

7

Free Will and Buddhism

A reflection on early Buddhism, the will, determinism and mental freedom

Theme: Is there free will?

An essay by Piya Tan ©2004

FREE WILL, DETERMINISM AND FATALISM

1 Key terms and ideas

1.1 THEMES AND OVERVIEW

1.1.1 This essay originally formed Section 3 of the Introduction to **the Atta,kārī Sutta** (A 6.38).¹ However, due to its length (reflecting the importance of the subject), it merits a separate title. It is well known amongst many informed Buddhists of our time that, in human terms, there is really “no free will or personal choice.” This idea goes hand in glove with the early Buddhist teaching of **nonsel**, that there is, in true reality, neither essence nor abiding entity behind any kind of existence, human or non-human, animate or inanimate.

When we neither understand nor accept the teaching of nonself, it seems obvious that some kind of **self**, that is, “our” self must be in charge of our actions, for example. It is, after all, we assume, *this* self that chooses to write this essay, or read a book, listen to music, talk to someone, do anything or not do it at all. That we can choose to do or not to do any such thing seems so obvious.

1.1.2 The findings of **Benjamin Libet**, an American neuroscientist of the University of California, San Francisco, a pioneer in the study of human consciousness, in the 1970s, seemed to prove otherwise. Libet, researching into neural activity and sensation thresholds, initially worked to determine the amount of activation of specific parts of the brain needed to trigger artificial somatic sensations, based on routine psychophysical methods.

In time, he turned to investigating human consciousness. In his most famous experiment, he wanted to demonstrate that the unconscious electrical processes in the brain called the “readiness potential” (RP) (Bereitschaftspotential)—discovered by Lüder Deecke and Hans Helmut Kornhuber in 1964²—precede conscious decisions to perform volitional, spontaneous acts, implying that unconscious neuronal processes *precede* and potentially *cause* volitional acts, which are then retrospectively felt to be consciously motivated by the subject. Hence, this experiment challenged the belief in free will, but Libet was also criticized for making implicit assumptions.³ Libet’s idea was significant enough to inspire further study in the neuroscience of free will, which is, understandably, also of interest to Buddhism. [1.1.4]

1.1.3 What does Libet’s findings prove?

1.1.3.1 In his experiments, Libet asked volunteers to extend one of their arms and, whenever they felt like it, out of their own free will, to flex their wrist. A clock allowed the subjects to note exactly when they decided to act, and by fitting electrodes to their wrists, the start of the action could be timed. More

¹ SD 7.6.

² H H Kornhuber, L Deecke, “Hirnpotentialänderungen bei Willkürbewegungen und passiven Bewegungen des Menschen: Bereitschaftspotential und reafferente Potentiale,” *Pflügers Archiv* 284 1965:1-17.

³ C Jarrett, “Exposing some holes in Libet’s classic free will study.” *Research Digest*. 2008: <https://digest.bps.org.uk/2008/09/19/exposing-some-holes-in-libets-classic-free-will-study/>.

electrodes on the volunteer[s'] scalps recorded a particular brain wave pattern called "the readiness potential," which occurs just before any complex action and is associated with the brain planning its next move. It was found that the decision to act came *after* the readiness potential!⁴

From this experiment, it seemed clear that what we notice as "the decision to act," what we take to be our free will, occurs only *after* the process of action had begun. "Will," it seems from this experiment, does not initiate the action, but is a by-product of the process.

1.1.3.2 Such a conclusion is difficult to accept because it goes against our nature, as a rule, to *first* decide to do something *before* we act. It even provokes a fear of the possibility that we may not really be in charge, neither of our body nor our mind. Our conventional wisdom simply rejects that such scientific evidence can debunk our notion of the will. The fact that scientists do research at all shows that they have the free will to do so! [12]

Some clever person may make a Zen quip that the scientists have *no* choice but to do the research, or that we have *no* choice but do what we are doing. It is difficult to imagine how, for example, I have no choice, but to write this paper. To begin with, we need to master a language in order to write well. Language has to be learned. In learning, we make numerous choices and efforts to master words, work with ideas, learn to work with a computer, and so on.

1.1.4 On the other hand, it is not difficult, even interesting, to consider the possibility that we have no free will. It does not really go against the grain of any early Buddhist teaching. The Buddha teaches that karma in intention (*cetanā*), and only when we insist on translating *cetanā* as "will," there may be such a problem in face of Libet's experiments.

For Buddhists who understand and accept the teaching of "the unconscious," the dark karmic forces lurking in the depths of our mind, known as **latent tendencies** (*anusaya*), the idea of *no* free will is very relevant, since it only proves that we are at the mercy of our unconscious latent tendencies. The question here is: what does this mean? [8.2]

1.1.5 One person who apparently accepted Libet's conclusions (despite their criticisms from other scientists) was the celebrity monk, **Brahmavamso**, who even excitedly declared that this was indeed the truth which those with an experience of dhyana (*jhāna*) were able to experience. We must, at best, take this as his personal opinion, since it can be confounding when we make such statement of science in Buddhist terms.⁵ [1.1.3]

From the sutta teachings on meditation and from our own experiences of Buddhist meditation, we may notice how things rise and fall, that is, the conditionality of phenomena (that is, mental states). We may even say that we can understand **nonsel**f from such experiences. However, clearly, when we do so we would, technically, be arhats. For, only the arhat has fully understood nonself to gain awakening. But then, this is a different matter from that of "no free will."

1.1.6 Brahmavamso's view that Buddhism teaches that we have "**no free will**" is one such "interesting,"⁶ but seriously problematic, to say the least. Common sense will tell us, for example, that if there is no free will, then, *how do we ever become free from suffering*, for example? In fact, **the Atta,kārī Sutta** (A 6.38)

⁴ Benjamin Libet, 1985: see biblio below.

⁵ For Brahmavamso's views on free will, see *Dhamma Journal* 5,1, 2004a:50 f.

⁶ Another curious view of Brahmavamso's is that "the Buddha discovered dhyana," which has been examined in some depth at **SD 33.1b**. Apparently, he has changed his view after the publication of this essay (SD 33.1b).

records the Buddha as declaring, amongst other things, “the element of initiative” (*ārambha, dhātu*) rejecting the notion that “there is no action of one’s own, that there is no action done by others.”⁷

1.1.7 In a karmic sense, there is *some* truth to the idea that we have no real control of ourself: we are dictated by our habitual karma. In other words, we have become **habitual beings**, caught in the rut of our latent tendencies [1.1.4]. We have no choice but to do what we like to do, spurred on by our lust, hate and delusion.

For example, we must clearly define how **the suttas** see “free will”; what is “the will” (if this idea is known or accepted in early Buddhism at all). Then, there is the matter of our lacking free will: if this were the case, then, there is no way that I can, by my own effort, by **self-reliance**, decide to work for the path! We might even conclude—as in some Mahāyāna teaching—that we are already enlightened, and do not, or cannot, work for it at all!

1.1.8 The most brilliant scientist within living memory, **Stephen Hawking**, has this to say about free will in his essay on “Is everything determined?” (1993):⁸

I have noticed that even people who claim that everything is predestined and that we can do nothing to change it look before they cross the road. Maybe it's just that those who don't look don't survive to tell the tale.

One cannot base one's conduct on the idea that everything is determined, because one does not know what has been determined. Instead, one has to adopt the effective theory that one has free will and that one is responsible for one's actions. This theory is not very good at predicting human behaviour, but we adopt it because there is no chance of solving the equations arising from the fundamental laws.

There is also a Darwinian reason that we believe in free will: a society in which the individual feels responsible for his or her actions is more likely to work together and survive to spread its values. (1993:122; highlighted and paragraphed)⁹

1.2 NO DETERMINISM?

1.2.1 Karma and determinism

1.2.1.1 A popular definition of karma is found in **the Samuddaka Sutta**¹⁰ (S 11.10):

Just as the seeds are sown, so shall the harvest be;
Good comes to the doer of good; evil to the evil-doer—
As one has planted the seed, so shall one feel the fruit.¹¹ (S v903/1:227)

This verse or its popular version—“as we sow, so we shall reap”—has often been misquoted as a Buddhist article of faith. The interesting point here is that this stanza (*gāthā*), included in **the Sa, gāthā**

⁷ A 6.38/3:337 f (SD 7.6).

⁸ A lecture given in the Sigma Club seminar, Univ of Cambridge, April 1990.

⁹ Stephen Hawking, *Black Holes and Baby Universes and Other Essays*, 1993.

¹⁰ Also called **Isayo Samuddaka S** or **Sambara Samuddaka S**. An almost identical saying, “By good works a man becomes good (*puṇya*), by evil works evil (*pāpa*),” attributed to the Vedic sage Yajñavalkya and secretly transmitted to another sage, Jāratkāra (Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.2). See Basham 1989:43 f.

¹¹ *Yadisam vappate bijam | tadisam harate phalam | kalyāṇa, kārī kalyāṇam | pāpa, kārī ca pāpakam | pavuttam vappate bijam | phalam paccanubhossasī ti.*

Vagga (the first chapter) of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, actually belongs to the free floating ancient **gnomic poetry** of India which the Buddhists have preserved.¹² In other words, this is technically not “Buddha Word” (*Buddha, vacana*) but a popular saying. Only what is truly “well-said” (*subhāsita*)—that which lessens or removes greed, hate and delusion—is regarded as Buddha Word.

1.2.1.2 The background of this popular “sower’s karma” saying is found in **the Isayo Samuddaka Sutta** (S 1:227), where a Buddhist myth relates an impending battle between the gods and the asuras (“titans”),¹³ the latter (according to the account) dwelled in the great ocean. Some virtuous seers who dwelled on the ocean shore, fearing that the asuras would destroy their hermitage as had occurred before, requested “a guarantee of safety” (*abhaya, dakkhiṇa*) from Sambara, the asura leader. However, Sambara, who detested the seers for being “the hated devotees of Sakra [the lord of the devas]” (*duṭṭhānaṃ sakka, sevināṃ*), replied, “I will give you only fear!” The terrified seers resorted to putting a curse on Sambara:

Though we have asked for safety, you give us but fear.
Having received this from you, may fear without end be yours!
Just as the seeds are sown, so shall the harvest be;
Good comes to the doer of good; evil to the evil-doer—
As one has planted the seed, so shall one feel its fruit. (S vv902 f/1:227), SD 39.2

It is said that as soon as Sambara falls asleep, he wakes up howling as if struck from all sides by a hundred spears. The other asuras rush to comfort him until the break of dawn. Henceforth, his sickened mind trembles; hence, his other name, Vepa, citti (“whose mind trembles”)¹⁴ (SA 1:347).

1.2.1.3 The “sower’s karma,” as such, should be understood in its context as a folk saying, does not fully reflective of the Buddhist teaching of karma, especially since such a folk notion may encourage a **deterministic view of karma**. This is what, in philosophical terms, is call “hard” **determinism**—a view of causality without free will, such as the Jain view that we must face the fruits of *all* our past bad karma before we can be liberated.¹⁵

The Buddhist conception of karma is much more complex, as would be apparent from our study of **the Loṇa, phala Sutta**¹⁶ [4.2]. Karma does not work mechanical, without any Nemesis,¹⁷ or supreme judge or almighty dispenser of karmic justice. A habitually bad person, for example, on account of his habitual bad mental habits, commits a small bad deed, but faces its consequences in a grave way. A habitually good person, on the other hand, on account of his habitually wholesome mind, is able to with-

¹² Winternitz 1933 2:57 f. Another example of the ancient Indian gnomic tradition is **Ālavaka S** (Sn 1.10), which is a riddle in the ballad (*ākhyāna*) form, given by the yaksha Ālavaka to the Buddha who answers them, Sn 181-192. “Too many cooks spoil the broth” and “Good wine needs no bush” are English gnomes.

¹³ “Asuras,” (*asura*), lit “anti-god,” variously tr as “titan,” “demon.” They were once gods in Tāvātimsa but fell from their state through being intoxicated with drinks. Their attempted return to Tāvātimsa resulted in protracted battles with the gods led by Sakka (S 1:216 ff; J 1:202-204; DhA 1:272-280; SnA 484 f).

¹⁴ For the name’s etym, see SD 39.2 (2.1).

¹⁵ On the Jain view of “hard determinism,” in terms of karma, see SD.2.10 (3.2.2).

¹⁶ A 3.99/1:249-253 @ SD 3.5 esp (2).

¹⁷ Nemesis, in Greek mythology, a daughter of Night (Nyx) or Darkness (Erebus), is the Greek goddess of retribution and vengeance, the agent of divine punishment for wrongdoing and esp for hubris, the presumptuous defiance of the gods. She is the personification of divine vengeance, of reverence for the natural order of things, of the fear of retribution, and of conscience.

stand the fruits of his bad karma with minimal damage, so to speak. This is an example of a “soft” determinism. [1.2.2]

1.2.2 Conditionality as determinism

As a modern philosophical term, **determinism**, in simple terms, is the doctrine that assumes that every event has causes (note the plural), and that every conscious action has potential consequences. However, it is useful to distinguish two kinds of determinism: the hard and the soft. In classical mechanics,¹⁸ it was assumed that if we knew the position and momentum of every particle of matter at any moment, then we could, in principle, know their position and momentum at any other future time. This is an ultimate “hard” (or nomological) determinism.¹⁹

Such a view has “softened” with the development of quantum mechanics,²⁰ in which the deepest knowable levels of cause and effect appear to be probabilistic on nature, shifting the notion of perfect prediction to that of probabilistic prediction. In psychology, the existential and humanist stand insists on a measure of “free will,” with which a person can remain outside the deterministic tentacles of the behavioural sciences. This is known as a “soft” determinism [3].

1.2.3 Is there a “thing” called free will?

1.2.3.1 While Western philosophy tends to think free will as the freedom that an “agent” (a sort of independent “doer,” like some kind of self or soul), early Buddhism see any such “agent” or “doer” as simple arising from conditions (interdependent causes and effects). Such an agent can, under certain conditions or with proper training (especially meditation), freely choose to do or not to do an action.

In other words, despite postulating a soft or weak determinism [3] of conditionality, early Buddhism allows, indeed, insists on our using our free will to make the right moral choices, be morally responsible and work beyond the retribution of karma, to attain the freedom of awakening to true reality. Such a system does not need any permanent agent or abiding self or eternal soul. What connects us to our actions and consequences are our mental continuity (flow of consciousness) and memory. In short, the only agent Buddhism recognizes is our own mind, especially intention (*cetanā*) [1.2.3.2].

1.2.3.2 This kind of approach to the problem of free will is called “compatibilist,” that is, the early Buddhist notions of action and morality see both determinism and free will as being *compatible*.²¹ Daniel Dennett, for example, criticizes the Cartesian notion of the soul as the ultimate inner controller of the body or “doer,” and replaces it with a dynamic notion of intention that is dependent on the agent’s cognitive ability to reflect, plan, act and control.

¹⁸ Classical mechanics is theoretical physics up to approximately the end of the 19th cent, before the concepts of quantum theory (1900) and special relativity (1905). Classical physics [as it is also called] relied largely on Newton’s mechanics and James Clerk Maxwell’s theory of electromagnetism. It may still be applied with high precision to large-scale phenomena involving no very rapid relative motion. (*Oxford Dictionary of Science*, 6th ed, 2010: classical physics).

¹⁹ The definitions here and in the foll para are based on Reber, *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, 1985: determinism.

²⁰ Quantum mechanics A system of mechanics based on quantum theory (the theory of small-scale physical phenomena), which arose out of the failure of classical mechanics and electromagnetic theory to provide a consistent explanation of both electromagnetic waves and atomic structure. The quantum theory states that while it is impossible to specify precisely both the position and the simultaneous momentum (mass velocity) of a particle, they can only be predicted. This means that the result of an action can be expressed only in terms of probability that a certain effect will occur. See *Oxford Dictionary of Science*, op cit: quantum theory.

²¹ See Siderits 1987; Gier & Kjellberg 2004; Federman 2010. Repetti 2010a (and his other related writings).

Similarly, the Buddha rejects any brahminical concept of soul (*ātman*) as the ultimate controller, and replaces it with a dynamic notion of intention. “The parallels between the rejections of Cartesianism and Upanishadic Brahminism show that although the Buddha rejects ultimate free will [10.1], he accepts a compatibilist free will that allows self-control and moral choice.”²²

1.3 THE AGENT AND EARLY BUDDHISM

1.3.1 What is an agent?

Loosely, an **agent** is anything or anyone or a group that brings about an effect. An agent is an actor who shapes his environment, affects his surrounding, and simply do things. Philosophically, such an agent must, firstly, be non-physical (traditionally a self or soul),²³ because the physical world, as we know, is governed by causality, while the agent must be free. Secondly, the agent should have a genuine power of choice and an ability to exercise ultimate control over action and movement. Anything less than this would not account for freedom.²⁴

The problem of free will is a product of European thought and is rooted in medieval Christian theology [6.1]. This problem is then generalized to encompass the entire realm of moral choice, and eventually human conscious choice in general. The French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) presented his “proof” of free will, by invoking a very similar notion of God to support his argument for ultimate free will.²⁵ The Cartesian “proof” is widely rejected today, and his notion of free will simply cannot be imposed on Buddhism, which rejects the idea of an almighty God.²⁶

Nevertheless, even the position of those who think that free will is nothing but an illusion falls under the category of “Cartesianism,” because it is based on the assumption that without a non-physical soul that transcends causality (that is, determinism), there is no place for genuine free will. This is the first kind of free will (FW1), the one that is rejected by Buddhism.²⁷ [1.4.1.1]. The kind of free will found in early Buddhism is said to be “compatibilist.” [1.2.3.2]

1.3.2 The Upanishadic agent

The kind of free will that is virtually identical to the Cartesian view can be found in Brahmanism, in the Upanisads, which is an eternal unchanging soul (*ātman*), which is the same as the universal soul, the Brahman. Some Upanishadic passages suggest a strong association between a soul (*ātman*) and control. Even the common Advaita²⁸ interpretation of *ātman* only as an ultimate locus of perception,²⁹ see it also as an ultimate locus of control.

Thus, knowing means controlling, and controlling allows those who know to gain whatever they wish. In the same way, by knowing the *ātman*, the brahmin renouncer gains ultimate control through

²² Federman 2010:1.

²³ Early Buddhism, of course, rejects any such notion [1.3.3].

²⁴ See John Foster, *The Immaterial Self*, London: Routledge, 1991:267.

²⁵ René Descartes, “Meditations on First Philosophy,” in *Discourse on the Method and Meditation on the First Philosophy*, David Weissman (ed), London: Yale Univ Press, 1641/1996:86.

²⁶ Federman 2010:3.

²⁷ See Federman 2010:6-8.

²⁸ Fully, Advaita Vedānta, a Hindu school of non-duality or monism, which holds that the *ātman* (soul) is identical with the universal soul or Brahman

²⁹ According to Patrick Olivelle, common mistake: Olivelle, *The Upanisads*, Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 1998:lvi.

“internalizing the sacrifice.”³⁰ *Ātman* is repeatedly described as an “inner controller” (*antarayāmin*), and the center of perception (BAU 3.7.22).³¹

The Buddha rejects the brahminical notions of the *ātman* and the Brahman for the simple reason that they do not and cannot exist. Whatever exists must exist in time whatever exists in time is impermanent and changing. More importantly, if we relegate our control to *ātman*, then we would not feel accountable for our actions, especially when we can purify ourselves through rituals. Hence, no matter how bad we are, or how much bad we do, we can still be purified by doing the right rituals performed by the brahmins. Even then, only certain classes (the brahmins, the kshatriyas and the vaishyas) have direct access to the brahmins and their jealously guarded sacred texts and costly complicated rituals, often involving the sacrifice of numerous lives.³²

1.3.3 Agency in Buddhism.

1.3.3.1 The first kind of free will (FW1) [1.4.1.1]—we can term it “agential free will”—that of some kind of eternal soul or abiding entity, is unequivocally rejected by the Buddha and completely foreign to early Buddhism.³³ The kind of free will that is compatible with the Buddha’s teaching, is the kind that gives the agent (the individual) ability to control his action in conformity with his will, when there are no constraints, coercions or compulsions that limit action. This is the second kind of free will (FW2), which we can call “intentional free will”³⁴ [1.4.1.1].

1.3.3.2 The whole Buddhist life, as encompassed by **the 3 trainings** (*ti, sikkhā*)—will work only when there is free will, and brings about some personal, mental or spiritual freedom at every level. The Buddhist training begins a Buddhist, on his own free will, taking up at least the 5 precepts, or on a higher level, the monastic precepts, so that he is able to wholesomely restrain his body and speech. These precepts are not commandments dictated by a supreme being or a prophet of his, but “step of training” (*sikkhā, pada*) voluntarily and joyfully taken up by the practitioner to be liberated from moral vice.

Indeed, the precepts are effectively constraints, but they are wholesome one that the practitioner freely undertakes to free his body and speech which constitutes his **moral training** (*sīla sikkhā*). In other words, moral training is not a goal in itself, but is the foundation and spirit of the **mental cultivation** (*samādhi sikkhā*), which is the next stage of training. Essentially, this is a training to know, tame and free the mind from any mental hindrances—sensual lust, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt—so that the mind goes on to blossom into the calm and bliss of dhyana, when the mind is fully free of the body.

Moral virtue is the basis for a cultivated body (*bhāvita, kāya*), a morally healthy body, which is, in turn, the basis for mental cultivation that bring about a cultivated mind (*bhāvita, citta*), a wholesomely healthy mind.³⁵ Such a healthy mind in a healthy body are excellent bases for **wisdom training** (*paññā sikkhā*), the third level of Buddhist discipleship.

This is when we enjoy the beauty of the freed mind of dhyana for as long as we wish. Then, emerging from that profound bliss, we go on to know and see for ourselves the truth of true reality, which is even more liberating in a more spiritually refined way. And if we do all this right—meaning we clearly

³⁰ Collins 1982:64.

³¹ Federman 2010:3-8.

³² See eg **Kūṭa, danta S** (D 5/1:127-149), SD 22.8.

³³ See Federman 2010:3-8.

³⁴ Federman 2010:9.

³⁵ See eg **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,9/1:239 f), SD 49.4.

see the impermanence, the unsatisfactoriness and non-self of all phenomena—then we are on the way to awakening in this life itself.

1.3.3.3 The question now is: who or what is the agent here throughout the 3 trainings? It is certainly not an eternal soul or any abiding entity. This agent is our **mind** itself, and it is this mind that undergoes transformation and is, in due course, freed and awakens. In other words, our mind is the *agent*, the one that effects changes in us, but at the same time, the mind itself is transformed. Hence, the mind is neither an unchanging self nor an abiding entity, but the “self (*attā*),” that is, *we ourself*, or more specifically, *our mind*, in the process of knowing, transforming and liberating itself.³⁶

The stages of such a mental evolution by way of the 3 trainings is described, for example, in **the Mahā Assa,para Sutta** (M 39). A recluse’s moral training includes having moral shame and moral fear, purity of body, speech, mind, and livelihood, sense-restraint, moderation in food. Then, wakefulness, and mindfulness and clear comprehension prepares him for effective mental training, which comprises overcoming the 5 mental hindrances, and the attaining of the 4 dhyanas. Wisdom training comprises the 3 knowledges of the recollection of past lives, of how beings fare according to their karma, and of the destruction of mental influxes (that is, arhathood).³⁷

1.3.3.4 Another example is that of Rāhula’s training given by the Buddha himself, as recorded in **the Amba,laṭṭhika Rāhu’lovāda Sutta** (M 61). The Buddha instructs the 7-year-old novice, Rāhula (the Buddha’s only son), to reflect on all his actions, thus:

Rāhula, **whenever you want to do** an action with the body ⟨with speech | with the mind⟩, you should reflect on it thus:

“This action I want to do with the body—will it harm me, or harm others, or harm both?³⁸ Is it an unwholesome bodily action with painful outcome, painful result?” (M 61,9/1:415), SD 3.10

Conscious reflection (*paccavekkhana*)—meaning careful consideration and planning—stand out as necessary components of the Buddhist path to liberation. The Buddha instructs Rahula to reflect before, during, and after performing any action, because otherwise he would unconsciously and automatically follow his habits and dispositions.

He may be acting “freely,” but there is no freedom of the will [1.4.1.2], because he is not mindful of his acts, unaware of their moral potential and consequences. His will or intention (*cetanā*), in other words, is dictated by his negative past conditionings, in the form of latent tendencies.³⁹ And he is not even mindful or conscious of this. Even an unconscious, but deliberate, act has karmic potential. Ignorance of karma is no excuse.⁴⁰

Reflection on desire and its consequences allows Rahula to hold back certain unwholesome ones and to perform wholesome ones. As Dennett suggests, becoming a free agent requires knowing our own

³⁶ On “self” (*attā*) referring to the mind, see SD 26.9 (1.6.2; 2.1.2).

³⁷ M 39/1:271-280 @ SD 10.13.

³⁸ “Will it harm me, or harm others, or harm both?” *atta,vyābādhāya pi...para,vyābādhāya pi...ubhaya,vyābādhāya pi samvatteyya*. The common key word here, *vyābādha*, means “distress, pain, affliction.” This phrase constitutes the golden rule: see **Veḷu,dvāreyya S** (S 55.7) for a broader application, where a wholesome action should be “purified” in three ways, ie by observing them oneself, by exhorting others to observe them, and by praising such deeds (S 55.7.6-12/5:354 f).

³⁹ In simple terms, these are habits and dispositions motivated by greed, hate and delusion, and rooted in lust, ill will and ignorance. On the latent tendencies, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3.

⁴⁰ See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b.

desires, and requires knowing, or at least imagining, the consequences of our actions.⁴¹ A mind coloured with lust, hate, or delusion cannot reflect or plan appropriately, and is limited by itself.

A clear mind, on the other hand, is a good guide to our own desires, and is a powerful tool that turns knowledge into wise decisions. This is, in practice, an exercise of a conscious will (not of unconscious negative conditionings). It may not be “ultimately free-willed” [1.3.2], but it is clearly free to the extent that the mind is not overburdened emotionally, so that it is aware of its own state, and is able to imagine the consequences of its actions or non-actions.⁴²

1.4 TWO KINDS OF FREE WILL

1.4.1 Agent and intention

1.4.1.1 Free will is a modern western category which is useful for our understanding of early Buddhism and its vital relevance to the issues of our own times, and, of course, our own understanding of self and awakening. As such, we need to carefully investigate and try to understand what is meant by “free will,” or how the term is being used in various writings. We have a number of simple and interesting books and readings on free will, to start with.⁴³

There are, in fact, two definitions that we need to distinguish, of which only one is compatible with what the Buddha taught. The Buddha rejects free will as a power that belongs in the soul, that transcends the physical and that has ultimate control (FW1)—we can call this “agential free will.” On the other hand he accepts the idea that people have free will when they are able to control their actions in conformity with their will or intention when there are no constraints, coercions, and compulsions on either planning or performance (FW2)—we can call this “intentional free will.”⁴⁴

1.4.1.2 By **intentional free will** is meant our ability to initiate or control action (*ārambha, dhātu*)⁴⁵ in conformity with our will, when there are no constraints, coercions, and compulsions that limit performance. The term *arambha, dhātu*, translated as “element of initiative,” is found in **the Atta, kāri Sutta** (A 6.38), where it refers to our ability and propensity to act on our own free will with any of our 6 sense-faculties, that is, the 5 physical senses and the mind.⁴⁶ [1.1.3]

Although such activity, especially those of the 5 physical senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and acting with body) are construed as **the freedom of action**, what is really significant to us is that we must have **the freedom of the will**. There are important differences between the two. The freedom of action, most of the things that ordinary people do in their daily lives (such as going to school, working on a job, going shopping), even successfully executing their goals, often depends on factors wholly beyond their control. They often have external (physical and social) and internal (mental) constraints on the range of options they have. We are often not responsible for the presence or absence of such constraints that directly or indirectly affect us, even though we can choose to act or not to act.

⁴¹ Dennett 1984:52-57.

⁴² See Federman 2010:10 f.

⁴³ See eg T Pink, *Free Will: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, 2004. Another informative source is Timothy O’Connor’s article on free will (2010) in the online Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/freewill/>.

⁴⁴ Except for the technical names, this section is based on Federman 2010:11.

⁴⁵ Not *ārabha, dhātu*, as in Federman 2010:9.

⁴⁶ A 6.38/3:338 @ SD 7.6.

The freedom of the will, on the other hand, is the harmonious congruence of how we think or intend, and acting (or not) accordingly. In other words, we know that we have a desire to do something,⁴⁷ and we know that the desire (say to keep a wallet or handphone which we have found) is wrong, and so we hand it over to the proper authorities. Or, we know that the desire is good, and we act accordingly. Simply, put our mind (or heart) goes in tandem with our actions. As we will, so we act.

Those acting freedom—enjoying the “freedom of action”—may not often or not really enjoy the freedom of the will. A schoolboy has no choice but be a student; an employee has no choice but to work as his job or employer demands; an avid shopper often buys on compulsion. In other words, they are fettered by the “weakness of will.”⁴⁸

1.4.2 Cognition and volition

1.4.2.1 Whatever arises in this world does so by way of a network of interdependent conditions. Like the physical world, our mental actions and states, too, dependently arise. What we are—our actions and thoughts—arise interdependently (*paṭicca,samuppanna*). Although **dependent arising** (*paṭicca samuppāda*) [3.3] is a deterministic doctrine (it shows how conditions work interdependently to determine how we act and what we are), we are only caught up in its deterministic process when we lack an understanding of how it works, and how to “de-condition” ourselves so that we can break the negative cycle of such conditioning, which in turn leads to mental and spiritual liberation.

Hence, the Buddhist goal is that of freedom from mental bondage (that is, a burden, *bandhana*, or a yoke, *yoga*) (A 3:68). As such, nirvana, for example, is often described as the “security (or safe place) from bondage” (*yoga-k,khema*).⁴⁹ This mental yoke—simply put, the twin yoke of ignorance and craving—is what deprive us of our mind’s free will to work to liberate itself.

1.4.2.2 Without such a free will, we are yoked to the world. But it is a world of our own creation. How is this created, and how does it pass away? **The (Samuday’atthaṅgama) Loka Sutta** (S 12.44) instructs us on how our “world” of senses (including the mind) arises and falls away, thus:

3 And what, bhikshus, is the arising of the world?

4 (1) Bhikshus, dependent on *the eye and forms*, eye-consciousness arises.

The meeting of the three is contact.⁵⁰

With contact as condition, there is feeling;⁵¹

with feeling as condition, there is craving;

with craving as condition, there is clinging;

⁴⁷ This ability to introspect is technically known as a “metamental” state, ie, “thinking about our thoughts,” or a reflexive awareness. See Repetti 2010a:169.

⁴⁸ See Repetti 2010a:168 f.

⁴⁹ On “security from bondage” (*yoga-k,khema*): V 2:205 = It 11; D 3:123, 125, 164; M 1:117, 347, 357; S 1:175, 2:195, 226 3:112, 4:125, 5:130 f; A 1:50, 2:40, 52, 87, 247, 3:21 f, 353; It 9, 27; Dh 23..

⁵⁰ *Tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso*. For a discussion on this passage, see Bucknell 1999:318 f f.

⁵¹ From hereon, **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18,16) continues: “What one feels, one perceives. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one mentally proliferates. What a person mentally proliferates is the source through which perceptions and notions due to mental proliferation impacts one regarding past, future and present forms cognizable through the eye.” (M 18,16/1:112 f). See SD 6.13. A passage similar to this section (the preceding three sentences) is found in **Pariññā S** (S 35.60) where, however, the learned noble disciple becomes disillusioned (*nibbindati*) with the contact arising from sense-organ, sense-object and sense-consciousness (also using the sentence, *tinnaṃ saṅgati phasso*), and as such “becomes dispassionate (*virajjati*); through dispassion, he is freed (*vimuccati*); through liberation, he understands, ‘Clinging has been fully understood by me.’” (S 35.60/4:32 f).

with clinging as condition, there is	existence;
with existence as condition, there is	birth;
with birth as condition there arise	decay and death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.

Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

—This, bhikshus, is the arising of the world.

(S 12.44,3-4/2:73), SD 7.5

The same is then respectively said of the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind. The repetitive dynamic of the teaching is vital, as it works as a cognitive programme, as it were, to teach, inspire and transform us spiritually through self-understanding—that we *are* really the world, one that we have ourselves created, and, as such, can end. This is the beginning of the mind's free will.

The ending of our world is then described, using the same dynamic recursive readings so that we internalize the truth of the teaching for self-transformation:

10 And what, bhikshus, is **the ending of the world**?

11 (1) Bhikshus, dependent on **the eye and forms**, eye-consciousness arises.

The meeting of the three is *contact*.

With contact as condition, there is *feeling*; with feeling as condition, there is *craving*.

11.2 But with the remainderless fading away and ending of that same craving comes **the ending of clinging**;⁵²

with the ending of clinging,	there is the ending of existence;
with the ending of existence,	there is the ending of birth;
with the ending of birth,	there is the ending of decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.

Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.

—This, bhikshus, is the ending of the world.

(S 12.44,10-11/2:74), SD 7.5

1.4.2.3 The same is then respectively said of the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind. It should be noted here how with the uprooting of craving, the whole world-creating cycle is broken, which effectively ends suffering.⁵³ This craving is ended with our understanding and wise response to feeling, that is, initially to accept any reaction to a sense-experience that is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, just as they are without desiring, nor disliking, nor ignoring them respectively.⁵⁴ Instead, we regard them all as being mind-made⁵⁵ and, as such, impermanent.⁵⁶ Once we can manage this reflection, we move on to see them as being unsatisfactory and non-self.⁵⁷

1.4.2.4 We see here the essence of a Buddhist cognitive de-conditioning—“letting go” on a basic mental level—where a “world-to-mind”⁵⁸ sensory input is simply taken for what it is, without any hedonic evaluation in terms being desirable, undesirable or neutral. This is the stage when we dismantle the determinism of our sense-stimuli, so that we are not determined by the world. Indeed, this is the deter-

⁵² This apparently shows that the dependent arising cycle can be broken here. For a different opinion, see **Dependent arising**, SD 5.12 (18).

⁵³ On dealing with craving, see *Kāma-c, chanda*, SD 32.2.

⁵⁴ See *Nimitta and anuvyañjana*, SD 19.14.

⁵⁵ The reflection on the “mind-made” (*mano,maya*) is often applied to meditative states, esp dhyanas: see **Aṭṭhaka,nāgara S** (M 52,4.3 etc), SD 41.2.

⁵⁶ See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

⁵⁷ See **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59), SD 1.2.

⁵⁸ For this phrase and its cognate below, see Repetti 2010a:176.

minism that enslaves the world of the unawakened, so that we are caught in its gravity and orbit around it as its satellite.

When we have got the hang of this cognitive deconditioning—when we learn to be *with* the world, but not *of* the world—we are ready to work on a conative deconditioning: letting go on a deeper mental level, where we work with our own volitions and formations, the willing and creative powers of our minds. This can only be done effectively with deep meditation or dhyana, when we can truly experience the mind as it really is.

When we are *conatively deconditioned*, we are becoming fully free in a “world-to-mind” vision, when we are able to transcend our sense-faculties, so that the world is no more a self-induced illusion, a mind-made mirage, but stands before us as it truly is. We are thus able to rise above the world that had shaped us, and now we are able to shape it in any wholesome way we want. This is the transhuman, even super-human, stage when we are, if we choose to, able to cultivate psychic powers. But more importantly, we are able to direct the super-calm and super-clear mind to cultivate the wisdom to destroy our mental influxes (*āsava*), those negative input from the world that feeds our craving, existence, views and ignorance.⁵⁹ We are now fully liberated as arhats.⁶⁰

1.4.2.5 As unawakened beings, if we are conscious, we cannot help having sense-experiences. By themselves, none of them is problematic; they may even be rewarding if the stimuli are wholesome (like seeing a peaceful monastic, or hearing a Dharma talk, and so on). However, we need to be mindful that we do not react negatively we perceive any such experiences as being desirable, undesirable or boring. One easy way of resolving such emotional reactions is to attend to them as being “mind-made, impermanent.”⁶¹

1.5 RIGHT VIEW AND COMPATIBILISM. The notions of free will and compatibilism may be modern philosophical categories, but they are vitally useful in helping us understand the moral and soteriological significance of early Buddhism, relevant to our lives today. This is not to say that these notions are new to the Buddha’s teaching. The roots of free will and compatibilism can be seen in the right view pericope, formulated as follows:

- (1) There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed.
- (2) There is fruit or result of good and bad actions [karma].
- (3) There is this world, the next world.
- (4) There are mother and father, spontaneously born beings.
- (5) There are brahmins and recluses who, living rightly and practising rightly, proclaim this world and the next after having directly known and realized it for themselves.

(**Apaṇṇaka Sutta**, M 60,6/1:402), SD 35.5⁶²

While (1) refers to the efficacy of actions (such as the benefits of charity), (2) refers to karma and moral accountability, (3) refers to the spatial notion of a universe that other worlds (and parallel universes) as the field of such actions and reactions, (4) refers to the temporal notion of our actions, as having

⁵⁹ On “mental influxes,” see SD 30.3 (1.3.2).

⁶⁰ On the arhat, see (**Arahatta**) **Susīma S** (S 12.70), SD 16.8.

⁶¹ See **Nimitta and anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14 esp (5.3).

⁶² Further see SD 48.2 (3.4.4). For the better known negative formulation as the wrong view pericope, see **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,23/1:55), SD 8.10; **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,10/1:287), SD 5.7; **Sandaka S** (M 76,7.2/1:515), SD 35.7; **Mahā Cattārisaka S** (M 117,5/3:71 f), SD 6.10. The wrong views here are refuted in **Apaṇṇaka S** (M 60,5-12/1:401-404), SD 35.5. See SD 40a.1 (5) Wrong views and right view.

the potential of affecting us even beyond this life, (5) essentially states the possibility of goodness and spiritual liberation.

In giving both the formulation of right views above, and their opposite formulation of wrong views clearly evinces that we have a choice between good and bad. This is our free will. And must choose wisely because whichever we choose would have moral consequences upon us, that is, they affect us physically and mentally. This is the deterministic or conditionality aspect of right view. Both free will and determinism work together harmoniously here.⁶³

1.6 DETERMINISM VERSUS FATALISM

1.6.1 Free will and determinism.

1.6.1.1 Thus far, we have seen that in early Buddhism, free will works closely with conditionality, that is, dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*) [3.3]. Dependent arising, comprising a network of inter-dependent causes and effects is, of course, a form of determinism (because it works on causality). However, without any involvement of an agent [1.3] that is a permanent soul or abiding self, we call this form of causality a “soft determinism.” [1.2.2]

1.6.1.2 In other words, free will and dependent arising work together here, not against one another. In early Buddhism, there is an opposite of dependent arising. It is neither free will nor freedom, but **indeterminism** (*ahetuka,vāda*, non-causality doctrine,⁶⁴ or *ahetuka,diṭṭhi*, non-causality view), as exemplified in **the Nimitta Vagga** (A 2.8).⁶⁵

In early Buddhism, we see versions of indeterminism as the views held by the heterodox teachers Pūraṇa Kassapa as denying any effects of actions (*akiriya,vāda*), and Makkhali Go,sāla as denying any cause or condition (*n’atthi hetu n’atthi paccaya*), that is, non-causality (*ahetu,vāda*).⁶⁶ While Pūraṇa teaches a kind of amoralism (actions have no consequences),⁶⁷ Makkhali rejects causality or conditionality, upholding a sort of predestination [1.6.2] that all beings will be “purified through transmigration” (*samsāra,suddhi*), that is, destined to be purified no matter what they do.⁶⁸

1.6.1.3 If free will is the nature of our awakening or awakened mind, that freedom arises from our understanding of dependent arising—how what we do and what we are, are both dependently arisen. In other words, it is within our power, and indeed, it is an urgent necessity that we exercise this power, to attract the conditions that free our minds.

The opposite of dependent arising—that we can shape our own life and destiny—is the “doctrine of fortuitous arising” (*adhicca,samuppanna,vāda*),⁶⁹ that is to say that things occur incidentally, without cause or reason,⁷⁰ but on account of fate (*niyati*) [1.6.2], chance (*saṅgati*) and nature (*bhāva*).⁷¹ The

⁶³ See Federman 2010:8-15.

⁶⁴ MA 3:121,22 (cf DA 1:168,20); UA 352,4.

⁶⁵ Ten examples of indeterminism or non-causality are given in **Nimitta Vg** (A 2.8.1-10/1:82 f) = BE 1.77-86. UA 345,8; J 5:228,22, 237,7.

⁶⁶ See Ency Bsm: ahetu,vāda; also determinism and indeterminism.

⁶⁷ On Pūraṇa Kassapa, see **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,17/1:52 f), SD 8.10.

⁶⁸ On Makkhali’s indeterminist views (*ahetuka,vāda*), see **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,19/1:53 f), SD 8.10.

⁶⁹ This term, *adhicca,samuppanna,vāda*, although convenient, is rare and commentarial: DA 1:118; ThaA 3:190. The doctrine—that of the “fortuitous originationists”—is def as grounds 17-18 of the 62 grounds for wrong views in **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1,67-70/1:28), SD 25.2.

⁷⁰ D 1:28,21 = U 69,30; D 3:33,15+33, 138,10 = S 2:22,25 = A 3:440,9; S 2:113,2; KhpA 107,5 = Vism 200,29; UA 345.

term was probably an early Buddhist neologism that was coined to contrast with its antonym, *paṭicca-samuppāda*.⁷² It is rarely used outside this context.⁷³

1.6.2 Fatalism

1.6.2.1 We have just noted that the opposite of the early Buddhist doctrine of causality or dependent arising is not free will or freedom, but indeterminism (*adhicca.samupanna,vāda*) [1.6.1.2], which was unequivocally rejected by the Buddha. This, notes Federman, is often overlooked, at least understated in Buddhist scholarship, “perhaps because of the common confusion between determinism and fatalism. The latter is an ethical notion that any choice is meaningless.” (2010:13).

In other words, no matter what we do, things will happen regardless of our efforts. A related term is “predestination,” especially in a God-belief system, where everything, or the more significant things in our lives, is said to be due to “God’s will.” In such a system, “man proposes, God disposes.” We may still do what we like, but we have no control whatsoever over the result of our actions. In this sense, it is the same as fatalism [1.6.2.4].

1.6.2.2 An important related term here is the noun, *niyati*, “necessity, fate”⁷⁴ and its important adjective, *niyata* (often occurring in the Canon), meaning (usually in positive senses): (1) “constrained, bound; restrained; disciplined; constant”⁷⁵ and (2) “(whose outcome is) fixed, determined, inevitable, sure, limited”⁷⁶, especially in the compound, *niyati,vāda*, “the doctrine of necessity or fate.”⁷⁷

The best known usage for sense (2) of *niyata* is found in the streamwinner pericope, thus: “a streamwinner, no longer bound for the lower world,⁷⁸ sure⁷⁹ of going over⁸⁰ to self-awakening (*sotāpanno avinipāta,dhammo niyato sambodhi,parāyano’ti*).⁸¹

Another important term, albeit commentarial, is the compound, *niyata,micchā,diṭṭhi*, “fixed wrong views.” [1.6.2.3]

⁷¹ From the phrase, *niyati,saṅgati,bhāva,pariṇāta*, found in the description of Makkhali Go,sāla’s views, in **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,19/1:53), SD 25; DA 1:161 f & Ency Bsm 4:401 (Determinism and indeterminism).

⁷² See Jayatilleke 1963:445.

⁷³ See Federman 2010:12 f.

⁷⁴ DA 161,24 (*niyatīti niyatā*. ad D 1:53,32: *niyati,saṅgati,bhāva-pariṇatā* = MA 3:120,15 = SA 2:341,10); J 6:-226,22×3.

⁷⁵ V 5:115,22; D 3:217,1; A 4:391,11 (*niyāt’āyuka*, “whose lifetime is fixed”); Dh 142; DhA 3:83; Vv 17.6; J 1:44,-29*, 6:225,27*, 296,9’; Pm 1:130,11. See DP: niyacchati, under “niyata².”

⁷⁶ V 3:10,24; VA 196,19; Dhs 1290; Vbh 121,27 f; Pug 13,20 f.

⁷⁷ MA 3:233,21.

⁷⁸ *Avinipāta*, alt tr “not fated for birth in a suffering state”; opp of *vinipāta*, “the world of ruin/suffering,” another name for the 4 woeful courses (*duggati*) or the 4 lower worlds (*apāya*), esp as *niraya,tiracchāna,pettivisaya,asurakāyā* (KhP 189,12 = DA 2:496,11 (on D 2:55,27) = SA 2:97,5 (on S 2:92,16); Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes 5 courses (*pañca,gati*) (D 33,2.1(4)/3:234; A 9.68/4:459) are mentioned: the hells (*niraya*), the animal birth (*tiracchāna,yoni*), the ghost realm (*petti- or pittī,visaya*), the human world (*manussa*) and the heavenly world (*deva*). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (*asura,kāya*) as the fourth woeful course. The remaining two are “happy courses” (*sugati*). For a discussion, see A:ÑB 1999:14-19. See **Pañca,gati S** (A 9.68/4:459), SD 2.20. See also a late work, **Pañca,gati,dīpana**, ed L Feer (JPTS 1884:152 ff); tr Feer, *Annales du Musée Guimet* 5, 1883:514-528: sv Naraka,kaṇḍa, Tiracchāna~, Peta~, Manussa~, Deva~.

⁷⁹ “Sure,” *niyato*, or “assured (of awakening); of fixed destiny.” “Assurance” (*niyāma*) is a name for the noble path (Vism 177).

⁸⁰ “Going over,” *parāyano*, also “destined for.” Skt *parāyaṇa* can also mean “a place of refuge” (SED sv; not listed in PED or CPD), prob a later Skt usage.

⁸¹ See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1,6/3:225), SD 16.7.

1.6.2.3 Three kinds of *niyata, micchā, diṭṭhi*,⁸² “fixed wrong views” or “false belief entailing inevitable (bad) results,” are mentioned in the Puggala Paññatti Commentary, that is, the false views of:

- | | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|--|
| (1) non-causality | <i>n’atthika, vāda</i> | our actions have neither causes nor effects |
| (2) amorality | <i>akiriya, vāda</i> | our actions have neither good nor bad results |
| (3) annihilationism | <i>n’atthika, vāda</i> | actions have no results, after death, we are annihilated |
- (PugA 251,19)

A person having any such views is said to have “drowned, gone under” (*nimugga*) into the floods of views. The Puggala Paññatti describes such a person as being “of utterly black, unwholesome qualities” (*ekanta, kālakehi akusalehi dhemmehi*) (Pug 7.1). Its commentary quotes Makkhali Go, sāla as an example of one with fixed wrong views (PugA 251,22). [1.6.2.4]

1.6.2.4 Technically (or philosophically), Makkhali’s “doctrine of fixed views” (*niyati, vāda*) would be called fatalism. For this reason, it is rejected by the Buddha, not because of its being determinism. Apparently, notes Federman (2010:13), Makkhali Gosala also believe in a kind of determinism, in which certain cosmic principles govern the amount of pain and pleasure inflicted upon beings.

This aspect of Makkhali’s views is not at odds with the Buddhist doctrine, which accepts that the manifestation of pleasure and pain is governed by natural “law,” that is, karma. Buddhism is at odds with Makkhali’s view when he claims that a person is purified without cause (*ahetu*) or condition (*apaccaya*). In other words, all the causes or conditions for pleasure and pain are external to the person, who can do nothing about his purification.⁸³ Makkhali also claims that there is no “self-effort” or agency (*atta, kāra*), will (*virīya*), or human exertion (*purisa, parakkama*) (*id*).

Makkhali’s position, then, is an ethical one—about what people can and cannot do. The Buddhist rejection of this view, notes Federman, is “not a rejection of a deterministic theory of causality but a rejection of fatalism. The confusion between fatalism and determinism lies at the heart of the above-mentioned objection (that determinism implies that agents are controlled by causality).” (2010:13)⁸⁴

1.6.2.5 In early Buddhism, free will is incompatible with fatalism [1.6.2.1], but it is compatible with determinism. Determinism here, basically, refers to causes and conditions, especially those that we have control over (as in “soft” determinism) [3]. Indeed, we must have soft determinism for free will to work.

Freedom, then, means our ability to achieve certain future scenarios and avoid others. However, because our knowledge of the present and the past is always limited, any attempt to describe the future in advance would be only approximate possible situations. Even if we well know the present, and a knowledge of the past, the future is still uncertain, as it has not yet happened. As such, it is meaningless to speak of omniscience that includes all future knowledge—which would inevitably predestination, even fatalism! Then, it does not really matter whatever we do now, as the future will take its own course any way.

1.6.2.6 The fact that we cannot really know what the future holds is a vital basis for free will. The future, in other words, is yet unmade. Indeed, an exact knowledge of the future is irrelevant since omniscience (in the sense of knowing the exact future) is impossible. This leaves us with plenty of elbow room to observe, learn, and consider various events, and to plan and decide our actions.

⁸² Tkp 168,19; AA 2:27,20+21; PugA 251,19.

⁸³ D 2,19/1:53 (SD 8.10).

⁸⁴ On how Dennett’s analysis (eg 1984:61) show that, while free will is incompatible with fatalism (or, in his words, “inevitability”), it is compatible with determinism, see Federman 2010:13 f.

This view is clearly compatible with how the Buddha understands freedom. For this reason, he rejects the idea of an all-knowing God that transcends the causally operated universe.⁸⁵ He also denies that he has full knowledge of all things since true omniscience is impossible. However, if he wishes, he is able to know anything that can be known about the past or the present. And from both these knowledges, he is able to infer, to some reasonable extent, about the future. For example, he is certain that, on account of his awakening, he would not be reborn.⁸⁶

1.6.2.7 Human choice and effort, then, has a causally effective power within a conditionally operative reality. In other words, the fact that reality is deterministic does not contradict our ability to examine, reflect on what to do next and to decide and act accordingly. This kind of free will—imperfect and limited, as it may be, but neither powerless nor irrelevant—is not the opposite of determinism, but of fatalism.

While determinism means that things happen because various conditions caused them, it is silent on whether an agent [1.3] (some kind of abiding self or entity) causes anything. As evident in early Buddhism, determinism may work even in a world without agents at all. On the other hand, fatalism is an ethical view because it says that agents do not have the power to cause anything, so that there is no point in trying. This understanding has far-reaching ethical significance, and the Buddha is fully aware of this.⁸⁷

2 The “will” and early Buddhism

2.1 Early in the history of the modern study of Buddhism, C A F Rhys Davids, in her much neglected essay, “**On the will in Buddhism**” (1898), complains how “[t]he critics unversed in the study of the Buddhist Canon in the original” have followed “Schopenhauer’s pointing finger” in labeling Buddhism as “Pessimism, Pantheism, Atheism, Nihilism, Quietism, or Apatheia” (1898:47). Rhys Davids explains that a major way by which these scholars’ squint have arisen is through wholesale reliance on translations (without checking them out against the original texts): “In respect of the language through which they acquire their knowledge of Buddhist philosophy, they are at the mercy of the translator” (1898:47 f).

2.2 Even in the last century, world-renowned scholars such as historian Arnold Toynbee erroneously asserted that “inward peace” in Buddhism seems “unattainable” because desires cannot be given up without cultivating the desire to give them up, and that Buddhism enjoins “the suppression of desires that are ordinarily regarded as being altruistic, such as love and pity.”⁸⁸ This only shows how misinformed and unsympathetic they are about early Buddhism or Buddhism in general.

The problem of language still confronts those of us who try to translate the early Buddhist ideas so that the minds of our times can understand them. This problem is especially acute in connection with our task at hand, namely, that of understanding the nature of the will and early Buddhism.

⁸⁵ **Brahmajāla S** (D 144/1:18 f), SD 25.2.

⁸⁶ **Te,vijja Vaccha,gotta S** (M 71,6-10/1:481-483), SD 53.3. The last knowledge—that of the future—where it is possible to know is called “inferential knowledge” (*anvaye ñāṇa*). **Saṅgīti S** (D 33) speaks of 4 kinds of knowledges: knowledge of the present (*dhamme ñāṇa*), inference (*anvaye ñāṇa*), knowledge of other’s minds (*pariye ñāṇa*) and conventional knowledge (*sammutiyā ñāṇa*) (D 1,1(11)/3:226).

⁸⁷ See Federman 2010:14.

⁸⁸ *An Historian’s Approach to Religion*, London: Oxford University Press, 1956:64. Qu by Bruce Matthews 1983: 77, where he mentions other examples.

2.3 C A F Rhys Davids sums up the problem in these words:

As only one of several important instances, I would draw attention to the Buddhist attitude in relation to the volitional side of the human mind. It is not possible to equate in Pali the word “will,” either in psychological comprehensiveness, or for its train of bad metaphysic. If however, we lop off the metaphysic, and resolve “will” into the classes of mental states or processes, of which it forms a factor more or less, and which, in its wider or its narrower meaning, it is used to designate, we shall find in Buddhist terminology abundance of suitable words, and in the philosophical treatises an application of them as discriminative as we find among ourselves, and sometimes even more so.

There is so far no evidence of a reduction of complex volition into simple conation, such as may be found in our more scientific modern textbooks. There is no such developed psychology to be met with as is implied in the strictly psychological use of carefully distinct terms (such as Appetite, Desire, Deliberate Choice), where a coefficient of bare conation is discerned as involved with feeling of a certain sort, or with both intellect and emotion. But we do find in the Piṭakas a pretty constant discrimination in the employment of terms connoting volition, between psychological import only and ethical or moral implication.

(C A F Rhys Davids, “On the will in Buddhism,” 1898:48 f)

We shall here examine some of the Pāli texts related to the conative or “willing” aspects of early Buddhist psychology. At the end of this essay, we shall continue this discussion of a “conative psychology.” [7]

3 A “soft” determinism

3.1 The tide has changed in recent times due to the maturing of modern Buddhist studies. A number of modern scholars have written insightful papers on the question of free will in the Nikāyas.⁸⁹ The earliest formulation of the free will question is found in the speculations of the anti-brahminical eremitical *śramaṇa* movement⁹⁰ of the 6th-5th century BCE of the central Gangetic plain. The sramanas⁹¹ are generally divided into two groups: the *kamma, vādī* or *kiriya, vādī*, who claims that there would be retribution for human deeds,⁹² and the *akiriya, vādī* for whom all human effort is fruitless.⁹³

The efficacy of action view (*kamma, vāda*) is that our present condition is partly the result of our deeds in previous lives. Those who reject this view, that is, the non-efficacy of action (*akiriya, vāda*), believe that all deeds, past, present or future, have no effect on the condition of beings. “Thus, in its extreme forms the [*akiriya, vādī*] would say that there is actually no causal connection between what a living being does and what he is or becomes, in this or in another life” (Gomez 1975:81 f).

⁸⁹ For useful and easy introductions, see Chinda Chandrkaew, “Buddhist concept of free-will,” 1973; Luis O Gomez, “Some aspects of the free-will question in the Nikāyas,” 1975; Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 1992:210-222. See biblio for details.

⁹⁰ Śramaṇa movement, see eg KN Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:69-168.

⁹¹ This anglicized word is found in modern English dictionaries such as the Webster’s 3rd New International.

⁹² See, eg: V 1:71 (where erstwhile fire-worshippers are allowed ordination without probation since they are *kamma, vādī*); **Soṇadaṇḍa S** (D 4.6), where the Buddha is declared to be “one who teaches karma, who teaches (the efficacy of) action” (*kamma, vādī kiriya, vādī*) (D 4,6/1:115); **Añña, titthiya S** (S 12.24) where Sāriputta declares to the wanderers that the Buddha teaches the efficacy of action (S 12.14/2:33 ff).

⁹³ The locus classicus is **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2), on the views of the 6 heretical teachers (such as Makkhali Go, -sāla) (D 2,16-33/1:52-59). The notion that actions are fruitless does not necessarily imply a denial of the law of karma as seen in the threefold classification of non-action (*akiriya*) in **Titth’āyatana S** (A 3.61): our present condition is all due to our past actions; that it is the result of a god’s creation; or, that it is by sheer chance (A 3.61.1-4/1:173-175), SD 6.8 (2004). See also S 3:210; A 1:286 (*n’atthi kammaṃ, n’atthi kiriyaṃ, n’atthi viriyaṃ*).

3.2 In the Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta (D 4.6), the Buddha himself is declared to be “one who teaches karma, who teaches (the efficacy of) action” (*kamma, vādī kiriyā, vādī*) (D 4,6/1:115). The Jains, however, appear to have considered themselves *akiriyā, vādī*.⁹⁴ Gomez, in his article, “Some aspects of the free will question in the Nikāyas,” notes:

The reason is obvious, to the Buddhist what determined the future was not the act itself but the intention of the act.⁹⁵ This to the Jain seemed to culminate, by necessity, in moral corruption, for them, they claimed there would be no objective criteria for right and wrong. In a certain sense, they were right in claiming that the Buddhist was not a *kriyāvādin*; at least we must grant that Buddhism does not represent strict *karmavāda*, that is, it would not accept a necessary and unqualified relation of cause and effect between an act and its retribution. Evidently the Buddhist would consider certain acts as not retributable.⁹⁶ Now, this very question is central to the problem of determinism; whether the human condition is or is not necessarily and absolutely determined. The question whether this predetermination is of one’s own doing is ultimately irrelevant if the determination is unqualified.⁹⁷ The Buddhist texts, therefore, will often offer a view of karmic causation that could best be described as “**weak**” or **modified [or “soft”] kriyāvāda**: the human condition is not totally or absolutely determined by the deeds of the human agent.
(Gomez 1975:82; emphasis added)

3.3 The fact that all conditioned existence (that is, everything “outside” of nirvana) keeps to the law of conditionality, fully exemplified in the 12-link formula of dependent arising (*paṭicca, samuppāda*),⁹⁸ clearly shows that Buddhism teaches determinism, but as Gomez states, this is a “weak” or modified determinism, which is similar to “soft determinism” [1.2.2]. That is to say, we are not totally determined by our deeds—an important fact attested in a number of places in the Canon.⁹⁹ The main point is that the cycle of dependent arising is *reversible*, that is, the reverse (*paṭiloma*) cycle ends what has arisen from the forward (*anuloma*) cycle.¹⁰⁰ The reversibility of the dependent arising is clearly evident in **the nun Selā’s reply** when Māra tries to confuse her.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ H Jacobi, *Jaina Sutras* II, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884:309, 316-319, 385; but the Jain stand is by no means clear. In **Soṇakāyana S** (A 4.233), the brahmin Sikha Moggallāna says that the youth Soṇakāyana accuses the Buddha of *akiriya, vāda* and annihilationism, but Soṇakāyana’s own allegiances are not mentioned (A 4.233/2:232).

⁹⁵ See H Jacobi, *Jaina Sutras*, 1884:414 f. The locus classicus for this question is, of course, **Upāli S** (M 2:371 ff). Cf **Śrī Sūyagaḍāṅga, sutta** (Dvitiyāṅgam) (Sūtrakṛtāṅga, sūtra, the 2nd Aṅga of the Jain Canon with commentaries in Skt by Śīlaṅgācārya (Śīlāṅka) and Harṣakula...), Bombay: Nirnayasaagara Press, 1879:323, 927 f. [Gomez’s fn, normalized]

⁹⁶ See below, the discussion on **Loṇa, phala S** (A 3.99/1:249-253). See also **(Mūla) Nidāna S** (A 3.33/1:134-136), esp *Yaṃ bhikkhave alobha, kataṃ kammaṃ alobha, jaṃ...lobhe vigate evaṃ taṃ kammaṃ pahīnaṃ hoti ucchinna, -mūlaṃ? Tālā, vatthu, kataṃ anabhāvamkataṃ āyatim anuppāda, dhammaṃ... (A 3.33, 2/1:135).*

⁹⁷ This is clearly the position of some passages in the Nikāyas, such as **Devadaha S** (M 101/2:214-228), discussed later, and the text referred to in **[Sāmañña, phala S** (D16-33/1:52-59)]. But I am not sure that all Buddhists would concur; cf, for example, Bodhicaryāvatāra and Pañjikā 9.71-73 and the key passage in 6.30-32. [Gomez’s fn]

⁹⁸ On deopendent arising, see 5.16.

⁹⁹ See **Atta, kāri S** (A 6.38), SD 7.6 esp (3).

¹⁰⁰ That Buddhism teaches karma is a sort of determinism, but it also teaches personal effort (*atta, kāri*). As such, this Buddhist approach here could, in modern philosophical terms, be called **compatibilism** (see Anthony Freeman, 2000:61 f). See also Luis O Gomez 1975:85.

¹⁰¹ Gomez however thinks that Selā’s stanza has a “deterministic ring in the theory of nonself” (1975:86).

- 548 [Māra:] By whom is this figure (*bimba*) made?
Where is the maker of this figure?
Whence has this figure arisen?
Where does the figure cease?
- 549 [Selā:]¹⁰² This figure is not made by self-made (*atta,kata*),
Nor is this misery (*agha*) made by another (*para,kata*).
It has come to be dependent on a cause (*hetu*):
With the cause's breakup it will end. (S 15.9/1:134)

The Saṃyutta Commentary says that both “figure” (*bimba*) [548a] refers to individual existence (*atta,-bhāva*), and *agha* [549b] too is individual existence because it is a basis for suffering (SA 1:193).

3.4 During the Buddha's time, there are two opposing views as regards to suffering: one is that suffering is caused by oneself (*atta,kata*) [549a], the other is that it is caused by others (*para,kata*) [549b]. The eternalists (*sassata,vādī*), who hold to the former notion, believe that there is a permanent self (soul) transmigrating from life to life, reaping the fruits of its own deeds.

The annihilationists (*uccheda,vādī*), especially the materialists, who hold the latter position, believe that we are annihilated at death and nothing survives, so that our share of suffering and happiness is due entirely to external conditions. A number of suttas in **the Nidāna Saṃyutta** (S 12) discuss this problem, namely, the Acela Kassapa Sutta (S 12.17/2:18-22); the Timbaruka Sutta (S 12.18/2:22 f); the Añña Titthiya Sutta (S 12.24/2:32-37), and the Bhūmija Sutta (S 12.25/2:37-41).

3.5 In **the Sīvaka Sutta** (S 36),¹⁰³ the Buddha tells the wanderer Moliya Sīvaka that what we experience (feel) is not always due to past deeds (determinism) [1.6.2], but could be due to various physical causes: bile disorders, phlegm disorders, wind disorders, a combination, weather change [heat], carelessness, assault [accidents and trauma], and the results of our karma.

Now, Sīvaka, when those recluses and brahmins teach such a teaching, who hold such a view: “Whatever a person feels, whether it is pleasurable, painful or neutral, all that is due to past deeds”—they deviate from what one should know for oneself, and from the common truth in the world. Therefore, I say that these recluses and brahmins are wrong. (S 36.21/4:230 f)

KARMA AND THE WILL

4 Not everything is due to karma

4.1 COMMON SENSE. This “common sense” statement of the Buddha simply points to the obvious fact, as attested in the **Atta,kārī Sutta** (A 6.38),¹⁰⁴ that beings are known to exercise free will in such universal

¹⁰² For an interpretation of Selā's reply, see **Bhava S** (A 3.76/1:223 f), where it is said that karma is the field, consciousness and craving the moisture “for the consciousness of beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving” for further existence. “The ‘cause’ (*hetu*), then, is the kammically formative consciousness accompanied by ignorance and craving. When that dissolves through the elimination of ignorance and craving, there is no production of aggregates, elements, and sense bases in a future life” (S:B 429 n359). The imagery of seeds and vegetation found in **Bīja S** (S 22.54/3:54 f) also helps to clarify these verses.

¹⁰³ See SD 5.6.

¹⁰⁴ SD 7.6.

actions as walking about and doing things. This is “the free will of beings” (*sattānaṃ atta,kāro*) (A 6.38,4+10/3:338).¹⁰⁵

4.2 SOFT DETERMINISM IN THE SUTTAS. Another well known text attesting to the “weak,” modified or “soft” determinism [3] of Buddhism is **the *Loṇa,phala Sutta*** (A 3.99), where it is stated,

1 (a) “Monks, for one who says thus: ‘Whatever karma a person¹⁰⁶ performs, he would experience *that same karma*,’¹⁰⁷ [that is, he reaps as he has sown] there is no living of the holy life, no opportunity for the right ending of suffering.

But, monks, for one who says thus: ‘**Whatever experienceable karma [one that entails a consequence] that a person does, he would experience *the result of that karma* [that is, whatever fruits he reaps, they accord with his karma],**’¹⁰⁸ there is the living of the holy life, the opportunity for the right ending of suffering.¹⁰⁹

(b) Here, monks, for a certain person who has done only a slight evil karma, it might take him to hell. Again, monks, for another¹¹⁰ person that same slight evil karma is felt right here and now—not in the least does it seem to be abundant at all.¹¹¹

2 (a) Monks, **what sort of person who has done only a slight evil karma, it might take him to hell?**

Here, monks, a certain person is of undeveloped body,¹¹² undeveloped moral virtue, undeveloped mind, undeveloped wisdom: he is (mentally) limited (*paritta*), he has a **small**¹¹³ **self** (*app’ātuma*)—he dwells small and suffering.¹¹⁴

Such a person, monks, is one who has done only a slight evil karma, it might take him to hell.

(b) Monks, **what sort of person is one who has done that same slight evil karma that is felt right here and now—not in the least does it seem to be abundant at all?**

¹⁰⁵ See Chinda Chandrkaew 1973:277.

¹⁰⁶ “A person,” *ayaṃ puriso*, lit “this person”.

¹⁰⁷ *Yathā yathāyaṃ puriso kammaṃ karoti tathā tathā taṃ patisaṃvediyati*. It is possible here that “karma” (*kammaṃ*) also refers to the Vedic sacrifice. In that case, the Buddha is saying that there is no wholesome efficacy in such rituals.

¹⁰⁸ *Yathā vedanīyaṃ ayaṃ puriso kammaṃ karoti tathā tathāssa vipakaṃ patisaṃvediyati*. “That should be experienced,” *vedanīyaṃ*, or “that which should be felt or known”. A:ÑB has “But if one says that a person who performs a kammic action (with a result) that is variably experienceable, will reap its result accordingly—in that there will be (a possibility for) the holy life...” (A:ÑB 315 n70). I take “experienceable” (*vedanīyaṃ*) here as qualifying “karma” (*kammaṃ*); that is, to distinguish “experienceable karma” (one’s personal action) from the Vedic *karma* or ritual. Gomez renders *vedanīyaṃ* here as that which “do entail a consequence” (1975:83).

¹⁰⁹ Henry Clarke Warren, in the early years of western Buddhist scholarship, gives a very insightful, if somewhat free, tr of this passage [1a]: “O priests, if any one were to say that a man must reap according to his deeds, in that case, O priests, there is no religious life, nor is any opportunity afforded for the entire extinction of misery. But if anyone says, O priests, that the reward a man reaps accords with his deeds, in that case, O priests, there is religious life, and opportunity is afforded for the entire extinction of misery.” (*Buddhism in Translations*, 1896:221)

¹¹⁰ “For another,” *ekaccassa*, lit “for a certain (person).”

¹¹¹ Be *Nāṇupi khāyati kiṃ bahu-d-eva*. Cf *n’atthi aṇū pi saññā*, “not even a minute perception; not the least” (Sn 802).

¹¹² “Undeveloped in body,” *abhāvita,kāya*, here meaning “resorting to self-torture, not taking care of one’s body or health”. See **Loṇa,phala S** (A 3.99), SD 3.5 Intro.

¹¹³ “Small self” (*app’ātumā*) or “insignificant self” (Harvey 1995:25, 56).

¹¹⁴ *Appa,dukkha,vihārī*. Comy: *Appakena pi pāpena dukkha,vihārī*, “he dwells in suffering because of the little evil” (AA 2:361). This phrase is clearly to be contrasted with *appamāṇa,vihārī* below.

Here, monks, a certain person is of developed body, developed moral virtue, developed mind, developed wisdom: he is (mentally) unlimited (*aparitta*), he has a **great self** (*mah'attā*)¹¹⁵—he dwells immeasurable (*appamāṇa*).

Such a person, monks, is one who has done that same slight evil karma that is felt right here and now—not in the least does it seem to be abundant at all. (A 3.99,1-2/3:249)¹¹⁶

Then follows the famous simile of the salt crystal: when a small grain of salt is dropped into the Ganges river, it makes no difference to her waters, but when a large grain of salt is dropped into a cup of water, it becomes undrinkable due to its salty taste. Even so, one who habitually lives a wholesome life but falls into an occasional moral lapse (the small grain of salt) suffers not its fruit in the hereafter; but the habitual evil-doer suffers the fruit both here and hereafter.

5 Karma, *cetanā* and volition

5.1 Damien Keown, in his book *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (1992), discusses the close similarities between the Buddhist notion of *cetanā* and Aristotle's *prohairesis*, both terms translatable by "moral choice." One important common characteristic is that "in both cases the excellence of reason is to be found in intuitive insight and the excellence of the emotions in moral perfection" (1992:211). In other words, there is an overlapping and interconnection between reason and emotion, between the cognitive and affective powers of the psyche.¹¹⁷

The impulse for action, however, comes not from the intellectual faculties but from the non-rational part of the psyche, or the emotions. In terms of the *Abhidhamma* analysis, these twin intellectual and emotional operations would seem to be embraced by the group of six "specific" (*paññā*) psychic functions (*cetasikas*), namely, "applied thought" (*vitakka*), "sustained thought" (*vicāra*), "resolution" (*adhimokkha*), "courage" (*virīya*), "joy" (*pīti*) and "desire" (*chanda*).¹¹⁸ These two complementary processes are fused in *cetanā*, the compass-needle of moral choice, which is deflected in accordance with the psychic field around it. Assuming that one both understands what is good and also desires it, the moral course will lie towards virtue (*kusala*) and final perfection (nirvana).

(Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 1992:212 f; emphasis added)

5.2 Y Karunaratna, in his article on "Cetanā" in the *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, notes that

Cetanā or the will is conditioned by affective and cognitive elements (*vedanā, saññā*) and may either function as the closely directed effort on the part of the individual or it may function, as it often does, without conscious deliberation by him... (*Encyclopaedia of Buddhism: cetanā*, 90)

Cetanā is often translated as "volition" or "intention," both of which is taken only in their purely cognitive sense, would give them a false and inaccurate narrowness. But since words are the meanings

¹¹⁵ On the "great self", see **Loṇa,phala S** (A 3.99), SD 3.5 Intro.

¹¹⁶ See SD 3.5 esp (2).

¹¹⁷ See eg Bruce Matthews 1975 & 1983.

¹¹⁸ On the meanings of these terms, see DhsA 142-145.

we tag onto them, we can use words meaningfully.¹¹⁹ In the **Poṭṭhapāda Sutta** (D 9),¹²⁰ the Buddha declares to the householder Citta that he (the Buddha) uses words, terms and language as a skilful means:

For, Citta, these are merely common names, common expressions, common usages, common designations in the world that the Tathāgata [Thus Come] uses without attachment to them."¹²¹ (D 14,55/1:202)

5.3 Due to the lack of common English words to translate such technical Buddhist terms as *cetanā*, we can use English near-synonyms by clearly re-defining them in our own usage within the Buddhist context. Having said that, we can translate *cetanā* as “volition” or “intention,” defining it as “the choice, conscious or unconscious, to act based on a thought or a feeling,” or as the Attha,sālinī puts it: “That which intends is called **cetanā**: the meaning is that it directs to itself related mental states as objects” (*cetayati ti cetanā, saddhim attanā sampayutta, dhamme ārammaṇe abhisandahati ti attho*, DhsA 111). Damien Keown makes a helpful note:

We may note, however, that what is put into effect need not be physical action, and that the use of the term “volition” may not always be inaccurate. The Buddha seems to have held the view that the process of *cetanā* was followed by a *praxis* of some kind, and that deliberation (*cetayitvā*) was followed by action (*kammaṃ karoti*). However, he distinguishes three types of *praxis*: bodily (*kāyasā*) [sic],¹²² vocal (*vācāsā*) [sic] and mental (*manasā*). *Cetanā*, then, reaches a terminus with moral implications, but the morally determinative *praxis* may be purely mental in form. When *cetanā* is used in this sense, the translation of it by “volition” may not be misleading. (Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 1992:220)

5.4 *Cetanā*, as such, is not the “will” as taken in the modern philosophical sense, but is the mind behind the act (bodily, verbal or mental) rooted in an immoral intention (*lobha*, greed; *dosa*, hate; *moha*, delusion) or rooted in a moral intention (*alobha*, non-greed = generosity; *adosa*, non-hate = lovingkindness; *amoha*, non-delusion = wisdom). How did the notion of the will as we knew it arise then?

6 The origin of the “will”

6.1 One of the ancient theistic shadows that still lurks in English and other western languages is the notion of “free will.” Even the Bible and ancient Greek philosophers do not have any word for “will,” but speak rather of “choice,” that is, decisions regarding what to do stemming from reasoning of what we need and how to get it, or else from irrational wants. In other words, choice is the result of some combination of reason and desire, rather than an exercise of the “will.”

¹¹⁹ Padmasiri de Silva, while acknowledging that *cetanā* and *saṅkhāra* are often synonymous, and “suggests the idea of volition” (1979:78), thinks they cannot be adequately rendered into English as “will” or “volition” (1979:79). He suggests translating *saṅkhāra* as “conative dispositions” (1979:78).

¹²⁰ See SD 7.14 (2005). On how the Buddha redefines various brahminical terms to effectively communicate with to his audience, see A K Warder 1956, Joanna Jurewicz 1995, 2000, & K R Norman 1991.

¹²¹ *Loka, samaññā loka, niruttiyo loka, vohārā loka, paññattiyo yāhi Tathāgato voharati aparāmasan ti*, lit “These are names of the world, expressions of the world, usages in the world, designations in the world...” See **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 14,55/1:202), SD 7.14 (1).

¹²² This Pali word and the next do not exist, and should respectively be *kāyena* and *vācāya*.

A number of western scholars have shown that it was **Augustine of Hippo** (354-430), a dominant personality of the western Church during his time, who “was, in fact, the inventor of our modern notion of the will”¹²³ and “the first philosopher of the will.”¹²⁴ One of his reasons for his invention of the notion of “will” (*voluntas*) was to explain the origin of evil and sin, which Augustine traced back to a primeval “perversion of the will.”¹²⁵

Augustine had the deep conviction that if people are evil, it is their fault, not God’s or the world’s. For Augustine, all God’s creation (including free will) is good—“all that is, is good.”¹²⁶ However, when this free will is used to turn away from God, it is a sin. Whereas sin is caused by the act of free will, virtue, on the other hand, is not the result of human will, but of God’s grace. In other words, evil arose from what is good! Of course, Augustine’s philosophical situation here is more complicated. Understandably, even modern Christian theologians have great difficulty with Augustine’s theology of free will.¹²⁷

6.2 Neither Aristotle’s *prohairesis* nor the Buddhist *cetanā*—both translatable as “moral choice”—are pure abstract volitions. Aristotle is sometimes criticized for failing to develop an adequate theory of the will, but most modern philosophers think that Aristotle “did not do so badly without it.”¹²⁸ Anthony Kenny replies to this charge as follows:

The criticism of Aristotle depends upon a certain view of the nature of the will. According to a view familiar in modern philosophical tradition, the will is a phenomenon of introspective consciousness. Volition is a mental event which precedes and causes certain human actions: its presence or absence makes the difference between voluntary actions. The freedom of the will is to be located in the indeterminacy of these internal volitions. The occurrence of volitions, and their freedom from causal control, is a matter of intimate experience

It is true that this account of the will is not to be found in Aristotle. This is not to Aristotle’s discredit, for this whole conception of volition and freedom has been subjected, in our own time, to decisive criticism by philosophers such as Ryle and Wittgenstein. Philosophers who accept the criticisms of this school have attempted to build afresh a philosophical theory of the springs of human action which will be free of the confusions involved in the theory familiar in modern philosophical tradition. The resulting new structures bear a remarkable resemblance to what we find in Aristotle’s *Ethics*. (Kenny, *Aristotle’s Theory of the Will*, Yale, 1979:vii f)¹²⁹

6.3 Modern Buddhist scholars are themselves aware of the absence of “free will” in Buddhism, and that as such it is also free from its philosophical problems. Y Karunaratna, for example, writes:¹³⁰

¹²³ Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*, University of California, 1982:144, also 123, 127; & Alasdair McIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame, 1988:156 ff. See also foll n.

¹²⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind 2: “Willing,”* NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978:84-110. John Hick says that “St Augustine...has probably done more than any other writer after St Paul to shape the structure of orthodox Christian belief...for Augustine’s influence was exerted at an earlier and more plastic stage in the growth of the Christian mind...” (J Hick, *Evil and the Good of Love*, London: Macmillan, 1985:37). See also Hick 1985:59-69.

¹²⁵ *Confessions* 7:15.22: The perverted will is “twisted away from you, O God, the highest substance, to lower things.” Perversion = *per* (wrong way) + *versus* (turning).

¹²⁶ *Confessions* 7:15.28.

¹²⁷ Damien Keown notes, “It is likely that the origination of the philosophical concept of the will by Augustine was influenced and facilitated by the Latin language and its comparative lack of psychological refinement,” and qu A Dihle (1982:132 ff) where this problem is discussed at length.

¹²⁸ W F R Hardie, *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980:163. Qu by Keown 1992:215.

¹²⁹ Qu by Keown 1992:215. See op cit 1992:214-218 for a discussion on “The Will.”

¹³⁰ Qu by Keown 1992:216, 218, who also qu Padmasiri de Silva, *Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, 1979:78.

The expression “freedom of the *will*” or its equivalent is not found in the *suttas* or other authentic texts recording the teachings of the Buddha and its use in modern expositions only reflects an unstated wish to interpret Buddhist thought in terms of the categories of Western thought.

(Karunaratna, *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism: cetaṇā*, p91)

6.4 In summary, we can say that since the Buddha’s teaching does not subscribe to the notion of the will (which is a later theistic invention), Buddhism does not subscribe to the notion of “free will.” This is not because the Buddha does not teach that we have a moral choice in our actions, but simply that both the notion of the “will” and connected idea of “free will” are both later theistic inventions that are narrow and problematic which even most modern philosophers reject.

7 The “will” in early Buddhism

7.1 Due to the limitation of the psychological vocabulary in English, the Pāli term *cetaṇā* is often rendered as “will,” although it is just as often translated as “intention” or “volition.” The Anglo-Saxon word “**will**” has the advantages of being the shortest and simplest of the three terms, and as such should be adopted, taking care to note its proper application in Buddhism. **Sue Hamilton** makes this insightful observation:

In the *Khandha Saṃyutta*, the *saṅkhāra-k,khandha* is defined as the six groups of volitional activity.¹³¹ Once again the sixfold classification is according to the connection of the six senses with their corresponding six objects. Significantly, this definition of the *saṅkhāra-k,khandha* clearly separates what in the West would probably be called “will” from the other mental states.¹³² In Buddhism, the teaching that karma is intention makes it particularly important that this be clearly defined: the nature, presence or absence of volitional states determine the way in which, and the extent to which, one is “bound.”

(Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:71; Pāli normalized)

7.2 The nature of the volition or will (*cetaṇā*) can be further teased out from the Buddha’s famous definition of karma:

I say, monks, that karma is volition. Having willed, one acts through the body, through speech and through the mind. (A 3:425; cf D3:104)

“At first sight,” notes Sue Hamilton, “the second sentence here appears to have the rather odd meaning of ‘having willed (mental activity), one acts through the mind (more undifferentiated mental activity).’ But this is a context in which the will is clearly distinguished from thoughts, and so the definition of karma means: ‘*Bhikkhus*, I say that action is the will. It is according to one’s will that what are referred to as bodily actions, speech and thoughts take place.’” (1996:109)

7.3 *Saṅkhārā* (*saṃ + √kr̥*, to do) are so called because they volitionally construct conditioned states.¹³³ They volitionally construct the conditioned states that are the body, feeling, perception, volitional activities and consciousness, that is, the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*) (S 3:87). This passage clearly shows

¹³¹ *Katamā ca bhikkhave saṅkhārā? Cha-y-ime bhikkhave cetaṇā,kāyā* (S 3:60) [Hamilton’s fn].

¹³² “I am using ‘will’ in a general commonsense way and do not imply any technical meaning which may be associated with specific philosophies” [Hamilton’s fn].

¹³³ *Saṅkhataṃ abhisāṅkharotī ti bhikkhave tasmā saṅkhārā ti vuccanti* (S 3:87).

that the individual's will determines his future existence: "one's volitions are the instrumental factor in the coming-to-be of the entire human being."¹³⁴

7.4 The Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta (M 18) is instructive here where Mahā Kaccāna (with the Buddha's approval) makes this important observation that is the heart of the sutta:

¹³⁵Friends, dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. **The meeting of the three is contact.**¹³⁶ With contact as condition, there is feeling. What one feels, one **[112]** perceives. What one perceives, one thinks about.¹³⁷ What one thinks about, one mentally proliferates.¹³⁸ What a person mentally proliferates is the source through which perceptions and notions due to mental proliferation¹³⁹ impacts one regarding past, future and present forms cognizable through the eye.¹⁴⁰

Friends, dependent on the ear and sounds, ear-consciousness arises....

Friends, dependent on the nose and smells, nose-consciousness arises....

Friends, dependent on the tongue and tastes, tongue-consciousness arises....

Friends, dependent on the body and touches, body-consciousness arises....

Friends, dependent on the mind¹⁴¹ and mind-objects, mind-consciousness¹⁴² arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as condition, there is feeling. What one feels, one perceives. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one mentally proliferates. What a person mentally proliferates is the source through which perceptions and notions

¹³⁴ Sue Hamilton 1979:71 & fn: "Collins (1982:202) translated *saṅkhatam abhisankharoti ti tasmā saṅkhāra* as '(people) form a construction, thus they are "formations".' Though this translation may be philosophically correct, it makes no mention either of the *khandha* the passage is defining or of the role of the volitions in the constructing of an individual."

¹³⁵ *Cakkhuñ ca āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhu,viññāṇam, tiṇṇam saṅgati phasso, phassa,paccayā vedanā, yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi, yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti, yaṃ papañceti tato,nidānam purisaṃ papañca,saññā,saṅkhā samudācaranti atītānagata,paccuppannesu cakkhu,viññeyyesu rūpesu.* A passage similar to this section is found in **Pariññā S** (S 35.60) where, however, the learned noble disciple becomes disillusioned (*nibbindati*) with the contact arising from sense-organ, sense-object and sense-consciousness (also using the sentence, *tinnam saṅgati phasso* [16]), and as such "becomes dispassionate (*virajjati*); through dispassion, he is freed (*vimuccati*); through liberation, he understands, 'Clinging has been fully understood by me.'" (S 35.60/4:32 f). **The Mahā Hatthi,padōpama S** (M 28) closes with a similar, beginning with the statement: "If, friends, internally **the eye** is unimpaired [intact] but no external forms come into its range, and there is no appropriate conscious engagement [appropriate act of attention] (*tajjo samannāhāro hoti*), then there is no appearance of that class of consciousness" (M 28,27-38/1:190 f). On Nāṇananda's notion of the 3 phases of mental proliferation, see **Madhu,-piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14 (2).

¹³⁶ *Tiṇṇam saṅgati phasso.* For a discussion on this passage, see Bucknell 1999:318 f f.

¹³⁷ "One thinks about," *vitakketi*. On how when thinking stops, desires do not arise, see **Sakka,pañha S** (D 21,2.2-/2:277).

¹³⁸ This verse up to here is also found in **(Samuday'atthaṅgama) Loka S** (A 12.44/2:71-73) and **(Sabb'upādāna) Pariññā S** (S 35.60/4:32 f) in different contexts.

¹³⁹ *Papañca,saññā,saṅkhā*, see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14 (3).

¹⁴⁰ This important passage is the earliest statement on the Buddhist theory of perception. See **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14 (4) above.

¹⁴¹ "The mind," *mana*. Here Comy glosses as *bhavaṅga,citta* (MA 2:79), the life-continuum, sometimes called the unconscious or sub-conscious.

¹⁴² "Mind-consciousness," *mano,viññāṇa*. Here Comy glosses as "advertence" (*āvajjana*) and impulsion (*javana*) (MA 2:77).

due to mental proliferation impacts one regarding past, future and present mind-objects cognizable through the mind. (M 18,16/1:111 f @ SD 6.14)

From this passage we can note that sensory activity comprises a triad of sense-organ, sense-object and sense-consciousness. In his Majjhima translation manuscript, Ñāṇamoli makes this insightful observation:

The meeting of eye, form, and eye-consciousness is called contact. Contact, according to dependent origination [*paṭicca,samuppāda*], is the principal condition for feeling. Feeling and perception are inseparable [**Mahā Vedalla Sutta**, M 43,9/1:293]. What is perceived as “this” is thought about in its differences and is thus diversified from “that” and from “me.” This diversification—involving craving for form, wrong view about permanence of form, etc, and the conceit “I am”—leads to preoccupation with calculating the desirability of past and present forms with a view to obtaining desirable forms in the future. (M:ÑB 1205 n232)

7.5 The Mahā Hatthi, padôpama Sutta (M 28) closes with a similar analysis of the eighteen elements (the 6 sense-organs, and 6 sense-objects and 6 sense-consciousnesses) as does **the Madhu, piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18.16), beginning with the statement:

If, friends, internally **the eye** is unimpaired [intact] but no external forms come into its range, and there is no appropriate conscious engagement [appropriate act of attention] (*tajjo samannāhāro hoti*), then there is no appearance of that class of consciousness. (M 28,27-38/1:190 f)

However, when there is an appropriate conscious engagement, then the sense is stimulated. **The Madhu, piṇḍika Sutta** continues, showing how from such a sense-stimulus, that is, contact (*phassa*), there arises feeling and so on:

Indeed, friends, when there is the eye, a visual form and eye-consciousness [and, mutatis mutandis, all the other four sense-organs, and their respective objects and consciousnesses], it is possible to discern **contact**.¹⁴³

That being the case, when there is contact, it is possible to discern **feeling**.

That being the case, when there is feeling, it is possible to discern **perception**.

That being the case, when there is perception, it is possible to discern **thinking**.

That being the case, when there is thinking, it is possible to discern **the impact of perceptions and notions due to mental proliferation**. (M 18,17.1/1:112), SD 6.14

7.6 In terms of the aggregates (*khandha*), **feeling** (*vedanā*) here can be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, but **formation** (*saṅkhāra*) is only involved if there is a volition related to the feeling. For this reason, in **the Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43), Sāriputta instructs Mahā Koṭṭhita thus:

¹⁴³ So vat'āvuso cakkhusmim sati rūpe sati cakkhu,viññāṇe sati phassa,paññattim paññāpessati ti thānam.. Comy says that this passage shows the entire round of existence (*vaṭṭā*) by way of the 12 sense-bases. The next section [18] shows the cessation of the round (*vivaṭṭa*) by the negation of the 12 sense-bases. (MA 2:78). The structure *paññattim paññāpessati* (lit “he describes the description,” “he defines the definition”) is idiomatic, meaning simply “he describes; he defines”. Paraphrased, this sentence may also read “It is possible to define contact as the meeting of sense-organ, sense-object and sense-consciousness.”

Feeling, perception and consciousness, āvuso—these states are conjoined, not disjoined, and it is impossible to separate any of these states from the others in order to describe the difference between them. For what one feels, that one perceives; and what one perceives, that one cognizes. (M 43,9/1:293)

However, it is interesting that the sutta does not say that formations (*saṅkhārā*) are similarly inseparable. In other words, we have a choice with formations, whether to let them arise or not.¹⁴⁴ In this connection, there is a useful term *abhisāṅkhāra*, often rendered as “accumulation” (of karma), of which **the Parivimāṃsana Sutta** (S 12.51/2:80-84) says there are three kinds: meritorious accumulation (*puññābhisāṅkhāra*), demeritorious accumulation (*apuññābhisāṅkhāra*) and unshakable accumulation (*āneñjābhisāṅkhāra*).¹⁴⁵ Meritorious actions (*puññam saṅkhāram*) brings on to rebirth in a place of merit, a happy state (here referring to the human state and the form worlds). Demeritorious actions (*apuñña saṅkhāram*) brings us to a place of demerit, a suffering state. The practice of unshakable mindfulness (*āneñjam saṅkhāram*) leads us to rebirth in the formless states.¹⁴⁶

All this only occurs to one who has “gone to ignorance” (*āvijjāgato*). The arhat, however, has transcended both merit and demerit (*puñña, pāpa, pahīṇa*, Dh 39), and has no need even of the unshakable birth. However, great caution is needed here not to misunderstand that an arhat is “beyond good and evil,” in the sense that he is not subjected to ethical standards and moral virtue. What is meant here is that the arhat does not think or act in terms of merit and demerit, the workings of *saṅkhāra*, but is beyond such habitual moral swings of the unawakened. Yet, the arhat is a truly morally virtuous and liberated being.

8 Volition and latent tendencies

8.1 From the discussion thus far, we can see how formations (*saṅkhāra*) creates karma through our mind of good (*puñña*) or bad (*apuñña*) behind our deeds, and in this way becomes a support for future lives. How formations shape our future life is explained in **the Saṅkhār’upapatti Sutta** (M 120). In fact, the term *saṅkhār’upapatti* means “rebirth according to *saṅkhārā*.” *Saṅkhāra* is the creator of our world.¹⁴⁷

The unawakened mind creates its own world, that is, the workings of the six senses and our reacting to them.¹⁴⁸ If such an unawakened person were to perceive (*sañjānāti*) any feeling (*vedanā*) or thinking (*vitakka*), it would be immediately coloured by internal narrative, and this would inexorably lead to mental proliferation (*papañca*), a very complex level of experience tainted by our desires and prejudices—a state that is synonymous with mental formations (*saṅkhārā*).¹⁴⁹ The last stage of this process is clearly detailed in the first statement of the short **Cetanā Sutta 1** (S 12.38):

¹⁴⁴ See Sue Hamilton 1996:72, 91-95.

¹⁴⁵ See also D 3:217 = Pm 2:178; S 2:82; Nm 1:90, 180, 334, 430, 2: 217, 244, 253; Pm 1:124; Vbh 135, 137. These 3 kinds of karmic accumulation are discussed at Vbh 135. **Āneñja, sappāya S** (M 2:262 f) explains in detail how *viññāṇa* becomes *āneñjūpaga*, “brings one to the unshakable,” ie the formless realms. See also S:B 765 n136.

¹⁴⁶ Curiously, Brahmavaṃso, in his essay, “Paṭicca-samuppāda: Dependent origination” renders *āneñja* as “being something in-between” *puñña* and *apuñña* (2002:26).

¹⁴⁷ See Brahmavaṃso 2002:25 f.

¹⁴⁸ On the “world” here, see **Sabba S** (35.23/4:15), SD 7.1 (2005).

¹⁴⁹ On the theory of perception involved here, see **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14 (4).

Monks, what one intends (*ceteti*), and what one plans (*pakappeti*), and when one has a habitual tendency (*anuseti*)¹⁵⁰—this is a mental object [basis] (*ārammaṇa*) that supports consciousness.

When there is a mental object [basis], there is a support for consciousness.

When consciousness has a support and grows, there is further **generation of rebirth**.

When there is the further generation of rebirth, there further arise birth,¹⁵¹ decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair.

Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering. (S 12.38,2/2:65 f)¹⁵²

8.2 Mental proliferation (*papañca*) or conceiving (*maññanā*) are mental constructs created by the power of **the latent tendencies** (*anusaya*), also translated as “underlying tendencies” and “latent dispositions.” The suttas give a list of 7 latent tendencies, namely:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. sensual desire | <i>kāma,rāga;</i> |
| 2. aversion | <i>paṭigha;</i> |
| 3. view | <i>diṭṭhi;</i> |
| 4. spiritual doubt | <i>vicikicchā;</i> |
| 5. conceit | <i>māna;</i> |
| 6. desire for existence | <i>bhava,rāga;</i> and |
| 7. ignorance | <i>avijjā.</i> |

It is interesting to note that 4 of the latent tendencies (in **bold**)—sensual desire, view, desire for existence and ignorance—form the 4 “mental influxes” (*āsava*), a list common in later works and the Commentaries (D 2:81; Vbh 373). Three of them (without “views”) form what is probably an older set (eg S 4:256). [8.3]

8.3 They are also listed in **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33),¹⁵³ **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18),¹⁵⁴ **the Cha,chakka Sutta** (M 148),¹⁵⁵ **the Anusaya Sutta** (A 7.11 & 12/4:8 f) and **the Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 383). They are deeply embedded in our mind through past habitual deeds and can only be uprooted on attaining the path. An older list is probably the one listing the 3 latent tendencies of aversion (*paṭigha*), lust (*rāga*), and ignorance (*avijjā*).¹⁵⁶

The Sall’atthana Sutta (S 36.6)¹⁵⁷ goes on to say how

- (a) when one shows aversion towards painful feeling, the latent tendency of aversion (*paṭighānusaya*) arises;
- (b) when one delights in sensual pleasure, the latent tendency of lust (*rāgānusaya*) arises;
- (c) when one does not understand such feelings according to reality, the latent tendency of ignorance (*avijjānusaya*) arises. (S 36.6,8/4:208)

¹⁵⁰ That is, one habitually does something whether out of unwholesome motivation or wholesome motivation, or even without intention.

¹⁵¹ “Birth” (*jāti*), omitted in PTS ed.

¹⁵² See **Cetanā Sutta 1-3**, SD 7.6abc & S:B 757 n112.

¹⁵³ D 33,2.3(12)/3:254, 282.

¹⁵⁴ M 18,8/1:110. See SD 6.14 (5).

¹⁵⁵ M 148.28/3:285.

¹⁵⁶ See **Sallatthana S** (S 36.6/4:207-210), SD 5.5 (2004). On latent tendencies, see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14 (5).

¹⁵⁷ See SD 5.5 (2004).

These mental constructs build up the latent tendencies, leading to stronger and more tenacious defilements that motivate more unwholesome thoughts, speech and actions, all of which in turn reinforce our negative attitudes and habits in a vicious cycle. Latent tendencies, as such, are our psychological biases that ultimately shape our character and actions, that is, they are the unawakened “human nature.” These tendencies lie dormant deep in our unconscious ready to rear their ugly heads at any stimulation or provocation.

8.4 What is even more interesting—in terms of free will and determinism in early Buddhism—is this second statement of the **Cetanā Sutta 1** (S 12.38):

If, monks, one does not intend, and one does not plan, but one is still driven by latent tendencies¹⁵⁸ (*anuseti*)—this is a mental basis that supports consciousness.

When there is a mental basis, there is a support for consciousness.

When consciousness has a support and grows, there is **further [continued] arising of rebirth.**

When there is the further arising of rebirth, there further arise birth, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair.

Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.¹⁵⁹ (S 12.38,3/2:65 f)¹⁶⁰

Cetanā Sutta 1 statement 2. The Saṃyutta Commentary (SA 2:71) explains the second statement of the sutta in this manner. This statement refers to the moment when there is occurrence of any (wholesome or unwholesome) volition of the 3 planes (*bhūmi*),¹⁶¹ and no occurrence of mental fabrications of craving and views. By “**but one still has a habitual tendency**” (*atha ce anuseti*) is meant that the latent tendencies are included because they have not been abandoned here in the resultants of the 3 planes, in the limited functional states (the five-door adverting and mind-door adverting cittas),¹⁶² and in form. As long as the latent tendencies exist, they become a condition for the karmic consciousness; for there is no way to prevent its arising.

8.5 The Saṃyutta Porāṇa Ṭīkā says that this second statement shows that wholesome and unwholesome karma capable of producing rebirth is accumulated in the preliminary stage (of the path of practice), and that even without planning (through craving and views), the volitions of insight meditation in a meditator who has seen the dangers in existence are still conditioned by the latent tendencies and are capable of generating rebirth.

¹⁵⁸ “**But one still has a habitual tendency**” (*atha ce anuseti*): the latent tendencies are included because they have not been abandoned here in the resultants of the 3 planes, in the limited functional states (the 5-door adverting and mind-door adverting cittas), and in form. As long as the latent tendencies exist, they become a condition for the karmic consciousness; for there is no way to prevent its arising. See **Cetanā S**, SD 7.6a (3) for more details.

¹⁵⁹ Comy says that this section refers to the moment when there is occurrence of volition of the 3 planes, and no occurrence of mental fabrications of craving and views (SA 2:71). See **Cetanā S**, SD 7.6a (3) nn for further discussion.

¹⁶⁰ For further discussion, see **Cetanā Ss 1-3**, SD 7.6abc & S:B 757 n112.

¹⁶¹ **The 3 planes** (*bhūmi*), which the Suttas call “existences” (*bhava*), ie, sense-existence or sense sphere (*kāma,-bhava*), the form existence or form sphere (*rūpa,-bhava*) and the formless existence or formless sphere (*arūpa,-bhava*) (D 3:215; M 1:294). In the suttas, 4 planes (*bhūmi*) are also mentioned, ie, the sensuous plane (*kāmaṅvacara,-bhūmi*), the form plane (*rūpāṅvacara,-bhūmi*), and the formless plane (*arūpāṅvacara,-bhūmi*) (Pm 1:83).

¹⁶² That is, they arise even before one is ever conscious of them. On the cognitive process (*citta,vīthi*), see Abhs: BRS 4.1-30/149-184 (ch 4). See diagram below.

It is also stated to show that even when wholesome and unwholesome states are not present, there is still an establishing of karmic consciousness with latent defilements as condition. So long as these states have not been abandoned, they lie latent in the existing resultants of the 3 planes, etc. In other words, without mindfulness and wisdom we have practically no real control over our actions and their consequences.

9 How “the will” creates karma

9.1 Habitually reinforced over many lives, the latent tendencies become deeply embedded in an individual’s nature. Moved by any of these latent tendencies, we consciously or unconsciously, wittingly or unwittingly, acts on our own initiative or on being prompted by others.¹⁶³ A passage in **the Bhūmija Sutta** (S 12.25), repeated in **the Sañcetanā Sutta** (A 4.171), should be studied with **the Atta,kārī Sutta** (A 6.38), since the passage discusses self-effort and other-effort in greater detail. The relevant section is quoted here in abridged form:

Ānanda, where there is the body, because of bodily volition (*kāya,sañcetanā*), pleasure and pain arise internally. Ānanda, where there is speech, because of verbal volition (*vacī,sañcetanā*), pleasure and pain arise internally. Ānanda, where there is the mind, because of mental volition (*mano,sañcetanā*), pleasure and pain arise internally—and with ignorance as condition.¹⁶⁴

Ānanda, by oneself [on one’s own initiative] (*sāmaṃ*), one generates that **bodily volitional formation** (*kāya,saṅkhāra*), conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally. Or, Ānanda, prompted by others (*pare*), one generates the bodily volitional formation, conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally.

Ānanda, one mindfully [deliberately] (*sampajāno*) generates bodily volitional formations, conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally; or, unmindfully [undeliberately] (*asampajāno*), one generates the bodily volitional formation, conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally.

Ānanda, by oneself,...or, prompted by others, one generates **verbal volitional formation** (*vacī,saṅkhāra*)...

Ānanda, one mindfully...or, unmindfully generates verbal volitional formations conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally.

Ānanda, by oneself,...or, prompted by others, one generates **mental volitional formation** (*mano,saṅkhāra*)¹⁶⁵...

Ānanda, one mindfully...or, unmindfully generates mental volitional formations conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally.

Ānanda, ignorance is attended by [subject to]¹⁶⁶ these states.¹⁶⁷ But with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance, the body does not exist conditioned by which pleasure

¹⁶³ See Sue Hamilton 1996:76 f, 109.

¹⁶⁴ Here I take *avijjā,paccayā ca* (vl *vā*) as belonging the end of the first para, following the Aṅguttara reading and Bhikkhu’s Bodhi’s advice (S:B 748 n77).

¹⁶⁵ Although the term *mano,saṅkhāra* is used here, from the context it is clearly synonymous with *citta,saṅkhāra* in connection with the *saṅkhāra* link of dependent arising, as at (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2.14/2:4), SD 5.15 (2004). However, Bhikkhu Bodhi notes, “[t]here is justification for identifying the [*citta,saṅkhāra* here] with the *cittasaṅkhāra* at [**Kāma,bhū S**, S 41.6/4:293,17] and [**Cūḷa Vedalla S**, M 44,15/1:301,28-29], defined as *saññā* and *vedanā*” (S:B 749 n79).

¹⁶⁶ *Anupatita* (DhA 3:463), pp of *anu-patati*, to run after, to follow, to pursue; to fall on or into, to attack (acc) (D 1:56 = M 1:517 = S 3:211).

and pain arise internally. Speech does not exist conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally. The mind does not exist conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally.¹⁶⁸

The field does not exist, the ground does not exist, the base does not exist, the foundation does not exist, conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally.¹⁶⁹

(S 12.25,13-19/2:39 f = A 4.171/2:157-159; cf A 3.60.3/1:171)

9.2 The Saṃyutta Commentary says that here the Buddha's instruction is to show that pleasure and pain do not arise with contact alone as condition, but with other conditions as well. In this case, the bodily, verbal and mental volitions are the karmically effective volitions that function as conditions for the resultant pleasure and pain. The Commentary goes on to identify the 3 volitional formations with the 3 types of volitions mentioned in the sutta.

We generate (*abhisankharoti*) these formations [that is, our actions are karmically potent] "on one's own initiative" (*sāmaṃ*) when we act without any inducement by others, with an unprompted mind (*asaṅkhārika, citta*). We act mindfully (*sampajāno*) when we act with a knowledge of karma and its fruits; and unmindfully (*asampajāno*) when we act without such knowledge¹⁷⁰ (SA 2:57 f).

In simpler terms, this means that even when we commit an act out of *ignorance* (*avijjā*) (that is, without any conscious intention, good or evil), it is still karmically potent. In fact, here we can freely render *sampajāna* as "consciously deliberate" and *asampajāna* as "unconsciously deliberate." This latter state is forced by the latent tendencies.

9.3 The Majjhima Commentary on the **Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44.15/1:301) explains that the bodily formation and the mental formation are said to be formations "bound up" with the body (*kāya, paṭibaddhā*) and the mind (*citta, paṭibaddhā*), in the sense that they are *formed* respectively by the body and by the mind, while the verbal formation is a formation in the sense that it *forms* speech (MA 2:366). If these formations arise through the three doors of action, then, that is where they are at their formative stage, and as such their most vulnerable.

9.4 The first step towards breaking this samsara, therefore, is to restrain the senses which involves stopping at the bare sense-experience without plastering it over with layers of colourful meanings that are purely subjective. A classic example of the instruction is **sense-restraint** (*indriya, samvara*) is the one the Buddha gives to the monk Māluṅkyā,putta as recorded in **the Māluṅkyā,putta Sutta** (S 35.95):¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Comy says that **ignorance** is attended by these states under the heading of decisive support (*upanissaya*) since they are understood in the phrase "With ignorance as condition, volitional forms." On the interpretation of *paṭicca, samuppāda* in the light of the 24 conditional relations (*paccaya*), see Vism 17; see also Nyanatiloka, *Guide Through the Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, 3rd ed 1971:159-173.

¹⁶⁸ Comy: That the body does not exist which, if it existed, would enable pleasure and pain to arise conditioned by bodily volition, The same method of explanation applies to speech and the mind. (Question:) "But an arhat acts, speaks and thinks; so, how is it that his body, etc, do not exist?" (Reply:) "In the sense that they do not generate karmic results. For the deeds done by an arhat are neither wholesome nor unwholesome karma, but merely functional (*kiriya, matta*)." As such, it is said of him, "The body, etc, do not exist" (SA 2:58). "An alternative explanation might be simply that with the elimination of ignorance there will be no further arising of the 5 aggregates, the basis of all experience, and thus no further experiencing of pleasure and pain" (S:B 749 n81). On the arhat's **functional consciousness** (*kiriya, citta*), see Abhs 1.15 = Abhs:BRS 50.

¹⁶⁹ Comy: There is no *field* (*khetta*) in the sense of a place of growth; no *land* (*vatthu*) in the sense of a support; no *base* (*āyatana*) in the sense of a condition; no *foundation* (*adhikaraṇa*) in the sense of a cause (SA 2:59).

¹⁷⁰ This passage may be the locus classicus for the Abhidhamma distinction between *sa, saṅkhārika, citta* and *asaṅkhārika, citta*: see Abhs 1.4 = Abhs:BRS 32 ff.

¹⁷¹ See **Maluṅkyāputta S** (S 35.39.12/4:72 f), SD 5.9 (2004).

Māluṅkyā,putta, regarding what is seen, heard, sensed and cognized by you,
 in the seen will be only the seen;
 in the heard there will only be the heard;
 in the sensed there will only be the sensed;
 in the cognized there will only be the cognized. (S 35.95,13/4:73)

9.5 In doing so, the practitioner “unwills” himself against accumulating formations, and so cuts down his latent tendencies, that would otherwise induce the willing of more formations. As such, **Sue Hamilton** concludes,

one could, and ultimately should, experience feelings *without* any concomitant volitions: an *arahant* is able to experience pleasant and unpleasant feelings while remaining entirely detached from them. This is stated in the *Vedanā Saṃyutta*, where we read that the well-taught Ariyan disciple has no repugnance for painful feeling, or delight in sensual pleasure [**Sallatthēna Sutta**, S 4:209].¹⁷² The process of analyzing the person into *khandhas* shows how this is a constitutional possibility. (Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:72)

10 The efficacy of our effort

10.1 While rejecting the notions of the “will” and “free will,” early Buddhism also rejects both strict or “hard” determinism (events in our history and our lives are fixed or predestined) [3.1] and “hard” indeterminism (where things just happen, by chance or some supreme being’s fiat, and we have no control over them). Avoiding the extremes of ultimate free will (where our volition is in full control of our conduct) and of extremes of determinism (where causality is something mechanically fixed), the Buddha teaches the efficacy of our effort, that is, the doctrine of karma (*kamma,vāda*) and the effectiveness of our mental effort.

10.2 If human actions were only the results of past actions or the fiat of a creator-God, then, our present actions and experiences would all be predetermined, and any effort on our part would be pointless since all effort have been predetermined. In **the Deva,daha Sutta** (M 101), the Buddha says:

Monks, there are some recluses and brahmins who speak thus and hold this view, that whatever a person feels, whether pleasure or pain or a neutral feeling, all this is caused by past karma [deeds].¹⁷³ Thus they claim that by means of austerities they put an end to past karma, that they abstain from performing any new deeds (in the present), that there is no inflow (of karma) into the future. Because there is no inflow (of karma) (*anavassava*) into the future, there is the extinction of karma; with the extinction of karma, there is the extinction of suffering; with the extinction of suffering, there is the extinction of feeling; with the extinction of feeling, suffering will be exhausted. (M 101,2/2:214)¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Hamilton mistakenly gives the reference in her footnote as “M 4:209.”

¹⁷³ This doctrine, ascribed to the Jains, is criticized by the Buddha in **Sīvaka S** (S 36.21/4:230 f), SD 5.6, and **Titth’āyatana S** (A 3.61/1:173 f), SD 6.8. The Buddhist teaching is that feeling arises not as a result of past karma but a concomitant of present action, and also recognizes feelings that are neither karmically active nor karmic results.

¹⁷⁴ See also D 2:230; M 1:93; A 1:134-136, 249-253, 2:230-232.

10.3 The Buddha totally rejects this notion, giving these reasons amongst others:¹⁷⁵

When you have an intense undertaking or make intense effort, do you then feel a sharp, severe and painful feeling associated with the undertaking? Or, again, when you do not have an intense undertaking or make an intense effort, do you then not feel a sharp, severe and painful feeling associated with the undertaking? (M 101,12/2:219)¹⁷⁶

To this the Nigaṇṭhas, of course, have to answer yes to the first question and no the second, whereupon the Buddha declares the necessary implications that if this were so, then how could the Nigaṇṭhas possibly claim that “whatever a person feels, whether pleasure or pain or a neutral feeling, all this is caused by past karma”?¹⁷⁷

10.4 Gomez summarizes the argument as follows:

Only if the opposite were true, that is, if intense effort and the nigaṇṭha austerities were not accompanied by equally intense pain, only then would it be true that whatever a man experiences is the result of previous deeds. For if the intense effort and application, which austerities require, bring about a correspondingly painful feeling here and now, that very fact proves that one does have experiences brought about by one’s own effort in this very life. (Gomez 1975:84)

The arising of suffering lies in the mind of craving and attachment. Yet this very same mind can be trained, controlled and free. One of the most important tools for freeing the mind is **dependent arising** (*paṭicca,samuppāda*) [3.3] where our sufferings are shown to be rooted in ignorance, caught in a cycle of immediate causes and effects, providing the conditions for continued suffering. One can, however, reverse the cycle and break it forever.¹⁷⁸

11 Implications of moral choice

11.1 Karma is intention: when we act with a wholesome mind, the act is wholesome; when we act with an unwholesome mind, the act is unwholesome. Intention (*cetanā*), as such, is morally determinative, and an action without intention is not morally charged. This idea was revolutionary in the Buddha’s own time but not unique to Buddhism in our own time.

This is not an idea which is peculiar to Buddhism. The English criminal law, for example, considers both the mental state of the accused and his overt actions. It draws a distinction between the *mens rea* and the *actus reus*: the latter is the physical action and the former is “the state of mind which must be present in an accused if his overt action is to constitute a crime, and if he is to be held responsible for it.” [David Walker, *The Oxford Companion to Law*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970]. (Keown 1992:222)

¹⁷⁵ See **Devadaha S** (M 101) for all the arguments.

¹⁷⁶ *Yasmiṃ vo samaye tippo upakkamo hoti tippaṃ padhānaṃ, tippā tamhi samaye opakkamikā dukkhā tippā kaṭukā vedanā vediyatha. Yasmiṃ pana vo pana samaye na tippo upakkamo hoti na tippaṃ padhānaṃ, tippā tamhi samaye opakkamikā dukkhā tippā kaṭukā vedanā vediyatha.*

¹⁷⁷ M 101.13-14/2:219 f.

¹⁷⁸ On dependent arising, see SD 5.14-17 (2004), esp 16.

11.2 However, if motive alone is the measure of rightness and goodness, then such ethics and morality would lack compassion and spirituality. In the early 20th century, Louis de la Vallée Poussin points out, following the Abhidharma,kośa, for example, the ritual sacrifice of animals is not meritorious merely because brahmins believe it to be so; nor is euthanasia for aged parents morally right even though it is the custom in certain countries.¹⁷⁹

11.3 Volition is mental action: it gives rise to two actions, bodily and vocal action.

[Bhaṣya:] Volition is called mental action; that which arises from volition,¹⁸⁰ namely action which has been willed, is made up of two other actions, bodily and vocal action.

(Abhidharmakośa Bhāṣyaṃ 4.1cd = Abhk:Pr 552)

The distinction between intention (*cetanā*) and action (*kamma*) is only for ethical consideration, but as we have seen, they are both really one. So too are actions of body, speech and mind part of the same process called a “person.” In this sense, we are what we do (Dh 165): we are the result of our karma, the heirs to our karma, the owners of our karma (M 135.4/3:135). Karma as *cetanā* (intention, volition) has a broad sense of not only understanding the virtue or the vice of an action, but that one fully *is* the action—body, mind and heart.

Keown gives the following helpful illustration:

Generosity and the other virtues involve not merely the bare realization that a practice is good, but also the instantiation of the practice. The implementation depends upon a personal commitment which involves more than purely intellectual assent to its goodness. In short, *cetanā* describes not merely intention but the total posture of the personality, both cognitive and affective.

(Keown, 1992:213)

11.4 At this point, we need to examine intention and action a little deeper. While it is true that the moral worth of an action depends on its intention—good begets good, evil begets evil—however, this does not mean that the mere absence of an intention frees one from moral accountability. For example, if one sees a child in danger of drowning, but does not help to save him (when one can swim and there is no one else around), claiming that one has no ill intention towards the child, it is clear that one has no compassion at all. [See 1987 report from a Malaysian newspaper here (Right).]

Or, one could, with “good intention,” give money to a poor drug addict who will use it to buy more drugs. Or, one could keep the precepts with a wrong motive, such as with the aim of gaining magical

Girl drowns as watchers haggle over rescue money

[The Star (Malaysia), 13 Aug 1987.]

BEIJING, Wed. — A Chinese schoolgirl drowned in a lake last month as 40 to 50 people stood by, some haggling over how much money it was worth to rescue her, an official newspaper reported today.

Zhang Yinqian, 14, got into trouble while swimming, the daily said. A friend failed to help and shouted to the people nearby.

“Who will give me money if I save her?” one replied.

“Even 200 or 300 yuan (\$137.5 to \$200) would be no good,” said another.

“There are too many Chinese, you should let her die,” said a third.

Finally, a man tried to save Zhang but couldn’t. Her body was found later after family and teachers paid to get it out of the lake.

The *People’s Daily* said the girl’s death had raised a furore in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province. — Reuter.

¹⁷⁹ Poussin, *La Morale Bouddhique*. Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1927:30 [cf Abhk 4.68d = Abhk:Pr 645 ff]. Qu by Keown 1992:221.

¹⁸⁰ For the Jains, mental action is only semi-action (*aḍḍha,kamma*) (M 1:372; Abhk 4.105, 73ab; Uvāsakadasaō 2, App 2, p18; SBE 14:83,l 165, 179, 242, 315). [Pruden’s fn]

powers. As such, intention alone is not the criterion of moral rightness. The Abhidharma,kośa gives many examples showing that even deeds done with a good intention are wrongful if they are rooted in delusion (*moha*) (Abhk 4.68d).

11.5 In early Buddhism, intention is no different from the 3 unwholesome roots (*akusala,mūla*) of greed, hate and delusion and the 3 wholesome roots (*kusala,mūla*) of lovingkindness, generosity and wisdom (D 3:275; It 45). As such, “intention” is not merely a matter of “good intention” or of “no intention” to act (mentally, verbally, bodily), but refers to a *state of mind*, that is, whether one’s action is *motivated* by greed or by non-greed, by hate or by non-hate, by delusion or by non-delusion. In short, *intention is motivation*, what moves one to act.

In this sense, we have “free will,” that is, one can consciously choose between action and non-action, good and evil. And yet, the extent of free will is not the same in everyone. This limitation is due to one’s personal habits and tendencies. If one is habitually an evil-doer, one has a greater propensity for evil acts. The habitual good person has a greater tendency for good deeds. By this very same fact, one can say that there is after all no such thing as “free will,” since whatever one does is motivated by one’s latent tendencies. Only the saint who has transcended or destroyed his latent tendencies really has free will.

11.6 In other words, the unawakened being is really helpless in habitually reacting to thoughts and external stimuli in negative ways. And yet, the radiant mind (*pabhassara citta*) lies at the heart of all sentient beings. Despite one’s seeming helplessness and ignorance, one can still touch this radiant mind, beginning with one’s awareness that there is this spiritual potential. As such, everyone can change for the better. The purpose of the Buddha’s teaching is to provide the motivation and environment for healing and caring, for positive change and spiritual liberation.

11.7 David Loy, in his insightful study of Aṅguli,māla, entitled “How to reform a serial killer” (2000), applies this Buddhist insight to our own times by arguing for the need for restorative rather than punitive justice in his discussion of “intention” and karma:

One modern approach to *karma* is to understand it in terms of what Buddhism calls *saṅkhāras*, our “mental formations,” especially habitual tendencies. These are best understood not as tendencies we have, but as tendencies we *are*: instead of being “my” habits, their interaction is what constitutes my sense of “me.” But that does not mean that they are ineradicable: unwholesome *saṅkhāras* are to be differentiated from the liberatory possibilities that are available to all of us if we follow the path of replacing them with more wholesome mental tendencies.

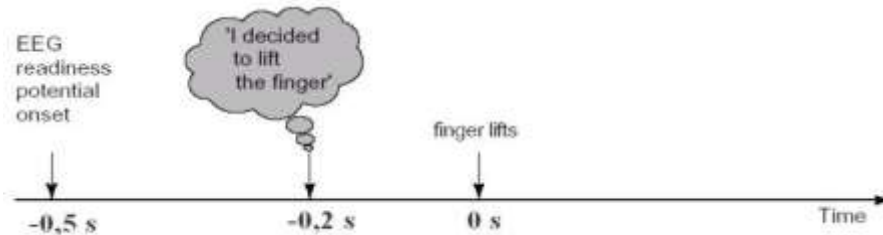
The point of this interpretation is that we are punished not for our sins, but by them. People suffer or benefit not for what they have done, but for what they have become, and what we mindfully do is what makes us what we are. This conflation makes little sense if *karma* is understood dualistically as a kind of moral “dirt” attached to me, but it makes a great deal of sense if I am my habitual intentions, for then the important spiritual issue is the development of those intentions. In that case, my actions and my intentions build/rebuild my character just as food is assimilated to build/rebuild my physical body. If *karma* is this psychological truth about how we construct ourselves—about how my sense-of-self is constructed by “my” greed, ill-will, and delusion—then we can no longer accept the juridical presupposition of a completely self-determined subject wholly responsible for its own actions. Again, we can no longer justify punishment as retributive, but must shift the focus of criminal justice to education and reformation.

(David Loy, “How to reform a serial killer,” 2000:156 f)

For our present purposes of discussing the nature of free will in Buddhism, we can follow up from Loy's insights by saying that since we construct ourselves or "selves" through our own actions/intentions, we can therefore ourselves deconstruct them. What prevents us from doing so is a lack of self-knowledge, a lack that is aggravated when we push this personal responsibility onto an external agency by blaming others, or most deleterious of all, by surrendering our will to a superhuman deity, a god, gods, or God.

12 Benjamin Libet and free will

12.1 In 1965, Hans H Kornhuber and Lüder Deecke investigated the correlations between arbitrary movements of hand and foot (such as, a person opening or closing his hand) and electrical activities in the brain (EEG). They discovered a rather strange phenomenon: even 1 second before the hand (or foot) is moved, there is EEG activity, which they called "Bereitschaftspotential" (readiness potential or RP), here illustrated:



[Source: <http://www.blutner.de/philom/consc/consc.html>]

12.2 In 1983, Benjamin Libet, from the Medical Centre of the University of California at San Francisco, fascinated by this finding, asked a very important question: *If a simple action like moving our hand us prepared for more than half a second in our brain, at what moment do we consciously decide to perform this action?* Libet and his colleagues, in their findings on "backward referral in time," published in the 1980s,¹⁸¹ reported that the EEG results showed that the cortex became active with a "readiness potential" (RP) of 350 milliseconds before the reported awareness of a "wish to move," and an average RP of 550 before the actual movement begins.

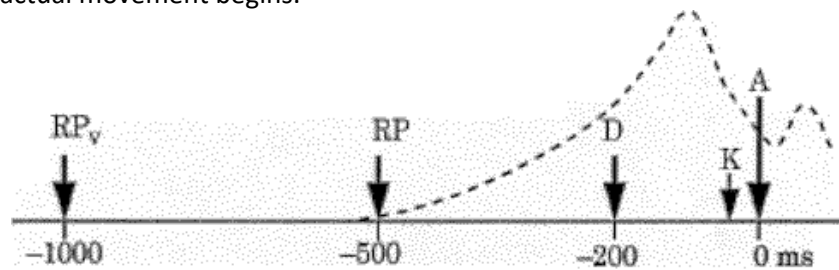


Fig. 1: Sequence of readiness potential (RP), volitional decision (D), and onset of action (A), as well as the control stimulus on the skin (K). If the action is planned ahead, the readiness potential starts already at time RP. After Libet (1985).

[Source: http://faculty.virginia.edu/consciousness/new_page_8.html]

¹⁸¹ B Libet, "The experimental evidence of subjective referral of a sensory experience backwards in time." *Philosophy of Science* 1981 48:182-197; Libet et al, "Time of conscious intention to act in relation to onset of cerebral activity (readiness potential): the unconscious initiation of a free voluntary act." *Brain* 1983:623-642. See biblio for other works.

12.3 These experiments imply that consciousness lags behind our experience of the world—that our subjective awareness of a decision occurs measurably later than the actual moment of decision! Libet, however, argued that once events reach neuronal adequacy (ie half a second of activity), they are subjectively referred back to the time of the initial evoked potential. As such, even though consciousness takes half a second to build up, events will still seem to happen in real time.¹⁸²

12.4 We commonly experience wishes, desires, decisions to act, or not to act, and take it for granted that it is the conscious experiences themselves that exercise control over our consequent acts. However, Libet (1985) found that our brain prepares to act not just *before* we act, but even before we experience a wish to act!¹⁸³ In everyday life, we behave as what academics call “naïve realists,” that is, we take events we experience to *be* the events that are actually taking place. In reality, all that we have are experiences of something. For everyday experiences, the assumption that the world is just as we experience serves us well.

12.5 Max Velmans explains:

When playing billiards, for example, it is safe to assume that the balls are smooth, spherical, coloured, and cause each other to move by mechanical impact. One only has to judge the precise angle at which the white ball hits the red ball to pocket the red. A quantum mechanical description of the microstructure of the balls or of the forces they exert on each other won't improve one's game.

That said, the experienced world is not the world in itself—and it is not our experience of the balls that governs the movement of the balls themselves. Balls as-experienced and their perceived interactions are global representations of autonomously existing entities and their interactions, and conscious representations of such entities or events can only be formed once they exist, or after they have taken place. The same may be said of the events and processes that we experience

to occur in our own bodies or minds/brains. When we withdraw a hand quickly from a hot iron, we experience the pain (in the hand) to cause what we do, but the reflex action actually takes place before the experience of pain has time to form. This can also happen with voluntary movements. Suppose, for example, that you are required to press a button as soon as you feel a tactile stimulus applied to your skin. A typical reaction time is 100 ms or so. It takes only a few milliseconds for the skin stimulus to reach the cortical surface, but Libet, et al. (1979) found that awareness of the stimulus takes at least 200 ms to develop. If so, the reaction must take place preconsciously, although we experience ourselves as responding after we feel something touching the skin. The mind/brain requires time to form a conscious representation of a pain or of something touching the skin and of the subsequent response. Although the conscious representations accurately place the cause (the stimulus) before the effect (the response), once the representations are formed, both the stimulus and the response have already taken place.

(Velmans, “How could conscious experience affect the brain?” 2002:10 digital ed)

¹⁸² See Susan Blackmore, “The state of the art—the psychology of consciousness,” 2001:3 digital ed.

¹⁸³ “For example, a simple motor act such as flexing one's wrist is preceded by a negative-going readiness potential (RP) recorded at the scalp around 550 milliseconds. Surprisingly, the readiness potential also precedes the experienced *wish* to act by around 350 milliseconds. This suggests that, like the act itself, the experienced wish (to flex one's wrist) may be one *output* from the (prior) cerebral processes that actually select a given response rather than being the cause of those processes.” (Max Velmans, “Preconscious free will,” 2003:2 digital ed).

12.6 The Libet work generated much discussion and debate. His ideas, however, were not new. Over 200 years ago, the Scottish philosopher, David Hume (1711-1776), pointed out that events that are close together in space and time are more likely than spatio-temporally distant events to be perceived as causally related. Conversely, in terms of probability, as we have it in the Bayes equation, events known to be causally related are more likely to be close in time and space than unrelated events. There are a number of possible explanations of the Libet findings:¹⁸⁴

- (1) The conscious decision to move is an illusion. By the time you are aware of the decision, the mental processes for movement are well underway. [Furthermore, we could also question whether the unusual circumstances of the experiment, with subjects thinking in advance about making a decision, and then making one for no reason whatever, actually represent normal thought processes.]
- (2) We have conscious veto over decisions. The plan to move begins outside of awareness. The act cannot be carried out unless you consciously decide to let it proceed.
- (3) Dennett's alternative: There is no Cartesian Theater.¹⁸⁵ Thus, there is no one moment at which the decision to move enters awareness. It is fruitless to try to measure the specific time at which awareness of an event occurs. [We are clearly talking about two different time-scales here: the organic time of the brain/mind and the physical time of the body. Organic time is always relative: when we find something interesting, time flies; in a dull situation, our organic time slows down. Organic time, in other words, is a personal sense of time.]

12.7 Let us now examine some of **the Buddhist implications** of Libet's work on "backward referral in time." If our subjective awareness of a decision occurs measurably later than the actual moment of decision, this means that we have not really willed it, but that the decision is the result of unconscious conditions. In short, there is no free will involved. We are truly creatures of habit who simply respond to stimuli. Such is clearly the case of the unawakened reactive person who is fettered by the unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion. However, we cannot be so certain about the awakened mind of the arhat (for no such experiments have been conducted on them).

12.8 The findings of Libet's experiments implies that our brain initiates a "mental volitional act" unconsciously. The Buddhist response here would be that such unconscious reactions are spurred by our latent tendencies (*anusaya*) [3.6]. Libet's findings are neither novel nor radical in Buddhist terms, but they help present the Buddhist teachings on how the mind works to those unfamiliar with the Buddhist

¹⁸⁴ "Free will" (Psy391D, Class 10) 13/10/04, <http://courses.umass.edu/psy391d/freewill.html>. My additional comments are within brackets.

¹⁸⁵ Theatre metaphors are common in discussions of consciousness, and arguably can be helpful (eg BJ Baars, *In the Theatre of Consciousness: The workspace of the mind*. Oxford: OUP, 1997). "It certainly feels as though I am sitting inside my head and experiencing the events in turn as though they were some kind of show. But this is a big mistake, argues Dennett. While almost everyone rejects outright Cartesian dualism, most psychologists and neuroscientists still believe in some kind of centre, where everything comes together and 'consciousness happens'; some kind of magic finishing line beyond which events 'come into' consciousness, or a centre from where 'my' decisions are made and 'my' instructions sent out. But this cannot be, for the reality of the brain is a massively parallel system with no middle. So, as Dennett puts it, 'When you discard Cartesian dualism, you really must discard the show that would have gone on in the Cartesian Theater, and the audience as well, for neither the show nor the audience is to be found in the brain, and the brain is the only real place there is to look for them.' (Dennett 1991:134) (qu in Susan Blackmore 2001:5 digital ed). Dan Dennett, the American philosopher, points out that the experiments involve at least two mental reporting processes, one to do with the occurrence of the decision, one to do with the state of the clock, which makes any judgement of simultaneity highly problematic.

psychological vocabulary and approach. Libet's work is of course important to Buddhists, in the sense that it provides the scientific basis for the Buddhist explanation of the mind.

12.9 The psychological implication is that consciousness is not a high level authority that gives orders to subordinated instances. The main role of consciousness is a *selective* one, deciding from amongst numerous possibilities suggested by unconscious processes.¹⁸⁶ Max Velmans makes an insightful observation on this connection:

Just as the interactions amongst experienced billiard balls represent causal sequences in the external world, but are not the events themselves, experienced interactions between our sensations, thoughts, images and actions represent causal sequences within our bodies and brains, but are not the events themselves. The thoughts, images, and feelings that appear in our awareness are both *generated* by processes in our bodies and mind/brains and *represent* the current states of those processes. Thoughts and images represent the ongoing state of play of our cognitive systems; feelings represent our internal (positive and negative) reactions to and judgements about events.¹⁸⁷

(Velmans 2002:11 digital ed)

12.10 In simple terms, whatever we are “conscious of” or discern (*viñānāti*) are actually projected states (*saṅkhārā*) in our own minds. Furthermore, such consciousnesses or states are the result of what we actually choose to notice of the numerous phenomena that come within the range of our senses. Peter Harvey, in *Selfless Persons*, quoting L S Cousins, says just this in his comment on the Atta,kārī Sutta: “...karma affects discernment [*viññāṇa*] by determining which of the many phenomena in a person's sensory range are actually *noticed*” (1995:152).

12.11 The ethical implication is that the role of intentional free will [1.2.4.1] is not to initiate a voluntary act, but rather to *understand* and *control* whether the act occurs or not, which constitutes the morality of commission and of omission. Our moral life starts off and is based on the morality of omission, that is, the “negative morality” (*varitta,sīla*) of the Buddhist precepts, beginning with, “I take upon myself the training-rule *not* to harm life,” and so on.

The morality of commission is the “positive morality,” where our body and speech are directed to acts of compassion, charity, contentment, truth and mindfulness. We then go on to broaden and strengthen the mindfulness aspect of our spiritual life, so that we increasingly understand the nature of the mind with the goal of liberating it to see true reality and awakening.

12.12 In his writings, Libet apparently does not claim that there is no free will, but simply discussed the “backward referral in time” of our conscious thoughts. Libet, in his abstract to his article, “Do We Have Free Will?” in *The Volitional Brain: Towards a Neuroscience of Free Will* that he co-edited (with Anthony Freeman and Keith Sutherland), remarks:

Freely voluntary acts are preceded by a specific electrical change in the brain (the “readiness potential,” RP) that begins 550 ms before the act. Human subjects became aware of intention to act 350-400 ms after RP starts, but 200 ms before the motor act. The volitional process is therefore initiated unconsciously. But the conscious function could still control the outcome; it can veto the act. Free will is therefore not excluded. These findings put constraints on views of how

¹⁸⁶ See <http://www.blutner.de/philom/consc/consc.html>.

¹⁸⁷ See also B Mangan, “Taking phenomenology seriously: The ‘fringe’ and its implications for cognitive research.” *Consciousness and Cognition* 2,2 1993:89-108.

free will may operate; it would not initiate a voluntary act but it could control performance of the act. The findings also affect views of guilt and responsibility. But the deeper question still remains: Are freely voluntary acts subject to macro-deterministic laws or can they appear without such constraints, non-determined by natural laws and “truly free”?

(Libet, Freeman & Sutherland, *The Volitional Brain*, 1999: abstract)

12.13 It is possible to argue that if our actions are already “decided” even before we execute them and that we are only conscious of them after the fact, then there is no such thing as a criminal act, since no one would then intentionally commit a crime! This is of course an over-simplification and misinterpretation of Libet’s findings.

Max Velmans, however, provides this apt response:

If I know that an act is unlawful, but consciously choose to commit it, this reflects my state of mind irrespective of whether my conscious awareness of that state is determined by preconscious mental processing. “I” include my unconscious and preconscious mind/brain as well as my conscious experience. This allows one to establish *mens rea* and legal responsibility. I could plead that my conscious decision to commit a crime can’t be held responsible, as it was determined preconsciously, by my brain. But then the judge could say: “The court accepts that your conscious decision is not guilty, but we will have to jail your brain!” (Velmans 2003:14 digital ed)

12.14 All scientific researches and discoveries tend to be provisional. Their value is in breaking the ground for further investigation and better understand of natural phenomena. Such researches and discoveries are open to scrutiny, and not all scientists, for example, accept Libet’s findings,¹⁸⁸ or they offer critical insights into his view that suggest our mental lack of free will.¹⁸⁹

Refetti, for example “conjecture that future research that combines both sorts of studies will reveal that meditators’ scores on the temporal disparity between neural volitions and mental volitions will be significant less than those of non-meditators.”¹⁹⁰ By “both,” Refetti means the researches of Buddhist meditators or meditation, and those related to Libet’s pioneering ideas (that neural volition precedes mental volition). In short, Libet’s views may apply to non-meditators or, as we say, the unawakened, but if we can actually read the minds of the awakened, even of those who have benefitted from meditation, it is another matter.

12.15 In closing, it must be said that while it is true that we all have free will, we are able to make choices—as **the Atta,kāri Sutta** (A 6.38)¹⁹¹ demonstrates—it is wisdom that we need: a fool is more likely to choose foolishly, the wise are more likely to choose wisely. With wisdom, we are more likely to make the right and good choices with wholesome consequences. The foolish lack free will when they follow their habitual tendencies; the wise enjoy free will as long as they carefully watch the present moment and respond with a wholesome mind.

¹⁸⁸ Mele (2009) and O’Connor (2009), eg, argue that the data presented by Libet and his supporters wholly fail to support their revisionary conclusions. See also Dennett 2003:231-140.

¹⁸⁹ See Repetti 2010a:175 f.

¹⁹⁰ Repetti 2010a:207 n50.

¹⁹¹ A 6.38/3:337 f = SD 7.6.

13 Buddhist conative¹⁹² psychology

13.1 What Libet observed was that the experienced wish *follows* the readiness potential, but *precedes* the motor act itself (by around 200 milliseconds)—time enough to consciously *veto* the wish before executing it. Libet suggested that the *initiations* of the voluntary act and the accompanying wish are developed preconsciously, but consciousness can then act as a form of censor which decides whether or not to carry out the act.¹⁹³ Most significantly, Libet’s findings seems to support the notion that we are aware of what we want to do, say or think *only after we have done, said or thought it!* Clearly this is the case in an ordinary worldly untrained in mindfulness.

13.2 In 1998, Richard King, in his paper on “Vijñaptimatratā and the Abhidharma context of early Yogācāra,” writes:

It is important to bear in mind that the Yogācāra conception of *citta/vijñāna* denotes a whole complex of events and processes which cannot be adequately rendered by English terms such as “consciousness” or “mind.” The “*citta*” of *cittamatra* includes within it the conscious apprehension of sensory objects (six in all including the *mano-vijñāna*). This is a crucial point to acknowledge since, for the Yogācāra school, the sensory apprehension of objects cannot be divorced from one’s consciousness of it (though it is possible to make a purely abstract and theoretical distinction between *vedanā* on the one hand and *vijñāna*, *saṃjñā* and *saṃskāra* on the other when discussing the *skandhas*).

In a sense the Yogācāra position offers the flipside to the standard Abhidharma position that *citta* is intentional, that is, that to be conscious is to be conscious of an object. For the Yogācāra, to postulate an object requires that it is first apprehended by a *citta*. The emphasis here is no longer on the suggestion that *citta* is intentional but rather on the fact that objects of consciousness are just that.

Thus, the thesis of the intentionality of *citta* becomes displaced in the emerging [Yogācāra] philosophy by an emphasis upon the “phenomenalistic” nature of objects. Objects are really dharma-constructs and representations (*vijñapti*), dependent upon the complex processes of *citta* for their appearance. Thus, one can talk of apprehending a sensory object only after one has become conscious of it. Sensory apprehension is thereby subsumed by the Yogācāra analysis under the broader domain of “*citta*,” which, now more clearly than ever, remains too rich and all-embracing a term to be rendered by “mind” or “consciousness.”

As well as an awareness of sensory objects, *citta* also denotes the organising faculty of the *manas*, the affective distortion of that process by the defiled mind (*kliṣṭa manas*) as well as the subliminal karmic seeds (*saṃskāras*) and latent dispositions (*anusaya*) that are collectively known as the *alaya, vijñāna*. The complexity of terms like *citta*, therefore, when combined with

¹⁹² **Conation** refers to that aspect of the mental processes having to do with volition, striving, willing. The term was used historically to represent a basic mental faculty, and until recent times was rarely used. However, with the influence of Buddhist psychology, it is regaining currency along with **affection** (emotion, feeling, mood) and **cognition** (thinking, conceiving, reasoning, imagery, problem-solving, etc). In secular psychology, these are traditionally regarded as the three “mental functions.” See A S Reber, *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, 1985 svv.

¹⁹³ See Velmans 2002:21 n4, digital ed. See also R Karrer, C Warren & R Ruth, “Slow potentials of the brain preceding cued and non-cued movement: Effects of development and retardation,” in DA Otto (ed), *Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Event-related Potential Research*, Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1978 & N Kantinen & H Lyytinen, “Brain slow waves preceding time-locked visuo-motor performance,” *Journal of Sport Sciences* 11 1993:257-266.

the Yogācāra endorsement of the category of rupa-dharma and the acknowledgment that vijñāna remains only one of five *skandhas* suggests that it is problematic to interpret the early Yogācāra literature as propounding a form of idealism at least in the sense in which this has commonly been understood in the West. (Richard King, 1998:6 (of 10) digital ed; slightly ed)

13.3 In early Buddhist mindfulness exercise, however, such as that taught in **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10), the practitioner to watch every action, feeling, thought and phenomenon that arise “Only this present state | (as it arises) one sees that with insight” (*paccuppannañ ca yo dhammañ, tattha tattha vipassati*, M 3:117), as **the Bhadd’eka,ratta Sutta** (M 131.3) instructs.

13.4 The affirmative character of a Buddhist conative psychology is clearly evident in the texts. As Bruce Matthews declares,

The whole Buddhist path is based to a degree on positive willing. In the Eightfold Path (*aṭṭh-aṅgiko maggo*) the first factor in the so-called meditation or *samādhī* section¹⁹⁴ is **right effort** (*sammā,vāyāma*)¹⁹⁵ which indicates that the mental energy of proper attention and desire undergirds meditation: “And what, your reverences, is right effort? As to this...a monk generates desire, endeavours, stirs up energy, exerts his mind (*cittam*), and strives for the non-arising of evil unskilled states,” M 3:251. (Bruce Matthews, *Craving and Salvation*, 1983:78; emphasis added)

In fact, the 4 right efforts, second only to right view,¹⁹⁶ applies to all the other factors of the noble eightfold path, especially the “training in moral virtue” (*sīla,sikkhā*), comprising right speech, right action and right livelihood, that encompasses the daily lives of both the monastic and the lay.

13.5 The Mahā Sakul’udāyī Sutta (M 77) summarizes the Buddha’s teaching into the well known list of “7 sets,” the third of which is a very proactive set of teachings, namely, the 4 paths [bases] of spiritual success (*iddhi,pāda*):¹⁹⁷

Furthermore, Udāyī, I have taught my disciples the way: my disciples who practise the way cultivate **the 4 paths of spiritual success [power]** (*cattāro iddhi,pāda*).

(1) Here, Udāyī, a monk cultivates the path of spiritual success, complete with concentration through zeal [desire to act] (*chanda*) and through determined endeavour.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ On the structure of the threefold training and its canonical sources, see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16), SD 9 (10d).

¹⁹⁵ The **Mahā Sakul’udāyī S** (M 77) defines the 4 right efforts thus: “(1) Furthermore, Udāyī, a monk rouses the desire for the non-arising (*saṃvara padhāna*) of unarisen evil unwholesome states, and endeavours, rouses effort, exerts the mind, and strives; (2) he rouses the desire for the abandoning (*pahāna padhāna*) of arisen evil unwholesome states, and ... strives; (3) he rouses the desire of the arising (*bhāvanā padhāna*) of unarisen wholesome states, and ... strives; (4) he rouses the desire of the maintaining (*anurakkhanā padhāna*), non-disappearance, strengthening, increase and developing to fulfillment of arisen wholesome states, and...strives. (M 77,16/2:11)

¹⁹⁶ On the primary position and universal relevance of **right view** (*sammā,diṭṭhi*), see **Mahā Cattārisaka S** (M 117), SD 6.10 (2004).

¹⁹⁷ Explained in **Iddhi,pāda Saṃyutta** (S 5:268 f). Other references: D 2:213 f, 3:77, 221; M 1:103, 2:11; S 4:365, 5:254-293 passim; A 1:39, 297, 2:256, 3:81 f, 4:464; Vbh 216; Pm 1:111, 113, 2:205. On a simpler level, these 4 paths [bases] of spiritual success power can be paraphrased as: (1) will power; (2) effort or energy; (3) mental focus; (4) reviewing our progress. These can be applied in a more worldly sense as the 4 paths of success (in our enterprises).

¹⁹⁸ “The path of spiritual success, complete with concentration through zeal and through determined endeavour,” *chanda,samādhī,padhāna,saṅkhāra,samannāgataṃmidhipādam*; Gethin: “the basis of success that is furnished both with concentration gained by means of desire to act, and with forces of endeavour” (2001:81). On *chanda* as the “desire to act,” see Gethin 2001:90 f.

(2) He cultivates the path of spiritual success, complete with concentration through effort (*virīya*) and through determined endeavour.

(3) He cultivates the paths of spiritual success, complete with concentration through mind (*citta*) and through determined endeavour.

(4) He cultivates the path of spiritual success, complete with concentration through investigation (*vīmaṃsā*) and through determined endeavour.

And in this way, many of my disciples dwell having attained to the perfection that is the peak of superknowledge. (M 77,17/2:11)

13.6 Bruce Matthews, in his study of *Craving and Salvation* (1983), points to another important aspect of early Buddhism in that “the Sutta Piṭaka emphasizes the significance of positive conation”:

This is seen in the clear distinction between unwholesome (*akusala*) and wholesome (*kusala*) desire and volition. This is notably the case with many synonyms for craving (*taṇhā*). The last chapter [3] referred to the “adhesive strip” of *taṇhā*, which describes a number of synonymous volitional factors. These, like *taṇhā*, bind consciousness (*viññāṇa*), mind (*mano*), and “personality” (*citta*) to ignorance and *saṃsāra*. So in M 3:32 we find *chanda* (lust, striving), *rāga* (passion), *upādāna* (grasping) and *anusaya* (inclination), all used synonymously with *taṇhā*. There are as well other lists, such as D 3:238, where *pipāsa* (thirst) and *pariḷāha* (fever of passion) are used synonymously with craving, and in M 1:270 *nandī* (feeling of delight), like craving, is said to come just before grasping in the Series of Dependencies [*paṭicca,samuppāda*].

Some of these synonyms, notably *rāga* and *pariḷāha*, are never used in a positive conative sense. There are, though, instances where both *taṇhā* and other synonyms are used positively to express the reformation and cultivation of will and desire. (1983:78; Pāli refs normalized)

14 Summary

14.1 In summary, it should be said that while early Buddhism does not have a notion of “will” in the western philosophical sense [5], it distinguishes between conscious effort and unconscious habitual acts through the 3 doors of the body, speech and the mind. The ubiquitous teaching on mindfulness (*sati*) simply means that we should put forth a *conscious* effort in recognizing phenomena as they arise.

14.2 The central teaching of **the Bhadd’eka,ratta Sutta** (M 131) consists in the conscious watching of our present actions (bodily, verbal and mental), noting them as a doctor would examine a patient, and nursing any unwholesome thought to wholesome health through reflecting on the nature of such actions as expressions of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self:

Let one not go back after¹⁹⁹ the past,
For what is past has passed away,²⁰⁰
The present state as it arises,²⁰²

Nor harbour fond hope for the future.
And the future has not yet come.²⁰¹
With insight, see each of them.

(M 131,3/3:187-189)

¹⁹⁹ “Let one ... go back after” (*anvāgameyya*), pot 3 sg of *anvāgameti* (caus of *anvāgacchati* = *anu* + *ā-gacchati*), lit “to let come back,” ie to wish something back (CPD).

²⁰⁰ Alt tr: “For the past is gone.”

²⁰¹ Alt tr: “And the future is yet unreached.”

²⁰² Comy: One should contemplate each state as it arises by way of the 7 contemplations of insight (ie by way of insight into impermanence, suffering, not-self, revulsion, dispassion, cessation, relinquishment) (MA 5:1 f).

14.3 In the ultimate analysis, however, we have to say there is really no free will, or there is no need for any will, on the level of the awakened mind, that is, one that fully understands the nature of non-self. Since there is no self, there is none to will, or, put in a positive language: there is none who wills; there is only the willing! We have thus broken free from Plato's cave,²⁰³ and found ourselves in a crowded and noisy city and there is this intra-city driverless train that goes in a huge loop around the island. After a while we realize that we keep passing the same places repeatedly, and we are feeling lost, desperate and bored.

So we choose the most likely station, get off, and start walking on our own effort. Despite the crowd—teeming with the helpless, the helpful, the self-helping and those helping themselves—we are basically alone and need to find our own way home to safety.

Only suffering exists, no sufferer is found;
 The deeds are, but no doer of the deeds is there;
 Nirvana is, but not the person who enters it;
 The path exists, but no traveler is seen on it. (Vism 513)

14.4 With this understanding, we would be fully liberated, when the mind is so spontaneous that it is beyond both free will and determinism. Even with a faith-based or wisdom-based constant vision of impermanence, we can take the first step on the path as streamwinners, when we are said to be “independent of others” (*apara-p, paccaya*)²⁰⁴ or spiritual autonomy,²⁰⁵ that is, we enjoy free will as agents of our own happiness and awakening.

Life is such that we may not get what we pray for, but we often get what we believe in. It's harder, and less helpful, to believe that there is no free will than that there is. Hence, if all else fails to convince us, **we must believe in free will: we have no choice!**

— — —

Bibliography

- Blackmore, Susan
 2001 “State of the art: The psychology of consciousness.” *The Psychologist* 2001 14:522-525.
- Brahmavaṃso, Ajahn
 2001 “Anattā: non-self,” in 2004:1-16.
 2002 “Paṭicca-samuppāda: Dependent origination,” in 2004:17-52.
 2004a “Deep insight that liberates.” Perth: Buddhist Society of Western Australia. *Dhamma Journal* 2004 5,1:31-69.
 2004b *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Anattā and Paṭicca-samuppāda*. ©Ajahn Brahmavaṃso, Bodhinyana Monastery, Western Australia, 2002. Singapore: Buddhist Fellowship, 2004. [(1) “Anattā: non-self,” rains-retreat Dharma discourse, 2001 = 2004:1-16; (2) “Paṭicca-samuppāda: Dependent origination” [1992], rev 2002, in 2004:17-52.] Free booklet.
- Campbell, Joseph Keim; Michael O'Rourke & David Shier
 2004 (ed) *Freedom and determinism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004..
- Clark, S R L
 1975 *Aristotle's Man: Speculations upon Aristotle's Anthropology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- Collins, Steven
 1982 *Selfless Persons*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

²⁰³ On Plato's cave, see SD 5.16 (19.4.3.2).

²⁰⁴ See **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8 (5.6).

²⁰⁵ See Repetti 2010a:187 f.

- Dennett, Daniel
 1984 *Elbow Room: The varieties of free will worth wanting*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.
 1991 *Consciousness explained*. London: Little, Brown & Co, 1991.
 2003 *Freedom Evolves*. London: Allen Lane, 2003.
- de Silva, M W Padmasiri
 1979 *An introduction to Buddhist psychology*. London: Macmillan, 1979.
- Duch, Włodzisław
 [Dept of Computer Methods, Nicholas Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland]
 1995 "Physics of consciousness." IV National Conference on "Modeling biological systems," Kraków 2-3/06/1995, pp 101-114
 1996 "From brain to mind to consciousness—without hard problems." Sympozjum Kognitywne '96: Świadomość a Percepcja [Consciousness and perception]. Instytut Filozofii UAM, Poznań, 6-7 Dec. 1996.
- Federman, Asaf
 2010 "What kind of free will did the Buddha teach?" *Philosophy East & East* 60,1 Jan 2010:1-19.
<http://enlight.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-PHIL/phil222515.pdf>.
- Freeman, Anthony
 2000 "Responsibility without choice: A first-person approach." Paper delivered at (1) "Towards Science of Consciousness—Tucson 2000" Conference, AZ: Tucson, 10-15 Apr 2000; (2) St Michael's, Exeter, 13 Sep 2000 (rev). *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7,10 2000:61-67. <http://www.imprint-academic.com/jcs>
- Garfield, Jay L
 2014 "Just another word for nothing left to lose: Agency and ethics for Mādhyamikas," in (eds) Matthew R Dasti & Edwin F Bryant, *Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 2014:164-185.
- Gier, Nicholas F; & Paul Kjellberg
 2004 "Buddhism and the freedom of the will: Pali and Mahayanist responses." In Campbell et al 2004:277-304. <http://www.class.uidaho.edu/ngier/budfree.htm>
- Gombrich, Richard
 2006 "Appreciating the Buddha as a pivotal figure in world history," in *The Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai Lectures*, London, 2006. ["We have free will and are wholly responsible for ourselves." (1st lecture, p7).]
- Gomez, Luis O
 1975 "Some aspects of the free-will question in the Nikāyas." *Philosophy East and West* 25,1 Jan 1975:81-90. <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-PHIL/luis.htm>. See Alex Wayman, 1975.
- Hamilton, Susan
 1996 *Identity and Experience: The constitution of the human being according to early Buddhism*. London: Luzac Oriental, 1996. [On the 5 aggregates, *pañcakkhandha*.]
- Harvey, Peter
 1995 *The Selfless Mind: Personality, consciousness and nirvāṇa in early Buddhism*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995.
 2007 "'Freedom of the will' in the light of Theravāda Buddhist teachings," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 14 2007:35-98.
- Hawking, Stephen
 1993 *Black Holes and Baby Universes and Other Essays*. London: Bantam Books, 1993.
- Imwagen, Peter Van
 1983 *An Essay on Free Will*. Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 1983.
- Jayatilke, K N
 1963 *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*. London: Allen & Unwin 1963; repr Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980.
 1970a "The criteria of right and wrong." *The Mahābodhi* 78 May-Jun 1970:114-120.
 1970b "The ethical theory of Buddhism." *The Mahābodhi* 78 Jul 1970:192-197.
 1970c "The Buddhist ethical ideal or the ultimate good." *The Mahābodhi* 78 Sep 1970:262-267.
 1971 "The basis of Buddhist ethics." *The Mahābodhi* 79 Feb-Mar 1971:50-56.

- Jurewicz, Joanna
 1995 "The Rgveda 10, 129—an attempt of interpretation." *Cracow Indological Studies* Vol.1: International Conference on Sanskrit and Related Studies September 23-26, 1993 (Proceedings), Cracow, Enigma Press, 1995:141-49.
 2000 "Playing with Fire: The pratityasamutpada from the perspective of Vedic thought." *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 26, 2000:77-103.
- Kalupahana, David J
 1969 "The problem of psychological causation and the use of terms for 'change' in the early Buddhist texts," *Vidyodaya* 2,1 1969.
 1976 *Buddhist Philosophy: A historical analysis*. Honolulu: Univ of Hawai'i Press, 1976.
- Kane, Robert
 2002 (ed) *Oxford Handbook of Free Will*. NY: Oxford Univ Press, 2002.
- Karunaratna, Y
 EB "Cetanā." In *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*. Colombo: Government of Sri Lanka, 1961- .
- Keown, Damien
 1992 *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*. Houndsmill & London: Macmillan, 1992.
- King, Richard
 1998 "Vijñaptimatratā and the Abhidharma context of early Yogācāra." *Asian Philosophy* 8,1 Mar 1998:5-18.
- Libet, Benjamin
 1981 "The experimental evidence of subjective referral of a sensory experience backwards in time." *Philosophy of Science* 1981 48:182-197.
 1985 "Unconscious cerebral initiative and the role of conscious will in voluntary action." *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 1985 8:529-539; see also comys in same issue 539-566 & *BBS* 10:318-321.
 1999 "Do we have free will?" In Libet, Freeman & Sutherland (eds), *The Volitional Brain*, in *Journal of Consciousness Studies* *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6 1999:47-58.
 2000 "Do we have free will?" In B Libet, Anthony Freeman & Keith Sutherland (eds), *The Volitional Brain: Towards a Neuroscience of Free Will*, Exeter (Devon): Imprint Academic, 2000:47-57.
 2002 "Do we have free will?" In Kane 2002:551-564.
- Libet, Benjamin; EW Wright; Jr, B Feinstein & DK Pearl
 1979 "Subjective referral of the timing for a conscious sensory experience: A functional role for the somatosensory specific projection system in man." *Brain* 102 1979: 193-224.
 1983 "Time of conscious intention to act in relation to onset of cerebral activity (readiness potential): the unconscious initiation of a free voluntary act." *Brain* 106 1983:623-642. See also remarks by SS Obhi & P Haggard, *American Scientist* 2004, 92:358.
- Libet, Benjamin; Anthony Freeman & Keith Sutherland
 1999 (eds) *The Volitional Brain: Towards a neuroscience of free will*. Thoverton, Devon: Imprint Academic, 1999; & in *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6,8-9 Aug-Sep 1999.
- Loy, David
 2000 "How to reform a serial killer: The Buddhist approach to restorative justice." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 7 2000:145-168.
- Matthews, Bruce
 1975 "Notes on the concept of the will in early Buddhism." *Sri Lanka Journal of History* Dec 1-2 1975:152-160.
 1983 *Craving and Salvation: A study in Buddhist soteriology*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983. See esp pp 74-92
- Mele, Alfred
 2009 *Effective Intentions: The power of conscious will*. Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 2009.
- Nagel, Thomas
 1974 "What is it like to be a bat?" *Philosophical Review* 1974 83:435-450. Repr with comy in D R Hofstadter & D C Dennett, *The Mind's I*. NY: Basic Books, 1981.
- Norman, K R

- 1991 "Theravāda Buddhism and Brahmanical Hinduism: Brahmanical terms in a Buddhist guise." In *The Buddhist Forum II* seminar papers 1988-90, ed Tadeusz Korupski. London: Univ of London (SOAS), 1991:193-200.
- O'Connor, Timothy
2009 "Conscious willing and the emerging sciences of brain and behavior," in George F R Ellis, Nancy Murphy & T O'Connor (eds), *Downward Causation and the Neurobiology of Free Will*. NY: Springer, 2009:173-186.
- Pérez-Remón, Joaquín
1980 *Self and Non-self in Early Buddhism*. Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1980.
- Pockett, S
2002 "On subjective back-referral and how long it takes to become conscious of a stimulus: A reinterpretation of Libet's data." *Consciousness and Cognition* 11 2002:144-161.
- Repetti, Riccardo
2010a "Meditation and mental freedom: A Buddhist theory of free will." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 17, 2010:166-212. <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/2010/07/15/meditation-and-mental-freedom/>.
- 2010b "Earlier Buddhist theories of free will: Compatibilism." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 17 2010:278-310. <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/files/2010/12/Repetti-Earlier-Buddhist-Theories1.pdf>.
- 2010c *The Counterfactual Theory of Free Will: A genuine deterministic form of soft determinism*. Saarbrücken (Germany): Lambert Academic Publication, 2010.
- 2012a "Buddhist reductionism and free will: Paleo-compatibilism." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 19, 2012: 33-95. <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/files/2012/04/Repetti-Buddhist-Reductionism-and-Free-Will-final1.pdf>.
- 2012b "Buddhist hard determinism: No self, no free will. no responsibility." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 19, 2012:130-197.
- 2014 "Recent Buddhist theories of free will: compatibilism, incompatibilism and beyond." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 21, 2014: 279-352. <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/files/2014/01/Repetti-Recent-Final2.pdf>.
- Rhys Davids, C A F
1898 "On the will in Buddhism." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 10, 1898:47-59.
- Siderits, Mark
1987 "Beyond compatibilism: A Buddhist approach to freedom and determinism." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 24,2, 1987:149-159.
- Smilansky, Saul
2000 *Free Will and Illusion*. Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 2000.
- Tuske, Joerg
2013 "The non-self theory and problems in philosophy of mind." In S M Emmanuel (ed), *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, Chichester (UK): John Wiley, 2013: esp 435-428.
- Velmans, Max
2002a "How could conscious experiences affect brains?" *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 9,11 2002:3-29. <http://cogprints.org/2750/01/JCSVelmans2001.final.htm>.
- 2003 "Preconscious free will." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10,12, 2003:42-61. <http://cogprints.org/3382/01/Cogprints%5FPRECONSCIOUS%5FFREE%5FWILL.htm>.
- Wallace, Allan B; & John Searle
2005 *Consciousness East and West*, Northwestern Univ: Cognitive Science Program (Internet video broadcast), 2005. ["There is no autonomous decision process independent of any circumstance, or outside of the causal nexus."]
- Warder, A K
1956 "On the relationships between early Buddhism and other contemporary systems." Based on a paper read to the SOAS Buddhist Seminar, Feb 1953. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London 18,1 1956:43-63.
- Wayman, Alex

1975 "Discussion of Frederick Streng's 'Reflections on the attention given to mental construction in the Indian Buddhist analysis of causality' and Luis O Gomez' 'Some aspects of the free-will question in the Nikāyas.'" *Philosophy East and West*, 25,1 Jan 1975:91-93.

Wegner, Daniel M

2002 *The Illusion of Conscious Will*, London: MIT Press, 2002. [Anti-Cartesian account of free will.]

050125 rev061025 070307 081109 090517 091019a 110224 131111 140717 150601 160325 181230
190318 211105