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Emotion and Feeling in Mind/Body Problem

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Emotions: windows on the body

The problem of *emotions* seems to be crucial in order to *embody* mind. I focus my attention on a particular feature of emotion, *feeling*; we *lack* at all a more *general theory of feeling*: emotion is only *one* of the many possible *felt* states and, maybe, neither the more interesting one.

Feeling puts in question above all cognitive approaches: as in Frijda & Swagerman (1987), cognitivism can't simply *ignore* the problems connected to the emotion-debate, above all *the role of the body*. So, by a neurobiological perspective, A. Damasio's «*background feelings*» are discussed here in order to rethink *feeling* not only as a *higher order* phenomenon and to show its intimate connection with the *body*.

Feeling

In one of his last articles C. Castelfranchi (1998) proposes a *functional* analysis of *needs* (as *felt* states) without begging the question of *feeling* as Frijda (1987) did. He shows that in order to *feel* we can't lack *proprioception*, but, on account of the *intentional* structure of *needs* (need for..), we can't lack *mental states* too, representations. Each of them, *alone*, is not sufficient for *feeling*.

On the neurobiological side, Damasio's concept of «*background feeling*» (2003; 1999) goes back to the origin of the term «*feeling*», that is *touching*. By this perspective, *feelings*, above all *background* ones, are considered as part of the basic biological regulation of the organism.

Under my skin (I've got you...)

In some experiments by A. Damasio (1994) and his staff, patients with prefrontal damages had to react to some emotional *stimuli*. The neuroscientist measured their reactivity by means of *skin conductance*, on account of skin is the main *tactile* organ and, at the same time, the main *viscus* of our body, involved in *interoception*.

As a result, experimental subjects didn't *feel* what they *had* to feel: they showed no connection with the *somatic* dimension of emotion. Nevertheless, amazingly, there were no differences in their *knowledge*: "simply" they didn't *feel* what they *knew* they *had* to feel in similar situations, thanks to the cortical track given from the so called «*somatic marker*».

Knowing without feeling, feeling without knowing

Though Castelfranchi stresses the importance of the *body*, from a functional point of view, his analysis may be misleading, because it considers *feelings* as *intentional* states. In

Damasio's experiments on patients with prefrontal damages, it emerges a difference between the *somatic* level of *feeling* and the *cognitive* one of *knowledge*. There are some *feelings* in which these two dimensions are *not* necessarily connected, because they have not an *intentional* structure: it is the case of «background feelings».

So, reconsidering Castelfranchi's functional analysis, we should say that the *intentional* structure *pertains to need* (need for..), such as to every *cognitive* state, needing other cognitive structures (beliefs), *not to feeling itself*. As Damasio's *background* levels of feelings suggest, maybe *intentional stance doesn't pertain to feeling itself*, that is, rather, intimately connected with the lowest bodily states.

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