READING 24

The No-Self Theory: Hume, Buddhism, and Personal Identity

James Giles

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Giles's publications include *A Study in Phenomenalism* (1994), *No Self to Be Found: The Search for Personal Identity* (1997), *French Existentialism: Consciousness, Ethics, and Relations with Others* (editor, 1999), *Kierkegaard and Freedom* (editor, 2000), *The Nature of Sexual Desire* (2004), and *Kierkegaard and Japanese Thought* (editor, 2008).

Our reading is an excerpt from Giles's 1993 article "The No-Self Theory: Hume, Buddhism, and Personal Identity." (The entire article is the concluding chapter of *No Self to Be Found.*) Giles begins by presenting the no-self theory set forth by Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) in *A Treatise of Human Nature.* Hume contends that we never experience a self, but only an ever-changing flow of perceptions, and therefore have no legitimate basis for positing the existence of a self, for claiming that persons retain their identity over time. He explains that even though we realize that all objects, including ourselves, are constantly changing, the images we form of an object are so similar from moment to moment that we are misled into thinking there is some unchanging "substance" underlying these changes. In the case of human beings, we call this alleged substance a "self." Hume says that although it is permissible in ordinary discourse to call a changing object (for example, a tree or a person) the same object over time, we should keep in mind that, strictly speaking, there is no identity involved.

Giles proceeds to develop Hume's no-self theory in terms of Buddhist thought. He explains that Buddhism, like Hume, holds that what we call the self is just a bundle of ever-changing elements, and that although it is permissible to speak of a "self" in *conventional* speech (which is established by mutual agreement), the word has no referent in *ultimate* speech.

In the final section of his article, Giles expands the no-self theory by explaining how this doctrine is compatible with the fact that we sometimes have psychological or emotional states that seem to give an instantaneous awareness of self. Giles holds that what we are instantaneously aware of in such states is not some unchanging entity, but a "constructed or condensed self-image"—that is, a composite of related images and meanings referring to how I see and feel about myself at that moment. These moments, Giles argues, are but rare occurrences in consciousness. The constructed self-image, and thus self-awareness, is consequently not part of the fabric of experience. It is rather a secondary phenomenon that experience itself creates.

[INTRODUCTION]

The problem of personal identity is often said to be one of accounting for what it is that gives persons their identity over time. However, once the problem has been construed in these terms, it is plain that too much has already been assumed. For what has been assumed is just that persons do have an identity. To the philosophers who approach the problem with this supposition already accepted, the possibility that there may be no such thing as personal identity is scarcely conceived. As a result, the more fundamental question—whether or not personal identity exists in the first place—remains unasked. Consequently, the no-self theory, that is, the rejection of the notion of personal identity altogether, is never fully considered. . . .

[HUME'S NO-SELF THEORY]

Hume[1] was the first Western philosopher to unmask the confusions attending our idea of personal identity and subsequently to reject the idea as a fiction. It will be worth our while, therefore, to start by conducting a detailed examination of his position. . . .

What, then, is Hume's position? If we attend to the section "Of Personal Identity" in Book I of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, an answer is immediately forthcoming. Hume starts by pointing out that although some philosophers believe we are continuously aware of something we call the self, when we look to our experience there is nothing to substantiate this belief. We are never, says Hume, aware of any constant invariable impression[2] that could answer to the name of self. What we experience, rather, is a continuous flow of perceptions that replace one another in rapid succession. "When I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*," says Hume, "I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch *myself* at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but the perception."[3] Within the mind, he continues, these perceptions "successively make their appearance—pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations." And there is nothing to the mind but these perceptions. There is consequently never any simplicity within the mind at one time, nor identity at two different times. Nor, says, Hume, do we have any idea of a self; for every real idea must be derived from some one impression; "but self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are supposed to have reference."

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[1]David Hume (1711–1776) was a Scottish philosopher and historian; for a biography, see p. 46. [D. C. ABEL]

[2]In Hume's philosophy, the mind consists of *perceptions*, of which there two kinds: *impressions*, which are forceful and lively (for example, seeing a tree), and *ideas*, which are less forceful and lively (for example, imagining a tree). An idea is genuine (as Hume explains later in this paragraph) only if it derives from an impression. [D. C. ABEL]

[3]David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., rev. P. H. Nidditch (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). This and all subsequent quotations from Hume are from the Book I, Part IV, Section VI, "Of Personal Identity," pp. 251–263. [J. GILES]

With this much said against the notion of personal identity, Hume turns to the question of why we have such a proclivity to ascribe identity to our successive perceptions. Prefacing his reply to this question, Hume points out that a distinction must first be made between "personal identity as it regards our thought or imagination, and as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves." His concern here, he says, is with the former. He then starts his answer by distinguishing between the ideas of identity and diversity. In the former case, we have the idea of an object that persists, invariable and uninterrupted, through a particular span of time. It is this that comprises our idea of identity. In the case of diversity we have the "idea of several different objects existing in succession and connected together by a close relation." Now although these two ideas are plainly distinct, it is certain, says Hume, that in our "common way of thinking" we generally confound them. That is, we often claim that an object at one time is identical with an object at another time, when in fact the two are little more than a succession of different objects connected by a close relation. To justify these absurd ascriptions of identity, we either come up with the notion of a substantive self by feigning the continued existence of our perceptions, or we imagine the existence of something mysterious that binds our many perceptions together. Even where we do not do this, we at least have a propensity to do so. We can see, then, says Hume, that because we often assert the existence of such fictions, the problem of personal identity is not merely a verbal dispute.

It is natural to ask, therefore, what it is that induces us mistakenly to attribute identity to something while, being a succession of objects, it is really an instance of diversity. Hume feels that the answer must lie in the workings of the imagination. The reason why we might make such an attribution, says Hume, is that "the passage of thought from the object before the change to the object after it, is so smooth and easy that we scarce perceive the transition and are apt to imagine that it is nothing but a continued survey of the same object." This is especially true when the alteration is either relatively small or when it occurs gradually and insensibly.

From here Hume goes on to consider the various other ways in which we ascribe identity to objects that are variable and interrupted. This lays the ground for his account of personal identity. For the identity of the mind, like that of such changing things as plants, animals, repaired ships, rebuilt churches, and republics, says Hume, is only a fictitious identity. It must therefore be similarly explicable in terms of the workings of the imagination. Hume concludes his account with the important remark that all "nice and subtle" questions concerning personal identity are best considered as grammatical rather than philosophical difficulties. Thus, except where the notion of a fictional entity or principle is involved, all disputes about personal identity are merely verbal disputes and can never possibly be decided. . . .

If we view the section "Of Personal Identity" as a whole, we will see that in the first four paragraphs Hume discusses the actual identity of the self and categorically rejects the notion as untenable. He does, however, feel that we have a natural propensity to ascribe identity to ourselves, and it is to an explanation of this propensity that Hume devotes the rest of his discussion. This division in the

text is also attended, for the most part, by a division in the type of language that Hume uses to discuss identity. In the first part, Hume speaks in a categorical way. Thus it is claimed, for example, that "there is no impression constant and invariable," "there is no such idea [of the self]," "I always stumble on some particular perception or other," and, finally, "there is properly no *simplicity* in [the mind] at one time, nor *identity* in different [times]."

However, when we come to the second part of the discussion, the language becomes more psychological than categorical. That is, Hume's concern here is more with how we imagine, suppose, ascribe, or attribute identity rather than with the actual identity of things. And so the second part begins by asking "What then gives us so great a propension[4] to *ascribe* an identity to these successive perceptions and to *suppose* ourselves possessed of an invariable and uninterrupted existence through the whole course of our lives?" This psychological language continues, for the most part, throughout this latter half: The repaired ship "is still *considered* as the same; nor does the difference of the materials *hinder us* from *ascribing* an identity to it"; although plants and animals undergo a total change, "yet *we still attribute* identity to them"; a man who hears an intermittent noise "*says* it is still the same noise"; and because an earlier church is demolished before its successor appears we do not think of them as being different "and for that reason are *less scrupulous* in *calling* them the same." Likewise, when Hume says we can extend our identity beyond our memories, his discussion makes it plain that he is only talking about "the most *established notions* of personal identity"—that is, what is commonly believed to be true about personal identity, and not about personal identity itself.

This use of psychological language to discuss the supposed identity of interrupted and variable objects should keep us alert to the fact that Hume is here discussing only the origin of our belief in such identity, and not the actual identity of what is really an instance of diversity. Once we see this we should not be worried by Hume's occasional use of categorical statements in what is overtly a discussion of psychology. Thus, when, in the second part of the text, Hume states that a seedling that becomes a tree "is still the same oak," all that is before this makes it plain that he can only mean that it is still *called* the same oak, or it is still *supposed* to be the same oak, or some such thing, not that it is actually still the same oak. Likewise, when he says that the infant becomes a man "without any change in his identity," all that he can mean is "without *our attributing* any change to his identity." . . .

Hume even says that a rebuilt church that we only imagine to be the same as an earlier one, can still be called the same as its predecessor "without breach of the propriety of language." He does not, unfortunately, elaborate on this. However, at the end of the section on personal identity something is said that suggests how it might be permissible to call two things the same that in fact are only imagined to be the same. Here Hume states that all disputes about the identity of successive objects "are merely verbal, except so far as the relation of parts gives rise to some fiction or imaginary principle of union." Thus if two persons are arguing about whether or not an earlier church is the same as its

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[4]*propension:* tendency, inclination. [D. C. ABEL]

rebuilt successor, and neither of them is asserting the existence of a fictional entity or principle of union that somehow unites the two churches, then their dispute will be merely about how the word "same" is to be used in these circumstances. That is, they will not be disputing an actual identity but only the linguistic conventions surrounding our use of identity terms. If we imagine that our disputants finally agree that our linguistic conventions permit us to call the two churches the same (a conclusion to which Hume would give his assent), then we can see why it is permissible to call two things the same that are in fact different. This is because there are two levels at which the notion of identity can be employed: one that deals with questions about identity at the metaphysical or ultimate level, and one that deals with them at the verbal or conventional level.

[BUDDHIST NO-SELF THEORY]

It is disappointing that Hume does not have more to say about the two levels of "disputes." For it is with such an account that we are able to explain why it is acceptable for us to continue to talk in terms of selves and personal identity despite the fact that there are no such things. We can, however, arrive at a fuller understanding of what the two-level account involves by turning to another version of the no-self theory. This is the no-self theory as propounded by the Buddha[5] and various of his followers. The Buddhist theory can offer some insights. For at the very heart of this theory lies the doctrine of the two levels of truth. Although the different schools of Buddhist thought disagree on the exact nature of the distinction to be drawn between the two truths, there are enough similarities—at least in the early Hinayana[6] schools—for us to give a general account. This will . . . allow us . . . to see what Hume might have been getting at. . . . I hasten to add, however, that I am not here attempting a scholarly exposition of Buddhist thought; for my present interests are confined to an exposition of the no-self theory of personal identity. It is just that Buddhism has some valuable contributions to make here. There are, of course, problems involved in the cross-cultural discussion of ideas; Hume and the Buddha, after all, lived their lives in very different social and historical contexts. And yet I do not think that these difficulties need detain us; for when we go to the texts where Buddhist thinkers are grappling with the problem of personal identity, we find their concerns are essentially the same as Hume's.

In the earliest texts of Buddhism, the Pali Canon (about 500 B.C.E.), we come across a distinction drawn between two types of discourse: that of direct meaning and that of indirect meaning. The former type of discourse is said to be one whose meaning is plain while the latter type needs to have its meaning inferred with reference to the former. In the discourses of indirect meaning, words are used

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[5]The Buddha (born Siddhartha Gautama; about 563–483 B.C.E.) was the Indian philosopher who founded Buddhism. [D. C. ABEL]

[6]Hinayana ("Small Vehicle [to enlightenment]") Buddhism, also called Theravada ("The Teaching of the Elders") Buddhism, is distinguished from a later form called Mahayana ("Great Vehicle") Buddhism. [D. C. ABEL]

that apparently refer to persisting entities such as a self or an I that, according to the Buddha, are merely "expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world that the Tathagata[7] makes use of without being led astray by them."[8] That is, although we may use words like "self" and "I," we should not be led into thinking that they actually refer to something, for they are but grammatical devices. This nondenoting aspect of these expressions is something that must be inferred in light of the discourses of direct meaning. In this latter type of discourse, the nonexistence of anything permanent or enduring, such as the self or I, is asserted, and the misleading features of language—those features that lead us astray into the belief in an I—are made explicit. Here there is no need for inference, since the meaning of such discourse is plain.

As it happens, however, we are apt to confuse the two types of discourse: "There are these two who misrepresent the Tathagata. Which two? He who represents a sutta[9] of indirect meaning as a sutta of direct meaning and he who represents a sutta of direct meaning as a sutta of indirect meaning."[10] Although the Pali Canon does not elaborate here, we can easily see what sorts of errors are being referred to. On the one hand we might think that someone who is using the words "self," I," or "Buddha" (which are mere turns of speech) is in fact denoting a particular entity. Or, on the other hand, we might think that someone who is denying the existence of the self cannot really mean what he or she is saying and so we might be tempted to infer a further meaning that would still allow the existence of the self. We might, for instance, think that the person making this claim is only denying the existence of a certain type of self.

The discussion of the two types of discourse is continued in the various Buddhist commentaries on the Pali Canon, and here we are introduced to the related ideas of two levels of truth. In one commentary it is stated that all "Buddhas[11] have two types of speech: conventional and ultimate. Thus 'being,' 'man,' 'person,' [and the proper names] 'Tissa,' 'Naga' are used as conventional speech. 'Categories,' 'elements.' 'sense-bases' are used as ultimate speech." Because of this division in speech, we are told that the Buddha "declared two truths: the conventional and ultimate; there is no third. Words [used by] mutual agreement are true because of worldly convention; words of ultimate meaning are true because of the existence of elements."[12] Although the various elements are said to be the constituents of which everything else, including what we call the self, is made, it is not because the elements are more basic than the self that the self is said ultimately not to exist. It is simply because there is nothing in the world, not even an assemblage of the elements, that can be identified with the

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[7]*Tathagata:* (Pali, "one who has thus gone," "one who has thus attained") the perfect one—an epithet of the Buddha that he uses when speaking of himself. [D. C. ABEL]

[8]Pali Canon text (*Dingha Nikaya* I.202) cited in K. N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (London, England: George Allen & Unwin, 1963), pp. 319–20. [J. GILES]

[9]*sutta:* discourse. [J. GILES]

[10]Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, p. 361. [J. GILES]

[11]*Buddhas:* enlightened beings. [J. GILES]

[12]Commentary text cited in Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravada Buddhism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 154. [J. GILES]

self. Although the Buddha cites various characteristics that something must have if it is to be considered a self, the most important is that of permanence or identity over time. But when we look to our experience, there is nothing but impermanence: Our bodies, feelings, and thoughts are forever coming and going. In this sense the Buddha is in complete agreement with Hume: Where there is diversity there can be no identity. None of this, however, implies that statements that make use of words like "self," "I," "you," "Tissa," or "Buddha" are false or nonsensical at every level of discourse. For they can be true at the conventional level, which means that they can be true because of their being used in accordance with mutual agreement—that is, linguistic convention.

A good illustration of how this distinction is to be drawn is given in a well-known passage from *The Questions of King Menander* (about 100 C.E.).[13] In this dialogue, the Indo-Greek King Menander puts various questions about the nature of the self to the Buddhist monk Nagasena. At the opening of the dialogue, Menander asks "How is your Reverence known, and what is your name?" The somewhat provocative answer given to the king is "I'm known as Nagasena, your Majesty; that's what my fellow monks call me. But though my parents may have given me such a name . . . , it is only a generally understood term, a practical designation. There is no question of a permanent individual implied in the use of the word." Menander is quite astonished by this reply and eventually asks "If your fellow monks call you Nagasena, what then is Nagasena?" He asks whether Nagasena is any part of the body or the mind, or whether he is all of these things taken together, or whether he is anything apart from them. To all of this Nagasena replies merely "No, your Majesty." Menander then exclaims triumphantly: "Then for all my asking I find no Nagasena. Nagasena is a mere sound! Surely what your Reverence has said is false!" But Nagasena is not to be dealt with so swiftly and, in good Socratic[14] fashion, replies by himself asking a question: "Your Majesty, how did you come here—on foot, or in a vehicle?" "In a chariot," says Menander. Nagasena then asks what the chariot is, whether it is the pole, axle, wheels, frame, reins, or yoke, or whether it is all these taken together, or again whether it is something other than the separate parts. Menander replies in the negative. With this Nagasena fires back at the king his own reasoning: "Then for all my asking, your Majesty, I can find no chariot. The chariot is merely a sound. What then is the chariot? Surely what your Majesty has said is false! There is no chariot!" Menander protests that he has not said anything false: "It's on account of all these various components, the pole, axle, wheels, and so on, that the vehicle is called a chariot. It's just a generally understood term, a practical designation." Nagasena's rejoinder is to praise Menander for this remark and to point out that the same holds true of himself. For it is because of his various components that he is

[13]Quotations from the *Menander* text come mainly from *Sources of Indian Tradition*, ed. William Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 1:103–105. However, the editor omits the important final remark made by Nagasena. This line, which I have included, can be found in *The Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, vol. 22, *Milinda's Questions*, vol. 1, trans. I. B. Horner (London, England: Luzac, 1963), pp. 37–38 [J. GILES]. Milinda is another name for Menander. [D. C. ABEL]

[14]Socrates (470–399 B.C.E.) was a Greek philosopher. [D. C. ABEL]

known by the practical designation "Nagasena." However, he adds, in the ultimate sense there is no person to whom the name refers. . . .

Nagasena rejects any notion of a person that exists in the ultimate sense: A person is not ultimately something other than his parts (the strict theory), nor is a person ultimately the sum of his parts (the reductionist theory).[15] This does not mean, however, that the word "Nagasena" is a mere sound, for it is more than that: It is a generally understood term whose proper use is determined by mutual agreement concerning how, when, and where it is to be used. Or, as Nagasena says, it is because of his various components that he is known as "Nagasena," even though "Nagasena" does not refer to anything. . . .

Some will no doubt find it paradoxical that we can use personal language correctly when there is nothing to which these terms ultimately refer. It was reasoning akin to this, it seems, that led Descartes[16] to his famous proclamation "I think, therefore I am." I must exist, reasoned Descartes, because even when I doubt that I exist there is still an I that is doing the doubting. But Descartes has become led astray by his own language, for there is no need for the "I" in "I think" or "I doubt" to refer to anything. What Descartes was aware of, as both Hume and the Buddha would agree, was just thinking, not an I that was doing the thinking. Consequently Descartes might just as well have said (and should have said if his concern was with ultimate rather than conventional truth) "There is thinking, therefore there are thoughts." And such a deduction, if we may call it that, does not suffice to prove the existence of an I.

A possible response here would be to say that although there need be no reference to an I when we use the noun sense of "thinking" or "thoughts," when the verb sense "I think" is employed, then plainly there must be some reference to a subject; for what is it that thinks? To this it can be replied that although the term "think" does require a subject, this is little more than a grammatical requirement. And so we might just as well employ a nonreferring grammatical subject rather than the misleading term "I." This is a point that was recognized by Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, who said about Descartes' dictum: "We should say, 'It thinks,' just as we say 'It thunders.' Even to say *"cogito"*[17] is too much if we translate it with 'I think.' To assume the 'I' to postulate it, is a practical need."[18] Thus, since the use of the verbal sense "thunders" also requires the introduction of a subject, we bring in the word "it" and say "It thunders." But this does not mean that the grammatical subject "it" here refers to anything. All we are saying when we say "It thunders" is "There is thunder." Consequently, since the requirement that the word "thinks" have a subject is also a convention of grammar, or, as we might say with Lichtenberg, a practical need, we could

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[15]*reductionist theory:* a theory that one kind of thing can be "reduced to" (explained fully in terms of) another kind of thing. [D. C. ABEL]

[16]René Descartes (1596–1650) was a French philosopher and mathematician; for a biography, see p. 144. [D. C. ABEL]

[17]*cogito;* the first-person singular of the Latin verb *cogitare,* "to think," which Descartes used in "*Cogito ergo sum,*" the Latin version of his statement "I think, therefore I am." [D. C. ABEL]

[18]Cited in J. P. Stern, *Lichtenberg: A Doctrine of Scattered Occasions, Reconstructed from His Aphorisms and Reflections* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), p. 270. [J. GILES]. Lichtenberg (1742–1799) was a German philosopher and physicist. [D. C. ABEL]

likewise employ "it" to serve this purpose. We could say "It thinks, therefore there are thoughts," and the appearance of "it" here would no more imply a reference to an actual subject than would "it" in "It thunders." . . .

[AN EXPANSION OF THE NO-SELF THEORY]

Hume often speaks in Book II [of *A Treatise of Human Nature*] of our idea or impression of the self as though it were something that occurs instantaneously within our awareness, a singular perception that we experience as the object of pride and humility. But, as Hume has told us, there is no impression or idea of the self; there is only the smooth and uninterrupted progress of thought within our imagination. But how is it that a smooth and uninterrupted progress of thought could appear instantaneously within awareness? The notion of an uninterrupted progress is a temporal notion; it is something that occurs over an extended period of time. Accordingly, it is difficult to see how such a train of perceptions could be an object to which we could, in an instant, direct our emotions. . . .

The way for us to deal with this problem, and so fill out our picture of the no-self theory, is to see that when we enter a psychological or emotional state that seems to depend on an instantaneous awareness of self, what we are doing is not reflecting on a succession of related ideas (which could not be done at any one instant); rather we are latching on to a particular collection of some of these ideas that, by virtue of their being related, can instantaneously present themselves in a condensed form to our awareness. It is with this discovery of a constructed or condensed self-image, as we shall call it, that we are brought to a central point within the no-self theory—namely, that although we may on various occasions have experiences of something that we take to be our self, on closer examination this object of our awareness turns out to be nothing more than a collation of related images. . . .

When I enter a state of self-awareness, the I that is summoned before my consciousness is not a simple entity that infixes itself changelessly in my mind. It is rather a composite of various fading images that will have some reference to how I see and feel about myself. I may, for example, have an image of my face as it appeared to me in the mirror this morning that is nevertheless infused with features of previous images of my face. Thus, although my eyes and lips might appear to me as they did today, my cheeks and the shape of my face might seem more like those of myself of 12 years ago. Or again it might include features of how I would imagine myself to look in 20 years. This composite image of my face might itself be superimposed on some familiar scene, say, the beach where I often go for walks. Here the sand dunes might be incorporated into the cheeks and the rising of the waves into the forming of a smile. And all of this will be presented in a suffusion of affective tones that will exhibit the emotional evaluations I have of myself. Like other of our condensed images, the self-image will have but an ephemeral existence; the constituent images, continuously dissolving as new associations, make their way into the complex. Just what the constituents of the constructed self-image are will naturally be different for each person, since each person will see herself in a different way. While for one

person it may consist mainly of idealized images of her physical appearance, for another it may be a mixture of certain sensations or emotions, while for a third it may be images of how others respond to her. To verify that this is so one need only ask different persons to describe what it is they are aware of when they are aware of themselves. It will then be seen that such images vary quite markedly. . . .

We now have to ask what it is that leads someone into perceiving the constructed self-image as being a self. And here again the work of Buddhist philosophers is most helpful. According to Buddhist theory, what we call a person is really just an aggregation of the five *khandhas* or elements. These are: physical form, perceptions, feelings, motives, and consciousness. But none of these elements, whether considered separately or in combination, can rightly be identified with the self, for they lack the various qualities that we attribute to the self.[19] This, however, does not stop one from mistakenly identifying oneself with one or another of the elements, and indeed this is a ubiquitous confusion from which Buddhism hopes to set us free. But what is it that leads a person to this mistaken identification? To answer this we need to refer back to our previous discussion of the conventional and ultimate levels of truth. There we saw that although personal names and personal pronouns do not at the ultimate level refer to anything, at the conventional level it is quite acceptable to use such expressions for pragmatic reasons. Thus the Buddha uses the language of the self as convenient designations without being led astray by them. The problem is that, unlike the Buddha, many of us do get led astray by the expressions we use; that is, in failing to notice that we are using language at the level of convention, we end up thinking that there must be something to which the words "I" or "self" refer. And so we turn our gaze inward (because this is where the self is supposed to exist) and, coming upon one or another of the elements, or a collection of the elements, hasten to identify it with our self.

[19]This argument is given in "Lesser Discourse to Saccaka," in *The Collection of the Middle-Length Sayings (Majjhima Nikaya)*, vol. 1, *The First Fifty Discourses (Mulapannasa)* trans. I. B. Horner (London, England: Pali Text Society, 1954), pp. 280–91. [J. GILES]