

Achille Varzi • 713 Philosophy Hall • email: av72 • url: ~av72 • Office hours: by appointment (Zoom)

- **DESCRIPTION.** Philosophers do not work in a lab. When it comes to testing their theories, they do not and generally cannot run an actual experiment. Rather, they rely on thought experiments, which are devices of the imagination. But what exactly is a thought experiment? How does it work? What sort of evidence does it provide? This seminar will address these questions by taking a close look at a number of influential thought experiments used by philosophers to deal with issues and theories in different domains: epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of language, aesthetics, and political philosophy.
- **FORMAT.** Seminar discussion based on weekly readings. Each seminar will be introduced by a brief presentation given by a team of two students.
- **READINGS.** There is no textbook for this seminar. All required readings are available on CourseWorks as pdf files. Additional literature will be made available as the semester progresses.
- **REQUIREMENTS.** Active participation, a seminar presentation, a final paper (10–15 pages).
- **SCHEDULE.** Here is breakdown of the semester.

1.	1/11	Introduction: The lab of the mind	No reading
	1/18	<i>Martin Luther King Jr. Day, no class</i>	
2.	1/25	Epistemology: Pocket money	Gettier 1963 – Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?
3.	2/1	Ethics (1): The trolley problem	Foot 1967 – The Doctrine of the Double Effect
4.	2/8	Phil Mind (1): Mar, the color scientist	Jackson 1982 – Epiphenomenal Qualia
5.	2/15	Aesthetics: Authentic copies	Borges 1939 – Pierre Menard, author of <i>Don Quixote</i>
6.	2/22	Metaphysics (1): The two spheres	Black 1952 – The Identity of Indiscernibles
	3/1	<i>Spring Break, no class</i>	
7.	3/8	Political Phil: The veil of ignorance	Rawls 1971 – A Theory of Justice (excerpt)
8.	3/15	Ethics (2): The violinist	Thomson 1971 – A Defense of Abortion
9.	3/22	Phil Language: “Gödel”	Kripke 1972 – Naming and Necessity (excerpt)
10.	3/29	Metaphysics (2): Occupy Wall	Effingham & Robson 2007 – Mereology and endurantism
11.	4/5	Phil Mind (2): The Chinese room	Searle 1980 – Minds, Brains, and Programs
12.	4/12	Conclusion: Becoming a vampire	Paul 2014 – Transformative Experience (excerpt)

- **BACKGROUND LITERATURE.** There is a large literature on the use of thought experiments in philosophy and in the sciences. The following texts are not required, but you may find them interesting/helpful.

Daniel Dennett, *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking*, Norton 2013.

Michael T. Stuart, Yiftach Fehige, and James R. Brown (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Thought Experiments*, Routledge 2018.

Roy A. Sorensen, *Thought Experiments*, Oxford University Press 1992.

Tamar S. Gendler, *Thought Experiment. On the Powers and Limits of Imaginary Cases*, Garland 2000.

James R. Brown, *The Laboratory of the Mind. Thought Experiments in the Natural Sciences*, Routledge 1991 (second edition, 2011).

Mélanie Frappier, Letitia Meynell, and James R. Brown (eds.), *Thought Experiments in Science, Philosophy, and the Arts*, Routledge 2013.

Katerina Ierodiakonou and Sophie Roux (eds.), *Thought Experiments in Methodological and Historical Contexts*, Brill 2011.