

Johannes Heinrichs

INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY

**The Common Logical Roots of
Anthropology, Politics, Language,
and Spirituality**

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We dream of traveling through space: is the universe not in us?
We do not know the depth of our mind. The mysterious way is in-
wards. In us, or nowhere, is eternity with their worlds,
the past and the future.
(Novalis, *Blüthenstaub*, 1798)

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Subsequently, the publisher's editor was less merciful but hopefully a better advocate for the reader.

I appreciate much the trustful and competent cooperation from Christian Schön and Valerie Lange of *ibidem* Press.

Prior to this edition, Franz Fassbender published a brochure with a very short version of this book under the title *Diamonds of Integral Philosophy* in his Aurovillian *Prisma* edition (prisma@auroville.org.in; ISBN 9 78 8193 367513). I trust this low-cost, abbreviated Indian edition will serve as great help for nonprofessional students of philosophy.

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Introduction to the English/Indian Edition

The predecessor of this book appeared in 2014 in German and was titled *Integrale Philosophie*. But this book is not just a translation. The author has modified its content for Indian and English speaking readers. This adaption is based on his opinion that the decisive encounter between European, especially German, and Indian philosophy has not yet happened.

It is not the aim of this book to review the great waves of reception of Indian philosophy and wisdom in Germany since the end of the eighteenth century, which is marked by names such as Friedrich Schlegel, Franz Boas, Max Mueller, Arthur Schopenhauer, and many others.

Neither can it be the intention of the author to give any comparative survey of Indian and German or European philosophy. Such an ambition would completely alter and even falsify the central aim of the chapters of this book, which is a systematic and not a historical one. There is a central and fundamental thought that functions as the unifying bond of these nine chapters, and which is new in contemporary philosophy, in spite of great predecessors in the so-called German idealism. This thought can be labeled as reflection theory, the systematic evaluation of the human self-consciousness that is constituted by his faculty of self-reflection. We will discuss this fundamental point in the first chapter.

In the European history of thought, it was René Descartes who made a new beginning by the thinking Ego as the methodical point of departure. The “critical philosophy” of Immanuel Kant and his successors continued this way: All content of philosophy has to be justified before the instance of the critical thinker. Therefore, all “modern” philosophy in the Western sense begins with epistemology. The rich doctrines of ancient Greek philosophy, represented

by Plato and Aristotle, as well as the great medieval synthesis of “Christian philosophy,” represented by Thomas Aquinas, were radically called into question by this way of departure into scientific philosophical thinking.

This calling into question happens in the encounter between Indian and modern Western philosophical thinking. It does not fall into the authors’ field of interest and competence, and it is not possible to give a strict proof of this parallel. I have heard about both positions from specialists of Indian thought: On the one hand, the history and doctrines of Indian philosophy are incomparably richer than their Western counterparts, while, on the other hand, all this rich stuff is “pre-critical” in the Western sense. If any decision between these opposite views on Indian philosophy is possible at all (which I doubt because the different points of view are decisive), it is outside my purview.

My intention is to present a systematic approach on Western philosophy, which includes modern and unified thinking on main issues of philosophy, covering the disciplines of epistemology, anthropology, social philosophy, theory of human action, philosophy of language, theory of art as a meta-language, a philosophy of mysticism and spirituality, the outlines of ontology, an ethical perspective, and, finally, all these disciplines in a unified view.

The main characteristic of contemporary Western philosophy is the denial of such a systematic approach, a denial that is nevertheless not well argued and proven, but a feeling of the “*Zeitgeist*” (spirit of the time). This is the place to confess that I see myself in strict opposition to the irrational “*Zeitgeist*.” Philosophy in Europe, as well as in Germany, has declined to be mere history of philosophy. A spiritual philosophy is taught only in the theological faculties of universities—faculties which, in a modern European understanding, have nothing to do at the universities because these Christian theologies are doctrines of religious faith and not philosophy in this critical understanding.

In the German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland), this “division of work” between philosophical and theological university faculties is especially strong because of the concordat between Hitler and the “Holy Chair” in 1933, which none of the political parties in Germany has dared to touch as they feared that ending such an arrangement would cost them electors among the Christian population. This situation will surely change during the next twenty years or so, but until now it is one decisive factor in the situation of philosophy in the German-speaking countries that there is not really free philosophy in these countries, even though a liberty of thought is reclaimed by those professors of philosophy who proclaim a materialistic (naturalistic), atheistic thinking or just so-called language analysis of the Anglo-Saxon type (inaugurated by the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein). I will come back to the principal deficiency of that dominating type of “language analysis” in my chapter on language theory (Chapter 5). Even the Critical Theory of Society – which dominated after World War II (beside the Nazi philosopher Heidegger) and brought the great heritage of Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx into the public discussion, who were more brilliant historians and aphoristic than systematic thinkers. Their successors like Jürgen Habermas tried to change that, but in no convincing manner at all. There is – under the power of power-liberated “discourse” (an unclear notion) – no culture of real public dialog. Occasionally I will come back to these names, even though I do not intend to make this book a history of philosophy instead of philosophy. My critique has always been moderate, but it seems that the sharpest critique is constructive theory, and there is proof that it is possible. If you oppose the predominant relativistic “*Zeitgeist*” of one or the other color, you are not forgiven. Systematic thinking is associated with naivety, even more as one cannot refute its value.

This is the general situation of contemporary Western philosophy. In each of the following chapters, I will show its prime deficiencies, even if this is not my main intention. My main aim is to show that systematic philosophical thinking is not only possible but is also of

the greatest importance for shaping of a “new age” of our societies and of mankind, to use an expression already of Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo is by far the most important instance for the adaptation of this book to Indian readers. Born in Kolkata in 1872, he was educated in London and Cambridge since the age of 7, learning not only the most refined English but also German to a certain extent. To read German philosophers in their language was important for his understanding of what he calls German “subjectivism” and the “subjective era” in general. I depict that the lasting essence of that “subjectivism” is the cultivation of self-reflection, not at least in a theory of reflection, which has already been mentioned as the unifying systematic essence of this book.

Before we delve deeper into that decisive issue, let us briefly recall the dates of Sri Aurobindo’s later life.¹

After returning to India in 1893 at the age of 21, he worked for the next 13 years in the princely state of Baroda in the service of the Maharaja and as a professor in the state’s college. He could not find in his wife an intellectual or spiritual partner; there was more uneasiness on both sides than happiness as a couple. In 1906, Aurobindo quit his service in Baroda and went to Calcutta, where he initiated the Indian nationalist movement. As an editor of the newspaper *Bande Mataram*, he put forward the idea of obtaining complete independence from Britain. Arrested three times of sedition or treason, he was released every time for lack of evidence. Sri Aurobindo began the practice of yoga in 1905. Within a few years, he achieved several fundamental spiritual realizations. In 1910, he withdrew from politics and went to Pondicherry in French India in order to escape from the British administration and to concentrate on his inner self and spiritual work. Over the next 40 years, he developed a new spiritual path, the Integral Yoga, whose ultimate aim

¹ I paraphrase slightly the short biography which is to be found in the work edition of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, especially of the collection *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination*, third impression (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry 2012).

was the transformation of life by the power of a “supramental” consciousness. In 1926, with the help of his spiritual collaborator, the Mother, he founded Sri Aurobindo Ashram. His vision of life is presented in numerous works of prose and poetry, among the best known of which are *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, and *Savitri*. Sri Aurobindo passed away on 5 December 1950 having had the satisfaction of the great day of India’s independence on his very birthday, 15 August 1947.

Remarkable, if not unique, is the deep connection of politics (which is often neglected in his biography), philosophy, and spirituality with Aurobindo. The reader need not expect in this book another account of Aurobindo’s teaching. What he or she can expect instead is a continuous, more or less explicit, demonstration of parallels between what has been elaborated in this book and Aurobindo’s teaching. We meet each other in Truth found on different paths. Sri Aurobindo is, in spite of the diligent elaboration of his thoughts, not a systematic thinker in the Western understanding. He proposes his insights thoroughly, but without taking into account methodological and epistemological questions. The mutual confirmation of insights from the point of view of a newly rethought Indian tradition on one hand, and of “critical” Western thinking (in the technical sense of this word since Kant), on the other hand, might be of mutual interest and enrichment. As far as I see, there is no contradiction between both approaches, in spite of the huge methodical differences, which a connoisseur of Aurobindo’s writings will notice from the very beginning.

Perhaps the followers of Aurobindo will even ask what at all the followings chapters of reflection theory have to do with their leader’s thinking. However, Aurobindo is not taken here as a master of wisdom who drew from the well of Vedic tradition or personal revelation, but just as a philosopher.

Here I come back to Aurobindo’s announcement of a “subjective era,” which is not far from the “new age” he proclaimed as the first one, more than half a century before the new-era wave in the seventies of the twentieth century:

Meanwhile, the nascent subjectivism preparative of the new age has shown itself not so much in the relations of the individuals or in the dominant ideas and tendencies of social development, which are largely rationalistic and materialistic and only vaguely touched by the deeper subjective tendency, but in the new collective self-consciousness of man in that organic mass of its life which he has most firmly developed in the past, the nation.²

What follows in Aurobindo's text is Chapter IV of *The Human Cycle*, entitled "The Discovery of the Nation Soul." We will come back to this notion in our chapter on social philosophy (Chapter 3). For the moment, our attention should only be directed to the thesis that the lasting essence of that "subjectivism" is the *cultivation of self-reflection*, not at least in a theory of reflection, which has already been announced as the unifying systematic essence of this book, and as a result of the best of German intellectual history. Aurobindo sees both sides of German subjectivism, the gift and the danger of political misuse of which all the world knows better than of the gift:

Germany was for the time the most remarkable present instance of a nation preparing for the subjective stage, because it had, in the first place, a certain kind of vision—unfortunately intellectual rather than illuminated—and the courage to follow it—unfortunately again a vital and intellectual rather than a spiritual hardihood,—and, secondly, being master of its destinies, was able to order its own life so as to express its self-vision. We must not be misled by appearances into thinking that the strength of Germany was created by Bismarck or directed by the Kaiser Wilhelm II. Rather the appearance of Bismarck was in many respects a misfortune for the growing nation because his rude and powerful hand precipitated its subjectivity into form and action at too early a stage; a longer period of incubation might have produced result less disastrous to itself, if less violently to humanity. The real source of this great subjective force which has been so much disfigured in its objective action, was not in Germany's statesmen and soldiers—for the most part poor enough types of men—but came from her great philosophers, Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Nietzsche, from her great thinker and poet Goethe, from her great musicians, Beethoven and Wagner, and from all in the German soul and temperament which they represented. A nation whose master achievement has lain almost entirely in the spheres of philosophy and music, is clearly predestined to lead in the turn to subjectivism and to produce a profound result for good or evil and the beginnings of the subjective age.

This was one side of the predestination of Germany; the other is to be found in her scholars, educationalists, scientists, organizers. It was the industry, the

² *The Human Cycle* (see footnote 1), p. 33.

conscientious diligence, the fidelity to ideas, the honest and painstaking spirit of work for which the nation has been long famous. [...] In Germany the bridge was there, though it ran mostly through a dark tunnel with a gulf underneath; for there was no pure transmission from the subjective mind of the thinkers and singers to the objective mind of the scholars and organizers.³

A short analysis of gifts and dangers of the German “soul” was never so clear as this one, though we cannot pursue it into all the implications of collective psychology in the given context. This context is the *gift of reflexivity*, of the discipline and culture of self-reflection. It is this very reflexivity in which lies the connection between philosophy and “the industry, the conscientious diligence, the fidelity to ideas, the honest and painstaking spirit of work” of Germany’s “scholars, educationalists, scientists, organizers.” German philosophy after Immanuel Kant was nothing else but the progressive self-explication of the human gift of self-reflection: Fichte, a great disciple of Kant, discovered what was lacking in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* – the intellectual intuition (*intellektuelle Anschauung*). Hegel discovered the inner reflection as the great principle of all conscious life; the role of outer, theoretical reflection is to make that implicit reflection explicit.

This path of self-discovery of the individual in general and of the philosopher in particular is paved with difficulties. It is even a battlefield of errors and insights until today. We will enter this battlefield from the very first chapter and will inspect it in detail, even if a historical investigation is not my main objective. The main objective is to recognize the important alternatives from the very beginning.

Therefore, what Sri Aurobindo calls the spirit of subjectivism in German culture is nothing else but the spirit and gift and danger of self-reflection.⁴ Having recognized this, although in different terms, is what makes Aurobindo an ideal negotiator or mediator between this very German book and the Indian spirit.

³ *Human Cycle*, p. 40 s.

⁴ The author has interpreted the famous complaint against the Germans by Hegel’s youth friend Friedrich Hoelderlin in his novel *Hyperion* from this very point of view (see *Revolution aus Geist und Liebe (Revolution by Spirit and Love)*, Munich 2007).