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XIII. Reincarnation 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 of human existence. Both are very powerful intellectual concepts

with considerable explanatory value in many areas of study. In a logical consistent and parsimonious manner, this ideology solves a number of philosophical, religious, psychological, historical, and biological problems. What follows are fourteen 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 pre-existent mind (subtle body composed of the substance of subtle matter and energy) creates the physical body (gross matter and energy) including the brain. Subtle matter and energy of mind-thought when reduced to a lower level of vibration transforms into the gross matter and energy of the brain, being that the subtle realm is the original source of the gross plane. The brain is the gross and external part of the mind and the mind the subtle and internal aspect of the brain. Of course there is a difference between creating a physical entity like a hand and in creating the brain. The way the physical body is created is determined by the genes received from the parents. We then live through the physical body and brain until they die and then we proceed to another world since the mind survives the death of the physical body. The gross and lower vibrational state has a much shorter lifespan than the subtle and higher vibrational state.

The subtle body (soul, mind) does not enter into a pre-existent physical body, but creates a new one. The incarnating subtle body composed of the substance of extended subtle matter and energy enters into the womb. From the sperm, egg, liquids, food, and hereditary materials (genes) it slowly creates a physical body and brain. This is why there is a correspondence between thoughts in the mind and the neurological changes in the brain since they are created out of the same substance (Akasha) in two different forms. When they say the soul is the size of an atom when it enters the mother's womb they mean it is of minute size.¹ A person does not have to believe in reincarnation or even the pre-existence of the soul to accept this idea. If one rejects these two ideas then at conception God creates a mental body made of subtle matter and energy that enters into the womb and from the material it encounters it creates a physical body and brain.

Swami Vivekananda tells us, "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, mind] 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, mind] receives from the parents the material out of which to manufacture a man.”² “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, mind] 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.”³ “If cellular transmission is the all-sufficient explanation, materialism is inevitable, and there is no necessity for the theory of a soul. If it is not a sufficient explanation, the theory of an individual soul bringing into this life the experiences of the past is absolutely true.”⁴

Vivekananda adds, “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.” “The mind has a fine body and through this it works on the gross body.” “The explanation of the grosser is in the finer. The effect is the gross and the cause the subtle. This gross universe of ours, which we see, feel, and touch, has its cause and explanation behind in the thought.”⁵ So the physical universe is the effect, the mental universe the cause. “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.”⁶ “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.”⁷

According to the Realistic Idealism of Vivekananda the subtle idea becomes the gross entity. The subtle and gross are both real, though the idea precedes the object. Does the subtle chronologically become the gross over time or does this occur when preceding from a higher ontological level to a lower one? This is why Brahman-God creates the world from Divine ideas (See Chapter VI. Creation of the Phenomenal World, Section 1). In the gross plane thought is subjective while at the subtle level it is objective.

Conversely, many neuroscientists believe in epiphenomenalism the materialistic theory of the mind that consciousness, thoughts, and emotions are by products and completely dependent for their existence on corresponding physical and biochemical events within the human body and have no causal effects on physical events. They reduce psychology to neurology. While fear seems to make the heart beat faster, it is the biochemical secretions of the brain and the nervous system that are doing so. According to weak epiphenomenalism unlike strong epiphenomenalism, mental events can be caused by both physical phenomena and other mental phenomena.⁸ An opponent of this idea, Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) rejected the materialist conceptions of the mind; that consciousness and perception can be reduced to the mechanical operations of matter. Under no conditions can material things like brains possibly think or perceive.⁹

One of the most popular views in contemporary science is Physicalism (Naturalism) that reduces everything that exists to physical properties. What is non-physical such as thoughts depend on the physical for their existence. The mental is not reducible to the physical, but no changes can occur in the former without some change in the latter. Some believe that eventually all mental states and properties will be explained by scientific accounts of physiological processes and states of the brain.¹⁰

Naturalism (Physicalism) maintains that the ultimate reality is matter, and not mind or spirit. The material world is the only real world since nothing exists beyond nature. Everything is explained in terms of nature since it is the original and fundamental source of all that exists. All things originated from matter, which through natural laws and forces takes on different forms. Mind is a function of the material brain and cannot exist apart from the body. All types of mental activities including imagination, thinking, reasoning, etc. are the functions of the brain. They reject any supernatural or idealistic explanation of reality. Naturalism has been criticized for ignoring the spiritual, moral and cultural values of life. How can they explain how life evolved from inorganic matter?¹¹

In the 20th century Materialism evolved into Physicalism, since it views matter more sophisticatedly in terms of physical energies and forces, curved space-time, and dark matter. According to Special Relativity matter and energy are interchangeable. It was formerly thought that the microscopic world of atoms was simply a scaled-down version of the macroscopic world. Because the macro and micro realms differ so radically according to quantum mechanics this idea is no longer held. For example, Werner Heisenberg mentioned, “Atoms are not things.”¹²

According to David Chalmers the “Hard Problem of Consciousness” is the problem of why we have subjective consciousness experiences and feel bodily sensation and emotions. Qualia are individual instances of a subjective qualitative conscious experience. They include: a) perceptual experiences such as tasting, smelling, feeling, seeing, and hearing; b) bodily sensations, for example, physical pain, hunger, and dizziness; c) passions or emotions like feeling joy, love, grief, and fear; and d) moods of calmness, boredom, and depression. These experiences are known only through direct awareness immediately apprehensible by consciousness. Qualia are a quality or property perceived or experienced and are not propositional attitudes dealing with beliefs. Only a person who has had a similar experience can understand them.¹³ Erwin Schrödinger (1887-1961) wrote, “Consciousness cannot be accounted for in physical terms. For consciousness is absolutely fundamental. It cannot be accounted for in terms of anything else.” Akasha at the subtle level of vibration is mental being both ideas about experiences and the experiences themselves (qualia), and at a gross level of vibration is physical which includes the body and brain.¹⁴ The mental and the physical are two different aspects of Akasha.

In his notes Vivekananda wrote, “Supposing you could look into my brain while I am thinking, you would only see certain molecules interchanged. You could not see thought, consciousness, ideas, images. You would simply see the mass of vibrations--chemical and physical changes.... External analysis will go to the brain and find physical and chemical changes. It would never succeed [in answering the questions]: What is the consciousness?”¹⁵

The conscious mind has an awareness of both inward psychological facts and external events and objects. It experiences the qualia mentioned by David Chalmers; is involved in various types of activities that involve physical and psychological activity, memory, volition, and reasoning; feels a personal identity of being the same self over a lifetime; and has a self-conception of being a certain type of person.

Previously in a 1983 article Joseph Levine addressed the issue mentioning in the philosophy of mind and consciousness there is an explanatory gap in attempting to understand how physical properties give rise to feelings. To say, “Pain is the firing of C fibers,” does not help us to understand how pain feels. Consciousness appears to only manifest in physical systems like the brain that are highly organized.¹⁶

A possible explanation of the Hard Problem is panpsychism that everything material, however small, has an element of individual consciousness. That consciousness is a fundamental feature of reality and not an emergent property of matter. Consciousness always existed and did not emerge at a later date as held by emergentism. At the macro level physical theory deals only with extrinsic or relational properties and causal structure, not with the intrinsic properties of matter that like consciousness cannot be externally observed. Physics tells us how an electron behaves, but it doesn’t tell us about its internal nature.¹⁷ If a panpsychist believes that the smallest unit of consciousness is fundamental then there is the problem of explaining how these micro constituents combine to produce the more complex human consciousness. A limited form of panpsychism is explained by Vivekananda, “Every cell in your body has a soul conscious of the cell. It is a separate entity. It has a little will of its own, a little sphere of action of its own. All [cells] combined make up an individual. [In the same way,] the Personal God of the universe is made up of all these [many individuals].”¹⁸ Meaning that a living cell has consciousness, but not a non-living material object like a rock that does not have a subtle body.

On the other hand, Jagadish C. Bose (1858-1937) a Bengali scientist conducted experiments to attempt to prove that metals like steel are subject to cyclical fatigue and have conscious properties like feelings and memory. He subjected metals to a combination of mechanical, thermal, chemical, and electrical stimuli and found similarities between metals and plant cells.¹⁹ Bose invented instruments to measure electrical responses in plants and concluded that an electrical spasm occurs during the end of life for a plant. Swami Abhedananda met Bose in London, and Sara Bull (1850-1911) a supporter of Swami Vivekananda in 1911 left him \$20,000 in her will to carry on his research.²⁰

Without consciousness, there can be no subjective experience of sense experience or ideas. While consciousness is one and unitary, thought is dualistic and reflective. Thought produces mental modifications in the mind (Vrittis) that differ from each other. It is Consciousness that illumines all of the mental modification is one and the same.²¹ This differs from Pure Consciousness (Chit) that is only subjective. At the highest ontological level, Pure Consciousness (Chit) is the unchanging eternal subject without an object. In the ontological creative process it objectify into thought (Objectification), which is both a subject and an object.

The Double-Aspect Theory of B. Spinoza (1677), P. Strawson, and Thomas Nagel teaches that physical matter and consciousness reduce to a more basic underlying primary substance that possesses both of these properties. On the other hand, Neutral Monists like Bertrand Russell (1927) indicate that the more basic underlying stuff is neither physical matter nor consciousness. Possibly physical matter and consciousness are the gross and subtle aspect of the Indian Akasha the primary substance.²²

Neurologists have found a correlation between thoughts in the mind and physical activity in the brain. This is because the mind and physical brain are made of the same substance but differ in level of vibration. It is a false premise to think that physical processes in the brain generate subjective consciousness. As explained above by Vivekananda the process acts in the reverse direction. The subtle is the cause (mental) and the gross (physical) is the effect. Possibly thoughts and feelings as vibrations produce long-term physical changes in the brain. Certain aspects of the mind operate through certain parts of the brain. So if a part of the brain is damaged as with for example traumatic brain injury, those particular thought vibrations cannot operate through it. Are thoughts and feelings in the mind and physical brain activity the same phenomena experienced in subtle (mind) and gross (brain) matter and energy respectively? Human

thought as vibrations of subtle matter work in both directions, good vibrations produce good thoughts, and good thoughts produce good vibrations.

If the states of the brain determine the way people sense, think, and feel then the problem of the “unity of consciousness” arises. According to the conventional way of thinking unity is due to the synthesizing work of the mind, since we experience the world in an integrated way. How is information unified by the brain mechanism into a phenomenal object since each facet of an object, such as its shape and color is processed in a different area of the brain? The “binding problem” is to explain how is this sensory data is integrated into a coherent whole.²³

When the mind creates the brain it might work through quantum mechanics that determine the shapes and properties of molecules like neurotransmitters and proteins that affect how the brain works. Because the mind creates the brain this might be a reason why neurologists are finding that if a person has a particular kind of thought or feeling, a specific area of the brain will be activated. One study found that meditating changed the white matter around the anterior cingulate of the brain.²⁴ Are there neurological actions that correspond to Savikalpa Samadhi or does it transcend the activity of the brain? Does meditation work through different areas of the mind depending on the nature of the experience and in turn does this stimulate different regions of the brain?

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.”²⁵ “Subtle bodies are the invisible germs or nuclei which contain the mind, the intelligence, the reasoning, the power of thinking, the willpower, 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.”²⁶ He makes an important point that the soul does not enter into pre-existing body, but creates a new body.

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

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.”²⁷

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.”²⁸

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 (antahkarana), 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.”²⁹ Death is the change from one body to another.

Swami Satprakashananda informs us, “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 departs 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.”³⁰

At death we leave our physical body and material possession behind us. What we take with us is our mind and mental impressions (samskaras) and our karmas. So it is important to have the right samskaras and karmas since they determine the nature of our future events both in afterlife and our next birth.

Sarada Devi realized that when the body dies, the only thing we take with us is our karmas and samskara. “Such is life, here today, gone tomorrow! Nothing goes with one, except one's merit and demerit; good and evil deeds follow one even after death.” “What one claims as his possession will be left behind at death. Still men cannot understand this simple truth.”³¹ So we should always act and think in a way that will produce good karmas and samskaras.

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.”³²

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, a body composed of external physical matter (corporeal) whose fundamental property is spatial extension and internal immaterial mind whose basic property is non-physical, non-spatial thought (incorporeal). The problem is if they are so different how can they interact with each other. Conversely, for Property Dualism there is only one fundamental kind of thing in the world, material substance, which has two different kinds of properties. For example, a brain has physical properties like weight and mass and mental properties such as having beliefs and feelings. Property dualism does not accept an immaterial mental substance and consequently there is no interaction between two different kinds of thing.³³ Unlike Physicalism, Property Dualism does not state that mental properties ultimately reduce to physical properties.

Contra Descartes, Vivekananda's solution is that the physical body (matter) is the gross aspect and the mind (thought) the subtle aspect of a single entity. He states, “Now that which we call matter and mind are one and the same substance. The only difference is in the degree of vibration. Mind at a very low rate of vibration is what is known as matter. Matter at a high rate of vibration is what is known as mind. Both are the same substance; and therefore, as matter is bound by time and space and causation, mind which is matter at a high rate of vibration is bound by the same law.”³⁴ Gross and subtle matter and energy differ only in their level of vibration. Could we call this Dual-Aspect Monism whereby the mental and the physical are two aspects of the same underlying substance? The gross realm is perceivable to our five senses, but not the subtle realm.

The mind and thought have spatial extension in subtle matter and energy. They are both manifestations of the underlying reality Akasha (Primal Matter) and Prana (Primal Energy). A change in thought or feelings brings about an alteration in the subtle matter and energy that acts on the gross matter and energy causing the neural entity in the brain to undergo a change. This way consciousness, thoughts, and emotions have a causal effect on physical events. 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 causal order.

What is that substance that has both a physical and mental aspect? Why do mind and matter have such a different nature? In opposition to Descartes' presentation both the body and mind are extended, the former in physical matter and the latter in subtle matter. If one accepts panpsychism (see above) then the material body has something related to consciousness. Thought arises in the mind because it being subtler than the physical body is a better reflector of the Atman, the pure consciousness.

Frederick Myers (1843-1901) of Cambridge University thought there was a substance intermediate between mind and matter that he called metetherial.³⁵ According to Lieutenant Colonel Arthur E. Powell (1882-1969) the astral body acts as a bridge between mind and physical matter. "Thus, without the general action through the astral body there would be no connection between the external world and the mind of man, no connection between the physical impacts and the perception of them by the mind. Conversely, whenever we think, we set in motion the mental matter within us; the vibrations thus generated are transferred to the matter of our astral body, the astral matter affects the etheric matter, this, in turn, acting on the dense physical matter, the grey matter of the brain." The Astral body extends in all directions generally ten to eighteen inches beyond the limits of the physical body, but even farther in a spiritually developed person. It is called an 'aura.'³⁶

Vivekananda explains, "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."³⁷ In the rebirth process, one's 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 (at least on the physical level) 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 Jesus.

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.”³⁸

Near-death experiences (NDE) validate that the human mind can exist apart from the physical body and the brain. They show that consciousness can operate independent of the brain and neurological events. NDE are reported by people who came close to death and then temporarily entered another realm or dimension. Some were resuscitated after being considered clinically dead with no brain activity or pulse rate or respiration. During that time they might witness a doctor working on their physical body and when they return to normal consciousness verify with the physician what they saw them doing. With advances in medical resuscitation techniques, the number of NDE has increased significantly. The basic characteristics most commonly reported concerning NDE include: being separate from and outside of their physical body, visions of deceased relatives and friends or religious figures, a feeling of peace or joy and a sense of harmony or unity with the universe, sudden insights or understanding, the presence of a light, and a review of their life events. At this time thought-processes might speed up and the senses become more vivid.

The permanent results of a NDE are a belief in afterlife, loss of fear of death, and positive changes in beliefs, values, and attitudes. The experience brings about a greater appreciation of life, increases love for others and the desire to help them, lessens the concern for monetary gain and status, and it deepens religious faith. The people who have NDE are

psychologically healthy individuals. Prior understanding or lack of knowledge often had no influence on the nature of their experience. For example, they might have been an atheist who formerly did not believe in afterlife. These encounters properly understood will enhance our understanding of consciousness. Concerning people who witnessed their own operation while apparently unconscious, patients who had survived a cardiac arrest later accurately described the resuscitation procedures and the unexpected events that occurred. There have been cases of children who met a deceased relative whom they were not familiar with. Later they identified the deceased relative from family portraits they had not seen before.³⁹

Apart from near-death experience, some people have had Out-of-Body experiences where they were floating outside their physical body often looking down at themselves from above. They typically happen without warning and usually temporary. “The following experience is described by a 36-year old police officer on her first night out patrolling, who found herself in pursuit of an armed suspect, “When I and three other officers stopped the vehicle and started getting [to] the suspect ... I was afraid. I promptly went out of my body and up into the air maybe 20 feet above the scene. I remained there, extremely calm, while I watched the entire procedure – including watching myself do exactly what I had been trained to do.”⁴⁰ This is an apparent example of bilocation of being present in two different locations simultaneously. She was 20 feet above her physical body and at the same time working through it. The woman police officer was aware of her actions in the physical body not subjectively internally from within, but objectively externally through perception from without. Her conscious mind from which she described the incident was situated above her body and not in her physical body. Was it her subtle body that was 20 feet above her physical body?

2) Actions and thoughts in a prior life determine our situation in this life: a) the individual’s personality and character (which is subject to change), b) who their parents will be in this life, which determines their heredity including DNA, and c) their environment. This is due to reincarnation in conjunction with the law of karma and samskaras. The soul returns to earth to undergo further spiritual evolution and transformation. This is the main purpose of life to develop your self so that you attain to your maximum level of perfection.

To determine your birth with particular parents, your personal karma must combine with the laws of physics, biology, psychology, etc. into one supersystem both at the macro and micro level that we might call the Laws of Nature in the broadest sense of the term. The combination of every type of descriptive (not prescriptive) law into one might be referred to as a Theory of Everything.

Memories of our past lives are gone, but the mental impressions (samskaras) and karmas created at that time have a tremendous effect on our behavior and events in this life. Samskaras are the result of all thoughts and actions the individual has experienced. They operate below the level of normal consciousness leading to the formation of behavioral patterns being the cause of all character traits and innate dispositions. Aptitudes and talents that are gained in a prior 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. Our prior life activities determine our potentialities in this life. So it is best to concentrate on developing those areas where we have the greatest potential for future success.

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.”⁴¹

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.”⁴²

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.”⁴³ “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.”⁴⁴

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.”⁴⁵

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.”⁴⁶ 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.”⁴⁷

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. According to Ian Stevenson, MD empirical study of 31 sets of twins who had verified memories of their prior life, in every case they had significant past life relationships as being siblings (35%), friends (29%), other family relationships (19%), or spouses (16%).⁴⁸ Due to the Principle of Selective Affinity, in the majority of cases children take birth from parents of roughly a similar nature. Most important, their past life experiences determine who their parents will be in this life and that in turn determines the nature of the heredity transmission they will receive. For more on this subject see Chapter VIII, Section 10 Heredity.

The Lamarckian inheritance (named after the French biologist Jean Lamarck (1744-1829)) teaches, “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.⁴⁹ 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 though it is not due to heredity. 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.

Consider physical heredity. For example, a person has earned the karma in a prior life to become an outstanding athlete in this life. First they have to inherit the right kind of body to accomplish that task. This requires that they have the parents with the right kind of genes. Is there any possibility in the hereditary process that the person is like a magnet that can attract the right genes from their parents? Their system automatically selects out the genes it wants to manifest. This power of attraction would apply to all inherited characteristics. Is there any way that neuroscience could investigate this hypotheses to see if it is correct or not.

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 on the mind) 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. If we knew about a persons prior life we would have a much better understanding of why people act the way they do.

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 of all cultures 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 are 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.'"⁵⁰ Unlike the personal unconscious, the collective unconscious is composed of universal and regularly occurring modes of apprehension. It houses the memories, predispositions, and experiences of the human race that are passed on from generation to generation and are shared by all the individuals. Since we all share in the same collective unconscious this is responsible for the common nature of people. The collective unconscious is comprised of the psychic life of our ancestors back to the earliest beginnings

Carl Jung's collective unconscious is a universal version of the personal unconscious, composed of ancestral memories that are shared with other members of the human species. These universal concepts called archetypes can be signs, symbols, or patterns of thinking and behaving. They are shared by all people and genetically inherited from our ancestral past. Archetypes are found in different cultures, as expressed in literature, art, dreams, and religions. The universal themes are often very similar because they have emerged from archetypes common to all of humanity that are part of our collective unconscious. All humans, regardless of ethnic and geographic differences, share the same collective pool of instincts and images. The idea of the collective unconscious helps to explain why similar themes are found in mythologies throughout the world. This concept is not widely accepted because it is difficult to scientifically prove or disprove through laboratory experiments the existence of the collective unconscious or that images of mythology and other cultural symbols are inherited. Also, the collective unconscious is not directly experienced since it lies beyond the conceptual limitations of the individual human consciousness. The similar mental patterns of human beings can also be explained by the common environment they live in. For

example, they all have families, come in contact with plants and animals, and are aware of night and day, etc.⁵¹

Another 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. If there is a collective unconscious for all of humanity is there a collective unconscious for subgroups like each ethnic group, nation, gender, religion, etc. that is subject to change overtime. The argument against it is that there is too much variation within a single group. There is a collective consciousness within a crowd as at for example at a football game, but it is temporary and the people are located in close proximity to each other.

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.”⁵² 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 in sense perception among humans is that we function at the a similar 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.”⁵³ If we had a sixth sense, we would receive more sensual information about the object

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. mind] migrates and manufactures body after body.”⁵⁴

It is possible biogenists' have over-interpreted their own data concerning inheritance of mental characteristics. For examples, Vedantists attribute genius to the person's prior life intellectual development and not to inheritance due to a very low probability of an auspicious combination of genes. Granted if the parents have a high IQ, there is a good chance their offspring's will also have one. But this is due to their karmic affinity and other social factors. 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” (e.g., that educating a person directly changes their genes) which biogenists' deny. Another example, the Northern Europeans who destroyed the Roman Empire were referred to as barbarians, warlike people without a sophisticated intellectual culture. Yet only four centuries later they produced the Irish sage Erigena and beginning a couple of hundred years latter a host of Northern European geniuses and saints. Much credit must be given to the Catholic Church for preserving the intellectual culture of Western Europe at that time by educating monastics. Albert Einstein was brilliant because of his mental self-development in prior lives. Though his parents and their parents were of mediocre intelligence, can we say he inherited any of his genius? Biologists might answer yes, but are their theories only hypotheses based on limited evidence?

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.”⁵⁵

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.

Reincarnating into the same or a similar society is necessary to preserve the social-cultural continuity of the group. For example, the people in India, China, Canada, and Mexico tend to differ because in their prior life they came from a similar background that they are now in. Living many lifetimes in the same type of society has produced a lasting character and way of thinking.

3) The mind originally a blank tablet vs. innate ideas. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) offered a highly original epistemological (Pramana) 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.” Scientist now realize that the human mind does not begin as a blank tablet, but they attribute this to genetic heredity and not to prior life activity. The pre-existence of the self explains that these predispositions and innate ideas are due to prior life experiences.⁵⁶ See Chapter VIII, Section 10. Heredity, for more of Vivekananda’s views on this subject. “Why is it we do not remember anything of our past lives? This is our explanation: Consciousness is the name of the surface only of the mental ocean, but within its depths are stored up all our experiences, both pleasant and painful.”⁵⁷

Noam Chomsky ascertained that humans have an innate ability to learn language without someone actively teaching them. Children instinctively pair a noun with a verb even if they have not been taught grammar structures. Could this be due to the fact that the children learned language in their prior lives?⁵⁸

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 conscious 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.⁵⁹

It is possible that in the realm of ideas, Pure Objectivity is not an achievable goal. This is because we interpret events based on our prior experiences, conceptual background, and particular outlook on life. One event can be interpreted in multiple ways. Does Pure Objectivity assume there is an ideological thing-in-itself independent of interpretation? This is why truthfulness is such an important virtue, where the person strives to reach judgments free of their own egoistic desires, personal biases, emotions, and false beliefs.

In *Meno*, Plato describes Socrates’ epistemological “Theory of Anamnesis” (Reminiscences, Remembering). “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."⁶⁰ 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 learned 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 falling from heights or being around contagious diseases.⁶¹

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 resolved by Vivekananda. From the standpoint of reincarnation he agrees with both positions. These ideas were learned from experience in a prior life. 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.

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.”

Gottfried Leibniz explained that, “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.’”⁶² For Leibniz the mathematical notion that $1 + 1 = 2$ is an innate idea known without empirical evidence.⁶³

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.⁶⁴ Similarly, in this life in most cases we do not remember the details of our prior experiences through they do affect our character.

The American linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky (b. 1928) held that, “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. Children demonstrate a facility for acquiring spoken language but have to go to school to learn how to read and write. Chomsky and others think that due to inheritance humans are born with certain cognitive modules that allows them to learn a language during the first few years of life. They believe this is something that most people inherit, compared to genius which is inherited by only a small of people. Regarded by many as the father of modern linguistics, Noam Chomsky is rated by one Internet source as the most famous 21st-century philosopher in the world.⁶⁵

4) Why do most people develop mentally at a much faster rate during their early years than in 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 relearning the skills and aptitudes they developed in prior lives.⁶⁶ 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 personal identity, continuing to think of ourself as the same person throughout the life process. In order to maintain a psychological unity we need a sense of personal 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 personal identity of a person, based on internal consciousness (memory). Due to our memory of past events we have a mental identity over our lifetime. A second factor is continued external bodily existence.

Over a lifetime we maintain a continuous physical bodily identity including the brain, though the body undergoes many relatively slow gradual changes.⁶⁷ Third is the individual ego factor that tells us we are a separate person from other people. 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. As a reaction to ego identification we feel satisfaction, pride, guilt, etc. in regard to our prior actions. Our prime duty is to attempt to make ourself as good as possible. Fourth, are the social factors. 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. Fifth, not only is there a bodily continuity but also a mental continuity. Our internal and external life events are basically orderly and purposeful, and not a purely random chaotic process. There is a logical associative connection between the events of our life. A continuity continues so when we wake up in the morning we are mentally pretty much the same person that we were when we went to sleep the night before. By contrast dream events are often dichotomous going from one event to an unrelated event. Six, a nondualist might consider our sense of personal identity as due to the unchanging Atman that underlies our human nature.

A religious person believes that their present life-style determines the nature of their post-mortem existence after the physical body dies. If they do not accept reincarnation they teach a continuous personal identity due to an immortal soul.

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."⁶⁸ "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.”⁶⁹

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.”⁷⁰

We should realize that our present physical body and brain, memories, and social contacts are only temporary forms of personal identity. At a deeper level it is the subtle (mind) body (linga-sharira, suksma-sharira) and its mental impressions (samskaras) that preserves our personal identity and the persistence of a permanent self over many lifetimes. When the physical body dies and we lose our memory of past events, we do not lose our personal identity. After rebirth the karmas and samskaras from our prior lives (combined with those of this life) continue to effect out life events and behavior patterns. These are the residual karmas that were not worked off in a prior life. We do not want the physical body to die because we falsely think it is the basis of our personal identity. Memories of prior lives are stored in our unconscious mind. In the reincarnation process the subtle body does not enter into a new body, but creates a new body through a process of materialization. It is the same person working through successive physical bodies it has created and hence receiving karma from the actions of a prior life is justified.

The enduring subtle body creates innumerable gross physical bodies (sthula-sharira) over a series of lifetimes. According to Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), “Nature never makes leaps “and that “all natural change is produced by degrees.” “Nothing is accomplished all at once, and it is one of my great maxims, and one of the most completely verified, that Nature makes no leaps: a maxim which I called the Law of Continuity.” Changing thing will occupy all possible intermediate states. This law holds for changes in spatial location, time, form, qualities, and from state to state, in fact in all natural changes.⁷¹

Similarly, there is a continuity in which over time the subtle body manifests a continuous series of differing physical bodies. There is a continuous and progressive development from a lower to a higher state. The subtle (mental) body is an extended body having shape and size made of the substance of subtle matter and energy that are the 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 ourselves as the physical body of flesh and blood and are very much influenced by our memories of the past. A psychological identity with the physical body rather than the subtle body brings about a fear of death. We should identify with our much longer lasting subtle body.

While personal identity involves our persistent existence over time, self-identity concerns the nature and characteristics of our personality and character. To some extent we retain a similar character from one lifetime to the next, due to our samskaras that determine our thoughts, karmas that regulate external events, and our ego. According to Charles H. Cooley's (1864-1929) social psychological concept of the Looking-Glass (Mirror) Self (1902), we form a self-image of ourselves based on what we think other people think of us. We evaluate ourselves through the eyes of others, our self-image is based on our assessment of other people's view of us. Why do people not like to be criticized? Because sometimes they internalize the other person who psychologically becomes part of their psyche and evaluate themselves based on what that person says about them. The nature of our self-identity is caused by the way we interpret other people's judgments and opinions of us. To a large extent other people define our place (location) 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. Of course their judgment is based on the way we act. So we can try to get them to change their mind though this is often not easy to do. 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.⁷² People often behave in accordance with other people's expectations of them, by adapting certain behavior patterns, thoughts, and emotions to influence the people they associate with. Other aspects of our self-identity is based on what we do, own, and have accomplished; and our memories of prior events and acquaintances in our life.

Self-identity or self-concept is based on the personal traits and beliefs that characterize an individual, and on their status and role in the social-economic-cultural world. Identities relate to our self-image and self-esteem and tell us and others who we are. They involve a set of beliefs, ideas, attitudes, and habits; sense of continuity, a feeling of uniqueness, and a sense of affiliation based on membership in various groups like a religion, family, and an occupation. Its components include physical and psychological characteristics along with cultural, national, ethnic,

professional, religious, gender identity, etc. This process defines an individual to others and to themselves. Our ongoing experiences are subject to alteration, so identities can change over the course of a lifetime. The nature of the identities vary according to our differing relationships with other people, such as friends, family members, co-workers, neighbors, etc. Identities include characteristics that we have no control over such as gender, ethnicity, age, height, and those we can change like religion, political preference, geographical location.⁷³ Self-identity involves internalization of a set of norms and values through a process of socialization. First, one must learn what the norms and values are, gain understanding of their implications, accept them as part of their character, and then apply them in real life situations. They may be gained from another person whereby the interpersonal process becomes an intrapersonal one.

Our behavior and thought process is determined by our self-identity, how we look upon ourself. Identifying with the body one is apt to seek after physical pleasures, with the mind will strive for intellectual pleasures/enjoyment, and with the spirit will want divine things like Brahman-God.

The idea of the “Generalized Other” is attributable to George H. Mead (1863-1931) of the University of Chicago. A person has a choice they can relate to and create a self-identity based on their interactions with other people or with groups. We form an idea of the generalized and integrated conceptions of the expectations, attitudes, and meanings of a group we belong to. Next, we relate ourself to the group and its various members. Self-identity arises from a process of social interaction concerning the expectations that other people have about our actions within the particular group. This attitude and expectation become generalized so that it does not represent the specific attitude of a single concrete person. In this way, we learn what is expected of us and develop a pattern of behavior. We think of ourself from the perspective and viewpoint of a group of other people. The other group could be all people; a demographic group such as a gender group, age group, or an ethnic group, or an even a smaller group of people. Since we are members of a number of different groups with different characteristics, each person synthesizes the range of values and expectations in their own unique way.⁷⁴

Spiritual transformation involves a new self-identity and self-image at the intra-psychoic 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 their thoughts and behavior, having two separate identities where conflicting ways of acting and values are held simultaneously.

6) Reincarnation is an involutory not a devolutionary process. We reincarnate back to seed form not only physically but also mentally. Particularly as a child and adolescent, much of our former knowledge exists in our unconscious and not conscious mind. We unwittingly empty ourselves, temporarily renouncing our former knowledge and skills.

7) 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 that dematerialized and now rematerializes. The universe definitely recycles, but does it reincarnate? This depends on two factors: 1) can only conscious beings reincarnate and 2) is the universe as a whole a conscious being? The philosopher Plato (427-327 B.C.) believed that the world is a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence.⁷⁵ For a more detailed explanation see: Ch. VIII. What Happened Before the Beginning of the Universe?, Section 4.

8) Reincarnation supports an evolutionary view of life, that we have a "Will to Evolve." What is the purpose of human existence? The answer is very simple, the goal of these many lives is self-improvement, to make ourselves a better person. As we develop more of the inner divinity within us is manifesting. Having forgotten our past, each life we have a new conscious identity and an opportunity to improve ourselves.

The concept of natural selection was developed independently by Charles Darwin (1809-82) and Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913) 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." The population evolves because individuals with certain variants of the trait are more likely to survive and reproduce more than individuals with other less successful variants. It is

now believed by scientists to be the main process that brings about evolution.⁷⁶

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.”⁷⁷ 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.”⁷⁸

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.”⁷⁹

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 the person 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.⁸⁰

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."⁸¹ "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."⁸²

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.⁸³ Henri Bergson (1859-1941) considered evolution to be directed by a creative internal force (*elan vital*). See Ch. VIII. Swami Vivekananda's Scientific Cosmology, section 9 for more details.

When we are born we are like a seed with our future self contained within it. Obviously the seed of one person differs from the seed of another. The contents of our personal seed depend on our thoughts and actions in prior lives. That content is hidden to us in the unconscious mind and some of it will manifest on the conscious level in this life.

What is the meaning of life? Why are we born on earth? According to reincarnation the answer is simple, to improve ourself so that we are ready to enter the Brahmaloaka-Kingdom of Heaven. To accomplish this task 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. For most people the meaning of life centers around their job, friends, family, and activities. This brings self-improvement that eventually leads to the higher stages.

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.⁸⁴ 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.

Charles Darwin and others described the evolution of the species, while reincarnation explains the mental and spiritual evolution of the individual person. A single lifespan is far too short a time period for a person to get rid of all the obstacles that prevent them from attaining to life in the Brahmaloaka-Kingdom of Heaven. According to the Hindu and Buddhist idea, individual souls reincarnate repeatedly and pass through many cycles of births and deaths. They are psychologically bound to the cycle of transmigration largely because of their desires and attachments. Each person has to progressively evolve before they can attain to the liberated-saved state of existence. This is accomplished by practicing renunciation, cultivating virtues, living an admirable life, self-surrender to Brahman-God, pursuing the highest knowledge, and fixing their mind on the Divine realm.⁸⁵ 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.

9) 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.⁸⁶ 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 combined with the law of karma supports the idea of perfect justice, that the reward or punishment one receives is equal to their 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.

10) 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."⁸⁷ The Muslim al-Razi (13th century) taught that animals also have rational souls.

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.⁸⁸

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.”⁸⁹

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.⁹⁰ 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 live 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 on the mind), and on how their mind vibrates. That is why it is best to meditate and purify your mind so that it reflects and manifests spiritual consciousness. It is also determined by ones occupation; and family, religious, ethnic, social, and other group identifications and system of beliefs.

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.⁹¹ The Viennese psychologist Alfred

Adler (1870-1937) wrote about the striving for superiority, the basic innate drive of human action.⁹² Properly executed these drives can spur on the evolutionary process.

Various Christian denominations disagree on the nature of God's grace and the extent of His sovereignty. Brahman-God's grace depends on where one is located in the Reincarnation Process. Some people receive Resistible Grace to varying degrees and others Irresistible Grace. Brahman-God remains sovereign but has different plans for different people. Calvinism teaches that the saving grace of God is effectually applied to the Elect, the people whom He has decided to save. Those who obtain salvation do so, not by their own free will, but because of the sovereign grace of God.⁹³ For Vedantists, the Elect are those people who are further along in the Reincarnation Process. Everyone is predestined to be eventually liberated-saved, but some people have more lives to live before this will occur.

11) Universal liberation and salvation occur after 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. 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. 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.

Vivekananda teaches, "The idea of a real universal love is only possible from this point of view. All are our fellow passengers, our fellow travelers--all life, plants, animals; not only my brother man, but my brother brute, my brother plant; not only my brother the good, but my brother the evil, my brother the spiritual and my brother the wicked. They are all going to the same goal."⁹⁴ Reincarnation teaches we should treat other people with the best of intentions since we are fellow travelers on the path to perfection. The environmentalists are correct since all of nature;

fungus, plants and animals are evolving toward the human level and deserve good treatment.

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.⁹⁵ 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: Ch. XII. Liberation-Salvation and Samadhi, Section 4.

There are some problems with the one-life thesis. Many Biblical passages support Universal Salvation such as: Old Testament: Is. 45:23, 66:23; New Testament: John 1:9, 4:42, 11:32, 12:47; Rom. 5:18, 8:21; 1 Cor. 15:22-23, 28; 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 1:9-10; 1 Tim. 2:3-4, 6, 4:10; Tit. 2:11; Heb. 2:9, 8:11-12; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Jn. 2:2.⁹⁶ But most people who believe only in one life find it hard to accept the idea that all people will be saved. For one thing, many people do not attain much moral progress in a single life. They live a relatively restricted life and experience only a small portion of the things human life has to offer. Most people are not saints or sinners neither deserving eternal heaven or hell. People who believe only in one life and in Universal Salvation cannot explain why it is better to be virtuous rather than non-virtuous if all people are saved regardless of the life they lived, unless they believe evil people have to undergo a long purgatory. The majority of people are psychology attuned to a human life and not to a divine life in heaven. On the other hand, reincarnation allows people many lifetimes to develop morally and spiritually to prepare themselves for heaven; it allows people to experience a wide variety of lifestyles; and according to the law of karma the penalty does not exceed the crime. It does not violate a sense of justice, that a person has to suffer eternally for a finite number of sins.

12) Reincarnation has been validated by scientific evidence. Canadian born Dr. Ian Stevenson (1918-2007) whose mother had a keen interest in the religion of Theosophy 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.⁹⁷ The research was funded in part by a million dollar bequest from the Western Vedantist Chester Carlson (1906-68), 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. They correctly pointed out the place names, the names of people, and other details that were associated with their past life. 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."⁹⁸ Perhaps some psychics could explain why these children often forget their prior life experiences by the age of eight. Does a shell of their former body disintegrate at that time? Also, we do not know how many children have some knowledge of their prior life. If they make an assertion in this regard it would probably not be taken seriously by their parents.

In the reincarnation process a persons facial features can remain the same across incarnations though they might change their race or ethnic affiliation. Quite often they maintain the same personality traits. In addition, they might change their religion and nationality from one lifetime to another. In many ways they pick up where we have left off in their last life. The same talents are there, so if they made an impact in one life they are apt to do it again. They might experience a setback if they choose to follow a new path, for example if a successful novelist decides to become a physicist. Due to collective group karma they are apt to meet some of the people they knew in a prior life though the roles could be different. An example would be marrying someone they knew in their last life. On encountering these people there may be a feeling of recognition. About 20% of the children remember the period between lives on earth.⁹⁹

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.¹⁰⁰ 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.¹⁰¹ 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.’”¹⁰² The deceased person was often a relative whom they resembled. These dreams are more vivid and realistic than other dreams being auditory, visual, and sensory. They occurred in 22%, of Stevenson’s approximately 1200 validated childhood past life memory cases.¹⁰³

While the memories of our past lives are forgotten in the conscious mind they remain in our 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.

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 among homosexuals? For reincarnationists, the inclination towards homosexuality is based on one’s prior life activity. Jim Tucker has followed up on

Stevenson's work by writing about Western children who had detailed memories of their past life that were verified as to their accuracy by other people.

Stevenson also authored two books covering 200 subjects who had birthmarks and birth defects that corresponded with wounds they received in their previous life.¹⁰⁴ People who had been stabbed to death in their prior life had birthmarks in the same bodily location. Being stabbed to death left a mental impression (samskara) on the mind. When being reborn the mind created a new body (and brain) and that mental impression created a birthmark. How this process works exactly we do not know. But we must remember that Vivekananda pointed out that the mind and body interact because they are the subtle and gross aspects of a single substance. In this way he was able to refute Descartes Substance Dualism (as explained above).¹⁰⁵

In addition, Ian Stevenson also studied near-death experiences (NDE). In the late sixties he founded the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia that later produced research on a number of phenomena that included reincarnation and NDE. In the mid-seventies Raymond Moody did his medical residency as a psychiatrist at the University of Virginia, where he interviewed people who had NDE. Moody went on to establish the International Association for Near-death Studies (IANDS) and the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*.¹⁰⁶

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 this regard. This is in spite of the fact that reincarnation has been accepted by many prominent thinkers in the West and 33% of the American population according to the Pew Research Center.¹⁰⁷ Reincarnation like psychic powers is not part of the present scientific paradigm. An important reason these ideas have been ignored in intellectual circles is because in most cases rebirth is difficult to verify. Also, we do not know who reincarnated as who. This means these ideas can be accepted on the basis of coherent reasoning, but in most cases they cannot be empirically verified.

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur E. Powell 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.”¹⁰⁸

13) 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.¹⁰⁹ 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. The “Reincarnation Theory of History” helps us to understand the sudden rise and fall in the number of creative geniuses in a country. We are not privy to the workings of the reincarnation process, so we can only look at those societies that increase the opportunities for a genius to develop their talents. In which countries this will occur in the future is difficult to predict before the event occurs, while it will be more obvious after it occurs. One problem is that people reincarnate in a certain location for a number of reasons.

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.¹¹⁰ 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 reincarnate 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.¹¹¹

A sociological implication is that many people reincarnate back into the same country, civilization, or religion. This is an important factor that explains the continuity of national characteristics, cultural identity, and religions over a long period of time. Reincarnation is an essential element for the continuity of these institutions. For example, many of the people living in China today, in their prior life were members of an Oriental country which helps to perpetuate their national character traits. They retain their *samskaras* (mental impressions) from their previous life. This factor is an aid in preserving National Dharma and Glocalization of distinct cultures. Today this is occurring in the revitalization of the Indian, Chinese, and other ancient civilizations.¹¹²

14) According to Vedantists, most people after the death of the body go to a temporary world and then are eventually reborn on earth or a similar type of existence. Only a small number are permanently liberated-saved and do not return to the physical plane.

15) The Avatara reincarnates, which supports religious pluralism. Also, as Sri Ramakrishna stated the Avatara does not tell all, so he has something new to say in his next life on earth. What he states in each of his incarnations if properly followed is sufficient to attain liberation-salvation.

Some critics think the belief in reincarnation causes spiritual complacency. But it is good that Hindu's accept reincarnation and karma since they are valuable concepts in helping us to understand more about the nature of life.

One positive factor is that after rebirth a person is happy being a child with limited physical and mental capabilities even if they accomplished a great deal in their prior life. They judge themselves relative to other children of the same age and not in relation to adults.

5. 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, Judeo-Christian writers, and religious schools such as the ancient Greek Orphic school (6th century B.C.), 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 B.C.), 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), Isaac Luria (b. 1534), Giordano Bruno (b. 1548), Benedict Spinoza (b. 1632), Gottfried Leibniz (b. 1646), Baal Shem Tov (b. 1700), Hasidic writers (since the eighteenth century), David Hume (b. 1711), Johann Herder (b. 1744), 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), and the Mormon, Christian Science, Unity Church and many others. Distinguished supporters of reincarnation from other fields of study include: Johann Goethe (b. 1749), George Sand (b. 1804), Madam Blavatsky (b. 1831), 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), and Ian Stevenson (b. 1918).¹¹³

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 who believe in afterlife, and 44% for the 18-24 age group. These high percentages were attained even though this doctrine was vigorously and sometimes harshly suppressed for many centuries in many Western countries.¹¹⁴ “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.”¹¹⁵

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.”¹¹⁶

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.”¹¹⁷

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.¹¹⁸

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.¹¹⁹ The stay in the third heaven is probably temporary and he will quite likely be reborn on earth.

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 individual's 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.¹²⁰

Jean Paul Sartre (1905-80) and Albert Camus (1913-60) two French existentialist atheist philosophers 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. They mistakenly thought that life has no meaning beyond what we give it.¹²¹ 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 a few 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. As Jesus stated, "In my Father's house there are many mansions" (KJ, Jn. 14:20). According to the Internet a British team of psychics made contact with the deceased actor Lionel Barrymore (1878-1954). His father was born in India in the Punjab. On the Internet there is a 15-minute recording made in 1957 of Barrymore where he tells us he is living in a post-mortem world for actors. Vedantists interpret this as a temporary lower heaven, not the higher Kingdom of Heaven. There he joyfully met his relatives and old friends and he was surprised to find animals (a dog) lived there. If these animals formerly lived on earth, then after they die than can go to a temporary lower heaven, which should make animal lovers happy. He mentioned he made some contact with earthly existence checking out recent plays that were not as good as the plays he was involved in.¹²² Karma is worked out not only on earth but in the period between lives on earth. Many do not think that karmas can be created in this state, but possibly new samskaras emerge that guide the person in their next life.

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 preexistence 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."¹²³

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.” In another interview Henry Ford told the *San Francisco Examiner* (August 26, 1928), “I adopted the theory of Reincarnation when I was twenty-six.... Work is futile if we cannot utilize the experience we collect in one life in the next. When I discovered Reincarnation it was as if I had found a universal plan. I realized that there was a chance to work out my ideas. Time was no longer limited. I was no longer a slave to the hands of the clock.... The discovery of Reincarnation put my mind at ease.... I would like to communicate to others the calmness that the long view of life gives to us. Genius is experience. Some seem to think that it is a gift or talent, but it is the fruit of long experience in many lives. Some are older souls than others, and so they know more.” Ford’s good friend the inventor Thomas Edison was a member of the Theosophist Society. During Edison’s last illness when asked, “Do you believe in survival after death?” he told a reporter, “The only survival I can conceive is to start a new earth cycle again.”¹²⁴

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. Our unfilled desires create a desire for rebirth on the earthly plane.

In Vishistadvaita and Advaita schools of Vedanta the subtle body (soul) is described as being the size of an atom. When the physical body dies it leaves through a small aperture in the body. This raises the question, how does it experience the entire organism if it is not all-pervasive?

A Soul Group is a collection of souls that incarnate together for one or more lifetimes. We do not know the influence of Soul Groups since we are not aware of our relationships with these people in former lives or in

the in-between state between lives on earth. Also, the relationship between members of the group are apt to take different roles in each life, e.g. the mother in one life might be a friend in the next. To some extent they share karma and have emotional attachments to each other.¹²⁵

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 where it describes the views of 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) concerning the ideas of Ramanuja, Vivekananda, Philo, Ibn Gabirol, Abraham Ibn Ezra, and Benedict Spinoza.

e) And pre-existed in another physical body and reincarnated (held by Hindus, Buddhists, and some Judeo-Christians) as discussed above.

f) In a heavenly realm (not the Kingdom of Heaven) from which it descended. This idea was taught 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.¹²⁶ 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.”¹²⁷ 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.”¹²⁸

It is significant that the first anathema directed against Origen and Origenists at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, did not reject reincarnation per se as some people think, but opposed Origen’s specific conception 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 important 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.¹²⁹

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.”¹³⁰ “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.”¹³¹ Present day Mormons believe that before humans lived on earth, they pre-existed spiritually, with a spirit body.

g) In seed form (Vivekananda, Augustine, Luria). Vivekananda comprehended, “The seed produces the tree. The tree produces the seed, which again comes up as another tree.... 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.”¹³²

The Greek Stoics (c. 300 B.C.) taught, “The world as a whole and the various things that exist within it develop and grow out of an initial seed [Logos Spermatikos] in which all the features that will later appear are already present in seminal [seed] fashion. The evolution of the cosmos, being like that of an organism, is understood after the manner of a biological process which gradually manifests certain hidden possibilities. Everything is conceived according to the pattern of embryological growth.”¹³³ For the Stoics matter is formless and indeterminate, while the corporeal logoi spermatikoi that originate from God are the generative principles that contain the powers and laws for the growth of each type of natural thing.¹³⁴

For Plotinus the immaterial logoi spermatikoi reside in the World Soul and in the soul of a particular being. They are dynamic forces and internal laws of development subject to Divine providence.¹³⁵

R. A. Marcus, senior lecturer in medieval history at the University of

Liverpool pointed out that according to Augustine's (354-430) Theory of Seminal Reasons (*Rationes Seminales*), "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."¹³⁶ The question arises did God create everyone identically or differently; for example, some with a male and others with a female nature or some people with more intelligence than others?

Panpsychism is the theory that not only humans and animals have an inner or psychological being, but so do plants and possibly objects referred to as inanimate. An 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 or potential form in inorganic matter? To answer it resulted from "creation out of nothing," would be an unscientific explanation.¹³⁷

The German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) 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 range in quality from sensitive, to animal, and to human souls.¹³⁸ A commenter mentions, "Leibniz' form of idealism, known as Panpsychism, views monads as the true atoms of the universe and as entities having perception. The monads are substantial forms of being, elemental, individual, subject to their own laws, non-interacting, each reflecting the entire universe. Monads are centers of force, which is substance while space, matter, and motion are phenomenal and their form and existence is dependent on the simple and immaterial monads."¹³⁹ Monads are partless, unextended, immaterial, and indivisible entities and

infinite in number.¹⁴⁰

h) in formless prime matter-substance, an 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”¹⁴¹ (See: Ch. 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.”¹⁴²

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 (LOK) and reincarnation are held by all of the major philosophical systems of

Hinduism. They are 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 [Personal God].¹⁴³ “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”¹⁴⁴

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 LOK expresses the will of God. The order of karma is set up by God, who is the ruler of karma. 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 LOK, 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.”¹⁴⁵

Vivekananda wrote, “Just as in the case of electricity the modern theory is that the power leaves the dynamo and completes the circle back to the dynamo, so with hate and love; they must come back to the source. Therefore do not hate anybody, because that hatred which comes out from you, must, in the long run, come back to you. If you love, that love will come back to you, completing the circle.” “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.”¹⁴⁶

Brahman-God would not be omnipotent if the LOK exists independent of It and would in some ways be subservient to the power of karma.

It was fathomed by Origen (c. 185-254) a Greek Christian philosopher from Alexandria, Egypt 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.”¹⁴⁷ 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.”¹⁴⁸

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."¹⁴⁹ 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."¹⁵⁰ "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.”¹⁵¹

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.¹⁵²

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,¹⁵³ or as a ransom paid to the devil as some early Church Fathers believed.¹⁵⁴ William Lane Craig teaches punishment for a crime is necessary since the virtue of Justice is part of God’s Divine nature. Brahman-God’s honor is not violated by human sin. Atonement reconciles man to God, not God to man. 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.”¹⁵⁵ As an act of grace a totally loving Brahman-God incarnates as an Avatara to reconcile us to the Divine realm. An Avatara willfully receives the punishment (penalty) in place of humans (substitution). The penalty is not paid to the Avatara but by Him.

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 penalty of sin. Throughout his harsh and immaculate life on earth and his crucifixions he took on their bad karma (as did Sri Ramakrishna). 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. According to the Conservation of Energy the amount of total energy in the universe is constant. Naturalism involves empirical investigation rather than relying on supernatural explanations. For more details on Atonement see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. IV. Avatar-Divine Incarnation: Their Mission and Legacy, Section 4. Sin and the Doctrine of Atonement.

Roman Catholics teach that as an act of grace, Jesus Christ, his mother Mary, Paul (Col. 1:24-25), and the Apostles 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” (good karma) that the pious Church members can draw upon in unfolding their spiritual nature. The saints of the Church have added to this treasury. Good spiritual works include faith, prayer, religious pilgrimages, charitable acts, and other meritorious activity.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, a spiritual and 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 religious progress. For more on the Treasury of Merit, See Ch. X. Avatara-Divine Incarnation, Section 4A.

A distinction must be drawn between the notion that Brahman-God guides and controls the LOK that is external to It, and another idea that the LOK is an internal manifestation of the will of Brahman-God. With

justice being a 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 LOK is under the control of the Lord, prayer and religious ritual are efficacious in producing positive karma and lessening the effects of negative karma. The apostle 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).

The law has two aspects. One is the prescriptive moral law (what behavior should be), which the *Bible* and other religious scriptures of the world discuss. They deal with how people should act, the proper way of doing things. Moral Laws do not describe the behavior of individuals but attempt to influence it. Paul also 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. All people are subject to the prescriptive moral law and norms that judges their behavior. Legalism is the view that religion consists in obeying a strict prescribed code of moral laws. Government laws are another type of prescriptive law, being rules that regulate the conduct of people, specifying what is mandatory and what is prohibited, what should (positive law) and should not be done (restrictive law). They tell us what behaviors are not acceptable, and working through a system of rewards and punishments what are the consequences of performing these acts.¹⁵⁷

Second is the descriptive laws (what things are) that all people are subject to. Karma is an aspect of the laws of nature that determines the external events a person has to deal with. It can be expressed qualitatively or quantitatively. We are also under the descriptive aspect of the LOK, which is its mode of operation concerning the results of our activity. 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 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.

By obeying the commandments of the law written about in the religious scriptures and elsewhere, an individual will no doubt receive good karma, but this by itself will not liberate-save a person. By serving the Lord and dedicating the fruits of one’s actions to Brahman-God, a devotee

will receive spiritually auspicious karma that leads to the individual to liberation-salvation. The greater the spiritual potential of the devotee, the more likely they will receive these special graces. Devotees with little substance receive less grace.

The law of samskaras (mental impressions) concern the internal behavioral patterns of the mind. These two descriptive laws karmas and samskaras (which are two manifestations of the same law) combine to determine our character, behavior patterns, and personality.¹⁵⁸ What is descriptive is prescriptive in the sense that it indicates how to act, e.g., the law of gravity tells us not to jump off a high cliff. Descriptive laws are often laws of nature such as Newton's laws of motion or Mendel's laws of genetics, and can be found in other areas of study like the economic law of supply and demand.

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.”¹⁵⁹ 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.”¹⁶⁰

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 apply to all people. These laws deal not only with the body, but also 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 present samskaras, which in turn are karmically 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.”¹⁶¹ Vrittis are thought waves in the conscious mind that sink down into the unconscious mind and become samskara. These samskaras eventually give rise to new vrittis.¹⁶²

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 compassionate grace than solely by karma which can be very harsh. 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.”¹⁶³ Brahman-God in Its infinite mercy facilitates liberation by speeding up the karma-eliminating process. It rearranges your karmas to set you on the right track. This grace eventually frees (liberates, saves) a person from the control of the laws of nature that includes the LOK. 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.”¹⁶⁴ 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.¹⁶⁵ There is no event without a reason and no effect without a cause. Every fact has an explanation, it does not explain itself. 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 LOK 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, and/or from a scientific perspective as an impersonal and mechanic law of nature. According to Buddhism and Jainism, karmas do not require the existence of God. Most people think of karma as determining external events but it is equally as important in determining the internal events of the mind. Broadly defined it has two aspects, external karma that effects the causal sequence of external events (that include other people's reactions to us) and internal karma that effects the workings of our mental events and emotions (samskaras). 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 positively correlate as when a person reacts happily to another persons friendly action, or they may vary greatly as when a person feels depressed when external events are going well. The strength of a samskara is based on intensity, repetition that forms a habit (vasana), and continuity of a thought or feeling.

Samskaras are stored up in the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious (where they are hidden in the psyche) parts of the mind. Each samskara is spatially located somewhere in the three aspects of the mind. They are produced by our prior thoughts, feelings, and actions and act as a predisposition toward doing a similar action or having similar thought or feelings in the future. Every action, thought, and feeling leaves a samskara, an impression that awaits fruition in future actions, thoughts, and feelings. They act as behavioral tendencies, subliminal impressions, potential habits, inner drives, and/or innate dispositions. Samskaras are the basis of our knowledge, memory, feelings, choices, attitudes, and likes and dislikes. They determine our self-perception and the way we interact with other people. Due to the reincarnation process every person is born with the samskaras they acquired in their prior lives. Repetitions of similar action, thoughts, or feelings strengthen the predispositions (samskaras) that combine to establish a habit pattern (vasana). Habits are more or less fixed way of thinking, willing, or feeling based on prior repetition of similar mental activity. Samskaras and vasanas are the driving forces behind our actions. Through yogic practices the samskaras that lie below the threshold of consciousness can be discovered. The goal is to strengthen

positive samskaras and eliminate the negative ones. By gaining control over the samskaras and through proper training a person can develop good and useful habits.¹⁶⁶

Based on 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.¹⁶⁷

As an explanation for the existence of suffering (theodicy) the theory of karma explains why a person experiences unhappiness. It is due not to Brahman-God, but to the causal chain of their former deeds. 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 LOK implies that the world was created by an intelligent creator possessed with a plan, purpose, intention, and design.

Karmic energy is not a mere abstraction, but is a concrete substantial entity that has good and bad effects. As a law of nature it is highly scientific, though operating at the subtle level it is not well understood by modern physical scientists. 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.

According to the Mimamsa School of philosophy, the highest goal of life can be attained only by performing the right types of Karma. But according to the Samkhya and Vedanta, the highest goal of life can be attained only after renouncing Karma.

Robert Sapolsky in his book *Determined: Life Without Free Will* (2023) makes the valid point that people have a determined will, not a freewill. He believes that people act the way they do because of the nature of their brain and their environmental upbringing, which is based on chance and not under their control. So people should not be praised for meritorious behavior or blamed for hideous acts. He does not realize that the events that occur to us are the result of our karma. The universe is all

law and nothing (at least at the macro level) occurs by chance. We determine our DNA because our prior life events determine who our parents will be in this life. Chance and luck have nothing to do with determined events in a lawful universe.¹⁶⁸

5. How the Law of 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” (LOK). 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.” Whatever we are now is the result of whatever we have been or thought in the past; and whatever we shall be in the future will be the result of what we do or think now.” “There is no motion in a straight line. A straight line infinitely projected becomes a circle. The force sent out will complete the circle and return to its starting place.”¹⁶⁹ 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.”¹⁷⁰ 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.

Regarding “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 it 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.”¹⁷¹ 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.”¹⁷² “Action and reaction are opposite and equal, says the 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.¹⁷³ 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.¹⁷⁴

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.”¹⁷⁵

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.¹⁷⁶

Relating to the *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.”¹⁷⁷

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.”¹⁷⁸ 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.¹⁷⁹

According to the theory of karma all human events are karmically determined by the laws of nature (Natural Determinism), with the exception of the grace of Brahman-God and the grace of the Atman. The LOK operates because the various forces of nature work through us that follow a law-like pattern. It 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. There is a perfect symmetry and harmony between

the giver and receiver of an action. External events and internal events (that determine the way we act and think) of humans are subject to precise laws like the laws of physical objects. Everything in the universe is subject to Law.

The universe is governed by definite laws; it is a cosmos, not a chaos. The LOK affects the body, the mind, and external events. It describes an orderly and harmoniously determined universe where all events are interrelated with perfect synchronicity. For every giver of a particular karma there has to be a person who is ready to receive that karma. According to the LOK everything is determined including the outcome of the throw of dice or the lottery. Following the karmic chain every event is both a consequence of previous occurrences and a cause of future events. There is no chance or randomness in the karmic world. Certainly all events in the macro world are determined, but the jury is still out on whether this applies to the micro quantum world. Quite likely causal interconnectiveness occurs between the macro and the quantum world. Carl Jung came up with the idea of Synchronicity, which is an attempt to explain the occurrence of highly improbable coincidences between events where there is no apparent causal connection. According to the LOK these apparent random events are causally determined.

Karma is composed of matter (substance) and energy in a state of vibration; occurs in space and time; and is characterized by causation (action-reaction) and law, a principle of limits, combining elements, rhythm (cycles), hierarchy (levels), polarity, attraction and repulsion, interconnection due to unity, subtly-grossness, regularity (homeostasis), and whole-part and inner-outer relations.

It is important to realize that at the present moment we are determining our future. What we are now thinking and doing determine both our future thoughts and actions and the life events to come. So we should keep this in mind and discriminate on these matters.

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 possibly prove the necessity of why there has to be a LOK to maintain the equilibrium of the universe where opposing forces or influences are balanced. All events including those of human history are determined by their configuration and interrelationship with other events. A change 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 and their vibrations). It is sustained through the process of cosmic justice. There are external and the internal laws of nature (dealing with the operation of the mind), and the law of karma is an interaction between the two. The physicists of today realize that all activity in the universe requires units of energy. You might call it a social physics, i.e., social events are caused by subtler forms of matter and energy.

According to the “Principle of Polarity” contraries are correlative and interdependent, so if one exists its opposite must also exist. This principle assumes the contraries are on the same ontological level or two aspects of the same entity. This means that a single entity has two poles a thesis and an antithesis that are a pair of opposites. Hot and cold share the common characteristic of temperature but vary in degree of vibration. Does this principle apply to love and hate, good and bad, or matter and spirit? Are they different degrees of the same thing?¹⁸⁰ On an IQ scale the high and low scores balance each other as they do on a normal curve based on a series of random events.

All entities in the phenomenal world are fragments of Mahat, the Universal Mind (subtle aspect) and Universal Body (gross aspect). A single entity through the act of creation divides into parts; one Mahat becomes the many, unity subdivides into diversity. After this Mahat continues to act upon, and communicate with the phenomenal world. The result is a holistic and interrelated universe. It is omniscient and omnipotent and we being a fragment of it have limited intelligence and power. For more on Mahat, see VII. Saguna Brahman and the Universe and Panentheism, Sections 3 and 4.

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 as a latent state in the cause. The cause transforms into the effect. Before an effect can occur the potentiality must be inherent in the cause like a large future tree in a small seed. Karma is often delayed because it does not manifest until the circumstances are right. When the obstructions that prevent the manifestation of the karma are removed, the effect naturally flows out of its cause.¹⁸¹

In his notes, Vivekananda implies that the cause transforms into the effect. “The cause is not one thing and the effect something else that exists as a result. The effect is always the cause worked out. Always, the

cause becomes the effect. The popular idea is that the effect is the result of the operation of a cause which is something independent and aloof from the effect. This is not so. The effect is always the cause worked out into another condition.” “Glass is produced out of certain materials and certain forces used by the manufacturer. In the glass there are those forces plus the materials. The forces used have become the force of adhesion, and if that force goes, the glass will fall to pieces; the materials also are undoubtedly in the glass. Only their form is changed. The cause has become the effect. Wherever you see an effect you can always analyze it into a cause, the cause manifests itself as the effect.”¹⁸²

Following this principle applied to the LOK; in all cases the effect exists in the cause though it is unperceivable to us. The effect is in some way substantially identical with the cause, and pre-exists latently in it. Granted, it is much easier to understand the karmic process when milk transforms into curd since they are composed of the same material substance. More difficult is to explain is people committing a wide variety of crimes of different natures (varying cause), yet all receiving the same effect of going to jail. So at the physical level there does not have to be an exact correspondence between the nature of the crime (cause) and the punishment (effect). At the mental level the crimes are equivalent in that they each produce unhappiness in other people as does going to jail. The matching problem of the effect not corresponding to the cause is avoided at his level. So the LOK appears to work at the mental level of subtle matter and energy though it manifest in the realm of physical matter and energy.¹⁸³ Does the inner working of the LOK occur at the macro level or at the atomic and/or sub-atomic quantum realm?

Karma generally manifests in the same lifetime, but it can be delayed from one life to the next. In this case the karma is conveyed through the same subtle body that exists in both lifetimes. Did the cause exist in the subtle realm (unconscious mind) as an idea and then manifest in the next lifetime on the gross plane? Since the acts of karma combine with other deeds to produce an outcome, an act like giving money to charity can result in a wide variety of outcomes. This makes it not always easy to predict future karmic results. But lets say in a particular case an act of charity resulted in the person receiving a nice gift from a friend. What is the common substance that transformed from cause to effect in this case? If there is long delay between an action and its karmic fruits such as one lifetime to the next then we will not know the causal relation between the events.

The LOK is a law of causation. With causality, one event, process, state of affairs, object, or variable (a cause) through an asymmetrical relationship contributes to the production of another process, state of affairs, object, or variable (an effect).¹⁸⁴ This law interconnects physical, mental, personal, and social factors into a single causal system. Karmic effects deal with the consequences of the deed, the doer's circumstances and external events, and with their 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. Human development is ordered and arranged by the LOK. This law is not obvious because it is a complex mixture of so many different elements combining in so many different ways and there is often a delay between the cause and the eventual effect.

Manifest functions yields intended karmic results, and latent functions 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. For example, a religious ceremony fulfills the latent function of reinforcing group identity.

It is possible to believe in karma without belief in rebirth or rebirth without belief in karma? Some Westerners 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. 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. People tend to seek optimum fulfillment of their needs. If an individual can enjoy happiness without performing good actions, why then should they live a moral life? Without the LOK there would be less need to live a moral life.

The karmic system involves a network of relations and feedbacks between people interacting with one another. When the person reacts to their karma they have a cause and effect feedback loop system. Karmic results if not delayed for a long time are routed back to the person as inputs that motivate their future actions. Bad karma serves as a feedback system that can motivate a person to change their actions.

Reacting to recognizable karmic results is a reflexive process. Operant (instrumental) conditioning is a method of learning that uses positive reinforcement and punishment to generate desired consequences. Through this process an association is made between a behavior and its consequences. Often, good karma is positive reinforcement that sends a message to a person that their present actions should be continued or intensified. Bad karma (a type of punishment) suggests to people that their actions should be limited, stopped, or altered, unless they are optimistic and expect their present way of acting to yield good karma in the long run. Karma as a motivator of human action is more effective if it is immediate, if it is repeated, and of a greater intensity. According to Edward Thorndike's Law of Effect (1898) behaviors that are followed by a desirable outcome are more likely to be repeated and those that are followed by an undesirable outcome are less likely to be repeated.¹⁸⁵

Alterations include creating counter-karma in an attempt to correct the situation that will nullify or reduce the influence of the former unpleasant results. Sarada Devi the Holy Mother (1853-1920) explained that, "One cannot escape from the effect of one's past karma. But if a person lives a prayerful life, he gets off with only the prick of a thorn in the leg where he was to suffer from a deep cut." "If you do a good act, it cancels the effects of your evil deeds. If one prays, takes the Name of God and thinks of Him, the effects of evil are cancelled."¹⁸⁶

Karma is both quantitative in terms of intensity and qualitative in respect to type. Good and bad karma take on a wide variety of forms. An act can produce mixed karma with both positive and negative elements making it more difficult to decide on which future actions to take. The situation is even more complex if it involves two or more positive and two or more negative karmas interacting with one another.¹⁸⁷

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 considered to be desirable by a majority of people in 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 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 come to fruition, 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 than 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 unconscious 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 similar types of positive and negative vibrations. It is a law of vibrational affinity and attraction where a person receives back what they send out.

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 [mind]. 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 the laws of nature, 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 through right conduct, good actions, and for some severe austerities.¹⁸⁸

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.¹⁸⁹

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 LOK in the future. For example, at the time a youthful person might become depressed if they lose 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.

If two people are involved in karmic exchange then there must be a harmonious equivalent coordinated reciprocal relationship, where one person is fit to give (the cause) and the other to receive (the effect) 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.

Karmas are the external events and the samskaras the internal mental events that interact with each other. Any act alters the karmic and samskaric configurations necessitating a future change somewhere else in the karmic and samskaric structural networks. Where we are located in karmic and samskaric space is subject to change. The Law of Karma combines internal causation with eternal causation. Internal causation means our prior actions (karmas) and thoughts (samskaras) determined our present ones. External causation means that activity and thoughts in the outer environment determine the way we think and act. External

actions are conveyed empirically and thoughts through vibrations.

Prarabdha-karma is working itself out during the present life; sanchita-karma is due to actions performed in a prior or during this life that has not yet been worked out; and agami-karma has accumulated due to actions performed in this life that will reach fruition a future life.¹⁹⁰ 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 in prior lives.

The LOK 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 LOK seriously. This is known *a priorically* through reason and empirically through observation and experience. While success is basically due to talent and hard work, good karma is also a factor. The majority of people accept their good karma of a success which they might take credit for; but do not accept their bad karma of a failure which they are apt to blame other people or their circumstances on.

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 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 result in 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. Punitive aspects of the LOK are embodied in public laws that seek to penalize those people who violate the law.

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."¹⁹¹ 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, intensions, desires, character, and moral virtue of the agent. 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.

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 LOK is a law of justice that involves a system of consequences that results from any action. It is a universal principle comprehensively applying to all individuals in every aspect of society (e.g. social, political, economic, legal, etc.), be it in the past or present. It is egalitarian in the sense that we are all equal before the dictates of the LOK.

We are responsible for the negative things that come to us and not the Lord. The LOK explains the inequalities of human life. Therefore we should feel no malice toward those people who bring us our unpleasant karma. Karma is an impersonal law and mechanism of cause and effect that does not require a personal lawgiver. It is totally impartial and

unchangeable, not being one thing at one point in time or location and another thing at another. According to this law people receive what they deserve, merit, or are entitled to. The distribution of rewards and punishments are proportional to ones acts, thoughts, and feelings. 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.¹⁹² There can be no eternal punishment since the penalty cannot exceed the crime.

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. The world is intrinsically meaningless so humans are compelled to find or create their own meaning. Nature has no reason for existing, it can only be described by a physical scientist, but it cannot be explained. The scientifically described universe does not answer our questions concerning value or meaning.¹⁹³ 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.¹⁹⁴ 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 often do not properly understand the karmic effects of our actions and thoughts in this life.

There is a Multiplier Effect in the accumulative amount of good and bad karma generated by an act. This includes the actions of others for which you are the cause. 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.¹⁹⁵

Another arithmetic equation is that a major factor in determining whether an institution survives depends on the amount of good karma minus the amount of bad karma. Institution here is defined broadly to include a type of organization, a type of government (such as a dictatorship), and many other things.

After he had the illness Sri Ramakrishna could see his throat cancer as a blemish on his subtle body.¹⁹⁶ Is an illness in the subtle body before it is detected by a doctor through medical instruments or felt by the patient? 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. It is like an idea or a feeling existing in the unconsciousness but not in the conscious mind. Does the atomic and sub-atomic (quantum) realm equate with the subtle realm?

An individual receives not only individual but also group (collective) karma. As a member of a group such as a nation, community, ethnic group, gender, religion, business, geographical area, etc. an individual receives both positive and the negative effects of belonging to that group. Both good and bad people receive the collective karmic results, though not every group member gets the same effect. The group members share the karma to some extent. We belong to many organized and unorganized groups and so are subject to many types of karma. In a democracy a relatively small number of people make the political decisions, while the vast majority receives their effects even if they did not favor the decision made. We can gain some idea about how group and individual karma operates by studying the events of history. A critic mentioned that the climate crisis was created primarily by the industrialized world, yet according to the World Bank it is in the less developed countries where the negative consequences are being most felt. This is because the less developed countries benefited more from industrialization than they contributed to the process. Another example is 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-spirit group). In their new life they may maintain similar roles like husband and wife or take on new capacities and a different relationship. Is group karma a type of collective consciousness?

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 about 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 1918-20, stock market crash of 1929, and the Covid19 coronavirus pandemic beginning in 2019. Former regional histories have merged to form a single world history within which events occurring 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. This is extremely important today with the possibility of a nuclear war. Adrsta (Aurva) 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. Does it operate at the quantum level?

A theory of karma can be employed for self-improvement that benefits the individual and can be applied purposely for creating a better society. All attempts should be made to create 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 to 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 can 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.¹⁹⁷ From our standpoint it was the karma of Europe that brought about Napoleon. There is no “Substitute Avatara” because he descends from a higher world out of grace not karma.

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, having exact knowledge of unpredictable future events (precognition, prognostication, trikalajnatvam), the ability to use ones mind to exert force and move a nearby physical object (psychokinesis), understanding foreign languages without training (Xenoglossy), and reading the content of other peoples mind (telepathy). They cannot be explained at the physical level, only at a deeper subtle level of causation. Miracles occur because they are subject to unknown laws of nature.¹⁹⁸

Does the LOK extend to the animal level? Are animals capable of creating new karmas and working off old ones? 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. Certainly, an animal must modify itself before it can evolve to a higher level. It is stated in the prior chapter that in 1957 the deceased actor Lionel Barrymore (1878-1954) mentioned animals living in a lower heaven where he resided, and we add due to their good karmas and samskaras (mental impressions) produced while living on earth.

Are living entities like plants subject to the LOK? 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. Does our karma cause natural events such as earthquakes; certainly it determines if we will be effected by them.

Attribution theory is concerned with how individuals interpret the cause of events or behaviors they experience and how this relates to their thinking and behavior.¹⁹⁹ For example, a person receives unpleasant karma

from another person. They might place the blame on that individual resulting in anger and dislike. Or they might take personal responsibility and accountability for their own actions, realizing they are receiving the fruits of their own karma. Each of these two responses produces new karmas and samskaras that will be worked out in the future.

Much of bad karma is due to the fact that people are more concerned with immediate results than with long-term effects. There are some disadvantages with being over attached to the present moment. 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.²⁰⁰ Hence, if a person realized the karmic effect of their bad actions they would be significantly less likely to perform them. Karmas that are harmful may be pleasure-seeking or egocentric. It is a big mistake to choose pleasure over goodness.

Some acts that result in bad karma are a form of self-punishment, unconsciously motivated by a self-destructive impulse arising from guilt over past actions.

According to the James-Lange Law (1884-85) which is controversial and disputed, emotional samskaras such as worry, fear, anger, happiness, and depression follow from and are the result of a physiological state. An emotion is experienced when the brain reacts to the information received from the body's nervous system. A person sees a wild animal, starts trembling and then experiences fear and begins to run. If this is so then the law of karma causes a person to have a certain physiological state resulting in a particular emotion.²⁰¹

Short term bad karma can be good karma if one understands its meaning and we react properly to it. Then in the long run it will result in good karma.

A major problem with the LOK is that how it works has never been explained. To accomplish this task would take a great deal of thinking. One might cite Isaac Newton's Third law that reads, "For every action there is an equal [in magnitude] and opposite [in direction] reaction." If an object A exerts a force on object B, then object B must exert a force of equal magnitude and opposite direction back on object A. "When two bodies interact, they exert force on each other, and these forces are known as action and reaction pairs." Symmetry occurs in nature, where one body cannot exert a force on another without experiencing a reactive force itself.²⁰² A problem is that for Newton this process is immediate, but for

karma it is often delayed, sometimes from one lifetime to another. How do we explain that so-called random or chance events, whose causes are unknown, are determined by the LOK?

There is a tendency to like the people who bring us our good karma and to dislike those who bring us our bad karma.

The Law of Karma as a System of Ethics

Sanskrit words such as Rta (moral order), Vrata (rules of conduct), and Dharma (righteousness, duty) 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 should be shunned to avoid pain. It is a first principle and master rule of morality that tells us why we should perform good actions. The ethics of the LOK 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. A karmic action can be expressed by “I ought” to do this if one is interested in a long run positive outcome. Seeking to produce good karma through virtuous actions is beneficial both for the individual and for any group including a country. Think what the world would be like if bad actions produces long-term happiness and good actions long-term misery.

The LOK is a conceptual tool that can be applied to many different types of ethics. Karma Dharma is a system of ethics and a moral philosophy based on karmic action. 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. At the group level good actions lead to “The greatest happiness for the greatest number” of people. Standards of morality are based on the practical implications of the karma they produce. Following Deontology it is a duty to ourself to engage in the karmic activities with consequences that will maximize our personal happiness and minimize our unhappiness.²⁰³ 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 rewards us when we act properly, and punishes us for misdeed, telling to give up activity that hold back our evolutionary development.

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 a law of nature that does not require faith to operate since it functions whether you believe in it or not. It is a product of nature and not formed like civil laws from an agreement between people.

True happiness is derived from living in harmony with the LOK. 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 relations, 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.

According to the LOK, a descriptive statement of “what is” leads to a prescriptive statement of “how one ought to act.” This assumes an “ought” is based on goal-directed behavior toward a desired end. If one wants to attain the goal Y (what is), it can be reached through the act X (an ought). Assuming people desire happiness, knowledge of the LOK aids a person in reaching that goal. Performing a moral act yields good karma. The LOK is based on both observation and reasoning. This idea might be in opposition to David Hume’s Law (1711-76) that you cannot derive an “ought” from an “is,” that is prescriptive claims cannot be derived solely from descriptive claims. It also does not coincide with G. E. Moore’s (1873-1958) Open-Question Argument that refutes the identification of moral properties with natural properties.²⁰⁴ This is because of the interrelatedness and interconnectedness within the universe. Things that appear to be separate like a moral and a natural property are related in some way.

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-Cultural Space” in terms of their nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, geographical location, job type, personal characteristics, age, etc.

The LOK is incompatible with nihilism, meaning that life is meaningless so we should reject 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, 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.²⁰⁵

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.²⁰⁶ It is the LOK 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.

A possible negative feature of believing in the LOK 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 and that the law can be quite harsh. This callousness toward the suffering of other people can be quite harmful. We should think that it is the good karma of other people that we will help them out of their problems. As Arvind Sharma notes we receive good karma by engaging in virtuous action and bad karma by ignoring the suffering of others. He gives the example of a doctor who treats a person for lung cancer knowing that chain-smoking was the cause of it.²⁰⁷

All people create some bad karma by maintaining their physical body. We kill microbes with each breath and destroy some forms of life to feed the body. This type of karma is generally worked off by fulfilling our duties; for example by working on a job.

Knowledge of the LOK is like a conceptual tool that is generally used for good purposes but on occasion might be harmful.

There is also a problem with delayed karma is that a person cannot always be certain as to which actions produced the karmic results. So if they receive bad karma they might not realize in what ways they should change their actions to avoid negative karmic results in the future.²⁰⁸

It is very difficult to figure out how the LOK exactly operates. Perhaps, it is due the fact that the entire cosmos is composed of vibrational energy. These energy vibrations permeate through everything around us, both living and material. According to the law of attraction there is a gravitational pull between similar vibrations of energy. Our thoughts and emotions are composed of vibrations that are sent out into the universe and things with similar vibrations are attracted to us and we to them.²⁰⁹ There is an unknown harmony in the universe that causes these events to occur in the way they do.

A person cheats others and as a result acquires a serious illness. Since one involves economic activity and the other bodily health, the problem is what is the common link between the two events. The first event brings unhappiness to the victim and the second unhappiness to the perpetrator. So is happiness and unhappiness the common link between the two events? Or is it something else? For the causal process to work it is necessary to have a common link between the cause and the effect. The cause transforms into the effect, which maintains the conservation of energy.

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).²¹⁰

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.²¹¹

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.”²¹² 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.”²¹³ “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.”²¹⁴

This moral precept is the foundation of the Advaitic monistic ethics and the LOK. 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 do good things 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. One of the best methods to develop renunciation is to get in the habit of producing counter and samskaras.

To quote Swami Abhedananda, “A believer in the law of karma (LOK) 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.”²¹⁵

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 LOK, an individual can bear the hardships of life with more tranquility, peace, and patients.²¹⁶

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.”²¹⁷ “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.”²¹⁸

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.²¹⁹ Yet, according to the doctrine of karma we can willfully determine by our present actions and thoughts, which will in turn determine our future decisions and actions. The attitude of fatalism that we are powerless to change our circumstances 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). We should do everything possible to create the karma for a good and happy future existence.

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 ourself as passive agents of our 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.²²⁰

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. To create good karma we should help other people as much as we can. 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 LOK. 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.²²¹

One can also think of their misfortunes as the grace of Brahman-God that in the long run is best for us and make us a better person. If we received bad karma, rather than blaming other people or our circumstances, it is best to determine what caused it, and how we can change our ways to avoid it in the future. 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.

The karmic process is an excellent means for promoting moral education. Knowing the karmic cause of our suffering we can prevent it from 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. Understanding how the moral law operates acts as a guiding principle in setting up any type of organization. It offers guidelines on how create an efficient and rational organization in the best possible way.

Accepting our negative fate as due to the manifestation of our karma will help one to avoid a lot of bitterness. There are many ways we can interpret an event. Individual progress requires the right choice. For example, the LOK can be interpreted in a tamasic submissive fatalistic way that whatever happens to us is predetermined and therefore inevitable. The present is the result of our prior activities. Or it can be determined in a rajasic way as Swamis Vivekananda and Abhedananda do, that we are the makers of our own destiny. At this very moment we are determining both the person we will become in the future (samskaras) and the events we will experience (karmas). So we should do their best at this present moment to make our future as joyful and meaningful as possible.

If things go wrong the LOK 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. Following Rational Choice Theory a person should try to maximize their good karma and minimize the bad karma. 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.”²²² In this case water is like counter-karma.

Fortunately virtues form an interrelated system and so an improvement in one virtue will enhance the other virtues to varying degrees. It depends on the degree of correlation (integration) between the improved virtue and another virtues, which varies from person to person. Vices also are part of an interrelated system.

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. 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.

Prayashcitta is the Sanskrit term for penance, atonement, and expiation. The most common forms of Hindu penance prescribed for intentional and unintentional misdeeds include: repentance, remorse, and reflection where a person feels bad about and admits their misdeed, and vows not to repeat the act (Anutapa); various austerities such as celibacy, sleeping on the ground, or fasting (Tapas); restricting one's diet to eating bland foods or consuming small quantities (Upavasa or Vrata); giving away gifts such as material possessions and food to the needy (Dana); reciting mantras or Vedic prayers, either audibly, inaudibly, or mentally (Japa); yogic mediation or praying (Vrata); and making pilgrimages by travelling on foot to distant holy sites, or bathing in sacred rivers (Tirtha).²²³

In the Christian Church penance is a sacrament or rite, being a religious ceremony or act. Sin that defiles a person’s soul is looked upon as an offence against God who can forgive them. Internally, penance involves repentance that consists of feeling remorseful (contrition), regret, and sorrow and having faith that their sins have been forgiven.

Externally, acts of self-discipline involve devoting time to prayer or reading the *Bible* or other spiritual books. Also included are acts of voluntary self-denial such as fasting, continence, and abstaining from alcohol or tobacco use. Positive acts of penance or satisfaction include works of mercy, service to their neighbor, almsgiving, and making sacrifices. The Roman Catholics, Orthodox Churches, and some Protestant denominations also include confession by revealing their sins in order to heal and purify the person. Confession does not involve merely stating the sinful things the person has done since the Priest might prescribe a cure. The cure is often the opposite of the sin, so if a person was involved in stealing if possible they might return what they stole and give alms to the poor. The goal is to make amends for past sins and to prevent future sins from occurring.²²⁴ Penance is efficacious for destroying the bad karma caused by the misdeed, and hopefully will improve the mental impressions in the mind. Religious ceremonies and ritual are performed to absolve a person from the negative effects of their sins (bad karma). 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."²²⁵

For more on this subject see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. X. Religious Practices, Section 8. Counter-Karma and Samskaras.

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² CW, II: 222-23, 441.

³ CW, I:8-9.

⁴ CW, IV:271.

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⁸ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiphenomenalism;

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiphenomenalism. As important as this idea is, the Vedanta Society oftentimes does not place much emphasis on reincarnation since the goal of life is to seek liberation not rebirth. When creating the physical body, the subtle body brings into being the Pingala and the Ida. "Pingala, according to them [later yogis], is on the right side of the spinal column, and the Ida on the left, and in the middle of the spinal column is the Sushumna, an empty channel. Ida and Pingala, according to them, are the currents working in every man, and through these currents, we are performing all the functions of life." The Pingala "starts from the left hemisphere of the brain, crosses at the base of the brain to the right side of the spine, and recrosses at the base of the spine, like one-half of the figure eight.... [The Ida] reverses this action and completes this figure eight" (CW, I:224; VIII:43).

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¹⁴ Web: iep.utm.edu/hard-con; plato.stanford.edu/entries/consciousness; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard_problem_of_consciousness. For more on Akasha see Chapters VII and VIII.

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¹⁶ Joseph Levine, "Materialism and Qualia: the Explanatory Gap," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 64 (1983), pp. 354-61; cf. Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Explanatory_gap

¹⁷ *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, eds. S. Schneider and M. Velmans (John Wiley, 2017), pp. 106-24; Web: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/panpsychism>; www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5DfnljZPGw; iep.utm.edu/hard-con. Some might consider consciousness to be a single comprehensive state with sensory perceptions, bodily sensation, affective, and cognitive components.

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²⁷ Swami Satprakashananda, *The Goal and the Way* (St. Louis, MO: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1977), pp. 211-12.

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- ⁶² Copleston, IV, pp. 83-84, 318-19.
- ⁶³ Web: www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Innate_idea
- ⁶⁴ Head and Cranston (1961), p. 291.
- ⁶⁵ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Innatism; www.thefamouspeople.com/21st-century-philosophers.php
- ⁶⁶ Broad (1976), II, p. 617.
- ⁶⁷ Web: www.iep.utm.edu/person-I; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_identity
- ⁶⁸ S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932, 1964), pp. 229-30, 234.
- ⁶⁹ Radhakrishnan (1964), p. 236.
- ⁷⁰ Satprakashananda (1977), p. 206.
- ⁷¹ Copleston, IV: 292-93.
- ⁷² Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Looking_glass_self
- ⁷³ Web: www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/identity; wikipedia.org/wiki/Identity_formation
- ⁷⁴ Theodorson, pp. 170-71.
- ⁷⁵ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anima_mundi

⁷⁶ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_selection

⁷⁷ CW, I:292-93.

⁷⁸ Abhedananda (1899, 1964), p. 65.

⁷⁹ Sister Shivani, *Swami Abhedananda in America* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1947, 1991), p. 284

⁸⁰ Abhedananda (1946), pp. 8-9, 54-55.

⁸¹ Lal, p. 184.

⁸² Aurobindo, pp. 707-08, 715.

⁸³ 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.

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⁸⁵ Web: www.hinduwebsite.com/reincarnation.asp

⁸⁶ William Atkinson, *Reincarnation and the Law of Karma* (Chicago: Yogi Publishing Society, 1908, 1936), pp. 142, 152, 160, 143-49, 158-59.

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⁸⁸ 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.

⁸⁹ Geoffrey Hodson, *Reincarnation, Fact or Fallacy* (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1967), pp. 2-7.

⁹⁰ Tillich, I, pp. 259-61; II, pp. 29-36.

⁹¹ Stavig (2013), pp. 331-32 goes into more detail on the "Will to Manifest Prana."

⁹² Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 278, 612, 630, 633.

⁹³ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irresistible_grace

⁹⁴ CW, I:421-22.

⁹⁵ Joseph Bettis, "Is Karl Barth a Universalists?," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 20 (1967), pp. 425-428, 436, discusses arguments used against universal salvation.

⁹⁶ Web: www.patheos.com/blogs/keithgiles/2021/07/76-bible-verses-to-support-universal-reconciliation/76

⁹⁷ *Washington Post* (Feb. 11, 2007); *New York Times* (Feb. 18, 2007), both on the Web.

⁹⁸ 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. For an interesting YouTube example of a child who remembered details of his prior life see Web: www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMLLFHO8ys8

⁹⁹ Web: [https://www.reincarnationresearch.com/principles-of-reincarnation/Evidence and Principles of Reincarnation-Understanding Past Lives](https://www.reincarnationresearch.com/principles-of-reincarnation/Evidence%20and%20Principles%20of%20Reincarnation-Understanding%20Past%20Lives)

¹⁰⁰ Stevenson (1977b), p. 316.

¹⁰¹ Ian Stevenson, *Children Who Remember Prior Lives* (Charlottesville VI: University Press of Virginia, 1987), pp. 93-124; (1977b), pp. 637-39, 655-60.

¹⁰² Stevenson (1987), pp. 98-99; cf. Web: www.lisis.net/index.php?page=semkiw-ian-stevenson-reincarnation-past-lives-research

¹⁰³ Web: <https://psi-encyclopedia.spr.ac.uk/articles/announcing-dreams-and-related-experiences>

¹⁰⁴ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Stevenson

¹⁰⁵ CW, VI:34.

¹⁰⁶ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Near-death_studies

¹⁰⁷ Web: www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/01/new-age-beliefs-common-among-both-religious-and-nonreligious-americans

¹⁰⁸ Powell (1927, 1978), pp. 210-11. The complete book is located at Web: www.theosophy.world/sites/default/files/ebooks/Arthur-E-Powell-The-Astral-Body-1927.pdf

¹⁰⁹ P. Sorokin, *Modern Historical and Social Philosophies* (New York: Dover, 1963), pp. 230-33.

¹¹⁰ SCD, II, p. 150.

¹¹¹ CW, VI:495-96. 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. Müller's Indian background appears not to be noticeable in his physical features, but is evident in his way of thinking.

¹¹² One might object stating the population of countries has increased considerably over the recent centuries. This is due in part to an increase in life expectancy. So for example, if life expectancy increased from twenty to eighty years, ceteris paribus, the countries population would increase fourfold. Also, people could be coming from other planes of existence or other worlds if there is human life on other planets or in other universes.

¹¹³ 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).

¹¹⁴ Gallup Poll, *Religion in America* (Princeton: Princeton Research Center, June/July, 1982), pp. 183, 192-93.

¹¹⁵ Web: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reincarnation>

¹¹⁶ BSB, III.1:8; BGC, 6.41; Karl Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* (8 vols.; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970-96), III, p. 171.

¹¹⁷ Swami Abhedananda, *Life Beyond Death* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1984), p. 78.

¹¹⁸ *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.

¹¹⁹ WARHD, p. 426; cf. Web: www.trans4mind.com/spiritual/myers1.html; www.near-death.com/experiences/paranormal05.html

¹²⁰ McTaggart (1930), pp. 118-23, 132-33; Broad (1976), II, pp. 610-11, 614, 632-33. R113-R112*

¹²¹ Heine (1983), pp. 156-57; cf. Web: iep.utm.edu/existent/

¹²² Web: [youtube.com/watch?v=f_Fox3Q-jOk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_Fox3Q-jOk)

¹²³ Edwards, VII, pp. 122-23.

¹²⁴ Head and Cranston (1961), p. 270-71, 290; Saha, p. 50.

¹²⁵ Web: <https://innergrowthcenter.com/soul-group/16>

¹²⁶ CC, IV, 40; FP, I, 4; III, 6:4; Joseph Trigg, *Origen* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), pp. 109-10.

¹²⁷ FP, I, 8:1-2, 4; G. Stavig, "Origen and Indian Thought," BRMIC (March 2003), pp.133-40.

¹²⁸ 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.

¹²⁹ Head and Cranston (1961), pp. 324-25, 39-42 lists the nine anathemas against Origen.

¹³⁰ ST, I-II, 5.4. For another translation see, Web: www.newadvent.org/summa/2.htm

¹³¹ CG, III, 62-63.

¹³² CW, II:426.

¹³³ Gerard Verbeke, *The Presence of Stoicism in Medieval Thought* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1983), p. 22.

¹³⁴ Web: www.cairn-int.info/article-E_RHS_612_0245--logoi-spermatikoi.htm

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ R. A. Markus, R. A., "Marius Victorinus and Augustine," in A. H. Armstrong, ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), pp. 398-400.

¹³⁷ *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), V, Panpsychism.

¹³⁸ *The Modadology*, tr. Robert Latta (London: Oxford University Press, 1898, 1951), pp. 115-17.

¹³⁹ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idealism

¹⁴⁰ Web: iep.utm.edu/lei-mind

¹⁴¹ CW, I, p. 147.

¹⁴² Muller (1989), pp. 85, 185-86.

¹⁴³ BSB, II.1:34; 3:41-42; Herman (1971), pp. 270-72.

¹⁴⁴ BSB, II.3:42.

¹⁴⁵ Radhakrishnan, II, p. 694.

¹⁴⁶ CW, I: 196; V:434.

¹⁴⁷ FP, II, 9:8.

¹⁴⁸ FP, II, 9:6; I, 8:2.

¹⁴⁹ JPR, pp. 79-83; GTP, III, 23, 51; H. Joel Laks, "The Enigma of Job, Maimonides and the Moderns," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 (1964), 345-64. For other issues concerning Job in relation to the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, see James Norton,

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¹⁵² J. David Bleich, ed., *With Perfect Faith* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1983), pp. 479, 497.

¹⁵³ A. Daniel Frankforter, *A History of the Christian Movement* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1978), pp. 121-22.

¹⁵⁴ Vergilius Ferm, ed., *An Encyclopedia of Religion* (Paterson, NJ: Littlefield, Adams, 1959), p. 44.

¹⁵⁵ John Hick, “Is the Doctrine of the Atonement a Mistake?” in *Reason And the Christian Religion*, ed. Alan Padgett (Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 247-63.

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¹⁵⁸ Web: www.gotquestions.org/not-under-the-law.html; study.com/academy/answer/what-is-the-difference-between-prescriptive-and-descriptive.html.

¹⁵⁹ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1938, 1984), pp. 232-33, 245-46.

¹⁶⁰ Muller, pp. 182, 258.

¹⁶¹ CW, VI:56.

¹⁶² Web: <https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/5748/samskara>

¹⁶³ CW, VI:481.

¹⁶⁴ CW, V:400.

¹⁶⁵ Runes, p. 250.

¹⁶⁶ Harold Coward, “Psychology and Karma, *Philosophy East and West* (Jan. 1983), pp. 49-60; cf. Web: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samskara_\(Indian_philosophy\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samskara_(Indian_philosophy)); www.yogapedia.com/definition/5748/samskara

¹⁶⁷ BSB, IV.4.22.

¹⁶⁸ “Do We Have Free Will?” by Swami Medhananda. Discussion on Sapolsky’s ideas begin 7 minutes into: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugKBMwuB6Hg>

¹⁶⁹ CW, II:348; I:196; IV:21; V:270.

¹⁷⁰ CW, VII:104.

¹⁷¹ Tipple, pp. 573-74; Prabhavananda3, p. 130.

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¹⁷⁸ Umesh Patri, *Hindu Scriptures and American Transcendentalists* (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1987), pp. 88-89.

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¹⁸² CW, VI:125; II:429.

¹⁸³ See Section 3. Cosmic Mind (Mahat) and the Creation of the Universe (Akasha-Prana) in Chapter VII after the mention of Sir Humphrey Davy concerning the relationship between ideas and physical existence.

¹⁸⁴ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causality

¹⁸⁵ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reinforcement; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operant_conditioning

¹⁸⁶ Web: www.vedantany.org/saying-holy-mother-sarada-devi

¹⁸⁷ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feedback

¹⁸⁸ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karma; www.hinduwebsite.com/jainism/karmainjainism.asp

¹⁸⁹ Bruce Reichenbach, “Karma, Causation, and Divine Intervention,” *Philosophy East and West* (Apr. 1989), pp. 135-149.

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¹⁹¹ CW, I:243.

¹⁹² Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Retributive_justice; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justice

¹⁹³ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existentialism; iep.utm.edu/existent

¹⁹⁴ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thowness

¹⁹⁵ 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.

¹⁹⁶ Saradananda, p. 393; III:1.11.

¹⁹⁷ W. G. Runciman, *Social Science and Political Theory* (Cambridge, University Press, 1969), pp. 9-10.

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¹⁹⁹ Web: www.verywellmind.com/attribution-social-psychology-2795898MENU

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²⁰⁴ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Is-ought_problem; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open-question_argument

²⁰⁵ "The Natural Law Tradition in Ethics," Web: plato.stanford.edu/entries/natural-law-ethics/

²⁰⁶ Web: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral;> http://aporia.byu.edu/pdfs/hughes-the_role_of_happiness_in_kants_ethics.pdf

²⁰⁷ AM, p. 304; Arvind Sharma, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil," *Philosophy East and West* (Oct. 2008), p. 573.

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²¹³ CW, I:261.

²¹⁴ CW, I:364.

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²¹⁶ Abhedananda (1965a), pp. 75-76.

²¹⁷ Sister Shivani, *Swami Abhedananda in America* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1947, 1991), pp. 283-84, from *The Arena* (Feb. 1900).

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²¹⁹ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compatibilism

²²⁰ CW, VIII:184; II:225.

²²¹ An excellent reading source is, "Proceedings of The Seminar on Karma and Rebirth," *Indian Philosophical Annual* (1965), pp. 1-168, especially pp. 108-16.

²²² ST, I, 22.2. For another translation see, Web: www.newadvent.org/summa/1.htm

²²³ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prāyaścitta

²²⁴ Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penance

²²⁵ John Hardon, S.J., *The Catholic Catechism* (Garden City, NY; Doubleday, 1975), pp. 487-89, 484.