The Downtown Review

Volume 1 | Issue 1 Article 5

January 2015

Buddhism, Confucianism, and Western Conceptions of Personal Autonomy

Joshua Sias
Cleveland State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/tdr

Part of the Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons, and the Philosophy of Mind Commons

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Recommended Citation
Sias, Joshua. "Buddhism, Confucianism, and Western Conceptions of Personal Autonomy." *The Downtown Review*. Vol. 1. Iss. 1 (2015) .
Available at: https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/tdr/vol1/iss1/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at EngagedScholarship@CSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Downtown Review by an authorized editor of EngagedScholarship@CSU. For more information, please contact library.es@csuohio.edu.

I. *Introduction*

The contemporary conversation surrounding personal autonomy theory is primarily concerned with discussing autonomy in relation to western liberal conceptions of individualism, society, and other elements surrounding modern understandings of personal autonomy. An outsider reviewing the modern discourse over personal autonomy theory may be led to believe that either those within the conversation are simply indifferent to the exclusion of eastern philosophical notions relevant to self-government (and self-determination), or that eastern classical models are incapable of offering much to the discussion of personal autonomy.[1] Due to the subjective nature of the first of these possibilities, I am in no position to offer much in support or denial of the indifference claim. On the other hand, the latter of these observations can be addressed from an outsider's view. As this is the case, the following paper is aimed at addressing common components of the modern discussion over personal autonomy theory from a predominantly eastern perspective. The components featured will include rationality, introspection, enrichment through social interaction and moral responsibility. As Theravada Buddhist and Confucian philosophical models remain particularly dominant systems of thought in the East and because these represent significantly different philosophies, I have chosen to utilize these systems in my treatment.

My goal here is twofold. First, I address common misconceptions about Buddhist and Confucian models that may lead autonomy theorists to reject their utility.[2] Second, I offer additional thoughts on personal autonomy theory. Using elements of the eastern models discussed in earlier sections, my contributions to the discussion are intended to show that Buddhist and Confucian models are able to offer inspiration to those currently engaged in the debate over personal autonomy.

II. *Buddhist Principles and Personal Autonomy Theory*

When seeking to understand an agent's autonomy, many theorists begin by pursuing autonomy in accordance to self-governance and/or self-determinism, as well as other forms of self-identification.[3] The Buddhist principle of *anatman*, on the other hand, is usually translated as "no-self".[4] In fact, the denial of the self represented in the doctrine of *anatman* is at the core of Buddhist epistemology.[5] At face value, it appears that autonomy theory—with the importance it places on conceptions of the self—and Buddhist philosophy—denying the ontological reality of the self—are incompatible. To combat this misconception, one must understand *anatman* in two additional ways: the history from which it was created and the additional philosophical elements originally partnered with its teaching. Discussing the background, Mackenzie rightly addresses the reactionary climate *anatman* stemmed from: "First and foremost, the doctrine of no-self is a rejection of the *atman* – the unitary, unchanging, eternal, spiritual substance that is said, in the Vedic tradition, to be one's true self."[6] The mistake made by many unfamiliar with Buddhism is the assumption that the declaration of no-self equates to an all-encompassing denial of the many different meanings ascribed to the word "self." While the denial of the Vedic self is clear in Buddhist texts, "it is also the case that [Buddhists] resist explicitly denying the existence of a self."[7] This is apparent in the exchanges between Buddhists and their intellectual counterparts. What we are left with is a different conception of the self, one that requires a short discussion of the partnering elements attached to *anatman* mentioned earlier.

Buddhism begins with the assertion that all life is suffering or *duhkha*[8] and that we are able to break the cycle of suffering. From here, Buddhism notes three major elements of existence that come to shape the teachings (and path) that follow. Known as *Trilak□a□a* in Sanskrit, the marks of existence are impermanence, suffering, and *anatman.*[9] It is important to

note that these categories are not mutually exclusive; the coexistence of these elements is precisely the problem Buddhism attempts to solve. One way to show the inherent connection between the elements of existence is the following:

Nothing is permanent ▫ The illusion of permanence causes suffering ▫
The everlasting self is impermanent.
(Clinging to the false notion that an enduring self exists increases suffering.)

To escape the cycle of suffering one must understand the nature of existence.[10] In response to this, one may be left wondering "who or what am 'I' if 'I' have no enduring self?" In answering this question, the Buddhist is likely to reference the five aggregates (*skandhas)*, which are the five components that are shared amongst all sentient life. These are physical form, feelings, perceptions, dispositions, and consciousness.[11] To better relate the *skandhas* to the self, MacKenzie uses the famous account of the Buddhist monk Nagasena and his debate with the Greco-Bactrian king Milinda. Comparing a person to a chariot, Nagasena argues that the chariot "is not any one of its parts, it is not the mere sum of its parts, and yet it is not anything separate from its parts."[12] In this way, the ultimately real self Milinda seeks cannot be found amongst the *skandhas* and is also not a result of the *skandhas* coming together.

The self in Buddhism can be understood in two ways, the ultimate permanent self (*paramarthasat*) which is an illusion and an impossibility due to the nature of impermanence all things share and the conventional self (*samvrtisat*) which is impermanent and reducible.[13] The *skandhas* are utilized to describe how "continuity operates" and how suffering is continuously created. The doctrine of *anatman* is understood in accordance with the equally important notions of impermanence and suffering. The sense of self people have is without an intrinsic quality; it is instead extrinsic, being dependent on the "psychophysical continua" that form the momentary usage of the term.[14] As Ho puts it, "the self [in Buddhism]. . . is a transient flux in the endless

process of cosmic changes; for there is nothing eternal or permanent, but change. . . Nothing is, everything becomes."[15] In this way, one can see that Buddhism requires the agent to understand the formation of their current state, as every moment is created in relation to those that came before it. This mirrors the view of David Hume's conception of the self, which he described as consisting of "different and co-existent parts [that] are bound together in close relation."[16] The significance Buddhism places on the changing nature of the self also draws parallels to the importance personal autonomy theory puts on understanding the nature of one's thoughts and desires.[17]

In addition to the connectedness of states of being, Buddhism requires the individual agent (which is a stream of conscious states) to meditate on his or her inner self in order to escape the world of suffering he or she interacts with. Confusion rises when an outsider reflects on the goal of the intensive self-reflection Buddhism entails. Meditation is seen as a form of self-direction that can lead to a state of "transcendent consciousness," effectively destroying the "subject-object distinction" that begins the meditative journey.[18] The practice of meditation itself can be understood as autonomy enriching. Translated from the Pali word *bhavana*, which means culture or development, meditation refers to a practice of mental development that cultivates "such qualities as concentration, awareness, intelligence, will, energy, the analytical faculty, confidence, joy, [and] tranquility."[19] It is apparent that Buddhism requires higher states of self-reflection and rationality than most autonomy theorists argue for. Not only is this apparent in the practice of meditation, which is understood by Buddhists as a way to rid oneself of ignorance, but it is also well-represented in the documented teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddha's encounter with the *Kalamas*, recorded in the *Anguttara-nikaya*, attests to the importance Buddhism places on rational self-reflection. After defending the doubts the

Kalamas have towards visitors who claim to know truths, the Buddha advises the villagers that doubt should only be viewed as dispensable when one determines something to be certain. He states "when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome (*akusala)*, and wrong, and bad, then give them up. . . And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome (*kusala*) and good, then accept them and follow them."[20] While the ability to doubt information that one does not properly analyze (and to do so when making everyday decisions) may seem extreme to many formulating theories of personal autonomy, it remains that some, generally those arguing for strong substantive models of personal autonomy, require heightened levels of reflection and rationality in the formation and acting out of "certain" wants and desires.[21] As rationality is essential to Buddhist philosophical models, the moral implications of one's actions also take on heightened levels of importance. Again, a substantive element of many autonomy theories—normative data, such as the moral intuitions of a particular culture— can be found in Buddhist thought.[22]

Thus far my discussion on Buddhism and autonomy has provided a different approach to understanding the self. While western conceptions often postulate models of the self that are understood to exist intrinsically and over long periods of time, the Buddhist conception is extrinsic and temporal. Despite the metaphysical differences, both the western and Buddhist models require the components of self-reflection and self-knowledge essential to autonomy theory. The doctrine of interdependent origination inherent in the notion of self proposed by Buddhists echoes the importance western models place on understanding the causes of one's wants and desires. Also drawing parallels with the western theories of autonomy, the significance of rational introspection is well-represented in Buddhism.

Before moving on to my discussion of Confucianism and autonomy, it is useful to mention that the goal of extinguishing the self in Buddhism is intended to lead the meditator to a plane of co-existence that is shared with every other living being. The self that Buddhists work to extinguish is similar to the destruction of ego prevalent in radical forms of psychoanalytic practice.[23] Considering the significance the law of causation plays in Buddhist epistemology, the end point of complete immersion with others acts as a realization that everything is essentially connected. Although this tendency to escape the confines of individualism may seem odd to Westerners, the connection of the self to the other is not distinctly Buddhist. As Ho states, "psychological decentering is…a unifying theme that highlights the commonality in Eastern conceptions of selfhood and identity."[24] As my discussion of Confucianism will center on relational notions of the self and its relevance to personal autonomy theory, I will forego a full description of this feature of Buddhism.[25] Nonetheless, this characteristic of Eastern thought is incredibly beneficial to establishing what makes an action autonomous.

III. *Confucian Principles and Personal Autonomy Theory*

For many in the West, Confucianism is seen as a system primarily concerned with social order, each of its fundamental principles taking on roles that help facilitate the realization of an ordered society. In Confucian thought, it is often believed that the value of an individual is determined solely by his or her contribution to the society he or she takes part in. Bockover stresses this point stating, "One's "self" [in Confucianism] is the product of cultivating the humanity that embeds one in community. Formatively one learns how to be a person by learning how to be properly responsive to other humans."[26] This appears to challenge the common western models of autonomy that place importance on the individual's ability to act according to

their own value system.[27] Also an issue of possible contention, Confucianism stresses the prominent role the mandate of heaven (天命) and the moral exemplar (君子) play in shaping the actions of the individuals within a society.[28] The notion that an agent's reflections should be formed through an intermediary source may be unappealing to theorists who are attempting to construct a model that accounts for a person's ability to make decisions that can be considered one's own.

Beginning with the largest factor, both in terms of the effect it has on liberal conceptions of autonomy and in regards to the importance it holds to Confucian models, personal identity is undeniably understood by Confucians in a relational sense. This is apparent in the composition and meaning of the principle *ren* (仁), one of the most important elements of the Confucian system.[29] Being the combination of the characters for person (人) and the number two (二), *ren* is often translated in reference to a plurality of people, as observed in the common translation of *ren* to humanity.[30] Adding to the complication of the individualistic self, Confucianism values a devotion to filial piety, *xiao* (孝) that easily surpasses the degree of obedience required by other schools of thought. For Confucius, *Kongzi* (孔子) the foundation of morality is found in the earliest relationships one forms, namely that between parent and child.[31] The child should respect and obey his parents, the young should act in a similar fashion to their elders, and so on.[32] The notion of self recognized in Confucianism follows this line of reasoning, as morality is only able to be formed in relation to others, the self too requires a process of formation through others.

As Wong argues, the relational theories proposed in the East are a better assessment of the self than models seeking to establish a self that exists apart from the social factors that influence and form an individual's conception of who her or she truly is. The social models

"need only imply that having relationships is a necessary condition of being a person, [it need not be implied] that one's identity as a person comes to nothing more than the sum of one's relationships."[33] In this way, the modern discourse on personal autonomy in the West and the notions of the self in classic eastern thought are not as conflicting as they are often made out to be. This is apparent in modern substantive accounts of personal autonomy. MacKenzie and Stoljar note that substantive accounts "treat autonomy as intrinsically relational and introduce conditions of autonomy that derive from the social relations within which agents are embedded."[34] The benefits of a relational approach to autonomy are many, including recognition of internal and external differences amongst individuals, as well as an acknowledgment of the formation of individual reflections, the development of competencies, and the ability one has to bring one's own reflections into action.[35] What remains unexplained is how Confucianism manages to allow the sense of self-governance required of western conceptions of autonomy. In other words, under the influence of the social factors essential to the Confucian model, how does one determine whether a decision is one's own?

Similar to Buddhism, Confucianism stresses the importance of self-reflection.[36] In addition; individuals are expected to interact with virtuous models and, as the models represent the virtuous characteristics of humanity (*ren, li, etc.)*, are encouraged to follow the lead set by these models. The prominence of the mandate of heaven and the moral exemplar embody this fundamental characteristic of Confucius' teaching.[37] As these elements exist not as a coercive manipulator of another's actions, but instead as an ideal to which one can act towards, they do not necessarily limit the ability an agent has to govern his or her own actions. In regards to conforming to the authority of Heaven's mandate, Brindley remarks on the necessary forms of autonomy needed to interact with Heaven:

> At least two levels of autonomy are necessary. First, individuals must acquire the motivations to abide in the Dao…Second, since the Dao is not communicated transparently to humans, individuals must also cultivate themselves so as to be able to understand what the Dao is and how one might go about fulfilling it. Both of these objectives require continuous individual input, in the form of self-cultivation, acquisition of knowledge, self-reflection, decision-making, and action. (*sic*)[38]

As Brindley demonstrates, the meaning attached to Heaven's mandate lacks a substantial description, and therefore the agent is responsible for determining the meaning and the course of action her or she understands the mandate to represent.[39] Here, the self-reflection essential to both eastern and western models resurfaces.

In regards to the moral exemplar, the focus returns to the relational self. The moral exemplar can be understood in many ways. "A man of self-cultivation,"[40] the exemplar stands apart from others in that he manages to adhere to and display the virtues valued by Confucian ethics. Further adding to this character's heightened status in society is the way he manages to consistently act in accordance to the revered virtues, reaching a depth of understanding that no longer requires him to put effort into his virtuous thoughts and/or actions.[41] Echoing the philosopher king of Plato,[42] the moral exemplar is given a position of authority due to his vast knowledge and his consistent displays of virtuous action.[43] In the way in which one may seek the guidance of an expert in deciding some decision one feels unprepared to take on alone (such as visiting a banker to help with investments, or the aid of a text when researching a paper), those individuals who are not certain of their decisions and the effects they may have are encouraged in Confucianism to emulate those who have achieved the insights pursued by everyone. Referred to by Wong as "the developmental sense of relationality," the exemplar acts as an aid to others in the formation of the moral and autonomous self sought by human beings.[44] The relationship

between the exemplar and the individuals who seek guidance is thus one of enrichment through social interaction. Because the exemplar is able to make decisions on the principles he comes to understand without effort and without appealing to others, he is considered to be the sole author of his actions.[45] In this context, the self-cultivation modeled by the exemplar can be understood as a form of rational and moral deliberation that influences others to build on these valuable characteristics often ascribed to autonomous agents by autonomy theorists. Due to the explicit link of autonomy to morality, and the rarity of the moral exemplar in society, one may understand Confucianism as proposing a strict form of autonomy that is only reached by a few individuals.[46] Nonetheless, the significance of relational forms of autonomy and the "developmental sense of relationality" inherent in Confucianism are areas in which western theorists of personal autonomy would be wise to attend to in their efforts to determine what makes an action autonomous.

IV. *Underdeveloped Elements of Autonomy Present in Eastern Thought*

In the introduction to this paper, I questioned the way in which personal autonomy theorists ignore eastern conceptions of the self, determinism, and other relevant features of autonomy theory. In my discussion of Buddhist and Confucian philosophical models, I have shown how elements of eastern thought are able to maintain many of the shared, and generally upheld, characteristics necessary for personal autonomy. Ranging from self-reflection, rationality, and an understanding of how reflections come to be formed to the more relationally-defined requirements of social influence and non-coercion, my coverage thus far has managed to cover many of the components of personal autonomy held essential to theorists engaged in the modern discourse. What remains is to show that these classical models still have the ability to

influence the current discussion over personal autonomy. While one could argue that autonomy theory has already discovered many of the insights sketched in the Buddhist and Confucian discussions given above, [47] what follows is a short introduction to a few components that have been either under defined or completely disregarded. My intention here is not to present a new theory of personal autonomy, as that task would go beyond the scope of this work; instead I wish to utilize the discussions on Buddhist and Confucian models given above to complement the modern discourse.

For the Buddhist, the ultimately intrinsic and permanent self is an illusion. The conception of self that proves effective for the Buddhist and his or her goals is an extrinsic and temporary self.[48] With this in mind, the notion that an agent must own one's goals throughout one's life is rendered insignificant under the Buddhist view. Extended to theory, the notion of the extrinsically temporal self reduces global models covering the autonomy of agents to much smaller, and easier to handle, local formulations.[49] By scaling a model down to focus on episodic or localized autonomy, the theorist is better suited to assess the chain of causation that formulated an individual's reflections. The common example of the agent who decides to join a cult that he or she knows will limit his or her abilities to act autonomously is then easily determined, in regards to the moments or decisions that follow the choice to enter the cult, to be acting non-autonomously (or less autonomously). The action of choosing to join the cult can then be understood to be autonomous, given that the agent meets the standards generally applied to autonomy.[50] Global views of autonomy fail to account for the temporary nature of the self, as well as the temporary nature of the decisions and actions that stem from the agents interaction with the world he or she is a part of. The inevitable point of interaction with others, in both the formation and the carrying out of decisions and actions, expresses the importance of focusing on

conceptions of the self that are extrinsic. As the Buddhist model focuses on these characteristics of the self, as well the important element of temporality, the classic scenarios autonomy theorists use are stripped of the unnecessary complexities surrounding global conceptions of autonomy. Due to Confucianism's reliance on a relational understanding of the self, the component of autonomy theory presented here fits nicely into the Confucian system.

In addition to the benefits of understanding autonomy in a relational sense, the exalted character of the moral exemplar in Confucianism can also influence the discourse surrounding autonomy in the West. One of the most prominent areas of contention in the modern debate over personal autonomy is whether or not procedural or substantive models are better suited to take on the topic at hand. Briefly put, procedural accounts of autonomy require that the agent follow a process of critical reflection when forming and acting on desires. Substantive accounts demand more of the agent, requiring that the procedure of critical reflection be supplemented with conditions that are not specifically suited to the individual.[51] The procedural theorists tend to argue that the substantive side of the debate requires too much of the individual, consequently resulting in a reduced percentage of the population who qualify as autonomous. On the other side of the argument, the substantive theorists tend to consider the procedural models too lax. In requiring little of the agent, many argue, the procedural accounts fail to take certain factors into consideration. Without a substantive element internalized oppression, forms of coercion, and a range of other factors that limit one's ability to act autonomously are not properly assessed. While some theorists are willing to discuss autonomy as a matter of degree or scale, allowing procedural accounts to constitute a lower threshold of autonomy and substantive a higher threshold, others give this approach little attention.[52]

Similar to the matter of global and local models of autonomy, it seems apparent that autonomy is better understood in terms of degree. An agent who approaches a particular decision with the knowledge and/or abilities to comprehend or manage the outcome of his or her decisions and actions is far more likely to govern the choice made in that instance. On the other hand, an agent who is restricted from making an autonomously rich decision in respect to one instance is not necessarily less autonomous in regards to another.[53] In this way, the theorist is in a position to value those competencies or autonomy building features of the agent that allow them the ability to act richly autonomous.[54] For some theorists, such as Friedman, models requiring less of the agent are praised in that they make it so "more people can qualify as autonomous."[55] When discussions of autonomy deal primarily in localized versions of autonomy that are also understood to be matters of degree, the feared outcome of making autonomy open to only a few is dealt with. Autonomy becomes a characteristic that is shared by any agent who is able to govern himself or herself or make decisions. The value ascribed to higher cases of autonomous action remains intact as well, for these cases act as valuable models of richly autonomous persons.

It is here that the moral exemplar of Confucianism shows itself. In much the way that Confucianism elevates the character of the exemplar to a heightened position, autonomy is able to elevate those who make autonomous decisions. In doing so, those working on personal autonomy theory are able to value those models that require more of the agent while also maintaining the liberal principle of equal opportunity to all. They are able to do this by recognizing, as the Buddhist and Confucian systems do, that all people have the capabilities to reach heightened states of autonomous authority over their desires and reflections. When this characteristic of equal consideration of the capabilities agents are able to possess is applied to

autonomy theory, a call to create a society of agents who are given access to the same autonomy-enhancing features as those who act richly autonomous is put in place. What this entails is an enhanced focus on those areas of governance that build on the individual's ability to act autonomously.

V. Conclusion

In the earlier sections of this paper, on (II) Buddhist and (III) Confucian principles, I entertained the possibility that major features of the traditions covered make it hard to utilize their insights in the modern debate over personal autonomy. I found that this is not necessarily true and may be a result of misunderstanding. In explaining these misunderstandings, I discovered that Buddhist and Confucian thinkers value many of the qualities that the autonomous individuals of western models possess. These include, but, are not limited to rationality, introspection, enrichment through social interaction, and moral responsibility. Following my discussion of Buddhist and Confucian principles and the ways in which they support autonomy, I attempted to show that elements of classical eastern thought are able to enrich the discussion of personal autonomy in the West. I did this by utilizing the temporary and extrinsic self of Buddhism and the moral (and autonomous) exemplar of Confucianism. By applying these concepts to the current discourse of personal autonomy, I was able to introduce components that help bring major areas of disagreement (global vs. local, procedural vs. substantive theories) into perspective. While I did not intend to present a new model of autonomy, I did hope to demonstrate that western theories of autonomy can be enhanced by the inclusion of eastern concepts. In this way, I have challenged others working on personal autonomy to expand their pool of resources beyond the confines of western liberal theory.[56]

Notes

[1.] Another possibility may be that those working in personal autonomy theory are, for the most part, products of liberal societies and because of this factor alone, have unconsciously excluded eastern views from their consideration. Ironically, this sort of thing seems to work well as an example of how socialization can influence one's ability to take seriously alternative points of view, a common point of discussion in the modern discourse over personal autonomy theory.

[2.] My intention is to keep my discussion of Buddhist and Confucian concepts to those that are well known, widely accepted, and characteristic of the philosophical traditions they belong to. In this way, I am able to keep the discussion within the scope of personal autonomy theory while also encompassing most of the traditions that stem from the original Theravada Buddhist and early Confucian systems of thought.

[3.] For example, Diane Meyers argues that the autonomous agent must possess self-discovery, self-definition, and self-direction. She also argues for the importance of an agent's ability to act according to their own authentic self. The stress of the "self" is not specific to Meyer's work. The "self" is a general characteristic of personal autonomy theory.

See: Meyers, Diana. "An Alternative Account of Autonomy." Self, Society, and Personal Choice. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989. (p. 42-58).

[4.] On occasion *anatman* will be translated as "no soul," although this is considerably less common.

[5.] Ho, David Y F. "Selfhood and Identity in Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, And Hinduism: Contrasts With The West." Journal For The Theory Of Social Behaviour 25.2 (1995): 115-139. Philosopher's Index. Web. 23 Mar. 2014. (p. 123).

[6.] MacKenzie, Matthew. "Self-Awareness Without A Self: Buddhism And The Reflexivity Of Awareness." Asian Philosophy 18.3 (2008): 245-266. Philosopher's Index. Web. 23 Mar. 2014. (p. 251-2).

This is well established in Buddhist studies, for this reason references to the historical competition between Buddhist and Vedic models of the self can be found in the works of Ho, Black, Ganeri, and Mackenzie included within this work's citations.

[7.] See pages 26-7 of Black for a description of the different interactions early Buddhist thinkers had with competing schools on the nature of self.

Black, Brian. "Senses of Self and Not-Self in the Upanisads and Nikayas." Hindu and Buddhist Ideas in Dialogue: Self and No-Self. ed. Kurnetsova, Irina., and Jonardon Garneriand, Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad. Surrey: Ashgate, 2012. (p. 26).

[8.] I follow Black's translation of the term *duhkha* as suffering here because it follows the most common translation of the term. It is worth noting that *duhkha* consists of much more than the word suffering can account for. *Duhkha* represents all physical and mental forms of pain and discomfort that make up life.

[9.] Black, *op. cit.,* 18

Black's overview of the three marks is as follows: impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), non-self (*anatta*). I use the Sanskrit terms throughout this article as they are more familiar to me, Black utilizes the original Pali in his translations.

[10.] As Morgan states, "Buddhism is primarily a practical philosophy" (514). Therefore, the teachings and doctrines that follow take the goal of eliminating suffering as its main objective. The intended pragmatic use of Buddhist doctrine will be a topic I will return to shortly.

Morgan, Jeffrey. "Buddhism and Autonomy-Facilitating Education." Journal of Philosophy of Education 47.4 (2013): 509-523. Education Research Complete. Web. 18 Apr. 2014.

[11.] Mackenzie, Matthew. *loc. cit.*, 252.

"The body or physical form (*rupa*), feelings (*vedana)*, perceptions (*samjna*)*,* dispositions (*samskara*), and consciousness (*vijnana*)".

[12.] *Ibid.*

[13.] MacKenzie, Matthew. *op. cit.*, 253.

The issue of Buddhist reductionism and the challenges against it go beyond the scope of this paper. For a detailed account and defense of Buddhist reductionism, see the works of MacKenzie cited in this paper. Also, Ganeri gives his own perspective on the philosophical issues stemming from Buddhist reductionism, which includes a fascinating discussion of the similarities between the *skandhas* of Buddhism and David Hume's skeptical conception of the self.

[14.] Mackenzie, Matthew. *op. cit., 256.*

[15.] Ho, *loc. cit.*

[16.] qtd on page 69 of: Ganeri, Jonardon. "Buddhist No-self: An Analysis and Critique." Hindu and Buddhist Ideas in Dialogue: Self and No-Self. ed. Kurnetsova, Irina., and Jonardon Garneriand, Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad. Surrey: Ashgate, 2012.

[17.] Take as an example the work of John Christman. Christman argues that one must have an understanding of how they came to desire or have a particular want. The importance of the formation of desires, and the agent's knowledge of how they came to desire certain things, plays a large role in modern personal autonomy theory.

Christman, John. "Autonomy and Personal History." Canadian Journal of Philosophy. Vol. 21, No. 1, (March 1991).

[18.] Ho, *op. cit.*, 124.

Due to space limitations, I am unable to give a full account of the significance meditation has on personal autonomy. I would be remiss not to add the following:

[19.] Rahula, Walpola. "What the Buddha Taught." 1967 ed. Chester Springs: Dufour Editions. (p. 68).

For more on the effects of Buddhist meditation, see Rahula chapter 7.

[20.] Rahula, *op.cit.*, 2-3.

[21.] For a survey of the differing types of autonomy theory see:

Mackenzie, Catriona., and Natalie Stoljar. "Introduction: Autonomy Refigured." Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self. Cary: Oxford University Press, 2000. (p. 3-31).

[22.] It may be argued that Buddhism, as well as Confucianism (III), are religious systems and thus morality is included not as a result of philosophical study but instead as a means of religious adherence. Given the history these two traditions have, both rooted and developed in periods rich in philosophical dialogue (with Buddhism rooted in the debates between *Astika* and *Nastika* schools of thought and Confucianism stemming from the intellectually stimulating era known as the 100 warring states period) this critique fails to comprehend the beginnings of these traditions.

The clear link between Buddhism and Kantian ethics, both requiring the agent to possess heightened levels of rationality and a strong moral component is an example of a model of free will that requires certain moral constraints. When morality is discussed in the modern discourse of autonomy theory, it generally falls into the realm of either the individual's value system or substantive requirements for autonomy.

[23.] Ho, *op. cit.*, 125.

[24.] Ho, *op. cit.*, 137.

[25.] The "enrichment through interaction" component of modern autonomy theory is best explained in terms of relational autonomy. Although my discussion here does not fully flesh out this component in relation to Buddhism, as it is largely covered in my discussion of Confucianism, it is worth mentioning that Buddhism is relational in practice as well. The *Sangha* (or community of monastic Buddhists) is such that monks are taught in the ways of mediation (self-cultivation) by others who are further in their training. In addition, the early *Sangha* was dependent on the lay community for sustenance, the relationship being reciprocal in that the monks and nuns gave teachings in exchange for the food and clothing they received. These are only a few instances of "enrichment through interaction" in Buddhism.

[26.] Bockover, Mary L. "*Confucian Ritual as Body Language of Self, Society*, and Spirit." Sophia 51.2 (2012): 177-194. Humanities International Complete. Web. 20 Apr. 2014. (p. 183).

The readings by Brindley and Wong describe and attempt to deconstruct this common western view of the Confucian philosophical system.

Brindley, Erica. "Moral Autonomy And Individual Sources Of Authority In The Analects." Journal of Chinese Philosophy 2 (2011): 257. Academic OneFile. Web. 23 Mar. 2014.

Wong, DB. "Relational and Autonomous Selves (Chinese Moral Tradition)." Journal of Chinese Philosophy 31.4 (n.d.): 419-432. Arts & Humanities Citation Index. Web. 23 Mar. 2014.

[27.] For examples of theorists who utilize valuation systems such as those discussed see:

Watson, Gary. "Free Agency." The Inner Citadel. Ed. Christman, John. Oxford University Press, 1989. (p. 118-19).

Ekstrom, Laura Waddell. "A Coherence Theory of Philosophy." International Phenomenological Society. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. 53. No. 3. (Sep. 1993), (p. 604).

[28.] Heaven's mandate, Tianming (天命). Moral exemplar, Junzi (君子).

I use the translation "heaven's mandate" for 天命 throughout this essay. It is worth mentioning that 天 also means sky. Some Confucians prefer to translate 天 as the Dao opposed to heaven. Regardless of how it is translated, the western conception of heaven is not the intended meaning here. In order to be consistent with the works I utilize throughout my exposition,命 is referred to throughout this essay as mandate. As Slingerland notes in the introduction to his translation of the Analects, 命 had already taken on the alternative meaning of "fate" or "destiny" by the time the Analects were composed. I utilize the translation of 君子 as "moral exemplar" here, opposed to the common interpretations of "gentleman," "man of nobility," or "superior man" for reasons of inclusiveness. The complexity of early Chinese characters adds a degree of mystery to the principles discussed in relation to Confucianism. Many of these meanings are still debated by scholars of eastern philosophy today.

See the following for a more comprehensive description of these terms:

Slingerland, Edward Gilman (intro. and trans.). "Kongzi (Confucius) 'The Analects'." Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy. ed. Ivanhoe, Phillip J., and Bryan W. Van Norden. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003. (p. 1-57).

Brindley, *op. cit.*, 257-8.

[29.] Wong, *op. cit.*, 420-1.

[30.] Bockover offers the following list of common translations: "goodness, benevolence, nobility, humanness, humanity, love, and human-heartedness." Her paper attempts to show that *ren* is necessarily tied to *li* (ritual propriety), and thus should be understood as "a kind of "activity" that establishes one as a person and supports human flourishing in general but is not patently observable in modern behavior terms, for *li* is *ren* action that cannot identifiably be measured…(178).

Bockover, *op. cit.*, 178.

In stressing the importance of *ren*, Junping notes that it is mentioned in the Analects 109 times. Other important principles of Confucianism are given much less attention, with *li* being mentioned 75 times, and *xiao* only appearing in the Analects a total of 11 times.

Junping, Liu. "Rethinking Justice: Toward An East-West Approach In Understanding Filial Piety." Contemporary Chinese Thought: Translation And Studies 39.1 (2007): 75-86. Philosopher's Index. Web. 25 Apr. 2014. (p. 81).

[31.] Junping, *op. cit.*, 80.

Also see: Slingerland, *op. cit.*, 3. (Analects, 1.2).

[32.] Confucianism adheres to a hierarchal system where certain social roles are expected to respect and obey (to a reasonable degree) those of a higher status. In doing so, everyone is accounted for in the social sphere, respect being both given and received by individuals. The relationships are generally framed as "father to son, elder to younger brother, husband to wife, ruler to subject,…and friend to friend." As Bockover mentions, these distinctions are adaptable to the times we live in, and the sexist nature of the common translation is mendable. The relations can be restated as such: parent to child, elder sibling to younger sibling, spouse to spouse, ruler to subject, and friend to friend.

For a further discussion of the five relationships of Confucianism, see pages 185 and 186 of Bockover's entry.

On the association *xiao* has to *ren*, and an argument for the priority of *ren* over *xiao* in the Analects, see Junping, *op. cit.*, 81-83.

[33.] Wong, *op. cit.*, 421.

[34.] MacKenzie and Stoljar, *op. cit.*, 21-2.

[35.] *Ibid.*

[36.] Brindley, *op. cit.*, 258.

[37.] See Brindley for a comprehensive look at how "heaven's mandate" encourages the individual to act autonomously. See Wong for a focus on the influence of the moral exemplar's role in society. My intention is only to introduce these concepts and show that they do not necessarily threaten the autonomy of an agent.

[38.] Brindley, *op. cit.*, 263-4.

[39.]Ibid.

Also see note 27.

[40.] Ho describes the moral exemplar in this way, due to its brief yet accurate description of the exemplar, I borrow his description here.

Ho, *op. cit.*, 119.

[41.] Slingerland, op. cit., 2.

[42.] Like Plato's philosopher king, the moral exemplar of Confucianism possesses the knowledge and virtuous character desired of figures in positions of power.

Plato. Trans. by Desmond Lee. "The Republic." New York: Pengin Group, 2007 ed. (p. 219-26).

[43.] Slingerland, op. cit., 3. (Analects, 12.22).

[44.] Wong, *loc. cit.*

[45.] Wong, *op, cit.*, 426.

[46.] *Ibid.*

Wong argues that while the moral exemplar's are the "sole authors" of the actions they happen to carry out, "sole authorship" must be perceived in the case of exemplars as being done through means of "helping others" and giving "respect to others when it ought to be given…"

[47.] Conversely, one is also able to argue that because western theorists have largely ignored the philosophy of the east, they have unintentionally restricted the development of the modern discourse. One could argue that the early stages of the dialogue, particularly the procedural models that began the exchange of ideas that followed, could have been shifted to a later stage that took the relational model of autonomy as the starting point of the overall discourse.

[48.] Morgan defines Buddhist autonomy in the same way as I do here. He states, "Buddhists can indeed support autonomy, but the autonomy supported is necessarily of temporary and extrinsic value" (519). Although I utilize the same language as Morgan, the way I employ the Buddhist view of autonomy differs greatly from that of Morgan's model.

Morgan, *loc. cit.*

[49.] I am using the terms "global" and "local" as I have come across them in the literature. "Global" refers to attempts to determine autonomy over the course of an agent's life whereas "local" refers to attempts to determine autonomy in relation to specific decisions, actions, reflections, etc.

[50.] I consider the standards of autonomy theory to include self-reflection, rationality, and a lack of oppressive or coercive factors in the decision making process.

[51.] See note 21.

[52.] Friedman allows for the scale discussed here in her "A Conception of Autonomy", the major difference between her and me being my preference for substantive models and her affinity towards procedural models.

See: Friedman, Marilyn. "A Conception of Autonomy." Autonomy, Gender, Politics. Oxford University Press, 2003. (p. 3-29).

[53.] For example, a banker who knows the ins and outs of his occupation is more likely to make an autonomously rich decision in respect to his finances than an agent who knows little about the workings of the financial sector. In this particular instance we can say that the banker is more autonomous in her decision. Conversely, the agent who knows little of banking may be in a position to better evaluate and weigh the effects of her decisions in regards to her health because of the teaching and training she received prior to becoming a doctor. The Banker, not having access to the facilities and information the doctor has in determining issues of one's health, can then be considered less autonomous regarding her health.

[54.] By "richly autonomous" I mean to emphasis those agents who, when his or her decisions and actions are placed on the scale of autonomy, lean more towards the side that requires heightened states of knowledge, abilities, and other elements important to substantive models of autonomy.

[55.] Friedman, *op. cit.*, 23.

[56.] I do not wish to give the impression that the misunderstanding and dismissal of eastern philosophy in the modern discussion over personal autonomy is undertaken deliberately by those working in the field. If anything, my personal view is that western philosophy as a whole largely ignores the insights of the East. As technology has made the transference of information easier, I see no reason why these incredibly thought provoking ideas should not be given consideration when discussing topics that people everywhere share an interest in.

Working Bibliography

Brindley, Erica. "Moral Autonomy And Individual Sources Of Authority In The Analects." Journal Of Chinese Philosophy 2 (2011): 257. Academic OneFile. Web. 23 Mar. 2014.

Black, Brian. “Senses of Self and Not-Self in the Upanisads and Nikayas.” Hindu and Buddhist Ideas in Dialogue: Self and No-Self. ed. Kurnetsova, Irina., and Jonardon Garneriand, Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad. Surrey: Ashgate, 2012. (p. 11-27).

Bockover, Mary. "Confucian Ritual As Body Language Of Self, Society, And Spirit." Sophia 51.2 (2012): 177-194. Humanities International Complete. Web. 20 Apr. 2014.

Christman, John. “Autonomy and Personal History.” Canadian Journal of Philosophy. Vol. 21, No. 1, (March 1991).

Ekstrom, Laura Waddell. “A Coherence Theory of Philosophy.” International Phenomenological Society. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. 53. No. 3. (Sep. 1993), 604.

Friedman, Marilyn. “A Conception of Autonomy.” Autonomy, Gender, Politics. Oxford University Press, 2003. 3-29.

Ganeri, Jonardon. “Buddhist No-self: An Analysis and Critique.” Hindu and Buddhist Ideas in Dialogue: Self and No-Self. ed. Kurnetsova, Irina., and Jonardon Garneriand, Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad. Surrey: Ashgate, 2012. (p. 63-76.)

Ho, David Y F. "Selfhood and Identity in Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism: Contrasts with the West." Journal for The Theory of Social Behaviour 25.2 (1995): 115-139. Philosopher's Index. Web. 23 Mar. 2014.

Junping, Liu. "Rethinking Justice: Toward An East-West Approach In Understanding Filial Piety." Contemporary Chinese Thought: Translation And Studies 39.1 (2007): 75-86. Philosopher's Index. Web. 25 Apr. 2014.

Mackenzie, Catriona., and Natalie Stoljar. “Introduction: Autonomy Refigured.” Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self. Cary: Oxford University Press, 2000. (p. 3-31)

MacKenzie, Matthew. "Self-Awareness Without A Self: Buddhism And The Reflexivity Of Awareness." Asian Philosophy 18.3 (2008): 245-266. Philosopher's Index. Web. 23 Mar. 2014.

Morgan, Jeffrey. "Buddhism And Autonomy-Facilitating Education." Journal of Philosophy of Education 47.4 (2013): 509-523. Education Research Complete. Web. 18 Apr. 2014.

Meyers, Diana . “An Alternative Account of Autonomy.” Self, Society, and Personal Choice. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989. (p. 42-58).

Plato. Trans. by Desmond Lee. “The Republic.” New York: Pengin Group, 2007 ed. (219-226).

Rahula, Walpola. “What the Buddha Taught.” 1967 ed. Chester Springs: Dufour Editions.

Slingerland, Edward Gilman (intro. and trans.). “Kongzi (Confucius) ‘The Analects’.” Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy. ed. Ivanhoe, Phillip J., and Bryan W. Van Norden. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003. (p. 1-57).

Watson, Gary. “Free Agency.” The Inner Citadel. Ed. Christman, John. Oxford University Press, 1989. 118-119.

Wong, DB. "Relational And Autonomous Selves (Chinese Moral Tradition)." Journal of Chinese Philosophy 31.4 (n.d.): 419-432. Arts & Humanities Citation Index. Web. 23 Mar. 2014.