

**Problem of Knowledge –
Problem of Causality, Change and Time**

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Academy for New Education

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First Edition, 2012

ISBN: 978-93-82085-08-9

Published by:

POPULAR MEDIA

Jhilmil Industrial Area, Delhi-110095

popularmedia@ymail.com

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Problems of Knowledge and Sri Aurobindo's Concept of the Supermind

But our nature sees things through two eyes always, for it views them doubly as ideas and as fact and therefore every concept is incomplete for us and to a part of our nature almost unreal until it becomes an experience.

Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*.

There is an ascending movement of knowledge which seeks to find its fulfilment in the attainment of the highest, completest and the most indubitable knowledge. In this search it rises higher and higher and on the way it stops at certain stations wondering at each whether it is not the terminus it wants to arrive at. The first such station at which it stops is the level of perception.

For a percept by itself is complete and of the facthood and of the immediate truth of which we have to refer to nothing outside it.

Problem of Knowledge

That there are percepts and that what is perceived is really perceived are indubitable facts and whatever higher knowledge there may be and whatever correction it may make in the knowledge by perception, it cannot abolish these facts except by denying them with the help of the idea of a mysterious Maya or of the inexplicable; but then such abolishing knowledge would not be the highest knowledge.

However, very soon it is found that perception is only a station on the journey, not a destination; for the reason that compares one percept with another finds a certain opposition between them; it finds that two given percepts concerning the same object are so opposed to each other that if one is true the other must be false; and within the field of perception itself there are no means to determine the final truth of either. And this gives rise to the doubt regarding the whole realm of perception. May it not be that all percepts are false? But the idea of falsity presupposes the idea of truth which in turn presupposes for the reason at least an existence of the truth. But when the field of perception itself is held in question we cannot

discover the existence of that truth while confined solely to that very field.

Or if we do not raise this extreme doubt we may arrive at an intermediary kind of doubt; for if we observe the percepts we find that they change according to the position that the subject takes with respect to the object of perception. And this gives rise to a doubt whether the percepts do not depend entirely upon the percipient. And this doubt is reiterated by the fact that in perception we perceive no necessity of the existence of the object so that of no object we can say it must therefore be existing even when perceptual contact is withdrawn. But as against this we also observe that we cannot perceive things at will, and if the objects depend upon the percipient the latter would not have to labour to understand the object; there would then be no questioning, no groping, no error with respect to the objects of perception.

It may be then that the objects exist independent of the percipient; and with respect to this hypothesis also two positions can be taken. According to the first position, objects are so independent of the perceptual-

conceptual activity of the percipient that there is no correspondence between them and therefore what the percipient can know of the objects is not the objects as they are, the objects-in-themselves, but only his mental ideas about the objects, the mental categories which are *a priori* and underived from experience although elicited through sense-experience. These categories are purely mental and entirely inapplicable to objects-in-themselves and if an attempt is made to apply these categories to objects-in-themselves we are led to antinomy and opposition. But this view can hardly be substantiated by any perceptual evidence and therefore so long as we remain on the perceptual level we cannot decide upon this view.

The second alternative position returns to the primary certainty of sense-perception with which we began; it holds the reality of the objectivity of the object and its qualities and Space and Time and maintains that our knowledge of them is determined by them and not by the mental constitution of the percipient. But in view of the uncertainty of the knowledge by sense-perception it confesses that certainty of knowledge is not

possible and that the highest that we can attain to is approximation and probability.

But if objectivity is real and can be so known by the percipient, the subject, then it is reasonable to suppose that objectivity and subjectivity are not opposed to each other; and since the object presents itself before the subject and can be known only by the subject, and since the subject can know, that is to say, enter into the object — for how else can it be known? — The ultimate stuff of the two should be identical. For then only knowledge is possible. Nevertheless, if the differentiation of the subject and the object persists we may suppose that identity is not opposed to differentiation. The subject and the object then may be regarded as essentially identical and yet each as the same Identical presenting to the other for its self-revelation.

This indeed is a speculation and as of any other so of this there is no possibility of being certain on the perceptual-conceptual level. For here on this level we have no direct experience of this essential identity of the subject and the object, their revelation as the subjective and objective faces of the One. The object does not

reveal itself to the subject: the subject has to grope and attempt a difficult and practically unsuccessful entry into the object; the subject also retains its separation from the object and uses indirect means which maintain that separation rather than unite the two. The subject and the object are thus divided from each other and so certainty of knowledge is not possible at this level.

Still we can note the conditions under which alone we can attain to the definite and indubitable knowledge of the objects which we as subjects attempt to know and yet fail to know. The first condition is that I, the subject, and the object should in some way be identical, that is to say, identical in the very stuff of being; for to know the object means to know the very essence of it, the object-in-itself; and if that essence of the object is fundamentally different from me, the subject, I shall never know the object. The second condition is that although this essential identity is indispensable, there should be real, that is to say, as opposed to illusory, differentiation of the subject and the object; for unless there is this differentiation I shall never know the object as object. And yet if, and this is the third

condition, I am to know the essentiality, the peculiarity, the very differentia of this differentiation of the object from me, the subject, I should myself be capable of throwing myself into that object and becoming that object, and still at the same time not losing my subjectivity, the essentiality, the peculiarity, the very differentia of my differentiation from the object—for otherwise once again I would cease to be the subject and thus would not know the object as object.

Whether these conditions are capable of fulfilment or not is a separate question, but this much at least is clear that since these conditions are not fulfilled as yet, the present conflict between rationalism and empiricism, subjectivism and objectivism and idealism and realism adds only to the uncertainty of our knowledge and therefore no final solution is possible on any one of these conflicting lines of thought. And in this uncertain state of knowledge if we are so determined as to deny any higher possibility, we may deny it; but then it would be dogmatism.

As a matter of fact, as we rise higher new fields of knowledge open before us. For if the

reason operating on sense-perception and sense-data disturbs the simple certainty of the percept, it also arrives by liberating itself from the occupation with sense-data at the metaphysical knowledge which gives us the certainty of the concepts of pure reason. These concepts are found to be the very stuff of the pure reason and therefore are undeniable for it; pure reason exists by them and to deny them would be to deny pure reason itself.

One such concept is that of the Infinite as the underlying Reality of the universe. To reason an absolute end or an absolute beginning is self-contradictory and therefore cannot be; there can be no limit which it can assign or fix in Space and Time before which there is nothing or after which there is nothing. Not only that, reason goes farther and looking at the Movement and finding there not the Stable and Permanent which alone can be the support of this Movement, it goes beyond the categories of Space and Time and comes to conceive an Existence-in-itself, timeless and spaceless, the Infinite, the Eternal, the Absolute to which the categories of quantity, quality, relation and modality do not apply.

This Reality, this Self-existence, says the pure reason, must be; and yet in positing this the reason points to something beyond itself; something of which it is certain and yet which it cannot and does not know. And reaching this utmost limit of its operation, it returns upon itself for a critical self-examination. And it finds that it fails to know the Whole, the Perfect, the Infinite because whereas the Infinite must be or rather is — for that which must be is for the pure reason — unitary, its own movement is piecemeal; it operates through cutting and dissecting the concrete into that and what and thus misses the unity. It applies the same method to all its concepts of Space, Time, Quantity, Quality, Relation and Modality and finds that these concepts also betray the same self-contradiction with which it is itself ridden. These therefore cannot be real; the Real is that which goes beyond all these, the One without the second.

And then the inevitable question arises as to how all this movement, these things of perception, these categories of thought, this division and differentiation, the entire mass of the discord and disharmony that we call our ordinary existence — how all these are

reconciled with or contained by that Transcendental unitary self-existence that is the Infinite. Is it that they are not reconciled at all? For the world of our perception and thought by its inherent disharmony and discord appears to be fundamentally and essentially different from that other harmonious and unitary Absolute Reality. But this cannot be because if Reality is Infinite nothing can be outside it; all that is must be in it or must be That itself. Shall we then say that only That exists and all else is false, that is to say, an illusion, a false perception, an error of limited consciousness? But if That alone exists how did the false perception arise? And in whom did this false perception arise? It must be in That only for nothing else exists. But then we return to the original question still unsolved. The only answer that we are forced to give is that if the facts are what they are, all the discords of the world are somehow, inexplicably, contained in the Infinite, and when so contained and viewed as such from the point of view of the Infinite the present discord ceases; and then what we get is the all-harmonious, perfect, unitary and unrelational Whole, the Absolute.

But this last note of 'somehow' and 'inexplicable' shows that we have reached here the utmost limit of pure reason. For it becomes clear now that just as it cannot know the Infinite although it is compelled to posit It, even so it cannot know how to unite the universe and the Infinite although it is compelled to regard the universe to be somehow contained in the Infinite. But this ignorance is sufficient to raise certain doubts regarding the completeness of our premise. We may be certain of our concept of the Infinite, but so long as we do not know what that Infinite is how are we to know whether the Infinite is opposed to the finite, the Indeterminate to the determinate? We do not have, on the other hand, true knowledge of the universe which has been declared to be ridden with self-contradiction. On the perceptual-conceptual level we do not have any certainty about the true nature of the universe of our perception; pure reason gives us certainty — but only the certainty about the Infinite in which the universe must be contained. It does not throw any further light on the nature of the universe; on the contrary, in returning to the universe it still takes the

same perceptual-conceptual view of it. If so, we may suppose that the insuperable difficulty is not really in the problem but in the incompleteness of our premise. And this opens out a fresh line of approach.

For it may now be argued that if in the vision of the Infinite or rather in the unitary concrete experience of the Absolute all discords cease to be, then is it not because there was in reality no discord, and all the discord that we were imposing was not in fact but only in idea relative to our finite mode of seeing and thinking? In fact it may be that the fundamental categories of world-existence are not self-contradictory and therefore not the elements of discord which have to be resolved. For if they were not essentially in harmony with the Infinite, they could not have any existence whatsoever, not even a false and perceptual existence.

But this is a speculation and as of any other which attempts to fathom into the mystery of the as yet unknown Infinite, so of this we cannot be certain. For Reason does not stand at the origin of the determination of the universe; it is itself a determination and as yet

unable to see the primary relation between the Indeterminate and the determination; there is still a veil between it and its original source; and until the two aspects of knowledge – the knowledge of the Infinite and the knowledge of the universe – meet in a supreme act of knowledge, we would be encircling in vain to relate the two entities which are very largely to our Reason two words without precise meaning.

Still we can see and note down what could be the nature of that faculty or power, if there is any such, which alone could know with certainty what reason attempts to know and yet fails to know. Firstly, it must be identical with the Infinite; for to know the Infinite is to know the essence of the Infinite, the Infinite-itself; and if that essence were different from the essence of this power or faculty which attempts to know the Infinite, it will never know the Infinite. Secondly, it must itself be identical with that principle of differentiation which is responsible for the categories of world-existence. Thirdly, the subject, the knower, himself should be identical with the Infinite and the power or faculty of perfect knowledge; for otherwise he would not know

their uniqueness and the totality of the knowledge of the Infinite and the universe; and finally, the Infinite and that faculty of perfect knowledge should be the determinant and constitutor of the knower, the subject, for otherwise they would not know the determination of the subject and thus lack of completeness of knowledge which we demand of them.

Whether there is any such faculty or not or, if in existence, whether it is possible for us to have such a faculty is a separate question; but this much is certain that if we do not admit the possibility of such a suprarational or supramental faculty we shall never be able to be certain of the relation that this world holds with the Infinite. And in the absence of this certainty even whatever certainty that we have of the metaphysical knowledge would come to be seriously doubted and challenged. For there are always two ways of obtaining knowledge, through ideation and through experience; and unless we realise in experience what we idealise, our idealising will remain almost unreal to our need for experience. Therefore our need of experience also has a kind of reason which accepts not

the reason of ideas but the reason of facts and experience: to it therefore anything which is unrealisable is a meaningless word, a non-sense. So it is possible always to question the concepts of pure reason until they are realised. Thus the rationalistic philosophy in the West which denies the possibility of our having the realisation of the Infinite has come to be challenged by Positivism according to which metaphysical concepts are meaningless and therefore metaphysics is a non-sense. Positivism therefore turns back upon pure reason and returns to the primacy of sense-experience.

This in fact represents the present and immediate crisis of the Western mind; for this reaction of the sense-mind against the higher and nobler faculties has come at a time when that high certainty which was felt with respect to physical sciences has itself come to be questioned and scientific knowledge is being gradually regarded as only probable. It is thus a movement towards uncertainty, as never before. The Western mind has therefore to decide if it wants to rise higher to new vistas of experience and knowledge or to deny or thwart the persistent instinct or intuition in

man to realise the highest.

In fact the opposition between reason and experience is fallacious. For if we examine carefully, we find that just as sense-mind needs for its operation the presentation of sensible facts, even so pure reason also needs for its operation on them the presentation of its ideas. Thus the concept of the Infinite is not the product of reason, it is the very stuff of its being; and if we go still deeper we find that there is in us the faculty of intuition which gives its first intimations to reason of the existence of the Infinite. And the foundation of intuitional knowledge is conscious or effective identity between that which knows and that which is known. The possibility therefore of our having that intuitional knowledge is already implied in the very functioning of pure reason.

On the other hand, the positivist appeal to experience and verifiability is incomplete. For in the first place, sense-experience gives us no certain knowledge, and it can at the most arrive at tolerable probabilities; this would mean that not only metaphysical knowledge but in fact even the concepts of science are

little more than non-sense. In the second place, the refusal to admit the truths of pure reason is arbitrary since it is based upon an unfounded assumption that reason and truth are entirely divorced from each other. And finally, if we are impartial enough, we have to take note of supraphysical experiences; for then it becomes possible for us to see that we can enter through the inner consciousness into subtler planes of existence and even to the highest and supreme experience of the Infinite.

Thus the movement of knowledge must rise higher into the field of spiritual experience to see if it gets there what it seeks. And indeed once again we find in the spiritual field the same kind of, though intenser and wider, certainty of the facthood and of the truth of the experience as we got in the field of sense-perception. As there, so here, the experience is complete by itself and for the facthood and truth of which we have to refer to nothing outside it; as there, so here, the fact that there are spiritual experiences and that whatever is experienced is really experienced is indubitable; and whatever higher knowledge there may be and whatever corrections it may

make in the knowledge by spiritual experience, it cannot abolish the facthood or truth of spiritual experience except by ignoring them; but then such ignoring knowledge would not be the highest knowledge.

But unlike in sense-experience, in spiritual experience the subject finds its final rest and so of all search of knowledge. The experience is found to be so total and integral that the spirit and reason feel justified in regarding it as the ultimate and final destination of all knowledge. The spirit knows then that the Truth and reason supports it; and there is no possibility of moving anywhere farther.

But if we look here for the fulfilment of the conditions of integral knowledge we find that all of them are not fulfilled in any single spiritual experience; where we find the identity of the subject and the object the differentiation between the two is absent, and vice versa. And this leads to variation in knowledge and claims which conflict with each other.

There are three fundamental experiences in terms of which we can translate roughly all the multitudinous varieties of spiritual experience. The first is one in which the

Subject finds itself as the inactive Witness Self or Purusha to which an entirely alien principle of active Nature or Prakriti presents its construction of the world as Object. The ultimate difference between Subject and Object or an ultimate dualism is a position which we have met before and reason has considered it to be untenable. But now in the light of this experience which has an inherent certainty and finality about itself, reason also comes to see that its reasonings were mere constructions, perhaps sufficient within themselves but having no relevance to the ultimate facts of existence; for experience shows that there is an ultimate dualism. And thus we get a dualistic philosophy armed with its own mental logic and its appeal to intuition and experience.

The second is the experience in which the Subject, the knower, merges himself completely into the pure and indeterminable eternal existence of the Infinite beside which there is nothing else, the experience of the Immutable and unqualified Absolute, the *Nirguna* Brahman. And then if we ask of the universe in relation to this experience we are told that that universe is a lie, an illusion, an

existence which in fact never existed except to false vision. This again is the position which we have met before and reason has found it to be untenable. But in the light of this experience which has an inherent certainty and finality about itself, reason also comes to see that its reasonings were mere constructions and that reason being itself ridden with self-contradiction cannot really give us the truth; it finds now that its constructions have no relevance to the fact of supreme experience. And thus we get the philosophy of Illusionistic Monism which is armed with its own mental logic and appeal to intuition and experience.

And the third is the experience in which the Subject finds in the Object, the Infinite, the true Subject of himself as well as of the universe which in turn are found to be the objective self-determinations of the Infinite, the *Saguna* Brahman. In this experience we find a promise of greater knowledge of the Infinite as related to the universe, but here there is a lack of the experience of the identity of the terms of knowledge which prevents us from coming to any certain knowledge about the ultimate relation of these terms. But in the light of this experience, once again, reason

comes to see that its demand for complete knowledge is presumptuous and has no relevance to the final fact of experience. And thus we get the philosophy of Qualified Monism armed with its own mental logic and appeal to intuition and experience.

Had we to meet the one and the single realisation at the end and summit of every spiritual endeavour our reason would be obliged to accept the final test and authority of that experience however much it may disappoint the expectations of reason. For then reason would recognise its limitations and submit to the supremacy of knowledge by experience. But here we find that different roads lead us to different goals, different summits, and the reason which compares these experiences remains undecided between them.

It has however been argued that essentially these spiritual experiences point to the same Reality and that so many different philosophies are only so many different ways of stating the same Truth. But this argument errs by over-simplifying and therefore explaining away the real problem. It is true

that each of these philosophies speaks of the Being or the Infinite as the content of spiritual experience; but each gives a different and opposing account and this difference and opposition is clearly meant and upheld by the originators of these philosophies themselves.

Faced with this conflict, if we are to argue with each position that the other is invalid then we are led to three alternatives, namely, either that none is valid or that one of them or two of them are valid or that each one is valid. But none of these alternatives can be proved. For to prove we must be in possession of some such knowledge whose validity is not in question. This situation therefore pushes us to a greater and higher and more certain knowledge in the light of which this conflict could be resolved. For at this level we find as yet a limitation which prevents consciousness to look beyond its present occupying experience. It may be that the spiritual experience is not the plane of ultimate experience but of the penultimate's. And the phenomenon of opposing spiritual experiences would point to a probability that the Infinite is so complex as to combine and harmonise apparently opposing principles. Indeed there

is nothing inconceivable in the fact that that which is really Infinite should have various faces of Itself each of which can be variously experienced and yet should give in each experience the sense of perfection. For may it not be that the Infinite is the original Mystery of which what appears to the limited mind as contradictories are really its equal and complementary truths?

But this is a speculation and unless we find a substantiating experience we cannot be certain about it. For here there is still something that escapes us. We are in search of the knowledge of the Infinite and the mystery of the origin of the universe, the action of the determining power of the Infinite and the process of self-determination of the Infinite. But here on the spiritual plane when we attain to the Infinite and attain identity with it the world disappears, determinations are found to be substanceless name and forms having no reality, and the subject, the knower, also merges into the unqualified oneness of the Infinite, the *Nirguna* Brahman. On the other hand, when we approach the Infinite in His creative activity, the subject, the knower, can enter into a relation with Him,

embrace Him, realise his truth as a portion of Him and realise also the truth of the universe as a determination of Him, but still the identity with Him which alone can give us the complete knowledge of Him, the subject and the universe, is still denied. There is still a veil between that *Nirguna* Brahman and this *Saguna* Brahman and we do not know as yet the principle which determines this differentiation and therefore in which we can hope to arrive at the ultimate all-comprehensive knowledge.

Still we can be certain that if these spiritual experiences are valid, they must be of an Infinite which is not a blank indeterminable but which by its own power of self-determination determines itself into various aspects of itself. If there is the Infinite, there cannot be anything alien to itself and therefore the power of determination also must be its own power; not only that but that Power must be in essence identical with the Infinite for then only can it effect the real determinations of the Infinite. To the cognition of this Power then there would be no opposition or conflict between these various aspects of the Infinite but, on the contrary, harmony between them and even ultimate oneness. And yet, thirdly,

we have to suppose that in each of these aspects there must be independent completeness; for otherwise we would be led to the illogical position that the perfection of the Infinite is broken in its determinations.

Whether there is such a power or not is a separate question; but if there is no such power we have no explanation of the conflict of spiritual experiences, no way to bridge and synthesise the truths of these spiritual experiences; if there is no such power we have no means to attain to the indubitable knowledge of the Infinite in its relation to the universe and the knower of this universe; and finally if there is no such power we shall not attain to the indubitable knowledge of the objects of this universe which our very physical senses demand of us to have. If there is no such power we shall have no certainty of any knowledge; we are left between conflicts without any hope of issue or solution.

But already in some of the ancient records of Knowledge such as the Veda and the Upanishad we find the description of the Supreme Reality which shows that the seers of those ages had ascended to a plane of

knowledge where these opposing experiences meet and fuse so as to give a synthetic and integral knowledge. In fact in India this synthetic knowledge has always remained and even when afterwards in the Age of Reason different schools of philosophy came into existence each with its own exclusive truth, efforts were made from time to time to recombine the divided aspects into some image of the old catholicity and unity. But for the past several centuries after the age of the *Acharyas* there has come about a stagnancy both in spiritual as well as philosophical fields. The exclusive philosophies of the *Acharyas* gave rise to endless controversy and in the absence of any higher synthetic experience no further development could take place. This stagnancy represents the inner crisis of the spirit of India; for it shows that when a decisive stage was reached when different spiritual experiences coming in a direct conflict showed the necessity of rising to a still higher place of experience where the conflict could be resolved, no such effort came forth.

This crisis still continues to a large extent because although we find now developments in the spiritual and philosophical fields, the

stagnancy of the past seems to have taken such deep roots that they have not been sufficiently understood or even noticed by the general philosophical and spiritual mind of the nation.

Nevertheless a leap has been taken and a higher ascent has been made. And the complete result of this supreme effort we find in Sri Aurobindo's revelation of the existence and effective operation of the Supermind. And if we study this concept of the Supermind we find in it the answer to all our questions that have arisen in the course of our enquiry.

In the first place, we find that on the supramental plane the different and opposing truths arrived at by different spiritual experiences are in fact not opposed to each other but are complementary aspects of the Supreme Infinite Being; they are not illusory but real determinations of the Infinite; in the supramental consciousness these aspects meet and fuse into each other. The supermind sees these truths of the Infinite, and for the creation and as a basis of creation puts them forth. But this determination does not involve the division of perfection: "An independent completeness of identity," says Sri Aurobindo,

“with each of the primal aspects and powers — not narrowing as in the mind into a sole engrossing experience seeming to be final and integral, for that would be incompatible with the realisation of the unity of all aspects and powers of existence — is a capacity inherent in consciousness in the Infinite....But the Supermind keeps always and in every status or condition the spiritual realisation of the Unity of all.”

This explains also why perfection is experienced in any given aspect of the Infinite. In fact we may suppose that all sense of perfection of any plane of experience is due to the indivisibility of the original Perfection of the Infinite. In all determinations the Infinite remains undivided. But at the same time it becomes clear that absorption in any single experience is a sign of limitation and has to be explained in terms of the operation of the dividing act of the Mind.

There are two aspects of the Supermind which render its knowledge of the Infinite and the universe infallible. The first is the fact of its being the self-awareness of the Infinite; the second is its being the power of self-

determination which is inherent in that self-awareness. Now when we speak of the self-determining power of the Infinite it should be clear to us that the Reason which still borrows the contents of its ideas by analogy from the facts of sense-experience commits a fallacy when it puts the Infinite and determination in irreconcilable opposition to each other. To it determination is a division which breaks the whole and thus destroys the perfection of the whole; to it therefore determination of the whole is a self-contradictory idea and therefore something that cannot be; and if the facts of experience compel it to regard the fact of determination as something ultimate, it takes resort to 'somehow' and 'inexplicability'. To the Supermind, on the contrary, determination is not a division, but a self-manifestation of the Infinite; necessarily therefore determinations pre-exist in the Infinite and to create, that is to say, manifest them, the Infinite has not to be broken; determinations are the eternal truths of the Infinite and the Supermind brings them forth and arranges them. The determination of the Infinite therefore is not to the supramental consciousness a mystery or an inexplicable

phenomenon but a fact of direct knowledge and execution. The phenomenon is not mysterious, it is the Reality itself which is to our limited mind a Mystery. It is this mystery which Reason has to accept, not the unaccountability of the phenomenon of the Infinite creating teeming finites *ad infinitum*. To the supramental consciousness the Supreme is not a rigid Indeterminable, an all-negating Absolute. And this the Supermind knows because it is itself the self-awareness of the Infinite and because it is itself the self-determining power of the Infinite.

This being so we can now be certain of what this universe is; we can be certain that the universe is not ultimately an illusion but a real self-determination of the Infinite; it is, in other words, an objective representation of Reality to itself effected by the instrumentality of the Supermind which mediates as what Sri Aurobindo calls the Real-Idea between the Infinite and the objective self-representation. For what is contained in the Infinite is simultaneously conceived, that is to say, idealised subjectively and realised, brought forth objectively by the Supermind. Therefore nothing in the universe is a mere idea without

any substance behind it; so not only subjective idealism but also the theory which reduces our world-experience to certain universal mental categories which are regarded as having no correspondence with the objects, that is to say, the substance of the objects, is fallacious. For ultimately the subjective and the objective are only the two sides of a single vision, and there is therefore in the supramental cognition a complete correspondence between them. The conflict therefore between subjectivism and objectivism also is fallacious.

On the supramental plane we come to know with certainty the original relation of the three terms of existence, the Infinite, the universe and the individual. It becomes certain here that the individual is at once identical in essence with the Infinite and yet in manifestation a concentration of the Supreme Consciousness of the Infinite; it is thus from the point of knowledge a self-objectivisation of the Infinite so that the Infinite can look at itself from the point of view of the individual. In this relation we find the primary conditions of complete knowledge entirely fulfilled: here there is a complete mutuality and identity of the terms of knowledge. The individual can

know the Infinite for it is in fact one with the Infinite, the Object-in-itself; but this identity does not abolish the differentiation of the individual so that the two terms can be known subjectively and objectively on the basis of identity. And the same relation holds true of the individual and the universe, the subject and the object. Here again the subject and the object are in essence identical with the infinite, and therefore the subject can know the essence of the object, the object-in-itself; moreover, the object is seen as an objective differentiation proceeding from the subject itself; and therefore it is possible for the subject to throw, to project itself into the object and know the essentiality, the peculiarity, the very differentia of the differentiation of the object from the subject and yet without losing its own subjectivity, the essentiality, the peculiarity, the very differentia of the subject's differentiation from the object.

This then is the possibility when the movement of knowledge reaches the summit of being and experience. And having reached this summit it is again possible to come down and convert our lower instruments of knowledge and to fulfill them by uniting them

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with their corresponding higher terms. Thus the spiritual knowledge can be heightened into the supramental; the reason can be converted into a form of the self-luminous intuitional knowledge; and our physical senses too can be so converted as to the physical means of supramental knowledge.

CAUSALITY, CHANGE AND TIME

“The tree does not explain the seed, nor the seed the tree; cosmos explains both and God explains the cosmos.”

Sri Aurobindo

If we are to mean by Causality the necessary, as opposed to contingent, relation between events, so as to explain the phenomenon of change, then indeed such relation is not evident to our perceptual cognition. For what we perceive is merely the succession of constantly changing events, but nowhere any necessity or power necessitating change. On the contrary, there is visible to us the phenomenon of infinite variation which cannot be explained by any law of necessity. It is true, however, that by close observation we do not perceive certain uniformities, that is to say, certain broad repetitions of sequences of events; but there again, they are not entirely uncontradicted, and since what we perceive belongs either to the present or to the past but

never to the future, and since it is impossible to observe all the instances of uniformities, no causal law of necessity can be established.

It has, however, been argued that the proof of Causality has not to be sought for in our sense-experience or observation of the world. For it is contended that Causality is not an idea constructed or derived from experience but an innate or an *a priori* category of Pure Reason. Reason, it is thought, is so constituted that it cannot conceive of an event except in the framework of Causality, that is to say, except as related to another by which it is determined and therefore from which it necessarily follows. To Reason, therefore, it is held, Causality is an undeniable and self-evident concept.

And yet, pursuing this line of thought, it has been concluded that Causality, when reflected upon, turns out to be unintelligible, unreal and impossible. It has been argued that Causality is a rational attempt to show the necessity of the occurrence of an event or change; but since everything in the world which we may regard as a cause of another is itself an event, we are led to postulate a Cause

or Determiner, transcendent, self-existent and free from any necessity. For if we do not postulate a Free Cause, it is argued, we are led to infinite regress resulting in failure to show the necessity of the event in question and thus proving the absurdity of the idea of Causality. But on the other hand, so the argument continues, if there is a Free Cause, there will be a beginning of the causal series to being which there will be a first act unpreceded by any previous act or necessity. And this, it is held, contradicts the idea of Causality according to which there is always a previous necessity to cause an event. It is concluded therefore that Causality is an antimony implying at once the necessity and impossibility of the beginning of the causal series, a self-contradiction, unintelligible and therefore something that cannot be.

Shall we then return to the primary perceptual certainty of the phenomenon of Change and Becoming? But it has been held that Change too is as much ridden with self-contradiction as Causality. It has been argued that the very conception of change implies the existence of a permanent to which change belongs; for if we do not postulate a

Permanent Substance, it is argued, we would be obliged to say that there is nothing which changes and thus prove the absurdity of the idea of change. But, on the other hand, if there is a Permanent Substance, so the argument continues, change must belong to it since otherwise it would fall outside it and thus be unreal. But if it belongs to the Permanent Substance, the latter will be affected by change and thus cease to be permanent. It is concluded, therefore, that Change is an antinomy implying at once the necessity and impossibility of a Permanent Substance, a self-contradiction, unintelligible and therefore something that cannot be.

But then how are we to account for the phenomenon of change? For we have on the one hand, a Permanent Substance and on the other, the phenomenon of change which cannot be and yet which we perceive and experience. It has been declared that the problem is insoluble and therefore it is wise not to raise it.

But this insolubility does not satisfy the demand of our Reason for explanation and solution. Perhaps there is somewhere, we

begin to think, some incompleteness of experience or fallacy in the argument which pronounces the phenomenon of change as self-contradictory or illusory. Perhaps there is some missing link between that Absolute and Infinite Permanent, on the one hand and this relative world of change, on the other. Perhaps there is no fundamental contradiction in the coexistence of the Infinite which is the Permanent and the Change. It may indeed be argued that the Permanent cannot be a fixed form which ceases to be when afflicted with change; it must, on the contrary, be some essence which remains what it is always and eternally without any form or in any number of forms, even as sweetness, for instance, remains the same in all the various forms of sweet things or even as clay is the same whether it assumes the form of a toy or a jar or any other form or none at all. If it is merely formless, no form could ever come into existence — for there is no other reality from which it could derive its existence; on the other hand, it is not impossible for the Infinite to have a power of self-formation in infinite names and forms — nay, on the contrary, it must have this power since the denial of this power

would contradict the perfection of the Infinite. We arrive then at the idea of Reality as a permanent and perfect essence which is at the same time an omnipotent power of self-formation and realisation of infinite potentiality of inherent names and forms which it may or may not assume and yet remain what it is, — a paradox, but is it a self-contradiction? For does potentiality not presuppose, not any incapacity or want, but instead a capacity or a power of realising what is already and essentially is? What is not there is merely the actualisation of essence in manifestation; but the perfection of the essence does not depend upon its manifestation; it is already there eternally and permanently. Manifestation is only a free exercise of the omnipotent power of realising in Time what is already and essentially is eternally and timelessly.

It is then by the recognition of the omnipotent Power, one with and inherent in the Infinite, as a link between the essence and the phenomenon of change that we are able to arrive at a solution of the problem. For then we see that change is a process of self-realisation of the infinite potentialities inherent

in the essential Reality. It proceeds from Reality and effects real formations without affecting the eternal and permanent essence of the Being. It is thus not an illusory or a non-existent superimposition on the eternally inactive Absolute but an effective and real process effected by the inherent power of the Absolute itself.

In effect, we have arrived at the idea of Reality as at once a self-existent Being and a Free Causal Will or Power capable of projecting and realising its own potential names and forms. But can we, it may be asked, accord our acceptance to this idea which implies the reality of causality – causality which has been declared, as we have seen, to be an insoluble antinomy? But it may be that this antinomy arises not because of any inherent inadequacies in the idea of causality but because of some confusion or fallacy in the argument. It may indeed be admitted that the causal series does imply a Free Cause; but it may also be pointed out that if the existence of the Free Cause is taken to imply a temporal beginning of the causal series we have to declare that to be impossible. For since the idea of beginning is valid only in Time, the idea of

the beginning of the temporal or causal series is unthinkable. But if the Free Cause is transcendental and therefore Timeless, is it not reasonable to suppose that its causal activity also is timeless? For that which causes the temporal and causal series cannot itself be a temporal event, having a beginning at some date or moment. It must be a Timeless act of the Infinite. This would mean that there is between the Timeless Eternal and the Time-Eternity an intervening Timeless Will causing timelessly a beginningless temporal and causal series. It is then the recognition of this intermediate Timeless Will which enables us to solve the antinomy of causality. For in that will and act we have the sufficient explanation of the necessity of the causal series without involving us into the impossible situation of supposing a beginning of the temporal or causal series. We can then be certain that the universal causal relations which our reason is obliged to suppose in the sequences of events are not imaginary constructions having no corresponding truth in the objective universe; for we see now that Causality is a fundamental character of the Truth of existence and that our mental

category is a reflection of that objective Truth – the subjective idea corresponding to the objective fact. The causal laws are, we might say, that Timeless Will working in different conditions and circumstances, the manifestations of that original Law of creation.

But what about the phenomenon of infinite variation? Does this phenomenon, it may be asked, not contradict the operation of the causal law? Our reply is that this phenomenon does not contradict our position: for our supposition is that the Reality to which the Timeless Will belongs has infinite potentialities and therefore there is nothing impossible in its manifestation of infinite variety. For the omnipotent Will may bring forth and arrange potentialities in some order and uniformity but it may also permit infinite variation of the complex working of the Time-Eternity.

There is, however, still the question of the relation between the Timeless Will and the Time-Eternity which it causes; but we can be certain that since these two are not temporal events they cannot be related in terms of Time. The only way therefore by which we can relate

them is by supposing a simultaneity of the two in the all-powerful Infinite. We have already seen how Reality is simultaneously a self-existent Being and the omnipotent Power; we may now say that the self-existent is the Timeless Eternal which becomes the Time-Eternity through the free exercise of its omnipotent and Timeless causal Will.

But it may be objected that the temporal series, that is to say, the Time-Eternity, which the causal will is shown here to be causing is so ridden with self-contradiction that it is unintelligible, unreal and impossible. For it has been argued that the temporal series is a succession of diverse elements needing a further reconciliation by a further relation, and so on *ad infinitum*. It is concluded therefore that Time is an antinomy implying at once the necessity and impossibility of succession, a self-contradiction, unintelligible and therefore something that cannot be.

Now it may be admitted that there is undoubtedly the successive movement implying a diversity of moments, for otherwise there would be no phenomenon of change and development. But just as all forms and names

are potentially present in the Infinite and therefore reconciled with each other through their common basis in the Infinite, even so the diversity which succession implies may be regarded as inherent in the Infinite and therefore reconciled with each other through the same common basis.

This would mean that the Infinite is at once the basis of Time and Time itself, an infinite extension by self-projection and an eternal successive movement by self-observation; for if it is not an extension, it cannot be the basis serving as the common support of successive moments: and this extension presupposes a power of self-projection on the part of the omnipotent Infinite. Again, if it is not successive movements the latter would be alien and therefore unrelated to it; and this successive movement presupposes a power of successive self-observation. But there is no impossibility in the Infinite having this double power. For neither self-projection nor self-observation involves any unbridgeable division in the Infinite. For if there were such division we can arrive at it by analysis of the presented Time at irreducible and indivisible units of moment.

But what we find on the contrary is that any given unit of Time is infinitely divisible; and this means that at the bottom of the presented Time, there is something which always remains undivided. In fact, we can even go farther and say that since there is infinite, divisibility there is in reality no such thing as a process of division which can break the given object into two unbridgeable units. What we call division is then merely demarcation which delimits but does not cut. We may then conclude that the infinite Time-Extension and successive Time-Eternity imply no impossible division in the Infinite but they are only a process of self-delimitation which can justifiably be attributed to the omnipotent power of the Infinite. Indeed, an omnipotent Will exercising freely its power of self-limitation is the secret of all creation and causality.

APPENDIX

Timeless and Spaceless Reality and Space and Time

An extract from Sri Aurobindo's "*The Life Divine*".

The original status is that of the Reality timeless and spaceless; Space and Time would be the same Reality self-extended to contain the deployment of what was within it. The difference would be, as in all the other oppositions, the Spirit looking at itself in essence and principle of being and the same Spirit looking at itself in the dynamism of its essence and principle. Space and Time are our names for this self-extension of the one Reality. We are apt to see Space as a static extension in which all things stand or move together in a fixed order; we see Time as a mobile extension which is measured by movement and event: Space then would be Brahman in self-extended status; Time would be Brahman in self-extended movement. But

this may be only a first view and inaccurate: Space may be really a constant mobile, the constancy and the persistent time-relation of things in it creating the sense of stability of Space, the mobility creating the sense of time-movement in stable Space. Or, again, Space would be Brahman extended for the holding together of forms and objects; Time would be Brahman self-extended for the deployment of the movement of self-power carrying forms and objects; the two would then be a dual aspect of one and the same self-extension of the cosmic Eternal.

A purely physical Space might be regarded as in itself a property of Matter; but Matter is a creation of Energy in movement. Space therefore in the material world could be either a fundamental self-extension of material Energy or its self-formed existence field, its representation of the Inconscient Infinity in which it is acting, a figure in which it accommodates the formulas and movements of its own action and self-creation. Time would be itself the course of that movement or else an impression created by it, an impression of something that presents itself to us a regularly successive in its appearance, — a division or a

continuum upholding the continuity of movement and yet marking off its successions, — because the movement itself is regularly successive. Or else Time could be a dimension of Space necessary for the complete action of the Energy, but not understood by us as such because it is seen by our conscious subjectivity as something itself subjective, felt by our mind, not perceived by our senses, and therefore not recognised as a dimension of space which has to us the appearance of a sense-created or sense-perceived objective extension.

In any case, if Spirit is the fundamental reality, Time and Space must either be conceptive conditions under which the Spirit sees its own movement of energy or else they must be fundamental conditions of the Spirit itself which assume a different appearance or status according to the status of consciousness in which they manifest. In other words there is a different Time and Space for each status of our consciousness and even different movements of Time and Space within each status; but all would be renderings of a fundamental spiritual reality of Time-Space. In fact, when we go behind physical space, we become aware of an extension on which

all this movement is based and this extension is spiritual and not material; it is Self or Spirit containing all action of its own Energy. This origin or basic reality of Space begins to become apparent when we draw back from the physical: for then we become aware of a subjective Space-extension in which mind itself lives and moves and which is other than physical Space-Time, and yet there is an interpenetration; for our mind can move in its own space in such a way as to effectuate a movement also in space of Matter or act upon something distant in space of Matter. In a still deeper condition of consciousness we are aware of a pure spiritual Space; in this awareness Time may no longer seem to exist, because all movement ceases, or, if there is a movement or happening, it can take place independent of any observable Time sequence.

If we go behind Time by a similar inward motion, drawing back from the physical and seeing it without being involved in it, we discover that Time observation and Time movement are relative, but Time itself is real and eternal. Time observation depends not only on the measures used, but on the consciousness and the position of the observer:

moreover, each state of consciousness has a different time relation; Time in Mind consciousness and Mind Space has not the same sense and measure of its movements as in physical Space; it moves there quickly or slowly according to the state of the consciousness. Each state of consciousness has its own Time and yet there can be relations of Time between them; and when we go behind the physical surface, we find several different Time statuses and Time movements co-existent in the same consciousness. This is evident in dream Time where a long sequence of happenings can occur in a period which corresponds to a second or a few seconds of physical Time. There is then a certain relation between different Time statuses but no ascertainable correspondence of measure. It would seem as if Time had no objective reality, but depends on whatever conditions may be established by action of consciousness in its relation to status and motion of being: Time would seem to be purely subjective. But, in fact, Space also would appear by the mutual relation of Mind-Space and Matter-Space to be subjective; in other words, both are the original spiritual extension, but it is rendered

by mind in its purity into a subjective mind-field and by sense-mind into an objective field of sense-perception. Subjectivity and objectivity are only two sides of one consciousness, and the cardinal fact is that any given Time or Space or any given Time-Space as a whole is a status of being in which there is a movement of the consciousness and force of the being, a movement that creates or manifests events and happenings, it is the relation of the consciousness that sees and the force that formulates the happenings, a relation inherent in the status, which determines the sense of Time and creates our awareness of Time-movement, Time-relation, Time-measure. In its fundamental truth the original status of Time behind all its variations is nothing else than the eternity of the Eternal, just as the fundamental truth of Space, the original sense of its reality, is the infinity of the Infinite.

The Being can have three different states of its consciousness with regard to its own eternity. The first is that in which there is the immobile status of the Self in its essential existence, self-absorbed or self-conscious, but in either case without development of consciousness in movement or happening; this

is what we distinguish as its timeless eternity. The second is its whole-consciousness of the successive relations of all things belonging to a destined or an actually proceeding manifestation, in which what we call past, present and future stand together as if in a map or settled or very much as an artist or painter or architect might hold design all the detail of his work viewed as a whole, intended or reviewed in his mind or arranged in a plan for execution; this is the stable status or simultaneous integrality of Time. This seeing of Time is not at all part of our normal awareness of events as they happen, though our view of the past, because it is already known and can be regarded in the whole, may put on something of this character; but we know that this consciousness exists because it is possible in an exceptional state to enter into it and see things from the viewpoint of this simultaneity of Time-vision. The third status is that of a processive movement of Consciousness-Force and its successive working out of what has been seen by it in the static vision of the Eternal; this is the Time movement. But it is in one and the same Eternity that this triple status exists and the movement takes place; there are

not really two eternities, one an eternity of status, another an eternity of movement, but there are different statuses or positions taken by Consciousness with regard to the one Eternity. For it can see the whole Time development from outside or from above the movement; it can take a stable position within the movement and see the before and the after in a fixed, determined or destined succession; or it can take instead a mobile position in the movement, itself move with it from moment to moment and see all that has happened receding back into the past and all that has to happen coming towards it from the future; or else it may concentrate on the moment it occupies and see nothing but what is in that moment and immediately around or behind it. All these positions can be taken by the being of the Infinite in a simultaneous vision or experience. It can see Time from above and inside Time, exceeding it and not within it; it can see the Timeless develop the Time-movement without ceasing to be timeless, it can embrace the whole movement in a static and a dynamic vision and put out at the same time something of itself into the moment-vision. This simultaneity may seem to the finite

conscious-ness tied to the moment-vision a magic of the Infinite, a magic of Maya; to its own way of perception which needs to limit, to envisage one status only at a time in order to harmonise, it would give a sense of confused and inconsistent unreality. But to an infinite consciousness such an integral simultaneity of vision and experience would be perfectly logical and consistent; all could be elements of a whole-vision capable of being closely related together in a harmonious arrangement, a multiplicity of view bringing out the unity of the thing seen, a diverse presentation of concomitant aspects of the One Reality.

If there can this simultaneous multiplicity of self-presentation of one Reality, we see that there is no impossibility in the **co-existence** of a Timeless Eternal and a Time Eternity. It would be the same Eternity viewed by a dual self-awareness and there could be no opposition between them; it would be a correlation of two powers of the self-awareness of the infinite and eternal Reality, – a power of status and non-manifestation, a power of self-effecting action and movement and manifestation. Their simultaneity, however contradictory and difficult to

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reconcile it might seem to our finite surface seeing, would be intrinsic and normal to the Maya or eternal self-knowledge and all-knowledge of Brahman, the eternal and infinite knowledge and wisdom-power of the Ishwara, the consciousness-force of the self-existent Sachchidananda

Kireet Joshi

Kireet Joshi (b.1931) studied philosophy and law at the Bombay University. He was selected for I.A.S. in 1955 but in 1956 he resigned in order to devote himself to the study and practice of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at Pondicherry. He taught Philosophy and Psychology at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education at Pondicherry and participated in numerous educational experiments under the direct guidance of the Mother.

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