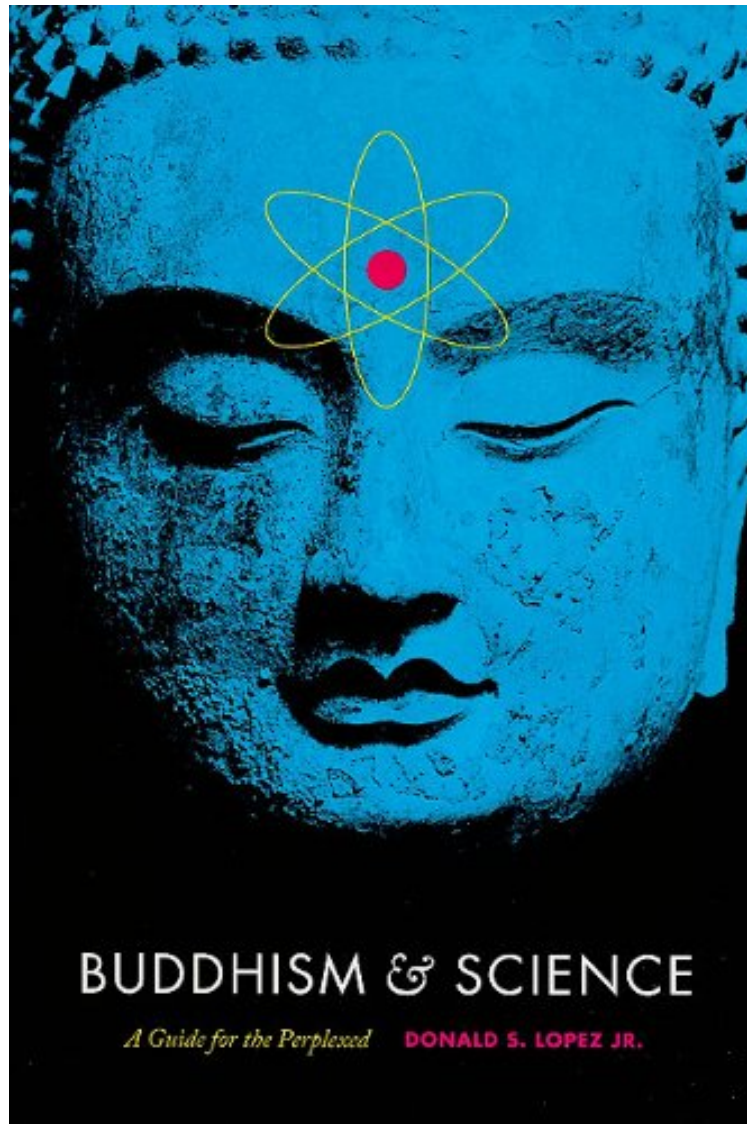


(Download free pdf) Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed (Buddhism and Modernity)

## Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed (Buddhism and Modernity)

*Donald S. Lopez Jr.*

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**Donald S. Lopez Jr. : Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed (Buddhism and Modernity)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed (Buddhism and Modernity):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating.By C. D. VarnLopez does a stellar job at giving the context and complicating the assumptions behind modern interpretations and myths around Buddhism. His foray here

into Buddhism and Science is particularly interesting focusing on both Western engagements and engagements in Asia and the creation of "Buddhist Modernism" in both Asia and the US through the 19th and 20th centuries and dipping into the 21st. Lopez picks representatives of Sri Lankan, Chinese, Tibetan, and Japanese adaptations to science as well as Orientalist narratives about it and the current discourse around the Dalai Lama and his role in Buddhist modernism. Some has said Lopez does not let science speak for itself and capitalizes it as if it is an equal discourse on religion, but it appears to me that Lopez is pointing out that concepts of science being applied to Buddhism are not "science" as practiced at the moment and more science as abstraction divorced from practice. Strongly recommended. 7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Generally quite informative, yet sometimes disappointing.

By S. J. Snyder Lopez does a solid job of backgrounding the century-plus of dialogue between Buddhists attempting to put their best foot forward to the West, along with some Western acolytes, and purveyors of Western science. (That said, other books cover this part of Lopez's acreage in more detail.) From the historic overview, Lopez then looks at some specific Buddhist issues, such as meditation, or the idea of whether we can talk about a "science of Buddhism." He does a good job of presenting Buddhist beliefs and texts in all of this, and explaining where the Buddhist approach comes from. That said, contrary to claims that he is so academic that, like a Bart Ehrman, he in no way acts as an apologist for Buddhism, he indirectly does exactly that. And, that's where this book gets disappointing. The dialogue or discourse Lopez presents is actually more of a monologue. Even when science gets to speak for itself, in the last and shortest chapter, on meditation. And, this is part of the book's disappointment. Reading reviews on this site, I was hoping for more critical analysis of Buddhism's claims to be scientific, such as the Dalai Lama claiming Buddhism and science are totally compatible even as he holds onto beliefs in karma, reincarnation and other matters metaphysical and says he will never surrender those beliefs. Sure, Lopez tells us this is what the Dalai Lama has said, but, that's it. Also, I do NOT like the consistent capitalization of the word "Science." To me, it seems like Lopez is implying it is itself a religion. So, this is a very good book about how Buddhism does -- or, even more, about how Buddhism **wants to** -- interact with science. Except briefly in the meditation chapter, we are given little comment on the other side of the discourse. 53 of 56 people found the following review helpful.

A Necessary Corrective

By B. L. Cloud This book illustrates how Buddhism has religious elements that are **IRRECONCILABLE** with science. [If you have iTunes, look up "Saturday Morning Physics," and you can see a lecture on "Buddhism and Science" by Donald Lopez which is not quite a condensation, but perhaps an introduction to this book]. When I first saw this book, I just assumed that it would be about how Buddhism and science are complementary, since most similarly titled books are. If you're a practicing Buddhist, or have a beginning interest in Buddhism, I'm not sure whether to recommend this book or not, because Lopez is to Buddhism what Bart D. Ehrman is to Christianity, i.e. Lopez has a purely academic interest in Buddhism, and is the opposite of an evangelist; whether intentionally or not, he discourages belief in Buddhism. What he says is technically true, but if you're a Buddhist, this book is painful to read. On the plus side (counter-intuitively, perhaps), this book has pushed me to an openness to the more "supernatural" aspects of Buddhism. In this book, Lopez looks at representative Buddhists from the past hundred or so years who attempted to reconcile Buddhism with science: Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933, Sri Lanka), Taixu (1890-1947, China), Shaku Soen (1859-1919, Japan), Gendun Chopel (1903-1951, Tibet), and the Dalai Lama (b. 1935, Tibet). In the first chapter, Lopez points out that, in Buddhist cosmology, there is a mountain in the center of the world/universe, Mount Meru. Each of the aforementioned Buddhists attempt to reconcile this belief with science. Dharmapala, for instance, "refutes" the Newtonian view as being incorrect. Taixu attempts to reinterpret Mount Meru as a metaphor. Also in this chapter, the fact that the Buddha claimed the world was flat also poses problems for the aforementioned Buddhists. In the second chapter, "Scientific Racism" enters the picture. If you're familiar with the history of science, you'll know that Darwin's idea of natural selection and competition between races, for almost a hundred years, was interpreted as justifying racism, so much so that scientists claimed that non-whites were inherently inferior. This dovetails into an idea that is prevalent in 19th and early 20th century academia that, early in India's history, it had been invaded by a race calling themselves Aryans, and since Sanskrit is part of the Indo-European language family, Europeans therefore saw the Buddha as being, in a very real sense, racially equal. So, for example, Taixu in 1937 writes a letter to Hitler that, since the Germans are Aryans, they should adopt a religion founded by an Aryan: Buddhism. Now, Lopez notes that Taixu was very likely unaware of Hitler's agenda, and I agree that Taixu innocently bought into the then current "scientific" thinking. I won't summarize the whole book, but you get the gist of what Lopez is getting at. Science is subject to revision, and so any claims of being in sync with science are going to be provisional and shifting. In a footnote on page 235, Lopez quotes Hermann Oldenberg: "But any one who attempts to describe Buddha's labours must, out of love for truth, resolutely combat the notion that the Buddha [was attempting the] reformation of national life." That phrase "out of love for truth" I think is applicable to Lopez, I believe that it is his impetus for writing this book. Lopez once described his anthology "Buddhism in Practice" as being "a necessary corrective," and I think that too is applicable here. I agree and disagree with Lopez's conclusions. Lopez doesn't go back far enough in history to mention that, when Buddhism entered China, for instance, it lost elements and gained elements: Buddhist missionaries omitted offensive concepts, and aspects of Indian tradition that were congenial to Chinese tastes were emphasized; influenced by Daoism, nature became an important concept in Chinese Buddhism as it never had been in India; Chinese social values emphasized

family, so the bodhisattva Vimalakirti, for example, became a model of a sage who maintained his loyalty to the family while pursuing the path of the Buddha; none of the schools that were major in China had been major in India. Is the influence of science on Buddhism less valid than the influence of Daoism and Chinese culture on Buddhism? At the same time, I am against scientism, i.e. the view that natural science has authority over all other interpretations of life, such as philosophical, religious, mythical, spiritual, or humanistic explanations. There are some questions that science hasn't figured out yet, and maybe those questions will eventually be answered, or maybe they never will. In conjunction with Lopez's book, I would recommend reading David Berlinski's "The Devil's Delusion: Atheism and its Scientific Pretensions". I think that it's interesting that we live in an age where almost every view has to be reconciled with science, that we live in an age of "scientific pretensions." I think that Buddhism is an eminently valuable philosophy and practice. I, for one, like the current climate of Buddhism's openness to a dialogue with science, in spite of the checkered history of the dialogue that Lopez has pointed out. The best impact this book could have would be an acknowledgment of, and honesty about, that history.

"A tour de force. This extremely original and well-written book... provides all the background needed for those unfamiliar with Buddhism to understand the tradition and the perplexing scientific claims made for it." - Richard M. Jaffe, Duke University "In Buddhism and Science, Donald Lopez fills a major gap, and he does so with his trademark rigor, concision, and élan. No serious student of science-and-religion can afford to skip this book." - Jack Miles, general editor, Norton Anthology of World Religions "About the Author Donald S. Lopez Jr. is the Arthur E. Link Distinguished University Professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Michigan. He is the author, editor, or translator of a number of books, including *The Madman's Middle Way*, *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, and *In the Forest of Faded Wisdom: 104 Poems by Gendun Chopel*, a Bilingual Edition, all published by the University of Chicago Press.