
Reinterpreting Buddhist's No-self Theory: A Philosophical Study on Human Actions and Moral Responsibilities

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Abstract: The relation between human actions and moral responsibility for the consequences of the actions is a debatable topic in contemporary Buddhism. The reason is each action has either good or bad consequence(s). If consequence(s) of an action are good, the action is praiseworthy and rewarding. But if consequence(s) of an action are disastrous then the action is blameworthy. Buddhists endorse the concept of human actions and their consequences as they uphold the doctrine of *karma*. However, they deny the existence of a 'permanent self'. Few questions arise in this regard. If a permanent self does not exist then who guides a person to decide the course of an action? How does a person choose to perform an action of the many alternatives in a situation? Who takes responsibility for the consequences of an action? This paper attempts to answer these questions by reinterpreting the Buddhist's 'no-self' theory from epistemological and logical perspectives. While answering these questions, the paper discusses libertarianism, paleo-compatibilism, hard-determinism, and soft-compatibilism theories. It finds out which theory supports Buddhist's claim on human actions and moral responsibility for consequences of the actions. This paper argues that Buddhists while rejecting the existence of a 'permanent self' affirm the existence of impermanent psychophysical entities (*five skandhas*). The mereological sum of these psychophysical entities is known as a 'person' who performs an action. A person becomes morally responsible for the consequences of an action for the reason that it justifies the Buddhist's doctrine of *karma*.

Keywords: No-self theory, Moral Responsibility, Human Actions, Buddhism, Theory of Karma

1. Introduction

Buddhism repudiates the existence of a permanent self (*sabbe dhamma anatta*¹) and affirms the existence of impermanent psychophysical entities² that constitute a human being.³ The psychophysical entities are five *skandhas* that account for the illusion of the existence of a 'permanent self'. This illusion arises in human mind due to the ignorance of a fact that there is nothing permanent on this earth. Everything is momentary and in a constant flux. The possession of the ignorant mind tempts an individual to believe that he/she owns and achieves something. An ignorant mind compels one to believe that his/her name

imparts a unique identity in the society. Due to the possession of an ignorant mind, human beings tend to suffer. In Buddhism, 'suffering' is one of the noble truths. According to Finnigan, the principal cause of human suffering typically lies in an ignorant mind that fails to recognise the non-existence of a 'permanent self' [9].

While enunciating that human lives are full of suffering, Buddhists suggest the noble eightfold path (*āryāṣṭāṅgika-marga*) to eradicate suffering from human lives. The noble eightfold path is prescribed to eradicate ignorance from human minds and cease suffering to a great extent. Eradication of ignorance from human mind requires getting rid of the belief about the existence of a permanent self. Buddhists believe that an enlightened mind which discerns the four noble truths understands the world from an altruistic perspective, and thereby behaves to the worldly objects with responsibility and accountability.

Although Buddhists reject the existence of a permanent self, they uphold the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth [9]. They believe

1 It is found in the Dhammapada, verse 279. For English translation of Dhammapada text please see [34], and also see [26].

2 The five psycho-physical elements are; physical form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjñā*), volition (*saṅkhāra*), consciousness (*viññāna*) [37].

3 Buddhist no-self theory is regarded as a middle path between eternalist view of self and annihilation view of self [12, 19-21].

that *karma* is associated with one's rebirth on this earth and the relationship between these two doctrines ascertains that a person performs certain actions that have specific consequences (*karmaphala*). This belief is based on the fact that a good action (*karma*) accrues *karmic* merit and a bad action *karmic* demerit [9]. According to these *karmic* merits and demerits, results of an action (*karmaphala*) are categorized as good or bad. Good consequences of an action are praiseworthy and, bad consequences, such as violence, hatred, tragedy etc. are blameworthy. The consequences of an action determine the rebirth of an individual on this earth [9, 37].

Against this background, a few questions arise; If a permanent self does not exist, then who accrues *karmic* merit or demerit of an action? Who suffers and from whom sufferings should be eradicated? Who decides to adopt the noble eightfold path to get rid of ignorance and suffering? Who is an agent of an action? Who decides to perform an action out of the many alternatives in a given situation? Who is morally responsible for the consequence(s) of an action?

This paper attempts to answer these questions by reinterpreting the Buddhist's 'no-self' theory from Theravāda Buddhism perspective.⁴ Although Theravāda Buddhism school of thought denies the existence of a permanent self, but it affirms the existence of impermanent psychophysical entities (five *skandhas*). The paper asserts, in line with Siderits's view, that the mereological sum of impermanent psychophysical entities is known as a 'person' [39]. A person performs actions and becomes morally responsible for the consequences of actions for the reason that it justifies the Buddhist's doctrine of karma.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section critically examines Theravāda Buddhists' views on no-self theory. The second section attempts to answer the questions, who performs an action and who should take responsibility for the consequences of an action? The third section describes the Buddhist's notion of a 'person' who exercises free will in order to choose the course of an action and decides to perform the action out of many alternatives available in a given situation. The paper submits, by considering the compatibilist's view on determinism and free will, that a person is morally responsible for the consequences of his/her actions.

2. Buddhism and 'No-self' Theory

Buddhists do not accept the existence of a permanent self, as there is no *pramāṇa* that supports its cognition [25]. They endorse the view that a permanent self does not exist ontologically. This view is challenged by the Nyāya School; an orthodox school of Oriental Philosophy. The Naiyāyikas argue that a permanent self exists through time without any modifications.⁵ The existence of a permanent 'self' is not to

be apprehended as a physical body or a psychical element. The reason is a physical body requires a place for its existence and a psychical element such as desire, aversion, pleasure, pain etc., requires a bearer [41]. The physical body is mere a place for the occurrence of the experience, whereas 'self' is the actual experiencer of different experiences of cognition, desire, aversion, pleasure and pain [41]. The concept of 'self' is explained as an entity that is over and above the psychical and physical entities, and at the same time it is not to be comprehended as an amalgamation of both psychical and physical entities. It may be understood as a unique substance that has the distinct qualities, i.e. desire, aversion, volition, pleasure, pain and cognition (Nyāyasūtra; 1.1.10)⁶. These qualities are regarded as the mark of existence of a permanent self for the reason that it cannot be possessed by the brain and the body of a person.

Naiyāyikas convey that the concept of 'self' is described as a permanent, independent and an enduring entity. The term 'self' refers to the term 'I', where 'I' is the possessor or owner of a person's body and mind. It is the subject of one's experience of the worldly affairs. The reason is an experiencer experiences objects of the world and the experiencer cannot be other than a permanent and enduring self. Thus, a self is to be comprehended as an enduring entity in spite of it being involved in various forms of superficial changes [7].

Buddhists defend their view and assert that 'self' is neither a permanent entity nor an enduring entity. Rather, it is used to denote the impermanent psychophysical entities (five *skandhas*). This assertion is made in the Milindapañha⁷ with reference to the dialogue between the monk Nāgasena and the King Milinda. The dialogue between the King Milinda and the monk Nāgasena suggests that a 'permanent self' does not exist in the empirical world, but a person's body parts (physical elements) and mental events (psychical elements) actually exist. According to Vasubandhu (4th century C.E.), a self is neither a material nor an eternal entity. There is no permanent entity called 'self' exists in the empirical world. The notion of 'self' is reduced to the impermanent psychophysical entities those are continuously arising and ceasing. The denotation of the continuous arising and ceasing aggregate of impermanent psychophysical entities is known as 'self' or 'I' [25].⁸

In consequence of the denial of existence of a 'permanent self', the following questions arise;

Who performs an action?

Who should take responsibility for the consequence(s) of an action?

3. Human Actions and Moral

entity that contains memory, therefore permanent self exists. For more discussions on this topic and Buddhist reply on no-self theory, see [8]. For Vasubandhu reply on memory and recognition of an object, see [6] and [4].

6 *Icchā-dveṣa-prayatna-sukha-duḥkha-jñānāyatmanoliṅgam* [5].

7 Milindapañha is a text of non-canonical Pāli literature of Theravāda Buddhism.

8 Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośa and its commentary Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam reflect his philosophical inclination towards Vaibhāṣika-Sautrāntika school of Buddhism. In this sense, Vasubandhu's works represent Theravāda school of thought.

4 Buddhism is classified into Theravāda and Mahāyāna groups. We have used the term Theravāda instead of Hīnayāna because the term Hīnayāna is pejorative.

5 Naiyāyikas argue that permanent self exists without modification because a permanent self is required to hold memory of past experiences. That is, since we have memory of past experience and it cannot be possible without an unchanging

Responsibility

Human actions are linked to their consequences, which are either treated as good or bad. Good consequences are praiseworthy, and bad consequences, such as violence, hatred, tragedy, etc. are blameworthy. Consequences of an action are invariably associated with a performer or doer of that action. Taking responsibility for the consequences of an action presupposes the ontological and permanent existence of a doer of an action (a self) who decides the course of an action and performs the action.

A question erupts, does Buddhists accept the ontological existence of a 'person' (self) who performs an action and thereby morally responsible for the consequence of that action? According to Theravāda Buddhism, the existence of a self is not be considered as over and above the impermanent psychophysical entities. Rather, it is to be considered as conglomeration of preceding and succeeding steps of one's consciousness.⁹ In this regard, Theravāda Buddhists offer two interpretations of self.¹⁰ First, self as an owner of all psychophysical entities, and second, it is believed to be a denotation for the impermanent psychophysical entities [6, 17, 25]. When both these meanings are conflated in an argument, the fallacy of equivocation arises. Consider the following argument;¹¹

Moral responsibility is assigned to a self who is an agent of an action.

There is no permanent self in Buddhist philosophy.

Therefore, in Buddhist philosophy, there is no agent of an action and thereby there is no moral responsibility of an action.

This argument commits the fallacy of equivocation. The fallacy of equivocation states that when a term has two different meanings and it is used in two distinct propositions of an argument, a valid conclusion cannot be drawn from two premises taking them together. It violates the deductive argument rule that is, an argument must possess three and only three terms. Fallacy of equivocation is of three types; ambiguous major, ambiguous minor, and ambiguous middle.

This argument consists of two premises and a conclusion. The conclusion is drawn from the two premises. The conclusion is not true, because one of the premises is false. The reason is in the major premise and in the minor premise, the term 'self' is used for two different meanings. In the major premise, the term 'self' expresses about 'a person' (conglomeration of impermanent psychophysical entities)

who is an agent of an action, whereas in the minor premise the term 'self' states about an independent, enduring entity over and above psychophysical entities. In this case, we commit the fallacy known as ambiguous middle.

In order to avoid the fallacy of equivocation, it is proposed that the term 'self' may be used for 'person' to denote the impermanent psychophysical elements. A 'person' is thus regarded as the mereological sum of the causally connected momentary psychophysical elements [39]. The term 'person' may also be used for a convention that stands for the momentarily existing mereological sum of causally connected psychophysical elements. In this context, even if we consider a person has ontological existence and involves in the process of change, no fallacy will be committed. Rather, it would justify that a person denotes conglomeration of both physical entities (body parts) and psychical entities (feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousness) those are continuously arising and ceasing [36].

Theravāda Buddhists affirm the existence of a conventional 'person' and deny the existence of a 'permanent self' (*sabbe dhamma anatta*).¹² Gautama Buddha himself talked about 'person' in the Mahāparinirvāna-sūta which emphasized the existence of a conventional 'person'. Buddha said to his follower Ananda, "Make yourself your own refuge" [27].¹³ Considering this statement, one may argue if a 'person' does not exist, then how can a 'person' make his/her own refuge? It is quite obvious that Buddha does not refer to the permanent 'self' while using the term 'yourself' as he denies the very existence of a 'permanent self' in numerous occasions in his sermons (*sabbe dhamma anatta*). Perhaps, Buddha only referred to a 'person' in a conventional sense as the one who decides the course of an action and performs that action. Thus, it may be asserted that Buddha accepted the ontological notion of a 'person' who performs an action and is morally responsible for the consequences of that action. This assertion leaves a question that is answered in the next section- Does a 'person' have free will to decide the course of an action and consequently perform it?

4. Free Will, Determinism and Human Actions

The concept of a 'person' is central to the question of free will and moral responsibility of an action. If a person exercises his/her 'free will' in order to perform an action, he/she is morally responsible for the consequences of that action. It implies that if a person does not use his/her free will to decide the course of an action and performs it, he/she is not morally responsible for the consequences of that action [39, 30-32].

However, it cannot be simply asserted that free will exists in a person and thereby he/she is morally responsible for consequences of his/her actions. Inwagen [18] argues that if an effect is entirely determined by its previous cause, then free

9 Theravāda Buddhists analyse the self as a stream of consciousness [22].

10 The notion of self is debated by Naiyāyikas and Theravāda Buddhists [6, 25]. While debating the notion of self they interpreted the notion of self in two ways. First, self is an owner of psychophysical entities, and second, it is a denotation for the impermanent psychophysical entities. By 'owner of psychophysical entities', I mean that self is owner of the body (physical entity) where it resides. It is owner of experiences (psychical entity/phenomena). According to Naiyāyikas, all experiences belong to a self and hence self is the owner of experiences. In 'Refutation of a Theory of a Self', Vasubandhu argues against the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika notion of self as the owner of experience and thoughts [4]. Therefore, Theravāda Buddhists and Naiyāyikas were also aware of these two interpretations of self.

11 This argument is inferred from Goodman's [13, 14] and Repetti's [31] works.

12 See [1, 2, 36] for the discussion on conventional person.

13 *Attadipaviharatha, attasaranaanasarana.*

will does not play any role in deciding the course of an action. Further, if we accept the principle that anything happens on this earth is predetermined, we subscribe to the theory of ‘determinism’, and if determinism is considered to be true, then a person does not use his/her free will to decide the course of an action and in turn perform it. In this regard, a question arises, if an action performed by a person is predetermined, then how would he/she be held responsible for the consequences of that action? To put it in simple terms, if a person has no control over the causal conditions of his/her actions then how would he/she be the ultimate source of his/her decision and in turn perform the action? Further, it is a possibility that an action may not be determined by previous causal conditions, but it may occur due to the randomness. In this context, the performed action is beyond a person’s control. It implies that a person does not necessarily use his/her free will to decide the course of an action and perform it.¹⁴ Hence, a person is not morally responsible for the consequences of the action. This argument gives rise to a further question, i.e. do actions occur in this world due to randomness?

According to Theravādins, each and every action is causally conditioned and no action takes place due to randomness [13, 14, 29-32, 35, 36, 38]. As Buddha said, “when this is, that is; when this is arising, that arises; when this is not, that is not; when this is ceasing, that ceases” [27]. To put this argument in a symbolic form, we can write “when A is, B is; when A is arising, B arises; when A is not, B is not; when A is ceasing, B ceases”. This argument expresses that there is a cause for every action. It signifies that an action is causally determined. From this analysis, we may affirm that Theravāda Buddhists endorse the determinism theory.¹⁵ If determinism is considered to be true then who would be morally responsible for consequences of an action? Can we claim that Buddhists’ avoid the question of moral responsibility of an action?

It cannot be enforced on the Theravādins that they avoid the question of moral responsibility of an action. This is quite evident from the two facts that Buddhists subscribe to the notion of moral responsibility of an action. First, Theravādins reject Makkhali Gosāla’s arguments on fatalism. The view of Makkhali Gosāla is mentioned in the Majjhima Nikāya as;

“There is no cause or condition for the defilement of beings; beings are defiled without cause or condition. There is no cause or condition for the purification of beings; beings are purified without cause or condition. There is no power, no energy, no manly strength, no manly endurance. All beings, all living things, all creatures, all souls are without mastery, power, and energy; moulded by destiny, circumstances, and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes”. [23]

The theory fatalism states that anything occurring on this

earth is due to one’s fate.¹⁶ An individual’s fate is predetermined and cannot be changed.

Buddhists reject the fatalist’s arguments on human actions and confer the proposal that an individual’s decision to perform an action is controlled by his/her free will.¹⁷ They accept the theory of *karma* and rebirth, which state that an action is linked to its consequences (results). It is believed that an action and its consequences are inseparable from each other. It is evident from the Buddhists’ suggestion that if a person follows the noble eightfold path (*āryāṣṭāṅgika-marg*), he/she can eliminate suffering (*dukkha*) from the earthly life and stop the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*). If Buddhists had not accepted the notion of human actions and moral responsibility of the consequences of the actions then why did they suggest the noble eightfold path to eliminate suffering?

These analyses suggest that Buddhists did not avoid the question of free will and moral responsibility, and at the same time they did not explicitly also mention about the concept of ‘free will’. However, Buddhist scholars have explained what Buddhists could have stated on ‘free will’ from their commitment to other doctrines *pratityasamutpādvāda*, *anātmavāda*, *kṣanabhangavāda*, *karma* and rebirth theory, rejection of fatalism, and so on [13-15, 29-32, 35, 36, 38]. This paper critically examines Buddhist’s notion of free will with reference to (i) libertarianism (ii) paleo-compatibilism (iii) hard-determinism and (iv) soft-compatibilism theories. At the end, it will suggest which theory or theories would be best suitable for Buddhist to confirm their own established doctrines.

Libertarianism states that free will exists and determinism is false. Paleo-compatibilism expresses that there is no real incompatibility found between free will and determinism. It is so because both free will and determinism are two different realities of a discourse. Determinism expresses about ultimate level reality, whereas free will enunciates about conventional level reality. Hard determinism states that determinism is true and free will does not exist for a human action. Soft-compatibilism suggests that free will and determinism are essentially compatible to each other. The reason is a person can choose an action out of many alternatives and perform the action in a given situation.

Griffiths explains Buddhist’s views on libertarian notion of free will as follows:

“Things like personal appearance, physical defects, mental capacity, place of birth, social class, moral character of one’s parents— all these are determined by *karmic* effect. But within these parameters it is still possible to act well or badly, to make the best possible use of what has been determined for one or to make things still worse by bowing to one’s limitations. So Buddhist *karmic* theory is certainly not a strict determinism”. [15]

The libertarian notion of free will can be repudiated on the account that it undermines the Buddhist’s

14 According to Pereboom, if cause of an action is random then the occurrence of that action is beyond agent’s control [24]. In this sense, action cannot be avoided.

15 The notion of *pratityasamutpādvāda* is debated in Buddhism by considering determinism theory and other theories. But in this article we have explained *pratityasamutpādvāda* relating to determinism theory. For more discussions on *pratityasamutpādvāda* and determinism theory see [10-14, 20, 21, 27, 36, 40].

16 It is called as *niyati* [28].

17 By rejecting fatalism, Theravāda Buddhists rejects any form of inevitabilism—the view that we cannot be avoid our destined future. In this sense, Theravāda Buddhists implicitly accept evitabilism.

pratityasamutpāḍāvāda doctrine. The reason is for Buddhists, everything is causally conditioned and therefore determinism is true [13, 14, 35, 38]. If determinism is true, is it really compatible with free will or not?

Siderits defends the paleo-compatibilist's notion of free will by relating it to the notion of conventional level of reality and the ultimate level of reality [35, 38]. At the level of conventional truth, it is correct to say that a 'person' exists and performs an action, whereas at the level of ultimate truth, it is correct to say that there is no 'permanent self' and only momentary psychophysical entities exist. Thus, the concept of free will and moral responsibility come under the conventional level of reality, whereas determinism theory satisfies the ultimate level of reality. This argument suggests that free will and determinism occur in one discourse (human actions) but as two different level of realities. So, there will be no real incompatibility found between free will and determinism.

Siderits proposes an analogy of an automobile to differentiate the level of conventional and ultimate reality [38]. The analogy explains that a car starts when the key is turned right (the conventional level of reality). On the contrary, if someone claims that the car starts only when the key is turned on thus allowing the switching on of the ignition and completing the circuit between the battery and coil consequently enabling the current to pass through the solenoid. In this case according to Siderits, the car is then dropped out of the picture. Rather, the discourse is now about the parts of the car (ultimate level of reality). In a similar manner, partite 'person' indicates the conventional level of reality, and impartite 'person' (i.e. causally connected mereological sum of psychophysical entities) indicates the ultimate level of reality. Thus, the theory of determinism belongs to the ultimate level of reality.

A question may arise, does free will and determinism belong to two different realities- conventional and ultimate reality? Repetti rejects the arguments that free will and determinism are referring to two different realities [30]. According to Repetti, both free will and determinism should refer to either conventional level of reality or ultimate level of reality [30]. It is so because determinism also finds in conventional level of reality, and free will too finds in the ultimate level of reality. Thus, Repetti's suggestion conveys that free will and determinism should be placed in a single level of reality- either to conventional level of reality or to ultimate level of reality [30].

However, Goodman repudiates Siderits's paleo-compatibilist views on free will of a person for the performance of an action [13]. According to Goodman, Buddhists views on free will should be regarded as hard determinism [13]. He argues that:

"if the parameters are all determined by *karma*, then people's actions must be caused by the parameters, by something else, or by nothing. If actions are caused by the parameters, then they are determined. If they are caused by nothing, they are utterly random, and therefore not free. If they are caused by something else, this something else must either

be the self or something other than the self. If the something else is not the self, then either determinism or randomness will result. But the something else cannot be the self, because according to Buddhists, there is no self." [13]

Hard determinists argue that there is no moral responsibility for an action because, determinism is true and free will does not decide the course of an action. It is wrong to assign moral responsibility to a person's action and make him/her responsible for the consequences of his/her action.

Believing in hard determinism would lead to accept volitional impotence, which implies that one cannot change his/her own action and behaviour as it is already predetermined. It disregards Buddhists' view that changes in one's action can be made through certain meditative practices. Hard determinism thus undermines Buddhist doctrine of *karma* and rebirth. If hard determinism is held to be true it would be worthless to practice the noble eight-fold path to eradicate ignorance and suffering from earthly life.

Our opinion on Buddhists' notion of free will is that it is required to be considered as soft-compatibilism (as argued by Repetti) [29-33]. Soft compatibilism states that free will and determinism are compatible to each other as a 'person' can choose a course of an action and decide to perform it out of the many alternatives available in a given situation. We found, Buddhist's views on free will is much closer to soft compatibilists' views on free will, as they affirm that a person exhibits free will with a 'responsibility entailing sense' [33]. This means, even if determinism is true a person can choose an action from many alternatives and perform that in a given situation.¹⁸ The excerpt from Majjhima Nikāya endorses our proposal, which is placed below for the support and reference:

"Now, householders, of those recluses and Brahmins whose doctrine and view is this: 'there is a cause and condition for the defilement of beings; beings are defiled owing to a cause and condition. There is a cause and condition for the purification of beings; beings are purified owing to a cause and condition. There is power, energy, manly strength, manly endurance. It is not the case that all beings, all living things, all creatures, all souls are without mastery, power, and energy, or that moulded by destiny, circumstance, and nature, they experience pleasure and pain in the six classes,' it is to be expected that they will avoid these three unwholesome states, namely, bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, and mental misconduct, and that they will undertake and practice these three wholesome states, namely, good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, and good mental conduct. Why is that? Because those good recluses and Brahmins see in unwholesome states the danger, degradation, and defilement, and they see in wholesome states the blessing of renunciation, the aspect of cleaning." [23]

This excerpt expresses that Buddhists believe in the theory of causation (determinism) and a person has power, mastery,

18 It is upheld by Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika that volition (*cetana*) is the cause of an action [3]. That is, an action is caused due to the volition and the external circumstances [22]. We can say that the collection of the preceding and succeeding steps of consciousness guides a person from within to choose a particular course of an action.

energy to choose the course of his/her action.¹⁹ It illustrates that if one has knowledge of the cause and effect, he/she can avoid undesirable events.²⁰ Arguably, if a person (P) has knowledge of the cause and effect, i.e. if P knows that doing an action (A) will give result (R), then he/she may choose consciously whether to perform A or reject A. This suggests that a person possesses undisputed self-regulative abilities.²¹ Even if the theory of causation or determinism is considered to be true it cannot be ruled out that there are certain possibilities to avoid the determined outcomes of an event through self-regulative abilities. This argument justifies that a person uses his/her free will in the 'moral responsibility entailing sense', and further, it suggests that human actions are not predetermined as fatalists and hard determinists argue for it.

From the above discussions, it is asserted that a person (psychophysical entities at a particular moment) who is used for a denotation purpose only, consciously decides an action and performs that action in a given situation.²² A person may encounter multiple choices to decide the course of an action, but subsequently he/she decides an action to perform it or veto it.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, in a civilized society, a person's action is linked to its consequences. An action is praiseworthy and rewarding if consequence(s) of the action are good. An action is blameworthy if consequence(s) of the action are disastrous. A human action presupposes the existence of a doer. But Buddhists rejects the existence of a permanent self as an action doer. The paper argued that Buddhist's rejection of the existence of a permanent self does not suggest the non-existence of an action doer. Instead, they assert that a doer of an action' is the continuously arising and ceasing of psychophysical elements (*pañcaskandha*).

In this paper, the term 'self' is replaced with the term 'person' to avoid the fallacy of equivocation. Buddhists propose that a person exists in the empirical world in a conventional sense for a denotation purpose only, and not as a permanent entity. While discussing moral responsibility of an action, the paper elucidates libertarianism, paleo-compatibilism, hard-determinism, and soft-compatibilism theories. The paper argued that Buddhists are regarded as soft-compatibilist as they reject the fatalists view, and advocate the theory of causation, and the theory of *karma* and rebirth. From the soft-compatibilist standpoint it is argued that a person possesses self-regulative abilities to perform certain actions. A person uses his/her free will to

choose an action and perform it. Hence he/she is morally responsible for the consequences of his/her action.

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19 When a person asked to Buddha that there is no permanent self, then how can we choose action on our own? Buddha replied that there is an 'element of initiating' (*ārabha-dhātu*) in a person i.e. some kind of ability to choose that allows them to initiate and direct actions such as bodily movements [16].

20 This suggests that Buddhists accepted evitabilism, see [33].

21 Self-regulative ability of a person is consistent with no-self theory [33]. That is, even there is no permanent self, a person has self-regulative abilities.

22 A person performs an action by relating to psychophysical elements in which consciousness is one of the elements.

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