



The Mystery of God and the Claim of Reason: Comparative Patterns in Hindu-Christian Theodicy

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Abstract In a comparative study of *karma* theodicy and atonement theodicy, as developed by some Hindu and Christian theologians, this article argues that they present teleological visions where individuals become purged, purified, and perfected in and through their worldly suffering. A *karma* theodicy operates with the notion that there is some form of proportionality between past evil and present suffering, even if such correlations can only be traced by an enlightened sage or are known to the omniscient God. Christian mystics too seek not so much to explain suffering as to identify suffering with the agony of Christ on the cross, and they envision such suffering as part of a unitive journey where their love of Christ is purified. In these ways, both styles of theodicy use rational resources towards the goal of explanation, while reminding their adherents that the faltering intelligibility that they seek is to be seen as an integral component of their active participation in a sense of theological mystery that enfolds, and yet transcends, their finite existences.

Keywords *Karma* · Reincarnation · Atonement · Rammohun Roy · Sydney Cave · Alfred George Hogg · Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan · Rāmākṛṣṇa · Julian of Norwich

The themes of human suffering and the theological significance of its existential depths and its differential distributions across humanity are crucial to various dimensions of both Christian living and the socioreligious matrices of Hinduism. The Christian gospel—the “good news”—is grounded in the claim that a set of remarkable events centered around the life, death, and resurrection of a first-century Jewish figure called Jesus of Nazareth has inaugurated a new age where the divine spirit is actively working in and through the agonizing realities of human evil, suffering, and death. The Vedāntic soteriological traditions within the wider

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theological, experiential, and cultural matrices of Hinduism claim that the processes of *karma* and rebirth constitute a moral stage where individuals are gradually perfected towards their telos of supramundane fulfillment. As is indicated by this thumbnail sketch of “Christianity” and “Hinduism”—two massively complex blocks of scriptural exegesis, ritual practice, and soteriological technology—the motif of suffering is interwoven with questions of the origin of the world, the theological significance of human existence, the ultimate destiny of humanity, the transhistorical fulfillment of temporal life, and so on. Therefore, the Hindu and the Christian responses to the famous question, “Why does God allow suffering?,” which are at times sharply divergent and at other times strongly resonating, involve whole constellations of concepts such as original sin, free will, *karma*, predestination, self-realization, grace, ignorance, reincarnation, resurrection, and others.

Over the last five decades or so, a significant amount of philosophical material has been produced on the “problem of evil”—the question of why there is evil in a world which is putatively produced and sustained by a God who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. The argument from the premise that there is evil to the conclusion that there is no deity with various omniattributes has been broken down into two types—the logical and the evidential. According to the former, there is a deductive argument which proceeds with the force of logical necessity from the premise to the conclusion (Mackie 1955). If such an argument demonstrating logical incompatibility were to be devised, it would render theism incoherent at one stroke. However, the logical argument is usually taken as refuted—thus, it has been noted that God might allow certain instances of evil to bring about a good by which they are outweighed (Van Inwagen 1996). Philosophers such as William L. Rowe (1996) have instead developed versions of the evidential argument which argue inductively from the existence of certain types of seemingly pointless or “dysteleological” suffering to the nonexistence of a God who is omnipotent and morally perfect. The evidential argument too does not constitute a knockdown proof for or against the divine existence, for epistemic agents evaluate and assess the “evidence” differently from the perspectives of their own worldviews. The current analytical landscape regarding the problem is thus populated by various standpoints which can be placed in two broad categories—defense and theodicy. The former strategy seeks to rebut the charge that the existence of evil indicates that the existence of God is implausible or unlikely, by contending, for instance, in an influential style of argumentation called “skeptical theism,” that we are finite cognitive beings and therefore we cannot properly claim that we are able to comprehend the morally sufficient reasons an omniscient God could have for allowing specific instances of evil (Alston 1991; Wykstra 1984). The burden of proof is shifted to the nontheist on the grounds that the ways of God are so epistemically inaccessible to humanity that we are not in a position to state decisively that certain instances of evil are indeed gratuitous or irredeemable in the ultimate analysis. In contrast, the latter takes on the burden of proof and seeks to provide a more substantive account of the teleological orientation of suffering in a world under divine providence. One version, called the “free will” theodicy, argues that moral evil arises through the misuse of libertarian free will, which is intrinsically valuable and is given to us by God. Another version, called the “soul-making” theodicy, claims that human beings

are placed by God in challenging environments where by learning to choose the good, they can develop moral character and cultivate specific other-regarding virtues (Stoeber 1992: 50–58).

Introducing Karma and Atonement

Our argument will highlight certain distinctive blends of skeptical theism and substantive theodicy which have been developed for engaging with the presence of evil across some Hindu and Christian universes. The key foci in the constellations of debates that we will discuss are the “doctrine of *karma* and rebirth” and the “doctrine of the atonement” in the Hindu and the Christian contexts respectively. According to the former, suffering is to be understood as a pedagogic dimension of the world which is a moral gymnasium orientated towards the production, across several lifetimes, of the ultimate goods of human existence. The latter seeks to explain how salvation was wrought by God in Christ through his “atoning” death on the cross—had it not been for this offer of salvation through his sacrificial death, human beings would have remained in a state of bondage to the sinful world marked by suffering. We will see that these styles of theodicy, which seek to justify the ways of God in a world of great suffering, incorporate aspects of the more skeptical thesis that we are not in an epistemic position to plumb the depths of God whose mysterious ways are inscrutable. They invoke the sentiments expressed by Isaiah: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord” (55:8–9). While Hindu and Christian theodical worldviews are elaborated through distinct prisms of scriptural texts, a study of these styles on comparative registers indicates certain resonant parallels across their ways of seeking to make sense of the ways of God vis-à-vis evil in the world. Following Francis X. Clooney’s (1989: 548) notion of a “comparative theodicy,” which would proceed through mutual illumination and interrogation, we will highlight certain shared emphases on “soul-making” in and through the world, and on the acceptance of suffering as a constitutive dimension of the spiritual life, as well as certain divergent motifs relating to the incarnation of Christ and the multiple reincarnations of the human self. While Hindu or Christian theodical systems are sometimes presented as definitive solutions to the problem of evil (Herman 1976: 287), these proposals are, in fact, enmeshed in dense sets of presuppositions which point the inquirer towards the cultivation of a sense of mystery in the face of the divine infinity. Spiritual adepts across both Hindu and Christian worldviews are often presented as those individuals on the road to perfection who have renounced attempts to cognitively master the ways of God and who instead envision suffering as a vital aspect of the ongoing perfection of the world. Such saints embody and express a cosmological optimism that, in the final analysis, there is nothing that is pointlessly wicked or irredeemably flawed, so that in their spiritual vision suffering itself ceases to be a “problem”—even though others would have to accept on trust at least some of their truth-claims about the unfailing encompassment of human evil by divine goodness.

Thus, as we will see, both the doctrines of *karma* and atonement supply distinctive responses to the problem of evil in the form: “because of *x*, *y*, and *z*” (for instance, incarnation, divine sport, reincarnation); however, regarding the question, “but why *x*, *y*, and *z*—in the first place?” they direct us towards the spaces of divine mystery. Since a reasoned account of why there is evil in the world is integrally related to an outline of Christian salvation and Hindu *mokṣa*, theodicy often featured in the writings of, on the one hand, Christian missionaries in British India who articulated variations on the atoning death of Christ and, on the other hand, Hindu intellectuals who sought to understand the pervasiveness of evil through constructive reformulations of the notions of *karma* and rebirth. We begin with Sydney Cave’s *Redemption: Hindu and Christian* (1919) and move to Alfred George Hogg’s *Karma and Redemption: An Essay Toward the Interpretation of Hinduism and the Re-Statement of Christianity* (1909) and *The Christian Message to the Hindu* (1947). We work with these texts because they constitute two highly reflective sets of Christian engagements with Hindu notions of evil and suffering, even if the reflections are not always sufficiently informed or nuanced: for instance, as we will see, they tend to view the karmic cycles as entirely juridical or retributive and overlook their teleological orientations within Hindu worldviews. Nevertheless, their writings remain useful resources for our purpose because they highlight, in a comparative register, certain vital issues which form the conceptual core of debates relating to theodicy in Hindu and Christian religious universes. A major theme they work with is that of “unmerited suffering”—namely, the suffering undergone by individuals which cannot be causally traced to their own doings—and they grapple with the claim that a *karma* theodicy is able to situate such seemingly gratuitous suffering within the rational order of a cosmos shaped by universal justice (Herman 1976). Max Weber declared in 1916 that the “*Karma* doctrine...represents the most consistent theodicy ever produced by history” (1958: 121), and several other thinkers have repeated this claim. Thus, according to Svāmī Paramānanda, the doctrine of *karma* and reincarnation rejects the notion that there is any capriciousness in the moral cosmos: “All reward and punishment are only the natural reactions of our own actions and wholly determined by us. We reward and punish ourselves” (1919: 53). For such Hindu thinkers, a *karma* theodicy vitally holds out the prospect that all individuals will arrive at the *summum bonum* along their moral trajectories shaped by worldly suffering across multiple lifetimes.

In contrast, for Cave (1883–1953) and Hogg (1875–1954), there is ultimately no “solution” to the problem of evil along the lines of a rational schema; their styles of “skeptical theism” instead point to the mystery of the atoning death of Christ whose sufferings human beings should accept as the prototype for their own trials on their earthly pilgrimages towards the eschatological goal of self-sacrificial love. According to some mainstream Christian eschatological visions, individuals who fail to respond in faith to the good news announced by Christ will not receive the ultimate gift of salvation. However, some Christian theologians have also held that the promise of salvation should not be tied to a conscious incorporation into the fruits of Christ’s atoning death and that when the impediments to knowing God are

removed in the afterlife, individuals will freely turn to God (Robinson 1950: 119; Hick 2010: 362–64; Talbott 1990).¹ Thus, regarding the question of what happens to those who die in ignorance of Christ, Stephen T. Davis (1990: 183) writes that the Bible offers no clear answers on this matter, but on the basis of his conviction that reconciliation to God is possible only through Christ and that it would be “unfair” on the part of God to condemn such individuals, he puts forward a “theological conjecture.” It may be possible, Davis writes, that the ignorant are given a chance to hear the gospel (for the first time) after their deaths, which is followed by a positive response to Christ on their part.

A survey of Hindu-Christian interreligious encounters over the last three hundred years or so indicates that the conceptual pivot of many of these debates is the defense or the rejection of precisely a *karma* theodicy or the doctrine of the atonement, with the question of universal salvation often playing a significant role in these intellectual exchanges. The interpretations of the person and the work of Christ offered by figures ranging from Svāmī Vivekānanda (1863–1902) to Mahātmā Gandhi (1869–1948) to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975) view Jesus primarily as a moral teacher and reject the notion that his sufferings on the cross have a sacrificial quality and lead to the forgiveness of the sins of human beings (Thomas 1969). They view Christ as an *avatāra*, *yogī*, and so on, but not as a savior whose death on the cross “in place” (Greek: *anti*, *hyper*, *peri*) of sinful human beings is an atonement that reconciles them with God (Malkovsky 2010: 3–4). Given that a central aspect of Christ’s theological uniqueness is understood in mainstream Christianity in terms of his atoning death, an examination of some of the reasons for Hindu rejections of the notion that God was in Christ’s reconciliatory work is vital to an understanding of Hindu-Christian interreligious dynamics. After our study of Cave and Hogg, we will therefore turn to the arguments developed by Rammohun Roy (1772–1833) against the doctrine of the atonement. Roy offered what is probably the first biblically informed Hindu critique and addressed a vital theme which continues to structure several strands of Christian theologizing on the doctrine—namely, the morality of the atoning death which is said to be the foundation of the salvation of humanity.

Unmerited Suffering: Between Karma and Christ

Cave begins his presentation of what he refers to as the “doctrine of cyclic recompense” by noting that unmerited suffering is a deep mystery in the face of which Western humanity simply falls dumb, and in such cases the attempts “to justify the ways of God to man” have failed² (1919: 179). He offers an initial response, from his Christian perspective, by claiming that if what is being demanded

¹ In this article, the doctrine of the atonement is presented as the central motif of Christian theodicy because it is crucial to the soteriologies sketched by Cave and Hogg. This doctrine indeed remains the pivot of theodicy for theologians from various Reformed, Baptist, and Pentecostal denominations. At the same time, however, it is important to note that some theologians from Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, and Anglican denominations have increasingly moved away from atonement-based theodicy.

² Cave Claim 1.

is a perfect knowledge through which we can plumb the depths of the divine nature, we should simply state that the problem at hand is insoluble because of the limitations of our finitude. However, in the case of the Hindus, he goes on to note, the problem is not only not insoluble, but has in fact been solved—the effects of the actions performed by individuals within one lifetime shape their existence in subsequent lifetimes, so that the dynamics of reward or retribution connect the cycles of births and deaths. Thus, since the human condition is a result of one's own prior deeds, Hindus are not mystified by the forms of seeming injustice that, in the estimate of others, run throughout the world. Cave highlights two dimensions of the doctrine of recompense across lifetimes which he regards as significant: it “provides a theodicy easily understood and generally accepted,” and it “secures the recognition of the principle of retribution” (1919: 180). After this sketch of the doctrine, Cave proceeds to articulate several critiques. First, he argues that there is indeed some retributive connection between sin and suffering, as is indicated in the notion that as we sow, so shall we reap.³ However, the doctrine sets up a “mathematical equation” between actions and their effects of the following type: “so much surplus of good deeds equals so much happiness; so much surplus of evil deeds equals so much misery” (Cave 1919: 181). Second, a systematic application of the doctrine, which not only includes human beings, but also extends to the divine reality itself, leads to the following problem. Either the finite gods are subject to the karmic law, and thus undergo the cycles of births and deaths, or the supreme Brahman is beyond the karmic principle, and thus inactive or only passively involved in the redemption of humanity. Consequently, there is no conceptual space in the doctrine for a “living God,” and we have here, Cave remarks pointedly, “a theodicy which has little use for a ‘theos’”⁴ (1919: 184). Third, properly understood, the doctrine does not strengthen, but in fact weakens, the moral connection between past sins and present suffering, for human beings do not have any memory of their previous existences⁵ (Cave 1919: 189).

Cave's discussion of the doctrine sets the backdrop for his outline of what he claims to be distinctive about the Christian understanding of “the problem of evil,” which arises from the fact that faith in the God of mercy who is the creator, sustainer, and governor of the world seems incompatible with natural calamities which wipe out entire populations at a stroke. However, in the New Testament, we are not given a speculative solution to the problem—rather, the forms of suffering undergone by the disciples of Christ for his sake are presented to us as opportunities for glorifying God. Thus, the problem in these books “is not so much solved as removed,” for it is not viewed in terms such as retribution for past errors or the failure of God to act justly in human history⁶ (Cave 1919: 192). Jesus pointed to God the Father who lovingly created human beings not as things but as persons who are capable of exercising free choice, and through their faith in God Christians are able to say that amidst all their miseries the world is sustained by divine love. Thus,

³ Cave Claim 2.

⁴ Cave Claim 3.

⁵ Cave Claim 4.

⁶ Cave Claim 5.

Christians view suffering as charged with the redemptive telos of deepening their daily existence in the God of love who works through the evil of the world: “The Holiest died upon the cross. It is not strange that those who seek to follow Him should have to suffer. Such suffering has not been counted punishment but privilege. It is a witness to the love of God. It is a continuation of the work of Christ”⁷ (Cave 1919: 195).

Finally, Cave elaborates what he regards as the overarching distinction between the *karma* theodicy and the Christian’s participation in the sufferings of her master—unlike the former which is juridical and leaves no conceptual space for a divine judge, the Christian understanding of punishment is remedial and moral. While notions of retribution are indeed integral to the Christian message, there is no attempt to proportionately adjust past sin and subsequent punishment—indeed, at its heart lies the preaching that human beings can receive forgiveness for their sins and enter the kingdom that Christ has inaugurated. Thus, Christianity speaks of a rebirth not in the strict Hindu sense, but as a “new birth” where individuals receive an impetus of divine power which regenerates their personalities, so that by making a decisive break with their past lives shaped by selfishness, they turn to the God of love. However, the “forgiveness” in the Christian message should be understood not in a juridical sense of granting an amnesty or cancelling old debts, but as the reconciliation of human beings with God, and this restoration is effected through the atoning death of Christ the savior. The holy God cannot treat human sin with indifference, and to turn us around from our sinfulness with the moral power of love, God who was in Christ demonstrated through his agonized death on the cross the eternal significance of redemptive love⁸ (Cave 1919: 196–203).

Hogg, a Scottish educational missionary, was a professor at Madras Christian College for several decades and significantly also a teacher of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. He strikes in several writings some of the notes we have observed in Cave, while adding some distinctive variations. He comments that he often found undergraduate students to be of a controversialist spirit in their interactions with Christian missionaries, and the charge that he had to specifically counter was that the problem of unmerited suffering was one to “which the Christian Church has formulated no answer” (Hogg 1947: 10). Hogg puts forward the following contrast between the Hindu and the Christian approaches to the question of reconciling unmerited suffering with belief in a benevolent creator: both agree, as a matter of fact, that there is no conceptual problem with this issue, but the former believes this to be the case on the basis of the law of *karma* and rebirth while the latter makes the claim that “it is right that there should be undeserved suffering”⁹ (Hogg 1947: 75). Hogg defends the Christian position by arguing that in a world that runs, under divine providence, in accordance with natural laws, there will be instances when certain actions of sinful human beings lead to the undeserved suffering of their fellow-creatures. However, Christ’s atonement must not be understood in juridical or forensic terms as if he bore upon himself the sins of guilty human beings, but

⁷ Cave Claim 6.

⁸ Cave Claim 7.

⁹ Hogg Claim 1.

viewed as the focal point through which was expressed the divine horror of sin as well as the divine love that burns it up in a purifying fire¹⁰ (Hogg 1909: 108–9).

At the same time, Hogg (1909: 65) is concerned, as is Cave, to affirm the centrality in Christian doctrine of the notion of divine judgement, while arguing that the focus of God's providential care is not proportioning in a juridical manner happiness to merit, but offering all human beings the gift of eternal fellowship with God. As innocent Christians suffer the evil consequences of the sins of others, they should retain a quiet confidence in the presence of God and demonstrate to others the regenerating power of their unmerited love (Hogg 1909: 96–97). If the Christian experience of salvation is thus shaped by the moral force of God's redeeming love, the Hindu pilgrimage towards liberation is shaped by the calculus of recompense. Echoing Cave's points about a quantitative adjustment and the retributive dimension of the *karma* theodicy, Hogg notes the Hindu belief regarding a "relative proportionment" (1917: 222) between the empirical joys and sorrows of an individual and her moral deserts, even if this proportionality is not readily visible or manifest to the eye.¹¹ However, there are two strands underlying this conception, one of which is the doctrine of transmigration, and the other is the view that there is a moral order in the universe so that no individual experiences unjust suffering. Hogg writes that whatever may be a Christian theologian's final conclusion concerning the former, the latter remains crucial to Christian reflections on the problem of suffering.¹² Though the New Testament does provide a response to the question of suffering, believing that it is caused by sin, Christian theologians have not developed any systematic theory for the question of the "distribution of suffering" among human beings (Hogg 1917: 225). The ultimate reason for this, Hogg believes, is the conviction that Christ, who suffered more than anyone else, is present to those who are in agony and that as the loving God He did not want to remain extraneous to their struggles on earth. Somewhat remarkably, in the light of the reflections of present-day Christian theologians who have grappled with the question of belief in divine goodness in the face of "horrendous evil" (Adams 1999), Hogg argues that unmerited suffering cannot be regarded as a horror in Christian life which is centered around the life and death of the innocent Christ who did not deserve to suffer. Therefore, when an individual is subjected to suffering which others have deserved more directly, she should regard it with a sense of joy: "Christianity teaches that unmerited suffering is not an outrage and an injustice; that it is, on the contrary, a privilege and an honour"¹³ (Hogg 1909: 60). Conversely, while the *karma* hypothesis claims to eliminate injustice from the grand scheme of things by squaring an individual's suffering with her (past and present) merits, Hogg argues that such a retributive law "can cut both ways" (1947: 79). For example, if a self-sacrificing person were to perform an action that would increase the happiness of another, the latter would have to experience more pain in a subsequent birth so as

¹⁰ Hogg Claim 2.

¹¹ Hogg Claim 3.

¹² Hogg Claim 4.

¹³ Hogg Claim 5.

to restore the balance, with the consequence that all acts of other-regarding benevolence would ultimately be futile¹⁴ (Hogg 1947: 79).

The rejection by Cave and Hogg of a strict proportionality between past sin and present suffering (Cave Claim 1 and Hogg Claim 1) can be traced to the mode of skeptical theism in the Book of Job, which seems to challenge human attempts to explain the origin, presence, and persistence of inexplicable suffering. While the friends of Job, a righteous person who suffers grievously, operate with the understanding that suffering is related to the failure to keep God's commandments, David B. Burrell (2008) notes that Job himself does not speak about God but directly to God, and in turn God listens to and speaks to Job. The Book does not seek to offer sufficient reasons for why people suffer but points to the interaction between Job and the sovereign God who is the creator, preserver, and governor of the vast universe.

The biblical sense of a disjunction between finite human reason and divine mystery appears later in a famous debate between Saint Augustine (354–450 CE) and his redoubtable critic, the Pelagian Julian of Eclanum (386–455 CE). This disputed revolved, among other things, around the question of divine equity and, more specifically, whether God can be said to be “just” if, according to Augustine's notion of divine predestination, God will not effect the conversion of all human beings and put them on the road to salvation. Until around 396 CE, Augustine seems to have accepted the Ciceronian definition of justice as “giving each person her due” according to which *iustitia* is based on the *ius* as established by the *iuris consensus*. After his intense reading of Saint Paul around this time, however, he began to grapple with the biblical text (Malachi 1:3) which states that God hated Esau even before he was born. This declaration could not be explained in terms of a Ciceronian understanding of justice for Esau had not transgressed any rules, human or divine, to have deserved such a condemnation. Augustine was led to transpose *iustitia* from a secular concept to a theocentric one: *iustitia* was now ultimately rooted in the divine will itself which had established the correct (but now violated) hierarchy of relations between God and the created world (McGrath 1983). This shift in the understanding of *iustitia* became more prominent in Augustine's polemical exchanges with Julian concerning divine grace and original sin towards the end of his life, with Augustine firmly emphasizing that the human will in a fallen world is unable to turn towards God unless it is regenerated by divine grace. Julian argued that God judges each individual with regard only to her personal merits and claimed that he had biblical support for his view that God always judges human beings *in aequitate*. Augustine, in turn, replied with an appeal to the “Parable of the Laborers” in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–10) where all the workers received the same wage even though they started work at different times of the day (*Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* i, 38). Consequently, in response to questions such as why God chose Jacob over Esau even before their births when there could have been no moral differences between them, Augustine appealed to the hiddenness of God's justice. In fact, he says that he calls God “just” simply because he cannot find a better word and that our human

¹⁴ Hogg Claim 6.

conceptions of justice cannot be applied to God who is in fact beyond justice (Augustine, *Sermo* 341, 9 [419 CE]).

Augustine's sense of the divine mystery did not seem to be acceptable to Julian, as John M. Rist points out: "How far is Augustine justified in drawing such a distinction between human and divine standards? Julian of Eclanum thought that Augustine's account of the justice of God preserved the name of justice but nothing recognizable of its substance" (1994: 275). Augustine would perhaps reply that though he affirms that God is indeed "just," this is primarily a theological conception which must not be quantitatively measured in terms of the legal rights and duties of an individual within the framework of a political community. For Augustine, human beings cannot be regarded simply as individuals for they possess a corporate Adamic identity through their participation in a sinful humanity, and one cannot rationalize the divine dealings with fallen creatures by claiming that God must dispense justice, like a human judge, by dealing with each individual separately "according to her deserts" (*De civitate Dei* XIV, 26). As we will see, fourteen hundred years later, Roy would invert this Augustinian argument, structured by an appeal to the "inscrutable" judgment of God, during his debates with Baptist missionaries over the atoning death of Christ.

The Karma Theodicy: From Proportionality to Mystery

If a Hindu theologian—adopting a Ciceronian understanding of justice—could argue that God spurned Esau because of his prior karmic demerits, for an Augustinian Christian theologian the scriptural text can only be explained through an appeal to the mysterious judgment of the eternal God who is morally perfect. Thus, the set of contrasts presented by Cave and Hogg between certain styles of theodicy in Hindu and Christian thought involves dense networks of claims about the nature of the divine reality, the shape of the moral cosmos, and the dynamics of human emancipation from worldly conditions. Cave and Hogg articulate specific critiques of the *karma* theodicy and suggest that the Christian understanding of evil is couched in terms not so much of a rational justification, but of an individual's "soul-making" through an existential identification with the suffering of the "man of sorrows," Jesus Christ (Cave Claim 6 and Hogg Claim 5). We will now analyze these critiques, and then go on to study some Hindu responses to the Christian doctrine of the atonement.

Between Cave and Hogg, on the one hand, and the proponents of a *karma* theodicy, on the other hand, lies a sharp contrast relating to the theme of "unmerited suffering"—while the former argue that it does exist and is subsumed into divine redemptive purposes, the latter is constructed partly to ultimately reject its possibility. For a formulaic statement, in quasi-arithmetical terms, of the connection between past and present, we may turn to *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 6.1.45: the same person enjoys the fruits of the same meritorious or demeritorious act in the

next world in the same manner and to the same extent according to the manner and the extent to which that act has been performed in this world.¹⁵ The question of quantitative proportionality between moral acts and their deserts remains a vexed theme in debates relating to *karma* and rebirth, especially given that the severity of the suffering that some people undergo—for instance, the inmates at Auschwitz or those afflicted with chronic pain—seems to be vastly inconsistent with evil they may have committed (Kaufman 2005: 21). To begin with, *pace* Cave and Hogg, the *karma* theodicy need not be presented as a predictive calculus which would spell out in the here-and-now the precise timing, extent, and distribution of rewards and punishments, for across the Hindu and the Buddhist traditions, only self-realized or enlightened individuals such as the Buddha are said to be able to see the specific workings of karmic processes in the light of their spiritual perfection. At the same time, however, there are indeed some scriptural texts which do not hesitate to delineate descriptive correlations between past misdeeds and present suffering. According to *Manusmṛti* 12.55–68, a Brāhmaṇa who steals is said to be reborn as a spider, snake, or vicious ghoul, while to stealers of specific objects specific rebirths are assigned: by stealing grain one becomes a rat, by stealing deer a wolf, by stealing a horse a tiger, and so on. The voluminous Purāṇas too occasionally outline such chains of karmic consequentiality. For instance, *Varāha Purāṇa* 203.13–18 says that people who deal in the flesh of animals suffer torments in hell, take birth as deformed human beings, and are afflicted with various physical and mental ailments.

The principle of proportionality suggested by these texts indicates that an individual cannot attain the infinite good of liberation through finite acts performed within the short span of one lifetime. Therefore, as Radhakrishnan notes, the pilgrimage towards the ultimate involves arduous processes which stretch across vast expanses of time: “The self aims at fulfilment of function or development of individuality.... There are no blind rushes to the goal. The children of a God in whose eyes a thousand years are as a day need not be disheartened if the goal of perfection is not attained in one life” (1932: 288). The principle can also be given a negative formulation which states that no summation of human errors can be commensurate with eternal punishment, so that the Christian eschatological possibility (if not reality) of everlasting torment in hell is to be rejected: “Even if we have made innumerable mistakes, we cannot suffer eternally, because for a finite action there cannot be an infinite punishment, since action and reaction must always be equal” (Paramananda 1919: 53). Interestingly, Geddes MacGregor invokes this principle from a Christian perspective to argue that some aspects of the belief in *karma* and reincarnation can be situated on the horizons of Christian soteriology. Different individuals receive different sets of opportunities to respond to God and their spans of earthly life are widely different, so that “the notion that each is to be judged for all eternity on the basis of such disparate opportunities is totally incompatible with the concept of a beneficent and almighty God.... The doctrine of transmigration fits perfectly as a Christian interpretation of Purgatory” (MacGregor 1991: 94–95).

¹⁵ *yena yāvān yathādharmo dharmo veva samīhitaḥ | sa eva tat-phalaṃ bhunkte tathā tāvad amutra vai ||*

Therefore, given the karmic correlation from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, we could consider a possible world where God, the dispenser of cosmic justice, metes out punishments to human beings. Even if their suffering seems horrendous from our finite perspectives, if we are able to affirm, perhaps through an appeal to scriptural sources, that there is no iniquity in the morally perfect God (Psalm 32:3), we can trust that this suffering is proportionate. As we have seen, Cave and Hogg too do not object to the claim that God is a divine judge—indeed they affirm it (Cave Claim 2 and Hogg Claim 4)—but they wish to add that God’s primary providential care lies not in dispensing or upholding universal justice, but in bringing human beings towards God through the moral force of divine love. The vital question now is whether the karmic order of cosmic justice is an inviolably closed causal structure, so that God is its (somewhat passive) universal governor who cannot directly (“miraculously”) intervene in its filaments to draw human beings towards God (Sharma 1990a: 52–55). We have the following dilemma expressed in Vedāntic terminology—on the one hand, if Brahman is under the sway of the law of moral causation, Brahman is not supreme over the world, but, on the other hand, if Brahman liberates only a few individual selves without regard to the operation of the karmic principle, Brahman is partial to them.

This question was a major cause of a split in the tradition of Rāmānuja—one group called the Vaḍagalais insisted that the individual must have some prior consciousness of its moral unworthiness which is an occasion (*vyaja*) for Brahman, the “just” upholder of the karmic law, to mercifully step in, while the other camp, the Teṅkalais, argued that the devotional response of the individual to Brahman is itself a product of “divine help which is uncaused” (*nirhetukakṛpā*). We may frame these intra-Vaiṣṇava debates in terms of the attempt to negotiate the tension between the Lord’s absolute sovereignty (*svātantrya*) and His gracious mercy (*kṛpā*), while simultaneously affirming both. Both groups agreed that the Lord’s merciful approach to the world is unconditional (*nirauṇādhika*) and innate (*sahaja*) in that when He raises bound selves out of the cycle of rebirth, this action is not caused by anything external to His nature. Where they disagreed was over the thorny question of whether when He does make Himself mercifully accessible to a specific bound self at a specific time, one can continue to speak of an “uncaused grace” of the Lord or whether this divine offer is partially conditioned by the self’s previous *karma*. The reputed founder of the Teṅkalai tradition, Maṇavālamāuni, argued that the Lord’s gracious *karma*-erasing glance in itself was efficacious in removing sins from an unworthy individual such as Nammālvār who had not performed any religious austerity nor practiced any forms of *yoga*. Venkaṭanātha (also known as Vedāntadeśika), however, is not convinced with this response and argues that if the Lord liberates individuals in an arbitrary manner with no regard for their previous *karma*, He should have, to be truly merciful and not cruel or partial to those whom He does not choose, drawn all beings towards Himself. Instead, he argues that the Lord has laid down certain pretexts (*vyaja*) such as the act of taking refuge in the Lord or performing the discipline of *bhaktiyoga*, and when the individual takes up one of these means towards liberation (*mokṣa*), the Lord, with His disfavor towards them pacified, brings them towards Himself by destroying their ignorance. Therefore it is the ripening of the individual self’s *karma* at a

specific time, with the Lord continuously upholding the karmic order, that produces in it the desire for *mokṣa* and Nammālvār's liberation too took place through the fruition of his past *karma* (Mumme 1987: 265).

In the Vedāntic frameworks of these debates, such perplexities over divine majesty and accessibility are shaped by certain aphorisms in the key text, the *Brahmasūtra*, which suggests, through a *prima facie* viewpoint (*pūrvapakṣa*), that Brahman is not the ultimate cause of the universe, for inequalities, defects, and imperfections of various sorts are manifest in it, and these cannot be attributed to Brahman (Herman 1971). In his commentary on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.34, Śaṅkara responds that the production of this unequal world is shaped by the fruits of works in the form of the virtues and the vices of individuals, and because God takes these factors into consideration God is beyond reproach. However, as Bimal Krishna Matilal (1992: 368–69) has noted, the dependence of God on the karmic merits and demerits of individuals involves a restriction on the divine omnipotence. A similar restriction is implied by Rāmānuja's theodicy, which begins by noting the *prima facie* claim that a merciful divinity would not produce a world such as ours which is full of evils of various kinds—rather, a divinity moved by pity would produce one that is altogether happy. He responds in his commentary on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.33 by stating that Brahman produces the world solely with the motive of productive joy (*līlā*). Though the Lord Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa is ever self-satisfied (*ātmatṛpta*) in that He has no desires that are unattained, He may find a certain activity delightful not because He stands to gain something from it that He was lacking earlier, but simply because He finds it inherently delightful. To emphasize this point, he gives the example of a great king who indulges himself in a game of balls not because he wishes to attain anything (he has already conquered the world) but entirely as a sport. Once again, the Lord cannot be charged with partiality and cruelty, for the differential types of suffering in which individuals are immersed are the karmic results of their own prior actions (Thibaut 1904: 477–79). At this stage, however, one could object that given that the Lord's *līlā* unfolds in accordance with the nomic operations of the karmic system, the Lord is unable to intervene to assist worldly individuals on their karmic trajectories.

If the law of *karma* is inviolable, there is no arbitrariness about the world in which every individual receives the just deserts for her prior actions, but if the Lord cannot loosen the connection between past actions and present conditions according to His will, the Lord cannot, in effect, intervene in human affairs. A possible response is to view such “intervention” not in terms of the Lord as the remover of the karmic inheritance of a specific individual, but as the ever-present empowerer of human agency who, by administering the law of *karma*, enables individuals to gradually move closer to Himself (Reichenbach 1989). This response is, in effect, the Vaḍagalai resolution of the dialectic between divine “grace” and divine “justice” in Śrīvaiṣṇava theology: on the one hand, the Lord is like the rain that falls equally on all, while, on the other, the Lord actively seeks to draw the embodied selves towards liberation by engendering in them, in accordance with the law of *karma*, devotional love towards Himself. Thus, Veṅkaṭanātha emphasized that there need not be any conflict between the Lord's favor and the karmic order: the finite self is not an autonomous entity effecting its own liberation, for it is the Lord who as the

universal agent (*sarvakartā*) makes possible the fruition of good *karma*, and the Lord prompts the self to move towards *bhakti*, or the act of surrender (*prapatti*). Thus, Venkaṭanātha holds that Lord who, as the supreme governor of the karmic law, metes out rewards and punishments to individual selves also mercifully helps these selves immersed in the world: “The sovereignty of one without mercy is oppressive. The compassion of one who is not sovereign is of no help to others and brings pain to himself” (Mumme 1987: 259, citing Vedāntadeśika 1980: Chapter 23, page 640). Now the Teṅkalai concern seems to be that under this conception of the Lord’s relation to the law of *karma*, the Lord becomes its mere administrator. They argued that in order to safeguard the Lord’s supremacy over the world one must emphasize that He can raise any self without regard to its previous *karma* towards Himself. However, if the Vaḍagalai understanding of intervention threatens to push the Lord into the background, the Teṅkalais had to face the charge of arbitrariness known as *sarvamuktiprasaṅga*: if the individual’s response indeed plays no role in the Lord’s compassionate approach to the world, the Lord should have liberated all selves and not just a specific few. In an almost Augustinian manner, Maṇavālamūni points to the hiddenness of the divine wisdom and develops the analogy of a king who takes one woman to be his queen out of many. The king’s will cannot be questioned, and his subjects do not dispute his preference, and *a fortiori* when the infinitely more sovereign Lord desires to grant release to one of his “accessories” we may not seek to discover the reason for this choice (Mumme 1987: 261–62).

Thus, Cave rightly notes (Claim 2) that if the karmic order is understood as a rigorously juridical system based on quantitative adjustments, the divine reality indeed becomes reduced to the status of a distant judge who passively overlooks its operation. However, as the Vaḍagalai-Teṅkalai debates indicate, these medieval Vaiṣṇava theologians too were aware of this theme, and as they grappled with it, they arrived at somewhat different conclusions. Nonetheless, *pace* Cave, they did not view the karmic processes merely as a judicial matter of recompense—they would argue that individuals undergo, in and through the retributive system of *karma*, a spiritual reformation in the direction of their Lord. The key question that emerges in this context is whether such regeneration is intelligible in the milieu of reincarnation, for given that individuals do not usually recall their putative past lives, they cannot be held morally culpable in this life for alleged crimes they do not remember. Mariasusai Dhavamony argues that the “doctrine cannot be reconciled with the fact that there is no continuity of consciousness of people between their past and present lives. Justice requires that the same conscious person who sinned must be punished for his or her own crime and no other” (1991: 162). Thus, as Cave too had pointed out (Claim 4), the processes of *karma* and reincarnation cannot be a pedagogical instrument in moral restoration since we do not know the past errors for which we are presently said to undergo suffering.

At least three types of responses have been offered in reply to this particular critique. The first response states although we lack such memories, this epistemic gap does not in itself disprove the metaphysical realities associated with a reincarnating self. Thus Radhakrishnan argues that “the metaphysical question of the continuity of the self is not in any way affected by the discontinuity of memory”

(1932: 299). We do not conclude that the early stages of our infancy were nonexistent simply because we do not have any conscious recollections of those days, and likewise we are not rationally justified in ruling out the reality of past lifetimes simply because we do not have any memories of them (Chadha and Trakakis 2007: 536). The second response transforms this seeming epistemic vice into a theoretical virtue and claims that the usual absence of memories assists our spiritual regeneration, for if we were overwhelmed with memories of past errors, we would be unable to fix our attention on the road toward our recovery (Paramananda 1961: 94). The third response is to appeal to the authority of some spiritual adepts who have undertaken specific disciplines and who are able to recall their past lives. *Manusmṛti* 4.149 (ca. 200 CE) states in this connection: “By reciting the Vedas constantly, by performing purifications, by engaging in ascetic practices, and by not inflicting harm on creatures, he remembers his former birth.” As individuals progress on the spiritual path, they are able to activate dispositional memories which are transmitted across lifetimes. However, this response raises the question as to why individuals who are yet unable to retrieve these deep memories should accept the reality of past lives. An important disanalogy applies to the example relating to our infancy: we believe we existed during our early years on the basis of the testimony of our parents whom we regard as trustworthy witnesses. The vital point is whether we can appeal to any reliable witnesses for the reality of reincarnation, given that we ourselves are not able to specify precise correlations between past errors and present suffering. Our epistemic confidence in this matter could be grounded in an attitude of trust—individuals believe in the reality of reincarnation, even in the absence of the knowledge of the “how” relating to these karmic processes, because they trust in figures such as the Buddha, the Hindu *yogīs*, and so on. An argument along these lines has been developed by Stephen H. Phillips (2009: 134) who notes that just as sense perception has epistemic value in everyday life, yogic perception too can reveal to us features of reality which are otherwise inaccessible, and we should not reject its veridicality unless we have specific reasons to doubt its deliverances. Alternatively, we could speak of hope in the moral efficacy of reincarnation: “The hope that a just punishment will be meted out to the criminal at some future time is sufficient to sustain our faith in the legal system as a means of moral education, and a similar hope motivates the belief that the law of karma can allow for the moral development of the individual” (Chadha and Trakakis 2007: 537).

Therefore, we are enjoined by Paramānanda to “work diligently and prayerfully and always remember that in this universe there is no such thing as chance or injustice” (1919: 55). At this stage, we encounter Hogg’s criticism that in such a world every individual becomes, in effect, a monad closed inwards into itself, and by assisting others we are only inhibiting the free operation of the karmic processes (Hogg Claim 6). At the heart of this objection lies the following dilemma: either the *karma* theory is a complete and closed account of evil and suffering or it is not. If it is the former, we seem to have a form of strong causal determinism, according to which the present state of the universe is exhaustively explained in terms of its precedent states (which include human actions), so that while the theory can console

us that there is no unmerited suffering, it is in effect a form of fatalism which denies free moral agency. If it is the latter, it loses its comprehensiveness as a systematic theoretical account of each and every particular instance of suffering that an individual undergoes (Kaufman 2005: 26–27). The response of Monima Chadha and Nick Trakakis (2007: 548) to this challenge rightly notes that the traditional presentations of *karma* and reincarnation presuppose a libertarian, or at least a compatibilist, account of free will, so that even though one's character and dispositions have a causal history, these antecedents do not undermine one's free agency. The epic narratives, for instance, speak in some places of individuals washing away their sins (*pāpa*) through means such as austerities, sacrifices, and gifts (*Mahābhārata* 12.36.1). *Garuḍa Purāṇa* 1.230.42 states more assertively that even if the evil deeds of a person are as great as the mountains, these are destroyed entirely by remembering Viṣṇu. That is, persons are not simply collections of events connected as karmic chains, but they can exercise some measure of agency over these causal sequences. While a fatalistic reading of the theory, along the lines of Hogg (Claim 6), can support a form of amoralism, Arvind Sharma points out that the Hindu scriptures, in fact, instruct us to help others and avoid hurting them:

The *same* doctrine of karma and rebirth, which holds us accountable for what happens to us, also urges us to perform good karma rather than bad karma and unattached karma rather than attached karma. Thus, just as doctors go about treating diseases that the patients have brought upon themselves, those who subscribe to the doctrine of karma and rebirth are also under an ethical obligation “to help reduce the pain and misery in the world” (2008: 573; emphasis in the original).

There is a further complication that notwithstanding the general view that one individual cannot experience the fruits of another person's actions, we also encounter in some Purāṇas the notion of “transfer” of merits and demerits across karmic chains. Thus *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 3.9.15 states that a guest turned away by a householder transfers to the latter all his own misdeeds (*duṣkṛta*) and takes away his merit (*puṇya*). Again, in *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* 8.256–64, King Hariścandra tells Indra that he will not go to heaven (*svarga*) unless the inhabitants of his city, who have incurred various types of sins, also proceed there. Whatever his merits through alms, sacrifices, and prayers, they should be common to him and to his citizens—thereafter, all the people with their children, servants, and wives ascended to heaven along with the king.

The Atoning Death of Christ: Between Mystery and Model

Our discussion has indicated that while the *karma* theodicy is often presented as a straightforwardly “rational” account of the presence and the pervasiveness of evil in the world, its justification ultimately involves an appeal not quite to “pure reason” but to attitudes of trust and hope and the acceptance of certain truths on the basis of scriptural testimony. For instance, the explanation for the suffering an individual undergoes in one lifetime is in terms of karmic deserts, but if one pushes the

explanation offered backwards and asks why there is a karmic order at all which operates across vast cosmological cycles, the “skeptical theist” response is that such worldly systems are part of the joyous productivity (*līlā*) of the Lord which transcends human understanding. Sharma argues in this connection that

while it might not be possible to prove the doctrine [of *karma* and rebirth] with absolute certainty, it seems to be equally the case that the doctrine cannot with absolute certainty be established as demonstrably false. As in the case of the existence of God it seems to be a doctrine about which reasonable persons might reasonably differ (1990b: 232).

More recently, Mikel Burley notes that the belief in *karma* is not based on empirical evidence and that “it has arisen, and persisted, in human communities independently of anything that would be recognized as data comparable to that which supports the connection between smoking and lung cancer” (2013: 156). While this belief indeed plays an explanatory role in the lives of some people, it is not typically regarded as subject to empirical verification or falsification. Because the parties to the debate share distinctive frameworks, this dispute continues to be intractable and its resolution in the life of an individual would be akin to her undergoing a religious conversion (Burley 2013: 163).

The Christian framework of justice is to be located in the Jewish understanding of God as the supreme judge, where just individuals are those who live in accordance with the divine law. This judicial understanding has certain parallels to the karmic conception of a moral order and is expressed in statements such as “I will not justify the ungodly” (Exodus 23:7) and “He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 17:15). However, there opens up, in Pauline and later Augustinian Christian theology, a moral gap between human effort and divine grace: human beings are incapable of rendering to God what is due to God, and only God can “justify” them in their present sinful condition. Thus, the Christian understanding of the atonement involves a somewhat different type of mystery than *līlā*: the claim is that some events, between 1 CE–34 CE, associated with a Jewish man called Jesus crucially configured the shape of salvation. At the heart of Hindu-Christian debates over the atonement lies the momentous question of how a series of events that took place two thousand years ago can impart salvation today (Fiddes 1989). The central thesis of Roy’s critique of the Christian understanding of the atonement is that Jesus is our redeemer not because he vicariously died “in our place” as a propitiation for our sins, but because he taught us that through heartfelt repentance we receive forgiveness for our sins. According to Roy, who published his *The Precepts of Jesus: The Guide to Peace and Happiness* in 1820, the foundations of the Christian religion are these: we express our love of God and our love of fellow-beings, and God is one and undivided in person. Jesus proclaimed the moral truths of love of God and love of neighbor, and dogmas relating to the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, the vicarious atonement, and others are not indispensable for salvation. The *Precepts of Jesus* was reviewed negatively by the Baptist missionary, Reverend Joshua Marshman (referred to as the “Reverend Editor”), and Roy followed with *An Appeal to the Christian Public*, published in 1820, *Second Appeal to the Christian*

Public (in 1821), and *Final Appeal to the Christian Public* (in 1823), to defend his views.

Before sketching the argumentative threads between Roy and Marshman, we outline the key standpoints that have been developed in the history of Christian doctrine relating to the atoning death of Christ (Blair 1963). The multiple sets of imageries that have been elaborated under the rubric of “the doctrine of the atonement” seek to answer the basic question of how the salvific work of Jesus, encompassing his life, death, and resurrection, heals the rupture between sinful human beings and their loving and just creator (Swinburne 1989). However, unlike the Nicene Creed (in 325) or the Chalcedonian Creed (in 381), which relate to the nature of the Godhead and the divinity of Christ, there is no “creedal” statement of the precise dynamics of how Christ’s atoning death is pivotal for human salvation. As Christian theologians have attempted to articulate the nature and the efficacy of Jesus’s saving work, they have configured certain “models” which are often clustered around three major groups—the ransom, the moral exemplar, and the substitutionary. According to the ransom model, often associated with figures such as Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, and more recently Gustaf Aulén, human beings were in bondage to sin and death (personified as the “devil”), and Christ, our savior, has paid a ransom to the devilish forces and liberated us. By living a sinless life, and yet dying like a common criminal, Christ, who is innocent, has given God the divine right to set us free from the grasp of satanic powers. The moral exemplar model, most famously associated with Peter Abelard, states that Christ, through his sinless life of loving his enemies even to the point of death, set an example for us to follow on our path of spiritual reformation. By indwelling through our own lives the patterns of Christ’s selfless love, we respond to Christ’s salvific offer of restoration of our broken relation with God. Finally, the substitutionary accounts—which have been developed in somewhat different ways by figures such as Anselm, John Calvin, and others—state that human beings, who have committed serious offences against God, are themselves incapable of compensating God for these wrongs; however, Christ has graciously stepped in on our behalf, satisfied the demands of justice, and effected our reconciliation with God. Since God is the God of justice, the punishment for death and separation from God that we have incurred through our sinfulness cannot be simply waived; thus, the sinless Christ becomes our willing substitute and through his perfect self-sacrifice makes reparation on our behalf. As this overview suggests, the models relating to the atoning life and death of Christ are a dense meshing of “objective” and “subjective” dimensions. On the one hand, God “objectively” brings about a transformation in the fabric of reality—for instance, God is incarnate in the Son, Christ offers his sinless life as a true exemplar for human beings, and so on. On the other hand, human beings have to “subjectively” respond to and appropriate in faith this account of what God has wrought “objectively” in and through the work of Christ (Jathanna 1981: 448).

A vital theme that emerges from these “models” is that the atoning death of Christ was necessary in some sense for the salvation of humanity. While Marshman charged that the moral precepts of Jesus were not sufficient for salvation unless these were “accompanied with the important doctrines of the Godhead of Jesus and his atonement” (Roy 1951b: 1), Roy responded that the numerous biblical passages

he had quoted in his *Precepts of Jesus* indicate that following the precepts to love God and neighbour is indeed sufficient to lead human beings to peace and happiness. Here lies the crux of the matter between Roy and Marshman: the former argues that by following Jesus's commandment to love, we are led to eternal life, while the latter charges, from his Baptist Christian perspectives, that the "most excellent precepts" compiled by Roy from scripture are insufficient for salvation unless these teachings lead people to the doctrine of the cross (Roy 1951b: 4–5). Roy asks whether Jesus, whom Marshman presents as God incarnate, suffered on the cross in the "divine nature" or in his "human capacity" and seeks to dismantle both horns of this dilemma. The former option is "highly inconsistent" with the divine nature which, by definition, is not liable to death and agony, while the latter view is "totally inconsistent" with divine justice and also the principles of human equity, for it is grossly unjust to inflict the sufferings of the cross on one human being who had never transgressed the divine will for the crimes committed by others (Roy 1951b: 33). Roy writes that he is aware that in some countries people think that they are justified in detaining individuals who, having voluntarily undertaken to repay the debt of others, fail to discharge the debt. Even so, "every just man among them would shudder at the idea of one's being put to death for a crime committed by another, even if the innocent man should willingly offer his life in behalf of that other" (Roy 1951b: 34). These strands are brought together in the chapter on the atonement in the *Final Appeal* where Roy (1951c: 11) argues that it is more consistent with justice that a judge should have mercy on those who express repentance and forgive their crimes, than he should put an innocent man to death to atone for the guilt of the condemned culprits. We learn from the Bible that sins have been forgiven through the intercession of prophets, even though they did not undergo an atoning death. Therefore, through the intercession of Jesus, whom God has exalted above all the prophets, we can receive pardon for our sins, without believing in his vicarious sacrifice on the cross (Roy 1951c: 17).

Roy thus argues that according to Marshman's understanding of the atonement, God is capable of a "palpable iniquity"—God inflicts the divine wrath on an innocent man for the purpose of "sparing those who justly deserve the weight of its terrors" (Roy 1951c: 28). The "sacrifice" of Jesus should instead be understood as a spiritual oblation, thus guarding Christianity from being viewed as a religion based on the death of a human victim (Roy 1951c: 20–21). As we noted earlier, Cave and Hogg sought to allay such moral anxieties by arguing that Christ's atonement should not be understood in juridical terms as if he was punished by God for the sins of guilty human beings. More recently, Paul K. Moser has argued that Jesus willingly and obediently underwent suffering which God would "deem adequate for dealing justly...with our selfish rebellion against God" and Jesus "pays the price on behalf of humans for righteous divine reconciliation of sinners" (2010: 143). God meets the standard of morally perfect love, which human beings could not, in Jesus who is the salvific mediator between God and humanity. Further, God could not refrain from punishing sin because God is essentially a just judge. Oliver Crisp (2011: 119) has argued that God elects that Christ perform the act of atonement in place of human beings, and this act, which has infinite value, is at least sufficient to atone for their sin. Roy would perhaps not have found the defenses of Moser and Crisp persuasive,

for their accounts retain the basic substitutionary element (“on behalf of”) which he had rejected in his debates with Marshman. More specifically, he could have inverted a view such as Crisp’s with his claim: “If it be urged, that it is inconsistent with common justice to pardon sin that requires the capital punishment of death without an atonement for it, it may be replied, that the perfection of divine justice, as well as the other attributes of God, should not be measured by what are found in, and adopted by, the human race” (Roy 1951c: 17). That is, if we were to argue that judges cannot let crimes go unpunished without the imposition of a severe penalty, Roy responds that we are confusing our *human* standards of justice with the perfection of *divine* justice. Roy argues that it is, in fact, more consistent with divine justice that God has mercy on those who have tried to follow the divine laws or showed contrition at their failure to love God than that God “should select for favour those whose claims rest on having acquired particular ideas of his nature and of the origin of his Son, and of what afflictions that Son may have suffered [as atonement] in behalf of his people” (Roy 1951a: 64).

Around seventy years later, we find another Christian missionary in India, John Murdoch (1893), complaining about what he regards as the “misuse” of Christian terminology on the part of Keshub Chunder Sen (1838–1884), a key figure in the Brāhmo Samāj. Murdoch (1893: 93–94) argues that the Christian understanding of atonement relates to an innocent man who voluntarily suffers “on behalf of” offenders, whereas according to the Samāj, atonement entirely involves an individual undergoing contrition for sin. Though he does not use these precise terms, Murdoch believes that Sen’s conception is too subjective or psychically “internalist”—the Christian faith requires a more robustly “externalist” foundation, in the form of an objective divine revelation, for the actuality of human salvation. The viewpoints of Marshman, Murdoch, and others remain real options in various dimensions of contemporary Christology and involve debates too subtle to be summarized in this article (Demarest 1997: 147–99). However, an emerging consensus in some Christian theological circles is an understanding of the reconciliation of humanity to God without some of the morally problematic “legalistic” aspects of the notion of penal substitution (Murphy 2009). For an account of the atonement that avoids the notion that Christ was wrathfully punished by God “instead of” us, we may turn to Gordon Graham who asks us to consider the analogy of one individual A who has incurred a financial penalty which she cannot pay; however, another individual B freely pays it and removes A’s criminal status. If A eventually pays back the amount, A’s action renders just the original restoration effected by B. Graham (2010: 134–35) proposes that we regard Christ as the individual who was able to pay the price of sin and human beings can become united with him by submerging their worldly selves in him through baptism. As Graham’s vocabulary indicates, the estrangement of human beings from their God is a truly “costly” error on their part, and only God, through the decisive intervention of an atoning death, can reinstate the original harmony between humanity and divinity. According to these understandings of the atonement, through the gifts of the operation of the Holy Spirit, an individual “subjectively” appropriates or realizes the “objectively” offered salvation to all humanity that has been effected through the atoning death of Christ. We should view God the Father, God the Son, and God

the Holy Spirit in terms of the Trinitarian mystery, so that Christ's atoning death would be misconceived if it is characterized as the punishment inflicted on one individual (Christ) who is "substituted" for another individual (the rest of humanity, viewed collectively): rather, since the being of Christ is the being of the Trinitarian God, it is the—whole—divine reality that is involved in the reconciliation of humanity in and through the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. The "objective" possibility is realized when the Holy Spirit produces in individuals the response of faith and they existentially appropriate the gift of salvation; this soteriological telos of humanity is "the fulfilment of God's whole purpose in the death of Christ" (McIntyre 1992: 97).

Negotiating Evil in the World

Our comparative study of the *karma* theodicy and the doctrine of the atonement thus suggests two distinctive configurations of negotiating "unmerited suffering" in the world—the former denies its existence, while the latter is founded on the claim that it is undergone by the savior God. Nor are their respective vocabularies readily translatable. The Christian theo-logic of "incarnation," "original sin," "Trinity," "vicarious suffering," "sacrificial death," and others, becomes intelligible only if one traces its origins in the rich matrices of biblical theology; and a sympathetic engagement with the *karma* theodicy requires an adequate grasp of its Vedāntic idioms such as *saṃsāra*, *bhakti*, *mokṣa*, and others. And yet, across the cognitive-experiential boundaries of these distinctive religious universes, one can discern resonant sets of theological problems—the location of a retributive system within a remedial order of grace or *kṛpā*, the conceptual tension between divine justice and divine mercy, a skeptical theist appeal to divine inscrutability or *līlā*, and so on. Thus, while the notion of a *karma*-shaped quantitative proportion between sin and suffering is usually not encountered in Christian worldviews, some theologians, as we have seen, have echoed such a conception in speaking of Christ's atoning death in terms of the "satisfaction" of justice, the "paying" of a costly price, and so on. However, a central strand of Christian responses to evil and suffering, as we have noted in Cave and Hogg, is that one should become meditatively grounded through God-attunement in the suffering of Christ, the one who suffered horrifically. Thus, both Cave and Hogg strikingly refer to human suffering as a "privilege" (Cave Claim 6 and Hogg Claim 5) through which individuals are purged of sinfulness and become attuned to God.

Unlike the understandings of God (as triune) and of Christ (as one divine person with two natures) which all mainstream Christian denominations share, the connective tissue between the past event of Christ's ("sacrificial") death on the cross and the present action of an individual's turning away from sinful worldly existence through the operation of the Holy Spirit has never been spelt out in clear creedal terms, not least because these matters are said to constitute the "mystery of salvation" (White 1991). As a generalization, however, these denominations would claim that an individual's response in faith to the "mystery of Christ" brings about an "objective" shift in the world's patterns of ego-centered living, so that she is

concurrently able to “subjectively” re-envision her worldly sufferings not as meaningless blips on a cosmic radar but as forms of God’s active invitations to her to become God-centered and to view her entire existence as a divine gift (Gunton 1988: 157). Thus, for instance, while a certain individual called John, before he turned to Christ, might have responded to his daughter’s agonizingly painful death with a sense of deep futility, today as a Christian with the “in-sight” into suffering as a purgative crucible within which human wills gradually become aligned with God’s sovereign will, even while he continues to grieve for his daughter, he also envisages her suffering as a redemptive moment which is graciously enfolded into the cosmic narratives of the mystery of God’s love. The Christian hope is that individuals such as John and his daughter will come to understand in the afterlife that it is Christ’s death on the cross which “objectively” set in motion the salvific processes that led to their becoming “subjectively” able to discern, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God in everything—even, or perhaps especially, during the dark nights of excruciating torment. Had the God-human, Jesus Christ, not directly intervened in patterns of human self-seeking, suffering and evil—the visceral manifestations of a world out-of-joint—would have remained unhealed. By con-forming their sinful existences to his divine being and by becoming filled with his divine love, human beings learn not so much how to solve suffering (as if suffering was simply a theoretical riddle), but to engage with suffering, through soteriological processes of soul-making, in concrete settings of worldly living. The claim here is not that the gift of future salvation “justifies” present horrific suffering in some sort of a crude end-justifies-means egocentric logic: it is rather that those individuals whose narrative identities are pivoted on the transformation wrought in the world through Christ are enabled to embark patiently on a pilgrimage of hoping that, in the end, the theo-logic of Christ will shine through diaphanously (Stump 2010). In the final analysis, therefore, the telos of Christian theodicy is not to justify, legitimize, or explain suffering, but to indicate existential spaces—of the meditation of the *Stabat Mater* in Roman Catholic milieus and, more generally, of pastoral support—where the assurance that “all will be well in the end” becomes credible to individuals who begin to see the world, in a courageous venture of faith, as lovingly enveloped by God. Such an assurance is not mere wishful thinking for it is grounded in the Christian truth-claim that Christ simultaneously unraveled and reformed the very fabric of reality—that is, through the “Christ event,” individuals are graciously empowered to view the entire creation with the eyes of suffering love (Surin 1989: 150).

Christian mystical literature too repeatedly strikes the note that through the agony of our worldly suffering we are brought nearer to the eternal presence of God, as we surrender our fallen wills to the divine will and gradually identify ourselves with Christ on the cross (McDermott 2008). By becoming “mystically” incorporated into their meek Lord who himself suffered horribly, human beings would learn, without always demanding the transparent clarity of a why or a how, to pray trustfully, “Thy will be done” (Matthew 6:10), even if in their frail conditions of finitude, they might occasionally also humbly pray, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matthew 26:39). Therefore, the Christian saint regards suffering as a purgative instrument in the “dark night” of the soul during which it becomes progressively

strengthened through the love of Christ. The Christian hope is in life eternal with God who triumphed over evil in the resurrection of Christ and who will overcome the evils an individual has undergone in the world (Adams 1999). Thus, Julian of Norwich, an English fourteenth-century anchoress, declared that in and through the miseries of our fallen humanity, we can yet trust in the redemptive love of Christ, so that ultimately “all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well” (Windeatt 2015: 174n20). Maureen L. Walsh (2012) has noted that the “openness” in Julian’s hope that salvation can be extended towards non-Christians stood in somewhat uneasy tension with mainline Church teachings about the destiny of individuals who have not responded with faith to Christ through baptism. Crucial to her theological vision of God’s all-encompassing love was the note of a deep spiritual affinity between the suffering of Christ and the suffering of humanity:

THEN our good Lord Jesus Christ spoke, asking, “Are you well pleased that I suffered for you?”

I said, “Yes, good Lord, thank you...”

Then Jesus, our kind Lord, said, “If you are pleased, I am pleased.

It is a joy, a bliss, an endless delight to me that I ever suffered my Passion for you; and if I could suffer more, I would suffer more” (Windeatt 2015: 68).

While Julian was herself aware that some of the contents of her “showings” (that is, her visions of God) were in opposition to Church doctrines about the salvation of the unbaptized, her eschatological hope of a soteriological universalism shines through in passages such as the following:

With a kindly countenance our good Lord looked into his side, and he gazed with joy, and with his sweet regard he drew his creature’s understanding into his side by the same wound; and there he revealed a fair and delectable place, large enough for all [hu]mankind that will be saved and will rest in peace and in love (Walsh 2012: 196).

The claim that ultimately our response to the problem of evil should be shaped not by a rational explanation, but by an acceptance that the world is enveloped by divine redemptive love, appears also in the Vedāntic terminology of a Hindu figure such as Rāmakṛṣṇa (1836–1886). For Rāmakṛṣṇa, the journey towards liberation involves an increasing sense of being infused with divine love so that the devotee sees her actions as undergirded by God, the supreme agent. To the question as to why there is so much suffering in the world, he replies that the world is the *līlā* of God and is like a game, and there is sin and suffering so that the game can continue for a while. Echoing certain vocabularies of Christian mystical figures such as Julian, the claim is that for those who have become deeply rooted in the reality of God (*īśvara*), there will be a quiet, even joyful, acceptance of the joys and sorrows of human existence, because they are understood to be densely interwoven into the rich fabrics of the world sustained by God. Thus, after indicating that everything depends on the will of God who has produced, as divine *līlā*, entities with varied qualities, Rāmakṛṣṇa declares that the individual who has realized God is able to state: “I am the machine

and you are the operator; I am the house and you are the indweller; I am the chariot and you are the charioteer; you move me and thus I move; I speak as you make me speak” (Gupta 2010: 175; my translation). Such God-infused individuals would have attained the spiritual perfection where one becomes capable of viewing worldly suffering as incorporated into the divine *līlā* which is teleologically oriented towards the production of saints who have overcome egoism and who see God in everything (Maharaj 2018: 257–59). On another occasion, we hear echoes of the medieval debates over the seeming opposition between divine grace and divine justice:

Nanda: “Is God partial? (*paṅśapātī?*) If things happen through God’s grace (*kṛpā*), then I must say that God is partial.”

Rāmākṛṣṇa: “God has become everything—the living beings and the world. You will realize this when you have perfect knowledge. God has become the twenty-four principles—mind, intellect, body, and so on. Towards whom could God be partial?”

Nanda: “Why has God assumed all these forms, where some are wise and some are ignorant?”

Rāmākṛṣṇa: “This is God’s sweet will (*tār khuṣī*)....The Divine Mother is full of bliss and is engaged in the *līlā* of creation, preservation, and destruction. There are countless living beings, and only one or two among them obtain liberation—and even that makes Her happy...”

Nanda: “This may be Her sweet will, but it is our death!”

Rāmākṛṣṇa: “But who are you? The Divine Mother has become all this. As long as you do not know Her you keep on saying, “I,” “I.” All will realize God—and indeed all will be liberated” (Gupta 2010: 878; my translation).

According to Rāmākṛṣṇa’s “panentheistic” insight (*vijñāna*) into the world as the expression and embodiment of God, evil is vitally encapsulated into the divine life: ultimately, it is God who suffers and it is God who liberates all individuals through their spiritual disciplines (Maharaj 2018: 269–71). Thus, across Hindu-Christian theological boundaries, we find two “mystical” figures—Julian and Rāmākṛṣṇa—concluding with a theological confidence that “in the end” the divine presence will transmute all worldly suffering, notwithstanding the vital difference that the understanding of the soteriological significance of suffering is located, for Julian, on the horizon of a single lifetime and, for Rāmākṛṣṇa, on the horizons of multiple lives. The strands of “theodicy” and “skeptical theism” thus become densely intertwined: for individuals on the path of spiritual perfection, suffering is not so much an intellectual problem to be cerebrally dissected as a theological invitation to become existentially grounded in the transcendental source of being, love, and goodness.

Theodicy in Comparative Registers: Adjudicating Truth-Claims

Our arguments in the preceding sections have outlined the internal logics of certain Christian theodical and Vedāntic Hindu theodical explanations. Moving on now to the register of epistemic peer conflict in the field of Hindu-Christian dialogue, we

can ask: why is it that so many sincerely truth-seeking, adequately informed, and spiritually sensitive Hindus and Christians have not (yet) been able to arrive at a consensus on whether it is Christian theodicy or Vedāntic theodicy which is cognitively and spiritually more plausible, coherent, and adequate? As we have suggested throughout our discussion, it is not the case that one side possesses perspicuous rationality and the other side is submerged in rank irrationality—rather, the worldview of each group is shaped by a dense intertwining of (a) invocation of mystery and (b) reasoned argumentation. Because the pattern of (a) and (b) is somewhat distinctive for both Christian theodicy and Vedāntic theodicy, what might readily seem to a Vedāntic theodicist to be a blatant inconsistency could instead be for a Christian theodicist a call to exercise patience in the face of an inscrutable mystery—and vice versa.

Consider the following truth-claims:

Christian truth-claim: The Christ-event “objectively” changed the existential densities of the world, and this transformation is to be “subjectively” appropriated by individuals today by responding with faith to the Christ-event.

Hindu truth-claim: The webs of our present mode of existence are karmically shaped by the moral quality of our own existences in previous world orders, even though we usually have no recollection of these world orders.

Neither the Christian truth-claim nor the Hindu truth-claim can be readily verified or falsified in the manner of empirical claims such as “Washington is the capital of USA” (“true”) and “The color of snow is orange” (“false”). Embedded in the Christian truth-claim is the response of faith, and the plausibility of the Hindu truth-claim depends on whether we are willing to place our trust in a *guru* who defends the reality of reincarnation. Therefore, if we inquire into whether the Christian truth-claim or the Hindu truth-claim is more mysterious, since there is no transcendental “calculus of mystery,” there is also no impartial cognitive umpire who could authoritatively judge which party is unduly helping itself to too much of the “mysterious.” For a Vedāntic theodicist, the claim that a chronologically distant series of events of world-historical significance, which took place sometime around 33 CE in Judea, has crucial implications for how we respond to suffering today might seem conceptually puzzling or bewildering; while for a Christian theodicist, the claim that because of moral choices made in past lifetimes of which we have no conscious recollection we are undergoing suffering in the present could be deeply implausible or enigmatic. Both the Christian theodicist and the Vedāntic theodicist indwell pedagogic milieus of “faith seeking understanding,” but because the mystery to which they point cannot be apprehended or assessed in a context-independent manner, there is no straightforward response to our question about the precise measure of this mystery.

Given that the entwining of (a) and (b) forms an epistemic circle for both the Christian truth-claim and the Hindu truth-claim, the vital question now is whether this circle is vicious or virtuous. In all such dialectical engagements, the key debate is over who should carry the epistemic burden of proof, and even if we were to agree that the burden is to be shared among both parties, how to determine the relative

weights to be shared. In short, then, the reason why epistemic peer conflict across Christian theodicy and Vedāntic theodicy is intractable is because both groups come to the epistemic table with different sets of background presuppositions about what is more intuitively reasonable, coherent, and plausible.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the arguments between Hindu figures such as Roy, on the one hand, and Christian theologians such as Cave, Hogg, and others, on the other hand, relate to a matter of faith. That the Holy Spirit constitutes the salvific “link” between Christ’s death on Calvary and our incorporation today into Christian patterns of regeneration, justification, and holiness is not a point to be rationally demonstrated, but is a theological mystery to be existentially appropriated through the venture of faith. Thus, Paul Jensen remarks: “I am compelled to conclude that, in a deeply mysterious way, at the cross God in Christ endured and exhausted the consequences of human sin” (1993: 155). This theological appeal to mystery is precisely what Gandhi opposed while expressing his puzzlement regarding the supposed salvific power of Christ’s death on the cross: “His death on the Cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it my heart could not accept” (1990: 224). From the Hindu perspectives of figures such as Vivekānanda, Gandhi and others, it would seem difficult to readily incorporate into their worldviews the notion that Christ died “for us” in a providential divine plan. While the notion that suffering has a redemptive value is not entirely alien to Hindu thought—for according to the theory of *karma*, each individual makes progress towards the divine by working out one’s karmic merits and demerits—Hindu thinkers have usually rejected the notion of one individual “bearing the sins” of another. The various metaphors that have been deployed in the Christian traditions to describe the salvation wrought by God in Christ, such as Christ paying a penalty to God, Christ reconciling humanity to God through his sacrificial death, Christ bearing upon himself the punishment that human beings deserve, and so on, do not find a ready home in a theological-moral universe where an individual’s estrangement from the divine, manifested in worldly suffering, has to be worked out through the operations of the karmic law. Much of Hindu reflection on Jesus Christ is more congenial to “functional” Christologies, according to which Jesus is an (or even the) exemplar of God’s love, than to “ontological” Chalcedonian Christologies which hold that in the “mystery” of the incarnation it was the being of the triune God that was identified with the finitude of the world. At the same time, as we have seen, karmic explanations too involve appeals to the “mysterious” nature of God’s *līlā*, and they are not equivalent to a straightforward empirical explanation of, say, why an unsupported object falls towards the earth. While everyday scientific explanations are at hand as to why John had a toothache, karmic causation has to be invoked at a different metaphysical level to explain why it was John and not Mary who was particularly susceptible on that day to this agony.

Our comparative study, then, indicates certain distinctive features of the *karma* theodicy and the atonement theodicy. Whether through spiritual transformation across multiple lifetimes or by becoming conformed to Christ in one lifetime on earth, in both these theodical systems we encounter the motif that in and through worldly crucibles “souls” can be purged, purified, and perfected. The former is situated in a worldview which operates with the notion that there is some form of proportionality between past evil and present suffering, even if such correlations can only be traced by an enlightened sage or are known to the omniscient God. Therefore, in contrast to Cave and Hogg, the karmic structure of reality should not be seen as punitively retributive, for it is teleologically orientated towards the production of liberating goods through spiritual transformation across lifetimes (Stoeber 1992: 172–87; Long 2016; Maharaj 2018: 260–62). At the same time, theistic Hindu worldviews often claim that the “ultimate” reason why there is a karmic structure at all is to be attributed to the supra-rational *līlā* of the divine reality. Christian mystics too seek not so much to explain suffering as to identify suffering with the agony of Christ on the cross and view such suffering as part of a unitive journey where their love of Christ is purified. At the same time, this emphasis on the participative dimension of suffering has not prevented Christian theologians from developing various “models” which seek to make sense, in the enterprise of “faith seeking understanding,” of how the death of an individual two millennia ago brought about a decisive soteriological transformation in the fabric of reality. Both Hindu and Christian theodical styles would therefore resonate with William C. Placher’s claim that although theologians have often been rightly criticized for invoking “mystery” whenever they have not been able to supply good reasons, “it is not intellectual cheating to refuse to explain something if you can give an account of why just this should not be explicable” (1996: 211).

Therefore, to return to the terms we highlighted at the beginning of this article, the *karma* theodicy and the atonement theodicy are both a distinctive blending of a robust account of why there is suffering in God’s world and a more skeptical reminder about the finite limits of human understanding. As to our beliefs that the universe is karmically structured by the divine reality who generates it through a cosmic *līlā* or that we will receive the gift of eternal life after the resurrection when our worldly sufferings will be re-envisioned in the light of the beatific vision—beliefs which are pivotal for Hindu and Christian theodicies respectively—they are not usually empirically demonstrable, but are deeply grounded in the testimony of others, an attitude of trust, or a hopeful faith. Consequently, theodical visions cannot be neatly lined up for straightforward confirmation or falsification. For instance, while Hogg’s claim that suffering is “a privilege and an honor” (Claim 5) sounds implausible when applied to the case of the suffering of infants who cannot consciously reflect on their afflictions, and more plausible when relocated in the context of *karma* and reincarnation, conversely the Hindu claim that even for horrific evils such as genocidal violence there is a just proportionality between past deed and present event could seem debatable to some. Again, while Cave’s objection (Claim 5) that individuals cannot undergo moral transformation without being able to remember (putative) previous lifetimes can seem weighty to some, others could respond that even in the absence of “subjective” recall of past lives

they accept the “objective” truth of *karma* and reincarnation through the testimony of their *guru* in whom they have sought refuge and whom they regard as authoritative in spiritual matters. Thus, when Christian theologians such as Marshman, McIntyre, or Graham declare that suffering is to be existentially navigated and rationally comprehended as encapsulated into a vision of divine love where God “objectively” underwent a sacrificial death, and the fruits of this atonement are to be “subjectively” appropriated, the coherence or plausibility of such an account is deeply embedded in a matrix of truth-claims pronounced from biblical horizons. Likewise, when Hindu theologians such as Rāmānuja, Rāmākṛṣṇa, and Vivekānanda claim that the world is a moral laboratory for the perfection of individuals across multiple lifetimes, this soteriological telos of evil and suffering is to be situated within an interwoven constellation of numerous scriptural statements relating to the nature of the human self and the *līlā* of the divine self. In these ways, both Hindu and Christian theologians use rational resources towards the goal of explanation, while reminding their adherents that the faltering intelligibility they seek is to be seen as an integral component of their active participation in a sense of theological mystery that enfolds, and yet transcends, their finite existences.

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