



Press release

## **The 22<sup>nd</sup> Jean-Louis Signoret Neuropsychology Prize of the Fondation Ipsen has been awarded to Jean Decety (University of Chicago, Chicago, USA)**

**Paris (France), 22 November 2013** – The international jury under the presidency of Prof. Albert Galaburda (Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA) awarded on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013 the 22<sup>nd</sup> Jean-Louis Signoret Neuropsychology Prize of the Fondation Ipsen (20.000€) to Jean Decety (University of Chicago, Chicago, USA) for his work that played a major role in the understanding of empathy.

Our emotions connect us to one another, but it is our caring about others' emotions that promotes interpersonal bonds. Empathy shapes the landscape of our social and moral lives. It can motivate helping others in distress; plays an essential role in inhibiting aggression, and facilitates cooperation between members of a similar species. In the lecture that he gave following the awarding of the Prize, Jean Decety began the talk by discussing how sensitivity to others' needs has evolved in the context of parental care in mammalian species. Then he examined the neurobiological mechanisms supporting its operation in humans and showed that empathy is facilitated by multiple physiological, hormonal and neural systems. Neuroimaging studies focusing on the perception of others' physical pain and social distress will be presented in support of the adaptive function of empathy in social interactions. Activation in brainstem, amygdala, insula, anterior cingulate cortex and orbitofrontal cortex is modulated by situational contexts and personal characteristics. One corollary of this neuroevolutionary model is that caregiving produces social preferences. Empathy is indeed a limited resource and has some unfortunate features. There is behavioral and neuroscience evidence demonstrating that group biases critically moderate the conditions in which empathic understanding and empathic concern are expressed. Finally, Jean Decety addressed empathetic dysfunction in individuals with psychopathy to further illustrate how the lack of sensitivity to others' suffering can contribute to a callous disregard for the welfare of others and amoral conduct.

Jean Decety is professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Chicago. He is a leading scholar on the social neuroscience of empathy, morality and prosocial behavior, as well as other topics related to neurobiology of social cognition. His work has led to new understandings of empathy, affective processes and moral decision-making in typically developing individuals as well as psychopaths. His research uses neuroimaging techniques (functional MRI and high-density EEG) and genetic to examine how biological and social factors interact in contributing to empathy and the motivation to care for the well-being of others. Dr. Decety is the current President of the *Society for Social Neuroscience*. He recently edited the *Oxford Handbook of Social Neuroscience* (2011) and *Empathy from Bench to Bedside* (2012).

### **About the Jean-Louis Signoret Neuropsychology Prize**

Launched in 1992, this prize has been awarded by the Fondation Ipsen to many renowned specialists: Eric Kandel (1992), Jacques Paillard (1993), Rodolfo Llinas (1994), Stephen Kosslyn (1995), Alfonso Caramazza (1996), Jean-Pierre Changeux (1997), Edoardo Bisiach (1998), Joseph LeDoux (1999), Joaquin Fuster (2000), Stanislas Dehaene (2001), Deepak Pandya (2002), Uta Frith (2003), Hanna and Antonio Damasio (2004), Marc Jeannerod (2005), Faraneh Vargha-Khadem (2006), Alvaro Pascual Leone (2007), Elizabeth Warrington (2008), Pierre Maquet (2009) and Giacomo Rizzolatti (2010), Patricia Kuhl (2011) and Cathy Prize (2012).

The jury members are: Albert Galaburda (Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA), President, Jocelyne Bachevalier (Emory University, Atlanta, USA), Laurent Cohen (Hôpital de la Salpêtrière, Paris, France), Branch Coslett (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA), Richard Frackowiak (CHUV, Lausanne, Switzerland), Didier Hannequin (Hôpital Charles Nicolle, Rouen, France), Kenneth Heilman (University of Florida, Gainesville, USA), Bernard Laurent (Hôpital Bellevue, Saint-Etienne, France),



Kimford Meador (Emory University, Atlanta, USA), Michel Poncet (C.H.U. Hôpital Timone, Marseille, France), Donald Stuss (The Rotman Research Institute, Toronto, Canada).

### **About the *Fondation Ipsen***

Established in 1983 under the aegis of the Fondation de France, the mission of the Fondation Ipsen is to contribute to the development and dissemination of scientific knowledge. The long-standing action of the Fondation Ipsen aims at fostering the interaction between researchers and clinical practitioners, which is indispensable due to the extreme specialization of these professions. The ambition of the Fondation Ipsen is to initiate a reflection about the major scientific issues of the forthcoming years. It has developed an important international network of scientific experts who meet regularly at meetings known as *Colloques Médecine et Recherche*, dedicated to six main themes: Alzheimer's disease, neurosciences, longevity, endocrinology, the vascular system and cancer science. Moreover the Fondation Ipsen has started since 2007 several meetings in partnership with the Salk Institute, the Karolinska Institutet, the Massachusetts General Hospital, the Days of Molecular Medicine Global Foundation as well as with the science journals Nature, Cell and Science. The Fondation Ipsen produced several hundred publications; more than 250 scientists and biomedical researchers have been awarded prizes and research grants.

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