

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONSCIOUSNESS – HEGEL AND SRI AUROBINDO

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## PREFACE

The Philosophy of Consciousness that is presented here in book form was originally presented as a lecture course in Auroville in 2015 and 2016, under the auspices of the University of Human Unity, which is a research project that began in 2007. Members of the project's research team have offered a variety of exploratory courses and seminars each year since its inception, most of which have focused primarily on Vedic literature and texts, and on the writings of Sri Aurobindo. I have attempted, in most of my courses, to introduce, summarize, and reflect upon other related topics, and the works of other authors whose ideas were parallel to and often contemporaneous with Sri Aurobindo's, and which seem to share a common purpose. Two of these courses were titled *The Philosophy of Evolution* (2012), and *The Philosophy of Religion* (2014), both of which are also available in book form.

The procedure followed for these courses has been to first research the general topic as thoroughly as time permitted, then to present a different author or theme each week or two, over a period of about three months, recording the lectures, and then transcribing them and editing them into book form. I have become increasingly aware of the drawbacks to such an approach over the years, while at the same time enjoying its advantages. It has been possible to introduce a wide range of ideas in a relatively short time-frame to a varying audience, with the general objective of stimulating interest and providing guidelines for pursuing a more in-depth study of the topics. The drawbacks have been that none of the ideas could be pursued systematically or in-depth, and much of their authors' valuable work was overlooked or understated, which I regret. It is also unfortunate that oral presentations tend easily to be repetitious and may be pushed into unplanned directions by audience participation. This seems to work in the immediate context, and it is perhaps appropriate to the informal oral medium. It also gives room for a degree of spontaneity which sometimes reveals unforeseen insights. When the lectures are transcribed there is an opportunity to expand the quotations, reflections, and arguments to a certain extent, and to make the references more explicit, which I hope makes the written form more readable. But it nevertheless remains an essentially oral product that works better for the ear than for the eye.

The reading, as well as the writing, of philosophy takes time, and philosophers such as Hegel and Heidegger, who have provided many of the insights in this study, have generally been considered especially difficult to read and understand. Therefore a summary of their ideas which does not require much reading, or any reading at all if the lecture is heard, should provide an opportunity for students to become familiar with some of their key ideas, who would not otherwise be likely to do so. And if the lectures are heard, then these ideas could be more easily comprehended than they would be if read. However, the aim of this course, somewhat paradoxically, is not the understanding of philosophy, but the seeing and hearing of what "consciousness" is.

The association between hearing and comprehension is a topic that is discussed in this course, along with the concept from Indian philosophy known as *sruti* – *intuitively inspired sight and speech* – which is the *faculty* on which Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is based. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, that the course was initially meant to be heard and not read. And yet the written word is, for the time being, the most universal medium of transmission, and we are virtually forced to depend on it. My hope, however, is that these lectures, and especially the ones that focus on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* mentioned in the Supplement,<sup>1</sup> will be heard by those whose interest is stimulated by the written text.

Rod Hemsell

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Savitri and the Philosophy of Consciousness 1.0 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNO97nAq6Bc>,  
2.0 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYelc5SQDME>, 3.0 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuKYMdE4w-o>

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# THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONSCIOUSNESS – HEGEL AND SRI AUROBINDO

## INTRODUCTION

**It is therefore** *the game of the world* that must be first thought; before attempting to understand all the forms of play in the world. (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*)

### **Erasing the difference, filling the gap, igniting the flame**

The classical notion of knowledge is that the essence of things, the truth, the logos, the *idea*, are known immediately and expressed by language. The ideas are embodied by things and revealed by speech. Thought systems expressed by language thereby represent the truth, the Being, of beings. With 'modernism' and the scientific analysis of things based on quantitative measurement and logical induction and deduction, there intervenes a constructed world of theoretical explanation and subjective interpretation which becomes the object of thought, language, and other symbolic systems. Language then is a tool for the expression of the scientific understanding of things, or of the economic or political or religious understanding, and not the expression of a direct perception of things, or of the things themselves. Formerly word, speech, language expressed a close identity with the known; latterly it has expressed a mediated system of abstract thinking about the known. Then the known becomes the interpretation, and not the things themselves. Unfortunately, then the being of things no longer matters much. It is caring for the being of things that needs to be restored, as Heidegger said. Whitehead made a point of this division in many of his lectures, where he treated the distinction between the intuitive and the analytic approaches to knowledge as a matter of historical development. Today the difference is more likely to be explained by theories of the split brain in neuropsychology.

Especially in the modern age of science and technology, word, speech, or sign signify conceptual systems of explanation, our “frames” of knowledge, and not the processes and things the systems are supposed to explain, and even less their integrity, their feelings, their self-existent meaning and purpose. This view or analysis is postmodern, one for which Derrida is best known, but which was also articulated in a previous epoch by Heidegger, Bergson and Whitehead, and before them by Hegel. In this postmodern epoch of the analysis of language especially, our abstract rational understanding has become the object of our thought and speech. It's what our language expresses. And these frames of understanding have become more real to us than the world to which our thought and speech refer. Thus our language becomes an expression of a world that our rational minds create, as a kind of distant representation of the world that we inhabit, like a fictional adventure in a book or movie, or a political ideology, or an election campaign, or an advertisement, which may have little to do with the real conditions of life, although they represent the values and aims of certain people or institutions. Even the thoughts of philosophers such as Heidegger, Whitehead, and Bergson then easily become the objects of academic interpretations and ideological institutions, which may have little to do with the view of reality expressed by those philosophers.

We may speak at length about climate change for example, or about wars for oil in the middle east, without any real sense of how our own lives and the lives of others, near and far, are actually involved in creating these things that we conceptualize, criticize or oppose. We don't experience them personally and we don't need to, because they are presented to us by the media or by academia in a frame of understanding that serves us well enough. In it we can find everything we need to know about history, politics, and the economy in order for us to be sufficiently well informed, critical, communicative citizens, and in order for us to propagate the “accepted” versions of things.

Phenomenology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in both philosophy and psychology, tried very hard to convince us that this enframing understanding actually cuts us off from reality, and that we should step back from it as far as possible in order to recover a more direct and immediate understanding of ourselves and the world. The process of stepping back from our conditioned understanding, values, and beliefs, is known as *epoche*, a Greek word that signified “suspending judgment” in ancient Greek civilization. This is actually the work of philosophy according to Heidegger, and it is quite similar to the spiritual principle expressed by Indic spiritual traditions as detachment and equality towards any stimuli, *samata*. The efforts by phenomenologists were somewhat effective in reforming academic disciplines, for a while. A deeper view of the human being emerged in the first half of the century. But then electronic media and the globalization of technology came along in a big way and replaced both the frame and critical thinking with a ready made world of encoded signifiers that have only a virtual reality to signify. For example, what does a movie like *The Martian* actually signify? We see a glorified image of the idealized practical mind and technology that can survive literally anything. So, we are finally cut off totally from ourselves and the real world, and we now believe in a virtual reality, similar to an ancient mythology. This, as we know, was also the critique of knowledge and society that succeeded phenomenology in the form of critical theory, and was eventually followed by postmodernism in the 50s and 60s. Now, however, we have passed beyond “thinking” and all of us see similar things, do similar things, understand things in similar ways, and communicate our feelings and thoughts with a similarly conventional language, expressive of widely shared beliefs based on the digital media. And the fact that we share these things globally is actually good grounds for believing that they represent the real world; it all works pretty well in terms of predictability, and we get enough social reinforcement to continue believing in it.

From these circumstances and reflections two perennial questions must again concern us, which have preoccupied philosophy and science off and on for a long while: 1) How do we happen to be conscious of these things in the first place? and 2) How do these things happen to be what they are, rather than something else? In other words, What is our consciousness and knowledge really, and What is the being of the world?

Scientific thinking in the past 100 years or so has made significant progress in answering number 2, with the theory of the evolution of life and mind, and the history of the physical universe. The processes involved in evolution are linear, causal, continuous and can be measured in terms of observable temporal progressions (which as Bergson demonstrated get spatialized by our measurements and become fixed frameworks of our understanding). How we happen to be conscious, in the first place, however, and actually apprehend experience and analyze it correctly, is a different matter. First of all our “consciousness” does not seem to be linear and measurable; it has been happening the same way at least since humans began to communicate their thoughts about the world they experience. Consciousness is primordial. And the same is true in the domain of animal consciousness, at each level of complexity from mammals down to reptiles and fish and birds and protozoans. Consciousness does not seem to be bound by time and linear causation in the same way as life processes and physical structures are, which are constantly changing. And, as the Idealists have always pointed out, the forms that consciousness perceives and knows also do not change. Elephants continue to be elephants, language continues to be language, ideals continue to be ideals, the Universe persists. Though there have been untold ages of species variation and extinction, the species are still what they are or were, and so is the process of their adaptation, procreation, and survival. The laws of nature don't change.

Consciousness, in its aspects of a-temporality and universality, has therefore been thought of generally as being something “spiritual”, unchanging, immutable, and the forms that it knows are thought of as

existing differently in the mind than they do in the processes of the material bodies that express those forms. This is the root of that perplexity known as the ontological difference, the difference between the being of things, from their forms and processes that can be measured. And so the question for philosophy, psychology, and the natural sciences perennially becomes not only how our spiritual nature happens to do what it does, but also how it happens to exist in the context of what it knows as its other of a changing material nature? What is its ontological status, its origin as well as its process? In the modern period, and even more in the recent period of scientific technology, with neuroscience dominating the research in consciousness, the view that consciousness is a special phenomenon of the human brain has further reduced the enigma to material processes, thus widening the gap between the phenomenon of consciousness itself, and the constructed understanding of it based on the analysis of brain function. Can consciousness, a spiritual event, actually be reduced to neuronal assemblies and functions in the brain, or anything material? This notion was criticized by St. Augustine on philosophical grounds around 400 CE, and even more cogently now in the light of scientific evidence which indicates that human consciousness does not even need a brain.<sup>2</sup>

Of course the easy answer, after eliminating all the possibilities we can imagine and that circulate in the media today, is that consciousness doesn't exist at all, or at least not as something separate or different from matter. Consciousness, if it exists, has evolved along with its material structures and inheres in their elements and processes, as a principle of intelligence or mind. The monistic materialists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with some idealists of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, could therefore say, simply, that the universe is made of intelligent substance. But at the same time, there have always been the skeptics who have propelled themselves into the waters of dualism, determined to discover or deny the relationship between these spiritual and material modes of existence, the conscious and unconscious, the mental and the physical, the abstract and concrete aspects of this enigmatic unity. Some have actually denied the existence of consciousness itself, however absurd that may be, since the denial is a product of consciousness.

Now, given that this apparent duality exists and the problem still has not been solved, at least for human intelligence, and particularly for the many schools of opposed thought systems that have tried to understand it throughout history, we find ourselves today, right here at this moment, – the privileged inheritors of this most prestigious, profound, noble, immemorial, and troublesome responsibility and the appointed or selected caretakers of the mystery, the seekers of the secret, the magi – responsible for preparing the future leaders of our species and the world to think and to will on the basis of consciousness of the truth of things, for the sake of our common good. They (and we) must at least strive to do the right things for the right reasons. And perhaps that means going beyond the accepted wisdom. Perhaps, as the ancients believed, consciousness is also force – whether of truth or of falsehood.

The philosopher Thomas Nagel, in *Mind and Cosmos*, states the problem like this – and perhaps this will serve as our job description: “The inescapable fact that has to be accommodated in any complete conception of the universe is that the appearance of living organisms has eventually given rise to consciousness, perception, desire, action, and the formation of both beliefs and intentions on the basis

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See Dr. Bruce Greyson, director of the center for brain-consciousness research at the University of Virginia, who has documented many cases, including a girl, who was an honor student entering Smith college, and as the result of an accident had a brain scan which showed she had no cerebral cortex, but only a brain stem. Dr. Greyson comments that according to normal brain science she should not have been capable of any thought, much less an outstanding intellect. <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yosn\\_GHYiR4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yosn_GHYiR4)>

of reasons. If all this has a natural explanation, the possibilities were inherent in the universe long before there was life, and inherent in early life long before the appearance of animals. A satisfying explanation would show that the realization of these possibilities was not vanishingly improbable but a significant likelihood given the laws of nature and the composition of the universe. It would reveal mind and reason as basic aspects of a nonmaterialistic natural order.” And he concludes the section of his book with this thought, which must necessarily guide all our deliberations about the future: “Perhaps the basis of this identity (of the mental and physical poles of reality) pervades the world.”<sup>3</sup> This was the basic insight at the root of the philosophy of A. N. Whitehead, now known as panpsychism, which he apparently attributed to Francis Bacon's observation that, “It is certain that all bodies whatsoever, though they have no sense, yet they have perception; for when one body is applied to another, there is a kind of election to embrace that which is agreeable, and to exclude or expel that which is ingrate..., and whether the body be alterant or altered, evermore a perception precedeth operation....”<sup>4</sup> Subsequent ages of materialistic science have of course tried to blot out his idea. Practically speaking, however, if we could reach this ground of understanding, experientially and with certainty, beyond the conflicting theories of materialism and idealism, science and philosophy, what would a convergence on such a ground imply, what difference would it make, why should we think it necessary?

It is only when we realize that “consciousness” is more than our individual human subjectivity, and especially more than a product of the neuronal assemblies in our brains, and that it is, in fact, an omnipresent principle of existence, present in all forms, throughout time and space, that we can refocus our intelligence on the interdependence of all aspects and levels of existence. Only if this “spirit” is felt and seen in all things, and only if we identify with that reality as the uniting common ground of our existence, will a “practical spirituality” be possible, in which the interconnection of all life is respected, and ideals such as energy sustainability, the preservation of biodiversity, and the creation of a harmonious global civilization become realizable. But this understanding is not new. Long before Bacon, it was there in the Upanishads – Know all in the self and the self in all; it re-emerged in 18<sup>th</sup> century western idealism, and again in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in phenomenology and evolutionary thought, and in the philosophies of Bergson, Whitehead, and Sri Aurobindo. To grasp this way of knowing and being nonetheless requires a practice, an *epoche*, a rejection of our false values and habits, and an ascent above the practical mind, now just as it always has since the time of the ancient Veda, Upanishads, and Yoga in India<sup>5</sup>. Practical spirituality is applied spirituality, and to apply spirituality to life is not always what we are told is practical. Bergson said that a universalized consciousness would not necessarily enhance our social status, but it would align us with the creativity of the universe. And Whitehead enshrined in his philosophy the belief that it is the unique feature of human intelligence that it can perceive “value” and focus its will on achieving those things that are truly important. Moreover, he saw that things have value in themselves and for others just by virtue of being what they are. Bergson, Whitehead, and Sri Aurobindo were contemporaries, and their philosophies are often compared because they shared such philosophical views and intuitions of the larger meaning of consciousness.

Let us leap forward, then, beyond this already dizzying altitude, away from all of the constructions and deconstructions of our many *epistemes*. If we are to 'seize the ecological alternative'<sup>6</sup> we will need to

3 Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos* (2012), p. 32.

4 A.N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, p.41.

5 According to these philosophies there is a fundamental unity of Consciousness and Nature, or Mind and Matter, which can be known experientially.

6 This INTRODUCTION was presented, in a slightly different form, as a paper for the conference “Seizing an Ecological Alternative” sponsored by the Center for Process Studies at the Claremont School of Theology in June, 2015. I have put

leap. And we will be wise to take the advice of the great phenomenologists, idealists *and* sceptics, who have taught us to step back from those familiar histories and theories and faiths and facts, *epoche*, because they have become our obstacles. Our assumptions regarding the soul that pervades the universe, pro or con, may have led to our careless destruction of the planet. Our assumptions about an omnipotent and omniscient god, pro or con, may have led to our dominance and enslavement of every form of life. Because whatever our science, philosophy, and religion have told us so far has failed to deliver the highest goods. As Derrida points out in his seminal work on writing, *Of Grammatology* (1974), logical thinking and print based culture have given us many goods along the way from Plato to Hegel, while at the same time preventing us, ultimately, from being able to even see what the highest good might be. Truth, harmony, beauty, excellence...happiness, which may have been grasped by a more intuitive and inspired consciousness at some distant intervals in human history, have disappeared from the horizon of our thinking. Philosophical thinking about these things has become scientific thinking - about evolution, economics, climate change and sustainability; can we avoid extinction, can we make some design changes that will enable us to sustain our already achieved levels of happiness, at any cost?

Then let us step back. This is both the phenomenological and the Buddhistic method of reduction, not into a mathematized universe, but into the silence, into the stillness of the mind and the stillness of the drive to conquer nature, into the soul that pervades the universe. For if there is a power of evolution, then there is a possibility of something else, a novel creative advance - another 'power of consciousness' that can emerge, a more ethical and universal will, a more resilient and sensitive body, forms of thinking and willing that lie ahead waiting for us to shift our priorities, our patterns of behavior, our vibrational levels in order to liberate new potentials of being. If we don't do that then we are condemned to keep on turning about in larger or smaller circles of the same egoistic patterns, for the same small reasons with the same ultimately unsatisfying and perhaps catastrophic results. We must sacrifice those familiar patterns of egoistic dominance and submission, self-satisfaction and self-deception for the sake of conventional values, and convenience, from our prestigious knowledge and power, and become the scientists and philosophers of an enlightened, liberated humanity.

It is a two-fold sacrifice – the phenomenological reduction and the ascent toward a higher, more universal intuition of the needs and possibilities of humanity, and of the world as a whole. This is the key to the next emergence of consciousness. In the last epoch of scientific and philosophical advance, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, thinkers of genius such as Whitehead, Bergson, and Sri Aurobindo saw this need and this possibility, and they ventured forward on a path beyond the limits of rational mind. There is a way forward, a pathway that has already been scouted. And it requires a reversal first of all, - an individual transformation, an expansion beyond the small ego and the small mind. We can become dynamic creative centers of the consciousness of the whole, of society, of humanity, of the universe, - which of course we already are to some extent, but it is possible to be so on a much vaster, more universal, more impersonal scale. As Hegel put it, in a moment of extraordinary clarity, at the beginning of an earlier epoch, we must “negate our subjectivity”. Only the heart and mind that is cultivated for “the universal and the true” becomes capable of the “ethical life”, a life free from selfishness, dedicated to the highest good. We must become conscious of the hearts and minds and bodies of others, beyond all forms of petty egoism, self-interest, norms of acceptance, and attachment to our little victories and defeats. We must be willing to sacrifice ourselves, our lives, our careers, our institutions, our cherished beliefs, in order to allow another energy of consciousness and force to emerge, a more comprehensive, deeply intuitional, subtle and powerful perception, thinking, and will

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forward the idea that the rationalistic consciousness that has created the serious environmental problems of today cannot be expected to solve the problems it has created, and therefore another evolution of consciousness must be envisioned.

that do not hesitate and doubt and negotiate before knowing and doing what is needed, because it sees and is what it sees. Such a creative, intuitively discerning, enlightened consciousness and force are there ahead of us, waiting for us to take the leap forward. And at this time we have the momentum of the most advanced society that has ever existed, the highest level of general well-being, and at the same time the greatest likelihood of global catastrophe and ultimate extinction, as our ground and point of departure. A direct leap into that unity that pervades the universe is our only chance.

We know where we have to go, we know the reason why, and we know how to get there. So is this evolutionary leap, then, inevitable? If so, is the time frame predictable? Are there conditions that would be more or less favorable and that are in our control? If not, do we know the probabilities of success or failure under different circumstances and constraints? Well, as has already been said, if the rational mind is to be displaced by a higher power of consciousness, then we can work toward this development by suspending our reliance on the former and invoking the latter, by acts of will, discrimination, and sacrifice. And we know very well that disciplines of this sort have been advocated by spiritual teachers throughout history, with varying degrees of success on the scale of individuals or small groups, but never with much success on a large collective scale. And it is also well known that the materialistic bias among scientists is likely to prevent most from accepting the propositions of the intuitivist philosophers such as Bergson, Whitehead, Sri Aurobindo, Nagel, and others who have followed them, however inspiring the proposition might seem to those inclined toward philosophical idealism. And so the former will try to convince the latter of an atomistic view of the brain and mind, a view critically examined and dismissed by Bergson, Whitehead, and Sri Aurobindo almost a century ago, for example. And the intuitivists will try to convince the atomists that everyone and everything is a part of all the others by virtue of the universal principles that determine each, a view criticized and dismissed by materialists such as E. O. Wilson, Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins today. And so we end up back in the calculating rational mind that holds fast to the principles of empirical knowledge on one hand and spiritual knowledge on the other. These opposing orientations to knowledge, the material and the spiritual, the empirical and the intuitional, are as much a reality of the world in which we live as climate change and burger king. The appeal we are making is to an alternative beyond both, to a mutual recognition of the validity and limits of each, and to the willed emergence of a higher power of consciousness that can erase the differences, fill the explanatory gap with a direct perception of the integral truth of things, and ignite the flame of creativity in us, the ever-living fire, that can liberate us to realize the truer, more harmonious and caring being that we are.

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The approach that is taken in these lectures, as in our other courses that have been published in book form by the University of Human Unity,<sup>7</sup> is an exploration of the points of view of various philosophers of the modern and post-modern period who have asked the question: What is Consciousness?, from Hume in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, who seems to have been the first to systematically do so in modern times in the West, to the great thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century who have explored the question – Bergson, Whitehead, Heidegger, Sri Aurobindo to its limits. And Hegel stands between, as we shall see, like the axis around which this most difficult of questions must turn. From the empirical reflections of Hume to the phenomenology of Hegel, and his foremost exponent Heidegger, to the intuitive cosmologies of Whitehead and Sri Aurobindo, we will hope to rediscover many of the steps that have been taken in order for the cobblestones of the path of Consciousness to be laid, which we must see and feel in ourselves and stand firmly upon, if we are to learn how this question is to be asked, and how it has been

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<sup>7</sup> *The Philosophy of Evolution - Part 1 Darwin and Sri Aurobindo, Part 2 Mind and Supermind* (2012), and *The Philosophy of Religion - Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity* (2014), by Rod Hemsell.

asked, by the greatest minds of the past. Then we may hope to have some chance of moving forward on the way, and finding the answers that even today are as elusive as they have always been since first this question of questions was asked.

The lecture course format followed here is necessarily too brief and informal to adequately consider any of the great works that have been referenced, and many of the ideas that I have highlighted in order to give us clues and aids along the way of this difficult path have been taken out of the very rich and important contexts in which they have been presented and developed, which is extremely regrettable, and for which I sincerely apologize, to the authors and to the readers.

## PART I – FROM EPISTEMOLOGY TO PHENOMENOLOGY

### Lecture 1

The philosophy of consciousness is a research project we are now launching in order to explore some of the many attempts throughout the history of thinking to determine what consciousness is. And I would like to begin with the normal end of the spectrum of consciousness where thought is constrained by the objects of perception. At the other end of the spectrum, when we come to the philosophies of Hegel and Sri Aurobindo, we may find that consciousness is something entirely different. But let us explore the basics first. What is consciousness? Enormous amounts of money and life-energy and scientific research are being expended today to try to answer this very simple question. I just asked the question to a group of high school students and they immediately knew the answer. So I am going to ask you, and I would like for you to answer the question simply, according to what comes easily and immediately to mind. What is consciousness?

*Answer: “Our way of experiencing.” “Awareness.”*

Yes. Awareness is the most common definition. We are aware of our experience. And we are aware of many different objects of that experience which comes to us primarily through our senses, at least according to the opinions of many philosophers and scientists. Sensation is a mysterious phenomenon whereby objects in front of us get seen, and smelled, and felt. And when we see objects and smell them and feel them, they are in our awareness. For a very long time in the development of human consciousness and knowledge, this has been known. It is not a secret. Consciousness is our awareness of objects.

If we look back at texts written in 500 BCE, and texts written in 500 CE, and in 1500 CE, and texts written just recently, we will find many examples of this common understanding being stated clearly. So what's the big problem? We know what consciousness is already. Sensation. Perception. Reflection. Abstraction. Imagination. Reasoning. Understanding. Informed action, all in the context of perceived objects, the phenomena of awareness. That's basically the spectrum of what we conventionally recognize as consciousness. And that spectrum is facilitated by various structures with which we are also familiar: the nervous system, the brain (some people distinguish between these two), the sense organs, thought, reflection and expression of various kinds, language, art, literature, science, social laws and norms; these structures, from the physical body to conventional means of communication and well defined patterns of behavior, to the higher faculties of ethical and aesthetic inspiration, all facilitate the phenomenon we call consciousness. So we seem to know perfectly well what it is and how it works. Or do we?

There have always been those, throughout the history of the development of these ideas, who have rigorously questioned this whole notion. And I want to share with you some of the statements of those who have thought seriously and differently about this question, such as the famous sceptics Sextus Empiricus (2<sup>nd</sup> Century) and David Hume (18<sup>th</sup> Century). I am also inviting us to think about this question seriously, and perhaps differently, ourselves. Because **philosophy** is a process of attaining wisdom. It has no other meaning or purpose. And it doesn't have much to do with history. Any

academic historian can tell us who said what when. But then, there are a few shining examples of human behavior genuinely in search of wisdom. As Heidegger tells us, the philosopher wants to understand and express the whole system of the reality that exists for that mind. And philosophers are generally not particularly interested in when or how others have managed it, even though they read what other philosophers have written; they usually move on quickly. Philosophers have a kind of genius that is naturally inclined to exercise all of the faculties of consciousness to a very fine degree. And for them language and thought and society, the nervous system, and all the other structures that we have mentioned serve adequately for the attempt to understand and express as completely as possible the nature of reality as they see it, which includes 'consciousness'. But there aren't so many people who actually do this kind of philosophy; we can probably count them on our fingers.

And at the same time, philosophical thinking has developed over centuries, like religion. The knowledge and wisdom that the religions have produced wasn't once and for all. It continues to develop, as I have tried to show in my study *The Philosophy of Religion*<sup>8</sup>. And at each spike in its development there is an original thinker and seer who is re-formulating the same ideas that the others have formulated, because there is a spiritual reality that they wish to express. That is what the inspired philosophical mind wants to know and say. And the ability to see it and to express it develops. It develops in different cultures, time frames, languages, epochs, and it gets periodically restated in a new way throughout history. And so it is with this question of the phenomenon of consciousness. Philosophy, in particular, has always been preoccupied with understanding the phenomena of 'mind'. And though the mind's faculty of consciousness seems obvious, it remains one of the greatest mysteries.

In our course on the philosophy of evolution which has preceded this one, I recall that the second lecture of the second part, was a lecture titled 'The Sankhya and Yoga View', where this was said, "I have a goal for this course. It is not just to review philosophical ideas. The goal is to pursue an opening to a direct intuitive perception of the truth of evolution." So now we can just substitute 'consciousness' for 'evolution' in this statement. As Sri Aurobindo said to us, which I quoted there, "In the method of Jnana Yoga, the yoga of truth-consciousness, it helps to begin with the idea and then to follow a path of knowledge that ends with the direct perception of the thing itself." He says we should start with the idea and pursue it to its absolute degree of knowledge. This is the method of the yoga of knowledge.

If we believe what we have heard, and will be hearing, about the limited nature of the rational mind, then we will have learned that in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, as well as in the philosophies of others, such as Hegel, Bergson and Whitehead, the rational mind is a tool that evolution has manifested in the human being in order to progress to another level of mind and eventually to what Sri Aurobindo calls supermind. The evolution of the rational mind is a transitory phenomenon, it is not an end in itself; it is a means produced by evolution because it is essential for the success of the mental being, and also in order to move beyond this being's limitations. The next evolution can't happen without it. Reason is a faculty of the rational mind, and ideas are objects of that mind's consciousness. For example, justice is an idea. We use the power of reasoning to define it, to understand it, to seek it, and to realize it socially.

So the idea that consciousness is awareness, and that it has evolved in life from an early stage, for example from at least as early as the paramecium which has some form of cognition of light and heat, up to the level of higher animals that are aware of many things and with whom we share almost all of

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8 For previous courses such as *The Philosophy of Religion*, *The Philosophy of Evolution*, and others presented in this series, see <http://universityofhumanunity.org/>

our behaviors, is an idea that we wish to understand. It is the natural activity of that faculty of mind called reason to understand things of which consciousness is aware, including the patterns and principles of matter, life, and the higher ideas of mind such as justice, truth, and beauty. And it wants to understand this thing or this process whereby it has awareness, which seems to be so essential to life. It is this faculty whereby it knows the ideas that give life meaning, - generally called consciousness or more specifically intelligence, - and it wants to understand the emergence of this phenomenon in the process of evolution. How has it come to be so?

But is this faculty or ability of the mind restricted to us humans? There are some philosophers who have decided that because other animals don't have language, which we do and can discuss these things, we are not animals, and animals are not conscious. At least we are in another category with regard to consciousness, and 'animals' therefore aren't conscious in the same way. In a series of lectures given by the philosopher Jacques Derrida late in his life, perhaps his last lectures in fact,<sup>9</sup> he spoke at length about animal consciousness and the ways it has been viewed historically in literature and philosophy. And he pointed out that many philosophers of the modern period like Descartes and Kant did not attribute consciousness to animals at all. And more recently a neuroscientist named Antonio Damasio, who is also a philosopher, in a book titled *Self Comes to Mind* (2010), argues that animals are automatons. Based on extensive laboratory research he concludes that animal behavior happens as a result of energy in the nervous system and brain, self-moved but unconscious. Human beings, on the other hand, are moved similarly but we have the ability to think, to make judgments, and to reflect upon our actions. And it is this ability of self-reflection that he calls consciousness. But lo and behold, even our thinking and ethical actions, he also believes, are mechanically generated by neurotransmitters in the brain. For him, the brain generates consciousness. And he defines this product of the brain called consciousness as “self-awareness”. What distinguishes us from animals is only our ability to know that we know, and to express this aspect of our awareness through language. This is a theory and definition of consciousness that we will have to consider more thoroughly later in the course.

So, why not accept this idea, at least for the moment? We have awareness of objects, including our own awareness; we think, we speak, we imagine and understand, and we act ethically, or at least practically and purposefully, all of which happens by virtue of natural, electrochemical processes in the brain. Even today, at the most sophisticated levels of scientific thinking, there is nothing special about consciousness. It is simply a product of natural neuro-biological processes. Does anyone see a problem with this? Well, we will encounter many philosophers in this study who question the ability of biological processes to cause our awareness. Phenomenal consciousness has as its objects such processes, and all the world of our experience, while neuronal activity is simply a cellular system made of molecules. What we hold in our consciousness – ideas, impressions, knowledge, objects of awareness – is not something we can find in the molecules or nerve synapses of the brain. From this obvious fact some schools of philosophy and neuroscience conclude that there should at least be direct correlations between brain functions and the phenomena of consciousness, for which they eagerly search, in the manner of historians trying to find the cause of a momentous change in social structures as the result of a simple accident or random event.

David Hume, for example, sat in his study in England about three hundred years ago and wrote hundreds of pages of the most intricate, logical reflections on, and thorough explanations and interpretations of, consciousness. And this was presumably, according to the materialist theory, all done by electrochemical processes in his brain, perhaps as a result of recombinant DNA. Well, if you are inclined to believe that, then you may really want to follow this course, because we will be challenging

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9 Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008).

the tendency to reduce consciousness to physical processes throughout our study! But it is not a bad place to start, because Hume and the empirical thinkers apparently have very brilliant brain cells: he wrote all of these 800 pages – on his own, presumably as a result of his brain's activity. I would therefore like to share with you some of the things he said in this book, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1749), because his reflections are really the beginning of serious thought about the nature of consciousness.

On the first page, he said, “All of the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS. The difference betwixt these consists in the degree of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness. Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions: and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul.”<sup>10</sup>

So, he is clearly not focusing on the neuro-biology of awareness, because he couldn't have done so at that period of technological development. He is focusing on the processes of consciousness that consciousness knows by reflecting on itself. All of our perceptions, and feelings about our perceptions, he believes enter the soul with a certain force and vivacity from outside us, creating one category of consciousness that he calls impressions. He says, then, “By ideas I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning; such as, for instance, are all the perceptions excited by the present discourse ...” Our consciousness receives impressions, and becomes aware of the images of those impressions that first enter the soul from somewhere outside us. Everything you are imagining and thinking right now, as a result of hearing or reading these words, comes first into your awareness with some force, vivacity of some kind, in the form of impressions, and on the basis of that process you get an image, a thought, an idea, according to Hume. “Excepting only those which arise from the sight and touch, and excepting the immediate pleasure or uneasiness it may occasion.” The pleasure or uneasiness come from the emotions we feel inside us which intervene between the impressions and the ideas.

Now pay close attention to his next statement. “Every one of himself will readily perceive the difference between feeling and thinking. The common degrees of these are easily distinguished; though it is not impossible but in particular instances they may very nearly approach to each other.” One is stronger than the other, and the second is an image of the first. The feeling and the idea may occur close to each other or with more of a time lapse between them. “... After the most accurate examination, of which I am capable, I venture to affirm, that the rule here holds without any exception, and that every simple idea has a simple impression, which resembles it, and every simple impression a correspondent idea. That idea of red, which we form in the dark, and that impression which strikes our eyes in sunshine, differ only in degree, not in nature.”

So the red that we see on someone's head, the impression of a red hat, and the red that we imagine when we go to bed tonight and close our eyes, and presumably also the shape of the hat, are the same. One is an impression cast upon the senses, and it becomes an idea. Later on when we think about it, it will be the same red: impression → idea. Then he says, “That the case is the same with all our simple impressions and ideas tis impossible to prove by particular enumeration of them. Everyone may satisfy himself in this point by running over as many examples as he pleases. But if anyone should deny this universal resemblance, (between impressions and ideas), I know no way of convincing him but by desiring him to show a simple impression that has not a correspondent idea, or a simple idea that has not a correspondent impression. If he does not answer this challenge, as tis certain he cannot, we may

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10 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1749), Book I, Part I, Sections 1-4

from his silence, and our own observation, establish our conclusion.”

Now we know where thought comes from; it comes from the impressions we get from sensations. Nothing could be clearer. But is the impression really more vivid than the image of red which we recall later? And we may also ask the question of veracity. Do our ideas accurately reflect our impressions? He says yes. In fact, they are virtually the same. However, one of the problems with which we might meet his challenge, is with something like the idea of justice, (which I hope we have in our awareness). We have a kind of innate sense of right and wrong. And to some extent we are even horrified by some acts of injustice, sometimes by even very small ones, because of the utter ignorance and carelessness that motivates them, and the pain they cause, even though there is no way to prosecute them, because they happen in the family or among friends and colleagues. In any case, somehow we have a sense of injustice. But how many instances of justice or injustice have we experienced that can explain our sense of 'justice' based upon previous impressions? Can our experience explain our understanding of justice? The root of this problem goes back to the question asked by Plato: what impressions can the senses give us of something as complex and non-material in nature as the idea of justice? The idea of justice is surely not conveyed to our awareness by light, sound, touch, taste, and smell, through our senses. In fact, we may have never had an experience that qualify us to know what justice is.

Later on in this first section of his work, however, Hume insists that there are no innate ideas. And he gives an elaborate explanation of complex ideas, such as justice, based on the theory we have just heard. He says that we receive primary impressions of relationships like resemblance, contiguity, and causality from things that occur in close proximity to each other. And on the basis of these impressions the mind imagines these impressions in different ways, thus creating secondary ideas, and from these secondary associations of ideas, the mind constructs its complex view of the world. But everything that is imagined and constructed in this way has its source in original impressions, such as cause and effect relationships. When one type of action causes a consistent and specific effect or reaction, or when one color recurs in association with a particular shape, or when a certain family always inhabits a certain house, these constant associations become complex ideas and definitions. This is the fundamental theory of knowledge known as empiricism. Our sense of justice would then be derived from recurrent experiences of behaviors that occur in proximity to each other and create good and bad feelings. But as we have said, this kind of association seems inadequate to explain 'justice', which in fact rarely if ever actually occurs in society. It is known to us but not experienced. Here again we may find grounds for challenging Hume. Yes we see the family enter the house repeatedly, and also many other instances of this behavior, which bear a close resemblance to each other, but does this give us the idea of habitat, security, and safety? It is a fact that all creatures in nature need and have these things, just as they all gather and eat food, procreate, and adapt to environments. And don't we know these complex patterns of ideas, like security and safety, which cannot be perceived by the senses, and yet we perceive them, as a whole, because they exist as such, and not because a lot of piecemeal impressions that get associated in the mind, which then constructs a meaning from its own imaginations? It is rather, as if our consciousness were a mirror of the 'meaning' of structures and processes that *are*, in a way that cannot be perceived by the senses.

Later, however, Hume also asks the question of 'substance'. We normally think that qualities inhere in specific substances, known as accidents in Aristotelian thinking. So the unjust behavior that we witness belongs to the person who enacts it, the nesting behavior we observe belongs to a species of bird. But Hume says that all we know are our impressions, and our ideas that reflect those impressions, and we have no idea whatsoever about the existence of a bird, or of something like what Dr. Damasio says that he knows - for example that our impressions inhere in the neuronal network of the brain before becoming images and ideas in the mind which generate our conscious awareness. We have no way of

knowing whether the pink of the rose inheres in the flower, according to Hume. All we really know are our impressions which we name 'pink' and 'flower'. The pain that is caused by some action may make an impression on our minds, either directly or indirectly, but we do not know that its origin is in an evil intent, or even whether there is an actual body or mind that feels it. We cannot know the existence of a substantial entity according to Hume, but only the impressions that are made on our senses and our minds – sensations and images. Therefore something like justice, or evolution, or the web of life are only constructs based upon mental associations, which have a more or less remote origin in observational experience. The patterns that we think exist in nature are actually only constructs of our minds. This removes us from any actual connectedness to things in nature.

In this early theory of consciousness, it is asserted that we can know absolutely nothing about what is outside our impressions and ideas. I know your face and name because of impressions I have received through my senses. But according to Hume there is no substantial being that exists continuously that carries your name and wears your clothes and has your history, as far as we can know. You may know such things because you have those impressions. But the continuum of your existence cannot be known by me or anyone else. I know that you are there now and that you were in my field of experience a week ago, and at other times, and each of those exposures constitute sensory impressions which are not actually connected in any way to something outside my experiences. They allow me to join these sensory impressions from memory and association that may give me the idea of your identity. Your existence however is only a construct based upon my impressions. Such impressions are not connected in any way other than through the associations of our ideas. How do you feel about that? There is a kind of recurrence of impressions that allows me to imagine that you are the same person who was there before. But I cannot know that you are an actual person, says Hume. You don't exist outside of my mind, because we can't know the existence of external substance, and external substances do not have any demonstrable continuous existence. The consciousness of objects is constructed solely within our minds, based upon our sensory impressions. And here the question of veracity again arises, which concerns whether our impressions and ideas accurately reflect what really exists in the world, which Hume doubts. He believes we really can't know, except relatively, by experimental verification. I must doubt your existence. You may affirm it. But I only have your word. And if I think you have done something terribly unjust, that is only a 'feeling' I have. Don't worry about it too much, unless of course a lot of other people happen to share the feeling. Then you may be in trouble!

Science has developed in remarkable ways since 1740 however, and we now can prove that there is a continuum of substance, for example through genetics and life processes that have a connected existence in and among species through the processes of DNA and evolution. Even though we cannot experience this continuity, we know that it has objective existence. And the Platonic school of philosophy has always known that we are conscious of other things that cannot be experienced directly, such as justice. But it was quite possible for Hume to doubt all of that. As I pointed out in the course on evolution, Darwin arrived at his theory solely on the basis of his empirical observations of nature, of which he collected many. But he didn't know much about genetics and paleontology. He associated his observations in a way that told him that there was a continuum within and between species over millennia of development. And this process of observation of things and his association of ideas was good enough for him; in fact empirical observation works pretty well.

At that time, however, our intellectual consciousness was extremely focused on analyzing the processes of obtaining data, and reasoning about data, and also noticing that many of our conclusions reached on the basis of our observations were false. The human being is largely ignorant of why anything happens the way that it does. We don't really know why people do what they do, or why things are what they are, with certainty. Our sense impressions usually don't give us this information. And as Hume said,

between our impressions and ideas our feelings and emotions intervene. Yet we are still able to piece together the objects of awareness in such a way that makes sense to us, and also allows us to make accurate predictions and take purposeful actions. This was the beginning of what Sri Aurobindo called the subjective age, and consciousness was beginning to reflect upon itself, but it was naturally sceptical about its ability to know the truth of things, and about its understanding of itself.

I was planning to introduce some of the texts from the early period of scepticism in Greece, with which Hume was certainly familiar, at this point, but we will have to postpone that exploration for later. Plato would say that justice is an idea in itself, a self-existent idea, not something we arrive at by experience, but a universal truth of Being. We all have an innate sense of justice because it is a universal quality in things, like goodness, beauty, and truth. These ideas are eternal realities, and they do not depend at all on our accumulated impressions. Our ability to reason about such things doesn't come from the number of exposures that we have to experience; it comes from reason itself, which is a faculty of consciousness that corresponds to the fact that everything has a reason for being what it is. If everything didn't have an origin, a reason for being, and an end, then no amount of experience would tell us that it does. Reason is the *logos*, the right relation of everything to its origin. The processes that we observe don't tell us anything about the origin or the end of things. The origin and the end of things are known by consciousness because they are the substance of consciousness in things, its essence is in the relations and meanings of things. What we know from experience is only a mental blip in the spectrum of consciousness.

These are two quite different points of view. And we will notice that the empirical, sceptical point of view and the idealist, rational point of view have alternated in dominance throughout the development of human knowledge and culture, and we can experience that alternation even in our own temporal existence and consciousness. Now, however, in order to look beyond the limitations of these reasoned attempts to understand consciousness, let us hear a more personal and spiritual view expressed in a contemporary comment by the Mother, Mirra Alfassa, in which we can glimpse both poles of the alternation quite clearly, and consider the question of 'consciousness' from a spiritual point of view:

“More and more I am convinced that we have a way of receiving things and reacting to them that *creates* difficulties. There are three categories: things in themselves, our attitude toward things (those two always give trouble), and a third one where absolutely everything is viewed with respect to the Divine, in the Consciousness of the Divine – then all becomes marvelous and easy! When we live in the consciousness of the body and its ways of reacting and receiving things as they happen – oh, what a misery! When we live in the consciousness of others, their want, their need, their relationship with us – what a misery! But when we live in the Divine Presence, and the Divine does everything, sees everything, is everything – then there is Peace, time has no weight, and everything is easy. Everything is a phenomenon of consciousness. The crux of the problem is *our* human way of being conscious versus the divine way of being conscious. That’s the whole question. It’s the difference between an object and its projection. Things essentially *are*, but we see them projected as if on a screen, one after another. In that divine Consciousness, things become almost instantaneous, as it were. There is the exact sense of what we are supposed to do, what we are supposed to be, and *why* we have been created. All these terms *together*; complementing one another without any contradiction.”<sup>11</sup>

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11 The Mother, *Notebook on Evolution*, p. 255-257, [www.kheper.net/topics/Aurobindo/Notebook\\_on\\_Evolution.pdf](http://www.kheper.net/topics/Aurobindo/Notebook_on_Evolution.pdf), *Mother's Agenda*, Dec. 25, 1971.

## Lecture 2

We have now to introduce Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, or *Phenomenology of Mind*, in our exploration of the question of consciousness, which will stretch out over several weeks of lectures, as we said last week, and gradually uncover each layer of the question, like a Chinese doll, - or perhaps it's a Russian doll, or an Indian elephant, until we finally get to the point. The question of consciousness naturally brings us to phenomenology, which is why this course has been subtitled Hegel and Sri Aurobindo; they have both focused the question in a certain prominent way, which may be called 'phenomenological'. And since the first chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is titled "Consciousness", if for no other reason, we must consider Hegel in a course on the philosophy of consciousness. From Hegel to Sri Aurobindo, we can see the systematic unfolding of the human project to answer this question in a persistent and thorough way.

We have started with empiricism and scepticism, and I would like to continue that discussion a bit further before going on to phenomenology, especially because of a methodological link between them that is important for us to understand. But first let me draw your attention to an article that appeared in the *Guardian* just last week, January 21, 2015, titled 'Why Can't the World's Greatest Minds Solve the Mystery of Consciousness?' It is a long article that introduces many of the ideas and names that will come up in this course, and at the end it tells about a Russian entrepreneur who put 30 of the top scientists and philosophers, including David Chalmers and Daniel Dennett, on a yacht to Greenland for a week last summer with the challenge to try to answer the question we are asking, and they could not agree! Some even deny that there is such a thing as consciousness. So it turns out that even after millennia of great minds grappling with this question, we still do not know the answer.

Last week we heard something from David Hume that we can all probably agree with, more or less. He said that our sensations which give us an impression of things are reflected in the mind by corresponding ideas, and that every idea has a corresponding impression which is based on a sensation. To do a little experiment along these lines, imagine – our imaginations are combinations of ideas that we have gotten from impressions – imagine that you are in Crestone in Colorado where I live in America and you walk up the mountain road where you will come upon a Carmelite Chapel, and a little farther on you will find a Hindu Temple, and a little farther a Tibetan Buddhist Stupa. And now you have in your imagination a visual impression of these things that you have seen. (An image is projected on the screen of these three objects, seen below.)



You are now pretty high in the mountains overlooking an extremely vast valley, and you have a clear mental impression, and an idea, of all these things that you have seen. Is there more to it than that? Consciousness, you will recall, has been defined as the awareness of objects.

But in fact there is more. If you have spent a little time at the Buddhist Stupa at the top of the mountain, you will know that you can't go inside it, but that it has been constructed with the relics of all the 16 Karmapas and many generations of Tibetan Buddhist gurus inside it, such as Milarepa and Padmasambhava. And it has been instantiated and consecrated by the 16th and 17th Karmapas. So now you know something more about it than you can gather by just looking at it, or at the picture. When you stand beside it you feel quite small; it is a huge Stupa. And if you are somehow aware of the intention of this object you may feel a strong sense of the vibrancy and energy of these great Tibetan teachers, a presence that emanates from it which makes you feel very still. The view that you have of the valley below and the wind blowing in the prayer flags will also somehow be absorbed into the stillness that you feel.

If you have lived in the area for awhile you might also know some of the men and women associated with these structures. For example, in the Carmelite monastery there is a group of women and men who are monks living there, and you will know that it is a bi-gender, or co-ed Christian monastery where masses are performed regularly in a warm and loving atmosphere, in view of stained glass depictions of struggling campesinos. And you will perhaps be aware that inside the Hindu temple there is a beautiful white marble statue of the goddess Lakshmi and devotional songs are sung there daily. So when you see those buildings, they may have a vibrancy and meaning that go beyond just the physical visual impression that you have while looking at them. The phenomena of your awareness may include several layers of experience, and I want you to imagine the full richness of this phenomenon. You may even know from our previous course on the philosophy of religion, or from other exposures you have had, that the idea of the Trinity is something that is innate and important to each of these three religions, and that the symbolism of these structures bears evidence of this idea, which you might also identify with in some form.

Now phenomenology will tell us that all these impressions and ideas are phenomena, they are appearances in our awareness; they are not the things themselves, not the buildings, not the Holy Trinity. And the sceptical tradition in philosophy, which goes back to the ancient Greeks, will tell us that we can't know what the reality of all these things actually is; we only know our impressions and mental constructs, from the bricks and mortar to the ritual and symbolism and the human beings who hold all of these things in high esteem. But still, when we put it together, this may be called 'knowledge'. And this knowledge, greatly facilitated by that aspect or faculty of consciousness known as memory, may then also become an object of consciousness. Whether it is, or even possibly can be, true with respect to the world that it reflects and represents, is what the sceptics have always

questioned.

Sextus empiricus elaborated this philosophy in a 2<sup>nd</sup> Century commentary on the philosophy of Pyrrho, who lived at the time of Alexander the Great and traveled to India, where he is said to have sojourned with Buddhist monks and *yogis* for several years. The fundamental teaching of this school, as formulated by Sextus, says this:

**“The nature of things is unknown. Our relation to them must be one of suspension of judgment, without activity, desire, or belief,—that is, an entirely negative relation. The result is that state of having no opinion, called *εποχή* (epoche), which is followed in turn by *ἀταραξία* (ataraxia).”**

(Pyrrhonism)<sup>12</sup>

I would now like to review briefly the arguments or modes of thought (tropes), formulated by Sextus, which were meant to persuade us to suspend our judgment about things, and by doing so, to achieve happiness. For the purpose of this school of philosophy, and of most schools at that period of time, was 'happiness', which the Dalai Lama also tells us today is the aim of the practice of Buddhism. Sextus elaborated the principle and process (*dunamis*) of this school of thought like this:

**“The *ἀπομύκησις* of the Sceptical School is to place the phenomenal in opposition to the intellectual "in any way whatever," and thus through the equilibrium of the reasons and things (*ἰσοπέθειστος ἰσότητος*) opposed to each other, to reach, first the state of suspension of judgment, *εποχή*, and afterwards that of imperturbability, *ἀταραξία*. We do not use the word *ἀπομύκησις* in any unusual sense, but simply, meaning the force of the system. By the phenomenal, we understand the sensible, hence we place the intellectual in opposition to it. The phrase "in any way whatever," may refer to the word *ἀπομύκησις* in order that we may understand that word in a simple sense as we said, or it may refer to the placing the phenomenal and intellectual in opposition. For we place these in opposition to each other in a variety of ways, the phenomenal to the phenomenal, and the intellectual to the intellectual, or reciprocally, and we say "in any way whatever," in order that all methods of opposition may be included. Or "in any way whatever" may refer to the phenomenal and the intellectual, so that we need not ask how does the phenomenal appear, or how are the thoughts conceived, but that we may understand these things in a simple sense. By "reasons opposed to each other," we do not by any means understand that they deny or affirm anything, but simply that they offset each other. By equilibrium, we mean equality in regard to trustworthiness and untrustworthiness, so that of the reasons that are placed in opposition to each other, one should not excel another in trustworthiness. *εποχή* is a holding back of the opinion, in consequence of which we neither deny nor affirm anything. *ἀταραξία* is repose and tranquillity of soul.”**

The arguments that he gives may seem spurious to us today, for as I said, we know much more than was known

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12 [Excerpts are from https://www.free-ebooks.net/ebook/Sextus-Empiricus-and-Greek-scepticism](https://www.free-ebooks.net/ebook/Sextus-Empiricus-and-Greek-scepticism) by Mary Mills Patrick.

in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century or even in the 17<sup>th</sup>, because knowledge then depended strictly on what could be known by sense impressions and reasoning. They didn't have laser microscopes and telescopes and computerized memory. Let us consider just a few of the ten basic arguments of Sextus and we will get the idea.

- (1) “The first trope is based on the difference in animals, and according to this trope, different animals do not get the same ideas of the same objects through the senses. This we conclude from the different origin of the animals, and also from the difference in the constitution of their bodies. ...
- (2) The second is based upon the difference in men. For even if one assents to the hypothesis that men are more trustworthy than the irrational animals, we shall find that doubt arises as soon as we consider our own differences. For since man is said to be composed of two things, soul and body, we differ from each other in respect to both of these things; for example, as regards the body, we differ both in form and personal peculiarities. ...Now if the same things act upon different men differently, on account of the difference in the men, for this cause also suspension of the judgment may reasonably be introduced, and we may perhaps say how each object appears to us, and what its individual differences are, but we shall not be able to declare what it is as to the nature of its essence.
- (3) While, however, the Dogmatics are conceited enough to think that they should be preferred to other men in the judgment of things, we know that their claim is absurd, for they themselves form a part of the disagreement; and if they give themselves preference in this way in the judgment of phenomena, they beg the question before they begin the judgment, as they trust the judgment to themselves. Nevertheless, in order that we should reach the result of the suspension of judgment by limiting the argument to one man, one who for example they deem to be wise, let us take up the third trope. The third trope is the one based upon differences in perception. For example, paintings seem to have hollows and prominences to the sense of sight, but not to the sense of touch. ...Myrrh is the same because it delights the sense of smell, but disgusts the sense of taste. ..Wherefore we cannot say what each of these things is by nature, it is possible only to say how it appears each time.
- (4) In order to attain *epoche* by fixing the argument on each separate sense, or even by putting aside the senses altogether, we take up the fourth trope of *epoche*. This is the one based upon circumstances, and by circumstances we mean conditions that are according to nature or contrary to nature, such as waking or sleeping, the age of life, moving or keeping still, hating or loving, need or satiety, drunkenness or sobriety, predispositions, being courageous or afraid, sorrowing or rejoicing. For example, things appear different as they are according to nature or contrary to it.
- (5) The fifth trope is that based upon position, distance, and place, for according to each of these, the same things appear different, as for example, the same arcade seen from either end appears curtailed, but from the middle it looks symmetrical on every side; and the same ship appears small and motionless from afar, and large and in motion near by, and the same tower appears round from a distance, but square near by.

We can easily conclude from these brief examples of his arguments, which are stated much more elaborately in the original text, that Sextus based his scepticism on the relativity and fallibility of the senses and opinions based on sense impressions. The translator and commentator, Mary Patrick, points out that the reference to the Dogmatics in trope 3 refers to the schools of Plato and Aristotle, which held that the idea of a ship, for example, could be known quite absolutely, and independent of any variations in ships or perceptions. With regard to ethics, Sextus points out that people from different cultures have different ethical, moral, and religious practices and beliefs, which may seem perverse and revolting to people of other cultures, so it is impossible to make judgments about these things, while Plato would say that all of these variations are manifestations of an ideal of goodness, truth, and beauty which can be known behind the appearances. The commentator also suggests that the scepticism of Sextus lasted only a few centuries and was replaced by a truer and more progressive age of science that embodies more closely the ideas of Plato and Aristotle.

Hume's scepticism is obviously also based on the idea that our sense impressions and ideas do not tell us about the reality of things themselves. He was followed closely by Immanuel Kant who also stressed

the fallibility of 'subjective' human consciousness with respect to things in themselves, and he distrusted the ability of the empirical process to give us reliable knowledge, but he added the notion that our minds are somehow naturally predisposed to understand things in terms of natural laws that apply to all things. We therefore *assume* that our reasons and judgments about things are true because the categories in terms of which things are understood, such as substance, relationship, causality, space, time, and purpose, are the universal laws by which things in nature are also determined. This process of thinking and reasoning is called 'cognition' by Kant, and it corresponds more closely to Plato's and Aristotle's understanding of 'knowing', than to Hume's sceptical empiricism, and is therefore referred to as Idealism even though it is sceptical toward our ability to know things in themselves. In each of these earlier forms of philosophical thinking about consciousness we find a strong foundation for the doubt still prevalent today regarding the 'subjective' nature of consciousness and our ability to know the truth of things. But the idea of 'subjectivity' has also changed in important ways between the time of Hegel (say 1815), Sri Aurobindo (say 1915), and today, in 2015, as we shall see.

But let us return to the examples of perception and understanding that we have at hand with these three religious artifacts, just to confirm Hume's fundamental ideas about consciousness, and then to transcend them. You might recall, having heard it from me, - which would be an impression acquired through your sense of hearing, - that in the Tibetan Buddhist religion the idea of the Trinity is embodied in the Trikaya, which is the doctrine of the three bodies of the Buddha: the Dharmakaya, the Sambogakaya, and the Nirmanakaya, and this corresponds quite closely to the idea of the Holy Trinity in Christian tradition, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And these ideas in turn correspond quite closely to the Hindu conception of the Paramatman, the Atman, and the Jivatman, or the transcendent Self (Brahman), the universal Self (devas, universal principles or gods), and the individual Self (jivatma) dwelling in all the principles, forms and forces of Nature (known as *prakriti, maya, shakti*). Each of these three buildings with their steeples and spires can be said to represent these three aspects of existence, which Sri Aurobindo has referred to often as the transcendent, the universal, and the individual. You may have learned this, one way or the other, and acquired impressions that have been translated into these ideas, which are much more profound than the simple appearances of these buildings. The phenomenon of the symbol and what it represents is much more than an architectural phenomenon, or a place to go in the winter in order to get warm and sing devotional songs or listen to inspired lectures. It is a spiritual phenomenon. There are many layers of such phenomena that extend in time through our lives and through thousands of years of human experience.

We are conscious of all of that, in these phenomena, these appearances. How is it so? What is this 'consciousness' of all of that? And how is it that there are some really bright people, professors of philosophy and science for example, who say that this idea of consciousness is just an illusion? According to the empirical view, our brains are processing sensory inputs, and images, and connections between images that vibrate in various ways that mirror things like cause and effect relationships, spatial and temporal relations that we perceive, and these are retained as experiences in the brain. But the relationship that one thing has to another is just a fact of experience. There is nothing special about knowing such things, it's what humans do; these facts of consciousness are just impressions recorded in the brain, like those which our pets have when they know where the food bowl is, and when we come and go from the kitchen, and so on. These are physical processes that create images which somehow become ideas in the brain/mind complex. And then that information gets processed by our neural assemblies as the will to repeat the experiences that we find enjoyable and meaningful.

But in the philosophy of consciousness in the last two hundred years, we also find during this period of development, some bright minds that are impressed by the fact that we have an 'awareness' of all of these phenomena together, and of their meaning. That we are actually conscious of them, and we know

about these things, as they are in themselves. This knowing actually does know those realities of history and philosophical belief and their symbolic manifestations in these buildings that we have seen here and in other places. All of the accumulated impressions of that world of religion really do exist and we really know that they exist, and they are vividly present in these structures. This is called 'phenomenal consciousness'. It is the awareness of all of that qualitative content that we experience and know. It is not just an impression of objects. It is the vivid awareness that we have in our understanding of those complex realities that actually exist.

So then it begins to appear that consciousness is something more than just sensations that give rise to impressions that are translated into ideas. Through that process a relationship is established with realities, powerful realities that have influenced civilizations. These phenomena have considerable importance in the evolution of humanity, far beyond the scope of our impressions and judgments. And their importance and the effects that they have had are precisely a function of our consciousness of them. But when Hume said, in 1740, "I would fain ask those philosophers who found so much of their reasonings on the distinction of substance and accident, and imagine we have clear ideas of each, whether the idea of substance be derived from the impressions of sensations or reflection?", he was expressing his firm disbelief that any of these things that we think we know actually do exist in themselves. And he based this idea on scepticism regarding sense impressions: "If it be conveyed by our senses, I ask which of them and after what manner? If it be perceived by the eyes, then it must be a colour; if by the ears, a sound; if by the palate, a taste; and so of the other senses. But I believe none will assert, that substance is either a colour, or sound, or a taste. The idea of substance must therefore be derived from an impression of reflection, if it really exist. But the impressions of reflection resolve themselves into our passions and emotions, none of which can possibly represent a substance. We have therefore no idea of substance, distinct from that of a collection of particular qualities, nor have we any other meaning when we either talk or reason concerning it."<sup>13</sup>

Hume had a real doubt about the existence of substance and accident, or of the constant reality of an object that goes through various changes and moments of existence while retaining its identity. So we have two views of reality: one says that these things (temple, chapel, stupa) really do exist, and that they are substantial expressions of the reality of religious belief which has varying forms and expressions in different religious traditions. Religious belief is a substantial, universal reality of human civilization and culture, which has led to the general betterment of humanity, and these are some of its many temporal expressions. On the other hand, from the sceptical point of view, what we see and believe about these appearances is entirely a result of sensory impressions, followed by our passions and emotions, which are subjective, and therefore they can't help us to know the truth of these things themselves. When we rise above our passions and emotions, what we have is a pure idea about these things and nothing more. This of course has important implications for society, and for human behavior as a whole, as we have said before. It may allow us to treat everything with utter detachment, which may in turn lead to the suspension of judgment and peace of mind; and on the other hand it may encourage us to treat nature, and human beings who have other beliefs and cultures, with ruthless abandon and utter disregard for their innate meaning and value, which in the 1700s is exactly what the 'empirical' civilization tended to do. This kind of empirical thinking has made it possible for science to theorize, analyze and categorize all sorts of things that are observed, without thinking that those things themselves exist as such and, for example, might have feelings, or exist for a purpose. Teleological thinking is not part of this scientific perspective. As far as we know, a plant or an animal might as well be a machine. Hume says, also, with respect to continuous existence, that we have no idea about the continuous existence of anything. Each time we see something we may believe that it has a continued

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13 Hume, *op. cit.*

existence but according to him we can't know that, we can only associate our different impressions. This kind of thinking has characterized quite a lot of thought and action from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century to the present, and it still does so, especially in science.

Those who don't think this way are usually known as idealists and phenomenologists. So how would the phenomenologist think about these things. I would like for us to read some of the arguments in this other 800 page tome, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, but for now let me just summarize some of the fundamental moves in Hegel's thinking. He would say, based upon our conscious awareness of that object, that the object exists. That object is a Catholic Chapel, and that one is a Hindu Temple, and the other is a Buddhist Stupa. And those are significant world religions, whether we see them in front of us or not. About half of the people who think philosophically, think like this. Of course a large majority of people do not think at all. So people like Hegel refer to those other people as "naive". Most people are naïve; they just accept everything as whatever they feel it is, and they don't ask the question whether it has a substantial existence or not, or whether their evaluation is true or not, or whether something has a purpose. But the philosophy of consciousness is a study of people who do think. And they think about these kinds of things. Philosophers think about these questions. Hegel, in particular, defined a methodology for thinking about what things are.

It goes something like this: if we say 'this' cross or this spire, it implies others. It belongs to a group, and that group is much larger than these three; it includes the whole world of symbolic crosses and spires. Every one of those is another one of the 'this' universal category. So the person who thinks, knows much more when she sees one temple spire than just that visual impression of an immediate object. Each one of these is a particular thing with an individual quality, but altogether they belong to a universal presence on the earth of physical symbols that have had tremendous importance to masses of humanity and numerous civilizations. It is this 'universal' that we in fact 'know' when we see a particular object that has those qualities; we do not know the brass and its weight and length, and molecular content and age and the perpendicular angles of the thing on the top of the chapel, and it wouldn't matter if we did. The object is the expression of an idea, and that is the Reality. Human beings actually have the capacity of being conscious of a phenomenon and of its essence, as we shall hear often from Sri Aurobindo: *What our mind sees as contraries may be to the infinite consciousness not contraries but complementaries: essence and phenomenon of the essence are complementary to each other, not contradictory,—the phenomenon manifests the essence; the finite is a circumstance and not a contradiction of the infinite; the individual is a self-expression of the universal and the transcendent—*. When we are conscious of something, we are not just reflecting upon the impressions of our senses. And when we exercise this faculty of consciousness in this way, we grasp a meaning with respect to such objects that is much vaster and more significant than anything we can experience through our senses. The consciousness of universals goes far beyond the range of our sensory impressions and our reflections on the images they create.

That kind of knowing of universal truths has to be accounted for by a philosophy of consciousness. We probably don't doubt that we know universal truths and that they are powerful realities. But in order to get to that point we have also to surmount our passions and emotions, and even our primary and secondary ideas. Therefore Hegel and phenomenology in general recognize the importance of the *epoche*, and they understand perfectly well the basis for the sceptic's doubt about the reliability of sensory impressions. But by stepping back from our momentary impressions and our opinions and beliefs, we do not necessarily negate knowledge and existence. On the contrary, we establish a more comprehensive certainty about the existence and meaning of the things themselves. Hegel would reflect that when we put together all of the incremental differences, which in a sense negate each other, and arrive at a unity, that unity is not a sum of those differences. It is a unity that negates the particulars but

which also belongs to a vast universal field of other entities. And all of this 'being other than' becomes a larger unity and a more complete reality. And this Hegel calls 'understanding', and it is arrived at by a methodology known to scepticism as *epoche*, but instead of concluding that nothing is known, it arrives at universal truths.

So we have taken three steps: from the impressions to the universals, and by putting the universals together we arrive at a larger unity, which we can't directly perceive but which we know is the whole, - in this case the world of symbolic religious truth. And we know that it exists. This is known as phenomenal consciousness. Phenomena are appearances, plain and simple, something that appears to consciousness. And in the phenomena that we perhaps just glimpsed, behind the immediate appearances of things, there is a universal being of religious symbolism whose various artifacts indicate the possibility of rising above falsehood and evil, and realizing absolute divine being, which I think we can agree is an existing belief, expressed through various symbols and doctrines. So it is more than a phenomenon; it is also the being that is present in things. Now Hegel takes a further step from this 'understanding' and states that this being has no other unity than the unity it has for consciousness. But it has that unity for consciousness because the unity exists. And it exists because of all the forces in time and space that constitute it. Hegel made this incredible move in the philosophy of consciousness by realizing that consciousness is identical with all the forces of existence as well. All the forces resolve themselves into the consciousness which knows them and which they express. And the individual consciousness can embrace that universal consciousness, which is one with itself and the truth of the things that embody it. When the human being embraces the universal truth in a substantive and dynamic way, it is the experience of the Absolute, the Reality. The absolute of consciousness is also the absolute of everything that exists as individual particular forces, processes, and things, and as their universal being. Consciousness and World are One Being.<sup>14</sup>

This is Hegel's philosophy of negation. Each individual object or packet of energy and expression of quality negates the other, for example the arch is not a spire, the spire is not a cross, and yet each is a symbol of transcendence; each form is necessary to its opposite, for example a place of worship grows out of the need for or lack of such a place; each difference is necessary to the identity and completeness of the other. Again, for example, the warm spacious hall below the spire where people gather is necessary to the meaning of the spire above; each thing is understood by consciousness to be completed by its 'other', and no individual particular is important in itself except as an expression of the larger whole of which it is an instance. The whole field of relationships among entities is a field of force, which by negating the separateness or incremental differences and deficiencies between individual entities, we come to know their absolute unity through the elevation of consciousness. By his enormous effort of philosophical contemplation, Hegel arrived at the point, which is also the goal of a *yogic* or spiritual transformation of consciousness, where one can rise from the everyday naïve world view to consciousness of the unity of the whole in each of its parts. And so, as the Mother could say, in the last years of her 'sayings': "When you are conscious of the whole world at the same time, then you can be conscious of the Divine." But it takes an effort of negation, the phenomenological *epoche*, the negation of attachment to falsehoods, partial truths, limited perceptions, and conditioned opinions and beliefs. *Epoche* means suspending judgment, bracketing everything you know about science and philosophy, and stepping back into absolute consciousness, which is Spirit.

This is also the principle and process expressed by Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine*, a hundred years

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14 Sri Aurobindo has expressed this level of consciousness, with respect to the symbolism of transcendence that has been discussed, in a most remarkable way in a canto of *Savitri*, which is also an explanation of the existence and purpose of "consciousness" itself. See Supplement 1.

after Hegel, when he wrote: “It is necessary to distinguish between the essential Reality, the phenomenal reality dependent upon it and arising out of it, and the restricted and often misleading experience or notion of either that is created by our sense-experience and our reason.”<sup>15</sup> The method arrived at by both scepticism and idealism for achieving this is known in phenomenology as *epoche*.

### Lecture 3

Hegel arrives at absolute knowledge by a process of negation, as we heard in the last lecture, and he began where the thought of the philosophers of that period was concentrated, on the sceptical philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, and Hume. That school of philosophy tried to determine what consciousness is on the basis of perception. It generally does not recognize the existence of substances; everything that is known is subjectively constructed by the mind on the basis of sense perceptions. Shortly after that Kant, who followed that movement, articulated in great detail the theory that mind has innate structures that enable it to cognize impressions according to necessary universal categories. And his thinking was followed by Hegel and his successors who brought about a major reversal of this way of thinking about consciousness. They recovered the classical Greek idea that it is possible to know the essential nature of things themselves. So we may be able to see in this progression a gradual development in the philosophy of consciousness from scepticism to idealism to phenomenology, like a wave that finally crests with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of Truth-Consciousness, as I hope we will see more clearly as we go forward.

Hegel explains that we negate the particular because we are conscious of its membership in the universal. Nothing has real meaning in itself, but only as part of a universal principle that it expresses. If that were not the case, each thing that we experience would just vanish immediately and there would be no coherence in existence. There is coherence because everything that exists and everything that happens is related to a purpose for which it endures; it is for the sake of something. By virtue of that, everything is related to everything else. But we can't know this without thinking about our experience, and by thinking we elevate our consciousness from mere impressions and notions, to an understanding of the relationships and meaning of things. We only need to be aware of the biosphere to know that

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15 Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (2005 ed.), p. 489

everything is related. But we would not know such things without thinking about them. The insects in the rainforest do not tell us that they are related to everything in their environment, but they are, and we know it.

Hegel contemplated this kind of knowing very deeply and came to the conclusion that consciousness knows universals. Universals don't exist apart from consciousness; they are immaterial and beyond sense perception. We could imagine that universals exist in their particulars, and in fact they do, and philosophy has recognized this aspect of existence since Aristotle interpreted Plato. In this sense universal principles have an ontological existence through the particulars that express them. The *eidōs*, the idea or form, is a universal, and all of the particulars that embody it participate to some extent in that universal. This is the fundamental principle of Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics. But with Hegel's philosophy the emphasis begins to fall on the ontological existence of universals themselves, which is much closer to Plato's original meaning of the Ideas. The human mind in some way perceives both the individuals and the universals, and the universals belong to its consciousness in a special way. Hegel takes a third step by understanding that the universals, in belonging to consciousness, constitute the essence or self of consciousness, which is also the essence or self of things. There is a union whereby consciousness realizes itself as the ground of universals, and experiences itself in those universals, such that understanding amounts to knowing the essence of things as such, by virtue of their essences being present in consciousness. It is Spirit then that is achieved by consciousness in its process of perception, understanding, and elevation to a higher level of unity with the known. And it is the Origin of the universal that is experienced through its forces and forms in the world. Here we find in Hegel evidence of the importance of the idea of the Trinity in his thought.

As we have seen in our previous discussions, for example,<sup>16</sup> when we know various vehicles that we observe on the street, such as the Toyota SUV, the Mahindra SUV, and the Tata SUV, we have clear visual impressions of their identities and differences, and we know that all are members of a vast world of vehicles that serve the purpose of transportation. We also know that this purpose in turn is an expression of the principle of power which, by linking human beings all over the earth, serves their survival and advance, while also, at the same time, constituting a power of destruction that may threaten the survival of the species. We don't just represent this in an empty, abstract way, but we are actually conscious of that greater, more complex reality, through its phenomena. And that larger universal phenomenon of Power is known by us because it is a reality. But it is not a reality that anyone can perceive with their senses. And it is not just a mathematical equation in which we add up various particulars that equal a unity of expenditures. It actually is a unity of being, and there are many other similar power complexes in the biosphere and the world that are integrated in larger universal unities. The highest unity that we can become conscious of is the unity of the one supreme spiritual being of Power that is expressed through all the multitude of levels and beings of the world. There is a spiritual consciousness of that original unity of being which is Absolute and Divine.

Now, we are going to move beyond this understanding that we have reached of the phenomenology of Hegel. In the train of Hegel's philosophy in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century a number of inspired minds followed, and then in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Husserl and Heidegger appeared and carried phenomenological thinking a step further, which is where we are now going. Heidegger is perhaps the foremost commentator on Hegel's philosophy. He published *Being and Time* in 1927, followed the next year by *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, and two years later he wrote *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, and this is just a fraction of his work that might be considered commentaries on Hegel. In a similar way, much of the work of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher Jacques Derrida is a commentary on Heidegger, and

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16 Omitted from the transcribed version of the previous lecture.

therefore, indirectly a commentary on Hegel, which I mention simply to indicate the powerful influence that this way of thinking has had. Heidegger and Derrida are among the most influential philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

But we might reflect that what we have heard from Hegel is a description of how consciousness works based upon 'thinking', and what we have heard from the sceptics and empiricists is a description of how consciousness works based upon 'sensory impressions'. Have these theories come close to answering the question, What is Consciousness? Or are they just descriptions of some of the ways in which consciousness works on its objects? Heidegger raises the question, How is it that the mind 'knows' things in the first place? We have agreed that consciousness is the awareness of objects. And Hegel tells us that we can also know the essence of those objects. By reflecting abstractly on the phenomenon we can get to its inner meaning or essence. We did that, for example, with transportation. If we think about the principle of transportation we realize that this is what vehicles exist for. This is their inner meaning. And it has a quite prominent place in the history of civilization because of an inner will to power that has never manifested in such a tremendous way before. It has made the entire globe accessible to everyone, and it has entailed the massive exploitation of the earth's natural resources.

But then, Heidegger asks how consciousness realizes that it is not those objects, while at the same time knowing them. There is a difference. Consciousness knows those objects *and* their essences, and also knows there is a difference, called the ontological difference, between the things that we know with our senses and the universals in which the things participate, and between these objects and the consciousness that knows them, which we know by abstract reflection and reasoning, by 'thinking'. What is the relationship between consciousness (or 'thinking' and 'knowing', because Heidegger generally prefers not to use the word 'consciousness') and the things, the objects known, whether they be universals or particulars? (As some of you will know, the Buddhists have solved this problem by saying there is no difference between knowing and known. Everything is 'mind'. And there have also been some Western philosophers who have reached this conclusion, as we will see later.)

But for Heidegger the question goes back to distinctions that were made by the 'scholastics' of the middle ages in Europe when the writings of Aristotle and Plato were being rediscovered and interpreted by the Christian philosophers. They recovered the Aristotelian idea that the forms or essences of things are known by the mind because the mind is of the same immaterial substance as those universal essences. Therefore, there is an innate, natural faculty of mind that can know the forms things, just as those forms cause the things to be what they are. The immaterial species or forms of things are somehow extracted from the matter of things by the mind which is also of that immaterial nature. This was the thinking that preceded modern thinking about consciousness, beginning with Descartes and Hume. Hume said there are no substances or souls or spirits. We just have sensory impressions from which we construct the meaning of things. Aristotle taught the scholastics, however, that the soul of things is the principle of intelligence in them which makes them what they are and which we share with things. And of course Sri Aurobindo was quite familiar with this way of thinking as a result of being a scholar of ancient Greek, as was Heidegger. Heidegger, then, came up with a unique approach to this question, which distinguishes him in the field of thinking about consciousness.

I would like to read a passage which marks the transition in Heidegger, along this road of thinking about consciousness, from phenomenology to fundamental ontology. Fundamental ontology means that these essences actually exist in things and we actually know them directly. It is not merely a matter of extracting notions about things. We are *dasein*, we are there in the world with things, and being there in the world we share with everything in the world what is there in it, itself. We are able to know things because it is our nature, as beings in the world, to know the being of beings, to know things essentially,

and to know the truth of them. There are no boundaries between thinking, knowing and being. So here, in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Heidegger opens the door to this possibility, and he explores it in great detail through this and other volumes of philosophical writing. He says:

“For Hegel the thing in itself is truly accessible...” Now, if we read that big volume of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, he also says this many times, but in a very complex language in which he is constantly explaining why and how he thinks that way. But here is the thing as stated by Heidegger. “...the thing in itself is truly accessible, but only when we are serious about absolute knowledge. But when the thing in itself is the object of *absolute* knowledge, then this knowledge can no longer be that which stands over *against* us, that which by itself no longer stands *over against* absolute knowledge as *alien* or *other*. In such a case this knowledge would not be absolute. It would have no power at all over its known, but would be relative... If the thing in itself is absolutely known and knowable, then it loses its oppositional character, becomes truly *in itself*, having the character of an *itself* or of a for-itself. It defines itself as belonging to a self, which knows itself as itself. What we who know absolutely know as the thing in itself is what *we ourselves* are, but always as those who know absolutely. ...What we know in the thing in itself is our *spirit*.”<sup>17</sup>

If we are just in the everyday naïve consciousness, then we don't know things themselves. We know our sensations and impressions. But if we are serious about absolute knowledge, then we can know the truth of things themselves. This is radical subjectivity. It is not the subjectivity of Kant and Hume, but the subjectivity of everything in itself. It is the emergence of the thing itself in consciousness. “Thus, if the supersensible is to be seen, we must ourselves go there, as we who know absolutely. We ourselves must go there, not only so that the access to the supersensible is really accomplished and so that seeing is accomplished in truth and absolutely, but also so that there is something there – something of ourselves as those who know absolutely – where we gaze knowingly. For only in this way is there the absolutely knowable – if the thing in itself is indeed absolutely knowable. In this sense Hegel emphasizes at the conclusion of the entire Section A, which deals with consciousness: 'It is manifest that behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the interior of things there is nothing to be seen unless we go behind it ourselves, as much so that we may see as that there be something behind there which can be seen.' If the term “we” is grasped simply as a pronoun which indicates the readers who happen to come across the work..., then everything becomes totally absurd. Put the other way, it is crucial that this “we”, its meaning, and its role, be meditated upon from the first sentence of the work and repeatedly thereafter.”<sup>18</sup>

We can know absolutely the interior of things themselves, as spirit. Now the question is, How is it so? Is it true? Can we demonstrate that it is true? Do we think that it is true? According to Hegel, spirit is the being of things. As in Hegel's and Sri Aurobindo's view, it is spirit that becomes material things. We have a recovery here by Heidegger, and by Husserl before him, of the *epoche*, the negation insisted upon by Hegel, the phenomenological reduction. It is necessary to negate appearances and pre-conceived notions, and to restore a direct consciousness of being there with the thing itself. We have to become conscious of the spiritual being of things, the soul. We do not accept the appearance of things as what things are. Through the appearance of things we experience the things themselves, first of all as participants in a universal, along with many other participants, until eventually we arrive at an understanding of the essence of things, which is an understanding of their being and spirit.

The idea of intentionality is introduced at this point by Heidegger, as an essential aspect of this process

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17 Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (1988/1994), p. 110.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 111. By this he implies that “we” refers to philosophers who make the effort to know absolutely.

of consciousness. It is a term defined by the medieval philosophers as the process whereby the species, form or soul of things comes into our consciousness. The intention of something to be what it is communicates itself through its appearance to consciousness. Its intention to be what it is is what we know and without that intention it would be nothing. Heidegger develops the idea of intentionality somewhat differently and to a greater extent. His fundamental notion of being a human being is that we comport ourselves toward things naturally with the intention to know them, and to know them in such a way that we know that for which they exist; we know the purpose of the things that we know. We are also aware of ourselves as beings who know things for the sake of that for which they exist. We are in a relationship with things in such a way that allows us to know that for which they exist and to care about their being. Heidegger calls this intentionality. And he says, most significantly, that the essential thing about human beings, our nature, is that we care about everything that we know. Our knowing is always an inherent grasp of things themselves in terms of their purpose, and meaning. We don't just know something as an object. We know the wooden object there as a chair which is for the purpose of sitting. If it is broken we want to fix it for that purpose. We know the State as a collectivity of human beings that exists for the mutual benefit of its members. We know the tree as a living thing that grows and produces leaves and flowers and fruit that nourish and stabilize the biosphere. We know the art of music as the expression of feelings and visions that we perceive through hearing in an essential way that is other than the sound of the notes. Because these things that we receive from objects are in fact what things are, their meaning, their intention. We should note that this notion of receiving knowledge of things directly was also expressed in early Sanskrit philosophical texts by the term *prakamya*, and it is similar to the classical Greek idea of *gnosis*.

In an early writing, only recently translated, Heidegger developed the ideas of intuition and expression as different poles of intentionality in an entirely Hegelian manner. Everything is an expression of its essential nature, and human consciousness is naturally inclined to intuitively grasp that which is expressed by things, and so the distinction gets blurred between subjectivity and objectivity, a theme that Heidegger will pursue for many years. So, he writes in 1920, "Only the thinking of the Origin itself can discover itself, precisely in that it becomes aware of the entire content of consciousness as generated from the origin. ...This is by no means some psychological idealism. Considered from the side of the subject, subjectivity appears as the basis of objectivity, provided that the latter constitutes itself in subjectivity. But considered logically, subjectivity is rather to be explained as the opposite side of objectification, of determination, of consciousness, because the latter is determination, positing in unity. This relational unity and primal unity is the primal lived experience. It is therefore neither subjective nor objective idealism, but idealism of the origin or absolute idealism if one attaches importance to terms. ...Philosophy has as its goal this absolute concretion of the relation of consciousness in which every singularization is superseded and only has a sense as singularization of a higher and finally ultimate unity which is that of the absolute and certain knowing, of self-knowing."<sup>19</sup>

And again, in 1927, in his major sequel to *Being and Time*, he wrote more explicitly, and yet enigmatically, of this fundamental problem of consciousness: "The statement that the comportments of the *dasein* are intentional, means that the mode of being of our own self, the *dasein*, is essentially such that this being, so far as it is, is always already dwelling with the extant. ....It follows that... intentionality is neither objective nor subjective in the usual sense, although it is certainly both, but in a much more original sense, since intentionality, as belonging to the Dasein's existence, makes it possible that this being, the Dasein, comports existentially toward the extant."<sup>20</sup> And this is indeed the basic problem of phenomenology with which, along with Hegel and Heidegger, we may hope to achieve

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19 Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression* (2010) p. 94,105.

20 Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1975), p. 64-65.

some closure in this study.

The whole world in which we are, we are dwelling *with*. And the intention that we have is not something belonging to me or you. It is the consciousness field in which all of us know similarly what we know, because it is there. It is not that each of us is a separate little intellect analyzing and comparing what we know with other little intellects so we can agree on what we know about what is there. That is the scientific method for achieving certainty of some kind. But that is not how consciousness basically functions and it is not what we are. We are “spirit” that manifests itself in the world through all the universals; that universal light that manifests itself in the particulars, is in everything just as it is in us, and another name for it is – Consciousness. It is a principle of existence.

“The intentional constitution of the *dasein's* comportment is precisely the ontological condition of the possibility of every and any transcendence. Transcendence, transcending, belongs to the essential nature of the being that exists as intentional, that is, exists in the manner of dwelling among the extant. Intentionality is the *ratio cognoscendi* of transcendence.”<sup>21</sup>

Transcendence means to go beyond oneself: to go beyond the ego and to be conscious of the world, is the meaning of transcendence here. One thing about consciousness that we have to recognize is that consciousness is always consciousness of something. Consciousness of the chair is a form of transcendence. Consciousness of the power in transportation for achieving the purpose of control of space is another form of transcendence, toward the universal. Consciousness of the spiritual nature in all things that enables us to know them is a form of transcendence. Consciousness of the Absolute itself as the unconditioned absolute Spirit is consciousness of that reality itself. There is an infinite number of levels of the operation of consciousness. The question then is, What is consciousness? The answer here is that the consciousness of the human being is that being's innate intentional comportment toward things that enables it to be there with the extant as what is immediately known, which is the being of things.

Now, since to complete this necessarily brief exploration of Heidegger's interpretation of Hegel's philosophy will take another session, I would like to divert the discussion momentarily to concentrate for a moment on the 'Vedic' or 'classical' conception and mythology, something that both Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo frequently do. They often refer back to the ancient traditions of thought. And it appears to me that, in his long essay on the temporality of consciousness that we will soon explore in some detail, this way of thinking of Heidegger is based on the Greek idea of the Logos. The *logos*, which is translated variously as '*reason*', '*proportionality*', '*Word*', is the spirit in everything that causes it to be what it is, and also makes it possible for the mind to know what it is, which is a Platonic idea. Heidegger says, in a quite luminous passage in his '*Basic Problems*',

“In Hegel, philosophy is in a certain sense thought through to its end. He was completely in the right when he himself expressed this consciousness, but there exists just as much the legitimate demand to start anew, to understand the finiteness of the Hegelian system, and to see that Hegel himself has come to an end with philosophy because he moves in the circle of philosophical problems. This circling in the circle forbids him to move back to the center of the circle and to revise it from the ground up. It is not necessary to seek another circle beyond the circle. Hegel saw everything that is possible. But the question is whether he saw it from the radical center of philosophy; whether he exhausted all of the possibilities of the beginning so as to say that he is at the end. No extensive demonstration is needed to make clear how immediately, in our attempt to get beyond being to the light from which and in which it

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21 Ibid, p. 65

itself comes, into the brightness of an understanding, we are moving within one of Plato's fundamental problems. ...

“At the end of the sixth book of the Republic, ... Plato gives a division of the different realms of beings, with particular regard to the possible modes of access to them. He distinguishes the two realms of the *horaton* and the *noeton*: things visible to the eyes, and things thinkable. The visible is that which is unveiled by sense; the thinkable that which understanding or reason perceives. For seeing with the eyes, there is required not only eyes, and not only the being that is seen, but a third, *phos*, light, or more precisely the sun, *helios*. The eye can unveil only in the light. All unveiling requires an antecedent illumining. The eye must be *helioeides*. Goetha translates this by *sonnenhaft*, like the sun. The eye sees only in the light of something. Correspondingly, all non-sensible cognition – all the sciences and in particular all philosophical knowledge – can unveil Being only if it has Being's specific illumination – if the *noeisthai* also gains its own specific *phos*, its light. What sunlight is for sensuous vision, the *idea tou agathou*, the idea of the good, is for scientific thinking, and in particular for philosophical knowledge. At first this sounds obscure and unintelligible; how should the idea of the good have a function for knowledge corresponding to that which the light of the sun has for sense perception? As sensible cognition is *helioeides*, so correspondingly all *gignoskein*, all cognition is *agathoiedes*, determined by the idea of the *agathon*. We have no expression for 'determined by the good' which would correspond to the expression 'sunlike'. But the correspondence goes even further. ... 'You will, I believe, also say the sun furnishes to the seen not only the possibility of being seen, but gives to the seen, as beings, also becoming, growth, and nurture, without itself being a becoming.' This extended determination is correspondingly applied to knowledge. Plato says, 'So then you must also say that the known, not only receives its being known from 'a good', but also it has from thence *that* it is, and *what* it is, in such a way indeed that 'the good' is not itself the being-how and the being-what, but even outstrips 'being' in dignity and power.' That which illuminates the knowledge of beings (positive science) and the knowledge of being (philosophical knowledge) as unveiling, lies even beyond being. Only if we stand in this light do we cognize beings and understand Being. The understanding of being is rooted in the projection of an *epekeina tes ousias*, a radiance of being. Plato thus comes upon something that he describes as 'outstripping being'. This has the function of light, of illumination, for all unveiling of beings, or in this case illumination for the understanding of being itself.”<sup>22</sup>

Illumination for the understanding of being itself comes from the *idea tou agathou*, the idea of the good. The idea of the good in Platonic philosophy corresponds to what Sri Aurobindo calls in *Savitri* the Ray. It is a ray of the Supramental Sun, Surya, the god of Truth, and Savitri is his daughter, an emanation that illuminates the mind on a higher plane than the rational plane of consciousness, and reveals to the mind through inspired speech the essential truth of things. The Supermind, the Supreme Truth-Force beyond mind and beyond the gods, also gives to everything its being, its force to be, and its quality of being what it is. That is the Vedic conception as we have heard explained in the course that runs parallel to this one, based on Sri Aurobindo's translations and commentaries.

In the same book referred to by Heidegger, the Republic, Plato says that the Good empowers beings to be what they are, and it empowers knowing to know what they are. So the Good is this field in which human consciousness naturally unveils the truth of things, and the purposes for which they exist. But how this is possible is explained in the ancient texts of India and Greece by cosmic powers of creativity and knowledge, personified as universal beings and gods, by the absolute Good and Truth, beyond world and cosmos, which pervades and supports everything in time and space, the plane of real universals.

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22 Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1982), p. 282-284

The topic which follows in Heidegger's discourse is 'temporality', the theme of *Being and Time*, with which he was preoccupied throughout his career. And what does time have to do with this conception of consciousness? Everything becomes what it is only because of time.<sup>23</sup> Sri Aurobindo said that time was the will of the Divine. Everything has a duration (force) and is able to become what it is in relation to itself and everything else that becomes, because of Time. Heidegger will demonstrate that we are aware of time transcendently. If we think about what has been, what is now, and what will be, the 'has been' represents itself in some way in what is now; the now is not very different from what has been; and it prefigures all of that which is coming in the future. But in our knowing and our being it is always the now. And yet the now of consciousness also contains the what was then, and the what is to be. So, our consciousness stands outside of time while knowing the temporal becoming of what things are. He calls it *ekstatic* being, standing out of and beyond while being in the now.

We know time as the progressive unfolding of what is anticipated, on the basis of what has already been, and what is possible. Everything has its then, and now, and to be; its becoming is a continuum, a growth and change and passing away, an awareness of the loss of what was, in the moving beyond of time, an absence, a trace. And in that sense, everything obeys the laws of temporality. And consciousness is possible only because of the continuity of this 'has been', 'is now', and 'will be', in the flow of everything that we experience. Consciousness is therefore 'temporality', in the sense that it stands outside time while being in the continuum, aware of the temporal nature of things. Temporality is the process of everything becoming what it is, and of human consciousness being aware of that becoming. Consciousness *is* therefore the temporality of things, according to Heidegger. Awareness of the three times enables us to know what something essentially is, and it is necessary for the something to become what it is, because Being is temporal. Spirit has chosen time as its way of being, and this consciousness is only possible because of its temporality. Everything we know, we know temporally. This answer to the question of consciousness, posed by Heidegger's philosophy, is that it is the essence of the human being, whose existence is intentionally directed to knowing the being of things through the horizon of time.

The connection with mythological thinking is that the Ray of Illumination enables the seer to know the origin and end of things. It is an illumination that is possible because of the nature of time. Spirit, which is timeless, has chosen to manifest itself in time. It is possible to know what things are as their permanence or identity, when everything in fact is constantly changing, because of temporality. The duration which is required for something to become what it is, is what consciousness knows, because consciousness is that temporality of things. Consciousness-force is the dynamic unity and coherence of things in their temporal becoming. And this is also the Vedic conception of existence. It is essentially consciousness-force; *chit-shakti* is the being of things.

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23 Earlier we mentioned that intentionality is the mode of knowing things in terms of their meaning and purpose, and as such, transcends the immediate appearance of things. In Heidegger's philosophy, time is intimately connected with this concept of knowing the Being of things. Time as such will not be explored extensively here, but I will endeavor to summarize the importance given to the subject by Heidegger. According to a book by Jimena Canales titled *The Physicist & the Philosopher* (2015), which gives a detailed account of the debate between Bergson and Einstein on the nature of Time, for Bergson time is the subjective duration and intensity of things; for Einstein it is the objective scientific measurement of relative rates of change; and for Heidegger it is a more originary principle of the Being of beings and its knowability as such.

## Lecture 4

At this point, we could possibly be ready to reach an understanding that makes the answer to our question, What is Consciousness?, reachable. It should now become clear how the question could be answered according to the perspectives that Hegel and Sri Aurobindo have created for us, which I will approach in this lecture via Heidegger to some extent. But first I would like for us to gaze out the window, while it is still light, and literally just gaze out the window at the trees, hearing the birds, remembering their parliament of chatter, but basically just gazing at what is there. ...

So, what is consciousness really? The phenomenological method known as *epoche* tells us to suspend all judgment. And furthermore, to deny ourselves completely and absolutely any notion of validity. Scientific notions for example should be avoided, negated. Any reliance on philosophy or mythology or science, in order to answer the question phenomenologically, should be avoided. We have already discussed at length various notions of what consciousness is, and we know that it is the awareness of objects. And in fact, when we gaze out the window we are simply aware of what is there, in the garden. We don't need to analyze or understand or name anything. We could enumerate the things and represent them in many ways. But, initially, primordially, pre-cognitively, we are simply aware of what is there. And it is *there*. It's not in our mind or our brain; it's not an impression we are holding in the synapses of our nervous system. We are actually aware of that, there. And we are actually there being aware of it, because we are, in a sense, there, with our awareness. And this is the case all the time. But we impose upon that awareness, all the time, feelings and judgments and opinions and constructs. The idea of phenomenology is to not do that, to step back and allow being there just to be there, for us and for itself.

Then, Heidegger asks the question, “What is the ontological condition for that to be possible?”. *Ontology* means the study of what is; not what we think or how we think about what is, but what is. It is *epistemology* that studies what and how we know. With respect to Vedic hymns, for example, and the planes of the gods that are invoked, one could take this same point of view, if one were so fortunate. Those universal powers with god's names are also there. So nothing is excluded from the phenomenological method. We can simply be there with what is, at all times - with human behavior, with nature, with the problems that infest our intelligence, with our judgments, with internal and external phenomena that are the presences and appearances of things, and with universal principles. Most of the things we are aware of are present in physical space. But if we are psychologists, we could be present with the emotional experiences and complexes that people have. Then the phenomenological approach would be about not imposing on those experiences a lot of preconceived Freudian or Jungian ideas. And one practice that has developed from this position is to respond authentically to the experiences, as if they were ours. But that is not our concern right now. Our concern is with the philosophical understanding of consciousness, to be present with that.

This concern has been present, in a prominent way, as we have seen, especially since about 1600; more than ever before, the 'modern period' was preoccupied with this question of consciousness. So we have the philosophies of Descartes, Hume, Kant, and so on up to Hegel, who was perhaps the pinnacle of that movement, because he wrote the huge volume titled *The Phenomenology of Mind*, which the translator, about halfway along, comments should be translated *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. So there is a transition. And yet, the first section is titled 'Consciousness'. And what Hegel has told us is that what we refer to as consciousness is to a large extent 'self-consciousness'. We collect the impressions that the empiricists speak about and we contemplate them in the form of ideas. Then we elevate those ideas to the level of understanding, whereby we realize that this takes place in the process of reflection itself. The abstract conception of things is in our consciousness. This is the first part of Hegel's phenomenology. He describes how this happens. And like all the philosophers of the modern period, his descriptions are quite accurate, although each philosopher has a unique point of view and formulation. Then, we should perhaps also recall Heidegger's comment that one should not overlook Hegel's emphasis on the Trinity. In fact, the last sections of his book are largely focused on the idea of the Trinity and on Spirit. And we should also recall that in the philosophy of religion we have explained that the Trinity in Christianity, as well as in other religions, often refers to the Transcendent, Absolute Spirit, the Universal Spirit, and the Individual soul of things, as a threefold Unity. The realization of the unity of this three-fold essence of things, in Hegel and in the various religious traditions, entails a process of negation. It is necessary to negate concepts, judgments, feelings, personality, ego, in order to perceive the reality of the three-fold spirit, and this is the phenomenological idea of the *epoche*, the process of stepping back from our personal opinions, attachments, judgments and preconceptions into the still Self (of the individual) where it is possible to be simply conscious of self, and everything, as universal self, universal nature, universal life, etc. In the religious traditions it has been generally recognized that such an *epoche* or negation of the ego-mind is necessary in order to be conscious of the spiritual reality of everything – the transcendent, the universal, and the individual spirit.

I would like for us to hear a passage from the latter part of his *Phenomenology* in which Hegel reaches a kind of culmination of his meditation on consciousness, with the idea of the Absolute Spirit as the force of self-manifestation in the universal and individual forms of existence. And here we see also a development that is important in the philosophy of consciousness, which is evident in others of this period as well: Schiller, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and the later phenomenology in general – the need to associate consciousness and force. The things that we experience are at the same time forces as well as objects of consciousness. He says: “Here, then, we find as a fact of consciousness, or

the general form in which Being is aware of Being – the shape which Being adopts – to be identical with its self-consciousness. This shape is itself a self-consciousness; it is thus at the same time an existent object, and this existence, or being, possesses equally directly the significance of pure thought, of Absolute Being. The Absolute Being existing as a concrete actual self-consciousness, seems to have descended from its eternal pure simplicity; but in fact it has, in so doing, attained for the first time its highest nature, its supreme reach of being. For only when the notion of Being has reached its simple purity of nature, is it *both* the absolute abstraction, which is pure thought, and hence the pure singleness of self and immediacy or objective being, on account of its simplicity. What is called sense-consciousness is just this pure abstraction; it is this kind of thought for which being is the immediate. The lowest is thus at the same time the highest; the revealed which has come forth entirely to the surface is just therein the deepest reality.”<sup>24</sup>

“Force as such, force as driven back within itself, is in this way by itself an excluding unit, for which the unfolding of the elements or differences is another thing subsisting separately; and thus there are set up two sides, distinct and independent. But force is also the whole, or it remains what, in its very conception, it is; that is to say, these differences remain mere forms, superficial vanishing “moments”. The differences between force proper, withdrawn into itself, and force unfolded and expressed in independent constituent elements, would at the same time have no being at all if they had no subsistence; i.e., force would have no being if it did not really exist in these opposite ways. ...Looked at broadly, it is manifest that this process is nothing else than the process of perceiving, where the aspects, both percipient and content perceived, are at once inseparably united as regards the process of grasping the truth, and yet, by that very fact, each aspect is at the same time reflected into itself, is something on its own account. ...Thus the process, which formerly took the shape of the self-negation of contradictory *conceptions*, here assumes *objective* form, and is a movement of force, the result of which is to bring out the “unconditioned universal” as something which is not objective – which is the inner (unperceived) being of things.”<sup>25</sup>

This rather obscure and profound reflection seems to be an almost physical or mechanical description of how the Absolute projects itself into spatial and temporal forms, and by so doing creates its own self-consciousness. An attempt is made to account for “consciousness” as a sort of necessary result of the projection: as the particular is made to embody a form of the universal, it becomes conscious of itself in the difference. The infinite in the finite is the form of consciousness. But is this an adequate explanation, we might ask, as we have done at every turn, or is it merely a way of describing the fact of consciousness as an awareness of the difference between the knower and known, the universal and particular?

Heidegger, in his interpretation of Hegel, then asks the same question in a slightly different way, beyond Hegel: But is consciousness just abstract thinking based on impressions as the empiricists have defined it? Does this adequately explain how things are known immediately? How is it that we have a primordial ability to know things that are, in the first place, without any elevation through a process of abstraction? What is this primordial ontological self or being that is able to know things as they are, without mediation of any kind? What is this strange identity and difference between force and consciousness? With this move, I think Heidegger has done something quite extraordinary. And we will see more clearly how this works out with Sri Aurobindo. But first I would like to revisit some other expressions of Heidegger which are necessary for understanding the idea of the identity and difference of the subject and object just posed by Hegel. Heidegger says, “The statement that the comportments of the *dasein* are intentional, means that the mode of being of our own self, the *dasein*, is essentially such

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24 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1931 trans), p. 760

25 Ibid., p. 184-185

that this being, so far as it is, is always already dwelling with the extant.”<sup>26</sup> And here, of course, Heidegger is moving toward the ancient Greek expression, which is the theme of much of his philosophy, “Being and knowing are the same.”

All of those things we experience are extant. They are standing there, and we are comporting ourselves toward them, as I have already pointed out, with a sense of their being *for* something. We know that everything that is there is there for something, and we care about that. This knowing comes to us by virtue of our own being, because, as Heidegger explains, the being of the human being is of that nature. All of the things that are extant in our experience are known by us to have been something, to be something now, and to be becoming something other in the future: the has been, is now, and will be, of each instant of being. Then he states again, with definitive clarity, his theory of consciousness as such: “The intentional constitution of the *dasein's* comportments is precisely the ontological condition of the possibility of every and any transcendence.”<sup>27</sup> And again we must ask, is this an adequate explanation, or only a theoretical description of the fact?

One type of transcendence is just to know things in their universality. But before that, we need to want to know things in their universality, which is to know what things really are: the meaning that they embody. We are that being which comports itself toward things in their being. And this knowing is primordial. He says that we could not transcend the self in any way if we did not have this connection with everything already, known as consciousness. “Intentionality is the *ratio cognoscendi* of transcendence.”<sup>28</sup> It is how we process things, as things extant in our world. “It follows that... intentionality is neither objective, extant like an object, nor is it subjective in the sense of something that occurs within a so-called subject. ...Intentionality is neither objective nor subjective in the usual sense, although it is certainly both, but in a much more original sense, primordial, pre-cognitive.”<sup>29</sup>

That being out there in the garden is neither objective nor subjective; it is just what is there. Our knowing it and its being there are the same. He wants us to realize that we have an innate, fundamental, *a priori* connection with everything; that consciousness already knows everything as far as what it is, before reflecting, analyzing, constructing anything. If we want to represent it and talk about it, then it becomes something else, more subjective. “This (*a priori* connectedness) makes it possible that this being comports itself existingly toward the extant. With an adequate interpretation of intentionality, the traditional concept of the subject and of subjectivity becomes questionable. Not only does what psychology means by the subject become questionable, but also what psychology itself, as a positive science, must presuppose implicitly about the idea and constitution of the subject.”<sup>30</sup> Psychology must presuppose a lot of things about the constitution of the subject in order to be a positive science, which is constructed from impressions. All of that is questionable with respect to the primordial being there of the *dasein*.

“The traditional philosophical concept of the subject has also been inadequately determined with regard to the basic constitution of intentionality.” Now this rather obscure and complicated Heideggerian sentence is actually very important. The traditional philosophical concept of the subject, refers to the Cartesian '*cogito*', the 'I think therefore I am', but Descartes said eventually I think because of God, and then thinking acquires a very important status: I am because I think, and because God thinks in me. But he didn't ask, How is it so?, or What is thinking? The whole world of science has proceeded

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26 Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1988), p. 64.

27 Ibid., p. 65

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

systematically on the basis of the I am because I think. Heidegger therefore says many interesting things about this “I think”, “I know”, intentionality, and the *dasein*, in this commentary on Hegel. And then he refers to a long passage in Plato about the soul, which becomes particularly relevant when we come to the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. “The *psuche*, says Plato, discourses with itself about being. It discusses being, otherness, sameness, motion, rest, and the like, thoroughly, with itself. That is, it already of its own self understands being, actuality, and the like.”<sup>31</sup> It doesn't need axioms, it already spontaneously knows and discusses these things with itself, and discriminates: sameness and difference, temporality, being. This is known in Plato and in Hegel as dialectic. The Hegelian dialectic is about the self observing objects and realizing that the objects disappear in the universal, and the universals disappear in the self of consciousness, which disappears in the self of the whole, the Origin or Absolute Spirit. That dialectic becomes, for Hegel, the dialectic of consciousness. The *logos psuches*, the reason why everything is what it is, is known by us naturally, by virtue of our being what we are. Temporality enables us to know the being of things. For example, we know that the duck waddling across the barnyard and jumping on the haystack to lay its egg, is what it is, and we know what it is, because of the continuity of its being, actuality, and purpose in time. The form and matter and motion, the being of the duck, are known to us immediately because of the temporality of consciousness. These things are what they are because of the continuity of being in time, and we know the being of things because of the continuity of time. The things become what they are, also, because of their continuity in time. If we know things themselves because of the continuity of time then our knowing is the continuity of time itself. We are temporal beings who know things in their temporality. Human consciousness is unique with respect to its temporality. “The *logos psuches* (soul of reason) is the horizon to which every procedure which attempts to elucidate being, actuality, and the like, betakes itself.”<sup>32</sup> We could not elucidate anything without the horizon of time. And the Being of things, which is Spirit, would not have a temporal counterpart without that horizon; without it nothing would exist.

Now let us turn to Sri Aurobindo. He makes a statement in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, regarding how we should comport ourselves toward things 'yogically' in order to know things 'divinely'; in order for the 'divine', 'the spirit', the 'self of things', to become the object of consciousness, and not just things. Consciousness of the divine truth of things is a special energetic way of being. It is not the everyday consciousness. But it presupposes many of the things that we have heard. He says, “The witness self (*purusha*) in the mind observes that the inadequacy of his effort, all the inadequacy of fact in man's life and nature, arises from the separation and consequent struggle, want of knowledge, want of harmony, want of oneness. It is essential then for him to grow out of separative individuality, to universalize himself (the first stage of the Hegelian *epoche*), to make himself one with the universe. This unification can be done only through the soul, by making our soul of mind one with the universal mind, our soul of life one with the universal life-soul, to make our soul of body one with the universal soul of physical nature.”<sup>33</sup>

That which knows primordially, the witness self, perceives that the things for which we exist, and for which others exist, such as justice, harmony, truth, beauty, aren't happening wherever we look. We have an innate sense of how things can become what they truly are, and if we didn't we couldn't make a judgment about the inadequacy of things as they are. But even with things that are more naturally what they are, we may lose or forget our primordial and immediate awareness of their being. If we look back at the philosophical explanations we have heard of how the mind interprets things objectively and subjectively and constructs its knowledge of the world, and then recall Heidegger's commentary on

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31 Ibid., p. 73

32 Ibid.

33 Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1970), p. 614.

Hegel which suggests that we can go behind the veil and know things in themselves as ourselves, we may glimpse the difference in consciousness to which Sri Aurobindo is referring, between empirical consciousness based on sense perceptions and a direct consciousness of the being of things.

The universal life-soul is not every leaf and tree and bird and squirrel, it is the universal life in all of those things at once, the life-soul with which we can experience oneness. To be one with that, and with the purpose of all of that, the mind of all of that, the 'for what' of all of that, is the mind-soul. Each of those things in nature knows its purpose and is striving to realize it, as are we. And we have a sense of this striving to become. To be in that oneness of striving of all of that, with the purpose of the things themselves, and to be one with the energy of all of that, and experience all of that in our physical body as if it were ourselves, would have an effect on things radically different from our ordinary relationships with things. And it could have far reaching effects, as Sri Aurobindo suggests. "When this can be done, (this universalizing of the soul of mind, life, and body) in proportion to the power, intensity, depth, completeness, permanence, with which it can be done, great effects are produced upon the natural action. Especially there grows an immediate and profound sympathy and immixture of mind with mind, life with life, a lessening of the body's insistence on separateness, a power of direct mental and other intercommunication and effective mutual action which helps out the now inadequate and indirect communication and action that was til now the greater part of the conscious means used by embodied mind."<sup>34</sup> How could such a shift towards universality and oneness not significantly impact the ways in which we comport ourselves toward the natural world, and even more so, the ways in which we comport ourselves toward our own humanity and society?

So then, if we ask Sri Aurobindo, in the way that Heidegger asked, How is it so?, we might first presuppose the primordially of consciousness, which is the nature of being itself. It is the absolute in things, as Hegel said. We might then read a definition from Sri Aurobindo which corresponds very closely to the metaphysical ideas of Hegel and Heidegger, but extends them in the direction of a spiritual transformation of consciousness which we might encapsulate as a terminal point with respect to our exploration of phenomenology. There has been this shift in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as we have seen, away from epistemological subjectivity to ontological subjectivity, and the question What is? Rather than How does the mind know? It's very concrete in Bergson, Heidegger, Whitehead, and Sri Aurobindo. How is it that what exists is conscious? We may presuppose the primordially of consciousness; it's the nature of being, and the essence of our being human, as Heidegger says. Let us emphasize that this shift to ontology is very significant in the development of human consciousness. This question was not there in 1700 or 1200 or 400 CE.

Sri Aurobindo, then, gives this very Hegelian explanation of consciousness in *The Life Divine*: "Existence is in its activity a Conscious-Force which presents the workings of its force to its consciousness as forms of its own being. Since Force is only the action of one sole-existing Conscious Being, its results can be nothing else than forms of that Conscious Being; Substance or Matter, then, is only a form of Spirit. The appearance which this form of Spirit assumes to our senses is due to that dividing action of Mind from which we have been able to deduce consistently the whole phenomenon of the universe. We know now that Life is an action of Conscious Force, of which material forms are the result; Life involved in those forms, appearing in them first as inconscient force, evolves and brings back into manifestation as Mind the consciousness which is the real self of the force and which never ceases to exist in it even when unmanifest. We know also that Mind is an inferior power of the original conscious Knowledge or Supermind, a power to which Life acts as an instrumental energy; for, descending through Supermind, Consciousness or Chit represents itself as Mind, Force of

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34 Ibid., p. 615

consciousness or Tapas represents itself as Life. Mind, by its separation from its own higher reality in Supermind, gives Life the appearance of division, and by its farther involution in its own Life-Force, becomes subconscious in Life and thus gives the outward appearance of an inconscient force to its material workings. Therefore, the inconscience, the inertia, the atomic disaggregation of Matter must have their source in this all-dividing and self-involving action of Mind by which our universe came into being.”<sup>35</sup>

We may think about Einsteinian theories of matter and energy, or about biological forces, or Agni, or electricity, or Shakti, or any kind of force that we know of. Every form of force in existence is only the action of one sole existing conscious being. The whole phenomenon of the universe is a product of dividing mind which proportionally divides, geometrically divides, temporally divides, atomically and sub-atomically divides everything so that form can exist. This division is the principle of Mind. And Life is involved in all the forms that live and move, a universal force of immense significance. If the form of life isn't now what it has to become, this doesn't mean that it isn't there. Every form of life is on its way to becoming what it is already in itself. It is already that because 'itself' is really a universal conscious being which diversifies itself infinitely in time and space so that all the forms may reflect 'the other' at their own level of awareness. And nothing is not aware of something, as Whitehead's philosophy says. Everything is prehensive of something on some level of vibrational 'feeling'. If we extended our self of mind, our self of life, and our self of body into the forms of the universe, the world, the environment, as Sri Aurobindo suggests, we would know the vibrational interactions and relative consciousness of everything, directly, in terms of their potential, their actual, and their possible.

This is also the Hegelian and Aristotelian idea of privation: each thing overcomes its deficiencies and completes the deficient status of the other. Mind is just a lower vibrational force which descends from Supermind. So, when Hegel said that it seems that the supreme being descended in all of these forms, and what we perceive in nature is really a revelation of the being of that Absolute Origin from which it descends in force and form, this is a higher mind intuition that Hegel had articulated a hundred years before Sri Aurobindo, which Aristotle had attempted to describe more than two thousand years earlier in his theory of the relationship between form and matter, and which philosophers of Spirit share with those religious minds who have periodically broken through the ego-mind's limitations and realized the Self in all throughout human history. This has been possible because consciousness is that primordial relationship between all actuals, potentials, and possibles. And this Conscious-Being is the self, the force, and the form, of all, in its already complete Self and in its temporal becoming. This is the mystery, and the cosmic Reality, of Time.

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35 Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (1970), p. 216-217

## PART II – FROM SCIENCE TO COSMOLOGY

### Lecture 5

We ended with Sri Aurobindo's thought last time and we are starting with it again tonight. Up until now the subject has been phenomenology: Hegel and Sri Aurobindo. Now I'm going to try to move forward into metaphysics, and then into science – neuroscience and neuro-phenomenology especially. Heidegger anticipates this move, of course, when he says at the end of *The Problems of Phenomenology* that we comport ourselves towards beings in their being. But that phrase “in their being” means something that we are not necessarily aware of, and it is probably not something we know much about. So, he says, there are two possibilities for the objectivization of knowledge. One is to know beings as beings and the other is the Hegelian elevation of that knowing to the Being of beings. That also means the universalization of consciousness and its elevation into Absolute Spirit. The former possibility, of knowing beings as such, is the objectivization of knowledge known as science, which is much more familiar to us. The latter is properly termed “metaphysics”.

What we are going to try to do eventually is to view the question - What is consciousness? - from the point of view of both metaphysics and science. Then, I would like to follow this discussion with the subject of cosmology. What are the implications of the question of consciousness, if it is in fact, as Sri Aurobindo says, a fundamental principle of existence? What if consciousness is not just a matter of knowing, not just what we know, or how we know things, but rather something that leads us beyond the human mind altogether into a cosmic dimension of reality? Perhaps, then, the Indian conceptions of all of these things, the Vedantic cosmology and psychology of consciousness, which are found to be the basis of Sri Aurobindo's view, just as a kind of Platonic cosmology is the basis of Hegel's, and Heidegger's, as well as Whitehead's, views, are necessary for an understanding of “consciousness”, which we thought belonged especially to the human mind. And finally we will come to the sociology of Supermind. What does all of this have to do with the evolution of human consciousness, and of society, and their future possibilities? And there we shall come back to Hegel and the post-Hegelians and Marxists, whose philosophy is largely concerned with the elevation and perfection of the human being in society, and this of course is the main thrust of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy as well.

I would like to start now, however, with a text of Sri Aurobindo that opens the discussion in the direction of matter and energy and what happens in the world. This text of Sri Aurobindo is typical of the phenomenological attitude and also provides a metaphysical bridge with the central philosophical issues of consciousness that we have discussed at length up to now. He says: “It is necessary to distinguish between the essential Reality, the phenomenal reality dependent upon it and arising out of it, and the restricted and often misleading experience or notion of either that is created by our sense-experience and our reason.”<sup>36</sup> The premise here is that there is a reality other than the way things appear and the way we perceive them.

The phenomenal reality is what we see and know, but do we see what it is an expression of, its larger universal truths? We began with sense-experience, perception and reason which are central to the

philosophy of Hobbes, Locke, and Hume, and moved through the phenomenological theme of how we know what is behind the appearance of things, where we found a methodology of knowing such things as universal principles, by the phenomenological reduction or *epoché*. If we suspend judgment and don't rely on sense experience, and simply become conscious of that which is, then we can gather something more of the reality that is expressed by the phenomena. But beyond that, there is the essential reality, according to metaphysics, the Being of things. This is how Sri Aurobindo saw the problem:

“The physical scientist probing into phenomena erects formulas and standards based on the objective and phenomenal reality and its processes: to his view mind may appear as a subjective result of Matter, and self and spirit as unreal; at any rate he has to act as if matter and energy alone existed and mind were only an observer of an independent physical reality which is unaffected by any mental processes or any presence or intervention of a cosmic Intelligence. The psychologist, probing independently into mind consciousness and mind unconsciousness, discovers another domain of realities, subjective in its character, which has its own law and process; to him Mind may even come to appear as the key of the real, Matter as only a field for mind, and spirit apart from mind as something unreal. But there is a farther probing which brings up the truth of self and spirit and establishes a greater order of the real in which there is a reversal of our view both of the subjective mind realities and objective physical realities so that they are seen as things phenomenal, secondary, dependent upon the truth of self and the realities of the spirit. In this deeper search into things mind and matter begin to wear the appearance of a lesser order of the real and may easily come to appear unreal.”<sup>37</sup>

These are, respectively, the typical views of materialism, phenomenology, idealism, and their characteristic limitations with respect to knowing the truth of things. Their primary limitation is that they all begin from sense experience, and the idea that the world, if it exists, is external to the perceptions of consciousness. The world of appearances is declared to be not real, but at best is only something constructed by mind, and this is the case for Hinduism and Buddhism, as well, because of the limitations of the reasoning mind itself. If we recall the philosophy of Heidegger, which dwells upon the idea of temporality: to know the being of things means passing beyond reason and logic based upon perception, and finally grasping, understanding, and knowing what is their purpose, in view of what temporal things can become, in terms of their possibilities. This would be a reality beyond both the material one that is perceived and the ideal one that is constructed. And with this idea the phenomenological view can arrive at what Hegel termed Spirit, the essence of things. This conclusion may therefore also be a starting point for the philosophical explanation of existence as well as consciousness, known as 'metaphysics'.

We know things, in a pre-metaphysical or primordial way, as Heidegger said, as what things are 'for', in their becoming toward something else. We don't know things just as they appear in the frozen moment, nor only in their abstract universality; we know them temporally, and immediately, as being in transition to what they can become. Even if what we see is not something that is changing radically, for example a group of people like this one here, sitting quietly for an hour: we know that it is here for a purpose, which is what brings us here. And it is not necessary for us to articulate this very specifically. We know that the bus is not just an object out there, an object of perception; it exists for the purpose of taking us somewhere later. Our fundamental orientation to ourselves and nature and existence grasps things in their temporality. This is a phenomenological truth. But, even so, we don't necessarily grasp that beyond this apparent movement of beings there is a universal principle. For example, with respect to busses and SUVs, the power to be in many places and to unite distances for the sake of a more

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37 Ibid.

harmonious and prosperous and useful existence. There is this drive in things to be more than they are. Things participate in their universal principles. And each thing has the meaning that it has, as Plato said, because of its participation in those universal principles or ideas. So in nature, for example, the movement of the birds and the bees is about procreation, not just flying and crawling, and we don't hesitate for a minute regarding such things. Flying and crawling serve the purpose of procreation, of life. This understanding is as natural to us as breathing because, as Heidegger said, we are beings that are conscious of the being of things. And consciousness is possible in this view because nothing is static in so far as what its truth is; everything is what it is and what it was and what it is becoming at each moment in a continuum that we are aware of. We are not fixated on the actual now, or the past, or the future. We are that being who spontaneously knows things in that holistic way. Therefore consciousness is transcendent: we are outside of the becoming of things in our consciousness and therefore can know their being. But this is a phenomenological conclusion: consciousness is possible and it is transcendent because of the temporal nature of existence. And then, Sri Aurobindo adds to this perspective, as we have heard, that consciousness is in fact a universal principle of the existence of things themselves; it is prior to things, and to Time. Things are moving toward what they have to become because of the consciousness in them, *chit-shakti*, *consciousness-force*. Everything from elemental matter to complex life, to higher intellectual functioning, is a level of consciousness-force that is manifesting as energy in form. And everything, because of that, is constantly responding to something else, and relating to something else, and becoming something else. Then, in performing the Hegelian negation, we see that nothing is just what it appears to be at the moment; everything is a part of something else which makes a larger whole that negates its individual momentary transitory existence. It disappears in that larger network of things that gives it meaning. Therefore, the idea that everything is a temporal expression of something which is atemporal and has a larger purpose, is a fundamental metaphysical idea. There is a reality beyond anything perceptible, and thus *meta-physical*. Unfortunately, this negative logic has led to nihilistic philosophies of life, especially in the East, as both Hegel and Sri Aurobindo have observed, and in the West, as we shall see. But it is a logic that also leads to the positive truth behind the illusion, and to a transcendent Spirit.

It follows, then, to ask whether consciousness is something more than awareness, as the metaphysical view tries to show us. From the beginning we have defined consciousness as awareness, and the whole phenomenological discourse has been about awareness of various kinds. But Hegel mentioned that “force” is also a fundamental principle, and that absolute knowledge descends from Spirit into force in order to present itself to consciousness as form and knowledge. And Sri Aurobindo said the same thing – consciousness-force, *chit-shakti*, is the essence of everything that exists. Consciousness presents itself to itself through force (forms and processes) as the awareness of things. Consciousness is universal, therefore, and every form, or thing, or force, is an expression of it at some level.

Following Hegel, there were philosophers such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and beyond them into positivist and postmodern thinking, who have written at length on this idea of force. And you will recognize this way of thinking and have a sense of how influential it has become in the materialistic world-view, from your own experience. I would like to read a short bit from Schopenhauer, who was a contemporary of Hegel and Darwin, and who developed the primacy of the idea of force. He wrote: “The first step in the fundamental knowledge of my metaphysics is that the 'will' we find within us does not, as philosophy previously assumed, proceed first of all from knowledge; that it is not in fact a mere modification of knowledge, and thus something secondary, derived, and like knowledge itself, conditioned by the brain; but that it is the *prius* of knowledge, the kernel of our true being. The will is that primary and original force itself, which forms and maintains the animal body, in that it carries out that body's unconscious as well as conscious functions. ...Further, it is the same will that in the plant forms the bud, in order to develop from it leaf and flower... It is the insight that what is inward and

original in all the changes and movements of bodies, however varied and different they may be, is essentially identical...”<sup>38</sup>

So, the principle of oneness, which enables us to identify everything as what it is in time and space, is the will in it to be that which it is. It is the Self, in one and all, as the Upanishad says. And it is the Will in us that enables the emergence of a faculty that recognizes, knows, and represents this Will in another entity, as its essential being and self, because we share this universal principle with everything, which Schopenhauer identifies, not as “consciousness” or “self”, - in the sense of knowledge and understanding as in Hegel, and not as “matter” as in the materialist view, both of which he disparaged, but - as the Will which is the force of being in things. This idea will later become a very essential notion in the theory of evolution, as we have previously shown at length in our course on the Philosophy of Evolution.<sup>39</sup> There is evidently a power in things that determines their qualities and purposes and relations, which is infinitely diverse and yet the Same. In his identification of this principle Schopenhauer says that, “We nevertheless have only one opportunity of becoming more closely and immediately acquainted with it, namely in the movements of our own body. In consequence of this knowledge, we must call it Will. It is the insight that what acts and drives in nature and manifests itself in ever more perfect phenomena, (Darwin's idea of evolutionary progress), after working itself up to such a height, that the light of knowledge immediately falls on it, - in other words after getting as far as the state or condition of self-consciousness - now stands out as that *will*. It is the will that we know most intimately, and it is therefore not to be explained further by anything else. Accordingly, it is the thing-in-itself, in so far as this can in any way be reached by knowledge. Consequently, it is what must express itself in some way in everything in the world; for it is the true inner being of the world and the kernel of all phenomena.”<sup>40</sup>

The most fundamental principle of existence for Schopenhauer is 'the will to be', which he also calls the *force of nature*, and that is the source of everything. It is what manifests through the forces, forms and processes that we know. And *we do know them*, according to Schopenhauer: they are the outer forms and energy and quality of the self that are perceived through our body's organs of sense and the mind's perceptions. But that in them which manifests through the forms and processes we do not necessarily know by the senses, although we can know it by our faculty of “intelligence” which *represents* what we perceive. In Sanskrit this inner being or truth of things is known as the *swabhava*, their nature and their essential being, which perhaps we can perceive and grasp as such, before any reflection or analysis. This idea supports the phenomenological notion in Hegel and Heidegger of knowing things immediately, instead of knowledge coming to us as a process of thought and abstraction, as the empiricists suggest. We have also heard from Sri Aurobindo that it is possible to unite our soul of mind with universal mind, our soul of life with universal life, and our soul of body with universal physical existence, consciously. This would imply, as Schopenhauer also seems to suggest, that we are essentially one with everything, with regard to the will in everything that is expressing itself in the infinity of forms and processes of nature at different levels all the time. And for Schopenhauer these outer, material manifestations are expressions of other universal principles and laws, which can also be known. This implies, as Sri Aurobindo said, that there is a reality behind the phenomena which we should strive to know, and which is other than what we perceive: it is metaphysical. To arrive at this knowledge, it is necessary for us to distinguish between that reality itself, the phenomena that express it, and our senses, perceptions, and reasoning. For Schopenhauer that reality is Will, which can be known as such when we release ourselves from preoccupations with our own willing and perceptions,

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38 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. II (1958 trans), p. 293

39 Rod Hemsell, *The Philosophy of Evolution*, (2014), see especially Lecture 8, p. 295.

40 Op cit., p. 294

and the intellect is free to grasp the essential reality itself.

The shift that is made in Schopenhauer's philosophy, is that for him it is the *action of manifestation in matter* through which we know the essential will in things as “one” and as the essential thing-in-itself. It is the behavior of things, their movement to become, their motion and becoming which appear in the forms of matter, that enables 'intelligence' to know things as 'will'. For him, the will is somehow an innermost, universal self and motive power of things, and *representation*, his term for intelligence or consciousness, is its secondary counterpart. This is an idea that we will also hear when we get to some forms of Vedanta and Indian cosmology, as well. And it turns out that Schopenhauer was a serious student of Hindu and Buddhist philosophical texts, and quotes from them periodically in his writings. Unfortunately, however, Schopenhauer apparently accessed only the most extremely dualistic and illusionist forms of that philosophy, and by reducing existence to the two principles of Will or Force, and Intelligence or Representation, he failed to adequately explain the existence of either. There must be something that “wills” and whose qualities are expressed in its forms, but here Schopenhauer's thought appears to be somewhat confused, because at one point he says that the will itself has perceptions: “The action of the body is nothing but the act of the will objectified, ie., translated into perception...the will is knowledge *a priori* of the body, and the body is knowledge *a posteriori* of the will. ...pain and pleasure are immediate affections of the will in its phenomenon, the body...”<sup>41</sup> And at another point he says that the Intelligence liberated from the Will, as in the case of artistic genius, expresses itself in higher forms of understanding, which implies that the Intelligence not only represents but also wills and creates: “...the intellect of the genius is detached from the will and so from the person, and what concerns these does not conceal from him the world and things themselves; on the contrary, he becomes distinctly conscious of them, and apprehends them in objective perception in and by themselves; in this sense he is *reflective*. It is this reflectiveness (liberated from the will), that enables the painter to reproduce faithfully on canvas the nature he has before his eyes, and the poet accurately to call up again by means of abstract concepts the perceptive present by expressing it, and thus bringing it to distinct consciousness...”<sup>42</sup>

But his “confusion” is profoundly instructive as well, because of his firm determination to interpret existence in terms of these two distinct principles - Will or Force and Intelligence or Representation - and yet that he faced the constant challenge of defining their difference and their relationship throughout more than a thousand pages of careful reflection. The difficulty became especially apparent in his discussion of priority with respect to causality, for example. He adopted a strong form of the Aristotelean concept of the *final cause*, and said that Intelligence was the destined outcome of the Will in its manifestation of the cosmos from the beginning. Somehow, therefore, the principle of Intelligence is the cause of the Will's acts, and the essence of the entire deterministic chain of existence. And yet he insisted that the Will was prior and Intelligence could only represent its forms of expression. This primacy of the idea of force as primal causality and the essence of existence, eventually became the most important thrust in subsequent materialistic science. Schopenhauer called the Will the *prius*, prior even to material force, and yet it gives everything its characteristic nature of causality – everything we perceive and represent is known in terms of its cause and effect. From this he derived the notion of absolute determinism that has also characterized much of materialistic philosophy and science since Descartes and Bacon, who famously believed that everything could therefore be known by scientific analysis.

Several aspects of Schopenhauer's extreme metaphysical view may be seen in this relatively short

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41 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. I (1958 trans), p. 100-101.

42 Op cit., Vol. II, p. 382.

passage, which also betrays a certain element of self-contradiction: "...I say that every being without exception *acts* with strict necessity, but *exists* and is what it is by virtue of its *freedom*. ...In short, determinism stands firm; for fifteen hundred years attempts to undermine it have been made in vain. ...There is no escape from this absurdity other than the knowledge that the *being and essence* of all things are the phenomenon of a really *free will* that knows itself precisely in them; for their *doing and acting* are not to be delivered from necessity. ...Accordingly, as *necessity* belongs to the phenomenon, not to the thing-in-itself, in other words, not to the true nature of the world, so also does *plurality*. ...Everyone knows only one being quite immediately, namely his own will in self-consciousness. He knows everything else only mediately, and then judges it by analogy with that one being; according to the degree of his power of reflection, this analogy is carried further. Even this springs ultimately and fundamentally from the fact that there is really *only one being*; the illusion of plurality (*Maya*), resulting from the forms of external, objective apprehension, could not penetrate right into the inner, simple consciousness; hence this always meets with only one being."<sup>43</sup> Many important issues that are fundamental to the question of "consciousness", as well as to an understanding of Schopenhauer's philosophy, are revealed in this concise but paradoxical argument. And I think it is safe to draw some inferences at this point, always bearing in mind that the translation into English from the original German may not give us the best understanding of Schopenhauer.

Existence is a fundamental duality of Will that predetermines everything, the principle of Force, and Representation which knows its forms, or the principle of Consciousness. The apprehension of objective reality, whether the processes of nature, or the eternal ideals and principles which are stated by him to be the objects of awareness for a higher and liberated *self-consciousness*, is for him ultimately an illusion; determinism and the chain of material causality that is perceived in nature, and represented by intelligence, as well as the eternal principles of beauty and glory and delight that are perceived and expressed by the person of genius, are the product of a subjective awareness of a reality that it only knows as its representation of the forms of Will, and they have no other reality. The appearances that incite motives and make the body conscious through action, are a kind of Kantian or Humean world of constructed forms; they are only forms of representation, and no other reality actually exists. This is a static conception of forms that are perceived and then represented by consciousness. In themselves they are expressions of the universal Will which is their sole reality.

There are at least two consequences of this view, which may be considered unfortunate and perhaps dangerous: one is that the perfectly ordered universe of causal relationships, which constitute the material world, can be perfectly represented by Intelligence, and therefore our knowledge is absolute. It is knowledge of what is. The other is that this Intelligence is itself merely a secondary result, or product, of the illusionary phenomena of the Will in all things, which is the only thing that intelligence really perceives. Our knowledge is therefore a meaningless illusion, and so is the world created by Will.

In many ways this may look like Hegelian thinking: there is a world of material force, there is a consciousness that arises by negation to an understanding of universal truths, there is an absolute, and there is freedom. And in fact Schopenhauer quite knowledgeably and effectively quotes Plato and the Greek tradition on which German Idealism is based. And yet, in the end, his philosophy is the contrary of Hegel's, which he declared to be foolish and completely wrong. For Hegel (and for Sri Aurobindo as well) the world is a real materialization of Absolute Spirit, therefore capable of perfect expression and absolute knowledge. But for Schopenhauer, the world, including matter, nature, thought, the glorious creations of poetry and philosophy, and the realm of the Ideal, are all merely illusions of the brain,

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43 Ibid., p. 321

caused by a Will that is, in itself, apart from these illusions it creates, reducible to nothing. In effect, Schopenhauer has used the language of German Idealism to create its opposite. And he has referred to terms such as “absolute identity” and “a so-called intellectual intuition” that would claim a relation of identity between the real and the ideal, as “the whole Hegelian pseudo-philosophy that has engrossed the attention of the German public for twenty-five years.”<sup>44</sup> We may speculate that this condemnation of Hegel was probably based, to a large extent, on Hegel's rejection of the illusionist philosophy of Hinduism, which Schopenhauer himself had adopted; that is to say it is Hegel's positive affirmation of Self and Spirit as opposed to Schopenhauer's rejection of both as illusion which determined the latter's total rejection of the former. But Schopenhauer's philosophy can also be seen as a vindication of the subjectivist and skeptical view of the day, which reduced both the material world and our knowledge of it to meaninglessness. This attitude was subsequently reflected in the philosophy Nietzsche, who also adopted a variant of Schopenhauer's philosophy of will, which he called the Will to Power, as the fundamental principle of life and existence, but with Nietzsche it took a more dynamic and creative form. With respect to our knowledge and ideals and human achievement in general, Nietzsche was skeptical, but he put his faith in matter and the biological turn of the day, believing that his will to power could overcome human limitations and concealed unlimited creative potential. As he wrote, for example, in these brief aphorisms: “The meaning of “knowledge”: here as in the case of “good” or “beautiful,” the concept is to be regarded in a strict and narrow anthropocentric and biological sense. In order for a particular species to maintain itself and increase its power, its conception of reality must comprehend enough of the calculable and constant for it to base a scheme of behavior on it. The utility of preservation – not some abstract-theoretical need not to be deceived – stands as the motive behind the development of the organs of knowledge – they develop in such a way that their observations suffice for our preservation. In other words, the measure of the desire for knowledge depends upon the measure to which the will to power grows in a species: a species grasps a certain amount of reality in order to become master of it, in order to press it into service (March 1988).”<sup>45</sup> “The victorious concept of “force”, by means of which our physicists have created God and the world, still needs to be completed: an inner will must be ascribed to it, which I designate as “will to power,” ie., as an insatiable desire to manifest power; or as the employment and exercise of power, as a creative drive ... There is nothing for it: one is obliged to understand all motion, all “appearances,” all “laws,” only as symptoms of an inner event and to employ man as an analogy to this end. In the case of an animal, it is possible to trace all its drives to the will to power; likewise all the functions of organic life to this one source.”<sup>46</sup>

And for Schopenhauer before him, force was the one and only unifying principle and reality, the *prius*, and all forms of matter its expression: there is an unbroken, inevitable, perfectly ordered progression of manifestation that we experience and that our intelligence represents as the material world. And this dualistic view of reality as a mysterious combination of both Consciousness and Force is in fact a very prominent and important recognition of both principles as necessary to an adequate explanation of existence, although it may not adequately explain either. We may see, or experience in various ways, as Schopenhauer must have done, the interdependence of things and the temporal and meaningful mutual unfolding of their potentials, which may be termed “force of nature”, and also that this knowing of our experience is a representation of that reality. But is it necessarily the case, we may ask, that this process of being and becoming consciously experiences itself? Couldn't it simply be the forms and processes of a blind mechanical force of will? This of course is the point of view of extreme materialism, and it is the crux of the problem that comes forth prominently in the succeeding age of positivism and science.

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44 Ibid., p. 92

45 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (1967 ed.), p. 267.

46 Ibid., p. 333

Is the world only a mechanism and consciousness an illusion? Schopenhauer's contribution to philosophy ultimately exacerbates the problem. And its influence on both science and philosophy can still be seen today among those with a certain disposition to deny the existence of consciousness altogether, or to claim that it is only an epiphenomenon, as did Nietzsche.

One of the chief dilemmas which soon appeared in the theory of evolution that began to be elaborated during the same period as German Idealism, was to understand the phenomenon of adaptation and how species manifest their qualities in a niche in which they react to everything around them in terms of their own nature, and carry out their behaviors according to their own nature, yet in relation to all the other creatures around them acting according to their natures, as if in a predetermined, or at least a logically orchestrated, way. The world we are conscious of is a world of beings that are becoming what each one essentially is in a meaningfully dynamic interconnected world. But how does any of them know what they essentially are and can become? Certainly no one received a template at the beginning; even human beings don't have that privilege, and yet we become individuals to our utmost capacities, unless something severely obstructs us, and even then we try to overcome any limitations, and strive to realize our potentials, - through our relationships with the world, and through our differences. So we have a kind of innate drive or will to do that, along with all the other members of the kingdom of Matter, Life, Mind, which results in an extraordinary diversity of species and individuals. But how is it so? How is it that each of these individuals, species, niches, webs, and ecosystems have arrived at the particular forms of expression that we know today, with a high degree of interdependence? Well, we know Darwin's answer. Variations emerge and are either selected or rejected by nature. But from where do they come, we may ask: isn't it from a vast storehouse of potential far beyond anything that can be measured?

Schopenhauer would say that it is by a predetermined and inevitable chain of cause and effect. And although he described the world of perceptions, the world known to science, quite beautifully at times, unfortunately he came to the conclusion that it is all, nonetheless, an illusion of the mind, a *maya*, which of course many schools of Indian thought have also concluded. And this conclusion does not explain in the least how "consciousness" or "will" happen to arise in a material world in the first place, nor how we make such judgments about that world. It is simply so, according to Schopenhauer, who simply proposes a Will that makes it so. But that Will and that Intelligence in organisms still responds consciously to stimuli, formulates an intention, acts fittingly under the conditions of nature, survives, and interacts meaningfully with the life around. So, the concept of Self somehow reaches us, in order to explain the unique energies and behaviors and qualities and relationships of everything. If there is Will, there must be something or someone who wills. If there is freedom, there must be something or someone who is free. If we elevate our understanding, in the Hegelian sense, and comprehend the vast web of matter, life, and mind that has become the field of both the science and the philosophy of ecology, more than a hundred years after Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, then we may be able to grasp the reality of a consciousness that exceeds and unifies the entire field. As the Upanishad says, there is a Self in all, and all are in the Self. This is a metaphysical notion that may definitely help us find a more comprehensive answer to the question, What is consciousness? If each individual is constantly selecting what it prefers and doesn't prefer, what is good for it or not, and even the paramecium is perceiving and adjusting itself to light and heat in a way that suits its well-being, this behavior depends upon the processing of information, also known as cognition. And cognition is another name for consciousness, although consciousness may also have many other functions and meanings. But information processing, feeling, judgment, intention, are apparently going on in all organisms all the time. And the fact that each one is processing information and willing itself into being is indicative of the presence of consciousness at every level of life, to some degree. Consciousness then, according to Sri Aurobindo's conception, is in fact the "force of being". It is the process of beings expressing themselves, through the

force of will according to their natures, and not only their “awareness” of themselves and others. Though similar in many ways to Schopenhauer's conception, this view would be considerably wider, more dynamic, and more comprehensive than his notion of Will. In fact, Sri Aurobindo argues that this larger conception of Consciousness in relation to the idea of Force is the ultimate principle of existence; it is Consciousness-Force. He comments, in a context that is pertinent to a critique of Schopenhauer's ideas, but also, especially, to the question of Consciousness in general:

“We have got back to an Existence which is really nothing but Force, Force at rest or in movement, absolute Force perhaps, but not absolute Being. It is then necessary to examine into the relation between Force and Consciousness. But what do we mean by the latter term? Ordinarily we mean by it our first obvious idea of a mental waking consciousness such as is possessed by the human being during the major part of his bodily existence, when he is not asleep, stunned or otherwise deprived of his physical and superficial methods of sensation. In this sense it is plain enough that consciousness is the exception and not the rule in the order of the material universe. We ourselves do not always possess it. But this vulgar and shallow idea of the nature of consciousness, though it still colours our ordinary thought and associations, must now definitely disappear out of philosophical thinking. For we know that there is something in us which is conscious when we sleep, when we are stunned or drugged or in a swoon, in all apparently unconscious states of our physical being. Not only so, but we may now be sure that the old thinkers were right when they declared that even in our waking state what we call then our consciousness is only a small selection from our entire conscious being. It is a superficies, it is not even the whole of our mentality. Behind it, much vaster than it, there is a subliminal or subconscious mind which is the greater part of ourselves and contains heights and profundities which no man has yet measured or fathomed. This knowledge gives us a starting-point for the true science of Force and its workings; it delivers us definitely from circumscription by the material and from the illusion of the obvious. ...A true science of force and its workings would understand that consciousness is there in everything expressing some quality of being and when we are conscious of such qualities we are finding a gateway to its reality and essence. Phenomena are a doorway into that reality behind the surfaces of things.”<sup>47</sup>

The idea that 'consciousness' means our normal waking mental state certainly hasn't yet disappeared from philosophical thinking, by any means, though some are beginning to glimpse the possibility of what for Sri Aurobindo is the wider and truer understanding of the term. In current phenomenology, for example, there is the fairly prevalent notion that what beings are expressing in relation to other beings is a product not of just the self of an individual but of the self of each of the individuals with whom an individual is in relation, and therefore constitutes a larger field and being of consciousness. This is the concept of the ecology of consciousness. The whole environment of life is expressing itself consciously through the force of the beings in the environment, which is an expression of themselves, of their being, of which they are aware and which determines their expressions. This more holistic direction in seeking to explain consciousness is being expanded even further today by philosophers and scientists of what is known as the “new materialism”, which we will see as we proceed to explore some of the more recent attempts to explain consciousness in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries. The most advanced thought today, in fact, reflects Sri Aurobindo's radical reversal of Schopenhauer's rather simplistic view of consciousness as an emergent phenomenon of the animal brain. For example, Sri Aurobindo wrote, around 1920:

“Consciousness uses the brain which its upward strivings have produced, brain has not produced nor does it use the consciousness. There are even abnormal instances which go to prove that our organs are

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47 Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (1944/2004), p. 92.

not entirely indispensable instruments, — that the heart-beats are not absolutely essential to life, any more than is breathing, nor the organised brain-cells to thought. Our physical organism no more causes or explains thought and consciousness than the construction of an engine causes or explains the motive-power of steam or electricity. The force is anterior, not the physical instrument. ...We may go farther. When we speak of subconscious mind, we should mean by the phrase a thing not different from the outer mentality, but only acting below the surface, unknown to the waking man, in the same sense if perhaps with a deeper plunge and a larger scope. But the phenomena of the subliminal self far exceed the limits of any such definition. It includes an action not only immensely superior in capacity, but quite different in kind from what we know as mentality in our waking self. We have therefore a right to suppose that there is a superconscient in us as well as a subconscient, a range of conscious faculties and therefore an organisation of consciousness which rise high above that psychological stratum to which we give the name of mentality. And since the subliminal self in us thus rises in superconscience above mentality, may it not also sink in subconscience below mentality? Are there not in us and in the world forms of consciousness which are submental, to which we can give the name of vital and physical consciousness? If so, we must suppose in the plant and the metal also a force to which we can give the name of consciousness although it is not the human or animal mentality for which we have hitherto preserved the monopoly of that description.”<sup>48</sup>

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48 Ibid., p. 93-94

## Lecture 6

Another interesting system of understanding that we should take note of in this context is a current scientific conception of the self that seems in line with Schopenhauer's thought, and provides an important framework for our attempt to understand what consciousness is. Antonio Damasio, who is a neuroscientist and philosopher, has recently published a book titled *Self Comes to Mind* (2010). He has accumulated and analyzed an extraordinary amount of data based on laboratory experiments and medical histories. And he has come to the conclusion that the idea of self is a product of human evolution alone. Animals don't have it. He has developed the theory that there are certain functions of the nervous system and brain that map our internal organism and the information our senses give us about the world outside us, and in the relationship between these neural maps of ourselves and the world there somehow emerges the possibility, in the brain of the human being alone, the notion that we are individual selves, self-conscious because of an awareness of the difference between ourselves and others. In his view then, the idea of self is a production of the brain's structures and functions. Other organisms, animals in particular, he thinks process information that is needed for survival and have mental properties in their information processing systems, but they are basically automatons which are not conscious of what they are and do because, as he defines consciousness, it is only when an organism becomes conscious of itself as an entity and conscious of others as separate, that it can be called "conscious".

This scientist, who has read Descartes, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Plato, etc, and who has written several books of philosophy himself, has apparently been so thoroughly impressed by his medical research and the empirical data collected on the operations of the nervous system, that he has come to this conclusion about the nature of consciousness based solely on this data. There is no evidence that I see of any real philosophical thinking in his analysis. There are interesting chapters in his book, no doubt, about how he thinks the brain becomes conscious of the body and of the world outside the body, and what the neuronal processes are that apparently give us an awareness of these things. And his descriptions are very detailed and authentic. According to his view of the nervous system's production of consciousness we create a proto-self and a core self and an autobiographical self strictly on the basis of the processing of neurochemical input and output. So for him, consciousness is not a metaphysical or spiritual principle. It is simply a product of the evolution of the physical organism of humans. And what has struck me about this theory is that he has actually defined consciousness as what we normally call the "ego". He says, "When I talk about consciousness I am not referring simply to wakefulness (*awareness*), a common misunderstanding that comes from the fact that when wakefulness is lost, standard consciousness is lost as well. Consciousness does not refer simply to a plain mind process without a self feature. ...consciousness is a state of mind that occurs when we are awake and in which there is private and personal knowledge of our own existence, situated relative to whatever its surround may be at a given moment."<sup>49</sup> It is this self feature, the awareness of self, that constitutes the definition of the term "consciousness" for him. Animals have awareness but lack this feature of self-consciousness. He says, more explicitly, "Given the presence of wakefulness and mind, both of which you will need if you are to be conscious, you might say that the distinctive feature of your

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49 Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind* (2010), p. 168.

consciousness is the very thought of you. But in order to make the poetry accurate you would have to say, the very “felt” thought of you.”<sup>50</sup> And this sounds to me exactly like the common definition of “ego”. What you feel is you, your identity, the “I am”, is the definition of consciousness for Damasio. It is your separate self identity. And here we may see a vast difference between scientific thinking and philosophical thinking, even on the part of a scientist of mind who has written books of philosophy. This way of thinking is based exclusively on sense impressions.

To elaborate a little on this example, we can read an account of the process itself in an earlier book written by Damasio titled *The Feeling of What Happens*: “Thirty-two years ago, a man sat across from me in a strange, entirely circular, gray-painted examining room. ...Suddenly the man stopped, in mid-sentence, and his face lost animation; his mouth froze, and his eyes became vacuously fixed... For a brief period, which seemed like ages, this man suffered from an impairment of consciousness. Neurologically speaking he had an absence seizure followed by an absence automatism, two among the many manifestations of epilepsy, a condition caused by a brain dysfunction.”<sup>51</sup> In each of the two books mentioned, detailed examples of brain dysfunctions are given as evidence of the direct correlations between the brain and consciousness. And this is true throughout the literature of neurology and psychology since William James and Sigmund Freud. But as we often find mentioned in the philosophical literature of the same period, correlating a brain dysfunction with a consciousness dysfunction does not necessarily constitute a causal relationship; nor does it explain anything about the relationship between the healthy brain and normal consciousness.

This debate goes back to the empirical philosophy of Hume, which asserts both the necessity of skepticism regarding the certainty of cause-effect relationships, and at the same time the validity of such inferences, and their demonstrable applications, based on repeated observations. This has become the foundation of most philosophical criticisms of empirical scientific thinking, in fact. Cause-effect relationships are often asserted with respect to outcomes which they do not actually explain. But Damasio carries his argument, and his motives, quite a bit further into this questionable territory. He writes, “The shaping of my notion of consciousness probably began that day, without my noticing it, and the idea that a sense of self was an indispensable part of the conscious mind only gained strength as I saw comparable cases. ...I regard the problem of consciousness as a combination of two intimately related problems. The first is the problem of understanding how the brain inside the human organism engenders the mental patterns we call, for lack of a better term, the images of an object. By *object* I mean entities as diverse as a person, a place, a melody, a toothache, a state of bliss; by *image* I mean a mental pattern in any of the sensory modalities, e.g., a sound image, a tactile image, the image of a state of well-being. Such images convey aspects of the physical characteristics of the object and they may also convey the reaction of like or dislike one may have for an object, the plans one may formulate for it, or the web of relationships of that object among other objects.”<sup>52</sup> Before going on to his other important problem, we should perhaps reflect critically on this one. He says that entities that exist in the world are objects, which seems to assume that the objects perceived are real things. Then he says that we have images of those objects which “convey” a wide variety of things, presumably to our awareness, such as characteristics of the objects, our feelings about them, our plan of action, and the web of relations in which all this is embedded. This is, to say the least, an attribution of enormous scope and importance to the notion of an image. On the one hand it represents the things perceived, and on the other it represents our feelings and judgments about those things. And thirdly, all of this is somehow produced by the brain. Here we find, in fact, a fairly comprehensive statement of all the

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50 Ibid., p.171

51 Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens – Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (1999), p. 6.

52 Ibid., p. 9

disparate elements and complexities that have plagued the question of consciousness since Hume. Then Damasio goes on to define problem number two: “This is the problem of how, in parallel with engendering mental patterns for an object, the brain also engenders a sense of self in the act of knowing. ...The sensory images of what you perceive externally, and the related images you recall, occupy most of the scope of your mind, but not all of it. Besides those images there is also this other presence that signifies you, as observer of the things imaged, owner of the things imaged, potential actor on the things imaged. If there were no such presence, how would your thoughts belong to you? ...The solution for this second problem requires the understanding of how, as I write, I have a sense of me, and how, as you read, you have a sense of you... The solution also requires the understanding of how the images of an object and of the complex matrix of relations, reactions, and plans related to it are sensed as the unmistakable mental property of an automatic owner who, for all intents and purposes, is an observer, a perceiver, a knower, a thinker, and a potential actor. ...The book is about my idea of what consciousness is, in mental terms, and about how consciousness can be constructed in the human brain.”<sup>53</sup>

Now, as far as what goes on in the brain explaining this complex world of mental phenomena, on which Damasio bases his hopes, – this is an outcome that it is rather unreasonable to expect. So far, the most that can be hoped for is a set of hypothetical correlations between the two, based on laboratory measurements. Removing certain parts of the brain in order to demonstrate the loss of certain mental capacities has had some apparent success, but it has also been demonstrated that other parts of the brain can often take over and execute the lost functions. It has even been shown that certain mental functions that are normally correlated with specific areas of the brain can be conducted with hardly any brain or no brain function at all.<sup>54</sup> But a question that is more interesting to raise from the point of view of philosophical thinking, is whether this association between “consciousness of self” and the wide range of other phenomena associated with the mind has any validity at all. As we have said, most of the things that Damasio associates with this sense of self are feelings, emotions, and personal identity. But animals too are capable of learning and performing responsible tasks, as well as exhibiting feelings of loyalty, sympathy, happiness, sadness, anticipation and cunning, without having a sense of self, according to Damasio. And at the other end of the spectrum of mind, we might argue that human beings normally carry out the performance of duties, respond to circumstances, rationally plan and execute complex acts of analysis, synthesis, intention and will, without any sense of being any more than an instrument of the energies and drives that are moving them. In fact, if they stopped to think about themselves, they would often be unable to do anything of the sort. And it may not be until they suffer frustration and angst that they become aware of self. For Damasio, finally, we must consider the possibility that the importance and wide range of functions that he attributes to “images” may be the consequence of his own learning style and mental predisposition. There are those who attribute great importance to “impressions”, or to “imagination”, or to “abstract thought”, or to “calculation”, or to “inspiration”, or to “reason”. And we will find that there are theories of philosophy, and art, and science, that correspond, to a large extent, to these various predispositions of their authors. Anyone can see that Damasio tends to attribute everything that the mind does to “images”, and one might well infer from this that he, himself, is a person who is strongly fixated on this function of his own mind.

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53 Ibid., p. 9-11

54 See Dr. Bruce Greyson, director of the center for brain-consciousness research at the University of Virginia, who has documented many cases, including a girl, who was an honor student entering Smith college, and as the result of an accident had a brain scan which showed she had no cerebral cortex, but only a brain stem. Dr. Greyson comments that according to normal brain science she should not have been capable of any thought, much less an outstanding intellect. <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yosn\\_GHYiR4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yosn_GHYiR4)>

Today we find phenomenologists who have gone forward quite progressively since the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries toward the understanding of consciousness as a relational field of being, far beyond the functions of any human brain or mind, in the scope of its importance to species, to societies, and to the order of life in the cosmos. And on the other hand we find philosophers and scientists of mind who reduce the idea of consciousness to the most fundamental brain mechanisms, which they believe give us a sense of being ourselves, and are responsible for everything we know and do, like Schopenhauer. It's not important that we are a self among other selves that are conscious, by virtue of the nature of existence as we know it, or that the "self" has a larger metaphysical meaning than a thing with emotional behaviors, but they emphasize simply that we have become self-conscious as a result of physical processes. And the term we hear frequently from this school of thought is that the brain "gives rise" to this consciousness, as well as to thought and awareness in general. But this is merely an "aspect" of consciousness that has been the primary focus of psychology for more than a century. This consciousness of self is responsible for all the emotional complexes that the human being experiences, all the angst that gives rise to guilt and depression, according to the existentialists; all the madness that constitutes the personality of tyrants, etc. But can this really be the meaning of consciousness? As we heard earlier from Sri Aurobindo, we will have to go far beyond these limited notions of consciousness, still held jealously by both psychology and neuroscience, if we are to adequately address the question of "consciousness".

Consequently, it has occurred to me that the world we live in today is already completely different from the world of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The way we understand things is categorically different. Even the attempt of today's science, and neuroscience in particular, to understand consciousness is categorically different from the Humean and Hegelian way of understanding things. If we look at the beginning of the modern period, from say 1600 to 1900, we see that it was an intensely rationalistic period of development. From the point of view of art it was the period of the development of perspective, and from the point of view of science it was a period of highly theoretical and abstract thought which attempted to understand everything rationally and speculatively, with very minimal dependence on observation and experiment, and only relatively simple technologies. During that period "consciousness" was in the background as a vague awareness of the mind's ability to analyze things and then to apply the principles of things that were understood in this way to practical improvements in life and society, to its systems of manufacture, medicine, economics, ethics, government and law. This was the meaning of consciousness. Then, around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were significant developments in our understanding of things in terms of evolutionary theory, relativity, quantum mechanics, with an enormous increase in the sophistication of their applications, in electronic and atomic energy technologies. So we can see a significant shift from rational philosophical and scientific thinking with Hegel and Schopenhauer or Newton and Leibnitz, to the highly technological worlds of Einstein and Hubble, and from the positivistic analysis of the extended world, to a more deeply subjective, phenomenological understanding of the inner worlds of human experience with Freud and Jung, or James and Bergson. The picture that I am seeing is of an arc of development in the understanding of human consciousness from empiricism, to idealism, to phenomenology over a period of about 400 years. There was the beginning of the "subjective age" as Sri Aurobindo called it, from the subjectivity of impressions, opposed to an external and extended world; and then there was the subjectivity of transcendence, which saw the external world from within as Idea; then there came the subjectivity of identity between the internal and external world, and a sense of the inner and outer connectedness of things mental and material; finally there began to emerge the subjectivity of the whole, of being the world, of a larger Self that is One with World – awareness of the Self in others and in all, dynamically creating and experiencing everything – awareness of Oneness, fulfillment, beauty, harmony, joy.

But now I would like to consider the work of another contemporary scientific mind who is also pursuing the question of consciousness from the point of view of physics. His name is Stuart Kauffman and he is a biophysicist. I want us to see and feel and grasp in some way what this scientific approach is and how it is different from both the neurological and the phenomenological approach. Kauffman's most recent book is titled *Reinventing the Sacred* (2008), and what this implies is that what has been sacred in the past was an invention of human beings, and now we can invent another sacred. But that's not the most important thing to know. His approach to understanding evolution and consciousness is similar to another thinker that we will also be considering, Evan Thompson. Both of them know a great deal about neuroscience. Kauffman is really a scientist and Thompson is really a philosopher. But both have been associated with a neuro-phenomenologist named Francisco Varela who suggested in the 90s that neuro-phenomenology would be a science that could understand consciousness through understanding the biology of the brain. Both Kauffman and Thompson have participated in extensive laboratory research, and Kauffman has come to the point in his thinking where he says, "From the larger perspective of this book that seeks to move beyond reductionism to a scientific world-view of emergence, and ceaseless creativity, the evolutionary emergence of overwhelming organization of process, is the most visible example of a phenomenon that is in no way accessible to reductionism."<sup>55</sup> He is a physicist, and yet he says repeatedly that physics cannot predict or explain the behavior of the biosphere. The concept of "emergence" as he defines it means that a world of biological principles, laws, and processes has emerged that is totally different from the physical world. Neuro-phenomenologists working from a biological perspective will say, similarly, that mind as it has manifested in the human being, as a result of the development of the brain, is another emergent phenomenon which the principles of life and the biosphere cannot predict or explain. So there is this threefold mind-life-body complex that Sri Aurobindo formulated as a fundamental and necessary understanding of the human being, back in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in a very precise way. It is now commonly understood that we inhabit a threefold world in which mind, life and body each behave differently, according to different principles and processes, and yet function as one organism. But this fact leads, nonetheless, to what is known as the hard problem, or the explanatory gap, in current theories of consciousness. How can the emergence of mind be explained on the basis of anything that is known about life and matter? There is a mystery there. It is the one that was articulated by John Locke in the 17<sup>th</sup> century: "If there must be something eternal, let us see what sort of being it must be. And to that it is very obvious to reason that it must necessarily be a cogitative being. For it is impossible to conceive that ever bare incogitative matter should produce a thinking intelligent being. It is as impossible to conceive of that, as that nothing should of itself produce matter."<sup>56</sup>

We have seen with Damasio that enormous amounts of time and energy are still being spent to discover how the brain produces the mind. This would be an example of reductionism according to Kauffman. He says, quite rightly, that the processes of the mind cannot be reduced to either the processes of life or the neural phenomena of the brain. But, he nevertheless says that the dynamics of living cells provide an analogy for how the higher functions of life and mind arise. He says, "Living cells carry out work to construct restraints on the release of energy and the resulting work does in fact construct many things, including further constraints on the release of energy ... If constraints can be thought of as boundary conditions (like for instance the membrane wall of a cell), then cells build a richly interwoven web of boundary conditions that further constrain the release of energy, so as to build yet more boundary conditions. ... The total amount of work a system can do depends upon the energy flow through the system. It would seem that we need to consider the product of the total amount of work done multiplied by the diversity of work that is done. This is mathematizable. For a cell, this would maximize the total

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55 Stuart A. Kauffman, *Reinventing the Sacred* (2008), p. 89.

56 From Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (1995), p. 74.

amount of work times the diversity of work in the selectable tasks the cell would carry out. ...the measure is the total energy flow in an ecosystem times the diversity of that energy flow. ...If this were true for biospheres, then, despite extinction events, their long-term behavior would be to maximize something like the total diversity of organized processes that can happen.”<sup>57</sup>

So, after analyzing the thermodynamic behavior of matter, and cellular behavior in organisms, and extrapolating to economics in human societies, and various other systems, he formulates a theory of growth and diversification in all systems based on physics. In fact, he inserts a revealing comment into this argument by inviting the reader to “be a physicist for a moment, and think of a gas of randomly moving particles”. And then he explains: “Crucially, such random motion of the gas particle is pure heat. Yet, and this is critical, there are precisely no constraints in this random system. Thus, the diversity of what can happen next is maximized in a system of particles in random motion, not in a system with boundary conditions or constraints. ...This may provide the clue we need to find a useful conception of a sense in which a diversity of constraints maximizes the diversity of “events” that can happen. If constraints and their diversity are somehow to be related to a physical meaning of information and to “events”, then we need to introduce boundary conditions on the maximally random motion of the random gas – to have fewer motions, and thus constrain the release of energy into fewer degrees of freedom.”<sup>58</sup> And here we see the sudden appearance of the idea of “information” which, as in Locke's “cogitative being”, is another term for consciousness, and it emerges in this thinking according to a principle of thermodynamics derived from physics.<sup>59</sup> Undoubtedly, of course, this is an event of consciousness.

It seems obvious to me that this purportedly anti-reductionist philosophy of “nature's process”, to which virtually everything in existence can be attributed, including the evolution of consciousness, turns out to be a highly elevated kind of reductionism, in which nature replaces God as an infinitely creative force in conceptual design space. The fundamental law that is being invoked may no doubt be attributed to the work of the Nobel Laureate physicist, Ilya Prigogine.<sup>60</sup> Another of Kauffman's favorite ideas is attributed to Darwin's concept of pre-adaptation. The maximization of diversity through processes of growth is demonstrated in evolutionary theory by the development of organs and functions that were not initially present as something advantageous to survival and adaptation. They seem to be the result of an immediate environmental adaptation that later became something more. For example, the jaw and vocal chords came to be as a result of the evolution of upright mobility. As a result of upright mobility the brain cavity expanded, and as that happened the vocal system developed, leading to the emergence of language. Kauffman tells us that this development of the vocal system and language could not have been predicted by the enlargement of the brain cavity or the emergence of upright mobility. It was due to this pre-adaptive development for mobility that eventually led to diversification through the maximization of work done under the constraining conditions of hominid evolution during that period of time, which led to the emergence of language development. The development of language, according to this theory, was nothing more than another novel emergence in

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57 Ibid., p. 92-100

58 Ibid., p. 98-99

59 See Kauffman (2008): “Suppose we take, as a measure of the amount of “information” in a nonequilibrium thermodynamic system such as a cell, the diversity of constraints that are partially causal in the diversity of events or processes that happen next. Then we might hope that in living systems under natural selection the diversity of events or processes that happen next would be maximized. ...we need a concept of information as constraints on the release of energy that then constitutes work, and then hope to show that natural selection maximizes the diversity of work that is done in cells, organisms, ecosystems, and biospheres”, (p.98).

60 See Rod Hemsell, *The Philosophy of Evolution* (2014) quoting Ilya Prigogine: “Every process that a thermodynamic system may undergo can go in one direction only. And the opposite process, in which both the system and its surroundings would be returned to their original state, is impossible” (p. 286).

nature's unlimited arena of design space, into which Kauffman then introduces the helpful notion of “the adjacent possible”. But what about “thought”, one might ask, especially in the context of the question of consciousness. Language may have been made possible by the development of the physical body, but thought seems to be something entirely different, on which language depends.

The argument presented by Kauffman is clearly another form of the metaphysical concept of “force” with which our discussion began. If consciousness is force in the universe, and force in the universe, especially on our planet, is busy evolving forms according to the principle of diversification through maximization of work, then our consciousness is a natural product of that process, pushing on beyond its present boundary conditions. “All of this evolution of the propagating organization of process in and among cells, linking matter, energy, work, constraint, and semiosis (*ie.*, “*meaning*”), was going on in the biosphere billions of years ago, before the evolution of multi-celled organisms, and is part of the evolution of the biosphere into its adjacent possible. We are the fruits of this biosphere. We can only have profound gratitude to participate in this ongoing evolution. The creativity of nature should truly be God enough for us.”<sup>61</sup> Well, let us note that the notion of the “adjacent possible” has just entered the lists of grand metaphysical ideas, containing in its storehouse of unmanifest potentials, before even multi-celled life could emerge, all the organizational processes of that yet to be emerging life, already at work. As in Schopenhauer, in the form of an originating Will, this force has eventually produced our species which can consciously represent to itself the whole amazing process. Let us not fail to recognize what the scientist is saying here: Nature's thermodynamic processes have produced the biosphere and consciousness and human brains and economic systems and cultures. We should bow down before this omnipotence. Of course, but where is the Will, or the sense of purpose and satisfaction, or the principle of “self” with its desires and satisfactions, in all this? Are they already present in the primordial stir and the thermodynamic swirl? There seem to be many things that are missing from this view.

Similarly, there are now schools of quantum neuro-biology that are endeavoring to show that mind and life and everything else is a product of that most elusive and unpredictable domain of existence studied in the department of quantum physics, the quantum mechanical field. Reductionism therefore continues to be pervasive in the scientific study of consciousness. And of course our clever rational intellects love a good analogy, after all. So just as our consciousness, which is intangible, reflects the world of life in a relatively exact way, perhaps the measurable physical world is a reflection of the invisible quantum mechanical world that underlies it. Means and extremes. But the asymmetry here undermines the illusion: even mental consciousness is vibrant with life, as is matter, while the gulf between physical consciousness or mental consciousness and the quantum field could not be greater or less knowable. It is purely mathematical, a product of the mind. So it seems that these efforts at reduction have given us the same inexplicably related and interconnected worlds of matter, life, and mind with which the moderns, as well as the ancients, began, but no satisfactory integration. And “consciousness” remains as enigmatically unexplained and elusive as ever in terms of anything that we know about any of these three worlds. In an earlier book by Kauffman, titled *The Origins of Order*, he says at the beginning that the task of the book is “to answer the question, What are the sources of the overwhelming and beautiful order which graces the living world? To presume to ask such a question is also to know one must not presume to succeed. Questions such as this must ever be asked anew as each generation comes to perceive new ways of ordering its view of life.”<sup>62</sup> The central thesis of his book is that all these wonderful things are the result of a principle of spontaneous self-organization which is the basis of life. We must agree that this is an inspiring intuition, and we should recognize that it has become quite

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61 Op cit., Kauffman (2008) p. 100.

62 Stuart Kauffman, *The Origins of Order – Self-organization and Selection in Evolution* (1993), p. xv.

widespread in our generation's view of life. And yet, as we have seen and will continue to see in this course, there has also been a strong tendency for several generations, to seek the evidence for that principle in mechanism and measurement, which is to say, in Matter rather than in Spirit. The problem with this approach is obvious with regard to the question of consciousness. Consciousness is not something that can be observed and measured by the methods of science. It is a phenomenon of Spirit.

## Lecture 7

Consciousness, as we know, is our view of things. It is our experience of things, which leads us to make choices about what we do on the basis of what we know and feel and want, etc. It may be that this understanding gives us the force to create new adjacent possibles, as Stuart Kauffman says. And what he says is probably true, from that point of view. But it doesn't tell us how the mind understands things and makes the choices that it does, however maximized cellular diversity may be, nor how this translates into action. The maximization of work on the cellular level may be a product of some of the things we do. In fact medical science may have increased cellular potential in ways that couldn't have been imagined a few centuries ago. The human population that has resulted from the inventions of medical science couldn't have been predicted from any previously known human population. Who could have predicted this civilization with its technology two hundred years ago, or who could have predicted the development of language as it is now known and used 50 thousand years ago? These are emergent phenomena, as the term has been defined by Kauffman, and consequently unpredictable on the basis of what was known or achieved by prior levels of the evolutionary emergence of life or mind. But when we think of bringing together philosophy and science to address the question of consciousness, we come to realize that there are many problems that are not dealt with at all by the approach that primarily considers the measurability of processes that is typical of science. There are other perspectives and other ways of addressing these issues.

For example, there is another creative philosopher of science named Evan Thompson, whose work we will consider, that is quite different from Kauffman's, although both men know many of the same things. Thompson is a young professor of philosophy, and he is the son of William Erwin Thomson who originally published the *Adventure of Consciousness*<sup>63</sup> in America, and founded a research institute known as the Lindisfarne Foundation, which sponsored many creative thinkers in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thomson therefore grew up with people around him like Francisco Varela and Gregory Bateson. He has recently been involved in neurological research and philosophy in several universities, as well as writing several books on phenomenology. And he has had a close relationship with the Dalai Lama and Buddhism. So we will become acquainted with his research and thought from his book titled *Mind in Life*, focusing especially here on Thompson's reference to the work of Merleau-Ponty.

Evan Thompson writes, "To try to bridge the explanatory gap between consciousness and nature by revising how we think about matter, life and mind, the burden of Merleau-Ponty's argument has been to show that the notion of form can both integrate the orders of matter, life, and mind and account for the originality of each order. On the one hand, nature is not pure exteriority. But rather, in the case of life, has its own interiority, and thus resembles mind. On the other hand, mind is not pure interiority but rather a form or structure of engagement with the world, and thus resembles life. The first side of this

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63 Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life – Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind* (2007), p. 78-79

story begins with matter and life. Given the notion of form, as Merleau Ponty presents it, we can no longer understand nature in Cartesian fashion as simply “a multiplicity of events external to each other and bound together by relations of causality”. This conception of nature as sheer exteriority (*partes extra partes*, as Merleau-Ponty puts it), is already surpassed by the morphodynamical notion of form at the physical level. Form, so understood, “is no more composed of parts which can be distinguished in it than a melody (always transposable) is made of the particular notes which are its momentary expression” (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, p. 137). It is at the vital level, however, that interiority arises. Interiority comprises both the self-production of an inside, that is an autopoietic individual, and the internal normative relation holding between this individual and its environment (the intrinsic relation that surmounts the mutual exteriority of organism and milieu). As we have seen, this sort of interiority – the self-production of an inside that also specifies an outside to which it is normatively related – arises through autopoietic closure and the thermodynamic requirements of basic autonomy. Thus autopoiesis is a condition of possibility for the dynamic emergence of interiority (Varela, 1991).”<sup>64</sup>

Let's think about this for a minute. Autopoiesis means creating oneself, and autonomy means self-control. The emergence of the idea of the “self” happened in philosophy quite a long time ago, in fact a few millennia ago, and here it is being presented as a cognitive phenomenon. Self is a fundamental and dynamic idea of how something becomes what it is. Autonomy and interiority are concepts that mean that an individual organism acts in the world according to its own nature. And by acting in the world it uses the energy of its environment which alters, or co-creates, its expression of itself at the same time that it alters the environment. This idea of Merleau-Ponty and of neuro-phenomenology is that the self of the organism is constantly being expressed and the environment is constantly being created around it by its action and energy to move in the direction of what it can become. And we know from Heidegger that the human being knows things spontaneously in terms of their “will be”, their “is”, their “has been”. We are temporal in our consciousness in the same way that things are in their being and becoming. This enables us to know the being of things. Because nothing is just what it is in the present instant. We are all much more than what we are in this instant. In fact everything that we know has temporal continuity, or we couldn't know it. If things only existed in this instant and then disappeared, no knowledge would be possible. Just as we know ourselves as the same in spite of the fact that we are constantly changing, ie., in a year 98% of our cells are renewed, everything that we encounter is of the same sort. Everything in existence exists for something, in which its past, its present, and its future constitute its being and becoming.

Looking at biology, and trying to understand consciousness, the neuro-phenomenologists explain the process of nature as one of relationships between the autonomous self, its boundary conditions, and its utilization of the environment that, altogether, give it its meaning. For every organism, everything that is done gives it meaning. When the cat chases the mouse, it expresses its catness. When we pursue learning and energize ourselves and society around pursuing knowledge and artistic creation, these actions give us our meaning. A value is created by the action of the self creating itself in being and time, which is known by Evan Thompson's school of thought as the dynamical systems approach to understanding consciousness. In this view, consciousness is the world in its temporal movement towards expressing itself as meaning and purpose and value. All individuals are selves, at every level from single-celled organisms or even, according to some philosophers, from molecules, in relation to others processing energy and information in the field of interconnected events. At our level, conscious action gives us a relatively complete awareness of the world, and our action in the world, in order to realize the potential of the world. For us to believe that we are separate individuals struggling for survival and dominance is an illusion. We are conscious entities that realize ourselves in the context of

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64 Ibid., p.79

the other, which is a definition of consciousness according to this phenomenological theory. So, does this explain consciousness? Certainly it is an explanation of “mind in life” as it demonstrates itself through the organization of meaningful connections that enhance its well-being. But does a theory of interiority and autonomy explain the fact of consciousness itself, – this extraordinary phenomenon of knowing awareness and intelligent choice that we have? This is the question that Thompson is exploring. As he pursues it further through the biological philosophy of another phenomenologist named Hans Jonas, who was also a student of Heidegger, he writes:

“Living beings affirm their own identities by differentiating themselves from their surroundings and thus demand to be seen from an autonomy perspective. Autopoiesis is basic autonomy in its minimal cellular form: a living cell stands out from a chemical background as a closed network of self-producing processes that actively regulates its encounters with its environment. What Kant recognized as a distinguishing characteristic of organic beings – that they are unities rather than mere aggregates – finds its minimal expression in a living cell. A cell, not merely a persisting material aggregate, is a self-sustaining unity, a unity that dynamically produces and maintains its own identity in the face of what is other. Jonas has this distinctive mark of life in mind when he writes: “The introduction of the term ‘self’, unavoidable in any description of the most elementary instance of life, indicates the emergence, with life as such, of internal identity – and so, as one with that emergence, its self-isolation too from all the rest of reality” (1966, p. 82-83).”<sup>65</sup>

Interiority therefore means here a certain “perspective”, or a characteristic way of being in relation to an “exteriority” with which it is in some kind of relation. It does not mean a physiological inside made of neurons or genes, in relation to a sensorium that reacts to external stimuli. The idea of autonomy in the context of life, in the vital world, is the meaning of living, being, relating, acting, and eventually knowing oneself in terms of one's own needs and goals determined by that interior identity. Each action is an expression of the self. This is the dynamical theory of consciousness. “Life is a self-affirming process that enacts its own identity and makes sense of the world from the perspective of that identity. The organism's “concern”, its “natural purpose”, is to keep on going, to continue living, to affirm and reaffirm itself in the face of imminent not-being. Incessant material turnover and exchange with the environment is both the reason for this concern and the only way to meet it. Such is the immanent teleology of life: “Organic individuality is achieved in the face of otherness, as its own ever-challenged goal, and is thus teleological” (Jonas, 1968, p. 243). The theory of autopoiesis can be called upon to complement this account. According to this theory, immanent purposiveness, the organism's concern, is not any extrinsic, heteronomous purpose or adaptive function, as in neo-Darwinism, nor any special vital force or entelechy, as in vitalism. Rather, as we have seen, it is the two-fold purposiveness of identity (self-production) and sense-making (adaptivity and cognition), based on autopoiesis. ...This two-fold purposiveness turns an indifferent physicochemical world into an environment of biological significance: “The environment (*Umwelt*) emerges from the world through the actualization or the being of the organism – granted that an organism can exist only if it succeeds in finding in the world an adequate environment” (Mereleau-Ponty, 1963, p. 13).”<sup>66</sup>

This is a scientific dynamical interactive energetic forceful explanation of consciousness. But then Thompson asks, near the end of his book, But what makes the agent a conscious subject in the first place? Obviously the self is an agent of its own interactions. The self, enacting itself, experiences itself. If this phenomenon is extended to the biosphere, even to the cosmos, we come to the idea of pan-experientialism in the philosophy of Whitehead, which we will consider thoroughly in the section on

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65 Ibid., p. 149

66 Ibid., p. 153

cosmology. However, even after this persuasive definition of the self, and the self in relation to the other as creating meaning and identity, and even if we add to that the meaning of “goodness” – the good in the Platonic sense manifesting through all these interactions: every successful or even unsuccessful interaction is good if it leads toward the “can be” – and even if we can infer that life, by virtue of the meaning that it creates, has the good as its goal, which would be a typical opening for metaphysics, a theory of cosmos and of consciousness as something that enhances the ability of organisms to realize the good – the question still remains. The strange thing is, that when that meaningful expression of the self happens, we are conscious of it; we know, we are aware of what is happening and we usually know why it is happening. We don't need a complicated theoretical description of it; it is immediate. Then we find ourselves situated in this dynamical temporal process of life, making choices that we believe are the best for us and the things around us, or at least avoiding the disasters, and experiencing the fruits of those choices – *harmonia* as it's called in Greek – by virtue of the *logos*, the reason that everything has for being what it is. But in spite of all this elaborate understanding of the phenomenon, none of the things that we have heard, from the theories of Kauffman to the theories of phenomenology and the biology of cognition, explain how we “know”, – the phenomenon of “consciousness” – because it's not something material. Both Kauffman and Thompson agree that there is not a one-to-one relationship between the neuronal activity in the brain and what we know, though there may be a correlation, and there is the evidence of meaningful action which occurs in relation to certain neural processes. What we know is a completely different plane of reality, however, than the neuronal energy exchanges in the synapses. There is “interiority” in the sense of perspective, there is awareness, and feeling, to be sure. And there is the manifestation of the self, in its expression and the realization of its potential, and of its type in relation to the environment and other selves. But how it is that this complexity yields experience as “consciousness”, or how it is all perhaps created by “consciousness” as intelligent will and intention, stands simply as “what is”, thoroughly and dynamically described, but not explained. The explanatory gap is still there. What is the relationship between that level of analysis and that world of energy exchange and vital autopoiesis, and the world of everything known about DNA, and the galaxies, and the differences between societies and civilizations, and music and philosophy? Our knowledge is vast. And then there is the far vaster world of structures and processes out there that are known and that have a vaster interrelated and meaningful reality of which we are merely minuscule fragments. We grasp all of those complexities of reality because we are in that world too, and we do know all of those things. So consciousness still stands above the three-fold reality that is now understood so well but which that none of it explains.

Thompson attempted to simplify, or simply circumvent the problem with a reference to Maturana, the co-author of the theory of autopoiesis with Varela, as did Fritjov Capra in his book on the subject. According to the theory of autopoiesis, there is a threefold dynamic process of self-making, cognition, and entropy, which is to say life, mind, matter. For Merleau-Ponty it is the complex nature of “form” which is the thing, along with its being and becoming, the idea of the whole with all its parts – matter, life, and mind, which is an idea that was thoroughly explored by Aristotle in antiquity, for whom the form was indeed the *final cause* of things, its *idea*.

Capra: “To understand the nature of life from a systemic point of view means to identify a set of criteria by which we can make a clear distinction between living and nonliving systems. ...the recent formulations of models of self-organization and the mathematics of complexity indicate that it is now possible to identify such criteria. The key idea of my synthesis is to express those criteria in terms of the three conceptual dimensions, pattern, structure, and process. ...I propose to understand autopoiesis, as defined by Maturana and Varela, as the pattern of life; ...dissipative structure, as defined by Prigogine, as the structure of living systems; ...and cognition, as defined by Gregory Bateson and more fully by Maturana and Varela, as the process of life. ...Autopoiesis (self-making) and cognition

(process of perceiving and knowing) are two different aspects of the same phenomenon of life. In the new theory all living systems are cognitive systems, and cognition always implies the existence of an autopoietic network.”<sup>67</sup> And Thompson: “As Maturana put it in a ground-breaking early paper: “A cognitive system is a system whose organization defines a domain of interactions in which it can act with relevance to the maintenance of itself, and the process of cognition is the actual (inductive) acting or behaving in this domain. Living systems are cognitive systems, and living as a process is a process of cognition. This statement is valid for all organisms, with and without a nervous system (Maturana 1970, p. 13).”<sup>68</sup>

So the upshot of this school of thought is that Mind is Life, Life is Mind. And in fact this has been the thinking of philosophers with a mind for biology since Darwin, Wallace, and Haeckel in more recent times, and since Spinoza and Leibnitz in the period of high Rationalism, and for a long time before the modern age of scientific thinking began. In fact this has generally been the cosmological view: the universe is made of “intelligent substance.” But this is more a theory of life than of mind or consciousness, even though Thompson denies his current version's vitalism. As his title suggests, “mind in life” is an elaboration of the idea that life processes are characterized by cognition, at least to the extent that they are expressive of purpose on both an individual and a collective scale. In fact this admirable work might be seen as more a biology of consciousness than a philosophy of consciousness. Its focus is largely on the biological theories of Maturana and Varela, which it explores in a very thorough and important manner, in the context of phenomenology. But there is a point at which this understanding of life as consciousness takes a decisive turn away from philosophy in the direction of physiology and the neurology of consciousness, and devotes itself to finding the origins of consciousness in the material processes of the brain. It is the scientific turn.

In Thompson's phenomenological view, “force” is manifested through the self-production or autopoiesis of organisms in relation to the environment, which results in cognition, and this is somehow the basis of consciousness. “...Meaning is intrinsic to the coupling of organism and milieu, and thus surmounts their mutual exteriority.” But then, somewhat surprisingly, he devotes the later part of his book to the importance of finding “the neural basis of mental activity”. He says, “Dynamic systems theory is supposed to mediate between phenomenology and neuroscience. The strategy of neurophenomenology (Varela's) is to find a common structural level of description that captures the dynamics of both the impressional, retentional, protentional flow of time consciousness, and the large scale neural processes thought to be associated with consciousness.”<sup>69</sup> We have heard quite a bit from phenomenology about this flow of time consciousness, especially from Heidegger, and now we are hearing that this grasp of the ground of consciousness needs to be mediated by an understanding of neural processes, according to Varela's theory. And so, the project to find the basis of consciousness in the neural structures gets underway, with what is called neurophenomenology.

Thompson says, “What we now need to examine is how this self-constituting flow is supposed to be structurally mirrored at the biological level by the self organizing dynamics of large scale neural activity. ...Any model of the neural basis of mental activity, including consciousness, must account for how neural activity can operate in a coherent way from moment to moment. Various empirical theoretical considerations suggest that the time scale of such neurocognitive activity is in the range of 250 to 500 milliseconds. Varela calls this scale of duration the 1 scale, which he distinguishes from the 1 to 10 scale of elementary neural events, and a 10-100 scale of descriptive narrative assessments...

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67 Fritjov Capra, *The Web of Life – A new scientific understanding of living systems* (1996) p. 160

68 Op. cit., p. 124

69 a-b Ibid., p. 329-331

There is a competition between different neural assemblies in the brain...<sup>34b</sup>, and so on. So, he has now gone from his previous recognition of the flow of time in the process of consciousness and understanding, to the pursuit of its neural coordinates. And this I would say is clearly a turn towards materialism, with the obvious consequence that the topic of consciousness is quickly lost in the paraphernalia of laboratory processes of measurement and a mounting plethora of data which, however closely or remotely they may appear to correspond to conscious events, will never explain them. But let us back up for a moment and take a closer look at Thompson's phenomenology of consciousness at the point where it seems to offer the most promise. He said, "... our being conscious of external temporal phenomena entails that our temporally enduring experiences of those phenomena are self-aware."<sup>70</sup> The phenomena that we are aware of are temporal, and our enduring experience of those phenomena is also temporal, so we are aware of the temporality of things in relation to the temporality of consciousness. Heidegger has told us that because our consciousness is primordially temporal we can be aware of things in the process of their temporal changes. If our consciousness were not temporal in itself, we would not know things in terms of their 'has been', 'are', and 'will be', but it is spontaneous that we know things in that way. Therefore it is our mode of being conscious, and just about everybody and everything that happens to us and that we experience day by day and moment by moment we know in terms of its temporal nature. And we contribute to the realization of the potentials of things, we care about things in motion from their 'has been' through their 'are now' to their 'will be'. That is constantly our preoccupation with people and things. So it seems to be true that our consciousness is temporal in itself. However, it is still open to question whether the statement that such "temporally enduring experiences" are necessarily self-aware implies that "experience" is aware of itself, and experience and awareness are then identical, or whether it implies that experience entails self-awareness, in addition to the awareness of things, which is an assertion that we have questioned a number of times already. But he persists with this idea: "Inner time consciousness is nothing other than pre-reflective self-awareness."<sup>71</sup> Even if we meditate on the self and we are only conscious of the self in its pure static nature, pre-reflective, not thinking about anything, but just being in the self: that being in the self is also temporal. It is a continuum of being in the self. Let's hold this idea and come back to it.

Thompson then asks a truly fascinating metaphysical question: "If we understand time-consciousness in this way, then what becomes of the absolute consciousness of absolute flow? How does it fit into this account?"<sup>72</sup> Hegel has told us that everything in nature is in motion: the force of things is how things become what they are. So if we elevate this idea to the universal flow of things, we arrive at the concept of absolute universal flow. Then, when Thompson asks, "what becomes of absolute consciousness of absolute flow?", without referring to Hegel, or Heidegger, or Merleau-Ponty, this means that these ideas of phenomenology have now been absorbed into philosophical thinking, and have become commonplace assumptions. He therefore seems to reach this conclusion quite easily: "In answering this question we arrive at the following fundamental idea: The absolute flow of experiencing simply is the pre-reflective self-manifestation of our experience." In other words, our experience of the absolute flow, and the absolute flow, are the same thing. And we come again to this fundamental position of phenomenology, looking out at the garden, we are conscious of everything in the field of our perception. We don't need to analyze and reflect on the botany or the weather, we simply are conscious of what is there, primordial being there *is consciousness*. We seem to be getting closer.

"Put another way", says Thompson, "the structure of inner time consciousness, – primal impression,

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70 Ibid., p. 328 Let me point out that this discussion of time consciousness is carried out by Thomson in the context of an examination of Husserl's philosophy, and as such has been taken out of context for the purposes of this study.

71 Ibid

72 Ibid

retention, protention – is exactly the structure of pre-reflective self-awareness, and also precisely the absolute flow. The absolute flow is the standing streaming living present.”<sup>73</sup> This is meditation in action: the standing streaming living present, which is present now, and it is present now, and also now, and so on. It is our consciousness and whatever we are conscious of, the pre-reflective nature of experience in its ever changing intensities. “On the one hand the living present is streaming, because it is the continuous transformation and intentional modification of the about to happen into the happening into the just happened. On the other hand the living present is standing because the three-fold structure of protention, primal impression, retention, is always present and unchanging.”<sup>74</sup> This seems to be remarkably close to the relationship between *purusa* and *prakriti*, the most fundamental description of what consciousness is in the Indian philosophical system. *Purusa* is the still self witnessing *prakriti*, the flux of nature, and realizing that they are one.

If we really want to know what consciousness is, then, we have to get in touch with our pre-reflective self awareness, because that is consciousness. There are many interesting disciplines that one can follow to accomplish this, and there are numerous philosophies based on this understanding. This is the idea of the phenomenological *epoche*. And it entails a movement of consciousness beyond the sense-mind, beyond the analytical rational mind, and even beyond Reason. As Sri Aurobindo put the proposition: “Reason accepts a mixed action when it confines itself to the circle of our sensible experience (*which is what science is supposed to do, we might add*). Reason admits its law as the final truth and concerns itself only with the study of phenomena; that is to say, with the appearance of things in their relations, processes, and utilities. Reason accepts its pure action when accepting our sensible experiences as a starting point. But refusing to be limited by them, it goes behind, judges, works in its own right, and strives to arrive at general and unalterable concepts which attach themselves not to the appearances of things but to that which stands behind their appearances.”<sup>75</sup> And what is that? It is “universals”, and we are back to Hegel. The next step above sensory experience, is the understanding that everything that we know is related to something else that we know. Everything has a self-nature, according to the idea of autonomy that we heard from Thompson earlier, and is driven to be itself, in relation to some other thing. Nothing is just a particular object. Everything is a member of a set of universals. Hegel tells us that when we are conscious of those universals, we are operating on the level of pure mind which holds the universals to be what things really are. The universal is what we know, it is not the particular. The particulars are manifestations of the universals which actually constitute their space-time reality. Consciousness is the universal present both in our awareness and in the particulars that embody it. Or at least that is the Hegelian formula for understanding consciousness. Sri Aurobindo continues:

“The complete use of pure reason brings us finally from physical to metaphysical knowledge. But the concepts of metaphysical knowledge do not fully satisfy the demand of our integral being. (*This is the critique of Hegel and speculative philosophy from the evolutionary perspective of Sri Aurobindo.*) They are indeed entirely satisfactory to the pure reason itself because they are the very stuff of its own existence. ...The one means we have left in our mentality is an extension of that form of knowledge by identity which gives us the awareness of our own existence. It is really upon a self-awareness more or less conscient, more or less present to our conception that the knowledge of the contents of our self is based. Or to put it in a more general formula, the knowledge of the contents is contained in the knowledge of the continent. . . . When the self-awareness in the mind applied both to continent and content, to own-self and other-self, exalts itself into the luminous self-manifest identity, the reason also

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73 Ibid

74 Ibid

75 Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (2005 ed.), p. 67-71

converts itself into the form of the self-luminous intuitional knowledge. This is the highest possible state of our knowledge when mind fulfils itself in the supramental.”<sup>76</sup>

At this point we come to a possibility that is quite the reverse of the plunge of neuro-phenomenology into the synapses, and also to the notion that self-conscious experience constitutes the fundamental basis of all consciousness: it is an ascent beyond self-conscious experience and the duality of subject and object, into the realization that the experiencer and the experience, consciousness and object, self and nature are essentially one Self which, through its universalization, exists in all and unifies all, from matter to mind and beyond. Consciousness is both the force in motion and its temporal self-awareness; it is both the Will and its Representation; it is both the Being and the Becoming. It is consciousness that builds the synapses that relay the inputs and outputs of sensory phenomena; it is consciousness that dynamically enacts the web of life with its myriad of meaningful interactions; it is consciousness that raises the elements of matter into the forms of life and the perceptions and judgments and intentional determinations of mind.

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76 Ibid

## Lecture 8

If we are asking the question repeatedly and reading many different versions of the answer: What is Consciousness?, finally we come to the idea that Consciousness in fact just Is. Conscious being is the fundamental principle of existence. And everything is an expression of it. So there is nothing to be explained as far as consciousness goes – every structure, every molecular society, every cell, every organism, every nerve synapse and system of synapses, every species in the biosphere, the biosphere itself, the solar system and the universe, all are structures of consciousness. The human organism is the most complex expression that exists at present. But we cannot localize consciousness in the brain, or heart, or nervous system, or sensorium, or species, or planet. From the simplest to the most complex structure, all are structures of the one field and self of consciousness. It includes the consciousness of all organisms and their vast intersubjective reality. One of the things we have heard, that makes sense to me, is the idea of the self that is generated by the action of each organism. When it acts in relation to an environment it generates itself, and it enacts a meaningful relationship with the environment that corresponds to its intention, or purpose, or need. Meaning is a spontaneous result of the action of any entity that is self creating. We have heard this philosophy in the context of neuro-phenomenology, which has a strong basis in biology, and it goes back to the *umwelt* idea of ethology, that all living things are what they are and do what they do in relation to their environment, according to the unique characteristics of each organism and its surroundings. But in this new view of consciousness, it is not the action that generates the self, but rather the self that generates the action. And because that is the case, self-awareness is not an emergent event, and not the pivot around which individual experience turns, but the ever-present, the universal presence and force that gives every event its meaning in relation to the whole. In this sense, it is the classical *logos*. But this term has acquired a great many interpretations over the centuries and it is no longer possible to rely on it to convey the meaning that we believe it once had. Sri Aurobindo's term for this universal consciousness-force is “supermind”.

In this context it would be good to now introduce some ideas of Whitehead, as an introduction to cosmological thinking. He says, “The problem of perception and the problem of power are one and the same, at least so far as perception is reduced to mere prehension of actual entities.”<sup>77</sup> Prehension is the term Whitehead uses for primal, pre-reflective self-awareness, which is only raised to the level of “consciousness” by those who think. Consciousness, in the broader sense in which I am using it, was termed “mentality” by Whitehead.<sup>78</sup> But then, the ontological question arises in his philosophy, How is

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<sup>77</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality – an essay in Cosmology* (1929/1978), p. 56.

<sup>78</sup> “Mental activity is one of the modes of feeling belonging to all actual entities in some degree, but only amounting to conscious intellectuality in some actual entities” (p. 56).

an actual entity actual and an entity? Should we just accept that the world is made of actual entities, or should we reflect philosophically on what it means to be an entity and to be actual? As human beings, unfortunately, we need to ask such foolish questions, because life is really very mysterious and we hear all kinds of stories. So we begin to wonder what it means and where it is all headed. Then Whitehead, in his book *Process and Reality*, in the course of a discussion of Hume's philosophy, tells us that, "Perception in the sense of consciousness of such prehension, requires the additional factor of the conceptual prehension of eternal objects, and a process of integration of the two factors."<sup>79</sup> Now what are those? Eternal objects are what Hegel would call universals. The quality red for example is not in the cap on the head but it is what we see and know about the cap on the head, along with its shape and use. For example when a cat has a tick on its ear, it is aware of the entity growing in size but it isn't much concerned because it doesn't have much sensation in its ear. Similarly the tick is aware of, or prehends, the tissue that it is attached to for the purpose of nutrition. *We* are aware of such actual entities, as tick, and ear, to which we attach a name that represents a category: tick is insect, it is bad, it is feeding itself at the expense of cat. All those veins in the ear are very appealing to it. If its teeth were the teeth of another cat, the cat would be less accommodating. When we begin to conceptualize such universals we are aware of our prehensions and of the prehensions of others. We know particular things as expressions of universals. Tick is not ear and ear is not tick, and both are negated in the process of conceptualizing these entities through mutual exclusion, based on our prehensions and our categorizing conception of the parasitic relationship, which is one among millions of such relationships. We know such things in a way that cat and tick do not. Our consciousness is quite removed from the actual physical and vital happening of the things observed and yet it understands their actuality. They are there before us as things that exist. And being human beings who care, we feel like liberating the cat's ear from that nasty tick. This process of consciousness is well understood by phenomenology. We have heard this explanation of things and of how consciousness works in detail already from Hegel.

Whitehead then expands the notion of a cosmic generality: things get their actuality through an intercession of eternal objects and physical processes. So the tick is a certain species of animal, and so is the cat, and their interaction is characteristic of the occurrence, the event, of animals living in the forest, which are a product of universal animal species, universal forest species, characteristics of certain geographical locations on earth, and so on, which have immediate, enduring, physical embodiments. This life event is a combination of many universals occurring together in a particular set of prehended and prehending things which have actual existence. The particulars are an actual concrescence of many universals. Therefore Whitehead explains that this is an ontological view of reality; it is not only an explanation of our consciousness of things but it explains how things actually are what they are. Consciousness is merely an aspect of their existence, though it is an essential one. And he says this is an "organic view": everything that exists is part of a larger whole, and everything experiences in some way the whole of which it is a part and the parts of which it is a whole. Whitehead says, in effect, that the power to be what a thing is and the prehension, or primal perception, of the thing are the same.

The universals exist on a plane of universals, also known as ideas. This is a kind of Platonic philosophy of how things get to be actual. Everything that exists is a concrescence of physical processes and eternal objects. Human consciousness knows both, the actual entity and the eternal objects that participate in that identity. This is how we know things. He says, "The perceptive constitution of the actual entity presents the problem, how can the other actual entities, each with its own formal existence, also enter objectively into the perceptive constitution of the actual entity in question? This is the problem of the solidarity of the universe. The classical doctrines of universals and particulars,

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79 Ibid., p.58

subjects and objects, individual substances not present in other individual substances, of the externality of relations, all alike render the problem incapable of solution. The answer given by the organic philosophy is the doctrine of prehensions involved in concrescent integrations and terminating in a definite complex unity of feeling. Each of these objects feels the other. To be actual must mean that all actual things are alike, objects enjoying objective immortality in fashioning creative actions, and that all actual things are subjects, each prehending the universe from which it arises. The creative action is the universe always becoming one in a particular unity of self experience, and thereby adding to the multiplicity, which is the universe as many.”<sup>80</sup> What endures is the universal, which the temporality of consciousness experiences, while the actual entity is constantly changing in the flow of time.

If we associate this philosophy with the scientific approach of neuro-phenomenology which told us that every entity is a self that enacts itself in relation to nature in and around it, and it enacts itself in order to get what it needs to affirm its own integrity, and every entity is doing that: all are selves interacting with other selves to make the unity of life; then we can see a parallel between that biological way of looking at things and this philosophical way of looking at things. But the neuro-phenomenologist is not projecting that notion outside of the one to one ratio of experience. He is not generalizing about the one and the many, about the universality of consciousness or prehension. The neuro-phenomenologist is just measuring the immediate interactions between things and the corresponding neural processes in the brain, and trying to put together correspondences on the analytical level based upon cause and effect and sensation and perception. But the philosopher is taking his awareness of that process and projecting it onto a plane of universals and a view of reality as a whole. And he sees that 'consciousness' is not a product of the interactions but is a principle inherent in the whole. It explains the patterns and the processes, rather than being an outcome explained by them.

Whitehead, in fact, commented in a very cogent and specific way on the difference between this scientific paradigm that has prevailed since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and the philosophical perspective that is needed to correct its limitations. Even though his analysis of the problem was written in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we can see that the situation hasn't changed very much a hundred years later. “If science is not to degenerate into a medley of *ad hoc* hypotheses, it must become philosophical and must enter upon a thorough criticism of its own foundations. ...There persists, however, throughout the whole period (*of the 17th-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries*) the fixed scientific cosmology which presupposes the ultimate fact of an irreducible brute matter, or material, spread throughout space in a flux of configurations. In itself such a material is senseless, valueless, purposeless. It just does what it does do, following a fixed routine imposed by external relations which do not spring from the nature of its being. It is this assumption that I call “scientific materialism”. Also it is an assumption which I shall challenge as being entirely unsuited to the scientific situation at which we have now arrived.”<sup>81</sup> “The doctrine which I am maintaining is that the whole concept of materialism only applies to very abstract entities, the products of logical discernment. The concrete enduring entities are organisms, so that the plan of the whole influences the very characters of the various subordinate organisms which enter into it. In the case of an animal, the mental states enter into the plan of the total organism and thus modify the plans of the successive subordinate organisms until the ultimate smallest organisms, such as electrons, are reached.”<sup>82</sup> “...we have to admit that the body is the organism whose states regulate our cognisance of the world. The unity of the perceptual field therefore must be a unity of bodily experience. In being aware of the bodily experience, we must thereby be aware of aspects of the whole spatio-temporal world as mirrored within the bodily life. ...my theory involves the entire abandonment

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80 Ibid., p. 56-57

81 A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (1925), p. 17

82 Ibid., p. 79

of the notion that simple location is the primary way in which things are involved in space-time. In a certain sense, everything is everywhere at all times. For every location involves an aspect of itself in every other location. Thus every spatio-temporal standpoint mirrors the world.”<sup>83</sup>

As we heard earlier from Sri Aurobindo, conscious being is the fundamental principle of existence, which is similar to what we have heard from Whitehead. But Sri Aurobindo added an especially important factor. He said that this conscious being that is the self of everything, and therefore constitutes the meaningful interrelationships of the whole field of experience, can be known directly. It is not merely a theoretical or philosophical construct; it is an experiential truth that can be known by a consciousness that is elevated and expanded by a Yoga of Transformation. The way of that Yoga of Transformation, he said, is through an absolute stillness: mental, vital, and physical. The transformed consciousness that emerges from that stillness, in proportion to the stillness achieved, knows the self of all by identity. He said that nothing is more useless than metaphysics unless we add to it such a Yoga, and then, by a transformation of the conceptual mind and ego, we can become aware of all beings in their essential truth. And then, he said, it is possible to act from the stillness of the self in all in a way that is an action of all through the individual, an impersonal action that enhances the well-being and self-realization of other entities at the same time that it enhances one's own self-realization and meaning and purpose. This is possible because consciousness on the universal plane is a manifestation of three principles: seeing, understanding, and acting. It is that threefold power in some form at every level of being in the world, in every entity and society of entities, according to the power that is embodied in the structures of existence at any particular moment. In principle it is: 1) the inner and outer awareness of the self of things. It is: 2) a processing of immediate information through the prehension of actual entities. And it is: 3) the will or drive or appetite that enacts itself according to the potentials for self-actualization that are available under prevailing conditions. This threefold principle of consciousness is hidden and obscured by matter, life and mind at the lower levels of organization and it becomes increasingly transparent through its evolutionary emergence in more complex organisms.

The emergence of such a highly transformed consciousness is possible because, according to the cosmological philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, Consciousness-Force or Supermind is the inherent reality and hidden cause of evolution and the emergence of every form of matter, life, and mind in the universe. He writes: “...it is only when we cease to reason and go deep into ourselves, into that secrecy where the activity of mind is stilled, that this other consciousness becomes really manifest to us — however imperfectly, owing to our long habit of mental reaction and mental limitation. Then we can know surely in an increasing illumination that which we had uncertainly conceived by the pale and flickering light of Reason. Knowledge waits seated beyond mind and intellectual reasoning, throned in the luminous vast of illimitable self-vision. ...The view I am presenting... sees the creative Idea as Real-Idea, that is to say, a power of Conscious Force expressive of real being, born out of real being and partaking of its nature and neither a child of the Void nor a weaver of fictions. It is conscious Reality throwing itself into mutable forms of its own imperishable and immutable substance. The world is therefore not a figment of conception in the universal Mind, but a conscious birth of that which is beyond Mind into forms of itself.”<sup>84</sup> And that which is beyond mind and possesses the Real-Idea that is the essential truth of things, is the Supermind. For Sri Aurobindo, the goal of our evolutionary existence is to rise into that which is its Origin: “Mind has to make room for another consciousness which will fulfill Mind by transcending it or reverse and so rectify its operations after leaping beyond it: the summit of mental knowledge is only a vaulting-board from which that leap can be taken. The

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83 Ibid., p. 91

84 Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (2005 ed), p. 125

utmost mission of Mind is to train our obscure consciousness which has emerged out of the dark prison of Matter, to enlighten its blind instincts, random intuitions, vague perceptions till it shall become capable of this greater light and this higher ascension. Mind is a passage, not a culmination.”<sup>85</sup>

### An Interim Conclusion

Our fundamental assumption, based on the explorations that we have conducted in this section, is that 'consciousness' is a principle of existence, and not merely the emergence of self-awareness at the level of human or animal mind. Mind, like life and matter, is an evolutionary emergence of the fundamental, self-existent principle of consciousness. If we reflect back over the various theories of consciousness that have been expressed, especially since Hegel, we will notice two distinct tendencies in the general conception and definition of what consciousness is. One is the tendency to see it as a universal principle of life and mind such as we find elaborated in Whitehead's philosophy of prehension, a form of panpsychism that includes the whole universe, or in the more recent theories of some phenomenologists and evolutionary biologists, that all energy coupling and exchange in organisms constitutes a form of cognition and meaning. As Konrad Lorenz put it, all energy exchange is information. In other words, consciousness is there in some form at every level of life and mind, if not of the universe as a whole. The other tendency is to consider consciousness as an emergent property of mind/brain evolution which becomes manifest only in human beings, or perhaps in higher animals, when they become reflective and self-aware. For those of the former inclination, the term consciousness applies to pre-reflective, immediate, or primal awareness and even to subconscious feelings and dreams, as well as to self-conscious reflection, while to the latter it means only knowing that we know, and doesn't give us control of anything. It is an epiphenomenon.

Those who consider consciousness as synonymous with self-awareness usually associate this awareness with language development and also with a scientific notion of linear causality, or at least of a linear continuum of space/time, such that the earlier manifestations of organ systems and behaviors somehow cause the language function to emerge. It is only when organic evolution reaches the level of species and organ complexity found in higher animals that consciousness can then emerge on the basis of prior and simpler processes of development. This idea of linear succession, or causality, is perhaps analogous to the notion that life spontaneously emerges from matter, like mammals from reptiles, according to our perception of the fossil record, though how this could happen is far from certain. The universalist and holistic meaning of consciousness, on the other hand, is usually associated with a philosophical approach to knowledge based on an intuitive grasp of the whole of life and mind rather than on strictly observable and quantifiable data, and it generally seeks to express its understanding in the form of universal principles of explanation, such as Leibnitz's idea of sufficient reason. The idea that Consciousness-Force is the fundamental principle of existence, which we have taken from Sri Aurobindo, and the similar idea of Hegel that it is Knowledge-Will, obviously belong to the universalist philosophical category. And this idea in fact has a great explanatory power even when applied to the field of processes studied by science.

Stuart Kauffman, as we have heard, asserted that the emergence of higher forms of life such as the biosphere or the creation of a global economic system cannot be predicted or explained on the basis of the phenomena of physics and molecular biology. The amazing processes of thought that he employs to explain the equally amazing molecular basis of life would not therefore be thought of as having the potential to mutually explain each other. They belong to virtually separate worlds, except that both thought and the economy, he says, are in all likelihood products of a principle he identifies with

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85 Ibid., p. 136

thermodynamic diversity. “Nature's processes” in his view are a sufficient explanation for everything that exists, including the “emergence of consciousness”.<sup>86</sup> But the idea that Conscious-Being is the origin of all forms of evolutionary emergence, even if they arise from processes of thermodynamic disequilibrium, says that the structures and processes of atoms, molecules, and cells work the way they do because they are expressions of consciousness at that material and vital level of existence. The complex processes of life and the emergence of the vastly diverse forms of plants and animals in the biosphere are an expression of consciousness at those levels of complexity, and not merely emergent from material processes. And the forms of mind, from the learning behavior of simple organisms to systems of mathematics, philosophy, science and law are expressions of consciousness at the currently highest known level of emergence, which is supported by and contains each of the successively lower levels of consciousness down to primal matter. The highest levels of consciousness that express agency, value and meaning are exactly the aspects of existence that Kauffman recognizes cannot be “explained” by the linear methods of description and measurement used by science. But we suggest that they *can be* explained by a philosophical approach that grasps process at every level of organization as an expression of consciousness.

If, then, the scientific approach to knowledge of nature accepted the explanation that is proposed by such philosophies, and it began to interpret molecular, organic, and organismic events as processes of consciousness, along with the higher functions of mind that seem to emerge inexplicably from below, there would be no obstacle to viewing living bodies as holistic systems in which all the structures and functions of the organism work together to accomplish their purposes in relation to their environments and societies in ways that appear to our higher rational mind, in fact, to be conscious behaviors. This appearance is actually the case, because they are exactly that at differential levels of organization. In a similar way, the philosophies of consciousness could begin to interpret molecular, sub-molecular, and organic processes and behaviors as powers of consciousness operating in an apparently autonomous and mechanical way on the surface yet driven by and attuned to their own self-generating purposes and connected to, and harmonious with, the entire biosphere and cosmos of which they are part. If the only difference between molecules, one-celled organisms, plants, animals, and humans is a difference in levels of complexity/consciousness, then the explanatory gap between matter and mind disappears. Then the difference between the scientific and philosophical approaches to knowledge would be only methodological and not fundamental. The difference in effect would be erased, (though still present), and the gap filled with a growing luminosity of discovery. This would be a demonstrable solution to the theoretical issues. But there is a more dynamical, practical, and inspiring aspect of the idea of Conscious-Being.

This human organism that we are, with its five physical senses, its sense mind, rational mind, and all its ideal, ethical, aesthetic, and intuitive capacities, is already aware of much more than the objects that it knows through sensation, perception, and abstract analysis. It perceives things beyond the range of its immediate awareness. It anticipates and plans and creates the future. It invents technological devices that extend perception into the depths of the material, biological and intellectual universe. There are musicians, poets, philosophers, and scientists that achieve levels of insight and inspiration, vistas of visionary understanding, and creative energies that can unite bodies and minds in a field of resonance that achieves new levels of understanding and organization affecting civilization as a whole. This

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86 Stuart A. Kauffman, *Reinventing the Sacred* (2008); e.g., “Suppose we take, as a measure of the amount of “information” in a nonequilibrium thermodynamic system such as a cell, the diversity of constraints that are partially causal in the diversity of events or processes that happen next. Then we might hope that in living systems under natural selection the diversity of events or processes that happen next would be maximized. ...we need a concept of information as constraints on the release of energy that then constitutes work, and then hope to show that natural selection maximizes the diversity of work that is done in cells, organisms, ecosystems, and biospheres” (p.98).

wonderful, but often misguided, 'rational' consciousness manifesting in the human organism is an evolutionary structure whose destiny is to exceed itself. It is toward the emergence of such higher potentials that we refer when we attempt to envision and invoke the idea of the sociology of supermind.

If Consciousness-Force is the fundamental principle of existence, as many exponents of ancient Indian thought, as well as some of modern and post-modern evolutionary philosophy and psychology, have believed, and if all forms and processes in time and space are expressions of the same principle, then it becomes necessary to draw certain metaphysical conclusions. One is that the universe and everything in it is a dualism of spirit and matter, which has usually been the conclusion of philosophers in one form or another throughout the ages. But it is also necessary to conclude that somehow that duality is a unity. The problem that follows from these conclusions or assumptions is to define the relationship between the two that enables them to take an infinite variety of unitary forms. Often there has been an intuition among philosophers that the consciousness side of the equation, being non-material, is free and infinite, while the material side is conditioned and finite. But those who have moved toward an intuition, or perhaps a perception, of an actual "unity" have also concluded that the spirit in matter creates novel forms that embody purpose, and that everything evolves toward a more perfect, orderly, and beautiful expression of the one spiritual conscious-being, whose force is also unlimited. This is the fundamental understanding of most spiritual philosophy, and it was also a fundamental belief or intuition of both Darwin and his contemporary Hegel.

The human species represents the evolutionary emergence in matter and life of a form of consciousness that can frame these ideas, and that can perceive the potential of an unending evolution of forms that embody ever higher degrees of organization, efficiency, strength, beauty, knowledge. This species has understood itself in this way for only a few thousand years, according to extant historical records. But according to those records we can easily see, also, that the process of change in the forms of expression of intelligent life, civilization, and culture has been accelerating. Nothing is more evident in human civilization than the acceleration in knowledge and mastery that has taken place in just the last 100 years. And yet this very phenomenon is making us acutely aware of the limits that are being reached with respect to the role that this species now plays in expressing its knowledge and mastery. It is precisely this awareness that is driving the consciousness and will of thoughtful people everywhere in the world to find ways to achieve more harmonious expressions of unity between the different nations, cultures, and societies of humanity, and between humans and the environments of life and matter on the earth to which they belong. But the challenge appears to this rational mind, even in its moments of greatest clarity, to be insurmountable, unless a true sense and consciousness of unity emerges, and a new type of humanity is manifested that understands itself and the world as one, and can act spontaneously from a position of true unity. This would be a real manifestation of practical spirituality – a conscious perception of the needs and potentials and importance of each member of that unity, and an action and force that perpetually creates conditions for the expression of its highest innate potentials, which in Western philosophies and religions have traditionally been known as the Good, the Beautiful, and the True. The infinitely free and creative consciousness-force of existence, of which we and all forms and processes are an expression, has within it the potential to create something more on the earth, beyond the human as we know it, toward which we must aspire and strive.

Let us imagine, for example, that we discipline ourselves to dwell in the stillness of primal awareness that we have heard about. In that state we experience the Self as a peaceful and luminous presence in ourselves and others, permeating everything we are aware of. This gives us a sense of an impersonal identity and energy of will that is one in several unique bodies and minds. In that awareness of attunement we might decide to create music, or art, or dance, or to climb a mountain, or to build a house or a village, or inspire our fellow humans to create a new social system. In the process we would

reflect on those concepts of agency, value, and meaning mentioned by Kauffman, which characterize human consciousness and endeavor (will), and we might realize that we had become agents of values and meanings, of a creative dynamic, quite different from the general norms of society. Of course musicians and artists do experience this, but now we are struck by the momentum of our creativity that is pushing those conventional norms toward their dissolution, and replacing them with a new dynamic. Those generally accepted norms are not just commonplaces to be tolerated or ignored but are in the process of being transformed as we persist in our creative endeavor, as if moved from a 'within' that is also 'the' within. We have become conscious of a common interiority that unites us, and of a spontaneous energy of flow that sustains our outer activity. And we have also become conscious of triggering a shift in the energy, quality, and consciousness of the field as a whole, in others, in the immediate moment and in the environment, in such a way that the movement does not perish in the usual manner of the temporality of things. It continues to innovate and build. We experience ourselves as the instruments of a creative flow that enhances the general field of experience in an immediately perceptible way that is also communicated spontaneously and purely to all around.

But there is emerging another aspect of this phenomenon that is even more remarkable than the creativity and harmony that is being shared. Because that stillness has permeated all the levels of the physical, vital, and mental being, all sense of need or lack or egoistic demand has disappeared! And in the place of these very familiar drives and motivations there is a strong presence above the head that also seems present above every head, sending down a stream of luminous vibrations that are tangible, flowing through the head and neck and chest and abdomen and limbs, making everything vibrant with a calm luminosity. At some moments one feels almost immobilized by this presence, and at other moments released into a happy flow of activity that seems illimitable. There is a kind of inner assurance that these vibrations are revitalizing the centers of the individual body and making it flexible and strong while at the same time showing the channels of activity to be followed for maximum effectivity in doing the tasks that the group has chosen. Nothing is particularly different about the tools and techniques that are being employed or about the objects being created: they are the same yet different, filled with an impersonal spirit of love and beauty.

In the sixties philosophers like Fromm and Marcuse, both Freudian Marxists who had been students of Heidegger, wrote books and gave lectures on the possibility of a kind of freedom that would be possible for society if all the means at hand were properly utilized to fulfill our basic needs, and instead of a society of dominance and repression we learned to create a society in which the reality principle of the ego and id were replaced by the pleasure principle. Marcuse, an expert in the philosophy of Hegel, referred to Schiller, a contemporary of Hegel, in developing the idea of a new aesthetic humanity and society:

“Only when the "constraint of need" is replaced by the "constraint of superfluity" (abundance) will the human existence be impelled to a "free movement which is itself both end and means." Liberated from the pressure of painful purposes and performances necessitated by want, man will be restored into the "freedom to be what he ought to be." But what "ought" to be will be freedom itself: the freedom to play. ...Once it has really gained ascendancy as a principle of civilization, the play impulse would literally transform the reality. Nature, the objective world, would then be experienced primarily, neither as dominating man (as in primitive society), nor as being dominated by man (as in the established civilization), but rather as an object of "contemplation." To be sure, if freedom is to become the governing principle of civilization, not only reason but also the "sensuous impulse" requires a restraining transformation. The additional release of sensuous energy must conform with the universal order of freedom. However, whatever order would have to be imposed upon the sensuous impulse must itself be "an operation of freedom." The free individual himself must bring about the harmony

between individual and universal gratification. In a truly free civilization, all laws are self-given by the individuals: "to give freedom by freedom is the universal law" of the "aesthetic state"; in a truly free civilization, "the will of the whole" fulfills itself only "through the nature of the individual." Order is freedom only if it is founded on and sustained by the free gratification of the individuals."<sup>87</sup>

Ideas like these were dynamically creative of the movement of liberation for which the sixties are known, and in which Auroville was founded by the Mother. But, as we know, and as Marcuse feared would happen, there was a subsequent reversion or fall of the culture of freedom back into the society and economy of dominance and repression, if in fact it was ever anything more than an imagination. And the primary deficiency was in the failure to focus on and realize a fundamental elevation and transformation of consciousness; changing social structures and dynamics is not enough. The Marxist idea of achieving freedom through the restructuring of the patterns of ownership, capital and labor, was not realized, because the type of humanity to realize it had not yet been created.

Now, however, about fifty years later, under the influence of the Yoga of Transformation we may find ourselves emerging into just such a liberated consciousness by virtue of a force in stillness that has literally dissolved the compulsions of that former complex or syndrome of repression and replaced it with an illimitable calm and creative energy of freedom and creativity. We have now moved beyond the philosophy and science of social consciousness, and the imaginations of an ideal mind, into the dynamic unity of consciousness and force which is the essence of Being, and it is opening us into a new evolutionary epoch.

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87 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (1955), p.189-190

### PART III – HEGEL AND SRI AUROBINDO

#### Lecture 9

In this section of lectures on the philosophy of consciousness I will make some concluding remarks which I hope will be meaningful, and will bring closure, or “satisfaction”, as Whitehead would say, to our exploration of “consciousness”. We began with a certain European history of the question, What is consciousness?, and we have reviewed the empirical school, the school of German Idealism, the school of phenomenology, and finally the school of intuitional cosmology, in philosophy, and to some extent the neurological school, and neuro-phenomenology, which have been flourishing for the past forty years or so. And in my view this arc of development in thinking, although it has spread itself over a few hundred years, has actually recapitulated a form of understanding that was already stated in the Upanishads a few thousand years ago. I recently heard a presentation on the Upanishads in which I could also hear this modern arc of development being restated, as it was done in the writings of Hume and Hegel, then Heidegger, Ponty and Gadamer in the phenomenological school, and in Bergson, Whitehead, and Sri Aurobindo, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and as it will certainly continue to be restated, because we actually move through these stages of understanding and development whenever we make an effort to know what consciousness is. It doesn't come to our understanding as a whole and immediately. It requires time to make all of the connections. I suppose that another level of consciousness is evolving that will spontaneously grasp the whole, but as our minds are presently constituted it requires a process of connecting observations and ideas and levels of understanding, and a kind of energy of focus and clarity that develops gradually. Heidegger calls this 'gathering' and 'dwelling'. It is mainly philosophers who do this. Most people couldn't care less about what consciousness is, and don't have 'time' for it. Everyone assumes that they just have it, it works, and why should it be questioned? We take it for granted, so to speak.

One of the things we have heard, however, is that this consciousness that is aware of things and understands things on the basis of perception is the ordinary mind. And it doesn't need to go beyond its understanding in order to work. But it also doesn't know the truth of anything. And it isn't necessary to know the truth of anything in order to function perfectly well, in a state of ignorance. One of the things that the Upanishads tell us is that the Ignorance and the Knowledge co-exist. The Knowledge is the

unity of the whole, and the Ignorance is the temporal unfolding. As Sri Aurobindo has said from the beginning and constantly, for real knowledge we must first grasp the Unity in order to understand the parts and the processes. But this is the opposite of what the human mind does. He received this idea from the *sruti*, and practised it, but this isn't what human beings normally do.<sup>88</sup> The mind doesn't access the Unity first, and maybe never, because the mind is limited by its perceptions.

The philosophy of consciousness, however, is a history of the pursuit by certain individuals who had the ability to ask this question. And if we didn't have them to refer to, we probably wouldn't bother. It's only the most developed minds that are able to study the mind and understand its limits. They must first reach its limits and then reflect on those limits. This is therefore a pursuit that is confined to a very thin spectrum of human functioning. The gist of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and Yoga is that some of those, from that thin strip of individuals who reach the limits of mind – and they will not necessarily be philosophers – may be able to evolve a consciousness beyond the mind, and consequently they may have a significant influence on the general evolution of consciousness. It is Consciousness, as such, that we want to know and understand. If we say “the evolution of consciousness”, then what do we mean exactly? Do we mean that narrow strip of human functioning that tips into the higher mind and the Overmind planes? Or is it something else? It had better be something else, because that evolution which takes place through thinking has a tendency to not be able to change anything. Sri Aurobindo's persistent critique of Yoga and Eastern wisdom is that a few can liberate themselves from the limitations of mind but this doesn't change anything in the world, and the processes of liberation have been going on like this for a few thousand years. (Well, as we know, this is not entirely true. Many things have changed as a result of the influence of the religious and ethical mind, which was shown in our course on the philosophy of religion, and many things have changed as a result of the analytical scientific mind, over the centuries. But suffering and exploitation and war and disease and ignorance nevertheless still exist at this relatively advanced stage of human life.) There is a pretty good record of those who have exceeded the limitations of the mind, though there have not been many. But then Sri Aurobindo goes thoroughly into the examination of the difference between 'the mind', as such, and 'consciousness'. As we have seen, in one of the most important chapters of *The Life Divine*, for our purposes here, which is titled 'Conscious Force', he elaborates the definition of consciousness in detail.<sup>89</sup> And one of the things he says is that we must lose entirely the idea that consciousness means the awareness of objects. This is the conventional understanding of the term, as we have seen repeatedly. The common understanding says that consciousness means the awareness of objects, and at a slightly higher level it means our self-awareness of the awareness of objects, self-reflective awareness of our perceptions and thoughts. He destroys this idea, and we will come to this criticism again.

But now I would like to retrace some of the fundamental arguments of Hegel and Sri Aurobindo, because the exploration of the ideas of these two philosophers of consciousness, or we might say the similarity of their consciousness of Reality, is our theme. And first I will dwell on some of the fundamental concepts of Hegel's philosophy, which is a philosophy of 'spirit', by which is meant that intangible plane of experience and reality that knows and is the Real, beyond the planes of physical things and processes, and beyond the plane of our perceptions and notions. It is the plane of universals and of consciousness, as such. In his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel focuses on consciousness of the 'good' that the ethical mind conceives of as a possibility of human society, and he says, for example:

“The basis of right is the *realm of spirit* in general. And its precise location and point of departure is the

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88 See below, Supplement 2, *Sruti and Yoga Philosophy*.

89 See above, p. 48.

will; the will is *free*, so that freedom constitutes its substance and destiny and the system of right is the realm of actualized freedom, the world of spirit produced from within itself as a second nature. ...The freedom of the will can best be explained by reference to physical nature. For freedom is just as much a basic determination of the will as weight is a basic determination of bodies. ...Heaviness constitutes the body and is the body. It is just the same with freedom and the will, for that which is free is the will. ...But as for the connection between the will and thought, the following remarks are necessary. Spirit is thought in general. ...But it must not be imagined that a human being thinks on the one hand and wills on the other, and that he has thought in one pocket and volition in the other, for this would be an empty representation. The distinction between thought and will is simply that between theoretical and practical attitudes. But they are not two separate faculties; on the contrary, the will is a particular way of thinking – thinking translating itself into existence, thinking as the drive to give itself existence.”<sup>90</sup>

Spirit produces from within itself all movement, and form, and process, and this is done by the will, which is the movement, the energy, the dynamism of Spirit toward its actualization. And the entire external world is the actualization of this will of the Spirit. Such a principle of Will was also a fundamental perception, or speculation, of Schopenhauer as we have seen. And in the Sanskritic philosophy of the Upanishads, the term *chit-shakti*, consciousness-force, which Sri Aurobindo sometimes also translates as knowledge-will, refers to the seeing-knowing-acting that brings into play all the forms of existence, out of the absolute. We know this by analogy with our will on the human level: we intuitively think ahead; we perceive and calculate and understand the immediate; and we energetically enact our self-awareness and world-awareness for a purpose. But there is a problem here, which philosophy recognizes and which constitutes the fundamental Hegelian turn. It is the discrepancy between the “concept” of the absolute freedom of the will, or Spirit, and the limited and imperfect will of the human being; the discrepancy between the elevated abstraction of thought and the concrete experience of life. The distinction and the difference, between the absolute and the relative, the finite and the infinite, the universal and the particular, as must always be remembered, constitutes the central focus of idealism in philosophy. We would therefore like to make this a vivid understanding in our own experience. And for that, we must elevate our own consciousness. Hegel's definitions, along with Sri Aurobindo's prescriptions, should help us do that. And we will need to make an effort of imagination and of reasoning to complete the process. Hegel says then, “The will which has being in and for itself is truly infinite, because its object is itself, and therefore not something which it sees as other or as a limitation; on the contrary, it has merely returned into itself in its object. Furthermore, it is not just a possibility, predisposition, or capacity, but the infinite in actuality, because the concept's existence or objective externality is inwardness itself.”<sup>91</sup>

Hegel explains the discrepancy between the world of ideal knowledge and consciousness, and the world of experience and perception, in detail here, – as he had done previously in his characterization of nature and consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – in terms of the “good” as it is conceived in this form of Idealism with its negative methodology: “The *good* is the *Idea*, as the unity of the concept of the will and the particular will, in which abstract right, welfare, the subjectivity of knowing, and the contingency of external existence, *as self-sufficient for themselves*, are superseded; but they are at the same time essentially contained and preserved within it. The good is realized freedom, the absolute and ultimate end of the world. ...Every stage is in fact the *Idea*, but the earlier stages contain it only in more abstract form. For example, even the 'I' as personality is already the *Idea*, but in its most abstract shape. The good is therefore the *Idea as further determined*, the unity of the concept of the will and the particular will. It does not belong to abstract right, but has a complete content whose import

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90 G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1991 Eng. ed.). p. 35.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 53

encompasses both right and welfare. ...Within this Idea, welfare has no validity for itself as the existence of the individual and particular will, but only as *universal welfare* and essentially as *universal in itself*, ie., in accordance with freedom; welfare is not a good without *right*.”<sup>92</sup> (And the concept of *right* is inherent in *absolute freedom*, as we have heard.)

We should refer again, and always, to the premise at the beginning of the *Philosophy of Right* which established the relationship between the Idea and its existence, between the concept and its actualization. This is of crucial importance for understanding both the nature of consciousness and the possibility of ethical life. Hegel said:

“Philosophy has to do with Ideas and therefore not with what are commonly described as *mere concepts*. On the contrary, it shows that the latter are one-sided and lacking in truth, and that it is the *Concept* alone (not what is so often called by that name but which is merely an abstract determination of the understanding) which has *actuality*, and in such a way that it gives actuality to itself. Everything other than this actuality which is posited by the concept itself is transitory *existence*, external contingency, opinion, appearance without essence, untruth, deception, etc. The *shape* which the concept assumes in its actualization, and which is essential for cognition of the *concept* itself, is different from its *form* of being purely as concept, and is the other essential moment of the Idea. ...The unity of existence and the concept, of body and soul, is the Idea. It is not just a harmony, but a complete interpenetration. Nothing lives which is not in some way Idea. The Idea of right is freedom, and in order to be truly apprehended, it must be recognizable in its concept and in the concept's existence. ...But this concept as it is for itself in its truth may not only be different from our representation of it: the two must also differ in their form and shape. If, however, the representation is not false in its content, the concept may well be shown to be contained in it and present in essence within it; that is, the representation may be raised to the form of the concept. But it is so far from being the measure and criterion of the concept which is necessary and true for itself, that it must rather derive its truth from the concept, and recognize and correct itself with the help of the latter.”<sup>93</sup>

We have used the examples of spires, steeples and crosses on the tops of religious structures to help us visualize these distinctions, and we have used the example of SUVs that we see on the streets, and we can also use organic nature, as Hegel did in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There he described the plant kingdom as it is observed scientifically and pointed out that flowering plants, for example, produce organs of reproduction that can be analyzed structurally, chemically, functionally, in their relationship with the elemental environment and the insect kingdom, and so on. But we also observe in them an internal structure of reason by which we understand the unity of the parts for the purpose of reproducing the individual and the genus across the plant kingdom, in a way that transcends each of the separate parts and aspects of the individual plant. The universals such as shape and color and fragrance, and the seed producing dynamics of nutrition and growth, which are being realized in each particular plant, are the transcendent objects known by us. From its beginning in the seed to its blossoming into new seed bearing plants, the self or essence or purpose of being a plant are present from its first stage of budding to its last stage of withering. By an elevation of consciousness from the level of observation based on perception we arrive at an awareness of the universal spirit and individualized essence of the plant, and from this awareness we derive the reason and purpose that are operative in the plant. The reason and essence are realities that present themselves to consciousness, but not to the faculties of direct perception which can only perceive the sensible qualities of the individual object.

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92 Ibid., p. 157

93 Ibid., p. 25-27

In many of our presentations we have used the example of plants, and roses in particular, to illustrate the Indian or Vedantic conception of the *prana*, or life force, by which these principles come into manifestation. According to that system, *prana* is not a physical force but a kind of dynamic essence that sustains the particular qualities of the rose – its shape and color and fragrance and radiance, as well as its biological processes of growth and reproduction, repeated throughout the plant kingdom and the whole world of organic life. And this pranic force also sustains the organs of sense and the faculties of perception in conscious things, which receive the qualities of the rose in such a way that not only are the various aspects of the thing perceived, but also the unity which is known as 'the rose', with all the power of beauty and delight that is the rose's essence. By this process of consciousness-force we become aware of the being of things, which exists throughout their process of becoming, and yet this 'identity' is nowhere to be found apart from consciousness itself. According to this view, what is known by us is the self-nature, or essence, of the rose, which is also a self-knowing in us. As Hegel said, there is an interpenetration of the unity of the whole in all aspects of the existence of the object. But in the Indian system, the reason, the word, the Logos that is known in this way through the existence of things, and which constitutes knowledge, has its origin in a higher universal force of consciousness, the *chit-shakti*, which is the self-knowing or self-seeing of the Absolute. This is that Being and Will which becomes the universal principle of life, the *prana shakti*. Consciousness, in this view, is both the being and knowing of the object, its inner form and meaning in the spiritual sense, and the knowable shape, quality, and energy of its concrete existence.

Actualized freedom is the externalization of the absolute Spirit, said Hegel. But actualized freedom is never really free. It is always expressed within the contingencies of existence. If we have a will to operate the LCD projector in order to vivify this lecture with text on the screen, we may be constrained by the availability of electricity, or the connection of the computer cables, how much we can show in the given amount of time, and so on, but the projection is nonetheless an actualization within constraints of the freedom of the will. This constitutes the “shape” of freedom through which we may become conscious of the “form” of freedom on the plane of the Absolute Spirit. (I gather that by “shape” Hegel means the quality or qualities that are embodied in the particular event, as opposed to the universal or the essence that it embodies, which from the time of Plato and Aristotle were known as the “form”.) The unity of thought and will in the externalization of Spirit on the plane of temporal human existence, like the unity of soul and body, is a kind of reflection of the unity of freedom and will which are eternally actualized on the plane of the Absolute. This idea of being “actual” in the sense of perfect on the plane of the ideal, and a process of realizing “potential” on the plane of matter is also an Aristotelian concept, which explains the processes of existence as a kind of translation of the higher unity above into a duality below. Similarly, Hegel describes the human personality or 'I', as already the Idea of freedom and right in essence in the individual but these qualities are as yet to be actualized by the will under the conditions of existence in society. Hegel seems to say that a perfect actualization of freedom may never be possible within the constraints of existence, but human consciousness can discern the good, and will its actualization, or enact the universal will to freedom, under these conditions, because of the form of right that exists on the plane of highest abstractions.

The philosopher Henri Bergson also developed this idea that consciousness and will are a unity, in his book *Matter and Memory*. He said that consciousness is basically action which follows from discernment, and discernment is a combination of memory and perception. He observes that memory and perception are simultaneous, leading to discernment and action. The observations of Bergson are important to bear in mind when we reflect on what consciousness is. Bergson's philosophy is a philosophy of consciousness, written at about the same time as Sri Aurobindo's major works and similar in many ways. Bergson described memory precisely as a function of matter. Memory is everywhere, he said, and is a universal feature of consciousness, which is similar to the idea of the

*chitta* in Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Sanskrit term, where it means physical memory and is sometimes also translated as 'mind'.

Hegel, about two hundred years earlier, reflected that thought is spirit, spirit is free, and its action is the will, therefore the Idea of right can be known and willed by the human being. This is typical of European philosophical thought. Spirit is the intangible realm and nature is the tangible realm of our experience and our consciousness. So how are the intangible and the tangible related? This is the big problem of philosophy. We think, we will, we act, and there are effects in material forms. But the intangible can't be touched. It is spiritual. It is consciousness. These are universal notions in both Eastern and Western philosophical and religious thought. But this consciousness can also suspend memory, discernment, and action and be in its own stillness, in which it perceives the universals and absolutes of existence, and where it can know fully and directly, for example, the essence of the rose. And this option for consciousness has been more characteristic of the philosophical and religious thought of the East. The stillness and emptiness that generates intangible processes, like awareness and thought, which may in turn lead to tangible processes, like applied science and political action, is known as Spirit. When it is conscious of itself, it knows absolute freedom and knowledge and right; when it is conscious in the human, it knows the relative values of these things in relation to their absolutes, which are reflected in their temporal embodiments. For example, we decide to come here to the lecture, and we find a means and we come. The reason why we came here – notice the word 'reason' – is much larger than actually coming here, it has to do with a totality of meaning which has the result of us being present here, now. But the fact of our presence here is just a blip in the process of time. The meaning of it is that we are pursuing a certain elevation of consciousness that will enable us to realize what it is that exists and makes life meaningful, and how it is that consciousness exists, or how anything happens to exist consciously. This is a mystery, and this kind of thinking has been happening throughout history. A few have taken this pursuit to a high level which has resulted in a philosophy of consciousness.

As I have pointed out before, it is at this highest level of thought that Hegel's philosophy of mind and ethics has parallels in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of spirit. Even though Hegel's philosophy is a philosophy of consciousness, at a certain point it becomes a philosophy of spirit. As we know, the title of his work is sometimes translated as the Phenomenology of Mind and sometimes as The Phenomenology of Spirit. And we see that Hegel was in fact at a transitional moment in his thought and language, between the mental and spiritual levels of consciousness. It is at his point where we find that Sri Aurobindo's thought and philosophy of spirit are more fully developed. But this is not merely a historical or philosophical fact. It is a critical point in the development of thought and the evolution of consciousness. Hegel and Sri Aurobindo were both critically aware of the limitations of the spiritual mind that finds the culmination of its development in the emptiness, and disappears into the Absolute. But the achievement conceived by Hegel's thought, of the perfected organization of society by the ethical mind, and by social structures based on the concept of right and welfare, was soon to be reversed by the thinking of Marx, as we shall see, and by the subsequent rise of totalitarianism and a series of genocidal wars. The severest limitation of Hegel's thought is its possible culmination in the technological destruction of human society by nuclear war, in spite of the advancements in social organization achieved by the ethical mind and reason. It is necessary for us to become conscious of these limitations of ethical and metaphysical thought in general and, more importantly, of the crucial point of departure in ourselves and in humanity that it reveals to us. The question of consciousness must culminate in the possibility of the evolution of consciousness itself, beyond the limitations of mind, which Sri Aurobindo's philosophy represents and defines.

Therefore, at this point in our course, I will end the lecture with an introduction to Sri Aurobindo's

philosophy and methodology of the transformation of consciousness, its elevation beyond the limitations of mind, and the consequent evolutionary emergence of the principle of Consciousness-force itself on a new level of its manifestation, as he has described the process.

### The Integral Yoga of Knowledge (Part 1)

“Our first imperative aim when we draw back from mind, life, body and all else that is not our eternal being, is to get rid of the false idea of self by which we identify ourselves with the lower existence and can realise only our apparent being as perishable or mutable creatures in a perishable or ever mutable world. We have to know ourselves as the self, the spirit, the eternal; we have to exist consciously in our true being. Therefore this must be our primary, if not our first one and all-absorbing idea and effort in the path of knowledge. But when we have realised the eternal self that we are, when we have become that inalienably, we have still a secondary aim, to establish the true relation between this eternal self that we are and the mutable existence and mutable world which till now we had falsely taken for our real being and our sole possible status.

In order that there should be any real relation, it must be a relation between two realities. Formerly we had thought the eternal self to be a remote concept far from our mundane existence if not an illusion and an unreality, because in the nature of things we could not conceive of ourselves as anything except this mind, life, body, changing and moving in the succession of Time. When we have once got rid of our confinement to this lower status, we are apt to seize on the other side of the same erroneous relation between self and world; we tend to regard this eternity which we increasingly are or in which we live as the sole reality and begin to look down from it upon the world and man as a remote illusion and unreality, because that is a status quite opposite to our new foundation in which we no longer place our roots of consciousness, from which we have been lifted up and transfigured and with which we seem to have no longer any binding link. Especially is this likely to happen if we have made the finding of the eternal Self not only our primary, but our one and absorbing objective in the withdrawal from the lower triplicity; for then we are likely to shoot at once from pure mind to pure spirit without treading the stairs between this middle and that summit and we tend to fix on our consciousness the profound sense of a gulf which we cannot bridge and can no longer cross over again except by a painful fall.

But the self and the world are in an eternal close relation and there is a connection between them, not a gulf that has to be overleaped. Spirit and material existence are highest and lowest rung of an orderly and progressive series. Therefore between the two there must be a real relation and principle of connection by which the eternal Brahman is able to be at once pure Spirit and Self and yet hold in himself the universe of himself; and it must be possible for the soul that is one with or in union with the Eternal to adopt the same poise of divine relation in place of our present ignorant immersion in the world. This principle of connection is the eternal unity between the Self and all existences; of that eternal unity the liberated soul must be capable, just as the ever free and unbound Divine is capable of it, and that we should realise equally with the pure self-existence at which we have first to aim. For integral self-possession we must be one not only with the Self, with God, but with all existences. We must take back in the right relation and in the poise of an eternal Truth the world of our manifested existence peopled by our fellow-beings from which we had drawn back because we were bound to them

in a wrong relation and in the poise of a falsehood created in Time by the principle of divided consciousness with all its oppositions, discords and dualities. We have to take back all things and beings into our new consciousness but as one with all, not divided from them by an egoistic individuality. ...

It is true that the mind opposes any such identification and if we allow it to persist in its old habits and activities, it will rather strive to bring again its veil of dissonances over our new realisation and possession of self than to shape and subject itself to this true and eternal vision of things. But in the first place, if we have proceeded rightly on the path of our Yoga, we shall have attained to Self through a purified mind and heart, and a purified mind is one that is necessarily passive and open to the knowledge. Secondly, even the mind in spite of its tendency to limit and divide can be taught to think in the rhythm of the unifying Truth instead of the broken terms of the limiting appearance. We must therefore accustom it by meditation and concentration to cease to think of things and beings as separately existent in themselves and rather to think always of the One everywhere and of all things as the One.”<sup>94</sup> ...

“Given the self-differentiation of the Divine in which we dwell, concentration is the means by which the individual soul identifies itself with and enters into any form, state or psychological self-manifestation (*bhava*) of the Self. To use this means for unification with the Divine is the condition for the attainment of divine knowledge and the principle of all Yoga of knowledge.

This concentration proceeds by the Idea, using thought, form and name as keys which yield up to the concentrating mind the Truth that lies concealed behind all thought, form and name; for it is through the Idea that the mental being rises beyond all expression to that which is expressed, to that of which the Idea itself is only the instrument. By concentration upon the Idea the mental existence which at present we are breaks open the barrier of our mentality and arrives at the state of consciousness, the state of being, the state of power of conscious-being and bliss of conscious-being to which the Idea corresponds and of which it is the symbol, movement and rhythm. Concentration by the Idea is, then, only a means, a key to open to us the superconscient planes of our existence; a certain self-gathered state of our whole existence lifted into that superconscient truth, unity and infinity of self-aware, self-blissful existence is the aim and culmination; and that is the meaning we shall give to the term Samadhi.”<sup>95</sup> ...

“In the first place we have seen that intellectual thought is in itself inadequate and is not the highest thinking; the highest is that which comes through the intuitive mind and from the supramental faculty. So long as we are dominated by the intellectual habit and by the lower workings, the intuitive mind can only send its messages to us subconsciously and subject to a distortion more or less entire before it reaches the conscious mind; or if it works consciously, then only with an inadequate rarity and a great imperfection in its functioning. In order to strengthen the higher knowledge-faculty in us we have to effect the same separation between the intuitive and intellectual elements of our thought as we have already effected between the understanding and the sense-mind; and this is no easy task, for not only do our intuitions come to us incrustated in the intellectual action, but there are a great number of mental workings which masquerade and ape the appearances of

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94 Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1999 ed.), p. 368-370

95 *Ibid.*, p. 321

the higher faculty. The remedy is to train first the intellect to recognise the true intuition, to distinguish it from the false and then to accustom it, when it arrives at an intellectual perception or conclusion, to attach no final value to it, but rather look upward, refer all to the divine principle and wait in as complete a silence as it can command for the light from above. In this way it is possible to transmute a great part of our intellectual thinking into the luminous truth-conscious vision, – the ideal would be a complete transition, – or at least to increase greatly the frequency, purity and conscious force of the ideal knowledge working behind the intellect. The latter must learn to be subject and passive to the ideal faculty.

“But for the knowledge of the Self it is necessary to have the power of a complete intellectual passivity, the power of dismissing all thought, the power of the mind to think not at all which the Gita in one passage enjoins. This is a hard saying for the occidental mind to which thought is the highest thing and which will be apt to mistake the power of the mind not to think, its complete silence for the incapacity of thought. But this power of silence is a capacity and not an incapacity, a power and not a weakness. It is a profound and pregnant stillness. Only when the mind is thus entirely still, like clear, motionless and level water, in a perfect purity and peace of the whole being and the soul transcends thought, can the Self which exceeds and originates all activities and becomings, the Silence from which all words are born, the Absolute of which all relativities are partial reflections manifest itself in the pure essence of our being. In a complete silence only is the Silence heard; in a pure peace only is its Being revealed. Therefore to us the name of That is the Silence and the Peace.”<sup>96</sup>

## Lecture 10

The Idea is the original creative force of existence, sometimes known as the Good, the Divine Mother, Satyam-Ritam-Brhat: the Truth, the Right, the Vast. It's the original Idea of Existence which brings all forms into the becoming of Time, every relationship, every energy, every concentration of beauty and power and truth and justice and proportionality and order (and their opposites) that exists in the cosmos. All of that field is the product of the Idea, and that is the Will of the Supreme: Being. The Will to Be. All philosophy is about this: the relationship between Spirit and Matter.

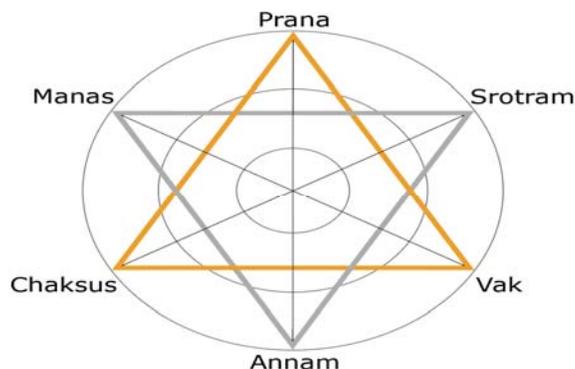
Why do we do philosophy? The purpose of philosophy is to realize the Good, the True, the Beautiful – Wisdom, Happiness, liberation from ignorance. Philosophy is not an academic game. Philosophy is a human activity of the very highest level. It attempts to integrate this individual organism with that universal plane of existence that contains all potentialities in their perfect, absolute forms, the forms of the Idea. That plane of potentialities is known as Sambhogakaya in Buddhism; in Christianity it is the Word, the Logos, the Divine Mind. In Hinduism it is the Divine Mother, the Mahashakti, Mahat. In Buddhism this trinity of the transcendent, the universal, and the individual planes of existence is known as Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, Nirmanakaya. In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy the highest is the Self, Atman, Purushottama, the middle is the Mahashakti, Divine Supermind, Mahat, and the third is the Soul, Jivatma. We are all embodiments of these three principles. In Christianity this trinity is named Father, Son, Holy Spirit. This is a common universal understanding in all systems of ancient wisdom.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 315-316

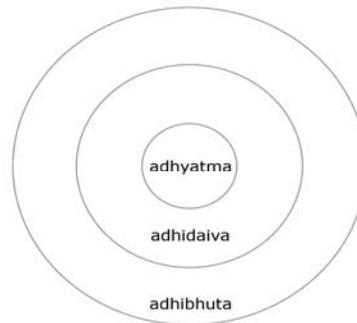
Sri Aurobindo often speaks of the Transcendent, the Universal, and the Individual. Basing his philosophy on the Isha and Kena Upanishads he says that the individual must universalize himself in order to know the Transcendent. It cannot be known directly. The transcendent is the Unknowable. But it can be known through its powers of manifestation: Beauty, Truth, Love, Harmony, Order, Perfection. If we know those then through them we can get a glimpse of their unlimited, unknowable origin which can never be known in itself. We can't know That. It is unknowable. So in the Kena Upanishad, the gods, Indra, Vayu, Agni are all asking 'Who is this origin of my mind, my life, my energy? Who is this that is the speech of my speech, the mind of my mind, the life of my life.' The god Agni, who is the energy of every form, the knower of every birth, cannot answer the question, "what is its own origin?". It's something beyond. Vayu, the life-force itself, cannot answer the question. Even the highest mind of illumination, Indra, cannot know its own origin, because it is unknowable. Even his incomparable illumination of knowledge has an origin beyond itself. Even these universal beings know they are not the origin of their own forces. And they are struggling to answer this question. So they turn to the Divine Mother, and she lifts her finger and indicates the beyond. And then they see. But even those ultimate powers and principles can't enter into That. The Upanishad says therefore, if we turn these energies in us toward their origin, then we can know That through them. And this frees us from the limitations of relative existence.

The purpose tonight, however, is to do philosophy, and this is mythology. But we have a proposition that underlies our endeavor in this course, which is that, if we can integrate our relative knowledge and society and human behavior, its music and art and the highest philosophical knowledge, with the principles of harmony and beauty, and inspired revelatory speech, – and if we can integrate our expressive faculties with this highest order of existence and with the relationships between human beings in society, – and if we can also integrate the *prana shakti*, the aspiration toward the divine that flows in us from this life plane to that spiritual one, and from that spiritual origin down into this manifest existence, – and if we can integrate all of that with this evolutionary mind, life, and body of the individual; – if we can actively integrate these poles of our inner and outer being, these six horizontal/vertical relational poles: our elemental life and body, the social dimension of life, the intellectual, the artistic, and the revelatory dimensions of mind, and the self that unites all of these levels and faculties of our being, then we might arrive at a different quality of knowledge than what we normally have when we study the conventional approaches to knowledge such as sociology, philosophy, psychology, science and art. This is the theory of the integral paradigm of knowledge, represented by the diagram below,<sup>97</sup> which is based on the identification of our faculties of consciousness with the universal divine principles that they express.



97 The diagrams have been been taken from the integral paradigm of knowledge, by Vladimir Yatsenko, who has presented this theory in detail through a variety of courses and seminars of the University of Human Unity - <http://universityofhumanity.org/>.

According to this theory, derived largely from Sri Aurobindo's commentaries on the Upanishads, the faculties of 1) elemental physical consciousness (annam), 2) sight (chaksus), 3) mind (manas), 4) self-knowledge or spirit (pranam), 5) hearing (srotram), 6) speech (vak) are each divine principles, or gods, that manifest conscious being in the cosmos. By developing each of these faculties to their fullest potential in ourselves we can know everything directly and integrally in itself, because each has a corresponding outer extension in the world, as well as a subjective interior intention. For example, the faculty of sight corresponds to relations in space and gives us information about things and their intentions and movements in the world around us. Similarly, an organism's nerves and muscles react to influences that attract or repel by contracting and expanding, which constitute “feelings” that give the organism information about itself in relation to others. Such “feelings” would be considered a form of “consciousness” by intuitive philosophers such as Whitehead and Sri Aurobindo, and constitute what is known in the system of Indian psychology as *chitta*. This would be in contrast, of course, with the understanding of a contemporary neuro-scientist like Damasio who would not consider such physical feelings, even if they also include memory and volition, to be “consciousness” as they define the term.



In the diagram above, all of conscious existence is represented: the inner circle represents the highest level of the Trinity, the Transcendent (adhyatma); the middle circle represents the gods or universal principles, powers and faculties of consciousness (adhidaiva); the outer circle represents all the Forms and Forces that are the expressions and embodiments of these universal principles in cosmic existence (adhibhuta). We shall look more closely at this Vedantic theory of consciousness a bit later in this lecture. And we shall also consider in more detail the methods by which the different levels of consciousness in us can be developed and integrated.

Hegel's philosophy is known as negative philosophy. According to him it is necessary to negate our limited, egoistic ideas of things, which we normally invest with so much importance, and to negate our immediate limited perception of things on which our ideas are based, in order to understand the real meaning of things. It's necessary to negate those immediate structures of knowledge in order to know their origins and essences: the reality itself. If we do this, and take a fresh and integral view of ourselves and the world, our conventional approaches to knowledge can be elevated into a dimension of truth that these approaches normally exclude. This is a theory of knowledge which also comes to us from Eastern philosophy, based on the Upanishadic notion of Vidya and Avidya. There is the knowledge of the One, the Unity, and there is the knowledge of the Many, the Multiplicity; the former is said to be the Truth, which is the One of which everything is a part, and the latter is the Ignorance, the illusion that each thing is separate and has its own validity and importance. But the two co-exist always - the Absolute and the Relative in Hegel's terms. But in the Eastern version, known also as

*Brahmavidya*, the negation is more radical than in Hegel: to really know the One, and to know that the Multiplicity is That, and to know that That is the Multiplicity, requires an absolute negation and transformation of the intellectual mind. The “mind” as we know it cannot do that: it cannot know the One.

But for the purposes of understanding “consciousness” as other than “mind”, it is also important to remember what we learned earlier from Hegel and Heidegger about existence. The truth of things is present in the things that are known; it is our being there with things that enables us to know them as what they really are in both their appearance and the Reality. In other words, the knowledge 'of things' is revealed by the things, through our faculties of perception, ideation, understanding, and intuition. These appearances of things are also an expression of what they really are, which is a higher universal essence that can only be partially expressed in the forms of time and space, and which is obscured by the appearances. Their truth can only be discovered and known on a higher plane of abstraction and ultimately of Being. One of the methods for achieving this, as we have learned from phenomenology, is known as *epoche*, or stepping back, suspending judgment, and grasping the whole by a more direct intuition, rather than through the fragmented knowledge that the analytical thought process can achieve. This is also the fundamental principle of Yoga in many traditions and the first movement of the transformation of consciousness prescribed by Sri Aurobindo. Both Hegel and Sri Aurobindo have given us theories of knowledge based upon a metaphysical understanding of existence that supports this possibility, as have others whose cosmology and intuitional view of reality also support this view. According to many of those who have this view of reality, it is the nature of conscious existence to know itself, and to eventually attain and express that knowledge in a form of Absolute Truth.

We can therefore see Hegel's philosophy in relation to Sri Aurobindo as if Hegel is formulating a philosophy of mind, and Sri Aurobindo is formulating a philosophy of the origin of that mind in a larger principle of consciousness. It's as if Hegel's principles of consciousness are a step down, and yet they are absolutely correct. But it's a view of the mind at its utmost ability to think and know. It is capable of that view because of an origin from which that mind descends. It is possible for us, therefore, to view certain aspects of the Upanishads as if they were the origin of Hegel's philosophy, whether he knew it or not, and in fact he may have. In any case, I would like for us to hear the purest form of this knowledge in the context of our question, What is consciousness?

In Sri Aurobindo's commentary on the Isha Upanishad, he says, “The totality of objects is the becoming of the Lord in the extension of his own being. Its principle is double. There is consciousness; there is Being.” (In the Vedantic schools these principles are known as Purusha and Prakriti, Self and Nature.) “Consciousness dwells in energy upon its self-being to produce Idea, idea of itself and form and action inevitably corresponding to the Idea. This is the original Indian conception of creation, self production, or projection into form.”<sup>98</sup> (So the original idea is that consciousness presses out of itself, in form and energy, itself. It is called the Producer, in the Veda. The Producer is producing everything all the time from itself.) “Being uses its self-awareness to evolve infinite forms of itself governed by the expansion of the innate Idea in the form. ...In the idea of some thinkers the world is a purely subjective evolution, not real as objective facts; in the idea of others it is an objective fact but one which makes no difference to the essence of Being. Both notions claim to derive from the Upanishads as their authority, and their opposition comes in fact by the separation of what in the ancient Vedanta was viewed as one. Brahman is his own subject and his own object. Whether in his pure self-existence or in his varied self-becoming. He is the object of his own self-awareness. He is the knower of his own self-being. The two aspects are inseparable. ...The Lord appears to us in the relative notion of the process of things first as

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98 Sri Aurobindo, *The Upanishads* (1971 ed.), p. 57

Kavi, the Wise, the Seer. He is first of all the seer of himself in things. He is the creator of himself which he sees, which he is. The Kavi sees the Truth in itself, the truth in its becoming, in its essence, possibilities, actuality. (We would like to do this. We would like to see the truth as ourself in things, as the producer of things according to their nature. We would like to know everything as it really is in itself. This would be the knowledge of the seer.) He contains all that in the Idea, the Vijnana, called the Truth and Law, *satyam ritam*.

(Everything is true and what it is, in spite of our impressions and feelings, judgments and preferences. This is a hard thing to accept perhaps, - that the world is the Self, as it is now. But this is the foundation of rationalism. What is right and what is true is not the things; it's the Self, the essence, in the things. The things themselves will never be absolutely true and right. They are constantly changing. They get to be more organized or less organized, more or less creative, truer or falsier in their expression. But that's the world of the second nature of the self, the world that exists in time and space. This is not the Self that exists in all of those things. And this is the relationship between the infinite and the finite. This truth of existence is what Hegel says enables us to overcome objectivity and subjectivity, our limited mental view. It is the view of self and the other as one; it is both and it is the same. But to really know this we must elevate our consciousness above the level of the rational intellect to what Sri Aurobindo calls the supramental consciousness. We may be sure that Hegel had a strong intuition of this possibility and based his phenomenology of mind/spirit upon it. Sri Aurobindo's view is that it should become a reality of experience, of which our evolutionary human consciousness is capable, and which will enable us eventually to realize the ideals of absolute truth and freedom and a harmonious life, which have been the perennial objects of the Ideal Mind.)

“The Truth and Law of things is the Brhat, the Vast. Viewed by itself, the realm of Vijnana would seem a realm of predetermination, of concentration, of compelling seed-state. But it is a determination not in previous Time, but in perpetual time; a Fate compelled by the Soul, not compelling it, ... present in the expansion of the movement as well as in the concentration of the Idea. Therefore, the truth of the soul is freedom and mastery, not subjection and bondage.”<sup>99</sup> The obstacle to truth and freedom for the human being is the limited mind, in the embodiment that has been formed so far by evolution, with its partial and illusory experience of the world. This more comprehensive view would seem to clarify many of the apparent confusions in Schopenhauer's speculative vision.

Then, the next level of manifestation of our mental existence is the Manishi. The Manishi is the Thinker. He takes his stand in the possibilities. This is that principle and power of consciousness from which the mind is derived. “He has behind him the freedom of the infinite and brings it in as a background for the determination of the finite. Therefore every action in the world seems to emerge from the balancing and clashing of various possibilities. None of these however are effective in the determination except by their secret consonance with the Law of that which has to become. The Kavi is in the Manishi and upholds him in his working. But viewed by itself the realm of the Manishi would seem to be a state of plasticity, of free-will, of the interaction of forces, but of a free-will in thought which is met by a fate in things.”<sup>100</sup> (Everything is what it is in relation to what is becoming. And what is becoming is always that which is, the free self, the absolute. So it will become a freer society in a hundred years, and a new species in a thousand years, and it has already become many epochs and species that are now extinct, and that becoming is known by the Manishi in the human being as relative change. And this more comprehensive view of the essential structure of mind would seem to clarify much of the confusion that is apparent in the empirical science of consciousness. But that ever-

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99 Ibid., p. 59

100 Ibid., p. 60

changing is the Unchanging that is ever-present. And that is the Truth, understood by the intellectual mind, the Thinker in us, as a chance process, contingent upon environmental conditions at every step of the way.)

Virat, the third principle of the mental manifestation, “is the heroic leader of the manifestation, the will to action, who extends himself in the realm of eventualities. He fulfills what is contained in the Truth, what works out in the possibilities reflected by the mind, what appears to us as the fact, objectively realised. ...This is the truth of things as seen from above and from the Unity (Vidya). It is the divine standpoint; but we have to take account of the human standpoint which starts from below, proceeds from the Ignorance (Avidya), and perceives these principles successively, not comprehensively, as separate states of consciousness. ...He has to start from death and division and arrive at unity and immortality. He has to realise the universal in the individual and the Absolute in the relative.”<sup>101</sup>

To see things from the Unity is the whole issue, and the mind can't do it, says Sri Aurobindo. The seeing of the Unity requires another consciousness, which we can realize. Virat is in all of us, as the mental will, Kavi and Manishi are in all of us, as the Seer who already always knows what is, was, and will be, the Thinker who sorts it out and understands and plans the steps. But Virat is the one that takes action and implements the process. These are the universals of the mental being. And Sri Aurobindo always insists that we have to universalize our consciousness and be in the universal vital and the universal mental, to see and realize the gods in us and in everything, and liberate ourselves from the small illusionary mental and vital being. We may also remember the first article of the Mother's guidelines for those who would be “true Aurovilians”. She said the first necessity is to discover who we really are, which is a vast and free being. It's not our personality, not our heredity, not our social conditioning. We have to leave those identities behind and be that vast, free, knowing self. In that we are one with all, the Self in all, producing all. She presented this as a guideline for our lives. Sri Aurobindo, in *Savitri*, somewhat more emphatically implores us to do this, and foretells the fate and the future of such an enterprise.

O Force-compelled, Fate-driven earth-born race,  
O petty adventurers in an infinite world  
And prisoners of a dwarf humanity,  
How long will you tread the circling tracks of mind  
Around your little self and petty things?  
But not for a changeless littleness were you meant,  
Not for vain repetition were you built;  
Out of the Immortal's substance you were made;  
Your actions can be swift revealing steps,  
Your life a changeful mould for growing gods.  
A Seer, a strong Creator, is within,  
The immaculate Grandeur broods upon your days,  
Almighty powers are shut in Nature's cells.  
A greater destiny waits you in your front:  
This transient earthly being if he wills  
Can fit his acts to a transcendent scheme.  
He who now stares at the world with ignorant eyes  
Hardly from the Inconscient's night aroused,  
That look at images and not at Truth,

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101 Ibid., p. 60

Can fill those orbs with an immortal's sight.  
Yet shall the godhead grow within your hearts,  
You shall awake into the spirit's air  
And feel the breaking walls of mortal mind  
And hear the message which left life's heart dumb  
And look through Nature with sun-gazing lids  
And blow your conch-shells at the Eternal's gate.  
Authors of earth's high change, to you it is given  
To cross the dangerous spaces of the soul  
And touch the mighty Mother stark awake  
And meet the Omnipotent in this house of flesh  
And make of life the million-bodied One.<sup>102</sup>

The Force that we feel sometimes above us, this higher vibration descending in us, this Force that is generated by the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, allows us to see through the veil sometimes; it parts the veil, as Uma Hemavati, the Divine Mother, is said to have done for the gods in the Kena Upanishad. This illuminating presence, also known as Savitri, starts to work on our mind, life, and body to reconnect us with our higher Self and integrate that higher seeing and force into our threefold human consciousness. So now, perhaps, we can reassemble these principles of the integral knowledge that we have briefly gathered from Sri Aurobindo's commentaries on the Upanishads and from his Yoga Philosophy, and realize how such a seeing and knowing is possible.

If we assemble the various elements – mythological, cosmological, and philosophical – that this Vedantic conception of conscious existence presents, we envision a higher self of mind that sees, thinks, and wills its own manifestation in the structures of this lower realm of body, life, and mind, with its faculties of sight, thought, hearing, speech, embodied in a material organism that evolves upward in response to a spiritual force that descends from a larger universal dimension of existence above. That higher plane is characterized as a plane of universal principles and powers, known as devas in Sanskrit, of which the faculties of mind are a manifestation. It would perhaps be useful to visualize all of this as a sphere, or a series of integrated spheres, rather than as the flat two-dimensional diagrams shown above. The lower region of the sphere, or spheres, contains the planes of our physical, vital, and mental energies; the intermediate region contains the universal divine principles; and the higher region is the Self or Absolute Spirit with its Divine Mind, or Consciousness-Force, and its Delight of Infinite Existence (Sat-Chit-Ananda).

We have to rise above our horizontal mental seeing, hearing, feeling, and thinking, and adopt the vertical, supramental, view, if we are to evolve beyond our present limitations. This is the only choice that presents itself, with respect to the problems of the world, the problems of humanity, and the problems of the little mind and life, when we have realized the limitations of mind and reason. And it entails a powerful evolutionary choice. It requires us to integrate an energy of consciousness beyond the ordinary human level. We have to allow it to press our present limitations out of the ordinary mind-life-body complex, and produce in this ordinary world the forms of that emerging new structure of consciousness – the form of the Idea that engenders the body of Time. This Idea is not something in our intellectual mind. The word 'Idea' means here the seeing of the Absolute by Itself which originates the principles and processes of mind and life. This Idea has another, yet to be manifested embodiment which is divine and luminous, and our evolutionary progression is a series of spikes along the way

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102 Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, (1997 ed.) p. 370

which have enabled members of our species, from time to time, to recover a glimpse of that origin and goal, and to gradually approximate it more closely. There are moments when we grasp the whole, the Idea itself, which is the Vast, and then we see all of these temporal moments as the Divine Process. These are our moments of inspiration and creativity. They must become a continuous seeing, thinking, and acting from the highest plane of self, embodied in a new form of super-human consciousness.

### The Integral Yoga of Knowledge, (Part 2)

“For the disciple of an integral Yoga there can be no hesitation; as a seeker of knowledge it is the integral knowledge and not anything either half-way and attractive or high-pinnacled and exclusive he must seek. He must soar to the utmost height, but also circle and spread to the most all-embracing wideness, not binding himself to any rigid structure of metaphysical thought, but free to admit and combine all the soul’s highest and greatest and fullest and most numerous experiences. If the highest height of spiritual experience, the sheer summit of all realisation is the absolute union of the soul with the Transcendent who exceeds the individual and the universe, the widest scope of that union is the discovery of that very Transcendent as the source, support, continent, informing and constituent spirit and substance of both these manifesting powers of the divine Essence and the divine Nature. Whatever the path, this must be for him the goal. ...

This cannot be done without an uncompromising abolition of the ego-sense at its very basis and source. In the path of Knowledge one attempts this abolition, negatively by a denial of the reality of the ego, positively by a constant fixing of the thought upon the idea of the One and the Infinite in itself or the One and Infinite everywhere. This, if persistently done, changes in the end the mental outlook on oneself and the whole world and there is a kind of mental realisation; but afterwards by degrees or perhaps rapidly and imperatively and almost at the beginning the mental realisation deepens into spiritual experience – a realisation in the very substance of our being. More and more frequent conditions come of something indefinable and illimitable, a peace, a silence, a joy, a bliss beyond expression, a sense of absolute impersonal Power, a pure existence, a pure consciousness, an all-pervading Presence. The ego persists in itself or in its habitual movements, but the place of the one becomes more and more loosened, the others are broken, crushed, more and more rejected, becoming weak in their intensity, limp or mechanical in their action. In the end there is a constant giving up of the whole consciousness into the being of the Supreme. In the beginning when the restless confusion and obscuring impurity of our outward nature is active, when the mental, vital, physical ego-sense are still powerful, this new mental outlook, these experiences may be found difficult in the extreme: but once that triple egoism is discouraged or moribund and the instruments of the Spirit are set right and purified, in an entirely pure, silent, clarified, widened consciousness the purity, infinity, stillness of the One reflects itself like the sky in a limpid lake.”<sup>103</sup>

“What then, when he so resumes his hold upon the universe and views no longer himself in the world but the cosmos in himself, will be the position of the Jiva or what will fill in his new consciousness the part of the ego-sense? There will be no ego-sense even if there is a sort of individualisation for the purposes of the play of universal consciousness in an individual mind and frame; and for this reason that all will be unforgettably the One and every Person or Purusha will be to him the One in many forms or rather in many aspects

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103 Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1999 ed.), p. 361-363

and poises, Brahman acting upon Brahman, one Nara-Narayana\* everywhere. In that larger play of the Divine the joy of the relations of divine love also is possible without the lapse into the ego-sense, – just as the supreme state of human love likewise is described as the unity of one soul in two bodies. The ego-sense is not indispensable to the world-play in which it is so active and so falsifies the truth of things; the truth is always the One at work on itself, at play with itself, infinite in unity, infinite in multiplicity. When the individualised consciousness rises to and lives in that truth of the cosmic play, then even in full action, even in possession of the lower being the Jiva remains still one with the Lord, and there is no bondage and no delusion. He is in possession of Self and released from the ego. \*The Divine, Narayana, making itself one with humanity even as the human, Nara becomes one with the Divine.” <sup>104</sup>

“This Self that we are has finally to become to our self-consciousness entirely one with all existences in spite of its exceeding them. We have to see it not only as that which contains and inhabits all, but that which is all, not only as indwelling spirit, but also as the name and form, the movement and the master of the movement, the mind and life and body. It is by this final realisation that we shall resume entirely in the right poise and the vision of the Truth all that we drew back from in the first movement of recoil and withdrawal. The individual mind, life and body which we recoiled from as not our true being, we shall recover as a true becoming of the Self, but no longer in a purely individual narrowness. We shall take up the mind not as a separate mentality imprisoned in a petty motion, but as a large movement of the universal mind, the life not as an egoistic activity of vitality and sensation and desire, but as a free movement of the universal life, the body not as a physical prison of the soul but as a subordinate instrument and detachable robe, realising that also as a movement of universal Matter, a cell of the cosmic Body. We shall come to feel all the consciousness of the physical world as one with our physical consciousness, feel all the energies of the cosmic life around as our own energies, feel all the heart-beats of the great cosmic impulse and seeking in our heart-beats set to the rhythm of the divine Ananda, feel all the action of the universal mind flowing into our mentality and our thought-action flowing out upon it as a wave into that wide sea. This unity embracing all mind, life and matter in the light of a supramental Truth and the pulse of a spiritual Bliss will be to us our internal fulfilment of the Divine in a complete cosmic consciousness.” <sup>105</sup>

## Lecture 11

I would like to read some text that offers perhaps a culminating view of this whole exploration of the question, What is consciousness?, with respect to Hegel and Sri Aurobindo. We have read several passages from the philosophy of Hegel and we will therefore know that consciousness and freedom are concepts that Hegel associates with Absolute Spirit. He wrote several books developing the idea that

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104 Ibid., 366-367

105 Ibid., p. 372-373

Spirit is consciousness and freedom, and Will is the spirit of consciousness and freedom in manifestation, or in action, as Force. Will and consciousness are Spirit, and will is that power of consciousness that manifests and demonstrates freedom. The Will is free. We can contemplate will in ourselves, in various ways, in order to validate this description of it as “freedom”, and this was a fundamental tenet of Schopenhauer's philosophy of Will as well. One of the necessities of this contemplation is to negate the everyday manifestations of will, which is also a fundamental principle of Yoga, as we have seen. The will that actualizes itself on a mundane practical level can be negated with respect to its principle. We can then contemplate the Will in all of its many forms, which may be quite unconscious and limited in themselves, and come to the conclusion that will in us can be elevated in consciousness to the principle of the Will itself, in relation to all of the particular expressions of it. We can then realize that the principle of will itself has a quality of absoluteness: it can will anything and it in fact wills everything. On an even higher level it can be seen as the force that manifests Spirit in every possible way, and as such it is infinite. It is an absolute expression of the Absolute Spirit, which is understood by Hegel to be the truth of existence. In itself, as such, it is the force of absolute Freedom. When it enters into manifestation it is then constrained by time, space, circumstance, and the infinity of contingencies that are the necessary conditions for there to be individual expressions and dynamic processes of Absolute Spirit in its relative manifestation. The One becomes the Many, thereby limiting itself by virtue of its own free will.

Similarly, in this metaphysical view of things, Hegel sees that the relation of Absolute Spirit to its manifestation in time and space brings about an awareness of the limited forms of things in relation to each other. This mutual awareness of particulars, and their differences, in relation to each other, is that form of the Absolute Spirit known as consciousness. In other words, the existence of things, as such, is the field of consciousness. This notion seems to correspond quite closely to the process of prehension as defined by Whitehead in his theory of pan-experientialism, which for him is an outcome of the interaction between eternal objects, or universals, and actual events. Absolutely everything in manifestation is therefore aware of everything else to some extent, in his view. And he acknowledges that his philosophy of organism is to this extent similar to the philosophy of Hegel.<sup>106</sup> Thus we arrive at the proposition that Absolute Spirit is Will, and Absolute Spirit is Consciousness. The result is a cosmic existence characterized by will and consciousness manifested as force in an infinity of relative forms and processes ascending in degrees of organization and relative freedom from matter to spirit.

Hegel believed that at this point in the development of human consciousness, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, because human beings were capable of the knowledge of absolutes through an awareness of universals and the negation of particulars, they could therefore achieve ideal conditions of freedom and justice in human society through acts of will. This is an idea that Plato entertained much earlier, of course. But the progress of society took a somewhat different course through many centuries of human history, until the faculties of ethical judgment, and the ideal of right, destined to be determined by rational thought, and realized universally, eventually resurfaced in a prominent way around the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From that time on the quest to understand consciousness, will, perception, judgment began again in a particularly focused way, first with the British empiricists and then with the German idealists, enhanced by the close proximity and interaction, through global trade, of Eastern and Western culture. And this period of modern civilization, with its extraordinary scientific, technological, and economic advancement, termed by Sri Aurobindo the “subjective age”, was consequently inspired by this way of thinking in a fundamental and profound way. It is as if 'mind' entered into a new dimension of its

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106 A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (1978), p. 167: “On one side, the one becomes many; and on the other side, the many become one. But what becomes is always a *res vera*, and the concrescence of a *res vera* is the development of a subjective aim. This development is nothing else than the Hegelian development of an idea.”

manifestation.

I would like to illustrate this way of thinking and the impact it has had on society by reading a few passages that are paraphrases and explanations of Hegel by Herbert Marcuse. We have read numerous passages from Hegel, which have often seemed to us to be rather complicated and obscure, but these passages from Marcuse, who was one of the foremost commentators on Hegel in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are much easier to read and understand, and they also place Hegel's thought in a contemporary context that is more relevant to us and the conditions of human society today. Marcuse published his classical commentary on Hegel, titled *Reason and Revolution*, in 1941, which was also the year of the first exterminations in Auschwitz. It was also one year after Sri Aurobindo wrote the second 500 pages of *The Life Divine*.

Marcuse began his successful career in philosophy as an expatriate German in America, with this remarkable book on Hegel, at exactly the time when the holocaust was getting underway in Germany. And I think it is important for us to bear this context in mind as we hear what he has to say about the philosophy of Hegel. Marcuse was also one of the foremost advocates of a change of consciousness that he perceived emerging in the 60s, symbolized for him by the student revolts in Paris in 1968. The entire argument that he presents can also be viewed in our context, seventy-five years after his 1941 book, after an unprecedented period of social, economic, and technological development, – as a result of the relatively free will of human beings, – that has been dominated by a philosophy of positivism which is not idealistic at all, as Marcuse will tell us. Positivism is a philosophy which holds that human beings actually do not have free will and everything that happens on earth is a product of natural laws. It is also a philosophy that is based on a fundamentally materialistic view of existence. Everything is determined by laws of physics or chemistry or biology or sociology, but whatever happens to be going on is exactly what ought to be going on. That's why it is called positivism. Whatever power is in place in government or whatever forms the society and economy are taking, are all quite OK because everything moves in life according to such natural laws and we can't do anything about it anyway. Hegel's philosophy was followed and overcome by this philosophy, in spite of the promises of the French revolution, the demise of religious authority, and the growth of rationality by which he was inspired. All were largely superseded by the emergence and success of another kind of authority, in the form of science and technology.

Here we are two-hundred years later facing some issues as a species, such as injustice and inequality, pollution, overpopulation, and climate change, which may be crucial to our survival, and the question of ideal government has become quite relevant again. The fact that representatives of all the governments of the world are meeting now in Copenhagen to put proposals on the table for reducing the threat of global warming, is a significant event with respect to the idea of universal human rights. Seventy-five years ago, or two hundred years ago when Hegel was writing, who would have thought that all humans have a right to clean drinking water and air and domestic security, which should be protected by all governments. But today people do think seriously about these things, and do believe that there are universal human rights, and that the will of human beings is perfectly free to ensure that these rights are guaranteed by governments. Even if they sell the water at exorbitant rates, and dam rivers and displace populations, and destruction is equal to conservation, still the ideal of universal rights and freedom of the will are generally held in high regard, and their preservation is thought to be the duty of the state. I hope that we have followed Hegel's arguments closely enough to understand that there are certain metaphysical justifications for such beliefs. The universal spirit of freedom, will, consciousness, and force is at work in all relationships, from the most material to the most social and intellectual. And yet, in the field of consciousness studies today, there are also strongly held views regarding the materialistic origins of consciousness, particularly in the field of neuroscience, which

claim that what we know and do is strictly the result of mechanical processes in the brain which determine our perceptions of reality. Therefore it is important for us to acquire a thorough understanding of how the mind works, as well as how the brain works, in order to confront the question of consciousness in a way that is relevant to our actual existence.

Hegel made an important distinction, for understanding the mind and how it works, between reason and understanding. And I would like for us to review quickly this distinction. In his paraphrase of Hegel, Marcuse says, “The operations of the understanding yield the usual type of thinking that prevails in everyday life, as well as in science. The world is taken as a multitude of determinant things, each of which is demarcated from the other. Each thing is a distinct, delimited entity related, as such, to other likewise delimited entities. Understanding is a concept that is based upon the perception of 'things'. And reason, then, is a process that we perform on the basis of those perceptions. We first categorize the things that we perceive and then through processes of analysis and reasoning we relate them to their universal identities.”<sup>107</sup> All of these processes, from sensation to perception to ideation, we generally understand to be the functions of “mind”. And through these functions we have a more or less clear understanding of the world of which we are a part. And we constantly test the relative truth of that understanding through our actions and their results.

For example, as we have said before, we understand that all of the SUVs, whether they are Toyota SUVs, or Tata SUVs, or Mahindra SUVs, are generally too big for the roads and streets in India, use too much fuel for a country with the developmental parameters that this country has, and add too much carbon pollution to the atmosphere, but they all serve the larger purpose of transportation which unites people in space and time in a way that accelerates the development of both individuals and society. So we have elevated the SUV that we see on the street to a level of universal meaning, as something that serves the general purpose of transportation, and increases pollution. We perform this sort of elevation of things that we understand to a level of universal meaning all the time, through a process of negation. And this understanding can then be applied in our choices of whether to use such means and to participate in achieving such goals or not. In a similar way, we understand that systems of government based on strong central control believe that to be the best way to further the aims of society, while other systems adopt a theory of decentralization of control and representative government in order to achieve those aims. When we evaluate these competing systems it appears today that the latter has been more successful than the former, and we may also recognize that both create a large amount of pollution and destruction of the environment which possibly threatens human survival. We may then act on the basis of this understanding of social and political realities in ways that are meaningful and can influence the forms that these realities take, which in turn may give us a sense of the extent to which our understanding and action, our consciousness and force, reflect a true understanding of the reality.

In this course on the philosophy of consciousness, we are trying to focus our attention on what is. What is consciousness? What is the SUV phenomenon? What is its meaning? What is our civilization today? What are its values and aims? On the basis of such determinations we make judgments and we recommend policies. How we become conscious in this way may eventually be a question for epistemology or for brain science, but we are now concerned with becoming as conscious as possible of what is, by means of philosophical reflection.

So Marcuse<sup>108</sup> then tells us, “Understanding conceives a world of finite entities, governed by the principle of identity and opposition.” Please remember this. Understanding is based on the discernment

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107 Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution – Hegel and the rise of social theory* (1941), p. 44

108 *Ibid.*, p. 44-45

of identities and differences. Those identities and differences exist. Then we elevate that discernment to a level that Hegel calls reason. "As distinguished from understanding, reason is motivated by the need 'to restore the totality'. How can this be done? First, says Hegel, by undermining the false security that the perceptions and manipulations of the understanding provide. The common-sense view is one of indifference and security, the 'indifference of security'. Satisfaction with the given state of reality and acceptance of its fixed and stable relations make men indifferent to the as yet unrealized potentialities that are not yet given with the same certainty and stability as the objects of sense." So we simply accept what SUVs are, and if we have the money we buy one. We accept the economic disparities because we don't know any better. It's the way things are. That's the 'normal' consciousness of the human being. All of the conditions under which we live we accept with relative indifference because we have a sense of security in accepting them. But if we become reasoning beings, we may ask questions about how it could be, or should be, otherwise. How could things be better? How could the potentialities be better realized in terms of "right" or "freedom" or "justice" than they are in the conventional forms. The process of unifying opposites: how it is/how it could be; what I perceive/what I think. We are working in this matrix of opposites. "The process of unifying opposites touches every part of reality and comes to an end only when reason has 'organized' the whole so that 'every part exists only in relation to the whole', and 'every individual entity has meaning and significance only in its relation to the totality'."109

So the SUV exists and is what it is in relation to Absolute Spirit, Freedom, Will, universal principles of mobility and efficiency, economy, and human drives and needs. The SUV itself doesn't exist. What exists is this spectrum of the real, the totality. The meaning of things and their significance come from their relation to the totality, not from the things themselves. The significance of the projection machine on the table is that it assists us in the learning process when it projects the image of this text on the screen. It has meaning only in relation to its use for information transfer and, as such, it belongs to the family of technology called media. This is a relatively high level of performance in the fields of life and mind. Calling attention to this totality should also enhance the meaning and significance of such things for us in the context of our lives. But the critics of Hegel, of which there are many these days, tell us that, since Auschwitz it has been hard for people to believe that everything has its existence in relation to the totality, especially if that totality is Right, and Freedom, and Truth. Even if we can believe that the information media is an expression of all of those principles, at least in terms of its potential, it is virtually impossible anymore to think about reality in relation to the Absolute, when our perception of the immediate reality has been so utterly the opposite of Right and Freedom. But soon we will hear from Sri Aurobindo how incorrect this view is, and we will come to appreciate more fully how close Sri Aurobindo's and Hegel's philosophy actually are to each other.

The critics of Hegel today will say that this way of thinking is a product of 'retroactive reconstruction'. We think about things that have happened and we assign a meaning to them in relation to a totality that we imagine or create by a thinking process. But this totality and this meaning are constructed by the mind retroactively in order to make it seem that everything has a purpose, and we don't really know what purpose things have when they are happening. We assign meaning to things after the fact in order to somehow understand and justify our behavior and the movements of history. The critics will say that there is no way that Auschwitz can be reconciled by the reason, and it is not possible to argue that such events have a purpose in relation to the being or existence of humanity. This too is the thinking of the ethical mind, of which Hegel by the way was a preeminent example. We will be able to put this critical standpoint in perspective when we come to Sri Aurobindo, but for the moment we are examining a view of consciousness from the Hegelian standpoint. I think this is useful because the rational mind

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109 Ibid.

actually does think and function in this way. And in this case we must judge that Auschwitz was an indisputably evil phenomenon.

“To know what a thing really is, we have to get beyond its immediate given state and follow out the process in which it turns into something other than itself. In the process of becoming,...its reality is the entire dynamic of its turning into something else and unifying itself with its 'other'. The dialectical pattern represents, and is thus 'the truth of', a world permeated by negativity, a world in which everything is something other than it *really* is, and in which opposition and contradiction constitute the laws of progress.”<sup>110</sup>

Actually we can look back and reconcile absolutely everything, on the basis of that retroactive principle, even slavery, and genocide. When I was a student in the 60s and first read this argument, it was the first year in which black citizens in America got the right to vote. And when Marcuse was writing this, as I said, it was the first year of the exterminations at Auschwitz. He is writing this at that moment. Everything is something other than it really is, and opposition and contradiction constitute the laws of progress, as well as of thought. We could say that, after WWII, almost immediately, seventy-five nations got independence from colonial rule, and they were mostly nations that cooperated with the Allies. Marcuse worked for the secret service in America during the war against Germany, where he had been a member of the group of prominent philosophers known as the Frankfurt School. They defended German Idealism, many were students of Heidegger, and they were also strong proponents of a form of radical Marxist criticism known as 'critical theory'.

We find the transition to Marx and Marxist thought, at this point, in the writings of Marcuse. But first, there is a good segue into Marx from Hegel: “That which persists in this merely empirical manner without being adapted to the idea of reason cannot be regarded as real. The political system (*at the time of Hegel*) had to be destroyed and transformed into a new rational order.”<sup>111</sup> So the political system at the time was not the right one, according to Hegel, but he understood that the right kind of government and society could actually be created from the level of development that had been achieved in European society on the basis of reason. And to a certain extent he was right. Slavery has been abolished, black people in America can vote, we now have global capitalism and global warming everywhere, which is a kind of world order that didn't exist in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. And these advances were foreseen to a certain extent by Hegel and by Marx, by virtue of the process of reason. It sees where we are, it sees where we are going, and it seeks the means to get from one to the other, at least in principle. This is what the reason does. If we don't use it then we simply accept indifferently the current state of things. But the faculty of reason sees and feels and knows the inadequacies and potentials of the status quo and it wills the “right” that it understands to be a larger reality, of which the momentary reality is a deficient part.

Karl Marx followed, and there was a development in Hegelian thought. As we have seen in the course on the philosophy of religion, when a seer comes along in human society, he has a few followers, and sometime later another seer comes along and develops the ideas of the first, and the base of followers – of the good idea – expands. And here we see another example of the same pattern in philosophy. Marcuse said that Hegel's affirmation of the right form of government to be created, by violence if necessary, “rested on the assumption that social and political forms had become adequate to the principles of reason, so that the highest potentialities of man could be developed through a

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110 Ibid., p. 49

111 Ibid., p. 51

development of existing social forms.”<sup>112</sup> Hegel's dialectic had recognized the alienation of consciousness by the objects of desire and the products of labor: “man is overpowered by things he has himself made”. But he argued that this alienation could be overcome by reason, “and all contradictions totally reconciled in the realm of thought”, with the historical result that a more perfect unity of consciousness and its objects would be achieved through a process of social development within the existing monarchical system. And his justification of this belief was to be found in the perfection of reason itself, as Marcuse shows us. “The truth, Hegel maintained, is a whole that must be present in every single element, so that if one material element or fact cannot be connected with the process of reason, the truth of the whole is destroyed.” He therefore believed that the social reality would necessarily conform to the truth of reason. Marx appreciated this argument but pointed out its weakness and thus laid the foundations for a critical theory of society and historical materialism. As Marcuse explains it, Marx said that there was an outstandingly important element that did not conform to the truth of reason – the proletariat. “The existence of the proletariat contradicts the alleged reality of reason, for it sets before us an entire class that gives proof of the very negation of reason. ...If the exercises of the absolute mind, art, religion, and philosophy, constitute man's essence, the proletariat is forever severed from his essence... History and social reality themselves thus 'negate' philosophy. The critique of society cannot be carried through by philosophical doctrine, but become the task of socio-historical practice.”<sup>113</sup>

Marx put everything that Hegel said in the context of social and historical realities, such as ownership, commodity exchange, and class struggle, as opposed to the realities of the higher mind. He used Hegel's argument to negate Hegel. He agreed with the dialectic of negativity but countered that negativity means to overcome the thing which doesn't fit, and not just to negate it abstractly. It means to actually negate the existence of what doesn't fit in the totality of thinking and social practice and not just the particulars in relation to the universals. Social practice embodies the negativity. We can see that the SUV in our example of universals is not just a particular form of transportation sitting there on the road, it also is a factor in the destruction of the environment and a power symbol of the elite class that exploits the poor for its capitalistic gains. We see and feel this phenomenon more and more in India today as the commercial powers systematically expand the use of land and other resources for the development of the automobile industry. Marx says then, that the socio-economic order needs to be changed radically, which to him meant to eliminate the proletariat by abolishing private property.

But Marx's view can also be understood in terms of idealism. He said that, “The true history of mankind in the strict sense will be the history of free individuals, so that the interest of the whole will be woven into the individual existence of each. In all prior forms of society the interest of the whole lay in separate social and political institutions which represent the rights of society as against the rights of the individual.”<sup>114</sup> Marcuse comments that, “Marx's idea of a rational society implies an order in which it is not the universality of labor but the universal satisfaction of all individual potentialities that constitutes the principle of social organization. Marx contemplates a society that gives to each not according to his work but according to his needs. The idea of reason has been superseded by the idea of happiness.”<sup>115</sup> Marx has taken Hegel's process of ideal thinking to the people by making it a ground for the establishment of a truly fair and equal and happy arrangement of society, which he called communism.

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112 Ibid., p. 260

113 Ibid., p. 261

114 Ibid., p. 283

115 Ibid., p. 293

Well, as was suggested earlier, this form of idealism, and idealism in general, were soon overtaken by positivism, which is the dominant philosophy of human society today in the form of capitalism. Today, the hegemonic capitalistic approach is generally thought to be the best because it is dominant, and it is dominant because it's the best. Although we have heard a lot about all that is wrong with it, all the wars and traumas, and exploitation, and the loss of connectedness and identity, that were the themes of many writers of the school of critical theory, like Herbert Marcuse and Eric Fromm in the 60s, we tend to accept it with a certain disinterestedness because of the security and comfort that it gives us. And it appears that Hegel was right to the extent that the human consciousness on one level of right and freedom and will is being satisfied on a larger scale today than ever before by the degree of identity between human desire and the world of things that it has created. Human beings are generally more affluent, our relationship with governments, from wherever we may come, gives us the right to travel and be anywhere that we choose, our relationship with social institutions gives us access to medical care and education, our relationship with local economies gives us access to food and shelter, almost universally. The degree of freedom we enjoy has given a black man in America the right and the ability, not only to vote, but to become president. These things would not have been imagined even a hundred years ago, and do in fact constitute a nearer approach to the Ideal that the mind can conceive, in spite of two world wars and the continued disparities between capital and labor. But we also remember that Hegel warned us about the “security of indifference”, and we know that the disparities between capital and labor, wealth and poverty, are still responsible for a great deal of human suffering.

We can see in these examples that there are many contradictions in society today with respect to right, freedom, justice and perhaps even the survivability of our species. For example, we know that about 20,000 farmers have committed suicide each year in India for the past ten years, because of agricultural debts. We know that genocides have continued to be perpetrated on the grounds of ethnic differences in several countries of the world even during the past few decades. We know that global warming, which is created by human social and economic behavior, is likely to precipitate environmental disasters over the next few decades. We know that only a few individuals now own a majority of the wealth of the world, and the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. And because of these things, Marx's materialistic ideal of the fulfillment of all human potentials by means of a social re-organization is not likely to be realized without radical changes, not only in the social order, but in the consciousness of humanity. Finally, we know that the higher mind of reason may elevate consciousness to an awareness of the absolute values of right, freedom, truth, and will, but a higher power than reason must evolve if these principles are to be realized in the life of humanity.

The critics of Hegel, and the critics of Marx, the critics of capitalism, and of communism, will all say that the ethical consciousness – what we feel and believe and understand about these values and ideals – is quite relative. Some will say there is nothing wrong with building SUVs; they are a sign of progress. The fact that 1% owns 65% of the wealth of the world has actually made things better for everyone. Some will say that if we don't change this pattern soon everything will go down the drain due to global warming, wars, and natural disasters. The defenders of positivism and capitalism and industrialism and technology will say that we have made the best choices that we could, and the ideals of reason, and the elevation of consciousness to the level of Absolute Spirit, freedom and justice and truth, are merely mental justifications for doing what we do.

And this brings us back to Sri Aurobindo and the perspective of a higher consciousness and higher dialectic than that of reason. He says that, “Absoluteness of conscious existence is illimitable bliss of conscious existence.” And here he adds a radically new dimension to the ideals of the ethical mind. He says, “Absoluteness of conscious existence is illimitable bliss of conscious existence; the two are only different phrases for the same thing. All illimitableness, all infinity, all absoluteness is pure delight.

Even our relative humanity has this experience that all dissatisfaction means a limit, an obstacle, – satisfaction comes by realisation of something withheld, by the surpassing of the limit, the overcoming of the obstacle. This is because our original being is the absolute in full possession of its infinite and illimitable self-consciousness and self-power; a self-possession whose other name is self-delight. And in proportion as the relative touches upon that self-possession, it moves towards satisfaction, touches delight.”<sup>116</sup>

Now, we might ask, where does this put us with regard to the views of reason and the ideals expressed by Hegel and Marx? And how should this view affect our existential awareness of the need for historical change? What becomes of that ethical point of view in relation to this metaphysical/spiritual dimension? In the Hegelian and Marxist view, to overcome an obstacle to the expression of freedom, or to overcome the obstacle of proprietary ownership in order to reduce alienated labor, would be satisfactions on the material plane, which perhaps we can now see in the context of a totality that is infinite self-delight on the spiritual plane. We can think, and perhaps experience, that principle of delight, like the principle of freedom and will, or happiness and fulfillment, as the whole in relation to which things get their relative meaning and value. Something is relatively good or bad in relation to its ability to realize a potential satisfaction, in relation to its hidden essence of delight, as well as freedom and right. This is the perspective that Sri Aurobindo elaborates in his philosophy of 'the life divine', thereby adding a deeper dimension to critical thought. He writes:

“We have to recognize, if we thus view the whole, not limiting ourselves to the human difficulty and the human standpoint, that we do not live in an ethical world. The attempt of human thought to force an ethical meaning into the whole of Nature is one of those acts of willful and obstinate self-confusion, one of those pathetic attempts of the human being to read himself, his limited habitual human self into all things and judge them from the standpoint he has personally evolved, which most effectively prevent him from arriving at real knowledge and complete sight. Material Nature is not ethical; the law which governs it is a co-ordination of fixed habits which take no cognizance of good and evil, but only of force that creates, force that arranges and preserves, force that disturbs and destroys impartially, non-ethically, according to the secret Will in it, according to the mute satisfaction of that Will in its own self-formations and self-dissolutions.”<sup>117</sup>

The ethical world-view is a product of the higher mind of humanity, and it is true within its limits. But this is the Hegelian negative philosophy raised to a higher degree. Hegel asks us to negate the particular and to see the universal in order to know the right. But Sri Aurobindo is asking us to negate both the particular and the universal and to elevate consciousness into the original self-delight of existence, the original absolute of freedom and right. And in this context he also offers a profound critique of the limited ways in which our ethical consciousness is applied, and points us towards an evolution of consciousness beyond the level of the ethical mind.

“In this respect man even now is only half-ethical. And just as all below us is infra-ethical, so there may be that above us whither we shall eventually arrive, which is supra-ethical, has no need of ethics. The ethical impulse and attitude, so all-important to humanity, is a means by which it struggles out of the lower harmony and universality based upon inconscience and broken up by Life into individual discords towards a higher harmony and universality based upon conscient oneness with all existences. Arriving at that goal, this means will no longer be necessary or even possible, since the qualities and oppositions on which it depends will naturally dissolve and disappear in the final reconciliation.”<sup>118</sup>

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116 Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (2005 ed.), p. 99

117 Ibid., p. 103

118 Ibid., p. 104

The proposition made by this higher idealism of spirit, which is based on the Indian idea of sat-chit-ananda, is that the conscious force of existence has its origin in the more dynamically powerful reality of the delight (*ananda*) of existence. Spirit is Consciousness-force and Will, but its highest reality, and that which secretly drives things to be what they are, is delight. It is the *rasa* hidden in even the most basic drives and experiences, without which the concepts of 'happiness' and 'satisfaction' would not be possible. But in order to realize this truth of existence, it is necessary to negate our superficial impressions of things based on sensation and perception at one level of experience, and based on preferences and opinions regarding good and evil on another level of experience. If this negation is achieved, – and Yoga is the recommended methodology for achieving it – then our perceptions of things would be of their hidden delight, even if their outward form is its extreme opposite. And in that state of awareness, we would be empowered by a dynamism greater than it is possible to achieve by means of a sense of right and the concepts of reason, which tend to leave us virtually powerless in the face of the contradictions of life.

“We must first make it clear to ourselves that just as when we speak of universal consciousness we mean something different from, more essential and wider than the waking mental consciousness of the human being, so also when we speak of universal delight of existence we mean something different from, more essential and wider than the ordinary emotional and sensational pleasure of the individual human creature.”<sup>119</sup>

When we make something clear to ourselves, it means we become conscious of it. And this is possible because consciousness is omnipresent, in the molecules, the cells, in the organs, the senses, the mind, the elements of the earth and the life around us. Everything in existence is a form of consciousness, as Hegel said. But beyond functionality, and reason, and ethics, and aesthetics, there is another consciousness of existence itself. Consciousness is Existence, and at that level of consciousness it is self-delight – Sat-Chit-Ananda. It is what we are, essentially. We make our ethical judgments and rational decisions along the way, but how far does it actually get us. And where are we going? Humanity doesn't yet have either the consciousness or the will to actually do what is right. And Sri Aurobindo is pointing us toward a higher power of consciousness that is yet to evolve, under the force of a will that is a drive in us to realize our full potentiality. Universal consciousness in everything that exists is interacting, sensitively, with feeling for the things around it, in order to express and become in each, 'what it is', its qualitative being. And this has been recognized by the phenomenology and the intuitive cosmology of consciousness. But in neuroscience, and science in general, this qualitative aspect of existence is still not a commonly accepted idea. The common definition of consciousness is the 'awareness of things', in an abstract sense. But the idea that the 'delight of existence' is also something that is universal in things, is as yet quite far from being a common awareness of consciousness. Even Hegel apparently did not have this awareness. But he was absolutely right that the things we perceive are not what things really are. Things are partial, temporal expressions of an infinitude of freedom *and delight*. And to have this awareness experientially would be a higher realization of consciousness and freedom than Hegel conceived. But this is the proposition and goal of Yoga, and it could possibly enable new structures to emerge in society. When we can dwell in that experience of self-delight, in the universal being of things, on a sufficient scale to give outer things a chance to change, free from the imposition of our limited desires and practical judgments, then new social structures and behaviors surpassing reason and practicality, surpassing little desires and satisfactions, might find the freedom to emerge from within. This is the evolutionary view that Sri Aurobindo's philosophy presents to us.

“Pleasure, joy and delight, as man uses the words, are limited and occasional movements which depend on certain habitual causes and emerge, like their opposites pain and grief which are equally limited and

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119 Ibid., p. 105

occasional movements, from a background other than themselves. Delight of being is universal, illimitable and self-existent, not dependent on particular causes, the background of all backgrounds, from which pleasure, pain and other more neutral experiences emerge. When delight of being seeks to realise itself as delight of becoming, it moves in the movement of force and itself takes different forms of movement of which pleasure and pain are positive and negative currents. Subconscient in Matter, superconscient beyond Mind this delight seeks in Mind and Life to realise itself by emergence in the becoming, in the increasing self-consciousness of the movement. Its first phenomena are dual and impure, move between the poles of pleasure and pain, but it aims at its self-revelation in the purity of a supreme delight of being which is self-existent and independent of objects and causes. Just as Sachchidananda moves towards the realisation of the universal existence in the individual and of the form-exceeding consciousness in the form of body and mind, so it moves towards the realisation of universal, self-existent and objectless delight in the flux of particular experiences and objects. Those objects we now seek as stimulating causes of a transient pleasure and satisfaction; free, possessed of self, we shall not seek but shall possess them as reflectors rather than causes of a delight which eternally exists.”<sup>120</sup>

Within the delight of being there are positive and negative currents. But they do not impact the delight itself. It is omnipresent. If we experience extreme conditions of human society in another way, for example, then we are operating on the human vital or mental level. If we experience those extreme conditions as the becoming of delight, through sometimes seemingly impossible resistances, then we will notice their positive and negative currents, but they will get their perceptible meaning and value from their relation to the totality, as Hegel said that they should, and not from their immediate limited appearances. Perception, ideation, and action would be an embodiment of truth-conscious delight. The divine delight is beyond negation. It is the One.

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120 Ibid., p. 106

## Lecture 12

Let me wind up this exploration by reiterating some of the arguments we have heard and the conclusions we have reached. And then we may be able to move beyond the question of consciousness. If we are going to envision a society, such as Hegel and Sri Aurobindo have envisioned, in which every human being is fulfilled on the basis of freedom, the freedom to be, and the freedom to express in infinitely diverse ways the truths of ourselves and existence, then we will realize that many of the structures of society and human behavior that exist now will have to change. But for that to happen, the human being must change. The outer and relational is a product of the inner. Changing the outer structures on the basis of the rational mind will not fundamentally change their essential constitution. (Of course we don't want to change. We are quite happy being the musicians and psychologists and philosophers and scientists that we are, and we can continue doing what we do forever....but that possibility also apparently may have its limits.)

The world seems to be producing situations that 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century music and philosophy can't any longer influence very much. The world is changing, and it is changing in relation to the development of the rational mind. This society in which we live is a product of the emergence of that rational mind in a particular way, around the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and it has developed systematically for these few hundred years, successfully creating a society in which the values of the rational mind have been manifested in every possible way. This development has undoubtedly been a great benefit to the human species. And yet it has reached its limits, many of which were intuitively perceived by the psychologists and sociologists and philosophers, especially in the school of 20<sup>th</sup> century critical theory. They gave us detailed analyses of the pathological ways in which people functioned in relation to both society and themselves. And today the limits they described are perceived and reported in even more extreme forms by scientific data. With respect to technological development, and the exploitation of nature and human beings by those who have financial power, with all its economic, social, and environmental consequences, are reaching extremes that simply cannot continue forever. They are reaching unsustainable limits.

With respect to Hegel, we have been told that the good is manifest freedom, and the destiny of the world is a state of universal freedom. A fundamental premise of this argument is the idea that the basis of right is the realm of Spirit. We have also heard from the Sanskritic philosophy, that there is such a plane of spirit above this temporal world, the Mahat, which is the basis of right, the *satyam ritam* that exists in itself. And its precise location and point of departure is the Will; it is the Spirit, Self, Soul in things that motivates them to become what they are. It is a higher vibrational field within and above this plane of body, life, and mind, interpenetrating all. This will, or consciousness-force, is free. Freedom constitutes its substance and destiny. But of course it is encumbered in us by the body, life, and mind. It is freedom seeking to create within these structures the manifestation of Spirit. The world of Spirit is infinite, and this existence is produced from within itself as a second nature, the world of its relative evolutionary expression. There are two realities. One is the infinite omnipresent reality of Spirit and the other is the finite, temporal world of matter, life, and mind. The system of right, which is the origin and end of the world that we organize and value, is the realm of actualized freedom.

Some prophets of the future will say that we are already so free that we should now be able to employ technology to solve all our problems, and many skilled human beings will undoubtedly make a heroic effort to do so, with a confidence that reminds us in fact of Hegel. But we haven't solved these problems yet, and it seems that we are not as free to do so as we might think. On some level we block

ourselves from employing the means we have created. We are still constrained by our human mental and physical limitations, and that is a fundamental principle of evolution. Homeostasis is the principle of moving forward within the constraints of what has already evolved, many structures of which will be retained within the new formations that emerge. The evolutionary solution envisioned by Sri Aurobindo is an elevation of consciousness above the planes of body, life, and mind, into the vibrational field of Absolute Spirit, which has always been the solution proposed by the schools of Yoga for the alleviation of suffering. But in the higher vision of an evolutionary Yoga, the process is reversed by the Will to allow that infinite peace and power and delight to descend more and more into the structures and functions of mind, life, and body, until they are entirely penetrated and governed by Spirit: so that not only is “consciousness” transformed and liberated, but the human being and society are also elevated into a new type of being. This is an evolutionary universe and an evolutionary planet. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is an expression of the idea that Spirit has chosen, or willed, this evolutionary mind, life, and body to create ever more interesting and delightful possibilities.

At the beginning of his cycle of philosophical writing in 1914, Sri Aurobindo said, “No synthesis of Yoga can be satisfying which does not in its aim reunite God and Nature in a liberated and perfected human life.”<sup>121</sup> His idea of Yoga and the transformations it makes possible were not seen as an end in themselves. It has the aim of ultimately achieving a perfected nature and life. And we can see here the presence of the Hegelian-Marxist relationship between absolute freedom and the possibility of a revolutionary change in the organization of society. But then, in the hundreds of pages that followed in each of many volumes of his writings, Sri Aurobindo primarily articulated the process of inner change, and the descent of a higher consciousness, which is required in order for there to be such a change in the outer nature of things. We should understand that his focus shifted more and more in his writings toward what needs to happen within the human being, rather than on the nature and process of social change. The focus of the organization of his Ashram was also not so much on changing social behavior and structure, but on creating an environment conducive to preparing for a change of consciousness in at least a small group of human beings. This change was not seen to be something that would happen universally in humanity, without first achieving it in a few individuals, which is also a fundamental principle of evolution.

We find this emphasis on individual transformation especially in *Savitri*, which was written during a period of about twenty years, after he had written his philosophy. The first part of *Savitri* describes the experiences of the individual Yogin. At the end of the first cycle he experiences union with the highest divine power, the Divine Mother, and he persuades her to send a ray of herself into this evolutionary field to break the resistance. He has realized that the resistance in humanity is so great that even the practice of Yoga, even a very elevated Yoga, is not likely to bring about the change that is required. Then the second part of *Savitri* is about the descent of that ray, which is a symbol of the principle and power of a new consciousness. He describes the advent of that divine presence working at first in a universal way in humanity through art and science and ethics but not finding the human being capable of going beyond its intellect. Then she becomes more present to a few as an inspiration and spiritual experience but they also are not able to change anything within or outside themselves. Eventually, the Yogi who brought this new power into existence summons her to him in the form of a spiritual presence, and missions her to find the ready human being. And there is only one. That one, named Satyavan, may be any one of us who are thus prepared to undergo the necessary spiritual change. The characteristics and qualities of this ready human being are then described in detail. It is significant that she finds him, after traveling all the earth in her car of happy light, in a silvan solitude, descends in him, does the Yoga of Transformation in him, and when, through this process of Yoga that is narrated in

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121 Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (199 ed.) p. 8

detail in this section of cantos, she realizes in the mortal her union with the Supreme Self, and immediately Satyavan dies. In the third section of *Savitri*, she then follows the soul through death and is revealed in the process to be the Will of the Supreme in humanity to reincarnate in a new type of being.

The focus of Sri Aurobindo in this most important and ultimate work is on the necessity for the human being to overcome the obstacles, in human nature and existence, to the emergence of a higher consciousness, and on the kind of inspiration and power and effort that are needed to do so. And it is also an authentic transmission of that inspiration and will by someone who has made the effort and knows the path. This is not philosophy. I would therefore like for us to hear some passages from *Savitri*, for two reasons. One is so that we will hear it and see it in the vivid language of the *mantra*, which has a power that comes from those planes of universal consciousness that are represented in the ancient Veda, as well as in many subsequent spiritual and metaphysical teachings. It is a power of illumination through speech. The other reason is that this ancient spirituality and philosophy can be applied today for the evolutionary purpose that Sri Aurobindo had in mind. *Savitri* is a teaching and a transmission that reveals how this force of illumination works, though it may appear to us to be merely a story or a myth. The passages that I will read should make it clear what the requirements are and what the experience and the results of the advent of this higher spirituality of body and mind can be. In these lines the spiritual being of illumination, Savitri, appears to the ready human being, who says:

“O thou who com’st to me out of Time’s silences,  
Yet thy voice has wakened my heart to an unknown bliss,  
Immortal or mortal only in thy frame,  
For more than earth speaks to me from thy soul  
And more than earth surrounds me in thy gaze,  
How art thou named among the sons of men?  
Whence hast thou dawned filling my spirit’s days,  
Brighter than summer, brighter than my flowers,  
Into the lonely borders of my life,  
O sunlight moulded like a golden maid? ...

I have beheld the princes of the Sun  
Burning in thousand-pillared homes of light.  
So now my mind could dream and my heart fear  
That from some wonder-couch beyond our air  
Risen in a wide morning of the gods  
Thou drov’st thy horses from the Thunderer’s worlds.  
Although to heaven thy beauty seems allied,  
Much rather would my thoughts rejoice to know  
That mortal sweetness smiles between thy lids  
And thy heart can beat beneath a human gaze  
And thy aureate bosom quiver with a look  
And its tumult answer to an earth-born voice.  
If our time-vexed affections thou canst feel,  
Earth’s ease of simple things can satisfy,  
If thy glance can dwell content on earthly soil,  
And this celestial summary of delight,  
Thy golden body, dally with fatigue  
Oppressing with its grace our terrain, while

The frail sweet passing taste of earthly food  
Delays thee and the torrent's leaping wine, then  
Descend. Let thy journey cease, come down to us.

I, Satyavan, have lived  
Contented, for not yet of thee aware,  
In my high-peopled loneliness of spirit  
And this huge vital murmur kin to me,  
Nursed by the vastness, pupil of solitude.  
Great Nature came to her recovered child;  
I reigned in a kingdom of a nobler kind  
Than men can build upon dull Matter's soil;  
I met the frankness of the primal earth,  
I enjoyed the intimacy of infant God.

Before Fate led me into this emerald world,  
Aroused by some foreshadowing touch within,  
An early prescience in my mind approached  
The great dumb animal consciousness of earth  
Now grown so close to me who have left old pomps  
To live in this grandiose murmur dim and vast.  
Already I met her in my spirit's dream.  
As if to a deeper country of the soul  
Transposing the vivid imagery of earth,  
Through an inner seeing and sense a wakening came.

I carved my vision out of wood and stone;  
I caught the echoes of a word supreme  
And metred the rhythm-beats of infinity  
And listened through music for the eternal Voice.  
I felt a covert touch, I heard a call,  
But could not clasp the body of my God  
Or hold between my hands the World-Mother's feet.  
In men I met strange portions of a Self  
That sought for fragments and in fragments lived:  
Each lived in himself and for himself alone  
And with the rest joined only fleeting ties;  
Each passioned over his surface joy and grief,  
Nor saw the Eternal in his secret house.  
I conversed with Nature, mused with the changeless stars,  
God's watch-fires burning in the ignorant Night,  
And saw upon her mighty visage fall  
A ray prophetic of the Eternal's sun.  
I sat with the forest sages in their trance:  
There poured awakening streams of diamond light,  
I glimpsed the presence of the One in all.  
But still there lacked the last transcendent power  
And Matter still slept empty of its Lord.

The Spirit was saved, the body lost and mute  
Lived still with Death and ancient Ignorance;  
The Inconscient was its base, the Void its fate.  
But thou hast come and all will surely change:  
I shall feel the World-Mother in thy golden limbs  
And hear her wisdom in thy sacred voice.  
The child of the Void shall be reborn in God,  
My Matter shall evade the Inconscient's trance.  
My body like my spirit shall be free.  
It shall escape from Death and Ignorance.”<sup>122</sup>

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122 Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* (1997 ed.), p. 400-406

This is literally a vision of spirit, and a call for it to come down, as it was meant to be seen and effected in experience in the Vedic tradition. He says here, "Even a brief nearness has reshaped my life"; this divine presence is something that we feel. It is not a story about someone else's experience. It is our story when we enter into this transformational Yoga. But its deepest significance is in the sense that is conveyed of a divine presence that is no longer realized only in a spiritual trance liberated from life and its imperfections. It is a spiritual presence in matter and life that transforms the everyday world of experience. It overcomes the divisions of subjectivity/objectivity, mind/matter that have preoccupied the philosophy of consciousness, and the divisions of good/evil and life/death that have preoccupied the religions forever. Satyavan says then:

I look back on the meaning of myself,  
A soul made ready on earth's soil for thee.  
Once were my days like days of other men:  
To think and act was all, to enjoy and breathe;  
This was the width and height of mortal hope:  
Yet there came glimpses of a deeper self  
That lives behind Life and makes her act its scene.  
A truth was felt that screened its shape from mind,  
A Greatness working towards a hidden end,  
And vaguely through the forms of earth there looked  
Something that life is not and yet must be.  
I groped for the Mystery with the lantern, Thought.  
Its glimmerings lighted with the abstract word  
A half-visible ground and travelling yard by yard  
It mapped a system of the Self and God.  
I could not live the truth it spoke and thought.  
I turned to seize its form in visible things,  
Hoping to fix its rule by mortal mind,  
Imposed a narrow structure of world-law  
Upon the freedom of the Infinite,  
A hard firm skeleton of outward Truth,  
A mental scheme of a mechanic Power.  
This light showed more the darkneses unsearched;  
It made the original Secrecy more occult;  
It could not analyse its cosmic Veil  
Or glimpse the Wonder-worker's hidden hand  
And trace the pattern of his magic plans.  
I plunged into an inner seeing Mind  
And knew the secret laws and sorceries  
That make of Matter mind's bewildered slave:  
The mystery was not solved but deepened more.  
I strove to find its hints through Beauty and Art,  
But Form cannot unveil the indwelling Power;  
Only it throws its symbols at our hearts.  
It evoked a mood of self, invoked a sign  
Of all the brooding glory hidden in sense:  
I lived in the ray but faced not to the sun.  
I looked upon the world and missed the Self,  
And when I found the Self, I lost the world,

My other selves I lost and the body of God,  
The link of the finite with the Infinite,  
The bridge between the appearance and the Truth,  
The mystic aim for which the world was made,  
The human sense of Immortality.  
But now the gold link comes to me with thy feet  
And His gold sun has shone on me from thy face.  
For now another realm draws near with thee  
And now diviner voices fill my ear,  
A strange new world swims to me in thy gaze  
Approaching like a star from unknown heavens;  
A cry of spheres comes with thee and a song  
Of flaming gods. I draw a wealthier breath  
And in a fierier march of moments move.  
My mind transfigures to a rapturous seer.  
A foam-leap travelling from the waves of bliss  
Has changed my heart and changed the earth around:  
All with thy coming fills.<sup>123</sup>

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123 Ibid., p. 406-408

This presence and new consciousness links the finite with the Infinite. This is what we have been talking about in philosophy: the bridge between the appearance and the truth. If we can discover this in ourselves, everything can change. This is the aim for which the world was made, the human sense of immortality. When that wave of bliss comes it changes the appearance of everything, and through everything the divine bliss, the freedom, the infinite, can be seen, and nothing any longer has the limits that it appeared to have. Sri Aurobindo saw that until there is a transformation of consciousness like this nothing outwardly can change significantly. Radical change can happen only after the new consciousness becomes a norm, at least among a few. And this follows the evolutionary law. Change always begins with one, and a few, and a family, and a society until a new type fills a niche. First there must be the ascent, a spiritual elevation of consciousness; then the descent of the new principle and power; and then, finally, a transformation that makes possible the advent of the “other”, which is not a mental being, but a supramental body, life, and mind. Our fathers are the blind kings, as portrayed symbolically by Satyavan's father in *Savitri*. Only when we abandon that world of false seeing, which adverse circumstances have made it possible for Satyavan to do, does it become possible to acquire a new seeing. The new is proportionate to the rejection of the old.

Perhaps, from this inspired vision and philosophical understanding, from Sri Aurobindo's view of what can be on the basis of what is, we can get some clearer indications of the possibility of a manifestation of freedom that can be achieved by the “will” under the conditions of a truly spiritualized humanity. By a transformation of the will, from the physical and vital and mental will, to a spiritual will, the will of the Divine in things can reveal itself to us, and work energetically and luminously in us to achieve a new order. But this requires a constant determination to have this experience and to surrender to it. It is not just about understanding something. The difference between Hegel and Sri Aurobindo is not one of understanding. It's that Sri Aurobindo insisted that there must be a spiritual action and a change effected by human beings in relation to the divine force. The evolution of the practical, rational, and ethical mind has reached its limits, and Savitri, the goddess of illumined speech, is the bridge to that new order, or a sketch of the bridge, an appearance which is a reality that we can experience. The difference between appearances and reality, the finite and the infinite, can then be known, but not by the intellectual mind but by a direct intuition.

SUPPLEMENT – SAVITRI AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

1

Sri Aurobindo's inspired seeing of the existence and purpose of consciousness:

The World-Stair, *Savitri*, Book 2 Canto 1 (an excerpt)<sup>124</sup>

There walled apart by its own innerness  
In a mystical barrage of dynamic light  
He saw a lone immense high-curved world-pile  
Erect like a mountain-chariot of the Gods  
Motionless under an inscrutable sky.  
As if from Matter's plinth and viewless base  
To a top as viewless, a carved sea of worlds  
Climbing with foam-maned waves to the Supreme  
Ascended towards breadths immeasurable;  
It hoped to soar into the Ineffable's reign:  
A hundred levels raised it to the Unknown.  
So it towered up to heights intangible  
And disappeared in the hushed conscious Vast  
As climbs a storied temple-tower to heaven  
Built by the aspiring soul of man to live  
Near to his dream of the Invisible.  
Infinity calls to it as it dreams and climbs;  
Its spire touches the apex of the world;  
Mounting into great voiceless stillnesses  
It marries the earth to screened eternities.  
Amid the many systems of the One  
Made by an interpreting creative joy

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124 Ibid., p. 98-99

Alone it points us to our journey back  
Out of our long self-loss in Nature's deeps;  
Planted on earth it holds in it all realms:  
It is a brief compendium of the Vast.  
This was the single stair to being's goal.  
A summary of the stages of the spirit,  
Its copy of the cosmic hierarchies  
Refashioned in our secret air of self  
A subtle pattern of the universe.  
It is within, below, without, above.  
Acting upon this visible Nature's scheme  
It wakens our earth-matter's heavy doze  
To think and feel and to react to joy;  
It models in us our diviner parts,  
Lifts mortal mind into a greater air,  
Makes yearn this life of flesh to intangible aims,  
Links the body's death with immortality's call:  
Out of the swoon of the Inconscience  
It labours towards a superconscient Light.  
If earth were all and this were not in her,  
Thought could not be nor life-delight's response:  
Only material forms could then be her guests  
Driven by an inanimate world-force.  
Earth by this golden superfluity  
Bore thinking man and more than man shall bear;  
This higher scheme of being is our cause  
And holds the key to our ascending fate;  
It calls out of our dense mortality  
The conscious spirit nursed in Matter's house.  
The living symbol of these conscious planes,  
Its influences and godheads of the unseen,  
Its unthought logic of Reality's acts  
Arisen from the unspoken truth in things,  
Have fixed our inner life's slow-scaled degrees.  
Its steps are paces of the soul's return  
From the deep adventure of material birth,  
A ladder of delivering ascent  
And rungs that Nature climbs to deity.

### Sruti and Yoga Philosophy

I understand that *Savitri* is a work of Sri Aurobindo that is intended to achieve something that philosophy cannot achieve, and that the human being alone also cannot achieve. In Vedic tradition the *mantra* is necessary to connect the higher mind with the Overmind so that there can be a direct transmission from that plane of consciousness. And it is an energetic transmission; it raises the vibrational structure of human consciousness. This has been a practice of Vedic tradition, including Mahayana Buddhism, forever.

One of the first things that we read about in several of Sri Aurobindo's books is *sruti*. *Sruti* he says is the basis of his teaching, and it is something that we hear, but it is not the words and sounds and understanding that we hear. It is a truth of consciousness and being that is revealed to us by that speech. *Sruti* is a seeing, hearing, knowing that does not come from the mind.

In ancient Indian philosophy this was always been known. They speak about perception and reasoning and imagination and logic – all of the standard mental faculties – and then they speak about *sruti*, which is something different. Sri Aurobindo refers often to the higher intuition, and a faculty of “ideal mind”, by which the *sruti* is produced. Sri Aurobindo speaks about this faculty in his earliest philosophical writing and it is the source of his philosophy and his teaching. He mentions frequently in his books that he is communicating the *sruti*, and it is not philosophy as it is normally understood.

But the human mind wants to read philosophy, and to see it with the eyes, and make mental associations based on the concepts that we read. But this is not what Sri Aurobindo is doing. It is something different. And when he comes to *Savitri* it is even more different, because it belongs to a category of transmission known as *mantra*. *Mantra* is the *sruti* expressed perfectly as a rhythmic sound transmission of the intuitive Overmind vision, which makes it possible for us to see something immediately. That immediate hearing/seeing is the purpose of *Savitri*.

In my understanding, it is not especially important that there are 49 cantos. Whether there were nine or four, it would be the same thing. Its significance is not in an underlying story or in a continuity and

progression in the “book”. In this sense *Savitri* is not a book. It is a compilation of mantric transmissions which reveal the processes and experiences of the Yoga of Transformation.

If we think about what we have heard about consciousness, we may come to the understanding that what the philosophers of the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were writing about was a certain level of consciousness, the intellectual mind level based on sensation, perception, and reflection. This is what Hume and Kant were writing about – they were describing and trying to explain the functioning of the mental consciousness, and not consciousness in general. There is practical mind, vital mind, intellectual mind, higher mind, and the Overmind intuition which is another level of consciousness. This is the first thing that we should begin to learn about consciousness. It is awareness, but there is awareness on many different levels and of many different kinds. There are also subhuman and elemental levels of awareness.

The early philosophers of ancient India and Greece, around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, were thinking about happiness and liberation from falsehood and illusion. In both Indian and Greek traditions there is a fundamental awareness of the need to suspend judgment in order to experience happiness. These teachings mention many of the things that the mind cannot know or doesn't understand. If we step back from this mind, we may enter into a consciousness of imperturbable delight. The negation of the lower ego-mind brings liberation from falsehood and illusion. The philosophy of Yoga is based on this fundamental truth of consciousness.

*Savitri* is a transmission of this truth, and for a moment it gives us access to exactly that experience. And it is very far from our thought about these things. Only the teacher and master of the *mantra* is capable of transmitting the energy of that awareness on this mental plane. This is a well known tenet of both Hindu and Buddhist yoga traditions. The essential technique that is used for the mantric transmission is rhythm. And the only way that we can really know it and what it contains is by hearing it. So, let us then listen to a rhythmic transmission of *Savitri* in which the most fundamental movement of liberation from the lower mentality into the stillness of the Self can be seen and heard.

### *The Pursuit of the Unknowable*

ALL IS too little that the world can give:  
Its power and knowledge are the gifts of Time  
And cannot fill the spirit's sacred thirst.  
Although of One these forms of greatness are  
And by its breath of grace our lives abide,  
Although more near to us than nearness' self,  
It is some utter truth of what we are;  
Hidden by its own works, it seemed far-off,  
Impenetrable, occult, voiceless, obscure.  
The Presence was lost by which all things have charm,  
The Glory lacked of which they are dim signs.  
The world lived on made empty of its Cause,  
Like love when the beloved's face is gone.  
The labour to know seemed a vain strife of Mind;  
All knowledge ended in the Unknowable:  
The effort to rule seemed a vain pride of Will;  
A trivial achievement scorned by Time,  
All power retired into the Omnipotent.  
A cave of darkness guards the eternal Light.  
A silence settled on his striving heart;  
Absolved from the voices of the world's desire,

He turned to the Ineffable's timeless call.  
A Being intimate and unnameable,  
A wide compelling ecstasy and peace  
Felt in himself and all and yet ungrasped,  
Approached and faded from his soul's pursuit  
As if for ever luring him beyond.  
Near, it retreated; far, it called him still.  
Nothing could satisfy but its delight:  
Its absence left the greatest actions dull,  
Its presence made the smallest seem divine.  
When it was there, the heart's abyss was filled;  
But when the uplifting Deity withdrew,  
Existence lost its aim in the Inane.  
The order of the immemorial planes,  
The godlike fullness of the instruments  
Were turned to props for an impermanent scene.  
But who that mightiness was he knew not yet.  
Impalpable, yet filling all that is,  
It made and blotted out a million worlds  
And took and lost a thousand shapes and names.  
It wore the guise of an indiscernible Vast,  
Or was a subtle kernel in the soul:  
A distant greatness left it huge and dim,  
A mystic closeness shut it sweetly in:  
It seemed sometimes a figment or a robe  
And seemed sometimes his own colossal shade.  
A giant doubt overshadowed his advance.  
Across a neutral all-supporting Void  
Whose blankness nursed his lone immortal spirit,  
Allured towards some recondite Supreme,  
Aided, coerced by enigmatic Powers,  
Aspiring and half-sinking and upborne,  
Invincibly he ascended without pause.  
Always a signless vague Immensity  
Brooded, without approach, beyond response,  
Condemning finite things to nothingness,  
Fronting him with the incommensurable.  
Then to the ascent there came a mighty term.  
A height was reached where nothing made could live,  
A line where every hope and search must cease  
Neared some intolerant bare Reality,  
A zero formed pregnant with boundless change.  
On a dizzy verge where all disguises fail  
And human mind must abdicate in Light  
Or die like a moth in the naked blaze of Truth,  
He stood compelled to a tremendous choice.  
All he had been and all towards which he grew  
Must now be left behind or else transform  
Into a self of That which has no name.

Alone and fronting an intangible Force  
Which offered nothing to the grasp of Thought,  
His spirit faced the adventure of the Inane.  
Abandoned by the worlds of Form he strove.  
A fruitful world-wide Ignorance foundered here;  
Thought's long far-circling journey touched its close  
And ineffective paused the actor Will.  
The symbol modes of being helped no more,  
The structures Nescience builds collapsing failed,  
And even the spirit that holds the universe  
Fainted in luminous insufficiency.  
In an abysmal lapse of all things built  
Transcending every perishable support  
And joining at last its mighty origin,  
The separate self must melt or be reborn  
Into a Truth beyond the mind's appeal.  
All glory of outline, sweetness of harmony,  
Rejected like a grace of trivial notes,  
Expunged from Being's silence nude, austere,  
Died into a fine and blissful Nothingness.  
The Demiurges lost their names and forms,  
The great schemed worlds that they had planned and wrought  
Passed, taken and abolished one by one.  
The universe removed its coloured veil,  
And at the unimaginable end  
Of the huge riddle of created things  
Appeared the far-seen Godhead of the whole,  
His feet firm-based on Life's stupendous wings,  
Omnipotent, a lonely seer of Time,  
Inward, inscrutable, with diamond gaze.  
Attracted by the unfathomable regard  
The unsolved slow cycles to their fount returned  
To rise again from that invisible sea.<sup>125</sup>

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125 Ibid., p. 305-307 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNQ97nAq6Bc>,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gbf2LmWWbfc>

End

Jan. 22, 2017