

My research project addresses one of the most fundamental philosophical questions: what is the nature of thoughts and what are their essential properties? Investigating the notion of *thought* and the closely related notion of *content* in different philosophical traditions I will try to answer such questions: “What do we actually say when we ascribe thoughts to other people?”, “When do two thoughts have the same contents and when do their contents differ?”, “What makes my thought be about a particular object?”, “What is the relation between the notion of content and behavior?”.

One of the most central features of our psychic lives is that we have mental states, which are about something. What exactly are the contents of those states? Let’s imagine Jan, who thinks “Warsaw is a city with more than two million inhabitants”. Jan’s thought has a well-defined content: it is about an individual – Warsaw and it represents it as having a certain property – being a city with more than two million inhabitants. If Warsaw has over two million inhabitants, Jan’s belief is true. According to one of the two leading philosophical theories, contents are identified with the truth conditions.

Let’s imagine Jan sitting on a bus in Warsaw and thinking: “This is a city with more than two million inhabitants”. Jan’s thought is about an individual – Warsaw, which he represents as having a certain property. According to the theory mentioned above Jan’s thoughts in both cases have identical contents. It might however be that in the second case Jan doesn’t know that he is in Warsaw. He might also believe that Warsaw is a very small town with less than 20 000 inhabitants. According to the presented theory Jan has two contradictory thoughts *that Warsaw is a city with more than two million inhabitants* and *that Warsaw is not a city with more than two million inhabitants*.

The dominant referential theory of content overlooks a crucial aspect of our thoughts: the fact that we always think of an object in a certain way. We might think of the same objects in different ways, without realizing it. Those different ways of thinking about an object might motivate different behaviors. Thus, if we want our theory to capture the connection between beliefs and behavior, we must accordingly modify our notion of content. The aim of my project is to propose such a theory, which would accommodate those opposing intuitions.