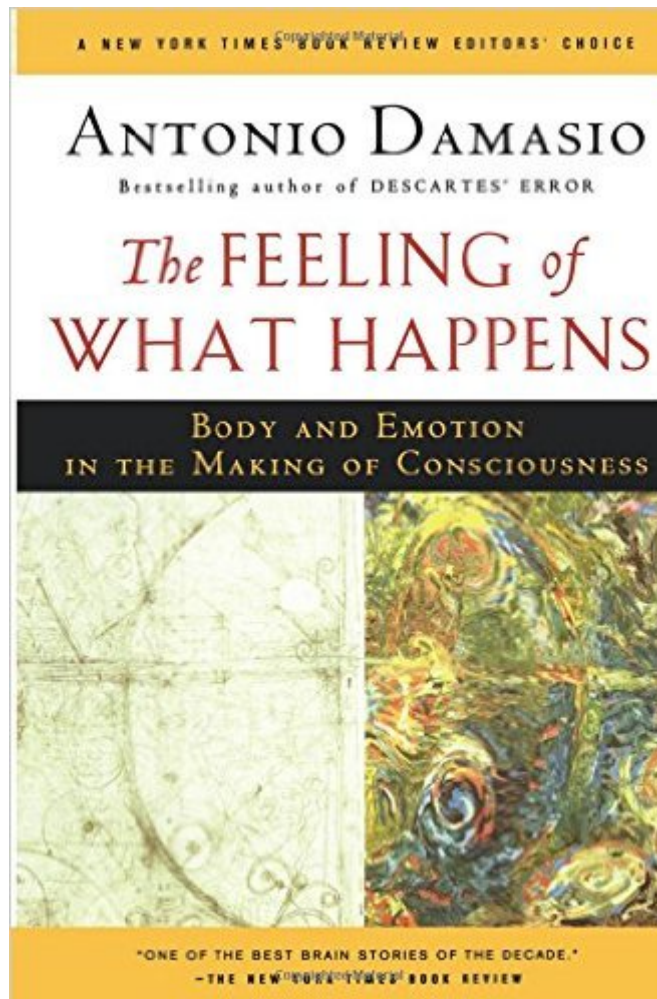


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The Feeling Of What Happens: Body And Emotion In The Making Of Consciousness



Synopsis

The publication of this book is an event in the making. All over the world scientists, psychologists, and philosophers are waiting to read Antonio Damasio's new theory of the nature of consciousness and the construction of the self. A renowned and revered scientist and clinician, Damasio has spent decades following amnesiacs down hospital corridors, waiting for comatose patients to awaken, and devising ingenious research using PET scans to piece together the great puzzle of consciousness. In his bestselling *Descartes' Error*, Damasio revealed the critical importance of emotion in the making of reason. Building on this foundation, he now shows how consciousness is created. Consciousness is the feeling of what happens—our mind noticing the body's reaction to the world and responding to that experience. Without our bodies there can be no consciousness, which is at heart a mechanism for survival that engages body, emotion, and mind in the glorious spiral of human life. A hymn to the possibilities of human existence, a magnificent work of ingenious science, a gorgeously written book, *The Feeling of What Happens* is already being hailed as a classic.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a landmark book, almost irrespective of how accurate all of Antonio Damasio's extensive theoretical formulations turn out to be. He is the first to admit (in the book itself) that things are changing so fast in this area of neuroscience that virtually nothing on the table at this point can be considered doctrinal, or not subject to potentially major modifications. That being said, I suspect that much of Damasio's more original terminology, terms such as "proto-self," "core-self,"

"autobiographical self," "core consciousness," and "extended consciousness" will quickly become part of the basic lexicon in consciousness neuroscience in many quarters, due to the sheer force of his ideas and the volume of original thought in this work. At the heart of this enterprise is Antonio Damasio's supposition (generally not informing much theorizing about consciousness) that the brain can't be conscious unless it represents not just objects, but a primitive self, and also represents the basic manner in which the self is being altered by interaction with the object(s). In other words, consciousness requires that the brain must represent not just the object, not just a basic self structure, but the interaction of the two. This is still an atypical foundation for a theory of consciousness, given that until recently, it was implicitly assumed that the self could be safely left out of the equation. There has been a recent sea change on this crucial point, parallel with the cogent formulations in Damasio's book. The book will challenge and delight the most sophisticated readers, while rarely leaving the less sophisticated lost or overwhelmed.

Damasio breaks down into minute, qualitative descriptive detail how the body/brain functions in humans, and ergo, de facto, many mammals. This book's strength is that Damasio backs up his claims regarding neural anatomy, physiology, and function with specific examples from comparative neuropathology. The book's weakness is that he goes on at length with qualitative descriptions for non-intuitive notions like how the body and brain function as a singular unit, and how emotions and feelings are integral along with body/brain physiology. I say this is the book's weakness because Damasio often bogs down and even tries to describe phenomena that are possibly ineffable, but these attempts at qualitative description are also one of the strengths of this book. This may seem contradictory, but possibly the book would have read differently if the author had stuck to purely quantitative case studies. However he did not, so we get through Damasio's several qualitative, alternate descriptions of singular phenomena an attempt to flesh out and make organic the dry clinical data. On the one hand the book could have been more concise without the extended descriptive sections, on the other hand the book possibly becomes richer and more meaningful because of them; this is up to the reader to decide. Having said this, the book itself endeavors to demonstrate how consciousness emerges from gross neuroanatomy and physiology. In this Damasio is successful in using neuropathology to define terms such as: homeostasis, consciousness, language, mental images, neuronal maps, cathexis, and hedonic tone (although he does not use these two latter terms explicitly). In all honesty Damasio is very strict about defining his terms.

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