

Survival of Bodily Death
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Sri Aurobindo's Model of the Soul
Michael Murphy

Michael Murphy briefly discussed the Indian seer Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary vision, of which the central term is Satchitananda, the self-existent being, consciousness-force, and delight of Divinity. As the ground of all existence, Satchitananda is both transcendent and immanent to every moment of creation. Aurobindo describes all manifest creation as an emanation (or involution) into space-time and matter of Satchitananda. Because this process is beyond normal human comprehension and description, Aurobindo can offer only the metaphors of adventure, lila (the cosmic play), and ecstasy to describe that which is indescribable. Interestingly, although Aurobindo's metaphysical vision of the involution of Satchitananda into matter, time and space was written before the big bang was a well-known scientific hypothesis, his system fits well with what science has discovered.

After Satchitananda poured itself out into time and space, it started to evolve. Its subsequent evolutionary unfolding has given rise to threshold moments in which fundamentally-new properties emerge in the manifest universe, such as life arising from matter, and mind from life. At each stage, though, the principle of subsumption is at work, meaning that an emergent property includes much that came before it. Thus, mind includes both life and matter, while life only includes the later.

Murphy described Aurobindo as an "emergent" philosopher comparable to Lloyd Morgan and Samuel Alexander, because each would agree that there is an unpredictable creativity at work in the unfolding universe. For Aurobindo, while the entire evolutionary process is slowly making the implicit Divine explicit in the world, it is creating novel, unpredictable dimensions to the universe as well. Evolution is both an uncovering of the hidden divine and an emergence of the truly novel.

The Human Soul and the Five Bodies

After briefly describing Aurobindo's evolutionary system, Murphy turned to the Indian seer's vision of the human soul. While on the one hand the soul maintains its eternal oneness with Satchitananda, it simultaneously enters the evolutionary process of matter, time and space. This incarnating aspect, or dimension, of the human soul, which he calls the "psychic being" or chaitya-purusha, is the part of us that reincarnates from life to life. In relation to the Platonic tradition, Murphy noted that the word "daimon," as used recently by the psychologist James Hillman in his book *The Soul's Code*, strongly resembles the chaitya-purusha.

Aurobindo maintains that there exists a supreme power, the Supermind, which is the first emanation from Satchitananda and can be brought into play through the practice of yoga to lift mind, life, and matter into ever greater consciousness, power, and delight and thus manifest more and more of our latent divinity.

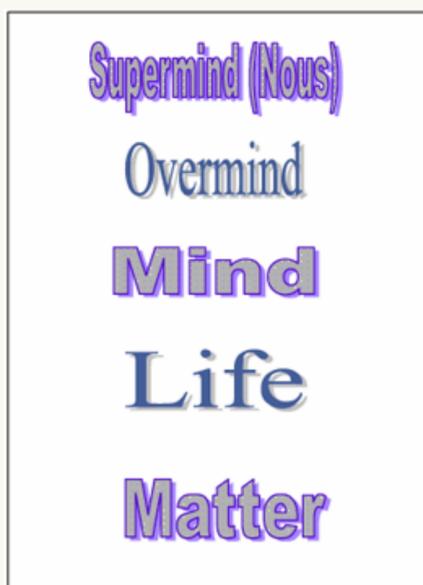
Murphy noted that Aurobindo's dual model of the soul would fit with J.J. Portman's Delta position, in which the soul has both material (existing as an expression of the Supermind) and immaterial (eternal oneness with Sachitananda) aspects to it.

Murphy also described the five bodies mentioned in the Taittiriya Upanishad:

1. **Anamaya kosha** – the physical body
2. **Pranamaya kosha** – the body of ki/chi (energy)
3. **Manamaya kosha** – the mental body (intention)
4. **Vinanamaya kosha**– the supramental body
5. **Anandamaya kosha** – the bliss body

In his writings, Aurobindo envisioned a radical transformation of the flesh into new forms of embodied life, and Murphy has been looking for instances of this in his research. The five bodies indicate that our physical life is only the first layer of our being. According to Aurobindo, we have other bodies that comprise our manifest nature.

Overall, Murphy's presentation of Aurobindo's model emphasized that any discussion of human personality, soul, and survival will be incomplete if it does not incorporate an evolutionary cosmology. Without it, we will miss central insights into the deeper purpose and nature of who we are as participants in the evolutionary adventure. As Aurobindo himself writes on the mystery of rebirth and the survival of bodily death, "the solution depends upon the nature, source and object of the cosmic movement, and as we determine these, so we shall have to conclude about birth, life, death, the before and the hereafter."



Sachitananda (Divine)

Involution into matter precedes evolution back to the Divine.
Evolution is the unfolding of the Divine in the universe.
Evolution makes the implicit Divine explicit.

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