17 March 1951

“In the workings of the universe whatever happens is the result of all that has happened before.”
Questions and Answers 1929 (26 May)

What do you mean by this?
The universe is in perpetual movement and it is the unfolding of the supreme Consciousness. So all that happens is conditioned by all that preceded it. The universe continues to be what it is because of what it has been, and what it has been was the result of what it was before. And what it will be... will be the consequence of what it is!

Is the unfolding of the universe continuous or does it stop somewhere? What is it that gives us the impression of a beginning, of a decision to begin?

Where does the decision to begin come from?... (laughing) From the Supreme probably, I do not know! It may be that one day He decided to have a universe of the type we have and He began to objectify himself in order to have a universe.

Each element of this universe is eternal because the universe is the Eternal. Now, in the Eternal it is difficult to speak of a “beginning”. Evidently It has always been and It will always be. Only, take for example (this is an image, remember, do not make me say things I do not say), take a sphere which is full of infinitesimal things in an incalculable number. If you change the relation of all these elements, well, the number is so great, the possibilities of relations so many that you may easily speak of an infinite, although from a philosophical point of view it is not an infinite; yet from a descriptive point of view one may say...
that it is infinite. Each element is eternal. All the combinations are infinite, but the same combination never repeats itself twice. Thus the universe is eternally new and yet it is eternally the same.

According to tradition it is said...

Yes, yes, but it is not a question of tradition. There are people who speak of Pralaya,¹ I know, but that simply means (excuse me, but one must speak a little lightly, otherwise this becomes insufferable) that one day perhaps the Supreme may feel tired, dissatisfied with the kind of universe He has made and may want to create another! Then, as it is He Himself, He takes everything back into Himself and puts it out again! That is what people call “pralaya”, but it changes nothing; all the elements of the universe are eternal and eternally will the combinations be different.

According to science, our physical world of three dimensions is not infinite: it is bent back upon itself in a space of more than three dimensions. This closed universe of three dimensions is continually expanding and all the objects of the universe are running away from each other at a speed increasing with their distance. If one goes back into the past, one reaches a time when the universe was almost condensed at one point and that would give the key to the constitution of Matter of which the ninety-two elements have never been explained till now. This “condensed point” or “primitive atom” goes back three or four billion years. This is what the Indian tradition calls “the golden egg”. But before that? Nothing is known. Quite recently an American scientist has put forth the theory that this movement of infinite expansion will not

¹ Pralaya, or the end of the world.
17 March 1951

continue, that a contrary movement will set in and all will be gathered back again.

A universal respiration.

If one could travel with a ray of light coming from the sun to the earth, the departure and arrival would be simultaneous, for the traveller’s “proper time” would be stopped.

Light seems to me to be too material for this consciousness of simultaneity.

Evidently when one emerges from form and enters the “frontier” state between form and the Formless, everything is simultaneous, but this is very far from the density of light.

I wonder (it is possible, it is to be seen), but I doubt whether something physical could be capable of giving this simultaneous consciousness of the universe.

Of course, no material object or being can travel at the speed of light, but supposing it to be possible, as the number of light-rays is practically infinite and covers the whole material universe, one would be able to know everything, apprehend everything.

But that would not be a simultaneous integral knowledge of the universe, not even of the earth. For one who remembers the extra-terrestrial light, remembers the movements of the higher light, terrestrial light is slow, as it is dark. But this would already be an expression of something higher... I don’t know.

Light is a very good symbol, but I do not think it to be a total one.

Is light faster than thought?... You cannot make a concrete experiment with thought. Sound is something very, very slow, but thought is already something quicker than light... perhaps
not. Thought gives the sensation of the instantaneous. Do you perceive thought in the physical body, for example? Do you perceive thought apart from a material quality? It remains to be seen, doesn’t it? Let me explain: if you go out of your body, if you go out of the vital world and enter the mental world, all relations are different from what they are for thought when in the body. Compared with the body, thought seems an immediate thing like light, for example, even more than light. But when you have nothing to do with the physical any longer and you enter the mind itself, there are relations which may be rendered by a certain time and certain space which do not exist for the physical consciousness but which exist for the mental consciousness. That then would be, if you like, the explanation of what you were saying, that Time changes; for it is evident that in the universal formation there is an infusion of progressive consciousness which is psychologically translated by a relation with new worlds or new “dimensions”.

For example, it is said that for a certain period the terrestrial world was ruled by “overmental” forces and that this rule is going to be transcended, that the world will be governed by supramental forces; well, each time new forces descend upon earth, a change is produced and a change of consciousness must have a corresponding change of movement. You say that the movement of expansion becomes more and more swift; this means that the world is filled with a consciousness which makes the movements of the world more and more rapid. This would be altogether the material transcription of the spiritual phenomenon. The earth is being charged more and more with forces coming from ever higher regions (for our consciousness), which means that they come faster and faster, giving more and more the sense of the instantaneous. What has been discovered is a kind of physical symbolism of this phenomenon which would tend to prove scientifically that the universe is in progress.

The other possibility is that it is a matter of a vibratory movement of inhaling and exhaling — this is quite possible; but
the phenomenon of concentration would not necessarily mean a retrogression; it is simply a passage from one movement to another.

The stars are receding from one another at a speed that increases with their distance.... What does this imply?

These are images, aren’t they? You can conceive of a universe becoming bigger and bigger, but then what is it that will contain this universe? What would there be beyond this universe?... Immediately our small human mind conceives of something quite empty and a universe occupying more and more place in this void, which means that there would be a space in this void, which is an absurdity. In fact, one should say, “It is as though”, because that is not really what happens, it is only a way of expressing it. To catch hold of a notion even a little bit accurate, one must pass from the material to the psychological explanation, and even if you arrive at the psychological, you are still very far from the truth, which is neither psychological nor spatial, but something else which evidently finds it difficult to express itself in our terms. It is a well-known experience: each time one goes into a consciousness beyond our consciousness (I cannot say spatial), our terrestrial consciousness (not even positively terrestrial, but rather individual), each time one has an experience which transcends the individual consciousness, that is to say, transcends the consciousness of the part to enter a consciousness of the Whole, when one wants to translate this experience, one finds all words empty of sense, because language has been formed to translate human experience for the human mind. We have all the necessary words, even with many shades and subtleties, to express human experience, since language has been made for that, but what language will you use to explain what is outside all language? It is extremely difficult. So you say, “It is like this, it is like that”, and while you are speaking you realise that the experience is being so completely
distorted that at times you are understood to mean entirely the opposite.

For this reason science is full of paradoxes.

Yes, and all spiritual books which speak of the experiences of another world are always full of paradoxes. They say, “It is like this, it is like that”, in an attempt to give you a suppleness which will allow you to understand — but even so you do not understand.

The truth is that these experiences can be communicated only in silence.

And yet, it has been said (and it is a true fact) that these worlds, like the supramental world, are going to express themselves physically. Then what is going to happen? Will they find new words? New words must be found for them.... It is difficult, for if new words are found, they have to be explained!

After all, the ancient initiatory systems were good in a way, in the sense that they revealed the Knowledge only to those who had reached a stage where they could receive it directly without the help of words. And I’m afraid it may come to the same thing now — perhaps even one who has this supramental knowledge will never be able to make himself understood by people, unless they themselves become capable of entering into this knowledge. And so the logical result is that people will say, as I have heard it said: “Oh! It is just as in ordinary life.” Precisely because all that is not of the ordinary life completely escapes our perception, it cannot be transmitted by words.

Take a place like this, which is surcharged with certain forces, certain vibrations; these vibrations do not show themselves in visible and tangible things — they can produce changes, but as these changes occur according to a method (as all physical things do), you pass almost logically from one state to another and this logic prevents you from perceiving that there is something here which does not belong to normal life. Well, those who
have no other perception than that of the ordinary mind, who see things working out as they habitually do or seem to do in ordinary life, will tell you, “Oh that, that is quite natural.” If they have no other perception than the purely physical perception, if they are not capable of feeling the quality of a vibration (some feel it vaguely, but those who are not even capable of feeling that, who have nothing in them corresponding to that or, if they have something, it is not awakened), they will look at the life here and tell you, “It is like the physical life — you have perhaps some ideas of your own, but there are many who have their own ideas; perhaps you do things in a special way, but there are lots of people who also do things in a special way. After all, it is a life like the one I live.” ... And so, it may very well happen that at a given moment the supramental Force manifests, that it is conscious here, that it acts on Matter, but those who do not consciously participate in its vibration are incapable of perceiving it. People say, “When the supramental force manifests, we shall know it quite well. It will be seen” — not necessarily. They will not feel it any more than those people of little sensitivity who may pass through this place, even live here, without feeling that the atmosphere is different from elsewhere — who among you feels it in such a precise way as to be able to affirm it?... You may feel in your heart, in your thought that it is not the same, but it is rather vague, isn’t it? But to have this precise perception... Listen, as I had when I came from Japan: I was on the boat, at sea, not expecting anything (I was of course busy with the inner life, but I was living physically on the boat), when all of a sudden, abruptly, about two nautical miles from Pondicherry, the quality, I may even say the physical quality of the atmosphere, of the air, changed so much that I knew we were entering the aura of Sri Aurobindo. It was a physical experience and I guarantee that whoever has a sufficiently awakened consciousness can feel the same thing.

I had the contrary experience also, the first time that I went out in a car after many, many years here. When I reached a
little beyond the lake, I felt all of a sudden that the atmosphere was changing; where there had been plenitude, energy, light and force, all that diminished, diminished... and then... nothing. I was not in a mental or vital consciousness, I was in an absolutely physical consciousness. Well, those who are sensitive in their physical consciousness ought to feel that quite concretely. And I can assure you that the area we call “the Ashram” has a condensation of force which is not at all the same as that of the town, and still less that of the countryside.

So, I ask you: this kind of condensation of force (which gives you quite a special vibration of consciousness), who is there that is really conscious of it?... Many among you feel it vaguely, I know, even people from outside feel it vaguely; they get an impression, they speak of it, but the precise consciousness, the scientific consciousness which could give you the exact measure of it, who has that? I’m not alluding to anyone in particular, each one can look into himself. And this, this condensation here is only a far-off reflection of the supramental force. So when this supramental force will be installed here definitively, how long will it take for people to perceive that it is there?... And that it changes everything, do you understand? And when I say that the mind cannot judge, it is on facts like these that I base myself — the mind is not an instrument of knowledge, it cannot know. A scientist can tell you the proportion of the different components in any particular atmosphere, he analyses it. But as for this proportion here, who can give it? Who can say: There is such a vibration, such a proportion of this, such a proportion of that, such a proportion of the supramental?... I put the question to you so that you may ponder over it.