

Thought

PHIL 29S
Stanford University – Summer 2018
TTh 4:30 – 5:50



Instructor

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Description

There is no doubt that thinking is central to what it means to be human. But what are thoughts? And what kind of process is thinking? The attempt to answer these questions spans several disciplines. Philosophers study how our thoughts could be about things and what distinguishes thoughts from other mental states, such as emotions and bodily sensations. Psychologists and neuroscientists investigate the cognitive and neural mechanisms that underpin our capacity to think. Linguists examine the relationship between thought and language. And researchers in computer science and artificial intelligence investigate whether machines can think and whether creative thinking can be automated. In this course, we will draw on these disciplines to explore some of the many fascinating aspects of thought. Questions covered will include: What is the fundamental nature of thoughts? Can thoughts be explained in terms of physical states? What kind of control do we have over our thoughts, and what kind of responsibility do we have for them? What is it to think creatively? How do we know our thoughts? Can thinking occur in public or is it a purely private process?

Texts

Bayne, Tim (2013). *Thought: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Crane, Tim (2016). *The Mechanical Mind: A Philosophical Introduction to Minds, Machines and Mental Representation*. Routledge.

Other readings will be made available on Coursework in PDF.

Course Requirements

Two Short (~1-2 pg.) Assignments (P/NP): 10%

Two Midterm Papers (3-4 pgs): 35%

Final Paper (4-5 pgs): 25%

Participation: 30%

It's crucial that you come to class every day. This is a discussion-based course and much of the material that we will talk about is not easy to extract from the readings on their own. The readings vary in length, but they all require close study. You should read them carefully before we discuss them in class, and you may need to read them more than once. Some of the readings will be challenging and include unfamiliar technical terms. Don't get frustrated if you don't understand something right away. Other people are likely to be confused too. If after re-reading, you still have trouble understanding, bring it up in discussion or email me about it.

Schedule

Week 1: What is thought?

Bayne, Chapter 1

Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Related Writings* (selections)

Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (selections)

Week 2: The computational theory of thought.

Bayne, Chapter 2

Crane, Chapters 3 and 4

(Recommended: Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, Chapter 2)

Week 3: Challenges for the computational theory

Block, 'Troubles with Functionalism'

Fodor, *The Mind Doesn't Work That Way*, Introduction

Week 4: Formats of mental representation

Crane, Chapter 1

Goodman, *Languages and Art* (selections)

Kosslyn, Thomas and Ganis, *The Case for Mental Imagery*, Chapter 1

(Recommended: Block, 'Mental Pictures and Cognitive Science')

Midterm Paper Due

Week 5: Is thinking a purely private process?

Bayne, Chapter 3
Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (selections)
J.D. Haynes et al. 'Reading hidden intentions in the human brain'
A.M. Owen et al. 'Detecting awareness in the vegetative state'

Week 6: The philosophy and psychology of reasoning

Wason, 'Reasoning'
Johnson-laird, 'Mental Models and Human Reasoning'
Carroll, 'What the Tortoise Said to Achilles'
Boghossian, 'What is Inference?'

Week 7: Thought and language

Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics*, Creative Aspect of Language Use
Carey, *The Origin of Concepts*, Chapter 7: Language and Core Cognition
Highly Recommended: Philosophy Talk Episode 'Language and Thought' by Ken Taylor and John Perry

Midterm Paper Due

Week 8: The role of emotion in thinking.

Johnson-laird, *How We Reason*, Emotions as Inferences
Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, The Somatic Markers Hypothesis
Hanoch, 'The Search Hypothesis of Emotion Revisited'

Week 9: Creative thinking.

Poincaré, Mathematical Discovery
Stokes, 'The Role of Imagination in Creativity'
Boden, 'Creativity and Artificial Intelligence: A Contradiction in Terms?'

Week 10: The ethics of thought.

Bayne, Chapter 7
Hieronymi, Controlling Attitudes
Mendlow, 'Thought Crime'
Mendlow, 'Punishing Pure Thought'

Final Paper Due

Policy for Late Work

Unless a legitimate reason is provided in advance, one increment of grade (for example: A to A-) will be taken off for each day a written assignment is late.

Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: <http://oae.stanford.edu>).