

Buddhism and Cognitive (Neuro)Science: An Uneasy Liaison?

Abstract

The main aim of this article is to shed light on the intricate relationship between Buddhism and science by focusing on what is becoming an increasingly popular area of contact between the two domains, namely the study of consciousness in the field of cognitive (neuro)science. First, three fundamental ways of approaching the relationship between Buddhism and science are outlined: (a) rejection (Buddhism and science are not, and cannot be, compatible); (b) acceptance (Buddhism and science share important commonalities); (c) construction (Buddhism and science are compatible because they have been made compatible in the course of specific historical processes). It is claimed that which of the three stances one takes depends ultimately on how one construes

the two parties involved and the nature of their (potential) interaction. To exemplify this, the scope of the discussion is narrowed to the domain of consciousness research and a general overview of some of the main arguments for and against the collaboration between Buddhism and cognitive (neuro)science (“Three Turnings of the Wheel of (Non)Interaction”) is provided. Finally, in light of the tentative results of our analysis, a short reflection of some of the most pertinent presuppositions and entailments of different stances towards Buddhism-science dialogue is laid out, with special emphasis on the distinction between construing Buddhism as “living” versus “dead” tradition.