

The Bodhisattva's Brain: Owen Flanagan Meets Critics

with Christian Coseru, "Buddhism, Comparative Neurophilosophy, and Human Flourishing"; Charles Goodman, "Buddhism, Naturalism, and the Pursuit of Happiness"; Bronwyn Finnigan, "Examining the Bodhisattva's Brain"; and Owen Flanagan, "Buddhism and the Scientific Image: Reply to Critics."

BUDDHISM AND THE SCIENTIFIC IMAGE: REPLY TO CRITICS

by Owen Flanagan

Abstract. I provide a précis of *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized* (2011), and then respond to three critics, Christian Coseru, Charles Goodman, and Bronwyn Finnigan.

Keywords: Buddhism; consequentialism; contemplative science; eudaimonism; naturalism; no-self; phenomenology; physicalism; subjective realism

THE BODHISATTVA'S BRAIN

The Bodhisattva's Brain, or the idea behind it, originated in an invitation to a small meeting at the Dalai Lama's residence in Dharamsala, India for a meeting on "Destructive Emotions and How to Overcome Them." This Dalai Lama, the 14th, is very interested in science. My job as a philosopher of mind and moral psychology was to introduce him and some other Buddhist leaders, some Burmese Theravadins, most fellow Tibetan lamas, to the thought of Plato and Aristotle, Hobbes and Hume on the nature of moral emotions and our norms for their expression. Besides the excitement of sitting for a week in the Dalai Lama's living room discussing emotions with him, his team, and several world-class mind scientists, I was struck consistently by the unusual situation of the leader of a great world spiritual tradition—or better of a sect of a great world spiritual tradition—being so open to science. My philosophical career working on the nature and function of consciousness on the one hand and moral psychology on the

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other has been explicitly motivated by concerns about the conflict between what Wilfrid Sellars called the scientific and the manifest image, the latter of which I describe as the image, or better, as multiple humanistic images, images of persons as conceived across world traditions. Almost all the latter are offered by great world traditions that are not, for understandable reasons—science is new—science-friendly. My problem has always been: how do we make the picture of ourselves as finite animals living in a material world consistent with the image that says we are more than animals with prospects for more than finite, material existence? Or, put another way: How do we make sense of ourselves as meaning makers in a world that just might be a meaningless surd governed by indifferent causal processors?

Thus, it was very interesting to me as a committed philosophical naturalist to discover that the world's most visible Buddhist, the 14th Dalai Lama, was both very interested in science and claimed that Buddhism should not commit itself to any beliefs that are not also scientifically credible. Conflict between the spaces of science and spirituality is one of the most, if not the most familiar zone of conflict among the spaces of meaning that constitute the space of meaning (early 21st century). For normal citizens of developed countries the space of meaning (early 21st century) is comprised of this set of spaces: ethics, politics, science, technology, arts, spirituality (Flanagan 2007). We live in, and move about, all these spaces. These spaces are part of the surround, pretty much unavoidable if you are awake. The conflict between the space of spirituality, typically in its religious forms, and the space of politics is the other contender for the zone of greatest conflict. And these conflicts ramify.

Is it possible that Buddhism, internal to itself, has the resources to not only peacefully co-exist with science, but to create opportunity for dialogue with science? Can Buddhism explain how it is possible to think of ourselves as beings whose fate is tied to living in the world described by science—by astrophysics and cosmology, quantum physics, evolution, and cognitive neuroscience—and also, at the same time, to make sense of the projects of seeking to flourish, to live meaningful individual and collective lives, to rightfully care about what is true, good, and beautiful? Is it possible that Buddhism could be a live philosophical option for twenty-first century secular thinkers who take science seriously?

The book is divided into two parts, which can be read separately: The first part, called “An Essay in Comparative Neurophilosophy,” consists of three chapters devoted to questions about the potential friendliness of Buddhism to Darwin's theory of evolution, to naturalism about consciousness, and to a tame conception of karma. One feature of the dialogue between Buddhism and science that I had a ringside seat for, involved various members of the “neuroenthusiasta” —who are over the top about what neuroscience can do—claiming that neuroscience was actually in the process of empirically vindicating the claims of one lived philosophical

tradition, namely Buddhism, to yield happiness and flourishing, or something in the vicinity, at a higher rate of return than the other contenders. The hyperbole was (and continues to be) jaw-dropping. But I judged the desire expressed and embodied in the idea of vindicating scientifically the claims of a philosophical tradition to be uncommon and thus worth paying close attention. Here were people, Buddhists or folk who judge Buddhism as the correct answer to the question—How ought I to be and live?—who are not typically materialists about consciousness looking at the brain for markers or correlates of a happy and good human life. I set myself this role—a sort of epistemologist-participant-observer from the planets of analytic philosophy and twenty-first century cognitive science. It was interesting, to say the least, to watch a lived philosophical tradition interested in empirical evidence of its efficacy. I tried to watch the dialectic closely and offered in *The Bodhisattva's Brain* a report of the lessons learned. In the first part of the book I claim that Buddhism, like all great spiritual traditions, has a conception of human flourishing which is moralized, that is, there is a conception of a good human life and a system of pay-back, soteriological payback based on the quality of one's earthly human life. One of my questions is whether the conception of a good human life can be naturalized, understood separately from the nonnaturalistic soteriology, independent of karma and rebirth? The title of this part of the book, "An Essay on Comparative Neurophilosophy" actually turns out to be something of a pun since my argument tries to establish that even Buddhism naturalized does not conceive of a good human life as mostly assessable by what goes on in the head, or the brain, and it certainly does not privilege narrow hedonic goods like happiness over goods like meaning and purpose and relations, none of which are in-the-head and none of which can be assessed solely by neuroscientific investigation—and this even though it is an inference to the best explanation that we are fully material beings living in a material world.

The second part of the book is called "Buddhism as a Natural Philosophy." In the three chapters of the second part, I take up the feature of Buddhism that makes it most interesting to me, namely, Buddhism claims that there is a powerful conceptual, possibly a motivational link, between being an empiricist epistemologist, gaining metaphysical insight into the impermanence of everything including one's self, and being a good person who flourishes, and possibly is happy. Part II is devoted to explaining more thoroughly what, assuming now there can be such a thing, a naturalized Buddhism would look like, and how it might be an interesting conversation partner to those of us who are scientific naturalists and who are still trying, after all the years, to better understand what there is, how we can know it, and how best to live given all the uncertainty. How does belief in impermanence, dependent origination, no-self, and emptiness warrant or motivate the sort of expansive compassionate ethics that Buddhism

endorses? I do my best to avoid scholastic debates among Buddhists, internal to Buddhism, about esoteric matters, since I am interested in its prospects as a lived philosophy for us, or for some segment of us, reflective people who take naturalism seriously, who are still trying to work out the conflict between the scientific and various humanistic images.

A final, motivating factor in writing this book and also a hope for it, is this: I have always been a fan of comparative philosophy, long convinced that there are certifiably great non-Western philosophical traditions, for example, Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, or for that matter extinct Western traditions, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Cynicism about which most Westerners, philosophers included, are ignorant. I've always thought that the study of these traditions might disabuse us of several related blind spots: Ethnic chauvinism, the view that non-Western traditions are esoteric in a bad way, for reasons beyond their unfamiliarity; the idea that Religion (with a big 'R') is inevitable for psychological reasons, and that it is required, true or false, to shore up meaning and morals. I thought this an opportune time to speak to an audience of secular-minded thinkers who are impressed by science allergic to supernaturalism, a suitable deflated secular Buddhism, what I call "Buddhism naturalized."

Buddhism, like Plato and Aristotle's philosophies, is a comprehensive philosophy. It contains a metaphysic, epistemology, and an ethics, a way of conceiving the human predicament, human nature, and human flourishing that are deep and not outdated. Now some parts of Buddhism are superstition and untenable from a modern perspective, possible even from a perspective internal to Buddhism. Is it possible to take an ancient comprehensive philosophy like Buddhism, subtract what is now by our own epistemic lights unwarranted, and have a worthwhile philosophy for twenty-first century scientifically informed secular thinkers? I think so.

REPLY TO CHRISTIAN COSERU

I am grateful for Christian Coseru's compelling and artful advocacy of comparative philosophy in his essay "Buddhism, Comparative Neurophilosophy, and Human Flourishing" (2014). And I am grateful especially for the invitation to reflect more on issues at the intersection of philosophy of mind, cognitive science, neuroscience, and Buddhist phenomenology. So, I'll say a bit about the metaphysics of mind, the explanatory gap, and the role and status of phenomenology.

Metaphysics of mind. Most every great wisdom tradition has advocated some form of immaterialism about mind. One reason is that mental states seem transparent and lacking in the texture or granularity of ordinary everyday things. Another is that immaterialism goes well with beliefs in immortality. It is pretty clear that living bodies die, decay, and

disperse. But immaterial stuff, substances, or properties, might continue. Now Buddhism pretty clearly is not a kind of substance dualism since Buddhist metaphysics is event and process-friendly, but substance-unfriendly. In *The Bodhisattva's Brain*, I make clear that this is good; event and process metaphysics fit well with much of modern science, with particle physics and glass being a slow moving liquid, and you and I being impermanent.

But Buddhism in most every form I have studied, and among every Buddhist practitioner I have interviewed in Thailand, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and China, as well as the members of the Dalai Lama's team, as well as every professional Buddhologist at universities I have queried, agree that most Buddhisms are committed to some kind of *immaterialism* (or are indifferent to the question). If the kind of immaterialism has a name it would probably be some kind of property dualism.

Coseru thinks that I myself leave open the door for property dualism and he thinks that maybe I should do so. He writes:

But there is an obvious tension in Flanagan's project. On the one hand, he declaims that "neutrality of the metaphysics of mind is not a live option" (90) . . . On the other hand, he does not hesitate to remark that "subjectively experienced states" may perhaps "have *sui generis* properties that are nonphysical" (52). By expressing hope that the identity theory may at least work for basic sensations, while at the same time shying away from epiphenomenalism, Flanagan could be offering us a more moderate version of naturalism.

Let me clarify: When I write that "Perhaps subjectively experienced mental states have *sui generis* properties that are nonphysical," I am simply summing up what the advocate of the neural correlate view, who is a property dualist, might say. Not what I think.

So let me say where I think the evidence leads on the metaphysics of mind. It leads to the view that each and every mental state – conscious or unconscious – is some bodily state or other. This is token physicalism. Some mental states, sensations, for example, may well be the same, or very similar, bodily states across members of a species. This is type-physicalism for sensations, and maybe for the basic emotions.

Why think physicalism is true? Specifically, why think such a hybrid physicalism is true, where some states like "thinking today is Saturday" is already multiple realized in different bodies, but where seeing "*that* red in the same way" is not? For physicalism in general, the answer is that it is an inference to the best explanation given everything we now know about the way the world works from across the sciences. For the specific hybrid token and type physicalism about the mental that I advocate, the reason to believe it is because things are working out very well for mind scientists who operate with this set of assumptions. And most do.

Still Coseru might press me: why not be what I call “quietistic” or agnostic on the matter of the metaphysics of mind? He expresses concern that I might only *seem* to be offering a “more moderate version of naturalism” —because I admit that we don’t even know how seeing a paper clip is realized in the brain, and thus he wonders why I insist on physicalism given our vast ignorance. He writes: “Readers will be left wondering why, then, he would claim that the best explanation for why, say, ‘intentions to act . . . are causally efficacious’ is because ‘they are neural events (65).”

Now I take it that Coseru’s suggestion that I should express more open-mindedness about the metaphysics of mind is in part because that will be more congenial to Buddhists who will have trouble thinking naturalistically about mind. But he also seems to think that the evidence warrants quietism.

Coseru may be right about the political point. But I favor commitment to physicalism about mind, first, for the principled reasons I just gave. Physicalism is an inference to the best explanation given what we know about how the world works. But second, and importantly in the present context, thinking that immaterialism of the property dualist or psychophysical parallelist variety is really a live option means that you also think that epiphenomenalism is a live option. But for epiphenomenalism to be a possibility, then natural selection would have to regularly choose mental state capacities that do no work. It would be the end of the world as we know it! In 1890, William James wrote that “epiphenomenalism” was an “unwarrantable impertinence in the current state of psychology.” It is an even more unwarrantable impertinence 125 years later!

The explanatory gap. The view of mind I am advocating is called “subjective realism” (Flanagan 1992, 2002, 2007). Experiences are real; they are not illusory, and desires, moods, emotions, beliefs, attention, deliberation are all causally efficacious. This much should be attractive to the Buddhist since it helps in part to explain how the work of meditation and self-cultivation might actually work. The burgeoning industry studying the effects of meditation assumes that it does whatever work it does in normal psychobiological ways.

In any case, according to the subjective realist view, consciousness has special first personal psychological aspects (none of which involve non-physical properties) because each and every experience is unique and experienced in a direct way by the organism whose experience it is (Flanagan 1992). That is what complex nervous systems do, or better, that is one of the things they do: they produce experiences to and for the systems whose nervous systems they are. Physicalism explains why we each have our own and only our experiences. We are each attached to our own and only our own bodies in the right sort of ways. My experience that I am typing right now is a bodily event in me. But I am not in touch with the neural events

that are part of its realization, nor am I in touch with many events in my back and arms and fingers, and so on, that are also involved in my typing right now. The third person perspective of the mind sciences is what yields this knowledge. As for the explanatory gap, it gives way as we become more comfortable with some increasingly deep, reflectively equilibrated picture of how the mind conceived first, second, and third personally works. The view is metaphysically realist and epistemically nonreductive. Mental life is real, it does all sorts of work, and although each and every mental state is some bodily state or other, how it is detected and how it seems first personally and third personally are neither phenomenally nor informationally the same.

Phenomenology. Now subjective realism warrants deploying what I call, *the natural method* (1992, 1996, 2000, 2002, 2007). In studying experience pay attention at a minimum to the phenomenology, the psychology, and the neuroscience and seek reflective equilibrium among these perspectives. This is common practice in cognitive neuroscience. My method is, as Coseru says, similar to Varela-style neurophenomenology and to Churchland-style neurophilosophy. But he rightly points out that I don't say a lot in the book about phenomenology other than in the first two chapters where I am very interested in what states of mind, if any, are on offer for a person who flourishes Buddhist style. What is it like to be such a person? A person on the path, a realized person or an enlightened person? Are the moral emotions experienced by such a person the same or different from that of a person committed to a Confucian way of being, a twenty-first century liberal American way of being? An Aschuar Indian way of being? I care deeply about this sort of inquiry and recommend it.

But what about the idea that phenomenology or so-called contemplative science could tell us something about the deep structure of mind primarily relying on phenomenology? Coseru writes: "Flanagan is inclined to concede that phenomenology might actually work as a reliable method for the descriptive analysis of experience. But, he <Flanagan> asks, 'Does phenomenology reveal anything more . . . than how the mind seems first-personally?' (81) For the naturalist the answer is obvious: phenomenology cannot reveal to us certain hard facts about the nature and function of cognition; for instance, that color perception is mostly foveal or that, due to the lack of light-detecting photoreceptor cells on the optic disc of the retina where the optic nerve passes through, there is a blind spot in a certain region of our perceptual field."

Now Coseru himself has written deeply about the rich tradition of Buddhist phenomenology in his book *Perceiving Reality* (2012), and that he just recommended I might have attended to or pointed to. Although I cite the *Abhidamma* in *The Bodhisattva's Brain* and elsewhere as containing first class phenomenology, Coseru thinks that I might be more suspicious

than I ought to be about Buddhist phenomenology and about the prospects for contemplative science. Maybe.

The main example he gives of where I am ungenerous is one where I express skepticism about a claim that Buddhist phenomenologists have made with some frequency in classical and contemporary literature to the effect that if one attends carefully one will see or experience the mind as it really is, where the way it really is, is pure luminosity, free from the three poisons, and not in any way physical. This alleged piece of phenomenological insight was endorsed initially, or seen, we might say, by Dharmakīrti (sixth century) in his *Commentary on Dignāga's "Compilation of Prime Cognition."* But my suspicion in this case (it may be that all these cases need to be assessed case-by-case) is that the relevant phenomenological claim is so obviously a theoretical one that you'd expect to get from a tradition already making exactly these claims that we ought to be extremely suspicious of it. This point is related to my concern expressed to Charles Goodman about the work of meditation possibly being less a way of detecting, for example, that there is no-self, or experiencing no-self, as it were, than a way of inducing the belief that there is no-self.

One final point: Coseru recommends that we note and explore the incredible range of views and the multiple intersections among some classical Buddhist phenomenologists and contemporary phenomenology. He is right to notice the range of views and the multiple intersections. But notice the state of play and ask yourself if it is a notch in phenomenology's credibility as an autonomous method for understanding and explaining mind that so many very smart phenomenologists from across the ages and across various traditions fail to agree on almost anything. In both the Buddhist dialectic that Coseru describes and the Western phenomenological tradition from Brentano and Husserl and James to contemporary HOT ("higher order thought") and HOP ("higher order perception") theorists, such as David Rosenthal (2005) and William Lycan (1996) to those who oppose them, there is very little agreement about, for example, how the self seems, let alone how it is; about whether propositional attitude states have phenomenal properties, and so on. There is nothing more important in life than experience, and sometimes it is good to survey ourselves in order to know ourselves, to work on ourselves, to better ourselves, and to engage in the universal human project of trying to flourish. My current thinking is that something like anthropological thick description is possible and extremely helpful for understanding how certain social groups see and experience their worlds. But I am increasingly skeptical that first person phenomenology will yield something like universal structures of experience or consciousness, will reveal anything very interesting or deep that we don't already know about the way experience is ahistorically. If one of the aims of "contemplative science" (Jerry Fodor used to quip that most disciplines that name themselves "science"

aren't—compare: leisure science, recreation science, political science to physics, chemistry, biology) is to provide thick description of how experience seems, I am all in favor of it. But if the agenda includes getting at something like our true, original nature, Buddha nature, for example, I remain a skeptic. For Buddhist reasons, I think there is no such thing.

REPLY TO CHARLES GOODMAN

I'll comment on four points Charles Goodman makes in his extremely clear, thoughtful, and sensitive commentary "Buddhism, Naturalism, and the Pursuit of Happiness" (2014): Reincarnation and no-self; Karma; Buddhist consequentialism; and meditation.

Reincarnation and no-self. Truth be told, I'd love not to talk about reincarnation at all because afterlives, onward lives, future lives in either their heavenly Abrahamic forms or in their Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain forms, not to mention their Platonic and Pythagorean prelives form, are ideas that just don't fit with a naturalistic picture. But the topic is unavoidable. And of course I get how the relevant ideas might be both consoling and fit beautifully into a system with a karmic eschatology, and in that way serve several sociomoral/political purposes by encouraging the illusion. And truth be told many new age types who find heaven and hell laughable ideas, think that Buddhism is cool because, well, "you never know."

Now Goodman worries that I get wrong the logical relationship between the doctrine of no-self and the traditional belief in reincarnation and worries that I think or might be read as suggesting that the two are contradictory. But he points out that the conjunction of these two theses "is not a contradiction, but merely empirically rather implausible—which is not the same at all." In the quote Goodman offers I don't say that there is a contradiction. I just say that how reincarnation could even begin to work for a being that has no-self "presents serious logical problems" (Flanagan 2011, 132). For reasons Goodman gives there is no combination of resources internal to Buddhism and available in the modern scientific world view that make any description of a pre, after, or onward life warranted. Goodman provides a very interesting and helpful account of how rebirth might work for a self—really a no-self, *anatman*—conceived in a Buddhist information-theoretic way. Indeed, his compelling description sounds eerily like what will happen when we are allowed to upload something like ourselves minus our phenomenal *dasein*—assuming we really do have some such—onto the iCloud or onto the singularity of artificial intelligence—and thereby have some sort of informational continuity—but no experiential continuity after we disperse in that old fashioned way called "death" and "dying." Mark Siderits (2011)—the current heavyweight

champion among Buddhist reductionists—has been suggesting lately that we really are something like Robo-buddhas and that we ought to see ourselves as such. Ethically, the world will be better. The idea is something like this: If no one experienced herself in any way at all, if we could be like zombies, no one would have motivation to be selfish!

In any case, after Goodman artfully explains how reincarnation is supposed to work inside classical Buddhist metaphysics, he does come down where I do on the empirical implausibility:

Although we can't convict them of inconsistency, there are some embarrassing questions we could press against traditional Buddhists. Is the signal that carries the information from the dying person to the one who is born a physical signal, or a non-physical signal? If it's a physical signal, how come we haven't detected it yet? What enables the mechanism in the brain that sends the signal to know what direction to send it in, so that it will be picked up by an appropriate embryo recipient? If it's simply broadcast in all directions, what would guarantee that only one embryo picks it up? If, as many claim, the signal is received at conception, how can a fertilized egg store all that information? But if the signal is non-physical, what evidence is available that is sufficient to overcome the very powerful scientific case for the causal closure of the physical? And won't the signal be subject to the very same problems that sink interactionist substance dualism?

Questions of whether and how we are persons right now, how we do actually continue right now, if we do, and how we might continue to be even if only as information, and even if our phenomenal selfhood dies each moment, and even if it, our phenomenal self, eventually ceases to have even a closest continuer, is exactly the sort of profitable and exciting discussion that I think can occur when we open-mindedly cross traditions and speak of such problems as the self and personal identity.

In *The Bodhisattva's Brain*, I only touch the surface of how Buddhism might help us think more clearly about selfhood and identity. I point out that no contemporary naturalist is a soul or *atman* theorist, so the only question is how deconstructive and reductive our analysis of actual psychobiological organisms should get. This is compatible with saying that among *anatman* type conceptions, science and metaphysics have not yet converged on anything like an obvious best view. For now I favor a view of the self as being constituted by relations of phenomenal psychological continuity and connectedness in an organic package. The view is something of an embodied Aristotelian, Lockean, or William Jamesian view than it is Parfitian or full on Buddhist reductionist view *à la* Mark Siderits (2003).

Now Goodman encourages me late in his commentary to push what in the book I call “the ephemerality envelope,” and accept full on “emptiness.” He writes “identifying with my present time slice, regarding that as a self, is just as much a mistake as regarding anything else as a self.” I know many Buddhists say this. But I don't think we should go that route and my

reason is principled. It seems to me that Buddhist reduction is analytic or metaphysical. One can do the conceptual reduction of a person until they are empty of all being. But one cannot do an actual empirical reduction of a living psychobiological organism of the sort that humans are that reveals them to be empty of all the features that the biological and human sciences rightly attribute to them. While we are alive, we exist as gregarious social animals with the right sort of psychobiological equipment to support a kind of personhood that is not of an atman or soul-based sort, but that is not reductive or eliminativist either.

Karma. Goodman writes:

Given that the traditional understanding of rebirth is, at least, implausible, we are in need of a new understanding of the meaning of karma. Flanagan proposes a “tame interpretation of karmic causation” (77), understanding this form of causation as just consisting in all the actions of sentient beings and the results that we ordinarily understand to flow from them. This category is certainly tame enough for the naturalist to accept, but it is so far from the distinctive theses that Buddhist texts have in mind when they talk about karma-vipāka-phala, the result of maturation of action, as to be not an interpretation of that concept at all. So much has been stripped away that it would be less misleading to say that Flanagan has abandoned the concept of karma altogether.

I am inclined to accept this. My only resistance comes from my naturalistic sympathy to the impulses that the desire for justice expresses and that the idea of karma embodies. There is a lot of research now in evolutionary biology, anthropology, primatology, and psychology that indicates that Strawsonian reactive attitudes for love, gratitude, anger, resentment, and forgiveness come with the equipment. Interestingly, Buddhists ask us to overcome some of these possibly natural attitudes, like anger, so theoretically they could say the same about whatever sublimated desire is expressed by karmic ideas that the universe will pay back the good and the bad eventually. Actually, Goodman (2009) recommends something like this sort of adjustment in our retributive attitudes in *Consequences of Compassion*. Because all earthly mammals so far studied have what I am calling karmic impulses, I am inclined to say of the disposition to “karma-tize” human action what P. F. Strawson said of induction: it comes with the equipment. Something like it or the impulse it expresses is likely to show up across all human forms of life. So, there is a certain amount of psychological realism in accepting and acknowledging the naturalness of what I call “tame karma,” and also recognizing its untame form as a projection or extension of certain natural wishes, hopes, desires into an unwarranted, hypertrophic belief.

Buddhist consequentialism. Goodman says too many subtle things on this topic both here and in his wonderful book *Consequences of Compassion* for me to do justice to in the few pages I have. Some quick comments: First, I do offer a “complex and heavily hedged” picture of the moral landscape both inside Buddhism and in general. As I say in my response to Bronwyn Finnigan below, I don’t have an ethical theory and thus do not promote one in the book. In part, this is because I doubt that what we conceive of the moral domain is one thing, that what we conceive of as falling in the moral domain is the same as other traditions do, that there is a single source of value, moral or otherwise, and so on. This is one reason why in the book I say that I see my analysis of the eudaimonistic components of Buddhism as compatible with Goodman’s, also very complex and hedged view. Like Goodman, I think that “consequentialist theories are not incompatible with eudaimonism” or even better (for his view), most good consequentialist theories provide a theory of human flourishing even if they do not locate the source of morality in human flourishing. Goodman’s view in his book is that the deep source of Buddhist morality is in the agent-neutral fact that suffering is bad. My suffering is no more or less important than anyone else’s. And thus, the Buddhist view is not agent centered.

Of course, as often occurs in this dialectic, there are objections to the very idea of agent neutral reasons, as well as to the demand for what Goodman calls “foundational justification” or, what is different, there may be acceptance of the agent neutral reasons for great compassion as the source of our moral obligations, and then also the acknowledgment of various practical considerations for allowing various agent centered prerogatives, including attending first and primarily to one’s own flourishing and that of one’s loved ones. I think naturalized Buddhism will have to allow some such agent centered prerogative since if enlightenment is real, if there is truth, conventional and ultimate to be known, and if flourishing is possible the units that realize these goods are always people, sentient beings, Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and such. The sources may be impersonal but the realizers are not—indeed they cannot be—impersonal states of affairs. Again, this is a reason to resist full on emptiness for persons.

Meditation. In response to my wondering, my skepticism about the connection between attaining wisdom about no-self and becoming less, even unselfish, Goodman suggests that knowing no-self is insufficient to make one unselfish. But seeing that, or experiencing that, there is no-self, that my self evaporates, will (or might) make me less selfish. He proposes that it is part of the work of the combination of resting meditation (*shamatha*) and insight meditation (*vipassana*) to “start to see through the illusion of self, [so that] then you can begin to relate to the world in a selfless way.” He says this might be like going through much of your life in a flow state.” And it might alter one’s “acceptance window,” making one happier.

This is all possible. It is even as Goodman says testable. But here's the rub.

Hypothesis One. Meditation allows one to see through the illusion of the self and this makes one less selfish, even unselfish.

Hypothesis Two. Meditation *alters* one's states of consciousness so that one comes to experience oneself as less self-y, and this makes one less selfish, even unselfish.

Goodman, like most Buddhists, frame things in terms of Hypothesis One. But Hypothesis Two is a possibility (there are many others) and it does not require that the self is an illusion, which is seen as such. It only requires that one's attachments be mitigated, mellowed, moderated, possibly overcome by altering consciousness and one's attitudes, possibly by producing a hallucination that makes it seem as if there is no-self even though there is a self. The first hypothesis is that there is an illusion that is seen as such and this has good moral effects. The second is that good moral effects are produced by inducing a false view. This would be bad because having false views is naughty according to Buddhists, and producing and encouraging them is even worse.

The point is that there is still a burden on the Buddhist to explain whether the work of meditation involves the self being truly and correctly seen and experienced as illusory, insubstantial, or empty that is the key or whether it involves altering consciousness so that even though the self is no illusion, it seems so or at least that one's attitudes and attachments are seen as less compelling and one's connection to others is magnified. I favor the second hypothesis. But it is yet another terrific topic for ongoing comparative philosophical, psychological, and anthropological discussion.

REPLY TO BRONWYN FINNIGAN

Bronwyn Finnigan's paper "Examining the Bodhisattva's Brain" (2014) leaves me feeling as if I am a character in a John Malkovitch film based on Stanley Fish's classic, "Is there a Text in this Room?" where Fish explores the idea that the reader, not the author, gets to determine what any text says or means. I am the character shouting from deep down some rabbit hole: "There is a text in this room. I wrote it!" In some cases, Finnigan's interpretations are not about the interpretation of my writing, where that would credibly require a hermeneutic, a shared form of life, and so on. Some are disputes about my typing, about what words are printed on the page. This is unfortunate because Finnigan and I do have disagreements about the nature and status of analytic philosophy in the style of conceptual analysis, which she admires more than I do, versus naturalistic philosophy, which I admire more than she does, and about the proper procedure for successfully executing the sort of anachronistic, ethnocentric, and cosmopolitan project

I undertake. But these disagreements are hard to find beneath what is a strong misreading of *The Bodhisattva's Brain*.

I need to start by clearing away the falsehoods and misrepresentations as they used to be called before postmodernism, in part because the false is the enemy of the true, and in part because the falsehoods motivate and energize Finnigan's single, almost clear, argument for what different book she thinks I should have written, one that she is positioned to write and that I encourage her to write. Finnigan writes, "the *only textual evidence provided for his <Flanagan's> characterization of Buddhist thought is the popular discourses of the Dalai Lama*" (my italics). And she laments the lack of reference to "*credible sources*" (my italics). Amazingly, she writes, "*Flanagan does not make direct appeal to any Buddhist philosophical literature, whether historical or contemporary*, of which there is a considerable amount" (my italics). And she suggests that ignoring completely this philosophical literature is at the root of my complaint that the Buddhist philosophical tradition lacks rigor.

The first claim is just false. I discuss, refer to, and depend primarily on the Pali Canon, and on commentators as diverse as Nagarjuna, Dharmakirti, Santideva, and Tsongkapa for my characterization of Buddhist thought.

Second, as for not citing "credible sources," Finnigan does not say who the credible sources are or might be, but it would be very odd to think that José Cabezon, Peter Harvey, Steven Collins, Edward Conze, Jay Garfield, Damien Keown, Mark Siderits, Charles Goodman, Georges Dreyfus, Bob Thurman, Thupten Jinpa, Wapola Sri Rahula, Paul Williams, and Donald S. Lopez Jr., all of whom are discussed, engaged, and referred to, are either not in fact referred to in the book that refers to them, or that they each individually and all taken together lack credibility as sources.

Third, I do not think, nor do I say or suggest that Buddhist philosophy is not rigorous. It is. Indeed, a central message of *The Bodhisattva's Brain* is that Buddhist philosophy, especially when naturalized, passes inspection for high epistemic standards, where what counts as high epistemic standards nowadays includes scientific methods, and not only conceptual rigor. What can't pass such inspection are certain aspects of Buddhist soteriology, and likely some parts of the Buddhist metaphysics of the self. These are the parts of Buddhism that I argue will need to be naturalized if the many credible insights of Buddhist metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics are to make their way more deeply into Western secular precincts.

These misreadings matter, as do several related substantive ones, all of which taken together fuel Finnigan's confident insistence that I should have written a different book, and devoted myself to an exploration of the Madyhamaka philosophical tradition that she works on, especially as it pertains to debates about no-self, emptiness, and the distinction between conventional and ultimate truth. One reason Finnigan thinks I need plumb more deeply into Madyhamaka is because I deploy the

concepts of “causes” and “constituents” when speaking about flourishing, and the Madyhamaka tradition has things to say about such concepts. But here Finnigan’s own scholastic tendencies are showing. I use the concepts of “causes” and “constituents” (as well as the related concepts of “components” and “effects”) as they are used in the first instance in contemporary cognitive science, in the way, for example, Mill’s methods invite, or the way talk of dependent and independent variables is deployed in mind science, or the way such terms are used in the widely accepted interventionist account of causation, where *c* is a cause of *e* just in case were *c* different, so would *e* be different. The conversation I am trying to promote in *The Bodhisattva’s Brain* among Buddhists, scientific naturalists, and secular minded people impressed by science will not be advanced by engaging classical Buddhist mereology and classical Buddhist metaphysics of causation. Second, and most importantly, according to Finnigan, I need Madyhamaka because I read Buddhism as concerned with the flourishing of persons while also favoring Buddhist reductionism or, what is different, eliminativism about persons. These two are in tension, possibly inconsistent. Madyhamaka might help rescue me from tying myself in knots or courting inconsistency.

Now it is true that I would have a serious problem with my own positive view if I interpreted Buddhism as concerned with flourishing of persons or sentient beings and also thought that there were in fact no persons or sentient beings to flourish. But I don’t think that. Finnigan says that I “accept a reductive characterization of the Buddhist metaphysics of personal identity.” I am a great admirer of Siderits’s work on Buddhist reductionism (2003), but I never “accept a reductive characterization” in *The Bodhisattva’s Brain*. In chapter 5, the chapter devoted exclusively to the problem of selfhood or personhood and where Madyhamaka views are plumbed, I am crystal clear that I endorse, for reasons of scientific naturalism and psychobiological realism, an Aristotelian view of personhood. I explicitly argue against and reject the reductive and eliminativist views that Finnigan pins on me in the section called “resisting *anatman* extremism.” So when Finnigan worries that the tension between “a ‘Lockean’ reductive ontology and an—‘Aristotelian’—eudaimonistic ethical theory is likely not to be lost on the contemporary Western metaphysician or ethicist,” I agree. That is why I spend most of the book exploring that very tension. But since I explicitly reject the reductive view (and the eliminativist one) I don’t have the problem she thinks I have. And in any case, the idea that going internal to Buddhist debates, entering the hermetic rooms of Buddhist scholasticism, will clarify the stakes here is implausible. The debates Finnigan wishes me to seek clarification from are, to my eye, philosophical black holes, that is, good examples of where language reaches its limits, concepts lose their grip, and debate becomes interminable. I am an analytic philosopher, but it is 100% clear throughout the book that the main epistemology I bring to bear to examine Buddhist thought is what

is broadly known as the scientific method, and the substantive theories of persons and their minds that contemporary evolutionary biology, the human sciences, and naturalistic philosophy of mind offer. Much of analytic philosophy—analytic metaphysics, some types of conceptual analysis, for example—is science-unfriendly. (I sometimes call this kind of analytic philosophy “Australian Rules” philosophy, although David Lewis is partly responsible for its current popularity as a style.) I do philosophy in the spirit of Quinean style analytic philosophy—as a philosophical naturalist with the substantive commitments that go with that set of commitments.

The extent to which my interpretation of Buddhism is eudaimonistic and the degree to which my preferred ethical conception is eudiamonistic is a matter of some dispute. Let me try to settle the matter. Buddhism, like every contender ethical theory, offers a picture of flourishing. Buddhism is eudaimonistic in that sense. The “is” is the “is” of predication, as in “Kareem is tall.” But it is not a eudaimonistic theory in the strict sense, where the “is” is the “is” of identity, as in “Kareem is Kareem.” Indeed, no theory with a soteriology or eschatology that I can think of is, or, I am inclined to say, can be eudaimonistic in the strict sense. The reason is this: both the ground that determines what a good/flourishing life is, the source of value, and the payoff for living one—the *summum bonum*—are otherworldly, transcendent, supernatural, or some such. This is why Aristotle may be a eudaimonist in the strict sense, but Aquinas is not. All I claim is that classical Buddhism has a eudaimonistic conception inside itself, which can be extracted from the claws of the nonnaturalistic soteriology to which it is normally attached. Doing so reveals ethical resources that should appeal to naturalists.

Furthermore, the only similarity I am confident of with Aristotle, once the nonnaturalistic soteriology of Buddhism is lopped off, is structural. Both have a theory of what it means to live a good human life. And they are, as I discuss at length, quite possibly rivals, since the virtues recommended differ substantially. These are the reasons why I say that my analysis is perfectly compatible with Charles Goodman’s (2009) argument that the good, impersonally conceived, is the source of value for Buddhism, or at least it is compatible with his reconstruction of Buddhism naturalized as a kind of consequentialism. If I were a eudaimonist I wouldn’t say this, and if classical Buddhism was eudaimonistic, as Damien Keown (1992) may think, I couldn’t say it. Finnigan thinks I need to be reminded that there is controversy about imposing a meta-ethic, especially on one of our main contenders, on Buddhism. I know this, which is why I say it, and why I don’t do it, that is, impose a meta-ethic. I am puzzled by her puzzlement over the idea that an ethical theory might combine elements of eudaimonistic virtue theory, consequentialism, and even deontology. Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill have theories of virtue. There is character consequentialism, perfectionist consequentialism, motive consequentialism, all

sorts of hybrid nonreductive, pluralistic, ethical theories on offer. I, as well as P. J. Ivanhoe, Charles Goodman, Samuel Scheffler, Peter Railton, Nancy Sherman, Martha Nussbaum, and many others, advance such theories or nontheories.

In closing, I am grateful that my three critics have given me a chance to engage in exactly the sort of profitable dialogue I hoped that *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized* might engender. We live in the early part of the twenty-first century among and amidst various images—secular, scientific, spiritual, and various admixtures of these images. The project of integrating these images, of making them consistent and consilient in our time, as well as open to expansion, elaboration, and enrichment in the future, is no small or easy task. Buddhist metaphysics, epistemology, psychology, and ethics show depth, patience, and intellectual humility that make for an ideal conversation partner as we continue the project of understanding who and what we are, what our place is in the larger scheme, and, most importantly, how to locate meaning, live well, and achieve the various excellences that are open to finite creatures like ourselves.

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