

COMPARATIVE ONTOLOGY AND THE INTERPRETATION OF 'KARMA'*

I

PREFACE

This paper begins with a preliminary exposition of the "doctrine" of *karma*, on the more or less standard interpretation. The intelligibility of this doctrine is then called into question; the standard interpretation is found problematic in terms of our natural everyday understanding. It is then suggested that the proper method of interpretation of *karma* requires the excavation of the categorial structure or ontological paradigm which renders *karma* intelligible. The intelligibility of a concept or doctrine is relative to a given ontological paradigm or world view which must be taken as a whole. So, a preliminary sketch is given of the *generic karma* categorial structure and the formal features of this ontological paradigm are explicated. It is shown that *karma* is, indeed, intelligible when interpreted or translated in terms of its indigenous world view. This leads to considerations of the formation of world views or ontological paradigms. The concept of formal ontology is presented and factors which contribute to the differentiation of world views are made explicit. This opens the way for a new understanding of the nature of philosophical interpretation or radical translation between different worlds. The notion of ontological hermeneutics is developed and it is shown that radical translation between different ontologies is really an intra-linguistic enterprise. Any given natural language, through its formal ontological structure, has access to any possible ontology or world view. Radical translation becomes the project of re-creating or reconstructing the original ontological paradigm which shapes a given world and defines its intelligibility. The implication is that no culture or tradition has privileged access to its ontology or scheme for interpreting experience. The paper concludes with further interpretation and elaboration of the *karma* paradigm. The inner logic and coherence of the *karma* ontology is disclosed, and certain features

of *karma* which before appeared opaque, incoherent, arbitrary and unintelligible, become transparent, intelligible and necessitated by the structure of the *karma* paradigm. Thus, the paper has a two-fold aim. One is to give a philosophical interpretation and translation of *karma*. The other is to make explicit the logic of interpretation and translation which determines the method of ontological analysis being used. And this involves the development of ontological hermeneutics and formal or comparative ontology.

[INTRODUCTION]*

"Karma" is often taken to indicate a "law of action" or a "principle of causality" with special reference to moral action. Sometimes it is loosely designated as a "doctrine". Whatever its status and however it may be appropriately referred to, it is clear that this term is as problematic as it is characteristic of Indian thought in general. But it is one thing to raise questions about the truth and verifiability of *karma*, another to inquire into its intelligibility or sense. Indeed, investigation of the *meaning* of a term is logically prior to consideration of its *truth*, of evidence for its validity, or of the legitimacy of belief in it. For if it is unintelligible then questions of its truth are not appropriately raised. So I shall begin this investigation of *karma* by raising some questions about its meaning and intelligibility while bracketing questions about its truth, verification and grounds for belief. If it is found to be intelligible then to this extent at least it is a *possible* object of belief and a *candidate* for truth. Perhaps it may even be found worthy of belief.

[The "doctrine" of *karma*: preliminary exposition]*

The Sanskrit term "karma" is derived from the root *kr* which means "to do". An exemplary summary statement of the doctrine of *karma* is given by Eliot Deutsch in his introduction to *The Bhagavad Gītā* :

"The term *karma* means 'deed', 'work', 'action' and is used in the Hindu tradition to mean both any action which produces tendencies or impressions (*sanskāras*) in the actor,

(* Main topics are indicated in brackets—"[:.]", and sub-topics are in parentheses, "(...)",)

which then function as determinants to his future action, and specific ritual actions which are performed in the context of Vedic ceremonial religion. Further, according to most of the Indian philosophical systems, *karma* suggests a 'law' of moral nature which holds that actions necessarily produce effects and that this is enacted over a period of innumerable births, deaths and rebirths. Every action must produce its results—if not immediately, then at some future time—and every disposition to act is the result of one's past action. One is completely responsible for oneself. A man's present condition is a result of his past action over many lives, and his future condition will result from his past and present action".¹

(The Conceptual Connection Between *karma*, *samsāra* and transmigration)

First of all, then, "karma", according to this interpretation, means human action which causally produces results of consequences. But the distinctive feature of *karma* seems to be that the *identity* of the agent or actor extends over innumerable lifetimes, and that the effects of actions are played out over many lives of the same agent. So the *identities* of agent, actions and causes and effects extend in time through innumerable births and deaths. It appears that *karma* is essentially tied to a certain conception of existence-in-time, a world view in which existence is without beginning and without end in time (*anādi*). This conception of existence is called "samsāra", which means that which is incessantly in motion or flux, the world of phenomena. This conception of perpetual existence as applied to the cosmic history of a particular human agent leads to the notion of *transmigration*. This is the specific aspect of *samsāra* in which the identity of the phenomenal self (*jīva*) persists through different lifetimes so that at death the existence of the *jīva* is not terminated but is transformed and continues to exist and is "reborn" (re-incarnation, trans-incarnation). This means that birth is not the beginning of the existential identity of the particular *jīva*, and death is not the cessation of its existential status. Thus, the notions of *karma*, *samsāra* and *transmigration* are essentially connected conceptually. This is made explicit by M. Hiriyanna :

"Since, however, those causes cannot all be found within the narrow limits of a single life, it postulates the theory of *samsāra* or the continued existence of the self (*jīva*) in a succession of lives. Thus the theory of transmigration is a necessary corollary to the doctrine of *karma*".²

This conceptual connection is also explicitly acknowledged by Deutsch in his book *Advaita Vedānta* :

"From now on when the term 'karma' is used, it refers to the joint doctrine of the 'law' of *karma*—the principle of causality which holds that all moral actions produce moral effects—and of *samsāra*—the principle that there is a transmigration of the self (the *sūkṣma-śarīra* or 'subtle body') in a series of births, deaths and rebirths".³

(*Karma* as a 'moral law' : *jīva*, *avidyā*, *bandha*)

The second distinctive feature of *karma* is that it is taken to be a *moral law* which means that it applies primarily to human agents and conduct and not to all existent entities in general. Thus Hirianna says,

"In the first place, the doctrine [of *karma*] extends the principles of causation to the sphere of human conduct and teaches that, as every event in the physical world is determined by its antecedents, so everything that happens in the moral realm is preordained".⁴

This passage leaves us suspended as to whether *karma* is a *universal* principle of causality which applies to all existent entities or whether it is restricted to the realm of human conduct in a specifically moral context. In any case *karma* is often taken to be restricted to moral conduct and is a "causal" law in some special sense. The moral context is special in that it applies to the phenomenal self (the *jīva*) which is in bondage (*bandha*) to existence-in-time (*samsāra*) and which is thus alienated from true Being. It is this alienation and bondage of the phenomenal self which gives rise to the moral dimension of *karma*. For *samsāra* is born from primal ignorance or *avidyā* and the moral end of persons is to overcome this *avidyā* and transcend the bondage and inherent suffering of phenomenal existence.

"The other important point of agreement among the various schools is the recognition of liberation or release (*mokṣa*) from the cycle of rebirths as the highest of human ends or values ... and *mokṣa* has come to be acknowledged as the highest of human values by all the doctrines, so that all of them are now doctrines of salvation."⁵

So, moral value and conduct is possible and required because of the alienation of existence-in-time from Being. The true Self does not exist in time, does not act, is not born and does not die. The *existent* self (*jīva*), as part of the phenomenal world, always has some particular moral value and is part of a hierarchy of values. That is, to exist is to have some *value status* in a hierarchically ordered phenomenal world. It is in this context that the possibility of moral value arises. *Karma* may be good or bad, and good conduct is that which tends to overcome the need for conduct, to overcome the bondage of *samsāra* and bring release from phenomenal existence.

"According as one acts, according as one conducts himself so does he become. The doer of good becomes good. The doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action".⁶

It appears, then, that the *jīva* always has some intrinsic value status which is determined by its constituent qualities, and the actions of such a value-qualified *jīva* inevitably reflect its value-status. *To exist is to be qualified in moral value*. One is what one does and one does what one is. And *karma* indicates a causal moral law which specifies a relation between the actions of the *jīva* and its existential value-status :

"According to the doctrine of *karma* everyone—as a *jīva* in bondage to the world—is conditioned and determined by his conduct, as this is enacted over a period of innumerable births, deaths, and rebirths. Every deed that one performs has its effect in the world and forms within the doer a *samskāra* or *vāsanā* (tendency) that becomes the basis of his future deeds. *Karma* is thus a 'law' that sets forth the relation between one's action as a *jīva* and one's state of being".⁷

Finally, we may end this preliminary exposition by acknowledging that the different schools of thought in India have each developed the doctrine of *karma* in distinct ways, each gives *specific* connotations to the concept. Nevertheless there is a *generic* level of analysis, a general sense of "karma", which applies to the different traditions. Again, Deutsch makes this explicit :

"Whether *karma* has its roots in the *Rg Veda*, or was borrowed from non-Aryan sources, or whether again it is but a natural extension of beliefs present in early Vedic times, is of historical importance. All the later systems of Indian thought agree, though, that *karma* is operative in life; they disagree only about *what* it is that transmigrates and about *how* it takes place; *that* it takes place is accepted, and this alone is of philosophical importance."⁸

[Preliminary Questions about Karma]

Does *karma* make sense? Is it rationally intelligible? We have seen in the above sketch that *karma* is essentially tied in sense with *samsāra* and transmigration. It is this connection which gives *karma* its distinctive features. But precisely what makes it distinctive also renders it questionable and problematic in intelligibility. For we are familiar enough with the concept of an agent performing actions which have consequences and which produce tendencies or habits. Our ordinary intuitions about *agents*, *actions* and *causes* appear to be straightforward and intelligible. But when it is added that the *identity* of the agent (*jīva*) extends cosmically through time and spans innumerable lifetimes, and that the causes and consequences of actions are played out in a cosmic context through many lifetimes, our ordinary understanding is jolted and strained. What can it possibly mean to speak of a person or actor whose identity and existence extends through a beginningless series of births and deaths? Our common sense notion of a person takes its existence and identity to be delimited between birth and death. The existence of a person begins with birth (or conception) and ends (in any identifiable form) with death. What strange conception is this that takes the person to have pre-existed in innumerable lives (and presumably retaining its existential identity through

diverse forms) and to post-exist in ongoing lives and forms? The very meanings of "birth" and "death" are altered. Time itself seems to bend and move in a circle. And the concept of a person or agent becomes dislodged from its familiar and natural contexts. For when the *principle of identity* of a thing is changed the very sense of its concept is altered. It seems, then, that the karmic context which is committed to *samsāra* (perpetual temporalized phenomenal existence) and to transmigration (the perpetual identity of the *jīva* through a series of lives) bends and stretches and perhaps snaps our common conceptions of *time*, *existence*, *person*, *cause*, *action*, *birth* and *death*.

Even worse, we are expected to make sense of the possibility that the form of existence of a given *jīva* may change from life to life; that a *jīva* may be in the form of a human being in one life and return in the next life as an insect, plant or "lower" animal. Our common notions of persons is that they are different in *type* from other forms of life, that persons are special in the realm of existence and radically different in identity and characteristics from other creatures. What can it possibly mean to say that a person may be reborn as an insect? This again strains our imagination, our conceptual powers. Not only are we required to make sense of the *identity* of a person extending through cyclical time in innumerable life-times, but also of the *type* of being evolving and changing through different existential forms and species, in effect, *changing identity* and "essential" characteristics. We lose our bearing here with the notions of *person*, *identity* and *existence*.

And the same holds for our notions of *action* and *cause*. Given our commonly accepted commitment that existence and identity are delimited within *one* given lifetime (what is to count as *one* lifetime?), proscribed between birth and death, we naturally *identify* actions and causes (and their effects) within the temporal span of one lifetime. The *karma* doctrine requires us to conceive that certain unknown (and unknowable?) occurrences in previous lifetimes are the causal conditions of actions now being performed, and that the actions now being performed will have their full effects and consequences, if not in this lifetime then in subsequent ones. Of course this demands much more

than a mere elasticizing of our ordinary concepts of *action* and *cause*. By no stretch of the imagination can we break through the *conceptual* barrier of common understanding in which the existential scope of a person is delimited within the poles of birth and death in one conventional lifetime. The very *sense* of *action* and *cause* is being tampered with, the *principle of use* of these terms is critically changed, the principle of identity of these concepts is radically altered.

The radical changes in the conceptual function and use of "person", "action" and "cause" required by the *karma* doctrine seems to make a mockery of these concepts in their natural use. For when the antecedent causal conditions of my present actions extend through alleged previous lifetimes of which I am not aware, how can I possibly be said to act intelligently, deliberately, rationally and responsibly? We *assume* in everyday life that we have access to the relevant antecedent causal conditions which take effect in *rational* action. And if deliberation and choice are to have meaning it is reasonable to expect that we can specify the ends of our actions and anticipate the full fruition of the consequences and effects of these actions within a reasonable length of time. But if my actions and their effects are played out past my death and through innumerable presumed future lives, again of which I have no direct awareness, the very *rationality* of human action is seriously challenged. For rational, deliberate and voluntary action takes for granted access to and influence over the antecedent causal conditions as well as the effects and consequences. We can *identify* a given action which occurs at some time. But what becomes of the concept of *action* when a given act is extended *cosmically* through time and a series of lives? How long does *one* act take? What is to count as *one* act and what are the criteria of identity of a given act? What becomes of deliberate action then?

The *intelligibility* of *karma* is even more problematic than it already appears. For we have seen that *karma* is taken to be a "moral" law of conduct. But if the form of existence of the agent (*jīva*) in previous and subsequent lives may be non-human (insect, plant, fish, etc.) then what are our moral responsibilities to these non-human species? Presumably any of these species

may be inhabited by a *jīva* in its ongoing cosmic journey. What is the scope of the moral community? Are we to assume that the *activities* of insects, for example, are really actions with moral worth? If transmigration makes sense then it is possible for a human being to be reborn in the form of some other creature. If so, wherein consists the *identity* of that person in the new form? Are we to assume that the external form of this newly born creature is somehow accidental to the inner identity or essence of the original person? We seem forced *either* to hold that only persons (human beings in the conventional sense) perform moral actions which are of a different type from mere activities of other species, *or else* to hold that *actions are activities* and all creatures are capable of moral action and are part of a cosmic moral order. Either way there appears to be incoherence in terms of our everyday notions of human action and the activities of other creatures. In this light the question hinted at earlier take force : Does *karma* indicate a universal cosmic causal law which applies to all existent entities or is it restricted in sense to the sphere of human moral action? If all activities *are* actions and all creatures are part of one cosmic moral order then *karma* becomes a universal causal moral law.⁹

These are just samples of the sorts of questions which naturally arise in trying to make sense of the *karma* doctrine. These questions concern the intelligibility of *karma*; questions of truth, evidence and belief have not yet been addressed. The question, then, is : Can we make sense of *karma*?

[*Making Sense of Karma: Preliminary Sketch of Karma Ontology*]

I wish to show in this paper that the "*karma* doctrine" does indeed make sense. But the intelligibility of *karma* is determined by an integral world-view or ontology taken as a whole. In general, the sense of a term or concept in natural language is relative to a particular categorial scheme or ontology, and apart from this its sense remains indeterminate, variable and ambiguous. Making sense of *karma* requires the explication of the ontological structure or paradigm in which it originates and in which alone it gets its meaning. An ontology (world-view, categorial scheme for interpreting experience) is a *system* of intelligibility and what makes sense in one world need not (and often does not and cannot) make

sense in another. "Common" expressions in ordinary language are inherently equivocal (systematically ambiguous) in sense between ontologies. The task of philosophical interpretation or translation is to excavate and specify the ontological paradigm or categorial structure which renders a given term or doctrine intelligible. Thus, *karma* is not so much a law or principle, or even a "doctrine" as it is an ontological paradigm or integral system for interpreting experience as a whole. The *karma* paradigm is a unified structure with its own inner coherence and logic. In this respect interpretation of *karma* must be systematic and not fragmentary and partial, *Karma* can only make sense when we enter the unique conceptual space of *karma-ontology*. And interpretation of *karma* in the context of its indigenous *categorial* structure de-mystifies it and reveals its inner coherence and rationality.

This is why the challenge to the intelligibility of *karma* given above has force. We cannot make sense of *karma* in terms of the ontological paradigm(s) which happens to inform our ordinary conventional language at this time. *Karma* cannot make sense when interpreted through an alien world-view with a different categorial structure. It is bound to appear incoherent and unintelligible when so interpreted or translated. Our task is to explicate the original general ontological paradigm which generates the *karma* "doctrine".

We saw above that *karma* is essentially tied to *samsāra* and transmigration. The latter are primary structural features of the *karma* paradigm. It is only when the full structural meaning of *samsāra* is appreciated that the *karma* doctrine emerges with intelligibility. In carrying out this sketchy preview of the *karma* paradigm we shall attempt to recreate the inner logic of its ontology.

(The Principle of Conservation and Continuity of Existential Status)

First of all, *samsāra* is an ontological commitment which formally determines the nature and status of existence, and thereby shapes a unique world. This existential commitment is twofold. On the one hand, it is a commitment to the view that existence is co-extensive with time which is cyclical in the sense of being without beginning or end. Existential status is *perpetual* and *continuous*

in a cosmic way. This means that *any* and *every* existent entity has an ongoing cosmic history, an indefinitely long past and future. On the other hand, *samsāra* is a commitment to the *phenomenal* status of existence, that is, that existential status arises through primal ignorance or *avidyā*. So existential status holds only on the phenomenal level of appearance and is alienated from true Being, which is beyond time, change, existence.

This *samsāric* feature of *karma* ontology is the key to uncovering the intelligibility of the karma doctrine. For this world shaping (and sense-determining) commitment formally defines the nature of existence and existent things. To exist is to be qualified (constituted by *gunas*), to have name and form (*nāma-rūpa*). And to be qualified is to be delimited and limited in space and time, to be particularized, and hence to suffer privations and incompleteness. And since existential status is perpetual and cosmically continuous, an existent entity will always be in bondage to qualification and finite delimitation. Alienation and bondage (in this formal sense) are *intrinsic* to existential status. It must be stressed that this is true of *all* existent things, not only for human beings.

In the case of human beings, for example, the structural meaning of *samsāra*, which involves perpetual existence, is manifested in suffering and bondage which *does not begin* with birth and *does not end* with death. Birth and death are mere *stages* and *events* in the ongoing continuous history of a given person (*jīva*). The existential status (qualified nature) of a *jīva* extends through time and innumerable births and deaths. It is important to notice that this *transmigratory* feature of human existence is *not* an *added* thesis about the human condition, but is a *structural requirement* of the *samsāra* commitment. The *samsāra* ontology *requires* that all existent entities (as existent) be perpetually existent. In the special case of humans this principle of continuity of existence generates the notion of transmigration. All existents transmigrate in the generic and formal sense that they persevere in their existential status in time through all changes. Thus *samsāra* entails the principle of conservation of existential status.

(Causality as an Internal Principle of Continuity/Inheritance of Existential Status)

The principle of conservation and preservation of existential status means that an existent thing is always qualified and retains its particular identity through all its transformations in its cosmic history. It is this principle which formally shapes the meaning of *causality* in *karma* ontology. The notion of cause and effect here is unique in sense. It does not have the epistemological and psychological connotations of causality in Hume's thought, for example. Rather, it is an *ontological relation* of continuous qualified identity through time in the history of a given entity. The qualities which constitute the existence and identity of a thing at a given moment in time are passed on (transferred, inherited) through causal change at a later moment. Causality in *karma* ontology is not an external principle of association of distinct events but rather an *internal* principle of qualitative inheritance and continued existential identity of a given thing through time and change. It is a formal feature of the *samsāra* ontology. The latter *requires* causality to be an inner connecting principle in the fabric of perpetual existence. It is this requirement that makes causality cosmic, that explains, for example, why the causes of human actions have antecedents in previous lives, and why present actions take full effect in subsequent lives. There is no mystery about causal relations holding through a series of lifetimes in the *samsaric* existence of a given *jīva*.

In the light of *samsāric* existential status it becomes clear that whether or not I have experience or awareness of previous or subsequent lives is irrelevant to the question of intelligibility of *karma*. That I am not able to verify transmigration through direct experience does not challenge the legitimacy of the formal principle of conservation of existential status. Indeed, this *samsāric* principle, like the principle of conservation of energy (which is an ontological commitment of modern science) appears more intelligible and likely than the suggestion that existential *status* begins with birth and ends with death, in the conventional sense. Of course eventful qualitative changes occur at birth (conception?) and death, but precisely because they *are* eventful they are signals of continued qualified existential status.

(Identity and Individuation : Existents as Quality-values)

As we now recall that *samsāric* existence is at the level of phenomenal appearance, arises in primal ignorance and is alien-

ated from true Being, the question of the principle of identity and individuation of an existent emerges. We saw that *to exist is to be qualified*. This samsāric principle has formal significance. Any existent entity is at once particularized with its identity and discriminated from others. But individuals in this ontology are *not* substantial in an Aristotelian sense, for example. Individuals, being existent and phenomenal, are not ultimately real in the samsāric world. Rather, they are *constituted by qualities*. "Substance" at the existential level becomes a principle of *qualitative identity*. True substance, if it obtains at all, does so on the level of Being, not existence. This is a critical feature of *karma* ontology. It is a mistake to import alien *substance*-models of identity and individuation into the karmic world. If, for example, I think of existent entities as if they were Aristotelian substances, the notion of *karma* would be opaque.

The *qualitative* model of identity and individuation of existents is a distinctive feature of *karma* ontology. Existence is constituted by certain primitive quality-features or categories which are at once descriptive and evaluative (quality-values). The *guṇas* or strands which constitute existence in the Sāṅkhya school is an example of this. The three *guṇas* which make up all existence combine descriptive qualities and values.¹⁰ And the identity of a given existent is determined by the particular combination of quality-features which constitute it. Thus, in this qualificational (in contrast to substantial) model of identity, individuation and existential status of any given entity is determined by its constituent quality make-up. And since the elemental qualities are at the same time values, every entity has unique existential *status and value*. Thus, to exist is to have determinate identity—to be qualified and to have existential status-value.

The identity of individuals in the samsāric world is determined by their quality-value make-up. And since individuals are not substances *with* qualities, but *constituted by* qualities, the very concept of an individual is radically different from other substance-ontologies. An existent changes in time and yet retains its identity and individuation. It is not necessary to appeal to *substance* to explain this, as we have seen in the case of Hume's thought. But the implication of this is that *the boundaries of*

individuals are fluid in change through time. There is no underlying permanent substance wherein the identity of an individual consists. As the qualities change the existential make-up and value of the entity alters. Nevertheless, the entity retains its identity through change and, to this extent, is the "same" entity. It becomes clear in a *qualificational* ontology that the concepts of "identity" and "sameness" have a different meaning from their counterparts in a substance ontology. An existent changes radically in the course of its history and retains its cosmic identity (is the *same* entity) precisely because it need not conform to the alien essentialistic criteria of identity found in substance/essence ontologies.

The qualitative make-up of an entity can affect another and be affected by others. It is possible to have qualitative (existential) exchange and interchange between entities.¹¹ This ontological possibility is enhanced by the fact that *all existents in the saṃsāric world are of the same kind*, as we shall see in a moment. There are no antecedent constraints on the possibility of qualitative exchange and transformation between different entities. In this world entities *can* transact at the level of existential identity. It is this ontological feature which explains the origin of caste structure and fears of existential contamination, for example. For one's existential value *is* one's qualitative make-up and qualitative identity may be transacted among existents, each of which has a particular existential value. In this world it is true to say that *one is what one does and one does what one is*. One's identity is reflected in and reflects one's activity, for existential identity is constituted by qualities, states and activities.

This fluidity of existential identity in the saṃsāric world does not deny the real distinctions and differences between existent entities. This becomes obvious once we recognize that the terms "same", "different", "identity", "distinction" and "entity" are systematically ambiguous between qualificational ontology and substance ontology. What counts as a *real* distinction in the substance model does not apply to the saṃsāric paradigm. In the latter the criterion of identity (and differentiation) is determined by the particular *combinations* (mixtures) of constituent qualities or *guṇas*. The particular quality/value configurations

which constitute an individual determines its distinctness and unique identity. But these real distinctions in the samsāric world do not entail that entities are of different *types*, as in the case in certain substance models.

(The Feature of Qualificational Monism)

Since the primary quality-features which constitute *all* existents (human beings and other creatures) are *universal*, a *qualitative monism* is entailed. This means that all existents, despite the real differences between them, are of *the same ontological type*. This is another critical feature of *karma* ontology. In our commonly shared categorial scheme we take human beings to be of a different order of being from other creatures, to be different in *type*. Such type difference means that the categories which give unique character to a given type of entity *cannot* apply (without a category mistake) to other types of entities. An ontology which is committed to type differences is thereby committed to formal constraints on possible intelligible transformations; we cannot conceive of a transformation from a human being into an insect, for example. It would be a category mistake, and not merely a false statement, to say that this insect was (or is) a person. The categorial structure to which we are committed in our ordinary language, and which shapes and determines what makes sense and what does not, *rules out formally* the possibility of a transformation from human-kind to alien sorts of creatures, like insects. However, in *karma* ontology, which involves a radically different categorial structure, new conceptual possibilities emerge. For since all existents are constituted by a common resource of primary quality-values (*guṇas*) an ontological monism is entailed. The primary quality-categories apply to all possible entities, and all existents are, despite the real differences between them, of the same ontological type *formally*. This is a *structural requirement* of *karma* ontology, of qualificational monism.

A consequence of this is that there are *no formal antecedent constraints* on possible qualitative transformations, on interchange and exchange of existential identity. Since a given existent is identical with its constituent *guṇas*, and since its identity is as rigid or fluid as its possible qualitative transformation, it may intelligibly *become anything* whatever in the samsāric world. This

is the ontological ground of transmigration. The possibility that a particular *jīva* was an insect in a previous life and is in the human form (or qualitative configuration) in this life, and may be either liberated from the *samsāric* world altogether or reincarnate as a dog, for example, in the next life, is perfectly intelligible in qualitative monism. Thus, three main features of *karma* ontology: the principle of conservation of existential status through time and change, the principle that the identity of an existent is constituted by its quality-values, and the principle of qualitative monism—together render the concept of *transmigration* or *transincarnation* perfectly intelligible. When transmigration is interpreted in an alien ontology, however, an ontology which is committed to a substance model of identity and individuation which assumes that substances are of different types, it appears to be unintelligible, incoherent or mystical.

(Action as Qualities and States of Things)

The ontological features of the *karma* paradigm give the concept of action unique meaning. Since an existent entity is identical with its constituent quality-values, with its qualifications and modification, its identity is manifested in its states and activities. Any entity in the *samsāric* world is always in some unique determinate existential state, and this, of course, includes its activities. The activities of an entity are not external to it, not mere products which are separable from its identity, but rather constituent of the thing itself. This is why in the sphere of *human activity* the ontological principle of action — “One is what one does and one does what one is” — makes sense. The actions and activities of a *jīva* are as perpetual and inevitable as its existential status. To exist is to be in some form of activity, whether deliberate or not.

“No one can remain, even for a moment, without performing some action. Everyone is made to act helplessly by the *guṇas* born of *prakṛti*”.¹²

This feature of *karma* ontology requires human action to be on the same level conceptually as all other forms of activity. The activities of insects, for example, have the same existential origin as the activities of humans. This is another implication of *samsāric monism*. The fact that human actions are activities in

the *karma* ontology formally necessitates *either* that all existents be considered as part of a cosmic moral order *or* that *karma* is not specifically moral at all. It would be incoherent and forced in *samsāric* monism to draw a sharp categorial boundary among existents such that moral action applies to humans only and not to the activities of other entities. Now it begins to be clear why the concept of action, like the concept of cause, is cosmic in extent and why *one* act can spread through a series of lifetimes. The concept of *action* in *karma* ontology is radically different in sense from the concept of action that we find in Aristotle or Kant, for example. Karmic actions are activities, and *all* existents are in some form of activity. For activities constitute the existential identity of existents, their quality-values and states. This conception of action reinforces the intelligibility of transmigration with its implication that a *jīva* may trans-incarnate as an insect or plant, for example. The activities of insects or plants are on a par with the activities of humans. There can be only differences in *degree* here, not of kind. A *jīva* which takes the form of a plant does not cease to be active. *Karma*, then, potentially applies to all existents. The ontological alternatives begin to emerge. If *karma* is conceptually tied to *samsāric* monism, then it applies to all existent entities. But if *karma* applies only to human beings, and human conduct is taken to be different in *kind* from the activities of other creatures, then *samsāric* monism must be rejected.

(The Concept of Moral Action)

Of course this view of human action, transaction and interaction requires a radically different concept of moral action than we find, for example, in Aristotle or Kant. We saw earlier that *karma* involved a *moral* dimension. It should now be clear that the concept of moral action here is *unique in sense*. It was pointed out earlier that to exist is to have some *value-status* in the *samsāric* order of things. This was because the primary qualities (*guṇas*) were also moral values. One of the three *guṇas* in Sāṅkhya philosophy, *sattva*, is descriptively "dynamic equilibrium" and also connotes the values of intelligence and goodness. Value is woven into the fabric of things; there is no room in this ontology for a categorial difference between fact and value, for to have descriptive or qualitative content is precisely to have moral value-status.

But good and bad *karma* (and in general, all activity) remain within the *samsāric* realm of existence-in-time. Any action, good or bad, exemplifies the principle of conservation of existential status and therefore leads to further altered qualifications or modifications. This is the principle behind the remark that "all actions produce results". No human action in time, good or bad, can itself alter the *samsāric* existential status. Once qualified always qualified; actions only deepen our involvement in *samsāric* qualifications. Conventional *morality* is concerned with the distinction between good and bad actions, but this applies only to the *jīva*, the moral agent which is to be identified with its activities.

By contrast, the *ethical* concern with liberation (*mokṣa*) applies to the Self and involves the ideal of non-action or detached action. The detachment in action (whether good or bad) is a radical *transcategorical* detachment, the non-action which comes with the realisation that the *jīva* with its *samsāric* existence is born of ignorance and is not to be identified with the true Self which is not *samsāric*, not in time, not an agent and not karmic. This detachment is a radical transcendence of *samsāric* existence as a whole which comes when the *avidyā* from which existence arises is dispelled. No action in time, then, can bring about this radical transformation beyond existential status. Only the discriminating wisdom which recognizes that the true Self is not the *jīva* can effect the release which is salvation from the bondage of *samsāra*. This radical transformation is a non-action which goes beyond good and evil. Thus, a distinction must be made between *moral action* which is bound within *samsāric* existence, and *ethical non-action* (detachment in action) which brings *mokṣa*.

(Summary Review and Transition)

In this preliminary sketch of the *karma* ontology I have stressed that there is an integral ontological paradigm in terms of which the doctrine of *karma* is to be interpreted. This doctrine can and does make sense when interpreted in the context of its indigenous categorial structure. This ontology has its own inner logic and coherence which is a system of intelligibility, a scheme for interpreting experience as a whole.

Before we proceed with further development and elaboration of the *karma* ontology it is necessary to address directly the issues of the logic of translatability and interpretation, of the nature of ontological paradigm formation, and of the method of comparative ontology, which are raised in the preceding mode of analysis.

The challenge for philosophical interpretation or translation is to explicate the ontological paradigm or categorial structure which renders a particular concept or doctrine intelligible. This method of *ontological hermeneutics* must now be reviewed and examined before we proceed with the interpretation of *karma*. The following questions naturally arise. What is an ontology? How are different ontological paradigms shaped? What considerations distinguish different ontologies? How is an ontology related to a natural language? Is there an ontology in ordinary conventional language? In what way is an ontology a system of interpretation of experience as a whole? How does it determine the sense (intelligibility) of a language? Can two different ontologies share common terms with common meanings? Or must it be the case that all terms are systematically ambiguous between different ontologies? And if each ontology internally defines its own form of intelligibility how is translation or interpretation between different worlds possible?

[COMPARATIVE ONTOLOGY AND THE LOGIC OF INTERPRETATION]

(The Concept and Method of Formal Ontology)

In a previously published paper, "Formal Ontology and Movement Between Worlds"¹³ (hereafter abbreviated *MBW*) I presented the concept and method of formal ontology in the context of the methodology of comparative thought. It is now necessary to review some of the main themes of comparative ontology and develop them further here with specific reference to the logic of interpretation.

(Ontology as the Investigation of Categories and Kinds)

First of all I attempted to show that the *sense* of a term in natural language is relative to an ontology or world view. The

"same" term in ordinary language will have different senses in different ontologies. The term "ontology" (the science of being) is used in the classical sense to indicate the formal science of the *kinds* of things there are, in contrast to the predominant contemporary use of the term in the analytical tradition where it has come to mean the investigation of *what there is*. The question of *what there is* is essentially tied to the concept of *truth*, whereas the consideration of the *kinds of things there are* concerns the nature of *sense*. The science of the kinds of things there are involves an investigation of the nature and formation of the *categories* which constitute the world and inform experience. Meaning or sense, as manifested in a language, is determined by the particular categorial structure or world view which informs the language. Thus, the category structure of a language is the origin of sense and determines what possibilities are intelligible. For example, a given category configuration would determine whether two particular terms in a language may be joined significantly to form a thought and specify some possible state of affairs. If the two terms in question may not be so joined, then their union results in a category mistake and fails to depict a real possibility. In this respect *sense is prior to truth*; sense determines what *may be* the case (possibility) while truth is a matter of what *is* the case (actuality). A categorial structure, therefore, at once defines the sense of a language and determines the nature of its world and the structure of experience that is possible in and through it. What makes sense is intrinsic to a world view or category structure, and different world views have different sense structures. What makes sense in one world fails to make sense (is unintelligible or a category mistake) in another. Considerations of sense-formation must be addressed before issues of truth are appropriately raised.

(Ontology as the Investigation of the Origin of Sense)

So *ontology* is at once the investigation of sense and of the nature of being or the world. The assumption here is that what makes sense, what is intelligible or conceivable or possible reflects the *form* of a world. And the form of a world is constituted by a particular categorial structure. Categories such as, substance, individual, entity, attribute, quality, space, time, cause

and so on, configure in different ways to structure a world and thought. The different possible configurations of categories shape different worlds. Language, thought, world and experience mutually reflect one another through a categorial structure. There is no thought or experience apart from some particular categorial configuration. In this respect an ontology as a category structure is a scheme or paradigm for the interpretation of experience and world. *To experience the world is to interpret it through an ontological paradigm.*

The meaning of thought as reflected through language is always relative to an ontology. It was shown in the *MBW* paper that ontological structures are formed through the logical or predicative form of thought. Logic investigates the *form* of thought and reveals thought to have a predicative structure. Thought consists of the joining of subject and predicate terms. The form of predication is the structural origin of categorial configurations.¹⁴ Thus, we move in a circle in which the logical form of thought is reflected in language and manifested in the world. A world is constituted by a categorial configuration which is structured by logical form and experience is an interpretation of the world in virtue of its categorial structure or ontological paradigm as this is apprehended through language. But an interpretation is a systematic mode of *making sense* of things, of determining what is intelligible or meaningful. Whether we begin with thought language, world or experience we find that a categorial structure or ontological paradigm is presupposed and manifested. The common consideration here is sense or meaning. It is in this, context that the term "ontology" is used. *Ontology* is the investigation of the origin of sense or meaning as it emerges through categorial structures which equally inform thought, language, world and experience.

(What is Formal Ontology?)

I have spoken of categorial *structures* (plural) and this implies that there are different schemes or paradigms for interpreting, experiencing or making sense of the world. This point needs to be explored and clarified.

Natural consciousness and language, while always being in some determinate form with respect to sense and the world, has

the inherent openness, power and potentiality to reconstitute or reform itself. The particular world view or category structure, the particular system for interpreting and making sense of the world, which a natural language happens to be committed to at a given time in its ongoing evolution is always subject to revision and revolutionary change. The sense structure of a language must not be thought of as being rigid and fixed once and for all. On the contrary, as determinate as its sense may be at a particular time, it may be reconstituted and reformed. A natural language must not be identified with its form of sense at any given time. For what makes sense in a language is determined by the ontological paradigm or categorial configuration to which it happens to be committed, and this may, and often does, change. An essential feature of natural language is its power to revise and reinterpret the world it reflects, the potentiality to radically change its sense. Thus, a natural language is recursively and reflexively open to reinterpretation.

So, different ontologies are possible within the same natural language. Alternative world views may be expressed through the same language, and this means that language, in itself, is *indeterminate in sense* apart from reference to a specific ontological paradigm. This raises a number of questions. How many different paradigms or categorial sense structures are possible within a language? How are paradigms distinguished? What considerations shape a given paradigm uniquely? Precisely how does a given paradigm determine the sense of a language? What is the logic of transformations between different paradigms? Is there a logic to radical revision of sense structure in a language?

The conception and method of formal ontology is developed to answer these and similar questions. Different *particular* ontologies share common features or principles. *Formal* ontology, in contrast to *particular* or *material* ontologies, investigates the *form* of any ontology. Although different ontologies are worlds apart they nevertheless share common structural or formal principles. These formal principles define in general terms what it means to be a world, to be an entity of *any* type in that world, to be of the same or different type, etc. They are the formal conditions which determine whether a world is a possible or coherent world.

It was shown in the *MBW* paper that these formal principles were the logical conditions of the possibility of "movement" of any kind (e. g., translation, interpretation, revolutionary transformations, etc.) between different worlds. And we shall see in this paper that they are necessary conditions in the logic of interpretation.

(Ontological Paradigms or Categorical Structures)

We may best appreciate what "formal ontology" means and how formal ontological principles are conditions for any ontology by *applying* this method of analysis to different *examples* of ontological paradigms. So let us now examine in greater detail what an ontological paradigm is and how different paradigms are formed.

It was stated earlier that an ontological paradigm was a particular categorical configuration which defined a world view and constituted a scheme for interpreting or making sense of the world. But what is a category? And how do categories configure to shape sense in a particular language, and to determine what is and is not possible within a particular world?

(Categories as the logical form of concepts)

An ontology, as a particular categorical configuration, determines the *kinds* of things there are in the world it defines and constitutes, and thereby determines what does and does not make sense in the linguistic or conceptual depiction of this world. The notion of "kind", which is so fundamental to ontology, may be formally defined in terms of *category*. A *category* is the logical form of any given concept. Thus, in ordinary language a particular concept term such as "red" specifies a particular determinate color. But in terms of its logical form "red" (like every term in the language) has its logical opposite or *contrary*, which may be indicated by "un-red". This logical contrary specifies every other color than red, including the privation of color, namely, that which *lacks* color and is "colorless". Together, the contraries "red" and "un-red" exhaust the range of "what is colored". The latter is the *category* of color. While "red" and "un-red" are property-words, the logical union of the contraries, indicated by the absolute term/red/(which signifies "that which is either-

red-or-un-red") is a *category-word* and may be said to specify a *feature* (rather than a mere property). Any concept in its logical absolute form is a *category* which specifies a *feature* of the world. Ontology is primarily concerned with the *features* of the world, and only secondarily, if at all, with properties.

(Types of Kinds or Entities and Predicative Form)

This special notion of a category is the key to defining the *kinds* or *types* of things there are in any given world. The *form* of any ontology is the logical structure of thought. In classical Aristotelian logic, for example, the logical form of thought is *predicative* : every thought consists of a logical predicate being positively or negatively joined to a logical subject. But not all terms in the language may significantly configure; logical laws determine which terms are mutually predicable. This is a *formal* feature of sense formation in natural language—language discriminates between sense and non-sense. The laws of predication formally determine which terms in the language may be intelligibly joined in thought.¹⁵ And when all of the categories of a language are mutually deployed according to these laws they form a predicative structure which shows which terms may be significantly joined in predication. When terms that are not formally predicable are joined in a sentence non-sense results, a category-mistake committed. Category-mistakes are sentences which fail to specify a thought, are unintelligible, and neither true nor false. A thought which is category-correct makes sense and is thus either-true-or-false. To make sense is to have *truth-status*, to be/true/, rather than to have determinate truth-value. This is another way to express the earlier point that *sense is prior to truth*. Whether a thought is true or false is subsequent to and dependent upon whether it makes sense.

Predicative form and the laws of predicability, then, are the formal origin of categorial structure and hence of sense formation in natural language. An ontological paradigm is a particular categorial structure. We may now observe how categorial relations define the ontological *types* of things there are in a given world. Since a categorial structure is a network of predicative relations it is not surprising to find the *formal principle of types* in the form of a predicative law :

(Formal Principle of Types)

"Within a given world, two entities *a* and *b* are of different ontological type if and only if a category term of feature *P* applies to *a* but not to *b*, and a category term applies to *b* but not to *a*".

For example, in ordinary English we find that stones are /colored/, but numbers are not, and numbers are /even/, but not/colored/. It would be a category mistake to join numbers and colors predicatively. "Seven is blue", for example, is a category mistake. Thus, by the above formal criterion of type difference, stones and numbers are of different types. This example shows that type differences with respect to a given world are determined by the particular category structure or ontology and are immediately tied to the sense formation of the language in question.

(Illustrations of Different Ontological Paradigms)

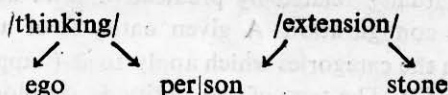
A *category*, we have seen, is the logical form of a *concept*, and a *type* is the ontological form of an *entity*. Together, the categories and types which are discriminated in a particular language are mutually related by predicative laws and thus fall into a predicative configuration. A given entity is of a particular type depending on the categories which apply to it ("apply" here means "predicable of"). The type of an entity is ontologically revealing since it obviously indicates the *nature* or *essence* of the thing. The categories or features of a thing specify its nature. Thus to know that a particular entity is /colored/ reveals that it is /extended/ or in space and located. Numbers, which are not in space, are obviously of a very different nature.

We are now in a position to illustrate how different categorial structures shape different ontological paradigms and determine different forms of sense or meaning. An ontology is a world view, and in this sense it is clear that the dualism of Descartes, the idealism of Berkeley or Hume, the materialism of Hobbes or Democritus, and the monism of Spinoza are different world views. Each recommends a restructuring of the categorial configuration, each argues for a new model or paradigm for making sense of the world and experience, each wishes to revise the sense of conventional language.

Descartes uncovers a *dualistic* paradigm in his *Meditations*. He presents a categorial structure which reconstructs and redefines the configuration of *categories* and *types* in ordinary experience. He argues that the category of /thought/ (the feature of thinking and being in some mode of consciousness) and the category of /extension/ (the feature of occupying space and having dimension), are mutually exclusive and distinct. This means that they *cannot* apply to (be predicable of) the same entity. The implication of this radical category distinction is that *mind* (the type of thing that is /thinking/) and *body* (the type of thing that is /extended/) are of different ontological types. This radical dualism of mind and body necessitates a distinctive feature of Descartes' ontology, namely, that *persons* are dual in nature, are composite and not primitive individuals. The ontological paradigm which Descartes is recommending is represented in the following diagram :

Figure 1

(Dualistic Paradigm)



Here we find that the ego is a purely thinking thing and is of a different type from stones, which are extended in space. (This is an instance of the law of type difference). It would be a category mistake in this paradigm to predicate "thought" of stones or "spacial location" of egos. This is how a category configuration determines what makes sense and what does not with respect to a given paradigm. The situation with *person* in figure 1 is problematic because both categories apply to persons and yet the figure shows that the two categories are mutually exclusive and unrelated. The only way formally to resolve this predicament, assuming, of course, that the two category terms are univocal, is to *require* that *persons* are composite and dual, rather than primitive individuals. So, the category of /thinking/ applies to person *qua* mind, and the category of extension applies *qua* body, and the person is a dual entity of *mind-and-body*.

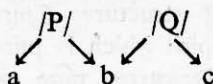
It must be stressed that this is a *formal requirement* of the paradigm. Incoherence would result if persons were taken to be individuals in this ontological paradigm. A formal ontological law is in effect here :

(*Formal Law of Individuals and Ambiguity*)

"If a , b and c are any three entities in *any* world and P and Q are categories such that P is predicable of a and b but not c , and Q is predicable of b and c but not a , then either P must be equivocal over a and b or else Q must be equivocal over b and c . Conversely, if P and Q are univocal terms, then the middle term, entity b , must be equivocal or composite."

(Illustration)

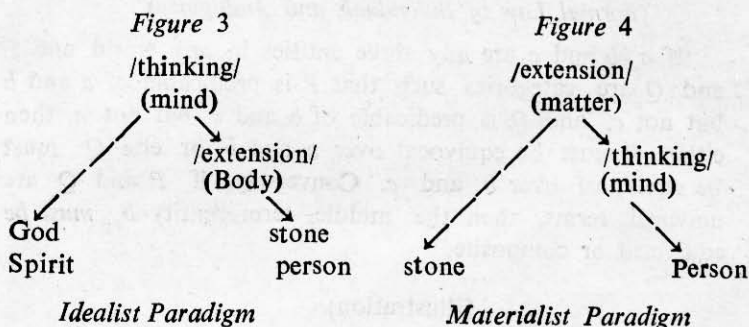
Figure 2



This formal ontological law is a necessary condition of coherence for any possible world. If it is violated an incoherent ontology results, which, of course, means a breakdown in the sense structure of the language in question.¹⁶

When the Cartesian dualistic paradigm is contrasted with other ontological paradigms we begin to see more clearly *both* how radically different in sense structure different worlds are *and* how the formal ontological principles are common to different worlds and determine their inner logic and coherence. Let us consider simultaneously the ontological paradigms of an *idealist* and a *materialist* categorial structure. In Berkeley's ontology, for example, we find a very different categorial configuration from the Cartesian one. Berkeley, as an idealist, argues that the unifying category of all experience is /thinking/, which here indicates spirit or consciousness and what is presented to and dependent upon consciousness or mind. Accordingly, the category of /matter/, or /extension/, as the primary feature of space, is *derivative* from the category of /thinkin/ or /mind/ and logically depends upon it for its sense. In other words, the category of I.P.Q...¹²

/matter/ is included within the category of /mind/. This is precisely what Descartes rejects. Berkeley's paradigm entails a different sense structure for language from Descartes'. It may be depicted as in the following figure :



In Berkeley's categorial structure, figure 3, the predicative possibilities allow for a spirit which is purely /thinking/, without body, as in the case of Descartes' pure ego, but here we find that a person is of the same type as a stone—both sharing the same features of being a body with thought. Of course this is radically different from the Cartesian world in which stones and persons are of different types, for persons are in the category of /thought/ while stones are not. In the world of the idealist all things necessarily fall within the category /thought/, and his world is thoroughly spiritual. Thus, Berkeley's paradigm *necessitates* that persons and stones are of the same type and have the same predicative possibilities. It makes sense to say of a stone that it depends upon /thinking/ and is of the nature of /thought/. But this would be a category mistake in the Cartesian world in which the categories of /thought/ and /extension/ are radically distinct. Again, in Berkeley's paradigm we find that the concept of a person is a primitive individual and not composite. This, too, is entailed by the paradigm. In this respect the Idealist paradigm avoids the mind-body dualism of the Cartesian ontology. The point to be stressed is that what makes sense in Berkeley's world does not make sense in the Cartesian world, and *vice versa*. And we begin to see more clearly how different ontological paradigms reshape the sense of terms. For example,

the term "person" has different senses in the two paradigms, it is *systematically* ambiguous. Here it is natural to wonder whether the word "person" has anything in common between the two paradigms, other than the mere inscription. And, in general, it must not be assumed that the basic categories have univocal sense between different worlds.

As we consider the materialist paradigm in figure 4 we find the contrary position to that of the idealist. The materialist argues that the primary category of language and world is that of /matter/, and that thinking or /mind/ is derivative and logically dependent upon /matter/. In this paradigm we find that a stone is, as in the Cartesian paradigm, purely /extended/ apart from thought and of a different category from persons. However, in this world persons are thinking bodies and this is a different concept of *person* from that found either in the Cartesian or Idealist paradigm. In this materialist world there is no room for a pure spirit apart from matter; it is not possible to conceive of God without body, for example. Again we find that what can be thought or conceived of in the materialist world is different from what makes sense and is possible in the other two paradigms. What can be said significantly, or is category-correct, in one paradigm is a category mistake in another. And even if the same thing is *said*, the same utterances made, in different worlds, the sense would be systematically ambiguous. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the same formal ontological laws hold for any possible paradigm. The formal principle of type difference or of individuation, for example, are conditions for any possible world. The materialist *can* take persons to be individuals since the categories are connected; and the same holds for the idealist. The dualist, however, *cannot* maintain this without violating the principle of individuation.

(Ontological Considerations which Distinguish Paradigms)

What are the ontological considerations which distinguish different paradigms or worlds? In general, any ontological commitment which formally changes the predicative or categorial possibilities is a world-shaping and paradigm-distinguishing desideratum. We have seen in the three illustrations that each paradigm is shaped by different ontological commitments: the Cartesian

dualist maintains (assumes ?) that the category of mind is radically distinct from and unrelated to the category of body; the materialist is committed to the thesis that all experience and all features of the world fall under the inclusive category of /matter/; and the idealist maintains the contrary ontological thesis that all experience, all entities and features of the world, are to be explained in terms of the category of /mind/. Needless to say, the terms “/mind/” and “/matter/” are systematically ambiguous between the three paradigms, for formal and structural reasons, since each is bound up in different predicative possibilities.

As we take other examples of ontological paradigms from the history of Western thought we begin to see the variety of ontological commitments which make a world of difference. Take Hume's ontology, for example. Since the primitive elements or individuals which make up experience of the world are the immediate impressions of perception (sense-data), and since these impressions are atomically discrete and momentary, the impressions of sound being of a different type from the impressions of sight, and each lasting only a fleeting moment, we find a paradigm in which there is no substance, in the sense of an underlying continuously existing entity which is the principle of unity and identity. This means that the entities designated by the common nouns of ordinary language are not primitive individuals but are really *clusters* or *bundles* of atomic and momentary impressions. The term “table”, for example, indicates in Hume's phenomenalist ontology a congery of ever-changing momentary and discrete impressions. Needless to say the sense of “table” is radically different in Hume's language or paradigm than it is in its ordinary conventional use. The interpretation of this term according to Hume's paradigm differs from the conventional interpretation which preanalytically and informally accepts a different paradigm. Notice here, too, that the status of ordinary objects as classes or clusters of individuals (atomic impressions) is *necessitated* by Hume's atomic and phenomenalist paradigm, and *determined* by the formal principle of individuation. Since what I *see* and what I *hear* and what I *smell* are atomically discrete and of different types, these perceptual terms have different senses from the perceptual terms of ordinary language, where it is assumed

that what we see, hear and smell are united in the same individual object. Thus, we find in Hume's case, which, by the way, is a development of Berkeley's paradigm, that the *atomism*—the commitment that the primitive individuals of experience and language are discrete and atomic—gives unique shape to his paradigm and is a world-distinguishing consideration

The same is true of Spinoza's monistic paradigm. This ontological paradigm and form of making sense of the world takes the Cartesian commitment that the categories of /thought/ and /extension/ are mutually exclusive and unrelated. In fact, Spinoza goes further to hold that they form two distinct languages. However, he rejects Descartes' commitments to there being finite substances and instead maintains (argues?) that the very meaning of "substance" requires us to conceive of substance as infinite and one and indivisible. This leads to his ontological monism in which reality is One (Substance/Nature/God). This means that conventional discourse must be radically re-interpreted in its meaning since the conventional assumption of discrete and individual substances is false and apparent and are *really* only modes of the one true Infinite Substance. Thus, here again we find a world-shaping and sense-making ontological commitment which radically alters the interpretation and significance of experience or thought.

It should be noticed that neither Hume nor Spinoza is recommending that we change what we say in ordinary conventional discourse. For we continue to say the same things—that there are tables, and that the table is square and brown, etc.—but the meaning of these conventional utterances are radically revised in the light of the recommended ontological paradigm. These utterances about tables, for example, would have very different interpretations in the paradigms of Hume and Spinoza.

(Formal Factors which Alter Predicative Possibilities)

From the comparison of these different ontological paradigms we may discern general patterns of the ontological considerations which distinguish different paradigms. One factor which distinguishes paradigms is a structural change in the *categorical configuration*, the sort of change we found in the move from the

idealist to the materialist paradigm. Another sort of consideration is a formal change in the *principle of identity and individuation*, the type of transformation found in the paradigm of Hume or Spinoza. Hume's paradigm was different because of his commitment to phenomenal *atomism*, while Spinoza's was unique because of his commitment to monism. In each case the *material* criterion of what is to count as an individual, as one entity, is transformed; the *formal* principle of individuation which holds for any possible world remains the same. For Hume, the individuals of conventional discourse are interpreted to be *really* bundles of momentary atomic impressions. And for Spinoza the individuals of ordinary discourse are taken to be *actually* modes of the one true Substance or Individual which is God or Nature. Thus, there are different structural ways to reform sense, to alter the predicative possibilities, and to differentiate ontological paradigms of interpretation. The differences between atomism and monism, between materialism and idealism, between dualism and pluralism, and between substantialism and asubstantialism (qualificationism), and so on, are formal ontological commitments which distinguish different world paradigms. Ontological commitments which change the status of existence, taking existent entities to be phenomenal or apparent rather than real, will have a formal bearing on predicative status and mode of interpretation. Or, making a commitment to the perpetual and continuous status of existence through time, and through an endless series of rebirths, will formally change the principle of identity of existent entities, as is the case in the *karma* paradigm. Whatever the structural transformation which reshapes sense and predicative possibilities the net effect will be either to change the categorial configuration, and thereby alter the very meaning of the categories, or else to change the criteria of identity and individuation of entities which alters the types of things discriminated in a given paradigm. And, of course, change in one affects the status of the other.

(The Integrity, Coherence and Inner Logic of Paradigms)

It must be stressed that each paradigm has its inner integrity and logic. A paradigm is a *complete system* for interpreting experience as a whole. It *defines* what makes sense and

what are predicative possibilities. In this way it defines what is conceivable or intelligible and hence, what *may* be the case, what *can* be true or false. We have seen in the examples above that the *form* of a paradigm prescribes and proscribes the internal features of its world and language. We saw, for example, that Descartes' dualistic paradigm necessitated that persons be treated as composite entities. We also saw in the case of Hume's paradigm that conventional objects *must* be treated as clusters of fleeting atomic phenomena. These ontological properties were formally dictated by the categorial structure of the respective paradigms. So an ontological paradigm must be *taken as a whole* and once we enter its inner coherence and logic it leads us and teaches us and constrains us to think in radically new ways. The exploration of a new paradigm leads to startling conceptual discoveries as a strange new world is disclosed.

(Paradigms as Cultural Prototypes)

Furthermore, the pervasiveness and depth of an ontological paradigm may be easily overlooked. To say that a paradigm is a *complete system* for the interpretation of *experience as a whole* means that all levels of experience are shaped by the paradigm in question. In this respect a paradigm or categorial structure, as a world view, is a *cultural prototype* in the sense that it informs everyday experience, moral experience, social and political reality, esthetic expression, and so on. As we enter the Hindu paradigm, for example, at some sufficiently general level, we begin to see how the world view or ontology shapes experience at all levels. It explains why the religious form of life of the Hindus takes the particular form it does; it reveals the inner logic which illumines and inspires its esthetic ideals and practice; it discloses the deeper reasons for the social reality and behaviour being the way it is; it determines why the form of moral experience *must* take the course it has taken; it shapes the deep-seated attitudes of the culture towards knowledge and truth, and makes manifest the research values which determine the acceptable and desirable forms of scientific practice; and to the extent that a culture is consistent and coherent and faithful to its shaping paradigm it uncovers the inner logic which

shows the rationality, intelligibility, unity and coherence of all of these forms of cultural experience.

ONTOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS AND THE LOGIC OF TRANSLATION

(The Universal Interest in Sense and Interpretation)

A central concern of this paper has been to give an interpretation of *karma* and to present the *general method* of interpretation being used. The translation and interpretation of *karma* is an exploration of its sense, and we have seen that this requires ontological analysis and explication of the *karma* paradigm or catogorial structure in terms of which this "doctrine" may be intelligibly interpreted. Ontological analysis is an investigation of the origins of sense formation which is always relative to a particular paradigm of interpretation. To apprehend meaning is to interpret, and interpretation is possible in terms of an ontological paradigm. In this respect such paradigms are *semantic* schemes of interpretation. Thus, the investigation of sense or meaning and the logic of interpretation and translation are primarily matters of ontological analysis.

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation, and interpretation pervades all levels of experience. It has become clear that *to experience is to interpret*, for experience of any form is possible only with respect to some categorial structure, can only arise within some ontological paradigm or world view. Whether at the level of mundane daily experience, or the experience of scientific research and theory, whether in our religious or esthetic lives, interpretation is always present; the hermeneutical concern is universal. *Ontological hermeneutics* investigates the origin and formation of sense or meaning and is a method of interpretation through ontological analysis.

(The Philosophical Problem of Translation)

The philosophical problem of radical translation must be distinguished from issues of linguistic translation. It is one thing to translate between different languages, such as Sanskrit and English, another to "translate" between different ontological paradigms. The former is called "lingusitic" translation, the latter "philosophical" or "ontological".

(The Ontological Relativity of Sense)

The possibility of translation between different worlds or ontologies is in question since, as we have seen, sense or meaning is *relative* to a particular ontological paradigm or categorial structure. A given term in natural language is indeterminate in sense apart from some paradigm. But it has been stressed that sense is *defined* internally by each paradigm. A term has determinate sense only *within* a given paradigm, paradigms being closed systems of interpretation which have their own inner logic and form of coherence. What makes sense in one world fails to make sense in another. This implies that there is radical and *systematic ambiguity* between different ontological paradigms. Different paradigms do not share common meanings of terms. Paradigms are radically incommensurable in terms of internal sense, they are different "language games". And since there are no "neutral" meanings for terms *between* paradigms, it is natural to wonder *whether* translation between different worlds is possible at all.

(Radical Indeterminacy of Sense in Natural Language)

The systematic ambiguity of sense between paradigms is complemented by the radical indeterminacy (variability, relativity) of sense in natural languages. For if the sense of a term is always relative to some *particular* paradigm (the *ontological relativity* of sense), a given term in natural language will obviously be devoid of determinate sense. For this reason it is problematic to speak of the "same" term between different paradigms. *The principle of ambiguity between paradigms* rules out the possibility of terms with ontologically "neutral" or shared sense. It is therefore more accurate to speak of *the same linguistic expression* or inscription (rather than a term or concept) in natural language shared by different paradigms. *The principle of indeterminacy of sense* applies to expressions or linguistic inscriptions in natural language. For example, the expression "person" in ordinary English is indeterminate in sense apart from some specific categorial structure which provides a context for its sense and interpretation. It was shown in the comparison of different paradigms above that the expression "person" was systematically ambiguous between worlds, it had different senses in each

paradigm. This is true of all linguistic expressions; they are all indeterminate in sense apart from an interpretive scheme.

This is not to say that the term "person" has no sense in ordinary English. Of course it does. But this is because ontological paradigms *are* at work shaping sense in ordinary language at any given time in its history and evolution. Conventional discourse has determinate sense only insofar as it makes ontological commitments to certain categorial structures. I speak in the plural here since it is often the case that a variety of paradigms simultaneously shape sense in ordinary language. This is the origin of ambiguity in ordinary language. And it is *this* feature of conventional discourse that is sometimes referred to as its "informal" character. It may be the case, for example, that one ontological paradigm determines our religious commitments and experience, while another shapes our scientific practice and values, and still another our social and political reality. Such multiple commitments to different paradigms simultaneously in conventional or ordinary discourse is at once its virtue and its vice. It is a virtue in as much as it celebrates the inexhaustible power of natural consciousness to entertain different forms of life, or "language games", as Wittgenstein would put it. This anti-reductionist and anti-essentialistic tendency of ordinary language is a sign of its health and vitality. On the other hand, this "informal" feature of natural discourse, as many of the "ideal-language" analytical philosophers have warned, is a source of confusion, ambiguity and incoherence. And we can see why, since any given expression in ordinary language will have different senses when interpreted or used in different ontological contexts. This is confusing only because it is not explicitly recognized that different categorial paradigms are influencing the interpretation of the same expression simultaneously. Different "rules of use" or "language games" are being used to interpret the given expression, and here language "goes on a holiday". It is clear that both the formalist and the informalist have their legitimate points.

(Openness of Language to Radical Revision)

It was pointed out earlier that natural consciousness, natural language, must not be identified with the particular paradigms

of interpretation to which the linguistic community happens to be committed at any given time. For the distinctive feature of language is its openness to radical revision and revolution in sense structure, its power and potentiality to reconstitute its forms of sense. And this process of revision is constantly at work in the evolutionary history of a language. For example, as scientific discourse evolves and develops its paradigms for interpreting experience a new vocabulary develops and impinges upon the conventional senses of terms in ordinary non-scientific discourse, and gradually new senses or connotations emerge in ordinary speech. Or, the revision may be more profound and dramatic as in a religious or cultural revolution. Such radical transformation in cultural consciousness may be understood as the shifting to new ontological paradigms. More often, however, it is really the deepening of understanding of a world view to which the community is *already* committed. An ontological paradigm, we have seen, has its integrity and inner logic. The full import of a paradigm is often not appreciated by the cultural community which resides in that world. The paradigm is slowly developed and understood, and when it fades a renaissance is called for, and so on.

(Radical Translation as Intra-Linguistic Interpretation)

Given these features of sense in natural language—that sense is relative to a paradigm, that there is radical ambiguity and incommensurability between paradigms, and that sense is variable and indeterminate in natural language—the problem of translation is intensified. Translation between natural languages is the *starting point* of ontological hermeneutics. For example, the *linguistic* hypothesis that “karma” be translated in English as “deeds performed with consequences”, leaves radically open to interpretation the relevant sense of “deed”, etc. It was shown earlier that “deed” or “action” is systematically ambiguous between the different categorial paradigms which were compared. It is different in sense still within the *karma* paradigm. For this reason successful *linguistic* translation, the appropriate mutual mapping of *expressions* or *inscriptions* between natural languages is the starting point of radical translation or philosophical hermeneutics. The challenge for ontological hermeneutics is to *disambiguate* the expressions in question by interpreting them through appropriate categorial paradigms. The aim of radical

translation is to render *determinate* the indeterminate sense of the proposed expression within the *same* natural language. Thus, *philosophical translation is intralinguistic interpretation*. Radical translation is not between the expressions of different natural languages, e. g. Sanskrit and English, but the ontological interpretation and disambiguation *within the same language*.

(Radical Translation as Movement Between Worlds)

This suggestion seems ironic, even perverse, in the light of our habit of thinking of translation as an inter-linguistic enterprise. But the question of radical translation concerns the systematic ambiguity of expressions within a given language between different ontological paradigms or categorial schemes of interpretation. And it has become clear that all *possible ontological paradigms are accessible within the same natural language*. Radical translation, then, is interpretation between different worlds or paradigms; it is cross-ontological rather than inter-linguistic. And it is "cross-cultural" only if this designation implies that different cultures reflect different ontological paradigms and are worlds apart.¹⁷

But translation or interpretation between different worlds is not a matter of synonymy or of the mutual mapping of expressions which have the *same* sense, for this is ruled out by the principle of radical ambiguity between paradigms. There are no synonymous concepts between *different* worlds. Rather, *the ideal of radical translation is identity of meaning* which is to be achieved through reconstruction of the original categorial paradigm in question. For example, the ideal in the translation of "karma" is to reconstruct the original *karma* paradigm within English, and in this way to uncover and recover the *identical* system of sense which gives "karma" its intelligibility. There are no ready-made equivalent terms for "karma" in ordinary English. Instead, expressions from ordinary English must be *given* the appropriate significance by interpreting them within the context of the *karma* paradigm. The *system* of sense of the *karmic* categorial structure must be re-created within English. It is in this respect that radical translation is intra-linguistic interpretation.

The implication of this is that there can be no "translation" between *different* ontological paradigms, only the re-creation of

identical paradigms. But the more interesting and challenging task of ontological hermeneutics is to discern differences in meaning, systematic ambiguity in sense, between different worlds. The aim of ontological hermeneutics is not to "translate" the categorial structure of Spinoza's monism into the paradigm or language form of Hume, for example, but rather to appreciate the systematic differences in sense between these two worlds. So ontological hermeneutics has the dual aim of either recreating *identical* sense or recognizing systematic *differences* in sense between different paradigms.

(All Ontological Paradigms Accessible Within Natural Language)

The key assumption in this account of radical translation is the openness or accessibility of a natural language to all possible ontological paradigms. Once it is clear that a natural language is not to be identified with the particular ontological paradigm(s) which happens to inform it at a given time in its evolution, when it is seen that it is open to ontological evolution, revision, revolution and radical re-interpretation, then its internal accessibility to any possible world is readily acknowledged. This power of natural language to develop or radically reconstitute its sense structure is a manifestation of the *formal* ontological structure which holds for any natural language. The formal features of natural consciousness or language is the source of the openness and transparency of thought, of the recursive potentiality of natural language to re-interpret and re-form its sense.

This open-textured feature of natural language is the key to understanding radical revolutions in sense — religious reformation or conversion, metaphysical revision, scientific conceptual or theoretical revolutions, cultural renaissance, etc. And here we find two sorts of transformations possible. One sort of transformation is *evolutionary* and *developmental*. That is, a given paradigm, at any given time in the history of a cultural tradition, may undergo *internal* development and growth. This is possible because, as we have seen, any paradigm has its integrity and potentialities which are subject to exploration and discovery. A paradigm is never fully manifest or understood, never completely exhausted or comprehended. The uncharted territory

of the inner landscape of an ontology is the frontier which allows for a cultural renaissance, which allows for a breakthrough into a new self-awareness, for a deeper appreciation for the inner meaning of a cultural world.

But the other sort of transformation is, perhaps, the more radical one of *external revolution and revision*. Here the culture, the natural language, undergoes a radical re-formation of its world view or sense structure with the introduction of a new ontological paradigm. Such revision is dramatically seen in the history of revisionary metaphysics in Western thought. For example, Spinoza's thought may be seen as recommending a new ontological paradigm, a new categorial scheme for interpreting experience and revising the religious tradition. The same may be said for Hume's ontological recommendations. Needless to say, the two forms of transformation shade into one another. For example, the cultural/ontological revolution from the Hindu to the Buddhist world may, indeed, be taken as the introduction of a new paradigm, but it may also be taken as a further deepening of the inner meaning of the Hindu world view. And the religious revolution effected by Jesus may at once be regarded as the recommendation of a new form of life *and* as the deepening of appreciation of the earlier tradition or world view. The fact that there are such evolutions and revolutions within the same natural language in the history of a culture testifies to the openness of natural consciousness to re-interpretation.

(No Culture has Privileged Access to its Paradigm)

The formal accessibility to any possible world within the same natural language has important implications for cross-cultural research and translation. If philosophical translation is the *re-creation* of an "alien" world view within a natural language, then the ontological paradigm in question is just as open to exploration and development in its new linguistic setting as it is in its native cultural milieu. Ironical though it may be, no culture has privileged access to its ontological paradigm; it may equally misunderstand itself, deceive and violate itself, and may be as unfaithful to its ontological commitments, as some "alien" interpreting culture might. Indeed, it may well be that the distance of a foreign perspective, the possibility of objectivity through the

fresh look of disinterested eyes, may be an antidote to the myopic subjectivity of native self-interest. And no culture can claim privileged authority over the correct interpretation of its world. It can make no special claims to legitimacy, and has no special rights of ownership of its world view. Thus, for example, it is perfectly possible for an interpreter in a "Western" linguistic setting to attain a deeper grasp of the *karma* paradigm than a given native Hindu might have. It appears that native cultural corrigibility follows from the open textured feature of natural language.

(Exegetical and Creative Interpretation)

It becomes clear that ontological hermeneutics may take two forms. One objective is to explicate the *actual* interpretation or understanding that a given cultural tradition has of its ontological paradigm at a given time. This is *descriptive or exegetical* interpretation. So one task in the interpretation of *karma*, for example, would be to explicate how native Hindus have *in fact* interpreted their world. But precisely because the native interpretation of a paradigm is corrigible and distinguishable from the paradigm itself, there is room for the *development* of interpretation of the paradigm. A second task, therefore, is *creative interpretation* which has licence to explore and discover a paradigm in new ways. It is restricted neither by native or foreign antecedent interpretations. Creative interpretation is at liberty to excavate a paradigm in a new light and develop a new, and hopefully, more faithful and profound interpretation.¹⁸

(Incoherent Interpretation and Mixed Paradigms)

Of course there are logical constraints on authentic interpretation or translation. Natural language tends to be informal in the sense that it may be simultaneously committed to a *variety* of ontological paradigms. We saw earlier that this is a source of both virtue and vice when it comes to interpretation. *Incoherence* results when an interpretation mixes paradigms. Thus, interpretations of *karma* which assume alien categorial structures or which capture some features of the *karma* paradigm piecemeal are bound to land in incoherence and generate unintelligibility. A special type of global category-mistake results with *paradigm-crossings*. A paradigm crossing confuses systems of meaning, or

"language-games". A critical constraint for ontological hermeneutics, then, is to clearly distinguish distinct paradigms and to avoid the incoherence of mixed paradigms.

This leaves open the question of adjudication between different paradigms. It need not be assumed that a given community or natural language must be committed to only one ontological paradigm at a time. The luxury of the informal attitude welcomes a plurality of world views. A given community may be committed to a particular world view and still remain open to, tolerate, entertain, and even celebrate a different ontology. This is possible because, as was stressed earlier, there is a difference between sense and truth. To make an ontological commitment to a particular world, to embrace it as true, does not preclude the possibility of entertaining a different world as intelligible, coherent and possible. One may be committed to the truth of his world view and still enter the intelligible structure of an alien world and appreciate it without affirming it. Thus, a Christian, from this point of view, has access to the Hindu world and may appreciate its intelligible powers while neither affirming nor denying it. And the question remains open: how many worlds can one simultaneously inhabit and be committed to? It is not obvious that the answer is: only one at a time!

(Quine's Scepticism about Radical Translation)

It is natural to wonder how the theory of radical translation being proposed here speaks to the well-known sceptical concerns of Quine. Especially since I have used terms such as "indeterminacy of sense", "ontological relativity" and "radical translation". But it should be apparent that Quine's logical framework is radically different from the *categorial* logic which ontological hermeneutics presupposes. Quine's logical language is *extensional* and takes reference and truth as primary. His language takes meaning to be specified by truth-conditions and involves a quantificational world which fails to discriminate between different types of things. As a result there is no nonsense in such a language, every syntactically well-formed sentence being either true or false. By contrast, the categorial logic presented here is an *intensional* language which takes sense as prior to truth and reference. It assumes a category-differentiated world

in which entities fall into different types and predicability is governed by formal category structure. There is a world of difference between the two logical languages. Thus, the expressions "indeterminacy of sense", "ontological relativity" and "radical translation", for example, are systematically ambiguous between these two logical frameworks or paradigms. Quine's scepticism concerning radical translation (in *his* sense) is a *result* and *requirement* of his logical language which is committed to indeterminate reference. It does not apply, however, to ontological hermeneutics, and is not required in a categorial logic.

(Formal Conditions of Radical Translation)

We may now review some of the main features of ontological hermeneutics. First, sense in natural language is indeterminate (indeterminacy of sense). The sense of a term is relative to a particular ontological paradigm (ontological relativity), and a term considered apart from a specific paradigm remains variable and open to interpretation (systematic ambiguity). But a natural language cannot be identified with any particular ontological paradigm and is essentially open to systematic re-interpretation. This power to re-constitute its intelligible form springs from its formal ontological structure (formal ontology). In this respect a natural language has access to any possible categorial structure or world view. It is here that the formal condition of radical translation appears. For radical translation, that is, translation between different worlds, amounts to ontological interpretation within the same language, and is hence intralinguistic. But ontological interpretation *begins* where successful linguistic translation ends. For the linguistic expressions of a language remain indeterminate in sense without ontological interpretation; the same sentence may be given different senses, there being a difference between what is *said* and what is *meant*. In any case, there is systematic ambiguity between different paradigms, which means that there are no common univocal terms between different worlds. It is now clear that radical translation does not presuppose common meanings between different paradigms. On the contrary, radical ambiguity is precisely what makes such translation possible. For ontological interpretation is the disambiguation of terms in a natural language, the systematic assignment

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of terms to their respective ontological paradigms. Thus, ironically, radical translation is possible *because* of the systematic ambiguity of terms between paradigms and trades on the radical indeterminacy and variability of sense in natural language.

[FURTHER INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION OF THE KARMA PARADIGM]

In the light of the foregoing discussion we may now resume the explication of the *generic karma* paradigm and ontological interpretation of *karma*. It was shown earlier that the "doctrine" of karma makes sense when interpreted in terms of the *karma* paradigm which involves the features of conservation and preservation of existential status (*samsāra*), of a qualitative principle of identity or individuation, and of qualitative monism. These features distinguish the *karma* paradigm as a unique world view. We also saw in a preliminary way how these formal features of the *karma* paradigm rendered intelligible and necessitated certain characteristics of the karmic world view. For example, the notion of transmigration does make sense in a world in which the identity of the individual (*jīva*) is not delimited by conventional birth and death. If the identity of a *jīva* is constituted by its qualities (*guṇas*) and has a cosmic history, without beginning and without end, then the notion of a *jīva* re-incarnating in a subsequent life is intelligible and *required* by the paradigm. Furthermore, it became clear that in *samsāric* qualitative monism all existents are homogeneous in type, so qualitative transformations are possible and intelligible between different existential forms. This feature of the *karma* paradigm explains why a *jīva* might take the form of an insect, for example, and so on.

(The Generic Sense of *Karma* and Specific Differences)

We are in a position now to *apply* the generic paradigm to actual issues of interpretation. Thus far in the paper attention has been focused on the *generic karma* paradigm. But it is clear that there are real *specific* differences concerning the interpretation of *karma* among the various schools of Indian thought. The Yoga School develops *karma* in one way, while the Advaita tradition moves in another, and both of these differ significantly from the interpretation of *karma* in the early Buddhist tradition. It is

natural to wonder whether the generic paradigm encompasses them all, and whether the differences between the schools do not require the detection of ambiguity in the concept of *karma*. In response to this legitimate concern it should be noted that there are constraints on the sense of *karma*, as there are, of course, on any term in a language. If the term *karma* is taken to be equivocal between the various schools, then this means that different ontological paradigms are involved. That would open the question whether there are any limits to the sense of *karma*. For example, might we then say that *karma* arises in Hume's thought, or is obviously present in Aristotle's ontology? The analytical procedure followed in this paper has been to begin *informally* with what is commonly taken to be the doctrine of *karma* in the most generic sense, and then to formalize it through ontological hermeneutics to get at the generic paradigm. If one wishes to argue that the concept of *karma* in Buddhist thought, for example, is radically different in sense from the Hindu tradition, then the alternative *karma* paradigm would have to be produced.

But the assumption behind the explication of the *generic* paradigm is that there are shared ontological commitments, at a sufficient level of generality, among the different karmic schools. For example, the concept of *karma* will have a place in an ontology that is committed to *samsāra*. And, indeed, it is found that the Hindu and Buddhist schools share such an ontological commitment. The point is that the specific differences between the different schools are real, but they are disagreements within a shared commitment to the intelligibility of *samsāra* and transmigration. Thus, in a *samsāric* paradigm it is formally required that there be some principle of identity through the transformations of life to death and back to life again, in an ongoing series. But precisely *how* this is effected is open to specific interpretation, and allows room for disagreement. The Abhidharmic School, given its *other* ontological commitments (to *dharma*s) about the nature of individual entities, is constrained to give one sort of account of the transfer of identity, and the Sāṃkhya School, with its commitments to *guṇa*s, is constrained to give a different account. But real differences at this level do not preclude the possibility of shared ontological commitments at a more generic level. It is a common commitment to *samsāra* that gives the

different schools of Indian thought a distinctively "Indian" character. And it is the conspicuous *absence* of such a commitment among the European schools of thought, for example, which gives force to the general contrast between these two cultural traditions. Thus, Deutsch's remark, which was quoted earlier, may be appropriately recalled here :

"All the later systems of Indian thought agree, though, that *karma* is operative in life; they disagree only about *what* it is that transmigrates and about *how* it takes place; *that* it takes place is accepted, and this alone is of philosophical importance".¹⁹

Specific disagreements, then, concerning *how* the transference of identity between lives takes place, and *what* the mechanism of transference is, whether it is some "stuff" which transmigrates, for example, may be seen as local disagreements within a shared general sense structure. Real disagreements about *how* transmigration takes place presuppose that transmigration is intelligible. So the presence of *specific* differences implies common *generic* commitments.

(Transference and Non-transference Models of *Karma*)

This way of accounting for specific differences within a shared generic context may be applied to what appears to be a fundamental split in the Indian tradition over the interpretation of *karma*, namely, whether *karma* is transferable or not. Two recent interpreters of *karma* have taken different sides on this issue.

On the one hand, McKim Marriott develops a "transactional" model for Indian thought which seems to imply that *karma* is transferable in some sense. On the other hand Karl Potter disagrees and argues that Marriott's interpretation cannot apply to the *karma* theories expounded in Yoga and Advaita, since these theories do not allow for the transfer of *karma*. How is this issue to be understood? Is there an issue here at all? In what follows I shall apply the generic *karma* paradigm and show that there is room for both interpretations, and that such *specific* disagreements are natural rather than problematic.

Let us begin with a brief sketch of Marriott's interpretation. It was stressed earlier that an ontological paradigm is a

cultural prototype which shapes all levels of human experience. This aspect is nicely brought out in Marriott's interpretation, for he attempts to apply his model of analysis to all facets of Indian social reality. His interests are anthropological and ontological, but it is clear that his conceptual model is grounded in the ontological karma paradigm. Marriott says,

"This essay proceeds from the axiom that the prevasive indigenous assumptions of any society, such as Indian notions of the identity of actor and action and of the divisibility of the person, provide bases on which an anthropologist may construct his models of cultural behavior in that society. It applies that axiom by constructing a monistic, dividualistic general model of Indian transactions, fitting this model first to the most accessible data, which are on the interrelations and ranking of castes. It then proceeds to a wider review of the typical transactional tactics and strategies of groups and persons in India's varied moral, instrumental, and affective systems of action."²⁰

Although the ontological issues are eclipsed in the discussion, Marriott rightly focuses on the critical issues of the identity of actor and action, of the existential divisibility of the person or agent, of a generic monism, and of the criteria of individuation. These are precisely the *ontological* features which were stressed in the presentation of the generic karma paradigm. The striking parallel continues as Marriott develops his model :

"Indian thought about transactions differs from much Western sociological and psychological thought in not presuming the separability of actors from actions. By Indian modes of thought, what goes on *between* actors are the same connected processes of mixing and separation that go on *within* actors. Actors' particular natures are thought to be results as well as causes of their particular actions (*karma*). Varied codes of action or codes of conduct (*dharma*) are thought to be naturally embodied in actors and otherwise substantialized in the flow of things that pass among actors. Thus the assumption of the easy, proper separability of action from actor, of code from substance (similar to the assumption of the separability of law from

nature, norm from behaviour, mind from body, spirit or energy from matter), that pervades both Western philosophy and Western common sense..is generally absent ; code and substance (Sanskrit *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, *dharma* and *śarīra*, and so on) cannot have separate existences in this world of constituted things as conceived by most South Asians..Before one begins to think of Hindu transactions, one thus needs firmly to understand that those who transact as well as well as what and how they transact are thought to be inseparably 'code-substance' or 'substance-code'. The latter term will be used in this essay to stand, perforce awkwardly, for belief in the non-duality of all such pairs".²¹

This model agrees with the *karma* paradigm in insisting on the inseparability of actors from actions. The samsāric paradigm with its qualificational monism revealed that one's identity is constituted by the qualities, states and actions or activities which applied to it, and this explained why *one is what one does*. And, in general, all dualities which held in a substantial and atomic paradigm melted in qualificational monism. This is precisely what Marriott intends by his term "substance-code". This term may be naturally interpreted as the *quality-values* of the *karma* paradigm, and it is a signal of a correct breakaway from a substance paradigm to a qualificational paradigm. It was pointed out earlier that the existents in a samsāric world were not to be taken as discrete substances, but rather as constituted by the universal qualities (*guṇas* or codes) which applied to all existents. If we take "substance-code" in this ontological sense then Marriott's transactional model conforms to the generic *karma* paradigm precisely. Existential transaction is one of the primary features of qualificational monism. So Marriott's model is on firm ontological ground.

Marriott shows in his paper that this transactional model is a powerful explanatory device when applied to social behaviour in India. The caste system, for example, may be seen as a natural outgrowth of a world view in which one's existential identity itself may be transacted, where there are "boundary overflows" between individuals. Some of the main features of Marriott's conceptual model are nicely summed up in Potter's paper :

"Marriott delineates a number of features of substance-code : it may be relatively gross or subtle, i. e. more or less capable of transformation, such transformations conceived on analogy with the heating or cooking of foodstuffs. It is 'particular, therefore divisible, highly diverse', it 'constantly circulates' and constitutes 'all natural entities', which are inevitably transformed 'by combinations and separations of their substance-codes'. A characteristic and fundamental aspect of Indian life consists in the exchanging of substance-code, and Marriott goes on to provide an interpretation of Indian thinking about caste involving distinguishing castes according to the strategies their members adopt in transacting such stuff...On Marriott's view the Indian conceptual scheme is 'monistic' : there is basically one kind of stuff, called 'substance-code', and Indian thought is not characterized (as ours is) by separations between law and nature, mind and body, spirit and matter, substance and code, etc. The scheme is 'particularistic' : substance-codes are basically particles which are constantly moving from one aggregate (body) to another. These particles of substance-code range in size from gross to exceedingly subtle, and in value from negative (evil) to positive (good or pure). It is noteworthy that not only is what we (Westerners) think of as 'material stuff' so constituted, but likewise 'perceived words, ideas, appearances, and so forth' are also types of substance-code. Persons, in this scheme, are aggregates of particles of substance-code of various kinds, and their nature is constantly changing due to gain and loss of these particles. Persons are thus, in Marriott's terminology, 'dividual' rather than 'individual', and they are constantly exchanging some of themselves with what is in their environment, including other persons".²²

It should be strikingly clear that Marriott's model squares with the main features of the *karma* paradigm: the 'dividual' notion of personal identity, the substance-code which are qualitative and evaluative at the same time, the identity of persons with their states and activities, and the qualificational monism which rejects the substance model of individuals and permits and requires the possibility of transformations and transactions at all levels.

While Potter acknowledges that Marriott develops "an analysis superior in explanatory power to previous accounts of caste behavior", he nevertheless maintains that this model of analysis cannot apply to the non-transference model of *karma* in Yoga and Advaita:

"The fundametal reason why Marriott's interpretation cannot fit the karma theories expounded in Yoga and Advaita is that those theories do not allow for transfer of karma, while the interpretation that one naturally derives from Marriott is that they should. Karmic residues are construed as substance in these theories, and if anything can be said to be 'code' these certainly can. Yet it seems to me we must recognize that in Yoga and Advaita and other philosophical systems karmic residues are not transferable".²³

Here, then, we find a specific difference in the interpretation of *karma*. Marriott's transactional model seems to entail that *karma* is transferable while Potter's analysis discloses that *karma* is not transferable in Yoga and Advaita.

The issue between Potter and Marriott needs to be clarified. From the point of view of the *generic* karma paradigm, the fact that there are specific differences of interpretation concerning the transferability of *karma* is neither surprising nor problematic. There *appears* to be a fundamental disagreement concerning the *sense* of *karma* because Potter and Marriott are speaking on different levels. Marriott is developing a *general* conceptual model which applies to all existent entities in a *samsāric* world. And in this world of qualificational monism, where all existents are "dividual", existential transformations or transactions are *possible* or *conceivable* on all levels. But it is clear that dividual entities retain their identity through such transformations. Which *specific* constituent qualities (substance-codes) of an individual are *in fact* transferred or transacted is open to differing interpretations. It is perfectly plausible for Yoga and Advaita to be ontologically committed to the generic paradigm and nevertheless *deny* that karmic residues are *in fact* transferred between different persons. But this does not mean that qualificational transference (transaction of substance-code) in general must be rejected, much less the rejection of the generic paradigm as a whole. On the contrary, both

Yoga and Advaita are committed to the ontological features of the *karma* paradigm: to *samsāra*, to transmigrion, and to qualificational monism. Obviously there must at least be "lateral" transaction of karmic residue in the transformation of birth to death to re-birth in the ongoing history of a single *jīva*. But to deny the "vertical" transference of karmic residues *between* different *jīvas* is a point of specific disagreement which is permitted within the generic paradigm.

But Potter seems to treat the issue of the transferability of *karma* in *isolation* from the fundamental ontological issue. The specific question of transference *cannot be separated* from the context of the ontological paradigm taken as a whole. Does Potter wish to deny that the *other* features of the *karma* paradigm which are evident in Marriott's model are also rejected by Yoga and Advaita? If so, what is the *alternative* ontological paradigm to the transactional one? The alternatives for Potter's line of argument seem to be the following. Either Potter wishes to argue that the *entire* ontological paradigm implied in Marriott's model fails to apply in Yoga and Advaita, in which case a different ontological paradigm must be produced, and this would mean that the concept of *karma* is systematically ambiguous between the transactional and non-transference paradigms. Or else Yoga and Advaita are indeed committed to the generic *karma* paradigm with its transactional possibilities, but simply *deny* that *in fact* karmic residues are transferred or transacted between persons. If the latter, then the specific disagreement over the transferability of *karma* poses no special difficulty. If the former then the task for ontological hermeneutics would be to draw out the systematic ambiguity between the different ontological paradigms, and again there is no special problem. Otherwise it would be incoherent to pick and choose from the *karma* paradigm rather than taking it as an integral whole. Such fragmentary analysis is bound to fall into the incoherence of mixed paradigms.

Again, if Yoga and Advaita are simply *denying* the specific case of karmic transference between persons, then the disagreement between Potter and Marriott is accommodated, indeed made possible, by the generic paradigm. For this paradigm in principle (and formally) allows for qualitative transference at *all* levels of

existence. This makes it possible for a particular theory to *deny* that there is transfer of karma, while another contrary theory *affirms* this. The possibility of both denial and affirmation here, however, presupposes the *intelligibility* of transference. The fact that one affirms what the other denies shows the deeper shared commitment to the significance of transference. Otherwise, does Yoga or Advaita *deny*, in principle, transference and transaction of other qualities or "residues" between persons or other existent entities in the samsaric world? If they did, then this would be evidence that a very different ontological paradigm was in effect here. Thus, the two interpretations have much more in common than it first appeared. They share a generic paradigm which invites and even requires specific differences in interpretation. Such diversity at the level of specifics is to be expected and celebrated, rather than found problematic or to be explained away.

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NOTES

- Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the following:
 - (i) The Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, Session on *Karma*, March 30th, 1978, in conjunction with AAS, Chicago.
 - (i) Columbia University : University Seminar on Oriental Thought and Religion, April 7th, 1978
 - (iii) International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, April 15th, 1978, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee in the session on "Ontologies, Epistemologies, and Cross-Cultural Translatability".
- 1. *The Bhagavad Gītā*, translated with introduction by Eliot Deutsch, Holt, Reinhart and Winston, New York, 1967, pp. 12-13
- 2. *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy*, M. Hiriyanna, Allen and Unwin, India, 1973, p. 47
- 3. *Advaita Vedānta*, Eliot Deutsch, The University Press of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1973, p. 68

4. M. Hiriyanna, op. cit., p. 46
5. *Ibid.*, p. 50
6. Quoted by Eliot Deutsch from *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Up.* (IV, 4 5) in *Advaita Vedānta*, op. cit., p. 67
7. Eliot Deutsch, *Ibid.*, p. 67. It should be noted that "state of being" must here be taken as indicating *existential* status, and cannot refer to the true Self which is beyond states and qualifications.
8. Deutsch, *Ibid.*, p. 68
9. It is clear that the *sense* of "moral" is here in question. It was indicated earlier that *karma* gets its moral dimension from the context of the alienation of *samsāric* existence from true Being. This means that the distinction between good and bad conduct is *within* the *samsāric* realm, but the aim of moral conduct is to transcend this realm, going beyond good and evil. And now that we entertain the possibility of all existents being part of one cosmic moral order the deep ambiguities in the term "moral" begin to surface.
10. *Guṇas* are the primary features which constitute all existent entities. But these features are *quality-values*. *Sattva*, for example, has the connotations of "dynamic equilibrium", "potential consciousness", "intelligence", "objectivity" and "goodness".
11. This is the *ontological* background which supports one interpretation of the transactional analysis of McKim Marriott in his paper, "Hindu Transactions : Diversity Without Dualism". This is developed in the last part of this paper.
12. *Bhagavad Gītā*, tr. Deutsch, op. cit., ch. 3/5, p. 48
13. *Philosophy East and West*, 26, no. 2, April 1976. See also "Formal Ontology and the Dialectical Transformation of Consciousness", forthcoming in the same Journal, January, 1979.
14. For details see *MBW*.

15. For detailed development of this point see *MBW*.
16. Of course, this is where ambiguity and metaphoric language are connected. When "category mistakes", from the literal point of view, are nevertheless taken to have significant use it must be in a metaphoric sense.
17. In this context the term "cross-cultural" gets its force by trading on the connotations of "cross-ontological".
18. Thus, a given culture may fail to grasp the full import of a paradigm to which its community is committed. A cultural renaissance, reformation or revolution may result from a new insight into the paradigm. In this respect a paradigm *teaches* and *instructs* as deeper meanings are disclosed. But such creative interpretation is just as possible from "foreign" sources as from native initiative. A cultural renaissance may well be launched from foreign soil.
19. See footnote 8 above.
20. MaKim Marriott, "Hindu Transactions: Diversity without Dualism" in *Transaction and Meaning* ed. Bruce Kapferer, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1976, p. 109
21. *Ibid.*, pp 109-110
22. Karl H. Potter, "The Karma Theory and its Interpretation in Some Indian Philosophical Systems", a paper delivered at Haverford College in the Gest Lecture Series in the Fall, 1977.