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# Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters To Philosophy



## Synopsis

This is a book for scholars of Western philosophy who wish to engage with Buddhist philosophy, or who simply want to extend their philosophical horizons. It is also a book for scholars of Buddhist studies who want to see how Buddhist theory articulates with contemporary philosophy. *Engaging Buddhism: Why it Matters to Philosophy* articulates the basic metaphysical framework common to Buddhist traditions. It then explores questions in metaphysics, the philosophy of mind, phenomenology, epistemology, the philosophy of language and ethics as they are raised and addressed in a variety of Asian Buddhist traditions. In each case the focus is on philosophical problems; in each case the connections between Buddhist and contemporary Western debates are addressed, as are the distinctive contributions that the Buddhist tradition can make to Western discussions. *Engaging Buddhism* is not an introduction to Buddhist philosophy, but an engagement with it, and an argument for the importance of that engagement. It does not pretend to comprehensiveness, but it does address a wide range of Buddhist traditions, emphasizing the heterogeneity and the richness of those traditions. The book concludes with methodological reflections on how to prosecute dialogue between Buddhist and Western traditions. "Garfield has a unique talent for rendering abstruse philosophical concepts in ways that make them easy to grasp. This is an important book, one that can profitably be read by scholars of Western and non-Western philosophy, including specialists in Buddhist philosophy. This is in my estimation the most important work on Buddhist philosophy in recent memory. It covers a wide range of topics and provides perhaps the clearest analysis of some core Buddhist ideas to date. This is landmark work. I think it's the best cross-cultural analysis of the relevance of Buddhist thought for contemporary philosophy in the present literature."-C. John Powers, Professor, School of Culture, History & Language, Australian National University

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"His valuable new book admirably serves its purpose of helping analytic philosophers understand some of what Buddhists have written about the very questions they study. In fact, *Engaging Buddhism* goes further, giving strong reasons to believe that contemporary physicalist philosophers of mind could strengthen their positions in important ways by drawing on Buddhist thought and that analytic philosophers more generally can find valuable insights in the Buddhist tradition. This book has many strengths. The writing is crisp, technically precise, yet elegant and engaging... Garfield has done a wonderful service in producing this impressive and intriguing book, which is always interesting and often enjoyable to read and which can open up new philosophical prospects equally well for both long-standing and newly minted students of Buddhist thought." --Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews Online "This book has been much needed, even if many have not realized the need. Writing from a position of deep engagement with Buddhism and philosophy, Garfield (philosophy, Yale, Smith, and elsewhere) does an excellent job explicating central Buddhist concepts and relating them to Western contemporary and historical philosophical concepts and problems.. Clearly, the book is rich in terms of breadth...Garfield does an excellent job of balancing rigor, breadth, and depth while bringing together two very different traditions. And he is careful to engage a variety of Buddhist perspectives...Highly recommended." -- Choice "Engaging Buddhism is the most impressive, insightful, informative, and accessible book I've ever read on Buddhist philosophy...is one of the most significant contributions to the Western reception of and engagement with Buddhist philosophy. This book is a must read for Western philosophers, but also for Buddhist philosophers who attempt to engage Western philosophy, as this blueprint is bi-directional." -- Science, Religion & Culture "Garfield's book is a thought provoking and illuminating engagement with (mainly Mahayana) Buddhist thought. The chapters on metaphysics, the self, epistemology and ethics are the most interesting ones...Another asset of the book is that it moves beyond a mere scholarly discussion of (the history of) Buddhist ideas. Chances are high we will see more books engaging with non-Western thought in the future. Garfield's book is a good example of successfully doing this." -- Metapsychology Online Reviews "...Garfield engages with a wide range of thinkers such as Hume, Kant, and Heidegger, in order to show the relevance of Buddhist thought to the

history of philosophy itself. By engaging complex Buddhist thoughts in terms of dialogues relevant to contemporary western philosophy, Garfield takes the initial steps necessary to broaden philosophy's global understanding in order to make cross-cultural philosophical study a reality." -- Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal "The arguments in Engaging Buddhism are primarily directed toward professional scholars of Western philosophy, but the implications of Garfield's work are far-reaching. His concise presentations of Buddhist views on topics such as interdependence, emptiness, and the mind are useful for any student or practitioner of Buddhism who wishes to understand such topics more deeply and in a broader context. Garfield's discussion of emptiness in the third chapter is particularly useful for the student of Buddhism." -- Buddhadharma: The Practitioner's Quarterly

Jay L. Garfield is Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Professor of Humanities and Head of Studies in Philosophy at Yale-NUS College, Professor of Philosophy at the National University of Singapore, Recurrent Visiting Professor of Philosophy at Yale University, Doris Silbert Professor in the Humanities and Professor of Philosophy at Smith College, Professor of Philosophy at Melbourne University and Adjunct Professor of Philosophy at the Central University of Tibetan Studies. Professor Garfield teaches and pursues research in the philosophy of mind, foundations of cognitive science, logic, philosophy of language, Buddhist philosophy, cross-cultural hermeneutics, ethics and epistemology.

This book is extraordinarily clear and valuable in the manner in which it brings Buddhist philosophy into encounter with Western philosophy, too often just known as "philosophy" as though it were the real deal and other approaches merely ethnic expressions. The manner in which Buddhist philosophy both meets and diverges from Western philosophy is fascinating and the outcome is a greatly enriched horizon. I recommend this book highly.

I am not sure what audience this is intended for. There is some interface with western philosophy, but it deals mainly with an overview of different subjects, such as epistemology, in Buddhism. I am enjoying this book, it is easy enough to read and it contains enough new information to stay interesting.

This book is a wonderful summary and explanation of Buddhist philosophy presented in the context of the corresponding western philosophical topics. Powers' rear cover review captures the impact beautifully. I would add that "non-scholars" will also benefit greatly from reading and contemplating

this book. While spiced with technical terms, the topics are presented so lucidly that an amateur like me didn't have to resort to a dictionary. The two page summary of action theory and karma is sublime. And so too the entire ethics chapter. For a thoughtful practitioner the book will remind us of, and reinforce, those teachings and commentaries which drew us to the Dharma. For me it was manna, each page nourishing and deepening my understanding of topics near and dear to me.

Garfield has written a good introduction to basic Buddhist concepts such as suffering, primal confusion (ignorance), dependent origination (causation), emptiness and, last and foremost, the self. His brief survey of the history of Buddhist schools is handy knowledge. I much appreciate the tie-ins with western philosophers, who have in the past and are now considering many of the same questions that concern Buddhist philosophers past and present. Though I have not yet finished reading the text, I have been recommending it to my thoughtful and curious friends.. As a Zen practitioner, I am delighted to discover ancient sources in Buddhist thought that underlie Zen practice. As a non-philosopher (though the book casts an interesting shadow on this assertion), the discussion of philosophical concepts takes my focused attention and careful consideration to grasp its meaning. Well written, occasionally evoking smiles and chuckles, it is not a dry tome. Rather, I call it a passionate presentation of profound ideas.

A wonderful book, the heart of the Mahayana. I am surprised it was not re-translated earlier.

1: no structure to the book, we're jumping around in a free-association style according to the whims of the author. tibet, nagarjuna, abhidharma etc. all thrown into the same chapter. far from being carefully contrasted, they are just shoved in there, often without any qualification.2: many of the parallels to European philosophy are lazily presented, e.g. "the parallels to Hume are startling here," again without qualification. uhm, they may be, but you're the author of the book - you're supposed to argue your opinion and give us through the parallel with explications and quotes.3: the language is loose and again, lazy. some of the phrases he uses make no sense if you think about them but sound okay at face value. as any academic writer knows, writing with looseness is easy, writing with precision is hard. which of the two do you expect from an Oxford UP book priced at 30 bucks?

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