A COMPARATIVE LOOK AT KARMA AND DETERMINISM

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Degree of Master of Arts

by

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Introduction

1.1 Purpose

Upon encountering Buddhism in my philosophical studies, I was instantly interested in the concept of karma and how it could be applied to a Western philosophical background. I decided that I wanted to examine if the Theravada and Mahayana traditions of Buddhism are able to provide a solution to the problems associated with determinism and free will known as the Compatibility and Traditional problems. The purpose of this project is to provide a comparative look at the notions of karma from Lynken Ghose and determinism and free will from Peter Van Inwagen. I present to readers a reformulation of Van Inwagen’s concept of determinism merged with Ghose’s conception of karma with the conclusion that Van Inwagen’s position is made stronger by the union of these two ideas.

1.2 The Outline

Chapter one will provide an explanation of Lynken Ghose’s understanding of karma. Chapter two will present an articulation of Peter Van Inwagen’s understanding of free will and determinism. Based upon these explanations, I will compare and contrast the similarities and differences between Ghose’s understanding of karma and Van Inwagen’s understanding of free will and determinism in chapters three and four respectively. In chapter five, I will argue how certain insights from Ghose’s understanding of karma can shed light on Van Inwagen’s understanding of free will and determinism. Below is a more detailed summary of each chapter.
In chapter 1, I begin with an investigation of Ghose’s understanding of the two dimensions of karma as the act of willing and as the effects of the act of willing. Secondly, I explore Ghose’s view on whether all actions result in karmic fruit or not. Thirdly, I inquire into Ghose’s view on whether karmic fruits can be purified.

In chapter two, I present a basic explanation of both determinism and free will by Van Inwagen. I believe this explanation will provide the reader with enough background so that he or she will be able to understand the issues of incompatibility that rest between determinism and free will. Lastly, I explain what Van Inwagen proposes to be the solution to this seeming incompatibility.

In chapter three, I provide a discussion of what I have determined to be the most important distinctions between Lynken Ghose’s conception of karma and Peter Van Inwagen’s conceptions of free will and determinism. I look at the differences in the methods of study used by Ghose and Van Inwagen. I also examine Ghose’s notion of Buddha nature and argue that it plays an important role when looking at the notions of both free will and free action. This concept of Buddha nature is absent in Van Inwagen’s notions. By looking at this concept, I hope to provoke the reader to begin to consider how the addition of this feature changes the entire issue at hand. Ghose’s Buddha nature adds a variable to the mix which provides solutions to Van Inwagen’s determinism and free will. Following this examination, I look at Van Inwagen’s notion of natural laws and provide illumination as to the differences between the use of the laws of nature for Van Inwagen and Ghose. Then I proceed to look at the different ways from which one might perform an action and attempt to explain in different terms the difference between ‘action from disposition’ and ‘action from ability’. I examine Ghose’s explanation of the three poisons and argue how their addition
adds to Van Inwagen’s ideas; Ghose requires that wisdom comes into play, whereas Van Inwagen does not even consider wisdom. Lastly, I look at Van Inwagen’s argument for the requirement of moral responsibility and contrast it to Ghose’s notion of karma; one’s karma primarily determines one’s situation.

In chapter four, I look at the similarities between the notions of the two thinkers. I look at the notion of ‘action’ which has been developed by both thinkers previously in this project. Then, I look at the similarities between the notion of dispositional action for each thinker, which includes a discussion of the feelings one has when one says “I should do x” as opposed to “I want to do x”. Following this, I look at both thinkers’ notion of acting from a ‘free’ standpoint. I look at what both Van Inwagen and Ghose argue about one’s responsibility and the punishment of offending individuals. Lastly, I argue how Ghose’s notion of karma is not in contradiction with Van Inwagen’s notion of the laws of nature.

In the first part of chapter five, I further elaborate on the comparisons made in chapters three and four. I chose to address those arguments which dealt with the possibility or requirement of free will and what kind of person is capable of performing such actions. I believe that Ghose’s position is able to step in where Van Inwagen has become stuck and provide a possible solution to Van Inwagen’s problem. Ghose’s position supports that determinism is true and does not rule out the possibility of free actions. In the second part of chapter five, I look at how this new Van Inwagen-Ghose formulation provides a response to both the Traditional and Compatibility problems. In the last part of chapter five, I look at a possible determinist response to the new formulation and provide a counter-response.
Chapter 1

Karma as Action and the Effects of Action

1.1 Introduction

I chose to work with Lynken Ghose’s conception of karma because he provides a clear and compact overview of the notion of karma as it is taught in both Theravada and Mahayana schools of Buddhism\(^1\). He provides insight gleaned from commentators, Buddhist monks and lay practitioners in order to help clarify and develop a conception of karma that is able to address the notions of action, karmic fruit and the deterministic aspect of karma. This kind of clear overview is able to quickly explain the concept of karma without trying to tie in many of the more spiritual aspects of Buddhism. Ghose is able to pick out the significant information surrounding the notion of karma, and he frames his explanations of these through the lens of western psychology. Through Ghose’s explanations, a western reader is able to relate more easily to the concepts with which he works.

Throughout this chapter, I investigate Ghose’s understanding of the two dimensions of karma as the act of willing and as the effects of the act of willing. I investigate Ghose’s view on whether all actions result in karmic fruit or not, and then I inquire into Ghose’s view on whether karmic fruits can be purified. These explanations are used in chapters three, four and five in order to illustrate the differences between Ghose’s conception of karma and Peter Van Inwagen’s conceptions of determinism and free will. Though this examination, I will use these concepts to look at the similarities between the two authors. In the last chapter, I argue that Van Inwagen’s

\(^1\) Ghose, Lynken. 2007. p.259
position can be improved upon by adding to it some aspects of the concepts covered in this chapter.

1.2 Karma as action and the effects of action

There are two ways in which the word karma can be used. Karma can be used as ‘action’ and as ‘the effects of action’. I explore the notion of karma as both action and the effects of action, that is, karmic fruits.

Ghose explains that actions can be verbal, physical, or mental. He turns to a number of principal Buddhist texts including Anguttara Nikaya, Abhidarmakosa, Mulamadhyamaka-karikas, and Visuddhimagga for explanation, for which I will provide clarification. In the Anguttara Nikaya\(^3\), karma is described as the act of willing; from this act of willing effects are produced. These effects are also called karma, but I must clarify that karma is the act of willing which produces karmic effects. Also, a reader has learned that she creates karma. This means people willfully act with their bodies, speech, and minds\(^4\). The Abhidharmako’sa\(^5\) teaches that “the variety of the world is born of karma.” This means that karma as action produces the variety of the world. Again, one can see that karma is volition, such that it is the act of willing. This karma can be mental, verbal or produced by one’s body.

\(^2\) Ghose, Lynken. 2007. p.260

\(^3\) Bhikkhus, volition (cetana), I say, is kamma. Having willed, we create kamma, through body, speech, and mind [Bhikkhu, Payutto. 1993].

\(^4\) Guenther, H. 1976. p. 42

\(^5\) The variety of the world is born of karma (action); karma is volition (cetana) and (also) that which follows from action (i.e., effect or result). Volition is mental, verbal, or bodily action [Sastri, Dwarik. 1998].
For example, imagine that you are walking past a candy store when you are suddenly struck by the motivation to walk inside and get a lollipop. You do, in fact, walk into the store and purchase a lollipop. By purchasing a lollipop, you have willed your body to walk into the store, pick up a lollipop, carry it to the register for purchase, give the cashier money, and leave the store. Thus, your karma as action is your willful action. However, as stated before, this is not the only way to understand karma. Karma is also the effects of this willful action.

The effects of willful action produce another type of karma known as karmic fruit. Karmic fruits can be mental or physical. According to Garma C.C. Chang, all karma exists in the mind, so I will not cover, in depth, the notion of physical karmic fruits. Mental karmic fruits are called cetana, and I will investigate this notion in more detail. Cetana has multiple meanings: (1) motivation (2) intention (3) internal states (4) memory traces.

I will begin by discussing the notion of cetana as the motivating force behind one’s actions in order to explain the intentional aspect of cetana. Then, I explain why it is that cetana is considered to be produced in the mind. In order to accomplish this task, I look at Ghose’s explanation of cetana through the Western notion of internal states. I continue the Western-style explanation of cetana through the notion of memory traces. I believe that Ghose’s explanations, through a Western psychological perspective, are able to most effectively illustrate to a Western reader Ghose’s Buddhist notion of cetana. Also, these explanations serve to clear up any confusion that may still be present surrounding the notion of cetana such that by the end of this chapter the reader should have a basic, but comprehensive, understanding of this notion.

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6 [... ]All karmas are rooted in one’s Mind, which like all the worlds and universes, is but a phantom or magic play! [Chang, C. 1971. p. 174]

7 Guenther, H. 1976. p. 42
Ghose draws a concept of karma, or ‘cetana’, as “a state of willing, a state of coordinating, or a state of directing things towards a particular course of action” in order to explain karma as the effects of action. He strengthens this concept by turning to Guenther, who in *Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidhamma* says that karma, or cetana, is similar to what we describe as our motivation, stimulation to do something, or drive. However, Ghose points out that Guenther is hesitant to translate cetana *strictly* as volition.

Ghose goes on to cite J.P. McDermott as saying that cetana is a sort of ‘intentional impulse’; and he cites Peter Harvey as saying that cetana is the “psychological impulse behind an action, that which sets going a chain of causes culminating in a karmic fruit.” It is important to note that while cetana sets going a chain of causes culminating in karmic fruit, it is also a mental karmic fruit in itself. Ghose explains that intentions in the ethical sense are usually held to be either positive or negative. Intentions are products of our intellectual analyses, or one can think of them as as ideas which have been ‘abstracted from the felt aspects of life’. Therefore, intentions are commonly held to be purely cognitive. However, as Ghose points out, our positive and negative emotions are not held in the absence of the experience of a feeling. Intentions have feelings attached to them and cannot be purely cognitive.

According to Ghose, Western psychologists typically involve motivation with “changes in an organism’s internal states.” He refers to Damien Keown who says that “when a motivation is caused by a change in one’s internal state, the term ‘push’ is used to define it; when

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8 Ghose, Lynken. 2007. p.263
9 Ibid. p. 263
10 Ibid. p. 263
11 Ibid. p. 263
12 Ibid. p. 264
a motivation is caused by an external environmental influence, the term ‘pull’ is used to define it.”

Ghose explains that ‘push’ and ‘pull’ entail a sort of movement toward the object of the motivation. Action, according to Ghose, in contrast to non-action, exhibits either physical or mental movement. Ghose proposes that thoughts work in this way as well. “Regardless of the nature of the action, be it mental, physical, or verbal, there is always some sort of psychic impulse or movement involved towards an internal or external object.”

Ghose points out that the ‘impulse’ is a good way to understand cetana. At this point, it is possible to shorten our working definition of cetana to: “a psychic volitional impulse or psychic feeling of being pulled in one direction or the other.”

Since we now know that the mind is where cetana is developed, Ghose points out that it may help to turn to Western psychological notions for clarification. Many western psychological works do not tend to see one’s own immorality as being the cause of the production of karmic

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14 Cetana is best pictured as a matrix in which the push and pull of the rational and emotional aspects of the psyche are funneled in the direction of a moral choice. In this way, cetana can be seen as ‘not distinct from thought and feeling. [Ghose, L. p. 264]

15 Ibid. p. 264

16 It is important to note that Ghose, in his definition, makes the mental feeling of being pulled in a particular direction the agent to do secondary. According to Ghose, in the Visuddhimagga and Dhammasangani, the mind and body retain a sense of force of their own while being completely interconnected. Yet, Ghose points out that in the traditional Buddhist notions of mind and body “the mind is seen first and foremost as a locus of power.” (Ghose, p. 264)

17 Ghose turns to the Shedgyud, which is a Tibetan Tantric text, which says that “the specific causes of sickness are that unenlightenment produces desire, hatred and ignorance, and they produce the ills of air, bile, and phlegm as a result.” From this, Ghose explains that it is the psychological ills that produce the physical ills; therefore, the mental is primary and the physical is secondary to it. Ghose explains that there is a “psychic feeling component underlying all physical, mental and verbal action and that this psychic feeling is the primary defining characteristic of cetana.” (Ghose p. 266)

18 Ibid. p. 266
fruit; instead, they state that repeated memories of past occurrences are due to unresolved feelings associated with memories of certain powerful incidents. The presence of a repetitive memory and residual feelings merely demonstrates the mind’s natural tendency to attempt to resolve or come to peace with past experiences; they do not have immorality as their basis.\(^\text{19}\)

Although the origins appear to be different, both Buddhist scholars, which Ghose draws from, and Western thinkers, on Van Inwagen’s side, are talking about the same idea. Karmic fruit is left as a residue in the mind that causes one to have an unsettling feeling that things are not at peace or that things need to be resolved. Ghose turns to Freud’s idea of ‘memory traces’ and explains that these traces are residues that are left in one’s mind after one experiences a powerful incident in their life. According to the idea, situations have a certain ‘strength’ to them and require a certain level of reaction from a person experiencing it. “If one’s reaction is commensurate to the strength of the incident, then there will not be a trace or residue left in the unconscious; if one’s reaction is not commensurate, a residue will be left over.”\(^\text{20}\) He goes on to say “the more conscious, or aware, one is, the more appropriate one’s reaction will be and the strength of the memory trace will be less.”\(^\text{21}\)

For example, if I were walking down the street, thinking about what I will be eating for dinner, not being very aware of my surroundings, and I were to get hit by a car, a mental trace would be left in my mind. In the following days, you can be fairly certain that I would be mentally beating-myself-up for not being aware and walking in front of a car. The mental gymnastics that I would undertake to try to figure out how I could have acted in a better way-

\(^{19}\) Ibid. p. 277

\(^{20}\) Ibid. p. 278

\(^{21}\) Ibid. p. 278
perhaps I should not have been so focused on myself and paying attention to my surroundings-
are an example of karmic fruit that was produced by my action. My reaction to the situation was
not commensurate to the strength of the incident. The incident required that I be aware enough
to not walk into traffic, and had I not walked into traffic, no mental trace would be left in my
mind. The situation would have nothing to ‘resolve’. However, I did not put forth enough
awareness into the situation so I was hit by a car and now I am able to lie in a hospital bed and
try to resolve the situation in my head; a residue has been left. 22

1.3 Do all actions result in karmic fruits?

Now that we have developed a basic understanding of karma as action and karmic fruit as
being both physical and mental with cetana making up the body of mental karmic fruits, we are
now able to start to look at questions about the possibility of actions that do not produce karmic
fruits at all. Ghose wonders “if cetana in Buddhism is defined as a volitional impulse or feeling,
and if it primarily implies a psychic feeling, which pulls one in a particular direction, even when
the action is verbal or physical, then would every action of every person always be accompanied
by cetana?” 23 He further asks if the experience of being pulled to do something is present in the
mind of an enlightened individual. For the sake of this paper, ‘enlightened person’ will be used
to refer to a Buddha, bodhisattva or an arahant.

22 Buddhism, according to Ghose, teaches that the proper way to respond to a situation is with awareness and
mindfulness. Therefore, the more mindful, or aware, a person is in a situation, the production of karmic fruit is
lessened, such that the residue is not as strong. Ghose cautions us not to think of karmic fruit as a memory itself, but
rather as the power that a memory has over one’s freedom to make decisions. [Ghose, L. p. 269]

23 Ibid. p. 260
In searching for an answer to these questions, Ghose turns to Bhikkhu Bodhi’s and Bhikkhu U Rewata Dhamma’s guide to the *Abhidhammattha Sangaha*. “All volitional action, except that of an [enlightened person], constitutes karma. [Enlightened people] do not accumulate karma, since they have eradicated ignorance and craving, its roots.”

Ghose explains that if an action is not made with ignorance and craving, then it is not the kind of action that will produce any residual effect. According to Chang, “[...] all Buddha’s acts are done with ease and freedom”.

According to Ghose, the *Atthakatha* says that “this is called action that is neither dark nor bright with neither-dark-nor-bright result, action that leads to the destruction of action.”

‘Action’ is referring not to action itself, but to the effects of action. There is a particular type of action that leads to the destruction of the effects of action. According to Ghose, ‘effects of action’ refers to the psychic residue that has been left over from an action, yet it can also refer to those effects one feels in his own body or in his environment. Buddhadasa, a Thai Buddhist interpreter, explains that this type of karma is “neither black nor white, a karma that serves to neutralize the other two kinds. It consists in coming to perceive non-selfhood, emptiness. This kind of action is what we may call Buddhist karma, the real karma, the kind of karma the Buddha taught—indeed transcending all karmas… it wipes out every kind of bad and good karma.”

This type of action is related to the Buddhist perception of non-self, and this non-self view is the

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24 Bodhi and Dhamma. 1993. p.200


26 Nanamoli. 1995. p.391

vehicle through which an individual can eliminate the causes of his problems, which Ghose deems to be selfishness and ignorance.²⁸

The action of the enlightened person is entirely unselfish and free of ignorance. This type of action does not produce future karmic fruit and also purifies the residues that have been built up in a person’s mind from previous selfish or ignorant action. In the Theravada tradition, “through one’s willpower, one deepens one’s meditation practice and refines one’s morality, and have reached a certain level of profundity that allows one to act in an entirely non-selfish way.”²⁹

1.4 Can karmic fruits be purified?

It is at this point that I am able to begin to look at whether or not karmic fruit, as a result of self-centered action, can be purified or eliminated. If not, then one is completely locked into living out the result in its entirety³⁰; if a self-centered action has been performed, can this result be purified? According to the previous discussion, karma as the effects of action can be purified and one need not live out the consequences; if one acts in a completely unselfish and non-ignorant way then one destroys past karmic fruit and does not produce any karmic fruit.³¹ The question remains, “Are there types of actions that do not produce karmic fruits at all?” This answer is obviously ‘yes.’ Unselfish, non-ignorant, enlightened action does not produce karmic fruit.

²⁸ Ghose, Lynken. 2007. p.267
²⁹ Ibid. p. 267
³⁰ Ibid. p. 260
³¹ Ibid. p. 269
It has been established that karma involves the feeling of being pulled in a direction, but there has not yet been an examination of what this entails. Ghose returns to Karen Horney for illumination in this area. Horney explains two different ways in which one may experience a ‘pulling’. According to her “when one experiences drives or motivations that are unhealthy or neurotic, we feel pulled toward a course of action in a ‘compulsive’, anxious way. Whereas drives or motivations which are healthy and originating from the real self have the felt quality of being spontaneous, free and non-compulsive.”

According to Ghose, the unhealthy motivations arise because a person is trying to actualize an ‘ideal’ self. This ideal self is what the person thinks that he/she ought to be as a result of being told by others how he or she should be. In striving to actualize one’s ideal self, one ‘loses touch with one’s real self.’

Ghose explains that compulsive motivations can be verbalized with ‘should’ statements such as, ‘I should take out the trash’; healthy motivations can be verbalized as ‘I want to because I want to’ statements. The person who takes out the trash because it is what he/she ‘should’ do will have a different felt quality than the person who takes out the trash because it is what he/she wants to do. “Someone who is in touch with her real self is in touch with her true feelings about an issue or a person, and therefore, never feels driven or compulsive about her motivations. In other words, there is a freer, less anxious, quality to her motivations.”

What does it mean to have more free or less anxious motivations? According to Horney, the person who is in touch with her real self is able to experience this feeling. In Ghose’s Buddhism, this is in the realm of the enlightened person. Ghose cites the Anguttara Nikaya as

32 Ibid. p. 270
33 Ibid. p. 270
34 Ibid. p. 270
saying that “the untainted mind of the sage is, in fact, that of flexibility, and softness of mind.”

Ghose goes on to explain that in the Dhammasangani, mental illness refers to the absence of mental dexterity; therefore, mental dexterity is to be sought.

In order to more fully develop an understanding of the mind of the enlightened person, Ghose again cites the Anguttara Nikaya as saying that selfish or ignorant motivation is based upon the notion of the three poisons: greed, hatred, and delusion. Ghose explains that one can use this to understand the enlightened person’s mind because such a person’s mind is free of the three poisons. This person does not have selfish or ignorant motivations. According to Bhikkhu Payutto:

With no desire, greed, hatred or delusion, there is not karma. With no karma, there are no karma results to bind the mind. With no karma to bind the mind, there emerges a state of clarity which transcends suffering. The mind which was once a slave of desire becomes one that is guided by wisdom, directing actions independently of desire’s influence.

From this, one can now also say that karma has the effect of binding the mind. When one is free from one’s karma, one is no longer a “slave to desire.” Ghose explains this as being in a position with the freedom in making choices.

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35 Ibid. p.271
36 Bhikkhu, Payutto. p. 78
37 Ibid. p. 78
Chapter 2

The incompatibility of determinism and free will

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with Buddhist notions of karma, developed by Lynken Ghose, such that a basic understanding has been grasped so as to allow one to move on to the western notions of free will and determinism. In this chapter, I explain the aforementioned concepts with the help of Peter Van Inwagen. Peter Van Inwagen presents a basic explanation of both determinism and free will that I believe will provide the reader with enough background so that he or she will be able to understand when I begin to explore the issues of incompatibility that rest between determinism and free will. Lastly, I explain what Van Inwagen believes to be the solution to this seeming incompatibility.

According to Peter Van Inwagen, there are two problems that typically arise when philosophers look at the notions of both ‘free will’ and ‘determinism’ and try to determine if the two are compatible. He calls these the ‘traditional’ and the ‘compatibility’ problems. The traditional problem is the problem of trying to determine the compatibility of ‘free will’ and ‘determinism.’ The compatibility problem is the issue that if free will and determinism are indeed compatible, then free will must entail determinism, and the traditional problem
disappears.\textsuperscript{38} These are the issues which have motivated many philosophers to delve into this area of research, and are also the reasons behind Van Inwagen’s essay.

Before one can begin to look at the aforementioned issues, it is important that an understanding of the concepts of determinism and free will is developed.

2.2 Determinism

According to Van Inwagen “determinism is quite simply the thesis that the past determines a unique future.”\textsuperscript{39} This definition has two parts, there is the ‘unique future’, and there is the past which determines the unique future.

For example, I am planning on having dinner at 5:00pm. I can imagine all sorts of other things that I could do at 5:00pm; I could go fishing on a lake, take a walk in the park, or read a book at the library. However, only one of these options is physically possible. I cannot be in multiple places at once; therefore, if I am going to be reading a book at the library at 5:00pm, I cannot also be fishing on a lake at 5:00pm, or taking a walk in the park at 5:00pm. Because I can only physically be doing one thing at 5:00pm, the thing that I do will be the unique future which was determined by the past. The past must be the actual past, such that it is the past that actually occurred. Also, just as I demonstrated by being unable to physically be at the lake fishing and at the library reading a book at the same time, the laws of nature apply. My past, which is the actual past, consists of instances in which I have entered into verbal contracts with others consisting of times and places for which to read books at the library. Also, my past includes my

\textsuperscript{38} Van Inwagen, Peter. 1983. p.2

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. p.2
relationship with my girlfriend, and instances in which I have been admonished for breaking verbal agreements. The last bit of important information is that I spoke with my girlfriend earlier today and told her that I will be located at the library and will be reading a book at 5:00pm. Therefore, my past determines my unique future of reading a book at the library at 5:00pm.

According to Van Inwagen “determinism may now be defined: it is the thesis that there is at any instant exactly one physically possible future.” 40

Van Inwagen goes on to further explain what is meant by ‘laws of nature’, as they apply to determinism. He says that any definition of a ‘law of nature’ must contain the following:

1. The phrase ‘is a law of nature’ is a real predicate: it is typically and properly used in ascribing certain property to certain object (unlike, say, ‘exists’, according to Kant, or ‘is good’, according to R.M. Hare);
2. The objects that have this property are sentences or propositions (non-linguistic entities expressed by sentences) or whatever it is that are the bearers of truth-value: anything that is a law is also either true or false;
3. whether a proposition or sentence is a law is independent of what scientists or others happen to believe or happen to have discovered: a proposition, if it is a law, is unchangeably and objectively so, just as, according to the prevailing view of mathematics, a proposition, if it is a theorem, is unchangeably and objectively so, whatever mathematicians or others happen to believe or happen to have proved. 41

A law of nature, for example, is that water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit at sea level. This example satisfies all of Van Inwagen’s requirements. It is typically and properly said that water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit at sea level. This statement is either true or false, and therefore bears a truth-value; it is unchangeably and objectively so. Although humans have not always known the measurement of heat in degrees Fahrenheit that water must reach in order to boil, water has always boiled at 212 degrees; human beings merely lacked the means of

40 Ibid. p.3

41 Ibid. p.6
measurement. Even so, humans still came to understand that water will boil if one provides enough heat. Van Inwagen points out that a lack of understanding does not excuse one from the laws of nature, just as ignorance of traffic speed laws does not excuse one from being ticketed when speeding.

Van Inwagen says that the point of developing an understanding of the notion of the laws of nature is that we come to understand that they are in play, all of the time, and it does not matter if we have discovered them or not.42

The definition of determinism has been developed thus far in the following ways: “the thesis that the past determines a unique future”43, and also as; “the thesis that there is at any instant exactly one physically possible future.”44 There is an understanding that the past determines the singular physically possible future, and one of these ways is through laws of nature. “[If determinism is true, then no one has any choice about anything.”45 Rather, when a person thinks he is making choices, he is actually just experiencing the unique present which has been determined by the actual past.46

42 Ibid. p.8
43 Ibid. p.2
44 Ibid. p.3
45 Ibid. p.105
46 One interesting critique of determinism, which I will not discuss beyond this, comes from J.K. Campbell. Campbell argues that “If determinism is a threat to our free will, it is so only because there are true propositions about the remote past [prior to our existence][...] That there is a remote past is a contingent truth about the actual world, one that is not essential to the thesis of determinism.” [Campbell. J.K. 2007. p. 109] Anthony Brueckner supports this by arguing that if determinism is the thesis that the past and the laws of nature necessitate the future, then if there were a person who existed at the beginning of time (the time which the remote past began) then “the assumption that there is no past relative to [the person who existed at the beginning of time and his first action] will quite naturally give rise to the consequence that there is no argument from determinism to the conclusion that [the person who existed at the beginning of time] is not free.” [Brueckner, Anthony. 2008. p. 12-13] Therefore, according to Brueckner, the only person who is able to be free is the person who existed at the beginning of time.
2.3 Free will

So now that a reader has a basic grasp of determinism, I must examine something that proves to be very detrimental to it: free will. According to Van Inwagen;

When I say of a man that he ‘has free will’ I mean that very often, if not always, when he has to choose between two or more mutually incompatible courses of action--- that is, courses of action that it is impossible for him to carry out more than one of--- each of these courses of action is such that he can, or is able to, or has it within his power to carry it out. A man has free will if he is often in positions like these: he must now speak or now be silent, and he can now speak and can now remain silent; he must attempt to rescue a drowning child or else go for help, and he is able to attempt to rescue the child and able to go for help; he must now resign his chairmanship or else lie to the members, and he has it within his power to resign and he has it within his power to lie.\(^{47}\)

Therefore, according to Van Inwagen, free will is a sort of “power or ability of an agent to act.”\(^{48}\) In other words, one can say that if a person has free will, then he or she ‘can’ do something. Free will does not mean that one is legally or morally allowed to perform certain actions, rather it is more like one’s raw ability to perform an action.\(^{49}\) Also, free will follows the laws of nature, such that if someone were to say “I’m so hungry that I could eat a whole horse” this individual would not literally be able to eat an entire horse. This person would not be making an accurate assessment of their hunger and stomach size. It could be said that the person is not free to be able to eat an entire horse.

\(^{47}\) Ibid. p.8

\(^{48}\) Ibid. p.8

\(^{49}\) Ibid. p.9
The power or ability of an agent to act is also not to be thought of as a ‘causal power’ or ‘capacity’ to do things. Van Inwagen points out that just because one possesses the capacity to do something, does not mean that he or she will actually do it.\(^{50}\) For example, I possess the capacity required to put down the toilet seat every time I flush, but I still get playfully scolded by my girlfriend when I leave the seat up. Just because I have the capacity to do something, does not mean that I actually do it. Van Inwagen points out that when one speaks of a person’s capacities, he often uses words that refer to one’s possession of something.\(^{51}\) For example, “John currently has a reduced capacity for sports”. Therefore, if someone were to ask John if he wanted to play basketball at this moment he would decline, just as he would decline an invitation to play baseball; John currently possesses a disposition such that he will react to all invitations from his friends to play sports in the same way. He will decline.

Now consider the notion of one’s abilities. According to Van Inwagen, when one speaks of one’s abilities, he speaks in terms of ‘can’. For example, if you were to inquire as to why John has a reduced capacity for sports, you might be told “John fell out of a tree.” This response is different from the last because John does not possess a disposition for falling out of trees by which every time he climbs a tree he then falls out of it. Rather, according to Van Inwagen, John, by having the ability to fall out of trees (an ability I imagine that most children possess) has shown the “power to originate changes in the environment.”\(^{52}\) John’s falling out of a tree caused a change in the environment. His refusal to play sports while recovering is something that is caused and the refusal is John’s response to that cause. However, when he fell out of the

\(^{50}\) Ibid. p.10

\(^{51}\) Ibid. p.10

\(^{52}\) Ibid. p.11
tree, Van Inwagen explains, John could have not fallen out of the tree, or he could fall out of the
tree, but neither of these actions was brought about as a reaction, but rather as an action.

Van Inwagen explains that, just as we discussed the term ‘possible futures’ when looking
at determinism, free will entails one’s access to bringing about possible futures. One acts freely
when he or she originates change in the environment, and one does not act freely if he or she acts
reactively from a sort of disposition.

Now that an understanding of both determinism and free will has been developed, it may
be apparent to the reader that the two concepts have some conflicting points. In fact, Van
Inwagen explains, that because determinism requires that it is the past and not the present, which
determines the unique future that will take place, what one does must actually have been
determined by the past. What one does now is not the product of free will. Free will, therefore,
cannot exist if determinism is true.

When looking at free will I used ‘disposition’ and ’ability’ to highlight the difference
between one’s reactive response to the environment and the origination of change in the
environment by an agent. It may be helpful to think of free will and determinism using the same
terms. If determinism is true, then all of one’s actions are a reflection of a sort of disposition to
react to the environment when one encounters it. However, as before, this is a state of reaction
and not a state of origination. For example, imagine that John was sitting on the beach, when all
of a sudden, he begins to kick a coconut around in the sand. After a while, he had devised a
simple game by which he tried to kick the coconut into a hole in the sand. If determinism is true,
then it was determined by the past that John would start kicking a coconut around in the sand and
eventually create a game of it. Perhaps John has the disposition to make up games when he gets
bored. Or, perhaps John does not have some sort of disposition to create games, but rather just
decided to create a game. After observing his creation, one might say that John can create games.

2.4 Moral Responsibility

Van Inwagen says that we do have free will, and therefore determinism must be flawed, if not false. “Our not having free will would mean that we are morally responsible for nothing. The strongest argument for the existence of free will seems to me to be this: moral responsibility requires free will and we are responsible for at least some of the things we have brought about.”

The argumentation is presented as follows:

1. The past determines the unique future; the past is responsible for the future.
2. There was a past before any human existed.
3. Humans are not responsible for the future.
   3.1 If a human is not responsible for the future, then he cannot be responsible for anything.
4. Therefore, if determinism is true, then free will does not exist.

However, Van Inwagen explains that we do have moral responsibility.

We all, therefore, believe that people are sometimes morally responsible for what they do. We all believe that responsibility exists. And, I think, if we examine our convictions honestly and seriously and carefully, we shall discover that we cannot by our nature and the nature of human social life, as our behavioral manifestations of assent to the proposition that we have free will are forced upon us by the sheer impossibility of a life without deliberation. I think that we shall now discover that we cannot but view our belief in moral responsibility as a justified belief, a belief that is simply not open to reasonable doubt. I myself would go further: in my view, the

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53 Ibid. p.188
54 Ibid. p.188
proposition that often we are morally responsible for what we have done is something we all know to be true.55

Therefore, for Van Inwagen, because moral responsibility is something all know to be true, free will must exist and determinism must be false.

It became rather clear to me that the above notion can be confusing for one encountering it for the first time. The way in which I will clear up this confusion is by looking at what a determinist and a compatibilist might say in response to Van Inwagen’s moral responsibility argument.

2.5 A response to determinism

In response to Van Inwagen’s notion of moral responsibility, a determinist might say, “But Peter, when you perform any action, be it moral or not, you were determined to perform that action by the actual past, and therefore you aren’t responsible for the actions that you perform.” This is a restatement of the above argument with which Van Inwagen takes issue. Van Inwagen could cleverly respond by asking the determinist if he believes that wrongdoers should be punished. Now the determinist is trapped, for he has just said that because the past determines the unique future that one cannot be held responsible for his actions. In order to respond to this line of questioning, the determinist either has to recant and say that wrongdoers should be punished and therefore are responsible for what they have done, or he can say that wrongdoers are not to be blamed for their actions. Van Inwagen challenges the determinist to “think and examine our convictions honestly and seriously and carefully,” and by doing so it will be revealed that our society believes that moral responsibility does exist. Otherwise, it does not

55 Ibid. p.209
make sense to talk about punishment other than in a masochistic sense. It would be perverse to punish people who are not responsible for their actions; our society mourns when it makes such mistakes. Van Inwagen would challenge the determinist to see if what he is purporting to be true actually matches up with the way he lives in the world. Since it does not, determinism must be false.

2.6 A response to compatibilism

In response to Van Inwagen’s notion of moral responsibility, a compatibilist might say, “But Peter, all that you have shown to be true is that determinism, as it stands, cannot be true. You have argued that not all actions are determined actions; and you have argued that there are at least some actions for which we ascribe responsibility. Therefore, are you not purporting a sort of compatibilism yourself?” Van Inwagen would respond by saying that determinism, as he understands it, is in fierce opposition to his notion of free will. To Van Inwagen, the differences between free will and determinism make it such that it does not make sense to talk about free will while keeping determinism. “You fool,” he might say, “have I not just proven to you that determinism must be false and that free will exists?” After all, for Van Inwagen determinism works in such a way that the actual past entails the unique future. To say that the past determines some things, but not others, and that there is also the possibility of being responsible for what one does, brings up a few big problems. Van Inwagen would be uncomfortable with this idea because one would have trouble determining which actions were determined and which were not. Also, remember, Van Inwagen wants people to closely examine their convictions. When one does this, one is able to quickly realize that society does not seem to have much trouble punishing those whom it deems responsible for unwholesome actions. I believe that Van
Inwagen would challenge the compatibilist to attempt to come up with conceptions of free will and determinism that are not contradictory. Until then, Van Inwagen firmly believes that free will and determinism are mutually exclusive. In chapter five I attempt to provide such a compatibilist response.
Chapter 3

The incompatibility of Karma with Free will and Determinism

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a discussion of what I have determined to be the most important distinctions between Lynken Ghose’s conception of karma from chapter one, and Peter Van Inwagen’s conceptions of free-will and determinism from chapter two. The goal of this chapter is to argue that, while Ghose and Van Inwagen both attempt to explain similar concepts, the two thinkers do not come up with entirely compatible ideas. First, I look at the differences in the methods of study used by Ghose and Van Inwagen. Next, I examine Ghose’s notion of Buddha nature and argue that it plays an important part when looking at the notions of free will and free action; this concept is absent in Van Inwagen’s notion. By looking at this, I hope to provoke the reader to begin to think about how the addition of this feature changes the entire issue at hand. Ghose’s Buddha nature adds a variable to the mix which provides solutions to Van Inwagen’s determinism and free will. Following this, I explore Van Inwagen’s notion of the natural laws and provide illumination as to the differences between the use of the laws of nature for Van Inwagen and Ghose. Then I look at the different ways from which one might perform an action and attempt to explain in different terms the difference between ‘action from disposition’ and ‘action from ability’. Next, I look at Ghose’s explanation of the three poisons and argue that its addition adds to Van Inwagen’s ideas; Ghose requires that wisdom come into play, whereas Van Inwagen does not even consider this. Lastly, I look at Van Inwagen’s argument for the
requirement of moral responsibility and contrast it to Ghose’s notion of karma; one’s karma primarily determines one’s situation.

3.2 Method

Ghose, working with a close textual analysis of ancient texts paired with the input of commentators, provides an explanation of karma and its components without dealing with intricate philosophical problems in the way that Van Inwagen does in his work. Ghose’s explanation is not meant to be an attack on another philosophical view, but is rather just an exposition of karma and its components in a way that Westerners, or others who are not familiar with Buddhist philosophy, are able to understand. Ghose is not looking to provide a contentious notion so as to facilitate more work in the area. For Ghose, there is no compatibility problem as all of the notions that he is working with are component parts of his concept of karma.

Van Inwagen, on the other hand, works on providing an explanation of free will and determinism such that he can argue that the two are incompatible. Van Inwagen, rather than just trying to provide the reader with an understanding of the concepts he is working with, has ulterior motives for producing his work. Van Inwagen sets out to prove that free will and determinism are incompatible. Van Inwagen uses more contemporary sources and writes to respond to a philosophical debate over the “traditional” and “compatibility” problems and then proposes the “strongest” argument for the compatibility of free will and determinism.
3.3 Buddha Nature

Ghose’s notion of Buddha nature plays an important part when looking at the notions of free will and free action. One cannot look at the Buddha nature without first examining the no-self idea. The no-self idea is the idea that there is not a permanent or independent self or ‘soul’. According to Ghose, in Mahayana Buddhism there are two key concepts involved in the no-self view although they can be seen as equivalent to each other. They are Buddha nature and emptiness. According to Ghose, Buddha nature is a description of ‘original mind’.

The doctrine of original mind states that each of us has a deeper portion of the mind beneath the part of the mind that we are most familiar with; namely, surface disturbances such as fleeting emotions, random thoughts and so-forth. The majority of the descriptions of this original mind appear to come from meditative experiences. Mahayana Buddhism often states that when one meditates on the breath or any other object, the surface of the mind is stilled and then one can get in touch with the actual deeper nature of the mind itself. If we are able to get in touch with this deeper more fundamental part of the mind in a consistent way, then we can find ultimate peace.  

However, as Ghose points out, it is important to realize that this original mind or Buddha nature is not to be understood as a ‘soul’ or an independently existing entity, but rather that it is intertwined with the rest of the world. Also, Ghose points out that in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition all sentient beings are considered to have the same Buddha nature, such that no being could have a different original mind or Buddha nature. Ghose explains that Buddha nature, as he understands it, is considered to be made of the same material that the rest of reality is made from, contrary to the Western notion of an immaterial self. Ghose compares this notion of Buddha nature to Karen Horney’s ‘real-self’ concept, in that both the real-self and Buddha nature explain

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56 Ghose, Lynken. 2007. p. 260
the deeper level of being beyond one’s thoughts and emotions. Both theories credit the use of greater awareness as the way in which one can reach their Buddha nature or real-self.

Now, having briefly looked at Ghose’s concept of Buddha-nature, one has established that it is not to be understood as a ‘soul’ or an independently existing entity, but rather that it is intertwined with the rest of the world. Recall that all sentient beings are considered to have the same Buddha nature, and Buddha nature is made of the same material as the rest of reality. It was also said that Buddha nature can be explained as the deeper level of being beyond one’s thoughts and emotions. Practice in mindfulness and awareness can allow one to get in touch with this Buddha nature. This standpoint of Buddha nature is the standpoint from which enlightened individuals come to act.

Van Inwagen’s notion of determinism does not have such an idea. Van Inwagen’s determinism is silent when it comes to what is going on in the mind of the individual. Rather, it has no bearing on anything that an individual has in his/her head because anything that he/she is currently experiencing was determined by the individual’s actual past. For Van Inwagen’s determinism, one who practices mindfulness and awareness would be determined by the past to practice mindfulness and awareness. This individual would be determined to get in touch with his Buddha nature. If one is in touch with one’s Buddha nature then one is able to act most freely and not produce karmic fruits. However, this is the opposite of what Van Inwagen wants to say. In contrast, Van Inwagen would most likely argue that it is not possible to have actions that are not caused and do not cause other actions. For Van Inwagen, if determinism is true, then all actions are caused actions.
3.4 Laws of Nature

In chapter two, while developing an understanding of determinism and free will, the idea of “laws of nature” which apply to all things in existence all of the time were explored.

According to Van Inwagen, a law of nature must contain the following:

1. The phrase ‘is a law of nature’ is a real predicate: it is typically and properly used in ascribing certain property to certain object (unlike, say, ‘exists’, according to Kant, or ‘is good’, according to R.M. Hare);
2. The objects that have this property are sentences or propositions (non-linguistic entities expressed by sentences) or whatever it is that are the bearers of truth-value: anything that is a law is also either true or false;
3. Whether a proposition or sentence is a law is independent of what scientists or others happen to believe or happen to have discovered: a proposition, if it is a law, is unchangeably and objectively so, just as, according to the prevailing view of mathematics, a proposition, if it is a theorem, is unchangeably and objectively so, whatever mathematicians or others happen to believe or happen to have proved.\(^{57}\)

According to Van Inwagen, these laws of nature are what determine our unique present. If determinism is true, no one has a choice about anything, because one is actually just caused to do what they do by way of the laws of nature. Van Inwagen’s conception of free will contains a notion of the laws of nature, but these laws of nature are not as all-encompassing. Rather, there are laws of nature, but they do not cause all events.

Ghose’s conception of karma, as cetana, is different from Van Inwagen’s conception of the laws of nature for a number of reasons. Ghose’s cetana is a description of the mechanism through which individuals (sentient beings) may be caused to do some act. Ghose’s cetana can be said to be a weaker force than that of the laws of nature in that cetana is not a rule or a formulaic rubric by which one could identify the input and know what the output will be. Ghose’s cetana is not a universal force, but is something that one experiences privately as the

\(^{57}\) Van Inwagen, Peter. 1983. p.6
internal motivating force, which may cause one to perform an action. The laws of nature, however, exist as external rules which govern the physical world.

For example, imagine that Jim walks into a barbershop. One can begin to ask all sorts of questions about the situation. For Van Inwagen’s conception of determinism to be true, Jim was caused by the actual past, such that there was an event before Jim’s entering the barbershop that causally determined Jim to go into the barbershop. There must be some force which must be unknown to Jim, and ourselves for that matter, that for some reason, given the actual past, will cause Jim to enter the barbershop. According to Van Inwagen’s conception of determinism, Jim had no choice in the matter, but was caused, or forced, to go into the barbershop when he did.

If one explores this example from the perspective of Van Inwagen’s free-will notion, one gets a very different explanation for the situation. One does, however, need some more information about the situation so as to fully explicate the notion’s application. Jim, being an intelligent young adult knows that getting his hair cut will allow him to present himself in the most professional way. After all, Jim has an interview for a high level office position at OfficeWorld, and Jim has been living with his parents for the past few years, so he has not been very keen on keeping up his appearance. For the past few years, Jim has had the disposition of relying on his parents to take care of his basic needs and even provide him with various electronic games. Jim appears to have a disposition to not cut his hair when he does not have to provide for himself. After all, for the past few years this has proven to be true for Jim; he has not cut his hair and has done just fine in his situation. At some point in time, Jim’s father lets Jim know about a position at OfficeWorld that has just opened up and that Jim ought to apply. After a phone call, Jim is asked to come in for an interview.
According to Van Inwagen, a man has free will:

When he has to choose between two or more mutually incompatible courses of action---that is, courses of action that it is impossible for him to carry out more than one of---each of these courses of action is such that he can, or is able to, or has it within his power to carry it out.\(^{58}\)

The example of Jim fits this description; either Jim can walk into the barbershop, or Jim cannot walk into the barbershop.

In Van Inwagen’s conception of free will, remember, Van Inwagen explains the importance of the notion of ‘action from a disposition’ and ‘actions from ability’. The example shows how Jim had the disposition to not cut his hair, and proved this by not cutting his hair for a few years. Jim had the ability to cut his hair the entire time that he was not cutting his hair, but he did not do so because of his disposition. However, Jim, by walking into the barbershop for a haircut has, according to Van Inwagen, originated a change in his environment. Jim acts freely by acting, not from his disposition, but out of his ability to originate change. At this point it is important to remember that the notion of free will and the notion of determinism are both looking to explain how it is that people come to do the things that they do; determinism requires that all events are caused by previous events, and free will requires that not all events are caused by the past but that change can be originated in one’s environment in the present. This is not to say the two theories are mutually exclusive, but I will wait to talk more about this in the following chapter.

In order to look at our example from Ghose’s notion of karma, we must first assume that Jim is not an enlightened individual. The example makes no mention of this, and it would be difficult to work Jim’s past into a conception of an individual with no self-seeking desires. After

\(^{58}\) Ibid. p.8
all, Jim seemingly was selfish in relying on his parents to provide for all of his needs for the past few years. Jim had produced an amount of karmic fruit by performing unwholesome actions, which was accompanied by cetana. If one turns back to chapter one, one can see that “if an action is not made with ignorance and craving, then it is not the kind of action that will produce any residual effect.”

59 Remember that cetana was defined as a karmic fruit made of “a psychic volitional impulse or feeling of being pulled in one direction or the other.”

60 I will discuss the importance of the possibility of Ghose’s enlightened individual later, but for now, let us continue with the example.

Jim, being influenced by cetana, will have a sense of being pulled in one direction or another. In order to more fully explain, imagine that Jim’s father told Jim that he must move out within a month. Jim must now get a job to support himself. Jim is physically able to get a haircut, but now his father has produced in him a fear of being homeless. This fear will weigh heavily on Jim for the next month and provide a sort of disposition from which Jim will get his hair cut. The fear which has arose in Jim’s mind is a part of Jim’s cetana. Fear provides him with a motivation to cut his hair; without such motivation, Jim’s cetana pulled him to leech resources from his parents. His prior cetana did not provide him with motivation to cut his hair. In this instance, one can say that Jim did not freely choose to go to the barbershop, but rather that he was influenced by his cetana. Jim was caused to go to the barbershop.

From the above example, one can see that the laws of nature play a part in all of the working notions. The laws of nature appear to be very strict and provide causation in a formulaic way for determinism. If one had all of the information about the past and knew all of

59 Ibid. p.7

60 Ghose, Lynken. 2007. p. 266
the laws of nature, then one would be able to predict the future, because there are no uncaused events and the unique future is determined by the actual past. For Van Inwagen’s conception of free will, one can see that the laws of nature still apply, but that there is also the possibility that an individual can act from ‘ability’ and not from a ‘disposition’ such that change may be originated in their environment.

Finally for Ghose’s conception of karma, cetana has been argued to act in ways similar to the laws of nature, but not as strongly. In the next section I hope to further explain the importance of the possibility of Ghose’s enlightened person, such that a reader may fully understand how the laws of nature work within Ghose’s conception.

3.5 Possibility of action from ‘ability’

Van Inwagen’s conception of determinism, requiring that no one has a choice about anything that he or she does, leaves out one key factor that is touched on in Van Inwagen’s conception of free will. This factor is more fully explicated by Ghose’s conception of karma; the possibility of an individual to perform a different sort of action.

A reader has seen, in Van Inwagen’s conception of free will, two types of actions. There are actions from a disposition and actions that one performs from one’s ability. Actions from a disposition do not cause a contradiction with Van Inwagen’s conception of determinism because these dispositions can just be explained as being caused by one’s past. Action from one’s ability is problematic, though. This type of action is problematic because it entails that there is a possibility that some actions are not caused by the past but are set in motion in the present. These actions represent the origination of change in one’s environment. Van Inwagen does a fine job
of explaining what these actions are, and what they entail, but I believe that he does not do a good enough job of explaining that this sort of action is possible.

However, Ghose in his conception of karma provides what I believe is an account of the necessity of enlightened action that Van Inwagen’s account of free will is missing. Van Inwagen’s conception of free will only entails that there are some actions that are not caused by the past, while Ghose’s explanation entails that enlightened actions lead to the ceasing of the production of karmic fruits and cetana. Such actions do not produce a psychic residue in the mind after being performed. This leads to one’s ability to freely act apart from the mental force of cetana. This conception differs from that of Van Inwagen’s free will because in Ghose’s opinion a person may only act freely if one is performing enlightened action as an enlightened individual. Such a conception provides for a way for one to free oneself from the mental causality of cetana and karmic fruit, but does not allow one to circumvent the laws of nature.

What is it about enlightened action that allows it to do this? If one looks back to chapter one, she remembers that the action of Ghose’s enlightened person is entirely unselfish and free of ignorance. The action of Ghose’s enlightened person does not produce future karmic fruit and also purifies the residues that have been built up in a person’s mind from previous selfish, ignorant action. In the Theravada tradition “through one’s willpower, one deepens one’s meditation practice and refines one’s morality, and have reached a certain level of profundity that allows one to act in an entirely non-selfish way.”

According to Ghose, unenlightened action is performed from a sense of compulsion to do or not do something. This compulsion or unhealthy motivation according to Horney can be

61 Ibid. p.267
characterized as ‘should’ statements. People feel the need to perform an action because they feel that they ‘should’ do it. These compulsions could also be characterized as ‘need’ statements (i.e. I ‘need’ to take out the trash). This is the way that most actions are performed. If I were to ask someone, “Why are you doing x?” he will most likely tell me that he is doing x because he needs to do x in order to do y. In this case, the individual never has a feeling of ‘wanting’ to perform the action, but does it only out of a sense of compulsion. Healthy motivation can be characterized as ‘want’ statements, in which an individual feels the need to do something because she ‘wants’ to do it. These are the type of actions that can be candidates for enlightened action, but this does not fully illustrate the point. After all, people often casually say things like “I want an ice cream cone.”

“I want an ice cream cone” may be enough to satisfy Van Inwagen’s requirement for free will, if my want of an ice cream cone is brought about not by the causality of the past, but by my ability to want an ice cream cone. My getting an ice cream cone may be seen as the origination of change within my environment. However, my want of an ice cream cone is probably due to, what Ghose explains as, the three poisons: greed, hatred, and delusion. My verbalization of my desire for an ice cream cone could also be caused by my disposition of loving ice cream cones and buying them whenever I can. In this way, my ‘want’ of an ice cream cone is shown to be neurotic and selfish. However, I may also want the ice cream cone because I just walked past a sad-looking stray dog on the street and wanted to brighten its day by giving it an ice cream cone. If I get the ice cream for the dog, and I am not caused to do so by greed, hate, or ignorance, then I may be freely wanting the ice cream cone. Recall the passage from chapter one in which Bhikkhu Payutto says:
With no desire, greed or hatred, there is not karma. With no karma, there are no karma results to bind the mind. With no karma to bind the mind, there emerges a state of clarity which transcends suffering. The mind which was once a slave of desire becomes one that is guided by wisdom, directing actions independently of desire’s influence.\(^{62}\)

If I am free from the influence of desire, I can apply wisdom to the situation, see what the situation needs, and do what needs to be done. In this simplified case, there was a dog that looked as if it would benefit from a kind gesture and a sugary snack. Had I been influenced by desire, I might have kept the ice cream cone for myself. If I was a slave to desire, I would think myself crazy to get an ice cream cone, be about to eat it, and then give it away to a dog.

It is important to remember that enlightened action is not the type of action that is able to be performed by all individuals, at least not without training. Remember “through one’s willpower, one deepens one’s meditation practice and refines one’s morality, and have reached a certain level of profundity that allows one to act in an entirely non-selfish way.”\(^{63}\) Therefore, it takes a refinement of one’s meditation practice and morality to reach a point at which the individual may perform enlightened action.

Van Inwagen’s conception of determinism does not allow for one to circumvent the influences of the past so as to be free to act in the present. Enlightened action therefore, is not possible if determinism is true.

Van Inwagen’s conception of free will allows for an individual to perform an action from one’s ability, and not from a disposition to do so. However, it is not clear that individuals are ever in a position from which they can say that they are not acting from a disposition. After all, is not my ability to drink soda tempered by my disposition to drink water? Even if I decide to

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\(^{62}\) Payutto. 1993. p.78

\(^{63}\) Ghose, Lynken. 2007. p. 267
drink water, and I do not feel compelled to do so, I may be being influenced by the three poisons: greed, hatred, and ignorance. If this is the case, I am not acting freely.

Ghose’s conception of karma requires the possibility of enlightened action, otherwise human beings would just be working with a deterministic worldview, such as that conceived by Van Inwagen’s determinism. Enlightened action, for Ghose, is the only sort of action that can be considered to be free because it is not influenced by greed, hatred, and ignorance. The possibility of such action is the defining feature of Ghose’s conception, and he takes it further by explaining how it is that one may become able to freely act apart from the influence of desire. Van Inwagen’s conception of free will does not specify who is able to perform free actions, but only tells readers what it would be like to act freely. Ghose actually talked to people who are considered to be enlightened individuals. These individuals are not theoretical forms or ideas, but are actual living examples of Buddhist philosophy. They act freely, according to Ghose. Therefore, there is an important feature of Ghose’s conception that requires an individual to be free from the influence of the three poisons in order to act freely.

3.6 The three poisons

According to Van Inwagen, a person can be said to act freely when he originates change in the environment, acting from his ability and not from a disposition to do so. However, Van Inwagen’s conception differs from Ghose’s conception of free action because Van Inwagen does not require that wisdom play a part in determining what action is to be performed. For example, imagine that Jim has gotten his hair cut and is walking in to his interview at OfficeWorld. Upon entering, Jim pulls out a fishing rod and begins casting it down the hall. On Van Inwagen’s free will interpretation, one can look to see if Jim typically does this upon entering business offices. If
he does not have a disposition to do so, then one could say that Jim originated a change in his environment by casting his fishing rod in the business office. For Van Inwagen, Jim freely chose to cast his fishing rod in the business office.

But if one tries to examine the story from the perspective of Ghose’s notion of karma, then she runs into a bit of a problem. While Jim’s action fits Van Inwagen’s notion of free will, his action cannot be considered to be free in Ghose’s interpretation. Jim’s action cannot be considered to be free because it, quite obviously, will produce both mental (cetana) and physical karmic fruits.

For example, after casting his fishing rod in the business office, Jim was tackled by security personnel and escorted off of the premises. He now has to tell his father what has happened and Jim has to deal with the punishment his father comes up with. This wonderfully illustrates the difference between Van Inwagen’s free will and Ghose’s free action. According to Ghose, Jim was not acting freely. Jim, although not acting from a disposition, was not guided by wisdom in making his choice to cast his fishing rod in the business office. Ghose would argue that Jim must have been acting from a sort of disposition, as one could give no other reason for his attempted fishing in the business office of OfficeWorld. Jim must have been influenced by a combination of the three poisons such that his action was selfish. Perhaps Jim began casting his fishing rod in the business office because he wanted to attract attention to himself; this would be a selfish motivation. If Jim were able to give a good reason, such as there was a giant shark in the office and he was trying to catch it to save everyone who was in danger, then Ghose might agree that Jim may have been acting freely.
3.7 The role of morality

As developed in chapter two, Van Inwagen believes that humans have free will, and he believes that his conception of determinism must be flawed, if not false. For Van Inwagen’s determinism to be true, moral responsibility cannot exist because of the following argument:

1. The past determines the unique future; the past is responsible for the future.
2. There was a past before any human existed.
3. Humans are not responsible for the future.
3.1 If a human is not responsible for the future, then he cannot be responsible for anything.
4. Therefore, if determinism is true, then free will does not exist.  

Moral responsibility is impossible because of premise 3, and 3.1. This makes sense, if humans are not responsible for the future, then humans cannot be responsible for anything. The problem only arises when one thinks of the implications of this. If determinism is true, then none of the actions that individuals do have any bearing on their morality because they are not responsible for what they do. Therefore, mass murder, thievery, extortion, rape, and slavery are all things for which people are not morally responsible and were caused by the past and could have occurred in no other way. Also, there would be no point in punishing wrongdoers because they were a sort of ‘victim’ of determinism, in the same way that those who were harmed by the destructive actions are ‘victims’ of the agent.

Van Inwagen points out that human beings do not want to accept this conclusion. Rather, people want to say that humans are at least partially responsible for what they do; such that it would make sense to punish someone for performing an action because they actually had a choice in the matter. For example, imagine that Jim, our interesting character from our previous examples, was walking home from his failed interview attempt when he sees a small child

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64 Van Inwagen, Peter. 1983. p.188
playing on a boat-dock located nearby. Imagine that Jim walks over and nudges the small child so that she goes tumbling down into the water.

According to Van Inwagen, when one encounters a situation such as this, he might say something like “Oh my goodness! What a terrible act that Jim has done!” If at a later time, he finds that the circumstances were such that on his walk home Jim had received a phone call in which the caller told Jim that if he did not push the child into the water that his entire family would be killed, this new information about Jim and his situation might cause him to say “Jim was not responsible for what he did; he was forced to do it.” According to Van Inwagen, one cannot continue to say that “Jim has done a terrible act!” if one also wants to say that he is not responsible for it. Van Inwagen states; “To call an act ‘despicable’ is to censure its agent for performing it, while to say of an agent that he was not responsible for what he was doing when he performed an act is to excuse him for performing it; and one cannot simultaneously excuse and censure.”

Therefore, according to Van Inwagen, it is a common belief that is shared by all that responsibility for actions does, in fact, exist. He goes even further by saying; “in my view, the proposition that often we are morally responsible for what we have done is something that we all know to be true.” From this proposition, Van Inwagen concludes that because moral responsibility exists then there can be no debate as to the existence of free will; it is required.

If one looks at the issue of moral responsibility from the standpoint of Ghose’s notion of karma, one may see many similarities. One main difference emerges. For Van Inwagen, humans are responsible for some of the things that they have done; whereas for Ghose, what one ‘does’ produces karmic fruit and then one must deal with it. One’s karma, according to Ghose, is the

65 Ibid. p.208
66 Ibid. p.209
primary causal factor in determining one’s current circumstances. Basically, because the majority are not enlightened, and do not act from the standpoint of Ghose’s Buddha nature or original mind, all actions will produce karmic fruit, since they are all selfish actions and therefore they are responsible for their current situation.

This is different from Van Inwagen’s conception of one’s responsibility. While Van Inwagen only goes as far as to say that people are responsible for some of their actions, Ghose says that our actions determine our circumstances; each person is responsible for his or her own situation, which seems to me to show a higher amount of responsibility than what is found in Van Inwagen’s notion. For Van Inwagen, a person can condemn another for committing a wrongful act. In a way, the person is responsible for committing the act, and therefore needs to be punished; he is responsible for his punishment. Ghose takes it farther; he would say that the offender is responsible for not only his punishment, but also for being in a situation in which he commits the wrongful act, and for everything else that is part of his situation. This person would not be considered to be acting freely because they were under the influence of the three poisons.

While Ghose and Van Inwagen both attempt to explain similar concepts, the two thinkers do not come up with entirely compatible ideas. First, I examined the differences in the methods of study used by Ghose and Van Inwagen. Next, I looked at Ghose’s notion of Buddha nature and argued that it plays an important part when looking at the notions of free will and free action. I explored Van Inwagen’s notion of the natural laws and provided illumination as to the differences between the use of the laws of nature for Van Inwagen and Ghose. I looked at the different ways from which one might perform an action and explained the differences between ‘action from disposition’ and ‘action from ability’. I discussed Ghose’s explanation of the three poisons and argued that Ghose requires that wisdom comes into play, whereas Van Inwagen does
not even consider this point. Lastly, I looked at Van Inwagen’s argument for the requirement of moral responsibility and contrasted it to Ghose’s notion of karma; one’s karma primarily determines one’s situation.

I hope that the reader found this chapter to be helpful by arguing the main differences between the notions of the two thinkers, Ghose and Van Inwagen. As I move on to the following chapter, where I will be arguing similarities, the reader will understand that these two theories do have conflicting points. They do not fit nicely together. However, after one is able to understand the differences between things, it can become much easier to pick out similarities. It is my hope that the reader will be doing this as they follow along.
Chapter 4

The Compatibility of Karma with Free Will and Determinism

4.1 Introduction

In chapter three, I looked extensively at the differences between Peter Van Inwagen’s conceptions of determinism and free will and Lynken Ghose’s conception of karma. In part I of this chapter, I look at the similarities between the notions of the two thinkers. First I look at the notion of ‘action’ which has been developed by both thinkers previously in this project. Next I look at the similarities between the notion of dispositional action for each thinker, including a discussion of the feelings one has when one says “I should do x” as opposed to “I want to do x”. Following this, I examine both thinkers’ notions of acting from a ‘free’ standpoint. Next, I discuss what both Van Inwagen and Ghose have to say about one’s responsibility and the punishment of offending individuals. Lastly, I argue that Ghose’s notion of karma is not in contradiction with Van Inwagen’s notion of the laws of nature.

4.2 Action

This chapter begins where I began chapter one; I will look at the notion of ‘action’ for both Ghose and Van Inwagen. First, however, I want to turn to Ghose’s conception of karma. Remember that karma is both action and the effects of action. For Ghose, action can be verbal, mental, or physical. Therefore, karma can be verbal, mental or physical. The effects of action (karmic fruits/cetana/karma) are thus also verbal, mental or physical. Karmic fruits are produced
by the performance of ‘unwholesome’ or selfish action, which is, in turn, also a karmic fruit/cetana/karma. So, karma produces more karma, which produces more karma. For example, imagine that Ryan eats a chocolate-chip cookie. Ryan’s eating of the cookie is the result of Ryan’s past actions. Ryan’s eating of the cookie is Ryan’s experience of the ‘living out’ of a karmic fruit which was produced by Ryan’s karma. Ryan does not have a ‘free’ choice about the matter, but rather he was influenced by his cetana. Ryan’s cetana caused him to eat the cookie. Ryan is always influenced by his karma from his past, and will continue to create karmic fruits; more karma which he will need to address.

This notion is very similar to what I would consider an interpretation of Van Inwagen’s determinism found within Van Inwagen’s conception of ‘action’. Remember from chapter two that Van Inwagen’s determinism requires that all events have a cause. This cause is provided by the past, which is a succession of causes. The current situation has been caused by the actual previous situations/actions/events, and these events, in turn, will cause the unique future to come to pass. Return to the example of Ryan and the chocolate chip cookie. Ryan’s eating of the chocolate-chip cookie was determined by the actual past, which are the events that actually occurred in the past. Ryan is living out the consequences of past actions and his current actions will have implications for his future. However, he is not the agent from whom the causal chain was started, but rather he is born into the chain and then dies as part of it. Ryan’s entire existence is, therefore, determined for him. From these explanations it should be apparent to the reader that Ryan, in both examples, is stuck in a world of strict causal laws and in no way is acting ‘freely’. I argue that the notion of karma entails a sort of determinism that, while not being as strong as Van Inwagen’s, is also able to provide an explanation for the current state.
4.3 Dispositions

Van Inwagen argues that one can think of the actual past of a person as consisting of the events that actually occurred and also as the dispositions held by this person. After all, if everything is determined by the past, dispositions are as well. If a reader remembers from chapter two, action from the standpoint of a disposition is an example of a person reacting to a situation and not originating a change in his/her environment.

In order to simplify this explanation, it makes sense to think of one’s karma as one’s developing dispositions from which one can act only in reaction to one’s environment. From this simplification, I argue that one’s disposition is a standpoint from which determined actions are made.

One’s actual past, including one’s dispositions, may be understood to determine one’s unique future. Imagine that John, a 21 year old college student, drunkenly wandered into a busy street and is struck by a car. For Van Inwagen, John was determined by his actual past to be hit by a car in his unique future. John, having a disposition for overzealously drinking large amounts of alcohol and then wandering through the city streets on his way home, was determined by his disposition to be wandering in the street when he was struck by a car.

Ghose has a similar take on John’s situation. John is determined by his karma to be wandering in the streets when he was struck by a car. John, by being influenced by the karmic fruits (as dispositions) which resulted from his past unwholesome actions had no ‘choice’ in the matter. Rather, he was disposed to be wandering the streets on his way home. His wandering home is his reaction to his environment, and is not an action from wisdom, but from his disposition to wander drunkenly through the streets on his way home.
Both Van Inwagen’s determinism and Ghose’s karma entail one’s acting from a sort of disposition, which is a reaction to one’s situation and not one’s origination of change in it.

4.4 Should Do versus Want to Do

Ghose explains in chapter one that compulsive motivations can be verbalized with ‘should’ statements such as, ‘I should take out the trash.’ Healthy motivations can be verbalized as ‘I want to because I want to’ statements. The person who takes out the trash because it is what they ‘should’ do will have a different felt quality than the person who takes out the trash because it is what they want to do. The person who takes out the trash because they feel that they should do it is, most definitely, influenced by the felt quality of ‘should’. The reader should be able to relate to this notion. How many times have you been told to do something that needs to be done, and then gone to do them solely because they need to be done? Now think of a time that you chose to do something because you wanted to do it. There is a different felt quality for each situation. In one situation you were motivated by external forces such as your mother tells you to clean your room. In the other situation, you were motivated by internal forces; you in a way caused yourself to do what you did by wanting to do it. Your wanting to do it is what motivated you to do what you did.

Resonating with Ghose, Van Inwagen states that there are forces called the laws of nature. These laws of nature can be considered to be a sort of external motivation. However, if one remembers that in order for determinism to be true, then the actual past must entail the unique future. Thus, all external and internal motivations are part of this actual past which entails the unique future. It may seem as if one’s motivations cannot be the cause of one’s actions, but this is not the case. There is nothing to say that these motivations cannot be the
cause of one’s actions, since these motivations will have been produced by the actual past that came before him as the unique future.

For Van Inwagen’s conception of free will, one can see internal motivations, such that the agent is being caused to do something, expressed as one’s dispositions. For example, my constant refusal to go line-dancing with my friends is caused by my disposition towards line dancing; namely, that I do not enjoy it. External motivations are very similar, in that they are the causes of one’s dispositions. Remember the example from chapter two when John fell out of a tree. When John fell out of the tree, he was injured such that he could no longer climb a tree. Thus, if he were asked if he wanted to go tree-climbing, John would refuse. By injuring himself, John has made himself unable to climb trees safely, and as a consequence he has developed the disposition towards tree climbing such that he will not climb until he has healed.

For Van Inwagen and Ghose, these ‘should’ and ‘want to’ examples allow us to see the internal and external motivations at play in one’s situation. The external forces are karmic fruits which one has produced through their performance of unwholesome action, or external forces (as physical karmic fruits) are determined by the actual past and determine a unique future. Either way, the external forces are argued to be deterministic in nature. Likewise, the internal forces are cetana, mental karmic fruits, which also serve to further determine one’s actions though do so internally as motivations and desires. Even though these are mental and not physical, their influence is just as great and is able to cause one to act.

4.5 Freedom

According to Van Inwagen, free will requires that not all actions are determined by the past, such that it is possible for an agent to originate a change in his environment instead of
reacting to it. When one reacts to one’s environment one is caused, or determined, to do something. For example, if I toss a ball to John, he will either react appropriately or he will get hit with the ball. John’s action is caused by my throwing the ball to him. My action of throwing the ball, without being caused to do so in response to perhaps a rude remark by John, was not determined by the past. If I threw it as a reaction to something to John had just said, then my action was determined by the past.

Similarly, Ghose says that not all actions are determined by one’s karma; enlightened action is free-action. In this case, it appears that Ghose is able to provide a more detailed description of what type of action can be considered to be free. From these two ideas, one can say that not all actions are determined by the past, and these actions are the actions performed by enlightened individuals. Recall that Ghose’s enlightened individuals do not act in reaction to their environment, but rather as individuals who originate changes in their environment. It is important to understand that the possibility of non-determined action is given a criterion for which such action may come about; enlightened action is not determined action. Thus, enlightened action is not caused by psychological impulse. Enlightened people do not accumulate karma, as they have eliminated ignorance and craving. Now, there is an explanation for the possibility of free will. This must be completed by one who does not act in reaction to her environment but instead originates changes in it and is not determined by the past. Therein also lies an explanation of who can act from this standpoint: enlightened individuals. These individuals are able to perform freely, because they are not acting from a standpoint of ignorance and craving.

It is now possible to draw some conclusions about the past’s determination of one’s unique future. If a person is not enlightened, then his/her actions will be made from the
disposition of ignorance and craving, and thus his/her actions will be determined by his/her disposition.

4.6 Responsibility

Now I examine the issue of moral responsibility. For Van Inwagen, people are at least partially responsible for the things that they do. Peter Van Inwagen wants to say that individuals are at least sometimes morally responsible for what they do. Since it is said that humans are responsible for some of the things they have done, people must have had a choice in the matter; otherwise, the notion of responsibility falls apart. Society says that someone is responsible for his/her actions. If Sally stabs John, then Sally is the agent which performs the action of stabbing. In order to punish Sally for her actions, one must be able to say that she was responsible for the action. This is what the court system is, typically, used for. A person is brought before a jury to decide if the person is responsible for committing the actions of which he/she has been accused. In the case of mentally insane persons, a jury may find the defendant to be not-guilty based upon an evaluation of the individual’s mental state. If it can be determined that the person was not in her “right mind,” she may be found to be “not-guilty” for her action. The verdict of “not-guilty” is equivalent to saying that she was not responsible for the action that she performed.

For Van Inwagen, the issue of responsibility lies in whether or not an agent had a choice in committing a wrongful act, which is worthy of punishment. Determinism cannot be true, according to Van Inwagen, because according to his argument inquired into in chapter two:

1. The past determines the unique future; the past is responsible for the future.
2. There was a past before any human existed.
3. Humans are not responsible for the future.

Van Inwagen, Peter. 1983, p.188
3.1 If a human is not responsible for the future, then he cannot be responsible for anything.
4. Therefore, if determinism is true, then free will does not exist.

Free will must exist if society is to be able to justify the punishment of wrongdoers; otherwise the punishment that is carried out is carried out on an individual who was not responsible for his actions. This would be similar to punishing a car for running out of gas, and I hope that the reader agrees that this would not be an intelligent action.

For Ghose, there is a difference in what he wants to say people can be held to be “responsible.” In one sense, a person is responsible for creating his or her current situation, as his or her past actions have been made with ignorance and craving. Thus, an individual’s karma, which she is responsible for, determines her existence. However, in another sense, individuals are not acting freely, during their acquisition of karma. If this is true, then they cannot be held to be fully responsible for their current situation. Individuals can say that it is their disposition and not their ability that is responsible for their situations. Dispositions serve to provide reactions to our environment, but they do not originate a change in the environment.

If a reader now looks to Ghose’s notion of an enlightened individual, he can liken this notion to that of a pilot who is flying a plane manually. This pilot must act, not from a disposition, but from a more active standpoint. His actions are not reactive, but are made from his ability to actively originate change in his environment. Ghose’s enlightened individual is no longer influenced by ignorance and craving, and therefore, does not have to worry about these influences coming into play. He can steer the plane freely. His free action is performed with wisdom, as opposed to being performed from a disposition.

In conclusion, individuals can be said to be more responsible for their actions once they have become enlightened. In fact, I believe Ghose’s enlightened person is fully responsible for
their actions. If someone were to speak to a determined person and ask him about his responsibility for his actions, this person could say that he is fatalistically determined to perform all of his actions, and therefore, has no say in determining his future. In this case, he would say that he is not responsible, and he may even say something that reflects his perceived helplessness such as “I had no choice” or “It just happened.” If one were to ask an enlightened individual if she is responsible for her actions, she will most assuredly say that she is fully responsible. After all, this enlightened individual has developed her meditation technique along with cultivating wisdom such that her actions are performed from wisdom. It does not make sense to talk about dispositional wisdom, such that when one encounters a situation he deals with it from the standpoint of wisdom. Wisdom is a dynamic standpoint which allows the enlightened individual to understand a situation and do what she decides is the best thing for her to do. This means that Ghose’s enlightened individuals are more responsible for what they do, because they actively decide what it is that they do. For the determined person, there is no choice to be made; there is only an action dictated by disposition.

The unenlightened person can be said to be responsible, as stated earlier, in one way. The unenlightened person acts from ignorance and craving and continues the production of karmic fruits. These karmic fruits, as stated in chapter one, can be both mental (cetana) and physical. These physical karmic fruits could be manifested on the individual as some sort of external punishment chosen by others. For example, it could happen that Sally must live out the consequences of her karmic fruits after she is arrested, charged, tried, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison for stabbing John. In this way, one can say that Sally is responsible for what happened, even though she was not completely free to act in her situation. She was being influenced by her karmic fruits at the time that she stabbed John. However, consider a scenarios
in which Sally is an enlightened individual. Through meditation and her derived wisdom, she decided that stabbing John will prevent him from shooting up the local post-office. When this enlightened Sally stabs John, she is fully responsible for her actions. She was not driven by ignorance and craving, but was compelled by wisdom to stab John in order to prevent greater harm. Regardless of whether Sally is arrested and sentenced, or praised as a hero, enlightened Sally is more responsible than unenlightened Sally.

4.7 Laws of Nature

I spent a good part of chapter three explaining how Van Inwagen’s conception of determinism entails the laws of nature, and that Ghose’s notion of karma did not have much of a place for them. However, the last chapter served to highlight the differences between the thinkers, this chapter serves to highlight their similarities. One area, which I purposely did not fully explicate, is this idea of the laws of nature.

Remember, for Van Inwagen, laws of nature are universally applicable. They affect all things at all times. There are no exceptions. These laws of nature are things like “an object that has mass, also has an attractive force which we call gravity.” This notion is true, or at least appears to be so and people have no way of determining otherwise. To prove the theory of gravity false would require one to find an object which has mass and yet no attractive force associated with it. Ghose’s notion of karma is not in opposition to a notion such as this. In fact, the only problem that I found him to have with it is that Ghose’s notion requires that there must be more than laws of nature which are responsible for determining the way all things are. One’s cetana is not universal so it cannot be considered to be a law of nature. However, if one looks at
the notion of cetana from the context of gravity, he may have found a solution to this very problem.

Gravity can be considered to be ‘private’ or individualized to each massed object, such that an object with the mass of our Sun will have a greater gravitational force than an object with the mass of a grain of rice. Similarly, each individual will have a different ‘degree’ of cetana. Yet, just like gravity, cetana is still able to be considered as a universal force. All unenlightened humans possess an amount of cetana of varying strengths, which depend on one’s past, unwholesome actions. Thus, karma can be said to be a ‘law of nature’ which applies to all humans, and enlightened individuals have found a way to halt their production of it. This would be akin to a massed object losing its mass, and therefore losing its gravitational field. The law of nature that says that massed objects have gravity is just like the law of nature that unenlightened individuals have karma. Karma still applies universally, just like the law of attraction is universal. But just like gravity needs to have mass in order to exist, karma needs unenlightened persons in order to exist.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at the similarities between the notions of the two thinkers. First I looked at the notion of ‘action’ which has been developed by both thinkers previously in this project. I explored the similarities between the notion of dispositional action for each thinker, including a discussion of the feelings one has when one says “I should do x” as opposed to “I want to do x”. Following this, I examined both thinkers’ notions of acting from a ‘free’ standpoint. Next, I discussed what both Van Inwagen and Ghose have to say about one’s
responsibility and the punishment of offending individuals. Lastly, I argued how Ghose’s notion of karma is not in contradiction with Van Inwagen’s notion of the laws of nature.
Chapter 5

Combining Ideas of East and West

5.1 Introduction

In chapters three and four, I have investigated the similarities and differences between Ghose’s understanding of karma and Van Inwagen’s understanding of free will and determinism. Based upon this study, in the first part of this chapter I will further elaborate on some of the comparisons made in chapters three and four. That is those comparisons which dealt with the possibility or requirement of free will and what kind of person is capable of performing such actions.68 I believe that Ghose’s position is able to step in where Van Inwagen has become stuck69, and provide a possible solution to Van Inwagen’s problem; namely, the problem that determinism is true and does not rule out the possibility of free actions. In the second part of this chapter, I look at how this new Van Inwagen-Ghose formulation provides a response to both the

68 Chapter 4 pg. 6 “From these two ideas, we can say that not all actions are determined by the past, and these actions are the actions performed by enlightened individuals, or individuals who are not acting in reaction to their environment but rather as individuals who originate changes in their environment.”

69 Chapter 4 pg. 7 “Determinism cannot be true, according to Van Inwagen, because according to his argument inquired into in chapter two (1) The past determines the unique future; the past is responsible for the future. (2) There was a past before any human existed. (3) Humans are not responsible for the future. (3.1) If a Human is not responsible for the future, then he cannot be responsible for anything. (4) Therefore, if determinism is true, then free will does not exist.”
Traditional and Compatibility problems. In the last part of this chapter, I examine a possible determinist response to the new formulation and provide a counter-response.

5.2 Who is free?

Chapter two provided a reader with an explanation of Van Inwagen’s conception of determinism. By altering Van Inwagen’s conception of determinism, the possibility of completely free-action, and therefore free will, may be argued to be available to only Ghose’s enlightened individual. In this way, human beings are able to remain in both of the thinkers’ good graces. After all, Ghose’s enlightened individual is not determined to act because he has developed his mind through meditative practice and has eliminated the influence of the three poisons. For Van Inwagen, the person with free will is a person who is capable, and does originate changes in his environment. This person does not merely react to his environment. Also, Ghose provides an explanation, which states that Buddhism provides a method by which one may become enlightened or free.

Finally there is an explanation for the way in which the current situation has been brought about. I argue that Van Inwagen’s determinism can be interchanged without much difficulty for Ghose’s notion of karma. Determinism states that the actual past determines the unique future. I do not believe that this conflicts with Ghose’s notion of karma. Ghose, however, does include the possibility of accidents. I believe that after some pressing, he may be willing to grant that even accidents may be caused by one’s karma. Remember that Van Inwagen believed that free will must exist because of the problem of moral responsibility. While I do not think that Van Inwagen would necessarily agree with me on this, I do believe that his theory is open to the following: Free will exists, but only for Ghose’s enlightened individuals. Only enlightened
individuals have removed all of the motivations and driving forces by which one is driven to do things, therefore they are free to act. Because of their freedom, they are responsible for the actions that they perform.

In order to appeal more readily to Van Inwagen and to make this a true compromise, one may even change this thesis to say: Free will exists, but only in the application of wisdom to a situation, such that a person is not acting from a disposition, but rather acts from the standpoint of wisdom which will dictate, possibly, a different action for similar situations. When one acts from a disposition, one responds to similar situations in the same way, every time. For example, if Jim were playing whack-a-mole, Jim will act from the disposition of ‘when a boffer-mole pops up, he strikes it on the head.’ Upon the popping of a mole, this Jim is fully determined to strike the mole back into its hole as best he can.

However, if Jim acts from the standpoint of wisdom, he may understand that by using his hands, instead of the clumsy mallet, he can strike the moles into their holes much faster. By applying such wisdom, Jim will achieve a higher score. I realize that this example could be explained in other ways, but allow the following explanation to illustrate the desired point. Instead of merely reacting to his environment, as from a disposition to follow the posted instructions, or hit the moles into their holes reactively, Jim is able to perform a different sort of act. He applies wisdom to the situation to understand what it is that is going on, namely moles pop-up, and the goal which is to put them back as fast as possible. He then continues to apply wisdom in order to figure out the best way to complete the task that the game has presented to him. After a second, he decides to use his hands to play the game, since he can move his two hands faster than swing a silly foam mallet. If someone were to come up to Jim and say “Hey!
You are cheating!” Jim would have to accept responsibility for doing so. He acted not in accordance with a disposition to follow the rules, but of his own free will.

However, if Jim were to be questioned as to the reason that he is playing the game with the mallet such as in the first case, he can provide a reason that is in accordance with his disposition to play the game correctly. One would not say that Jim is responsible for playing the game correctly, but that the game’s instructions and Jim’s disposition to blindly follow game instructions are responsible for Jim’s actions.

5.3 The Traditional and Compatibility problems

In chapter two, I mentioned two problems with which Van Inwagen, and many others, are concerned. The first problem is the traditional problem. The traditional problem is the problem that arises when one attempts to determine the compatibility of free will and determinism. The second problem, the compatibility problem, is the issue that if free will and determinism are compatible, then free will must entail determinism. If this holds true, then the traditional problem will disappear in light of this new one. It is at this point that I believe that a combination of both Van Inwagen’s and Ghose’s notions of free will, determinism, and karma is necessary in order to address these two problems.

In response to the traditional problem, I have argued that while the world is found to be mostly determined, such that the unique future is brought about by the influence of the actual past, there is still the possibility of action from the standpoint of free will by the possibility of enlightened individuals. Remember, Ghose’s enlightened individuals perform actions that are “neither black nor white,” do not lead to the production of karmic fruit, and therefore are actions which do not precipitate a causal chain. This is in opposition to unenlightened action, which will
always produce karmic fruit, and continue a causal chain of events. Remember, that Van Inwagen’s free-will is akin to acting from the standpoint of ability and not a disposition. Dispositional action, as stated before, is determined action. Action from the standpoint of ability is considered to be free-action. In order for my solution to the traditional problem to work, I must therefore conclude that most, if not all, of our actions are performed from a dispositional standpoint.

The compatibility problem remains to be addressed. Recall that the compatibility problem states that in order for free will and determinism to be compatible, free will must entail determinism, and therefore the traditional problem falls away. While this problem appears to be more complex than the last, I do not find this problem to be difficult at all. The situation seems to suppose that both free will and determinism must be the case at all times, and this would make this problem more difficult. However, if one moves to thinking about the possibility of both free will and determinism both playing a role at the same time, one runs into an issue. For example, if Jim is determined by his actual past to perform his current action and live out his unique future, then he cannot also be acting freely. This would be a direct contradiction. Rather, Jim can act from one of these standpoints at a time, and in no way can be both acting freely and acting out a determined action. Therefore, the compatibility problem has a solution. Jim can either be acting from a determined standpoint, or he can be acting freely. I argue that free will does not entail determinism, but rather a person can act from only one of these standpoints at a time.

5.4 Thought Experiment

Upon the completion of the last section, I was struck by the idea of a response to my solution to the compatibility problem. “Kiel,” the challenger might say, “how does Ghose’s
enlightened person become enlightened? If she is only able to act freely once she is enlightened, then is one not determined to become enlightened?” I think that it is safe to say that Ghose’s enlightened person is, in a way, determined to become enlightened. A person’s karma has determined one’s current situation, and therefore his or her future situation. According to Ghose, one becomes enlightened by eradicating the three poisons (ignorance, greed and craving) and by training oneself through the practice of meditation. If one becomes enlightened, then beforehand, he must have been determined to eradicate the three poisons and train himself in meditation. If this is the case, then another problem arises, which is a reformation of the compatibility problem. However, now it will be worded as ‘determinism entails free will.’

It is at this point that I believe I can say that there is a more hopeful light surrounding the notion of determinism entailing free will, as opposed to free will entailing determinism. It is as if a directional shift has been made. Instead of a completely determined world, there exists an understanding that it is possible for one to become able to act freely through training one’s mind to be free of the three poisons and practicing meditation. One may be determined to become enlightened, but one is not determined once he or she becomes enlightened. One’s actions, being neither white nor black, do not create karmic fruit such that other actions are caused. Ghose’s enlightened individual lives as a causing agent and originates changes in his situation instead of reacting to it; he is free.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I fit Ghose’s notion of karma together with Van Inwagen’s conception of determinism and free will, bringing about a new understanding of all notions. I then presented a discussion of the ‘traditional’ and ‘compatibility’ problems which led Van Inwagen to undertake
his project, and I illustrated how each might be answered by a combination of Ghose’s and Van Inwagen’s relevant notions. Then, I explored whether or not this combination has actually answered the questions, or has only brought up other issues. Lastly, I looked at the implications of this newfound combination of determinism and free will and concluded that this new interpretation provides a world in which there is the possibility for free action, while still requiring that determinism is true, albeit slightly reworded.

Upon developing an understanding of Van Inwagen’s conceptions of determinism, I felt as if his system was overbearing. It held no possibility for the execution of an action in any way other than in reaction to something else. I could not provide reasons for my behaviors in any way other than to say that I was determined by the past to perform this action and therefore, I am not responsible for my action. I have no say in what I do. Van Inwagen’s free will notion seemed to be incomplete, because it allowed for one’s ability to bring about possible futures, but did not recognize that one’s desire to bring about a possible future is influencing one’s actions that help it to manifest. The newfound combination that I have devised removes the impossibility of ever making a choice, and restricts this ability to Ghose’s enlightened individuals. However, as a reader has just seen in the last section, Ghose’s enlightened individual was, in a way, determined to become enlightened. Determinism entails free will, and therefore, there is the possibility of free will.
Bibliography


