

Bojan Borstner and Smiljana Gartner (eds.), Thought Experiments between Nature and Society: A Festschrift for Nenad Mišćević

Pećnjak, Davor

Source / Izvornik: **Croatian Journal of Philosophy, 2018, 18, 241 - 244**

Journal article, Published version

Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:261:155998>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-07-23**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[Repository of the Institute of Philosophy](#)

and taking into account, it can be integrated back into one of the models, so that in the future it will provide a relevant “lateral constraint” to some exercise of imagination. If we assume that imagination is typically imagistic, and that mental models are typically concrete and “iconic”, but that both allow for thought processes that range from more iconic-pictorial to more digital deductive ones, then we shall notice that the two media, imaginative and model-sustaining one, nicely fit together and can interact in a non-problematic way.

NENAD MIŠČEVIĆ

University of Maribor, Maribor, Slovenia
Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

Bojan Borstner and Smiljana Gartner (eds.), *Thought Experiments between Nature and Society: A Festschrift for Nenad Miščević*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, xxxviii + 437 pp.

This volume is a festschrift dedicated to Nenad Miščević, well-known Croatian philosopher, for the occasion of his 65th birthday. During his years in philosophy, Miščević engaged almost all areas of philosophy. So, since thought experiments, according to some people, lie in the foundation of all the disciplines and subdisciplines of philosophy as an indispensable foundational reflective tool, and could be, at the same time, a philosophical problem of their own (well, everything, “everything”, “everything” can be a philosophical problem), it seemed appropriate to take them as the central theme of this celebration volume.

The book consists, beside Introduction by the editors, the personal account of Miščević by Bojan Borstner and Tadej Todorović, and the Miščević’s own account of his views on thought experiments, of 22 chapters and each chapter has Miščević’s reply. Contributors to the volume are (in order of appearance): Timothy Williamson “From Anti-Metaphysics to Metaphysics”, Howard Robinson “Intuitions and Thought Experiments”, Maja Malec and Olga Markič “Miščević on Intuitions and Thought Experiments”, Nenad Smokrović “Curiosity and the Argumentative Process”, Peter Gärdenfors “Sematic Transformations”, Danilo Šuster “Lucky Math: Anti-luck Epistemology and Necessary Truth”, Guido Melchior “Epistemic Luck and Logical Necessities: Armchair Luck Revisited”, Smiljana Gartner “Did a Particularist Kill the Thought Experiment?”, Marian David “Experimental Philosophy, Gettier-Cases and Pragmatic Projection”, Peter Simons “Concepts in a World of Particulars”, İlhan Inan “Is the Speed of Light Knowable A Priori?”, Andrej Ule “Mental Models in Scientific Work”, Ferenc Huoranszki “Natural Kinds and Conceptual Truth”, Majda Trobok “Grasping the Basic Arithmetical Concepts: the Role of Imaginative Intuitions”, Andraž Stožer and Janez Bregant “The Colour Dilemma: A Subjectivist Answer”, Matjaž Potrč “Dasain in a Vat”, Pierre Jacob “Knowing One’s Own Mind” (some real history instead of thought experiment: Balkan wars were fought 1912–1913 and Miščević was not born then, so he could not be a victim of these wars.), Friderik Klampfer “The False Promise of Thought-Experimentation

in *Moral and Political Philosophy*”, Miodir Matulović “Mišević, Mental Models, and Thought Experiments in Political Philosophy”, Boran Berčić “Are Nations Social Constructs? Nenad on Nations”, Rudi Kotnik “Thought Experiments in Teaching: TE as a Suppositional Real Story”, and Boris Vezjak “The Ring of Gyges and the Philosophical Imagination”.

The articles are grouped under three main headings—the first deals with general problems about thought experiments, the second deals mostly with the relation of the thought experiments and the (science and metaphysical structure of the) world; the third concentrates on thought experiments in the philosophy of mind, philosophy of politics, morality and society. But subdisciplines of philosophy emerge in each of the three parts. Some of the articles deal more about some other particular problem which Mišević discusses in his numerous works, rather than exactly the thought experiments or intuitions.

Of course, it is not possible, in a short review, to give even an elementary justice to such a volume which contains many good and new ideas, arguments and well-supported theories; and to each chapter, so I have chosen just several chapters for more detailed exposition (so it is a subjective choice).

Mišević, in his overview “Accounting for Thought Experiments—25 Years Later” characterises thought experiment (13) as an “armchair” reflexion which involves “experimental design” for a theory which is to be tested, the construction of a counterfactual scenario and its careful presentation, thinking and reflecting carefully about the presented scenario and, finally, “the decision” about the theory that is tested. This “decision” is intuition of the experimental subject (it can be the author of the thought experiment himself, or an interlocutor), and it is usually compared with some relevant similar other thought experiments. So, thought experiments are performed only cognitively, “in the laboratory of mind,” to use James Brown’s characterisation (17). They often include visual imagination, but what is important in the end—to confirm or disconfirm the theory which is tested—should be careful reasoning about the scenario and the theory, though intuitions elicited are more scenario-based than inference based (26). Mišević further develops some details about where to place thought experiments in the wider theoretical picture and then develops some specifics of thought experiments—their phenomenology, the characterisations of mental models building and engages experimental philosophy which challenged the use of thought experiments. Mišević calls his proposal, which aims at characterisation and explanation of the structure and role of thought experiments and intuitions, “Moderate Voice of Competence View” (26). Briefly, according to this model, distinct group of phenomena is made by intuitions-dispositions and judgements; there is a psychological capacity to use imaginative and judgemental competencies so we get intuitional data which do not involve theory and contain only just a small amount of proto-theory. For Mišević, concepts are not the proper objects of intuitions; they are only subordinated in their role to the main function of intuition which is aimed toward external objects, items and facts (26).

Howard Robinson in his article expresses scepticism about the closely related notions of “thought experiment” and “intuition”—about their usefulness in philosophy. He uses the term “revolution” to illustrate the point.

Many various events are called revolutions, but only one property is common to them says Robinson—they are radical changes. Beside this, each particular case (of revolution) is for a discussion of its own, if we would like to say really important and significant matters about each of them. Precisely this is transferred to “intuitions” and “thought experiments”. Robinson (51) gives this definition for “intuition”: “A belief is intuitive when the grounds for holding it are either not dependent on the kind of reasoning, or publically available evidence, which are normally regarded as necessary for a rational belief, or go beyond what available evidential considerations of a more public kind would strictly justify”; and for “thought experiment” (53): “A thought experiment envisages a situation meant to throw light on a philosophical problem where, whether that situation actually obtains or not, is held not to be relevant to its ability to illuminate the issue.” Nothing else is generally important for these two notions—each case is on its own, with its content and details, for relevant discussion. So, after exposing a certain number of examples of “intuitively plausible or implausible cases” and thought experiments across semantics, problem of personal identity, philosophy of mind, epistemology and ethics, Robinson concludes that we should be very sceptical about discussing “intuitions” and “thought experiments” as that they are themselves a philosophical problem.

Smiljana Gartner questions the applicability of thought experiments in ethical contexts. It is possible to conceive a thought experiment as a certain ethically relevant situation and then to change only slightly the properties of that situation, but changes in attitudes toward the thought experiment, adding just these slight changes, could be, and sometimes are, dramatic; sometimes we can go back and forth even with contrary or contradictory attitudes what should we do in such situations. It seems that the condition of stability is not often satisfied concerning thought experiments in ethics. Gartner concludes that if we use thought experiments in ethics, we should be extremely careful and precise.

Peter Simons argues in his contribution, that there are no concepts and meanings as abstract objects. For Simons, there are only particulars and collections of them. Moreover, general concepts as well as singular concepts, fall to the same constraints if we explain them nominalistically. To have such nominalist explanation of the concepts, their use and understanding, we have to identify the collection of particulars that revolve around them (the main concrete example is the concept “horse”). These are: users, words, other external representations, acts, activities, capacities, compliants. Though interrelations between them are complex and sometimes very complicated, still we can find them and all these are, according to Simons, identifiable as concrete entities.

Boris Vezjak, in his article, challenges the idea that Plato offers a “thought experiment” in his *Republic*, as is claimed by Mišević, in the story of the myth of Gyges, and his objections are fourfold, so there are: general methodological objection, motivational objection, structural objection, and interpretative objection. Vezjak attempts to show by these considerations that Plato’s telling myth does not have relevant properties to be classified as a thought experiment as we today conceive what thought experiment is.

This Festschrift presents many different pieces of excellent philosophical work for further study and discussion. So, take a real experiment—take this book and read whatever interests you and find out Mišćević’s answers to articles particularly mentioned here and, as well, for all the others. We can praise editors for their immense work done.

DAVOR PEĆNJAK
Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb, Croatia

Boran Berčić (ed.), *Perspectives on the Self*, Rijeka: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2017, 375 pp.

The collection *Perspectives on the Self* brings together seventeen essays which explore the notion of the Self. Employing both historical and conceptual analyses of the Self, the authors cover a variety of topics from research areas that include metaphysics, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, philosophy of language, ethics and history of philosophy. The book, published by the University of Rijeka, is a result of a conference, *The Self*, which took place at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka (Croatia) on March 31 and April 1, 2016. As noted in the preface by the editor Boran Berčić, Full Professor at the Rijeka Department of Philosophy, the participants of the conference, whose essays make up the volume, are in different ways involved in the research project *Identity* at the University of Rijeka. Those include both Croatian and foreign philosophers along with the reviewers of the book, Nenad Smokrović and Dušan Dožudić.

The book is divided into six chapters. The first chapter, titled “Self and Body”, starts with “The Central Dogma of Transhumanism” by Eric T. Olson (University of Sheffield). Olson argues against the transhumanist claim that it is metaphysically possible to upload our psychological selves into a digital computer. He identifies the transhumanist claim as resting on a metaphysical assumption that we are essentially patterns (the *pattern view*) which can be transmitted as information. He then confronts the claim by insisting that we are essentially material things (more specifically—biological organisms), not patterns, and as such cannot be “detached” from our biological substrate and transferred into a computer. He also considers the so-called *constitutional view* and the *temporal parts view* but concludes that they cannot serve the transhumanist’s purposes.

Miljana Milojević (University of Belgrade) in “Embodied and Extended Self” combines a functionalist ontology of the self with an embodied and extended view on the mind. She starts by accepting the psychological-continuity criterion of personal identity (Parfit). She then casts it in a realizier-functionalist ontology which, Milojević believes, allows for an embodied view on the mind for which she finds justification in the works of Gallagher, Shapiro and others. Finally, she uses multiple realizability of the mental to extend the self beyond the boundaries of the organism.

Zdenka Brzović (University of Rijeka) in “The Immunological Self” surveys a number of possible identity criteria for a biological organism (functional integration, autonomy, genetics). After showing their flaws, Brzović shifts her analysis to different versions of the *immunology criterion*. She discusses the *self-nonself theory* (Burnet), several versions of the *systematic*