

# On the Nature of Space, Dynamism, and Free Will

## Part 1 of 2

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In connection with the preceding discussion,<sup>1</sup> I received some time ago a letter with two questions formulated in it according to the letter, but when fully considered appears to be a group of twelve questions. I have been unable to answer this with a succeeding tape due to the fact that I was producing other tapes at the time, but I propose now to consider these questions, and to introduce the subject I shall read the letter.

In reference to your tape to Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ on space, two questions arise in my mind. The first question concerns the relationship, if any, between absolute Abstract Space as Pure Substance, Universal Consciousness, and the principle of dynamism requiring both of the above making the unified triune, and Sri Aurobindo's notion of the Absolute Transcendence. If I understand correctly, you are saying that consciousness is the container of all objects and concepts, and we usually deal with the contents of consciousness rather than with consciousness itself. Are consciousness, substance, and dynamism contents in absolute Abstract Space? Ought then we to deal with the container—Space? Are the above, namely, substance, consciousness, and dynamism what Sri Aurobindo designates as *Sachchidananda*? Am I correct in assuming that Being-Consciousness-Bliss are not so much qualifying attributes of Brahman as they are the terms that express the apprehension of Brahman by man? Is absolute Abstract Space transcendent in the sense that, "World lives by That; That does not live by the world"? Quoted from *The Life Divine* p. 23. Is there a distinction here as that between panentheism and pantheism, namely, between the Transcendent as the container of all and Universal Substance or Space as the container of all?

The second question I have concerns *Fohat*. According to the tape, *Fohat* unites Universal Consciousness and Universal Substance. "It is the 'bridge' by which the Ideas existing in the Divine Thought are impressed on Cosmic Substance as the Laws of Nature."<sup>2</sup> You stated, I think, that *Fohat* "is the basis of the whole energetic side of Being," namely, it is the "principle of dynamism". Its manifestation consists of all the forces of nature including light and electricity. If I am correct, the creative principle of directive knowledge is for Sri Aurobindo the Supermind. If Supermind is the intermediate link between the unity of *Sachchidananda* and the

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<sup>1</sup> See the audio recordings, "On Space," parts 1 and 2.

<sup>2</sup> H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophy Company, 1893), 44.

diversified world of mind, life, and matter, it seems that it has the same function as *Fohat*. Is this assumption anywhere near accurate?

There is another philosophical problem that is often of main interest to many of us. This is the problem of the free will. Do you agree with Sri Aurobindo that our present notion of free will is tainted with excessive egoism, and imagines freedom to be the capacity to act with complete independence, in isolation, without any determination other than its own choice? Yet, we have no nature with those characteristics. Our nature is part of the cosmos and subject to the supreme Transcendence. The only freedom to be attained is that which is gained by becoming the instrumentality of the Divine. Then one would not be subject to any determinism, because one would be united to the source of all determination. Man's will becomes free when it is surrendered to Brahman's Will?

Perhaps you would be so kind as to (if time permits) give us a helping hand with the free will problem. Often in our discussions the free will problem turns into an irrational hodgepodge. It seems to be such a difficult problem to approach. For example, in my ethics class I find it a bit frustrating to know exactly where to start so the students get some clear and distinct notion without a great deal of confusion. I'd be forever grateful if you could shed some light on this subject.

The close of the essential part of the letter.

These questions I find highly thought provoking, and also that they tend to lead one into the very depths of ontological thought. But there is a degree of misapprehension in one of the questions with respect to the use of the conception "absolute Abstract Space." Bear in mind this is not my own invented conception, but a conception which occurs in *The Secret Doctrine* in that portion of the discussion following the formulation of the first fundamental. Absolute Abstract Space is represented there as representing bare subjectivity. In other words, absolute Abstract Space is not simply the combination of "pure substance, Universal Consciousness, and the principle of dynamism requiring both of the above making the unified triune." It is thus, as it were, a symbol for a psychological principle—bare subjectivity. The bare subjectivity is the essentiality in this case. As I pointed out in the discussion of Dr. \_\_\_\_\_'s letter, bare subjectivity, it would appear, is not to be identified with the pure subject to consciousness, or the *Atman*, or the *Paramatman*, but rather with that state of consciousness which is not concerned with any objective element. Now, by objective element we would mean any content whatsoever, whether it was the world about, or the sensuous domain, or the world of ideation, which is the conceptual domain. We could, then, define it, I think truly, as consciousness without content, not necessarily at this point implying consciousness without a subject, but simply consciousness without content. Thus, right here we do not have a term which is on the same level necessarily as the term Absolute Transcendence of Sri Aurobindo. However, in the text there are terms which suggest this Universal Transcendence. Let us return to the text and note this fact. We start out with the postulate that there is:

. . . One Absolute Reality which antecedes all manifested, conditioned Being. This Infinite and Eternal Cause . . . is the Rootless Root of “all that was, is, or ever shall be.” It is of course devoid of all attributes and is essentially without any relation to manifested, finite Being.<sup>3</sup>

Now, this would seem to fit the meaning of Sri Aurobindo when he refers to Absolute Transcendence, for it is “without any relation to manifested, finite Being.” That, then, the Absolute Reality, the Rootless Root, rather than absolute Abstract Space would be the term that would seem to correspond to Absolute Transcendence.

Now, a word would seem to be appropriate with respect to the possible meaning of Absolute Transcendence. We must remember that in dealing with the philosophies that grow out of spiritual Realizations, there is always a question as to whether the terminology used by one writer with respect to that of another carries the same precise meaning. There is a difference of perspective that may be of such a nature that there is no absolute correspondence but only an approximate correspondence between the different terminologies. This is a point we must keep in mind when we compare the teachings originating from different sources. Our guiding thread, I believe, should be the way the terms are employed; and in that case, I do see a great similarity between this ultimate Absolute Reality and the Absolute Transcendence of Aurobindo. Conceive of it as that which remains unaffected whether there is an evolution and an involution or not. It remains the same. It is unaffected by the presence or absence of process. This is something which may be attained by a profound state of Realization. It is a kind of consciousness which stands above all process and is not affected by it. On the other hand, without this which stands above all process, there could be no process at all. It thus would seem to have an office analogous to that of the catalyst in our modern chemistry—a catalyst being a chemical substance which by simply being present renders possible a chemical combination which otherwise would not be possible, but which itself remains no part of the final product. We could think, then, of the ultimate Reality as being such a catalyst and that therefore it would be an Absolute Transcendence.

However, the term ‘transcendence’ in this sense needs some further consideration. It could be interpreted in a form that would not be acceptable if we were to take ‘transcendence’ in the sense that Immanuel Kant used the word ‘transcendent’ as contrasted to his use of the word ‘transcendental’, then a transcendence in that sense could hardly be acceptable, for it is conceived by Kant as that which cannot be experienced, or rather, in my terminology “imperierced,” or otherwise known.<sup>4</sup> It could enter, thus, into a discussion only as an invented postulate; and while the method of postulation is important in the development of Western thought, and particularly in the field of Western science, it does not seem to be a characteristic part of traditional Oriental philosophy that has not been influenced by Western methodology. There is every reason to believe that Oriental metaphysical thought is grounded upon the function of Enlightenment or Realization and the thinking is a transcription from such Realization

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>4</sup> For the definition of ‘imperierced’, see audio recordings “General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy,” part 10, and “On My Philosophy: Extemporaneous Statement.” In speaking of introceptual knowledge, Wolff says, “The third function therefore gives you imperierced, not experience. It is akin to sense perception in the sense of being immediate, but is not sensuous.”

rather than a simply invented postulate. In fact, there are some items which I have quoted elsewhere from *The Mahatma Letters* that indicate that the very method of postulation is not permitted in the Oriental methodology.<sup>5</sup> So, I would suggest that the Absolute Transcendence of Aurobindo does not employ the term in the same sense that Kant had in mind in speaking of the “transcendent,” but rather it remained a principle that could be introduced only because it could be Realized. In that sense, I would wholeheartedly accept the factuality of an Absolute Transcendence as meaning that which is unaffected by the presence or the absence of a universe, by the presence of an involution and evolution or the absence of the same, but remains constant, though, neither an evolution, nor an involution, nor a universe could exist if THAT were not there.

Quoting further from the letter:

If I understand correctly, you are saying that consciousness is the container of all objects and concepts, and we usually deal with the contents of consciousness rather than with the consciousness itself.

Yes, that is perfectly correct. It must be understood that here consciousness is to be conceived of not as a vector line between a knowing subject and a known object, but rather in the sense of a container, which in the last analysis contains both the subject and the object. I think the distinction between the term ‘consciousness’ as used in these two senses is close to, if not identical with, the Tibetan terms *Rig-pa* and *shes-rig—shes-rig*—being understood in the sense of the vector line consciousness connecting a knower and a known, and is thus aware of phenomena; whereas, *Rig-pa* is to be understood as a consciousness entirely above phenomenal awareness, and thus to be conceived of as a container. Instead of thinking of it as a vector line, think of it rather as akin to an *n*-dimensional space—*n*-dimensional because we are unable to put any restrictions upon it. In that sense, then, consciousness becomes very easily equivalent to Space, for we do define space as the container of all things, and in terms of consciousness we would say that consciousness is the container of all objects. The distinction between the word ‘thing’ and ‘object’ here is deliberate as they are not to be used exactly as synonyms. The thing being a supposed external existence outside consciousness in every sense—a conception which I think we must in the last analysis reject; whereas, object is explicitly that which is contained within consciousness.

It is unquestionably true that we deal with the contents of consciousness rather than with consciousness itself in the vast bulk of our discourse. In fact, the isolation of a subject to consciousness, and then beyond that, the isolation of consciousness itself as a pure self-existence, is a matter of considerable difficulty. And, in fact, in almost all dealings in the discourse of mankind, we are speaking in terms of the contents, and only of the contents. The turning of our power of awareness away from this external orientation may be called the very crux of the yogic problem. Ordinarily, we infer the existence of a subject to consciousness; we do not know it. But it is possible, by means of

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<sup>5</sup> A. T. Barker, ed., *The Mahatma Letters* (Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1923), 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.

yogic process, and also through the aid of self-analysis, to become acquainted with the subject as a reality which never can be an object; although, a concept pointing to it can be produced which will be a constructed object, and beyond this, at a level of a higher Realization, awareness of the Pure Consciousness does become a possibility. It's a bringing of these elements into the field of discussion that is the very central interest of my whole philosophy.

Continuing with the letter:

Are consciousness, substance, and dynamism contents in absolute Abstract Space?

No, here we have again the misconception referred to earlier. Absolute Abstract Space, let me remind you, is the representation of bare subjectivity, an aspect, as it were, of Consciousness. Ceaseless Motion<sup>6</sup> is the other symbol representing Universal Consciousness. Ultimate Being is a broader conception than absolute Abstract Space, and it is the ultimate Being or the One Absolute Reality, the Rootless Root of all, that is the container of consciousness, substance, and dynamism. This is just an error in the use of terms, and bear in mind I'm following the terminology as given in *The Secret Doctrine* here.

The next question is:

Ought we then to deal with the container—space?

Yes, most decidedly. That is the very central point in all the effort of this philosophy: to orient oneself to an awareness in which consciousness itself is that of which one becomes aware in some profound Realization, to root oneself not in the content, nor even in the self, but in the consciousness. This is one of those facts that are so difficult because they are so simple and self-evident. As I know it, the problem of yoga is not that of gaining control over an ever larger and larger complexity, but just essentially the movement in the opposite direction—a movement toward that which is the utmost in simplicity and obviousness so that it becomes difficult to find.

Continuing with the next question:

Are the above, namely, substance, consciousness, and dynamism what Sri Aurobindo designates as *Sachchidananda*?

Here, bearing in mind the modifying condition I spoke of above, it would seem to me that the terms could mean very much the same thing. In both cases we have three elements. In the one case, substance, consciousness, and dynamism; in the other, substance represented by *sat*, consciousness represented by *chit*, and bliss or delight represented by *ananda*. The one discrepancy here is that if we take *Fohat* as representing dynamism, it appears to us as a different conception from that of *ananda*, and there is a nice little question here. Is *ananda* essentially the dynamic principle? It may well be so, for as one penetrates into the state of *ananda*, it is essentially not a state that is static, but

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<sup>6</sup> The text on p. 42 refers to “absolute Abstract Motion representing Unconditioned Consciousness.”

one which has an essentially energetic quality. Thus, it may well be that in the one case the emphasis was simply upon the affective *quale*, while in the other case the emphasis was upon the productive potential. There is a difference of perspective involved here, but it could well be that in the Vedanta the *Sachchidananda* means the same thing essentially, with that difference of emphasis, that in *The Secret Doctrine* is contained in the conceptions of a substance, consciousness, and dynamism as a triune reality—triune for the reason that these three are not ultimately separable. They are not separate and separable except for analysis. But wherever there is consciousness, there is also substance and there is also dynamism; and also, where there is substance, there is also consciousness and dynamism; and where there is dynamism, there is also consciousness and substance—that these three are always present with some very interesting consequences following from this which were dealt with in the discussion of the original letter of Dr. \_\_\_\_\_.

Returning to the questions:

Am I correct in assuming that Being, Consciousness, Bliss, that is *Sachchidananda*, are not so much qualifying attribute of *Brahman* as they are the terms that express the apprehension of *Brahman* by man?

I would agree with that statement quite wholeheartedly. Actually that which is beyond all attributes cannot be itself conditioned by attributes, so that this terminology very clearly refers to the human realization when we conceive of a developing human consciousness. But how is it possible that man could know *Brahman*? The problem at first seems a well-nigh impossible one. When we conceive, for instance, of our physical universe as having a diameter on the order of billions of light years, and contrast that with the physical human being that we see here and now, the immensity is overpowering, and becomes all the greater when we consider words such as those in the *Bhagavad Gita* where Krishna says in effect, “I produce all this universe from an infinitesimal part of myself and yet remain apart.” Compared to the infinite, an immensity such as a cosmos billions of light years across is no more than a flyspeck relative to the magnitudes that fall in the purview of ordinary human consciousness. In fact, the image of the flyspeck is far too large when we make a comparison with the infinite. If we measure man simply by what we see empirically here, it all seems an impossibility; but we are here confused by an appearance. Conceive of man as a microcosm reproducing the macrocosm—and this conception may be extended to all creatures whatsoever, not only to man—then that microcosm participates in the very infinity of the macrocosm, and the microcosm is derived from the macrocosm and shares in the infinity of the macrocosm. I’ve dealt with this problem elsewhere using a mathematical symbolism.<sup>7</sup> Now, man can know *Brahman* only because in reality, though generally unknown to him, he is *Brahman* already.

The next question asks:

Is absolute Abstract Space transcendent in the sense that, “World lives by That; That does not live by the world”? This sub-phrase being a quotation from *The Life Divine*.

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<sup>7</sup> See the audio recording, “General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy,” part 4.

There is the same error here that I have discussed before. I would say that the Absolute Reality is indeed That by which the world lives but does not Itself live by the world. That is the only correction I would make in the statement. Absolute Abstract Space having the restricted meaning in the text that I have noted before.

The final question in the first paragraph of the letter is as follows:

Is there a distinction here as that between panentheism and pantheism, namely, between the Transcendent as the container of all and Universal Substance, or Space, as the container of all?

Here we have introduced a distinction that probably is not too familiar to everybody. A preliminary word may be of help. Most of us in the West who have had a Christian background have had a familiarity with the theological conception of theism, which is the usual Christian point of view and seems to be the point of view of all the religions that come from Ben-Israel, which in addition to Christianity includes Judaism and Moslemism. The theistic conception involves the idea that there is an infinite divinity separate from the cosmos that produced the cosmos. Pantheism, on the other hand, views the divinity as coextensive with the cosmos. Panentheism is a conception less familiar but implies that the divinity is identical not only with the cosmos, but extends, even infinitely, beyond the cosmos in the Transcendent. This is the conception implied in the quotation earlier made from the *Bhagavad Gita*. I think that the view here is definitely much closer to that of panentheism, but hardly wholly so. We must remember that *The Secret Doctrine* is colored by both a Buddhistic and Vedantistic point of view. Panentheism would seem to be truly Vedantic, but not Buddhistic. Buddhism, from the *sutras* and the logic of Buddhism, would have to be classified as radically non-theistic. This brings up points that are perhaps difficult for us to assimilate. Buddhism does in certain phases conceive of a cosmic Buddha which is treated practically as a religious object, but is not to be viewed as the same as a theistic, pantheistic, or panentheistic conception. The difference between the theistic, pantheistic, and panentheistic conception on one side and the Buddhistic non-theism on the other would seem to lie in this: that in the former case, the concept of being at the root of all is original, whereas the concept of principle in Buddhism is conceived as the root of all; and the cosmic Buddha would appear to be as that which was produced by the evolution, a consequent of the evolution, rather than the root principle underlying all. The conceptions here become rather abstruse.

We will take up now the second paragraph of the letter, and as heretofore quote again from it:

The second question I have concerns *Fohat*. According to the tape, *Fohat* unites Universal Consciousness and Universal Substance. It is the bridge by which the ideas existing in the divine thought are impressed on the cosmic substance as the laws of nature. You stated, I think, that *Fohat* is the basis of the whole energetic side of being, namely, it is the principle of dynamism. Its manifestation consists of all of the forces of nature including light and electricity.

Yes, and I might add here, including life and will, as well as the more objective forces such as light and electricity, and the cohesive power of molecules, the energies in the atom, and so on. Continuing:

If I'm correct, the creative principle of directive knowledge is for Sri Aurobindo, the Supermind. If Supermind is the intermediate link between the unity of *Sachchidananda* and the diversified world of mind, life, and matter, it seems that it has the same function as *Fohat*. Is this assumption anywhere near accurate?

Indeed, I think this is a very good suggestion, for *Fohat* here in *The Secret Doctrine* fulfills the same office as that attributed to Supermind in the Aurobindian philosophy. In fact, if I remember correctly, he says somewhere that Supermind is the executive aspect of *Sachchidananda*, abiding in the upper hemisphere which renders possible the whole manifestation within the lower hemisphere. Considering the functions of the two, I'd say the conception of *Fohat* has a substantial similarity to that of the Aurobindian Supermind.