



THERAVĀDA BUDDHIST VIEW ON THE IDEA OF FREE WILL FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

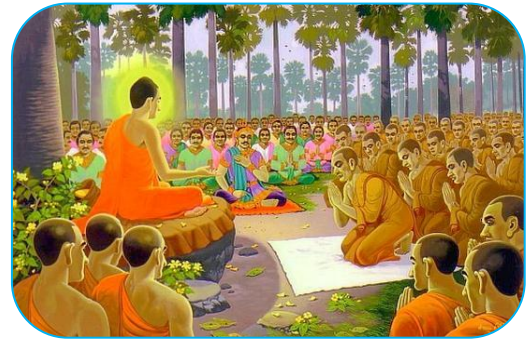
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ABSTRACT

This article briefly discusses some of the views of Theravāda Buddhism on the idea of Free Will in Western Tradition based on the theory of no soul and of causality.

KEYWORDS: *free will, determinism, no-soul, the unconditioned, the conditioned, Dependent Origination, Karma, grasping.*



INTRODUCTION

The idea of 'free will' takes an important role in the ethical aspect of philosophy. If we go back to the history of philosophy, we can find that determinism was developed in order to get away from fatalism that people's destiny is determined by the gods. The great atomist Leucippus' idea that 'nothing occurs at random, but everything for a reason and by necessity.' was popular among scholars who emphasized rationality. On the contrary, Epicurus, a disciple of Democritus, however, believed that there must be some sort of random swerve from the path prescribed by the naturally determining laws. Aristotle also argued that virtue and vice are up to us and voluntary. Aristotle and Epicurus are considered to be the first to express the idea of 'free will' in the history of Western philosophy.

Most scholars of this period attempted to show that Buddhism was not vulnerable to the dilemma that consists of the prima facie incompatibility between determinism (or its Buddhist cousin, dependent origination) and free will. Early-period scholars attempted to circumvent this dilemma by arguing for some sort of middle path position that avoids both rigid determinism and chaotic indeterminism, but their attempts insufficiently articulated just what sort of causation could occupy this middle ground. Determinism implies that every event is causally necessitated by previous events in inviolable accordance with immutable laws of nature. Belief in free will implies that some of our deliberative efforts, choices, and actions are sufficiently self-authored or "up to us," such that they ground attributions of moral responsibility, such as praise and blame, related reactive attitudes, such as remorse and punishment, and the variety of our normative institutions that presuppose that much of our behavior flows from our autonomous agency.

The dilemma here is that either determinism is true or false. If determinism is true, then the causes of our actions predate our existence and are unalterable, in which case our behavior, though it appears to be our free choice, is really rigidly fixed in advance, in which case we are not morally responsible. However, if determinism is false, the causes of our choices are utterly random and chaotic, and thus they are no more "up to us" than a seizure or the toss of a coin. Therefore, in this article, I have to investigate whether we seem to lack free will and ultimate moral responsibility simultaneously.

BODY:

It is, here, necessary to analyse the term 'free will' into two parts. The first part 'free' just looking for a random chance that will break the determinism that cannot be avoided may have been established in advance or it may absolutely be free from causality. We can conclude it is meant to be the latter because the second one 'will', if it is defined as absolutely being determined and considered as an adequately determined choice, then it cannot be free, and it will lead to the acceptance of determinism. It should be noted, here, the concept of free will is basically Abrahamic. God and souls, justice and Judgment Day, reward and punishment, are related to the idea of 'free will' for the establishment of the basic guiding moral principles. Religious scholars want to prove the existence of Soul and souls.

Free will is defined as the faculty of Soul or Ataman so as to build a moral principle based on it. If everything happens according to the laws of nature, it is determined. The idea of 'free will' was invented not only to destroy determinism, but also in order to solve the moral problem that arises in the context of naturally conditioning states and causality. Then, it is necessary to understand the doctrine of Buddhist no-soul theory in brief in order to rationalize the problem from Buddhist point of views. He said:

"Here, bhikkhu, a well-taught noble disciple . . . does not regard material form as self, or self as possessed of material form, or material form as in self, or self as in material form. He does not regard feeling as self . . . perception as self . . . formations as self . . . consciousness as self, or self as possessed of consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. That is how identity view does not come to be."

In the doctrine of no soul, Anatta lakkhana sutta, the Buddha preached the monks that any of five aggregates should not be regarded as self. In Dhammapada verse-279, all dharmas including Nivarna are of no self, he also taught. Theravada Abhidhamma also accepts four kinds of ultimate realities, namely, physical matters, consciousness, mental factors, and Nirvana. The first three are in the set of conditioning states and the conditioned. The last one is the un-conditioned which is the total absence of the first three, and absolutely free. But it can't be a soul or a will because it's just a total absence of the conditioning universe. No absence can be an entity. Atman, Soul, Self, or Egoistic Entity, which is perceived to exist within or outside of the body as an eternally lasting, un-perishable, and unchanging substantiality, is a false view. It is only a metaphysical assumption. In order to avoid confusion about existence and reality, there are two types of truth in Theravāda Buddhism, namely, sammuti sacca or conventional truth and Paramattha sacca or ultimate truth. Th. Stcherbatsky clearly defined these two truths in his book, Buddhist Logic but in accordance with Mahāyāna philosophy thus:

"The one reality consists of bare point-instants, they have as yet no definite position in time, neither a definite position in space, nor have they any sensible qualities. It is ultimate or pure reality. The other reality consists of objectivized images; this reality has been endowed by us with a position in time, a position in space and all the variety of sensible and abstract qualities. It is empirical reality. with phenomenal or empirical reality"

In Theravāda philosophy, two truths must be empirically accepted. We can use terms and names for persons, things, and objects, etc, and also use pronouns like 'I', 'We', 'You', 'They', 'He', 'She' and 'It' for them in conventional truth. Even if there is no self, the use of 'I' is not a fraud. It may be necessary for society and the world to call the things and persons that are materialized in a densely mutually supported and interwoven manner of psycho-physical energies and forces to create their provisional, particular, and exclusive existences according to time and position. However, these existences are not basic and ultimate energies which are always inter relative, interdependent, interactive, mutually supportive, and reciprocally conditioning. They are empirical in the sense of temporarily ultimate truth.

It is impossible for any conditional existence to exist in terms of independent. Therefore, will is only within the sense of relativistic conditions of causality, and any mental states, including will, cannot be free. It must be subject to the conditional judgment of various causes and reasons. Nonetheless, in Buddhism, there is no reason to say that every relative existence must be within the set of conditioning states and the conditioned. If we consider Nirvana, the unconditioned, the total absence of conditioning

states and the conditioned as an existence, is a relative to the whole conditions of universe. Freedom, therefore, is attainable in a relative sense, not primarily and actually concerned with neither being relative nor being irrelative but with being unconditioned. Mentally, absolute freedom cannot exist in any form. Free will can be defined as a will that is free from all effects of conditioning states under the law of causality.

Such thing cannot be real. How can a will as one of the mental forces that are continually generating and being generated within the principle of cause and effect, arises freely, then? From this perspective of introspection, we can see that Buddhism leans towards determinism. However, if the will is not free, why should we pay attention to morality? According to karma theory of Paticcasamuppāda doctrine, although activities are purposefully and deliberately carried out by stimulative intention or volitional will, Buddhism accepts that they are not of free choice but alternative, conditional and optional decision as one of mental functions. Nevertheless, Buddhism recognizes that the stimulative intention is a leading factor for mental, verbal, and physical activities that are called karma.

The Buddha, in accordance with the doctrine of Dependent Origination (patticca samuppāda), elaborated four main factors called graspings (upādāna), in Vibhanga Abhidhamma Pāli canon, that dominate and control the stimulative intentions, namely, lustful attachment to sensual things such as appearance, sound, and smell, taste and tangible things (kāmapadāna), lustful obsession with ideologies and beliefs (ditthupādāna), lustful attachment to habitual practices (sīlavatupādāna), and lustful attachment to theory of soul as the idea 'I have a self' (attavādupādāna). Without the influence and control of these four graspings we have to establish the power of purified stimulative intention or will by reducing the lustful attachments as much as possible by mindful and watchful observance on psychophysical nature, and the dangers and sufferings that are given by wild defilements or natural impulses.

Being gradually free from such wild and natural impulses, will or stimulative intention becomes powerful more and more as it becomes less and less controlled by the attachments. This theory points out a will can be purified and powerful, though it may not be free from the set of conditioning states and the conditioned. Causality is not a problem but wild and bewildered mental defilement. Causality is consistent with hard determinism, given that nothing about causes and results require that agents be construed as ultimately responsible for their behavior.

CONCLUSION:

Therefore, it can be said that Buddhist philosophy is a doctrine that builds conditioned wills in alternative choices and options into powerful conditioned wills maintaining moral principles. In this analysis, we can see although Theravāda Buddhism does not accept free will, and it only accepts 'conditioned will' but also it can still develop moral integrity and responsibility. Thus, we can conclude that there is no problem of morality as to the idea of 'free will' in Theravāda Buddhism. It is not at all obvious that Buddhism rejects moral responsibility, although without accepting any agent like free will and self, as too much of Buddhist doxology ties karma intimately to (implicit and often explicit) notions of moral responsibility or desert.

Buddhist interest in free will is not contingent upon responsibility, or vice versa, but rather on soteriology. The point is that the Buddha advised disciples how it is that faulty conceptions of identity do not arise, presumably to help the disciple rehabilitate any fault conception the disciple may maintain, so that the disciple may avoid feeding the conditions that fuel the arising of the faulty self-conception. This does imply that a conception of self that does identify self with any of the aggregates is faulty and/or implicated in suffering. But all of this is consistent with the claim that I make and that the Buddha did not reject the processing person system in the sense of energies combination, its efficacious role in agency, or its grounding of attributions of desert and moral responsibility.

Arguably, all the Buddha rejected here was faulty identification with it as one's self. As to the theory of free will, Buddhism may be soft determinism, the idea that determined behavior need not be rigid and need not be incompatible with a certain non-chaotic conception of free will and moral responsibility, because one may satisfy certain determinism friendly agent proximal conditions that

might be sufficient for responsible agency. For example, to mention just two such agent proximal conditions, the knowledge of cause and effect renders undesirable events inevitable (and thus nonrigid), and mindfulness of the way volition generates action helps to cultivate control over one's volition, and also control is non-chaotic by giving the stimulative intention a leading role among all kinds of mental factors that instantly generate psycho-physicality as a result of actions. Then, moral responsibility is in-avoidable although there is no unmoving mover behind the moving but moving.

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