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Article

# The Karmic Theory of Inequality

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## Abstract

This paper introduces the Karmic Theory of Inequality (KTI) with the formal explanation for the persistence of individual differences through the lens of Buddhist philosophy. The theory conceptualizes inequality as the cumulative outcome of intended actions expressed in physical (P), verbal (V), and thought (T) modalities, each weighted by a causal-intentional function (I). Using logical reasoning and mathematical proof, we demonstrate that no two individuals can have identical intentions across the infinite lifecycle of past and present moments. Differences in lifespan, health, wealth, beauty, wisdom, and social status are inevitable regardless of external conditions or interventions. This theory provides a fresh perspective on why inequality remains a constant feature of societies. The KTI is original in proving the certainty of inequality among individuals and species.

**Keywords:** karmic theory of inequality; new theory of inequality; mathematical proof

## 1. Motivation

Many accept that all living beings are naturally unequal across individuals, communities and even species. Some are long-lived; others short-lived. Some are strong; others weak. Some are beautiful; others not. Some are wise; others foolish. Some are rich; others poor. Some are privileged; others hated. These inequalities are observable among species and between individuals in the society. Elephants live longer than dogs. Lions inspire fear; deer are prey. Peacocks display beauty; other birds appear plain. Bees cooperate; snakes live alone. Even within a species, differences exist. Some animals live with rich owners; others struggle in the wild. Some fight in the streets; others thrive peacefully. We can see the parallel in human societies. Children born in wealthy families have access to better nutrition, education, and healthcare. Others grow up in poverty, facing scarcity and illness. Modern science offers some relatable answers. Biologists point out genes, environmental and natural diversity. Economists and sociologists emphasize institutions, policies and chances. Physicists highlight Newton's Third Law of Motion in which every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Yet all of these leave a big question: why do such differences occur in the first place.

The teachings of Buddha provide a unique perspective on the origins of inequality. The Law of Karma emphasizes that actions are not neutral or randomly created; rather, they produce consequences directly linked to the intentions (cetanā) behind them. The Cula-Kammavibhanga Sutta (MN 135) and Maha-Kammavibhanga Sutta (MN 136) explain how past actions shape present outcomes (Bhikkhu, 2013). Inequality is therefore not a matter of chance but arises from moral causality. According to Buddhist teachings, the intention-weighted actions affect all aspects of life including lifespan (āyu), health (ārogya), wealth (bhoga), beauty (vaṇṇa), wisdom (paññā), and social status (issariya). Some people live long lives; others die young. Some are born with disabilities; others enjoy robust health. Some grow up in wealth; others in poverty. Some are naturally attractive; others are not. Some have access to education and well-educated; others lack support. Some are born into privilege; others face marginalization. In different species, similar patterns are evident. Domesticated dogs in caring homes thrive while abandoned dogs struggle. Wild elephants show social cooperation whereas other species fight to survive. It is clear that cumulative intention-weighted actions create differences that no two individuals or species share the same life path.

Lifespan, for example, is formed by whether beings refrain from harming others. Those who act with care and respect toward life tend to experience longevity while those who cause harm or take life may encounter shorter lives or greater vulnerability. Health is similarly shaped by one's quality of intentions. Compassionate and mindful behavior promotes physical and mental well-being, whereas harmful and aggressive actions increase the likelihood of sickness, injury, or other afflictions such as disability. Wealth is another domain in which intentions have long-term consequences. Acts of generosity, sharing, and ethical earning contribute to future abundance while selfishness, greed, or exploitation can lead to scarcity and financial hardship. Beauty, too, is affected by moral conduct. Kindness, gentleness, and harmonious interactions with others often manifest in attractiveness and a pleasing presence, whereas hostility, cruelty, or harshness may diminish physical appeal or social perception. Wisdom is shaped by a similar logic. Those who cultivate knowledge, respect teachers, and engage in learning develop discernment, insight, and cognitive ability. Conversely, individuals who disregard learning, scorn guidance, or neglect reflection often remain ignorant, limiting their understanding of the world and their own actions. Social standing is also linked to intention. Respecting others, acting with integrity, and fostering positive relationships contribute to recognition, honor, and influence, whereas disrespect, deceit, or arrogance can lead to social marginalization.

Since no two individuals share identical intentions across the infinite continuum of past and present, the outcomes of these intentions necessarily diverge. Then, social and individual inequalities are structurally inevitable regardless of external interventions. The Karmic Theory of Inequality (KTI) formalizes these intuitive insights. We identify three principal modalities of action: Physical (P), Verbal (V) and Thought (T), and each modality is connected with an intentional function  $I(t)$  which measures moral and causal significance. Even slight differences in intentions produce cumulative effects over cyclical time and gradually causing inequalities among individuals and species. The KTI bridges between Buddhist philosophy and observable inequality. It explains why inequality remains across individuals and species, and why it is a continuing feature of existence. We also argue the role of ethical conduct following moral guidelines such as the five precepts of Buddhism can reduce extreme inequalities and create fairer outcomes. However, perfect equality is impossible within the cycle of life (birth and death). In this paper, we show why inequality persists by ones' linking intentions and its karmic consequences.

## 2. Concept and Preliminary

### 2.1. Concept

Classical economists offered an early framework for understanding inequality. Adam Smith (1776) believed that self-interest guided by the invisible hand would lead to natural harmony, minimizing persistent imbalances. David Ricardo (1817) analyzed land rents and comparative advantage, assuming long-run market equilibrium. John Stuart Mill and Laurence Laughlin (1885) distinguished natural laws of production from social distribution, leaving space for institutional correction, while Thomas Malthus (1798) argued that population pressures would keep wages near subsistence, framing poverty as an inevitable outcome of demographic forces. Collectively, these thinkers viewed inequality either as a temporary state or as a natural feature that markets and social evolution would eventually correct. Later critiques challenged this optimism. Karl Marx (1887) argued that inequality is inherent in capital accumulation, producing structural and enduring class divisions. In the twentieth century, Simon Kuznets (1955) proposed the "Kuznets curve," suggesting inequality rises during industrialization but falls with development, while more recent analyses, such as Thomas Piketty's (2014) *Capital in the 21st Century*, demonstrate that when the return on capital exceeds economic growth, inequality widens persistently. Philosophers also entered the debate: Amartya Sen (1999) reframed inequality in terms of freedoms and capabilities, while John Rawls (1971) argued that inequalities are justifiable only if they benefit the least advantaged. These

perspectives shift the focus toward empirical measurement and normative evaluation, but they share the underlying belief that institutions and policies can significantly alter inequality's trajectory.

The Karmic Theory of Inequality (KTI) presented in this paper challenges both the classical faith in equilibrium and the modern reliance on structural or policy interventions. Drawing from Buddhist philosophy, KTI argues that inequality is not merely the outcome of economic systems or institutional design but the inevitable result of intention-weighted actions (kamma). The Karmic Theory of Inequality (KTI) stands on two bases. The first comes from Buddhist teachings. The second comes from formal theoretical reasoning. What the Buddha taught in *Cula-Kammavibhanga Sutta* (MN 135) and *Maha-Kammavibhanga Sutta* (MN 136) state that actions are led by intention (*cetanā*). Good or bad intentions form results the differences in lifespan, health, wealth, beauty, wisdom, and social status across persons. The formal base gives a structure to these insights. We assume that every person acts in three modes: Physical (P), Verbal (V), and Thought (T). Each action has an Intentional Function (I), which gives weight to the moral quality of that action. A sequence of intentions produces a karmic sum, and this karmic sum determines life outcomes. Taken together, these two bases imply that no two lives can be exactly equal. Differences in intention produce differences in karmic sums. These, in turn, produce differences in outcomes. This is why inequality cannot be erased only by external conditions such as wealth transfers or social reforms. The roots of inequality lie in intention itself.

## 2.2. Preliminary

We now build the formal side of KTI. Each individual  $i$  at time  $t$  has three actions types and that can be expressed as:

$$X_i(t) = (P_i(t), V_i(t), T_i(t)) \quad (1)$$

Besides, his or her action carries an intention score:

$$I_i^X(t) = f(X_i(t), \theta_i(t)) \quad (2)$$

where  $X \in \{P, V, T\}$  and  $\theta_i(t)$  is the moral quality of the action, and we assume the intention function ( $f$ ) is continuous in time and finite for each  $t$ .

The total karmic sum of an individual across an infinite time ( $\infty$ ) is

$$K_i(\infty) = \int_0^{\infty} (I_i^P(t) + I_i^V(t) + I_i^T(t)) dt. \quad (3)$$

This karmic sum links to outcomes of individuals through a mapping function:

$$\Omega_i = (l_i, h_i, w_i, b_i, \psi_i, s_i) = g(K_i(\infty)) \quad (4)$$

where  $l_i$  is lifespan,  $h_i$  is health,  $w_i$  is wealth,  $b_i$  is beauty,  $\psi_i$  is wisdom and  $s_i$  is social status. The mapping  $g(\cdot)$  means that the different karmic sums lead to different outcome vectors. Since no two individuals share exactly the same intention path of intentions across infinite time, their karmic sums must differ and so must their lives.

The use of infinity ( $\infty$ ) is accordingly with Buddhist teachings on the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra* in Pali). Even small differences in intentions at one moment accumulate over many lifetimes, producing large differences in outcomes. These assumptions are perfectly consistent with per Buddhist teachings that every intended action has a result and that no intended action is lost. Equations (1) to (4) thus set the mathematical foundation needed for the proofs that establish why inequality is inevitable within KTI.

## 3. Propositions and Proofs

In this section, we formalize the main results of the Karmic Theory of Inequality. All theorems assume the framework defined in Section 2. Actions, intentions and karmic sums are defined over infinite time ( $t \in [0, \infty)$ ).

### Proposition 1. Existence of Differences in Intentions

For any two individuals  $A$  and  $B$ , there exists at least one action type  $X \in \{P, V, T\}$  and a time  $t_0 \geq 0$  such that

$$I_A^{X_0}(t_0) \neq I_B^{X_0}(t_0) \quad (5)$$

where  $I_i^X(t)$  is the intention function associated with action  $X$  for individual  $i$ .

**Proof of Proposition 1.**

Each individual  $i$  has three types of actions at time  $t$  as shown in equation (1) with corresponding intention functions as shown in equation (2).

Suppose for the sake of contradiction, that for all  $t \geq 0$  and all  $X \in \{P, V, T\}$

$$I_A^X(t) = I_B^X(t) \quad (6)$$

Under this assumption, individuals A and B must have identical actions and moral qualities at all times. Consequently, their life experiences and choices are identical across all moments including infinite lifetimes (saṃsāra). The KTI assumes that no two individuals share same or equal intention paths within saṃsāra. Therefore, the assumption of identical intentions contradicts the foundational principle of unique intention paths. Therefore, there exists at least one action type  $X_0 \in \{P, V, T\}$  and a time  $t_0 \geq 0$  such that

$$I_A^{X_0}(t_0) \neq I_B^{X_0}(t_0) \quad (7)$$

The contradiction implies that the assumption is false.  $\square$

**Proposition 2. Existence of Differences in Cumulative Karmic Sums**

Let A and B be any two individuals with intention functions  $I_A^X(t)$  and  $I_B^X(t)$  for  $X \in \{P, V, T\}$ . If there exists a time  $t_0 \geq 0$  and an action type  $X_0$  such that

$$I_A^{X_0}(t_0) \neq I_B^{X_0}(t_0) \quad (8)$$

Also, assume the non-negativity of intentional function  $I_i^X(t) \geq 0$  for all  $t \geq 0$ .

Then, the cumulative karmic sum for individual  $i$  is.

$$K_i(\infty) = \int_0^\infty \sum_{X \in \{P, V, T\}} I_i^X(t) dt \quad (9)$$

This integral form aggregates all intentions over the infinite timeline of saṃsāra.

Next, KTI assumes  $I_i^{X_0}(t_0)$  is continuous, and  $\delta I = |I_A^{X_0}(t_0) - I_B^{X_0}(t_0)| > 0$ . Therefore, the nonzero difference  $\delta I$  contributes positively to the integral. Integrating over infinite time, the difference at  $t_0$  ensures that

$$d(t) = \sum_{X \in \{P, V, T\}} (I_A^X(t) - I_B^X(t)) \quad (10)$$

This satisfies  $\int_0^\infty |d(t)| dt > 0$ .

Then, the cumulative karmic sums of person A and person B differ:

$$K_A(\infty) \neq K_B(\infty) \quad (11)$$

**Proof of Proposition 2.**

From the preliminary, we know that the cumulative karmic sum for individuals A and B is.

$$K_A(\infty) - K_B(\infty) = \int_0^\infty \sum_{X \in \{P, V, T\}} (I_A^X(t) - I_B^X(t)) dt = \int_0^\infty |d(t)| dt \quad (12)$$

By this assumption, there exists  $t_0 \geq 0$  and  $X_0 \in \{P, V, T\}$  such that

$$I_A^{X_0}(t_0) \neq I_B^{X_0}(t_0) \quad (13)$$

Without loss of generality, suppose  $I_A^{X_0}(t_0) > I_B^{X_0}(t_0)$ . Then,  $d(t_0) > 0$ .

Since intention functions are assumed continuous and finite, there exists an interval  $[t_0 - \epsilon, t_0 + \epsilon]$  for some  $\epsilon > 0$  where  $I_A^{X_0}(t_0) > I_B^{X_0}(t_0)$ . Thus, over this neighborhood,

$$\int_{t_0 - \epsilon}^{t_0 + \epsilon} d(t) dt > 0 \quad (14)$$

From the non-negativity assumption ( $I_i^X(t) \geq 0$ ) thus, the integrand difference  $d(t)$  cannot oscillate indefinitely in sign to produce a complete cancellation. From the difference function  $\int_0^\infty |d(t)| dt > 0$ , it ensures that the local positive contribution established above cannot be exactly canceled by later differences.

Suppose the contradiction that  $K_A(\infty) = K_B(\infty)$ . Then,

$$\int_{t_0 - \epsilon}^{t_0 + \epsilon} d(t) dt = 0 \quad (15)$$

However, we already showed that  $\int_{t_0 - \epsilon}^{t_0 + \epsilon} d(t) dt > 0$ .

We may also let  $I_A^{X_0}(t_0) = e^{-t}$ ,  $I_B^{X_0}(t_0) = \frac{1}{2}e^{-t}$ , and  $I_A^X(t) = I_B^X(t) = 0$  for  $X \neq X_0$ .

Then,

$$K_A(\infty) = \int_0^\infty e^{-t} dt = 1 \quad (16)$$

$$K_B(\infty) = \int_0^\infty \frac{1}{2} e^{-t} dt = \frac{1}{2} \quad (17)$$

$$K_A(\infty) > K_B(\infty) \quad (18)$$

Thus, the cumulative karmic sums of individuals A and B must be different.  $\square$

### Proposition 3. Inequality Persists Despite External Interventions

Suppose individuals A and B have different cumulative karmic sums as proven in proposition 2, there is no finite external intervention at any time  $t_0$  can produce the equality of outcomes for A and B under KTI. External interventions can equalize their outcomes in saṃsāra.

Let an external intervention  $\varepsilon_{t_0}(t)$  be applied at time  $t_0 > 0$ , representing wealth transfers, free education and health access, policy reforms or other acts.

Assume the boundedness of intervention for all  $t \geq t_0$  for some constant  $M$

$$|\varepsilon_{t_0}(t)| < M < \infty \quad (19)$$

Then, the post-intervention outcome for individual  $i$  is given by

$$\Omega_i^\varepsilon(t) = g(K_i(\infty)) + \varepsilon_{t_0}(t), i \in \{A, B\} \quad (20)$$

where  $g(\cdot)$  is the outcome function mapping karmic sums into observable life outcomes.

Thus, the inequality persists even after external interventions.

### Proof of Proposition 3.

From the proposition 2, we know that  $K_A(\infty) \neq K_B(\infty)$ . Since  $g(\cdot)$  is a function applied identically to both, we get  $g(K_A(\infty)) \neq g(K_B(\infty))$ . Thus, inequality exists prior to any intervention.

The post-intervention outcomes are given by

$$\Omega_A^\varepsilon(t) - \Omega_B^\varepsilon(t) = g(K_A(\infty)) - g(K_B(\infty)) + (\varepsilon_{t_0}^A(t) - \varepsilon_{t_0}^B(t)). \quad (21)$$

Here, the first term is a fixed, non-negativity difference while  $K_A(\infty) \neq K_B(\infty)$ . The second term is bounded in absolute value by  $2M$ .

It is possible that in some finite time interval  $[t_0, t_0 + T]$ , the bounded intervention partially reduces the gap as follows:

$$|\Omega_A^\varepsilon(t) - \Omega_B^\varepsilon(t)| < |g(K_A(\infty)) - g(K_B(\infty))|, t \in t_0, t_0 + T \quad (22)$$

However, since interventions are finite while karmic differences are determined over an infinite horizon, the bounded perturbation cannot eliminate asymptotic difference.

Taking the limit as  $t \rightarrow \infty$ , the effect of the finite intervention becomes insignificant relative to the fixed karmic gap.

$$\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} (\Omega_A^\varepsilon(t) - \Omega_B^\varepsilon(t)) = |g(K_A(\infty)) - g(K_B(\infty))| \neq 0 \quad (23)$$

That is:  $\exists t_0: \varepsilon_{t_0}(t) \rightarrow \Omega_A^\varepsilon(t) \neq \Omega_B^\varepsilon(t)$  as  $t \rightarrow \infty$ . Therefore, there exists the inequality despite external interventions in the cycle of life (saṃsāra).  $\square$

## 4. Discussion

The Karmic Theory of Inequality (KTI) shows why differences in life outcomes persist across individuals. These differences do not come from chance alone. They come from different intentions. Small differences in intention accumulate over the infinite time for past and present moments. Over many lifetimes, these differences grow. Consider two children born in the same village. Person A acts kindly, honestly, and diligently. Person B acts selfishly or carelessly. In this life, Person A has better health and social bonds. Person B faces more difficulties. Over future lives, these differences add up. Person A's actions lead to longer life, more wealth, and stronger social standing. Person B's actions lead to hardship and limitations. Even small differences now become large differences over cycles of life. Historical figures also show this pattern. Leaders who act with integrity gain lasting respect and influence. Leaders who act corruptly face instability and loss. Their actions affect not only this life but also future lives. KTI appears in the animal world too. Dogs or cats cared for by humans thrive. Neglected animals struggle. In the wild, animals that cooperate or protect their young survive better. Aggressive or reckless animals face higher risks. These patterns repeat over generations and lifetimes.

KTI does not say social policies are useless. Education, laws, and ethical guidance shape intentions. Following the five precepts of Buddhism avoiding harm, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxication reduces extreme inequality. However, perfect equality is impossible. Even if resources are equal, differences in intentions produce different outcomes across lifetimes.

Policies improve fairness in a single life, but cannot erase accumulated differences. True fairness requires ethical actions now and in the future. Still, KTI leaves an empirical for future research. They may examine the effects of moral education on long-term inequality. They can also explore intergenerational and inter-life transmission of karmic outcomes. In short, inequality is natural. It arises from differences in intention across many lives. Human and animal examples confirm this. Ethical conduct reduces suffering, but it cannot erase differences fully. KTI highlights the importance of moral education, mindfulness, and ethical living across lifetimes.

## 5. Conclusions

The Karmic Theory of Inequality (KTI) presented in this present paper is built in Buddhist teachings and supported by logical reasoning and mathematical proof. It formally defines actions, intentions, karmic sums, and life outcomes within *samsāra*. The propositions validate that the presence of different intended actions in past and present moments inevitably produce differences in the lives of individuals at this moment. Such differences are visible both in the human world and in the animal world. Inequality, therefore, is neither random nor accidental. It is a natural and unavoidable feature of life. While social and economic policies can reduce suffering and improve fairness, they cannot completely eliminate inequality in the society. KTI bridges ancient wisdom with the modern theoretical study. It offers a framework to study how intended actions shape life outcomes. This paper also opens an avenue for further research on the link between ethical livings and inequality following the five precepts of Buddhism.

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