



# Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge

*B. Alan Wallace*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge

*B. Alan Wallace*

## Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge B. Alan Wallace

Science has long treated religion as a set of personal beliefs that have little to do with a rational understanding of the mind and the universe. However, B. Alan Wallace, a respected Buddhist scholar, proposes that the contemplative methodologies of Buddhism and of Western science are capable of being integrated into a single discipline: contemplative science.

The science of consciousness introduces first-person methods of investigating the mind through Buddhist contemplative techniques, such as *samatha*, an organized, detailed system of training the attention. Just as scientists make observations and conduct experiments with the aid of technology, contemplatives have long tested their own theories with the help of highly developed meditative skills of observation and experimentation. Contemplative science allows for a deeper knowledge of mental phenomena, including a wide range of states of consciousness, and its emphasis on strict mental discipline counteracts the effects of conative (intention and desire), attentional, cognitive, and affective imbalances.

Just as behaviorism, psychology, and neuroscience have all shed light on the cognitive processes that enable us to survive and flourish, contemplative science offers a groundbreaking perspective for expanding our capacity to realize genuine well-being. It also forges a link between the material world and the realm of the subconscious that transcends the traditional science-based understanding of the self.

## Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge Details

Date : Published November 1st 2006 by Columbia University Press (first published September 29th 2006)

ISBN : 9780231138345

Author : B. Alan Wallace

Format : Hardcover 256 pages

Genre : Religion, Buddhism, Nonfiction, Psychology, Biology, Neuroscience, Philosophy, Spirituality, Science

 [Download Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscienc ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge B. Alan Wallace**

---

# **From Reader Review Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge for online ebook**

## **Robert Allen says**

I appreciate the insight this book offers regarding what we have missed because of our scientific singular focus. It presents a lot questions in the world of the mind, consciousness, religion, and science. The subtitle "Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge" is a little misleading because the convergence doesn't really happen. Wallace explains partial convergence or spotty convergence.

---

## **Nina says**

I'll be honest, I couldn't get through this whole book without skimming parts of it, but parts of it I did read in detail and the concepts are pretty interesting.

---

## **Alessandro says**

Author believes in Cartesian dualism without adequately addressing logical and metaphysical problems with this view.

---

## **Ella says**

Patient/family shelf

---

## **Kristin says**

This book has some interesting ideas but it's definitely tough to get through.

---

## **Tim says**

This book's primary argument, simplified, is that modern neuroscience should take more seriously the first-hand experience of high-level buddhist contemplatives, or meditators. As someone who knows a little about modern western science and absolutely nothing about Buddhism's meditative practices, I found Mr. Wallace's presentation to be informative and interesting. At the same time, the organization of the text cries out for the services of a hard-hearted editor wielding a large red sharpie.

The book's subject matter is no doubt difficult. The most convincing arguments occurred early in the text, and concerned Mr. Wallace's critique of modern science in general. Choice targets for Mr. Wallace include

the dysfunctional philosophical standpoints between the branches of the hard sciences, the increasingly faith-based claims made by modern scientists, and, especially, the quasi-religious status modern science enjoys in today's society.

More complicated, and somewhat less convincing, is Mr. Wallace's repeated assertion that modern science can and should disconnect itself from one of its most cherished historical dogmas: that it can only study phenomena from a third-person-objective perspective. Despite the plethora of quotes from quantum physicists and early philosopher/mystics and psychologists, it remains hard to see how today's scientists could really and truly "do" science while relying almost solely on the unprovable testimony from high level Buddhist individuals.

Mr. Wallace seems to want to point out that, by acting the way that it does, science is necessarily missing out on some important truths. His arguments to this end seem convincing. However, Mr. Wallace takes it as a given that by "tweaking" science in some fundamental ways, it will have just as much power but more scope, as it were. This is where I get lost in the argument. To me, the tweaks Mr. Wallace proposes would make science not really science any more. For now I prefer to believe the alternative view: that there are some questions science, by reasons of its defining limitations, simply is not built to answer. And these questions are the questions that concern the fundamental truths that are important to every one of us.

I mentioned before that I thought the text was in need of an editor. It is for this reason, despite the interesting subject matter and the great array of research conducted by the author, that I gave it two stars. According to the Goodreads popup, two stars does not mean "bad." It means "It was OK."

I gave it this rating because arguments and statements in the book are not presented in the most compelling manner, and several arguments seem to come around again and again, coming back to bedevil the reader when he thought that the text had moved on to some other issue. In particular, the statement that neuroscientists have no way of measuring consciousness was repeated so many times, and in so many different contexts, that every time it popped up I began to feel I was welcoming back some well-known friend.

Also, there is an entire chapter on the different schools of Buddhism and their history that, while perhaps of interest to someone looking for an introduction to Buddhist history, seems to have little to do with the argument of the book. In fact, this chapter actually takes away from the book's argument. Through many previous chapters, Mr. Wallace labored to convince the reader that Buddhism is not just some mystical mumbo-jumbo, but is actually about something as real as neuroscience is.

To an uninformed reader like myself the chapter on Buddhist history, and especially its snippets of quotes from Buddhist experts, which, to speak frankly, made little or no sense, actually seemed to belie Mr. Wallace's assertion that Buddhism was something that needed to be taken seriously. To be fair, I'm sure these things would make much more sense to someone who'd taken the time to study them more deeply, and in a larger context. But this is not provided for in the book, and so I found that chapter in particular to be in need of some serious work to make it more successful in bolstering the argument for the book's primary audience.

---

## **Sonya Huber says**

Wow. I'm not saying I understood all of it...

---

## **Stephen Antczak says**

Attempts to present itself as a scientific treatise on how the Buddhist contemplative tradition can be used in conjunction with empirical science to discover the nature of consciousness, but indicates that that the nature of consciousness has already been ascertained by "advanced meditators." Essentially, Wallace tries to paint empirical science as being dogmatic and close-minded, and cherry-picks examples and ideas in science to make his point. He also tries to present claims that advanced meditators obtain supernatural powers, such as being able to see the future, read mind, walk through walls, etc. and then attacks empirical science for not taking such claims seriously. He resorts to labeling anything approach to understanding consciousness that does not confirm his assertion that Buddhist meditators have already discovered the nature of consciousness (as a primordial consciousness detached from brains, leading to the "logical conclusion" of reincarnation) as being rooted in idolatry. Apparently he does not detect the irony in this.

It's a shame, because I think the contemplative tradition has a lot to offer in terms of helping people in general, and even in helping empirical science in a lot of ways, but Wallace undermines this with his insistence on promoting the religious "truth" of his Buddhist faith, and working really hard to explain why empirical science, by not affirming his beliefs, is wrong.

---

## **Raven says**

I really wanted to like this book, and looked for it for some time, but it just wasn't the book I had hoped it would be. The author starts from a position of religion and then argues about the flaws of science, rather than starting from "how can we study this aspect of religion scientifically", which is the book I wanted. So his whole first chapter where he's proposing a contemplative science provoked a "THAT'S NOT SCIENCE, THAT'S NOT HOW YOU DO SCIENCE, YOU NEED A TESTABLE HYPOTHESIS AT THE LEAST" and it's hard to get over my twitch there. In the second chapter we're more in agreement... I do think there is, effectively, the job of science (to help us understand the material world around us and how it works) which doesn't encompass all areas of human knowledge. (Art, literature, philosophy, religion....) So I'm sympathetic to the argument that science doesn't give you an answer to "What is best in life?" or "What is good?", but he doesn't stop there, and instead subscribes to the vexingly wrong theory that scientific materialism is itself a religion too... working hypotheses about things we have no known way of knowing are not the same as articles of faith.

50 pages in to a 170 page book, he hasn't even mentioned neuroscience yet, which is pretty irritating for a book subtitled "Where Buddhism and neuroscience converge". I expect there to be some neuroscience, rather than him complaining about the limitations of physics and making analogies about the Big Bang. It's a pity, because he's obviously a smart guy who has done a lot of research and has thought a lot about the history of the development of science and its current place in Western culture. But the parallels that he draws between the vacuum between stars and the inner contemplative vacuum in the mind just aren't persuasive for me. I did like his coverage of Buddhist contemplative traditions better, but given how much I wanted to argue about his characterization of science (which I do know a fair bit about), that made me wonder if an equal dose of skepticism should be applied to his representation of Buddhist history (which I do not know nearly as much about). I was hoping for a book more like "Zen and the Brain", a neurological study of the characteristics of the mind in deep meditation, and comparing the measurable characteristics with the subjective experiences of

the meditators. (I do agree with the author that subjective experiences, in aggregate, can be very valuable in studying the mind! We just need enough of a sample size to be statistically significant, and studies well designed enough to draw the proper correlations.) I should probably just go look and see if the "Zen and the Brain" guy has written anything this century -- I seem to prefer my intersectionality here to start from science rather than starting from religion.

---