

**SRI AUROBINDO'S INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY**

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Email: pratapkativarapu@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is a grand system of reconciliation and integration. It is aptly called integral philosophy that synthesizes world-views and philosophical notions. The Integral vision of reality is one of the greatest contributions of Sri Aurobindo. It was an attempt to recapture the forgotten truths of Vedantic philosophy of realistic non-dualism, i.e., an effort at understanding reality in its undivided wholeness and fundamental oneness. For Aurobindo, the ultimate Reality is "One without a second," i.e., the Brahman. But based on Its different manifestations, he distinguishes the Reality between Higher hemisphere and the Lower hemisphere, of which the latter is the derivative of the former. Higher hemisphere refers to Its pure state of existence, as Transcendent Reality, or Saccidananda. It consists of Existence (Sat), Consciousness (Cit), Bliss (Ananda), and the Supermind. But It has also other poises, such as cosmic and personal existence. Thus the cosmic manifestations are referred to as Lower hemisphere. The lower hemisphere consists of Mind, Life and Matter. The differentiating characteristic between these two poises of being rests on 'knowledge' and 'ignorance'. In the higher hemisphere, there is the manifestation of the 'knowledge' of Oneness of Reality. The lower hemisphere is veiled by ignorance, and consequently it manifests division and duality. But Sri Aurobindo works out an integral knowledge which consequently strives for correspondence between the principles of the two hemispheres. It is through the mediation of Supermind that the higher and lower hemispheres are connected by the illumination of knowledge. All knowledge of the human mind can be divided into two categories, i.e., the higher knowledge and the lower knowledge. Sri Aurobindo works towards the synthesis of these two types of knowledge for the realization of the full knowledge. The integration of all knowledge, which is the ideal of Sri Aurobindo, is attained through Yoga.

Keywords: *Integral Monism, Nirguna, Saguna, Spirit, Supermind, Brahman, Pantheism, Panentheism, Integral Yoga, Saccidananda.*

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A. SYNTHETIC PHILOSOPHY

The Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is a grand system of reconciliation and integration. It is aptly called integral philosophy that synthesizes world-views and philosophical notions. It synthesizes the apparently conflicting ideas and contradictory claims. The heart of integral philosophy is all-inclusiveness, and nothing is neglected in its systematization. Aurobindo wished to found a philosophical system that would embrace all divergences in order to establish a synthetic sound system. Accordingly various syntheses can be traced in the philosophical endeavour of Sri Aurobindo, namely, the reconciliation between East and West, Infinite and Finite, Individual and Society, and Spirit and Matter.

The East and the West meaningfully meet in Aurobindo. The West aims at a humanistic approach and cosmic salvation. But its pre-occupation with intellectualism and the analytical approach have reduced it to being one-sided. The East presents a spiritualistic approach according to which everything is the manifestation of the Absolute. The spiritual vision is marred by its individualistic salvation and concerns. It is in the acceptance of the positive values, namely, cosmic salvation and spiritual vision, and in the transcendence of the negative ones, i.e., intellectualism and individualism that an integral vision can be born. Transcendence from the respective cultural settings, and the acceptance of the values of others can surely open up a bright future for humanity.

His synthetic approach bridges the gap between the individual and society. The Indian system has always shown the individualistic tendency in its approaches. Even the goal of human existence is directed towards individual salvation. Sri Aurobindo preferred to work for a social development or the transformation of the whole humanity, taking inspiration from the cosmic vision of the western World, along with the spiritual foundation of the Indian traditions. Human nature cannot have its complete fulfilment without a self-exceeding or self-transcending experience. One should have the awareness of the Divine within and without, and such awareness will enhance one's capacity to work for the transformation of others and the cosmos. Divinity in him is to express itself in and

through genuine love of mankind and selfless service of humanity.

Spirit and matter are normally considered as the two independent entities that constitute the human person. History of western philosophy presents a constant struggle between these two entirely different entities. The essential characteristics of the body or matter are extension and passivity, whereas those of the mind or the spirit are thought and activity. The problem that the philosophers have faced has been about the way in which the mind and the body could be connected. Rationalism and Empiricism suggested various solutions to this problem. Indian philosophy, - in particular Sri Aurobindo, does not visualize the problem between spirit and matter. Spirit and matter are not two independent realities, but two inseparable poles of existence, or two forms of manifestation of the Supreme. Materialism and spiritualism are reconciled in the Integral Advaita. Integral Advaitism affirms the reality of the world as well as of the Absolute, of matter as well as of spirit. Matter and Spirit are not contradictory, rather, are the lowest and the highest terms of Existence. Aurobindo affirms: "The Two are one: Spirit is the soul and reality of that which we sense as matter, matter is a form and body of that which we realise as Spirit."¹

Aurobindo incorporates into his philosophical system a great variety of philosophical and religious traditions both from the East and the West. In the synthesis of various approaches one may run the risk of identifying entities which are clearly distinct and arise from quite different existential bases, and consequently ignore or bypass the distinctive world-view and position of each system. Synthesis is an attempt to accommodate various ideas into one's own way of thinking, and therefore it can destroy the integrity of the distinctive philosophies. Aurobindo's integralism is also not free from such a danger. For example, in his attempt to unify both the higher and the lower existence, Aurobindo considers them as being essentially Divine. He does not sufficiently recognize the real difference between the Infinite and the finite, and among the finite itself between matter, life and mind. Again, in the process of involution and evolution



Aurobindo affirms the immanent and transcendent nature of the Divine. Everything is the manifestation of the Divine. In involution, It descends, and in evolution It returns to Itself. In this process of involution and evolution, Aurobindo emphasizes more immanence than transcendence.

The narrowness of the foundations is yet another limitation of Aurobindo's Integral philosophy. Though he acknowledges a wider integration of various philosophical systems, basically his system is founded on the historical and ideological frame-work of Hindu thought. Aurobindo seems to be closing his eyes against the philosophical contributions of Buddhism, Jainism and Islam, and upholds and projects the glory of the Hindu traditions. Though Indian sectarianism, especially, Vaishnavism, Saivism, and Saktism, receives occasional entry into his system, Sri Aurobindo bases his philosophical foundations on Indian systems at the exclusion of the non-Hindu traditions of India.

B. INTEGRAL YOGA AND NEW RELIGION

Integral Yoga is Aurobindo's new attempt attaining the liberation of man. Its newness rests on its aim, standpoint and totality of method. It transmutes the traditional conception of liberation that rests on the individual salvation, and instead emphasizes the total spiritualization of the universe, with a view to establishing perfect harmony between the outer and inner spheres of life. Integral Yoga cultivates all the capacities of man so as to use them for an integral realisation. The goal of Integral Yoga is not self-annihilation in another world but spiritual transformation within this world. It seeks to bring to full self-realization the omnipresent reality, not by leaping from this world into another, but by developing all the capacities of man, and integrating them for a total transformation. Aurobindo integrates into his system the great truths of the monistic pantheism of Advaita, the practical spiritualistic dualism of Samkhya with the practical disciplines of the yoga of Patañjali, the threefold ways of the Bhagavad Gita, and the basic structure of Tantrism. But such a universalistic and synthetic approach of Integral Yoga is not free from limitations.

In the vision of Sri Aurobindo, the Integral Yoga will enlarge, enrich and ultimately transcend the modes of life and thoughts of today's traditional

religions, and consequently he visualized a universal community of men with altogether new values and visions. This gnostic community will be guided by supramental values, and the members will effect a kingdom of God here on earth. Though he asserts that the new community is not guided by the religious ideals, in principle, it carries out glimpses of new religious consciousness. The 20th century marks a change of religious consciousness. There have been various attempts at situating religiosity in the context of social reconstruction and development. Against the secularization of life, and the technological and industrial boom a new religious consciousness was born, integrating both the social and religious concerns. Aurobindo's philosophy too contains an attempt to achieve a global-religious vision. He could thereby get out of the shackles of the traditional religious concepts, and opt to work for a single religion of humanity.

Aurobindo has not made a comparative study of all religious traditions. Though he mentions occasionally Christian spirituality and tradition, he does not undertake a systematic study regarding Christian religion. He preferred to think in a free manner and wrote extensively regarding the nature and history of religion. , in fact, based his studies on the Indian religious traditions, and wrote commentaries on Vedic Hymns, Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita. He has supplied a social dimension to the spiritual and religious truths, and affirmed that the core of religiosity is to have inward experience of truth. It is this inward experience that has to become an outward expression in creating a universal consciousness.² He criticizes the traditional religions, especially Christianity for its dogmatic and intellectual assertions, and its involvement with Western history.³ True religion, according to him, should inspire within the community a "living sense of human oneness and practice of openness."⁴

Though Aurobindo wished to shape a new religious consciousness of the oneness of humanity with the intention of integrating both the religious and the social values, he too easily becomes a prey to the spirit of his own religion - Hinduism. Comparing Hinduism with the western religions, Sri Aurobindo saves Indian religion from dogmatism: "For religion in India limited itself by no one creed or dogma; it not



only admitted a vast number of different formulations, but contained successfully within itself all the elements that have grown up in the course of the evolution of religion and refused to ban or excise any.”⁵ It is true that his new religion preaches against the ritualism, dogmatic assertions and social inequalities, but it is also equally true that such attempts have not effected the new religious consciousness and the social reconstruction which he visualized. Hindu religion is not yet fully free from the social and religious inequalities brought out by the caste system and the consequent practice of untouchability. Such dangers and evils threaten the very ideal of universal consciousness and human oneness.

C. INTEGRAL MONISM

The heart of Aurobindo's Integral Philosophy is the Integral Monism. The basic philosophical system of Sri Aurobindo sees Reality as One. The ordinary experience introduces us with manifold existence. The manifold existence does not pose difficulties in understanding the Reality, as it is the manifestation of the Divine. It is the One who is the Many, the lord of creation, and the source and foundation of everything. Aurobindo had a comprehensive vision of the Absolute. The Absolute is immanent, transcendent, impersonal, as well as personal God.⁶ The Absolute Reality is simultaneously moving and unmoving, formless and possessing form, beyond the world and fully in the world, essentially indeterminable but manifesting endless determination. The same Absolute Reality is manifested in graded continuity from the lowest matter to the highest spirit. “The Being is One, but this oneness is infinite and contains in itself an infinite plurality or multiplicity of itself: the One is the All; it is not only an essential existence but an All-Existence.”⁷ It is the one in the many, the conscious in unconscious.⁸ Aurobindo thus maintains an attempt to unify the conception of Reality.

His attempt for unity, however, creates a division in the conception of the Divine itself. Aurobindo considers Brahman as both impersonal (*nirguna*) and personal (*saguna*), and thereby unites the two contrary aspects. In his analysis, it is the personal aspect of the Divine that evolves, and the impersonal aspect is transcendent to the very

process of evolution: If everything is the manifestation of the evolved Brahman, it is his personal aspect which is manifested, and the transcendent Brahman seems to be irrelevant. Aurobindo does not clearly explain the function and the importance of the impersonal Brahman.

Aurobindo considers reality as one, and consequently there is the oneness of the Infinite and finite. Such a claim is at stake when he speaks of the role of the Supermind as the intermediary link between the lower and the higher hemispheres. It is through the Supermind that the Divine has its self-manifestation. The very principle of intermediary evokes the sense of two separate poles. Again the oneness of reality becomes vague with his conception that matter is essentially Spirit. As against the traditional Hindu concept that matter is evil, Aurobindo upholds its importance and positive character. But in his extreme identification of matter with Spirit, there lies a danger of attributing limitations to the Spirit. Besides, his view that matter stands as an obstacle to the evolutionary ascent of the Spirit reveals inconsistencies in his thinking.⁹ Aurobindo, on the one hand, upholds the identity between Spirit and matter, and on the other differentiates between them. Though the synthetic approach of unity in multiplicity is attractive to the mind, one's concrete experience creates vagueness and inconsistency.

D. PANTHEISM VERSUS PANENTHEISM

The relation between God and the world is an age-old and perennial inquiry in philosophical circles. The questions asked are: whether God is independent of the universe, or is God a perfect being by himself? Various explanations have been advanced in order to explain the relation between the two, such as theism, pantheism, panentheism, etc.¹⁰ According to the classical theism, God is the independent universal cause, and the universe is dependent on God. Classical theology upholds the independence of God not only from the universe, but also from all created realities. God's existence, according to it, can be safeguarded even without the creation. Since God is free from creating a world, and even free from creating in a particular mode, the effects need not be directly following from the nature of the cause. An opposite conception is



pantheism that considers God as an inclusive reality. Consequently God is not independent of the cosmic totality which shares the divine essence. Contemporary thinkers, especially the Process philosophers, do not consider both theism and pantheism as contrary, but present an integration of the two. Such integration is referred to by the term panentheism.

The conception of the oneness of Reality, and the consequent identification of God with the cosmos prompt one to consider Indian philosophy as pantheistic. This criticism could be extended to Sri Aurobindo too. Pantheism is the view which identifies God with the sum of things and denies His transcendence. If the nature of the absolute is exhausted completely by the course of the world, and if the two become one, it is then pure pantheism. Within a pantheistic perspective, God is not conceived as transcending the universe and so is not thought of as Creator or Providence. It rejects the Creator-creature distinction.¹¹ According to the Upanishads the present world is not something distinct and separate from Brahman, existing side by side with Brahman and Atman, but is one and the same with them.¹² The entities of the world are but knots in the rope of Brahman's development. Brahman is the sole and the whole explanation of this world of ours and all that happens therein. This Upanishadic theory too evokes the criticism levelled against pantheism. But a closer view of Indian philosophy will convince us that it is far from pantheism in its strict sense.

It is true that the Upanishads contain passages in which Brahman is represented as claiming identity with all sorts of things. But the pantheistic and polytheistic tendencies expressed in the Vedas and the Upanishads are countered by other passages that offer a more monotheistic and henotheistic views. The plurality of the Vedic gods leads one to polytheism. However, a survey of the Vedic religion will enable us to find here neither polytheism nor monotheism but a simple primitive stage of belief to which both of these may be said to owe their origin. Instead of sticking to either monotheism or polytheism, Max Müller considers Vedic religion as 'henotheism.' It is a belief in single gods, each in turn standing out as the highest.¹³

Henotheism does not mean polytheism, but a belief in a particular divinity for a particular occasion. One can also observe a gradual transformation of the henotheistic belief of the Vedas into the spiritual monotheistic belief of the Upanishads.

There are passages in the Rig Veda and the Upanishads which declare that the reality is not exhausted by the world process. RV, 10.90.3 states that all beings are only a fourth of the Purusha, while the three other fourths remain immortal in the shining regions.¹⁴ According to the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad one foot of Brahman consists of the three worlds, the second of the triple knowledge of the Veda, the third of the three vital breaths, while the fourth, exalted above the dust of earth, shines as the sun.¹⁵ What the Upanishads declare is not that the universe is God, but universe is in God. The Upanishads do not highlight the immanent nature of God at the expense of His transcendent nature. God is greater than any of His manifestations or of the universe. God is as much and more beyond the universe, as the human personality is beyond the body, which is the instrument of its life here.¹⁶ The Hindu concept establishes an intimate relationship between God and the universe. But it neither imprisons God in the world, nor separates Him from the world. God expresses Himself in the world, and the world is the expression of His life. God in the infinite fullness of His being transcends His actual manifestations. What the Upanishads want to emphasize is the indwelling presence of the Divine in all the nook and corner of the universe. They affirm that the fundamental element of all existence is God Himself. Such a belief is fundamental to all the religions. In this sense, the religion of the Upanishads is not pantheism.

The central characteristic of Indian theistic philosophy is not pantheism, but panentheism. The line between pantheism and panentheism is narrow. Pantheism holds that God is the sum of the realities, and there is true identity between the God and the cosmos. It considers everything as part of God, or as an aspect of the Divine. Panentheism seeks a middle ground between classical theism and pantheism, preserving the former's claim that God has intellect and will and the latter's sense of intimate connection between God and universe. In panentheism, God is a



person who includes the universe, or a soul whose body is the universe. Pantheism is the conception that everything has existence in God, without exhausting the infinity of the divine nature. According to it, there is an intimate relationship and dependence between the created and the creator. The world is perceived as the fulfilment of God's creative possibility. The world has no dependent existence, and it has to exist by and in the Infinite: "No finite can exist in itself and by itself, it exists by the Infinite and because it is of one essence with the Infinite."¹⁷ Aurobindo does not hold the common principle of the pantheism strictly, it has the spirit of pantheism that everything rests in God.

The characteristics of pantheism become more evident when seen vis-a-vis the theory of creation. There is a difference between the Western and the Indian understanding of creation. While the Christian philosophy speaks of creation, the Indian philosophy understands it as becoming: "Creation is not a making, but a becoming in terms and forms of conscious existence."¹⁸ Aurobindo does not agree with the Christian concept of creation "out of nothing" (*ex nihilo*); "creation is not a making or bringing into being of that which was non-existent."¹⁹ Causality is seen as a mere transformation or modification of the cause into effect. For Hinduism creation is a "centrifugal (deifugal) movement in which the produced being is a degradation of the original, divine plenitude," whereas Christian theology emphasizes "the act of the free will of God in effecting a being with its own new act of existing (*novitas essendi*) which depends on him."²⁰ The difference between the West and the East is that while the former emphasizes the efficient cause, the latter underscores the material cause.

For the Western thinking, creation requires causes. The word 'creation' signifies both an action and an object produced by it. Creation is then an action by which the beings are brought out of the universal cause i.e., the Self-Existent Being. Creation necessarily presupposes the existence of the Self-Existent being with His ideas and His power. The self-existent being i.e., God, brings into existence things corresponding to His divine ideas by His divine infinite power. The western theory of creation is best expressed in St. Thomas Aquinas, who gives a

metaphysical basis for creation. He considers that in the wake of constant changes and new evolutions in the cosmos, the reason for the existence cannot be sought in the created things themselves, but must be referred to an external cause. The theory of causality explains the meaning and dynamism of creation itself.

Following Aristotle, St. Thomas understands causality in four principles: matter, form, the origin of motion, and purpose, and the final cause. The material and formal causes are intrinsic and constitutive of corporeal beings. It is the intrinsic relation between matter and form that constitutes the existence of a concrete thing: the form perfects, actuates, and specifies matter, and the matter individuates the form. The material cause may be described as that out of which something is made; and the formal cause is that pattern in a thing according to which it is made and defined. The efficient and final causes are extrinsic to the being caused and are considered as agent and end respectively. The efficient cause is "what makes something to be."²¹ It is a productive action or efficiency that creates a thing. The final cause is that purpose for which something is done. It is the final cause that influences the efficient cause to act.

St. Thomas explains that fourfold causality by a single cause, i.e., the efficient cause. His basis for the efficient causality could be derived either from the Platonic source, that everything that is created must necessarily be created by some cause, or from the Aristotelian source, that everything that is in motion must have been moved by something else (ST. I. 2.3; SCG. I.13). For St. Thomas, even the final cause can be related to the efficient cause. The end or purpose appears as a model, and it is the artist who grants the being to a particular thing. In the Divine Being we have the actuality of all reality and all forms (ST. I. 4.1), and the whole world is a likeness of God (ST. I.4.3). It is in demonstrating the existence of God by efficient causality that we can speak of creation. Since God is absolute and infinite, He contains in himself the being and perfection of all creatures.

The Christian conception of creation is creation "out of nothing" (*ex nihilo*) rather than "emanation" or "outflow" from God's own nature.



Creation *ex nihilo* means that there is no pre-existing stuff whatsoever, and things have come to exist solely because of the Word and creative power of God. The expression "out of nothing" does not mean that nothing is a reality out of which God makes things. It means only a sequence from non-being to being. Creation is a free act of God, who not only created the universe in the beginning, but also sustains or conserves it by His power. Christian theology believes in the divine conservation of creatures, affirming that no creature exists unless God actively sustains its existence. It is, in other words, a "continuous creation" (*creatio continua*). But it should not be confused with *ex nihilo* that brings into existence something that previously did not exist. When he conserves some being, he sustains the continued existence of a being that is already in existence.

Creation is also a relation. There is a twofold relation: real in creatures and logical in Creator. God is the source and cause of all existence and existents. Creation owes its existence to God and there is the dependency of creatures on God as the Infinite Cause. As the creatures depend completely on the creator God for their existence, there is a real dependence and relation with God. God's relation to the creatures is not real in this sense, since His Existence is in no way determined by the creatures. He does not become part of their substance, and therefore His relation with them is like an agent who is present in the subject on which it operates. In so far as the creatures receive their 'being' from the Infinite Being, God's presence diffuses in all things intimately as their efficient cause. The intimate relation between the creature and the creator leads towards participation. Participation expresses both the bond uniting the creature to the creator, and the separation which prohibits them from intermingling. It takes away any pantheistic conception along with the interaction between God and the world. There is the fundamental ontological distinction between the creator and the creatures: creation is by God, but not out of God. God bestows on creatures a being that is their own and not His. In the creative schema, God is considered as the efficient cause, and not as the material cause.

As it has been already explained, Indian philosophy does not have a systematic presentation of the theory of creation. Instead of the theory of creation, Indian thinkers deal with the principle of becoming or of evolution. Though in a mythological language certain Vedic hymns allude to the creation of the cosmos, it is the Samkhya system that contains the early traces of the philosophical ideas. Later on the Vedantic thinkers too contributed theories regarding causality. Accordingly there developed two important theories regarding causality: *parinamavada* and *vivartavada*, representing the Samkhya and the Vedanta systems respectively. According to the *parinamavada* the cause really changes into the effect while according to *vivartavada* this changing of the cause into the effect is not real but only illusory. Clay turning into pot is an example of *parinamavada*, while the rope's appearing as a snake is an example of *vivartavāda*.

The early Samkhya system understands causality in terms of three principles: a) the emanation of each principle from a preceding one by modification (*tattvavikara*), b) the manifoldness of phenomenal appearances, according to varying proportions of the *gunas* (*gunaparinama*), and c) the existence of the effect in the cause (*satkarya*). According to these theories, creation is an emanation or an emission from the Creator, and consequently there cannot be a Creator operating on matter outside of himself. Since creation is an emission, the effect (the created thing) pre-exists in the cause itself. The varying phenomenal appearances are to be explained in terms of different combinations of the three *gunas*, namely *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.

Basing on the earlier Samkhya theory, the Classical Samkhya developed the theory of creation known as *satkaryavada*, a theory according to which the effect and the cause are equally real, the former being a modification of the latter. As against the Christian thinking, the Samkhya system does not believe in the theory of "creation out of nothing," but only posits the transformation of the cosmos from the fundamental principle, *Prakrti*. According to the Samkhya system, the effect pre-exists in the cause in a concealed or in a latent form, and therefore the effect is only a modification (*parināma*) or a manifestation of the cause, and not a new creation.



Causation is then nothing more than the manifestation or the transformation (*parinama*). In reality the effect and cause are different names of one and the same reality in different states.

Vivartavada is the doctrine of phenomenal development, according to which "the cause produces the effect without itself undergoing any change whatsoever." Here Brahman gives rise to appearances only, and therefore there is no real transformation. Viewed in the light of this theory, Brahman only appears as the world. It is here that the theory of *maya* enters the scene. Ramanuja, like the Samkhya system, accepts *parinamavada*. But according to Ramanuja, the universe is the result of Brahman while according to Samkhya, the universe is the result of *Prakrti*. Ramanuja's view is called *Brahma parinamavada*, and the Samkhya view is *Prakrtiparināmavāda*.

There is an overturn of the Christian emphasis of efficient cause. The Samkhya, while making the difference between the efficient and the material causes, emphasizes the latter. It is the material cause that enters into the effect while the efficient cause acts only from without. The efficient cause is conceived as negative in its nature. It is required only to remove obstacles and to determine the direction in which it is to exhibit movement. Despite the fact that the effect is hidden in the cause before it is manifested, an efficient cause is needed to make it manifest. In order to obtain oil it is necessary to crush the seeds. In the absence of this cooperating power or energy, the effect cannot be made manifest.

Aurobindo considers the Absolute as the Creator of the world as well as its material cause: "He does not create out of a void, out of a Nihil or out of an unsubstantial matrix of dream. Out of himself he creates, in himself he becomes; all are in his being and all is of his being."²² But he does not limit his conception of the Divine in terms of immanence. He sees Brahman as Transcendent too. Brahman "dwells within man and Nature but is greater than man and Nature."²³ It is by accepting the transcendent dimension of the Absolute that Sri Aurobindo could present involution. Complete immanence would mean that Brahman cannot evolve further. An efficient causality can be attributed to Absolute and

thereby a distinction can be established between the Absolute and the created. Accordingly Sri Aurobindo's philosophy cannot be termed as pantheistic, rather could be considered as panentheistic.

Though Sri Aurobindo agrees with the Christian thinking regarding God as the efficient cause, the dependency of the finite on the Creator, and the freedom of God in the act of creation, there are divergences between him and the Christian notions. Against the Christian teaching of "creation out of nothing" and the denial of God as material cause, Aurobindo affirms that Brahman is also the material cause by denying that creation is possible out of nothing. He seems to consider the Christian concept of nothing as the material out of which God creates. It is in fact a misunderstanding of the Christian concept of "creation out of nothing" which actually refers only to God's infinite Will and Power and His Freedom in creating the universe. Besides, Aurobindo believes that what is created out of nothing is essentially nothing or is an illusion. It seems as if his criticism of the concept of "nothing is not against the Christian philosophy, but against the *sunyavada* theory of the Buddhists, a theory that affirms that everything is void. He writes: "It is not possible that they are made out of a Nothing, a Non-Existence other than the Absolute; for that will erect a new dualism, a great positive Zero over against the greater indeterminable X we have supposed to be the one Reality."²⁴

Though Aurobindo criticizes the Christian notion of "creation out of nothing," he assumes its spirit. He agrees with the Christian theology that there is nothing beyond the Absolute in the act of creation. By considering God as the material cause, he affirms that there is nothing other than the Absolute. His concept of God as 'material cause' should not be understood as to mean God as the material stuff with which the universe is created. It only means that the Absolute God is the ground and source of all the existents. By considering God as the material cause, he asserts all the more the immanent presence of the Divine here on earth and thereby reduces the gap between both the Infinite and the finite, and the finite realizes its existence as the participation in the Divine Existence. It has to be



asserted that the Christian conception and Aurobindo's view regarding creation are not opposed to each other, but are presented from different angles. While for Aurobindo, the dependence and relation are intrinsic (since Brahman is both the efficient and the material cause), for the Christian view they are extrinsic (Brahman is only the efficient cause). Aurobindo's integral vision of reality affirming the finite as being part of the Infinite God, and the intrinsic relation of the cosmos as being the Absolute God, places him within a theistic and pantheistic tradition. Aurobindo acknowledges his reliance upon the theistic trend of Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita that teaches the Hindus the ways and means to love and serve God. The whole approach of Hinduism towards this goal of life goes in line with the Christian theism. There are such a lot of similarities between Christianity and Hinduism regarding their conception of God.

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