

Concepts of Freedom and Responsibility in Theravada Buddhism

THE problems pertaining to freedom and responsibility are largely contingent on the relations that exist between theories of ethics and causality in the different systems of philosophy and religion. An attempt is made, in this paper, to examine some of these problems as they affect the religion and philosophy of Theravāda Buddhism.

The teaching of the Buddha combines, in admirable harmony, the spirit of philosophical inquiry with the needs of the religious consciousness. It assumes its philosophic character in so far as it is rendered into the terms of language and logic and its religious character in so far as it is constantly alive to the problem of universal suffering. In the view of the Buddha human life is essentially ethically conditioned and the greater part of his teaching is, therefore, devoted to the betterment and perfection of human life, both individual and social, in its manifold aspects. Betterment and perfection are possible only through change. And a change in the ethics of individual and social behaviour must necessarily be preceded by the description, analysis and understanding of the facts of ethical life. Among the vitally important considerations governing this primary activity are the concepts of volition, freedom and responsibility.

These concepts as they occur in the Pali Nikāyas have been already studied and interpreted by a large number of scholars some of whose conclusions thereon show the widest divergence.¹ Some of them have found

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almost insurmountable difficulties and irreconcilable incompatibilities between the basic teaching of the Buddha and the concepts referred to above. I shall examine these arguments with a view to showing (a) that most of their difficulties are of their own making and (b) that the concepts are valid and admissible, in a truer definition, consistent with the Buddha's basic teaching.

The tendency to create artificial and, therefore, unnecessary difficulties and conflicts is clearly illustrated in Keith's treatment of the subject. The argument, as he develops it, is somewhat as follows : As the world is an interplay of causes and effects and conditions, therefore, everything in it is deterministic : hence there cannot be any such thing as freedom of the will or moral responsibility in human action. Pursuing this kind of argument, Keith says :

'Strange as it may seem, when one ground of the denial of a self is remembered, and the apparent determinism of the chain of causation, the Buddha has no doubt whatever that the determinism of Makkhali Gosala is the most detestable of all heresies. The position is the more remarkable because one of the arguments in the Canon and later against the existence of a self is that such a thing must be autonomous, while all the world is conditionally and causally determined. *But the issue is solved by the simple process of ignoring it,*² and Buddhism rejoices on being freed from any error of determinism to menace moral responsibility.'³

Keith is certain that the freedom of the will is also 'illogical' and 'inconsistent' with the doctrine of the non-self.⁴ Nor is this all. After asserting that the rule of Kamma is inconceivable with freedom, he ventures to provide the following additional information :

'If there is a series, each of which is in the relation of cause, effect, cause and so on, then, while it can be said that the series as a whole is uncaused, it is equally clear that every single link in the chain is caused and without the possibility of freedom.'⁵

Apart from the soundness and validity of this interpretation of the Buddha's causal doctrine, there is one thing that clearly emerges from the statements made by Keith. That is, an unmistakable attempt on his part to

2. The italics are mine.

3. KEITH, A. B. : *Buddhist Philosophy*, 116.

4. *ibid*, 173 n. 1.

5. *ibid*, 174.

RESPONSIBILITY IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

conceive freedom purely apart from causality and its resultant determinism. It will therefore be seen at once that the difficulties, far from being inherent in the problems of causality and ethics, are really resident in his own pre-conceived and arbitrary notion of freedom.

Unfortunately, however, Keith is not alone in this kind of artificially created situation. Mrs. Rhys Davids, who most dogmatically clung to her own idea of what original Buddhism ought to have been, thus expresses herself on this subject :

‘ Soul and free will, for the Buddhist, stand or fall together.’⁶

From this statement it is obvious that the whole argument of Mrs. Rhys Davids rests on the arbitrary assumption that there cannot be ‘ Will ’ without an accompanying metaphysical entity called ‘ Soul.’ To this pre-conceived notion about free will and soul she adds a most remarkable form of interpretation when she says :

‘ The Buddhist, harping on *anicca* and *anatta*, repudiated in the highest sense all becoming, all will.’⁷

On the other hand, we have an altogether different theory on this subject by Tachibana. Whereas Keith used the causal and deterministic argument to *deny* free will and responsibility, Tachibana uses the same argument to *assert* them. According to the latter, the denial of free will by other Indian thinkers is refuted in Buddhism precisely by the two doctrines of causality and *Kamma*. Tachibana says :

‘ We ourselves are moulders of our fate. No one else is to be blamed for our misery, or praised for our happiness. It is quite clear from these statements that Buddhism emphasises the freedom of the will and that its morality is autonomous *par excellence*. Autonomy is a prominent characteristic of this religion.’⁸

In this interpretation Wijesekera agrees with Tachibana. Wijesekera himself uses the causal argument to assert free will. He says :

“ We regarded man as intrinsically a morally free agent who had within him the power to choose between alternative causes of action. Is this justifiable according to the Buddha’s doctrine ? Certainly yes. There

6. RHYSDAVIDS, MRS. C. A. F. : *Psychological Ethics*, lxxxix.

7. RHYSDAVIDS, MRS. C. A. F. : *The Birth of Indian Psychology*, 298.

8. TACHIBANA, S. : *Ethics of Buddhism*, 92.

is in fact no more important conviction in the whole of the Buddha's philosophy than the idea that within this individuality (*nāmarūpa*) there is the potentiality of release if only man wills that way.⁹

It should be clear from the foregoing opinions that the problem of freedom turns very largely on the usage of terms and that the difficulties are not inherent in the problem itself. A great deal of argument about causality and moral freedom and responsibility and the resultant problems are therefore deriving themselves from a confusion about the meaning of words. The first essential, then, is to define the terms involved and ascertain what we understand by them. The terms as we have already mentioned them, are will, freedom thereof, causality and moral responsibility. Like many other terms in philosophical discussion these terms themselves are far from being self-explanatory and therefore lack in precision of meaning. In discussing the idea or ideas of freedom implied in Buddhism it is highly arbitrary to persuade ourselves to believe that the Buddha's idea of freedom ought to be, if not must be, the same as our own. Any inquiry undertaken from this point of view is bound to be a failure in so far as the discovery of the facts is concerned, as it has been amply and clearly shown in the case of Keith and Mrs. Rhys Davids. As freedom is a relative concept, like any other concept, there cannot obviously be one absolute concept of freedom to which all can agree. There can be, even from a practical point of view, as many ideas of freedom as there are people, nay, even more. In regard to Buddhism, more precisely Theravāda Buddhism, the relevant consideration is not a particular scholar's private idea of freedom but that idea of freedom that is either explicitly expressed or otherwise implied in the relevant documents bearing on the subject.

In the Suttas of the Pali Nikāyas we have several discussions relating to moral freedom.¹⁰ The task of understanding the Buddha's idea of moral freedom is greatly facilitated by the fact that the Buddha not only speaks of his own position in the matter but has also described, in relation to other contemporary Indian philosophers, what his position is not. On the evidence of the Suttas there seem to have been many ideas and doctrines of moral freedom current during the time of the Buddha. In all these instances moral freedom is defined in the context of human conduct specially relevant

9. WIJESKERA, O. H. DE A. : *Buddhism and the Moral Problem*, 11ff.

10. A. I, 173ff. 62, 287. III, 337ff. 72ff. IV 174, 182ff.

S. II, 19ff. 33ff. III, 210, 206, 64ff. 211ff.

D. I, 115, 52-9, 60ff.

M. I, 405, II, 167ff. III, 25, 19

RESPONSIBILITY IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

to the ethical activities of the individual. The main theories of moral freedom (or the absence of it) referred to in the Pali Nikāyas can be grouped as follows :

That the individual's behaviour can be determined by

- (a) nothing at all (*ahetu-appaccayā, adhiccassamuppanna*),
- (b) his own agency or spontaneously (*sayamkāra*),
- (c) individuals other than himself or factors external to himself (*para-kāra* or *paraṃkāra*).
- (d) the agency of God or Creator (*issara-nimmāna-hetu*),
- (e) a combination of (b) and (c) above.

(a) says that everything, that is, all events and human actions, is due to purely fortuitous circumstances. This view is represented in the Nikāyas partly by Makkhali Goṣāla and partly by Pūraṇa Kassapa. The view is stated as follows : There is no cause or condition for the defilement of the individual. It happens fortuitously. The same applies for his purification. There is no purposive action, manliness, exertion, effort, energy, resolution or intention. All beings experience pain and pleasure without any choice whatever, being subjected to an inescapable and permanent pre-determined order of things. Fools and the wise alike must necessarily run through this course of recurrent birth and death until they are finally able to put an end to all pain."¹¹

It will be seen that this view denies causality altogether. And following on this position it also denies the freedom of the will and conative or volitional capacity. Pūraṇa Kassapa's own theory is similar to this and is stated as follows: There is no effect issuing from good or bad action. There is neither this world nor another beyond the grave. There is no father nor mother. There is none who has realised ultimate reality. Both eternalists and nihilists are permanently destroyed after their death.¹²

In this view the doctrine of *kamma* and the freedom of action on the part of the individual are completely denied. Kassapa thus becomes an *akiriyavādin*, "an indifferentist."¹³ Makkhali Gosala becomes a fatalist or determinist, *niyatisaṅgativādin*. How did the Buddha react to this indeterminism and determinism ? The Buddha calls himself an upholder of the doctrine of action (*kiriyavāda*) in contrast to Kassapa who denies the doctrine

11. D. I, 53-4 ; S. III, 210.

12. S. III, 206 ; M. I, 401-2.

13. RADHAKRISHNAN, S. *Indian Philosophy*, I, 275.

of action.¹⁴ The Buddha describes the denial of action (*akiriyavāda*) as a false view (*micchāditṭhi*).¹⁵ Accordingly, the assertion of action is described by him as a wholesome view (*sammāditṭhi*).¹⁶ Gosāla's view amounts to an uncompromising determinism of a special kind. Everything in the past, present and future is so thoroughly and remorselessly determined in accordance with a special kind of God-less teleology that no man can help doing what he does and seeing what he sees happening around him. Hence, according to Gosāla there is no will, volition, exertion, intention, choice and manliness. In contrast to Gosāla the Buddha says that he is an upholder of action, activity and purposive action (*kammavādin, kiriyavādin, viriyavādin*).¹⁷

The Buddha's approach to the whole question is essentially ethical. The doctrine of ethical determinism was repugnant to his moral consciousness. In the Pali Nikāyas he has not concealed his disapproval of such teachings. The implications of the deterministic doctrine were alarming to the ethical consciousness of man. This position implies a world of complete chaos in which any kind of ordered existence such as we actually experience would be impossible. It crowds out the possibility for any kind of religious endeavour or ethical striving. If it is concluded that no one ever acts freely one may readily pass to further conclusions that no actions are either right or wrong, for one is obliged to do only what one can help doing. On this view to say that one has acted wrongly is meaningless since that implies that one could have acted wrongly. And since also there are no obligations of a moral sort there is no need to stick to an ethical terminology at all. As a matter of fact this is precisely what Kassapa and Gosāla say when they deny that there is anything called good and bad in a moral sense. This then is the result of consistently maintaining the theory of fortuitous origination. It will be remembered how Keith maintained the view that causality and freedom of the will were incompatible and inconsistent with each other. On the other hand, here we have an interesting position where *denial* of causality of any kind is also inconsistent with freedom of the will. Here then is a consideration which tends, among other effective objections, to vitiate the argument of Keith. If causality is inconsistent with freedom, the denial of the former is itself equally inconsistent with the latter. But before we can adduce other arguments against the position taken up by Keith and other scholars, it is first necessary to examine the remaining theories of freedom or its denial mentioned in the above list.

14. A. I, 287.

15. M. I, 406.

16. *ibid.* 407.

17. A. I, 287.

RESPONSIBILITY IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

The second theory says that all human actions and events are solely due to the individual's own agency (*sayamkāra*). The statement that the behaviour of the individual is determined entirely by his own nature is contradicted by empirical evidence to the contrary. The whole universe constitutes an environment to the individual. It is at least physically impossible for an individual to live altogether apart from the world since it is the ground on which he lives. Even if he withdraws himself from all other individuals and beings he cannot yet get away from the physical forces which are part of the world of his experience. The very air he breathes amounts to an environment. As a matter of fact every individual is influenced not only by the other individuals but also by the physical environment that surrounds him. The actions of every individual are influenced and restricted to a very large extent by factors which are largely independent of him, such as the effects of physical restraints of various kinds. Even if it be imagined that he can live without coming under the influence of the physical environment and the actions, habits and thoughts of other individuals, he cannot yet live altogether apart from his own physical frame which is external to his mind. There is an intimate, nay, inseparable association between the mind and body of every individual. And it is highly unlikely that he can live in a manner that will enable his body to escape the effects of the surrounding physical forces, for no man can live in a vacuum. Moreover, if everything happens due solely to one's own agency then there need not be any statement or problem of moral responsibility for the question simply does not arise. On the other hand, all experience goes counter to this view. If all events are due to one's own agency then one should be in a position to control, if not all of them, at least a good part of them. But this never happens. According to the view of Gosāla and Kassapa moral responsibility becomes impossible while according to this second view it becomes altogether superfluous, if not meaningless. The Buddha sets himself against this latter view too.¹⁸ According to him the statement that suffering is solely due to one's own agency is not only wrong but meaningless.¹⁹ Moreover, to say that everything is due to self-agency is to take up a metaphysical position amounting to eternalism.²⁰ There are other implications involved in saying that everything is due to one's own agency. To say so is to do violence to the truth of change, impermanence, non-substantiality and dependent origination of all phenomena. From the point of view of conditional causality it is impossible to speak of a sole agency, whether it refers to a physical or mental phenomenon.

18. S. II, 19-21.

19. *ibid.* 19.

20. *ibid.* 20.

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

The third view says that human behaviour is determined by factors external to the individual, be they either individuals other than himself or physical factors (*para-kāra*). To say that all human behaviour is determined by purely external agencies is as true as to say that it is determined by one's own agency. The testimony of experience falsifies this description of the impulses of human behaviour. If it is true that behaviour is entirely determined by external circumstances, then, for instance, two individuals placed in identical situations can be expected to act and react in an altogether identical manner. But this does not happen. Two students of research working on the same material, eating the same food and sharing the same living room and so on and writing two theses on the same given subject can be expected to produce practically identical theses at the end of their work. But this never happens. There will be differences, if not in interpretation, at least in the phraseology and style of composition. Moreover, there are other considerations that are ignored in this view. For instance, this view ignores completely the psychological situations in the mind of the individual which can act as impulses to action. Furthermore, there are certain metaphysical implications involved here. If it is said that all behaviour is due to external causation, then there arises the question of the identity of the individual, that is, in relation to the impact of external forces on his behaviour. And so long as it is maintained that it is not the individual but the external forces and circumstances that govern his behaviour the possibility to speak of moral responsibility or freedom of the will is altogether excluded. One cannot be responsible for one's own actions simply because they are not done by one's self. If at all moral responsibility is to be conferred it has to be so conferred on all the external circumstances, and not on the individual. Thus this theory which says that behaviour is determined by external causation alone denies every conceivable kind of freedom and responsibility save one. And that one is hardly to be called freedom, namely, the freedom to be a slave to external circumstances. The Buddha denies and refutes this view outright. Here too the question as to whether all behaviour and ethical conduct and experience are externally determined is, in the view of the Buddha, altogether meaningless.²¹ To say that one agent (in this case, the external world) does things and another experiences them is both to deny responsibility and lead up to a nihilistic position.²² The Buddha therefore refutes and denounces both extremes of self-agency and external agency. He says that these two views constitute two extremes and that in rejecting them he teaches the doctrine of the middle way.²³ What this middle doctrine

21. S. II, 19.

22. *ibid.*, 20.

23. *ibid.*

RESPONSIBILITY IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

is and how it resolves the apparent conflict between causality and freedom will be discussed shortly ; in the meantime, it is necessary to complete our examination of the other remaining theories of freedom and moral responsibility.

The fourth view says that human behaviour is due to the evolution of the teleological pattern of God, the Creator (*Issara-nimmāṇa-hetu*). Logically there is no difficulty in holding this view in relation to the facts and events of the world. But it creates difficulties in relation to our empirical evidence when we think of God as infinitely good and infinitely powerful. This is how people actually think of God if they sincerely believe in him. There is, for instance, the difficulty in reconciling the presence of evil and crime in the world with the infinite goodness and omnipotence of God. If all experience is God-impelled and God-generated there is no need to exert ourselves in ethical life. There is also no need to try to perfect ourselves simply because God has created us in accordance with his inscrutable ways. To attempt to better ourselves in various ways is not only meaningless but dangerous because that would amount to an interference with the plans of God and an affront to his almighty dignity. Moreover, the ascription of everything to God renders the function of moral responsibility superfluous, for God himself is the source of cosmic responsibility. To the Buddha the most important implication arising from this theory is the ethical one. If people go on praising God for the good things in life and blaming him for the bad things, then, the result is nothing short of ethical anarchy. No one in the world becomes responsible for anything that has happened or has been said, done or thought by anybody and everybody. This makes all ethics, all religion and philosophy to disappear from the world if people sincerely and impartially sort out matters. This is why the Buddha objects to this theory. This view makes a mockery of all freedom and responsibility in the sense in which we have been considering these so far.

The last of the five theories of freedom and moral responsibility is the one which maintains the view that human behaviour is due to both self agency and external agency (*sayam kārāṇi ca paraṇikārāṇi ca*). We have considered these two views separately and found each of them wanting in adequacy and truthfulness. Two views which are the contrary of each other without being the contradictory of each other and which are found wanting in truthfulness and accuracy cannot give us the complete truth when they are placed together, side by side. Each view asserts something that is not incomplete but also inaccurate. And each is squarely based on a distinct

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

metaphysic which is the contrary of the other. In order, therefore, to obtain an organic and integral unity in the two views, the first essential is to merge the two metaphysics together into an harmonious combination. This cannot be achieved by placing the two together, for there cannot then result inner consistency. For, as has been shown above, these two theories represent two extremes in regard to the subject of human behaviour. The putting together of two extremes does not effect anything towards attaining completeness. They continue to represent, while being placed together, not one consistent picture but two extremes of it. Moreover, to speak of two extremes allows the possibility to speak of a middle and other parts in the same picture. It is therefore necessary in the interests of consistent completeness to disallow the continued existence of the two theories as two extremes and to reformulate the whole thing altogether afresh by taking into consideration the facts as fully as they are found. The result would then be neither one extreme, nor another, nor both together but an entirely different theory. This is precisely what the Buddha has done. Hence he has no sympathy with a theory which merely puts together two mutually inconsistent theories.

We have thus far examined the main theories current during the time of the Buddha pertaining to the subject of freedom of the will and moral responsibility. And as a result of this inquiry we are now in a position to appreciate the back-ground against which the Buddha's own doctrine in regard to this matter should be viewed. It was clearly demonstrated by analysing the arguments of each school of thought that there was no freedom and responsibility in any one of them even in the common-sense signification of these two terms. Some of the views analysed were based on distinct theories of causality such as external causation, teleological causation and indiscriminate and universal determinism. One theory also denied causality of any kind and constituted thereby a morally indifferent absolute indeterminism. It now remains only to analyse and examine the Buddha's idea of freedom and responsibility in regard to its inter-relations with his other teachings with special reference to causality.

In the teaching of the Buddha, in so far as it is presented to us in the Nikāyas of the Pali Canon, we are able to distinguish between at least two major concepts of freedom, one transcendental and the other empirical with particular reference and relevance to man's ethical consciousness. In the ultimate analysis the only true and final freedom is release from the domain of causality, from the realm of conditioned existence. This freedom

RESPONSIBILITY IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

is called by various names, the commonest being *vimutti*,²⁴ *ceto-vimutti*,²⁵ *paññāvimutti*,²⁶ *saṃmā-vimutti*,²⁷ *nissarana*²⁸ and *mutti*.²⁹ This freedom constitutes at once the perfection of life as well as the goal of religious endeavour.³⁰ The freedom of the ethical consciousness is differently conceived. The terms used to denote this are multifarious, the commonest among them being *cetanā*,³¹ *virīya*,³² *padhāna*,³³ *virīyaparakkama*,³⁴ *purisa-kāra*,³⁵ *bala*,³⁶ *chaṇḍa*,³⁷ *saṃkappa*,³⁸ *purisathāma*,³⁹ *nikkama*,⁴⁰ *upakkama*,⁴¹ *ārambha*,⁴² *purisaparakkama*⁴³ and *utthānavirīya*.⁴⁴

As we have already noted in some other connection the Buddha calls himself by three significant names, *kammavādin*, *kiriya-vādin* and *virīya-vādin*. By these three names he means that he upholds the effectiveness and existence of moral causation, freedom of action and the capacity for will and volition. The words *kamma*, *kiriya* and *virīya* are more or less synonymous in certain usages although each of these has its own special and distinctive meaning. In the commentaries this fact has been clearly illustrated.⁴⁵ To the Buddha, unlike to the Jina, *kamma* is primarily of psychological significance. Accordingly, *kamma* and volition have between them an essential correspondence. As a matter of fact the Buddha says: Volition, O monks, I declare to be *kamma*.⁴⁶ Action derives its movement and significance

24. D. I, 174, III, 288. A. II, 247, III, 165. S. I, 206, 222, 266, 356. Sn. 725ff.

25. D. I, 156, III, 78. 247ff. S. I, 120, II, 214, IV, 119. A. II, 36, 214.

26. See fn. 25 above.

27. A. II, 222. V. 327, Ps. I, 107.

28. Vin. I, 104. D. III, 240, 248. S. I, 128, 142. M. I 87

29. Sn. 344.

30. It is unnecessary, for the purposes of this paper, to go deeply into the question of transcendental freedom of Nibbana. For descriptions of spiritual freedom upon attaining enlightenment reference may be made to the inspired poetry of the Thera and Therī Gāthās. *Vide* Thl. 46, 53, 65.

31. Active thought, intention, purpose, will, volition.

32. Vigour, energy, effort, exertion, initiating or rousing energy.

33. Exertion, energy, effort, striving, concentration.

34. Exerting effort, purposive action.

35. Manliness.

36. Strength of purpose, power, force.

37. Impulse, excitement, intention, resolution, will, zeal, ardent desire, striving.

38. Thought, intention, plan, purpose.

39. Manly strength, courage.

40. Endurance, exertion, strength.

41. Doing, acting, undertaking.

42. Attempt, effort, inception of energy.

43. Exerting effort, purposive action.

44. Initiating or rousing energy.

45. Cp. especially the lists given in the two Niddesas

46. A. III, 415.

through its psychological impulse. Really, action in thought, word and deed assumes moral significance only if it is the result of fully conscious volitional impulse.⁴⁷

It may be objected that so far no attempt was made to define precisely the Buddha's concept of moral freedom. In some of the earlier paragraphs it was either explicitly stated or implicitly assumed that the Buddha upheld both moral responsibility and freedom of the will. In the course of the criticism of the views of other teachers by the Buddha no attempt was made by the latter at the outset itself to propound his own theory. He was only using the dialectical method to disprove and discredit the views of the opponent by pointing out the inner contradictions involved in them or by reminding them that parts, if not the whole, of their views ran counter to the evidence of empirical knowledge or by bringing out the unedifying implications involved in their views in so far as ethical life was concerned. So far it has been only a criticism of the views of others. There is no instance in the Nikāyas where the Buddha specifically sets out to give a formal definition of moral freedom. In his view, this was hardly necessary, for, he considered all formal definitions to be incomplete, if not altogether misleading. He calls them mere conventions, popular agreements and general usages (*lokanirutti, lokavohāra, lokasamaññā*)⁴⁸. He certainly does assert the pre-eminence of volition in moral action and he also speaks of freedom and freed men and women but does not provide us with set definitions in the sense in which we understand them. What has therefore to be done in order to get the kind of definition of freedom that we are after, is to study the relevant statements made by the Buddha on this subject and then try to construe the position that results thereby. But this cannot be done unless and until we first try to determine the precise connection between the doctrine of causality and the ethical doctrines. The kind of freedom in ethical action that will be found in the Buddhist teaching has, of necessity, to depend on the implications that arise from its central doctrine of causality. We shall therefore have to postpone defining the Buddha's concept of moral freedom until such time as we have found out carefully what these implications are.

The Buddha explains all events in terms of his doctrine of causality (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). All phenomena, that is, all *dhammas*, "elements" are said to be causally dependent, on each other and on one another. If then,

47. It is unnecessary, for the purposes of this paper, to go into all the details of the doctrine of Kamma in Buddhism, except in so far as it has a direct bearing on the discussion of causality and moral responsibility.

48. D. I, 202.

RESPONSIBILITY IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

as the Buddha says, all things are causally 'determined' there arises an interesting question : How can we reconcile 'determinism' with 'freedom' and 'responsibility' ? On the face of it, the question looks formidable, that is, only till we analyse the meanings of the terms in the question and find out the confusion that is involved in formulating it. Especially for our present purpose, it is very necessary indeed to determine the meanings here involved, firstly, to avoid confusion in our minds and, secondly, to avoid altogether circularity of argument. When Keith uses the word 'determinism' he does so without troubling himself to tell us carefully what he precisely means by this term. The following definition of determinism is taken from a student of modern philosophy and it seeks to express what philosophers commonly mean when they use it. 'Determinism is the doctrine that every event which has occurred, is occurring or will occur, was, is, or will be, completely determined.'⁴⁹ The question then is simple : Is Buddhism a determinism in this sense ? The answer to this question is simple enough but it has to be preceded by the reasons for it. The statement that everything is determined during the past, present and future has primary reference only to physical causation. The natural physical forces existing in the world will come under this kind of causation. All inanimate matter devoid of volitional impulses and conscious purpose will continue, as it did in the past, to obey the so-called laws of physical causation. If the Buddha's doctrine of causation has reference and applicability to this physical world only, then it can be said that Buddhism is a determinism of a kind. But this is not so. Physical causation is only one aspect of universal causation. The other aspect is the moral causation or more precisely psychological causation. Both kinds of causation are found in our experience. But it may be said that physical causation over-rides and over-powers psychological causation. The consequence of this would be to assert the supremacy of matter over mind. This is denied in Buddhism. The Buddha says that the mind is supreme and pre-eminent in regard to human behaviour. The world is led by the mind : *cittena nīyati loko*.⁵⁰ Mind is the fore-runner of *dhammas*, mind is the chief of them, they are conceived by the mind : *mano-pubbaṅgamā dhammā mano-seṭṭhā manomayā*.⁵¹ Apart from what the Buddha says there is the experience of everybody that falsifies the purely physical causation of everything. It has already been pointed out that human behaviour is not entirely determined by external circumstances. People do not obey physical laws as blindly as do the purely

49. KORNER, S. : *Kant*, (Pelican Books), London, 1955, 132.

50. S. I, 39.

51. Dh. 1.

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

inanimate forms of matter. It is true that the individual is influenced by his environment but then influence does not mean that he is solely governed by that environment. Moreover it is equally true that the individual has the capacity in him to change his environment appreciably. And the individual can also, to a considerable extent, withdraw himself from his environment by resort to introspection and *jhānic* meditation. The stimuli from the external objects can be cut off at least considerably by means of the practice of *samatha-bhāvanā*. In human behaviour experience makes us aware of a conscious state of mind called 'choice' or 'opportunity.' This choice is the expression of the individual's own nature. The conscious or deliberate exercise of this choice then makes us aware of a 'sense of freedom.' In whatever we do we find evidence of a joint function, the co-operation of external circumstances and the exercise of our will. It will therefore be seen that human behaviour is not entirely and solely determined by purely physical factors.

But there arises here a possible objection. We construed determinism to have primary reference only to physical causation. Perhaps Keith did not mean to narrow it down this way. Let us suppose that determinism has reference not only to physical events but also to psychological processes. While physical causation determines all physical event-patterns, it may now be argued by the critic, all psychological events are equally well and thoroughly determined by a psychological law of causation. This objection needs analysis in order to find out where the conflict lies. What is apparently conveyed in this statement is the view that whatever happens in psychological life is merely the evolution of what has been pre-determined. This is fair to be inferred in so far as reference is made to a universal law of psychological causation in the objection raised. In that case we have two distinct theories or assumptions contained here. The first is that there is one law of psychological causation universally applicable in the case of every individual, after the manner of physical laws, governing the behaviour of all physical objects and events. The second assumption is that all psychological behaviour is pre-determined. These views are refuted in Buddhism. Causality is only a function that takes place in the dependence on a variety of *dhammas*. This is especially significant in the case of psychological events. The psychological action in each individual is only proper to himself. The functions of psychological action between any two individuals may appear to be similar but they are never wholly identical. If there is, on the other hand, a uniform law of psychological causation, then it should be possible to predict the behaviour of a given individual in every case with complete success. But this

RESPONSIBILITY IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

is not possible through the empirical means available to science. Moreover, if this law prevails throughout there is no question of 'responsibility.' Each individual preserves his own proper individuality precisely because his own psychological life functions on the basis of causes and conditions peculiar to himself. The second assumption namely that everything is due to the past is denied by the Buddha when he refutes the view that every event is pre-determined (*sabbaṃ pubbekatahetu*).⁵²

The denial that everything is due to pre-determined causes and effects is especially significant in the present connection. Volition is not something that belongs to the past. It is a faculty that is ever present. This volition is also a factor in the determination of events. If volition does not itself participate in the bringing about of events then it can be said that all such events are mechanically caused. To the extent that volition also has a part to play in this matter of human behaviour, to that extent, events cease to become mechanical or deterministic. A student of modern philosophy has emphasised the distinction between the meanings of these two terms.⁵³ According to him (and of course, according to the dictionaries too), determinate means having a definite nature while determined means controlled by external factors. I should prefer to take determinate more properly as having a *specific nature*. If we were to apply this terminology we shall see that the causality of the Buddha does not amount to a determinism. On the other hand, what results is that every instance of causal dependence becomes a determinate event. There is nothing abstract in the world. Everything has got to be specific. Thus we cannot speak of a fire in the abstract : fire in any instance has to be a specific fire such as sandal-wood fire etc. In this way according to the Buddha's theory of causality everything in the world becomes determinate without at the same time making it necessary to deny the function of will and volition in human behaviour. This means clearly that Buddhist causality and determinism are not one and the same thing.

If the agency of will is neither denied nor impaired according to this conclusion then the stage is ready for us to define and determine the Buddha's concept of freedom. But at this very stage there can arise one last objection. We saw at the beginning of this discussion how Keith appeared to think of freedom outside the domain of causality. But we also pointed out that this difficulty belongs neither to the volition of psychology nor to causality but more truly to an arbitrary concept of freedom as thought out and imagined

52. M. II, 217. A. I, 173

53. RICHARDSON, C. A. : In Hoffman, *Freedom and God*, 115.

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

by Keith himself. From what has been said so far it should be clear that there is no need, if not the very possibility, to think of freedom apart from causality and its functioning. Causality engenders order and cosmos into the world. Where causality is denied the result is anarchy and chaos.

Freedom according to the Buddha does not mean the abandonment of order and norm in the universe. Where there is order and norm there is freedom. Where there is anarchy and chaos freedom becomes meaningless. Thus it can be said that freedom is possible only where orderly and consistent conditions are available. Freedom is unthinkable without responsibility. But how can there be any kind of responsibility in anarchy and chaos? Thus both responsibility and freedom can necessarily exist only in a world conceived as orderly. This is the picture of the world that the Buddha has presented to us in the Suttas of the Pali Nikāyas. He says that the principle of conditionality or causal dependence is existent in the universe regardless of the fact whether or not a Buddha appears on this earth.⁵⁴

We may now define the Buddha's concept of the freedom of the will on the strength of the various facts which we have been considering so far. An action according to the Buddha is freely done when its immediate cause is a volition, that is, a psychological state within the individual himself. An action is not a free action if its immediate cause is a factor external to himself. In the case of a volitional action we are able to identify the causes and conditions with the individual himself. The individual cannot help himself if the immediate cause derives itself from the external environment. For instance if the individual blinks his eyes when suddenly exposed to a very bright and powerful light the immediate cause and condition for that action are predominantly the external stimuli. It has no deliberate volition and therefore that action is not ethically significant. Hence ethically he is not responsible for that action. Responsibility obtains in fully conscious volitional action only. This is, for instance, why ethical responsibility is denied in dreams because while the individual is asleep his volition is not fully active. In all other cases of volitional activity the individual assumes full responsibility for his actions. This makes it possible for us to speak of moral responsibility in the Buddha's teaching of causality and ethics. Thus the Buddha says that each individual is responsible for whatever he does or will do in his volitional life.

54. S. II, 25.

RESPONSIBILITY IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

Thus we can safely conclude that the Buddha's doctrine of causality can be reconciled in the highest sense with the doctrine of moral responsibility and freedom of the will. It is this truth that gives meaning to the life of ethical endeavour as it is inculcated in the Buddha's teaching. Due to the superior power of the will all emotions can be restrained, integrated, purified, unified and perfected. With the aid of will power the individual can develop one-pointedness of mind and thereby induce *jhānic* consciousness with a view to gaining the highest intuition and ultimate perfection and becoming one who has achieved the highest and noblest truth (*anupattasattha*).

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