

Karma

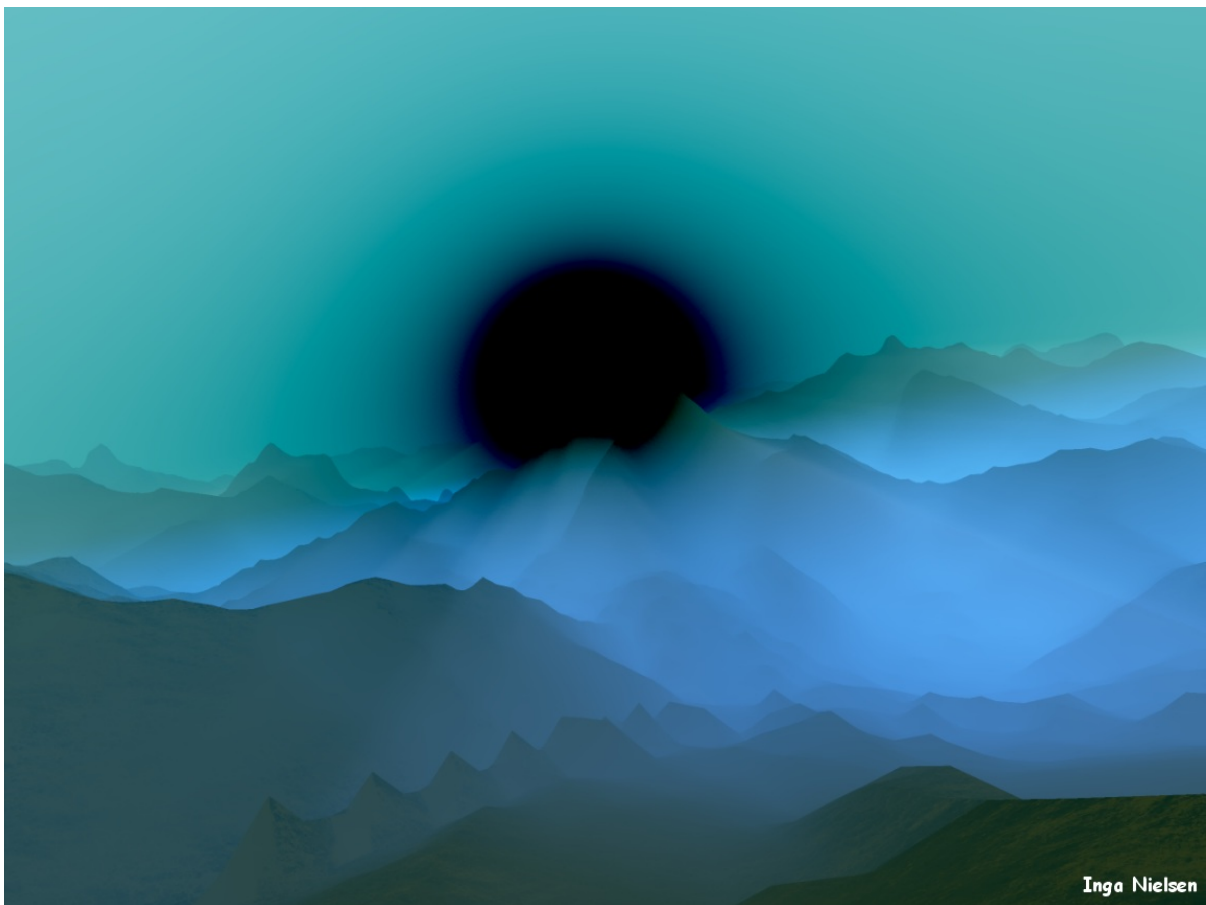
Unknown and Unknowable

I don't pretend to understand the Universe — it's a great deal bigger than I am. . . . People ought to be modester.

— Thomas Carlyle¹

All until *The Good* is reached is beautiful; *The Good* is beyond-beautiful, beyond the Highest, holding kingly state in the Intellectual-Kosmos, that sphere constituted by a Principle wholly unlike what is known as Intelligence in us. Our intelligence is nourished on the propositions of logic, is skilled in following discussions, works by reasonings, examines links of demonstration, and comes to know the world of Being also by the steps of logical process, having no prior grasp of Reality but remaining empty, all Intelligence though it be, until it has put itself to school.

— Plotinus²



Inga Nielsen

¹ Thomas Carlyle's remark to Wm. Allingham, quoted in D.A. Wilson's & D. Wilson McArthur's *Carlyle in Old Age*.

² Plotinus: *Ennead* I, viii "On the Nature and Source of Evil," ¶ 2; (tr. MacKenna & Page)



The Unknowable is neither a “force behind phenomena,” nor some kind of energy storehouse.

The “unknowable” of Herbert Spencer³ bears only a faint resemblance to that transcendental *Reality* believed in by Occultists, often appearing merely a personification of a “*force behind phenomena*” — an infinite and eternal *Energy* from which all things proceed.⁴ . . . Theosophy rejects the Spencerian “He” and substitutes the impersonal IT for the personal pronoun, whenever speaking of the Absolute and the “Unknowable.” And it teaches, as foremost of all virtues, *altruism* and self-sacrifice, brotherhood and compassion for every living creature, without, for all that, worshipping Man or Humanity.⁵

It is essentially the same as our Consciousness,

Herbert Spencer has of late so far modified his Agnosticism, as to assert that the nature of the “First Cause,”⁶ which the Occultist more logically derives from the “Causeless Cause,” the “Eternal,” and the “Unknowable,” may be essentially the same as that of the Consciousness which wells up within us: in short, that the impersonal reality pervading the Kosmos is the pure noumenon of thought.⁷

Persisting unchanging in quantity, but ever changing in form.

Thus Spencer, who, nevertheless, like Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, only reflects an aspect of the old esoteric philosophers, and hence lands his readers on the bleak shore of Agnostic despair — reverently formulates the grand mystery: “that which persists unchanging in quantity, but ever changing in form, under these sensible appearances which the Universe presents to us, is an unknown and unknowable power, which we are obliged to recognize as without limit in Space and without beginning or end in time.” It is only daring Theology — never Science or philosophy — which seeks to gauge the Infinite and unveil the Fathomless and Unknowable.⁸

³ [Herbert Spencer, 1820–1903, English philosopher. His particular interest was in evolutionary theory which he expounded in *Principles of Psychology* in 1855, four years before Darwin’s *The Origin of the Species*, which Spencer regarded as welcome scientific evidence for his own *a priori* speculations and a special application of them. He also applied his evolutionary theories to ethics and sociology and became an advocate of ‘social Darwinism,’ the view that societies naturally evolve in competition for resources and that the ‘survival of the fittest’ is therefore morally justified. — Abridged from *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*, 1990.]

⁴ *Secret Doctrine*, I pp. 281-82

⁵ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE BABEL OF MODERN THOUGHT) XIII p. 97

⁶ The “first” presupposes necessarily something which is the “first brought forth,” “the first in time, space, and rank” — and therefore finite and conditioned. The “first” *cannot be the absolute*, for it is a manifestation. Therefore, Eastern Occultism calls the Abstract All the “Causeless One Cause,” the “Rootless Root,” and limits the “First Cause” to the *Logos*, in the sense that Plato gives to this term.

⁷ *Secret Doctrine*, I pp. 14-15

⁸ *Ibid.* I p. 19 fn.



“It has no kinship of nature with Evolution.”

Ideas, in their very nature and essence, as conceptions bearing relation to objects, whether true or imaginary, are opposed to absolute THOUGHT, that unknowable ALL of whose mysterious operations Mr. Spencer predicates that nothing can be said, but that “it has no kinship of nature with Evolution,”⁹ — which it certainly has not.¹⁰

“ . . . Only the First Cause and its direct emanations, our spirits (scintillas from the eternal central sun which will be reabsorbed by it at the end of time), are incorruptible and eternal.”¹¹

At the hour of the Pralaya, the two *aspects* of the unknowable deity, “the Swan in darkness” — Prakriti and Purusha, nature or matter in all its forms and Spirit — no longer subsist but are (*absolutely*) dissolved.” . . . There will be, as there ever were in time and eternity, periodical dissolutions of the manifested Universe, but (*a*) a partial *pralaya* after every “Day of Brahmā;” and (*b*) a Universal pralaya — the MAHĀ-PRALAYA — only after the lapse of every Brahmā’s age.¹²

All else is illusion, corruptible and ephemeral: the heresy of separateness.

Hence *Non-Being* is “ABSOLUTE Being,” in esoteric philosophy. In the tenets of the latter even Ādi-Buddha (first or primeval wisdom) is, while manifested, in one sense illusion, *Māyā*, since all the gods, including Brahmā, have to die at the end of the “Age of Brahmā;” the abstraction called Parabrahman alone — whether we call in Ain-Soph, or Herbert Spencer’s Unknowable — being “the One Absolute” Reality. The One secondless Existence is ADWAITA, “Without a Second,” and all the rest is *Māyā*, teaches the Adwaita philosophy.¹³

“Divine thought cannot be defined, or its meaning explained, except by the numberless manifestations of Cosmic Substance in which the former is sensed spiritually by those who [being intellectually and ethically fit] can do so.”¹⁴

Whatever St. Paul may have had in his profound mind when declaring to the Athenians that this “unknown,” ignorantly worshipped by them, was the true God announced by himself — that Deity *was not* “Jehovah” (*Acts xvii*, 23-24), nor was he “The Maker of the world and all things.” For is not the “God of Israel” but the “Unknown” of the ancient and modern Pantheist that “dwelleth not in temples made with hands.”¹⁵

⁹ Principles of Psychology, § 474

¹⁰ *Secret Doctrine*, II p. 490

¹¹ *Isis Unveiled*, I p. 502; [quoting Hermetic axiom.]

¹² *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 552

¹³ *Ibid.* I p. 54 *fn.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* I p. 327

¹⁵ *Ibid.* [On the Hellenes who “alone had dared to raise publicly an altar to the UNKNOWN GOD.]



Out of an Unknowable and Ever-Concealed Centre, Consciousness keeps unfolding, “and infused through the totality of artifacts, the mental agitates the molecular and mixes itself with the magnificent corporeal.”¹⁶



The *nous* of the Greeks, which is (spiritual or divine) mind, or *mens*, “Mahat,” operates upon matter in the same way; it “enters into” and *agitates* it:

“Spiritus intus alit, totamque infusa per artus,
Mens agitat molem, et magno se corpore miscet.”

[Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI, 726 *et seq.*]

In the Phœnician Cosmogony, “Spirit mixing with its own principles gives rise to creation” also; (*Brücker* i, 240); the Orphic triad shows an identical doctrine: for there *Phanēs* (or *Erōs*), *Chaos*, containing crude *undifferentiated* Cosmic matter, and *Chronos* (time), are the three co-operating principles, emanating from the Unknowable and concealed *point*, which produce the work of “Creation.” And they are the Hindu *Purusha* (*Phanēs*), *Pradhāna* (chaos), and *Kāla* (*Chronos*) or *time*. . . . [Wilson] remarks that “as presently explained, the *mixture* [of the *Supreme Spirit* or *Soul*] is *not mechanical*; it is *an influence or effect exerted upon intermediate agents* which produce effects.” The sentence in *Vishnu Purāna* Bk. I, ch. ii: “As fragrance affects the mind from its proximity merely, *and not from any immediate operation upon mind itself*, so the *Supreme* influenced the elements of creation,” the reverend and erudite Sanskritist correctly explains: “As perfumes do not delight the mind by actual contact, but by the impression they make upon the sense of smelling, which communicates it to the mind,” adding: “The entrance of the *Supreme Vishnu* into spirit, as well as matter, is *less intelligible* than the view elsewhere taken of it, as the *infusion* of spirit, identified with the supreme, into *Prakriti* or matter alone.” He prefers the verse in *Padma Purāna*: “He who is called the *male* (spirit) of *Prakriti* . . . that same divine *Vishnu* entered into *Prakriti*.” (Wilson, Vol. I, pp. 27-28 *fn.*) This “view” is certainly more akin to the plastic character of certain verses in the Bible concerning the Patriarchs, such as Lot (*Gen. xix.*, 34-38) and even Adam (*iv*, 1), and others of a still more anthropomorphic nature. But it is just that which led Humanity to *Phallicism*, Christian religion being honeycombed with it, from the first chapter of *Genesis* down to the *Revelation*.¹⁷

¹⁶ Virgil: *Aeneid* VI, 726-27; (*tr.* Casten). Cf. “Virgil’s *mens agitat molem*” in our *Mystic Verse and Insights Series*.

¹⁷ *Secret Doctrine*, I pp. 451-52 *fn. et seq.*



Spirit and Matter are emanations of the One Reality, That Perfect Unmanifested Consciousness, or *Non-Being*. It is and It will remain forever unknown and unknowable.

[The Occultist] maintains that Spirit and Matter are two FACETS of the unknowable UNITY, their apparently contrasted aspects depending, (a) on the various degrees of differentiation of the latter, and (b) on the grades of consciousness attained by man himself. This is, however, metaphysics, and has little to do with physics — however great is its own terrestrial limitation that physical *philosophy* may now be.¹⁸

Personal consciousness is a differentiation in space and time of a ray of Universal Consciousness.

Man is certainly *no* special creation, and he is the product of Nature's gradual perfective work, like any other living unit on this Earth. But this is only with regard to the human tabernacle. That which lives and thinks is man and survives that frame, the masterpiece of evolution — is the "Eternal Pilgrim," the Protean differentiation in space and time of the One Absolute "unknowable."¹⁹

On the subjective side, is the One Life. On the objective, myriads of lives "immanent in every atom of Matter."

[Fohat] is One and Seven, and on the Cosmic plane is behind all such manifestations as light, heat, sound, adhesion, etc., etc., and is the "spirit of ELECTRICITY, which is the LIFE of the Universe. As an abstraction we call it the ONE LIFE; as an objective and evident Reality, we speak of a septenary scale of manifestation, which begins at the upper rung with the One Unknowable CAUSALITY, and ends as Omnipresent Mind and Life immanent in every atom of Matter. Thus, while science speaks of its evolution through brute matter, blind force, and senseless motion, the Occultists point to *intelligent* LAW and *sentient* LIFE, and add that Fohat is the guiding Spirit of all this. Yet he is no personal god at all, but the emanation of those other Powers behind him."²⁰

Matter is ever *becoming* according to ideal forms.

"Oh, my son, matter *becomes*; formerly it *was*; for matter is the vehicle of becoming. Becoming is the mode of activity of the uncreate deity and foreseeing God. Having been endowed with the germs of becoming, matter [objective] is brought into birth, for the creative force fashions it *according to the ideal forms*. Matter not yet engendered, has no form; it becomes when it is put into operation."²¹

¹⁸ *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 543

¹⁹ *Ibid.* II p. 728

²⁰ *Ibid.* I p.139; [on the "Messenger of the primordial Sons of Life and Light," and "the 'spirit' of ELECTRICITY, which is the LIFE of the Universe."]

²¹ *Ibid.* I p. 281; [quoting Hermes Trismegistus, the Thrice Great.]



“The Kabalists never cease to repeat that *primal intelligence* can never be understood. It cannot be comprehended, not can it be located, therefore it has to remain nameless and negative. . . .”

When Logos reposes in the bosom of Parabrahman, He cannot see Parabrahman other than as Mulaprakriti, that “mighty expanse of cosmic matter” which veils Parabrahman from even the highest logoic perceptions. Parabrahman is ever unknown to Logos, as It is to ourselves.

Over and around, higher and lower, within and without, Unknown Intelligence sustains the Great Architect of the Universe, the Creative Deities, and All that lives.

Hence the Ain-Soph — the “UNKNOWABLE” and the “UNNAMEABLE” — which, as *it* could not be made manifest, was conceived to emanate manifesting Powers. It is then with its *emanations alone that human intellect has to, and can deal*. Christian theology, having rejected the doctrine of emanations and replaced them with direct, conscious creations of angels and the rest out of *nothing*, now find itself hopelessly stranded between Supernaturalism, or miracle, and materialism. An *extra-cosmic* god is fatal to philosophy, an *intra-cosmic* Deity — *i.e.*, Spirit and matter inseparable from each other — is a philosophical necessity. Separate them and that which is left is a gross superstition under a mask of emotionalism.²²

This great circle (which Eastern Esotericism reduces to the point within the Boundless Circle) is the Avalōkitēsvara, the *Logos* or *Verbum* of which Subba Row speaks. But this circle or manifested God is as unknown to us, except through its *manifested* universe, as the ONE, though easier, or rather more possible to our highest conceptions. This Logos which sleeps in the bosom of Parabrahmam during Pralaya, as our “*Ego* is latent [in us] at the time of *sushupti* or sleep”; which cannot cognize Parabrahmam otherwise than as *Mūlaprakriti* — the latter being a cosmic veil which is “the mighty expanse of cosmic matter” — is thus only an organ in cosmic creation, through which radiate the energy and wisdom of Parabrahmam, *unknown to the Logos, as it is to ourselves*.²³

“*Ideal nature*,” the abstract Space in which everything in the Universe is mysteriously and invisibly generated, is the same female side of procreative power in Nature in the Vedic as in every other Cosmogony. . . . behind and higher than the *creative* deity, there is a superior deity, a planner, an Architect, *of whom* the Creator is but the executive agent. And still higher, *over and around, within and without*, there is the UNKNOWABLE and the *unknown*, the Source and Cause of all these Emanations.²⁴

²² *Secret Doctrine*, II p. 41

²³ *Ibid.* I p. 429

²⁴ *Ibid.* II p. 43



It is the “Spirit” of “God” that moves upon the face of the waters of “Creation.”

The *Unknowable*, referred to in various ways in *Rig-Vedic* verse, such as “*Nought Was*,” called, later on, “Parabrahm”; the [Hebrew] (*Ain*, nothing, or the “Ain-Soph” of the Kabalists), and again, the “Spirit” (of God) that moves upon the face of the waters, in *Genesis*. All these are *identical*.²⁵

The “Eternal Breath” cannot know I itself by I itself because it is devoid²⁶ of self-consciousness. Neither can the Infinite know the Finite.

To know itself or oneself, necessitates consciousness and perception (both limited faculties in relation to any subject except Parabrahman), to be cognized. Hence the “Eternal Breath which knows itself not.” Infinity cannot comprehend Finiteness. The Boundless can have no relation to the bounded and the conditioned. In the occult teachings, the Unknown and the Unknowable MOVER, or the Self-Existing, is the absolute divine Essence.²⁷

It can only know aspects of I itself through “Its acting powers.”
Scripture, any more than Nature, does not lay down a set of definitions.²⁸

The marvels of the One Spirit of Truth, the ever-concealed and inaccessible Deity, can be unravelled and assimilated only through Its manifestations by the secondary “Gods,” Its acting powers. While the One and Universal Cause has to remain forever *in abscondito*, Its manifold action may be traced through the effects in Nature. The latter alone being comprehensible and manifest to average mankind, the Powers causing those effects were allowed to grow in imagination of the populace.²⁹

²⁵ *Secret Doctrine*, II p. 128

²⁶ Innocent?

²⁷ *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 56; & cf. *ibid.* “And thus being *Absolute* Consciousness, and *Absolute* Motion — to the limited senses of those who describe this indescribable — it is unconsciousness and immoveableness. Concrete consciousness cannot be predicated of abstract Consciousness, any more than the quality wet can be predicated of water — wetness being its own attribute and the cause of the wet quality in other things. Consciousness implies limitations and qualifications; something to be conscious of, and someone to be conscious of it. But Absolute Consciousness contains the cognizer, the thing cognized and the cognition, all three in itself and all three *one*. No man is conscious of more than that portion of his knowledge that happens to have been recalled to his mind at any particular time, yet such is the poverty of language that we have no term to distinguish the knowledge not actively thought of, from knowledge we are unable to recall to memory. To forget is synonymous with not to remember. How much greater must be the difficulty of finding terms to describe, and to distinguish between, abstract metaphysical facts or differences. It must not be forgotten, also, that we give names to things according to the appearances they assume for ourselves. We call absolute consciousness ‘unconsciousness,’ because it seems to us that it must necessarily be so, just as we call the Absolute, ‘Darkness,’ because to our finite understanding it appears quite impenetrable, yet we recognize fully that our perception of such things does not do them justice. We involuntarily distinguish in our minds, for instance, between unconscious absolute consciousness, and unconsciousness, by secretly endowing the former with some indefinite quality that corresponds, on a higher plane than our thoughts can reach, with what we know as consciousness in ourselves. But this is not any kind of consciousness that we can manage to distinguish from what appears to us as unconsciousness.”

²⁸ Spinoza, *Tract. Theol. Polit.* [Scriptura non tradit definitiones, ut nec etiam Natura.]

²⁹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE ORIGIN OF THE MYSTERIES) XIV pp. 249-50; [on the deception and despotism of the Brāhmins. Cf. “Ages later in the Fifth, the Aryan Race, some unscrupulous priests began to take advantage of the too easy beliefs of the people in every country, and finally raised those secondary Powers to the rank of God and Gods, thus succeeding in isolating them altogether from the One Universal Cause of all causes.” *Ibid.*]

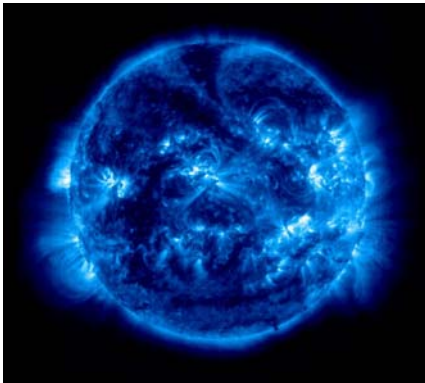


**Karma is one with the
Unknownable, “an Absolute
and Eternal Law in the World
of manifestation. . . .”**

. . . and as there can only be one Absolute, as One eternal ever-present Cause, believers in Karma cannot be regarded as Atheists or materialists — still less as fatalists: for Karma is one with the Unknownable, of which it is an aspect in its effects in the phenomenal world. . . . Intimately, or rather indissolubly, connected with Karma, then, is the law of rebirth, or of the reincarnation of the same spiritual individuality in a long, almost interminable, series of personalities. The latter are like the various costumes and characters played by the same actor, with each of which that actor identifies himself and is identified by the public, for the space of a few hours.³⁰

**It is the Unknown Deity,
the One Law for All, and vice
versa. “The Deity is subject to
this law, or rather it is the law
of the Deity. . . .”**

The Deity desires experience or self-knowledge, which is only to be attained by stepping, so to say, aside from self. So the Deity produces the manifested universes consisting of matter, psychical nature, and spirit. In the Spirit alone resides the great consciousness of the whole; and so its goes on ever producing and drawing into itself, accumulating such vast and enormous experiences that the pen falls down at the thought. How can that be put into language? It is impossible, for we at once are met with the thought that the Deity must know all at all times. Yet there is a vastness and an awe-inspiring influence in this thought of the Day and Night of Brahman. It is a thing to be thought over in the secret recesses of the heart, and not for discussion. *It is the All.*³¹



³⁰ *Secret Doctrine*, II pp. 305-6; Cf. “Some theosophists, in order to make Karma more comprehensible to the Western mind, as being better acquainted with the Greek than with Aryan philosophy, have made an attempt to translate it by *Nemesis*. Had the latter been known to the profane in antiquity, as it was understood by the Initiates, this translation of the term would be unobjectionable. As it is, it has been too much anthropomorphized by Greek fancy to permit our using it without an elaborate explanation. With the early Greeks, ‘from Homer to Herodotus, she was no goddess, but a *morel feeling* rather,’ says Decharme; the barrier to evil and immorality. He who transgresses it, commits a sacrilege in the eyes of the gods, and is pursued by Nemesis. But, with time, that ‘feeling’ was deified, and its personification became an ever-fatal and punishing goddess. Therefore, if we would connect Karma with Nemesis, it has to be done in the triple character of the latter, viz., as Nemesis, Adrasteia and Themis. For, while the latter is the goddess of Universal Order and Harmony, who, like Nemesis, is commissioned to repress every excess, and keep man within the limits of Nature and righteousness under severe penalty, *Adrasteia* — ‘the inevitable’ — represents Nemesis as the immutable effect of causes created by man himself. Nemesis, as the daughter of *Dikē*, is the equitable goddess reserving her wrath for those alone who are maddened with pride, egoism, and impiety. (See *Mesomēdes*, *Hymn to Nemesis*, verse 2; in Brunck’s *Analecta* II, 292. Cf. Decharme, *Mythologie de la Grèce Antique*, p. 304.) In short, while Nemesis is a mythological, exoteric goddess, or *Power*, personified and anthropomorphized in its various aspects, *Karma* is a highly philosophical truth, a most divine noble expression of the primitive intuition of man concerning Deity. It is a doctrine which explains the origin of Evil, and ennobles our conceptions of what divine immutable Justice ought to be, instead of degrading the unknown and unknowable Deity by making it the whimsical, cruel tyrant, which we call Providence.” *Ibid. fn.*

³¹ *Judge Letters*, II (XV) p. 60

