

A New Paradigm for Science and Religion in the Twenty-first Century
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Over the past 150 years, scientific materialists have proclaimed that the universe and the nature of human existence can be understood solely in terms of configurations of matter-energy and space-time, which operate under the mindless laws of physics, chemistry, and biology. Nobel prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman, an enthusiastic materialist, declared, “there is nothing that living things do that cannot be understood from the point of view that they are made of atoms acting according to the laws of physics.” Another Nobel Prize-winning physicist and avowed materialist, Steven Weinberg, concluded, “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.” Within this world view, the human species is understood solely as a product of natural selection and genetic mutation. As the biologist Stephen Jay Gould writes, “Evolution is purposeless, nonprogressive, and materialistic.” And finally, the physicist Stephen Hawking sums up the materialist position, “The human race is just a chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet, orbiting around a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a hundred billion galaxies.”

And yet, according to modern cosmology, roughly 68 percent of the universe consists of dark energy and 27 percent consists of dark matter, about which scientists know nothing. In fact, everything ever observed with all our scientific instruments—i.e., all known matter and energy—adds up to less than five percent of the universe. It turns out that known configurations of matter and energy account only for a very small fraction of the universe as we know it. It is then confidently asserted that only physical phenomena can influence other physical phenomena. But lacking conclusive experimental foundations, this is a metaphysical belief rather than an observation based on evidence. And it is a belief that is challenged, as we shall see, by the latest advances in quantum physics.

The very status and knowability of matter and energy have been called into question by some of the same physicists who have so ardently promoted scientific materialism. Richard Feynman acknowledges that the conservation of energy is a mathematical principle, not a description of a concrete mechanism. He adds, “It is important to realize that in physics today, we have no knowledge of what energy *is*.” And with regard to the fundamental nature of particles of matter and energy, Steven Weinberg declares, “In the physicist’s recipe for the world, the list of ingredients no longer includes particles. Matter thus loses its central role in physics. All that is left are principles of symmetry.”

According to the latest advances in theoretical physics, space-time has fared no better. Theoretical physicist Nima Arkani-Hamed recently stated that “many, many separate arguments, all very strong individually, suggest that the very notion of space-time is not a fundamental one. Space-time is doomed.”

The eminent 19th-century biologist Thomas Huxley was a dedicated advocate of Darwin’s theory of evolution and an enormously influential promotor of science as the key to unlocking the mysteries of the universe. But his enthusiasm for science was tempered by his profound skepticism about the idea that everything in the universe could be reduced to matter, force, and their emergent properties. He was particularly dubious of the proposition that consciousness could be understood within a materialist framework, commenting, “it seems to me pretty plain that there is a third thing in the universe, to wit, consciousness, which, in the hardness of my heart or head, I cannot see to be matter or force, or any conceivable modification of either...”

Despite these clear failures of the materialist paradigm, when it comes to the science of the mind, materialism has been accepted and adopted without question. This process began with the rise of behaviorism in the early 20th century and has become entrenched in neuroscience over the past sixty years. Nobel Prize-winning neuropsychiatrist Eric R. Kandel, a seminal figure of 1960s, defined his field in this way: “The task of modern neuroscience is as simple as it is formidable. Stripped of detail, its main aim is to provide an intellectually satisfying set of explanations in cellular and molecular terms of normal mentation: of perception, motor coordination, feeling, thought, and memory. In addition, neuroscientists would ultimately also like to account for the disorders of functions produced by neurological and psychiatric disease.”

In this way, the newly created field of neuroscience did not begin with any groundbreaking discovery pertaining to the mind-body problem, but rather with an article of faith in materialism (more recently re-badged as “physicalism”). This included the assumption that mind and consciousness could be explained as nothing more than functions of the brain. In other words, neuroscience began by covering over the mind-body problem with a leap of faith into reductionist explanations. This is a salient case in point of historian Daniel J. Boorstin’s observation that “illusions of knowledge,” and not mere ignorance, are the greatest impediments to scientific discovery.

This move to the assumed axiom of materialism had immediate and profound implications for how mental health and mental disorders would be understood. For Kandel, mental disorders are purely biological in nature. The brain is understood as a “complex biological organ possessing immense computational capability: it constructs our sensory experience, regulates our thoughts and emotions, and controls our actions.” In Kandel’s explanation, the brain is responsible for simple behaviors like running and eating as well as complex, quintessentially human processes, like thinking, speaking and creating works of art. Kandel concludes, “Looked at from this perspective, our mind is a set of operations carried out by our brain. The same principle of unity applies to mental disorders.” According to this demoralizing worldview, it is the brain that is the agent of all our thoughts, intentions, and behavior. Humans, as sentient beings, are not responsible for our actions or for mental disease or for our well-being. As people, we are recast as merely illusory, epiphenomenal functions of our brains.

This belief in a purely physical explanation has been the working hypothesis of neurology, pharmacology, and psychiatry for the past fifty years. And yet, if it were true, exponential advances in the knowledge of the brain and in the development of psycho-pharmaceutical drugs should have yielded a plethora of medications that cure an ever-widening array of mental disorders. But in fact, so far *there is not a single psycho-pharmaceutical drug that can actually cure a mental disease*. For sure, many medications can suppress and subdue the symptoms of mental distress, much as pain-killers can suppress the symptoms of physical disease and injuries. And this is valuable in alleviating suffering. But just as it is a mistake to believe that opioids are “treating” physical ailments, so it is irrational to suggest that pharmaceutical drugs are “treating” mental illnesses. At best they can assist in the better management of symptoms, but as an actual cure they are largely a chimera.

Donald Hoffman is one of only a few neuroscience researchers who candidly acknowledges the failure of physicalists to solve the mind-body problem or reveal the nature of consciousness. He summarizes this failure as follows: “Now, Huxley knew that brain activity and conscious experiences are correlated, but he didn’t know why. To the science of his day, it was a mystery. In the years since Huxley, science has learned a lot about brain activity, but the

relationship between brain activity and conscious experiences is still a mystery.” Hoffman also notes that the physicalist assumptions of most contemporary cognitive scientists are based on antiquated, 19th-century mechanistic physics, which have been widely repudiated by advances in physics over the past 120 years.

One of the most brilliant advances in theoretical physics was proposed by John Archibald Wheeler, who applied the principles of quantum physics to the universe as a whole, resulting in the new field of “quantum cosmology.” Wheeler postulated that a measurement is only a true observation of the physical world when it imparts *meaningful information*, signifying a transition from the realm of mindless stuff to the realm of conscious knowledge. Rather than thinking of the universe as matter in motion, he proposed that one could regard it as an information-processing system, requiring the participation of conscious observers who are aware of such information. One startling discovery from quantum cosmology was that for the universe at large, time itself disappeared from the equations: the universe is frozen. Only when an “observer-participant” is introduced, with a perceptual reference point in space-time, does time and a changing universe manifest. The evolution of the universe can occur only when an observer identifies “now,” thereby establishing both past and future relative to that present moment. But past and future exist only relative to this observer-participant; they do not exist objectively.

Here, it is crucial to distinguish between information as a purely objective quality of a physical system, inversely related to entropy, and meaningful (or semantic) information that refers to something outside itself. There is no physical instrument that can detect whether a sound, for example, is a phrase that has a referent and is therefore meaningful. Sounds become words and phrases only for conscious language-users, and the *meaning* of those sounds has no physical characteristics. The very category of “physical” is created on the basis of non-physical, meaningful information. And there can be no doubt that such information has causal efficacy in influencing the minds and behavior of human beings. Our thoughts, intentions, emotions, and desires are but a small sampling of other non-physical, natural phenomena that have causal efficacy in the natural world.

Physicist Christopher Fuchs, founder of the Qbist interpretation of quantum theory, took a step beyond quantum cosmology by asserting, “Qbism...treats the wave function as a description of a single observer’s subjective knowledge. It resolves all of the quantum paradoxes, but at the not insignificant cost of anything we might call ‘reality,’ [e.g.,] a single objective reality is an illusion.” His ground-breaking theory abandons the tradition, traced back to the ancient Greeks, of thinking about the world in purely objective terms, without the involvement of a “knowing subject.” “QBism,” he writes, “goes against that grain by saying that quantum mechanics is not about how the world is without us; instead it’s precisely about us in the world. The subject matter of the theory is not the world or us but us-within-the-world, the interface between the two.”

Materialists commonly promote science as the only viable way to fathom the whole of the universe and of human existence. But there is nothing scientific about scientific materialism any more than there is anything religious about religious dogmatism. Thomas Huxley was outspoken in his disdain for the tendency to pit science and religion against each other as if they were fundamentally antagonistic: “Of all the miserable superstitions which have ever tended to vex and enslave mankind, this notion of the antagonism of science and religion is the most mischievous. True science and true religion are twin-sisters, and the separation of either from the other is sure to prove the death of both. Science prospers exactly in proportion as it is religious; and religion flourishes in exact proportion to the scientific depth and firmness of its basis.”

The great pioneer of modern psychology William James proposed that the way to rescue both science and religion from the intellectual and methodological limitations of dogmatism was for both to embrace a spirit of “radical empiricism.” He wrote, “I say ‘empiricism’ because it is contented to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience; and I say “radical,” because it treats the doctrine of monism itself as an hypothesis, and unlike so much of the half-way empiricism that is current under the name of positivism or agnosticism or scientific naturalism, it does not dogmatically affirm monism as something with which all experience has got to square.”

The Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century rose up in rebellion against the scholastic dogmatism of its day. Since then, science has advanced by formulating new theories and then revising them or replacing them with better theories as the scope of empirical knowledge has increased. Over time, many scientists have found it difficult to resist the temptation to form their own dogma to replace a religious one. No doubt there is something profoundly unsettling about questioning our deepest assumptions. By the term “dogma” I mean a coherent, universally applied worldview consisting of a collection of beliefs and attitudes that call for a person’s intellectual and emotional allegiance. A dogma thus has a power over individuals and communities that is far greater than the power of mere facts and evidence-based theories. In fact, it may prevail despite the most obvious contrary evidence; a commitment to a dogma may grow all the more zealous in the face of obstacles. Thus, dogmatists often appear to be incapable of learning from any kind of experience or logic that is not acceptable within the confines of their own beliefs.

Although the spirit of radical empiricism in science has often been stifled by closed-mindedness, it was embraced by the great revolutionaries of modern science—Galileo, Darwin, Einstein, and Niels Bohr. It is certainly the hallmark of the thinking of ground-breaking scientists of the modern era, including the physicists John Archibald Wheeler, Anton Zeilinger, and Christopher Fuchs, as well as the cognitive scientists Francisco Varela, Donald Hoffman, and David Presti. Of course, dogmatism has plagued each of the religions of the world since their inception, but throughout history, great contemplatives have repeatedly overcome this temptation by open-mindedly focusing on personal inquiry and experience in their quest for truth and liberation.

In this light, I now turn to the role of Buddhism in both the history and future of what I call “contemplative research.” This is the contemplative tradition with which I am most intimately familiar, having studied and practiced full-time as a committed Buddhist for the past forty-nine years.

Gautama Buddha embraced the principles of empiricism and pragmatism in his advice to his followers. In a famous discourse he says, “Do not be led by reports, or tradition, or hearsay. Be not led by the authority of religious texts, nor by mere logic or inference, nor by considering appearances, nor by the delight in speculative opinions, nor by seeming possibilities, nor by the idea: ‘this is our teacher.’ But when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome, wrong, and bad, then give them up... And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome and good, then accept them and follow them.”

The core of the Buddha’s contemplative discoveries, and of the teachings that arose from them, centers on four themes: (1) experientially identifying the full range of suffering to which humans and other sentient beings are vulnerable; (2) identifying the fundamental, underlying causes of suffering, with an emphasis on the origins of mental distress; (3) realizing the real possibility of freedom from suffering and its causes; and lastly (4) applying oneself to an

integrated worldview, to meditative practices, and to a way of life that will lead one to achieve such freedom. These are commonly known as the Four Noble Truths. Suffering and its causes are natural phenomena, not to be attributed to supernatural influences. Freedom from them is achieved not simply with faith, grace, or obedience to divine law, but from *knowing reality as it is*. So the pursuit of freedom and of truth are inextricably intertwined throughout all Buddhist teachings. One must experientially discover the nature of reality for oneself, and all the Buddha's teachings should be evaluated critically. As the Buddha emphasized, "Just as the wise accept gold after testing it by heating, cutting, and rubbing, so are my words to be accepted after examining them, but not out of respect for me."

In accordance with the Buddha's spirit of open-minded empiricism and sound reasoning, the Dalai Lama has often commented that if science produced compelling evidence to refute a Buddhist belief, he would reject that belief. On the other hand, he has also stressed that merely failing to confirm certain contemplative discoveries is not grounds for rejecting them. An absence of evidence is not evidence of an absence. It is telling that such open-mindedness and respect is rarely expressed by scientists for the intersubjectively corroborated discoveries made by contemplatives. As the third-century Buddhist contemplative Aryadeva explains, "It is said that one who is unbiased, perceptive, and intent on practice is a suitable disciple of the Buddha's teachings. The good qualities of the instructor are not otherwise, nor are they different for fellow students." These very same qualities should be equally essential for anyone wishing to embark on a career in science.

Nowadays, Buddhist meditation is strongly associated with mindfulness. This term was authoritatively defined by the ancient Indian Buddhist master Nagasena: "Mindfulness, when it arises, calls to mind wholesome and unwholesome tendencies, with faults and faultless, inferior and refined, dark and pure, together with their counterparts...mindfulness, when it arises, follows the courses of beneficial and unbeneficial tendencies: these tendencies are beneficial, these unbeneficial; these tendencies are helpful, these unhelpful. Thus, one who engages in spiritual practice rejects unbeneficial tendencies and cultivates beneficial tendencies." It is evident that the Buddha's themes of empiricism and pragmatism are also central to the cultivation of mindfulness. In the Buddhist understanding, mindfulness is clearly oriented toward the development of introspective *wisdom*, which is in turn driven by an aspiration to identify and alleviate the inner causes of distress and of genuine well-being.

The scientific study of the mind began only in the late nineteenth century. Thus far, it has failed to shed any light on the nature of consciousness or on the origins of the human mind. The relationship of the mind to the body is as impervious to science now as it was a century ago, and what happens to consciousness at death remains a mystery to science. In contrast, Buddhist contemplatives have been undertaking experiential and rational inquiry into the nature, origins, and potentials of the mind for at least two and a half millennia. Inquiry into the nature of consciousness and its role in the natural world is a core theme in all Buddhist theory and practice, and such knowledge is seen as indispensable to the achievement of liberation from suffering.

The Sikkim-born Buddhist contemplative Yangthang Rinpoche, one of my own mentors, states succinctly how to begin an open-minded inquiry into the nature of the mind. He is drawing from the Great Perfection school of Tibetan Buddhism. "By looking inward, you observe your own mind. Do not follow after past thoughts, or anticipate thoughts to come. As for the wild agitation of the thoughts of the present moment, as soon as you direct your mind inwards upon itself, loosely rest right there, without fixing or modifying anything in the slightest." This is a

classic method for calming the mind so that one can penetrate beyond the domain of the human psyche to explore the sphere of reality from which the mind emerges.

The nineteenth-century Tibetan contemplative Dūdjom Lingpa described the common experience of many generations of Buddhist contemplatives who have engaged in such intensive full-time meditative training as follows: “By applying yourself to this practice continuously at all times, both during and between meditation sessions, eventually all coarse and subtle thoughts will be calmed in the empty expanse of the essential nature of your mind....finally, because the ordinary mind of an ordinary being, as it were, disappears, discursive thoughts go dormant, and roving thoughts vanish into the space of awareness.”

Thus, Dūdjom Lingpa goes on to explain how the domain of the mind in which all mental activities are experienced dissolves into a sheer vacuity called the *substrate*. This field is immaterial, devoid of thought, a space-like vacuity, a blankness in which appearances are suspended. We naturally, but unconsciously, enter this state in deep, dreamless sleep, when fainting, and when dying. With rigorous and intensive contemplative training, however, one can become fully and lucidly aware of this vacuity. In deep and sustained meditation, the mind that experiences this empty space is a sheer luminosity of awareness known as the *substrate consciousness*, characterized by bliss, luminosity, and non-conceptuality. This primal flow of consciousness has been discovered by contemplatives of other traditions and is labelled in different ways. It is widely recognized among Buddhist contemplatives that this primal flow of consciousness does *not* emerge from the brain, but rather becomes *conditioned* (or *configured*) by the brain and other influences as the human mind develops and is activated.

Contrary to the widely-held, materialistic belief that memories are “encoded in the brain,” Buddhist and other contemplatives have discovered that they are in fact stored in this primal continuum of consciousness. From this core domain of consciousness, the human mind emerges and the patterns in which it comes to function are indeed conditioned by the developing organ of the brain. But it is the primal consciousness that continues after death, when the brain-conditioned human mind has dissolved. Thus, rather than the brain being the “hard-drive” to the “software” of the mind, according to Buddhist understanding, the brain would be more analogous to a keyboard, and the metaphorical hard-drive would instead be the substrate consciousness.

The discovery of the conservation of consciousness from lifetime to lifetime has been affirmed by Western philosophers dating back to Pythagoras (who claimed to know of past lives from his own experience), on through Socrates, Plato, and Plotinus. It has been advocated by contemplatives from the major world religions—Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In his *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays*, published in 1894, Thomas Huxley wrote this about the theory of reincarnation: “In the doctrine of transmigration, whatever its origin, Brahmanical and Buddhist speculation found, ready to hand, the means of constructing a plausible vindication of the ways of the Cosmos to man.... Yet this plea of justification is not less plausible than others; and none but very hasty thinkers will reject it on the ground of inherent absurdity. Like the doctrine of evolution itself, that of transmigration has its roots in the world of reality; and it may claim such support as the great argument from analogy is capable of supplying.” A century later, the astronomer Carl Sagan wrote in his book *The Demon-Haunted World* that scientific attention should be given to the claims of young children who report the details of a previous life. He advocated rigorous studies to check on the veracity of their reports. This is precisely the kind of research that has been done for more than forty years in the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia. This research has resulted in a

growing body of evidence in support of the theory of reincarnation. Sadly, the scientific community has largely shown a greater allegiance to materialist dogmas than they have to empirical evidence that might challenge their beliefs.

Through the closing decades of the nineteenth century, when metaphysical belief in mechanistic materialism dominated the natural sciences, it was assumed that the only causal influences on matter and energy are configurations of matter and energy. The physical world was seen as being causally closed. But with empirical evidence supporting Einstein's general theory of relativity, it has turned out that space-time, while not derivative of mass-energy, does causally interact with it. There is increasing scientific evidence that consciousness, too, is not derivative of matter and *yet does causally interact with systems of mass-energy*. All of these three basic categories of natural phenomena (mass-energy, space-time, and consciousness) are conserved—none of them can emerge from nothing, and nor can they ever turn into nothing. Configurations of each of these categories emerge from prior configurations of their own category and transform into later configurations of their own category. In line with John Wheeler's thinking, the conceptual constructs of "mass-energy" and "space-time" are derived from semantic information gleaned from objective observations. Likewise, the concepts of "consciousness" and "mind" are derivative of information gleaned from introspective, subjective observations. None of these phenomena is inherently real, independent of its conceptual designation. They exist only relative to the meaningful information on which their conceptual designations are based, and such information is not physical, *nor* is it a form of consciousness. Moreover, meaningful, semantic information itself is not inherently real, for it exists only relative to the mind that understands it, just as the mind does not exist independently from the objects it apprehends.

While the materialist assumption that the mind and consciousness are generated solely by the brain is hardly ever questioned by cognitive scientists, *it has never been empirically tested or confirmed*. The contemplative hypothesis regarding the conservation of consciousness, in contrast, has been tested repeatedly over thousands of years. The procedure for putting it to the test of experience is straightforward: After settling the mind in its natural state, through rigorous, sustained training, the contemplative comes to rest, clearly and discerningly aware, in the substrate consciousness. The contemplative researcher then directs his or her attention to a specific time in the past. As if retrieving data from one's hard-drive, one then observes the memory that comes to mind, with its related imagery, emotions, and other associated mental events. One first trains in retrieving memories from earlier in this life, those which are normally beyond the reach of one's normal, waking consciousness. These can be confirmed or repudiated by objective and reliable sources. Once it is determined that even very early memories can be accurately retrieved, one then targets specific times prior to this life. One then observes what emerges from one's substrate consciousness. If clear and distinct memories do emerge that appear to stem from a past life, then they are to be subjected to critical assessment to determine their accuracy. Could they have been acquired from sources other than one's own substrate consciousness? In this way, the veracity of previous life memories can indeed be tested.

For many centuries, Buddhist contemplatives have penetrated even beyond this primal flow of individual consciousness to a non-local, atemporal dimension of awareness that is beyond all conceptual categories, including self or other, subject or object. The methods designed to break through to this ultimate ground-state of consciousness proceed first by experientially determining whether one's own, individuated flow of consciousness actually exists in and of itself, by its own inherent nature. The conclusion drawn by many generations of Buddhist contemplatives is that it is empty of any such autonomous existence. Yangthang

Rinpoche clarifies this point, “As soon as you rest in your natural state, thoughts spontaneously cease and depart. In the natural lucidity where thoughts disappear is the empty, transparent, *essential* nature of the mind.” This experience is like space, devoid of any object and transcending all conceptual categories, even those of existence and non-existence. He continues, “Right there in that emptiness is the clear and lucid *manifest* nature of the mind. Devoid of any expressible, substantial characteristics, its own spacious and unimpeded luminosity is naturally clear.” While the substrate consciousness and the substrate it experiences are conditioned by prior causes and conditions and do change from moment to moment, this deepest dimension of awareness, called *primordial consciousness*, is unconditioned. So is the all-encompassing emptiness it realizes, which is known as the *absolute space of phenomena*. These two, nominally regarded as subject and object, are in fact timelessly undifferentiated, for there is no duality between the perceived and the perceiver.

All streams of individual consciousness—of humans and of all other sentient beings throughout the universe—are said to stem from such primordial consciousness, and all configurations of space-time and mass-energy are crystalized formations of the absolute space of phenomena. In other language, this is the ultimate, divine ground of being, which transcends the conceptual constructs of both monistic materialism and mind-body dualism. Yangthang Rinpoche concludes, “In the mindstream of one who realizes this Great Perfection, impartial compassion and impartial pure vision emerge effortlessly and naturally.” Comparable reports of an ultimately liberating contemplative realization are found in each of the great contemplative traditions of the world, as presented by Aldous Huxley in his classic work *The Perennial Philosophy*.

According to the Buddha, the highest dimension of genuine well-being, which never diminishes, stems from knowing the ultimate nature of reality. Such wisdom can be gained only by cultivating superbly discerning capacities of the mind. This includes rigorous training in mindfulness and introspection. A high degree of mental balance and stability is needed to sustain the kind of insight that can radically transform one’s entire being. Moreover, any such mental training must be rooted in the purest levels of ethical discipline that come to permeate every aspect of one’s life. Buddhist ethics essentially boils down to the twin pillars of non-violence and benevolence. These are the indispensable foundations of all Buddhist practice. The Buddha summarized his teachings as a whole like this: “Do not engage in evil behavior of any kind. Devote yourself to a bounty of virtue. Completely subdue your own mind. This is the teaching of the Buddha.”

Buddhist practice is designed not only to root out the inner causes of unhappiness, but also to cultivate genuinely sustainable well-being. This state of eudaimonia emerges from within, without being contingent on outer, pleasant circumstances. The Buddha described three kinds of genuine well-being arising from the contemplative life: the well-being of contentment and the clear conscience of leading an ethical way of life; well-being gained through the cultivation of mental balance, including the development of mindfulness and introspection; and finally, the supreme well-being of the complete freedom that is acquired through insight into the actual nature of the mind and the role of consciousness in the natural world. In short, he encouraged his followers to find out what really constitutes genuine well-being and, based on this understanding, to cultivate it. This message seems vitally important to all people throughout the course of human civilization, but it is uniquely pertinent to our present-day times.

Humankind is now facing an unprecedented crisis that imperils the entire ecosystem, including human civilization itself. In large part, our current problems stem from the industrial

revolution that began 150 years ago. This has brought about a gradual domination of global culture by materialism as a worldview, hedonism as a prime value, and consumerism as a way of life. In response to the catastrophic loss of meaning and the degradation of our environment that has ensued from this triad, the challenge is to adopt a radically empirical approach to understanding the mind. This kind of inquiry will shed light on the true causes of mental distress and genuine well-being by turning inward to observe the mind directly, rather than narrowly focusing on behavioral expressions and neural correlates.

For those of us committed to this ideal, we seek to understand the nature of consciousness and its vast potential for effective transformation. In order to do so, we must be willing to overturn centuries of cultural chauvinism, racism, and closed-mindedness toward cultures and ethnic groups seen as “other.” It is such destructive mind states that have caused modern civilization to ignore the ancient discoveries such cultures have made regarding human nature and reality as a whole. Our approach as contemplatives must be to integrate first-person methods of inquiry developed and practiced by the great contemplative traditions of the world with the third-person methods of inquiry utilized in the physical and cognitive sciences.

I believe that the global crises we face today—environmental, social, racial, medical, economic, and spiritual—can be overcome if the human family joins together in seeking to understand the nature and potentials of the mind that is common to us all. We must persevere on this quest in a spirit of deep humility, mutual respect, and heartfelt compassion for one another as human beings and for all the sentient beings with whom we share this planet.

I would like to conclude this essay with a call to action. Rampant materialism (scientific, spiritual, and social) has been obstructing the evolution of open-minded science *and* religion for more than a century. And yet, the more the physical and mind sciences have progressed, the more they themselves have revealed the fallacies of the materialist paradigm. Still, due to the ideological and methodological constraints of this de-humanizing worldview, the nature, origins, and potentials of consciousness, the mind-body problem, and the actual sources of mental illness and of genuine well-being remain largely unknown to science. *The limitations of materialistic science correspond exactly to the strengths of the great contemplative traditions of the world.* The current pandemic is a clarion call for each of us to withdraw temporarily from the rush to consume and instead to explore new kinds of simplicity and solitude. This is an opportunity to re-evaluate our fundamental way of viewing reality, our priorities, and our way of life. It is high time to break free from what is binding us as a species—namely, closed-minded materialism, hedonism, and consumerism. It is no exaggeration to say that these human failings are destroying the ecosphere and undermining human civilization. By embracing a new open-mindedness, we may begin to explore the potentials of consciousness, and investigate the powerful role of mind in the natural world. For the first time in human history, we could draw on and integrate both the deepest insights from modern science and the great contemplative traditions of the world, potentially leading us to a new era of human flourishing.