

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

Part 5 of 7

Franklin Merrell-Wolff
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In the discussion that preceded in Part 4, we came upon the problem of logic which was introduced by a certain pejorative statement of Sri Aurobindo which I have challenged at that time. It is important for us to come into an understanding of the real office of logic. And at this point I faced a real embarrassment because so much material flowed into my mind that I have faced some real difficulties of organized presentation. The subject could be elaborated into the space of a whole volume, for we are not now dealing with the proximate material of logic, on which there is general agreement among all those who actually understand the subject of logic, but with the ultimate subject matter on which there are differences of opinion. What I'll suggest, therefore, will be a point of view on this subject which, I will acknowledge, may well be challenged by other points of view, but let us consider it this way.

First of all, we have the view that logic is a principle of relationship between terms that are ideational; in other words, it belongs to a strictly conceptual process. But I would like to suggest this: that logic is not simply important in connection with thought or expression but also with our whole notion of law and order and is not only ideational in its reference. Thus, we do have the idea of an order in nature; we have the idea that nature is somehow governed by law. Perhaps in the last analysis the question may be raised: is there any reason to believe that nature is ordered by law? Could it not be wholly arbitrary and the whole notion of an order in it be a figment of the imagination? My only answer to that would take this form: that the faith or intuition that there is an order in nature exists and is evidence of a possible truth; secondly, that those men of outstanding Realization such as Buddha, Shankara, and Aurobindo, do in their formulations exhibit not only an orderly presentation, a something that is reasonable and conceivable, but they ground this upon the very Realization itself. And in my own case, I direct your attention to that Realization which I called the High Indifference. The principle of most primary importance exemplified here was the principle of *equilibrium*, namely, a principle of balance in all things—that any tendency towards distortion in any direction led to a counter action that corrected the distortion. I think we may properly say that the principle of equilibrium is the master form of which *karma* is the extension in the field of action—every action, therefore, leading to its supplementary action, that which corrects any possible distortion. Here, then, we could extend the principle of logic to be the master form in the field of conceptuality for all notions of law.

Here it is important to point out that in the collection of activities that are logical, the most important, probably, is that of mathematics, and the part of mathematics may be

regarded as simply a more rigorous extension of the principle of logic than that which occurs in general non-mathematical discourse. We may say that whatever else it may be, mathematics is logic and all of the three schools of various interpretations of the nature of mathematics would, to this extent, agree. These are the schools of the *logicists*, who regard mathematics as logic only; the school of the *formalists*, who treat it as a logical process but as meaning essentially nothing; and the school of the *intuitionists*, who would say that it is logic plus certain intuitions, insights, or Vision spelt with a capital 'V'. Therefore, we must include in our total meaning of logic all that is covered by the conception of mathematics.

Now I recall your attention to the quotation from a certain letter of Sri Aurobindo which was given in the fourth part. The statement was made there that the logic was not a universal principle but rather an individual matter—there was your logic, my logic, the logic of A, the logic of X, the logic of Y, and so forth, suggesting that it was purely subjective. And this is a point where I do take serious exception to the position of Sri Aurobindo. Let us take for example the attitude of the individual who is working in the field of mathematics. There, there is a complete indifference as to what the conclusion of a given combination of factors may be. One's intuition or guess might be that a consequent would take such-and-such a form, but if the proof shows that it takes a different form, there is complete acquiescence on the part of the reasoner. There is no such thing as a subjective distaste because the conclusion did not come out as expected in the first place. We have instances of this kind that have been reported in the experience of mathematicians. In an early number of *Monist*, the great French mathematician, Henri Poincaré, tells of his experience in attempting to show that a certain kind of function could exist. And he worked for many days without making any successful progress. Then one evening he had taken exceptional amount of coffee during the evening meal and afterwards when stepping into the cab suddenly the light broke upon him and he saw that the function could not exist. He saw in a glimpse the logic of the situation and worked it out afterwards in short order. There was here no sadness because the conclusion was different from what he originally expected; what he was after, in fact, was the truth of the matter and the fact that the truth was different from expectation was quite irrelevant. This, I will say, is the virtually universal experience of all mathematicians—that they are indifferent to the form the truth may prove to be. Their only concern is with the finding of what that truth may be. They feel successful if they have found the truth even though it contradicts their earlier expectation. Now, what does this imply? It implies simply this: that we're dealing with something that's highly objective. In fact, the one language that we have today that is really universal among all peoples, who have reached the point where they can understand it, is mathematical language. There is one mathematics everywhere. Therefore, it is to be regarded not as something subjective, in the invidious sense, but perhaps the most objective thing we have in the relative field of consciousness. The force of mathematical logic is more objective than the resistance that a rock opposes to one when he tries to pass through it.

When logic itself is the subject matter of a logical discourse, we have what may well be the only example of a purely conceptual process which draws upon no material from the perceptual or introceptual orders. It is for that reason a very difficult kind of thinking, for it has no aid from the images that belong to the perceptual order or the intuitions that belong to the introceptual order. It is very abstract and very formal. But it

is dealing simply with relationships and the terms in relation appear as abstractions, very commonly in the form of letters. To give to this material a value beyond a purely conceptual value, we have to give to the terms that stand in relation a meaning that goes beyond those relations. Most commonly that meaning is to be found in the perceptual order. We have experiences that are perceptual and from them we make conceptual transcriptions which are introduced into our logical systems which, when highly pure, are forms of mathematics. In the same way, when we have transcriptions from an introceptual order, we give to our terms a specific meaning or pointing which then enter into possible logical relationships. This leads to a definite delimitation of the meaning of logic as such; it deals with the problems of relatedness, not with the existence of any substance or of any other immediacy. The importance of a given substance or an immediacy is not in question here; in fact, it is affirmed that logic by itself would be a useless activity if it were not related to something given by immediacy. But, it is important to understand one's tool with which he is working and that is the reason why the study of logic, including the study of pure mathematics, is one of great, in fact, premier importance, for bear in mind, that the whole technological structure of our modern civilization would not be possible without pure mathematics as the base for the applied mathematics which is employed. More than anything else, the placing of a man upon the moon was dependent upon the adequate mathematics for the achievement of that objective.

Now, we must consider what logical process cannot do. It cannot determine, as a pure process, that a tree for instance must be, or that a tree cannot be; and in the same way, it cannot prove that a state of Realization must be or that it cannot be. All that it can do is to say, if so and so, then thus and so; but it cannot determine the original so and so. Put in abstract terms, it is in the form: if a then b —but it cannot determine by itself that a must be or that a cannot be. This delimits it definitely.

Now, I perfectly well realize that many people misuse logic; that they run into paralogsms or sophisms; and that the logic is thus a something that appears to be like logic is often employed to build a case for a preferred objective, and that here the subjective factor does enter into the picture. But my point is this: it's not true logic that is at fault, but other factors such as preference, wishfulness, a feeling attitude that corrupts the clarity of the thinking. True thinking must be cool, dispassionate, and indifferent as to the consequence of the thought, and those who have not reached this point of discipline may very well enter into many errors that could be, from a point of view of inadequate observation, blamed upon the logic. They may claim logic for supporting their position, whereas, in point of fact, it does not. I can understand Aurobindo's impatience with such manifestations.

But now to support the main thesis here I shall make certain other quotations from Aurobindo himself. First, consider this quotation from the same book of letters referred to before, in this case on p. 300, and quoting as follows:

The eternal Reality is neither cold nor dry nor empty; you might as well talk of the midsummer sunlight as cold or the ocean as dry or perfect fullness as empty. Even when you enter into it by elimination of form and everything else, it surges up as a miraculous fullness—that is truly the Pernam; when it is entered affirmatively as well as by negation, there can obviously be no

question of emptiness or dryness! All is there and more than one could ever dream of as the all. That is why one has to object to the intellect thrusting itself in as the *sab-janta* (all-knowing) judge: if it kept to its own limits, there would be no objection to it. But it makes constructions of words and ideas which have no application to the Truth, babbles foolish things in its ignorance and makes its constructions a wall which refuses to let in the Truth that surpasses its own capacities and scope.¹

Now, this is a clarification of Aurobindo's point in his often pejorative treatment of logic. My answer, however, is that it is not logic that is at fault here, but an imperfect understanding of how it may be used—an imperfect understanding of its limits and its powers.

Now, there are other quotations that lead to much higher possibilities which also come from Aurobindo. Turn to p. 424 of *The Life Divine* and begin with the last sentence that starts on that page. The quotation is as follows:

It is held by the reason that truth must be empty of any conflict of contradictions: if so, since the phenomenal universe is or seems to be the contrary of the essential Brahman, it must be unreal; since individual being is the contrary of both transcendence and universality, it must be unreal. But what appear as contradictions to a reason based on the finite may not be contradictions to a vision or a larger reason based on the infinite. What our mind sees as contraries may be to the infinite consciousness not contraries but complementaries: essence and phenomenon of the essence are complementary to each other, not contradictory,—the phenomenon manifests the essence; the finite is a circumstance and not a contradiction of the infinite; the individual is a self-expression of the universal and the transcendent,—it is not a contradiction or something quite other than it, it is the universal concentrated and selective, it is one with the Transcendent in its essence of being and its essence of nature.²

And again, toward the bottom of p. 425, quoting:

To understand truly the world-process of the Infinite and the Time-process of the Eternal, the consciousness must pass beyond this finite reason and the finite sense to a larger reason and spiritual sense in touch with the consciousness of the Infinite and responsive to the logic of the Infinite which is the very logic of being itself and arises inevitably from its self-

¹ Aurobindo Ghose, *Letters on Yoga*, vol. 22 of *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 175.

² Aurobindo Ghose, *The Life Divine*, vol. 18 of *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 474-475.

operation of its own realities, a logic whose sequences are not the steps of thought but the steps of existence.³

Finally, quoting from *The Synthesis of Yoga*, the larger volume, p. 323:

It is not by becoming irrational or infrarational that one can go beyond the ordinary nature into supernature. It should be done by passing through reason to a greater light of superreason. This superreason descends into reason and takes it up into higher levels even while breaking its limitations; reason is not lost, but changes and becomes its own true unlimited self, a coordinating power of the supernature.⁴

These three quotations present a picture to which I would take no exception whatever. But the picture here presented is very different from that impression which we received from the first quotation in which reason was made to appear as a purely subjective phenomenon, as purely representing the position of my reason, your reason, the reason of A, of B, of X, and Y. Thus, it would seem evident that Aurobindo is using the term ‘reason’ and ‘logic’ in different senses in these different quotations. Now, there is no doubt that there is a limited kind of reasoning that is wholly inadequate for that which transcends a narrow, relative understanding. Not only do I agree with this position, but I would independently affirm it.

Now let us consider what we have here. First, let us look at the idea that appears in the first quotation, that the reason requires that there should not be any conflict of contradiction. The law of non-contradiction takes this form: that *a* cannot be both *a* and *not-a* at the same time and in the same sense. Taken in that sense, there can be no reasoning that permits indiscriminate contradiction; but, there may be statements taken in different senses so that in that case *a* could be both *a* and *not-a*, or taken at different times. Here, then, we would have a paradoxical consideration rather than a true contradiction though it might well appear to the uninitiated as a contradiction. Certainly, in the epistemological logic of Hegel, the contradictory enters into the picture as a complementary. We know only by the principle of contrast here in our relative field of knowledge; therefore, any *a*, to be known, must stand in contrast to *not-a* and, therefore, in a certain sense, implies *not-a*. This is familiar with our reasoning. This subject I’ve handled in the discussion of the paradox.⁵

Now, there is no doubt that there is a logic which we might call the “worm view”: the one that is very simple and elemental and is characteristic of most materialistic thinkers. But there is also the “eagle view”: a view which involves great extent of vision; and here the logic may be fully as rigorous as it is on the level of the worm view, but opens up doors totally inaccessible to the worm. If Aurobindo’s pejorative statements

³ Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 475.

⁴ Aurobindo Ghose, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, vol. 21 of *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 269.

⁵ See the audio recordings “Meaning of the Paradox,” parts 1 and 2.

with respect to logic and reason are aimed at the worm view, I cannot disagree with him, but I think he could have made himself somewhat clearer.

Now, there does seem to be a function, faculty, or organ, which might be called the “eye of logic”: a sort of combination of vision and reason which does not operate so much in the sense of reasoning as in the form of an immediate apperception which includes not only terms, which may be placed in relationship, but the total complex of content and relatedness at the same time. This is a function with which I am at least to some degree acquainted. It has been called “mental clairvoyance,” which contrasts with clairvoyance or clairsentience in the ordinary sense in that it does not give a sensuous or a sensuous-like content, does not deal with particulars, but gives an immediate apperception of universals. It is closer to the apperception of a forest than to the perception of a tree. It is like a vision that penetrates deeply within to the heart of things and reveals a profound sense of order. In fact, the emphasis lies on the orderliness of the Ultimate rather than upon the beingness, the specific aspects of the Ultimate. In the delight reported in connection with the Realization of August 7, 1936, and the experience of beauty, and so forth, the experience was not simply that which is characteristic of what we designate as the “aesthesis” or the “aesthetic” in our common parlance; it included this value, but also that other kind of beauty which is from time to time experienced in connection with mathematical thought: what you might call a “logoic” delight and beauty. It was, thus, a synthetic sense of delight and beauty in which, to myself, the logoic aspect carried the greater share of the value, though the aesthetic aspect was also there and valued. The vision involved a sense of an underlying reasonableness in the total order of being with respect to which all the material in the field of our relative knowledge was relatively irrational if not completely so. It meant that in the heart of things, there is an order; that that heart of things can be trusted, and that one can feel at home with it, that above all things, it was not merely arbitrary.

That there is a difference between finite logic and the logic of the infinite is a knowledge that is not confined to men of great Realization like Sri Aurobindo, or Shankaracharya, and the great Buddha; it is also known to mathematicians of our day who do not claim to be men of Realization. Now, here I shall point out certain things that may seem very weird to those who are not initiated in the subject. First, I shall call your attention to a certain statement of Shankaracharya; it is to this effect: that when the *sadhaka* attains to the Realization of Brahman, he not only realizes himself as identical with a *part* of Brahman, but rather that he is, and always has been, and always must be, part and parcel of the Brahman and identical with the *whole* of Brahman. Now, this leads to the implication that the Brahman, also, is present in the individual entity—not simply a part of the Brahman, but the whole of the Brahman. The *sadhaka* who has attained Fundamental Realization has merely become cognizant of an eternal fact which was unavailable, apparently, to his consciousness before. He did not make a new fact, he realized an eternal fact. If, then, the Brahman is present in the individual *sadhaka*, whom we conceive of as a human being, he is also present in any entity whatsoever—present not simply in part, but present as a whole. He is present, or That is present, in the atom and in the finest subdivision of matter. The whole of Brahman is there present in the apparent part here, that is, the whole of space, the whole of being, is present in any part of space, in any apparently partial being; and the whole of eternity is present in any momentary span of time in its entirety.

Now, I imagine that statements of this sort will appear to those who are not experienced in this field as being like the most imaginative and impossible of fairytales; yet, there are statements in the logic of the transfinite that parallel this that are attained by processes of rigorous mathematical reasoning. If we substitute for the phrase, “the whole of Brahman”—which we have said is present in the apparent part such as a human or non-human individual; such as a biological entity and a non-biological entity—let us substitute for the words “the whole of Brahman” the phrase “equal cardinality.” Then we will find this statement, as a part of rigorous mathematical formulation, namely, that the cardinality of the number of points in a line a millionth of an inch in length is equal to the cardinality of the number of points in a line reaching from the earth to the most distant galaxy known to astronomy. This statement can be proved by very simple means and will lead to the counter statement that the sum total of all the beings, as represented by points in the line reaching from the earth to the most distant known galaxy, is in completeness present in the shortest line imaginable, say a one-millionth of an inch. Does this seem incredible? I admit, to the uninitiated it may; but it is known as a matter of rigorous proof, of sheer logic. Or we can say, as a parallel statement, that the cardinality of the total number of numbers in any interval such as that from zero to one has the same cardinality as that of all the rational numbers from zero to infinity. This has been proven; and, therefore, the whole of the cardinality of the totality of all rational numbers is reproduced in the cardinality of the numbers lying between zero and one. These statements concerning cardinality are the equivalent of those statements based upon Shankaracharya’s formulation concerning the individual’s identity with not simply a part of Brahman, but with the whole of Brahman.

Now, this I submit is an example of the logic of the infinite and certainly it departs from the logic that is valid with respect to finite manifolds. Thus, we can take out of an infinite set other proper sub-sets that are equal in cardinality with the original set—yet lack certain elements that are present in the original set and therefore is a proper part—and set up a one-to-one correspondence between the elements of the original set and the elements of the proper part of that set. This is never by any possibility true of merely finite sets, and this illustrates how the logic of the infinite may seem almost like a fairytale when contrasted to the logic of the finite; yet, one is not abandoning the security of the modulus of reason when he moves in terms of the logic of the infinite and that is one of the most important bases of security as one penetrates into the metaphysical deeps.

As Immanuel Kant noted in his “Introduction” to the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the problem of how pure mathematics is possible is just as greatly involved in the critique of David Hume as the companion problem of how a pure metaphysics is possible, it becomes evident that here we have two disciplines that involve the same difficulty. And as Kant pointed out in that “Introduction,” there can be no question but that pure mathematics is; it has demonstrated itself so completely, not only in the logical sense, but in the applications to all of the problems of technology which give us a command in the technical field that we would not have otherwise. So, there can be no question as to its existence. Yet David Hume’s critique would render pure mathematics as impossible as it did, apparently, pure metaphysics.

There is in connection with this a thought that I would like to suggest, namely, that in pure mathematics we have that which may be viewed as the *Shakti* of pure

metaphysics. This is borrowing a conception from Oriental philosophy where the force principle or the manifesting principle is regarded as feminine, whereas, the non-manifested principle is regarded as masculine. Although I do not usually employ terms that are based upon such biological differences, nonetheless the pertinence of such a relationship is quite evident. Mathematics, as compared to pure metaphysics, is the principle of formation; and, therefore, by orientation to it, we may find that we have a ladder which reaches way down into the depths of *Sangsara*, yet, without contamination, leads clearly to the transcendental heights that are authentically metaphysical. It is, therefore, a possible way of yoga, a form of the yoga of knowledge: something that has not been corrupted in its immersion into the *sangsaric* field, but has retained the highest order of purity known to man, an essentially incorruptible purity that was able to remain pure even when there was a descent to the depths. So, I suggest this thought: that pure mathematics is the *Shakti* or manifesting principle of pure metaphysics.