

¹ To explain this stance I will examine some of the implications of the *Anattalakkha a Sutta*, (*Discourse on the Characteristic of Non-self*) comparing these with an influential account of free will provided by the philosopher Harry Frankfurt.

In discussing the concept of freedom one of the most basic distinctions western philosophers have drawn is that between *empirical* and *metaphysical* freedom. Empirical freedom refers to the ability to act as one wants. Formulated negatively, it can be understood in terms of the absence of constraints obstructing an individual's ability to do as they like. The notion of 'constraint' can be understood as either *external* or *internal* to the agent. Philosophers have distinguished different sets of constraints in spelling out particular understandings of freedom. Political philosophers, for example, have focused on external restrictions such as those imposed by governments, political classes, and material conditions. Psychologically minded thinkers, by contrast, have emphasized internal constraints such as compulsions, obsessive thoughts, depression, confusion and so on.

For philosophers working in the area of metaethics, however, it is the idea of *metaphysical* freedom that has been seemed most germane. Metaphysical freedom, like

¹ The position taken in this paper can be found in Adam 2011, where it is framed against the views of Harvey 2007. Here I sharpen the argument, with little reference to Harvey's position.

were a self, he asserts, it would be that aspect of the person over which one would have control. We do not have control over any of the aggregates. The five aggregates are all that a person is. Therefore there is no self ().

Bhikkhu Bodhi makes some observations about the basis of this argument. The selflessness of the aggregates is demonstrated:

...on the ground that they are insusceptible to the exercise of mastery (). If anything is to count as our 'self' it must be subject to our volitional control; since, however, we cannot bend the five aggregates to our will, they are all subject to affliction and therefore cannot be our self.³

Thus if there were a self, whatever it might be, we would be able to control its states. In the above passage, concerning we would choose not to suffer and to be well in our bodies if we could; this is our natural wish and predisposition. Nevertheless, we remain afflicted and disposed to affliction. Suffering is inherent to . We cannot simply wish it away. If were the self we would be able to do this. It is important to notice that the sense in which we are said we to lack control over is one of *direct* control over its *states*, in particular its state of being subject to *affliction*. In the passage above there is no denial of the idea that we *can do* as we wish with respect to the actions we perform with our bodies; the denial is of the notion that we *can be* as we wish with respect to the presence or absence of affliction. The wish that the Buddha describes as impossible to fulfill is "Let my form *be* thus, let my form *not be* thus," not "Let my form *do* thus, let my form *not do* thus". If free will is simply understood as the empirical ability of persons to act voluntarily or to do as they want, the Buddha's position here does not imply any denial of this. All it suggests is that we cannot directly wish away the suffering associated with the first aggregate. In fact, the Buddha's teachings are premised on the idea that *it is possible* to do something about suffering; indeed we *can* eliminate it. But we cannot simply do away with it *directly*.

Are we then to conclude that Buddhist doctrine implies a qualified free will, one in which we can *do* as we will if not actually *be* as we will immediately, according to our wishes? Is this the end of the story? Actually, the Buddha's implied position turns out to be considerably more complex than this.

To understand how this is so, we need to revisit the concept of 'the will'. Let us follow others in tentatively identifying the English language concept *will*

meant to capture those mental events that direct one's actions -- physical, mental and vocal. It would appear, then, that *volitional* formations constitute the very aggregate in virtue of which action is *voluntary*. Keeping this understanding in mind allows us to raise a deeper question regarding the will's freedom. For, as mentioned, an analysis identical to that carried out on *sa* is applied to each aggregate in turn -- including *sa*.

Volitional formations are non-self. For if, bhikkhus, volitional formations were self, they would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to have it of volitional formations: 'Let my volitional formations be thus; let my volitional formations not be thus.' But because volitional formations are non-self, volitional formations lead to affliction, and it is not possible to have it of volitional formations: 'Let my volitional formations be thus; let my volitional formations not be thus.' (SN III 67)

4 (f)1(un-2 (f)TJO.)-Thus it would appear that the (re) aggregate that includes the will is not subject to control. Following our analysis with respect to *sa*, the lack of freedom here consists a

Second-order considerations are also critically important in the well-known analysis of free will provided by the philosopher Harry Frankfurt:

Besides wanting and choosing and being moved *to do* this or that, men may also want to have (or not to have) certain desires and motives. They are capable of wanting to be different, in their preferences and purposes, from what they are. Many animals appear to have the capacity for... 'desires of the first order', which are simply desires to do or not to do one thing or another. No animal other than man, however, appears to have the capacity for reflective self-

Frankfurt's version of free will makes sense of some common intuitions regarding our everyday actions. Most of us, most of the time, are moved to act by ordinary desires that we want to have move us. Hence, on Frankfurt's analysis, most of our actions are freely willed. This way of thinking about things makes sense of these instances in which we 'feel free' in acting and are therefore willing to take responsibility for what we do. Our actions reflect our choices and the values we identify with. In brief, they reflect 'who we are' (or at least who we take ourselves to be). We do think of such actions as freely willed.

On the other hand, Frankfurt's account is not without its counterintuitive aspects. As we have seen, the identification of the will with one's effective desire entails a denial of free will to Frankfurt's addict. This runs against our intuition that persons are always in possession of a free will -- even when their actions are compelled. In such cases we usually say that one is acting against one's own will, which is thought of as remaining free even when one is forced to act against it.

There is, in fact, another well-attested understanding of the will that would support this latter intuition. According to this understanding, in saying that one wills something, there is no implication of effort. If, contra Frankfurt, we conceive of the will as the desire (or set of desires) that one *most identifies with* -- as opposed to one's effective desire -- we can maintain that while the unwilling addict's

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willingly done (i.e. accompanied by); this is the key factor in determining moral responsibility. *Freedom* of the will is not. The point is that the action is voluntary, not that the will is metaphysically free in some way. Universal causality is not considered a constraint or obstacle to moral responsibility from the Buddhist perspective; it is, rather, a requirement.⁸

5. *Degrees of freedom.*

Freedom in Buddhism is not understood as a quality of the *will*. If there is no independent source of volitions over and above our mental, physical and vocal actions then there certainly cannot be free will in any ultimate sense. Indeed it is precisely from the higher perspective that the will can be seen to be unfree. Our lack of free will logically follows from the Buddhist position on the ontology of the self. There is no independent s (pe)3 err(a)4 (l)8t2 (g)63.1 (O3£10 (phy)8 (s0 (t) (hia)4 (ITd()Tj0.0019 (c)-0.01l)4 (y)8 Td() (

may be attributed to them accordingly.

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