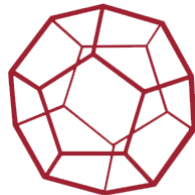


Reincarnation and Karma

From the Point of View of Modern Scientific
Thought

GA 34



Reincarnation and Karma

From the Point of View of Modern Scientific Thought

GA 34

by

Rudolf Steiner

1903

Source: [Rudolf Steiner Archive](#)

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Preface

There are two times Rudolf Steiner refers to a small book he published on the subject of Reincarnation and Karma. Below are the two quotes and their respective sources and dates.

Hence in my little book, Reincarnation and Karma, and also in my book, Theosophy, the ideas of repeated earth-lives and of karma could be worked out in relation to the thought-forms of natural science, but with reference to human individuality in contrast to the animal species.

*From Jesus to Christ (lecture 2)
October 06, 1911*

and

What can be said on this subject has practically all been said either in the pamphlet, Reincarnation and Karma from the standpoint of modern Natural Science, or in the chapter on reincarnation and karma in the book Theosophy.

*Reincarnation and Karma (lecture 1)
January 23, 1912*

In the second book quoted above I included as a prologue a lecture that is dated on the [RSArchive](#) as 26 March 1903, given in Berlin, with a GA number of "unknown". I also found on the [RSArchive](#) another short set of lectures listed under the GA number of 34 with dates of October/November of 1903 (these lectures here). Comparing the "GA unknown" and the first lecture of "GA 34", one can see they are the same lecture, different translations. Looking up on the [RSArchive](#) by date all lectures given in 1903, all those listed are listed as being given

in October and November only. This presents somewhat of an enigma as to where the month of March for the same lecture fits — whether an error or the months for GA 34 are in error. Needless to say, the month has little to do with the importance of the lecture. However, the fact that Dr. Steiner mentions the "little book" or "pamphlet" once 8 years later in 1911, then again in 1912 lends a great deal of importance to the lecture – and to the companion lecture and the course of questions & answers following as shown in the GA 34 version.

I present here GA 34 in it's entirety as a valid copy of the pamphlet Dr. Steiner spoke of in later years. The short preface on the Table of Contents source page mentions these "two essays originally published in *Luzifer/Gnosis*" — a monthly magazine that published the beginnings of Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy, soon after separated from the Theosophical Society. In his **autobiography** Steiner spoke of this publication:

Immediately upon the foundation of the German section of the Theosophical Society, it seemed to me a matter of necessity to have a publication of our own. So Marie von Sievers and I established the monthly *Luzifer*. The name was naturally in no way associated at that time with the spiritual Power whom I later designated as Lucifer, the opposite of Ahriman. The content of anthroposophy had not then been developed to such an extent that these Powers could have been discussed. The name was intended to signify only "The Light-bearer."

Although it was at first my intention to work in harmony with the leadership of the Theosophical Society, yet from the beginning I had the feeling that something must originate in anthroposophy which evolves out of its own germ without making itself in any way dependent upon what theosophy causes to be taught. This I could accomplish only by means of such a publication. And what anthroposophy is to-day has really grown out of what I then wrote in that monthly.

. . .

Very soon *Luzifer* had so far increased its circulation that a Herr Rappaport, of Vienna, who published a journal called *Gnosis*, made an agreement with me to combine this with mine into a single publication. Then *Luzifer* appeared under the title *Luzifer-Gnosis*. For a long time also Herr Rappaport had a share in the undertaking.

Luzifer-Gnosis made the most satisfactory progress. The publication increased its circulation in a highly satisfactory fashion. Numbers which had been exhausted had to be printed a second time. Nor did it "fail." But the spread of anthroposophy in a relatively short time took such a form that I was called upon to deliver lectures in many cities. From the single lectures there grew in many cases cycles of lectures. At first I tried to maintain the editorship of *Luzifer-Gnosis* along with this lecturing; but the numbers could not be issued any longer at the right time – often coming out months later. And so there came about the remarkable fact that a periodical which was gaining new subscribers with every number could no longer be published, solely because of the overburdening of the editor.

In *Lucifer-Gnosis* I was able for the first time to publish what became the foundation of anthroposophic work. There first appeared what I had to say about the strivings that the human mind must make in order to attain to its own perceptual grasp upon spiritual knowledge.

It appears clear to me that this pamphlet, shared below, should be considered one of the first formal discussions made by Steiner on the subject of reincarnation and karma and, therefore, an important read.

~ Anthony



Reincarnation and Karma

I. Reincarnation and Karma

Concepts Compelled by the Modern Scientific Point of view

Francesco Redi, the Italian natural scientist, was considered a dangerous heretic by the leading scholars of the seventeenth century because he maintained that even the lowest animals originate through reproduction. He narrowly escaped the martyr-destiny of Giordano Bruno or Galileo. For the orthodox scientist of that time believed that worms, insects, and even fish could originate out of lifeless mud. Redi maintained that which today is generally acknowledged: that all living creatures have descended from living creatures. He committed the sin of recognizing a truth two centuries before science found its "irrefutable" proof. Since Pasteur has carried out his investigations, there can be no longer any doubt about the fact that those cases were merely illusion in which people believed that living creatures could come into existence out of lifeless substances through "spontaneous generation". The life germs entering such lifeless substances escaped observation. With proper means, Pasteur prevented the entrance of such germs into substances in which, ordinarily, small living creatures come into existence, and not even a trace of the living was formed. Thus it was demonstrated that the living springs only from the life germ. Redi had been completely correct.

Today, the spiritual scientist, the anthroposophist, finds himself in a situation similar to that of the Italian scientist.

On the basis of his knowledge, he must maintain in regard to the soul what Redi maintained in regard to life. He must maintain that the soul nature can spring only from the soul. And if science advances in the direction it has taken since the seventeenth century, then the time will come when, out of its own nature, science will uphold this view. For — and this must be emphasized again and again — the attitude of thought which underlies the anthroposophical conception of today is no other than the one underlying the scientific dictum that insects, worms and fish originate from life germs and not from mud. The anthroposophical conception maintains the postulate: "Every soul

originates out of the soul nature," in the same sense and with the same significance in which the scientist maintains: "Everything living originates out of the living." [1]

Today's customs differ from those of the seventeenth century. The attitudes of mind underlying the customs have not changed particularly. To be sure, in the seventeenth century, heretical views were persecuted by means no longer considered human today. Today, spiritual scientists, anthroposophists, will not be threatened with burning at the stake: one is satisfied in rendering them harmless by branding them as visionaries and unclear thinkers. Current science designates them fools. The former execution through the inquisition has been replaced by modern, journalistic execution. The anthroposophists, however, remain steadfast; they console themselves in the consciousness that the time will come when some Virchow will say: "There was a time — fortunately it is now superseded — when people believed that the soul comes into existence by itself if certain complicated chemical and physical processes take place within the skull. Today, for every serious researcher this infantile conception must give way to the statement *that everything pertaining to the soul springs from the soul.*"

One must by no means believe that spiritual science intends to *prove* its truths through natural science. It must be emphasized, however, that spiritual science has an *attitude of mind* similar to that of true natural science. The anthroposophist accomplishes in the sphere of the soul life what the nature researcher strives to attain in the domains perceptible to the eyes and audible to the ears. There can be *no contradiction* between genuine natural science and spiritual science. The anthroposophist demonstrates that the laws which he postulates for the soul life are correspondingly valid also for the external phenomena of nature. He does so because he knows that the human sense of knowledge can only feel satisfied if it perceives that harmony, and not discord, rules among the various phenomenal realms of existence. Today most human beings who strive at all for knowledge and truth are acquainted with certain natural-scientific conceptions. Such truths can be acquired, so to speak, with the greatest ease. The science sections of newspapers disclose to the educated and uneducated alike the laws according to which the perfect animals develop out of the imperfect, they disclose the profound relationship between man and the anthropoid ape, and

smart magazine writers never tire of inculcating their readers with their conception of "spirit" in the age of the "great Darwin." They very seldom add that in Darwin's main treatise there is to be found the statement: "I hold that all organic beings that have ever lived on this earth have descended from one primordial form *into which the creator breathed the breath of life.*" (*Origin of Species*, Vol. II, chapter XV.) — In our age it is most important to show again and again that Anthroposophy does not treat the conceptions of "the breathing in of life" and the soul as lightly as Darwin and many a Darwinian, but that its truths do not contradict the findings of true nature research. Anthroposophy does not wish to penetrate into the mysteries of spirit-life upon the crutches of natural science of the present age, but it merely wishes to say: "Recognize the laws of the spiritual life and you will find these sublime laws verified in corresponding form if you descend to the domain in which you can see with eyes and hear with ears." Natural science of the present age does not contradict spiritual science; on the contrary, it is itself elemental spiritual science. Only because Haeckel applied to the evolution of animal life the laws which the psychologists since ancient days have applied to the soul, did he achieve such beautiful results in the field of animal life. If he himself is not of this conviction, it does not matter; he simply does not know the laws of the soul, nor is he acquainted with the research which can be carried on in the field of the soul. ^[2] The significance of his findings in his field is thereby not diminished. Great men have the faults of their virtues. Our task is to show that Haeckel in the field where he is competent is nothing but *an anthroposophist*. — By linking up with the natural-scientific knowledge of the present age, still another aid offers itself to the spiritual scientist. The objects of outer nature are, so to speak, to be grasped by our hands. It is, therefore, easy to expound their laws. It is not difficult to realize that plants change when they are transplanted from one region into another. Nor is it hard to visualize that a certain animal species loses its power of eyesight when it lives for a certain length of time in dark caves. By demonstrating the laws which are active in such processes, it is easy to lead over to the less manifest, less comprehensible laws which we encounter in the field of the soul life. — if the anthroposophist employs natural science as an aid, he merely does so in order to illustrate what he is saying. He has to show that anthroposophic truths, with respective modifications, are to be found in the domain of natural science, and

that natural science cannot be anything but elemental spiritual science; and he has to employ natural-scientific concepts in order to lead over to his concepts of a higher nature.

The objection might be raised here that any inclination toward present-day natural-scientific conceptions might put spiritual science into an awkward position for the simple reason that these conceptions themselves rest upon a completely uncertain foundation. It is true: There are scientists who consider certain fundamental principles of Darwinism as irrefutable, and there are others who even today speak of a "crisis in Darwinism." The former consider the concepts of "the omnipotence of natural selection" and "the struggle for survival" to be a comprehensive explanation of the evolution of living creatures; the latter consider this "struggle for survival" to be one of the infantile complaints of modern science and speak of the "impotence of natural selection." — If matters depended upon these specific, problematic questions, it were certainly better for the anthroposophist to pay no attention to them and to wait for a more propitious moment when an agreement with natural science might be achieved. But matters do not depend upon these problems. What is important, however, is a certain attitude, a mode of thought within natural-scientific research in our age, certain definite great guiding lines, which are adhered to everywhere, even though the thoughts of various researchers and thinkers concerning specific questions diverge widely. It is true: Ernst Haeckel's and Virchow's conceptions of the "genesis of man" diverge greatly. But the anthroposophical thinker might consider himself fortunate if leading personalities were to think as clearly about certain comprehensive viewpoints concerning the soul life as these *opponents* think about that which they consider absolutely certain in spite of their disagreement. Neither the adherents of Haeckel nor those of Virchow search today for the origin of worms in lifeless mud; neither the former nor the latter doubt that "all living creatures originate from the living," in the sense designated above. — In psychology we have not yet advanced so far. Clarity is completely lacking concerning a viewpoint which might be compared with such scientific fundamental convictions. Whoever wishes to explain the shape and mode of life of a worm knows that he has to consider its ovum and ancestors; he knows the direction in which his research must proceed, although the viewpoints may differ concerning other aspects of the question, or even the statement may be made that the time is not yet ripe when definite thoughts may be formed concerning this or that point. —

Where, in psychology, is there to be found a similar clarity? The fact that the soul ^[3] has spiritual qualities, just as the worm has physical ones, does not cause the researcher to approach — as he should — the one fact with the same attitude of mind as he approaches the other. To be sure, our age is under the influence of *thought habits* which prevent innumerable people, occupied with these problems, from entering at all properly upon such demands. — True, it will be admitted that the soul qualities of a human being must originate somewhere just as do the physical ones. The reasons are being sought for the fact that the souls of a group of children are so different from one another, although the children all grew up and were educated under identical circumstances; that even twins differ from one another in essential characteristics, although they always lived at the same place and under the care of the same nurse. The case of the Siamese Twins is quoted, whose final years of life were, allegedly, spent in great discomfort in consequence of their opposite sympathies concerning the North-American Civil War. We do not deny that careful thought and observation have been directed upon such phenomena and that remarkable studies have been made and results achieved. But the fact remains that these efforts concerning the soul life are on a par with the efforts of a scientist who maintains that living creatures originate from lifeless mud. In order to explain the lower psychic qualities, we are undoubtedly justified in pointing to the physical forebears and in speaking of heredity, just as we do in the case of bodily traits. But we *deliberately* close our eyes to the most important aspect of the matter if we proceed in the same direction with respect to the higher soul qualities, the actually spiritual in man. We have become accustomed to regard these higher soul qualities as a mere enhancement, as a higher degree of the lower ones. And we therefore believe that an explanation might satisfy us which follows the same lines as the explanation offered for the soul qualities of the animal.

It is not to be denied that the observation of certain soul functions of higher animals may easily lead to this mistaken conception. We only need draw attention to the fact that dogs show remarkable proof of a faithful memory; that horses, noticing the loss of a horse shoe, walk of their own accord to the blacksmith who has shod them before; that animals which are shut up in a room, can by themselves open the door; we might quote many more of these astonishing facts. Certainly, the anthroposopist, too, will not refrain from admitting the possibility

of continued enhancement of animal faculties. But must we, for that reason, obliterate the difference between the lower soul traits which man shares with the animal, and the higher spiritual qualities which man alone possesses? This can only be done by someone who is completely blinded by the dogmatic prejudice of a "science" which wishes to stick fast to the facts of the coarse, physical senses. Simply consider what is established by indisputable observation, namely, that animals, even the highest-developed ones, cannot count and therefore are unable to learn arithmetic. The fact that the human being is distinguished from the animal by his ability to count was considered a significant insight even in ancient schools of wisdom. — Counting is the simplest, the most insignificant of the higher soul faculties. For that very reason we cite it here, because it indicates the point where the animal-soul element passes over into the spirit-soul element, into the higher human element. Of course, it is very easy to raise objections here also. First, one might say that we have not yet reached the end of the world and that we might one day succeed in what we have not yet been able to do, namely, to teach counting to intelligent animals. And secondly, one might point to the fact that the brain has reached a higher stage of perfection in man than in the animal, and that herein lies the reason for the human brain's higher degrees of soul activity. We may fully concur with the persons who raise these objections. Yet we are in the same position concerning those people who, in regard to the fact that all living creatures spring from the living, maintain over and over again that the worm is governed by the same chemical and physical laws that govern the mud, only in a more complicated manner. Nothing can be done for a person who wishes to disclose the secrets of nature by means of trivialities and what is self-evident. There are people who consider the degree of insight they have attained to be the most penetrating imaginable and to whom, therefore, it never occurs that there might be someone else able to raise the same trivial objections, did he not see their worthlessness. — No objection can be raised against the conception that all *higher* processes in the world are merely higher degrees of the lower processes to be found in the mud. But just as it is impossible for a person of insight today to maintain that the worm originates from the mud, so is it impossible for a clear thinker to force the spirit-soul nature into the same concept-pattern as that of the animal-soul nature. Just as we remain within the sphere of the living

in order to explain the descent of the living, so must we remain in the sphere of the soul-spirit nature in order to understand the soul-spirit nature's origin.

There are facts which may be observed everywhere and which are bypassed by countless people without their paying any attention to them. Then someone appears who, by becoming aware of one of these facts, discovers a fundamental and far-reaching truth. It is reported that Galileo discovered the important law of the pendulum by observing a swinging chandelier in the cathedral of Pisa. Up to that time, innumerable people had seen swinging church lamps without making this decisive observation. What matters in such cases is that we connect the right thoughts with the things we see. Now, there exists a fact which is quite generally accessible and which, when viewed in an appropriate manner, throws a clear light upon the character of the soul-spirit nature. This is the simple truth that every human being has a biography, but not the animal. To be sure, certain people will say: Is it not possible to write the life story of a cat or a dog? The answer must be: Undoubtedly it is; but there is also a kind of school exercise which requires the children to describe the fate of a pen. The important point here is that the biography has the same fundamental significance in regard to the individual human being as the description of the species has in regard to the animal. Just as I am interested in the description of the lion-species in regard to the lion, so am I interested in the biography in regard to the individual human being. By describing their human species, I have not exhaustively described Schiller, Goethe, and Heine, as would be the case regarding the single lion once I have recognized it as a member of its species. The individual human being is more than a member of his species. Like the animal, he shares the characteristics of his species with his physical forebears. But where these characteristics terminate, there begins for the human being his unique position, his task in the world. And where this begins, all possibility of an explanation according to the pattern of animal-physical heredity ceases. I may trace back Schiller's nose and hair, perhaps even certain characteristics of his temperament, to corresponding traits in his ancestors, but never his genius. And naturally, this does not only hold good for Schiller. This also holds good for Mrs. Miller of Gotham. In her case also, if we are but willing, we shall find soul-spiritual characteristics which cannot be traced back to her parents and grandparents in the same way we can trace the shape of her nose or the

blue color of her eyes. It is true, Goethe has said that he had received from his father his figure and his serious conduct of life, and from his little mother his joyous nature and power of fantasy, and that, as a consequence, nothing original was to be found in the whole man. But in spite of this, nobody will try to trace back Goethe's gifts to father and mother — and be satisfied with it — in the same sense in which we trace back the form and manner of life of the lion to his forebears. — This is the direction in which psychology must proceed if it wishes to parallel the *natural-scientific* postulate that "all living creatures originate from the living" with the corresponding postulate that "everything of the nature of the soul is to be explained by the soul-nature." We intend to follow up this direction and show how the laws of reincarnation and karma, seen from this point of view, are a natural-scientific necessity. It seems most peculiar that so many people pass by the question of the origin of the soul-nature simply because they fear that they might find themselves caught in an uncertain field of knowledge. They will be shown what the great scientist Carl Gegenbaur ^[4] has said about Darwinism. Even if the direct assertions of Darwin may not be entirely correct, yet they have led to discoveries which without them would not have been made. In a convincing manner Darwin has pointed to the evolution of one form of life out of another one, and this has stimulated the research into the relationships of such forms. Even those who contest the errors of Darwinism ought to realize that this same Darwinism has brought *clarity* and *certainty* to the research into animal and plant evolution, thus throwing light into dark reaches of the working of nature. Its errors will be overcome by itself. If it did not exist, we should not have its beneficial consequences. In regard to the *spiritual life*, the person who fears uncertainty concerning the anthroposophical conception ought to concede to it the same possibility; even though anthroposophical teachings were not completely correct, yet they would, out of their very nature, lead to the light concerning the riddles of the soul. To them, too, we shall owe *clarity* and *certainty*. And since they are concerned with our spiritual destiny, our human destination, our highest tasks, the bringing about of this clarity and certainty ought to be the most significant concern of our life. In this sphere, striving for knowledge is at the same time a moral necessity, an absolute moral duty.

David Friedrich Strauss endeavored to furnish a kind of Bible for the "enlightened" human being in his book, *Der alte und neue Glaube (Faith — Ancient and Modern)*. "Modern faith" is to be based on the revelations of *natural science*, and not on the revelations of "ancient faith" which, in the opinion of this apostle of enlightenment, have been superceded. This new Bible has been written under the impression of Darwinism by a personality who says to himself: Whoever, like myself, counts himself among the enlightened, has ceased, long before Darwin, to believe in "supernatural revelation" and its miracles. He has made it clear to himself that in nature there hold sway necessary, immutable laws, and whatever miracles are reported in the Bible would be disturbances, interruptions of these laws; and there cannot be such disturbances and interruptions. We know from the laws of nature that the dead cannot be reawakened to life: therefore, Jesus cannot have reawakened Lazarus. — However, — so this enlightened person continues — there was a gap in our explanation of nature. We were able to understand how the phenomena of the lifeless may be explained through immutable laws of nature; but we were unable to form a natural conception about the origin of the manifold species of plants and animals and of the human being himself. To be sure, we believed that in their case also we are concerned merely with necessary laws of nature; but we did not know their nature nor their mode of action. Try as we might, we were unable to raise reasonable objection to the statement of Carl von Linné, ^[5] the great nature-researcher of the eighteenth century, that there exist as many "species in the animal and plant kingdom as were originally *created* in principle." Were we not confronted here with as many miracles of creation as with species of plants and animals? Of what use was our conviction that God was unable to raise Lazarus through a supernatural interference with the natural order, through a miracle, when we had to assume the existence of such supernatural deeds in countless numbers. Then Darwin appeared and showed us that, through immutable laws of nature (natural selection and struggle for life), the plant and animal species come into existence just as do the lifeless phenomena. Our gap in the explanation of nature was filled.

Out of the mood which this conviction engendered in him, David Friedrich Strauss wrote down the following statement of his "ancient and modern belief": "We philosophers and critical theologians spoke to no purpose in denying the existence of miracles; our authoritative

decree faded away without effect because we were unable to prove their dispensability and give evidence of a nature force which could replace them in the fields where up to now they were deemed most indispensable. Darwin has given proof of this nature force, this nature process, he has opened the door through which a fortunate posterity will cast the miracle into oblivion. Everybody who knows what is connected with the concept 'miracle' will praise him as one of the greatest benefactors of the human race."

These words express the mood of the victor. And all those who feel like Strauss may disclose the following view of the "modern faith": Once upon a time, lifeless particles of matter have conglomerated through their inherent forces in such a way as to produce *living* matter. This living matter developed, according to necessary laws, into the simplest, most imperfect living creatures. These, according to similarly necessary laws, transformed themselves further into the worm, the fish, the snake, the marsupial, and finally into the ape. And since Huxley, the great English nature researcher, has demonstrated that human beings are more similar in their structure to the most highly developed apes than the latter are to the lower apes, what then stands in the way of the assumption that the human being himself has, according to the same natural laws, developed from the higher apes? And further, do we not find what we call higher human spiritual activity, what we call morals, in an imperfect condition already with the animal. May we doubt the fact that the animals — as their structure became more perfect, as it developed into the human form, merely on the basis of physical laws — likewise developed the indications of intellect and morals to be found in them to the human stage?

All this seems to be perfectly correct. Although everybody must admit that our knowledge of nature will not for a long time to come be in the position to conceive of how what has been described above takes place in detail, yet we shall discover more and more facts and laws; and thus the "modern faith" will gain more and firmer supports.

Now it is a fact that the research and study of recent years have not furnished such solid supports for this belief; on the contrary, they have contributed greatly to discredit it. Yet it holds sway in ever extending circles and is a great obstacle to every other conviction.

There is no doubt that if David Friedrich Strauss and those of like mind are right, then all talk of higher spiritual laws of existence is an absurdity; the "modern faith" would have to be based solely on the foundations which these personalities assert are the result of the knowledge of nature.

Yet, whoever with unprejudiced mind follows up the statements of these adherents of the "modern faith" is confronted by a peculiar fact. And this fact presses upon us most irresistibly if we look at the thoughts of those people who have preserved some degree of impartiality in the face of the self-assured assertions of these orthodox pioneers of progress.

For there are hidden corners in the creed of these modern believers. And if we uncover what exists in these corners, then the *true* findings of modern natural science shine forth in full brilliance, but the *opinions* of the modern believers concerning the human being begin to fade away. ^[6]

Let us throw light into a few of these corners. At the outset, let us keep to that personality who is the most significant and the most venerable of these modern believers. On page 804 of the ninth edition of Haeckel's *Natuerliche Schoepfungsgeschichte* (Natural Genesis) we read: "The final result of a comparison of animals and man shows that between the most highly developed animal souls and the lowest human souls there exists only a small quantitative, but no qualitative difference; *this difference is much smaller than the difference between the lowest and the highest human souls, or the difference between the highest and the lowest animal souls.*" Now, what is the modern believer's attitude toward such a fact? He announces: we must explain the difference between the lower and the higher animal souls as a consequence of necessary and immutable laws. And we study these laws. We ask ourselves: how did it come about that out of animals with a lower soul have developed those with a higher soul? We look in nature for conditions through which the lower may develop into the higher. We then find, for example, that animals which have migrated to the caves of Kentucky become blind there. It becomes clear to us that through the sojourn in the darkness the eyes have lost their function. In these eyes the physical and chemical processes no longer take place which were carried out during the act of seeing. The stream of nourishment which has formerly been used for this activity is now

diverted to other organs. The animals change their shape. In this way, new animal species can arise out of existing ones if only the transformation which nature causes in these species is sufficiently great and manifold. — What actually takes place here? Nature brings about changes in certain beings; and these changes later also appear in their descendants. We say: they are transmitted by heredity. Thus the coming into existence of new animal and plant species is explained.

The modern believers now continue happily in the direction of their explanation. The difference between the lowest human souls and the highest animal souls is not particularly great. Therefore, certain life conditions in which the higher animal souls have been placed have brought about changes by means of which they became lower human souls. The miracle of the evolution of the human soul has been cast out of the temple of the "modern faith" into oblivion, to use an expression of Strauss', and man has been classified among the animals according to "eternal, necessary" laws. Satisfied, the modern believer retires into peaceful slumber; he does not wish to go further.

Honest thinking must disturb his slumber. For this honest thinking must keep alive around his couch the spirits which he himself has evoked. Let us consider more closely the above statement of Haeckel: "*the difference (between higher animals and men) is much smaller than the difference between the lowest and the highest human souls.*" If the modern believer admits this, may he then indulge in peaceful slumber as soon as he — according to his opinion — has explained the evolution of the lower men out of the highest animals?

No, he must not do this, and if he does so nevertheless, then he denies the whole basis upon which he has founded his conviction. What would a modern believer reply to another who were to say: I have demonstrated how fish have originated from lower living creatures. This suffices. I have shown that everything evolves — therefore the species higher than the fish will doubtless have developed like the fish. There is no doubt that the modern believer would reply: Your *general* thought of evolution is useless; you must be able to show how the mammals originate; for there is a greater difference between mammals and fish than between fish and those animals on a stage directly below them. — And what would have to be the consequence of the modern believer's real faithfulness to his

creed? He would have to say: the difference between the higher and lower human souls is greater than the difference between these lower souls and the animal souls on the stage directly below them; therefore I must admit that there are causes in the universe which effect changes in the lower human soul, transforming it in the same way as do the causes, demonstrated by me, which lead the lower animal form into the higher one. If I do not admit this, the species of human souls remain for me a miracle in regard to their origin, just as the various animal species remain a *miracle* to the one who does not believe in the transformation of living creatures through laws of nature.

And this is absolutely correct: the modern believers, who deem themselves so greatly enlightened because they believe they have "cast out" the miracle in the domain of the living, *are believers in miracles, nay, even worshipers of the miracle in the domain of the soul life.* And only the following fact differentiates them from the believers in miracles, so greatly despised by them: these latter honestly avow their belief; the modern believers, however, have not the slightest inkling of the fact that they themselves have fallen prey to the darkest superstition.

And now let us illumine another corner of the "modern belief." In his *Anthropology*, Dr. Paul Topinard [7] has beautifully compiled the findings of the modern theory of the origin of man. At the end of his book he briefly recapitulates the evolution of the higher animal forms in the various epochs of the earth according to Haeckel: "At the beginning of the earth period designated by geologists the Laurentian period, the first nuclei of albumin were formed by a chance meeting of certain elements, i.e. carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen, under conditions probably only prevailing at that epoch. From them, through spontaneous generation, monads developed (the smallest, imperfect living creatures). These split and multiplied, rearranged themselves into organs, and finally, after a series of transformations which Haeckel estimates as nine, they bestowed life upon certain vertebrae such as the amphioxus lanceolatus." We may skip the description of the further animal species in the same direction and add here at once Topinard's concluding sentences: "In the twentieth earth epoch, we find the anthropoid ape approximately during the whole Miocene period; in the twenty-first, the man-ape which does not yet possess speech and a corresponding brain. In the twenty-second period, Man finally appears as we know him, *at least in his less perfect forms.*" And

now, after having cited what is to be understood as the "natural-scientific basis of the modern belief," Topinard, in a few words, makes a significant confession. He says: "*Here the classification comes to an abrupt halt. Haeckel forgets the twenty-third degree in which the brilliant Lamarck^[8] and Newton^[9] appear.*"

A corner in the creed of the modern believer is thereby exposed in which he points with the utmost clarity to facts, concerning which he denies his creed. He is *unwilling* to rise into the human soul sphere with the concepts with which he tried to find his way in the other spheres of nature. — Were he to do this, were he, with his attitude of mind acquired through the observation of external nature, to enter upon the sphere which Topinard calls the twenty-third degree, then he would have to say to himself: just as I derive the higher animal species from the lower through evolution, so do I derive the higher soul nature from the lower through evolution. I cannot understand Newton's soul if I do not conceive of it as having sprung from a preceding soul being. And this soul being can never be looked for in the physical ancestors. Were I to look for it there, I would turn upside down the whole method of nature research. How could it ever occur to a scientist to show the evolution of one animal species out of another if the latter, in regard to its physical makeup, were as dissimilar to the former as Newton, *in regard to his soul*, is to his forebears: One conceives of one animal species having proceeded from a similar one which is merely one degree lower than itself. Therefore, Newton's soul must have sprung from a soul similar to it, but only one degree lower, psychically. Newton's soul nature is comprised in his biography. I recognize Newton by his biography just as I recognize a lion by the description of its species. And I comprehend the species "lion" if I imagine that it has sprung from a species on a correspondingly lower stage. Thus I comprehend what is comprised in Newton's biography if I conceive of it as having developed from the biography of a soul which resembles it, is related to it as *soul*. From this follows that Newton's soul existed already in another form, just as the species "lion" existed previously in a different form.

For clear thought, there is no escape from this conception. Only because the modern believers do not have the courage to think their thoughts through to the end do they not arrive at this final conclusion. Through it, however, the reappearance of the being who is comprised

in the biography is secured. — Either we must abandon the whole natural-scientific theory of evolution, or we must admit that it must be extended to include the evolution of the soul. There are only two alternatives: *either*, every soul is created *by a miracle*, just as the animal species would have to be created by miracles if they have not developed one out of the other, *or*, the soul has developed and has previously existed in another form, just as the animal species has existed in another form.

A few modern thinkers who have preserved some clarity and courage for logical thinking are a living proof of the above conclusion. They are just as unable to familiarize themselves with the thought of soul evolution, so strange to our age, as are the modern believers characterized above. But they at least possess the courage to confess the only other possible view, namely: the miracle of the *creation of the soul*. Thus, in the book on psychology by Professor Johannes Rehmke, ^[10] one of the best thinkers of our time, we may read the following: "The idea of creation ... appears to us ... to be the only one suited to render comprehensible the mystery of the origin of the soul." Rehmke goes so far as to acknowledge the existence of a conscious Universal-Being who, "as the only condition for the origin of the soul, would have to be called the *creator of the soul*." Thus speaks a thinker who is unwilling to indulge in gentle spiritual slumber after having grasped the physical life processes, yet who is lacking the capacity of acknowledging the idea that each individual soul has evolved out of its previous form of existence. Rehmke has the courage to accept the miracle, since he is unable to have the courage to acknowledge the anthroposophical view of the reappearance of the soul, of reincarnation. Thinkers in whom the natural-scientific striving begins to be developed logically must of necessity arrive at this view. Thus, in the book, *Neuchristentum und reale Religion (Neo-Christianity and Real Religion)*, by Julius Baumann, ^[11] professor of philosophy at the University of Goettingen, we find the following (twenty-second) paragraph among the thirty-nine paragraphs of a *Sketch of a Summary of Real-Scientific Religion*: "Just as in inorganic nature the physical-chemical elements and forces do not disappear but only change their combinations, so is this also to be assumed, according to the real scientific method, in respect of the organic and organic-spiritual forces. *The Human soul as formal unity, as connecting Ego, returns in new human bodies and is thus enabled to pass through all the stages of human evolution.*"

Whoever possesses the full courage for the natural-scientific avowal of faith of the present age must arrive at this conception. This, however, must not be misunderstood; we do not maintain that the more prominent thinkers among the modern believers are cowardly persons, in the ordinary sense of the word. It needed courage, indescribable courage to carry to victory the natural-scientific view in face of the resisting forces of the nineteenth century. ^[12] But this courage must be distinguished from the higher one in regard to logical thinking. Yet just those nature researchers of the present age who desire to erect a world conception out of the findings of their domain are lacking such logical thinking. For, is it not a disgrace if we have to hear a sentence like the following, which was pronounced by the Breslau chemist Albert Ladenburg, in a lecture at a recent (1903) Conference of scientists: "Do we know anything about a substratum of the soul? I have no such knowledge." After having made this confession, this same man continues: "What is your opinion concerning immortality? I believe that in regard to this question, more than in regard to any other, the wish is father to the thought, for I do not know a single scientifically proven fact which might serve as the basis for the belief in immortality." What would the learned gentleman say if we were confronted by a speaker who said: "I know nothing about chemical facts. I therefore deny the chemical laws, for I know not a single scientifically proven fact which might serve as the basis for these laws." Certainly, the professor would reply: "What do we care about your ignorance of chemistry? First study chemistry, then do your talking!" Professor Ladenburg does not know anything about a substratum of the soul; he, therefore, should not bother the world with the findings of his ignorance.

Just as the nature researcher, in order to understand certain animal forms, studies the animal forms out of which these former have evolved, so the psychologist, rooted in natural science, must, in order to understand a certain soul form, study the soul form out of which the former has evolved. The skull form of higher animals is explained by scientists as having arisen out of the transformation of the lower animal skull. Therefore, everything belonging to a soul's biography ought to be explained by them through the biography of the soul out of which this soul concerned has evolved. The later conditions are the *effects* of former ones. That is to say, the later physical conditions are the effects of former physical conditions; likewise, the later soul conditions are the effects of former soul conditions. This is the content

of the *Law of Karma* which says: all my talents and deeds in my present life do not exist separately as a miracle, but they are connected as effect with the previous forms of existence of my soul and as cause with future ones.

Those who, with open spiritual eyes, observe human life and do not know this comprehensive law, or do not wish to acknowledge it, are constantly confronted by riddles of life. Let us quote one example for many. It is contained in Maurice Maeterlinck's book *Le Temple Enseveli (The Buried Temple)*. This is a book which speaks of these riddles, which appear to present-day thinkers in a distorted shape because they are not conversant with the great laws in spiritual life of cause and effect, of Karma. Those who have fallen prey to the limited dogmas of the modern believers have no organ for the perception of such riddles. Maeterlinck puts [forth] one of these questions: "If I plunge into the water in zero weather in order to save my fellow man, or if I fall into the water while trying to push him into it, the consequences of the cold I catch will be exactly the same in both cases, and no power in heaven or earth beside myself or the man (if he is able to do so) will increase my suffering because I have committed a crime, or will relieve my pain because I performed a virtuous deed." Certainly; the consequences in question here appear to an observation which limits itself to physical facts to be the same in both cases. But may this observation, without further research, be considered *complete*? Whoever asserts this holds, as a thinker, the same view point as a person who observes two boys being taught by two different teachers, and who observes nothing else in this activity but the fact that in both cases the teachers are occupied with the two boys for the same number of hours and carry on the same studies. If he were to enter more deeply upon the facts, he would perhaps observe a great difference between the two cases, and he would consider it comprehensible that one boy grows up to be an inefficient man, while the other boy becomes an excellent and capable human being. — And if the person who is willing to enter upon soul-spiritual connections were to observe the above consequences for the souls of the human beings in question, he would have to say to himself: what happens there cannot be considered as isolated facts. The consequences of a cold are soul experiences, and I must, if they are not to be deemed a miracle, view them as causes and effects in the soul life. The consequences for the person who saves a life will spring from causes different from those for the criminal; or they will, in the

one or the other case, have different effects. And if I cannot find these causes and effects in the present life of the people concerned, if all conditions are alike for this present life, then I must look for the compensation in the past and the future life. Then I proceed *exactly like the natural scientist* in the field of external facts; he, too, explains the lack of eyes in animals living in dark caves by *previous* experiences, and he presupposes that present-day experiences will have their effects in future formations of races and species.

Only he has an inner right to speak of evolution in the domain of outer nature who acknowledges this evolution also in the sphere of soul and spirit. Now, it is clear that this acknowledgment, this extension of knowledge of nature beyond nature is more than mere cognition. For it transforms cognition into *life*; it does not merely enrich man's knowledge, it provides him with the strength for his life's journey. It shows him *whence he comes and whither he goes*. And it will show him this whence and whither beyond birth and death if he steadfastly follows the direction which this knowledge indicates. He knows that everything he does is a link in the stream which flows from eternity to eternity. The point of view from which he regulates his life becomes higher and higher. The man who has not attained to this state of mind appears as though enveloped in a dense fog, for he has no idea of his true being, of his origin and goal. He follows the impulses of his nature, without any insight into these impulses. He must confess that he might follow quite different impulses, were he to illuminate his path with the light of knowledge. Under the influence of such an attitude of soul, the sense of responsibility in regard to life grows constantly. If the human being does not develop this sense of responsibility in himself, he denies, in a higher sense, his humanness. Knowledge lacking the aim to ennoble the human being is merely the satisfying of a higher curiosity. To raise knowledge to the comprehension of the spiritual, in order that it may become the strength of the whole life, is, in a higher sense, *duty*. Thus it is the duty of every human being to seek the understanding for the Whence and Whither of the Soul.



2

How Karma Works

SLEEP has often been called the younger brother of death. This simile illustrates the paths of the human spirit more exactly than a superficial observation might feel inclined to assume. For it gives us an idea of the way in which the most manifold incarnations passed through by this human spirit are interrelated. In the first chapter of this book, *Reincarnation and Karma, Concepts Compelled by the Modern Scientific Point of View*, it has been shown that the present natural-scientific mode of thought, if it but understands itself properly, leads to the ancient teaching of the evolution of the eternal human spirit through many lives. This knowledge is necessarily followed by the question: how are these manifold lives interrelated? In what sense is the life of a human being the effect of his former incarnations, and how does it become the cause of the later incarnations? The picture of sleep presents an image of the relation of cause and effect in this field. ^[13] I arise in the morning. My continuous activity was interrupted during the night. I cannot resume this activity arbitrarily if order and connection are to govern my life. What I have done yesterday constitutes the conditions for my actions of today. I must make a connection with the result of my activities of yesterday. It is true in the fullest sense of the word that my deeds of yesterday are my destiny of today. I myself have shaped the causes to which I must add the effects. And I encounter these causes after having withdrawn from them for a short time. They belong to me, although I was separated from them for some time.

The effects of my experiences of yesterday belong to me in still another sense. I myself have been changed by them. Let us suppose that I have undertaken something in which I succeeded only partially. I have pondered on the reason for this partial failure. If I have again to carry out a similar task, I avoid the mistakes I have recognized. That is, I have acquired a new faculty. Thereby my experiences of yesterday have become the causes of my faculties of today. My past remains united with me; it lives on in my present; and it will follow me into my future. Through my past, I have created for myself the position in which I find myself at present. And the meaning of life

demands that I remain united with this position. Would it not be senseless if, under normal conditions, I should not move into a house I had caused to be built for myself?

If the effects of my deeds of yesterday were not to be my destiny of today, I should not have to wake up today, but I should have to be created anew, out of the nothing. And the human spirit would have to be newly created, out of the nothing, if the results of its former lives were not to remain linked to its later lives. Indeed, the human being cannot live in any other position but the one which has been created through his previous life. He can do this no more than can certain animals, which have lost their power of sight as a result of their migration to the caves of Kentucky, live anywhere else but in these caves. They have, through their deed, through migration, created for themselves the conditions for their later existence. A being which has once been active is henceforth no longer isolated in the world; it has inserted itself into its deeds. And its future development is connected with what arises from the deeds. This connection of a being with the results of its deeds is the law of karma which rules the whole world. *Activity that has become destiny is karma.*

And sleep is a good picture of death for the reason that the human being, during sleep, is actually withdrawn from the field of action upon which destiny awaits him. While we sleep, the events on this field of action run their course. For a time, we have no influence upon this course. Nevertheless, we find again the effects of our actions, and we must link up with them. In reality, our personality every morning incarnates anew in our world of deeds. What was separated from us during the night, envelops us, as it were, during the day.

It is the same with the deeds of our former incarnations. Their results are embodied in the world in which we were incarnated. Yet they belong to us just as the life in the caves belongs to the animals which, through this life, have lost the power of sight. Just as these animals can only live if they find again the surroundings to which they have adapted themselves, so the human spirit is only able to live in those surroundings which, through his deeds, he has created for himself and are suited to him.

Every new morning the human body is ensouled anew, as it were. Natural science admits that this involves a process which it cannot grasp if it employs merely the laws it has gained in the physical world. Consider what the natural scientist Du Bois-Reymond says about this in his address, *Die Grenze des Naturerkennens* (*The Limits of the Cognition of Nature*): "If a brain, for some reason unconscious, as for instance in dreamless sleep, were to be viewed scientifically" — (Du Bois-Reymond says "astronomically") — "it would hold no longer any secrets, and if we were to add to this the natural-scientific knowledge of the rest of the body, there would be a complete deciphering of the entire human machine with its breathing, its heartbeat, its metabolism, its warmth, and so forth, right up to the nature of matter and force. The dreamless sleeper is comprehensible to the same degree that the world is comprehensible before consciousness appeared. But just as the world became doubly incomprehensible with the first stirring of consciousness, so the sleeper becomes incomprehensible with the first dream picture that arises in him." This cannot be otherwise. For, what the scientist describes here as the dreamless sleeper is that part of the human being which alone is subject to physical laws. The moment, however, it appears again *permeated by the soul*, it obeys the laws of the soul-life. During sleep, the human body obeys the physical laws: the moment the human being wakes up, the light of intelligent action flashes forth, like a spark, into purely physical existence. We speak entirely in the sense of the scientist Du Bois-Reymond when we state: the sleeping *body* may be investigated in all its aspects, yet we shall not be able to find the soul in it. But this soul continues the course of its rational deeds at the point where this was interrupted by sleep. — Thus the human being, also in this regard, belongs to two worlds. In one world he lives his bodily life which may be observed by means of physical laws; in the other he lives as a spiritual-rational being, and about this life we are able to learn nothing by means of physical laws. If we wish to study the bodily life, we have to hold to the physical laws of natural science; but if we wish to grasp the spiritual life, we have to acquaint ourselves with the laws of rational action, such, for instance, as logic, jurisprudence, economics, aesthetics, and so forth.

The sleeping human body, subject only to physical laws, can never accomplish anything in the realm of the laws of reason. But the human spirit carries these laws of reason into the physical world. And

just as much as he has carried into it will he find again when, after an interruption, he resumes the thread of his activity.

Let us hold on to the picture of sleep. If life is not to be meaningless, the personality has to link up today with its deeds of yesterday. It could not do so did it not feel itself joined to these deeds. I should be unable to pick up today the result of my activity of yesterday, had there not remained within myself something of this activity. If I had today forgotten everything that I have experienced yesterday, I should be a new human being, unable to link up with anything. It is my *memory* which enables me to link up with my deeds of yesterday. — This memory binds me to the effects of my action. That which, in the real sense, belongs to my life of reason, — logic, for instance, — is today the same it was yesterday. This is applicable also to that which did not enter my field of vision yesterday, indeed, which never entered it. My memory connects my logical action of today with my logical action of yesterday. If matters depended merely upon logic, we certainly might start a new life every morning. But memory retains what binds us to our destiny.

Thus I really find myself in the morning as a threefold being. I find my body again which during my sleep has obeyed its merely physical laws. I find again my own self, my human spirit, which is today the same it was yesterday, and which is today endowed with the gift of rational action with which it was endowed yesterday. And I find — preserved by memory — everything that my yesterday, that my entire past has made of me. —

And this affords us at the same time a *picture* of the threefold being of man. In every new incarnation the human being finds himself in a physical organism which is subject to the laws of external nature. And in every incarnation he is the same human spirit. As such he is the *Eternal* within the manifold incarnations. *Body* and *Spirit* confront one another. Between these two there must lie something just as memory lies between my deeds of yesterday and those of today. And this something is the soul. It preserves the effects of my deeds from former lives and brings it about that the spirit, in a new incarnation, appears in the form which previous earth lives have given it. *In this way, body, soul, and spirit are interrelated.* The *spirit* is *eternal*; *birth* and *death* rule in the *body* according to the laws of the physical world;

both are brought together again and again by the *soul* as it fashions our *destiny* out of our deeds. (Each of the above-mentioned principles: *body*, *soul*, and *spirit*, in turn consists of three members. Thus the human being appears to be formed of *nine* members. The *body* consists of: (1) the actual body, (2) the life-body, (3) the sentient-body. The *soul* consists of: (4) the sentient-soul, (5) the intellectual-soul, (6) the consciousness-soul. The *spirit* consists of: (7) spirit-self, (8) life-spirit, (9) spirit-man. In the incarnated human being, 3 and 4, and 6 and 7 unite, flowing into one another. Through this fact the nine members appear to have contracted into *seven* members.)

In regard to the comparison of the soul with memory we are also in a position to refer to modern natural science. The scientist Ewald Hering published a treatise in 1870 which bears the title: *Ueber das Gedächtnis als eine allgemeine Funktion der organisierten Materie (Memory as a General Function of Organized Matter)*. Ernst Haeckel agrees with Hering's point of view. He states the following in his treatise: *Ueber die Wellenzeugung der Lebensteilchen (The Wave Generation of Living Particles)*: "Profound reflection must bring the conviction that without the assumption of an *unconscious memory* of living matter the most important life functions are utterly inexplicable. The faculty of forming ideas and concepts, of thinking and consciousness, of practice and habit, of nutrition and reproduction rests upon the function of the *unconscious memory*, the activity of which is much more significant than that of conscious memory. Hering is right in stating that it is memory to which we owe nearly everything that we are and have." And now Haeckel tries to trace back the processes of heredity within living creatures to this unconscious memory. The fact that the daughter-being resembles the mother-being, that the former inherits the qualities of the latter, is thus supposed to be due to the *unconscious memory* of the living, which in the course of reproduction retains the memory of the preceding forms. — It is not a question here of investigating how much of the presentations of Hering and Haeckel are scientifically tenable; for our purposes it suffices to draw attention to the fact that the natural scientist is compelled to assume an entity which he considers similar to memory; he is compelled to do so if he goes beyond birth and death, and presumes something that endures beyond death. He quite naturally seizes upon a supersensible force in the realm where the

naturally seizes upon a supersensible force in the realm where the laws of *physical nature* do not suffice.

We must, however, realize that we are dealing here merely with a comparison, with a *picture*, when we speak of memory. We must not believe that by *soul* we understand something that is equivalent to conscious memory. Even in ordinary life it is not always conscious memory that is active when we make use of the experiences of the past. We bear within us the fruits of these experiences even if we do not always consciously remember what we have experienced. Who can remember all the details of his learning to read and write? Moreover, who was ever conscious of all those details? *Habit*, for instance, is a kind of unconscious memory. — By means of this *comparison* with memory we merely wish to point to the soul which inserts itself between body and spirit and constitutes the mediator between the Eternal and that which, as the Physical, is inwoven into the course of birth and death.

The spirit that reincarnates thus finds within the physical world the results of its deeds as its destiny; and the soul that is bound to it, mediates the spirit's linking up with this destiny. Now we may ask: how can the spirit find the results of its deeds, since, on reincarnating, it is certainly placed in a world completely different from the one in which it existed previously? This question is based upon a very externalized conception of the web of destiny. If I transfer my residence from Europe to America, I, too, find myself in completely new surroundings. Yet my life in America is completely dependent upon my previous life in Europe. If I have been a mechanic in Europe, my life in America will take on a form quite different from the one it would take on had I been a bank clerk. In the one case I shall probably be surrounded in America by machines, in the other by banking papers. In every case my previous life determines my surroundings, it attracts, as it were, out of the whole environment those things which are related to it. This is also the case with my spirit-soul. It surrounds itself quite necessarily with what it is related to out of its previous life. This cannot constitute a contradiction of the simile of sleep and death if we realize that we are dealing only with a simile, although a most striking one. That I find in the morning the situation which I myself have created on the previous day is brought about by the *direct* course of events. That I find on reincarnating an environment that corresponds to the result of my deeds of the previous life is brought about through the affinity of my reborn spirit-soul with the things of this environment.

What leads me into this environment? Directly the qualities of my spirit-soul on reincarnating. But I possess these qualities merely through the fact that the deeds of my previous lives have implanted them into the spirit-soul. These deeds, therefore, are the *real cause* of my being born into certain circumstances. And what I do today will be one of the causes of my finding myself in a later life within certain definite circumstances. — Thus man indeed creates his destiny for himself. This remains incomprehensible only as long as one considers the separate life as such and does not regard it as a link in the chain of successive lives.

Thus we may say that nothing can happen to the human being in life for which he has not himself created the conditions. Only through insight into the law of destiny — karma — does it become comprehensible why "the good man has often to suffer, while the evil one may experience happiness." This seeming disharmony of the one life disappears when the view is extended upon many lives. — To be sure, the law of karma must not be conceived of as being so simple that we might compare it to an ordinary judge or to civil justice. This would be the same as if we were to imagine God as an old man with a white beard. Many people fall into this error. Especially the opponents of the idea of karma proceed from such erroneous premises. They fight against the conception which *they* impute to the believers in karma and not against the conception held by the true knowers.

What is the relation of the human being to his physical surroundings when he enters a new incarnation? This relation is composed of two factors: first, in the time between two consecutive incarnations he has had no part in the physical world; second, he passed through a certain development during that period. It is self-evident that no influence from the physical world can affect this development, for the spirit-soul then exists *outside* this physical world. Everything that takes place in the spirit-soul, it can, therefore, only draw out of itself, that is to say, out of the super-physical world. During its incarnation it was interwoven with the physical world of facts; after its discarnation through death, it is deprived of the *direct* influence of this factual world. It has merely retained from the latter that which we have compared to memory — This "memory remnant" consists of two

compared to memory. — This memory remnant consists of two parts. These parts become evident if we consider what has contributed to its formation. — The spirit has lived in the body and through the body, therefore, it entered into relation with the bodily surroundings. This relation has found its expression through the fact that, by means of the body, impulses, desires, and passions have developed and that, through them, outer actions have been performed. Because he has a corporeal existence, the human being acts under the influence of impulses, desires, and passions. And these have a significance in two directions. On the one hand, they impress themselves upon the outer actions which the human being performs. And on the other, they form his personal character. The action I perform is the result of my desire; and I myself, as a personality, am what is expressed by this desire. The action passes over into the outer world; the desire remains within my soul just as the thought remains within my memory. And just as the thought image in my memory is strengthened through every new impression of like nature, so is the desire strengthened through every new action which I perform under its influence. Thus within my soul, because of corporeal existence, there lives a certain sum of impulses, desires, and passions. The sum total of these is designated by the expression "body of desire." — This body of desire is intimately connected with physical existence, for it comes into being under the influence of the physical corporeality. The moment the spirit is no longer incarnated it cannot continue the formation of this body of desire. The spirit must free itself from this desire-body in so far as it was connected, through it, with the single physical life. The physical life is followed by another in which this liberation occurs. We may ask: Does not death signify the destruction also of this body of desire? The answer is: No; for to the degree in which, at every moment of physical life, desire surpasses satisfaction, desire persists even when the possibility of satisfaction has ceased. Only a human being who does not desire anything of the physical world has no surplus of desire over satisfaction. Only a man of no desires dies without retaining in his spirit a certain amount of desire. And this amount must gradually diminish and fade away after death. The state of this fading away is called "the sojourn in the region of desire." It can easily be seen that the more the human being has felt bound to the sense life, the longer must this state persist.

The second part of the "memory remnant" is formed in a different way. Just as desire draws the spirit toward the past life, so this second part directs it toward the future. The spirit, through its activity in the

body, has become acquainted with the world to which this body belongs. Each new exertion, each new experience enhances this acquaintance. As a rule the human being does a thing better the second time than he does it the first. Experience impresses itself upon the spirit, enhancing its capacities. Thus our experience acts upon our future, and if we have no longer the opportunity to have experiences, then the result of these experiences remains as memory remnant. — But no experience could affect us if we did not have the capacity to make use of it. The way in which we are able to absorb the experience, the use we are able to make of it, determines its significance for our future. For Goethe, an experience had a significance quite different from the significance it had for his valet; and it produced results for Goethe quite different from those it produced for his valet. What faculties we acquire through an experience depends, therefore, upon the spiritual work we perform in connection with the experience. — I always have within me, at any given moment of my life, a sum total of the results of my experience. And this sum total forms the potential of capacities which may appear in due course. — Such a sum total of experiences the human spirit possesses when it discarnates. This the human spirit takes with it into supersensible life. Now, when it is no longer bound to physical existence by bodily ties and when it has divested itself also of the desires which chain it to this physical existence, then the fruit of its experience has remained with the spirit. And this fruit is completely freed from the direct influence of the *past* life. The spirit can now devote itself entirely to what it is capable of fashioning out of this fruit for the *future*. Thus the spirit, after having left the region of desire, is in a state in which its experiences of former lives transform themselves into potentials — that is to say, talents, capacities — for the future. The life of the spirit in this state is designated as the sojourn in the "region of bliss." ("Bliss" may, indeed, designate a state in which all worry about the past is relegated to oblivion and which permits the heart to beat solely for the concerns of the future.) It is self-evident that the greater the potentiality exists at death for the acquirement of new capacities, the longer will this state in general last.

Naturally, it cannot be a question here of developing the complete scope of knowledge relating to the human spirit. We merely intend to show how the law of karma operates in physical life. For this purpose it is sufficient to know what the spirit takes out of this physical life into

supersensible states and what it brings back again for a new incarnation. It brings with it the results of the experiences undergone in previous lives, transformed into the capacities of its being. — In order to realize the far-reaching character of this fact we need only elucidate the process by a single example. The philosopher, Kant, says: "Two things fill the soul with ever increasing wonder: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me." Every thinking human being must admit that the starry heavens have not sprung out of nothingness but have come gradually into existence. And it is Kant himself who in 1755, in a basic treatise, tried to explain the gradual formation of a cosmos. Likewise, however, we must not accept the fact of moral law without an explanation. This moral law, too, has not sprung from nothingness. In the first incarnations through which man passed the moral law did not speak in him in the way it spoke in Kant. Primitive man acts in accordance with his desires. And he carries the experiences which he has undergone through such action into the supersensible states. Here they become higher faculties. And in a subsequent incarnation, mere desire no longer acts in him, but it is now guided by the effect of the previous experiences. And many incarnations are needed before the human being, originally completely given over to desires, confronts the surrounding world with the purified moral law which Kant designates as something demanding the same admiration as is demanded by the starry heavens.

The surrounding world into which the human being is born through a new incarnation confronts him with the results of his deeds, as his destiny. He himself enters this surrounding world with the capacities which he has fashioned for himself in the supersensible state out of his former experiences. Therefore his experiences in the physical world will, in general, be at a higher level the more often he has incarnated, or the greater his efforts were during his previous incarnations. Thus his pilgrimage through the incarnations will be an upward development. The treasure which his experiences accumulate in his spirit will become richer and richer. And he thereby confronts his surrounding world, his destiny, with greater and greater maturity. This makes him increasingly the master of his destiny. For what he gains through his experiences is the fact that he learns to grasp the laws of the world in which these experiences occur. At first the spirit does not find its way about in the surrounding world. It groans in the dark. But

find its way about in the surrounding world. It gropes in the dark. But with every new incarnation the world grows brighter. The spirit acquires a knowledge of the laws of its surrounding world; in other words, it accomplishes ever more consciously what it previously did in dullness of mind. The compulsion of the surrounding world decreases; the spirit becomes increasingly self-determinative. The spirit, however, which is self-determinative, is the *free spirit*. Action in the full clear light of consciousness is *free action*. (I have tried to present the nature of the free human spirit in my book, *Philosophie der Freiheit*, [*Philosophy of Freedom — Spiritual Activity*].) The full freedom of the human spirit is the ideal of its development. We cannot ask the question: is man free or unfree? The philosophers who put the question of freedom in this fashion can never acquire a clear thought about it. For the human being in his present state is neither free nor unfree; but he is on the way to freedom. He is partially free, partially unfree. He is free to the degree he has acquired knowledge and consciousness of world relations. — The fact that our destiny, our karma, meets us in the form of absolute necessity is no obstacle to our freedom. For when we act we approach this destiny with the measure of independence we have achieved. It is not destiny that acts, but it is we who act in accordance with the laws of this destiny.

If I light a match, fire arises according to necessary laws; but it was I who put these necessary laws into effect. Likewise, I can perform an action only in the sense of the necessary laws of my karma, but it is I who puts these necessary laws into effect. And new karma is created through the deed proceeding from me, just as the fire, according to necessary laws of nature, continues to be effective after I have kindled it.

This also throws light upon another doubt which may assail a person in regard to the effectiveness of the law of karma. Somebody might say: "If karma is an unalterable law, then it is wrong to help a person. For what befalls him is the consequence of his karma, and it is absolutely necessary that it should befall him." Certainly, I cannot eliminate the effects of the destiny which a human spirit has created for himself in former incarnations. But the matter of importance here is how he finds his way into this destiny, and what new destiny he may create for himself under the influence of the old one. If I help him, I may bring about the possibility of his giving his destiny a favorable turn through his deeds; if I refrain from helping him, the opposite may perhaps occur. Naturally, everything will depend upon

whether my help is a wise or unwise one. [The fact that I am present to help may be a part of both his Karma and mine, or my presence and deed may be a free act. (Editor.)]

His advance through ever new incarnations signifies a higher development of the human spirit. This higher development comes to expression in the fact that the world in which the incarnations of the spirit take place is comprehended in increasing measure by this spirit. This world, however, comprises the incarnations themselves. In regard to the latter, too, the spirit gradually passes from a state of unconsciousness to one of consciousness. On the path of evolution there lies the point from which the human being is able to look back upon his successive incarnations with full consciousness. — This is a thought at which it is easy to mock; and it is easy to criticise it negatively. But whoever does this has no idea of the nature of such truths. And derision as well as criticism place themselves like a dragon in front of the portal of the sanctuary within which we may attain knowledge of these truths. For it is self-evident that truths, the realization of which lies for the human being in the future, cannot be found as facts in the present. There is only one way of convincing oneself of their reality: namely, to make every effort possible to *attain this reality*.

3

Answers to Some Questions Concerning Karma

The following question has been asked: "According to the law of reincarnation, we are required to think that the human individuality possesses its talents, capacities, and so forth, as an effect of its previous lives. Is this not contradicted by the fact that such talents and capacities, for instance moral courage, musical gifts, and so forth, are directly inherited by the children from their parents?"

Answer: If we rightly conceive of the laws of reincarnation and karma, we cannot find a contradiction in what is stated above. Only those qualities of the human being which belong to his physical and ether body can be directly passed on by heredity. The ether body is the bearer of all life phenomena (the forces of growth and reproduction). Everything connected with this can be directly passed on by heredity. What is bound to the so-called soul-body can be passed on by heredity to a much lesser degree. This constitutes a certain disposition in the sensations. Whether we possess a vivid sense of sight, a well-developed sense of hearing, and so forth, may depend upon whether our ancestors have acquired such faculties and have passed them on to us by heredity. But nobody can pass on to his offsprings what is connected with the actual spiritual being of man, that is, for instance, the acuteness and accuracy of his life of thought, the reliability of his memory, the moral sense, the acquired capacities of knowledge and art.

These are qualities which remain enclosed within his individuality and which appear in his next incarnation as capacities, talents, character, and so forth. — The environment, however, into which the reincarnating human being enters is not accidental, but it is necessarily connected with his karma. Let us assume a human being has acquired in his previous life the capacity for a morally strong character. It is his karma that this capacity should unfold in his next incarnation. This would not be possible if he did not incarnate in a body which possesses a quite definite constitution. This bodily constitution, however, must be inherited from the forebears. The

incarnating individuality strives, through a power of attraction inherent in it, toward those parents who are capable of giving it the suitable body. This is caused by the fact that, already before reincarnating, this individuality connects itself with the forces of the astral world which strive toward definite physical conditions. Thus the human being is born into that family which is able to transmit to him by heredity the bodily conditions which correspond to his karmic potentialities. It then looks, if we go back to the example of moral courage, as if the latter itself had been inherited from the parents. The truth is that man, through his individual being, has searched out that family which makes the unfoldment of moral courage possible for him. In addition to this it may be possible that the individualities of the children and the parents have already been connected in previous lives and for that very reason have found one another again. The karmic laws are so complicated that we may never base a judgment upon outer appearances. Only a person to whose spiritual sense-organs the higher worlds are at least partially manifest may attempt to form such a judgment. Whoever is able to observe the soul organism and the spirit, in addition to the physical body, is in a position to discriminate between what has been passed on to the human being by his forebears and what is his own possession, acquired in previous lives. For ordinary vision these things are not clearly distinguishable, and it may easily appear as if something were merely inherited which in reality is karmically determined. — It is a thoroughly wise expression which states that children are "given" to their parents. In respect of the spirit this is absolutely the case. And children with certain spiritual qualities are given to them for the very reason that they, the parents, are capable of giving the children the opportunity to unfold these spiritual qualities.

Question: "Does Anthroposophy attribute no significance to 'chance'? I cannot imagine that it can be predestined by the karma of each individual person when five hundred persons are killed at the same time in a theater fire."

Answer: The laws of karma are so complicated that we should not be surprised when to the human intellect some fact appears at first as being contradictory to the general validity of this law. We must realize that this intellect is schooled by our physical world, and that, in

general, it is accustomed to admit only what it has learned in this world. The laws of karma, however, belong to *higher worlds*. Therefore, if we try to understand an event which meets the human being as being brought about by karma in the same way in which justice is applied in the purely earthly-physical life, then we must of necessity run up against contradictions. We must realize that a common experience which several people undergo in the physical world may, in the higher world, mean something completely different for each individual person among them. Naturally, the opposite may also be true: common interrelations may become effective in common earthly experiences. Only one gifted with clear vision in the higher worlds can give information about particular cases. If the karmic interrelations of five hundred people become effective in the common death of these people in a theater fire, the following instances may be possible:

First: Not a single one of the five hundred people need be karmically linked to the other victims. The common disaster is related in the same way to the karmas of each single person as the shadow-image of fifty people on a wall is related to the worlds of thought and feeling of these persons. These people had *nothing* in common an hour ago; nor will they have anything in common an hour hence. What they experienced when they met at the same place will have a special effect for each one of them. Their association is expressed in the above-mentioned common shadow-image. Whoever were to attempt to conclude from this shadow-image that a common bond united these people would be decidedly in error.

Second: It is possible that the common experience of the five hundred people has nothing whatsoever to do with their karmic past, but that, just through this common experience, something is prepared which will unite them karmically in the *future*. Perhaps these five hundred people will, in future ages, carry out a common undertaking, and through the disaster have been united *for the sake of higher worlds*. The experienced spiritual-scientist is thoroughly acquainted with the fact that many societies, formed today, owe their origin to the circumstance of a common disaster experienced in a more distant past by the people who join together today.

Third: The case in question may actually be the effect of former common guilt of the persons concerned. There are, however, still countless other possibilities. For instance, a combination of all three possibilities described might occur.

It is not unjustifiable to speak of "chance" in the physical world. And however true it is to say: there is no "chance" if we take into consideration all the worlds, yet it would be unjustifiable to eradicate the word "chance" if we are merely speaking of the interlinking of things in the physical world. Chance in the physical world is brought about through the fact that things take place in this world *within sensible space*. They must, in as far as they occur within *this space*, also obey the laws of *this space*. Within this space, things may *outwardly* meet which have *inwardly* nothing to do with each other. The causes which let a brick fall from a roof, injuring me as I pass by, do not necessarily have anything to do with my karma which stems from my past. Many people commit here the error of imagining karmic relations in too simple a fashion. They presume, for instance, that if a brick has injured a person, he must have deserved this injury karmically. But this is not necessarily so. In the life of every human being events constantly take place which have nothing at all to do with his merits or his guilt in the past. Such events find their karmic adjustment *in the future*. If something happens to me today without being my fault, I shall be compensated for it in the future. One thing is certain: nothing remains without karmic adjustment. However, whether an experience of the human being is the effect of his karmic past or the cause of his karmic future will have to be determined in every individual instance. And this cannot be decided by the intellect accustomed to dealing with the physical world, but solely by occult experience and observation.

Question: "Is it possible to understand, according to the law of reincarnation and karma, how a highly developed human soul can be reborn in a helpless, undeveloped child? To many a person the thought that we have to begin over and over again at the childhood stage is unbearable and illogical."

Answer: How the human being can act in the physical world depends entirely upon the physical instrumentality of his body. Higher ideas, for instance, can come to expression in this world only if there

is a fully developed brain. Just as the pianist must wait until the piano builder has made a piano on which he can express his musical ideas, so does the soul have to wait with its faculties acquired in the previous life until the forces of the physical world have built up the bodily organs to the point where they can express these faculties. The nature forces have to go *their way*, the soul, also, has to go its way. To be sure, from the very beginning of human life a cooperation exists between soul and body forces. The soul works in the flexible and supple body of the child until it is made ready to become a bearer of the forces acquired in former life periods. For it is absolutely necessary that the reborn human being adjust himself to the new life conditions.

Were he simply to appear in a new life with all he has acquired previously, he would not fit into the surrounding world. For he has acquired his faculties and forces under quite different circumstances in completely different surroundings. Were he simply to enter the world in his former state he would be a stranger in it. The period of childhood is gone through in order to bring about harmony between the old and the new conditions. How would one of the cleverest ancient Romans appear in our present world, were he simply born into our world with his acquired powers? A power can only be employed when it is in harmony with the surrounding world. For instance, if a genius is born, the power of genius lies in the innermost being of this man which may be called the causal-body. The lower spirit-body and the body of feeling and sensation are adaptable, and in a certain sense not completely determined. These two parts of the human being are now elaborated. In this work the causal-body acts from within and the surroundings from without. With the completion of this work, these two parts may become the instruments of the acquired forces. — The thought that we have to be born as a child is, therefore, neither illogical nor unbearable. On the contrary, it would be unbearable were we born as a fully developed man into a world in which we are a stranger.

Question: "Are two successive incarnations of a human being similar to one another? Will an architect, for instance, become again an architect, a musician again a musician?"

Answer: This might be the case, but not necessarily so. Such similarities occur, but are by no means the rule. It is easy in this field to arrive at false conceptions because we form thoughts concerning the laws of reincarnation which cling too much to externalities. Someone loves the south, for instance, and therefore believes he must have been a southerner in a former incarnation. Such inclinations, however, do not reach up to the causal-body. They have a direct significance only for the one life. Whatever sends its effects over from one incarnation into another must be deeply seated in the central being of man. Let us assume, for instance, that someone is a musician in his present life. The spiritual harmonies and rhythms which express themselves in tones reach into the causal-body. The tones themselves belong to the outer physical life. They sit in the parts of the human being which come into existence and pass away. The lower ego or spirit-body, which is, at one time, the proper vehicle for tones may, in a subsequent life, be the vehicle for the perception of number and space relations. And the musician may now become a mathematician. Just through this fact the human being develops, in the course of his incarnations, into an all-comprehensive being by passing through the most manifold life activities. As has been stated, there are exceptions to this rule. And these are explicable by the great laws of the spiritual world.

Question: "What are the karmic facts in the case of a human being who is condemned to idiocy because of a defective brain?"

Answer: A case like this ought not to be dealt with by speculation and hypotheses, but only by means of spiritual-scientific experience. Therefore, the question here will be answered by quoting an example which has really occurred.

In a previous life a certain person had been doomed to an existence of mental torpor because of an undeveloped brain. During the time between his death and a new birth he was able to work over in himself all the depressing experiences of such a life, such as his having been pushed around, subjected to the unkindness of people, and he was reborn as a veritable genius of benevolence. Such a case shows clearly how wrong we can be if we refer everything in life karmically back to the past. We cannot say in every instance: this

destiny is the result of this or that guilt in the past. It is very well possible that an event has no relation whatsoever to the past but is only the cause for a karmic compensation in the future. An idiot need not have deserved his destiny through his deeds in the past. But the karmic consequence of his destiny for the future will not fail to appear. Just as a businessman's balance account is determined by the figures of his ledger, while he is free to have new receipts and expenses, so new deeds and blows of destiny may enter the life of a human being in spite of his book of life showing a definite balance at every given moment. Therefore, karma must not be conceived of as an immutable fate: it is absolutely compatible with the freedom, the will of man. Karma does not demand surrender to an unalterable fate; on the contrary, it affords us the certainty that no deed, no experience of the human being remains without effect or runs its course outside of the laws of the world. It affords us the certainty that every deed or experience is joined to just and compensating law. Moreover, if there were no karma, arbitrariness would rule in the world. As it is, I may know that every one of my actions, every one of my experiences is inserted in a lawful interrelationship. My deed is free; its effect follows definite laws. It is the free deed of a businessman when he makes a good deal; its result, however, shows up in the balance sheet of his ledger in accordance with definite laws.



Notes

1. △ It is necessary to make this statement, for today superficial readers are numerous, and they are always ready to read all manner of nonsense into the expositions of a thinker, even though the latter takes great pains to express himself precisely. For that reason I should like to add here quite especially that it would never occur to me to fight those who, resting upon scientific premises, follow up the problem of "spontaneous generation." But even though it may be a fact that somehow mere "lifeless" substances do unite to form living albumin, this does not prove that, rightly understood, Redi's conception is wrong.
2. △ While research has been undertaken in the "field of the soul" by modern psychologists, the only difficulty is that modern psychology denies the existence of the soul apart from the physical body. (Editor.)
3. △ The adherents of Wundt must feel disagreeably affected by my speaking of "soul" in such outmoded fashion, while they swear by the words of their master who just recently has proclaimed that we ought not to speak of "soul" since, after the "mythologizing of phenomena has evaporated into the transcendental," nothing has remained of this "super-real" soul substance but an "interrelated occurrence." Well, Wundt's wisdom resembles the assertion that we must not speak of "lily" because we are merely concerned with color, form, the process of growth, and so forth. (Wundt, *Naturwissenschaft und Psychologie, Natural Science and Psychology*.)
4. △ Carl Gegenbaur, anatomist; Jena and Heidelberg.
5. △ Carl von Linné (Carolus Linnaeus), Upsala (Sweden, 1707–1778).

6. △ There may be many people today who wish to inform themselves quickly about the teachings of spiritual science. They will find it very bothersome if we first present to them explicitly the natural-scientific facts in a light that will make them serve as the basis upon which an anthroposophical view may be erected. They say: we wish to hear something about spiritual science, but you give us natural-scientific facts which every educated person knows. This is an objection which shows very clearly how little our contemporaries are inclined to think seriously. In reality, those who make the above statement know nothing at all about the far-reaching consequences of their knowledge. The astronomer knows nothing about the consequences of astronomy, the chemist nothing about those of chemistry, and so forth. *There is no salvation for them but to be modest and to listen quietly when they are shown that, because of the superficiality of their thinking, they know nothing at all about that which in their conceit they believe they have completely exhausted.* — And even anthroposophists often believe that it is unnecessary to prove the convictions of karma and reincarnation by means of the findings of natural science. They do not know that this is the *task* of the human groups to which the inhabitants of Europe and America belong; and that without this basis the members of these groups cannot truly attain to spiritual-scientific insight. Whoever wishes merely to repeat what he hears from the great Teachers of the East, cannot become an anthroposophist within the European-American culture.
7. △ Paul Topinard, M.D., anthropologist; Paris, 1830–1911.
8. △ Jean Baptiste de Lamarck, Paris; 1744–1829.
9. △ Sir Isaac Newton, Cambridge, London, also France; 1642–1727.
10. △ Johannes Rehmke, philosopher; Greifswald. 1848–1930.
11. △ Julius Baumann, 1837–1914.

12. △ The writer of this essay cannot be charged with failure to acknowledge the great merits of our modern believers for the very reason that he himself, in his book *Die Raetsel der Philosophie (Riddles of Philosophy)*, has presented these merits in connection with the spiritual evolution of their epoch, fully appreciating and acknowledging their value.
13. △ I can imagine that there are many people who consider themselves standing at the pinnacle of knowledge and who consider the present exposition "completely unscientific." I can understand these people, for I know that this objection forces itself upon anyone who has no experience in the domain of the supersensible and who, at the same time, lacks the necessary restraint and modesty to admit that he still might learn something. Such people, however, should at least refrain from stating that the processes described here "contradict the intellect" and "cannot be proved by the intellect." The intellect cannot do anything but combine and systematize facts. Facts can be *experienced*, but not be "proved by the intellect." With the intellect, you cannot prove a whale. Either you must have seen it yourself, or you must let somebody describe it who has seen one. It is the same with the supersensible facts. If we have not yet attained to the point where we can see them ourselves, then we must permit them to be described to us. I can assure everyone that the supersensible facts which I describe in the subsequent pages are just as "factual" for the one whose higher senses are opened, as is the whale.



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