as our goal – or rather by our re-election (and we are told that the

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5 Ibid., p. 375

6 Ibid., p. 373

7 Ibid., p. 298

word 'religion' comes from *relegere*, to re-elect), we direct our course towards him with love (*dilectio*), so that in reaching him we may find our rest, and attain our happiness because we have achieved fulfillment in him. For our Good, that Final Good about which the philosophers dispute, is nothing else but to cleave to him whose spiritual embrace, if one may so express it, fills the intellectual soul and makes it fertile with true virtues.”<sup>8</sup>

We have seen that, at the start of his review of philosophy, which leads him to set the tone and guidelines for much of the philosophical debate that has followed up to the present time, as he did also for Christian doctrine, he points out that, although the true philosopher is the lover of God, just because men call themselves philosophers does not necessarily mean that they are lovers of true wisdom. Therefore, he said, it was necessary to choose some among the philosophers with whom the subject could be discussed on a reasonable level. It makes no sense, he said, to discuss philosophy with those who are not lovers of true wisdom. And Plato had made a similar argument against the sophists in his time. So Augustine selected and reviewed the ideas of a list of philosophers who are still the ones that students of philosophy think are worthy of note today, and that is because they are the ones that were also reviewed at length in the writings of Aristotle: Pythagoras, Thales, Anaxagoras, Diogenes, Socrates, Plato, etc. In fact, most of what is known about these philosophers was preserved in the writings of Aristotle. By the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, the works of Plato and the pre-Socratics had been lost, and the school of Plotinus and neo-Platonism had been carried forward by the students of Aristotle. It's just a matter of historical fact that for more than a thousand years after Christ, Plato was known primarily through the writings of Aristotle. And in my view Aristotle was a very good voice for Plato, and there is very little difference between them, although there are different viewpoints about that.

So, Augustine comes to this point, which is most interesting to us: “Plato deservedly achieved the most outstanding reputation among the philosophers, and he quite overshadowed all the rest.” In fact he was known as Plato the Divine, and was considered to be in a league by himself in Athens in those days. He had the ear of the aristocracy and the kings. His student Aristotle was the teacher of Alexander the Great. So these teachers were held in very high esteem. Somehow Augustine understood this and also that what Plato had to say was the foundation of thinking about God. In fact the Christian religion has preserved the teachings of Plato and Aristotle immaculately, and they have formed the basis of Christian doctrine. So, at this point Augustine says, “The study of philosophy is conducted along two lines.” And here we depart from other levels of thought and enter into the field of pure philosophy. What is it? How does it get to be wisdom and knowledge of God? Augustine will tell us.

“The two lines of the study of philosophy may be called practical and speculative philosophy, the former dealing with the conduct of life and the establishment of moral standards, the latter concerned with the theory of causation and the nature of absolute truth.”<sup>9</sup> To understand the theory of causation, how things get to be what they are, and to understand absolute truth, the Divine, and to understand ethical life, the Good, those are the three domains of traditional philosophy – ontology, epistemology, and ethics. “Socrates is the type of excellence in practical wisdom, while Pythagoras concentrated on the contemplative, for which he was equipped by his intellectual power. It was Plato's great claim to fame that he brought philosophy to its perfection by joining together these two strands. He then divided philosophy into three parts: moral philosophy, which particularly relates to action; natural philosophy, devoted to speculation; and rational philosophy, which distinguishes truth from falsehood. ...However, Plato's own thought in and about these three separate divisions; that is, how he defined the end of all action, where he located the cause of all phenomena, and where he found the illumination of all

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8 Ibid., p. 375-376

9 Ibid., p. 303

reasoning processes; these are matters which, in my judgment..., we cannot determine.”<sup>10</sup> And this tells us that Augustine didn't have access to the original texts. But what he has is enough for him to lay the foundation of Western philosophical thought, and that is what he does. He says, “There are thinkers who have rightly recognized Plato's pre-eminence over the pagan philosophers and have won praise for the penetration and accuracy of their judgment, and enjoy a widespread reputation as his followers. It may be that they have some such conception of God as to find in him the cause of existence, the principle of reason, and the rule of life. Those three things, it will be seen, correspond to the three divisions of philosophy, natural, rational, and moral.”<sup>11</sup> Philosophers have laid down, throughout history, East and West, the idea that knowledge of the divine is the basis of those three aims of knowledge.

Ethics means the rule of life, or how to live the good life. Plato's works are full of discussions about that. Ontology is the study of what causes things to be, and to be what they are, the study of Being. Epistemology, *episteme* in Greek, is the study of how we can know the truth, or what truth is. How do we know that what we know is true? This is an endless debate, and it gets to be known as 'logic' in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. For Aristotle it was known as rhetoric because speech and logic at that time were assumed to be able to represent authentic knowing more or less accurately and effectively. The intellect and mind were still thought of as integral parts of the natural order of the world. There was still thought to be a relationship between what we think and say and what actually exists. Of course everything I have said today is true and you have understood it perfectly, so how could it be questioned, right? Or maybe I am just a sophist entertaining you with some statements about religion so that I can gain your respect and we can cultivate a pious religious relationship. Maybe that is what Sri Aurobindo is doing. He is impressing us with the power of speech so that we will become devoted to his doctrines and practice the transformation of consciousness. Well of course that is what he is doing. In Christian teaching this is *kerygma*, the powerful transmission of the word, and the word is God. Do we believe it is possible to have a transmission of divine knowledge through speech? My god, what a radical idea! But it happens to be the foundation of Hindu spirituality, and Buddhist spirituality, and Western Platonic/Christian spirituality.

So, Augustine perceives this level of truth and language in Plato via Plotinus and the neo-Platonists. And he believes that some of those philosophers are lovers of wisdom and can transmit it, and that it does correspond to the Christian inspiration. He says, “If Plato says that the wise man is the man who imitates, knows, and loves this God, and that participation in this God brings man happiness, (...in whom for us all things are held together, in whom for us all things are certain, in whom is found all goodness), what need is there to examine the other philosophers? There are none who come nearer to us than the Platonists.”<sup>12</sup> Because he perceived that this was true, it has influenced the whole history of Christianity, and through it the whole modern age. This ancient Greek idea of the supreme good, the *summum bonum*, is what has carried Christianity and all modern thinking forward. The works of Plato were rediscovered in Europe around the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, and the whole intellectual development from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century on was driven by Plato. Sri Aurobindo's writing is full of Plato. He was a Greek scholar and read the original. He wrote one book on harmony that is an imitation of Plato. And his philosophy is Platonic. In the middle of a commentary on the Kena Upanishad about the *sruti* he says that it is the divine *logos*. And his idea of the *gnostic* consciousness comes from this period of Greek thinking; it is a neo-Platonic term. Sri Aurobindo has been able to blend Sankhya and Vedanta with Platonism because they conveyed the same perceptions at the same time on different sides of the world. When

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10 Ibid., p. 303

11 Ibid., p. 304

12 Ibid.

you look at those ideas, the ideas of Sankhya philosophy and Platonic philosophy in their modern versions, you can see that they were derived from a very similar type of understanding and perception.

So then, what is this Platonism? There is an important passage in Augustine where he distinguishes between the materialist philosophers and the metaphysical philosophers, and the same arguments were put forward by him that we see today. And they will put us right where we want to be: squarely in front of the concept of Spirit. He says, "Platonism must take pride of place over 'fabulous' theology, with its titillation of impious minds by rehearsing the scandals of the gods, and over 'civil' theology, where unclean demons posing as gods, have seduced the crowds who are wedded to earthly joys... The teaching of both these theologies, the 'fabulous' and the 'civil' must yield place to the doctrine of the Platonists; for the Platonists assert that the true God is the author of the universe, the source of the light of truth, and the bestower of happiness." Augustine's disenchantment with the Roman customs of worshiping the gods of pleasure and wealth and power, as well as with the corrupt and unjust laws of civil society, is quite apparent here. And of course the definitive texts on civil law, ethics, and metaphysics had been written by Plato and Aristotle, and must take precedence over what Augustine perceived to be the impieties and perversions of the Roman state. He then puts forth the arguments that align the Platonists with the true religion, as he sees it, and that characterize the debate between science and spirituality alive even today.

"And the other philosophers also must yield to those great men who recognize so great a God – I mean those other philosophers whose minds were so subservient to the body they conceived only of corporeal origins for all natural phenomena. Thales finding it in water, Anaximenes in air, the Stoics in fire, Epicurus in the atoms, that is in infinitesimal material particles, indivisible and imperceptible; and there are all the other thinkers, whom it is unnecessary to enumerate, who have maintained that the cause and origin of the universe is to be found in material bodies, simple or compound, inanimate or animate, but still material bodies."<sup>13</sup> (Today, scientists and philosophers are looking for the causes of things in infinitesimal material particles, in the quantum field. But Plato and Aristotle knew otherwise.)

"These thinkers and their like could not conceive of anything beyond the fantasies suggested by imagination, circumscribed by the bodily senses. They had, to be sure, something within themselves which they did not see; they formed a mental picture of what they had seen outside themselves, even when they did not see it any longer but merely thought of it. Now when a material thing is thus seen in the mind's eye, it is no longer a material object but the likeness of such an object; and the faculty which perceives this likeness in the mind is neither a material body, nor the likeness of a physical object; and the faculty which judges its beauty or ugliness is certainly superior to the image on which it passes judgment. This faculty is the human intellect, the rational constituent in the soul of man, and that, without any doubt, is not a material object, if it is true that the image of the object, when it is seen and judged in the mind of a thinking man, is not a material object. Then it cannot be earth, or water, or air, or fire; not one of the four elements, as they are called, of which the visible material world is constituted. But if our mind is not a material object, how can God, the creator of the mind, be himself a material thing?"<sup>14</sup>

So here we are, asking the philosophical, empirical, ontological questions. What is the relationship between what we perceive outside ourselves and our thought about that, our conceptual understanding of what we perceive? This is the pearl of philosophy. And this kind of thinking leads to the idea of Spirit, as soon as this question is asked, about the relationship between knowing and the known,

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13 Ibid., p. 306

14 Ibid., p. 306-307



between the perception of things and the representation of perception by the mind. The mind perceives the identity between thought and the things, and it also perceives the difference, which exists only in consciousness. The difference itself doesn't exist in things. This idea is the foundation of epistemology. And the material movements of particles and molecules in the brain certainly don't cause thinking about such things as beauty, and truth, and justice.

Augustine continues, “So, then, those thinkers (the materialists) must rank below the Platonists, as we have said. And so must those who would blush to assert that God is material, but suppose him to be of the same nature as the mind of man. They are not worried by the excessive mutability of the human soul, a mutability which it would be blasphemous to ascribe to the divine nature. They retort, 'It is the body that changes the nature of the soul; in itself the soul is immutable'. They might as well say, 'It is an external material object which wounds the flesh; in itself the flesh is invulnerable'. Nothing at all can change the immutable; what can be changed by an external object is susceptible of change, and cannot properly be called immutable.’”<sup>15</sup>

It is typical of modern science and scientific philosophy to assert that we get our thoughts and inspirations from the impact of material things in the environment or from the impact of molecules in our brains and nerves, and here is the definitive argument against such thinking already stated in 400 CE. And then the concluding argument that nothing can change the immutable, and that the cause of non-material things such as the mind and soul must itself be immutable, brings us to the definition of Spirit. And this argument is also pursued at length by Sri Aurobindo, in the concept of the 'self-existent' spirit, which is by definition immutable, which is not caused by anything, and yet it is that from which everything proceeds. It is also absolutely free, and absolutely beautiful, and absolutely true. All the mutable forms in the universe proceed from its self-existent, absolute power. And that is the concept of Spirit.

## 5. The Immutable Spirit

“Know that to be the Brahman and not this which men follow after here.”<sup>1</sup> In this text and commentary on the Kena Upanishad by Sri Aurobindo, we find a kind of definition of the Brahman, or let's say a definition of God, as self-existent, immutable Being. And in the philosophy of religion, we come necessarily to this question: what is God? There are many texts in the philosophy of religion throughout the centuries that have tried to answer this question. For example, I have mentioned Anselm, who was an important Catholic philosopher around the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. He eventually became one of the most important theologians in the history of the church, because he wrote extensively and brilliantly on this subject. And I have mentioned that from his time on, around the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Century, the Catholic cathedrals and monasteries became the main centers of learning throughout Europe and eventually the first universities. The reason why that happened is something we should try to grasp, because the development of human consciousness through the history of religion is an important objective of learning. And that was our starting point.

When we find such close similarities in the definition of concepts like sacrifice in Hinduism and Buddhism, and then we find in Augustine, at the foundation of Christian doctrine, definitions that are almost identical to those of Buddhism and Hinduism, we come to perceive that this is a phenomenon of consciousness. Religious teachers and thinkers throughout history have considered sacrifice to be

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Kena and Other Upanishads* (2001 ed.), p.6

absolutely necessary for the development of the human being. And by sacrifice they mean the renunciation of worldly desires and attachments in order to be able to focus on Spirit, to be purified by Spirit, and to live a spiritual life, which from the beginning has been perceived to be the purpose of human existence. The great philosophers and seers and mystics have said this in the same way in many different cultures. And in most cases “worldly” has meant materialistic and egoistic.

We are focusing now on Augustine, and we have heard some of his arguments on the philosophy of causation. One argument is that mind cannot be explained by material causation. He said, “If mind is not a material object, how can God, the creator of the mind, be a material thing?” The association is made here between mind, as the principle of intelligence, which doesn't have 'objects' in it; and the spiritual representation by mind of material things. Somehow consciousness is perceived to be a spiritual substance and not a material substance, from the beginning of rational thought. And Augustine gets these concepts from Plato and Aristotle who were very clear about all of this. What we find in these sections of the *City of God* is a restatement of the arguments of Plato and Aristotle, and this is the foundation of Christian philosophy. Throughout the centuries of Christian history we find restatements of Plato and Aristotle. Thomas Aquinas is the best known for writing books that paraphrased the writings of Aristotle almost verbatim. But all the way back to Augustine, which is 800 years before Aquinas, and 800 years after Plato – 1600 years – we find continuous development of the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, and from the 12th Century on we find that the age of science takes off in the cathedral schools because of this development. So the modern age is a direct product of those schools, in which mathematics, and logic, and astronomy, along with theology of course, were all developed by high ranking members of the Catholic hierarchy like Anselm and Aquinas. In this transition “spiritual” becomes more and more exclusively associated with “mind” and “intellect”.

In Augustine we find the pivotal transmission of Platonic thinking from Greek into Latin. He was a Greek scholar, a famous rhetorician, a student of the school of Plotinus, and a Catholic bishop, who is known as one of the most influential authors of Christian doctrine. So, as we read these texts we should try to grasp the significance of this phenomenon. But we should also see how this early Christian thought extends beyond the limits of European philosophy and history into a more universal dimension of pure metaphysical or spiritual thinking, in addition to its tendency toward logic and science. In his argument on non-material causation, Augustine said, “...Nothing at all can change the immutable; what can be changed by an external object is susceptible of change, and cannot properly be called immutable.” This idea of immutability is a concept that we find elaborated especially in Hindu thought. The Brahman, the self-existent being, is fundamentally immutable, unchanging, formless. And the idea of *purusa*, of self or soul, is that there is such an entity in us which is immutable. We should find it through the practice of Yoga. Sri Aurobindo makes this point very strongly in his commentaries on the scriptures. Yoga is an integral part of the philosophy of the Upanishads because it is understood that not only is this immutable being the truth of things, but we must discover it in ourselves, and for that reason it is necessary to sacrifice worldly preoccupations, to renounce the attachment of the mind and the energies of life to material objects, to withdraw from that realm of experience, and to have the experience of the immutable.

So, Augustine, emphasizing this principle further, says, “These philosophers, the Platonists, have been raised above the rest by a glorious reputation they so thoroughly deserve. And they recognized that no material object can be God. For that reason they raised their eyes above all material objects in their search for God and realized that nothing changeable can be the supreme God. And therefore, in their search for the supreme God, – *(and this is important to note because one of his main preoccupations was with the Romans who made sacrifices to all the multifarious lower gods, and he devotes chapters to arguing against that practice; this was one of his strongest points of contention)* – they raised their

eyes above all mutable souls and spirits. They saw also that in every mutable being the form which determines its mode of being and its nature can only come from him who truly is because he exists immutably.”<sup>2</sup> This is pure Platonism. In the thinking of Plato and Aristotle, the form of things is what we know. We don't know the matter of things. Every general concept that we have, which is based on experience, is a form: we know the form of the elephant, the form of the human being, the form of democracy – we do not know the solid material thing, and we know that such ideal forms as democracy do not exist materially and actually anywhere in the world. There are multifarious attempts that approximate the ideal throughout history, most of which succumb to plutocracy and oligarchy. So democracy is an ideal form. But even the nefarious approximations to democracy are forms of the idea. We do not know their day to day incremental becomings and all the internecine battles between people that enable the stronger to rise and the weaker to fall, but we know these things in general because that is the form of politics. Generation and corruption are stages through which societies pass, and we know societies in terms of their definitions and qualities, languages and developmental periods. We have conceptual understandings and impressions of things which are more or less transitory 'forms' that we identify with those societies, and if we know the truth about something we know its true form.

So the distinction is made between the matter and process of something and the form that it becomes, or that it can potentially become. And our clever minds know more than what actually happens in time and space. So from where does that a-temporal seeing and knowing come, and the ability to know the truth about things? How is it that these material bodies, and dynamic life energies, and mental impressions and emotions all support an intelligence which knows the forms of things, and yet it is not in those things and those things are not in it? Some of those forms are even truer than things. For example, we have a concept of justice which enables us to make judgments about all kinds of things that happen to us and in society, that we judge on the basis of some notion that we have of justice. But we have never experienced true justice. So, Plato understood that the human being has a pre-conceptual understanding of things, which is especially apparent in the fields of aesthetics and ethics.

Augustine then goes on to say, “It follows that the whole material universe, its shapes, qualities, ordered motions, elements disposed throughout its whole extent, stretching from heaven to earth, together with all the bodies contained within them; and all life, whether that which merely nourishes and maintains existence, as in the trees, or that which has sensibility as well, as in the animals; or that which has all this, and intelligence besides, as in human beings; or that life which needs no support in the way of nourishment, but maintains existence, and has feeling and intelligence, as in the case of angels – all these alike could come into being only through him who simply is. For him existence is not something different from life, as if he could exist without living; nor is life something other than intelligence, as if he could live without understanding; nor understanding something other than happiness, as if he could understand without being happy. For him, to exist is the same as to live, to understand, to be happy.”<sup>3</sup>

The 'simple', in philosophy, means that which is without any cause outside of itself. So the self-existent is simple, immutable, uncreated being. It simply is; and from it every mutable form comes into being. This is a fundamental concept of God, and it doesn't matter if we look at it in terms of Greek, Platonic thinking, or in terms of Vedanta in India, or whatever, this is the most fundamental origin of the concept of God. Human consciousness has realized, at least since the development of rationality, – whether derived from logic, intuition, or mystical experience, – that because the mind holds in it concepts of things, and those concepts seem to be unchanging, and because the things themselves in

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2 St. Augustine, *City of God* (1986 ed.), p. 307

3 Ibid., p. 307-308

nature seem to be essentially unchanging, since most people in the past have lived in terms of a span of a few hundred years of memory and recorded experience, and elephants are still elephants and the planetary cycles are still the same, so there is a perception of permanence, even though in material things nothing is permanent. But most of the things we perceive recur constantly, and so their forms seem to be permanent. Even though some species may become extinct or new ones appear, we do not perceive that. Therefore, there is plenty of evidence that for a long time in human cultures there has been a fundamental perception of a quality or aspect of existence that is unchanging. And if we know these 'spiritual' things, like the forms of species, or ideal democracy or justice, then we have in us a faculty that is not material, which knows things that are not material. And this is known today as phenomenal consciousness. It knows the unchanging forms of things that appear to be constantly changing. Augustine and Plato were perceiving and trying to explain phenomenal consciousness. And even today the big problems in philosophy and neuroscience concern phenomenal consciousness. How is it that we have phenomenal consciousness? And what is the relationship between phenomenal consciousness and the phenomena it perceives? And of course philosophical reflection on this question leads to the two branches of philosophy which try to understand how and to what extent we know the truth of things (epistemology), and how the things that we know happen to be there in the things we perceive in nature (ontology).

Augustine, following Plato, jumps to the conclusion that nothing could be if it were not caused by something that is itself unchanging. And that is a big leap. It leads to the form and definition of God as absolute spirit. Augustine at this point puts the terms of physical existence, life, and intelligence in nature in a necessary relationship to the attributes of God, whose nature is existence-intelligence-happiness: Sat-Chit-Ananda in Hinduism. The self-existent must be all powerful, all knowing, and all blissful, if all the forms and qualities of existence are caused by that being. The threefold terms of body-life-mind and the threefold spiritual being of Existence, Consciousness, Bliss are perceived and formulated similarly in both Western and Eastern traditions.

The philosophers of evolution, from Aristotle to Darwin, have perceived the urge in nature to fulfill the potential of the form. The animal reproduces itself, feeds its young, builds its nest; the human being has the drive to regulate society, create the forms of justice, enjoy harmony and beauty in music and art. There is a drive in nature to achieve perfection. Darwin too observed that nature appears to be able to solve all its problems and to move species towards perfection through greater and greater levels of complexity. Therefore, he said, we have no reason to believe that the human being will not arrive at a state of perfection. Similarly, the philosophers of religion have conceived, in a symbolic form, of the absolute principle or cause of this drive for perfection in human nature. The immortal, the perfect, the self-existent being must want to manifest its nature in time and space, and so it manifests in creatures a drive to become like it. So nature is created in the image of God. This is one of the core movements in the philosophy of religion. The wisdom that comes from religion is deeply rooted in this idea that the mind looks ahead, beyond its limitations, conceives of pure harmony and justice and truth, and strives to realize it. One of the products of that thinking is to postulate a final cause of all this. Nature would not manifest this drive for perfection in these forms of matter, life, and mind if it were not meant to be so by some all-embracing and all-powerful intention and purpose. Such a purpose could only derive from that which is perfect in itself.

“It is because of this immutability and this simplicity (of the divine mind), that the Platonists realized that God is the creator from whom all other beings derive, while he is himself uncreated and underivative. They observed that whatever exists is either matter or life, and that life is superior to matter, that the form of matter is accessible to sense, that the form of life is accessible to intelligence. They therefore preferred the 'intelligible' to the 'sensible'. By 'sensible' we mean that which can be

apprehended by bodily sight and touch, by 'intelligible' that which can be recognized by the mind's eye. Physical beauty, whether of an immobile object – for instance the outline of a shape – or of movement – as in the case of melody – can be apprehended only by the mind. This would be quite impossible, if this 'idea' of beauty were not found in the mind in a more perfect form, without volume or mass, without vocal sound, and independent of space and time. ...it is obvious that anything which admits of increase or decrease is changeable.”<sup>4</sup>

This is the idea of the pre-conceptual nature of mind. It knows beauty and justice before it experiences beauty and justice, because it is of the same nature as the divine mind which contains all the ideal forms of existence eternally. So Sri Aurobindo says that spiritual consciousness is a reversal of our normal process of knowing. We always thought that these concepts of mind were the cumulative product of centuries of experience and analysis and comparative opinions. The misconception of science and philosophy about ideal mind has been to think that Plato and Aristotle meant that the form of the elephant is eternal. But none of the species of life are eternal; it is the essence and power and beauty of Life that is eternal, and it is infinitely creative. This is the way consciousness sees things on a high level of functioning that grasps the whole on the basis of the potential, actual and possible nature of things. Plato has many beautiful and elaborate arguments to prove this theory, and they constitute the fundamental critique of mind. What we distinguish between objects is called difference. And that difference doesn't exist in a material form. So how can I know something that doesn't exist in a perceptible form? Similarly, with the beauty of music, the notes of a musical composition are sound vibrations traveling through space, but where is the beauty? It is not in the sounds themselves. It is in their relationships which exist in our sensations, perceptions and memory. So mind is a principle of existence, inherent in sensations, perceptions, memory, and aesthetic and emotional intention. The physical energy in those bodies and instruments exists in time and space, and the dynamic vital energy and emotional feeling that creates and produces the music is tangibly conveyed in time and space, but the product of beauty and meaning is purely mental. Therefore, he says, the intelligible is 'preferred' over the sensible because it is a higher, finer, more beautiful and meaningful form in the hierarchy of existence. And above that is the unchangeable or eternal form of truth and beauty and creativity that is the source. Plato was a radical critic of mind, however. He said that what is in the higher mind is real and the rest is *me on*, non-existent. Aristotle had a slightly higher opinion of matter. He thought that the forms that things have are the realities, and the matter and energy just sustain the forms which draw the matter into its various qualities and states. This is known as hylomorphism and is the source of the distinctions we make between form and matter. In eastern thinking it is the distinction between *pususa* and *prakriti*, self and nature.

“This consideration has readily persuaded men of ability and learning, trained in the philosophical discipline, that the original 'idea' is not to be found in this sphere where it is known to be subject to change. In their view both body and mind might be more or less endowed with form (or 'idea'), and if they could be deprived of form altogether they would be utterly non-existent. And so they saw that there must be some being in which the original form resides, unchangeable, and therefore incomparable. And they rightly believed that it is there that the origin of all things is to be found, in the uncreated, which is the source of all creation.”<sup>5</sup>

Now I want to outline the fundamental categories of philosophy, based on Augustine's view of Plato: rational philosophy, moral philosophy, and natural philosophy. We have just heard Augustine's view of Plato's natural philosophy. It attempts to explain the causes of things. And in classical Greek thinking

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4 Ibid., p. 308

5 Ibid., p. 308

the causes of things are the forms, and the form of something is the highest good that it can realize. The highest good that can be realized by all forms is the Good, *idea tou agathou*. Plato says that it is the power of this highest good to empower everything to be what it is. And that is exactly Sri Aurobindo's definition of Supermind. It is the power of consciousness that brings into being everything that is, along with the energy to perfect it. If we were in that consciousness, there would be perfect energy to realize our potential and the potential of everything around us. It is the Mother, the Mahashakti. So Plotinus, who comes into view in our history of these ideas at this point, developed this idea, and called it the Divine Mind. His idea was that the absolute, immutable creator emanates the Divine Mind, which is its first power to bring into being the ideal forms of things, which then attract matter throughout time and space into temporal forms. There is the absolute, the Divine Mind, and all the evolving souls and bodies of things, in descending order, and this seems to be quite similar if not identical to Sri Aurobindo's schematic of creation based on Hindu metaphysics: the Brahman, the Mahashakti, the gods, and the lower hemisphere of matter, life, mind.<sup>6</sup>

“In rational philosophy”, says Augustine, “the second division, which the Platonists call logic, heaven forbid that I should think to compare them (the Platonists) with those who have placed the criterion of truth in the bodily senses and have decided that all that belongs to the realm of learning is to be measured by such unreliable and misleading standards. Such are the Epicureans, and other philosophers of that type; and even the Stoics, who are so violently attached to the subtle art of disputation, which they call 'dialectic', they hold that the art is to be derived from the bodily senses. They assert that it is from this source that the mind draws its concepts of the things which they explain by means of definition. ...Here I always wonder what bodily senses they use to see that beauty which they say is found only in the wise. With what physical eyes have they beheld the beauty and grace of wisdom? On the other hand, those philosophers whom we deservedly prefer to all the rest, have distinguished between the things discerned by the mind and those attained by the senses, without either detracting from the proper power of the senses, or ascribing to them powers beyond their competence, while they have declared that God himself, the creator of all things, is the light of the mind, which makes possible every acquisition of knowledge.”<sup>7</sup>

This is the definitive critique of empiricism on the one hand, and an exposition of the fundamental tenets of speculative philosophy or idealism on the other. Science insists that reliable knowledge must be based on what can be observed by the senses. And here the strong materialist arguments of the great evolutionist and moral philosopher Kropotkin come to mind. He was so enamoured of the discoveries of science in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, for example, that he said the fact that we perceive ethical behaviors in lower animals through the phenomena of 'mutual aid' means that we get our notions of ethics from the observation of nature, and that ethical behavior was clearly the product of evolutionary selection in nature. Therefore the beliefs of speculative philosophy and mysticism have been definitively overcome. What we learn about philosophy from these very basic observations of Augustine, however, is that the materialist view fails to ask either the question how ethical behavior could be a potential of nature in the first place, or how the mind by its observation of nature through the senses comes to know that the behavior of nature is ethical. And then, Augustine goes even further in his critique by asking about the origin of those highest of ethical and aesthetic creations of the spiritual mind which have no counterpart in nature.

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6 In *The Life Divine* we find a blending by Sri Aurobindo of the Platonic and Vedantic ideas of the causal nature of the Absolute, Immutable, Inexpressible Reality and its expression in, and identity with, all the qualities of existence. See below, p. 40.

7 Ibid., p. 309

We don't very often experience the beauty and grace of wisdom, and we may not have a chance to do so in this life. But, on the other hand, we might experience it almost naturally, because we have this capacity as human beings to get out of our sensorium and to tune in to that grace and beauty, and to dwell in it. The divine Mahashakti brings those energies of the Overmind plane closer to the realm of the sensorium so that we can connect with it. The book *Savitri* is about how to connect with that plane of gods, or universal powers and principles, through the *mantra*, or inspired word. All we really need to do is to renounce our preoccupations with sensations and perceptions and conceptions and tune in to that higher divine energy and experience it in everything. But it is not something we experience with the ordinary senses. Sri Aurobindo says we do not actually have a faculty for doing so as yet; it has to evolve, but we can adapt some of our existing faculties for that function, and eventually the 'organ' for experiencing the divine consciousness will evolve. For the moment we have to use the *chakras*, and nervous system, and mind and will, in a certain way, so that our perception shifts and we can perceive the divine grace and beauty and truth.

Then Augustine goes on to review Plato's moral philosophy. Natural philosophy is about causation. Rational philosophy is about how we know the truth. Now, "there remains the moral section of philosophy, (ethics in Greek) which discusses the question of the *Summum Bonum*, to which we refer all our actions, which we seek for its own sake, not for any ulterior end, and the attainment of which leaves us nothing more to seek for our happiness. For this reason it is called the 'end'; everything else we desire for the sake of this, this we desire for itself alone."<sup>8</sup> Perhaps at this point we should recall the lines from the Kena Upanshad with which this lecture began. And in his commentary on that text, Sri Aurobindo presents a beautiful argument regarding exactly the difference that Augustine is defining here, between relative goods and the absolute, the *Summum Bonum*. Sri Aurobindo says:

"Here in the world that man knows, he possesses something which, however imperfect and insecure, he yet values. For he aims at and to some extent he procures enlarged being, increasing knowledge, more and more joy and satisfaction and these things are so precious to him that for what he can get of them he is ready to pay the price of continual suffering from the shock of their opposites. If then he has to abandon what he here pursues and clasps, there must be a far more powerful attraction drawing him to the Beyond, a secret offer of something so great as to be a full reward for all possible renunciation that can be demanded of him here. This is offered,—not an enlarged becoming, but infinite being; not always relative piecings of knowledge mistaken in their hour for the whole of knowledge, but the possession of our essential consciousness and the flood of its luminous realities; not partial satisfactions, but that delight. In a word, Immortality.

We renounce ourselves in order to find ourselves; for in the mental life there is only a seeking, but never an ultimate finding till mind is overpassed. Therefore there is behind all our mentality a perfection of ourselves which appears to us as an antinomy and contrast to what we are. For here we are a constant becoming; there we possess our eternal being. Here we conceive of ourselves as a changeful consciousness developed and always developing by a hampered effort in the drive of Time; there we are an immutable consciousness of which Time is not the master but the instrument as well as the field of all that it creates and watches. Here we live in an organisation of mortal consciousness which takes the form of a transient world; there we are liberated into the harmonies of an infinite self-seeing which knows all world in the light of the eternal and immortal. The Beyond is our reality; that is our plenitude; that is the absolute satisfaction of our self-existence. It is immortality and it is "That Delight"<sup>9</sup>

In his elucidation of the doctrine of the good, based on Plato, who wrote many dialogues on this topic, Augustine says, "The Good, which conveys blessedness, is said by some to depend on man's body, by others to derive from his mind; while yet others have located it in both mind and body. They observed,

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8 Ibid.

9 Sri Aurobindo, op. cit., p. 22-23

of course, that man himself consists of mind and body, and therefore they believed that the one or the other of the two constituents, or the one *and* the other, could be the source of his well-being – the source of that Good which is an end in itself, the guarantee of happiness, the standard of reference for all action, beyond which there is no further standard to be looked for. Thus, those who are said to have added a third, extrinsic kind of good – honour, glory, money, or the like – have not introduced it as the Final Good, to be sought for its own sake, but as a good relative to some other end. A good of this kind they held to be a good for the good, but an evil for the evil. ...All those schools must be ranked below those philosophers who have found man's true Good not in the enjoyment of the body or the mind, but in the enjoyment of God. This is not like the mind's enjoyment of the body, or of itself; nor is it like the enjoyment of friend by friend; it is like the eye's enjoyment of light – or rather that is the closest analogy possible. ...For the present, it suffices to mention that Plato defined the sovereign Good as the life in accordance with virtue; and he declared that this was possible only for one who had the knowledge of God and who strove to imitate him; this was the sole condition of happiness. Therefore Plato has no hesitation in asserting that to be a philosopher is to love God, whose nature is immaterial. It immediately follows that the seeker after wisdom will only attain to happiness when he has begun to enjoy God.”<sup>10</sup> (That Brahman, and not this which men follow after here.)

The definition of God, the path of renunciation, and the categories of understanding – natural, rational, moral – these are the fundamental principles of the philosophy of religion. The philosophy of religion based upon reason tells us the meaning of God, how to live the ethical life, and how to distinguish between truth and falsehood. All of those definitions are based on the idea that higher mind is capable of knowing something truly. And Christianity and Buddhism and Hinduism are all three religions based upon reason. The argument of Sri Aurobindo in the commentary on the Kena Upanishad is an argument based upon reason. The immortal delight is in that, and not in this which men follow after here. The idea of Yoga is that by identifying with that immortal delight, one then invests matter, life, and mind, with a quality that by themselves they do not have, but it requires a conversion and ultimately a transformation of consciousness, and then one starts to perceive and act with an energy and quality that was not possible before that conversion and transformation. And that is the process of Yoga. The teaching of Yoga is that the psychic being in us can come through the obscurity of the physical, and the obscurity of the vital, and through the obscurity of the conceptual mind, and connect with the universal divine Self in all things, and then re-energize its relationships on that basis.

The idea that there is a drive in human beings to realize perfection is complemented in Bergson's and Sri Aurobindo's thinking by the idea of a descent of genius or spirit in a few who from time to time break through a pathway for that more linear drive to be elevated and to progress. They see that the great seers and mystics from time to time bring in the power and vision of things such as, for example, universal love. Evolving humanity doesn't think about universal love. No one thinks about universal love. People think about who they like and who they don't like, and what the advantage is of liking or not liking somebody. No ordinary human society is going to discover universal love. But then a powerful spiritual vision comes down, and suddenly we think – Wow, if we experienced universal love that would change everything! And then we start aspiring to manifest a type of humanity that resonates with others as itself. Now that was the teaching of Jesus, – that you should love yourself as God and others as yourself. But this idea got its impetus during that period of the Christ's teaching and it led to the *City of God*, and to universal ethical society, and now there is a new impetus to bring that spirit down for evolutionary change. So, at least as far as the philosophy of religion goes, this constitutes a development in the ethical and spiritual consciousness of humanity.

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1      0 Augustine, *Ibid.*, p. 310



*An excerpt from The Life Divine indicating the causal nature of the Immutable, Absolute, Spirit<sup>1</sup>*

In fact the Infinite does not create, it manifests what is in itself, in its own essence of reality; it is itself that essence of all reality and all realities are powers of that one Reality. The Absolute neither creates nor is created,—in the current sense of making or being made; we can speak of creation only in the sense of the Being becoming in form and movement what it already is in substance and status. Yet we have to emphasise its indeterminability in that special and positive sense, not as a negation but as an indispensable condition of its free infinite self-determination, because without that the Reality would be a fixed eternal determinate or else an indeterminate fixed and bound to a sum of possibilities of determination inherent within it. Its freedom from all limitation, from any binding by its own creation cannot be itself turned into a limitation, an absolute incapacity, a denial of all freedom of self-determination; it is this that would be a contradiction, it would be an attempt to define and limit by negation the infinite and illimitable. Into the central fact of the two sides of the nature of the Absolute, the essential and the self-creative or dynamic, no real contradiction enters; it is only a pure infinite essence that can formulate itself in infinite ways. One statement is complementary to the other, there is no mutual cancellation, no incompatibility; it is only the dual statement of a single inescapable fact by human reason in human language.

The same conciliation occurs everywhere, when we look with a straight and accurate look on the truth of the Reality. In our experience of it we become aware of an Infinite essentially free from all limitation by qualities, properties, features; on the other hand, we are aware of an Infinite teeming with innumerable qualities, properties, features. Here again the statement of illimitable freedom is positive, not negative; it does not negate what we see, but on the contrary provides the indispensable condition for it, it makes possible a free and infinite self-expression in quality and feature. A quality is the character of a power of conscious being; or we may say that the consciousness of being expressing what is in it makes the power it brings out recognisable by a native stamp on it which we call quality or character. Courage as a quality is such a power of being, it is a certain character of my consciousness expressing a formulated force of my being, bringing out or creating a definite kind of force of my nature in action. So too the power of a drug to cure is its property, a special force of being native to the herb or mineral from which it is produced, and this speciality is determined by the Real-Idea concealed in the involved consciousness which dwells in the plant or mineral; the idea brings out in it what was there at the root of its manifestation and has now come out thus empowered as the force of its being. All qualities, properties, features are such powers of conscious being thus put forth from itself by the Absolute; It has everything within It, It has the free power to put all forth;<sup>6</sup> yet we cannot define the Absolute as a quality of courage or a power of healing, we cannot even say that these are a characteristic feature of the Absolute, nor can we make up a sum of qualities and say “that is the Absolute”. But neither can we speak of the Absolute as a pure blank incapable of manifesting these things; on the contrary, all capacity is there, the powers of all qualities and characters are there inherent within it. The mind is in a difficulty because it has to say, “The Absolute or Infinite is none of these things, these things are not the Absolute or Infinite” and at the same time it has to say, “The Absolute is all these things, they are not something else than That, for That is the sole existence and the all-existence.” Here it is evident that it is an undue finiteness of thought conception and verbal expression which creates the difficulty, but there is in reality none; for it would be evidently absurd to say that the Absolute is courage or curing-power, or to say that courage and curing-power are the Absolute, but it would be equally absurd to deny the capacity of the Absolute to put forth courage or curing power as self-expressions in its manifestation. When the logic of the finite fails us, we have to see with a direct and unbound vision what is behind in the logic of the Infinite. We can then realise that the Infinite is infinite in quality, feature, power, but that no sum of qualities, features, powers can describe the Infinite.

We see that the Absolute, the Self, the Divine, the Spirit, the Being is 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, and it follows that the One is or has become many; but how can the limited or relative be the Absolute and how can man or beast or bird be the Divine Being? But in erecting this apparent contradiction the mind makes a double error. It is

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1            1 Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (2005 ed.), p. 348-350

thinking in the terms of the mathematical finite unit which is sole in limitation, the one which is less than two and can become two only by division and fragmentation or by addition and multiplication; but this is an infinite Oneness, it is the essential and infinite Oneness which can contain the hundred and the thousand and the million and billion and trillion. Whatever astronomic or more than astronomic figures you heap and multiply, they cannot overpass or exceed that Oneness; for, in the language of the Upanishad, it moves not, yet is always far in front when you would pursue and seize it. It can be said of it that it would not be the infinite Oneness if it were not capable of an infinite multiplicity; but that does not mean that the One is plural or can be limited or described as the sum of the Many: on the contrary, it can be the infinite Many because it exceeds all limitation or description by multiplicity and exceeds at the same time all limitation by finite conceptual oneness. Pluralism is an error because, though there is the spiritual plurality, the many souls are dependent and interdependent existences; their sum also is not the One nor is it the cosmic totality; they depend on the One and exist by its Oneness: yet the plurality is not unreal, it is the One Soul that dwells as the individual in these many souls and they are eternal in the One and by the one Eternal.

## 6. The Highest Good - Society and Morality

This is the philosophy of religion. How to live the good life, what is the good life, the ethical life? It's the highest good. The highest good is the universal and true, otherwise known as Spirit. What is universal and true is the absolute Spirit. And the absolute Spirit is Consciousness. It's the first principle of existence: that which is immutable, and simple, and self-existent. That without which there is nothing. And if everything comes from it and it is the essential truth of everything, then that is what contains all absolute values. They are itself. It is absolute beauty, truth, power, the *summum bonum*, the highest good. So, after we read Hegel, Augustine, Sri Aurobindo, the Platonic metaphysical tradition, we get this idea of the good which, as Plato says, empowers everything to be what it is. This idea continues to appear through the course of centuries. This is the explanation of Consciousness as 'what evolves in all the structures of existence'. Neuroscience is never going to find consciousness in the brain cells or in the reduction of phosphorous in the nerve synapses. But the reduction of phosphorous *is* consciousness on the material plane. The material, vital and mental planes, or principles, are structures of consciousness. Therefore it is 'consciousness' that evolves in these structures. In itself it is absolute, self-existent Being.

If we move to evolutionary theory from that standpoint we can explain the evolution of structure, physical, vital, mental, as different energy levels of the same thing, which is 'consciousness'. It is the unity of all absolutes – beauty, power, truth, etc, which becomes diversified in the infinity of things, beings, processes, qualities and quantities, and their relationships. What gives the form its unique combination of qualities, for example, the shape and fragrance and colors of the rose, is a principle of consciousness that equates the quality and quantity of energy in a being. This is not a matter of scientific proof however. Science, and the empirical mind, observe the array of ever-changing patterns in nature and see that they are connected and calls the continuum of their relationships evolution. Each new species that occurs retains an essential combination of structures from which it has evolved, – genes, body types, functions, – and according to this principle of homeostasis we observe the connectedness in the continuum of evolution. How is that possible? It is because Nature is a goddess, and she values continuity, and proportionality, and mutuality, and purpose, which are rolled out in the infinite variety of forms and their interrelationships in Nature. Darwin joked that when he referred to Nature as a goddess, he was of course only using a figure of speech which everyone would understand, and yet the statement also conveys a certain quality of awesomeness about the process that he was observing. And it is that unfathomable aspect of Nature, which is also real, that metaphysical theories try to explain. But beyond the theoretical understanding of the process, in order to identify with the energy of the process and experience its beauty and power and infinity, the rational mind can undergo a conversion, and the higher intuition can experience the energy of nature in its forms of infinite beauty

and power and have a direct perception, not only of the appearance of things but of the essence of things. This is the idea of the highest good, which is the object of spiritual consciousness. According to the philosophy of Hegel, and of religion in general, this conversion brings about, or is achieved through, the loss of ego. Then it becomes possible to love everything and sacrifice for the whole, as if it were oneself: with the result that ethical living becomes possible. And so we have brought this statement of Hegel forward as an important and fundamental proposition of the philosophy of religion: "If heart and will are cultivated with the universal and the true, then there is ethical life."

The new topic at this point, then, is morality, and the difference between society and culture. The statement of Hegel refers to culture. Another primary source for our study is Bergson's book *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1935). I would suggest that this is the cardinal text for the philosophy of religion in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Bergson received the Nobel Prize after its publication in 1935, and this was about seven years before the publication of the complete version of *The Life Divine* by Sri Aurobindo, for which he also received a Nobel Prize nomination. It is also interesting to note that Bergson published *Creative Evolution* in 1907 and Sri Aurobindo began the serial publication of the first part of *The Life Divine* in 1914. Sri Aurobindo was well aware of the writing of Bergson, as were most progressive thinkers during that period, and I have pointed out many times that their thinking is closely parallel in many ways. This is a phenomenon of human consciousness. It is not just a matter of Bergson and Sri Aurobindo, writing and publishing books in close temporal proximity, or reflecting in a similar way on the new science of evolution. The consciousness that they express and that their philosophy represents is an evolutionary phenomenon. Philosophy and psychology, from Plato and Augustine to Hegel, Bergson and Sri Aurobindo have constituted a continuum in the development of consciousness. Now Bergson, in *The Two Sources*, and Sri Aurobindo in *The Human Cycle*, both point out that human consciousness can't go beyond the limitations of the rational mind without evolving the higher intuitive mind; this is the bridge for the next evolutionary development, and they are both saying this and operating from this point of view. Some have known throughout the history of philosophy that beyond the rational mind is the intuitive mind and beyond the intuitive mind is the gnostic supermind, which constitute a sequential series in the evolution of consciousness that can be realized. But the mass of humanity has not yet evolved even a rational mind.

In Sri Aurobindo's conception of the evolution of consciousness, just because some human beings' consciousness may have a direct intuitive grasp of the 'being of things', and experience a relation of identity so that things are in them and they are in things, and their actions may correspond to the energy of manifestation of the truth of things, this still does not mean that they are the supramental beings that he conceived to be a possibility of the higher evolution of consciousness. Therefore, what Hegel conceived of as ethical living has been surpassed in the evolutionary vision of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. But what that vision has also understood is that human societies evolve as well, and they represent various levels in the evolution of consciousness that have been achieved and have become norms for society. It therefore takes time for new structures to emerge from within these already established structures of society that represent millennia of habits of consciousness, values and social behavior. This is what Bergson's book is about.

Another important resource for our study is Talcott Parsons, who was a professor of sociology at Harvard in the 1970s. His book is titled *The Evolution of Societies* (1977). He also understood that various stages of social development correspond to stages of the evolution of consciousness. The structures of society are therefore patterns of human consciousness and behavior that are sustained over long periods of time, and either make possible or hinder the emergence of further stages of development. Existing levels of social development are self-sustaining patterns that enable human beings to co-exist at certain levels of fulfillment and expression of the human potential. The human

social structures are like the structures of the societies of lower species, such as insects, or primates, except that when those species exhaust their possibilities, other species evolve. But the human species has populated the whole earth and filled every niche in the biosphere without changing its fundamental biological structure because it continues to innovate and adapt socially to every environment and circumstance. There is this perceptible difference between animal and human evolution, although there are also many similarities and identities and parallels, which have been demonstrated in the field of ethology, especially in the work of Konrad Lorenz.

Bergson then reaches the conclusion that morals and social norms for human societies are like laws for insect colonies. An ant colony will reproduce itself, and each level of responsibility will be continuously filled by its members, according to “natural law”, while in human society the same reproduction of structures and fulfillment of roles occurs by intelligent will and choice, according to norms and obligations. Ants don't have to choose their behavior patterns, they simply occur according to the fixed patterns that have been established through evolution. So the difference, says Bergson, is the principle of intelligence. This doesn't mean “mind” because the principle of mind is there in the patterns and structures of the insect society as well. But we choose to do the things that are required in order for us to maintain our ant hills. Human mind, based on language and symbols, maintains the hierarchic relations and roles in society because of the sense of obligation. We learn through language and the re-enforcement of behavior patterns by society that we have certain obligations. As long as we fulfill the obligations demanded by the social norms and structures, we receive the reinforcement needed for us to perform the roles that are expected. Thus we learn the value of maintaining our social structures and functions. And for Bergson it is this sense of obligation that informs human intelligence and choice, and it is the source of morality in human societies.

As pointed out by Augustine, and as we know from other traditional societies that still exist, the relationships of piety and deference to authority within the family and society, are very important. They are followed unquestioningly, and they hold societies together, making it possible for them to provide food, to create laws and the arts, to maintain a relatively high level of productivity and harmony, which are generally known as “culture” – the mental species' equivalent of the vital patterns of animal life. But in every society this pattern eventually reaches a limit with respect to its size, resources, and competition with other similar communities, just as it does in animal societies. Therefore the history of warfare goes on throughout the history of human societies. The members of a human society have an innate loyalty to their group, their family, their community, and their patterns of hierarchy and authority. But these things don't necessarily extend to the towns on the other side of the river. In North American history it is known, for example, that there were hundreds of native tribes warring against each other much of the time. And we see the same thing in early Chinese, Indian, and European societies.

Human societies, then, function according to structures of intelligence – cognition, language, values, orders, that human beings have established sufficiently well to maintain the integrity of the social group, including warfare against external groups. From this there develop patterns of communication between groups in order to mitigate conflict, encourage trade, make political arrangements for security and cooperation, and which enable larger social units to form and eventually evolve into states. The sociologist, Talcott Parsons, thus adds a significantly higher level of complexity to the understanding of social evolution by distinguishing between society and culture. But by the latter he seems to mean especially the values embodied in religion, language, literature and arts. The legal system of the Romans for example, seems to still be considered by him to be a structure of society rather than culture, but this is not a distinction that the philosopher Bergson bothers to make. For him, culture seems to be primarily an intellectual or rational extension of the social patterns based on animal evolution. Parson

tells us, however, that some of the most significant changes in the *evolution* of human societies took place within the ancient states or kingdoms of Greece and the states or tribes of Israel, and that these changes were a function of culture rather than 'social behavior' in the lower, more vitalistic and practical Bergsonian sense. This source of morality, as well as the evolution of consciousness, comes into the picture in those cultures where either a highly rational or a revealed religion develops. We have spoken about the high level of rationality in Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity and that the concept of God is based to a large extent on Reason. It appears, then, that for Parsons reason and religion would constitute sources of moral values and behavior other than those that are coextensive with social structures. Bergson refers to such value systems as intermediate between society and the higher inspirations that come from the spiritual mind.

At any rate, Parsons' view is that Israel was a tribal society with warfare taking place regularly between groups and regions, until after the phenomenon of the Exodus from Egypt and the inspiration of Moses, when the Judaic or Hebrew speaking people developed a conception of God that was uniquely monotheistic and absolute. Yahweh was the god of 'the people', and a covenant was established by Moses between that supreme God and his chosen people. If the people behaved according to his laws, and rejected other minor gods, the true God would protect them and lead them to the land of milk and honey. If his people did not obey, then God would punish them through the agency of other nations. When the Israelites came into this direct relationship between themselves as a people and that supreme and absolute God, according to Parsons, the social order changed. The old practices, hierarchies, idols and forms of worship, the patterns of tribal society, all eventually changed. The process of change went on for hundreds of years, but when the diaspora took place and the temples were destroyed the concept of a universal power of being, independent of a geographic locale or priesthood and hierarchy, had been established that enabled the people of God, with their direct relationship to the supreme, unmanifest, absolute power, to develop societies that were based on equality under the divine law, and they were then relatively independent of the rule of priests and kings and tribal norms for their survival and status.

This development of consciousness from a rigid tribal hierarchic structure to a more individualized, universalized ethical society was a significant step in human civilization, due to the 'cultural' phenomenon of an inspired leader and powerful religious reform. Subsequently, with the development of Christianity and its message of universal salvation and the brotherhood of humanity, this movement of universalization and autonomy extended beyond the Jews, and the Roman Empire as a whole became the field for the evolution of a new value system in which all human beings could co-exist with freedom, equality and respect. This then became the theme of Augustine's *City of God*, in which the entire civilized world, or humanity in general, could live in that city, as free souls, as well as in the "city of man". The significance of Jesus Christ may then be seen as a step in the universalization of consciousness, the spread of the idea of universal love and service, which made possible the humanization of all societies, and the sacrifice of self-interest for the sake of humanity as a whole, with the possibility of eternal life through redemption and the resurrection of the spirit. This possibility became a matter of individual choice, wherever and under whatever social norms one might live. As pointed out earlier in this course, the canon of the Catholic church eventually became the law of the land, and it was the church's responsibility, to a large extent, to ensure that life was regulated according to both social norms and religious ideals, for a thousand years. This didn't perfect society or humanity, but it was a significant change in social and moral values from those of tribal life and from those regulated by divine kings, as in ancient Egypt, Greece, China and India.

Bergson then raises the question about religious culture and the cultivation of the human being with respect to the divine, as opposed to the cultivation of worldly morals and norms of social behavior. This change does not come about, according to Bergson, as a result of social evolution. Social evolution is

based on the sense of obligation which comes about as a result of the natural evolution of society based on earlier archaic patterns of animal behavior. It is an evolution of moral values based on power structures and hierarchies of obligation. He says that no one who is functioning within that framework of morals is going to think about universal love. The world of social norms is based on relationships that keep the group together and protect it from outsiders, and there is no advantage for it in thinking of the one self in all. There would be no motivation from within the social structure itself, from this evolutionary point of view, to adopt the view of an absolute or universal divine consciousness. This view comes only from a higher plane of ideal mind, or spirit, that enters into society through inspired individuals, and manifests its values through the power that comes from those higher planes of consciousness. These inspired individuals have an enormous influence on societies when they come.

This is the view of an evolutionary philosopher in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, speaking about two sources of the evolution of morality and religion. One is an evolution from below of natural relationships and the other is an evolution from above that brings in a spirit of divine love for humanity as a whole. This descent is assimilated into society, bringing about a shift in social values, legitimated by a group that adopts those higher values in a very deliberate way, which may or may not become a church or a priesthood. And as Christianity demonstrates, this influence spreads more or less rapidly and is eventually incorporated into the social structures. Parsons' theory confirms this idea by showing this pattern in the history of Israel, where an inspired covenant comes in through its prophets. The result is that, eventually the Jews become a people with more universal values who are spread far and wide. And then Christianity follows, with the fall of the Roman Empire, bringing in its more universalized vision of love and charity, for which earlier Greek civilization had prepared the ground with its philosophy of the natural order of the cosmos, ethics, and the highest good. The culture of the Greeks was inspired by the Platonic philosophers with their view of the ideal purpose of everything in nature, and the Greek city-states embodied to a large extent the ideals of law, justice, ethical behavior, the good, and the beautiful, into which came the Jews of the diaspora, followed by the advent of Christianity, which progressively culminated in a society and culture dominated by the idea that all human beings can be free, can realize their higher divine self-hood, and have a right to justice under any rule of law. These are now the norms of our humanistic civilization, which are clearly far from the tribal norms and the rules of kings.

The evolution of consciousness in human society, according to these philosophers of evolution, has come about as a result of the gradual change of social values in response to the appeal and attraction of a higher spiritual mind. Bergson's idea is that there are two forces in human evolution: there is the impulsion of society from below, and there is the attraction and appeal of the higher ideals from above, which are expressed by an inspired, divine manifestation. The structures that are evolving from below respond to that influence and its assimilation carries the human species forward in its evolution of consciousness. This is the philosophy of Bergson, for which he received the Nobel Prize. So, someone was listening. And he also said that the next major intervention or incarnation of the higher divine truth would have an even greater influence because of the better prepared ground provided by global society today, which is relatively free from the archaic structures, and intermediate religious structures, and even the rational structures of the past. There is a greater general level of independence and freedom and intelligent choice among individuals in society today than ever before. He therefore predicted that the next avatar of universal love would have an even greater civilizing influence than has been possible in the past.

Bergson, writing about the possible higher evolution of consciousness, says many amazing things. For example: "...we know that all around intelligence there lingers still a fringe of intuition, vague and evanescent. Can we not fasten upon it, intensify it, and above all, consummate it in action, for it has

become pure contemplation only through a weakening in its principle, and if we may put it so, by an abstraction practiced on itself? ...A soul strong enough, noble enough to make this effort would not stop to ask whether the principle with which it is now in touch is the transcendent cause of all things or merely its earthly delegate. It would be content to feel itself pervaded, though retaining its own personality, by a being immeasurably mightier than itself, just as an iron is pervaded by the fire which makes it glow. Its attachment to life would henceforth be its inseparability from this principle, joy in joy, love of that which is all love. In addition it would give itself to society, but to a society comprising all humanity, loved in the love of the principle underlying it. ...Now detachment from each particular thing would become attachment to life in general.”<sup>1</sup>

So this is the principle of sacrifice. By sacrificing one's egoistic attachment to vital impulses and mental conceptions, by liberating the *purusha* from *prakriti*, one finds an identification with the totality, and one no longer lives for oneself but for the whole, because one experiences the self in all and all in the self. But in order to do that it is necessary to renounce attachments, and universalize consciousness, as we have heard repeatedly in this course from many different religions. And then Bergson broaches the question with which we began our study:

“But should we, in such a case, still speak of religion? ...Are not the two things so different as to exclude each other, and to make it impossible to call them by the same name? ...Yet there are many reasons for using the word religion in both cases. In the first place mysticism – for that is what we have in mind – may, it is true, lift the soul to another plane: it nonetheless ensures for the soul, to a pre-eminent degree, the security and the serenity which it is the function of static religion to provide. ...In defining mysticism by its relation to the vital impetus, we have implicitly admitted that true mysticism is rare. ... it lies at a point which the spiritual current, in its passage through matter, probably desired to reach but could not. For it makes light of obstacles with which nature has had to come to terms, and, on the other hand, we can understand the evolution of life, setting aside any bypaths it has been compelled to follow, only if we view it as seeking for something beyond its reach, something to which the great mystic attains. If all men, if any large number of men, could have soared as high as this privileged man, nature would not have stopped at the human species, for such a one is more than a man.”<sup>2</sup>

If life is seeking for something beyond its reach, and if it sees and grasps its goal clearly enough, then we can imagine that it might not get stalled on some of those many bypaths that it has taken along the way. Bergson is predicting such a higher than the human evolution, and he believes that the influences that manifest through certain mystics can point the way. Then the question is, at what point will the social structures be permeable enough to receive that current and go beyond present human evolution? To evolve a universalized consciousness – of the self in all and all in the self – is “the way”. It is the higher intuition which has that perception and the energy to affirm the self in all, in spite of the many differences and uniquenesses and positive and negative qualities that every individual manifests. If one doesn't make judgments on the basis of some other criteria, then one can grasp directly and nurture that being, or self, into its full potential. This is never done, or only rarely, because all the other structures of consciousness come into play which inhibit and limit how much can be expressed of what one truly is. We are only supposed to express enough to fit into the social moulds. So a truly universalized higher mind or intuitive mind would be the ground for the next evolution, beyond the present limitations of consciousness and social norms.

Sri Aurobindo had a similar vision but introduced another factor into the equation which Bergson perhaps didn't see or didn't emphasize. Those social structures that evolve from below, the tribal

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1 Henri Bergson, *The Two sources of Morality and Religion* (1977 ed.), p. 212

2 Ibid., p. 213

structures, and magical mythic structures, and rational structures are not just purely dependent upon natural laws, or on social relations and conventions, because that self which is one in all is also there in those structures. What is driving the self of a particular species, for example, to manifest its niche in relation to all the other species around it? We know that each species is conscious of those around it with which it is engaging in the development of its niche. The meaning of consciousness in fact is this unified field which allows these different types to interact in a meaningful way through energy exchanges, cognition, memory, and so on. There is already present in all living structures an intentionality, a self which is the expression of the higher self, which is infinite, and which expresses itself in all of these multitudinous forms and forces and processes of life. It is a spiritual truth or essence in each thing that can be realized by human beings. The higher self and all of these lower selves are one, *purusha* and *prakriti* are one, and we can already tune in to that creative evolutionary force that was there from the beginning in each and every species and type and individual, expressing itself uniquely in each. This might not have been realizable by primitive societies or ant hills, but we are at a level in the evolution of consciousness that enables us to tune in to that creative evolutionary force, which was there from the beginning. And yet it definitely gets a new boost from the inspiration that comes down by the agency of a higher and greater mystical revelation. We are in fact living in an era of the bringing down of a greater quantum of that original spiritual force and consciousness into this more highly evolved social, rational structure of consciousness than existed in any earlier civilizations. A global society and global ethics are now taken for granted everywhere. For that new infusion of divine force to elevate this current status of humanity and achieve a substantial leap forward isn't by any means inconceivable.

But as Bergson points out, and as we will see in the passages below from Sri Aurobindo, there may still be resistances, and the next breakthrough of consciousness will certainly require a powerful impetus. But there is at least a possibility that goes beyond theory. As Hegel says, if we can feel the fire and generate that presence in ourselves, then our faith is not a blind faith, or a faith based on doctrine, but the presence itself burning within us and seeing its possibility. This has a dynamic creative potential that is beyond anything that our rational minds can derive from reading these books. We know, experientially, that we are privileged to be able to resonate with what these books mean. This evolutionary force then ceases to be something theoretical and abstract. We can look around us and see the obstacles, and Sri Aurobindo spoke very directly to both the potentials and the obstacles that we feel. There is a potential of that original creative evolutionary force that is showing itself to a sufficient degree in various ways, so that some are inspired to shift the focus of their consciousness and to resonate with this pure universal creativity. They know that it is unlimited. It is infinite. And it is a concrete reality. It is Consciousness, and everything that exists is just that.

*(This lecture was followed by a reading from The Human Cycle by Sri Aurobindo, which is reproduced in part below.)*

### *Conditions for the Coming of a Spiritual Age<sup>3</sup>*

A subjective age of mankind must be an adventure full of perils and uncertainties as are all great adventures of the race. It may wander long before it finds itself or may not find itself at all and may swing back to a new repetition of the cycle. The true secret can only be discovered if in the third stage, in an age of mental subjectivism, (*which we may take to have gotten underway with Hegel and Husserl in Germany*) the idea becomes strong of the mind itself as no more than a secondary power of the Spirit's working and of the Spirit as the great Eternal, the original and, in spite of the many terms in which it is both expressed and hidden, the sole

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3 Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle* (2005 ed.), p. 254-256



reality. Then only will the real, the decisive endeavour begin and life and the world be studied, known, dealt with in all directions as the self-finding and self-expression of the Spirit. Then only will a spiritual age of mankind be possible.

To attempt any adequate discussion of what that would mean, and in an inadequate discussion there is no fruit, is beyond our present scope; for we should have to examine a knowledge which is rare and nowhere more than initial. It is enough to say that a spiritual human society would start from and try to realise three essential truths of existence which all Nature seems to be an attempt to hide by their opposites and which therefore are as yet for the mass of mankind only words and dreams, God, freedom, unity. Three things which are one, for you cannot realise freedom and unity unless you realise God, you cannot possess freedom and unity unless you possess God, possess at once your highest Self and the Self of all creatures. The freedom and unity which otherwise go by that name, are simply attempts of our subjection and our division to get away from themselves by shutting their eyes while they turn somersaults around their own centre. When man is able to see God and to possess him, then he will know real freedom and arrive at real unity, never otherwise. And God is only waiting to be known, while man seeks for him everywhere and creates images of the Divine, but all the while truly finds, effectively erects and worships images only of his own mind-ego and life-ego. When this ego pivot is abandoned and this ego-hunt ceases, then man gets his first real chance of achieving spirituality in his inner and outer life. It will not be enough, but it will be a commencement, a true gate and not a blind entrance.

A spiritualised society would live like its spiritual individuals, not in the ego, but in the spirit, not as the collective ego, but as the collective soul. This freedom from the egoistic standpoint would be its first and most prominent characteristic. But the elimination of egoism would not be brought about, as it is now proposed to bring it about, by persuading or forcing the individual to immolate his personal will and aspirations and his precious and hard-won individuality to the collective will, aims and egoism of the society, driving him like a victim of ancient sacrifice to slay his soul on the altar of that huge and shapeless idol. For that would be only the sacrifice of the smaller to the larger egoism, larger only in bulk, not necessarily greater in quality or wider or nobler, since a collective egoism, result of the united egoisms of all, is as little a god to be worshipped, as flawed and often an uglier and more barbarous fetish than the egoism of the individual. What the spiritual man seeks is to find by the loss of the ego the self which is one in all and perfect and complete in each and by living in that to grow into the image of its perfection,—individually, be it noted, though with an all-embracing universality of his nature and its conscious circumference. It is said in the old Indian writings that while in the second age, the age of Power, Vishnu descends as the King, and in the third, the age of compromise and balance, as the legislator or codifier, in the age of the Truth he descends as Yajna, that is to say, as the Master of works and sacrifice manifest in the heart of his creatures. It is this kingdom of God within, the result of the finding of God not in a distant heaven but within ourselves, of which the state of society in an age of the Truth, a spiritual age, would be the result and the external figure.

Therefore a society which was even initially spiritualised would make the revealing and finding of the divine Self in man the supreme, even the guiding aim of all its activities, its education, its knowledge, its science, its ethics, its art, its economical and political structure. As it was to some imperfect extent in the ancient Vedic times with the cultural education of the higher classes, so it would be then with all education. It would embrace all knowledge in its scope, but would make the whole trend and aim and the permeating spirit not mere worldly efficiency, though that efficiency would not be neglected, but this self-developing and self-finding and all else as its powers. It would pursue the physical and psychic sciences not in order merely to know the world and Nature in her processes and to use them for material human ends, but still more to know through and in and under and over all things the Divine in the world and the ways of the Spirit in its masks and behind them. It would make it the aim of ethics not to establish a rule of action whether supplementary to the social law or partially corrective of it, the social law that is after all only the rule, often clumsy and ignorant, of the biped pack, the human herd, but to develop the divine nature in the human being. It would make it the aim of Art not merely to present images of the subjective and objective world, but to see them with the significant and creative vision that goes behind their appearances and to reveal the Truth and Beauty of which things visible to us and invisible are the forms, the masks or the symbols and significant figures.

#### *The Advent and Progress of the Spiritual Age*<sup>4</sup>

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4 Ibid., p. 265-268

Therefore the individuals who will most help the future of humanity in the new age will be those who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being. Even as the animal man has been largely converted into a mentalised and at the top a highly mentalised humanity, so too now or in the future an evolution or conversion—it does not greatly matter which figure we use or what theory we adopt to support it—of the present type of humanity into a spiritualised humanity is the need of the race and surely the intention of Nature; that evolution or conversion will be their ideal and endeavour. They will be comparatively indifferent to particular belief and form and leave men to resort to the beliefs and forms to which they are naturally drawn. They will only hold as essential the faith in this spiritual conversion, the attempt to live it out and whatever knowledge—the form of opinion into which it is thrown does not so much matter—can be converted into this living. They will especially not make the mistake of thinking that this change can be effected by machinery and outward institutions; they will know and never forget that it has to be lived out by each man inwardly or it can never be made a reality for the kind. They will adopt in its heart of meaning the inward view of the East which bids man seek the secret of his destiny and salvation within; but also they will accept, though with a different turn given to it, the importance which the West rightly attaches to life and to the making the best we know and can attain the general rule of all life. They will not make society a shadowy background to a few luminous spiritual figures or a rigidly fenced and earth-bound root for the growth of a comparatively rare and sterile flower of ascetic spirituality. They will not accept the theory that the many must necessarily remain forever on the lower ranges of life and only a few climb into the free air and the light, but will start from the standpoint of the great spirits who have striven to regenerate the life of the earth and held that faith in spite of all previous failure. Failures must be originally numerous in everything great and difficult, but the time comes when the experience of past failures can be profitably used and the gate that so long resisted opens. In this as in all great human aspirations and endeavours, an *a priori* declaration of impossibility is a sign of ignorance and weakness, and the motto of the aspirant's endeavour must be the *solvi tur ambulando* of the discoverer. For by the doing the difficulty will be solved. A true beginning has to be made; the rest is a work for Time in its sudden achievements or its long patient labour.

The thing to be done is as large as human life, and therefore the individuals who lead the way will take all human life for their province. These pioneers will consider nothing as alien to them, nothing as outside their scope. For every part of human life has to be taken up by the spiritual,—not only the intellectual, the aesthetic, the ethical, but the dynamic, the vital, the physical; therefore for none of these things or the activities that spring from them will they have contempt or aversion, however they may insist on a change of the spirit and a transmutation of the form. In each power of our nature they will seek for its own proper means of conversion; knowing that the Divine is concealed in all, they will hold that all can be made the spirit's means of self-finding and all can be converted into its instruments of divine living. And they will see that the great necessity is the conversion of the normal into the spiritual mind and the opening of that mind again into its own higher reaches and more and more integral movement. For before the decisive change can be made, the stumbling intellectual reason has to be converted into the precise and luminous intuitive, until that again can rise into higher ranges to overmind and supermind or gnosis. The uncertain and stumbling mental will has to rise towards the sure intuitive and into a higher divine and gnostic will, the psychic sweetness, fire and light of the soul behind the heart, has to alchemise our crude emotions and the hard egoisms and claimant desires of our vital nature. All our other members have to pass through a similar conversion under the compelling force and light from above. The leaders of the spiritual march will start from and use the knowledge and the means that past effort has developed in this direction, but they will not take them as they are without any deep necessary change or limit themselves by what is now known or cleave only to fixed and stereotyped systems or given groupings of results, but will follow the method of the Spirit in Nature. A constant rediscovery and new formulation and larger synthesis in the mind, a mighty remoulding in its deeper parts because of a greater enlarging Truth not discovered or not well fixed before, is that Spirit's way with our past achievement when he moves to the greatnesses of the future.

This endeavour will be a supreme and difficult labour even for the individual, but much more for the race. It may well be that, once started, it may not advance rapidly even to its first decisive stage; it may be that it will take long centuries of effort to come into some kind of permanent birth. But that is not altogether inevitable, for the principle of such changes in Nature seems to be a long obscure preparation followed by a swift gathering up and precipitation of the elements into the new birth, a rapid conversion, a transformation that in its luminous moment figures like a miracle. Even when the first decisive change is reached, it is certain that all humanity will

not be able to rise to that level. There cannot fail to be a division into those who are able to live on the spiritual level and those who are only able to live in the light that descends from it into the mental level. And below these too there might still be a great mass influenced from above but not yet ready for the light. But even that would be a transformation and a beginning far beyond anything yet attained. This hierarchy would not mean as in our present vital living an egoistic domination of the undeveloped by the more developed, but a guidance of the younger by the elder brothers of the race and a constant working to lift them up to a greater spiritual level and wider horizons.

## 7. Doctrines of the Trinity – (1) Christianity

I now want to launch this course into a deeper exploration of some fundamental metaphysical doctrines of religion. We have heard the idea, from Pannikar, about the difference between faith and belief. He made the distinction between the living divine reality that we perceive, or that is perceived by the seers, and the doctrine that is developed to express that reality of experience. He called them, respectively, faith and belief. From Hegel we have heard the distinction between the conceptual understanding of spirit and the dynamic engagement with spirit through devotion and sacrifice. Another important source of this kind of distinction in the philosophy of religion is Cardinal Newman. Two of his well known books, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1855), and *An Essay in Aid of A Grammar of Assent* (1870), were inspired by his search for the fundamental beliefs of Christianity, first as an Anglican Bishop and lecturer at Oxford University, and then as a Catholic, after he converted halfway through his career and finally became a Cardinal. In both religions he was a prominent thinker and teacher and writer. He wrote other important books on the history and theology of Christianity during that period as well, and some were read by Sri Aurobindo as a student, as we can see in the collection of books that he brought with him from England, and also reflected to some extent in his writing. In Newman's search for the roots of his religion, he discovered that there was in it the phenomenon of the development of the belief system, which spanned eighteen centuries in Christianity, in relation to the original inspiration. Even though many things happened during that period that were original and important, somehow he found that all of the doctrines had their seeds in the earliest writings and experiences at the inception of Christianity, and so he perceived a pattern in the development of doctrine that seemed parallel to the evolution of species.

We see in science, which has focused persistently on functions and organs and behaviors that have developed through many species over millennia, a grasp of how the beginnings foreshadow future developments in organic systems. And in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy we learn that it is “consciousness” that evolves; that structure is a product and vehicle of consciousness. At each level of the evolution of structure a higher level of consciousness is embodied by the process. And in Hegel we find the idea that the evolution of spirit is recorded through history; history is in fact the evidence of the evolution of spirit. That's the idea that the Mother also seems to have had in mind in the “koan” with which we began this course. It is important to understand the stages of the evolution of consciousness as they have manifested in the history of religion, in the sense of the philosophy of religion and not the institutions of religion. It is a field of evolution in which human societies have made consistent efforts to understand reality and bring into society higher principles of organization and ethics, and also to embody the higher inspirations of mystics; the desire to be guided by that higher mystical inspiration because it is real, and valid, and important, has had a major influence on the evolution of society. The religions have all been to some extent an embodiment of, or an effort to embody, higher inspired knowledge of the nature of reality. This is the idea we covered last time, of the manifestation in society of social structures that progressively embody higher values in civilization. This was the fundamental idea that inspired Bergson. Newman was similarly inspired by the role of religious experience in

history, as we will hear in some samples of his thought along these lines tonight. But in his work we will also see the strong influence of the epistemological skepticism that was prevalent in his day, and which is a persistent theme in his philosophy. In the *Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, he writes:

“It is the characteristic of our minds to be ever engaged in passing judgment on the things that come before us. No sooner do we apprehend than we judge: we allow nothing to stand by itself: we compare, contrast, abstract, generalize, connect, adjust, classify: and we view all our knowledge in the associations with which these processes have invested it.

“Of the judgments thus made, which become aspects in our minds of the things which meet us, some are mere opinions which come and go, or which remain with us only til an accident displaces them, whatever be the influence which they exercise meanwhile. Others are firmly fixed in our minds, with or without good reason, and have a hold upon us, whether they relate to matters of fact, or to principles of conduct, or are views of life and the world, or are prejudices, imaginations, or convictions. Many of them attach to one and the same object, which is thus variously viewed, not only by various minds, but by the same. They sometimes lie in such near relation, that each implies the others; some are only not inconsistent with each other in that they have a common origin: some, as being actually incompatible with each other, are, one or the other, falsely associated in our minds with their object, and in any case they may be nothing more than ideas, which we mistake for things.”<sup>1</sup>

Ideas which have a common origin can still be relatively inconsistent. We have only to reflect on the principles by which we live, to understand that this idea of judging and comparing and having convictions may be various in one or many minds. To achieve certainty about the “origin”, or the object as Hegel would put it, is not easy, because of the nature of mind. Newman's sensitivity to these limitations of knowledge shows the strong influence of skepticism on his thinking, which is a characteristic of a great deal of modern, and especially British, philosophy, and its influence seems to have driven Newman to constantly question even the veracity of his own certainties. But his skeptical approach to belief is also an early pre-formulation of the problem in epistemology stressed by Husserl, Heidegger, and Bergson, of the tendency of the rational intellect to “frame” reality in terms of concepts, interpretations, ideas, theories that displace the reality itself. Therefore the problem of phenomenology is to get back to the reality. This seems to be Newman's chief concern as well.

“The idea which represents an object or supposed object is commensurate with the sum total of its possible aspects, however they may vary in the separate consciousness of individuals; and in proportion to the variety of aspects under which it presents itself to various minds is its force and depth, and the argument for its reality. Ordinarily an idea is not brought home to the intellect as objective except through this variety; like bodily substances, which are not apprehended except under the clothing of their properties and results, and which admit of being walked round, and surveyed on opposite sides, and in different perspectives, and in contrary lights, in evidence of their reality. And, as views of a material object may be taken from points so remote or so opposed, that they seem at first sight incompatible, and especially as their shadows will be disproportionate, or even monstrous, and yet all these anomalies will disappear and all these contraries be adjusted, on ascertaining the point of vision or the surface projection in each case; so also all the aspects of an idea are capable of coalition, and of a resolution into the object to which it belongs; and the prima facie dissimilitude of its aspects becomes, when explained, an argument for its substantiveness and integrity, and their multiplicity for its originality and power.”<sup>2</sup>

If we are familiar with post-modern philosophy and the idea of deconstruction, this reflection of

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1 John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (2011 ed.), p. 26

2 Ibid., p. 27

Newman is clearly an early forerunner of the methods of deconstruction. Derrida for example will analyze a religious idea or a psychological complex or a work of art or literature in terms of the circumstances of its occurrence and all the different interpretations that have been given to it, or applications that it has had, historically, psychologically, linguistically, politically, and so on, and deconstruct little by little all the different aspects until what is left is the “originality and power” of the object itself. It itself suddenly stands forth as what it is in the midst of all the judgments and opinions and traces that it has left and that surround it. This is also the approach that Sri Aurobindo has taken in pursuing the development of Hindu doctrine. In his *Essays on the Gita*, he speaks of the necessity of recovering its core doctrines because it is an ancient language, the cultural context is very different from today's, and there are innumerable interpretations by different schools of Hinduism throughout the centuries. It is evident that Sri Aurobindo is fully aware of the idea of the development of doctrine, and he probably read this book in which Newman has applied the analysis of development to many Christian doctrines. Sri Aurobindo was also obviously aware of the necessity of deconstructing the layers of interpretation that surround such doctrines, in order to disclose their reality. But the emphasis of his approach, and of Newman's, is not on the critique, or the methodology of interpretation, but on discovering the truth of the thing itself.

At this point then, we will launch ourselves into an in-depth look at the doctrine of the Trinity. And we will follow Newman's application of the theory of development to some extent in his attempt to disclose the doctrine of the Christian Trinity. But we will find a doctrine of the Trinity in each of our three religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. And not only is there a development of this doctrine within each religion. There is apparently a metaphysical, spiritual reality that each of these religions is attempting to articulate through its doctrines. Each of them has developed similar doctrines to express that reality throughout its history, as we will see. And as we have noticed the similarities between Augustine and Plato and the medieval doctors and Sri Aurobindo and Hegel, who have expressed basically identical ideas with slight variations throughout the history and development of the philosophy of religion, it seems that the doctrines of the Trinity are like various lines of development within one kind of religious mind whose lines cross other similar minds from time to time, and perhaps will resolve into a single spiritual object. A secondary thesis tonight might then be that not only do we find parallels in the development of doctrine, but we may see that totally different traditions, or inspired seers, are in fact attempting to convey one eternal reality. As Sri Aurobindo asserted in the beginning of our study, there is one Eternal Reality which has to be known, and it is necessary to seek it in the different religions because of its complexity, which cannot be known in its completeness through any one tradition. And this is exactly what Newman says about the doctrines within his own tradition. In the beginning of Christianity we read the words that expressed the experience of the men of that period, and then four hundred years later we read a massive literature of debate about what it was that they were seeing and expressing, and then that understanding is developed further twelve hundred years down the road by Anselm and Aquinas, and so on. These long periods of time seem to not matter very much for the development of a doctrine of the Eternal Reality, or of Purusha and Prakriti, or of the Holy Trinity. These are difficult concepts to understand and grasp, because they represent a complex reality of existence. And it may in fact be beyond the ability of the mind to ever fully grasp them.

The idea of the development of doctrine, from an original pure perception and active engagement of consciousness with the spiritual reality, through hundreds of years of reengaging and re-visioning and restating, according to Newman, eventually arrives at a more complete understanding and expression than was possible at the beginning. Similarly, in the theory of evolution we are told that human consciousness is contained at the beginning of primitive life in the worm, and from the annelida to the human, according to these evolutionary seers, looking at the fossil record and the genetic record, there has been a continuum of development. So this is a “view”, as they say in Tibetan Buddhism, that comes

into the development of doctrine in religion. It is an in-depth view which only becomes possible when almost everything is known about a subject, and then the mind can pass beyond the analytical constructive processes of the rational intellect into a more holistic intuitive grasp of the whole. This seems to be a fundamental understanding of knowledge in philosophy, then, whether of religion or evolution or metaphysics: that there is the constructive analytical process of knowledge based on empirical evidence, and there is the intuitive direct grasp of the whole that comes through 'gathering and dwelling', as Heidegger says.

We can find a good example of this more comprehensive, contemplative grasp of things in Sri Aurobindo's doctrine of the Logos or Divine Word, for example. He has written extensively about *sruti* and *mantra*. If we hear what he says, it can only be understood to be a fundamental comprehensive teaching about a principle of existence that is of supreme importance. We can hear it and feel it, and it says something that we don't get from other teachings. We may get a glimmer of it here and there but we do not get such a substantive treatment of this idea of the Word anywhere else, to this extent of clarity and power. He says, for example:

“All creation is expression by the Word; but the form which is expressed is only a symbol or representation of the thing which is. We see this in human speech which only presents to the mind a mental form of the object; but the object it seeks to express is itself only a form or presentation of another Reality. That reality is Brahman. Brahman expresses by the Word a form or presentation of himself in the objects of sense and consciousness which constitute the universe, just as the human word expresses a mental image of those objects.”<sup>3</sup>

The essence of something is never embodied in the physical-vital-mental form. The form, in this sense, is an ever changing process and structure that embodies something else which is essential or immortal. This then is a kind of trinity: there is Brahman, there is the essential nature, or Word, and there is the temporal embodiment, for example of “beauty” or “justice”. It is first an absolute attribute of the Brahman, then an essential power or principle, and then the movements in culture and art, or of flowering plants in nature, which embody to the mind the various forms of beauty and power. But they do not express the infinite and absolute power and beauty; they are its temporal expressions. And there is the absolute and infinite Being beyond that. If it is a really perfect expression we may be able to perceive each of the levels in it; it may represent the essential reality to an extent that is overwhelming. We can sometimes experience that in *Savitri*, when the beauty and power of the word is so great that we understand that Savitri is the goddess of illumined speech, and she appears to us through the sound, the rhythm, the meaning, and behind her is the absolute divine Shakti of whom she is a Ray. And we might even glimpse its divine origin through the Ray, as we hear it and see it. This is certainly what Sri Aurobindo intends with *Savitri*. So he says of the supreme power of speech:

“That Word is creative in a deeper and more original sense than human speech and with a power of which the utmost creativeness of human speech can be only a far-off and feeble analogy. ...This, then, is the supreme Word, Speech of our speech. It is vibration of pure Existence, instinct with the perceptive and originative power of infinite and omnipotent consciousness, shaped by the Mind behind mind into the inevitable word of the Truth of things; out of whatever substance on whatever plane, the form or physical expression emerges by its creative agency. The Supermind using the Word is the creative Logos.”<sup>4</sup>

The “truth of things” is their potential, or their essence, the thing that they eventually can become in one lifetime or in a thousand. And then they may transform, or evolve, into another version of that same truth. Species, and religious teachings, societies, and cultures, languages and arts express

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3 Sri Aurobindo, *Kena and Other Upanishads* (2011 ed.), p. 29

4 Ibid., p. 32

themselves through centuries of approximations to their essential truth. This is, again, pure Platonism. And this doctrine of the divine Logos as an essential vibration of speech that creates the potential forms of things, was similar in a variety of ancient traditions. There was a philosopher at the time of Christ, before the Christian gospels were written, named Philo of Judaea, for example, who wrote about the divine Logos. He was a prominent Jewish teacher of philosophy in the Graeco-Roman society, and when I first read something of his as a student fifty years ago, I thought it was something truly incredible and wonderful. In his time Greek thinkers defined the Logos as the divine animating principle of the universe – *logos spermaticos*. Philo wrote, 'And the Father, who created the universe, has given to his archangelic and most ancient Word a preeminent gift, to stand on the confines of both and separate that which had been created from the creator. ...This same Word is continually a suppliant to the immortal God on behalf of the mortal race, and is the ambassador sent by the Ruler to the subject race.'

And then Plotinus will come along in two centuries and call that word which separates the creator from the created the Divine Mind, the original emanation of the absolute. In order to create the universe, the absolute emanates its power that contains in it all of the ideas, the principles, the gods, in one supreme emanation – the Supermind in Sri Aurobindo. That emanation then becomes diversified in expression through time and space in the souls and forms of beings. Between Philo and Plotinus there was the Christ, who was known in the gospel of St. John as the Logos, and which constitutes the middle term of the Christian Trinity. St. John was also a prominent Greek philosopher of the time, who wrote: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him.' And this seems to be what Sri Aurobindo was saying based on the Kena Upanishad. There is this universal doctrine of divine creative power that is identified with speech. Speech is a human faculty that is capable of amazing things, including the power to convey truth, and through conveying truth to shape values and outcomes. Seeds are sown through speech and realities emerge that embody the original ideas formulated through speech. So maybe the idea of the divine Word is just an analogy of human speech elevated to the status of the divine origin, in order to erect a structure of beliefs to legitimize an authoritarian hierarchy. It could be either way, and both could be true, in various times and circumstances and at the same time.

That Supreme Being can also be creating through the higher mind's imagination an understanding of the essence of speech and consciousness. Either way, it is like the symbol of the two triangles in the Star of David, and in the symbol of Sri Aurobindo. There is a descent into human knowledge and society of an understanding of higher principles, and there is an ascent toward those higher principles by virtue of the nature and structure of the human being. This nature and structure of the human consciousness has discovered and created a spiritual understanding that has focused in a particular way on a certain idea that attempts to show the relationship between the higher spiritual consciousness and the lower every-day dynamics of life, and to create an understanding of the relationship between the above and the below. This understanding is usually communicated through allegorical symbolism. In Christianity this has been done through the doctrine of the Trinity. What is the doctrine and what is the reality that it represents? If we can grasp this, then we are really entering into the inner temple of the philosophy of religion. And Newman was an inspired voice for this tradition, in-so-far as it can be conveyed through speech, and through the development of doctrine, as we will now hear. We should simply try to hear what he says about the Trinity, and allow him to create an idea in our consciousness of what it is.

“No one is to be called a Theist, who does not believe in a Personal God, whatever difficulty there may be in defining the word “Personal.” Now it is the belief of Catholics about the Supreme Being, that this essential characteristic of His Nature is reiterated in three distinct ways or modes; so that the Almighty God, instead of

being One Person only, which is the teaching of Natural Religion, has Three Personalities, and is at once, according as we view Him in the one or the other of them, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—a Divine Three, who bear towards Each Other the several relations which those names indicate, and are in that respect distinct from Each Other.

This is the teaching of the Athanasian Creed; viz. that the One Personal God, who is not a logical or physical unity, but a Living *Monas*, more really one even than an individual man is one...—He at once is Father, is Son, is Holy Ghost, Each of whom is that One Personal God in the fulness of His Being and Attributes; so that the Father is all that is meant by the word “God,” as if we knew nothing of Son, or of Spirit; and in like manner the Son and the Spirit are Each by Himself all that is meant by the word, as if the Other Two were unknown; moreover, that by the word “God” is meant nothing over and above what is meant by the “Father,” or by “the Son,” or by “the Holy Ghost;” and that the Father is in no sense the Son, nor the Son the Holy Ghost, nor the Holy Ghost the Father. Such is the prerogative of the Divine Infinitude, that that One and Single Personal Being, the Almighty God, is really Three, while He is absolutely One.

Indeed, the Catholic dogma may be said to be summed up in this very formula on which St. Augustine lays so much stress, “Tres et Unus,” not merely “Unum”; hence that formula is the key-note, as it may be called, of the Athanasian Creed. In that Creed we testify to the Unus Increateus, to the Unus Immensus, Omnipotens, Deus, and Dominus; yet Each of the Three also is by Himself Increateus, Immensus, Omnipotens, for Each is that One God, though Each is not the Other; Each, as is intimated by Unus Increateus, is the One Personal God of Natural Religion.”<sup>5</sup>

Now, 'natural religion' is something we have spoken quite a bit about. It is the religion of reason. The religion of Plato believes that there is one supreme god whose emanations are the ideas. The idea of the Good is that which empowers everything to be what it is, and also to be known to be what it is, because knowledge is one of the ideas that it creates. In Platonic philosophy there is this correspondence between the way things are and how they are known to be what they are. This is the idea of *noein* and the *gnoston*. The *gnoston* is that which is known to be what it is. It is known not just in its form but in its origin and purpose. And this is possible according to Plato because the good contains knowability as well as knowing. The knowability of things is their shape, their quality, their form, and consciousness using the senses can know them. This same philosophy is laid out by Sri Aurobindo in his commentary on the Kena Upanishad, which says basically the same thing about the relation between the senses and the objects of sense. There is the *pranic* field in which things become what they are and are known consciously as such. And what is this field? It is *spiritus sanctus*, the divine in all, *daivi prakriti*; that is, if we choose to borrow terms from another tradition in order to expand our interpretation. But here we may note the inherent limitation of doctrine which, in this case, defines a term in relation to other terms and concentrates exclusively on itself as a doctrine, thereby excluding the possibility of focusing consciousness either on the reality of its object, or on other traditions of inspired knowledge. The mental or conceptual object displaces the spiritual object that it represents. But perhaps we have been sufficiently sensitized by our study to turn, at this point, toward the object itself.

There is the origin, which is the Father, the supreme formlessness of the Spirit; and there is the Son, who is the Word, the creative force, the Divine Mind; and there is the Holy Spirit that brings everything into being according to its nature and shines in every soul; and when we are perceiving this universal energy and creative force and peace and light, that is God; and when we are perceiving the Son as the perfect manifestation of the creative Word of Love and Grace and Redemption and Compassion in a form, which can be seen and felt, that is God; and when we perceive the supreme formlessness of absolute Spirit, then that is Almighty God. And this is the Holy Trinity. But however much our doctrines may clarify our belief, the distinction remains, as Newman points out, along with Pannikar

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5 John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1979 ed.), p. 111-112



and Hegel, between this and the fire of faith, between the doctrine and the direct transparent grasp of the reality, which is perhaps the only real issue for the philosophy of religion.

“That this doctrine, thus drawn out, is of a notional character, is plain; the question before me is whether in any sense it can become the object of real apprehension, that is, whether any portion of it may be considered as addressed to the imagination, and is able to exert that living mastery over the mind, which is instanced as I have shown above, as regards the proposition, “There is a God.”

“There is a God,” when really apprehended, is the object of a strong energetic adhesion, which works a revolution in the mind; but when held merely as a notion, it requires but a cold and ineffective acceptance, though it be held ever so unconditionally. Such in its character is the assent of thousands, whose imaginations are not at all kindled, nor their hearts inflamed, nor their conduct affected, by the most august of all conceivable truths. I ask, then, as concerns the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, such as I have drawn it out to be, is it capable of being apprehended otherwise than notionally? Is it a theory, undeniable indeed, but addressed to the student, and to no one else? Is it the elaborate, subtle, triumphant exhibition of a truth, completely developed, and happily adjusted, and accurately balanced on its centre, and impregnable on every side, as a scientific view, “*totus, teres, atque rotundus*,” challenging all assailants, or, on the other hand, does it come to the unlearned, the young, the busy, and the afflicted, as a fact which is to arrest them, penetrate them, and to support and animate them in their passage through life? That is, does it admit of being held in the imagination, and being embraced with a real assent? I maintain it does, and that it is the normal faith which every Christian has, on which he is stayed, which is his spiritual life, there being nothing in the exposition of the dogma, as I have given it above, which does not address the imagination, as well as the intellect.”<sup>6</sup>

Newman says many interesting things about this mystery of the Holy Trinity, - the Three who are One. We will hear a few more of his statements in order to bring this spiritual object into clearer focus. He mentions some phrases that occur in the gospel, for example, going back as close as possible to the original inspiration.

“This being understood, I ask what chapter of St. John or St. Paul is not full of the Three Divine Names, introduced in one or other of the above nine propositions, expressed or implied, or in their parallels, or in parts or equivalents of them? What lesson is there given us by these two chief writers of the New Testament, which does not grow out of Their Persons and Their Offices? At one time we read of the grace of the Second Person, the love of the First, and the communication of the Third; at another we are told by the Son, “I will pray the Father, and He will send you another Paraclete;” and then, “All that the Father hath are Mine; the Paraclete shall receive of Mine.” Then again we read of “the foreknowledge of the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit, the Blood of Jesus Christ;” and again we are to “pray in the Holy Ghost, abide in the love of God, and look for the mercy of Jesus.” And so, in like manner, to Each, in one passage or another, are ascribed the same titles and works: Each is acknowledged as Lord; Each is eternal; Each is Truth; Each is Holiness; Each is all in all; Each is Creator; Each wills with a Supreme Will; Each is the Author of the new birth; Each speaks in His ministers; Each is the Revealer; Each is the Lawgiver; Each is the Teacher of the elect; in Each the elect have fellowship; Each leads them on; Each raises them from the dead. What is all this, but “the Father Eternal, the Son Eternal, and the Holy Ghost Eternal; the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost Omnipotent; the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost God,” of the Athanasian Creed? And if the New Testament be, as it confessedly is, so real in its teaching, so luminous, so impressive, so constraining, so full of images, so sparing in mere notions, whence is this but because, in its references to the Object of our supreme worship, it is ever ringing the changes (so to say) on the nine propositions which I have set down, and on the particular statements into which they may be severally resolved?”<sup>7</sup>

Do we derive from these words some notion, let's call it a 'notion', a 'concept' of the three who are one,

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6 Ibid., p. 112-113

7 Ibid., p. 120-121

equally divine, the same, but in three distinct forms? Newman will argue that this is a mystery. The mind can focus on each of those levels and separate definitions and qualities, but he will say that the mind cannot grasp the unity. It can only conceive of it. It knows the meaning of these separate statements. And at some moment it can experience an infinite absolute uncreated spiritual being; at another moment it can experience and visualize a perfect embodiment of that being in a form that is equally divine but limited to a personal human form that contains in it that divinity, but which is no longer the absolute and uncreated; and at another moment it can experience a universal spiritual force and luminosity and presence in every being, let's call it the Mother's force, the luminosity and presence of the divine teacher, *paracleitos*, which is so luminous and loving and powerful that it cannot be conceived of as a quality of the human being. ...We can sense its infinite source through it, but that is so vast that we can't really conceive of it; we can only be amazed by it. And for that to be in a human body is equally amazing. And then to feel in everything a pulsation and fragrance and sweetness that is similar to that original embodiment, makes all of these words mean something that is beyond definition. This is a mystery. This is what the mystics are saying. We can sometimes experience a grace that allows us to know, to grasp something of the *rasa* of that mystery, and then we can put around it all kinds of beautiful luminous expressions, as Sri Aurobindo has done in *Savitri*. We can say that Savitri is that Ray of divine spirit that comes from the divine Supermind, of which the sun is the symbol, Surya, the Lord of Truth and Light. And according to Christian belief Jesus was an actual embodiment of that source, as was the Mother, according to our belief, an actual embodiment of the Mahashakti because the quality that she manifested was so far beyond the ordinary that one can only say that it was unlimited and divine. And yet we know that the real unlimited is far beyond that, although they are somehow the same divine being. Everything that happens in life, in the world of generation and corruption, the world of mind, life, and body, is a very meager and distant, and often distorted, reflection of that original power of intelligence, and meaning, and quality, that spiritual Being which is the divine Logos. That's actually what the word means.

This has been reiterated and explained century after century through innumerable voices, that have attempted to express That Reality in some form or idea that relates the above and the below, something that is hidden below, revealed in the middle, and originates in the absolute above. So, to conclude this *excursus*, I would like to read something from the original Greek version of the New Testament (in translation), from which we heard another fragment earlier. "Jesus said, I will ask the Father and he will give you another helper, (*parakleitos*), the spirit of truth, to stay with you forever. I have told you this while I am still with you. The helper, the holy spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything I have said. Peace, I leave with you, my own peace I give to you. I do not give it to you as the world does. Do not be worried and upset, do not be afraid." This is That Peace, as Sri Aurobindo says in *The Synthesis of Yoga*: 'we shall call That, that Peace and Silence'. This is a central spiritual experience of the divine, and all of these symbolic attempts to communicate That are inspired by That. That is a reality which is represented by language, which at some moments is so resonant with that quality of being itself, that one is illumined by it and inspired by it. It is mediated by one who dwells in that consciousness, and then their speech can express it. This is why many traditions have recognized the power of *mantra* as a fundamental method for awakening consciousness. Those who dwell in that consciousness do sometimes have the ability to communicate it.

## 8. Doctrines of the Trinity – (2) Hinduism

I would like to review the approach that we have taken in this exploration, beginning with Pannikar. He said that when we undertake a study of comparative religion or inter-religious understanding or the philosophy of religion, it becomes necessary to suspend if possible, or to bracket

in the phenomenological sense, our personal beliefs. He says, “The positive aspect of that attempt lies in the fact that it distinguishes between the conceptualized beliefs of the person and their underlying existential faith.” When we bracket our beliefs, we can set aside the doctrines and the ideas but we still retain our fundamental experience. ...”The problem arises when we pretend to bracket not a formulation or a notion but a fundamental conviction of the person at the existential level.” We can't really bracket what we know from experience, and pretend that we do not believe it. But if we accept the distinction between faith and belief, he says, we may be able to agree to a certain necessary bracketing of our beliefs. And then he says, “I would prefer to call for transcending them altogether.” And if we do that we are moving toward the realm of the reality, the spiritual reality itself, in which we have faith. And it is separate from the doctrines. If we transcend our belief system then it becomes possible to see the Christian Trinity for what it is, and the Buddhist Trinity for what it is, and the Hindu Trinities for what they are, because they are all representations of a spiritual reality. And what the philosophy of religion is trying to address is the reality of Spirit, the truth of Spirit. What is the spiritual reality? That is the object of the philosophy of religion, which has been extensively explored and articulated by the philosophers of religion and spiritual seers and teachers for thousands of years in each of the traditions. But the point is not to compare the traditions; it is to go beyond them and see the truth of the spiritual reality of existence itself. And that reality, as Newman says, is something that is extremely complex. It is not something that can be captured by one era of the development of a belief, or even by two thousand years of development. He says that the problem lies in discovering and understanding that the reality has been seen and articulated repeatedly, in new and even contradictory or heretical ways, for thousands of years, and yet the reality itself doesn't change. The attempts to articulate it may sound different at different times because of changes in the thought process, or changes in society, or changes in consciousness, because it is not only doctrine that develops; it is also society and language and human consciousness that develop; and the way the reality is understood changes, but not the reality. The challenge for understanding doctrine, then, is to put it all together. He says that “...the increase and expansion of the Christian Creed and Ritual, and the variations which have attended the process in the case of individual writers and Churches are the necessary attendants on any philosophy or polity which takes possession of the intellect and heart, and has had any wide or extended dominion; that from the nature of the human mind, time is necessary for the full comprehension and perfection of great ideas; and that the highest and most wonderful truths, though communicated to the world once for all by inspired teachers, could not be comprehended all at once by the recipients, but, as being received and transmitted by minds not inspired and through media which were human, have required only the longer time and deeper thought for their full elucidation. This may be called the Theory of the Development of Doctrine.”<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was quite in agreement with this point of view, and he expanded upon it in his *Essays on the Gita*. He also took major steps to reexamine in depth and restate the Hindu doctrines. He made perhaps the most powerful effort in the history of this tradition, in fact, to synthesize all of the developments and come up with the core doctrines in a language and way of thinking that is appropriate to our post-modern social and cultural conditions, emphasizing not only the necessity of the development of doctrines in order to find their fullest expression, but more importantly the necessity to make them understood by new generations and contexts of humanity and civilization in an accessible intellectual form. With respect to the development of doctrine in the Gita, he says,

“The Gita has to synthesize the Yoga doctrine of liberation by works and the Sankhya doctrine of liberation by knowledge; it has to fuse *karma* with *jnana*. It has at the same time to synthesize the Purusha and Prakriti idea common to Sankhya and Yoga with the Brahmavada of the current Vedanta in which the Purusha, Deva, Ishwara,—supreme Soul, God, Lord,—of the Upanishads all became merged in the one all-swallowing concept

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1 John Henry Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (2011 ed.), p. 23

of the immutable Brahman; and it has to bring out again from its overshadowing by that concept but not with any denial of it the Yoga idea of the Lord or Ishwara. It has too its own luminous thought to add, the crown of its synthetic system, the doctrine of the Purushottama and of the triple Purusha for which, though the idea is there, no precise and indisputable authority can be easily found in the Upanishads and which seems indeed at first sight to be in contradiction with that text of the Sruti where only two Purushas are recognised. Moreover, in synthesising works and knowledge it has to take account not only of the opposition of Yoga and Sankhya, but of the opposition of works to knowledge in Vedanta itself, where the connotation of the two words and therefore their point of conflict is not quite the same as the point of the Sankhya-Yoga opposition. It is not surprising at all, one may observe in passing, that with the conflict of so many philosophical schools all founding themselves on the texts of the Veda and Upanishads, the Gita should describe the understanding as being perplexed and confused, led in different directions by the Sruti, *srutivipratipanna*. What battles are even now delivered by Indian pundits and metaphysicians over the meaning of the ancient texts and to what different conclusions they lead! The understanding may well get disgusted and indifferent, *gantasi nirvedam*, refuse to hear any more texts new or old, *srotavyasya srutasya ca*, and go into itself to discover the truth in the light of a deeper and inner and direct experience.”<sup>2</sup>

There was a rich period in the development of Hindu doctrine between about 400 to 200 BCE when there were these three prominent schools of thought, among other 'darshanas', which were all considered to be Vedic in origin, so they were not really competitive, but they were each elaborate systems, and the Gita was the main repository of Vedanta, after the Vedas and the Upanishads, which attempted to put all of the doctrines together. But there were still some unresolved problems. In this paragraph from the chapter titled 'Sankhya, Yoga, Vedanta' in the *Essays*, we can get a glimmering of the idea in Sankhya Philosophy that there are two purushas, soul states or mind states: the one that is involved in nature and the one that is liberated from illusion; and the idea of Yoga that there are millions of purushas, souls or minds, to be liberated; and in the Gita that there are three purushas (levels of the soul or self). We know that in Christianity also there is a debate about whether we are all separate immortal souls, and whether the soul lives in one life or many lives, or whether we are one soul in many bodies and lives. Are we the soul involved in life and emotions or are we the transcendent immortal soul; is the soul destined to go to hell or go to heaven or can it already be liberated and elevated to do divine work in this life, and so on? These are fundamental questions that we think about from time to time, when we find ourselves either very unliberated, or very liberated, or inspired, or influenced by this or that school of thought, and they are persistent problems. Can we realize the self through practice and effort (work) or can we only step back from life and achieve liberation through pure transcendent knowledge (meditation)? These two approaches to liberation are both present in the Gita as steps that are not mutually exclusive but complementary. Sri Aurobindo therefore sought to clarify these somewhat conflicting doctrines, and even after he had written several chapters in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, and three chapters in the *Essays on the Gita*, and a couple of chapters in his commentary on Kena Upanishad explaining the doctrines of these three schools, finally in the second part of *The Life Divine* written in 1939-40 he wrote another amazing chapter titled 'Brahman, Purusha, Ishwara – Maya, Prakriti, Shakti' in which he didn't bother with any textual commentary or intellectual analysis; he went straight into the vision of the reality of these complex essential doctrines of the dualities of Purusha and Prakriti, Brahman and Maya, Ishwara and Shakti. One of our purposes tonight is to hear something of these final clarifications from that later chapter, written near the end of his career, when he was deeply into the writing of *Savitri*.

In the earlier chapters of the *Essays on the Gita*, however, he states the basic doctrine of the Sankhya system several times, and in order for us to know what Sankhya is, it will help to read a passage or two from this source. He says, for example,

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2 Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (2010 ed.), p. 88,89

“The Gita...speaks of three Purushas or rather a triple status of the Purusha. The Upanishads in dealing with the truths of Sankhya seem sometimes to speak only of two Purushas. There is one unborn of three colours, says a text, the eternal feminine principle of Prakriti with its three gunas, ever creating; there are two unborn, two Purushas, of whom one cleaves to and enjoys her, the other abandons her because he has enjoyed all her enjoyments. In another verse they are described as two birds on one tree, eternally yoked companions, one of whom eats the fruits of the tree,—the Purusha in Nature enjoying her cosmos,— the other eats not, but watches his fellow,—the silent Witness, withdrawn from the enjoyment; when the first sees the second and knows that all is his greatness, then he is delivered from sorrow. The point of view in the two verses is different, but they have a common implication. One of the birds is the eternally silent, unbound Self or Purusha by whom all this is extended and he regards the cosmos he has extended, but is aloof from it; the other is the Purusha involved in Prakriti. The first verse indicates that the two are the same, represent different states, bound and liberated, of the same conscious being,—for the second Unborn has descended into the enjoyment of Nature and withdrawn from her; the other verse brings out what we would not gather from the former, that in its higher status of unity the self is for ever free, inactive, unattached, though it descends in its lower being into the multiplicity of the creatures of Prakriti and withdraws from it by reversion in any individual creature to the higher status. This theory of the double status of the one conscious soul opens a door; but the process of the multiplicity of the One is still obscure. To these two the Gita, developing the thought of other passages in the Upanishads, adds yet another, the supreme, the Purushottama, the highest Purusha, whose greatness all this creation is. Thus there are three, the Kshara, the Akshara, the Uttama. Kshara, the mobile, the mutable is Nature, *svabhava*, it is the various becoming of the soul; the Purusha here is the multiplicity of the divine Being; it is the Purusha multiple not apart from, but in Prakriti. Akshara, the immobile, the immutable, is the silent and inactive self, it is the unity of the divine Being, Witness of Nature, but not involved in its movement; it is the inactive Purusha free from Prakriti and her works. The Uttama is the Lord, the supreme Brahman, the supreme Self, who possesses both the immutable unity and the mobile multiplicity. It is by a large mobility and action of His nature, His energy, His will and power, that He manifests Himself in the world and by a greater stillness and immobility of His being that He is aloof from it; yet is He as Purushottama above both the aloofness from Nature and the attachment to Nature.”<sup>3</sup>

The idea of the soul or self involved in nature is the *Kshara purusha*; the idea of the self liberated from nature, viewing nature without attachment, is the *Akshara purusha*. These two correspond to the division between the energy of Nature and Spirit. Spirit is thought of as being a principle other than Nature, immutable, eternal, pure; and Nature is the process of the activities of formation, the three *gunas*, creation, destruction and balance. That's the activity of *prakriti* which draws the spirit in, and it believes it is all of that, until it steps back and enjoys liberation. In Yoga philosophy that stepping back requires renunciation, purification, meditation, entering into *samadhi* and staying there until all attachments are dissolved and *prakriti* falls silent. It is based on the Sankhya philosophy of the duality of Spirit and Nature. But then there are problems with that because, if Nature is doing everything, Nature is producing the *buddhi* which is the intelligence to make that decision to be liberated, and Nature is producing *manas*, the sense mind that experiences all of the problems, and Nature is producing the vital-physical forms that are struggling to survive and develop, then how is it that when the Purusha steps back, Nature just keeps on doing what she does in others. This liberation doesn't liberate anything except the individual soul. So it's not like a solution to the problem of suffering in the world. On the other hand it doesn't explain how Nature does what she does. There is no causal relationship in that philosophy between Purusha and Prakriti. The Sankhya just says that Purusha draws near to Prakriti and she does all of these things; and the Purusha steps back from Prakriti and she falls silent. But it's Nature that is doing everything, so what is the relationship between the Self and the intelligent will, the choice to withdraw? It's Nature that produces the will to withdraw and be liberated from itself. So this is a limitation of Sankhya, but it still seems to account for many things. The Gita

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3 Ibid., p. 78,79

develops this thought and adds another Purusha, the highest Self, Purushottama whose will drives Nature to do what she does. It is therefore a trinity: Kshara (the involved self), Akshara (the liberated self), and Uttama (the supreme self) who is united with Nature at the highest level of Spirit.

Now, it would be possible for us to conjecture that Purusha *becomes* Prakriti; in Nature there is no difference between them, they are two principles of the same thing, and Purusha experiences itself as the will moving in the energy of Nature, or as the energy liberated from nature when it dissociates itself and becomes pure quiescent energy; then it resumes its unity with Nature without losing its consciousness of Self, and realizes itself as the divine force of Nature, encompassing all of time and space as both *kshara and akshara, and as the supreme, the uttama*. In the individual, it can be the Brahman consciousness, still and immutable, and at the same time involved in all the action of Prakriti. This is the step that was taken by the Gita to resolve the three different views of how spirit can be related to the world. Then we could conclude that the three levels of Nature are not different from the three levels of Spirit. They are One, interpreted in terms of a relationship of duality: Purusha/Prakriti, on three levels of consciousness-force: involved, liberated, transformed; or as Saguna Brahman moving in the energy of time and space, Nirguna Brahman, eternally motionless and empty, and Ishwara, the Lord of its Nature force, Shakti. As Newman suggested, the mind may find it easier to conceive of each of these states of being separately, as in fact Hindu philosophy has done, while the mystery beyond the comprehension of the mind, is the Divine Trinity.

Sri Aurobindo says in all of his commentaries that this kind of metaphysical knowledge is virtually meaningless, and useless, without Yoga. Yoga in this sense means the effort to acquire the stillness and emptiness to be able to see That Brahman in its different states or aspects. To think about or hold a notion of the Brahman is what we have heard from Hegel and Newman and Pannikar is the meaning of doctrine, it is what the mind is capable of doing; but to experience what these Trinities are or what the Brahman is, in terms of the absolute creative word, the inspired Divine Mind, the immortal soul of the mortal, requires a direct intuitive grasp of its reality. And that generally requires that we are concerned enough with this objective to enter into a spiritual process of transformation that liberates us from illusion and gives us the ability to be in the world with detachment, and power, and delight. If we don't have that spiritual grasp, we are not going to live the divine life or be 'ethical' beings, dwelling in the highest Good, Truth, and Beauty. So Sri Aurobindo integrates these philosophies in a way that is specific and intentional with respect to such a realization. In his work we have an opportunity to hear something that is not merely mental or notional. He explains in the chapter of *The Life Divine* to which I have been referring, for example, that these things can be expressed through language, but the language used must be appropriate to the thing that is being communicated and understood. According to all of the traditions that we have studied, it is such a tangible experience of Spirit that the special form of inspired spiritual speech known as Sruti can achieve. And it is this possibility of language which is perhaps the key to the problem of knowledge that Newman found so intractable with respect to the mind's ability, or inability, to grasp the mystery of the Holy Trinity and spiritual truth in general. In his introduction to this chapter, Sri Aurobindo addresses the problem explicitly:

“But although thus indeterminable to Mind, because of its absoluteness and infinity, we discover that this Supreme and Eternal Infinite determines itself to our consciousness in the universe by real and fundamental truths of its being which are beyond the universe and in it and are the very foundation of its existence. These truths present themselves to our conceptual cognition as the fundamental aspects in which we see and experience the omnipresent Reality. In themselves they are seized directly, not by intellectual understanding but by a spiritual intuition, a spiritual experience in the very substance of our consciousness; but they can also be caught at in conception by a large and plastic idea and can be expressed in some sort by a plastic speech which does not insist too much on rigid definition or limit the wideness and subtlety of the idea. In order to express this

experience or this idea with any nearness a language has to be created which is at once intuitively metaphysical and revealingly poetic, admitting significant and living images as the vehicle of a close, suggestive and vivid indication,—a language such as we find hammered out into a subtle and pregnant massiveness in the Veda and the Upanishads. In the ordinary tongue of metaphysical thought we have to be content with a distant indication, an approximation by abstractions, which may still be of some service to our intellect, for it is this kind of speech which suits our method of logical and rational understanding; but if it is to be of real service, the intellect must consent to pass out of the bounds of a finite logic and accustom itself to the logic of the Infinite. On this condition alone, by this way of seeing and thinking, it ceases to be paradoxical or futile to speak of the Ineffable: but if we insist on applying a finite logic to the Infinite, the omnipresent Reality will escape us and we shall grasp instead an abstract shadow, a dead form petrified into speech or a hard incisive graph which speaks of the Reality but does not express it. Our way of knowing must be appropriate to that which is to be known; otherwise we achieve only a distant speculation, a figure of knowledge and not veritable knowledge.”<sup>4</sup>

It has been my contention for a few years now that this was Sri Aurobindo's primary mission: to create a language through which these spiritual truths could be effectively conveyed to us. Sanskrit is no longer accessible to us, as is the case with other ancient languages. So two things are required: the consciousness of that reality, and an extraordinary creative genius. When those two things come together, throughout history there have been inspiring, powerful teachings that have had a significant impact for ages. I think that this was Sri Aurobindo's primary objective. To demonstrate this, I am going to read a passage on the 'Brahman, Purusha and Ishwara', and then a passage on the same theme from the *mantric* poem *Savitri*, and we will see and hear that this language and its content are far superior to anything we have heard so far today. The passage from *Savitri* will express the same ideas in a way that is a quantum leap beyond the prose passage, which is an inspired expression of the reality referred to by Sankhya, Yoga, and Vedanta. Sri Aurobindo conveys here a sense of that divine reality as a Trinity of individual, universal and transcendent Self: the self as the soul in all beings, the self as universal expression of the essential qualities of existence, and the self as absolute, all-containing, immutable spirit. In the passage from *Savitri* that follows he conveys the mystery of the biune reality of Nature and Spirit.

*Brahman, Purusha, Ishwara – Maya, Prakriti, Shakti*

“Brahman the Reality is the self-existent Absolute and Maya is the Consciousness and Force of this self-existence; but with regard to the universe Brahman appears as the Self of all existence, Atman, the cosmic Self, but also as the Supreme Self transcendent of its own cosmicity and at the same time individual-universal in each being; Maya can then be seen as the self-power, Atma-Shakti, of the Atman. It is true that when we first become aware of this Aspect, it is usually in a silence of the whole being or at the least in a silence within which draws back or stands away from the surface action; this Self is then felt as a status in silence, an immobile immutable being, self-existent, pervading the whole universe, omnipresent in all, but not dynamic or active, aloof from the evermobile energy of Maya. In the same way we can become aware of it as the Purusha, separate from Prakriti, the Conscious Being standing back from the activities of Nature. But this is an exclusive concentration which limits itself to a spiritual status and puts away from it all activity in order to realise the freedom of Brahman the self-existent Reality from all limitation by its own action and manifestation: it is an essential realisation, but not the total realisation. For we can see that the Conscious-Power, the Shakti that acts and creates, is not other than the Maya or all-knowledge of Brahman; it is the Power of the Self; Prakriti is the working of the Purusha, Conscious Being active by its own Nature: the duality then of Soul and World-Energy, silent Self and the creative Power of the Spirit, is not really something dual and separate, it is biune. As we cannot separate Fire and the power of Fire, it has been said, so we cannot separate the Divine Reality and its Consciousness-Force, Chit-Shakti. This first realisation of Self as something intensely silent and purely static is not the whole truth of it, there can also be a realisation of Self in its power, Self as the condition of world activity and world-existence. However, the Self is a fundamental aspect of Brahman, but with a certain stress on its

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4 Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (2005 ed.), (337,338)

impersonality; therefore the Power of the Self has the appearance of a Force that acts automatically with the Self sustaining it, witness and support and originator and enjoyer of its activities but not involved in them for a moment. As soon as we become aware of the Self, we are conscious of it as eternal, unborn, unembodied, uninvolved in its workings: it can be felt within the form of being, but also as enveloping it, as above it, surveying its embodiment from above, *adhyaksa*; it is omnipresent, the same in everything, infinite and pure and intangible for ever. This Self can be experienced as the Self of the individual, the Self of the thinker, doer, enjoyer, but even so it always has this greater character; its individuality is at the same time a vast universality or very readily passes into that, and the next step to that is a sheer transcendence or a complete and ineffable passing into the Absolute. The Self is that aspect of the Brahman in which it is intimately felt as at once individual, cosmic, transcendent of the universe. The realisation of the Self is the straight and swift way towards individual liberation, a static universality, a Nature-transcendence. At the same time there is a realisation of Self in which it is felt not only sustaining and pervading and enveloping all things, but constituting everything and identified in a free identity with all its becomings in Nature. Even so, freedom and impersonality are always the character of the Self. There is no appearance of subjection to the workings of its own Power in the universe, such as the apparent subjection of the Purusha to Prakriti. To realise the Self is to realise the eternal freedom of the Spirit.”<sup>5</sup>

These concepts are not easy for the mind to grasp, and therefore a special language is required, and a transformed consciousness, in order to really understand them. It is like this with Purusha and Prakriti, and with “the gods” of the Vedas, and with yogic states like *sunyata* and *samata*. Because they are not normal states of being, it helps to have the *mantra*. In our course on Sri Aurobindo's poetry, therefore, we have read quite a few poems on these themes - 'The Witness and the Wheel', the experience of *nirvana* in the Brahman and the liberation of the self from nature in the Book of Yoga, (p. 12 above), where Savitri is “sepulchered in body and mind”, rises above in her liberated consciousness, and receives the power of the Divine Mother. There are many poems of Sri Aurobindo that are about entering into and dwelling in the emptiness in order to receive the descent of the divine Shakti. And we have heard cantos about the gods in which the information conveyed is similar to what we have heard from other scriptural texts and commentaries about what the gods can and can't do or know. One of the patterns that we have seen in the religions, and also in Sri Aurobindo, is that the gods are universal powers that we serve and to which we sacrifice in life. But ultimately, for the sake of spiritual transformation, we have to turn those gods toward their source, and then our sacrifice is only to the Supreme.

I have recently seen a narration by the Mother about a visitation that she had from one of the divine *mahashaktis*, I think it was Saraswati, who told the Mother that she was willing that henceforth everything she did would come through her surrender to the Supreme, and therefore she (the Mother) would not need to intervene in or solicit or direct her assistance in the divine work. This is a kind of mythological story that the Mother told about the turning of a goddess toward her ultimate source. We can interpret this to mean that a goddess like Saraswati who has inspired music and art, and to whom men turn for that inspiration, can become an instrument of the transformation of human consciousness in general if we shift our focus in that direction. It is similar to the story of the Kena Upanishad in which the gods want to discover their source; the god of mind seeks to know its origin, the god of life seeks to know its origin, the god of the physical world wants to know its origin, and when they are unable to find it by their own efforts they turn to the Divine Mother who, as we have heard in our reading of *Savitri*, 'made a gesture as of worlds thrown away', parted the veil, and revealed to the gods their supreme source, the light of the Brahman. We will recall that Augustine was preoccupied with the same idea. How can we solicit the gods and their intervention for us when we and they depend on the one supreme source of all power and light? The idea that there is one divine reality to whom all

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5 Ibid., p. 361,362



sacrifice and obeisance are due, and not to any intermediate powers, is a theme that we find in the religions; we will find it also in Buddhism. So now we will hear a section of *Savitri*, which may reveal something more substantial along these lines about the nature of the gods. And then we will hear the *mantra* of Purusha and Prakriti. The sections within each of the cantos of *Savitri* are all generally complete in themselves with respect to the spiritual experience or teaching that Sri Aurobindo wishes to transmit through the visionary power and rhythmic intensity of mantric speech, and can be read as such.

*Savitri, Book 1, Canto 4, The Secret Knowledge (the gods)*

Two are the ends of the mysterious plan.  
In the wide signless ether of the Self,  
In the unchanging Silence white and nude,  
Aloof, resplendent like gold dazzling suns  
Veiled by the ray no mortal eye can bear,  
The Spirit's bare and absolute potencies  
Burn in the solitude of the thoughts of God.  
A rapture and a radiance and a hush,  
Delivered from the approach of wounded hearts,  
Denied to the Idea that looks at grief,  
Remote from the Force that cries out in its pain,  
In his inalienable bliss they live.  
Immaculate in self-knowledge and self-power,  
Calm they repose on the eternal Will.  
Only his law they count and him obey;  
They have no goal to reach, no aim to serve.  
Implacable in their timeless purity,  
All barter or bribe of worship they refuse;  
Unmoved by cry of revolt and ignorant prayer  
They reckon not our virtue and our sin;  
They bend not to the voices that implore,  
They hold no traffic with error and its reign;  
They are guardians of the silence of the Truth,  
They are keepers of the immutable decree.  
A deep surrender is their source of might,  
A still identity their way to know,  
Motionless is their action like a sleep.  
At peace, regarding the trouble beneath the stars,  
Deathless, watching the works of Death and Chance,  
Immobile, seeing the millenniums pass,  
Untouched while the long map of Fate unrolls,  
They look on our struggle with impartial eyes,  
And yet without them cosmos could not be.  
Impervious to desire and doom and hope,  
Their station of inviolable might  
Moveless upholds the world's enormous task,  
Its ignorance is by their knowledge lit,  
Its yearning lasts by their indifference.  
As the height draws the low ever to climb,  
As the breadths draw the small to adventure vast,  
Their aloofness drives man to surpass himself.  
Our passion heaves to wed the Eternal's calm,

Our dwarf-search mind to meet the Omniscient's light,  
Our helpless hearts to enshrine the Omnipotent's force.  
Acquiescing in the wisdom that made hell  
And the harsh utility of death and tears,  
Acquiescing in the gradual steps of Time,  
Careless they seem of the grief that stings the world's heart,  
Careless of the pain that rends its body and life;  
Above joy and sorrow is that grandeur's walk:  
They have no portion in the good that dies,  
Mute, pure, they share not in the evil done;  
Else might their strength be marred and could not save.  
Alive to the truth that dwells in God's extremes,  
Awake to a motion of all-seeing Force,  
The slow outcome of the long ambiguous years  
And the unexpected good from woeful deeds,  
The immortal sees not as we vainly see.  
He looks on hidden aspects and screened powers,  
He knows the law and natural line of things.  
Undriven by a brief life's will to act,  
Unharassed by the spur of pity and fear,  
He makes no haste to untie the cosmic knot  
Or the world's torn jarring heart to reconcile.  
In Time he waits for the Eternal's hour.  
Yet a spiritual secret aid is there;  
While a tardy Evolution's coils wind on  
And Nature hews her way through adamant  
A divine intervention thrones above.<sup>6</sup>

*Savitri, Book 1, Canto 4, The Secret Knowledge (Purusha and Prakriti)*

All here where each thing seems its lonely self  
Are figures of the sole transcendent One:  
Only by him they are, his breath is their life;  
An unseen Presence moulds the oblivious clay.  
A playmate in the mighty Mother's game,  
One came upon the dubious whirling globe  
To hide from her pursuit in force and form.  
A secret spirit in the Inconscient's sleep,  
A shapeless Energy, a voiceless Word,  
He was here before the elements could emerge,  
Before there was light of mind or life could breathe.  
Accomplice of her cosmic huge pretence,  
His semblances he turns to real shapes  
And makes the symbol equal with the truth:  
He gives to his timeless thoughts a form in Time.  
He is the substance, he the self of things;  
She has forged from him her works of skill and might:  
She wraps him in the magic of her moods  
And makes of his myriad truths her countless dreams.  
The Master of being has come down to her,  
An immortal child born in the fugitive years.

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6 Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* (1997 ed.) p. 57,58

In objects wrought, in the persons she conceives,  
Dreaming she chases her idea of him,  
And catches here a look and there a gest:  
Ever he repeats in them his ceaseless births.  
He is the Maker and the world he made,  
He is the vision and he is the Seer;  
He is himself the actor and the act,  
He is himself the knower and the known,  
He is himself the dreamer and the dream.  
There are Two who are One and play in many worlds;  
In Knowledge and Ignorance they have spoken and met  
And light and darkness are their eyes' interchange;  
Our pleasure and pain are their wrestle and embrace,  
Our deeds, our hopes are intimate to their tale;  
They are married secretly in our thought and life.  
The universe is an endless masquerade:  
For nothing here is utterly what it seems;  
It is a dream-fact vision of a truth  
Which but for the dream would not be wholly true,  
A phenomenon stands out significant  
Against dim backgrounds of eternity;  
We accept its face and pass by all it means;  
A part is seen, we take it for the whole.  
Thus have they made their play with us for roles:  
Author and actor with himself as scene,  
He moves there as the Soul, as Nature she.  
Here on the earth where we must fill our parts,  
We know not how shall run the drama's course;  
Our uttered sentences veil in their thought.  
Her mighty plan she holds back from our sight:  
She has concealed her glory and her bliss  
And disguised the Love and Wisdom in her heart;  
Of all the marvel and beauty that are hers,  
Only a darkened little we can feel.  
He too wears a diminished godhead here;  
He has forsaken his omnipotence,  
His calm he has foregone and infinity.  
He knows her only, he has forgotten himself;  
To her he abandons all to make her great.  
He hopes in her to find himself anew,  
Incarnate, wedding his infinity's peace  
To her creative passion's ecstasy.  
Although possessor of the earth and heavens,  
He leaves to her the cosmic management  
And watches all, the Witness of her scene.  
A supernumerary on her stage,  
He speaks no words or hides behind the wings.  
He takes birth in her world, waits on her will,  
Divines her enigmatic gesture's sense,  
The fluctuating chance turns of her mood,  
Works out her meanings she seems not to know  
And serves her secret purpose in long Time.  
As one too great for him he worships her;

He adores her as his regent of desire,  
 He yields to her as the mover of his will,  
 He burns the incense of his nights and days  
 Offering his life, a splendour of sacrifice.  
 A rapt solicitor for her love and grace,  
 His bliss in her to him is his whole world:  
 He grows through her in all his being's powers;  
 He reads by her God's hidden aim in things.  
 Or, a courtier in her countless retinue,  
 Content to be with her and feel her near  
 He makes the most of the little that she gives  
 And all she does drapes with his own delight.  
 A glance can make his whole day wonderful,  
 A word from her lips with happiness wings the hours.  
 He leans on her for all he does and is:  
 He builds on her largesses his proud fortunate days  
 And trails his peacock-plumaged joy of life  
 And suns in the glory of her passing smile.  
 In a thousand ways he serves her royal needs;  
 He makes the hours pivot around her will,  
 Makes all reflect her whims; all is their play:  
 This whole wide world is only he and she.<sup>7</sup>

### 9. Doctrines of the Trinity – (3) Buddhism

I venture to introduce the doctrine of Trikaya with some trepidation, because it is not something that ordinary people usually do. We have considered some quite esoteric subjects, but nothing quite so esoteric as this. Although Sri Aurobindo has commented that Vedanta without Yoga is useless, and Yoga is an esoteric approach to Vedanta, Tibetan Yoga is fundamentally *tantric*. And that means that it is an intense practice, done with a *guru*, who is a master, and it is a very serious undertaking. Even though I have studied Mahayana Buddhism for fifty years, and I have had empowerments with Lamas, I am not an expert or a regular practitioner of Buddhism. So, having said that, I am going to attempt to share with you some teachings with regard to this trinity, known as the three bodies of the Buddha: *dharmakaya*, *sambhogakaya*, and *nirmanakaya*.

The background that we have in the Christian Trinity, and in the trinity of the Purushas in Hinduism, is significant for understanding this tradition. But I am not trying to compare them or to insinuate that they are the same. My approach is more of a deconstructive approach. I think we can explore traditional religious knowledge and philosophy in a way that is not heavily conditioned by a point of view. We deconstruct points of view in order to know the different ways in which something is seen, and hopefully we can then see 'it' through removing layer by layer the conventional views. In fact, all of these teachings from the religious traditions seem to be asking us to deconstruct our normal perceptions and conceptions in order to see the reality of spirit. As long as we hold on to our narratives and believe in our values and day to day system of understanding life, we are probably not going to see the meaning of spirit. The idea of sacrifice is that we have to give up our attachments and make ourselves as transparent as possible with respect to a higher truth of existence than the one that dominates our normal day to day outlook. The Tibetan Buddhists call this a 'view' because the discipline leads to a view of reality that is absolutely not what our minds and our senses normally tell

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7 Ibid., p. 60-63

us about reality. It is another, highly specialized view.

When one goes through the so-called generation stage, which is *sutra* teaching about self-discipline, and then one goes through the completion stage, which is the *tantric* practice, then one sees that other reality. The assumption is that we want to do that, or we feel we need to do that because we are not satisfied with our every day view and we seek something that is truer, and rejuvenating, and inspiring. And in order to do that we have to break through the conventional barriers that make social life possible. Therefore a risk is entailed in stepping out of those conventional ways of knowing and being. The philosopher Bergson said that if human beings were willing to leave their rational framework aside and enter into an intuitive consciousness, it would amount to being aligned with the creativity of the universe, but it wouldn't achieve much in terms of ordinary social success and conventional values. So a risk is implied. To enter into that intuitional view and energy requires the sacrifice of a lot of ordinary behaviors and values by which we evaluate ourselves and others and by which others evaluate us. Therefore people go into monastic orders where it is safe to step out of the box. One of the purposes of Auroville as a laboratory of spiritual evolution is to make it safe to step out of the box. But because it is a township made up of people who are not necessarily choosing a radical change of view, we find a lot of the time that we just build more boxes. At the same time, there is a relative safety in stepping out, at least a little bit. The point of view of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is that this should be a common practice in the world. It should not be necessary to enter a monastic order or go to a community of spiritual seekers because it would be a natural evolutionary movement for human beings more and more to step out of the box, and it would become a norm. In the evolutionary perspective, the 'new consciousness' is perhaps not so new but the conception of it as a norm is definitely different than we find in most traditions. There has been a development of Hindu philosophy and Yoga, therefore, in the vision of Sri Aurobindo, that suggests the possibility of spiritual evolution becoming a norm because humanity has reached the point of secure, relatively harmonious global culture and can afford to take some risks with respect to the sacrifice of the ego's "I, my, me, mine". Also because there is population overgrowth, resource depletion, and the problems humanity faces, which seem to require a different way of seeing and being. There is a kind of push from the social standpoint and a pull from the evolutionary standpoint, and this is exactly what Bergson was suggesting would be the case when he was writing in the 1930s.

The fact that Tibetan Buddhist tradition kept a very highly esoteric discipline in a preserved pristine state for the past one-thousand years, and was then forced to bring it out into the world, fits that evolutionary perspective very neatly. We can't say there is a cause-effect relationship, but we can observe historically that the Tibetan Buddhist tradition has preserved the teachings that were given around 250 CE by Nagarjuna, and 600 CE by Chandrakirti, and 700 CE by Padmasambhava, and in 1100 by Naropa, and Tsongkapa in 1400, this tradition of Highest Yoga Tantra, in a very pure form of persistent monastic development that can now come to us from Tibet at a time when it may be important for the future of humanity. When the Dalai Lama was here in Auroville recently, he mentioned that his tradition recognized that its roots were in south India, and around 800 CE Buddhist and Hindu *tantra* in south India were very dominant and powerful. If we read the Lakshmi Tantra from Hinduism and the *Guhyasamaja tantra* from Tibet, from around the same time, we see almost no difference.

Sri Aurobindo's teaching is recognized to be very closely kin to the Kashmiri Shaivite tradition of Trika, Swatantra Trika, which was alive at the time of Abhinavagupta in 1000 CE. That doctrine and system of Yoga Tantra also went to Tibet from India and was developed there. The theory of the development of doctrine is pertinent to this situation, because there are all of these teachers and several schools of Tibetan Buddhism that have elaborated these teachings throughout the history of Tibetan

Buddhism, in extraordinarily precise streams, which we can get, first hand, from all of the Lamas who are teaching now in the West and who have been initiated in these various streams of Buddhism. For example we get this teaching from the Dalai Lama on *Mahamudra*, which we will review tonight, and he has done similar teachings and commentaries on *Kalachakra Tantra* and Dzogchen, and so on. And he is an authority on the many commentaries that have been written on all of these doctrines for a thousand years. In the 1980s the Dalai Lama gave a series of teachings in the West on Dzogchen which, prior to that, was considered to be the most esoteric of the secret doctrines, and the other Lamas were not teaching it. So he took the step and gave four teachings in different countries, one of which I attended, and now they are all doing it. There are many highly trained teachers, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche is one, and another in America is Dzogchen Ponlop, and the teaching of Dzogchen is now available to us.

In the philosophy of religion, we have been considering the doctrines of the Trinity, and in Buddhism the most prominent trinity is the Trikaya: the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Nirmanakaya are considered the three bodies of the Buddha. On the website of the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, who is the head of the Kagyu order of Tibetan Buddhism, a long teaching on the Three Bodies of the Buddha by Traleg Rinpoche is presented which begins with these words:

"THE FRUITION OF BUDDHIST PRACTICE is the realization of the three kayas--Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Nirmanakaya. These are the three bodies of Buddha's being or enlightenment."<sup>1</sup>

And in his discourse on Mahamudra, to which we will be referring at length, the Dalai Lama writes:

"The simultaneously arising mind is dharmakaya, a body encompassing everything. ...Likewise, the three bodies of a Buddha automatically arise from the three aspects of mind – from its voidness, a body encompassing everything (*dharmakaya*); from its clear light lucidity, a body of forms of full use (*sambhogakaya*); and from its appearance-making, a body of emanations (*nirmanakaya*)."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the earliest source of this teaching is called the Guhyasamaja Tantra, and Tsongkapa commented on it extensively in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. This teaching, along with the Six Yogas of Naropa, Kalachakra Tantra, and Dzogchen are basically schools of transmission of the Trikaya view. The goal of Tibetan Buddhism is to pass out of the illusory mental view and attain this view of reality. The *tantric* aspect is especially important because the process of moving from the normal view to this view is rigorous, and it is specific. Much of what we have heard about Hinduism is 'yoga philosophy', which recommends yoga practice in order to attain its realization, but the Hindu framework seems to be much more relaxed. The Tibetan Buddhist approach is not relaxed; it is rigorous, and the practices, which are guided by a *guru*, require strict adherence to the guru's teaching, which probably the monastic tradition in Tibet was designed to achieve. It is a training of the mind in systems of knowledge, training in generating purifying energies in the body, training in visualizing the guru and deities to an extent that enables one to receive a transmission of divine force, training in an elaborate system of symbols that embody the view of a higher spiritual mind. The theoretical part can be studied here, but it is important to keep in mind that the *tantric* energetic is necessary to attain this view, according to this tradition. One must undertake certain energetic activities in this tradition, in addition to what might be considered more conventional practices such as purification and renunciation, which are known as *sutra* teachings.

Mahamudra means "the great seal"; it seals us within a certain way of understanding that is impervious

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1 <http://www.kagyu.org/kagyulineage/buddhism/cul/cul02.php>

2 H.H. The Dalai Lama, *The Gelug/Kagyu Tradition of Mahamudra* (1997), p. 263,265

to the ordinary movements of mind. One deliberately steps out of those movements into this way of understanding things. It is derived from an early Indic, Hindu and Buddhist school of spiritual thought known as *madhyamaka*, which was present at the time of the *darshanas*, and which says that the world we perceive has no inherent reality. Several of the Vedic schools of that period tried to refute this view, but it remains a strongly held view of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, as well as of some schools of Vedanta. This is the view about which the Dalai Lama is speaking in his commentary on the Mahamudra. He says, for example:

“In everyday life, our mind gives rise to an appearance of so many things – mountains, fences and pastures, houses, towns and so on, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile or bodily sensations, and mental objects or events. When we have gained an understanding of voidness to some extent, according to our capacity – in other words, when we have gained some understanding of existence established by virtue of dependent arising – then no matter what our mind gives rise to an appearance of right now, we think that it exists as what it is simply relative to conditions and factors. It exists as what it is by virtue simply of mental labeling – by virtue simply of the conventions or labels that can name it as “this” or “that”. It exists relative to conditions and factors other than itself. Since it exists simply as what can be apprehended as a cognitive object by conceptual thought, then anything mind gives rise to an appearance of as its object of cognition exists simply as what can be labeled by a conceptual thought that labels or ascribes a name to it. It exists simply as what can be apprehended as an object of cognition by the conceptual thought that can conceive of it.”<sup>3</sup>

If we know a little about Western philosophy, we will know that there was a period of thinking about knowledge in ecclesiastical philosophy known as nominalism. It arose in the cathedral schools as a strong movement against absolutism, and in the West philosophers like Hume and Kant learned to think sceptically from this school of nominalism. It says that all we really know are the things that we label as such. We don't have knowledge of things themselves, but our mind enables us to understand things according to various conditions that we perceive. According to those conditions we name things and call that knowledge. Kant is the most famous one who said that we don't know things themselves; we only know our mental constructs of things. That 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century thinking in the West was very similar to this Buddhist view. Nyaya philosophy in India said that things have reality in themselves and we are able to know what they are. That is the more typical Hindu view, and we have heard a lot about the *pranic* field and the essences of things in Hindu philosophy, which is closer to the Aristotelian philosophy which says that we know the forms of things, because that is what they essentially are. But now we are hearing the expert's authentic statement about the *madhyamaka* view which is strongly illusionist. And this view extends to the reality of things themselves. The Dalai Lama's commentary continues:

“We are now aware of the non-inherent existence of everything our mind gives rise to an appearance of, including our mind itself. We are aware of the deepest nature of these things, namely that, because their existence is established by virtue simply of conceptual thought, everything is devoid of all impossible ways of existing, such as independent existence established by virtue of an inherent, findable self-nature or defining characteristic. When we are completely certain of this, we scrutinize the nature of this devoid nature or the deepest truth itself. We look closely to see if there is such a thing as a devoid nature that is immune from being itself devoid of existing inherently. Is there a devoid nature, existing truly and inherently on the side of either itself or the basis of the object having it as its nature, that establishes its own existence without simply depending on what can be mentally labeled? Can there be such a thing as a devoid nature that exists through its own power by virtue of itself, without

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3 Ibid., p. 153

being dependent upon, or without existing simply as something we can be led to understand through a line of reasoning such as “all things are devoid of inherent existence because they and their identity do not inherently exist as one or many”? ...When we examine these points, it dawns on us – through the power of our understanding existence by virtue simply of conditions – that devoid nature, or deepest truth, is itself devoid of true, inherent existence. As Sanggyay-yeshey has said, “You experience the deepest sphere of reality dawning” - the voidness of voidness – without need to rely on anything else.”<sup>4</sup>

Nothing exists by virtue of a findable self nature, because nothing has a findable self-nature. If everything that we label as existing is devoid of inherent existence, then the void is also void of inherent existence. This is tautological thinking for sure. But imagine doing many rounds of systematic breathing practices, and concentrating on *mantras*, ie., powerful sounds, vibrating in the *chakras*, and meditating on the inherent devoid nature of everything, for days, months, years, and eventually coming to this understanding of “mind”. It results in a radical perception of emptiness which is the product of a deliberate negation of the contents of the mind, along the lines that Hegel said was necessary if we are to experience the reality of spirit. That negation, or its effect, is a state of consciousness known in Tibetan Buddhism as “the clear light mind”, which is the void itself, and the pure essence of being. That voidness 'gives rise' to everything that appears in and by virtue of that clear light mind. We are all just that, and every appearance, perception, thought, breath of air, eventually is understood to be void of inherent self-nature, because it is perceived as and in the voidness of mind. Many similar arguments are stated by the Dalai Lama in this commentary, and there are clearly many different ways to state this idea. One further step that is taken here, for example, is the paradoxical assertion that non-existence, as such, is not being implied:

“In other words, when the mind that apprehends the dependently arising appearance of things makes something appear as its object of cognition, it understands that what this is merely an appearance of arises dependently, by virtue of simply mental labeling. This realization induces conviction in the understanding or meaning of its non-existence as not existing as what it is through its own power, independently of anything else. ...When we do this, then the more our mind gives rise to the appearance of things, the more strongly the conviction is induced that whatever they are appearances of is devoid of true, inherent existence. That being so, as we say, quoting Tsongkapa's *The three Principal Aspects of the Path*, “Appearance eliminates the extreme of true, inherent existence and voidness eliminates the extreme of total non-existence.” Because things are devoid of true, inherent existence, mind gives rise to an appearance of them as “this” or “that” relative to circumstances, arising dependently on factors other than themselves, namely mental labeling. Thus understanding this line of reasoning effectively induces conviction in both existence and identity established by virtue simply of circumstances. Furthermore, conviction in existence and identity established by virtue simply of circumstances, induced in this way, invokes reciprocal conviction in the total absence of true, inherent existence and true, inherent identity. Appearance does not impede voidness and voidness does not impede appearance.”<sup>5</sup>

If I may hazard a simplification of this complex argument, it seems to me to mean that things arising in the mind do exist as things arising in the mind, but as such have no inherent existence apart from the mind, which is itself a void of clear light, “like space”. That being the nature of mind, the argument seems to establish both the existence of and the voidness of things arising dependently in the mind, as such. But does it thereby establish that inherent non-existence applies also to things outside the mind, things which might correspond to the mind's notions of the vital-physical structure of organisms for

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4 Ibid. p. 154

5 Ibid., p. 155



example? It would seem to be so in what might be termed a “weak sense”. In this passage we hear that 'dependent arising' is the nature not only of the contents of mind but of everything that exists, which is therefore essentially void of inherent reality.

“A mind that apprehends voidness does not apprehend it in an affirming manner. There are no such thoughts as “This is the voidness I have ascertained,” or “Now I am meditating on voidness.” There is nothing like this, but just the mere absence of what is to be refuted. Such a mind decisively understands that even though mind gives rise to cognitive objects, making them appear as if truly and inherently existent, and even though mind implies the actual existence of these truly and inherently existent things, yet the existence of such things is not in the slightest bit established by something truly and inherently there at the place where they appear to exist, as it seemed before. Therefore our decisiveness is a clear cutting off of a fantasy and what it implies, like the cutting of a taut rope. ...Such a mind understands madhyamaka, the middle way from which the two extremes have been eliminated. What are the two extremes? They are the extreme of true, inherent existence and the extreme of total non-existence. When our mind stays within the sphere of the mere nullification of the object to be refuted (*ie., inherent existence*), decisively understanding that things actually do not exist at all in the manner in which they had appeared to exist, that very mind of understanding eliminates the extreme of true, inherent existence. Furthermore, when we understand that the objects upon which we affirm the absence of true, inherent existence arise and exist as what they are dependently – in other words, when we understand that their existence is established and proven relative to conditions and factors other than themselves – we realize that their dependently arising existence eliminates their total non-existence.”<sup>6</sup>

This Mahayana view of Mind, then, presents a close parallel to the idea of the Akshara Purusha in the Hindu systems of Sankhya, Yoga, and Vedanta. This Mind is an ontological reality: it is a universal all-containing field of stillness and consciousness without attachment to its content. When the Self steps back from nature, according to Raja Yoga, and experiences itself as the pure vast emptiness of being, that self is voidness. When it draws close to *prakriti* or nature, it gets lost in the becomings of things and their appearances. This is the fundamental teaching of Yoga Philosophy. The 'highest yoga tantra' of Buddhism is a very elaborate system of understanding this movement of liberation from the illusory nature of the mind. When one enters the voidness, the universal aspect of it is then known as *dharmakaya*: the emptiness is perceived to be the true nature of everything. It is the Buddha Mind that is this absolute void of everything. When that Mind withdraws back towards the world of sensation and perception, it encounters the universal powers of existence, and the absolute values of things, which is known as the *sambhogakaya*. This is the world in which arise the liberated universal principles and powers of divine beings. And when Mind withdraws further toward temporal, material existence, it finds the arising of systems and structures of energy in bodies and minds in nature that are emanations of that higher divine mind; and this world of emanations is known as *nirmanakaya*. The practices of Buddhism are then designed to make one conscious of the energies and movements of light arising in the body, that correspond to the arising of universal divine forces, and then to resolve all those arisings back into the absolute void of the *dharmakaya*. This at least seems to be a way of understanding this trinity of the bodies of the Buddha, which provides a close parallel to the idea of the three Purushas.

Tibetan Buddhism has taken the ancient esoteric Indic systems of spiritual knowledge and honed them into methods that achieve the result of liberation, and entry into the three minds or worlds of the Buddha, in a powerfully effective way. All the highest divine cosmic energies, symbolized by beings such as Samantabhadra, the universal ocean of wisdom, then can generate creative ecstatic energies in

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6 Ibid., p. 150-152

the human being. In Dzogchen practice, the practitioner invokes and allows the energy of the all-loving divine Mother, for example, to enter through the crown *chakra* and into the heart center, where it dissolves the illusory sense of separateness and suffering, and it can then radiate back into the world in the true cosmic form of divine consciousness. Thus, a goddess such as Sherab Chama, or Chenrezig, in the Mahayana cosmology is similar to Mahalakshmi or to Varahi in Hinduism, and works in the same way, as we read in the Lakshmi Tantra and Sri Vidya traditions. There are so many symbols that have been generated by the Tibetan Buddhist tradition that are similar to symbols in the Hindu system of Yoga Tantra, all of which seem to follow a pathway of immortality through the absolute stillness and emptiness of being into the pleroma of divine light and bliss. It is a pathway that Sri Aurobindo has defined in *Savitri* with astonishing poignancy:

The One only real shut itself from Space  
And stood aloof from the idea of Time.  
Its truth escaped from shape and line and hue.  
All else grew unsubstantial, self-annulled,  
This only everlasting seemed and true,  
Yet nowhere dwelt, it was outside the hours.  
This only could justify the labour of sight,  
But sight could not define for it a form;  
This only could appease the unsatisfied ear  
But hearing listened in vain for a missing sound;  
This answered not the sense, called not to Mind.  
It met her as the uncaught inaudible Voice  
That speaks for ever from the Unknowable.  
It met her like an omnipresent point  
Pure of dimensions, unfix'd, invisible,  
The single oneness of its multiplied beat  
Accentuating its sole eternity.  
It faced her as some vast Nought's immensity,  
An endless No to all that seems to be,  
An endless Yes to things ever unconceived  
And all that is unimagined and unthought,  
An eternal zero or untotall'd Aught,  
A spaceless and a placeless Infinite.  
Yet eternity and infinity seemed but words  
Vainly affixed by mind's incompetence  
To its stupendous lone reality.  
The world is but a spark-burst from its light,  
All moments flashes from its Timelessness,  
All objects glimmerings of the Bodiless  
That disappear from Mind when That is seen.  
It held, as if a shield before its face,  
A consciousness that saw without a seer,  
The Truth where knowledge is not nor knower nor known,  
The Love enamour'd of its own delight  
In which the Lover is not nor the Beloved  
Bringing their personal passion into the Vast,  
The Force omnipotent in quietude,  
The Bliss that none can ever hope to taste.  
It cancelled the convincing cheat of self;  
A truth in nothingness was its mighty clue.  
If all existence could renounce to be

And Being take refuge in Non-being's arms  
And Non-being could strike out its ciphered round,  
Some lustre of that Reality might appear.  
A formless liberation came on her.  
Once sepulchred alive in brain and flesh  
She had risen up from body, mind and life;  
She was no more a Person in a world,  
She had escaped into infinity.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose in presenting this passage from *Savitri*, which we have heard before, is to illustrate that in both traditions the realization of the voidness of the Buddha's Mind, or of *nirvana* in the Brahman, is furthered by a transmission from the *guru* through the *mantra* of that state of consciousness. Therefore if we read the *mantra* of Sri Aurobindo with a certain rhythmic intensity, as instructed by him, we may be able to perceive more of the reality of that which is being spoken of here than we can get from the intellectual accounts of it. We have heard a lot about the divine Logos in esoteric Christianity, which is the Divine Mind, and about the *sruti*, the creative Word of the Brahman, in the Upanishads and Sri Aurobindo, and about the tradition of mantric transmission in Tibetan Buddhism.. From the *sruti* we learn that the Brahman, which is unknowable, emanates the divine Mother, the Mahashakti who is the consciousness and force of the Brahman, who then creates the universal powers and principles – matter, life, mind, purpose, mutuality, meaning, quality – the form of the gods, in whom we can perceive the divine universal energies at work in nature. Every quality in existence has in it a seed sound which is an emanation of the Brahman. Then the Yogi who is in that state of universal energy and delight can transmit that consciousness through the *mantra*. This kind of transmission is a fundamental aspect of the 'highest yoga tantra'.

As Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche puts it in his treatise on *Unbounded Wholeness*, “The power of essential precepts, the method for realizing wholeness, lies neither solely nor perhaps even primarily with their words but, rather, with their status as an uninterrupted continuum of the word, that is, of essential precepts derived from experience of enlightened beings. ...This “uninterrupted continuum of the word” invokes the three kinds of transmission well known in Bon and Buddhist Dzogchen: the mind-to-mind transmission from Buddha mind itself; the condensation of this into more localized signs and symbols, which began the transmission through time and space (originary sound/speech); and the form in which humans can understand the teaching – namely the transmission of words (language) into the ears of listeners. ...These three are associated respectively, with the “flow of blessings” from unlocalized space of realization to esoterically charged symbols, to and through the words of human language. The point is that these are in continuity, that the essential precepts are present in every case, that scripture is therefore, in and of itself, authentic.”<sup>8</sup>

The uninterrupted transmission of the Buddha Mind (*dharmakaya*) takes place through enlightened beings like Samantabhadra, the universal ocean of divine consciousness (*sambhogakaya*), which is received directly by the yogi Lama who is aligned with the Samantabhadra energy field, and who formulates the mantra as power and quality of sound and meaning, which is then transmitted through this emanation body (*nirmanakaya*) to the prepared listener. This is a theory of spiritual practice that has been known in occult traditions, especially in India, for a long time. It was also well-known to Sri Aurobindo, and *Savitri* is such a transmission. The importance of this process to the Mahayana Buddhist realization was especially emphasized by the Dalai Lama in his commentary on Kalachakra Tantra, with regard to the three bodies of the Buddha. He said:

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7 Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* (1997 ed.) p. 547-548

8 Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, *Unbounded Wholeness* (2006), p. 163-164

“...in order to attain the Form Body of a Buddha it is necessary to have a substantial cause of a similar type for a Form Body (*sambhogakaya*); also, for the Truth Body (*dharmakaya*) it is necessary to have a substantial cause of a similar type. Since this is the case, our coarse body, which is a fruition of past karma, cannot serve as a substantial cause of similar type for a Buddha’s Form Body. ...A Buddha’s Body is one undifferentiable entity with that Buddha’s mind; the form or body that is of one undifferentiable entity with a Buddha’s subtle mind cannot be a coarse form. The Form Body that is of one undifferentiable entity with a Buddha’s subtle mind is itself a very subtle entity, and thus as its substantial cause of similar type a body that has a very subtle nature must be achieved at the time of the path (*nirmanakaya*). ...Hence, a mode of achieving even the substantial cause of a Buddha’s Form Body is not set forth in the three lower tantras (Action Tantra, Performance Tantra, Yoga Tantra) or in the Perfection Vehicle (*sutra*), and a mode of achieving the uncommon substantial cause of a Buddha’s mind is also not set forth in the three lower tantras or in the Perfection Vehicle. ...the uncommon substantial cause must be the mind of clear light, and the three lower tantras and the Perfection Vehicle do not set forth a means of achieving the fundamental innate mind of clear light. ...therefore, without depending in general on Mantra and in particular on Highest Yoga Mantra, Buddhahood cannot be attained.”<sup>9</sup> This is a doctrine of transmission of the Trikaya by a realized Yogi.

#### 10. The Existence of God and the End of Time

Each of the religious traditions that we have considered defines 'spirit', the spiritual reality, as something which is the opposite of material reality. And each arrives at that conclusion by negation. The Buddhist idea that *nirvana* and *samsara* are the same, is similar to the idea that the *saguna* and *nirguna* Brahman are the same, and Sri Aurobindo's assertion is that stillness and action, and form and formlessness, do not constitute a contradiction, because in the higher spiritual mind the essence of reality is emptiness, oneness, absolute pure spirit, and everything that arises is essentially that, while it is also relatively the expression of some quality. In the Upanishads all qualities of existence are expressions in time of the timeless Brahman. But things in time and space are perceived by the lower mind or sense mind as relative and different. From the point of view of the spiritual mind all are seen as expressions of the absolute. The absolute Spirit is therefore “empty” in the sense of being essentially invulnerable to change, or immutable. What could be seen in the Mahamudra process of negation is that *in that absolute essential mind, which can be realized by us*, everything can be seen as an arising of, in and from that mind, and everything returns back into that by the process of negation. Similarly, in Heidegger we get the ancient Greek saying from Parmenides that the origin of being, which is ever-present, is the infinite – *arche ton onton to apeiron*. And for Heidegger that infinite is Being. So I had a glimpse last week of the fact that by reducing everything to mind, the Buddhists achieve the same thing as the Hindus achieve by elevating everything to Brahman, or to Purusha and Prakriti.

Tonight I want to revisit the process of negation defined by Hegel in order to prove the existence of God. The Western mind has this idea that we have to come to some kind of erasure of the difference between subjectivity and objectivity in order to prove things that are known only subjectively. In the philosophy of religion I think we have to acknowledge that proving the existence of God has been one of its projects for all of these millennia in both East and West. Even in Eastern philosophy, scriptures like the Kena and Isha Upanishad are just defining the absolute in relation to the relative, in order to 'demonstrate' the existence of God. The idea of proving the existence of God is not like proving a

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9 The Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, *Kalachakra Tantra* (1985), p. 164-165

mathematical theorem, however. It is more like assembling an adequate number of arguments to be able to see clearly what you are talking about. In the case of God it is a perplexing aim, to prove the existence of something that you cannot see but that is real to your experience. 'Difference' is not something that we perceive with our senses, for example, but we do see it mentally. Something like 'the Absolute, the Perfect, the Immune' in Sri Aurobindo's description of the Self, cannot even be seen mentally. We must 'be' it in order to 'know' it. The hope, then, is that by attempting the proof one goes through the processes necessary for revealing the reality of Being.

The other thing I would like to do at this point is to consider another aspect of the philosophy of religion which I have referred to as the '*eschaton*', the end of time. This is especially important in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, and in the realm of spiritual development in general. Human consciousness has a need to know that there is going to be some outcome of all of this suffering which the religions insist that it is somehow necessary to negate in order to arrive somewhere else. Where is the somewhere? Is spirituality meant to just occupy the mind so that its problems disappear in a kind of empty bliss, or is everything already perfect and we just don't see it? Maya is an illusion, and the reality is the Brahman; this is a very common way of thinking in Hinduism. So if we realize that truth, then it should perhaps be the end of the road. But in Christianity there has been a persistent idea, based on the Gospels and the Old Testament and Judaism, that the end is actually some kind of culmination of the whole affair; that everything has a purpose, and there is an ultimate purpose. The study of this way of thinking is called eschatology, and the *eschaton* is the final state of things, the end. So I would like to wind up this course by concentrating on what that might be. And in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that way of thinking has gotten a big push from the philosophy of evolution. Evolutionary thinking has invested the *eschaton* with value far beyond any value that it had before.

For example, I will read a passage from Bergson that is an indication of the importance of this direction of thinking in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. And let me encourage everyone again to have a look into *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. I have mentioned before Bergson's idea that morality in social evolution is the advance, the push from below, and the influence of the mystical visionary exerts a pull from above. The idea of a higher evolution cannot really be conceived of as coming from the social development which is conditioned by obligations and trade offs of all kinds. The idea of universal love, and of humanity passing into a consciousness which expands and disappears into the divine totality, can hardly be conceived on the basis of everyday experience. This comes from visionaries. Bergson points out that there has been an intervention throughout history of mystical consciousness, and ideas and experiences from a higher consciousness have formed a direction for the more natural urges toward order from below. This notion of an interaction between the above and the below has played an important part in evolutionary thinking in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, which is especially evident in the works of Bergson, Teilhard, Sri Aurobindo and Gebser.

Jean Gebser's book, *The Ever-present Origin*, was published in 1950, and he refers in it to both Bergson and Sri Aurobindo. His idea of evolution, based on a passage from Parmenides referred to often by Heidegger, is that the origin, the *arche*, of things is ever-present; everything arises from the infinite and returns back into the infinite, and this ever-present origin is atemporal Being. Gebser traces the development of symbolism throughout the history of social evolution and identifies the archaic period, the magical period, the mythical period, the conventional religious period, the relational period, and he predicts the emergence of an integral consciousness. It is a consciousness that he calls verition, which is characterized by an atemporal consciousness of time. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century, he said, was especially preoccupied by time consciousness, whereas previously, since the Renaissance, the mind was preoccupied with spatial consciousness. Quantum mechanics is a good example of the emergence of the atemporal view of matter as the simultaneous occurrence of space, time, and energy, as opposed to

the Newtonian view of a mechanical universe. Evolutionary thinking is characterized by the view that things are constantly changing, and that there is an absolute, uninterrupted continuum of change in time. This idea inspired philosophical biologists like Darwin and Haeckel to conceive of the perfectibility of man. The work of these later philosophers of religion, then, is based on the theory of evolution and evolutionary thinking.

If we look back on the philosophy of the 'end time' in Christianity, we find the idea that at a certain point in the future the Christ reappears, and there is a conversion of everything by the presence of God on earth. Suffering is abolished. As Augustine puts it, quoting Revelations, "See the dwelling of God with men; and he will dwell among them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them. And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes; death shall be no more, and there will be no mourning or crying, nor any pain; for the old order of things has passed away." Chapter XX in the *City of God* is all about the end times, and Augustine is the authority. His interpretations were accepted by the Catholic Church, and since the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, based upon Augustine's careful reading of the works of John, and the Platonists, and the Prophets, the Apocalypse and the end times refer to the thousand year period that began with Christ's resurrection. He was convinced that Christ spoke about two resurrections. The first was the resurrection of the soul, and for a 'thousand years', which meant a cycle of time, an eon, human beings would have the opportunity of the resurrection of the soul and dwelling in the City of God. Then, at the end of those thousand years, all who have lived the life prescribed by Christ would be resurrected in an immortal body. The so-called 'Last Judgment' would take the community of Christians, or purified souls, living and dead, up into eternal life, while that purifying and transforming blaze would destroy all of the unredeemed souls. This conception of Augustine gives us an idea of the meaning of the 'eschaton'.

If we think about this as Hegel thought about it, we can better understand his view that it is possible to enter into a community of purified, resurrected, ethical souls now, by living a life of faith and sacrifice. Hegel believed that the evolution of consciousness in 1800 had come to the point where it was possible to dissolve the subject-object dichotomy in the consciousness of Spirit. The spiritual being of existence was no longer a matter of conceptual understanding and symbolical representation. It was now possible to know Spirit directly, and those who performed the negation of subjectivity and difference, and elevated their consciousness into union with Spirit, would become ethical beings, capable of universal love and living the spiritual life. This understanding was apparently conditioned to a large extent by Hegel's reading of Augustine. But then, twenty years later, Darwin appeared and a new era of thinking began that was really characterized by a new perception of time. And this new perception is somehow fundamental to the evolution of consciousness. The new perception of time sees and knows directly the whole energy field of nature; it is a powerful and dynamic perception that grasps the end, the potentiality and the possibility, toward which things are propelled. ...We know it is inevitable that things are going to change. When we process the perspective of evolutionary spirituality we no longer think that things are fixed as they are or as they have been for millennia; 99% of species that have ever existed are now extinct. We don't need to be attached to the present or the past; civilizations vanish; species vanish; and new expressions of this universal being arise. Solar systems and galaxies come and go, and the universe now seems set to expand to infinity. We can tune into that movement and experience our lives as one with the universal creative force. So Bergson comes along and expresses this view very well in his philosophy of creativity and time.

"We have shown", he says, "that matter and life, as we define them, are coexistent and interdependent. This being the case, there is nothing to prevent the philosopher from following to its logical conclusion the idea which mysticism suggests to him of a universe which is the mere visible and tangible aspect of love and of the need of loving, together with all the consequences entailed by this creative emotion: I mean the appearance of living

creatures in which this emotion finds its complement; of an infinity of other beings without which they could not have appeared, and lastly of the unfathomable depths of material substance without which life would not have been possible.”<sup>1</sup>

The quantum energy field had to come into existence by some force other than itself, as did the web of life. And that force has to be an immaterial force because nothing comes from nothing; matter can't be created by matter without an infinite regress; and matter can't create life – they are different principles. So here we have the traditional argument for the existence of God. The finite universe implies the existence of an infinite being, because the finite universe is totally contingent, and there is no reason why anything should make sense in a totally contingent universe (which is the Buddhistic argument for the innate emptiness of Mind). But in fact everything makes perfectly good sense. All species exist for the sake of the web and each lives for the purpose of filling its niche, which means its survival. As Aristotle said, everything in nature exists for a purpose, and everything is causally connected. So there are two arguments: the coming into existence of the material universe implies an unlimited or immaterial being as its cause, and it must be a conscious being because everything has a purpose and fits logically into the whole (not to mention the fact that living things embody consciousness which is not material). These are known respectively as the cosmological and teleological arguments for the existence of God. But let us continue with Bergson.

“No doubt we are here going beyond the conclusions we reached in *Creative Evolution*. We wanted then to keep as close as possible to facts. We stated nothing that could not in time be confirmed by the tests of biology. Pending that confirmation, we had obtained results which the philosophic method, as we understand it, justified us in holding to be true. Here we are in the field of probabilities alone. But we cannot reiterate too often that philosophic certainty admits of degrees, that it calls for intuition as well as for reason, and that if intuition, backed up by science, is to be extended, such extension can be made only by mystical intuition. In fact, the conclusions just set out complete naturally, though not necessarily, those of our former work. Granted the existence of a creative energy which is love, and which desires to produce from itself beings worthy to be loved, it might indeed sow space with worlds whose materiality, as the opposite of divine spirituality, would simply express the distinction between being created and creating, between the multifarious notes, strung like pearls, of a symphony and the indivisible emotion from which they sprang.”<sup>2</sup>

We can isolate the symphonies, but the emotions from which they spring, their source, can't be framed and packaged just because the symphony was written and performed and heard. If we do think so, then we are in the conventional rational mode of thinking. We are constantly thinking in terms of things that happen in our experience, which we 'enframe' and either want to retain and repeat or to reject and avoid, but we forget that nothing now is the same as it was when it happened before. The whole continuum has moved on, and everything is different now from what it was yesterday or last week. If we really tune in to the intuitive direct grasp of the ongoing creativity of evolution we will see that each moment and event that occurs is novel. You may have planned to be here at this time for several days, and I may have thought about what I was going to say in this lecture, but in fact what is happening right now is new. Bergson grasped this vision of everything in existence essentially being the way the mystics see it, and he found confirmation of this view in science, and especially in the understanding of time. And this constituted a shift toward time consciousness, toward Supermind, and toward participating in the creativity of evolution.

Hegel then, in his recapitulation of the proofs for the existence of God, wrote: “Human beings consider the world, and because they are thinking and rational beings, since they find no satisfaction in the

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1 Henri Bergson, *The two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1977 ed.), p. 255

2 Ibid., p. 256

contingency of things...”, because we either want them and don't have them, or we have them and don't want to lose them, and so on, and everything is dependent on the mind and its attachments, or some other contingency, as the Buddhists say. So we elevate ourselves from the finite to absolute necessity. If it is necessary in order to exist or to survive, then that is important. If it is only a question of whether the camera was on when the deer came to the pond, because we 'want to' monitor deer/lion interactions, that is not a necessity, it is a contingency. Even whether the deer shows up is a contingency. But the survival of the lion depends on that pattern because its existence is in jeopardy in that region. And we are good scientists who want to improve the survival rate of the lion. The lion needs food in order to survive; that's the final necessity. The big picture in which we see all this is 'evolution', and the human being thinks that there must be something that is necessary in and for itself, which is the ground of this phenomenon of nature and of all these contingencies. And that ground of necessity is called Reason.

Everything exists for a purpose, which is beyond all the contingencies, and it is the expression of the infinite divine being through evolutionary forms: beauty, power, proportionality, mutuality, loyalty, creativity, love, the hierarchy of divine qualities that emerge in forms on the basis of the ground of necessity - which is Being. If we think about Being, as such, then we pass beyond contingency awareness into the radiance and beauty and power of Being. We human beings go through this procedure of negation in order to liberate ourselves from the limitations of contingency and dependency; in order to experience a heightened, elevated sense of the meaning, and force, and creativity of existence. The idea of spiritual community is that human beings create this sense of meaning together in order to be here, and stay here, and not to give up or succumb to disillusionment and suffering and meaninglessness. We negate every kind of temporal feeling, emotion, attachment, delusion, through spiritual practice, such as Mahamudra, and sacrifice, according to Hegel, in order to affirm the ground of necessity. Then the poisons resolve into good, necessary, meaningful moments; death disappears as a problem; one limited, temporal body and life we call a moment of the soul in its ongoing attempt to manifest its truth, for which one life is simply too short. If one negates contingency and enters into the blissful emptiness, it affirms everything by negating everything. The necessity of negation for the rational being amounts to the affirmation of absolute Spirit.

Now, the ontological proof for the existence of God is more difficult. The cosmological proof has to do with everything being necessary to everything else in the cosmos (the web of life). The teleological proof has to do with the necessary sequence of everything from the beginning to the end (the purposefulness of things). The end must be present in the origin of everything. Then everything becomes what it is according to its nature, and everything is an unfolding of the divine origin. The ontological proof says that, if being is God and perfect, then it must exist. Science doesn't much like any of these arguments but especially not this one. Perfection would not be perfect if it didn't exist. Hegel puts it like this: if everything has an inner purpose, that purpose doesn't exist in a moment of time and space, it isn't sitting there in the chair, but it exists in a much larger frame of time and energy, and that is Spirit. The proper progression, says Hegel, is from finite organic life, to absolute organic life, to universal purposefulness. “Because there are finite spirits, therefore the absolute spirit necessarily is.” And for the mystical philosopher this is not merely a matter of logic; it is a self-evident truth. Hegel says:

“This proof passes over from the concept of God to the being of God. The ancients, i.e. Greek philosophy, did not have this transition; even within the Christian era it was not accomplished for a long time, because it involves the most profound descent of spirit into itself. One of the greatest scholastic philosophers, the profoundly speculative thinker Anselm of Canterbury, grasped this representation for the first time in the following way. We have the representation of God. But God is no mere representation, for God *is*. Or, how is the determination of being to be mediated with God? For



being and God are two different things. ...Anselm expressed the mediation in the following way. A feature of the representation of God is that God is absolutely perfect (a very indeterminate expression). We can say that on the whole that is quite correct. But if we hold fast to God only as a representation, then what is merely represented is something deficient and not what is most perfect. For that which is perfect is something that is not merely represented but also is, actually is. Therefore, because God is that which is perfect, God is not only a representation, for actuality and reality belong to God as well. ...In the subsequent and more extensive elaboration of Anselm's thought by understanding, it was said that the concept of God is that God is the quintessence of all reality, the most real essence. Now being is also a reality; so being also belongs to God."<sup>3</sup> A good Hegelian version might be: that which is most real cannot not exist.

As the Dalai Lama said, the Truth Body of the Buddha is a very subtle body indeed! We wouldn't know it if it were not a reality present to our consciousness, and it could only be present to our consciousness if it were somehow the actual self-existent nature of reality. Nothing could arise as qualia in consciousness if Consciousness were not that self-existent ground of being – the empty, effulgent, infinite, clear light mind. The idea of infinite potential, beauty, power, truth, are therefore essential principles of Consciousness – the Divine Mother. In this age of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and the synthesis of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Science, all the arguments for the existence of God boil down to Consciousness. And the arguments can go on endlessly in an effort to express the inexpressible. But the fact remains that on the physical, the vital, the mental, the rational, aesthetic, ethical and spiritual levels of being, forms of Consciousness are present at each level. Therefore, Consciousness is the first principle and origin of existence. To use Augustine's argument, no form whatsoever could come into being without it; for without it there would be nothing, which is inconceivable. Consciousness, therefore, is the Absolute. Consciousness is omnipresent. Consciousness is the essence of existence. We may be sure that Bergson and Sri Aurobindo, at least, would agree.

So, for those who have performed the sacrifice, and affirmed the truth of absolute Spirit as Consciousness, what is the view of the final outcome to be reached, the ultimate purpose of this evolutionary life? As a result of a century of evolutionary thinking, and especially through the inspired mystical philosophy of Bergson and Sri Aurobindo, the idea that the purpose of being human, as expressed in previous ages by mystics, is a life of love, and self-giving, and immortality, culminates in the idea of evolution toward a state of total Consciousness. In that state we would act from an individual center as if acting from the totality. The unity of the individual, the universal, and the transcendent would be a constant living force of creative Consciousness. It would put at our disposal total energy and truth to manifest in the sensorium, in the manifold of life, whatever is there to be manifested for the sake of the next novel event. Bergson said that if we could pass out of the rational mind into the higher intuitive consciousness, that direct grasp of the whole would enable us to function in harmonious union with creative evolution. Creativity would be at our disposal, if we could just pass from this limited temporal conception of things into that atemporal verition, where we burst into the creative dynamic of God. The powers that we draw from then would come from the *sambhogakaya*, or Overmind, the infinite universal mind of wisdom, and the human would become the attuned expressive instrument of the Divine Trinity. This would seem to be the perfect manifestation of the Trinity, understood according to the idea of the 'first resurrection', the millennium of purification and personal sacrifice which transposes the consciousness of the mortal into the presence of divine love; and this would then make possible the elevation of the species, in the 'second resurrection', by the 'flame of transformation' which transforms the physical into an immortal, spiritual body. So we are beginning to envision this possibility not as an exceptional mythological event foreseen in the history of religion, but

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3 Hegel, *Lectures on the philosophy of religion* (1988 ed.), p. 181-183

as a symbolic way of speaking about the future evolution of consciousness in nature. This is the evolutionary pathway foreseen by Bergson and Sri Aurobindo.

Then Teilhard de Chardin came along, and he said that this is the evolution of complexity. In his view, inspired he said by Bergson, he sees all the different stages of society and culture and organic evolution culminating in a cosmic consciousness, which he calls the noosphere, where human beings realize that they are all one in a kind of super-organism whose circulatory system is not in the human being but is a circulatory system of global technological energies, and whose brain is not in the human being but is a kind of global design mind that is synthesizing all the information provided by the technological substratum, so that the individual human consciousness merges with the luminous electronic omega point and no longer needs the material earth to support it.

Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future evolution is quite different, because he sees the higher divine mind into which our temporal consciousness is transformed coming down by degrees into the physical plane of the human being and the matter of the earth, and transforming them into a field of higher divine energies, in a manner analogous to the way the ethical mind has transformed the vital animal nature of humanity during the past millennium. The individual consciousness would disappear in the consciousness of the whole which is centered somewhere there above the mind, above the crown *chakra* in indefinite light-space, and governs everything from that impersonal cosmic center of consciousness-force, which we would learn through Yoga to allow to displace the normal, habitual functioning of the individual body, life, and mind.

This again is somewhat different from the Christian eschatology of Augustine which speaks about the first resurrection as a millennium of purification and commitment to the community of truth and love. But we could perhaps see an alignment with Sri Aurobindo's view if we think of the second resurrection as the next millennium of the transformation of the physical human community by the Supramental consciousness-force which has the possibility of evolving a species of beings with an immortal body. We have seen through this study, especially in *Savitri*, that Sri Aurobindo has assimilated Augustine's view, along with Platonism, quite thoroughly, as well as the Hindu and Buddhist mythologies which foresee the coming of a next *avatar*, Kalki in Hinduism, and Maitreya Buddha in Mahayana Buddhism, whose power is to bring about an omniscient consciousness in humanity that abolishes suffering and ignorance entirely. Sri Aurobindo drew from all of these sources, as well as from evolutionary theory, and synthesized them with extraordinary creative power. There are passages in *Savitri* that are prophetic and deal directly with the idea of the *eschaton*. He speaks about major transformational changes to come in the human being that will make possible another type of evolution. And in that view he sees a demarcation between the human and superhuman that has to be concretized through a spiritual process of transformation. A great deal of *Savitri* is about the concretization of that interim transitional being. We will end our exploration of the *eschaton* then, with some of those prophetic sections in his writing.

*Excerpts from Savitri on Sri Aurobindo's vision of the eschaton*

Voice of the Divine Mother:

In an ill-fitting and voluminous robe  
A radiant purpose still conceals its face,  
A mighty blindness stumbles hoping on,  
Feeding its strength on gifts of luminous Chance.  
Because the human instrument has failed,  
The Godhead frustrate sleeps within its seed,

A spirit entangled in the forms it made.  
His failure is not failure whom God leads;  
Through all the slow mysterious march goes on:  
An immutable Power has made this mutable world;  
A self-fulfilling transcendence treads man's road;  
The driver of the soul upon its path,  
It knows its steps, its way is inevitable,  
And how shall the end be vain when God is guide?  
However man's mind may tire or fail his flesh,  
A will prevails cancelling his conscious choice:  
The goal recedes, a boundless vastness calls  
Retreating into an immense Unknown;  
There is no end to the world's stupendous march,  
There is no rest for the embodied soul.  
It must live on, describe all Time's huge curve.  
An Influx presses from the closed Beyond  
Forbidding to him rest and earthly ease,  
Till he has found himself he cannot pause.  
A Light there is that leads, a Power that aids;  
Unmarked, unfelt it sees in him and acts:  
Ignorant, he forms the All-Conscient in his depths,  
Human, looks up to superhuman peaks:  
A borrower of Supernature's gold,  
He paves his road to Immortality.  
The high gods look on man and watch and choose  
Today's impossibles for the future's base.  
His transience trembles with the Eternal's touch,  
His barriers cede beneath the Infinite's tread;  
The Immortals have their entries in his life:  
The Ambassadors of the Unseen draw near.  
A splendour sullied by the mortal air,  
Love passes through his heart, a wandering guest.  
Beauty surrounds him for a magic hour,  
He has visits of a large revealing joy,  
Brief widenesses release him from himself,  
Enticing towards a glory ever in front  
Hopes of a deathless sweetness lure and leave.  
His mind is crossed by strange discovering fires,  
Rare intimations lift his stumbling speech  
To a moment's kinship with the eternal Word;  
A masque of Wisdom circles through his brain  
Perturbing him with glimpses half divine.  
He lays his hands sometimes on the Unknown;  
He communes sometimes with Eternity.  
A strange and grandiose symbol was his birth  
And immortality and spirit-room  
And pure perfection and a shadowless bliss  
Are this afflicted creature's mighty fate.  
In him the Earth-Mother sees draw near the change  
Foreshadowed in her dumb and fiery depths,  
A godhead drawn from her transmuted limbs,

An alchemy of Heaven on Nature's base.<sup>4</sup>

Voice of the Hero Yogi:

I know that thy creation cannot fail:  
For even through the mists of mortal thought  
Infallible are thy mysterious steps,  
And, though Necessity dons the garb of Chance,  
Hidden in the blind shifts of Fate she keeps  
The slow calm logic of Infinity's pace  
And the inviolate sequence of its will.  
All life is fixed in an ascending scale  
And adamantine is the evolving Law;  
In the beginning is prepared the close.  
This strange irrational product of the mire,  
This compromise between the beast and god,  
Is not the crown of thy miraculous world.  
I know there shall inform the inconscient cells,  
At one with Nature and at height with heaven,  
A spirit vast as the containing sky  
And swept with ecstasy from invisible founts,  
A god come down and greater by the fall.  
A Power arose out of my slumber's cell.  
Abandoning the tardy limp of the hours  
And the inconstant blink of mortal sight,  
There where the Thinker sleeps in too much light  
And intolerant flames the lone all-witnessing Eye  
Hearing the word of Fate from Silence' heart  
In the endless moment of Eternity,  
It saw from timelessness the works of Time.  
Overpassed were the leaden formulas of the Mind,  
Overpowered the obstacle of mortal Space:  
The unfolding Image showed the things to come.  
A giant dance of Shiva tore the past;  
There was a thunder as of worlds that fall;  
Earth was o'errun with fire and the roar of Death  
Clamouring to slay a world his hunger had made;  
There was a clangour of Destruction's wings:  
The Titan's battle-cry was in my ears,  
Alarm and rumour shook the armoured Night.  
I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers  
Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life  
Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;  
Forerunners of a divine multitude,  
Out of the paths of the morning star they came  
Into the little room of mortal life.  
I saw them cross the twilight of an age,  
The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,  
The great creators with wide brows of calm,  
The massive barrier-breakers of the world

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4 Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* (2007 ed.), p. 339

And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,  
The labourers in the quarries of the gods,  
The messengers of the Incommunicable,  
The architects of immortality.  
Into the fallen human sphere they came,  
Faces that wore the Immortal's glory still,  
Voices that communed still with the thoughts of God,  
Bodies made beautiful by the spirit's light,  
Carrying the magic word, the mystic fire,  
Carrying the Dionysian cup of joy,  
Approaching eyes of a diviner man,  
Lips chanting an unknown anthem of the soul,  
Feet echoing in the corridors of Time.  
High priests of wisdom, sweetness, might and bliss,  
Discoverers of beauty's sunlit ways  
And swimmers of Love's laughing fiery floods  
And dancers within rapture's golden doors,  
Their tread one day shall change the suffering earth  
And justify the light on Nature's face.<sup>5</sup>

## *AFTERWORD*

### Process Theology and the Problem of Evil

There was no occasion to bring into these lectures any reference to process theology, which is based on the philosophy of A. N. Whitehead, although it is certainly an important topic in the philosophy of religion. And the word "evil" hardly occurred anywhere, although there was frequent reference to human suffering and death, which could certainly be considered forms of evil. What is of greater concern, however, is that in the emphasis placed on negation, and transcendence of the mortal condition, by the philosophy of religion, there is perhaps a tendency to ignore the prevalence, especially during the period of post-Hegelian philosophy in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, of the persistent occurrence of extreme forms of evil in human societies, such as civil wars, World Wars, slavery, racism, and genocide. During that period there was also a strong tendency toward atheism and agnosticism in the more developed, educated, and scientific societies and cultures, largely due to the enormity of such evils. How could a perfect God create such an imperfect world? These are concerns that have been addressed in an interesting manner by process theology, which is based largely on the same ideas of Platonic philosophy that have characterized much that we have heard in this course, and it would seem to be appropriate at this point, therefore, to indicate some of the features of this school of thought, especially with reference to the problem of evil.

Whitehead was not only an avowed Platonist but a close follower of the philosophy of Bergson, and as such his philosophy is closer than others to that of Sri Aurobindo, especially, I think, because they were both Platonists with a strong interest in the theory of evolution. Whitehead's philosophy of 'Process and Reality' is founded on the idea that there is a spiritual Reality of eternal forms that become concrete

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 342

through the Process of nature. In order to explain the fact that the forms of nature are meaningful, logical, purposeful, and progressive while at the same time they are made up of constantly changing material forces and events, he adopted a version of Platonic/Aristotelian hylomorphism, combined with Bergsonian creativity. In his view, nature is a constant process of embodying eternal forms that exist in the mind of God, and therefore every entity and group of entities, or societies of forms and events, whether atomic or human or any degree of complexity in between, constitute novel occasions in the creative interaction of the temporal and the eternal dimensions of reality. And this process is mediated by the principle of prehension, which means that every particle and composite form of existence, from atoms and molecules, to cells, individuals, species, and societies, has some degree of awareness or cognition of itself and its surroundings, a view that he called panexperientialism. That, at least, is a simplified summary of his philosophy based on my reading of it. And it is a view that seems consonant with the idea of evolving Consciousness with which our lectures have concluded.

David Ray Griffin, who is a theologian and prominent exponent of Whitehead's philosophy, explains how his philosophy may be termed 'panentheism' as follows: "...Whitehead rejected the view that the ultimate creativity of the universe is to be ascribed to God's volition. ...God always exists in relation to a world, to some multiplicity of finite actual occasions – whether these actual occasions are ordered into a cosmos, such as ours, or exist merely in a state of chaos. ...This world, more precisely, exists in God. This doctrine is known as panentheism, which means that all finite things are in God... This is not pantheism, which says that all things are God. According to panentheism, both God and the world have their own creative power. They remain distinct, so the world's evil does not impugn the divine goodness. But the existence of the world is entailed by the divine existence. ...This way of understanding the relation of God to the world, ...obviously has implications for the problem of evil. He said that traditional theism, by regarding God as having created our world out of absolute nothingness, left "no alternative except to discern in God the origin of all evil as well as of all good." Whitehead, by contrast, thought of the creation of our world as "not the beginning of finite matter of fact, but the incoming of a certain type of social order". That is, in creating our world, God evoked a contingent form of order out of a situation that already embodied certain principles of order – principles that are not contingent but necessary, lying in the very nature of things. We have looked at the most basic of these principles: that in addition to God there is always a multiplicity of finite occasions embodying creativity, with creativity involving the twofold power of self-determination and efficient causation on future events."<sup>1</sup>

This view reinforces the idea of a fundamental duality in existence, which recurs frequently in the philosophy of religion, as we have seen: spirit and matter, immortal and mortal, infinite and finite, *purusha* and *prakriti*, Self and Nature, Brahman and Maya. The problem for all such systems of understanding is how to reconcile the opposites and unite the poles. And each philosophy or religious system solves the problem in a slightly different manner. But we have also seen that the idea of a Trinity composed of 1) an absolute spirit, 2) an extension or emanation of that spirit which is capable of creating, energizing, and sustaining a world, and 3) of an actual materialization of that spirit in time and space, is a common strategy for building the bridge. In the view of both Whitehead and Sri Aurobindo, for there to be an evolutionary process in time and space it is necessary that a material energy or *prakriti* is created which embodies certain principles and obeys certain immutable laws, and within that structure the ideal forms can manifest through natural processes, under constant pressure from the higher planes of reality to progressively manifest their truth. Thus, a natural world is created that is a combination of relative goods and evils, truths and falsehoods, pleasures and pains, which provide a context for and possibility of manifesting a perfect order, under necessarily challenging, if not

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1 David Ray Griffin, *Two Great Truths* (2004), p. 87-88

impossible, conditions.

Clearly many metaphysical issues are raised by this discussion, which may be crucial to one's acceptance or rejection of a system of belief. In fact, as Griffin cites, many Christian theologians in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, under the influence of naturalism and science rejected the traditional belief in God as the creator because it was inconceivable that God could create a world with evil in it, and also rejected the idea of a divine resurrection because it was inconceivable that God could intervene in the natural order of things. Their faith was then reduced to a belief in Jesus Christ as a messenger of goodness, and in God as a cluster of ideals constructed by the mind. In that scenario there is not much hope for a higher evolution or a divine perfection, in this life or another. The problem here, as pointed out repeatedly during the course of these lectures, is that the rational mind is incapable of coming to terms with the mystery of existence, and as long as it is not transformed by spiritual practice into an instrument of a higher form of knowledge, it will not grasp "the logic of the infinite", and its rational beliefs and debates will not pass into a truth-consciousness that can perceive directly the unity of opposites that constitute Reality.