Buddhist Moral Responsibility:

The Deterministic and Agentless Moral Responsibility of Buddhism

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Declaration

I, Chun Hei Dylan Ngan, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

Moral responsibility seems to intuitively require two fundamental elements, an agent that is responsible, and the freedom of will to be deemed responsible. Buddhists, however, adopt two theses: the non-self thesis and the claim that the natural world adheres to ‘dependent origination‘ (a seemingly strict system of cause and effect). Yet, they engage in moral responsibility that they hold to be a way out of suffering and the cycle of life and death through enlightenment. This thesis explores how Buddhist moral responsibility could accommodate what seems to be a blatant contradiction. I investigate whether Buddhist moral responsibility could be thought of in a different way.

Impact Statement

This thesis presents an exploration into Buddhist moral responsibility and its relationship with Buddhists metaphysics. Within academia, it first increases an understanding of the Buddhist world view, especially when it comes to reality and appearances. Second, it explores the metaphysical theoretical underpinning for its moral psychology, the Buddhist's ethical framework and practices, specifically the transformative power of awareness, understanding and wisdom that leads to liberation and enlightenment. Three, it examines the role of freedom in terms of its metaphysical place and function, as well as how it is expressed and applied in moral responsibility. Four, it covers the Buddhist view of selfhood and the role of the agent within Buddhist metaphysics and moral responsibility. It opens exploration into a more explicit and clear investigation into Buddhist methodology for the alleviation for suffering and development of peace and happiness. It allows for bridging the gap within the literature that explores Buddhist moral responsibility without considering metaphysics, and it can be found in sources that have been missing in current literature, namely, Mahayana resources and commentary from Chinese Buddhists underexplored within the Chinese Canon of Buddhist literature (as current literature has focused on the Pali Canon). Furthermore, engagement and comparison with Western philosophy is plausible, such as Kant, given his work on freedom and the metaphysics of morals, as well as contemporary work on moral responsibility such as Strawson and the compatibilism of determinism. Outside academia, it can offer insight into psychology, and implications of Buddhist moral responsibility in legal and political applications.

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CHAPTER I:

Buddhism and Moral Responsibility

I.1 Introduction

Moral responsibility seems to intuitively require two fundamental elements, an agent that is responsible, and the freedom of will to be deemed responsible. Buddhists, however, adopt two theses: the non-self thesis and the claim that the natural world adheres to ‘dependent origination‘ (a seemingly strict system of cause and effect). Yet, they engage in moral responsibility that they hold to be a way out of suffering and the cycle of life and death through enlightenment. I intend to explore how Buddhist moral responsibility could accommodate what seems to be a blatant contradiction. I investigate whether Buddhist moral responsibility could be thought of in a different way.

Buddhists seem to have the means of overcoming their contradiction firstly, by considering the conditionally arising world, bound by cause and effect, only phenomenologically, leaving room for freedom in the ‘transcendental’. Secondly, by restricting the role of freedom to ‘awareness’. And thirdly, while recognising that there is no independent and unchanging ‘self’, that is not to say nothing is morally responsible.

Buddhist moral responsibility, I think, seems to be one of a different kind. First, it recognises and places emphasis on the causal factors of why and how we act rather than on blame and praise. Second, it does away with the assumption that a moral

agent is an independent unchanging self of free will. Third, it focuses the goal of moral responsibility on changing how we can behave for the better.

Rather than the free *will* of a moral agent that underpins moral responsibility, Buddhists may advocate for a freedom of *awareness* and understanding of the causes of our suffering, as the roots of moral responsibility. I intend to show that Buddhist moral responsibility is a different kind of moral responsibility. It is one that simultaneously recognises and involves the implications of determinism, whilst permitting freedom.

To begin with how moral responsibility is usually understood, we may begin with engaging with our moral intuitions (Foot, 1967; Thomson, 1976). That is to say, we may reflect upon our moral values, our conceptions for right and wrong, good, and bad actions. Based on our moral conceptions, we have certain moral expectations of one another, of how we *should* behave, which in turn allow us to morally appraise one's character, and to morally respond to one another in specific ways given certain actions, intentions and resulting consequences (Hart, 2008; Watson, 1996: Smith, 2015; Calhoun, 2019). This notion is distinctly different to us, for instance, from questions of causal responsibility, expectations that come from one's physical capabilities, appraisal of one's physical attributes or our legal liabilities.

To demonstrate, if Rahel, my friend, steals my car, I don't just hold them responsible in the sense that I acknowledge they causally moved my car to a different place, nor am I considering calling the police and bothered only by the fact that they broke a law. By holding Rahel morally responsible, I may think of them as less of a friend in some way, I feel hurt and betrayed, and as a result I may remove them from my life. All this

is to say, moral responsibility holds a special place in our lives, it has unique significance and provides a different dimension of meaning.

Crucially, moral responsibility is tied to agents, their wills, and identities. When we think of appropriately assigning moral responsibility, we do so assuming that it is towards other persons who have an autonomous choice in what they do, and we'd feel quite silly doing so in the same way to that which does not have such a will, like a table. It is unclear however, if Buddhists conceive of moral responsibility in the same sort of way. They look at the world and they see a system of cause and effect. When they look at themselves, they don't seem to think that there is a self as we would understand it. Buddhists assert that we seem to operate in transient and impermanent processes, rather than stable unchanging identities. Some therefore assert that these two Buddhist observations are inconsistent with moral responsibility.

Therefore, my thesis project aims to examine these two key presumptions of moral responsibility within Buddhism: freedom of will, and the notion of a moral agent. I explore how Buddhist moral responsibility can seemingly do without both, as they seem to claim that the world is bound by cause and effect, that there is no 'self', and yet have a system of moral responsibility that has the role of leading us beyond the natural cycles of life and death, a way beyond physical laws.

I address this question by first, in this chapter, by outlining my methodology and approach. I will do this by giving a contextualisation of the Buddhist materials I will be exploring. This includes a brief historical outline of Buddhism, the sort of texts I will be

referring to, and the scope and boundaries of these sources for the purposes of this thesis.

Second, I shall provide an exegesis of the foundations of key Buddhist teachings (the first three teachings that the Buddha gave), but more particularly how Buddhist teachings in general can be understood in terms of its content, aims and methodology. This will assist in clarifying my own approach towards these teachings for my discussion.

Third, I will explore the problem of free will within the Buddhist context, considering specifically, the teaching of dependent origination, and how it could be interpreted as deterministic. I follow this with the wide and varied arguments from different scholars therefore, on what the Buddhist's position on this is therefore meant to be, or should be, regarding the problem of free will. I argue that despite dependent origination, there is much emphasis on the notion of freedom and liberation within Buddhist teachings which can't be ignored.

Fourth, in which case, I propose there is a middle way that may grant Buddhists an account of freedom (not free will), that accommodates dependent origination. I suggest that by turning to Mahayana traditions of Buddhism, we may have a Buddhist equivalent of a phenomenal world that would allow the adoption of Kant's ideas regarding the problem of freedom, that renders freedom at least possibly consistent with dependent origination.

That being said, Kant's account itself invites a lot of questions that remain to be answered. I thus lay out the major puzzles that result in a powerful objection that demands clarification and resolution. To resolve this, I demonstrate how Buddhism can clarify and resolve these puzzles and the resulting problem through the notion of delusion within the Mahayana tradition. This shall be followed by a more comprehensive account of Buddhist freedom, exploring what exactly is this freedom, and whether we can say more about what it means, its scope and the role it plays. This will lead to a new plausible conception of Buddhist moral responsibility. I will then return to the views covered in the third chapter, to elaborate on how this new kind of moral responsibility presents a better alternative.

Fifth, whilst Buddhist moral responsibility is meant to liberate the moral agent, Buddhists adopt the notion of non-self. I will outline the argument the Buddhists have against any notion of an independent and consistent core self, and how this has been perceived as a problem for moral responsibility. If Buddhists claim what we are is an impermanent, transient, and interdependent thing, this means it can't be considered as a 'self', an independent and consistent core identity. Even with the plausibility of freedom, Buddhist moral responsibility does not make sense without an individual to liberate. I propose that Buddhists can resolve this problem by simply not committing moral responsibility to a 'self', but merely to a non-self agent, with a capacity for conscious awareness.

I ultimately conclude that we could render Buddhist moral responsibility and Buddhist metaphysics at least possibly consistent. But more importantly, the takeaway is a different kind of moral responsibility. It promotes understanding and addressing

causes and effects of our actions, rather than focusing on the assignment of blame and personal responsibility along with appropriate emotional responses.

I.2 History of the Buddha

To begin, I first draw the contextual boundaries of what I will be exploring and examining in the broad umbrella of what can considered to be Buddhism within the scope of this thesis. For the purposes of this thesis, I intend to separate 'Buddha' with the 'ism'. Meaning, I will be discussing the Buddha and the philosophical teachings attributed to him and his disciples during his life, or be discussing derived material from later commentators that has at its fundamental basis, those very teachings.

I will not be discussing Buddhism as a religion or social belief, which means avoiding magic, obscure metaphysics, ritual, tradition, nor complying with only a specific school of thought within Buddhism. The boundaries of the investigation will therefore be within the limits of, as the Buddha puts himself as the aim of his teachings, '(the nature of) suffering and the cessation of suffering' (Alagaddūpama Sutta). This will include the Buddha's philosophy for what he considered to be the nature of our suffering, namely its causes and manifestations, and his methodology for the ceasing of the causes of suffering.

Because of a focus on the Buddha, it is worth providing now the historical context of what is meant by the historical Buddha, as opposed to *a* Buddha. Buddha, is not in actual a reference to a specific person, but rather a title ascribed to one who is fully enlightened. In fact, Buddha can be translated to, as the enlightened one. This means that a Buddha can be referred to anyone who has attained this state of being. However,

the Buddha most referred to in Buddhist texts, the main protagonist, is the historical Buddha of our age, Siddhartha Gautama.

I will now attempt to give a brief summary of the historical context of the life of Siddhartha Gautama, but it's worth bearing in mind that legend and history are hard to differentiate in accounts of his life, and there are many conflicting and varying accounts[1]. I will be using *A Sketch of the Buddha's life: Readings from the Pali Canon*.[2]

For the purposes of this thesis, I will just cover the main aspects of his life that are relevant to contextualising the philosophical discussion in this thesis. I will not be aiming to provide a historically comprehensive account of his life.

Siddhartha is said to have been born and lived around the 5th or 6th century BCE in what is modern day Nepal to the rulers of the Sakya clan. In a society that had a caste system, he was born in the Kshatriyas caste, the caste of rulers and warriors. The caste at the top of the hierarchy, the Brahmins, the priest caste, are meant to be those who went forth to spiritual practice or at least to live a spiritual life. It is worth mentioning here, that the caste one is born to, were meant to determine the sort of life you were meant to lead, and for a ruler to live the life of a Brahmin, such as the Buddha did, might have been considered unorthodox due to crossing the responsibilities of the caste.

[1] Ariyapariyesana Sutta, the Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta, the Mahāsaccaka-sutta, the Mahapadana Sutta, and the Achariyabhuta Sutta, for canonical accounts that contain parts of the Buddha's life, Buddhacarita, Lalitavistara Sūtra, Mahāvastu, and the Nidānakathā, for fuller biographies summarised by others

[2] By Access to Insight

This would be increasingly controversial if the lower castes, the Vaishyas, the merchant caste, followed by the Shudras, the labourers, and the lowest caste, the Dalits which are referred to as the untouchables (the extremely poor, tribal, or unfortunate), were to cross caste boundaries and take on a life that was not suited to their caste. It's important to note that this was because of the belief in karma, where one's birth is a result of the good deeds or bad deeds one has done in your life. So, to be born in a lower caste or a higher one, is a just punishment or reward, and therefore one deserves to suffer or to enjoy life in a particular caste.

The Buddha in his teachings, and acting as an example, would end up emphasising the notion that one's birth may determine the circumstances you are born into, but it doesn't determine what life makes for oneself thereafter. The spiritual life for Buddhism, is open to all who wish to seek it, not just for the Brahmins. This gives some indication that the Buddha's sense of moral responsibility in the case of karma is unique to his time.

In his youth, he is said to have lived a life of luxury, before he encountered the four sights: an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a monk. It was this that led the Buddha to reflect upon the suffering and impermanence of the world, and sought to seek a means of liberation from suffering. He subsequently left home, his family, and inheritance to the throne to live as an ascetic and a mendicant. Learning from many teachers but ultimately finding it dissatisfactory, he arrived at his own awakening through meditation and obtained enlightenment, achieving freedom from suffering and the cycle of life and death (nirvana). In forty-plus years of teaching, he taught a system (the Dharma) of practices that had the goal of alleviating the suffering of others, and

to help others achieve liberation. He founded a monastic order and lay Buddhist community (Sangha) and attained parinirvana (the final liberation in death).

After the Buddha's passing, Buddhism became an influential religion throughout Asia, his teachings would be spread and would be analysed, interpreted, and differentiated into many schools of thought, with their own philosophies and practice. I will now discuss the context of these teachings (Dharma) as I understand it, before giving some context of this thesis' main source material, the body of Buddhist texts that contain the dialogues of the Buddha (Sutra) and finally I will briefly outline the schools of Buddhist thought as I understand them.

I.3 Contextualising Buddhist Teachings (Dharma)

The Buddhist teachings are usually referred to as the dharma, but that term is not uniquely Buddhist and existed prior to Buddhism. As a result, the term is used, even within Buddhist contexts to reflect different meanings, and understanding this, will help in the comprehension of what is meant by Buddhist teachings, or to be precise, the elements of those teachings.

Whilst one can look at the term definitionally (Grimes, 1996), my own analysis of the aspects of dharma can be helpfully understood broadly in three ways. First, the dharma of facts, that is to say, dharma in reference to something like data in sciences. In the Buddha's time, the education system includes the sciences, and to teach empirical facts, whether sociological, physical, biological (such as in medicine), is to

teach dharma. For Buddhism, that would correspond to teachings of empirical observation, such as, that there is death and suffering in the world.

Second, there is the dharma of laws, in terms of *how* things work. These correspond for instance to natural principles and laws in natural philosophy, but also reflect moral laws. Examples of a natural law would be the laws of cause and effect within Buddhism, or more precisely, dependent origination. Teaching of this sort would describe the sort conditions required to make something happen, or not happen. For instance, moral laws reflect the teachings of karma, such as to avoid painful consequences, one should avoid acting unwholesomely, such as harm or murder others.

Third, is the dharma of theory, that is the teachings of *why* something works the way they do. This is the aspect that corresponds to Buddhist metaphysics and moral psychology, where teachings will describe why the natural or moral laws work the way they do. For example, these are the teachings describing specifically each stage of dependent origination, step by step, what leads to another, or a theoretical outline of the stages towards enlightenment psychologically.

In general, to possess teachings of any of these, to possess dharma, allows one to establish a school of philosophy. In the Buddha's time, there were contemporary teachers who taught amoralism, fatalism, materialism, eternalism, Jainism and agnosticism for instance (Samañ̃aphala Sutta), and they may in some respects share similar dharmas, but also disagree and possess unique dharmas. They have their own description of the facts, the laws, and the theories. In terms of dharma in religious contexts, there would be teachings that serve the particular purpose of promoting

wholesomeness, morality, and social conduct. This would involve teachings of precepts and moral values which are suitable for the laity and the monastics as they just allow one to live a better life, or afterlife. However, it's worth differentiating the dharma in a spiritual context, meaning the teachings that serve the particular purpose of liberation from this world, reincarnation, and suffering (moksha or nirvana).

In Buddhism in particular, there is a notion that dharma, are teachings that only respond to views we have and correspond to our psychological experiences, rather than metaphysical truth of ultimate reality. I will elaborate on this in the following chapter, but it's important to note firstly that the Buddha did not teach all that he knew:

'In the same way, monks, those things that I have known with direct knowledge but have not taught are far more numerous [than what I have taught]. And why haven't I taught them? Because they are not connected with the goal, do not relate to the rudiments of the holy life, and do not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding. That is why I have not taught them.' (Simsapa Sutta)

This is therefore to illustrate two things, one, there are aspects of what the world is like that the Buddha has not taught, and two, nor is that his goal. It would be more accurate to consider his teachings as practical and goal orientated.

That being said, what was taught by the Buddha, is organised into three categories, the Sutras or Suttas (the discourses or dialogues), the Vinaya (the ethical discipline) and the Abhidharma (the higher teachings in Theravada, or in Mahayana traditions, known as the commentary, which is the organisation, rationalisations, analysis and synthesis of the Buddha's teachings). For the purposes of this thesis, I will mainly

focus on the sutras, there will hardly be any mention of the specific monastic codes, and there will be only the occasional reference to the Abhidharma or the commentary. I do this because I wish to narrow down as close as possible to what the Buddha says (the Buddhavacana, word of the Buddha). As such, I will now provide some context to the sutras.

I.4 Buddhist Dialogues (Sutra)

Originally, the Buddha delivered these teachings orally and never wrote them down in any form, nor did he have any disciples write them down either, as such, the teachings of the Buddha's time were spoken, memorised and recited to others.[3]

After the Buddha's passing (nirvana), there were attempts to standardise what is meant to be considered the canon of Buddhist teachings through multiple Buddhist councils.

In terms of the teachings written down, the earliest evidence of Buddhist texts was apparently found to be dated back to the first century BCE. These were written on birch bark and some aspects of the collection were written on palm leaves and they were found in what is modern day west Pakistan, what was the location of Gandhara. Gandharan Buddhism is thought to be an important link between Indian and Buddhism in China, and parts of what is now in the Chinese canon of Buddhism is traceable to these Gandharan Buddhist texts. Whilst the Magadhan and Pali language featured

[3] I thank the many Buddhist teachers, communities, especially the North London Buddhist Centre Chair, Ratnaprabha for the many conversations that helped inform these parts of context provided in this section.

prominently in the passing down of Buddhist teachings, the Pali canon of the Buddhist teachings was also written down in the first century BCE in Sri Lanka.

Different schools hold different collections of different sizes, but for the purposes of this thesis I will mainly be referencing the Pali canon, which is the most widely academically studied Buddhist material. It is the only complete collection that is written in one of the languages that existed in the Buddha's time. The sutra aspect of the Pali canon and features the four main collections of discourses (Nikayas) and one minor collection.

The only Mahayana material from the Chinese canon I will refer to minimally are what is considered the Pranja (wisdom) sutras when discussing the middle view and delusion when concerning Buddhist metaphysics.

One final note regarding my use of the sutras, the Kalama Sutta outlines the following teaching by the Buddha:

Don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, "This contemplative is our teacher." When you know for yourselves that, "These qualities are unskillful (or skillful); these qualities are blameworthy (or praiseworthy); these qualities are criticised (or praised) by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead (lead away from) to harm & to suffering" — then you should abandon them (or uphold them) (Kalama Sutta).

This is worth drawing attention to, that the teachings of Buddhism are not wholly based on reason or metaphysical truth, but on the practicality of its usefulness in correspondence to our experiences. To put simply, whether the practices lead us away from, or closer to, suffering. I'll elaborate on this in the next chapter.

I.6 Summarising Thoughts

To summarise, in this chapter, I've given an introduction outlining my aims, scope and methodology of my thesis on Buddhist moral responsibility. I have drawn out the boundaries of what I will explore within the large umbrella term of all that can be considered Buddhism. I have given a brief historical context of the historical Buddha, his life, aims and experiences, as well as a bit of background of the time and main beliefs that existed during his time. I have given a contextual outline of how I am to understand the Buddha's teachings (the Dharma), but also the term in general, how it can be understood in Buddhism particularly, and also how it was used in contrast regarding other philosophical schools in the Buddha's time.

Then, I have given some context as to the part of the dharma, namely the sutras, which I will be drawing from within this thesis. I have outlined some of its history and origins, its collection, and the canon I will be using. In summary, I have provided the scope and boundaries of the Buddhist sources I will be referring to throughout the thesis.

In the second chapter, I provide an exegesis of the foundations of Buddhist philosophy. This will include the fundamental teachings, aims and methodology of Buddhism. This will lead into my discussion regarding free will and determinism in Buddhism.

CHAPTER II:

Foundations of Buddhist Philosophy

In this chapter, I will outline the fundamental Buddhist teachings that I will be drawing from, and how I have chosen to understand them. First, I shall provide an exegesis of the foundations of Buddhist teachings understood as a middle way response to extreme views. Second, I show how Buddhist teachings can be understood as tailored for psychological impact. Third, I will outline the uniqueness of the Buddha's methodology that will be contextually important to bear in mind.

II.1 The Core Buddhist Teachings

It is taught by the Buddha that one suffers as a result of stubborn clinging to certain philosophical positions and views. Even if one does happen to hold the true correct philosophical position, if it is not obtained through individual awareness and experience, but rather by hearsay for instance, it is not deemed to be ultimately beneficial. What we end up with by approaching wisdom in this way, is merely a 'wrangling of views' (Harvey, 2000, pp.239-40). The Buddha even goes so far in the Paramatthaka Sutta to say that a 'brahmana (the Buddha and his enlightened disciples) is beyond, does not fall back on views'.

This therefore gives me some difficulty in establishing what to make of the Buddha's teachings for this thesis. It seems to be a mistake then, to consider the Buddha's philosophy as arguments for a particular claim or position, or to say Buddhists, Buddhism or the Buddha believes or claims this or that at all. Steven Collins, for

example suggests that the teachings can be considered to be less concerned with what philosophical position is being held, rather the psychological impact it has when one holds them, and how it could be addressed (Collins, 1990, p.129). It's also noted that the Buddha taught with the purpose of guiding us to realising the truth ourselves, not to give us a strictly accurate metaphysical picture, because that is impossible to teach (Gowans, 2017).

In which case, I shall therefore run with Gowans and Collin's suggestion and lay out how I will approach the Buddha's teachings by understanding the context of those teachings, their aims, and his methodology of teaching. My exegesis of the Buddha's philosophy will encompass three parts, the *content* (the what), the *goal* (the why), and the *style* (the how).

I shall understand the *content* of Buddha's teachings as a response to beliefs held by his contemporaries at the time, that is to say, his teaching methodology is context dependent. I shall understand the Buddha's teachings as Collins suggests as being concerned with psychological impact as its *goal*, particularly in terms of suffering and peace. I shall understand that the *style* of the Buddha's teachings is inconsistent by design, as it progresses and changes according to who he is teaching. I consider the Buddha's philosophy as a moral psychology that uses metaphysical claims instrumentally, and as the Zen tradition points out, it would be a mistake to take those metaphysical claims (which are tools to guide one towards truth) as genuine descriptions of truth themselves.[4] Therefore, for the purposes of my thesis, I am only

[4] The common analogy is that the teachings are like a finger pointing to the moon. To focus on the finger would render one unable to grasp at the moon itself, the truth.

concerned with whether the metaphysical teaching of dependent origination, which I will outline in the next chapter, can be considered consistent with Buddhist moral responsibility.

II.2.1. The Buddha's Philosophy as a Response to Contemporary Beliefs

To recall, Buddha puts himself as the general aim of his teachings to be about '(the nature of) suffering and the cessation of suffering' (Alagaddūpama Sutta). This means that the Buddha's philosophy entails what is considered to be the nature of our suffering, namely its causes and manifestations, and his methodology for the ceasing of the causes of suffering. Having in his lifetime surveyed the many attempts by others to achieve this aim, he remained dissatisfied with what he had learned and sought to seek out enlightenment for himself.

Given the Buddha's dissatisfaction with the philosophies he encountered, his teachings can be seen as a response to existing views, a different approach to the path away from suffering. In his first teaching, he summarised the basic principle of his philosophy as the Middle Way (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta).

This essentially is the core of the content of Buddhist teaching, a middle way between two extreme views, that is to say not extreme in the sense of being radical, but extreme in the sense of adopting one of two dualistic positions, views at extremity. This Middle Way is not to be understood as a view in of itself, but a method, that by rejecting dualistic positions, one could arrive closer to the truth. It appreciates essentially that views tend to schematically divide the world into claims that something is the case, or

something is not the case, and fails to appreciate nuance and complexity, but more importantly, as mentioned before, fails to appreciate the psychological effect of possessing or holding on to a certain view.

1. The Buddha's First Rendition of the Middle Way

The Buddha's first attempt at applying the Middle Way to a case example, is the teaching of rejecting two extreme views about life at the time.

'There are these two extremes that are not to be indulged in by one who has gone forth. Which two? That which is devoted to sensual pleasure with reference to sensual objects: base, vulgar, common, ignoble, unprofitable; and that which is devoted to self-affliction: painful, ignoble, unprofitable. Avoiding both of these extremes, the middle way realized by the Tathagata — producing vision, producing knowledge — leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding' (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta)

One is the view that through ascetic practices of self-mortification, one could alleviate their suffering by essentially gaining access to higher states of being, either in terms of caste or physical material goods, or even spiritual states of wisdom. The idea is that suffering is caused by bad karma, and one could gain karma points by proactively exposing oneself to suffering, thereby investing in good karma in the future. The other extreme, is the view that one alleviates their suffering purely through satisfying the sensual pleasures. Rejecting both these views as failing to ultimately alleviate one from suffering, the Buddha proposes instead the four noble truths, which is the Middle Way in theory, and the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the Middle Way in practice.

The first truth is the truth of suffering which he describes in more detail, 'birth, ageing and death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs'. It also includes wanting what we cannot have, the loss of the things we love, being forced to be in situations or with people we don't like, and all suffering can be summarised in short, as clinging to or being clouded by the five aggregates (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Ādittapariyāya Sutta). I will give further details about the five aggregates in a moment when the Buddha applies the Middle Way to extreme views about the self, but in short, the idea is that suffering in this sense, arises from the ignorance or delusion in mistaking what we are as a 'self', a confined unchanging definition of our identity. This means that we have expectations and the notion that we have control over ourselves and over things that are 'ours', only to be disappointed when we can't for instance, control our bodily functions, or our emotions as we'd like to.

It's important to note here that suffering, which is psychological, is distinct from mere physical pain, which is the physical sensation. As often encapsulated by the notion, 'pain is inevitable, suffering is optional', the Buddha described suffering as a 'second arrow' to pain. In life when painful events are already something that will occur, suffering is the psychological type of pain that we add on ourselves when we perceive life events in a certain way:

"The Blessed One said, 'When touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical & mental. Just as if they were to shoot a man with an arrow and, right afterward, were to shoot him with another one, so that he would feel the pains of two arrows; in the same way, when touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person sorrows,

grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical & mental.'" (Sallatha Sutta)

The second truth is the truth of craving being the immediate origins of suffering (from ignorance over self-view, there arises desire)[5], the origins of this psychological addition, with craving being sometimes translated as desire. This is a specific notion of desire meaning a deluded desire, wanting, or expecting something to be the case when it is not possible. For instance, wanting to always be healthy and to never die. Of craving, there are three types to illustrate this idea, sensual craving (Kāma Taṇhā), craving for existence (Bhava Taṇhā) and Craving for Non-existence (Vibhava Taṇhā).

I think this relates back to perhaps the sort of reasoning behind why the Buddha rejects the two extreme views, as it is founded upon some form of delusion. The person who holds the view that suffering can be alleviated by satisfying one's sensual pleasures and therefore craves it, fails to realise that the satisfaction of sensual pleasures ultimately fails to be truly satisfying, that is to say, brings one no peace from suffering. No matter the extent of the pursuit to satisfy sensual pleasures, they are still exposed to three forms of suffering (Dukkha Sutta): further physical suffering where one can be too hot, too cold, too dry, too humid, or even suffering due to pain, or to suffer from physical distress and illness. They are still exposed to psychologically related suffering stemming from the impermanence of life, things having to change (viparinama-dukkha), or suffering due to attachment to a certain view or expectation of the world, often translated as suffering from fabrication (samkhara-dukkha). To be clear therefore, it is not the mere satisfaction of sensual pleasures itself that somehow brings one

[5] This is elaborated upon when I discuss the twelve links of dependent origination.

suffering, it is the psychological expectation, that it brings one satisfying lasting happiness, and reality failing to deliver, that causes one psychological suffering.

Likewise, the one who holds the view that self-mortification leads one away from suffering is mistaken as they crave or hold the expectation that being born in better circumstances, either a higher caste or even a higher realm (further existence of themselves or pleasurable certain states of being), would result in true satisfaction. However, they fail to recognise the fact that better physical circumstances not only fail to resolve the psychological conditions that leads one to suffer when death, old age and illness etc. comes along, but rely on the delusion that there is an essential soul that is reincarnated and will live a better life in the next one. Or for those who hold the view that self-mortification may lead one away from reincarnation in entirety (non-existence of themselves or certain painful states of being), also is motivated by a craving or an expectation that the way to avoid suffering is to expose oneself to pain now, for the purposes of avoiding pain in the future. Their failure seems to be rooted in delusion that pain is something to be avoided or can be avoided.

In response, the Middle Way advocates instead for a psychological review for the Buddhist. Rather than heading for sensual pleasures, one embarks on critical reflection of what truly satisfies and brings one peace. Pain is not to be avoided through gaming the karmic system, it is to be accepted, and life is to be lived fully recognising that pain is to occur, so that life could be lived having made the most of it.

For example, the delusion that we have time, and the failure to be mindful of impermanence and death can lead one to not fully appreciating the time we have left

with loved ones. But being fully aware of that fact, can open one to ensuring that whatever time is left is lived in full appreciation of one's loved ones. Enlightenment in the Buddhist sense is full awareness and understanding. The Buddha's methodology can be seen essentially as a form of therapy. To summarise, the Buddha did not think that suffering was the means to liberation from suffering, rather it is insight and wisdom from awareness that leads away from suffering through acceptance and understanding which I will explicate now.

The third truth is the truth of the possibility of ceasing suffering and that it indeed possible to work oneself psychologically to better cope with suffering, and the fourth truth is how to do this, via the 'Noble Eightfold Path — right view, right thoughts, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration' (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta). This Noble Eightfold Path is essentially the summary of the Buddha's methodology in regard to Buddhist practice.

It's worth unpacking here what these eight aspects mean (Mahācattārīsaka Sutta). Right view can be understood as the prerequisites of the Buddhist path of liberation. It means that one has the view of cause and effect, or more specifically our actions lead to consequences, with good ones leading to better outcomes (wholesome actions), and bad actions leading to worse outcomes (unwholesome actions). Not only this, but one has awareness of what those specific actions are.

In the Discourse on Right View (Sammaditthi Sutta), the Buddha outlines the ten wholesome actions (and corresponding unwholesome ones). There are three bodily

actions of wholesomeness, which is to abstain from taking life or injuring others, stealing and sexual misconduct.

This is followed by four types of harmful speech one should abstain from. There is *lying*, that is to deliberately speak falsehoods that harms others, or for the purposes of self-gain. By the same principle one should refrain from *cruel* and *hurtful* speech. Likewise, one should not engage in *divisive* speech that breaks up relationships and causes people to dislike one another. Finally, one should refrain from *meaningless* speech. That is to say, speech that is not conducive to helping others, despite not harming others.

Finally, there are three mental wholesome actions and that is to abstain from greed, hatred, and delusion. Greed is to be more precisely understood as overindulgence in one's desires, or could be to desire desires. For example, one may desire chocolate, but have a higher intention to stop eating as many sweets as possible. Greed would be to have the higher order intention to also want to want chocolate. Hatred can be more clearly defined as to wish harm to others (ill will), not just simply dislike. Delusion is defined as possessing wrong view, meaning, not having right view.

The other aspect of right view is the notion of equality and responsibility of actions. That is to say, contrary to certain beliefs during the Buddha's time, one's caste (or social class) does not define one's destiny, character and life. We are defined instead, by our bodily, verbal, and mental conduct. Furthermore, there is the view concerning reincarnation. Again, contrary to beliefs about reincarnation during the Buddha's time,

reincarnation in Buddhism works less like a soul being transferred from vessel to vessel, but more the idea that we have continued existence through cause and effect.

For example, when I light one candle with another candle, there is a connection of cause and effect, but neither the same flame nor same candle persists in this relationship. Likewise, reincarnation is not the rebirth of the same 'person', it is merely reemphasising that our actions have consequential effects in the future, and that death is not the end, but merely a state of continued existence and further suffering. Finally, right view includes the acceptance of the four noble truths.

Right thoughts, or sometimes translated as right intention or resolve, or emotional content, has two aspects. First is the resolve to neither do harm to oneself or another. Second, is the disillusionment with sensory pleasures and wishing to find a way towards liberation and the ending of the cycle of life, death, and suffering. Right speech refers to abstaining from four types of harmful speech as mentioned before. Right action follows the same principle of non-harming and corresponds to bodily wholesome actions mentioned before. Following from this, right livelihood means to sustain oneself without engaging in careers that involve, rely on, or encourage the harming of others, like being an arms dealer, selling poisons, being a slaver etc.

Right effort concerns unwholesome and wholesome actions, which are as mentioned before defined consequently by actions that lead to worse or better outcomes respectively. Wholesome actions would lead one away from suffering, and unwholesome actions would lead to further suffering. Right effort is exerted when one ceases unwholesome actions one is already doing, doesn't take up on unwholesome

actions they haven't done, continues wholesome actions they are already doing, and takes up on wholesome actions they haven't yet taken up on. Often, this takes the form of restraining the senses, paying attention to our faculties of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and our thoughts.

Right mindfulness or meditation is about being more specific about our awareness and attention (Satipatthana Sutta). It means more explicitly, about being able to, and to develop discipline in paying attention to the things we pay attention to. It is the training against being neglectful and losing conscious awareness over our actions and experiences.

Furthermore, one should be especially attentive to four aspects of our lives (four frames of reference). The idea is that one should often meditate on and be aware of the biological nature of our body, in that it is not as desirable as we think, and prone to sickness, old age and eventually dies. Buddhists also meditate on their sensations, and how often they have experiences that cause them suffering.One should further be mindful of the erratic and impermanent state of our minds. We are often bombarded with many thoughts and mental events throughout the day and throughout our lives, and focus, concentration and a calm and clear mind are luxuries that require discipline and training.

Finally, there is the meditation of a lack of an substantial, independent core self in our mental objects. All this is reflective of what is summarised as the three marks of existence, anicca (impermanence), dukkha (dissatisfaction or suffering) and anatta (the insubstantiality of phenomena, that is to say, things lacking an independent core

self). I will revisit this again when I analyse how the Buddha applies the Middle Way to views regarding the self.

Right concentration, or sometimes referred to as samadhi, involves moving away from active mindfulness to passive awareness (Samadhi Sutta). That is to say, meditation is often about directing our attention to an object, to have an object of attention. Concentration is slowly doing away with deliberate objects of attention, and allowing ourselves to just be aware. This results in states or stages of dhyana (jhana), or Chan in Chinese, or Zen in Japanese. Progressing each stage allows one to slowly do away with biases, or conditioned ways of thinking. For instance, in the first stage, one learns to be aware without deliberating assigning an object of attention. The following stages one may learn to be aware of, but not let one's attention be dictated by sensations and so on. The point of this practice is to be aware without agitation, and reach a state of tranquillity and calmness. To put it another way, to be mindful, but at peace. This then prepares one's psychological state that allows one to reach insight and wisdom, which I will elaborate on when I discuss dependent origination.

To summarise and recap, the noble eightfold path is an expansion or elaboration on the essential principle of Buddhist practice, which is known as the middle way as a response to existing views (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta). The notion of 'right', not too dissimilar to the Golden Mean, is meant to be the middle way between the two extreme views of sensory indulgence and self-mortification.

2. The Buddha's Second Rendition of the Middle Way

In the Buddha's second teaching, the Buddha applies the Middle Way to two extreme views of the self (Anattalakkhana Sutta). It was widely believed at the time that beings had an inherent immortal soul, and that was the self. Alternatively, there were those who believed that there was no self, that we were nothing. A variation of this type of belief could be the notion that we are merely manifestations of the dreams of a God, and in actuality, we are nothing substantial at all.

In response, the Buddha taught that whilst we were not a 'self' or a soul, we were not nothing either, thus the notion of non-self. I explore the Buddha's argument in more depth when I discuss non-self later on, but to summarise briefly: while we may take our bodily form as the self, or identify ourselves with our feelings, mental perceptions, mental events and our consciousness, none of these things are permanent fixtures. Our bodily form changes, as do our feelings, mental perceptions, mental events and the things our consciousness happens to be paying attention to. Therefore, they don't wholly define who and what we are. It is in the nature of our identity, whether physical or psychological, to change. Suffering arises, when we stubbornly cling to the idea that we are something that does not change, or cannot change. Similarly, it would be wrong to suggest just because we change, we are nothing at all.

3. The Buddha's Third Rendition of the Middle Way

In the Buddha's third teaching, he applies the Middle Way to two extreme views regarding our senses (Ādittapariyāya Sutta). There were those who held the belief that we should indulge in our senses, let it wholly guide our lives in our sensations of pain and pleasure, in contrast to those who held the belief that we should ignore our senses

(especially in the practices of self-mortification). In response, the Buddha taught rather that we shouldn't take our senses too seriously (aiming for dispassion and estrangement), in that we shouldn't always live our lives chasing after what is pleasurable to our senses and running away from what is painful to our senses, but as noted earlier in the first teaching that is not to say our senses should be ignored, to recall the first teaching regarding self-mortification.

If we take our senses too seriously, we fall victim again to indulging in sensual pleasures. If we go beyond mere 'dispassion' and ignore our senses, we may live our lives in an ungrounded way, and those who did hold this belief often sought to make a point of subjecting themselves to self-mortification and extreme pain. This would be in contradiction to being mindful of our sensations and feelings. The point seems to be it is far more beneficial to live our lives in a grounded way, but keep a healthy attitude that things are not always as they appear, and just because something gives us sensual pleasure, it doesn't mean we should pursue it endlessly without forethought.

One last point regarding the Middle Way is that it seems to be intentionally vague as to what exactly it is, as the Buddha only applies it to different views about different philosophical positions. An analogy can be made with the sport of archery. It's hard to describe what exactly is the middle way, in the same way it is hard to theoretically explain how to obtain accuracy in archery. It's something that can only be felt out in practice. The Buddha's expansion and teachings I consider, to be guidelines, like a sports coach, and it's up to the practitioner to feel things out for themselves with their own insight and wisdom.

Buddha has given other summaries as to what the content of the Buddha's teachings are supposed to be:

'To cease all evil, to cultivate good, and to purify one's mind — this is the teaching of the Buddhas' (Dhammapada)

'For I assert the non-doing of bodily, verbal, and mental misconduct…the annihilation of lust, hatred, and delusion… For I teach the Dhamma for the abolition of lust, hatred, and delusion' (Verañjasutta).

Moreover, the practice is categorised into three aspects, known as the threefold training of ethics (or virtue) (right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort), concentration (or mind) (right mindfulness, right concentration), and insight into wisdom (or discernment) (right view) (Sikkha Sutta). The ethical discipline's importance in developing virtue is particularly stressed by the Buddha: "For that which I have proclaimed and made known as the Dhamma and the Discipline, that shall be your Master when I am gone. 'Behold now, bhikkhus, I exhort you: All compounded things are subject to vanish. Strive with earnestness!' This was the last word of the Tathagata." (Mahāparinibbāna Sutta). This is to emphasise the Buddha's philosophy is not one focused on views, but practice and application.

In summary, for the purposes of this thesis, rather than working from the basis that the Buddha has a philosophical position, I'm going to understand the *content* of his teachings as a response to philosophical positions. As to why this is done in more detail, I will show how the Buddha's teaching corresponds to psychological impact.

II.2.2. The Buddha's Philosophy Tailored for Psychological Impact

The notion of the Buddha's philosophy not being one of views, but rather of psychological benefit, is best seen in the following teaching in the Kalama Sutta:

"Now, Kalamas, one who is a disciple of the noble ones — his mind thus free from hostility, free from ill will, undefiled, & pure — acquires four assurances in the here-&-now:

"'If there is a world after death, if there is the fruit of actions rightly & wrongly done, then this is the basis by which, with the break-up of the body, after death, I will reappear in a good destination, the heavenly world.' This is the first assurance he acquires.

"'But if there is no world after death, if there is no fruit of actions rightly & wrongly done, then here in the present life I look after myself with ease — free from hostility, free from ill will, free from trouble.' This is the second assurance he acquires.

"'If evil is done through acting, still I have willed no evil for anyone. Having done no evil action, from where will suffering touch me?' This is the third assurance he acquires.

"'But if no evil is done through acting, then I can assume myself pure in both respects.' This is the fourth assurance he acquires.

"One who is a disciple of the noble ones — his mind thus free from hostility, free from ill will, undefiled, & pure — acquires these four assurances in the here-&-now."

To give context, the Buddha here outlines reasons why one might have in adopting the Noble Eightfold Path. The argument here is summarised as the following: regardless of one's views regarding the afterlife, whether you believe there to be one or not, and regardless of one's views regarding karma, whether you believe there are evil consequences that are born from actions or not, one still achieves peace and security in the now by living a virtuous life.

If one believes in the afterlife and they live a virtuous life, they are at peace and reassured by being born in better circumstances. If one does not, then they are at peace and reassured in the present now being free from thoughts of hatred towards others, greed, and delusion, for instance. If one believes in karma and lives a virtuous life, they are at peace and reassured that they will bear no evil consequence. If not and they live a virtuous life, the virtuous life in of itself, grants one peace and security as they are not psychologically burdened with hatred, greed and delusion, in the here and now. What matters is not what you believe or hold to be true, but whether you have peace and security in the present moment. The emphasis is therefore in the absence of psychological burden and suffering.

This is further elaborated in the whole psychological system the Buddha proposes that one progresses through as they adopt the Noble Eightfold Path. In the Kimatha Sutta, the Buddha speaks about the psychological progression one has by living a virtuous life. As a reward for virtuous living over time, one gains freedom from remorse (due to not harming oneself or others). With freedom from remorse over time, one gains happiness (due to the benefits of living a virtuous life). With happiness over time, one gains rapture (deep psychological satisfaction from not grasping at external conditions of happiness, rather from the untroubling nature of virtuous living itself). With rapture over time, one gains serenity (contentedness, feeling secure and untroubled). With serenity over time, one gains pleasure (understood more accurately as the pleasure of peace). With peace over time, one gains concentration (of one's awareness and attention). With concentration (of awareness) over time, one gains knowledge and vision of things as they are. With knowledge and vision over time, one gains disenchantment (or disillusionment). With disenchantment over time, one gains

dispassion (the loss of deluded desire as discussed before). With dispassion, one gains liberation from suffering as a reward (through acceptance).

In summary, this shows how the *content* of Buddha's teaching can be understood not only as a response to existing philosophical positions, but responds to them with regard to psychological impact as the *goal*. The next section explores how this response takes shape in the methodology of *how* the Buddha teaches in terms of *style*.

II.2.3. The Buddha's Teaching Methodology

The Buddha's teaching methodology was also adaptive to the particular audience he spoke with, meaning the Buddha did not teach everything at once. He taught in specific stages, progressing through levels. That means that none of the Buddha's teachings can be taken with certainty as the Buddha's own absolute view. There are many versions of the same general principle perhaps, and often diluted, simplified, and adapted to make the teaching more palatable or acceptable to an audience, adjusting to their level of understanding, background, personal biases, and struggles. As a result of this, it would be important to note that often, views are argued to be attributed to the Buddha, or the notion of "the Buddhist view", that have not taken this context into consideration. As mentioned before for example, it would be a mistake to attribute to Buddhism, what is normally understood or taken to be as Karma and reincarnation, without taking into consideration the Buddhist teachings of non-self.

To elaborate, what he taught changed largely depending on his audience, their specific goals, and their learning capabilities. For example, upon beginning secondary school,

we were introduced to and taught Newtonian mechanics as the ‘accurate’ picture of physics. After a few years, we realised that this picture had shortcomings and we were introduced to concepts of relativity when we started to learn about physics at an astronomical and planetary scale. And subsequently we were then taught that this view in itself, was unable to accommodate the behaviour of matter at the quantum level. One could say that our physics teacher or curriculum was inconsistent or was lying to us, but the truth is that we weren’t able to understand the more complicated nuanced arguably more ‘accurate’ pictures, without first coming to terms with the simpler but incomprehensive ones.

Similarly, the Buddha had to teach in the same fashion. He taught at a certain level to lay followers, and at another to his monks, and depending on the monk and their specific queries and level of understanding, habits, personalities, and confusions, he tailored his teachings so that they could be understood.

In the Paṭhamauggasutta, Ugga, a Buddhist householder gives his own summary of the Buddha’s teaching methodology prescribed to him:

“The Buddha taught me step by step, with a talk on giving, ethical conduct, and heaven. He explained the drawbacks of sensual pleasures, so sordid and corrupt, and the benefit of renunciation. And when he knew that my mind was ready, pliable, rid of hindrances, elated, and confident he explained the special teaching of the Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path. Just as a clean cloth rid of stains would properly absorb dye, in that very seat the stainless, immaculate vision of the Dhamma arose in me: ‘Everything that has a beginning has an end.’ I saw, attained, understood, and fathomed the Dhamma. I went beyond doubt, got rid of indecision, and became self-assured and independent of others regarding the

Teacher's instructions. Right there I went for refuge to the Buddha, his teaching, and the Saṅgha. And I undertook the five training rules with celibacy as the fifth." (Paṭhamauggasutta)

Given slight differences in the Chinese canon's translation of this sutra, I'd like to give a more comprehensive explanation of this teaching methodology of the Buddha. The Buddha often begins first with a fundamental teaching of action (kamma) and cause and effect, the notion of responsibility and being self-defined through one's actions, and continuity of consequences after death. Then he progresses to Dana, which is the notion of generosity, usually expressed through giving and charity, but also in practising according to the dharma (acting as a good example) and teaching the dharma.

This is followed by the householder's ethical discipline (which is less strict than that of the monastics), which emphasises non-harm to oneself and restraint. Following from this is the teaching that having observed good, wholesome conduct, there are higher planes of existence as the reward. This is then contrasted with the reality that even in those higher planes of existence, suffering is unavoidable due to dissatisfaction and impermanence. As such, the drawback of sensual pleasure is emphasised, which leads to disillusionment with the cycles of life and death. There is then praise of desirelessness and one should seek to learn from the noble ones in their renunciation and their conduct. Only then, does the Buddha teach the four noble truths and the noble eightfold path.

A final note on the Buddha's methodology, is his own analogy with a raft regarding how teachings should be used and understood by the practitioner:

“And what should the man do in order to be doing what should be done with the raft? There is the case where the man, having crossed over, would think, 'How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands & feet, I have crossed over to safety on the further shore. Why don't I, having dragged it on dry land or sinking it in the water, go wherever I like?' In doing this, he would be doing what should be done with the raft. In the same way, monks, I have taught the Dhamma compared to a raft, for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding onto. Understanding the Dhamma as taught compared to a raft, you should let go even of Dhammas, to say nothing of non-Dhammas." (Alagaddupama Sutta)

As touched upon before, the teachings are meant to serve a purpose of psychological progression away from suffering. Having achieved the next stage within practice, the teachings, and views one has held before should be abandoned.

II.2 Summarising Thoughts

In this chapter, I have provided the exegesis of the core Buddhist teachings, and how I have chosen to understand them. I have provided an exegesis of the foundation of Buddhist philosophy understood as a middle way between extreme views. I have shown how Buddhist teachings can be understood as tailored for psychological impact. I have also outlined the uniqueness of the Buddha’s teaching methodology. All this will be the basis of my discussion in the next chapter, regarding the teaching of dependent origination and how it could be interpreted as deterministic.

CHAPTER III:

Dependent Origination and Determinism

III.1 Dependent Origination

Given the seemingly active elements of practice, and the notion of seemingly being able to progress towards enlightening and liberating oneself through moral living, means that many Buddhist practitioners have good reasons to believe Buddhism presupposes free will in some way. Focusing on the active transformative elements of practice and the notion of karmic consequences motivating wholesome actions, Paul J. Griffiths assumes and takes the Buddhist view to be a libertarian one (Griffiths, 1982). Meaning, for Griffiths, Buddhists hold that we have free will of the kind such that we are an uncaused cause as described by Galen Strawson (1994), rather than being bound in such a way that everything we do is necessitated by previous events in accordance with the laws of nature.

This is because Buddhists advocate for things that one *should* do or *can* do for the sake of good consequences, and for that teaching to be meaningful, or to use Strawson's words, for us to be 'truly responsible for how one is, mentally speaking' (ibid.) they must assume a free will that transcends the physical laws, that allows them to consciously and explicitly choose to be enlightened, or liberated from suffering, and to have succeeded in doing so. The motivation seems to be that it makes little sense to teach or talk about moral responsibility, if enlightenment or liberation will happen deterministically, or it won't, it's out of our hands. So, one could make the case for Buddhists being adopters of libertarian free will.

For example, if a parent tells their child they should not steal because bad things will happen to them, the underlying assumption must be that the child can break away from the physical laws of determination and decide to not do so. The child can understand and be aware of that relationship of cause and effect, and with the use of reasoning, change their own behaviour with a transcendent type of freedom. Otherwise, being aware of that fact, can make no difference to the outcome. The warning not to steal would be a meaningless teaching, in the sense that it would be silly to tell a wave not to crash into a boat.

However, while the Buddha himself has never taught on free will directly, his teachings on cause and effect and interdependence seem to indicate the contrary. According to the Buddha's metaphysics, all phenomena arise according to *pratītyasamutapāda*[6]. In this chapter therefore, I will explore the problem of free will within the Buddhist context.

First, I shall give an outline of the teaching of dependent origination and the ways one can understand it. Second, I will show it could be interpreted as deterministic. I follow this with the wide and varied arguments from different scholars therefore, on what the Buddhist's position on this is therefore meant to be, or should be, regarding the problem of free will. Finally, I argue that despite dependent origination, there is much emphasis on the notion of freedom and liberation within Buddhist teachings which can't be ignored.

[6] Translated usually as dependent origination, and I will be referring to it as such hereafter.

III.2 Dependent Origination

Similar to the other expressions of the Middle Way explored in the previous chapter, the teaching of dependent origination is also a middle way between two extreme views. The Buddha describes this as follows:

"By & large, Kaccayana, this world is supported by (takes as its object) a polarity, that of existence & non-existence. But when one sees the origination of the world as it actually is with right discernment, 'non-existence' with reference to the world does not occur to one. When one sees the cessation of the world as it actually is with right discernment, 'existence' with reference to the world does not occur to one…'Everything exists': That is one extreme. 'Everything doesn't exist': That is a second extreme. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathagata teaches the Dhamma via the middle." (Kaccayanagotta Sutta)

The two extreme views that the Buddha speaks against, is to say that something has independent existence, as in, exists entirely as in of itself, or does not exist at all. The teaching of dependent origination is understood as an alternative view of existence, suggesting that things do exist, but they exist in an interdependent way according to conditions and causes that give rise to it. Things exist as temporary impermanent processes that come about as a result of previous causes and conditions and also cease to be when those causes and conditions themselves cease to be. For example, consider a flame. A flame does not have independent existence, it comes into being as a result of three crucial conditions: heat, oxygen and fuel. Once any or all of these conditions run out or cease to be, the flame itself ceases to be. And of course, just because the things cease to be, or flames go out, does not mean things nor flames never existed or do not exist.

The Buddha summarises this general idea as the following:

"'When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn't, that isn't. 'From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that." (Assutavā Sutta)

This essentially means, where there is a cause and condition (heat, oxygen, and fuel) for something (flame), that something (flame) comes into being. When there lacks the cause and condition for something (heat, oxygen, and fuel), that something (flame) does not come into being. The ceasing of causes and conditions for something (removal of heat, oxygen, and flame), is the cessation of being for that something (the flame ceases to be).

This general principle can be further explicated more specifically in two ways. In terms of the nature of how things work in the world, and in terms of how our psychology and minds work. In terms of nature, the first way of understanding this idea is through the notion of karma, which I have introduced briefly in the previous chapters. The notion is that through acting in a wholesome and virtuous way, one gains good and wholesome rewards. Alternatively, if one were to act in an unwholesome way, one gains unwholesome and bad outcomes. It is through certain actions and way of life that support these outcomes conditionally and as causes, and the Buddha notes that irrelevant or the wrong sort of causes and conditions would therefore not have the same effect, likened to the laws of nature:

"What do you think: There is the case where a man is one who takes life, steals…Then a great crowd of people, gathering & congregating, would pray, praise… 'May this man, at the break-up of the body, after death, reappear in a good destination, the heavenly world!' What do you

think: would that man — because of the prayers, praise, & circumambulation of that great crowd of people…after death, reappear in a good destination, the heavenly world?

Suppose a man were to throw a large boulder into a deep lake of water, and a great crowd of people, gathering & congregating, would pray, praise, & circumambulate with their hands palm-to-palm over the heart [saying,] 'Rise up, O boulder! Come floating up, O boulder! Come float to the shore, O boulder!' What do you think: would that boulder — because of the prayers, praise, & circumambulation of that great crowd of people — rise up, come floating up, or come float to the shore?" (Paccha-bhumika Sutta)

The Buddha also uses a similar analogy with ghee and oil in a lake, making the point that as the laws of nature dictate that the oil or ghee shall float above the water, no amount of praying would command the oil or ghee to sink. In the same way, it is not by prayer that causes good and wholesome outcomes, nor by prayer can one overturn good karmic consequences, but it is determined by wholesome actions and virtuous living, like the laws of nature. And if one commits unwholesome and bad actions, no amount of prayer will overturn the karmic consequences of those actions either.

In terms of our psychology of suffering, the Buddha outlines specifically a twelve-link chain of how our suffering comes to be:

'And what is dependent co-arising? From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness. From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form. From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media. From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From

clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.' (Paticca-samuppada-vibhanga Sutta).

The dependent origination of our life is described as a twelve linked circular chain, each link a requisite condition of the next, that is to say as the Buddha explains in the Maha-nidana Sutta, that with the absence of the previous requisite condition in the chain, the subsequent requisite condition would cease to exist. Drawing from these two texts in combination I shall now outline how the chain of dependent origination works.

It begins with ignorance of the truth of the state of the world and ourselves, specifically in regard to our suffering, the causes of our suffering, the cessation of suffering and how we can contribute to the cessation of suffering via the Noble Eightfold Path (Four Noble Truths). Because of ignorance, we have fabrications of three kinds: of the body, verbal and mental. These are our dispositions or habits that form the basis of bodily, verbal, and mental 'actions' and conduct. For instance, an example of a bodily fabrication would be our genetic code or being able to breath without ever being taught. Or we may form dispositions ourselves, training in such a way that we have muscle memory. A verbal fabrication would for example be certain terms that we habitually use, or even a language we know, so that if we were to speak, it would take the form of those terms or in a specific language. A mental fabrication could be a conceptual schema, a way of thinking, could be a traumatic experience, could be a reward cycle that forms the basis of an addiction, or a tendency to be hot-tempered. To be clear,

these are not actions of themselves, but the dispositions that form the basis of our conduct. A different way of conceiving it would be as a construct.

From fabrications, there arises our consciousness, more specifically to mean our ability to therefore discriminate between different fields of information. This is why the Buddha lists six; eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and intellect, corresponding to how we discriminate information according to sense fields: forms (or sights), sounds, smells, tastes, touch and with the addition of mental objects. This gives rise to name and form, where we ascribe labels to how we perceive information. We may classify (name) certain mental functions as feelings (pleasure, pain and neutral), as different from perception (labelling something as of a certain type such as ‘tree’), intention, contact (our senses coming into contact with a sense-object, our tongues tasting a strawberry), and attention (when something comes into notice).

And of form when it comes to our senses, we may divide our sensory experiences into that of four qualities: fire, earth, water, and air, representing heat, solidity, fluidity, and motion respectively. Take the human body for instance, our body heat, the rigidity of our bones, the fluidity of our blood, and the ability to walk and run as motion.

Once we have these corresponding mental schemas in place (consciousness discrimination leading to name and form), this will allow us to have the six-sense media. That is to say, we will be able to make sense psychologically, of the information we receive through the medium of our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and intellect. The idea as I understand it seems to be, without the schemas (fabrication), the ability to discriminate amongst the senses (consciousness), and the ability to turn sensual information into concepts (name and form), there could be no notion having the

medium of sensation, in that that the signals we receive from our senses wouldn't register as senses and concepts that could be understood.

From the six sense media, there arises contact. Such that once we have the faculty of senses, our senses have to make contact or interaction with objects of sensation in the environment in order to receive sensual information. Without sense media, there could be no notion of contact. From contact, there are the feelings we associate with each of our senses. Particularly as mentioned before, with each sense-feeling, we may ascribe pleasurable, painful, and neutral feelings. This leads into the notion of craving (which is the causal condition the four noble truths emphasises), with each of our six sensual feelings, we may then desire to pursue (or to avoid) the pleasurable ones, or painful ones, or neutral ones, depending on the person and what has formed the basis of their fabrications and mental constructions. For instance, for those who seek sensual indulgence, they crave to pursue pleasure and avoid pain, for those who seek liberation through self-mortification, they may crave to pursue pain and avoid pleasure.

To clarify the last few stages, I understand the process as beginning with the notion of information being of different sensory types (consciousness), followed by further conceptual distinction of this information by function and quality (name and form), this allows for our conceptualisation of the information when senses make contact with the external world and receive information. And that conceptualisation (consciousness plus name and form) of information we receive (six senses plus contact) results in how we feel about that information.

With craving, there arises clinging or sustenance, that which we grasp for and wish to build a life around trying to satisfy our cravings. The Buddha outlines we may cling for sensuality, views, precepts and practice, and the notion of self. I understand it as building a life of pursuing a goal relevant to our senses (indulgence for instance), or trying to pursue the absolute objective right way of seeing things, or trying to pursue the absolute objective right way of doing things (sometimes translated as clinging to rites and rituals, or traditions), or the notion of believing and seeking one's 'true self'. Another helpful way to understand this is the notion of developing attachments, anchoring one's life, or chaining oneself to one of these things.

Having clung onto these aspects, we start to indeed build a notion of a life and identity, such is the notion of becoming. Of which there is sensual becoming (a notion of a life built around sensation, a hedonistic life for instance), form becoming (a notion of a life built around what can be perceived such as bodily and verbal actions, or a material life), or formless becoming (a notion of life built around that cannot be perceived such as concepts and fabrications, a mental life).

From these notions, there is birth, the actual life that is built on the basis of the notions we have. Biological birth is part of the picture, as we do so as a result of our biological schemas all the way up to the notion of what sort of life we have in mind (starting a family, for instance). But birth in another sense also encompasses the realisation of the hedonistic, material and mental notions of the sort of life we wished to build for the satisfactions of craving. Thus, giving rise to the different biological beings and the shaping of the different lives each and all of us lead, including animals and other

beings, each with their own bodily forms, feelings, perceptions, fabrications, consciousness, and variations of sense media.

With birth, there is aging and death. Again, there is the notion of biological aging and death, of which the physical body we identify with breaks apart. But there is also the broader notion of death of which the notion of a life we've built, is ultimately subject to decay and cessation as well. Whether it is a career, a relationship, a legacy, an empire, a philosophy etc. And this is the aspect of which we feel the most direct suffering and stress as the Buddha points out. That which we crave for the sake of satisfying ourselves, either never was fully satisfying, was satisfying for a while, but ultimately ceases to satisfy us anymore when things don't go our way.

The description of this chain as a cycle, or the notion of a cycle of life and death, means that this chain is self-propelling, in one or more aspects of life as we conceive of it. As long as we continue to be ignorant, the cycle repeats itself, with ignorance followed by fabrications and so on, ultimately leading to another notion of life followed by death. To summarise, I understand this cycle as outlining that as a result of our ignorance, we fall subject to our volitions (whether voluntary ones such as developing a habit or involuntary ones such as genetics), which result in having deluded conceptions of how things are. These conceptions inform how we make sense of our sensory information, leading to craving and desire of how we would like things to be, which ultimately sets us up for suffering (psychological pain), when things don't turn out that way.

As the Buddha notes, in response to Ananda's claim that dependent origination is 'deep (in) its appearance, and yet… it seems as clear as clear can be', says 'Don't say that Ananda, Don't say that. Deep is this dependent co-arising, and deep its appearance' (Maha-nidana Sutta). Meaning, that this teaching is difficult to understand and penetrate, let alone explain. In which case, I shall provide a case that applies the teaching of dependent origination to a specific example.

Consider if one were to play a game of monopoly with family and friends. Ignorance regarding the game of monopoly would be ignorance in regard to the suffering that occurs in the playing of monopoly (arguments, being upset, hatred towards nephew etc.), ignorance in terms of the cause of suffering (desires relevant to playing monopoly, such as buying property, winning by bankrupting others, avoiding losing). To recall, these desires are based on some form of delusion as noted in the previous chapter, such as thinking that the satisfaction of these desires as truly fulfilling or long lasting, or to take the game so seriously that one fails to recognise that the goal was to have fun with family and friends. There is also the ignorance of the possibility of playing monopoly in a way that does not entail suffering, and finally ignorance of how to achieve this possibility. These would be the ignorance of the four noble truths specific to playing monopoly.

As a result of this ignorance, one is then subject to the fabrications of the game. The schemas, rules and success criteria of the game are the volitions or determining factors of how one approaches the game. An example of bodily fabrication would be one is encouraged or possesses the tendency to gain as much money as possible, or buy property. A verbal fabrication would be the tendency to negotiate exchanges of

property so that one gains the most economic value. A mental fabrication would be the tendency to feel joy when one gets a birthday gift from chance, or to feel upset at the necessity of paying rent.

From fabrication, then comes our consciousness being relevant to the game, our ability to then discriminate amongst the types of information we gain from our senses. We are able to tell the difference between the notion of being conscious of how the top hat looks and knowing that this is information of a different type, compared to how it feels in regard to touch. Name and form then allow us to conceive of notions of how we feel, how we mentally label each item relevant to the game (perception), what our goals are (intention), what we should engage with on the board (contact), what we should pay attention to and qualities of how each item is qualitatively different (formal difference between a house and a hotel).

With these notions established, will then our *six senses* come into relevance in terms of being able to receive this information when it comes into *contact* with the items on the board. From this information we may then have feelings in regard to information of each sensory type, and to have feelings of pleasure, pain and neutral towards these. From feelings, we may then crave and desire that which brings us pleasure (money, others landing on one's property so that they have to pay rent, avoiding paying rent and taxes etc.).

Our cravings and desires then become clinging and attachments, one identifies with and build our game plan around how one feels when things happen in the game (sensual clinging), or how one approaches the game in terms of how one thinks is the

right approach to win (view), or one has a strategy they learned such as buying only houses and not hotels (precept and practice), or one self-identifies with the plight of their top-hat piece (when it lands on taxes or has to pay rent, they have the association of themselves landing on taxes and paying rent). Thus, leads to becoming, adopting the plights of one's piece, feeling upset when it lands on taxes (sensual), being concerned regarding the property owned and the loss of money (formal), and having a concern over the strategy of play and whether one wins or loses (non-formal).

With this, the birth or self-identification process is complete, taking on the piece as an extension of oneself, and with that the burdens of the successes and failures of playing the game, anger, hatred, loss, defeat, being sent to jail and eventually the ending of the game. And thus, an outline of the 'origination of the entire mass of stress and suffering' of monopoly. The twelve links as a specification of the principle of dependent origination, shows how it works in terms of our psychology of suffering.

III.3 Dependent Origination as Deterministic

This teaching seems to be inconsistent with the libertarian Buddhist view as stated earlier. First, as originally stated as a general principle of things existing necessitating requisite conditions and without these conditions the same things won't exist, dependent origination is a view that is likened to a principle of causation, such that things and events do not come about independently, but are dependent and originate from past events. This added with the laws of rebirth, laws of wholesome and unwholesome rewards as likened to the laws of nature, suggest that dependent origination operates through strict principles, that is to say, are not random. If there is

a description of events at a given time, and such events act as requisite conditions for events that occur after, and they operate in conjunction with the natural laws (rebirth, karma, or physical natural laws in general etc.), then it should seem that dependent origination implies that events of the future are entailed by events of the past.

Consider in comparison, Van Inwagen's definition of determinism (Van Inwagen, 1975, p.186):

1. For every instant of time, there is a set of propositions that expresses the state of the world at that instant.
2. If A and B are any propositions that express the state of the world at different instants, then the conjunction of A with the laws of physics entails B.

This is to mean, summarising, that like determinism, dependent origination seems to imply that how the world is like at one point in time, operating with physical laws entails, or necessarily leads to how the world is like at another point in time. Additionally, the specific twelve link chain implies a kind of psychological determinism as well. Consider Van Inwagen's definition slightly altered:

1. For every instant of time, there is a set of propositions that expresses the state of our mind at that instant.
2. If A and B are any propositions that express the state of the mind at different instants, then the conjunction of A with laws or principles of mind (the twelve links) entails B.

Similarly, how the mind is like at one point in time, operating with psychological laws entails, or necessarily leads to how the mind is like at another point in time. From how

the mind is now, with a perfect understanding of those psychological laws, we can accurately determine how the mind has been, and the mind will be like. Following from Strawson's argumentation in regard to determinism leading to the impossibility of moral responsibility (1994), the same argument can be applied to the view that free will and moral responsibility has no place in Buddhism due to dependent origination (Strawson, 1986).

The argument is the same as in, to be truly more responsible, one has to be truly responsible for the way one is (physically and psychologically). This means, one has to have consciously and explicitly chosen to be a certain way, and to have succeeded in doing so. According to dependent origination, the requisite conditions for how we are physically and psychologically are not a result of independently explicit and conscious choices, but rather from other requisite conditions. For instance, I did not choose to be consciously and explicitly ignorant, nor did I consciously and explicitly choose to be subject to fabrications (volitional tendencies) and so on. Therefore, one is not and cannot be truly morally responsible.

While Buddha has not given a detailed description of the causal chain of all phenomena, in that the mechanics of rebirth and wholesome rewards, and the twelve links are merely necessary but not sufficient conditions, the principle of dependent origination still seems to be deterministic. This is also supported by the notion that the Buddha does seem to possess superior knowledge of the conditions involved in arising and ceasing phenomena (as an enlightened being), but chooses only to teach the conditions relevant to Buddhist practice towards liberation and enlightenment, as

noted before. Nevertheless, the principle of dependent origination seems to indicate that the basic libertarian picture can't be the one that the Buddhists endorse.

Given this strict law of our beginnings, comings, and goings, it becomes apparent that the view is not a simple one of karmic consequence due to our explicit and conscious choices. Yet, the teachings of the Buddha do at least seem to make out as if one develops wisdom through active practice (as discussed in the previous chapter) as an antidote to ignorance, the beginning of the cycle, where one can put an end to rebirth through the cessation of dependent origination from its origins. This indicates to others that a compatibilist interpretation would be more suitable, where free will is taken to be compatible in some way with a deterministic world (Siderits, 1987, 2008, 2017).

Mark Siderits proposes considering the problem via the two levels of existence discussed by Vasubandhu[7] in the Commentary on the Treasury of the Abhidharma (Siderits, 2007). Our understanding of the world in this view is divided into ultimate truth, or conventional truth (as we talk about it in our day-to-day life). The proposition is, therefore, that conventionally, there is free will in persons and there is conventional moral responsibility. From the perspective of ultimately reality however, there is no free will to speak of. So, one can say that determinism poses no problem to begin with. Causal determinism operates at the ultimate level, but free will operates conventionally. Understood this way, Buddhists can speak of a person as free despite determinism (Siderits, 1987).

[7] Vasubandhu was a Buddhist philosopher and monk (4th to 5th Century C.E.). His work is a commentary on one of the 'baskets' of Buddhists philosophy, the Abhidharma.

Siderits, is not alone in advocating for compatibilism, with Karin Meyers (Meyers, 2014) proposing that free will exists for conventional persons, but on the ultimate level, coming up empty, or Daniel Breyer (Breyer, 2013), arguing that in practice, Buddhists accept perspectivalism, where we consider ourselves as being free and morally responsible when it comes to our own moral practices, but others as determined and not morally responsible when contemplating the metaphysical ultimate truth. This would allow us to simultaneously to accommodate seemingly contradictory notions like overcoming one's anger (changing one's mental state through active practice) through contemplating the metaphysical truth of others not having a choice in their actions as taught by Śāntideva, a Buddhist monk in his *Bodhicaryāvtāra* (Goodman and Schulz, 2020). However, Buddhist perspectivalism has received objections over its consistency, that I won't be able to explore further here.[8]

Alternatively, there is the view of soft compatibilism, allowing us to hold on to at least a limited form of agency and free will, by reconceiving what we mean by free will. Meaning, transformation towards liberation through our own genuine free mental effort is genuinely possible, but rather than having full free will from the beginning, we come to develop more and more free will with practice (Repetti, 2019). This notion of free will is inspired by Harry Frankfurt's hierarchical account of freedom (Frankfurt, 1971), where what we do is free when it comes from an active identification with higher order desires, which is aware of and takes into account lower desires. Free will is about having some kind of volitional control over the content of one's higher order desires.

[8] As argued by Katie Janavaud (2018), 'perspectivalism entails the relative truth of perspectivalism itself'.

For instance, ‘I want cake’ is a lower order desire, and a higher order desire is one that determines whether I *want* to want cake. My act of eating cake is free if I have had the control over the desire to want to eat cake. Buddhist practice is training of the higher order, ‘meta-level’ of all mental activity, the judge of what sort of mental life we think we ought to have, and by increasing our free will through practice, which involves reflective critique, meditation, and observation, we can act more according to the higher order mental will, rather than lower order mental activity (emotions, thoughts, desires etc.) (Repetti, 2019, p.154).

One objection from Caruso (2020), is the fundamental question arises as to where this identification with the higher order will is coming from. What reasons do we have to consider, when we think of certain mental activity as the ones we ought to have, and certain mental activities as the ones we ought not to have. Jay Garfield (Garfield 2021) states: ‘agency is not only compatible with determinism, but presupposes it…if our behaviour were not caused it could not be caused by our intentions. But if our actions were not caused by our intentions, we would not be free, but impotent’ (pp.46-17).

Meaning, if there are higher level reasons as to why we think a certain mental activity as the one we ought to have, it is true that there is a utilisation of will, but in adherence to higher level reasons, it would appear that this will is not free after all but further determined or conditioned by other causes (or reasons). If the higher order will doesn’t adhere to any further higher reasons, then it would seem that it's random. The objection here is, it seems to be, against this notion of free will as genuinely free.

Then maybe one should give up this idea and understand as Garfield does, that Buddhist moral responsibility is not about those active practical elements after all, but just a recognition of the phenomenology of moral responsibility, meaning, an awareness and acknowledgement of the moral responsibility of conventional appearances (Garfield, 2021). But as Bobby Bingle argues, Buddhists do seem to take seriously the notion of holding agents morally responsible, even to the extent of having appropriate emotional responses (praise or blame), to corresponding motivations (Bingle, 2018). As he cites the Alagaddupama Sutta, in which the Buddha rebukes a monk who mis-taught the dharma:

"Worthless man, from whom have you understood that Dhamma taught by me in such a way? Worthless man, haven't I in many ways described obstructive acts? And when indulged in they are genuine obstructions …. But you, worthless man, through your own wrong grasp [my teaching], have both misrepresented us as well as injuring yourself and accumulating much demerit for yourself, for that will lead to your long-term harm and suffering."

If Garfield was right, and the Buddhists hold a purely phenomenological moral responsibility that is descriptive, then there remains a tension with the Buddhists assigning praise or blame to certain actions and motivations.

One way of maintaining that one can preserve certain notions of moral responsibility, and yet maintain that we should understand Buddhists as hard determinists and rejecting free will, is to resolve that tension by focusing our attention on the notion of deserving something within moral responsibility (Pereboom 2001, 2014; Caruso, 2020). Gregg D. Caruso's analysis of Derek Pereboom's idea is essentially to say that Buddhists abandon moral responsibility in the conventional sense, meaning, a moral

responsibility grounded in ‘basic desert’. This is defined as a moral responsibility in which an agent ‘would deserve the blame or credit just by virtue of having performed the action, given an understanding of its moral status, and not, for example, merely by virtue of consequentialist considerations’ (Pereboom, 2014).

By separating basic desert from moral responsibility, we can accommodate Bingle’s point that Buddhists do take seriously the notion of holding agents responsible without contradicting hard determinism. This is done by restricting moral responsibility instead to non-desert considerations, particularly regarding concerns about benefits that we can obtain for the future, if we are to hold someone morally responsible. More details and specific examples are elaborated on by Caruso (Caruso, 2020), but just to raise an obvious case is that holding a thief responsible for their crime has the future benefit of potentially preventing them from doing it again. This would mean that moral responsibility that just involves unhelpful ‘backward looking blame, anger, and retribution’ would be inconsistent with hard determinism. This is as Caruso demonstrates with examples from the sutras, consistent with how the Buddha only allows moral criticism if there is future benefit to be gained. This has the added benefit of avoiding the unsavoury consequence of thinking people deserve the terrible things that happen to them as a result of their own karmic actions (Goodman, 2002, 2009).

Despite denying the possibility to transcendentally change and transform our minds, the argument is that Pereboom’s account would be the kind of moral responsibility the Buddhists accept; one that concerns itself with benefiting us, rather than assigning blame. I agree with Caruso and Pereboom here that this is the new sort of moral responsibility the Buddhists would agree to.

However, there is a slight caveat where Buddhists and this view of moral responsibility slightly comes apart. Goodman notes himself that Buddhists *do* seem to think that transcendental mental transformation is possible through meditation and contemplation of reality. I will now argue that Buddhist teachings do seem to imply that there is a transcendentally free element within a mostly deterministic existence.

III.3 Freedom in Buddhism

Freedom of the transcendental kind, that is to say, unbound from the laws of nature can be seen in three ways, at the beginning of embarking on the noble path, the practice of the noble path itself, and the end-goal of the noble path. To begin, one such indication that this sort of transcendental kind of freedom may be present in Buddhism takes place allegedly during Siddhartha's practice before he became a Buddha. In descriptions of his life, it is said that he had put a golden bowl in the river and vowing that 'If I am to attain enlightenment, let this bowl go upstream', that is to say, against the current, which the bowl does (Swearer, 2004, p. 132). It would appear that one's taking upon the path, is likened to going against the laws of nature.

This is supported by the Buddha's own teachings in the sutras, as in the Nadi Sutta, the Buddha uses the analogy of a river with a strong current that drags everything with it in its path, leading to 'disaster'. Likewise, a person who has no intention of embarking on the noble path, is swept away as well, by their own ignorance and fabrications, leading to suffering. The river's flow as an analogy is used again in elaboration regarding those who take upon the noble path within the Anusota Sutta, outlining four different types of people:

‘And who is the individual who goes with the flow? There is the case where an individual indulges in sensual passions and does evil deeds.

And who is the individual who goes against the flow? There is the case where an individual doesn't indulge in sensual passions and doesn't do evil deeds.

And who is the individual who stands fast? There is the case where an individual, with the total ending of the first set of five fetters, is due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world. This is called the individual who stands fast.

And who is the individual who has crossed over, gone beyond, who stands on firm ground: a brahman? There is the case where an individual, through the ending of the mental fermentations, enters & remains in the fermentation-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having known & made them manifest for himself right in the here & now.’

Here again is the notion that those who do not take upon the noble path are swept away with the flow, and those who begin to practice it go against the follow, stand fast, or are able to go beyond it, reaching liberation, depending on their level of practice and enlightenment. If the flow is understood to be the cycle of suffering and life and death as noted in dependent origination and the twelve links, it seems that there is the indication of the possibility of going against it, resisting its flow, and crossing (ending) it. There seems to be the possibility of this sort of freedom against this determination.

Within the specifics of the psychology of practice, in the Upanisa Sutta, the Buddha does not only outline the twelve links, but provides a further elaboration as to what is sometimes called reverse or transcendental dependent origination, a sequence that outlines the psychological process of enlightenment (Harvey, 2013, pp.46-59). The Buddha outlines that enlightenment, or ‘knowledge of the destruction of the cankers’,

that is to say, awareness of the fact that one is indeed enlightened and liberated has a supporting condition, which is emancipation (or liberation) itself. Liberation itself has dispassion as a supporting condition, which is supported by disenchantment (or disillusion), which is supported by knowledge and vision of things as they really are, which is supported concentration, followed by happiness, then tranquillity, rapture, joy, and faith, in this order of supporting conditions (Upanisa Sutta)[9]. Faith, however, is supported by suffering, which is followed by the sequence of the twelve links I've outlined before.

Although described as reverse or transcendental dependent origination, the fact that the beginning of the psychological noble path is conditioned by suffering, which itself follows the twelve links seem to indicate that the path towards enlightenment is determined as well. However, I note that not all who suffer develop faith. Meaning, what is particular about the transcendental noble path, unlike the twelve links, is as mentioned before, that it is likened to going against or across the flow rather than being swept by the flow. That is to say, it's important to note that rather than a 'requisite condition' as used to describe the twelve links, the transcendental sequence is merely noted as 'supporting conditions'. They are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions, they assist or are part of what *is* necessary for practice of the noble path, which I shall argue in the next chapter, is the notion of awareness or mindfulness, and that it is this awareness which could be free.

[9] I won't be able to go into detail as to what these psychological stages specifically mean here for the purposes of this particular thesis.

This is further supported by the fact in the Cetana Sutta, the Buddha described a different supporting condition to joy, namely freedom from remorse, which is itself supported by virtue:

‘For a person endowed with virtue, consummate in virtue, there is no need for an act of will, 'May freedom from remorse arise in me.' It is in the nature of things that freedom from remorse arises in a person endowed with virtue, consummate in virtue.
"For a person free from remorse, there is no need for an act of will, 'May joy arise in me.' It is in the nature of things that joy arises in a person free from remorse.’

Another clarification must be noted at this point, in which the Cetana Sutta notes that no will is necessary in the progression of these psychological states within transcendental dependent origination. So, it is important to note that it cannot be freedom of *will* itself the Buddhist speaks of, but freedom of something else, which I will also elaborate upon in the next chapter.

There remains still one aspect of practice that requires emphasis that supports the notion of a transcendental freedom, and it’s the notion that it is described as a process of unbinding, or liberation (Mulapariyaya Sutta). Furthermore, the goal of practice, nirvana itself, is meant to be a release from the cycle of life and death, of continued suffering. The twelve links are a description of this determined cycle, and dependent origination is meant to be likened to the laws of nature, and yet it is possible through the noble path for one to be liberated from it, to be beyond it. This is not just a psychological type of enlightenment or liberation, but a transcendentally metaphysical one.

This is shown through the Mula Sutta, which the Buddha outlines:

'All phenomena are rooted in desire. All phenomena come into play through attention. All phenomena have contact as their origination. All phenomena have feeling as their meeting place. All phenomena have concentration as their presiding state. All phenomena have mindfulness as their governing principle. All phenomena have discernment as their surpassing state. All phenomena have release as their heartwood. All phenomena gain their footing in the deathless. All phenomena have Unbinding as their final end.'

Whereas phenomena (our *flawed* or *deluded* subjective experience of the world as rooted in desire, which itself is rooted in delusion and ignorance as noted before) is conditioned according to dependent origination, nibbana is the ending of phenomena, the negation of phenomena and determination. Practice is described as a way to this 'unconditioned', undetermined state of nirvana and liberation beyond the laws that govern the flow and cycle of suffering, life, and death of the world (Asaṅkhatasutta). It seems that the Buddha's teachings do suggest a transcendental type of freedom whether in the beginning of embarking on the noble path, the practice of the noble path itself, and the end-goal of the noble path.

It is this that makes me regard the compatibilist position as not one the Buddhists can adopt. While considering conventional and ultimate reality as separate allows us to speak about and continue our moral practices, it considers freedom and moral responsibility as a matter of appearances, of convention, and cannot be considered on the same level of reality. And yet, for Buddhist moral practices and liberation, conventional and ultimate reality are forced to interact at the same level. Moral practices are said to lead to metaphysical consequences, the liberation from the cycle of life and death. Meaning, Buddhist moral responsibility interferes in some way with,

and operates beyond, the natural laws of dependent origination, putting an end to reincarnation. What compatibilists can't do in this instance, is explain why conventional practices, as they believe, can lead to metaphysical outcomes. The compatibilist position is just that, it is compatible, but *inconsistent* with the metaphysics, it does not account for the engrained metaphysical role and relationship that Buddhist moral practices and Buddhist moral responsibility seemingly have to play.

Caruso's moral responsibility is consistent with the metaphysics of all phenomena being conditioned and caused yet contradicts the implication from Buddhist practice that seems to indicate that we can have some freedom in mental transformation. What this indicates to me, is the possibility of a new way of interpreting Buddhist moral responsibility, one that allows Caruso's non-desert moral responsibility to additionally account for Buddhist mental transformation and liberation.

III.4 Summarising Thoughts

Assessing the interpretations discussed above then, they largely suggest the moral picture is not an indication of transcendental free will (or at least, freedom), which means that moral responsibility of the libertarian kind has no place in Buddhist philosophy. As to how the seemingly deterministic teaching of dependent origination and freedom could be metaphysically consistent at the same level of reality, there is no obvious solution. It is clear to me however, both aspects are present in Buddhist teachings. Therefore, *should* there be a possible resolution between the apparent contradiction between determined causality and freedom necessary for moral

responsibility, it would be fruitful for the Buddhists, even if it's moral responsibility in the restricted non-desert sense that Pereboom and Caruso advocate for.

The views of Caruso and Pereboom explore mainly, what sort of moral responsibility would be consistent given determinism, assuming free will to be already out of the picture and inconsistent with determinism. But what seemed odd to me, is that despite this view being grounded on metaphysical claims (whether the Buddha's dependent origination or hard determinism), they don't focus on metaphysics much at all. There is a gap in the literature as most have tried to reconcile the tensions between determinism and moral responsibility, but there is not much exploration into the metaphysical possibilities and a metaphysical solution for the consistency of determinism and free will has been so far neglected or underexplored. I suggest in the next chapter, with help from Kant, this is a possibility.

CHAPTER IV:

Transcendental Freedom

IV.1 Kant's Freedom

In pursuit of the sort of freedom that would grant Buddhists an account of freedom that accommodates dependent origination, in this chapter, I suggest that by turning to Mahayana traditions of Buddhism, we may have a Buddhist equivalent of a phenomenal world that would allow the adoption of Kant's ideas regarding the problem of freedom, that renders freedom at least possibly consistent with dependent origination.

First, I shall give an outline of what Kant's proposal is regarding freedom in a deterministic world. Second, I will justify why I think the Buddhists may borrow certain aspects of Kant's view given the Mahayana Buddhist teaching regarding the phenomenal world. Third, I acknowledge that Kant's account itself invites a lot of questions that remain to be answered, thus I shall lay out the major puzzles that result in a powerful objection that demands clarification and resolution. If the Buddhists were to borrow this idea of transcendental freedom, then it would also inherit its problems. Fourth, to try and overcome this, I will demonstrate how Buddhists can clarify and resolve these puzzles and the resulting problem through the notion of delusion within the Mahayana tradition.

Finally, this shall be followed by a more comprehensive account of Buddhist freedom, exploring what exactly is this freedom, and whether we can say more about what it means, its scope and the role it plays. This will lead to a new plausible conception of Buddhist moral responsibility. I will then return to the views covered in the third chapter, to elaborate on how this new kind of moral responsibility modified presents a better alternative. Ultimately, I will show what this new kind of non-desert Buddhist moral responsibility may look like. More precisely, I conclude that freedom and moral responsibility for Buddhists, is freedom of awareness and responsibility over that awareness. Awareness and understanding why we do things; can lead us to change how we do things. This allows Buddhists to have a moral responsibility that is conducive to the free transformation of oneself, despite much of everything else being determined.

To begin, Kant explicitly rejects the compatibilist approach[10], instead opting to give us a means of at least conceiving of freedom as being consistent with a deterministic natural world. He does this through the notion of splitting into two, the realm of the transcendental, where freedom can be from, and the realm of phenomena, that which we are acquainted with through our senses. If Kant's conception of freedom is indeed consistent, and his proof for the existence of such a freedom succeeds, then this could support the Buddhists in making moral responsibility consistent with their own metaphysics.

A clarification is needed about Kant's conception and that it is not meant to be a full descriptive account. Freedom for Kant is by his explanation, definitionally beyond our full comprehension. Thus, all we can do is 'comprehend its incomprehensibility' (Kant, *Groundwork*, Part III, 4:463). All that he gives us, is a freedom that can be conceived of as consistent with observed determinism in the world. As well as this, we have some justification as to this freedom existing.

Kant outlines that the puzzle of freedom arises from two observations of causality that conflict with one another. When we observe the causality of events, we see that when something happens, it is preceded by something else before it, causing it. Thus, we can arrive at two explanations of causality. One, that there is a chain of causation which arises ultimately from a first cause. Two, the chain of causation is infinite in its scope (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A528-535/B556-563; *Proleg* 343).[11]

[10] The kind as proposed by both Leibniz (1678/80?), (after 1690), (1699-1703?) and Hume (1739-40), (1748)
[11] See, Guyer (2006); Wood (2004) for interpretations and commentary on Kant's theory of freedom.

For example, consider a stretch of billiard balls lined up with one another going far down one direction, and similarly far down the opposite direction. From our point of view, our limited scope of what we can see in front of us, we can observe that every ball in front of us moves as a result of the previous ball colliding with it. Said previous ball has also moved, due to a preceding ball and collision. Having observed this, we can claim that moving balls are caused by previous moving balls. However, we cannot see what has occurred in the faraway direction of the beginning of this chain of causation, thus, we have two theories as to what may have occurred there. One, there is a first ball causing the chain of movement. Or two, the chain of balls just goes back indefinitely with no beginning. While the notion of infinite balls seems intuitively nonsense and can be dismissed, this is due to an imperfect analogy. The latter theory could be supplemented with a finite number of balls, but recognising another series of causes, such as a pool cue striking the ball, preceding by the movement of the arm, muscles, nervous system and so on.

There is a good reason to accept the first cause theory, for without some sort of first cause then there is the question of how it all began. The intuition seems to be that an incomplete causal chain would have us accept a chain of moving balls going back infinitely. Therefore, it seems reasonable for there being a first ‘free’ undetermined and uncaused cause to exist.

Nonetheless, the second theory upon examination also seems to be a reasonable option to accept. This is because we have never seen this so-called first free undetermined cause. We have no empirical evidence for such a phenomenon. All we have seen so far is a series of cause and effect, and we have not observed an

uncaused cause. No moving ball as far as we've seen has done so because of its own volition without collision from a preceding ball and thus, there is a lack of evidence to support this theory. Therefore, as reasonable as a first free undetermined cause is, it is difficult to accept this claim without evidence.

To accommodate both explanations and their intuitive pull, Kant proposes transcendental idealism as a means of resolving the contradiction (A535–57/B563–85). This allows us to perceive causality and events in a different light. The world and its objects are divided into things as they *appear* (phenomena) and things as they *are* (transcendental). Meaning, the billiard balls as they appear, do have causality as they appear to move due to collisions with one another. This is empirically true. But there is a question as to the behaviour of billiards balls in *actuality.* Having said that, the appearance of an object does ultimately depend on the object itself. Like my shadow, it can only appear if I exist. The point is, while one may observe the appearance of my shadow and account for its empirical behaviour, my actual behaviour is not captured fully by just watching the shadow.

If we are to think of the world and causality in this fashion, we could now entertain the possibility that empirical causality operates in the phenomenal realm of appearances, such that billiard balls collide with one another in a deterministic way, and, that it is also possible for an 'intelligible' (or conceivable) undetermined free cause which exists in the realm of actuality (the first mover of billiard balls). To use my previous analogy, the natural laws of determinism govern my shadow, while I in actuality have some sort of free causation.

For freedom explicitly, it means that when it comes to our moral actions and our freedom of will, we, a moral agent, can have an 'intelligible' character of free causality, as well as an 'empirical' character which operates under deterministic causality (A539/B567). However, by definition, this intelligible character does not operate in the world of observed phenomena, that is to say, cannot be described in phenomenological terms (A551–2/B579–80). This is what Kant means by the *possibility* of freedom in a phenomenologically deterministic world (A557–8/B585–6), but nevertheless an incomprehensible freedom in actuality[12].

To help elaborate on what exactly this means for us, we can think of freedom having two faces to elucidate on what kind of freedom this is via comparison. Practically, there is the apparent assumed freedom, which is our everyday choice in what to have for lunch, but Kant's freedom is a transcendental kind of undetermined causal power (A446/B474). When we make choices, we presume that we possess this power, more so when we consider moral actions and responsibility, even though on the surface, those choices have the appearance of being causally determined by many conditional factors. Simply put, Kant gives us the option of our moral choices genuinely being free in of itself but having a determined appearance.

Granting Kant's conception of our possible freedom in the transcendental sense, he suggests further that we reason to accept the existence of such a freedom. He appeals to the awareness of what he calls the 'fact of reason' (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:43-55)[13]. This awareness is our intuitive notion of moral obligations and

[12] See, Reath (2006); Allinson (2004) for interpretations and commentary on Kant's transcendental idealism and freedom.
[13] See, Allison (1990): Kleingeld (2010); Sullivan (2012)

duties. For instance, should I lend my friend's car, I'm consciously aware that I should return it to them. I recognise that it would be the wrong thing to do to keep the car, and the right thing to do to return it, perhaps with a full tank.[14] The recognition is then something I have to choose to act in accordance with or not. What makes us 'intelligible' free moral agents, is that ability of awareness (5:42).

Being aware of our moral obligations, we have a 'concept of freedom'. This is due to the fact that the concept of freedom is baked into the idea of whether or not I choose to act in accordance with our moral intuitions (5:29-30). If I don't conceive of myself as free to choose to act, then my moral knowledge loses meaning, it is merely a deterministic series of cause and effect. This is a sort of circular-like piece of reasoning. Meaning, it is through the intuition of obligation, our moral knowledge of what it is to do the right thing that gives us the concept of freedom. Returning the favour, the concept of freedom gives meaning to our moral knowledge, as freedom is what gives moral knowledge significance and justification. With moral knowledge justified, it gives weight to the existence of freedom, for there could not be justified moral knowledge without the existence of freedom (5:47).[15]

As to what exactly this summarises freedom to be, I understand it as the transcendental causal power which grants us the choice to act in accordance with the moral obligations or moral good, we intuitively have the knowledge and awareness of. Having mentioned before, since by definition this causality operates from the transcendental realm, Kant is satisfied with the conclusion that beyond this basic

[14] It's worth noting that it is unclear as to whether Kant means that the fact of reason is an awareness of the *obligation,* or the discernment of the morally *right* thing to do.
[15] See, Callanan (2013); Guyer (2007); Schönecker and A. Wood (2015); Sedgwick (2008); Timmermann (2007) for interpretations and commentary on Kant's freedom and morality.

outline of freedom, its possibility, and existence, nothing else can be known about it (Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:226-227).

IV.2 Kantian Freedom for Buddhists

There is a reason to conceive of Buddhism being parallel to Kant's account and can therefore adopt Kant's ideas for a solution. This is because the Buddhist world view is not entirely dissimilar. Recall the Mula Sutta as I referenced in the last chapter where the Buddha outlines:

'All phenomena are rooted in desire. All phenomena come into play through attention. All phenomena have contact as their origination. All phenomena have feeling as their meeting place. All phenomena have concentration as their presiding state. All phenomena have mindfulness as their governing principle. All phenomena have discernment as their surpassing state. All phenomena have release as their heartwood. All phenomena gain their footing in the deathless. All phenomena have Unbinding as their final end.'

This gives us some indication that phenomena as understood in the Buddhist context, is also not an accurate reflection of things as they are, but rather a deluded experience, as described being rooted in desire, which in itself, as described by dependent origination, rooted by ignorance. This is distinct from what we are supposed to gain from the transcendental path which is 'knowledge of things as they really are'.

Whilst compatibilists have used Vasubandhu's notion of conventional reality and ultimate reality as a means to justify compatibilism, I consider this as a way of being able to see that Buddhists also see a world divided between as Kant describes, the phenomenal and the transcendental. This means that dependent origination, could be

a description of how things work in the realm of appearances as rooted in ignorance, and transcendental dependent origination, could be a description of how we may arrive at things as they really are.

This notion is more explicitly elaborated upon in Mahayana sources. Consider how in the Diamond Sutra the Buddha teaches:

'Never troubling about appearances, in accordance with suchness, unmoving. Why? Because all conditioned dharma are like dreams, phantoms, bubbles, shadows, like dew, or again like lightning, in this way, should you view them' (translated by Watson)

Or in the Avatamsaka Sutra:

'Mind is like an artist, able to paint the worlds' (Book 19 in Chinese, Book 20 in the Thomas Cleary translation).

This again seems to show that Buddhism holds that the phenomenon of the world is not only an appearance and unreflective of how things actually are, but conditioned by our minds (ignorance, desire etc.) As well as this, again, Buddhist practice can make knowledge of how things actually are possible.

This is remarkably similar to Kant's metaphysics, in which there is a realm of things in which they are, separate from the realm of phenomena in which things are as they appear to us, operating through strict causation through dependent origination. There are many differences in Buddhist and Kantian philosophy, but the relevant thing that the Buddhists can make use of, is precisely this divide between realities. Holding that the realm of the transcendental being separate from the phenomena allows Buddhists to regain the possibility of freedom despite the deterministic realm of phenomena.

To adapt Kant's account for Buddhists would therefore look something like the following. In the realm of phenomena, it is indeed the case that all phenomena arise due to dependent origination, and are therefore determined. However, in the realm of the transcendental, where things reside as they are, it is possible for there to be our power for genuine freedom. In which case, all the Buddhist teachings regarding active ethical practice, karmic consequences, and moral responsibility may become genuinely metaphysically consequential with this original causal power of freedom.

As I've mentioned, the compatibilist Buddhist view also has a dual-level structure of reality, but where it differs from this account, is that they place free will in the conventional realm of appearances, and the realm of ultimate reality as deterministic. In contrast, what I propose is that the realm of appearances is deterministic, and *freedom* resides in the realm of things in themselves. This account opens up the genuine possibility of metaphysical transformation through transcendental freedom towards liberation from suffering. This is through being transcendentally free to adopt the non-desert moral responsibility advocated by Pereboom and Caruso. Buddhists can borrow from Kant and have a picture of moral responsibility that renders freedom at least consistent with their own metaphysics, a non-desert Buddhist moral responsibility.

A combination of Buddhist and Kantian philosophy has shown on the surface how transcendental freedom can be consistent within Buddhist metaphysics. If we are to conceive of the world in two parts, one being of appearances which operates under natural laws, and the other being transcendental in which things as they are, or more precisely, we as we are, may possess freedom. However, this combined account

invites a lot of questions demanding clarification and elaboration, and the Kantian account of freedom itself, has garnered powerful objections and puzzles. As such, if the Buddhists were to borrow this idea of transcendental freedom, then it would also inherit its problems.

IV.3 Problem of Necessary or Random Freedom

Despite Kant's insistence that nothing else can be said, his account does invite two specific clarificatory points. First, the exact nature of our role as an agent amongst the two faces of freedom. If we are to conceive of freedom as merely the choice to act according to moral intuitions, then our role would be the shot that sets off the first billiard ball colliding into the subsequent one. This means, we are within the realm of phenomena and appearances, interacting with it. Should we instead conceive freedom as the transcendental causal power specifically not within the realm of phenomena, then freedom is more likened to the notion of intelligible causality, occurring transcendentally.

To put it more clearly, we are to be thought of in this picture as separate from the realm of phenomena. The agent is therefore in a position being between two realms, likewise with freedom. What needs clearing up is what exactly is freedom thought to be, the intelligible causal part residing in the transcendental, or the choices that correspond and interact with the realm of the phenomena.[16]

[16] See Reinhold, *Essay on a New Theory of the Human Capacity for Representation* (1789) and Schopenhauer, *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics* (1841) for the two interpretations of Kant's freedom.

Second, the relationship between freedom and moral action. To recall, our concept of freedom stems from moral knowledge, whilst freedom gives meaning and justification to said moral knowledge, and that justified moral knowledge gives us proof for freedom's existence. Should freedom be understood as the transcendental causal power which gives moral agents the choice to act according to our awareness of moral knowledge, then clarification is needed for what is to be said then about immoral actions. The implication seems to be that there is no 'freedom' for immoral actions, as it only seems to arise out of a *failure* of using the freedom to choose to in accordance with moral knowledge.

These two puzzling queries start to mount into a more substantial worry for my proposal. In the proof, Kant says that morality and freedom are bound together intrinsically, such that freedom is to be understood as transcendental intelligible causality. It is something to do with what we are conscious of as an obligation to choose to adhere to. However, should immoral acts be free, then freedom should be conceived of as a choice in the realm of the phenomena, for the transcendental does not offer us immoral intuitions. The account of freedom under examination is unsatisfyingly unclear.

This lack of clarity results in a crucial problem for Kant noted by Ulrich, as his account would seemingly render freedom a necessity, which is either not free, or a result of chance, as argued in the previous chapter, which fails to give us moral responsibility (Noller and Walsh, 2022). Freedom conceived as the transcendental causal power which offers the choice to act accordingly to the awareness of moral knowledge, combined with the notion that there are no free immoral actions, implies that intelligible

causality is operating only for certain actions. There is then a principled exclusion of immoral action, whereas moral actions occur due to a higher transcendental cause, which we cannot comprehend. If the moral act occurs out of a causal necessity, there is no genuine choice. This is because we cannot freely act otherwise. On the other hand, if there is a lack of a principled reason why some actions are free and others are not, then moral actions are those that have been decided through random spontaneity in the transcendental, a freedom with no principles.

Alternatively, if we were to say that a free immoral action is possible, a similar problem remains. Should there exist a principled reason as to why the transcendental causal power leads us sometimes in conducting moral actions, and at other times to immoral ones, then again, this reason is simply a higher reason which necessarily compels with no free choice. Should there be no principled reason, then moral acts or immoral acts occur with a roll of the transcendental dice. This is all to say, for us to have moral responsibility, our moral actions must occur through the utilisation of our reasoning, meaning, we do them as a result of moral reasoning and consideration, not because of random outbursts. The lack of clarity in the comprehension of those reasons, should they exist, means that in this picture, not only do we have no freedom in actuality, but we also have reasons we can't even understand, which means we can't engage in moral reasoning. The alternative is that it's random, and we have no principled moral reasons at all, which also means there is no moral reasoning to engage in. Therefore, again, leaving moral responsibility in trouble.

A possible defence by Schmid is to simply bite the bullet and accept that there is a higher reason that necessarily compels us (Guyer, 2024). That is to admit, that what

this account gives us is only an appearance of freedom. Ultimately within the transcendental realm, our moral choices are traced back to a transcendental reason, a higher cause, which determines our moral actions. For Schmid, as long as it seems to us in the realm of phenomena, that we are not determined and necessarily compelled, that is freedom as far as we are concerned. Granting us these moral reasons and biting this bullet is not a satisfying answer as it still seems to miss Ulrich's challenge. The point remains, there is no freedom of will after all. There is no exercise on our part of discerning the moral good and making a decision. Moral responsibility is one of appearances. As Creuzer states, free will is an illusion (Noller and Walsh, 2022), and with that, so is moral responsibility.

Nonetheless, neither Buddhists nor Kant would have accepted Schmid's defence. As noted before, Buddhists have not been advocating for the appearance of freedom and moral responsibility, but something that gives us metaphysical liberation. If Buddhists are to supplement their account with Kant's ideas, then the Buddhists require a solution to the problems that arise from these ideas. I suggest that Buddhist resources can offer a different way of understanding Kantian ideas and addressing the worries and problems that have been encountered. If the Buddhists can address these problems, then they can incorporate Kant's ideas without these glaring issues.

IV.4 Freedom and Choice

Recalling the similarity of the general Buddhist outlook with Kant's, there is also a notable distinction in Buddhist philosophy that may prove fruitful to these problems: the notion of deluded experience. While Kant makes no claim about what objects

reside in the transcendental or what they are like, Buddhists make the claim that the phenomenal is nothing like the transcendental. To labour the point, Kant allows for the possibility that our phenomenological experience may indeed reflect things as they are, whereas Buddhists don't. By definition for Buddhists, our phenomenological experience is one conditioned by ignorance. The crucial implication here is that therefore, nothing in the transcendental is relevant to our intellectual understanding (and by extension for our moral purposes), given that anything we know, whether conceptually or empirically is according to both the Buddha and Kant just our phenomenological experience of appearances.

The relevant takeaway here is to acknowledge that the transcendental gives us nothing we can know phenomenologically, since it is by definition beyond (deluded) experience. Buddhists, therefore, can have the resource of resolving the problems within the Kantian account through this. Essentially, the idea is this: there is a difference between freedom, which is rooted in the transcendental, and the (deluded) phenomenological context required in making moral choices.

Let me illustrate this idea by giving an example. Consider that I am playing a character in Grand Theft Auto V (GTA V), a video game. At this point, it is irrelevant as to whether the real world is incomprehensible (according to Kant) or empty outside GTA V (for the Buddhists). When I am playing GTA V, I am immersed in a realm of phenomena. I, the player, reside outside GTA V, but I interact with its game world when playing it. GTA V has rules in the game system, determined by its programming, and these define the game's narrative and mechanics, which means that there are things that I can and

cannot do in GTA V. I cannot fly about for instance, there are places that I cannot access, and I must progress in a certain way.

These rules, by analogy, are the natural laws of the world. Although there are restrictions on me, there are aspects I seemingly have a role in determining. I can choose which items to have, use, how I interact with others and treat them. What to take from this is that if there is freedom, it's not to be found within the rules of the game, but in me, the player. This is nonetheless a restricted freedom, by virtue of the mechanics in the realm of phenomena.

Examining further, we realise that these choices don't make much sense without the specific context of GTA V. The actions, interactions, consequences, only have meaning and significance inside the game. Beyond it, it would be meaningless to speak of not having enough ammunition, or the consequences of murdering the wrong target. Likewise, freedom, whatever it may be like, is to be found in the agent, or the player, who exists in the transcendental merely interacting with the realm of phenomena. When we play a game, we are sitting in the real world, interacting with the game realm. The realm of phenomena is determined by causality, but within the mechanics, it is understood that we are able to make certain choices. That being said, no matter how significant or impactful these choices are in the context of the phenomenal, in the transcendental, lacking said context, moral responsibility is meaningless.

Thus, for Buddhists, their moral responsibility only makes sense in the realm of phenomena, and not meant to have a direct relationship with the transcendental.

Meaning, Buddhist moral responsibility is not meant to liberate us directly and metaphysically from the cycle of life and death, rather, Buddhist moral responsibility is instrumental to that goal, but something else is doing metaphysical transformation. Wholesome and good actions are a means of avoiding unhelpful consequences or obstacles towards the intended goal of psychological development.

For example, there is no time to reflect and philosophise should you be running away from the law after committing a crime. It's worth recalling that for the Buddha, his aim is not necessarily to achieve 'moral goodness', but to foster favourable conditions for the purposes of realising the truth (enlightenment), as a means to stop participating in the causes that leads one to suffering and the cycle of life and death (Pāsarāsisutta). Having once fully reached the transcendental, as to become enlightened or to enter nirvana, one is also liberated from moral responsibility. That is to say, once one stops playing the game, one is also liberated from its rules and the choices one makes within it, and moral responsibility also ceases to be relevant.

IV.5 Buddhist Resolution

Buddhists therefore now have what they need to reinterpret, supplement, and provide some clarity to some worries regarding Kant's ideas and resolving Ulrich's objection. As to where I am to place myself and my freedom between the two realms, Buddhists can say that the agent is part of the realm of the transcendental but interacting with the realm of phenomena. It doesn't make sense to say I am part of the phenomena in the same way I am not actually within GTA V. Thus, understood this way, freedom resides with me, the player, in the transcendental, the intelligible causality. Properly

interpreted, freedom is not to be understood as *the* choices within the realm of phenomena. Choice is the expression of our free causality put into context of the phenomena. The player provides the causal power of making a *choice* of what to do in the game.

Subsequently, to clarify and summarise, Kant states our conception of freedom comes from moral knowledge, which in the example, is analogous to understanding the cause and consequences of our action in the game. This is combined with the freedom within moral responsibility, in that I have argued to be interpreted as being the source of the power of choice. We can now answer the puzzle and say that there is therefore freedom to choose to act in moral *and* immoral ways in the realm of the phenomena. However, to labour the point, freedom itself is not choice, thus we are not directly free to act. What I mean by this is, freedom is a first transcendental cause which leads to moral or immoral acts occurring in the realm of phenomena. Freedom operates with things as they actually are (player), and actions occur in the phenomena (game). Moral actions, therefore, to hold one morally responsible is only phenomenological.

To explain with more clarity, freedom is the transcendental causal power giving one the ability to choose in the realm of phenomena as to whether (or how much) one adheres to the moral principles one is aware of. I can choose to act for the 'better outcomes', act morally, or act for 'worse outcomes', act immorally. I am a free player, but I am only able to make choices by recognising the rules of the game. This is what I mean by moral acts deriving meaning from context. Following from this, while there is technically a 'best' way to play GTA V, high score for instance (or other success criteria), we don't necessarily have to play for score, nor does this 'best' translate into

the transcendental. Whether something is for better or worse, is up to the agent. That is to say, how one plays the game, what considers to be their own ideal outcome is dependent on the person (be a doctor, politician, be rich and famous etc.), and a better action or worse action depends on whether it helps one achieves their ideal outcome. Moral responsibility and choice may be intertwined in the realm of the phenomena; however, freedom and moral responsibility belong to separate realms.

Buddhists can now face Ulrich's dilemma between necessity and chance. Having established the notion that one is not free to act, given freedom and choice belong to different realms, then it shall be the case that there is no such notion of being free to act immorally, for we are not free to act at all. In the same way my actions in the game reside only in the game, they are not actions in the real world. Thus, there is no problem of intelligible causality working for some actions and not for others, so Ulrich's objection does not follow. There is no higher reason to be found in the transcendental that compels us necessarily, nor is it the case that we have no reasons to act which makes moral responsibility a game of chance.

Nonetheless, I have not escaped the problem entirely. Although my interpretation states that we are not free to act, freedom is the source of power in which we choose to act in the realm of phenomena. Thus, Ulrich's problem can be modified to being, if I am *able to choose* to act, then I must have reasons to choose. Should these reasons be transcendental, it is incomprehensible and compels me necessarily, if there is no reason in the transcendental, then we are back with randomness again. I respond to this merely by clarifying that while freedom gives us the power of choice, the reasons for choice can only be found in the realm of phenomena. Freedom is not about coming

up with those reasons, it's only limited to accepting, or to be more precise, being aware of those reasons.

To elaborate, when I am finding a reason to act one or another in GTA V, I appeal to the information I am aware of in the game. The facts, game mechanics, consequences determine whether I decide to switch my equipment, what weapon to select, who to avoid killing. I consider if an item provides better stats in achieving my goals, how it affects the game world, and the sort of character I wish to be. Our freedom is the power to be aware and consider these things, and ultimately the reasonings we find best, we accept. Nonetheless, in this account, the reasons themselves stem from and only have contextual meaning in the game world. Reasons we use to make moral decisions are similarly found in the realm of the phenomena, when we take in the information of what is at stake, but the stakes are contextual to the realm of phenomena, they are not to be found in the transcendental. The incomprehensibility of the transcendental is by definition, lacking any context, therefore there are no moral reasons or stakes to be found there, only raw freedom.[17]

Schmid's failure to receive Buddhist endorsement can seemingly be applied to my interpretation. To have morality meaningless in the transcendental, would surely render it a morality of appearances again. If I wish to argue for the preservation of both freedom and moral responsibility, it seems I am giving up the latter. I respond by suggesting the problem is not that Buddhist moral responsibility is just a phenomenological occurrence, the problem is rendering moral responsibility on the

[17] It's important to note here that this account is Kant inspired, but not a Kantian account, this is not a claim Kant would agree with.

whole, meaningless. My view does not make Buddhist moral responsibility meaningless, it is conducive to genuine metaphysical change and supposed liberation of the agent, but it does not do so directly, only instrumentally. Buddhist moral responsibility still functions through the reasons we use to make moral decisions within the realm of phenomena and how we hold each other responsible for those decisions, but serves only to develop wisdom and change us psychologically, and through that wisdom, liberate us from reincarnation and suffering.

To clarify, Buddhist moral responsibility while operating solely in the phenomena, where it derives its context, the metaphysically transformative aspect of liberation resides in the agent, the player, and their freedom. Buddhists hold each other responsible for how they use that freedom, as Buddhist moral responsibility provides the required context and conditions for one to achieve liberation from the deterministic cycle of life and death.

To recap, with Kant's help Buddhists could regain transcendental freedom in a deterministic world. With the Buddhist notion of delusion, Buddhist moral responsibility could at least be consistent with Buddhist metaphysics. Albeit it is an instrumental moral responsibility for the sake of providing enlightenment and freedom from suffering. The next inquiry is to explore this transformative notion of freedom.

IV.6 Freedom of What, Exactly?

To take stock briefly, the Kantian-inspired Buddhist account allows freedom in the agent, yet recognises that one's reasons to act, our contextual information about the

world, lies in the phenomena. Choice, therefore, or the exercise of our mental faculties in coming to make that choice is determined by the context, the things, or reasons we take into account in the use of our freedom. This is therefore not an account of direct free will, yet there is implied to be freedom somewhere, that leads to a will, a will with free origins, but is nevertheless conditioned by context.

Recalling Kant's proof, where he appeals to the awareness of what he calls the 'fact of reason' (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:43-55), Buddhists also place emphasis on some notion of awareness. Precisely, what they seem to deem to be free, is awareness itself, in general. I argue that Buddhists can be said to hold that freedom *is* awareness, our ability to pay attention to the things we pay attention to.

This is evidenced, as I have touched upon briefly before, in outlining the twelve links of dependent origination. The Buddha states that the origin of being and suffering, is ignorance or lack of awareness of the truth of the state of the world and ourselves. The antidote, it seems, and the only thing we can freely do is target the first cause, the first link, which is therefore, awareness which leads to wisdom. Supporting this notion is that within all Buddhist practices, is the fundamental idea of developing mindful awareness (*Sati)*.

In the Satisampajaññasutta, the Buddha states:

"Mendicants, when there is no mindfulness and situational awareness, one who lacks mindfulness and situational awareness has destroyed a vital condition for conscience and prudence. When there is no conscience and prudence, one who lacks conscience and prudence has destroyed a vital condition for sense restraint. When there is no sense restraint,

one who lacks sense restraint has destroyed a vital condition for ethical conduct. When there is no ethical conduct, one who lacks ethics has destroyed a vital condition for right immersion. When there is no right immersion, one who lacks right immersion has destroyed a vital condition for true knowledge and vision. When there is no true knowledge and vision, one who lacks true knowledge and vision has destroyed a vital condition for disillusionment and dispassion. When there is no disillusionment and dispassion, one who lacks disillusionment and dispassion has destroyed a vital condition for knowledge and vision of freedom."

To recall, in the noble eightfold path, there is a right view, right thoughts, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta). Although right mindfulness is its own practice, it is really a more focused or specific version of mindful awareness, in particular, of the body, sensation, of the mind, and of the phenomena of the world (Satipatthana Sutta). Mindful awareness is involved in all aspects. In order to possess the right view, one must be aware of suffering in the world, right thoughts require one's awareness of one's thoughts, and in the same vein, awareness of what one does, how one makes a living, how one applies effort and diligence. Whether one pays attention to what they pay attention to, is a prerequisite the free ability to progress or transform oneself according to the noble eightfold path.

Even the threefold training of ethics, meditation, and insight into wisdom is about being aware and paying attention to thoughts, body and speech, our mind and attention itself, in order to achieve insight. The stressing of the ethical discipline's importance (Mahāparinibbānasutta) is in essence, a stressing of the importance of one's awareness of what one is doing. That is all to say, all aspects of Buddhist practice require mindfulness, or more precisely the whole point of Buddhist practice is the

training and development of awareness and mindfulness, it is a ‘vital condition’ for the practice towards ‘knowledge and vision of freedom’.

If I am correct, and freedom is that of awareness, Buddhist practices indicate we have the means to freely choose to pay attention to what we pay attention to. For instance, we breathe without conscious effort, it operates itself all on its own, but we can pay attention to it. However, we need to undertake training as we fail to pay full attention due to distractions (or as the Buddha calls it, poisons, such as greed, hatred, and delusion). Thus, we fail to be fully aware or enlightened (Buddha). But when we let go of delusion, that is to say use our awareness, we gain wisdom. Enlightenment, in this sense, is just a state of being fully aware. The line of reasoning, I think is something like having been aware of the reasons to act, all our subsequent actions are determined. The more aware we are, the more information we have access to, the more context we have, the better motivated, justified, and informed, our subsequent determined reasons for our actions.

The Dhammapada also suggests a similar idea:
‘All mental phenomena have mind as their forerunner; they have mind as their chief; they are mind-made. If one speaks or acts with an unwholesome mind, ‘dukkha’ (suffering) follows him just as the wheel follows the hoofprint of the ox that draws the cart.’

If my analysis is correct, and awareness or unawareness is the first free cause, the unwholesome mind, so to speak, is the mind that is unaware, is ignorant, hence according to the twelve links of dependent origination, suffering is determined as a

result of it. Likewise, should the mind be aware, then the original cause of suffering is mitigated. That is not to say what has already been caused, or determined can be stopped, as once you start a sequence of events it will be determined to play out to its conclusion, but the next cause of suffering will not occur, or start, as a result of increased awareness[18]. The freedom of transforming our lives for the better, the freedom in better exercising our will, lies in the original cause of greater awareness.

One may wonder if there is room in determinism for new (aware) causes to take place. This is where the Buddhist notion of impermanence can inform us on the technical aspects of how this is supposed to work. Impermanence states that all phenomena arise, persists for a while, and ultimately ceases to be. This suggests that new phenomena can arise in place of old phenomena that have concluded its determined cycle. Determinism does not necessarily mean that causes have eternal effects, just that effects are bound to causes.

A helpful example would be a fire. It is determined that with the combination of conditions (causes), heat, oxygen, and fuel, there is the effect of fire. But with time, one of the conditions is bound to run out, and hence the fire goes out eventually. It is not possible however, to have the conditions, and not have the effect. The removal of

[18] I acknowledge here that there is much further room to flesh out the psychological technicalities of mental transformation in relation to dependent origination and the physical technicalities of our relationship as agent, with the physical world in terms of cause and effect, such as what we have control over, and what we don't. For example, even if we are fully aware and fully informed, certain events will still happen as a result of natural causes and effect (death), yet the point it seems is not to stop terrible things from happening (we can't anyway, since the cause had already started), it's to accept and understand these things and to not cause the next terrible thing. Rather than being angry over the fact I (or someone or something else) planted an apple tree only after it has grown when I wished for a peach tree, since I can't reverse time or transform it into a peach tree, I can only accept it, and make sure I plant the next one correctly if I wanted a peach tree. I don't have the space to give a full analysis of these aspects, as the project of this thesis is merely to give an outline of how freedom and moral responsibility is possible, not a full outline of how it will work, but it is something I will endeavour to provide in the future.

fire must require the removal of one of its causes. If the cause of ignorance is removed, such as in the case of no longer adding more fuel to the fire, the fuel that was already there will still likewise burn until completion, but the fire will not be sustained in the future with no more additions of fuel.

To summarise with the example of GTA V, the idea is simply that if we have an increased awareness of our context (our character, the game world, and how it functions), we will be able to make better decisions about what we do. If we stumble through the game blindly, we won't be able to make good decisions about certain things and will therefore suffer as a result. However, poor decisions we've made before out of a lack of awareness will still result in consequences that affect us, such as killing a civilian, but if we are more aware now, subsequently, we are able to make better decisions in the present and future. Different things that we are better or worse aware of (we may be aware of the weapon statistics, but unaware of the rules of the game) will complicate the ultimate outcome, but in general, the more awareness, the better informed we are, which lends itself to better outcomes.

This account, therefore, allows for a will with the free origins of awareness, that makes possible the transformation of our lives for the better, without interfering with the determined phenomena of the natural world.

IV.7 Comparing Accounts

To further elaborate on the account, I now compare this account with the views previously explored to address the concerns raised in them, and to show how this new modified account presents a fruitful alternative.

Griffiths focused on active elements of practice and the notion of karmic consequences and assumed the Buddhist view to be a libertarian one (Griffiths, 1982). I've noted before that it ignores the metaphysical view of dependent origination. My account *does* take into account the metaphysical view of dependent origination, without losing the significance and meaning of teachings regarding moral practice, as opposed to the view that free will and moral responsibility has no place in Buddhism (Strawson, 1986). This is because the ultimate underlying purpose and principle of moral practice, in regard to our bodily, verbal and mental conduct, is to pay attention to them and to exercise awareness. When the teaching is telling us what one should do or cannot do, it works from the principle that in order for us to act morally, we have to be mindful of our actions, and our reasons for them in the first place, which then makes the determined subsequent actions possible. Buddhist moral responsibility is meant to help ourselves and others become more aware.

Siderits proposed the compatibilist account of dividing reality into ultimate truth and conventional truth, and so that conventionally, there is free will in persons, ultimately however, there is no freedom (Siderits, 1987, Meyers, 2014, Breyer, 2013). My account likewise adopts the idea of splitting the world into two, only in terms of appearances (conventional), and things as they are (ultimate). Our conclusion differs

though, as for my account, there is ultimate freedom in things as they are, but not conventionally in appearances. This allows for freedom and genuine moral responsibility to be possible. This resolves the problem that under the compatibilist view, Buddhist practices would only be phenomenal and cannot result in transcendental change. This contradicts the notion of moral responsibility having a metaphysical role in our release from the cycle of life and death.

My account also adopts the attractive intuitions of Repetti's account of soft compatibilism, which proposes we come to develop more and more free will with practice (Repetti, 2019). Likewise, there is this notion of transformation and development, only that in my account, the thing that is developed is the scope awareness, which then leads to the will, rather than the will directly itself. This avoids Caruso's insight into a fundamental problem of Repetti's account which if there are higher level reasons as to why we think a certain mental activity as the one we ought to have, it would appear that this will is not free after all but further determined or conditioned by other causes (or reasons) (Caruso, 2020). The fundamental ability to be aware, in my account, does not have to adhere to any higher reasons.

However, that is not to say awareness cannot be determined by reasons. We have reasons to direct our attention on something in particular, for instance, but my point is, the ability to be aware, unlike the exercise of our will, does not necessarily require a reason. We *can* be aware of things, without reasons to do so. Our ability to be aware does not necessarily have to be bound, but the exercise of will does require a reason in order to be an exercise of will.

Caruso's resolution of Garfield's phenomenology of moral responsibility, in which Buddhist moral responsibility is just an acknowledgement of the moral responsibility of conventional appearances (ibid.) that is in tension with Bingle's observation that Buddhists do seem to take seriously the notion of holding agents morally responsible (Bingle, 2018), is in alignment with my account. I agree with Caruso and Pereboom that the sort of moral responsibility that is required to resolve this tension cannot be the type of moral responsibility grounded in 'basic desert', where the point is to assign moral blame or praise, or to evaluate one's moral character (Pereboom, 2014).

As I mentioned before, by separating basic desert from moral responsibility, they propose a moral responsibility concerned with non-desert considerations, particularly regarding concerns about benefits that we can obtain for the future, if we are to hold someone morally responsible. This moral responsibility does away with unhelpful 'backward looking blame, anger, and retribution', and focuses on what we can do to make moral responsibility work towards addressing the causes of suffering, particularly in the instrumental effects of blame and merit.

However, my account, differing from Caruso's, allows for genuine transformation and free agency to be possible through awareness which Buddhists want to preserve. Furthermore, my account allows for Caruso's and Pereboom's moral responsibility to genuinely be enactable and applicable, by expanding on the notion of *how* exactly we are to make moral responsibility work towards addressing the causes of suffering.

My elaboration and extension on this point within my account, Buddhist non-desert moral responsibility allows for free *awareness* and understanding of the causes of our

suffering. Consider again, the example of the thief. Caruso's account will claim that holding a thief morally responsible is only worthwhile if it has future benefits, such as potentially preventing them from doing it again or persuading others not to do so. My account goes further as it promotes the idea that the key takeaway or instrumental effect of blame and merit, is that it leads to awareness. The thief, recognising and being aware of the social and legal consequences of stealing, might be led to try other means without resorting to breaking the law.

That being said, my account goes even further than this by stressing on the importance of awareness that is lacking from Caruso and Pereboom's account, particularly of what the causes or reasons the thief has to steal in the first place, and addressing the causes, instead of the agent. To recall the Buddhist notion of dependent origination, it recognises fundamentally that our actions, who we are, is a combination of a multitude of dependently conditional factors. The thief may steal out of hunger (biological reasons), out of greed (societal, cultural, reasons of value) or out of ignorance (isn't aware of any other way).

Buddhist moral responsibility is seen in this view, ideally, going beyond a game of punishment and reward for consequentialist or instrumental purposes. It is not a question of who is responsible, rather, a question of how our actions are determined, why we act the way we do. Having understood these causes, we can respond by addressing them. If we increase our awareness of what causes us to suffer, we will be better equipped to address them. That is to say, we can better address the things that have led the thief to want to steal in the first place (better distribution of resources,

revaluation of cultural and social values, promoting better awareness of charities and food banks etc.).

My account, therefore, allows the Buddhists not only to have a will of free origins, namely free awareness that determines the will, but allows for the awareness to be transformative. This free awareness is what promotes a much kinder and more compassionate form of moral responsibility, in the spirit of Buddhism[19]. While it recognises the instrumental benefits of blame and merit, ultimately, the goal is to promote the recognition and awareness of the causes of suffering in one another, and addressing the problem, without having to render someone blameworthy or at fault.

IV.8 Summarising Thoughts

There are two immediate considerations that come to mind regarding this new kind of Buddhist moral responsibility. First, ultimately abandoning blameworthiness, is key to this account. However, the root cause of suffering in this account is a lack of awareness. Recognising that awareness is freely ours means that we are responsible for our lack of awareness. In which case, it can be said that we are morally responsible in the blameworthy sense lacking awareness and mindfulness.

[19] Consider how the Buddha presents the four noble truths: there is suffering, there is the origin of suffering (craving), it is possible for suffering to cease, and the way to the cessation is through the noble eightfold path. The entire system is based just on recognising cause and effect, and addressing the causes in order to alleviate suffering. At no point, is there any need for finger-pointing or blame of any agent as being responsible for the suffering, in the same way a doctor will recognise the causes of an illness, and address it, without blaming the patient for it. The Buddhist view goes even further to recognising that even if the actions and habits of the patient have indeed caused the illness, those actions and habits themselves are caused by other factors, ultimately leading to lack of awareness.

I, on the other hand, don't consider one blameworthy (but still morally responsible) for the lack of awareness. In the same way, to use Pereboom's words, what's key for desert based moral responsibility is 'an understanding of (an action's) moral status' (Pereboom, 2014). A lack of awareness, is by definition a lack of understanding. In response to this, one might suggest, there is the instance of wilful ignorance being morally responsible and blameworthy: where one is not willing to *practice* awareness and be mindful of one's own attention.

According to this account, the cause for not being willing to practice awareness and mindfulness, merely demonstrates a lack of awareness in of itself, namely a lack of understanding for the value of awareness. This may lead to a follow up query about whether an individual of this sort may be condemned to eternal suffering and lack of awareness. The Buddha does already have a response to this in his teaching of the four noble truths. The first of which, suffering is part of the life experience of those who are unaware, and importantly, suffering is also something that demands our awareness. However, while it does give us a starting point and *something* to develop our awareness of, our free awareness is ultimately our responsibility to further develop.

The second problem is the other aspect of Buddhist metaphysics, the notion of non-self. The acceptance of such a thesis is problematic for Buddhists, as the transformative aspect of freedom, awareness, and wisdom (which Buddhist moral responsibility is meant to help develop) is meant to reside in someone, whilst the Buddhists deny the existence of a 'self'. Even if there is freedom of awareness, it seems that according to the Buddhists, there is no one to possess it, no one to be

transformed, no one to be enlightened and no one to be liberated from the cycle of life and death. This will be the subject of my exploration in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER V:

The Moral Agent

V.1 Role of the Agent

Whilst, with the help of Kant and Caruso, Buddhists can have an account of non-desert moral responsibility that is consistent with a transcendental freedom of awareness, such that we are responsible for that awareness and can plausibly act beyond the determined laws of the world, there remains a glaring metaphysical inconsistency with the other Buddhist claim: non-self.

If Buddhist moral responsibility is meant to play a special metaphysical role, the agent of moral responsibility is the same agent that is enlightened and liberated from the cycle of life, death, and suffering. If Buddhists deny such a subject, then there is no one to be morally responsible, no one to be enlightened and no one to be liberated from the cycle. This would be a contradiction to the whole point of moral responsibility in Buddhism. In this chapter, I am able to only introduce the problem and give a possible suggestion towards a resolution.

The moral agent, in which as previously explored, is where the transcendental freedom and the ability to be aware is said to reside in. However, there are two clarifications needed, one, is there even such a candidate for this agent, and two, if so, what is this

agent supposed to be, or has to be, like, in order to be morally responsible for the Buddhists.

In this chapter, I shall examine how the Buddhists can have this framework of moral responsibility, whilst denying the 'self'. First, I will provide an outline of the arguments Buddhists have against the notion of an independent and consistent 'core' self and how this has been perceived as a problem for moral responsibility.

Second, I will consider the resolution from the Buddhists that are of the same vein as proposed in the free will problem, that is to separate conventional truth and ultimate truth. Whilst what we are is an impermanent, transient, and interdependent thing, and it's difficult to consider that as a 'self', an independent and consistent core identity, I argue that does not mean that the Buddha advocates the view we are 'ultimately' nothing. Even with the plausibility of freedom via transcendental idealism, Buddhist moral responsibility is difficult to sustain without some sort of agent to be responsible at the ultimate level, and by extension to be liberated. Third, to address this, I shall show that the Buddhists are able to resolve the problem and have a unique notion of an impersonal and deterministic morality. They can do this by clarifying what they take the moral agent to be, not as a 'self', but something else that is capable of awareness. I shall conclude that there is at least a Buddhist moral responsibility that can be possibly consistent with Buddhist metaphysics.

V.2 The Buddhist Argument

Historically, the Buddhist argument often taken in the context of being against the Nyāyan[20] conception of the self, however the Buddha's argument is broadly against all schools who hold similar intuitions of independent and consistent selves. Some which believe the body as the self, others, a soul. Nonetheless, Nyāyan's conceive of the self as an inner core, a reference of 'I', the subject of conscious mental states, the seat of autonomy and possesses identity through time. Additionally, they claim that the self is distinct from the body and our mental states, and it is permanent (Datsi and Phillips, 2017, pp.74-75). Whilst exactly what the Buddha's claim is, is not universally agreed upon, but I shall present the minimalist claim that is accepted amongst all schools, that conceptions of the self should be, and candidates of what the self is, are contradictory (Harvey, 2009, pp.266-267). Whilst the self is meant to be independent or consistent, the candidates for the self are interdependent and impermanent. More specifically in this instance, what the Nyāyan conceives to be, or could conceive to be the self, possesses inner contradictions.

Covering all grounds, the Buddha presents an outline of the possible components of a person and examines whether our components could be a candidate for the self. These are referred to as the five skandhas (aggregates): form, feeling (or more precisely, hedonic states), perception (labelling), fabrications or mental dispositions, and consciousness (Ibid. p.267). The material form refers to what we could consider our biological body and parts, hedonic states are pleasurable, painful, or neutral sensation, perception is defined in this instance as the ascription of a conceptual label.

[20] The Nyāya were a Hindu school of philosophy that emphasised reasoning.

For instance, we see a moving object consisting of many mechanical parts and an engine, we understand it to be a ‘car’. I’ve explained both fabrications and consciousness before when discussing dependent origination, but to recall, they are mental volitions and discriminatory recognition according to our different sense perceptions respectively.

The first argument against the notion of the self is against the qualification of independence (Maha-nida Sutta). The Buddha argues that if any of the aggregates are meant to be independent, that is to say, if something is truly the self, distinct from everything else, we should have perfect control over it. And yet, we don’t have perfect control over the aggregates. We cannot make things one way or have things not be one way (Harvey, 2009, p. 269):

“Bhikkhus, form is not-self. Were form self, then this form would not lead to affliction, and one could have it of form: 'Let my form be thus, let my form be not thus.' And since form is not-self, so it leads to affliction, and none can have it of form: 'Let my form be thus, let my form be not thus.” (Anatta-lakkhana Sutta)

This is further supported by the notion of *interdependence* or interconnectedness (Anālayo, 2021), as a consequence of conditional arising. Take for instance, as a biological body, we are a culmination of parts, and those parts are developed in relation to our diets, environment, and other organisms. Take for instance around half of the cells in our body belong to other non-human microorganisms cohabiting our bodies, and do in fact, affect our thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Meaning, the body is not an independent entity, it is influenced by and formed by many factors and conditions. We are not in perfect control over our bodily form.

Similarly, the Buddha points out that our hedonic states depend on our bodies and external stimuli (like a flame). Our perceptions are conditioned by education, upbringing and culture, determining what sort of conceptual label we place on things. Our volitions and tendencies are determined again by our social environment, and sometimes even biology and genetics. And our consciousness is conditioned by the objects we hold in perception all the time, dragged along by our senses. We like looking at beautiful things, for instance, we turn our heads when we hear a loud noise.

That is all to say, all of the components of a person are not separate and distinct, they are related and interdependent on one another, our environments, our social relations and our culture. We are biological, social, and cognitive beings as well, tied together in a habitat, on a planet. We are influenced by and influence other things. While we may distinct ourselves categorically, where we have practical independence, no one exists in a vacuum, no component of a person is truly independent.

In response to the notion of a soul being independent, the challenge would be to suggest what qualities of the soul are independent. Intuitions often suggest that this would be the thing responsible for thoughts, will and consciousness perhaps, but these qualities are not truly independent. This is reminiscent of a problem posed to dualists, in which if the mind and body are separate, distinct, and independent, it opens up a lot of questions as to how they are supposed to interact. The interaction itself seems to indicate interdependence. That is all to say, the first Buddhist argument against the self, is against the notion of an independent self.

The second argument is against the self as a permanent or consistent thing. In the Nyāyan picture of the self, the consciousness aggregate is meant to reflect the subject

criterion of the self, the constructing activities reflect the seat of autonomy, and with the exception of the material form, the other aggregates are also distinct from the body. And yet, the Buddhist claim is this, none of these things fulfill the criteria of permanence and consistency. All the aggregates, no matter which the Nyāyan chooses, in combination or isolation, are impermanent (Harvey, 2009, pp.268-270; Siderits, 2007, pp.38-46):

"Is consciousness permanent or impermanent?" — "Impermanent, venerable sir." — "Now is what is impermanent pleasant or painful?" — "Painful, venerable sir." — "Now is what is impermanent, what is painful since subject to change, fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this is I, this is my self'"? — "No, venerable sir." (Anatta-lakkhana Sutta)

To be clearer, our biological bodies are metabolising and ageing at all times. Our hedonic states are influenced constantly by stimuli and experiences. Our perceptions change when we adopt new concepts and abandon others. Our constructive activities are often dedicated to doing or willing one thing at one time, and another at other times. Our consciousness is often led to hold different objects in perception and attention. This is reminiscent of Hume's "bundle of perceptions" (Hume, 1739, T.1.4.6.3). This is therefore an argument against the notion of a permanent or consistent self. In summary, Buddhists do not take what we are to be an independent and consistent thing, hence the 'non-self' thesis. Their commitment to the lack of an independent and consistent self have led to scholars considering it a problem for free will and therefore moral responsibility for Buddhists.

V.3 Agentless Moral Responsibility

As mentioned before, the problem for Buddhists is the seemingly contradictory notion of holding someone morally responsible whilst denying there is some 'one', in that it is an independent and consistent one person who is morally responsible. This is closely related to the discussion previously, in that if we are free, the denial of a 'self' seems to preclude the notion of someone being free. If there is no one to be free or morally responsible, it would be odd for Buddhists to have a system of moral responsibility that is meant to lead 'one' to liberation[21].

As a result, there are those who take that the denial of the 'self' results in the conclusion that Buddhists ultimately reject free will and moral responsibility, given the lack of a moral agent[22]. Whilst others that the Buddhists notion of 'non-self' is in fact consistent with free will and moral responsibility[23]. The former's argumentation is simply dismissive, and I find them unconvincing largely because of the significance of freedom and moral responsibility within Buddhism as I have argued before. Those who argue for consistency largely follow Vasubandhu's footsteps in separating the two levels of existence (Siderits, 2007).

The argumentation that the lack of self is consistent with free will and moral responsibility follows almost exactly the same line as lack of free will and moral responsibility, with minor adjustments. To prevent repeating the same line of argument, I shall summarise briefly and highlight the key differences. Rather than suggesting that

[21] Those who have focused on this problem include Siderits (2011, 2016), Repetti (2016), Thompson (2007), Wright (2017), Strawson (2017), Blackmore (2013), Albahri (2006) and Caruso (2020).
[22] See Strawson (2017), Goodman (2002), Blackmore (2013).
[23] See Siderits (2017), Repetti (2017, 2019), Harvey (2017), Adam (2017), Meyers (2017).

there is the conventional truth of free will and the ultimate truth that there is no free will, the suggestion here is that there is the conventional ‘self’ and the ultimate truth that there is no ‘self’. Phenomenologically, as we experience everyday life, we live and operate under the practical delusion of having an independent and consistent identity, but ultimately, there is no such entity. But the experience of a self is the self, hence the experience of selfhood, free and moral responsibility, is consistent with the ultimately reality that we lack the ‘self’. Conventionally therefore, Buddhists can speak in terms of ‘you’ and ‘I’ and attribute freedom and moral responsibility to individuals, as if there are independent and consistent selves (Siderits, 1987).

Likewise, it concedes that ultimately, there is no self to be free, no self to be ultimately morally responsible. It is merely a matter of phenomenology, a practice of appearances. We are ultimately a stream aggregates, and no ‘one’ is liberated or enlightened. Again, Meyers agrees that we are merely conventional persons (Meyers, 2014). Garfield thus concludes, Buddhist morality is not about active practical elements, but a recognition of the phenomenology of morality, namely the phenomenology of the self. The awareness that we appear to behave as if we are an independent and consistent self which has freedom, but in actuality, we do not (Garfield, 2021).

To reemphasize, Bingle insists that if this were true, it’s hard for this to be consistent with Buddhists seemingly taking seriously the notion of holding agents morally responsible, assigning praise and blame (Bingle, 2018). Hence, in response, Pereboom and Caruso advocate for a non-basic desert type of moral responsibility (Pereboom 2001, 2014; Caruso, 2020). That is to say, that the Buddhist’s apparent

taking of moral responsibility seriously, is not inconsistent with the lack of an agent, but merely for the sake of pursuing future benefits and avoiding future harms. Moral responsibility and the self are instrumentally useful notions of achieving these outcomes.

Similarly to freedom, the Buddha has not outright said that there is no self, nor that there is a self (Gombrich, 2009). In that, the Buddha has never clearly affirmed or denied the existence of the self, only posited arguments for which candidates are 'non-self', or that the type of commonly held self, namely the independent and consistent kind, don't reflect what we are. To me, the running strategy that is based on assumption of 'no self' at all at the ultimate level does not accurately portray the Buddha's teachings. In combination with his teaching on non-self and his teaching of dependent origination, to recall, both applications of the Middle Way advocates for a teaching that is neither to say something (a self) exists or does not exist. That means, it's important to remember that we are changing beings, impermanent and inconsistent substantially, but that is not to say we are nothing at all, we are precisely: a being that is changing and whose existence is dependent on other conditions.

That being said, when Buddhists speak of enlightenment, the Buddha is said to be the enlightened 'one' or that 'one' can practice active mental transformation through the noble eightfold path. There is trouble with understanding who is being enlightened here, and what is being transformed. If the who in question is namely the aggregates, these are conditioned, bound by strict laws of cause and effect. And yet in the Asaṅkhatasutta, the Buddha teaches the noble path, as a means to the 'unconditioned'. Liberation and enlightenment are the state of the unconditioned, a state in which one

is no longer bound to the laws of cause and effect. So, it could not be the case that the aggregates are what is enlightened or liberated.

V.4 A Possible Way Forward and Concluding Thoughts

Alternatively, Buddhists can consider a moral agent that is designated by the aggregates. One suggestion is to say that the agent is this capacity for awareness. Take for instance, Jeff McMahan's proposal for what we are, embodied minds. We are the "continued existence and functioning, in nonbranching form, of enough of those regions of the brain in which consciousness occurs in order for the brain to retain the capacity with relevant support systems, to support consciousness or mental activity" (McMahan, 2002, pp.66-69).

To explain, the agent for McMahan is whatever is needed for the continuity of minimal consciousness. To translate it into Buddhists terms, it is whatever we need for the awareness we possess. Of course, not unlike a computer, there is the minimum capability for a computer to be operating, and the physical requirement for its operation. The computer has a hard drive, as we do have a body and a brain, and our consciousness or awareness is dependent on what parts of our biology are minimally required to sustain it. Our hardware is impermanent, but our capacity for awareness, the minimum software, remains. Buddhists may disagree with the details, but what they may accept is that what we can hold morally responsible, or as to answer what is enlightened, is precisely this awareness that we possess.

This awareness is not independent, as it is a product of the biological parts that are interdependent with the world. Our awareness is not a distinct and independent substance, it's a capacity, like running. As long as our parts are working minimally however, we have a capacity for awareness that can be developed.

To answer the problem regarding enlightenment and who or what is enlightened, it becomes clearer with this picture how the Buddhists can reconcile enlightenment. First, that which becomes enlightened is not a self. Second, enlightenment is more properly understood as the realisation through the capacity for awareness, that the consciousness has mistaken the five aggregates for a self. And that upon realisation, we are liberated psychologically and conceptually.

To use a notable example from the Matrix, Neo, when visiting the oracle, sees a monk seemingly being able to bend spoons. The monk explains, "don't try to bend the spoon, that is impossible. Instead, only try to realise the truth… there is no spoon. Then you'll see that it is not the spoon that bends, it is yourself". The idea is much the same, don't try to become enlightened, that is impossible, only try and realise the truth, there is no self. It is not the self that is enlightened, but enlightenment is only realisation through the capacity of awareness.

It must be admitted that while I have given an outline for a way forward, there remains much to say about how it works, whether psychologically and metaphysically, which I hope to explore further. Nonetheless, Buddhists, despite the rather radical notion of the transcendental realm of reality and awareness, what they end up with, is a new kind of moral responsibility. If there is something that we are, that is to say, a minimal

continuous capacity for awareness or consciousness, and that we are free to use our awareness, that is to say, unbound in our ability to pay attention to what we pay attention to, then it is possible that in this way, Buddhists have the beginnings of a kind of moral responsibility consistent with their own metaphysics.

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