A. NATURE OF THE 'LAW' OF KARMA

Though the theory of Karma is often restricted to the understanding of a law that is operative in the field of human actions, it is also understood in terms of a law that is all-pervasive and is applicable to anything material, mental or moral that happens in the world. In the field other than that of moral actions the law is usually designated as the causal law; and the moral law implied by the theory of Karma is, then, considered to be an extension of the universal law of causation into the moral sphere. In this application the moral law that is designated by Karma means not the universal law, but the law in a specific field though applicable, without exception, to everything in that field. But, we have already mentioned that Karma is also understood as universal in the sense of being applicable to all the fields. Now, whether it is the law of causation or the law of Karma that is all-pervasive could be a verbal issue. But, then, it is necessary that we note the difference in the meaning of the phrase 'the law of Karma' on the two occasions: one, when we say that it is the extension of the law of causality into the moral realm, and two, when we say that it is the law of Karma that pervades all spheres of reality. One is a specific sense, and the other is a much more general sense. If this is taken note of, then, we are inclined to say that it is immaterial whether we call the universal law as the law of Karma or as the law of causation.

But is this all to it? And, in any case, could we not approach the thing in some other way? Suppose we say that
both the law of causation and Karma are universal, though each operates in its own plane. But then why all this emphasis on the understanding of Karma as a causal law? And, what are the connections between these corresponding realms, if any? What are the implications of saying that the causal law is the law of Karma in the material realm, or that the law of Karma is the causal law in the moral realm? A consideration of these will enable us to see whether we can really interchange the two phrases, 'the law of Karma' and 'the law of causation'. That is, apart from the issue of naming the law (which we thought, as suggested in the previous paragraph, to be the whole point at issue), we might do well to ask the question: In what sense can we say that it is the same law that is present in all the spheres of reality? And, if it 'is' the same law, would it be the 'same' if we understand it as a moral law or as a causal law?

An analysis of this kind is hoped to throw some light on the many problems connected with the theory of Karma. For instance, it might enable us to consider such questions as: If the law of Karma and the law of causation are operating in different fields what are their respective fields? But, if Karma is understood as universal because it operates in all the fields, what is its mode of operation? And, if it is the law of causation that is universal, does it remain the same law when operating in different fields? If Karma is the law of causation in the fields of moral actions, can we really specify any cause and its corresponding effect in that case? Is it not an assumption to consider the actions as causes and say that they would have their effects? Again, is Karma a fact, or a hypothesis, or a postulate, or a belief, or ...? Is 'fact' of the moral sphere of the same kind as a fact in the material or physical realm? Can
we say that the law of causality is more rational and scientific, whereas the law of Karma is less so? If this is so, does it affect the meaning or credibility of the theory of Karma?

K.H. Potter's attempt seems to be an instance of trying to subsume one law under the other; — in this case the law of Karma under the law of causation, though, of course, he modifies the phrases. He rejects the use of the term 'law', and substitutes it by 'principle'. But, law or principle, his attempt is to understand one with reference to the other; i.e., he tries to understand the law of Karma as being of the same kind as that of causality. And what is more, he wants to understand the causal law with reference to its use in the field of empirical science. This is because of his initial presupposition in favour of naturalism which he thinks is a prerequisite, not only to understand the Karmic law, but for arriving at any philosophy worth the name.

With respect to the causal law, Potter rejects the use of the term 'law', because the causal law is neither descriptive nor prescriptive. It is according to him a 'principle' and it serves the important function of formulating "a basic presupposition of scientific enquiry since any empirical enquiry seeks for explanation, and all such explanations are in a broad sense causal." And viewing the law of Karma as parallel in function to the law of causation, he views it as a principle, a principle which formulates a certain programme for moral enquiry. According to Potter, then, "the Karmic principle exhorts us to keep on seeking explanations" for the moral occurrences.

By the change of usage from 'law of causality' to
'principle of causality', Potter gives the impression that he has widened the meaning of causality (or causal principle) such that the Karmic law is not affected when its function is supposed to be one parallel to that of the causal law. But actually he does not get out of the restricted meaning of causality even when he presents it as a principle. This is of enormous advantage to him, because, being committed to naturalism, it enables him to treat the Karmic principle from the angle of vision that is developed from the physical and material sciences. The fundamental question is whether the belief in naturalism as a belief in the continuity of the scientific method is necessary to consider the principle of Karma. It will also be good to consider whether Potter's insistence on naturalistic interpretation of Karma does justice to it.

We shall consider only this last question here. By submitting first to the naturalistic stand, and by seeing the function of the Karmic law as parallel to the principle of causation which is neither prescriptive nor descriptive. Potter limits the scope of Karma unjustifiably. When he says that the Karmic principle is only an exhortation to keep on seeking explanations to moral occurrences, he relegates the law to an inferior and limited status. Moreover, as Donald Wulfout has pointed out in his criticism of Potter, it is not clear how, from a purely naturalistic standpoint, Potter can say that this seeking for explanations to the moral occurrences is a "worthwhile human concern." In fact, from the level of a basic principle of life seen in its context, Potter pulls down the theory of Karma to the level of a programme for moral inquiry.

As to the nature of the 'causal law' it is important to note that it is in the field of empirical sciences that
the law took its definite shape; and as such it cannot be easily divested of its empirical adjuncts.\textsuperscript{5} By the time of Hume and J.S. Mill we meet with the idea that two events C and E are related as cause and effect if they fulfil the following conditions: (i) they are contiguous in space and time, (ii) C precedes E, and (iii) C is unfailingly followed by E. A fourth trait that seems to cling to the idea of necessity or compulsion was submitted to a destructive analysis by Hume. The decisive step was the introduction of the \textit{quantitative method} through the works of Galileo. This made possible the rational foundation of the laws of nature culminating in Newton's \textit{Principia}. But the computability of one state of the solar system from another does not actually mean that one state is the cause of the other. It is better understood as functional dependence. And yet, with the rise of the quantitative method causality began to take a new aspect. As a result, the question 'how' superseded 'why'.\textsuperscript{6}

It is important to note here that the 'cause' in answer to the question 'how' is different from the 'cause' in answer to the question 'why'. There is, of course, a causal nexus involved here. But it is not in the (philosopher's) sense of a relation between two events. Rather, computability of one state from another, and consequently a sense of determinism corresponding to this computability became the hallmark of the notion of causality. Things came to such a stage by the time of Lamattrie that man, and the whole universe was likened to a machine, and it was thought that, if only we had the necessary intelligence, we would have been able to find out all the laws in all the fields and predict the future in its totality. But this view of man and the universe was to receive a set back from the very field of science,
particularly that of physical science with respect to atomic physics. That we cannot even describe a particular state of matter sufficiently, let alone predict a future state, was becoming increasingly evident, and with the principle of indeterminacy propounded by Heisenberg, this was confirmed finally.\(^7\)

The set back the mechanical model had to suffer and the rise of the non-mechanical model embolden one to think that the laws and concepts developed in any particular field need not accurately apply to all other fields. It is no more held with the enthusiasm of Lamattrie that man follows the blind mechanical necessity as a machine, that any future human action is predictable as the solar or lunar eclipse\(^8\)— if only we knew the laws.

If only we knew the laws! One is tempted to say this because of his enthusiasm to carry over the concept of causation in the physical sense to all the fields, rather than being satisfied with the general (wider) sense of causation which need not necessarily mean predictability or even the possibility of a complete description of a single state. If this is found increasingly difficult and even impossible in the very field of empirical sciences, how much more would be the problem if we employ it in the field of human actions! Hence the necessity to understand the Karmic law on a line different from and not parallel to the law of causation. It is all right to call it a causal law, if we mean it with all the necessary qualifications. That is, if we do not so much mean causal. Then we won't be tempted to ask the question as to what is the particular cause and what is the particular effect in the Karmic scheme except to say in general that actions have their corresponding consequences. It is all right to call
it a moral law, if we do not restrict the meaning of 'moral'. Then we shall not be made to wonder as to how can there be any field that is outside the rule of universal order. It is all right to name the order as causal or moral, provided we note that when we say one or the other we are changing not from one field to another, but from one perspective to another. Then we shall not be prompted to ask the question as to what are the fields of the respective laws. And we won't be so much confused as to whether Karma is a fact or a fiction, a postulate or an assumption, a rational theory or a mere belief.

But instead of considering any of these issues in isolation we shall go ahead with our attempt to clarify the notion of Karma. We shall first consider the relevance of the evidence from the empirical sciences which purport either to support or to refute the theory.

B. RELEVANCE OF EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Those who hold that empirical facts are relevant to the theory of Karma and rebirth may be divided into two groups: those who put forward facts to deny the theory, and those who want to support it by such facts. The 'evidences' for or against are mostly from the fields of biology and psychology. We shall consider only one or two of such attempts, and sum up with a few general remarks on such endeavours.

But, before going into any such particular attempt, let us make a few observations on the situation:

1. There is the general idea that the notion of
Karma and rebirth is fairly simple needing no clearer formulation. This paves way to the possibility of various understandings, and the consequent confusion.

ii. Most people are particular only that the theory must not be abandoned; but they do not mind in what way it is held. (This, of course, not to be said with respect to people in whose lives this notion is playing a significant role, but only with respect to the theoreticians in the field.) As a consequence, deeper analysis of the issues involved is rare. When some think it stands or falls with the support or removal of support from extraneous sources, some others hold that the theory is purely metaphysical, and as such the empirical facts are irrelevant. Those who hold that the theory is only metaphysical would be at pains to show that something still remains even after the empirical significance is taken away. As a middle way, some people hold that the empirical facts may be relevant, but that they do not, and cannot, constitute an essential proof or refutation of the theory.

iii. But what is often lost sight of is the need to guard the theory from unnecessary support and unwarranted attacks from the fields other than that in which the theory has its meaning and relevance.

iv. This does not mean that the theory, if accepted as religio-philosophical, should not be allowed to be reinterpreted or modified in the light of newer insights. Only it is meant that in any attempt to reinterpret, the purpose must be to clarify and guard the significance of the theory, and not to purge it of its essential meaning by subjugating it to such analyses as adopted by naturalists and empiricists, who either deny the supernatural or want
it to be brought under the empirical method — which comes to the same.

v. At the same time, the newer and clearer understandings in other fields might be the fitting occasions to rethink and reconsider the issues involved in the acceptance of the theory. For, at no time can we be too sure that we are fully in a position to theorize on such crucial matters.

vi. But this does not mean that we are entitled to reject a religio-philosophical theory in favour of any empirical approach which promises to include all truth, but would not be, after all, capable of doing it.

With these general observations we shall go into the considerations of a somewhat representative attempt to deny the truth of Karma and rebirth. This is the attempt by Swami Iswarananda in his book: "Does the soul Reincarnate?"

According to him there is an "unbroken material (protoplasmic) continuity" from one generation to another, and this forms the "physical basis of inheritance". This physical continuity of the offspring with the parent organism does not allow the "indivisible unity, persisting identity and separate existence at all times of every īvā from all other īvās". But these three ideas are so essential to the doctrine of Karma and rebirth, for it is the same individual that is reborn according to this theory. This leads Swami Iswarananda to think that the findings of biogenesis call for a reconsideration of the Hindu understanding of the many souls that exist eternally and are born again and again in different bodies. Parallel to the cell-division and physical multiplication, he suggests
a self-division and multiplication of souls. Of course, he admits, there is no evidence from the field of biogenesis for assuming that one single soul (say purusa) got multiplied into many in the course of creation. But the "logic of biogenesis" points to this assumption.

Now, if this is accepted, then the whole theory of Karma and rebirth will have to be rejected or at least reinterpreted radically. Swami Iswarananda's reinterpretation retains Karma in its "internal sense" in as much as none can escape the "psychological effect of one's own actions as long as the individual is alive". But this reinterpretation is as good as rejecting the theory. For one thing, it is not clear what he means by the "psychological effect of one's own actions". Does it mean something that affects the individual only temporarily? Then it is really not significant. It is a temporal adjunct to the soul that is eternal. Secondly, this interpretation makes morality superficial. For it is the enlightenment that enables one to be moral; not that being moral leads to enlightenment. It must be noted that what is said is not merely that morality is not a necessary step to enlightenment; but that morality cannot be a step at all; that it comes after enlightenment. This complete reversal of the usual understanding is reminiscent of the suggestion by some scholars (like, Schweitzer, for instance) that Indian thought is not ethical, but mystical. In spite of all that could be said in favour of such a view, it must be pointed out that it is wrong to deny the role of the ethical aspect in making a man human/divine. Hence the internal sense that Swami Iswarananda is granting to the theory of Karma is as good as no sense.

What is striking about Swami Iswarananda is not so
much his refutation and rejection of Karma and rebirth; but his understanding of such a religio-philosophical theory of Karma and rebirth as a theory that needs explication in terms of physical and natural sciences. He has taken the theory as signifying something that stands or falls with support or removal of support by "evidences" from science. The trend is absolutely fruitless and even dangerous in so far as Swami himself may have to reject the very idea of soul as something that is 'not-physical' if he chooses to press his method a little further. Of course, he says the rejection of this theory of Karma and rebirth does not affect the essence of Hinduism. But what would be left of Hinduism or of any religious/philosophical system if it can exist only by courtesy of a naturalistic or empirical mode of analysis and understanding?

We shall now consider Swami Iswarananda's stand in some detail.

There is a particular understanding of man that underlies Swami Iswarananda's criticism of the theory of Karma and rebirth. The understanding of 'man' as composed of two parts, one physical, the body, and the other non-physical, the soul. And when he suggests another set of theories, he still holds on to this model. The same model where man is composed of the physical and spiritual parts. Is it necessary to understand this distinction between body and soul as a distinction between two real entities? Is not the man that is real and is not body or soul only an abstraction? It is natural that the understanding of man as that of two parts will have to face problems — not only from biogenesis and science, but even in the metaphysical realm. For instance, the question as to how the two interact. It is therefore at this point that we should start our
searching. What Swami Iswarananda does is, rather, to substitute one set of theories by another which would also be open to the same philosophical attacks as the previous theory.

Swami Iswarananda is considering certain scientific developments as a threat to the theory of Karma and rebirth. This is because he supposes in the very beginning that this theory is not so much metaphysical as empirical. Otherwise he would have seen that the metaphysical, in spite of all its connections with the empirical, cannot really have any threat from the empirical evidence; and he would not have subjected the theory to an analysis that gives primacy to the empirical. On the other hand if we treat the subject from within, that is without treating it from a scientific standpoint, it might enable us to see what exactly is the meaning of the theory, and what the meaning of the different concepts are. This will lead us to continually re-examine the concepts employed in the theory and the theory itself, rather than first trying to examine the very frame-work of the theory. And even when we re-examine the frame-work of such a metaphysical theory with respect to such scientific and sociological facts, the idea must be to consider the metaphysical by itself and not 'scientifically'. That is to say, one should not be tempted to think that it is the empirical investigations and evidence that lend support and strength to metaphysical theories. This does not mean that empirical knowledge cannot "point" to an error in a metaphysical theory. It might very well. But when this happens, what is to be done, is to examine the theory, consider it on its own merits and render the necessary reinterpretations; but without subjugating the metaphysical to the empirical. The danger is that of naturalism; but, of course, Swami Iswarananda does not go the whole hog. He has to abandon
this predilection for the scientific investigation when he accepts the soul as that which is not physical. (He suggests a theory of self-(soul)-division parallel to the physical cell-division.) He retains the soul, the supernatural. Only he yields to the naturalistic temptation in so far as it enables him to substitute one theory which includes the supernatural elements by another theory which also includes this supernatural.

But it is unclear as to what is gained by this substitution. The theory that is suggested by Swami Iswarananda is also open to all the important doubts that could arise with respect to the earlier theory. And almost all the metaphysical problems that arose with respect to the denounced theory do arise again. Such as, for instance, the mode of interaction between the physical and the non-physical. Perhaps the only advantage of Swami Iswarananda's theory is that it is less open to immediate criticism from the scientific standpoint. But this is also not very clear. In any case, the criticism from the religious and metaphysical standpoint will be much more. If one is to give as much importance as Swami Iswarananda gives to the questions from the scientific standpoint, why not give an equal importance to the objections from the metaphysician's and religious man's standpoint? One could have very well distinguished between the metaphysical and the empirical in the very beginning. And this would have avoided the raising of the kind of questions that Swami is raising; and one could consider the more serious problems that plague the theory of Karma and rebirth.

All this points to one thing: what is wrong with Swami Iswarananda's stand is not so much the drawbacks of his new theory, but the 'way' he is trying to avoid one theory and to arrive at another. What is evident in his analysis
is an inclination to divest a philosophical theory of all its metaphysical significance, and a readiness to subject the theory to empirical analysis. (But it may be noted that this method is used only to get rid of a theory. As soon as another theory is posited, the method is abandoned. If one is to depend so much on the scientific evidence for explaining such notions as Karma, soul etc., it is not clear how one can arrive at a soul which, according to Swami I. too, is purely non-physical.) In doing philosophy it is important to clearly distinguish between the metaphysical, the religious and the empirical, and to avoid any confusion between these.

Further, what can be profitably done with a religio-philosophical theory is to consider it in itself and probe to find out its real significance, without being too anxious about its conformity with scientific theories. Such an endeavour might mean also clarifications and even re-interpretations, but not so much the abandoning of the theory for its inconveniences. Considering what Swami Iswarananda has gained by his method of analysis, one is inclined to say that the other method we have suggested above would have yielded better results. It would enable us to get nearer to the meaning and significance of a theory understood at its best, instead of fighting against a theory after assuming a convenient but not-so-suitable or not-comprehensive interpretation of it — an interpretation and meaning that is perhaps not so much a part of the theory.

Another attempt to consider empirical evidence as relevant to the theory under consideration is from the field of parapsychology. Dr. Ian Stevenson,\textsuperscript{13} for instance, is one who has done a lot of painstaking studies in this
matter. We shall mention only the salient points about this approach without discussing his thesis or method in detail.

i. Dr. Stevenson's claim is not of any "conclusive" evidence for reincarnation. But he argues that the evidence justifies much more extensive and sympathetic study of this hypothesis than it has hitherto received.14

ii. He bases his study mostly on the reports of claimed memories of earlier lives.

iii. By reincarnation he does not actually mean the rebirth of Hinduism which is a corollary to the theory of Karma. On the other hand he thinks it better to delink reincarnation from the theory of Karma where a causal link exists between the conduct in one life and the circumstances of another.15

iv. And yet he thinks that the assumption of "some form of surviving personality" is warranted by the fact of memories, some people have of their past lives.

Unlike Iswarananda Swami's attempt to deny the theory of Karma and rebirth in view of empirical evidence from biogenesis, Ian Stevenson's attempt is to adduce support from certain parapsychological phenomena (esp. that of claimed memories of previous lives) for the survival of a person after death and his being born again into this world.

There are a few things to be noted with reference to this attempt:
i. After extensive research and analysis the evidence for rebirth is admittedly not conclusive, but only the hope is there that it will "support" the theory.

ii. What this evidence will support is also not very clear. Does this evidence from "memory" of the past life really support the rebirth of the same individual? Or it points only to some kind of physical and psychical continuity between generations?

iii. And this dependence on a few persons' claim of such memories appear to be an unsafe step in any way.

iv. It is important to note the distinction between two senses of reincarnation: — reincarnation understood as a purely empirical phenomenon, and reincarnation as forming a part of religio-philosophical theory. If it is the reincarnation in the merely empirical sense that is intended, one should not have any objection to such methods as Stevenson's. But if what is meant is reincarnation as part and parcel of Karma theory, then it is not clear whether the reincarnation here is only empirically held, or with a significance that cannot probably be grasped by empirical methods. Therefore it must not be too readily supposed that what evidence we have from parapsychology is supporting the theory of rebirth as associated with Karma.

v. Again as in the case of Swami Iswarananda's attempt to deny Karma on account of the biological evidence, we must say that any attempt to render support to the theory of rebirth (as associated with Karma) will not take us any great length.

vi. It may also be noted that such attempts have been
there with respect to other trans-empirical ideas — such as soul and immortality. And it is not at all clear what such attempts have achieved. Is it any further clarification of the idea itself, or a substantiation of a particular meaning and interpretation of it? In fact, the question is whether such ideas as soul, immortality etc., are really supported by such evidence from the empirical sciences.

vii. And finally it is noteworthy that attempts are being made from empirical standpoint both to support and reject the religio-philosophical notions; — whatever the worth of such attempts may be.

Underlying all these attempts is the idea that any theory, even the religio-philosophical ones, should stand the test of empirical investigations. And hence the attempt to base the whole analysis on the empirical meaning and implications of such theories. One such attempt is that of E. Steinkraus who even hopes that further discussion of the theory of Karma would be most salutory in seeking to make the facts of spiritual life more coherent and intelligible. But, he is against the idea of finding satisfaction readily in a traditional doctrine of Karma. In short, he wants the theory to incorporate historical and scientific observations.

But the question that immediately arises is this: In what way shall we incorporate the scientific and historical facts into this theory? Does not this project presuppose the possibility of clearly relating all the scientific facts to a theory which is mainly belonging to the religio-philosophical field? This seems to be an unwarranted assumption. Of course the underlying reason for launching
such a programme is the confusion as to how the empirical and the religious ideas are to be related. It is all right to say that a religious notion should not conflict with a known scientific fact. But, in spite of all its crudity when one is prepared to see the religious theory in itself and at its best, it is not at all clear how one can decide about its compatibility or incompatibility with a scientific fact. For instance, how can one ever decide the meaning and worth of one's belief in God by considering it in relation to scientific facts. Should this be the method at all? If this is not the way in which it is to be done what is the sense of talking about Karma theory incorporating into it the scientific fact?

Of course this is not intended to mean that science and religion can contradict. There is no question of contradiction or compatibility, because these do not operate in the same plane. This in spite of all their interrelationship in actual life. But to reiterate our mainpoint: That the religious and the scientific facts do not and cannot contradict does not mean that the scientific facts support religious beliefs. What is to be noted is that such empirical facts are not relevant to religion in the sense of being a support to or providing a refutation of religious notions; — in whatever other respects their relevance may be.

C. DEMONSTRABILITY AND RATIONAL BASIS

Apart from the question of the relevance of empirical facts to the truth and acceptability of the theory of Karma there is the important question of the 'rationality' or 'philosophical basis' of the theory. We shall consider the possibility of philosophical 'demonstration' or 'proof'
of this theory in the present section. Because, the acceptability of the theory is often supposed to depend on the possibility of such proofs. And we shall in our discussion consider first the attempt made by Eliot Deutsch, a famous philosopher of the West, to deny the theory of Karma on the basis of its demonstrability.

Deutsch's endeavour is to show that the Indians have not approached the theory of Karma critically. He tries to do this through a consideration of the status of the theory in Advaita Vedanta, according to him the most reputed system of Indian thought. His analysis is as follows: According to the epistemology of Advaita Vedanta the Karma theory cannot be justified and has no sufficient reason/proof to hold on. Because it is not demonstrable by any of the pramāṇas.

1. Pratyākṣa (perception) is the sense perception gathered from the sense-object contact. In the case of Karma it is not possible to have a knowledge from sense perception, since no immediate sense-experience is available.

2. Upamāṇa (comparison) and 3. Anupalabdhi (non-cognition) are the second and third means of valid knowledge. These two have their basis in the sense-perception. Hence Karma cannot be known by these means of knowledge. For, Karma theory has the basic presupposition, "As one acts, so one becomes". This may be applied and verified in this present life. But how can we extend it to the past and future? 19

4. Anumāṇa (inference) is the fourth means of valid knowledge. This inferential method requires an invariable
concomitance between the major and the middle terms. This is a mediate knowledge based on the apprehension of a universal agreement between two things. Karma cannot be established in this way. Apart from the inference, there is another notion of rational demonstration implicit in Advaita Vedanta. An idea or a doctrine may be regarded as demonstrated if it coheres with or follows from the basic metaphysical principles of Vedanta, and if its denial involves consequences which are self-contradictory. In this way too, Karma cannot be demonstrated since Brahman alone is the really real Reality.²⁰

5. **Arthāpatti** (postulation) is the next means of valid knowledge. It is an assumption. Fatness of one who does not eat by day is unintelligible in the absence of eating at night. Here the fact assumed is **the only one that can explain another fact.** Now this also cannot explain the theory of Karma.²¹ For, Karma is not the only supposition to account for the good and bad luck of persons. Predestination or similar theories can account for inequalities found in the world.

6. **Śabda** (testimony) is the last or the sixth means of valid knowledge received from the testimony of the scriptures or of reliable persons. In Advaita the term testimony is used with respect to 'Śruti', the Vedic Scriptures and Upaniṣads. This scriptural authority is accepted only for those truths which transcend the reason and the senses and are derived from spiritual experience. Eliot Deutsch contends that Karma cannot be a content of spiritual experience. Thus he concludes that Karma is undemonstrable according to Advaita Vedanta and hence logically it has the status of a fiction.²²
There are a number of problems to be noted in Deutsch's approach.

1. First of all, his taking Advaita Vedanta as representative of Indian thought is questionable. There is of course a sense in which one may say that Advaita Vedanta is the apex of Indian thought and that it incorporates into it all the other viewpoints that have established their claim as valid philosophical systems. But Advaita Vedanta in this sense ceases to be a system of thought or philosophy, but just an assumed name for the general features of the Indian perspective of reality colouring all the systems of the soil. But in so far as it is formulated in so many theories, and as to the extent that these theories contradict the theories in other religious and philosophical systems we have to take Advaita Vedanta as only one of the many systems of Indian thought. And its representative character is questionable and all too often questioned.

2. Whether Advaita Vedanta is representative of Indian thought or not, the reason for Deutsch's selecting it for a consideration of the theory of Karma seems to be that it promises, as he hopes, a good ground for rejecting the theory. As Brahman alone is real, everything else is unreal and what is unreal is a fiction. Therefore Karma is a fiction. This is the gist of Deutsch's argument. And this evidently is too naive a method to dismiss any theory worth the name. One feels like saying that Deutsch need not have taken the pain of considering the demonstrability of the theory by the various pramāṇas. Because, whether demonstrable by pramāṇas or not, the force of the argument is that Karma is not real because only Brahman is real; and what is unreal is fiction.
3. And it is surprising that he even capitalises
on the fact that 'fiction' has many meanings. True that
'fiction' is used as opposite to 'real'. But is it the
right understanding of Advaita Vedanta to say that when
Brahman alone is real everything else is a fiction? Does
even Śankara say that this world is a fiction in the sense
in which Deutsch uses the word — i.e. as a figment of
imagination? Is not the world and its multiplicity unreal
only when taken along with the really real Brahman?

4. Again, does not Śankara use theories to describe
his experience and to build his philosophy? Of course,
Brahman is anūrvacaniya. But that does not mean that
speculation or theorising is not possible with regard to
the Sāṃśāric realm. It only means that theory has its
limits. That we must not depend only on theoretical
knowledge. That we must transcend it. But this does not
warrant us to call all theories fictions.

5. Even in the consideration of the various pramāṇas
Deutsch is all too hasty to summarily use it to reject
Karma. For instance in the case of Pratyakṣa he does not
consider all types of perception — such as alaukika
pratyakṣa. Again, what are the limits of perception when
related to a religio-philosophical theory? And what is the
nature of its relevance? In the case of Anumāna he is ready
to note that there is a notion of rational demonstration
such that something can be held rational if the theory or
notion coheres with or follows from the basic principles
of the system — in this case Advaita Vedānta. But here
too he quickly rejects the notion of Karma as undemonstrated
because nothing can cohere with Brahman, the only Real.
Even Śankara, who accepts Karma theory, is to be expected,
then, to have not thought of coherence! Coming to Sabda
pramāṇa Deutsch says only Brahman can be the content of spiritual experience; therefore Karma is not a content of spiritual experience. Only what is the content of spiritual experience can be the meaning or the message of the Śruti etc. Therefore Karma cannot be derived from Śabda either. Easily argued; but not so convincingly.

6. The attempt of Deutsch may be seen in this way:
(a) Karma is, of course, not demonstrable by physical senses.
(b) Karma is not demonstrable by reason or inference because it depends on perception. (c) Karma cannot be the message of the scripture, because, only what transcends the reason and senses can be the truth of the scriptures. Because Advaita Vedānta rejects all theories in the ultimate analysis, Karma is not included in the ultimate category. And it, of course, does not find a place among the physical objects or the mathematical formulae. But what is so wonderful about it!

7. But, what is the status of a religio-philosophical theory? Does it fall so readily in either of the categories mentioned above — the three categories of physical, logical, and mystical? In fact a theory is neither a physical reality, nor a logical reality, nor mystical. And yet, it may connect all these together. Indeed, the worth of a theory may depend also on how well this connection is achieved.

8. That we may use theory and yet may not depend on the theory, that we may reject it in the realm that is beyond theorising — this is one of the important messages that Advaita Vedānta has for all. Not considering this fact has led Deutsch to employ the special status of theory in Advaita Vedānta for rejecting theory as such. It is like
committing suicide because this life is unreal. But this is not the best understanding of Advaita Vedanta in any case.

9. Of course Deutsch admits that the theory of Karma has practical advantages; that it explains the concept of mokṣa in a better way; that it is a significant solution to the problem of evil. But what does he mean by practical advantage, explaining mokṣa, and solving the problem of evil? Supposing that we are to understand the role and the meaning of a theory with respect to its function, it is surprising that Deutsch has not been able to see the theory as it is seen by most of the Indians.

10. What is most important for our consideration is the idea of 'rationality' that is involved in Deutsch's analysis. Also the scope of 'proof' in such matters. Most writers have clearly expressed the opinion that the theory of Karma is not provable. S.N. Dasgupta, the great historian of Indian Philosophy did not hesitate to say it openly that it is a dogma.23 But he should not be taken to mean that Karma, therefore, is unphilosophical or that Indian thought is not philosophical as some Western critics have tried to establish. A.R. Wadia in his article "Philosophical implications of the Doctrine of Karma"24 has also clearly stated that this theory is not proved or provable, but he holds that it is not irrational. Again Rys Davis goes a step further and says that it is not disprovable:

"Now the doctrine of transmigration, in either the Brahmanical or Buddhist form, is not capable of disproof; while it affords an explanation quite complete to those who can believe it of the apparent wrongs in the distribution here of happiness or woe."25
Evidently he too accepts the worth of the theory. Prof. G.R. Malkani also strongly affirms that the law of Karma has a claim on our reason in the sense that it makes the facts of spiritual life more coherent and intelligible. This law stands on its merits and is essentially a rational idea. All this points to one thing: that it is not necessary that something should be proved in the empirical or deductive manner for it to have the status of a worthwhile theory; that its rationality does not depend on such proofs.

That, 'proof' is a dying word in philosophy, is only too often emphasised. In philosophy something is not really proved, but is 'shown', or one is enabled to 'see'. Arguments are used. But they are not decisive. Coming to a vision through a rational process is very unlike doing sums. What is sought for is insight, and the insight is couched in words and presented in the form of a theory. 'Rational' — the term has a wider range of meaning than what can be established deductively. Proofs do not deductively infer, but only point to a vision. If this is so, then to talk of demonstrability of a theory even in the sense of deduction is asking for too much. Therefore to conclude, as Deutsch does, that Karma is a fiction because it cannot be demonstrated, is putting the whole thing in a wrong way. The theory of Karma, its rationality or philosophical worth, does not depend on its demonstrability in the strict logical sense. The theory of Karma and rebirth is as good as (if not better than) any other explanation for the problems that the theory proposes to give an explanation. Karma is not true as a mathematical formula, but it is the truth of one's very being — i.e. in the context where this is held. This must be sufficient philosophical reason to accept its worth. This, of course,
raises the question as to what is the criterion for deciding the philosophical worth or acceptability of a theory. (But we shall consider this later.)

Another point deserving consideration is whether this kind of a view affects the meaning of this theory (or of theory as such) substantially. Yes, it does in one sense. In so far as the theory is understood as built up only in answer to the question and doubts raised, it appears that the theory has suffered in status. But this view of theory gains in so far as the connection is established between the theory and the actual life. In the case of the Karma theory it may be said that the meaning of the theory is not so much in its supposed empirical and logical implications, but in its actual implications for life — in its function of ordering our lives and opening up greater possibilities.

D. 'DEVELOPMENT' OF THE THEORY

As we have seen in the second chapter, according to Raymond Panikkar we can detect three operative ideas regarding Karma in the Indian tradition. They may, briefly, be re-stated here for our analysis.

1. Karma as a saving sacrificial action by which the human and divine collaborate to maintain the universe and cause it to reach its goal. This aspect, which is the original idea, is expressed in the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas.

2. Karma as Karma marga, i.e., the path of action of good works as the way to human salvation and fulfilment. Action is inevitable and as such not entangling if it is performed in the right way and with the right spirit. It is not detachment from action that is required, but detachment in action from its expected fruits. The Bhagavadgītā still remains the highest example of this attitude.
3. Karma as the theory causing rebirth which may briefly and simply be formulated thus: 'as a man sows, so will he reap'; or, 'what one does, that he becomes'.

Though Panikkar thus detects three operative ideas of Karma, he does not mean that these are three stages in the development of the doctrine. He is merely attempting to bring together the many threads of Indian tradition regarding this point.

We may even say that it is possible to talk of the development of the theory in a certain sense though not in the sense in which many people have tried to trace it. In this connection, let us see the interrelation between the different meanings of Karma. When it is said that only sacrifice was meant by Karma first, and the theory or law of Karma is of later origin, it is sometimes implied that an essential change has taken place with respect to the meaning of Karma. It is further implied that, being of later origin, Karma theory is not so basic to Indian tradition. But this contention can be refuted by pointing to the principle of Rta in the Vedic literature, because both Rta and the theory of Karma presuppose the same thing — a universal order. As Dr. T. G. Kalghatgi puts,

"It is difficult to say that when and where the concept of Karma originated in India. Some have traced the origin of Karma in the principle of Rta. Rta is the cosmic principle pervading the whole world and Gods and men must obey it. It is the anticipation of the law of Karma."
Let us therefore consider the interrelationship between the Vedic and Upanisadic meanings of Karma.

True that the Vedic sense of Karma is ritualistic. Karma means Yajña or sacrifice. But there are two things to be noted here. In the first instance, in a world that is most ritualistic and where sacrifice is at the centre of the stage, it is only natural that any theory of human life will be woven around the sacrifice. Secondly, even in the Vedic context sacrifice is closely related to the concept of Rta such that the very purpose of sacrifice is the maintenance of Rta. Though the sacrifice is offered to the gods so that they may be strong and happy in pursuing the task of maintaining Rta, the gods themselves, like men, are to be governed by Rta.

It appears that here the status of law is ascribed to Rta. It is governed by gods. But in maintaining this universal order man has an important role to play — i.e., in so far as the sacrificial act is necessary to maintain Rta. Thus we see that human activities are not determined by something external to it, but these acts determine, to a considerable extent, what his world should be. This is the Vedic understanding of life and its laws.

Again there is the other type of sacrifice which were to be done for the sake of personal fruits. These were different from the niskäma-sacrifice which is not for any personal result, but for the maintenance of the cosmic order. The very distinction between these two types of sacrifices — and that too with reference to desire and fruit of action — shows the importance that is given to actions with respect to their consequences. Therefore,
whether we call it law of Karma or law of Rta, we see that it is the same perspective that determines man's life and activities. Whether we call it just sacrifice or call it action as right or wrong in the ethical sense, will depend on whether we view all actions from the point of view of sacrifice or we view sacrifice itself from the point of view of ethical considerations.

The point of the above analysis is not to say that it is the same theory that is present both in the Vedas and in the later understanding of Karma, but merely to suggest that, in spite of the differences of the theories, they have a specific relationship between them. Each is to explain and regulate the life of the individual. The ethical or the ritual emphasis in either case does not take away from this essential commonness. Especially to be noted is the fact that each employs human actions as the fulcrum of its explanation of life and reality. This explains the other more apparent connections between these theories. Some see a kind of historical process of secularisation from the Vedic and Brähmaic conception of sacrifice to the general conception of life itself as a kind of sacrifice. According to this view sacrifice is the sacred action par excellence which brings salvation and various kinds of well-being. But with the rise of the oppressing priestly class and the consequent ritualisation to the extreme, life itself came to be regarded as a rite and conducive to salvation and happiness, if conducted properly. Whatever the worth of this historical and sociological interpretation, it points to the similarities between the two viewpoints: the sacrificial where life's goal is attained through the rites and the ethical where life itself is considered as an elaborate sacrifice.
Coming to the other meaning of Karma as *Niskāma*,

*Karma* — the theory explicated in the *Gīta* — it must again be pointed out that, though Karma acquires a new aspect and importance with this theory, it is still based on the centrality of autonomous human action. It is around this that the theory of bondage and liberation, the whole understanding of the human pursuit, is built up. In so far as the ethical considerations are suppressed, this theory is different from the ethical understanding of actions as right or wrong. And this is certainly different from the sacrificial understanding and ritual orientation to life. And yet, this theory shares with the earlier-mentioned theories of Karma, a common approach to the understanding and the resolution of life's problems.

But, as already hinted at, attempts are also made to establish that there is a kind of development regarding the theory of Karma such that the theory is either (a) not very essential to Indian thought, or (b) not complete until some particular phase of development is reached. Without immediately going into a more detailed discussion regarding the essential nature of the theory, we may hazard a remark here; that the theory is essential to Hinduism; that, though the theory might in one sense be substituted without injury to the thought as such, the basic features of this theory will remain with any other theory that substitutes this one. And, regarding the attempts to see a development in the doctrine of Karma, we intend to discuss this with reference to the endeavour made by Dr. De Smet to establish that the theory passes through various phases in its development and reaches its culmination in the theistic interpretation of the *Gīta*. 
Even in Christianity we talk of development of religion and of the idea of God. But we also say that, whatever the stage of man's development, there was always the idea of God in man; that man had always a religious dimension. Thus it is clear that when the development of the idea of God is talked about, it is done not to deny the importance of religion and the idea of God as a necessary dimension of man's very existence. Rather, the very analysis of the development is intended to throw more light on this important belief. Therefore, we can say that the development talked of, is not one affecting the essence of God or religion. But it affects only the external modalities. Only the theoretical sophistication in the understanding of the issues is developed; the basic understanding itself is not necessarily improved. The implication herein is that the ancients too had as much awareness of the Ultimate as we do have today, in spite of all their primitive ways of expressing their understanding; that they were as much religious as we are with our sophisticated theories of religion. In short, development of religion and religious ideas is accepted only in a theoretical sense and not in the sense that there is development affecting the essence.

Now, we may ask whether it is in the same way that Dr. De Smet is looking at Karma. He perceives a development in Karma from the Vedic period through the Upanisads to the Bhagavadgita. He too may agree that the development from Vedas to Upanisads (with respect to Karma) is only textual and theoretical, not affecting the essence of Karma. But with the advent of the next stage, i.e. the stage of the Gita — which he takes to be solely theistic, or even monotheistic — a real change takes place. This according
to him is a crucial stage in the development of the doctrine. It is also the final stage where Karma becomes a meaningful theory by the adoption of God into the framework of understanding. One is led to think that De Smet is interested in the earlier stage of the development—the development of Karma from the Vedic to the Upanisadic stage—because he can take the next step, which he very much wants to take. In this respect he even forgets that the development talked about here in his analysis undermines the basic value of the theory of Karma; and the systems which accept Karma without accepting God are not considered to have developed it fully.

If De Smet is too ready to see a development in the theory of Karma such that there is an essential growth regarding it, it is because it helps him to arrive at the stand he wants to take, i.e., Karma is something man could have managed without, and, even in its most developed sense, this theory is not sufficient to enable us to understand and manage our lives unless it is associated with God.

And this leads us to a discussion of the interrelationship between Karma and God in Indian thought.

E. KARMA AND GOD

In his treatise *The Copernican Reversal: The Gitakāra's Reformulation of Karma* Dr. De Smet contends that monotheism is the corner stone of the teaching of Gīta. On the basis of this assumption he tries to show that it is the adoption of monotheism that has enabled the Gitakāra to show the way out of the entanglement of Karma-saṁsāra. What is involved here is not merely the disputable interpretation of the teaching of the Gīta as essentially
monotheistic. The more important implication here is that Karma can be a full-fledged theory only if theism (nay, even monotheism) is accepted. But it is an obvious fact that, though there is theism and monotheism in Indian thought, the thought itself is not just monotheistic or even theistic. Coming back to the question of Karma, it is also clear that the doctrine is as plausible and sound without the acceptance of any God as it is with God. There are various systems which do not bring in God, and yet show the way of release from the Karma-samsara. These systems provide the refutation of De Smet's stand.

What is underlying such an interpretation of Karma as incomplete without bringing in God, is the supposition that morality can exist only with God, and that God is God only if He controls everything even not allowing the autonomy of the moral law. E. Steinkraus expresses this when he says: "The Karma doctrine introduces a fundamental bifurcation between God and the moral law which is not only rationally difficult, but is out of harmony with the essential tradition of all Jews, Christians, and Muslims. What is God, if He is not interested in morality and justice ... ?" It is interesting to note one thing about his approach: That the bifurcation between God and moral law is "rationally difficult" to accept. As if God controlling morality does not affect the autonomy of the moral law! As if it is "rationally" tenable! It is clear that this conclusion of Steinkraus is prompted by the tenacity to hold on to one's own belief and the eagerness to do away with other people's beliefs as not so rational, because "it is out of harmony with the essential tradition of all Jews, Christians and Muslims." But, apart from the rationality of either view there is another important issue. If the theory of God
implies the autonomy of the ultimate law giver, and if the theory of Karma means the autonomy of law itself, do they not replace or substitute each other?

Let us now consider in some detail the relationship between God and Karma in Indian thought.

1. It is true that God is accepted in some of the Indian systems. But except Cārvāka, there is no system which does not accept Karma, whereas there are many systems which do not at all accept God. This leads one to imagine that if at all any one of these concepts is more basic to Indian thought, it is the concept of Karma. But is it so?

2. Again, what is the position of Karma or God when in a single system both these are accepted side by side? Is any of these inferior to the other? Or, do they enjoy the same status?

a. It may be said that even when God is accepted along with Karma, God is not in full control of this inexorable law. But does not God suffer in status then? If so, this use of the word 'God' is different from that in the Western context, or that without Karma.

b. On the other hand, if the law ceases to be inexorable then the question will have to be asked as to whether Karma is the same here as when it operates without God.

c. From (a) and (b) above, it appears that we cannot have both Karma and God without at least one of them undergoing an essential change in status. And here one is tempted to say that Karma actually substitutes God.
3. But if this is accepted we will have to say that a theistic Indian system truly is either theistic or Karmic but cannot be both. However, this cannot be claimed to be the best interpretation of such a theistic system. Of course, it is possible to say that the very fact of polytheism in India indicates how God is affected by Karma and such other theories. But the assumption here is that God is lesser God when there are many gods. This in fact, agrees with the understanding of polytheism as inferior to monotheism. But one need not subscribe to this view so readily. Nor is it necessary to conclude so quickly that either Karma or God in theistic systems is not original or genuine.

Therefore, we must take a closer look at the coexistence of Karma and God. In spite of all the appearances to the contrary, we may be able to find out how God and Karma are both accepted side by side without anyone of these being lowered in status. Suppose one says that Karma is made inferior to God such that God controls everything including Karma. But, it seems that there are Karmas which even the God cannot prevent, i.e., if a particular Karma is done, its result will follow invariably. Even in the case of the Karma where God's grace can remove the effect of the action, there too grace can be understood as a help and not the sole reason for the removal of the effect. Of course without grace it might not have been possible; but with grace alone it would not have been possible either. Man has to work it out in his life with the help of God. Hence we may say that even when God and His grace come into the picture, it is not necessary that Karma suffers in status; but rather we might interpret God's grace as help, though necessary help. And it is grace still because this help is sometimes understood as not deserved by man.
Thus it is possible to argue that even when both Karma and God are accepted side by side it is not necessary that Karma suffers in status. Similarly with God and His grace. Karma and God's grace can exist side by side without any one of these being affected, by the other. To quote Prof. Malkani,

"The God of love may indeed be there; and if he is there, the law of grace will certainly operate. At the same time, it will not be affected by the law of Karma. Karma is no doubt inexorable. The individual alone is responsible for what he makes of himself. But grace is always available to him if he seeks it." 

Again, "the goal is freedom from the recurring series of births and deaths ... God helps man, but God is not responsible for the lapses of man. God is blameless and stainless. He never interferes with the operation of the law of Karma which governs the lives of all living beings. That is in a sense the teaching of Hinduism." 

But, here we may again raise the question, "can Karma be talked of as substituting God in some way?" It is clear from the foregoing that the substitution talked of, does not mean that when both Karma and God are accepted either of these must suffer in status. In fact the very question of status is not real. The whole issue is the result of looking at God and Karma as if they were just a matter of doctrine or theory. And the problem becomes acute when the theory is taken out of its living context: practical as well as theoretical. What really happens is that when confronted with a crucial problem one takes recourse to both Karma and
God. Just as it is not warranted to brand the God of the polytheist as a lesser God, so also it is not necessary to imagine that either God or Karma must be suffering in status when accepted side by side. The support for saying this is the life of the individual and the community which alone is the proof and the integrating ground for the various theories.

And yet we may say that there is some sense in understanding Karma as substituting God. In facing the problems of life man takes recourse to God or Karma and not necessarily to both. It is possible that there can be a way of living where the admixture of God and Karma (as in Ramanuja) plays a role. But it is also clear that other equally significant and worthwhile ways of living are worked out, sometimes taking recourse to God alone, sometimes taking recourse to Karma alone. Therefore we might say that Karma and God are two paradigms representing two ways of living. And in this sense we may talk of Karma as partially substituting God. This enables us to understand why in one context the emphasis is on God, and why in another on Karma; to understand why, when God is above everything, Karma does not arise its head; and why, when Karma reigns supreme, God recedes to the background. And yet both Karma and God may sometimes coexist without either of these being subjugated to the other. All these possibilities can be worked out with sufficient theoretical systematisation, as they are worked out in the actual lives lived.

Of course, there is the question of different emphases in different contexts, and a consideration of these is likely to lead us to the "actual" differences between different perspectives. But we shall take this up only in the conclusions.
Another point worth noting in this connection is the relationship between God and adṛṣṭa. Many of our joys and sorrows cannot be traced to any work done by us in this life. Even those that are due to acts done in this life, do not arise out of them immediately, but after some time. A wicked man in the heyday of youth may be a sufferer in the infirmity of old age. Our good actions produce a certain efficiency called puṇya (merit), and bad actions produce certain deficiency called pāpa (demerit) in our souls. This stock of merit and demerit accruing from our good and bad actions is called Adṛṣṭa. There is nothing more mysterious in the concept of Adṛṣṭa than in those of virtue and vice.

Adṛṣṭa is understood as an unintelligible principle. If so, how is it that adṛṣṭa manages to produce the proper consequences? Hence it is argued that adṛṣṭa must be guided by some intelligent agent to produce the proper consequences. Individual selves cannot be said to direct or control adṛṣṭa, and further, it is not rare that adṛṣṭa defies the control of their will. So the intelligent agent, who guides adṛṣṭa is the eternal, omnipotent, and omniscient Divine Being. In other words, it is God who controls our adṛṣṭa and dispenses all the joys and sorrows of our life, in strict accordance with it. God gives us the fruits of our actions in the shape of enjoyments or afflictions like a wise and able king rewards or punishes his subjects according to their actions, good or bad. He is the dispenser of the fruits of our actions.

F. KARMA AND FREEDOM

Freedom from Samsāra being the ultimate goal of man, it is important to consider to what extent the theory
of Karma is helpful to attain this goal. But it is necessary to take note of two things here: (a) In the first instance freedom in the sense of mokṣa or ultimate liberation should not be taken simply in the negative sense. Of course, freedom is understood as the release from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. But if Karna-Saṁsāra is not understood as explaining away this earthly existence, but as trying to give a meaning to it, — a meaning that transcends its temporality and finiteness then there is no necessity for sticking on to the negative sense of freedom or mokṣa. (b) Secondly, it must be emphasised that moral behaviour is the ladder to liberation. And the question is: to what extent is the theory of Karma conducive to moral behaviour? In spite of the evident emphasis of this theory on good actions, there is a repeated attempt to accuse the theory of being fatalistic. If this charge is correct in the least, then the whole theory is self-defeating in so far as it does not allow individuals the freedom to choose between alternatives, there by ruling out both the responsibility for the deed and possibility of merit and demerit accruing as a result. Therefore, we shall consider this issue in some detail.

Eliot Deutsch is only one of the many who consider the theory of Karma as liable to the criticism of it as being fatalistic. The acceptance of Karma is supposed to make for a kind of apathy in one's attitude towards life. He is well aware of the fact that the doctrine itself affirms the possibility of change, and that it is open to one to remake his life, and that the future is not a finished product like the past. Nevertheless, he contends that in practice the theory encourages a tendency to give up in the face of the enormous burden of one's past experience. Because it is easier to accept one's position, one's behaviour as governed
by one's predispositions, than it is to change it; and

alas, Karma readily supports this attitude. However, Deutsch

is quick to add that this is, at least in theory, too

mechanical an interpretation of the theory of Karma and is

thus a "misinterpretation". But then it is not at all clear

why he should consider it as a strong objection if Karma

is accused of being fatalistic. He even considers the theory

as highly inconvenient on account of this. Suffice it to say

that this indicates how irresponsible one can be when one wants to denounce a theory.

Almost everybody who has said anything about Karma has

invariably touched this question of fatalism. According to

Prof. G.R. Malkani,

"The commonest objection is that the law leads
to fatalism, the tendency to take suffering,
poverty, disease etc., for granted. People do
not exert themselves sufficiently to remove the
causes of their misfortune. Everything is blamed
on the law, and man's power to find redress is
discounted." 42

But, unlike Deutsch, Malkani is clearly supporting the theory
against this attack. He affirms that man himself is the
master of his destiny; that no act of his can go unrewarded;
that he can begin to act and improve his lot any moment. It
stands to reason that if my present condition of life is the
result of my past actions, my future will depend upon what
I do in the present. Thus, according to him, the law of Karma
gives us the strength to face with courage the challenge of
life without any excuse for our moral failures. It is a fully
dynamic theory which says that no human effort will ever be
lost, that nothing will come our way which we have not deserved.
In view of the foregoing considerations we are inclined to think that the objection that Karma theory leads to fatalism is not so fatal. Our argument may be summed up thus: the present, though the result of the past, is not wholly determining the future. Here, by the 'present' is meant the result of the past alone. This does not include the whole of the man, the doer of the action, though there are several constrictions on him. The future, thereof, is determined by the present actions which are not wholly determined by the past. The circumstances may be determined to any extent, but not that man or his actions are the products of his circumstances. A.R.Wadia puts it pithily when he says:

"A man's past Karma determines the field, the environment, in which he is born; but it is left to him to build up his new Karma within the limits of his environment."\(^43\)

There are a host of other such points raised against the theory of Karma. For instance, that it is anti-social, individualistic, etc. But it is forgotten that Indian Ethics, like any counterpart of it, is social in nature. Moreover, moral integrity is considered essential for the spiritual preparation for moksa. Of course, there is some point in saying that the theory must be re-interpreted to include inter-personal responsibility of persons such that one can suffer for another's evil doing, that is, within certain limits. But it is evidently a misunderstanding to say that the theory is as such individualistic and anti-social. Eliot Deutsch makes the same mistake when he contends that a moralist or a sociologist could present a strong case for showing the social inconvenience of Karma.\(^44\)
It must be said, in view of these prevailing criticisms, that it is not the theory of Karma, but a misunderstanding or a misinterpretation of it, that can lead to individualistic and anti-social attitudes or to fatalism. Of course, one can say "this is my Karma" and sit tight in the face of obstructions. But then it is not the Karma theory that makes him to give up trying. Just as it is not the mistake of God or of belief in God if one says, "anyway God's will will be done, why should I bother"? In either case it is the misunderstanding of the idea that plays havoc. One wants to avoid trying, or cannot try very hard, and gives the explanation that it is God's will, or it is his Karma. It is clear that what is at fault is not the theory but its use. Therefore, it is not just to say that Karma leads one to fatalism whereas belief in God, for instance, does not. If Karma can be misunderstood, so also can God be.

Misunderstanding can be because of many reasons. One may not be very eager to understand it, but only to use whatever understanding that immediately helps, as in the case of the man who does not find a way out of his problem, cannot face it, and says 'it is my Karma', in a bad sense. When one says 'it is my Karma' in a good sense, i.e. the sense in which this response helps him to face this life-situation, we may then say that he has understood the theory of Karma and that he has correctly used it.

Another important source of misunderstanding is to forget that Karma or God is only the "last explanation". If I do whatever is possible to be done and then finally say that it is my Karma or it is God's will, then it is less likely to be misused or said in frustration. But, if whenever I have a problem I am inclined to say that "it is my Karma" or "it is God's will" then the likelihood is
more that it is said in a bad sense, i.e., meaning "what can I do about it"! This is because I have used this "last" explanation as a convenient first explanation. It is something like using the name of God in vain. For example when it is said "God does everything", if one asks "Does He move this leaf also?", then, this is a clear misunderstanding.

Misunderstanding is also possible when the theory is taken out of its context. This misunderstanding is very often linked with a misinterpretation of the theory, as when one, who is not taking the total system into consideration, accuses the theory of this problem and that. Total context means the other theories of the system, and also the way of living that is stimulated and in a way supported by the system. In fact it is the total life, practical as well as theoretical that constitutes the context of a theory — whether it is that of Karma or of God.

In the whole of the above analysis we have used the phrase 'theory of Karma' without actually limiting it to any particular interpretation of it. Of course, we mean the theory regarding actions. But it must also be noted that we have not meant just one 'theory' or merely a theory of 'actions'. We do really mean the whole context where the theory finds its place along with the other connected theories. In short, a way of looking at life, a way of taking the events of life, such that there is the possibility of enriching life itself. It is necessary to take the theory in its fuller sense so that we avoid a great many of misunderstandings. And thus we are enabled to get a better glimpse of its meaning as a reasonable explanation to the problem of life, and as a stepping stone to a higher and liberated level of being — that is, moksa.
'Explanation' to the problem of life! This we shall discuss in the following section. We shall attempt and answer to the question as to how the theory of Karma and rebirth, along with other connected theories in the context, provides an explanation to the problem of life in general, and to the problem of evil in particular.
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