(A) The concept of reality

To make an inquiry into the nature of the ultimate Being has been the central and perennial concern of all philosophising directly or indirectly. In fact, philosophy was born only in the human quest of knowing what is the Being of all beings, the single source of all that is. The beginning of both Indian and Western philosophies was ontological in nature.

Sri Aurobindo's ontology is called integral Advaitism. Before we proceed to understand his integral Advaitism, it is essential to keep in mind what he calls "The Materialistic Denial" and "The Refusal of the Ascetic". Philosophy, according to Sri Aurobindo, cannot ignore the claims of either the materialists or the spiritualists. According to him, both the materialists and the idealists are one-sided since both ignore the other aspect of the reality. A spiritualistic philosopher who denies the
reality of matter is one-sided; so also are the materialists who deny the reality of the spirit.

For Sri Aurobindo, both matter and spirit are the lowest and the highest forms of existence respectively. Matter is nothing but the expression of the spirit. The Upaniṣad proclaims, "Matter is Brahman." So, we cannot ignore it if we intend to take an integral and comprehensive view of reality. Sri Aurobindo observes:

The affirmation of a divine life upon the earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base unless we recognise not only eternal Spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutual robe, but accept Matter of which it is made, as a fit and noble material out of which He weaves constantly His garbs, builds recurrently the unending series of His mansions.

Sri Aurobindo opines that matter and spirit will not appear as opposite poles if we take into consideration the intervening grades between them, namely, life, mind, the supermind, and the grades which link the mind to the supermind. "Otherwise the two must appear as irreconcilable opponents bound together in an unhappy wedlock and their divorce the only reasonable solution." If spirit and matter are separated from each other, then one is forced to make a choice between the two. Sri Aurobindo observes:

For both Thought and Life, a choice then becomes imperative. Thought comes to deny the one as an illusion of the imagination and other as an
illusion of the senses; Life comes to a fix on the immaterial and flees itself in a disgust or a self-forgetting ecstasy, or else to deny its own immortality and takes its orientation away from God and towards the animal.

Sri Aurobindo contends that both materialism and spiritualism have done much harm to humanity though we cannot ignore their service to humanity.

Materialism upholds the view that matter or physical existence is the basic ontological reality, and that life, mind, etc., are nothing but by-products of matter. It regards sense experience as the sole means of valid knowledge. Thus, anything that does not come within the realm of sense perception cannot be regarded as real. Sri Aurobindo holds that this is purely a one-sided view. Sri Aurobindo observes:

If pushed to its extreme, it would give to a stone or a plum-pudding a greater reality and to thought, love, courage, genius, greatness, the soul and mind facing an obscure and dangerous world and getting mastery over it an inferior dependent reality or even an unsubstantial evanescent reality.

The subjective view of our existence is completely ignored in materialism. Of course, it may be held that objects have value only when they are related to the subject. The objective and the subjective are so closely interlinked that one cannot be comprehended without the other. Sri Aurobindo says:
In fact, subjectivity and objectivity are not independent realities, they depend on each other; they are the Being, through consciousness, looking at itself as subject on the object and the same Being offering itself to its own consciousness as object to the subject.

For Sri Aurobindo, both the objective and the subjective are two essential aspects of the manifested reality carrying equal value.

Coming to idealism, Sri Aurobindo holds the view that even idealism by itself is one-sided, since it holds that every object of experience in its proper original nature is a content of consciousness or the mind. He holds that the mind, whether individual or universal, cannot be the creator of the universe. He says that the individual mind suffers from all types of limitations and, thus, it cannot be regarded as the creator of the universe. Even the universal mind cannot be considered as the creator of the universe. If the universal mind possesses the same characteristics of the individual mind, then it cannot be said to be possessed of omnipotence and omniscience. If it is different from the individual mind altogether, it cannot be called the mind. The universe is the creation of consciousness which is one with the being of the divine. Whatever it creates is constituted of the stuff or substance of being and, therefore, is real. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:
It is true that there is no such thing as an objective reality independent of consciousness; but at the same time there is a truth in objectivity and it is this, that the reality of things resides in something that is within them and is independent of the interpretation our mind gives to them and of the structure it builds upon its observation. These structures constitute mind's subjective image or figure of the universe, but the universe and its objects are not a mere image or figure. They are in essence creations of consciousness, but of a consciousness that is one with the beings, whose substance is the substance of Being and whose creations too are of that substance, therefore, real. In this view the world cannot be a purely subjective creation of consciousness; the subjective and objective truth of things are both real, they are two sides of the same reality.

For Sri Aurobindo, this one ultimate reality, sat-cit-ānanda is multi-dimensional in nature. It accommodates all the opposites like one and many, static and dynamic, finite and infinite.

Sri Aurobindo accounts for the multi-dimensional nature of the reality by his logic of the infinite and by his theory of involution and evolution. By the logic of the infinite, Sri Aurobindo means the logic of the divine or the supreme Being. According to him, the so-called opposites, namely, one and many, silence and dynamis, finite and infinite, appear to be contradiction in terms only to the human reason, but not to the logic of the infinite. Sri Aurobindo aptly says, "What is magic to the finite is the logic to the Infinite." In other words, infinite consciousness does not work arbitrarily, but in its own
definite and well-established laws. The infinite has reason, but it is not like our limited reason; it is much higher and greater. It is a spiritual and supramental reason. Sri Aurobindo says, "There is a logic in it, because there are relations and connections infallibly seen and executed."\(^9\) He further says:\(^{10}\)

It is a greater reason, a greater logic because it is more vast, subtle, complex in its operations; it comprehends all the data which our observation fails to seize, it deduces from them results which neither our deductions nor inductions can anticipate, because our conclusions and inferences have a meagre foundation and are fallible and brittle.

According to Sri Aurobindo, we have to judge everything from three perspectives, namely, the individual, the universal, and the transcendent. The total realization of the individual, is possible when it is related to both universal and transcendent and vice versa. The real nature of the transcendent is comprehended only when it is realized not only in its essential and indeterminate aspect, but also in its dynamic and determinate aspect. Sri Aurobindo observes:\(^{11}\)

The Infinite is at once an essentiality a boundless totality and multitude; all these have to be known in order to know truly the Infinite. To see the parts alone and totality not at all or only as sum of parts is a knowledge but also at the same time an ignorance; to see the totality alone and ignore the parts is also a knowledge and at the same time an ignorance, for a part may be
greater than the whole because it belongs to the transcendence; to see the essence alone because it takes us back straight towards the transcendence and negate the totality and the parts is a penultimate knowledge but here too there is a capital ignorance. A whole knowledge must be there and the reason must become plastic enough to look at all sides, all aspects and seek through them for that in which they are one.

The higher reason, or the "logic of the infinite", instead of denying the reality of the world in order to avoid the contradictions, solves it by giving a deeper meaning to the concept of indeterminable. "Indeterminable" does not mean the absence of determinations, but indicates two essential characteristics of the absolute. Firstly, they reveal the freedom of the absolute from limitations by its own determinations. Secondly, the absolute is free from all the eternal determinations. Creation is nothing but the Being becoming in form and movement what is already the substance. But the indeterminability is emphasised because, without that, reality would be a fixed eternal determinate. Sri Aurobindo argues that the freedom of the absolute for all creation and determination should not itself be considered as a limitation. It should not deprive the absolute of the other kind of freedom, i.e., the freedom of the infinite, self-manifestation or self-determination. Self-determination is to be considered as freedom, but not as determination implying a force of limitation. For Sri Aurobindo, no real contradiction enters into the central
fact of the two aspects of the absolute. The indeterminate and determinate, i.e., the nirguna and the saguna are, thus, the complementary aspects of reality. With the help of the logic of the infinite, Sri Aurobindo solves the so-called contradictions between the one and the many, the silence and the dynamism, and the finite and the infinite.

Śaṅkara, to do justice to the Advaitic thought, contends that the one is real and that the many are illusory. He establishes the illusoriness of the world of many so that it will not be a contradiction. Here, Sri Aurobindo says that the one and the many appear to be a contradiction only to finite reason which does not understand the implication of the terms, "one" and "many". Sri Aurobindo feels that the mind commits a double error in establishing this oneness on a mathematical basis. It regards it as a limited finite unit which cannot be other than what it is without losing its essential character. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

It is thinking in the terms of the mathematical finite unit which is sole in limitation, the one which is less than two and can become two only by division and fragmentation or by addition and multiplication; but this is an infinite oneness, it is the essential and infinite Oneness which can contain the hundred and thousand and the million and billion and trillion. Whatever astronomic and more than astronomic figures you heap and multiply, they cannot overpass or exceed that Oneness, for, in the language of the Upanisad, it moves not, yet is always far in front when you would pursue and seize it.

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There is no limitation to the oneness of the absolute. It is capable of multiplying itself infinitely without losing its unity in the midst of all diversity. The infinitude of Brahman cannot be said to exist if it is not capable of multiplying itself infinitely. But it does not mean that the one Brahman should be taken as the sum of many. So, this is the second error which the mind commits in conceiving the relation between the one and the many. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

Pluralism is an error because, though there is the spiritual plurality, the many souls are dependent and interdependent existence; this sum also is not the one nor is it the cosmic totality; they depend on the One and exist by its Oneness; yet the plurality is not unreal, it is the One soul that dwells as the individual in these many souls and they are eternal in the One and by the One eternal.

In a similar fashion, we can also reconcile the contradiction between the static and the dynamic in relation to the absolute. Some philosophers view reality as static, immobile, and immutable; and some others look upon reality as dynamic, a boundless movement. So, the absolute is regarded by some as Being and by some others as Becoming. They could not think of the absolute as possessing these so-called opposites in itself in reality. So when they accept one aspect of reality, automatically they deny the other. But Sri Aurobindo, who aims at establishing an integral reality, says that, with the help of the "logic of the
infinite", we can think of the absolute possessing these two opposites. He says that they are two aspects of reality. A silent and static infinite, without power and energy, cannot be regarded as the ultimate reality.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the static provides the basis for movement. They are two aspects of the same reality, positive and negative. Each one is necessary for the other. Sri Aurobindo says:14

It is out of this Silence that the word which creates the worlds for ever proceeds; for the word expresses that which is self-hidden in the Silence. It is an eternal passivity which makes possible the perfect freedom and omnipotence of an eternal divine activity innumerable cosmic systems. For the becomings of that activity derive their energies and their illimitable potency of variation and harmony from the impartial support of the immutable Being, its consent to this infinite fecundity of its own dynamic Nature.

So the absolute is capable of holding on to its infinite energy in the state of silence and releasing it in infinite movement.

Sri Aurobindo also tries to meet the so-called contradictions between the finite and the infinite with the help of the "logic of the infinite." According to him, the finite is nothing but self-determination of the infinite under the conditions of space and time. Sri Aurobindo observes:15
The finite is a frontal aspect and self-determination of the infinite; no finite can exist in itself by itself, it exists by the Infinite because it is of one essence with the Infinite.

Brahman, says the Upanisad, is subtler than the subtest, greater even than the greatest. Brahman does not become small by manifesting itself in the insect and does not become great by manifesting itself in the cosmos. Sri Aurobindo says:

This mighty energy is an equal and impartial mother, samam Brahman in the great term of the Gita and its intensity and force of movement is the same in the formation and upholding of a system of suns and the organisation of the life of an ant-hill.

So, the differentiation between the finite and the infinite is only apparent and not real. Sri Aurobindo justifies that Brahman, the non-dual principle, accommodates opposites like the one and the many, the finite and the infinite, Being and becoming. It is integral and all-inclusive. It includes all the aspects of reality in its all-embracing unity. Sri Aurobindo observes:

The real monism, the true Advaita, is that which admits all things as Brahman and does not seek to bisect its existence into two incompatible entities, an eternal truth and eternal falsehood, Brahman and non-Brahman, self and not-self, a real self and an unreal, yet perpetual Mayā. If it is true that self alone exists, it must be also true that all is the self.
Sri Aurobindo accounts for the existence of the plurality and opposites, which appear to be contradictory to the essential nature of Brahman, by his theory of involution and evolution. We understand that for Sri Aurobindo the finite world does not stand in opposition to the absolute or infinite, but it is its expression and manifestation. But a question may be raised how the absolute, which is timeless, spaceless, and immutable, can reveal itself as the finite, limited by space and time. Here Sri Aurobindo accounts for this phenomenon by his theories of involution and evolution.

(B) The involution and evolution

Sri Aurobindo says that we generally speak of evolution of life from matter, and of mind from life. But this does not explain why the mind has evolved out of life, and life out of matter. Emergence of life out of matter, and of mind out of life, can have logical validity only when it is presumed that life is already involved in matter and that mind is in life. In other words, matter is "veiled-life" and life is "veiled-consciousness". The prior involution has to be presumed in order to explain the new emergents.

For Sri Aurobindo, the whole universe is the self-expression of the supreme reality, which is of the nature of existence, consciousness, and bliss (sat-cit-ānanda).
According to him, *sat-cit-ānanda*, out of immense delight, puts limitation upon itself. By its power of self-limitation or self-concealment, it veils itself stage by stage. In other words, the supreme consciousness, which embodies knowledge in totality, descends gradually from the higher levels of consciousness to the lower levels of consciousness and at last to the level of inconscience, i.e., matter. Hence, according to Sri Aurobindo, the principles of mind, life, and matter are nothing but the self-limited and self-concentrated form of Brahman. Though these principles apparently seem to be different from Brahman, essentially they are one with Brahman. The involvement of the supreme reality indicates that matter is not condemned to remain in its original state of inconscience and intertia, but it has all the potentiality to evolve itself to the principle of spirit. Sri Aurobindo is of the view that, since there has already been the involution or descent of the spirit in matter, the matter has all the possibility to regain the status of the spirit. This process of rising or ascent of matter to the level of spirit, which is its essential nature, is known as the process of evolution. Hence, says Sri Aurobindo, not only is there the descent of the spirit into the principle of ignorance and inconscience as manifested in the material world, but there is also ascent of the different grades of existence into their highest or
supreme status of the spirit. In short, there is not only involution, but also evolution. The order of evolution is just the reverse of that of involution. The order of involution has been described as follows: existence, consciousness-force, bliss, supermind, mind, psyche or soul, life, and matter. The process of evolution starts with matter and reaches its highest point or culmination with the emergence of the supermind and the principles of bliss, consciousness-force, and existence.

But, says Sri Aurobindo, sat-cit-ānanda does not express itself into the varied multiplicities directly, but indirectly, by its creative principle which is the selective faculty of knowledge. Sri Aurobindo technically terms this as supermind, or the gnosis, or real idea, or divine māyā.

The first descent of sat-cit-ānanda takes place in bringing forth supermind. At this level, the supreme reality still retains its absolute identity in and through the many. Similarly, the many continue to remain one in the utmost degree. The next step of descent is the overmind. Here, to a great extent the inherent immanent oneness is lost though the basic unity of the many with the one is there. This is the first parent of ignorance or avidyā. It is also called lower māyā. Division and separation, self-limitation and fragmentation, find their roots in the overmind.
In the mind, which is the next step of involution, we find the actualisation of division and separation, fragmentation and self-limitation, in its completeness, which have their seeds in the overmind. The mind loses the supermind's capacity of global vision and integral outlook.

Between the mind and overmind, Sri Aurobindo also identifies other minds, which represent different layers of consciousness. They are the intuitive mind, the illumined mind, and the higher mind. The nature of these faculties and their function in epistemic activity will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

After descending to the level of mind, sat-cit-ānanda still goes down further. Here, there is a greater density, darkness, and obscurity. The control of the mind is lost, and there enters desire, hunger, etc.

The last stage in the involution is matter, which is nothing but total self-concealment. Here, there is total self-oblivion or self-forgetfulness of consciousness. In other words, it is the plunge of light into its own shadow. But it contains all the latent powers of the spirit since it is the veiled form of sat-cit-ānanda.

Self-concealment in the matter is followed by the self-discovery of the spirit in the same medium. In other
words, involution is followed by evolution. It brings out all that is involved in the inconscient. The spirit will be the final evolutionary emergent because it is the original involutionary element. Evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo, "is the progressive manifestation by nature of that which slept or worked in her"\(^{19}\) as well as the "overt realisation of that which she secretly is".\(^{20}\) In explaining evolution, Sri Aurobindo observes:\(^{21}\)

Evolution is nothing other than a heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest being so that it may be raised into the greater intensity of what is still unmanifest, from matter into life, from life into mind, from the mind to supermind.

In involution as well as evolution, Brahman is all the three causes rolled into one, namely, the material, the efficient, and the teleological. Since the world is a self-becoming of Brahman itself, it is the material cause. Again, it is the efficient cause because the manifestation of the world is self-willed, self-directed, and self-impelled. And, at last, it is the teleological cause because its self-differentiation is for the delight of self-representation in phenomenal forms. Figuratively speaking, Brahman is the play, the player, and the play-ground. For Sri Aurobindo, evolution necessarily implies evolution of consciousness, since the Being is pure consciousness which has involved. Till now, evolution has passed through three stages--matter,
life, and mind. The present is the mental plane represented by present human consciousness. In matter, consciousness is dormant or asleep. In life, it reveals itself in sensation, perception, feelings, etc. In mind, the consciousness becomes intellectual. Since the absolute is also "all-knowledge", its evolute like matter represents indetermined nescience; the mind represents ignorance (veiled knowledge); and the supermind represents absolute knowledge. So far, in respect of the evolution, there has not been, says Sri Aurobindo, merely evolution of forms, but also the evolution of consciousness and knowledge. The forms have gone on developing, and the instruments of knowledge have been added to these forms to enable the organism to become more and more conscious.

With regard to evolutionary process, Sri Aurobindo says that the ascent from one grade to another takes place by the heightening and intensification of consciousness-force present in an occult way in the material nature. Matter goes on evolving into higher and higher forms until a stage is reached, when the consciousness-force present in a latent way in matter is so much heightened and intensified that it seeks a new channel of expression with the result that the principle of life evolves or emerges out of matter. Added to this, there is the pressure from higher planes, where the evolving principle has already a dominant status.
on the physical plane. This pressure from the higher planes enables the hidden principle to emerge and establish itself in the world.

Evolution first occurs in matter. Matter is the explicit manifestation of the element of "sat" in sat-cit-ānanda. Sri Aurobindo observes: "Matter is the Sat-Cit-Ananda represented to his own mental experience as a formal basis of objective knowledge, action and delight of existence." Matter is essentially consciousness fallen asleep. The explanation of matter in Sri Aurobindo's thought indicates that both spiritualism and materialism are one-sided. Spiritualism holds that matter is non-existent and, hence, it is not real. According to materialism, matter is ontologically prior; but for Sri Aurobindo, though matter is the starting point of evolution, it is not ontologically prior since it is the self-involution of the absolute. In Sri Aurobindo's thought, matter enjoys only the chronological priority, but not logical or ontological primacy. While matter is the lower form of the manifestation of the element of "sat" in sat-cit-ānanda, life is the lower form of expression of the element of "cit" in sat-cit-ānanda. Sri Aurobindo is of the view that life has been from the very beginning involved and implicitly operative in matter. Evolution brought it forth into the manifestation in vital phenomena. It is not a by-product of
matter. In it, we sense the first vibration of the evolving consciousness.

The next evolute is mind. It has become, in man the intellectual consciousness. It is characterised by mediacy, doubt, uncertainty, and inadequacy. In mental knowledge, there is this duality of subject and object. It depieces, delimits, and differentiates the reality, but at the same time it has the constant urge to go beyond the parts and reach the whole. It proceeds to synthesise the divided units with a view to arriving at the unity of the whole, but it fails.

The above view of Sri Aurobindo can be well understood in the light of Bradley's conception of thought. Bradley is of the view that thought breaks the original unity of experience into "that" and "what", the subject and the object. After bringing this dualism, it makes an attempt to transcend this dualism and reach the original unity. When it tries to transcend the dualism between "that" and "what", it ends up in suicide. If the distinction between the subject and the object is transcended, there is no room left for thought. As Sri Aurobindo would put it: 23

In its attempt to go beyond the parts and reach the whole the mind falls from its own firm ground into the ocean of the intangible, into the abyss of the infinite where it can neither perceive,
conceive, sense, nor deal with its subject for creation and enjoyment.

Henri Bergson expresses the same view with reference to intellectual knowledge. To Bergson, intellect or thought has a mere pragmatic function. It does not yield any knowledge of the reality. For both Sri Aurobindo and Bergson, the intellect represents only the superficial aspects of consciousness.

The explicit manifestation of all the three evolutes are found in human being. But apart from these three, the human being is also endowed with an inner and abiding psychic entity called soul around which body, life, and mind are organised into an individual entity or ego. Sri Aurobindo is of the view that the soul or the psyche is the lower form of manifestation of the element of ānanda in sat-cit-ānanda. The true soul is the psychic being or Caitva Puruṣa which is the central core of our being. This Puruṣa is nothing else than the Supreme Spirit dwelling within us.

Evolution, for Sri Aurobindo, does not stop with this. According to him, "mind is a passage, but not a culmination." It must culminate in some greater emergence. He calls it as supermind. He is emphatic about the idea that time has come when evolution must take a leap into the next higher stage, i.e., supermind.
In Sri Aurobindo's scheme of evolution, there is involved a triple process - process of widening, heightening, and integralization. This is considered to be the most original contribution of Sri Aurobindo.

**Widening:** When evolution takes place at the level of matter, there is the evolution of forms of matter. Here, the simple forms of matter are evolved into complex forms.

**Heightening:** In evolution, there is an ascent of the lower grades of existence to the higher grades of existence. For example, when life evolves out of matter, there is the ascent in the evolutionary process from the grade of matter to that of life.

**Integration:** As soon as the lower grade rises to the higher grade of existence, it takes up all the lower grades to the higher grade and transforms the lower ones according to its own law. Sri Aurobindo puts it thus:  

A taking up what has already been evolved into each higher grade as it is reached and a transformation more or less complete so as to admit of a total changed working of the whole being and nature, an integration must be also part of the process, if the evolution is to be effective.

The purpose behind the evolutionary process is to uplift the matter and all other principles present in a potential manner in the heart of matter to their divine status. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:
The end of this triple process must be radical change of the action of Ignorance into an action of knowledge, of our basis of inconscience into the basis of complete consciousness—a completeness which exists at present only in what to us is superconscience.

Sri Aurobindo further observes:

An evolution in the inconscience is the beginning, an evolution in the Ignorance is the middle, but the end is the liberation of spirit into its true consciousness and an evolution in the knowledge.

But the freedom of the spirit into its true consciousness cannot be possible just with the emergence of life and mind. Of course, one cannot ignore the fact that there are notable changes in matter with the emergence of the above evolutes. Mind still suffers from all-round ignorance since it is still controlled and subjugated by the subconscious and unconscious forces of nature. So, for the total transformation, there must be an emergence of supramental principle which is the original creative energy.

For Sri Aurobindo, the emergence of the supermind is a logical necessity since what is involved must evolve. According to him, in evolution, there are two processes which operate simultaneously: the upward tending force from below and an upward-drawing, downward pressing force from the above. The upward-tending force from below has itself two parallel lines of simple process, namely, sublimation and integration. By "sublimation", we mean a kind of
purification and refinement and rising into higher level of that which is impure, dense, and base in consciousness. The dense matter has refined itself into life, and the impure life has purified itself into mind, and now the half-aware mind is transforming itself into something higher than itself. It is inevitable and indispensable that mind has to transcend itself. This is the very logic of the evolutionary process of nature.

In Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution, sublimation has to be attended by a parallel line of development, namely, integration, since sublimation alone would mean the elimination or absorption of that which is lower. By this process, the higher embraces the lower, and the lower continues to exist though it has undergone some change depending upon its receptivity to the higher principle. Hence, when the life for the first time has shown its face, matter is not withdrawn, but it becomes vibrant with new urge. Likewise, when mind gets evolved or emerges from life, matter gets transformed and it has to become more alive, responsive, and almost communicative. In a similar fashion, perhaps, when a still higher principle than mind emerges, matter shall lose its density and will become more vibrant.

Similarly, life was sensitive at the plant level and more organised in the animal level. Again, when mind
came into life, life became imbued with a greater purification, with a greater intelligence. Likewise, mind which is, in its present status, divisive in its approach to things, ignorant, limited, and short sighted, has to bring out of itself the new principle hidden within it, namely, supermind. With the emergence of supermind, mind too like the other principles, will be subject to transformation. It will be endowed with more luminosity, wider understanding freeing itself of its narrow limitation to a large extent.

This ascent or pressure from below is not sufficient by itself to bring down the higher level or status. The higher level itself has to consent to descend and this is the second descent, if we may call it so. There is a kind of deep aspiration and urge from below, and the higher responds from the above by coming down. Hence, in Sri Aurobindo's thought, the impetus in evolution is twofold— the urge from below and the pressure from above. At first, there is the process of ascent and next is the process of descent. There is not only ascent or descent, but also an ascent through descent. The mode of progression is ascent - descent - integration. Thus, we find a kind of integralism in Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution in which the highest forms of reality are capable of existing simultaneously in different poises in its descent.
In Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary scheme, the "supermind" is the key word. It is the higher instrument of consciousness and hence the higher faculty of knowledge. Whereas matter, life and mind are stages of ignorance, supermind is a stage of knowledge. Here, ignorance only means separative awareness. There will be radical change in the evolutionary process at the emergence of supermind; that is, evolution will be through knowledge and not through ignorance. When the supermind descends, nature is transformed into supernature and human beings into gnostic beings. The apparent self-contradictions of thought which we find at the intellectual level are harmonised in the higher rationality of supermind.

The unique and greatest contribution of Sri Aurobindo is that the human is not the culminating point in evolutionary scheme, but is only the transitory being. As Sri Aurobindo puts it, "The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature... has worked out man. Man himself will be a thinking and living laboratory in whom... she wills to work the superman, the God." Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution is well summed up in the following words:

First there is the tendency to grow at the terrestrial level from matter to mind through life. Second, there is a tendency 'to know' from the level of mind to supermind. And third, there is the transcendental level of perfection in sat-cit-ananda. Thus in Sri Aurobindo's conception of evolution we find how the 'will to grow' leads to the 'will to know' and which takes up the will to perfection and freedom.