Self & Selves

The nature of not-self and personal development

by Piya Tan ©2007

To JAN KYSELA of the Czech Republic,
University of Lancaster, UK, & the NUSBS Discovering Buddhism,
In joyful appreciation (*muditā*) of his great interest in seeking the truth, 2008-2009.

> "Nothing is more usual than for philosophers to encroach on the province of grammarians, and to engage in disputes of words, while they imagine they are handling controversies of the deepest importance and concern."
>
> (David Hume, *Enquiry*, E 312. Appendix 4, *Philosophical Works* 1854 4:382)[1]

1 Seeking the self

We have elsewhere[2] discussed on some basic level why the Buddha rejects any notion of a permanent entity, such as a soul (Skt *ātman*). Here, we shall look deeper into the problem of knowledge, identity and spiritual liberation.

1.1 THE 30 GOOD FRIENDS. During the first year of the Buddha's ministry, while he is at Isi,patana, Uruvelā, near Benares, resting at the foot of a tree in a silk-cotton grove (*kappasika vana,saṇḍa*), a group of thirty good friends (*bhadda,vaggiyā sahāyakā*), approach him, asking him if he has seen a woman (who has stolen their clothes and valuables) passing by that way.

After questioning them further, the Buddha then says:

"Which is best (*varaṁ*),[3] boys: seeking a woman, or seeking oneself (*attānaṁ gaveseyyātha*)?"[4]

"Seeking oneself is better, Blessed One!" reply the young men.

The Buddha's words settle their destiny. Of course, boys could have answered according to their erstwhile youthful emotions, but seeing the calm and inspiring figure of the Buddha, they feel compelled to rise to the occasion. Giving up their sensual frolic, they listen attentively to his Dharma, and soon all attain the "eye of truth" (*dhamma,cakkhu*), a term referring to any of the three lower stages of sainthood. Upon their request, the Buddha ordain them into the order.[5]

1.2 THE ANSWER LIES WITHIN. The Rohitassa Sutta (S 2.26) preserves an interesting conversation between the Buddha and an astral traveller, Rohitassa, who asks the Buddha whether the physical universe has a limit, so that things as we know them cease to be:

> "Is it possible, bhante, by going, to know or to see or to reach the end of the world, where one is not born, does not age, does not die, does not pass away, does not arise?"
>
> "As to that end of the world, avuso, where one is not born, does not age, does not die, does not pass away, does not arise—<u>it cannot be known, seen or reached by going</u>, I say."
>
> (S 2.26.2-3/1:61) = SD 7.2

Rohitassa is delighted with the Buddha's answer. For, in his previous life, Rohitassa was a seer with the power of astral travel. He could cross a huge ocean in a single stride and fly as fast as an arrow. However, although he has spent almost all his adult life doing this, he could not reach the world's end. The Buddha then adds:

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[1] See text of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

[2] You are advised to first read **Is there a soul?** = SD 2.16 before reading this chapter; or, you could read this chapter together with **Is there a soul?**

[3] *Vara* is a pregnant word meaning "excellent, splendid, best, noble," and also "blessing." See PED: vara.

[4] *Taṁ kiṁ maññatha vo, kumārā, katamaṁṁ nu kho tumhākaṁ varaṁ—yaṁ vā tumhe itthiṁ gaveseyyātha, yaṁ vā attānaṁṁ gaveseyyāthā'ti.*

[5] V 1:23 f; DhA 2:33 f; J 1:82; AA 1:100, 147; ThiA 3.

> However, avuso [friend], without having reached the end of the world,[6] there is no making an end to suffering, I say.
>
> Avuso, in this very fathom-long body[7] endowed with perception and the mind, that I make known the world, the arising of the world, the ending of the world, and the way leading to the ending of the world.[8] (S 2.26.9/1:62) = SD 7.2

The Buddha's answer sets the parameters of our inquiry regarding selfhood (*atta,bhāva*),[9] the world and spiritual liberation, in short, about life itself. Our inquiry will begin with the investigation of these questions: what is *this body* made of; *how* do we know, and *what* can we know?

1.3 WHAT IS THIS BODY MADE OF?

1.3.1 The four elements. The early Buddhist texts define the human body in at least two well known ways: (1) as the four elements (*dhātu*), and (2) as the six senses (*āyatana*). We will examine the four-element model first. The four-element model defines the body in terms of the physical world as experienced by a sentient being, where the terms of reference centre on "the body-endowed-with-consciousness" (*saviññāṇaka kāya*).

The earth element (*paṭhavī*) is hardness, softness, roughness, smoothness, heaviness, lightness,[10] and also resistance. It is so called because, like the earth, it serves as a support or foundation for physical phenomena. Whatever in our body that is of karmically acquired hardness or firmness—head-hair, body-hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, stomach contents, dung and so on—this is called our own earth element.

The water element (*āpo*) is cohesion, stickiness (viscidity), thickness (viscosity), and liquidity. Whatever in our body that is of karmically acquired liquidity or fluidity; bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin-grease, saliva, nasal mucus, synovial fluid, urine, and so on—this is called our own water element.

The fire element (*tejo,dhātu*) is decay, heat, cold, oxidation, combustion, and digestion (metabolism). Whatever in our body that is of karmically acquired heat or warmth, such as that whereby we are heated, consumed, scorched, whereby that which has been eaten, drunk, chewed, or tasted, is fully digested, and so on—this is called our own fire element.

The wind element (*vāyo,dhātu*) is motion, vibration, distension, and pressure. There are various karmically acquired "winds" in our body, that is, breathing, peristalsis, and muscular movement—this is called our own wind element.[11]

From all this, it is clear that the four elements are not really *states* of matter as they are dynamic *processes* (or phases) of the body. They are certainly not meant to be any scientific explanation of the composition of the human body or of matter. The purpose of the four-element model, as we shall see, is for *reflecting on the impermanence of the body in relation to ridding any notion of an abiding self or soul.*

1.3.2 Reflection on the elements. **The Mahā Hatthi,pādôpama Sutta** (M 28),[12] **the Mahā Rāhul'-ovāda Sutta** (M 62) and **the Dhātu,vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 140) present the four elements in some detail in

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[6] By "world" (*loka*) here the Buddha means the "world of formations" (*saṅkhāra,loka*), speaking on the level of "ultimate truth" (*param'attha,sacca*) in response to Rohitassa question based in reference to the "physical world" (*okāsa,loka*), that is, on the level of "conventional truth" (*sammuti,sacca*). See **Rohitassa S** (S 2.26) = SD 7.2 Intro (1). On the two levels of language, see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9/1:178-203) in SD 7.14 Intro (4).

[7] "In this very fathom-long body," *imasmiñ-ñ-eva vyāma,matte kaḷevare.* The word *kaḷevara* is probably cognate with the English "cadaver." Comy glosses these 4 statements as those of the 4 noble truths. Thus the Buddha shows: "I do not, friend, make known these four truths in external things like grass and wood, but right here in this body composed of the four great elements." (SA 1:117 f)

[8] *Na kho panâhaṁ āvuso appatvā lokassa antaṁ dukkhassa anta,kiriyaṁ vadāmi. Api ca khvâhaṁ āvuso imasmiṁ yeva byāma,matte kaḷevare sa,saññimhi sa,manake lokañ ca paññapemi loka,samudayañ ca loka,nirodhañ ca loka,nirodha,gāminiñ ca paṭipadanti.*

[9] On *atta,bhāva,* see Aloysius Pieris 1979: 13-15.

[10] These are amongst the characteristics mentioned at Dhs §648/165, see also Dhs 962/177.

[11] For a more detailed definition, see ***Rūpa*** = SD 17.2a (5).

connection with human body. Their presentations are both reflective and instructive. And their purpose is very clear: it is to rid our minds of the idea of anything permanent, especially the popular ancient notion that this body is the self (*taṁ jīvaṁ taṁ sarīraṁ*).[13] Take, for example, the opening definition, that of the earth element:

> What is **the earth element** [hardness]?[14]
>
> Whatever that is solid, rigid [solidified][15] and clung to[16] internally and individually [belonging to oneself], namely,
>
> *head-hair, body-hair, nails, teeth, skin;*
> *flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys;*
> *heart, liver, membranes (around the lungs), spleen, lungs;*
> *large intestines, small intestines, stomach-contents, dung,*
>
> or whatever else that is solid, solidified and clung to, internally and individually [belonging to oneself]—this is called internal earth element.
>
> Now both the internal earth element and the external earth element are simply **earth element** [hardness]. And that should be seen as it really is with right wisdom thus:
>
> "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self."
>
> (M 62.8/1:421 f) = SD 3.11; (M 140.13-19b/3:240-242) = SD 4.17

All the other three elements are similar presented: first, they are defined in terms of relevant "internal" parts (that is, bodily samples). Secondly, the phrase "clung to" refers to any bodily process arising as a result of our karma. Thirdly, both the internal element and the external element (in the universe) are of the same nature ("simply earth element," etc). Fourthly, and most importantly, we should not "own" any of the elements [2.4(2)], that is, to identify with it, or regard it as an abiding entity.[17]

The (Anattā) Udāyī Sutta (S 35.234) makes this point very clear, by showing that consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is not an abiding entity or eternal soul, but *arises from conditions*. Consciousness arises at each of our six senses, when stimulated by a sense-object. For example, this is how *eye-consciousness is explained as being not self*:

> "Doesn't the eye-consciousness, avuso [brother], arise in dependence of the eye and forms?"
>
> "Yes, it does, avuso."
>
> "If the cause and condition for the arising of the eye-consciousness were all to cease completely without any remainder, could the eye-consciousness be discerned?"
>
> "No, avuso."
>
> "In this way, avuso, this has in many ways been shown, revealed and declared, in a manner of speaking (*pariyāyena*), by the Blessed One, thus:
>
> 'Thus [For this reason] is this consciousness not-self.'" (S 35.234.4/4:166) = SD 26.4

The consciousnesses arising from the other five senses are similarly explained as being not self.

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[12] M 28.5-25/1:185-190 = SD 6.16. Also **M 62**.8-17/1:421-426 = SD 3.11 Intro (4), & **M 140**.13-18/3:240-242 = SD 4.17. On the 4 elements are mentioned, each in connection with the parable of the saw (M 21.20/1:129).

[13] **D 6**.15/1:157, **7**.15/1:159, **9**.26/1:188; **M 25**.10/1:157, **72**.7/484 (×2), **72**.14/485 (×2); **S 12**.35/2:62 (×2), **12**.36/2:63 (×2), **12**.37/2:64 f (×2); **A 10**.93/5:186 (×2), **10**.95/5:193 (×2), **10**.96/5:196 (×3); **U** 67. The opp view is "the self is one thing, the body another" (*aññaṁ jīvaṁ aññaṁ sarīraṁ,* id). See further [1.6.1].

[14] This sentence is not found in the **Mahā Rāhul'ovāda S** (M 62), but is in **Dhātu,vibhaṅga S** (M 140.14/-3:240) = SD 4.17.

[15] "Solid, rigid [solidified]," *kakkhaḷaṁ kharigataṁ.* The former is the element's characteristic (*lakkhaṇa*) and the latter its mode (*ākāra*) (Vism 286). In the Abhidhamma, the hardness (*kakkhaḷatta*) itself is the earth element (VismṬ 362 f). See Karunadasa 1967:17 f.

[16] "Clung to," *upādiṇṇa.* In the Abhidhamma, this is a technical term applicable to bodily phenomena that are produced by karma. Here, in Mahā Rāhulovāda S (M 62), as well as **Mahā Hatthipadôpama S** (M 28), it is used in the general sense as applicable to the entire body insofar as it is grasped as "mine" and misapprehended as a self.

[17] Further on the 4 elements, see ***Rūpa*** = SD 17.2a.

In **the Anatta,lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59 = V 1:33 f), the Buddha shows that the five aggregates of existence (*pañca-k,khandha*)—form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness—are *dukkha* (unsatisfactory) [1.5.2]; in **the Cha,chakka Sutta** (M 3:282) he shows that the six senses (the eye, etc), are *anicca* (impermanent); in **the Arahatā Sutta 1** (S 22.76), he shows that the five aggregates are both unsatisfactory and impermanent:

> Bhikshus, form is impermanent: whatever is impermanent is unsatisfactory [suffering]; whatever is unsatisfactory is not-self. Whatever is not-self is not mine, I am not that, that is not my self. (S 22.76/3:82 f; see Dh 277-279 = Tha 676-78, Pm 2:106 for simplified versions)

1.4 HOW DO WE KNOW? Whatever exists is either physical or mental; whatever we can know is either physical or mental. Whatever exists and whatever we can know, as such, are *impermanent*. Since they are impermanent, they are also *unsatisfactory*, and since we have no real control over them or anything in the universe, including ourselves, there cannot be any abiding entity, such as a soul. We can *know* all this, that is, they have meaning for us. The question now is *how do we know all these things?*

The answer is found in a short but remarkable discourse, **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23), where the Buddha declares:

> **3** "Bhikshus, I will teach you the all (*sabba*). Listen to it.
> And what, bhikshus, is the all?
> The eye and forms,
> the ear and sounds,
> the nose and smells,
> the tongue and tastes,
> the body and touches,
> the mind and mind-objects.[18]
> This, bhikshus, is called the all.
> **4** Bhikshus, if anyone were to say thus: 'Rejecting this all, I shall make known another all'—that would be empty talk on his part.
> When questioned he would not be able to reply and, moreover, he would meet with vexation.
> And what is the reason for this?
> Because, bhikshus, that would not be within his domain." (S 35.23/4:15) = SD 7.1

We can know things (that is, ourselves and the external world) through the six senses (*saḷāyatana*), that is, our physical senses (the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body) (*pañc'indriya*) and the mind. They are our only tools of knowledge, and their objects are all that we can know. This is the essence of early Buddhist epistemology or theory of knowledge, and it is in this sense that it is an empirical and pragmatic teaching (but we will soon see that Buddhism is much more than this).

1.5 WHAT CAN WE KNOW?

1.5.1 The sense objects. Here I am not distinguishing between (1) what *we* can know and (2) what *can* be known. Strictly speaking, the first question implies that our knowing is very limited, that is, our knowing is at best sense-based. There are a lot more things that we do not know due to the limitation of our senses. The second question—What *can* be known?—implies that there some things (such as God, nirvana, etc) which can never be known, and they are best left at that.

As for the Buddha, he knows all that needs to be known for the purpose of spiritual liberation, but he also knows much more beyond that, that is, all that can be known, as stated in **the Siṁsapā Sutta** (S 56.31):

> At one time, the Blessed One was staying in a simsapa[19] forest near Kosambī.
> Then the Blessed One, having gathered a few simsapa leaves in his hand, addressed the monks:

[18] "Mind-objects," *dhammā,* alt tr "mental phenomena."

[19] *Siṁsapā;* Skt *śiṁśapā*; Pkt *sīsava, sīsama:* see SD 21.17 Intro.

"What do you think, bhikshus, which is more: these few simsapa leaves gathered in my hand, or those on the simsapa trees above?"

"Bhante, few are the simsapa leaves that the Blessed One has gathered in his hand, but there are very much more on the simsapa trees above."

"Even so, bhikshus, much more is the direct knowledge that I have known, but that has not been taught. Few is that which has been taught.

And why, bhikshus, have I not taught [pointed them] out?

Because, bhikshus, they are not connected to the goal, not connected to the fundamentals of the holy life, and do not lead to revulsion, to letting go, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana.[20]

Therefore, I have not taught them." (S 56.31/5:437) = SD 21.7

The Buddha then goes on to say that all we need to know for our own liberation are *the four noble truths*, and that we should devote ourselves to understand them.[21]

From **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23), we can deduce that all are "knowable" are the six sense-objects or sense-data, namely, visual forms (seeing, movements, etc), sounds (noise, voices, etc), smells, tastes, touches ("feelings"), and mind-objects (thoughts, memories, ideas, mental feelings, etc).[22] However, the last, mind-objects (*dhamma*), also include the respective *consciousnesses* (that is, the six consciousnesses) (*viññāṇa*) attending to each of the five physical senses. Schematically, these 18 elements (*aṭṭhā,dasa dhātu*) (as they are called), can be represented thus:

Sense-organ	Sense-object	Sense-consciousness
the eye	forms	eye-consciousness
the ear	sounds	ear-consciousness
the nose	smells	nose-consciousness
the tongue	tastes	tongue-consciousness
the body	touches	body-consciousness
the mind	mind-objects	mind-consciousness

Each of these six consciousnesses (the third column) is a sense-consciousness, that is, is the *attention* (*samannāhāra*) that we direct through a sense-organ to its respective sense-object.[23] Each of the first five consciousnesses—those that arise at the physical senses—are immediately followed by a mind-consciousness which registers that sense-experience and decides what to do with it, as it were.[24]

Mind-consciousness, in other words, always accompanies a physical sense-experience, but it also accompanies a mental sense-experience. In other words, there is a mind-consciousness immediately following each of the six kinds of sense-impression. Through such interfacings, we *know* visual forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mind-objects. Our sources of knowledge, the doors of knowing, as such, are our *six senses* [1.4]. Our objects of knowing, all that we can know, are the *sense-objects*, that is,

form	that which is *seen:* shapes, colours, etc;
sound	that which is *heard:* sounds, voices, etc;
smells	that which is *smelt:* odours;
tastes	that which is *tasted:* flavours;
touches	that which is *felt:* bodily feelings;
mind-objects	that which is *mentated:* thoughts, memories, ideas, mental feelings, etc.

[20] On this formula, see ***Nibbidā*** = SD 20.1.

[21] On the 4 noble truths, see **Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana S** (S 56.11/5:421) = SD 1.1, & **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22.17-21/2:304-314) = SD 13.2.

[22] S 35.23/4:15 = SD 7.1.

[23] See **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18.16/1:111 f) = SD 6.14.

[24] For more details, see ***Viññāṇa*** = SD 17.8a (4).

The most important thing here is that the regular presence of *mind-consciousness* (*mano,viññāṇa*) trailing every sense-experience, gives us the impression that there is a smooth continuous flow of sense-data. These data-flow or "stream of consciousness" actually comprises thought-instants of sense-experiences, like bits of digital data running through a computer's CPU. They are discrete units of conscious information. But because of the faster-than-lightning speed at which they move, we have the impression that our thought-processes are unbroken, even unified, as a permanent entity.

But this stream of consciousness is really a rapid flow of discrete thought-moments. And, consciousness, as we know, is impermanent, and the mind, too, is impermanent. This is what we will now turn to.

1.5.2 What is the mind made of? One of the most common models that the Buddha uses to explain the interfacing between the body and mind is that of the five aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*). They are as follows:

Aggregate	Composition or Function	Conditioned by
Form	the 4 elements [1.3.1]	food
Feeling	6 kinds (arising through the senses)	contact (sense-impression)
Perception	6 kinds (of the sense-objects)	contact
Formations	6 kinds of volition (via sense-objects)	contact
Consciousness	6 kinds (of the sense-organs)	name-and-form

Of these five aggregates, the first—form (*rūpa*)—is physical, that is, comprising the four elements [1.3.1]. The middle three—feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), and formations (*saṅkhāra*)—are mental. The last, consciousness (*viññāna*) stands on its own, because it is behind all the other aggregates, taking them as its "home" (*oka*),[25] functioning as what we call "cognitive consciousness." When the rest of the aggregates are at rest (such as when we are sleeping), consciousness is still there, but on "stand-by" mode. (This is actually the subconscious, technically called "existential consciousness"). It is this existential consciousness or rebirth consciousness that moves on to take rebirth when we pass on.[26]

The five aggregates are sometimes summarized as "**name-and-form**" (*nāma,rūpa*) especially in the 12-link dependent arising model [2.3]. "Form" (*rūpa*), of course, refers to the four elements, as already mentioned. "Name" (*nāma*) consists of feeling, perception, volition, contact, and attention—which also constitutes *the mind*.

The name-and-form model is useful in reminding us *not* to reify our experiences, not to "thingify" what are really events and processes. What does this mean? This has to do with how we make sense of things. When we see a *form,* say, something yellow, edible and tasty, our minds at once give it a *name*: "banana!" The mind, of course, works in a more complicated way than this. Immediately upon experiencing a banana, we will detect a sense of pleasure at the eye-door, since we like bananas. (This immediate reaction has been conditioned by our previous banana experiences, so that we perceive yellow bananas as being delicious.) Each time, we respond in this manner, we reinforce our liking for bananas.

Bananas are not too bad: they are delicious and nutritious, provided we do not take too much of them. But we have many other, even more interesting, kinds of experiences. Imagine if we substitute "banana" with something more complicated like an object that arouses anger, or sexual feelings, or fear, or confusion. The reaction becomes much more complicated.[27]

How does this complication arise? Through our attempts at "owning" our sense-experiences, that is, when we create our own private world of virtual realities. Such experiences are simply mental and physical phenomena, events and processes that come and go at our sense-doors. This "owning" reaction reifies what are really fleeting events, and reinforces our latent tendencies of lust, aversion and ignorance [3.3]. All this conjures up within us a mirage of an abiding self that *pulls* at or gravitates toward any sign of pleasure, *pushes* away at what is perceived as pain, and *ignores* everything else.[28]

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[25] See **Hāliddakāni S** (S 22.3.4/3:9 f) = SD 10.12.

[26] On the cognitive and existential consciousnesses, see ***Viññāṇa*** = SD 17.8a (6).

[27] This is where latent tendencies (*anusaya*) come into play: see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18/1:108-114) & SD 6.14 Intro (5).

[28] On signs and how to deal with them, see ***Nimitta & Anuvyañjana*** = SD 19.14.

THE BĀHIYA TEACHING. So how do we go beyond virtual reality and directly see true reality. **The Māluṅkyā,putta Sutta** (S 35.95) contains an important teaching by the Buddha, known as "the Bāhiya Teaching" or "Bāhiya's teaching," because it is famously given to Bāhiya, as preserved in **the Bāhiya Sutta** (U 1.10), thus:

12 Here, regarding things[29] seen, heard, sensed[30] and cognized [known] by you:[31]
in the seen **there will only be the seen;**
in the heard **there will only be the heard;**
in the sensed **there will only be the sensed;**
in the cognized **there will only be the cognized.**
13 [32]When, regarding what is seen, heard, sensed and cognized by you,
in the seen there will only be the seen;
in the heard there will only be the heard;
in the sensed there will only be the sensed;
in the cognized there will only be the cognized,
then you are "not by that."
When you are "not by that," then you will "not be therein."
When you are "not therein," then you will "be neither here nor beyond nor in between the two."
This is itself the ending of suffering.[33] (S 35.95/4:73) = SD 5.9; (U 1.10/6-8) = SD 33.7

The first paragraph exhorts us to simply observe our sense-experiences *as is*, without any comment, to just let them come and let them go. After a while, with consistent mindful practice, we begin to have a better understanding of how our minds work.

The phrase "not by that" (*na tena*) means that we would not be aroused "this or that" lust, hate, delusion, or fear.

"Not be therein" (*na tattha*) means that we would not be caught up *in* any experience, such as in visual forms, sounds, etc.

"Be neither here…nor in between the two" (*n'ev'idha na huraṁ na ubhayam antarena*) means that we would not be reborn anywhere, not into this world again, nor into some heaven, nor be caught in any intermediate state. We are free from birth and from suffering.[34]

TRAINING FOR TRUE REALITY. We *can* train ourselves to go beyond virtual reality and its falseness, and directly look into true reality where liberating wisdom is found. It begins with the perception of impermanence, and goes through the perception of suffering, and culminates in the perception of not-self. In many well known discourses, such as **the Anatta,lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59)[35] and **the Cūḷa Saccaka**

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[29] "Regarding things seen, heard, sensed and cognized," *diṭṭha,suta,muta,viññatabbesu dhammesu,* lit "in things that are to be seen, to be heard, to be senses, to be cognized." See foll n.

[30] *Muta*, that is, what is tasted, smelt and touched. See prev n.

[31] This verse is the crux of the sutta and *satipaṭṭhāna*. In sutta terms, such experiences are not to be seen as "This is mine" (*etam mama*) (which arises through craving, *taṇhā*), or as "This I am" (*eso'ham asmi*) (due to conceit, *māna*), or as "This is my self" (*eso me attā*) (due to wrong view, *diṭṭhi*) (**Anattā,lakkhaṇa S**, S 3:68). In short, such experiences are not "beliefs" but direct experiences of reality. See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f. In simple Abhidhamma terms, such a process should be left at the sense-doors, and not be allowed to reach the mind-door. As long as the experience of sensing is mindfully left at its sense-door and taken for what it really is, that is an experience of reality (*param'attha*); after it has reached the mind-door and evaluated, it becomes conventional (*paññatti*) reality, that brings one suffering due to greed, hate or delusion. When such sense-experiences are mindfully left on the reality level, one would in due course see the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. See Mahasi Sayadaw, *A Discourse on Malukyaputta Sutta,* tr U Htin Fatt, Rangoon, 1981.

[32] This teaching is also given to the ascetic Bāhiya Dārucīriya (**Bāhiya S**, U 1.10/8). See SD 5.9 Intro (2).

[33] On this koan-like teaching, see **The Taming of the Bull** = SD 8.2(10).

[34] For details, see SD 5.9 Intro (2).

[35] S 22.59.12-16/3:67-69 = SD 1.2.

Sutta (M 35),[36] this well known pericope that embodies these three perceptions, reflecting on the true nature of the five aggregate are formulated thus:

> "What do you think? Is ⟨**form | feeling | perception | formations | consciousness**⟩ permanent or impermanent?"
> "Impermanent."
> "Is what is impermanent suffering or pleasurable?"[37]
> "Suffering."
> "Is what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.'?"[38]
> "No." (M 35.20/1:232 f) = SD 26.5; (S 22.59.12-16/3:67-69) = SD 1.2

Thus, we are comprised of *form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness*, and they are all impermanent. Being impermanent, they can never fully satisfy us, and as such they bring suffering, or at least dissatisfaction. Since all this means we have no real control over our bodies and minds, we cannot really own them, or identify with them, or regard them as being our "self." [2.4]

1.5.3 Name-and-form. The five aggregates are sometimes referred to as "name-and-form" (***nāma,-rūpa***) [1.5.2], which is a pre-Buddhist term, used in the early Upaniṣads to denote the differentiated manifestation of Brahman, the non-dual reality that manifested itself in all things in the world (according to Brahmanism). This diversity is experienced by our *senses* as having different appearances and forms, and by *thought* as different names or concepts.

In this latter context—the mind as *thoughts*—we use the term ***papañca*** (mental proliferation).[39] Such experiences tend to arouse and attract a myriad thoughts, so that we are flooded with them, and feel exhausted, confused and lost: we are drowned in thoughts.[40] This is because our inner "controller" is goading us on to simply accumulate things, and never really experience them, busily rushing through life, but never really living life, heading towards a health problem.

In the Buddha's system, "form" (***rūpa***) often refers to *the four elements* [1.3.1], both internal (as the body) and external (as another's body and the environment).[41] The Pali term "name" (***nāma***) should not be merely taken in the literal sense.

> *Nāma* is an assemblage of mental factors involved in cognition: feeling, perception, volition, contact and attention (*vedanā, saññā, cetanā, phassa, manasikāra*).[42] These are called "name" because they contribute to the process of cognition by which objects are subsumed under the conceptual designations. (S:B 48)

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[36] M 35.20/1:232 f = SD 26.5.

[37] *Dukkhaṁ vā sukhaṁ vā.*

[38] *Etam mama, eso 'ham asmi, eso me attâ ti.* These are "the 3 graspings" (*ti,vidha gāha*), ie, of view (*diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), of conceit (*māna*) (MA 2:111, 225). The notion "This is mine" arises through craving (*taṇhā*); the notion "This I am" arises through conceit (*māna*); the notion "This is my self" arises through views (*diṭṭhi*). These three considerations represent respectively the 3 kinds of mental proliferation (*papañca*) of self-view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), and of conceit (*māna*) (Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f).The opposite formula, *n'etaṁ mama, n'eso 'ham asmi, na mêso attā ti,* is applied below to the 5 aggregates [§24b]. See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind,* 1995:32 f.

[39] See eg **Madhu,piṇḍika S**, M 18 = SD 6.14 Intro (2).

[40] For a list of the "16 doubts," ie wrong views proliferating over the past, future and present, see **Sabb'āsava S** (M 2.7-8/1:8) = SD 30.3; **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38.23/1:264 f) = SD 7.9; **Paccaya S** (S 12.20/2:25-27) = SD 39.5.

[41] See eg **Mahā Rāhul'ovāda S** (M 62.8-12) = SD 3.11; also **(Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56.7/ 3:59) = SD 3.7 n (The 4 great elements).

[42] **(Paṭicca,samuppāda) Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2.12/2:3) = SD 5.15.

In other words, while *nāma* is centred on the mind (*citta*) and *rūpa* is centred on the four primary elements, as Harvey points out, "there is no dualism of a mental 'substance' versus a physical 'substance': both *nāma* and *rūpa* each refer to clusters of changing, interacting processes."[43] It should be noted that in the Nikāyas *nāma,rūpa* does not include *viññāṇa* (consciousness), which is actually its condition, and the two are mutually dependent, like two sheaves of reeds leaning against one another.[44]

In other words, when name-and-form (*nāma,rūpa*) is correlated with the five aggregates, **name** is identified with the three "name" aggregates (*nāma-k,khandha*) of feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and mental formations (*saṅkhāra*), and **form** is identified with the "form" aggregate (*rūpa-k,khandha*), that is, the physical body.[45] **The Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 12.2)[46] defines name-and-form thus:

> And what, bhikshus, is name-and-form?
>
> Feeling, perception, volition, contact, attention—this is called name. And the four great elements and the material form derived from the four great elements—this is called form**.** Thus this is name and this is form—this is called name-and-form. (S 12.2.12/2:3)

Form (*rūpa*), as seen here in the Vibhaṅga Sutta, is invariably defined as the four great elements (*mahā,-bhūta*),[47]that is, earth, water, fire, and wind (that is, extension, cohesion, heat/decay, and motion).[48] Consciousness (*viññāṇa*), although inseparably linked with the three mental aggregates, is not included here as *it is the condition for name-and-form*.[49] Name-and-form and consciousness: this is another way of looking at what we really are, deep inside and throughout.

1.6 PERSONAL IDENTITY.

1.6.1 Is the body the self? We are still in the midst of an inquiry into the *location of the self,* and whether such a notion is possible. Whatever exists is either physical or mental [1.4]. We have discussed that it is not possible for a permanent self to exist in the body or as the body [1.3]. Let us now examine this situation a little deeper. If there is no permanent self or abiding entity, how do we identify a person; how do we know it is the same person we are referring to? And what defines a person?[50]

Many works of literature depict the problem of who or what constitutes a *person*. Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), for example, presents two persons in the same body (but one at a time).[51] Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (c1601) has multiple persons in multiple indistinguishable bodies.[52] The theme of one person in one body appearing to be different bodies or as "nobody" is found in the ancient Greek myth of Odysseus in the cave of Cyclops (c700 BCE).[53] Such stories point to some problems regarding the nature of identity—which raises at least two very practical problems here regarding *identity*.

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[43] Harvey 1993:11 digital ed.

[44] See **Nala,kalapiya S,** S 12.67/2:114; also **Mahā Nidāna S** (M 12.21-22/2:63) = SD 5.17. See also S:B 48 & SD 5.17 Introd (5).

[45] Vism 17.187/644 f. On some technical difficulties regarding this term, see Bodhi 1984:18 n1, Harvey 1993: 3-5 (digital ed) & Hamilton 1996a ch VI, esp 124-127.

[46] See SD 5.11.

[47] **Mahā Rāhul'ovāda S** (M 62/1:420-424) = SD 3.11, esp Introd (4); **Mahā Hatthi,padôpama S** (M 28/1:185-191) = SD 6.16, esp Introd (3); also D 1:214.

[48] Vism 443; Abhs ch = Abhs:BRS 234-238, Abhs:SR 154 f, Abhs:WG 215-218.

[49] See **Dve Khandha S** (S 22.48/3:47 f) & SD 17.1a Intro (4). On consciousness (*viññāṇa*), see SD 17.8a.

[50] Parts of this section are based on the **OECD** paper, "At a Crossroads: "Personhood" and digital identity in the information society," 2007. See Biblio below sv OECD,

[51] For an annotated study & other sources, see http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Annotated_Strange_Case_Of-_Dr_Jekyll_And_Mr_Hyde.

[52] For text, see http://www.maximumedge.com/shakespeare/twelthnight.htm; for study guide, see http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/xTwelfth.html#Twelfth.

[53] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyclops for overview & sources.

The first problem is that since a *body* can change without the *person* changing,[54] people may have difficulty recognizing each other. This is why disguise works effectively, and it is also why our national identity (ID) card photos are re-taken periodically. This is an ancient problem that goes back to the times of the Greek mythology, as reported by the Greek historian, **Plutarch** (c46-c127), in what is known as "the ship of Theseus" or "Theseus' paradox,"[55] translated into English by John Dryden, thus:

> The ship wherein Theseus and the youth of Athens returned [from Crete] had thirty oars, and was preserved by the Athenians down even to the time of Demetrius Phalereus, for they took away the old planks as they decayed, putting in new and stronger timber in their place, insomuch that this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question of things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same. (Plutarch's *Theseus,* tr John Dryden) http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/theseus.html

Plutarch thus questions *whether the ship would remain the same since it had been entirely replaced, piece by piece, or is it still the same ship?* As a corollary, we can question what happens if the old *replaced* parts were used to build another ship. Which, if either, is the original "ship of Theseus"?

We might here deny that the second ship is *not* the original, since the original no longer exists. Similarly, if we say that A dies and is reborn as another human B, he is clearly not A, since A is dead. Of course, we could say that it is A's *consciousness* that becomes B. In this case, B would very likely inherit some, if not all, of A's characteristics. Here, we have the case of *continuity* which we will discuss further below [1.7.2].

Suffice it to say here that the early Buddhists would not agree with Locke [1.6.2] when he argues that since *a person is his consciousness*, if the consciousness ("person") of a criminal (say, a thief) were to move into the body of a butcher, we should punish the butcher, since he is now the thief! Suppose the thief/butcher were punished, it is the butcher's physical body that would suffer from the punishment, and should the butcher later return to his old body, he would find it unjustly punished!

The second problem of physical identity—a practical one—arises significantly today in the use of **biometrics**. We must here agree that actions, including digital activity, are an extension of a person. In our age of digital information, *digital identity* extends a person's domain. (It is also important, for example, to the domain owner that he has control over his digital identity, which activates personhood and promotes both social connectedness and autonomy.)

Faces, fingers, and other body-parts change, or are even lost over time, affecting the accuracy, even the feasibility, of biometric identification. Biometric researchers, knowing this, are careful to select physical traits as biometric modalities based on two criteria: stability and distinctiveness.

Stability refers to the tendency of a trait to change slowly in a significant way in an individual. *Distinctiveness* is the unlikelihood or low probability that a particular configuration of a trait—such as a pattern of fingerprint ridges—is shared by two individuals. No trait is entirely stable; as such, biometrics, in principle, can only establish to a limited level of probability that an individual has been correctly identified: there can be no absolute certainty of this.

The third problem of identity is that *a person can change without the body appearing to change*. We cannot assume (as the body theory does) the identity of physical bodies across time. This is the basis for legal exemptions from legal accountability. For example, a defense lawyer may be able to save his client from punishment if he (the lawyer) can establish that although the accused had *intentionally* committed the crime, *knowing* at the time that it was wrong, his mental state at the trial is such that he cannot understand either the wrongness of his act or the reason for which he would be punished.

This problem, however, causes further problems for identification of persons, for example, in a digital system, people often forget passwords. This lack of the mental continuity that is the basis for identity of a person, Locke would assert, makes it impossible to identify him under such a circumstance. When systems try to recover from the effects of users' forgetfulness, they typically do one of two things: *ask for*

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[54] This is an idea expressed by the English philosopher, **John Locke** (1632-1704) [1.6.2].

[55] For other examples, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ship_of_Theseus.

other remembered facts (but this may not always work), or *ask for physical objects* like ID cards or birth certificates—but events like the destructive Asian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina clearly show that these things too cannot be depended upon as an infallible mechanism of identification.[56] In the end, we must admit that *the self*—that is what serves to identify us as a unique being—cannot be our body, at least, not our body alone.

1.6.2 Is the mind the self? We have discussed that it is not possible for a permanent self to exist *in* the body or *as* the body [1.6.1]; but can the self or soul exist *apart* from the body? That is, could an abiding self exist as a mind? We have also discussed a few important problems with the "body theory" [1.6.1].

In western philosophy, there is the "memory theory," which has it that A is identical with B, *if and only if A remembers experiencing events from B's life*. One famous argument for this is **John Locke**'s prince/cobbler appeal to the possibility of body-switching:

> …should the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince's past life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler, as soon deserted by his own soul, everyone sees he would be the same person with the prince, accountable only for the prince's actions.
>
> (Ch 27 "On identity and diversity," *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1689)

When the prince wakes up in the body of the cobbler, what seems to make him the prince rather than the cobbler are his memories of the prince's past life and his utter lack of the cobbler's memory.[57]

According to **Penelhum,** there are at least two simple but important objections to this example of memory theory.[58] Firstly, continuity of memory is *not* strictly needed for personal identity in a conventional sense. I might, for example, have a spell of amnesia, yet I am still Piya. (Then, I may of course have to relearn the fact that I am indeed Piya!)

Secondly, **memory** is not always what we think it is. There is, firstly, a *weak*, subjective, sense, that is, of faintly remembering *as of* such and such; and there is a *strong*, objective, sense of remembering, that is, accurate and true memories. When we speak of memory of people and events, we normally refer to the second sense. Even then, I could be deluded into thinking that I am Gotama Buddha himself—even having vivid memories of sitting under a Bodhi tree, and teaching the five monks—but surely I would be deluded (because he has attained nirvana).

The first type of memory, *the subjective*, is insufficient for personal identity. The best we can surmise is that the second type of memory, *the objective*, is sufficient for personal identity, but for a trivial reason. I clearly remember, for example, having written this article, and then teaching it to a class—all of which is accurate and true—but this is possible because I *presuppose* that I am the same person who has done the writing and taught the class. As such, this too cannot for certain be the ground of personal identity—all this is based on presuppositions![59]

Then there is the most serious problem of all: our memories tend to be *selective* and *constructed.* We choose to remember certain things, and forget most else; we do not always remember things as they have

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[56] Further read Pojman, *Introduction to Philosophy,* 2004: 330-334.

[57] Locke's argument here was explicitly to resolve a religious problem, that of the Christian resurrection. Locke's distinction between man and person makes it possible for the same person to show up in a different body at the resurrection and yet still be the same person. Locke focuses on the prince with all his princely thoughts because, in his view, it is consciousness which is crucial to the reward and punishment which is to be meted out at the Last Judgment. See http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke/supplement.html. To some extent, this is close to the Buddhist idea that it is the consciousness that is reborn from person to person, and who bears the karmic fruits. But the similarities stop there: see esp the conditionality of consciousness as expounded in **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38/-1:256-271) = SD 7.10.

[58] See Terence Penelhum, *Survival and Disembodied Existence,* 1970; 384 f; also Sarah B Merrill, *Defining Personhood,* 1998: 55. For a biblio on memory, see http://consc.net/mindpapers/5.1#.5.1e.

[59] Various scholars have voiced such and other objections: see eg Antony Flew, "Locke and the problem of personal identity," in CB Martin & DM Armstrong (eds), *Locke and Berkeley*, 1968; JL Mackie, *Problems from Locke,* Oxford, 1976: ch 6; Bernard Williams, "Personal identity and individuation," in *Problems of the Self,* Cambridge, 1973; Sarah Bishop Merrill, *Defining Personhood*, 1998: 55 (Terence Penelhum's objections).

happened; and we tend to fabricate or colour important details according to our inclinations or agenda. What we regard as personal memories are often personal *impressions* which tend to evolve and change over time. Here is a simple experiment. Try to recall what you, as a 3-year-old, remember of yourself before that time; then when you were a teenager, how did you remember your past? Then, as an adult, and so on. And what do you *now* think of those memories that you had had at those various stages in your life?

The bottom line is that *the mind*—be it memory, consciousness, or personal impressions—*cannot be the self* for the simple reason that they are constantly evolving and changing. We could of course take *all* such experiences to be the self in a conventional sense. This is an *evolving and changing* self, which is, in fact, an accepted convention or concept often used in Buddhism for purposes of instruction [2.4.1].[60]

1.6.3 A mind-body continuity. **The Assutava Sutta 1** (S 12.61) contains this remarkable, almost modern sounding, statement by the Buddha:

> It would be better, bhikshus, for the uninstructed worldling to take this body, made of the four great elements—rather than the mind—as the self.
>
> What is the reason for this?
>
> Because this body, made of the four great elements, is seen standing for one year, two years, three years, for four, five, or ten years, for twenty, thirty, forty or fifty years, for a hundred years, or is seen standing for even longer.[61]
>
> SIMILES. But that which is called "mentation" (*mano*), or "mind" (*citta*), or "consciousness" (*viññāṇa*), arises as one thing and ceases as another, *like night and day*.
>
> Just as *a monkey*, bhikshus, roaming through the forest and mountain-side, takes hold of one branch,[62] letting that go, then grabs another, even so, bhikshus, that which is called "mentation," or "mind," or "consciousness," arises as one and ceases as another, like night and day.
>
> (S 12.61.6-8/2:94 f) = SD 20.2

The Buddha's tone is very clear—he was making a hypothetical statement; but let us take up his hypothesis for a moment, and investigate its significance. We shall examine, in this connection, two strange stories from the Dhammapada Commentary: the first, one of the earliest cases of a sex-change, and the second, a tale of how a monk was reborn as a louse.

In the first case—**the Story of the Elder Soreyya** (DhA 3.9). It is said that Soreyya, a seth's son,[63] living in a city of the same name, upon seeing the elder Mahā Kaccāyana's golden complexion, thinks lustfully, "O how great it would be for my wife to have the golden hue of his body!" At once, he turns into a woman. Out of shame, *she* runs away, and goes to live in far away Takka,silā. There, in due course, she marries the son of the Takka,silā seth, and has two sons.

Then one day, a close friend of hers, another seth's son, on a visit to Takka,silā, meets her. Upon hearing her story, he chides her for having had such a lustful thought towards an awakened monk, and advises her to seek Mahā Kaccāyana's forgiveness. She accordingly returns to Soreyya, and meeting Mahā Kaccāyana, seeks his forgiveness, and at once reverts into a man. Having learned his lesson, and deeply moved by religious feeling, he renounces the world, and in due course becomes an arhat.[64]

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[60] See John Hospers, *An Introduction of Philosophical Analysis,* 1967: 405-424.

[61] *Dissatâyaṁ bhikkhave cātum,mahā,bhūtiko kāyaṁ ekam pi vassaṁ tiṭṭhamāno, dve pi vassani tiṭṭhamāno, tīṇi pi vassāni tiṭṭhamāno…* (the text repeats a full sentence for each number, but is here abridged in the scribal tradition). Comy here introduces the post-Buddha theory of moments (*khaṇika,vāda*)—that formations right there even as they arise—and so asks why the Buddha says that the body "stands [endures]." In autoanswer, it says that the body endures just like the light of a lamp burns through the night "by way of a connected continuity" (*paveṇi,sambandha,vasena*), even though the flame ceases right where it burns without crossing over to the next part of the wick. (SA 2:99)

[62] On the monkey simile, see SD 20.2 Intro (3).

[63] A seth (*seṭṭhī*) was a financial entrepreneur who funded large businesses.

[64] **Soreyya-t,thera Vatthu,** DhA 3.9/1:325-332 (Dh 43); for Eng tr, see *Buddhist Legends* (DhA:B) 2:23-28.

Whether you accept this story as a psychosocial myth or as a pious tale of the saints, it has at least two significant points worth noting. Firstly, towards the end of the story, when the populace hears Soreyya's story of sex change, they ask him which of his sons did he love more: *the two he fathered, or the two he mothered*. His answer would win the approval of the feminists: he loved the two he mothered more.

The second point is the question of whether Soreyya was *really* a man or a woman. From the story, we know that Soreyya spends most of his time as a man, and perhaps just over two years as a woman. Even though he experiences a sex change, his identity as the individual named Soreyya remains intact. For, we are told that Soreyya's friend meets Soreyyā (as a woman) in Takka,silā and recognizes Soreyyā; and that after being forgiven by Mahā Kaccāyana, he returns to being a man. Despite an episode of being a woman who bears two sons, Soreyya's consciousness remains intact and unbroken as a person, interestingly, without any legal issues that would dog such a situation in any urban society today.[65]

The second Dhammapada story—**that of the elder Tissa** (DhA 18.3)—is even more dramatic. It is the tale of a greedy monk who is reborn as a louse. It is said that a certain monk of Sāvatthī named Tissa is very attached to his robe of fine cloth. Then suddenly, dying of indigestion, he is reborn as a louse inhabiting that very robe he is attached to!

With his death, his robe becomes the common property of the community. Still attached to the robe, it is said that he (as a louse) runs up and down the robe, screaming, "They are plundering my property!" The Buddha perceiving this, instructs the monks to set the robe aside for a week. At the end of the week, Tissa the louse dies and is reborn in Tusita heaven. It is then that the Buddha allows the monks to divide the robe up amongst themselves.[66]

Even if this story is taken as fictitious, it has an interesting *psychological* import. We become what we are attached to: the hand takes the shape of what it grasps. Even as a louse, Tissa exhibits the same attachment that he has as an undisciplined monk. However, the Buddha, out of compassion, lets Tissa the louse have his way (by leaving the robe aside for a week), so that he dies happy and is reborn in a heaven. In terms of the continuity of consciousness, we can surmise that the louse *is still* Tissa, although he is no more in a body of monk, of which he proves himself unworthy.

We see a similar transformation theme in a literary work of modern times, that is, in a novella by the German writer, Franz Kafka (1883-1924), entitled ***The Metamorphosis*** (1915),[67] a tragic story of a human being who changes into a beetle of sort (*Ungeziefer*),[68] and yet remains the same person he was, with the memories and personality of his previous human state intact. If he had simply been *replaced* by a beetle, notes **Hospers,**

> his state would not have been so terrifying: he would have died and never known the difference; the terrible fact is that it is still the same person, though now in—or occupying, or possessing, or animating—the body of a beetle. The transformation described is, so far as we know, empirically impossible and contrary to all biological laws; but it is logically possible, and in fact it is easily imagined. Our question remains: If this happened, wouldn't we still say "Here is the same person"? (Hospers 1967: 411)

Iin all these stories, there is a transformation. There was originally a human body, but became a woman, a louse, or a beetle. In all these cases, there is still a *physical continuity* between the earlier and later states.[69] In other words, a person may physical assume another form or other forms, but as long as there is some semblance of continuous conscious and physical continuity, he is still the "same" person.

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[65] Cf KWEH Soon Han and LEE Chiat Jian Jeffrey, "Transsexuals and Sex Determination," *Singapore Academy of Law Journal* 4 1992: 86. Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=648421.

[66] DhA 18.3/3:341-344 (Dh 240); for Eng tr, see *Buddhist Legends* (DhA:B) 3:120-122.

[67] Orig in German, *Die Verwandlung;* for a modern trs, see http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5200/5200-h/5200-h.htm & http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/stories/kafka-E.htm.

[68] See problem of translating this word: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Metamorphosis#Lost_in_translation.

[69] In the movie *Here Comes Mr Jordan* (1941), the protagonist begins as a prize-fighter who dies prematurely, owing to some mix-up in the files of heaven, and then occupies the body of an industrialist, with his memory and

1.6.4 The same yet not the same. A change of body, even in a series of rebirths, does not produce a different person, but preserves the same continuity of consciousness. But what if it is *not* a physical continuity, but a *non-physical* one. Buddhist teachings allow this. Rebirth of a person or a being can occur physically (with all or most of the five physical senses) (*kāma,bhava*), as a form existence (*rūpa,bhava*), or as a formless existence (*arūpa,bhava*). In all such existences, a being has the same but evolving (or devolving) stream of consciousness.[70]

We can safely say that *the possession of the same body* is a criterion of a person's selfhood, that is, what constitutes the "same" person. (The quotation marks around the word "same" will become obvious soon.) Let us examine a simple everyday case first. Your body has changed a great deal but is still the same body: you have the same body as you did when you were a child, but it is now much bigger and taller. It is so different in appearance that someone who has not seen you since you were five years old would probably not recognize you today. Yet we could still say, "It's the same person," that is, we would at least mean that it is the same *personal continuity* of your physical body that you had since you were born, no matter how much it has grown or changed.[71]

What is this "**personal continuity**" that gives us as sense of selfhood, that we are the same person through time? It is *a causal connectedness*—a series of causes and effects of the interaction of our body and mind. We are alive because our consciousness is capable of interacting with our physical senses, and our mind is capable of interfacing with such experiences. We have already discussed how our six senses are the doors of experience and knowledge, and how the mind interfaces with what is knowable. [1.4]

Taking this understanding further, we can now say that we are able to know things because we can *remember* experiences and events. Our memory allows us to experience a sense of continuity in our experiences and those of others, also in other living beings (not necessarily human), in processes (like a plant growing) and in things (we can distinguish a cat from a dog), and so on.

Because of our memory and mindfulness (or attention), we do not see a human being one moment and then a cat the next, but rather, over time, we notice that a baby becomes a child, and a child turning into a youth, and then an adult. Although you are not now the same person as you were as a three-year-old—that is, there is no part of you now that is the same as it was then—you *remember* your name/s, family, home-town, friends, schooling, etc.

So we, as humans, are psycho-physical processes, mind-body continua. Yet, in such a process or continuum, there is no primary substance or abiding entity that remains constant, preserving some sort of "I"-ness. Even those four elements—earth, water, fire and wind—that compose our bodies are merely dynamic phases of matter, and not fixed entities [1.3.1-2]. In other words, *we are the same person, yet not the same*! **The Milinda,pañha** explains this apparent paradox very well with a few well known similes.

A bowl of milk is left standing and the next day turns to curds. Although they are physically different, they are sequences in the same process. (Miln 40 f, 48)

A lamp burns in the three watches of the night. Is the flame the same or different during each watch? "It is not the same, and it is not another." (Miln 40)

Then, there is the simile of the candle. One candle is burning. It lights another candle. The flame is "passed on." It is the same flame, yet not the same one.[72]

1.7 PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

1.7.1 Initiative and intention. From what we have discussed so far, it is easier for us to understand that it is through personal continuity and memory [1.6.4] that we are an individual who, through *intention* and *initiative*, is responsible for our actions. Since we each have a mind, we are capable of generating

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personality. We have here a case where a person successively inhabits different bodies. See http://en.wikipedia.org/-wiki/Here_Comes_Mr._Jordan. See Hospers 1967: 411 f for another example.

[70] There is the exception of the realm of non-percipient (or unconscious) beings (*asaññ a,sattā*), who are in a state of super-hibernation, whose consciousness are suspended yet not dead. Once when a thought arises in them, they fall from that state. See **Saṅkhār'upapatti S** (M 120.27/3:102) = SD 3.4; also Nyanatiloka, *Guide Through the Abhidhamma-Piṭaka,* 3rd ed 1971:68, 79, 96, 99, 105, 107, 109.

[71] For further philosophical discussion, see Hospers, 1967: 410 f.

[72] See Gethin, *Foundations of Buddhism,* 1998: 138-146; also Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy,* 2007: 32-35.

karma. Generally speaking, we are said to have some level of "will power"[73] or the "element of initiative" (*ārambha,dhātu*),[74] that is, we can deliberately initiate or begin an action through any of the three sense-doors (the body, speech or the mind).

On a more technical level, we have the term ***cetanā***, which is usually translated as "intention" or "volition," and defined as "the choice, conscious or unconscious, to act based on a thought or a feeling," or as the Attha,sālinī puts it: "That which intends is called ***cetanā*:** the meaning is that it directs to itself related mental states as objects" (*cetayatî ti cetanā, saddhiṁ attanā sampayutta,dhamme ārammaṇe abhisandahatî ti attho*, DhsA 111). **Damien Keown** helpfully observes:

> We may note, however, that what is put into effect need not be physical action, and that the use of the term "volition" may not always be inaccurate. The Buddha seems to have held the view that the process of *cetanā* was followed by a *praxis* of some kind, and that deliberation (*cetayitvā*) was followed by action (*kammaṁ karoti*). However, he distinguishes three types of *praxis*: bodily (*kāyasā*) [sic],[75] vocal (*vācāsā*) [sic] and mental (*manasā*). *Cetanā,* then, reaches a terminus with moral implications, but the morally determinative *praxis* may be purely mental in form. When *cetanā* is used in this sense the translation of it by "volition" may not be misleading.
>
> (Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics,* 1992:220)

Cetanā, as such, is not the "will" as taken in the modern philosophical sense, especially in the sense of having a "free will" to choose between good and evil, or between God and his nemesis, etc. Expediently, we might define the Buddhist conception or use of *will* as "conditioned process, but most of its conditions lie within a person, and some are simultaneous with it, such as mindful awareness. There is a sense, then, in which a person has control over the actions he performs." (Harvey 1995: 67)

However, more commonly, we are creatures of habit, that is, our habits create and re-create us. We act in ways that would reinforce us to re-act, to be reactive, after a while reacting to stimuli without much mindfulness. We are essentially controlled by our *latent tendencies* [3.3], which autopilot us into *intentions* that are usually biased by greed, hate, delusion and fear.

Intention (*cetanā*), in other words, is *the mind behind the act (bodily, verbal or mental)* rooted often in an immoral intention (*lobha,* greed; *dosa,* hate; *moha,* delusion). On the other hand, if we have wisely trained ourselves and mindfully act, such actions are likely to be rooted in morally virtuous intention (*alobha,* non-greed = generosity; *adosa,* non-hate = lovingkindness; *amoha,* non-delusion = wisdom). It is only such intentions, good and bad, that really *belong* to us: *We are owners of our karma.*[76]

1.7.2 Personal continuity. One problem still remains unanswered: if there is no self, no abiding entity, *who* then does the action? If there is no self, does that mean I am not responsible for my actions? Is there anyone responsible for the action? For example, a clever thief, when caught, could argue that when he stole the fruits yesterday, he was not the same person he is today, that is, the one who is caught. The simple answer is that *he is still the same person*.

The question "who does the action" is a loaded question, one wrongly put. By using the word *who*, we assume that it is a *person* or *entity* who does the action, that there is a *doer*. The point is the questioner does not know this; so the question is better rephrased as: "How does an action occur?"

We know that we are the same person in at least two important ways: personal continuity and memory [1.6]. Firstly, we are each a "**personal continuity**" that gives us as sense of selfhood (*atta,bhāva*), that we are the same person through time. We exist as in *a causal connectedness,* a series of causes and effects of the interaction of our body and mind. We are alive because our consciousness is capable of interacting with our physical senses, and our mind is capable of interfacing with such experiences [1.6.4]. Secondly, we have **memories** of our past selves and events that can be recalled in some chronological order.

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[73] We should not make too much of this "will-power," esp as the theistic *voluntas*: see **Free Will** = SD 7.7 (6).

[74] Also *ārabbha,dhātu,* A 6.38/3:337 f = SD 7.6.

[75] This Pali word and the next do not exist, and should respectively be *kāyena* and *vācāya.*

[76] **Cūḷa Kamma,vibhaṅga S** (M 135.4/3:203) = SD 4.15; given in the 3rd sg in **Āghāta Paṭivinaya S 1** (A 5.161/3:185 f) = SD 12.23. See further Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind,* 1995: 66-68.

Since we have this sense of personal continuity and memory, we are responsible for our actions, past and present, that is, insofar as they are *intentionally* done [3.1]. This responsibility is real because they are done by the connected series of selves of which we remember or are capable of recalling.

Indeed, if we are made up of an abiding entity (such as a soul or *ātman*), especially if we claim it to be a pure *ātman*, it would be very difficult to explain how we can commit evil deeds or suffer their consequences. As a permanent soul, we have to be either good or bad, but never only good or only bad (or sinful). If we were all good, we do not need salvation; if we were all bad, we would be able to win salvation! But being both good and bad, the soul, as such, is necessarily *impermanent*, capable of spiritual evolution. Buddhists do not mind accepting the notion of an *impermanent* soul.

The situation could be worse. Suppose that we have a soul, and it is *given* to us by another powerful being, say a God. Suppose that this God, besides being the all-powerful creator, is also all-knowing and all-loving. When we speak in this way, there are many serious problems, especially philosophical, religious and ethical ones. Firstly, we cannot define things into existence. It is noble to have such fond hopes, but quite a different thing when we regard *beliefs* as facts. All that we can say is that these are beliefs, perpetuated by stories and dogmas rooted in hope and fear.

Secondly, and more problematically, is that if there *were* an all-powerful creator who created everything, both good and evil. (In fact, the idea of *sin* especially applies to disobedience to such a God's "com mands.") If God is all-knowing, he would know that we would commit evil just as we would do good. If God wills everything, then we are not responsible for our action (for example, my being a Buddhist and writing this would all be God's will). Then there is suffering in the world. If God allows us to suffer, he cannot be all-loving; if he is all-loving, but cannot do anything to remove our sufferings, then he cannot be all-powerful.[77]

As the Greek philosopher, **Epicurus** (341-270 BCE), finely puts it, or rather, so fine and ancient is this statement that it is attributed to Epicurus:

> Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God? (Epicurus, attributed)

The British philosopher **David Hume** (1711-1776)[78] [4.2] puts it in the form of a dilemma:

> If the evil in the world is from the intention of the Deity, then he is not benevolent. If the evil in the world is contrary to his intention, then he is not omnipotent. But it is either in accordance with his intention or contrary to it. Therefore, either the Deity is not benevolent or his is not omnipotent. (Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,* 1779: parts 10-11)[79]

We can see that religious ideas, whether it is about God or the soul, can be very problematic. For that reason, God-believers need to say: "Seek not to understand that you may believe, but *believe that you may understand*,"[80] which is essentially the same as saying: "Don't think about it, just follow!" However, on a more positive note, a Buddhist would interpret this statement as meaning, "I believe that I will understand." That is, I have faith that I will be wise in due course to understand how the mind creates God and religion, good and evil, suffering and liberation. Doesn't it sound more true, sensible and spiritual, then simply to say: "Seek to understand that you may believe—and be free."

Why *do* such God- and related ideas arise, in the first place. Note that I did not as "Why *did* such God and related ideas arise," which implies that it is a fixed and singular idea. Ideas about God arises even in

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[77] See John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, 1967: 425-480 (section 21).

[78] See http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume/#HumWor.

[79] See http://www.scribd.com/doc/2160255/David-Hume-Dialogues-Concerning-Natural-Religion. See John Hospers, *An Introduciton to Philosophical Analysis,* 4th ed 1997: 221.

[80] *Ergo noli queerer intelligere ut credo, sed crede ut intelligas,* St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) in his *Tractate* 29 on the Gospel of John.

our own time, and there is even a "history" of God,[81] showing how such ideas evolve through time. The most useful fact we have may be summed as "every believer his God" (just as the Tibetans say "every lama his doctrine"). We might even say that there is nothing wrong with God, but it is simply devastating when people presume to speak for him and commit atrocities in his name.

Religion, as we know, started well before science and Buddhism. Before the rise of the scientific method, modern learning and secular government, much of human knowledge was speculative, depending on whether the society was *tribal* (the Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam and their various forms), *highly centralized* (the Chinese religions:, Daoism, Confucianism, Chinese Buddhism, and their various forms) or *settled but diverse* (Indian religions: Brahmanism, Hinduism, Buddhism and their various forms).

Amongst all the religions, Buddhism, especially early Buddhism, is the only one that *totally rejects any notion of the soul or abiding self.* Beginning with a pragmatic approach, the Buddha investigates *how* we know [1.4] and *what* we can know [1.5], and then he goes on to formulate how we can use such knowledge so that we have self-understanding and direct knowledge into true reality. To facilitate such an investigation and evolutionary process, the Buddha makes use of whatever vocabulary or theoretical models that are helpful. One such skillful means is the Buddha's usage of the term "self" (*attā*) and words related to the mind, which we will now examine.

2 What is the self?

2.1 USAGES OF "SELF." We cannot totally avoid the word "self" (*attā*), especially in language. This is the *linguistic self* or *reflexive self*, a term of self-reference in human communication. As a regular reflexive pronoun in Pali, *attā* is used in the masculine singular for all numbers and genders, as in "we should restrain *ourselves*" and "she did it *herself*." Here are some canonical expressions of *atta* used in a reflexive sense:

suddhaṁ attānaṁ pariharati,	he keeps himself pure (A 1:148 f, 4:109 f; DhsA 128).
parisuddha,kāya,kammantataṁ attani sampassamāno,	sees in himself complete purity of bodily conduct (M 1:17).
attā'nuvāda,	self-reproach (A 2:121).
atta,vetana,	supporting oneself (Sn 24).
attā,dhīna,	master of himself, independent, free (of a liberated slave) (D 1:72).
khem'atta,	at peace with himself, tranquil (S 1:112).
rakkhit'atta,	self-guarded, prudent (S 1:154; Tha 142).
pahit'atta,	self-willed, resolute (D 2:141; S 1:187; Sn 425, 432 f, 961).

Many other such examples can be found in the *Critical Pali Dictionary,* the PTS *Pali-English Dictionary* and Cone's *Dictionary of Pali,* under *attā* and its compounds.[82]

The second usage of *attā* is found in context of spiritual training, where, for various reasons, concentration on oneself, either as the instigator of religious progress or as a particular character type, is the focus of interest. This is where *attā* could well be rendered as "the mind."

In a well known story, the Buddha tells the 30 young men searching for a runaway thieving courtesan that they would be better occupied "searching for yourselves" (*attānaṁ gaveseyyātha*, V 1:22) [1.1]. There are other exhortatory usages of "self" (*attā*), for example:

so karohi dīpaṁ attano,	make an island unto yourself (D 2:100; S 3:43; Dh 236, 238).
attā hi attano nātho,	the self is the lord of self; you are your own master (Dh 160, 380).
attān'upekhī,	watching oneself, observing the mind (A 3:133 f).
atta,gutta,	self-guarded, mentally restrained (S 5:169; A 2:27 f, 3:6; Dh 379).
bhāvit'atta,	self-developed, mentally cultivated (A 4:26).
att'aññū,	who knows oneself, knows his own mind (D3:252; A 4:113).

[81] See eg Karen Armstrong, *A History of God,* Ballantine Books, 1994.

[82] For other examples, see Collins' *Selfless Persons* (1982:75 f), where he gives *atta* the sense of "conscience."

sādhukaṁ attanā va attānaṁ paccavekkhanti,	the practice of strict self-examination (A 1:53).
attanā va attānaṁ sañjānāmi,	by the self I know the self (M 1:8).

Thirdly, there is a particular usage of the term *attā* that is rejected, giving the essential clue to the kind of thought and discourse that refers to the denial of self, the doctrine of *anattā*. The Buddha rejects any static, unalterable dogma which posits a permanent and reincarnating self or person, that is,

atta,vāda,	the doctrine of self (D 3:230, S 2:185; A 3:447).[83]
attā'nudiṭṭhi,	speculation about the [or "a"] self (D 2:22; S 3:185; A 3:447).

2.2 LANGUAGE-CONSTRUCTED SELF. We cannot, of course, take our ability to see patterns of continuity on our lives for granted. Not everyone sees the same pattern, nor do we make the same sense of the causal patterns that we experience. In fact, we tend to *interpret* such patterns in a very private and personal manner. This can create some problems in our lives. We will now examine *how* we see these causal patterns that give us a sense of identity: how we create such selves.

2.2.1 Language and "selving." Philosophers, linguists and sociologists have noticed the close connection between language and the idea of self. The idea of "self" arises when we become aware of the "other" (other people and animals) or "Other" (other beings or power). Self, in other words, is the individual's construction of a distinct social identity, a person separate from others. We are not born with self-consciousness—there is no *self* without the *other or others*—but we acquire an awareness of self as a result of early socialization. Understandably, the God-idea is also closely related with the "selving" process in human evolution.[84]

The social theorist, **Anthony Giddens,** describes the selving process as one that closely works with the rise of language in society:

> The constitution of the "I" comes about only via the "discourse of the Other"—that is, through the acquisition of language—but the "I" has to be related to the body as the sphere of action. The term "I" is in linguistic terms a "shifter": the contextuality of social "positioning" determines who is an "I" in any situation of talk…. An agent who has mastered the use of the "I," as Mead[85] says, has also mastered the use of "me"—but only via the concomitant mastery of a syntactically differentiated language. For I have to know that I am an "I" when I speak to "you," but that you are an "I" when you speak to "me," and that I am a "you" when you speak to me… and so on. (Giddens, *The Constitution of Society,* 1984: 43)

Language fools us into believing that there is an "I" apart from or behind our fleeting experiences. Our habit of attributing meaning to our experiences and those of others, of connecting such experiences together, conjures in our minds a false mirage of identity. In reality, there is only this "connectedness," and nothing else. **Gethin** insightfully notes:

> The fact that experiences are causally connected is not to be explained by reference to an unchanging self that underlies experience, but by examining the nature of causality. (1998: 139)

We will now, for the rest of this section, examine how language misleads us into creating and projecting notions of self. Then we will discuss the causal connectedness of thing [2.3].

2.2.2 How words "create" non-existent things. Let us examine the sentence, "There is no self." Grammatically, this sentence is correct, but philosophically, it does not really make sense. In fact, the sentence, "There is *no* self," is self-contradictory. How is this so? When we talk about something that does not exist (like an abiding soul), we tend to reify it, that is, we try to define it into existence, as it were. When we say or hear the word "self," the idea arising in our mind is: "There is a self." Just as when

[83] Also BDict 184 f, or a search of any digital Pali Canon.
[84] See eg Philip Mellor, "Self and suffering," 1991: 54.
[85] That is, George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society,* Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 1934.

we say, "Unicorn," we imagine *a horse-like animal with a horn on its forehead*. So, the word "self" itself conjures a notion of something existing and permanent, meaning "the self exists."[86] So we end up really saying, "There is no 'there is self'."

However, I can say, for example, "I do not have a handphone." This sentence is meaningful since there are numerous *handphones* easily available, but I do not have any of them. Or, I could say, "The house is not built yet." You can understand me, because I am *referring* to a structure that is like the numerous buildings we can see around us. In other words, the meaningfulness of the word "handphone" or "house," and each of the sentences as a whole, depends on some other concept or reality. The word or idea "handphone" or "house," however, is meaningless in itself. (If I suddenly were to tell you, "House!" You would probably retort, "Why do you mean?")[87]

Similarly, we often say (in English), "It is raining." Here "it" has no meaning, although unconsciously perhaps we tend to associate "it" with "the rain" or "the sky," but then the sentence would run "The rain is raining" or "The sky is training"![88] Or, I could say, "It's been nice meeting you," when "it" really has no sense—it is called an "anticipatory subject" in English grammar: in other words, it anticipates or refers to what is said next. *It* has no meaning in itself.

Language sometimes tries to express the non-existent or the inexpressible: we speak of God, soul, *ātman*, Buddha, nirvana. Just because a word exists does not mean that it refers to a real thing: we cannot define something into being. We could say "I believe in unicorns" but it does not mean that they exist. Or, we could say, "The house is not built yet." Here "house" is clearly non-existent. Similarly, the word "consciousness" is used after the fact to describe a person's state *after* he is awakened, when what used to exist before ("consciousness"), ceases to be after he passes away.

We speak of Buddha and of nirvana as if we have experienced them. All we can say is that they are meaningful sounds, but we are still blind to the full meaning. We can begin to feel our way around, and listen to the silent spaces in between the words. As the silence of the words grow more complete, our view of reality, too, becomes more whole. For the moment, we can only say that *the word is not the thing.*

In **the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta** (D 9),[89] the Buddha declares to the householder Citta that he (the Buddha) uses words, terms and language as a skilful means:

> For, Citta, these are merely common names, common expressions, common usages, common designations in the world that the Tathāgata [Thus Come] uses without attachment to them."[90]
>
> (D 14.55/1:202)

2.2.3 How our thoughts "create" non-existent things. Now we come to the most problematic word or letter: "I." Take the sentence, "I am angry." Or, we could think of, or better, feel, any of numerous other negative emotions. The first thing to note is that we have directed our attention to a particular sign (*nimitta*) of the event (eg a word/s used, the tone of voice, a past irritating image, a tired feeling, and so on).

The next thing we do is to look for more details to build up the anger, or desire, or negative emotion: we open our mental "file" on that person or situation, and add on to what has preoccupied our minds. In other words, we are only reacting to a part of person or event, not to the whole person or situation. In fact, on more careful examination, we would discover that we have actually created our own version or phantom of the person or situation!

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[86] See **Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) = SD 9 Intro (9h).

[87] See Siderits, "Word meaning, sentence meaning and Apoha," 1985: 133.

[88] In Chinese, we would say 下雨 *xiàyǔ*, "the rain falls," and this sentence is less problematic than the English one.

[89] See SD 7.14 (2005). On how the Buddha redefines various brahminical terms to effectively communicate with to his audience, see AK Warder 1956, Joanna Jurewicz 1995, 2000, & KR Norman 1991c.

[90] *Loka,samaññā loka,niruttiyo loka,vohārā loka,paññattiyo yāhi Tathāgato voharati aparāmasan ti,* lit "These are names of the world, expressions of the world, usages in the world, designations in the world…" See **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 14.55/1:202) = SD 7.14 Intro (1).

As discussed earlier [1.6.2], we tend to project our own mental constructs onto other people and situations. When we perceive a person or an event, we are actually telling ourselves a narrative that we have invented ourselves. But where do these stories come from? Either the past or the future.

Most of the time, we are likely to be ruled by our past. Our likes and dislikes, and what we tend to ignore, are all moulded and biased by our past experiences. Memories (usually repressed) of a past pleasant experience tend to spur us to react favourably to a similar present sense-impression (such as a visual object, say a person) and to *desire* to retain, even escalate and collect, such impressions and associations. This is how desire breeds desire, keeping us leashed to it. This is the lust-driven "I."

On the other hand, we tend to be repulsed by what even hints at some past unpleasant memory hidden in our subconscious, so that we react with *dislike* (anger, ill will, violence, etc). We simply want to push away such sense-impressions, even utterly annihilate them, as if it is possible to do so. Every time we get angry, we are likely to get angry again, and it usually gets worse each time. Anger grows into hate, which grows into ill will, and then into violence and destruction. This is the ill-will-driven "I."

What if we do not have any memory of a certain experience? For example, we have never really been kind, and for some reason (such as being terribly hurt in the past), we think that true kindness does not exist. So when someone shows us kindness, we become suspicious, and react negatively. Otherwise, we tend to *ignore* or avoid such people, that is, those who do not fit our mental definition of someone we like. We are simply driven by the pull of like and the push of dislike, and unmoved by any good we fail to recognize. This is the ignorance-driven "I."

If we spend too much time thinking of the past, especially dwelling in negative memories and perceptions, we are likely to feel *guilty* or remorseful about things done or undone. Guilt is a feeling that we have wronged someone in the past, perhaps the person is already dead; or, perhaps we think that we have wronged someone we will never meet again. Either way we feel helpless. The point is that the past is gone, and there is nothing you can do to change it, except to leave it where it is and deal with the present. The best way to heal yourself over such guilt is to love and forgive yourself with lovingkindness, as you would forgive those people you truly love.

If living in the past affects us negatively, thinking too much about the future, too, affects us in a similar way. In meditation, when the mind dwells too much in the future, we notice that it becomes *restless,* as if anxious to jump into action, to grasp at straws and chase wild geese of the future. If we spend a lot of time planning the future, we lose touch with the present moment—we neglect those who are near and dear to us, we neglect our health, and most of all, we are not living in the present moment. And yet, even as we speak, the present moves into the past, and we are already in the future. Only when we are truly living in the present can we really mould the future.

2.2.4 E-prime: Avoiding dogmatic language. Then there is the problem of how we express ourselves and communicate with the world. Often, we make general and summary statements, expressing our bias or fear rather than reflecting the reality of the situation. We tend to use the verbs-to-be (is, am, are, etc) which over-define the situation in sentences using

- the "*is* of identity" or copula, eg "Kusumah is a florist" (but, does she work as a florist 24 hours a day?) and
- the "*is* of predication," eg "A monk is a holy man" (but, what about a monk who has a large bank account? Is he really a holy man?).

Linguists, noticing such problems and the danger of making dogmatic statements, introduced the idea of E-prime[91] language. E-prime eliminates the "is-dependent" over-defining of situations where we tend to confuse one aspect or viewpoint of an experience with a much more complex totality. This helps us to be more objective and creative in problem solving. Such premature judgments as "There is no solution to this problem" can be restated more objectively as "I don't see a solution to this problem yet."

[91] The term was coined by David Bourland in his *A Linguistic Note: Writing in E-Prime* (1965) to refer to the English language modified by prohibiting the use of the verb "to be" (am, are, is, etc). E-Prime arose from Alfred Korzybski's General Semantics and his observation that English speakers most often use "to be" to express dogmatic beliefs or assumptions, or to avoid expressing opinions and feelings as such. A good place to start your research on E-Prime is http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/E-prime and then follow the links.

Or, if we are listening to a long Buddhist talk, we might say of the speaker, "He *is* boring." In E-prime we would instead say, "This long talk makes me feel bored." After all, we can see there are those who are actually alert and enjoying the same talk. Or, perhaps we do not like the topic or have some issues about it, so that what we really mean is "I don't like this talk because it reminds me of something wrong I have done."

As such, we have to be careful how we use language, especially in religion. We must ensure that we do not end up making a dogmatic statement, especially one that claims to be universally true when it is only partially true or merely a conventional truth.[92] So how do we speak more clearly, and in a manner that reflects reality more closely?

Earlier on, we noted that our only sources of knowledge are our six senses [1.4], and all that we can know are the six sense-objects [1.5]. Before expressing ourselves to others, we should first determine which *sense* (that is, sense-faculty) we are referring to: is it about something we have seen, or heard, or smelt, or tasted, or felt, or an idea? Instead of summarily declaring, "It is bad!" we should determine perhaps, "He looks sick," or "She sounds happy," or "It smells burnt," or "It tastes flat," or "I feel like throwing up," or "I feel sad."[93]

Then we need to relate to *the conditions* that our statements refer to. "He looks sick: he appears pale and weak." "She sounds angry; she is shouting loudly and jumping up and down." "I feel sad that people do not care to speak clearly." And so on.

Otherwise, we are likely to be projecting the memories of our past negative experiences or some negative emotions onto the situation. Instead of relating to the real situation, we are actually making it all up into something else and telling our own stories. Our speech, in other words, should reflect the true situation better, so that we are better prepared to improve ourselves spiritually and bring happiness wherever we go.

2.3 SELF IS A PROCESS. We have mentioned [2.2.1] that language and our habit of connecting experiences together, trick us into thinking there is some sort of abiding self behind our experiences, a Cartesian ghost in the machine [3.2.3]. It is interesting—and important—to note that the language of the early Buddhist texts uses less *nouns* (thing words) but more *verbs* (actions, states and processes). When the Buddha speaks of his central teachings—when he speaks of the precepts, of the mental hindrances, of mental concentration, of the aggregates, of awakening—he is speaking of static states but dynamic processes. He speaks less of *what* we are, but more of *how* we are, and of *being* [3.1].

The Buddha again and again points to the "connectedness" of experience. The understanding of this connectedness of phenomena is so crucial to self-understanding that there is a special name for it: dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*). It is a cyclic model through which we realize *how* we were, what we *are*, and how we will *be*. How the past shape our present, how both past and present shape our future, and what we can do to break out of the vicious cycle of life and death.

The fullest statement or "standard version" of the dependent arising formula (the X-*paccayā*-Y pattern) has twelve factors in eleven propositions and is found, for example, in **the (Paṭicca,samuppāda) Desanā Sutta** (S 12.1) and **the Kaccā(ya)na,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15), thus:

with ignorance as condition,	there are volitional activities;
with volitional activities as condition,	there is consciousness;
with consciousness as condition,	there is name-and-form;
with name-and-form as condition,	there are the six sense-bases;
with the six sense-bases as condition,	there is contact;
with contact as condition,	there is feeling;
with feeling as condition,	there is craving;
with craving as condition,	there is clinging;
with clinging as condition,	there is existence;

[92] See further, ***Saññā*** = SD 17.4 (6.2).

[93] Note the usage of "feel" here and in the previous sentence. They both mean "experience," but apply to different senses.

with existence as condition, there is birth;
with birth as condition, there arise decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.
—Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

But with the utter fading away
and ending of ignorance, volitional activities end;
with the ending of volitional formation, consciousness ends;
with the ending of consciousness, name-and-form ends;
with the ending of name-and-form, the six sense-bases end;
with the ending of the six sense-bases, contact ends;
with the ending of contact, feeling ends;
with the ending of feeling, craving ends;
with the ending of craving, clinging ends;
with the ending of clinging, existence ends;
with the ending of existence, birth ends;
with the ending of birth, there end decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.
—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering. (S 12.1/2:1 f**,** 12.15/2:16 f) = SD 6.13

This 12-link series is described, in philosophical terms, as *the principle of causality* and the nature of *personal continuity*, showing how the past moulds the present, and both shape the future. It gives us a good idea that there is no abiding entity or soul in such a dynamic process, and despite, even because, of that, we are in charge of shaping our own lives and destiny.[94]

In psychological terms, *dependent arising* can be seen as describing an *unconscious* process, that is, the cycle occurs outside of our awareness. We are being autopilotted by past ignorance and reacting in craving and re-creating ourselves in our own image. The *dependent ending,* on the other hand, is a conscious process, whereby we remove (to some extent at least) ignorance and craving, and take over the helm of our lives.[95]

The dependent arising formula is, in fact, an elaboration of *the first and second noble truths*, explaining suffering (*dukkha*) and the arising of suffering, as evident in **the Titth'āyatana Sutta**.[96] It traces the chain of causal arising back beyond craving (*taṇhā*) to its ultimate origin in ignorance (*avijjā*). The dependent ending formula is, conversely, a more elaborate statement of *the third and fourth noble truths*, that is, how suffering ends, that is, the goal of spiritual liberation (nirvana), and how to get there.

2.4 ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE SELF. Why does the Buddha unequivocally reject the notion of an abiding self or soul? We can simply say that it is simply because *it is not there*. Furthermore, it is the onus of those who claim that something exists to prove or show that it actually exists. No amount of definitions or fiats can bring anything into existence. Unfortunately, we often live in an "I say so" world: as children we have to obey parents because *they say so*; when we are in love, we obey the whims of our beloved because *she says so*; at work, we have to do the boss' commands, because *he says so*; if we are religious we do our preachers' word, because *they say so*; above all, we do the biddings of our karma, because *it says so*!

So we do not really have any control of ourselves. **Steve Collins,** in his book *Selfless Persons*,[97] gives three main arguments for denying the self or soul (*ātman*) in early Buddhism.

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[94] See Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism,* in 1998: 140-146.

[95] See eg Falkenstrom 2003: 8 (where is used the term "pre-conscious"). I use *pre-conscious* to refer to a sort of arrière-pensée that precedes physical action and speech, ie, the intention behind the expressed action.

[96] **Titth'āyatana S** (A 3.61.11/1:177). See SD 6.8.

[97] Steve Collins, *Selfless Persons,* 1982: 97-103; see also Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism,* 1998: 136-139.

(1) WE HAVE NO REAL OR ULTIMATE CONTROL OF OUR BODY OR MIND. The first argument is that *we do not really have any real or ultimate control over any of the five aggregates*, as stated in **the Anatta,-lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59):

> Bhikshus, form [the body] is not self.
> For, bhikshus, if form were self, this form would not bring about illness [affliction], and it would be possible to tell the form: 'Let my form be such. Let my form not be such.'[98]
> But because form is not self, form brings about illness [affliction], and it is not possible to say of form: "Let my form be such. Let my form not be such." (S 22.59/3:66 f) = SD 1.2

The same is said of the other aggregates: feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. Since all these are impermanent and subject to pain, how can we say we have ultimate control over them?

(2) WE CANNOT REALLY "OWN" OUR BODY OR MIND. The second argument against the self is that *we cannot really own anything,* as stated in **the Anatta,lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59) and **the Cūḷa Saccaka Sutta** (M 35) [1.5.2],

> "What do you think? Is ⟨**form | feeling | perception | formations | consciousness**⟩ permanent or impermanent?"
> "Impermanent."
> "Is what is impermanent suffering or pleasurable?"[99]
> "Suffering."
> "Is what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.'?"[100]
> "No."
> "Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of ⟨**form | feeling | perception | formations | consciousness**⟩ whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near[101]—all forms ⟨etc⟩ should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:
> 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'[102]

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[98] This is the first argument against the self-notion, that is, the nature of the five aggregates are not subject to one's control (*avasa,vattitā*), but they are all subject to illness [affliction], and as such cannot be our self.

[99] *Dukkhaṁ vā sukhaṁ vā.*

[100] *Etam mama, eso 'ham asmi, eso me attâ ti*. These are "the 3 graspings" (*ti,vidha gāha*), ie, of view (*diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), of conceit (*māna*) (MA 2:111, 225). The notion "This is mine" arises through craving (*taṇhā*); the notion "This I am" arises through conceit (*māna*); the notion "This is my self" arises through views (*diṭṭhi*). These three considerations represent respectively the 3 kinds of mental proliferation (*papañca*) of self-view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), and of conceit (*māna*) (Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f).The opposite formula, *n'etaṁ mama, n'eso 'ham asmi, na mêso attā ti,* is applied below to the 5 aggregates [§24b]. See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind,* 1995:32 f.

[101] See S 22.48/3:47. This classification of the aggregates (by way of the totality formula) is explained in detail in the Vibhaṅga and briefly in the Visuddhimagga: **"internal"** = physical sense-organs; **"external"** = physical sense-objects; **"gross"** = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); **"subtle"** = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); "**inferior**" = unpleasant and unacceptable sense-experiences [sense-world existence]; "**superior**" = pleasant and acceptable sense-experiences [form & formless existences]; **"far"** = subtle objects ("difficult to penetrate"); **"near"** = gross objects ("easy to penetrate") (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). "Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy" (Gethin 1986:41).

[102] *N'etaṁ mama, n'eso 'ham asmi, na mêso attā ti.* A brief version, "There can be no considering that (element) as 'I' or 'mine' or 'I am'" (*ahan ti vā maman ti vā asmī ti vā*) is found in **Mahā Hatthi,padôpama S** (M 28/1:184-191 §§6b-7, 11b-12, 16b-17, 21b-22). This is opp of "the 3 graspings" (*ti,vidha gāha*) formula: *etam mama, eso 'ham asmi, eso me attâ ti* [§§12-16]. In **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59.12-16/3:68), these formulas is

(M 35.20/1:232 f) = SD 26.5; (S 22.59.12-21/3:67-69) = SD 1.2

Here we see the aggregates in their "totality"—throughout all space and time, not matter what quality of aggregates—they are all impermanent, suffering and not self. We cannot own them for these very reasons. This statement is a clear rebuttal to a powerful wrong view prevalent amongst the brahmins of the Buddha's time, especially as stated in the Upaniṣad that: "You are that (soul)" (*tat tvam asi*).[103]

(3) SELF IS MEANINGLESS APART FROM EXPERIENCES. The third argument is that the term "self" (*attā*) is meaningless apart from particular experiences. This is expounded by the Buddha to Ānanda, as recorded in **the Mahā,nidāna Sutta** (D 15). After expounding the teaching on dependent arising at length, the Buddha dismisses the various ways in which people tend to define a self, as "having form," or "formless," and whether "limited" or "unlimited" in either case.[104]

Then the Buddha, asking a rhetorical question, "How many ways are there in which one can regard self?" explains to Ānanda that there are *three*: feeling is regarded as being identical with self, that is, as "feeling is my self"; or, the self is regarded as being without feeling, "my self is insentient"; or, neither of these, but that "my self feels, my self has the attribute of feeling." The Buddha then declares that it is not fitting (*na khamati*) to regard it in any of these ways for the following reasons.

In the first case, that <u>self and feeling are identical</u> (*vedanā me attâ ti*), that is, the self is identified with the aggregates (DA 2:507 f). Now, explains the Buddha, *feeling is of three kinds*: pleasant, painful and neutral. With which is the self to be identified, since only one kind of feeling can prevail at any time? Moreover, *all feelings are impermanent and causally conditioned*, so that the self, too, has to be subject to arising and passing away.

Secondly, there is the wrong notion that <u>the self is said to be insentient</u> (*appaṭisaṁvedano me attā ti*), where the self is identified with the form aggregate (DA 2:507 f). Here, the Buddha declares, "Where there is no feeling at all, is it possible to say, 'I am'?" Since this is not possible, this view is not fitting, too.

Thirdly, where <u>the self is said to feel, or to have the attribute of feeling</u> (*attā me vediyati, vedanā,-dhammo hi me attā'ti*), the Buddha similarly asks, "Where feeling is completely absent…might one be able to say that 'I am this'?" Again here this is not tenable.[105]

Rupert Gethin gives this helpful overview of the argument of the abiding self:

> The gist of the Buddhist critique of the notion of "self" is then this. It cannot be denied that there is a complex of experience going on: this can be conveniently analysed by way of the five aggregates. But where precisely in all this is the constant, unchanging self which is having all experiences? What we find when we introspect, the Buddha suggests, is always some particular sense datum, some particular feeling, some particular idea, some particular wish or desire, some consciousness of something particular. And all these are constantly changing from one moment to the next; none of them remains for more than a mere moment. Thus, apart from some particular experience, I never actually directly come across or experience the "I" that is having experiences. It is something entirely elusive. This looks suspicious. How can I know it is there? For it is impossible to conceive of consciousness apart from all these particular changing details, and if we abstract all the particular details of consciousness we are not left with a constant, individual "self" but a blank, a nothing. (Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism,* 1998: 138)

2.5 SELF AS DOER AND KNOWER.

<u>2.5.1 Names for the mind.</u> We have already mentioned that *attā* ("self") is often used in the early Buddhist texts to refer to *the mind* [2.1]. In the early texts, too, we often find the words *citta, mano* and

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applied to the 5 aggregates & in **Pārileyya S** (S 22.81/ 3:94-99) to the 4 primary elements. See also **Rāhula S** (A 4.177/2:164 f). See **Pārileyya S,** SD 6.16 Intro (5). See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind,* 1995:32 f.

[103] Chāndagya Upaniṣad 6.8-16; cf KR Norman, "A note on *attā* in the Alagaddūpama-sutta," 1981c: 19-29.

[104] D 15.25-26/2:65 = SD 5.17.

[105] D 15.27-32/2:66-68 = SD 5.17.

viññāṇa used, often interchangeably, for "the mind,"[106] and sometimes, as in **the Assutava Sutta 1** (S 12.61), the Buddha speaks of "'mentation' [thought], or 'mind,' or 'consciousness'" (*cittam iti pi mano iti pi viññāṇaṁ iti pi*) as if they are synonyms,[107] that is, in the general sense of "the mind." The Saṁyutta Commentary, in fact, says that all these are names for the mind-base (*man'āyatana*) (SA 2:98).

However, although these three terms have the same meaning, as noted by **Bhikkhu Bodhi,** in his translation of the Saṁyutta Nikāya,

> in the Nikāyas they are generally used in distinct contexts. As a rough generalization, ***viññāṇa*** signifies the particularizing awareness through which a sense faculty (as in the standard sixfold division of *viññāṇa* into eye-consciousness, etc) as well as the underlying stream of consciousness, which sustains personal continuity through a single life and thread together successive lives (emphasized at S 12.38-40).[108] ***Mano*** serves as the third door of action (along with body and speech) and as the sixth internal sense base (along with the five physical sense bases); as the mind base it coordinates the data of the other five senses and also cognizes mental phenomena (*dhammā*), its own special class of objects. ***Citta*** signifies mind as the centre of personal experience, as the subject of thought, volition and emotion. It is the *citta* that needs to be understood, trained, and liberated. (S:B 769 n154)[109]

Bodhi uses "mentality" for *mano*.[110] However, here I am influenced by the Buddhist Dictionary definition of *citta,* where *adhicitta* = "higher mentality." Moreover, as Bodhi himself adds:

> ***Mano*** serves as the third door of action (along with body and speech) and as the sixth internal sense base (along with the five physical sense bases); as the mind base it coordinates the data of the other five senses and also cognizes mental phenomena (*dhammā*), its own special class of objects. (id)

As such, "mentation" (a function) is clearly a better translation of *mano* than "mentality" (more of a state). This is just a bit of pedantry probably limited to this passage. In fact, the simple word "thought," well translates *citta* here, too. Elsewhere, it is best (as Bodhi himself admits) to translate *citta* and *mano* as "mind," as most translators now do, too. The point is to be aware of the right context.

2.5.2 The doer is not self. One important discovery we usually make during meditation, is that we are often enough full of distracting thoughts. We hear voices telling us *things* (this is nice, this is not, this is boring, and so on) and telling us to *do* things (scratch that itch, move that numb leg, let's go home, and so on)—of course, these are the least of our problems; for, usually, the thoughts are far more dramatic. Our minds whisper to us: buy that gadget, find a new handphone, get a bigger car, get back at that guy, I need more money, I want more pleasure, I am stressed, and so on. This is the "doer" or "controller," that powerful inner voice, at work.

Yet, most of us go through life thinking we have full control of things around us; some politicians, leaders or thinkers even go further and think that they can be in control of everything. This is one reason why religion—or, more specifically, the *spiritual* aspects of religion—stand out at the other end of the scale of things. The delusion that "I'm in charge" is a major hindrance to meditation and mindfulness practice. The notion that everything, or, at least, things around us, should run just as we want it, often creates restlessness, worry and fear.

We often let past memories flood our minds, so that we are overwhelmed with negative emotions, especially sadness, regret, worry, and guilt, regarding things done and undone. Some people dwell so much on their past tragedies, losses and problems, so that they continue to live them in repeated reprise and replay, and as a result they are not living the present. They care little or have no time for loved ones,

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[106] Eg D 1:21; S 2:94 f. See also **Dictionary of Buddhism** (Oxford): citta.

[107] S 12.61.47/2:94 f = SD 20.2. Cf **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1): *Yaṁ...idaṁ vuccati cittan ti vā mano ti vā viññāṇan ti vā* (D 1.49/1:21,21).

[108] On the 2 kinds of consciousnesses, see **Cetanā S 1-3** (S 12.38-40/2:65-67) = SD 7.6a+b+6c.

[109] For a detailed discussion, see Hamilton 1996a: ch 5 & also ***Viññāṇa*** = SD 17.8a(12).

[110] S:B 595 & 769 n154.

nor for friends—they have no time even for themselves.[111] In fact, they are so lost in their past selves, that they totally neglect their present realities. Ever living in the past, they are dead to present.

We often speculate of the future, wondering: What will I be? What will not be? What will happen? What will not happen? Or, we daydream: I will be; I will not be; This will happen; This will not happen; and so on. These are all thought proliferations that know no limit.[112]

Most of our conscious lives, we are more caught up with *planning* to do things that actually doing them. We plan a thousand things, but probably do only very few of them, if at all. And having realized our plan or wish, we feel *dissatisfied*, and plan for something else. This is because our mind, or more specifically, the "doer," is fickle, ever running after every sense-stimulus. We not only shop around looking to buy things, we also shop around religious teachers, groups and religions—but most common of all, we shop around our thoughts.

Sometimes we feel *fear* for no apparent reason, or we are unable to understand why feel afraid or insecure. The most likely reason is that we feel we have something important or a lot of things missing from our lives. So we desire for things, for security, for comfort, for love, for friends, for sex and so on. Fear or anxiety arises when we think we are unable to find these things. Or, having found these things, we are afraid to lose them; we become attached to them. From attachment, arise fear (Dh 213-216).

Imagining we have a lack, we feel a want; what we want, we often get in due course; what we get, we will fear to lose it; what we cling to, we could never enjoy; when we do not enjoy something, we are ever and again hunting for it. Ironically, what you search for, you will find it. The vicious cycle never ends. We turn to God, or to the devil; we invoke gods and ghosts; we turn to magic and superstition. We look for answers outside of ourselves, when we should be examining why really are we looking for things, how we think, and we fail to see the inner stillness. We have given up thinking for ourselves, and allow others to think for: *we have handed our remote control to others!*

All such negative emotions, failures and suffering thrive, driven by the notion that is there is a permanent self that is "in charge." The way out of this "doing" cycle is to understand that the "**doer**" or "controller" cannot let go of doing: the doer simply must keep on doing, and cannot help itself. It takes some wisdom to see that the doing is merely a conditioned reflex. A simple reflection may help here.

REFLECTION. The next time you relax beside a lake, notice how ripples form on the water surface. A single leaf, flower, or object drops on the water, and ripples appear in waves moving outwards. Look closely and you see with your mind's eye that the water is not moving *outwards*: it is only the kinetic energy pushing the water *upwards* each time. The waves appear to move towards you: moving, yet not moving. There are really no waves, but only water pushed up and down in a patterned way.

Our minds work in the same way: we form ideas and emotions and take them to be real, and act or react accordingly. A simple way of exposing the falseness of such "doings" is to recall some childhood difficulties (such as fear, anger, etc) we have gone through. Most likely, we would think that we know better now and would have responded differently with that wisdom. The same reasoning should then be applied to our present condition: "What would I do if I were wiser now?" We may be growing older but the child is still in us, and this child—our "doing" mind—has to grow, too. Let us now examine how we can tame and free the doer.[113]

2.5.2 The knower: Letting go of the "controller." If you are properly familiar with some simple form of Buddhist meditation (like breath meditation or lovingkindness meditation), you will notice the "controller" in your mind. This is the "self" arising from the depths and darkness of our unconscious; it arise from our latent tendencies of being drawn to things we see as pleasurable, pushing away things we see as unattractive, and ignoring what we do not understand.

Powerful as this inner "doer" or "controller" may be, there is yet another side of our mind, a sort of silent (sometimes, sleeping) partner. This is the "**knower,**" whose roots lie just as deep as those of the doer, so that the doer and the knower always go together in the unawakened mind. While the doer is

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[111] On the importance of spending quiet time with ourselves, see **Ti Sikkhā S** (A 3.88) = SD 24.10c Intro (3).

[112] See eg **Yava,kalāpī S** (S 35.248) = SD 40a.3; also **"I" The nature of identity** = SD 19.1 (4.3).

[113] On "the doer," further see **The Unconscious** = SD 17.8b (2.1).

rooted in the past and future, *the knower merely deals with the present*. Being less experienced as it were, the knower tends to be weaker than the doer in the unawakened mind.

But we can train the knower. Firstly, we have to train it not to be a henchman or slave to the doer, obeying its every beck and call. Secondly, the knower should train itself to see the *impermanence* of the present moment. All this training needs a calm and clear mind. [1.5.2]

We can use deep meditation to stop the doer for a while, even a long while—such a being reborn in a dhyanic realm and spending aeons there. However, even those states are impermanent, and we will return to old painful states. It goes in an unending cycle.

The "knower" reacts to what it knows, and knowing leads to doing. This knower is technically known as consciousness (*citta*) [2.5.1]. On a simple level, this *citta* merely processes what is going on at each of the six sense-doors; but it also has other important functions.[114] So, this *citta* is like a huge iceberg, of which only about 10% is seen above the water, and 90% lies hidden underneath. The seen 10%—the "actor"—comprises our actions and words, mostly motivated by the "doer," lying just below on the pre-conscious level. But there is the massive behemoth, the strong silent "knower" that lies mostly hidden, forming the bulk of the unconscious.[115]

Very often people today still make the "Cartesian error" of thinking that since one thing is sure—"I exist"—therefore, it must be a permanent self, an abiding entity [3.2.2-3]. They think there is *something,* even *someone,* there that knows, or as **Brahmavamso** puts it:

> "The knower" is usually called consciousness or *citta* (mind), which is what knows. That knowing is often seen to be the ultimate "self." Very often people can get the perception, or the paradigm, in their minds of perceiving something in here, which can just know and not be touched by what it knows. It just knows heat and cold, pleasure and pain. It just knows beauty and ugliness. However, at the same time (somehow or other), it can just stand back and not be known, and not be touched by what's actually happening. It is important to understand that the nature of consciousness is so fast, so quick, that it gives the illusion of continuity. Owing to this illusion, one misses the point that whatever one sees with your eyes, or feels with the body, the mind then takes that up as its own object, and it knows that it saw. It knows that it felt. It's that knowing that it saw, knowing that it felt, that gives the illusion of objectivity. It can even know that it knew.
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> When philosophy books talk about "self reflection" or "self knowledge", the fact that not only do "I know", but that "I know that I know", or that "I know that I know that I know", is given as a proof of the existence of a self. I have looked into that experience, in order to see what actually was going on with this "knowing" business. Using the depth of my meditation, with the precision that that gave to mindfulness, to awareness, I could see the way this mind was actually working. What one actually sees is this procession of events, that which we call "knowing." It's like a procession, just one thing arising after the other in time. When I saw something, then a fraction of a moment afterwards I knew that I saw, and then a fraction of a moment afterwards I knew that I knew that I saw. There is no such thing as, "I know that I know that I know." The truth of the matter is, "I know that I knew that I knew." When one adds the perspective of time, one can see the causal sequence of moments of consciousness. Not seeing that causal sequence can very easily give rise to the illusion of a continuous "knower." This illusion of a continuous "knower" is most often where people assume that their "self" resides.
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> However, as it says in the suttas, one can see that even knowing is conditioned (*saṅkhata*) (M 64).[116] One can see that this too rises because of causes, and then ceases when the causes cease. This is actually where one starts to see through the illusion of objectivity. It is impossible to separate the "knower" from the known. As the Buddha said many times, "In all of the six senses, such as the mind base, when mind base and mind objects come together it turns on mind con-

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[114] We have discussed its two important forms, cognitive consciousness and existential consciousness: see ***Viññāṇa*** = SD 17.8a(6). See also (3) & (5.1) below.

[115] For the iceberg diagram illustrating this, see **The Unconscious** = SD 17.8b (2.2).

[116] **Mahā Māluṅkya,putta S** (M 64) = SD 21.20.

> sciousness. The coming together of the three is called *phassa* (contact)" (eg M 28).[117] Consciousness is conditioned, it has its causes, and it's not always going to be there. During the experience of jhana one is totally separated from the world of the five senses. All five senses have disappeared. All that's left is mind, mind base, mind experience. One then knows clearly what mind (*citta*) is. (Brahmavamso 2001:4, digital ed)

Or, as the English neuropsychiatrist, **P Fenwick,** puts it very succinctly, "The characteristic of enlightenment is a permanent freeing of the individual from the illusion that he is 'doing'."[118] **Susan Blackmore** provides a contemporary insight on this:

> How is it possible to live without doing? One answer lies in the simple phrase "as if." You can live *as if* you have free will; *as if* you are a self who acts; *as if* there is a physical world outside yourself. You can treat others *as if* they are sentient beings who have desires, beliefs, hopes and fears—adopting the intentional stance towards others, and towards yourself. This way of living drops any distinction between real and *as if* intentionality, or real and *as if* free will. (2003:413 f)

This *as if* approach means, I think, that you have some level of understanding that the real world is not what it appears to be, but since that is the way most people view it, you respect and respond to that virtual world in a way that would not mentally or spiritually jeopardize yourself in anyway, and at the same time you will be able to healthily relate to others. It is like playing "Let's pretend" but being serious and compassionate about it.[119]

3 Types of selves

3.1 WE CREATE OURSELVES. All religions speak of impermanence; all religions understand suffering; *only early Buddhism teaches not-self.* To understand not-self is to understand that we construct ourselves anew every moment of consciousness. As long as we are not in deep dreamless sleep, we are ever conscious *of* something: we are conscious of what we are looking at, or hearing, or smelling, or tasting, or touching, or thinking of. Just as that conscious moment arises, it stays but a moment, and at once passes away.

Every such conscious moment has two aspects: content and intention. The *content* is what we experience—a form, a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, a thought—that is, the *what* of experience. To be careful in our description, we can say that we do not actually, for example, see, but only have a "visual impression" or "idea of a visual form." Such ideas are *not* what we directly apprehend, but rather *that by which* we apprehend.[120]

On apprehending something—on receiving a sense-impression—we immediately find a *name* for it. It is to *such* names that we refer when we use words that signify them. These are the actual *objects* that we *perceive* or recognize (that is, re-cognise). This applies to ideas of things, as well as to objects of conceptual thought, memory, imagination and emotions.[121] The point is that all these processes are mental constructs, very personal impressions of things.

One of the greatest mistakes of the pre-modern western philosopher is *to try to define things into reality*.[122] The evangelists created God and goodness in their own images, and many others, titillated by the material success of mega-churches and feverish gospel rallies often show symptoms of the Stockholm

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[117] **Mahā Hatthi,padopama S** (M 28) = SD 6.16.

[118] P Fenwick, "Meditation and the EEG." In M West (ed), *The Psychology of Meditation.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987:117. See also S Blackmore 2003:413 f.

[119] On "the knower," further see **The Unconscious** = SD 17.8b (2.2).

[120] For a more detailed study, see **Language and Discourse** = SD 26.11.

[121] For an interesting reading, see Mortimer J Adler, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes,* 1985: 5-29, 65-77.

[122] See esp Mortimer J Adler, 1985: 77-82.

syndrome[123] in openly or tacitly approving of them. It is worth noting that words like God, soul, good, sin, evil, and most other such words that we use *have no meaning in themselves*. We attribute our own meanings to them; that is, we *use* them in ways that we like.

The Austrian philosopher **Ludwig Wittgenstein** (1889-1951) said, "Don't look for the meaning, look for the use."[124] Surely, it's even more true to say: Don't look for the meaning, look for the *abuse*! For he also says, "The work of philosopher [and the theologian, we might add] consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose"[125] and that "What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday usage."[126]

What Wittgenstein meant by "Don't look for the meaning, look for the use" is that if we were to take a broom apart and look at the brush, the head and the stick, we will not have a broom; if we sees the broom in action, we will understand what a broom is.[127] Language, in other words, is not mere words, but how they are used. It is context-sensitive. To show this, Wittgenstein provided examples of sentences or expressions that can be interpreted in more than one way. One of his most famous examples is, "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language."[128] Does this mean:

(1) philosophers *use language to combat bewitchments*, or

(2) philosophers *battle bewitchments caused by language itself.*

This ambiguity can only be resolved in context, showing that language cannot be broken down into self-contained units of meaning.[129] [4.1]

To understand something is *to go beyond the words that refer to it*. We must not be preoccupied by a tree so as to miss the whole woods. We see a sunset; we photograph it, but it is only a picture, not a sunset. A sunset is not pixels on paper, but a living experience. We can smell, but we cannot collect smells or preserve them. We can taste, but cannot always enjoy the exact taste we want. We can touch, but if we do not let go, we feel nothing. We can think, but a thousand thoughts rush by.

If we do not live the present moment, we have lost it forever. Even if we live the present moment, it is still but a moment. But they are not the same: the former has not tasted it, but the latter has. Our true happiness is proportionate with our living the present: knowing what pain is, enjoying pleasure, and seeing impermanence in the absence of both.

It's not the content of experience, the *what*, but the *how* of experience that shapes us. Our *intention*, how we respond to experience, creates us. When we respond with *lust*, we are lustful; when we respond with *ill will*, we are hateful; when we *ignore* it, we are deluded. When we experience life with *charity*, with *love*, with *wisdom*, they are what we become. We build our world out of our emotional responses. It is not *what* we are that really matters, it is *how* we act that we truly are.

Let's give the last word on this to the Buddha because he has already made a similar statement, in fact, an even more significant one, over two and a half millennia before Wittgenstein. In the Book of Twos (*Duka Nipāta*) of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, in **the Neyy'attha Nīt'attha Sutta** (A 2.3.4-5), the Buddha declares:

> Bhikshus, there are these two who misrepresent the Tathagata. What two:
>
> (1) Those who explain a sutta whose sense is explicit [has been drawn out] (*nīt'attha*) to be implicit [to be drawn out] (*neyy'attha*).
>
> (2) Those who explain a sutta whose sense is implicit [to be drawn out] (*neyy'attha*) to be explicit [has been drawn out] (*nīt'attha*).

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[123] The Stockholm syndrome is an extreme form of *identification*, ie, a psychological defence mechanism sometimes seen in an abducted hostage, in which the hostage shows signs of admiration for or loyalty to the hostage-taker, regardless of risk or danger he is in: see **Gadrabha Samaṇa S** (A 3.81) = SD 24.10b Intro (2.3).

[124] *Philosophical Investigations,* 1953. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophical_Investigations.

[125] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §127.

[126] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §116.

[127] Dr Alan Whithead (MP, Southampton, UK), House of Commons Standing Committee F (pt 4) col 186: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmstand/f/st030114/pm/30114s04.htm.

[128] See *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1922 §23; & http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophical_Investigations.

[129] See eg Ford & Peat, "The role of language in science," 1988.

These, bhikshus, are the two who misrepresent the Tathagata. (A 2.3.4/1:60) = SD 2.6b

Bhikshus, there are these two who do not misrepresent the Tathagata. What two:

(1) Those who explain a sutta whose sense is explicit (*nīt'attha*) explicit [whose sense has been drawn out].

(2) Those who explain the sutta whose sense is implicit (*neyy'attha*) as implicit [whose sense is to be drawn out].

These, bhikshus, are the two who do not misrepresent the Tathagata. (A 2.3.5/1:60) = SD 2.6b

This is an important statement on religious language. A religious statement may be made in *conventional* language (one based on everyday language, describing causes and conditions), using imagery, stories and illustrations. Or, it may be made in the *ultimate* language, that is, Dharma language, pointing to the fact that things have no intrinsic nature or abiding essence. For example, the Buddha says that *the five aggregates are impermanent, suffering and not-self*: he is speaking on an ultimate or Dharma level.

Similarly, in such statements as "The self is the lord of self" or "One is one's own master" (*attā hi attano nātho*) (Dh 160), the first *attā* can mean either "self" or "the mind" [2.1]. As such, the meaning of the sentence is that the mind can master itself. For, how else could it be? When the mind is well-mastered, we are our own master. We should be careful not to confuse the *attā* (meaning "self," or referring to the mind) with the brahmanical *ātman*, which is a conception of an abiding entity.

3.2 THE CONSCIOUS SELF.

3.2.1 What are we dealing with? Now we will look at a few questions about consciousness and the soul-idea: How do I know I exist? How do I know I am conscious? What does it mean to be conscious? Is the self or soul the same as consciousness, or not? Since this essay is in English, you, the reader, may be familiar with at least a bit of western philosophy. A bit of western philosophical background also gives our discussion a broader perspective to briefly mention such philosophical developments where our discussion here can be enriched. As British Buddhist scholar, **Richard Gombrich,** in his *How Buddhism Began,* reminds us:

> What is being denied—what is a soul? Western languages are at home in the Christian cultural tradition. Christian theologians have differed vastly over what the soul is. For Aristotle,[130] and thus for Aquinas,[131] it is the form of the body, what makes a given individual person a whole rather than a mere assemblage of parts. However, most Christians conceive of the soul, however vaguely, in a completely different way, which goes back to Plato that the soul is precisely other than the body, as in the common expression "body and soul," and is some kind of disembodied mental, and above all, moral, agent, which survives the body at death. But none of this has anything to do with the Buddha's position. He was opposing the Upaniṣadic theory of the soul. In the Upaniṣads[132] the soul, *ātman*, is opposed to both the body and the mind; for example, it cannot

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[130] **Aristotle** (384-322 BCE), one of the greatest Greek philosophers, a student of Plato and teacher of Alexander. Together with Socrates, he is one of the founding figures of Western philosophy. He wrote on many subjects, incl aesthetics, metaphysics, theology, poetry, theater, music, logic, rhetoric, economics, politics, government, ethics, physics, biology, zoology, and astronomy. Aristotle's ideas have profound influence on the Islamic and Jewish philosophy and theology in the Middle Ages, and continue to influence Christianity even today. Unfortunately, only about a third of his works have survived. As regards the self or soul, he regarded it as the "form" of the body, ie, what make the physical body a living thin. He apparently regarded the soul as being a part of the body, not separate from it. See http://www.iep.utm.edu/a/aristotl.htm; also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle.

[131] **Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274), an Italian Catholic priest of the Dominican, and a very influential philosopher and theologian in the scholastic tradition, profoundly influence by Aristotle. Much of modern western philosophy arose as a reaction against, or as in agreement with, his ideas, particularly in ethics, natural law and political theory. Thomas (Aquinas is a placer name) regarded the human soul as something immaterial, capable of living apart from the human body after death. See http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aquinas/.

[132] **The Upaniṣads** are brahmanical scriptures which today form the core teachings of Vedanta. Beginning before the Buddha's time, they grew over many centuries and do not belong to any literary period. Their ideas are

> exercise such mental functions as memory or volition. Furthermore, the essence of the individual living being was claimed to be literally the same as the essence of the universe. This is not the complete account of the Upaniṣadic soul, but adequate for present purposes.[133] (1996: 15 f)

The Buddha is, of course, not only concerned with debunking the Upaniṣadic soul-view. It is a predominant idea of his times, and obviously he has to answer it, and which he does magnificently. His overall plan, however, is clear from his teachings as preserved in the early texts: *to understand our body and mind, train them, and attain liberation*. Understandably, the Buddha's teachings go far beyond merely criticizing and debunking some of the systems of his time. It is useful to note, too, that even within one and the same religion (such as Hinduism and Christianity) today, there are diverse views of the soul: some believe it to be immortal, some believe we have more than one soul, some believe the soul of the evil will be annihilated, and so on.[134]

3.2.2 I think, therefore I am? It is useful now to briefly examine a few significant parallel developments in western philosophy. The most famous pioneering attempt to answer these questions in western philosophy was made by the French philosopher **René Descartes** (1595-1650). Although Descartes believed in an almighty, all-knowing and loving God, he began his philosophical inquiry by assuming that there was a powerful demon at work arranging things in such a way that he would *believe* there was a world of real physical objects, when in fact they do not exist at all. Since he could not tell the difference, he decided that he could never really know if it was a table before him, or trees outside, and so on. For sure, he could doubt that these things existed.[135]

What could he *not* doubt? It was not possible for him to doubt *his own existence*; for, if he did not exist, no demon could deceive him. Since he doubted, he must exist; if he had any experiences whatever, he must exist. Thus his own existence was an absolute certainty to him, upon which he famously concluded in French, *Je pense, donc je suis,* better known to us in its Latin translation as: "*Cogito ergo sum*" ("I think therefore I am")[136] or, more fully, "*Dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum*" ("I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am"). This philosophical statement, although one that Descartes himself did not think worth pursuing, became a foundational element of Western philosophy, that is, until recent times.[137]

For Descartes, the self or the human mind consists entirely in *thinking*, understood in the widest sense of the term (*cogitare, cogitation* = consciousness). This "thinking being" (*res cogitans*) has the attributes of thinking, feeling (sensation) and willing, in the same way as things in the physical world have colour or weight, and whose nature consists in extension (*res extensa*).[138] We will see that Descartes conception of the consciousness as a "thing" (*res*) is the main weakness of his idea of self.

3.2.3 Cartesian dualism. Such is the basis for the famous—but generally rejected—dualistic theory of Descartes, that man is made up of immaterial thinking substance or soul (*res cogitans*), and a material extended substance, or body (*res extensa*), which mysteriously interact. He was, to his credit, the first western philosopher to clearly identify the *mind* with consciousness and self-awareness, and to distin-

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monist, some of which hinted at earlier texts. Originally, they were secret teachings, transmitted by the guru to students who sat up close (*upaniṣad*) to them. The Upanishads speak of a universal spirit or *Brahman*, and an individual soul, *ātman*, at times asserting their identity. Brahman is the ultimate, both transcendent and immanent, the absolute infinite existence, the sum total of all that ever is, was, or shall be. Amongst the oldest and best known Upaniṣads are the Aitareya, Bṛhad-āraṇyaka, Taittirīya, and Chāndogya. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upanishad.

[133] See Paul Williams, *Buddhist Thought,* 2000: 56-62.

[134] For an overview, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soul.

[135] See Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis,* 1967: 496.

[136] Formulated in *Discourse on Method* (French), 1637 part 4, & *Principles of Philosophy* (Latin), 1644 §7; expounded in *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, 1641 (2.3) = *Meditations on First Philosophy,* tr John Cottingham, Cambridge Univ Press, 1986: 15. For a contemporary discussion, see Hans Küng, *Does God Exist,* 1981: 3-41, & http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cogito_ergo_sum.

[137] See **Deva,daha S** (M 101) = SD 18.4 Intro (5.4).

[138] Meditations 2 = Cottingham (tr) 1986: 16-23.

guish it from the brain, regarded as the seat of intelligence.[139] Hence, he was the first to formulate the mind-body problem, the Cartesian dualism.[140]

The central claim of Cartesian dualism is that the immaterial mind and the material body, while being ontologically distinct substances (they exist independently), causally interact. Mental events cause physical events, and vice versa. But this leads to a substantial problem for Cartesian dualism: How can an immaterial mind cause anything in a material body, and vice-versa? This has often been called the "problem of interactionism."

Understandably, modern philosophers generally reject the Cartesian dualism because of its insuperable difficulties. British philosopher **Gilbert Ryle** (1900-1974), for example, famously dismisses it as "the dogma of the ghost in the machine."[141] Ryle charges that it rests on a category mistake.[142] Nouns like "mind" and "self" are taken to be the names of things, "but there are no such things, and such words function as descriptions as human behaviour."[143] We have earlier mentioned the predominance of "action words" in the early Buddhist texts [2.3].

Interestingly, even **William Temple**, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1942-44), the head of the Anglican Church, too, rejects the Cartesian dualism. Temple, in fact, blames Descartes for having misled modern philosophy into the belief that what we know are our own ideas. Temple's evolutionary view of human development is close to that of the German philosopher, **Eduard von Hartmann** (1842-1906).[144]

Suffice here to say that some of the modern philosophical developments (eg MJ Adler 1985) are coming closer to the teachings of early Buddhist psychological theory. **Mortimer J Adler**, for example, almost in a Buddhist tone (except for the wine!), writes that

> when we are perceiving, we are directly conscious of something other than our percepts.
>
> What is that *something other?* The answer is: the table, wine bottle, and glasses that you and I perceive when we are sharing the experience that results from our perceptual activity. Our experience of the table, bottle and glasses is a public experience, not a private experience exclusively our own. (MJ Adler 1985: 12)

In other words, that "something other" consists of *sense-objects*, which are objective facts, accessible to all who have the respective senses capable of sensing them. What we make of such objects are *subjective,* a private response. In Buddhist psychology, the sense-objects are said to have their own existence whether we sense them or not; but we never really sense them *directly*. We are always projecting our own perceptions and narratives on to them. They are only objects as *names* which we commonly react or refer to, but each of us have our private perceptions of them.

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[139] In early Buddhism, the brain plays no role at all in human consciousness because *the mind* has no location. See **Meditation & Consciousness** = SD 17.8c (6).

[140] See *Meditations on First Philosophy,* tr John Cottingham, Cambridge Univ Press, 1986: 1-64. On dualism, see also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cartesian_dualism#cite_ref-De_3-0.

[141] Ryle, *The Concept of Mind,* 1949: 15 f.

[142] The term "category mistake" was introduced by Gilbert Ryle in his book, *The Concept of Mind* (1949: 16 f), to remove what he regarded as a confusion over the nature of mind, arising from Cartesian metaphysics. Ryle argued that it was a mistake to treat the mind as an object made of an immaterial substance because predications of substance are not meaningful for a collection of dispositions and capacities. Many philosophers have employed Ryle's idea of a category mistake or category error, but there is no lasting agreement on how to identify them. Thus, eg, a visitor would make a category mistake if he observed the various colleges, libraries, and administrative offices of say Oxford, and then asked to be shown "the university." The visitor mistakes the university for another institution like those he has seen, when in fact it is something of another category altogether: "the way in which all that he has already seen is organized" (1949: 16). On categories, see http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/categories/.

[143] See John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-century Religious Thought,* 1963: 310 f.

[144] **Hartmann** wrote on *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869) some 30 years before **Freud** (1856-1939) wrote about the Unconscious. Freud, in his *The Ego and the Id* (1923), credits **Georg Groddeck** (*The Book of the It*, 1923) with the term *id,* which Groddeck uses to refer to the concept of Dao or organic universal spirit. See John Macquarrie 1963: 270.

3.2.4 Buddhist view of "self." Like most modern philosophers, Buddhist thinkers and teachers of today, too, reject the Cartesian dualism. Notwithstanding this, it should be noted that the Buddha often uses the mind-body model, too, but this is more of a "property dualism,"[145] not a physical dualism, like that of Descartes. A "model" is, after all, a skillful means (*upāya*), a teaching method improvised *ad hominem*, a personally-tailored didactic approach. The best known application of this dual model is seen *in the five aggregates*, often mentioned here [1.5.2].

Although the five-aggregate model appears dualist—based on a body-mind dichotomy—it is a very dynamic model: every aggregate or part therefore is in constant change, and they function together or holistically. The body or form aggregate (*rūpa-k,khandha*) comprises the four elements, that is, four phases of the physical body, ever reconfiguring itself as hardness (solidity), cohesiveness (liquid), decaying (heat), and motion [1.3.1]. The "formless" aggregates (*arūpa-k,khandha*)—feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness, too, are ever-changing [1.5.2]. After all, *only in change can we relate to the world and ourselves*. Without change, we can neither speak of "exist" or "not exist," meaning ceases. It is because of change—the flow of words and thoughts—that you can right now understand or have some idea of what you are reading!

In fact, our minds,[146] like a computer, *work in an on-off mode*; that is to say, we often tend to think in black-and-white terms. Either I like something or not; otherwise, I would ignore it. This rut process is, of course, being autopilotted by to our latent tendencies, lust, aversion, and ignorance [3.3]. **The Kaccā(ya)-na,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15) records how, when the monk Kaccāna,gotta asks the Buddha on right view, he declares this profound statement:

> **4** "This world, Kaccāna, mostly[147] depends upon a duality: upon (the notion of) existence and (the notion of) non-existence.[148]
>
> **5** But for one who sees **the arising of the world**[149] as it really is with right wisdom, there is no notion of non-existence regarding the world.
>
> And for one who sees **the ending of the world** as it really is with right wisdom, there is no notion of existence regarding the world.[150]
>
> **6a** This world, Kaccāna, is mostly bound by fixation [attachment], clinging and inclination.[151]

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[145] According to "property dualism," the same thing (eg a human) can be described using mental terms or physical terms, but one description cannot be reduced to the other. As such, if you are in physical pain, this fact can be described in mental terms, such as how it feels to you, or in physical terms, such as which sorts of neurons are firing where in your nervous system. This theory avoids reducing the mental to physical without the need the need for two different substances. (Susan Blackmore, *Conciousness: An introduction,* 2003: 12 f)

[146] Buddhists generally view that the brain works mostly in response the mind. In a sense, the brain is like a computer's "central processing unit" (CPU), but it does not work by itself, and needs input from the user (a human being). The real situation is of course more complicated than this.

[147] "Mostly," *yebhuyyena,* here refers to the ordinary being, except for the noble saints (*ariya,puggala*) who hold on to the extreme notions of either something exists (*atthitā*) (eternalism, *sassata*) or does not exist (*natthitā*) (annihilationism, *uccheda*) (SA 2:32). See foll n.

[148] Here, following Bodhi, I have rendered *atthitā* as "the notion of existence" and *n'atthitā* as "the notion of non-existence." See SD 6.13 Intro (2).

[149] On the tr of the terms *samudaya* and *nirodha* see SD Intro (3).

[150] The 2 sentences of this verse are the two extremes rejected by the Buddha in **Lokāyatika S** (S 12.48/2:77), including 2 more: that all is unity and that all is plurality. Comy: In terms of dependent arising, "the origin of the world" is the direct conditionality (*anuloma paccay'ākāra*), "the ending of the world" is the reverse conditionality" (*paṭiloma paccayākāra*). Here the world refers to formations (*saṅkhāra*). In reflecting on the direct-order dependent arising, (seeing the rise of phenomena) one does not fall into the notion of annihilationism; reflecting on the reverse dependent origination, (seeing the ending of phenomena) one does not fall into the notion of eternalism. (SA 2:33). The Buddha's teaching on the origin and ending of the world (in terms of the five aggregates) is found in **Loka S** (S 12.44/2:73 f).

6b But this person (with right view) does not engage in, cling to, incline towards that fixation and clinging, the latent tendency of mindset and inclination—he does not take a stand (that anything is) 'my self'.[152]

He has neither uncertainty nor doubt that what arises is only suffering arising, what ceases is only suffering ceasing.[153] His knowledge about this is independent of others.[154]

It is in this way, Kaccāna, that there is right view.

7 'Everything is [all exists] (*sabbam atthi*),'[155] Kaccāna, this is one extreme. 'Everything is not [all does not exist] (*sabbaṁ n'atthi*),' this is the second extreme.[156] (S 12.15/1:17) = SD 6.13

To claim that something *exists* is one extreme of the truth spectrum; to say something *does not exist* is the other extreme. In fact, to say something exists is to imply *stasis*—the word becomes a thing. To refer to *existence*, the verbs-to-be ("is," "are," etc) are used. However, when I say, "This is a book," I am only at best referring to a certain state or view at a certain point in time. It could be a block of word or a stack of papers in dim light. Even if it is "really" a book, and appears not to change, it is really made up of the four elements [1.3.1]. After some time, it will break apart and crumble.

Let us look at a more tricky situation, yet a very common one. Some might say, for example, "B is bad," and so effectively condemns B to utter badness. The situation, however, is different when we say, "It is bad for B to rob a bank."[157] ("It" here is simply what, in grammar, is called an "anticipatory it," referring to an impersonal agency.)[158] Only when such dynamic situations are properly predicated, that is, attaching qualities to them that they make sense: we can talk about them and do things with them.

What does it mean to say something *is*? When we say something *is,* we are falsely separating it from the rest of reality. For example, if I say "B is black," I mean that it is different from all non-black things. However, there is a problem here: "black" is only meaningful in relation to "non-black." But the true reality is that there are countless shades and hues of grayness and other colours between black and non-black.

When we predicate something, we are giving it *attributes*, or putting it into a *category*: "a beautiful sunset," "a kind person," "a sweet smell," "an ancient Indian text," and so on. We have *defined* or *expres-*

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[151] "bound…adherence," PTS *upāy'upādānâbhinivesa,vinibandha,* but preferred reading is Be Ce *upāy'upādānâbhinivesa,vinibaddha* = *upāya* (attachment, fixation) + *upādāna* (clinging) + *abhinivesa* (inclination, mindset, adherence) + *vinibaddha* (bound, shackled) [alt reading *vinibandha,* bondage]. Comy: Each of the three—fixation, clinging, inclination [mindset]—arise by way of craving (*taṇhā*) and views (*diṭṭhi),* for it is through these that one fixates to, clings to, inclines to the phenomena of the three spheres as "I" and "mine." (SA 2:33). These three words appear to be syns or near-syns of latent tendencies, but I have rendered them in order of their subtlety (fixation, clinging, inclination [mindset]). See S:B 736 n31.

[152] "But this…'My self'," *tañ câyaṁ upāy'upādānaṁ cetaso adhiṭṭhānaṁ abhinivesânusayaṁ na upeti na upādiyati nâdhiṭṭhati "attā me" ti.* Comy: Craving and views are called "mental standpoint" (*cetaso adhiṭṭhana*) because they are the foundation for the (unwholesome) mind, and "the latent tendency of inclination [mindset]," or perhaps "inclination [mindset] and latent tendency" (*abhinivesânusaya*) because they stay to the mind and lie latent there (SA 2:33). This is a difficult sentence, and I am guided by the Sutta spirit than the letter. See S:B 736 n32. Cf **Hāliddakāni S 1** (S 22.3.9/3:10) = SD 10.12.

[153] Comy: Suffering (*dukkha*) here refers to the 5 aggregates of clinging. What the noble disciple sees, when he reflects on his own existence, is not a self or a substantially existent person but only the arising and passing away of causal conditions (*paccay'uppanna,nirodha*) (of dependent arising). (SA 2:33). Cf **Selā**'s verses (S 548-551/1:134) & **Vajirā**'s verses (S 553-55/1:135).

[154] "Independent of others," *apara-p,paccayā.* From stream-entry on, the noble disciple sees the truth of the Dharma by himself, and as such is not dependent on anyone else, not even the Buddha, for his insight into the Dharma. However, he may still approach the Buddha or an enlightened teacher for instructions and guidance in meditation until he attains liberation.

[155] On these two "notions," see SD 6.13 Intro (2).

[156] The Buddha then goes on to list the dependent arising and dependent ending formulas. [2.3]

[157] For a discussion on E-Prime language, which is referred to here, see ***Saññā*** = SD 17.4 (6.2).

[158] Karunadasa notes, in the English language, when we say, eg, "it rains" or "it thunders," "we dichotomize a single process by the use of the word 'it.' In the same way, when we say, 'I think,' we tend to believe that there is an I-entity in addition to the process of thinking." (1991:15)

sed a certain idea in our minds, or *referred* to something in a certain way, but just because we define something, no matter how accurately or how great the details, does not mean that it exists (we simply cannot define something into existence), nor that it is really what we think it is (we could be mistaken). It is merely a virtual reality, projected by words, ideas and hope. (The Buddha remarkably states that all religious and philosophical ideas arise from *feelings*!)[159]

On a basic level of psycholinguistic processes, the moment we *define* something, we are assuming to exclude it from everything else.[160] For example, when I say "chair," I am effectively taking everything else as "not-chair."[161] This is, of course, the foundation of Aristotle's epistemology, theistic reasoning and most westernized way of thinking: we relate to a thing in terms of what it is not.[162] Here, we are mostly discussing *ontology*, inquiring how we exist, and what the self is, and we are discussing *psychology*, how our minds work, and how the notion of selfhood affects our personal growth. Let us now examine the deepest levels of our minds, the unconscious self.

3.3 THE UNCONSCIOUS SELF. If we have a *conscious* self, there must be a part of us that is *unconscious.* According to early Buddhism, the deepest part of our mind consists of our latent tendencies [1.7.1]. As we interact with others and the environment, we act through our body, speech and mind. *Every conscious action will bear reactions*: it tends to repeat itself and to grow exponentially. In simple terms, we can group our habitual acts as being motivated by greed, hate or delusion, which are in turn fed from the dark depths of lust, aversion and ignorance, that is, the latent tendencies, of which we are not conscious.

Long before Freud wrote on the pleasure principle or *id,* the Buddha has been teaching about *taṇhā* or lust[163] as the first latent tendency (*anusaya*), and its opposite, *paṭigha* or aversion, both of which are fuelled by *avijjā* or ignorance. Thus, in the final analysis, there is only one real latent tendency, one real root of suffering, that is, ignorance (*avijjā*), meaning *not knowing the true nature of reality*. Rooted in ignorance, we perceive an existential lack within ourselves: not finding anything inside, we try to fill that emptiness by collecting things from outside to fill it. But it is an existential emptiness, a bottomless chasm. So we are caught in a samsaric cycle, a Sisyphian task.[164]

The repetitiveness of the cycle conjures up a mirage of a "mover" of the cycle, some sort of abiding entity, and the "moved," another abiding entity. Hence, we see the notion of selfhood closely linked with craving. In fact, **the Cha,chakka Sutta** (M 148) says just this: that craving can be appropriated as a self (*taṇhā attâ'ti*), and the Buddha patiently reminds us:

> If anyone were to say, "Craving is self"—this is not fitting. For, the arising and passing away of craving are seen [discerned].
>
> Since the arising and passing away of craving are seen [discerned], it would thus follow that: "My self rises and passes away" (*attā me uppajjati ca veti ca*).
>
> Therefore, it is not fitting to say, "Craving is self."
>
> Thus the body is not-self, touches are not-self, body-consciousness is not-self, feeling is not-self, craving is not-self. (M 148.14(6)/3:283 = SD 26.6

Analayo adds: "…craving is so well entrenched in experience that it has become part of our sense of identity. This makes the removal of craving all the more difficult, since to reach freedom from craving not

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[159] See **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1.105-143/1:39-44) = SD 25.

[160] For a more detailed study, see **Language and Discourse** = SD 26.11.

[161] See **Language & Discourse** = SD 26.11 (9).

[162] This dualistic notion is also found in the Buddhist theory of language, but it is not the only notion. Early Buddhist epistemology, however, speak of four possible truths: (1) is, (2) is not, (3) both is and is not, and (4) neither is nor is not. On the four points, see **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72/1:483-489) = SD 6.15 & **The Unanswered Questions** = SD 40a.10.

[163] On the possible origin of Freud's terms and model of id, ego and super-ego, see ***Viññāṇa*** = SD 17.8a (8)n.

[164] On Sisyphus, see **Yodh'ājīva S** (S 42.3) = SD 23.3 Intro.

only requires developing the insight that craving is inexorably bound up with dissatisfaction and frustration, but also requires giving up part of what is experienced as 'I' and 'mine'." (Analayo 2008: 12)

This fundamental ignorance is embodied as the first noble truth, that of suffering (*dukkha*), meaning "existential unsatisfactoriness."[165] This is a reality check that, firstly, our current situation is not a satisfactory one, and secondly, that we can be better than what we are now. The second noble truth is that of the arising (*samudaya*) of suffering, that is, craving (*taṇhā*). However, craving is not the *cause* of suffering: it is only a *condition* (*paccaya*) for suffering, even then it is only a necessary, not a sufficient, one.[166]

The pericope on the second noble truth—as found, for example, in **the Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11)—states that craving leads to *the arising of suffering*, and discern three kinds of craving, thus:[167]

(1) sensual craving (*kāma,taṇhā*),
(2) craving for existence (*bhava,taṇhā*), and
(3) craving for non-existence (*vibhava,taṇhā*).

The first, **sensual craving**, could arise in connection with any of the six senses, resulting in altogether six modes of craving on account of each sense-object. These are the six "bodies of craving" (*taṇhā,kāyā*), comprising craving for forms (*rūpa,taṇhā*), for sounds (*sadda.taṇhā*), for smells (*gandha,taṇhā*), for tastes (*rasa,taṇhā*), for touches (*phoṭṭhabba,taṇhā*), and for mind-objects (*dhamma,taṇhā*).[168]

Craving for existence could be for material or immaterial forms of existence, resulting in craving for form (*rūpa,taṇhā*) and craving for the formless (*arūpa,taṇhā*), which **the Saṅgīti-Sutta** lists with craving for cessation (*nirodha,taṇhā*), "craving for cessation."[169] (Here, "cessation" (*nirodha*) evidently refers to the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā,vedayita,nirodha*),[170] that is, the desire of the meditator or inhabitant of the form or the formless worlds to attain higher stages, but not understanding the real reason or making the right effort.)

The God-believers of our time who do not meditate generally have no idea of the form and the formless worlds. The kind of heaven they envision would be at best that of the sense-world (that is, if they have accumulated the right karma to be reborn there). Their view is that such a heavenly life is eternal, and as such is overwhelmed by the wrong view of eternalism (*sassata,diṭṭhi*), which ironically would in fact hinder them from being reborn there!

Craving for non-existence (*vibhava,taṇha*) is a kind of death-wish or desire "to end it all," that is, a craving for annihilation in a materialist as well as a spiritual sense. This is the wrong view of annihilationism (*uccheda,diṭṭhi*), which could range from the wish to destroy ourselves by suicide or euthanasia, thinking that we would abandon the self (for a materialist), or by way of a religious suicide, hoping to merge or be in companionship with a supreme reality (like Brahman or God).

The key factor behind all such modes of craving is a view of a self that abides behind them. From a Buddhist perspective, "all these forms of craving are but manifestations of ignorance, since however refined the experience they aim at may be, the truth of the matter is that there was never a self to be annihilated in the first place." (Analayo 2008: 22)

4 Our true self

4.1 THE SELF IS LANGUAGE-CONSTRUCTED. One significant point that you might notice in this study up to now is *the role that language plays in the way we look at ourselves and the world*. All our ideas, whether religious or not, are language-based [3.1]. Often we simply inherit or accept religious notions, such as God, sin, good and evil, heaven and hell, and so on, without really understanding what they entail. We seem quite contented to follow such received wisdom. Sadly, most received wisdom

[165] On this defiition, see **Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana S** (S 56.11/5:421) = SD 1.1 Intro (4).
[166] On necessity and sufficiency, see **Necessity and Sufficiency in Early Buddhist Conditionality** = SD 35.16.
[167] S 56.11/5:421 = SD 1.1; also in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.1.10(16)/3:216).
[168] Eg **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.2(8)/3:244).
[169] D 33.1.10(16)/3:216.
[170] See **Animitta Ceto,samadhi Pañha S** (S 40.9) = SD Intro (3.2).

amounts to blind faith or wishful thinking. That is, until we realize one day that these ideas are false and do not really work at all.

When a religion promises that all you need to do is simply *believe,* and you would be blessed with whatever you need or want (including mundane wealth and eternal life), what really is going on is that *your self-view is being given positive strokes*. We are hearing what we want to hear, and think that we are getting or wishes granted. (Fairy tales are full of such stories, reflecting our childhood insecurities.)

Sooner or later, such God-believers are in for a *religious shock*, such as when they suddenly and tragically lose a loved one, or are being told they are terminally ill, or are being cheated of their life's savings. We are still being tested although we have been loving God and lived by the Book. The sad reality is that we have simply taken others' word for granted. We have not really looked within and understood ourselves. These problems will always plague us as long as we do not leave God alone. [1.7.2]

Being unawakened, we are often in need of some kind external support, because we fail to look within ourselves, at the root of our problems or situation. Our language often makes matters worse for us. When we say, "*I* am suffering," or "*He* is hurting me," or "*They* are better than I am," we are *owning the pain.* The language we use *reifies* the pain; language tends to *objectify* the experience, when all experiences are really *subjective* (it depends on how we look at it). The fact is that *only* the pain, or the sadness, or the anger, exists, but *no* "I," "he," "they," etc. This means that <u>we should deal with the *problem* not the person</u>. There are only people *with* problems, not problem people. Or better: there are no "problem self," only problems in a situation, and they are, as such, all impermanent.

Disowning the pain is one of the best ways to heal ourselves. Let us now reflect on these healing verses from the Dhammapada:

Akkocchi maṁ avadhi maṁ	"He abused me! He beat me!	
ajini maṁ ahāsi maṁ	He defeated me! He stole from me!"	
ye taṁ upanayhanti	those who harbour such thoughts	
veraṁ tesaṁ na sammati	their anger does not subside.	(Dh 3)
Akkocchi maṁ avadhi maṁ	"He abused me! He beat me!	
ajini maṁ ahāsi maṁ	He defeated me! He stole from me!"	
ye taṁ na upanayhanti	those who harbour *not* such thoughts	
veraṁ tenûpasammati	their anger as such subsides.	(Dh 4)

These verses exhort us not to be caught up in the *victim role*, that is, to forgive those who have hurt us, and to take charge of our lives. We should not let the past rule our lives; then we lose even the present; for, we are still haunted by our demons. Bury the dead, and left them buried.

We may be more *bipolar* then we think, that is, if we think that the world is simply black or white, that either you are with us or against us. The point is that the world or life is more complicated than we think: life is not always black or white, but there is a wide range of progressive hues, including grey areas, in between [3.2.4].

Modern science, cybernetics and logic are essentially based on the Aristotelian duality or bivalence, that *a statement is either true or false* (and cannot be both), but in reality often defies science and logic. We have to think beyond duality, beyond black and white, beyond truth and falsehood. In a world of language and mental constructs, words often have private meanings, known (or unknown) only to the speakers themselves.

To go beyond duality here means not to be caught in a language game of only being given two choices. We do have other choices, such as not playing this game. As such, it is meaningful, for example, for us to say that we do not care to say or think, "There is a God," or "There is no God." The question does not arise. If we leave God alone, and work towards self-understanding, there will be greater peace, prosperity and wisdom in the world.

Even in the highest heavens, there is the notion of self-identity, says the Buddha, as a result of which even heavenly beings are unable to see the impermanence of their celestial lives. The Buddha continues,

> "But, avuso [friend], even the Brahmā world [the high heaven] is impermanent, uncertain, trapped in self-identity.[171] Bhante, it would be good if your mind let go of the Brahmā world and you direct your mind to *the cessation of self-identity*."[172]
>
> If he says thus, "My mind has turned away from the Brahmā world and is directed to the cessation of self-identity,"—then, Mahānāma, there is no difference between a lay follower who is thus liberated in mind and a monk who has been liberated in mind for a hundred years, that is, there is no difference between the one liberation and the other.[173]
>
> (S 55.54.18-19/4:410) = SD 4.10

4.2 THE SELF IS IMPERMANENT AND SUFFERING. Having said all that, now it is time for us to look within ourselves. When we look within our minds, what do we find? **David Hume** [1.7.2] makes a very interesting observation:

> Furthermore, if we retain this hypothesis about the self, what are we to say about all our particular perceptions? They are all different, distinguishable, and separable from one other—they can be separately thought about, and can exist separately—with no need for anything to support their existence. In what way do they belong to self? How are they connected with it? For my part, when I look inward at what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure, or the like. I never catch myself without a perception, and never observe anything but the perception. When I am without perceptions for a while, as in sound sleep, for that period I am not aware of myself and can truly be said not to exist. If all my perceptions were removed by death, and I could not think, feel, see, love or hate after my body had decayed, I would be entirely annihilated—I cannot see that anything more would be needed to turn me into nothing. If anyone seriously and thoughtfully claims to have a different notion of himself, I can't reason with him any longer. I have to admit that he may be right about himself, as I am about myself. He may perceive something simple and continued that he calls himself, though I am certain there is no such thing in me….
>
> But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.
>
> (Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739-40: 1.4.6)

If we discount Hume's idealist bias ("When I am without perceptions for a while…and can truly be said not to exist"),[174] his words here could well be describing a Buddhist view of perception. Indeed, to a significant extent, the Buddhist view of reality does overlap with Hume's idealism, that is, what we *perceive* of ourselves or the world is mind-made (*mano,mayā*). What is mind-made is impermanent; what is impermanent is suffering (unsatisfactory); and what is impermanent and suffering has no self [1.3.2].

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[171] "Trapped in self-identity," *sakkāya pariyāpanno,* lit "included in self-identity"; alt tr "enmeshed in self-identity." Childers (DPL): "included, contained, belonging to." As in **Sīha S** (S 22.78), where the devas who regard themselves as permanent, stable and eternal are really "impermanent, unstable, not eternal, trapped in self-identity" (S 3:85). The Comy there explains the expression as "included within the five aggregates." Thus when the Buddha teaches them the Dharma sealed with the three characteristics [impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, not-self], exposing the faults in the round of existence, the fear of knowledge enters them. (SA 2:288).

[172] "Cessation of self-identity," *sakkāya,nirodha,* a syn of the 3rd noble truth = nirvana: D 3:216 (*antā*), 3:240; M 1:299; S 3:159, 5:410; A 2:33, 2:165, 3:246, 3:401; see also DA 3:992, AA 3:153; *sakkāya = te,bhūmaka,vaṭṭa* ("cycles of the three worlds," ie sense, form, and formless worlds) (AA 3:404). This instruction is direct the dying person's mind away from rebirth in the Brahmā world towards the attainment of Nirvana. The overcoming of *sakkāya,diṭṭhi* ("self-identity view") leads to streamwinning: see **Entering the Stream** = SD 3.3 (5.1).

[173] "Between the one liberation and the other," *vimuttiyā vimuttiṁ,* as at A 3:34 in ref to arhathood. Comy says that when one liberation is compared to the other, there is no difference to be found (SA 3:292). In effect, this is a statement that the dying layman has become an arhat. See Intro.

[174] Idealism is the philosophical view that some or all objects only have existence in the mind.

4.3 THERE IS *NO* SELF. Why is it so vital to understand not-self, or at least to reflect on it whenever we can? The idea of the self is what gives us the opportunity to be *selfish*. First, we begin with the notion that "I am special," then we look for others who are like *us*, so we form a tribe of *us*-like selves. Our bi-polar world is uneasily populated by selves who are friends (people *like* us) and enemies (those *unlike* us), or strangers (those we don't care about).

The most dangerous and destructive people we see around us, those who, in history, have brought about mass destruction, are great believers in the self. They believe in putting *themselves* first always: their body, tribe, race, belief, political system and religion, come first. While the great religious founders pervaded their faiths with charity and wisdom, these self-centred but dark and empty shadows turn them into destructive tribal systems, incessantly on a crusade against *the other*.

The dark shadows of mediaeval religious tribalism, intolerance and destructiveness are well and alive amongst us even today in the forms of evangelical religions. They are characterized by an unparalleled self-righteousness, triumphalism, exclusivism and superstition: they believe *only* they are right; *only* they will be saved; *only* their God is true, all others are demons. Only human-centred science and learning, the secular government, and open-minded wisdom of non-believers, have tempered the evangelists' intolerance and disrespect for others, and prevented them from implementing their zealous hidden agenda—although such measures have not always been successful.[175]

The best way to protect and immunize ourselves against this self-centred and anti-others evangelism, and to heal the serious damages and pains they are causing and planning, is to *reflect on and understand the truth of not-self*, and to help others understand the nature of true selflessness. We need to gently and patiently educate ourselves and others in opening up our hearts and minds to touch our inner stillness that infuses us with true faith in mankind and our liberation.

4.4 BEING SELFLESS. Like the four noble truths, the truth of *anattā* is a **"teaching peculiar to Buddhas"** (*buddhāna samukkaṁsika desanā,* M 1:380). Buddhaghosa, in his Commentary on the Vibhaṅga, says: "The characteristics of impermanence and suffering are known whether Buddhas arise or not; but that of not-self (*anattā*) is not known unless there is a Buddha...for the knowledge of it is the province of none but a Buddha." (VbhA 49 f)

The Buddha sometimes shows the nature of not-self through impermanence (eg the Cha,chakka Sutta, M 148), sometimes through suffering (the Pañca.vaggi Sutta, S 3:67), and sometimes through both (eg the Arahanta Sutta S 3:83 f, and the Anicca Sutta, S 4:1). Why is that? While impermanence and suffering are both evident, not-self or soullessness is not evident (MA 1:113).

When we understand and accept that there is no self, life and the whole world begin to make sense. There are *no things* at all, only *processes* going on within and without ourselves. And these processes are infinitely interlinked, so that we cannot find a starting-point. For the convenience of language, we can as such say that we have discovered our *true self*.

In the ultimate analysis, our true self is neither inherited nor static, but is a quest, conscious or unconscious, for self-understanding: *the self in search of itself*. The former "self" is a doubt, the latter, self-knowledge. We began this study with the story of the Buddha asking the thirty young men whether they would like to seek the self [1.1]. Being intelligent, or at least, curious, they agree, and the Buddha teaches them how to take up that self-quest.

The quest for the true self is not a set of characteristics that is at once observable, unless we look hard and long, and remember and understand what we observe. This self-quest is an account of our personal life, or more exactly, an account of our mind's inquiry, an inner quest, a spiritual journey. On a human and social level, **Giddens** insightfully puts it as follows:

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[175] In the early years of the 21st century (2001-2008), world politics was basically polarized by George Bush, widely acclaimed as one of the worst presidents of the USA, between the fundamentalist Christians (that he was) and the Muslim world, whose terrorists shocked the world with suicide killings and mass-bombings, killing thousands of innocent people, incl their own believers. Ironically, this period was also marked by frequent bad weather and worsening global climate, and a collapse in global financial market (2008)! See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/-September_11,_2001_attacks.

> A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor—important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing "story" about the self. (*Modernity and Self-Identity*, 1991: 54)

The self-quest is a life-long reflexive project : *it is to live life as if this moment is our last*, so that we treasure it, learning whatever we can from it. For, at the journey's end, we find that the destination has all along been the journey itself. But that goal could not have been reached except for the journey. Without going, life's journey cannot end. [1.2]

What is this journey like? It is the constant exploration and observation of how *impermanent* this body of ours is, how this world is, so that we do not identify with either in any real way—that is, we abandon the self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*)—and is due course we become *emotionally independent individuals*, known as streamwinners.[176]

4.5 THE ONION SIMILE. As a famous Buddhist joke goes: *life is like an onion*. Our purpose in life is peel that onion, peeling on and on, to discover the "I" in its midst, and in the process we often shed tears or laugh at ourselves. But when the last layers are peeled, we find that there is really not a thing there.

Often we look for things that are not really there. Let me relate an ancient parable of the buried treasure, as I remember it, which to me beautifully sums up what I have taken so many words to express. On his deathbed, a poor but wise man gathers his children together and tells them that there is a great treasure in their sprawling family land. This treasure should be shared between everyone. As soon as the last rites are over, all the children at once diligently go about their task of digging up the land to look for the buried treasure.

After months of digging, covering almost every corner of their land, they found no treasure. So they all meet together and express their disappointment. Could it be that their father has lied to them? Then one of them look up with clear bright eyes and declares: "*There* is the treasure! It is all around us—all our digging has enriched our land and we can plant so many things on it!" And so they live the rest of their days in great health, great wealth, and great happiness.

Done is what that needs to be done. *Kataṁ karaṇīyaṁ, nâparaṁ itthattāyā'ti*.[177] In this way, we have found our true self, and become a truly self-*less* person.

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[176] See **Entering the Stream** = SD 3.3.

[177] "Done what had to be done, there is no more of this state of being." This is a pericope describing the state of the arhat: see eg **Arahatā S 1** (S 22.76.2/3:83) = SD 26.7.

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