

Polity, Economy and Society: Structural Contradictions and the Dynamics of History

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History sees the 'world' in a different way than the 'world' sees itself. What is 'seen' is generally in the 'present', isolated, unrelated and almost as sufficient-unto-itself. The historian, even of the 'present', cannot see things in that way. For him, the so-called 'polities' are forming and re-forming, the boundaries and the 'names' changing all the time. What can he really talk about, when that which he is telling about is always changing? Yet, he has to talk and, in talking 'create' the illusion of stability and permanence when there is none. The history of the 'world' from, say, the end of the First World War is an evidence. Name the country and you will see the problem. There are exceptions but, then, one would have to go a little more, a little backward into the past to see the contours melting, the boundaries getting fuzzier and hazier, and thus realize that the realm of the political has perhaps to be understood in a different way than the historian has tried to understand it, particularly since the so-called 'nation-states' came into being. China seems an obvious exception but, for the moment, we shall treat it as that, only wondering whether something would happen to it that, say, happened to the USSR or earlier to India.

The essential contingency of the unit of study which history deals with has been sought to be bypassed by treating history as the study of 'civilizations' rather than polities. But this is to forget that 'civilizations' not only were preceded by distinctive political formations, but cannot even be conceived without them. Cultures are not civilizations, just as societies are not polities. The latter cannot be thought of without the former, but both cultures and societies can exist and have existed without the latter. One may, if one so likes, see the 'seed', the 'elements', the 'potentialities' of the latter in the former, but that would be

a 'retrospective' look, and the 'insistence' most probably based on the view that nothing 'new' can ever come into being as whatever happens must already have been there in an 'implicit' or 'potential' form as otherwise how could it have come into being.

But even if socio-cultural formations can be there without explicit political or civilizational formation, can they be without the activity called 'economic' without which neither society nor culture can be conceived to 'exist'. What is this activity and what is its relation to society and culture, and how is it affected by the mutational eruption of political formations on the one hand and civilizational creations or constructions on the other, is the question without answering which we shall scarcely understand what goes on in history.

Economic activity may be seen at the human level as the transformation of 'nature' or rather that which is 'given' into something which is 'usable' or 'consumable' in the context of 'needs' which are primarily biological and, secondarily, cultural in nature. This transformational activity involves both knowledge and action which keep continually changing and growing, and have to be preserved and passed on from generation to generation. The closest term conveying this transformation of nature into that which is used for life's purposes in the Indian tradition is '*anna*' or 'food' which has been considered as the first level at which *Brahman* or the ultimate reality 'appears' or becomes 'real' to man. The 'world' is the 'food' for 'life' or *prāṇa* as the *Upaniṣad* says, but in order to become that it requires human activity which itself requires energy, both physical and mental, which in turn is sustained by the world transformed into food once again.

This is the cycle known in economics as the one obtaining between 'production' and 'consumption'. The distance between them may be as small as one likes, but the 'distance' has to be there, and though it can increase and be 'larger' it can never be so large as to become unbridgeable, as then the very purpose of 'production' would be nullified. The mid-way process can assume many forms, but one that has attracted the attention of the economists most is 'exchange', particularly of different kinds of 'food' where the transaction *adds* not only to the 'value' of the product concerned, but to an enhancement of its 'utility' to both the parties concerned.

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This, roughly, is the way 'economic' situation may be characterized before the mutation in social formations dirempts and divides it and brings what we call a 'polity' into being. Whatever the reasons for this, a new and far-reaching distinction is introduced in the 'body social' between those who are 'ruled' and those who 'rule'. The relation is, and has to be, asymmetrical, but the political asymmetry brings a new asymmetry into being that is primarily 'economic'. The first one relates to 'power', while the second relates to 'wealth', but that is not the whole story. The dichotomy and the division creates a class of those who do not perform any function in the 'production processes' of the economy, unless the exercise of the political function itself is supposed to contribute to the functioning of the economy. This, at least theoretically, has to be seen as purely contingent even if in actual fact it happens to be different, as in the pre-political stage, the economy functioned without it. There arises thus a new class of 'pure consumers' who do not create any 'economic value' in the system. They may be said to create 'political value' but then the key problem would become the relation between 'political' and 'economic' values for the theoretical understanding of a functioning social system.

The economy of the society concerned has now to support the 'ruling class' and the administrative structure it slowly builds to exercise its function, institutions and structures which just did not happen to be there before, as they were not necessary. The 'political costs' to the society thus have not to be seen only in terms of the new distinction brought into being by asymmetries of power, but also in terms of the economic costs that it entails which, though more invisible, happen to be as 'real' as the former.

The most visible sign of this is the imposition of 'tax', the very idea of which was totally absent earlier, and the drawing of a formal boundary dividing the internal exchange relations from those that are 'external'. The political boundary thus becomes also an economic boundary across which exchanges are controlled and regulated not by those who are involved in the transaction, but by someone else who has the final 'say' in the matter.

The 'economic' boundary is, however, different from the 'political' boundary as the exchange relations that occur across it are 'necessary'

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'governed', and 'responsibility' taken for its welfare, growth and development, it is difficult to say what the balance-sheet will be in the long run. The 'loot and plunder' is one thing, 'settled conquest' another. Still another is the case when the conquerors come from 'outside', but settle in the land they have conquered as the Turko-Afghan and Mughal rulers did in India. The Mughal empire was not an 'empire' in the sense in which the Ottoman empire was one, or the Roman or the British empires which may be regarded as the classic examples of what an 'empire' is supposed to be.

The expansion and consolidation increases the 'costs' particularly as there is a 'time-lag' for the 'gains' to accrue and accumulate, necessitating the 'expansion' even further, resulting in a repetition of the cycle once again. Polities 'live' on 'borrowed credit', and empires do it even on a grander, more spectacular scale, dazzling the onlooker who does not see the yawning gap behind and beneath it all. This they can do, as they provide the environment for economy to flourish and wealth to be created through an expanding internal and external trade. Merchants become bankers and money-lenders to the State and finance even its military enterprises in order to keep the credit-worthiness of the State afloat and, of course, get a share of the 'spoils' when the victory is won.

The interrelationships of the economies of the conquering State with those of the places that are conquered and the inter-meshing of political and administrative structures is a story that is seldom told, particularly in the context of the conflicts they generate. But it is clear that the political hegemony is seldom accepted and arouses 'resistance' as it affects the deep identifications and self-respect of a people more than economic relationships which take a longer time to be seen as essentially adverse in character and, in many cases, this may not even be actually so. The Marxian analysis, based as it primarily is on the capitalist mode of production and the uneven interrelationships between States with unequal development in that mode in what has been called the 'imperial' relationship with the colonies, has so intermeshed the 'political' with the 'economic' that it has failed to see the relative autonomy and independence of the two. The very differentiation of the political function and its institutionalization creates a dynamics of its

own, bringing into being 'new' forces that radically affect and alter all previously functioning aspects of societies, including its culture and economy. In fact, the differentiation and institutionalization of the political function brings gradually into being a differentiation and institutionalization of other aspects also which earlier were unified in a whole so invisibly that they were hardly perceived or felt to be there at all. The relative autonomy, independence and internal causality of these fields becomes manifest only *after* they have become so differentiated and institutionalized. But, so does the conflict and the ambivalent relationship they have with the polity, as also with one another. The claim of each on the polity and of the polity on them creates a situation where no one is satisfied, and yet the dynamics and dialectic of dissatisfaction, if carefully handled, lead the polity and the society forward.

The differentiations, however, lead to a division, both horizontal and vertical, which create new asymmetries of rank, status, prestige and power besides those of the 'ruler' and the 'ruled', and thus increasingly bring into being the problem of the relationships between them. The State plays, and has to play, a mediating and integrating role but, increasingly, it is seen as partisan tilting the balance in favour of those who provide the economic foundation for it and those who legitimize its function and practice, something which it always needs. The creators of wealth have generally been known, but not so the 'legitimizers' of those who exercise the ruling function in the polity. The problem of 'legitimacy' is always there, but there is the added problem of 'justification' as what those who rule do, is not exactly acceptable or palatable to many even if it be in their 'real' interest or the interest of the society and polity as a whole.

The real problem of a polity which represents 'self-consciousness' at a collective level, is to ensure the maintenance, continuance and growth of *all* that society consists of as constituted, through its increasingly differentiated and differentiating structures, and embodied in institutions with their own divergent values for the realization of which they have been formed and which is the *raison d'être* of their existence. But while seeing to all this and taking responsibility for it, it also has to see about itself, its continuity and the way it is discharging its function. Its

relation to society from which it is so ambiguous as the latter needs to be institutionalized of the purposes, and if those purposes have gone wrong and need to be re-examined in the history of man's experiments in this perspective to realize at first sight that once the nothing can be done about it those who rule but, sooner from within and without.

But even in normal circumstances those who are to rule shall ensure the necessity so arises to ensure this for all other institutions in the history of 'political experiments' the ages. How to avoid a system and cannot be removed, is a problem which western tradition has been unable to solve which perhaps was first tried to be described and documented by Aristotle, recorded more than two hundred years since.

The problem relates to the nature of power and how the latter can exercise its interest that the former are 'appointed', 'tenure of office' and 'appointed' do step down when they are appointed. There is also the question of who are the persons entitled to exercise the notion of 'citizen' in the wider sense of Aristotle's definition of 'citizen', also attributed to Aristotle, 'animal' is wider in nature than 'citizen' restricting it to the realm of

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relation to society from which it got differentiated, thus, is strange and ambiguous as the latter never forgets that the differentiation and the institutionalization of the political function occurred for certain purposes, and if those purposes were not being achieved, something must have gone wrong and needs to be rectified to set things right. The history of man's experimentation with forms of polity has to be seen in this perspective to realize that it just is not the case as may appear at first sight that once the ruling function has become autonomous nothing can be done about it. The delusion of 'omnipotence' may infect those who rule but, sooner or later, it is corrected by forces generated from within and without.

But even in normal circumstances, the question remains as to how those who are to rule shall be appointed, the succession ensured and in case the necessity so arises, removed. The political centre tries to ensure this for all other institutions in a society, but the fact that it has to ensure this for itself as well creates that 'insoluble' problem which the history of 'political experimentation' has been trying to solve over the ages. How to avoid a situation where the ruler becomes a 'tyrant' and cannot be removed, is the central question whose answer in the western tradition has been given by what is called 'democracy' and which perhaps was first tried in the history of Greece by Athens as described and documented in *The Athenian Constitution*, a work ascribed to Aristotle, recording the history of the experiment for more than two hundred years since the time of Solon till his own times.

The problem relates to the relation between the ruler/s and the 'ruled', and how the latter can exercise 'control' over the former, as it is in their interest that the former are supposed to govern. The problem thus is of 'appointment', 'tenure of office' and ensuring that those who are appointed do step down when their tenure is over, unless they are re-appointed. There is also the problem of the 'process of appointment' and who are the persons entitled to take part in it. This gave rise to the notion of 'citizen' in the western tradition of thought about polity and of Aristotle's definition of man as a 'political animal'. The other definition, also attributed to Aristotle, which defines man as a 'rational animal' is wider in nature but, when combined with the narrower one restricting it to the realm of the 'political', opens the door to an under-

standing of western thought regarding the 'understanding' of man as perhaps nothing else could. Aristotle's teacher had already shown the way to this type of understanding, but Plato was ambivalent, as his understanding of 'reason' was different and, in any case, he did not seem to understand the problem to which the seeking for the 'democratic' form of political organization was the answer. Plato seems never to have seen the perennial problem from which all polity *qua* 'polity' seems to suffer. The asymmetrical relations of power which the formation of a polity legitimizes may, at any time, turn, by the very nature of the structural situation into those which are exploitative, oppressive and tyrannical. Aristotle too did not seem to have seen this, even though he seemed to have engaged in a comparative study of the constitutions of the 'city-states' of Greece in general and of Athens in particular, as evidenced in *The Athenian Constitution*. In fact, both he and Plato seemed to have had an adverse opinion regarding the functioning of 'democracy' in the Athenian 'City-State', particularly after the way it treated Socrates as documented in *The Trial and Death of Socrates* by Plato, his pupil and one of the greatest philosophers the world has ever seen. The reflection on justice in *The Republic*, it has been argued by some, should be seen in this perspective. Plato seems to have felt that a 'democracy' could perhaps be as tyrannical as any other form of polity, or perhaps even more so.

The Macedonian conquest of Athens, first by Phillips and then by Alexander, put an end to the experiment in democracy described in *The Athenian Constitution* but the Aristotelian definition of man as a being who was both 'rational' and 'political' at the same time haunted and influenced Western thought and practice, just as did Plato's vision of a 'utopia', or an 'ideal polity' in which alone perhaps a fully 'rational' life could be lived, a life that included for him the contemplation of 'ideas' or rather the 'Real' which coincided with the Idea of Good.

The realization of 'Reason' in the realm of the political and the definition of man in its terms introduced a perennially active dimension in the nature of man to make him 'concerned' with the other at an impersonal and institutional level which was different from the personal and individual level in terms of which the problem of morality was generally conceived and defined. Being a 'human being' meant to

be a member of this public domain realization of the public good 'private' personal relations which to be 'privative' in character, that of being fully human, particularly rational or irrational, constitute valued in terms of them.

The transformation in the nature has not been sufficiently noticed of the 'public good' and involvement of individual and inter-institutional 'representative' capacity, and not exactly that 'universality' of which about whose locus continues to be the same which is talked about in individual-centred as it is enmeshed and blame and freedom. Nor the distinction between 'instrumental rationality' and 'wert-rationality' matter, as they still remain bound 'value' remains central in the

These notions of 'rationality' in the way the Athenian Greek saw the simulation which put the individual Church, rather than of the political however was the Catholic, as a matter, not shared by the Lutheran the basis for the way both Kant and subject, even though there was the latter's formulation, though it provided the possibility of a return 'greatest good' (happiness) of enormously effective in the social dental is shown by the development after Bentham, Mill and Sidgwick reason to the public sphere and

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be a member of this public domain and actively participate in it for the realization of the public good, and not just to live in the world of 'private' personal relations which, at least in one Greek sense, was said to be 'privative' in character, that is, 'something' which 'deprived' you of being fully human, particularly as this world was essentially non-rational or irrational, constituted as it was by feelings and emotions and valued in terms of them.

The transformation in the notion of 'rationality' that this involved has not been sufficiently noticed. It was now being seen in the context of the 'public good' and involved a 'participative', 'deliberative' inter-individual and inter-institutional character where each thought in a 'representative' capacity, and not as an individual person. This was not exactly that 'universality' of reason which philosophers have talked about whose locus continues to be the individual, nor is its 'good' the same which is talked about in the context of ethics which remains individual-centred as it is enmeshed and stuck in the issues of praise and blame and freedom. Nor is this the reason which thrives on the distinction between 'instrumental' and 'intrinsic' rationality or *zweck-rationalitat* and *wert-rationalitat* so dear to social scientists since Weber, as they still remain bound to the individual whose apprehension of 'value' remains central in the analysis.

These notions of 'rationality' and 'value' derive not so much from the way the Athenian Greek saw it, but rather from the Christian formulation which put the individual at the centre, but as a member of the Church, rather than of the polis as Aristotle had perhaps seen it. This, however was the Catholic, and perhaps the Byzantine, view of the matter, not shared by the Lutheran break which seems to have provided the basis for the way both Kant and the utilitarians thought on the subject, even though there was a crucial difference between them as the latter's formulation, though still rooted in the individual subject, provided the possibility of a return to the Greek notion *via* the idea of the 'greatest good' (happiness) of the 'greatest number'. That this, though enormously effective in the socio-political realm, was essentially accidental is shown by the developments in ethical thought in England after Bentham, Mill and Sidgwick. But, the return of the realm of reason to the public sphere and to the 'thinking' about the 'public good'

was taken over in the 'policy-oriented' sciences such as economics, politics, law, etc., though the success of Rawls and the enormous reputation of Habermas suggest that philosophers have not entirely given up the way Aristotle tried to think about man and understood and defined him.

The application of rationality in the public sphere has, however, been confined mainly to economics and as for politics it has almost exclusively concerned itself with the polity within the boundaries which constitute and define it. The political perspective cannot but 'see' the world as defined by itself, and this has boundaries without which it cannot be considered a polity. Economics, as we said earlier, does not have those boundaries, though when seen in the political perspective, it generally tends to have one. The point is that 'reason' in the public domain functions differentially in the realm of politics and economics. It is easier for it to transcend and transgress national boundaries in the economic than in the political realm where the distinction between the 'inner' and the 'outer', the 'we' and the 'they' is insurmountable because of the structural limits themselves.

Polity, it should be remembered, is defined differentially in respect of those for whom it is 'responsible', that is, its own citizens, and all the rest, that is, other polities and peoples are alien to it. The twin values of power and welfare that define the realm are related in such a way that while the former is subordinated to the latter at least to some extent in the context of its own citizens, there is nothing of this sort in relation to those which constitute the 'other' to the polity outside itself. There, pure considerations of power prevail and if these are ever tempered it is only by considerations of power that are relevant to it.

The two values that define the realm of the political are intrinsically at odds even in the internal domain, but there, in spite of this, the welfare-dimension has to be taken into account as it is that for which the polity is supposed to be there. The regulative and the integrative function that this involves in respect of all aspects of society includes the economic aspect as well, and it is this which leads to that strange and paradoxical situation where everything that is intrinsically 'universal' has to be parochialized and seen from the perspective of the state to which one belongs, and in terms of its interests alone.

The enormous harm that mankind has seldom been that humanity could not build what we call 'civilization' over-arching umbrella of inconceivable. The role of contribution of smaller states small city-states of ancient which arose in Post-Mughal elsewhere as in Rajasthan which kept the flame alive without them they would

It is perhaps this interjunctive unifying, consolidatory period, scattered, separate polities brought into being what we call a civilizational point of view tried on the rise and fall of empires certainly becomes 'visible' empires pre-supposed long diverse fields at various places even in the period when it was on them and which receded from them. This is as true of the history of Alexander's in Greece as of what they had conquered in the history of culture and can be safely said that Toyotomi sees them exclusively in fostered. Religions, he fostered cultural creativity; they to born and outlasted them

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The enormous harm that it has done to the 'universal' interests of mankind has seldom been noticed or emphasized, but it is equally true that humanity could not have engaged in its various enterprises and built what we call 'civilizations' without the protection, patronage and over-arching umbrella of polities without which this would have been inconceivable. The role of empires in this regard is well known, but the contribution of smaller states should not be forgotten. It is not only the small city-states of ancient Greece or of Renaissance Italy or of those which arose in Post-Mughal India in the sub-Himalayan region and elsewhere as in Rajasthan, but also the innumerable unknown ones which kept the flame alive and the civilizational enterprises 'going', as without them they would have died long ago.

It is perhaps this interplay between the centralizing, overarching, unifying, consolidatory periods of the Great Empires and the decentralized, scattered, separate political centres that nourished creativity and brought into being what we call 'civilizations' in history. Seen from the civilizational point of view, the two are not opposed as the story centred on the rise and fall of empires has tended to paint. The polity certainly becomes 'visible' in that which we see as 'Empires', but the empires presupposed long periods when creativity was fostered in diverse fields at various places under different polities which continue even in the period when imperial unity and authority is superimposed on them and which recedes when the imperial sway gets loosened over them. This is as true of the Mauryan and the Gupta empires in India, as of Alexander's in Greece and later of the Romans on large parts of what they had conquered in Asia. The role that empires have played in the history of culture and civilizations has yet to be examined, but it can be safely said that Toynbee seems to be definitely wrong when he sees them exclusively in terms of the universal religions that they fostered. Religions, he forgot, have the same history as other areas of cultural creativity; they too had been there *before* the empires were born and outlasted them when they disappeared.

The function of the polity is to continue to do at a self-conscious level what society does almost naturally as the latter not only pre-dates the former, but continues to perform its functions even when the polity gets institutionalized and differentiated, though in a radically modified

form. The polity, in fact, differentiates and formally separates through institutionalization many of these functions, and tries then to unify and integrate them, creating more institutions in this process and thus increasing the 'costs' of 'running' the society which hardly were there before.

The differentiation of political forms and their evolution, or rather the changes in them over time and the effect these have had on society have hardly been studied, but many of the so-called 'social formations' have been the direct or indirect result of the polity's, or rather the political state's vaster interest in perpetuating itself and enhancing its power and power-bases in the society. There is, however, always an 'external' aspect of the polity's relation to other polities which the purely society-centred analysis misses, and which becomes visible even to the blindest eye when a polity assumes the form of an 'empire'.

'Empire', by definition, is expansionist, constituted as it is by those who have been conquered and whose societies and cultures are, by this very fact, 'inferior' even if they are in certain exceptional cases acknowledged as superior, as is said to be the case in the relation between Rome and Greece. The incorporation of that which is conquered, thus creates not only the empire but also that asymmetry within it which impels it to a course involving further and further expansion till it results in an economic bankruptcy and political disaster and the external discontent results in increasing resistance and the costs of maintaining control become so high that the centre not only cannot meet them, but cannot keep itself from breaking and collapsing.

The 'collapse', however is only a 'return-back' to an earlier situation when the empire had not arisen and the enormous complications, differentiations and institutionalizations had not taken place with only one difference of course, and the difference consists in the 'memory' of that which was achieved during the days of the empire when everything was 'staged' and 'played' to be seen and chronicled and recorded and remembered. These included not only the political events about which the historians write, but also the intellectual and cultural creations which the post-imperial decentralized societies and polities try to preserve and develop in their own ways, 'freed' as they are of the centrally

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effect these have had on society
the so-called 'social formations'
t of the polity's, or rather the
tuating itself and enhancing its
. There is, however, always an
on to other polities which the
and which becomes visible even
mes the form of an 'empire'.

ist, constituted as it is by those
ocieties and cultures are, by this
n certain exceptional cases ac-
the case in the relation between
f that which is conquered, thus
hat asymmetry within it which
r and further expansion till it
political disaster and the exter-
tance and the costs of maintain-
itre not only cannot meet them,
nd collapsing.

urn-back' to an earlier situation
e enormous complications, dif-
d not taken place with only one
consists in the 'memory' of that
of the empire when everything
d chronicled and recorded and
he political events about which
ual and cultural creations which
s and polities try to preserve
l' as they are of the centrally

imposed standards and norms of the imperial metropolis where every-
thing was concentrated.

The decentralization reduces the wastage and the costs and thus
releases funds for a more economical use giving rise to results which,
though less spectacular and glamorous, are equally important as it is
through them that the enterprises of a civilization are carried forward.

The economic base and the political superstructure are always in a
tension and the interplay between them provides that dynamics which
Marx saw but did not clearly understand. The dynamics, however, is
not determined by these two alone, as the polity's relations with other
polities, provides that third dimension which determines the inner de-
velopment not only of the polity, but of its relation to its own 'economy'
as well.

These, however, are 'internal' factors in the story of a civilization
which is centred in its intellectual and cultural enterprises which in-
clude the life of the imagination and what is called 'spirit'.

The unasked question that this raises, however, is what happens to
'man' who is the centre of all this drama and whether history with all
the changes in polity, economy and society leave his 'essence' 'un-
touched', or transform and transmute him in a sense that is difficult to
grasp as the very activity of thinking and understanding seems to be
structured in such a way as to determine and give form to itself by
conceiving of everything, including itself, as constituted by the differ-
ences that distinguish and define them as 'this' rather than 'that'. The
retrospective look at the evidence provided by history seems to suggest
that there is little change in man since he became self-conscious and
reflected on himself and the world around him and his 'relation' with
it. But even if all this is admitted, it does not follow that 'something'
that is defined in terms of a property or set of properties, cannot lose
them and cease to be either as an individual or a class or species, as
that would then imply that any 'object' defined in this way would never
'cease to be', as it cannot do so by definition. Such a conclusion would
be unpalatable and hence unacceptable as it would confer 'immortality'
on everything that could be defined as having a *svarūpa* or *svabhāva*
or essence.

The attempt to save the situation by opting for the immortality of the species alone and sacrificing that of the individual would not help unless one were to assume that *all* the species have existed *all* the time since they came into being and that no 'new' species can ever arise because of the eternal fixity in them imposed by one's definition. But if once it is accepted that there could have been a time when the species called 'man' was not there, then there can be no reason to think that it will always be there *or* that it will not give rise to some other species which would be related to man, as he is said to be related to those from which man is said to have arisen. The relation of this new species to man would be similar to the one that seems to obtain between man and other animals, no matter if the differentiating characteristic is described in terms of 'rationality' or 'citizenship' or *dharma*, that is, the sense of 'rightness' or 'wrongness' in respect of anything that is apprehended by his consciousness.

Thinkers like Aurobindo and Chardin, and even Nietzsche, have struggled with this question, but none of them could have seen the far-reaching fundamental changes in the very structure of the human condition that are being introduced by what goes under the name of genetic engineering, information technology, transmutation of elements and the transformation of mass into energy, all actually around us in different degrees of maturation. Chardin did talk of a 'Noo-sphere' on the analogy of 'Bio-sphere' which man's mind was gradually creating for his 'mental living' just as life had earlier created the biosphere for its sustenance, survival and growth of life on this planet.

But the thought of all of them is 'consciousness-centred', while what is happening is almost the opposite. Consciousness is being ambushed, threatened, overwhelmed by something that is its 'opposite' and we seem to have reached a stage where the very 'reality' of consciousness is in question. Any thinking about consciousness now will have to take into account, at least at the human level, the political, the economic and the socio-cultural matrix in which it is embedded and through which it has to function and achieve its ends. But, if we are to understand its 'history' and learn from it we will have to get rid of the illusion which its apparent transparency projects and makes us believe that it always was as it 'appears' to be. A 'look' at the 'animal world' around, as Sri

Aurobindo did, should be his own words used in a 'illusion of the obvious'.

The 'self-centredness' of 'being', gets a little less 'centredness' imposed on it sarily to live, and which universality which the me the other end of the spectr two radically opposed dire question of the future. But *of Human Unity* and *The I* and *The Life Divine*, witness times, just as Gandhi's 'economic fields do in a differ the faint awareness of soi beyond them, each in his c temptation of 'turning awa forward, the 'double denia tion' and the trail that Gan his way. It is the vision th in which all pioneering e consciousness has to be of of polity, society and eco sistant. Gandhi saw this as from the real challenges p infiltrating and shaping eve less as they are 'wedded' to of the message contained he said or did, as he 'kne accept mistakes when b Aurobindians and Aurovi supermind doing things fo fields which really challer to use Sri Aurobindo's te that human consciousness

opting for the immortality of the individual would not help. Species have existed *all* the time so 'new' species can ever arise imposed by one's definition. But it had been a time when the there can be no reason to think will not give rise to some other, as he is said to be related to arisen. The relation of this new one that seems to obtain better if the differentiating character 'citizenship' or *dharma*, 'consciousness' in respect of anything else.

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'consciousness-centred', while what consciousness is being ambushed, that is its 'opposite' and we very 'reality' of consciousness consciousness now will have to take the political, the economic and embedded and through which out, if we are to understand its to get rid of the illusion which makes us believe that it always 'animal world' around, as Sri

Aurobindo did, should be sufficient to dispel the illusoriness which, in his own words used in a different context, may be characterized as 'illusion of the obvious'.

The 'self-centredness' of consciousness and life, and perhaps of all 'being', gets a little less at the human level because of the 'other-centredness' imposed on it by those dimensions in which it has necessarily to live, and which helps it in attaining an impersonality and universality which the meditative consciousness seems to provide at the other end of the spectrum. What is the relationship between these two radically opposed directions of consciousness, is the unanswered question of the future. But the fact that Sri Aurobindo wrote *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Human Cycle* besides *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Life Divine*, witnesses the challenge of this awareness in modern times, just as Gandhi's 'experiments' in the political, social and economic fields do in a different way. But these are just the 'beginning', the faint awareness of something that is needed and we have to go beyond them, each in his or her own way. The path is untraversed, the temptation of 'turning away' too great, and yet if humanity is to move forward, the 'double denial' has to be replaced by a 'double affirmation' and the trail that Gandhi blazed has to be followed, though not in *his* way. It is the vision that should matter and not the 'accidentalities' in which all pioneering efforts are inevitably enmeshed. The value-consciousness has to be operationalized, brought to work in the fields of polity, society and economy which seem most recalcitrant and resistant. Gandhi saw this as perhaps no one else did, but he turned away from the real challenges posed by modern technologies which are now infiltrating and shaping every aspect of life. The Gandhians stand helpless as they are 'wedded' to the wording of *Hind Swaraj* and oblivious of the message contained in his life which was never bound by what he said or did, as he 'knew' what he was doing and was prepared to accept mistakes when he realized that they were such. As for Aurobindians and Aurovilleites, they seem to believe more in the supermind doing things for them, rather than do things on their own in fields which really challenge the higher mind and the intuitive mind, to use Sri Aurobindo's terminology, to shape them nearer the values that human consciousness vaguely apprehends at present. The lessons

from the 'masters' have to be learnt, but the path one has to find for oneself and traverse the way one can. The emerging realities of society, polity, economy and technology can only be ignored at costs which are unimaginable at the historical juncture man finds himself today. The awareness of this along with the great traditions of experimentation with consciousness in the past may help in restoring and redressing the balance in the thought and action that is needed today.