

Workshop

Recent Developments in Neuroscience and Law

Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany

October 12, 2001

Report by Kathleen Wermke and Oliver Goodenough

On February 19, 2001, the Gruter Institute sponsored an afternoon session on Law and Neuroscience at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. Dr. Kathleen Wermke organised the session as part of her Institute-sponsored initiative at Humboldt's Institute for Anthropology, affiliated with the Charité Medical School.

The gathering began with a presentation by Oliver R. Goodenough (Law, Vermont) entitled "Locating the Sense of Justice in the Brain," in which he described the use of brain scanning experiments to explore the neurological basis of the sense of justice. The remainder of the afternoon was consumed by an extended discussion of how biological knowledge could help us understand how humans think about right and wrong. Topics ranged from evolutionary and zoological approaches to developmental and neurological insights.

Those in attendance included Prof. Manfred Bierwisch (Linguist and past Vice President of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Science), Prof. Günter Tembrock (Humboldt-University, Department of Behavioral Sciences), Prof. Dietmar Todt (Head of the Department of Behavioral Sciences of the Free University of Berlin), Prof. Jürgen Weissenborn (Head of the Department of Psycholinguistics of the University Potsdam), Herbert Helmrich (lawyer, Member of the Landtag Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), and Werner Mende (Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences). The Gruter Institute extends special thanks to Professor Rolf Winau, director of the Center for Humanities and Health Sciences and director of the Institute for Anthropology. We are grateful for his hospitality in hosting the session and look forward to further co-operation between the Gruter Institute and Humboldt University.