

# THE MEANING OF HISTORY

Principal Miller Endowment Lectures 1976  
The University of Madras

by

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REPRINTED FROM *Journal of The Madras University*  
Volume XLIX No. 2, July 1977



UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS  
MADRAS-600005.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1977

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Price Rs. 1-50

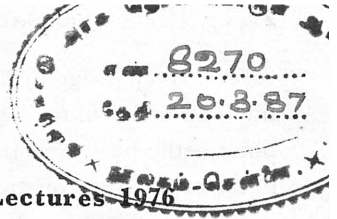
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PRINTED IN INDIA

AT AVVAI ACHUKKODAM, 96, P.V. KOIL STREET, MADRAS-13.

PART I

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R. K. TRIPATHI

First of all I would like to thank the syndicate of the University of Madras for the honour they have done me by inviting me to deliver the Principal Miller Endowment Lectures. When I look at the list of eminent scholars who have delivered these Lectures in the past I wonder whether I will be able to come up to your expectations. What adds to my difficulty is the fact that for the last several years, a number of persons have been talking about the same theme, namely, "The inner meaning of history as disclosing the one increasing purpose that runs through the ages". But my only hope is the fact that probably the audience is not the same and I may afford to repeat even what has already been said by my predecessors.

I

It seems to us that no body lives only in the present; concern for the future is found even in birds and animals. The present itself seems to take its colour and importance from the future or else the present is present and there is an end of the matter. If there were no case for the future the present itself would lose much of its meaning; the present is nothing but some kind of occupation with the future. While this is universal, interest in the past history is not universal; man is the only animal who has the peculiarity of being interested not only in the future but also in his past. Man alone and no other animal seems to have this interest in the past along with his concern for the future and occupation with the present. Man not only likes to know his past but also likes and tries to preserve it if possible. And he not only likes to preserve the past, he also likes to give meaning to it. It is this factor, namely, man's interest in his past that makes his history more complex than that of other animals. If there were only two points in man's life—the present and the

future, the passage from the one to the other would be in a straight line and hence much simpler. But it is not so; there is also a third point,—the past, and the problem is whether all the three points are in a straight line or otherwise. This is the problem concerning the meaning of history. Is human history going in a straight line or is it in a circle or is it going a zig zag way? We shall see later how people have taken different views of history. Here what we want to stress is man's interest in history because that is of great importance and puts man at the top of animal kingdom. The lowest animal is one which thinks only of the present and not of the future; a higher one is that which thinks of the future also. But the highest animal is one which thinks not only of the present and the future but also of the past.

## II

Now, why does man take interest in the past? Interest in the future is intelligible, but why is the past important? Man has always and every where been concerned with his past but the motives operating behind this interest do not seem to be the same always. Some people are interested in their past because they want to glorify themselves on the basis of their ancestry. Others seem to be more interested in pointing out the great decay and deterioration of man in the present as compared to the past. Some times knowledge of the past is used in order to justify the present and to predict the future. There are others who refer to the past only to show that man at present is much more advanced than his ancestors. So there can be obviously different ways of looking at the past and its relation to the present and the future. But whatever be the motive behind our interest in history and whatever be the way of our looking at history, it is certain that somehow or in some sense or the other, we do regard history as meaningful. This is because history unfolds to us the nature of man and his aspirations; it seems to provide a kind of mirror to man in which man can see himself. Man's history is not like the history of other animals, much less like the history of rivers and mountains. Man's history is the history of a being who has aspirations, who has the freedom to make efforts and who has the capacity to "look before and after". So the question concerning the meaning of history is really a question concerning man's nature and his destiny.

One has therefore to understand the nature of man and his place in the universe in order to develop a perspective which enables us to think of the meaning of history. It is therefore not by accident that philosophy and religion alone take up the question concerning the meaning of history; in philosophy and religion alone the question of the nature of man and his place in the universe is considered. The historian can give us history but the moment he proceeds to give us the meaning of history he forthwith becomes a philosopher speculating about the cosmos. It is our philosophy of man and his place in the universe that determines our view of the meaning of history. So there can be as many types of the philosophies of history as there are types of the philosophy of man and universe, and we shall consider some of the important ones here.

### III

But before we consider the important views of history, let us briefly notice the three broad ways of looking at history. They are: A. the view that the past was much better than the present and that the future will be worse as there is gradual deterioration; B. the view that the past was primitive and backward and that the present is a great advance on the past; the future will be better as there is gradual progress; C. the view that there is neither progress nor regress of the world as a whole and always progress and regress are temporary and regional.

The view that the past was glorious and the present has gone down in comparison to the past is a view very commonly held in eastern countries specially India. The idea of the Golden Age is very common. Of the four yugas, the first or the *satya yuga* was the best and after that there has been a gradual fall. The worst or the darkest is said to be the *Kali* or the fourth age through which we are passing at present. The Purāṇas present a grim picture of the *kali* age and threaten us that much worse days are ahead. Of course after *Kaliyuga* there will be *satya yuga* again but if we take into consideration only the four yugas, there is gradual deterioration. Though this view seems to be more a matter of faith than of historical evidence, some people try to prove it by pointing out how there has been deterioration even in one's life term. It is not that

these people are blind to the great technological advance these days but that they believe that things were much better in the hoary past. It seems to us that deterioration referred to in this view is more of social and moral life than to science and technology. Perhaps some people would hold that in science and technology also the earlier age was better.

In contrast to the above view there is the view more prevalent in the west than in the east that there is constant progress in all spheres and that we are heading towards an age the like of which was never there before. This view seems to be under the influence of the theory of evolution and so comparatively it is a modern approach. Religions of the west also seem to lend support to this view in as much as the birth of Jesus Christ and Mohammad seems to be a historical event of great cosmic significance. History is said to take a definite turn after that.

If we compare the above two views we find that the former is much older than the latter. It is also clear that the former takes into consideration a much longer span of history than the latter. Moreover, the latter view depends on a certain theory of creation or on a certain view of evolution and some people may reject both. However, the merit of these views is that for them history has a certain direction which gives unity to it; they may be based on evidence or faith but they do have a cosmic way of reading history.

The third view or the view that the world has always been like this and it will always be like this is the view of the Mīmāṃsakas who do not believe either in creation or evolution. The world has neither a beginning nor an end. There never was a time when the world was not and there never will be a time when the world will not be there. Nor is there any governor or ruler of the world; the world is governed merely by the law of Karma. The Jainas and the Buddhists also seem to take the same view. According to these systems the process of events in the world have no direction and no general meaning: events may have meaning for individuals but there is no such thing as cosmic meaning. The Jainas and the Buddhists do believe in periodic birth of Buddhas and Tīrthankaras, who give a direction to the world but they do not seem to believe

in any cosmic plan or purpose of history as such. It may be difficult to prove this view conclusively but is not easy to disprove it either, if we take a sufficiently long view of history. Neither the doctrine of creation nor that of evolution is conclusively proved. So the *Mīmāṃsā* view is not more vulnerable than the theory of creation or of evolution as Kant has very well shown. Unless we are able to comprehend the whole span of time we can say nothing about the whole history of the world. Nor can it be said that the *Mīmāṃsā* view gives no perspective, because it does require us to shed all false hopes and false fears and asks us to accept the world as it is and to depend only on our *Karmas*.

#### IV

We have seen above diametrically opposed views of history. If the interpretation of history depends on our knowledge of history, why should there be such diametrically opposed interpretations? There are good reasons for it. First of all, we do not know our whole history; our knowledge of history is rather piecemeal and fragmentary. The whole history of man is neither known nor can be known. Even the present is not fully known, what to talk of the past. And even the little that is known is unconnected. Secondly, even the history which we possess is not wholly objective. In fact it is seriously doubted whether history can be wholly objective or as objective as other sciences are. There is no doubt that the predilections and prejudices of historians do affect their presentation of history. Under these circumstances, how is it possible to say any thing about the whole history of man? And even if an attempt is made, what will be its value? No inductive generalisation is possible on the basis of insufficient data, and if one does try to do it, one will be faced with any number of rival views.

It seems to us therefore that unless we are able to see some kind of inner unity and continuity underlying the history of the universe, it will not be possible to have a view of the whole or a perspective to the whole. This inner unity of history like the unity of nature must be based on some a priori concept or idea. It is philosophy and not history that determines our view of history. That is why the different philosophies of history that we have are based on some a priori principle explicitly or implicitly. Basically there seem to be two types of the

philosophies of history - the rationalistic and the religious - and both these are in some sense a priori. We are aware that there is also a third kind of the philosophy of history which is called positivist, but this view also seems to proceed on an a priori basis. So our thesis is that though a philosophy of history may be seemingly based on history it is nonetheless and necessarily a priori. These philosophies of history only try to fit facts of history into their a priori scheme; they do not prove the a priori principle itself. After all there is a difference between illustrating a principle by some facts of history and proving the principle itself. Let us now look at some of these principles.

## V

Interest in history or the direction of history seems to be there in the Bible but it became prominent after the advent of Christianity. The ancient Greeks though they had literature like epics do not seem to be really interested in history. They do not give us a philosophy of history in the modern sense of the term in as much as they do not interpret the movement of history. But the Greeks were certainly interested in views about the cosmos and in man's destiny. They were interested more in the problem of being and becoming or change and permanence. Some of them like Parmenides and Plato accepted the unchanging alone as real; others like Aristotle regarded both change and permanence as real while philosophers like Heraclitus thought that only change was real. In spite of such differences in their metaphysical outlook they seem to believe in a cyclic order. There is no such thing as movement in a straight line whether of progress or of regress. There are ups and downs as for example in political regimes and there are repetitions but no straight movement in a fixed direction. It is only when we take a short area of the circle into consideration that it appears to be a straight line. This view seems to be based on the observation of the cycle of day and night or of seasons. However, there seems to be one feature of Greek thought which is notable. According to the Greeks human nature does not change and remains always the same. Most of the Greeks believed in the spiritual destiny of man.

Coming to the modern age when the fashion of having a philosophy of history seems to have started, we may begin with Hegel



who may be regarded as the best representative of an a priori view of history. But the origin of the view is traceable to Kant. It is strange that Kant who was opposed to the use of the categories of understanding beyond experience should have suggested an a priori view of history. If we cannot know nature a priori, we cannot also know human history a priori. But the teleological argument for which Kant had a weakness made him feel that if there is a Divine providence (and we must accept that as a presupposition of moral life) then human history in spite of the chaotic facts of history must have a meaning and must have a goal. There must be some continuity and progress. Kant admits that just as a part-view of nature does not support our belief in design, so also a short view of history would not support belief in progress. Besides this belief in progress, there is another suggestion which Hegel seems to get from Kant. Man has two conflicting tendencies in his nature - one for aloofness (freedom) and the other for society. For man society is at once an obstacle as well as a necessity. Hence there is the need to have a society in which the two conflicting tendencies are harmonised, a society which "combines with greatest possible freedom, the most rigid determination and guarantee of the limits of this freedom, in such a way that the freedom of each individual may coexist with that of others".<sup>1</sup>

Kant has been criticised for his faith in moral progress and the progress of society. But Hegel seems to have accepted Kant's idea of progress and his ideal of society. Hegel tries to assimilate these ideas in his system. Nonetheless while Kant's view seems to be theistic, Hegel's view which emphasises immanence is absolutistic. For Hegel reason and reality being one, reason reveals the nature of reality. Reason being dialectical, reality also is dialectical and not static. The dialectical movement is horizontal as well as vertical. When it is vertical it means transition from one stage to another and this is history. Horizontally we have the opposition of being and non-being, of the subjective and the objective, of the one and many and so on and that is the universe. The vertical movement is from the point of view of freedom. To quote Hegel's words, "The eastern nations knew only that one is free; the Greek and the Roman world only that some are free; while we know that all men absolutely (man as man)

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1. Walsh, Introduction to Philosophy of History, p. 123.

are free."<sup>2</sup> World history "exhibits this development of the consciousness of freedom on the part of spirit and of the consequent realisation of that freedom".<sup>3</sup> The process, according to Hegel, culminates in the Christian culture of the Germanic nations. Freedom for Hegel is not complete negation of control; it is not the freedom to do what you like; rather it is freedom in a society or the freedom to do what you ought to. The individual and the society are both free though related to each other in different stages of development.

Hegel takes nations as units and tries to support his view by quoting history. He presents a neat scheme but his knowledge of history is as poor as it is necessary for him. His generalisations are sweeping. As regards the dialectical movement of spirit, it is not clear as to what happens after the attainment of freedom. What would Hegel say if he were present to see the rise of Hitler in Germany or to see the rise of democracy in India? He talks of an immanent and impersonal teleology, but the position of the individual man seems to be rather difficult. From one point of view man seems to occupy the supreme position in the universe as he is a conscious rational spirit capable of realising his potentialities through art, morality and religion. But from another point of view he seems to be just a tool in the process of the dialectical movement which is inexorable. No man can isolate himself: every one has to be a part of the state. It is the whole and not the part that is supreme. It is true that the goal of man and the direction of the historical movement are not fixed by God or any external being. It is inherent in the very nature of reality and of man. But the supreme absolute seems to swallow up the man.

The philosophy of history as presented by Marx is no less a priori than Hegel's to which it is related closely though it goes in a different direction. While Hegel's view emphasising as it does the nature and movement of spirit is spiritualistic, the approach of Marx is socio-economic and materialistic. Though Marx seems to depend on history, his view is a priori in as much as he accepts the dialectical movement like Hegel. It is difficult to understand the possibility of dialectical movement

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2. Quoted in *Philosophy of History* by W.H. Dray, p. 73.

3. Quoted in *An Introduction to Philosophy of History*, by W.H. Walsh, p 140.

in the context of a materialistic philosophy. Marx rejects the priority given to consciousness by Hegel or other idealists because he feels that consciousness itself is determined by socio-economic and environmental conditions. Man is wholly a product of circumstances. Individuals, groups and nations are all governed by socio-economic conditions and laws. Dialectic operates in the form of giving rise to opposed socio-economic societies or structures. To begin with, there arises the class of hoarders and exploiters (the capitalists) and then there is a reaction giving rise to the dictatorship of the proletariat and finally there is the establishment of a classless society. In this way the dialectic reaches its final goal. It is thus obvious that for Marx no other values count except the social and the material. He accepts the interest theory of value and tries to explain away all in terms of that. Human history is neither directed by any other value nor reaches any except that of classless society. But like Hegel, Marx also does not tell us as to what happens after that.

Akin though not allied to the Marxist view is the positivist view also which believes in some kind of evolution as Hegel and Marx do, but progress according to this view is not dialectical. Comte like every other evolutionist believes in the evolution of every thing and in continuous progress. Evolution means progress from the primitive stage to the more advanced stage. Comte points out three stages of the development of human civilisation. The first stage or the most primitive stage is that of superstition and belief in God's supernatural powers. It is marked by lack of scientific knowledge and predominance of religious dogmas. The second stage is the stage of reflection on philosophy when reason wakes up and man tries to have rational beliefs rather than accept things on faith. But at this stage also one is not completely free from primitive beliefs. It is only when the third or the final stage of science arrives that man has true objective knowledge. Real progress begins after this stage.

Evolutionism has a great hold on the western mind today. Just as religious men in the west cannot think except in terms of creation by God, so men of scientific thinking cannot think except in terms of evolution. Every thing is explained in terms of evolution and the theory is used to explain away religion and spirituality. But certain

very difficult questions arise with regard to the theory of evolution. What is it that gives the initial impetus to evolution? Does it have any definite direction or not? If there is no definite direction or directing force, what is the guarantee that there will be no regress? Does evolution have an end or no? Is it or not going to stop anywhere? These are some of the questions which have been considered by one contemporary Indian thinker, Sri Aurobindo, whom we will consider next.

## LECTURE II

Sri Aurobindo has tried to give a spiritual turn to the theory of evolution by weaving it with Vedānta. This he does by pointing out that in order to make evolution possible, there must be already some kind of involution or descent of the spirit. Involution does not only make evolution possible but also gives a push and a direction to evolution ; it goes towards its source or the Absolute which exercises a pull to the process of evolution. So there is a push as well as a pull for evolution. It is the Absolute that descends and takes the form of matter and that is why matter starts evolving and gives rise to life which in its turn gives rise to mind or mental consciousness. So far evolution has reached only the mental stage but it has yet to go further and reach the stage of supermind when the imperfections of mind are overcome and man is able to enjoy the bliss of Sacchidānanda. It is to be noted that the whole of the Absolute does not become matter nor is matter only an appearance ; matter, life, mind and supermind are all manifestations of the Absolute, and evolution is an integration of all these. Thus evolution has a spiritual beginning and also a spiritual end : it has a direction and a goal. Art, morality and religion are meaningful and necessary.

History of mankind is to be read in the light of the above process of evolution so that everything comes to have spiritual significance. Wars, epidemics, earthquakes, droughts, floods, all ups and downs have to be understood as part of the process which is cosmic and so not wholly intelligible to the finite mind. The logic of the infinite is magic to the finite. Sri Aurobindo prophesies the birth of a new race of supermen, a race which is quite different from the race of supermen conceived by Nietzsche. The supermen are perfect and perfectly integrated souls who have realised the Sacchidānanda. The whole process is real process made possible by the *cit-śakti* of Brahman. Evolution does not mean the transcendence of the lower by

the higher but an integration of all the lower stages ; it is at once individual and cosmic.

Sri Aurobindo rejects not only the māyāvāda of Śankara but also his ideal of mukti. Śankara's view, according to Sri Aurobindo, makes the world process meaningless and his ideal is individualistic. Says Sri Aurobindo, "I do not base my yoga on the insufficient ground that the self (not soul) is eternally free. That affirmation leads to nothing beyond itself, or if used as a starting point, it could equally well lead to the conclusion that action and creation have no significance or value ..... This yoga accepts the value of cosmic existence and holds it to be a reality ; its object is to enter into a higher truth consciousness or Divine Supramental Consciousness in which action and creation are the expression not of ignorance and imperfection, but of the truth, the light, the Divine Ananda." (Letters) In this way, though not giving a philosophy of history, Sri Aurobindo sees a purpose and a goal behind all that happens in history. The goal is the gradual transformation of man and eventual birth of supermen or a new race. But it must be noted that this cosmic process does not make human effort unnecessary. Sri Aurobindo emphasises the important role of human effort and aspiration if only to expedite the process. Man has to prepare himself for the great advent.

## II

In continuation of the spiritual view of Sri Aurobindo, it seems proper to consider the theistic view which though spiritual in outlook does not believe in evolution. According to the theistic view the world is not only created by God but is also looked after by Him. It is not a world left to itself but a world in which God takes interest and that to such an extent that He sends mesaiahs and prophets to the world from time to time. And not only that. He himself comes in some form or the other to set the world right, to lead it and to inspire it. On surface, it may seem that there is so much evil in the world, so many wars and epidemics, so many floods and earthquakes, so much corruption and cruelty, so much injustice and inequality that one finds it difficult to believe that the world is governed by an Almighty and all-good God. To the theist, it is only a surface view,

the real and the inner truth is that the world is not forlorn and forsaken but taken good care of by the Lord. Wordsworth has expressed the theistic faith in a beautiful way in the following words :

An assured belief,  
 That the process of fate  
 However sad or jubilant  
 Is ordered by a Being of Infinite benevolence  
 Whose everlasting purposes embrace  
 All events  
 Turning them to good.

The same idea is expressed by Browning in his famous line,

‘God is in His Heaven and all is well with the world.’

The theistic view as also the view of Sri Aurobindo is a matter of faith ; it is not based on any empirical evidence nor is it the result of any a priori scheme like that of Hegel. Faith is not derived from experience ; it rather conditions our interpretation of experience. The religious faith does not take into account the details of history ; it emphasises the underlying cosmic force behind our life giving it purpose and direction. In the history of western theism probably St. Augustine was the pioneer who presented this outlook philosophically. He held that there was a constant struggle between the forces of good and evil in the world. But since the good is backed up by God, the ultimate victory is bound to be that of the good. In the case of man, God has given him the freedom of choice so that he can save himself if he chooses the side of the good or God. But this does not mean that God has left man wholly to his self-effort. When God finds that man is losing his battle, He steps in and intervenes. He sends prophets and even brings himself down to earth to save the situation. In fact there is a sense in which man is always helpless and always needs the help of God inasmuch as he can by no amount of self-effort overcome what is called the original sin, a sin which is universally shared. Man is free to exert himself and he must, but he cannot afford to dispense with God who alone can save him ultimately.

## III

Theism in India is somewhat different from western theism. There are certain doctrines or dogmas of western theism which are not accepted in India. The doctrine of absolute creation is not accepted; the conception of created souls is unknown and there is no such thing as original sin admitted here, and the goal of life is not conceived as heaven. Theism in India believes in cyclic creation and destruction; the souls are regarded as eternal; the source of bondage and consequent suffering is ignorance; the goal of life is freedom from bondage or rebirth. The most important doctrine accepted by Indian theists and not accepted in the west is that of rebirth due to our karmas. Both in India and the west, it is believed that God is all goodness (mangalamaya) and takes keen interest in the life and destiny of all living beings. But the manner in which God is believed to take interest in us is conceived differently in India. It is believed here that God is both a person and a system. The system is the law of Karma. God does not award reward and punishment to individuals but the fruits of his karma and this is done for the sake of his spiritual evolution and for the maintenance of a moral order. So the award of the fruits of our Karmas is in a manner which serves our best spiritual interests. The law of Karma does not operate blindly or mechanically as it is conceived in Mīmāṃsā, Jainism and Buddhism but under the direction and supervision of all-knowing, all-powerful and all-good God. The law is so directed that in the process of operation it ultimately leads man to spiritual awakening when man turns his attention to God and the spiritual goal of life. The law of Karma does not mean determinism of all our actions. What is determined is the fruit of our Karma and not the Karmas of the present life. What we have in this life cannot be due to Karmas in this life, but new Karmas are possible. God has laid down the principles of Karma in the scriptures and so the first step in the direction to God is to accept the scriptures and to lead one's life according to their injunctions. So long as man lives a life which is not in accordance with the Śāstras, he has no chance. Man has to go on suffering, having frustrations and failures so long as he does not obey the scriptures. As a result of repeated failures man comes to realise sooner or later that it is virtue or life according to the scriptures that leads to happiness. The next step is the realisation that the happiness



attained by virtuous deeds is not permanent and therefore cannot be the ultimate goal of man as man aspires after permanent happiness. At this point the Śāstras again tell man that if he wants to attain permanent happiness he must be free from bondage or the circle of birth and death. Then comes the point when man comes to realise that he cannot attain freedom all by himself or by his own efforts. He is in need of the grace of one who is eternally free and who is all-compassion, that is God. This realisation makes man turn to God in all humility, devotion and love. The Guru who leads man to God is therefore regarded as God Himself. It is in this way that the law of Karma gradually leads us to the ideal of God-realisation and it is in this sense that the law of Karma is itself a form of the grace or *kṛpā* of the Lord.

Attention may be drawn to certain features of the above process. First of all it should be clear that all that is happening to man individually or collectively is not due to any arbitrary will or chance ; everything whether it is pain or pleasure is the fruit of our Karma. Hence, the responsibility of man is great. The evil in the world is man's own doing and God permits it because all this helps man in his spiritual evolution. God is, therefore, not to be blamed either for creating evil or for not interfering. In other words, the Divine law or the law of Karma is not punitive but remedial ; it cures man of his egoity and ignorance. God does nothing but what is spiritually good for us. Man may desire progeny and prosperity, name and fame, or all other kinds of objects of enjoyment which are supposed to give happiness but God will not grant them unless the gift helps us spiritually. We get them only when we deserve them, and we deserve them either as a result of our Karmas or when we have surrendered ourselves wholly to God and He takes our whole burden upon Himself. Sometimes we pray for something and our prayer is not heard and then we feel that God is not kind to us. But we forget that we can get only what our Karmas deserve or we forget that God would grant to us only what is spiritually beneficial and not what we desire. We do not like suffering but He may send a lot of suffering if that is good for us in His judgment. So God is never unkind ; only there is conflict between His judgment and ours. While our aim is self-gratification or enjoyment, His aim is to enable us to go beyond the very possibility of all

suffering. In other words, God's point of view is always spiritual while ours is not. So neither suffering nor any other evil is out of place in the scheme of God; we do not see His whole scheme, and we do not understand His purpose and so our judgment has no meaning. The best thing is to accept His will and dispensation.

The above perspective is obviously a matter of faith, at least to begin with. Later on as one advances towards God one is able to see God's will. The more one comes to know, the more one loves God for all that He does and has done. At a certain stage one is not able to see any evil at all: everything, howsoever, bad apparently is nonetheless good as it has a spiritual aim, being a gift of God, the Beloved. At this stage there is no duality of wills, no conflict; there is what one may call a perfect harmony or perfect integration of personality. Man is at one with himself, he is at one with the universe, he is at one with God. Everything in the world comes to have a purpose, a spiritual purpose; everything gets related to everything else in the world. Nothing is arbitrary, nothing is accidental and nothing out of tune with the Divine.

It has been said above that God is not only a system but also a person. This means that it is possible for God to interfere with the law of Karma and to overrule it. God does not ordinarily overrule it, but He certainly does it when He finds that the spiritual growth of man at some stage needs it. Ordinarily the rule is that God comes directly to our help when we are free from pride and egoity. When man does not arrogate to himself kartaship and depends wholly on God alone, then comes the time for God to set aside the law of Karma and to operate directly. The law of Karma operates so long as we have kartaship and bhoktaship but when one becomes an *arta* or an *artharathi* God overrules the law of Karma and shows direct intervention. So if God does not come to our rescue, we should be sure that our ego is standing in His way. When man sheds his ego or pride God takes him up in His lap as it were. All that God wants is that after going through births and rebirths, frustrations and failures, man should give up pride, should see his helplessness, should look up to Him, the only power in the world.

It can be thus seen that there are two forces working behind the universe—the force of the law of Karma and the direct power of

God. In fact, they are not two forces; they are only two ways of God's operation — the indirect and the direct. It is certain that God operates directly also. One example of the direct operation of the power of God is seen in the instance of incarnation. God incarnates Himself in the world, not only once but any number of times, to save the world. The fact of incarnation is of great significance for illustrating the direct interest of God in the world, specially because incarnation is wholly due to the will of God and not due to our karmas; it is wholly due to His desire to save His creatures, to lead the world on the spiritual path by removing the obstades and obstructions.

#### IV

So far we have taken into consideration only realistic views of the world and its history. Not only are the positivists, evolutionists and Marxists but also the idealists like Hegel and Sri Aurobindo as also the theists regard the world and its processes as real, and so they are as good as realists. But there are certain schools of thought such as the Vijñānavāda, Śūnyavāda and Advaitavāda which regard the world as mere appearance or false, something due to avidyā or māyā. So the question arises as to whether the world process can have any meaning in such systems. We will here consider mainly the Advaitic point of view.

We have already made reference to Sri Aurobindo's criticism of Advaitism. Western thinkers also point out that in a philosophy which regards the world as illusory, the world process cannot but be meaningless so much so that even morality and moral progress would cease to have any meaning. All values derive their meaning from the reality of the world and reality of life in the world. If man, society and history are all false, the very question regarding their meaning does not arise. Nothing shakes our faith on our values and nothing damages it so much as māyāvāda. Individuality which is the very basis of all values and hence itself a supreme value is false and so there is nothing on which values can stand. Individuality being false, all human relations becomes false and there is nothing left to make our aspirations possible. Can the utter loss of individuality or absorption in the infinite be a real goal for man? Can man really

aspire to lose his individuality? This is the way in which *māyāvādā* is generally criticised.

It seems to us that the above is a complete misunderstanding of the Advaitic position. Falsity of the world does not mean its disappearance or its rejection by everyone; falsity of the world means only the rejection of its ultimate reality, as Brahman alone is ultimately real. The world is false only for one who has realised Brahman. Not until one has realised Brahman it is proper for any one to say that the world is false. It follows therefore that so long as the world is taken to be real, i.e., so long as the reality or ground of the world (Brahman) is not known, there is no option for us but to pursue worldly values. So Advaitism does not stand in our way. Not only that. Advaitism holds also that life in the world if lived according to the *śāstras* and in a righteous way would promote our spiritual life inasmuch as it would purify the mind and would eventually make us fit for higher life. So, life in the world is not meaningless. In fact it is said to be a matter of good luck to be born as a man and in a good family because that enables a *jīva* to pursue higher life. One cannot attain the spiritual goal unless one is born as a man. Critics of Advaita forget that *māyā* does not only forge bondage to man but also enables him to aspire after the spiritual goal. But for *māyā* Brahman cannot function as *Īśvara* whose main function is to help man in his effort for liberation; *Īśvara* is the source of scripture which is indispensable for spiritual life. *Īśvara* also looks after the spiritual future of the world. He even takes birth in the world and does the needful for the good of man. The Advaitin is therefore no less a theist than any one else. His only insistence is that if the world is taken to have ultimate reality, then there can be no final freedom because in that case duality will be an eternal feature. Bondage can be removed by knowledge only if it is taken to be due to ignorance and not due to any reality, because knowledge cannot do anything to reality. It can remove only ignorance.

Further, unless *māyā* is admitted a serious difficulty arises regarding the incarnation or *avatāra* of God. The point is that God cannot be said to be really born or to assume a body in a real sense because in that case the imperfections of the body will really belong to Him. The perfection of God in the form of incarnation can remain unaffec-

ted only if the incarnation is taken to be due to māyā. This point is not appreciated by theists who believe in the reality of the world. Realists are not able to see that what is negated by māyāvāda is really not worthwhile or is really a source of bondage.

Some people specially in the west seem to regard individuality as some kind of ultimate value and so they feel unhappy at the prospect of the loss of individuality. They abhor the ideal or merger in the infinite and would prefer some kind of fellowship with God. But they do not see an obvious contradiction. Man has an inner urge for infinity and eternity, and infinity and individuality are not compatible because individuality always means limitation. So individuality has to be shed if one wants to attain infinity: one cannot have both ways keep individuality and also attain infinity. If we come to think of it we can see that it is our ego that takes the form of our love for individuality, the ego that is universally considered as the enemy of all spiritual life. Mere refinement and purification of the ego does not mean its transcendence; the ego has to be left behind if we want to have a life higher than that of the ego.

So we may safely make the observation that māyāvāda does not make life and its values meaningless. Everything that the realist and the theist wants to regard as real is real and meaningful but not ultimately. But if the realist insists that everything should be ultimate, it only shows that he does not appreciate the problem of bondage or the value of freedom. Advaitism is obviously not meant for such people. It is meant only for those who have seen through the hollowness and momentariness of the world and its values. The goal of life for Advaitism is transcendence and not transformation which seems to be the goal in theism and evolutionism. Transformation being temporal can't be permanent and eternal. The temporal is useful and not meaningless but at the same time it cannot be one with the eternal. The temporal without itself being a part of the eternal helps us in reaching the eternal and that is exactly its significance. Time and eternity meet in man as it were, but man has to transcend time in order to reach eternity, because eternity is not merely infinite time; eternity means going beyond time, going beyond change or history. So long as we are in love with the temporal, we

are really not serious about the eternal. But at the same time it is the temporal that awakens us to the eternal.

In conclusion we may say that it is not possible for us to devise an a priori scheme into which all the details of past history can be fitted. Nor is it possible to predict the facts of history on the basis of an a priori scheme. At the same time human history cannot be merely a play of physical and biological forces. Unless we ignore the message of the different religions of the world in general and of Hinduism in particular, it has to be admitted that the life of every individual in particular and that of the whole universe in general is frequent with spiritual meaning. In order to accept the spiritual meaning of life, it is not necessary to regard empirical life and reality as ultimate ; it can be meaningful without being ultimately real as is suggested by Advaita Vedānta.

