

# Preface

On a sunny day in summer 2016, the two editors (RJS and JF) were sitting in a café on the Hauptstrasse near the Psychology Department of Heidelberg University. When the discussion moved to the topic of textbooks, RJS asked JF if he would be interested in coediting a textbook on the psychology of human thought. There are not many recent competitors, RJS noted. JF agreed that contemporary textbooks in the field of human thought are truly hard to find.

Soon the idea emerged to produce an “open-access” textbook that could be used, free of charge, by students all over the world. The newly founded publishing house, “Heidelberg University Publishing” (HeiUP), seemed to be a perfect platform for this idea. We wrote a proposal for the Editorial Board of HeiUP, which accepted our idea and soon gave us the go-ahead. We then looked for potential contributors for our chapters and obtained commitments from some of the world’s leading experts in the field.

Although not every college or university teaches such a course, we believe that it is an extremely important course for any psychology major—or, arguably, anyone at all—to take. First, we know that even a high IQ does not guarantee that a person will think well in his or her everyday life. People commit cognitive fallacies, such as the sunk-cost fallacy (otherwise known as “throwing good money after bad”), every day. It is important for students to understand their lapses in thinking and to have ways of correcting them. Second, standard cognitive-psychology or cognitive-science courses only scratch the surface of the field of human thought. Such courses need to include a wide variety of other topics, such as perception, learning, and memory, so that they cannot possibly go into any true depth on complex thought processes. Our textbook fills this gap. Third, we are

seeing today how even leaders all over the world—individuals chosen to help guide whole countries into the future—often show astonishing and sometimes seemingly inexplicable lapses in their critical thinking. We all need to understand how such lapses can occur, especially when people are under stress, and how they can be corrected. We hope, therefore, that you profit as much from this course as we both did, taking similar courses, when we were younger.

## The Content

This idea for an edited textbook, *The Psychology of Human Thought: An Introduction*, is motivated by our view that much of the “action” in psychological science today involves the study of human thought (as witnessed by the success of books such as Daniel Kahneman’s *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 2011, and of Steven Pinker’s *The Stuff of Thought*, 2007, both of which became best sellers). The excitement of the field notwithstanding, we were able to find only two textbooks on the topic of human thought (Manktelow, 2012; Minda, 2015). Yet, a course on “Thinking” (or any of its related course names) is one of the most exciting in psychology. Such a course, taught at the undergraduate level by the late Professor Alexander Wearing, was part of what motivated RJS to enter the field of complex cognition. Because of the scarcity of recent textbooks covering the broad range of this field, it seemed timely to present a new one edited and authored by experts in the field of human thought.

## For Whom This Book is Written

This volume is intended as a primary or secondary textbook for courses on what we call “The Psychology of Human Thought”, which can take a number

of different names, such as *The Psychology of Human Thought*, *Thinking, Reasoning, Problem Solving*, *Decision Making*, *Complex Processes*, *Higher Processes*, *Complex Cognition*, *Higher Cognition*, or similar titles.

The course is usually taught at the third (college junior) undergraduate level, or one level higher than courses on Cognitive Psychology. Many students with an interest in cognition take the cognitive-psychology or cognitive-science course first, followed by the more advanced course on human thought.

## How to Use This Book

The chapters describe the specific topics of the field in terms of theories, research, and applications. The pedagogical elements in the book include:

1. **Chapter summaries.** Each chapter has a summary of the main points at the end.
2. **Questions for comprehension and reflection.** Five or so questions, at the end of each chapter, assess both comprehension of and reflection on the material of the chapter. These questions are thought-based rather than simple factual-recall questions.
3. **Tables and figures.** The use, where relevant, of tables and figures to illustrate and clarify material is based on the idea that multiple

representations of information help students understand the material better.

4. **Glossary.** The book contains a glossary at the end of each chapter that defines key terms. These key terms are bolded in the text.
5. **Hot topics.** This box discusses current research as seen by the chapter author(s), with some references and also a photograph of the author(s).

## Conclusion

We hope that you enjoy this overview of the psychology of human thought. If you have any comments or suggestions, please send them to the editors at robert.sternberg@cornell.edu or joachim.funke@psychologie.uni-heidelberg.de

The editors thank the very supportive team from Heidelberg University Publishing, especially Maria Effinger, Daniela Jakob, Anja Konopka and Frank Krabbes. Claire Holfelder and David Westley did a wonderful job in checking language from non-native authors. Also, we had the luck to have one of the best (and fastest!) copyeditors we could think of: Julia Karl. Thanks a lot for your invaluable help, Julia! It was fun to work with you!

R.J.S. & J.F.  
Ithaca, NY, USA & Heidelberg, Germany  
Summer 2019

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