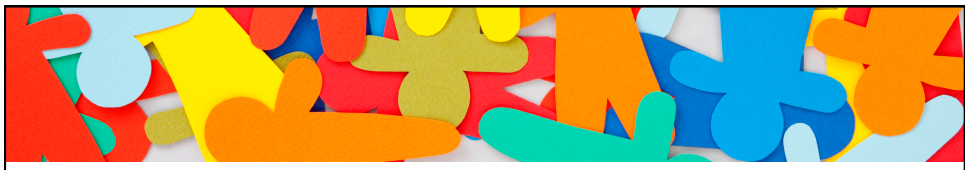


Philosophy of Mind Workshop Series
1. Introduction

Workshop series developed by Sophie Stammers, research fellow at Project PERFECT, University of Birmingham, and conceived of in partnership with Mind in Camden in 2017. Email s.stammers@bham.ac.uk

Aims

What we want from the group – group values

Intros and what you want from the workshop series

Shape of the workshop series

Today:	Introduction and philosophical techniques
Session 2	Experiences
Session 3	Beliefs
Session 4	Rationality
Session 5	Models of mental health
Session 6	Evaluating experiences and beliefs

Shape of the workshop series

The course looks critically at:

- Unusual experiences and beliefs which do not reflect shared reality, and ways of thinking which seem irrational, and how these cognitions can very often arise in *absence* of any mental health crisis or any psychiatric diagnosis, as well as alongside these.
- Why some unusual beliefs and experiences have been pathologised, while others have not; and why some instances of irrationality have been identified with 'madness', and others have not.
- The claim that unusual experiences and beliefs are predominantly negative: we look at how these cognitions can contribute to knowledge, and explore their role in supporting a unified and coherent sense of agency.

Guiding questions for today

- What sense of 'argument' is relevant to philosophy?
- What is a thought experiment, and what are they used for?
- What's the difference between normative and descriptive claims, and why does it matter?

"Argument"

Combative, confrontational, hostile?

Online Etymology Dictionary for "argue"

c. 1300, "to make reasoned statements to prove or refute a proposition," from Old French *arguer* "maintain an opinion or view; harry, reproach, accuse, blame" (12c.), ultimately from Latin *arguere* "**make clear, make known**, prove, declare, demonstrate," from PIE **argu-yo-*, suffixed form of root *arg- "**to shine**; white." The transmission to French might be via *arguere* in a Medieval Latin sense of "to argue," or from Latin *argutare* "to prattle, prate," frequentative of *arguere*.

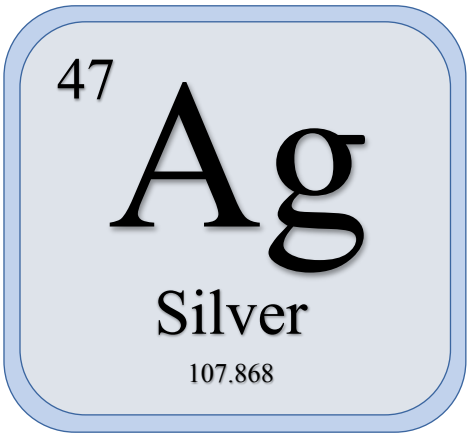
De Vaan says *arguere* is probably "a denominative verb 'to make bright, enlighten' to an adj. **argu-* '**bright**' as continued in *argutus* and outside Italic." He cites a closely similar formation in Hittite *arkuuae-* "to make a plea." Meaning "to oppose, dispute, contend in argument" is from late 14c. Related: *Argued*; *arguing*.

“Argument”

See “argent”

From Latin, "silver" or "white metal.

- Making ourselves clear.
- Making ourselves understood.
- Deeply communicative practice



Thought experiments

Nominate someone to summarise your thought experiment to the group.

1. What is the philosophical issue that the thought experiment is encouraging us to thing about?
2. What are your intuitions, what do you think it shows?

The bridge

On holiday, you decide to visit a new attraction – a bridge that spans a wide canyon, with a floor made of glass so that you can see the distant ground below. You learn that the bridge has been guaranteed as structurally sound by several engineers, but as you walk out across it, your heartbeat rises, your legs go weak, and you are soon trembling with fear. What should we call your new attitude towards the bridge? After all, on reading the engineers' guarantee, you *believe* the bridge is safe. Do you also *believe* it's not safe, or is your state of mind something other than a belief?

Adapted from Tamar Szabó Gendler in:

Gendler, T. S. (2008.) 'Alief and Belief,' *Mind and Language* 23 (5): 552-585.

The notebook

You and a friend are invited to a dinner party by another friend. Your friend has an excellent memory for dates and addresses, but you decide to write down the date and address of the party in your notebook. The day of the dinner party comes, and there is your first friend, having retrieved the information on when and where to go from her memory. You consulted your notebook to prompt you where you needed to go. Is it correct to say that you both *remembered* the date and address of the party, or is it only your friend who truly remembered? If we use external objects to help us store and retrieve information does that count as thinking itself? If it doesn't, what's the relevant difference between thinking "inside the head" and thinking "outside the head"?

Adapted from Andy Clark and David Chalmers in:

Clark, A. and D. Chalmers. (1998). 'The Extended Mind,' *Analysis* 58: 10-23.

The city dweller

Imagine a person blind from birth, who used his other senses, such as hearing, touch, proprioception, etc. to learn all about the city he lived in. He knew everyone in the city, he learned about the city's buildings, its side streets, its animals, its markets, and so on. Now imagine that he recovered his sight. True, the names of colours would not be known to him. But in general, he would find that nothing in the city would be different to the idea that he had of it before he recovered his sight, and he would be able to recognise everything in the city as he knew it before. The only significant change would be that he would know his surroundings with greater clarity and fullness. Do you agree this would be the case?

Adapted from Ibn Tufayl in:

Tufayl, I. (1972) *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy ibn Yaqzān: a philosophical tale*. Translated with introduction and notes by Lenn Evan Goodman, New York: Twayne.

The experience machine

Virtual reality technology advances to a point where you can put on a headset and body suit, and enter into an experience that is indistinguishable from reality. The programmers have made it such that you can live any life experience you want – travel the world, live in a mansion, become a famous rockstar – all the while totally believing that it is really happening, having no memory of the machine. But there's a hitch: if you want to use the experience machine, there's no going back. You can either opt into your dream life experience forever, or not get to try it all. So, what would you do?

Adapted from Robert Nozick in:

Nozick, R. (1974). *Anarchy, state, and utopia,* New York: Basic Books, 42–45.

Normative vs. descriptive claims

Normative claims

Normative claims make value judgements

Sometimes they prescribe what ***should*** be done *(relative to some set of values or standards)*

Descriptive claims

Descriptive claims do not make value judgements, they just make a claim about how something ***is***.

Normative vs. descriptive claims

- Sarah went to the gym near her house and played squash with Sayeed for 45 minutes.
- We should try to get 7-8hrs sleep a night.
- Game of Thrones is watched by millions of people.
- Game of Thrones is a great TV series.
- John believes that cats are great.
- John's belief is weird.
- Sarah bought the coat for £30, but it is a very high-quality coat, and she should have paid more for it.
- The bus should have picked them up at 08:13, but they waited until 08:43 before a bus arrived.

Normative vs. descriptive claims

Why might it be important to know if a claim is normative or descriptive?

When you have a normative claim, who decides what the relevant norms are?

(Optional) readings for next session

"Hearing voices? Don't assume that means schizophrenia"
https://tinyurl.com/m1reading1

"Perception and Perceptual Illusions"
https://tinyurl.com/m1reading2

General resources for browsing or own research:

Imperfect Cognitions blog:
imperfectcognitions.blogspot.co.uk

The Stanford Encylopedia of Philosophy: **plato.stanford.edu**