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XIII. Reincarnation, the Pre-existence of the Soul (Self), and the Law of Karma

1. Theoretical Implications of the Doctrine of Reincarnation

Indian: “The embodied soul assumes, successively, diverse forms in various places, according to its deeds ... it assumes another body for the enjoyment of [suitable] objects” (Svet. Up. 5:11-12; cf. Br. Up. 6:2.16; Mun. Up. 1:2.10). “Warn-out bodies are shed by the dweller within the body. New bodies are donned by the dweller, like garments.... Rebirth is certain for the dead” (BG* 2:22, 27, pp. 42-43; 6:41; 7:19; 8:15-16, 21; 9:20-21; 15:6; Kat. Up. 1:3.7; Mun. Up. 3:2.2; Pr. Up. 5:3). “You and I, Arjuna have lived many lives. I remember them all: you do not remember” (BG* 4:5, p. 60; cf. 2:12).

Old Testament: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return” (Job 1:21). “That which is, already has been; and that which is to be already has been” (Eccl. 3:15). “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” (Jer. 1:5). “I [the Lord] send my messenger to prepare the way before me ... I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes” (Mal. 3:1; 4:5). “All souls are prepared to eternity, before the formation of the world” (2 Enoch 23:5). “Now I was a good child by nature and a good soul fell to my lot; nay, rather, being good, I came into a body undefiled” (Wisd. 8:19-20). New Testament: “He [Jesus] saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, Rabbi who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind” (Jn. 9:1-2)? “He [Melchizedek, king of Salem] is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life” (Heb. 7:3).

The doctrine of reincarnation (punarjanman) and law of karma provide a coherent, logically consistent, and comprehensive grand unified theory. Both are very powerful intellectual concepts with considerable explanatory value in many areas. In a logical consistent and parsimonious manner, this ideology solves a number of philosophical, religious, psychological, historical, and biological problems. What follows are twelve theoretical implications of the doctrine of reincarnation.

1) The human brain does not create thought and the mind; but rather at conception and afterwards the mind (subtle body composed of the substance of subtle matter and energy) creates the physical body (gross matter and energy) including the brain. Conversely, many neuroscientists believe in epiphenomenalism the materialistic theory of the mind that consciousness, thoughts, and emotions are completely dependent for their existence on corresponding physical and biochemical events within the human body.¹

Swami Vivekananda offers a different solution to the problem. He tells us, “As a fingernail is to the body, so is body to intelligence. The nail is a part of the body, but it can be pared off hundreds of times, and the body will still last. Similarly, the intelligence lasts aeons, while this body can be ‘pared off,’ thrown off.... This body is just the external crust of the mind. They are not two different things; they are just as the oyster and its shell. They are but two aspects of one thing; the internal substance of the oyster takes up matter from outside, and manufactures the shell. In the same way the internal fine forces which are called mind take up gross matter from outside, and from that manufacture this external shell, the body. If, then, we have control of the internal, it is very easy to have control of the external. Then again, these forces are not different. It is not that some forces are physical, and some mental; the physical forces are but the gross manifestations of the fine forces, just as the physical world is but the gross manifestation of the fine world.”² “What is the theory of evolution? What are the two factors? A tremendous potential power which is trying to express itself, and circumstances which are holding it down, the environments not allowing it to express itself. So, in order to fight with these environments, the power is taking new bodies again and again.”³

Vivekananda adds, “We admit some part of this hereditary transmission. How far? As far as furnishing the material. We, by our past actions, conform ourselves to a certain birth in a certain body, and the

only suitable material for that body comes from the parents who have made themselves fit to have that soul [self] as their offspring.... So far it is clear then, that this impression is in the mind, that the mind comes to take its birth and rebirth, and uses the material which is most proper for it, and that the mind which has made itself fit for only a particular kind of body will have to wait until it gets that material. This we understand. The theory then comes to this, that there is hereditary transmission so far as furnishing the material to the soul [subtle body] is concerned. But the soul migrates and manufactures body after body, and each thought we think, and each deed we do, is stored in it in fine forms, ready to spring up again and take a new shape.” “By the law of heredity, the reincarnating soul [subtle body] receives from the parents the material out of which to manufacture a man.”⁴ “We cannot deny that bodies acquire certain tendencies from heredity, but those tendencies only mean the physical configuration, through which a peculiar mind alone can act in a peculiar way. There are other tendencies peculiar to a soul [subtle body] caused by its past actions. And a soul with a certain tendency would by the laws of affinity take birth in a body which is the fittest instrument for the display of that tendency.”⁵

Vivekananda explained, “The external world is but the gross form of the internal, or subtle. The finer is always the cause, the grosser the effect. So the external world is the effect, the internal the cause. In the same way external forces are simply the grosser parts, of which the internal forces are the finer.”⁶ So the physical universe is the effect, the mental universe the cause.

Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) affirmed that, “In the Platonic and Egyptian theories we see that the souls, after leaving the body, enter into another body which is waiting to receive the migrating soul, but in the Hindu theory of Transmigration the body is not waiting to receive the migrating soul, but on the contrary the soul, being subject to the laws of evolution, manufactures the gross material body according to its desires and tendencies. Just as a germ of life will develop a grosser form by cellular subdivision, by growth, and by assimilation of the environmental conditions, so the germ of the human soul will manufacture the body by obeying the laws which govern the physical plane. Parents are nothing but the channels through which, the migrating souls receive their material forms. Parents do not create the souls; they have no power to create. They can only give the suitable environment necessary for manufacturing a gross physical body. The souls come with their tendencies, with their

desires, and they remain as germs of life. Now these germs of life contain vital forces, sense powers, psychic powers, and ethereal particles of matter. At the time of death the soul contracts and withdraws all its powers from the sense organs to its innermost center, and in that contracted state it leaves the body.”⁷ “Subtle bodies are the invisible germs or nuclei which contain the mind, the intelligence, the reasoning, the power of thinking, the will power, and the senses; i.e., the powers of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, and so forth. All these powers are there in the germ of life. It also contains the impressions of the previous manifestation.... At the time of death, the individual germ of life contracts all its forces and powers and these are centralized into a nucleus and that nucleus retains the life, the mind, the powers of the senses, and all the impressions and experiences the individual has gathered.”⁸

When a person dies their thought-energy does not dissipate but remains stored up in the subtle body. The subtle body is a sheath of energy that continues after death consisting of buddhi (intellect), ahamkara (ego), and manas (mind and perception).

A monk of the Ramakrishna Order in St. Louis, Missouri, Swami Satprakashananda (1888-1979) maintained, “When a bound soul is ready for rebirth on the human plane, the impressions of his karma lead him to the parents from whom he can secure the materials for his gross body. The fine physical vesture that he wears has the potency to acquire the necessary material elements. Being associated with food, he enters the body of the male parent suitable for his purpose. There he gets into the requisite sperm, which turns into a potent seed for his development as an individual. This is the seed that being united with the requisite ovum in the female parent turns into the zygote and becomes ready for germination.... Led by its karma the transmigrating soul gets into the requisite sperm and the ovum out of countless reproductive cells. The fusion of the sperm and the ovum required for its physical body is by no means a matter of chance. Nor is this brought about by blind natural force. Behind it is the universal law of cause and effect in the form of the law of karma. Neither the sperm nor the ovum can be counted as an individual in the sense in which the fertilized egg is.”⁹ The subtle body does not enter into a physical body, but creates a new one. The incarnating subtle body (soul) composed of the substance of extended subtle matter and energy enters into the womb. From the sperm, egg, liquids, and food it slowly creates a physical body and brain.

Satprakashananda adds, the individuals “progress is dependent primarily on the development of the mind and secondarily on the development of the body. Modern biologists distinguish the mind from the body but consider it an annex. Consequently, in their view the mind is inseparable from the body; there is no clear-cut distinction between the two; the same hereditary units, the genes that bring forth the body also bring forth the mind—both arise from the same physical particles transmitted by the parents. But the difference in the nature of the mind and the body is so marked that both cannot have the same kind of material components.”¹⁰

Reversing the process Swami Satprakashananda denotes, “At death the embodied self leaves only the gross physical body, but departs with the subtle body and the causal body underlying it. With the subtle body all its components, i.e., the five pranas (the five phases of the vital principle), the five organs of perception, the five motor organs, and the mind (antah-karana), go with him. With the mind all its contents go. Nothing belonging to the physical body or the outer world can the departing soul take with him, but nothing of the mind can he leave behind. The impressions of his karma, comprising his merits and demerits, his right and wrong ideas, his good and evil tendencies and capacities, invariably go with him. These are the factors that determine his journey beyond. Just as a man's inner attitudes and thoughts determine his life's course before his death, so do they after his death. His immediate course depends on what thought prevails in his mind at the time of death. A man's habitual thought naturally becomes predominant at the time he leaves the body.”¹¹ Death is the change from one body to another.

In order to find how a man is reborn we must find how he dies. At death, the self, the real man, leaves the physical body, but retains the subtle and the causal body. The mind with all its contents belongs to the subtle body. According to those impressions of karma (including volitional actions, experiences, and thoughts) that become prevalent in the mind of a dying man, a very fine physical vesture composed of the subtle and the causal body, is formed at the time of his departure from the gross body. This fine garb carries the potencies of the next gross body he assumes. He may go to a higher or a lower region impelled by the impressions of karma. But when these are exhausted the residual karma will lead him eventually to this human plane, where alone he has a chance for liberation. It is to be noted that unredeemed or unliberated souls are subject to rebirth and not the liberated.”¹²

The YouTube presentation, “24 People Who Were Clinically Dead Describe What They Saw Before They Were Revived” implies that consciousness remains after the brain has died. One person mentioned, “I was floating above myself in the hospital bed and could see the doctors getting ready to save me.”¹³

The Mind-Body problem was introduced into modern Western thought by the French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650). As a substance dualist Descartes believed there are two types of substances on the same level, body whose fundamental property is spatial extension and mind whose basic property is non-physical, non-spatial thought. The question arose, how can body and thought interact upon each other if they have totally different natures?¹⁴ Vivekananda’s solution is that the physical body is the gross aspect and the mind the subtle aspect of a single entity. They are both aspects of the underlying reality Akasha (Primal Matter) and Prana (Primal Energy). While Descartes and Spinoza place the mind and body on the same level, Vivekananda considers it to be a hierarchy where the mind ontologically precedes the physical body in existence. Sankhya philosophy teaches that thought arises because mind being subtler than the physical body is a better reflector of Purusha (Atman) the pure consciousness.

According to Vivekananda, “There are different effects of Karma in life. One man lives fifty years, another a hundred, another dies in two years, and never attains maturity; all these differences in life are regulated by past Karma.”¹⁵ In the rebirth process, ones karmas and samskaras determine whom the souls (self’s) parents will be, which in turn determines the genes they will receive. Pre-existing and subsequent karmas during our lifetime do determine our biological nature concerning gender, physical features, length of life, health and sickness, etc. Since the subtle body creates the biological physical body out of pre-existing materials, is it to some extent the creator of our DNA within the genes? Karma is a more fundamental entity than genes, since it is what determines the genes we will receive. The causation is circular, karma determines DNA, and DNA results in certain behavioral patterns that create new karmas. Christians will agree in the case of Jesus Christ that his many virtues were not inherited from his ancestors and not due to his DNA, but were part of his pre-existent Divine nature. But those Christians who do not accept the pre-existence of the soul (self) for other people, hold that these principles apply only to him.

Along these lines Pitirim Sorokin (1889-1968) wrote that materialists discuss, “life, sensation, reflexes, and conscious thought,” asserting that these immaterial forms of being in some miraculous way are developed by matter in its evolution. By this operation the materialists commit again the error of self-contradiction, of ‘miraculous conception’ of ‘conscious thought’ by thoughtless matter.”¹⁶

2) An individual’s personality and character in this life are the result of their prior life experiences that determine their environment and heredity in this life.

Memories of our past lives are gone, but the mental impressions and karmas created at that time have a tremendous effect on our behavior and events in this life. Aptitudes and talents gained in one life are not lost and will resurface in future lives, even though the original events are forgotten. Even in this life we have forgotten the details of past events, e.g., what he had for dinner one or ten years ago unless our diet is relatively unchanging. Yet, the mental impressions created during those forgotten events in this life continue to effect our actions, attitudes, and outlook.

Swami Vivekananda disclosed, “Each work we do, each thought we think, produces an impression, called in Sanskrit Samskara, upon the mind and the sum total of these impressions becomes the tremendous force which is called ‘character.’ The character of a man is what he has created for himself; it is the result of the mental and physical actions that he has done in his life. The sum total of the Samskaras is the force which gives a man the next direction after death. A man dies; the body falls away and goes back to the elements; but the Samskaras remain, adhering to the mind which, being made of fine material, does not dissolve, because the finer the material, the more persistent it is.”¹⁷

Vivekananda adds, “The men of mighty will the world has produced have all been tremendous workers--gigantic souls, with wills powerful enough to overturn worlds, wills they got by persistent work, through ages, and ages. Such a gigantic will as that of a Buddha or a Jesus could not be obtained in one life, for we know who their fathers were. It is not known that their fathers ever spoke a word for the good of mankind. Millions and millions of carpenters like Joseph had *gone*; millions are still living. Millions and millions of petty kings like Buddha's father had been in the world. If it was only a case of hereditary transmission, how do you account for this petty prince, who was not, perhaps, obeyed by his own

servants, producing this son, whom half a world worships? How do you explain the gulf between the carpenter and his son, whom millions of human beings worship as God? It cannot be solved by the theory of heredity. The gigantic will which Buddha and Jesus threw over the world, whence did it come? Whence came this accumulation of power? It must have been there through ages and ages, continually growing bigger and bigger, until it burst on society in a Buddha or a Jesus, even rolling down to the present day.”¹⁸

Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) stated, “Again the theory of heredity cannot explain all the causes which produce geniuses and prodigies. On the contrary, the doctrine of rebirth of the soul or reincarnation explains all these things satisfactorily. Why was it that the shepherd Mangiamelo could calculate like automatism when he was five years of age?... in the whole history of the genealogy of geniuses, all the greater examples like Shakespeare or Lincoln or Jesus or Buddha or Shankaracharya, we do not find any trace of genius in the family of these great men, on the contrary, their parents and grandparents did not show such powers.”¹⁹ “The theory of pre-existence alone can explain why two souls at first sight know each other and become attached to each other by the tie of friendship. This mutual love will continue to grow and will become stronger, and in the end will bring these lovers together, no matter where they go. Therefore, Vedanta does not say that the death of the body will end the attraction or the attachment of two souls; but as the souls are immortal so their relation will continue.... we ought to regard it; as a great blessing that we do not recollect our past lives and past deeds.”²⁰

Swami Prabhavananda (1893-1976) the head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California designated that Yoga psychology teaches that an individual's conscious and unconscious thoughts and actions are caused by samskaras, which are latent mental tendencies in the mind. When a thought is no longer conscious, it leaves a mental impression in the unconscious mind, which in the future will give rise as a new conscious thought. “In the ‘unconscious mind,’ ... are stored the impressions and tendencies which have been formed in our previous existences, and which, taken together, have made us what we are.... The samskaras, or potentialities, represent therefore, the root impressions received from all our past experiences, including those of our former lives, and they have molded our characters so that, even though largely forgotten, they still indirectly control or influence our every act and thought.” The sum total

of the samskaras forms the character of the person. “This subconscious mind, carrying our whole record, past and present, defining the character and the tendencies we are born with, which in turn determine the way we react to present conditions.”²¹

In the West, Plotinus (c. 205-70) taught the soul must pass from one body to the next until it has purified itself. Being attached to the body, after death, the soul is drawn back to the sensible world in order to assume a new bodily form. “The soul of each individual possesses the rational forming principles of all the individuals which it animates in succession.” “The souls, changing their bodies, appear now in one form and now in another.” “Each soul comes down to a body made ready for it according to its resemblance to the soul’s disposition.”²² The soul’s “memory of the things here below carries it down here ... and in general it is and becomes what it remembers.” “Besides their [different] bodies they can differ very notably in character, and in the activities of discursive reason and as a result of the lives they have lived before; for Plato says that the souls' choices take place according to their previous lives.” The world is like a “stage where the actor who has been murdered changes his costume and comes on again in another character.”²³

Inheritance of mental characteristics is supported by biologist and psychologists because of the positive correlation between the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) of parents and children, and because of the personality and character similarities of identical twins even if raised separately. But these two phenomena are also explained by reincarnation, independent of heredity. Due to the law of selective affinity, most often children take birth from parents of roughly a similar nature. Most important, their past life experiences determine the nature of the hereditary characteristics they receive from their parents.

According to Lamarckian inheritance (named after the French biologist Jean Lamarck (1744-1829)), “An organism can pass on characteristics that it has acquired through use or disuse during its lifetime to its offspring.” The inheritance of acquired characteristics has been rejected by the scientific community.²⁴ From a reincarnationists and karmic perspective, owing to the principle of affinity, mental and, moral characteristics acquired by the parents is an important factor in attracting souls with similar mental traits to be their children. There is a selective affinity between the acquired characteristics and the type of souls born into the family. For example, if a person studies hard and becomes a

professor, it is more likely that intelligent children will be born into that environment where they can enhance their talents. This is only a probability and not a certainty since there are too many unknown contributing factors from a prior life that determines which souls will become their children.

After years of study psychiatrists Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, and Carl Jung each agreed that heredity and environment by themselves are not sufficient to explain and predict a child's present and future adult behavior. Freud accepted Jung's idea of phylogenetic (or archaic) collective inheritance. But the collective unconscious and hylogenetic inheritance explains only group characteristics and not individual differences as reincarnation or the pre-existence of the self does.

A far better explanation of individual differences than *phylogenetic* inheritance and *archaic heritage* is the pre-existence of the soul (self). Samskaras (mental impressions) come not from the collective history of mankind, but rather from the individual history of that particular person's past lives. These samskaras developed in prior lives are an important factor in determining a person present character and behavioral patterns.

Archetypes are the universal dispositions of the human mind analogous to Plato's Forms by which the mind organizes its contents. Why do all humans possess the "thought forms" (to various degrees) such as love, dislike, selflessness, selfishness, happiness, unhappiness, etc? For Carl Jung (1875-1961) the archaic images consist of instincts, and mental forms inherited from the ancestral past. They are potentialities to experience and respond to the external environment, in the way that our ancestors did. Archetypes are "inborn forms of 'intuition,'... which are the necessary *a priori* determinants of all psychic processes" that "force his ways of perception and apprehension into specifically human patterns. The instincts and the archetypes together form the 'collective unconscious.'"²⁵ Unlike the personal unconscious, the collective unconscious is composed of universal and regularly occurring modes of apprehension. We all inherit the same forms but the content varies from person to person. We all share in the same collective unconscious and this is responsible for the common nature of all people.

One problem with this idea is why did our ancestors act and think in a similar way? Did they inherit these tendencies from their ancestors? This pushes the problem farther and farther back into the past without arriving at a solution.

Reincarnation and the pre-existence of the self (soul) is a better explanation of individual difference between people. They deal with different individuals while a “collective consciousness” is concerned with group divergence. Two people are members of the same racial-ethnic group yet they differ radically because of their pre-this life behavioral patterns.

Another explanation for the similarity between people is offered by Swami Satprakashananda, “Every individual mind is the universal mind particularized. This is why similar traits are noticeable in the ideas, imagination, and sentiments of different types of people despite their divergences.”²⁶ All human minds are a fragment of the Universal Cosmic Mind, and consequently we have common ways of feeling, reasoning about, and perceiving things. Brahman-God as the Cosmic Mind and Will is working and manifesting through all individual minds and wills, which accounts for both universal properties and forms common to all normal human minds, and for individual differences between people. Another reason for the similarities among humans is that we function at the same vibrational level. As Vivekananda wrote, “We have five senses, and we represent Prana in a certain state of vibration. All beings in the same state of vibration will see one another, but if there are beings who represent Prana in a higher state of vibration, they will not be seen.... All are parts of the same ocean of Prana, they differ only in their rate of vibration. If I can bring myself to the quick vibration, this plane will immediately change for me: I shall not see you any more; you vanish and they appear.”²⁷

While in most cases the doctrine of reincarnation is in line with modern science, it does not accept the thesis of the hereditary transmission of mental qualities. Vivekananda remarked, “The simple hereditary theory takes for granted the most astonishing proposition without any proof, that mental experience can be recorded in matters, that mental experience can be involved in matter.... This is a most impossible position, and until these physiologists can prove how and where those impressions live in that cell, and what they mean by a mental impression sleeping in the physical cell, their position cannot be taken for granted.... The theory then comes to this, that there is hereditary transmission so far as furnishing the material to the soul is concerned. But the soul [subtle body] migrates and manufactures body after body.”²⁸

Quite likely biogenists’ have over-interpreted their own data. For examples, Vedantists attribute genius to the person’s prior life intellectual development and not to be inheritance due to a very low probability of an

auspicious combination of genes. Over the last couple of centuries there has been an astounding improvement in intellectual development in China. But this is due to the vastly improved educational system and other factors, and not to a change in genes, unless one believes in the “inheritance of acquired characteristics” which biogenists’ deny.

From the Catholic standpoint Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) writes, “Now the intellectual souls cannot be educed from the potentiality of matter, since it has already been shown that the intelligent soul altogether exceeds the power of matter ... Again, if the generation of a thing is the cause of a thing's being, then its corruption will be the cause of its ceasing to be. The corruption of the body, however, does not cause the soul to cease to be, since the soul is immortal, as was proved above. Consequently, neither is the production of the body the cause of the soul's entry into existence. But the transmission of the semen is the proper cause of the engendering of the body. Hence, the transmission of the semen is not the generating cause that brings the soul into being.”²⁹

Reincarnation and karma have a far greater scope than the laws of heredity. The latter cannot explain why people are born into certain circumstances, but the former has the advantage that it clarifies this issue.

3) Mind as a blank tablet vs. innate ideas. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) offered a highly original epistemological explanation for reincarnation, “Without a fund of already existing experience, any new experience would be impossible, for there would be nothing to which to refer the new impression. So, if, as some of the European philosophers [e.g. John Locke] think, a child came into the world with what they call *tabula rasa*, such a child would never attain to any degree of intellectual power, because he would have nothing to which to refer his new experiences. We see that the power of acquiring knowledge varies in each individual, and this shows that each one of us has come with his own fund of knowledge. Knowledge can only be got in one way, the way of experience; there is no other way to know. If we have not experienced it in this life, we must have experienced it in other lives. How is it that the fear of death is everywhere? A little chicken is just out of an egg and an eagle comes, and the chicken flies in fear to its mother. There is an old explanation. It is called instinct. What makes that little chicken just out of the egg afraid to die? How is it that as soon as a duckling hatched by a hen comes near water, it jumps into it and swims? It never swam before,

nor saw anything swim. People call it instinct. It is a big word, but it leaves us where we were before.... What we call instinct in men or animals must therefore be involved, degenerated, voluntary actions, and voluntary actions are impossible without experience. Experience started that knowledge, and that knowledge is there. The fear of death, the duckling taking to the water, and all involuntary actions in the human being which have become instinctive, are the results of past experiences.”³⁰ See Chapter VIII, Section 10. Heredity, for more of Vivekananda’s views on this subject.

That fund of knowledge that Vivekananda refers too is hidden in the unconscious mind of the child but much will eventually enter into the person’s conscious mind.

It is possible that the conscious mind is nearly blank at the moment of birth, but behind and ready to surface are the unconscious samskaras and vasanas (habits which are organized and unified collections of samskaras) gained in prior lives that eventually enter into consciousness awareness.

The Hermeneutic School of Philosophy as taught by the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) is grounded on the fundamental concept that “interpretation” is always based on our prior fund of knowledge. Given the same piece of religious information, the Atheist, Fundamentalist, Christian liberal, and Vedantist are likely to each interpret it in a different way. An expert who has the proper prerequisite fund of knowledge can easily understand a new idea in that area, while an amateur lacking that prior knowledge is unable to grasp the new idea.

In *Meno*, Plato describes Socrates’ epistemological “Theory of Anamnesis” (Reminiscences). “He suggests that the soul is immortal, and repeatedly incarnated; knowledge is actually in the soul from eternity, but each time the soul is incarnated its knowledge is forgotten in the trauma of birth. What one perceives to be learning, then, is actually the recovery of what one has forgotten. (Once it has been brought back it is true belief, to be turned into genuine knowledge by understanding.) And thus Socrates (and Plato) sees himself, not as a teacher, but as a midwife, aiding with the birth of knowledge that was already there in the student. The theory is illustrated by Socrates asking a slave boy questions about geometry. At first the boy gives the wrong answer; when this is pointed out to him, he is puzzled, but by asking questions Socrates is able to help him to reach the true answer. This is intended to show that, as the boy wasn't told the answer, he could only have reached the truth by

recollecting what he had already known but forgotten.”³¹ One limitation of this idea is the soul would not have knowledge of recently discovered knowledge that was not known in the past, e.g. Einstein’s Theory of Relativity would not be known to a soul before the 20th century. Nor can we expect a soul to have learnt all knowledge of the past.

According to Rene Descartes (1596-1650), innate ideas are inborn universally valid concepts present in the mind at birth. “On first discovering them it seems that I am not so much learning something new as remembering what I knew before.” Their content is derived solely from the nature of the mind and includes geometrical truths; our knowledge of God, and some logical propositions like, something cannot come from nothing. Additional innate ideas mentioned by others encompass moral truths; the notion of causality, logical and mathematical truths; and avoidance of hazards such as heights or contagious diseases.³² The conflict between empiricists like John Locke who hold that all knowledge is derived from experience, and rationalists like Rene Descartes who supports innate ideas, is avoided by Vivekananda. From the standpoint of reincarnation he agrees with both positions. From a broader standpoint unlike the Western rationalists, for a reincarnationist innate ideas vary from person to person depending on their prior fund of knowledge, and deal not only with intellectual concepts but also with attitudes, aptitudes, and skills that determine their character and activity. They are a major force in the evolution of the individual, not only of humans but also of animals.

Rene Descartes (based on the commentary of Frederick Copleston, S.J., 1907-94) termed innate ideas as, “*a priori* forms of thought which are not really distinct from the faculty of thinking.... Yet it is clear that Descartes does not restrict innate ideas to forms of thought or moulds of conception. For he speaks of all clear and distinct ideas as innate. The idea of God, for example, is said to be innate. Such ideas are not, indeed, innate in the sense that they are present in the baby’s mind as fully-fledged ideas. But the mind produces them, as it were, out of its own potentialities on the occasion of experience of some sort. It does not derive them from sense-experience. As has already been remarked, Descartes was no empiricist. But sense-experience can furnish the occasion on which these ideas are formed.” For Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), “Innate ideas are innate in the sense that the mind derives them from itself; but it does not follow that every mind starts with a stock, as it

were, of innate ideas and truths or even that every mind never comes to an explicit knowledge of all those truths which are derivable from itself. Further, Leibniz did not deny that experience may be necessary in order to attend to or come to a conscious awareness of innate ideas and truths.... 'Thus it is that ideas and truths are for us innate as inclinations, dispositions, habits or natural propensities and not as actions, although these potentialities are always accompanied by some actions, often insensible, which correspond to them.'"³³

For the American linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky (b. 1928), "Humans must be born with a universal innate grammar, which is determinate and has a highly organized directive component, and enables the language learner to ascertain and categorize language heard into a system.... the ability to learn how to properly construct sentences or know which sentences are grammatically incorrect is an ability gained from innate knowledge." The extraordinary ability to learn complex concepts possessed by very young children contain a systemic complexity that could not have originated from their experiences.³⁴ For a reincarnationist this is explained by the fact that people learned languages in their prior life and these mental impressions have remained in their subtle body.

Louis Figuier (1819-94) maintained that innate ideas are the result of traces on the mind of knowledge previously acquired in a former lifetime. They are the memories of the intuitions of experiences that occurred prior to this life. Though the memory of acts performed in a prior life are forgotten, traces of the impressions remain producing aptitudes and special faculties of the mind.³⁵

4) Why do most people develop at a much faster rate during their early years from birth to adulthood? The British philosopher John McTaggart (1866-1925) explained that one reason this may be caused by the fact that up to the age of adulthood, they are recultivating the skills and aptitudes they developed in prior lives.³⁶ In a single birth, an individual progresses through millions of years of evolution in a relatively short time, from conception to childhood and on to maturity. This rapid progress is due in part to the recapitulation of the personal evolutionary progress that the individual made in their former lives. In the maturation process to some extent the individual is manifesting the faculties that they developed in their prior lives. Without this prior life development, the relatively rapid development process that constitutes the birth and maturation process

would not be possible. After reaching adulthood many people have to go through the slower process of cultivating new talents and aptitudes that they did not possess in a prior life.

5) Throughout our lifetime our body and mind continually change, yet we maintain an innate feeling of self-identity, continuing to think of ourselves as the same person throughout the life process. In order to maintain a psychological unity we need a sense of self-identity, a self-aware center of reference for our actions and experiences. Personhood requires self-consciousness and an ego that operates in and through human awareness. John Locke (1632-1704) developed the criterion of the self-identity of a person, based on consciousness (memory). Due to our memory of past events we have a mental identity over our lifetime.³⁷ A second factor is continued bodily existence. Over a lifetime we maintain a continuous physical bodily identity including the brain, though the body undergoes many changes. Third, are the social factors in self-identity. For example, other people who interact with us consider us to be the same person even if they have not seen us for many years. We retain the same name and carry an ID that other people accept. Fourth is the individual ego factor. Each of us has been entrusted with a particular self that we strongly identify with. We have a direct mental experience of our thoughts and feelings that we identify with and only an indirect experience of other peoples. We feel our pain directly, other peoples through empathy. The continuous process of our life events is basically orderly and purposeful, and not a purely random chaotic process. Our duty is to attempt to make

ourselves as good as possible. As a reaction to ego identification we feel

nondualist might consider our sense of self-identity as due to the unchanging Atman that underlies our nature.

The Vedantic philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) indicates, “The linga-sharira or subtle body which is said to accompany one throughout one's empirical existence is the form on which the physical body is molded. It is this which assumes the body necessary for its efficiency at its next birth by attracting physical elements to itself. At physical death, only the gross, outer form perishes. The rest of the self is not disturbed. Rebirth is only the renewal of the instrument through which the self works. The self is not at each birth a new entity but a continuous process. A transition is conceived from one situation to another at physical death.”³⁸ If heaven is a state where perfection prevails and improvement and progress are impossible, even the noblest of us are not in a fit condition to enter heaven. While the best of us are not quite prepared for the sudden splendor of bliss, the worst of us are not so bad as to be cast aside into eternal doom.”³⁹

Swami Satprakashananda notes, “The doctrine of reincarnation maintains the identity of an individual throughout a succession of births and deaths. One and the same individual appears in different physical garbs, retaining the same mind, which is separable from the body.”⁴⁰

We should realize that our present physical body and brain, memories, and social contacts are only temporary forms of self-identity. At a deeper level it is the subtle (mind) body (linga-sharira, sukshma-sharira) and its mental impressions (samskaras) that preserves our self-identity and the persistence of a permanent self. The enduring subtle body creates innumerable gross physical bodies (sthula-sharira) over a series of lifetimes. According to Gottfried Leibniz principle of continuity, “Nature never makes leaps,” and that “all natural change is produced by degrees.”⁴¹ Similarly, there is a continuation of the subtle body that slowly changes manifesting a continuous series of physical bodies. It is an extended body having shape and size composed of the substance of subtle matter and energy that compose a mind. Since we remain the same person from life to life, some of the karmas we created in a prior lifetimes come to fruition in the present life. The samskaras created in former lives form a psychological continuity that shapes our character and personality in this life. You inherit your own acquired characteristics from previous lives. We think of ourself as the physical body of flesh and blood and are very much influenced by our memories of the past. We should identify with our much longer lasting subtle body. Even better spiritual religion

teaches us at a deeper level to identify with our Divine spiritual causal body (karana-sharira). Some nondualists might teach the Atman is the basis of our self-identity.

Self-identity involves not only who we are, but what is the nature of our personality and character. According to Charles H. Cooley's (1864-1929) social psychological concept of the Looking-Glass (Mirror) Self (1902), we form a self-image of ourself based on what we think other people think of us, which we might refer to as a "Generalized Other." Meaning it is based on our assessment of what many other people think of us. The nature of our self-identity is determined by the way we interpret other people's judgments and opinions of us. To a large extent other people define our place and role in society and tell us who we are. We are each like an actor in a play and others decide what role we will perform in it. We can try to get them to change their mind. Consequently, most people try to get other people to react positively to them. The process is life-long since one's self-image and role in society can change somewhat over a period of time.⁴² Another aspect of our self-identity is our memory of prior events and acquaintances.

Spiritual transformation involves a new self-identity and self-image at the intra-psychic level. This is not easy to attain, if the pre-religious life differed significantly from the present one. Once an identity is formed, it provides a sense of self and inner coherence, meaning, and significance to one's life. There is a sense of a stable self, having control over their life. Spiritual progress is slowed down if a devotee compartmentalizes and has two separate identities where conflicting ways of acting and values are held simultaneously.⁴³

6) An important question asked today in theoretical physics is what occurred before the universe came into existence? Did time not exist and was the universe created out of nothing? Over a century ago Swami Vivekananda working from a more comprehensive framework was able to supply a solution to this problem. What preceded the present universe in the transformational process was the prior universe. We might say in a sense the universe reincarnates or recycles. For a complete explanation see: Ch. VIII. Swami Vivekananda's Scientific Cosmology, Section 4.

7) Reincarnation supports an evolutionary view of life. What is the purpose of human existence? The answer is very simple, it is self-

improvement. The concept of natural selection was developed independently by Charles Darwin (1809-82) and Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913, later a Theosophist) in 1858, and elaborated on by the former in the following year. The idea being that “organisms better adapted to their environment tend to survive and produce more offspring.” It is now believed by scientists to be the main process that brings about evolution.⁴⁴

In 1896, Swami Vivekananda explained the yogic theory of evolution that he attributed to Patanjali. “The true secret of evolution is the manifestation of the perfection which is already in every being; that this perfection has been barred and the infinite tide behind is struggling to express itself.... This infinite tide behind must express itself; it is the cause of all manifestation.... In the animal the man was suppressed, but as soon as the door was opened, out rushed man. So in man there is the potential god, kept in by the locks and bars of ignorance. When knowledge breaks these bars, the god becomes manifest.”⁴⁵ He considered this to a better explanation of evolution than natural selection.

Swami Abhedananda in his book *Reincarnation* (1899) made this important statement, “As this gradual growth cannot be expected in one life we shall have to admit the truth of Reincarnation, which teaches gradual evolution of the germ of life or the individual soul [self] through many lives and various forms. Otherwise, the theory of Evolution will remain imperfect, incomplete and purposeless. The Doctrine of Reincarnation differs from the accepted theory of Evolution in admitting a gradual but continuous evolution of the subtle body through many gross forms. The gross [physical] body may appear or disappear, but the subtle body continues to exist even after the dissolution of the gross body and re-manifests itself in some other form.”⁴⁶

In his rejoinder to Horatio Dresser’s critique of Vedanta Philosophy, Abhedananda writes, “Mr. Dresser says: ‘From Vedantists point of view, then, there is no permanent value in finite experience.’ On the contrary, the Vedanta teaches that every experience has a permanent value. Every stage of evolution is necessary for the progress of the individual soul. At every step of our finite experience, we are learning something and helping ourselves in unfolding the higher powers latent within us.... It is the individual ego, or soul that reincarnates, or manifests its latent powers through different stages of evolution—to fulfill its desires and to gain experience until perfection is reached and the highest state of spiritual realization is attained.”⁴⁷

Swami Abhedananda defines natural selection differently than Darwin. In the reincarnating process the subtle body (thought body) by the law of natural selection involuntarily and unconsciously selects the proper parents and environment to be born in. This way they can best manifest their inherent nature and talents during their earthly existence. Darwin's theory does not explain the cause of the higher spiritual, rational, and moral nature of humans.⁴⁸

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) mentioned a single lifetime is not sufficient to reach the highest state. "If there is an evolution of consciousness in an evolutionary body and a soul inhabiting the body, a real and conscious individual, then it is evident that it is the progressive experience of that soul in Nature which takes the form of this evolution of consciousness: rebirth is self-evidently a necessary part, the sole possible machinery of such an evolution."⁴⁹ "For a new birth, a new life is not a taking up of the development exactly where it stopped in the last, it does not merely repeat and continue our past surface personality and formation of nature. There is an assimilation, a discarding and strengthening and rearrangement of the old characters and motives, a new ordering of the developments of the past and a selection for the purposes of the future without which the new start cannot be fruitful or carry forward the evolution. For each birth is a new start; it develops indeed from the past, but is not its mechanical continuation: rebirth is not a constant reiteration but a progression, it is the machinery of an evolutionary process."⁵⁰

All forms of life undergo the reincarnation process in an effort to manifest their innate perfection. This internal force is the source of evolution in nature, the cause of new species and the evolutionary progress toward higher complexity of structural organization.⁵¹ Henri Bergson (1859-1941) considered evolution to be directed by a creative internal force (*elan vital*). See Chapter VIII. Swami Vivekananda's Scientific Cosmology, section 9 for more details.

In the past in certain cases the process of reincarnation was likened pessimistically to a revolving wheel that spins around and around in a meaningless circle, a cycle of endless births and deaths, making no apparent progress.⁵² Vivekananda conceptualizes reincarnation more optimistically as a progressive personal evolutionary process, whereby the soul (subtle body) makes gradual progress towards the higher ideal. Since most people are not aware of the main purpose of life, this progress is apt to be slow and may temporarily reverse itself.

Many people after passing from this world will not be liberated or saved, but will be reborn on earth. So religion should aid them in their self-development by making them a better person.

8) Reincarnation combined with the law of karma explains the inequality of birth found in human existence. A person who believes in only one-life, is puzzled by the fact that one person is born into an environment that encourages religious piety, and another into criminal surroundings and child abuse that can promote immoral behavior. One person in an environment that promotes future success, another in the opposite environment; one person with a high IQ, another a low one, etc. Of course a strong-minded person can overcome these defects. All of this is explained by the pre-existence of the self and the law of karma.

William Walker Atkinson (aka Yogi Ramacharaka, 1862-1932) raised the pertinent question concerning salvation, how can there be justice, if a few deeds performed in one short lifetime, are responsible for a future eternity of bliss or unhappiness? What's more, why are certain people born under the most favorable circumstances for becoming virtuous and others under the worse? What is the fate of infants who passed away at a young age? It would be a tragic loss, if they have no opportunity for further development. A person needs repeated lives to evolve from the lower conditions and to develop and unfold the higher.⁵³ Most people have a desire to return to the earth where they feel the most comfortable, and are not ready to pass onto a heavenly oriented realm. Reincarnation supports the idea of perfect justice, that the reward or punishment is equal to the original act.

We should feel compassion for people in distress, realizing it is their good karma that they should be helped out of their negative situation. We have an obligation to act on their behalf if that is possible. The Hindu religion like every other religion advocates charity, compassion, love, friendliness, and the need to do one's duty to others.

9) Many lives are required to attain to a higher state of spiritual and moral personal development. Spiritual regeneration requires much effort that cannot be completed in one birth. An individual has to struggle hard in many lives to be able to realize their Divinity and know who they really are. Swami Vivekananda informs us, "Starting as some fungus, some very minute, microscopic bubble, and all the time drawing from that infinite storehouse of energy, a form is changed slowly and steadily until in course

of time it becomes a plant, then an animal, then man, ultimately God. This is attained through millions of aeons, but what is time? An increase of speed, an increase of struggle, is able to bridge the gulf of time. That which naturally takes a long time to accomplish can be shortened by the intensity of the action, says the Yogi. A man may go on slowly drawing in this energy from the infinite mass that exists in the universe, and, perhaps, he will require a hundred thousand years to become a Deva, and then, perhaps, five hundred thousand years to become still higher, and, perhaps, five millions of years to become perfect. Given rapid growth, the time will be lessened.”⁵⁴

What is the meaning of life? Why are we born on earth? According to reincarnation the answer is simple, to improve oneself so that one is ready to enter the Brahmaloaka-Kingdom of Heaven. To this our thought process has to be compatible and in harmony with the higher world. This requires acquiring better samskaras (mental impression), vasanas (habits, an aggregate of samskaras), and karmas.

The Christian mystical theologian Evagrius of Ponticus (a Roman Providence now part of Turkey, c. 345-99) specified that a person's present position on the cosmic ladder is dependent on their level of contemplation. “As the individual advances from one type of knowledge to another he puts on the form of body, or rather is transformed into that bodily form, which is appropriate to his new state, and at the same time enters the environmental conditions appropriate to that body.” Each intellect (nous) receives a body appropriate to the virtues and sins they engendered in their former existence.⁵⁵

In England, the Theosophist Geoffrey Hodson (1886-1983) wrote, “No single life, even if of the allotted span, can possibly provide a sufficient number and variety of experiences, challenges and opportunities necessary for the attainment of the stature of the perfect man. The fulfillment of human life—becoming perfect physically and intellectually as well as spiritually—is indeed impossible in one brief human life alone.... If, however, reincarnation be true, if we do return to earth time and time again, growing a little on each occasion, then the possibility exists of full unfoldment.”⁵⁶

Reincarnation explains that the reason for human existence is that through these experiences we attain the necessary self-development. Working through life situations and all of its challenges, our higher nature slowly unfolds itself. One must be confronted with situations that call for both positive action and the renunciation of negative characteristics. The

religious purpose of earthly life is to work out our own liberation-salvation. Working with finite freedom the individual makes the choices leading to self-actualization, personal responsibility, and the development of a strong and rational sense of self.⁵⁷ Vivekananda mentioned we show love and sympathy to others, knowing they are travelling along the same path we have trod.

The theory of the souls (subtle body's, self's) progressive evolution over many incarnations is a life-affirming idea. This life, afterlife, and the person's next earthly life are a continuous stream of events, and could even be thought of as a single life of an incarnating subtle body. What we do and think in this life guide the soul to its future destination. It implies that a well-lived life on earth is of value, even if a person does not realize all their goals during their lifetime. That in the new life the person to a large extent takes off to some extent from where they left off in their prior life. Fortunately, the process of nature protects us by making us forget our prior life activities. It is a great blessing that we do not recall the misdeeds of our former lives, since this would hold back our progress considerably. One is not burdened by the restraining and negative effects of memories of past mistakes. This is why trying to remember our past life events is not recommended and can hold us back. Rebirth provides a fresh start, a new opportunity and way of life to progress up the ladder of existence. Being placed in a new environment, allows opportunities for self-development, new experiences, progress, and alterations in lifestyle. Not knowing our karmas and acquaintances from former lives makes life events more of a novelty and less predictable. For example, love at first sight would be interpreted differently if we had memories of our acquaintance with the person in a prior life. Yet, we are not completely free of former life, since the unconscious mental impressions (samskaras) from past lives remain and determine our behavior patterns in this life to some extent. Granted we do not remember the events of our prior life, but in our present existence we have forgotten the details of most of the events of this life particularly our childhood.

Multiple lives make more sense than a single life, particularly for people who pass away at an early age or are not able to realize their ambitions. According to the implications of the doctrine of reincarnation most saints of the past have been liberated-saved, while most ordinary people return to the earth to live future lives. Consequently, because of the selectivity of the liberation process, the number of saintly people living on earth at any one time is limited.

When a person passes away all of their earthly possession that they value remain behind, but they take their mind with them. So it is important to get the mind both intellectually and emotionally in as good a shape as possible. A person's afterlife destination is determined by their karmas, samskaras (mental impressions), occupation; and family, religious, ethnic, social, and other group identifications.

In the reincarnation process all people must necessarily regress back to the embryo and childhood state, temporarily concealing their former life accomplishments. A person might have been an outstanding intellectual, leader or athlete in a prior life. In this life, these talents are involved in seed form in the baby, child, adolescent, and only manifest after many years of progressive development. It is like a tree that becomes a seed and from it a new tree is born. This progressive impetus to evolve is centered not in the species but in the individual. The mental impressions (samskaras) of our prior lives remain preserved deep in the unconscious mind in a subtle unrecognized state. The impressions not the memories of the prior life slowly emerge defining the nature of the person in combination with the new samskaras that are being created. "There is a "Will to Manifest Prana," the primary drive found in all living beings to express energy, force, and power.⁵⁸ The Viennese psychologist Alfred Adler (1870-1937) wrote about the striving for superiority, the basic innate drive of human action.⁵⁹ Properly executed these drives can spur on the evolutionary process.

10) Universal liberation and salvation are due to living many lives not a single one. Human life has a purpose which is to progress higher and higher up the latter of existence until liberation-salvation is attained. The Christian ultra-Universalists who believe we live only one life on earth conclude that all people no matter what kind of life they lived are saved after death. This idea is subject to the criticism that if this were so, there would be little need for religion or for living a moral or spiritual life. For that reason many Christians who believe that a person lives only one life on earth cannot accept universal salvation. According to the Restorationists the wicked enter a purgatory of punishment at death, which purifies them and makes them virtuous. Critics might reply that in this world suffering often does not make a person virtuous. Suffering caused by others makes some people resentful.

Reincarnation is an optimistic idea since everyone is eventually liberated-saved. The Hindu and Buddhist idea is that of a long progress of

personal evolutionary development, through innumerable lives on earth and other worlds until the individual attains an eternal Divine state of existence. If all people were liberated-saved after a single lifetime there would be a tremendous moral difference between one person and the next. By accepting a many lives view the objections raised by the traditional Christians against the ultra-Universalists and Restorationists are nullified. A reincarnationist is more apt to believe that considerable effort and renunciation are required to be liberated, since the majority of people will be reborn. Religions that accept reincarnation like Hinduism and Buddhism tend to be more pluralist than the others. They realize that the individual if not in this life, will attain liberation sometime in the future.

The process of reincarnation eventually leads to liberation and salvation. All people will eventually discover their innate Divinity and attain to a state of perfection. A Reincarnationist acknowledges the transforming power of Brahman-God's grace, Divine justice, justification by faith, the atonement of the Divine Incarnation, redemption, the responsibility of people to live a good moral life, and realizes the importance of religion in realizing these goals.⁶⁰ Brahman-God does not save all people in the universe at one point in time, since the Lord desires to perpetuate the creation. For more details see: XII. Liberation-Salvation and Samadhi, Section 4.

11) Reincarnation has been validated by scientific evidence. Canadian born Dr. Ian Stevenson (1918-2007) whose mother was a Theosophist was chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, School of Medicine. He and his colleagues investigated more than 2,500 children world wide, who had spontaneous memories of details of their last life on earth. In approximately 1,200 cases, he was able to scientifically substantiate their memories as being legitimate.⁶¹ The research was funded in part by a million dollar bequest from the Western Vedantist Chester Carlson, the inventor of the Xerox photocopier. Stevenson's staff applied the most advanced scientific research methods of verification, involving a great deal of interviewing and cross questioning of the subject and the people they knew in their preceding life. When the child returned to the location where they formally lived, they often described in detail with powerful emotions, the way things were during their former lifetime and the changes that have taken place since then. In legitimate cases about 90% of the statements the child made before coming to their prior environment, accurately described their previous life

family environment and associates who lived in another geographical area. “The typical case of this type starts when a child between the ages of 2 and 4, but occasionally older, begins to narrate details of a previous life that he claims to have lived before his birth.... One of the universal features of cases of the reincarnation type is the almost invariable tendency, for the subject to forget the memories of a previous life between the ages of 5 and 8.”⁶² Most often the subjects were reborn in a similar type culture, and frequently the individual was reborn within fifteen miles of their previous residence. For these people the median time interval between death and rebirth was only fifteen months. This relatively short period of time suggests that fragments of the old memories had not been discarded, but were brought back into their new physical body.⁶³ In one of his studies, of 725 cases of people with prebirth memories, 61% died violently in their previous life. Many of them died at a young age or were women who had small children to care for when they passed away.⁶⁴ Stevenson writes, “In many cases, someone connected with the (future) subject has a dream in which a deceased person appears to the dreamer and indicates their wish or intention to reincarnate. The dreamer is usually a married woman and a potential mother for the next incarnation of the person who is to be reborn. Sometimes the woman's husband, another relative, or a friend may have a dream of this type. I call these dreams ‘announcing dreams.’”⁶⁵ While the memories of our past lives are forgotten in the conscious mind they remain in the far vast unconscious mind. The unconscious mind is like a lake and the consciousness mind is its surface. Dr. Stevenson mentions how in some cases renewed contact with prior life associates created double identities that interfered with their present life. Indicating it is better to concentrate on our present life and not investigate prior ones.

In addition, Dr. Ian Stevenson made the discovery that in about 10% of the cases the person’s gender changed from one life to the next. This is the way nature operates. No doubt in a certain percentage of cases gender change is a factor in causing homosexuality. There are of course many other factors. For some people gender change is an aid in personal evolutionary self-development. If homosexuals make a gender change it is likely they would be a heterosexual in their new life. Gender change is more likely to have occurred in feminine natured males and masculine females. If one thinks that homosexuality is inherited, we might ask is there a scientific explanation for the fact that this behavior pattern has continued on for millenniums despite a very low fertility rate? For

reincarnationists, the inclination towards homosexuality is based on one's prior life activity.

Stevenson also authored two books covering 200 subjects who had birthmarks and birth defects that corresponded with wounds they received in their previous life.⁶⁶ People who had been stabbed to death in their prior life had birthmarks in the same bodily location.

The scientific community has ignored Stevenson's finding. Ideas have social status, and unfortunately in the Western intellectual tradition, reincarnation and the pre-existence of the self or soul has been low in spite of the fact that it has been accepted by many prominent thinkers of the West and about 25% of the overall population. Reincarnation like psychic powers is not part of the present scientific paradigm.

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Powell (1882-1969) the theosophist from Wales and the United States wrote, people "with unusually strong astral bodies, who reincarnate after a very short interval, it sometimes happens that the shade or shell left over from the last astral life still persists, and in that case it is likely to be attracted to the new personality. When that happens it brings with it the old habits and modes of thought, and sometimes even the actual memory of that past life."⁶⁷

12) In addition to explaining individual genius, at the macro level the "Reincarnation Theory of History" also helps us to understand the sudden rise and fall in the number of creative geniuses in a particular country. Pitirim Sorokin (1889-1968) pointed out that Arnold Toynbee's (1889-1975) theory of history does not explain the reason for the sudden rise and fall of a great civilization. Geographical factor, challenge and response, and withdrawal and return, do not properly tell us why there is an unexpected emergence of a dynamic creative minority in one culture and not another.⁶⁸ According to the basic principles of reincarnation and karma, gifted and creative souls, take birth in the proper environment during the opportune time, in the countries where and when they can best develop and express their talents. When the opportunities are there and the circumstances are auspicious, geniuses with special talent often are born into that environment.

Two examples of rapid intellectual decline in genius can be explained using Sorokin's data, though he gathered it for other purposes. During the 1451-1500 period Spain and Portugal combined (29%), and in the 1551-1600 period Italy (28%), each produced a higher percentage of creative discoveries and inventions than any other European country during that

half of a century. The Spanish Inquisition began in 1478 and the Italian Inquisition in 1542. In only two centuries, the percentage of European creative innovations and inventions plummeted from 29% to only 0.4 % in Spain and Portugal combined, and from 28% to 4% in Italy.⁶⁹ According to a reincarnationist, due to the Spanish Inquisition and the persecution of leading Italian thinkers during their inquisition, most of the creative thinkers took birth in other Western countries where they could best develop their talents. Conversely, the rapid rise of the United States from its inception was due in part, to opportunities attracting talented European people to incarnate in this country.

Swami Vivekananda believed that Sayana (1320-87) a famous *Rig Vedic* commentator in India was reborn as Max Müller (1823-1900) in Germany, in order to create worldwide interest in the *Rig Veda* and other areas of Indology.

In Vishistadvaita and Advaita schools of Vedanta the subtle body is described as being the size of an atom. At death it leaves through a small aperture in the body. This raises the problem, how does it experience the entire organism if it is not all-pervasive?⁷⁰

2. Other Aspects of Reincarnation (Aka Rebirth, Transmigration of the Soul, Metempsychosis, Palingenesis)

The idea of the reincarnation and/or the pre-existence of the soul (self) has been taught by many Western philosophers, Christian writers, and religious schools such as the ancient Greek Orphic school (6th century BC), Pythagoras (b. 582 B.C.), Empedocles (b. 490 B.C.), Socrates (c. b. 469 B.C.), Plato (b. 427 B.C.), the Druids (c. 3rd century BC), Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (c. b. 20 B.C.), *Talmud* (2nd-5th centuries), the Gnostics (fl. 120-40), Clement of Alexandria (c. b. 150), Origen (c. b. 185), Plotinus (c. b. 205), Porphyry (c. b. 233), *Midrash* (5th-12th centuries), Maximus the Confessor (b. 580), Johannes Scotus Erigena (c. b. 810), Bogomil (10th-14th century), Kabbalah writers (c. after 1000), Meister Eckhart (c. b. 1260), Cathari (12th-13th centuries), *Zohar* (13th century), Giordano Bruno (b. 1548), Benedict Spinoza (b. 1632), Gottfried Leibniz (b. 1646), David Hume (b. 1711), Johann Herder (b. 1744), Hasidistic writers (since the eighteenth century), Arthur Schopenhauer (b. 1788), Ralph Waldo Emerson (b. 1803), Henry David

Thoreau (b. 1817), Max Müller (b. 1823), Leo Tolstoy (b. 1828), Friedrich Nietzsche (b. 1844), John McTaggart (b. 1866), Nicolai Berdyaev (b. 1874), C. D. Broad (b. 1887), and Aldous Huxley (b. 1894). Other distinguished supporters of reincarnation from other fields of study include: Johann Goethe (b. 1749), George Sand (b. 1804), Thomas Edison (b. 1847), Paul Gauguin (b. 1848), Maurice Maeterlinck (b. 1862), Henry Ford (b. 1863), Prime Minister David Lloyd George (b. 1863), Jean Sibelius (b. 1865), William Butler Yeats (b. 1865), Wassily Kandinsky (b. 1866), Piet Mondrian (b. 1872), Harry Houdini (b. 1874), Edgar Cayce (b. 1877), General George Patton (b. 1885), Salvador Dali (b. 1904), Ian Stevenson (b. 1918), the Mormon, Christian Science, Unity Church and many others.⁷¹

According to a 1980 Gallup Poll, 23% of the adult Americans respondents (30% for the 18-24 age group) believed in reincarnation, which represented 34% of the people (44% for the 18-24 age group) who believe in afterlife. These high percentages were attained even though this doctrine was vigorously and sometimes harshly suppressed for many centuries in many Western countries.⁷² “In a survey by the Pew Forum in 2009, 24% of American Christians expressed a belief in reincarnation and in a 1981 survey 31% of regular churchgoing European Catholics expressed a belief in reincarnation.... The mean for the Nordic countries is 22%. The belief in reincarnation is particularly high in the Baltic countries, with Lithuania having the highest figure for the whole of Europe, 44%.... Overall, 22% of respondents in Western Europe believe in reincarnation.”⁷³

To understand how reincarnation occurs we must go to the Indian writers. Shankara articulated that after the physical body dies; the transmigrating soul goes to another world necessitated by their karmas. After some of an individual's karmas have been exhausted in another world they are eventually, reborn on earth in a situation determined by their unrepaid karmas that they accumulated in their previous lives. “By residual karmas are meant those other results of actions which are calculated to produce effects in this world, and which still stand over after experiencing the results that were to fructify there (in heaven); with these former the soul descends.” The yogi who did not attain the final goal, “Having completely enjoyed the pleasure in such a world [temporary heaven] he is reborn in the house of the pure and wealthy.”⁷⁴

Swami Abhedananda mentioned, “These subtle bodies, being governed by the law of cause and effect and subject to the law of action

and reaction, appear again either on this [physical] plane or on some other to express some powers, to manifest latent tendencies, and to gain knowledge and experience by coming in contact with these objects of sense which exist on the material plane.”⁷⁵

In the West, the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) raised the point, “It is always a subject of wonder that the older generations appear only to pursue their weary toil for the sake of those who come after them ... with no possibility of participating in the happiness which they were preparing.” For a reincarnationist, the older generation will benefit from their prior accomplishments when they are reborn.⁷⁶

Frederic(k) Myers (1843-1901) a Professor of the Classics at Cambridge University in England came in contact with Swami Vivekananda. After his passing up until 1932, Myers communicated twelve thousand pages of material to a dozen spiritualist mediums in England, the United States, and India. In these messages he stated that the soul reincarnates progressively from a rudimentary mineral form through the plant, animal, and human levels over a series of lives until it reaches its true Divine nature. He describes seven realms of existence from the earth plane to the highest formless and timeless spiritual realm. “The soul who enters that seventh state passes into the Beyond and becomes one with God.” Since Myers was able to progress only to the third heaven, “at the time of his communication his reports of the higher levels of consciousness beyond this are less detailed and more speculative.” He received information about the higher heavens from souls more highly evolved than himself.⁷⁷

The British philosopher John McTaggart (1866-1925) mentioned “even the best men are not, when they die, in such a state of intellectual and moral perfection as would fit them to enter heaven immediately.” With many people there is a slow rate of improvement combined with some regression. Future lives provide the opportunity for gradual improvement allowing an individual to reach a higher state. Reincarnation is an act of nature that allows this to happen. Activities in this life are sometimes incomplete and thus, desires are unfulfilled and can only reach fruition in a future life. Factors of heredity and environment often do not explain why an individual's innate characteristics, tendencies, qualities, and habits differ radically from other people who live under similar conditions. Why does one individual possess a special innate talent or a particular virtue from a young age, which other people cannot acquire after a lifetime of effort? Though a person has forgotten the events of their

earlier lives, they nevertheless have gained from the experience. Hopefully, these experiences: increased the power of their mind and the aptitude for acquiring new knowledge, strengthened the individuals character, and developed moral habits that will be carried over into the next life. Reincarnation clarifies why at first sight; two people may be almost instantaneously drawn together by a feeling of love, friendships and a state of mutual trust.⁷⁸

Jean Paul Sartre (1905-80) the French existentialist atheist philosopher mistakenly thought that the process of death is an absurdity without meaning. It is an annihilation that negates life and removes all meaning from life.⁷⁹ A reincarnationist realizes that death of the physical body is a natural event in the birth and rebirth cycle. It provides a new opportunity to grow and make progress in a new environment and life circumstances. It is our good fortune that in the next life we are not burdened by memories of the past and are free from the feeling of guilt caused by mistakes made in a prior life. Our horizons are expanded since we are born in new surroundings with new opportunities for self-development. Life is full of surprises such as love at first sight, which would be more evident if we were aware of our previous life events. We are freed from the memories of the past, but not the unconscious mental impressions (samskaras) and karmas. For some people death results in liberation-salvation.

According to the psychics who make contact with deceased people, most of these people live an existence that is neither pure bliss nor misery. Also, there are a variety of worlds, not the oversimplified idea of just two or three realms of existence. According to a newspaper report, a British team of psychics made contact with the deceased character actor Lionel Barrymore (1878-1954) who confirmed he was still acting in a post-mortem lower heaven (not the higher Kingdom of Heaven). People joyfully meet their parents and old friends and he was surprised to find animals lived there. If these animals formerly lived on earth a temporary lower heaven for their pets should make animal lovers happy.

Professor Ninian Smart (1927-2001) at the University of California, Santa Barbara concluded, "A number of arguments in favor of the theory have been propounded; they can be classified as metaphysical, empirical, and theological.... [For example] the metaphysical arguments attempting to establish the eternity of the soul [self] have been taken to imply pre-existence as well as postexistence... Empirical arguments are as follows. Children have instinctive capacities, which suggests that there must be

learning prior to birth. Similarly, it is sometimes argued that child geniuses, such as Mozart, indicate prenatal training.... The [theological] doctrine of rebirth provides the possibility of a long process of self-perfection, which harmonizes well with the religious vision of the world as a theater for moral striving.”⁸⁰

According to David Chalmers the “Hard Problem of Consciousness” is how can physical processes in the brain, generate the subjective consciousness experiences in the mind? These include sense experience, emotions, memories, etc. He suggests a theory based on panpsychism that everything material, however small, has an element of individual consciousness. The combination problem is how can conscious atoms combine to yield human consciousness?⁸¹

Panpsychism is the theory that not only humans and animals have an inner or psychological being, but so do plants and objects referred to as inanimate. A strong argument in its support is that according to science organic life arose from inorganic matter. How did psychic life come into being if it did not exist in rudimentary form in inorganic matter? To answer it resulted from “creation out of nothing,” would be an unscientific explanation.⁸²

Reincarnation implies that since at an earlier stage of our evolutionary development we were plants and animals, we share a kinship with all life and are related to the whole of nature. The purpose of Brahman-God’s creation is not only to benefit humanity, but also to enhance the development of all life forms that are slowly evolving toward liberation-salvation. Reincarnation favors maintaining the wide variation of plant and animal types, which allows the soul to advance through a wide variety of conditions.

In a 1938 interview, Henry Ford (1863-1947) the founder of the Ford Motor Company and a firm believer in reincarnation, expressed his belief that:

When I was a young man, I, like so many others, was bewildered. I found myself asking the question ... ‘What are we here for?’ I found no answer.... One day a friend handed me a book.... That little book gave me the answer I was seeking. It changed my whole life. From emptiness and uselessness, it changed my outlook upon life to purpose and meaning. I believe we are here now and will come back again.... Of this I am sure ... that we are here for a purpose. And that we go on. Mind and memory—they are the eternal.⁸³

As brilliant as they were both Nikola Tesla (1856-1943) and Albert Einstein (1879-1955) thought that we perished with the death of the body. They understood the physical world but not the metaphysical subtle realm.

At times Sri Ramakrishna mentioned the world is God's play. We are reborn because we get attached to the play both as an actor in it and an observer of it.

3. The Pre-existence of the Soul (Self)

There are several profound theories concerning the pre-existence of the soul (self). They are that the soul (self) exists:

a) Eternally in its Essential Nature (Atman) being consubstantial with the Transcendental Absolute God (Brahman). From the standpoint of their temporal aspect humans are subject to the conditions of finite existence. Conversely, from the perspective of their eternal aspect, all souls are one with the substance of the Godhead transcending both space and time.

See: Chapter II. The Atman dealing with Shankara, Vivekananda, Origen, Eckhart, and Tillich.

b) Eternally in the Divine Essence (Nirguna Brahman) See: Chapter II. The Atman dealing with Jan Ruysbroeck and Henry Suso.

c) Eternally as a thought in the Mind of God (Ishvara, Saguna Brahman) where they are perfect and immutable. All creatures eternally subsist more truly as indestructible intelligible beings as a part of the Divine Reality. See: Chapter IX. The Divinity of the Soul (Self) dealing with Erigena and Thomas Aquinas.

d) As a part of the World Soul-Universal Mind. Eventually the person returns to and merges with the Universal Mind retaining their individuality see: Chapter IX. The Divinity of the Soul (Self) dealing with Ramanuja, Vivekananda, Philo, Ibn Gabirol, Abraham Ibn Ezra, and Benedict Spinoza.

e) And pre-existed in another physical body and reincarnated (Hindus and Buddhists) as discussed above.

f) In a heavenly realm (not the Kingdom of Heaven) from which it descended. That the soul [self] pre-existed in a heavenly realm from which it descended was held by Plato, Origen, and Evagrius of Ponticus (345-99) a Christian mystical writer, in the Jewish Midrash, the *Zohar*, and by Isaac Luria (1534-72) the Palestinian Kabbalist. According to Origen (c. 185-

254) in the creation allegory discussed in the book of Genesis, all men are symbolized by Adam and all women by Eve. Like Adam and Eve, all souls (selves) were originally pure, serving the Lord and obeying His commandments. They lived in paradise, the supersensible ideal Platonic world (the Garden of Eden) as pure intelligences. On account of the misuse of their innate power of free will, the pre-existent souls (selves) turned away from God. Gradually they began to sin, and their soul (self) became heavy and weighted down and then descended into the terrestrial world, where they were clothed with gross physical bodies.⁸⁴ Origen wrote, "It is clear that certain sins existed before the souls, and as a result of these sins each soul receives a recompense in proportion to its deserts. They are sent forth from God as a punishment, that they must undergo on earth a first judgment.... But when they had revolted from their former blessedness they were endowed with bodies in consequence of the fall from their first estate which had taken place in them, and allotted to various ranks. So from being 'minds' they have become angels, archangels.... the cause of the diversity and variety among these beings is shown to be derived not from any unfairness on the part of the Disposer but from their own actions, which exhibit varying degrees of earnestness or laxity according to the goodness or badness of each."⁸⁵ It must be realized that the Garden of Eden is a lower heaven where sin is possible and not the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the Jewish Rabbinic Aggadic literature and the Midrash it is stated, "You must know that all the souls from Adam to the end of time were created during the six days of Creation. They were all in the Garden of Eden, and they were all present at the Revelation of the *Torah*.' These statements, and there are many others like them, demonstrate conclusively that the Rabbis of the Aggadah believed in the pre-existence of souls during the period of Creation, and that some of them believed they existed even before Creation."⁸⁶

It is significant that the first anathema directed against Origen and Origenists at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, did not reject reincarnation as some people think, but opposed their idea of Origen's specific idea of the pre-existence of the soul stating, "That they had previously been spirits and holy powers, but that, satiated with the vision of God, they had turned to evil." In addition, it is significant that the Council did not anathematize Origen's teachings concerning: the eternity of the world and religious scriptures, cosmic world cycles, the law of karma, God as Absolute, or gradual salvation.⁸⁷

The Fall that Origen mentions would have occurred from a lower heaven like the paradise of Adam and Eve or the Indian Svarga, since it is impossible to fall from the Kingdom of Heaven or the Indian Brahmaloaka. Thomas Aquinas offers many profound reasons why this is the case. "It has been shown above that man's perfect Happiness consists in the vision of the Divine Essence. Now it is impossible for anyone seeing the Divine Essence to wish not to see It.... the vision of the Divine Essence fills the soul with all good things, since it unites it to the source of all goodness.... Nor again can it be withdrawn by any other agent. Because the mind that is united to God is raised above all other things, and consequently no other agent can sever the mind from that union."⁸⁸ "Nothing is taken away from a thing by violence unless the power removing it is greater than the power which causes it. Therefore, since no power surpasses the Divine power, it is impossible for this vision to be taken away by violence.... Nor, indeed, may it cease to see because of a removal of the object, for the object, which is God, is always existing in the same way ... So, it is impossible for the vision of God, which makes men happy, ever to fail.... the nearer a thing is to God, Who is entirely immutable, the less mutable is it and the more lasting.... since reason will be at its peak strength, having been enlightened by the Divine light, so that it cannot swerve away from what is right."⁸⁹

g) In seed form (Vivekananda, Augustine, Luria). Vivekananda comprehended, "Everything begins, as it were, from certain seeds, certain rudiments, certain fine forms, and becomes grosser and grosser as it develops; and then again it goes back to that fine form and subsides. The whole universe is going on in this way."⁹⁰

R. A. Marcus, senior lecturer in medieval history at the University of Liverpool pointed out that according to Augustine's theory of seminal reasons, "God did create everything 'in the beginning' [Sir. 18:1], but allowed some of his creatures to remain latent, in a state of potentiality, waiting for the right time and the right environment for their actual appearance. He refers to things created in this condition as having been created 'potentially,' 'seminally,' 'invisibly,' 'causally,' and in other ways, and likens their coming into being to the germination of a seed and its development into the mature plant under the appropriate conditions. Following Stoic precedents [mediated through Neoplatonic philosophy], he calls this equivalent to the seed from which the plant develops *rationes seminalis* [seminal reasons] or *rationes causales*, and thinks of these as a kind of germinal existence of the fully actualized creatures, containing the

principles of their subsequent development.... there can be nothing really new since everything is latently present from the beginning.”⁹¹

The German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz contended that, “Souls of men preexisted not as rational souls, but merely as ‘sensitive’ [sensible] souls.... I grant an existence as old as the world . . . to all Monads or simple substances from which compound phenomena result; and I hold that each soul or Monad is always accompanied by an organic body.” They exist as sensitive or animal souls up until the time that they become human and receive the ability to reason.⁹²

h) And pre-existed in formless prime matter-substance (prakriti), the undifferentiated, unmanifested causal state of existence. In this realm there is no distinction of name and form between one immaterialized soul and another. At the beginning of a new world cycle (Pralaya) when the creation is manifested, primal matter transforms into the substances of subtle mental and gross physical matter. The soul takes on a mental and physical body in accordance with the karmas and samskaras (mental impressions) it created in the prior cosmic cycle.

According to Vivekananda, Akasha [Primal Matter-Substance without form and void] “is the omnipresent, all-penetrating existence. Everything that has form, everything that is the result of combination, is evolved out of this Akasha.... It cannot be perceived; it is so subtle that it is beyond all ordinary perception; it can only be seen when it has become gross, has taken form. At the beginning of creation there is only this Akasha.... At the beginning and at the end of a cycle everything becomes Akasha, and all the forces that are in the universe resolve back into the Prana”⁹³(See: Chapter VIII. Swami Vivekananda’s Scientific Cosmology, Section 3).

Lutheran and Calvinist Scholastics theologians distinguished between two stages, “(1) creatio prima, the first creation, corresponding to Gen. 1:1-2, during which God drew out of nothing the materia prima, or materia inhabilis, the primary or unformed matter (Sk. Akasha); and (2) creatio secunda, according to which God produced individual beings by imparting form and life to the materia prima.” For both Lutheran and Catholic theologians’ formless prime matter “is utterly potential and is devoid of all attributes or qualities.”⁹⁴

4. Brahman-God (Ishvara) and the Law of Karma and Samskaras

Old and New Testament: “I the Lord search the mind and try the

heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruits of his doings” (Jer. 17:10; cf. 32:19; 1 Sam. 26:23; Ps. 9:16, 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Is. 59:18; Ezek. 18:30; Mt. 6:12; 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 18:5-6). New Testament: “So each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12; cf. 2:10-13; Rev. 20:12); “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Gal. 3:13).

Unlike many other doctrines both the law of karma and reincarnation are held by all of the major philosophical systems of Hinduism. It is also accepted in Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Shankara (c. 688/788-720/820) discerned that humans are responsible for their life events, which are brought on by the merit and demerit of their accumulated karmas over several lifetimes. The inequalities between people are due to their own actions and not to Ishvara [a Personal God].⁹⁵ “In causing the individual to act, God [Ishvara] takes into account the efforts—characterized either as virtuous or vicious—which the individual makes.... God [Ishvara] acts merely as a general instrumental cause, dividing the resulting fruits of works unequally in accordance with the inequality of merit and demerit acquired by the individual beings ... God [Ishvara] ordains good and bad for the individual beings in accordance with the efforts made by the beings themselves”⁹⁶

The theism of Ramanuja (1017-1137) was insightfully explained by S. Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) this way. “God acts according to certain laws which are the expression of His nature. God does not make the soul do good or evil acts according to His caprice, but shows His constancy of nature by acting according to the theory of karma. If karma is independent of God, then God's absoluteness is compromised. The critic who declares that we cannot save the independence of God without sacrificing the doctrine of karma has not the right conception of the Hindu idea of God. The law of karma expresses the will of God. The order of karma is set up by God, who is the ruler of karma (karmadhyaksah). Since the law is dependent on God's nature, God himself may be regarded as rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked. To show that the karma is not independent of God, it is sometimes said that, though God can suspend the law of karma, still He does not will to do so. Pledged to execute the moral law which is the eternal expression of His righteous will, he permits evil which he might otherwise arrest. The inner ruler has regard in all cases to the volitional effort which prompts a man's action. He does not care to

upset His own laws and interfere with the world-scheme. God, though immanent in the world, does not wish to be intrusive.”⁹⁷

Vivekananda wrote, "She [the Divine Mother] is the power of all causation. She energizes every cause unmistakably to produce the effect. Her will is the only law, and as She cannot make a mistake, Nature's law-Her will-can never be changed. She is the life of the law of karma or causation. She is the fructified of every action. Under Her guidance we are manufacturing our lives through our deeds, or Karma.”⁹⁸

A distinction must be drawn between the notion that Brahman-God guides and controls the law of karma that is external to It, and the more advanced idea that the law of karma is an internal manifestation of the will of Brahman-God. With justice being Its primary virtue, the Divine Will functions through nature in a law-like manner. Conversely, when we transcend nature and enter into the heavenly realm, the Divine Will functions in a free and spontaneous manner with love and grace as its primary characteristics. Since the law of karma is under the control of the Lord, prayer and religious ritual are efficacious in producing positive karma and lessening the effects of negative karma.

It was fathomed by Origen (c. 185-254) a Greek Christian philosopher of Alexandria that, “God supervises by the power of his wisdom and distinguishes by the controlling hand of his judgment; and thus he has arranged the universe on the principle of a most impartial retribution, according as each one deserves for his merit ... Herein is displayed in its completeness the principle of impartiality, when the inequality of circumstances preserves an equality of reward for merit. But, the grounds of merit in each individual are known with truth and clearness only to God.” “The position of every created being is the result of his own work and his own motives.” God “dispenses all his gifts in proportion to the merits and progress of each recipient.”⁹⁹ Behavior performed in an antecedent life is responsible for the diversity and variety of circumstances that we find in the world. A just God “placed everyone in a position proportionate to his merit; nor will the happiness or unhappiness of anyone's birth, or any condition whatever that may fall to his lot, be supposed to be due to chance.” “The diversity and variety among these beings is shown to be derived not from any unfairness on the part of the Disposer but from their own actions ... according to the goodness or badness of each.”¹⁰⁰

In the *Old Testament* Job was a righteous and pious man who

shunned evil and enjoyed a prosperous life. Soon, there was a turnabout in Job's life and he was overwhelmed with much suffering and adversity (Job 1-2). Job and his friends believed that suffering is a result of evil acts. Convinced he had done nothing to warrant these misfortunes, Job challenged God's rule. He accuses God of being unjust in his allocation of reward and punishment (Job 9:21-24). God replied to Job, but he gave no explanation for Job's misfortunes (Job 38:1-42). Overpowered by the majesty of God's omnipotence, omniscience, and glory, Job regained his faith in the Lord's goodness and justice (Job 42:1-6). In spite of his encounter with God, Job was never able to solve the dilemma of why a just and noble person should have to suffer. The mystery of Job's dilemma is easily solved for a Hindu, Buddhist, or Kabbalahist who accepts the doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul (self) and the theory of karma.

Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) a Jewish thinker from Egypt explained due to Job's righteous nature and the grace of God, his temporary misfortune led him to greater insight and felicity, relying more on God and less on material possessions. His adversities were the key factors that led to his spiritual vision, enlightened view, and enhanced happiness. As Daniel H. Frank puts it, "For [Moses] Maimonides, Job is good, but not wise.... the antidote to human suffering is knowledge, specifically knowledge of God. We need not worry now about precisely what such knowledge amounts to, save to be clear that such knowledge has the effect of putting everything into perspective, clarifying what is truly of value and what is not. Heretofore, Job took happiness to consist in things such as health, wealth and offspring - commonly held goods - with the result that when these were taken away, suffering ensued. But with God's pronouncements from the whirlwind, and Job's (gradual) realization that his prior perplexity and suffering were grounded in a profound ignorance of the nature and (relative) value of things and a naive presumption about reward and desert, Job commences to understand that not even virtue guarantees felicity, only knowledge does. Only knowledge of God can guarantee that one possesses a sense of the relative value of things." Maimonides states, "When a man frees his thoughts from worldly matters and obtains a knowledge of God in the right way and rejoices in that knowledge, it is impossible that any kind of evil should befall him while he is with God and God with him. When he does not meditate on God, when he is separated from God, then God is also separated from him; then he is exposed to any evil that might befall him, for it is only that

intellectual link with God that secures the presence of providence and protection from the sea of chance.”¹⁰¹ In other words undergoing hardships if they bring increased understanding might be a form of good not bad karma.

According to Moses Maimonides the Lord rewards or punishes a person in accord with the quality, magnitude, quantity, and type of their deeds. “The exalted One rewards the one who observes his commandments of the *Torah*, and punishes the one who transgresses its admonitions. The greatest reward is the world to come and the greatest punishment is extinction.”¹⁰² “If you have served God with joy and observed His way, He will bestow upon you those blessings and avert from you those curses, so that you will have leisure to become wise in the *Torah* and occupy yourselves therewith, and thus attain life hereafter, and then it will be well with you in the world which is entirely blissful and you will enjoy length of days in an existence which is everlasting. So you will enjoy both worlds—a happy life on earth leading to the life in the World to Come. For if wisdom is not acquired and good deeds are not performed here, there will be naught meriting a recompense hereafter.”¹⁰³

The Jewish Hasdai Crescas (1340-1410/11) from Spain concluded that retribution is not a Divine punishment, which would be unjust, but is the natural effect of human deeds. “For, if reward and punishment follow from the deed and sins in the way that effects follow from causes, there would be no injustice attributable to God; no more than there is an injustice if someone is burned when he approaches fire, even if his approach is involuntary. It will be demonstrated that this is the meaning of reward and punishment.” The doer of good acts necessarily obtains beneficial results and evildoer receives the opposite. This process occurs in a natural, impersonal, and causal manner.¹⁰⁴

Following the logic of the reincarnation process there is a karmic connection, which explains some of the significant behavior patterns and events of the next life. For example, Jesus said, “I tell you Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood he was speaking to them of John the Baptist” (Mal. 4:5; Mt. 11:13-14, 17:10-13; Mk. 9:11-13; Lk. 1:17). Both Elijah and John the Baptist were men of spiritual strength born for the welfare of humanity. Another possible karmic connection is that Queen Jezebel sought the death of Elijah for slaying her prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:40; 19:1-2). In turn, Queen Herodias the wife of King Herod II Antipas, and her

daughter Salome, were responsible for having John the Baptist beheaded (Mt. 14:3, 6-11; Mk. 6:17-28).

The Christian doctrine of atonement attempts to answer the question, why did Christ have to die for people's sins? Why did he have to suffer during his life and later on the cross? According to the "Karmic Theory of Atonement," reparations are not rendered to God for his satisfaction as Anselm of Canterbury taught,¹⁰⁵ or as a ransom to the devil as Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Augustine believed.¹⁰⁶ Brahman-God's honor is not violated by human sin. John Hick made the point, "For a forgiveness that has to be bought by the bearing of a just punishment or the giving of an adequate satisfaction or the offering of a sufficient sacrifice or reparation is not forgiveness at all, but merely an acknowledgement that the debt has been paid."¹⁰⁷ We are not punished for our sins, but by our sins.

It is the law of karma that is part of nature that must be satisfied. Through the act of atonement, Jesus Christ paid off the karmic debt of his followers to free them from the bondage of sin. Throughout his harsh and immaculate life on earth and his crucifixions he took on their bad karma. Restitution is made not to persons (anthropomorphic) like God or the devil, but to the impersonal unalterable laws of nature. In the sense that the natural world cannot continue to exist unless the equilibrium of the karmic balance of forces is maintained. Naturalism involves empirical investigation rather than relying on supernatural explanations.

Roman Catholics teach that Jesus Christ, his disciples, and the saints of the Church through their exemplary lives produced "works of Supererogation." They are superabundant meritorious acts surpassing the necessary requirements of morality. Supererogation is a source of spiritual power within the religious organization. The result is a "treasury of merit," which the pious Church members can draw upon in unfolding their spiritual nature.¹⁰⁸ See Chapter X. Avatar-Divine Incarnation, Section 4A.

The apostle Paul wrote, "Sins will have no dominion over you, since you are not under the law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). He is referring to the prescriptive aspect of the law, the *Old Testament's* moral Law of Moses that tells us how we are supposed to behave. We are also under the descriptive aspect of the law of karma, which is the mode of operation concerning the results of our moral activity. Paul expressed the idea that, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

Karma is descriptive in that it explains the relationship between cause and effect in the realm of human action. It is also prescriptive (normative) in that understanding how it works guides our ethical behavior patterns. It is like the law of gravity that is prescriptive in the sense that if we desire to avoid a fall from a cliff, we know how to act.

The Christian concept of objective guilt is analogous to the Indian idea of bad or negative karma. Objective guilt “is the state of deserving condemnation or of being liable to punishment [reatus poenae] for the violation of a law or a moral requirement.... Guilt in this sense may be removed by the satisfaction of justice, either personally or vicariously. It may be transferred from one person to another or assumed by one person for another.”¹⁰⁹ Like negative karma, guilt brings about the obligation to satisfy justice and to pay the penalty for sins committed. In the Catholic purgatory by expiating their sins the person is working off their bad karma.

Immoral actions produce defiled mental impressions (samskaras), which is analogous to the Christian concept of pollution, the inherent defilement that all sinners are subject to. Protestant Christians tell us, “Macula is the stain or blemish; specifically, the spiritual pollution (pollutio spiritualis) and deformity of nature (deformitas naturae), i.e., the defilement of the soul that results from sin.... Sin has two immediate effects, (1) macula, or deformity of soul, and (2) reatus, liability under the transgressed law. Man is liable to punishment.”¹¹⁰

There is Brahman-God’s Double Agency that acts in two ways. First, the Lord works through the general laws of nature and karma that applies to all people. These laws apply not only to the body, but also to the mind working through samskaras (mental impressions, inherent tendencies) that determine the way a person thinks, feels, and acts. We follow our determined will that is based on the nature of our samskaras that in turn are due to our prior actions and thoughts. The universe (nature) is all law. All physical causes in the universe originate with Brahman-God, the First Cause. Vivekananda states, “God is the omnipotent supporter of the universe. What is called ‘law’ is the manifestation of His Will. He rules the universe by His laws.”¹¹¹

Second, is special grace applying to a lesser number of people who are open to it through a combination of the Lord’s (and the Mother’s) activity and their own effort. It is far better to live under the Lord’s grace than solely by karma. The Lord operates outside of the determined laws of nature, karma, and samskaras. As Vivekananda mentioned, “The Lord,

however is beyond all natural laws—is not under any rules and regulations.”¹¹² Brahman-God in Its infinite mercy facilitates liberation by speeding up the karma-eliminating process. This grace eventually frees (liberates, saves) a person from the control of the laws of nature that includes the law of karma. This state is reached through devotion, meditation, prayer, self-surrender (prapatti), good acts, and religious study. Some people consider the laws of nature to operate along a horizontal plane and the workings of Brahman-God along a vertical path. Though the human will is determined, we can rely on the freedom of our Atman or the grace of Brahman-God that has power over the natural world.

We might say “Law of Grace” if Brahman-God acts from necessity in the sense that the Lord is internally motivated by rationality that is Its nature. According to Vivekananda, “Disciple: Shri Girish Chandra Ghosh once said to me that there could be no condition in God's mercy; there could be no law for it! If there were, then it could no longer be termed mercy. The realm of grace or mercy must transcend all law. Swami Vivekananda: But there must be some higher law at work in the sphere alluded to by G. C. of which we are ignorant.”¹¹³ In addition, following the “Principle of Sufficient Reason,” attributed to Gottfried Leibniz’s every event has a logical reason or sufficient cause for its existence. From this we might infer that Brahman-God’s decisions (including acts of grace) must have a reason though they are not known to us. People who meditate, renounce, and live a spiritual life are under grace and are guided to create favorable karma; while other people are under the law of karma only, wherever it may lead them. Brahman-God, who is All-powerful and All-merciful, is capable of operating and suspending Karma and Rebirth through Divine Grace.

The structure of karma can be interpreted from a theological standpoint as being administrated by Brahman-God and Divine providence, or from a scientific perspective as an impersonal law of nature. Broadly defined it has two aspects, external karma that effects the causal sequence of external events (that include other peoples reactions to us) and internal karma that effects the workings of our mental events and emotions. We might call the latter the “law of samskaras” (mental impressions) that determine our basic nature, how our mind and feelings operate and is programmed by our thoughts and external behavioral patterns. The external and internal events interact and determine each other. At times they may correlate as when a person reacts mentally to

another person action, or they may vary greatly as when a person feels depressed when external events are going well. Samskaras are stored up in the conscious subconscious, and unconscious mind, produced by our prior thoughts, feelings, and actions. They act as a predisposition towards doing a similar action or having similar thought or feelings in the future. Repetitions of similar action, thoughts, or feelings strengthen the predispositions (samskaras) that combine to establish a habit pattern (vasana).¹¹⁴ Samskaras and vasanas are the driving forces behind our actions.

According to Shankara's Doctrine of Kramamukti (gradual liberation-salvation) one's position in the Divine realm is subject to progressive change. After devotional devotees go to the Brahmaloaka (Heaven), they undergo a process of gradual purification and illumination to reach a higher stage of development. This process involves new mental impressions (internal karmas) to accomplish the task.¹¹⁵

Karmic energy is not a mere abstraction, but is a concrete substantial entity that has good and bad effects. A compassionate guru not only takes on the bad karmic energy of the devotee, but also transfers some of their good karmic energy to their devotees making it easier for them to attain spiritual progress.

As an explanation for the existence of suffering (theodicy) the theory of karma explains why a person experiences unhappiness (due to the causal chain of their former deeds). This is not an ultimate explanation of why we perform acts that create our own suffering.

Hindus believe that all reward and punishment are the result of a person's cumulative karmas. Effects resulting from karmic actions are temporarily and proportional to the magnitude of the act. There is no world of eternal punishment, due to the fact that all human actions produce limited effects that are eventually worked off. Because the effect is equal to the cause and karma has inherent limits, justice cannot inflict an unlimited eternal penalty for a limited finite magnitude of sin.

The doctrine of karma offers evidence that there is order and design in the universe, supporting the teleological proof for the existence of Brahman-God. The structure, function, and interconnectedness of the law of karma offers evidence that world was created by an intelligent creator possessed with a plan, purpose, intention, and design.

According to the "Mimamsakas, the highest goal of life can be attained only by doing the right types of Karma." But according to the

“Samkhya and Vedanta, the highest goal of life can be attained only after renouncing Karma.”

5. How Karma Operates

Indian: "One becomes good through good karma and evil through evil karma" (Br. Up. 3:2.13). "Whatever deed it does, that it reaps" (Br. Up. 4:4.5; cf. LM 4:173, 234). "The embodied soul, by means of good and evil deeds committed by itself, assumes many forms" (Svet. Up. 5:12; cf. 5:7; Br. Up. 4:4.6; Ch. Up. 5:10.5; Mun. Up. 1:2.10). "You yourself have created the karma that binds you" (BG* 18:60, p. 172). "As a man himself sows, so he himself reaps; no man inherits the good or evil act of another man. The fruit is of the same quality as the action" (Mahabharata, 12.291.22).

Old and New Testament: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6; cf. Mt. 26:52; Rev. 13:10). "It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Dt. 19:21). "As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same" (Job 4:8). "Be assured an evil man will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will be delivered" (Prov. 11:21; cf. Dt. 24:16; Is. 3:10-11; Eze. 18:20). New Testament: "You will never get out till you have paid the last penny" (Mt. 5:26; cf. Lk. 12:59). "Judge not, and you will not be judged, condemn not and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you; ... For the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Lk. 6:37-38; cf. Mt. 7:1-2). "For all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Mt. 26:52); "He saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, Rabbi who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind" (Jn. 9:1-2)? "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7; cf. Rom. 2:9; 2 Cor. 9:6). "I will give to each of you as your works deserve" (Rev. 2:23; cf. 22:12).

As explained by Swami Vivekananda, "Every thought that we think, every deed that we do, after a certain time becomes fine, goes into seed form, so to speak, and lives in the fine body in a potential form, and after a time it emerges again and bears its results. These results condition the life of man. Thus he moulds his own life. Man is not bound by any other laws excepting those, which he makes for himself. Our thoughts, our

words and deeds are the threads of the net which we throw round ourselves, for good or for evil. Once we set in motion a certain power, we have to take the full consequences of it. This is the law of karma.” The fine (subtle) body is the mind composed of the substance of subtle matter and energy, which is the repository of a person's karmas that eventually objectifies on the gross plane as an effect. Taking on a new configuration the cause transforms into the effect. “Every motion is in a circle.... It is as certain as can be, that every bit of hatred that goes out of the heart of a man comes back to him in full force, nothing can stop it; similarly every impulse of love comes back to him.”¹¹⁶ The subtle body is the carrier of karma, since the karma remains after we pass away and is there when we are physically reborn.

Vivekananda added, “The dying thief on the cross reaped the effects of his past actions. He had been a Yogi and had slipped; then he had to be born again; again he slipped and became a thief; but the past good he had done bore fruit, and he met Jesus in the moment when liberation could come, and one word made him free.”¹¹⁷ He introduced the interesting concept that the thief on the cross was a “fallen yogi.” Some people have fallen from their achievement level of a prior life. For some reason, possibly too much alcoholic consumption, drug use, or sinful actions they have fallen from their former state. In this life they have the opportunity to rise to their former level and even surpass it. Occasionally we see someone make a dramatic and lasting improvement in their lifestyle. Their auspicious samskaras (mental impressions) were hidden in their unconscious mind and suddenly burst forth bringing about a new person.

Concerning “fallen yogis” even on the spiritual path one will always be tempted. It is more likely to occur in the early stages, but even a veteran yogi will have to retake the test if they did not pass in the past. If they are unable to make the necessary alterations in their thought process most often they might be held back somewhat from making progress. But in extreme cases they can fall. Swami Brahmananda explained, “If your mind does not become absorbed in God, it will be impossible for you to protect yourself from the many temptations of the world.” Swami Turiyananda warned us, “Never think you are safe, temptations come as long as we live.”¹¹⁸ Swami Premananda also mentioned that we will be tempted.

Swami Abhedananda makes the point that all events “have natural causes whether we know them or not. That which appears to be supernatural or providential to an unscientific mind, is natural to a

scientist or a philosopher, whose conception of nature is larger and more universal. Therefore, all chance-events or so-called accidental occurrences are just as much governed by the law of causation or karma as any ordinary result of some known cause.” “Cause lies in the effect and effect is latent in the cause. For instance, a seed contains the whole tree potentially and produces the tree, and the tree produces the seed again.”¹¹⁹ “Action and reaction are opposite and equal, says physical law. When we do certain acts we are sure to reap certain results.” “Every thought that you send out, is a consumption of energy, and it must come back in some form and react upon the centre whence it started.” Karma is law-determined and not due to chance.¹²⁰ Even so-called random or chance events, whose causes are unknown, are determined by the law of karma. All the thoughts that a person sends out as bundles of energy eventually return to react on the source from which they originated. Every action produces a corresponding reaction that returns to the initiator of the act. Strike a table and it will react with a similar force.

Concerning Basilides (fl. 120-30) the Alexandrian Christian Gnostic, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150/160-213/220) wrote, “Basilides lays down that the soul has previously sinned in another life, and endures its punishment here, the elect with honor by martyrdom, and the rest purified by appropriate punishment.” “All voluntary sins that are not caused by ignorance will bear fruit in a future life.” Basilides believed only involuntary sins and sins of ignorance can be forgiven.¹²¹

Plotinus’ (c. 205-70) views on the subject are that there is a cosmic symphony, each part of the universe affects the other parts and is affected by them. “Each kind of man, then goes according to nature and the rational principle to the place that suits him, and holds the position he has chosen.... each individual is fitted in, according to justice, in the parts of the universe designed to receive him.” “The inescapable rule and the justice [which govern the location of souls] are thus set in a natural principle which compels each to go in its proper order to that to which it individually tends ... to that to which it has an internal disposition.”¹²² From life to life people “change their positions, making slaves out of those who were masters before, if they were bad masters; and, if men have used wealth badly, making them poor; and causing those who have killed unjustly to be killed in their turn.... he was once the doer of that which he now suffers.” “If the sufferer is a good man, this will turn out for his

good." The world is a living organism whatever happens in one part produces a sympathetic reaction throughout.¹²³

Relating to the Jewish *Kabbalah*, M. Gaster discerned, "The Kabbalist, however, adds and superimposes the new theory of suffering and happiness, not for sins and good deeds performed in the person's lifetime, but for sins done during previous existences. The punishment was expected to fit the crime. Thus, if a man had sinned by his eyes, he would be reborn blind or suffering with his eyes, and, similarly, every other part of the body would then be affected by the sin committed through that part in the previous existence."¹²⁴

The American Unitarian minister Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82), described the Law of Compensation as a universal law based on equity and balance. It is a self-administered and mechanical like any law of nature. Based on this law, "You cannot do wrong without suffering wrong.... Every secret is told, every crime is punished, every virtue rewarded, every wrong redressed, in silence and certainty." "The rewards of action cannot be escaped, because he is transformed into his action, and taketh its nature."¹²⁵ In short, everyone must eventually pay off his or her own moral debts. The Law of Compensation is a counterpart of the physical law of uniformity in the moral world. Similar to physical laws, the Law of Compensation involves the conservation and transformation of energy from one entity to another.¹²⁶

According to the theory of karma all human events are karmically determined, with the exception of the grace of Brahman-God and the grace of the Atman. All parts of the universe are fragments of Mahat, the universal mind and body. Consequently, the law of karma is based on an integrated, deterministic, and holistic world. If one person changes the configuration changes and this brings about a necessary alteration somewhere else. The forces and powers of nature operate to attain a perfect balance and harmony. Karma is a self-adjusting, self-regulating, and self-manifesting structure. This is a law of compensation, an equal balance between an antecedent cause and a consequent effect. Newton's Third law reads, "For every action there is an equal [in magnitude] and opposite [in direction] reaction." Due to the interrelationship of all entities, it is absolutely necessary that the law of causation be maintained (i.e., that the effect equals the cause) both in the physical and mental realm, otherwise the universe would become chaotic and disintegrate. A physicist could prove the necessity of why there has to be a law of karma

to maintain the equilibrium of the universe. All events including those of human history are determined by their configuration and interrelationship with other events. A change in one place in the karmic system brings about a change somewhere else. Karma is an aggregate of very fine imperceptible material particles that have form (the substance of subtle matter and energy). It is sustained through the process of cosmic justice.

The universe is governed by definite laws; it is a cosmos, not a chaos. The law of karma affects the body, the mind, and external events. It describes an orderly and harmoniously determined universe where all events are interrelated with perfect synchronicity. According to the law of karma everything is determined including the outcome of the throw of dice or the lottery. There is no chance or randomness in the karmic world. Certainly all events in the macro world are determined, and the jury is still out on whether this applies to the micro quantum world. Quite likely the causal interconnectiveness applies to the macro and to the quantum world both within and between them.

The law of karmic interconnects physical, mental, personal, and social into an interconnected single causal system. Karmic effects deal with a person's external events and internal activities such as ideas, feelings, intentions, attitudes, desires, and volitions. The physical and mental are gross and subtle manifestations of the same substance. It works on both the individual and group level. According to the Indian doctrine of Satkaryavada (or Parinamavada), the effect pre-exists in the cause, in a potential form even before its manifestation. The effect exists prior to its modification in a latent state in the cause.¹²⁷ Following this principle an immoral means will transform into an immoral effect.

In the complex and cohesive structural-functional karmic system, good karma is functional and bad karma is dysfunctional. Manifest functions yield intended karmic results, and latent functions yield unintended results. Robert Merton (1910-2003) at Columbia University referred to "latent functions." Meaning many of the things we do have unintended and unexpected effects that may or may not be beneficial.

It is possible to believe in Karma without belief in rebirth or Rebirth without belief in Karma. Many people think karma applies only to this life and not to actions performed in a prior life.

The karmic actor plays a role within the behavioral system guided by norms, values, and traditional forms of behavior.¹²⁸ Karmic choices are influenced and constrained by a number of personal and social factors.

Karmic action is based on ideas and beliefs on how the actor perceives the situation in relation to his/her needs, the investment of emotion and feeling, moral rules of conduct, and the operation of the will through the allocation of energy. The karmic system involves a network of relations and feedbacks between people interacting with one other. People tend to seek optimum fulfillment of need. If an individual can enjoy happiness without performing good actions, why then should they live a moral life? Without the law of karma there would be less need to live a moral life.

Success comes from conformity, making your karmas and samskaras compatible with those of the groups you associate with. For example, if a person becomes the President of the United States it is because their karmas and samskaras are compatible with those of the country.

Some describe karma as a moral law, but its scope is much broader than that since it determines the results of all individual and group actions and events. For example, a person has a strong desire to be wealthy. They fulfill the necessary requirements and receive the good karma of abundant wealth. This is not necessarily a moral act (unless the term is defined extremely broadly) that involves goodness, virtue, or righteousness.

How does karma reside in the agent? As mental samskaras in the mind and as imperceptible forces (adrsta) or karmic energy in the subtle body. The Sanskrit terms adrsta and apurva are defined as, "The unseen potency of one's actions." This is one of the most important psychological concepts discovered by the Indians of the past. If people could see the hidden karmic effects of their present actions that will later take effect, surely they would act differently than they do now. Life events are full of hidden and unseen future effects, more complex than they appear to be. In most cases the karmic effect cannot be predicted with absolute certainty because it is the result of a configuration of multiple causes. We undertake a course of action for one purpose, yet the results are apt to be quite different from expected. For example, a young man moves to another city to acquire a job that he soon gives up, while the hidden karmic reason for the move is in that city he will meet his future wife. Is there an unconsciousness magnetic force between the energy vibrations of the future husband and wife that brings them together? Karma is very closely related to a person's vibrational state of mind that attracts other types of positive and negative vibrations.

The Jains consider karma to "consists of very subtle particles of matter that pervade the entire universe. Karmas are attracted to the karmic field of a soul due to vibrations created by activities of mind,

speech, and body as well as various mental dispositions. Hence the karmas are the subtle matter [and energy] surrounding the consciousness of a soul. When these two components (consciousness and karma) interact, we experience the life we know at present.” In turn an unperceivable magnetic karmic force attracts the person to things they have an affinity with. For the Jains, karmas operate as a self-sustaining mechanism of universal natural law, without any need of a Deity to manage them. A soul is released from worldly affairs as soon as it is able to emancipate itself from karma.¹²⁹

For the Buddhist the karmic process is an ongoing series of events that follow a causal pattern of one event determining the next. Unperceivable karmic seeds causally conditioned by prior events work on the physical body and mind. They reside as potencies, dispositions, and consciousness waiting to produce their fruits. Working off the accumulated karma burns the seeds, and proper discrimination destroys the root eliminating the dispositions and not creating new ones.¹³⁰

Subjectively, karma works through us, creating mental dispositions and tendencies (samskaras) that in turn affect our desires, passions, and perspective on the world. Every conscious or unconscious thought, feeling or emotion, act performed intentionally or unintentionally leaves a trace on the human psyche. Objectively, our acts produce karmic fruits (phalas) in our body and the world around us. A combination of our samskaras and phalas (fruits of action) determine our future actions.

After reviewing our past history we have a better understanding of the prior events of our life now, than when the events occurred. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) mentioned when life events occur some seem random and unexpected. It is only in old age when a person looks back on their life, then the series of events form a consistent and logical pattern. They have a hidden meaning that can only be understood in the light of later events. There is a teleological element in the relation of the unknown future on the present. The idea being that it is difficult to fully evaluate present conditions because they lead to unknown future events. The latter are now in a potential state and will causally manifest through the law of karma in the future. For example, at the time a youthful person might become depressed if they loose a job or their girlfriend leaves them. In old age, these events are re-evaluated and one discovers in the long run they were auspicious events that led to something more favorable. In every act there is combining of prior karmas with the present ones. So if

one wants to succeed at something in the present it depends on what they did in the past.

The activity is twofold, people both receive and reap the consequence of their past karma, and they give and deliver the consequence of other peoples karma to them. If two people are involved in karmic exchange then there must be a harmonious equivalent reciprocal relationship, where one person is fit to give and the other to receive the same karma. An example of compatible complementary needs is where one person is karmically equipped to offer help and the other one to receive it.

Prarabdha-karma is working itself out during the present life; sancita-karma is due to actions performed in a prior or during this life remaining latent during the present life; and agami-karma due to actions performed in this life that reach fruition in this or a future life.¹³¹ Many Indian thinkers believe a person expires the moment their prarabdha karma is exhausted. Many of the karmic effects we receive are due to actions performed in this life, not prior lives.

The law of karma is verifiable when it occurs in a direct and immediate fashion, for example when a person react positively to good treatment or negatively to bad treatment they receive from another Many people accept the idea of immediate and direct karma because they see ongoing evidence of it in their daily experiences. When Mr. A becomes angry and then screams at Mr. B who in turn reacts with anger and screams back. Hence, many Westerners take the law of karma seriously. This is known *a priori* through reason and empirically through observation and experience.

Most people accept a degree of probability (sometimes high) between a person's actions and the eventual outcome. Consequently, they undertake a particular plan of action to attain to certain goals. Be nice to people and they are more likely to be nice to you. But they do not accept the absolute necessity that a combination of acts and thoughts will necessarily bring a particular karmic result. It is not always evident because of the complexity of the matter that includes: good acts may produce some harm and bad acts some good, some effects might be delayed for a long period of time even from one life to the next, some karmas are worked off in a post mortem existence, karmas combine in many different ways, there are group karmas, etc.

But how does one explain delayed and indirect karma from a different source? Another act might produce karmic consequences that one receives a lifetime later. The circumstances have to be right for the karma to manifest. For example, if a person is born with the good karma of a business success, they often have to wait until they are an adult and purchase a business. The cause and effect might appear to be unrelated such as receiving good or bad health news not too long after the apparently unconnected act has been performed. Possibly a good person with a small backload of bad karma might receive their penalty sooner than a person that has a heavy backload of bad karma. Vivekananda mentioned, “When these Samskaras are very strong, they bear fruit quickly; exceptional acts of wickedness, or of goodness, bring their fruits even in this life.”¹³² An earthquake is delayed for years while its causes build up, so also it may take a long time for our personal actions to produce their effects. Since there is a time-gap between an act and its result, there must be some imperceptible link between the two.

The theory of personal karma differs from mechanical physical causation since effects are partially determined by the attitude, intentions, desires, character, and moral virtue of the agent. The karmic effect differs if the act is performed with a good intent, neutral intent, or a bad intent. Psychological impulses at the back of every action are as much integral parts of action as its behavioral expression. There is a big difference if one accidentally harms another person or maliciously does it on purpose. Intentionalism is the view that the moral value of an action is a function of the nature of the agent's intentions. The theory of karma as causality holds that disinterested or unintentional actions do not have the same positive or negative karmic effect, as interested and intentional actions. According to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), “A good will is alone unqualifiedly good.” We ask how can a deluded “good will” that does a great deal of harm be a good thing?

Critics mention that we do not remember the events of our prior life. These records have been kept as part of our unconscious mind, but they are not accessible to the conscious mind. The unconscious mind is like a lake or a pond and the conscious mind is only its surface. Does the unconscious mind contain knowledge of our future events that our conscious mind is unaware of?

The law of karma is both a law of nature and of justice. The natural law of justice involves the system of consequences that results from any action. It is a universal principle applying to all individuals. We are

responsible for the negative things that come to us and not the Lord. The law of Karma explains the inequalities of human life. Karma is an impersonal law and mechanism of cause and effect that does not require a personal lawgiver. According to this law people receive what they deserve, merit, or are entitled to. It requires no supernatural intervention; we suffer or succeed because of the natural outcome of our actions themselves, rather than through the subsequent intervention of Divine punishment or reward. The law of (bad) karma like Retributive Justice is a theory of punishment where the response to a crime is proportional to the offence. Hopefully it leads to the prevention of future crimes (deterrence) and the rehabilitation of the offender. Bad karma is not revenge because it is not personal and involves no pleasure at the suffering of others.¹³³ People commit a wide variety of crimes of different natures, but all receive the same penalty of going to jail. So there does not have to be an exact correspondence between the nature of the crime and the punishment.

Some Existentialist philosophers taught because of the world's tragic absurdity, at any point in time, anything can happen to anyone, to a good or bad person. That the world is intrinsically meaningless so that humans are compelled to find or create their own meaning.¹³⁴ Against this idea, according to doctrine of karma the world is law-like following a logical procession. There is meaning in human existence of pursuing self-development terminating in liberation-salvation.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) writes of “being thrown” (*geworfen*) into the world as something arbitrary and inscrutable. We are thrown into our present circumstances with all of its frustrations, sufferings, and demands that one did not choose.¹³⁵ But according to the karma theory, it is our karmas (actions) and samskaras (thoughts) that propelled us into our present situation, which is not an “accident of birth.” This is not easily understood because we do not know of our actions and thoughts in prior lives, and do not properly understand the karmic effects of our actions and thoughts in this life. We are now in the process of creating our future character and events.

There is a Multiplier Effect in the accumulative amount of good and bad karma generated by an act. For example, Mr. A screams at Mr. B and makes him angry producing one unit of bad karma. Frustrated Mr. B then gives Mr. C a bad time who in turn chastises Mr. D, etc. creating additional units of bad karma. If in each case (from Mr. A to B to C, etc.) if the effect decreased by 50% ($1/2$) we would have: $1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4}$ etc. resulting in two units of bad karma. The simple equation used to calculate the

amount of accumulated karma is: $1 / \text{amount of decrease} = \text{units of karma}$. The same principle and equation operate in the good karma process.¹³⁶

After he had the illness Sri Ramakrishna could see his throat cancer as a blemish on his subtle body.¹³⁷ Is an illness in the subtle body before it is detected through medical instruments? It is possible that much of the future already exists in a subtle realm. Before a karmic event is manifested in the physical universe it existed on the subtle plane. Does the atomic and sub-atomic (quantum) realm equate with the subtle realm?

There are also group karmas such as a husband and wife sharing some of their karmas. Also, there is small group karma where people who knew each other in a prior life are reborn together in their next life (a soul group). They may maintain similar roles like husband and wife or take on new capacities and a different relationship.

The historical future of societal and world events lie hidden beneath the surface in subtle karmic seed form. With perfect knowledge of this process one would know of future historical events. Today there is world karma, the common karma of humanity that comprises the sum total of all national and group karmas that we all share in. Examples include, the First and Second World War, world flu pandemic of 1918-19, stock market crash of 1929, and the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. Former regional histories have merged to form a single world history within which events anywhere are liable to have repercussions elsewhere. Our planet has become to a great-extent a communicational and economic unity in which national decision makers have a responsibility for the effects of their actions far beyond the borders of their own country. The contemporary karma of humanity constitutes a collective moral responsibility to prevent world wars, environmental catastrophes, and pandemics. Adrsta is the hidden cause of the world process in the human social-political-economic realm. Karmic energy is imperceptible to the five senses and the human intellect. We understand it through its gross manifestations.

A theory of karma can be employed for self-improvement that benefits the individual or can be applied purposely for creating a better society. All attempts should be made to create a good world and national karma. In Buddhist theory, common-karma (sādhāraṇa-karma) is the karma shared through communal destiny.

While most philosophers of history do not profess a rigid law of group karma, they do believe that the events which occur to groups, by necessity are results of historical forces originating from their past. A

country will remain prosperous and powerful, if it fulfills useful functions that benefit other countries. If it becomes corrupt or cruel it might lose its power, prestige, and creative potentialities. This phenomenon has occurred numerous times in world history.

According to some thinkers the events of history conform to a deterministic pattern of causes governed by rigid laws and impersonal forces. Friedrich Engels (1820-95) the German supporter of Karl Marx (1818-83) espoused an iron law of history, whereby if Napoleon had not lived, the impersonal force of history would have created a "Substitute Napoleon." They believed it is the causality of the economic modes of production that create the great men of history, including the personal characteristics of Napoleon. The culmination of the prior forces are the ultimate cause of the actions of a great historical figure.¹³⁸ Georgi Plekhanov (1856-1918) a Russian Communist also believed that the general course of historical events, are determined by the deep-lying productive forces and the relation among people in the socioeconomic process of production. However, while the unique personal qualities of influential people cannot alter the overall course of events, they do effect the individual characteristics of the historical process. Great people are those who possess the qualities that best serve the social needs of the time.¹³⁹ Does this mean if we had not lived there would have been a substitute us? From this standpoint we are part of an integrated karmic and samskaric network.

In most case modern science cannot predict with certainty the karma of a person. Nor can it explain how psychic powers (miracles) operate such as levitation, exact knowledge of what appears to be unpredictable future events, and understanding foreign languages without training. They cannot be explained at the physical level, only at a deeper subtle level of causation.

A great spiritual soul can transmit spiritual power and illumine the hearts of his/her disciples. Does this involve the transmission of spiritual karma or is this something else?

Does the law of karma extend to the animal level? It is certainly possible for animals to reincarnate through their subtle body. Their particular nature is the result of latent impressions acquired in their prior life experiences. Some believe animals do not produce karmas since they have no free will, but this is questionable. Pets behave in a certain way and people react to that. Is this not a karmic response? For example, a pet

brings happiness to its masters and receives love and affection in response. There is the example of a domesticated elephant that killed a human and was executed for that act. In the case of fish being killed by polluted waters, this is due to group karma. Certainly, an animal must modify itself before it can evolve to a higher level. It is stated in Section 2 how the deceased actor Lionel Barrymore (1878-1954) mentioned animals living in a lower heaven; no doubt temporary and due to their good karma and samskaras (mental impressions).

Are living entities like plants subject to the law of karma? If one plant is well treated and another one receives bad care, is this due to its prior life activity? Are the conditions of inanimate physical objects such as rocks determined by karma or an analogous law? We select out one similarly looking rock from a stack of rocks and then throw it on the ground. This does not appear to be due to the behavior of the rock. Our karma does not cause natural events such as earthquakes, but it does determine if we will be effected by them.

The Law of Karma as a System of Ethics

Sanskrit words such as Rta (moral order), Vrata (rules of conduct), and Dharma (righteousness, duty) expressly denote moral concepts. As a system of ethics the karma theory urges people to perform good acts because it is in their best interests to do so. Good conduct yields auspicious results and evil acts are shunned to avoid pain. It is the first principle and master rule of morality that tells us why we should perform good actions. The ethics of the law of karma are based on the precepts of practical reason. It shows the close contact between nature and morality being that good acts are eventually rewarded and bad ones are punished.

The law of karma is a conceptual tool that can be applied to many

ethics. Karma dharma is a system of ethics and a moral philosophy based on the law of karma. It is a pragmatic utilitarian ethic of consequentialism where the moral value of an action is determined by its consequences. Right actions have good consequences and wrong actions bad consequences. Moral propositions are evaluated in a utilitarian manner since in the long run following them leads to the practical effect of happiness and disregarding them to unhappiness. Standards of morality are based on the practical implications of the karma they produce. Following Deontology it is a duty to oneself to engage in the karmic activities with consequences that will maximize our personal happiness and minimize our unhappiness (Epicureanism).¹⁴⁰ Karma can be used as a tool of virtue ethics where I deliberately perform good acts that will bring about a moral self-transformation enhancing my moral character and making me a more virtuous person. This promotes personal evolution (Evolutionary Ethics). It can be used as karma yoga in order to bring liberation-salvation.

Karma dharma applies universally to all people in all societies of this world regardless of their many differences. It is not historically conditioned, but is unchanging and eternally valid throughout all moments of time. It is valid in every situation and under all conditions and can be followed simultaneously by everyone without exception. It is intrinsically good in itself and also instrumentally good, necessary for acquiring happiness. Karma is both a law of nature and a function of nature and like any natural law does not require faith since it operates whether you believe in it or not.

True happiness is derived from living in harmony with the law of karma. It tells us what we ought to seek goodness and avoid badness. This is accomplished by practicing the fundamental and unchanging moral forms of behavior such as being honest, truthful, intelligent, compassionate, courageous, and diligent. People most often seek knowledge, happiness and avoidance of pain, physical and mental health, social life, family, work and achievement, religion, and truth, recreation and leisure, and aesthetic appreciation. The good merit of happiness is produced by good deeds, which includes for many people working on a job and providing for a family. Undergoing sense pleasure uses up good karma, but does not create it.

One problem is that people have different value judgments. For example in the political world conservatives and liberals disagree on what is the good and right thing to do. Their decision is based largely on where

the person is located in “social space” in terms of their nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, geographical location, job type, personal characteristics, age, etc.

The law of karma is incompatible with nihilism, meaning that life is meaningless so we should rejection of all religious and moral principles. It is also incompatible with relativist and conventionalist views; that value is entirely relative to one’s community or determined entirely by convention. Therefore, good action is objective and fundamental and directs us to what is right. According to Aquinas’ ethical theory of “derivationism,” from a metaphysical study of human nature and its potentialities and actualizations we can discover what things are good for human beings and should be pursued.¹⁴¹

According to Socrates (469-399 B.C.) evil or bad actions are the result of ignorance. If a criminal were truly aware of the consequences of his actions, he would neither commit nor even consider committing a crime.¹⁴² Hence, if a person realized the karmic effect of their bad actions they would be significantly less likely to perform them. Karmas that take one down may be pleasure-seeking or egocentric. It is a big mistake to choose pleasure over goodness.

The German philosopher Kant pointed out, “Morals is not properly the doctrine of how we are to make ourselves happy, but of how we are to become worthy of happiness.” The moral law promotes the highest good (*summum bonum*) combined with complete happiness, the former producing the latter. He observed empirically that in this world, unfortunately virtue does not necessarily bring wellbeing and at times may conflict with it. A good will must be good in itself and not in virtue of its relationship to the agent’s own happiness.¹⁴³ It is the law of karma that fulfils Kant’s wish since it links happiness with virtue. The yogi agrees with Kant that the goal of spiritual practice is to make ourself worthy of the higher life.

Critics retort this can be an expedient calculating morality, not motivated by self-sacrifice and self-abnegation. One should perform good deeds not based on selfish desires, but for higher motives. Arthur Schopenhauer maintained that action for a selfish purpose destroys its moral worth. “An action effected merely by the threat of punishment and promise of reward would be moral more in appearance than in reality, since at bottom it would rest on egoism.” Morality is based on compassion for all living beings, and not due to a desire for a reward or to avoid punishment.¹⁴⁴

A possible negative feature of believing in the law of karma is making the mistake of placing the blame on the victim of bad karma. When thinking of other individuals and groups of people, keep in mind it is relatively easy to acquire some bad karma. This callousness toward the suffering of other people can be quite harmful. We should think that is the good karma of other people that we will help them out of their problems. Knowledge of the law of Karma is like a conceptual tool that is generally used for good purposes but on occasion might be harmful.

6. How to Produce Good Karma and Samskaras

Indian: “It [the Self] becomes virtuous through virtuous actions, and evil through evil actions” (Brh. Up. 4.4.5). “Abandon all dharmas [duties] and come to Me alone for shelter. I will deliver you from all sins; do not grieve” (BG 18:66); “Reliance upon Krishna is far better than any such expiatory acts, as religious austerities, or the like. Let any one who repents of the sins of which he may have been culpable, have recourse to this best of all expiations, remembrance of Hari [God]” (VP 2:6.29-34); Repentance (LM 11:228-31), prayer (RV 7:89.5; AV 6:51.3), not repeating the transgression (LM 11:231-33), confession (LM 11:228-29), study of the *Vedas* (LM 11:246-47), recitation of the *Vedas* (LM 11:46, 76, 227-28, 248-51, 259-60), performing a Vedic sacrifice (LM 11:75, 261), following prescribed caste duties (LM 11:236), giving money or property to the priests (LM 7:82-85; 11:4, 6, 39, 77, 128), chastity (LM 11:225), austerities (LM 11:228, 240), fasting (upavasa, anasaka) (LM 5:155; 6:20; 11:167, 204, 212-16, 260), avoiding liquor (LM 9:235; 11:55), standing all day (LM 11:225), and shaving off all of ones hair (LM 11:79) are recommended as forms of penance for both mortal (mahapataka) and venial sin (LM 11:240).¹⁴⁵

Old Testament: As an act of austerity and penance, fasting was practiced by the Israelites (Ex. 34:28; Neh. 9:1; Jer. 36:6). According to the vow of a Nazirite, a person should avoid “wine and strong drink” and should not cut their hair during the days of the vow of separation (Num. 6:1-5). The Israelites fasted, read from the book of the law for a quarter of a day, and confessed their sins and worshiped the Lord for another fourth of a day (Neh. 9:1-3). New Testament: The followers of John the Baptist and the Pharisees often fasted (Mt. 9:14; Lk. 5:33; 18:11-12) and the apostles of Jesus rigorously combined fasting with prayer (Acts 13:2; 14:23). Practicing celibacy (Mt. 19:11-12; Lk. 18:29-30), fasting in

private (Mt. 6:16-18); and renouncing worldly possessions (Lk. 14:33) and the desires of the flesh (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:16) are recommended.¹⁴⁶

Swami Vivekananda ascertained that we can control much of our karma that will bear fruit in the future, by creating counter-karmas and counter-samskaras (mental impressions). “The only remedy for bad habits is counter habits; all the bad habits that have left their impressions are to be controlled by good habits. Go on doing good, thinking holy thoughts continuously; that is the only way to suppress base impressions. Never say any man is hopeless, because he only represents a character, a bundle of habits, which can be checked by new and better ones. Character is repeated habits, and repeated habits alone can reform character.”¹⁴⁷ When a big wave of anger has come into the mind, how are we to control that? Just by raising an opposing wave. Think of love.”¹⁴⁸ “Love every one as your own self, because the whole universe is one. In injuring another, I am injuring myself; in loving another, I am loving myself.”¹⁴⁹ This moral precept is the foundation of the Advaitic monistic ethics and the law of karma. Virtuous acts yield happiness, and wrongful deeds bring unhappiness. Whatever actions, speech, and thoughts you project will rebound back on you. Always keep this in mind so you will refrain from performing vile acts. The more you give to others without asking for anything in return, the more that will be returned to you. It is possible to develop a system of ethics based solely on the theory of karma. One should follow the ethical path since it leads to happiness, while in the long run evil brings unpleasant results.

To quote Swami Abhedananda, “A believer in the law of karma is a free agent and is responsible for all the good and bad results of his own actions that attend to his life. He knows that he creates his own destiny, and molds his character by his thoughts and deeds. He never blames another for the suffering and misery which come to him. He learns by experience the true cause of events and removing the bad or evil, he performs such actions which produce good to all as well to himself.”¹⁵⁰ Most people do not realize that by their own volition, they have selected the role they are now playing on the stage of life. Through karmic actions, humans reward and punish themselves as a result of their own deeds and thoughts. We receive what we have a predisposition to be given. By understanding the principles that underlie the law of karma, an individual can bear the hardships of life with more tranquility, peace, and patients.¹⁵¹ Abhedananda in full agreement with this idea wrote in a reply to Horatio

Dresser, “As regards the fatalistic doctrines, the true student knows very well that the Vedanta teaches that we create our own fate, our own destiny, by our own works.”¹⁵² “One wave might overpower another or might counteract and subdue it. For instance, if our nature is loving, when we are angry, our anger overpowers our love.... the mother may be very angry with her husband, and at the same time if her baby comes, she instantly kisses the baby, and forgets all about the trouble which she had with her husband. That is the way the power of love can overpower the other feeling of anger.”¹⁵³

Arthur Schopenhauer wrote, “Man can do what he wills but he cannot will what he wills.” Meaning we are free to act according to our motive but the nature of that motive is determined.¹⁵⁴ Yet, according to the doctrine of karma we can willfully determine by our present actions and thoughts, how we will in the future and the nature of those actions. Fatalism leads to inactivity and pessimism, so Vivekananda and Abhedananda emphasized a dynamic ethic that we are the makers of our own destiny, our future is determined by our present actions and thoughts. We can analyze from effect to cause. So when something happens to us (effect) we can attempt to understand our karmic actions that brought it about (cause). Or we can analyze from cause to effect. When engaged in a particular activity (cause) we can attempt to discern what its future results will be (effect).

People do not realize how much of their life events are due to karma. Good fortune is determined by karma. So create better karma so more things will go your way in the future. Rather than fatalistically thinking of yourself as passive agents of your karma that leads to pessimism, we must realize we are the creators and masters of our own future and we should do so willfully and intelligently. Through self-determination we can hasten our own personal evolution. Vivekananda exclaimed, “It is the coward and the fool who says, ‘This is fate’--so says the Sanskrit proverb. But it is the strong man who stands up and says, ‘I will make my fate.’” Blaming others for our problems and faults only weakens us. Take the responsibility on yourself and realize you have the strength to change things. Vivekananda wanted people to have a feeling of power and control over their life and future.¹⁵⁵

Accepting the workings of the karma can be very beneficial in self-development of a higher character and personality. Perform good deeds that will bring happiness, peace, tranquility, and enlightenment. As free agents our character, personality, and everything that happens to us is a

result of our prior actions and thoughts. We are responsible for the good and bad things that come to us. People meditate and practice renunciation to lessen their bad karma. Do not place the blame for your misfortunes on other people. There is tremendous psychological value in accepting the law of karma. It helps to avoid being resentful when we realize we are the cause of what happens to us. People are bringing our karma to us. When people bring us our bad karma it is a message telling us we should act in a way that creates the karma for a better future. Our ego tells us other people are to blame.¹⁵⁶ Even better than this is to understand our misfortunes as the grace of Brahman-God that in the long run is best for us.

The karmic process is an excellent means for promoting moral education. Knowing the karmic cause of our suffering we can prevent it happening in the future. Having a better understanding of how karma functions we can predict, control, and manipulate it. The doctrine of karma provides: a belief in an orderly universe subject to laws that make it possible to anticipate a course of events and react accordingly, a strong sense of responsibility for one's actions and their consequences, the possibility to control events employing practical knowledge, the opportunity to organize one's life under a systematic methodological discipline that will maximize the goals one has set for oneself, and provides a rationale that allows a person to accept their misfortunes with forbearance. Accepting our negative fate as due to the manifestation of our karma will help one to avoid a lot of bitterness. Also, to believe "everything happens for a reason," helps one to accept the unpleasant aspects of human life. As the Christians say, "Everyone has their cross to bear" and so it something we should accept without bitterness or depression.

For those people who will not be liberated after death, right now they are writing the script for their next life. This applies to both their future samskaras (mental impressions) and karmas (external events). So they should do their best in this life, to make their next life as joyful and meaningful as possible. Much karma is worked off in this life; some almost immediately while others are left off until the next life.

If things go wrong the law of karma is telling us we should change our ways in order to create better karma in the future. Consequently, one of the best forms of penance is to create counter-karma (activity) and counter-samskaras (mental impressions). There is no need to feel guilt when we can perform good and noble actions that benefit other people in

order to offset our prior mistakes. Through the self-effort of our present actions, we are free to mould our future. Harsh acts performed in the past, can be karmically neutralized to a large extent by behaving in a compassionate way in the present and future. Cultivate the opposite karmic effect, by purposefully accumulating merit through moral acts and good deeds in order to offset the demerit of sinful activity. For example, being kind to someone who is angry with you often will counteract their wrath, just as medicine is used to counter the effects of an illness. In daily life personal karma is no doubt a factor in determining how successful a person will be in their enterprises. This is one reason a person should try to create as much good karma as possible.

Thomas Aquinas ascertained, “A thing can escape the order of a particular cause, but not the order of a universal cause. For nothing escapes the order of a particular cause, except through the intervention and hindrance of some particular cause; as, for instance, wood may be prevented from burning by the action of water.”¹⁵⁷ In this case water is like a counter-karma.

Devotion to Brahman-God, prayer, religiously oriented meditation, and good deeds are especially beneficial for working off bad karma and the effects of sin. Sinful activity produces a double negative effect. It results in bad karma characterized by adverse external circumstances. It also brings about bad mental impressions on the mind that contaminate one’s character, and create an inclination to recommit the mistake. Austere forms of penance are efficacious for destroying some of the bad karma caused by the misdeed, and hopefully will improve the mental impressions in the mind. Sin is not committed against Brahman-God, but is in opposition to the soul’s inner Divinity that prevents it from manifesting. Acts of sin alienate an individual from the inner image of Brahman-God, which constitutes their inner Divinity and Essential nature.

Other methods are employed to do away with bad karmas. In Christianity and other religions religious ceremonies and ritual are performed to absolve a person from the negative effects of their sins (bad karma). The grace of the remission of sins (bad karmas) is brought about by the sanctifying action. Eucharist-Communion is undertaken where sin is forgiven through Christ’s atonement, followed by the renewing of the spiritual life of the faithful. Sacramental food offerings (prasad) are eaten for this purpose and to purify the self.

Expressing the contemporary Catholic position, John Hardon, S.J. wrote, “For the entire and perfect remission of these sins there are three

acts required of the penitent, namely: ‘contrition, confession, and satisfaction.’” The sinner must be truly sorry for having offended God, tell his sins to the priest, and make reparation for the evil he committed.... the Church has always held that even mortal sins are remitted by an act of perfect sorrow, provided the person intends later on to tell his sins in confession. The technical term ‘attrition’ has come to be used to describe that sorrow for sins that is not motivated by the perfect love of God, and yet is sufficient for the remission of guilt provided the person also confesses to a priest. This kind of lesser contrition is "engendered the examination, consideration, and detestation of sins.... Sins can also be remitted by other means than sacramental absolution, e.g., attendance at mass, works of charity, earnest prayer, and the practice of virtues contrary to their sinful tendencies.”¹⁵⁸

Samskaras combine into habits (vasanas), a more or less fixed way of thinking, willing, or feeling based on prior repetition of mental experience.

For more on this subject see: SRWT, Ch. X. Religious Practices, Section 8. Counter-Karma and Samskaras.

Endnotes

¹ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiphenomenalism. As important as the idea is the Vedanta Society oftentimes does not place much emphasis on reincarnation since the goal of life is to seek liberation not rebirth.

² CW, I:253-54, 257-58.

³ CW, II:136.

⁴ CW, II: 222-23, 441.

⁵ CW, I:8-9.

⁶ CW, I, p.132.

⁷ Swami Abhedananda, *Reincarnation* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1899, 1964), pp. 94-95.

⁸ Swami Abhedananda, *Life Beyond Death* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1984), p. 99.

⁹ Swami Satprakashananda, *The Goal and the Way* (St. Louis, MO: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1977), pp. 211-12.

¹⁰ Satprakashananda (1977), p. 206.

¹¹ Satprakashananda (1977), p. 176.

¹² Satprakashananda (1977), pp. 211-12.

¹³ Web: <https://thoughtcatalog.com/lorenzo-jensen-iii/2017/08/24-people-who-were-clinically-dead-describe-what-they-saw-before-they-were-revived/>

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- ¹⁴ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind-body_dualism; R. Popkin and A. Stroll, *Philosophy Made Simple* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 74-76.
- ¹⁵ CW, I: 246.
- ¹⁶ *Pitirim Sorokin in Review*, ed. P. Allen (Durham: Duke University, 1963), p. 378.
- ¹⁷ CW, II:255.
- ¹⁸ CW, I:30-31 (1896).
- ¹⁹ Swami Abhedananda, *The Steps Towards Perfection* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1984), pp. 86-87.
- ²⁰ Abhedananda (1899, 1964), pp. 28-29.
- ²¹ Swami Prabhavananda, *The Spiritual Heritage of India* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), p. 268; *Vedanta for the Western World*, ed. C. Isherwood (New York: Viking Press, 1960), pp. 43, 175.
- ²² Enneads, V, 7.1; III, 2.4; IV, 3.12.
- ²³ Enneads, IV, 4.3, 8; III, 2.15; G. Stavig, "Plotinus and Indian Philosophy," BRMIC (Aug. 2002), pp. 313-18; (Sept. 2002), pp. 360-64.
- ²⁴ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamarckism#Critique
- ²⁵ Jung (1959), VIII, pp. 133-34.
- ²⁶ Satprakashananda (1977), p. 171.
- ²⁷ CW, I:157-59.
- ²⁸ CW, II:222-23.
- ²⁹ CG, II, 86.
- ³⁰ CW, II:220-21.
- ³¹ Web: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anamnesis_\(philosophy\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anamnesis_(philosophy));
www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Anamnesis
- ³² Web: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-epistemology>
- ³³ Copleston, IV, pp. 83-84, 318-19.
- ³⁴ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Innatism
- ³⁵ Head and Cranston (1961), p. 291.
- ³⁶ Broad (1976), II, p. 617. R112*
- ³⁷ Web: www.iep.utm.edu/person-I/; Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_identity
- ³⁸ S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932, 1964), pp. 229-30, 234.
- ³⁹ Radhakrishnan (1964), p. 236.
- ⁴⁰ Satprakashananda (1977), p. 206.
- ⁴¹ Web: <http://pgrim.org/pa2010reading/jorgensentheprinciple.pdf>
- ⁴² Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Looking_glass_self
- ⁴³ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Looking-glass_self
- ⁴⁴ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_selection
- ⁴⁵ CW, I:292-93.
- ⁴⁶ Abhedananda (1899, 1964), p. 65.
- ⁴⁷ Sister Shivani, *Swami Abhedananda in America* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1947, 1991), p. 284
- ⁴⁸ Abhedananda (1946), pp. 8-9, 54-55.

⁴⁹ Lal, p. 184.

⁵⁰ Aurobindo, pp. 707-08, 715.

⁵¹ Gopal Stavig, "Swami Vivekananda's Akasha-Prana Universe and Samuel Alexander's Space-Time Universe," *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture* (Oct. 2014), pp. 453-61.

⁵² Y. Krishan, "Is Karma Evolutionary?," *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* (Sept-Dec. 1988), pp. 21-27.

⁵³ William Atkinson, *Reincarnation and the Law of Karma* (Chicago: Yogi Publishing Society, 1908, 1936), pp. 142, 152, 160, 143-49, 158-59.

⁵⁴ CW, I:156-57.

⁵⁵ Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos Chapters on Prayer* (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1970), pp. LXXVII-VIII; David Evans, *Leontius of Byzantium* (Washington DC: Center for Byzantine Studies, 1970), pp. 97, 103.

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Hodson, *Reincarnation, Fact or Fallacy* (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1967), pp. 2-7.

⁵⁷ Tillich, I, pp. 259-61; II, pp. 29-36.

⁵⁸ Stavig (2013), pp. 331-32 goes into more detail on the "Will to Manifest Prana."

⁵⁹ Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 278, 612, 630, 633.

⁶⁰ Joseph Bettis, "Is Karl Barth a Universalists?," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 20 (1967), pp. 425-428, 436, discusses arguments used against universal salvation.

⁶¹ *Washington Post* (Feb. 11, 2007); *New York Times* (Feb. 18, 2007), both on the Web.

⁶² Ian Stevenson, "Reincarnation: Field Studies and Theoretical Issues," in Benjamin Wolman, ed., *Handbook in Parapsychology* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1977a), p. 637; Ian Stevenson, "The Explanatory Value of the Idea of Reincarnation," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 164 (1977b), p. 317.

⁶³ Stevenson (1977b), p. 316.

⁶⁴ Ian Stevenson, *Children Who Remember Prior Lives* (Charlottesville VI: University Press of Virginia, 1987), pp. 93-124; (1977b), pp. 637-39, 655-60.

⁶⁵ Stevenson (1987), pp. 98-99; Web: www.lisis.net/index.php?page=semkiwian-stevenson-reincarnation-past-lives-research

⁶⁶ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Stevenson

⁶⁷ Arthur Powell, *The Astral Body* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1927, 1978), pp. 210-11.

⁶⁸ P. Sorokin, *Modern Historical and Social Philosophies* (New York: Dover, 1963), pp. 230-33.

⁶⁹ SCD, II, p. 150.

⁷⁰ A large portion of this section was published in an article by G. Stavig in the BRMIC (Feb. 2020), pp. 19-22, Mar. 2020), pp. 10-16.

⁷¹ Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston, ed., *Reincarnation An East-West Anthology* (New York: Julian Press, 1961); Eva Martin, ed., *Reincarnation The Ring of Return* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1963).

⁷² Gallup Poll, *Religion in America* (Princeton: Princeton Research Center, June/July, 1982), pp. 183, 192-93.

⁷⁴ BSB, III.1:8; BGC, 6.41; Karl Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* (8 vols.; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970-96), III, p. 171.

⁷⁵ Swami Abhedananda, *Life Beyond Death* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1984), p. 78.

⁷⁶ *Theories of History*, ed. Patrick Gardiner (New York: Free Press, 1959), p. 25. This essay was translated into English by W. Hastie from whom Swami Vivekananda learned of Sri Ramakrishna.

⁷⁷ WARHD, p. 426; Web: www.trans4mind.com/spiritual/myers1.html;
Web: www.near-death.com/experiences/paranormal05.html

⁷⁸ McTaggart (1930), pp. 118-23, 132-33; Broad (1976), II, pp. 610-11, 614, 632-33. R113-R112*

⁷⁹ Heine (1983), pp. 156-57. K21*

⁸⁰ Edwards, VII, pp. 122-23.

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⁸² *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), V, Panpsychism.

⁸³ Head, p. 270; Saha, p. 50.

⁸⁴ CC, IV, 40; FP, I, 4; III, 6:4; Joseph Trigg, *Origen* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), pp. 109-10.

⁸⁵ FP, I, 8:1-2, 4; G. Stavig, "Origen and Indian Thought," BRMIC (March 2003), pp.133-40.

⁸⁶ Isaiah Tishby, "The Doctrine of Man in the *Zohar*," in Lawrence Fine, ed., *Essential Papers on Kabbalah* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 140-41.

⁸⁷ Head and Cranston (1961), pp. 324-25, 39-42 lists the nine anathemas against Origen.

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⁸⁹ CG, III, 62-63.

⁹⁰ CW, II:426.

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⁹³ CW, I, p. 147.

⁹⁴ Muller (1989), pp. 85, 185-86.

⁹⁵ BSB, II.1:34; 3:41-42; Herman (1971), pp. 270-72.

⁹⁶ BSB, II.3:42.

⁹⁷ Radhakrishnan, II, p. 694.

⁹⁸ CW, V:434.

⁹⁹ FP, II, 9:8.

¹⁰⁰ FP, II, 9:6; I, 8:2.

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¹¹¹ CW, VI:56.

¹¹² CW, VI:481.

¹¹³ CW, V:400.

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¹¹⁵ BSB, IV.4.22.

¹¹⁶ CW, II:348; I:196.

¹¹⁷ CW, VII:104.

¹¹⁸ Tipple, pp. 573-74; Prabhavananda3, p. 130.

¹¹⁹ Swami Abhedananda, *Doctrine of Karma* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1965a), pp. 8-9, 16.

¹²⁰ Swami Abhedananda, *Philosophy and Religion* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1951), p. 114; *True Psychology* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1965b), p. 52; (1965a), pp. 7-8, 15-19, 23-24, 42, 80.

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¹²⁴ James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909, 1930), XII, p. 438.

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¹²⁷ Grimes, pp. 64-65, 250-51, 325.

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¹²⁹ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karma

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¹³¹ Grimes, p. 171; *The Dimensions of Karma*, ed. S. S. Rama Rao Pappu (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1987), p. 35.

¹³² CW, I:243.

¹³³ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Retributive_justice

¹³⁴ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existentialism#Religion

¹³⁵ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thowness

¹³⁶ The Multiplier equation was developed by John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) the founder of macroeconomics. While Keynes' used it to measure the amount of spending we are not able to measure the quantitative magnitude of good and bad karma.

¹³⁷ Saradananda, p. 393; III:1.11.

¹³⁸ Runciman (1969), pp. 9-10. R132*

¹³⁹. Plekhanov (1959), pp. 162-65. G17*

¹⁴⁰ Damien Keown, "Karma, Character, and Consequentialism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* (Fall, 1996), pp. 329-50.

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http://aporia.byu.edu/pdfs/hughes-the_role_of_happiness_in_kants_ethics.pdf

¹⁴⁴ Schopenhauer (1965), pp. 44, 56, 137-40, 142-43, 172. S168*

¹⁴⁵ LM; T. M. Manickam, T. M., *Dharma According to Manu and Moses* (Bangalore: Dharmaram College, 1977), pp. 281-85.

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¹⁴⁸ CW, I:261.

¹⁴⁹ CW, I:364.

¹⁵⁰ Abhedananda (1965a), p. 19-20.

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¹⁵⁵ CW, VIII:184; II:225.

¹⁵⁶ An excellent reading source is, "Proceedings of The Seminar on Karma and Rebirth," *Indian Philosophical Annual* (1965), pp. 1-168, especially pp. 108-16.

¹⁵⁷ ST, I, 22.2.

¹⁵⁸ John Hardon, S.J., *The Catholic Catechism* (Garden City, NY; Doubleday, 1975), pp. 487-89, 484.