

DISCIPLESPLANET

# MY KARMA RAN OVER YOUR DOGMA!

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Trying to jump out of the bottomless pit.

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**A brief examination of the dogma of karma and the comparison  
with the dogma of Divine Grace.**

## Introduction

“My Karma, ran over your Dogma!” Have you ever seen this statement on a bumper sticker? I have seen it on a couple of cars in my time and often accompanied by other anti-theistic slogans trying to denigrate religion, and Christianity in particular.

What a seemingly urbane and witty catch-cry, well at least for the ill-informed neo-karmic protagonist. A single pejorative ‘one liner’ that some think dismisses the understanding and thus validity, of one of the most misused and properly understood Truth imperatives: Dogma.

Ah, but that’s the issue is it not? The negating of truth, so it would appear to the colloquially informed that this ‘pop-philosophy’ idea naively believes it has trumped the truth.

What is really important to do from the outset of any discussion/debate, is to clearly define terms and words before we glibly dismiss them. Let’s commence by examining the word *Dogma*.

According to the Collins Concise Dictionary Australian Edition, it is...

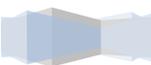
*“A Doctrine or systems of Doctrines claimed, by ecclesiastical authorities to be true.”*

Now let’s break this down – a Doctrine is simply a body of principles or teachings presented by a religious, political or philosophical group/agency/institution for acceptance or belief as being ‘true’.

So, for starters, anyone involved in philosophy, politics or religion that has a statement of beliefs – a creed, mission, or core principles – that are stated, has therefore a Doctrine... fine so far. To have those doctrines presented as ‘true’ is then labeled dogma.

Again, I see no problem; Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Neo-paganist, Humanist and Christian all do this... unless of course the parties sharing their ideas don’t believe the principles they have presented to actually be true. If this is so, then one, by our definition, cannot be dogmatic, one is merely offering an opinion. This of course is fine; however, for the opinion to become dogma, one must at least assert that the claims are true, and that evidence and epistemological evaluation can sustain that truth claim. If the person positing their creed/belief system does not believe them to true, then it begs the question; *Why believe it at all?*

However, it is the key word in all this epistemological exchange that needs to be defined before any sense of clarity can be found and for a fruitful search for knowledge to ensue; that key word is *Truth*.



I believe it was the great Theologian Dr. John Stott who said. *“We must be dogmatic about what we do know and agnostic about what we don’t know, not the other way around.”* But that’s just it, isn’t it? We appear, in our post-modern culture, to want to have it the ‘other way around’.

*“What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction, where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table.”* G.K. Chesterton <sup>1</sup>

So what is ‘Truth’ and how do we know it, so that our ‘dogma’ is legitimate and not merely a bigoted and myopic existential trip?

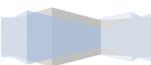
The best definition of ‘Truth’ I have seen was posited by Ravi Zacharias...

*“Truth is a property, assigned to an assertion that corresponds with reality as it is.”*

Explained - Truth is a distinct and unique attribute appointed to a positive affirmation that is consistent with reality as it objectively is. From an epistemological perspective, is the proposition coherent – make sense; is it cohesive – hold together consistently and robustly; pragmatic – does it work to produce what it claims.

This is an excellent working definition of Truth as it allows us to explore the ultimate absolute or subjective nature of a position to determine if it is indeed true or simply a passionately adhered to opinion.

I want to state here that being in a current ‘free’ culture we can believe whatever we like. We can adhere to any opinion, idea, philosophy, or deity we chose, but we cannot, from any objective perspective, say it is true without having that which is necessary to establish such. Now some souls have attempted to get around this by using ambiguous and spurious terms like ‘relative truth’, by attaching the word ‘truth’ to a subjective term or claim and couching it the murky mire of the [politically correct \(if not ill defined\) definition of tolerance](#), we believe we have a so called, new pseudo-legitimate turn of phrase. Remember, tolerance is only a virtue if there is an objection to or disagreement with the thing being tolerated. If there is no objection, scrutiny, or care about an issue, then your ‘permission’ of it has not moral energy, it is in fact a care-less position of ‘do whatever, I don’t care’ – This is now what passes for ‘tolerance’. Opinions can be relative, truth, by proper definition cannot. Bernard Baruch stated... *“Everyone is entitled to their opinion, but no one is entitled to be wrong about the facts.”*



The following statement is an example for clarification - Monotheistic religions claim there is only *One* God, Polytheistic religions claim there are many. Only one of these claims can be true, there is either one, or many, relativity doesn't come into it.

## Road testing 'karma'

So, what about [Karma or Kamma](#)? What about Karma and the question of suffering and evil compared to say, the dogma of Christian view of suffering and evil?

I love the Aussie 'pop-culture' definition of Karma, the one I consistently run into when talking with people endeavouring to find some transcendent existential anchor that satisfies the egoism in all of us. It goes something like this. "What you give is what you get returned – good, bad or ugly", and when someone we don't like has bad happened to them, then comes the quip, "Karma is a B...ch, isn't it?". These sounds good, don't they? Well, at least to my egocentric sense of justice they do.

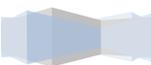
In my experience the sub-text on this take from the people using this term doesn't really consider the *downside* of this philosophy. They love to focus on the *up-side*, i.e. "I did a good thing and I am basically a 'good' person, so 'good' will come to me". From my encounters with people, they really don't see any 'bad karma' coming their way, because they are basically 'good' people.

Jesus Christ had a disturbing thing to say about our concept of 'good' when he was labeled by a young ruler as such. Jesus response was "[There is no one good by God alone](#)". Ouch! For me, that puts to rest any idea that I'm a 'good' person. So, assuming for a moment 'good' is a standard we are unable to attain, were does that leave us with Karma?

Before we leap into a critical examination of the ever-transient notion of Karma, it's important to look at the origin of the essential platform or one might say, *driver* for the 'assessment' that is Karma.

Early Hinduism was arguably an eclectic a-spiritual philosophy that had little to do with deities, less to do with temples/temple worship and even less to do with the 'afterlife'. In very early days it was the orally transmitted Hindu scriptures known as the Vedas, that were only passed on from older males of the upper classes to younger. With that question in mind let's have a look at Karma and its foundational ideas in attempt to address the issue of suffering and evil.

*...pantheistic religions have attempted extensive answers, and sometimes those answers are terribly confusing. The difficulty with Hinduism is that it has no monolithic answer to the problem of suffering. By declaring everything in the physical world to the non-real, illusory, changing, transitory, it ends up with philosophical problems beyond measure.*



*And, of course, one is compelled to ask, what has brought on this ‘illusion’ of evil, if everything is part and parcel of the divine reality?*

*There is a humorous story told of India’s leading philosopher, Shankara. He had just finished lecturing the king on the deception of the mind and its delusion of material reality. The next day, the king let loose an elephant that went on a rampage, and Shankara ran up a tree to find safety. When the king asked him why he ran if the elephant was non real, Shankara, not to be outdone, said, “What the king actually saw was a non real me climbing a non real tree!” (a non real answer) \*2*

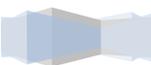
Time and space here will not permit us to explore this more fully, but this initial probe is enough to raise a multitude of philosophical ‘red flags.’ Although from the karmic perspective the physical world and its attachments are illusory – including evil and suffering – karma still insists on ‘paying for’ that illusory wickedness that was done in the illusory world. Here’s where reincarnation comes in.

*According to central teachings of Hinduism reincarnation is a given... “Accordingly, those who are of pleasant conduct here – the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb, either the womb of a Brahman (priestly class), of the womb of a Kshatriya (warrior or royal class), or the womb of a Vaisya (the working or professional class). But those who are of stinking conduct here – the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb or a dog, or the womb of a swine, or the womb of an outcast” Chandogy Upanishad, 5.10.8. Hinduism conveys here an inherited sense of wrong, which is lived out in the next life... This doctrine is un-negotiable in Hinduism. \*3*

How do we end suffering? According to the Buddhist teaching, if we can obliterate desire we will obliterate evil. In fact, the very word [nirvana](#) means the negation of the jungle of desire to which our rebirths have condemned us.... But, above all, Buddhism faces a truly insurmountable problem. If life is cyclical and there is not beginning to the incarnations, why is there an end? How does one have an infinite regress of causes, if there is a final incarnation? As Dr. William Lane Craig, keenly asked, and which neither Buddhism nor Hinduism cannot answer is, “*how does one jump out of a bottomless pit?*” \*4

## **No escape – or is there?**

There is no escaping Karma, it is endless and without mercy. Your mistakes lead you into the next cycle and hound you to seek perfection. The only ‘chance’ possible is to revisit pain and suffering again and again in various [illusory forms](#), like plant, animal or lower class humanity. You are imprisoned in the cycle until you reach the illusory ‘good’ free from all illusory reality. But remember, you can’t jump out of a bottomless pit.



The great teacher Mahatma Gandhi was perpetually plagued by the question... [“Can Hinduism atone for my sin”](#), and to all the evidences and teachings posited by both philosophies the answer is ultimately, NO!

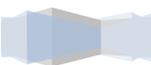
## **So what are our options, how do we break this Karmic cycle?**

Grace – remarkable teaching and incomparable gift – birthed in *dogma* and given by the ultimate non illusory Absolute. A gift so incredible, so remarkable it defies all that would deny it – The bottom of and rope into that ‘bottomless pit’. A poor but meaningful definition of Grace is *“undeserved or unmerited favour; a favour that cannot be earned or deserved”*. For the soul caught in the clutches of *Karma* and its cyclic partner [reincarnation](#) this is a breath of Life – the chance at real freedom.

Heavens Dogma, showed us from where evil has come. Dogma gave us the demarcation line for what and why, and dogma gave us the answer. The reality of suffering, wickedness and evil are problems all humans seek answers to. The Law of God was given in *dogma* to show us not only what is evil and causes suffering, but also our utter helplessness at reaching the standard set for alleviating evil and suffering. We, in our *sin* have no way to pay for it. But the God of creation also made a way to escape not just the punishment of sin, but also the stifling imprisonment of ‘the self’ it puts us in. God did not only show us our need, but in His incredible love gave the *grace* to meet that need through His Son, Jesus Christ – Immanuel, God with us. God Himself died on a Cross in our place, for our sins, to intervene in the cycle of sin, consequence and judgment, but through his perfect holy sinless shed blood washed away the guilt and made the atonement that Gandhi so longed for.

The atonement is not simply linked to the idea of behaviour, conduct and moral deviations from Divine standard – although it is that. More vitally, it is about the position, the state that lead us to those breaches. It is essentially idolatry – worshipping, serving, promoting and or surrendering to that which is not the perfect Divine Creator God. It is not merely misplaced desire or focus, it is a misplaced allegiance and devotion that has created the mess. Ultimately it is the [displacement of the One True God with our own, or other authority](#)

*“What becomes evident is that the pantheistic ship comes apart on the reef of evil. One cannot affirm the absence of a self while individualizing Nirvana, and one cannot talk about the cessation of suffering without also giving the origin of the first wrong thought. Buddhism has an intricate set of rules and regulations because it needs them. As a non-theistic path, it is a road strewn with kamma. It recognises evil and then, fatalistically, shuts its eyes to it, seeking escape.” \*5*



In her recent book ['Bono: In conversation with Michka Assaya'](#) Bono of U2 shared his thoughts on this incredible God given gift of Grace...

*It's a mind-blowing concept that the God who created the universe might be looking for company, a real relationship with people, but the thing that keeps me on my knees is the difference between grace and karma. Saying that the idea of karma is central to all religions, what you put in comes back to you: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in physics – in physical laws – every action is met by an equal or an opposite one. It's clear to me that karma is at the very heart of the universe. I'm absolutely sure of it. And yet, along comes this idea called grace to upend all that 'as you sow, so you will reap" stuff. Grace defies reason and logic. Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of our actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I've done a lot of stupid stuff...It doesn't excuse my mistakes, but I'm holding out for grace. I'm holding out that Jesus Christ took my sins onto the cross, because I know who I am, and I hope I don't have to depend on my own religiosity.\*<sup>6</sup>*

Can I encourage you; no plead with you, to open your heart and then your mouth. Come to God almighty in Jesus wonderful name and acknowledge we are stuck in sin and no amount of self-effort and reincarnation are going to get us out. Acknowledge that we are sorry, so very sorry for our error (don't let pride prevent you admitting you are wrong, you have sinned, forget anybody else it's not about them) Turn and accept Jesus sacrifice for YOU, bend your knee, surrender you will, capacity and agency to His Omnibenevolence, and ask [Him to come into your life and be LORD](#). Then in that place, grace takes on another level of wonderful giving in and through **REDEMPTION**....But that is another journey.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>. G.K. Chesterton [www.quotablequotes.com](http://www.quotablequotes.com)

<sup>\*2</sup>, (Page 119) <sup>\*3</sup>, (page 121) <sup>\*4</sup> (page 122) <sup>\*5</sup> (page 122)all taken from Zacharais, Ravi (1990) (pp 89) *Jesus among others gods* – W Publishing Group, division of Thomas Nelson. Tennessee

<sup>6</sup> taken from Assaya, Michka (Riverhead Books, 2005) *Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assaya*

