



# Marketplace Flash

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## Moral Epistemology, Neuroeconomics and Selling

What is the basis for moral choices? For centuries philosophers have wrestled with this type of question. Somewhat frustrated with the work of philosophers, scientists are now conducting research on the human brain to better understand moral epistemology. These researchers are seeking to understand whether moral decisions are made rationally or emotionally. The answer is moral decisions are made emotionally and then supported by reason. (“Researchers Seek Roots Of Morality in Biology, With Intriguing Results” by Sharon Begley, *Wall Street Journal*, June 11, 2004, page B1)

Related to this is the field of Neuroeconomics - a new field of study that seeks to understand the basis for human decisions. As with the scientists, economists are discovering that human beings make decisions primarily based on emotions and then justify the decisions rationally (“The Crazy Logic of a Successful Sale” by Michelle Nichols, *BusinessWeek Online*, June 4, 2004).

So what does this mean? It means that human beings are inherently driven by emotions. This idea is surely repugnant to many who would rather believe that people are fundamentally more rational than emotional. But the data argue the opposite. This means, for example, that the things we buy, the food we eat, the people we marry, the job we accept, the religious faith we embrace, and the candidates that we vote for are all choices we make largely from the heart, which is viewed by many as the seat of the emotions.

Sales people have long understood that people make decisions emotionally, which is why they have jobs. If humans are rational, there would be little need for sales people; all that would be needed would be a mechanism to convey the features and benefits of a product or service. Customers would analyze the options and make an objective unemotional decision without any influence from a sales person. This may happen in some situations, but the vast majority of sales are accomplished through sales people. This reality lends further credence to the hypothesis that decisions are made emotionally.

Even politicians understand the power of emotion to influence people, which is why the next three months will be filled with campaign rhetoric and staged pep rallies. If the American public were to elect the President based on reason alone, the Democratic and Republican parties would not focus on campaigning but on developing a clear, cogent and compelling platform. The American people would then weigh the pros and cons between the platforms, and vote without the hoopla of the campaigning, which would save millions of dollars. But this will not happen, because people make emotional decisions and then invent reasons to justify their decisions.

Christian philosopher Dennis Peacocke teaches the reality that people are largely driven by emotions with the saying, “the mind justifies what the heart has chosen.” Now scientists and economists are lining up in support of this understanding.

Why would the creator create people who are driven by emotions? One possible answer is that the creator desires for people to be relational. It is well understood that emotional bonding is the best glue for marriages. Likewise organizations that seek to be highly effective sponsor emotional bonding activities for their workers such as company picnics and Christmas parties. Perhaps the creator intended for human emotions, properly used, to encourage human relationships. And human relationships are the basis for efficacious selling, politics, business and human advancement.