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### It Wasn't Me: Reply to Karin Meyers

Rick Repetti

City University of New York, Kingsborough Community College

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# It Wasn't Me: Reply to Karin Meyers

Rick Repetti<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This is my reply to Karin Meyers, “False Friends: Dependent Origination and the Perils of Analogy in Cross-Cultural Philosophy,” in this Symposium. Meyers generally focuses on exegesis of what Early Buddhists *said*, which reasonably constrains what we may think about them if we are Buddhists. I agree with and find much value in most of her astute analyses, here and elsewhere, so I restrict my reply here to where we disagree, or otherwise seem to be speaking past, or misunderstanding, each other. In this regard, I focus on three of her claims. Meyers argues that (1) Buddhist dependent origination is not determinism; (2) attempts at naturalizing Buddhism threaten to run afoul of her hermeneutics; and (3) I seem to err on both fronts. However, I have emphasized that I am not a determinist, and I am not as concerned with what Buddhists *did* say about causation and agency. As a philosopher, I am mainly concerned with what philosophers *can* say about them.

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<sup>1</sup> Philosophy Department, Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York. Email: rick.repetti@kbcc.cuny.edu.

Thus, Meyers's criticisms of my work seem predicated on interpretations of ideas I do not exactly espouse. Thus, the "Repetti" that Meyers primarily critiqued, as the title to this Reply (hopefully humorously) makes clear, wasn't me! Whether I have failed to make my ideas clear, she has failed to accurately interpret them, or some combination of both, I am uncertain. Thus, I focus on trying to clarify those ideas of mine that Meyers seems to interpret in a way that I do not intend.

### Introduction

I have the utmost respect for the positive, constructive work that Karin Meyers has contributed to this discussion, here and in the edited collection, as well as to her excellent exegetical work elsewhere, interpreting Vasubandhu, and so forth. However, I am puzzled by some of her criticisms here, some of which seem to run afoul of the principle of charitable interpretation. The "Repetti" she critiques arguably *wasn't me*, but an interpretation that I would question. (Hence, the title of this paper.)

I was once guilty of similarly questionable interpretation when critiquing the work of Mark Siderits, in this journal (*Repetti Reductionism*). Siderits kindly informed me that *what Siderits says* and *Siderits's view* are two different things, that the Paleo-compatibilist position that he adduced was simply "a" position he thought certain Buddhist reductionists *could* take, and thus a position he was taken to delineating, but not one he was advocating as his own, nor as correct. I think a similar distinction is applicable here, our other (minor) disagreements notwithstanding.

### Meyers's Claims and My Replies

First, we have a point of disagreement, but one that also suggests Meyers is not representing my views adequately. In her opening sentence, Meyers assumes that there was no free will concept or discussion in Buddhism until recently, stating “neither the idea nor problem of free will were part of Buddhist intellectual history prior to contact with western philosophy in the modern era” (787). A few paragraphs later, she also claims: “Repetti . . . and most of the other contributors . . . seem to agree that . . . Buddhists did not have the idea of free will, much less a problem with it historically” (789).

However, in the edited collection she refers to, I argued against that view, noting that: (1) despite the fact that the term “free will” is absent in pre-modern Buddhist history, enough elements of the concept occur (Repetti *Why*); (2) the Buddha rejected a number of inevitabilist views that cover the range of free will skepticism, committing him to acceptance of some cognate of free will, regardless of the absence of that exact term (Repetti *Agentless*); and (3) the attempt to reconcile karmic causation with the sort of voluntary behavior required for the Buddhist path comes close enough to aspects of the free will problem to be considered a Buddhist parallel (Repetti *Introduction*). In addition, I noted (*Introduction*) that: (4) two of the contributors, Mark Siderits and Charles Goodman, debate the extent to which the free will problem is reflected in the tension generated by the facially contradictory advice of the authoritative Buddhist philosopher-sage, Śāntideva, which is to view others' negative behavior impersonally, but to view our own behavior personally; and that (5) another contributor, Emily McRae, discusses a congruent tension discernible in the similar advice of another Buddhist philosopher-sage, Tsongkhapa. I devoted considerable attention to the nuances on both sides of such views, so Meyers's remarks above seem to ignore those of my claims in *Buddhist Perspectives on Free Will* (to which

anthology she also contributed) that are relevant to the accuracy of her comments.

Second, Meyers seems to critique an interpretation of my view that I would deny, and on grounds I also question. In footnote 11, Meyers objects to my therapeutic sort of suggestion (Repetti *Why*) that a Buddhist theory of free will could play a role for Western, secular Buddhists who might be conditioned by a just-world assumption (an unconscious holdover from now-defunct belief in a creator God). I suggested that Buddhist beliefs in karma and rebirth may play what I dubbed a “soteriological” (soteriological, theodicy-like) role, eventually to be transcended by becoming more deeply steeped in the no-self view, at which point non-belief in post-mortem survival no longer matters. Meyers argues that my suggestion is “dubious on both exegetical and pragmatic grounds” (fn. 11), the exegetical idea (presumably) being that most (non-Western) Buddhists do not conceive of karma and rebirth that way, and the pragmatic idea being that most Western Buddhists find the idea of rebirth more difficult to assimilate than the idea of the no-self. This line of criticism is part of a larger theme that runs throughout Meyers’s contribution here, to the effect that Western philosophers who opt for a naturalized Buddhism may be unwittingly departing from Buddhism in some (unspecified but) important sense.

I think Meyers’s analysis partly misses the mark here in at least two ways. First, this comment (“dubious on both exegetical and pragmatic grounds”) seems to confuse most Western *philosophers* with most *Westerners*, but these are radically different animals. Whereas it is not unreasonable to think *most of our contemporary Western academic colleagues* (philosophers, scholars, intellectuals, etc.) are probably naturalists who are less comfortable with the idea of rebirth than they are with the idea that the self is some sort of construct, *the average Western person* is much more deeply committed to the substantive metaphysical nature of an

enduring self than they are to a denial of post-mortem survival. Second, Meyers interprets my therapeutic suggestion as an exegetical one, but it is not: It is a purely pragmatic justification for a possible soteriological and/or therapeutic role for a theory of free will that might carry the average Western person (not necessarily philosophers or scholars) some distance along the Buddhist path as they come to shift perspectives about the just-world assumption and the nature of the self. The idea, simply, is that many average Westerners have emerged from, but are probably still attached to, a just-world view that is no longer supported by monotheistic belief. There is enough in Buddhist doxology, such as the doctrines of karma and rebirth, that can serve as a temporary substitute for the underlying just-world assumption for those so inclined. This substitute can feed those soteriological needs while they slowly mature in the Buddhist path and gradually become comfortable with the no-self idea as they transform through contemplative experience. This was also but one (minor) among several (major) arguments I gave in support of the idea that there is, can be, and ought to be a Buddhist theory of free will.

Curiously, later on Meyers endorses what she critically attributes to me as my strategy, although with her own twist—a twist which, on my analysis (see below), is not really different in one sense, but is very different in another. Meyers states:

Instead of taking karma and rebirth as skillful means that might be replaced by a more naturalistic Buddhism, I suggest a soteriology in which Buddhist naturalism serves as a skillful means to lure western seekers and Buddhist philosophers to take up a seemingly naturalistic practice of Buddhist meditation, and then decide if their naturalism remains satisfying or plausible. (812)

My skillful-means-type suggestion, again, was just that Westerners tacitly possessed of a just-world assumption might be attracted to Buddhism because its twin doctrines of karma and rebirth could fulfill a theodicy-like function (soteriodicy: a godless analogue of theodicy that is soteriologically equivalent). This attraction could conceivably motivate, and promise some just-world-type comfort in, the soteriodical doctrines of karma and rebirth. (This would be regardless of whether they do so consciously or unconsciously, with more or less faith in a just-world theory, or whether or not they do so in a supernatural, quasi-supernatural, or pseudo-natural sense, according as they are individually inclined.) Over time, as they gradually become comfortable with the idea of the no-self, the no-self view could render the just-world view otiose. In my analogy, I compared monotheistic just-world-theory-based theodicy with heroin, and karma/rebirth soteriodicy with methadone, for recovering theists, most of which are ordinary people drawn to meditation and Buddhism, not professional philosophers or scholars. I did not suggest presenting Buddhism as seemingly naturalistic to naturalistic Western philosophers or scholars in order to lure them into Buddhist meditation practices that might engender supernatural experiences that would then implicitly challenge their naturalism. Flanagan, another contributor to the collection (*Negative*) that Meyers criticizes, does not do that either: he simply suggests that Buddhism can be naturalized, for philosophers so inclined (*Bodhisattva*), and that Buddhism can do without a free will theory (*Negative*).

Meyers, however, explicitly suggests presenting Buddhism as a *seemingly naturalistic* (but implicitly a stealth supernatural) philosophy in order to lure Western philosophers and scholars into meditation practices, implicitly with the idea that their contemplative experiences might not be able to be assimilated within their physicalism and naturalism. This line of reasoning suggests the sort of supernaturalism that she seems to imply might be necessary for (a more genuinely *Buddhist*) Bud-

dhism. However, in suggesting that the supernatural elements are optional for Western Buddhists, I am merely pointing out that these ideas are, in fact, optional for those who might prefer to see them as such. By analogy, it is optional for thus-inclined contemporary Catholics whether to believe that the Eucharist is *literally* the flesh-substance of Jesus, or for Jews whether to believe that pork is unclean; it is a separate question whether those who reject such beliefs remain *true* Catholics or Jews, respectively, but that is not my concern. The supernatural beliefs Meyers seems to think are not optional for those who wish to remain Buddhists clearly are not what Descartes had in mind (in his Third Meditation) when he argued that we cannot help but believe propositions that are clearly and distinctly true. To the contrary, the supernatural beliefs Meyers has in mind are the sort of ideas about which Descartes would have thought we ought to withhold judgment: propositions that are neither clearly and distinctly true, nor clearly and distinctly false, but in the grey area in between, what William James called “live options.”

To the extent that each of us is responsible for our judgments regarding propositions that are neither clearly and distinctly true nor clearly and distinctly false (propositions about which Descartes thought we should withhold judgment), assenting to their veracity is clearly optional as a matter of epistemology and as a matter of freedom of thought. Pragmatists like James would argue that for some of these sorts of propositions, pragmatic considerations require us to decide consciously whether to assent to them or not, namely, if they are *necessary* (meaning, if not deciding consciously implicitly entails a position on them) or *momentous* (meaning, of great consequence). If we—Buddhists or otherwise—are not free to form our own judgments about things that are neither clearly and distinctly true nor clearly and distinctly false, then we are not free to form *any* judgments. For none of us is free to form our own judgments about things that are clearly and distinctly true (because we *must* believe those) or things that are clearly and distinctly false (be-

cause we *cannot* believe those), as Descartes insightfully observed. Any ideology that demands that adherents cannot decide whether to lend assent to uncertain propositions is therefore multiply suspect.

Insisting that certain metaphysical beliefs are not optional for members of a religious belief system might seem innocuous when it comes to the study of the doctrinal beliefs of followers of Early Buddhism, say, but maintaining this sort of stance beyond those parameters would threaten to invalidate all but the earliest form of Buddhism, in which case I'm not sure the works of Vasubandhu, Candrakīrti, Nāgārjuna, or Śāntideva, for example, would be valid objects of genuine Buddhist study. That sort of thinking could also demand that true Catholics must believe in the transubstantiation of a piece of unleavened bread into the flesh of the deceased and resurrected body of Jesus, and that they engage in the ritual devourous, cannibalistic act, once a week, of consuming that metaphysical substance in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Considerations such as these function as a *reductio ad absurdum* for the idea that otherwise ungrounded (supernatural) beliefs in what science currently considers fantasy are not optional for contemporary secular Western Buddhists.

I acknowledge that a form of Buddhism that jettisons these supernatural ideas may or may not be properly *considered* "traditional" Buddhism, depending on how we wish to define that term. I accept Buddhists insisting that if these ideas are removed, the result is no longer traditional Buddhism, strictly speaking, but some derivative. But I have no objection to derivative forms of Buddhism, given its long and ever-adaptive history. I have taken no position, nor argued for one, on the normative aspect of this issue, i.e., whether these ideas should be jettisoned, or, if they are, whether or not the resulting view is sufficiently Buddhist. In fact, later on, Meyers herself says (of me) that I am "quite aware of the fact that most Buddhists would not recognize a naturalized

Buddhism as *Buddhist*” (797, emphasis hers), so this line of reasoning, on her part, seems unnecessary, if it is thought to be directed at my views. In fairness to Meyers, many of her objections do not name me explicitly as their target, so it is possible they are not directed at me. In fairness to myself, however, Meyers does weave in and out of many objections, explicitly mentioning and quoting me, interspersed with these more general objections, which gives the impression that most of them do target me, unless otherwise specified. In such cases, it is somewhat unclear. If any of these objections were not meant to be directed at my views, then my replies to those objections can be set aside, or at least the parts of those replies that assume that the objections are directed at my views.

Meyers generally acknowledges the legitimacy of the sort of analysis of Buddhist thinking about free will that I employ, but seems to be worried that it might be being offered *instead of* an analysis that is more exegetical, stating:

I would only urge that this be *alongside* and not in the stead of traditional Buddhist perspectives, and that we avoid any *a priori* assumption that modern naturalism has a greater claim on the possible or true than traditional forms of Buddhism. (I’m not sure Repetti would disagree.)  
(793)

I would not disagree. I do not advocate the naturalism she worries will replace supernatural Buddhism, and I have no reason to reject the sort of exegetical analysis that would delve into the core doctrinal philosophy of traditional Buddhism, about which I am admittedly relatively agnostic. I have made many remarks about how, as an analytic philosopher (and a long-term contemplative practitioner) I focus on what Buddhists *can* say, as opposed to what they *have said* or *do say*. I presented my views, not *instead of*, but “alongside” her own “traditional Buddhist perspective,” and over a dozen other views of Buddhist philosophers and

scholars, some traditional, others not, in the aptly-named *Buddhist Perspectives on Free Will* (note the plural term in the title), to which Meyers contributed. My remarks introducing these diverse views (*Preface; Introduction*) explicitly frame them as having been sequenced in a way to form a dialectical progression, with each subsequent article engaging in some way with the ones adjacent to it, forming a sort of philosophical conversation, a number of which contributions were of the sort Meyers seems to prefer, including her own contribution to that conversation. Again, in my own contributions to the anthology, I have made clear that a driving insight behind my motivation to explore possible Buddhist theories of free will is the fact that meditation virtuosos possess titanic, supernormal, and possibly supernatural abilities that make the mundane conception of free will set forth by the libertarian (as the strongest version of free will on offer in Western philosophy, namely, the ability to have done otherwise under identical conditions) pale in comparison.

Thus, I agree that contemporary naturalist assumptions ought not to be afforded such a superior *a priori* status that they automatically displace or replace traditional conceptions, and I doubt that I have given the impression that they should. Thus, I'm not sure what motivates remarks such as this last one, where Meyers urges against something I do not advocate. Although I did not press this point in the anthology, I do think that while there is no *a priori* argument against treating claims from pre-scientific eras as dismissible on that ground alone, or on the related grounds of their supernatural or magical content, there are *a posteriori* arguments for favoring a scientific approach over a magical or pre-scientific one.

Consider, for example, contemporary contemplative neuroscience versus ancient contemplative claims, as reflected in a criticism of contemplative neuroscience that might be made by Buddhist practitioners to the effect that studying the brains of meditation practitioners

cannot increase our understanding of the mind in ways that meditation itself can, or that we cannot infer anything about the mind from analyses of the brains of meditation practitioners, contrary to the phenomenal findings of contemplative neuroscience. There's validity in the general critique of contemplative neuroscience as involving some potentially misleading hyperbole (Van Dam et al.), but also validity in the provocative findings of contemplative neuroscience, such as the claim that meditation virtuosos like Mingyur Rinpoche exhibit otherwise extremely rare, momentary gamma waves as an enduring baseline state, and several multiples of gamma waves when practicing meditation (Goleman and Davidson 216-228). I would not favor the anecdotal mystical claims of someone from a pre-scientific age over those of neuroscience, as if the latter is less well founded than the former, or on equal footing. What evidence is there for the former? If, as Meyers seems to think, these claims ought to be presented alongside each other, presumably as equally credible alternatives, then I would disagree. By analogy, evolution theory and intelligent design theory are not equally credible: not a priori, but precisely because *a posteriori* evidence massively confirms evolution theory, and there is little to confirm intelligent design theory, absent some sort of underlying metaphysical orientation.

As skeptical philosopher Robert Nozick once said (158-159), absent supramundane background beliefs, what reason is there to believe the nondual mystical experience is more than just an unusual state in which the cognitive apparatus is damped down (like a stereo system that is on but is not playing anything)? It seems to be a case of special pleading (double standard) to hold such a high level of skeptical scrutiny for neuroscience, yet almost no scrutiny for one's own supramundane belief system, one shrouded, no less, in esoterica about emptiness, anti-realism, yogic perception, alternate dimensions that map onto trance states, etc. Although I tend to think there is something to the supramundane experience more than Nozick suggests, based on my own mystical

experience, when claims based on mystical experiences compete with claims based in science, principles of parsimony and the like do generally favor claims based in science. To think otherwise, as I more recently argued (*Buddhism*), begs the question in the sense that the grounds of such claims are in greater need of support than the claims themselves.

Sometimes Meyers's comments seem to move in two directions at the same time. For example, she says, "I don't think he means it" (to which preface I would question why she suggests something she does not think I mean), adding,

but because the analogy between the impersonal view of science and the Buddhist view of no-self does a fair bit of work in his soteriological justification for a Buddhist theory of free will, Repetti comes dangerously close at times to equating a modern scientific worldview with the ultimate truth of Buddhism. (794)

I do compare them, but not as part of my soteriological justification of the theory of free will that I develop, but only for the sake of trying to do two things: (1) to help the reader understand the (otherwise incredibly impenetrable, if not convoluted) Buddhist *two truths* doctrine by reference to the analogous set of binary perspectives found in the scientific versus common sense (naive realist) views of the world; and (2) to put Buddhism in the respectable light of science. I clearly do not equate them, however. I also see nothing "dangerous" in relating them.

Meyers (794) goes a step further, stating (of me) that "he adds the distinctively modern and western dichotomy between religion and science into the mix," referencing my claim that "A Buddhist NOMA issue is arguably whether conventional Buddhist truth (e.g., Buddhist religion) is non-overlapping with ultimate Buddhist truth (akin to science)," as if being distinctively modern, western, or dichotomous might make "the

mix” (of my ideas) problematic, but without saying exactly what the problem is. (I will explain what a NOMA issue is shortly.) In response, I would call attention to certain words in my quoted sentence: “issue,” “arguably,” and “whether”. It is “arguably” a legitimate philosophical point of curiosity or interest, i.e., an “issue,” particularly a NOMA issue, “whether” Buddhist conventional truths (which are arguably religious) and Buddhist ultimate truths (which are arguably not religious, but more analogous to what science considers ultimately real or true) are compatible or incompatible, or overlapping or non-overlapping, analogous to the NOMA issue.

What is a NOMA issue? According to Gould, science and religion range over “non-overlapping magisteria” (NOMA). This idea may be viewed as an issue of whether and to what extent religious beliefs, which may be understood to be part of the non-scientific world view, are distinct from scientific ones, in such a way that they have their own criteria, not necessarily the same sort of truth conditions that govern factual or scientific statements. Attempting to form a truce between them, Gould thought religion and science involve non-overlapping magisteria, with religion ranging over values and science ranging over facts. I think Gould is clearly wrong about that, as do most philosophers of religion and philosophers of science (as may be seen by considering whether intelligent design theory competes with evolution theory), but the idea is interestingly promising with respect to some interpretations of Buddhism. I did not assert that Buddhism (per se, or parsed into conventional and ultimate terms) does, nor that it does not, fall into one or the other of the two categories, NOMA or non-NOMA (overlapping). Instead, again, I was simply mapping out interesting logical possibilities that might raise the level of philosophical discussion about the issue of Buddhism and free will.

In general, almost everything I have said about Buddhism and free will is in the category of logical possibilities intended to raise the philosophical level of the discussion, as opposed to *advocating* views of my own—not that I never do that: sometimes I do advocate this or that point. But most of my points are made *arguendo*. Meyers goes on to admit (793) that she herself has made the sorts of comparisons I have made, and to suggest that her critique is driven by the need to differentiate between these ideas and comparisons—as if making such comparisons others give the impression that these things are more alike than they are, as her title, “False Friends,” suggests, but as if by delineating “the Perils of Analogy in Cross-Cultural Philosophy,” as her subtitle has it, she is not. Admittedly, these impressions are plausibly deniable, and she does raise a number of legitimate concerns, but the extent to which they apply to my work or that of the other contributors to the anthology is unclear.

Meyers takes issue with my claim, which I based on a book-length argument in its support by Mark Balaguer, that whether or not determinism is true is an open empirical question. She also seems to think that I think that the answer to that *empirical* question somehow figures in determining the *exegetical* question about whether or not what the Buddha thought about dependent origination was that it was, or was not, deterministic. That's a multi-level stacking of assumptions. She states:

Alongside authors who treat the question of whether dependent origination is deterministic as an *exegetical* question, Repetti cites Balaguer's discussion of the lack of decisive empirical evidence regarding the indeterminism of neural events relevant to libertarian free will. I don't see how what science knows or discovers about our neural events has much to do with what the Buddha meant by dependent origination. On 202-203, however, Repetti makes the appropriate distinction between the empirical

and exegetical, so I assume this was just an oversight. (fn. 13)

This passage places my comments *alongside* others in my text, as if their being thus placed implies something she questions but which I did not say, but later in the same passage Meyers acknowledges that I say the opposite of what she thinks I imply. But, rather than retract her earlier view, she retains it, and assumes that it was *just an oversight* on my part.

In her case, there appear to be *a number of oversights*. For example, Meyers acknowledges (much later, in her penultimate footnote, fn. 28) two other things that call some of her own claims above into question. The first is that I conclude that both determinism and indeterminism could turn out to be inconsistent with Buddhism. That observation calls into question her implicit worry that I might be attributing determinism to Buddhism. The second is that, on one meditation master's understanding of Buddhist omniscience about the future, the future is open, insofar as better practice might alter the future. But the idea of an open future requires indeterminism, something Meyers just rejected (in the above quote) as irrelevant. Below, she also proposes regulative control, which entails the ability to bring about an event that is not determined, which ability requires indeterminism. What puzzles me is why she thinks the issue of indeterminism is irrelevant to the Buddhist conception of agency only when I mention it.

Meyers also claims (which claim I will quote shortly below) that it is understandable that a philosopher cannot be expected to be an exegete. However, I repeatedly emphasize my primary focus on what Buddhists *can* say. That is a *philosophical* task, not an *exegetical* one, despite cases where the former may be constrained by the latter. I suggest a better *exegetical* approach to interpreting "Repetti" texts would be one that takes my seemingly problematic remarks not as oversights unintentionally contradicted by other things I say, but rather as evidence that one

may have misinterpreted some of my statements by not first taking into consideration all of my statements and the context they collectively construct. For context determines meaning, and the meanings of philosophical claims are typically developed in stages throughout an article, chapter, or book, if not over the course of a research program, which latter applies here.

Meyers goes on to critique my ideas as a function of my Western philosophical training and what she implicitly presumes to be also a function of my unfamiliarity with exegetical issues in Buddhist studies, stating: "I am less optimistic about his assertion that Buddhist traditions' 'supernaturalisms' are 'plausibly optional,' and the further implication that these are irrelevant to the inquiry into a Buddhist theory of free will" (796). I have made it clear in all of my writings that I am not primarily concerned with excavating what Buddhists *have* said or thought about free will or its cognates, but in what Buddhist philosophers *can* say about it, particularly in light of Western analytic philosophy. I have also argued forcefully that the alleged supernatural abilities of the meditation virtuoso would enhance a Buddhist theory of free will, though the theory can stand independently of them, so I am puzzled by these remarks. Meyers further states:

As a matter of textual interpretation and historical description, it is, of course, deeply problematic to rely on modern sensibilities about what is natural or plausible to decide what is essential to Buddhism.

Given that his primary training is in western philosophy, Repetti may not be aware of the extent to which this dynamic has infected modern interpretations of Buddhism or the degree to which it is has been subjected to critique in Buddhist studies. (796)

Whereas trying “to decide what is essential to Buddhism” is a task Meyers seems to take up, the similar (but minor, collateral) task I do take up (in the course of arguing for a certain view of free will that is informed by Buddhism) only incidentally involves not what is *essential* to *traditional* Buddhism, but merely to suggest, *en passant*, what may be considered *inessential* to contemporary western philosophers interested in Buddhism. If doing that sort of philosophical work—exploring what contemporary Buddhists and philosophers (with “modern sensibilities”) *can* say about free will—automatically makes “this dynamic” (presumably, the dynamic of my relying on my own modern sensibilities) guilty of exegetical violence (“infect[ing] modern interpretations of Buddhism,” and being oblivious to “the degree to which it has been subjected to critique in Buddhist studies”), then I am guilty as charged. But the antecedent to that hypothetical is not satisfied, for I am not engaged in the project of using a dynamic informed by modern sensibilities to excavate the original meaning and essential doxological elements of early Buddhism.

Meyers also seems to impute intentions to my arguments that I would deny, but, again, it may be that this one is not directly targeting my view, when she states: “the problem with letting naturalism inform interpretation of Buddhist doctrine is not merely descriptive; it also undermines the broader constructive philosophical enterprise” (797). However, I do not *let* “naturalism inform interpretation of Buddhist doctrine.” Rather, naturalism is but one of many paradigms that I *consider* as part of a broader set of possible approaches and perspectives, including supernaturalism, panpsychism, etc., and I do so not to “inform interpretation of Buddhist doctrine,” but to bring Buddhist ideas and insights into dialogue with contemporary philosophy and contemplative neuroscience. Again, Meyers does not explicitly identify me as one who lets naturalism inform interpretation of Buddhist doctrine, but she presents such remarks alongside enough similar remarks that do name me to justify the impression that they are aimed at my overall “dynamic.”

Meyers goes on to suggest that Westerners who flirt with Buddhist naturalism may be guilty of *colonialism*, or what I will dub “West-splaining,” when she says that, “by excluding ideas that we don’t find congenial, we embody a kind of intellectual colonialism that forecloses opportunities to submit our own philosophical assumptions to scrutiny and to be genuinely transformed by our encounter with another tradition” (797). Two quick replies are in order.

First, in the Preface to the anthology, I state that I was drawn to philosophy and Buddhism because, in my first meditation I had an out-of-body experience and countless subsequent related precognitive, transcendent, and related mystical meditation-based experiences that were inexplicable from the perspective of the physicalist’s/naturalist’s paradigm. They permanently altered my life trajectory, leading fairly directly to this combined work in analytic philosophy applied to the question of free will in Buddhism. Thus, I was obviously “genuinely transformed by [my] encounter with another tradition,” something Meyers compliments me for sharing (but then seems to cancel afterwards, to be discussed shortly). Second, throughout my many imaginative chains of philosophical exploration in the anthology, I am anything but “excluding ideas I don’t find congenial” or “foreclosing possibilities.” To the contrary, the bulk of my philosophical work, if not my philosophical *modus operandi*, is conceiving alternate possibilities and paradigms, even to ideas I find congenial. Again, I am not named in that objection, but it is not unreasonable to think it is being presented as applicable to my views.

As with her previous, initially questionable characterization of my claims followed by her subsequent imputation of an alleged slip on my part, Meyers goes on, in the very next paragraph, to mention my out-of-body experience, as if it is an “irony” that this happened to me but

fails to inform my thinking. But it is only her uncharitable interpretation of my remarks that gives the impression that the irony is on me.

I respect Meyers for (perhaps overzealously) trying to protect the core subject matter of her own (otherwise excellent) work in excavating exegetical gems from canonical and/or authoritative Buddhist texts without distorting their true meaning. It is a noble intention, surely what the Buddha would consider Right Intention, to preserve the *Dharma* as transmitted. In referring to those of my own mystical experiences that led me to study the *Dharma*, Meyers states:

This bit of personal history (which I commend Repetti for including) suggests to me, at least, that the fact that Buddhism countenances such experiences within a *radically different* conception of mind and world than found in our modern naturalisms—which tend to reject or explain away such experiences (e.g., Blackmore *Seeing*)—is not irrelevant to our inquiry. Put another way, the fact that traditional forms of Buddhism do not share our understanding of the “natural” (and hence “supernatural”) is significant. (798)

I agree. I make clear (*Preface*) that one of the things that appeals to me in Buddhism is precisely the fact that it promises to make sense of those mystical experiences of mine in ways that are not possible within the standard Western philosophical paradigms.

What I do not understand is why she thinks I *advocate* Buddhist naturalism, rather than simply put it on the table as an interesting philosophical project, among others to be considered (by those who wish not to be “ethnocentric,” to quote her quoting (797) of Flanagan), when I have stated that I cannot explain my most meaningful philosophical experiences within a naturalistic framework. Showing ways in which this

or that aspect of my analysis may be consistent with naturalism is not something to be embarrassed about, on the one hand, nor does it entail an aversion to supernaturalism, on the other hand. To the contrary, it bears repeating that a key premise in almost anything I've ever written about Buddhism and free will is that the sort of agency exhibited by Buddhist meditation virtuosos is so titanic and supernatural that it makes the libertarian's allegedly strong free will conception—the mere ability to have done otherwise under identical conditions—appear weak. This is anything but an aversion to supernaturalism.

In the very next sentence, Meyers directs her criticism to what may be seen as yet another case of West-splaining committed by another contributor to the edited collection, Owen Flanagan, despite the fact that Flanagan goes to great length to catalogue variously better and worse modes of cross-cultural philosophy and apply that matrix of possibilities to the issue of Buddhism and free will. Meyers states: “In this regard, one might note the performative contradiction in Flanagan’s contention that *naturalized* Buddhism offers a serious counterpoint to western concerns about free will and thus protection against ‘philosophical projection and ethnocentrism’” (Meyers 797, quoting Flanagan *Negative* 70). Flanagan is much more careful about his claim than Meyers suggests, however, for he is referring to the putative fact that Buddhism gets along just fine without belief in free will—that is his point here, not naturalism.

Meyers herself acknowledges the philosophical fruitfulness of a project of seeing what *can* be naturalized in Buddhism, separate from the question whether it *ought* to be naturalized, so it is questionable why she casts Flanagan’s naturalization project as a performative contradiction, simply because he explicitly acknowledges the possible dangers of approaching cross-cultural philosophy in a manner that threatens to distort. But whereas Flanagan is explicitly engaged in the project of natu-

ralizing Buddhism and advocating for it, I am not engaged in that project, much less advocating it.

In her concluding section, Meyers kindly describes some of my ideas as raising the level of the discussion, even over her own previous attempts. But in the same section she suggests that I may be employing some sort of bait and switch strategy to lure Western philosophers into engagement with Buddhism by presenting them with an intentionally disguised appearance of naturalism cloaking a hidden supernaturalism:

Despite the fact that Repetti relies on the idea of naturalizing Buddhism in order to justify inquiry into a Buddhist theory of free will, his conclusions in chapter seventeen do not require naturalizing Buddhism, nor does naturalization enter into his discussion there. Indeed, one might even get the impression that all the talk of naturalization may have just been a ploy to lure philosophers afraid of “hocus pocus” (Flanagan *Bodhisattva*'s) into a conversation with Buddhism, and not a true conviction in the idea that Buddhism can or should be naturalized. (812)

Three responses are in order, following an emerging pattern. First, this passage ignores the fact that I rely primarily and explicitly on the Buddha's own rejection of a number of forms of inevitabilism that constitute the bulk of the forms of free will skepticism, and I only mention the potential for naturalism as one among many other *minor* possible justifications, and not as one that I personally advocate. Thus, it is not a “fact that Repetti relies on the idea of naturalizing Buddhism in order to justify inquiry into a Buddhist theory of free will,” as I do not rely on that strategy.

Second, this passage seems to run afoul of the principle of charitable interpretation. Instead, third, Meyers could easily have, and *should*

have, taken the fact that my “conclusions in chapter seventeen do not require naturalizing Buddhism” and the fact that naturalization does not even “enter into his discussion there” and relied on those two remarks in order to avoid misinterpreting me as someone advocating naturalism in the first place. I do not engage in a bait and switch *ploy*, though Meyers explicitly advocates such a ploy.

A good part, if not the better bulk, of Meyers's analysis is not directly critical of my work or of the entire collection, but rather is taken up by her own positive analysis of the history of the shifting conceptual content to the notion of dependent origination throughout the different (mostly early) periods of Buddhism. I have no objection directly targeted to this fine feature of her work; in fact, I think a lacuna in Buddhist philosophical scholarship that needs to be addressed concerns the Buddhist understanding(s) of the nature of causation and which, if any, contemporary understandings may be coextensive, overlapping, or different. However, this aspect of her work is nonetheless indirectly critical of my analysis and that of most of the other contributors to the edited collection insofar as it constitutes the basis for her criticism of comparing the Western scientific conception of determinism with dependent origination, the latter of which she shows has more differences than commonalities with the former than recent commentators emphasize. Fair enough, in one sense, but perhaps not so, in another.

There is certainly a difference between any of the conceptions of dependent origination Meyers identifies and determinism; for example, dependent origination in its earliest rendering seems narrowly restricted to the chain of psychophysical links connected with soteriological progress, the narrow scope of which certainly differs from that of universal causation. However, any narrowly-scoped causal sequence will always differ in scope from universal causation, but, by analogy, the causal rules that determine transitions between H<sub>2</sub>O's solid, liquid, and

gaseous states are narrow in scope, but these are merely particular instances of this or that specific type of causal relationship: all such specific causal relationships, such as laws of genetic inheritance or electron bonding, however, fall under the broader category of universal causation, and are subject to it, whether we focus on this aspect of causality or not.

The arguably ostrich psychology strategy of not noticing universal causation does not exempt particular causation from universal causation, nor would a specific karmic cause/effect pair be exempt from the global interconnectedness of all conditioned phenomena (interdependence). Thus, this scope difference alone does not automatically guarantee a valid element of disanalogy. Likewise, nor do the other elements of disanalogy she identifies, such as Gowans's emphasis (in the anthology) on the organic (agrarian) examples of later, more broadly conceived interpretations of dependent origination that are somewhat broader in scope, though not explicitly universal. That is arguably more ostrich psychology, but not looking at the causal structure of the world doesn't make it go away.

This should go without saying, but many otherwise insightful analysts frequently miss this basic element of analogical critique. (Meyers's paper is subtitled "Dependent Origination and the Perils of Analogy in Cross-Cultural Philosophy," so I would expect her analysis of the main analogy in question to be one that avoids the perils of analogical reasoning.) Thus, all analogies between any two things A and B, by definition, must have some disanalogous elements, otherwise they are not two different things (in the latter case, A and B are just two instances of the exact same thing, or  $A=A$ , where A appears under a different description as B). Therefore, merely noting some disanalogous elements between any two *non-identical* entities A and B cannot automatically invalidate the A/B analogy in question. Rather, the differences between A and B re-

quired to undermine the analogy between A and B must be *relevant* differences, where the relevantly disanalogous elements must be those that directly undermine the *intention* or *point* of the analogy. It is not clear that Meyers's otherwise astute analysis of the differences between the various conceptions of dependent origination reveals those differences to be sufficiently relevant to the points of the analogies to invalidate them.

Of course, philosophical analysis should be sensitive to differences in conceptions between dependent origination and determinism, if any, when comparing them. But it does not follow from the fact that they are different in various ways that they cannot be intelligently compared at all, nor that they should not be compared, unless they are so different that they cannot be intelligently compared at all, in which case they would have *no* analogous elements. Nothing in Meyers's analysis suggests that they are so different that it would be unintelligible or a category error to even try to compare them. By analogy, the mere fact that neurological phenomena (such as Meyers suggested were completely off base in my reference to them) and biological phenomena (such as Gowans's agrarian, organic model) are different from chemical or atomic phenomena in no way invalidates the idea that they may all be analyzed from a deterministic perspective, or an interdependence perspective, contrary to the opposite ostrich psychology impression. Meyers's paper, again, is entitled "False Friends: Dependent Origination and the Perils of Analogy in Cross-Cultural Philosophy," but the greater perils of analogy in her own cross-cultural philosophy may not be so much the ones she points to as the ones directing her to point.

Besides, some quite respectable, brilliant Buddhist scholars take the view that Buddhist causation is deterministic; some of them (e.g., Goodman) were printed in the anthology, *alongside* my article and hers. It may or may not be the case that Buddhist causation is rightly considered

deterministic, but that is not a central concern of mine. The gist of my main argument (*Agentless*) is precisely that it doesn't matter what the nature of causation is from the perspective of the Buddhist meditation virtuoso. For the virtuoso enjoys not only freedom of the will, but mental freedom. That mental freedom is attainable regardless of not only the nature of causation (deterministic, indeterministic, neither, or both), but even if manipulated by nefarious neuroscientists, if embodied as a brain in a vat, or if downloaded into a digital mind. Surely this main claim—of the great power of Buddhist mental freedom—bears on Meyers's concerns, revealing them to be unfounded or misplaced.

In her concluding section, Meyers mentions my mystical experiences as the sort of thing Buddhism could explain (if only I was receptive), and implicitly depicts me as being unaware of what Buddhists have to say about those experiences, and as likely being insensitive to reasons, stating: "Learning what Buddhists have to say about these things probably won't affect Repetti's soft compatibilist account" (813). She proposes what is presented as if it is a stronger alternative to my account, that includes genuine *regulative control*, which requires indeterminism, as opposed to the sort of pseudo-regulative control that is possible in a deterministic world. (Genuine regulative control is my description, taken from Fischer, for the libertarian's ability to do otherwise.) Engaging with such contemporary Western ideas and the philosophical dynamic they are embedded in, it should be pointed out, is something that concerns Meyers, but only when I do so.

Yet again, Meyers ignores that I emphasize—and have been emphasizing for about a decade now—that the sort of titanic mind-control and psychic abilities depicted by Buddhist meditation virtuosos clearly surpass the libertarian's otherwise mundane ability to have done otherwise, e.g., the libertarian claims that while she chose the tofu, she could have chosen the seitan, all other things being identical. Meyers appar-

ently fails to grasp my simple definition of soft compatibilism: contrary to hard incompatibilism, which holds that free will is incompatible with determinism and with indeterminism, soft compatibilism holds that free will is compatible with determinism, with indeterminism, with both, and/or with neither. *Buddhist* soft compatibilism simply holds that Buddhism is compatible with soft compatibilism. Again, the sort of control that I argue is exhibited by Buddhist meditation virtuosos makes Meyers's allegedly "stronger" regulative control—the libertarian's mere ability to have done otherwise—appear facile, but I do not even reject that form of regulative control. I simply note that it is arguably optional.

Again, Meyers ignores what I have said about the role of my own physicalism-challenging meditation experiences, what I have said about the powers of meditation virtuosos, and what I have said about what Buddhism can say about them, directly stating or indirectly implying or suggesting that I'm unaware of this, that I haven't taken it seriously, or that I have ruled out things that I have not ruled out, stating:

But perhaps the real payoff for taking what Buddhists say on these matters seriously, for not automatically bracketing or ruling out the bits of Buddhism that smack of supernaturalism, is that it may turn out that our current naturalisms are insufficient to explain these and other human experiences. In other words, Buddhism may track features of our world (or worlds) that are worth knowing about but regularly excluded from our current naturalisms. (813)

Apart from the fact that implicit assumptions driving this quote seem clearly to refer to her corrective for me, I couldn't agree with this quote more. It simply does not apply to me.

In her concluding sentence, Meyers states: “Rather than relying on Gould’s NOMA thesis to guide our cross-cultural philosophical inquiries, perhaps we should aim for a more expansive, borderless, and eminently revisable magisterium” (814). Considering her implicit and sometimes explicit defense of a somewhat restrictive conception of Buddhism, which has normative implications regarding which (original) Buddhist beliefs are canonical and which (contemporary, western, scientific, or naturalistic) beliefs threaten to transmogrify Buddhism, her aspirational use of the phrase “more expansive, borderless, and eminently revisable” seems inconsistently applied. Whoever it is that Meyers thinks is “relying on Gould’s NOMA thesis to guide our cross-cultural philosophical inquiries,” or doing most of the things she seems to think I am doing in the anthology, my reply is the same: It wasn’t me.

I began by noting that either I have failed to express my own views clearly, Meyers has misunderstood them, or some combination of both. I have reviewed several of the claims Meyers seems to attribute to me, alongside several very related claims that were not explicitly directed at me, but which may reasonably be taken to be implicitly part of her general critique of my approach, and tried to show how they somehow miss the mark if they are indeed directed at my work. It is admittedly unclear whether some of her remarks that I have replied to were even directed to my work, but I thought it might be helpful to respond to them as if they were, just to clear up any possible misconceptions. I hope I have succeeded in clarifying anything that may have been unclear.

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