

# Reincarnation

## and the enigma of the After Life

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The Author, Denys Jackson, carefully examines a number of theories of Reincarnation and replies to each. The final section on "the Christian belief in the after life" summarizes the basic doctrine used in giving the replies. -EDITOR

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The latest period of Western history has been marked by considerable reaction of modern thought against the "scientific" materialism dominant at the turn of the century [i.e. the beginning of the 20th century]. Recent discoveries in physics have undermined the confident dogmatism of those who held that all that is observable, when investigation has been pushed to its farthest limits, will prove to be expressible in terms of matter, length and time. (i.e. of matter and energy). As Koestler has shown in detail in his latest work, "Janus" the Darwinian theory of the origin of species by natural selection which held the field for so long has been shown by the latest research to be untenable as an explanation of existing reality. It is no longer possible to wave away the large class of phenomena inaccurately labelled supernatural (the correct term is preternatural) which have been the field of psychical research, as mere fantasy to be ignored.

A very large number of those who now reject materialism, however, and have come to see that the methods of "science" can explain neither life nor mind, and can answer none of the deepest questions which thoughtful men have posed through the ages about the world order and its meaning, have an ingrained prejudice against the Christian orthodox tradition of our forefathers. Their acquaintance with it is commonly superficial.

In their adult life, all that they have read and heard assumes that the basic propositions of "Church Christianity" are of an "outworn" kind that no "modern man" can possibly accept. They prefer to seek enlightenment from a new source, "The wisdom of the East" whose alien character gives it the added appeal of novelty to those disillusioned about all things western, while its abstruse complexities of myth and symbol have an irresistible attraction for the sophisticated.

### THE TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS

Since the great religious systems of the East - apart from Islam, a Judeo-Christian offshoot - are based on the idea of "reincarnation", it is not surprising that this idea has come to be accepted by a very large number of our contemporaries. Belief in the transmigration of the soul from one body to another is very ancient, in the pre-Christian Western world as well as in Asia. Appianus tells us it was strong among the Teutonic people, and it was also a tenet of the pagan Celts. Pythagoras taught

it to the Greeks, and the later disciples of Plato - especially the great Plotinus - gave it a wide currency in the Roman Empire.

The Latin mind, however, was not attuned to it, and it lost ground with the triumph of Christianity, though recalled from oblivion for a time by the Cathar heretics of Southern France and Italy in the high middle ages. From the sixteenth century Renaissance on it was taken up by a small number of 'intellectuals' and romantic poets; but its large revival has only come in the de-Christianised West of our own [20th] century. Speaking of this faith as the "hope of the world", Irving Cooper, founder of the "Liberal Church" mentions a great and growing multitude who have found in it "the most logical response to a great number of problems of a religious, philosophic and social order".

The idea of reincarnation defended by modern Theosophists and Occultists - and by some who regard themselves as Christians - is not quite the same as the "metempsychosis" of the old pagan world. It has been adapted to the theory of evolutionary progress. In its pilgrimage through the ages, we are told, the soul of man may fall to the lowest human level, but never to animality, since this would imply loss of conscious human personality, making further atonement and new rebirth impossible.

## HINDUISM and BUDDHISM

In India, the doctrine of reincarnation has deep roots, going back beyond 1000 BC. The Hindu sacred books speak of it constantly. "As spring is reborn from winter" we are told "so life must be born again from death". Gautama Buddha, who built his system on Hindu foundations, held that the reincarnation of beings has its origin in eternity, and that gods as well as men are fixed on this "Wheel of Fate". By this idea, it is claimed, the inequalities of life in the world are accounted for. The present pain and ills of all men result from misdeeds committed in an earlier life, while well-being, the fruit of earlier virtue, if misused, will have to be paid for when the next life comes round. So "The whirligig of time brings about its revenges".

Certain critics have rejected reincarnation simply because it relies on Faith. For the Christian, this attitude is not possible. Faith is right and necessary when it is based on reliable testimony. The faith of the Christian in the "mysteries" of his religion is based on the proven authority and truthfulness of Jesus Christ, as manifested in His life, death and Resurrection. He came to teach truth, and He created an "organ of truth" the church, so that His word might be a growing, living voice through the ages.

What of Buddhism? The features of its holy founder are distorted by legend, while it is very difficult to know what he really taught, even about reincarnation. He left no "organ of truth" that we know of, and there are a wild variety of Buddhisms in the world today. Jesus Christ appealed to "The testimony of His Father" as validating His claim to be a bearer of truth - and the language of this testimony is the unmistakable one of miracles, culminating in His own return to life after a frightful public execution. "If you all do not believe Me, believe the works". Buddha could not appeal to this kind of testimony, because for him, men and gods were alike subject to the same fatality, and needed the same deliverance. He never presented his doctrine as "the word of God", since he could not go beyond the structure of nature to a Supreme Being possessing personality. He simply took his system from Brahmanism - it was, in origin, a Brahmanic heresy.

The origins of Brahman Hinduism remain obscure. In early Vedic India, there was no more faith in transmigration than in the Greek polytheistic cults. The destiny of a man was settled in one life, for weal or woe - either the kingdom of Yama or Hell. The doctrine of reincarnation may perhaps have

been transmitted to the Aryans by other people, - and it was grafted into the social pattern to sanctify the priestly and warrior castes above all others. In a word, reincarnation is a faith with no rational basis.

Buddha diverged from Hinduism because he held, like the Greek philosopher Epicurus, that the gods were not the concern of man: his problem was to get off the wheel of Fate, with its unending births and deaths. This could only be achieved by eliminating desire, which engendered the wretched illusion of self-existence. His "Noble Eightfold Path" showed how this was to be done, by a life of utter self abnegation, merging the self with the rest of nature by compassion. At the end, with complete enlightenment, came absorption into "The All" - the dewdrop of the self being lost in this shining sea: this was Nirvana.

## REINCARNATION and CHRISTIAN FAITH

This depressingly negative concept of "salvation" is not held by all modern Buddhists, however, still less all western believers in reincarnation. Some of these have claimed that it is not incompatible with the teaching of Christ. No doubt, they say, an extension of the purification process indefinitely would practically suppress heaven and hell. But what if reincarnation takes the place of purgatory? Is not this in conformity with Catholic teaching, merely giving it a new dimension?

Let us start by pointing out that no Christian community of today professes reincarnation. To establish this requires no deep research - simply visit any Christian church, listen to the sermon and observe the way of worship and read the catechism or statement of doctrine. The message is that we must work for our salvation in fear and trembling in this one life - for after that will come the judgement, and our eternal destiny will be decided once and for all. The self will live on in eternal happiness or woe. This is the doctrine taught by Christ in the gospels, and Christians know no other way of salvation.

The "Reincarnationist Christian" holds that the anger of God, pursuing the Christian beyond the grave, will make him live again and again till he learns to live well. This kind of penalty however, can scarcely be considered a very strong deterrent to sin. Who is going to be worried unduly by coming back to life in an endless succession of chances to make good?

For the rest, the reincarnationists' idea that the doctrine of reincarnation was originally taught by Christ, but has been suppressed by Church authorities in the interests of a policy of moralization by fear of Hell, has not a scintilla of evidence to support it in the whole of Christian history. It cannot be found in the Gospels, in the writings of St. Paul and the other Apostles, or in those of the Fathers. Those who treat of the theory at all do so only to condemn it.

## THE WITNESS OF THE CHRISTIAN FATHERS

For St. Jerome, the great translator of the Bible, the theory of reincarnation is an invention of "stupid philosophers and heretics", Lactantius dismisses it as childish fable. St. John Chrysostom finds it of all theories the vilest. St. Cyril points out that if the union of the soul with the body is intended to punish the soul for its faults, then death is in itself good, and Resurrection, the reunion of soul and body, evil. The righteous should be put to death so that their souls may attain fulfilment, while the wicked should be preserved as long as possible to make atonement for their sins!

St. Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria both point out that the human consciousness provides no foundation for the idea of reincarnation. There remains in our memory no vestige of these supposed

former lives. Origen, who was given to bold speculation, seems to have had the idea of the pre-existence of souls before human birth - an idea which seems to be reflected in Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality".

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting  
The soul that rises with us, our life's star  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar  
Not in entire forgetfulness  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home".

Maurice Maeterlinck expresses the same idea in his romance of "the Blue Bird". But this idea of the pre-existence of souls - their existence for a period without any union with matter - is clearly something different from belief in the transmigration of souls through successive births and deaths. It seems clear that Origen held the view expressed very beautifully by Wordsworth, and not the one of which he was mistakenly accused by St. Jerome. [Origen's speculation finds virtually no support in the Catholic Tradition.]

It is important to recall that certain Fathers received their faith from direct disciples of the Apostles - St. Irenaeus from St. Polycarp, who was taught by St. John. This gives their testimony an exceptional value; their voice is, in effect, the voice of those who heard the Word of Truth from Christ Himself.

#### THE OBLIVION OF FORMER LIVES

In the first centuries of the Christian Faith, its defenders challenged the believers in reincarnation to explain man's oblivion of his former lives. We can remember our dreams, often enough, and retrace quite insignificant events of a distant youth when we are old: but before this all is darkness with no shining star.

The believers in reincarnation are, of course, well aware of this. One of them admits that "memories of reincarnation are extremely rare: this is why they may be considered as individual illusions". Even the Mystics, she concedes, "who have reached Being even to its essence", are in general without this knowledge.

Plato accounts for the oblivion by supposing that the souls drink of the "chalice of Lethe" (forgetfulness) before being reborn. But how, asks St. Irenaeus, could the philosopher possibly know of this chalice, if his memory had been expunged? What was held a more plausible solution of this problem was presented by the neo-Platonists. The "cup of Lethe", they said, was a mere symbol. It represents the new body assumed, which has the intrinsic virtue of depriving the soul of its memories. But how then, said the Christian apologists, has the body now lost its power of expunging experiences of our present life?

A founding mother of modern Theosophy, Madame Blavatsky, attempts a fresh development of the Platonic notion. She distinguishes memory, the reproduction in consciousness of perceptions of the past, by way of "fantasy", as a function of the brain shared by man with the animal world, from reminiscence, an intuitive perception which is a function of the spiritual ego. It is the latter which contains the visions usually held abnormal - the inspiration of genuine feverish fancies and those associated with insanity.

Every time we die, says Madame B., our Ego lays down its physical elements like worn clothing, putting on new raiment. So looking into our present organism for memories of past times is as vain as looking for bloodstains, to find traces of a crime, on a shirt which the criminal has never worn.

The same Ego remains - but its past secrets are not hidden in its "clothes", (the three bodies, physical, astral and mental, which it is now wearing).

#### FANTASIES OF BODY AND SOUL.

If this theory were based on the firm "facts of psychic science" claimed by theosophists as supporting it, its explanation would carry conviction. But is it? As to the existence of an aura, or atmosphere surrounding each person's body, there can be no question. Its character depends on the state of his health, the kind of food he eats and his sexual development. The human body also exudes particles scattered in the surrounding atmosphere, and emits electric fluids and radio-active waves. This "aura" may sometimes be perceived by persons whose sensitive faculties are exceptionally acute or abnormally stimulated.

But what evidence have we that it can be detached from the physical body? How can we verify scientifically that three bodies actually occupy the same space, one expressing "feelings" another "concepts" and the third "abstract thought"? How can they be differentiated?

How can the "aura" be detached from the body and examined individually? And whence comes the demonstration of the "organ of the future" of which another theosophic prophet, Mrs. Besant, speaks, capable of perceiving the phenomena of the "astral world"? How has she attained the knowledge that the brain is united to the mental world by way of the pineal gland?

We are told by theosophists of the years which the soul, after death, is to spend in each of the different super-terrestrial spheres. How have these been worked out, and how has the intimate life of the soul undergoing "purification" in an elaborate fashion been observed?

Such are the "experimental facts" offered us on the testimony of hypnotized personal mediums, or so called "initiates". Can they possibly be held seriously to be in any sense proven or reliable?

#### DREAMING AND HYPNOSIS

The feats we perform in dreams, the intuitions which some have received of future events, are said by theosophists to show that the "astral body" then leaves the physical body, serving as its conscious organ in the higher world. It would take too long, here, to elaborate a complete theory of sleep, and would take us far from our subject. But when the chaotic and unstable world of the dreamer is critically analysed, the "prophecies" are apt to disappear in smoke, and for what remains, the theosophical theory is really not needed as an explanation. Normal and abnormal psychology will suffice.

The idea that memories of a former life can be elicited by way of hypnosis is very flimsily based. A large number of people can be hypnotized - and some have claimed to have such memories, including mediums of Allan Kardec's school. But other mediums reject the idea of reincarnation, and can discover nothing of memories of past lives in themselves. For the rest, it is important to remember that the will of a hypnotized person is grafted on to the will of the hypnotiser - and where the latter is an advocate of reincarnation, and suggests this in his questioning, the subject will not fail to give him the answers he wants - especially if he or she is already a believer in reincarnation.

From the fact that a subject hypnotized by a reincarnationist relates details of a former life as though they were present to him, we should not conclude that his real memory has returned to remote past worlds. For a law well known in psychology is that of the "matricity of ideas". These are energies of the spirit, stirring up immanent tendencies which develop into external actions.

If we suggest to one under hypnosis that he is a soldier a king or a beggar, he will act accordingly: if we implant the idea that he is living in one of his former incarnations, he will respond by assuming the attitudes required of him. According to the Victorian Government's Inquiry Board of 1965 into "Scientology" witnesses, under treatment by the cult's experts, recalled visiting Heaven 11,767 years before, working on the planet Mars, and suffering execution by firing squad in Nazi Germany in 1936, before being "reborn" in 1937! There can be no proof whatever that these supposed "experiences" were more than fantasies.

#### THE CASE OF BRIDEY MURPHY

More impressive is the case of Mrs. Tighe, of California, who, under hypnotism, described in close detail her life in Ireland as "Bridey Murphy", born in Cork in 1798, who died in 1864 in Belfast. This story received world-wide publicity, and was related on radio and TV. It was held by many as a convincing demonstration of the truth of reincarnation. But investigation failed to discover any Bridey Murphy whose birth and death had been recorded in the dates and places named, and a number of other details given out by Mrs. Tighe were found to be incorrect.

Finally, an investigation in Chicago in 1956 seemed to demonstrate what Dr. Dollard, a professor of psychology in Yale had suspected, that hypnosis had elicited from Mrs. Tighe unconscious memories stored up in childhood. At that time she had visited constantly the home of a certain Mrs. Corkell, whose maiden name had been Bridey Murphy, and had shown much interest in her family's Irish background. Mrs. Tighe herself agreed that, under hypnosis, she had probably recalled memories of names and incidents told to her.

Dreamers, those under hypnosis, and children below the "age of reason" whose sense of the difference between reality and fiction is weak, and who accept easily the invasion of other people's ideas, make poor witnesses in the cause of reincarnation. Is it really surprising that in countries like India, where reincarnation is generally accepted, one finds especially frequent instances of children's "reminiscences"?

#### LEGENDARY MEMORIES

This being the case, the advocates of reincarnation are eager to prove that some people have real memories of their past lives when they are in full command of their faculties. They refer to Pythagoras, Empedocles and Buddha, as well as Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Besant. What are these cases worth?

The stories of Pythagoras' reminiscences, told by remote hearsay, has too many obviously mythological elements to be regarded as more than legendary. It is not necessary to believe that he was a conscious liar: St. Augustine's suggestion that he was the victim of an illusion induced by an experience in sleep is more charitable, and could be true.

Of Empedocles we know little enough - but he seems to have been a strange person, who claimed at one time to be a god, demanding sacrifice. His life is said to have been ended by suicide - he threw himself into the crater of Etna. Aristotle considered him to be an epileptic.

We know far too little about Buddha's personal life and even his original teaching, to place much value on his legendary testimony. In *Isis Unveiled* Madame Blavatsky declares that "a child cried out that he was Buddha's reincarnation". I recall my own small youngest brother parading as a tram conductor with convincing fervour. What is the value of this sort of thing as "evidence"?

It is said that Julian the Apostate, who invaded Persia at the end of his short reign, thought he had been Alexander the Great; and Ovid is supposed to have had an idea that he had taken part in the Trojan War. I myself have lately read a novel by an author who seems to be convinced that she lived before as James IV of Scotland, and gives as "memory" details of his actual death in battle at Flodden! Well, well!

#### MADAME BLAVATSKY AND MRS. BESANT

To form a judgement about Madame Blavatsky's testimony to past life memories, one has only to look at her life - her admissions of a violent and 'unbearable' disposition, her talk of a 'split personality' after training as a medium, her account of a trip to Tibet which she had never made, and her proven frauds in Egypt and in America. That she was subject to hallucinations is known. What else can we believe about her stories of previous incarnations but that, if they were not frauds, they were the product of her unbalanced mind?

Mrs. Besant was from childhood subject to hallucinations: her abnormal selfishness eventually induced a megalomania which inspired her with the desire to found a "religion of the future" while she was a victim of phantom terrors. The question about her is not whether she was credible but what was the nature of her mental affliction.

D. D. Home found twelve women who believed that they were reincarnations of Marie Antoinette: six or seven recalled their lives as Mary Queen of Scots: twenty had memories of being Alexander the Great. Nobody, it seems, recalled being John Smith or Jane the farmer's wife! Other candidates claimed to be Our Lady and Saint John!

#### DEJA VU EXPERIENCES

The experience of Deja Vu (seen before) which certain people have undoubtedly had, is claimed to be one which can only be accounted for by the theory of reincarnation. This, however, is not so. M. Ribot recounts the case of a man who 'recalled' on approaching the gate of the Earl of Sussex's castle, that he had seen it all before, along with donkeys in front of the entrance and persons on the road. It turned out that, when sixteen months old, he had been carried in a basket on a donkey's back and left there for a time with other donkeys and three guides.

Other cases can be accounted for by resemblances between previous thought and experience, by book reading, or by dreams. But some are very puzzling indeed, like the experience of the two ladies who found themselves on a visit to Versailles, 'transported' briefly to the palace at the time of Louis XV. This, however, does not seem to have anything to do with reincarnation! The impression of present and past apparently coming together in the same instant of duration is called paramnesia by psychologists. A number of hypotheses about this mysterious kind of experience have been offered: but none of them have any apparent relation to the idea of former lives.

#### THE "ASCENT OF MAN" THROUGH MANY LIVES

The reincarnation believer, if he is consistent, must reject the eternal punishment of which Our Lord spoke so often as the lot of the unrepentant, God-defying sinner. According to him, all human beings will, by means of the mechanism of successive incarnations, attain moral perfection. This inevitable "Ascent of Man", Gustave Geley holds, is in accordance with the law of evolution, which is "always progressive" - a proposition which modern biologists would certainly find highly questionable!

Well, the certainty that however ill one behaves in the life one is actually living, an eternity of bliss (if Nirvana can be called that) will be ultimately yours in the long run, weakens the moral sanction of the reincarnationists considerably (if one believes in reincarnation). And if one is addicted to self-indulgence and the satisfaction of every desire and passion, what obstacle to this is presented by the thought of death? It means a shedding of the polluted parts of one's humanity and the renewal of youth through an indefinite number of lives. To be sure, we are told that the sinner will come to hate his moral misdeeds in the long run, because of the pain involved in desire and possession. But will not many say to themselves "Let us make the most of this life while the undesirable change in us is still far off?"

#### WHAT IS KARMA?

The guardian of reincarnationist sanctions, we are told, is Karma, a law which causes every action, word and thought to be followed inexorably by an effect adequate and proportionate to it. But, if Karma is able to evaluate so precisely, we must attribute to it a super-human intelligence. Nor can this intelligence which penetrates our inmost thoughts be "human consciousness", since this is nothing but the sum total of recollected past experiences, according to the Theosophists. It is awakened as we gather the bitter fruits of our bad deeds, words and thoughts - that is the effect of Karma. [Even though our human intelligence and our human consciousness has NO memory of these former misdeeds!]

The Hindu peasant does not ask who or what Karma is. He "feels" that some justice must be diffused in the world, and he does not go further than that. [The result, of course, is a terrible fatalism and apathy to improve his circumstances.] A Jesuit Professor, R. F. M. Balam of the Gregorian University in Rome - a convert of the Brahmin caste - has explained that the idea of 'proof' as Westerners see it, has no meaning for Brahmins. For instance, their classical thesis is that all religions are equally good, as all rivers flow to one sea and many paths lead to a mountain top. The idea of questioning whether these analogies really justify the equalization they draw from them does not occur. But unless they do this, they are only playing with metaphors which have nothing to do with a real comparison.

The Theosophists understand well enough that Western critics cannot be put off by the statement that Karma is an "unknown" and by refusals to answer questions about why it should be held to exist. They fall back on what they call the "Experience of thousands of ages" by which man has become aware of the existence of unerring justice and wisdom.

But can "experience" alone reveal the existence of a dominion of supreme justice for men without a clear knowledge of God the judge? Certainly, Nature and the facts of human life as lived do not show it forth! As for the "justice of Karma" it seems to be an extension of the physical law of action and reaction into the moral world. Is this application of a mechanical principle to the moral sphere justifiable?

#### THE SANCTION OF KARMA

The truth is that the "Sanction of Karma" is devoid of logical foundation, and the fashion of its application to real life has led to controversies among intelligent believers. Thus, the Hindu Palhumanay cites the case of a man of good fortune and virtuous upbringing and life who contracts a horrid, incurable disease or is exposed to undeserved disgrace. If the first state is the reward of a virtuous previous incarnation, it would seem that the disaster is the fruit of another kind of incarnation! Madame Blavatsky's answer to this kind of difficulty was another evasion. Only the

"Lords of Karma" can know its mysteries, we are told. But who are these "Lords"? How can they know the secrets of human life, and how do they direct the workings of Karma?

#### THE ISSUE OF RETRIBUTION

The reduction of the idea of retribution for evil done to a mechanical process spanning a number of lives would result in grave consequences if it were actually applied in human life. The criminal taken before a Court of Justice would simply say, I acted according to the impulse of my "Dharma", which is determined by the evolutionary level I have attained. If you are now superior to me morally it is because you have gone through more reincarnations since you were a brutal savage. How can you presume to punish me, then, for what I have done? Give me time, and all will be redressed. For the rest, it was my victim's Karma to be murdered, doubtless for a crime committed by him in a former life.

So much for the reincarnationists' help to life. It may be added that if the logic of Karma is accepted, to free a human being from suffering is to delay his expiation, and the fulfilment of his moral evolution - though it may serve yours, since compassion is always commendable. Finally, as Mrs. Besant points out, there is no forgiveness of even involuntary or accidental deeds which would be sinful if done deliberately. The man who kills unintentionally must suffer the consequence by being killed after his rebirth - and so on.

How, one wonders, can anybody seriously regard a pattern of 'retribution' of this kind as a serious solution of the problem of the differences of human fortune and the impunity of human misconduct?

We have no notion of who we were or what we did in our supposed previous existence. How then, can we "repent" of them: and what justice is there in an infliction of penalty for sins of which we know nothing, committed by someone of whose identity with ourselves we are wholly unaware?

#### EVOLUTIONARY "ASCENT"

Faced with these problems, modern reincarnationalists are prone to fall back on the magic word "evolution". Let us give up the antiquated concepts of sin and retribution, they say, and see our lives, and the lives of all mankind, as moving in successive, slow stages towards a final perfection fulfilling our highest aspirations. But this still leaves the problem of our ignorance of previous existence unexplained - while, for the rest, if the universe is gradually growing better and better, how are we to explain such lovely characters as Hitler and Stalin, and the general mass of iniquity and horror in today's world, exemplified by such things as the mass genocide in Cambodia during these last years? Technical achievement is visible enough, but can we seriously believe in the emergence of a higher man by way of moral evolution, in these last two millennia?

Another serious difficulty about reincarnation is the problem of how the process began. It cannot have been preceded by one whose misdeeds deserved punishment, or good deeds reward, since he was launched on his first life!

#### AND A STATISTICAL PROBLEM

Then there is a matter of statistics. Three hundred years ago, the world's population was around 500 millions, the demographic experts calculate. In 1970 it was something like 35,000 millions - seven times as large! If we are all reincarnated souls, it would seem that each soul of the period of Charles

It would have a sevenfold spiritual representation today - and the increase is still continuing. This enormously complicates the Karma process, doesn't it?

#### THE CHRISTIAN BELIEF IN THE AFTER-LIFE

There are compelling rational arguments for the view that the human soul is not extinguished by the death of the body - and this has been the general belief of man since the first primitive ages of his history. But as to the after-life, mere reason and human science can tell us nothing. Christian belief, based on what is held to be Divine Revelation, leaves many problems unsolved, and is full of mysteries.

But, by linking eternal destiny to the accumulation of heavenly treasure by way of the love of God and active love of our neighbour in a single life on earth, it has the effect of creating a sense of urgency in well doing.

On the contrary, the evil of the doctrine of reincarnation is that the lazy and self-indulgent can postpone the practice of virtue all too easily, with the thought of the indefinite series of lives in which he will have time to 'catch up' in the long journey towards Nirvana. For the rest, the notion that existing evils are the result of an unchangeable pattern of fated development, in whose meshes we are all irrevocably involved, is not one favourable to any kind of social progress. One of the historic evils of India has been the passive acquiescence of Hindus of low caste in their inferiority and degradation as the effect of Karma, and the arrogance of Brahmins who hold their higher status to be due to the operation of some sacred decree of fate.

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