

Aurobindo's Supermind, Teilhard's Omega Point,
and Plato's Doctrine of Recollection

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Abstract

The concept of recollection as proposed by Socrates in the *Meno* is Plato's proposition that humanity's access to "hidden secrets" is provided by divine allowance via the deathless human soul. There is no stultifying cognitive disconnect between the reincarnate soul's acquisition to *apriori* knowledge, Aurobindo's rungs of the ladder to Supermind, or Teilhard's ascent to Omega Point. The theory of involution-evolution neatly supports the recollection of eternal truths or forms without the need for a reincarnate soul. Involution-evolution is best served by evolutionary panentheism, which provides that divinity resides within and evolves with humanity. Accepting that the *highest principle* is omniscient and makes all knowledge available, then is humanity imbued with the potential for access to all knowledge. The-great-chain-of-being and the concept of involution-evolution each establish that the accession of knowledge facilitates the ascension to God, the Supermind, and the Omega Point in similar fashion to Plato's Doctrine of Recollection.

Keywords: anamnesis, Aurobindo, involution-evolution, recollection, Meno, Plato, Teilhard.

The process of involution-evolution supports Plato's doctrine of recollection through the *highest principle's*¹ impregnation of universal knowledge within matter, the basest foundation of the-great-chain-of-being. In the *Meno*, Plato proposes that humanity's access to "hidden secrets" is provided by recollection of universal forms that are *apriori* existent in the deathless human soul; "the soul must exist "somewhere else" before being bound to the body" (Klein 1989, 131). Among those who endorse the theory of involution-evolution, there exist multivalent interpretations of the primary cause. Aurobindo Ghose chose the God of Supermind, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin posited the Catholic trinity within the noosphere, called the Omega Point. "It is [also] evident that they both had read Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (1911) "and had incorporated elements of his thought into their own work" (Korom 1989, 124).

The Meno Paradox

In the *Meno*,² Plato asks: What are the means for understanding something that seems non-conceptual within existing knowledge? From where does evolving comprehension (re)discover its novelty? Must there be logic to recognition? Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005, 236) ask: How "are we to understand that people can learn or discover something that goes beyond what they already know, and something that is more complex than they have known"? To paraphrase: Either you know for what you are searching or you do not. If you *know* for what you are searching, you already have knowledge of it. If you do *not know*, you would not recognize it even if you came upon it. The historical polarities of Eastern and Western philosophical searches-for-meaning are mitigated by universal aspiration— the need to know

¹ The *highest principle* is a generic term for Supermind, Supernature, Omega Point, God, divinity. and so on. Specifics are used when appropriate.

² For this study I use the translation of *Meno* by Guthrie (1956) and commentaries by Grube (1981) and Klein (1998).

what we do not yet know through the acquisition of things for which we do not know we are searching.

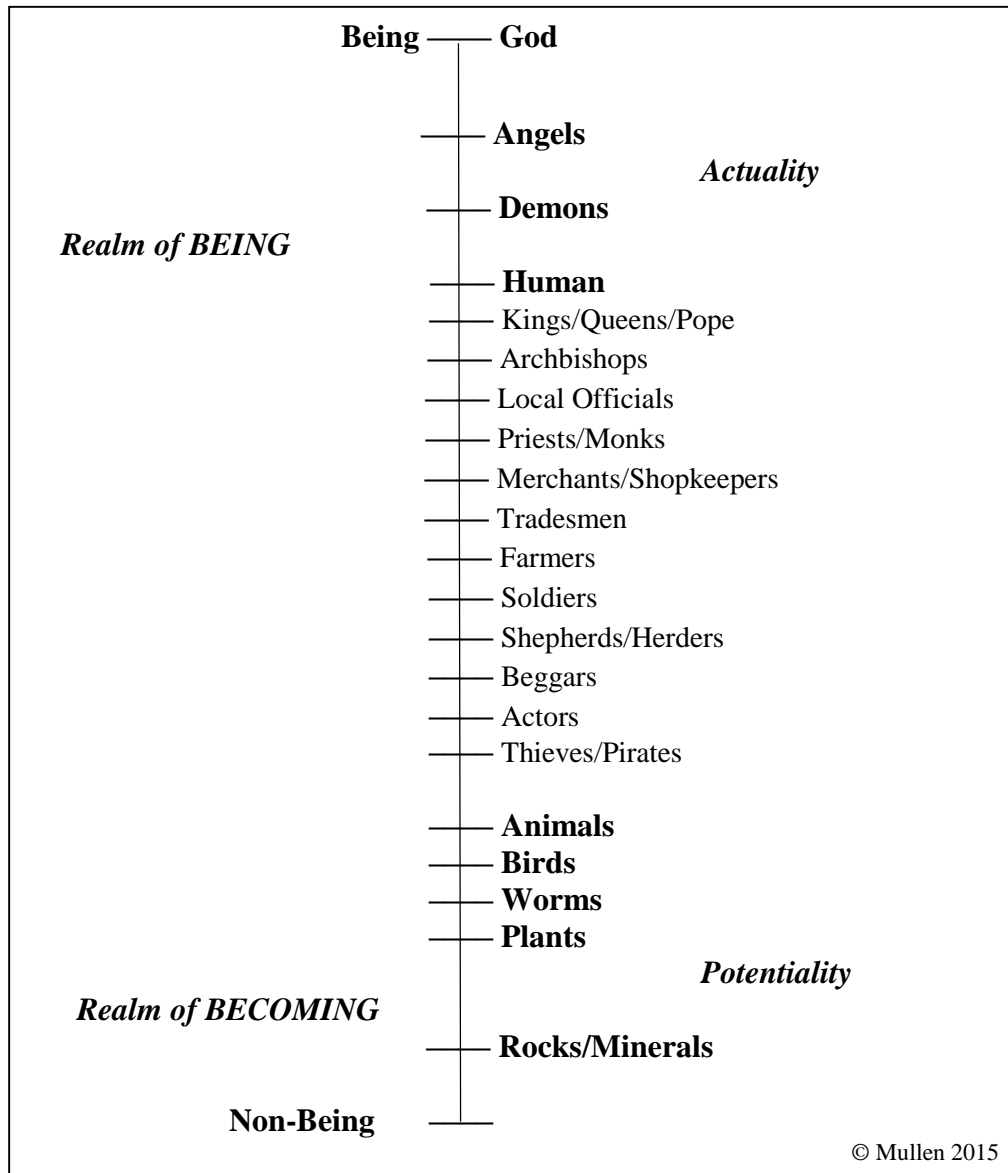
Meno is cast as Socrates' foil, a naive supporter of the rhetorical and largely shallow Sophist method of philosophy, which is the bane of Platonic intellectualism. The dialogue begins with Meno asking Socrates whether virtue can be taught, and this question (along with the more fundamental question of what virtue is) occupies the entirety of the text. Socrates responds to Meno's dilemma by applying the metaphysical to the allegorical in his application of recollection, validated by anamnesis, traditionally interpreted as a philosophically esoteric account of how learning is possible and verifiable. Plato believed that all eternal forms exist in another realm, with which our reincarnate souls were once acquainted. In the *Meno*, Plato tells us "that the soul always retains the ability to recollect what it once grasped of the forms, when it was disembodied prior to its possessor's birth" (Kraut 2013, 1).³ I argue that the theory of involution-evolution as supported by Aurobindo and Teilhard, supports Plato's recollection of eternal truths and forms without the need for transmigration.

Evolution of The-Great-Chain-of Being

The-great-chain-of-being is derived from Plato's philosophical division of the universe into forms (full beings), and sensible things (both being and not being) which are reflections of the forms. Figure 1. is a compilation of classic and renaissance interpretations of the-great-chain-of-being. The hierarchal chain denotes three basic features of the universe: plenitude, continuity, and gradation. The principle of plenitude states that the universe is full, containing the maximal

³ Melling's (1987, 62) argument *against* Plato's concept of recollection is based on this same necessity of reincarnation. The theory "represents an interesting and radical attempt to solve the fundamental problems of epistemology, but it solves them at an enormous price, the acceptance of the ... immortality of the soul and of successive rebirth: and ... it still does not explain how in its supposed prenatal existence the soul came to possess the knowledge it recollects in this life".

Figure 1. The-Great-Chain-of-Being



diversity of kinds of existences; everything possible is actual. The principle of continuity claims that the universe is composed of an infinite series of forms, each which shares aspects of itself with its associates. According to the principle of linear gradation, created things are arranged in hierarchical order from the barest type of existence to a *highest principle*. An entity's locus depends on the ratio of spirit to matter; the less spirit to matter, the lower its hierarchal level. At the hierarchal base are various types of incipient matter containing germs of

consciousness. Ascending levels include the vegetative class, animals, humans, and angels. At the pinnacle is God. Within each of these classes, there exist sub-hierarchies. Implicit in the Doctrine of Correspondences is universal interdependence and continuity which provides that different links of the chain are integrally related to the other links. Aurobindo's ladder to the Supermind has like implications, as does Teilhard's ascent to the Omega Point. Later systemized by Plotinus, the-great-chain-of-being was debated and modified by the Neo-Platonists, and became strongly influential during the 17th and 18th centuries where it morphed into the Addison influenced scale-of-being (Lovejoy 1936, 244). Teilhard saw the-great-chain-of-being as the universe evolving towards higher forms of complexity and consciousness, imbuing humankind with what he called "personality" which facilitates humanity's eventual integration with the *person of God*.

Platonic Roots

Aurobindo and Teilhard were well-informed in classical academics. Grumett (2006) writes extensively of Teilhard's Platonic roots in *Teilhard de Chardin: Theology, Humanity, and Cosmos*, with references to his continuity with the Platonic scheme of creation, and his preoccupation "with the imagery of the wings of the soul, undoubtable derived from Plato's *Phaedrus*, with which he was familiar".⁴ We know that Aurobindo was well-informed in classical academics, his philosophy a collaboration of Eastern and Western thought incorporating "elements of Plato's thought in building his own intellectual-spiritual structure" (Varma 1960, 449). Consistently amongst the top of his class, Aurobindo studied Western orthodoxy at St.

⁴ Much of Teilhard's specific platonic allusions are to the *Phaedrus*, especially with the degree of organization with degree of perfection inherent in the *person of God* as the Omega Point. De Lubac (1971, 32) "refers to the importance of Plato's *Symposium* in forming Teilhard's conception of love" (Grumett 2006, 186).

Paul's and Kings College at Cambridge. Although permanently returning to India⁵ at the age of twenty-one, he continued to supplement Western studies with Eastern theory and history, disclosing "a yogic view of reality using vocabulary gleaned from Plato's familiar discussion of representing reality", transforming "the Platonic view to his own ends" (Anderson 2000, 115). A study of the sources of *The Life Divine* (2006) indicates that, at several points, Aurobindo was profoundly influenced by Plato, writing that, "Plato brought in his eternal, ideal plane of fixed ideas, by which he seems to have meant at once an originating real-idea and an original ideal scheme for all things" (Ghose 1947, 36). In Plato, Aurobindo, and Teilhard we find the philosophico-evolutionary concepts of ascent but, "while Plato speaks in terms of ascent to the highest reason, Aurobindo is throughout concerned with the splendors of the divine Supermind" (Varma, 1960-61, 461-62), and Teilhard, the ascent to the unifying center of the Omega Point

Aurobindo's respect for Greek thinking is evident throughout his philosophy; he was especially fond of Heraclitus⁶ whom he regarded as a "child of the mystics" (Varma 1960-61, 141). In his creation of an integral synthesis, Aurobindo incorporated "the profound conceptions of the ancient Indian and the modern Western thinkers, but also some of the dominant ideas of the Greek teachers and philosophers" (Varma 1960-61, 148). Two concepts that illustrate Aurobindo's classic influence was the interpretation of the relation of the one and the many, and that of the destruction of the world by fire at the end of a cycle of creation. "Aurobindo compares the Heraclitian notion of conflagration with the Vedantic theory of the eternal cycles of manifestation and withdrawal from manifestation" (Varma 1960-61, 143):

⁵ Although a French province at the time of Aurobindo's migration in 1910, Pondicherry is now a part of the Indian union.

⁶ Ghose (1947) 15.

He compares Plato with the venerable Hindu sage and philosopher Samkara.⁷ He speaks of Plato's *Republic* and *Symposium* in terms of the highest admiration as among the finest and highest creations of the human mind in the fields of aesthetics, philosophy, and literature.⁸ He rightly accepts the influence of Heraclitus on Plato, a point also referred to by Aristotle.⁹

Aurobindo and Teilhard

There are many scholarly works on the comparative hypotheses of Aurobindo and Teilhard: Zaehner (1989), Nasr (1971), Feys (1973), Chetany (1978), Sethna (1981), Kristof (1969). They inform us that Aurobindo (1872-1950) was unfamiliar with Teilhard's work—the Catholic Church's ban on the Catholic priest's works was lifted five years after Aurobindo's death. Teilhard, however, confirmed their surface similarities: "I have the impression that it [Aurobindo's vision of evolution] is the same thing but for Asia",¹⁰ and Kristof (1969, 277) notes the "obvious parallel between Teilhard's and Aurobindo's teachings about the evolution of man and the salvation of all of humanity", although cultural and soteriological distinctions are evident. As Zaehner¹¹ points out, in the case of both "there is a passionate belief in evolution and the salvation of the whole of humanity" (Nasr 1989, 180-85). Aurobindo was less interested in science than spiritual evolution and the Bhagavad-Gita, and Father Teilhard combined Christianity with science and contemporary philosophy to create his metaphysical evolution, attaching "Darwinian thought to Catholicism, not to Hinduism as Aurobindo had," suggesting that "everything—spirit, matter, and mind—was advancing toward one final, complete,

⁷ Ghose (2006) Vol. II, 573.

⁸ Ibid, Vol I, 6

⁹ Ghose (1947) 52

¹⁰ Sethna (1981) 57.

¹¹ Zaehner (1971). Widely respected, it is noteworthy that, of *Evolution in Religion* (1971), Professor Betty (1972, 342) wrote: "...it is clear that the book is not really a study of the religious philosophies of Aurobindo and Teilhard—who *happen* to be the author's spiritual fathers, at least in some respects—but is rather a confession of faith of the author himself, who is a convert to Catholicism".

harmonious whole”, that he called the Omega Point (Wood 2008, 477). “Teilhard and Aurobindo purport that all matter contains a rudimentary germ of consciousness” (Korom 1989, 126). Both understood the consequence of energy on phenomenal existence, and both conjectured humanity’s collective ascent to the *highest principle*. Although neither pantheistic nor panentheistic, Teilhard (1959, 57) did acknowledge a spiritual need for pantheism in its interpretation of the ‘Whole,’ calling it a “a tendency which can be fully satisfied only in Christianity”.

Essential to the thought of both Aurobindo and Teilhard is the importance of humanity’s emergence through evolution via stages, theories unsupported by the scientific community at large. “Each stage of physical development is accompanied by a higher level of consciousness. Both metaphysicians use the term “ascent” to describe this movement” (Korom 1989, 27), Aurobindo positing a telos of the Supermind, while Teilhard (1959, 71) encapsulates ascending (as well as descending) levels of spiritual transformation as significant parts of the Whole or Omega Point.

Involution - Evolution

The concept of involution-evolution is predicated on the declension and ascension of entities from and to a *highest principle*. Evolutionary movement was made concrete by the Darwinian theory of natural selection in the late 19th century. Aurobindo coalesced the vision of the-great-chain-of-being with the theory of involution-evolution to facilitate his own ladder, illustrating “by a detailed working out of the evolutionary process how "matter" is tending or progressing, through “life” and “mind” with long intermediate ranges toward the “Supermind” (Sen 1952, 47). Involution-evolution posits that the *highest principle* intentionally thrusts its

being into the very depths of matter in order for all things to evolve towards ultimate and unifying consciousness. Aurobindo (Ghose 1919, 5) informs:

The Spirit which manifests itself here in a body, must be involved from the beginning in the whole of matter and in every knot, formation and particle of matter; life, mind and whatever is above mind must be latent inactive or concealed active powers in all the operations of material energy.

Kripal (2007, 420-21) calls involution and evolution, “two sides of the same enlightenment of the body, of the same incarnational process”. Involution is required for evolution because *some-thing* cannot evolve from *no-thing*. According to Odin (1981, 184), “involution signifies world creation, the self-projection of Spirit into inconscient matter (Skt. *prakṛiti*) which is in fact “veiled Spirit” and “secret God,” whereas evolution is the reverse”. This is not inconsistent with the Socratic concept of the soul’s eternal grasp on forms and ideas which, in Aurobindo’s view, “are held in order and harmony by the divine Supermind. Here, he claims to go further in idealism because he regards the creative idea as Real-Idea” (Varma 1960, 460). Teilhard (1974, 71) encapsulates these ascending (as well as descending) levels of spiritual transformation as significant parts of the Whole: for him, the final convergence point is the Holy Trinity of Christianity.

the universe has no complete reality except in the movement which cause all its elements to converge upon a number of higher centres of cohesion (in other words, which spiritualizes them); nothing holds together absolutely except through the Whole; and the Whole itself holds together only through its future fulfillment.

Theism to Evolutionary Panentheism

Theism is the belief in the *highest principle* as the creative source of the human race and the universe. “Classical theism posits an unqualified distinction between God and the world; although intimately related, God and creatures are always and entirely other than one another” (Cooper 2006, 18). Pantheism, as generally described, implies that God is immanent within or

identical to the universe; God is everything and everything is God. Clayton (1997, 479) writes of pantheism:

There is only the All, and everything that exists is contained within it. Unfortunately, pantheism can understand that All only as object rather than as subject, since there is no Other in relation to which it could emerge as subject.

Confusion and disagreement prevail amongst modern spiritual thinkers regarding pantheism versus panentheism, and indeed, the two can appear quite similar. Within pantheism, humanity is subject to the grace of God, but God is not subject to the wills or desires of humanity. The *highest principle* is all there is and humanity is incorporated into it. Pantheism does not reveal any subjectivity toward humanity. Essentially, the pantheist believes that the totality of all that exists is God, which projects a dualist dichotomy of subject-object because humanity is subjective to deific objectivity. The panentheist believes that the universe is a part of God, God is greater than the universe, and God is involved in all aspects of the universe at all times.

Evolutionary panentheism is the expansive theory that conceptualizes how a dynamic, evolving *highest principle* supports humanity's evolutionary advancement. There is no divine evolution apparent in theism, and no dynamic interaction between God and other entities in pantheism.¹²

Arête in the Meno

Meno initiates dialogue with Socrates by asking if *arête* can be taught—if it is the result of learning through practice, a natural possession, or some other source. Klein (1988, 41) translates *arête* as human excellence, and Grube (1981, 59f) as “specific virtues such as moderation, courage, et cetera, but it is also used for *the* virtue or conglomeration of virtues”.

Socrates asks Meno, “a totally unscrupulous man” (Klein 1988, 36), to clarify his understanding of *arête*, knowing full-well that Meno is not only *not* composed of *arête*, he does

¹² Mullen (2014). This and other information on evolutionary panentheism and the Supermind is loosely borrowed from my dissertation.

not have the capacity to understand its values. Klein (1988, 46) informs that, for Meno, human excellence depends on “the circumstance of the person ... his sex, his age, his status in the human community, the kind of action he is engaged in, the goal he pursues”. That being unsatisfactory, Meno then regurgitates the words of other statesmen by claiming that virtue or excellence is: “What else but the ability to rule over men” (Klein 1989, 54), a cultural evaluation of ancient Greek democratic inequality. It is one thing, Meno stipulates,

for a man (‘to be equal to the task of dealing with civic affairs, and to do so in such a way as to benefit his friends and to harm his enemies taking care to avoid harm himself’) and another thing for a woman (‘good housekeeping, safeguarding domestic property, and obedience to her husband’), one thing for boys, another for girls, one thing for free men, another for slaves (Melling 1987, 55).

Meno continues to grasp at straws by enumerating a list of other virtues such as courage, soundness of mind, wisdom, and loftiness before settling on the virtue of wise-thinking, “for this excellence, compared to any other human excellence, seems to come from an altogether more divine source whose power is never completely lost” (Klein 1989, 188), which Reuter (2001, 78) writes, “conjures up the picture of a Zeus-like deity handing out parcels of virtue to some individuals but not others”.

In the *Meno*, Socrates establishes that *aretê* is not a singular virtue but a totality of constituents that make-up the wholeness of human excellence; yet this concept remains obtuse and indefinable without cognizance of the parts which constitute the quality of the wholeness, components of which are attainable, according to Plato, through the process of recollection. There is no stultifying cognitive disconnect between the reincarnate or *apriori* soul of Plato, Aurobindo’s rungs of the ladder to Supermind, or Teilhard’s ascent to Omega Point. Each philosopher concedes that a *highest principle* makes available all knowledge, and advises that the

means to such telos is accessible when deemed appropriate—either through the returning soul or evolving consciousness.

Even as humanity grasps elements of human excellence, its totality remains mired in its current faculty of mind of which ignorance is a predominate factor. That is what the personage of Meno is meant to portray. Humanity's reach greatly exceeds its current grasp. Aurobindo proposed potential acquisition to full knowledge through his rungs-on-the-ladder to Supermind (see Figure 2.). According to him there are four levels of mind: present mind (I call it 'now-mind'), which has the potential to be superseded by higher-mind, illumined-mind, and intuitive-mind. In the *Phenomena of Man* (1959) Teilhard proposed the following five stages of accession to the Omega Point: already existing, personal, transcendent, autonomous, and irreversible

Involution—evolution posits the presence of the *highest principle* in matter and in the subsequent rungs that support Aurobindo's evolutionary ladder to the Supermind (Ghose 2006; Chaudhuri 1972), and Teilhard's stages of ascent to Omega Point, each level constituted by former and latter plateaus.

According to Plato, the ascent is from the cave, which is the sphere of darkness and shadows, to the objects of the world.¹³ From the worldly objects there is the ascent to the objects of scientific studies, which are comprehended by the understanding (*dianoia*), and, finally, there is the ascent to the realm of ideas, which culminate in the Idea of the Good. (Varma 1960-61, 144-45)

Ultimate cosmologic totality is the product of interconnected parts, each a constituent of the whole. The parts without the whole—as well as the whole absent all its parts—inadequate to total comprehension. From where do the missing puzzle fragments that have the potential to display this totality emanate? They *exist*, hypothetically, because the puzzle continues to form, ever-so-slowly, throughout the ages; but *how* is this totality of human excellence calculated

¹³ Plato, Republic VII. 514. Plato refers to "steep and rugged ascent" and "descent" in Republic VII. 516-517.

without an understanding of its constituents—singular virtues—which cannot be understood without knowledge of the whole? This is one of the reasons that Meno has such difficulty defining human excellence. Klein (1988, 78) tells us that Meno “speaks of human excellence as possessing good things such as health and wealth, the acquisition of gold and silver, as well as of honors and offices in the state”. However, human virtues are not material acquisitions, nor the ability to acquire same. The totality of excellence is made up of forms and ideas which constitute the pieces which comprise the entirety of the consciousness of the *highest principle*. Kraut (2013, 1) explains:

Among the most important of these abstract objects (as they are now called, because they are not located in space or time) are goodness, beauty, equality, bigness, likeness, unity, being, sameness, difference, change, and changelessness. (Kraut 2013, 1)

While the *Meno* fits well with other Platonic writings where it seems evident that *goodness* can be taught, Reuter (2001, 89-90) interprets Plato as believing that “virtue [human excellence] is neither teachable nor natural, but comes by divine allotment to those who possess it”. According to the evolutionary panentheist, the *highest principle* resides and evolves within all forms and, thus, full acquisition is ostensibly “attainable for human beings because we already have a portion (μοιρα) of the divine present within our rational psyche” (Reuter 2001, 94).

Recollection/Anamnesis

Irwin (1974, 771), writes: “Plato believes that moral knowledge and virtue [human excellence] will be acquired only by recollection and the training of desires associated with it”. In order to truly understand the quality of recollection as grounded by Plato, it is important to isolate the action of recollecting from similar yet disparate associations; Klein (1988, 111) reports, “the terms ‘recollection’, ‘reminiscence’, ‘remembrance’, ‘memory’, are used synonymously albeit imprecisely”. *Reminiscence* is retrieved memory of things and events that have occurred within the present life’s knowledge of a person to include what he or she has been taught, experienced, and otherwise acquired. Reminiscence of something cannot include information which has not yet been accessed. *Remembrance* has similar qualities except reminiscence connotes a positive or sympathetic memory, pleasant and supportive to our nature, while remembrance does not necessarily guarantee affability. *Memory* is our ability to retain and retrieve information on experiences which have occurred in the present life of a person. All three terms offer a form of recognition of *what was* and *what is*, not of *what is possible*. It is also prudent to remember that we are dealing with language, cultural mores, over 2400 years of analysis and interpretation, and the fact that Plato posits ambiguous hypotheses because, as with all evolving thinkers, his philosophy is often contradicting, as Kraut (2013, 12) illustrates:

In some of his works, it is evident that one of Plato's goals is to create a sense of puzzlement among his readers, and that the dialogue form is being used for this purpose. The *Parmenides* is perhaps the clearest example of such a work ... [and] several of his other works also have this character, though to a smaller degree: for example, *Protagoras* (can virtue be taught?), *Hippias Minor* (is voluntary wrongdoing better than involuntary wrongdoing?), and portions of *Meno* (are some people virtuous because of divine inspiration?)

The act of Socratic recollection is based on the soul’s ability to reincarnate. In

Aurobindo's philosophy, “the stress is on the constant evolutionary progression of the human

soul” (Varma 1960-61, 139).¹⁴ Although Aurobindo is not unfavorable to the concept, reincarnation is unnecessary for transmigration to the Supermind, as recollection is an inherent faculty of evolutionary nature. All knowledge is accessible because universal truths are intentionally embedded by nature or divinity (herein synonymous) in the meanest foundations of the-great-chain-of-being. This is Aurobindo’s theory of the rungs-of-the-ladder towards Supermind as well as Teilhard’s ascent to Omega Point.

Why is recollection of these truths an inherent human pursuit? What causes this essential compulsion to know that which is unknown? Recollection is grounded by the distinctly human, universal search-for-meaning. What motivates humanity’s passion to search for meaning is the fact that humankind is “motivated by discovering that he [or she] is ignorant and by his [or her] bewilderment to search earnestly for the truth” (Melling 1987, 58). Our ignorance perplexes us, promotes discontent and agitation, and makes us desperate for knowledge. As human nature determines, that which we do not have we want very much to obtain, and that which we do not know, we long to understand.

What is the relationship between the terms ‘recollection’ and ‘anamnesis’? According to Plato’s Doctrine of Recollection, humankind has already been exposed to universal truths in *apriori* existence via the reincarnate soul—their unveiling facilitated by anamnesis, the inner dialectical exchange of ideas that brings the recollection to truth-verifiable cognition. According to Klein (1988, 190), anamnesis “shows the soul as having a “third dimension” —an indispensable condition for its learning, that is, for its growth. Any interpretation, however, must take into account the cultural differentiations between Socratic thinking and contemporary

¹⁴ Ghose (1952) 8.

English understanding. Gulley (1954, 194) attempts to clarify the Greek concept of recollection through anamnesis:

how is one to *know* that a proposition is true and thus save an argument from being inconclusive? (80 d-81 a). It is anamnesis which enables one to *know* this, as opposed to having merely right belief (98 a; cf. 85 c 10-86 d I, 86 a 7-8). ... to have right belief is itself due to anamnesis. For there are two stages in the process of recollection: (a) the stirring up (see text) of true opinions, which are 'innate' (85 c 4 6; 86 a 7), (b) the conversion of these to knowledge (98 a, etc.) It is systematic questioning which initiates and furthers the process.

The act of recollection is causal to the act of anamnesis, which is the methodology of verifying the recollection through inner discourse and introspection, analogous to the pedagogic underscoring of Socratic discourse. Recollection is the ability to access that which is possible, and anamnesis is inquiry into the truth of that recollection. Klein (1988, 189) distinguishes that anamnesis "connotes a looking *back*, not only back into the past, but also back into oneself. It means a recovering or recapturing (*analambanein*) of something "within" or "inside" us". The recollected form or idea hinges upon our ability to look within ourselves and examine the reflection of our inner knowledge and constitution. Introspection leads to reflexive knowledge in which, in Drengson's opinion (1981, 239):

excellence is expressed as intelligent action which grows out of the open wakefulness to which Socratic philosophizing leads, when it frees us from our claims to know, from our prejudices, beliefs, opinions, erroneous habits of thought and the like, when it frees us, that is, from the ignorance of our ignorance.

In order to become that to which we aspire, we must eradicate our ignorance through acquisition and contemplation of the truths—the knowledge that Plato believed forever resides in the reincarnate soul and, Aurobindo and Teilhard purport, is omnipresent within our micro-macrocosm as an inherent consequence of involution-evolution. Contemplation,¹⁵ introspection, inner discourse, reflection—all are described as functions of anamnesis. For Teilhard (1955,

¹⁵ It deserves reiterating that, for Aristotle, contemplation is the theoretical study of human knowledge.

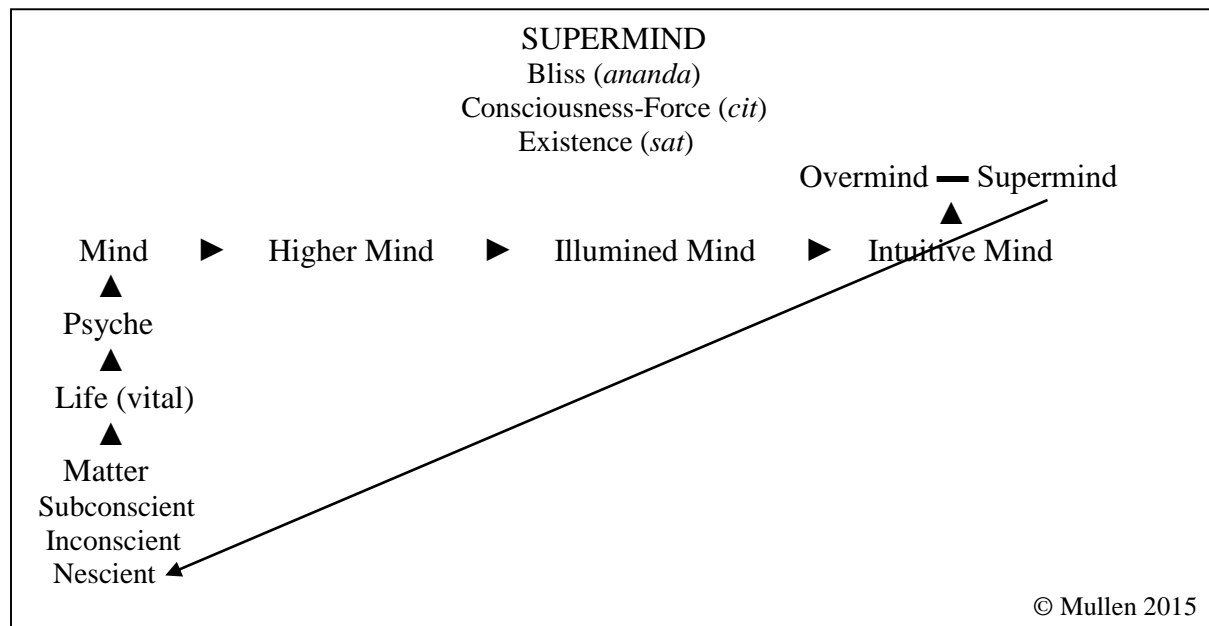
165), reflection is “the power acquired by a consciousness to turn in upon itself, to take possession of itself *as of an* object endowed with its own particular consistence and value”.

Socrates possessed the ability to fall into depths of reflection or contemplation without warning,

“looking at something within himself” (*pros heauton ti skepsamenos*),¹⁶ ... At those times he remains standing,¹⁷ lost in search, impervious to anything about him, reflecting (*synnoêsas*), that is, “turning his gaze back into himself”.¹⁸ (Klein 1998, 93)

Yet, even when an individual is able to validate the recollection through anamnesis, forthcoming notions may be misinterpreted, false, and/or impermanent.

Figure 2. The Path to Supermind¹⁹



¹⁶ *Phaedo* 95, e 7. CF. *Phaedrus*. 277 d 4 – 6 (per Klein).

¹⁷ *Symposium*. 175 A 7-9; 220 C 3-5 (per Klein).

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 174 d 5.

¹⁹ Figures 1. (The-Great-Chain-of-Being) and 2. (The Path to Supermind) do not convey correlation; one is a hierarchal determinate on a vertical scale, the other an evolutionary journey. While many diagrams of Aurobindo’s path to the Supermind also impose a rigid verticality, the evolutionary aspects of panentheism denote a less rigid graduation.

Aurobindo's Rungs-of-the-Ladder

The fundamental premise of involution-evolution is that of a *highest principle* thrusting itself into the meanest level of matter in order for evolution to commence. In Teilhard's Omega Point the universe unifies when humanity is super-personalized—completely individuated—and attains the penultimate form within the universe next to God, Which is the highest form of “personality”. As the Christian God is omni-existent, so are all of Its creations, and thus the Omega Point exists prior to evolution, i.e., within matter. Chaudhuri (1972, 190) writes: In the material world (*bhuh*) in which we live, matter is the matrix of all existence and the nurse of all becoming. Physics defines matter as material substance that has mass as opposed to mind (brain), spirit, soul, etcetera, and occupies rest space, especially as distinct from energy.

According to the theories of Aurobindo and Teilhard, a rudimentary consciousness resides within matter, which Whitehead also supports by hypothesizing that “the capacities which define the conditions of the possibility of novelty and self-creation must be latently present even in the lowest type of occasion in nature” (Hosinski 1993, 94).

Vital Life, Psyche, Now-Mind

Sen (1952, 51-52) provides details on the evolution of matter to vital life and beyond:

Looking to the pre-mental evolutionary stages we observed “matter” and “life” and their influence on the mind. The mind thus stands for us as a particular stage in a chained process of evolution. It carries within itself in a modified form the previous stages of “matter” and “life” as also the various stages yet to come in a nascent and an incipient form.

Vital-life, psyche (soul, spirit), and mind are integral parts of the metamorphosis from inertia to energy to organic expansion. Psyche is a quality that is commonly mobile, cognitive, but not necessarily capable of thinking (animals). Aristotle identified organisms by their potential, and attributed both plants and animals as having a psyche or soul. According to him, plants have the

lowest kinds of souls, animals have higher souls which can feel, and humans alone possess rational, reasoning souls. The evolutionary stages of matter to mind are evidenced by the concept of spiritual cosmic intention, which means that the *highest principle* “intentionally” thrusts its spirit or consciousness into matter—the genesis of evolution from which emerges vital life, psyche, mind, and so on, each stage having “various graduations and aspects ... constituted by particular beings, powers and movements, which can function independently or interact with aspects of other planes in supportive and integrative ways” (Stober 2009, 296).

The current apex of mental evolution is now-mind, which presages higher levels of post-ignorant adaptation. These stages (higher-mind, illumined-mind, intuitive-mind) must be attained in order to reach Aurobindo’s overmind. Each higher stage re-integrates with preceding stages “under a new principle, that of its own nature, but in doing so it acquires in a measure the characteristics of the lower ones” (Sen 1952, 51).

Higher-Mind, Illumined-Mind, Intuitive-Mind

Murphy (1992) argues that now-mind is currently at its meanest level, postulating there are those individuals who have achieved moments of clarity and intuition²⁰ that exceed their abilities. Higher-mind, the level beyond now-mind on the ascending plane towards Supermind, is far more receptive to enhanced spiritual knowledge. In a paper presented at the twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, Kunkolienker (1998, 3) writes of higher-mind:

Its basic substance is a unitarian sense of being with a powerful multiple dynamisation capable of the formation of a multitude of aspects of knowledge, ways of action, forms and significances of becoming ... it is a luminous Thought-mind, a mind or spirit-born conceptual knowledge.

²⁰ Murphy (1992, 187) writes of intuition: “Turned toward the self, it becomes an immersion in the indivisible flow of consciousness, a grasp of pure becoming. Unlike the intellect, which remains detached from its objects, producing knowledge that is relative to some viewpoint, intuition enters into what it knows, dispensing with symbols”.

In Aurobindo's thesis, from higher-mind evolves the illumined-mind, to which is added a brilliance, not of ordinary sources, but one of a spiritual manifestation. Illumined-mind is an evolution from higher thought to spiritual light. The mind is essentially *lit* from above to assist in discovering deeper spiritual truth and power. "The higher ranges are always more direct, intense, synthetic, dynamic than the lower ones where consciousness is slower, duller, more uncertain, more disintegrated" (Skora 2001, 23). Higher-mind and illumined-mind experience their authority and their own united completeness by unification with the ascendant plateau of intuitive-mind which possesses an even more certain form of reason or intellect. The intuitive-mind expands its reason with higher power and certainty. "It acts in a self-light of the truth which does not depend upon the torch-flares of the Sense-Mind and its limited uncertain percepts" (Kunkolienker 1998, 4).

Overmind and Supermind

Aurobindo's overmind resides on the next level beyond the highest degree of mind. In the words of McDermott (1972, 176), Aurobindo forecasts:

the Supermind will descend as soon as man has evolved to the point where he can utilize the Supramental power in accordance with the needs of the entire evolutionary process. In the meantime, a lower principle, Overmind, functions as a kind of bridge or shuttle, comparable to Plato's Demiurge, between the mental and supramental levels of consciousness.

In other words, once a human being has evolved beyond the highest plateaus of mind, it will matriculate to the overmind, where it ostensibly remains until all humanity has achieved the same residency. Overmind resides on the plane of Supermind, any perceived duality merging as single unity-consciousness in the realm of the *highest principle*. N. K. Gupta (1976, 19) writes:

one can see the multiple Godheads, each distinct in his own truth and beauty and power and yet all together forming the one Supreme consciousness infinitely composite and

inalienably integral ... gathering into itself all diversity, not destroying it, but annulling and forbidding the separative consciousness that is the beginning of Ignorance.

Saturated by pure consciousness, Supermind remains isolated from overmind, yet not completely detached because Supermind interlocutes with overmind, which job it is to assert and understand the truth of the lower planes. The overmind is the conduit of the many facets of existence, underscored in the evolutionary rungs of matter, life, psyche, and mind. These rungs are linked together by the entirety and faculty of the ladder itself, and are interdependent upon each other for upward mobility as well as descent. The overmind “cannot eliminate the discords and divisions, the conflicts and contradictions of the material world. The Supermind as the knowledge of unity-in-diversity can alone eliminate them” (Chaudhuri 1972, 184). It is the overmind that has the ability to create ignorance within cosmic existence, and it is the job of humanity to eventually break from its illusive cosmic existence. “The choice to cultivate our greater possibilities is ours, not God’s. ... There will be no further human development unless some of us work to realize it” (Murphy 1992, 198).

The Supermind has total knowledge inherent in it because its very nature is knowledge. Kunkolienker (1998, 5) writes of the need to eliminate ignorance (nescience) in order for humankind to advance to the highest levels of spiritual evolution:

[Supermind] must be in its very nature essentially free from ignorance and error: it starts from truth and light and moves always in truth and light. As its knowledge is always true, so too its will is always true, it does not fumble in its handling of things or stumble in its paces. In the Supermind feelings and emotion do not depart from their truth, make no slips or mistakes, do not swerve from the right and the real, cannot misuse beauty and delight or twist away from a divine rectitude.

For Teilhard, Aurobindo’s Supermind correlates with the second coming of Christ known as the Parousia. So, whether one chooses to call it Supermind, supernature, or the Omega Point, the *highest principle* manifests within humanity by its very act of involution even though this

manifestation is veiled from us by ignorance. In *Timaeus* (87 c – 88 b) Plato calls ignorance (*amathia*) the greatest disease (Klein 1989, 202), while Aurobindo (Ghose 2006, 523) informs that, within our now-minds:

the one great fact emerges that the very nature of our mind is Ignorance; not an absolute nescience, but a limited and conditioned knowledge of being, limited by the realization of its present, a memory of its part, an inference of its future, conditioned therefore by a temporal and successive view of itself and its experiences.

How does humanity achieve the extraordinary or metanormal²¹ advances demanded for advancement up the rungs of Aurobindo's rungs-of-the-ladder towards Supermind? First, we must recognize our ignorance, Giblin (1953, 205) writes: "Second, we must follow our right opinions ... Lastly, we must seek in dialectic the means to purify our minds and perfect our opinions into knowledge".

To iterate, for Teilhard, the Omega Point is attained through the following five stages: already existing, personal, transcendent, autonomous, and irreversible. (a) *Already existing* means that consciousness is real and ongoing in all things including matter. This is facilitated by Christ as the Holy Trinity because it is God the "person" who draws the universe towards Him. Since God is omni-present, It must exist within all Its creations; thus is consciousness present in matter. This is the only way to explain the evolution of consciousness, again, because *something* cannot evolve from *no-thing*. (b) *Personal* decrees that humankind is the penultimate intelligence which, for Teilhard (1955, 165), is super-personalization. "Intelligence is the evolutionary lot proper to man and to man *only* ... Man's possession of it constitutes a radical advance on all forms of life that have gone before it". The universe evolves towards higher forms of complexity, consciousness, and intelligence which is called (human) "personality",

²¹ Murphy uses the terms 'metanormal' and 'extraordinary' faculties in *The Future of the Body* (1992) to refer to "human functioning that in some respect radically surpasses the functioning typical of most people living today" (Taves 2005, 230).

facilitated though intense reflection (*anamnesis*) in order to reveal the truth in all things. (c) Since God is “transcendent”, and the Omega Point exists in matter prior to evolution, it is the Omega Point that is responsible for humanity’s evolution to “personality”. This stage can be correlated to Aurobindo’s overmind as it is the highest form or “super-personality” of humankind that is incorporated with God (Supermind). For Teilhard, who is neither pantheistic or panentheistic, God is not identical with the universe but separate, and humans, as created in Its image and likeness will, eventually be incorporated into It. The relationship between humanity and God is like two businesses, the smaller one has products relative to the desire of the larger institution, yet they remain separate until the latter incorporates the former into the dominant corporation. (d) *Autonomous* is when humankind becomes totally individualized, freeing itself from the limitations of space and time and, (e) humanity’s union with God is *irreversible*, meaning it is inevitable upon collective “personality”, and permanent once it occurs.

While recollection is fully experiential, the truth of the form must be supported by empiricism, facilitated by inner discourse and inner-deliberation (*anamnesis*). The recipient of the recollection may not understand what has been brought to light, and conclusions may be false, misrepresented, and/or misinterpreted. That initial reasoning can be false does not efface the experiential perception. The methodology is correct; the results ambiguous. Even so, the recollection has been made, and will ostensibly occur with greater frequency now that the veil has been lifted. Involution-evolution proposes that, with the support of the dynamic *highest principle*, these constituents of universal truth will ostensibly join the pantheon of humanity’s knowledge.

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