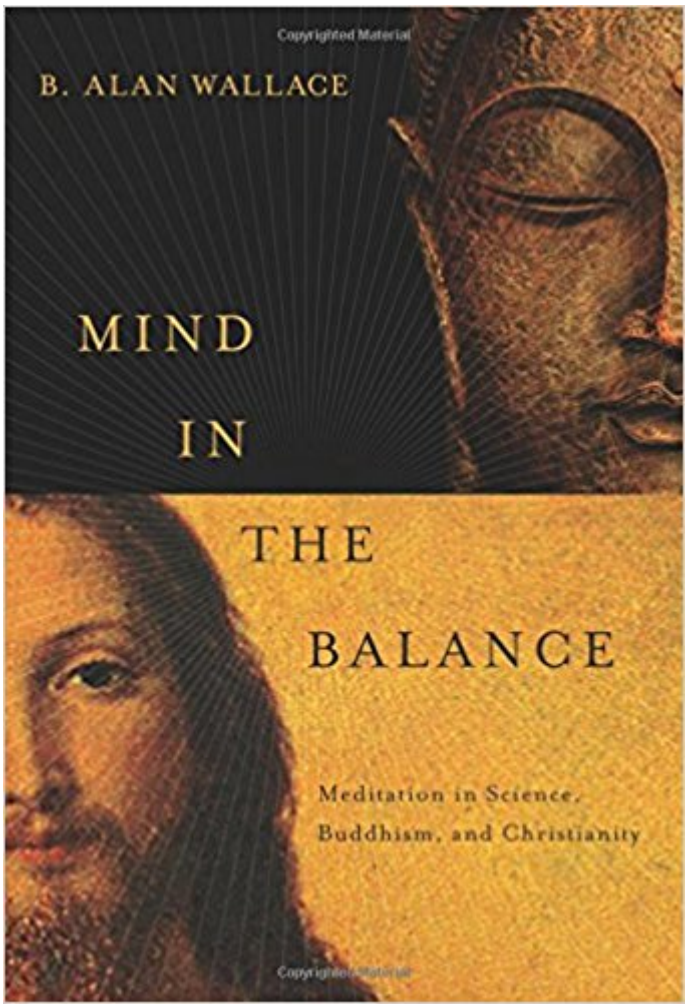
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Mind In The Balance: Meditation In Science, Buddhism, And Christianity (Columbia Series In Science And Religion)



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Synopsis

By establishing a dialogue in which the meditative practices of Buddhism and Christianity speak to the theories of modern philosophy and science, B. Alan Wallace reveals the theoretical similarities underlying these disparate disciplines and their unified approach to making sense of the objective world. Wallace begins by exploring the relationship between Christian and Buddhist meditative practices. He outlines a sequence of meditations the reader can undertake, showing that, though Buddhism and Christianity differ in their belief systems, their methods of cognitive inquiry provide similar insight into the nature and origins of consciousness. From this convergence Wallace then connects the approaches of contemporary cognitive science, quantum mechanics, and the philosophy of the mind. He links Buddhist and Christian views to the provocative philosophical theories of Hilary Putnam, Charles Taylor, and Bas van Fraassen, and he seamlessly incorporates the work of such physicists as Anton Zeilinger, John Wheeler, and Stephen Hawking. Combining a concrete analysis of conceptions of consciousness with a guide to cultivating mindfulness and profound contemplative practice, Wallace takes the scientific and intellectual mapping of the mind in exciting new directions.

Book Information

Series: Columbia Series in Science and Religion
Hardcover: 264 pages
Publisher: Columbia University Press; 1 edition (March 3, 2009)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 0231147309
ISBN-13: 978-0231147309
Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 0.9 x 9.1 inches
Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)
Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 12 customer reviews
Best Sellers Rank: #465,163 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #78 inÃ Â Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Religious Studies > Buddhism #244 inÃ Â Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Religious Studies > Comparative Religion #391 inÃ Â Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Basic Sciences > Neuroscience

Customer Reviews

Wallace is a master, guiding our inquiry into consciousness in exciting new directions. (Shift)Thought-provoking and at times insightful, this volume raises many interesting philosophical

issues and presents many useful references. (Choice)Anyone interested in understanding more about the mind and consciousness would enjoy reading this book. (Marcia Howton Inquiring Mind)

By establishing a dialogue in which the meditative practices of Buddhism and Christianity speak to the theories of modern philosophy and science, B. Alan Wallace reveals the theoretical similarities underlying these disparate disciplines and their unified approach to making sense of the objective world. He begins by exploring the relationship between Christian and Buddhist meditative practices, showing that, though these two faiths differ in their belief systems, their methods of cognitive inquiry provide similar insights into the nature and origins of consciousness. From this convergence Wallace connects the approaches of contemporary cognitive science, quantum mechanics, and the philosophy of the mind, combining a concrete analysis of conceptions of consciousness with a guide to cultivating mindfulness and profound contemplative practice.

I've given this book three stars because I find it difficult to rate. There are two parts to this book: the lesser part on Wallace's discontents with science, and the greater on Buddhism. Wallace also compares Buddhist ideas about meditation to various Christian mystics. Mr. Wallace, who was a monk for fourteen years and has an undergraduate degree in physics and the philosophy of science, as well as a doctorate in religious studies has impressive credentials for both parts of his work.I recommend knowing the basics of Buddhism before reading this book, because Wallace writes assuming some prior knowledge on the part of the reader and his focus is on meditation and mental states. Wallace spends a great deal of the book discussing meditative techniques alternating with chapters explaining the theory.As I read through Wallace's rants against science, I began to wish that I could tell him to sit down, try to calm his mind, and take deep breaths. Inhale peace, exhale frustration. Ask yourself: just why are you so angry? Despite his credentials, he seems to be be on a hobby horse about science, ignoring all nuance. Does he get equally upset about other religions that don't believe in reincarnation? This is best demonstrated by the fact that he will rave against science's materialism, and then tell us about experiments in which scientists study Buddhist practitioners. He is outraged by something one scientist said, and rails against all of science, and a couple of pages later be citing a scientist whose views he likes. He is also frequently speaking of psychology, whose credentials as a science, especially in earlier times, are somewhat dubious, often complaining about already discredited or modified ideas. In some ways, this is odd for an adherent of a religion whose founder said that one should not trust teachers, traditions, or scriptures, but test his ideas empirically and see if they work. I think that the idea of science

studying meditators and other people who enter into altered states of mind is excellent, but I think Wallace would be better off with a more positive attitude toward his prospective partners.

The book deals a devastating blow to the cognitive sciences as practiced today. Wallace argues that cognitive scientists and neuroscientists hold materialism -- the view that consciousness can be explained on a physical level -- as dogma. These fields tend to dismiss what may be learned from direct contemplation of the mind. In a simple and brilliant stroke, Wallace shows materialism to be a faith-based view. Why? The physical basis of consciousness has not been established. Wallace quotes Christoph Koch, a leading neuroscientist at CalTech, who says that the relationship between consciousness and the physical brain remains a mystery.Another deft move in the book is Wallace's revival of introspection as a means of understanding the mind. He revisits the early history of modern psychology when William James viewed introspection as a research method. Later, during the rise of behaviorism and the cognitive revolution, introspection was pooh-poohed as "unscientific." Behaviorists believed anything that could not be observed and measured empirically was not real. Wallace exposes this as nonsense. He suggests that meditation, being a direct experience of the mind, is akin to James' introspection, and has yielded profound insights into consciousness which can inform the cognitive sciences.A third line of inquiry explores whether nature has an absolute reality outside of human perceptions, or instead, nature can only be understood through the language and tools we bring to bear on it (a Phenomenalist view). Wallace highlights the work of distinguished contemporary scholars and scientists who have arrived at the latter view. He ties this view back to the Buddhist teaching that the entire world emerges from the "substrate" and returns to it. It is striking that certain strands of Western science and philosophy have ended up in the same territory as Buddhist contemplative wisdom.Throughout the book, Wallace fishes out prominent and obscure figures from history: Pythagoras, Nicholas of Cusa, Franklin Merrell-Wolff, Richard Feynman, and DÃƒÂ djom Lingpa, to name just a few. Wallace nimbly traverses the fields of history, philosophy, science, and religion.The author's voice is lucid, even-keeled, and confident. But taken as a whole, the book deals a withering blow to certain received truths of Western science. The contrast between the calm lucidity of the prose and the force of its argument is quite pleasing! But the book is much more than a critique of science as we know it; it offers a vision for how a contemplative perspective can enrich scientific inquiry.Wallace's ideas should be considered carefully by cognitive scientists of all stripes, philosophers of science, and anyone interested in the encounter between Western and Buddhist worldviews. I also give it the highest recommendation to any inquiring person who is willing to let his curiosity lead him into new

territory.

Excellent book on how to benefit from the best of the work in modern science,contemplative Christianity, and contemplative Buddhism. For those who follow the Buddhist Dharma there are practical meditation exercises and clear and precise statements about Buddhist theory of Reality and how it works. .

An exquisite piece of work, as all of Prof. Wallace's books are. It is rich in history and sings with clarity. I'd like to thank Prof. Wallace for help with understanding the confluence of these traditions which I have been struggling to piece together by myself. He cleared it all up in the space of a couple hundred pages.

Brilliant analysisOverarching knowledgeIncisive reasoningFree from cliche and repetitionA source of illumination to all those seeking consciousness

I love books from Alan Wallace, he is assertive and keen in his writing. Also I had the opportunity of meeting him in person so he is like his books.

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