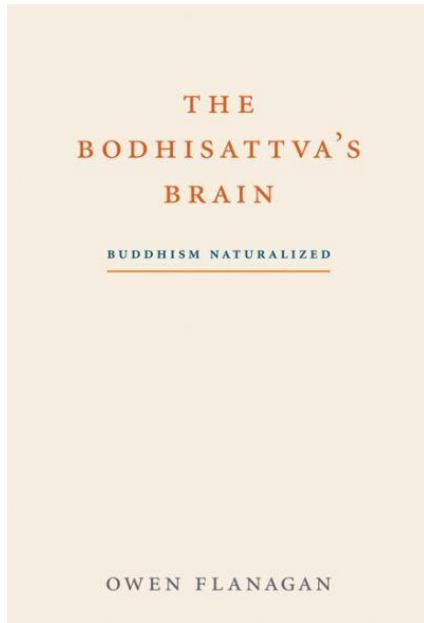


The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized



Author: Owen Flanagan

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About the Book

If we are material beings living in a material world—and all the scientific evidence suggests that we are—then we must find existential meaning, if there is such a thing, in this physical world. We must cast our lot with the natural rather than the supernatural. Many Westerners with spiritual (but not religious) inclinations are attracted to Buddhism—almost as a kind of moral-mental hygiene. But, as Owen Flanagan points out in *The Bodhisattva's Brain*, Buddhism is hardly naturalistic. Atheistic when it comes to a creator god, Buddhism is otherwise opulently polytheistic, with spirits, protector deities, ghosts, and evil spirits. Its beliefs include karma, rebirth, nirvana, and nonphysical states of mind. What is a nonreligious, materially grounded spiritual seeker to do? In *The Bodhisattva's Brain*, Flanagan argues that it is possible to subtract the “hocus pocus” from Buddhism and discover a rich, empirically responsible philosophy that could point us to one path of human flourishing.

“Buddhism naturalized,” as Flanagan constructs it, contains a metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics; it is a fully naturalistic and comprehensive philosophy, compatible with the rest of knowledge. Some claim that neuroscience is in the process of validating Buddhism empirically, but Flanagan’s naturalized Buddhism does not reduce itself to a brain scan showing happiness patterns. Buddhism naturalized offers instead a tool for achieving happiness and human flourishing—a way of conceiving of the human predicament, of thinking about meaning for finite material beings living in a material world.

About the Author

Owen Flanagan is James B. Duke Professor of Philosophy at Duke University. He is the author of *Consciousness Reconsidered* and *The Really Hard Problem: Meaning in a Material World*.

Review

“ if you are interested in current debates at the interface between religion, science and moral philosophy, there is much in this book that will engage you.” — Rupert Gethin, Times Higher Education

“Brilliant Flanagan brings much needed clarity, insight and sophistication to the debate.” — Julian Baggini, The Observer

“It is true that science has yet to produce good explanations of consciousness, value and free will. The suggestion brought to the fore by Flanagan — that Buddhism may be a source of insight in these areas — is a welcome and tantalizing one.”—Nature

“I can’t recommend this book enough. It’s thoughtful in the best sense of the word. If you’re a Buddhist (or someone leaning towards Buddhism) who likes to wrestle with philosophical issues, it will help you to think things through more clearly. If you are a Buddhist who is inclined toward Naturalism, it’s always nice to find another ally. Best of all, it’s fun to read.” , Seth Segall, The Existential Buddhist

“An engaging and intellectually daring foray into cross-cultural philosophy . . . the book will most likely win praise among contemporary philosophers, Buddhist scholars, and cognitive scientists alike for its bold and uncompromising stance on what is and is not worth keeping of this venerable tradition of philosophical inquiry, moral cultivation, and existential transformation. Flanagan brings to his critique a wonderfully wry and keenly acute sense of observation.”—Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews

“[T]he most important question may be whether the cultivation of Buddhist virtues will lead to the sort of happiness that comes with the sense that...life has meaning and value....Flanagan has many insightful things to say about this claim.”—The Philosopher’s Magazine

“Owen Flanagan writes with warmth, wisdom and wit. *The Bodhisattva’s Brain* is a milestone of cosmopolitan thought and should be read widely by philosophers, cognitive scientists, theologians and anyone concerned with human flourishing and the meaning of life.”—Times Literary Supplement

“Flanagan’s book is a fairly dense example of analytic philosophy, and the reader looking for a friendly introduction to Buddhism is advised to look elsewhere. But those interested in the effort to construct meaning from the secularized stuff of experience will find a sincere effort and helpful model in Flanagan’s Buddhism. Demonstrating the Buddhist concept of upaya—adapting one’s approach to suit particular circumstances—Flanagan gives us a Buddhism compatible with our scientific understanding of the universe that affords one of our best opportunities to cultivate human flourishing today.” — Scott F. Parker, Rain Taxi Review of Books

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