



Call for Applications

International Interdisciplinary Summer School: “The Neurobiology of Emotions and Feelings”

With António Damásio and Sabine Döring

June 2nd – June 6th, 2014

Topic

Classical Cartesian dualism holds that rationality is connected to the mind, distinct from the body, and hence isolated from any passions, including feelings and emotions. This year's guest to the Unsel'd Lectures, the US-American-Portuguese neuroscientist António Damásio, doubts this Cartesian dualism. On the contrary, he shows that emotions and feelings are strongly linked to human reasoning.

Damásio takes up an idea which was formulated by James and Lange at the end of the 19th century for the first time. According to this idea, emotions do not cause bodily symptoms. Rather, the contrary is the case, i.e. emotions themselves are caused by these very symptoms: we do not cry because we are sad, but we are sad because we cry. Emotions, therefore, simply consist of the neural monitoring of bodily symptoms which are evoked by an event such as recognizing a viper, i.e. a racing heart, high release of adrenaline, tensed muscles etc. They are neural and chemical responses through which the body monitors changes in its internal situation. During ontogeny these responses lead to the formation of neural patterns that make up a memory of the emotional states of respective experiences. This helps us to unconsciously value different options in the process of decision-making: The mere imagination of possible actions may lead to the evocation of respective emotions by these neural patterns. Thereby, the neural patterns provide a neural interface for emotionally valuing possible actions in a decision

making process. In this context Damásio speaks of somatic markers.

In terms of a mental experience, we have feelings of these body-states: “Feeling an emotion consists of having mental images arising from neural patterns which represent the changes in the body and brain that make up an emotion.”

Damásio's account is backed up by evolutionary evidence: Emotions come first in the history of evolution. The amygdala, which is mainly responsible for fear and for the recognition of fearful expression, is an evolutionary old part of the brain. Conscious feelings, however, rely on higher brain areas which evolved at a later stage. They are conscious experiences (thus, part of the mind) caused by emotions.

Damásio claims that his theory of somatic markers can be generalized and applied to all mental states: they all consist of varying types of bodily awareness: “The mind is built from ideas that are, in one way or another, brain representations of the body.” His theory of consciousness, thus, is a non-cognitivist one in the sense that it describes any state of mind as arising from the monitoring process of a set of bodily and behavioral responses. The mind is not just embodied; it is about the body. Its purpose and essence is to regulate and represent the state of the body. However, Damásio's theory of emotions and feelings is strongly debated. The philosopher of emotion Sabine Döring from Tübingen University holds that what is crucial for an emotion is its intentionality or ‘world-directedness’ in its

specific relation to the emotion's phenomenology in terms of the awareness of certain bodily changes (or a suitable 'as-if loop'). Suppose you tremble with indignation at an injustice. Then your experience cannot be identified as an instance of indignation rather than of anger by reference to the perception of certain bodily changes alone, for indignation is something like anger at an injustice and will therefore share the same bodily changes. The difference between anger and indignation rather stems from the different evaluations they involve: while anger is directed at things that are annoying, indignation is directed at things that are unjust. In accord with almost all philosophers of emotion, Döring argues that emotions are evaluations and have a representational content of a certain kind. This also means that emotions have correctness conditions and may be able to justify value judgments. The key question, therefore, is how emotional evaluation (intentionality) relates to the perception of bodily changes or to phenomenology in general.

The interdisciplinary summer school will focus on the significance of the neurobiology of feelings for neuroscience in general, but also on the consequences for social neuroscience, decision making, philosophy of emotion and, more broadly, on the issues of sentience, mind and consciousness.

António Damásio is David Dornsife University Professor of Neuroscience and director of the Brain and Creativity Institute at the University of Southern California, USA, which was founded by António Damásio and his wife Hanna Damásio. In addition, he is professor at the Salk Institute located in La Jolla, California.

Sabine Döring is Professor of Philosophy at Tübingen University. She is also Board Member and Principal Investigator of the Tübingen cluster of excellence Center for Integrative Neuroscience (CIN). Her main research areas are (meta-) ethics, aesthetics, and the theory of practical rationality, with an emphasis on emotion and the question of what role emotions have to play in the theory of value.

Program

The interdisciplinary summer school will take place at the Forum Scientiarum of Tübingen University, from June 2nd - June 6th, 2014. During the

summer school, twenty graduate students and junior scientists from all over the world will have the opportunity to discourse concepts of feelings and emotions with this year's Unselde lecturer António Damásio and our second lecturer Sabine Döring. The participants will also attend the Unselde Lecture held by António Damásio and an interdisciplinary colloquium, both open to the public.

Application procedure

To apply for the international summer school, applicants have to send in a completed application form downloadable from our website (www.unselde-lectures.de/cfa), including a **CV** according to usual standards. Additionally, each applicant is required to submit an **essay** of up to **5000 characters**. This essay should delineate your specific motivations and qualifications for the summer school's topic. Deadline for the receipt of complete applications (application form, CV, essay) is **February 20th, 2014**. A letter of admission will reach successful applicants by March 15th.

There is no program fee. The Forum Scientiarum seeks to facilitate the participation of competent students from all over the world, and as the Forum Scientiarum is provided a limited fund by the Udo Keller Foundation Forum Humanum for covering part of travel expenses, limited financial resources should not affect your decision to apply. Moreover, the Forum Scientiarum will assist participants in finding inexpensive accommodation. For more information please see our website.

Applications should be sent to unselde@fsci.uni-tuebingen.de or to our postal address:

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