



IS KARMA RETRIBUTIVISM? A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYTIC-SYNTHETIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract

No society operates in a vacuum. Individual human beings that make up the society also need substantial anchor on which to base their activities. Progress or constructive development in the society is usually the product of institutionalized policies that make such possible. The experience with extrinsic policy-infrastructure indicates its insufficiency to always guarantee good human conduct without which the envisaged societal good becomes impossible. Karma works at the intrinsic level to intelligibly complement the extrinsic institutional policies for ordered society. The paper examined the concept with a view to clarifying what it is all about. It also raised deeper questions concerning the metaphysical claims to its foregrounding as an intellectual reality. The finding is that the existence of karma flies on the face of unsustainable metaphysical and epistemological methodologies of approach. This unintelligibility notwithstanding, the concept scores significantly on the ethical dimension. The methodology employed in the research is the analytic-synthetic methodology.

Keywords: dharma, samsara, moksha, nirvana, metempsychosis

Introduction

Karma is a regular concept in Indian philosophy. Beyond the Indian world view, karma remains a theme that reverberates in the philosophies of the Ancient Oriental peoples generally. When properly interpreted, karma appears to pervade all aspects of the lives and meaning of the Ancient Asian world. In this understanding, karma informs social relations extensively. There is always the karmic interlocked in the moral world of the Orient. In other words, to a large extent, ethical matters are often times perceived along the spectrum of karmic operations. Due to the fundamental context of role, karma appears to suffuse the psyche and personality of individuals originally subscribing to the conceptual realities in the guiding principle. Since karma is intertwined in the existence of the people, it is dynamically comprehended to correlate with other concepts which are interpreted to provide meaningful insight into the deep questions and reality of human existence. For example, reincarnation or transmigration of souls or metempsychosis as it is sometimes called is one of such significant concepts that when elucidated tends to uncover the transcending mysteries of human physical existence, the transmogrifications at death and the apparent possibility of physical existential re-continuum of whatever form within Oriental mysticism. A lot in this depends on moral weighting and where the pendulum swings in the determination of which degree and form of physical existence can be assumed by the person in the cycles of existence occasioned by the karmic cosmic paradigm.

Oriental metaphysics is a dynamic phenomenon and karma derives its full explanation and operating principle from the metaphysical underpinning. This paper will uncover the metaphysical dimension with a view to providing an appraisal of the theory. The dynamic propensity of the Oriental world gives a perception of complexity to profound foundational explication attempt to the conceptual reality of karma. As a concept in focal consolidation deriving from practical and theoretical significance, karma needs grounding in a metaphysics



as the Ancient Indian scholars endeavored to achieve. This paper is interested in appraising the metaphysical complex and offering logically or rationally based conclusions.

The discourse will somewhat proffer meaning or conceptual elucidation and examination of karma in relation to retributivism. Again, it will attempt to expand the denotation beyond the merely retributive towards a more comprehensive application. The paper will wind up with further analytic comments.

Karma – analysis of origin and meaning

There is no consensus among Ancient Oriental scholars regarding the exact origin of the concept of karma. In this, there has only been probable references. One such claim to karma origination points to the Sanskrit speaking Aryans in India said to be responsible for building the Indus valley civilization (Kyabgon 2015: 13). There is the contest that in terms of origination, karma as a concept was both pre-Vedic and pre-Aryan era and as such was theorized to have been with the tribal peoples, all of the time (Kyabgon 2015: 13). Because it was a pre-Vedic phenomenon, in the course of time, the Vedas or Indian philosophical and quasi-religious writings/scriptures contributed to the karmic theory growth (Kyabgon 2015: 13). From all these, one can glean that karma origination dates to the very ancient times, beyond exact encapsulation of the details in Indian history of thought.

Over time, karma has acquired definitions and meanings ranging from the very simple to the very complex. Literally, karma means ‘action’ or ‘deed’ (Kyabgon 2015: 13). Etymologically, karma or its neuter form karman (written as ‘kamma’ in the non-Sanskrit ‘Pali’), traces to the root *kri* in Sans(*kri*)t which simply means ‘to do’ or ‘to make’ (Humphreys 2005: 12). According to the Hindu-American Foundation, the word karma again means ‘action’ or ‘deed’ (Hindu-American Foundation, 2014). All imperative references from the root word indicate human activity, action or conduct. Karma can be said to imply the collection of human actions. Social, business or even political activities and relations are all action-oriented. Human action remains what it is whether it issues from systematic intellectual reflection or putting the outcome of such reflections into practical realization. It can be surmised that the meaning of karma is particularly and pre-understandingly neutrally action oriented. As such, it applies to performances or human actions generally without specifications *sui generis*.

Beyond the generic apprehension, karma has to do with human actions directionally. Every action produces results/effects. According to the Hindu-American Foundation, an individual’s actions can be categorized as negative or positive, righteous or not, followed by the corresponding effects (Hindu-American Foundation, 2014). Righteous actions are dharmic – the result of practicing right teachings with positive results while the non-dharmic actions which are undesirable in the individual are negative and yield negative results (Hindu-American Foundation, 2014). The term ‘karma’ means action. Action links the human past to the present and projects into the future with the relational intricacies that this makes possible (Moorty 1997: 14).

Karma in another view of its meaning is equated from the material view point to the law of causal relations or the law of cause-and-effect; as it is put in one occasion, ‘the balance of cause and effect, the fact known in every science laboratory that action and reaction are equal



and opposite' (Humphreys 2005: 12). Karma as seen here covers both positive and negative actions. In other words, karma apparently accounts comprehensively for the actions that humans undertake and the possible consequential of those actions. The merits and demerits of actions may be immediately experienced or the experience may have to be remote in being a future development; the future could be a reality stretching to life cycles of the individual (Humphreys 2005: 36; Hindu-American Foundation, 2014). From here-on karma begins to shed its simplicity in acquiring a complex interpretation. Karma may stretch to any length of time within conscious imagination and even beyond what the human mind can grasp in the remote temporal distance.

The other meaning of karma has to do with its human sources. Karma is the creation of the individual simply because it is the result or product of human actions. Human thoughts produce karma as well (Hindu-American Foundation, 2014). It is man who creates Karma, for it is the product of his thought ... 'All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts' (Humphreys 2005: 26). Karma remains the inner moral sentinel regulating the human intellectual reflective activities and helping to orientate it to good.

The meaning of karma can be summarized. In the encapsulations attempted by Schuhmacher & Woerner, karma is action or deed – action in this case being inclusive of the physical and mental forms or rather the intellectual reflective kind and the execution of the ideas that proceed therefrom. Karma refers also to the consequence of a mental or physical action and 'the sum of all consequences of the actions of an individual in this or some previous life and finally, the chain of cause and effects in the world of morality (Schulmacher & Woerner 1989: 175). From the summary above, karma is all-pervasive, influencing every aspect of the human person in their thoughts and actions.

Karma as retributivism and further considerations

Karma broadens in its comprehension from a simple conceptually neutral action-orientation to many other concepts such as human destiny, fate, consequence of actions and retributivism. Karma is 'destiny or fate' or 'the doctrine of inevitable consequence' (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: 2016). Karma is regarded as the entrance to other theories in Indian philosophy. In other words, it holds the key to admission into and proper understanding of the other theories deriving therefrom in Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina thought (Reichenbach 1990: 1). One such theory to which karma opens the door to is reincarnation. In this perspective, karma 'is the totality of a person's actions and conduct during successive incarnations, regarded as causally influencing his or her destiny' (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: 2016).

Reincarnation functions based on the metaphysical law of cause and effect. Karma remains the 'law or principle through which such influence is believed to operate' (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: 2016). Reincarnation is retributivism in the metaphysical dimension of consequential actions. Karma is linked to this retributive justice that nature tends to bring about. To buttress this, karma is referred to as the 'principle of retributive justice determining a person's state of life and the state of his or her reincarnations as the effect of past deeds (Collins English Dictionary: 2014). Karma is result-oriented and its intentions are actualized either 'in this life or in a reincarnation' (Random House Kernerman



Webster's College Dictionary: 2010). Karma is the principle of balance in human existence. It thus operates beyond retributivism. 'Karma is believed to be a source of supernatural justice through which actions lead to morally-congruent outcomes, within and across lifetimes' (White & Norenzayan: 4).

The positive orientation and functional value of karma is no less significant than its retributive attributes. For this reason, karma again means, 'The cosmic principle of rewards and punishments for the acts performed in previous incarnation (Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary: 2010). Karma embodies all categorical qualifications – the good and bad and other such dualisms, thus it is understood as 'the good and bad emanations felt to be generated by someone or something' (Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary: 2010). Karma collaborates with the individual in preserving the moral law upon which the society stands. As action, karma 'means the moral law of cause and effect governing the future. Bad actions lead to rebirth in the lower orders of being. Good behavior leads to rebirth in the higher orders' (Dictionary of Unfamiliar Words: 2008). Karma operations transcend the material order thereby incorporating the spiritual, mystical or even metaphysical dimensions. 'Karma is the law of moral retribution, whereby not only does every cause have an effect, but he who puts the cause in action suffers the effect' (Humphreys 2005: 12).

Karma in certain schools of thought translates to the principle of nature balancing actions with rewards and retribution as deserved by individual conduct (Hayes 1989: 1). The karma explanation of human gains in virtuous actions and happiness and losses in unvirtuous acts that leads to suffering is emphatic and comprehensive. 'An unvirtuous action can only give rise to suffering, and a positive action can only give rise to happiness. This order can never be mixed up' (Hayes 1989: 1). The cosmic moral dimension has been compared to some laws of physics favorably. This is brought out vividly by Hayes in his claim that, 'This moral dimension is in the Buddhist view as much an invariable part of the natural universe as are such physical dimensions as the law of gravity and the laws of thermodynamics (Hayes 1989: 1).

Karma continues looking backwards. Its disproportionate insight into the past makes for its claim to a comprehensive summation of the existence of the individual and the consequential accumulation of effects following therefrom especially from before birth or from past human existence. Whether this theoretical mega-insight into previous existence is entirely sustainably plausible is a matter for further philosophical consideration. It is claimed that, 'There must have been causes, then, before his birth, to make a man miserable or happy and those were his past actions' (Archie & Archie 2004: 35).

Whether viewed as principle or practice, karma influences the moral compass of individuals and the society. It is seen as moral tool that can be put forward to address injustice and restore order. 'The doctrine of karma has been praised as a rational and morally edifying explanatory response to the existence of evil and apparent injustice in the world' (Burley 2014).

Indian philosophy is transcendental and largely moral. Of the basic concepts from which Indian thought is derived, namely, the self or soul (atman), works (karma) and liberation



(moksha), 'the concept of karma, signifying moral efficacy of human actions, seems to be the typically Indian (Indian Philosophy: www.eiilmuniversity.ac.in). Perhaps trying to comprehend karma prior to its theoretical developments, it has been tagged 'folk belief in ethical causation within and across lifetimes, that is, the expectation that a person's moral actions affect their future experiences' (White & Norenzayan: 4). Ill health is associated with karma. Logically, in terms of causal relations, certain diseases are attributed to the unobtrusive operations of karma. This has been documented even in scientific quantitative studies in Asian cultural contexts. 'Karma has been used to explain why some individuals get cancer and others do not, among Taiwanese, Chinese, and Thai cancer sufferers' (White & Norenzayan: 5). In a world view given to causal explanations, karma becomes a ready tool for causal relations extending as far as human pathological conditions. From empirical study, it has been underscored that belief in karma is stronger among adherents of Hinduism and Buddhism for instance than among Christians and non-religious affiliated Westerners (White & Norenzayan: 6). Belief in karma may in the cultures where it is popular co-exist with belief in 'fate, gods, evil spirits, witch craft, e. t. c. as well as magical causality although witchcraft is a differentiation from karma (White & Norenzayan: 7- 9).

Ethical-logical foundations of karma

According to karma, every deed produces effects. To produce good fruit, the act has to be morally good (kushala) or bad (akushala) and has to be voluntarily chosen or must have volitional impulse with effects also in the psyche of the doer and influencing his destiny in the direction determined by the deed (Schuhmacher & Woerner 1989: 175) The effects may have to do with more than just actions in terms of observed human activity. Actions encompass wider realities of human involvement such as speech, body language, reflective mental activities and the intention that informs action. Only a deed that is free from desire, hate, and delusion is without karmic effect. In this connection it should be noted also that good deeds bring "rewards", engender karma and thus renewed rebirth. In order to liberate oneself from the cycle of rebirth, one must refrain from both "good" and "bad" deeds (Schuhmacher & Woerner (1989: 175). Karma entails entanglement from which one needs liberation. This entanglement implies suffering and pain as part of human existence.

Karma endeavored to explain the origin of human suffering with further advancement in attempting to find solution to it. According to this doctrine, human suffering has its basis in the relationship of humans to moral values. Suffering always has ethical dimension. Karma traces this experience to its very root. 'Desire is the cause of suffering. Man's desire for the permanent in a world where nothing is permanent, a world in which everything is ceaselessly changing, causes suffering' (Omoregbe 2007: 274). The whole moral foundation of suffering has epistemological basis. It appears the problem stems from less than substantial information on the nature of reality. Due to confused knowledge of the true state of affairs, the individual person mixes substance with the shadow of it and the true with the illusory. This seems to explain the fact that to desire the ceaselessly changing or the shadow in the place of the substance is to desire pain and suffering since the shadow cannot translate to the substance metaphysically. This desire attracts bondage from which man would need liberation. This is why all the Vedic and non-Vedic schools, arising from karmic doctrine, aimed at 'initiating disciples into a way of life leading to enlightenment and liberation (Copleston 1980: 23). Without liberation, suffering becomes a feature of human existence. However, this is not all there is to human existence. Spiritual advancement and the development of higher



consciousness dovetails in the attenuation of the negative karmic state (Hindu American Foundation: 2014).

The human existential energy is directed towards liberation from the karmic effects. The goal is to attain moksha or the “balance of karmic account” – moksha fees from samsara or “the cycle of birth and rebirth”, (Hindu American Foundation: 2014). Moksha is the fruit of training whereby one learns to live in the present moment, the detachment from desire and its chain effects (rewards and punishments) culminating in the experience of ‘absolute peace and the awakening of pure compassion towards all’ (Hindu American Foundation: 2014). Moksha can also be attained by loving devotion to God and selfless service, where every action is viewed as offering to God (Hindu American Foundation: 2014). The method involves self-transcendence by way of practice. As Max Muller explains, according to Patanjali, ‘Karma-yoga becomes the tool by which the self is transcended (Indian Philosophy: www.eiilmuniversity.ac.in).

According to Omoregbe, life has to do with getting round suffering, extinguishing its causes and attaining tranquility. The answer to the problem of suffering is liberation from desire. It is to act with disinterestedness. This disinterestedness is linked to attainment of enlightenment or development of higher consciousness. The goal of this enlightenment is nirvana. ‘Literally the word “nirvana” means “extinction”, and it refers to the extinction of craving and of suffering (Omoregbe 2006: 120). Although Karmic theory developed in none strictly theistic world view, (Hinduism is polytheistic, Buddhism is atheistic, Jainism is into ancestor worship, e. t. c.) the concept of suffering is clearly phenomenological in which case it has to be wrestled with philosophically. Nirvana appears to be the Christian equivalence of paradise where all the contradictions and complexities of a transitory physical universe are resolved.

Metaphysical presuppositions of Karma

All actions for which we can be held morally accountable and which are done out of desire for the fruits have consequences (Reichenbach 1990: 13). The implication is that karma is bound to interest in the action done. In other words, the disinterested action performed without regard to gain or loss is meta-karmic. In Buddhist thought, the disinterested action can be encapsulated in concepts such as actions done ‘without covetousness’. In Jainism, Karma is attracted to the soul because of ‘vibrations’ or ‘its passions’ or as observed earlier ‘covetousness’ (Reichenbach 1990: 14). These are the different specifications of the tendencies to karmic attraction all emanating from desire. In the absence of these qualifications, karma does not have a place or intervening presence. The metaphysical underpinning here is that karma can be differentiated from universal causal laws whereby every action in so far as is caused has its effects. In karma, there is the ethical dimension in that karma is contingent on the presence of the qualifications for its reckonable interventionism (Reichenbach 1990: 15). Karma does not seem to intrude where its presence is not necessitated by action.

Another presupposition is that the karmic moral consideration is directly related to retributivism. The perception is that every deed affects cosmic balance in the way of consolidating it or undermining same. There is the tendency towards rebalancing in the face of disequilibrium. One can only try to distinguish between the law of retributive justice and



karma at the legal and meta-legal levels. While the legal dimension has to do with the Western concept of the penal code, karma is entirely meta-legal in the sense that it does not involve procedural jurisprudence. The Western 18th-century Enlightenment thinkers upon whose ideas most of the world's criminal justice systems are based ... see punishment as determined by the need to co-exist in an ordered society (Lalli). Karma would also be considered in that light since although not objectively jurisprudential, it aims to support a society where individuals can co-exist in harmony.

Some scholars take karma with misgivings since not all compensation due to human action is fully worked out in the present life and again since 'not all of our pain and suffering is deserved' (Reichenbach 1990: 16). Although karma would think otherwise, it does not attempt to provide any rationally plausible justification. However, it seems more appropriate to underscore that the distinctive compensation based on pains deserved or undeserved is more theistic than the non-strictly theistic, polytheistic or atheistic oriental world of karma.

At all points in human life, the Karmic modal operation makes itself pronounced. Jainism presents different kinds of karma ranging from the obscuring, the delusional or karma of false views, to that which clouds knowledge and or perception or intuition or the Karma that depletes energy (Reichenbach 1990: 16). Another classification is in terms of black karma associated with evil and white karma associated with worthy acts such as penance, study and meditations in the person already purified (Reichenbach 1990: 18). Good deeds may also produce collateralized pains and suffering, e.g., the suffering and death which ants undergo while humans thrash rice (Reichenbach 1990: 18). Finally, there is the Karma that is neither black nor white. This is the karma of those who have reached height in asceticism – because they operate beyond karma, with no desire or passions attached to their actions (Reichenbach 1990: 18). Asceticism refers to the sustained training whereby matter becomes non-rebelliously subjective to mind.

The final presupposition of Karma is its tie with reincarnation or the view that humans are born some time into this world and after death, somehow manage to be reborn physically into the same world (Reichenbach 1990: 22). The logic of this seems fascinating but the ontology invites pertinent questions. The logic is that bad actions have to be fully paid for. Since a life cycle may not suffice for the payment, another is called for to make up for the remaining balance in payment. Justice demands that it has to be the same person who is reborn physically otherwise, the suffering might transfer to another person which does not fall in well with karmic justice. This transmigratory journey may require as many cycles of it as are necessary to offset the debts (Reichenbach 1990: 22) and that is if more debts are not accumulated in the process.

Metaphysical-theoretical foundations of karma

Buddhist metaphysics has its basis in a world in flux. This is an empty world where nothing persists in time for more than a moment. There is nothing like a 'thing' for what is considered 'thing' is a series of moments comprising a vast array of factors flashing at the same moment but separately. A person is a certain kind of thing, and this same analysis applies accordingly. A person is a series of momentarily flashing factors (Potter 1999: 31). Cosmic reality is a function of the flux that characterize it. This reminds of the pre-Socratic Greek thinker Heraclitus of Ephesus, who theorized that reality is fluidity in constant motion since



everything is in a state of flux (Pirie 2009: 9; Composta 2008: 35). The fragility and emptiness of things undergird the nothingness at the heart of reality. This raises serious questions. Do we really in such a world view have the premise to discuss ontology? If ontology suffers salvaging from transcending identity notions, it turns complex the tendency to assign enduring specificities to things as their distinguishing characteristics.

How does the individual human person come to conscious self-assignment taking cue from the quote below?

For one thing, what I take to be me is actually one series among others, of apparently bodily physical factors, causing me to view myself as occupying a particular place in a particular time, to have a series of repeated visual experiences related in the way that causes me to speak of ‘my body’, ‘my sense organs’, ‘my location in a world of physical objects and other bodies’ and so on (Potter 1999: 31).

The defining concept is transitory phenomenon of visions or perceptions. The true situation hovers between illusion and none of it. Even the cosmos is entangled in this apparently metaphysical impasse. The physical world is not necessarily an all-out reality in the objective sense of the abiding tangible sensory object. If sensory, it becomes so by way of sophisticated interpretation. The analysis has to do with the reduction of the physical world to transitory elements based on such appearances as ‘color, sound, smell, taste and touch’ (Potter 1999: 31). Even to grant the possibility of factorial reductionisms is gratuitous since the so called earlier identified elements of the physical world may not be independent of the conceptualizing potentialities brought to the fore at the time of their conceptualization. If so, they succumb to the earlier attempt at situating them within the illusory domain or at the best that of human imagination. This being the case, in the view of certain scholarly circles, ‘they too are imaginary constructions’ (Potter 1999: 31).

The metaphysics of karma pervades the entire universe(s) of beings. Four other domains of beings exist besides the human, accounting for amongst others, the domain of animals and ghosts/spirits – beings are conditioned in the places they find themselves due to previous existence or karmic reincarnation (Potter 1999: 31 – 32). The end of the metaphysics is among other things, to offer comprehensive causes for all that a person is no matter from which angle one looks at it. Elsewhere the metaphysical state of the world is captured vividly thus:

The things of the world are insubstantial and illusory ... There is nothing permanent or stable in this world ... a process of ceaseless change like in everything else ... There is no permanent entity, no permanent ‘soul’ or ‘self’ in the human person, for what is known as the human person is nothing more than conglomeration of ceaselessly changing elements (Omeregbe 2007: 274).

The illusion that belies cosmic reality whether in the form of clinging to fundamentals such as personal identity or cosmic phenomenon such as the appearance of the physical universe strikes the problem of meaning at the core. How does man speak of the ‘self’ or the ‘soul’ with the ceaseless alterations in the qualities of ‘things’ – continuous processing of the new, transitioning notions of what seems to be and the problematic of the un-abiding? Self-identity



crisis especially in the human person that ought to lay claim to self-consciousness as an abiding reality seems to undercut karma at the very root of human existence. Actually, the metaphysics of the 'self' or the 'soul' obliterates the reality of karma in the theoretical claims to its existence, interventions and historically informed recording of the effects of human actions in whatever way this is supposed to be done. If there is no permanent self, where will karma have to act? Who carries the benefits and burdens of the karmic effects? Should it not be a metaphysical entity transcending all imaginable alterability or modifiability where such recording makes sense? The absence of a permanent self or soul suggests plausibly the absence of karmic effects on the soul.

Karma as a theory inherited from Hinduism to Buddhism is termed 'the eternal law of justice, the law of cause and effect, the law of retribution, which operates in the universe' (Omogbe 2006: 119). From this view of karma, it is always an inexorable principle that intervenes in the relation between one to self and one to the other. The inexorability of karma necessitates samsara or rebirth in the sense that unless one gets completely purified of the consequences of bad actions, one continues to reincarnate or transmigrate from one existence to the other till the process of purification is completed (Omogbe 2006: 119). This ethical-metaphysical determination of the quality of human existence presents another problematic as to the transmigration validity in the absence of a permanent self or a soul that subscribes to permanent self-identity. Ceaselessness does not transmigrate to ceaselessness or the merely flashing moment to another flashing moment that is best described as more of the illusory, imaginary or sensory motions of illusory sensation. The conclusion is self-evident, namely that from the standpoint of scholarship as proffered by the Indian philosophers, the theory of Karma cannot be sustained or justified. Although the ethics makes for attention and development of interest, the metaphysics provides grounds for a complete null-presupposition.

The karmic theory – an analytic discourse

The word karma though said to have originated from Hinduism has succeeded in conventional acceptance with the tendency to universal appeal. To this extent, karma qualifies as household word whose meaning is clearly understood. This paper argues in the negative in trying to x-ray and present karma for what it is in the true sense. It is this lack of clarification that was cause for the present academic project. What does the paper deny about karma and what is it that is being affirmed? The work does not propose nullification of the sense or spirit of karma and more especially the practical moral questions that the philosophy is geared to address. What has been subjected to appraisal and to be done away with is the ideological metaphysical consolidation that ought to lend formidability to the theory of karma. Again, the process through which karma operates in the purification process of what is of essence in the human person has been brought into closer scrutiny with the view to uncovering the less than satisfactory methodology on the route to nirvana. The dislodgment of karma as the Oriental theory of salvific ideology of moral, existential, psychological and social relations does not incorporate the advocating of the freedom to morally unexamined existence. Morality as the normative science of values is a factor in holding together the social fabric and ensuring the stability that is required for progress in the society. The non-presupposition of karma in the foreground of the empirical reality of human actions is fundamentally academic. The hermeneutics clarified the non-sustainability of karma in the ideas amalgamated in its metaphysical justification. Again, the epistemology remains unsustainable in so far as identity questions cloud the substantial issues in the karmic doctrine.



While undercutting the literary edifice that is purported to make karma in the metaphysical foreground, the functional role can still find valid place in causal relations and other such anglicised efforts at conceptual translative equalizations. Even here, the reality problematic is pertinent. Can karma, a Sanskrit concept from antiquity fully yield to equiperable translation? The anglicisation or even igbonisation would not be of help nor would any such linguistic endeavor appear exact except as working conceptual tool.

The theory of karma scores high on a perspective of cosmic moral questions of significance. Western scholars had had to wrestle with the problem of evil in the long course of history of the development of thought in the occident. Yet the solutions proffered had had to do with theism. The Oriental thinkers have in this theory made available a solution to the problem of good and evil that was totally and solely contingent on reason. The proposition seems to tally with the understanding that human rationality may workably do in finding answers to some existential and ontological problems that bother on contextualized social existence and the requirements for harmonious balance on the moral plane.

Without the metaphysical foundations which has been denied, karma puts forward the process-sojourn onto full humanity. This is true to any degree of philosophical reflection. The human development of higher consciousness is a process ontology. It cannot be otherwise especially in the adducing of thought perspectives that claim the contrary. The explanation appears to be that there is the reality of the empirical prelude to nirvana and it is not without this methodological process. Moral indifference may not after wards be rewarded with the resolution of the contradictions occasioned by same. On the other hand, human social institutions do not look the other way when the fabrics that hold the society together are undermined by purposive actions. There is always retributive response or other such alternative responses. If this is true of social empirics and institutional principles, it is strongly suggested to be the case ontologically. However, there are cushions to deserving karmic responses to suffering that may loosen off on the strict karmic process. Indian scholars have suggested the meta-karmic level of operation whereby selflessness becomes the predominating motif of every human action. In a world suffused with tendencies to evil, how far can this go?

Analysis of the karmic theory cannot be deemed to have been fair without comparative perspective to it. The assumption that reason suffices to elucidate the conundrum of pain and suffering suffers on absolute claims. Although the entertainment of such feat contributes to recipe of the merits of rational plausibility, the non-limitation falters on the basis of the phenomenological. The empirics contraindicate any such absolutism. Lived experiences contribute to the indices of unreason in a supposed causal relation. Take the case of a child born blind with opacity in the inquiry for causal relations. Karma would point to previous existence before current subsisting reincarnation. Since this work has succeeded in demolishing the metaphysics that purportedly lends credibility to such claims, there is left no causal relation since any other inquiries has yielded opacity as to cause. This comparison is suggested in order to de-absolutize the causal relation or cause and effect theory which seeks to translate karma equivalently to its comprehension.



In another dimension, the human mind is not all-capacity dynamic machine. The failure to realize and subscribe to this limitation transposes on the mind meta-psychic values beyond the natural capacity of the mind to accommodate. Reality yields to the mind in the degrees of it. The natural tendency to the inexhaustibility of the real by reason is also true. Absolute encapsulation of the real by the human mind escapes all of the time. In the light of this, supposing that karma metaphysics succeeds, karma could not have accounted foundationally for all of human pains and suffering. Why? Because reality escapes being fully or completely accounted for. Something of the real always escapes full grasp to continue to buttress the reality of the human condition or the place of the human person in the scheme of things.

Conclusion

This paper examined karma in the ramifications of it. The result is the nullification of the concept solely on the strength of Oriental metaphysics which sought to provide formidable anchor to it from cosmic constitutional analysis. The epistemology of karma with its unique methodology of processing karma from the metaphysics of the effects of human actions also suffered the same fate as the metaphysics. The paper however noted that the spirit of karma merits attention. This spirit of the concept survives any attempt at metaphysical analysis or synthesis. This obviously informed the understanding in the pre-Vedic metaphysical systematization.

The ethical dimension of karma invests it with practical validity as moral sentinel both in the individual human action and the society at large. Part of the fabric that holds the society together is the moral foundation and the preservation of the good in moral values. Karma aims to promote good morals with intervening metaphysical sanctions. It does this again by way of positive rewards for good done as corresponding metaphysical incentive to promoting the culture of good as principle of living. It is in this dimension that some observable good in the karmic principle can be proposed.

Karma remains the Oriental conceptual perspective to a pan-cosmic metaphysical principle. Must it be karma? Elsewhere, efforts have been made to find equivalence in translations, the difficulties with exactitude in meaning notwithstanding. The law of cause and effect approximates karma substantially. In science laboratories, the corporate world and social relations, there is always cause-effect that inform the dynamics of these operations. Karma will always remain a welcome development in the good face of it which is direly required to build a better world. In the retributive perspective, the validity of karma passes in the function to restore order and rebalancing in a society that has lost the sense of moral values and the unquantifiable negative effects of same.

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AMAMIHE: Journal of Applied Philosophy, Vol. 23. No. 2, 2025
ISSN Print: 1597 – 0779; ISSN Online-3043-5269
Department of Philosophy, Imo State University Owerri, Nigeria
Indexed: Academic Journals Online; Google Scholar; Igwebuike Research Institute

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