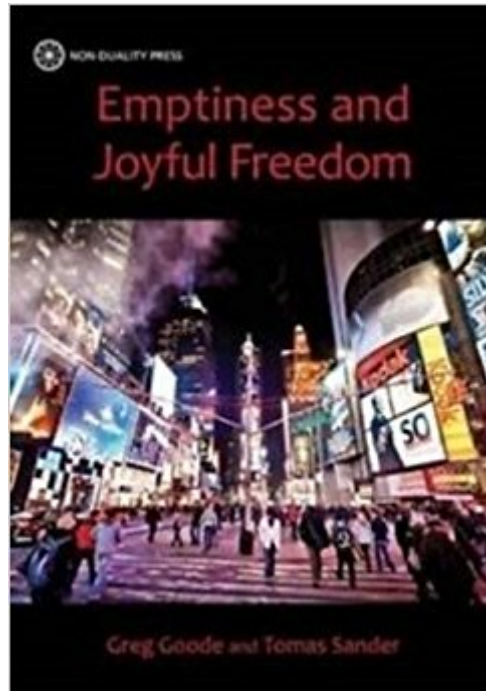




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Emptiness And Joyful Freedom



Synopsis

The pinnacle of Buddhism's understanding of reality is the emptiness of all things. Exploring reality towards the realization of emptiness is shockingly radical. It uncovers an exhilarating freedom with nowhere to stand, while engendering a loving joy that engages the world. This path-breaking book employs the emptiness teachings in a fresh, innovative way. Goode and Sander don't rely solely on historical models and meditations. Instead, they have created over eighty original meditations on the emptiness of the self, issues in everyday life, and spiritual paths. These meditations are guided both by Buddhist insights and cutting-edge Western tools of inquiry, such as positive psychology, neuroscience, linguistic philosophy, deconstruction, and scepticism. The result is a set of liberating and usable tools for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

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Customer Reviews

Dr. Greg Goode is known for a unique combination of penetrating insight, comfort with both Eastern and Western sources, and a down-to-earth sense of humor. He is the author of *Standing as Awareness*, *Nondualism in Western Philosophy* and many popular articles. Greg studied psychology at the University of California, and philosophy at the University of Rochester and the University of Tübingen. He became drawn to self-inquiry initially through the work of Brand Blanshard, George Berkeley, the Chinmaya Mission and Arsha Vidya Gurukulam. Greg's spiritual search came to its sweet conclusion through the Direct-Path influences of Francis Lucille and Sri Atmananda. Greg is a member of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association and

serves as the technical consultant for their peer-reviewed journal, Philosophical Practice.

The book is smilingly subversive, full of insights and new-to-the-field material. Co-writer, Greg Goode carries on his excellent outline of the insubstantiality of the felt sense of containment within a world, within a self, and as an object among objects he began in his last book, *The Direct Path*. However, in my opinion *The Direct Path* is the more consistent, insightful and soteriological (mind healing at the root level) working manual. Much of *Emptiness and Joyful Freedom* seems to derive from *The Direct Path* and I frequently felt confusion with what appeared to be a re-envisioning of the Non-Dual Awareness approach into the Emptiness approach. In the *Direct Path* the reader is skillfully led to see the non-realist nature of any object with direct seeing. In this book deconstruction seems to be presented more intellectually. That said, the many meditations (active inquiries) presented can definitely stimulate a sense of lightness of being, burdened less from the weight of self-narrative. Also the reader can come to see that objectivity is an illusion (though of pragmatic value) created by misperceiving a point of focus in an infinite web of codependent appearances. The book features Anti-Essentialism in all its aspects, which claims no representation can ever be shown to be grounded in an ultimate reality (which by the way does not lead to Relativism). Maybe it's inevitable with anti-essentialism that essentialist type arguments are sometimes used to back up claims. In this book a prominent example is the use of Thomas Metzinger's theory, whereby the brain is presented, uncritically, in a realist way to show that its supposed creation of consciousness is an illusion. Along with the brain's "really realness" the unconscious is also, at times presented inconsistently. In a realist manner at times and simply as conventional linguistic device at others. In the book there is much warning of falling into nihilism with the Western approach; however Scientific Materialism doesn't just lead potentially to nihilism, rather it is nihilistic in its very nature. Hence Metzinger's referring to the personal human as a "biological ego machine." AKA the Meat Robot of popular culture. There's nothing empty, light or free about this dominant ideology in mainstream Western thinking of the 19th and 20th centuries. By the way there is a long history of exceptional science carried out by scientists who have not accepted the metaphysical assumptions of materialism. Rupert Sheldrake is a contemporary example - *Science Set Free: 10 Paths to New Discovery*. In the chapter, "Refuting the self - not too much not too little", the reader is cautioned to follow a middle path between an essentialist self and a nihilistic extreme interpretation of emptiness that would propose eliminating even the 'conventional' self. The conventional self is likened to the 'self' of a computer when we say our computer didn't want to start today. The problem is it's hard to see how a line could be drawn in the sand. What room, in such wholesale deconstruction as implied

in Emptiness inquiry, is there for the dignity and implicit 'sacredness' of all manifestations of life? Repeatedly, unfindability is equated with nonexistence. But it would seem to be going too far to state that unfindability of inherent reality by the means available is the same as saying that the thing sought is nonexistent. We can never be sure that new means may come available some day. Emptiness and unfindability is then unknowability, an abiding mystery as to our own nature as well as the nature of all things. Clearly the unknowable, whatever it is, features livingness, beingness and awareness and in those moments of clear heart and mind, boundless kindness. The book also seems to devolve at times into encouraging seeking of future "better" mind states and personalities, a sure prescription for exquisite misery if misunderstood, which it is usually. Much of the gift of the Western approach is its rebellious potential for freedom, showing that meditation and spiritual living can really be active and engaged, does not need sanctioning from the East, or the ancient/long history argument and can infuse a great variety of lifestyles and activities. Ultimately any ideological contraction Eastern or Western will be seen clearly and rejected in this freedom. Finally, as shown, emptiness defeats itself, is self-emptying. So why not come up with one's own words such as "fullness" completeness so complete as to give no room for divisions, time, separate selves or mythic non-selves, least of all ego machines? Or maybe, with the wonderfully authentic skepticism of Sextus Empiricus whose Ten Modes of Pyrrhonism are outlined in the book, just "?", eyes wide open, living fully without closure? Nothing robotic in that! Maybe the best result of reading a book such as Emptiness and Joyful Freedom is to feel disturbed and illuminated, to float sweetly and argue back in turns, to chew on its contents for weeks after finishing. To have few answers but deeper questions after putting the book down. All language obfuscates as it discloses, so the conversation has no end. It seems important to not simply be fed and illuminated by a spiritual text but to talk back to it. To learn by engagement, to make discoveries intended and unintended by the authors. To this end Emptiness and Joyful Freedom serves well in stimulating such dialog and I look forward to the authors next book.

I am not new to the so called emptiness teachings but I am also not a Guru or holder of any credentials on this subject, but the benefit of investigating them has made me wish to share them. The Buddhist versions of these teachings have been more of the "translation/commentary" style for quite some time, as if any true understanding of them by a western mind was a lost cause. I don't agree with this approach to any kind of teaching at all and Greg Goode has added his efforts to move the whole issue out of a Cultural mentality. A basic investigation of Buddhism and the claim that the Emptiness teachings are its central message is worth looking into, but this book can be a

place to start for anyone. Don't give up on your interest in this stuff, it will take you to yourself, from yourself, and beyond the self altogether, if that is your intent....

This book is quite profound. These authors have taken a complex, often challenging Mahayana Buddhist teaching and made it readily accessible to those who may or may not already have familiarity with the subject of Emptiness. Having been fairly well versed in traditional Advaita and Non-Duality approaches, I made the initial error of presuming that "Emptiness" was synonymous with "Pure Consciousness" or the "Self" as is expressed in Advaita, until I inadvertently stumbled across one of the author's websites with an article that has since showed me otherwise. That said, these teachings have been like a new spiritual discovery and deliver precisely what they intend to deliver when applying the meditations to the emptiness of the inherent existence of all things, both gross and subtle. Understanding what exactly it is that's needing to be refuted, without refuting either too much or too little, preserves the Middle Way approach without falling into either essentialism (that things have an unchanging independent 'essence' to them) nor nihilism (that nothing matters since everything is illusory and nonexistent). And this book makes clear what exactly it is that is being refuted, and what is not. These teachings are additionally a gift to anyone who has ever found themselves at a non-dual satsang where 'conventional' reality and 'ultimately reality' are presented in the improper context, leading one into despair & confusion. Lastly, this too is great complement to the classical Madhyamika Buddhist texts, or simply as a work that stands on its own. Thanks guys.

I've been practicing some forms of meditation for a few years now, and have been reading extensively about Buddhism (as well as other wisdom traditions). More than often, it was hard for me to connect the depth of the philosophy/concepts with the simplicity of meditative practice. This book, bridges the gap marvelously. It is written in a very structured way and connects the dots between the concepts and practice very uniquely. More importantly, going through the book helps one get a "subjective", or experiential grasp of the notion of emptiness and how liberating it is. If you are curious about Buddhism and interested in reaping the benefits of meditation, and adopting anew, healthier perspective on life - this book is for you.

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