



Thought and Thinking

Abstract: Analyzing our mind we find both single and separate thoughts and thinking as a mental act and holistic experience. Single thoughts are linguistic concepts rather than real empiric entities. Thinking as a process is discussed as a viable alternative. But since processes are measurable, and thinking is not, the only other way to understand the nature of thought is through active participation in the transcendent flux of mind.

If we analyze our language and especially the concepts of 'thought' and 'thinking' - often used synonymously - we realize the following fundamental aspect. Our age of technology and science affects the way we use language and concepts in thinking. Considering the above-mentioned terms, the different significance and heterogeneity of their associated meanings throughout the centuries do not suggest that this differentiation has at any time been other than it is nowadays. 'Thinking' seems to be the process of having particular and single 'thoughts'. Whereas thoughts are considered as particularities or singularities, separable as single analytic entities, thinking has come to mean a procedural event known to everybody having self-consciousness.

If we think of a house, for instance, do we have a single, isolated 'thought' or does the whole event of representing a house before our inner eye express an underlying, undefinable and indeterminate process? Probably, most would concede to the latter notion, although we use the former one in our language. That is partly due to the fact that we are empirically occupied with particular things in our daily life. Our experience is always experience of single facts and entities, although we are sometimes aware of experience as a process in time.

We have to ask whether 'thoughts' are really possible. Is the concept of 'thought' not self-contradictory? We experience thinking as a holistic event, but notwithstanding this fact, we always speak of separate thoughts. This superficial usage of language does not justify the use of these concepts in philosophy. In communication with other people it may suffice and most of the time it is even adequate to talk of 'thoughts'. If we try to analyze a thought, to frame this thought precisely, to determine its shape, we must inevitably fail, because this whole process of thinking appears a riddle to us. We do not yet understand how thinking works. Psychology, neurophysiology, and neuroscience are preoccupied only with physiological, that is, physical processes going on in the body and especially in the brain. These organic events do not explain how we think or what thinking as such is. And it is not possible to come to an understanding of 'thinking' through the *via reductionis*.

As there are no single thoughts, we must conclude then, that thinking is a process. This concept of 'process' is likewise inappropriate for what philosophers call 'thinking'. What is a process? A process has a definite beginning and a definite end or purpose or goal. In between a gradual change or development takes place. If we look at the state of being in the beginning of a process which an object undergoes and at the state at the end of a process, we notice a change which has been accomplished by some influence from outside of the object or possibly also from inside of itself. This process presupposes temporality. Without time we could not discern a change, otherwise any development would be impossible. Process and time are indivisibly interlinked.

Process is derived from the Latin word 'procedere', that is from 'pro-', which means forward, and 'cedere', which means to go. "Procedere" means to go forwards, to go on, to continue in time, starting from a certain point and arriving at another point. This point could be in space or at the same place. The latter case is a development of one's inner self, for example emotions. The end of a process is however not meant to be absolutely finished. This process could only be a phase within a more comprehensive process, the process of life, or the process of the history of mankind or the evolution of Nature etc. We are most of the time able to determine accurate or at least approximate states of beginning and end, although these may sometimes be assumed quite artificially for the purpose of expediency and better understanding of a case in question.

Thus, we can say that a process is measurable. We can hold a conceptual measure to it (by comparison) and determine its contents, the change that has occurred during the process. We can observe even phases of the process itself. All this can be expressed fairly accurately in our language, especially if we relate processes to science. With emotional and subjective processes, which we all experience in our lives, we have more problems to determine them exactly. Again, we speak of a certain feeling of love, but we cannot determine it as a separate entity for which we hold it. We use the term 'love' as a single notion in our daily discourses, and we seldom are able to define 'love' if asked to. Besides being a symptom of our superficiality and our lack of reflection, this also points to the underlying fact that thinking and feeling are not single entities, nor processes in the scientific sense.

Thinking is not measurable. It is and remains indeterminate, indefinite, although empirically given to us in all its immediacy. This immediacy belongs to experience. Therefore, an immediate emotion, experienced for itself, says more than thousand words. If you have never experienced love for yourself, it is impossible for anyone to convey the concept of love, the meaning of love to you, because this is not a conveyable term or a teachable term like for example scientific terms. Immediate and experiential events cannot be imparted to other selves, unless the other one has also immediate experience and 'knowledge' of it. If we try to understand this immediacy and analyze it and describe it with our language, it loses its uniqueness and becomes a general fact, but a fact deprived of meaning, a vacuous and abstract term. This immediate event, in the act of experiencing it, remains somehow aloof of ratiocination and rationalization. As soon as we try to reflect upon it rationally, this experience vanishes into thin air, we lose our grip of it, and it becomes a rigid concept, obstructed and constrained by lifeless abstraction.

Therefore, in order to understand what thinking is, we have to consider two aspects:

1. If we consider thinking as a flowing, a flux, but not of single thoughts, but just a flux (compare also Williams' stream of consciousness), we come closer to what thinking really is.
2. As realized above, we are not able to grasp thinking by rationally reflecting on it. There is another mode of thinking: Paranoesis (Transrational Thinking). With this mode we are able to understand in a higher way and more holistically what thinking is.

To think transrationally means to think in Hologemes, that is, in wholes rather than in single entities, such as thoughts.

Maybe we have to change our view of seeing things or events. Instead of our subjective point of view (the subject is the center of the world since Descartes), we could apply a more participatory view. For instance: instead of saying that it is we who are doing the thinking, we could say, that we participate in thinking. We participate in the flux called thinking.

Analogy: when scooping a handful of water out of a flowing river, we do not produce the water ourselves, it is already there, we just take the water if we need to. The same could be applied to thinking: thinking is a flux and we just scoop thoughts out of it. This means, that thinking is something surpassing our body, something metaphysical and transcendent. In this transcendent flux, all possibilities of thoughts or rather of thinking events or entities in the Whiteheadian sense are contained and can be tapped by everyone. It remains for me to explain, why we have subjective thoughts and why we have just these thoughts we have and not some others, and why the thoughts differ from individual to individual.

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