

The Neuropsychology of Spirituality, Sexuality, and Sustainable Society

Can a neuroscientist distinguish between the brain of the Buddha and the brain of a violent criminal?
Does “being enlightened” or “being saved” have an objective (measurable) neurological signature?
Could God use an MRI to decide who may enter heaven’s gates...or determine who is already there?



In Part 1 of this 3-part series, we explore what the field of neuropsychology can reveal to us about the nature of who we are and what it means to ‘be spiritual.’ Spirituality can refer to the possession of particular internal states of **belief**, to the attainment and maintenance of particular internal **feelings** (ecstasy, bliss, love, joy, peace, etc), or to specific **practices**... actions in relation to self, the environment, and others. Because the neuropsychological basis for each of these is VERY different, a wide variety of topics will be discussed.

For some, a term such as ‘neurospirituality’ elicits feelings of hope in a 21st century marriage of science and spirit. For others, however, such words elicit fears of reductionism, of God in a test tube...boring at best and anti-spiritual at worst. This class is designed for both groups of people. In this class, we do not dissect to destroy, or quantify to explain away. Rather, we use the process of looking at these topics through the scientific lens to allow each of us to develop a more clear and profound understanding of what we seek to attain, which, hopefully, makes attainment easier. Whether you ascribe to thoughts from the East, West, or neither, this class will be relevant to you.

LIKELY TOPICS FOR PART I (SPIRITUALITY)

Perception, Knowledge, and What is Real

- **Perceptual Illusions, Geometric Hallucinations, and Blindsight:** Seeing, believing, and cortical wiring.
- **Amnesia, Agnosia, and Hemineglect:** Ways of not knowing.
- **Cognitive Blind Spots, Patternicity, and Synchronicity:** Can you find a pattern in the randomness?
- **Synesthesia and Auras:** Can you see with your skin or nose?

Emotions, Feelings, and the Limbic System

- **Pleasure and Dopamine:** How does addiction work?
- **Fear:** Does it lead to the dark side?
- **Love, Compassion, and Attachment:** Can a robot have these things? Is a soul required?
- **Empathy, Mirror Neurons, Body Language, Intuition, and Pheromones:** How we affect one another, profoundly.
- **Moral Judgments, Beauty, and the Insula:** Why is hand-washing important, and what makes something beautiful?

The Self

- **Left vs. Right Brain:** Is hemispheric balance desirable?
- **Searching for the Self:** Split-brains, brain-conjoined twins, Multiple Personality Disorder, and phantom limbs.
- **Volition, Consciousness, and Behavior:** Who or what is making choices? Did the devil make you do it?
- **Chakras and the Pineal Gland:** Descartes and the 3rd eye.
- **Out-of-Body Experiences and Oneness:** Can we create this in the lab?

Happiness and Wellbeing

- **Ecstasy, Ritual, and Higher States of Consciousness:** Are you wired for spiritual bliss? Does it matter?
- **Suffering:** A neuroscience perspective on the Buddhist view.
- **Meditation, Attention, and the Buddha Brain:** How do different forms of meditation work?
- **Somatic and Movement Therapies:** How might massage, yoga, taichi, and watsu enhance happiness?

Saturday, April 23, 2011. 9am - 4pm. Kilauea. \$60 - \$110 (sliding scale)

Dr. Olson has an M.A. in Education and a Ph.D. in Neuroscience, specializing in Cognitive and Behavioral Neuropsychology and Neuroanatomy from the University of Illinois where he taught neuroanatomy for graduate and medical students and studied memory, attention, volitional control systems, pheromones, and aesthetic preferences using EEG and eye movement technology. He’s the former Operations Manager for the Sustainability in Motion Bicycle Tour, the current VP of Kaua`i Path, and a certified permaculture instructor. He is currently an instructor at the Massage Therapy Program at Kaua`i Community College, the Pacific Center for Awareness and Bodywork in Kilauea, the Massage Program at Kalani Honua on the Big Island, and the YogAlign Training at the Kaua`i Yoga School in Princeville. He is also a massage and aquatic therapist and has training and experience in TM, Vipassana, and NVC.

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