

## Preface to the Third Issue

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In a leap year like the current one, the first quarterly issue of *AntiMatters* is released on February 29th. In other years the date of release is February 21st. February 21st is the birthday of the Mother, Sri Aurobindo's spiritual collaborator and founder of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE), ~~by which this e-journal is published.~~

No longer.

Mirra Alfassa was born in Paris in 1878 as the second child of an Egyptian mother and a Turkish father, a few months after her parents had settled in France. An extraordinarily gifted child, who became an accomplished painter and musician, she had many inner experiences from early childhood on. In her twenties she studied occultism in Algeria with Max Theon ♀ and his English wife Alma, a highly developed medium. After her return to Paris she heard of Sri Aurobindo from her friend Alexandra David-Neel ♀, who had visited him in Pondicherry in 1912. In 1914, along with her second husband Paul Richard, she traveled to Pondicherry and met him in person. There, she immediately recognized him as the mentor she had encountered in earlier visions, and knew that her future work was at his side. The following day she wrote in her diary these memorable words:<sup>1</sup>

It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance, He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.

O Lord, Divine Builder of this marvel, my heart overflows with joy and gratitude when I think of it, and my hope has no bounds.

Sri Aurobindo in turn saw in her an embodiment of the Divine Creative Force, in India traditionally known and approached simply as "The Mother." Although the Mother had to leave India after the outbreak of World War I, in April 1920 she returned to join Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry and never left again. In 1926, when Sri Aurobindo withdrew from outer contacts<sup>2</sup> and his growing group of disciples became the Sri Aurobindo Ashram ♀, she assumed charge of the disciples' spiritual development as well as their physical wellbeing. In 1952 she created the SAICE, and in 1968 she founded the international township project of Auroville ♀.

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1 The Mother, *Prayers and Meditations* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Puducherry, 2003).

2 See "Preface to the Second Issue," *AntiMatters* 1 (2) ♀.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother worked for the manifestation of a power of consciousness beyond mind, which Sri Aurobindo named “supermind.” Its full expression in matter would result not only in a new species with capacities as yet beyond imagination but also in a transformation of terrestrial life into a thing of beauty, power, and perfection still to us inconceivable. When, in 1926, Sri Aurobindo withdrew from outer contacts, it was to concentrate on the task of enabling the supermind to descend, take possession of his body, and for the first time act on matter directly, rather than through intermediary planes of consciousness of a still mental character. After Sri Aurobindo’s passing in 1950, the Mother continued this work, which bore its first fruit on February 29th, 1956. An account of her experiences in the course of this work is given in *Mother’s Agenda* <sup>2</sup>, an intimate record of the last eighteen years of her life.

So what is the significance of February 29th, 1956? About a month later, on April 23, she took a passage from her diary written on September 25, 1914:

O divine and adorable Mother, with Thy help what is there that is impossible? The hour of realisations is near. . .

The Lord has willed and Thou dost execute: A new Light shall break upon the earth. A new world shall be born. And the things that were promised shall be fulfilled.

and rewrote the second part:

Thou hast willed, and I execute: A new light breaks upon the earth. A new world is born. The things that were promised are fulfilled.

On February, 29th, 1960, she distributed the following message:

*(During the common meditation on Wednesday the 29th February 1956)*

This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you. I had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine.

As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that “the time has come,” and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces.

Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.

The following excerpt from the Mother’s “Wednesday class” of December 31st, 1954 throws further light on the significance of this event:<sup>3</sup>

This message [which the Mother is going to read] was written because it is foreseen that next year will be a difficult year and there will be many inner struggles and even outer ones perhaps. So I tell all of you what attitude you should take in these circumstances. These difficulties may perhaps last not only twelve months, that is, one full year, but perhaps fourteen months; and during these fourteen months you must make an effort never to lose the attitude about which I am going to speak to you just now.

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3 The Mother’s French class, which was composed of members of the Ashram and students of the SAICE, was held on Wednesday evenings.

In fact, I insist that the more difficult things are, the more you must remain quiet, and the more should you have an unshakable faith. Of all things this is the most important.

Usually, as soon as things become difficult, human beings get agitated, become irritated, get terribly excited and they make the difficulties ten times more difficult. So I am warning you right away that this is not to be done, that you must do the opposite; and what I am going to read to you is precisely what you must repeat to yourself as soon as you feel some anxiety or worry within you; you must remember what I am telling you today and remember it throughout the year. You can repeat it morning and evening profitably. Here, then.

Now, first in French:

*“Aucune volonté humaine ne peut prévaloir contre la Volonté Divine. Rangeons-nous délibérément et exclusivement du côté du Divin et la victoire finale est certaine.”*

Now here is the English:

*“No human will can finally prevail against the Divine’s Will. Let us put ourselves deliberately and exclusively on the side of the Divine, and the Victory is ultimately certain.”*

...

*Mother, ... [w]ill it be a difficult year for the Ashram or also for India and the whole world?*

Generally. The world, India, the Ashram and individuals. Everyone according to his mode, naturally not in the same way for all. Some things will seem easier than others. But generally speaking it is — if you like I can tell you — it is the last hope of the adverse forces to triumph against the present Realisation. If one holds on fast during these months, after that they will not be able to do anything very much, it will be a crumbling resistance. That’s it: it is essentially the conflict of the adverse forces, the anti-divine forces which are trying to push back the divine Realisation as much as they can. . . they hope, for thousands of years, you see. And it is this conflict which has come to its crisis. It is their last chance; and as those who are behind their external action are altogether conscious beings, they know very well that it is their last chance, and they will put all they can into it, and what they can is much. These are not ordinary little human consciousnesses. They are not human consciousnesses at all. They are consciousnesses which, compared with human possibilities, seem to be divine in their power, their strength, even their knowledge. Therefore it is a terrific conflict and one wholly concentrated on the earth, because they know that it is upon earth that the first victory has to be won — the decisive victory, a victory which will determine the course of the earth’s future.

You may have noticed that the Mother’s experience of February 29th, 1956 took place exactly fourteen months after this talk.

So what’s in this issue? It begins with a talk (presented at the 11th International Gebser Conference, University of Shippensburg, PA, November 1992), which gives an outline of the Mother’s work and experience following the supramental “descent” of February 29th, 1956.

Next come three papers that are heavily indebted to the excellent open-access e-journal *Constructivist Foundations* ♠. The first introduces radical constructivism ♠, an epistemology developed by **Ernst von Glasersfeld** from the constructivism of Jean

Piaget. The second presents the work of **Dewey I. Dykstra, Jr.**, on the catastrophic failure of traditional science education, which is couched in a realist and elitist paradigm, and the remarkable success of an alternative method of teaching, which incorporates the fundamentals of radical constructivism. The third introduces the work of **Herbert F. J. Müller** on “structuring with zero-derivation,” which also builds on von Glasersfeld’s epistemology.

By viewing certain structures as derived from, or referring to, a mind-independent reality, traditional ontology has painted itself into a corner. Consciousness is *encompassing*. The question as to how something in the objective world can give rise to subjective experience is therefore ill-conceived; it rests on the mistaken premise that mind and body are ontically separated, and that this separation has somehow to be overcome. Müller’s epistemology does not posit an outside world but sees the mind-world split as a result of an individual and collective structuring that takes place within an encompassing and intrinsically unstructured experience.

In the next essay, **Granville Sewell** ventures to answer what is perhaps the most difficult and probably the most passionately debated philosophical problem of all time: why do bad things happen to good people? In the commentary that follows, **Karen Litfin** takes exception to Sewell’s suggestion that God may not be fully responsible — that much of the world’s suffering is caused by humans rather than by God. The theological problem of pain assumes the existence of an extra-cosmic God. If, instead, God is immanent, the question is no longer how God came to admit within His creation a suffering and an evil to which He Himself is immune, but how He came to admit these things within Himself. Cruelty to others is one thing; self-infliction of suffering, I being the sole Existence, is quite another.

Next, sticking to the point, **Sri Aurobindo** addresses Sewell’s question in a letter he wrote to the French poet-writer-dramatist Maurice Magre, and again in what is probably the most suitable format for questions of this caliber — that of the divinely inspired epic poems of the past. It won’t be amiss — in this particular issue of *AntiMatters* — to indicate how the question presented itself to the Mother.<sup>4</sup>

These past few days I have been reading Perseus<sup>5</sup>[. . .]

The problem is roughly this: nothing exists that is not the result of the divine Will. Always the same problem[. . .]

Perhaps the problem is the opposition (if it is an opposition) between two attitudes, both of which should express our relationship with the Supreme. One is the acceptance — not only voluntary but perfectly content — of everything, even the “worst calamities” (what are conventionally called “the worst calamities”) [. . .] if Andromeda<sup>6</sup> were a yogi (with “ifs” you can build castles in the air, but I am trying to explain what I mean), she would accept the idea of death readily, easily. Well, it’s precisely this conflict between an atti-

4 *Mother’s Agenda*, February 6th, 1962.

5 *Perseus the Deliverer*, a play by Sri Aurobindo.

6 A character in *Perseus*.

tude quite ready to accept death [. . .] because it is the divine Will [. . .] and at the same time, the love of Life. This love of Life. Following the story, you would say: she lived because she had to live — and everything is explained. But that's not what I mean. I am looking at this outside the context of the story. Because things like that happen in the consciousness of. . . It always bothers me to get into big ideas and big words, but to truly explain myself, I should say: the Universal Mother. (*silence*)

Automatically, everything that exists is a natural expression of divine Joy, even the things human consciousness finds most horrifying — this is understandable. But at the same time there is this aspiration, so intense that it's almost anguish, for a perfection of creation to come. And it does seem that this intense aspiration and anguish in the material world is a necessary preparation for this perfection to come. Yet at the same time, whatever exists is perfect at each moment, since it is *entirely* the Divine. There is nothing other than the Divine. So there is simultaneously this plenitude of Divine Joy in each second, in whatever exists, and the aspiration, the anguish — and the difficulty lies in joining the two, there you have it.

Practically, you go from one to the other, or one is in front and the other behind, one active and the other passive. With the feeling of perfect joy comes an almost static state (certainly the joy of movement is also there, but all anticipation of the goal stays in the background). Then, when the aspiration of the Becoming is there, the joy of divine perfection at each moment withdraws into a static state.

And this very going back and forth is the problem. Perhaps that's how it must be, but it's unsatisfying — very unsatisfying.

At my fullest and most intense moments — moments when truly what exists is the universe (by universe I mean the Becoming of the Supreme) with the utmost active awareness of the Supreme — at such moments I am suddenly caught by that [the static, nirvanic aspect]. It's not a matter of choosing between the two, but rather a question of priorities from the standpoint of action on the lowest level. Instinctively (the instinct of this body, this material base), the choice is aspiration, because this being was built for action; but this cannot be taken as an absolute rule, it's almost like a casual preference.

One feels that life *is* this aspiration, this anguish, while bliss leads most naturally to the nirvanic side — I don't know. . . But then how to help people? You can recommend neither one nor the other. And if you say both, you are plunged into this same dilemma.

A problem like that reaches a point of such acute tension that you feel you know nothing, understand nothing, you will never understand anything, it's hopeless. When I reach that point, I always tilt in the same direction, it's always: "All right, I adore the Lord, as for the rest, it doesn't matter to me!" I enter into a marvelous adoration and let Him do what He wants! That's how it all ends up for me.

But this would only be suitable for those who have stopped thinking.

[. . .] a day or two ago (I don't remember exactly, it was rather fleeting but very interesting), I went through such a moment while walking in my room (it lasted while I was out on the balcony, too): suddenly a kind of absolute certainty that I knew nothing (there was no "I" at all). . . that one knew nothing ("one," there was no "one," there was only. . .); one couldn't know (I have to use words), one couldn't know, there was nothing to know, it was totally hopeless, it was completely *impossible* to understand anything, even, even going beyond the mind, and no formulation was possible, there was no possi-

bility of understanding. It was really so absolute that helping others, making the world progress, spiritual life, seeking the Divine, all of that seemed idle talk, empty words! There was nothing in it, it was nothing, and there was nothing to understand, it was impossible to understand — it was impossible to *be*. The feeling of a total incapacity. The experience was like a solvent — everything seemed to dissolve: the world, the earth, people, life, intelligence, all of it, everything was dissolved. An absolutely negative state. And my solution was the same as always: when the experience was total and complete, when nothing was left, then: “Who cares!” (it could really be put in the most ordinary words), “I adore You!” And the “I” was something utterly insubstantial: there was no form, no being, no quality — only “I adore You.” This “I” was “I adore You,” there was just enough “I” to adore You with.

From that moment on there was an inexpressible Sweetness, and within that Sweetness, a Voice. . . so sweet and harmonious too! There was a sound but no words — yet it held a perfectly clear meaning for me, like very precise words: “You have just had your most creative moment”!

Oh really! Well, that’s fine!

After that (*laughing*), I rang down the curtain!

And it ended in an ineffable smile, like. . . perhaps the very origin of humor. A sort of annihilation, an annihilation of everything, and then: “You have just had your most creative moment.” So I laughed, that’s all — there was nothing else to do!

In the following article **E. J. Lowe** explains why there are no “easy problems of consciousness.” He concludes

that reductive physicalism, far from being equipped to solve the so-called ‘easy’ problems of consciousness, has in fact nothing very useful to say about *any* aspect of consciousness. . . This indeed is my own conclusion. (I hasten to add, though, that I am very far from considering disciplines such as cognitive neuropsychology as being utterly worthless and uninformative: such disciplines take the notion of conscious thought and experience *for granted*, and attempt to correlate features of such mental states with structures and processes in the brain — an enterprise with which I have no argument — but they do not and cannot pretend to explain what thought and experience are and how their existence is possible in physically embodied creatures like ourselves.)

In the next essay **Christopher Holvenstot** characterizes the scientific endeavor as a low grade autism (Asperger’s disorder, a dissociative disregard for the logic of conscious states, emotion and interrelation and a high regard for things mechanical). His observation that “the right to describe reality to humanity comes with incredible perks and privileges difficult to relinquish when the paradigm loses its luster” recalls Dykstra’s analysis of why so little is done to remedy the failure of traditional science education. Again, the current materialist criteria require the pinning down of neural correlates before we can be said to understand anything about conscious phenomena. Holvenstot’s observation that this pinning down of neural correlates is a fool’s errand echoes Herbert Müller’s conclusion that the question as to how something in the objective world can give rise to subjective experience is ill-conceived. His observation, finally, that “our reality concepts need neither be universal nor fundamentally true [in

an ontological sense] to be effective and useful” is reminiscent of the respective insights of von Glasersfeld and Müller. This observation “frees us, as we formulate new conceptions, from the naïve assertion of having finally pinned down the fundamental/universal truth of our condition”:

With even the slightest and flimsiest of footholds in this next new realm one can turn back to view the familiar biospecific realm entire. One can't help but admire the queer and abstract nature of our provincial, biospecific reality. It is a unique and bizarre creation entirely determined by conscious processes and the imperatives of a biological format. Its logic, despite all, holds together with such tenacity and vigor. We will forever be physically, emotionally and psychologically tethered to the biospecific realm. However, viewing its logic and construction from the remote exterior perspective of the extracontextual allows us to use the same conceptual technology and methodology to construct additional extracontextual realms of equal strength and beauty.

Finally we have reviews of *The Design of Life: Discovering Signs of Intelligence in Biological Systems* by William A. Dembski and Jonathan Wells, *The Design Matrix: A Consilience of Clues* by Mike Gene, and *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* by John C. Lennox, and we have excerpts from *Healing the Mind: The Philosophy of Spinoza Adapted for a New Age* by Neal Grossman, *The Irrational Atheist: Dissecting the Unholy Trinity of Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens* by Vox Day, and *The Way Out is Up and other stories from Equals One* by Medhananda.

Happy reading!