Further Thoughts on the Relation of Buddhism and the Vedanta with Special Reference to the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

Part 4 of 7

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April 1971

For a Consciousness which is completely unconditioned, completely uncircumscribed, or completely full, there is no content whatsoever, but a vast luminousness. This statement is in complete agreement with the essential Realization where one rises above space, time, and law to the root which supports all these; from this, there follows a theory of world construction which will satisfy certain difficulties that we have now to consider.

I recall your attention to the quotation from p. 410 of *The Life Divine* as follows:

> . . . the creations of the absolutely Real should be real and not illusions, and since it is the One Existence, they must be self-creations, forms of a manifestation of the Eternal, not forms of Nothing [created] erected out of the original Void,—whether a void [of] being or a void [of] consciousness,—by Maya.[1]

The point made here strikes one as being highly impressive at first sight; but let us consider, would the "absolutely Real," that which is unrestricted in every sense, be incapable of a process of self-negation or of a partial self-restriction? If we do not place a restriction upon the resources of absoluteness by saying that it is incapable of partial self-negation or partial self-blanking-out, then we can have a theory of manifestation, emanation, or creation that is compatible with a theory of *maya*, at least in the sense as I have developed it in this series of discourses. But first, let us note the fact that a theory of world manifestation, emanation, or creation, is not necessary for the problem of yoga; all that is required for yoga is a viewpoint that makes the transition more accessible. We, thus, could take the world as it is, as an unexplained fact, and if by its negation we can successfully attain to a Fundamental Realization, the theory that renders that possible is pragmatically justified. And that, I think, is sufficient to justify the theoretical position of the Buddhistic philosophy and of the philosophy of Shankaracharya. However, the inquiring intelligence goes beyond this and seems to require some sort of intelligible explanation as to why and how there is a universe at all. And what here is suggested is this: that by a process of partial self-negation or partial blanking-out of the fullness of Consciousness, which, remember, is a state totally without content and wholly luminous,

[1] Aurobindo Ghose, *The Life Divine*, vol. 28 of *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 458.

then such blanked-out portion becomes the meaning of a content. Where there is relative nothingness or emptiness in the midst of the initial given fullness, there, there is a content for consciousness; there, there is an object before consciousness.

This gives, then, a picture of possible world creation which avoids the difficulty brought out in the quotation from Sri Aurobindo. We are aware of a content only to the extent that full Consciousness is restricted. A manifestation is not an *addition*, then, to an original state of non-manifestation, to an original state of pure, unrestricted Consciousness, a pure, non-phenomenal consciousness, but it is to be understood as being a *subtraction* from it. We produce a world by negation and we attain Realization by a negation of that negation. This is the technique suggested. I'm not excluding the possibility of other techniques, but this is the technique with which I am familiar. *Parabrahm*, or the All, or the One, or that ultimate Absolute, the Infinite, is all-in-all, is completely conscious in the state of non-manifestation, but produces a manifestation by self-restriction, by a partial self-negation, thereby producing the effect of a content in consciousness, an object before consciousness. The manifestation is thus by subtraction and division, not by addition and multiplication. This is the radical, Copernican shift which I, herewith, present as based upon the Realizations with which I am familiar. The detail of process is not what I am concerned with now; I am concerned with only the broad, basic principles of a manifestation, emanation, or creation, however it may be viewed, and that in turn defines the essential process of the yoga.

Now, the problem that was brought up by Aurobindo in connection with the quotation I made, namely, " . . . the creations of the absolutely Real should be real and not illusions . . . " is, I think, the heart of his argument against illusionism or the *Mayavada*. He found, then, what appeared to be a contradiction in this theory; but did he avoid contradictions in the positive construction he left with us? I think we'll find that the difficulty reappears in that which he positively advanced; for, consistent with the position of Shankaracharya, he maintained there is a distinction between knowledge and ignorance, or *Vidya* and *avidya*; that the state of the original source of all, the Absolute, is one of an initial knowledge, a state of complete knowing; and, that in the manifestation this knowledge is eclipsed and we have the condition of *avidya* or ignorance. Now, I'd like to quote this same sentence using these different conceptions: the creations of the absolute Knowledge should be knowledge and not ignorance. It seems to me that the same logical difficulty arises here that did arise in connection with the discussion of illusionism.

Secondly, Aurobindo affirms that there is a Divine and an undivine; and again, the same problem arises, for we can put these terms into the original phrase and we'd have this statement: the creations of the absolutely Divine should be divine and not undivine. I see no logical difference, here, between the problem of the *Mayavada* and the problem of the reconciliation of ignorance coming out of Knowledge and of the undivine coming out of the Divine. We could state it as a formula that: the creations of *x* should be like *x* and not the negations of *x*.

In our discussion so far we have dealt, very definitely, with logical considerations; and this brings up the question, just what is the importance of logic in connection with the problem of the ultimate nature of being and with the problem of yoga? Aurobindo has formulated himself on this subject in various ways. There is scattered through his writings a number of statements which are quite pejorative with respect to logic; but, on the other

hand, as one peruses his writings, one feels that here is a man who writes in terms that are well organized, that are evidently quite logical in form and do not make use of conceptions that are quite irrational. And for that reason, Aurobindo writes in a form that is in high degree intelligible. He practices, therefore, I would say, very fine discursive methodology and for that reason is a very impressive writer. But, in spite of the fact of this practice, there are those statements of his which are pejorative with respect to logic, and I will quote one of them for the purpose of presenting the problem that is here involved.

If we turn to the *Letters of Sri Aurobindo*, second series put out by Sri Aurobindo Circle, Bombay, 1949, and on p. 296 consider the following excerpt from a letter which was written to one of the *sadhakas*. I'll read the letter as a whole so that the context of the discussion will be brought fully before us. The heading is "Reason and Faith."

> But why on earth does your despairing friend want everybody to agree with him and follow his own preferred line of conduct or belief? That is the never-realised dream of the politician, or realised only by the violent compression of the human mind and life, which is the latest feat of the man of action. The "incarnate" Gods—Gurus and spiritual men of whom he so bitterly complains—are more modest in their hopes and are satisfied with a handful or, if you like, an Ashramful of disciples, and even these they don't ask for, but they come, they come. So are they not—these denounced "incarnates"—nearer to reason and wisdom than the political leaders?—unless of course one of them makes the mistake of founding a universal religion, but that is not our case. Moreover, he upbraids you for losing your reason in blind faith. But what is his own view of things except a reasoned faith? You believe according to your faith, which is quite natural, he believes according to his opinion, which is natural also, but no better, so far as the likelihood of getting at the true truth of things is in question. His opinion is according to his reason. So are the opinions of his political opponents according to their reason, yet they affirm the very opposite idea to his. How is reasoning to show which is right? The opposite parties can argue till they are blue in the face—they won't be anywhere nearer a decision. In the end he prevails who has the greater force or whom the trend of things favours. But who can look at the world as it is and say that the trend of things is always (or ever) according to right reason—whatever this thing called right reason may be? As a matter of fact there is no universal infallible reason which can decide and be the umpire between conflicting opinions; there is only my reason, your reason, X's reason, Y's reason, multiplied up to the discordant innumerable. Each reasons according to his view of things, his opinion, that is, his mental constitution and mental preference. So what is the use of running down faith which after all gives something to hold on to amidst the contradictions of an enigmatic universe? If one can get at a knowledge that knows, it is another matter; but so long as we have only an ignorance that argues,—well, there is a place still left for faith,—even faith may be a glint from the knowledge that knows, however far off, and meanwhile there is not the slightest doubt that it helps to get things done. There's a bit

> of reasoning for you!—just like all other reasoning too, convincing to the convinced, but not to the unconvincible, that is, to those who don't accept the ground upon which the reasoning dances. Logic, after all, is only a measured dance of the mind, nothing else.[2]

As a critique of the ideational processes of the politician, and, I may add, the salesman, the promoter, and the confidence man, I would agree with this stricture quite thoroughly. But what I disagree with is the calling of those ideational processes *logic*. On the contrary, I think we're quite justified in saying that it is the negation of logic, namely, sophistry. And here we must face the problem of determining what logic truly is, or at least as it is to be understood in all of my discourses.

Just as truth has a shadow which is falsity, so also logic has a shadow which is variously known as "sophism" and "paralogism." These two are as follows in definition: a sophism is an intentionally deceptive syllogism, and it has played a part in the emergence of true reasoning from out a mass of mixed false and true reasoning. And throughout the centuries, since the time of Socrates, a great deal of work has been done for the emergence of a true way of thinking. Sophisms do have some use and C.S. Peirce makes this point:

> Although logic cannot concern itself with reasonings intended to *deceive*, as such, yet it has the nearest interests with pretended arguments intended to 'wind up' an antagonist so that he does not know how to reply to them, and in the early days of the science they, no doubt, contributed much to the development of it. They are occasionally useful still. To be so, the less they deceive, while the more unanswerable they seem, the better.[3]

This would imply, as a discipline in differentiating true reasoning from false reasoning, the study of sophisms is a value.

Now a paralogism differs from a sophism in that a paralogism is, "A reasoning, especially a syllogistic reasoning, which is logically faulty and deceives the reasoner himself."[4] An enormous amount of work has been done since the time of Socrates to differentiate true reasoning from false reasoning. Much of the effort of Plato was directed in this direction and the result in that day was, finally, the formal logic of Aristotle which is variously known as Aristotelian or formal logic; it was the logic of the syllogism. Up through the days of the Scholastics an enormous amount of work was applied to the differentiation between false logic and true logic. And in our own day, logic has gone through a development of a very advanced sort extending it far beyond the limits of the syllogism. In fact, it involves a great deal more in what is now known as "symbolic logic." So, if instead of logic we substitute in the quotation from Aurobindo the terms *sophism* and *paralogism*, I agree with him fully. But I disagree completely when he

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[2] Aurobindo Ghose, *Letters on Yoga*, vol. 22 in *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 164-165.

[3] James Mark Baldwin, ed., *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan Co., 1911), 556.

[4] Ibid., 259

attaches these effects to the value which we call logic. This is a matter of serious moment.

In the quotation from Sri Aurobindo, he specifically referred to the mental processes of the politician, and I think we might be justified in taking time to consider what these processes are. There is a quotation from Raymond Moley's book, *27 Masters of Politics* that brings this into clearer light. This is a process of thinking that does not serve the ends of truth, though it can serve very well the ends of power. I shall not refer to the specific name of the person that the following question was based upon, but I'll substitute the letter X and quote as follows:

> I have been asked many times by those who know of my long association with X: "Is he"—or was he—"sincere?"
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> When time permitted, I always answered that sincerity, as a quality known to the generality of people, is not fairly applicable to a politician. Or to put it another way, in a category of virtues appropriate to a politician, sincerity occupies a less exalted place than it does among the qualities of a novelist, a teacher or a scientist. And that is in no way damning the politician, for he may exalt virtues such as kindness, understanding and public service far beyond those who sniff at his lack of sincerity.
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> Perhaps a fairly simple explanation of my meaning can be conveyed by a classical parable written in Plato's *Republic*.
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> A character in that dialogue describes an underground cave with its mouth open toward the light and, within, a wall facing the light. Inside the cave, and looking toward the wall, are human beings chained so that they cannot turn. From childhood they have seen only the wall and the reflections cast thereupon.
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> Behind them and toward the mouth of the cave is a fire. Between the imprisoned human beings and the fire men pass with "statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials."
>
> The objects thus carried are reflected upon the wall—the fire supplies the light. The human beings see the shadows, never the substance. And by manipulation of the objects, those who carry them determine what the enchained human beings conceive to be the reality—the truth.
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> Roughly translated into the terms of political behavior, the human beings are the public. The carriers of the objects are the politicians, considering not the substance of what they carry but the effect produced upon those who see the shadows.
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> The politician creates illusions. His words must be selected not because they are the most forceful or descriptive in conveying exact facts and situations, but because they will produce in the minds of hearers or readers the reaction desired by the speaker or writer. What therefore, does sincerity, as we talk this virtue to our children, have to do with the calculations of a politician?

> Ultimately, the considerations of a politician are not based upon truth or fact; they are based upon what the public will conceive to be truth or fact.
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> This produces what is called a "political mind." It is an adaptation enforced by the necessities of environment and survival, just as is the fur of a polar bear or the coloration of a ground-hog. A sort of natural selection operates in the political environment which promotes the survival and success of minds capable of what some may call dissimulation and others call insincerity.
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> The classical definition of a political mind has been provided by Bernard Hart in his great work on psychology. He said:
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> "When a party politician is called upon to consider a new measure, his verdict is largely determined by certain constant systems of ideas and trends of thought, constituting what is generally known as 'party bias.' We should describe these systems in our newly acquired terminology as his 'political complex.' The complex causes him to take up an attitude toward the proposed measure which is quite independent of any absolute merits which the latter may possess. If we argue with our politician, we shall find that the complex will reinforce in his mind those arguments which support the view of his party, while it will infallibly prevent him from realizing the force of the arguments propounded by the opposite side. Now, it should be observed that the individual himself is probably quite unaware of this mechanism in his mind. He fondly imagines that his opinion is formed solely by the logical pros and cons of the measure before him. We see, in fact, that not only is his thinking determined by a complex of whose action he is unconscious, but that he believes his thoughts to be the result of other causes which are in reality insufficient and illusory. This latter process of self-deception, in which the individual conceals the real foundation of his thought by a series of adventitious props, is termed 'rationalization.'"

And Moley goes on to say:

> If this be shocking to those unacquainted with the life of politics I hasten to assure them that the public has developed immunities which measurably serve as a sort of protection.
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> I realize that X himself would and Mrs. X probably will deny the foregoing evaluation. That, however, would be a logical extension of my argument. For no real politician would wish his words and judgments to be known as political. To eschew political motives is the first rule of politics.
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> Frederick the Great wrote a discourse refuting Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Someone said that Machiavelli, had he been alive, would have heartily approved Frederick's action in writing the book, because a first consideration in a Prince must be to repudiate the methods by which he actually rules.

> To quarrel with this interpretation of a politician, his habits of mind and his motives is to quarrel with human life, and, I may add, with politics as we know it. This suffices to explain the contrast between X's words and actions and the verities and results written in the record.[5]

Among the masters of politics, listed in Raymond Moley's book, there is one known as Charley Michelson, who, while he never occupied office nor ran for public office, was a power behind the scenes. He had the skill to write political speeches which other politicians read before the public, and he could write with equal facility either side of a political argument. The argument that he wrote had nothing to do with his own beliefs or convictions; it was merely political art in which he had a certain skill. In fact, he was hired by his party to destroy the reputation of a very noble man who at that time was president of the United States; and, he so far succeeded, that the reputation of that man suffered for many years in the public value. Fortunately, in the end, it was found that this valuation was false by the general public and some effort was made to make up to him for the great injury done to him; but, this is politics.

And, here I would like to say that from my own personal point of view as to code, since I value truth first among the virtues, I cannot but conceive of men whose mental processes are of this sort as among the most immoral of men. They do not stand on any higher level than that of the embezzler who can cleverly manipulate his books so that his theft cannot be discovered or can be discovered only with difficulty. It is a mark of our times that we judge the misuse of money more seriously than we do the misuse of truth and that mark is, in fact, an indictment. I submit that the misuse of truth is far more immoral than the misuse of money—trust.

What is implied in that which has been said so far is simply this: that there is a shadowy side of the intellective process as well as a luminous side—two wings, as it were, of the total process of mentation. The shadowy side would consist of sophism and paralogism, whereas the bright side would consist of logic, science, and philosophy. In the bright side the governing modulus is the search for truth, or, if truth be already known, the manifestation of truth insofar as that is possible within the limits of conceptual cognition.

Let us now consider in what true logic consists. It divides into three main divisions: one is deductive logic, of which the formal logic of Aristotle is the best known, but to this must be added the various principles that are to be found in symbolic logic which lies at the base of all mathematical thinking; there is second, that which is known as "inductive logic," the process employed by the science of our day; and, finally, epistemological logic, of which the triadic dialectic of Hegel is the outstanding example, but is involved in the *Critique of Pure Reason* of Immanuel Kant in a fundamental sense.

Now, considering first formal or deductive logic, it starts with some universal and from that derives conclusions that descend to a level of a more restricted extension or intention. It is, thus, a rigorous process and is the reason why the results of mathematics are so highly determinant and reliable.

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[5] Raymond Moley, *27 Masters of Politics* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1949), 42-44.

In contrast to that, in the process of inductive logic, the original material is derived from experience, which, in the beginning, is essentially particular and from this there is the effort to arise to a position of some sort of universalization. But the universal proposition or law which the scientist is seeking is not itself an originally known; we are inferring it from the elements of well-established experience in the form either of general observation or of laboratory experimentation. A body of material may be derived in this way and shows evidence of certain uniformities in nature. Then a process of the mind which is extra-logical essentially is applied to the invention of some universal postulate which more or less successfully integrates the particulars into an hypothesis, theory, or, if well-established, into the form of what is called in the scientific world a law; the latter, however, being not truly a known law but rather a well established hypothesis. When once such a universal statement as the postulate or hypothesis is established, then from it conclusions can be drawn, and, in general, these conclusions can suggest future experiments that might lead to certain predicted results or future observations as in the case of astronomy where certain consequences could be determined by general astronomic observation. If the predicted observation is verified in actual fact, then the conclusion is drawn that a strong presumption is established that the hypothesis is correct. If the hypothesis serves in this way for a protracted interval of time and does not fail, then there is a tendency to call it a law, although, as I pointed out, this is only a well-established hypothesis. This particular method involves a degree of uncertainty, and, in general, we may say that postulates are only heuristic principles and not definitely known facts or definitely known principles. They serve us practically and that is their main purpose.

Now, here I might introduce as a sort of footnote, a contrast with this that's to be found in the methods of those who wrote *The Mahatma Letters*. I direct your attention to the following quotation to be found in *The Mahatma Letters* on p. 52:

> Our philosophy falls under the definition of Hobbes. It is preeminently the science of effects by their causes and of causes by their effects, and since it is also the science of things deduced from first principle, as Bacon defines it, before we admit any such principle we must know it, and have no right to admit even its possibility."[6]

This implies that the methods of research here employed are not by means of postulational science, for, it is asserted that they "…have no right to admit even its possibility." In other words, postulating is asserting a possibility not an expression of a definite knowledge. Thus, there is implied that in this kind of research there is involved a power of cognizing universals directly from which deductions can be made as the implications of a principle.

Now, how can universals be known directly? As should be perfectly clear now, in the light of preceding discussion, universals are not derived from perceptual experience, but only concrete particulars. Secondly, conceptual cognition does not discover universal principle; it can operate when a universal principle is given or assumed, and draw the conclusions, but it cannot give the authority of a direct cognition of a universal principle.

[6] A. T. Barker, ed., *The Mahatma Letters* (Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1923), 52.

There remains, therefore, that only through introceptual cognition can universals be known; and that would imply that the science of those who wrote *The Mahatma Letters* is founded upon the action of this function, which is an action through direct Realization. And this implies that the value of introceptual cognition is not only for the resolutions of the problems of the human being, for the answering of the metaphysical questions of the pilgrim, but also for the determination of the principles upon which the science of causes by their effects and of effects by their causes can be developed—a science that could cover the very fields in which our science works but approached from a very different angle and with a much higher authority.

The third form of logic which I have called epistemological logic operates upon a different principle from that of the other two forms. It is not the deduction of a consequent from an already given universal, or wide extension or intention to a narrower extension or intention, nor is it the inferring of a governing postulate or principle from a collection of data. It rather is based upon a principle that is more or less psychological or epistemological, namely, that it is characteristic of all of our relative cognition that it is dependent upon the principle of contrast. We can know *right* only in contrast to *left*; we can know *good* only in contrast to *evil*; and so on throughout all the dualities. In other words, cognition here is based upon the principle of dualism as fundamental to our whole field of perceptual and conceptual cognition. The principle of the dialectic is this, therefore: that an assertion of any thesis implies the existence of its negation, the antithesis; and, in the Hegelian form, it advances from this to a synthesis that is the integration of the two. But, I have been informed that in the Buddhistic application of this principle there are only two steps, namely, the assertion of a thesis and the assertion of its antithesis, which, striking upon each other, lead to mutual annihilation very much as might be suggested by our conceptions of positive and negative matter in the theories of twentieth century physics. If a particle of positive matter comes into contact with a particle of negative matter, there is a mutual destruction of the two particles as matter so that they become pure radiation. The state of pure radiation, thus, is another state altogether. Thus, when the Buddhistic thesis contacts the antithesis there would be a mutual destruction which leads to a *nirvanic* state of consciousness here viewed as the analogue of the radiant state which negative and positive matter becomes when they meet.