

REVIEWS :

J. Feys, *The Philosophy of Evolution in Shri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin*, Calcutta : K. L. MUKHOPADHYAY, 1973, Pp. xviii-276, Price Rs. 35/-.

In this year of the birth-centenary of Shri Aurobindo, his thought has loomed large in the many conferences, seminars, lectures and other celebrations which have commemorated him and his 'integral yoga' promises to be a lasting inspiration to many, both in India and abroad. As to Teilhard de Chardin, while the publication of all his writings proceeds unabate towards its nearing completion and translations in English and many other languages follow it without much delay, the yearly bibliography of all works devoted to their elucidation and popularisation is probably the most abundant of any concerned with writers of this century. Both of them have already been compared with Bergson whose influence is certain on the development of their related thoughts but it remained to confront them with each other and specifically on the theme of evolution which is central in both.

The book under review addresses itself to this task. As a doctoral dissertation it reaches a high standard and may serve as a model to young researchers in philosophy. Leaving off the too well-trodden highway of facile generalisations, hazy synoptic views and self-satisfying value-judgments rightly deplored by J. N. Mohanty, it follows what he calls "the narrow alleys of the fact-finding, detail-accumulating and concept-analysing sort" [cf. *Seminar*, 25 (1961), p. 23]. As a work of comparative philosophy, it brings to clear light the differences between the two authors, especially the sharp contrast between their respective conceptions of evolution (science-based for Teilhard but yoga-derived for Aurobindo), but it also shows their profound affinity at the deep

level of conscious communion with universal reality. Whereas the conceptual tools of Teilhard are those of any specialist in paleontology and allied disciplines, those of Aurobindo were shaped in a metascientific region of experience, an origin which explains why some philosophers, even of India, fail to accept the explanatory value of 'supra-mental', 'superconscient', 'Supermind' and such like terms. Unlike these rationalist philosophers, Feys grants them that kind of validity which attaches to terms stemming from authentic mysticism while, at the same time, acknowledging with Zaehner that there is sufficient evidence to guarantee the authentic character of Shri Aurobindo's mystical experience as well as of the mystical undercurrent of Teilhard's thought.

After noting first the centrality of evolution in their respective world-views, Feys quickly brings to light a double characteristic common to these two views : for both evolution is not only as for the scientist a fact of the past but an ongoing process with future potentialities which much of their thinking endeavours to reveal; and evolution is a process centred on man, man being the focus of past evolution, its present turning point and even the agent of its future development along the lines either of integral yoga, or beyond the mere biological, of the 'noospheric' self-transcendence which leads to fulfilment at the 'Omega point'.

But in understanding evolution there is a great difference between their views owing to the influence of their philosophies. Shri Aurobindo conceives of it in terms of *pariṇāma* according to the theory of *satkāryavāda* which posits the pre-existence of the effect in the self-evolving cause. Evolution is then a process of 'unfolding' which manifests in temporal succession what was hiddenly comprised or 'involved' in the original causal reality (matter, life, mind, supermind). For Teilhard, on the contrary, evolution is a creative process which brings about novelty, gradual enrichment, in an ascent from simpler to more complex organisms involving a 'within' which at the highest level appears as consci-

ousness properly so called. The teleological factor of this ascent is the attractive force of the divine Omega. Thus evolution is understood within a monotheistic view of reality rather than from a monistic view point as in Aurobindo.

This essential contrast in the very conception of evolution overshadows though it does not overrule the many points of similarity between the two doctrines. While Aurobindo and Teilhard converge in their experience of 'communion with the all' and their feeling for universal unity, they stand poles apart in their teaching regarding man's fulfilment: "Human fulfilment, for Aurobindo, is man becoming God; for Teilhard, it is man coming to God". (p. 258).

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