

Causality and Freedom: Buddhist Analysis

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Abstract

‘Causality’ and ‘freedom’ are central to discussions in Philosophy of action. Causality and freedom have been addressed from ontological as well as ethical perspectives. Ontologically, causality refers to the dynamics of changes signifying the way there is continual success of cause and effect. Needless to say that cause and effect are relative terms. That which is a cause in relation to the effect can be seen as the effect in relation to its antecedent which is the cause. The relationship between cause and effect is one of necessity such that given the cause effect can be predicted in advance and given the effect the cause can be inferred retrospectively. Causal necessity leaves no room for human freedom. Therefore moral judgments cannot be passed on the causal process in the state of nature. ‘Freedom’ on the other hand is a moral concept. Freedom of will makes sense only in human domain, because human beings are endowed with autonomy of will. Given the circumstances, different individuals are free to act differently. Prima facie Causality and freedom do not go hand in hand. State of nature is understood and explained in terms of causal laws whereas it is the freedom of will which defines the distinctiveness of human action. The distinction between action and event is fundamental. Event is causally determined whereas action is determined by free will. In other words an event is caused whereas action is willed. Morality makes sense only in the domain of human actions, because human agents have autonomy of will. The ‘will’ can be used and abused as well on account of which the moral judgments are rendered meaningful.

Keywords: Causality, Freedom, karma, Determinism, Nirvana.

The dissertation is an exercise to undertake analysis of the notion of ‘causality’ and ‘freedom’ in Buddhist Philosophy. It would consist of five chapters, namely --

- (1) Introduction
- (2) Pratityasamutpada: Causality vs. Freedom.
- (3) Nirvana : Freedom beyond Causality
- (4) Karmic determinism and Nirvana
- (5) Conclusion.

Chapter – 1

Introduction --- This chapter will dwell at length on the views of causality by scientists, Philosophers and religious thinkers, at large. Causality goes hand in hand with determinism. There is no room for freedom in so far as the state of nature is concerned. Man cannot will things into existence. Things happen, because of the causal necessities. In other words given the antecedents the consequence follows and given the consequence the antecedents can be reconstructed. Moral judgment cannot be passed on events. It is wrong to say the earthquake is immoral, super cycle is moral. The events cannot be judged to be good or bad, desirable or undesirable. As the causal sequence in the state of nature, there is a uniform sequence in the moral domain. The law of karma states that as is the action, so is the reaction(karma-phala).As cause and effect that the action,(karma) and reaction(pratikarma) are also determined by certain deterministic laws. This is the karmic law. In other words when causality reigns in the state of nature, moral laws reign supreme in karmic domain. No wicked action goes unpunished and no virtuous action goes unrewarded. Man is free to do action but he is not free to determine the consequence of action. Under this interpretation causality and freedom are conceptually antithetical. It does not mean that the advocates of freedom deny causality. All that they argue is that despite the causal reinforcement, Man is endowed with freedom to act in the way one chooses to act. So freedom of will and choice define uniqueness of human agent. We would discuss whether and how karmic determinism and causality can be reconciled. Are human actions free? Doesn't causality extend to the domain of human action? These seminal issues are to be addressed in the subsequent chapter with special reference to Buddhism.

Chapter – 2

Pratityasamutpada:Causality vs freedom:- Causality refers to the state of causal sequence in the state of nature. Though the cause of the phenomena like cancer and AIDS could not be decreed till now it does not entitle one to say these happenings are uncaused. Our ignorance about the cause of a phenomenon does not mean that it is uncaused. Science is a progressive march in towards discovering the causal dynamics in the state of nature. Bacon rightly observed that 'knowledge is power'. By the knowledge of the causality man can regulate nature predict cause of events in the state of nature. Buddhists also point to the deterministic sequence in respect of action of human beings. Just as cause and effect are necessarily related action and reaction also follow deterministic pattern. While advocating causality and determinism in the state of nature Buddhist observe "Asmi sati idam bhavati " this being that appears . This chapter shall spell out the Buddhist view about causality in the state of nature and in the moral domain. " Ksanikbhada" is the Buddhist view that things are impermanent. Since change is the only unchangeable law of the universe all that human beings can propose to do is to discover the karmic sequence. Antecedent and consequences in form of action and its results do take place independent the nature of the action. As very nature of reality determine the cause and effect the nature of moral ontology determines the sequence of action and reaction. As is the action, so is the reaction. Since consequence is determined by antecedent it holds out the possibility that by preventing the cause by preventing effect.

Buddhists propose in causal model to explain the wheel of life (bhavackakra). This chapter shall discuss in at length the twelve spokes of the wheel, which explains how the past, present and future are causally related. We are what we are because of our earning in the past and therefore the future depends on our actions in this life. Man is the architect of his own destiny. This leaves room for autonomy of will and self-effort of human agent to escape from cycle of birth and death which has been termed as bondage leading to suffering. Buddhists deny the existence of a soul, because they advocate theory of impermanence. Since everything is transitory there is nothing like 'soul' as it was emphasized by traditional thinkers. According to traditional thinkers Soul is beyond causal change. Soul is a non-physical entity which endures repeated births and deaths. So called soul is so nothing but the aggregation of five components. But the apparent paradox is that it there is no soul. Buddhist are under obligation to explain how as rebirth possible. It will be explained how theory of no soul, (anatomavada) can be reconciled with the concept of rebirth by the notion of 'continuity'.

Chapter – iii

Nirvana: freedom beyond causality:- Buddhists on the one hand advocate causal determinism in the physical domain and strict moral determinism in the moral domain. At the same time they also argue in the favor of the possibility of escaping from this deterministic cycle in the karmic domain. The so called object is nothing but the series of changing instants. Life is nothing but series of changing states. The past determines the past and present determine the future. It appears that there is no room for freedom the present is strictly determined by the karmic effects of the past and present determines the future. Human beings an apparently helpless victims to the strict moral determinism. But the freedoms of will in karmic domain is accepted the Buddhist framework. Self-effort can prevent the cause and thereby it can prevent the effect. Just as a lamp burns subject to availability of oxygen in atmosphere the fire and wick. If any of the conditions of the world be withdrawn fire will not there. Similarly suffering has a cause. Suffering is due to the fact that one is subject to life cycle. Buddhists argue that one can escape to a vantage point and go beyond the karmic cycle by preventing the cause. Thus there remain moral the possibility of overcoming the primary ignorance. The root cause of 'bhavachakra' is primary ignorance which sustains the karmic cycle. By overcoming the elemental ignorance through proper knowledge one can escape to the state where the one is no more subject to the cycle of birth and death. This chapter will examine the ontological interpretation of suffering in the Buddhism. The ethical imperatives of Buddhism make a case for an existential state which is termed as nirvana. Nirvana is not negative state. It does not refer to absence of suffering but a presence of positivities. Buddha's last word be a lamp unto they self simply suggests that one has to work out of liberation. There is no room for divine intervention. Buddha silence to the ten metaphysical questions is significant because he wanted people at large to address the universal phenomena of suffering. Freedom of will is nothing but capacity for self-determination. Buddha underlines eightfold path to attain liberation. It does not refer to transcendental state because it can be attained here and now. Nirvana is not anti-life but pro-life. But when ignorance is overcome then the chains which bond on bhavachakra cease to be functional.

Chapter – iv

Karmic determinism and nirvana:- This chapter shall elucidate how nirvana as the state of highest is consistent with the karmic determinism in form the life cycle .This chapter will explain the nature of elemental ignorance and how having overcome it one can prevent the other spokes of the wheel. The karmic dynamism in from Buddhist perspective shall be explained at length along with the nature of eightfold path emphasizing nature of self- effort and show how they are mutually supportive of the self-effort. Life cycle through the advocate the favor of transience the state with beyond the dynamic of empirical cycle, they do not favor the thesis is supernatural .They deny transcendental state and there is no room for any transcendental intervention.

Chapter – 5

Conclusion:- Besides summarizing of the findings in the preceding chapters .This chapter shall examine how Buddhist concept of nirvana .State of perfection stands distinct as concept of liberation or mukti emphasized in other systems. Besides it will bring into focus of Buddhist concept of liberation (nirvana) and spell out ethical constructs and show how ethics is parasitic on ontology and how Buddhist notion of causality and freedom one finds unique synthesis of a metaphysics, axiology as well as pragmatics.

Method employed: ----- Analytical Method

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