

Beyond Natural Selection and Intelligent Design: Sri Aurobindo's Theory of Evolution

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An outline of Sri Aurobindo's theory of spiritual evolution is presented. Ultimate Reality relates to each world (ours need not be the only one) as the substance that constitutes it, as a consciousness that contains it, and as an infinite joy that expresses and experiences itself in it. In our world, Ultimate Reality is "playing Houdini," enchainning itself as best it can, challenging itself to escape from self-created darkness and inertia, to rediscover its true self and powers, to affirm itself in conditions that appear to be its very opposite. Sri Aurobindo calls the process by which these conditions are created "involution." Once we have a sufficient grasp of this process, we are in a position to understand the true nature of evolution, which is not finished: man is a transitional being, his greatness lies not in what he is, but in what he makes possible.

1 Evolution

Evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo, "is the one eternal dynamic law and hidden process of the earth-nature" (EDH¹ 246):

The keyword of the earth's riddle is the gradual evolution of a hidden illimitable consciousness and power out of the seemingly inert yet furiously driven force of insensible Nature. Earth-life is one self-chosen habitation of a great Divinity and his aeonic will is to change it from a blind prison into his splendid mansion and high heaven-reaching temple. (EDH 161)

The blind prison is the final outcome of a process Sri Aurobindo calls "involution," and the purpose of involution is to set the stage for the drama of evolution: "The involution of a superconscious Spirit in inconscient Matter is the secret cause of this visible and apparent world." (EDH 161)

That evolution happens is obvious. Once "the facts supporting it are marshalled, this aspect of the terrestrial existence becomes so striking as to appear indisputable" (LD² 868); "we can no longer suppose that God or some Demiurge has manufactured each

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Essays Human and Divine*. Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 1997. All quotations are given with the kind permission of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.

² Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*. Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2005.

genus and species ready-made in body and in consciousness and left the matter there, having looked upon his work and seen that it was good” (LD 738). But *how* evolution happens is a quite different question. It ought to be superfluous to point this out, but in certain quarters the ability to distinguish between the *fact* of evolution and its *process* seems to have been lost.

A theory of spiritual evolution is not identical with a scientific theory of form-evolution and physical life-evolution; it must stand on its own inherent justification: it may accept the scientific account of physical evolution as a support or an element, but the support is not indispensable. The scientific theory is concerned only with the outward and visible machinery and process, with the detail of Nature’s execution, with the physical development of things in Matter and the law of development of Life and Mind in Matter; its account of the process may have to be considerably changed or may be dropped altogether in the light of new discovery, but that will not affect the self-evident fact of a spiritual evolution, an evolution of Consciousness, a progression of the soul’s manifestation in material existence. (LD 868)

2 Ultimate reality

Sri Aurobindo’s theory of spiritual evolution makes use of the conceptual framework of the original Vedantic texts (the Upanishads), for, as he explains,

it is in those ideas that we shall find the best previous foundation of that which we seek now to rebuild and although, as with all knowledge, old expression has to be replaced to a certain extent by new expression suited to a later mentality and old light has to merge itself into new light as dawn succeeds dawn, yet it is with the old treasure as our initial capital or so much of it as we can recover that we shall most advantageously proceed to accumulate the largest gains in our new commerce with the ever-changeless and ever-changing Infinite. (LD 72)

Existence pure, indefinable, infinite, absolute, is the last concept at which Vedantic analysis arrives in its view of the universe, the fundamental Reality which Vedantic experience discovers behind all the movement and formation which constitute the apparent reality. (LD 73)

This primary, ultimate and eternal Existence, as seen by the Vedantins, is not merely bare existence, or a conscious existence whose consciousness is crude force or power; it is a conscious existence the very term of whose being, the very term of whose consciousness is bliss. . . Just as its force of consciousness is capable of throwing itself into forms infinitely and with an endless variation, so also its self-delight is capable of movement, of variation, of revelling in that infinite flux and mutability of itself represented by numberless teeming universes. To loose forth and enjoy this infinite movement and variation of its self-delight is the object of its extensive or creative play of Force.

In other words, that which has thrown itself out into forms is a triune Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, Sachchidananda,³ whose consciousness is in its nature a creative or rather a self-expressive Force capable of infinite variation in phenomenon and form of its self-conscious being and endlessly enjoying the delight of that variation. It follows

³ The Sanskrit terms are *sat* (existence, being, or substance), *chit* (consciousness), and *ānanda* (delight or bliss); hence Sachchidananda (*sat+chit+ ānanda*).

that all things that exist are what they are as terms of that existence, terms of that conscious force, terms of that delight of being. (LD 98–99)

In yet other words, an intrinsically unknowable reality manifests itself and relates to its manifestation as the substance (*sat*) that constitutes it, as a consciousness (*chit*) that contains it, and as an infinite bliss (*ānanda*) that expresses and experiences itself in it.

3 Why?

This ancient Vedantic theory of cosmic origin is immediately confronted in the human mind by two powerful contradictions, the emotional and sensational consciousness of pain and the ethical problem of evil. (LD 100)

Sri Aurobindo deals with these contradictions at great length. Here I shall mention only the obvious point that this contradiction cannot be resolved by any account that takes the Creator/Creatrix to be separate from His/Her creation.

On no theory of an extra-cosmic moral God, can evil and suffering be explained,— the creation of evil and suffering,— except by an unsatisfactory subterfuge which avoids the question at issue instead of answering it or a plain or implied Manicheanism which practically annuls the Godhead in attempting to justify its ways or excuse its works. But such a God is not the Vedantic Sachchidananda. Sachchidananda of the Vedanta is one existence without a second; all that is, is He. If then evil and suffering exist, it is He that bears the evil and suffering in the creature in whom He has embodied Himself. The problem then changes entirely. The question is no longer how came God to create for His creatures a suffering and evil of which He is Himself incapable and therefore immune, but how came the sole and infinite Existence-Consciousness-Bliss to admit into itself that which is not bliss, that which seems to be its positive negation.

Half of the moral difficulty — that difficulty in its one unanswerable form disappears. It no longer arises, can no longer be put. Cruelty to others, I remaining immune or even participating in their sufferings by subsequent repentance or belated pity, is one thing; self-infliction of suffering, I being the sole existence, is quite another. (LD 102)

Two related questions remain: how — through which process or in consequence of which development — did suffering and evil come into being, and why did Sachchidananda admit these imperfections into itself? As to why —

it is not altogether a mystery if we look at our own nature and can suppose some kindred movement of being in the beginning as [the world's] cosmic origin. On the contrary, a play of self-concealing and self-finding is one of the most strenuous joys that conscious being can give to itself, a play of extreme attractiveness. There is no greater pleasure for man himself than a victory which is in its very principle a conquest over difficulties, a victory in knowledge, a victory in power, a victory in creation over the impossibilities of creation, a delight in the conquest over an anguished toil and a hard ordeal of suffering. At the end of separation is the intense joy of union, the joy of a meeting with a self from which we were divided. There is an attraction in ignorance itself because it provides us with the joy of discovery, the surprise of new and unforeseen creation, a great adventure of the soul; there is a joy of the journey and the search and the finding, a joy of the battle and the crown, the labour and the reward of labour. If delight of existence be the secret of creation, this too is one delight of existence; it can be regarded as the reason or at least one reason of this apparently paradoxical and con-

trary Lila.⁴ But, apart from this choice of the individual Purusha,⁵ there is a deeper truth inherent in the original Existence which finds its expression in the plunge into Inconscience; its result is a new affirmation of Sachchidananda in its apparent opposite. If the Infinite's right of various self-manifestation is granted, this too as a possibility of its manifestation is intelligible and has its profound significance. (LD 426–427)

Shall we say that Sachchidananda is “playing Houdini”? That it has enchained itself as best it could, challenging itself to escape from self-imposed darkness and inertia, to re-discover its true self and powers, to affirm itself in conditions that appear to be its very opposite? And may not these conditions be the very conditions that lend the greatest possible stability and concreteness to its progressive self-realization, which may go on forever?

4 Supermind, space, and the subject-object dichotomy

It is not all that hard to see that imperfection, of which suffering and evil are the most glaring instances, results from the plunge into inconscience and the consequent limitations in knowledge and capacity of the evolving consciousness. But how is this plunge effected? To understand evolution, we need to understand the steps by which the stage for the drama of evolution was set.

To begin with, a distinction has to be made between mind and the original creative consciousness, supermind, to use Sri Aurobindo's terminology. To the latter, the unity of the all-constituting substance (*sat*), of the all-containing consciousness (*chit*), of the infinite delight at the roots of existence (*ānanda*), and of all these three aspects of Sachchidananda, is self-evident. To understand the function and characteristics of mind in the Aurobindonian scheme, we need another distinction, that between two poises of relation between the supramental self and the world.

In the *comprehending* poise (the Vedantic *vijñāna*), the conscious self is coextensive with the world, and the world is coextensive with the substance that constitutes it. The subject is wherever its objects are. No distances exist between the seer and the seen. There is in an extension — otherwise we could not speak of self or substance as being coextensive with the world — but its *quality* is beyond us. For it has neither the quality of space nor the quality of time, and these are the only extensive qualities known to us. Sri Aurobindo rarely shrinks from the challenge of stating “in terms of the intellect” what he has “observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily”,⁶ but here he has no

⁴ Divine play.

⁵ What Sri Aurobindo is telling us here is that the individual spirit, soul, or *puruṣa* — and this includes *everyone* who ever walked this planet — has *chosen* to participate in the adventure of evolution: “the assent of the embodied spirit must be there already, for Prakriti [Nature] cannot act without the assent of the Purusha. There must have been not only the will of the Divine Purusha to make the cosmic creation possible, but the assent of the individual Purusha to make the individual manifestation possible.” (LD 426)

⁶ “Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher — although I have written philosophy which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry — I was a poet and a politician, not a

choice:

And to a consciousness higher than Mind which should regard our past, present and future in one view, containing and not contained in them, not situated at a particular moment of Time for its point of prospection, Time might well offer itself as an eternal present. And to the same consciousness not situated at any particular point of Space, but containing all points and regions in itself, Space also might well offer itself as a subjective and indivisible extension,— no less subjective than Time. At certain moments we become aware of such an indivisible regard upholding by its immutable self-conscious unity the variations of the universe. But we must not now ask how the contents of Time and Space would present themselves there in their transcendent truth; for this our mind cannot conceive. (LD 143)

In the *apprehending* poise (the Vedantic *prajñāna*), Sachchidananda distantiates itself from the content of consciousness and thereby takes on the aspect of a self. Concomitantly, the self adopts a multitude of viewpoints within the content of consciousness, thereby effectively becoming a multitude of situated selves.

But what then is the origin of mentality and the organisation of this lower consciousness in the triple terms of Mind, Life and Matter which is our view of the universe? For since all things that exist must proceed from the action of the all-efficient Supermind, from its operation in the three original terms of Existence, Conscious-Force and Bliss, there must be some faculty of the creative Truth-Consciousness which so operates as to cast them into these new terms, into this inferior trio of mentality, vitality and physical substance. This faculty we find in a secondary power of the creative knowledge, its power of a projecting, confronting and apprehending consciousness in which knowledge centralises itself and stands back from its works to observe them. And when we speak of centralisation, we mean, as distinguished from the equable concentration of consciousness of which we have hitherto spoken, an unequal concentration in which there is the beginning of self-division — or of its phenomenal appearance.

First of all, the Knower holds himself concentrated in knowledge as subject and regards his Force of consciousness as if continually proceeding from him into the form of himself, continually working in it, continually drawing back into himself, continually issuing forth again. From this single act of self-modification proceed all the practical distinctions upon which the relative view and the relative action of the universe is based. A practical distinction has been created between the Knower, Knowledge and the Known, between the Lord, His force and the children and works of the Force, between the Enjoyer, the Enjoyment and the Enjoyed, between the Self, Maya and the becomings of the Self.

Secondly, this conscious Soul concentrated in knowledge, this Purusha observing and governing the Force that has gone forth from him, his Shakti or Prakriti, repeats himself in every form of himself. He accompanies, as it were, his Force of consciousness

philosopher. How I managed to do it and why? First, because X proposed to me to cooperate in a philosophical review — and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse; and then he had to go to the war and left me in the lurch with sixty-four pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self. Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!” (Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, p. 374. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972)

into its works and reproduces there the act of self-division from which this apprehending consciousness is born. In each form this Soul dwells with his Nature and observes himself in other forms from that artificial and practical centre of consciousness. In all it is the same Soul, the same divine Being; the multiplication of centres is only a practical act of consciousness intended to institute a play of difference, of mutuality, mutual knowledge, mutual shock of force, mutual enjoyment, a difference based upon essential unity, a unity realised on a practical basis of difference.

We can speak of this new status of the all-pervading Supermind as a further departure from the unitarian truth of things and from the indivisible consciousness which constitutes inalienably the unity essential to the existence of the cosmos. We can see that pursued a little farther it may become truly Avidya, the great Ignorance which starts from multiplicity as the fundamental reality and in order to travel back to real unity has to commence with the false unity of the ego. (LD 149–150)

It is in this apprehending poise, in which the many situated selves present themselves to each other as objects, that the familiar dimensions of space — viewer-centered depth and lateral extent — come into being and Sachchidananda effectively differentiates into consciousness and substance.

5 Ignorance of the Vedantic kind

We all know first-hand a state of exclusive concentration, in which awareness is focused on a single object or task, while other goings-on are registered, and other tasks attended to, subconsciously, if at all. As we have seen, it is by a *multiple* concentration that the one self assumes the aspect of a multitude of selves, and it is by a *multiple exclusive* concentration that it loses sight, in each self, of its identity with the other selves and with the self of all selves. The result is *avidya*, ignorance in the Vedantic sense, the veil that hides from the selves their true self and oneness. It altogether changes the character of the world they perceive.

One salient feature of this world is a differentiation of the force at work in it into one strand acting directly out of the one self and substance, and many strands each acting through an effectively separate self. If, moreover, it is the intention of Sachchidananda to “play Houdini,” then the former strand will appear to act mechanically. The supra-individual part of Sachchidananda’s creative self-knowledge will appear to be governed by inflexible laws. And this seemingly mechanical, involuntary, and unconscious action, along with the forms it supports, will be perceived as a self-existent, objective reality. Instead of knowingly owing their existence to Sachchidananda (its creative imagination or its self-effective will), the effectively separate selves will have no choice but to attribute their existence to an apparently mechanical action governed by apparently inflexible laws. And so they will have a hard time understanding how they can have something like a free will or how they can even be conscious. Clearly, ignorance in the Vedantic sense can create a lot of ignorance of the more common kind.

6 Mind

Mind, in Sri Aurobindo’s terminology, is not Sachchidananda’s aspect of consciousness but what this is reduced to when it multiply situates itself and, in each situated selves, loses sight of its identity with its other selves. Consciousness becomes “headless and

footless” (Rig Veda IV. I. 11), and “in the middle there is falsehood” as a result.⁷ As we have seen, the creative action of the supermind wells out of an infinite, self-existent delight. As long as the individual selves are consciously identical with each other and with the self of all selves, they perfectly express and experience this delight. But once they are “headless” — once their supra-individual self and its bliss-nature have become superconscious and thus inaccessible to them — they experience incapacity, discord, opposition, conflict, frustration, and the like.

The creative action of the supermind is primarily qualitative and infinite and only secondarily quantitative and finite. Mind can also be characterized as the supermind’s secondary action, limiting and dividing, for this remains conscious when the veil of *avidya* conceals from the individual self the bliss-nature of the supra-individual self.⁸

Mind in its essence is a consciousness which measures, limits, cuts out forms of things from the indivisible whole and contains them as if each were a separate integer. Even with what exists only as obvious parts and fractions, Mind establishes this fiction of its ordinary commerce that they are things with which it can deal separately and not merely as aspects of a whole. For, even when it knows that they are not things in themselves, it is obliged to deal with them as if they were things in themselves; otherwise it could not subject them to its own characteristic activity. It is this essential characteristic of Mind which conditions the workings of all its operative powers, whether conception, perception, sensation or the dealings of creative thought. It conceives, perceives, senses things as if rigidly cut out from a background or a mass and employs them as fixed units of the material given to it for creation or possession. All its action and enjoyment deal thus with wholes that form part of a greater whole, and these subordinate wholes again are broken up into parts which are also treated as wholes for the particular purposes they serve. Mind may divide, multiply, add, subtract, but it cannot get beyond the limits of this mathematics.

[The Mind’s] office is to translate always infinity into the terms of the finite, to measure off, limit, depiece. Actually it does this in our consciousness to the exclusion of all true sense of the Infinite; therefore Mind is the nodus of the great Ignorance. . . (LD 173–174)

It is only when the veil is rent and the divided mind overpowered, silent and passive to a supramental action that mind itself gets back to the Truth of things. There we find a luminous mentality reflective, obedient and instrumental to the divine Real-Idea.⁹ There

⁷ “The first and the highest are truth; in the middle there is falsehood, but it is taken between the truth on both sides of it and it draws its being from the truth.” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad V. 5. 1.) Sri Aurobindo explains: “The truth of the physical reality and the truth of the spiritual and superconscious reality. Into the intermediate subjective and mental realities which stand between them, falsehood can enter, but it takes either truth from above or truth from below as the substance out of which it builds itself and both are pressing upon it to turn its misconstructions into truth of life and truth of spirit.” (LD 618)

⁸ To be precise, this remains conscious *in front* of the veil, for while the veil is opaque to the surface consciousness (the consciousness in front), it is transparent to the consciousness behind. The latter encompasses the content of the former. What happens in the world therefore has two radically different meanings, depending on who is looking, the surface self or the larger self behind the veil.

⁹ “The view I am presenting goes farther in idealism; it sees the creative Idea as Real-Idea,

we perceive what the world really is; we know in every way ourselves in others and as others, others as ourselves and all as the universal and self-multiplied One. We lose the rigidly separate individual standpoint which is the source of all limitation and error. Still, we perceive also that all that the ignorance of Mind took for the truth was in fact truth, but truth deflected, mistaken and falsely conceived. We still perceive the division, the individualising, the atomic creation, but we know them and ourselves for what they and we really are. And so we perceive that the Mind was really a subordinate action and instrumentation of the Truth-consciousness. So long as it is not separated in self-experience from the enveloping Master consciousness and does not try to set up house for itself, so long as it serves passively as an instrumentation and does not attempt to possess for its own benefit, Mind fulfils luminously its function which is in the Truth to hold forms apart from each other by a phenomenal, a purely formal delimitation of their activity behind which the governing universality of the being remains conscious and untouched. It has to receive the truth of things and distribute it according to the unerring perception of a supreme and universal Eye and Will. It has to uphold an individualisation of active consciousness, delight, force, substance which derives all its power, reality and joy from an inalienable universality behind. It has to turn the multiplicity of the One into an apparent division by which relations are defined and held off against each other so as to meet again and join. It has to establish the delight of separation and contact in the midst of an eternal unity and intermixture. It has to enable the One to behave as if He were an individual dealing with other individuals but always in His own unity, and this is what the world really is. The mind is the final operation of the apprehending Truth-consciousness which makes all this possible, and what we call the Ignorance does not create a new thing and absolute falsehood but only misrepresents the Truth. The Ignorance is the Mind separated in knowledge from its source of knowledge and giving a false rigidity and a mistaken appearance of opposition and conflict to the harmonious play of the supreme Truth in its universal manifestation.

The fundamental error of the Mind is, then, this fall from self-knowledge by which the individual soul conceives of its individuality as a separate fact instead of as a form of Oneness and makes itself the centre of its own universe instead of knowing itself as one concentration of the universal. From that original error all its particular ignorances and limitations are contingent results. For, viewing the flux of things only as it flows upon and through itself, it makes a limitation of being from which proceeds a limitation of consciousness and therefore of knowledge, a limitation of conscious force and will and therefore of power, a limitation of self-enjoyment and therefore of delight. It is conscious of things and knows them only as they present themselves to its individuality and therefore it falls into an ignorance of the rest and thereby into an erroneous conception even of that which it seems to know: for since all being is interdependent, the knowledge either of the whole or of the essence is necessary for the right knowledge of the part. Hence there is an element of error in all human knowledge. Similarly our will, ignorant of the rest of the all-will, must fall into error of working and a greater or less degree of incapacity and impotence; the soul's self-delight and delight of things, ignoring the all-bliss and by defect of will and knowledge unable to master its world, must fall into incapacity of possessive delight and therefore into suffering. Self-ignorance is therefore the root of all the perversity of our existence, and that perversity stands forti-

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." (LD 125)

fied in the self-limitation, the egoism which is the form taken by that self-ignorance. (LD 181–183)

7 Life

Essentially, objects are subjects seen by other subjects. But to subjects who are ignorant in the Vedantic sense, objects possess an effectively independent existence. As the subject splits into an effectively independent object and a conscious self merely associated with it, so the subject's creative imagination splits into a seemingly unconscious objective action and a will merely exerting a limited influence on it. The objective aspect that conscious force assumes when it acts in or through ignorant individuals, is what Sri Aurobindo means by "life." But it is not the only meaning. As there are different senses for "mind," depending on the degree of ignorance or involution, so there are different senses for "life":

All life depends for its nature on the fundamental poise of its own constituting consciousness; for as the Consciousness is, so will the Force be. Where the Consciousness is infinite, one, transcendent of its acts and forms even while embracing and informing, organising and executing them, as is the consciousness of Sachchidananda, so will be the Force, infinite in its scope, one in its works, transcendent in its power and self knowledge. Where the Consciousness is like that of material Nature, submerged, self-oblivious, driving along in the drift of its own Force without seeming to know it, even though by the very nature of the eternal relation between the two terms it really determines the drift which drives it, so will be the Force: it will be a monstrous movement of the Inert and Inconscient, unaware of what it contains, seeming mechanically to fulfil itself by a sort of inexorable accident, an inevitably happy chance, even while all the while it really obeys faultlessly the law of the Right and Truth fixed for it by the will of the supernal Conscious- Being concealed within its movement. Where the Consciousness is divided in itself, as in Mind, limiting itself in various centres, setting each to fulfil itself without knowledge of what is in other centres and of its relation to others, aware of things and forces in their apparent division and opposition to each other but not in their real unity, such will be the Force: it will be a life like that we are and see around us; it will be a clash and intertwining of individual lives seeking each its own fulfilment without knowing its relation to others, a conflict and difficult accommodation of divided and opposing or differing forces and, in the mentality, a mixing, a shock and wrestle and insecure combination of divided and opposing or divergent ideas which cannot arrive at the knowledge of their necessity to each other or grasp their place as elements of that Unity behind which is expressing itself through them and in which their discords must cease. But where the Consciousness is in possession of both the diversity and the unity and the latter contains and governs the former, where it is aware at once of the Law, Truth and Right of the All and the Law, Truth and Right of the individual and the two become consciously harmonised in a mutual unity, where the whole nature of the consciousness is the One knowing itself as the Many and the Many knowing themselves as the One, there the Force also will be of the same nature: it will be a Life that consciously obeys the law of Unity and yet fulfils each thing in the diversity according to its proper rule and function; it will be a life in which all the individuals live at once in themselves and in each other as one conscious Being in many souls, one power of Consciousness in many minds, one joy of Force working in many lives, one reality of Delight fulfilling itself in many hearts and bodies. (LD 223–224)

Of the three principles matter, mind, and life, life is the most mysterious, most misun-

derstood, and most neglected. For we are not aware of the force of life at work in us in the manner in which we are aware of our ourselves as subjects, nor are we aware of it in the manner in which we are aware of ourselves as objects. We know well enough that we cannot learn much about our bodies by the method of introspection. We also know — though there are those who doubt it — that we cannot learn much about our conscious selves by studying our bodies. What we generally fail to realize is the wide gap that exists between our minds and our bodies. This gap is the domain of life. Life is hidden from us (i) because we cannot look behind the surfaces of objects — if we seem to do so, all we find is more objects and more surfaces — and (ii) because as a rule we are incapable of probing sufficiently into our subconscious parts.¹⁰

8 Setting the stage

The process of creation, conceived as a development of infinite delight into finite expressive forms, may be divided into three stages. The first concerns the development of infinite delight into expressive ideas; the second covers the transition from expressive idea to executive force; the third encompasses the creation, by the executive force, of a revealing form. Once we have a multitude of ignorant subjects perceiving each other as separate objects, the first stage takes place subliminally. The surface consciousness is centered in ideation and largely unaware of the qualitative influx that controls it from behind the veil.

The multiple exclusive concentration that produces ignorant selves, can deepen to the point where the second stage — the transition from expressive idea to revealing form — also takes place unconsciously. The executive force then is the somnambulist vehicle of expression of a subliminal creative imagination. While we haven't touched bottom yet — we are still tracing Sachchidananda's descent into involution — it will be obvious to anyone but a hardnosed selectionist that the plant kingdom answers to this description.

On the other hand, if the multiple exclusive concentration is carried to its ultimate extreme, the executive force itself falls dormant. But this is instrumental in the creation and maintenance of individual forms. "Life is nothing else than the Force that builds and maintains and destroys forms in the world." (LD 189) It is "a universal operation of Conscious-Force... that creates, maintains, destroys and re-creates forms or bodies." (LD 198) Hence when the executive force falls dormant, the result is a multitude of *formless* entities,¹¹ whose behavior is governed by apparently inflexible laws. The stage for the adventure of evolution is set. Welcome to the physical world!

¹⁰ This is why we are not only "headless" (unable to access the superconscious part of the spectrum of consciousness) but also "footless" (unable to access the subconscious part).

¹¹ According to a more widely held opinion, particles that lack internal structure are pointlike rather than formless. The least that can be said against this view is that it lacks support both from theory and from experiment. For further reasons to reject it see my "Particles, consciousness, volition: A Vedantic vision," *AntiMatters* 1 (1), 2007, pp. 23–53 ♣.

9 The evolutionary process

Let's recap. There is an ultimate reality. This relates to the world as the substance that constitutes it, as a consciousness that contains it, and as an infinite bliss that expresses and experiences itself in it. By adopting a multitude of viewpoints within the content of its consciousness, Sachchidananda takes on the aspect of a multitude of situated selves and thereby engenders both to the world's spatial aspect and the subject-object dichotomy. By an *exclusive* concentration in each self, consciousness — originally supramental — becomes mental. By deepening this exclusive concentration, consciousness becomes implicit in its own executive force. By carrying the exclusive concentration to its furthest extreme, the executive force, which serves to create and maintain objective forms, becomes implicit in a multitude of entities, which are not only unconscious but also formless. This, in brief, is the process of involution, which takes us from Sachchidananda to the so-called “ultimate constituents” of matter.¹² And it is obviously a *psychological* process. Therefore the process of evolution, too, is essentially psychological.

[T]he creation of forms of Matter, first of incontinent and inanimate, then of living and thinking Matter, the appearance of more and more organised bodies adapted to express a greater power of consciousness, has been studied from the physical side, the side of form-building, by Science; but very little light has been shed on the inner side, the side of consciousness, and what little has been observed is rather of its physical basis and instrumentation than of the progressive operations of Consciousness in its own nature. (LD 736)

[L]ife, mind, supermind are present in the atom, are at work there, but invisible, occult, latent in a subconscious or apparently unconscious action of the Energy; there is an informing Spirit, but the outer force and figure of being, what we might call the formal or form existence as distinguished from the immanent or secretly governing consciousness, is lost in the physical action, is so absorbed into it as to be fixed in a stereotyped self-oblivion unaware of what it is and what it is doing. The electron and atom are in this view eternal somnambulists. . .

In the plant this outer form-consciousness is still in the state of sleep, but a sleep full of nervous dreams, always on the point of waking, but never waking. Life has appeared; in other words, force of concealed conscious being has been so much intensified, has raised itself to such a height of power as to develop or become capable of a new principle of action, that which we see as vitality, life-force. It has become vitally responsive to existence, though not mentally aware, and has put forth a new grade of activities of a higher and subtler value than any purely physical action. . .

The transition to the mind and sense that appear in the animal being, that which we call conscious life, is operated in the same manner. The force of being is so much intensified, rises to such a height as to admit or develop a new principle of existence,— apparently new at least in the world of Matter,— mentality. Animal being is mentally aware of existence, its own and others, puts forth a higher and subtler grade of activities, receives a wider range of contacts, mental, vital, physical, from forms other than its own, takes up the physical and vital existence and turns all it can get from them into sense values and vital-mind values. It senses body, it senses life, but it senses also mind; for it has not only blind nervous reactions, but conscious sensations, memories, im-

¹² According to the canon of well-established theories in particle physics, the so-called Standard Model, these are the quarks and the leptons.

pulses, volitions, emotions, mental associations, the stuff of feeling and thought and will. It has even a practical intelligence, founded on memory, association, stimulating need, observation, a power of device; it is capable of cunning, strategy, planning; it can invent, adapt to some extent its inventions, meet in this or that detail the demand of new circumstance. All is not in it a half-conscious instinct; the animal prepares human intelligence. (LD 739–741)

[T]he appearance of human mind and body on the earth marks a crucial step, a decisive change in the course and process of the evolution; it is not merely a continuation of the old lines. Up till this advent of a developed thinking mind in Matter evolution had been effected, not by the self-aware aspiration, intention, will or seeking of the living being, but subconsciously or subliminally by the automatic operation of Nature. This was so because the evolution began from the Inconscience and the secret Consciousness had not emerged sufficiently from it to operate through the self-aware participating individual will of its living creature. But in man the necessary change has been made,— the being has become awake and aware of himself; there has been made manifest in Mind its will to develop, to grow in knowledge, to deepen the inner and widen the outer existence, to increase the capacities of the nature. Man has seen that there can be a higher status of consciousness than his own; the evolutionary oestrus is there in his parts of mind and life, the aspiration to exceed himself is delivered and articulate within him: he has become conscious of a soul, discovered the self and spirit. In him, then, the substitution of a conscious for a subconscious evolution has become conceivable and practicable, and it may well be concluded that the aspiration, the urge, the persistent endeavour in him is a sure sign of Nature's will for a higher way of fulfilment, the emergence of a greater status.

In the previous stages of the evolution Nature's first care and effort had to be directed towards a change in the physical organisation, for only so could there be a change of consciousness; this was a necessity imposed by the insufficiency of the force of consciousness already in formation to effect a change in the body. But in man a reversal is possible, indeed inevitable; for it is through his consciousness, through its transmutation and no longer through a new bodily organism as a first instrumentation that the evolution can and must be effected. In the inner reality of things a change of consciousness was always the major fact, the evolution has always had a spiritual significance and the physical change was only instrumental; but this relation was concealed by the first abnormal balance of the two factors, the body of the external Inconscience outweighing and obscuring in importance the spiritual element, the conscious being. But once the balance has been righted, it is no longer the change of body that must precede the change of consciousness; the consciousness itself by its mutation will necessitate and operate whatever mutation is needed for the body. (LD 875–876)

Evolution is the reverse of involution, but only in this particular sense: “what is an ultimate and last derivation in the involution is the first to appear in the evolution; what was original and primal in the involution is in the evolution the last and supreme emergence.” (LD 885–886) Particles do not turn back into conscious individuals; they aggregate, and it is aggregates of particles that form living organism. The inconscient substrate is not abolished but used. Because of its resistance, its darkness and inertia, evolution is the difficult and protracted adventure it was meant to be.

This movement of evolution, of a progressive self-manifestation of the Spirit in a material universe, has to make its account at every step with the fact of the involution of consciousness and force in the form and activity of material substance. For it proceeds by an awakening of the involved consciousness and force and its ascent from principle to prin-

ple, from grade to grade, from power to power of the secret Spirit, but this is not a free transference to a higher status. The law of action, the force of action of each grade or power in its emergence is determined, not by its own free, full and pure law of nature or vim of energy, but partly by the material organisation provided for it and partly by its own status, achieved degree, accomplished fact of consciousness which it has been able to impose upon Matter. Its effectivity is in some sort made up of a balance between the actual extent of this evolutionary emergence and the countervailing extent to which the emergent power is still enveloped, penetrated, diminished by the domination and continuing grip of the Inconscience. (LD 734)

[T]his taking up of the lower parts of life reveals itself as a turning downward of the master eye of the secret evolving spirit or of the universal Being in the individual from the height to which he has reached on all that now lies below him, a gazing down with the double or twin power of the being's consciousness-force,— the power of will, the power of knowledge,— so as to understand from this new, different and wider range of consciousness and perception and nature the lower life and its possibilities and to raise it up, it also, to a higher level, to give it higher values, to bring out of it higher potentialities. And this he does because evidently he does not intend to kill or destroy it, but, delight of existence being his eternal business and a harmony of various strains, not a sweet but monotonous melody the method of his music, he wishes to include the lower notes also and, by surcharging them with a deeper and finer significance, get more delight out of them than was possible in the cruder formulation. Still in the end he lays on them as a condition for his continued acceptance their consent to admit the higher values and, until they do consent, he can deal harshly enough with them even to trampling them under foot when he is bent on perfection and they are rebellious. And that indeed is the true inmost aim and meaning of ethics, discipline and askesis, to lesson and tame, purify and prepare to be fit instruments the vital and physical and lower mental life so that they may be transformed into notes of the higher mental and eventually the supramental harmony, but not to mutilate and destroy them. Ascent is the first necessity, but an integration is an accompanying intention of the spirit in Nature.

This downward eye of knowledge and will with a view to an all-round heightening, deepening and subtler, finer and richer intensification is the secret Spirit's way from the beginning. The plant soul takes, as we may say, a nervous-material view of its whole physical existence so as to get out of it all the vital-physical intensity possible; for it seems to have some intense excitations of a mute life-vibration in it,— perhaps, though that is difficult for us to imagine, more intense relatively to its lower rudimentary scale than the animal mind and body in its higher and more powerful scale could tolerate. The animal being takes a mentalised sense-view of its vital and physical existence so as to get out of it all the sense value possible, much acuter in many respects than man's as mere sensation or sense-emotion or satisfaction of vital desire and pleasure. Man, looking downward from the plane of will and intelligence, abandons these lower intensities, but in order to get out of mind and life and sense a higher intensity in other values, intellectual, aesthetic, moral, spiritual, mentally dynamic or practical — as he terms it; by these higher elements he enlarges, subtilises and elevates his use of life-values. He does not abandon the animal reactions and enjoyments, but more lucidly, finely and sensitively mentalises them. This he does even on his normal and his lower levels, but, as he develops, he puts his lower being to a severer test, begins to demand from it on pain of rejection something like a transformation: that is the mind's way of preparing for a spiritual life still beyond it.

But man not only turns his gaze downward and around him, when he has reached his higher level, but upward towards what is above him and inward towards what is occult within him. In him not only the downward gaze of the universal Being in the evolu-

tion has become conscious, but its conscious upward and inward gaze also develops. The animal lives as if satisfied with what Nature has done for it; if there is any upward gaze of the secret spirit within its animal being, it has nothing consciously to do with it, that is still Nature's business: it is man who first makes this upward gaze consciously his own business. For already by his possession of intelligent will, deformed ray of the gnosis though it be, he begins to put on the double nature of Sachchidananda; he is no longer, like the animal, an undeveloped conscious being entirely driven by Prakriti, a slave of the executive Force, played with by the mechanical energies of Nature, but has begun to be a developing conscious soul or Purusha interfering with what was her sole affair, wishing to have a say in it and eventually to be the master. He cannot do it yet, he is too much in her meshes, too much involved in her established mechanism: but he feels,—though as yet too vaguely and uncertainly,—that the spirit within him wishes to rise to yet higher heights, to widen its bounds; something within, something occult, knows that it is not the intention of the deeper conscious Soul-Nature, the Purusha-Prakriti, to be satisfied with his present lowness and limitations. To climb to higher altitudes, to get a greater scope, to transform his lower nature, this is always a natural impulse of man as soon as he has made his place for himself in the physical and vital world of earth and has a little leisure to consider his farther possibilities. It must be so not because of any false and pitiful imaginative illusion in him, but, first, because he is the imperfect, still developing mental being and must strive for more development, for perfection, and still more because he is capable, unlike other terrestrial creatures, of becoming aware of what is deeper than mind, of the soul within him, and of what is above the mind, of supermind, of spirit, capable of opening to it, admitting it, rising towards it, taking hold of it. It is in his human nature, in all human nature, to exceed itself by conscious evolution, to climb beyond what he is. Not individuals only, but in time the race also, in a general rule of being and living if not in all its members, can have the hope, if it develops a sufficient will, to rise beyond the imperfections of our present very undivine nature and to ascend at least to a superior humanity, to rise nearer, even if it cannot absolutely reach, to a divine manhood or supermanhood. (LD 742–745)

10 The malady of the world

All religion, all occult knowledge, all supernormal (as opposed to abnormal) psychological experience, all Yoga, all psychic experience and discipline are sign-posts and directions pointing us upon that road of progress of the occult self-unfolding spirit. But the human race is still weighted by a certain gravitation towards the physical, it obeys still the pull of our yet unconquered earth-matter; it is dominated by the brain-mind, the physical intelligence: thus held back by many ties, it hesitates before the indication or falls back before the too tense demand of the spiritual effort. It has, too, still a great capacity for sceptical folly, an immense indolence, an enormous intellectual and spiritual timidity and conservatism when called out of the grooves of habit. (LD 751–752)

The malady of the world is that the individual cannot find his real soul, and the root-cause of this malady is again that he cannot meet in his embrace of things outward the real soul of the world in which he lives. He seeks to find there the essence of being, the essence of power, the essence of conscious-existence, the essence of delight, but receives instead a crowd of contradictory touches and impressions. If he could find that essence, he would find also the one universal being, power, conscious existence and delight even in this throng of touches and impressions; the contradictions of what seems would be reconciled in the unity and harmony of the Truth that reaches out to us in these contacts. At the same time he would find his own true soul and through it his self, because the true soul is his self's delegate and his self and the self of the world are one. But this

he cannot do because of the egoistic ignorance in the mind of thought, the heart of emotion, the sense which responds to the touch of things not by a courageous and whole-hearted embrace of the world, but by a flux of reachings and shrinkings, cautious approaches or eager rushes and sullen or discontented or panic or angry recoils according as the touch pleases or displeases, comforts or alarms, satisfies or dissatisfies. It is the desire-soul that by its wrong reception of life becomes the cause of a triple misinterpretation of the *rasa*, the delight in things, so that, instead of figuring the pure essential joy of being, it comes rendered unequally into the three terms of pleasure, pain and indifference. . .

Self-knowledge is impossible unless we go behind our surface existence, which is a mere result of selective outer experiences, an imperfect sounding-board or a hasty, incompetent and fragmentary translation of a little out of the much that we are,— unless we go behind this and send down our plummet into the subconscious and open ourselves to the superconscious so as to know their relation to our surface being. For between these three things our existence moves and finds in them its totality. The superconscious in us is one with the self and soul of the world and is not governed by any phenomenal diversity; it possesses therefore the truth of things and the delight of things in their plenitude. The subconscious, so called,¹³ in that luminous head of itself which we call the subliminal, is, on the contrary, not a true possessor but an instrument of experience; it is not practically one with the soul and self of the world, but it is open to it through its world-experience.

The subliminal soul is conscious inwardly of the *rasa* of things and has an equal delight in all contacts; it is conscious also of the values and standards of the surface desire-soul and receives on its own surface corresponding touches of pleasure, pain and indifference, but takes an equal delight in all. In other words, our real soul within takes joy of all its experiences, gathers from them strength, pleasure and knowledge, grows by them in its store and its plenty. It is this real soul in us which compels the shrinking desire-mind to bear and even to seek and find a pleasure in what is painful to it, to reject what is pleasant to it, to modify or even reverse its values, to equalise things in indifference or to equalise them in joy, the joy of the variety of existence. And this it does because it is impelled by the universal to develop itself by all kinds of experience so as to grow in Nature. Otherwise, if we lived only by the surface desire-soul, we could no more change or advance than the plant or stone in whose immobility or in whose routine of existence, because life is not superficially conscious, the secret soul of things has as yet no instrument by which it can rescue the life out of the fixed and narrow gamut into which it is born. The desire-soul left to itself would circle in the same grooves for ever.

In the view of old philosophies pleasure and pain are inseparable like intellectual truth and falsehood and power and incapacity and birth and death; therefore the only possible escape from them would be a total indifference, a blank response to the excitations of the world-self. But a subtler psychological knowledge shows us that this view which is based on the surface facts of existence only, does not really exhaust the possibilities of the problem. It is possible by bringing the real soul to the surface to replace the egoistic standards of pleasure and pain by an equal, an all-embracing personal-impersonal delight. The lover of Nature does this when he takes joy in all the things of Nature universally without admitting repulsion or fear or mere liking and disliking, per-

¹³ The real subconscious is a nether diminished consciousness close to the Inconscient; the subliminal is a consciousness larger than our surface existence. But both belong to the inner realm of our being of which our surface is unaware, so both are jumbled together in our common conception and parlance.

ceiving beauty in that which seems to others mean and insignificant, bare and savage, terrible and repellent. The artist and the poet do it when they seek the *rasa* of the universal from the aesthetic emotion or from the physical line or from the mental form of beauty or from the inner sense and power alike of that from which the ordinary man turns away and of that to which he is attached by a sense of pleasure. The seeker of knowledge, the God-lover who finds the object of his love everywhere, the spiritual man, the intellectual, the sensuous, the aesthetic all do this in their own fashion and must do it if they would find embracingly the Knowledge, the Beauty, the Joy or the Divinity which they seek. It is only in the parts where the little ego is usually too strong for us, it is only in our emotional or physical joy and suffering, our pleasure and pain of life, before which the desire-soul in us is utterly weak and cowardly, that the application of the divine principle becomes supremely difficult and seems to many impossible or even monstrous and repellent. . .

The true soul secret in us — subliminal, we have said, but the word is misleading, for this presence is not situated below the threshold of waking mind, but rather burns in the temple of the inmost heart behind the thick screen of an ignorant mind, life and body, not subliminal but behind the veil,— this veiled psychic entity is the flame of the Godhead always alight within us, inextinguishable even by that dense unconsciousness of any spiritual self within which obscures our outward nature. It is a flame born out of the Divine and, luminous inhabitant of the Ignorance, grows in it till it is able to turn it towards the Knowledge. It is the concealed Witness and Control, the hidden Guide, the Daemon of Socrates, the inner light or inner voice of the mystic. It is that which endures and is imperishable in us from birth to birth, untouched by death, decay or corruption, an indestructible spark of the Divine. . . [It] puts forward a psychic personality which changes, grows, develops from life to life; for this is the traveller between birth and death and between death and birth, our nature parts are only its manifold and changing vesture. . . It is this secret psychic entity which is the true original Conscience in us deeper than the constructed and conventional conscience of the moralist, for it is this which points always towards Truth and Right and Beauty, towards Love and Harmony and all that is a divine possibility in us, and persists till these things become the major need of our nature. It is the psychic personality in us that flowers as the saint, the sage, the seer; when it reaches its full strength, it turns the being towards the Knowledge of Self and the Divine, towards the supreme Truth, the supreme Good, the supreme Beauty, Love and Bliss, the divine heights and largenesses, and opens us to the touch of spiritual sympathy, universality, oneness. (LD 235–239)

11 The future of evolution

Man is a transitional being, he is not final. (EDH 157)

Man's greatness is not in what he is but in what he makes possible. (EDH 160)

Mind is a clumsy interlude between Nature's vast and precise subconscious action and the vaster infallible superconscious action of the Godhead. (EDH 225)

A first condition of the soul's complete emergence is a direct contact in the surface being with the spiritual Reality. Because it comes from that, the psychic element in us turns always towards whatever in phenomenal Nature seems to belong to a higher Reality and can be accepted as its sign and character. At first, it seeks this Reality through the good, the true, the beautiful, through all that is pure and fine and high and noble: but although this touch through outer signs and characters can modify and prepare the nature, it cannot entirely or most inwardly and profoundly change it. For such an inmost change

the direct contact with the Reality itself is indispensable since nothing else can so deeply touch the foundations of our being and stir it or cast the nature by its stir into a ferment of transmutation. Mental representations, emotional and dynamic figures have their use and value; Truth, Good and Beauty are in themselves primary and potent figures of the Reality, and even in their forms as seen by the mind, as felt by the heart, as realised in the life can be lines of an ascent: but it is in a spiritual substance and being of them and of itself that That which they represent has to come into our experience. (LD 934)

In the animal mind is not quite distinct from its own life-matrix and life-matter; its movements are so involved in the life movements that it cannot detach itself from them, cannot stand separate and observe them; but in man mind has become separate, he can become aware of his mental operations as distinct from his life operations, his thought and will can disengage themselves from his sensations and impulses, desires and emotional reactions, can become detached from them, observe and control them, sanction or cancel their functioning: he does not as yet know the secrets of his being well enough to be aware of himself decisively and with certitude as a mental being in a life and body, but he has that impression and can take inwardly that position. So too at first soul in man does not appear as something quite distinct from mind and from mentalised life; its movements are involved in the mind movements, its operations seem to be mental and emotional activities; the mental human being is not aware of a soul in him standing back from the mind and life and body, detaching itself, seeing and controlling and moulding their action and formation: but, as the inner evolution proceeds, this is precisely what can, must and does happen,— it is the long-delayed but inevitable next step in our evolutionary destiny. There can be a decisive emergence in which the being separates itself from thought and sees itself in an inner silence as the spirit in mind, or separates itself from the life movements, desires, sensations, kinetic impulses and is aware of itself as the spirit supporting life, or separates itself from the body sense and knows itself as a spirit ensouling Matter: this is the discovery of ourselves as the Purusha, a mental being or a life-soul or a subtle self supporting the body. This is taken by many as a sufficient discovery of the true self and in a certain sense they are right; for it is the self or spirit that so represents itself in regard to the activities of Nature, and this revelation of its presence is enough to disengage the spiritual element: but self-discovery can go farther, it can even put aside all relation to form or action of Nature. For it is seen that these selves are representations of a divine Entity to which mind, life and body are only forms and instruments: we are then the Soul looking at Nature, knowing all her dynamisms in us, not by mental perception and observation, but by an intrinsic consciousness and its direct sense of things and its intimate exact vision, able therefore by its emergence to put a close control on our nature and change it. . .

It is only through these decisive movements that the true character of the evolution becomes evident; for till then there are only preparatory movements, a pressure of the psychic Entity on the mind, life and body to develop a true soul action, a pressure of the spirit or self for liberation from the ego, from the surface ignorance, a turning of the mind and life towards some occult Reality,— preliminary experiences, partial formulations of a spiritualised mind, a spiritualised life, but no complete change, no probability of an entire unveiling of the soul or self or a radical transformation of the nature. When there is the decisive emergence, one sign of it is the status or action in us of an inherent, intrinsic, self-existent consciousness which knows itself by the mere fact of being, knows all that is in itself in the same way, by identity with it, begins even to see all that to our mind seems external in the same manner, by a movement of identity or by an intrinsic direct consciousness which envelops, penetrates, enters into its object, discovers itself in the object, is aware in it of something that is not mind or life or body. . .

[A]t first this consciousness may confine itself to a status of being separate from the

action of our ignorant surface nature, observing it, limiting itself to knowledge, to a seeing of things with a spiritual sense and vision of existence. For action it may still depend upon the mental, vital, bodily instruments, or it may allow them to act according to their own nature and itself remain satisfied with self-experience and self-knowledge, with an inner liberation, an eventual freedom: but it may also and usually does exercise a certain authority, governance, influence on thought, life movement, physical action, a purifying uplifting control compelling them to move in a higher and purer truth of themselves, to obey or be an instrumentation of an influx of some diviner Power or a luminous direction which is not mental but spiritual and can be recognised as having a certain divine character,— the inspiration of a greater Self or the command of the Ruler of all being, the Ishwara. Or the nature may obey the psychic entity's intimations, move in an inner light, follow an inner guidance. This is already a considerable evolution and amounts to a beginning at least of a psychic and spiritual transformation. But it is possible to go farther; for the spiritual being, once inwardly liberated, can develop in mind the higher states of being that are its own natural atmosphere and bring down a supramental energy and action which are proper to the Truth-consciousness; the ordinary mental instrumentation, life-instrumentation, physical instrumentation even, could then be entirely transformed and become parts no longer of an ignorance however much illumined, but of a supramental creation which would be the true action of a spiritual truth-consciousness and knowledge. (LD 886–888)

As you will recall, the process of creation goes through three phases: the development of infinite delight into expressive ideas, the transition from expressive idea to executive force, and the creation, by the executive force, of a revealing form. Evolution may be likened to building a bridge. The support for one end of the bridge is a multitude of unconscious, formless entities — the final outcome of Sachchidananda's plunge into involution. The support for the other end is the infinite bliss at the heart of existence — deprived of its creative force. Evolution starts with a multitude of formless particles, whose spatial relations are potentially capable of constituting revealing forms, but the executive force needed to create such forms is missing. In addition, there is present from the beginning this infinite delight, potentially capable of issuing expressive ideas, but the dynamism needed to form such ideas is missing. This infinite delight thus incapacitated is what Sri Aurobindo calls the psychic principle or psychic entity. The term "entity" indicates an original multiplicity of the psychic principle — a multiplicity of souls antedating the plunge into involution and persisting throughout the adventure of evolution. (Remember note 5.)

Starting from the material end of the bridge, there evolve mental, vital, and bodily instruments, which may "act according to their own nature" or else be compelled "to obey or be an instrumentation of an influx of some diviner Power." Thus there is what we may call a "nature dynamism," by which those instruments act when left to themselves, and there is what we may call a "soul dynamism," by which the psychic entity influences them or compels them to act differently. Starting from the other end of the bridge, each psychic entity evolves a psychic being with a psychic personality that develops in proportion to the influence it wields over the outer nature.

[The] evolutionary working of Nature from Matter to Mind and beyond it has a double process: there is an outward visible process of physical evolution with birth as its machinery,— for each evolved form of body housing its own evolved power of consciousness is maintained and kept in continuity by heredity; there is, at the same time, an

invisible process of soul evolution with rebirth into ascending grades of form and consciousness as its machinery. The first by itself would mean only a cosmic evolution; for the individual would be a quickly perishing instrument, and the race, a more abiding collective formulation, would be the real step in the progressive manifestation of the cosmic Inhabitant, the universal Spirit; rebirth is an indispensable condition for any long duration and evolution of the individual being in the earth-existence. Each grade of cosmic manifestation, each type of form that can house the indwelling spirit, is turned by rebirth into a means for the individual soul, the psychic entity, to manifest more and more of its concealed consciousness; each life becomes a step in a victory over Matter by a greater progression of consciousness in it which shall make eventually Matter itself a means for the full manifestation of the Spirit. (LD 858)

There is an evolution of our outward nature, the nature of the mental being in the life and body, and there is within it, pressing forward for self-revelation because with the emergence of mind that revelation is becoming possible, a preparation at least, even the beginning of an evolution of our inner being, our occult subliminal and spiritual nature. . . . If the sole intention were the revelation of the essential spiritual Reality and a cessation of our being into its pure existence, this insistence on the mental evolution would have no purpose: for at every point of the nature there can be a breaking out of the spirit and an absorption of our being into it; an intensity of the heart, a total silence of the mind, a single absorbing passion of the will would be enough to bring about that culminating movement. If Nature's final intention were other-worldly, then too the same law would hold; for everywhere, at any point of the nature, there can be a sufficient power of the other-worldly urge to break through and away from the terrestrial action and enter into a spiritual elsewhere. But if her intention is a comprehensive change of the being, this double evolution is intelligible and justifies itself; for it is for that purpose indispensable.

This, however, imposes a difficult and slow spiritual advance: for, first, the spiritual emergence has to wait at each step for the instruments to be ready; next, as the spiritual formation emerges, it is mixed inextricably with the powers, motives, impulses of an imperfect mind, life and body,— there is a pull on it to accept and serve these powers, motives and impulses, a downward gravitation and perilous mixture, a constant temptation to fall or deviation, at least a fettering, a weight, a retardation; there is a necessity to return upon a step gained in order to bring up something of the nature which hangs back and prevents a farther step; finally, there is, by the very character of mind in which it has to work, a limitation of the emerging spiritual light and power and a compulsion on it to move by segments, to follow one line or another and leave altogether or leave till later on the achievement of its own totality. This hampering, this obstacle of the mind, life and body,— the heavy inertia and persistence of the body, the turbid passions of the life-part, the obscurity and doubting incertitudes, denials, other-formulations of the mind,— is an impediment so great and intolerable that the spiritual urge becomes impatient and tries rigorously to quell these opponents, to reject the life, to mortify the body, to silence the mind and achieve its own separate salvation, spirit departing into pure spirit and rejecting from it altogether an undivine and obscure Nature. Apart from the supreme call, the natural push of the spiritual part in us to return to its own highest element and status, this aspect of vital and physical Nature as an impediment to pure spirituality is a compelling reason for asceticism, for illusionism, for the tendency to other-worldliness, the urge towards withdrawal from life, the passion for a pure and unmixed Absolute. A pure spiritual absolutism is a movement of the self towards its own supreme selfhood, but it is also indispensable for Nature's own purpose; for without it the mixture, the downward gravitation would make the spiritual emergence impossible. The extremist of this absolutism, the solitary, the ascetic, is the standard-bearer of the

spirit, his ochre robe is its flag, the sign of a refusal of all compromise,— as indeed the struggle of emergence cannot end by a compromise, but only by an entire spiritual victory and the complete surrender of the lower nature. . .

There is thus a dual tendency in the spiritual emergence, on one side a drive towards the establishment at all cost of the spiritual consciousness in the being, even to the rejection of Nature, on the other side a push towards the extension of spirituality to our parts of nature. But until the first is fully achieved, the second can only be imperfect and halting. It is the foundation of the pure spiritual consciousness that is the first object in the evolution of the spiritual man, and it is this and the urge of that consciousness towards contact with the Reality, the Self or the Divine Being that must be the first and foremost or even, till it is perfectly accomplished, the sole preoccupation of the spiritual seeker. (LD 890–892)

As the crust of the outer nature cracks, as the walls of inner separation break down, the inner light gets through, the inner fire burns in the heart, the substance of the nature and the stuff of consciousness refine to a greater subtlety and purity, and the deeper psychic experiences, those which are not solely of an inner mental or inner vital character, become possible in this subtler, purer, finer substance; the soul begins to unveil itself, the psychic personality reaches its full stature. The soul, the psychic entity, then manifests itself as the central being which upholds mind and life and body and supports all the other powers and functions of the Spirit; it takes up its greater function as the guide and ruler of the nature. A guidance, a governance begins from within which exposes every movement to the light of Truth, repels what is false, obscure, opposed to the divine realisation: every region of the being, every nook and corner of it, every movement, formation, direction, inclination of thought, will, emotion, sensation, action, reaction, motive, disposition, propensity, desire, habit of the conscious or subconscious physical, even the most concealed, camouflaged, mute, recondite, is lighted up with the unerring psychic light, their confusions dissipated, their tangles disentangled, their obscurities, deceptions, self-deceptions precisely indicated and removed; all is purified, set right, the whole nature harmonised, modulated in the psychic key, put in spiritual order. This process may be rapid or tardy according to the amount of obscurity and resistance still left in the nature, but it goes on unflinching so long as it is not complete. As a final result the whole conscious being is made perfectly apt for spiritual experience of every kind, turned towards spiritual truth of thought, feeling, sense, action, tuned to the right responses, delivered from the darkness and stubbornness of the tamasic inertia, the turbidities and turbulences and impurities of the rajasic passion and restless unharmonised kinetism, the enlightened rigidities and sattwic limitations or poised balancements of constructed equilibrium which are the character of the Ignorance.

This is the first result, but the second is a free inflow of all kinds of spiritual experience, experience of the Self, experience of the Ishwara and the Divine Shakti, experience of cosmic consciousness, a direct touch with cosmic forces and with the occult movements of universal Nature, a psychic sympathy and unity and inner communication and interchanges of all kinds with other beings and with Nature, illuminations of the mind by knowledge, illuminations of the heart by love and devotion and spiritual joy and ecstasy, illuminations of the sense and the body by higher experience, illuminations of dynamic action in the truth and largeness of a purified mind and heart and soul, the certitudes of the divine light and guidance, the joy and power of the divine force working in the will and the conduct. . .

But all this change and all this experience, though psychic and spiritual in essence and character, would still be, in its parts of life-effectuation, on the mental, vital and physical level; its dynamic spiritual outcome would be a flowering of the soul in mind and life and body, but in act and form it would be circumscribed within the limitations —

however enlarged, uplifted and rarefied — of an inferior instrumentation. It would be a reflected and modified manifestation of things whose full reality, intensity, largeness, oneness and diversity of truth and power and delight are above us, above mind and therefore above any perfection, within mind's own formula, of the foundations or superstructure of our present nature. A highest spiritual transformation must intervene on the psychic or psycho-spiritual change; the psychic movement inward to the inner being, the Self or Divinity within us, must be completed by an opening upward to a supreme spiritual status or a higher existence. This can be done by our opening into what is above us, by an ascent of consciousness into the ranges of overmind and supramental nature in which the sense of self and spirit is ever unveiled and permanent and in which the self-luminous instrumentation of the self and spirit is not restricted or divided as in our mind-nature, life-nature, body-nature. This also the psychic change makes possible; for as it opens us to the cosmic consciousness now hidden from us by many walls of limiting individuality, so also it opens us to what is now superconscious to our normality because it is hidden from us by the strong, hard and bright lid of mind,— mind constricting, dividing and separative. The lid thins, is slit, breaks asunder or opens and disappears under the pressure of the psycho-spiritual change and the natural urge of the new spiritualised consciousness towards that of which it is an expression here. . .

If the rift in the lid of mind is made, what happens is an opening of vision to something above us or a rising up towards it or a descent of its powers into our being. What we see by the opening of vision is an Infinity above us, an eternal Presence or an infinite Existence, an infinity of consciousness, an infinity of bliss,— a boundless Self, a boundless Light, a boundless Power, a boundless Ecstasy. . .

[The spiritual transformation] achieves itself and culminates in an upward ascent often repeated by which in the end the consciousness fixes itself on a higher plane and from there sees and governs the mind, life and body; it achieves itself also in an increasing descent of the powers of the higher consciousness and knowledge which become more and more the whole normal consciousness and knowledge. A light and power, a knowledge and force are felt which first take possession of the mind and remould it, afterwards of the life part and remould that, finally of the little physical consciousness and leave it no longer little but wide and plastic and even infinite. For this new consciousness has itself the nature of infinity: it brings to us the abiding spiritual sense and awareness of the infinite and eternal with a great largeness of the nature and a breaking down of its limitations; immortality becomes no longer a belief or an experience but a normal self-awareness; the close presence of the Divine Being, his rule of the world and of our self and natural members, his force working in us and everywhere, the peace of the infinite, the joy of the infinite are now concrete and constant in the being; in all sights and forms one sees the Eternal, the Reality, in all sounds one hears it, in all touches feels it; there is nothing else but its forms and personalities and manifestations; the joy or adoration of the heart, the embrace of all existence, the unity of the spirit are abiding realities. The consciousness of the mental creature is turning or has been already turned wholly into the consciousness of the spiritual being. (LD 941–947)

Neither life nor mind succeeds in converting or perfecting the material existence, because they cannot attain to their own full force in these conditions; they need to call in a higher power to liberate and fulfil them. But the higher spiritual-mental powers also undergo the same disability when they descend into life and matter; they can do much more, achieve much luminous change, but the modification, the limitation, the disparity between the consciousness that comes in and the force of effectuation that it can mentalise and materialise, are constantly there and the result is a diminished creation. The change made is often extraordinary, there is even something which looks like a total conversion and reversal of the state of consciousness and an uplifting of its movements,

but it is not dynamically absolute.

Only the supermind can thus descend without losing its full power of action; for its action is always intrinsic and automatic, its will and knowledge identical and the result commensurate: its nature is a self-achieving Truth-consciousness and, if it limits itself or its working, it is by choice and intention, not by compulsion; in the limits it chooses its action and the results of its action are harmonious and inevitable. . . . As the psychic change has to call in the spiritual to complete it, so the first spiritual change has to call in the supramental transformation to complete it. For all these steps forward are, like those before them, transitional; the whole radical change in the evolution from a basis of Ignorance to a basis of Knowledge can only come by the intervention of the supramental Power and its direct action in earth-existence. (LD 950–951)

If a spiritual unfolding on earth is the hidden truth of our birth into Matter, if it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in Nature, then man as he is cannot be the last term of that evolution: he is too imperfect an expression of the spirit, mind itself a too limited form and instrumentation; mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being. If, then, man is incapable of exceeding mentality, he must be surpassed and supermind and superman must manifest and take the lead of the creation. But if his mind is capable of opening to what exceeds it, then there is no reason why man himself should not arrive at supermind and supermanhood or at least lend his mentality, life and body to an evolution of that greater term of the Spirit manifesting in Nature. (LD 879)

The full emergence of supermind may be accomplished by a sovereign manifestation, a descent into earth-consciousness and a rapid assumption of its powers and disclosing of its forms and the creation of a supramental race and a supramental life: this must indeed be the full result of its action in Nature. But this has not been the habit of evolutionary Nature in the past upon earth and it may well be that this supramental evolution also will fix its own periods, though it cannot be at all a similar development to that of which earth has hitherto been the witness. But once it has begun, all must unavoidably and perfectly manifest and all parts of Nature must tend towards a greatest possible luminousness and perfection. It is this certainty that authorises us to believe that mind and humanity also will tend towards a realisation that will be far beyond our present dreams of perfection. (EPY¹⁴ 583)

12 Epilogue

The process of involution terminates in a multitude of formless particles, whose spatial relations appear to be governed by inflexible laws. Being instrumental in setting the stage for the drama of evolution, these laws — the laws of physics — do not direct the play. If the infinite delight at the heart of existence is to appear on the stage, it must begin by evolving the necessary instruments, and this it cannot do without modifying the initial, physical mode of its creative dynamism. At the same time, given the Houdinesque character of the play, we can predict that the modifications will be so small and so few that no detectable “violations” of physical laws occur.

This changes when the Purusha begins to exercise a genuine control, or when the psy-

¹⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*. Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 1998.

chic being begins to take up the reigns of nature. One can foresee a growing susceptibility of the nature dynamism to soul dynamism or (what comes to the same) a progressive strengthening of the latter at the expense of the former. This development cannot but continue until it is complete, that is, until the nature dynamism ceases to exist as a separate dynamism, having been completely integrated into the dynamism of the soul. The bridge will be complete when an organism that has evolved from matter's end merges with a psychic being that has evolved from the immaterial end, our of the infinite delight that is Reality Itself.

The principle of the process of evolution is a foundation, from that foundation an ascent, in that ascent a reversal of consciousness and, from the greater height and wideness gained, an action of change and new integration of the whole nature. The first foundation is Matter; the ascent is that of Nature; the integration is an at first unconscious or half-conscious automatic change of Nature by Nature. But as soon as a more completely conscious participation of the being has begun in these workings of Nature, a change in the functioning of the process is inevitable. The physical foundation of Matter remains, but Matter can no longer be the foundation of the consciousness; consciousness itself will be no longer in its origin a welling up from the Inconscient or a concealed flow from an occult inner subliminal force under the pressure of contacts from the universe. The foundation of the developing existence will be the new spiritual status above or the unveiled soul status within us; it is a flow of light and knowledge and will from above and a reception from within that will determine the reactions of the being to cosmic experience. The whole concentration of the being will be shifted from below upwards and from without inwards; our higher and inner being now unknown to us will become ourselves, and the outer or surface being which we now take for ourselves will be only an open front or an annexe through which the true being meets the universe. The outer world itself will become inward to the spiritual awareness, a part of itself, intimately embraced in a knowledge and feeling of unity and identity, penetrated by an intuitive regard of the mind, responded to by the direct contact of consciousness with consciousness, taken into an achieved integrality. The old inconscient foundation itself will be made conscious in us by the inflow of light and awareness from above and its depths annexed to the heights of the spirit. An integral consciousness will become the basis of an entire harmonisation of life through the total transformation, unification, integration of the being and the nature. (LD 753)