



Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain

By Anthony Damasio

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Since Descartes famously proclaimed, "I think, therefore I am," science has often overlooked emotions as the source of a person's true being. Even modern neuroscience has tended, until recently, to concentrate on the cognitive aspects of brain function, disregarding emotions. This attitude began to change with the publication of **Descartes' Error** in 1995. Antonio Damasio—"one of the world's leading neurologists" (**The New York Times**)—challenged traditional ideas about the connection between emotions and rationality. In this wondrously engaging book, Damasio takes the reader on a journey of scientific discovery through a series of case studies, demonstrating what many of us have long suspected: emotions are not a luxury, they are essential to rational thinking and to normal social behavior.

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Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain By Anthony Damasio Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Neurologist Damasio's refutation of the Cartesian idea of the human mind as separate from bodily processes draws on neurochemistry to support his claim that emotions play a central role in human decision making. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

The idea that the mind exists as a distinct entity from the body has profoundly influenced Western culture since Descartes proclaimed, "I think, therefore I am." Damasio, head of neurology at the University of Iowa and a prominent researcher on human brain function, challenges this premise in a fascinating and well-reasoned argument on the central role that emotion and feelings play in human rationality. According to Damasio, the same brain structures regulate both human biology and behavior and are indispensable to normal cognitive processes. Damasio demonstrates how patients (his own as well as the 19th-century railroad worker Nicholas Gage) with prefrontal cortical damage can no longer generate the emotions necessary for effective decision-making. A gifted scientist and writer, Damasio combines an Oliver Sack-like reportage with the presentation of complex, theoretical issues in neurobiology. Recommended for wide purchase.

Laurie Bartolini, Legislative Research, Springfield, Ill.

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From [Booklist](#)

Pioneering scientist Damasio's international reputation is based on his explorations into the neurology of vision, memory, and language. His influence will extend far beyond the parameters of the scientific community with this marvelously lucid and engaging presentation of his innovative ideas about the interconnectedness of mind and body. Damasio begins with some dramatic case histories of people who have survived brain damage without severe physical impairment only to experience bizarre degradations of personality and thought processes. He explains these puzzling maladies by analyzing the various systems at work in the brain, from those associated with life support to the highest echelon of cognition. After discussing how emotions and feelings are expressed by the bodypounding heart, trembling hands, blushing Damasio launches into one of his main themes: how essential emotions are to our ability to reason and make decisions. As he illuminates numerous ways the body and the mind work together to process stimuli, draw upon memory, and fuel thought and judgment, Damasio convinces us that the self is a perpetually recreated neurobiological state. Descartes' error, then, was his belief that the mind and body are separate entities. On the contrary, Damasio tells us, their continual collaboration is the key to consciousness and individuality. *Donna Seaman*

Users Review

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