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WHITEHEAD AND AUROBINDO ON THE QUESTION OF EVIL: DOES THE EAST CONTRIBUTE ANYTHING NEW TO THIS ENIGMA?

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The classical theistic point of view identifies creativity and God, and God is the Supreme Being who alone is worthy of all metaphysical qualifications. And thus we have God, paying Him all metaphysical compliments and conceived as the foundation of metaphysical situation, with its ultimate activity. For Whitehead, such a perception of God will have the ineluctable consequence that "there can be no alternative except to discern in Him the origin of all evil as well as good." Therefore, more than anything else it was to deal with the problem of evil in a reasonable way that he distinguished creativity and God.¹ Whitehead rather conceives God as the supreme ground of limitation: then it is pertaining to God's very nature that He "divides Good from Evil" (SMW 179). It is for the same reason that Whitehead denied the notion of God as creator.

01. Whitehead's treatment of the problem of evil has invited various responses from scholars. For instance, Ford's comment that the "process theism of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne was clearly designed to circumvent" the persistent difficulty of the problem of evil confronted by classical theism (Ford 1967; 1973, 287). On the other hand, Madden and Hare observed that "process theism lies shipwrecked in the very same shoals it sought to avoid" (cited Ford 1973, 287).

1. God is the Source of Good Alone and not of Evil

Whitehead states that there are two types of evil: discord (physical and mental) and triviality – “Now evil is exhibited in physical suffering, mental suffering, and the loss of the higher experience in favour of the lower experience” (RM 92). Whitehead states that there are two types of evil: discord (physical and mental) and triviality – “Now evil is exhibited in physical suffering, mental suffering, and the loss of the higher experience in favour of the lower experience” (RM 92). What is important with regard to God and evil from a Whiteheadian point is that God is certainly not the source of evil, rather of Good alone. For him, God by definition is good. And in no way the goodness of God is compatible with evil. Whitehead’s presentation of God as the persuading power can be traced back to Plato. For Plato, God is not the cause of evil, but only of good.

The God, if he be good, is not the author of all things, as the many assert, but he is the cause of a few things only, and not of most things that occur to men. For few are the goods of human life, and many are the evils, and the good is to be attributed to God alone; of the evils the causes are to be sought elsewhere, and not in him (Republic II. 379).²

For Whitehead, “the possibility of genuine evil is rooted in the metaphysical (i.e., necessary) characteristics of the world” itself (Griffin 1976, 276).³ To quote Whitehead: “The categories governing the determination of things are the reasons why there should be evil” (PR 223). The metaphysical category here referred to is creativity (concrescence and transition embody its two forms). This is the reason why Whitehead maintains that any actuality is endowed with twofold power: power of self-creation and of other creation. In the classical sense of causation these two refer to final causation and efficient causation respectively.

Thus, for Whitehead the “freedom inherent in the universe is constituted by this element of self-causation” (PR 88). In virtue of its self-causation actual occasions have the power of self-determination. Whitehead points out that “All actual entities share with God this character of self-causation. For this reason every actual entity also shares with God the characteristics of transcending all other actual entities, including God” (PR 222). Therefore, evil arises from actual occasion’s capacity to transcend the divine purpose. “So far as the conformity is incomplete, there is evil

02. This points also to the fact that God does not create *ex nihilo*. What He did is that he brought out an ordered cosmos out of chaos – from a sphere which was “moving in an irregular and disorderly fashion” (*Timaeus* 30; Griffin 1976, 39).

03. David Roy Griffin. *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976.

in the world" (RM 60). Thus, evil originates from the capacity of the world not to conform to the divine purpose. Here Whitehead's reasoning pursues the classical conception that "so far as the conformity is incomplete, there is evil in the world" (RM 60).⁴ In this respect, the responsibility for evil is taken away from God and is attributed to the enjoyment of freedom by the creatures. God has given us freedom and evil is the product of freedom (Hartshorne). (Then the question is can we not apply Hume's reasoning here too that if God has given freedom why haven't he given a better freedom that spontaneously lead to good?)

If God is not the source of evil, rather of Good, Whitehead's distinction of creativity and God on the grounds of evil seems ambivalent. Whitehead maintains that "God has in his nature the knowledge of evil, of pain, and of degradation, but it is there as overcome with what is good. Every fact is what it is, a fact of pleasure, of joy, of pain, or of suffering" (RM 149). The question emerges is how does God overcome evil by good? In responding to the facts of evil in the world God provides ideal aims for the next state of the world designed to overcome the evil. (This ideal aim is also named "ideal consequent.") Whitehead argues that

Each actual occasion gives to the creativity which flows from a definite character in two ways. In one way, as a fact ... it contributes a ground. [...] In another way, as transmuted in the nature of God, the ideal consequent as it stands in his vision is also added (RM 151).

Overcoming here means transforming. That is why Whitehead further states:

Its very evil becomes a stepping stone in the all embracing ideal of God. Every event on its finer side introduces God into the world. Through it his ideal vision is given a base in actual fact to which He provides the ideal consequent, as a factor saving the world from the self-destruction of evil (RM 149). The Kingdom of heaven is not the isolation of good from evil. It is the overcoming of evil by good (RM 148).

Thus, in the Whiteheadian perspective to conceive evil in light of divine economy is not a valid answer. On the contrary Whitehead finds the reason of evil own destruction in nature itself: "The categories governing the determination of things are [...] also the reasons why, in the advance of the world, particular evil facts are finally transcended" (PR 223). Another interesting point we note here is the annihilation of evil in the evolutionary process of the world, a point of convergence between Whitehead and Aurobindo with regard to the question of evil.

04. It is also a point both Whitehead and Aurobindo discuss while they deal with the problem of evil.

Whitehead argues that one cannot start a metaphysical investigation having some preconceived ideas about God. God as the Ultimate has only religious grounds and not metaphysical reasons. In the classical understanding, from a religious point of view, everything depends on the will of a personal God. For Whitehead, such a view has validity only from a religious point of view. However, if one is to ask for the metaphysical implications of such a view the problem of evil comes up immediately. If everything occurs in accordance with the Will of God, He should be responsible for both good and evil in the world, which does not go in line with the Goodness of God. Whitehead clearly states that the nature of the God-World relation depends not on the will of God, rather "metaphysics requires that the relationship of God to the world should lie beyond the accidents of will and that they be founded upon the necessities of the nature of God and the nature of the World" (AI 168).

However, Whitehead's emphasis on the goodness of God shall not be mixed up with the classical understanding. For, in the classical perspective, Being was equated with Good and God was the Ultimate Being and thus the Ultimate Good. For Whitehead, it is no more acceptable today. We are no longer able to equate Being and Good. Evil is not just the absence of good; rather it has become the presence of something. Evil is a reality. In other words, being can be evil as well as good. Today one has to account both for the upward and downward movements of order; both for good and bad being. For Whitehead, evil is the actualization of a possibility at a wrong time. "Evil is the half-way house between perfection and triviality. It is the violence of strength against strength" (AI 276). Two things, which are not bad in themselves, when they come together sometimes in reality turn out to be evil. If something is evil it is not the way of God, even God's mysterious ways cannot account for or justify evil. "God is oriented towards good, towards the victory of the good over the evil" (Cloots, 1978, 95). If one equates being with good and God is taken to be the ultimate being, one has to say also that God is the source of evil.

One can also look at the problem of evil from another perspective. If God is Almighty and his vision of the world is perfect, why does he not make things in such a way that an incomplete response is impossible? Does God create only the possibility to act not according to his vision? For Whitehead, God does not create freedom at all. And possibility to act can be both good and bad. However, God is the only urge towards the good. Moreover, 'Almighty' does not mean that we can do something and God can do everything. The 'almightiness' should not be looked upon quantitatively but qualitatively. In other words, that means, we have to look for the richest form of power and that is not the power of "ants", but of language or persuasion. But a still richer form of power is power of 'love'. Put differently,

'almightiness' has to be seen in terms of love or loving (De Pater 1999).⁵ That is why Whitehead conceives God's power as power of persuasion.

In the Whiteheadian perspective, God does not prevent or dominate evil, but lets it be so. For, if God is able to overcome or prevent evil and is not doing it, he will not be a good God. Nevertheless "it is within his power to overcome evil because he accompanies every occasion in its creativity. Evil is not annihilated but healed." The role assigned to God by the Whiteheadians is to "lure the world to become more and more beautiful and a more valuable whole." God transcends the 'ultimate' evil as well in the sense that there is no eternal perishing in God as for every actual entity. Moreover, here the 'overcoming' does not mean 'preventing' evil, for that would render the concept of freedom (creativity) meaningless (Hartshorne). God's counter activity over the evil consists in the initial aim, a lure towards good that he gives to actual occasions, the best for that impasse. Therefore, it is stated that in God objective immortality becomes "everlastingness" (Cloots 1978, 96), which is the consequent nature of God.

It is argued that God does not dominate the whole of creativity and thus not within his [God's] power to prevent evil from happening (Cloots 1978, 96). This would mean basically three things: The first part of the sentence would mean that

- i) God is unable to control evil, for it is beyond his power
- ii) God respects the freedom of the creature
- iii) One gets the impression that creativity is the source of evil

The above idea would imply that if God were to dominate creativity there would have been no evil. In other words, one has to say that evil is simply there or it is *causa sui* - it is the coming together of two good things at the wrong moment. Here creative advance becomes the source of evil. The argument is that, in spite of the ideal ordering and divine luring, evil is an essential element of the creative advance, in the sense that this advance in nature is subject to decay and loss, because of the clash among the entities, for "they sometimes appear in the wrong place or time" (Mooney 221). Here one has to say that it is the self-creative nature of the actual occasions that is "responsible" for evil. Creativity as such is a neutral principle and, therefore, as such is not "responsible" for evil. What can be said is that creativity can be a source of good as well as evil. Here God is free of the allegation but God becomes a "powerless" reality, at least from the classical point of view. It

05. Wim A. De Pater. "Religious Language: The Ramsey Model." André Cloots & Santiago Sio (eds.). *Framing a Vision of the World: Essays in Philosophy, Science and Religion*. Leuven: Leuven University Press (1999) 99-128.

is certainly not the God of classical theology. The problem of course, in that case, the notion of God's power has to be re-considered. God's power can certainly no longer be what it was in classical theology, rather has to be understood as we have previously said, as power of persuasion. The presentation of God as the power of persuasion opens up a way for solving the problem of evil as well. The point is that the chaotic world has its own "movement" and hence cannot be completely coerced. This gives a novel perspective to God's *modus operandi* in general as persuasion of partially self-determining entities rather than as unilateral determination.

Whitehead maintains that the "power of God is the worship he inspires" (SMW 192). And in RM he puts the same as "the power by which God sustains the world is the power of himself as the ideal" (RM 149). From this we are motivated to argue further. For Whitehead, God is the "poet of the world" leading it with tender patience by his vision of truth, goodness and beauty. Here a classical theist would certainly raise objection: then how can God be the source of evil, even if we admit that God is the creator of the world, as understood in classical theism? If the very nature of God is Good and he leads everything only to Good, one can neither say that God is the source of evil nor that God creates evil, for only Good can come from him. But we have to face another question here: how can actual evil come out of his creation? God must at least have created or willed that possibility. All these have led us today to interpret variously the notion of God the creator.

Nevertheless, a renewed understanding of the notion of the creator also is very helpful in this regard. For instance, Desmond states that creation "has to do with metaphysical astonishment and perplexity about the ultimate, expressed in a metaphysical metaphor of origin that shapes the religious ethos of our ontological situation" (1999, 23). For Desmond, the notion of God the creator "gives some articulation to the ontological dependency of finite beings as a whole, even as it also tries to name something of the originative being of God ..." (1999, 39).⁶ Desmond maintains that "'Creator' addresses the mystery of the arche that gives rise to finite process itself" (1999, 33).⁷ Again, it is observed that "the act of creation is an always continuing origination and sustaining of finite being in being"

06. Desmond claims that his point of hyperbolic thought (the name Desmond gives to his understanding of the notion of creation) about creation is distinct from the 'holism' of panentheism. The distinctiveness consists in the fact that while panentheism focuses on the dynamism of becoming that moves towards a perfecting consummation, Desmond's point of view concerns the very becoming itself.

07. In this context Desmond relates his thought with the Hegelian view of the dialectical self-becoming of the origin. Desmond denies any form of self-becoming on the ground that "an origin that has to become itself to be itself must first be itself in order to become itself; else it is nothing, and there is no self-becoming" (1999, 33). Therefore, the Hegelian view of self-becoming says nothing about 'creation' which is other than itself. All self-becoming presupposes

(BB 255). What we see in present day interpretation of creation and creator is that often the literal adherence to the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* is given new dimensions. Here what is to be remembered is that if someone adopts the classical theistic view then evil in principle would be impossible for all beings come from God who is identified with the Good. And what we experience as evil is only absence of the good. Moreover, if God is being itself, how can there be independent beings, either for good or for bad? Or still, where does the power to sin come from? A return to the classical answers and solutions would help us to escape the problem of evil, but do not really confront and solve the problem of evil.

2. The Problem of Evil

In our discussion of the problem of evil in Whitehead we have come to the conclusion that the separation of creativity and God alone will not solve the problem of evil.⁸ Coming to Aurobindo, the issue gets more complicated when we learn that in spite of his recognition of evil he does not separate Sachchidananda and the Supermind to save Sachchidananda from being responsible for evil. Furthermore, Aurobindo does recognize God as the creator of the universe, a metaphysical compliment that Whitehead denied to God, also on the ground of the problem of evil. The immediate question then is how does Aurobindo solve the problem of evil? Who is responsible for evil? Could we formulate a reasonable solution for the problem of evil? If the world is a manifestation of the Absolute why evil and suffering occur? This problem encountered by all monistic philosophies is all the more true of Aurobindo's integral Advaitism, since for him the very manifestation is for Delight. One sees two contrasting responses with regard to how Aurobindo handles the problem.⁹ Precisely the question

"a more primal coming to be" which is the condition of possibility for any becoming at all, that which transcends the Hegelian 'whole'.

08. The problem of evil is amazingly many sided. This itself is an ample evidence for the fact that the "subject is quite in vogue in today's world" (Ruiz 587). Francisco Perez Ruiz. "God and the Problem of Evil: A Critical Review." *International Philosophical Quarterly* vol. XII (1972) 587-603. Today, what is for certain is that nobody denies the existence of evil in the world. For William James, presence of evil is a rock on which all forms of monism are wrecked (Srivastava 1968, 34).
09. It is very appropriate here to keep in mind that there are also differences of opinion regarding the way Aurobindo treats the problem of evil. For some, one of the chief merits of Aurobindo's philosophy is the way he deals with the problem of evil. In this regard it is credited to Aurobindo that he maintains realism with regard to evil, though he denies it any permanent status in cosmic existence. Thus Aurobindo could see even the problem of evil in light of the metaphysics of becoming. For some others, on the contrary, Aurobindo failed to deal adequately with the problem of evil and in that "he errs with the whole Hindu race." Review on "Srivastava's *An Introduction to Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy*." *Times Literary Supplement* (1943, cited in Srivastava 1956, 114).

is how does Aurobindo account for the problem of evil without separating being and power of being or Sachchidananda and the Supermind?

3. The Complexity of the Problem

Aurobindo discusses the problem of evil in conjunction with his integral non-dualistic thought. Moreover, he concurs with Whitehead in recognizing the reality of evil, perhaps over against the predominant trend of his own Indian predecessors who tried to explain it away by saying that evil is not real at all. Thus, Aurobindo is reluctant to accept the two major views with regard to the problem of evil. The first is that evil is unreal and is the product of ignorance, which was favoured by many early Indian thinkers, and which later became stereotyped as the general trend of Indian philosophy.¹⁰ The second extreme view, which Aurobindo disdains, is the Western approach which construes evil as a permanent feature of the world. In this perspective evil is as real as good and it explicates the co-existence of two opposing orders, one is of good and the other is of evil. However, primacy is given to good and God is identified with good. It is argued that the identification of good with God and the recognition of two opposing powers made the problem insoluble. The question that emerges is 'how can a God who is good itself allow evil? In this perspective, whatever view we uphold it would question God's omniscience or his omnipotence. Moreover, Aurobindo repudiates some of the popular views: (i) The view that there is an excess of pain and suffering in the world. Aurobindo's contention is that such a perspective does not present the true picture, in fact, it is an "exaggeration, an error of perspective" (LD 93). However, this response does not solve the problem, rather by that we are trying to escape the problem. Nevertheless, the question remains, if everything is a manifestation of Sachchidananda, where does evil come from? (ii) The attempt to answer it in light of the 'Law of Karma' – the view that our present sufferings are the outcome of our antenatal sins. The Law of Karma does not solve the problem, for, where it is suprema and inexorable there is no room for a moral and all-governing personal God. And (iii) Aurobindo rejects the traditional answers such as God permits evil as "a trial and an ordeal"

10. In this view evil can never assume a cosmic status, for it is only the product of ignorance and with the emergence of right knowledge it vanishes. It was the view generally promoted by Upanishads. In contrast to this view Aurobindo maintains that "as there are powers whose life is intimately bound up with the existence, the idea and the impulse of Good, so there are Forces whose life is bound up with the existence and the idea and the impulse of Evil. It is this truth of the cosmic Invisible that was symbolized in the ancient belief of a struggle between the powers of Light and Darkness, Good and Evil for the possession of the world and the government of the life of man; [...] invisible Personalities and Powers that draw man to the divine Light and Truth and Good or lure him into subjection to the undivine principle of Darkness and Falsehood and Evil" (LD 603).

(LD 94). He maintains that if God allows evil as a trial and an ordeal, such a God instead of being 'all Good and Love whom one worships' becomes a "God of might to whose law we must submit or whose caprice we may hope to propitiate" (LD 94).

4. God the Creator and the Enigma of Evil

Our concern here is to examine the compatibility of the notion of God as creator with the question of evil. Aurobindo initiates a shift from an extra-cosmic moral God to the Sachchidananda of Vedanta.¹¹ Sachchidananda is one existence that includes the world existence. And thus, Aurobindo states: "it is He that bears the evil and suffering in the creature in whom He has embodied Himself" (LD 95). Our God is not someone who stands aloof, rather 'the world is flesh of his flesh and bone of His bones'. As Whitehead himself observed, here God becomes a "fellow-sufferer" (PR 351), a striking convergence between Whitehead and Aurobindo. Sachchidananda is the supreme knower, or the only knower in all beings. Furthermore, since the world is a manifestation of Sachchidananda itself, any experience in the world is ultimately his own experience. Therefore, in Aurobindo the problem of evil takes a new turn in relation to God. The question of evil gets another dimension – the question is not 'why' but rather 'how' – How does God allow Himself to be involved in a world full of suffering? In other words, the question is no more why God, who is all 'Good and Loving' created evil, but rather why God, who is Supreme Bliss permits evil into his own nature and life?

Aurobindo treats the problem of evil in its three dimensions: (i) in its relation to the Absolute, the supreme Reality, (ii) its origin and place in the cosmic workings, and (iii) its action and point of hold in the individual being.

(i) With regard to the first point, for Aurobindo evil has no direct root in the supreme Reality itself nor is it a "fundamental or primary aspects of the Being" (LD 597). Here we have the convergence between Whitehead and Aurobindo in denying God as the source of evil. On the contrary, maintains Aurobindo, "these things [evil] are a by-product of the world-movement: the sombre flowers of falsehood and suffering and evil have their root in the black soil of the *inconscient*" (italics added). Evil is a by-product in the sense that it does not belong to the true nature of reality. It is not a permanent factor native to existence, for they are true only of

11. The ingenuity of Aurobindo is that he very well re-discovers the uniqueness of Indian concept of God which is transcendent as well as immanent (Srivostava 1956, 121). In the Indian perspective God's relation to the world is internal. Everything is in God and God in them. "The whole world is strung upon Me, as gems upon a string" (Gita vii, 7).

human "consciousness, true only of our partial knowledge and partial ignorance." Truth is relative to us because our knowledge is surrounded by ignorance (LD 598). Aurobindo's distinctive view of the problem of evil is that for him evil is not a permanent feature of universal existence. Nevertheless, being a realist, Aurobindo does not accept evil as mere illusion. He finds its root in the division of the Consciousness which itself is by virtue of its capacity for self-limitation. In this respect, ignorance is a development from knowledge by limitation viewed in light of the descent of consciousness. In this sense following statement of Aurobindo makes sense: "An involution of spirit in the inconscience is the beginning; an evolution in the Ignorance with its play of the possibilities of a partial developing knowledge is the middle, and the cause of the anomalies of our present nature, - our imperfection is the sign of a transitional state, a growth not yet completed" (LD 681). "Evil is the fruit of a spiritual ignorance and it will disappear only by the growth of a spiritual consciousness and the light of spiritual knowledge" (LD 631). The perception of human life as a process of continuous evolution in view of divinization also calls to mind that this spiritual ignorance itself is not a permanent state of life and therefore in this sense also evil does not have a permanent place in human life. In no way Aurobindo advocates that evil has a reality in the ultimate truth of Existence.

(ii) Coming to the second point that concerns the cosmic working of evil it has to be underscored that for Aurobindo, evil has only cosmic existence and pertain only to cosmic manifestations. "Only in cosmic manifestation that they become possible; they cannot pre-exist in the timeless being, for they are incompatible with the unity and bliss that are its substance. In cosmos also they cannot come into being except by a limitation of truth and good into partial and relative forms and by a breaking up of the unity of existence and consciousness into separative consciousness and separative being" (LD 601). However, in light of suffering and natural calamities, one is all the more prone to question the authenticity of the conscious principle that guides the universe.¹²

(iii) The second point is intimately connected to the third, for this cosmic existence is what accounts for the function of evil in individual being. It is the individual who feels the reality of evil in its most acute way. In the Aurobindonian perspective there cannot be evil where we have complete truth. In the same way, plurality itself is not evil and when we have complete mutuality of the consciousness evil has no voice.

12. Aurobindo is not unaware of these facts. On the contrary, he responds to it: "obviously this is an objection based on the limitations of our human intellect which seeks to impose its own particular rationality, good enough for limited human ends, on the general operations of the World-Force. We see only part of Nature's purpose and all that does not subserve that part we call waste. ... [but it] subserves well enough the large and universal purpose of things. That part of her intention ... Nature gets done ..." (LD 89).

It is when our self-assertiveness causes division and separation that evil enters. Aurobindo calls this kind of aggressive self-assertiveness egoism. Therefore, the material plane cannot be a place for the origin of evil, for there we don't have any consciousness. It is in the vital plane this separate assertiveness originates. The pain or the acuteness of suffering may result both from a sense of lack as well as from a noble discontent. The point is that we feel pain and suffering because we are conscious of another better state. Moreover, one can speak of evil only from the awareness of the sense of the good. And this "Divine discontent" is an ineluctable result of the spiritual nature of evolution. It reminds human beings that they have a higher destiny. It is this aspiration for the higher state that enables one to think that evil will be a thing of the past, amidst the acute suffering. Nevertheless, the reality of evil, irrespective of its source raises the question concerning divine bliss, it (divine *lila*) being the only reason for the manifestation of the universe.

5. Evil and Divine Bliss

Another important question comes up is if everything comes out of bliss and its nature is to realize bliss how do we speak about evil; what is their status? In other words, if everything is the manifestation of the Divine how does one account for the undivine elements in the divine existence? To answer this question one has to see this problem in its particularity. One of the ways through which evil presents itself is suffering and pain. Aurobindo claims that pain and suffering can be neutralized and in fact they can be turned into joy provided that there is a radical change of consciousness. He gives the example of a wounded soldier who fights for the country or a mother who cares for her child even at the cost of her own life. The complaint of the East towards the West is that it recognized the fact of evil in the world today and made a hasty conclusion that it is a permanent feature of it. In light of evolution the present stage can be considered only a preliminary stage and we may need to wait still for the higher stage of development, which is yet to disclose itself.¹³

It is observed that the presence of pain and evil do not contradict the universality of bliss. Our psychic being or soul is the eternal and immortal portion of the principle of bliss (Misra 1998, 17).¹⁴ Aurobindo clearly states that "there can be no artificial

13. However, Maitra observes that it is not true to say that the West has completely ignored the future dimension. In order to substantiate his point, for instance, he refers to C. E. M. Joad's *God and Evil*, from which one may deduce the future oriented solution for the problem of evil, though it is a very indirect reference (Maitra 1956, 127).

14. What the Upanishad states is also remarkable in this respect: "He who has found the bliss of the Eternal is afflicted no more by the thought, "Why have I not done the good? Why have I done evil?" One who knows the self extricates himself from both these things" (TU II. 9).

escape" from the problem of evil, for "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with its sweet and bitter fruits is secretly rooted" in the very human nature (LD 627). The moral and ethical dilemma¹⁵ can be overcome only by an inalienable conception of the delight of existence. An infinite, indivisible existence constitutes the self of things and the essential nature of this infinite existence is the infinite imperishable force of self-conscious being which itself has as its essential nature the infinite inalienable delight of being. The fundamental characteristic of this self-existence is that it keeps unadulterated its delight amidst form and formlessness, division and unity, in oneness and multiplicity, as well as in all sorts of experiences, pleasant, painful or neutral. The whole truth about delight of existence is beautifully presented by Aurobindo: "Delight is existence, Delight is the secret of creation, Delight is the root of birth, Delight is the cause of remaining in existence, Delight is the end of birth and that into which creation ceases" (LD 101).

6. The Interplay of Good and Evil

The all encompassing presence or the enigma of evil can be discerned from our own life. We are reminded that 'we are the light of the world'. In other words, 'we have to read ourselves as the signs of the good' (EB 76).¹⁶ Light in itself is something good and we ourselves feel it and we are signs of the good when we do something good in itself, or doing it for others. However, what is striking is that we manifest not only signs of the good, but also signs of evil. We are not only 'light of the world, but we become agents of darkness as well. I cannot see a better confession of this enigmatic human existence than that of St. Paul: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me" (Rom. 7, 19-20).

What is remarkable is that the questioner himself is questioned here. Then the answer remains other to us, in fact outside us. That is why it is rightly observed that we cannot completely answer extreme evil. The question still remains: who carries evil? With regard to the interplay of good as well as evil Aurobindo states the following:

The evolutionary intention acts through the evil as through the good; it has to utilise all because confinement to a limited good would imprison

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15. Aurobindo conceives the question of evil also as an ethical problem (LD 97). The argument is that it will be eliminated at a later stage of the evolution of consciousness. Below the human level we have an infra-ethical animal and beyond human level, in a supra-human life, one needs no ethics, for it transcends all ethical norms. However, the question is how convincing these answers are to a rational mind?
16. William Desmond. *Ethics and the Between*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.

and check the intended evolution; it uses any available material and does what it can with it: this is the reason why we see evil coming out of what we call good and good coming out of what we call evil; and, if we see even what was thought to be evil coming to be accepted as good, what was thought to be good accepted as evil, it is because our standards of both are evolutionary, limited and mutable. Evolutionary Nature, the terrestrial cosmic Force, seems then at first to have no preference for either of these opposites, it uses both alike for its purpose (LD 624-25).

Robindranath Tagore, Nobel laureate for literature, pursuing quite a similar line of thought has the following in this regard:

He has rapture of torture and passion and pain;
He delights in our sorrow and drives us to weeping,
Then lures with His joy and His beauty again (cited Roy 1982, 50).¹⁷

This statement of Tagore typically explicates the mind of the Indian sages with regard to the way of the Absolute. This state reveals the existence of duality but does not resolve it. The point of Aurobindo is that if one accepts the basic affirmation that everything has its origin in God one cannot but think of imperfection also as part of it. This is the wisdom of the East.

Good and evil come in with the development of mental consciousness; they exist in their rudimentary elements in the animal and primitive human mind, they develop with the human development. Good and evil are things which arrive in the process of the evolution; there is then the possibility that they will disappear in the process of the evolution. If indeed they are essential to its highest possible point of culmination, then they will remain; or if one of them be essential and the other non-essential, then that one will remain and its opposite will disappear (EDH 157).¹⁸

A question we raised previously comes up again: why does the divine not only tolerate but also maintain and encourage in its manifestation the imperfections and limitations?

17. Dilip Kumar Roy. *Six Illuminates of Modern India*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1982.

18. Aurobindo. *Essays Divine and Human*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1994.

7. Evil and Divine Economy

One of the distinguishing features of Indian philosophy is that it does not consider the issue of evil as a problem.¹⁹ Aurobindo stands distinct even when placing himself in the tradition of Indian *Gurus*, in his response to the question of evil. As we already noted, Aurobindo is a realist in his understanding of evil, over against the view of some Indian thinkers who tried to explain it away as a result of ignorance and having no existence of its own. He maintains that if falsehood, error, and evil appears and we feel and experience them in reality, there must be some reasons and necessity for their appearance and they will have some functions as well to accomplish "in the economy of the universe." Moreover, it cannot be "an inexplicable mystery of being, original and eternal, of which the divine All-Teacher is incapable of giving an account to himself or to us. There must be behind it a significance of the All-Wisdom itself, a power of the All-Consciousness which permits and uses it for some indispensable function in the present workings of our self-experience and world-experience" (LD 597). If evil appears in spite of the "complete and inalienable self-knowledge of the Brahman" it cannot be the result of "chance, an intervening accident, an involuntary forgetfulness or confusion of the Consciousness-Force of the All-Wise in the cosmos or an ugly contretemps for which the indwelling Spirit was not prepared and of which it is the prisoner erring in a labyrinth with the utmost difficulty of escape" (LD 597). For Aurobindo evil is only a stage in the evolutionary ascent. Evil appears only at a certain stage of evolution. Therefore, Aurobindo applies the theory of evolution in the case of evil as well.

The core of the Aurobindonian re-discovery of Upanishadic excellence is that if we consider evil as a permanent fact of the world, we will fail to solve the problem. Therefore, pursuing an Aurobindonian argument, what is demanded is an "*Umwertung aller Werte*" – a radical transformation of our whole outlook. In the Aurobindonian perspective what can effect this *Umwertung* is evolutionary perspective of nature. And evolution includes three aspects: widening, heightening and integration. What is meant by widening is the widening of the field giving greater possibility for the operations of the emerging principles. The heightening points to the ascent from grade to grade, from lower to higher; and thirdly, the principle of evolution here does not mean an abandoning of the lower stages as it ascends to the higher one, but rather a transformation of the lower stages, a lifting up of the lower stage and its integration with the higher. There is a dialectics involved in it. The higher, for Aurobindo, "is eternally present in the lower" and constitutes the eternal upward urge. He writes: "If in passing from one domain (or level) to another

19. A commendable reading for this topic would be *The Problem of Evil and the Indian Thought* by Arthur L. Herman in which the author analyses the various facets of the question.

we renounce what has been already given to us, if reaching to the mental life we cast away or belittle the physical life – which is our basis; or if we reject the mental and the physical in our attention to the spiritual; we do not fulfil God integrally” (quoted in Wadia 38). Therefore, for Aurobindo, this triple-faced evolutionary principle is the central truth of the universe and our failure to understand its nature and appreciate its value is the cause of the failure in handling the problem of evil adequately.

It is true that Aurobindo is a realist with regard to the existence of evil. Nevertheless, his occasional reference to ignorance, egoism and true knowledge as a solution to the problem makes his conception of evil ambiguous. The point is that if it is only the result of ignorance it is not real at all. But that would go against Aurobindo’s realism. Moreover, he tries to relate evil with divine economy, but did not supply a clear answer with regard to what that economy is.

The remaining question is how can the world be freed from Evil? Our analysis made it clear that the existence of evil is a cosmic problem. Therefore, any individual transformation will not solve the issue. What is demanded is a cosmic transformation, attainable by way of an evolutionary process. However, the condition of possibility of evolution is the Divine Grace, or divine assistance.

An important question still remains: whether we have solved or can solve the problem of evil either from a Whiteheadian or from an Aurobindonian point of view. It is still difficult to give a definite answer for such a question. Perhaps, a positive suggestion from Aurobindo and Whitehead is to see the problem of evil in light of evolution and to place it as a stage in the evolutionary process (PR 223). Nevertheless, it seems that they have not succeeded in articulating the source of evil in a reasonable manner. We do experience actual evil that transcends the domains human reasonableness. It seems that what all can do is to give some suggestions regarding the source as well as the means to remedy the problem of evil, but none can supply an intelligible argument with regard to its origin. The experience of evil is subjective and so also are the proposed solutions. Finally, what everyone can say is that evil is and is a matter of human experience. ■