

Taking a Point of View on a Debatable Question Concerning Karma and Rebirth

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My thesis is that there is a way to mediate between two competing views about karma and rebirth by arguing for a third position.

The first or traditionalist view is that supernatural agencies are required in the Buddhist system of concepts and that secularism and naturalized karma view will not supply concepts that are necessary for traditional Buddhism.¹

The second or modernist view holds that secularism and naturalized karma view is that supernatural agencies are not required in the Buddhist system of concepts and that, even without traditional concepts of karma, rebirth, and enlightenment after death, may still be a coherent karma and rebirth theory as applied to experience in this very lifetime.²

A third position or mediating view of co-existence advocates a doctrinal interpretation of Buddhist teachings, a socially engaged practice inspired by *metta*, and the theory and practice of *satipattana* (mindfulness of breathing).

I will inquire into each of the above views on karma and rebirth by asking: what does it mean, (the linguistic concern), how do you know? (the epistemological concern), and how does it work (the pragmatic concern)? These are three fundamental questions in philosophy for meaning, knowledge, and application. Although I will exemplify aspects of each position with reference to some Buddhist philosophers, I'm mainly interested in the three kinds of positions and the benefits

¹ A substantially different version of this first part was read at Association for Core Texts and Courses, Special Meeting, Irvine, California as "Which Asian Texts Should American College Students Read?" at Concordia University and the Atrium Hotel, July 13-15, 2018.

² Stephen Batchelor, *Buddhism without belief: a contemporary guide to awakening* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1977).

of each one. So I'm not interested in identifying the Buddhist scholar with what many call "the best view" or "the most popular view". I'm interested in identifying the kind of position most likely to bring unity to humankind and benefit the global ecosystem of animals, earth, and people going forward.

In sum, to raise the linguistic, epistemological, and pragmatic concerns about the interpretation of karma and rebirth is to raise some of the most significant and consequential questions we can ask of about Buddhism in modernity.

STIPULATIVE DEFINITIONS

For use in this paper I understand these terms as follows:

Naturalized karma and rebirth view: Naturalized theory of karma and rebirth holds that traditional concepts of karma, rebirth, and enlightenment are not necessary in Buddhism. Instead karma and rebirth are to be applied only to experience in this very lifetime; and talk about *nibbana* is only about *nibbana saupadisesa* (*nibbana* with the five aggregates intact) and not talk about *nibbana anupadisesa* (*nibbana* after death without the five aggregates for a *Tathagata*). The naturalized karma and rebirth view is essential to the Buddhist Modernist view, and is antithetical to the Buddhist traditionalist view.

Secularism: holds a viewpoint relating not to religion but to pragmatic and naturalistic concerns; relating not to spiritual matters but to ethical and everyday concerns.

Buddhist traditionalist view: holds that the theory of karma and rebirth without traditional concepts of karma, rebirth, and enlightenment is unintelligible. On this view the theory of karma and rebirth must include talk of enlightenment after death, that is, of *nibbana anupadisesa* (*nibbana* without the five aggregates intact) and Buddhist Modernism does not. Traditionalists assert that naturalized karma view is conceptually unconnected with related concepts that would ground key terms in traditional Buddhism.

Buddhist modernist view: asserts that naturalized karma view is capable of being connected with other concepts in Buddhism to form a coherent view about karma and rebirth. The Buddhist modernist view is the logical negation of Buddhist Traditionalist view.

An overview comment about Professor Richard Gombrich's interview with the Secular Buddhism organization, relates the idea of Buddhism in the modern world thusly:

"The term living tradition may seem as much an oxymoron as, well, Secular Buddhism. And yet this organic vitality is a hallmark of Buddhism, even and perhaps especially today. There have been growing pains as Buddhism rubs up against, and eventually becomes part of each different cultural context it encountered, but eventually Buddhism settled in. It's been an evolutionary tale, as new forms arise from the selective pressures of the environment, while older varieties may still flourish... or at least soldier on. Today is perhaps the greatest assault, as new ideas and cultures are pushing and pulling the tradition with unprecedented rapidity and variety."³

BODY OF THE PAPER

I. Introduction

The Appendix of this paper provides detailed text data for a well-rounded understanding of karma and rebirth. The Appendix uses a recent publication from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Press, *Common Buddhist Text: Guidance and Insight from the Buddha*, which includes Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana texts and is now available free online in a PDF.⁴ CBT, for short, is a singular development in the study of religion in Thailand today. It is one volume compiled by a team of Buddhist Studies text specialists that authoritatively presents Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana translations of Buddhist texts. The CBT in the Appendix of this paper shows in practice that and how topics in Buddhism may be presented well in only one volume of a little more than 400 pages, viz. MCU's *Common Buddhist Text*.

³ <https://secularbuddhism.org/episode-268-professor-richard-gombrich-buddhism-in-the-modern-world/>

⁴ Most Venerable Phra Brahmavajiranand, et al (ed. and trans.), *Common Buddhist text: guidance and insight from the Buddha* (Ayutthaya: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Press, 2017 and 2018).

In the paper I will outline versions of the Traditionalist and Modernist positions and propose a Middle Position. This position may activate cohesive community Buddhist values for both laity and monastic Sangha.⁵ On this view one may experience a continuity of experience from ordinary mental peace to *nibbana* in this very life whether monastic or laity.⁶ A path of social engagement that is agnostic about the supernatural but focused on meditation in daily life and benefiting local and global communities can coexist with traditional Sangha in the 21st century and beyond.⁷ In this process I will make my own argument toward proving a particular thesis about the interpretation of karma and rebirth, against the background of traditionalist and modernist positions.

II. Traditionalist and Modernist

When Stephen Batchelor published *Buddhism without Beliefs*, Bhikkhu Bodhi and others objected to several points in it. The main items are:

⁵Socially Engaged Buddhism refers to a process of applying meditation practice and *dhamma* teachings to situations of social, political, environmental, and economic suffering and injustice. Mentioned by Walpola Rahula in 1946 in connection with Buddha's instruction to monks to travel, spread the teachings widely, and that Buddha's teachings included social and economic matters. In the 1950s Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh and Plum Village made the idea influential through his collection of articles, "A Fresh Look at Buddhism", and in his response to war by community service in 1963 in Vietnam. The humanistic Buddhism movement in China of Taixu and Yinshun was an inspiration (and later Cheng Yen and Hsing Yun in Taiwan). In 1998 the Dalai Lama emphasized on a retreat in Bodh Gaya that, in contrast to Christians, Buddhists have not acted vigorously to address social and political issues. Roshi Pat Enkyo O'Hara has continued the Engaged Buddhist movement form Village Zendo in New York.

⁶ Divisions between monastics and laity are perpetuated by traditional beliefs that only ordained persons can attain enlightenment, but Buddhadasa has challenged this way of thinking. See, for example, Peter Jackson, *Buddhadasa A Buddhist Thinker for the Modern World* (Bangkok: The Siam Society Under Royal Patronage, 1988). Jackson observes: "many monks follow a *kammatic* form of Buddhism rather than a *nibbanic* rather than a *kammatic* form of Buddhism and some lay people follow the *nibbanic* form of the religion." (p. 319).

⁷ "Beyond" here refers to the emergence of a united Sangha consisting of male and female monastics and laity united on the basis of equality as human beings. These sons and daughters of the Buddha may work together toward common goals of *bhavana* or body-mind cultivation, facilitating human flourishing on the psychological and artistic levels, world peace, ecological harmony, and mitigating *dukkha* or suffering of all beings who can feel pain.

- A. Stephen Batchelor. *Buddhism without Beliefs: A Contemporary Guide to Awakening* (New York: Riverhead Books, Penguin Putnam Inc., 1997).
- B. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi. "Review of *Buddhism without Beliefs*" in BuddhaSasana home page English Section, buddhas.org

III. THREE PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS: Traditionalist, Modernist, and Mediating View

Argument A: TRADITIONALIST ARGUMENT [example: contrast this schema with Stephen Batchelor's *Buddhism without Beliefs*⁸]

- (1) There are two popular filters with which Buddhism is viewed, secularism and naturalized karma theory, and viewing Buddhism with either or both of these two filters one departs from traditional Buddhism.
- (2) Naturalized karma theory holds a view rejected by most Theravada practitioners, namely that without traditional concepts of karma, rebirth, and enlightenment karma theory may still be called karma theory if applied only to experience in this very lifetime.
- (3) Secularism holds views rejected by most Theravada practitioners, namely that by focusing on pragmatic and naturalistic concerns and not on spiritual matters is a good path.
- (4) As a corollary, viewing Buddhism from secularism and naturalized karma filters one departs from traditional Buddhism.
- (5) In traditional Buddhism, concepts of karma, rebirth, and enlightenment form a conceptual web and no one of these concepts are intelligible without the others.
- (6) The first part of *Kalama Sutta* about self-reliance forms a conceptual web with the second part recommending consulting the *vinnu* or wise ones, and also with the third part on the four assurances in "the safe bet argument"
- (7) There is no karma without rebirth and there is no self-reliance without the context of dialogue with the *vinnu* or wise ones and the safe bet argument of the four assurances.

⁸ Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Review of Buddhism without Beliefs: A Contemporary Guide to Awakening, by Stephen Batchelor," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 5 (1998): 14-21.

Therefore, secularism and naturalized karma filters are views rejected by most traditional Theravada Buddhist practitioners, and are regarded as conceptually unconnected with related concepts such as karma, rebirth, and enlightenment that would ensure the meaning of the terms in traditional Buddhism.

Now ask, applying the semantic, epistemological, and pragmatic criteria: what does the traditional view mean? How does one know it? How does the traditional view work?

The view has a meaning because there are language games and forms of life such as meditation, pilgrimage, and donation that conceptually fit together. The traditional view has an epistemological basis because those who practice the *abhinna* and *samadhi* and experience the 9th stage of meditation will know and see for themselves. Depending on the particular experience of individuals, there are many benefits possible from meditation such as developing the four *brahmaviharas* -- *metta*, (loving kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita*, (sympathy), *upekkha* (equanimity) -- and reducing *kodhana* (hatred and irritability). The view has pragmatic outcomes that work in terms of wellness and satisfactions that generations of meditators report having as benefits from studying with famous masters who know the psychic powers or *abhinna*. It does not however have the benefit of changing with the times, as the historically slow (and sometimes entirely lacking) support for women in Buddhism shows.

The main point about the traditionalist view is: supernatural agencies are required in Buddhism, and both the filter of secularism and the filter of naturalized karma theory have departed from traditionalist view of Buddhism in not believing in supernatural agencies.

Argument B: MODERNIST ARGUMENT [example: compare with Stephen Batchelor]⁹

- (1) Buddhism was never static but continually developed.
- (2) There is no static or original form of Buddhism that remains totally unchanged.

⁹ Interview of Stephen Batchelor from Barre Center for Buddhist Studies on his recent book, *After Buddhism*, buddhistinquiry.org (accessed October 24, 2021). Two of Stephen Batchelor's books, *After Buddhism* and *Secular Buddhism* are reviewed by Divan Thomas Jones from *Western Buddhist Review* in thebuddhistcentre.com (accessed October 24, 2021).

- (3) Whether there is any undisputable core of Buddhist doctrine is unclear.
- (4) There is no absolute standpoint to say a concept is or is not unconnected with Buddhism but only a range of possibilities in a contested space.

Therefore, on this Buddhist modernist view, doctrines of secularism and naturalized karma view are logically connected to Buddhism.

(N.B.: This conclusion of Buddhist modernism in Argument B contradicts the conclusion of Buddhist traditionalists in Argument A in I above and so we have a disputable question that the mediating position in Argument C will attempt to resolve.)

Now ask: what does it mean? How does one know? How does it work?

The modernist view has a meaning because there are language games and forms of life such as going to Sangha meditation meetings together, studying and discussing Buddhist writings in the group, helping newcomers find the way, and chanting together. The view has an epistemology because those who practice meditation will know and see the results for themselves. The view has pragmatic outcomes in terms of wellness and cultivation of mindfulness. It does not however have the advantage of retaining the traditional beliefs that many people find comforting and believable.

The main point about the Modernist View is that supernatural agencies are not required in modern Buddhism.

Argument C: MEDIATING THE TRADITIONALIST AND MODERNIST VIEWS

- (1) *Kesaputta Sutta*, commonly called the *Kalama Sutta* (or “Discourse to the Kalamas”) applies to modernist type criticism of karma and rebirth, and presents a wager (or safe bet) argument in defense of believing in karma and rebirth.

- (2) The safe bet argument can support the idea of karma and rebirth when expressed in narratives told, but not asserted as facts, that is, when they become guiding or regulative beliefs without metaphysics.¹⁰
- (3) As a corollary, Buddhist views like the “safe bet” argument of the *Kalama Sutta* cover belief in karma and rebirth without metaphysics in a pragmatic way against traditionalist claims that karma and rebirth must be understood as involving spiritual agencies. [By (2)]
- (4) The eightfold noble path consists of right view, right intention, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.
- (5) Morality, concentration, and wisdom constitute a summary of the eightfold noble path according to traditionalists.
- (6) Every day throughout the day people experience rising and falling, and karma and rebirth, because persons are not substances but processes constantly made and re-made within the causal nexus of change.¹¹ [compare to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and process philosophers]
- (7) As a corollary, Buddhism does not have to give up its traditional ethics of morality, concentration, and wisdom in replying to modernist criticism of karma and rebirth.

Therefore, the safe bet argument in “Discourse to the Kalamas” defends traditionalist belief in the theory of karma and rebirth from some modernist criticisms and allows one to retain traditional ethics when reinterpreted as regulative beliefs without metaphysics.

The main point about the Mediating View is that although supernatural agencies are not required in modern Buddhism, but they may be used by practitioners who find them comforting and believable.

Now ask: what does it mean? How does one know? How does it work?

First it has a clear meaning as use in language games and forms of life of going to meditation meetings, studying Buddhist writings, helping newcomers find the way, and chanting

¹⁰ My expression of this premise owes much to Richard Braithwaite, “An Empiricist View of the Nature of Religious Belief” and Wittgenstein’s idea of “regulative beliefs” recorded in *Lectures and Conversations*.

¹¹ I owe this point to Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, but the phraseology is mine so I cannot attribute it exactly to him.

together. Second, the view has an epistemology because those who practice meditation will know and see the results for themselves, and may be assisted with their questions by monks, nuns, and laypersons together who are in the community of practitioners. Thirdly, this mediating view combines the benefits of both monastic life and householder life. There are many benefits possible from meditation in terms of developing the four *brahmaviharas*, *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita*, *upekkha*, reducing anger and irritability (*kodhana*). The view has pragmatic outcomes in terms of wellness and satisfactions that generations of meditators report -- not by developing *abhinna* (six items of higher knowledge, psychic powers) -- but by developing *satipathana* (or *cit-wang* as Buddhadasa sometimes said). This could be developing the *kaya*, *vedana*, *citta*, and *dharma* as four initial keys to everything in Buddhadasa's *Anapanassati* system of mindfulness with breathing.¹² It has the advantages of retaining focus on traditional doctrines for those who need them and the advantage of adapting to changing times, and is therefore the most beneficial of the three views. It has the advantage over the Buddhist Modernist View of retaining some traditional beliefs that many people find comforting and believable. It has the advantage of being open to how Buddhism may develop in a future which can only flourish without dogmatism and in the spirit of discovery indicated in the *Kalama Sutta*.

The view has a meaning because there are language games and forms of life called modern Buddhism in which meditation practices and social engagement co-exist helping local and global communities. The view has an epistemological basis because those who practice both traditional Buddhist meditation and socially engaged Buddhism will know and see the dual strands of benefits intertwining themselves. These practitioners see that bringing together traditional Buddhist and modernist Buddhist practices have pragmatic outcomes far in excess of developing either of them in isolation. These practitioners are not cut off from tradition learn and grow both from famous old masters in robes and popular contemporary Buddhist speakers. It is a process philosopher's way of being Buddhist comparable to reenchantment without supernaturalism.¹³

¹² Bhikku Buddhadasa, *Mindfulness with breathing: unveiling the secrets of life* (Suan Mokbalarama, Chaiya: Dhammadana Foundation, 1990 and 2006), pp. 16, 40, 114 – 122, 127, 152, and 160.

¹³ For related developments in other religions, see *inter alia* John B. Cobb, *Process Theology*; C. Robert Mesle, *Process-Relational Philosophy*; and David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment without supernaturalism: a process philosophy of religion*.

Using meditation, engagement with societal issues related to the psychological issues of individual people, social issues related to Sangha and laity interaction, and all learn more from Buddhist social life while retaining the *dhamma* such as four noble truths and the eight-fold noble path.¹⁴

The main point about the Middle Position is that belief in supernatural agencies are not required in Buddhism but may be present in Buddhism for those who find these beliefs comforting and believable.

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Traditionalists assert that secularism and naturalized karma view and are conceptually unconnected with related concepts that would ground key terms in traditional Buddhism.

Modernists deny what traditionalists assert and instead assert that secularism and naturalized karma view are capable of being connected with other ethical concepts in Buddhism to form a coherent whole without metaphysics.

Middle Way position mediates by saying that that traditional meditation practices with *sila* (ethics) of the eightfold path can combine with old and new forms of meditation, so the three traditions of Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana can coexist and be practiced in a socially engaged way. In this way, *nibbana* in this very life is the focus of the meditative practices and socially engaged Buddhism is one form that mental cultivation (*bhavana*) takes. Anything to do with *nibbana* after death and *samadhi* states would still be a viable practice for those thus dedicated to the old tradition (*boran kammathana*) of esoteric Theravada.¹⁵ However, in modernity many practitioners in a unified Sangha consider the problem is to achieve greater unity. As I interpret Buddhaghosa, *anapanasati* (mindfulness of breathing) and *satipathana* (four foundations of mindfulness) are both very important. Just as doing philosophy and practicing Buddhism can be

¹⁴ A contemporary example is the monastery and eco-village of Ven. Prof. Dr. Hansa Dhammahaso at Sisaket. The eco-village is described in Kanchana Horsaengchai's dissertation in progress at IBSC MCU.

¹⁵ Kate Crosby, *Esoteric Theravada: the story of the forgotten meditation tradition* (Boulder CO: Shambala Publications, 2020).

done at different moments in a whole human life, so too different Buddhist traditions can coexist. From my perspective it is evident that, as stated above, the Middle Position is more beneficial than either of the other one-sided views and thus is the most acceptable view. Open-mindedness and not dogmatism has characterized the Buddha's perspective from the beginning and, accordingly, whatever view one takes it is important to keep an open mind.

EPILOGUE

In the mid to late 20th century philosophy, including philosophy of religion, pivoted toward Wittgenstein, and this development is not dead yet.¹⁶ Now the worlds of science and humanities are both taking a process turn. (See endnote 13.) Before, philosophy had its epistemological turn with early modern philosophy, its pragmatic turn with William James, and its linguistic turn in the 20th century. Perhaps now we can say there is a process turn. Alfred North Whitehead, John B. Cobb, David Ray Griffin, and C. Robert Mesle have shown the way to process philosophy and theology. It is a way distinct from the substance and dualistic thinking of the past. Some of these process thinkers, such as especially John Cobb, have shown a special affinity with Buddhist thinking, taking William James engagement with Buddhism further than ever before. One in this process group, David Ray Griffin, has written *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*, exploring how in his view Christianity is possible in modernity without mind-body dualism and without clinging to ghostly supernatural views of the afterlife. In modernity Don Cupitt paved the way in *A Sea of Faith* and numerous other books with his idea of a perspective with Buddhist form and Christian content.

Speaking personally for a moment, I hope that the next generation of¹⁷ Buddhist philosophers will develop inter-religious philosophy of religion in a process way towards global coexistence of faiths. This development may link with contemporary movements of ecological

¹⁶ Peter Harrison, Gifford Lectures, 7: "Wittgenstein on Religious Belief", accessed October 1, 2021 <https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/renewing-philosophy/7wittgenstein-religious-belief>.

¹⁷This recently published article of mine shows how binary thinking works to the detriment of animals: "Animals in Buddhism, Animal Symbolism, and the Importance of Animals in Buddhism" in *International Journal for the Study of Ch'an Buddhism and Human Civilization*, Chinese University of Hong Kong. July 2019.

awareness and breaking down unilateral binary thinking that pervades modern society in many ways.

APPENDIX

Let's see what the MCU expert translation team of international scholars say about karma and rebirth. Using the recently published *Common Buddhist Text: Guidance and Insight from the Buddha* (Ayutthaya: Mahaculalongkornrajavidyalaya University Press, 2017 and 2018), it is easily possible to choose a topic, for example, karma and rebirth, and sketch the outlines of the Buddha's with exact textual references from the Pali, and I now summarize.¹⁸

In Theravada Buddhism there is *samsara*, a cycle of rebirths, but it is without a known beginning. It follows that there is, on this view, no evidence of a first beginning initiated by a monotheistic substance called "God". (*Tinakattha Sutta* of *Samyutta Nikaya* II, 178). The reality of rebirth and karma is understood in Theravada Buddhism as independent from sacrifices and gifts, unlike in ancient Hindu rituals. It is an error to deny a future life, how one is reborn depends on one's conduct, and awakened ones directly know and see this. (*Apannaka Sutta* of *Majjhima Nikaya* I, 402) Buddhists think that believing in rebirth and karma is a safe bet as stated in the third part of the *Kalama Sutta*. This last one is a very important and well known *sutta*, but it is not one that people typically study deeply and completely: part one is about being self-reliant, the part two is about paying attention to the words of the wise ones, viz., the intellectuals (*vinnu*), and the third part is the probabilistic argument to the effect that believing in rebirth and karma is a safe bet.¹⁹ (*Kesaputta or Kalama Sutta* of *Anguttara Nikaya* I, 192). Another *sutta* says that there are five main rebirth realms: purgatory, animal, hungry ghosts, human, or the gods or devas. (*Nibbedhika Sutta* of *Anguttara Nikaya* III, 415). As Buddhism developed there came to be a sixth realm, the titans.

¹⁸ Most Venerable Phra Brahmapundit et.al, *Common Buddhist Text*, p. 258.

¹⁹ The four consolations of the *Kessamutt Sutta* (*Kalama Sutta*) are: if these is a heaven and I'm free from enmity and ill will, I will experience it; if there is not a heavenly realm I will still have been free from enmity and ill will; if bad things happen to people who do bad things, since I have no bad intentions then I will be unharmed; if bad things don't happen to people who do bad things, I will be pure anyway. (Kesamuttisutta – Bhikkhu Sujato, 65. With the Kalamas of Kesamutta suttacentral.net).

Perhaps the *deva* were of two types, one benevolent and shining, and another wrathful type who are malevolent and like to fight. The titans or *asuras* were divided over time from the benevolent deities to be an independent realm making a sixth rebirth realm. Anyway, rebirth as a human is a precious and rare opportunity as *Nakhasika Sutta* explains. If one is fortunate enough to have a human rebirth, then it is prudent to use the opportunity to attain enlightenment. (*Nakhasika Sutta* of *Samyutta Nikaya* II, 263.). Being born a human who can hear the *dhamma* is rare (*Dhammapada* 182). So, since life is short, it's good to practice while you can (*Dhammapada* 47). Our world in the context of the universe is one among clusters of worlds throughout the universe (*Abhibhu Sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikaya* I. 227-228). There are cycles of cosmic eons in Buddha's view (*Pabbata Sutta* of the *Samyutta Nikaya* II.181-182).

Next, to consider karma, karma (Pali: *kamma*) is volition (*Nibbedhika Sutta* of *Anguttara Nikaya* III.415), and one's unskillful actions have karmic impact sooner or later (*Dhammapada* 69-71). One's actions and thoughts condition one's rebirth, not the rituals of others (*Asibandhakaputta Sutta* of the *Samyutta Nikaya* IV.312-314). Karma shows how past actions lead to differences among people (*Culakammavibhanga Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya* III. 203-206). However, experiences, and skillful and unskillful actions, cannot all be blamed on past karma or a God, but neither are they causeless (*Titthayayatana Sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikaya* I.173-176). Feelings and illnesses are not all due to past karma (*Sivaka Sutta* of the *Samyutta Nikaya* IV.230-231). A good character can dilute the karmic results of a bad action (*Lonakapallaka Sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikaya*, I. 242-250). Self-determination of one's rebirth occurs through virtue, wisdom, and resolve (*Sankharuppati Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya* III.99-104). Karma can mature slowly, and one's view and attitude at the end of one's life is important (*Mahakammavibhanga Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya* III.214-215). There are implications of karma and rebirth for attitudes to others. For example, we have experienced in the past both the good times and bad times of others, so sympathy to others and non-attachment to good experiences are wise (*Duggatam and Sukhitam Suttas* of the *Samyutta Nikaya* II.186-187). This life and all rebirths result in ageing, sickness, and death, and nothing that is conditioned is permanent. (*Mahaparinibbana Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya* II.157 and the *Alagaddupamasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya* II. 157.) There are frailties of human life (*Ratthapala Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya* II.70-73), and one must accept the inevitability of death

(*Salla Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipata* 574-573). Anyway, the search for sensual pleasures leads to suffering (*Culadukkhakkhandha Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya* I.91-92.)

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