

An analysis of the Misinterpretations on the Buddhist Freewill and Personal Responsibility; A Comparative Review from the perspective of Buddhism and the Quantum Physics

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Introduction

The Buddhism while denying all deterministic theories presented a non-deterministic causal theory corresponding to personal responsibility and freewill. This theory of causal genesis easily can distinguish from all forms of strict determinism. Unfortunately, the causal theory of the Buddhism has been misunderstood by some scholars in the contest of personal responsibility and freewill. Knowingly or unknowingly the Buddhist theory of causation has been interpreted as a form of fatalism by them. For an example, *G.P. Malalasekara* has said on the topic of the Buddhist freewill that there can be no such things as freewill outside causal sequence which constitutes the world process. And also venerable *Walpola Rahula* mentioned “The question of freewill has occupied as important place in the Western thought and philosophy. But according to conditioned genesis, this question does not and cannot arise in the Buddhist philosophy ...not only is the so called freewill not free, but even the very idea of freewill is not free from conditions. The above statements hint there is no freewill in the Buddhist context which is free from conditional genesis, At same time, the above two statements indirectly give idea that the Buddhist causal theory is a kind of fatalism, so freewill in such a condition is wholly determined by the causal genesis (*paṭiccasamuppāda*).

This misconception must overcome through careful understanding of the Buddhist causal theory and the concept of momentariness (*anicca*). When it comparatively studied these two theories it can be understood that all physical phenomena of the world do not wholly predetermined by a causal genesis; such causal conditional process always is disturbed by the impermanence (transient) or evanescence (*anicca*). Therefore, the Buddhist casual theory is not unchanging deterministic pattern as interpreted by the above scholars; it is always related with the theory of

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impermanent. That is the reason why Buddha said all conditional things are impermanent (*sabbesaṅkharā anicca*).

Research Objectives

The main objective of the research is to give an adequate answer to misinterpretations on freewill and personal responsibility of the Buddhism with parallel to selected Western theories. And also the research aims to illustrate in-deterministic nature of the Buddhist causal theory in relation to the *Anicca* concept.

Research Methodology

Comparative and analytical methods employ in the research to materialize the above proposition. Data from the primary and secondary sources related to the field were collected through the libraries and E- library and discussed with scholars in the field.

Research Problems

Is the Buddhist causality a deterministic theory?

Is it possible to establish in-deterministic theory in the topics of the Buddhist freewill and personal responsibility while employing Causality and *Anicca*?

Can it compare the Buddhist causality and *Anicca* with quantum physics?

Literature Review

There are considerable researches on the Buddhist concepts of Freewill and personal responsibility. Some of them are as follows, K.N. Jayatilake, *Ethics in Buddhist perspective*, BPS, Kandy, (1972), William Farrigton, *The Identity Problem in Buddhist Ethics: An examination of Buddhist and Partition Conception of the Subject*, Birkbeck collage, University of Landon, (2007), Dharmasiri, Gunapala, *Fundamental of Buddhist Ethics*, Buddhist research Society, Singapore (1986), Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* London, Palgrave, (1992), G. P. Malalasekera, *The Status of the Individual in Theravāda Buddhist Philosophy* in *The Status of the Individual in East and West*, Ed. Charles A. Moore, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, (1968), Walpola Rāhula, *What the Buddha Taught*, Gordon Fraser, (1959) and etc. But it seems to be that only a few scholars have tried to give answer for the above topics, such as K.N. Jayatilake, William Farrigton and etc.

Research Framework

To study the Buddhist concepts Morality, Freewill, Personal Responsibility, Causality and *Anicca* with parallel to selected theories of the Western Philosophy. Basically here studies in-deterministic nature of the Buddhist causality in relation to the quantum physics.

Discussion

Someone might interpret the theory of *Anicca* as a deterministic process. If it is so, every changing conditions of the world must be predetermined by *Anicca*. But it is impossible to see any regular pattern of changing of physical and psychical conditions of the world. Say for an instance, it cannot be said what conditions of the world will be changed in the next moment (within exact time and space it is impossible to see what will happen in the next moment). Therefore, the impermanence theory of the Buddhism is not another type of fatalism. When causal conditions are disturbed by the *Anicca*, then, the causal theory cannot be interpreted as a regular pattern because the causal condition is broken by the evanescence (*anicca*). When the causal conditions break it feels that we depend on us as mentioned in the above. Aristotle in his physics and metaphysics declared the same in-deterministic casual theory which he emphasized about accidents caused by chance. For Aristotle, a break in the causal chain allowed us to feel our actions “Depend on us.” Epicurus was another Western philosopher who brought forward the in-deterministic theory on atoms movements, Epicurus argued, “As atoms moved through the void, there were occasion when they would swerve from their otherwise determined path, thus initiating new causal chain”. Further, Epicures argued “These swerves would allow us to be more responsible for our actions, something impossible if every action was deterministically caused.” Furthermore, during ninth century some scholars developed an in-deterministic quantum theory to overcome the causal deterministic theory. In 1925 Max Born, Werner Heisenberg and Pascual Jordan formulated matrix mechanics version of quantum mechanics “Matrix mechanics conformed discrete energy levels and random ‘quantum Jumps’ of electrons between the energy levels, with emission or absorption of photons accompanying the jump.” This theory of random quantum jumps of matrix mechanics of quantum physics also emphasize there is in-deterministic process even in quantum waves function which freed from deterministic causal conditions.

Conclusion

All the above Western philosophers and scholars have formulated different theories which are appeared as similar to each other to overcome deterministic causal conditions of their philosophies as the Buddha did in his philosophy by introducing theory of *Anicca* which probably disturbs to the deterministic causal conditions. Therefore, the Buddhist causality is not a deterministic teaching which restricts the freewill and personal responsibility of the man and it is an in-deterministic teaching which is very much similar to the quantum physics.

Keywords: Freewill, Personal Responsibility, Buddhism, Quantum Physics

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