Rick Repetti, *Buddhism, Meditation, and Free Will: A Theory of Mental Freedom*, Routledge, 2018, 206pp, \$145.00 (hbk), ISBN 978113830886

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Do worries about free will emerge in similar ways across philosophical traditions? Or do they reflect idiosyncratic commitments, which emerged under the influence of a specific religious tradition? These kinds of questions have recently captured the attention of philosophers who study South Asian Buddhism. And it's easy to see why.¹ Numerous South Asian Buddhist philosophers explored the relationship between action (*karma*) and intention (*cetanā*); but they did so in the context of clarifying the path toward liberation from the ongoing cycles of discomfort (*duḥkha*) that we all experience. But since these views were developed within a cultural context that didn't privilege worries about free will and determinism, exploring them may help to push contemporary disputes in novel directions. Unfortunately, figuring out which questions to ask about the relationship between South Asian Buddhism and contemporary disputes about free will is not an easy matter. To begin with, neither Pāli nor Sanskrit includes a term or phrase that serves as a ready translation for 'free will'. So perhaps explorations of South Asian Buddhism will offer alternative ways of thinking about freedom and agency (cf., Garfield 2014; Flanagan 2017). Since I've never felt the pull of arguments for the existence of free will, I'm happy to treat Buddhist philosophy as providing an alternative way of thinking about agency. But we should be cautious in adopting such a position; South Asian Buddhism is big tent, and numerous different perspectives on agency were defended by Buddhist philosophers. Furthermore, it is commonly assumed that something like free will is essential to any plausible theory of agency; and if this is right, then perhaps we should look to Buddhist discussions of free will adjacent concepts (e.g. *cetanā*) to find their distinctive ways of thinking about free will (cf., Chakrabarti 2017; Meyers 2013). Or perhaps we should just stick with contemporary philosophical disputes, and explore the things that a Buddhist *can* and *should* say about free will as we now understand it. Rick Repetti adopts this third approach in *Buddhism, meditation, and free will: A theory of mental freedom*. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first published monograph to explore contemporary questions about free will within a Buddhist philosophical framework (though see Meyers 2010). I think this book will push many readers to consider views that they would otherwise never entertain; and while I prefer another approach to these issues, I think that this will be beneficial to the field!

The primary goal of this book is to show that practices like yoga and meditation can be used to cultivate a form of 'mental freedom'. And over the course of Chapter 1 and 4, Repetti seeks to demonstrate that paying attention to the kinds of mental freedom that these practices open up can help us to make progress on contemporary disputes over the nature and possibility of free will. He begins with a brief discussion of his own meditative experiences. This discussion yields the foundation for his approach, though he also draws on discussions from traditional Buddhist sources. To my mind, his most significant claim is that the experience of freedom is not merely an experience of volition or choice; it is also an awareness of how to navigate internal obstacles that might otherwise stand in the way of attempts to achieve our preferred goals. In one evocative passage, he summarizes the relevant kind of experience as follows:

In the quiescent meditative space, I feel increasingly free from the psychosocial narrative that otherwise frequently colors and interprets my experiences, the agendas that frequently co-opt my time, energy, thought, intention, and emotion, all my self-imposed scripts about who I am, what my issues are, where I am headed, what I hope to or must accomplish — all my personal biographical baggage (p.18)

¹ Chakrabarti (2017) provides an overview of some of these issues, as well as an argument for the claim that free will was 'sort of' on the table in South Asian philosophy. The essays in Dasti & Bryant (2014) offer a broader overview of how free will adjacent concepts were used across different schools of Indian philosophers; and the essays in Repetti (2016) survey a similar terrain with a focus on Buddhist philosophy.

As a free will skeptic, and someone who see value in meditative practice, I found Repetti's position, here, to be quite intriguing. There is plenty of room for debate over the nature and value of these kinds of experiences; but his claims do seem to converge with a wide range of findings that have been reported throughout the philosophical and empirical literatures on meditation (e.g., Brewer et al 2013; Metzinger 2015; Meyer 2017; though see Thompson 2017).

From here, Repetti proceeds to his argument that this kind of experience opens up a new way of thinking about free will. He claims that a "practitioner who cultivates the ability to see the origin, conditions, patterns, and causes of his thoughts, volitions, emotions, sensations, feelings, etc., is able to fully grasp their nature, detach from their kinetic potential push or pull him into action, and thus control whether they manifest in action" (p.9). Thus, Repetti seems to suggest that the best way to understand mental freedom is as a capacity for rational choice and self-control. But importantly, he also acknowledges that free will cannot be understood as a simple capacity. Instead, it should be seen as a set of dispositions, or a mental orientation, that requires everything from the "meta-level ability to cultivate attentional control" to the capacity to examine and evaluate our immediate responses, and the ability to regulate and guide our "volitions, thoughts, emotions, choices, efforts, and actions" (p.147). Where these capacities are in place, Repetti contends that a person will retain the capacity to do otherwise (where they want to do so), and this will mean that their actions will be up to them. I'm not sure that this is what people are looking for when they talk about free will. But this way of thinking does have an important implication, which we should all be willing to accept. By tying free will to a set of capacities that must be cultivated, Repetti is able to pull away from the assumption that freedom is present everywhere, in everyone, to roughly the same degree. Whatever else the South Asian Buddhist tradition might have to offer, it suggests that freedom and liberation must be actively pursued; and to the extent that this fact has been neglected in many of the contemporary discussions of free will, it is worth thinking about what doors might be opened up by starting from the assumption that we are all mired in forms of ignorance (*avidyā*) that are difficult to overcome. Beyond this, the key question that remains is the one that I started with: Does South Asian Buddhism provide an interesting take on questions about free will, or does it yield an alternative foundation for thinking about human forms of agency? And the two longest chapters in this book provide Repetti's answer to this question.

In Chapter 2, he provides an overview of contemporary positions regarding free will. This discussion covers a lot of ground; but to my mind, there are two landmarks that are particularly worth noticing. First, Repetti holds that "the meaning of 'choice' has been warped by the assumption of determinism" (p.37). It has led causal fatalists to rule out the possibility of any type of freedom that could operate within the realm of cause and effect; and while the addition of indeterministic events could make things unpredictable, it's hard to see how they could be relevant to the ability to make rational and uncoerced choices. Fortunately, many philosophers now agree that we should focus on questions about whether people possess the kinds of agential control that would justify treating them as deserving praise or blame. Repetti's brand of 'soft compatibilism' sits comfortably within this framework; he argues that agential control is consistent with determinism, indeterminism, and various possibilities in between. Second, drawing on well-known arguments from Harry Frankfurt (1971), Repetti argues that meditative practices can help us minimize conflicts between motivating desires and higher-order reflective desires. Specifically, he claims that as we cultivate mindful awareness of our current state, as well as a sense of when we should have different kinds of motivations, we become more competent to make choices that are the result of reflection and good judgment (p.54). Thus, while "Frankfurt defines *freedom of the will* as having the sort of will (first-order) one wants to have (second-order), Buddhist Soft Compatibilism defines *freedom of mind*, or *mental freedom*, as having the sort of mind (first-order) one wants to have (second-order)" (p.154).

Those who are less familiar with the contemporary philosophical landscape will find this discussion incredibly helpful. Not only does it provide a useful summary of a wide range of philosophical positions, it also provides many of the resources that are necessary for situating and contextualizing the kind of view that Repetti is developing. By contrast, philosophers who are familiar with these disputes will probably find much to criticize here, as many positions in this vast

landscape must be passed over to highlight the landmarks that Repetti sees as most significant. There are two reasons why I mention this. First, Repetti did not address the views of free will skeptics who acknowledge that people can cultivate higher levels of responsiveness to reason, and lower levels to internal conflict in any detail (e.g., Pereboom & Caruso 2018; Focquaert et al 2018). This won't be a worry that every reader will share. I'll return to this point below, as it seems like such views may be close to a position that some Buddhists may be comfortable with. Second, and relatedly, the approach that Repetti takes has a broadly Strawsonian flavor. Specifically he suggests that normative practices, morality, love, and meaning all depend on our willingness to see one another as free and responsible agents (p.6). And many of the arguments that he develops seem to presuppose that free will and the reactive attitudes are essential to these kinds of human practices. This allows Repetti to reject the views of Buddhist philosophers like Śāntideva and Tsongkhapa, who recommend seeing the actions of others from an impersonal perspective, while viewing ourselves as agents (p.97). I agree with Repetti that this type of position seems strange; but as I note below, I think it's a view that Buddhist philosophers should love.

Repetti provides a similar overview of the arguments about free will that have recently been advanced by people working within Buddhist philosophical frameworks. He argues that many of these arguments mischaracterize the contemporary debates; and he worries that many of these arguments place too much emphasis on esoteric ideas, which can be jettisoned without much loss. His arguments in Chapter 3 will introduce many readers to perspectives that they would not otherwise encounter. But those who are more familiar with debates in Buddhist philosophy will probably find these arguments less than satisfying. Repetti expresses some degree of apprehension about arguments that distinguish two kinds of truth or reality (*satya*); he suggests that appeals to dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) may obscure otherwise clear questions about the nature of mental freedom (p.129);² and he argues that neural plasticity may provide the grounds for a naturalistic theory of karma, which allows us to step away from some of the less appealing aspects of the South Asian Buddhist worldview (p.157). I worry about each of these claims, though I understand Repetti's motivations in each case.³ More strikingly, however, he rejects claims about not-self (*anātman*) that are commonly thought to be essential to Buddhist philosophy. At one point, he goes so far as to claim that the self might be something that is cultivated, perfected, or uncovered along the path toward enlightenment (p.132). But in general, he simply expresses his sympathy for *Pugdalavāda* Buddhism. At first, I was apprehensive about this move, as it's hard to know exactly what *Pugdalavādins* were after. At minimum, they seem to have posited persisting 'persons' as a way

² The idea of dependent origination is central to Buddhist thinking, but there are many different approaches to explaining what it is, and it is difficult to summarize briefly. One classic articulation of dependent origination reads as follows:

When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases. That is, with ignorance as condition, formations [come to be]; with formations as condition, consciousness; with consciousness as condition, mentality-materiality; with mentality-materiality as condition, the sixfold base; with the sixfold base as condition, contact; with contact as condition, feeling; with feeling as condition, craving; with craving as condition, clinging; with clinging as condition, being; with being as condition, birth; with birth as condition, ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering." (MN III 63-4; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi 1995, 927).

Some philosophers have mistakenly taken dependent origination to be something like a universal causal relation, focusing on the first two sentences of this quote. Others have focused more directly on the chain of twelve links, which are intended to explain how different states follow from one another in the samsaric process; these connections are intended to "convey actionable information about specific conditions relevant to a particular outcome (i.e., the dis-ease or suffering that is *saṃsāra*) and, crucially, to avoiding that outcome" (Meyers 2018, 801). For a more detailed discussion of what dependent origination amounts to in the context of the free will debate, see Meyers (2018).

³ I won't rehearse her arguments here, but I find Karin Meyers's (2018) discussion of similar issues in her review of Repetti's recent edited volume compelling. Moreover, I think that the most promising approach to a philosophy with fewer borders is to take different traditions at their word, and allow them "to challenge our philosophical assumptions, concerns, and categories" (Meyers 2018, 793).

to account for individual responsibility (Carpenter 2016), and to make the possibility of rebirth intelligible. While it is not his central focus, Repetti does seem to think that the increased freedom that can be cultivated through meditative practices yields forms of control that guide Dharma-responsive patterns of thought and action. He doesn't focus on moral responsibility and basic desert (though it wouldn't be hard to develop his views on these issues);⁴ nor does he seem to be particularly concerned with the possibility of rebirth. His primary goal in appealing to *Puggalavāda* Buddhism is to avoid extreme claims about *anātman* that would make liberation from ignorance unintelligible. And in this respect, his arguments are probably quite close to the majority view in South Asian Buddhism, as most Buddhist philosophers accept the viability of person-talk in at least some domains (Meyers 2013, 2016, p.c.)

All told, Repetti defend a mildly revisionary approach to questions about free will and Buddhist philosophy, focusing on questions about meta-volitional control, and suggesting that meditative practice can increase our ability to act in ways that we would reflectively endorse. I find this kind of approach refreshing. And like Repetti, I would like to think that we can cultivate important forms of mental freedom using meditative practices. As I've argued in my own recent work, South Asian Buddhists developed many practices that we can use as we pursue individual and collective liberation. But I worry about the drive to link these kinds of claims to the existing discussions about free will (cf., Garfield 2010). Repetti's book has much to offer for philosophers who are interested in pursuing contemporary questions about free will from a Buddhist perspective (I would also recommend the work of Karin Meyers in this regard, as she develops similar positions, with a more pronounced focus on what South Asian Buddhist texts say). But it's not obvious to me that we should be pursuing precisely these kinds of issues. As Repetti argues, the assumption of determinism has generated a great deal of philosophical confusion. Likewise, I believe that a great deal of confusion is generated by allowing the terms of the debate to be set by disputes between libertarians and determinists. Against this backdrop, it may seem like some kind of revisionary compatibilism is the best option. But it strikes me as a mistake to play the free will game at all. Instead of pursuing these debates, I think we should be searching for ways to disrupt and reconfigure the fundamental questions that structure the debate!

As I noted at the outset, I'm inclined to think that South Asian Buddhism offers alternative ways of thinking about freedom and agency. In part, this derives from the fact that much of the focus in this tradition is on learning how to control one's own mind; Repetti rightly focuses on this issue, and I think that this is where the true value of his project lies. But in part my inclination derives from the way that South Asian Buddhists focused on the intention to eliminate various forms of suffering and dis-ease (*duḥkha*). As I read at least some parts of this tradition, this opened up the possibility of seeing our perspective on the world, and the actions that flow from these perspectives, as structured by massively complicated networks of interconnected *dharma*s. Against this backdrop, I think that Karin Meyers (2014, 44) is right to claim that people "enjoy the freedom to choose or control action, not despite the fact that their actions issue from *dharma*s, but when their actions issue from certain kinds of *dharma*s". This is a slightly different way of framing the issue than readers will find in Repetti's work, and I think that the differences matter. Meyers's way of thinking about freedom helps to highlight the role of constraints on thought and action, in the form of habits and practical dispositions. And when we take the elimination of *duḥkha* as our starting point, this helps to make it clear that the path requires cultivating both forms of *dharma*-responsiveness and compassionate motivations. Finally, I am inclined to believe that as *dharma*-responsiveness and compassionate motivations increase, the available options for action will begin to decrease, as it will become clearer what the world is really like, and what kind of action is required to minimize *duḥkha*. Importantly, the kinds of habits and practical dispositions that can facilitate this type of insight are something that can be cultivated regardless of whether we possess libertarian free will,

⁴ To answer these questions, it would be necessary to specify an account of what when an agent's morally significant actions are 'their own', in the sense that they deserve to be blamed for their morally wrong actions, and praised for their morally exemplary actions, just because they have performed these actions. I am inclined to think that a fully elaborated account of *dharma*-responsiveness would entail a theory of basic desert.

compatibilist free will, or no free will at all (cf., Pereboom & Caruso 2018; Focquaert et al 2018). And for this reason, I think that it may be wise to focus on cultivating the relevant capacities, instead of worrying about whether they are best understood as forms of free will. But let me say a bit more about why I think that this is the case.

Many South Asian Buddhists focused on the development of strategies that could lead to the elimination of entrenched and habitual forms of ignorance (*avidyā*). And instead of worrying about metaphysical issues, they tended to focus on the nature of human experience, and the structure of our ongoing experience of the world, as this seemed to offer the most promising route to minimizing *duḥkha* (cf. Ronkin 2005). This strikes me as a very different kind of perspective on the world than we find in most contemporary disputes about free will. At least some South Asian Buddhist saw the world as pervaded by forms of *duḥkha*, which arise:

as a consequence of actions conditioned by attachment and aversion, each of which in turn is engendered by confusion regarding the nature of reality, a confusion that is a kind of primal cognitive instinct, which includes a tendency to reify ourselves, and that which pertains to ourselves; to take that which is impermanent to be permanent; that which is insubstantial to be substantial; that which is interdependent to be independent (Garfield 2010, 338).

Put somewhat differently, at least some South Asian Buddhists seem to have treated our tendency to focus on ourselves, and to assume that we are persisting agents with stable properties, as the source of craving (*trṣṇā*), which is the principle cause of *duḥkha*, and the fuel that perpetuates ongoing cycles of *saṃsāra*. And the meditative practices that they developed were intended to disrupt our everyday way of engaging with the world, and to entrench new kinds of habits which would foster intentions to minimize ignorance. To be clear, this drive to eliminate ignorance is consistent with the kind of view that Repetti develops in his book. It does not require adopting a nihilistic view of the self, though it does require building up habits that are designed to eliminate our tendency to grasp at stability and persistence, and to recognize the interdependence of all experience. So where should Buddhist philosophers who focus on these kinds of issues stand on questions about free will? I think that this is a complicated question, and it may not have a determinate answer.

As Karin Meyers (2016) argues, many meditative practices move back-and-forth between an impersonal perspective, and a personal view of ourselves as intending agents. We chose to take up a meditative practice; but “at various points in the practice precisely who or what is in control can be difficult to discern (as is who or what is doing the discerning), and upon absorption into *jhāna* any sense of a doer or willer fades completely” (Meyers 2016, 186). We set intentions from a *personal* perspective, and initially, we exert *personal* effort to sustain those intentions; but over time this personal effort fades into the production of new habits, and these practices begin to make it clear that very little of our mental life is *currently* under our control, by clarifying the rich structure of the habitual forces that structure our encounters with the world; over time, as grasping at persistence begins to diminish, the meditator can even begin to cultivate reflective habitual dispositions that are less likely to be driven by *trṣṇā*, and less likely to produce or sustain *duḥkha*. Again, I don’t think that this way of framing the issue conflicts with Repetti’s claims; it only serves to highlight the extent to which our encounters with the world emerge from habituated forms of ignorance, or habituated forms of compassion and insight. Perhaps the right thing to say in this case is that freedom of the will is replaced with an account of habituation, which can guide us toward individual and collective liberation. Or perhaps the right thing to do is to adopt a revisionary approach to free will, which starts from the recognition of ignorance, and then focuses on ways of improving our understanding of the world. Regardless of which option we take, I think that one of the key things to notice is that South Asian Buddhists saw the world as pervaded by *duḥkha*, saw *duḥkha* as arising through karmic forces, saw these forces as unnecessary, and sought the practical means to bringing an end to the production of *duḥkha*. And at the heart of this project was reshaping our tendency to grasp at self.

But there is more to say on this point, as some South Asian Buddhists also came to realize that the notion of self that needs to be restructured is inherently social. This recognition derives from the sense that the tendency to grasp at self is also the driving force behind emotional poisons like

anger and hatred (*krodha*; *dveṣa*), which arise when we feel like an important goal has been obstructed, by another agent, in a way that threatens our identity, community, or values (Huebner 2018). Unlike most contemporary compatibilists (and unlike Repetti, so far as I can tell), at least some of these Buddhists seem to have thought that the reactive attitudes were an obstacle to the pursuit of liberation, and not a necessary constraint on human forms of life. So they developed strategies for transforming, modifying, and reshaping our patterns of affective engagement with the world. Furthermore, some of these South Asian Buddhists seemed to recognize that when the world is organized in ways that entrench structural biases, we will end up with habituated forms of ignorance that will govern our behavior, even where we have some understanding of what is right and what is wrong (cf., Huebner in press; McRae in press). And they recommended strategies that were designed to uproot the causes of these forms of collective delusion, through engaged and social practices. Consequently, this meant that ethics became a matter of reshaping our practical understanding of the world for the benefit of all sentient beings.

In *Bodhicāryāvatāra*, for example, Śāntideva advises readers to think of themselves and others in different ways. Having taken up the *bodhisattva* vow—that is, having committed to the pursuit of liberation and compassion for all sentient beings—he advises the reader to see the reactive attitudes that others display as arising from causes and conditions that are not under their control; but he advises the *bodhisattva* to minimize their experience of reactive attitudes, and to cultivate forms of patience that will allow them to control their emotions, and to reshape their intentions. Repetti worries that this kind of suggestion is “too inchoate to overturn [what he sees as] the Buddha’s views” (p.97). But I think it is a mistake to reject Śāntideva’s approach, given the way that it is situated within the interplay between personal and impersonal factors discussed by Meyers (2016). This type of position is likely to look odd from the perspective of someone who is embedded in contemporary disputes, where it is commonly assumed that reactive attitudes play an integral role in every human life. But Śāntideva takes a different tack. On at least one plausible reading of his project, he argues that only an impersonal perspective can allow us to search for the causes of *duḥkha*, so that we can figure out how to intervene to prevent *future* problems. As he puts this point in one famous passage:

When a house is burning down and the fire has spread towards the next house, any grass or such in which it might spread is dragged off and taken away. So, when the mind is catching alight with the fire of hatred as a result of contact with something, it must be cast aside immediately for fear that one’s body of merit might go up in flames (BCA VI:70-71).

The adoption of two distinct perspectives plays an integral role in this project, for it is only by seeing the underlying causes of a reactive attitude that we can address the interdependent network of causes that has produced it. And to the extent that our aim is to eliminate *duḥkha*, this is where our attention should be focused. As I read it, the ability to adopt these different perspectives is required for us to change what we can—that is, to modify our own dispositions to respond reactively in the future—while acknowledging that we cannot change the past, and that we can only move forward from where we stand. In her examination of a similar argument from Tsongkhapa’s *Lam rim chen mo*, Emily McRae (2016) suggests that the best way to interpret this vacillation between personal and impersonal factors is by distinguishing our forward-looking control over our own actions, from our ability to judge another person’s action only in retrospect. This seems exactly right to me, and I think it should shift the way we think about the pursuit of individual and collective liberation.

Does the interaction between personal and impersonal perspectives make room for thinking about a Buddhist perspective on free will (Meyers 2010)? Perhaps. But before we accept this conclusion, it might be wise to consider a similar set of claims that were defended by the 17th Century Dutch philosopher, Benedict de Spinoza. Spinoza (1677/2002, 239) argues that people believe that they have free will because they are aware of their motivations and desires, but ignorant of the causes that lead them to desire and pursue the things that they do. He also argues that this form of ignorance leads people to “make up stories of dwelling places and habitations of the soul” (Spinoza 1677/2002, 264). He then argues that a person who acts on the basis of their

immediate affective responses to the world “is not his own master but is subject to fortune, in whose power he so lies that he is often compelled, although he sees the better course, to pursue the worse” (Spinoza 1677/2002, 320). And in light of this fact, he recommends strategies for understanding the nature of our emotional states, and for actively working to shape our engagements with the world, in ways that will minimize the harmful effects of destructive emotions. On one reading, Spinoza’s aim in *Ethics* is to show us how to see the world from an impersonal perspective, and to thereby reshape our affectively driven engagements with the world that we inhabit. He seems to think that cultivating an ability to see the world in terms of such causes helps to minimize the forms of ignorance and *akrasia* that would otherwise govern our behavior. What this means is that Spinoza is not a flat-footed fatalist; and echoing a sentiment that would not be out of place in the philosophical traditions of South Asia, Spinoza advises his readers to endeavor, as far as they can, to live in accordance with the dictates to reason, as this is the only way to achieve liberation (Spinoza 1677/2002, 355). Had Spinoza not made it clear that he was rejecting the possibility of free will, it would be easy for a contemporary reader to extract a Spinozist theory of free will that was consistent with most of his claims! But this would be a mistake. At least as I read him, Spinoza thinks that the drive to posit free will is a way of avoiding the hard questions that arise when we try to figuring why particular patterns of behavior emerge, and what it would take to change them. On this view, the pursuit of individual and collective liberation requires figuring out which kinds of interactions will increase our capacity to act, and which will decrease it; and more importantly, it requires setting up the kinds of conditions (both internally and externally) that will allow us to increase our capacities to act.

It would take a much longer argument to draw out the continuities between Spinoza’s free will skepticism and the kinds of view that developed in at least part of the South Asian Buddhist tradition. But hopefully I’ve said enough to make it clear that questions about Buddhism and free will will always be vexed. Repetti is right to claim that there is quite a bit that a contemporary Buddhist *can say* about free will. But the more I think about the issue, the more certain I become that there isn’t anything that a Buddhist *must say* about free will; and I think that paying attention to their silence on the issue may be useful in thinking about what a contemporary free will skeptic *should say* about individual and collective liberation. But there is a final cluster of issues to address, which center on the experience of deliberately acting against one’s better judgement. Depending on how the questions are framed, this may provide a richer foundation for a Buddhist theory of free will and agency.

Many contemporary philosophers refer to such experience as ‘weakness of the will’. And many contemporary philosophers have adopted the Greek term *akrasia* to describe these kinds of experiences. But it’s unclear whether either way of framing things gets at the more general kind of experiences that were also familiar to South Asian philosophers. Here’s the problem. In the Classical Greek tradition these experiences were commonly thought to reflect a conflict between reason and desire. And this type of attitude is present in much of the current literature on the topic. Within South Asian Buddhist Philosophy, these kinds of experiences are likely to show up as continuous with the forms of ignorance that I discussed above (Harris 2016); and in this regard, they are closer to the forms of “bondage” that Spinoza discusses in *Ethics*, as they play a critical role in producing the ignorance that we are trying to overcome. Ignorance can take a wide range of forms, only some of which are tied to our intentions, and to acting in ways that feel irrational. And if the more general issue that emerges cross culturally is acting out of ignorance, perhaps this is why there is no single term or phase that serves as a ready translation for *akrasia* in Pāli or Sanskrit. Unlike ‘free will’, however, we do find numerous discussions of phenomena in this general vicinity throughout South Asian philosophy.⁵ So my final suggestion is that it may be worth thinking about how *acting from ignorance* is conceptualized in contexts where free will is not at issue. There is already some literature on *akrasia* in South Asian Buddhism; but as Sonam Kachru (p.c.) notes, an adequate account of the the relevant phenomena would require a more careful analysis of the distinctions and

⁵ My favorite example comes from the Pāṇḍava Gītā (v.57), where Duryodhana says: “I know what’s right, but I don’t do it; I know what’s wrong, but I don’t stop” (*jānāmi dharmam na ca me pravṛttiḥ jānāmyadharmam na ca me nivṛttiḥ*)

connections between acting against one's better nature and acting against one's better judgement, as these seem to be treated differently in South Asian Buddhist sources. I don't know where further explorations of this terrain will take us. But if I had to make a guess, I would assume that there are many more ways of thinking about acting from ignorance than there are ways of thinking about free will. And this strikes me as a useful area for free will skeptics to explore.

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