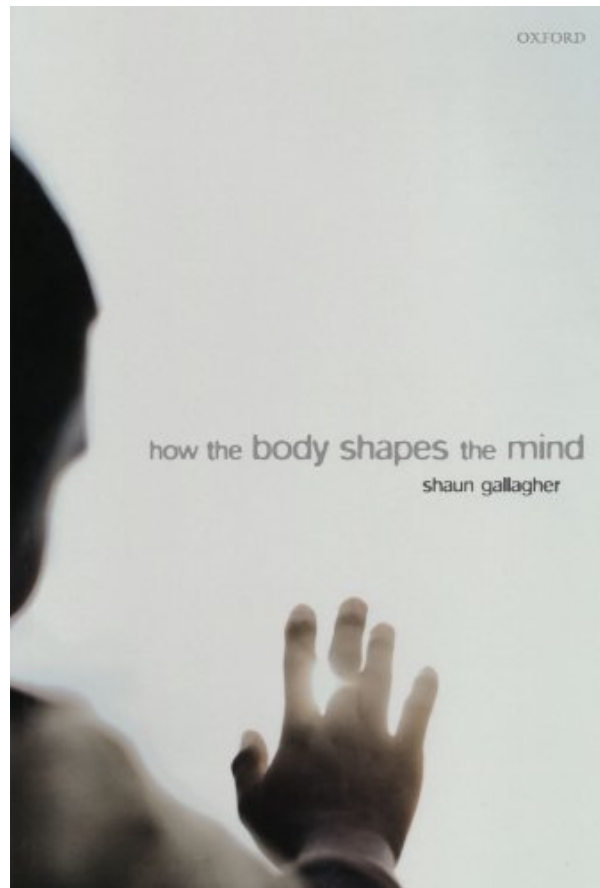
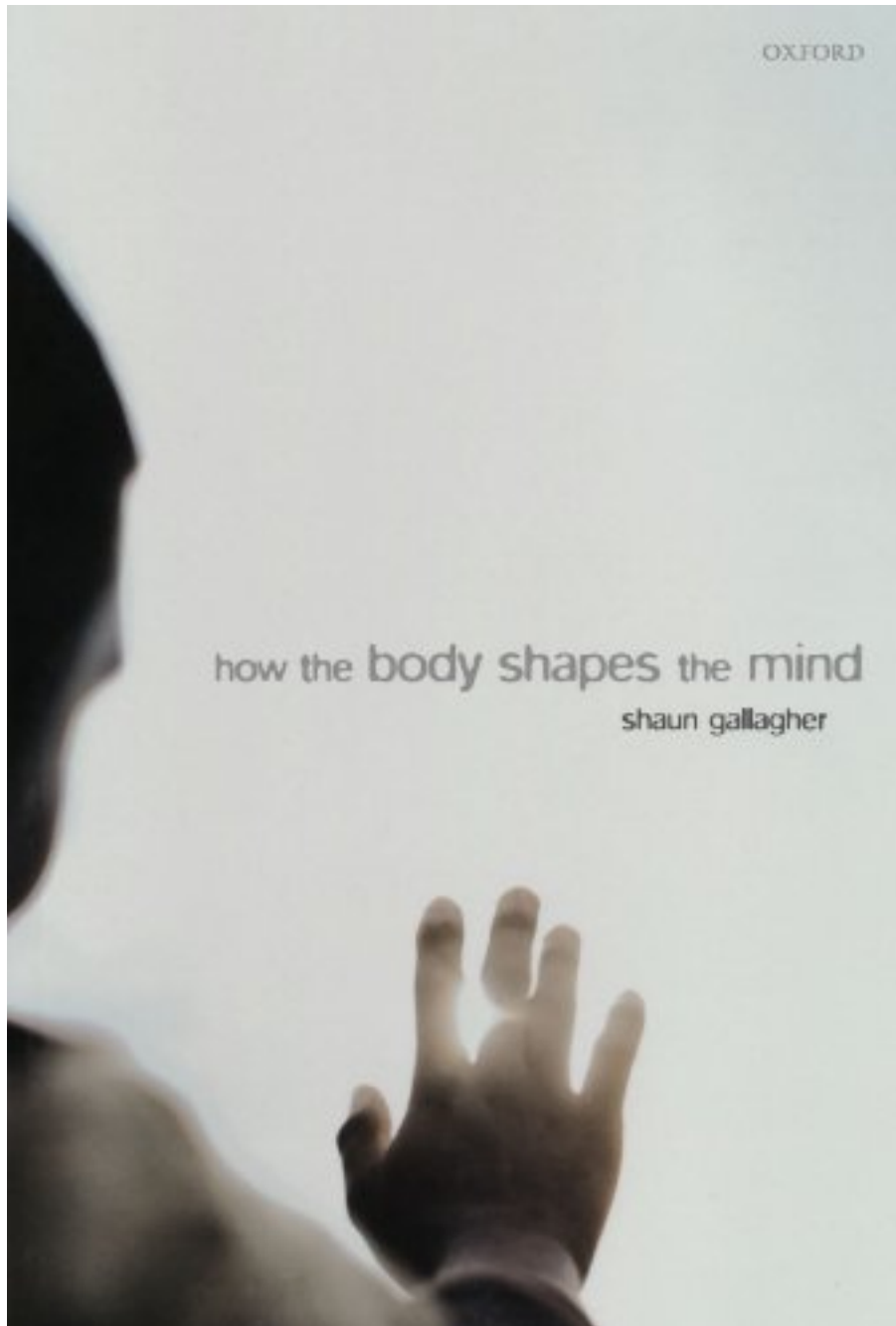


HOW THE BODY SHAPES THE MIND BY SHAUN GALLAGHER



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Review

"Indeed, many researchers will wish they had had this volume before publishing their own work, not because it presents startling new findings that will undermine what has come before, but because the work is so precise, and lays out the terrain so clearly, that it is now possible to see what should have been said all along."--Philosophical Psychology

About the Author

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How the Body Shapes the Mind is an interdisciplinary work that addresses philosophical questions by appealing to evidence found in experimental psychology, neuroscience, studies of pathologies, and developmental psychology. There is a growing consensus across these disciplines that the contribution of embodiment to cognition is inescapable. Because this insight has been developed across a variety of disciplines, however, there is still a need to develop a common vocabulary that is capable of integrating discussions of brain mechanisms in neuroscience, behavioral expressions in psychology, design concerns in artificial intelligence and robotics, and debates about embodied experience in the phenomenology and philosophy of mind. Shaun Gallagher's book aims to contribute to the formulation of that common vocabulary and to develop a conceptual framework that will avoid both the overly reductionistic approaches that explain everything in terms of bottom-up neuronal mechanisms, and inflationistic approaches that explain everything in terms of Cartesian, top-down cognitive states.

Gallagher pursues two basic sets of questions. The first set consists of questions about the phenomenal aspects of the structure of experience, and specifically the relatively regular and constant features that we find in the content of our experience. If throughout conscious experience there is a constant reference to one's own body, even if this is a recessive or marginal awareness, then that reference constitutes a structural feature of the phenomenal field of consciousness, part of a framework that is likely to determine or influence all other aspects of experience. The second set of questions concerns aspects of the structure of experience that are more hidden, those that may be more difficult to get at because they happen before we know it. They do not normally enter into the content of experience in an explicit way, and are often inaccessible to reflective consciousness. To what extent, and in what ways, are consciousness and cognitive processes, which include experiences related to perception, memory, imagination, belief, judgment, and so forth, shaped or structured by the fact that they are embodied in this way?

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Shaun Gllagher teaches in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Central Florida.

Most helpful customer reviews

30 of 31 people found the following review helpful.

A sweet and sour blend of technical writing and great prose: not for the uneducated.

By Joseph Conn

To begin, I must state: Buyer Beware. This text is involved and difficult to follow if you lack background in the field, be it even a class in university. I am currently taking a class that overviews subjects presented herein, and it seems if I were not I would only understand the book on a superficial level. With that said, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* is definitely a must-read for anyone interested in neuroscience, neuropsychology, and any related fields. The author spends a lot of time propping up popular or controversial interdisciplinary concepts from body image to the interconnectivity of the senses to free will itself and deftly taking them apart, rearranging them, and finding wholly new and interesting points of view. The book takes fields as varied as psychology, neurophysiology, and philosophy and weaves a web of facts, studies, and logic to present the author's viewpoint on a number of issues throughout the cognitive sciences and beyond to the philosophy of the mind.

I admit, there are moments in the book where I worried, "why is this book titled `How the Body Shapes the Mind'?" It felt like Gallagher was jumping from topic to disparate topic, with only certain chapters or sections actually pertaining to this overarching theme. However, by the end of each chapter, Gallagher masterfully and with genius execution brings each section into the whole.

The book is set up thematically into two Parts, which are subdivided into Chapters with sub-sections.

First, Gallagher delves into the realm of proprioception and revisits age old topics of body image and body schema. He also presents surprisingly insightful ideas on the nature of language and gestures. In my opinion this part held the most meat (empirical backing), taking two terms with convoluted meanings, and defining them in explicit and logical ways such that he can build and base further information in the book upon it.

To merely define is not enough, according to Gallagher, one must also explain how and why. The author spends a major section of his text describing in absolute detail, often referring back to prior sections in a way that may be defined by some as excessively self-referential (perhaps not to the level of an "infinite regress", but close), the ontological precepts of body schema and body image. This is an admirable way to present information, which presents it in a clear manner which he juxtaposes against extensive research and academic thought. This skillful presentation gives the author sufficient freedom to present new ideas without being hung up on the complications of necessarily testing all aspects of it.

Part 2 of the book leaves the realm of empirical research almost entirely, and focuses primarily philosophy and pathology. Gallagher successfully represents the text in the title. Every chapter leads further into how the body shapes the mind. By the end, the weight of all text bears down on the reader, suffocating them under the breadth and width of the discussion. The text becomes at times tedious, while at others interesting and refreshing. Most of this is due to writing style. The author is a very thorough writer to such an extent that the reader may be bogged down in the details, searching for the final point of the section.

The final chapters of the book take philosophical concepts such as Theory of the Mind and free will. It then takes these concepts, and argues successfully against all prevailing (presented) viewpoints. The deftness of the writing should be applauded. If there ever were a hole or weak spot in the author's own argument, it is exposed, poked, and prodded in kind with the rest. Having no background in either topic, these sections were

of particular interest for their introduction into the concepts, and then subsequent explanation of the body-mind duality and interactions which subsist between them.

As books go, this book is information dense, and definitely food for thought. The sections are ordered in such a manner that one creates a foundation for the next, and information flows bi-directionally, yet smoothly between chapters. The book will change your perspective on how you individually interact with the world, and will make you consider every action, thought, and movement with a new perspective. This book would have been one of those that simply cannot be put down until the end for me, except the flow and ease of reading were interrupted by two things. One, as mentioned earlier, is the distracting level of self-reference to other sections of the book, and the information provided therein. There are one or two studies in that book which were mentioned in sufficient detail to stand alone four or five times. Gallagher's habit of doing this may convince you to skim. Be careful, though, as new points interspersed or at the end of the reiteration may be missed. Second is Gallagher's ubiquitous use of footnotes. Personally, footnotes destroy the flow of a narrative, and make it difficult to keep track of the point throughout a monologue. Worse yet, the footnotes in this text can extend over a couple of pages, and often present lots of information that is integral to the actual book itself, so they cannot be skipped successfully.

Though the book is set up with architectural precision, and a distinctly scientific bend and tone, Gallagher allows himself some artistry. One poetic example from the book: "The body generates a gestural expression. It is, however, another person who moves, motivates, and mediates this process. To say that language moves my body is already to say that other people move me." Read it yourself to find the other gems.

In summary: read this book if the title interests you. The book covers exactly what it says it covers. If you like footnotes, and the character they bring to this book: enjoy. Otherwise I recommend reading them after you've gone through a section. You will find the book much more readable, and thus enlightening. If you don't have \$30, hope that they lower the price down to a more reasonable level, it is definitely worth to buy if you can afford it.

8 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

The most important book yet written on cognition, embodiment, development, and sociality.

By John Townsend

Shaun Gallagher's *How the Body Shapes the Mind* serves as the gold standard for lucidity and persuasiveness of argument in the cognitive sciences and philosophy of mind. This work focuses on embodiment and its essential role in informing and constraining mind(s).

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This book is aimed mainly at workers in the field and in related aspects of brain functioning. It is solid, important and well worth reading.

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