



## Use your imagination, Buddhism is a good idea

Most cultural stories begin one way or another with the persistent psychological questions 'who am I, 'who are you' and can we be happy? Work for this paper was prompted by a widespread popular conversation, as articulated by television programs such as/ Desperate Housewives/, which seek to find psychological meaning in our contemporary lifestyle. The paper considers the matter of psychological suffering, which continues to effect many people who otherwise live ordinary lives. Western psychology and philosophy supports the idea of Self development theories which are teleological. By teleological I mean the theory that argues that there are ends and purposes and that our individual lives, and indeed the world, have a purpose towards which we are moving. Inherent in this philosophical approach is the root cause of suffering. Some Mahayana Buddhist concepts of 'no self', and dependent co-arising could provide a less painful alternative.

The paper moves the discussion about Buddhism away from religion and into a philosophical discussion that involves western secular, humanist and scientific thinking. It revives some aspects of Freud and Darwin's work, reminding us that they are theorists who have already worked up ideas about transience. The sense of a self which we know, love and cherish is rather a tenuous entity. Indeed, it is not something we are born with but rather it is developed and designed throughout our lives. The ego-self (as psychoanalytic theory has come to call it) is a product of culture, a subject of conditioning, indoctrination, development and repression. The self in this sense is not something substantial, but it is a powerful psychological process, continually requiring an input of ideas to maintain its existence, these are gleaned from our cultural stories. Alternatively, for us in the west, the Buddhist cultural story suggest, as a therapeutic strategy, that we do not do battle with the ego, but attempt to see through it. To see that it is a fabrication, a set of ideas, beliefs and attitudes that have taken up psychological form and function.