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This essay critically reviews the most important highlights of the literature on free will in Buddhist philosophy. The Buddha and most subsequent Buddhist philosophers apparently lacked the free will concept, operating within an impersonal framework orthogonal to the free will discussion. As Western philosophy embraces subpersonal conceptions of mind and action informing Buddhism from its inception, however, Buddhism may enrich the Western discussion of free will. Buddhist scholars have only begun to discuss free will over the past 50 years. Nonetheless because Buddhism lacks the free will concept, its texts underdetermine what may be said about it, and thus interpretations of the implicit role of free will in Buddhist thought diverge.

free will, agentless agency, inevitablism, determinism, impossibility argument, consequence argument, manipulation argument, hard incompatibilism, semicompatibilism, paleo-compatibilism

Chapter 14

What Do Buddhists Think about Free Will?

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14.1. Introduction

The Buddha and subsequent Buddhist philosophers (until very recently) apparently lacked the concept of *free will* (Garfield, 2014/2016; Flanagan, 2016; Meyers, 2014),[2] operating within an ultimately impersonal framework *orthogonal* to the free will discussion (Heim, 2014), if not diametrically opposed to it (Garfield, 2014/2016; Flanagan, 2016). However, as Western science and philosophy increasingly embrace subpersonal conceptions of mind and action (Caruso, 2013), conceptions that have informed Buddhism from its inception (Garfield, 2015), Buddhism may have much to offer the discussion of free will (Repetti, 2016c). However, because Buddhism lacks the *free will* concept, its texts underdetermine what may be said about free will from a Buddhist perspective. Consequently Buddhist exegetical attempts to extract what may be implicit about free will in Buddhism diverge. In this paper I critically review the bulk of the extant literature on Buddhist thought about free will and argue against the view that drawing Buddhism into the free will discussion is ill-advised.[4]

Until recently Buddhism has remained silent about free will (Siderits, 1987; Goodman, 2002; Harvey, 2007; Adam, 2010; Federman, 2010; Garfield, 2014/2016; Gowans, 2014, 2016; Meyers, 2014; Flanagan, 2016). One reason, among many, is that Buddhism rejects the ultimate reality of an agent or self (Siderits, 2003), and its goal is the realization of that impersonal reality.[6] Thus the question whether the agent/self is

autonomous cannot arise.[7] Nonetheless the Buddha ridiculed the ideas of inevitable causation by fate, chance, gods, matter, and/or karma (Harvey, 2007; Federman, 2010; Wallace, 2011/2016), all considered *opposite* free will, and he prescribed a path promising to increase our abilities to make wise choices (Wallace, 2011/2016), completely control our own minds (Meyers, 2014), and attain the maximum of mental freedom, *nirvāṇa* (Repetti, 2010b, 2015). While "free will" talk runs orthogonally to the impersonal features of the Buddhist framework (Heim, 2014), the Buddha's rejection of inevitable causation affords Buddhism a solid warrant in the discussion.

However, because Buddhism is designed to eradicate the false sense of agency presupposed in free will discussions, some see the project of engaging Buddhism and Western philosophy in discourse on free will as misguided (Flanagan, 2016; Garfield, 2014/2016). Most Buddhists writing on the subject reject the *strong* view of free will embraced by *some* forms of libertarianism, according to which an immaterial autonomous agent/self exists outside the causal nexus, immune to material influences, able to interject phenomenal causes into the empirical realm—a kind of mini prime-mover-unmoved.[8] Clearly, in rejecting the agent/self, the Buddha implicitly rejected this idea,[9] as have others (Goodman, 2002; Adam, 2010), but this strikes me as the lowest-hanging fruit in this domain, so to speak. More subtly, others have claimed that while *ultimately* there is no self in Buddhism, *conventionally* there is agential functionality sufficient to ground a weaker, naturalistic conception of agency/self and free will (Federman, 2010; Harvey, 2007; Gier & Kjellberg, 2004; Meyers, 2014, 2016; Repetti, 2010b, 2015, 2016b, 2016c; Siderits, 1987, 2008/2016; Wallace, 2011/2016). But what might that be? Many of the

answers to that question overlap, so as we proceed, my descriptions of them will decrease in detail as they refer increasingly to ideas spelled out in earlier iterations.

14.2. Friquegnon: Three Buddhist Conceptions of Freedom

Just as there are different free will conceptions in Western philosophy, Marie Friquegnon (2016) argues that there are three distinct understandings of freedom in *various* forms of Buddhism. First, all Buddhists understand agency as unconstrained by divine power or material causality. As mentioned earlier, the Buddha's rejection of inevitable causation (also by fate and chance) established a Buddhist warrant in this discussion (Harvey, 2007; Federman, 2010; Wallace, 2011/2016; see also Repetti, 2010b). While material causality and fate are not identical with determinism, they share inevitablism,[10] and chance implies indeterminism. Garfield (2014/2016) and Flanagan (2016) seem to overlook this when they argue that Buddhism should not participate in the free will discussion (see also Heim, 2014).

Second, Friquegnon (2016) adds, all Buddhists see unethical actions as the direct result of mental states governed by anger/hatred, jealousy/attachment, and ignorance/fear. For instance, the Mahāyāna philosopher Śāntideva asserts in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* that we can no more blame someone under the impersonally caused influence of such mental states than we can blame fire for causing smoke. This suggests a causal explanation of actions as undermining an agential type of proximal control and implies a sense of unfreedom or mental bondage, the eradication of which is the goal of the Buddhist path and implies that its elimination is possible and constitutes another form of freedom. As Mark Siderits (2008/2016, citing *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 6:22–32) has emphasized, in the

same passage Śāntideva suggests the aspirant, aware of this causality, can alter it. As Meyers (2014) notes, path progress cultivates this sort of self-control.

Many agree with and develop this conception (Federman, 2010; Harvey, 2007, 2016; Meyers, 2016; Wallace, 2011/2016; Repetti, 2010b, 2015, 2016c). Thus the *ārya* (advanced practitioner), in practicing self-monitoring, restraint of desires, and various forms of self-regulation, cultivates an increasingly effective will of the sort she prefers to have, that is, a dharmic will (a will in accord with the dharma).[11] This involves increasingly effective proximal control but does not imply a substantive metaphysical conception of agency—only an empirical, psychological conception. As Aaronson (2004) notes, appealing to the Buddhist "two truths" doctrine (in which *conventional* truth permits pragmatic discourse that is ultimately false or misleading, unlike *ultimate* truth),[12] *conventiona*l agency increases inversely with the *ārya*'s realization of the *ultimate* ontological insubstantiality of her self.

Friquegnon's (2016) third concept of freedom, unlike Śāntideva's deterministic attitude about impersonally caused behavior in unenlightened beings, involves actions flowing from enlightened beings who embody the realization of the insubstantial/empty nature of agency/self. Their ego-less behavior is free of all forms of mental conditioning but poses a puzzle for discussion of free will. For Western thinking about free will typically involves an ability possessed by persons (metaphysically substantive agents).

How this "agentless agency" (Repetti, 2010b; see also Repetti, 2016a) ought to be related to free will is a puzzle, addressed by most thinkers reviewed here only in minimalistic, metaphorical terms, if that (e.g., Aaronson, 2004; Adam, 2010; Meyers, 2014, 2016; Harvey, 2016; Wallace, 2011/2016; Repetti, 2010b, 2012a, 2012b, 2014,

2015, 2016c). Kasulis (1985), borrowing a concept from Taoism, describes it as *wu wei* (doing without doing). Wallace (2011 p. 231/2016 p. 121) describes it similarly: "One non-conceptually rests in this timeless, pristine awareness, allowing actions to arise spontaneously and effortlessly, aroused by the interplay of one's own intuitive wisdom and the needs of sentient beings." The paradox of agentless agency will not be resolved here, but need not be. For it involves freedom not *of* the will but *from* it—more specifically, from its *adharmic elements*; compassion, generosity, and other forms of care involve volition present in enlightened beings (Repetti, 2010b).

Rather than puzzle over the metaphysics, B. Alan Wallace (2011/2016) sees the Buddhist tradition taking a pragmatic approach, exploring ways we can acquire greater freedom to make choices conducive to well-being, and describing practices of Mahāyāna Buddhism that point toward mental freedom. One is the cultivation of the ability to deliberately focus attention with continuity and clarity; another is the cultivation of insight into how attitudes shape experience, allowing for the possibility of altering not only the way we experience but how we are influenced by memory. Wallace's pragmatism rests on a liberating form of Mahāyāna metaphysics: the Great Perfection school of Tibetan Buddhism, emphasizing the realization of the substrate dimension of consciousness—pristine awareness—transcending conceptualization and the causal nexus (and its determinism/indeterminism dichotomy). Wallace sees this as the ultimate source of freedom and the ultimate nature of human identity.

As alluring as this transcendental picture is, Wallace's interpretation of the substrate consciousness is disputed even within Tibetan Buddhism, and to my thinking this model resembles strong free will as a causality-transcendent consciousness from

which free actions originate. Metaphysics aside, Wallace's pragmatic insight seems plausible: Buddhist practices *at least* support a weak (compatibilist) view of free will.

14.3. Story, Rāhula, Gómez, and Kalupahana: Wiggly Buddhist Determinism

Before we continue, let me unpack some terms. *Compatibilist* may be applied to the traditional Western sense of compatibility between free will and determinism but also to compatibility between Buddhist causation and impersonal agency required for moral cultivation on the path. Fischer (2006) argues that a strong conception of free will presupposes ability to do otherwise *under identical causal circumstances*, implying *indeterminism* (incompatible with *determinism*), but that moral responsibility is compatible with determinism, as Frankfurt (1969) argued: an agent can freely do X even if determined to, if the agent would have done X even if she could have done otherwise. Fischer adds, so long as she was able to respond to (moral) reasons for or against doing X, she is morally responsible regarding X. *Semicompatibilists* consider determinism incompatible with strong free will (which requires indeterminism) but compatible with moral responsibility or weak free will (which does not require indeterminism). I extend *semicompatible* to the broader sense of thinking Buddhist causation (and metaphysics) is incompatible with strong agency but compatible with weak agency and moral responsibility. On my analysis, most Buddhists writing on free will are semicompatibilists.

The earliest Buddhist philosophers in the contemporary period to consider Buddhist views of free will, Frances Story (1976), Walpola Rāhula (1974), Luis Gómez (1975), and David Kalupahana (1976, 1992, 1995), presented the Buddhist perspective

within the narrow parameters of the traditional question whether free will is consistent with determinism (see also Griffiths, 1982). I have reviewed their contributions at length elsewhere (Repetti, 2010a), so here I will only summarize my analysis. These philosophers agree that Buddhist causation, *dependent origination* (the view that all conditioned phenomena are dependent on earlier or simultaneous conditions), is neither purely deterministic nor indeterministic: the Buddha's remarks about karma *resemble* determinism but resist a purely deterministic characterization, as does the broader doctrine of dependent origination. For these reasons, they consider Buddhist causation to involve what I have described as "wiggly determinism" (Repetti, 2010a), affording Buddhism a *middle way* between determinism and indeterminism, forming an opaque form of compatibilism between free will and causation that is probably semicompatibilist.

These thinkers are not alone among Buddhists who view dependent origination as involving the nonnecessitated *regularities* Hume described as mere "constant conjunctions," nor in thinking this circumvents the determinism/indeterminism dichotomy: if determined, they are unfree; if random, they cannot be authored (see, e.g., Garfield, 2001). However, as I have argued at length (Repetti, 2010a), if a form of causation is not purely deterministic, then by simple negation it is indeterministic. It may be misleading to try to understand Buddhism through Western frameworks (Garfield, 2015; Heim, 2014), but it is doubtful that dependent origination can escape this dichotomy via wiggly determinism, Humean regularism, or other Buddhist causal models, such as Mahāyāna interdependence.[13] Either the causation is deterministic or it is not: if the former, then the causes of decisions originate prior to the agent; if the latter, the agent cannot claim to author them. In principle, because Buddhists don't believe in

the agent/self, they ought not to care, but that doesn't obliterate the problem. Let's consider more recent views.

14.4. Flanagan, Garfield, and Gowans: Buddhist Free Will Skepticism and Quietism

Owen Flanagan (2016) argues against bringing Buddhism into discourse with free will conceptions tainted by their genesis within a monotheistic theodicy Buddhism lacks. Likewise, Garfield (2014/2016) asserts Mādhyamikas (followers of Madhyamaka, Middle-Way Buddhism) lack a free will theory because they lack a monotheistic theodicy, a conception of the agent operating outside the causal nexus, and a deterministic model of causation. However, in addition to the Buddha's own rejection of inevitablism and the free will dialectical warrant generated thereby, Madhyamaka endorses the view that because there is no metaphysical foundation enabling the naive realist's worldview to be reduced or eliminated, it makes as much sense to say there are tables as to say there are table-like phenomenological appearances or that they are aggregates of atomic psychophysical tropes. Likewise it (arguably) makes as much sense to say people have free will.

Additionally both views flirt with the genetic fallacy insofar as they suggest that the notion of free will is illegitimate outside a theistic context because it has a theistic genesis. By analogy, however, if the concept of human rights had its historical genesis in Abrahamic doxography, *arguendo*, that would not necessarily invalidate the concept. Both thinkers also emphasize that Buddhism lacks a God concept, but that is neither entirely true nor entirely persuasive. It is not entirely true because there are gods in Buddhism, though they are mostly seen as caught within the karmic web like anyone else,

and thus soteriologically unnecessary (exceptions involving Buddhist deities notwithstanding).[14] And it is not persuasive because free will may obtain whether or not there is a God (Fischer, 1989).

Christopher Gowans (2016) places the metaquestion, how to think about Buddhism and free will, into the context of its historical absence (see also Gowans 2014). Gowans argues that the main reason for Buddhist quietism here is that Buddhist philosophical analysis is limited by soteriological parameters: whatever promotes enlightenment. Gowans concludes that if Buddhism must pronounce on any theoretical position, it would only be justified as "skillful means" (soteriologically instrumental for certain individuals) but would nevertheless remain silent on the metaphysics.

However, the Buddha's rejection of inevitablism seems soteriologically relevant and explicitly pronouncing on metaphysics. Additionally a Buddhist meta-ethical theory would be soteriologically justified, yet Buddhism has none, historically. Also, whatever justifies extant Buddhist theories of intentionality, phenomenology, and so on conceivably justifies free will theory. I have argued that Buddhism prescribes methods for cultivating virtuoso-level abilities associated with free will (Repetti, 2010b, 2015, 2016c). This view is implicit if not explicit in the works of several Buddhist scholars (Adam, 2010, 2016; Federman, 2010; Harvey, 2007, 2016; Wallace, 2011/2016; Meyers, 2014, 2016; McRae, 2016; Friquegnon, 2016; Abelson, 2016). Intuitively, if the *ārya* has greater free will–related skills than the average person, she has greater free will, which increases, paradoxically, proportionate to the decrease in the self-sense and peaks in *nirvāṇa*, the cessation of the self-sense. I have argued that this skill undermines the most powerful free will skepticism, "hard incompatibilism" (Repetti, 2010b, 2015), the view

that there is no autonomy *regardless* of whether or not we are determined, because either we are determined and not responsible for our choices, or we're not determined, and our choices are not up to us.

Derk Pereboom (2001) is a vocal advocate of hard incompatibilism, and Galen Strawson (1994) has advanced an abstract version of it with his "impossibility argument" that, irrespective of the causes of our mental states, whenever we choose, we are conditioned by the mental state we are in at the choice moment; because we cannot be the cause of our first mental state, we cannot be responsible for whatever mental state we are in at the choice moment, and thus it's *impossible* for us to be responsible for our choices. Our virtuoso, however, can escape from previous and present mental state conditioning, irrespective of its causal history. That *āryas* are able to cultivate skills that theoretically defeat the most powerful forms of free will skepticism justifies a Buddhist free will theory, if only for the explanatory purchase this exhibits on behalf of Buddhism. As Meyers (2016) put the point, Buddhism rejects the notion of autonomous agents but asserts abilities greater than those that would be possessed by them.

14.5. Meyers: Buddhist Semi-compatibilism

Like other writers in this area (Heim, 2014; Garfield, 2014/2016, 2015; Flanagan, 2016), Meyers (2016) acknowledges that the Buddhist and Western frameworks for agency are orthogonal (see also Meyers, 2014). But Meyers argues adeptly for what, on my analysis, counts as a semicompatibilist view, what may be called "agency lite," grounded in the works of the Abhidharma philosopher Vasubandhu. Paying very careful attention to the texts but informed significantly by Western analytic philosophy, Meyers critically examines Vasubandhu's (and his contemporaries') theories of karma, causation, and

liberation and how they differ from modern positions on free will (and the views of other Buddhists), but also how they describe an understanding of mind, agency, and action that is compatible with causation: everything is caused (perhaps not explicitly deterministically). Meyers concludes not only that mental qualities explain what we consider free will and ground an understanding of moral responsibility but that Buddhist training increases abilities typically associated with free will in the West, to the virtuoso level, a claim I have also developed in some detail (Repetti, 2010b, 2015, 2016d).

Meyers acknowledges the importance of the two truths doctrine in Buddhist thinking about free will, however implicit. *Ultimately* there is no agent/self, but *conventionally* individuals exhibit features typically considered sufficient for holding them responsible; that is, they are able to deliberate, consider consequences, approve or disapprove their intentions, restrain or allow various intentions to form actions, and so forth. Moreover *āryas* possess these abilities in far greater measure than the average person, and the Buddhist path requires them. Meyers's account counts as semicompatibilist: *ultimately* all behavior is impersonally caused; thus there is no genuine free will in ultimate reality, but *conventionally* individuals typically possess sufficient proximal control to qualify for moral responsibility.

14.6. Goodman: Buddhist Hard Determinism

Disagreeing, Charles Goodman (2002) argues forcefully that Buddhism is hard deterministic: dependent origination is deterministic, and determinism rules out free will; he also argues that because there is no self, there cannot be an *autonomous* self, and thus there cannot be autonomy. I think the latter inference is faulty: by analogy, just because it

follows from the fact that there are no unicorns that there cannot be any *winged* unicorns, it does not follow that there cannot be any wings.

Goodman and Siderits have argued for opposing interpretations of Śāntideva's remarks in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* at 6:22–32, where, on the one hand, Śāntideva advises the aspirant to view others' aggression as analogous to the liver's production of bile (impersonally), for purposes of self-control, but, on the other hand, when considering the objection that *because there is no self, there is nobody who can control the self*, Śāntideva suggests that the perspective of self-control is required for the path. Siderits (2008/2016) largely bases his "paleo-compatibilism" on Śāntideva's latter remark, whereas Goodman (2002, 2009) rejects that interpretation.

Goodman's argument rests on the Buddhist view that blame is a cognitive error, given that no *nonself* could be ultimately responsible for "its" behavior. However, Goodman (2016) has recently conceded a small point in the other direction. Echoing Gowans (2016), he now argues that the doctrine of skillful means might sanction belief in free will for individuals at certain stages of the Buddhist path. Goodman's concession, however, resembles a Platonic "Noble Lie" more than an acceptance of compatibilism.

Incompatibilism presupposes a strong view of free will according to which one can be free only if one's choices are *contracausal* (they could have been otherwise under identical causal conditions), something possible only in an indeterministic world. However, there are weaker, compatibilist conceptions of free will, according to which an agent is free just in case she exhibits the right sort of abilities (which may be deterministic), for example, reason-responsiveness, higher-order approval of lower-order volitions. Goodman's rejection of free will is restricted to strong free will.[15] Not all

Buddhists deal only with the strong conception of free will. However, even some who do deal with the strong conception derive opposite conclusions, such as Siderits.

14.7. Siderits: Buddhist Paleo-compatibilism

Siderits's is one of the earliest, seminal, and lasting voices in the contemporary dialectic on Buddhist views of free will. Siderits calls his view "paleo-compatibilist," but I identify it as semicompatibilist, to use a term more readily recognizable within the Western philosophical literature (Repetti, 2012a). Like most Buddhists writing on free will, Siderits's view rests on the two truths doctrine. Conventionally there are persons, but ultimately (within Abhidharma reductionism) there are only deterministic atomistic psychophysical tropes. Siderits argues that ultimately, where determinism applies, there are no agents, but conventionally, where persons obtain, some exhibit strong free will.

Siderits's views on the specifics are highly complex and equally problematic (Repetti, 2012a). A better way to understand Siderits's view is to classify it as a form of semicompatibilism: ultimately there's no free will; conventionally there is. It would be more parsimonious to say we have weak free will. However, *inter*level compatibilism—between ultimate and conventional levels—is not the same as *intra*level compatibilism, but the traditional debate is intralevel. Thus this sort of approach doesn't fully resolve the problem, but rather repartitions it.[16]

14.8. Coseru and Abelson: Buddhist Ethics without Agency?

Some philosophers have posed problems for Buddhist *ethics* involving free will. Christian Coseru (2016), for example, asks whether Buddhism may consistently describe its ideal of agent-neutral negative consequentialist ethics (espoused by certain authoritative Buddhist philosophers; Goodman, 2009) and its impersonal causal model.

Coseru argues that Śāntideva, by allowing moral rules to be discarded for skillful means (arguably a consequentialist principle), compromises the notion of responsibility that requires a freedom that is responsive to moral reasons.

Coseru challenges the compatibilist idea that if we dispense with strong free will, a weaker notion of responsibility, informed by cognitive science (say, "responsibility lite"), will do, suggesting our traditional notion of moral-responsibility-entailing strong free will needs revision. Responsibility-entailing conduct prescribed in the Buddhist path (and the altruistic bodhisattva ideal) demands that moral norms be endorsed independently of empirical research. If skillful means implies agent-neutral consequentialism, this implies actions can be effective outside the interdependent web of causation—but such an account jeopardizes the responsibility-entailing relation between freedom and the bodhisattva's aspirations. Thus Buddhist ethics and metaphysics seem incompatible with traditional conceptions of responsibility-entailing agency. Coseru is implicitly insisting on a strong conception of free will in the robust moral-responsibility-entailing sense that is inconsistent with the sort of consequentialism implicit especially in later Buddhism's bodhisattva ideal.

However, as I have argued (in chorus with the others mentioned earlier), Buddhism seems quite capable of accommodating revised notions of agency lite and responsibility lite. Whether or not strong free will and moral responsibility are necessary needs to be shown. Ben Abelson seems to agree, mostly. On Abelson's (2016) analysis of Buddhist reductionism, persons are impersonal psychophysical processes with only conventional existence. Buddhist reductionists, for Siderits (2003), are committed to this "Impersonal Description" (ID) thesis. Siderits defends against the charge (leveled by

Strawson, 1986) that the ID thesis implies the *extreme* claim (among others) that holding people responsible cannot be rationally justified. Abelson focuses on Siderits's reply to this objection, which appeals to "shifting coalitions" of self-revision processes (in the absence of a real self) as grounds for rendering responsibility attributions rational. Abelson argues that while this idea disarms Strawson's objection, it cannot account for the robust responsibility Siderits wants, though it grounds a modest responsibility stronger than the sort Siderits (and Coseru) dismisses as too weak. Abelson applies this analysis to support a form of weak free will consistent with Buddhism.

14.9. Strawson and Blackmore: No Phenomenological Self

Galen Strawson was one of the first Western philosophers to link the Buddhist view of the unreality of the self with the unreality of free will. Strawson's (1994) free will skepticism rests on his impossibility argument, which he takes to refute strong free will. In his most recent work on the subject, Strawson (2016) focuses on only one lemma of that argument, determinism, and how even determinists find determinism hard to assimilate into their daily lives. Unlike Peter Strawson (1962), who argued that we cannot adopt the skeptical perspective because it's too alien to our interpersonal reactive attitudes (e.g., resentment), Galen Strawson ("Strawson," except when Peter Strawson is being mentioned) thinks Buddhism represents a way of life that embodies that perspective.

Strawson proposes a thought experiment whereby we are to continuously attempt to attend to the impersonal causation of each thought, desire, and so on to bring the resilience of our habitual agential thinking to light. When we see how we cannot maintain the impersonal perspective, we are advised to take up meditation, thought to reduce the

gravitational pull of agential thinking. But Strawson's prescription—meditate to eliminate the self-sense—seems premature. Prognosis rightly precedes prescription. Before we prescribe free will's postmortem procedures, we must be sure free will is dead (Repetti, 2016b).

Regardless, Susan Blackmore (2016) describes how she embodies in her daily life the sort of view Strawson prescribes for the postmortem existence of the nonagent. Blackmore claims that meditation has contributed to her nonagential experience, confirming Strawson's assertion, disconfirming Peter Strawson's. This raises a metaquestion. Meditative awareness resembles phenomenological reduction, as Coseru (2012) shows, in which conceptual proliferation is bracketed. Does meditation render agency *invisible* or, worse, *disassemble* it—a kind of psychic suicide practice? It would be enough of an error to conclude something doesn't exist because one cannot, under certain circumstances, experience it, but quite another to bring about its nonexistence through such circumstances.

According to Aaronson (2004), progress along the meditative path *increases* the conventional (psychologically functional) sense of agency, say, "self lite," while diminishing the ultimate (metaphysically substantive) sense, the *ātman*. The self lite's self-regulative abilities constitute weak (compatibilist) free will. The *conventional* self becomes *more* functionally integrated along the path, not less (Harvey, 2007, 2016; Meyers, 2016; Repetti, 2010b, 2015). For Blackmore (2016), belief in strong free will diminishes with progress along the meditative path, but what Blackmore seemingly misses is that weak free will increases.

14.10. Aaronson, Harvey, and Adam: Two Senses of Self-Agency

Concurring, Peter Harvey (2010) has argued that the Buddhist path not only presupposes a conventional form of weak free will but seems to strengthen our conventional free will. More recently, Harvey (2016) claims the Buddhist version of the free will problem concerns whether its impersonal conception of the person is compatible with moral-responsibility-entailing agency, an issue we saw taken up by others (Coseru, 2016; Siderits, 2003; Strawson, 1986; Abelson, 2016; Meyers, 2014, 2016). Restricting his analysis to Theravāda Buddhism, Harvey (2007, 2016) emphasizes that the Theravāda view identifies various factors that increase conventional agency. Harvey concludes that Theravāda is compatibilist, a middle way between seeing a person as so impersonally conditioned as to lack the proximal agency ordinarily understood as required for responsibility and seeing the person as a strong agent/self with strong free will. His account resembles Aaronson's (2004) and seems semicompatibilist in both senses: He actually calls his view semicompatibilist (Harvey, 2016).

Martin T. Adam (2010, 2016) concurs with what seems clearly a semicompatibilist line of thought, based on an analysis of the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* (*Discourse on the Character of Non-Self*) and an application of the views of Frankfurt (1971). Adam argues that the Buddha's views and those in the Pāli sutras are incompatible with strong free will, but not weak free will or moral responsibility. He argues that Frankfurt's distinctions, between freedom of the person, of the will, and of action, suggest that Buddhist freedom admits of degrees—as most would agree—relative to the individual's spiritual development. Frankfurt distinguishes between freedom of the will (volitional/metavolitional harmony) and freedom of action (being able to act on one's volitions), not to define *freedom of the person* (he says nothing about this) but

rather *personhood*: a person is a being with a hierarchically structured will.[17] Apart from these minor differences, Adam's view comes close to my own.

14.11. Federman, McRae, and Repetti: Approaching Agentlessness, Agency Increases

Finally, a promising turn in recent scholarship involves attention to ways in which Buddhist practices afford practitioners abilities claimed to constitute skills significantly greater than those typically associated with free will, to control all mental states—even the powerful emotions treated as exculpatory in Buddhist ethics, for example, when an *ārya* experiences rage.[18] This growing body of literature is both historically and textually grounded and empirically informed.

For example, Asaf Federman (2010), focusing on early Buddhist texts, analyzes the Buddha's rejection of inevitable causation and of the *ātman*, and he considers the importance of the many self-regulative abilities cultivated on the path, from which he concludes that Buddhism endorses a form of compatibilism. Focusing on Tibetan texts, however, Emily McRae (2016) seems to come to a similar conclusion. McRae explores how we can exercise choice regarding emotional experiences and dispositions, the sorts of things we typically experience as instinctive, deeply conditioned, if not mostly inevitable (see also McRae, 2012, 2015). McRae argues that we can choose our emotions because we can intervene in them. Drawing on mind training practices advocated by Tsongkhapa, McRae argues that Tsongkhapa's analysis shows that successful intervention in negative emotional experiences depends on four factors: intensity of the emotional experience, ability to pay attention to the workings of one's mind and body, knowledge of intervention practices, and insight into the nature of emotions.

McRae argues that this makes sense of Tsongkhapa's seemingly contradictory claims that the meditator can and should control (and eventually abandon) her anger and desire to harm others, and that harm-doers are "servants to their afflictions," a tension we saw earlier in the debate between Goodman and Siderits regarding Śāntideva's analogy about bile and aggression. McRae concludes by considering the (I think semicompatibilist) implications of Tsongkhapa's account of choice in emotional life for the place of free will in Buddhism.

I agree with these latter thinkers and conclude that analysis of Buddhist practices that engender mental freedom increase—and thereby demonstrate—a form of weak free will sufficient for responsibility lite. From a Buddhist perspective, to the extent we—particularly Westerners—exercise *certain* capacities associated with free will (i.e., acting unreflectively on desires), we tend to decrease our mental freedom because *doing as we please* strengthens ego-based habit patterns that fortify the chief culprit in our suffering, the false sense of self. Conversely, as we increase mental freedom from the ego-volitional complex, we increase self-regulative ability, strengthening will, and subsequently exercising will *less* in the service of the ego-complex. Thus the closer one gets to mental freedom, the greater one's self-regulative (autonomous) abilities, but—and here's the paradoxical rub—as one attains the limit condition of mental freedom (*nirvāṇa*), one reaches maximal self-regulative ability, but there is no longer any sense of self, no *ego-based* volitional complex, in need of regulation. Thus the maximum of mental freedom (*nirvāṇa*) and of self-regulation (weak free will) coincide with the absence of any sense of self, *agentless agency*—a form of reason-responsiveness that is entirely dharmic: dharma responsiveness.

Reason-responsiveness is a central criterion in semicompatibilist accounts (Fischer, 2006); dharma-responsiveness grounds a Buddhist form of semicompatibilism. As Buddhist practitioners become increasingly dharmic (through soteriological practice), they not only increasingly approximate (or, on some views, instantiate) *nirvāṇa*; they also increasingly exhibit weak free will. But that increasingly powerful will is explicitly constructed for the sole purpose of eradicating the illusion of a metaphysically substantive agent/self, ironically, and vanishes upon its attainment of that goal.

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[2] Buddhist scholars have only begun to discuss free will over the past 50 years, in conversation with Western philosophers. See Repetti (2010a, 2012a, 2012b, 2014)

for in-depth reviews of most of this literature; see Repetti (2016a) for a representative collection of this literature.

[4] Some of my observations here are taken from Repetti (2016b).

[6] See Garfield (2014/2016), Gowans (2014, 2016), Flanagan (2016), Repetti (2016c). See Strawson (2016) and Blackmore (2016) on the realization of that reality.

[7] Goodman (2002) argues along similar lines.

[8] Not all forms of libertarianism require supramundane conceptions. Meyers (2014, 2016) claims Buddhism is logically consistent with the more naturalistic "event-causal" libertarianism, and Wallace (2011/2016) describes enlightened action in a way that resembles libertarian descriptions (*infra*), his rejection of the strong conception of free will notwithstanding.

[9] Federman (2010) compares critiques of the dualistic Cartesian model of the self with Buddhist critiques of the then-prevalent view of the *ātman* (self/soul).

[10] Goodman (2002) and Wallace (2011/2016) may be interpreted as objecting to this equation, but Repetti (2012b, 2014) notes that the relevant element of resemblance—inevitability—suffices to show that the Buddha was not an inevitablist and that this is reason enough to think he was not a *hard* determinist. See also Federman (2010).

[11] Frankfurt (1971) would consider this volitional/metavolitional harmony sufficient for compatibilist free will and moral responsibility. For a fusion of Frankfurt's hierarchical model and Fischer's reason-responsiveness model with features of *ārya* agency, see Repetti (2010b).

[12] See Thakchoe (2007) for a comprehensive analysis and explication of the two truths doctrine.

[13] See Repetti (2012a, 2012b) for critiques of these attempts.

[14] See Cozort (1986) on Tibetan deity yoga.

[15] For an in-depth critique of Goodman's (2002) earlier position, see Repetti (2012b).

[16] For an extensive critical review of Siderits's arguments, see Repetti (2012a).

[17] I have argued (Repetti, 2010b) that the sort of freedom constituted by enlightenment involves freedom from the otherwise conditioned nature of the ego-volitional complex, or freedom from the self, and that Frankfurt's metavolitional/volitional model of freedom of will may be usefully applied to identify the sort of self-regulative abilities that increase as the *ārya* cultivates dharmic intentions and deconditions from adharmic ones.

[18] See Harvey (2007) for a rich discussion of a spectrum of like cases taken from the Pāli canon.