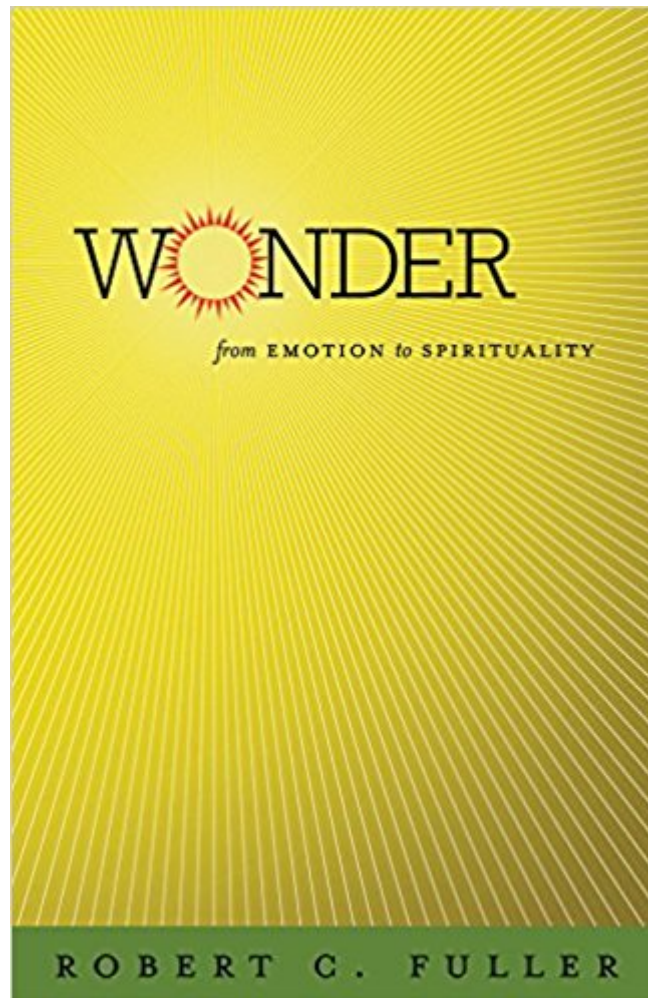




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# Wonder: From Emotion To Spirituality



## Synopsis

The attempt to identify the emotional sources of religion goes back to antiquity. In an exploration that bridges science and spirituality, Robert C. Fuller makes the convincing case that a sense of wonder is a principal source of humanity's belief in the existence of an unseen order of life. Like no other emotion, Fuller argues, wonder prompts us to pause, admire, and open our hearts and minds. With a voice that seamlessly blends the scientific and the contemplative, Fuller defines wonder in keeping with the tradition of Socrates--as an emotion related to curiosity and awe that stimulates engagement with the immediate physical world. He draws on the natural and social sciences to explain how wonder can, at the same time, elicit belief in the existence of a more-than-physical reality. Chapters examining emotions in evolutionary biology and the importance of wonder in human cognitive development alternate with chapters on John Muir, William James, and Rachel Carson, whom Fuller identifies as "exemplars of wonder." The writings and lives of these individuals express a functional side of emotion: that the very survival of life on earth today may depend on the empathy, compassion, and care that are aroused by a sense of wonder. Forging new pathways between the social sciences, philosophy, belief, and cultural history, *Wonder* deepens our understanding of the complex sources of personal spirituality and fulfillment.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It seems self-contradictory that one could write tediously about wonder, but religious studies scholar Fuller (*Spiritual but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*) manages to do just that as he chronicles the study of wonder's evolutionary-adaptive uses in Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* and its ethical applications in philosopher Martha Nussbaum's

writings on emotions. Wonder opens us to an unseen world beyond ourselves, Fuller observes, permitting us to think of wonder more as a religious sensibility than an emotion. Fuller offers short case studies of John Muir, William James and Rachel Carson to show how these three saw the world around them as an ineffable mystery whose organic unity calls for an experience of wonder rather than a cold scientific explanation. Fuller prosaically concludes that wonder functions as a neurophysiological response to unexpected events and that it seeks to penetrate what can't be seen; thus, wonder is "one of the principal sources of belief in an unseen order." Fuller's book is repetitious—he relates the story about the lack of the word "wonder" in psychology textbooks three times in close succession—and reveals little compelling or new information. 3 illus. (Feb. 27) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A cohesive, carefully written, and valuable exposition of the elemental importance of wonder as a component of spirituality. . . . Fuller expertly weaves together research in neurobiology, anthropology, and sociology to illustrate his claims about the workings of wonder as an emotional experience, so that when he finally places his own book within the larger project to understand 'spirituality in the flesh,' he has earned the reader's esteem by the care with which he establishes his categories.--Journal of Religion Fuller offers a carefully crafted analysis of religious experience that focuses on the connection between the emotion of wonder and personal spirituality. . . . Clearly written, with an excellent balance of theory and practical illustration, this convincing and compelling work makes a significant contribution to the understanding of human religiosity. Essential.--Choice

This book argues that religion and spirituality are rooted in wonder. Religion is less about truth or accepting a set of doctrines or beliefs and more about expressing and evoking particular emotions. Among the various emotions such as fear, anger, or shame for example—the author argues that wonder is both indispensable and in direct proportion to the achievement of a "vital and psychological mature" form of spirituality. Wonder, he goes on to say, fosters an intrinsically rewarding, contemplative-like receptivity (in contrast to a more active instrumental response) and cognitively "awakens our capacity for abstract, higher order thought" that is associated with a sense that a "more" or "higher" level of reality exists beyond physical or sensory appearances. In making his argument, the author seamlessly integrates clearly written and succinct

summaries of previous studies in evolutionary biology and developmental psychology on emotion, brief biographical studies of three persons who exemplified the effects of experiencing wonder in their lives (John Muir, William James, And Rachael Carson) and his own attempts to articulate the experience of wonder. In the process, he clarifies distinctions between religion and spirituality, wonder and curiosity, primary and secondary emotions, and arguments about the nature and validity of religion by, on the one hand, Freud and Marx and, on the other hand, Schleiermacher, Otto, and Abraham Maslow. Can a person go through life without wonder? Yes, and many persons do. But Fuller argues that is doing so such persons may miss an emotional experience leading toward a richer, more textured life, and a deeper sense of well-being. My highest praise of the book is that readers may be encouraged to foster and become more attentive toward the experience of wonder in their own lives. A footnote of sorts: It is unfortunate that academic publishers prematurely assume that books such as *Wonder* cannot reach a larger audience outside the academy and price (high) and market (very limited) their books accordingly. It is a self-fulfilling strategy, and Fuller and authors like him deserve better.

One of the few books on the emotion of wonder. A compelling and clear eyed view of how the emotion of wonder has played a profound role in both human spiritual, cognitive and societal development. The author views wonder through the eyes of several key historical figures such as Rachel Carson ("Silent Spring"), naturalist John Muir and psychologist William James. We all need to spend a little more time in wonder and this book will give you a very enticing reason to do so. Concise, well written and engaging.

Fuller is very eclectic, intellectual, generous and clear in his view of where emotion fits into the developing spiritual life. Although a professor of religion, he has a broad ability to weave in literary, psychological and religious thought throughout the book. I recommend it.

This is less about the spiritual wonder and more about the history and attempt to study it. It's a good book and worth the read.

Just like Heidegger when he proposes that at the beginning of the Greek philosophy the fundamental emotional state was wonder, and that in the modern culture the ruling mood is alarm. The multidisciplinary development that Robert Fuller shows in his book "*Wonder*" turns out to be an invitation to think about why we have lost the capacity to wonder. While our mood allows it, every

minute in our daily routine could be an opportunity to experience wonder.

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