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## Earlier Buddhist Theories of Free Will: Compatibilism

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# Earlier Buddhist Theories of Free Will: Compatibilism

Riccardo Repetti<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This is the first part of a three-article series that examines Buddhist accounts of free will. The present article introduces the issues and reviews earlier attempts by Frances Story,<sup>2</sup> Walpola Rāhula, Luis Gómez, and David Kalupahana.<sup>3</sup> These “early-period” authors advocate compatibilism between Buddhist doctrine, determinism (the doctrine of universal lawful causation), and free will. The second article reviews later attempts by Mark Siderits,<sup>4</sup> Gay Watson, Joseph Goldstein, and Charles Goodman. These

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<sup>2</sup> The sequence in the Abstract shows the earliest iterations of these authors' positions. Although Story's work was published in 1976, after some of the others' works, the material referenced here was first presented in a talk about twenty years prior to its publication in his book.

<sup>3</sup> Kalupahana (*Buddhist*). I also review the relevant discussions in Kalupahana (*History; Ethics*), both of which were published during the time frame of what I am referring to as the “middle-period,” although his “early-period” position remains relatively unchanged.

<sup>4</sup> Siderits (*Beyond*) was published in the time frame of the middle-period, but I also review Siderits (*Buddhism; Buddhist; and Paleo-Compatibilism*), although the substance of his main argument has not changed.

“middle-period” authors embrace either partial or full incompatibilism. The third article reviews recent attempts by Nicholas F. Gier and Paul Kjellberg, Asaf Federman, Peter Harvey, and B. Alan Wallace. These “recent-period” authors divide along compatibilist and incompatibilist lines. Most of the scholarly Buddhist works that examine free will in any depth are reviewed in this series.<sup>5</sup> Prior to the above-mentioned early-period scholarship, scholars of Buddhism were relatively silent on free will. The Buddha’s teachings implicitly endorse a certain type of free will and explicitly endorse something very close to determinism, but attempts to articulate the implicit theory bear significant interpretive risks. The purpose of this three-article series is to review such attempts in order to facilitate a comprehensive view of the present state of the discussion and its history.

### Did the Buddha Teach Free Will?

Monks, these two slander the Tathagata. Which two? He who explains a discourse whose meaning needs to be inferred as one whose meaning has already been fully drawn out. And he who explains a discourse whose meaning has already been fully drawn out as one whose meaning needs to be inferred.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Some others include T.P. Kasulis (*Zen*), Edward Conze (*Buddhist*), and Galen Strawson (Bounds). Kasulis and Conze only make certain remarks *en passant* that bear on the issue; they don’t directly analyze free will. Strawson only draws upon Buddhist ideas, such as the idea of the non-acceptance of a permanent self, in support of his rejection of free will. Although I reveal my hand throughout this three-article series, I have an account of “a” Buddhist theory of free will of my own (Meditation) and a more general version of the same account that engages deeply with the Western analytic philosophical discussion of free will (*Counterfactual*).

<sup>6</sup>“*Neyyatha Sutta: A Meaning to be Inferred*,” from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (AN) 2.25, Thanissaro Bhikkhu translation. Abbreviated references to Buddhist texts are based on Pāli

The title of Federman's article raises the question, "What Kind of Free Will Did the Buddha Teach?" This question suggests that the Buddha *taught* a certain kind of "free will." Federman's article attempts to substantiate that suggestion. The Tathāgata (the Buddha) never discussed "free will," but he did discuss fate, chance, karma, "dependent origination" or "conditioned arising" (the thesis that all conditioned phenomena originate or arise in dependence upon previous conditions),<sup>7</sup> the efficacy of volition, effort, choice, and action, and a host of things that *presuppose* a kind of free will. But as the *sūtra* quoted above suggests, explicit and implicit accounts of the Buddha's thought are very different things.

Contemporary Western philosophical positions on free will are almost entirely defined by their stance on the question of whether determinism or indeterminism is compatible with free will,<sup>8</sup> which poses the following dilemma. If determinism is *true*, our choices are inevitable,

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Text Society abbreviations of the Pāli Canon. All such referenced material is accessible online at *Access to Insight* (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/index.html>). A "Sutta" (Pāli; "sūtra": Sanskrit) is a discourse of the Buddha. (While such translations and/or explanations of basic terms are obvious to scholars of Buddhism, these sorts of explanations are intended for Western philosophers and others who might also be interested in the Buddhist view of free will.)

<sup>7</sup> In the text I qualify "phenomena" with "conditioned" because Buddhism accepts an unconditioned, *nirvāṇa*, and it is unclear whether *nirvāṇa*, which is typically characterized only in negative terms (i.e., as the absence of various undesirable factors), is properly described as a *phenomenon*. Also, the doctrine of dependent origination allows that the condition for something might be simultaneous with it. For instance, *nāma-rūpa* ("name and form") is characterized as both simultaneous with the six senses and as a key condition for those senses. However, it is not clear that this sort of dependency is *causal*, rather than *mereological* dependency or some sort of *subvenient/supervenient* dependence, in which case the linearity of causation is not *obviously* threatened by this sort of simultaneous dependence.

<sup>8</sup> Strawson's is an exception. He argues that free will is impossible for other reasons, reasons the Buddhist would reject: because choice is always influenced by one's mental states and these are always influenced in turn by prior mental states, and unless an agent could create itself it could not escape such influences, but no one is a *causa sui* (self-causing being). See Repetti (*Meditation; Counterfactual*), for a Buddhist refutation of this argument.

lawful effects of causes that predate our existence, so our belief that we have free will—that *we could have done otherwise*—is illusory. But if determinism is *false* (indeterminism), then our choices are random, no different from coin tosses, so we cannot credibly claim they are “up to us.” Thus, either way, there is no free will.

Dependent origination *seems* to be the same as determinism, under a slightly different description. But different descriptions that pick out identical phenomena cannot be substituted within belief contexts. For instance, “Clark” and “Superman” are different descriptions of the same (fictional) entity. Lois Lane may have seen Superman at the scene, but it would be an error to conclude that *she believed Clark Kent was there*. Likewise, dependent origination and determinism *might* describe the same principles, and it is not certain that they do, but even if they do, they involve different descriptions. Thus, it would be risky to conclude that the Buddha was a determinist.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> There is an interpretive issue about the claim that the Buddha was omniscient which threatens to undermine the point being made in the text. One understanding of omniscience implies that the Buddha’s epistemic states were marked by perfect apprehension of reality, and relative to this notion (of perfectly unobstructed apprehension of reality) because “belief” connotes some sort of epistemic *opacity*, it seems erroneous to attribute “beliefs” to the Buddha, as opposed to knowledge. But the point being made in the present case (by analogy with Lois Lane’s beliefs) turns precisely on the issue of how the descriptive content of a thought individuates that thought from other thoughts about the same object that are defined by different descriptive contents. Here is the problem: If omniscience implies that the Buddha knows the different descriptive contents of every thought and also all the cases where those different thought-descriptions denote identical objects, then my claim in the text—that the Buddha cannot necessarily be considered a determinist even if determinism and dependent origination differently describe the same phenomena—would be false. For if dependent origination and determinism are coextensive in their denotation, then the Buddha would know that, and he would be a determinist. I am uncertain about the exact type of omniscience the Buddha was supposed to possess, but it is not identical to that of the Western form attributed to an ideal God, so I am hesitant to make this sort of argument. One description of the Buddha’s omniscience that supports the idea that it is distinct from God’s omniscience is that it is not the case that the Buddha knows everything, but that he apprehends clearly anything he focuses his attention on. If he never focused his attention on the descriptions that constitute the doctrine of determinism, then the claim in the text holds. But even if the counterargument against my claim in the text is correct,

The Buddha explicitly discussed dependent origination, not as a threat to volitional freedom, but rather as an aid: to teach that volitional (and other) conditions that lead to mental bondage could be reversed, that they could lead to mental freedom. Those mental-bondage-fostering conditions involve the unreflective, unrestricted expression of volitional impulses, which is what many Westerners typically associate with free will: the ability to choose freely, to do whatever we want to do, to do as we please. The Buddha did not prize unregulated volitional expression, however. The Buddha valued the more general ability to *regulate* volitions, to choose *which ones* to express or restrain in order to attain liberation. He more likely would consider this broader ability to be what is meant by “free will.” And he would likely consider unrestricted volitional expression as a mental-bondage-fostering indulgence, propelled mainly by unreflective dispositions and thus better described as “unfree will.”

In any case, the Buddhist notions of (autonomy-resembling) regulated volition and (determinism-resembling) dependent origination are certainly compatible, because the former requires the latter, so the “problem” of their compatibility never arose within Buddhism. The Buddha did not explicitly discuss “determinism” or “free will,” nor did he value the conception that Westerners take to constitute free will, so the problem of the compatibility of determinism and free will never arose either. The Buddha advocated other volitional-regulation-related abilities, such as the ability to control attention, to be mindful, to cultivate dharmic<sup>10</sup> (liberation-oriented) views, intentions, and habits, and to

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we are not omniscient, and we lack knowledge of this equivalence between determinism and dependent origination, in which case a version of the argument applies nevertheless to what “Buddhists” believe.

<sup>10</sup> From “*Dharma*,” a complex, originally Vedic philosophical term whose meaning the Buddha revised. In the Vedas, the *varna* (caste) system posits that one’s karmic evolution determines one’s birth and thus one’s station in life, and one’s *dharmā* (duty) as such. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, for example, the god Krishna tells the *kṣatriya* (warrior caste) Arjuna that it is his *dharmā* to engage wholeheartedly in the massive battle before him, despite Arjuna’s compassionate stirrings for his potentially killed relatives, friends, and

reverse adharmic ones. The Buddha discussed mental freedom and placed it at the heart of his teaching, along with understanding of dependent origination as the key to its attainment (Kalupahana *Buddhist* 30). Because Buddhism is mainly concerned with dependent origination and mental freedom, and these concepts *resemble* determinism and free will, respectively, Buddhism has a wealth of *implicit* thought on free will, and an even greater wealth of *explicit* thought on these closely related ideas.

The central Buddhist belief that we can rearrange conditions in a way that leads to mental freedom *presupposes* a volition-regulating type of free will, whereas unregulated volitional expression is a *hindrance* to liberation, not something intrinsically valuable. The Western philosophical tradition typically wishes to *expand* volition-expressing autonomous agency and defend it against the *threat* of determinism, but for Buddhists, ego-based volitional impulse must be *tamed* with the *assistance* of (determinism-resembling) principles of dependent origination. Thus, in Buddhism, (determinism-resembling) dependent origination is not a problem but an ally, and this in turn means that “free will” is not a *philosophical* problem, but a *practical* one: how to regulate volitional impulses in order to achieve liberation. This is mainly why there is no “free will problem” *within* Buddhism and thus no discussion of it throughout Buddhist history prior to challenges from Western philosophy and science.

Thus, although the Buddha believed in free-will-resembling, mental-freedom-oriented volitional regulation and determinism-resembling dependent origination, whether he would have seen “free

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countrymen. The Buddha uses this term, capitalized, to refer to what may be characterized as the way things are (from the enlightened perspective), the pattern of things, or the law of all phenomena. It is sometimes used somewhat loosely to refer to the Buddha’s teachings, thought to be coextensive with the ultimate truth. This shift in meaning is didactic: the *Varna* system is not how things really are, not the ultimate truth.



will” and “determinism” as compatible is unclear. If, moreover, as Michael Barnhart claims,<sup>11</sup> a “blissful maintenance of contradiction” is often embraced within Asian philosophy, it follows that we cannot assume that anyone maintaining two beliefs has a belief about their compatibility, much less an account of it. Let us name the assumption that the mere maintenance of two beliefs in one mind or doctrine entails a belief in their compatibility “Barnhart’s fallacy,” and reasoning that avoids it “Barnhart’s virtue.” Any account that attributes “compatibilism” (between free will and determinism) to the Buddha risks Barnhart’s fallacy, and any account that attributes a view of “free will” to the Buddha also risks flouting the *sūtra* above.<sup>12</sup>

In Western philosophy there are so many conceptions of causality, autonomy, and their relationships as to make “the” free will problem a misnomer. Thus, attempts to resolve “the” free will problem appear sophomoric. There are good reasons to think Buddhism contains a plurality of views (Keown, *Buddhism*)—equally complex, if not more so. Maybe there is, as the title of Goldstein’s monograph suggests, *One Dharma*, but the differences in world view that divide Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhists alone are radical.<sup>13</sup> Because both Buddhist and Western philosophical conceptions of free will are so complex, attempts to integrate them will generate difficulties greater than attempts to understand either. Thus, we must be cautious in our assertions about “what the Buddha taught.”

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<sup>11</sup> Barnhart (recent conversation).

<sup>12</sup> AN 2.25.

<sup>13</sup> Theravāda Buddhism emphasizes the earliest Pāli texts that contain original discourses of the Buddha, the Buddha’s monastic rules, and philosophical explications of the doctrines implicit in both; these texts form what has come to be known as the Pāli Canon. Mahāyāna Buddhism includes variant versions of these, but places greater emphasis on subsequent texts, mostly in Sanskrit, that emerge later on in India beginning with the teachings of Nāgārjuna, an influential early Mahāyāna teacher considered by many Mahāyānists to be the “second Buddha” (Loy, Second).

I mentioned above that the early-period authors embrace a compatibilism between Buddhism, determinism, and free will. This does not mean that they commit Barnhart's fallacy *thereby*. Rather, they do not think Buddhism is threatened by the Western philosophical problem. It is natural that the first Buddhist scholars to consider whether Buddhism is threatened by this Western philosophical dilemma would be inclined to defend Buddhism by embracing compatibilism, because compatibilism may be described, in simplified terms, as the view that there is no problem with free will and determinism or indeterminism. Perhaps the greater reflection on the issue afforded by time and aided by the assertions of the early-period scholars partly explains why middle-period scholars begin to move in the other direction, toward incompatibilism.

The same factors likely explain why recent-period scholars divide along compatibilist and incompatibilist lines, a division that parallels the one between Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism. The relevant difference between them for purposes of *this* discussion is that because Theravāda Buddhism accepts a more *linear* version of *dependent* origination that more closely resembles determinism, Theravādins are likely to argue for compatibilism. Because Mahāyāna Buddhism embraces a more radical, non-linear, or holistic version of that doctrine, sometimes described distinctly as *interdependent* origination, that might be compatible with indeterminism,<sup>14</sup> Mahāyānists are more likely to argue for incompatibilism between free will and determinism than Theravādins. Conceivably, for each doctrinally distinct kind of Buddhism, there may well be a distinct theory of free will.

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<sup>14</sup> Arguably, the version of the doctrine of dependent origination that emphasizes interdependence may make things harder to predict, but it is all still conditionality at work. Indeed, it might count as a greater form of determinism, whereby every particle in the universe simultaneously causes and is caused by every other particle, and each such interconnection between any two particles is still linear in that particle A affects particle B while B affects A, each in a deterministic fashion. Adding them all together only magnifies the determinism.

As this relatively short synopsis of the issues reveals, there is no singular Buddhist theory of free will, just as there is no singular Western philosophical theory of free will. Each Buddhist account seems to capture some essential insight about free will but seems to remain inconclusive or unconvincing in whole. Unsurprisingly, the same holds for the Western accounts of the subject. The purpose of this three-article series is to highlight both what is intuitive and what is problematic in these Buddhist accounts, to help raise the level of the discussion and connect it more informatively with the Western discussion and its powerful challenges, and to facilitate more comprehensive Buddhist responses to these challenges.

Let us turn now to what the early-period scholars had to say, beginning with the earliest, Frances Story, who first addressed the problem in the 1950s.

### **Story: “Non-rigid” or “Soft” Determinism?**

Story (385) elucidates the key difference between karma and determinism by noting that whereas causation is universal, karma is restricted to *volitional* action and its consequences: “Volition, intention, O Bhikkhus, is what I call Kamma”.<sup>15</sup> Story analyzes the relationship between present volitional action, karmic processes and formations from the past (dispositions), future results (382-383), other categories of karmic and non-karmic causation, and how action may involve predispositions and other effects of previous karma. But he insists that because there is always an element of *volition* or *voluntariness* in any present action, despite the powerful karmic dispositional loading, so to speak, the karma doctrine is not fatalistic (389).

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<sup>15</sup> AN 4.63. “Bhikkhus” are Buddhist monks; “Kamma” (Pāli) is *karma* (Sanskrit), volitional action, its dispositional force, its effects, and/or the lawful principles of cause and effect that govern that force, seen to be like “seeds” that set up a chain of conditions that mature into later pleasant or unpleasant ‘fruits’ for the agent of the action.

Apart from his rich analysis of the different ways an action can *variably* bear fruit, Story makes interesting remarks about *action requiring intention*. Rejecting the karma doctrine of the *Bhagavad Gītā* (that prescribes action *without* expectation of result), Story says “there must, in any case, be desire for the accomplishment of the act, or the act itself could never be carried out” (388). This is a Humean axiom: reason without motive cannot move a person into action. However, Story adds: “This applies to every action except those performed by the Arahant; since there is no ‘unchanging Atman’, no distinction can be made between the doer and the deed” (388). Story’s “Arahant” (Pāli; Sanskrit: *arhat*) is an enlightened being; his “Atman” (*ātman*) is the Indian philosophical conception of an independent self or soul that Buddhism rejects in favor of a “no-self” doctrine that denies any integrated, enduring, substantive metaphysical underpinning to the aggregates of psychophysical phenomena that give rise to the impression of selfhood.

Story is astute to immediately connect the issue of no-self with free will, for it is unclear how a non-agent can perform any action, freely or otherwise.<sup>16</sup> But the idea of *non-intentional* enlightened action seems to contradict the idea of the necessity of intention for action. Story’s suggestion is that because the enlightened being is not an agent separate from the universe, the universe intends the action, as Wallace suggests (67-68); but the notion of cosmic teleology is difficult to square with scientific understanding. Story asserts these contradictory claims, but does not try to reconcile them. Arguably, however, they may be reconciled. Assuming that even non-dualistic action requires an initiating intention, it follows that the actions of enlightened beings count as intentional. Because there is no separate ego in the case of enlightened beings, there is no ego-volition, but there is volition, for example, the volition to spread the *Dharma*. This line of reasoning is initially promis-

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<sup>16</sup> The notion that a permanent, unchanging *ātman* can even act at all is equally rejected in Buddhism.

ing, but it still raises the question: Whose volition is it, if there is no agent? According to the Buddha's doctrine of *anātman* (no-self), insubstantiality or emptiness characterize not only the person, but everything, in which case volitions simply arise impersonally (based on the web of conditions in play). This is so whether a person is caught in the illusion of ego or not. Thus, the same question (about whose volition it is) applies to the enlightened and the unenlightened equally. And the answer is the same in both cases: the volition belongs, *ultimately*, to nobody, even though we may distinguish volitions by reference to the "persons" who express them, for pragmatic reasons. The only difference is that the *arhat* knows this, but the "worldling" (*puthujjana*)<sup>17</sup> does not, and takes the pragmatic reference to be substantive. *Arhats* may be said to have desires, primarily for the welfare of all beings, but they have no ego-volitions, cravings, and the like.

Story does examine the facially problematic issue of how a non-self can bear karma and whether or not the non-self who acts is the same non-self who experiences the karmic fruit. His answer is neither distinctly affirmative nor negative. He says that there is a karmic line running continuously through the series (392): although the individual is the result of all his previous karma, he is free in the present to perform actions that change his future. As he changes, he becomes, in a manner of speaking, someone else although there is continuity with the former self out of which he emerges. ("Self" here functions simply as a convenient pronoun.)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The worldling is not only the non-Buddhist (human or otherwise), but even most Buddhists, by virtue of the fact that they have not yet attained the first level of liberating insight that precipitates becoming a "stream entrant," that is, one who has entered the stream that leads to full awakening thereafter within a maximum of seven lifetimes.

<sup>18</sup> Presumably, Story is here trying to express in his own words the classic Theravāda view that over time, from life to life, a being is 'neither (unchangingly) the same, nor (completely) different' (*Milindapañha* 40). In other words, nothing of the person remains completely unchanged between any two moments, ultimately, and yet the continuity

Story says “We are free to select the causes which shall determine our action in the moment of choice” (392), illustrating the principle of dependent origination. But he adds that this “distinction is most important: it represents the whole difference between absolute determinism and free-will” (394). This reasoning, however, implies a *non-absolute* determinism, a thorn in Story’s account and for those who endorse a version of it—Gómez, Kaluphana, Gier and Kjellberg, Federman, and Harvey. Because these writers embrace dependent origination and reject absolute determinism, perhaps this is grounds for rejecting the idea that dependent origination and determinism really are the same idea under different descriptions. The problem with this idea is that because determinism is an absolute doctrine, any such qualification collapses into the claim that determinism is false, and thus that indeterminism is true.<sup>19</sup> But most of those same writers reject indeterminism, as we shall see.

One way to resolve this is to retain the rigidity of determinism but identify sub-categories like *karmic*, *psychological*, or *economic* determinism that are *relatively* non-rigid in that they involve many more va-

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between any two moments in what Siderits calls the “person-series” (Beyond Compatibilism, *passim*) is significant enough so that it would be a mistake to think of the changes that occur between any two stages as sufficient grounds to conclude that the entities present in any two such moments are entirely distinct, say, the way George Washington and King Milinda are entirely distinct.

<sup>19</sup> From the perspective of most Western philosophers writing on the subject, determinism is the doctrine of *universal* nomological (lawful) causation, and therefore *by definition* an absolute doctrine in that it is held to apply to all phenomena without restriction or exception. One could conceivably, however, accept a *non-universalized* version of the doctrine, say, such that *some* or *most* but *not all* phenomena are lawfully determined. The main reason deterministic philosophers do not embrace this possibility is that it is precisely what indeterminists typically claim: that even though the laws of nature apply to most (physical) phenomena, they do not apply to certain (intentional, psychological) phenomena, such as deliberation, choice, and action, the latter exceptions of which are alleged to be indeterministic. This dichotomy may be false, but there is a straightforward sense in which the philosophically worrisome implications of a universalized determinism vanish if one accepts a non-universalized version of the doctrine. For, on a non-universalized version of determinism, it would no longer follow logically that every future state of the universe, including every choice I will make, is fixed in advance.

riables than, say, chemical determinism, such that not all the variables that determine behavior *within that domain* admit of descriptions couched in vocabularies that operate within that domain. For instance, psychological determinism may involve laws that govern causal relations between mental states, described in “folk” psychological vocabulary (such as “belief” and “desire”), such as the “practical syllogism” generalization: for all persons, desires, and beliefs, if person A desires y and believes that x leads to y, then, *ceteris paribus* (other things being equal), A will do x.

But psychological determinism presumably allows that neurological and other “lower-level” laws also apply to and influence action, that not all the factors required for a full explanation of why person A desires y are couched in folk psychological terms, and that some of these involve lower-level (for example, neural) phenomena described by lower-level vocabularies and laws. In that regard, *psychological* determinism isn’t rigid or absolute, nor is *neurological* determinism, but *determinism simpliciter* is rigid and absolute, because it contains and ranges over all those sub-level laws and all their interactions. When an unqualified determinist thinks the laws in a sub-domain such as economics are non-rigid, she means that unknown factors not in the vocabulary of economics are in play. But this non-rigidity is sub-domain-*relative* and/or *merely* epistemic, in the same way that the weather is non-rigidly determined by laws couched in the vocabulary of meteorology, but ultimately rigidly determined nonetheless.

Thus, the better alternative is to use the more viable pair of contrasting qualifications to determinism, namely, *hard* and *soft*, as these have been articulated within the Western analytic philosophical discussion. Both involve determinism *simpliciter*, but “hard” just means “rules out free will” and “soft” just means “doesn’t rule out free will.” While there are other important ways of distinguishing them, we may capture

a core difference in meaning by attributing *inevitability* to hard determinism and *evitability* to soft determinism.<sup>20</sup> Let me explain what is meant by “evitability.” Although all determinists think that all events are determined and that whatever is determined will happen necessarily, for a hard determinist this implies that all events are determined *in such a way* that nothing we can do can make any difference whatsoever to final outcomes; for a soft determinist there is a possibility that an outcome may be changed by someone who is sufficiently aware of causes and conditions, even though the ultimate outcome is nonetheless determined. Soft determinists argue that awareness of how *this action* leads to *that undesirable outcome* engenders causal knowledge that renders *that undesirable outcome* evitable, for that outcome may be avoided by avoiding this action; this form of evitability is perfectly consistent with determinism, for it is the knowledge itself that causally contributes to the avoidance of the undesirable outcome, even if that knowledge itself was deterministically caused. The obvious connection with Buddhism is that the Buddha taught the evitability of mental bondage and therefore might be labeled a soft determinist.<sup>21</sup>

The only problem with the hard/soft distinction is that *both* are exceptionless. However, Story and his followers *seem* to think that although determinism *mostly* governs the universe, little pockets of free will (and, implicitly, of indeterminism) somehow obtain. But because if even a single subatomic particle is not determined, its indeterminacy could influence everything else, exceptions to determinism entail indeterminism. So, unless they have an account that refutes this latter claim, Buddhists would be wise to replace “non-absolute” with “soft.”

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<sup>20</sup> Dennett’s *Elbow Room* constitutes an elaborate, highly syncretic argument in support of the compatibility of evitability and determinism.

<sup>21</sup> Harvey and Federman rest their main compatibilist conclusion on the notion that this (Dennett’s) point about evitability applies to Buddhism in precisely the way just mentioned in the text: that the Buddha taught the evitability of suffering.



Story thinks that absolute or “rigid” determinism undermines free will; because he is certain that we have free will, determinism must not be absolute. For Story, this involves realizing that the dependent origination that accounts for suffering is the same dependent origination that—when the process is reversed—leads to the eradication of suffering: “That is the whole point of *Paṭicca-samuppāda*, the formula of conditioned arising—that it can be reversed, by repeated acts of decision. Man can swim against the current: if he could not, his evolution would be impossible.” (Story 394) The main problem with these otherwise plausible assertions is that they remain unanalyzed: they leave unresolved their possible implications, such as indeterminism. To Western philosophers, they smack of “libertarianism,” the view that free will and determinism are incompatible, but we do have free will, in which case determinism must be false (or, equivalently, indeterminism must be true).

One could maintain that dependent origination is compatible with the future-determining dharmic choices Story thinks express our freedom, yielding soft determinism, but his non-absolute determinism invites indeterminism. The ability to “swim against the current” suggests *contra-causality*, the ability to act *contrary* to all the causal determinants feeding into one’s behavioral system, but this also implies the libertarian’s indeterminism.

Story could have simply bit the deterministic bullet and claimed that the voluntary element attendant even upon karmic dispositions that powerfully sway the moment of choice are themselves determined, but that would require embracing one side of the Western philosophical dilemma described at the outset: that of accounting for how domino-like effects from lawful causes that predate our existence can be considered free. Other Buddhist writers endorse partial determinism, so perhaps the Barnhart’s-virtue-exhibiting conclusion, at this point, is that Buddhism has mixed feelings, unanalyzed ideas, or even inconsistent ideas about

determinism and freedom. As we proceed with our analysis of the other early-period scholars, this impression will strengthen.

### **Rāhula: A Qualified Compatibilism**

After explicating dependent origination and acknowledging the importance of free will in Western philosophy, Walpola Rāhula claims that the free will question “does not and cannot arise in Buddhist philosophy” (54). This claim only seems plausible, however, because he presupposes an *inflated* view of free will that entails freedom from *any and all conditions*:

There can be nothing absolutely free, physical or mental, as everything is interdependent and relative. If Free Will implies a will independent of conditions, independent of cause and effect, such a thing does not exist. How can a will, or anything for that matter, arise without conditions, when the whole existence is conditioned and relative, and is within the law of cause and effect? (54)

But one could claim that the problem is with this *inflated* version of the concept of free will as contracausal or acausal, where a *deflated* view of the will as involving causation works just fine. For anyone advocating this sort of deflationary view, Rāhula’s argument above commits a straw man fallacy.

After inflating the notion of free will, Rāhula then critiques that exaggerated notion on the basis of dependent origination. Not only is this a straw man fallacy relative to deflationary accounts, but Rāhula himself in the next breath advances a deflationary view of free will. But even the attack on this straw man ignores cases in the Buddhist literature that seem to involve contracausality, perhaps the most famous being the bowl that floated upstream *against the currents*—just one among many contra-natural, supernatural, or otherwise physical-law-violating, paranormal or psychic phenomena that litter Buddhist doxography (Ka-

lupahana *Buddhist* 21-23, 40-44, 114-115).<sup>22</sup> It is also unprincipled for those who think of *nirvāṇa* (enlightenment, ultimate reality) as *unconditioned* to dismiss out of hand the notion of free will *solely* on the grounds that it entails the idea of *unconditioned freedom*. This line of reasoning would suggest that we reject Story's enlightened beings' actions on the ground that they seem to flow from the unconditioned. However, if the Buddha acts from within a mental state characterized as *nirvāṇa*, and his actions ensue from his will, then because *nirvāṇa* is unconditioned and his will expresses it, his will seem to be free, logically speaking.

As suggested above, Rāhula subsequently admits the possibility of a conditioned, *relative* free will: "Will, like any other thought, is conditioned. So-called 'freedom' itself is conditioned and relative. Such a conditioned 'Free Will' is not denied." (54) This deflated approach to the question creates an opening for a Buddhist compatibilism according to which a naturally-construed form of agency is compatible with dependent origination. Rāhula does not develop the deflationary idea, but continues with his rejection of the inflated idea:

Here, again, the idea of Free Will is basically connected with the ideas of God, Soul, justice, reward and punishment. Not only is so-called

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<sup>22</sup> Arguably, however, one could claim that if one accepts psychic phenomena and the like, that does not mean that such phenomena are not seen as arising from (deterministic) conditions, but just that they are not entirely *physical* conditions. That is, if there are other dimensions of reality, such as the sort of (astral) worlds allegedly inhabited by devas, demons, and the like, one could conceivably hold that they are equally subject to dependent origination. Indeed, the Buddha seems to have suggested as much when he said that beings in heaven and hell realms are so deeply (karmically) engrossed in their pleasures and their pains, respectively, that they are unlikely to be receptive to the *Dharma*, and for this reason human birth is precious. But Buddhist and Western causality diverge here, for whereas this picture seems coherent from the Buddhist perspective, from the Western perspective the very notion of a non-physical realm violates a foundational assumption of determinism, namely, the closure of the physical domain: deterministic laws cannot work, cannot *govern* all physical phenomena, if there are non-physical causal elements that mysteriously inject novel causes into the otherwise deterministic physical causal stream.

free will not free, but even the very idea of Free Will is not free from conditions. (54-55)

Rāhula is intuitively right about the *inflated* idea of free will. A good question for Rāhula's analysis, however, is whether the following parallel claims are equally valid: "Not only is so-called *nirvāṇa* not free, but even the very idea of *nirvāṇa* is not free from conditions. Not only is the so-called unconditioned not free, but even the very idea of the unconditioned is not free from conditions."

Principles of fair reasoning suggest that opposing views be afforded the same dialectical apparatus as one's own, provided there is nothing in the opposing views that rules out parity of reasoning. Rāhula does not say much more on the subject. Thus, let us turn to Gómez's account.

### **Gómez: Further Attempts at a Middle-path Position**

Luis O. Gómez opens his article with signs of Barnhart's virtue, for he explicitly restricts his treatment of the problem to the *Nikāyas* (Pāli language early record of the discourses of the Buddha),<sup>23</sup> while acknowledging that Mādhyamaka and Yogācāra theories have important implications for the issue (81).<sup>24</sup> More to the point of Barnhart's virtue, Gómez states:

The reader should also be forewarned of the unavoidable risk of discovering in Buddhist scriptures nonexistent theories and problems, which are often nothing but the distortions caused by our Western microscope. I would, therefore, like to underline the

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<sup>23</sup> These are the canonical texts of Theravāda Buddhism.

<sup>24</sup> Mādhyamaka and Yogācāra are different forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Yogācārins (followers of Yogācāra) affirm an idealist (mind-only) metaphysics, but mādhyamikas (followers of Mādhyamaka, the middle path) neither affirm nor deny either wholly realist or wholly idealist metaphysics.

fact that we are here also concerned with speculative arguments that could be developed from basic Buddhist statements by *implication*, whether they were or were not formulated explicitly. (81; emphasis in original)

Gómez begins his analysis with the dispute between followers of two competing ancient Indian doctrines (*vāda*) about the efficacy and inefficacy of *kriyā* (action) or karma (action, and/or the effects of action)—*kriyāvāda* (or *karmavāda*) and *akriyāvāda* (or *akarmavāda*), respectively. Akriyāvādins thought all human effort was futile; I call this view “volitional fatalism.” Gómez differentiates two types of *kriyāvādins*, one fatalist, one not. Both thought that karma from previous actions extending backward through indefinitely many previous lives influences current states of being and thus current actions. One interpretation of *current* action is that it is an *inevitable* effect of karma that lacks (what I would describe as) any *initiating causal force* of its own. Let us call this view “karmic fatalism” and its denial “karmic non-fatalism.”

Karmic non-fatalists thought, in positive terms, that *effort* would help lead to liberation, whereas karmic fatalists thought, in negative terms, that *austerities* (often painful, to “burn” away the results of prior karma) and *abstention from action* would eventually end karma and lead to liberation. The Buddha pointed out that even this idea implies karmic non-fatalism, for we are able to either perform or not perform them, and their performance makes all the difference to whether we suffer during their performance (Gómez 84). The Buddhists were among many then-prevalent *kriyāvādins*, Gómez argues, but were of the karmic non-fatalist variety. Karmic fatalism resembles hard determinism, for it suggests that *current* actions are *inevitable* effects of previous karma. Gómez thinks,

therefore, that the arguments in the *Nikāyas* against karmic fatalism would also apply to “strict determinism,”<sup>25</sup> and he locates at least three.

The first argument Gómez identifies (82-83) is that not all negative experiences are caused by previous karma. For example, karma does not cause suffering due to bile, weather, accidents, and the like.<sup>26</sup> This is consistent with Story, for whom karma is restricted to *volitional* action. In other words, Gómez and Story seem to be in agreement on the idea that the Buddha’s teachings on karma do not entail that even all the non-volitional causes of one’s experiences, such as being killed in an avalanche, are themselves the karmic results of one’s previous volitions, but rather the karmic consequences that accrue to one in the future are restricted to one’s volitional behavior in the present. Gómez’s examples dispel the idea (sometimes erroneously associated with *karmavāda*) that every experience is *totally* caused by previous karma.

The second argument is that the relationship between actions and their consequences is not a one-to-one relationship such as might obtain in simple mechanical causation, say, between the striking of a match and fire. As an illustration, Gómez refers to the famous comparison between the effects of a grain of salt dropped in the Ganges versus one dropped in a small cup, on the one hand, with the uncharacteristically unethical action of an otherwise saintly person and the same action performed by an ordinary person, on the other hand (83). The Buddha says that if there were a one-to-one karmic relationship, the saintly life and liberation would be impossible.<sup>27</sup> With karma the conditions are so much more complex than they are with the match/fire relationship (which is actually more complex than it seems: when the *head* side of a *dry* match is struck with *sufficient* but *not excessive* force against a *certain*

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<sup>25</sup> His reasoning here suggests that he would substitute “hard” for “strict.”

<sup>26</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN), 36.21.

<sup>27</sup> *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (AN) 3.99.

type of sufficiently-*flint-covered* surface within a relatively-*oxygen-rich* atmosphere, fire results, but not if there are excessive winds or other defeating conditions). Both the salt and match examples are consistent with “strict determinism,” however, so Gómez could have avoided confusion if he distinguished non-strict and strict karma without arguing for a non-strict determinism.

The third argument involves the efficacy of effort. As suggested earlier, Gómez argues that the Buddha refuted karmic fatalism with the simple observation that the ascetic feels pain upon performing austerities and no pain upon their non-performance, in which case the performance or non-performance is what causes the pain or its absence (84).<sup>28</sup> Likewise, he could have argued, *abstention* is something one can *do* to alter karma, and involves *effort* (against desire). As Gómez suggests, the Buddha taught that it is precisely because actions are also *initiating causes* that we can attain liberation by performing the right actions, again illustrating the key principle of dependent origination.

The problem with Gómez’s argument is that (like Story) he extends the non-strict argument from karma, which is restricted to the volitional, to *all* dependent origination and causality, where the argument does not make sense. He does this because he thinks that the strictness of dependent origination contradicts the flexibility of karma.<sup>29</sup> To avoid this, he tries to work out some sort of “middle way” approach through this dilemma (88), and appeals to the no-self doctrine, the threats of

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<sup>28</sup> He may not have realized it, but this case also refutes volitional fatalism, for the ascetic must want to perform the austerity (albeit because he wants to attain liberation) in order to perform the austerity, in which case his volition to perform the austerity is what accounts for his performing and experiencing the austerity.

<sup>29</sup> He is not alone here. In his translator’s commentary to the *Sivaka Sutta* (SN 36.21), Thanissaro Bhikkhu, for instance, thinks the Buddha rejects determinism, stating “the Buddha’s teaching on kamma avoids determinism and opens the way for a path of practice focused on eliminating the causes of suffering in the here and now.”

eternalism and nihilism that attach respectively to asserting or denying the reality of anything, and the two-truths doctrine, which differentiates between the view of reality from the enlightened versus the everyday vantages (85-87). All of these complex efforts are, on analysis, misplaced; they are unnecessary and are less clear than his treatment of karmic fatalism. When the premises one offers in support of one's conclusion are weaker or less plausible than the conclusion, then that amounts to a form of question-begging.

All Gómez needed to do—like Story—was to acknowledge that karmic variability is consistent with invariable dependent origination. But his reasoning, particularly in the concluding section of his essay, suggests that for him—like so many others, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike—determinism entails fatalism. His closing sentence illustrates this:

The question is then, does the Buddhist middle way solve the problem, and the answer again is obvious, if by causation is meant “weak” conditioning, then perhaps it does solve it, but if total conditioning of the series is intended, then the Buddhist would be no better than the Ājīvika (Gómez 88).

(The Ājīvikas were akriyāvādin fatalist followers of Makkhali Gosāla.)

I submit that if Story, Rāhula, and Gómez understood the differences between hard and soft determinism, they would agree that the Buddha would reject hard determinism and would likely accept soft determinism. Because the same overall perspective is endorsed by Kalupahana, the same problems arise, as we shall see.

### **Kalupahana: Further Complications with Qualified Compatibilism**

David Kalupahana does not *directly* analyze free will or say much else directly on the subject. Kalupahana states that although there “is no one single term in the Buddhist texts that could be considered the equivalent



of the term *will*,” there are a variety of related terms such as *volition, intention, purpose, desire, craving, thirst, and want* (*Ethics* 49). In Western philosophy, however, these same notions fare equally alongside *will* as part of the phenomena to be explained. After detailing those other factors, Kalupahana argues that *volition* “is the most important factor in determining whether a person is responsible or not for an action” (52). Most Western philosophers would agree that whatever feature of voluntary behavior determines responsibility is a free-will-relevant feature, and that volition is such a key feature for determining responsibility. Although Kalupahana does not draw the inference, it would be logical, therefore, to equate volition with the “will” of “free will.”

Kalupahana examines several *causes* of volitional actions, such as instincts, conscious motivations (such as feelings of attachment and desire), and unconscious motivations (such as the desire to live), but concludes that Buddhist moral responsibility applies only to conscious motivations (*Buddhist* 46-47). This conclusion puts Kalupahana close to compatibilist Western philosophers (like Hume, Locke, Frankfurt, and Dennett) who see morally responsible agency as compatible with causation so long as the right relationship obtains between the agent, her volitions or reasons for acting, and her actions.

With volition as key to karmic and moral responsibility, all that is left for Buddhist compatibilism is an account of how dependent origination and volition mesh, such as Story’s account. Kalupahana begins to construct such an account, stating that the Buddha’s conception of causation involved four features:

- (1) It is objectively real (*tathatā*);
- (2) It involves necessity (*avitathatā*);
- (3) It involves invariability (*anaññathatā*); and

(4) It is conditional (*ida-ppaccayatā*) (*Buddhist* 27-28; SN.12.20).

Because causation is *conditional*, as in feature (4), knowledge of those conditional causes that lead to the desired conditional effects makes it possible to bring about the conditions that *necessarily*, as in feature (2), and *invariably*, as in feature (3), bring about freedom from the ordinary operations of causation that so far have led to mental bondage and suffering (31-33). If he's right about these four features, Buddhism might accept soft determinism. But Story (*Dimensions*) and Gómez (*Aspects*) resist the second and third of these four features, as discussed above, and Mahāyāna Buddhists would dispute the first three of these four features, as Gier and Kjellberg (*Buddhism*), and Wallace (*Buddhist*), argue.

Kalupahana sees the key insight of the Buddha's enlightenment as this knowledge of dependent origination (30, 115): "Freedom from the normal causal process and the attainment of the state in which the supernormal causal process is operative . . . is achieved as a result" (116). In other words, Kalupahana thinks that conscious volition is sufficient for moral responsibility, and that awareness of how causation operates opens up the possibility of the Buddhist path to a kind of freedom from the normal operation of causation. Although Kalupahana seems to implicitly accept soft determinism, because he is inconsistent about freedom from causation, supernormal causal operations, psychic powers, and so forth, he is difficult to pin down as a (soft) *determinist*. For instance, echoing the other early-period scholars, Kalupahana states: "The principle of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) avoids both strict determinism and chaotic indeterminism" (*History* 117). But this contradicts his statements (2) and (3) above.

Consider his next remark: "Reflective awareness (*anupassanā*) in the form of constant mindfulness (*sati*) is the means of discovering an appropriate method of behavior in a world of bewildering variety, richness, and creativity" (117). Although it is not developed systematically,

this remark implies that the increasingly-awakened mind has the ability to act wisely, close to the compatibilist idea of acting “reason-responsively.”<sup>30</sup> He continues, “One who adopts such mindfulness is able gradually to develop a method of behavior that need not necessarily conform to a preordained conception of ‘duty’” (*History* 117). Kalupahana is highlighting *flexibly* responsive behavior (as opposed to rule worship), the ability to spontaneously do the right thing regardless of situational complexity. I think we could call this ability, cultivated through Buddhist meditation disciplines, “*Dharma-responsiveness*,” as it parallels and yet exceeds the above-mentioned notion of “reason-responsiveness.”

Kalupahana’s remarks about dependent origination as intermediate between determinism and indeterminism are enigmatic. His other remarks only complicate matters. For instance, he says, “the principle of dependent arising takes into account the natural happenings in the subjective as well as objective spheres . . . without admitting absolutely determined psychological or physical laws that are totally independent of experience” (89). If there are no absolutely determined laws, however, determinism is false. On the other hand, he says of the Buddha,

His doctrine had to steer clear of notions of permanent existence and nihilistic non-existence, strict determinism and chaotic indeterminism . . . . The Buddha realized that it is inconsistent to advocate an absolute, inviolable law or uniformity and then take refuge in its violations in order to account for the ‘unusual.’ Similarly, he was not willing to consider the mental life and freedom

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<sup>30</sup> See Fischer (*My Way*) for an account of reason-responsiveness as the key to a “semi-compatibilist” form of free will that rejects the inflated, contracausal, indeterminism-requiring conception of autonomy as incompatible with determinism, but accepts a deflated form of free will whereby the agent’s ability to respond appropriately to moral reasons is compatible with determinism and sufficient for purposes of moral responsibility.

as anomalies to be sacrificed on the altar of the nomological or the neutral. (53)

Despite this suggestive language, Kalupahana does not unpack any account of how the intermediate position is supposed to work, except perhaps what is hinted at in his discussion of Ājīvika fatalism. There, Kalupahana describes an interesting distinction between free will and final freedom (liberation). The Ājīvikas rejected the efficacy of the will but accepted the inevitability of liberation at the end of a necessitated process. Kalupahana describes their fatalistic view by reference to a metaphor attributed to the Ājīvika teacher Makkhali Gosāla,<sup>31</sup> as “compared to a ball of thread thrown down from the summit of a mountain, which will unwind to its full length” (Kalupahana *History* 15), presumably by force of gravity alone. This image suggests inevitable movement in a certain direction. To this interesting metaphor Kalupahana adds, “No other condition will make any difference to its length” (15).

The soft determinist would disagree about the irrelevance of *effort* as the string unwinds, claiming that some of the unwinding is the result of efforts (even if some effort is the result of previous non-effort-involving causes). The idea *that specific causal conditions matter* to the chain of events distinguishes the determinist from the fatalist, who accepts only “fate” or “destiny” as an overarching cause, and the idea that *actions are initiating causes* (even if they are themselves caused) distinguishes the soft from the hard determinist (and accounts for the fact that soft determinists are evitablists, whereas hard determinists are inevitablists). It is surprising that Kalupahana does not argue that the efforts the practitioner makes are the conditions that account for the particular movements of the unraveling ball of thread, even if those efforts are initiated by previous conditions (such as hearing the *Dharma*).

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<sup>31</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* (DN) 1.20.

The Buddha thought belief in fatalism threatened volitional impotence, i.e., paralysis of the will. For one who accepts what I have called “volitional fatalism” above, once the unraveling string reached a knot, it would stop unraveling, and ultimate liberation would be suspended indefinitely, at least until that knotted condition was removed. By contrast, *Dharma*-responsiveness prevents all sorts of knots. This sort of adjustment to the Ājīvika’s string metaphor therefore aptly captures the sense in which the Buddha would favor a non-fatalistic or “non-rigid” determinism over a fatalistic or “rigid” form of determinism, although, again, I prefer to avoid the confusing connotations of these descriptors in favor of “hard” and “soft” determinism. Thus, regardless of whether determinism and dependent origination are identical, it seems sufficiently clear that the Buddha would reject hard determinism. However, two questions remain unresolved: whether dependent origination is best described as non-rigid determinism and whether non-rigid determinism equates with soft determinism.

### **Conclusion**

I have reviewed the bulk of early-period scholarship on Buddhism and free will and found it both intriguing and inconclusive, for although it raises interesting questions, it gives us few clear answers. I have attempted to raise the level of discourse by laying bare those elements essential to properly understanding what is meant by “Buddhism and free will” and by calling attention to important differences in explicit and implicit doctrine. Our review has clarified certain points and has identified others that remain unresolved. The Buddha’s entire teaching rests upon dependent origination. Dependent origination appears to be deterministic, but canonical counterexamples to determinism and physicalism suggest otherwise. It is possible that the Buddha may simply have been a Barnhart-style “compatibilist” about these contradictory tensions: he may simply have blissfully maintained implicitly contradictory

beliefs. (Of course, the belief that he attained a state of omniscience counts strongly against this latter option.) Whereas hard and soft determinists agree with the karmavādins that actions have effects, hard determinism suggests that because there are no alternatives, actions are inevitable. But belief in inevitability threatens volitional paralysis, and because the Buddha thought a belief that threatens volitional paralysis should be rejected, he would have rejected hard determinism. If dependent origination equates with determinism, it seems that the Buddha would accept soft determinism.

The Buddha may have held that a kind of “*virtually hard*” but *still soft* determinism applies more to worldlings than an unqualified soft determinism does, given the karmic heaviness of their volitional dispositions and their mental-bondage-fostering prizing of unregulated volitional expression. That is, because the typical worldling is so mentally bound, it may be said that he is *virtually* unfree, and thus that the causation of his behavior ostensibly resembles that of the hard determined (unless and until he begins to cultivate some volitional regulation and some mental freedom). Because that possibility is always present for beings “blessed with human birth,” they are only *virtually* hard determined, given the real possibility of reversing their conditions. By analogy, they are akin to prisoners in a cell that is periodically (quietly) unlocked electronically, not knowing that the visibly closed but unlocked door contains the possibility of freedom. Thus, the Buddha may have held that soft determinism applies more straightforwardly to serious or advanced Buddhist practitioners, especially as their practice deepens, in light of their intimate familiarity with the evitability principles of dependent origination and thus their mental-freedom-fostering prizing of volitional regulation—by analogy, their awareness of when and how the door is locked and unlocked. In addition, he may have held that enlightened beings are not even properly described as soft determined because there is no separation between them and deterministic reality; they are free be-

cause no volitions or actions are truly attributable to them as separate agents that could render them unfree.<sup>32</sup> By analogy with the idea of virtual hard determinism, this might be described as a determinism-consistent “*virtual indeterminist*” position. Nonetheless, both qualifications—virtually hard and virtually indeterminist—remain qualifications to, and thus forms of, soft determinism. Whether soft determinism is cogent is another matter, taken up elsewhere.<sup>33</sup>

The main unresolved doxographical issues are whether dependent origination should be characterized as soft determinism or as some mysteriously hybrid non-rigid determinism, whether it applies to enlightened beings, and whether the no-self doctrine implies there is no agency and thus no free will. If, in the final analysis, the Buddha was simply a Barnhart-style compatibilist who held contradictory views, these doxographical issues may remain unresolved. Even if we could resolve them, the alethic questions would remain long after we resolved the doxographical ones. In the subsequent articles in this three-article series, I trace the further evolution of these issues through the middle-period scholarship, which leans heavily toward incompatibilism, and the

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<sup>32</sup> Lest I give the impression that I am claiming that enlightened beings lack volitions (something I would deny), let me clarify the claims just made in the text. It is not that an enlightened person is seen as without volitions, but rather that her volitions are not the product of a separate ego. That is, an enlightened being has volitions but is free of ego-volitions (volitions influenced by spiritual ignorance). Further, it is not obvious that their volitions are just passively shaped by surrounding conditions, although Wallace seems to suggest as much when he describes enlightened behavior as exhibiting a “kind of freedom” such that “one nonconceptually rests in this timeless, pristine awareness, allowing actions to arise spontaneously and effortlessly, aroused by the interplay of one’s own wisdom and the needs of sentient beings from moment to moment.” (67-68). It seems perfectly consistent with the Buddha’s teachings that enlightened beings may have non-egocentric volitions that are all *Dharma*-responsive, such that they naturally respond only in wholesome ways to surrounding conditions, rather than in ways that are influenced by ingrained delusion and self-centeredness. Volitions connected with compassion, just to mention one type, appear to be both most natural for enlightened beings and quite consistent with *anātman* or non-ego.

<sup>33</sup> I argue that it is cogent (Meditation), but I also argue that the same model may be held, with minor modifications, even if indeterminism is true (*Counterfactual*).

recent-period scholarship, which (ironically) presents a forking path of possibilities, one compatibilist and one incompatibilist, not unlike the metaphorical forking path of possibilities that captures the impression that free will is the power to determine which of two futures our choice determines.

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