

Ramesh Chandra Pradhan

# Metaphysics of Consciousness

The Indian Vedantic Perspective

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Ramesh Chandra Pradhan  
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*Dedicated to  
My Parents  
And  
Parents-in-Law  
Who Inspire Me Always*

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# Prologue

The present essay is on an exploration of the metaphysics of consciousness from a transcendental and evolutionary perspective. It intends to study consciousness from a non-naturalist and non-materialist point of view that can claim to situate consciousness within the world yet without reducing it to a natural phenomenon. Much has been said about the so-called natural origin of consciousness in the brain in the contemporary philosophy of mind. But there is much that is unsaid on the real nature of consciousness which is individual and personal from the first-person point of view and is yet cosmic and universal in nature. Consciousness as a unified field of intersubjective and cosmic phenomena is so unique that no particular science, be it psychology or neurophysiology or cognitive science in general can unravel the mystery of consciousness. There is needed a comprehensive metaphysics of consciousness that can account for its personal, as well as cosmic dimensions within one unified theory.

The contemporary theories of mind have not been successful in unfolding the true of consciousness because of their naturalist and physicalist or materialist commitments. These theories have denied to the mind and consciousness all that are intrinsic to the latter, for example, their autonomy and creativity and their propensity to evolve into higher mind and consciousness. Consciousness has been projected by and large as a static and fixed phenomenon in the naturalist theories of consciousness owing their origin to the new discoveries in the neurophysiology and other natural sciences. Though consciousness has not been altogether denied in many of these theories, yet there is a prevalent ambivalence towards its ontological legitimacy. Because of the lack of understanding of the ontological nature of consciousness, there has been a general agreement on the idea that consciousness is an accidental feature of the universe and that it can be explained only in terms of the physical laws of the universe.

This essay begins with a critical examination of the broadly materialist and naturalist theories of consciousness by showing that naturalism and materialism as metaphysical theories have failed because they have misconstrued consciousness as a mere natural phenomenon in the universe. They have been too much concerned with the natural origin of consciousness to the utter neglect of the structures of

consciousness which bear within themselves the possibilities of higher consciousness. Philosophers have been successful in telling us how best we can explain consciousness within a physicalist metaphysical and epistemological framework. But that itself has proved to be a stumbling block for going beyond the physical or bodily dimensions of consciousness. The moral and spiritual dimensions of consciousness have been set aside by this framework as a result of which we have no knowledge regarding the superstructures of consciousness which embody values and meanings of life.

The main hypothesis of this essay is that there is a higher level of mind called the Supermind which integrates not only the cognitive and the emotional mind but also advances the frontiers of the human mind by extending consciousness within an evolutionary scheme beyond the confines of the bodily and the earth-bound mind. The present human mind, in spite of its stupendous cognitive achievements in science and technology, has remained stagnant and limited in many respects which touch upon man's spiritual and creative being. The inner spiritual being of man has been left in the limbo because the human mind has been staright-jacketed into the confines of the cognitive and rational structure of consciousness. Therefore, there is a need of bringing back the evolutionary perspective into metaphysics within which consciousness can be looked at as an evolving phenomenon that can transform itself into a supramental consciousness.

The idea of the Supermind may appear to be a distant dream at present because of the limitations of the present mind, but if the mind can look at its own past development from the primitive animal mind and consciousness to the present stage it can very well anticipate its own future development in the world history. The supramental consciousness is only a few steps away from the present human consciousness. The Indian thinkers from the Vedic times have been seized with the problem of supramental consciousness in various forms because they have been concerned with the problem of going beyond the finite and limited mind. This has resulted in the most inspiring spiritual quest of mankind for the unknown and the infinite realm beyond the horizon of the mental consciousness. The most singular achievement of the Indian mind is the Vedantic notion of Brahman as the one absolute cosmic and supracosmic consciousness. The Vedantic thinkers thus established the idea of the absolute being of consciousness which is transcendent to, as well as immanent in the universe. No idea in the world of thought has been more challenging than this idea of the oneness of consciousness as the ultimate Reality.

The Western thinkers over the ages have not been lagging behind in tracking the cosmic mind and consciousness beyond the horizon of the ordinary mind. From Plato to Hegel and beyond there has been a ceaseless quest for the higher mind in literature, philosophy and religion. This quest has resulted in the creation of the most exalted poetry, spiritual songs and the inspiring philosophies of the past ages. Needless to say that the West possessed the high illumination of the Supermind in the writings of its philosophical and religious masters. Philosophers both the East and the West have for the last thousands of years been in the quest of the exalted and enlightened mind in the form of the seers and savants of the most celebrated kind.



What prompted me to undertake this present work to bring back the idea of the Supermind is the frustrating effort of the contemporary thinkers to debunk the mind and consciousness as the relic of the by-gone ages and as the remnant of a superstitious past owing its origin to the unscientific and supernaturalist predispositions of the past generations. Nothing could be more absurd and irrational than to characterize the entire past of humanity as superstitious in believing that there is a stage of higher consciousness beyond the so-called cognitive consciousness which is the hallmark of the present scientific age. The contemporary times in the world history has been dismissive of the exalted metaphysics of mind and consciousness because of its own biases and presuppositions which are not entirely supported by reason.

My effort in this essay is to prove the following theses:

1. Mind and consciousness are real and autonomous (The autonomy thesis).
2. Consciousness is intrinsic to the world (The intrinsicality thesis).
3. Consciousness is primary over matter (The primacy thesis).
4. Consciousness is in the evolutionary process as the cosmos itself is on an evolutionary path (The evolution thesis).
5. The supramental consciousness is possible beyond the horizon of the present mental consciousness (The transcendental thesis).

The metaphysics of consciousness attempted here is a comprehensive theory of consciousness that locates consciousness in the universe and outside it so as to prove that consciousness is a metaphysically primary reality. It also grounds the physical world within an evolutionary scheme of things in which it is shown that the mind and consciousness are evolving from the simplest forms to the most exalted forms as the supramental consciousness. The path of evolution so far traversed by consciousness is at the threshold of the supramental consciousness. Supramental consciousness is the next stage of the human evolution.

In pursuit of the above mentioned goal, this essay begins to understand why the contemporary scenario in the philosophy of mind and consciousness is so depressing and uninspiring. Chapters 1–4 are devoted to examining critically the main presuppositions of the contemporary metaphysics of mind such as materialism or physicalism, functionalism and computationalism and other allied doctrines. I have brought out the alternative theories to naturalism and physicalism in phenomenology which have given the hope of understanding consciousness in a non-naturalist way. In Chaps. 5 and 6, I have discussed the Vedantic metaphysics of consciousness within the Advaitic tradition so as to build up a case for a transcendental theory of consciousness. In Chaps. 7 and 8, I have discussed the theory of Supermind of the Vedantic thinker Sri Aurobindo who had made it his mission to establish the metaphysics of supramental consciousness.

In Chaps. 9 and 10, I have examined the possibility of an evolutionary metaphysics of consciousness within the transcendental perspective by showing that the evolutionary approach provides a better alternative to the existing theories of consciousness. I have argued that consciousness can evolve into the supramental

consciousness in the process of evolution. In Chap. 9, I have examined the naturalist theories of evolution and have shown their inadequacies. In Chap. 10, I have laid down the main outlines of the metaphysics of consciousness on the basis of Sri Aurobindo's theory of supramental consciousness.

My conclusions are no doubt metaphysical but they carry the insights of the past masters in the exploration of the supramental consciousness. I owe much to the great thinkers of the past and so all that I claim to have done here is to bring those insights back to work out a metaphysics of consciousness.

Shimla, India

Ramesh Chandra Pradhan

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## About the Author

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# Chapter 1

## The Naturalist Metaphysics of Consciousness: Some Contemporary Issues



### 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline the main problems which are dominating the metaphysics of consciousness in the contemporary times. The most important problem is that of making the nature of consciousness explicit and of making a case for a vivid representation of the nature of consciousness. This problem has arisen because of the attempt of many philosophers and cognitive scientists (Dennett 1991), to refuse to accept that there could be an independent reality called consciousness. There is a prevailing atmosphere of scepticism about the exact nature of consciousness not only because we have no right method to understand it, but also because it is believed that consciousness itself is not a reality on its own.

The studies of consciousness undertaken by the scientific minded philosophers have given rise to many theories which come under the purview of materialism and naturalism (Searle 1992). The metaphysics of consciousness under the influence of the sciences such as psychology, neurobiology and the cognitive sciences, in general, have accepted the picture of mind as a mechanism which acts as a machine to produce consciousness (Dennett 1991). There is a common agreement amongst the scientific minded philosophers to refuse to accept that there is a substantive reality called consciousness. The widespread belief is that mind is at best a biological organ not different from the brain which is the seat of consciousness (Churchland ). This belief has undermined the very idea of consciousness as a creative force which is responsible for the development of the mental life of the human beings.

The present chapter is concerned with outlining the major theories which have negatively impacted our understanding of the mind and consciousness. The main thrust is to find out where the naturalist metaphysics of consciousness has gone wrong and to indicate how consciousness can be rediscovered.

## 1.2 The Age of Naturalism

The present age in the philosophy of mind is the age of naturalism because since the beginning of the twentieth century philosophy has taken a naturalist turn after the fall of idealism in the West (Husserl 1931, 1960). The Copernican Revolution initiated by Kant (), which led to the rise of idealism culminating in Hegel (), was thrown overboard by the new tide of naturalism which swept over the entire philosophical landscape of the twentieth century. This led to the rise of many variants of naturalism such as materialism, functionalism, body-mind identity theory and so on which were sceptical about the classical notion of the mind and consciousness. As in other fields, naturalism had its negative impact on the philosophy of consciousness because its agenda was to naturalize all phenomena including the mental phenomena to the extent of making it dis-enchanted (McDowell 1994).

The process of dis-enchantment entered into all areas of human concern such as ethics, religion and metaphysics resulting in what may called the naturalization of values, meanings and mind thus subverting the normative structures in human life and society. This subversion of normativity of reasons, and values brought into focus the loss of meaning of life which led to the revolt of the existentialist thinkers (Sartre 1956) against the overriding menace of scientism. Thus, there is a crisis not only in the European sciences (Husserl 1970), but also in the life of the human beings as a whole. It is no less a spiritual crisis (Husserl 1970).

Before we evaluate the negative impact of naturalism on human life in general and the human sciences in particular including philosophy, let us see how naturalism came to occupy the centre-stage in philosophy in the twentieth century. There are two main sources of naturalism in philosophy; they are: (1) the triumph of the natural sciences as the sole repository of knowledge; (2) the loss of appeal of metaphysics as a source of knowledge about the world. Both the sources appeared simultaneously to make it explicit that no place can be yielded to any form of non-naturalism as a way of thinking about mind and the world because there is nothing real beyond the boundary of Nature. Nature is supreme, and that closes the possibility of going beyond what is naturally given in our common experience.

Naturalism is a counter movement against the classical notion of transcendental metaphysics. It reverses the very process of philosophical inquiry by subjecting all concepts to their verifiability in sense experience such that nothing could be accepted which does not fall within the domain of sense-experience. Thus, there is a strong motivation for naturalism to make scientific understanding of the world the very foundation of philosophical understanding. The natural sciences because of their experimental method could succeed in explaining the world and everything in it by appealing to the natural laws which are discovered in the due process of scientific investigation. Therefore, there is now nothing in the world including man's existence which could not be scientifically explained. The impact of naturalism was thus evident not only in the physical sciences but also in the domain of the human sciences. Philosophy fell into the naturalist trap because of its over emphasis on the scientific method in the realm of philosophical thinking.

### 1.3 The Realm of the Mind

Philosophy of mind like any other branch of knowledge in philosophy increasingly had a naturalist turn because of the impact of naturalism from the beginning of the nineteenth century. There was a new wave of protest against Descartes (1912), and also against Hegel (1977), for their elevating mind to a universal phenomenon and then making mind and consciousness central to the map of the universe. This was found to be against the very spirit of modern science. So there was reversal in the fortune of the philosophy of mind built on the metaphysical premises of the Cartesian dualism.

The very concept of mind underwent a change in the hands of the naturalists in the sense that it was no more taken as a substance the way Descartes (1912), had proposed. Mind became dis-enchanted in the sense it was no more a metaphysical reality central to the universe but merely another natural object to be found in the world. Mind was naturalized to the extent of being a mere secondary phenomenon to be understood only in terms of its biological and physical origin. Darwin's theory of biological evolution of the species added a new dimension to the naturalist theory of mind because it could show that the mental phenomenon itself is a product of evolution through natural selection (Nagel 2012). Mind being a natural phenomenon cannot but be part of the evolutionary process according to the Darwinians. This led to the idea that the mind cannot have an extra-natural place in the universe and so must be merged into the physical processes of the universe. Mind thus got a new place alongside the natural objects like the material bodies without claiming any extraordinary power for itself. Nietzsche took up the Darwinian way of analyzing mind to dismantle the transcendental metaphysics of mind in his theory of the will-to-power (Nietzsche 1968), which ultimately led to the idea of the mind being a part of the expression of will-to-power within the natural world. The mind-body duality is rejected by Nietzsche for the reason that both body and mind have equal stake in the manifestations of the will-to-power.

What Nietzsche wanted to achieve, but could not because of his concept of will-to-power which was accorded a metaphysical place having the power to change the universe, was the complete naturalization of the mind. He still had to make room for the will to exercise its control over the material forces so that it gets its complete manifestation in the rise of the overman (Nietzsche 1968). Thus, the mental realm remained an essential part of the universe without the threat of being reduced to a physical realm. The mental capacities which were elevated to the level of universality by Hegel (1977), were retained in Nietzsche without having any dialectical power, but nonetheless, these phenomena were the source of the power to beat all the physical forces on the path of the will-to-power (Nietzsche 1968). The mind thus got a new lease of life till it was threatened by the empiricists in the twentieth century.

The transcendental metaphysics of mind and consciousness got completely replaced by the naturalist metaphysics in the twentieth century which not only robbed the mind of its metaphysical aura but also of the natural powers which it enjoyed as a part of Nature.

## 1.4 The Metaphysics of Materialism

Materialism as a form of naturalism has been one of the oldest theories of mind from the early materialists in Greece and India to the present day materialists all over the world. Materialism has a long history as a counter move to mentalism and idealism since the earlier times to the present day. Materialism proposes a new metaphysics of the universe which is based on the following principles: (a) the universe is physical in nature and everything in the universe is governed by the physical laws; (b) the universe is physically closed as all the natural phenomena in the universe without exception are physical in nature. Both the principles are rigidly followed by the materialists in explaining the nature of man and the universe. Therefore, in conformity with these principles, they believe that since the universe is physically closed under the physical laws (Searle 1992; Kim 1993), mind has no place in it unless the mind itself is physical in nature.

However, the materialists are divided over the question about how to treat the mind in the world, that is, how the conscious mind can be accommodated in a predominantly material world which is largely unconscious. If the universe consists of the material objects which are unconscious, then how can there be conscious beings like the humans and other sub-human creatures? The question of the presence of the conscious beings in a material world poses the greatest challenge to the materialists (Chalmers 1996). It is because consciousness itself is not a material or physical phenomenon. It is a unique phenomenon because it has a very different nature from that of the material bodies. Descartes had realized the difference between the conscious mind and the material body in his encounter with the inner world of consciousness (Descartes 1912). Though his contemporaries did not appreciate his discovery of consciousness on a metaphysical footing, he went on to say that the conscious world of the mind has a metaphysical status of its own, even if we have to accept causal interaction between the mental world and the world of the physical objects (Descartes 1912).

Descartes's mind-matter dualism remained unchallenged for centuries but ultimately it came under attack from the natural scientists because the latter could not accept the fact that there is a metaphysical reality called consciousness which is located in a mind that is free from the operation of the physical laws. The whole Cartesian two-world metaphysics was questioned (Ryle 1949), not only because there are no two distinct worlds like the mental world and the physical world but also because there are no two sets of laws such as those for the mental world and those for the material world. Modern science failed to appreciate that there is a metaphysical order that transcends the physical order. This led to the wholesale rejection of the Cartesian metaphysics for a new metaphysics of matter which can be in conformity with the scientific discoveries about the material world.

The triumph of materialism in the twentieth century is due largely to the success of modern science. But the philosophical difficulties faced by the materialists made them realize that their metaphysics is not only incomplete but also unjustifiable because there are non-material phenomena like mind, consciousness, intentionality,

desires and thoughts which are left out of the scheme of explanation materialism offers. This divided the materialists on the scheme of explanations into the class of the hard materialists and that of the liberal materialists (Chalmers 1996).

### ***1.4.1 Hard Materialism***

Hard materialism is also known as reductive materialism (Chalmers 1996), which has been very much part of the contemporary discourse on the nature of mind. It is so-called because it believes that all mental phenomena can be reduced to the physical phenomena in the brain. Here reduction means that if M is a mental phenomenon then it can be reduced to, or proved to be identical with, a physical phenomenon P. M and P are identical according to this view (Place 2002; Smart 2002). Though the mind-body identity theory can take many forms (Chalmers 1996), it always tends to reduce the mental phenomenon to the physical phenomenon because ontologically they are the same, though they are conceptually different. The reductive theory does suggest that there is no ontological difference between mind and body.

Reductive materialism is an ontological theory as it assumes that there is one and only one reality and that is matter, so that any other phenomenon which seems to differ from the material phenomenon must be identical with the latter. Thus, reductionism has been a way of denying the mind-body dualism inherited from Descartes. Reductionism as an ontological thesis has been defended by the materialists because that suits their metaphysics. But the fact of the matter is that it has failed to take into account many other ontological features of consciousness such as intentionality and subjectivity which cannot be reduced to any physical phenomena (Searle 1992). Therefore, reductive materialism has never been a complete doctrine because of its inability to explain consciousness.

Another form of hard materialism which has been offered by Churchland (1984, 1986), is known as eliminative materialism. According to this theory, mind is not reduced to the brain but is eliminated altogether because there is nothing called mind as such in the material world. Mind is a superfluous entity having no place for it in the universe. For the eliminativists, there is not only no mind-body dualism, but also there is no question of identity at all because there is one and only reality called matter. In the case of the human beings, all that is real is the physical body, so the so-called conscious phenomena can be taken as superfluous entities which are at best myths created by us. This radical form of materialism is acceptable to some because they think that within the scientific discourse there can be no place for the folk psychology which introduces the psychological entities like beliefs and desires (Stich 1983 ). The elimination of folk psychology makes eliminative materialism acceptable to the behaviourists and physicalists alike as they all assume that beliefs and desires are a metaphysical hindrance to the scientific study of the mind.

### 1.4.2 *Liberal Materialism*

Another form of materialism which is being offered by many (Chalmers 1996) is known as non-reductive or liberal materialism. This form of materialism does not offer reductive materialism as a solution to the mind–body problem. According to this view, mind and body are not identical the way reductivists have proposed. However, it is asserted by the non-reductivists that though mind is not reducible to the body or the brain, yet the mind is dependent on the body because it is the brain which causes the mental phenomena. The mental phenomena are real in the sense that they have their own properties such as subjectivity, though they are ultimately caused by the brain (Searle 1992, 2004). This form of materialism does not reduce the mental states to the states of the brain, but keeps the domain of the mental irreducibly different from the domain of the brains states (Searle 1992).

There are two ways in which liberal materialism can stake its claims regarding the irreducibility of the consciousness and other mental phenomena. First, it takes the mind as an emergent entity from the brain states in which case, the mind gets new emergent properties which are not available at the level of the brain states. Emergentism has had a long past (Alexander ) because its solution of the mind–body problem remained widely accepted (Ganeri 2012). What is remarkable about this theory is that it gives due importance to the mind, even though it accepts the material base of the mind. However, it does not explain how the new properties are acquired by the mind, when they cannot be derived from the brain itself. The emergence of mind remains a mystery.

The other form of liberal materialism is the supervenience theory (Kim 1993; Chalmers 1996, 2010; Horgan 2002 ) which suggests that the mental phenomena are dependent on the brain states. Supervenience is a form of dependence of the mental on the physical and not vice versa. There can be no change in the mental realm unless there is a corresponding change in the physical realm.. This form of dependence of the mind on the body does suggest that the mental and the physical are so connected that we cannot have the mental states unless there is a supporting ground for them in the brain. The mental realm which is supervenient on the physical domain is real and so cannot be dismissed as superfluous. Supervenience is not reduction but a form of dependence. So the mind does retain its causality (Chalmers 1996; Kim 1993) even while it is dependent on the body or the brain.

Supervenience is different from epiphenomenalism (Chalmers 1996; Kim 1993) because it retains mental causation, while the latter denies it. For the epiphenomenalism the mind is inert and bereft of causal power so that the mental phenomena become superfluous in the world. This form of materialism is very close to the reductive materialism without being so because it at least accepts the quasi-reality of the mind though it is only an epiphenomenon. There is no attempt to reduce the mental to the physical in this theory (Ganeri 2012).

## 1.5 The Metaphysics of the Mind–Body Dualism

The target of materialism is the mind-body dualism which has a long history since the time of Plato and revived by Descartes (1912), in the seventeenth century. Dualism held the ground for long before it could be challenged by modern science. The scientific world view which took the centre stage made dualism between matter and spirit look too metaphysical and transcendental a world view. The rigid distinction between mind and body or between spirit and matter was revised by philosophers such as Spinoza, Leibniz and later by Hegel (1977). But it is the materialists who tried to upstage dualism and bring in a monistic materialist metaphysics. The new metaphysical slogan was: matter alone is the reality.

But dualism is a hard nut to crack because it is underlying our general understanding of the world and man. Descartes did not create a dualistic metaphysics but only made explicit what was already in the general metaphysical understanding of the world. We have to go back to the ancient traditions of philosophical thinking to see the traces of dualism between matter and spirit. If we have to seek a metaphysical explanation of the relation between the mental and the physical entities, we had better seek its roots in the earliest thinking in the *Upanishads* (Sankara 2001, 2002). Because of its hoary past, dualism could not be dismissed so easily; there has been a revival of dualism in many forms other than the Cartesian dualism.

It has been suggested by Searle (1992), that the whole Cartesian vocabulary is wrong and that the language of dualism is itself faulty because it has introduced two distinct categories of mind and body without taking note of the fact that in reality there is no rigid division between the material objects and the mind (Searle 1992, 2004). But both mind and body are placed in Nature and are intertwined with each other, so the question of separation does not arise. Searle appeals to biological naturalism (Searle 1983, 1992) to justify the inseparability thesis because he shows that what we call the mind is causally produced by the body because of the organization of the brain. The brain is the causal seat of the mind and consciousness because the mental states are given rise to by the brain states. The brain is so composed that as a matter of causal necessity it gives rise to consciousness. This naturalist non-dualist position seems to replace the Cartesian dualistic picture by bringing down the categorial scheme of the traditional dualistic metaphysics. The old notions of mind and body are replaced by the new naturalist categories of brain and mind in a new framework of brain-mind unity.

### 1.5.1 Property Dualism

Even though Searle's scheme of mind-brain relation within a naturalist framework promises to do away with the substance-dualism of the Cartesian kind, it still retains a modicum of dualism between the mental and physical properties which are ascribed to the mind and the body, respectively. The phenomena at the physical level, namely,



the level of the brain have certain properties which are not present at the mental level. The mental phenomena acquire certain irreducible properties like subjectivity, intentionality, etc. which cannot be anticipated by the brain states (Searle 1983). Therefore, according to Searle, the mental phenomena have to be given a separate ontological status such that it can retain its new features without the threat of reductionism.

Searle seems to have accepted the fact that mental phenomena have a reality of their own though they are ultimately caused by the brain processes. This new reality demands its unique properties which can be called “mental” as distinguished from the properties which are “physical” by nature. Such being the case, in fact there are two kinds of properties that must be distinguished from each other. Thus, a kind of property dualism is inevitable within the Searlean framework. It may not be accepted by the staunch naturalists, but it cannot be denied that Searle himself allows for the possibility of the irreducible mental phenomena which are subjective in a strong ontological sense (Searle 1992). If that is the case, then it follows necessarily that the mental phenomena have their own properties which are different from the properties of the physical phenomena. This brings us back to the property dualism which is a familiar position in philosophy of mind.

P.F.Strawson’s famous distinction between P-Predicates and M-Predicates (Strawson 1959), reminds us of the property dualism which is inevitable in the framework which admits one substance with two kinds of properties. Strawson’s argument was very similar to Spinoza’s argument that there is only one substance which has two different properties, namely, Thought and Extension. Strawson’s P-Predicates are such that they include thought, perception and other mental activities, while the M-Predicates include those like extension, position and other physical states. Thus, a new dualism called Predicate-dualism emerges which is parallel to property dualism. This suggests that, however, we may try to get away from dualism, we cannot escape dualism at some level or other (Swinburne 1986).

Another version of property dualism could be what is called conceptual dualism (Papineau 2002) between the concept of the mental and the concept of the physical. Conceptual dualism is the view that even if at the ontological level there is only one reality which is physical in nature, there is still the possibility of a conceptual level where we have to admit that there are mental properties (Papineau 2002: 4–5) distinct from the physical properties. The conceptual level is the level of concepts naming two sets of properties. Here the suggestion is that though there is ontological monism about the physical reality, we are forced by our language to make room for two different sets of concepts to describe that reality. The mental concepts called phenomenal concepts (Papineau 2002: 96–103) are introduced at the conceptual level.

Conceptual dualism thus brings in the dualism of a non-ontological sort to wriggle out of the conceptual puzzles regarding consciousness. Consciousness cannot be squeezed into the straightjacket of the material reality, and so a new level of concept is introduced to make room for the description of consciousness in more acceptable terms. At least at the descriptive level, there is difference between how the mental

predicates are described as distinguished from the description of the physical predicates. However, this is a very anomalous position as it tries to reconcile ontological monism with conceptual dualism.

### ***1.5.2 Anomalous Monism***

The most radical defence of anomalous monism is by Davidson (1980), who argues that ontologically mind and body are one, but conceptually they are different. Davidson defends materialist monism while defending at the same time some form of conceptual dualism between the way the mental phenomena are described as distinguished from the way the physical phenomena are described. Beliefs and other mental states are described in an intentional language (Davidson 1980). The mental states are token identical with physical states at the ontological level, but they are differently presented in conceptual terms such that we can ascribe normativity and rationality to the mental states.

Davidson's argument is that there are no psycho-physical laws (Davidson 1980), which can bridge the gap between the mental and the physical realms. Therefore, the relation between the mind and body is not based on laws at all; it is a correlation based on conceptual necessity. The mental realm is the realm of normativity and rationality which cannot be accounted for by materialism. Thus, the mind–body relation is anomalous, and hence must be treated as extra-ontological. It is a more a matter of our linguistic and conceptual description that we have to accept the dualism between the mind and the body.

What is unique in Davidson's theory is that though it accepts monism at the physical level, it accepts dualism on the conceptual level between the mental states and the physical states. It is interested in keeping the mind free from physical determination because the mental phenomena are intentional in character. For the sake of the intentionality and the normativity of the mental states, the mind must be unshackled from the physical conditions of the body. Thus, Davidson argues that there is a level of the mind that is not constrained by the body and that it is the mind that plays its most important role in the rational behaviour of the human beings.

## **1.6 Functionalism as an Alternative Metaphysical Theory**

The idea of consciousness being an independent reality as has been argued (Chalmers 2002), requires that we must get out of the mess into which we have been pushed by the various materialist theories (Searle 1992). The functionalists who were unhappy with the materialist theories especially with the mind-brain identity theory went for a new way of understanding mind through the analogy of the Turing Machine (Putnam 2002). The mental states are now characterized as the functional states like the states in a machine table in terms of how the inputs and outputs are causally connected.

The machine table is a way of designing the mechanical device like the computer for organizing how the machine states function within a certain description (Putnam 2002). The causal relations among the machine states constitute a system which can be realized in any physical medium.

The functionalists claim that mind is such a system of inputs and outputs which are functionally related. Therefore, for them, mind is at best a functional system which can be realized in any physical medium including the human organism. The mental state like pain (Putnam 2002), can be interpreted as a functional state of the organism because there is a certain input–output relation within the organism resulting in pain. Pain is a state which happens not because how the brain works but because how the causal networking between inputs from the external source like sense stimulation and the resulting outputs in the form of external behaviour are causally related. The mental state of pain is not itself a behavioural state or a brain state but a functional state within a system (Putnam 2002). In fact, it is essentially a mechanical state needing no support from any particular physical system like the brain. Pain could be mechanically shown as part of a system which can be realized not only in the human organism but also in any organism, even remotely related to the human organism can realize the same pain states. Thus, functionalism suggests that mind is a computational system with a representational structure such that the mental representations are carried on in a Language of Thought (Fodor 1975). The Language of Thought is a computational language built into the menconnected with the human organism. This is called the multiple realizability of the functional states (Putnam 2002; Searle 1992).

What functionalism achieves as a theory of the mind is that it interprets mind on the model of a computational system like a Turing Machine, and thereby shows that mind is no less a functional system. Thus, mind is brought closer to a computer having a software which can be realized in multiple physical systems. Mind is a software which can be realized in any physical system (Putnam 2002; Block 2002). Though functionalism gets rid of the materialist reductionism, it falls into the trap of another reductionism, namely, functional reductionism. The whole of the mental states including thoughts and consciousness are represented in the form of machine states, and thus mind is reduced to a machine. This machine-reduction eliminates subjectivity of the phenomena because the meachine cannot account for how these mental phenomena are felt by the organism.

### ***1.6.1 Computational Representational Theory of Mind (CRTM)***

The most popular form of the mechanical view of mind is the computational representational theory of mind (Fodor 1975, 1987), which is an important part of functionalism as a whole. This theory goes beyond the functionalist view in showing that

all that happens in the mind are carried on in a mechanical way within the computational language. The latter is naturally designed because it is the built-in or innate language capable of operating all mental representations (Fodor 1975).

The mental representations are embodied in our thoughts, perceptions and beliefs which are called the cognitive activities undertaken by the mind. These representational states of the mind have propositional contents because they are basically propositional attitudes like “A believes that p”, “B perceives that p”, etc. in which case there is a proposition involved in the cognitive acts of the mind. Fodor, for example, claims that there is no cognition which is not a computation on representations (Fodor 1975). That is, the mind functions in such a way that all its cognitions are embedded in a computational language yielding mental presentations which can be either true or false. All the mental representations are concerning the world because of which they are evaluated as either true or false.

The computational representational theory of mind accepts the fact that all the mental representations are intentional in character in the sense that they are directed towards the world and its objects. Intentionality is a feature of the mental states (Searle 1983; Fodor 1987), such that the moment the mind represents the world intentionality accrues to the mental representations almost logically without there being any biological intervention. Intentionality is not a biological feature of mind (Searle 1983), but a logical feature because the mental representations are logically or syntactically driven (Fodor 1987). This syntactic view of mind is the hallmark of the computational representational theory because it relies on the fact that the formal structures of the computational language do not allow meaning or semantic content to come from an external source. These semantic contents are as a matter of fact narrow or limited to the mind (Fodor 1987). However, it is soon realized that the narrow contents cannot save semantics from being swallowed up by the syntax.

## 1.7 Conclusion

Thus, the metaphysics of naturalism has culminated in the emergence of the computational mind which explains the conscious mental phenomena in terms of machine states. This heralds the arrival of the mechanical mind in the post-Cartesian metaphysics of mind and consciousness.

The metaphysical theories discussed in this chapter owe their origin to the naturalist metaphysical presuppositions which are part of the overall picture of man's mind and consciousness as a machine. Both materialism and functionalism owe their origin to the naturalist presupposition that mind and consciousness are offshoots of matter and that they can be explained by the mechanical laws.

This chapter has explained how the mechanical laws operate at various levels of our mental life.

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# Chapter 2

## The Limitations of the Naturalist Metaphysics



### 2.1 Introduction

The naturalist metaphysics of the mind and consciousness has been subjected to severe criticisms in the recent past. It is because naturalism and its ally materialism have failed to explain consciousness in any convincing manner. Not only naturalism but also materialism could not explain how consciousness could be possible in a material world. This has led to the collapse of the naturalist and materialist metaphysics as it was founded on the presupposition that mind and consciousness are natural phenomena with their origin in the material structure of the universe especially in the brain.

This chapter will explore the different grounds on which the naturalist metaphysics failed. It will show that the metaphysics of consciousness needs new grounds to coherently explain the nature of the conscious mind.

### 2.2 Beyond the Metaphysics of Materialism

Materialism as a theory of consciousness has failed to account for how consciousness came into existence at all and how it functions in the creative and innovative way it does. The fact that the consciousness is a reality to be accounted for and that it occupies such an important place in the life of an organism cannot be accounted for in a simple materialist formula like the mind–body identity (Papineau 2002). If the reality of consciousness could be captured in the bland mind = body (brain) formula, then the whole of philosophy of consciousness could not have faced so many problems about the nature of consciousness. It is very clear that there is no such simple magic formula to solve the problem of consciousness. Consciousness is a rich and varied phenomenon which needs a full scale inquiry which goes beyond the philosophical presuppositions of materialism.

Materialism is a long standing philosophical theory which has tried to explain the universe and man in terms of the reductive method which consists of explaining every phenomenon in terms of the material principles such as the physical laws. The material concepts such as mass, energy, space, time, motion and causality have been taken as the basic concepts and these have been pressed into service to explain every other phenomena including the mental phenomena. The so-called materialist vocabulary is not only limited but also it is reductive when it is applied to the realm of the mental phenomena. Therefore, materialism has always preferred ontological monism to dualism of the mind and matter to make its explanatory schema free from inflated ontology (Papineau 2002: 5). However, this simple ontological economy comes at a high cost.

Materialism given its reductive approach and its eliminative agenda to get rid of the mental phenomena altogether as of secondary importance always faces resistance from other philosophers who are not sceptical like the materialists regarding consciousness. The non-sceptical anti-materialists do not admit that consciousness can be so easily dislodged from its ontological space. They try to show that there are many mental phenomena like the first-person experiences which cannot be eliminated or even reduced to something else. They are basic to universe (Chalmers 1996), and must be given an ontological status. This makes the materialists acknowledge that even if there are no ontologically real first-person experiences, at least there must be phenomenal concepts in our vocabulary to makes sense of the first-person experiences (Papineau 2002: 47). This leads to what is called conceptual dualism (Papineau 2002: 47–49) which suggests that there are two kinds of concepts such as the material concepts like table, chair, books, etc. and the phenomenal concepts like feeling, experiencing, etc. which are always first-personal in character.

Materialism has many forms and many hues such that defeating one form of materialism is not the same as defeating all of them. The eliminative materialist is the most radical amongst them who needs to be shown that he cannot be sceptical about what is obvious and true. The eliminativist or the deflationist materialism explains away the mental phenomena and so goes against what is commonly available to the conscious beings like the human beings (Chalmers 1996). Therefore, this form of materialism is the weakest among the materialist theories and can easily be got rid of (Searle 1992). The non-eliminativist or the inflationist materialism (Papineau 2002), goes beyond its radical counterpart in admitting conceptual dualism and thus partially admits that there is no a priori way of reducing mind to matter. This is nonetheless a half-way house because mind and consciousness still are in need of an ontological status.

### ***2.2.1 The Ontological Gap***

Now the question is: Can there be a conceptual dualism between matter and mind and not an ontological dualism? Those who claim that only a conceptual dualism (Davidson 1980; Papineau 2002), is enough to solve the mind–body problem miss



the central issue because they only think of solving a metaphysical problem through a conceptual analysis. The conceptual analysis is alright as far as it goes, but it does not go very far. The concepts of mind and body are part of a vocabulary which has been fashioned over the years to capture the intuitions we have regarding what mind is all about and how the body differs from it. But these intuitions are far too vague and indeterminate to solve any ontological problem much less the conceptual problems. Conceptually mind and body are, of course, different but they are also different ontologically.

The mind–body problem is an ontological problem and needs an ontological solution. We cannot just declare that the problem is solved if we somehow accept a mind–body identity theory (Place 2002; Smart 2002; Papineau 2002). This theory has been much in vogue because it takes the easy way out by suggesting that though mind and body are two different terms or concepts, they refer to the same stuff which is a material entity. That is, the theory suggests, at least in its token-token identity form, that there is only one and only one entity for which we have two referring terms and that entity is material in nature. This identity is, therefore, called contingent identity (Smart 2002; Papineau 2002), because it is based on scientific evidence. But this is problematic as it has been shown by Kripke (1980), that in no case can a contingent identity be the final solution to the mind–body problem. The contingent identity can be a matter of our epistemic understanding, but metaphysically it may turn out to be different. Thus, our so-called scientific evidence is just an evidence of what so far we have discovered about how the mind works, but what guarantee is there that our knowledge of the mind is complete? We cannot just take our physical science for granted when there is so much work to be done regarding the mind itself.

Both the token-token identity theory and the type-type identity theory are reductionist in their approach. They claim to solve the problem by reducing the mind to the body, and thus denying any ontological status to the mind itself. If mind loses its ontological status, then there is nothing to make it identical with the body. If the body is alone real, and the mind has been proved identical with it, then there is no reason to establish their identity when we know that the mind has no other reality than that of the body. There can be identity between two realities provided they share all the properties in common according to the Leibniz's Law of the Identity of the Indiscernibles. But the fact of the matter is that body and mind do not share all the properties in common. There is a unique property which makes the mind the mind and the body the body (Descartes 1912). This intuitive understanding of mind and body does not suggest that there can be any identity between mind and body. The reduction of the mind to the body itself is a metaphysical blunder, to say the least, because they are two different realities though they constitute a complex whole of the mind–body complex. Reductionism is thus a faulty ontological theory because it violates the basic principle of the independence of the mind and its properties by reducing it to the body and its properties.

### 2.2.2 *The Explanatory Gap*

The problem of an explanatory gap between mind and body or between consciousness and matter has been raised by Levine (2002), keeping in view the fact that there is no way both can be explained in the same framework of explanation. The conscious phenomena cannot be explained in the same objective way as the physical phenomena. There are many features of consciousness such as subjectivity, qualia, etc. which are beyond any objective explanation. Therefore, it is easy to find that while the physical phenomena including the brain states can be explained scientifically by appealing to the objective features of such phenomena, the mental phenomena refuse to be treated in the same way (Chalmers 1996).

The explanatory gap is the gap between the two distinct ways of explaining how the mental phenomena come into being as distinguished from the way of explaining the constitution of the physical phenomena. The physical phenomena are explained in terms of the physical laws which are based on the scientific evidences. They are subjected to the third-person observation and experiment. But the mental phenomena under no circumstances are going to be explained with the help of the physical laws. Therefore, the mental phenomena must be kept out of the explanatory schema meant for the physical phenomena. Thus, there emerges the explanatory gap (Levine 2002; Chalmers 1996), which is in a sense epistemic in nature.

Those who oppose the idea of an explanatory gap argue that the gap itself is a myth (Papineau 2002), because it arises due to the dualistic assumption regarding the nature of mind and body. Dualism itself is questioned as an ontological theory; therefore, the explanatory gap itself is questioned since it is based on those discarded presuppositions. But the rejection of the ontological gap reaffirms the methodological duality between the conscious phenomena and the physical phenomena without affirming the ontological duality between mind and matter. But this itself is fallacious because the explanatory gap cannot be meaningful in the absence of the ontological gap. Even the conceptual dualists (Papineau 2002; Davidson 1980) have to recognize that if there is no ontological gap, there is no sense in maintaining any conceptual dualism.

The explanatory gap needs to be further strengthened by an ontological gap because the former cannot be sustained without the support of the latter. The ontological support is an absolute necessity for making the explanatory gap intelligible. This has been realized by the philosophers who are not identity theorists (Chalmers 1996; Swinburne 1986), and those who oppose reductionism of any sort (Flanagan 2007).

## 2.3 The “Hard Problem” of Consciousness

The idea of the “hard problem” of consciousness has been raised by Chalmers (1996), as he finds a distinction between the solution of the problem of consciousness in an objective and scientific manner by appealing to the cognitive mechanisms and

the solution of the problem by taking into account the subjective and phenomenal experience. The latter addresses the “hard problem” of consciousness, while the former deals with the “easy problem” (Chalmers 1996: xiii, 1995–97: 9–28). The best way of explaining this distinction is to divide the problems of consciousness into those which can be solved scientifically, and those which cannot be so solved. The latter are called “hard” problems because the scientific and objective mechanisms cannot solve the subjectivity of phenomenal consciousness.

Chalmers has introduced this distinction in order to separate the scientific study of consciousness by neuroscience and cognitive science which take a third-person approach to consciousness from the first-person approach to consciousness adopted by him. The scientific third-person solution is an easy way out because there is no actual explanation of consciousness at all; rather consciousness is reduced to something else which is not consciousness. Chalmers holds the view that consciousness considered in its subjective character cannot be reduced to anything else and so must be treated in a new way. The new way takes consciousness “seriously” (Chalmers 1996), because it raises the problem of the subjectivity of conscious experience. Consciousness is primarily subjective and first-personal and so must be treated as phenomenal in character.

Chalmers makes a distinction between the “phenomenal mind” and the “psychological mind” (Chalmers 1996: 11–12). The phenomenal concept of mind refers to that aspect of mind which consists of how it feels, while the psychological concept of mind refers to what the mind does. This distinction is based on two ways of explaining mind and consciousness; the first one explains how the mental phenomena appear to the subject, that is, how they feel to the subject, while the second one explains the way the mind functions causally (Chalmers 1996: 11–12). He says: “For now, all that counts is the conceptual distinction between the two notions: what it *means* for the state to be phenomenal is for it to feel a certain way, and what it means for states to be psychological is for it to play an appropriate causal role” (Chalmers 1996: 12). This explains how we can consider mind from the first-person and the third-person point of view, respectively.

It is the phenomenal mind which raises the “hard” problems of consciousness because there is no easy solution to the first-personal or the phenomenal nature of consciousness. The moot question is: how does the personal or phenomenal experience arise at all? Even if we can explain the psychological states objectively and scientifically, we do not know how the phenomenal experience arises at all. Every phenomenal state like pain is also a psychological state in the mind which can be explained in terms of its causal role in the behaviour of the subject. But the phenomenality of the pain sensation cannot be explained in terms of its causal role.

There is no doubt that the hard problem of consciousness is really hard because we are led to believe that we cannot solve it with the methods employed in the sciences. It is a matter of wider acceptance now that phenomenal consciousness or P-consciousness (Block 2002) cannot be reduced to objective consciousness or A-consciousness (Block 2002) because they are two distinct types of consciousness. Besides, it is true that the subjective consciousness is ontologically independent of the so-called objective consciousness (Searle 1992; Chalmers 1996). Keeping

that in view, it is reasonable to argue that the P-consciousness or the first-person consciousness has to be taken as ontologically real, and therefore, we must be ready to raise the hard problem of consciousness as an ontological problem.

But making the hard problem of consciousness an ontological problem is not to make it intractable or mysterious. It is only to suggest that we can solve it only ontologically by taking into account the features in our experience which make it so hard a problem to solve. Chalmers (1996, 2010) wanted this problem to be the new challenge to the studies of consciousness because this problem has been brushed under the carpet by the so-called science of consciousness. The fundamental theory which he proposes (Chalmers 1996) takes this problem as pivotal to its explanation of consciousness. The greatest problem to solve for the fundamental theory is to recognize the first-person consciousness and to seek solution for it in terms of a dual-aspect theory which Chalmers (1996), advocates.

### ***2.3.1 The Dual-Aspect Theory***

The dual-aspect theory has its origin in the philosophy of Spinoza which has its resonance in the works of Strawson (1959). Chalmers revives it in the context of the contemporary studies of consciousness. He has faced the challenge of cognitive science which has its goal to interpret all mental phenomena in mechanistic terms (Dennett 1991, 2010), leaving aside the first-personal experiences. Chalmers's fundamental theory of consciousness accepts the conscious experiences as part of the universe (Chalmers 1996, 2010), and so he finds it undeniable that there are two aspects of the reality, namely, the informational and experiential. There are not only the information processes in the universe, but also there are experiences which are associated with the information processes. The latter can be studied mechanically but not the former because they go beyond the mechanical explanations of the universe. That is why there is a clamour for accepting a dualism of aspects of the universe: the experiential and the informational.

Chalmers mentions three principles in support of his theory of consciousness; (1) the principle of structural coherence, (2) the principle of organizational invariance and (3) the dual-aspect theory of information (Chalmers 1996). The first principle talks about the coherence between the structure of consciousness and the structure of informational awareness. The second is about the organizational invariance of two functional systems which will have the qualitatively identical experiential states if they share the same functional structure. The third principle reveals the fact that every informational state has an experiential state corresponding to it. The last is the most fundamental principle which defines the correlation between the functional and the phenomenal states (Chalmers 1996, 1995–97).

The dual-aspect theory of consciousness solves the hard problem of consciousness by recognizing the two sides of reality, namely, its physical and functional organization and the experiential aspect of it. The phenomenal reality is accepted in addition to the functional reality. This solves the problem at an ontological level because the

first-person experience which is the subjective space of experience demands a place in the universe (Chalmers 1996). Ontologically there is a dualism between two sides of the reality, i.e. the physical and the phenomenal which cannot be abolished by any monistic theory like materialism or functionalism.

## 2.4 Beyond the Naturalist Metaphysics

The fact that intentionality is a normative feature of consciousness and that it gives rise to meanings cannot be explained in a purely naturalist framework which takes the physical laws as final. There must be space for meanings and reasons within the theory of mind and consciousness (McDowell 1994). There has been of late considerable disquiet over the negative impact of reductive materialism and naturalism because the latter have led to the loss of the space of meanings (Flanagan 2007). Therefore, there have been persistent efforts to revise the very principles of naturalism.

Naturalism as a metaphysical theory can be of two types: 1. Hard or radical naturalism and 2. Soft or liberal naturalism (McDowell 1994; Flanagan 2007). Hard Naturalism accepts the materialist hypothesis that the realm of Nature is the realm of the physical laws and nothing in this realm works except under the physical laws. This sort of naturalism is also called “bald naturalism” (McDowell 1994), because it leaves no scope for anything other than the physical objects and processes in Nature. The material Nature is the sole reality that science must be concerned with. It even does not accept the conscious phenomena belonging to the mind as ultimately real. Even if it accepts mind and consciousness as real, it accepts them on the condition that they are reducible to material processes in the brain (Dennett 2010). Thus, there is no scope for intentionality within reductive naturalism.

It is liberal or soft naturalism which is able to accommodate mind and meaning within its framework (McDowell 1994; Flanagan 2007). It is because liberal naturalism is liberal enough to accept a second nature (McDowell 1994), which is beyond the scope of the physical laws. The second nature is the rational nature of man which allows for reasons and norms which are part of man’s nature. The human nature has been recognized by Aristotle as rational in essence because man is capable of rising above his animal nature by imbibing the reasons and values within his personal nature. Thus, the second nature embodied in man is beyond the pale of the primary nature which is out and out physical in nature. The rational nature is also natural but in a more liberal sense. It is nature not in the strict sense, but in the sense that can accommodate the space of reasons within it (McDowell 1994).

Intentionality and meanings are safe in the realm of the second nature because within this nature alone we can recognize them and makes them explicit. It is because man, though a part of Nature, is still having a nature of his own which is amenable to other laws than the physical. The non-physical laws are the rational laws which are found in the realm of logic and ethics and are different from those of physics and biology. This shows that we cannot straightaway say that human beings are natural objects like physical objects. The human beings belong to a different category of

entities within the realm of Nature without being reduced to physical objects. This special category of natural objects which the human beings belong to also marks a division within Nature between the first nature and the second nature (McDowell 1994; Kant 1929; Hegel 1977).

We can argue that in order to account for intentionality of the conscious states we must go beyond naturalism in the accepted sense, that is, beyond reductive naturalism. The latter has really made it impossible to account for consciousness in the non-reductive sense (Chalmers 1996). Non-Reductionism has a fair chance to explain consciousness by admitting it as a real and irreducible phenomenon in the universe.

### 2.4.1 *Non-reductive Naturalism*

The fact that reductive naturalism fails to account for consciousness (Chalmers 1996), makes us think of non-reductive naturalism as a possible solution of the problem of consciousness. What is non-reductive naturalism then? Is it another form of soft naturalism which we discussed earlier? Possibly, yes, because where radical naturalism fails, liberal naturalism steps in. But with a difference. Many liberal naturalists (Searle 1983), may offer a solution which goes against the liberalism of the second nature (McDowell 1994). There is always a doubt whether there is place for the second nature other than what is called the first nature. Searle's biological naturalism (Searle 1983), does not accept the idea of a second nature, but yet it does not accept the naturalist reductionism in his theory of mind.

The non-reductive naturalism has the following presuppositions:

1. Consciousness is ontologically real as it is subjective in character; there is a first-person ontology of the conscious states (Searle 1992).
2. Consciousness is causally reducible to the brain, but not ontologically (Searle 1992).
3. Consciousness is irreducible to the brain states because it has such emergent properties as subjectivity, qualia, etc. which the brain states do not have (Searle 1992).
4. Consciousness causally emerges out of the brain states but acquires a new autonomous status.
5. Consciousness in its phenomenal aspects is not susceptible to naturalistic explanations offered by the neurobiological sciences (Chalmers 1996).

Thus, non-reductive naturalism offers a new set of solutions to avert the naturalist explanations which verge on some sort of materialism of the reductive sort.

The most important question which non-reductive naturalism faces is regarding the thesis of irreducibility of consciousness which is ontologically imperative if we have to get away from reductionism. A conscious state S is irreducible to brain state B if S itself can exist on its own and can claim autonomy or independence from B. The non-reductive naturalist has to grant ontological independence to the conscious state S. But it is claimed by Searle that B itself is the cause of S (Searle 1983, 1992).

If B is the cause of S, then S is an effect of B and so cannot have complete autonomy. If S loses causal autonomy, then it cannot have ontological autonomy unless there is more to the reality of consciousness than its causal source. This is shown by Searle to consist in its subjective nature and its phenomenal properties. But the question is: How does consciousness get its subjectivity when it is caused by the brain which is itself a material object? This question remains unanswered in Searle's biological naturalism.

The other option is to accept the ontological duality between the conscious states and the brain states. This is easily available if we accept the fact that conscious experience itself is a fact of nature (Chalmers 1996), and that there is no way we can give a causal explanation in terms of the brain states. There can be a correlation between conscious states and the brain states but not causal interaction (Swinburne 1986; Chalmers 1996). This is called the dual-aspect principle (Chalmers 1996), because this ensures that there is not only information processing in the brain, but simultaneously there are conscious states of experience. The latter are the phenomenal states of consciousness which cannot be reduced to the information processes in the brain.

### ***2.4.2 Back to Dualism***

If the dual-aspect theory can be given due consideration, then we are on the verge of a new dualism, i.e. the dualism of aspects of the same reality. The reality is such that in one respect it is information and in the other it is experience. That is to say, the two aspects are not two different perspectives, but two co-existing aspects of the same reality. Chalmers's argument is that these aspects are two parallel but correlated aspects such that if one is there, then the other must be there. If information processing is a fact of nature, then the experience itself is a part of nature (Chalmers 1996, 2010). That is, both information processing and experience are invariably correlated such that no situation arises where there is information but no experience and vice versa. Therefore, from this, it follows that the universe is not out and out physical in nature and that there is a genuine reality called the phenomenal mind (Chalmers 1996).

The dualism that follows from the above position shows that the universe cannot consist of only one kind of stuff, namely, the material stuff. There is also the mental stuff which is entrenched in the universe. The mental stuff demands its autonomy in the sense that it cannot be reduced to the non-mental stuff. The worry that this will lead to Cartesian dualism is misplaced because both information and experience are not two substances in the Cartesian sense, but are two kinds of phenomena which are there in the universe. These two phenomena are so related to each other that there is structural coherence and invariance between them (Chalmers 1996). It is a matter of natural fact that these two kinds of facts, namely, the informational facts and the experiential facts are both present in the universe.

We are now in the familiar domain where we discern two kinds of facts or phenomena which have structures of their own. We cannot adumbrate a universe like the universe of ours where there is a permanent possibility of the absence of

experience. Experience in the sense of the first-person kind is real in our universe. However, it is logically possible that there could be a universe in which there is physical reality but no qualitative experience. Such a zombie-world cannot be logically ruled out (Chalmers 1996). The fact of the matter is that the actual universe is free from the zombies, but that does not rule out the logical possibility that there could be zombie like beings in another universe. Phenomenal consciousness is real in the universe where there are beings like the human organisms.

Another problem which bothers philosophers is whether the entire universe is characterized by the mental reality thus leading to panpsychism of some kind (Chalmers 1996). Such a scenario may lead to the idea that every piece of the material stuff is endowed with the experiential stuff such that there is no part of the universe which does not have a mental stuff. This has metaphysical implications which go beyond all scientific evidences. But in defence of this, we can always say that the possibility of mind as universally present throughout the universe is not logically inconsistent.

## 2.5 Return of the Self

The problem of self is back into the philosophy of mind because the concept of mind is incomplete without the concept of self and also because we cannot explain freedom and action without the self ; we cannot also explain human agency in the absence of the self. But the question is: What is the self that can explain freedom and agency? The obvious choice is to talk of an agential self which is involved in all our actions. All moral actions (Davidson 1980), presuppose the agential or moral self. But besides the moral self, we have also the notion of the metaphysical self (Wittgenstein 1961) which needs to be brought into the picture because the metaphysics of consciousness needs to be grounded in the metaphysical self.

## 2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the limitations of the naturalist metaphysics have been exposed to show that naturalism cannot be the viable metaphysics of consciousness. It has been argued further that the basic presuppositions of the naturalist metaphysics are not only wrong but also inadequate to explain consciousness. The idea of the “hard problem” of consciousness has been discussed to show that the reductive variety of naturalism cannot explain the subjective character of consciousness. The monistic metaphysics of the materialists has been shown to be inadequate as some of dualism is still possible. Besides, it has been shown that the notion of self is important for understanding mind and consciousness.



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# Chapter 3

## Objectivity, Subjectivity and the First-Person Point of View



### 3.1 Introduction

The naturalist metaphysics of consciousness brings in the distinction between the objective and subjective because it is part of its general presuppositions that there is a basic duality between the subject and the object because of which we can make a distinction between the first-person and the third-person point of view regarding man and the universe.

The objective study of consciousness by the naturalist metaphysics has been a failure because of which we have the rise of the first person-person point of view in metaphysics. It is this aspect of the study of mind and consciousness which will be discussed in this chapter. Before we bring in the first-person point of view, we will discuss the scope and the limits of the third-person point of view.

### 3.2 The Objective World View

An objective theory of consciousness is one that approaches the problem of consciousness from a standpoint which Nagel calls the “view from nowhere” (Nagel 1986). The standpoint which is from nowhere is the one which is occupied by the physical sciences. The latter does not take into consideration the human observer and his point of view. The so-called “secondary qualities” which Locke had introduced are sought to be avoided in a purely scientific point of view. The primary qualities which are physical properties are the only properties to be admitted in a purely objective standpoint.

The objective world view which is the impersonal and scientific world view is the one that has been the most favoured standpoint of contemporary science and philosophy. Objectivism has been the hallmark of this world view. That is, it has taken reality including man from this objective standpoint to consist in the facts that objectively define the world and man. The world as the objective reality is subjected to

explanations and interpretations from the point of view of the scientists who occupy an impersonal space vis-à-vis the world (Popper 1972). Therefore scientific knowledge is broadly ‘objective knowledge’ (Popper 1972) leaving aside the subjective elements from the world altogether on the ground that the latter are projected by the human mind onto the world. Thus, there has arisen a fissure between the objective world and the subjective mind. It is believed by the scientists that the world could be viewed from an absolutely nonhuman standpoint. This standpoint is called the God’s-eye-view of the world (Putnam 1981). One can infer from this that science itself is a product of this God’s-eye-view of the world.

Modern philosophy beginning with Descartes (1912), began with this note that the world and man are part of the God-created scheme of things and that there is no way philosophy could adopt anything less than God’s-eye-view of the universe. Though Descartes divided the world into the material and the mental worlds, he nevertheless maintained that both the worlds are subject to universal impersonal laws and that there is no way we can make one the more primary than the other. Both are equally real and they can interact but cannot be merged into each other (Descartes 1912). The Cartesian objectivism is manifest in the famous doctrine of the *Cogito* which surveys the world from an absolute standpoint. The axiomatic dictum, “*Cogito ergo sum*” is no less a universal principle than the laws of physics and mathematics. Thus, the world and man are assimilated into the universal scheme of the impersonal universe.

The Kantian Copernican Revolution (Kant 1929), tried to rectify the situation by bringing in the subjective standpoint into the focus but yet it retained the objectivism of the modern science. Kant provided a new way of understanding science with the same universal laws of physics and mathematics by emphasizing that these laws are partly the contribution of the human mind (Kant 1929). But Kant remained convinced of the fact that science and mathematics are universal sciences which have a transcendental origin in the human subject, and yet the human subject cannot change the face of the world the way Berkeley had tried to do in his re-interpretation of the world. Kant rejected Berkeley’s subjective interpretation of the world.

Thus, an objective theory of the world and man is one that is centred on the world, i.e. on the object and not on the subject. That is to say that the entire burden of epistemology lies on the object and not on the subject. The object-centred view of the world and man brings with itself the elements of impersonality and the objectivity of truth and knowledge into the discourse on the universe.

### 3.2.1 “The View from Nowhere”

The view from nowhere (Nagel 1986), is the high watermark of objectivism. It is the end of the road for all the attempts to see the world from the observer’s point of view. The observer is absent from the discourse of the world because he does not contribute anything to the world as such though he can make a conceptual net to represent the world (Wittgenstein 1961). That is, the world is absolutely real and independent of the human mind. The absolute reality of the world is a metaphysical

fact that has to be captured in the conceptual net of the scientific theories. But that does not change the face of the world because the latter is *sui generis*. Objectivism, therefore, becomes the new way of absolutizing the world at the cost of the human subject.

What does “the view from nowhere” stand for? From Nagel’s point of view, it stands for the universal standpoint that is not anchored in any particular subject or self (Nagel 1986). That is, it is not a particular standpoint of any particular self. It takes the universe as it is in itself and not from any perspective. It is the non-perspectival way of understanding the universe. Nagel finds this non-perspectival way of thinking not only paradoxical but also impossible because it leads to the idea that the universe does not contain any self within it. The observer self is redundant in this universe. But the fact of the matter is that there is a particular self which is myself, the “I” which cannot be denied as long as I am in the universe. My existence is a part of this universe. Therefore, the universal standpoint is not possible unless myself becomes a universal self. The universal self is as it was incarnated in me (Nagel 1986).

The duality between the universal self and the particular self, i.e. myself, in particular, makes the task difficult to accept pure objectivity without subjectivity. If objectivity is possible, then that implies subjectivity as well. If the universal standpoint is possible, it also allows that the subjective standpoint is possible. Objectivism as a theory of the universe is incomplete if there is no way we can make sense of the subjective way of thinking and perceiving. However, it is the objective way of thinking that draws the limits of the subjective way of thinking. The former is the way to the transcendence of the latter because in it alone lies the possibility of truth and reason. Subjectivity itself cannot guarantee truth which lies beyond the vagaries of the subjective way of thinking. So far as the truth regarding the world is concerned the objective way of thinking is the best guarantee for truth. If truth is confined to any particular perspective, then it cannot retain its objectivity and impersonality.

Rorty’s argument that truth is rooted in time and history (Rorty 1979), and that it is a human creation has the negative impact of making truth itself lost along with the objective world. His penchant for solidarity and not objectivity (Rorty 1979), makes truth disappear in the jungle of the ethnocentric truth-claims. Thus, relativism becomes the end result of the ethnocentric and anthropocentric way of understanding truth and the world. In the debate between objectivism and historicism (Putnam 1981), it is objectivism which preserves truth and not subjectivism per se. From this, of course, it does not follow that the subjective way of thinking has no significance at all. It remains as a starting point of all inquiry and gives way to inter-subjectivity and objectivity in the end (Davidson 2001).

### 3.2.2 *The Subject-Object Duality*

It is to be noted that modern epistemology is object-centred because the objective world is the object of all epistemological inquiry. The modern idea of a universal science is based on the principles of mathematics and on the strong notion of the

object as distinguished from the subject. The subject remains the passive observer which makes knowledge-claims, but cannot make them true or false. The objective world makes the knowledge-claims true or false (Davidson 1984). The world remains in the central focus of all scientific inquiry.

Since the subject or the self remains at the periphery of the natural sciences, there is no reference to the knower in the scientific theorizing, and all knowledge becomes world-directed as a matter of policy and principle. As a matter of fact, all scientific theorizing becomes objective in the sense that all subjective elements are pushed out of the frame of reference of all natural sciences. The silence of the subject and its being in the periphery facilitate the sciences to march ahead in the pursuit of the objective truth (Popper 1972).

The mental sciences like psychology follow suit in exploring the domain of mind in an objective manner because of the same objectivist spirit as is evident in all the natural sciences like biology, neurology, physics and so on. Psychology in the twentieth century has become an experimental and objective science deriving its methodology from the natural sciences. The science of mind as psychology is called resorted to the same empiricist method in collecting all its data for theorization. Psychology is no more a speculative science as there is a shift from the subjective domain of the conscious mind to the objective study of the behaviour of the human beings (Lycan 1990).

The dominance of objectivism in the mind sciences has resulted in a piquant situation in which the study of mind is carried on in the spirit of the science of matter, and thereby it reduces the mind to matter as a first step in search for the objective truth about the mind. The idea of a unified science takes over psychology into the fold of physics and thus results in some sort of a reductionism which makes mind a peripheral entity to be studied only in terms of the material or physical concepts. The loss of the autonomy of the mind sciences has a chain of consequences regarding the nature of consciousness, intentionality and meaning. Some of the normative concepts like intentionality and meaning are ruled out of the scientific discourse on mind.

### **3.3 Behaviourism and Cognitive Science**

Psychology as the science of mind and consciousness has been at the vanguard of an empirical investigation into the nature of mind (Brentano 1973), because it finds the speculative psychology of the past unable to study mind as it is. The speculative psychologies had to talk about the features of the mind which had no scientific relevance. Therefore, psychology in the twentieth century became experimental and scientific in the empirical sense of the term. James spearheaded this movement which culminated in the empirical theory of mind based on empirical evidences. This was further led by the behaviourists (Watson 1990), into a new kind of theory called behaviourism

What psychology as a science of the mind achieved is the fact that mind is no more a mysterious entity and that it is open to objective study by the scientists and philosophers. This emphasis on the objective method in psychological research led to new ways of making psychology a science on its own ground. The psychological sciences are now motivated by the new wave of empiricism and naturalism which swept across the intellectual domain in the twentieth century. However, there are two main features of this new movement which have posed a challenge to the study of mind as an independent reality; they are (1) reductionism and (2) materialism. Both reductionism and materialism made the study of mind grafted on to the physical sciences, namely, physics and chemistry. This has resulted in the intellectual poverty which we witness today in all areas of psychology. Psychology has been reduced to physics, and thus has been proved to be a secondary rather than a primary science. This has almost made psychology derivable from physics.

Psychological behaviourism (Watson 1990), committed the cardinal sin of making the psychological states in the mind to be the same as the behavioural states of the body. Mind is identified with the body in terms of the latter's behavioural and dispositional states. Mind as reality is now shown to be a shadow of the physical states of the body. Behaviourism took pride in translating the mental vocabulary into the language of the physical states of the body. This robbed psychology of its unique place in the study of the mind. The mind is pushed into the background and its place is occupied by the body and its behavioural states. This reversal in the fortune of psychology was inevitable because the slogan of the unified science (Carnap 2002), had the major aim to deny psychology any extra advantage in relation to the physical sciences.

Philosophical behaviourism (Ryle 1949), is no less guilty of depreciating mind as an ontological reality by its redrawing the logical geography of the mental concepts because ultimately there is no mental reality per se in this theory except as a set of behavioural dispositions. Mind is missing in this theory because of the fact that everything that Descartes discovered in the realm of the mind is taken over by the mental-conduct concepts like thinking, intelligence, will, emotion, etc. The mental reality gets overshadowed by the language of the mind leaving nothing to mind to claim as its own. Behaviourism thus has failed to understand mind in its real sense and so it has to be rejected by the post-behaviourist philosophy of mind.

Cognitive psychology (Fodor 1975), was a reaction against behaviourism and other allied reductive theories of mind. This psychology made it its mission to give mind a fair chance as an operating system of mental functions. Not only mind but also its internal computational functions were restored to their pre-behaviourist status. The cognitive psychologists argue that mind itself is a mechanism that does information processing in a computational way in the language of thought (LOT) (Fodor 1975). The cognitive mechanisms are variously described as mental representations and computations on the mental representations resulting in a mechanical theory of mind modelled on a digital computer (Fodor 1975). Thus, a new turn is taken in psychology towards a revival of the mental reality, though in the functionalist way. All mental functions are back into the discourse in terms of computability, functionality

and the input–output causal relationships. Mind is not reduced to a computer but is demonstrated to be a functional system on the model of the computer.

The cognitive mind is thus studied through its formal functions based on certain assumptions that mind is a syntactic system and has its own language, i.e. the language of thought. This is the way the mental functions are retrieved from a complete collapse by making it more a mechanical system than a physical system like the human brain. Mind is now more Cartesian than often realized because mind is not a bodily organism but a universal system of functions (Crane 1995), different from the body. The mind is like the software while the body is a hardware in which the mind can be realized.

### 3.3.1 *The Mechanical Mind*

Mind is back into the picture in the cognitive theory of mind because it is the mind which is at the centre of the mental activities like thinking, perceiving, believing and so on. The cognitive and computational nature of the mind is brought into the metaphysical picture of the mind.

The rise of computationalism is the hallmark of the new theory of mind heralding the arrival of the inner mental states which can be explained causally in terms of the input–output relations (Searle 1992). The computationalists are of the opinion that mind is not a material entity at all, but a system of operations which are computationally mapped in such a way that it is not required that there should be a human body to realize these functions (Kim 1993, 1998, 2011). Even lower animals have mental functions which are realized in a non-human bodily mechanism. Thus, the computational theory, as discussed already, gets rid of the human bias in its study of the mind. Mind is a universal system of functions which has an independent existence as a syntactic entity that explains all the mental functions including beliefs and desires. Thus, computationalism and the folk psychology come together to explain the nature of the mind (Fodor 1975, 1987).

The theory of cognition is based on the idea that mind is an information processing system (Dretske 2002), and that it is the very structure of the mind which needs a computational mechanisms for its operations. Thus, mind and computer are brought close to each other so that mind is now made to respond to the demands of the computations which are part of the rationalist concept of intelligence (Descartes 1912). The classical rationalism did manage to tell us to view human intelligence as computational in its nature. This is further explained by the computational theory as to whether Artificial Intelligence is possible at all (Lycan 1990: 8–11). In the AI project, there is a strong assumption that the computers can have intelligence like the human beings and that they are better in certain respects than the human minds.

### 3.3.2 *Folk Psychology*

The computational psychology has been contrasted with the folk psychology which is the psychology of the common sense origin (Stich 1983). It has been contended that folk psychology which deals with beliefs and desires is false (Stich 1983), and therefore, must be eliminated (Churchland 1984). Those who are against folk psychology want to suggest that there no beliefs as such which can explain human behaviour. That is, the so-called mental states called beliefs and desires are of no consequence so far as the causation of the human behaviour is concerned. For them, the mental states called beliefs and desires are such that they play no role in the causal mechanism of the brain. Therefore, they could be reduced to the brain states of some sort so that they will never pose as independent entities in the cognitive process.

The attack on folk psychology is motivated by a reductive strategy that leaves no room for the intentional states such as beliefs, desires, intentions and so on. The cognitive theory of mind which is proposed to be purely syntactic in nature (Stich 1990), has no need for beliefs and their semantic properties. The beliefs are by nature intentional and so are having semantic properties which are essentially of no use in the syntactic structure of the mind. Semantics of the mental representations has no place in the pure syntax of the language of the mind.

However, folk psychology has come to stay because no cognitive psychology can replace it. Cognitive psychology cannot throw out folk psychology because there is no way the latter can be eliminated or reduced to something else. Beliefs and desires are the way the human beings behave and act. They are part of the commonsensical way of understanding human mind and actions. Human life will be poorer in the absence of the beliefs and desires. Thus, there is every reason to believe that beliefs are an essential part of the mental makeup of man. They not only cause human behaviour but are also very much part of the way the human beings think and perceive.

In defence of folk psychology, Fodor (1987) and Searle (1992), have argued that the belief-desire psychology is essential to the study of mind because in the beliefs and desires lies the intentional structure of the mind. That explains how the mental phenomena have an intentional structure that cannot be explained by a pure mechanical theory of mind.

## 3.4 Why the Mechanical Theory of the Mind Fails

It is important to show how the syntactic nature of the mind is inadequate because of the fact that it misses the semantic nature of the mental representations. Searle has argued in his Chinese Room thought experiment (Searle 1980, 1992), that the mind in its syntactic form is unable to comprehend the meanings of the symbols it uses in its operations. The man in the Chinese Room manipulates the symbols formally according to the given dictionary and operates them without getting the meanings of the symbols. But a native Chinese speaker operates the same symbols



while comprehending the meanings thereof. Thus, the Chinese Room Argument shows that the computational mind operates mechanically and thus fails to get the meaning of the symbols it uses. The human mind is equipped with both the syntactic and the semantic structures. Therefore, it is capable of making the sense of the symbols it operates.

The computation theory of mind (Fodor 1975), fails to give a complete picture of the mind because it fails to meet the challenges of the Chinese Room Argument. The following are the challenges which no computational theory can meet:

1. The mental representations which include beliefs and desires cannot be syntactically explained.
2. The computations on the mental representations are formal structures which do not explain the meanings of those structures.
3. The human mind is not a computational machine but a biological system with intentionality.
4. The functions of the mind cannot be narrowed down to the machine functions as suggested by the functionalist and computationalists.

Thus, Searle's Chinese Room Argument has shown the limitations of the cognitive theory of mind based on the computer analogy (Searle 1992). It exposes the limitations of the mechanical and objective notion of mind as a computing system.

### ***3.4.1 The Conscious Mind: Phenomenal and Representational***

Now the important question is regarding the conscious mind itself. Is it phenomenal? or is it representational? Some argue that mind is representational and intentional in character (Dretske 2002), and must be viewed as such. Thus, it suits the computational view of mind (Fodor 1975), which provides a representational view of mind. But others argue that mind is basically phenomenal (Nagel 2002), and that representationality is a secondary phenomenon (Chalmers 1996). Thus, phenomenality and representationality are two different features of the mind and consciousness and must be treated as independent of each other.

Let us examine the two notions discussed above. Representationality is the hallmark of the propositional attitudes like thinking, perceiving, believing, etc. In these cases, what is important is how the cognitive acts have intentional contents with reference to the world. The acts of believing and thinking have intentional content when they are expressed in propositions. Therefore, the propositional attitudes have intentional contents because of which they have meaning and also the truth-conditions. The propositions which are involved in the beliefs and other propositional attitudes have intentional contents because of their relation with the world. This is the reason why they are taken to be representational in character (Fodor 1987; Searle 1983).

The phenomenal aspect of the mind lies in the mental states which have phenomenal quality called qualia or the raw feels. The latter are known as having the quality

of something being what it is like. The what it is likeness is a singular feature of the phenomenal states by which they are distinguished from the mental representations. This quality makes the mental states like feeling pain and seeing red distinguished as the phenomenal and non-representational states of the mind. Based on this ground Chalmers claims there are two minds, namely, the phenomenal mind and the psychological mind (Chalmers 1996). This has led to a watertight compartmentalization of the conscious mind to the detriment of a proper understanding of the mind.

However, it has been realized that such a bifurcation of the mind is not good because that makes two sides of the mind disconnected from each other. Therefore, there has been an effort to bring the two sides of the mind together (Horgan and Tienson 2002; Horgan 2002) in order to show that the phenomenal mind is also intentional and representational. The beliefs and thoughts which are representational are also phenomenal and vice versa. The purely phenomenal states of the mind like the sensations are no less representational just as the belief states are no less phenomenal. That is to say, both phenomenality and representationality converge on the conscious states of the mind. This is a major improvement on the separatist position alluded to before.

### **3.5 Consciousness from the Objective or the Third-Person Point of View**

The very idea of an objective consciousness comes from the fact that consciousness can be studied from the third-person point of view. This is what is opposed to Nagel's idea of a first-person consciousness (Nagel 2002). Objective consciousness is the subject of study of the cognitive sciences in general and cognitive psychology in particular. It is because we can talk of a science of consciousness in this objective sense from a psychological point of view. The chief features of such a science is that it studies the conscious states in terms of the scientific categories such as information processing, functions, input and output, the causal role, etc. Thus, consciousness is taken to be a matter of scientific study and methodological analysis in terms of the naturalist categories.

Objective consciousness is the subject-matter of the naturalist theories developed by the materialists, the identity theorists, the functionalists and the computationalists. All of them considered mind and consciousness as matters of a quantitative analysis, and therefore, they talked of the reduction of the mental states to the states of the brain or compared the mental functions to the functions of the machines (Dennett 1991; Fodor 1975). Thus, there arose a whole lot of theories regarding the naturalization of mind and consciousness (Dretske 1995; Chalmers 1996). Naturalizing consciousness is a part of the project of the objectivization of consciousness. Consciousness has thus been pushed into the domain of the natural facts in the world.

There are two ways in which the objectivist approach to consciousness functions: one way is to reduce consciousness to a physical phenomenon of the brain; the other is to place consciousness in Nature without reducing it to the brain states. While

the former favours reductive materialism or physicalism, the latter favours non-reductive physicalism. Both are naturalist and materialist approaches to consciousness (Chalmers 2002). What is peculiar to these approaches is their persistent effort to naturalize consciousness. Why so? One may ask. The standard reply is that consciousness cannot be a supernatural entity and so cannot be placed outside Nature. Therefore, there is no way consciousness can be beyond Nature. Naturalism becomes inevitable according to this argument (Dennett 1991; Chalmers 1996; McDowell 1994; Flanagan 2007).

But the question arises: Can consciousness be naturalized? Is naturalism itself consistent? Many who espouse a robust theory of consciousness do not find naturalism inevitable, nor do they accept naturalism as a consistent theory (Husserl 1931, 1960; Mohanty 1985). Their argument is that consciousness has a normative and transcendental structure which cannot be explained by any naturalist method (Mohanty 1985). The latter method is reductive in character, and therefore, it misses the very nature of consciousness as a transcendental phenomenon. The reductive theories are not only inadequate but also inconsistent (Mohanty 1985; McDowell 1994).

### 3.6 Irreducibility of Consciousness

The moot question is: Can consciousness be reduced to something nonconscious like the brain states, as the reductionists claim? The answer is, obviously not, because there is no way consciousness can be reduced to the brain states. Consciousness refuses to be identified with, or, reduced to, any state of the brain, or to a cluster of such states. Those who attempt at such reductions must be blind to the peculiar properties of consciousness which are markedly different from those of the brain (Searle 1992). Consciousness consists of the mental states which need a space of their own so that they can manifest their unique properties.

The most important property of consciousness is its subjectivity or the first-person character (Searle 1992; Chalmers 1996). Consciousness, therefore, has something it is like to be (Nagel 2002), so that nothing can take away this property from it. Consciousness, therefore, reveals itself as something unique, that is, as something of its own kind. That makes the conscious states of the mind belong to a different domain. Those who think of the world as only physical in nature must be ready to explain how consciousness is possible in a physical world (Chalmers 1996). There is already found to be an explanatory gap (Levine 2002), between the two types of phenomena we encounter, namely, those which are mental and those which are physical. The mental phenomena remain beyond the purview of the physical explanation of the universe.

There are multiple layers of consciousness which remain beyond the physical explanation of the origin of consciousness. The causal explanation of consciousness covers only one aspect of consciousness, namely, its origin in the brain. But that does not take us very far because by knowing the physical origin of consciousness we do not understand its essence or its basic structure which lies hidden from us.

The hidden essence of consciousness cannot lie in the brain (McGinn 1991), but within consciousness itself. The essence of consciousness must be some aspect of consciousness and so cannot be found outside consciousness. Searle accepts a form of causal reduction of consciousness because he thinks brain is the causal source of consciousness (Searle 1992). But this itself does not necessitate ontological reduction (Searle 1992). That is because consciousness has many more features like subjectivity and intentionality which cannot be ontologically reduced at all (Searle 1992; Chalmers 1996; Flanagan 2007).

### 3.7 Subjectivity of Consciousness

The most pressing issue concerning consciousness is subjectivity which is the very nature of first-person consciousness (Chalmers 1996). The subjective consciousness is also called phenomenal consciousness (Papineau 2002) because it is the most immediate and intimate consciousness. The fact that consciousness is subjective is recognized by many philosophers (Searle 1992; Chalmers 1996; Nagel 2002), who come to accept the fact that there is something it is like to be conscious. This fact is not an epistemic fact, but an ontological fact about being conscious. Any conscious organism has a special way of being conscious which is unique to the organism.

The idea of the first-personal consciousness has been recognized by philosophers since long because it is the way we have discovered consciousness that makes it first-personal. The method of self-discovery is found in Descartes's dictum: *cogito ergo sum* (Descartes 1912), which is continued by Husserl (1931), in his phenomenological study of consciousness. The first-person is the starting point of self-knowledge and self-discovery (Searle 1992; Bilgami 2008). The I or the first-person makes consciousness evident to the self or the person and that brings consciousness to its subject as its ontological site. Self or the subject is primarily the owner of consciousness (Ganeri 2012).

Subjectivity is an ontological category in the sense that it does not refer to how consciousness is known, but how it itself is. That is, the constitution of consciousness is ontologically prior to how consciousness is known by the owner. The ontic priority of consciousness is manifest in the way consciousness comes into being in an organism; the organism becomes conscious not because of any external factors but because of its own constitution. Therefore, consciousness has to be understood ontologically by itself but not in relation to the world. When we study consciousness by itself, subjectivity becomes the new ontological category that can reveal what consciousness itself is. Consciousness is out, and out subjective though, it is wide-open for everybody to share it and publicly observe it. So subjectivity is not privacy (Wittgenstein 1953). Consciousness is ontologically subjective but epistemologically objective (Searle 1992).

Nagel's famous essay "What is it like to be a Bat?" (Nagel 2002: 219–24) does raise the question of subjectivity by taking the bat's experience as a starting point. The bat as a conscious organism has its own unique experiences which cannot be

shared or owned by the human beings. It is because though the human beings can understand the bat's experiences from a distance, they cannot grasp it as a bat can. The bat is the owner of that experience, and therefore, it has its immediate access to its own experience because it is its own experience and no one else's. Nagel is here trying to understand why the bat's experiences cannot be owned by anyone else. He writes: "But fundamentally an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to be that organism—something it is like *for* the organism. We may call this the subjective character of experience" (Nagel 2002: 219). Thus the subjectivity of experience follows from the fact that the organism has a unique way of being itself.

Those who question the subjectivity of consciousness are those who see the bat's experience from an objective point of view. They are the ones who think that there is nothing unique about the bat's experience, or for that matter any organism's consciousness. For them the bat's experience has all the ingredients of something commonly and objectively called experience which can be deciphered and studied objectively and scientifically. They, in fact, are ready to reduce the bat's experience to something like the brain states of the bat and its accompanying physical features. Thus, they do not accept any fact of the matter about the bat's experience as such.

Nagel's defence of the subjectivity of experience, not only of the bat's but also of all conscious organisms, is based on his ontological theory that there are bat-experiences which cannot be denied or reduced at all. That is why there must be accorded an ontological reality to the subjective experiences as such. According to Nagel, "Reflection on what it is like to be a bat seems to lead us, therefore, to the conclusion that there are facts that do not consist in the truth of propositions expressible in a human language. We can be compelled to recognize the existence of such facts without being able to state or comprehend them" (Nagel 2002: 221). This is to say that we must be compelled to give an ontological status to the subjective consciousness in general.

### 3.7.1 *Qualia*

The question of qualia or the qualitative features of consciousness has been at the centre of the subjective or phenomenal consciousness because these features are not easy to do away with (Dennett 1991) yet are part of the understanding of consciousness. Qualia have come into the picture because there is ontologically a subjective aspect of consciousness. Qualia are the way a subjective experience comes into being with the so-called raw feels of a conscious state such as feeling pain. The phenomenal experience of feeling pain has a quality which makes it a unique experience with a certain raw feel. The experience of feeling pain is not the same experience as seeing a red colour.

The defenders of qualia point out that if we accept conscious experience C, then we must also accept that it has a certain property P which is inalienably intrinsic to C. If C is the way the pain is felt by the subject S or the way a thing appears red to her, or the way the sweet tastes to her, then all these qualities P, Q, R, respectively, are part of the subjective experience of S. There is no way we can imagine C, without P,Q,R. In that sense, P,Q,R are the qualia which define C or its equivalents. There is, therefore, a metaphysical ground for accepting that qualia are real and that they constitute the very nature of subjective or phenomenal consciousness (Chalmers 1996; Searle 1992). It must be granted that qualia are the intrinsic phenomenal properties of consciousness given to the subject in the first-person.

Dennett (1991), holds that those who defend qualia are under confusion and illusion about the qualitative properties of consciousness. They are confused because they think the qualia are substantive entities to be accorded a metaphysical status. They are in illusion because there are no such entities in experience which are “ineffable”, “intrinsic”, “private” and “directly or immediately apprehensible in consciousness” (Dennett 1991). Dennett seems to have assumed that qualia are such entities as described above being the private and ineffable qualities. He, therefore, thinks that such entities can be “quined” or eliminated with no loss to consciousness as such. Thus, Dennett’s “quining qualia” (Dennett 1991), is a part of his strategy to do away with the subjectivity of consciousness as such.

It can be said in defence of the qualia that the qualia are an indispensable part of conscious experience and that they constitute the way consciousness exists in a subject. If we remove them from consciousness, the latter has no way to manifest itself in the subject. If qualia are quined, then there is the possibility of the denial of consciousness altogether. Dennett’s argument that conscious experience does not depend on qualia which are just the figments of imagination does not hold good because qualia are not just added to consciousness from outside but are there in consciousness itself as the latter becomes manifest in the subject. The person or self who owns the experience has the first-person experience of what the conscious states are. The person’s seeming to experience colour is as much real as the colour experience itself. Therefore, the personal aspect of consciousness cannot be denied. The qualitative properties of consciousness emerge with the emergence of consciousness in the subject. Thus, subjectivity, conscious experience and qualia are necessarily connected.

The spectrum inversion or inversion of colour experience, though not actual, is possible after all (Chalmers 1996; Block 2002), because we can always conceive the fact that there may be somebody who sees colours differently and has a different spectrum of experience. Therefore, we cannot argue that if the same physical makeup is shared by two people, they must share the same experiences. The sameness of the physical structure does not ensure the sameness of experience. This proves that physicalism is false and that we must admit that conscious experience is an independent reality which cannot be denied by the materialists.

### 3.8 The First-Person Point of View

The distinction between the first-person and the third-person point of view is significant in philosophy of mind because consciousness can be studied from both points of view. As we have already seen, the third-person point of view takes consciousness as an objective phenomenon which leaves out many features of consciousness from consideration. The first-person point of view removes those lacunas and reveals consciousness in a new light. That is why there is a special emphasis on this point of view in this chapter. The idea of the first-person point of view is nothing new (Davidson 2001; Searle 1992). It is crucial to any understanding of the mind and the self which has been one of the metaphysical issues encountered in the twentieth century. Descartes (1912) was the first to introduce the first-person point of view in his famous dictum “I think therefore I exist”. The *Cogito* is the quintessential first-person which discloses the underlying features of the self, consciousness and all that the “I think” embodies.

With the arrival of the *Cogito* the philosophical scenario changed in modern philosophy. Philosophy became concerned with the “I” or the self as the starting point of the inquiry into reality. The entire burden of metaphysics and epistemology fell on the *Cogito* because there is no way we can understand the reality as a whole unless we unravel the mystery of the self or the “I”. Descartes rendered a great service to philosophy by making philosophy I-centric or centred on the self, i.e. the first-person. Though the self remained the pivotal point of departure of philosophy, yet philosophy was not confined to the self; it became involved in the objective world for good reasons because self is bound to confront the world as the not-self. This duality between the self and the world remained central to modern Western philosophy. However, so far as the self is concerned, modern philosophy left the legacy of the self-world and the mind–body dichotomy for the coming centuries in the history of philosophy (Kant 1929; Husserl 1931).

The present concern is with the primacy of the first-person which is a part of the Cartesian legacy. The first-person as the self provides the new key to the understanding of mind and consciousness precisely because the latter are necessarily related to the self or the first-person (Davidson 2001). In the absence of the self we cannot understand how consciousness is possible as a part of reality. Consciousness is as much real as the world of which it is a part. This is what is revealed by our understanding of the conscious processes that take place in the human subject. Consciousness is a subjective phenomenon because the human subject comes into the picture as the owner of consciousness (Strawson 1959). In the absence of the first-person or the self we cannot get hold of the reality of consciousness. Consciousness and subjectivity are necessarily connected.

Before we understand the nature of subjectivity, let us address the primacy question more thoroughly. The first-person standpoint is primary because it is the one that makes consciousness available to us. Though we can understand consciousness from the outside as a natural phenomenon, we can understand it in the true light only

when we approach it from within, that is, from our own point of view. Consciousness is always *my* consciousness; there is an intrinsic *mineness* to consciousness (Husserl 1960). This *mineness* is inalienable from my consciousness. That makes consciousness genuinely subjective from the phenomenological point of view (Zahavi 2005).

### 3.9 Self and Subjectivity

The Idea of self is crucial to the understanding of consciousness in view of the fact that the first-person account of consciousness necessarily brings in the self or the subject. The self is the owner of consciousness in the broad sense. Consciousness is I-consciousness because wherever there is consciousness, there is an “I” involved in it. That is to say, if we say X is conscious, we imply that X as an “I” or self has consciousness. X’s self is involved in the conscious process. In the absence of X’s self or his “I” there can be no consciousness *per se*.

Fundamentally, consciousness implicates a subject or self to which it is ascribed. There is no reason to doubt that such a self is intrinsic to the very nature of consciousness. Consciousness is not an entity but a process; it is a continuous flow of conscious states. This flow is necessarily a unified field of conscious states. In that sense, the self or the subject becomes a *sine qua non* for the possibility of a unified field of consciousness. The subject is essential to consciousness (Madell), because there is an irreducible idea of *my* consciousness. The *mineness* is the unique feature of consciousness attributed to the self.

Here the question arises: Is the self a substantive self independent of the conscious states? That is, is the self an ontological entity on its own independently of the conscious states which are ascribed to it? The answer could be no because there is no warrant to separate the self from the experience it has (Zahavi 2013). The self is necessarily related to the experiences it has. Hence, the self can be called an experiential self<sup>7</sup> (Zahavi 2013). On this it can be further argued that the experiential self is not a product of the experiences but is their presupposition. The self is the ontological support of consciousness without being an independent entity in the Cartesian sense. The Cartesian self, at least under one interpretation, is a non-experiential non-changing substantial self. But it need not be the case because Descartes himself admits the *Cogito* as the thinking and experiencing self (Descartes 1912). The self cannot but be related to the experiences which constitute the unified field of consciousness.

There are two main arguments to posit the experiential self: the first argument is that the self or the subject is the ontological ground of consciousness because of which the unity of consciousness is possible. Any number of experiences can be attributed to this self without there being any disunity among the experiences. The second argument is that some experiences are mine because I am the self among many other selves. My being a self cannot be taken away from me by any sceptical argument. I am there already as the experiencer, the first-person. That is why my ontological



reality cannot be brushed aside by any argument wishing away the first-person itself (Madell 2015). If my presence as a self is already built into my experiences, I am the metaphysically real self even if I am the only self in the world (Husserl 1960). The question is not whether I am the only self, but whether I am the self at all. If my existence as a self is metaphysically guaranteed, then any other self is metaphysically real.

My argument is that the experiential self is a metaphysical self because my existence is the ground of my experiences. Therefore, we cannot say that myself is a minimal self (Zahavi 2005). If it is minimal in the sense of a thin self, then it is not a thin self. My self is a robust self and is metaphysically well grounded because without my existence my consciousness becomes anchorless. The minimal self is too thin to claim all my experiences as mine. If we follow the minimalist theory, we will end up with a self having no role to play except as a formal self. The formal self is just a formal requirement like the Kantian “I think” but this is not what is demanded; the self needed is not just a formal self but a metaphysical self. “I think” and “I experience” are not just formal, but also experiential and metaphysical. Therefore, there is a way to make the self more robust and maximal.

### 3.10 The Irreducible Self

The most pressing problem that arises in this connection is the threat of the reducibility of the self (Dennett 1991). Philosophers unhappy with the robust self intend to reduce it to something else, namely, to the body or simply to a bundle or cluster of experiences (Hume 1878). Those who believe that there is no substantive self to account for the unity of consciousness try to argue that such a self is not warranted and is at best illusory (Albahari 2013). Their main argument is that the substantive self is the extra-experiential self which must be found to be illusory because there is no way we can prove it empirically and psychologically (Dennett 1991). Any attempt to bring in this self through the backdoor is at best a Cartesian legacy based on questionable metaphysical assumptions. This self they think is altogether dispensable.

They go further to argue that even the minimal self (Zahavi) which is part of our consciousness must be reduced to the Humean cluster or bundle of experiences. But is this possible? Can the self be a bundle of sensations? The bundle theory is not only absurd but also impossible to achieve because it presupposes the self which it wants to reduce to a bundle of sense perceptions. The self is a primitive category (Strawson 1959), and must be the basis of any concept of a conscious state like sensation or perception. A sensation is a sensation because of its being ascribed to a self. So no reduction of the self to a group of sensations is possible because the self is already there even before the reduction can begin.

Can the self be reduced to the body of a person whose self it is? Many seem to think that the body is the nearest possible entity to which the self can be reduced because the body is the constant companion of the self with which it is attached as

the self is embodied in any case. The body in this connection is the physical frame which constitutes the reference point for all conscious states like the sensations. The body is the location of the sensations like pain. Therefore, to know what the pain-sensation is, we must have knowledge of the physical location of the pain. But the pain-sensation is a mental state and not a physical state. The physical state is not the same as the mental state. Therefore, the body cannot take the place of the self to which the mental state is ascribed. The self thus cannot be reduced to the body because the body itself presupposes the self to which it is ascribed. Besides, the body which necessarily accompanies the self and through which the latter is embodied cannot be that to which the self can be reduced.

Thus, the self remains the basic metaphysical reality on which the consciousness itself depends for its unity and subjectivity (Searle 1992). The self remains the irreducible ground of the mental life of the human persons (Davidson 2001). The irreducibility of the self is best represented in the theory of the pre-reflective nature self-consciousness. This notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness suggests that we are pre-theoretically aware of the self as the basic ground of our mental life. The self-consciousness is ontologically the primitive state of our consciousness. In this state, there is the basic awareness of oneself without any theoretical intervention. The self is aware of itself as the self even before there is any thought of the self. This is an evidence of the fact that the self is aware of itself before it is aware of anything else including the world. There is, therefore, no way we can reduce this ontologically primitive self-consciousness.

### 3.11 Ontology of Subjectivity

Let us now revert back to the concept of subjectivity which cuts across many traditions including the phenomenological tradition which we have already referred to. The analytic tradition with which we are mostly concerned in this chapter is emphatic on the idea of subjectivity in the study of consciousness (Searle 1992; Chalmers 1996). It is because consciousness as a subjective phenomenon has drawn the attention of the philosophers who take the first-person stance regarding the conscious phenomena.

There are two prominent features of the first-person ontology: one is the subjective nature of consciousness; second is the phenomenal nature of consciousness. Both subjectivity and the phenomenality of consciousness are ontological features. Subjectivity is the primary ontological feature, whereas phenomenality is a secondary feature (Searle 1992; Flanagan 1992, 2007). However, the ontology of the first-person is incomplete without both these features. In this connection, it is necessary to take note of the fact that the first-person or the self comes to the centre-stage of our study of consciousness.

To begin with subjectivity, let us investigate what subjectivity is all about. Subjectivity is the primary ontological feature of consciousness in the sense that consciousness reveals itself completely when given in the primary mode of subjectivity. All

consciousness without exception is ontologically subjective, though epistemologically it could be objective (Searle 1992). The ontological subjectivity distinguishes the phenomenon of consciousness from all other phenomena in the world. Consciousness stands uniquely as a self-conscious phenomenon. This is the very intrinsic feature which makes it stand on its own vis-a-vis all other phenomena. The subjectivity is not conferred on consciousness by a higher-order thought (HOT) as claimed by Rosenthal (2002). If we allow a higher-order thought, then we will face an infinite regress and so we can never make the mental states subjectively conscious. Consciousness is subjective by its own nature and so there is no higher-order thought needed to make it subjective.

The phenomenal consciousness is the I-consciousness which makes consciousness distinguished from the objective psychological phenomena of the mind. The mental phenomena considered from the third-person point of view are the objective phenomena which need to be distinguished from the subjective phenomena. This is the distinction between the phenomenal and psychological consciousness (Chalmers 1996). Phenomenal consciousness is the first-person or subjective consciousness, whereas the psychological and objective consciousness is the third-person consciousness. The main features of the phenomenal consciousness apart from subjectivity are its intensely reflexive character which makes consciousness self-complete and autonomous.

### 3.12 Phenomenal Consciousness and the First-Person

Now the problem arises as to how we can track the phenomenal or I-consciousness if the first-person consciousness is “my consciousness”. The first-person consciousness is conscious of itself and is accessible to the first-person. This phenomenal consciousness has what Nagel calls the “something it is to be like” character (Nagel 2002). He has pointed out that what the bat or any other animal feels or experiences cannot be known by anybody other than the bat or the animal concerned. The same is true of the human experiences which can be known only by the person concerned. That is, experiences are deeply first-personal and so cannot be understood by anyone else from a third-person point of view.

The first-person experiences are all closed to the third-person and so there is a real problem about the phenomenal consciousness because it cannot be understood from the objective standpoint, and it cannot be known by anybody other than the first-person. This shows the primacy of the first-person so far as the phenomenal consciousness is concerned. However, the fact of the matter is that *prima facie* the first-person or subjective consciousness is such that it is itself self-given and so inscrutable from the objective standpoint. This first-person closure of phenomenal consciousness makes consciousness entirely subjective in the epistemic sense.

But there is a way Nagel’s proposal can be understood which does not support the first-person closure. Nagel is supposed to have said that the so-called bat-experience is cognitively closed and we can never know what those experiences are. This puts a

premium on our cognitive capacities themselves. These capacities are such that we cannot ultimately unravel the mystery of consciousness. That is, we cannot solve the problem of the mind–body relation with our limited cognitive apparatus (McGinn 1991). This Nagel-McGinn thesis does not deny that first-person consciousness is primary, but what it emphasizes is that consciousness itself cannot be finally understood by the human mind. Humana mind as such has its own limitations because of which we cannot unravel what is hidden in the human consciousness (McGinn 1991). The hidden factor in consciousness is beyond all human capacities irrespective of which point of view we occupy. Phenomenal consciousness is no exception to this rule. The I-consciousness is phenomenally given, but it does not disclose its hidden structure (McGinn 1991).

### 3.13 Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been shown that the first-person point of view emerges as the most legitimate way of understanding consciousness, especially its phenomenal aspect. It has also been shown that the third-person point of view cannot do justice to the subjective nature of consciousness. Subjectivity itself is an ontological category which has a prominent place in the metaphysics of consciousness. The subjectivity of consciousness is the metaphysical fact which must be taken seriously.

It has been shown that the objective approach to consciousness undertaken by the objective sciences does not succeed because these sciences work within the third-person point of view. The latter has been exposed to be inadequate and incomplete thus yielding place to the first-person or the subjective point of view.

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# Chapter 4

## From Naturalism to Anti-naturalism: Towards Transcendental Turn



### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter intends to explore the possibility of the transcendental metaphysics of consciousness from the predominantly phenomenological point of view. Phenomenology in the twentieth century has changed the face of the metaphysics of consciousness from the naturalist standpoint to the anti-naturalist and transcendent standpoints. This has resulted in the explorations of the structures and the limits of consciousness from a robust subjective or first-person standpoint.

Husserl (1931, 1960) has spearheaded this transcendental movement in the heart of Western metaphysics bringing in the much awaited idealist turn in philosophy after Kant's Copernican Revolution in metaphysics and epistemology (Kant 1929). This chapter will situate transcendental metaphysics in the Kantian-Husserian tradition and explore its implications for the metaphysics of consciousness.

### 4.2 The Transcendental Turn

In this connection it is imperative to take into consideration the transcendental turn against naturalism (Kant 1929; Husserl 1931), which unleashed a wave of protest against the naturalist world-view. It started with Kant and passed through Husserl to make naturalism see its limits in its search for the real nature of the mind and consciousness. Kant (1929) made an effort to make a new way to see the mind and consciousness in the best possible light in terms of the inner potentiality of the human reason. The reason is brought into its own light to make the world seen in terms of the reason's capacity to make the world intelligible in its rational structure. Besides, Kant (1929), made every effort to see the human self organize its rational capacities to shape the world in terms of laws of reason and not of Nature. The natural laws are subordinated to the laws of reason in his system of the world phenomena.

As far as consciousness is concerned, Kant made it a transparent medium of the world constitution which resulted in the rise of the phenomenal world as the correlate of the conscious processes enacted in the mind. The self-conscious “I think” which accompanies all the world representations is the process of consciousness unifying the world phenomena (Kant 1929). This is the crux of the Kantian transcendental method to capture consciousness in its non-natural forms as integrated into the unified phenomenal experience. The latter is the product of the qualitative experience and the conceptual structures emerging from within. This transcendental approach to consciousness brings out the non-natural structures from within consciousness itself.

Husserl (1931) brings out the undercurrents of non-naturalism in his transcendental study of consciousness. He brings a halt to the naturalist philosophies of consciousness in the hands of the empiricists and the naturalists (Brentano 1973). The naturalization of consciousness had destroyed the very intentional and normative structure of consciousness. That is the reason why Husserl has suggested the method of bracketing the natural world view by putting it out of action for making consciousness stand on its internal glory (Husserl 1931, 1960). By bracketing the natural attitude or the natural point of view, Husserl ushered in the transcendental phenomenology of consciousness.

This new way of studying consciousness which will be discussed in this chapter makes the following starting points:

1. It rejects naturalism as a way of understanding consciousness.
2. It makes the intentional structure of consciousness the new subject matter of phenomenological analysis.
3. It situates meanings in the heart of the normative consciousness.
4. It makes the world the phenomenal correlate of consciousness thus paving the way for the idealist view of the world.
5. It makes consciousness the ultimate source of values and meanings which human life.

### **4.3 The Anti-naturalist Metaphysics**

As a reaction against reductive naturalism, anti-naturalism arose as an alternative viewpoint on the nature of mind and consciousness. It was mainly Husserl (1931), who rose against the dominance of naturalism in the twentieth century along with of course Wittgenstein (1961). His contention was that naturalism has led philosophy astray from its main task of understanding the human subjectivity because it has concentrated more on the nature of the world in the post-Cartesian era. Both Husserl and Wittgenstein made a strong plea for the limits of the world which could be laid down by thought and reason so that subjectivity cannot be placed within the world itself. The attention of philosophy now turns back to the self or the subjectivity which must be placed outside the world.



Before we enquire further into the transcendental subjectivity it is now incumbent on us to go into the whole stand of anti-naturalism as a philosophical method. The following are some of the assumptions of philosophical anti-naturalism:

1. The order of Nature is not absolute because there are limits of the natural world. That is, the natural world is relative to the system of descriptions which we have designed.
2. The natural laws are not supreme because these laws are part of the conceptual systems human beings have designed. They are the man-made laws which are posited for the convenience of explanation.
3. The human subjectivity in the transcendental sense is outside the boundary of the world because there is no way we can place the self in the world itself.
4. Consciousness as such is in itself not a part of the world because the world itself is a projection of consciousness. Consciousness thus captures the world from its own sphere which is beyond the world.
5. The naturalist method of explanation of the mind and consciousness is to be superseded by the anti-naturalist method to do justice to the domain of consciousness.

With the above assumptions, anti-naturalism has come forward as an alternative account of the mind and consciousness. Its main thesis is that there are many phenomena in the universe or out of it which are not natural at all the way the physical phenomena are. Therefore, there must be a new way of understanding these phenomena with the help of the non-naturalist methods of explanation.

Anti-naturalism as a philosophical method rejects naturalism as the method of explaining the non-physical and the non-natural phenomena. Naturalism is shown to be not only limited but also incompetent to explain the human phenomena including consciousness. There are many sectors in the human affairs like man's social and moral concerns which cannot be adequately explained by the natural sciences. That is the reason why anti-naturalism comes forward as a new way of explaining the human mind and consciousness without appealing to the laws of Nature. The latter are adequate to explain the natural events and processes which take place in Nature, but they cannot explain what is supposed to be outside the boundary of Nature. Naturalists of course do not admit anything which is not natural, but that is their short-sightedness because of which they cannot see beyond what is natural and physical. The realm of the non-physical and the non-natural which is known as the realm of the normative entities is very much real and must be taken note of.

### ***4.3.1 Anti-naturalist Ontology***

The crux of the problem regarding naturalism is its ontology which restricts itself to the physicalist ontology, thereby ruling out the possibility of the ontology of the normative entities like the mathematical objects, moral values and spiritual experiences. The latter are not physical in nature and so must be beyond the limits of the

physical world (Wittgenstein 1961). There is a realm of the normative and the valuational which cannot be put within the physicalist ontology (Husserl 1931). The physicalist ontology is capable of entertaining only physical objects and processes which occur in the physical space and time, but it has nothing to say regarding the objects which are platonic in nature such as the essences, universals and logical forms which are matters of rational understanding and not of empirical experience (Kant 1929).

The selection of an ontology depends on how we look at the world, that is, on our conceptual apparatus (Quine 1953). There is a way in which we perceive the world to be. According to Quine's famous dictum: "To be is to be the value of a valuable", anything to be real must be the value of variable within a certain linguistic structure. That is to say, logic determines what is real in the world (Quine 1953). Reality in this sense is a matter of our logical projection. If this is the way we can make the world a matter of our logico-linguistic structure, then it becomes clear that nothing non-physical can be accommodated within the world because the non-physical objects may not apparently fit into this ontological scheme.

We can distinguish between formal and material objects in the following way: the formal categories of objects consist of such objects as Quality, Quantity, Relation, etc. whereas the material categories of objects include objects such as physical bodies, mass, force, event, etc. which have location in space-time (Husserl 1931, 1970a, b; Smith 1999). This division is based on the simple principle that the formal objects have a different identity from those of the material objects. Husserl carves out a formal ontology out of these formal categories as distinguished from the material ontology. This shows that there cannot be only material or physical ontology because we are bound to recognize the importance of the formal ontology. The naturalists are unable to accept the formal ontology because they are unable to look beyond our empirical objects given in sense experience. Quine's ontology is an example of the naturalist or physicalist ontology, while Husserl's is an example of anti-naturalist ontology.

The formal categories are part of our logical apparatus, but they are also part of reality. So it cannot be the case that these categories are a part of theory as Quine (1953), believes. Husserl's ontology is not the projection of a theory but are part of the logical structure of reality. On this, Husserl (1931) and the early Wittgenstein (1961), agree because both accept that the world is a totality of facts or the existing states of affairs. The world is formally describable in terms of the formal categories like objects and states of affairs. Both offer formal ontologies which can be grounded on formal logic. Thus, both Husserl and early Wittgenstein are anti-naturalists in so far as their formal ontologies are concerned.

#### 4.4 World or Nature

The concept of the world or Nature is central to any ontology. Both the material and formal ontologies presuppose the world. The latter is the background against which we can divide the categories into formal and material. The world is the totality of

facts or the existing states as Wittgenstein (1961), holds keeping in view his formalist description of the world. Husserl also takes the world in the same way as existing naturally in the realm of its own consisting of objects in relation to one another (Husserl 1970a, b). The world for Husserl and Wittgenstein is not just an assemblage of objects; there are objects in relation to one another.

The naturalist world view takes the world as something given and as independent of the human mind. It is the world which becomes the subject of study by the natural sciences. Not only physics and chemistry but also all other natural sciences are concerned with the world because they are in search of an explanation of the natural laws operating in the world. Husserl takes this world as the objective ground of the sciences which have since Galileo attempted to understand it in terms of mathematics (Husserl 1970a, b). The fact of the matter is that the objective sciences have always made the world an objective arena of mathematical analysis. The way the world is projected in the mathematical physics is the world of a mechanical kind that runs on the rails of the mathematical laws.

The world of mathematical physics is rather very different from the common world inhabited by the human beings. The latter is called the world of common sense. This is called the life-world by Husserl (1970a, b) because this is the world in which human beings live. This is also the surrounding world in which the animals and other living and non-living beings exist. This surrounding world is a massive world of physical and non-physical beings. Husserl's interest in this world is philosophical rather than scientific because he believes that the scientific world does not serve the purpose of philosophy because the latter as phenomenology is in search of the meaning of the world. The facts of the world do not serve the purpose of meaning because the latter has to come from some other source, namely, the observer or the self that is outside the world. Husserl's aim is to give a phenomenological account of the world rather than a scientific or naturalist account of it. This will be discussed in due course.

The world of common sense has been philosophically justified by the philosophers of common sense (Moore 1965), who believe that the world is beyond doubt so far as our ordinary life is concerned. There is no reason to doubt that the world exists for all practical purposes and that no metaphysics can prove that space and time are unreal. This proof of the external world which has been emphasized by Moore (1965), goes to show that it is futile to make any attempt to disprove the existence of the world. Wittgenstein (1967) made it clear that proofs are not needed because the world is already a part of our form of life and the language-games we engage in. The attempt to prove the existence of the world is misguided because the attempt to disprove its existence is equally misguided. This goes to show that the world which is the subject matter of common sense and science is beyond doubt and that there is no reason to accept the arguments of Descartes (1912), to prove the existence of the world against the sceptics.

### 4.4.1 *On Bracketing the World*

Husserl's anti-naturalism begins with the application of the method of bracketing (1931, 1960). This is the famous method of *epoche* which has been central to Husserl's phenomenology in the twentieth century. Husserl has invented this method to keep the natural world-view out so that a new phenomenological world view emerges in its place. The natural standpoint regarding the existence of the world is kept out of action so that the phenomenological standpoint stands out. Husserl writes:

We put out of action the general thesis which belongs to the essence of the natural standpoint, we place in brackets whatever it includes respecting the nature of Being: *this entire, therefore*, which is continually "there with us"... (Husserl 1931: 110).

Such is the method of bracketing which keeps our natural beliefs about the world and its existence out of action such that they are suspended for all practical purposes. Therewith Husserl suspends all the sciences and theories about the world because they have no relevance for his phenomenological project.

Husserl's project is phenomenological in the sense that it moves away from the world after bracketing it to the more fundamental reality of consciousness or the conscious Ego. The world is no more fundamental to his project though its existence is never doubted; the world is kept in brackets. From the world the attention moves to the Ego which is the transcendental Ego. Husserl elaborates this process of reduction in the following words:

By phenomenological epoche I reduce my natural Ego and my psychic life—the realm of my *psychological self-experience*—to my transcendental-phenomenological Ego, the realm of *transcendental-phenomenological self-experience* (Husserl 1960: 26).

Thus, the method of bracketing and reduction takes Husserl to the transcendental consciousness which is the new arena of philosophical reflection. The transcendental method of reduction achieves the desired result of reducing the natural world and the natural Ego to the transcendental consciousness and the transcendental Ego.

### 4.4.2 *Phenomenological Reductions*

Husserl's method of phenomenological reductions is a landmark development in the history of phenomenology as a study of consciousness. This method is a transcendental method which seeks to lay bare the universal and the necessary structures of consciousness (Husserl 1931, 1960). The method takes its first step in bracketing the natural world and keeping it in abeyance for the purpose of investigating into the nature and structure of consciousness. Consciousness as such needs to be detached from the external world because the latter is part of the natural order from which the conscious Ego has to detach itself. This distancing of the transcendental Ego from the natural world is the function of the method of reduction. This is accomplished by the repeated application of the method of reduction to arrive at the absolute

transcendental consciousness which is pure and unconditioned. The domain of pure consciousness is the phenomenological residue which cannot be further reduced (Husserl 1931).

The results of the phenomenological reductions are the following which constitute the bedrock of transcendental phenomenology:

1. Consciousness is freed from its empirical conditions which include its bodily conditions fixed by the world.
2. Empirical consciousness is reduced to the transcendental consciousness by virtue of the transforming effect of the reductions. Correspondingly the empirical Ego is transformed into the transcendental Ego.
3. Transcendental Ego or the transcendental subjectivity appears in all its intentional structures and the essences which are found a priori in consciousness.
4. The structures of meanings are embedded in the noetic-noematic structures of consciousness.
5. Phenomenology as the science of consciousness is firmly founded in the absolute and unconditioned structures of consciousness.

Thus, transcendental phenomenology appears as the new metaphysics of transcendental consciousness replacing the psychological science of consciousness. The latter is overcome and dethroned from its original position as a natural science of consciousness (Husserl 1960).

As far as the study of consciousness is concerned, phenomenology opens up a new way for an all comprehensive study of the essential structures of consciousness and the associated meaning structures which have remained unrecovered by the empirical sciences like psychology and neurophysiology. The latter sciences have no idea what consciousness has implicit in it as the meaning- or intentional structures. Especially the noetic-noematic structures have remained long in oblivion till the method of reduction was discovered.

## 4.5 The Absolute Ego-Consciousness

The greatest discovery of phenomenology is the absolute Ego or the transcendental Ego which has been the cornerstone of Husserl's philosophy. It is around the Absolute Ego that everything revolves in this philosophy which aims at a comprehensive egology (Husserl 1931). The method of this philosophy is to unearth the essential structures of meaning (Thevenaz 1962) which are laid deeply in consciousness. Unless consciousness is transformed or reduced to transcendental consciousness, these meaning-structures cannot be brought to the fore.

Now the question is: How is the Ego to be identified as the absolute Ego? Why is it absolute at all? These questions arise for the obvious reason that there is no way we can make the Ego less absolute than it actually is. The Ego in its transcendental aspect becomes the absolute and unconditioned Ego that absorbs all its structures within itself independently of the empirical world. The empirical world is no more

the world that constrains the Ego. The Ego is freed from the world absolutely. This is the reason why the Ego is absolute in the sense of being unconditioned by the world. But the question is: if the Ego is free from the world, how can it reveal something about the world through its intentional structures? The absolute Ego, for Husserl, is entirely unrelated to the world (Thevenaz 1962), because the world is the other pole of the Ego. The relation between the Ego and the world is that of the subject with the object. But this relation need not be such that the subject as the Ego is bound to be correlated with the object or the world. The absolute Ego belongs to a higher level because of which it cannot be always in relation to the world.

The absolute Ego is consciousness itself because the Ego is the Ego-consciousness. The Ego is conscious of itself, as well as of the world, which it constitutes in its noetic-noematic structures. The world is now constituted by consciousness at the transcendental level (Husserl 1960). Because of the constitution the world is reduced to an intentional world and is the sum of the meanings which the Ego bestows on the world. Thus, the absolute Ego re-absorbs the world within the circle of meanings and becomes the sole owner of the constituted world. It is the Ego's world that is transcendentially significant.

The Ego becomes the source of all meanings which the world bears in its constituted form. The natural world is reduced and in its place, we have the constituted world which is the world of meanings. The latter has no correlation in the empirical world. The supremacy of the Ego is finally established over the world because it is the Ego which bestows meanings on the world. This leads to some form of transcendental idealism in phenomenology. It is the intentional nature of consciousness which is the source of transcendental idealism (Husserl 1960).

## 4.6 Intentionality

Intentionality has been one of the most discussed problems in contemporary philosophy of consciousness. It is the problem of intentionality which has been very prominently discussed by Husserl after Brentano who introduced the problem while discussing the nature of the mental phenomena. Husserl's transcendental treatment of the problem gave it an important place in the discourse on consciousness (Husserl 1931). However, the philosophers of mind, in general, have given much importance to the concept of intentionality because of its centrality to the philosophy of consciousness (Searle 1983, 1992).

Intentionality primarily means that all conscious states are directed at objects other than themselves and that consciousness is always consciousness of something. (Husserl 1931; Searle 1983; Sartre 1956). There is unanimity amongst philosophers regarding the nature and function of intentionality of the conscious phenomena because consciousness at any rate is always regarding something, whether that something is actually present in the world or not. Conscious states like perception do require an object which is transcendent to them, but an experience like hallucination does not refer to any existing object in the world. Many experiences like dream

experiences are intentional even if there are no objects really existing. That is the reason why it has been held that consciousness does not depend on any object for it to function. Being about an object real or unreal is the defining feature of consciousness (Husserl 1931).

Intentionality defines the conscious states and not the objects in the world. Consciousness exhibits its intentional structure in its own functioning, and thus makes the objects appear before it with their characteristic features. The objective world appears before consciousness with all its properties, even if those objects are unreal, like the dream objects. The objects with their properties become objects of consciousness, and thus become the intentional objects. These intentional objects are noematic contents of consciousness, and thus logically are the essential part of consciousness. Husserl provides a transcendental ground to the noematic objects as distinguished from the noetic acts of consciousness (Husserl 1931). The transcendental method of reduction and bracketing in Husserl brings into sharp focus the constitutive elements of the intentional function of consciousness in organizing the world phenomena in terms of the noematic structures of consciousness (Husserl 1931).

Most recently intentionality has been studied from a naturalist point of view (Searle 1983; Dennett 2010), because it has been discovered that intentionality can be better understood in terms of its natural origin in the brain. The intentional conscious states have their origin in the activities of the brain so that by studying the brain and its functions we can better understand the nature of intentionality. For Searle, for example, the intentionality is a natural phenomenon like any other natural phenomenon like digestion and so on (Searle 1983), and so there is no way we can understand intentionality except by investigating the biological origin of it in the human brain. Both consciousness and intentionality are biological in origin and are caused by the brain. This theory is, therefore, called biological naturalism (Searle 1983).

The idea that intentionality is biological in nature is not disputed by the philosophers in the naturalist camp. What they dispute is whether the brain itself as a material body can give rise to a mental phenomenon like intentionality (Dennett 2010). If the universe is ultimately material or physical in nature, there can be no realm of consciousness per se independently of the brain. So as a hard core materialist, Dennett cannot accept the Searlean idea that consciousness is a real phenomenon in the world (Dennett 2010: 1–6). However, he cannot deny the apparent utility of the mental language and also the vocabulary of the intentional concepts like believing, desiring, etc. which play a crucial role in the understanding of the human persons. Keeping this in view, Dennett has developed the concept of intentional stance to understand man's intentional behaviour (Dennett 2010), according to which we can understand man's intentional behaviour in such way that we always interpret that behaviour as if it were intentional, even if it is actually not. This as if intentionality is a pragmatic way of understanding a physical system like that of the brain as if it were an intentional system (Dennett 2010: 35–45). Thus, intentionality is retained at the cost of its reality as a phenomenon in Nature. It is at best a secondary phenomenon which is attributed to the primary system of the brain.

Intentionality remains a primary phenomenon even if there are oppositions to such a theory as intentional realism because, however, we may try we cannot reduce intentionality to a physical phenomenon because that will go against the Brentano's Thesis which holds that only the mental phenomena are intentional in character. It is left to us how we account for intentionality within the broad framework of a theory of consciousness.

## 4.7 Transcendental Idealism

Husserl comes around to idealism as an inevitable consequence of his transcendental approach to consciousness or the Ego (Smith 2003), because this is how he could prove that the only reality that is absolute is consciousness itself. The world itself is dependent on consciousness because its meaning is constituted by the conscious acts of the Ego. Husserl writes:

Carried out with this systematic concreteness, phenomenology is *eo ipso* “*transcendental idealism*”, though in a fundamentally and essentially new sense. It is not a psychological idealism, and most certainly not such an idealism as sensualistic psychologism proposes, an idealism that would derive a senseful world from senseless sensuous data (Husserl 1960: 86).

Husserl thus distinguishes his form of idealism from the idealism of the psychologistic philosophers like Berkeley who claim to derive the world from the sense data. It is because the sense data are themselves senseless and so cannot give us the world that goes beyond the sense manifold.

Husserl distinguishes his idealism from Kant's transcendental idealism on the ground that the latter accepts the thing-in-itself as the limiting concept which allows for a reality beyond empirical knowledge. Such a reality is an anathema to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology because there is nothing outside the realm of consciousness as the thing-in-itself. Everything outside the realm of consciousness is senseless. For him, there is nothing outside the transcendental subjectivity (Smith 2003: 179). According to Husserl, if consciousness does not exist, then nothing could (Smith 2003: 179), because consciousness is alone absolutely real. If anything falls outside consciousness, then that becomes utterly vacuous and meaningless.

One may wonder if Husserl's phenomenology leads to some form of subjectivism or solipsism if there is nothing external to consciousness. But this misconception is easily dispelled if we take the idea of transcendental reduction in the right spirit. The latter does not deny the external world as given in our natural standpoint but only suggests that the natural world could be bracketed for consciousness to emerge as the source of meaning and intentionality. From the transcendental standpoint, consciousness confers meaning on the world and so consciousness becomes the absolute reality. From this point of view, phenomenology becomes a kind of idealism in the absolute sense. In Husserl's own words:



*The proof of this idealism is therefore phenomenology itself.* Only someone who misunderstands either the deepest sense of intentional method or that of transcendental reduction, or perhaps both, can attempt to separate phenomenology from transcendental idealism (Husserl 1960: 86).

This is a clear affirmation of the fact that phenomenology and idealism are inseparable, and that there is no reason to believe that Husserl has imported idealism from an external source. Idealism in the absolute non-subjective sense is the basic spirit of phenomenology.

## 4.8 Transcendental Intersubjectivity

Transcendental idealism does not preclude the reality of the world, nor does it deny the existence of other Egos in the community of Egos. Husserl is of the view that idealism in his sense goes well with realism in the sense that the world is real empirically, though it is ideal in the transcendental sense (Husserl 1960). Similarly, other Egos exist in the world even though they are constituted like the world itself. The constitutional status of the world and the community of Egos is derived from the transcendental Ego which performs the acts of constitution within its subjectivity. The latter is the sphere of mineness (Husserl 1960), within which the constitution takes place.

The problem of intersubjectivity arises because of the existence of the multiple Egos in the world. The relationship among the Egos is constituted in the sphere of consciousness of the transcendental Ego. This is possible because of the intentionality of the acts of consciousness which are undertaken by the transcendental Ego in the form of the primordial subjectivity. The other Egos come into existence by being constituted by the primordial consciousness or subjectivity. Husserl gives primacy to the transcendental subjectivity centring around my Ego. This facilitates the constitution of the other Egos in the community of the Egos as the monads (Husserl 1960), within my transcendental subjectivity.

Husserl characterizes the Egos as the monads which have a unique sphere of their ownness and which are independent of one another in the world. But they constitute a community of monads (Husserl 1960), because the monads make a common world of intersubjectivity. If the monads would have been absolutely independent of other monads, then they would fail to make a community of monads. Therefore, the intersubjectivity of the monads is metaphysically necessary to make possible a common world of interdependent monadic existence. Monads are the Egos which are drawn towards one another in the spirit of empathy (Husserl 1960: 134–35). This is a unique transcendental condition of the intersubjectivity of the monadic Egos on which depends how my Ego connects itself with other Egos in the relation of empathy in the intersubjective communion with others.

The relation of empathy is the foundation on which the intersubjectivity is transcendently constituted within the primordial sphere of transcendental subjectivity. In the absence of the strong bond of empathy, the monadic community will come

to naught and so the social structure of the monadic community will crumble down. Keeping this in mind, Husserl makes a transcendental plea to keep the entire intersubjective social world intact by making the monads come together through empathetic relationships. The social world of the monads is constituted transcendently within the subjectivity of the Egos. The sociocultural world is a commonly constituted world within the transcendental subjectivity of the Egos.

## 4.9 Life-Worlds

Transcendental phenomenology needs a bridge between the transcendental Ego and the social world of the intermonadic community. This has resulted in the absolute requirement of the life-worlds as the midway between the solipsistic Ego and the intersubjective world. This Husserl calls the life-world (Husserl 1960, 1970a, b; Smith 2003; Mohanty 1985). The life-worlds are the surrounding worlds of the Ego in which the latter has its being; that is, the life-worlds carry the life-activities of the Ego that makes moves towards constituting the world and other Egos. Husserl writes:

How do we have the life-world as a universal field, fixed in advance, of such established facts? It is the spatiotemporal world of things as we experience them in our pre- and extrascientific life and as we know them to be experienceable beyond what is (actually) experienced (Husserl 1970a, b: 138).

Thus, the life-world is the surrounding world of things which is given in our experience. It is pre-scientific in the sense that it precedes all theorizations of the world. It is an experienceable world that is given to our subjective consciousness.

The life-worlds are not strange entities to be encountered in imagination, but are the practical worlds in which the Egos participate. It is the Ego-world, so to speak, with which we as the human beings are in contact in our day to day living. The life-worlds are the multiple worlds in which the Egos participate, but which remain centred around the Ego-community. In that sense, the life-world is a community-world (Husserl 1960) constituted in the experience of the Egos. It can be said that there is no unique life-world which is common to all the Egos, but multiple worlds which may converge on a socially and transcendently constituted life-world. But the latter would no longer be the relative life-worlds, but the absolute life-world. Husserl's effort in this is to make room for the world as the habitat of the Egos, so that the Egos can eidetically constitute the sense of the common world. The common life-world is the ultimate world having significance in the intentional experience of the Egos.

The objective world of the natural sciences abstracts away from the life-worlds (Husserl 1970a, b), because of which the objective sciences fail to understand the pre-given world in which the human beings live. The latter is put aside by the scientific minded thinkers as subjective, and relative in their search for a common objective world acceptable to the natural sciences. But this world fails utterly to capture the

human elements which constitute the subjective foundations of the objective sciences (Husserl 1970a, b). The crisis in the European sciences is the crisis centred around the loss of the subjectivity of the human life-world (Husserl 1970a, b). Once the life-world of the human subjects is lost, there is no end to the objectivization and the mathematization of the natural world leading to the collapse of the meaning of the external world. Phenomenology of the subjective consciousness rejects this naturalistic conception of the world in favour of a meaningful world constituted within the intentional consciousness.

## 4.10 Back to the Ego

Phenomenology becomes inevitable as a reaction to the objectivist and abstract thinking that leads human reason astray at least in the sense that reason becomes a prisoner of its own limitations. Reason becomes the handmaid of the positive sciences, and thus deviates from the principles underlying the human sciences which speak of the human soul or the spirit. The spirit in man gets pushed aside as of no consequence for the understanding of man and society. Husserl has come back to the study of subjective consciousness (Husserl 1931, 1960), for bringing back reason to its origin in man and the human consciousness. He follows Kant (1929) and Hegel (1977), in making consciousness the new point of departure for philosophizing about man and the universe. Husserl writes:

Blinded by naturalism (no matter how much they attack it verbally), the humanists have totally failed even to pose the problem of a universal and pure humanistic science and to inquire after a theory of the essence of spirit purely as spirit which would pursue what is unconditionally universal... (Husserl 1970a, b: 273).

Thus, not only the scientists but also the humanists have failed to understand the spirit in man because of which they have failed to understand the human sciences. This is a great lacuna in the contemporary scientific view of man and the universe.

Both naturalism and objectivism have dominated the scientific and rationalist view of man and the universe. This has resulted in the lack of a proper understanding of man and the universe. This is the failure of rationalism as such in the modern European civilization (Husserl 1970a, b: 299). Husserl writes:

The reason for the failure of a rational culture, however, as we said, lies not in the essence of rationalism but solely in its being rendered superficial, in its entanglements in "naturalism" and "objectivism" (Husserl 1970a, b: 299).

Thus, there is a crisis in the human culture because of the naturalist and the objectivist way of thinking predominantly found in the positive sciences. This is a serious lacking in the way the human culture has developed in the twentieth century. Therefore, a new approach to man and the universe is needed by investigating the essence of reason and rationalism, and above all, the spirit of man. The spirit of man is a part of the universal spirit which must be studied if we have to save the human race.

Husserl has envisaged a bright future of the human race when he says that a new humanity is on the rise and that the new spiritual awakening in man is taking place through the rise of phenomenology. Phenomenology is the new philosophy of the spirit. As Husserl writes:

The development of an actual method for grasping the fundamental essence of the spirit in its intentionalities, and for constructing from there an analysis of the spirit that is consistent *in infinitum*, led to transcendental phenomenology (Husserl 1970a, b: 298).

This indicates the fact that nothing could be more appropriate than a study of the spirit in all its essentialities as manifested consciousness and its intentionalities. That will lead inevitably to the study of the Ego as the source of the intentionalities and all that follows from the Ego-consciousness in its attempt to construct a holistic view of the human existence and the existence of the universe. The spirit is the point of departure for our understanding of the world itself because “the spirit is not in or alongside nature; rather, nature is itself drawn into the spiritual sphere” (Husserl 1970a, b: 298). That is to say, we can reconstruct nature or the world by going into the depth of the spirit.

## 4.11 The Spirit

The idea of spirit enters into phenomenology because the latter is an egology or the science or philosophy of the spirit. The Ego is the spirit which is in man and which is both individual and universal (Hegel 1977; Mure 1965). Husserl appeals to the spirit for making his phenomenology a science of consciousness which can make the universal transcendental consciousness the core of this science (Husserl 1970a, b; Smith 2003). The spirit is the new point of departure for understanding consciousness because in the spirit itself there is the possibility of elevating consciousness from its mundane level to the level of universality and unconditionality.

Husserl’s phenomenological shift is towards the spiritual transformation of man in the direction of realization of God (Husserl 1970a, b; Smith 2003: 210). This makes Husserl closer to Hegel in his affirmation of faith in the spiritual destiny of man. But the difference between the two is that Husserl discovers the spirit in phenomenology of consciousness through reduction, while Hegel arrives at it through a dialectical examination of self-consciousness (Hegel 1977). Before we examine Hegel’s theory of the spirit, let us look at Husserl’s theory of spirit as the culmination of the theory of consciousness from the transcendental perspective. Transcendental phenomenology is the way to the discovery of the spirit. That is how Husserl arrived at the universal spirit as the source of meaning and intentionality.

There are two forms of the spirit in Husserl’s theory of consciousness. One is the individual spirit as the embodiment of the individual consciousness. The other is the universal spirit as the embodiment of the universal consciousness. Consciousness in the individual sense is the given phenomenon that is the subject matter of psychology which investigates the different structures of consciousness within the

natural attitude (Husserl 1931). These structures are psychological by nature and are subject to the psychological analysis. But when phenomenology arrives to take over consciousness as a transcendental phenomenon, it builds up its case for the arrival of the universal consciousness associated with the transcendental Ego. This transition from the psychology of consciousness to the transcendental phenomenology of consciousness is the new philosophical shift that is ushered in by Husserl in his quest for the universal spirit. The universal spirit is the new transcendental reality which has to be taken note of for making the philosophy of the spirit the new philosophy of consciousness.

Husserl's philosophy of the spirit is the philosophy of the transcendental Ego or the subject that is conscious. The transcendental subject is the universal subject which consciousness itself presupposes. Therefore, there can never be any psychological understanding of the Ego unless there is already a priori presupposition of the transcendental Ego. The latter throws light on the intentional structures of consciousness and their capacity to constitute the world. The world is constituted by the Ego or the spirit. The world is no more the natural world of the natural attitude but the world transcendently constituted by the spirit. The spirit is active in the world as the constituting force that confers meaning on the world.

#### ***4.11.1 Reason and Reality***

The spirit being in the focus of phenomenology the question inevitably arises, how far reason can be part of it (Smith 2003: 159–67), and how far reason can determine the nature of the reality of the external world. Reason is the central concern of phenomenology and also of the philosophy of the spirit. Reason is not just a faculty of the Ego but it is the all comprehensive structure of the transcendental subjectivity (Smith 2003). The Ego provides the rational structure to the phenomena it encounters and gives meaning to the world as the reality opposed to the Ego. The Ego is not a silent spectator of the world process but intervenes in it through reason to give a coherent structure to the world constituted in the intentionalities of the Ego consciousness.

Husserl talks of the phenomenology of reason (Husserl 1931), because he wants to introduce reason as involved in consciousness as the central features of the conscious acts which have a noema-noetic structure. Reason is not alien to consciousness but is part of it when the latter acts noematically. There are deeper reasons why consciousness involves rational structures because without these we cannot comprehend reality. What is real is what is rationally structured, that is, what is presented in terms of the rational categories. Husserl goes along with Kant (1929), in making the reality answerable to the rational modes of consciousness of the Ego. While Kant had an elaborate deduction of the categories, Husserl went straight to consciousness to discover the intentional laws of reason. Consciousness reveals its rational structures in their transcendental form.

To understand the relation between reason and reality, we must go back to the nature of consciousness and its relation with the world. Consciousness constitutes the world and so there is a direct relation between the world and a priori evidences which emerge from consciousness. These evidences are intuitively possessed by consciousness which, in turn, make the reality appear in the intuitive structures of consciousness. The world is thus absorbed into the intentional rational sphere of consciousness wherein the meanings of the world are ultimately founded. There is no world which is not validated in the sphere of the ownness of the conscious Ego (Husserl 1960). The reality or the world is the Ego's world that appears in the original structures of consciousness. This is what Husserl (1960), calls transcendental idealism.

## 4.12 Husserl's Kantianism

Husserl's phenomenology has a Kantian leaning in view of the fact that Husserl uses the transcendental method introduced by Kant (1929). Kant used this method to arrive at the universal and necessary conditions of our knowledge of the world. His aim was to establish a priori science of experience that can provide the absolute grounds for human knowledge. This he succeeded in achieving by his famous Transcendental Deduction of the categories (Kant 1929). This was a great achievement on his part in view of the fact that empiricism had already demolished a priori foundations of the knowledge of the world. Transcendental philosophy after Kant took this method to its logical conclusion as we find in Husserl's phenomenology (Mohanty 1985, 1989).

That Husserl is indebted to Kant is reflected in his phenomenological inquiry into the nature of consciousness and the intentional structures of the acts of consciousness. Husserl (1965) wanted to establish "a rigorous science" of phenomenology on the foundations of a priori evidences embedded in the transcendental consciousness. This science of consciousness is an echo of Kant's notion of philosophy as a science (Kant 1929). Both were dissatisfied with empiricism and so wanted to go back to a priori foundations of human knowledge and experience of the world. This has resulted in what we know as the transcendental phenomenology in the twentieth century almost on the model of Kant's transcendental philosophy.

There are two features of transcendental philosophy which must be discussed which are common to both Kant and Husserl. They are as follows:

1. Philosophy is a critique of reason or consciousness in order to find out what is true a priori, i.e. what is universal and necessary. This is the search for the absolute foundations of knowledge.
2. The nature of the world is known only through reason or consciousness by discovering those rational structures which are embedded in reason or consciousness. The world is dependent on reason or consciousness in the sense that it is only a priori structures of reason or consciousness that we can constitute the world.

Husserl could not have conceived his phenomenology had Kant not prepared the ground for it in his critical study of the pure reason as a method of inquiring into a priori foundations of human knowledge. Though Husserl (1960), owes a great deal to Descartes as far as the discovery of the *Cogito* is concerned, he owes immensely to Kant's transcendental philosophy for the idea of a transcendental foundation of our knowledge of the world. Thus, we can say that Husserl carries forward the Kantian transcendental metaphysical project to new directions which were not anticipated by Kant.

### 4.13 The Transcendental Metaphysical Project

The transcendental project in philosophy derives from Kant who made it his mission to unearth a priori functions of understanding and reason so as to discover those faculties that shape the structure of the world. Though Kant's aim was to understand the world (Kant 1929), he was forced to come back to reason to discover the structures of the world because reason alone can tell us what those structures could be. The a priori structures of reason alone reveal the structures of the world because of the fact that the world has a logical and rational structure. The Kantian transcendental project is the project of showing where the reason and the world meet and how they share the same logical structure (Kant 1929).

Kant's concept of self and self-consciousness (Powell 1990), has a major role to play in Kant's phenomenology of consciousness which is at the foundation of his transcendental project. Kant's concept of self-consciousness which appears as the transcendental unity of apperception provides the structures to the reason which, in turn, legislates over the world. Without this self-consciousness as the transcendental unity of apperception, there can be no unity in the functions of the reason, and therefore, there will be no unity in the world as such. For Kant, the world is the phenomenal world which is structured through the categories of reason (Kant 1929).

Husserl's transcendental project differs from Kant's to the extent that the phenomenological reduction has been introduced as the new method of bracketing the empirical world. Kant did not bracket the natural world because he thought the world as such as it is given in experience has to be studied to unearth its logical structures. Husserl thought it otherwise because he thought that if the natural world is taken as it is, unreduced and unbracketed, then we cannot get back to consciousness in its pure form and so no genuine understanding of consciousness would be possible (Husserl 1931, 1960). To unearth the pure consciousness and its logical structures become the new aim of the transcendental project. As J.N.Mohanty writes:

Finally, as transcendental philosophy, foundationalism would look for that ultimate foundation in nothing short of the a priori structure of reason, consciousness, experience or *subjectivity* (Mohanty 1989: 116).

#### 4.14 Unity of Transcendental Consciousness

Kant's transcendental unity of apperception and Husserl's unity of transcendental consciousness have a common origin, that is, in the unity of the transcendental self or the Ego. The Ego in Husserl or the self in Kant both have the same role to play in the constitution of the world. Kant's transcendental self-consciousness provides the epistemic background for the constitution of the one unified world. This world is the result of the synthesis of the empirical data received from the world through the categories (Kant 1929). The categories are located in the human understanding which makes them available in the intellectual activity of synthesis. Thus, there is parity between the unity of self-consciousness and the unity of the world (Powell 1990). Because of this, we can find in Kant a preview of the transcendental synthesis undertaken by the transcendental Ego in Husserl.

Husserl is articulate about the role of the transcendental Ego in his constitution of the world. For him, the Ego assumes the role of the transcendental unity of consciousness in making the world phenomenologically constituted in consciousness. The Ego consciousness through its intentionalities constitutes the objects given in consciousness through the noesis-noematic correlations. The synthesis that takes place is the synthesis of the hyletic date through the noemata so as to give rise to the world within the horizon of all possible data (Smith 2003). The world is constituted within the horizon of all noematic possibilities. The world is no more the natural world which is already reduced but the eidtic world discovered through phenomenological analysis.

Husserl is concerned with the unity of consciousness because he is of the belief that consciousness is a stream (Husserl 2006), in which all the conscious acts are merged. Consciousness in its pure form reveals itself as a stream precisely because there is no other way we can find consciousness after the phenomenological reduction. Empirical or natural consciousness also appears as a stream but that is not what phenomenology takes for granted. Within the phenomenological framework, consciousness is the unified whole presented through the phenomenological time (Husserl 2006). This is the way consciousness retains unity by virtue of its inherent tendency to keep all the temporal segments within one unified whole.

Transcendental consciousness as it has been discussed so far is the pure consciousness completely free from the natural conditions. It is the consciousness which the transcendental Ego bears as the transcendental subjectivity. Consciousness as borne by the transcendental subjectivity becomes the sole sphere of phenomenological investigation. The entire burden of phenomenology lies with the transcendental consciousness (Husserl 1931, 1960).

#### 4.15 The Absolute Consciousness and the Absolute Spirit

It is necessary now to see the similarity between the absolute consciousness in phenomenology and the absolute spirit made explicit by Hegel. Husserl finds the absolute spirit in his conception of the absolute consciousness or transcendental



consciousness. Husserl believed that absolute consciousness of the transcendental Ego is the explicit form of the absolute spirit because the latter is already implicit in the former.

The absolute spirit as conceived by Hegel is the highest manifestation of consciousness (Hegel 1977). The absolute spirit is the absolute spiritual consciousness that dialectically develops out of the empirical consciousness. The latter is the subjective consciousness pitted against an objective world in which case it is obvious that consciousness is conditioned by the objective world. However, the absolute consciousness cancels the subjective consciousness and transcends the subject-object duality. Absolute consciousness is so-called because it is free from all dualities and oppositions within it. It is a unified whole of all consciousness, subjective and objective.

Husserl did not directly take the Hegelian absolute spirit as his absolute consciousness, but the affinity between the two cannot be denied. What Hegel means by the absolute spirit is visible in Husserl's absolute consciousness. The absolute spirit for Hegel is the absolute consciousness (Hegel 1977; Taylor 1979), which comprehends dialectically the subjective and objective consciousness. The absolute consciousness manifests itself in the highest form as the all comprehensive universal consciousness which is called the spirit in the absolute sense. The absolute spirit or consciousness is also the absolute idea that has concretized itself as the absolute spirit (Stace 1955). From the Idea to Nature and then from the Nature to the Spirit is the dialectical movement which the absolute spirit takes to concretize itself (Stace 1955). This is the trajectory which the spirit takes in its triadic development from Idea in logic to Spirit in metaphysics. Thus, we are led to the highest form of consciousness in the phenomenology of spirit (Hegel 1977).

Husserl arrived at the notion of the absolute consciousness through the method of phenomenological reduction, while Hegel arrived at the absolute spirit by the method of dialectical movement from the Absolute Idea in logic. The dialectical movement is intrinsic to the Idea because the Idea in logic is itself the result of a dialectical movement from Being through Essence and Notion (Stace 1955; Mure 1965). The Absolute Idea dialectically moves into Nature and then to the Absolute Spirit. These dialectics play a role in Hegel's theory of the Absolute Spirit which Husserl never accepted. For Husserl, only the transcendental method of reduction can do the job because the residue of the reductions is the absolute Ego or the absolute consciousness.

What is important to observe in Hegel and Husserl is the movement of consciousness from its mundane level to the level of the absolute consciousness. The mundanized consciousness is that which is the conditioned consciousness bound up with the world. It cannot get rid of its world-centeredness. That is why Husserl demanded phenomenological reduction of the mundane consciousness in the natural attitude (Husserl 2006), so that transcendental absolute consciousness can arise.

Hegel himself was not satisfied with the conditioned consciousness or the natural mind, and therefore, he demanded a dialectical process by which consciousness can move beyond subjective consciousness to the absolute consciousness. Hegel's phenomenology moves through the process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis to

give rise to the absolute consciousness. Both Hegel and Husserl, however, demand a higher form of consciousness that can never be subjected to natural conditions. Both demanded a transcendental theory of consciousness to arrive at the highest form of consciousness.

## 4.16 Embodied Consciousness

To accept the reality of mind and consciousness does not mean to admit some kind of a disembodied existence of mind and consciousness. The fact that consciousness is located in the body is a necessary fact because consciousness gets expressed only in the medium of the body. In this context, it is necessary to emphasize that consciousness and the body are not alien to each other though they are ontologically independent of each other. The mind–body union is evidenced in all our mental and physical activities. The mental and physical activities are so intertwined that we cannot demarcate where the mental activities begin and where they end.

The idea of embodied consciousness has been very much part of the new strategy to counter the Cartesian concept of the disembodied mind (Merleau-Ponty 1962). Though Descartes never meant to argue for the disembodied mind, the idea of disembodied existence of the mind can follow from the theory of mind-body dualism (Descartes 1912). However, in the present union theory of mind and body, consciousness is metaphysically embodied and cannot be alienated from the body. This can be proved in the following way:

1. Consciousness gets involved in the bodily processes to make them conscious processes.
2. Conscious processes are not themselves physical processes.
3. Therefore, conscious processes are necessarily embodied in the physical processes.

This way of looking at the union of the body and the mind suggests that mind cannot exist without the body, and where there is consciousness, there is a body because it is the latter which gives expression to the mental processes.

The cognitive scientists have realized that the idea of formal or mechanistic theory of mind, will not do because the mental activities are embodied activities and need to be located in a physical medium (Merleau-Ponty 1962). This has led to the idea of embodied cognition because all cognitive activities take place in the medium of the brain (Dennett 1991). If cognition is a mental activity which can be mapped in a mechanistic system, then the system must be realized in a physical medium. This goes to prove that cognition and mental representations which are computational in nature, must be embodied and can be put in a physical system. Without embodiment, the formal computational system cannot work.

The demand for embodiment arose from within the phenomenology of consciousness when Heidegger (1968), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Sartre (1956) rejected the rationalist approach to consciousness initiated by Husserl (1931, 1960). Their

concern was to make the conscious being an embodied being, i.e. a being-in-the-world. If consciousness is left stranded outside the world, then it can dissolve itself into a ghostly entity and so cannot reveal the inner structures of meanings which it bears within itself. The intellectualist approach to consciousness can be countered by making consciousness embodied and incarnated in the world. Thus, consciousness now can be seen through the prism of its embodied structures. Consciousness is immanent in the world, and thereby it gives rise to all its normative elements like intentionality and meaning.

The idea of embodiment does not reduce consciousness to the brain states because embodiment itself does not mean reduction. The embodied consciousness is consciousness which seeks its expression through the medium of the body. The body remains the instrument of expression of consciousness, but consciousness is not the body itself. Both the body and consciousness are realities on their own and have to be understood through their intrinsic properties.

### **4.16.1 *The Body***

The human body bears the marks of intelligence and design according to the theory of natural evolution. It is evident from the fact that the body is not just a dead matter like the tables and chairs, but is alive with meaning and intentionality (Merleau-Ponty 1962). The body is no less intelligent than the mind is because the mind is united with the body. The body remains the locus of mind and consciousness. Consciousness is implicit in the body as a whole and also in its parts. It has been held by the philosophers that the body is the temple in which conscious mind is lodged. Plato believed that the body is like the cage in which the soul is imprisoned. This shows that the body is always the locus of the soul or mind.

It is the materialists who have treated the body as something non-mental such that the mind can be reduced to this body. By treating the body as having no consciousness they have misunderstood the nature of the body. The body is conscious like the mind because the body and mind go together and are necessarily co-existent. However, the materialists do not find consciousness in the body. For them, the human body like the brain is a physical entity that has to be treated as devoid of mind. This is how the identity theorists among the materialists treat the body as bereft of consciousness. For the materialists, the body as the physical entity is alone real; the so-called non-physical mind is itself a physical entity in disguise.

It has been of late realized that we cannot leave the body outside the ambit of the mind because mind in its various forms is lodged in the body. Because of this fact, the body is alive and is very much conscious. This is called the lived body by the phenomenologist (Husserl 1970a, b; Merleau-Ponty 1962). Because of this fact, the lived body becomes the source of meaning and intentionality. It becomes the bodily subject in which consciousness is expressed. The idea of the bodily subject carries significance because it is the object of phenomenological study.

Now the question arises: Can the body be a subject to which we attribute the conscious properties like subjectivity, intentionality, etc.? The phenomenologists (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Zahavi 2005), answer this in the affirmative because they accept that the body is itself conscious and so is the source of subjectivity and intentionality. For them, the body is not a dead matter and so it cannot be treated as an object per se. The body is the incarnation of consciousness and of the meanings which are located in the conscious mind. This insight into the nature of the body reveals the structure of bodily intentionality (Merleau-Ponty 1962). The idea that the body is central to the corpus of meanings and intentionalities becomes the new focus of phenomenology (Zahavi 2013). This move towards the body from consciousness is complementary to the move from the body towards the conscious mind. These two moves are interconnected and are inseparable from each other.

To treat the body as mindless is not correct because at no level is the body without consciousness (Dreyfus 2013). The bodily coping of the world is not a mindless coping because even the slightest grasp of an object by an infant is marked by consciousness. The infant's handling of the mother's breasts is intelligent and is purposeful. The hands of the infant move in a purposeful way for sucking milk. None can miss the intelligent movements of the human infant. This shows that there is nothing called mindless bodily coping of the world (Zahavi 2013). There is every reason to find that the mind pervades the body and all its activities. The mental and the rational cover the entire domain of the body thus proving that the mind and body are so intertwined with each other that one cannot be detached from the other.

## 4.17 Conclusion

This chapter has laid the foundations of the transcendental metaphysics of consciousness within the phenomenological tradition. It has explored how naturalism yields to anti-naturalism and gives rise to transcendentalism. This has prompted the emergence of the possibility of a transcendental theory of consciousness on the basis of the bracketing of the natural world. Consciousness is ultimately proved to be an absolute consciousness.

Thus, this chapter has made room for the metaphysics of the Spirit which has been crucial to the development of the metaphysics of idealism in the West. In this connection, it has been shown how Husserl's transcendental and Ego and Hegel's Absolute Spirit have strong affinity.

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# Chapter 5

## Self, Consciousness and Non-dualism



### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, an attempt is made to study consciousness from a non-dualist point of view. Non-dualism has been an established way of looking at self and consciousness, especially in the Indian Advaitic tradition (Sankara 1972). This tradition has offered a very sustainable method to arrive at the oneness of consciousness asserting that consciousness is ultimately one and non-dual in the sense that there is nothing other than consciousness in the ultimate sense. Consciousness is identified with Brahman or Atman in this tradition which has a given a new vision of the metaphysics of consciousness.

I will explore in this chapter all aspects of the non-dualistic theory of consciousness and try to show that consciousness being the ultimate reality can be proved to be the absolute reality thus leaving no scope for dualism of any kind. This will pave the way for showing that the Advaitic notion of self brings in a transcendental account of self as a conscious reality beyond mind and intellect. This reality is the absolute self, that is, both immanent and transcendent in Nature.

### 5.2 The Self

Advaita Vedanta (Sankara 1972) provides a theory of the self that is one and non-dual and is identified with consciousness. The self is the Atman that is all-pervasive and universal residing in all beings in the world (Sankara 2002). Atman is the being of all beings and is the absolute reality called Brahman. There is a metaphysical identity between Atman and Brahman and also between the self and Atman–Brahman. The concept of self, thus introduced makes a radical departure from the Western notion of self which always stands for the individual being. The Advaitic notion of self stands for the universal and absolute reality. The individual being is the jiva that is an embodied being in the world. Thus, the metaphysical self stands over and beyond

the individual self called the jiva. The universal and absolute self or Brahman is the subject of inquiry in Advaita Vedanta (Sankara 1972).

The self as the jiva is a finite and limited being embodied in the world. This self is the one that Advaita calls the self in bondage as it is in space and time and is limited by the adjuncts like the body, mind and the intellect (Sankara 2002). This limited self is the limited worldly being which needs to be released from its bondage to the world. It is necessarily embodied because without the body the jiva or the finite self cannot have its being in the world. On the contrary, the universal and the absolute self or Atman is free from all adjuncts and is free from all bondages. This self is the absolute reality or Brahman (Sankara 1972).

Advaitic non-dualism is concerned with the identity between the jiva and Brahman (Sankara 2002) because the jiva is inherently identical with Brahman. When all the adjuncts are removed as a result of the removal of ignorance, the jiva becomes identical with Brahman. When this transcendental condition of the identity of empirical self (jiva) and the universal self (Brahman) is realized, there is freedom of the self from bondage.

### 5.3 Two Selves

There is a metaphysical division between two selves, according to Advaita. The lower self or the jiva is the empirical self that is involved in the world. It is the one which is involved in the cycle of birth and death. It is in that sense the limited self. The other self is the absolutely free self which is not involved in the world. It is the higher self or the transcendental self (Sankara 2001). The analogy of the two birds in the *Mundaka Upanishad* speaks of the metaphysical distinction between the two selves (Sankara 2001).

Advaita Vedanta provides the metaphysical justification for the notion of the two selves. According to this view, the two selves are distinct because the lower self or the jiva is in Maya or Avidya, and therefore, it is in all aspects a bound self. Because of this conditional nature of the lower self, it is condemned to be in the world. That is, its destiny to go through the process of birth and death, and thus to suffer in the world. But the absolute self which is transcendent to the world is free from time and history and is thus beyond the cycle of birth and death. This transcendental self is the absolute reality called Brahman. Thus, the metaphysics of the two selves arises because of ignorance as there is only one self in the absolute sense. The lower self or the jiva is only an appearance as it arises because of the presence of ignorance. In the ultimate analysis, there is only one self that is Brahman which pervades all beings and is above Avidya or Maya. That is the absolute Brahman (Sankara 1972; Vireswarananda 1962).

The two selves theory of Advaita is only provisional because there are ultimately no two selves. There is absolutely only one self that is Brahman or Atman. The appearance of the lower self is based on Avidya due to which the jiva appears when it is associated with adjuncts. The appearance can be removed by the dawn of knowledge

regarding the identity between jiva and Brahman (Sankara 2002). Thus, the two self theory is only true from the empirical standpoint and not from the transcendental point of view (Gupta 2003; Sinha 1983).

The fact that the higher self is recognized shows that Advaita is not satisfied with the concept of the lower self because the latter carries the attributes of being finite and limited and also being of a worldly nature. Anything that is finite and limited is an anathema to Advaita because of the fact that it is due to the prevalence of Avidya that we have the idea of a lower self that distorts the reality of the higher self. The truth is that there is only one self and that is Atman or Brahman. It is this self that appears as the lower self or the jiva because of Avidya or ignorance. The nature of the lower self as the appearance of the higher self is revealed only when true knowledge of the self is available (Sankara 2002).

## 5.4 The Transcendental Self

The Advaita theory of transcendental self (Gupta 2003; Sinha 1983) is a unique contribution to the metaphysics of self which goes to prove that philosophy cannot be satisfied with a mere empirical notion of self (Wittgenstein 1961). The empirical self is part of the world and so is subject to the physical laws of the world. Therefore, it cannot rise above the physical limitations of the world. In view of this, the empirical self is always taken as the lower self in metaphysics, keeping open the possibility that there is a higher transcendental self which is beyond the world. The latter has been taken to be outside the world because there is nothing in the world that can be the self (Wittgenstein 1961).

Advaita admits that the world of contingent facts cannot have the self in it because the self is the condition of the world and not a part of it. The world presupposes the self as its support and source (Sankara 2002) and cannot contain it as one of its items. The argument that the self is pure and without any attribute goes to prove that the self is without origin and that it is without any beginning in time, whereas everything in the world has a beginning in time. Self and the world stand apart because they have nothing common. The world is the not-self that stands opposed to the self (Sankara 1972). In view of this, it is now proved that the self in its true nature as the transcendental self must stand outside the world (Wittgenstein 1961).

Sankara (1972) among the Advaitins argues that the self is the non-dual Brahman and cannot be the not-self which includes everything including the world. The world is opposed to the self or Brahman and so there is no way the self can be part of the world. The world is dependent on Brahman and not vice versa. Without Brahman the world cannot come into existence (Sankara 1972). Thus, Brahman is the transcendental self which goes beyond the world. However, the world is ultimately unreal (Sankara 2002) because it is due to Avidya that we see the world as real. In itself, the world is due to Maya which is responsible for the projection of the world (Radhakrishnan 1923). Thus, it can be proved that since Brahman alone is real, it goes without saying



that the world is not real in the ultimate sense. The existence of the world is only empirical (*vyavaharika satta*).

However, Advaita admits that the transcendental self or Brahman permeates the world (Sankara 2002) because the world could not be anything other than Brahman. The world is only an appearance (*vivarta*) of Brahman (Radhakrishnan 1923) because of the fact that, due to Maya, the world appears in Brahman. The world has no existence except in Brahman. This suggests that the question of the world having an independent existence arises due to ignorance (Avidya) but in reality it does not have an independent existence. The world is ultimately dependent on Brahman. This settles the question of whether we can conceive of the world apart from Brahman. There is no world as real except in and as Brahman.

## 5.5 The Self as Consciousness (*Cit*)

The Advaita theory of consciousness revolves around the notion of self or Atman because it is the latter which is identical with consciousness (Sankara 2002). Consciousness or *Cit* becomes the pivotal concept in the Advaita phenomenology (Gupta 2003; Sinha 1983) because of the fact that it is consciousness alone which is transcendently real. There is only one and one reality and that is consciousness. This metaphysical theory of consciousness transcends all empirical hypotheses about consciousness by exposing the limitations of the empirical characterization of consciousness (Gupta 2003).

Let us examine now the Advaitic theory that self is consciousness itself and that consciousness cannot be a mere attribute of the self as in the Nyaya-Vaisesika system (Gupta 2003). If consciousness would have been a mere contingent attribute of the self, then the self could be without consciousness when the appropriate empirical conditions are not available. In that case, we could have an unconscious self which is impossible according to Advaita (Sankara 2002). An unconscious self is a contradiction in terms because self is essentially a conscious reality. Self is Atman or Brahman which is consciousness itself (*Cit*). Brahman is real (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*) and bliss (*ananda*) (Sankara 1972, 2002). Brahman cannot be unconsciousness because it is consciousness that is self-effulgent and self-revealing (*svaprakasa*).

Besides, if the self or Atman would have consciousness as an attribute, then there would have been a difference between the self as the substance and consciousness as an attribute. The substance-attribute distinction would have created a duality between Brahman and consciousness and as a result the principle of non-duality would have been negated. Brahman or consciousness could not be proved to be non-dual, if consciousness itself would have been an attribute. The substance-attribute distinction is rejected by Advaita Vedanta because it is an empirical category pertaining to the empirical consciousness in its embodied state (Sankara 2002).

Advaita holds everything empirical and worldly as due to ignorance (*avidya*) because the latter gives rise to the differences between subject and object, substance and attribute, and between cause and effect, such that wherever we find differences of

these kinds, there is necessarily the presence of Avidya or Maya. Under the influence of the latter, there is the presence of differences. Differences are not real; only identity is real (Sankara 1972). Consciousness is free from all differences and distinctions. It is one and non-dual keeping itself free from all adjuncts which creates differences.

Empirical consciousness remains in the embodied state because it is in the body–mind complex that it arises and has its being (Sankara 2002). The empirical conditions like the body, sense organs, mind and intellect constitute the complex of adjuncts which are superimposed on the transcendental consciousness and so there arises the conditioned self in the world. The conditioned self is the cognitive and empirical self that is part of the world (Sankara 2002).

Advaita holds that everything empirical and conditional is due to Avidya or Maya. Under the influence of the latter, there arises differences between subject and object, substance and attribute and between cause and effect. Consciousness as such is free from all dualities. Therefore, it is neither subject nor object, neither substance nor attribute; nor is it either cause or effect. It is free from all adjuncts (Sankara 2002). Consciousness is non-dual and free from all differences.

## 5.6 Consciousness as Non-dual

Advaita holds a non-dualist theory of self and consciousness. Its aim is to prove that at the transcendental level there cannot be many selves or many kinds of consciousness (Sankara 2001, 2002). This is because there is one and only one absolute self or consciousness. The relative selves are many, but the absolute self is one. The multiplicity of the selves is due to ignorance or avidya; in reality, there is only one self, whereas from the practical point of view there are many selves. In a sense, the appearance of the many selves is a metaphysical illusion.

The non-duality thesis is a metaphysical thesis because of the fact that Advaita stands metaphysically committed to one reality, that is, Brahman (Sankara 1972). Brahman is the non-dual principle that underlies all phenomenal reality. The world and all things included in it give rise to the phenomenon of plurality. Therefore, it is easy to be misled into believing that the phenomenal reality is all that there is. This is what the dualist and pluralist philosophers, in fact, believe in their metaphysics (Gupta 2003). The Nyaya-Vaisesika and the Sankhya philosophers accept such a metaphysics because of their commitment to the manyness of reality (Hiriyanna 1932; Radhakrishnan 1923). Advaita refutes dualism and pluralism because of its acceptance of one metaphysical reality which is Brahman or Atman.

The proof of non-dualism lies in the metaphysical argument that there cannot be many ultimate principles. If there are many ultimate principles, then they can never be ultimate in the first place; they will be relative to one another. These principles could be subsumed under a more general principle; thus only the most general principle can be the ultimate principle. In view of this Advaita Vedanta unequivocally holds that there is one and one ultimate principle which cannot be superseded by another principle. Brahman is the ultimate and the absolute principle. It is the ultimate source

of all existence (Radhakrishnan 1923); it is itself uncaused and has no other source than itself. Thus, Brahman alone is the absolute reality (Sankara 1972).

The non-dual Brahman is taken to be the *adhistana* or support of the entire universe. The world itself is dependent on Brahman because it cannot be caused by anything other than Brahman. This explains why we must appeal to Brahman to explain the reality of the world. The world is inexplicable on its own; there is no reason why the world should exist except in relation to Brahman. It is Brahman which brings the world into existence (Sankara 2002), because that is how the world appears when Brahman is covered by Maya (Radhakrishnan 1923).

The appearance of the world (*vivarta*) is due to Maya because the latter makes Brahman appear as the world. In the absence of Maya, there is no world separate from Brahman. Everything is Brahman in the ultimate sense (Sankara 2002). Therefore, the world is non-different from Brahman. But the Brahman-world duality appears because of the presence of Maya. Advaita brings in the principle of Maya to explain the appearance of the world. That is the reason why Maya is an important metaphysical principle in Advaita Vedanta.

Brahman as consciousness is the one and non-dual reality because there is nothing other than consciousness which is real. Consciousness is the ultimate ground of all existence because of the fact that it alone can explain every other reality including the physical body. It can explain even the individual selves as the modifications of the one and non-dual consciousness. The individual conscious beings are the reflections of the one consciousness (Cit) (Gupta 2003).

## 5.7 The Embodied Self

Advaita Vedanta admits the embodied state of consciousness because of the fact that in this condition consciousness or the self assumes a new form without losing its own identity as Atman. Atman in this form becomes the *jiva* (Radhakrishnan 1923), the embodied self. There is no doubt that the *jiva* and Atman are essentially one (Sankara 2002), but they are apparently or conditionally different. The difference arises due to Avidya as it has been explained earlier. The inherent identity between the *jiva* and Atman is the fundamental metaphysical fact in Advaita Vedanta.

Now the question arises: Why does the *jiva* or the individual embodied self arise at all? The answer is that it is inevitable that consciousness or the self becomes embodied because that is the only way to explain the existence of the many selves which are no less real, though from a practical point of view (*vyavaharika satya*). The fact that many selves exist in the world must be due to the fact of their limited and finite nature. Consciousness or the self in the transcendental sense is one, but from the practical empirical point of view, it is bound to be many as a matter of practical necessity. The one becomes the many (Sankara 1972); the many is real conditionally.

The Advaitins view the plurality of selves as a matter of practical necessity (*vayavaharika satya*) because there is no way the individual human beings can overcome their limited and finite nature as long as they are in ignorance of their true

nature (Radhakrishnan 1923; Hiriyanra 1932). As a matter of fact, the human nature in its bonded state is limited and that is the reason of its being embodied in the world. The human body is the medium of its expression by which the self manifests itself in the form of the *jiva*.

Advaita Vedanta does not look down upon the human body as unreal and unimportant. The body is the receptacle of the human soul and in that sense is essential to the human existence in the world (Radhakrishnan 1923). The body is fully explained in the Vedantic literature as the very basis of the expression of the self (Sankara 2002), and there is no dearth of the appreciation of the body as the proper instrument of the self's own existence in the world. The body is different from consciousness but it is not separable from it as long as it is in its existence as a *jiva*. The individual self partakes of all the attributes of the body like birth and death and is subject to the changes which take place in the body. The self or consciousness is not affected by the changes in the body. Consciousness retains its identity as the pure self.

The individual self or the *jiva* is the agent of all actions (Radhakrishnan 1923), and is responsible for the results of his actions. The assumption of agency is the nature of the embodied self. Agency is the attribute of the embodied self because this self engages itself in all sorts of activities in the world. The individual is not only the *karta* or doer but also the *bhokta* or the enjoyer of the fruits of all actions (Radhakrishnan 1923). These actions in various ways bind the self to the world and create the conditions for the application of the law of Karma. The *jiva* goes through the cycle of birth and death because of its karmas (Sankara 2002).

The embodied self struggles to get rid of its bonded state because its conditional existence is not its final destination. The ultimate aim of the individual self is to transcend its embodied state so as to realize freedom through the knowledge of its identity with Atman or Brahman (Sankara 2001, 2002). Freedom is the realization of the true nature of the *jiva* as Atman or Brahman (Sankara 2001, 2002).

Thus, the individual self is the embodied self in the world which it tries to transcend by the realization of its true nature. This explains the Advaitin's attempt to account for man's existence in the world of space and time. Without this embodied state of the self, consciousness cannot make an effort to go beyond it. Transcendence of the conditioned state of existence is the ultimate destiny of the individual self.

## 5.8 The Witness-Consciousness

Advaita has introduced the concept of *saksi-chaitanya* or witness-consciousness in addition to the individual consciousness. The witness-consciousness is that consciousness that is merely a spectator or onlooker of the individual consciousness (Radhakrishnan 1923). It is only a witness of what is taking place in the individual mind and consciousness such as joys, sorrows and other emotional and cognitive states. Such being the case, the function of the witness-consciousness is to watch the mental states without itself undergoing them. The individual self or consciousness is the agent of all actions and undergoes all the mental states following from those

actions. But the witness-consciousness is not the agent of these actions. It is only a witness but not a participant in the actions (Sankara 2001).

The reason why Advaita needs a witness-consciousness is that it is necessary to make the individual self itself be supervised over its actions by another higher consciousness. That higher self is Atman nor Brahman is different from the individual self or the jiva but is not totally unconnected with it. The jiva on its own cannot undertake actions; it needs the directions from a higher self. That higher self is the witness-self which is very much in contact with the individual self but is not identical with it (Radhakrishnan 1923). The limiting adjuncts like the mind and the sense organs which are associated with the individual self are also associated with the witness-consciousness through which the latter is related to the former. However, in its true nature, the witness-consciousness is not affected by the limiting adjuncts.

The witness-consciousness is ever present in all three states of consciousness such as waking, dream and deep sleep. These three states are such that in all of them there is a continuity in consciousness of the witness-self, though in dream and deep sleep the sense organs come to rest. There is no outward activity going in these states and so the mind and sense organs do not function as they do in the waking state. But the witness-consciousness continues to be present in these states without interruption. It is because of this that the individual self can say “I had a dream”, “I slept well”, etc. The witness-self is the presupposition of all these knowledge claims. The witness-self is the eternal reality that makes the individual self work the way it does in the world.

Because the witness-self is really Atman or Brahman, though reflected in the individual consciousness, it remains ever pure and unaffected by the limiting adjuncts of the individual self. The pure consciousness shines in its purity by virtue of which the individual self becomes active in the world (Sankara 2001, 2002). The witness-consciousness has the function of directing the individual self without undertaking action on its own. It is the eternal self in the human being which is enworlded but not worldly like the individual self (Balasubramanian 2008).

## 5.9 Enworlded Subjectivity

The idea of enworlded subjectivity (Balasubramanian 2008: 49–57) brings out the Advaita theory of subjective consciousness in the metaphysical sense by showing that the individual self is embodied in the world. It is this self which is significant for the Advaitic metaphysics because the transcendental self is shown to be involved in the world as the enworlded self. There are two aspects of the latter self, namely, subjectivity or consciousness and the worldliness. Both the aspects constitute the self-in-the-world by showing that the self or Brahman is also immanent in the world (Balasubramanian 1996, 2008).

Now the questions arise: Why should the transcendental self which is beyond the world be involved in the world? The Advaitic answer is that there is no contradiction in Brahman entering the world as the immanent self because that is the very nature

of the self as the source of the world (Sankara 2001, 2002). The world is dependent on Brahman which is the source of the world and so Brahman is immanent in the world. This is how Brahman is present in the world. According to Advaita, the world appears due to Maya and so there is no world in the transcendental sense (Sankara 1972). In that sense, the world has phenomenal existence. Brahman is the underlying reality of the phenomenal world. Balasubramanian writes:

The empirical journey of the transcendental Subjectivity to the world horizon passes through the landmarks of the mind, the senses and the body. As it moves from its non-dual, non-relational state, there is *progressive entanglement* with objects transcendent to it until it emerges as the enworlded subjectivity in all its completeness (Balasubramanian 2008: 53).

There is thus the progressive entanglement of Brahman with the world as it takes place in the downward process from the non-dual state to the state of duality. The latter state is due to Maya and so is only empirically real.

The body, mind and the sense are the limiting adjuncts which qualify the enworlded subjectivity and these adjuncts limit Atman to the world. Brahman or Atman appears as limited and finite due to these adjuncts. The pure consciousness or self is reflected in the mind or the internal organ (*antah karana*), and thus becomes the individual world-entangled self. But all this happens under the purview of Maya. Therefore, there is an appearance of duality between the self and the world (Sankara 1972).

Thus, the self and the world come together even though they are inherently different. The self as Brahman alone is real because the world is just an appearance. Both cannot be true together. But due to Maya, they appear to be true together in the form of the enworlded subjectivity or the self-in-the-world.

## 5.10 Self and the World

The relation between the self and the world is the most difficult problem in Advaita because it is not very easy to explain this relation except through the concept of Maya. The world is not ultimately real, but its empirical reality cannot be denied. In a sense, the world is both real and unreal; it is unreal from the transcendental point of view, but real from the empirical point of view. Hence, it is called *anirvacaniya* because it is both *sat* (real) and *asat* (unreal) (Sankara 1972). The status of the world as the inexpressible reality makes it the most difficult to understand. As Radhakrishnan puts it:

Samakara asserts that it is impossible to explain through logical categories the relation between Brahman and the world. "The real is never known to have any relation with the unreal". The world somehow exists and its relation to Brahman is indefinable (*anirvacaniya*) (Radhakrishnan 1923: 566).

The indefinability of the Brahman-world relationship is the crux of the Advaita metaphysics and so it is this aspect of Advaita which needs meticulous consideration.

To delve further into this relationship, we must consider how the world comes into being at all. The world with all the multiplicity of things and beings is material in nature; so it is devoid of consciousness (*jada*). However, it appears to be real not because of itself but because of the self or Brahman which is consciousness in reality. The world comes into being because of Brahman. However, Brahman is not the temporal cause of the universe; it is its logical ground. Therefore, there is no temporal causal relation between Brahman and the world. The world appears when Brahman is associated with Maya. Maya is the power of the creative manifestation which gives rise to the world (Sankara 2001). Maya makes the world appearance possible because of its capacity to project the world. Brahman unaided by Maya does not give rise to the appearance of the world. Brahman in association with Maya becomes Isvara who is supposed to be the creator of the world. In the words of Radhakrishnan:

Maya evolves a variety of names and forms, which in their totality is the jagat or the universe. It also conceals the eternal Brahman under the aggregate of names and forms (Radhakrishnan 1923: 571).

This is a statement of the metaphysical fact that it is due to Maya that there is a world at all. Because of this fact, the world is not transcendently real. It is real only so far as Maya continues to project it. Maya itself, however, disappears when the knowledge of Brahman arises.

## 5.11 Maya and Adhyasa

Advaita introduces two important concepts such as Maya and Adhyasa to explain the nature of the world. These concepts have their ontological significance because of their role in explaining the Advaita metaphysics of the self and the world. First of all, Maya becomes the focal point in the explanation of the world. It is a negative concept because it does not stand for any positive reality except for the fact that it stands for the creative energy of Isvara in creating the world. So far as the creation of the world is concerned, Advaita feels the necessity of Isvara and Maya (Mahadevan 1969), because the latter explains how the world comes into being creating the phenomenon of duality. However, both have a negative role to play in showing that the world of duality is an appearance and not a reality (Sankara 1972; Radhakrishnan 1923).

According to Advaita, Isvara is an appearance of Brahman because Brahman as Isvara appears to create the world. In fact, there is no actual creation of the world. It is all due to Maya that we see creation when there is only an appearance of creation (*vivarta*) (Sankara 2001; Radhakrishnan 1923). Every form of duality that we see is because of Maya and so duality ultimately is false (Sankara 2001). Commenting on Gaudapada's *Karika*, Sankara writes:

Similar is the case with duality which is equally a mental illusion, for duality is not perceived in a state of concentration or deep sleep. Therefore, it is established that duality is a mere

figment of the brain. And therefore, it is well said that since duality does not exist, the highest Truth consists in the non-existence of dissolution and the rest (Sankara 2001: 253).

This is a statement of the fact that the duality is unreal because only in ignorance that one sees duality. Ignorance is caused by Maya which creates the illusion that the world exists with its diverse entities. The truth is that there is only the self or Brahman which is real. Sankara writes:

If from the standpoint of the highest Reality, duality is unreal, and the Self alone exists as the only Reality, then it amounts to this that all our dealings, conventional or scriptural, are surely matters of ignorance... (Sankara 2001: 252).

Avidya or ignorance shrouds the individual self and so it sees only duality under the influence of ignorance.

Maya is the ultimate source of ignorance which leads to the illusion of duality. As a result, there arises *Adhyasa* or superimposition of the unreal on the real. *Adhyasa* is a state of superimposing the world on Brahman just as there is superimposition of the snake on the rope in the case of rope-snake illusion. In the case of rope-snake illusion, the snake is not real and yet it is superimposed on the rope which is real (Sankara 2001). The unreal snake appears in the place of the rope, and thus creates the illusion of the snake. However, it disappears when we see the real nature of the rope. Similar is the case with the world. The world is like the snake which appears in the place of Brahman. So we see the world instead of Brahman because of the influence of Maya. The world is superimposed on Brahman because of Maya. As Sankara says, “all things imagined on the Self are unreal apart from the Self, like the snake imagined on the rope... the Self is transcendental and untouched by illusion... (Sankara 2001: 249). Thus, the self or Brahman is the only Reality and everything that appears in it is unreal and illusory.

*Adhyasa* arises because of the non-discrimination between the real and unreal. It is not just an empirical or psychological illusion (Misra 1976), but a case of logical confusion of the reality with something else which is not real. The unreal snake, for example, becomes confused with the real rope because of ignorance. This is Avidya or Maya which leads to the logical and the metaphysical error leading to the illusion of the snake. At the cosmic level, the world is confused with Brahman because of the lack of knowledge of Brahman. The temporal world is superimposed on the eternal Brahman.

## 5.12 Knowledge of Brahman

Knowledge of Brahman is central to the Advaitic metaphysics and epistemology because in it lies the possibility of the emancipation of the individual self. Brahman itself is of the nature of Knowledge (Sankara 2002). Brahman as consciousness is self-revealing (*savaprakasa*), and therefore, there is no other way of knowing Brahman except through its self-revelation. Brahman is not known by perception or inference; it is through *abda* that Brahman is known (Sankara 1972). Ultimately



direct experience of Brahman (*aparoksanubhuti*) is the surest way to the knowledge of Brahman.

Since Brahman is of the nature of consciousness or knowledge, there is no general epistemological difficulty in the knowledge of Brahman such as doubt (*samsaya*), etc. Brahman as the indwelling self is self-effulgent and self-revealing like the light of the sun (Sankara 2001). Sankara writes:

It knows by Itself; the *ajam*, birthless Reality, which is the Self. The idea conveyed is that the Self being ever a homogeneous mass of Consciousness, like the sun that is by nature a constant light, does not depend on any other knowledge (for Its revelation) (Sankara 2001: 306).

This is a clear description of the exceptional nature of the knowledge of Brahman. The nature of Brahman or the self being of the nature of the mass of consciousness, there arises no need for the external means to know Brahman. Consciousness reveals itself for ever without any external hindrance except ignorance or Avidya.

Avidya is like darkness which covers the self. The light of the self gets obstructed for the individual self; therefore, the latter remains in darkness as to the true nature of the self. But once Avidya is removed, there arises the knowledge of the self or Brahman. This is the way ignorance has to be removed by the practice of meditation on Brahman (Sankara 2001). Brahman is pure consciousness free from all defects superimposed on it by Maya. Maya creates the illusion of duality and that is the reason Brahman which is non-dual appears as dual. This is the crux of the Advaitic attack on duality. In Sankara's words:

The birthless, undecaying Reality that is the self, becomes multiple through Maya alone and not in reality. Therefore, duality is not the highest Truth (Sankara 2001: 290).

Thus, one is led to the firm conclusion that the knowledge of Brahman is possible when Maya is removed by meditation on the true nature of the self.

In the case of empirical knowledge, there is the subject-object duality since the knower is different from the object known. The knowing self is opposed to the objective world which becomes known only when the knower is in contact with it. The presence of duality is the hallmark of empirical knowledge both perceptual and inferential. But this is totally absent from the knowledge of Brahman which is superior to empirical knowledge of the world. There is no subject-object duality in the knowledge of Brahman because in this case there cannot be anything real other than the self. The world itself as the other does not exist at the transcendental level. Brahman stands in its own glory; there is nothing else that is opposed to Brahman (Sankara 2001, 2002). Brahman is the subject or the self that reveals itself. The self cannot be the object in any case. The subject as the seer sees itself (Sankara 1972; Balasubramanian 2008). Thus, with the rise of the knowledge of Brahman the subject-object duality disappears. There is only the self-identical Brahman revealing itself.

### 5.13 Self as the Seer and the Seen

Advaita admits the self as the seer (Balasubramanian 2008), which is the witness of all the mental modifications. The self sees all that happens at the physical and the mental levels. The body, sense organs and the mind constitute the gross psycho-physical complex which is the field of activity of the mind. The self is the witness of all these activities in the psycho-physical complex. The self is, therefore, the seer (*drasta*) of the body and the mind (Sankara 2002).

The self as the witness-consciousness is different from the individual self (*jiva*) which is endowed with the psych-physical complex. The individual self is seen by the witness-self as the seer as something opposed to the latter. The individual self with the body–mind complex becomes the object of consciousness because the latter as the pure self sees the embodied self as its objective counterpart. But the pure witness-consciousness can never be seen by any higher consciousness. It reveals itself as pure consciousness (Balasubramanian 2008). In the words of Balasubramanian:

One and the same self cannot be the knower and the known, the subject and the object of knowledge, at the same time. It is no argument to say that it is known through another Self or consciousness, for the Self is one and non-dual, and there is no plurality of consciousness. Since everything other than the Self is insentient, it is absurd to suggest that some other factor than the Self knows the Self. So it has to be admitted that the Self is self-established or self-luminous and that what is presupposed in all means of knowledge cannot be established through them (Balasubramanian 2008: 61).

This shows that the self that is the knower cannot be the object of knowledge; it is always the subject and never the object of knowledge. In that sense, the self cannot be known by the means of knowledge like perception and inference which presuppose the self. The self reveals itself being self-luminous. The self is of the nature of knowledge itself and so cannot be the object of knowledge.

Advaita takes consciousness or the self as eternal and non-changing as it does not admit of any change within it. Consciousness is free from temporality. It is unborn and causeless. It is free from all objects. Sankara writes:

But from the ultimate standpoint, *cittam*, Consciousness is nothing but the Self; and accordingly it is *nirvisayam*, without objects... Anything that has objects becomes connected with those objects. As Consciousness is objectless, It is unrelated (Sankara 2001: 378).

This is a clear statement of the fact that the self or consciousness in itself is without objects and is unrelated and absolute. This reveals the eternal nature of consciousness that does not undergo modifications at all.

The individual embodied consciousness undergoes modifications because of the involvement of the mind and the sense organs. Therefore, the empirical consciousness becomes limited and finite and as a result it becomes subject to birth and death. Temporality invades empirical consciousness and there arises the phenomenon of change in consciousness. However, Advaita proves that the appearance of change in consciousness is due to *Maya* because consciousness in its true nature is eternal and pure. Consciousness in association with *Maya* undergoes all kinds of modifications, and therefore, it becomes impure and limited. Even the so-called objects

which appear in consciousness are due to Maya and are ultimately unreal. Maya makes consciousness worldly and so involved with objects. The world itself is a false appearance due to Maya.

## 5.14 The Three States of Consciousness

Consciousness, according to Advaita, passes through three states such as waking, dreaming and deep sleep before it gains its true state in the Turiya, the fourth state. These three states characterize the embodied nature of consciousness in which it is conditioned by the limiting adjuncts like the body and the mind. In the waking state, consciousness is called Visva, in the dream state it is Taijasa and in the deep sleep it is Prajna (Sankara 2001). These are the different forms of consciousness according to its manifestation in them.

Consciousness as Visva is the ordinary experience of objects in the world. It is connected with the external objects which are gross in nature. Here consciousness is intentional by nature (Gupta 2003), by virtue of the fact that it is directed at them in perceptual experience. Consciousness enjoys the objects of the world by being involved in them (Sankara 2001).

As Taijasa consciousness in the dream state loses contact with external objects and is engrossed in the internal objects which are the impressions carried from the waking experience. Thus, consciousness enjoys the subtle objects within the body–mind complex. In this state, there is no contact with the outer world because the sense organs come to rest in the dream state. However, the mind is active in the dream state in projecting objects of innumerable kinds based on the impressions of the waking experience (Sankara 2001).

However, in the deep sleep consciousness as Prajna takes a different turn in view of the fact that it enjoys bliss being disconnected from the external and the internal world. Mind and the sense organs all come to rest and consciousness remains concentrated within itself. The state of bliss which consciousness enjoys is conditioned on the fact that it is free from all objects. In this state, there is no intentionality of consciousness because it is not directed at anything, external or internal. The experience of deep sleep is a state of non-intentional consciousness.

The fourth state of consciousness called Turiya is the true state of consciousness in its absolute reality. It is free from all the limiting adjuncts like the body and mind. It is free from the world and its objects (*prapancopasama*). It is “unchanging, auspicious and non-dual. That is the Self. That is to be known” (Sankara 2001: 200). Thus, Turiya is the true self which is pure, immortal and non-dual. Consciousness is fully revealed in its true nature in this state without being limited by Maya. While the three other states are under the purview of Maya, the Turiya is free from Maya, and therefore, it is pure.

The classification of consciousness in Advaita phenomenology (Sinha 1983; Gupta 2003), serves the purpose of demarcating the lower forms of consciousness in waking, dream and deep sleep states. The aim is to show how consciousness in its

embodied forms becomes entangled with the adjuncts under the influence of Maya. These states reveal the conditioned nature of consciousness both in its intentional and non-intentional forms. The Turiya consciousness is the absolute and pure consciousness free from the duality of the phenomenal world. It is the absolute consciousness having a non-dual nature.

## 5.15 Non-duality and Pure Consciousness

In Advaita metaphysics non-duality and pure consciousness go together. In fact, they are part of the same Reality. The Reality is Brahman or the self which is transcendently real. Brahman is one and non-dual having nothing else besides it. It is consciousness (*Cit*) which is the only Reality admitted by Advaita (Sankara 2001). In that case, consciousness is one and indivisible. It is the non-dual Reality. The following features of consciousness are metaphysically real:

- (1) Consciousness (*Cit*) is absolutely real (*Sat*) having no possibility of being sublated.
- (2) Consciousness is pure being detached from the objective world.
- (3) Consciousness is self-revealing (*svapprakasa*).
- (4) Consciousness is Bliss (*anandaghana*).

Consciousness is non-intentional having no world opposed to it.

The reality of consciousness is absolute because there is no way its existence can be denied. Everything else including the empirical world presupposes the reality of consciousness. The empirical world is dependent on consciousness and not the other way round. Consciousness is not causally dependent on the material world because the latter has only a derivative existence. The existence of consciousness is, therefore, absolute (Sankara 1972). The individual consciousness follows from the limiting conditions which are relative and dependent on Maya. Absolute consciousness is free from Maya (Radhakrishnan 1923).

Consciousness in the transcendental sense is pure because it is free from Maya and also from the objective world projected by Maya. The presence of the world in the empirical sense is the sign of duality because Brahman or consciousness is posited along with the world. But the world itself is a product of Maya, and therefore, it is not ultimately real. The only reality that remains eternally is consciousness. In that sense, it is pure and withdrawn from the world. It stands alone without objectivity (*nirvisaya*) (Sankara 2001).

Consciousness reveals itself because there is no other means by which it can be revealed, It is self-effulgent because it shines by its own light (Sankara 2001). Consciousness being absolute cannot depend on anything else. The fact that consciousness alone is real makes it necessary that consciousness is knowledge itself and not known by any empirical means.

Consciousness is bliss because it is free from all suffering and all defects (Sankara 2001). It is *anandaghana* because there is nothing in consciousness to make it limited

and finite. As infinite and unlimited it is bliss (Sankara 2002). Bliss is no empirical attribute of consciousness; it is the very nature of consciousness to be bliss (*Ananda*). Bliss is the ontological nature of consciousness.

Consciousness in its pure and transcendental nature is non-intentional because there is nothing else it is to be about. Empirical consciousness is posited against the world, and therefore, it is intentional. But pure consciousness is without anything else; so it cannot be about anything else. That makes it without external relations (Sankara 2001). Being non-related, it is non-intentional (Gupta 2003).

## 5.16 Duality and I-Consciousness

The problem of I-consciousness or the ego is solved by Advaita by bringing in the idea of Avidya as the source of duality in the empirical world. The phenomenon of the ego or the I arises due to ignorance or Avidya because the latter gives rise to a false appearance of the I as the centre of consciousness. Consciousness, as discussed earlier, has no centre in its transcendental non-dual nature. But duality arises as soon as consciousness has a centre like the individual self. In such statements as “I am thin”, “I am fat”, “I am blind”, etc. the term “I” stands for the individual self to which certain attributes are ascribed. In such cases, there is a reference to an embodied and centred consciousness which is limited by the attributes of ‘thinness’, ‘fatness’, etc. Such a consciousness is limited and finite.

The question of duality arises when there are individual selves like I, you, he or she, etc. The limited selves thus individuated are embodiments of the limited consciousness. The one non-dual self or consciousness appears as many limited empirical selves (Sankara 2001, 2002). Just as one indivisible Space becomes limited as the spaces in jars, so also one non-dual consciousness becomes the limited selves and when these selves are dissolved, they become one with the non-dual consciousness (Sankara 1972). The analogy of the Space is appropriate because the limited spaces in jars also get dissolved in the infinite and indivisible Space. The non-dual consciousness does not get divided by the limitations of the individual consciousness. It is indivisible and infinite. It only appears to be divided because of ignorance or Avidya (Sankara 1972).

Advaita admits the plurality of the individual selves on the ground that the plurality is a practical necessity and that it makes possible the actual world in which many human individuals exist. In the empirical world there is plurality of individual selves (Balasubramanian 2008). However, empirical pluralism is transcended by non-dualism at the transcendental level (Balasubramanian 2008). This is so because there is only one and infinite consciousness that is transcendently real. Advaita Vedanta accepts the transcendental consciousness that overcomes the limitations of the empirical consciousness.

Advaita phenomenology (Gupta 2003; Sinha 1983), accepts the non-duality of consciousness at the transcendental level but it accepts plurality of selves at the

empirical level. It accepts plurality as caused by Avidya. Avidya makes the appearance of the plurality of the selves at the empirical level possible. There is thus the gradation of the self from the plurality of the selves to the oneness of the self which is the central thesis of Advaita phenomenology (Sinha 1983). This passage from the many selves to the one non-dual self is possible because of the non-dual nature of consciousness.

### 5.17 Ego as Unreal

The ego or the jiva is not ultimately real, according to Advaita (Mahadevan 1969), because it is an appearance of the self due to Avidya. Avidya makes the self appear as the limited individual self as involved in the body–mind complex. The ego is so-called because it identifies itself with a particular mind–body complex. It becomes closely identified with the body as the latter is the locus of the individual consciousness. There is superimposition (*adhyasa*) of the body on the self, and thus it becomes the I which is the agent and enjoyer of actions. I-consciousness is the phenomenal self that appears in the world.

Advaita takes the I-consciousness as a limitation of the transcendental consciousness because in this process of limitation the higher consciousness or Atman assumes the form of the lower consciousness, the jiva. This is not a real transformation, according to Advaita (Mahadevan 1969; Balasubramanian 2008) of the higher self but an appearance (*vivarta*) of it in the world due to Avidya. The lower self or the jiva has apparent reality that lasts as long as the jiva does not realize its true identity. The jiva is in essence identical with the Atman (Sankara 1997), but due to Avidya, it does not realize this truth. The jiva becomes subject to sorrow and suffering and goes through the cycle of birth and death. The worldly life of the jiva is the subject matter of *adhya*-based life (Balasubramanian 2008).

The plurality of the jivas is a metaphysical fact because the world of plurality is practically real (*vyavaharika satya*). Under no circumstances can the plurality of the individual selves be denied. That is because, for all practical purposes, the world consists of many individual selves. But from the transcendental (*paramarthika*) point of view, there cannot be many selves. The transcendental self is one and non-dual (Mahadevan 1969; Balasubramanian 2008). The individual selves appear due to Maya and so they are unreal from the transcendental point of view.

Advaita admits that in the empirical world, the higher self or Brahman appears as many selves under the influence of Maya. The empirical world itself is a projection of Maya and so there can never be the absence of duality in this world. Consciousness becomes *adhyasa*-ridden and there are many embodied forms of consciousness. But once we transcend the empirical world we see the oneness of consciousness in the form of Brahman or Atman. This realization of the higher self or consciousness is the acme of Vedantic knowledge which culminates in the realization of jiva-Brahman identity (Sankara 1972).

The Advaita theory of I-consciousness opens up a new dimension of the phenomenology of consciousness in which the empirical ego dissolves into the transcendental ego or the self which is Brahman itself. The empirical ego has no existence in the higher plane of consciousness (Mahadevan 1969; Balasubramanian 2008; Sinha 1983). The empirical ego is unreal because there is a higher consciousness in which it is dissolved. The higher consciousness is Brahman which appears as the empirical ego or the jiva when the latter is in Avidya. Avidya divides the jiva from Brahman and so there is the necessity of knowledge that can remove Avidya.

Advaita phenomenology is unique in the sense that consciousness transcends its own lower form by its inner dynamics without the external help of another consciousness. Consciousness is one and non-dual.

### 5.18 Beyond the Ego

The Advaita approach to the ego and consciousness is characterized by its emphasis on the egolessness of consciousness in view of its notion of self-transcendence of the ego. In Advaita, the ego or the I-consciousness is not the final stage of consciousness; it is only a stage in the progressive development of consciousness. The ego or the I is limited and finite and so it cannot get us to the true nature of consciousness (Sankara 1972). The ego must be transcended to reach the supreme consciousness which is Brahman or Atman.

The ego-consciousness is limited because of its association with the adjuncts like the body and the mind. Consciousness is reflected through the mind and the intellect, and thus is limited and finite. This state of consciousness arises because of the influence of Maya which is the source of Avidya or ignorance. The individual consciousness is a limited consciousness because of which individual I becomes the owner of the limited form of consciousness. The I, therefore, becomes the product of a process of limitation due to Maya (Mahadevan 1969; Balasubramanian 2008). The empirical I is the negation of the transcendental I or the self.

The empirical I is essentially identical with the transcendental I as it is clear in the Upanishadic declaration: "Thou art That" (*tattvamasi*) (Sankara 1997). This clearly shows that the empirical I is really Atman, the transcendental I, the self. This is because the empirical I is only a limitation of the transcendental I (Sankara 2001), just like the infinite Space is limited by the space in a jar. When the jar is dissolved, the space within it becomes one with the infinite Space. So is the case with the empirical I; it becomes one with the transcendental I when it is dissolved with the disintegration of the body (Sankara 2001).

The transcendence of the ego is the main aim of the Advaita metaphysics because it is not satisfied with the empirical ego. The latter becomes a stumbling block to the realization of the true nature of the self. As long as the I persists as the agent and the enjoyer of actions, there is no possibility of the self or Brahman-realization.

## 5.19 Self-realization

Self-realization is the ultimate goal of life, according to Advaita (Radhakrishnan 1923; Mahadevan 1969; Balsubramanian 2008). According to this view, self being the highest Reality, Brahman, it becomes necessary to emphasize that to realize this or to know this is the ultimate goal of life. That is why the knowledge of Brahman becomes the inevitable goal of life for the Advaitin (Sankara 1972). By knowing Brahman, one becomes Brahman (Sankara 2001, 2002). This is the oft-quoted message of the *Upanishads* (Sankara 2001, 2002) and the *Brahmasutras* (Sankara 1972).

Now the question of the realization of the self is best understood in the context of the nature of the jiva as the limited and finite being which is under the influence of Maya. The jiva does not know its own self in its true nature because of Avidya; that is why it gets involved in the false identification with the body and the mind. This state of false identity is called the state of bondage where the true nature of the self is covered due to ignorance. In the state of self-realization the true nature of the self as Brahman is revealed. Knowledge of Brahman dawns on the jiva when the latter is freed from Maya. This is called liberation or moksa. In the words of Radhakrishnan:

Moksa is a matter of direct realization of something which is existent from eternity, though it is hidden from our view. When the limitations are removed, the soul is liberated. It remains where it is, what it is and eternally was, the first principle of all things (Radhakrishnan 1923: 636).

The state of moksa or liberation is the state of the individual self being liberated from Avidya or ignorance about its own nature. It is a case of realizing that the self is no other than Brahman. The freed self realizes that it is Brahman and not the ignorant jiva. Radhakrishnan writes:

The freed soul assumes the form of his true self (svatmanyavasthanam). Freedom is not the abolition of the self, but the realization of its infinity and absoluteness by the expansion and illumination of consciousness (Radhakrishnan 1923: 636–637).

Thus, moksa or liberation is the state of being established in Brahman (Sankara 1997), that is, to be identical with Brahman by realizing that the self is no other than Brahman.

In the state of liberation, nothing changes regarding the world and one's own self except the change in the outlook or the way of understanding. The world remains the same, but what changes is our way of looking at it as something different from Brahman. For the liberated soul everything is Brahman (Sankara 1997). For the liberated, the world is not dissolved but our false outlook is dissolved (Radhakrishnan 1923: 637). Thus, moksa is the state of knowledge as different from the state of ignorance and Maya.

Thus, self-realization is the new state of being of the self that realizes its true identity. This is the state of freedom from Avidya and Maya and the realization of Brahman. For Advaita, freedom is the state of getting back to one's true self as Atman, the supreme transcendental consciousness.



## 5.20 Conclusion

In this chapter, the non-dualist view of self and consciousness has been presented from the point of view of Advaita Vedanta. The following are the main points discussed in this chapter:

1. Self and consciousness are the same as, according to Advaita, self is consciousness itself. Consciousness is the very essence of the self.
2. Consciousness is one and on-dual in the sense that it is a single reality without any internal or external division within it.
3. Consciousness can be looked at from two points of view, viz. the empirical and the transcendental.
4. Empirical consciousness is associated with the limiting adjuncts like body and the mind. It is the embodied consciousness in the world. It is associated with Maya and Avidya.
5. Transcendental consciousness is free from the limiting adjuncts created by Maya. It is the pure non-dual consciousness.

Thus, the pure consciousness which is the transcendental consciousness is the ultimate reality according to Advaita Vedanta. It is this consciousness which is the absolute reality.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to have a transcendental analysis of consciousness in order to find out how a higher level of consciousness is possible when the limiting factors are eliminated. Advaita Vedanta has shown the way as to how the pure non-dual consciousness is to be established in metaphysics. The metaphysical theory of Advaita has studied consciousness from an absolute and non-dualist standpoint which offers a new way of understanding consciousness independent of the physical limits imposed by body. Advaita Vedanta has demonstrated that consciousness has to be studied as a transcendent phenomenon above the limits of the physical world so that we do not suffer from any naturalist handicap.

This chapter has brought in Advaita Vedanta to show that there is an established tradition which has studied consciousness from a metaphysical standpoint and which has overcome all dualities in its theory of consciousness. The proposed metaphysics of consciousness owes its inspiration to Advaita Vedanta which is evident in the following chapters.

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# Chapter 6

## Matter, Life and Mind: Setting the Boundaries of the Mind in Advaita Vedanta



### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to lay down the boundaries of the mind by showing its relation to matter and life and its place in the universe. Mind is the most visible face of the universe in that the universe appears to be pervaded by the mind and consciousness (Sankara 1997a, b; Sri Aurobindo 1973) in its basic structure. Besides mind, there are two other planes of existence such those of matter and life which need to be analysed because these planes are intimately connected with mind and consciousness. It is against matter and life that mind can be unfolded as the most important aspect of man and the universe.

In this chapter, the three planes of existence, namely, the physical, vital and the mental will be explored in order to show that the mental plane is connected with the physical and the vital. Besides, the scope and the limits of the mental plane have to be explained in order to unfold the possibility of the supramental existence.

### 6.2 The Fivefold Reality

In the Vedantic philosophy which we have discussed in the preceding chapter leaves scope for five forms of existence such as the physical, vital, mental, intellectual and blissful (Sankara 1997a, b; Sri Aurobindo 1973). It is because there is a continuity in the universe from the physical and vital to the mental. Matter and life are the two modes of existence that are universally acknowledged to be real in the universe. Mind is the third mode of existence which has also been universally admitted by the philosophers and scientists (Searle 1992). Thus, matter, life, mind and intellect are the forms of reality, which constitute the universe. It is to be noted that neither matter nor life nor mind could be the sole reality in the universe (Sri Aurobindo 1973).

Matter is one of the basic modes of existence because it is the basis of every other existence. Life itself requires the existence of matter as its source and support

(Sankara 1997a, b). Matter is the primary reality in the evolutionary hierarchy in the universe (Sri Aurobindo 1973). There is enough philosophical reason to postulate matter as the basis of the evolutionary process. First of all, matter is a gross form of existence so that all other subtle forms of existence come into being because of the prior existence of matter. Secondly, matter itself is constituted of other subtle elements which are the basic constituents of the material universe (Radhakrishnan 1932). Thus, there is a complex structure of matter both at the atomic and the subatomic levels, which give rise to the universe. This explains why matter is an indispensable form of existence in the overall structure of the universe.

Advaita Vedanta has accepted matter as a reality like any other school of Indian philosophy excepting that it does not accept it as the ultimate reality. For the Vedantic philosophers, the material plane of existence (*annamaya kosha*) is one of the planes in the multilayered reality and is thus the primary ground of the other planes of existence like life (*paranamaya kosha*), mind (*manomaya kosha*), intelligence (*vijnanamaya kosha*) and the plane of bliss (*anandamaya kosha*) (Sankara 2001). The different planes of existence are such that they are nested together thus constituting an integral reality of the universe. This approach to reality is unique in the sense that it integrates all the planes such as physical, vital and the mental into a coherent whole. That explains how the mind and body come together to constitute the human being just as at the cosmic plane matter and mind constitutes the broad spectrum of the cosmic existence.

The following are the characteristics of the different planes of existence:

The material plane (*annamaya kosha*): matter is insentient but is the receptacle of sentience. The material bodies are lifeless but give rise to life and consciousness. It is the support (*adhithan*) of all other planes of existence.

The vital plane (*paranamaya kosha*): Life emerges from matter by virtue of the fact that the material existence provides the ground for the rise of conscious life. The different forms of life from the simplest to the most complex come into being because of the modifications taking place in matter. Human life itself is possible because of the organic structure of the human body (Sankara 1997a, b)

The mental plane (*manomaya kosha*): Mind is the new emergent in the bosom of the conscious bodies thus making the appearance of intelligence possible in the universe. Mind is the new reality which explains such psychological phenomena as thinking, willing and feeling. Mind makes a difference to the way the organic life-forms interact with Nature (Sankara 1997a, b).

The higher mental plane (*vijnanamaya kosha*): The higher mental energy manifests itself as intelligence or intellect which is an essential constituent of the mental plane. It is the apparatus of intellectual activity which the mind possesses in its complex nature.

The plane of bliss (*anandamaya kosha*): The plane of existence which is an extension of the mental is called the plane of bliss because it has a high concentration of the mental energy in the pursuit of a complete mental life.

These five planes of existence constitute reality in all its aspects and layers.

### 6.3 Matter and Life

Matter and life are the twin forms of existence that have a significant place in the history of the universe. When the universe came into existence, the original form of existence was liquid matter which solidified into various forms of the material bodies like the mighty galaxies. The universe began to take various shapes thus taking the shape of the cosmos as a whole. This progressive history of the universe saw the emergence of life in its simplest forms, which multiplied themselves subsequently into complex life-forms. Thus matter and life came into existence because of the creative force propelling the universe. Matter and life are the two faces of the same reality that came into existence in the process of the evolution of the universe.

Modern science has discovered the fundamental structure of matter as energy such that every form of material existence is a form of energy. This material energy is expressed differently in Vedantic philosophy as the creative energy that manifests itself as life-energy (Sri Aurobindo 1973). The latter is the vital energy that pulsates through all the organic living bodies from the uni-cellular organisms to the multicellular organisms. All the organisms are informed by the same life-principle (*prana*). In the Upanishads, *prana* is given the status of the divine energy that runs through the whole universe (Sankara 1997a, b). It is the single most principle that makes the universe come alive by the creative manifestation of its divine energy.

Bergson (1998) has made the life-principle the fundamental principle of the creative evolution of the universe, which manifests itself in various life-forms. This principle is the vital force or *elan vital* which diversifies itself into the forms of life and matter, according to Bergson. In the Vedantic language, the Bergsonian life-principle is the *prana* which is present in every form of existence living and non-living (Sankara 1997a, b). As life or *prana* has the creative manifestation in the various forms, it is the sole principle explaining the universe and not matter which is the basic principle according to modern science. Modern science misses the fact that the universe is a creative process from which evolves new forms of existence (Bergson 1998; Sankara 1997a, b).

Life is not a mechanical process of change because life evolves non-mechanically (Bergson 1998) in a certain pattern which involves the life-force. The mechanical process of change is predetermined, and therefore its progression from the past to the future can be calculated a priori. As Bergson writes:

The essence of mechanical explanation, in fact, is to regard the future and the past as the calculable function of the present, and thus to claim that *all is given*. On this hypothesis, past, present and future would be open at a glance to a superhuman intellect capable of making the calculation (Bergson 1998: 37).

The mechanical sort of explanation takes the evolution of life as predetermined, and therefore it suits the scientific explanation of the universe which gives “the detached and fragmentary view of reality” (Datta 1970:261). In this point of view, time is denied its efficacy and everything is viewed from a timeless point of view. In Bergson’s words:

For time is here denied of efficacy, and if it *does* nothing, it *is* nothing. Radical mechanism implies a metaphysic in which the totality of the real is postulated complete in eternity, and in which the apparent duration of things expresses merely the infirmity of a mind that cannot know everything at once (Bergson 1998:39).

According to this view, time and duration are real and cannot be denied because that is the very essence of the being of the universe. “It is the foundation of our being, and, as we feel, the very substance of the world in which we live” (Bergson 1998:39). Life is temporal in nature and it changes in time so that nothing is repeated in the process of the evolution of life. The novelty in the process of creative evolution of life is real and cannot be denied by mechanism.

However, as to whether the creative evolution of life is teleological and is arranged according to a plan, opinions vary. Bergson does not accept teleology as a form of explanation of life because it denies novelty in evolution. This he calls finalism (Bergson 1998:39), which like mechanism denies the reality of time. Bergson writes:

The doctrine of teleology, in its extreme form, as we find it in Leibniz for example, implies that things and beings merely realize a programme previously arranged. But if there is nothing unforeseen, no invention or creation in the universe, time is useless again. As in the mechanistic hypothesis, here again it is supposed that *all is given*. Finalism thus understood is only inverted mechanism (Bergson 1998:39).

Thus Bergson goes on to reject both mechanism and finalism as inadequate to explain life and its evolution in the universe.

Vedanta accepts the empirical reality of the world and time because, according to this view, the world is as much real as time is. In the Vedantic ontology, there is the reference to the reality of matter (*anna*) as one of the five layers of existence (Sankara 2001). As both matter and life are real in the universe, it is assumed that there must be an ultimate principle which must be underlying both (Sankara 1997a, b) and that principle is Brahman or Atman. The force underlying matter and life is derived from a higher force, namely, that of Brahman which is the Internal Ruler of the whole universe (Sankara 1997a, b).

According to Vedanta, there cannot be any explanation of the universe without the presupposition of the reality of Brahman (Sankara 1972, 1997a, b). Neither matter nor life itself can explain itself without Brahman. In fact, metaphysically, Brahman is the absolute reality which explains everything (Radhakrishnan 1923) including life and matter. Therefore, the materialists are wrong in saying that matter is the ultimate principle which can explain the universe. Similarly, the vitalists are wrong in saying that life can explain itself (Bergson 1998). Both matter and life are inadequate to explain their own existence in the universe. According to Vedanta, Brahman alone can explain matter and life as the phenomena in the universe. Brahman is the foundation (*pratistha*) of matter (*anna*) and life (*prana*).

## 6.4 Brahman in Matter

The Vedantic metaphysics assumes that the underlying reality of matter is Brahman, which is consciousness (Cit) itself. That is, ultimately matter is implicitly consciousness because there is no materiality as a fundamental principle. Matter is a manifestation of consciousness by being the gross form of Brahman (Balasubramanian 1996). Brahman inhabits the material world as its essence, and therefore the material world is a form of Brahman at the empirical level. The idea that Brahman enters into the world after its creation is expressed in the Upanishads (Sankara 1997a, b) thereby meaning that there cannot be any explanation of the existence of the world without appealing to Brahman as the ultimate reality. Balasubramanian writes:

The heaven and the earth, and other phenomena of nature are parts of the universal Self and so no one of them can be identified with it. Brahman is the Self of all beings, sentient as well as insentient. If so, the physical world cannot be non-spiritual (Balasubramanian 1996:99).

This explains the idea that Brahman or Atman is the underlying principle of all existence and that everything including matter and life are dependent on Brahman.

Now the question arises as to whether, according to Vedanta, matter can exist independently of Brahman. The answer is no because there is nothing in Vedanta that allows matter or the material universe to exist on its own; matter is always a secondary principle while Brahman is the first principle (Sankara 1972, 1997a, b). Advaita Vedanta goes to the extent of saying that matter is real only from the empirical point of view, while from the transcendental point of view, it has no real existence. Ultimately everything is Brahman (Sankara 1997a, b). From that point of view, matter is itself a form of Brahman. Sri Aurobindo has expressed this view in the following passage:

Matter is also Brahman and it is nothing other than or different from Brahman. If indeed Matter were cut off from the Spirit, this would not be so; but it is, as we have seen, only a final form and objective aspect of the divine Existence with all of God ever present in it and behind it (Sri Aurobindo 1973:242).

Thus, it is made clear that nothing in the world including matter is other than or different from Brahman. Brahman is the only existence, one without a second (Sankara 1997a, b).

Now the question arises: If matter is unreal and so non-existent, then how are we to explain the mighty universe that exists all around us? The Vedantic answer is that matter is not declared non-existent and unreal in the empirical sense; it is there before us which we perceive with our sense-organs. But matter is ultimately Brahman and so there is no question of there being an independently real matter. The latter is unreal and non-existent, though matter as Brahman is real and existent (Sankara 1997a, b; Sri Aurobindo 1973).

The scientific view of matter as governed by mechanical laws is widely accepted as the established view in the sciences. But the Vedantic view of matter as a form of Brahman, the Divine Reality goes to prove something else. That is the reason why the sciences may reject the Vedantic view as scientifically not acceptable. But the fact of the matter is that the scientific point of view is only true from the empirical

point of view. Vedanta, however, is a transcendent metaphysics which does not deny the truth of science, but goes beyond it. In that sense, the idea that matter is a form of Brahman and that it is the principle of inertia which hides the dynamic force of life and mind within it has metaphysical justification (Sri Aurobindo 1973). Matter hides Brahman and gives the appearance of a mechanical and rigid system of brute existence. Sri Aurobindo writes:

For the second fundamental opposition that Matter offers to the Spirit, is this that it is the culmination of the bondage to mechanical Law and opposes to all that seeks to liberate itself a colossal Inertia (Sri Aurobindo 1973:244).

But this inertia is transitional because matter itself gives rise to life and mind, which liberate matter from the inertia. Matter itself becomes the instrument of infinite movement and action in its new manifestation of the life-force and consciousness. Thus, the existence of matter is transitional and is the first step towards the emergence of life as a form of Brahman

## 6.5 Life as a Form of Brahman

The Vedantic view of life is in a marked contrast with the scientific view of life because in the latter life is a gross biological phenomenon having its origin in the material universe. Life is born from the material conditions of the universe, according to modern science. That is the reason why science takes life broadly as a physical and mechanical phenomenon. The Darwinian picture of the phenomenon of life presents a mechanical process, which marks the different stages in which life has evolved in the universe. Life in plants, animals and human beings has the same tendency to replicate itself in the course of its evolution.

The Vedantic view presents a different picture of life in the universe. According to this view, life is a teleological process that makes progress manifesting higher forms of energy in its evolution in the universe. It is a form of cosmic energy that manifests itself in various forms in the universe (Sri Aurobindo 1973). Sri Aurobindo writes:

When we study this Life as it manifests itself upon earth with Matter as its basis, we observe that essentially it is a form of the one cosmic Energy, a dynamic movement or current of it positive and negative, a constant act or play of the Force which builds up forms, energises them by a continual stream of stimulation and maintains them by an unceasing process of disintegration and renewal of their substance (Sri Aurobindo 1973:176).

Thus life is pictured as continual process of growth, decay and renewal, which all life-forms are subjected to. Life in that sense is a ceaseless flow of energy culminating in a continuous process of growth. Though individual life-form is perishable, life as a whole as a cosmic energy ever flows in the universe. Sri Aurobindo writes:

It could be affirmed as a consequence that there is one all-pervading Life or dynamic energy- the material aspect being only its outer movement- that creates all these forms of the physical universe, Life imperishable and eternal which, even if the whole figure of the universe were



quite abolished, would itself still go on existing and be capable of producing a new universe in its place... (Sri Aurobindo 1973:176–77).

It is suggested here that life being the cosmic energy is eternal and imperishable and it goes on creating new forms in its ever-flowing process of evolution.

The Vedantic metaphysics admits life as the universal *prana* or life-energy that pervades the whole universe; it is itself a form of Brahman that pervades the universe. Life is Brahman as manifested in the physical universe. Like matter life also forms the gross aspect of Brahman, which is the Consciousness-Force manifesting in the universe (Sankara 1997a, b; Sri Aurobindo 1973). By being divine in origin, life is a creative process marching towards a higher form especially as giving rise to the mind. Mind is implicitly present in life because the latter conceals the mental energy which is another form of the same cosmic energy manifesting in the form of matter and life. Mind evolves out of life under the pressure of the cosmic energy that is Brahman.

## 6.6 Mind and Its Evolution from Life

The emergence of mind from life is a new event in the history of the universe, because it marks the beginning of a new form of life on earth which brings about a total transformation of the character of life in the universe. Life is no more a mere organic state having instinct as its guiding principle (Bergson 1998). The life in the plants and animals is marked by the presence of instinct, which guides the organisms to adapt themselves to the environment. Life at the lower level survives because of its adaptive behaviour. Therefore, life at this stage is more or less a mechanical process which can be moulded by changing the circumstances.

However, when mind appears on the scene life changes radically because of the presence of intelligence in the mental plane. Intelligence is present in all higher forms of life like those of the higher animals and the human species (Bergson 1998). The function of the mind is to manifest intelligent behaviour such that the intelligent species have a better chance of survival in the world. Intelligence makes a difference to the environment because the intelligent beings manipulate the environment to their advantage. Human intelligence, for example, is the most important phenomenon in the universe, which has guided the human species on the path of progress from the state of its primitive existence to the present state of complex existence. The human species is the most intelligent species on earth (Bergson 1998).

Intelligence as distinguished from instinct is a stronger mental force because of the nature of the mind as an instrument of the life's evolutionary impetus (Bergson 1998; Sri Aurobindo 1973). Mind is the very powerful form of the vital force that passes through the multitude of obstacles overcoming all of them in the process. Therefore, the mental beings like the human beings have succeeded in surviving through the ages from the beginning of life on the earth. The mentally equipped species have a

higher rate of survival than the less intelligent beings. Therefore, intelligence is the most potent form of the mental energy.

In the Vedantic discourse, mind or *manas* is the powerful internal organ which is assigned the task of thinking and planning the activities of man. The instrument of thought and planning is assigned to the internal organ called mind because of its power to make changes in the environment. The mind is not a passive instrument or organ because it is actively engaged in the multifarious activities of the agent or the ego. There is no function which the mind cannot perform with the help of other sense-organs. In a sense, the mental faculty in Vedanta is given the central function of making the sense-organs work with regard to the sense-objects in the world. The five *jnanendriyas* like the eye, ear, etc. and the five *karmendriyas* like hands, feet, etc. are all controlled by the mind. The mind, therefore, is the powerful instrument of knowledge and action of the ego or the embodied self (Sankara 2001, 2002).

The intellect or *buddhi* is admitted by Vedanta to be other than and superior to the mind or *manas* because the former guides the mind itself in its activities (Sankara 2001, 2002). The intellect is superior because it has the power of discrimination between the right and the wrong course of action. It guides the mental activities in acquiring knowledge regarding the world and also guiding the ensuing actions of the ego. The *buddhi* is given a higher place in the structure of the ego as it is the one which is responsible for the moral actions of the ego leading to a higher life (Sankara 1984). The person endowed with the enlightened intellect (*buddhijukta*) leads a higher life than the person whose intellect remains unenlightened. The intellect which is swayed by the sense-organs and is engaged in inferior activities leads to a lower life. Thus, the intellect is given the responsibility of bringing enlightenment to the ego by cutting down the snares of ignorance (*avidya*). This is, therefore, called the *buddhi-yoga* or the Yoga of enlightened intellect (Sankara 1984). The Bhagavad Gita takes the *buddhi* to be the last refuge of the enlightened man (Sankara 1984:95–97).

The faculty of intellect or reason has been universally accepted as a higher faculty than the mind itself. The rationalist philosophers in general from Plato onwards have accepted the intellect or reason as the most important faculty of the ego so that it functions at a higher level in the structure of the ego. The mere mental faculty is elevated to the intellectual faculty in the rationalist tradition for showing that the mind does more functions than being merely the passive instrument of cognition and actions. Reason or intellect reaches beyond the cognitive mind in apprehending Reality as a whole. That is why reason is given the function of coordinating the activities of the mind in comprehending Reality as a whole. The rational part of the human soul in Plato's philosophy is given a higher place than the mere intelligent mind. Rational mind is the higher faculty in all rational philosophies since the time of Descartes (1912). Thus, we have the idea of the rational mind organizing our knowledge of the world (Kant 1929) and comprehending the Absolute Reality or Spirit (Hegel 1977).

## 6.7 Reason and Experience

Reason or intellect has been recognized in the Western tradition as the source of all categories that are present in our knowledge and experience (Kant 1929; Hegel 1977). That is the reason it has often been argued that the highest form of knowledge is the intellectual knowledge obtained through the instrumentality of reason. It is not that sense-experience has been completely neglected. Sense-experience has been coopted by reason for the sake of the growth of the scientific knowledge of the world (Kant 1929). In this context it is necessary to note that both reason and experience make a concerted effort to make possible the knowledge of the world.

However, reason has been the foremost faculty of man which has been responsible for man's overall development as a rational being. It is this faculty which has been at the vanguard of man's total being, and therefore reason has been elevated to the highest position in the understanding of the human nature (Hegel 1977). Reason is nearer to Truth because the latter is comprehended by reason in the best possible way. Reason, therefore, has the prerogative to comprehend the Reality in its totality. But it has been claimed by some philosophers that reason in itself may fail to get at the Reality because of its analytical and divisive nature (Bradley 1969; Bergson 1998). According to them, reason divides the Reality into parts and cannot, therefore, see the whole Reality as such. Reason fails to comprehend the unity of Reality and so gets lost in the fragmentary jumble of parts (Bergson 1998). The divisive nature of the intellect is thus responsible for the distortion of our knowledge of Reality.

There has been a demand that reason be transcended by intuition so as to get the right kind of knowledge of Reality (Radhakrishnan 1932). Intuition has been recognized as a higher faculty that goes beyond reason. It is the one that has direct knowledge of Reality. In the words of Radhakrishnan:

Intuition stands to intellect in the same relation as intellect stands to sense. Though intuition lies beyond intellect, it is not contrary to it. It is called *samyaginana* or perfect knowledge. Reflective knowledge is a preparation for this integral experience (Radhakrishnan 1932:115).

That is to say, the intuitive knowledge is a form of integral knowledge which gives the total view of Reality in the sense that it presents a comprehensive view of the Reality. Such a form of knowledge is possible because it is vouched for by the human intellect itself. Intellect cannot reach the level of intuition but it is in a sense a preparation for it. Intuition does not contradict reason but goes beyond it.

## 6.8 Intuition and Integral Knowledge

Intuition is the higher faculty of the mind that grasps Reality in its totality such that nothing is left out of its comprehension. Intuition has been variously defined. Sometimes, it is called a direct perception or direct experience (*aparokshanubhuti*) of Reality (Sankara 1972). It is also called the suprarational knowledge of the Absolute Spirit (Sri Aurobindo 1973). In any case, it goes beyond the categories of reason

and apprehends Reality without the intervention of reason and its abstract categories (Bergson 1998). In intuition, Reality reveals itself in its totality and thus there is no veil of separation between the knower and the known. Reality is the way the things are; it is the absolute state of things. That state of being is known directly in intuition. This knowledge of Reality is integral knowledge. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

An integral knowledge then must be a knowledge of the truth of all sides of existence both separately and in the relation of each to all and the relation of all to the truth of the Spirit (Sri Aurobindo 1973:653).

Integral knowledge thus brings into light all sides of the existence of the Spirit and presents a coherent knowledge of the whole of Reality in this absolutely integral experience. Integral knowledge is the integral experience of Reality (Sankara 1972; Radhakrishnan 1932).

The intellectual knowledge is fragmentary and is divisive. It dismantles the whole of Reality into parts which do not cohere with each other. In such a scenario, knowledge is no more than some sort of ignorance (*avidya*). That is why Vedanta declares all partial knowledge to be ignorance (*avidya*). It is in this context that it has been said that the knowledge of Brahman is the knowledge of everything, i.e. is the knowledge of the Truth in all its aspects (Sankara 2001, 2002). Thus we can ascend from the state of partial knowledge to integral knowledge through the successive steps of the realization of the Absolute Reality (Sankara 1984). As Sri Aurobindo writes:

An integral knowledge demands an exploration, an unveiling of all the possible domains of consciousness and experience. For there are subjective domains of our being which lie behind the obvious surface; these have to be fathomed and whatever is ascertained must be admitted within the scope of the total reality (Sri Aurobindo 1973:651).

Thus, we can find that the scope of integral knowledge includes all aspects of our consciousness and that includes the totality of our spiritual experience.

## 6.9 Limitations of the Mind

Mind as the faculty of the ego is preoccupied with the world because of its dependence on the sense-organs which are related to the objects in the world. Therefore, the mental consciousness is related to the world and is limited by the world. The world as such consists of the external objects which impact the mind and its world-related activities. Mind is worldly in that sense and is intentional in its nature (Searle 1992). In the system of Vedanta, mind is not free from the world because it operates on the world as directed by the intellect. Mind and intellect together constitute the mental apparatus which account for the intentional nature of consciousness.

However, according to Vedanta, the mind and the world are so interconnected that one cannot be separated from the other. Mind and body are intimately related and so there is no way the mind can be detached from the body (Sankara 1984). The body and mind constitute one ego which is the embodied self. In this sense, the ego is a mental being having the intellect (*buddhi*) as its primary instrument. The mental life

of the ego is limited to the world in the sense that the mind gets involved in the world for its basic functions. Both knowledge and actions are the functions of the mind because of which the ego knows the world and acts upon it in its waking life. The ego is the “I” that is the doer and the knower. The I is the self which is in the world and so concerned with the world. The self or the ego cannot be what it is without the body, mind and intellect which constitute the worldly being of the ego (Sankara 1984).

The mind is limited and finite (Sankara 1997a, b, 2001, 2002) because it is involved in the world. It gets itself engrossed with the worldly objects as the objects of desire. The latter controls the mind by drawing it away towards the world. The man of worldly desires becomes the slave of the world and thus is bound with the multifarious allurements of the world. It is this bondage with the world which is the main source of the limitations of the mind. Vedanta declares the mind to be in ignorance because of its worldly nature which goes against the power of the mind to go beyond the world (Sri Aurobindo 1973) .

One may wonder why Vedanta does not take mind as the final stage of the human development while in the whole Western tradition mind has been given the highest place in the chain of being (Hegel 1977; Chalmers 1996). The reason is that in the Vedantic tradition, the mind is only the first step in the hierarchy of beings. The Vedantic metaphysics has introduced many ontological levels other than the physical and the mental ones. This is evidenced in the fact that the whole of the Vedantic metaphysics is founded on the principle that the physical and mental levels are only parts of a vast realm of supramental existence (Sri Aurobindo 1973). Thus, mind and the body are only rudimentary forms of existence, which are supervenient on the supra-physical and the supramental existence.

Before we explore the many dimensions of the supramental existence, we must explore the mental existence in a more minute way. In Vedanta, the mental existence is not only the lower form of existence but also it is only a fragment of a vast existence that surpasses the mind. The following are the features of the mental existence:

1. Mind originates from matter and life, which are the primary levels of existence in which mentality exists in a rudimentary form.
2. Mind has intelligence as its basic property, which makes it the instrument of thinking, willing and feeling.
3. Mind is the internal organ of the ego because it along with intellect constitutes the embodied self.
4. Mind is bound by matter in the sense that mind cannot exist without matter. Mind and matter are the twin forms of existence which are interlocked.
5. Mind is the source of bondage because it creates the limited ego-consciousness that is confined within its narrow and finite sphere of existence.

The finite and the limited character of mind and ego-consciousness is the hallmark of the mind that is involved in the world process. Mind and the world together constitute the phenomenal reality which is called *samsara* in the Vedantic metaphysics (Radhakrishnan 1932). It is this world that is projected as the changing and ephemeral world created by Maya (Sankara 1972). The mental existence along with

the existence of the world is part of Maya that creates the world of multiplicity. This world is ultimately superimposed on Brahman because of Maya (Sankara 1972).

The finitude of the mind is writ large on the face of the ego and the world because the mind cannot go beyond this ephemeral material world. The ephemeral mind is limited to the ephemeral world because of their being superimpositions on Brahman. The mind is as much a creation of Maya as the world is. Both the world and mind are finite existences having Maya as their origin. This explanation of the mind and the world is based on the Vedantic principle that Brahman alone is real and everything else is dependent on it (Sankara 1972; Sri Aurobindo 1973). Thus, it follows necessarily that mind itself cannot be an infinite reality and that it must have its origin in the finite ego which is itself a product of Maya.

## 6.10 Mind and Ego

The ego is the centre of the mind and consciousness. The ego is the embodied self that is constituted of the sense-organs, mind and intellect (*buddhi*) (Sankara 1984). The sense-organs are parts of the body, which is the seat of the mind and the intellect. The body is born and is subject to decay and death. It is made of matter or Prakriti (Sankara 1984). The sense-organs which constitute the body are such that they are used by the mind to be in contact with the world. The sense-organs are the chief instruments of knowledge and action of the ego, which is the owner of the mind. The mind is the internal organ which directs the sense-organs for organizing the activities of the ego. The mind functions under the supervision of the intellect (*buddhi*) (Sankara 1984).

The mind is supposed to be in direct contact with the world, and therefore it is vulnerable to the impact of the world on the senses creating the impressions of liking and disliking for the objects of the world. The mind is swayed by the world and so it becomes difficult to control the mind because of the mental force that binds it with the world (Sankara 1984). The mind becomes a victim of its own force and energy because the latter leads to its own fall. The mind creates its own bondage.

Mind is the creator of the ego that is in bondage. It is because mind creates the illusion of separateness and also of duality. It is the mind that creates the distinction between I and you and between the self and the world. This state of duality is created by ignorance (*avidya*) (Sankara 1972, 1984). Advaita Vedanta takes the mind and the intellect as the source of this ignorance. The way the mind works is conditioned by the limiting conditions of the body and the sense-organs. Mind is dependent on the body for its very origin, and therefore the body naturally influences the mind. Though for Advaita Vedanta, the body and mind are an essential part of the ego, yet they do not constitute the whole of the embodied self or the ego. The ego has the most important constituent called the self or Atman. The latter is higher than the body and mind (Sankara 1984).

The Atman of the ego is conditioned by the body and the mind. Therefore, in a sense the self has entered into the state of ignorance because of its association with the body and the mind. This state of being of the ego is contingent because it

can be removed by the knowledge of Atman or Brahman. This knowledge comes after the realization of the identity of the ego with Atman (Sankara 1997a, b). This knowledge of identity of the ego or jiva with Brahman is called liberation (Sankara 1972). Thus, the dissolution of the ego is the ultimate aim of Advaita Vedanta. The state of egolessness is the spiritual state that has to be ushered in by Yoga as the *Bhagavad Gita* suggests (Sankara 1984).

## 6.11 The Dissolution of the Ego

Vedanta declares that the ego or the embodied self is in a state of bondage and it must be liberated from this state (Sankara 1972). It is the firm belief of the Vedantins that the jiva or the ego is in ignorance or *avidya* and that this ignorance must be removed by the dawn of the knowledge of Brahman (Sankara 1984). The ego is the greatest stumbling block on the way to the knowledge of Brahman.

Now it may be asked: Why is the ego an obstacle to knowledge of Brahman and liberation? The answer is obvious: the ego is in ignorance due to Maya. The ego is a product of Maya, and therefore it is finite and limited in its nature. The self in the ego is limited by the body and the mind and so the self cannot know its real nature. The self is in a state of lack of knowledge of its own true nature and its identity with Brahman. The ego suffers from self-forgetfulness. This is its fallen condition.

There are two ways the ego is conceived to be fallen from its true nature: first of all, it has identified itself with the body and mind which are the not self. The body and mind are superimposed on the self (Sankara 1972), and therefore the self becomes superimposed on the body and mind. This superimposition takes place because of Maya as a result of which the self loses itself in the embodied state. The ego thus gives rise to the limited state of its worldly existence. Both the ego and the world rise due to Maya distancing themselves from Brahman.

The ego assumes the role of the agent or the doer (*karta*) in the world and claims to be the doer of all actions which are undertaken by the embodied ego (Sankara 1984). Agency of the ego is due to the false identification of the self with the body and the mind. The self in itself is without agency as it does not do anything (Sankara 1984). The self or Atman is free from all worldly activities and is pure. Therefore, no agency can be attributed to it. But due to Maya the self becomes identified with the ego which is an agent of the actions. The Gita like other Vedantic texts declares that agency of the self is due to Maya, and therefore it must be dissolved by the true knowledge of Brahman (Sankara 1984).

The agency of the ego is expressed in such statements as “I am the doer of all actions”, “I am the possessor of all these things”, “I shall do such and such actions in order to get such and such objects”, etc. In all these the “I” occurs signifying the finite embodied ego. The self falsely thinks that it does everything while it is the mind–body complex or the jiva which does all these. The I is the limited ego appearing as the agent. The self itself is beyond it. The real self is transcendental in character.

## 6.12 The Transcendental Self

Vedanta is committed to the transcendental self as distinguished from the empirical self. The empirical self is the ego or the jiva which is in the world. The transcendental self is outside the world (Sankara 1984; Wittgenstein 1961). The self or Atman is by its nature free from any attributes; it is partless, pure consciousness (Sankara 1997a, b, 2001, 2002). Because of its essence as pure consciousness, the self cannot be part of the world. The empirical self or the jiva, on the contrary, is part of the world. It is endowed with the body and the mind, which are its limiting adjuncts.

The Vedantic self is Brahman, which is the Absolute Reality. It is the all-pervading Reality, which is the source of the universe including the empirical egos (Sankara 1972). Brahman is the transcendental Reality which is the source of the world but not part of it because the world itself depends on Brahman. The world in Advaita Vedanta is due to Maya and so it cannot be real like Brahman. That is the reason why Brahman or the transcendental self is beyond all the limiting adjuncts and is free from Maya. Brahman is Absolute Consciousness beyond all embodiment and empirical conditions. Brahman is the unconditioned Reality.

The transcendental self is the condition of the world (Sankara 1972; Wittgenstein 1961). Therefore the world derives its meaning from the transcendental self since the latter is the source of the reality and the meaning of the world. The world is an appearance of the transcendental self or Brahman and thus it gets its existence derived from Brahman. There is no way the world can be on par with Brahman because it is unreal ultimately as it is based on Maya. Brahman is the only Reality that there is. It is the non-dual Reality (*advaita*).

Advaita Vedanta introduces the transcendental self as the Reality higher than the mind and the intellect. The self or Atman is transcendent to the mind–body complex and is the witness of the latter. The witness-self is the higher self that precedes the mind–body complex. In this sense, the Gita calls the self the knower (*kshetrajna*) and the mind–body complex the field of objects to be known (*kshetra*) (Sankara 1984:494–495). This distinction between the self, the knower and the body-mind complex as the object of knowledge marks the distinction between the self and the world. The self is the witness or the knower of the world and not a part of it because it is by nature transcendental in character. By being transcendental, the self transcends all the limiting adjuncts like mind, body and the world. The world is due to Maya along with all the limiting adjuncts like the mind, intellect, and the body. Therefore, the transcendental self is taken as free from Maya.

## 6.13 Mind, Intellect and the Self

The levels of mind, intellect and the self are demarcated because of the difference in the sphere of activities of these three. The mind is the domain of the sense-related activities, while the intellect is the domain of thought and understanding. In the



Vedantic thought, mind and intellect are different because of the demarcation of their activities (Sankara 1984). The mind is given the lowest sphere of activities because of its overwhelming dependence on the sense-organs and the sense-objects in the world. Mind is the instrument of the sense-activities which are undertaken by the ego. It is because of this that mind is taken as the internal organ that directs the sense-organs towards the sense-objects. Thus mind cannot get freed from the sense-objects because of the complete sway of the latter on the mind. The mental activities like knowing and thinking need the intervention of a higher faculty for their proper functioning.

The higher faculty is the intellect or reason (*buddhi*), which has a different function from that of the mind in the Vedantic thought. The intellect has the function of directing the mind and presiding over the mental activities. That makes the intellect or reason the faculty of reasoning, deliberating and inferring which are ordinarily taken as the mental activities. But they are the higher-order mental activities having the capacity to have higher-order thoughts. Thus, the intellect has the function of distinguishing between right and wrong, true and false and between what is to be done and what is not to be done. Vedanta assigns a higher status to the intellect because it is the one that has a direct relation with the higher Reality called the self or spirit (Sankara 1984; Hegel 1977). It is through the intellect or reason that the higher Reality is revealed.

In Vedanta, the higher Reality is the self or Atman or Brahman which is present in all as the inmost self (Sankara 1972). The ego embodies the self or Brahman. Therefore, we find the self in the ego or the jiva as a limited Reality. The self which is pure, eternal and transcendental is embodied because of its association with the body and the mind. That is, the body and the mind limit the pure Brahman into the jiva thus making the latter partake of a worldly life (Sankara 2001, 2002). The intellect, however, has the capacity to reveal Brahman if it is sufficiently sharpened and widened (Sankara 1984).

The *buddhi-yoga* of the Gita (Sankara 1984) is the process of making the intellect the instrument of the revelation of Brahman because the *buddhi* alone can take us to the higher Reality. The *buddhi* transcends the bondage of the mind to the world, and therefore it can have a higher view of Reality as a whole. The realm of Brahman is nearer to the intellect or reason because the latter can access the sphere of Brahman by virtue of its capacity to penetrate the higher realm of Reality (Sankara 1984; Sri Aurobindo 1973).

The intellect or reason has the capacity to turn the mind from the world towards Brahman. That is, it has the capacity to make the mind free from the sense-objects and make it fit for the higher knowledge of Brahman. Since the knowledge of Brahman is the highest goal of man, ultimately it is the intellect along with the mind which prepares the individual ego to realize its identity with Brahman (Sankara 1972).

## 6.14 Jiva and Brahman

The boundaries of the mind and intellect are laid down by the embodied self or the jiva in the sense that mind and intellect can go to the extent that is defined by the jiva or the ego. This follows from the fact that the jiva itself is a limited being and that it can have its being only because of Maya. The Maya generated being of the ego is necessarily finite and limited because it is subject to the limiting adjuncts of the mind and intellect.

As discussed before, mind is an internal organ of the jiva or the ego and so it is finitely enclosed within the life of the ego. The mind cannot go beyond the life of the jiva because mind is the limiting factor of the latter. The jiva has a worldly existence being a product of the Maya and so it is born in ignorance (Sankara 1972). The ignorance or *avidya* envelops the ego so much so that it cannot rise above the limiting conditions like birth and death and the Law of Karma. These limiting conditions make the jiva bound to the cycle of birth and death, that is, it becomes subject to transmigration (Sankara 1984). Thus the jiva becomes the contingent being that is bound to the laws of the contingent world. In this way, Advaita Vedanta defines human existence in terms of the limited and contingent jivahood.

The boundaries of the mind as defined by the boundaries of the jivahood are set in terms of the world and its existence due to Maya. The jiva as a limited being due to Maya remains far away from Brahman, the Supreme Being. Brahman stands on the other side of the dividing line laid down by Maya. While the jiva is under the veil of the Maya, Brahman remains free from it. Brahman transcends the world and Maya. Brahman is pure transcendental consciousness (Sankara 1972). It is pure because Maya cannot touch it; it is free from all the defects of the world because it is free from Maya (Sankara 2001, 2002).

The jiva as the minded being gets stuck up in the quagmire of the world and so it remains chained to the conditions of the world. Mind being an essential constituent of the jiva is thus conditioned to the world. Mind and intellect are ultimately the products of Maya like the world and the ego. They cannot on their own reveal Brahman unless the higher self enlightens them and make them the fit instruments of the knowledge of Brahman (Sankara 1972). For that the removal of the Maya is necessary because Maya blinds the mind and intellect. When mind and intellect are freed from Maya they can truly apprehend Brahman. In that case, the jiva itself becomes free from Maya and that is its liberation as it realizes its own identity with Brahman.

The jiva and Brahman are ultimately identical when Maya is removed. The jiva due to ignorance or *avidya* thinks that it is different from Brahman. But when ignorance is removed on the removal of the Maya the jiva is the same as the Brahman, that is, the individual embodied self is the same as the pure, transcendental self. This is the supreme knowledge of the ultimate Reality, according to Advaita Vedanta (Sankara 1972).

## 6.15 The Supreme Knowledge

Knowledge of Brahman is taken to be the higher knowledge in Advaita Vedanta (Sankara 2001) because it reveals the nature of the Absolute Reality. On the contrary, knowledge of the world, mind and intellect is considered to be the lower knowledge. The latter is the domain of the Maya and so it is considered to be the domain of ignorance (Sankara 2001). Thus we are led to the belief that nothing other than Brahman or the self is absolutely real.

In Advaita Vedanta the mind and the intellect along with everything related to the world fall short of absolute reality because they are part of the world which is due to Maya. They, therefore, remain within the orbit of Maya and so are the mere superimpositions on Brahman. Because of their secondary status, the mind and the intellect both are given the status of the instruments of the knowledge of Brahman (Sri Aurobindo 1973). However, the mind and the intellect do not shy away from knowing Brahman when they are suitably placed. This is the reason why Vedanta accepts the role of mind and reason in tracking the highest Reality.

In the process of the changes in the mundane consciousness of the mind and intellect, there is a definite change towards the higher consciousness which overcomes the boundaries of the mind and the intellect. Consciousness in its higher forms goes beyond the mental consciousness that is confined to the embodied spirit or the empirical ego. Mental consciousness tracks down the world in all its richness but it fails to grasp the supreme Reality, Brahman because the latter far surpasses the limits of the mental consciousness. Brahman as pure consciousness is free from the mental and intellectual constructions and remains the transcendental consciousness beyond mind and language (Sankara 2001, 2002).

The mental consciousness never remains static because it is impelled by its own inner force to move ahead of its own boundaries. It breaks its own boundaries in search of the vast realm of consciousness beyond the mind (Sri Aurobindo 1973). That is the secret of the human mind and reason which are incomplete in themselves but which move constantly beyond their limitations. The mental energy is a part of the cosmic energy that makes the human mind a fragment of the cosmic mind (Sri Aurobindo 1973).

The mind of the ego or the embodied self is a fragment of the universal mind because it is limited to its physical base in the human body. The human body because it is limited to the space-time world is a gross body having all the properties of a physical reality. The mind that exists in this body becomes limited to the physical boundaries. But the mental force never remains a handmaid of the body for it goes beyond the body in search of a higher Reality. The mind becomes transformed as it approaches the higher reality in the form of supreme consciousness.

Knowledge at the mental level remains fragmented and disharmonious. That is why Vedanta aspires for the higher knowledge beyond the mind. This is the crux of the Vedantic notion of knowledge (Sri Aurobindo 1973) because of which the mind itself gets transformed in a gradual process. The transformation of the human mind is central to the Vedantic philosophy of mind.

## 6.16 The Transformation of the Mind

That the mind can be transformed by the higher Reality is accepted by Vedanta because it believes that the mind cannot remain static in its nature and functions. Mind has a dynamic nature because of which it aspires to go beyond its role as an instrument of sense-perception and other related activities along with the functions of the intellect as the instrument of thought and reasoning. Both mind and the intellect in Vedanta remain at the level of the instrument in relation to the self or ego. The self asserts its supremacy over them because the self is the master of the mind-body complex (Sankara 1997a, b, 2001, 2002).

The transformation of the mind and the intellect takes place at the moment when they come nearer the self or Atman because of their refinement. When the mind becomes enlightened and illuminated by the self-effulgent self, the mind becomes aware of its relation with the self, though the self is absolutely free from all relations with the body-mind complex. The self because of superimposition becomes identified with the mind and body; so it appears as conditioned by these limiting adjuncts. The mind in itself remains independent of the self, but that does not prevent it from knowing the self as the supreme Reality. The mind rises from ignorance and becomes enlightened by the dawn of knowledge of the self. The ego realizes its identity with the self when its mind and intellect are free from ignorance. This state of enlightenment accrues to the mind when it becomes free from ignorance.

The transformation of the mind takes place as a result of the dawn of knowledge of Brahman on the mind. Both mind and intellect become transformed as the fit instruments of the knowledge of Brahman. The mind of the free man is different from the mind of the ignorant man because the latter is steeped in ignorance or *avidya* because of the presence of Maya. The Maya-enveloped mind gets transformed into the Maya-free mind because of the proximity of the mind to the self or atman. When the mind and the ego become one with the self, there is no ignorance and bondage. This state of the mind and the ego is the most cherished state in the Vedantic metaphysics.

## 6.17 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the limits of the mind and the intellect in relation to the self. It has explored the relations between matter, life and mind in the search for the metaphysical unity of the three in the over all metaphysics of the mind and consciousness. The Vedantic metaphysics of the mind consists of the totality of the relations between matter, on the one hand, and the life and mind on the other. These two poles of reality come together in the reality of the embodied self or the ego. The ego itself is a bounded reality because of its non-identity with the transcendental self or Brahman. When the jiva or the ego realizes its identity with Brahman, it becomes free from all bondage created by Maya.

This chapter has specifically focused on the boundaries of the mind and the intellect in the metaphysics of consciousness of Vedanta, especially of Advaita Vedanta. Its aim has been to show that the mind has capacity to rise beyond its boundaries by virtue of knowledge of Brahman. The mind transcends its limits because of its ascent to the reality of Brahman and its merger in the higher consciousness. In that state the mind is no more a mere internal organ of the ego but the self-illuminated mind of a higher kind. This is the transition of the mind to the supermind. This transition from the mind to the supermind will be discussed in the following chapters.

Advaita Vedanta has spearheaded the metaphysical theory of consciousness that postulates the oneness of the transcendental consciousness beyond the embodied mind and consciousness. It rejects the sole possibility of embodied consciousness and affirms that the human mind can overcome the embodied state and be identical with the cosmic consciousness. This chapter has outlined the way consciousness arises from its embodied state to its transcendental state.

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# Chapter 7

## Gradations of the Mind: Sri Aurobindo's Evolutionary Metaphysics



### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter intends to explore the evolutionary approach to mind especially from the perspective of Sri Aurobindo who has brought out the presuppositions of the Vedantic metaphysics of the mind. As discussed in the preceding chapters, Advaita Vedanta does not provide any metaphysics of evolution except in the indirect sense that mind has to travel a long way in the realization of its identity with the supreme consciousness. Mind as such has a limited existence, which has to be overcome by way of transcendence of its own limitations. Advaita Vedanta leaves mind in the domain of Maya or Avidya without trying to get it evolved into a higher mind. Therefore, there is an apparent lacuna in the Advaita metaphysics of mind because of the lack of an evolutionary approach. Sri Aurobindo brings out the a new Vedantic perspective in which the mind has the potentiality of evolving into a higher mind, and therefore has the goal of transcending itself into state of the Supermind.

In this chapter, the emphasis will be on the necessity of an evolutionary metaphysics of mind and consciousness as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo, the neo-Vedantic thinker. An attempt will be made to validate the metaphysical grounds on which evolution of the mind will be possible. There is a general awareness that mind and consciousness have different grades in which they prevail and perform different functions. The evolutionary metaphysics of mind provides justification of this general awareness.

### 7.2 The Evolutionary Approach to Mind

The metaphysics of mind which has been prevalent in many discourses on mind shows that there is a way of understanding mind which needs a grounding in something which generally makes mind evolve in the process of Nature. Mind as a natural phenomenon is given the status of importance in the domain of other natural

phenomena (Alexander 1966). Mind gets importance because it makes its activities impact other natural phenomena by way of either changing their direction or giving them values and meaning in the cosmos. Mind has the potential role of a meaning-giver from the cosmic perspective (Nagel 1912).

However, mind itself is not a static substance but a dynamic process which needs a different treatment from that of matter. While matter is static and insentient, mind functions ceaselessly as the domain of man's thoughts, perceptions and experiences in general. Mind is conscious, while matter is not. The idea that mind and matter are two different phenomena is universally accepted but there is hardly any agreement on the Cartesian duality between mind and matter. Mind and matter do not occupy the same ontological space and so must be put in different categories (Ryle 1949). This shows that mind must be treated differently and must be kept away from the categories pertaining to matter such as motion, rest, etc. Mind surpasses matter by virtue of its dynamic nature and its capacity to transcend its own nature. This point is evident in the various discourses on mind (Chalmers 1996; Sri Aurobindo 1973).

The evolutionary approach to mind is evident in many philosophical systems (Spencer 1885; Alexander 1966; Bergson 1998) because there is a definite way in which the mind has been discussed as a progressive phenomenon which develops into more complex and coherent phenomenon in the process of evolution. Because the mind is not a static but dynamic reality, it is all the more appropriate to view the mental phenomena in terms of the evolutionary categories. Mind develops not only in terms of its abilities but also in terms of consciousness. If we take the animal mind as the starting point in the evolutionary scale, we can very well see that there has been an evolutionary process in which the human mind has come into existence. If such an evolution would have been non-existent, then the human mind would have been completely cut off from the animal mind and there would have been no continuity between the two. But such is not the case.

The Cartesian philosophy of mind was completely anti-evolutionary because of which there was no possibility of the mind developing within the Cartesian framework. The mind remained strait-jacketed within its own fixed boundaries (Descartes 1912) because of which it never exceeded its own limits. But soon after the Cartesian framework was thrown out, the mind appeared in its full glory as a dynamic entity that grows and develops into higher forms. This was pointed out by the non-Cartesian philosophers (Hegel 1977; Spencer 1885) who opined that mind and consciousness have a continuous development and that they grow in all aspects from the simple to the complex.

### 7.3 Mind Versus Mind

The main issue for the evolutionary theory of mind is how to make the mind develop in an ordered manner so that it does not become a static substance. For the evolutionists, the problem is that of development and not of existence. For them, there is no doubt that the mind exists. But the problem is: What does the mind do to grow

further? Human mind has been for centuries in the process of evolution as the human species itself has been on the path of progress. The human consciousness has shown a continuous progression from the primitive mind to the mind of the civilized race (Spencer 1885).

The evolution theory throws light on the fact that the human mind is the subsequent stage after the evolution of the animal mind. The animal mind itself is an evolutionary step in Nature because it came into existence after a long struggle in Nature. All animal species do not have a mind in the way the higher animals have. It is because it took a long time before the higher animals got the mental capacity to make their survival possible. The animals like the insects do not have the mental capacity which the higher animals like the chimpanzees have. Though it is not known whether the higher animals other than the humans have a logical mind but it is clear that they have a mind that guides them in their struggle for survival (Spencer 1885).

It is scientifically proved that the human mind is the best that Nature has produced in the process of evolution. Human brain is so developed that it has given rise to the mind which can think logically. The human mind is a logical and thinking mind because of which man has been declared a thinking and rational being (Descartes 1912). The thinking mind is contrasted with the non-thinking and non-rational minds like the animal minds. The difference between the rational and the non-rational mind is so enormous that one cannot put them on the same level. The superior quality of the rational mind is such that it makes a great difference to the human species which is rational. The human species has the capacity to make the environment change to satisfy its needs. Nature responds to the human mind in more than one way (Kant 1929) because it is the mind that makes Nature to some extent by conferring on it the rational structures and meanings. Thus, Nature is no more a strange phenomenon but a domesticated one because of the intervention of the mind (McDowell 1994).

The human mind has arrived on the scene much later in the history of the universe (Sri Aurobindo 1973) because of the pressure of Nature under the guidance of a superior design in the universe. It was inevitable that the human mind came into existence because Nature had already prepared the ground for its emergence. Nature's basic principle is to manifest intelligence in the universe. The first sign of intelligence was manifest in the animals. This was followed by the human intelligence. Thus, there is scientific evidence for the fact that Nature is not dead matter but an intelligent organism which shows sign of evolution of the mind from the simple to the complex (Spencer 1885). This shows that the emergence of mind in the universe is not an accident but the result of a well-planned design.

## 7.4 Mind and Matter

The relation between mind and matter is a puzzle which the evolutionists have attempted to solve. The distinction between mind and matter which Descartes has introduced has failed to solve the problem because of the fact that both mind and matter claim to be two different substances which can never have any meeting point.



That is to say that if mind and matter are different and independent substances then there is no way we can make them come together by any principle of harmony between the two. That is why the evolution theorists have attempted to find out a principle by which both mind and matter can be brought together on the basis of a harmony between the two (Sri Aurobindo 1973).

The first question which we must take seriously is whether mind and matter are independent of each other at all. That is, we must ask whether mind and matter are so different that they can never meet. On the first sight, they appear to be very different; while the mind is conscious, matter is unconscious. Besides, the kind of activities which the mind can do cannot be done by matter as such. There is thus *prima facie* difference between mind and matter. But from this it cannot be concluded that they are independent of each other. Mind depends on matter for undertaking its activities like thinking and perceiving, etc. For example, the human body is necessary for the human person to think and perceive. Human persons are a complex of body and mind. Therefore, interdependence of body and mind cannot be denied. But this does not prove anything about the dependence of the body on the mind unless we show that the body itself can be under the influence of the mind. It is a well-known fact that body and mind mutually influence each other (Descartes 1912).

The evolutionists go beyond Descartes in bridging the gap between the mind and matter. For them, there is no reason to say that matter is completely independent of the mind. Matter itself prepares the ground for the emergence of mind because mind cannot be created out of nothing. The material conditions make it necessary for the mind to emerge (Alexander 1966). Matter itself is the ground on which the edifice of the mind stands. All emergent theorists believe that mind could not have come into being without the material antecedents. But that does not prove that mind is nothing but a modification of matter as the materialists claim.

The evolutionary theory of mind and consciousness rejects the materialist account of the mind because the latter makes the mind a static entity which does not undergo any evolutionary change. For the materialists, matter is the only reality of which the universe is made so that there is nothing in matter which can evolve into something else. The universe is itself a complex structure of matter and has fixed physical laws which govern the universe. Therefore, there is no evolution in the general structure of the universe, even life and mind which are part of the universe are modifications of matter. Thus materialism as a theory of the universe does not accept any evolution of life and mind in the universe. Life and mind are different modifications of matter and are not the products of evolution from matter.

Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution rejects the materialist hypothesis as the latter goes against the very nature of the cosmos, which shows signs of growth and development at various levels. While materialism takes matter as the ultimate principle of the universe, Sri Aurobindo takes consciousness as the ultimate principle which can explain all the phenomena in the universe. Matter loses its primacy in the universe and is superseded by mind and consciousness. The evolution of the mind in the universe is a fact of experience as matter itself gives rise to the mind because the inherent tendency of matter is to give rise to the mind and consciousness (Sri Aurobindo 1973).

## 7.5 The Primacy of Consciousness

Sri Aurobindo like all Vedantins advances the theory that the ultimate reality is consciousness or Brahman of which the universe or cosmos is a manifestation (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 25–32). According to him, the world or Nature is a manifestation of Brahman which is the indwelling infinite Reality. Sri Aurobindo writes:

This primary, ultimate and eternal Existence, as seen by the Vedantins, is not merely bare existence, or a conscious existence whose consciousness is crude force or power; it is a conscious existence the very term of whose being, the very term of whose consciousness is bliss (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 91).

Thus consciousness or Brahman is the ultimate Reality or Existence which is the basis on which the entire universe stands. This Reality is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss. It is also otherwise known as Sachchidananda (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 94–95).

Sri Aurobindo rejects the theory that matter is the ultimate Reality of which everything is a modification or transformation. Materialism in all its forms assumes that there is only one Reality in the universe and that is matter. Such a hypothesis is as ancient as philosophy itself because of its universal appeal to all materialist thinkers. This theory has its genesis in the early view that the universe has a physical structure, which consists of the atoms and their conglomerations. Such a view was widely prevalent in Greek as well as Indian philosophy. But it was challenged by the idealist thinkers all over the world. Plato rejected this theory in Greek philosophy. In Indian philosophy, the Vedantic thinkers in the Vedic tradition rejected this theory outright as a product of confused thinking. Sri Aurobindo represents the Vedantic tradition by showing that matter is not the primary Reality and that It is the Spirit or Brahman which is the ultimate Reality. He writes:

... the sharp division which practical experience and long habit of mind have created between Spirit and Matter has no longer any fundamental reality. The world is a differentiated unity, a manifold oneness, not a constant attempt at compromise between eternal resonances, not an ever lasting struggle between irreconcilable opposites (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 240).

Thus, the distinction between matter and spirit is not fundamentally real because the Spirit is the Reality in the universe and that matter itself is a form of the Spirit.

There is a novel attempt by Sri Aurobindo to put the Reality in perspective by bringing in Brahman or Spirit as the ultimate Reality. The primacy of consciousness follows from the fact that Brahman or Spirit is consciousness per se. The primary reality of consciousness is accepted because it alone can explain every other phenomenon in the universe. Consciousness is all pervasive and universal and so it underlies every phenomenon in the universe from the atom to the mighty cosmos. Consciousness is the ultimate source of the universe. Thus, Sri Aurobindo makes it clear that the material nature of the universe is itself a derivative phenomenon and cannot claim to be the ultimate Reality.

## 7.6 The Nature of Matter

The concept of matter has been familiar with us from time immemorial as that substance, which is the substratum of the attributes of extension, motion, mass, etc. Both science and common sense accept that the material bodies are extended objects in space and time and are bereft of consciousness. That is why both science and common sense treat the material bodies as objects that cannot think and have consciousness of any sort. Matter is contrasted with the living beings which can think and perceive. That is to say, matter is that which does not have mind and consciousness. Thus, the ontology of the material bodies stands poles apart from the ontology of the minds (Descartes 1912).

Sri Aurobindo argues against the commonsensical and the scientific view of matter and the material bodies. He turns the materialist picture of the universe upside down by suggesting that matter is not mindless and that it is not all that unconscious as science and common sense tell us. He suggests that matter and material bodies have underlying them a modicum of consciousness because matter conceals consciousness within itself. Matter is the expression of the Spirit. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Matter, – substance itself, subtle or dense, mental and material, – is form and body of Spirit and would never have been created if it could not be made a basis for the self-expression of the Spirit (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 642).

This is to suggest that what we call matter is an expression of the Spirit. This also goes to suggest that matter is the form and body of the Spirit.

For Sri Aurobindo, matter exists as the form of Reality or Brahman because the latter expresses itself in the form of matter. Matter would not have been created if Brahman would not have the need to express itself in the material form. Matter is a form of inconscience and ignorance because in it consciousness is concealed. Brahman chooses to involve itself in matter and so it manifests itself in matter. Matter, therefore, in no way can be considered as insentient and mindless. This view of Sri Aurobindo can be called the idealist or the spiritualist view of matter, which takes matter as a form of Spirit or consciousness (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 231–239). Sri Aurobindo writes:

Matter is Sachchidananda represented to His own mental experience as a formal basis of objective knowledge, action and delight of existence (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 239).

This is to show that Brahman or Sachchidananda chooses to unfold itself in the form of the material universe for the sake of enjoyment or delight. In other words, material form of the universe is the field of the joy of Brahman. In plain terms, it means that Brahman expresses itself in the material universe. In that sense, matter is Brahman itself.

## 7.7 Matter, Life and Mind

Sri Aurobindo takes into account the different levels of reality such as the physical, vital and mental so that apart from matter, life and mind are also taken as realities. These three realities such as matter, life and mind demand an ontological space for each of them individually and also collectively as a part of the ultimate Reality. It is, therefore, necessary to find out the importance of these realities in the economy of the universe (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 173–97).

Matter is, as already discussed, the substance that represents Reality in its material form in space and time. Thus matter provides the beginning of the chain of being that constitutes the universe. Matter is not inert or *jada* but is alive with consciousness concealed in it. In this sense, matter ceases to be completely lifeless. In fact, as Sri Aurobindo holds, matter gives rise to life and mind in the evolutionary process. In that case, we can say that matter holds life and mind in a concealed form. This is called involution of life and mind in matter (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 185). Sri Aurobindo writes:

This is precisely what must be expected if Life is a force evolving out of Matter and culminating in Mind, and, if it is that, then we are bound to suppose that it is already there in Matter itself submerged or latent in the material subconsciousness or inconscience (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 185).

This is to suggest that matter is already having life and mind in a rudimentary form such that when the time comes, both life and mind emerge out of matter. In this sense, matter is so important as the locus of life and mind.

Life is the force that underlies all the vital phenomena in the universe. Life emerges into a mighty force that underlies all the life-forms from the plants and animals to the human beings. Life in that sense is the universal energy that informs all forms of life in the universe from the smallest to the most complex. Sri Aurobindo characterizes life as a universal force and as a form of energy. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Life is everywhere, secret or manifest, organised or elemental, involved or evolved, but universal, all-pervading, imperishable; only its forms and organisms differ (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 179).

Thus, life is present as a universal force or energy such that it pervades the entire universe. It brings out the latent potentialities of the life's activities in various forms. Life is also the main impetus which pushes all the organisms towards their own perfection. Especially in the human species life becomes the dominant vital force that pushes upward towards the mind and beyond. Human life in that sense is the cradle of the new forces of mind and consciousness. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Life is a scale of the universal Energy in which the transition from inconscience to consciousness is managed; it is an intermediary power of it latent or submerged in Matter, delivered by its own force into submental being, delivered finally by the emergence of Mind into the full possibility of its dynamis (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 184).

This shows the way life acts in matter and goes further to give rise to mind in the evolutionary scale. Mind itself emerges from life because of this progressive manifestation of consciousness. Life is the intermediary between matter and mind.

## 7.8 Mind and Its Place in Nature

Mind is the most important phenomenon in the universe after matter and life. It is the principle of intelligence, emotion and will as we find it in the case of the human beings. Mind is not a single entity or substance but the principle of mental activities and also the faculty of thought, perception and many other activities. Sri Aurobindo focuses on the mind as a universal phenomenon from the submentality in the plants and animals to the mentality in the human beings (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 198–99). Mind spreads its wings all over Nature because of the fact that it is already present in matter and life though in a submerged form.

According to Sri Aurobindo, mind has appeared in the universe after a long struggle from its lower forms to its present forms in man. In its primitive submental forms, mind remained concealed in matter and slowly emerged from matter into the forms in plants and animals. This process of emergence of the mind from matter is called its evolution as a result of which new forms of mind have arisen in the material universe (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 198–206). Because of the presence of mind the universe itself has got a new status as the cradle of new forms of mentality. In this sense, we can feel assured that the evolution of mind in the universe is part of the design of Nature.

Sri Aurobindo brings out two aspects of the mind: one its involution in matter and second, its evolution. So far as the involution of the mind is concerned, there is the presence of mind in matter in the form of rudimentary mentality which is unmanifest in the material plane. In its unmanifest stage, mind is steeped in darkness which is not visible on the surface. That is why it appears that the material objects have no mind and consciousness. Sri Aurobindo argues that if mind is not already involved in matter, it cannot appear in the form of the mind of the plants and animals. There cannot be submentality or inferior mentality in the plants and animals unless matter has the potentiality to give rise to mind. Thus, the idea that matter is mindless has to be rejected because it goes against the very nature of the universe.

There is philosophical justification for involution of mind in matter on the ground that it lays the foundation of the possibility of evolution. Without involution, evolution itself becomes meaningless because it turns out to be an accidental and magical development of mind in Nature. That is why Sri Aurobindo makes the mind the intermediary between matter and Spirit so as to bridge the gulf between matter and Spirit. It is because mind partakes the nature of both matter and the Spirit. Mind evolves out of the matter and life in the ascending series crossing the limits of the matter and life. Mind carries forward the mentality present in matter and life and emerges as of immense power of knowledge and action. Mind, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the seat of power, knowledge and action. It is the instrument through which the animals and the human beings can carry on their practical activities (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 252–61).

However, mind is not the last in the series of the mental evolution. It is just a transition from matter towards the superior mind called the Supermind. The Supermind will be the higher stage of mind, which needs a greater evolutionary effort

on the part of man. Before we discuss the latter, we must examine how the mind functions and what are its limitations (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 271–89). Sri Aurobindo writes:

For in the evolution there are indeed radical transitions, from indeterminate Energy to organized Matter, from inanimate Matter to Life, from a subconscious or submental to a perceptive and feeling and acting Life, from primitive animal mentality to conceptive reasoning Mind observing and governing Life and observing itself also, able to act as an independent entity and even to seek consciously for self-transcendence... (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 273).

This gives a broad indication of the grades of the mind as it evolves through different stages from the primitive mentality to the present form of rational mentality of the human beings. Mind is constantly evolving into new forms, which will be discussed in due course.

## 7.9 Mind and Its Limits

Mind is the third stage in the evolution of the universe. It is preceded by matter and life. Mind arises from the stage of life by virtue of the impetus in the life-force. Sri Aurobindo takes mind as evolved from matter and life because mind is already implicit in matter and life. It is not that mind arises out of nothing. Had mind arisen accidentally in the universe, then mind would turn into a magical reality. But that is not the case. Like matter and life, mind itself is a substantive reality (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 159–72).

The evolutionary theory of mind takes the view that nothing in mind can be the result of a mechanical process and that everything in the mind is the result of a dynamic process of evolution. Mind is not the static reality that is somehow placed in the universe by a cosmic Deity. Mind is the result of the process of a divine manifestation in the material universe. Sri Aurobindo argues that mind itself is the manifestation of the supreme consciousness called Brahman. This view goes along with the idea that Brahman is the only Reality there is. Therefore, matter, life and mind cannot be independent realities: they are all manifestations of the Spirit in the universe (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 159–72). That is to say that the mind itself is a form of the supreme consciousness in its terrestrial existence.

The nature of the mind is such that it organizes the activities of the vital being which is the human individual born in the material world. Mind makes life intelligent and forward looking because life is aided by the mind to push it further in the journey towards perfection. Mind is the next stage where life gets its fulfilment. It is not that the mind is just a mechanical device or organ only to receive messages from the outer world. It is itself the creative faculty of intelligence, intellect and imagination. Mind, according to Sri Aurobindo, is a superior faculty rather than a mere internal organ. It is the best of man's faculties. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Mind, first, the chained and hampered sovereign of our human living. Mind in its essence is a consciousness which measures, limits, cuts out forms of things from the

indivisible whole and contains them as if each were a separate integer (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 162).

Thus mind functions as the instrument through which the conscious being apprehends reality and measures it by its own standard. It makes the whole Reality divided into segments because of its inherent power of cutting the whole into parts. Mind and reason are such that they make the whole appear as consisting of parts. Sri Aurobindo says:

Mind may divide, multiply, add, subtract, but it cannot get beyond the limits of this mathematics. If it goes beyond and tries to conceive a real whole, it loses itself in a foreign element; it falls from its own firm ground into the ocean of the intangible, into the abyss of the infinite where it can neither perceive, conceive, sense, nor deal with its subject for creation and enjoyment (Sri Aurobind 1973: 162–163).

Mind thus is bound by its limits which define its boundaries by showing that it cannot go beyond the finite reality and also it cannot enter into the arena of the Infinite. Mind is bogged down in its territory of the finite universe which it can understand and know by virtue of its own categories.

## 7.10 Mind and Ignorance

Mind, according to Sri Aurobindo, is steeped in ignorance so far as the knowledge of the Reality is concerned. The level of the mind is the level of groping and searching for Truth and not of the knowledge of Truth. This is because the level of the mind is still not free from the influence of the material and vital elements in Nature. Mind is limited by the body and the vital desires and impulses which lead the mind away from Truth. Mind is handicapped by its association with matter and life out of which it emerged. This is what Sri Aurobindo says on the mind:

For Mind as we know it is a power of the Ignorance seeking for Truth, groping with difficulty to find it, reaching only mental constructions and representations of it in word and idea, in mind formations, sense formations- as if bright or shadowy photographs or films of a distant Reality were all that it could achieve (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 272).

Thus mind cannot have direct access to the Reality and must be satisfied with the representation of it in the mental formations.

Sri Aurobindo is not sceptical about the capacity of the mind to find Truth but is only showing that mind itself has to rise higher in order to get at Truth. He is not condemning mind and intellect as having no consequence in the evolutionary process of Nature. He is very optimistic that mind has the capacity to go higher and become the knower of Truth but not before it becomes the Supermind. Mind itself is always seeking a higher status though it does not succeed always in this endeavour. Yet partial knowledge is still within the competence of the mind. Sri Aurobindo writes:

All the actions of this Mind Energy proceed on the opposite basis of the Ignorance and its divisions and, although they are the results of a certain conscious knowledge, it is a partial

knowledge, not a true and integral self-knowledge nor a true and integral world-knowledge (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 286).

This suggests that mind can have partial or half-knowledge and not the true and integral knowledge. However, there is still the sign that the mind is capable of rising above its limitations.

What emerges from Sri Aurobindo's conception of the mind is that mind is only a lower stage in the evolution process. That makes the mind half-ignorant and half-knower because of the enormous limitations which are imposed on the mind by ignorance. Mind is still on the way to perfection because of its own inherent power.. There is an enormous burden on the mind to go further in search of its higher stage in the Overmind and then in the Supermind (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 271–89).

## 7.11 The Grades of the Mind

The idea of the grades of mind is implicit in Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary theory of mind. According to him, the mind undergoes transformation at different stages of development. Sri Aurobindo, unlike other philosophers, does not accept that mind is permanently fixed and that it has no possibility of growth. The Western notion of mind as given by Descartes (1912) and others is that it is a fixed substance which has no possibility of growth. Sri Aurobindo rejects this theory on the ground that mind is in the process of development. He agrees with Hegel (1977) that mind has a large background in which it grows from its rudimentary stage to its more developed stage.

The theory of evolution as laid down by Sri Aurobindo holds that mind in its rudimentary form is involved in matter and life. Mind and consciousness both are underlying the material world and the life-world. In this form, it is implicit and concealed in matter and life. In this sense, mind is already present as concealed by inconscience or ignorance. Mind is without any awareness of itself in the material world. Consciousness itself is so concealed and covered by ignorance that its presence can hardly be marked by us. That is the reason why mind is taken as a very subtle principle, which is the principle of subconsciousness and submentality. Sri Aurobindo writes:

No doubt, the evolving Mind in us is hampered by its encasement in the obscurity of this life and body, and the original Mind principle in the involutionary descent is a thing of a greater power to which we have not fully reached, able to act with freedom in its own sphere or province, to build more revelatory constructions, more minutely inspired formations, more subtle and significant embodiments in which the light of Truth is present and palpable (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 272).

It is clear from the above that mind has a larger presence than is available in matter and life. In the latter, mind is present in the concealed form, and therefore its true nature is not revealed. In its higher nature, it is capable of more power and freedom



to act. Mind in that sense is a greater reality than it is in its involved stage in matter and life.

Mind in the involved state is completely without knowledge as it is pervaded by ignorance. Therefore, it is in the nascent state so that it cannot get any idea of Truth or Reality. It is debarred from any awareness of Truth. It is condemned into obscurity and darkness. But that is not the final destiny of the mind. It emerges to some awareness in the consciousness in plants and animals. Mind is present in the life of all forms because, without the presence of the mind, life itself cannot be possible. Mind is very close to life, though distantly related to matter. Thus, we are led to believe that mind has a bigger future than what it is in the stage of matter and life. Mind is a form of energy that pushes forward in evolution because of the evolutionary pressure in Nature.

## 7.12 Mind, Intellect and Reason

Intellect and reason are different aspects of the mind in so far as there are different activities which the mind does in Nature. First of all, mind is the faculty of thinking and other activities for which intelligence is absolutely necessary. Intelligence is that capacity of the mind by which it manages to do these activities. An intelligent mind is the mind that initiates the activities and brings them to fruition. Sri Aurobindo takes the mind as basically the intelligent mind that is on the path of evolution. This is the reason why he makes the mind transcend inconscience and ignorance in various degrees. However, for him, the intelligent mind is far behind in the evolutionary ladder. Intelligence can only give the mental being the method to achieve its activities. It cannot give any vision of Truth as such.

But there is a limit to the intelligent mind. It is still in the sphere of ignorance as the rest of the mind is. The faculty of mind remains confined to the activities of the mental and the vital man. The mental man is the elevated vital man because of which intelligence can guide the activities of the vital man (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 824–47) The mental man is a only a transitional being and his intelligence only a partial manifestation of consciousness. What the vital man cannot do the mental man can do because of intelligence. Even then the mental and vital men are still groping in the dark for the higher mind. Sri Aurobindo writes:

... Mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being. If, then, man is incapable of exceeding mentality, he must be surpassed and Supermind and superman must manifest and take the lead of the creation (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 847).

This is how Sri Aurobindo keeps the mental man in search of the Supermind so that in himself the mental man is only transitional and not the final goal of creation.

Mind evolves a faculty of rationality and reasoning because the rational mind will be a better instrument of consciousness to achieve its evolutionary goals. The rational mind and its consciousness are on the path of evolution because in them only we find a clear indication of knowledge. The rational man, as emphasized in the West,

is the epitome of higher consciousness which can be mapped through the rational activities. That is why the rational man (Descartes 1912) is the thinking man, who can know the secrets of Nature. But for Sri Aurobindo, the rational man is still a transitional man groping in darkness for knowledge of the Reality. The rational mind is not free from ignorance and other limitations though it has the seed of further evolution into a higher mind (Sri Aurobind 1973: 824–47).

Reason as universally recognized is the faculty of logical thought. It is the faculty of reasoning which decides what is true and what is false. Logic is the arena of valid and true thoughts and is the domain of logical laws which guide human thought. In this sense, it is a superior faculty for all practical purposes. But Sri Aurobindo does not accept its superior nature because it is still at the lower stage of the human evolution. The rational mind is only a very poor mind in comparison to the Overmind and the Supermind. The rationality of the mind is only a little elevated faculty of the mind. It is not self-complete and is still waiting for further growth in the evolutionary scheme of things. Even logic in the ordinary sense is not final. It is the ordinary logic of the finite in comparison to the logic of Infinite introduced by Sri Aurobindo (1973: 633–56).

The more we investigate the limits of the rational mind, the more we encounter the limits of rationality and logic. Mind cannot get at the highest Truth by the instrument of logic and rationality. Reason as the faculty of reasoning is still in search of the Truth which is beyond reason. The higher reaches of mind are beyond reason.

### 7.13 The Levels of Mind

There are different planes or levels of the mind, according to Sri Aurobindo. The ordinary mind is the one which is most familiar with us. It is the thinking and feeling mind that the human beings have come to possess in the process of evolution from matter and life. Mind has its place in Nature after matter and life in that order. The ordinary mind is the one that is the instrument of all the activities, which the human beings carry out in their ordinary life. Science, philosophy and other forms of thought are the routine activities of the ordinary mind. In this sense, the ordinary mind is so rich and many-sided. But Sri Aurobindo views this mind as the limited and surface mind because it is still in the grip of ignorance (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 919–63). Though the ordinary mind has emerged from matter and life, it is still limited to the laws of the material and vital plane of existence.

The ordinary mind evolves into the following planes or stages in the following order: the higher mind, the illumined mind, the intuitive mind, overmind and Supermind (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 919–63; Satprem 2003: 198–218). These different grades of mind are the different stages at which mind has to evolve. Therefore, it is the mind itself which passes through these planes in its evolution. Sri Aurobindo brings out the different planes of the mind in order to give a comprehensive view of the all the stages of the mind till it reaches the Supermind.

The first evolute after the ordinary mind is the higher mind because it is the one which breaks the boundaries of the ordinary mind by enlarging its scope of function. The higher mind has more capacity to think deeply and widely about the Reality or Truth. It is the mind of higher and wider thought. It receives light from above but is not completely enlightened by the supreme light. Sri Aurobindo writes:

... its special character, its activity of consciousness are dominated by Thought; it is a luminous thought-mind, a mind of Spirit-born conceptual knowledge (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 939).

Thus, the higher mind is still in the grip of its limitations, though it comes in contact with the higher Reality in its conceptual grasp. It deals with greater thoughts beyond the domain of logic. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

But here in this greater Thought there is no need of a seeking and self-critical ratiocination, no logical motion step by step towards a conclusion, no mechanism of express or implied deductions and inferences, no building or deliberate concatenation of idea with idea... (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 940).

However, the higher mind is a spiritual-mind more open to the higher mental planes. The higher mind has a wider scope in the evolution of consciousness from its material and vital base. The higher mind is a step forward in the direction of the Supermind.

The next stage or plane of the evolution of the mind is the illumined mind, which is still higher than the higher mind. This mind is a more spiritualized mind that can grasp Truth in a direct way. The illumined mind receives the light from above in a transparent way. Sri Aurobindo says:

This greater Force is that of the Illumined Mind, a Mind no longer of a higher Thought, but of spiritual light. Here the clarity of the spiritual intelligence, its tranquil daylight, gives place or subordinates itself to intense lustre, a splendour and illumination of the Spirit... (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 944).

Thus, at this stage, the mind is illumined by the light of the Truth or Spirit. It is flooded with light from above. It is flooded with the higher consciousness that pervades the mind in all its aspects. This is the mind of the seers and poets, who perceive the Truth with a clear vision. At this stage, the mind becomes illumined by the light of the Truth in such a way that Truth reveals itself in a clearer light (Satprem 2003: 203–206).

The next higher stage is that of the intuitive mind, which has been introduced by Sri Aurobindo. The intuitive mind leads directly to Truth by virtue of its capacity to access Truth through a direct grasp of it. Intuition is a way of seeing Truth and not merely contemplating on it through the thought schema. Therefore, it has been universally held that intuition stands beyond reason and is more comprehensive than reason. Intuition is a form of seeing and grasping reality. Sri Aurobindo observes:

Intuition is a power of consciousness nearer and more intimate to the original knowledge by identity; for it is always something that leaps out direct from a concealed identity (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 946).

Intuition is thus the perception of identity, which is the very nature of Truth. Identity is revealed in the intuitive consciousness. Sri Aurobindo further elaborates:

This close perception is more than sight, more than conception: it is the result of a penetrating and revealing touch which carries in it sight and conception as part of itself or as its natural consequence (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 947).

Thus, the intuitive mind is competent to grasp Reality by virtue of a direct revelation of the latter. It grasps Reality in a flash of light. “Intuition has a fourfold power. A power of revelatory truth-seeing, a power of inspiration or truth-hearing, a power of truth-touch or immediate seizing of significance.. a power of true and automatic discrimination of the orderly and exact relation of truth to truth...” (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 949). This is how the intuitive mind is given the higher status as nearer Truth than the preceding levels of mind.

The most important step in the evolution of mind is the Overmind, which Sri Ari Aurobindo grants the highest status next to the Supermind. The Overmind is the spiritual-mind that is in direct relation with cosmic consciousness. It is the infinite consciousness which has descended into the Overmind as it can capture the former within its wide and plastic openness. Overmind brushes aside all the limitations of the preceding minds and brings about a transformation within the individual consciousness. Here begins the arrival of the higher consciousness in the individual mind to transform it and divinize it. Sri Aurobindo observes:

The overmind change is the final consummating movement of the dynamic spiritual transformation; it is the highest possible status-dynamis of the Spirit in the spiritual-mind plane. It takes up all that is in the three steps below it and raises their characteristic workings to their highest and largest power, adding to them a universal wideness of consciousness and force, a harmonious concert of knowledge, a more manifold delight of being (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 952).

The Overmind is thus a transforming mind that brings about a sea change in the consciousness of the individual. It spiritualizes the lower planes of the mind and so it is given the higher status and power.

The Overmind descends into consciousness with its transforming power to make the individual mind the possessor of the Truth. Even then it is still limited by its own inability to transform a man without the aid of the Supermind. Overmind cannot transform wholly the Inconscience because it is handicapped by its dependence on Supermind for the final transformation of the human nature. However, without the descent of the Overmind into the earth-nature, the Supermind cannot transform man and nature.

## 7.14 The Supermind

The final stage of the evolution of the mind is the Supermind, which is the culminating point of the evolutionary ladder which the human mind traverses. It is the one that is granted the divine status because it is nearer to Truth or the Divine, Sachchidananda.

The Supermind brings about a total change in human consciousness, and therefore it is the sole Truth-Consciousness that makes man the gnostic being.

Supermind achieves all that the other minds could not have done, though these minds prepare the ground for the descent of the Supermind into the earth-consciousness. Sri Aurobindo has made the Supermind the highest principle of unity and oneness by which the entire cosmic Reality is transformed into the Divine Reality. As Sri Aurobindo observes:

The liberation from this pull of Inconscience and a secured basis for a continuous divine or gnostic evolution would only be achieved by a descent of the Supermind into the terrestrial formula, bringing into it the supreme law and light and dynamis of the Spirit and penetrating with it and transforming the inconscience of the material basis. A last transition from Overmind to Supermind and a descent of Supermind must therefore intervene at this stage of evolutionary Nature (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 954).

The transition from Overmind to Supermind and the descent of Supermind are a two-way process in which there is both ascent and descent of the cosmic consciousness. The Supermind is the cosmic consciousness that is emerging from the Overmind and is also descending into it to change the earth-consciousness.

The Supermind is the final stage in which consciousness develops till it reaches the Absolute or the Spirit, according to Sri Aurobindo. The Supermind itself is the Truth-Consciousness and not the Truth or Absolute itself. It is the light of the supreme Reality and not the Reality itself. The Supreme Reality or Sachchidananda takes the help of the Supermind to manifest itself in the world. Therefore, the supreme Reality uses the Supermind or the Truth-Consciousness for its own manifestation and involution in the universe.

The supramental descent into the human consciousness is the needed ground for the spiritual life in the world. In fact, the Absolute descends into the world through the instrumentality of the Supermind because the latter carries the light and power of the Absolute into the lower hemisphere of the earthly nature. Sri Aurobindo writes:

A supramental change of the whole substance of the being and therefore necessarily of all its characters, powers, movements takes place when the involved Supermind in Nature emerges to meet and join with the supramental light and power descending from Supernature (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 962).

Thus, the Supermind is not only involved in Nature but also it emerges from Nature and transforms it and makes it meet the Supernature or the Absolute.

## **7.15 Evolution and Involution: Sri Aurobindo's Idea of the Cosmic Design**

The idea of grades of mind as discussed above makes it imperative that the mind has an evolutionary trajectory. This idea is novel and challenging because it throws away all conceptions of a static and permanent mind-substance. It makes the following claims:

1. Mind evolves into Supermind through the planes of the higher mind, illumined mind, intuitive mind and Overmind.
2. Evolution is gradual and is guided by its own laws.
3. Evolution is preceded by involution in the sense that the Supermind is involved in the mind, life and matter.
4. Supermind involves itself in matter and inconscience.
5. Sachchidananda or the Spirit is involved in the material world because of its own will to manifest space and time.

These points make it clear that there are two processes interlinked, namely, involution and evolution. Involution is metaphysically prior to evolution because without the former the latter cannot take place. This is the reason why Sri Aurobindo has introduced the principle of involution in his theory of evolution (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 824–47). Evolution is the “bottom-up” process, while involution is the “top-down” process both being two sides of the same coin. The Reality manifests both these aspects in its manifestation of the world. It is the part of the cosmic design which Brahman has for the world.

Now the question is: Why is involution necessary, when the project is the evolution of mind and consciousness? Is involution absolutely necessary for evolution to take place? Sri Aurobindo answers these questions in his metaphysics of the Spirit. His answer is that the evolution of the mind and consciousness is not arbitrary or a product of chance, nor is it a purely natural evolution as in Emergent Evolution (Alexander 1966). It is a spiritual evolution in the sense that it is the evolution of the Spirit guided by the Spirit. There is, therefore, no way there can be evolution of the mind from matter, if the mind is not there already in matter, that is, if the matter does not have mind implicitly within itself, the mind cannot evolve out of matter. Similarly, the mind cannot evolve into the Supermind, if the latter is not already involved in the former. Hence, the necessity of the involution of the Supermind in mind, life and matter.

Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution which is the subject matter of discussion here is path-breaking because it has shown how the universe is evolving to realize its basic potentiality of divinity in it. The universe is evolving through matter, life and mind to Overmind and Supermind only to realize what is already implicit in, that is, the divinity which is underlying in Nature. Nature itself is divine which has been concealed behind Inconscience. This divinity has to be manifested in the evolution process. Evolution in this sense is a manifestation of the Divine at the different stages from matter and Inconscience to the supramental stage of consciousness. The latter is superconscience which is the culminating point of evolution. Thus, evolution is not a unilinear process but a two-way process in which what evolves is already involved in Nature.

Besides, it is the divine teleology which guides the evolutionary process. This teleological movement of the Nature bears the stamp of immanent teleology that guides the destiny of the universe and man. Sri Aurobindo's idea of teleology is different from the Western notion of teleology because while the latter has a linear view of the evolution of the universe, Sri Aurobindo adheres to the circular view of

the universe in which evolution is preceded by involution of the cosmic Spirit. Both ascent and descent of the Spirit characterize the evolutionary process.

## 7.16 Nature, Space and Time

In the evolutionary scheme of things, Nature plays the role of the representative of the Divine. Nature is the manifest form of the Divine, which is the Absolute or Sachchidananda. The Absolute has already descended into Nature and is concealed within it. Therefore there is urgent necessity of making the concealed Divinity evolve into full manifestation of its supreme consciousness. This evolution takes place in the heart of Nature. But Nature itself cannot evolve unless it is guided by the Divine itself.

Nature spreads itself in Space and Time because in the latter alone its evolution takes place. Space and Time are the twin realities that make Nature what it is. Nature is temporal and spatial because it is the visible reality that we encounter. The natural phenomena including the material and non-material phenomena constitute the vast system of Space and Time. The Divine Reality takes the help of Space and Time to manifest itself. Sri Aurobindo writes:

For in itself Sachchidananda must be a spaceless and timeless absolute of conscious existence that is bliss; but the world is, on the contrary, an extension in Time and Space and a movement, a working out, a development of relations and possibilities by causality—or what so appears to us—in Time and Space (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 143).

Thus, Space and Time are necessary for causality to operate in Nature. This is the manifested form of the Divine but this does not affect the Divine because it is beyond Space and Time. The timeless reality of the Absolute is not affected by its manifestation in Time. Time and Timeless are part of the same Absolute. The Divine realizes itself in Nature through Time and that is the reason the Absolute remains involved in Time. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Whatever is in its own being, takes form as self-knowledge, as Truth-Consciousness, as Real-Idea, and that self-knowledge being also self-force, fulfils or realises itself inevitably in Time and Space (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 144).

Thus, the Absolute takes the form of the space-time world in order to evolve in Nature to Supernature. Nothing in Nature is excluded from the domain of the Absolute. The entire outer Nature is the field of operation of the Divine Reality.

## 7.17 The Absolute

Sri Aurobindo develops his notion of Absolute in the Vedantic lines by showing that Brahman or Atman is the Absolute Reality. This Reality is also called Sachchidananda, the Sat-Chit- Ananda, that is, Truth, Consciousness and Bliss. This Absolute

Reality is, for Sri Aurobindo, also the Spirit, the Self or Divine (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 71–79). Sri Aurobindo does not go beyond the Vedantic thought to characterize the Absolute but he makes new moves to make the Absolute both transcendent and immanent. The Absolute is now not a mere transcendent Reality or a mere immanent Reality.

The following are the board features of the Absolute in Sri Aurobindo's thought:

1. The Absolute is the first principle of existence. It is Pure Existence.
2. It is the Conscious Force as it is the Consciousness which acts as a Force.
3. It is the pure Delight of Existence.
4. The Absolute is both outside the universe and inside it.
5. The Absolute is timeless and spaceless and yet is involved in Time and Space.

These feature taken together give a broad picture of the Absolute that is different from the Absolute in Advaita Vedanta (Sankara 1972) and the Absolute of the other systems of Indian thought.

The Absolute as the Pure Existent is the fundamental principle because it is the underlying Reality of all existence. It is Being which is the foundations of all beings. As the supreme Being, it is beyond all finite beings. Hence it is the Infinite Reality. However, Being is also Becoming at the same time because Being manifests itself as Becoming. Both the Infinite and Finite, the Being and Becoming are harmonized in the integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The pure existent is then a fact and no mere concept; it is the fundamental reality. But, let us hasten to add, the movement, the energy, the becoming are also a fact, also a reality.... We have therefore two fundamental facts of pure existence and of world-existence, a fact of Being, a fact of Becoming. (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 78).

Thus two aspects of Reality are taken into account in the concept of the Absolute, namely, the transcendent and the immanent aspects. In one aspect the Absolute is beyond any movement and becoming but in another aspect it is movement, energy and becoming in Space and Time. This is further emphasized in the following passage:

The Absolute is beyond stability and movement as it is beyond unity and multiplicity. But It takes its eternal poise in the one and the stable and whirls round itself infinitely, inconceivably, securely in the moving and multitudinous (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 78).

That is say, the Absolute is beyond stability and movement and also beyond unity and multiplicity. It is One and yet many. It is beyond all descriptions.

The Absolute is Consciousness-Force precisely for the reason that its of the nature of *Cit* or Consciousness that underlies all existence. It is both Consciousness and Force because the Absolute not only is conscious in itself but makes movements because of the Force it is. Consciousness as the Absolute is an active principle or a pure Will that compels it to make movements. It is the Divine Energy. The Absolute is the *Shakti* that makes the world of multiple objects possible (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 78).

Sri Aurobindo brings the concepts of Consciousness and Force together for the reason that, according to him, the Absolute is not a mere stable and fixed Reality; it is



also the dynamic and moving Reality. In that sense, the Absolute Reality or Brahman cannot be inactive as in Advaita Vedanta (Sankara 1972). For Sri Aurobindo Brahman is active and energetic because it is not only *Sat* but also *Cit-Shakti*. Sri Aurobindo writes:

For the Force that builds the worlds is a conscious Force, the Existence that manifests itself in them in conscious Being and a perfect emergence of its potentialities in form is the sole object which we can rationally conceive for its manifestation in this world of forms (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 90).

That is, the Conscious Force is the Absolute Reality that is manifesting itself in the universe in Space and Time. The world of multiple forms is the manifestation of the Absolute Reality or Brahman.

## 7.18 The Absolute and the World

As we ascend the evolutionary ladder from mind to Supermind, we reach the Absolute as the ultimate Reality. The Absolute is the Divine or Brahman or Sachchidananda. Sri Aurobindo makes it clear that the Supermind is the last stage of consciousness which gives us the direct vision of the Absolute Reality. The Supermind is the Consciousness-Force, which makes the Absolute reveal itself to the world. The Absolute depends on the Supermind to present the world of multiplicity. The world is the expression of the absolute delight or Ananda, which is the original nature of the Absolute. The world is the manifestation of the Absolute in its creative delight. The one Absolute becomes the Many in the world by virtue of its self-delight or *lila* (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 122–49).

The relation between the Absolute or Brahman and the world is perennially a puzzle. The Vedantins have solved this problem in various ways. The most prominent among them is the solution given by Sankara (1972). For him, the world is a product of Maya and is not real like Brahman. It is as the result of universalignorance that we see the world as a reality. Sri Aurobindo has found difficulties with his solution. He shows that the world is real as a manifestation of Brahman and not a product of Maya. The world has come out of Brahman as the latter's self-manifestation. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Such then is the view of the universe which arises out of the integral Vedantic affirmation. An infinite, indivisible existence all-blissful in its pure self-consciousness moves out of its fundamental purity into the varied play of Force that is consciousness, into the movement of Prakriti which is the play of Maya (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 109).

Maya for Sri Aurobindo is a creative Force that makes the world possible in its variety and richness. The world thus comes out of the pure bliss of Brahman. In this sense, the world is not Maya or illusion in the Advaitic sense.

Supermind as the Truth-Consciousness is the creative principle that facilitates the manifestation of Brahman as the world. The world is that in which Brahman has concealed itself only to emerge out of it in a process of evolution. Without the world,

the Divine could not have manifested itself. Supermind is the mediator between Brahman and the world as the creative matrix. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Supermind is the vast self-extension of the Brahman that contains and develops. By the Idea it develops the triune principle of existence, consciousness and bliss out of their indivisible unity. It differentiates them, but it does not divide (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 128).

Thus, the Supermind makes manifest the triune nature of Brahman in the form of existence, consciousness and bliss . Supermind is the Truth-Consciousness or the Real-Idea that acts as the creative principle of the universe. Sri Aurobindo further adds:

The Supermind is the divine Gnosis which creates, governs and upholds the worlds: it is the secret Wisdom which upholds both our Knowledge and our Ignorance (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 263).

That is to say, the Supermind acts as the creator, which makes the world possible. It is the creative principle which is responsible for the manifest universe.

## 7.19 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored the different grades of the mind in the course of its evolution. This is how Sri Aurobindo has projected the hierarchy of the mind in the quest for the Supermind. Sri Aurobindo's theory of the Supermind has been discussed to show that philosophy of mind can take a new turn with the discovery of the Supermind.

Sri Aurobindo has challenged the philosophy of the mind of the twentieth century with the evolutionary theory of mind and the theory of the Supermind. The Supermind is not an extended mind but a new phenomenon altogether. It is the absolute supra-rational mind, which has so far been kept in the background in Western philosophy of mind. None of the twentieth-century philosophers in the West has even attempted to talk about the mind beyond mind, that is, the mind that can surpass the ordinary mind. Hegel was the last philosopher to talk about the Absolute mind. However, that has been a part of the classical metaphysics which contemporary philosophy has left far behind.

Sri Aurobindo is the first twentieth-century Indian philosopher, who has talked about the Supermind as the new level of consciousness. He has brought out the Vedantic foundations of the concept of Supermind and has shown that Indian philosophy from the Vedic times was seized with this problem because in the Indian consciousness the possibility of the Supermind was well established. Sri Aurobindo has established a well-formulated theory of the Supermind keeping the Vedantic insights in the background.

In the next chapter, the nature of the supramental consciousness will be discussed and its various dimensions will be brought into focus.

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# Chapter 8

## Supermind and the Supramental Consciousness: Sri Aurobindo's Integral Metaphysics



### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the nature of the Supermind and the supramental consciousness in order to show that there is a level of the mental reality which is no more bound by the laws of the lower mentality. As Sri Aurobindo has expounded the theory of Supermind, it is imperative that the supramental consciousness is the next higher level of consciousness, which is destined to transcend the mental consciousness which is available at the present stage of development of the human race.

According to this view, mankind has been imprisoned within the mental consciousness because of which the human race has not ascended to the next stage of its evolution. Man is still a limited being who is steeped in ignorance and inconscience with occasional flashes of light from the higher planes of the mind. Sri Aurobindo has studied the human mind in depth to show that it is limited by ignorance and the lack of any higher knowledge. Keeping the evolutionary destiny of mankind in mind, it is suggested that Supermind is a distinct possibility and can be realized by the human mind even if it is limited and ignorant now.

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to examine the possibility of supramental consciousness on metaphysical grounds. It is necessary to examine this possibility on the ground that man's mind is inherently evolving into a higher mind by transcending its limits. Philosophers have been trying since long to find out what is beyond the logical and the scientific mind. The present attempt is to make that logical possibility into a distinct metaphysical possibility.

### 8.2 The Emergence of the Supermind

Supermind, as already explained in the previous chapter, comes into existence because of the evolutionary process operating in man and the universe. It is the result of a long struggle taking place in the mental plane from which the Supermind

emerges. Supermind is the principle of knowledge and will, which makes the universe come into existence. For that reason, the Supermind is the creator (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 122–31) of the universe. Sri Aurobindo writes:

A Principle of active Will and Knowledge superior to Mind and creatrix of the worlds is then the intermediary power and state of being between that self-possession of the One and the this flux of the Many (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 122).

This intermediary power is the Supermind. It is also the creative principle in the sense that it facilitates the creation of the universe. The supreme Being or Sachchidananda is the Absolute Reality, which manifests itself in the universe through the intervention of the active Will of the Supermind.

Supermind stands between the *Sat-Chit-Ananda* or Brahman and the world with its multiplicity. The One is Brahman which is the transcendent Reality and the world is the Many, which emanates from the One Reality. The Supermind stands between the two which shares with Brahman the nature of the Infinite and Absolute Reality and the same time makes the Many emerge out of the infinite Reality of Brahman. Supermind makes the Many arise out of the One. That is why the Supermind is the principle of the unity of the Many and the harmony of the phenomenal world, while it remains a transcendent principle. The Supermind inherits the indivisibility and the oneness of the Absolute Reality, though it makes the world emerge out of the oneness as the symbol of the Many. Sri Aurobindo writes:

But in the Supermind there is no paralysing division, because knowledge is not self-divided, force is not self-divided, being is not self divided as in the mind; they are neither broken in themselves, nor divorced from each other. For the Supermind is the Vast; it starts from unity, not division, it is primarily comprehensive, differentiation is only its secondary act (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 131).

That is to say that the Supermind is primarily the principle of unity but only secondarily it is the principle of plurality. It is the principle of unity as well as of multiplicity. The Supermind is the “divine and creative Supermind in which all is one in being, consciousness, will and delight, yet with an infinite capacity of differentiation that deploys but does not destroy the unity...” (Sri Aurobinod 1973: 131).

### 8.3 Truth-Consciousness

Supermind is the Truth-Consciousness, according to Sri Aurobindo. It is so-called because it is the consciousness of the Absolute Spirit and is the embodiment of Truth itself. The Supermind is the highest form of knowledge, and is therefore nearer to the Spirit or Brahman. Thus Supermind is the creative power of Brahman that makes the creation of the world possible. In that sense, it is the Will power of the supreme Reality. The Supermind pervades the universe as the creative principle of Brahman. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The Truth-Consciousness is everywhere present in the universe as an ordering self-knowledge by which the One manifests the harmonies of its infinite potential multiplicity (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 132).

Without the supramental ordering principle, the universe will become a chaos because the multiplicity itself cannot account for its order without the intervention of the Supermind.

Supermind is the Real-Idea, according to Sri Aurobindo, because it is the highest principle of unity and harmony in the universe. It is the Real-idea for the reason that the highest Reality manifests itself in the universe through the intermediation of the Supermind. It expresses the nature of the highest Reality (Misra 1957: 185). The Real-Idea is the Truth-Consciousness because of its higher status vis-a-vis Brahman. It is the nature of the Supermind to unify the universe and make it into a cosmic unity. It brings together the multiple entities in the universe. Sri Aurobindo writes:

This Supermind in its conscious vision not only contains all the forms of itself which its conscious force creates, but it pervades them as an indwelling Presence and self-revealing Light (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 135).

It is the principle underlying all the forms it creates. It makes the universe fall into a cosmic harmony because of which we can call the universe a manifestation of the supreme Reality, Sachchidananda. “It is seated within everything as the Lord in the heart of all existences” (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 136). Thus, the Supermind controls everything in the universe through its active power, which is present throughout the universe.

The Supermind is ultimately the divine consciousness that pervades the universe. It is different from and higher than the mind and mental consciousness. It is because of this divine power that the Supermind is given the highest creative status. It is the most pervasive principle that rules the whole universe. Sri Aurobindo writes:

We have to regard therefore this all-containing, all- originating, all –consummating Supermind as the nature of the Divine Being, not indeed in its absolute self-existence, but in its action as the Lord and Creator of its own worlds. This is the truth of that which we call God (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 132).

Of course, it is not a personal God but the active power of Brahman which creates the universe. In this sense, the Supermind is the Divine Being in its active form. Sachchidananda and Supermind are different only in their functional aspects (Misra 1957: 182–88).

## 8.4 The Triple Status of Supermind

The Supermind has three poises in its Truth-Consciousness by which it posits itself as the unifying and the diversifying principle. Supermind is the principle or Real-Idea of unification in the universe. It makes everything in the universe fall into a single harmony. Truth-Consciousness itself is the unitary principle, which

contains potentially everything within itself. It is the all-comprehending consciousness, which makes no distinction between consciousness and force (Misra 1957: 189). Sri Aurobindo writes:

The divine soul in this poise would make no difference between Conscious-Soul and Force-Soul, for all force would be action of consciousness, nor between Matter and Spirit since all mould would be simply form of Spirit (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 146).

In this poise of the Supermind, there is no individuation of consciousness and there is no diversification of the one consciousness into many forms. “The Supermind is, in this poise, not distributed or divided. It is everywhere the single and equal Brahman, *Samam Barhman*” (Misra 1957: 189–90).

The second poise which is called the apprehending consciousness is that of the Supermind leading towards diversification of consciousness in the universe. It allows for the individuation of consciousness. There is now the division between Consciousness and Force and also between Purusha and Prakriti (Misra 1957: 190). In this status of the Supermind, there is the appearance of duality between subject and object and the arrival of the multiplicity. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

In the second poise of the Supermind the Divine Consciousness stands back in the idea from the movement which it contains, realising it by a sort of apprehending consciousness, following it, occupying and inhabiting its works, seeming to distribute itself in its forms (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 146).

The second status of the Supermind is the status of the movement of consciousness into diverse forms. The Supermind as a Creator is manifest in this poise so that we can now see the play of the Divine in the universe in diverse forms. The One Brahman becomes the Many in the universe because of the intervention of the Supermind.

In the third status of the Supermind, it projects itself into the universe and is involved in the world-process. Hereby projection is meant the involvement of the Supermind in the world as the Creator of the Many out of the One. That is to say that the Supermind “no longer remains concentrated in knowledge observing and governing the movement of the its Force or Prakriti, but projects itself into the movement and identifies itself with each form of itself” (Misra 1957: 192). Thus, the Supermind acts in order to project the world by virtue of its supramental force. The world in Space and Time comes into existence because of the action of the Supermind. The multiplicity of the world-phenomena brings out the unity in diversity because there is not only unity but also multiplicity in the universe.

The Supermind is thus the foundation of the world, which has come out of Brahman because of the supramental Force acting in the universe. The Supermind is not only the Truth-Consciousness but also the Consciousness-Force. The three poises of the Supermind bring out the fact that there is not only unity in the Divine Consciousness but also the multiplicity of the world-creation.

## 8.5 Supermind and Overmind

The Supermind is the creative Consciousness-Force, which is busy manifesting the timeless Spirit in Time and Space. That is the reason why the Supermind plays an important role in the manifestation of Brahman in the world. Without the Supermind, the world could not have been created out of Brahman. Sri Aurobindo has given the Supermind the supreme status because of its creative power. However, the Supermind is assisted in this activity by the Overmind, which is in charge of the actual process of creation.

The Supramental consciousness being the highest form of consciousness needs the help of the subordinate Overmind consciousness in the process of the involution or descent of Sachchidananda. Sachchidananda begins to descend down to the material world through the stages of the Supermind and the Overmind. Overmind makes the descent possible because it is more inclined towards the material world because of its position in the hierarchy of the minds. As Sri Aurobindo suggests:

In its nature and law the Overmind is a delegate of the Supermind Consciousness, its delegate to the Ignorance. Or we might speak of it as a protective double, a screen of dissimilar similarity through which Supermind can act indirectly on an Ignorance whose darkness could not bear or receive the direct impact of a supreme Light (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 278).

Thus the Overmind acts as an intermediary between the Supermind and the material world because of its proximity to the latter.

The Overmind is in the direct control of the Supermind because of which the Overmind makes the move to bring out the world of multiple realities. In this sense, the Overmind acts on behalf of the Supermind to make further inroads into the world. Sri Aurobindo writes:

For Supermind transmits to Overmind all its realities, but leaves it to formulate them in a movement and according to an awareness of things which is still a vision of Truth and yet at the same time a first parent of the Ignorance (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 278–79).

Overmind descends into Ignorance because of its proximity to the latter and makes the process of involution possible. Therefore, it makes possible division and separation in the world. The material world arises because of this separation and division.

The separation of consciousness into multiple centres in the world is the work of the Overmind. There is the reality of the world as a distinct entity because of the intervention of the Overmind. The Overmind is the creative Maya, which makes the universe a reality in the bosom of the universal consciousness. The universal consciousness looks diversified because of the Overmind Maya (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 284–85). This is the way the Supermind descends into the Overmind, which makes the further descent into the material world possible. This shows that the Supermind is not static but dynamic in its world-creation. It makes the world in Space and Time possible because of the intervention of the Overmind.



## 8.6 The Gap Between Mind and Supermind

The mental plane of the human existence has been in the focus of analysis in Sri Aurobindo because it is this plane that needs transformation. Mind characterizes the present status of the human existence and so the future of the human race depends on how the human mind progresses further. Because of the centrality of the human mind in the present human existence, there is the demand to know the mind better in all its aspects. The human mind is in the process of evolution towards the Supermind.

On the nature of the mind, Sri Aurobindo has the following observations:

1. Mind is higher than matter and life, but is inferior to the Overmind and the Supermind.
2. It is the faculty of intelligence (*buddhi*) and emotion.
3. It is limited in its capacity because it is involved in matter and life.
4. It is not fully enlightened because it is still far away from the light of the Supermind.
5. It is surrounded by Ignorance and Inconscience.

Thus, for Sri Aurobindo, the human mind in its present stage is far away from the higher mind because it is still in the grip of ignorance (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 271–89). It is limited so far as the grasp of the supreme Reality is concerned. It belongs to the lower hemisphere of the total existence because of its proximity to matter. Mind is still groping in the dark about the ultimate Reality. It is the arena of thought, intelligence and emotions. The mental consciousness is so circumscribed that it cannot look beyond its own plane. It is imprisoned within its limitations so much so that it cannot know the Divine Reality. It can divide the Reality but cannot unify it. Sri Aurobindo writes:

In the first place the mind is an inveterate divider of the indivisible and its whole nature is to dwell on one thing at a time to the exclusion of others or to stress it to the subordination of others (Sri Aurobindo 2000: 398).

Because of this limitation, the mind cannot grasp the ultimate Reality which is Sachchidananda. The Absolute Reality is one and indivisible. Therefore, the mind which divides the Reality cannot understand it. It always makes fragments, and therefore it falls short of the integral knowledge of the Reality.

The mind needs to be understood in all its aspects before we can transform it. It is not only the sense-mind, but also the desire-mind in which its functions is involved in the lower nature of man. But it has also higher aspects, it being the thought-mind and the emotion-mind. All these mental planes need to be transformed into the Supermind (Sri Aurobindo 2000: 350–55). The Supermind must descend into the mind to divinise it and change it radically.

## 8.7 The Transformation of the Mind

The very idea of transformation of the mind is due to Sri Aurobindo's theory of the evolution of the mind into the Supermind. The main reason for this transformation is that the mind operates at a very low level so that it is incapable of knowing the Reality. Mind and reason is incapable of going beyond the limits within which they operate. They operate within the boundary fixed by Nature. Mind and the mental being functioning within this boundary so that they fall short of the knowledge of the Absolute Reality. Mind and the mental being do not have the capacity to know the Absolute. The Absolute itself remains hidden behind the veil of Ignorance. The mind and reason which are the main features of the mental being fail to penetrate the veil and so are condemned to the domain of the limited knowledge with regard to the Absolute Reality. Mind in a sense is the domain of ignorance, according to Sri Aurobindo. He writes:

Mind is not only capable of ignorance, but, because it acts always partially and by limitation, it works characteristically as a power of ignorance: it may even and it does forget itself in a complete inconstancy, or nescience... (Sri Aurobindo 2000: 625).

Thus mind is a limited force and since it acts within limits it is also the power of ignorance. It cannot make any headway beyond the veil of ignorance.

The Supermind in comparison is the power of light and divine power. It is the domain of the divine knowledge and consciousness. It is the supreme Truth-Consciousness, which acts on the mind from above as the source of the mental consciousness. The supramental consciousness is the fountain head of the consciousness at the mental and physical level. It is because the Supermind descends into the lower planes to function within them and make them the instruments of the supramental power. As Sri Aurobindo writes:

Supermind lends itself to the action of the inferior instruments; it is always there indeed at the core as a secret support of their operations (Sri Aurobindo 2000: 625).

This is to suggest that the Supermind works secretly within the lower planes of existence such as the mental, vital and physical. It works below the supramental level because of its involution in the mind, life and matter in the descending order.

The Supermind is the transforming power because it has the capacity to rule over the mind and life. Its power comes from the Divine, which is above and beyond the working of the mind and the supermind. The workings of the Supermind are "merely irradiations of the supermind which accommodate themselves to the limited functioning of the obscure instruments: its own characteristic nature is a gnosis superconscious to mind, life and body. Supermind or gnosis is the characteristic, illumined, significant action of spirit in its native reality" (Sri Aurobindo 2000: 625). Thus, it is the Supermind which ultimately rules over the mind, life and body and transforms them into the instruments of the supramental consciousness.

## 8.8 The Triple Transformation

The transformation of the mind is the key to the evolution of the mind to the Supermind. This transformation, however, takes place at three levels, namely, the psychic, spiritual and the supramental. These three levels are interconnected and are so inter-involved that each leads to the other. The transformation here implies not only change but also total structural change which is some sort of a radical reversal of the nature of the preceding level. Mind goes through these changes to arrive at the Supermind.

The psychic change is the change in the soul or the psychic entity, which is lurking behind the mental consciousness. The psychic being or the soul is the underlying substance of the mental personality. The soul is the element in our personality, which persists amid changes in the surface consciousness. It is the eternal element, which remains behind the veil of ignorance. The soul remains latent in our personality waiting to be awakened from its slumber. This can happen if there is an evolutionary push from below and a call from the above. The mind remains ignorant of the soul and its immortality as a result of which the soul remains shrouded in darkness. The psychic change takes place when the mind itself changes and begins to recognize the reality of the soul behind the veil (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 889–99). This in a sense involves a total change in the mind and the mental consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo writes:

... it is only when man awakes to the knowledge of the soul and feels a need to bring it to the front and make it the master of his life and action that a quicker conscious method of evolution intervenes and a psychic transformation becomes possible (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 895).

This awakening of the soul of man is the first step towards a radical transformation of the inner psychic being. The first step in this regard is the inner change in the psyche of the being of man.

The next stage of transformation is the spiritual one, which makes the mind spiritual by bringing it under the rule of the Spirit. The spiritualized mind is no more the ordinary mind but the spiritualized or divinized mind. The spiritualized mind is nearer to the Divine Reality as a result of which it makes its actions more amenable to the control of the Spirit or the Divine. As Sri Aurobindo writes:

At its highest the thinking mind is drawn always towards the impersonal; in its search it becomes conscious of a spiritual essence, an impersonal Reality which expresses itself in all these outward signs and characters but is more than any formation or manifesting figure (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 901).

The spiritualization of the mind and the mental being takes place because of the ascent of the mind to the higher mind because of its own purification. As a result, “the mind becomes pure, large, tranquil, impersonal: there is a similar tranquillizing influence on the parts of life...: (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 902). Thus, the spiritualization of the mind takes place by virtue of the elevation of the mind towards the Divine Spirit.

The last and the final transformation is effected by the descent of the Supermind into the human consciousness. It is the acme of spiritual perfection when the Supermind takes over the whole being of man and transforms it into the divine instrument for making the Divine Consciousness penetrate into the human consciousness. At this stage, the Supermind rules over the mind and the being of man. The Supermind is the Truth-Consciousness that is active and powerful enough to make changes in consciousness. The supramentalized consciousness bears the stamp of the Divine Reality and it makes the mind radically change in its actions and functions. This radical transformation of the human consciousness is the work of the Supermind because “only the Supermind can thus descend without losing its full power of action; for its action is always intrinsic and automatic...” (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 917). The Supermind is the Divine Force that can exert pressure on the human consciousness to become a Divine Consciousness.

## 8.9 The Ascent to the Supermind

The idea of the ascent to the Supermind is the greatest spiritual event that human consciousness can witness in the process of evolution. Consciousness gradually evolves into the supermental consciousness because of the evolutionary pressure and the influence of the supreme Reality. The human mind and consciousness rise above their limited spheres and ascend into the higher reaches of consciousness. The Supermind, which is already involved in matter, life and mind rises to the level where the Supermind descends into the human consciousness. There is the meeting of the Supermind ascending and the Supermind descending into consciousness. The whole of consciousness is transformed into the Divine Consciousness. Sri Aurobindo writes:

A supramental change of the whole substance of the being and therefore necessarily of all its characters, powers, movements takes place when the involved Supermind in Nature emerges to meet and join with the supramental light and power descending from Supernature (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 962).

Thus the ascent from below, that is, from matter, life and mind is the necessary move in Nature which effectuates the emergence of the Supermind. The ascent is the evolution that is the very nature of the movement of consciousness in the universe.

The nature of the ascent to the Supermind is defined as a case of evolution or progress from the lower or ordinary mind to the Supermind. Ascent in this sense is going higher and crossing the boundary of the limited and finite mind. The transition of the mind to the Supermind is a case of total transformation and reversal of the mind. Mind gets transformed when it ascends to the Supermind. The mental consciousness is transformed into the supramental consciousness because of this ascent. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

As the summits of human mind are beyond animal perception, so the movements of Supermind are beyond the ordinary human mental conception... (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 920).

That is to say that the Supermind belongs to a higher region than the ordinary human mind. Therefore, the transition has to be gradual and painstaking. It is not possible for the mind to jump to the Supermind without preparation and training. The mind makes slow progress in this regard because of its own inability to get into the Supermind by some kind of a sudden leap. That is why, Sri Aurobindo writes:

If the mind cannot enter into the nature of Supermind, it can look towards it through these high and luminous approaches and catch some reflected impression of the Truth, the Right, the Vast which is the native kingdom of the free Spirit (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 920).

This is the way the mind must approach the Supermind through approximation to the supreme light of the Supermind and the supreme Spirit.

The ascent to the Supermind takes place through the intermediary of the Overmind which makes the mind go up in the direction of the Supermind and the supramental consciousness. Mind on its own cannot achieve this ascent without the aid of the Overmind. There is the descent of the Overmind and the Supermind into the mind to make the latter rise to the level of the Overmind and Supermind. This descent is possible because Overmind and Supermind are already involved in the nature. Their descent into the earth-consciousness is inevitable because of this prior involution. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Overmind and Supermind are also involved and occult in earth-Nature, but they have no formations on the accessible levels of our subliminal inner consciousness... In order that the involved principles of Overmind and Supermind should emerge from their veiled secrecy, the being and powers of the Superconscience must descend into us and uplift us and formulate themselves in our being and powers; this descent is a *sine qua non* of the transition and transformation (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 921).

Thus, it is to be noted that the ascent to the Supermind is possible only by the descent of the Supermind into the earth-consciousness. Thus, the dual process of ascent and descent is the hallmark of the process of transition and transformation of the mind.

## 8.10 The Descent of the Supermind

Sri Aurobindo has introduced the concept of the descent of the Supermind as a part of his theory of evolution of the mind into the Supermind. According to him, there can be no evolution without involution or descent. That is to say that if there is no coming down of the Supermind there can be no coming up of the mind. The fact of the matter is that the mind evolves into the Supermind while the Supermind involves itself in the mind. The involution is a sort of coming down from the above which is otherwise known as the descent.

However, the question arises, why does the Supermind descend into the mind and how? This question can be answered by showing that the Supermind or the supramental Consciousness-Force descends into the mental consciousness for making the latter change. That is, the mental consciousness cannot change unless the Supermind makes changes in it. This is the essence of the idea of the descent of the Supermind. The Supermind is the higher mind above the Overmind, which is the power of the Spirit such that it has the capacity to change the consciousness at the mental level. The idea of descent involves the following ideas: first, the Supermind has the power to transform the mind and secondly, it is the creative power of the Spirit because of which it can bring the Spirit into the level of the mind, life and matter. The Supermind is the Consciousness-Force and so it can make the mind transform itself into the superior consciousness. Unless there is pressure from the above there can be no change in the mind and consciousness. Sri Aurobindo writes:

For a real transformation there must be a direct and unveiled intervention from above; there would be necessary too a total submission and surrender of the lower consciousness, a cessation of its insistence, a will in it for its separate law of action to be completely annulled by transformation and lose all rights over our being (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 922).

The power from above demands a total surrender of the lower consciousness and the cessation of its own power over our being. This is the total surrender of the mind to the Supermind or the Divine Will and Power.

The total transformation to be achieved by the Supermind involves taking the mind to the highest level in consciousness and also conquering the lower consciousness with its limitations and ignorance. The mental consciousness is also called the earth-consciousness (Misra 1957: 317), which is transformed by the Supermind. “As a result of the supramental transformation of the human personality, there will be a radical change in the working of mind, life and body” (Misra 1957: 317). Since this is a total transformation of the lower nature of man, it will lead to the emergence of a new personality called the gnostic personality. The kind of change that can take place is beyond the capacity of the ordinary mind to visualize. It can be taken to be a total change which the Supermind can alone achieve. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Out total being can rise out of subjection to fact of present Nature only by an identification with a greater Truth and greater Nature (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 926).

This identification with the “greater Truth and greater Nature” makes the radical transformation possible. In the changed condition, the individual being will be totally identified with the highest being, the Divine Purusha. The individual will be free from the subjection of Nature and will be in attunement with the highest Being, the Spirit. As Sri Aurobindo writes:

In place of the Nature of Ignorance with the individual as its closed field and unconscious or half-conscious instrument, there would be a Supernature of the divine Gnosis and the individual soul would be its conscious, open and free field and instrument.. (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 927).

Such is the effect of the supramental transformation, which will make the individual man a spiritual or gnostic being.

## 8.11 The Gnostic Being

The idea of the gnostic being or the divine personality is implicit in the evolution of the mental being into a supramental being. The latter is the gnostic being in the sense that the latter alone embodies the highest knowledge and wisdom. The gnostic being is so-called because it embodies Truth-Consciousness, which is the supreme knowledge of the Spirit. By its nature, the Supermind is of the nature of the supreme gnosis. This is written into the very nature of the supramental consciousness. Sri Aurobindo writes:

As we reach in our thought the line at which the evolution of Mind into Overmind passes over into an evolution of Overmind into Supermind, we are faced with a difficulty which amounts to an impossibility. For we are moved to seek for some precise idea, some clear mental description of the supramental or gnostic existence of which evolutionary Nature in the Ignorance is in travail... (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 964).

As described here, when the evolution reaches the Supermind there is the need of a new idea to express the supramental or the gnostic existence. The latter is beyond the mental concepts and also beyond our mental experience. Under the circumstances, the gnostic level is of a very different kind which must be described in a new language. The supramental consciousness changes the very nature of the mental consciousness. Therefore, there is a “radical reversal of consciousness and the standards and forms of mental cognition are no longer sufficient” (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 965). This is to suggest that the supramental cognition is of a very different kind, which demands a new language and a new idiom for expression.

The gnostic consciousness is markedly different from the mental consciousness. While the mental consciousness is always of the finite, the gnostic consciousness is always of the Infinite. It is the consciousness of the unity and harmony. It rises above all dualities, discords and differences. The Supermind or the gnostic being becomes the harbinger of unity, harmony and universal oneness. As Sri Aurobindo writes:

Mental nature, on the contrary, thinks, sees, wills, feels, senses with division as a starting-point and has only a constructed understanding of unity; even when it experiences oneness, it has to act from the oneness on a basis of limitation and difference. But the supramental, the divine life is a life of essential, spontaneous and inherent unity (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 965).

Thus, the hallmark of the supramental life is the unity and oneness which is spontaneous and intrinsic to the supramental cognition. This is itself the acme of perfection of the supramental consciousness. The way the Supermind acts is shown to be expressed in the grand harmony and unity of all existence.

The life of the gnostic being is the spiritual life that embodies the consciousness of the supreme Reality, Sachchidananda. The Supermind takes us to the threshold of the Supreme Being and makes us aware of the higher Reality in its magnificent light and illumination. Thus the gnostic being is established in the consciousness of the Supreme Being thereby making the spiritual being the highest being possible on earth. In Sri Aurobindo’s words:

The gnostic individual would be in the world and of the world, but would also exceed it in his consciousness and live in his Self of transcendence above it; he would be universal but free in the universe, individual but not limited by a separative individuality (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 972).

Thus, the gnostic individual will be in the world but he will be universal and would live in his transcendental consciousness beyond the mental horizon. He would be the divine being on earth embodying the divine consciousness. He will represent the divine consciousness on the earth (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 974–75).

## 8.12 Truth, Consciousness and Infinity

The supramental consciousness carries with it the new horizon of the mind and consciousness. It not only reverses the ordinary mind and consciousness but also brings in new elements which are undreamt of by the ordinary human mind. This summit of consciousness is the highest that can be thought of. That is the reason why Sri Aurobindo has given the highest importance to the Supermind in the evolutionary process.

The main character of the Supermind is the that it is the Truth-Consciousness in the sense that it represents the Truth in all its aspects. The Truth here is the Supreme Reality which is the Infinite Brahman. The supramental consciousness is the consciousness of Brahman, which is the supreme knowledge of the latter. The supramental consciousness brings out the consciousness of Brahman by virtue of it being the medium by which Brahman reveals itself. This knowledge is not the ordinary knowledge of duality but of identity and unity because it makes the ultimate Reality manifest in the world. The Spirit cannot be manifest unless the supramental consciousness reflects the supreme Brahman. Sri Aurobindo writes:

All supramental gnosis is a twofold Truth-Consciousness, a consciousness of inherent self-knowledge and, by identity of self and world, of intimate world-knowledge; this knowledge is the criterion, the characteristic power of the gnosis (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 1008).

The twofold Truth-Consciousness makes evident two kinds of knowledge, namely, the knowledge of the self in its pure form and the knowledge of the world in which self and world are one or identical. Both kinds of knowledge are knowledge by identity which is the highest knowledge, according to Sri Aurobindo. When this knowledge is available there is a perfect unity everywhere and the duality of self and the world disappears.

Identity and unity are the hallmark of supramental consciousness because it brings about a transcendence of the mental knowledge of duality. At this level, Reality is one and identical and that is Sachchidananda, the Supreme Reality. The lower knowledge of the duality disappears with the rise of the supramental knowledge of identity. This principle of identity is the supreme principle, which prevails upon the entire universe. This principle is none other than the supramental principle. Sri Aurobindo writes:



This would be the evident principle, the inevitable result of the very character of the Truth-Consciousness and its dynamic realisation of the spiritual unity of all being (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 1011).

This principle is the dynamic principle that organizes all the creation into one single unity. The world as the creation becomes divine in its true nature. This is the world in which the Infinite reality is manifested in the finite forms.

The Infinite Brahman becomes the finite world in Space and Time. The Eternal Spirit manifests itself in Time because of the creative power of the Supermind. The transition from the Eternal to the Temporal and from the Infinite to the Finite is the new venture of Consciousness on the earth. This is also the Divine Maya, which brings out the Many out of the One, Infinite Reality.

### 8.13 The Logic of the Infinite

The philosophy of Supermind demands a new logic to understand the activities of the Supermind in terms of its creative powers. The Supermind acts in the realm of the Divine by virtue of its being the creative power or Shakti of the Divine. It is the creative power which makes the world possible with all its multiplicities. The world has its origin in this supramental power. In order to understand the world and the Divine Reality behind it, Sri Aurobindo introduces a new logic called the logic of the infinite (Sri Aurobindo 1973; Misra 1957).

In order to understand this logic, we must first understand its necessity and relevance in contrasts with the logic that we know from Aristotle onwards. The latter is the logic of the finite and is known in terms of our experience. This logic has formulated its logical principles keeping in view the world that we know and is logically possible. In this logically possible world, certain fundamental laws of logic operate, namely, the law of Identity, the law of Non-contradiction and the law of Excluded Middle. These laws deal with the finite objects which are understood by the human mind. They are concerning things that can be finitely measured and mapped by our finite mind. Therefore, there is unanimity among logicians that these laws will not operate if the world suddenly changes drastically and there is no more any standard of measurement which will apply to this world.

Sri Aurobindo envisions a supramental world which will go beyond this world which is grasped by the ordinary mind. The ordinary normal mind cannot comprehend this world beyond the level of the mind. The way the Infinite Reality works cannot be deciphered by the ordinary mind and its reason. Reason as the instrument of thought cannot make sense of how the Reality works. Reality in its divine character surpasses all the boundaries of reason. That is the reason Sri Aurobindo talks about the supra-rational logic that can comprehend the workings of the Divine Reality. The laws of logic which are part of the structure of reason fail to deal with the supramental realm of the Divine Reality. Therefore Sri Aurobindo says that what is logical to the infinite Reality is magical to the ordinary mind and reason (Sri Aurobindo 1973).

The most important aspect of the Infinite Reality is that though it is One, it is Many at the same time. The Divine Reality is one supreme Reality called Brahman, but at the same time it is also the plural universe. The same Reality is both One and Many at the same time. This is a contradiction according to ordinary logic. But, according to the logic of the Infinite, there is no contradiction between One and the Many. The same Reality is both non-dual and plural at the same time. This is possible because of the Divine Maya, which makes One manifest itself in the form of the Many (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 323–64). This is where the logic of the Infinite works to reconcile both aspects of the Reality.

Another aspect of the Reality is its relation to Time. The supreme Reality is timeless but it is at the same time involved in Time. The timeless Reality becomes temporal and so both the timeless eternity and temporality inhere in the same Reality. In ordinary logic, there is a contradiction between the temporal and the non-temporal. But the logic of the infinite does not find any contradiction between the two. In fact, the Infinite Reality works both ways without an iota of incompatibility between the two (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 363–64). This is the way the logic of the Infinite becomes attuned to the working of the Divine Reality. It overcomes all the limitations of the mind and reason and makes room for the realm of the supramental logic. The supramental logic transcends the logic of the mental consciousness.

## 8.14 Knowledge by Identity

Sri Aurobindo conceives of knowledge of the Reality through the supramental idea of identity. Identity is the foundation on which the supramental consciousness and knowledge stand. The ordinary knowledge of the world is based on duality and difference. Therefore, this knowledge is considered to be the lower knowledge (*apara vidya*). The knowledge of the higher Reality, that is, Self or Atman is of a higher kind because of which it is left to the Supermind to grasp. The higher knowledge (*para vidya*) is the supramental knowledge because the principles of this knowledge are beyond the grasp of the ordinary mind. Ordinary logic also fails to understand the basic structure of the supramental knowledge or Truth-Consciousness. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The superior superconscient ranges are based upon the spiritual consciousness free and luminous, and it is there that we can trace the original power of knowledge and perceive the origin and difference of the two distinct orders of knowledge, knowledge by identity and separative knowledge (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 544).

The two orders of knowledge, namely, the knowledge by identity and the knowledge by separation are, respectively, the higher and the lower knowledge. By the supramental standard, the knowledge by identity is the superior knowledge because it is based on the spiritual consciousness of unity, while the separative knowledge is based on the fact of difference and disunity. The latter knowledge is the empirical knowledge of the world.

Now the question is: Why should the knowledge by identity be superior? To this, the reply could be that it is the highest knowledge because it gives us the Truth regarding the Divine Absolute. It is the spiritual knowledge of the Reality that is Transcendent and Infinite. The knowledge of the Sachchidananda is the superior knowledge because it takes us to the supramental realm where we become identical with the Reality or the Spirit. Knowledge in general demands a separation between the knower and the known. This is true of all the so-called scientific knowledge. For Sri Aurobindo, this knowledge is surrounded by ignorance because it does not disclose the nature of the Reality or Truth. This knowledge is half-ignorance because it falls short of the true nature of Reality.

The supramental knowledge of the Reality or the Spirit surpasses the limits of the lower knowledge by going beyond all differences and separations. That is why it is called the transcendental or spiritual knowledge. All the finite categories of reason or mind get dissolved in the higher knowledge. In the spiritual knowledge, our soul rises to the Spirit and becomes one with it. This self-knowledge or the spiritual knowledge is the knowledge by identity. Sri Aurobindo writes:

It is only by our awakening to our inmost soul or superconscient self that there can be a beginning of the spiritual knowledge with identity as its basis, its constituent power, its intrinsic substance (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 552).

Thus, the spiritual knowledge of the supreme Reality or the Spirit which is the superior knowledge must be the ground of our spiritual realization. It is this knowledge that is called the absolute knowledge of the supramental Reality.

## 8.15 The Lower Knowledge

What is called the lower knowledge is another name for ignorance because the lower knowledge never discloses the nature of the supramental Reality. It is knowledge in the sense that our mind is involved in it but it cannot reach the higher states of consciousness. Brahman is the supreme consciousness which is the absolute Reality. We can only have a mental glimpse of the Reality through the fragmented vision of the mind. Ignorance surrounds this lower knowledge in all its sides.

Ignorance is the limited and separative knowledge which gives a very dim vision of the Reality. It is limited and fragmented and cannot go beyond the boundaries of ignorance (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 553–65). The knowledge of Reality as it is disclosed to the mental consciousness is ignorance; it is the work of the lower mind, that is, the surface mind. At this level, the mind is not free from life and matter because the latter limit it from the below. Matter and life are the two other realms of Reality, which surround the mind and its functions. Because of this, it becomes involved in the subconscious. Thus, the mental knowledge faces on the one hand the limitations of life and matter and on the other it faces the prospects of the supramental knowledge. Mental knowledge, however, is not completely lost in matter; it has the prospect of rising to the supermind. Sri Aurobindo writes:

It is now possible to review in its larger lines this Ignorance, or this separative knowledge labouring towards identical knowledge, which constitutes our human mentality and, in an obscurer form, all consciousness that has evolved below our level (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 553).

The lower knowledge is handicapped by the fact that it is confined to the mental reality. It cannot expand its realm of operation beyond the limits of the mental consciousness.

The limits of our lower knowledge are known from the level of the Supermind, which is the realm of the highest knowledge. From the transcendental perspective, the lower knowledge is a limited and relative knowledge confined only to the level of the reality of the world in Space and Time. This knowledge is the empirical and relative knowledge that cannot rise to the level of the absolute or transcendental knowledge. Ignorance does not mean a complete absence of knowledge; it is only a partial knowledge it being in the shadows of the mental reality. Mind is the instrument of this partial knowledge and so there is a lack of something vital in this knowledge. Only when there is an ascent to the Supermind, there is the cessation of ignorance. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The mind is the ignorance attempting to know or it is the ignorance receiving a derivative knowledge: it is the action of the Avidya. The supermind is always the disclosure of an inherent and self-existent knowledge; it is the action of Vidya (Sri Aurobindo 2000: 828).

This is to suggest that the mind functions under the control of Avidya so that there is no way it can escape from ignorance or nescience.. On the contrary, the supramental action in the realm of the supramental consciousness is of a higher nature where we have the disclosure of true knowledge. The true knowledge is the complete knowledge or the integral knowledge.

## 8.16 Integral Knowledge

Integral knowledge is the goal of the epistemology of Sri Aurobindo, who is eager to go beyond the limits of the lower knowledge and to get fixed in the realm of the supramental knowledge which is the integral knowledge. By integral knowledge, he means the knowledge of the Reality which is never challenged by disunity, fragmentation and partial truth. The intellectual truth of the mind is superseded by the higher integral knowledge. It is this knowledge which has surpassed the scientific mind of the mankind which has been struggling within the realm of the partial knowledge since the evolution of the mental man. That is why Sri Aurobindo has been critical of the mental man and his rational faculty. He has been aware of the unlimited possibilities of man beyond mind, and therefore he has given the idea that we are in search of a new knowledge called the integral knowledge. He writes:

As soon as we rise above mind to the supermind, this initial harmony will be replaced by a greater and a more integral unity. The thoughts of the supramental reason meet together and understand each other and fall into a natural arrangement even when they have started from

opposite quarters... At a higher stage this harmony intensifies towards unity (Sri Aurobindo 2000: 830).

This is the way the Supermind makes the unification of all knowledge possible. It not only transforms the thoughts but also the feelings and the will at the higher stage by bringing into them unity and harmony.

The hallmark of integral knowledge is the harmony among the different aspects of consciousness. It is not only the knowledge of the self but also of the world. Above all, it is the knowledge of the supreme Reality. Self, world and the Divine Reality are integrated into a unitary consciousness by the elevated human mind. That is why there is no separation between the self and the world and the Divine Reality. This is the integral Reality called Sachchidananda. Therefore, there is no separation in knowledge of the integral Reality. The unified consciousness is the source of our knowledge of the Reality. Knowledge is at this stage is a move within consciousness because what is real is within consciousness itself. The Real and the Conscious are one. The Supermind unifies knowledge into one integral system of knowledge. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The supermind knows most completely and securely not by thought but by identity, by a pure awareness of the self-truth of things in the self and by the self, *atman i atmanam atamana*. I get the supramental knowledge best by becoming one with the truth, one with the object of knowledge; the supramental satisfaction and integral light is most there when there is no further division between the knower, knowledge and the known, *jnata, jnanam, jneyam* (Sri Aurobindo 2000:831–32).

Thus it is to be noted that the integral knowledge is the supramental knowledge that does not work by thought and reason but by the consciousness of the Reality or the Self. The supramental integral knowledge is the highest knowledge that can be available to the mind when it is supramentalized.

## 8.17 The Supramental Integration

The supramental integration of the Reality takes place at the level where the supramental consciousness descends into matter, life and mind and transforms them into one Reality. The Supermind is already involved in the mind, life and matter and so it is easy to descend into them with full force because of the awakening of the supramental consciousness. That is, when the Supermind takes over the matter, life and mind within its orbit and radically changes them there is no disunity between matter and life, and between matter and mind. All become part of one Reality, the supreme Divine Consciousness. The diverse realities recognized by the mind dissolve themselves into the one integral Reality. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The supermind in its completeness reverses the whole order of the mind's thinking. It lives not in the phenomenal, but in the essential, in the self, and sees all as being of the self and its power and form and movement, and all the thought and process of the thought in the supermind must also be of that character (Sri Aurobindo 2000: 844).

The unification of all reality takes place because of the unifying power of the Supermind. It is this that is the ultimate aim of supramental transformation.

The integration at the level of the Supermind is the unification of all the faculties of the mind as well as of the unification of consciousness itself. The mental consciousness at the various levels is to be integrated into the fold of the supramental consciousness. For example, the will and desire of the mind have to be integrated with the intellect or reason so as to present a unified mental consciousness. The mental functions have to be made into one single instrument of the supramental action. This is the process in which the mind itself gets transfigured into the supramental consciousness. This transformation of the mind and its consciousness into the Supermind and the supramental consciousness is the greatest event that takes place in the history of consciousness. The fragmented nature of the mind is transformed into a unified mind and consciousness.

The supramental conscious is known for its harmonies and unity and thus it is able to reflect the Spirit in the clearer light. The Spirit is directly reflected in the supramental consciousness because of which the Supermind is the highest instrument of the manifestation of the Spirit. It is in this sense that the Supermind far surpasses the mind and reason. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The action of the supramental *jnana* so constituted evidently surpasses the action of the mental reason and we have to see what replaces the reason in the supramental transformation (Sri Aurobindo 2000: 849).

This transformation marks the summit of the ascent to the Supermind. The evolutionary trajectory gets consummated on the arrival of the supramental consciousness. That is the summit which the human mind arrives at after a long struggle. Man's mind has been in the long struggle to go beyond itself. The arrival of the supramental consciousness is the final hour of the victory of the human mind on ignorance and Maya.

## 8.18 The Divine Life

The final aim of the evolution of man on earth is to establish divine life on earth. It is the new life that is struggling to emerge in course of the evolution of mind from matter and life. The Divine Spirit has prepared the ground for this emergence in its involution in matter and life. The Supermind and the supramental consciousness have been already present in the material Nature from its very beginning. The world itself is a manifestation of the Spirit and that is the reason why the Spirit is already implicitly present in the material Nature. Evolution is the gradual manifestation of the Spirit in its upward journey from matter to life and mind. Evolution is the manifestation of what is already in the nature.

The divine life is the life of the divine gnosis or supramental knowledge in which our life is transformed into a higher life of divine consciousness. Life in the material world becomes a new life of the divinity. It is the supramental life that is the new

phenomenon in the earthly sphere. The divine life is the new life in the world that has been possible because of the descent of the Supermind into the earth-consciousness. The Spirit becomes the new norm in the earthly life because of which Sri Aurobindo calls it the spiritual life (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 1015–1070). In this life, the mental consciousness is transformed into the supramental consciousness and thereby the whole biological life is changed into a higher life. Sri Aurobindo writes:

All spiritual life is in its principle a growth into divine living. It is difficult to fix the frontier where the mental ceases and the divine life begins, for the two project into each other and there is a long space of their intermingled existence. A great part of this interspace, — when the spiritual urge does not turn away from earth or world altogether,— can be seen as the process of a higher life in the making (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 1018).

Thus, the divine life is very much an extension of our ordinary earthly life in which the mind prevails but the new life begins when the mental life is transcended and transformed. The Spirit prevails in the new life transforming the mind into a Supermind.

In the spiritual life, the human being becomes a divinely inspired being who lives in the presence of the Divine and is completely controlled by the latter. The Divine Reality descends into the life of man so that man is no more the ordinary soul but the supersoul with divine consciousness in it. “As the mind and life become illumined with the light of the Spirit, they put on or reflect something of the divinity, the secret greater Reality,... and the whole existence is unified in the full light and power of the spiritual principle” (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 1018). That is to say that the divine principle or the Divine Reality becomes the ruling principle of the life. The life of man becomes the new life of the divinity or divine consciousness.

In this state of divine realization, man becomes divine because the Divine Reality descends into man. The human–divine duality is dissolved because of this unification of man with the Divine. This is the Advaitic realization of the identity of the individual soul (*jiva*) with the universal soul (*paramatman*). Sri Aurobindo redefines the idea of liberation in the classical Advaita by bringing in the idea of the evolution of man’s life into the supramental life. Liberation in this world is really becoming the divine being or the superman on earth (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 1015–1070). The superman’s life is the divine life in which the Divine Reality becomes one with the self of man. Sri Aurobindo writes:

But it is within us that the Reality must be found and the source and foundation of a perfected life; no outward formation can replace it: there must be the true self realised within if there is to be the true life realised in the world and Nature (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 1021).

Thus we are led to the divine life by becoming one with the Divine Reality. It is this that is the ultimate goal of the spiritual evolution of man.

## 8.19 Conclusion

The story of the spiritual evolution of man is the main theme in the theory of evolution that is laid down by Sri Aurobindo. The main contention of this theory is to bring the spiritual destiny of man to its fulfilment. As we have discussed earlier, the descent of the Supermind is the transforming moment in the evolutionary process. The human evolution can be quickened by the descent of the Supermind and the Spirit into man.

The human race is in the process of evolving into a superhuman race. The evolutionary process is unfinished but there is sufficient evidence that it will go on till the entire human race is divinized. The process is infinite and the temporal progression of the world is unending.

This chapter has undertaken the task of analysing the various stages at which evolution will take place from matter and life to mind and Overmind, and then to the Supermind. There is already the teleological plan of the universe in which the Divine-guided evolution has taken place. The future of this evolution is already imprinted in the present state of the human evolution. The final stage of the evolutionary process is the arrival of the supramental race, which can have at its command the supramental consciousness. The metaphysics of the Supermind will further be examined in the following chapters.

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# Chapter 9

## Cosmos and Consciousness: The Metaphysical Alternatives



### 9.1 Introduction

The present chapter intends to study the metaphysical alternatives available for understanding the place of consciousness in the cosmos. That consciousness is real in the universe is admitted more or less by scientists and philosophers except the sceptics. This is because there is no way consciousness can be denied as the very denial itself presupposes consciousness. But philosophers differ on the nature of the relation between consciousness and the universe or cosmos. Some admit that consciousness is intrinsic to the cosmos (Nagel 2012; Sri Aurobindo 1973), while others, especially the materialists and naturalists, hold that consciousness is accidental to the universe. The latter view is the result of the naturalist understanding of the universe and is likely to be found inadequate (Nagel 2012).

The available metaphysical alternatives such as materialism and naturalism have failed to address the fundamental questions concerning consciousness. They have taken the reductionist route to explain consciousness (Dennett 1991). There are even attempts to eliminate consciousness altogether from the universe (Churchland 1984). Such efforts have been futile for the simple reason that they have not been able to do away with mind and consciousness. The latter have fought back into the universe.

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to show that consciousness has a metaphysical claim to be real and that there are other ways of explaining consciousness which accord a fundamental status to consciousness in the universe (Sri Aurobindo 1973; Nagel 2012; Chalmers 1996).

### 9.2 The Cosmic Order

The idea of the cosmos is common to both science and metaphysics because it is the one reality which puzzles both the scientists and the metaphysicians. The basic question which arises with regard to the cosmos is its origin and its intelligibility

(Nagel 2012). How did the cosmos or universe come into being? How can we understand it? These questions are as much cosmological as metaphysical. The scientists are very much aware of the problem of the origin of the universe because they have offered theories regarding the origin of the universe like the Big Bang Theory. However, there has been no final solution to the problem of the origin of the universe. The Big Bang theory remains at best a mere conjecture or hypothesis.

The metaphysicians are concerned more with the intelligibility of the cosmos than with its origin (Bergson 1998; Nagel 2012) because the question of intelligibility is much more challenging than the question of origin. The assumption of the intelligibility of the world order has been at the basis of modern science and metaphysics. Nagel writes:

In the natural sciences as they have developed since the seventeenth century, the assumption of intelligibility has led to extraordinary discoveries, confirmed by prediction and experiment, of a hidden natural order that cannot be observed by human perception alone. Without the assumption of an intelligible underlying order, which long antedates the scientific evolution, those discoveries could not have been made (Nagel 2012: 16).

This is a clear affirmation of the fact that science itself presupposes the metaphysical idea that there is an underlying intelligible order of the universe. This order could not have been imported by science into the universe; it must be originally there which science itself presupposes.

But the question is: How can we explain this intelligible order of the universe? Many explanations have been offered by philosophers since the beginning of the human thought. One of the strongest and perhaps most scientifically acceptable explanations has been the naturalist and materialist explanation according to which the natural world is constituted of matter, and therefore the world order is fundamentally a material or physical order. It is the physical sciences which aim at bringing out the physical laws which underlie the physical order. This explanation is naturalistic because it believes that through the empirical methods alone we can discover the natural laws. But it is reductionist as well because it tries to explain everything in terms of the physical laws. Thus reductive naturalism has been the most acceptable theory in our times because of its overwhelming scientific acceptability. But at the same time it has left out of explanation many phenomena including the biological and mental phenomena like consciousness (Nagel 2012). That is why alternative explanations have been offered by the metaphysicians.

Reductive materialism fails to be a complete explanation of the universe and so it must be set aside as metaphysically inadequate. The complete explanation must be the one that takes into account the facts of the mental life of the organisms which are different from the inanimate objects. The biological and psychological facts relating to the animate objects are as much a part of the physical world as the facts relating to the inanimate objects. Consciousness is the most conspicuous fact which needs to be taken seriously. In the words of Nagel:

The implausibility of the reductive program that is needed to defend the completeness of this kind of naturalism provides a reason for trying to think of alternatives—alternatives that make mind, meaning, and value as fundamental as matter and space-time in an account

of what there is. The fundamental elements and laws of physics and chemistry have been inferred to explain the behavior of the inanimate world. *Something more is needed to explain how there can be conscious, thinking creatures whose bodies and brains are composed of those elements* (Nagel 2012: 20). (italics added).

Thus, it is supposed that the conscious creatures constitute a huge chunk of the universe which needs to be explained. The reductive explanations have utterly failed to take note of the reality of these conscious and thinking creatures.

### 9.3 Life and Mind in the Cosmos

It is beyond doubt that there are mental beings in the universe including the human beings. It is evident from the fact that the cosmos is rich with organisms which are conscious. From the unicellular organisms to the complex organisms like the human beings, there is a continuous chain of organisms which are conscious in different degrees (Sri Aurobindo 1973). The different forms of life which are present in the universe demand a non-materialist and non-reductive explanation. This is the reason why it cannot be said that the universe is only a material universe and there is nothing significant about the life present in the universe.

But the question arises: How can we explain the facts relating to life and mind in a predominantly material universe? (Chalmers 1996). The facts relating to life and consciousness are so overwhelming that we cannot easily brush them aside because they are so deeply entrenched in the cosmos (Nagel 2012). Without life and consciousness, the universe will be a lifeless desert. But that is not the case; the cosmos is replete with all forms of life and consciousness. Therefore, it is a mystery how life and consciousness are real in the physical universe.

The mystery can be resolved if we take a comprehensive world view which admits the reality of matter, life and mind (Sri Aurobindo 1973). There is not only the reality of matter in space and time (Alexander 1966), but also there is life along with mind. The reality of matter is a matter of our common experience; so also the reality of life and mind is equally a matter of our empirical experience. It is not due to physics that we have knowledge of matter, nor is it due to biology and psychology that we have knowledge of life and mind. Matter, life and mind are metaphysically real (Alexander 1966; Sri Aurobindo 1973). The metaphysical explanation of the origin of matter, life and mind is that they are ultimate in the constitution of the universe. Our universe cannot be conceived if we do not include these realities in the constitution of the universe.

## 9.4 Creation and Cosmic Consciousness: Sri Aurobindo and Nagel

The theistic explanation of the universe as a creation by a Divine Being has been content to keep the mystery of the universe alive without solving it by rational arguments (Nagel 2012). It is because by shifting the burden of explanation to the transcendent Being metaphysics cannot explain the intelligibility of the universe. If God would have created the universe, there is no reason why he should create an intelligent universe; he could have created any other universe with little or no intelligence. The theistic religions like Christianity accept the creation theory, which was later adopted by philosophers like Descartes and Leibniz. But there is no satisfactory explanation as to why God created the universe according to a divine plan and not a chaotic universe. The theistic philosophers have no answer to the question why God chooses to create the universe at all. Nagel (2012) has rejected the theistic design of the universe on the ground that God is not necessary for explaining the nature of the universe.

Though the theological explanation does not solve the problem, it at least has left the mark of a theory of the non-naturalist sort which can open the way for a better explanation of the universe. Theological explanations are not bound by the naturalist constraints imposed by modern science. They are transcendental in character (Nagel 2012), because they seek to explain the origin and nature of the universe from outside the universe. These explanations are marked by their rejection of the naturalist and materialist explanations. Theologically speaking, the universe presents the spectacle of an intelligent and well-ordered universe which shows the sign of a divine intelligence in the universe.

Sri Aurobindo has, as explained in the preceding chapter, offered an evolutionary account of the universe which is not exactly a theological account because he does not accept the creation theory. He accepts the fact that universe has a divine plan which shows that the universe has come out of a transcendent Being called Brahman (Sri Aurobindo 1973). The universe is a manifestation of the eternal and the infinite Brahman. The Vedantic theory of the universe traces the origin of the universe to the Divine Reality of which the space-time world is a manifestation. Sri Aurobindo provides an evolutionary account of how the universe has evolved from matter to life and mind. The universe or Nature, according to this account, is a divine manifestation or a divine play as it manifests at different levels the cosmic consciousness.

The theory of cosmic manifestation can be reconciled with the scientific world view by suggesting that the natural order of the cosmos can be taken as the manifestation of a superior intelligence. That intelligence does not belong to a personal creator God but to a supreme Reality called Brahman. Brahman is the ultimate Reality of which the world is a manifestation in Space and Time. There is no creator God here except the Divine Reality which makes the world its own manifestation. This ensures the fact that the world order is not accidental and that it is not purely physical either. The cosmic consciousness is a divine consciousness which can be explained only by

the supposition that there is a higher Reality than the world. The higher Reality is not only transcendent to the world but is also immanent in it.

The cosmic order is in this theory synonymous with the divine order and is the manifestation of a divine intelligence. However, repugnant this theory may be to the materialists and the naturalists, it achieves the purpose of debunking the materialist world view and presents instead a world view that can help us to go beyond naturalism per se. Sri Aurobindo accepts the divine design of the universe which is not a mere natural design accepted by the teleologists like Nagel (2012). If Nature has an implicit design, it cannot be due to the physical design of the universe, according to Sri Aurobindo, but due to the divine design immanent in the universe. Thus though Sri Aurobindo accepts the “natural teleology”, but it is ultimately a divine teleology because what is natural is divine as well. According to Sri Aurobindo, it is the divine teleology that is final because the whole cosmos operates on the basis of the divine plan. Nagel’s notion of the natural teleology falls short of the divine teleology because it fails to explain how there could be design in Nature unless that design is due to a cosmic mind or intelligence. The cosmic mind for Sri Aurobindo is the Divine Being or Brahman.

## 9.5 Cosmic Evolution

There is no doubt that the cosmos has a teleological structure and that it shows trends of evolution as it has been emphasized by philosophers like Nagel (2012). The fact of the matter is that the universe is not a static entity and that it has progressed from its earliest formations to its latest structures. The naturalist theory of evolution which Darwin propounded has shown that the species living on the earth have evolved over time and that man’s arrival on earth is the latest phase in the evolution of the species. That there is a biological evolution in the universe cannot be denied (Bergson 1998; Nagel 2012). It is because there are enough evidence to show that the biological species have taken evolutionary time to have reached the present stage they are in. Biological evolution is a matter of common knowledge after Darwin’s revolutionary theory. However, the Darwinians have not explained how the humans have developed from the animal species. The theory of natural selection has not given the right answer to the questions regarding the evolution of human consciousness. It cannot be the case that natural selection alone is responsible for the evolution of the human consciousness and its rational faculty (Nagel 2012).

Darwinism is a naturalist theory and so its explanation of the human consciousness is a naturalist explanation relying on the physical and biological factors of the universe for such an explanation. Darwinism in a sense fails to locate the place of the human mind and consciousness in the universe. Its only explanation is that the human life has evolved as a part of the natural order because of the physical circumstances. There is a sort of reductionism in this theory in the sense that every biological phenomenon is ultimately reduced to the physical phenomenon. Therefore, Darwinism has been clubbed with the materialist reductionism (Nagel

2012). Both Nagel and Sri Aurobindo reject the Darwinian theory of the evolution of species because they believe that the universe could not be due the accidental natural evolution.

The naturalist theory of evolution has been rampant in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy of Nature and life. It has remained inadequate to explain life as a phenomenon in the universe. All that it could say is that life is an accidental feature of the universe. According to this world view, the universe in course of evolution came to have the biological species as a matter of chance and not because of any necessity in the structure of the universe. That is, the physical universe because of its complexity gave rise to life by chance. However, it cannot be the case that the physical universe suddenly evolved life. There must be long preparation in the physical structure of the universe before life came on the scene. However, the theory of accidental evolution of life on earth gave rise to a scientific explanation which traced the origin of life to matter by a mechanistic explanation of life (Bergson 1998).

The mechanistic explanation of life was scientifically acceptable because it established the physical laws which explained how life came into existence. According to this theory, life was necessitated into existence because of the preceding physical conditions of the universe. Given those conditions, it was necessary that there was life on the earth. Thus, there is a necessary connection between the physical conditions and life. This theory made room for a mechanistic view of the universe, which eliminated Time in the evolution of the universe (Bergson 1998). Bergson writes:

The essence of mechanical explanation, in fact, is to regard the future and the past as calculable functions of the present, and thus to claim that *all is given*. On this hypothesis, past, present and future would be open at a glance to superhuman intellect capable of making the calculation (Bergson 1998: 37).

Thus for the mechanical explanation everything is already given, that is, the universe is already determined and there is no way there can be any radical change in the structure of the universe. That is also to say that a superhuman intellect can at a glance calculate the past, present and the future of the universe. This theory in a sense is acceptable to the materialist and the naturalist view of the universe.

## 9.6 Mechanism Versus Finalism

The mechanistic view of the universe has led to unacceptable results in the sense that it gives us the view of a closed universe (Bergson 1998) and denies the role of Time and change in the universe. Such a world view stands opposed to the evolutionary view of the universe in which the idea of change and evolution is central. Bergson has criticized the mechanistic view in the following way:

Radical mechanism implies a metaphysics in which the totality of the real is postulated complete in eternity, and in which the apparent duration of things expresses merely the infirmity of a mind which cannot know everything at once. But duration

is something very different from this for our consciousness, that is to say, for that which is most indisputable in our experience (Bergson 1998: 39).

Bergson has rejected mechanism precisely because such a world view denies the role of Time or duration in the universe, for “we perceive duration as a stream against which we cannot go. It is the foundation of our being, and, as we feel, the very substance of the world in which we live” (Bergson 1998: 39). Such being the case, there is no doubt that Time and evolution have a place in the universe which is non-mechanistically organized.

The mechanistic view of the universe is opposed by all teleological views which open up the possibility of a non-mechanical universe. The teleological view of the universe has been entrenched in Western philosophy since Aristotle and has been emphasized by Hegel among the modern philosophers. Such a world view has many acceptable features such as the idea that universe is evolving towards a goal or *telos* and that there is a principle of evolution which is underlying the universe. This evolutionary metaphysics has been at the foundation of the modern non-mechanistic world view (Alexander 1966).

What the teleological view of the universe demands is that the universe must be evolving towards a definite goal because without a goal the universe cannot move on the path of progress. Both Aristotle and Hegel were aware of the goal in the idea of the rise of a higher level of mentality or thought, which is at the culmination of the process of the evolution of the universe. This goal is not set by God but is written into the structure of the universe. The higher mind is the emergent feature of the universe, which is called the Deity (Alexander 1966; Maitra 1968).

Whatever be the goal of the universe, whether it be the Absolute in Hegel or the Deity in Alexander, it is a fact that a teleological view unfolds the features of the universe which were denied by the mechanistic view. The teleologically organized universe gives a better view of itself because it keeps itself open for future possibilities. There is no reason, however, to claim that the universe is set in motion by a transcendent God who has organized the universe in every detail including the goal itself. If that were the case, then finalism would be no different from mechanism (Bergson 1998). Bergson says:

But if there is nothing unforeseen, no invention or creation in the universe, time is useless again. As in the mechanistic hypothesis, here again it is supposed that *all is given*. Finalism thus understood is only inverted mechanism (Bergson 1998: 39).

Bergson is right in rejecting radical finalism that denies Time and change and thus he can very well argue that finalism in this radical sense is against the very spirit of evolution. However, all teleological theories need not deny Time. The evolution of the universe demands the reality of Time and the emergence of new levels of reality (Alexander 1966; Sri Aurobindo 1973). The universe can in no way be completely and eternally fixed; it remains open for future possibilities.

## 9.7 Time and Creative Evolution

No theory of evolution can deny the reality of Time because Time is the key to the evolutionary process. The temporality of the process of evolution is acknowledged by all evolution theorists including Darwin and the post-Darwinian biologists. The philosophers have taken the clue from science to recognize Time along with Space as fundamentally real (Alexander 1966; Sri Aurobindo 1973; Bergson 1998). This is because Time makes change and progress possible. Bergson's theory of creative evolution makes Time or duration a fundamental reality which defines the very nature of reality. According to this theory, both mechanism and finalism deny Time (Bergson 1998: 37–44).

Creative evolution is based on the fundamental assumption that reality is a vital force or *elan vital* which makes the universe a creative process in which new life emerges from out of the past forms of life by a spontaneous activity. Thus life spontaneously generates new forms by the very force or movement of life. This creative process of life brings novelty into the forms of life. In a sense, life explodes into diverse forms in the creative process. Thus since reality is the life-force itself, there is no way we can understand it except by intuition. Intuition is unlike the intellect which cannot understand the unitary nature of the life-force (Maitra 1968). Intellect is so designed that it cannot but divide and dissect the life-force. The intellect can deal with that which is stable and fixed and cannot deal with that which is moving and is in a flux. In Bergson's words:

Suffice it now to say that to the stable and unchangeable our intellect is attached by virtue of its natural disposition. *Of immobility alone does the intellect form a clear idea* (Bergson 1998: 155).

This is to suggest that the intellect is an instrument of action that can handle the things like the material objects which are fixed and immobile. Life is, on the contrary, a flux and ceaseless becoming. That makes the intellect an instrument of dissection and decomposition. Bergson writes:

Suffice it to say that *the intellect is characterized by the unlimited power of decomposing according to any law and of recomposing into any system* (Bergson 1998: 157).

The intellect, therefore, goes against the very spirit of Time and life and is best fitted to the material world, which is a fallout of the cessation of life. Matter comes into being when life ceases to exist.

Bergson made it clear that since life is the only reality which is fundamental to Nature, matter is real only derivatively as the cessation of life. Matter is opposed to life and so is the fallout of the cessation of the life-force. Thus the material world is a negation of the life-force such that the intellect is designed to understand the material world with the help of the mathematical laws. Intellect, however, is incapable of grasping the ultimate Reality which is life. For this reason, Bergson introduces the notion of intuition for understanding the ultimate Reality. Intuition which has direct access to reality is the fit instrument for understanding the Reality (Maitra 1968). Bergson writes:



Intuition and intellect represent two opposite directions of the work of consciousness: intuition goes in the very direction of life, intellect goes in the inverse direction, and thus finds itself naturally in accordance with the movement of matter (Bergson 1998: 267).

Thus it is intuition alone that can give us the knowledge of reality, that is, life. That ensures that we deal with both matter and life according to two different instruments of cognition, namely, intellect and intuition.

Human evolution itself has been a remarkable achievement of Nature because it has brought into existence the human consciousness. Man alone has been able to overcome the resistance of matter by going beyond the material world in search of freedom. Man is the embodiment of the highest form of life with all its freedom and spiritual awareness. Man in the process of creative evolution has been able to go beyond the animal instinct and thus has attained the spiritual awareness of the unity of mankind. In Bergson's words:

With man, consciousness breaks the chain. In man, and in man alone, it sets itself free. The whole history of life until man has been that of the effort of consciousness to resist matter, and of the more or less complete overcoming of consciousness by the matter which has fallen back on it (Bergson 1998: 264).

Thus human consciousness has been able to overcome matter better than the animals and other forms of life. Human consciousness has triumphed over matter and the material world in the process of evolution. Creative evolution has been fully successful in the case of the human species among all the species in Nature.

## 9.8 Evolution of the Higher Consciousness

Bergson's creative evolution of life and consciousness has indicated the possibility of the evolution of higher consciousness in man. This possibility is ingrained in the very movement of life, which introduces in man the possibility of a superior consciousness to the animal consciousness. Man stands at the apex of consciousness and thus indicates the possibility of spiritual life (Bergson 1998: 268). This is the acme of the evolutionary achievement. Bergson writes:

All the living hold together, and all yield to the same tremendous push. The animal takes its stand on the plant, man bestrides animality, and the whole humanity, in space and in time, is one immense army galloping beside and before and behind each of us in an overwhelming charge able to beat down every resistance and clear the most formidable obstacles, perhaps even death (Bergson 1998: 271).

Such is the evolutionary progress of mankind moving ahead to evolve into higher forms of life.

However, In Bergson's creative evolution, there is no place for teleology (Maitra 1968) as a result of which there is no indication that mankind is destined to attain higher consciousness. Teleology has been denounced as finalism (Bergson 1998)

because it sets a goal for evolution which is in a sense predetermined. In that sense what is to be attained has been fixed even before the evolution starts. That is why finalism is called “inverted mechanism” (Bergson 1998: 39). Thus creative evolution has been without a purpose or goal because it is supposed to give life unhindered movement. But this is a supposition which fails to give direction to evolution as such. Evolution is bound to be indeterminate and open-ended. For that reason, we cannot say that evolution of man will arrive at the emergence of a higher consciousness. It is a matter of fact that man has possessed higher consciousness because of the creative flow of the human life. It is no less a great achievement in the universe. However, it is accidental to the universe and not part of the cosmic teleology.

Sri Aurobindo has, as already discussed in the preceding chapter, provides a more consistent theory of evolution in which evolution is teleological and is designed to arrive at the goal of higher consciousness (Sri Aurobindo 1973). He has taken evolution as the ascent from matter to life and mind and then to the Supermind. This evolutionary process, as explained already, is a progressive movement of consciousness from the material plane to the plane of supramental consciousness by the different stages culminating in the Spirit or Sachchidananda. This progressive ascent to the Absolute Consciousness is the goal of evolution. In this sense, evolution has a direction and a purpose. That is why it is teleological, though the goal is the Spirit itself which guides the evolutionary process. Sri Aurobindo holds that evolution is the home-coming of the Spirit (Maitra 1968) because the Spirit which is already involved in matter comes back to itself through the process of evolution.

In Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual evolution (Misra 1957; Maitra 1968), the aim of the evolution is to attain spiritual consciousness and thus to divinize the material world. This is possible because the Spirit is already implicit in the material universe and has manifested itself in life and mind. It is ready to evolve further in the form of the Supermind. Thus there is already the evolutionary urge on the part of the mind to ascend to the Supermind (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 919–963). In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

There must be an emergent supramental Consciousness-Force liberated and active within the terrestrial whole and an organised supramental instrumentation of the Spirit in the life and the body- for the body-consciousness also must become sufficiently awake to be a fit instrument of the workings of the new supramental Force and its new order (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 962–63).

Thus the physical world itself will be transformed by the Supermind. The human nature will also be transformed by the supramental consciousness. Evolution is both an ascent and a descent because the higher consciousness in the Supermind must transform matter, life and mind. This is a radical form of transformation which the integral evolution of Sri Aurobindo aims at.

The emergent evolution propounded by Alexander (1966) fails to explain how from the Space-Time complex and matter, the higher consciousness or the Deity can come into being. It has no answer as to why the Deity arrives in the universe at the end of the evolution. In Sri Aurobindo’s integral evolution, the higher consciousness

is already implicit in the universe, and therefore it can evolve into the Supermind at the end of the evolution.

## 9.9 Matter and the Cosmic Consciousness

What we can gather from the theory of evolution propounded by Bergson and Sri Aurobindo is the possibility of a cosmic mind or consciousness which is not confined to the individual human beings, but to the cosmos. The cosmos shows the sign of consciousness as manifested in the animals and the human beings. The cosmic mind is the mind of the universal kind that pervades the universe. That is, the universe stands pervaded by a consciousness that has not only human significance, but also cosmic significance. The theories of evolution we have discussed thus far indicate the possibility of this cosmic consciousness.

Now the question is: In what sense is matter which has cosmic reality related to the cosmic consciousness? Can matter itself be the source or origin of cosmic consciousness? To this question the evolutionists have a negative answer. Bergson does not accept the fundamental reality of matter because the latter is a mere negation of life. Therefore, consciousness has to come out of life and not out of matter, according to Bergson. Similarly, for Sri Aurobindo, consciousness is primary and not matter and so matter cannot be the source of consciousness. Besides, according to him, matter itself has implicit consciousness (Sri Aurobindo 1973). Thus matter has been systematically downgraded in terms of reality and has been placed at the periphery of the universe.

From the above, we can conclude that consciousness is central to the cosmos and not matter. Consciousness has cosmic presence prior to matter, though it has been claimed by the materialists that matter has given rise to consciousness. Contrary to the materialist's claim, it is reasonable to claim that mind or consciousness has a central place in the scheme of the universe. Thus it can be argued that the cosmos has an intelligible order and that at the centre of this order there is consciousness (Nagel 2012).

The following are the main claims regarding the cosmic nature of the mind and consciousness:

1. Consciousness is irreducible to the material phenomena, and therefore it is real on its own.
2. Consciousness emerges out of the organic structure of the universe.
3. Consciousness is the source of the human intelligence, will and emotions.
4. Consciousness is manifest in every organic species including the human species.
5. The material world is itself a projection of the conscious mind, which is cosmic in nature.

Thus from the above, it can be inferred that consciousness is a cosmic reality which gives rise to matter as a form of itself. That is, matter is a form of consciousness because the material world manifests consciousness in its immense diversity.

## 9.10 Grades of Consciousness

Consciousness in its cosmic dimension passes through different grades keeping in mind its manifestation in different forms. Consciousness is implicit in matter but it is manifest in the plants and animals in that order. The consciousness in the plant world is subdued and less explicit than in the animal world. The animal consciousness is in comparison more explicit because it manifests the signs of intelligence, emotion and will of various degrees. There is no doubt that the animals at various levels show the signs of life and intelligence. The higher animals other than the humans exhibit the maximum degree of consciousness in comparison to the lower animals.

However, it is the human beings who manifest the highest form of consciousness involving mind, intellect and reason. The mere presence of mind even in the human children shows that the human beings are minded beings, who develop not only intellect but also reason. By intellect, the human beings develop the capacity to think and carry out many of the most sophisticated intellectual activities such as planning, making strategies for action and so on. Thus entire life of man is guided by intelligence. On the top of intellectual development is the arrival of reason and rationality because of man's capacity to decide actions on the basis of what is right and wrong, what is appropriate and inappropriate and so on. The rational faculty is not mere intelligence but also the capacity to acquire meaning in life (Nagel 2012). Thus reason takes over all the life of man. Therefore man is called a rational animal.

On the nature of the different levels of consciousness, there is no unanimity among the philosophers. While evolutionists accept that consciousness guides the process of evolution (Sri Aurobindo 1973; Bergson 1998), the non-evolutionists and naturalists do not accept the view that mind and consciousness are in the process of further development. Most of the naturalist philosophers do not accept any evolution in consciousness (Chalmers 1996). They hold that consciousness is static and is the final product of the natural processes in the brain. But this goes against the very nature of consciousness because consciousness has the tendency to develop in the direction of a higher goal. The teleological view of mind and consciousness (Nagel 2012) gives a new view of consciousness by positing that the human consciousness has been in the process of evolution towards a higher level where there is not only the development of the cognitive faculty but also the development of the non-cognitive faculties far beyond the range of the ordinary intelligence. Nagel (2012) is one with the teleological evolution theorists on the idea of the natural intelligent design of the universe which rejects the theological conception of the universe.

If we take the Vedantic thinkers as our guide, we are assured of the fact that consciousness can go beyond the present level of human consciousness. There is a possibility that the present consciousness, which is found to be limited and finite can become an unlimited, infinite and unbounded consciousness (Sri Aurobindo 1973). The highest spiritual consciousness or the consciousness of the Atman or Brahman is the universal consciousness which must be attained through evolution. The supramental consciousness is the higher form of consciousness which human evolution aims at (Sri Aurobindo 1973). This is comparable to the emergence of the

Deity in the universe in Alexander (1966) and also the creative spiritual consciousness in Bergson (1998). In any case, it stands to reason that consciousness can unfold further new dimensions which have not been unfolded till now.

### **9.11 Mind and Spirit: The Cosmic Teleology in Sri Aurobindo's Metaphysics**

The cosmic teleology posits the presence of the mind and consciousness which guide the course of the evolution of the universe. The presence of consciousness is the most singular fact of the universe, which has drawn the attention of the philosophers (Sri Aurobindo 1973; Chalmers 1996). But the fact that consciousness evolves is singularly pointed out by the evolution theorists (Sri Aurobindo 1973). This has to be noted that the naturalists amongst the evolutionists do not accept that there is any higher consciousness beyond the mental consciousness. It is the Vedantic thinkers who have invariably looked beyond the mind to the supramental consciousness (Sankara 1972; Sri Aurobindo 1973).

Even in the West, the philosophers like Hegel do acknowledge the presence of higher consciousness beyond the mind (Hegel 1977; Stace 1955). It is because the Hegelian thinkers admit that there is a Spirit which manifests itself in the world-process. It is the Spirit which is present in the historical process of the universe culminating in the emergence of the Absolute Spirit. The emergence of the Spirit as the Absolute is the culminating point of the Hegelian evolutionary metaphysics.

Both Hegel and Sri Aurobindo admit the reality of the Spirit and its evolution from matter and life to mind and beyond. In Hegel, the movement of the Spirit is dialectical moving from Being to Non-Being and then to Becoming. This process culminates in the evolution of the Absolute Spirit. In Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution, the Spirit is present in matter and life and mind and so it comes back to itself (Maitra 1968) in course of the evolution. In the latter theory, evolution presupposes involution of the Spirit in the world-process. That is to say, the Spirit which is already in the world-process comes back to itself by gradual evolution (Sri Aurobindo 1973). In any case, the Spirit evolves from its manifestation in matter, life and mind to its supramental manifestation. This is a process of progress of the Spirit from the state of matter and ignorance to the level of supramental knowledge. This is not a mechanical evolution because the Spirit chooses to evolve by its supreme Will. There is complete freedom on the part of the Spirit to evolve into the higher form of consciousness.

### **9.12 Spirit and Nature**

The idea of Spirit which is common to both Hegel and Sri Aurobindo is closer to the concept of the universal mind in the sense that the Spirit is the cosmic mind which is the world-spirit. In that sense, the Spirit becomes the new name for the cosmic

consciousness which pervades the universe. The Hegelian ideas of Reason, Thought or the Absolute (Stace 1955) stand for the World-Spirit that is meant to explain the universe in terms of consciousness (Hegel 1977). The Spirit or consciousness remains the fundamental Reality underlying the universe.

Now the question is: What is the relation between the Spirit and Nature or, for that matter, between the material world and the Spirit? This has been the perennial question confronting the philosophers since Descartes. That there is a dualism between Spirit and Nature in the Cartesian tradition is well known. But this has been challenged by philosophers like Hegel and Sri Aurobindo. According to them, the so-called dualism is only apparent because there is an underlying unity between the Nature and Spirit as both share the common substance which is nothing but consciousness. The Spirit is the consciousness which is underlying all natural phenomena. Consciousness pervades the natural world as it is the very implicit nature of the world. Nature is the Spirit in the implicit form. Both Hegel and Sri Aurobindo hold that Nature is the Spirit in its inner being and that the Spirit is involved in Nature. This theory may defy our commonsensical understanding of Nature. But that is only the superficial understanding of Nature which can be defied. Nature or matter keeps the Spirit hidden in it because Nature has given rise to life and mind in no uncertain terms. The unity between Nature and Spirit is the central thesis of the Hegelian metaphysics because both are the manifestations of the Absolute. Both are only the different stages of the evolution of the Absolute. Sri Aurobindo endorses it by suggesting that the Absolute Spirit or consciousness unfolds itself in the form of matter, life and mind in the ascending order so as to come back to itself.

The following are the main theses regarding the Nature–Spirit relationship:

1. Nature is Spirit in its implicit form because the Spirit pervades Nature and the natural order.
2. Nature embodies mind and consciousness in various degrees.
3. The Spirit externalizes itself in the form of Nature in order to manifest itself in the evolutionary process.
4. There is an identity between Nature and Spirit, though there is difference on the surface.
5. Nature depends on the Spirit for its very organic structure.

Thus there is a fundamental unity between Nature and Spirit in the sense that we cannot understand Nature unless we introduce Spirit or Thought or Reason as the underlying Reality (Stace 1955).

### 9.13 The World-Spirit

The idea of the world-spirit is intimately connected with the idea of the intelligible world order because we can understand the world as a harmonious order when we posit a universal mind or Spirit into the world order (Hegel 1977; Sri Aurobindo

1973). It may appear to be speculative if we talk of a world-spirit or world-will because modern science and philosophy are understood to have abolished such an idea. But be that as it may, it stands to reason to talk about a world-spirit in the Hegelian and Sri Aurobindian sense (Maitra 1968). It is because this concept alone can bring the world phenomena into a coherent and purposeful order. The world-spirit is the Absolute Spirit (Hegel 1977; Sri Aurobindo 1973) as it is manifest in the universe. Unless we presuppose an Absolute Reality we cannot make sense of the world as such.

The natural world order is not self-explainable because it cannot explain why it is there at all. We cannot explain why there is something rather than nothing unless we introduce a higher concept like that of Being or Absolute. The Absolute can provide the metaphysical framework for understanding the world. The Absolute Being or Spirit is the fundamental principle that explains the fact that the world exists and that it has a rational structure. Besides, the world has a purposive structure which is gradually realizing a goal that gives it a teleological character. The Spirit is working within the universe to evolve into the Absolute Spirit.

The universe is the field of the work of the Spirit in which the conscious mind is destined to evolve into a higher mind or Supermind (Sri Aurobindo 1973, 2000). This goal of evolving into the supramental consciousness is evidently written into the very nature of matter, life and mind in the universe. The supramental consciousness is unfolding in the universe in both the human and the non-human world. The world in Space and Time is progressing towards the realization of the Absolute Spirit because the world is guided by the world-spirit. The arrival of the supramental consciousness itself is a step towards that goal.

The world is in the throes of the spiritual evolution because the world is destined to reach a higher stage because of the inner compulsions which are working upon the earth-consciousness (Sri Aurobindo 1973, 2000). There is no reason to doubt that the world-order will disintegrate if the natural laws go out of existence. The world-spirit makes the world work with its laws because of the divine order that is the foundation of the natural order.

## 9.14 The Divine Laws

The idea of the divine laws is a metaphysical idea which presupposes the necessity of supraphysical laws for understanding the universe. The physical laws which are posited by the physical sciences are sufficient to explain how the universe works, but they do not explain why the universe works the way it does. That is why metaphysics always tries to go beyond science to explain the why- questions regarding the cosmos. There is enough reason to go beyond the sciences because the latter always have a very closed view of the universe because of which the universe is taken as a physical and mechanical system that runs on its own steam and is independent of any supernatural laws.

However, it is difficult to believe that the universe is ultimately only physical and that there is no room for supraphysical laws. It is because much of the universe is not exactly known to us and that there is a vast realm of the universe that goes beyond the human understanding. The fact that there is consciousness in the universe as an independent reality is a metaphysical truth which science cannot explain. Especially the reductive sciences of the present day are unable to explain how consciousness is possible in a purely physical world (Chalmers 1996). The reality of consciousness in the cosmos is a direct challenge to the naturalistic reductionism of the present century (Nagel 2012). If reductive naturalism is true, then there is no way there can be any place for consciousness in the world except as a physical phenomenon. The physical world itself is incapable of having consciousness as an independent reality unless we accept supraphysical laws of consciousness.

The supraphysical laws can be called the divine laws (Sri Aurobindo 1973) or the laws of the Absolute Spirit (Hegel 1977). In whatever way we may describe these laws, they remain irreducible to the physical laws. They constitute a separate metaphysical category. But the question is: Can such laws be understood rationally? Or are they known by intuition? It all depends on how we understand reason. If reason is the bare intellect, then the supraphysical laws may not be understood by reason. But if we take reason in a more comprehensive sense in the Hegelian way, we can always say that they are given to reason (Stace 1955). It is also true that the higher reason is some sort of an intuition that can directly know the supraphysical laws (Sri Aurobindo 1973). According to Sri Aurobindo, the divine laws can be known directly by the Supermind which is equipped to grasp these laws intuitively. Thus the cosmic or the divine laws are known to the higher reason or the Supermind because of its capacity to perceive the Reality directly without any intellectual mediation.

Before we go back to the question regarding the relation between the physical and the supraphysical laws, let us keep in mind that the universe itself is in the process of evolution from matter to the Spirit. The divine laws emerge in course of evolution because of the involvement of the Spirit in the universe itself. It is to be explained how this emergence takes place in a predominantly physical universe.

## 9.15 The Emergence of the Supraphysical Laws

Now the question is: How do the supraphysical laws emerge? Where do they come from? The answer to these questions is that the non-physical or supraphysical laws do not come from the physical world as it has been suggested by the reductive materialists. According to the latter, the so-called non-physical laws are really another form of the physical laws. The laws governing mind and consciousness are in reality physical laws, according to the materialists. There are only physical laws even at the mental laws. The so-called psychological laws are after all a modification of the physical laws.

According to the emergentists (Alexander 1966; Llyod Morgan 1923), the psychological laws emerge out of the material base because of the inner complexity of the



material world. The material world because of its complexity gives rise to the non-material properties which are novel in character. These properties are governed by the laws appropriate to this level of emergence. Emergentism as a naturalist theory of evolution entails the following (Kim 2010):

1. There is emergence of new properties which are not already present at the base level.
2. The base level consists of only material properties.
3. The emergence of the new properties is accidental.
4. Emergent evolution is not mechanical but teleological.

From the above, it is to be noted that emergent evolution shows that the new emergent features come out of the physical properties alone. The new laws which emerge are ultimately based on the physical laws. The new laws are completely absent at the base level but come into being accidentally as a matter of chance (Kim 2010). But this explanation given by the emergent evolutionists does not really explain how mind can emerge from matter. It keeps the emergence of consciousness a complete mystery.

The main problem which emergentism faces is as follows: if mind is absent in matter, then how can it come out of matter? How can a non-existent entity suddenly come into existence? This makes the reality of mind and consciousness a complete surprise in the world. Therefore, there is no way to explain consciousness except by going back to the Hegelian and the Sri Aurobindian explanation which accepts the reality of mind and consciousness already at the material base of the universe. If the universe has already mind and consciousness in the implicit form, then only can the mind emerge into the explicit form. The Spirit arises out of the material base because it is already there as involved in matter (Sri Aurobindo 1973). Hegel (1977) also would suggest that the world itself has already a rational structure because of which the mind and consciousness emerge in the universe carrying rationality into more explicit forms. The higher forms of consciousness emerge because of the implicit presence of the mind and consciousness in the universe.

## 9.16 The Rationality of the Universe

The universe has a rational order as suggested by Hegel (1977) such that we can decipher it by applying reason. Reason is the faculty that makes sense of the world order by applying the categories (Kant 1929; Stace 1955). The categories represent the way the world can be ordered into a coherent system. The best way to do this is to make the rational order of the universe contingent on reason which has these categories a priori. Both Kant and Hegel made these categories central to their logic and so they gave the plan of the universe in terms of these categories. The rationality of the universe follows from the categorial structure of the universe imposed on it by the human reason.

But now the question is: Is the structure of the universe imposed by the reason or is it divinely ordained? The non-theological answer given by Hegel is that it is the cosmic reason which is the source of the categories and that it is not the subjective reason of mankind (Stace 1955). So in a sense it is the universal reason which is also called the Absolute Idea that makes the world the coherent rational system. The world is logically planned and it is the complete manifestation of the Reason or Idea in Space and Time. Hegel also calls the universal reason the Spirit of which the world is a concrete manifestation (Taylor 1979). As Taylor writes:

The general structure of the universe ... is thus determined by virtue of its being the embodiment and expression of *Geist*. It includes a hierarchy of beings from the lowest inanimate forms through various kinds of living species to man (Taylor 1979: 27).

Thus the *Geist* or the Spirit develops various modes of consciousness in man to constitute the world-history. The progress of the Spirit is the progress of the world history as we know it by reason. Taylor writes:

The articulation of the universe in space and time can be deduced from the requirement of a cosmic spirit which must be embodied and expressed in it. Even the different stages of human history can be derived as necessary, from the nature of man's starting point in raw, uncultivated existence and the consummation he is heading towards (Taylor 1979: 28).

This is a graphic representation of the Spirit or the universal Reason as it manifests in the history of the world and man. This also represents the rationality of the universe in terms of the activities of the universal Reason.

## 9.17 Man, Spirit and World

In the evolutionary process, it is the arrival of the human species which shows the forward movement of the Spirit (Hegel 1977; Sri Aurobindo 1973). This has been accepted even by the naturalists (Alexander 1966; Bergson 1998), though in a subdued form. The emergence of man is a remarkable fact in the evolutionary history of the world. This is because the human beings bear the sign of rationality and thereby embody the Spirit in a concrete form. Man, therefore, is a spiritual being (Hegel 1977; Sri Aurobindo 1973) who demonstrates the different forms of spiritual consciousness in his multifarious activities.

The nature of man lies in the fact that he is not only rational, but also spiritual because of the fact that he transcends his natural existence in the world and becomes one with the Absolute Spirit. The Absolute Spirit is the Absolute Idea in Hegel (1977) and Brahman in Sankara (1972) and Sri Aurobindo (1973). It is the Absolute Consciousness which manifests itself in the cosmos and in man. Thus the ultimate goal of the evolution of the world is the manifestation of the Absolute Consciousness. Not only Hegel, but also the Vedantic thinkers hold that the Absolute Consciousness is the ultimate Reality. Though the Vedanta of Sankara does not provide a theory of evolution of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo, like Hegel, has given a theory of the

evolution of consciousness (Misra 1957; Maitra 1968). Consciousness surpasses the boundary of Reason, according to Sri Aurobindo, because Reason is not the highest form of consciousness. The Supermind in Sri Aurobindo's metaphysics is beyond Reason (Sri Aurobindo 1973).

Taking a clue from the above one can argue that there is no reason why consciousness should not be taken as the highest manifestation of the Spirit. In that sense consciousness in its absolute form must be the Absolute Spirit. The evolution of consciousness from matter to mind and from mind to Supermind must be logically possible because consciousness is implicit in the world-process and it is returning to itself through various stages to become actual in the world. The Spirit gets reflected in the supramental consciousness as the Absolute Reality. The supramental consciousness is the highest consciousness that man is capable of.

## 9.18 The Supramental Consciousness and the Cosmic Order

Now we must turn back to the question of the possibility of the supramental consciousness which is supposed to break the boundary of the mental consciousness. The entire burden of the new possibility lies in how the mind transforms itself into the Supermind. Though the total transformation of the present mind is in the realm of possibility, it cannot be denied that we are already in the threshold of such a new consciousness (Sri Aurobindo 1973, 2000).

The cosmic order is already pregnant with the possibility of the Supermind because there is already the *nisus* towards the higher mind (Llyod Morgan 1923). This is the prevalent opinion of the thinkers who see the distinct possibility of the higher levels of consciousness (Hegel 1977). As W. T. Stace says regarding the Hegelian scheme of evolution:

This evolution from inorganic matter to animal organism is the gradual return of the Idea, from its absolute self-contradiction in crass matter, to itself, to rationality. Spirit is the completion of this process (Stace 1955: 322).

This shows that the progress of the evolution passes from matter to mind and consciousness culminating in the Absolute Spirit. This progression cannot be a matter of chance but of a design implicit in the universe. The Supermind is the supra-rational consciousness which is making its presence increasingly manifest in the ascent of the mind to the higher stages of consciousness (Sri Aurobindo 1973). Sri Aurobindo writes:

There is, then, evidently a spiritual consciousness which is other than the mental, and it testifies to the existence of a spiritual being in us which is other than our surface mental personality (Sri Aurobindo 1973: 855).

The supramental consciousness is the spiritual consciousness which we are destined to arrive at if the process of evolution goes on uninterrupted.

Our aim here is to establish the cosmic teleology on a rational basis so that we can finally embrace the possibility of a supramental spiritual consciousness. It is not easy to prove that the cosmos is moving forward to a distinct goal of attaining spiritual consciousness. But there are evidence of this progress from within the consciousness of man. The following are the evidence for such a possibility:

1. Consciousness in man is ever dynamic because it is moving from level to level with a greater degree of sophistication.
2. The consciousness moves from its manifestation in the human body to the mental level by virtue of the physical consciousness transcending itself by the pressure of the mind.
3. The mental consciousness itself moves forward by breaking the mental barriers and adding new depths to its own rich domain of experience.
4. Mind ascends to the next level to reach the supramental level by its own acts of transcendence.
5. The level of the Supermind is already implicit in the mind because of which the mind is pushing forward in its ascent to the Supermind.

This is how the journey of the mind and consciousness can be mapped by the mind because of its inherent power to go beyond itself. Mind is moving constantly from the lower to the higher in its incessant evolution. But at the same time, the lower mind is also getting transformed because of the rise of the higher mind and its supramental consciousness.

## 9.19 The Spiritual Destiny of Man

The question which is imperative now is: What is the destiny of man in the universe if the universe is more than a material world? Can we take the existence of man not as a mere accident but as a necessary step in the history of the universe? Both the questions can be answered from the evolutionary point of view. First, since the universe is more than a material system, it has space for the Spirit as it is in the process of spiritual evolution (Radhakrishnan 1932). This signals the fact that mankind has a destiny far more than it has been realized now. That is the main claim of the evolutionary theories about the universe which can be spelled out in the following manner:

1. There is already the evolution of the universe from matter to life and from life to mind.
2. Mind is a dynamic principle working in the universe at various levels, both the human and the sub-human.
3. The mind is aware of its limits and is constantly transcending them.
4. Beyond the mind is the Supermind in the form of the higher and all-encompassing consciousness.
5. The supramental consciousness is the future of mankind which defines the spiritual destiny of man.

The future of mankind lies in man's evolution into the supramental or gnostic being (Sri Aurobindo 1973). This is the new possibility which can be found to be implicit in the human consciousness.

There are many ways the destiny of man can be discussed. First of all, it is to be found that man is not a mere physical being. He is a social, moral and spiritual being. There can, therefore, be no doubt that man transcends his physical nature and goes beyond it in search of a meaningful life. Man's physicality is only one aspect of his total existence. This has been vouched for by the thinkers of the East as well as the West. There is unanimity on the spiritual nature of man (Radhakrishnan 1932). The progress of human civilization has also demonstrated that the spiritual nature of man is written in the very nature of man's civilization which includes art, literature, science, philosophy and morality. All these are the manifestations of the spirit in man.

The cosmos is in essence a spiritual reality because of its organic structure and the way it has evolved so far. The world is not a mere chance product of matter. It is always driven by the Spirit. Thus the organically connected universe progresses from matter to spirit. This is the metaphysical description of the universe which transcends the scientific description. Radhakrishnan writes:

A scientific description of the nature of experience takes us gradually out of the world of matter, life, mind and intelligence to a spirit utterly transcendent beyond the description of the intellect, which manifests itself as the supreme self and the individual soul, the supreme reality and the universe. Here our quest ends. Human thought cannot go beyond it (Radhakrishnan 1932: 246–47).

This shows that the spirit is the end of the earthly progress of man, which culminates in the arrival of the superman or the spiritual man (Sri Aurobindo 1973).

## 9.20 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the metaphysical alternatives available in the understanding of consciousness in the cosmos. I have discussed some theories of evolution, which attempt to present a coherent view of the relation of consciousness to the cosmos. The theory which does justice to the phenomenon of consciousness is the one which gives a road map for the progress of consciousness from its manifestation in matter to its supramental manifestation. The evolution of consciousness from matter to the Spirit can be called emergent evolution.

There have been a variety of emergentism available in metaphysics. The naturalist emergentism of Alexander and Llyod Morgan has failed to address the main question regarding why consciousness emerges at all from the material base. There can be no reason why mind should appear in the material world unless the world itself has mind and consciousness implicit in it. Sri Aurobindo has answered this question more satisfactorily than others because he has shown that what emerges is already implicitly

present in that from which the emergent quality or reality come out. According to him, the Spirit is already in matter and so the former emerges out of the latter.

I have argued against the naturalist explanation of the universe and have suggested the availability of a transcendental method that can do justice to the emergence of consciousness in the cosmos. I have tried to show that consciousness not only emerges but also evolves into the transcendent Spirit through a gradual process of ascent. I have followed Sri Aurobindo in hazarding the guess that it is logically possible to postulate the transcendent reality of the Supermind on the way to the discovery of the Spirit in the universe. The transcendental explanation of the evolution of consciousness culminating in the Absolute Spirit seems to be a better alternative than the naturalist theories of the universe, which treat the presence of consciousness as an accidental feature of the material universe.

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# Chapter 10

## The Metaphysics of Consciousness: The Foundations of a Transcendental Theory of Consciousness



### 10.1 Introduction

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to lay down the foundations of a theory of consciousness that can meet the challenges of the naturalist–scientific theory of consciousness prevalent today. The present day theory of mind and consciousness accepted all over the world is the one that conforms to the demands of science, which are based on the psychological, biological and neurological findings of the natural sciences. The present age of science has pushed aside the metaphysical findings of the past ages and has marched ahead in proclaiming that there is no possible metaphysical solutions to the mind–body problem and that all that we need is to get rid of the mystery associated with mind and consciousness (Tye 1989; Dennett 1991). Thus we are on the brink of total scepticism regarding mind and consciousness.

However, there is a keen awareness amongst the philosophers that natural sciences and their reductive methods may not solve the problem of consciousness (Searle 1992; Chalmers 1996). They have looked beyond the reductive scientific method to solve the problem of consciousness which is conceded to be “the hard problem” (Chalmers 1996). This is the beginning of a new search for a theory of consciousness that can establish the autonomy of consciousness in the universe. Consciousness has been admitted to be real in the universe (Searle 1992; Chalmers 1996; Nagel 2012) with its subjective features which cannot be reduced to anything more basic than consciousness. Thus, we are again on the threshold of admitting consciousness as an independent reality in the metaphysics of the cosmos (Nagel 2012).

### 10.2 The Metaphysics of the Cosmos and Consciousness

In philosophy we cannot study the cosmos piecemeal the way science does; we have to widen our conceptual net (Wittgenstein 1961) to understand the universe. We cannot accept the old reductive dogma that matter alone is real and that everything

else must be reduced to the elementary particles of matter. The materialist dogma is a relic of the past which did not see the reality of anything in the universe other than that of the material bodies (Chalmers 1996). Thus metaphysics must look beyond matter to understand the nature of the universe and man. In short, we are in need of a metaphysics of mind and consciousness that not only can unravel the mystery of the universe but also can understand man in the universe from a new perspective.

The metaphysics of the cosmos must take into account the following facts regarding the universe:

1. It must tell how the universe has come into being, namely, its origin. That is, it must bring out the source of the universe.
2. It must throw light on the nature and the structure of the universe.
3. It must bring out the meaning of the cosmos so far as it is a system of interrelated facts and events.
4. It must make the universe intelligible to the human mind so far as the latter has a place in it.

Thus the metaphysics of the universe must address the ontological questions regarding the source, meaning and intelligibility of the universe so far as the universe is a significant system of things and beings of various kinds.

The most important metaphysical question regarding the universe is how it came into being and how it has reached the stage where it is now. Metaphysicians in the past from Plato to Hegel have attempted to answer these questions. They have tried to show that the universe is an organized system and that it reflects a rational order which can be understood in terms of the metaphysical categories of Reason, Form, Spirit, etc.. The fact that the universe has a rational order has been accepted by those who believe that the universe is not a mere physical system but a rational order having multiple dimensions of reality from matter to mind, from the particular to the universal and from the biological organisms to the thinking and conscious beings (Nagel 2012). The universe is not a mere assemblage of physical bodies but is a system of living and thinking beings. Therefore, the metaphysicians have given a picture of a multilayered world that cannot be put into the strait-jacket of the purely physical entities.

There has been a widely accepted metaphysical view that the universe is on the path of evolution from the simplest material bodies to complex human beings and beyond (Alexander 1966; Sri Aurobindo 1973). The universe is not a static but a dynamic system that throws up new forms of matter, life and mind (Bergson 1998). That is to say, the evolving universe is in the process of making new realities possible (Whitehead 1929) and getting the universe renew itself in various forms. Such a dynamic view of the universe makes room for an open universe, which is inherently changing and bringing new form of reality into the centre-stage. We cannot but accept such a view of the universe because it satisfies the metaphysical urge to bring the universe under an evolutionary scheme. This scheme brings meaning and intelligibility to the universe.

Now the main question is whether there is a rational and intelligible order in the universe or not. If there is an order which is rational, then it can be mapped by the



human reason. Thus there must be a pre-established harmony between the mind and the world (McDowell 1994). That is to say, there must be a way the world could be known through the categories of the human reason (Kant 1929). This can pave the way for the understanding of the universe by the human reason with its universal and necessary laws (Kant 1929). By accepting the intelligibility of the world by the human reason (Nagel 2012), we have already made room for the fact that the universe is not just a material system but an organic system with laws embedded in it which are not just the physical laws. The world has more than the physical laws which are part of the organic system of the world (Whitehead 1929).

Now the problem of the rationality of the world leads to a new metaphysical dimension, namely, the primacy of the human reason in the universe. The new metaphysics of the primacy of the reason brings us back to the position which has been left by Hegel. At least Western metaphysics owes a lot to Hegel who inaugurated the new metaphysics of the Spirit in the West. The time has come to bring back the Hegelian metaphysics of Spirit and consciousness to re-locate the universe in the metaphysical map. In such a metaphysical scenario, it will be easy to locate man's place in the universe. The new metaphysics offers the following theses:

1. The unity and the harmonious order of the universe.
2. The rationality of the universe.
3. The integral relation between man and the universe.
4. The primacy of mind and consciousness.
5. The possibility of a higher mind and consciousness.

These theses lay down the foundation of a new metaphysics of mind and consciousness. This metaphysics is not only rationalistic, but also evolutionary in nature. Besides, it depends on a transcendental method which gives up all pretensions to a naturalistic and scientific method in its reasoning.

### 10.3 Metaphysics and the Transcendental Method

The metaphysics of consciousness which is in the focus here requires a new method which can provide the basic principles of this metaphysics. The new method cannot be the same as one adopted by the naturalist theories of consciousness. The naturalist methods are not only inadequate but also unfit for understanding the nature of consciousness. This is because consciousness cannot be explained through the objective scientific methods that cannot take account of the subjective nature of consciousness (Chalmers 1996). The first-person character of consciousness is very much in need of a new method that can do justice to consciousness (Nagel 2012). But above all, the naturalistic methods adopted to explain consciousness leave the transcendental aspects of consciousness completely out of their purview (Husserl 1931).

A transcendental method is designed to overcome the limitations of naturalism. It focuses primarily on the nature of consciousness, which goes beyond the bodily and

mental nature of consciousness. There is the trans-natural form of consciousness, which can be called the supramental consciousness (Sri Aurobindo 1973, 2000) which cannot be dealt with by the naturalistic methods. Therefore, the transcendental method can be adopted to take into account how the supramental consciousness, as discussed in the preceding chapters, is possible and how it makes radical changes in the bodily and mental consciousness. The bodily consciousness can easily be explained by the causal theories of consciousness but there is something about the mental consciousness which cannot be so explained. This applies equally to the supramental consciousness which is transcendent to the bodily and the mental consciousness.

The transcendental method can lead to the following results:

1. It can bring about a total change in our understanding of consciousness by bringing into focus the supramental nature of consciousness.
2. It can take an integral view of consciousness which includes the bodily, mental, moral, aesthetic and spiritual consciousness within one unified structure.
3. It can take consciousness as an all-comprehensive consciousness that is fundamental to the understanding of the cosmos since consciousness is the primordial reality.
4. It can establish the possibility that the supramental consciousness can change the future of the mankind when it is well established in human consciousness.

## 10.4 Supernaturalism or Transcendentalism

The idea of supernaturalism is relevant in this regard to make a shift from naturalism to transcendentalism because the Supernature is transcendent to Nature and so is superior to Nature in many respects. By this of course, we do not suggest that the Supernature is something mysterious and spooky (McDowell 1994; Flanagan 2007). The Supernature is intelligible to human reason because it is the realm of reality which we often appeal to without accepting it as part of our natural discourse, e.g. self, God, value, etc. There is no reason to believe that we can manage without these notions like self, soul, mind, spirit, consciousness, reason, value, etc. which obviously stand for supernatural entities. Thus there is nothing spooky about such entities because without them we cannot understand man and the universe (Hegel 1977; Sri Aurobindo 1973).

The word ‘supernaturalism’ has a negative connotation because it sometimes means, or can be interpreted to mean, that there are extra-natural forces that control the universe. But this meaning is not always associated with supernaturalism. In a more refined sense, it can mean that there are some phenomena like value and consciousness which cannot be placed within Nature and that therefore they cannot be called “natural” in the usual sense. They can be called supernatural because of the fact that they have no place in the definite domain of the natural phenomena. They are, in short, transcendent to Nature and so are above and beyond Nature. This is the

simple meaning of supernaturalism which is not the same as the usual meaning of spookiness (McDowell 1994).

With a positive note, we can assert the following meanings of the term “supernaturalism”:

1. It stands for everything that cannot be reduced to natural phenomena.
2. It is that which goes beyond the realm of the natural.
3. It stands for all conceptual truths, which are not part of the natural order like the logical and mathematical truths.
4. It takes the metaphysical truths as transcendental, which do not conform to the demands of empirical confirmation.
5. All truths that belong to the domain of the trans-natural are considered supernatural.

With regard to the nature of consciousness, the supernatural truths assume importance because they alone tell us how we can understand consciousness through a transcendental method that can do justice to the nature and structure of consciousness (Husserl 1931; Sri Aurobindo 1973).

## 10.5 Consciousness as a Supernatural Phenomenon

Let us now inquire how we can consider consciousness as a supernatural phenomenon. The idea that consciousness is a supernatural or transcendental phenomenon goes against the scientific and commonsensical belief that consciousness is a natural phenomenon falling within the realm of the natural events and processes. Thus, there is a way we can find our mental states to be part of the natural world because they occur in the brain. Being caused by the brain as a natural entity consciousness takes the form of the natural events and processes. This is the most accepted view of the mental states like consciousness. Because all the scientific methods employed so far vouch for this. But the fact of the matter is that consciousness goes beyond its natural origin and assumes the form of supernatural phenomena by pushing beyond the limits of the natural order.

Thus characterizing consciousness as a supernatural phenomenon may appear to be unscientific and absurd. But that is not the case. Consciousness is not a phenomenon in the brain; it is the phenomenon that precedes the brain, that is, is prior to the brain. According to this view, the brain is a product of consciousness rather than the cause of it. The causal theories of consciousness fail to recognize that an unconscious brain cannot cause consciousness (Sri Aurobindo 1973). Had the brain been the cause of consciousness, then consciousness would have been a physical entity because the brain itself is a physical entity. But consciousness is by no means a physical phenomenon; it by all means is a transcendental phenomenon; it goes beyond the realm of the brain activities because the latter do not cause consciousness but are themselves the products of consciousness (Sri Aurobindo 1973).

Consciousness has many new properties like subjectivity and creativity, which are explainable not through natural methods; they are not physical qualities. They happen to accrue to consciousness because of the extra-physical nature of consciousness. Consciousness because of its inherent supernatural character assumes new forms which are not found in the realm of Nature. Of course, one can say that Nature contains the possibility of such qualities which are supernatural (Sri Aurobindo 1973). But there is a difference between the implicit state of consciousness and its explicit manifestation. The Supernature is contained in the domain of the Nature but is not the same as the Nature because the latter becomes supernatural because of the emergence of the new properties (Alexander 1966).

The supramental consciousness is the primary example of the supernatural because it alone brings about a radical change in the Nature by its own descent into Nature (Sri Aurobindo 1973). Nature itself is transformed by the arrival of the Supernature in it. Thus, we come face to face with the supernatural in the realm of the supramental consciousness.

## 10.6 Consciousness Beyond the Mind

We are in need of a way to understand the nature of consciousness that surpasses the mind. The mind is a limited instrument of cognition and apprehension. It is this instrument or organ, which has held us captive so far and so long. The mankind is held captive by this limited mind (Sri Aurobindo 1973) because of the inherent incapacity of the mind to rise beyond itself. But the history of the human consciousness has shown that the mind is beginning to capture the horizon beyond the mind. We are now in the threshold of this mind beyond the mind. The idea of the Supermind is a new venture of the mind beyond itself. Though now we are groping in the dark for the mind beyond the mind, yet we are in the vicinity of the new consciousness that can far surpass the limited consciousness of the mind.

There are two indicators of the new consciousness: one, the expansion of the boundary of the present mind and second, the increasing dissolution of these boundaries by the force of the higher mind (Sri Aurobindo 1973). There is the descent of the Supermind from above into the limited mind at various levels. These levels of experience are, however, within the bounded horizon of the limited mind. There has been a steady evolution of the mind from the present experiences to the limitless experiences beyond (Radhakrishnan 1932). The limitless experiences are intuitively revealed to the limited mind from above. There is no reason to doubt that all these spiritual experiences have meaning and content. Of course, the mystical experiences themselves are subject to interpretation. By and large, these experiences show the limits of our ordinary experiences. These are the experiences of the divinely inspired souls, which yearn for the Infinite and limitless Reality (Sri Aurobindo 2001).

The idea which demands philosophical justification is the idea relating to the content of these limitless spiritual experiences. These experiences are the experiences of the Infinite, the Limitless and the Vast that is beyond the limited mind (Sankara

1972; Sri Aurobindo 1973). This is how it has been described in the Vedanta as the experience of the Infinite Reality which defies language and mind (Sankara 2001, 2002). It is the repeated emphasis of the Vedantic metaphysics to point to the Infinite Reality beyond the horizon of the mental consciousness. The more we explore the new horizon the more we discover the contents of the supramental consciousness.

The new reality of the Supermind is knocking at the door of the mental consciousness by circumscribing it as limited and bound within the world. The supramental consciousness can be metaphysically described as the consciousness of the Reality that is the Absolute and Infinite. We can try to make it intelligible within the mental consciousness because the latter is itself evolving towards the Supermind. Mind itself is the first step towards the Supermind (Sri Aurobindo 1973, 2000).

## 10.7 Beyond Language and Thought

There has been a metaphysical debate as to whether the supramental consciousness can be expressed in ordinary language and thought. This is reflected in the idea that the ultimate and Absolute Reality cannot be expressed in words and thought (Sankara 2001, 2002). The metaphysicians across the board recognize the fact that our ordinary language and thought cannot express the ultimate Reality because the latter is beyond the limits of thought and language. This is true of the experiences, which are called mystical or ineffable (Wittgenstein 1961). However, the fact of the matter is that we must admit that there is something unique about the ultimate metaphysical truths, which cannot be expressed in ordinary language and thought which are meant for expressing things which are within the boundary of the world.

There are many ways philosophy demarcates the limits of language and thought. One way of doing so is to take the language of the ordinary experiences to be limited. Ordinary language, for example, is meant for expressing the empirical experiences. Therefore, anything that goes beyond the domain of the empirical experiences is bound to remain outside language and thought and thus must remain beyond empirical knowledge (Kant 1929). There is still a stronger argument that our scientific language and thought are limited because of the categories they use. Therefore, they cannot express the truths that cannot be represented though these categories. The metaphysical truths regarding the ultimate Reality are such that they cannot be expressed through the categories, which are limited to expressing scientific truths (Wittgenstein 1961).

The Vedantic way of looking at this problem consists in this that the ultimate Reality, which is Brahman can be known by intuitive experience but cannot be represented in the language of the empirical thought (Sankara 1972; Sri Aurobindo 1973). This way of demarcating the limits of language and thought is based on the fact that our mind and language cannot reach the level of the experience of Brahman. Brahman is transcendent to the language of the empirical thought because it is attributeless and so indescribable (Sankara 1972). This indicates the fact that we can know Brahman not through the ordinary thought and experience but by extraordinary experience and

intuitive thought. Vedanta does not deny the metaphysical knowledge of Brahman but denies that there can be any easy access to Brahman through the empirical means.

The Buddhists like Nagarjuna strongly endorse the Vedantic thought regarding the ultimate inexpressibility of the transcendent Reality like *Sunyata* (Murti 1955; Chatterjee 1975). The question of the ultimate Reality is taken out of the ordinary thought and language because the Buddhists believe that we can never be able to describe the ultimate Reality in the natural language. The *Sunyata* remains outside the boundary of ordinary thought (Murti 1955) because it is indescribable. There is much to infer from this transcendental standpoint because it reinforces the idea that nothing higher can be expressed in ordinary language and thought.

But the main question is: Can we leave the ultimate Reality to itself as unknowable, if language and thought are supposed to fail to express it? That is not the case, however, because we do talk about and know the ultimate Reality, though not through ordinary language and thought. For this, we have to recognize the fact that we have an intuitive grasp of the Reality though an extraordinary experience like the supramental consciousness (Sankara 1972; Sri Aurobindo 1973, 2000). The Vedantins resolve this problem by showing that supramental consciousness, which is beyond the horizon of the mind and language expresses the ultimate Reality. The supramental consciousness reinforces the fact that we have intuitive access to the ultimate Reality.

## 10.8 Reason and Beyond Reason

Reason or intellect is supposed to be the faculty of reasoning and logical thought. This has been the main source of knowledge in science and mathematics. Thought and reason dominate the cognitive domain because of their role in the making of theories in science and mathematics. However, there are many other domains where reason has to make room for something beyond reason. That which is beyond reason is called intuition. Intuition is a supra-rational faculty that makes room for the knowledge of a different kind found in religion and philosophy. In philosophies like Vedanta and Buddhism as also in the philosophies of many Western thinkers like Plato and Bergson the supra-rational intuitive faculty has played a role. This is because there are realms of human consciousness, where the rational faculty is not adequate. The direct knowledge of Reality is the hallmark of the supra-rational faculty (Radhakrishnan 1932).

Now the question arises: Why do we need a supra-rational faculty? The answer to this question is obvious: we need to go beyond reason because reason cannot give direct knowledge of Reality. If we want to have the direct and intimate apprehension of Reality, we need to have a faculty that can take us to the heart of the Reality without any mediation. Reason can give us indirect knowledge through reasoning. But this gives us fragmented knowledge, but not integral knowledge (Sri Aurobindo 1973). In order to get the integral knowledge of Reality we need to go beyond reason and take the help of intuition (Radhakrishnan 1932; Sri Aurobindo 1973). The fact is that Reality is a whole and not an assemblage of parts. Therefore, we can know

Reality fully if we can grasp it as a whole without any fragmentation. Reality brooks a no fragmentation.

Reason is the faculty of division and not of unity because the reasoning faculty divides everything into fragments and then attempts to unify them (Sri Aurobindo 1973). But the intuitive faculty does not divide the Reality but grasps it as a whole since the Reality presents itself to intuition as a whole (Bergson 1998). But the fact of the matter is that the Reality is not the object of empirical experience but experiences of a higher order. These experiences of the Reality are the experiences of Brahman according to the Vedantins (Sankara 1972; Sri Aurobindo 1973). Such experiences are not completely intelligible to reason and so we need the faculty of intuition to make sense of the spiritual experiences relating to Brahman. From this, we can conclude that intuition has a large role to play in making the higher experiences possible.

The problem of supramental consciousness, which we have admitted as real begins to look supra-rational because reason cannot map out the horizon of the Supermind. The Supermind far surpasses the limits of reason and goes into the depth of consciousness in order to bring out the infinitude of the Spirit. Thus we have to admit that the supra-rational faculty is a *sine qua non* for the understanding of the Spirit, which is beyond the boundaries of the mind and the world. The Spirit is the realm of Reality that goes beyond language and reason because the latter do not have the conceptual apparatus to decipher the nature of Reality. Reason itself needs the help of the supra-rational to transform itself to get direct access to the ultimate Reality.

## 10.9 The Dynamics of the Supramental Reality

When we look beyond reason, we are bound to encounter the Reality in itself as the absolute and unlimited. It is because we are assured of the Reality as the ultimate and supreme in view of the fact that it no more depends on our limited intelligence. Human mind surrenders itself to the Supermind to know the supreme Reality. The Reality is accessible to the Supermind because of the latter's capacity to apprehends the Reality. The Supermind is poised to know Absolute Reality or Brahman (Sri Aurobindo 1973).

The Absolute Reality is the Spirit which is of the nature of consciousness (Hegel 1977; Sri Aurobindo 1973). The only way we can characterize the Reality is by calling it the Spirit because the Spirit alone is of the nature consciousness. It is consciousness which alone is real because of the fact that to be conscious is to exist in itself and make one's existence different from the existence of others. Vedanta has elevated consciousness to the status of the Absolute Reality because it alone can make everything intelligible. The Vedantic idea of the Spirit as *Sat-Cit-Ananda* can explain every form of existence and consciousness in the world. Following the Vedantic line of thinking, we can make the claim that Reality cannot but be of the nature of consciousness (Radhakrishnan 1932; Sri Aurobindo 1973). That can serve

the purpose of explaining the dynamics of the Reality as the absolute ground of everything.

The metaphysics of consciousness which is outlined here is of a unique kind because it keeps aside all other metaphysical formulations of the Reality. It is not matter or life or mind individually or as taken together. The Reality is not a matter-life-mind complex (Alexander 1966; Bergson 1998). It is more than that. It is the Spirit or consciousness that manifests itself as matter, life and mind in successive stages of its evolution. That is to say, every form of existence is a form of consciousness or of the Spirit (Hegel 1977; Sri Aurobindo 1973). To be precise, the Spirit gradually manifests itself as the material world followed by the biological and the mental worlds. Each is the Spirit's own manifestation because through this alone the Spirit evolves into its full or concrete reality.

The existence of the material world has posed the most difficult problem for the metaphysicians across the centuries. It is because what we call the material world is a stubborn reality that defies all explanations in terms of mind and life. Matter refuses to be assimilated into any other reality. But matter has taken a new turn with the arrival of life and mind in the universe in a creative way. Matter has slowly receded into the background making room for life and mind to dominate the universe. That is why there is effort to see matter itself as a form of life and mind (Sri Aurobindo 1973). This new turn in metaphysics is due to the fact that it has taken the Spirit or consciousness as the ultimate Reality (Radhakrishnan 1932; Sri Aurobindo 1973).

Since consciousness is the ultimate Reality it can be shown that every form of existence is a form of consciousness in its cosmic dimension. Consciousness in the cosmic sense is not the subjective consciousness of the particular individuals. It is the universal consciousness which manifests itself as the subjective consciousness. Even the sub-human form of consciousness is a form of the cosmic consciousness. The whole universe itself is taken as the play of consciousness in its cosmic form (Sankara 1972; Sri Aurobindo 1973). The world in its multiplicity is the unified order of cosmic consciousness because of the fact that in the universe alone the Spirit comes into operation in self-realization in the form of the universe. The universe is the field of the Spirit's own action in the evolutionary process. As Vedanta would suggest, the cosmos is the divine order as controlled by the Spirit (Sri Aurobindo 1973).

## 10.10 The Spirit in the World

That the world has an intelligible order has been accepted universally because it is the foundation on which our understanding of the universe is based. But whether it is a spiritual or physical order has to be explained. By calling the order of the universe a spiritual order we have the following arguments:

1. There is an underlying Spirit or consciousness, which constitutes the cosmic order.
2. The cosmic order is conscious and purposeful.



3. It is the manifestation of consciousness in an evolutionary order.
4. The cosmic order is spiritual precisely because it is not just a natural-physical order but is guided by the Spirit.
5. The cosmos bears the stamp of the Spirit.

We have thus arguments to show that what we call a natural order in the language of science is in fact a spiritual or supernatural order in the language of metaphysics. Of course, we cannot show that there are any scientific proofs of this except that we assume for the purpose of explanation that there is consciousness or Spirit at the source of the universe (Radhakrishnan 1932; Sri Aurobindo 1973).

We can now for the sake of explaining the universe accept that there are two realities to begin with, namely, the Spirit as the absolute ground of all reality and the universe or cosmos. Both are intimately related because the universe is founded on the Spirit as the Absolute Reality, whereas the universe itself is a manifestation of the Absolute Spirit. The reality of the cosmos is the datum of our experience; it is that which is given to us as a fact. But for explaining this fact we need a higher Reality, namely, the Spirit or consciousness. The latter is a matter of metaphysical postulation because it is the source of all intelligibility. The need for such a Reality is metaphysical rather than scientific. It is the one postulation which goes a long way in removing all our doubts about the intelligibility of the universe.

We have accepted that the universe is teleological because there is a definite movement of the universe towards a goal, namely, the complete manifestation of the Spirit or consciousness. The manifestation takes place in Time because it is the medium in which that which is outside Time is manifested (Radhakrishnan 1932; Sri Aurobindo 1973). The eternal Spirit manifests itself in Time because the universe is a temporal process. The universe is the Spirit in Time and history, and therefore that which is Infinite and Eternal becomes temporal and historical. This is the crux of the evolutionary metaphysics which is laid down here.

## 10.11 The Spirit in Man

It is now pertinent to examine how the Spirit manifests itself in man. Man is the representative of the Spirit on earth. It is in man that the Spirit becomes concrete and visible. There is, therefore, the intimate link between man and the Spirit. Consciousness as the Spirit is present in the human being (Sri Aurobindo 1973; Hegel 1977). The Spirit or consciousness in man is individual consciousness that is related to the universal Spirit or consciousness. The universal Spirit is transcendent to the individual Spirit and is yet immanent in it.

The Spirit is variously explained in metaphysics. It is the Self or Atman in Advaita Vedanta (Sankara 1972) and is the Transcendental Ego in phenomenology (Husserl 1960). It is the Absolute Spirit in Hegel (1977). In all cases, the Spirit stands for the universal consciousness which is the foundation of all reality. As consciousness, it is the absolute and infinite Reality of which man and the universe are manifestations.

Here one can argue that there is no way we can explain the universe and man unless we assume the metaphysical primacy of the Spirit or the Self. It is a metaphysical assumption that there must be a fundamental principle underlying the universe which can explain everything.

So far as man is concerned, there is a metaphysical need to understand him in terms of the fundamental principle, i.e. the Spirit. Man is not a biological being only; he combines in him the body, mind and spirit (Radhakrishnan 1932). There are different layers in the being of man such as the physical, mental and the spiritual. These different layers constitute the unified Self of man. The Self is the unity of the being of man and is categorically different from the mind and the body taken separately. The Self is the Spirit. It is both the universal and the individual Spirit taken together. The universal Self is concretized in the individual Self. This unique reality called the Self is the most important concept in metaphysics because it illuminates very other reality in the universe (Descartes 1912; Sankara 1972).

## 10.12 Sri Aurobindo's Metaphysics of the Spirit

It is to be noted that Sri Aurobindo turns to the metaphysics of the Spirit from within the Vedantic framework because he finds that the only principle which works in the universe is the Spirit or Brahman (Sri Aurobindo 1973). He considers the universe as a manifestation of the Spirit. Like Hegel, he takes the universe or Nature as the expression of the Spirit. He thinks that there is no other way we can make the universe intelligible except as the manifestation of the Spirit. He is not ready to accept that the world is unreal or Maya as Sankara and his followers claim. For Sri Aurobindo, the world is real and is a form of the Spirit in space and time.

Sri Aurobindo also rejects the naturalist theories of evolution like those of Llyod Morgan and Alexander because they do not explain how the universe comes into being. If the world is the result of the evolution of matter in space and time, then there is no reason how mind and consciousness come into being from matter in space and time. The material structure of the universe cannot give rise to mind unless mind is already there implicit in matter. That is why Sri Aurobindo introduces the idea of the Spirit or mind as already involved in matter. The idealist metaphysics of the Spirit solves the problem of the existence of the world and also of the human beings. The Spirit in course of its evolution from matter gives rise to the mind and the Supermind.

Sri Aurobindo's metaphysics brings an end to naturalism and materialism by showing that the world is evolving into the supramental consciousness at various stages such as those of life, mind and Supermind. This metaphysics is not only all-inclusive but also integral in nature. That is why it can set to rest all puzzles arising out of naturalism and materialism.

## 10.13 The Spirit and the Body

In this connection, it is pertinent to raise the question regarding the relation between the Spirit and the body because it is part of the problem of the relation between the Self and world. The Self or I is intimately connected with the body because the Self is embodied in the body. Like the Self, the mind is also embodied because it is one reality that the Self carries with it by virtue of the necessary connection between Self, mind and the body. The Self is itself not the mind nor is it the body. It is above the mind and the body because the mind and body belong to the Self or the Subject.

Descartes (1912) made the body–mind distinction central to his metaphysics without realizing that it is this distinction which is going to create trouble for the Self as well. For Descartes, the Self or the I is a mental substance which is basically a thinking being. But this thinking being as a substance belongs to the world and thus the Self loses its metaphysical primacy. That is why Kant (1929) made the Self the transcendental unity of consciousness and dispensed with the idea of the Self as a substance. By this, Kant made room for the Self as a transcendental consciousness which is not part of the world. Wittgenstein (1961) made a further radical move to keep the transcendental Self outside the world. Thus the transcendental Self emerged as the new reality vis-a-vis the world thereby making it clear that there is no way we can keep the transcendental Self as a part of the world.

But the fact remains that the Self is also in the world at least from the empirical standpoint. This aspect of the problem has received attention in the contemporary times because of the fact that we cannot get away from the fact that the Self or I is also the engaged Self. The idea of the engaged Self or the embodied consciousness is emphasized in the writings of the philosophers like Heidegger (1962, 1968) and many others because of the fact that there is a definite move to bring the Self back to the world. Phenomenologists like Zahavi have argued that the empirical or embodied subjectivity is the main issue in phenomenology, but not the Husserlian transcendental subjectivity. This is because the embodied consciousness is more significant in philosophy as a result of the new turn in making the Self the being-in-the-world or the engaged Self. Thus we are at the beginning of the new era in the philosophy of Self or consciousness because of the importance of the embodied consciousness in understanding man and the world.

In Indian philosophy, this problem of embodied Self did not arise because the Self was always taken in its embodied form even when the Self was considered as transcendental as in the system of the Vedanta. For the Indian thinkers, the Self is taken as both transcendent and immanent considered from the two standpoints (Sankara 1972). The empirical Self is in the world embodied and engaged in the worldly pursuits (Ganeri 2012). There was never a controversy as to whether a transcendental Self can also be an empirical Self. In fact, the transcendental Self is supposed to be engaged in the world by virtue of its inherent tendency to be concerned with the world. This is the way Advaita Vedanta considered the Self or Atman as appearing as the empirical Self or *jiva* under the limiting conditions of the world. The world made a difference to the Self by conditioning it by the worldly

processes. These conditions are contingent and yet are so binding that the empirical Self easily gets dissociated from the transcendental Self though they are essentially one (Sankara 2001, 2002).

Sri Aurobindo (1973) has an innovative way of solving the problem of embodiment by showing that the body in which consciousness is incarnated is a manifestation of consciousness. The body is not metaphysically distinct from the Self because the Self or Atman is already immanent in the body. That is, the body is already conscious and so it is the expression of the Atman in the world. Therefore, the Self does not lose its transcendental status but is in addition the immanent Self in the world. The body is the Spirit in its worldly form. The Self or the Spirit and the body constitute a continuum in which the Spirit expresses itself in the form of the body. This solution to the problem of the Self-body relation is unique because it in no way accepts any dualism. There is an integral reality called the spirited body or the embodied Spirit (Sri Aurobindo 1973, 2000).

### 10.14 The Spiritualization of the Body

One of the key issues in contemporary philosophy of mind is how to understand the human body in view of the fact that in the major Western and Indian traditions the body has received less attention than it deserves. As a result, there has been a persistent effort to bring the body back to the centre stage of the philosophy of mind (Searle 1992; Chalmers 1996). The question is regarding how to relate the mind and consciousness to the brain and the body. The overwhelming view has been that the brain is the source of mind and consciousness, and therefore it is the human body which is the real entity which must be studied rather than the mind as such. But this turn towards the body is not fully convincing because the focus is still on the mind and the body comes along as the causal source of it. Mind is still in the focus.

A different approach is proposed by Sri Aurobindo (1973, 2000), who suggests that there is a better way of understanding the body by taking it as the expression of the Spirit or consciousness. In that case, the body is not alien to the Spirit or the mind but is the very expression of the latter. The body is the external form of the Spirit. In that case, the body is a spiritualized entity because of its being pervaded by the Spirit. Consciousness is the very nature of the body because the body is the instrument through which the Spirit makes itself manifest in the world. Sri Aurobindo (1973) resolves the Spirit-matter conflict by making the body the expression of the Spirit. Thereby he does not minimize the importance of the body but rather elevates the status of the body to that of a divine reality. He goes to the extent of saying that the body must be supramentalized by virtue of the descent of the Supermind into the human body (Sri Aurobindo 1973).

The spiritualization of the body is a sign of the fact that the body is not a stranger to the mind or Spirit because there is no definite gap between the body and the Spirit. Both the body and the Spirit are the two sides of the same Reality. Though the Spirit is the ultimate Reality, the body is not left behind because it is transformed by the

Spirit into a divine Reality because of the fact that there is no way we can identify the body except as pervaded by the Spirit. The body as an independent entity, which partakes of matter is of no consequence because it distorts the nature of the body. The body is not just an unconscious matter but is the very epitome of consciousness. It is not something to be kept aside from the nature of the human being but to make it an integral part of the human Self. The nature of the body has to be redefined to accommodate the view that body is the essential part of the spiritual being of man.

The contemporary discussion on the mind–body relation is not free from the Cartesian hangover because it still treats the body as an unconscious matter. But from the point of view of the Indian thinkers, the mind–body gap is a misnomer and that there is greater unity between mind and body than realized before (Pradhan 2019). There is unity between mind and body or Spirit and matter because of the integral nature of the Reality. Both Spirit and matter are integrally related so that there can never be any attempt to dissolve this unity. Unity passes into integrality and ultimately into identity (Sri Aurobindo 1973). The body is spiritualized to the extent it is seen as the image of the Spirit. The body is transformed into a divine instrument and thus is given the importance of divinity which it deserves. The body-consciousness is transformed into the divine consciousness.

## 10.15 Consciousness and the Brain

Much of the contemporary debate centres around the role of the brain in the emergence of consciousness and mind. There is a widely held view that the brain is the cause of consciousness (Searle 1992; Churchland 1984). According to this view, the only organ which is capable of producing consciousness is the brain, whether in man or in the animals. The brain is a subtle organ that consists of millions of cells which constitute the causal basis of consciousness. This theory is based on scientific facts which cannot be denied. But there the matter does not end. If that would have been the whole story of consciousness, then there is nothing that is not known about consciousness for the scientists. But that is not the whole story about consciousness.

If we look at consciousness metaphysically, we confront many questions which science of the brain cannot answer. The first question is: If the brain itself is not already conscious, how can it give rise to consciousness? The second question is: if the brain is a mere material body which has a complex structure, how can a material body cause something like consciousness which is not material in nature? The brain sciences cannot answer such questions because these are not within their purview. They can at best show that the brain is the causal basis of consciousness. If we take the metaphysical stand, then it becomes clear that consciousness is already immanent in the brain and so the conscious brain gives rise to the multiple forms of consciousness. The brain cells are living cells and so they have consciousness within the brain itself. From this, it follows that the brain is not a material body bereft of consciousness. It is not a sheer material body but an organism. As an organism, it is a living organ because of which it gives rise to the complex forms of consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo (1973) challenges the contemporary thinkers on this issue by showing that brain is not a mechanical device that produces consciousness according to the mechanical laws. For the contemporary thinkers (Dennett 1991), the brain is a system of mechanical operations which functions as an instrument of generation of consciousness. In that case, the brain represents a digital machine (Dennett 1991; Churchland 1984) which because of its complex mechanisms produces consciousness according to some laws built into the system. This is the scientific view of consciousness as it is propounded by the scientists and the scientifically minded philosophers. But this is opposed by Sri Aurobindo in his transcendental theory of consciousness. According to this theory, consciousness itself is transcendent to the brain, even though it is also immanent in the latter. Consciousness is prior to the brain and so it makes the brain participate actively in the emergence of consciousness. That is, consciousness which is immanent in the brain evolves into more complex structures.

The evolutionary perspective which we have discussed in the preceding chapters shows that consciousness in the brain evolves into supramental consciousness because of the supramental pressure acting on the human brain. The Supermind takes over the functions of the brain and make it give rise to supramental consciousness. So ultimately it is not the brain which produces consciousness but rather the Supermind compels it to give rise to consciousness. The brain is, therefore, only an instrument for the emergence of consciousness and not the causal source of consciousness. The ultimate Reality is the Spirit or consciousness and not the brain or the body. There is a transcendental origin of consciousness in the Supermind (Sri Aurobindo 1973, 2000).

In the evolution of consciousness, matter and the material bodies including the brain play an instrumental role because they are the media through which the Spirit evolves from mind to Supermind. Evolution of the Spirit takes place because consciousness has to acquire more complex structures to become the supramental consciousness. The spiritual evolution takes place under the direction of the Spirit itself and therefore there is no external agency to determine the course of evolution. Evolution is self-generated by the Spirit so as to show that the Spirit is evolving in Time and history to realize itself as the transcendent Reality.

## 10.16 Why the Supermind?

The demand for a higher mind has been part of the history of consciousness. The evolutionary scheme of the universe makes it necessary that the present mind must be transformed into a higher mind. In almost all spiritual traditions, there has been a clamour for the enlightened mind which goes beyond the present finite and limited mind. This is true of all Indian philosophical and spiritual traditions like Vedanta and Buddhism as it is true of the Western traditions from the Greek onwards.

The Indian traditions beginning with *Upanishads* have pursued the goal of achieving the state of the supramental consciousness. The *Upanishads* emphasize

the importance of the supermind for understanding the ultimate Reality and for pursuing a spiritual life (Sankara 2001, 2002; Radhakrishnan 1932). The supermind is the pure consciousness free from the limiting conditions imposed on it by the external circumstances. The Vedantic tradition is solely concerned with the way man can rise from ignorance to the supreme height of knowledge (Sankara 1972). The idea of the supermind is the hallmark of the Vedantic metaphysics and ethics as they are expounded in the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. The main emphasis of the Vedanta is on the evolution of the spiritual consciousness or consciousness of Brahman (Sri Aurobindo 1973) in the individual and the collective consciousness.

The Buddhist traditions (Murti 1955; Chatterjee 1975) equally are concerned with the rise of the enlightened mind (*buddhi, prajna*), which is the acme of the individual moral and spiritual perfection. Buddhism is itself the tradition of enlightenment which culminates in *nirvana* of the individual man. Such a state of the mind is kept as the goal of the Buddhist spiritual practices which keep man engaged in the life long process of renunciation and meditation. The Buddhist philosophy is the philosophy of the new consciousness that is free from all conditions externally imposed on the mind. For understanding the nuances of the enlightened mind, there must be an effort to integrate the Buddhist insights into the metaphysics of supramental consciousness.

The following features mark out the supermind from the ordinary mind:

1. The supermind is the pure transcendental consciousness, which is beyond the horizon of the ordinary mind and understanding.
2. The supermind is the source of wisdom in the sense that it comprehends Reality in its true nature.
3. The supermind is the spiritual mind because it is the source of all spiritual perfection and the ethical virtues.
4. The supermind brings about a spiritual transformation in the consciousness of the individual human beings.
5. The supramental consciousness is the rare consciousness lies beyond the horizon of the ordinary human consciousness.

The more we explore the features of the supermind we will come to the conclusion that man's mind has been engaged perennially in the pursuit of transcending its own limitations and getting at its own perfection.

## 10.17 The Supramental Consciousness

It is no wonder that the enlightened mind ascends to the supramental consciousness because this is what is aspired for by the enlightened mind. Sri Aurobindo (1973, 2000) has taken the enlightened mind to its supramental height by making it the supremely spiritualized mind. The aim is to make the present mind into a completely transformed mind. The philosophy of Supermind is a necessary sequel to the philosophy of the enlightened mind, which has been central the Indian philosophical systems. The Indian mind has been in the quest of the Supermind from the time

of the Vedic thought. It is because the Vedic mind had already reached the supreme height of the mind from which it could see the further heights of the Supermind.

Now we necessarily face the question as to why we need to think of the Supermind when the enlightened mind is itself a great step in the evolution of the human mind. The enlightened mind is the acme of the perfection of the human consciousness, which is envisaged as the highest mind. Therefore, it is the best that we can aim at in our philosophical thought. The seers and thinkers both in the West and in India have already got the idea of the enlightened mind above and beyond the ordinary mind. So one can argue that the idea of the Supermind is superfluous and so must not be pursued. But a deeper analysis can show that the evolution of the mind into the Supermind is a necessary step in the evolution of man in the world.

Sri Aurobindo's argument is that even the enlightened mind has so far not been able to achieve the goal of the evolution of human mind and consciousness. The evolution of the mind is not completely accomplished because no change has taken place in the human nature in spite of the arrival of the enlightened mind. The Supermind is the next step of the enlightened mind (Sri Aurobindo 1973), which can transform the human mind and consciousness. That is, according to Sri Aurobindo, the Supermind as the Truth-consciousness is a spiritual force which can transform consciousness from within by its descent into the human consciousness. With the supramental descent, the earthly nature of man will be divinized and made into the fit instrument of the Divine Being. This idea of the transformation of the human consciousness is implicit in the evolution of the human species because this is how consciousness has evolved from matter to the mental consciousness.

The following are the reasons why human consciousness must ascend to the supramental consciousness:

1. Human consciousness at the present stage is incomplete, limited and finite.
2. It is bound to the world and so is conditioned by the world.
3. The conditioned worldly consciousness is the home of conflict, limitations and perversions of the various kinds.
4. This consciousness has to be transformed and freed from the conditions binding it to the world.
5. The Supermind alone can make this transformation because it has the power and force to do so because it is itself the divine consciousness.
6. The evolutionary pressure and the human effort through Integral Yoga can accomplish this supramental transformation.

Thus, the process bringing about the divine transformation of man is the great task assigned to the Supermind because it is the highest that man can think of. The end of the human evolution is the complete spiritualization of the human nature.



## 10.18 Phenomenology of the Supermind

The supramental consciousness is in need of a phenomenological inquiry because only in such an inquiry can there be a full account of how consciousness can be transformed into the supramental consciousness. The mental consciousness has been studied by the phenomenologists (Husserl 1931, 1960) in order to find out how consciousness is intentionally attached to the world and how intentionality itself is a unique feature of consciousness as such. However, the phenomenology of the mental consciousness has failed to account for how supramental consciousness is possible. Within the phenomenology of consciousness as outlined by Husserl and others, there is a focus on cognitive consciousness which is underlined by intentionality (Husserl 1931). But from this, no inference can be made regarding how consciousness can rise above cognitive or intentional consciousness. Husserl is concerned with pure consciousness from a transcendental perspective (Husserl 1960), but he is silent on how consciousness can evolve into supramental consciousness. The Husserlian transcendental phenomenology stops at the transcendental Ego but does not explain how the Ego can evolve into the universal Spirit.

Sri Aurobindo has pushed the frontiers of phenomenology into the domain of the supramental consciousness in which the Supermind takes over the control of the Ego and projects the new horizon of the Supermind which bridges the gap between the Ego and the Spirit. The Supermind takes the human mind to a higher level by transforming it into the instrument of the Spirit. The Spirit as the absolute consciousness is directly apprehended by the Supermind (Sri Aurobindo 1973). The Supermind is the intermediary between the human mind and the Absolute Spirit.

Now the main question before the Sri Aurobindian phenomenology is how to get the Supermind free from the burden of the world. The world in this case is not a burden on consciousness because the world itself is a creation of the Supermind and not a constraint on the latter. Sri Aurobindo makes the world dependent on consciousness because the former owes its origin to the latter. The Absolute Spirit brings the world into existence by the instrumentality of the Supermind. The Supermind is the creative principle which accounts for the reality of the world. Thus there is no reason for the Supermind to be intentionally attached to the world.

The supramental consciousness is free from intentionality as a cognitive property of consciousness. The supramental consciousness is supra-rational and supra-intentional. Because of this fact, there is no residual problem of intentionality in Sri Aurobindo's phenomenology. Intentionality is relegated to the lower level of the mental and cognitive consciousness. There is, however, no denial of the fact that the world is independent of the lower mind, but so far as the Supermind is concerned, the world is always dependent on it.

## 10.19 Supermind, World and *Maya*

There is a persistent doubt whether the world would be real in the face of the Supermind, which is the creative principle of the world. There is no doubt that it is the Supermind which is absolutely real as the Truth-consciousness (Sri Aurobindo 1973, 2000). The world, therefore, ceases to be real in the absolute sense. It has a dependent existence. It is real in the relative sense. Advaita Vedanta is supposed to have accorded relative existence to the world (Sankara 1972). However, many have taken the existence of the world as unreal or illusory. But this is far from true even for Sankara who is the founder of the *Mayavada*. *Maya* in no case is illusion (Radhakrishnan 1932).

There is no reason to believe that the world is an illusion (Sri Aurobindo 1973). The world is the creation of the Supermind; it is the manifestation of the Divine Consciousness or the Spirit. In that sense, the world demands reality of its own which can be known and understood by the various methods of knowledge. Thus the empirical reality of the world is beyond doubt. But that does not mean that we can give the world a status independent of the Supermind. Ultimately the Supermind accords reality to the world by making it the object of synthesis in the supramental consciousness. That is, the world has meaning and value only within the domain of transcendental consciousness. The world is a manifestation of consciousness because of the fact that it exists in consciousness and is constituted by it.

The supramental consciousness in which the world exists has no intentionality as such except the one imposed on it by *avidya* or ignorance. The supramental consciousness is all-comprehensive and harmonious and therefore there is nothing outside it. The world itself is within the supramental consciousness. Thus the world is part of consciousness itself. There is no way there can be intentionality in the absence of the subject-object duality. The supramental consciousness transcends the mental consciousness of the subject-object duality. There is no other reality than the transcendental consciousness. Thus, the transcendental consciousness is the Absolute Reality cancelling the world itself as an independent reality.

The supramental consciousness is free from all limitations of Space and Time. It is the unbounded consciousness that absorbs all reality into it. The Absolute Reality or the Spirit itself is reflected in it. Given this situation, the supramental consciousness is the absolute knowledge itself (Sri Aurobindo 1973). This ensures the fact that absolute knowledge is free from *avidya* or ignorance. It removes all the limitations of the mental consciousness. The mental consciousness or knowledge falls by the wayside because it is ridden with ignorance. The mind falls short of the absolute knowledge of the Supermind.

The supramental consciousness is the summit of consciousness itself having no other to it. It is the integral consciousness that cancels all particular consciousnesses. All particular consciousnesses are integrated into the supra-cosmic consciousness. It makes the bodily and mental consciousness only a fragment of the universal consciousness of the Supermind. Such a domain of consciousness is very much akin to the Absolute Spirit in Hegel (1977) or the Absolute Experience in Bradley in which everything is merged as a part of the grand system. It is the grand harmony of consciousness in its purity and integrality.

## 10.20 Reversing the Mechanical Mind

The main objective of the idea of the Supermind is to reverse the idea of the mechanical mind, which engages in the activities of processing the thoughts and experiences of the ordinary human beings. The human mind which is the very organ of the cognitive processing is known to be the mechanical mind (Kim 2011). It is this organ of thought, which has been taken as a mechanical system of multiple activities (Dennett 1991) of the mind. As a result, the modern conception of mind as a mechanical system has gained ground on the basis of the scientific idea that the mind's functions are all logically mappable by a Turing machine (Kim 2011). The mind has been conceived under the model of the machine to facilitate our understanding of the mental functions.

The idea of the Supermind reverses this picture of the mind by suggesting that the mechanical mind is a caricature of the mind per se. Mind as a creative system has been at the vanguard of the creative activities of the human beings. Man is known by the mind that creates and projects new possibilities. But the idea of the mechanical mind shows that all these mental activities are performed within a mechanical system. This is no doubt that the mechanical mind is limited and that it gropes in the dark and finds no way to understand itself and the Reality beyond it (Sri Aurobindo 1973). The Supermind reveals the fact that the mechanical mind completely misrepresents the inherent powers of the mind and makes it a system of mechanical processes whereas these processes are no less creative because of the presence of consciousness underlying them. Consciousness is the ground of all our so-called mental activities. Consciousness is the transcendental source of the mental activities. Therefore, there can never be possible a complete mechanization of the mental processes. The supramental processes of the conscious mind resist this mechanization, which has been the cause of the disenchantment of the human mind.

The upholders of the Supermind take note of the fact that mind in its conventional aspects tends to appear as a machine and that it seems to act under the psychophysical laws. But a little reflection shows that the even the ordinary mind is creatively constituted and that it implicitly is the mirror-image of the Supermind (Sri Aurobindo 1973). That is, the present mind of man is on the evolutionary progression towards the Supermind. Given the creative nature of the human mind, it is all the more necessary that the Supermind can assimilate this mind to itself and transform it. The human mind can be supramentalized and divinized because of the power of the Supermind. The human mind is ready for the next level of its transformation. Therefore, there is no end to the ascending nature of the human mind. Such a mind is far from the mechanical mind of the materialist and the functionalist philosophers.

The gap between the mind and the Supermind is not unbridgeable because the Supermind can make a descent to the lower reaches of the mind and can transform it. In the process, the Supermind can elevate each function of the mind to a higher stage so that the functions of the mind are no longer confined to a mechanical system. The Supermind frees the mind from all its limitations and bondage to the limiting conditions of the world and makes it the instrument of supramental knowledge.

## 10.21 The Metaphysics of the Supermind

The Supermind can be pictured as the most creative divine mind, which makes moves beyond the laws of the psycho-physical mind. It is governed by its own laws which are supraphysical and supramental. It is in this context that Supermind is conceived as the creative matrix of the universe (Sri Aurobindo 1973). If we take the Supermind as a new category of the supramental philosophy, we can very well imagine that it is the new consciousness that is at once supramental and divine in nature. It is to be noted that we have to widen our philosophy of mind and psychology to accommodate the new categories of Supermind and supramental consciousness. The new philosophy as founded by Sri Aurobindo imbibes the best in the philosophies of the mind of the East and the West (Maitra 1968). It takes the idea of the Spirit from Hegel and the Idealists in general and makes it co-exist with the Vedantic idea of the Supermind so as to make room for the fact that the mind is no more under the iron mask of the mechanism and functionalism but is the free mind of the divine kind that transforms the whole of our consciousness.

The idea that mind is limited to the human body and the brain has been proved to be a misrepresentation of the powers and the functions of the creative force of the mind. The philosophers of the mind of the contemporary times have misunderstood the nature of mind and have offered the mistaken view that mind is a functional system and that it is a means of cognitive reasoning (Searle 1992). The theory of Supermind dispels all the illusions about the mind as a machine and proves that mind is creative and that it can be supramentalized in due course of the evolution of man and Nature.

Since all the theories of mind presently accepted are no match to the metaphysics of the Supermind in dealing with the acts and functions of the mind, the theory of Supermind is the most acceptable option for the philosophers of consciousness. Consciousness has to be studied only in the light of the Supermind because that is how we can unravel the mysteries of consciousness to the fullest possible extent.

## 10.22 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have tried to understand the nature of the Supermind so that we can reverse the theories which have so far been unable to deal with consciousness and mind in their true nature. We have come to the conclusion that the theory of Supermind has to be accepted because this alone shows us the way to the true nature of consciousness. This requires a new metaphysics of consciousness, which we have tried to outline in these pages.

The metaphysics of supramental consciousness overrules all the limitations of other metaphysical systems that study mind and consciousness. It has particularly rejected the materialist metaphysics that has plagued the contemporary philosophy of

mind. Materialism in its various forms has rejected the very possibility of consciousness as an autonomous metaphysical reality. As a consequence, it has failed to explain how human consciousness has given rise to various forms of human activity in the form of art, aesthetics, literature, science, philosophy and, above all, of ethics and spirituality. These realms of meanings have been completely denied of importance by the materialist thinkers.

The metaphysics of supramental consciousness outlined in this chapter has given a transcendental turn to the metaphysics of mind and has given broad indications as to how the idea of the Supermind can be central to this metaphysics. The Supermind is the new ontological category, which has to be made the guiding principle of any future metaphysics of the mind. It will not only expose the fault lines of the materialist metaphysics but also give impetus to the future investigations into the vast realm of the supramental consciousness.

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# Epilogue

The quest for the Supermind which has been the central concern of this essay has been completed with the assurance that there is a horizon beyond the present human mind and consciousness which beckons the presence of a higher level of consciousness. There is no doubt that the human consciousness is in the throes of an evolution towards a greater goal that defies the limits of the present circumscribed consciousness. The future evolution of man is entirely in the domain of the mind and consciousness because man's biological evolution is more or less closed. What demands recognition is mankind's new quest for the transformation of the human consciousness into the supramental consciousness.

The present state of the human consciousness is afflicted with limitations and inadequacies because of which there is a great deficiency in the spiritual and moral quotient of the human race. There is lack of universality and comprehensiveness in the present consciousness as a result of which the human race is rapidly degenerating into the animal consciousness manifesting itself in the self-destructive conflicts among races, religions and civilizations. This outward manifestation of the spiritual malaise in the human race is a clear sign of the fact that man's evolution is still incomplete and that there is a better future awaiting the human race beyond the present spiritual bankruptcy.

The contemporary world history is witness to the phenomenon of spiritual degeneration in the refusal of the mankind to engage in the pursuit of the higher values and meanings of life which have been eclipsed by the triumphal march of science and technology. The present day philosophy has been overawed by science because of which it fails to recognize the fact that there are deeper challenges facing mankind than the mere problems of scientific theory building and technological applications and their benefits. The questions relating to the moral and spiritual well being of mankind are set aside because they do not conform to the standards of truth and meaning set by science and technology. The hegemony of science and technology has been the bane of the modern civilization of the mankind which has led lamentably to the collapse of the grand dreams of the past generations about the glorious future of mankind.

The human race is at the cross-roads. First of all, it cannot but be proud of its past achievements and yet it cannot be happy with those achievements. It is dissatisfied with its own mental excellence. Secondly, it cannot look beyond its own present unhappy consciousness. The past investigations into this unhappy consciousness have resulted in a more unhappy consciousness; so there is an impasse in human thinking at present. It is here that great thinkers of the past can show us the way forward. If the present day thought is hamstrung by its own self-created limitations and illusions, there is no reason to believe that the human progress has come to a halt. The great men of the past have never tired of singing the song of the future progress of mankind. Therefore, we must look back to the wisdom of the past generations in understanding the human mind and consciousness.

My effort in this essay has been to revive the old wisdom about the greatness of the spirit of man. The idea that man is a spiritual and moral being beyond the limits of his physical being is still relevant to pursue in the face of the sceptical attitude of the present generations of human beings towards the things spiritual and moral in human consciousness. The tragedy of the present generation is that we are more concerned with the physical existence of man than with the spiritual existence because we have no belief that there could be a spiritual consciousness in man. Even we have no belief that there is consciousness as a real metaphysical reality. It has been argued by philosophers that man is no more than a machine and that his mind and consciousness are no more than mechanical systems which can be manipulated by the scientists and technocrats. The human mind thus has been reduced to a computing machine which functions according to formal rules.

This mechanistic view of man and the universe is the bane of modern and post-modern thinking. This has resulted in the view that man is at best a rational being capable of computational thinking and that he has nothing beyond his rationality and computational thinking. This has resulted in rampant reductionism and scientism engulfing the spiritual image of man. The universe itself has been dis-encharnted because of the mechanistic models through which we have attempted to understand it. There is collapse of the idea of the teleological universe which our forefathers had entertained. We, therefore, see no meaning and purpose in the universe and in the human life itself.

The Vedantic view of the universe and man has been one of the oldest philosophical views of mankind which has given a spiritual construal of the existence of man and the universe. There has been unanimity among the Vedantic thinkers that there is spiritual purpose in human life and the universe. This has given rise to the idea that man's life is not a play of the physical forces and that the universe itself is not a mere machine. For them, the universe manifests the reality of the Spirit or Brahman which is the ultimate Reality. Brahman is Existence-Consciousness and Bliss. Therefore, the universe and man are both parts of the same supreme Reality which is none other than the absolute consciousness.

On the foundations of the Vedantic metaphysics Sri Aurobindo has laid down a theory of evolution which aims at the supramental consciousness as the final goal of the human evolution. He has brought out the nîsus or the driving force of the evolution of consciousness in man as heading towards the realization of the supramental



consciousness. This theory of evolution has made the human existence a meaningful transition on the way to the supramental existence. The beginning of this evolution is timeless and so is the future of the evolution. It is an eternal process that is going on in the cosmos and is heading towards the realization of the supramental consciousness in the world history.

The present essay has attempted to bring out the metaphysics of the Vedanta to solve the present day problems regarding man and his mind and consciousness. It has brought out the evolutionary view of the universe and man in Sri Aurobindo's metaphysics. This has been necessary to show that there is a higher realm of human consciousness which mankind can get at in the evolutionary process. The idea of the Supermind which is the greatest contribution of the Vedantic thought has been brought into view to show that the future of mankind is not dark as it is portrayed by the present day thinkers, and that man is not a mere physical being who cannot ascend to any spiritual consciousness beyond the present body-bound consciousness. The end of the future journey of consciousness is to reach the summit of the supramental consciousness.

To recapitulate: man is in need of a metaphysics of mind and consciousness that can give him hope in his future journey. It is an evolutionary journey in which man is at the forefront. The end of this journey is the realization of the supramental consciousness and the arrival of a suprahuman race.

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