

# Compassion, Ethics, and Neuroscience: Neuroethics Through Buddhist Eyes.

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As scientists advance knowledge of the brain and develop technologies to measure, evaluate, and manipulate brain function, numerous questions arise for religious adherents. If neuroscientists can conclusively establish that there is a functional network between neural impulses and an individual's capacity for moral evaluation of situations, this will naturally lead to questions about the relationship between such a network and constructions of moral value and ethical human behavior. For example, if cognitive neuroscience can show that there is a neurophysiological basis for the moral appraisal of situations, it may be argued that the world's religions, which have traditionally been the keepers and purveyors of ethical values, are rendered either spurious or irrelevant. The questions point up broader dilemmas in the interface between science and religion, and raise concerns about the ethics of neurological research and experimentation. Since human beings will still arbitrate what is "moral" or "ethical," how can religious perspectives enrich the dialogue on neuroethical issues and how can neuroscience enrich dialogue on religion? Buddhist views on the nature of consciousness and methods of practice, especially meditation practice, may contribute to discussions on neuroscience and theories about the interrelationship between consciousness and ethical awareness by exploring the role that karma, intentionality, and compassion play in Buddhist understandings of the interrelationship between consciousness and ethics.

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