

The Art of Supposition

The Art of Supposition:

Homo Putans

By

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PREFACE

At fourteen, I became captivated by the Turkish word “*sanmak*”—supposing. The concept fascinated me, and I felt an unshakable urge to explore its depths. I decided to write a story about a man who lived fully aware of his suppositions. Obsessed with finding certainty in an uncertain world, he devised a peculiar method: reducing everything to the number four. Four bicycles, four books, four of every imaginable thing. To him, the symmetry and repetition of four offered stability, a foundation amid the chaos of supposing. Yet, as his life unfolded, this obsessive structure revealed its cracks, raising deeper questions about whether true certainty and awareness could ever be achieved. That story was my first attempt at grappling with the complexities of supposing, a seed that has grown into the ideas I now share in this book. Even then, supposition felt like more than a word: It was a doorway to understanding the human experience.

During a recent month-long stay in Kathmandu, a drug seller approached me, offering hashish. Out of curiosity, I decided to try it and ate it. What followed was an experience so extraordinary, I could hardly believe it. Time seemed to unravel, moving backward or stopping entirely. Reality became a looping series of repetitive movements, as if I were trapped in a recurring frame of existence. In those surreal moments, I *supposed* I was dead. The sense of permanence and normalcy vanished, leaving me in a world that felt unrecognizable. The illusion of time folding in on itself was haunting. I questioned whether I could ever truly live again. Everything spiraled in reverse, an endless rewind of reality. This profound confrontation with supposition was a turning point. It planted the seed for this book, urging me to explore the nature of reality, perception, and the fragile constructs we live within. That disorienting experience became the catalyst for everything I’ve written here.

This book introduces Homo Putans, the “supposing human,” as a novel philosophical framework for understanding human existence. Supposing, distinct from mere thinking or imagination, involves hesitation, doubt, and a creative engagement with possibilities. It is characterized by its ability to confront ambiguity and construct meaning in the face of uncertainty. When we suppose, we engage with a provisional reality, treating it as

plausible without the need for full affirmation. This act is a bridge between the perceived and the possible, enabling us to create and relate in the face of uncertainty. From everyday decision-making to the grand narratives of philosophy, art, and science, supposing is both an individual and collective endeavor that underpins our shared humanity.

We can claim that human existence is an uncertain and hesitant dance between what is and what could be. At the heart of this dance lies the act of supposing, a deeply human endeavor to engage with the uncertainties of existence. I propose that supposing is one of the most foundational acts of human cognition and existence. It is the process through which we bridge the ever-present gap between the internal and the external, the known and the unknown. In supposing, we craft narratives, imagine possibilities, and engage with reality in a way that is uniquely human. In this book, *Homo Putans: The Art of Supposition*, I propose that supposing is not merely an incidental cognitive function but a fundamental mode of human existence. It has an immense capacity of shaping our thoughts and relationships with the world.

The proposed concept, “supposing,” is examined as both a cognitive and philosophical act that bridges the gap between uncertainty and understanding. Drawing on historical and contemporary philosophical traditions, including Hans Vaihinger’s Philosophy of As If and phenomenological insights from Husserl and Brentano, the book situates supposing as a significant process in human cognition and meaning-making. While rooted in philosophical inquiry, the book also considers conceptual alignments with cognitive science to explore how supposing shapes perception and decision-making. By thriving in ambiguity, supposing is framed as an act of constructing potential realities and engaging with the unknown (Büyükbay, 2025).

The concept of Homo Putans, or “the supposing human,” offers a lens through which we can explore the multifaceted nature of supposition. Unlike Homo Sapiens, defined by the capacity for reason, or Homo Faber, characterized by the drive to create, Homo Putans encapsulates the human tendency to construct provisional realities. This tendency, rooted in both belief and imagination, allows us to navigate uncertainty and envision possibilities, yet remains grounded in the potential for action and truth.

In the context of modernity, supposing gains even greater significance. We live in an age characterized by rapid technological advances, shifting social norms, and a deepening awareness of the complexity of truth. In this

environment, the ability to suppose, without succumbing to dogmatism or despair, becomes an essential tool for survival and flourishing. Homo Putans is a figure not only of philosophical inquiry but also of resilience and creativity. This archetype embodies the human capacity to adapt and thrive in uncertain times.

This book seeks to explore supposing as a philosophical, scientific, and existential phenomenon. Drawing from a wide range of disciplines, including philosophy, cognitive science, and cultural studies, I aim to uncover the foundational role of supposing in shaping human thought and action. From the ancient debates of Plato to the groundbreaking theories of Hans Vaihinger, Edmund Husserl, and Jacques Lacan, I trace the evolution of supposing as a concept and its enduring relevance in contemporary thought. Moreover, I connect supposing to the insights of modern neuroscience and highlight its cognitive and neurological underpinnings. Through examples like Cotard syndrome and phantom limb phenomena, I illustrate how supposing operates at the intersection of perception, memory, and imagination. These cases reveal not only the power of supposing to shape our realities but also its potential to illuminate the workings of the human mind. Finally, this book delves into the cultural and existential dimensions of supposing, examining its role in art, literature, and social structures. Supposing, I argue, is not only a cognitive act but also a cultural and political phenomenon that reflects and shapes the values and aspirations of societies.

As you journey through the chapters of this book, you will encounter a rich tapestry of ideas, from the philosophical foundations of supposing to its implications for the human condition. Each section invites you to reflect on the ways supposing shapes your understanding of the world and your place within it. Through this exploration, I hope to illuminate the central role of Homo Putans in the story of human existence and to inspire new ways of thinking about what it means to be human.

Welcome to the world of Homo Putans. Let us suppose, together.

INTRODUCTION TO HOMO PUTANS

Deleuze and Guattari (1991) argue that philosophy's primary function is the creation of concepts. For these concepts to remain relevant and vital, they must undergo continuous re-evaluation and reinterpretation, even if this process involves placing them in new, contradictory contexts. One such dormant concept in need of revival is supposition. This work seeks to reawaken supposition as a crucial and underexplored element of human existence. By hypothesizing that human existence is fundamentally shaped by the act of supposing, this book invites a reexamination of the mechanisms underlying individual cognition and societal structures.

Deleuze and Guattari (1991) introduce the idea of conceptual personae as figures that embody and animate philosophical concepts. These personae serve to ground abstract ideas, making them tangible and relatable. The conceptual persona for supposition might be imagined as an individual moving in uncertainty, embracing ambiguity, and exploring novel possibilities. This persona exemplifies the courage to think beyond the known, inhabiting the tension between reality and imagination. Supposition, as a process, represents the horizon of thought, enabling individuals and societies to generate new concepts, question established beliefs, and expand intellectual boundaries. It mirrors lived experiences, acting as a lens through which individuals interpret and make sense of their perceptions and interactions with the world.

Supposition, as a cognitive process, extends beyond mere belief, imagination, or assumption. It operates as a universal mechanism, shaping how individuals construct reality and engage in behaviors, and navigate between perception and action. This study situates supposing as a bridge between these realms, creating a conceptual space where potentialities and possibilities converge. A review of existing literature underscores the multifaceted nature of supposition. Kahneman and Tversky (1982) explore how suppositional reasoning aids in assessing probabilities, though often influenced by cognitive biases. Roese and Olson (1997) highlight counterfactual thinking, a process akin to supposition, which involves imagining alternative outcomes to past events and its adaptive value for learning and decision-making. Currie and Ravenscroft (2002) emphasize imagination's broader role in enabling the mental rehearsal of hypothetical

scenarios, while Amy Kind (2016) categorizes supposition as a subset of imaginative activity, particularly within conditional or counterfactual reasoning.

Supposition and imagination, while overlapping, fulfill distinct cognitive roles. Supposition often serves practical or logical ends, focusing on reasoning and problem-solving by exploring hypothetical scenarios with attention to their plausibility (Evans and Over, 2004). Imagination, by contrast, engages in sensory-rich, creative exploration, unbound by epistemic constraints (Kind, 2013). Supposition is typically neutral and abstract, while imagination involves emotional and sensory vividness (Johnson-Laird, 1983). Yet, these domains are intertwined in practice: Supposition often draws on imaginative faculties for visualization, while imagination relies on supposition to structure its explorations logically.

Margherita Arcangeli (2019, 1) aptly describes supposition as “the missing mystery of philosophy”. She argues that supposition constitutes a unique imaginative state distinct from yet overlapping with related phenomena such as hypothesizing, conceiving, and entertaining ideas. Unlike traditional philosophical treatments that merge supposition with imagination, Arcangeli (2019) delineates its boundaries, presenting it as a bridge between imagination and logical reasoning. Her analytic approach highlights supposition’s epistemic role in exploring truth conditions and logical relations, contrasting with imagination’s sensory richness and creative freedom.

This work builds on and extends these insights by framing supposition as a defining feature of human existence through the concept of Homo Putans—the supposing human. This anthropological perspective positions supposition not only as a cognitive process but as a fundamental mechanism shaping societal structures, human interactions, and creativity. In doing so, it moves beyond theoretical frameworks. It links supposition to real-world phenomena such as collective action, societal cohesion, and artistic innovation. While cognitive science primarily explores supposition within the confines of mental states, this study expands its scope to include sociological, psychological, and existential dimensions.

A further distinction of this work lies in its practical orientation. Arcangeli (2019) has made significant theoretical contributions by delineating the relationships between supposition and imagination. However, her analysis remains largely confined to theoretical domains, without extending into real-world implications. By linking supposition to shared beliefs and

collective imaginaries, this study sheds light on its role in sustaining social cohesion and enabling human adaptability in the face of uncertainty.

The introduction of Homo Putans as a conceptual framework represents a significant innovation. It redefines supposition not as a discrete mental phenomenon but as the essence of human existence. Moreover, this research underscores the practical implications of supposition in navigating uncertainty and fostering adaptability. By linking supposition to hesitation, doubt, decision-making, and artistic creativity, it emphasizes its transformative potential in addressing the complexities of modern life.

Supposition has a close relationship with hesitation and doubt. The realm of supposing serves as an intermediary space where perception transitions into action. This space accommodates conflicting possibilities and opposing actions, allowing mutually exclusive potentials to coexist. Within this dynamic realm, individuals grapple with ambiguity and contradictions, laying the groundwork for decision-making. When individuals encounter stimuli, a cognitive gap emerges between perception and response. This gap becomes a site of intense mental activity, where hesitation and deliberation converge. Thus, the realm of supposing becomes a crucible for decision-making and synthesizes various possibilities into actionable outcomes.

Accordingly, this process is defined by two key features: the coexistence of conflicting possibilities and the productive role of hesitation (Vogl, 1988). The realm of supposing allows individuals to contemplate both actions and inactions, enriching decision-making by incorporating emotional, perceptual, and rational dimensions. In this space, contradictions and internal conflicts often find creative expression, leading to transformative outcomes. By distilling opposing ideas and emotions into coherent forms, the act of supposing fosters artistic and existential innovation.

The dynamic potential of supposition is further intertwined with modern developments in neurobiology. In this process, traditional notions such as *doxa* are redefined. Supposition acts as a mechanism enabling conceptual leaps beyond established norms, bridging existing ideas with unexplored potentialities. In ancient Greek philosophy, *doxa* was contrasted with true knowledge (*episteme*), often associated with subjective and mutable perspectives. Supposition transcends this traditional understanding by encapsulating latent possibilities alongside existing beliefs. It enriches *doxa* with a creative and dynamic dimension.

Modern advancements in neurobiology reveal how the brain engages in processes analogous to supposition. For example, the brain's interpretation of sensory inputs often involves predicting and filling gaps in information. This dynamic process highlights how supposition operates cognitively, bridging perception and imagination. It enables the transformation of static beliefs into fluid and adaptive frameworks. Supposition fosters a mode of thinking that is both reflective and anticipatory. It not only reflects human thought but also facilitates projection and creation. Through supposition, philosophy becomes a dynamic engagement with possibility, uncertainty, and the ever-expanding contours of human thought and experience. The conceptual persona of supposition—a thinker daring to suppose—illustrates the transformative power of this fundamental process.

Supposition is deeply linked to human insecurity, requiring engagement with the unknown and uncertain. While this confrontation with ambiguity can be challenging, it also fuels growth and innovation. Insecurity becomes a catalyst for exploration. It drives individuals and societies to create new concepts and adapt to changing realities. Supposition transforms doubt into creativity. Homo Putans rethinks established ideas, either by adapting them to new contexts or replacing them with more effective alternatives.

In the modern world, where rapid change necessitates constant reimagining, supposition provides a dynamic approach to conceptual development. As a vital mechanism for intellectual and societal evolution, supposition transforms doubt into a wellspring of creativity and insight. Its dynamic nature challenges the boundaries of thought, inspiring new ideas and affirming its central role in philosophical and practical understanding.

In daily life, Homo Putans—the supposing human—constantly acts on assumptions perceived as truths, even though these are often based on suppositions rather than objective realities. Perceptions, expectations, social norms, and rules are all deeply rooted in processes of supposing. Everyday cognitive acts vividly illustrate how supposing engages with uncertainty and explores plausible scenarios. For instance, hearing one's name called in a crowded room might lead to supposing a friend is nearby, only to discover it was someone else's name. Similarly, spotting a figure in the distance can prompt the supposition that it is a familiar person based on posture or clothing, even if closer inspection reveals otherwise. For example, when walking into a dark room and hearing a sound, one might suppose it to be caused by a pet, a person, or an object falling. This act reflects the brain's ability to simulate potential scenarios and guide

adaptive responses. We hear our phone ring but cannot check it immediately. We suppose it's either a friend calling, a work-related matter, or a spam call. These mundane examples demonstrate how supposing helps anticipate and prepare for plausible outcomes in daily life. We overhear someone say our name in a conversation and suppose they are talking about us. We think of various possibilities: are they praising us, critiquing us, or merely mentioning us in passing? This example reflects the role of supposing in interpreting incomplete or ambiguous social cues.

For instance, societal norms that dictate how individuals in specific roles should behave are outcomes of collective suppositions. These unexamined expectations shape behaviors and interactions, perpetuating a cycle of suppositions that guide everyday life. Society itself operates as a dynamic system, functioning through interconnected processes of supposing. Individuals and institutions influence one another as people interpret signals, form beliefs and behaviors in response, and collectively reinforce norms. Over time, these suppositions gain widespread acceptance as "truths," often without critical scrutiny. This "spiral of supposing" transforms individual beliefs into societal norms that ultimately shape collective behavior and policy.

Supposition transcends individual cognition, playing a central role across various disciplines. In literature, characters often act based on suppositions and invite readers to engage in similar acts of supposing. Writers leverage this process to provoke thought and evoke emotions. They create a shared imaginative space. In philosophy, supposition lies at the heart of epistemological debates. In aesthetics, art thrives within the realm of the *as if*. Art depends on the audience's willingness to participate in supposing. Similarly, in politics, leaders shape collective suppositions to influence public opinion and behavior. For instance, a political leader may assert the presence of a "threat," which, through collective supposition, becomes accepted as reality. Policies, behaviors, and societal responses then emerge from this shared act of supposing. While supposition is integral to human and societal function, its uncritical use can distort reality. Stereotypes, misinformation, and propaganda often exploit collective suppositions to manipulate public perception and advance specific agendas. However, supposition is also a powerful driver of creativity and progress. By imagining possibilities and constructing new paradigms, humans challenge boundaries, foster empathy, and develop innovative solutions to complex problems.

Even positive emotions, like happiness, can be understood through the lens of supposition. Is a person truly happy, or do they merely suppose they are happy? Happiness, from this perspective, may be a consciously constructed state—shaped and sustained through the act of supposing. This interpretation suggests that even the most cherished emotional states may lack the solidity and certainty they appear to have. Similarly, awareness is not a pure or static state but emerges from the process of supposition. Humans live by supposing they are aware, integrating this belief into their existence.

When supposition extends into the collective realm, it forms the foundation for societal structures and shared realities. These collective suppositions sustain social order, enabling individuals to fulfill their roles within the larger “game” of socially constructed truths. Uniquely, humans are beings capable of producing what they suppose. This interplay between what is supposed and the one who supposes underscores humanity's extraordinary creative power and capacity for imagination. Homo Putans transforms ideas, dreams, and concepts into tangible realities and continuously reconstructs both its existence and the environment around it. This dynamic process highlights the central role of supposition in shaping human life and fostering progress.

How does supposing differ from abduction? Charles Sanders Peirce first introduced abduction as a distinct mode of reasoning, alongside deduction and induction. In Peirce's words: “Abduction consists in studying facts and devising a theory to explain them. Its only justification is that if we are ever to understand things at all, it must be in that way” (Peirce, 1934, CP 5.145). Abduction seeks to reconcile new or surprising data with a plausible explanatory framework. Unlike deduction, which applies general principles to specific cases, or induction, which generalizes from specific observations, abduction generates a hypothesis that might explain the observed facts. Peirce argued that abduction begins with the recognition of something unexpected or puzzling: “A hypothesis is an explanatory suggestion which is the only possible justification for the facts before us” (CP 5.172). Abduction is the process of proposing a hypothesis that could explain the surprising observation. However, Peirce cautioned that abduction does not confirm the hypothesis; it merely suggests it as a possibility to be tested: “The abductive suggestion comes to us like a flash. It is an act of insight, although of extremely fallible insight.” (CP 5.181) Charles Sanders Peirce's concept of abduction, often described as “inference to the best explanation,” involves forming hypotheses to

explain observations and serves as a cornerstone of scientific reasoning and everyday decision-making (Fann, 1970; Kapitan, 1992).

While supposition and abduction share a focus on engaging with uncertainty and plausibility, their differences lie in purpose and epistemic commitment. Supposing is exploratory and flexible, helping to engage with uncertainty without requiring definitive resolution. In contrast, abduction is explanatory and goaloriented, seeking to identify the most likely explanation for observed phenomena. Both are essential cognitive processes, but they operate in distinct domains of reasoning and understanding. In other words, abduction seeks to arrive at the most plausible explanation for a given set of facts, often with an implicit goal of approaching truth (Nino, 2014). Supposing does not necessarily aim to resolve uncertainty but thrives in ambiguity, imagining alternatives without demanding resolution. In this sense, supposing might be seen as a precursor or complement to abduction, offering the space where abductive hypotheses are born. In terms of epistemic aims, abduction focuses on identifying the most likely explanation. For instance, if someone hears the sound of breaking glass followed by a dog barking, they might abductively conclude that the dog knocked over a vase. This hypothesis aligns with available evidence and is plausible (Frankfurt, 1958). In the same scenario, supposing might entertain a variety of alternatives, such as supposing a cat knocking over the vase, the wind breaking a window, or even an intruder causing the sound. Supposing explores these possibilities without needing to decide which is most likely. Unlike abduction, suppositions are not necessarily tested for plausibility but serve as creative seeds. Abduction is critical in formulating hypotheses. When Alexander Fleming noticed bacteria being killed in the presence of mold, he abductively hypothesized that the mold produced a substance lethal to bacteria, leading to the discovery of penicillin (Paavola, 2012). Supposing, however, might occur earlier in the process. In a social context, consider hearing someone call our name in a crowded room. Abductive reasoning might conclude that a friend is nearby based on familiarity with the voice. Supposing, by contrast, might entertain other possibilities: We might suppose that “they were calling someone else with my name” or “I misheard.” Supposing fosters cognitive flexibility, while abduction narrows possibilities through structured inference tied to evidence and logical reasoning.

The relationship of supposition with truth can be understood as nuanced and provisional, characterized by its exploration of potential truths without demanding certainty or definitive validation. Supposition operates in the realm of plausibility, where propositions are entertained as potentially

true. It does not assert or confirm truth but allows the mind to explore possibilities that could align with reality. Unlike belief or knowledge, supposition suspends judgment about the ultimate truth of a proposition. It temporarily acts as if something is true to explore its implications without the need for confirmation. This suspension of judgment is particularly valuable in contexts where certainty is unattainable or unnecessary, such as philosophical reflection, hypothetical reasoning, or everyday problem-solving. In supposing, truth often functions as a guiding horizon rather than an immediate goal. The act of supposing is not indifferent to truth—it acknowledges its possibility—but it does not demand a resolution. Instead, it leaves room for ambiguity and incompleteness, which can be instrumental in fostering creativity and exploration.

Supposition is particularly tied to practical truth, which is the kind of truth relevant to decision-making and real-world actions: It helps bridge gaps between what is known and what is uncertain, enabling individuals to anticipate or approximate truth in a provisional way. For example, when strategizing about future outcomes, supposing possible scenarios provides a framework for making informed decisions, even in the absence of complete information. While supposition does not confirm truth, it is often truth-oriented in its function: By engaging with plausible scenarios, supposition can act as a precursor to more rigorous truth-seeking processes like abduction or scientific testing. It provides the groundwork from which hypotheses are generated and further explored. Supposition's relationship with truth is one of engagement without commitment.

Guessing shares with supposing a response to uncertainty but lacks the deliberative and reflective qualities of supposing. Guessing is quick and often impulsive and does not necessarily involve reasoning or evaluation. It may occur when there is insufficient information to make an informed choice. Supposing requires reflection and consideration of potential scenarios. It is more deliberate and often involves a mental “what if” exercise to explore possibilities. Guessing may or may not align with plausibility. A guess does not require the proposition to be reasonable or connected to evidence. For example, guessing a random number in a lottery does not rely on any plausible reasoning. Supposing operates closer to reality and engages with plausible scenarios. It involves adopting a proposition that is at least potentially valid or believable. Accordingly, the key difference between guessing and supposing lies in their depth and orientation. Guessing is quick, often random, and lacks engagement with plausibility or truth. Supposing, on the other hand, is thoughtful, deliberate, and engages with plausible scenarios, operating closer to reality and truth.

Let's examine a case together: The scenario of a severed hand placed on a table and subsequently reconnected to the brain's neural system offers profound insights into the nature of perception and supposition. When the severed hand's nerves are reattached, and the hand is pricked with a needle, the pain is not felt where the hand currently lies but at its previous location—on the wrist. This phenomenon exemplifies the intricate workings of the brain's somatosensory system and the role of Homo Putans, or the supposing human, in realizing the world through constructed perceptions. This phenomenon arises from the brain's somatosensory mapping system, which processes sensory input from different parts of the body in specific cortical regions. These maps are built upon prior experiences and exhibit a strong resistance to change. Even when the hand's physical reality shifts, the brain's somatosensory map remains unchanged, causing a persistent perception of the hand at its previous location. This highlights the disconnect between the physical body and the brain's internal representations. For Homo Putans, perception is not a direct reflection of physical reality but a product of the brain's interpretive systems. The somatosensory system (S1), which handles sensory information like touch and temperature, creates a subjective sense of the body's internal state. Conversely, the visual system, or "where pathway," processes external spatial information, offering an objective representation of body and surroundings. When these two systems provide conflicting information—such as "the hand is here" versus "the hand is there"—the brain constructs two distinct phenomenal body spaces. This divergence results in a fundamental separation between the subjective somatosensory experience and the objective visual experience (Ramachandran and Hirstein, 1998). For Homo Putans, this creates a scenario where the perception of one's body differs from its physical reality. The individual might suppose their hand is at its former location based on somatosensory input, even when visual cues indicate otherwise. This interplay between conflicting neural systems exemplifies the neurophysiological basis of supposition. The brain's ability to generate and sustain conflicting perceptual outcomes underscores the interpretive nature of human cognition. Homo Putans navigates the world through a process of supposing, constructing perceptions based on neural information, prior experiences, and contextual cues. These subjective perceptions, while essential for functioning in daily life, often diverge from objective truths.

At the physiological level, supposition emerges as a mechanism for resolving discrepancies between internal and external inputs. The supposing human thrives on this interpretive flexibility, which allows them to adapt

to complex and shifting realities. This capacity to suppose illustrates how human perception is not merely reactive but creative, dynamically constructing a subjective world that often transcends objective physicality. The phenomenon of conflicting sensory inputs and the divergence between subjective and objective body space reveals the foundational role of supposition in human perception. Homo Putans embodies the human ability to solve these inconsistencies, turning them into a framework for interpreting and interacting with the world. This interplay between perception, supposition, and reality highlights the dynamic, adaptive, and creative essence of the supposing human.

This work seeks to reawaken the dormant concept of supposition. It is positioned as the foundational element of human existence through the lens of Homo Putans. By bridging cognitive science, literature, philosophy, and societal dynamics, this study reframes supposition not merely as a mental process but as a driving force behind creativity, decision-making, and social structures.

To explore the multifaceted dimensions of supposition, the book is structured into four parts:

1. Philosophical Foundations of Supposing

This section investigates the philosophical roots of supposition, engaging with diverse thinkers and frameworks:

- Plato's exploration of *doxa* and its relevance to supposing.
- Hans Vaihinger's "as if" philosophy and its implications for hypothetical reasoning.
- Phenomenology and intentionality, with a focus on how consciousness engages with supposition.
- Lacanian psychoanalysis, highlighting the unconscious dimensions of supposing.
- Wittgenstein's language and its implications for supposing.
- Sisyphus and the existential aspects of supposing.

2. Neuroscience and Homo Putans

This section delves into the cognitive and neurobiological underpinnings of supposition:

- The neuroscience behind how humans construct suppositions.
- The interplay between memory, imagination, and supposition in mental processes.

- The role of supposition in decision-making and adaptive thought.

3. Supposing in Politics, Culture, and Society

The third section examines supposition as a collective phenomenon:

- Its role in shaping social structures and sustaining ideologies.
- How supposition operates in cultural artifacts and literature.
- Its capacity to influence political discourse and collective imaginaries.

4. Supposing and Existence

The final section addresses the existential dimensions of supposing:

- The interplay between supposition and identity formation.
- How supposition relates to the concept of freedom.
- Its centrality to understanding the human condition and confronting life's uncertainties.
-

Through these interconnected parts, the book offers a comprehensive exploration of supposition as both a cognitive process and a universal condition, demonstrating its profound relevance to philosophy, science, and daily life.

PART 1

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SUPPOSITION

Across the history of philosophy, supposition has emerged as a recurring but often implicit theme. It addressed the limitations of human knowledge and the need to construct provisional truths. This section examines the philosophical roots of supposing through the lenses of key thinkers and traditions and highlights its foundational role in epistemology, metaphysics, and human cognition.

Plato's Doxa and Supposition

Plato's concept of doxa occupies a critical space in his epistemology and serves as the intermediate state between ignorance (agnosia) and true knowledge (episteme). Central to works such as *The Republic*, *Theaetetus*, and *Meno*, doxa represents opinion or belief—a cognitive condition shaped by sensory perception and limited understanding (Plato, 2018, 187e-201c). While it lacks the certainty and universality of episteme, doxa plays a necessary role in the progression toward higher knowledge. In the *Republic*, Plato contrasts doxa with episteme through his division of reality into the realms of becoming and being. Doxa belongs to the mutable, sensory world of becoming, while episteme pertains to the immutable forms in the world of being. This distinction is vividly illustrated in the allegory of the cave, where prisoners perceive only shadows and mistake them for reality (Plato, 1992, 514a-520a). The shadows represent doxa—incomplete and provisional truths shaped by limited perception. True knowledge, symbolized by the sun (the form of the good), requires turning away from the shadows toward intellectual enlightenment.

Within this framework, supposition functions as a cognitive act situated in the domain of doxa. It engages with partial truths and provisional understandings to navigate the complexities of an imperfect world. Although Plato critiques doxa for its epistemic shortcomings, he also acknowledges its essential role. For example, in *Meno*, Socrates explores

the idea of recollection (anamnesis), suggesting that doxa, when guided by reason, can lead to episteme (Plato, 1974, 81a-85b).

Accordingly, Plato's conception of doxa, typically rendered as "opinion" or "belief," establishes a fundamental framework for comprehending the act of supposition in epistemology. According to Plato, doxa exists in a transitional realm between episteme (actual knowledge) and ignorance (Renaut, 2018). Doxa denotes a cognitive condition that is neither entirely erroneous nor consistently accurate. This duality places doxa in a domain of uncertainty and provisionality, wherein individuals formulate beliefs based on incomplete or perceived truths (Plato 1992, 476d-480a). In the *Republic*, Plato contrasts doxa with episteme and illustrates the limitations of belief when compared to knowledge grounded in the forms (Renaut 2018, 75). According to his allegory of the divided line, doxa pertains to the visible realm of changing phenomena, which can be perceived but not fully understood without the intellectual rigor required to access the intelligible realm (Plato 1992, 509d-511e). Plato's critique of doxa in the *Meno* underscores its inferiority to true knowledge, yet it also highlights its functional necessity in navigating an imperfect world (Plato 1974, 98a). Doxa enables individuals to make sense of their experiences even when complete knowledge is inaccessible and bridges the gap between ignorance and understanding (Calvo, 1977).

However, Plato's dismissal of doxa as epistemically deficient has broader implications. By relegating Doxa to a subordinate status, Plato reinforces the primacy of episteme. Belief and supposition, though pragmatically useful, must ultimately yield to the pursuit of higher knowledge (Plato 2018, 201d-202b). Plato's *Theaetetus* further examines the nature of knowledge, interrogating doxa for its susceptibility to error and subjectivity. While doxa is vulnerable to misinterpretation, it also provides a dynamic foundation for philosophical inquiry (Plato 2018, 200c-210b). I argue that supposing emerges here as a tool for questioning, hypothesizing, and probing the unknown—a precursor to genuine knowledge.

Beyond epistemology, Plato extends his treatment of doxa to the moral and political realms. In the *Republic*, societal governance depends on a hierarchy of knowledge, where philosophers possessing episteme guide a populace largely operating within the realm of doxa (Plato 1992, 427d-434c). While the masses rely on simplified and accessible truths to maintain societal order, supposing serves as a functional means for masses to engage with and interpret these truths within their lived realities.

Plato also situates doxa within his metaphysical dualism, emphasizing its grounding in the imperfect world of becoming. Supposing, as a function of doxa, reflects the human struggle to move between sensory perception and intellectual insight. It embodies the effort to make sense of a complex and ever-changing world, offering a cognitive bridge toward the eternal forms. Despite its limitations, doxa is not dismissed outright by Plato. Instead, he positions it as a necessary stage in the dialectical journey toward episteme. I argue that supposing, as an active engagement within doxa, fosters philosophical reasoning, moral insight, and intellectual growth.

In sum, Plato's treatment of doxa provides a profound framework for exploring supposition. It highlights the tension between belief and knowledge, perception and reason, and the practical and the ideal. For Plato, doxa is both a limitation and a stepping stone. It reflects subjective certainty derived from personal perceptions and experiences, yet it lacks the transformative potential that supposition embodies. Supposition, in contrast, is inherently dynamic. It carries within it the weight of potentiality—the capacity to explore, doubt, and transform existing frameworks. This quality aligns supposition with forward-thinking and intellectual evolution, offering a pathway to transcend the static nature of doxa. While doxa represents established beliefs and opinions, often rooted in sensory perception and subjective certainty, supposition is forward-looking and exploratory. It thrives on doubt and hesitation, challenging the boundaries of what is known or believed.

Plato critiques doxa for its inability to grasp objective truth, asserting that only through reason and intellectual inquiry can one attain episteme. However, supposition's embrace of doubt and its capacity for transformation offer an alternative to the static nature of doxa. It is not a resting point but a dynamic process. While both supposition and doxa emerge from subjective perspectives and operate outside the realm of absolute certainty, they differ fundamentally in their orientation and purpose. Doxa leans on stability, reflecting beliefs that are often unchallenged and static. Supposition, by contrast, is marked by movement and transformation. It challenges the comfort of subjective certainty and seeks to engage with the unknown, embracing potentialities that doxa cannot reach. Supposition surpasses doxa by rejecting the simplicity of static belief and embracing the complexities of change, uncertainty, and exploration. By transcending the limitations of doxa, supposition becomes a vital tool for intellectual and existential growth, embodying the transformative power of thought in Plato's philosophical legacy. In sum, Plato's exploration of doxa provides a philosophical antecedent to the

concept of supposing. It can be framed as a provisional and often imperfect response to epistemic uncertainty. Supposing, as I see it, is the dynamic undercurrent of doxa. It is the act of navigating the unknown, the unprovable, and the intangible, creating functional truths to make sense of a world in flux. But unlike doxa, supposing does not submit to a hierarchical epistemic framework where knowledge reigns supreme. Supposing embraces its imperfection, not as a flaw but as its strength, a recognition that life's answers are often found in its questions. Table 1 compares the two concepts in terms of their key characteristics.

Table 1: Comparison of Doxa and Supposition

Aspect	Doxa	Supposing
Definition	Opinion or belief often shaped by sensory perception and limited understanding.	A cognitive process that actively engages with possibilities, doubt, and potentiality.
Epistemological Status	Positioned between ignorance (agnosia) and true knowledge (episteme); considered static and provisional.	Dynamic and exploratory, emphasizing movement toward greater understanding and creativity.
Relation to Truth	Relies on subjective certainty, often unchallenged and accepted as true.	Explores hypothetical scenarios without requiring epistemic certainty.
Temporal Orientation	Anchored in established beliefs and opinions about the present or past.	Forward-looking, focusing on possibilities and transformation.
Engagement with Reality	Passively reflects sensory and societal influences.	Actively constructs and explores potential realities.
Philosophical Roots	Rooted in Plato's metaphysical dualism, associated with the mutable world of becoming.	Found in multiple traditions, including Vaihinger's 'As If' and modern cognitive theories.
Role in Decision-Making	Provides a foundation for basic societal norms and practical understanding but lacks flexibility.	Guides complex decision-making by incorporating doubt, hesitation, and multiple possibilities.

Emotional Component	Often tied to comfort and stability in beliefs.	Associated with ambiguity, hesitation, and creative tension.
Potential for Change	Static, reinforcing existing frameworks and norms.	Transformative, challenging boundaries and fostering intellectual evolution.
Function in Society	Maintains social cohesion through shared opinions and beliefs.	Drives innovation and adaptability in both individual and collective contexts.

Hans Vaihinger’s “As If” Philosophy

Hans Vaihinger’s *Philosophy of As If* (1924) provides a seminal exploration of the role of supposition in human cognition. Vaihinger posits that humans construct “fictions”—concepts they knowingly accept as false or unverifiable to handle with the complexities of life and reality. These fictions, such as mathematical abstractions like zero or infinity, are not rooted in objective truth but serve as indispensable tools for reasoning and action (Vaihinger, 1924). Within Vaihinger’s framework, *as if* transcends the realm of belief to become a functional mechanism. It simplifies the overwhelming complexity of the world and enables individuals and societies to adapt and act effectively. These fictions are not static; they evolve alongside human needs and contexts. Thus, they are dynamic and creative and reflect the interplay between human cognition and the environment (Vaihinger, 1924).

A central tenet of Vaihinger’s philosophy is the distinction between truth and utility. As Vaihinger succinctly puts it, “the mechanism of thought is intelligible only through the purpose it serves: to facilitate the interrelation of sensations and render action easier” (Vaihinger 1924, 15). Vaihinger underscores the transient and adaptive nature of constructs, noting that “fictions drop out as soon as their purpose has been attained” (Vaihinger 1924, 52). Supposing is not primarily concerned with uncovering objective truths but with enabling comprehension and action. This perspective aligns with contemporary cognitive science, which emphasizes cognition’s adaptive nature rather than its accuracy.

Building on Kant’s distinction between the *phenomenal* (what can be perceived and known) and *noumenal* (the unknowable reality beyond perception) worlds, Vaihinger asserts that humans create abstractions to make sense of reality. Concepts like *infinitesimals* in mathematics or the

idea of atoms, while not directly observable, are indispensable for scientific advancement (Vaihinger, 1924). He contends that many social constructs, such as legal systems or moral codes, function as collective fictions that enable societal cohesion (Vaihinger 1924, 131-132). Vaihinger's notion of useful fictions has influenced various disciplines. Alfred Adler integrated the "as if" concept into individual psychology, emphasizing its role in guiding human behavior (Adler, 1925).

Hans Vaihinger's philosophy presents a revolutionary approach to understanding human thought and reality. He posits that absolute reality is unknowable and that humans interpret the world through fictions they treat "as if" they were real. These fictions play a functional role in science, ethics, and daily life, proving essential for survival and development. In sum, these constructs transcend the boundaries of truth and falsehood to enable practical engagement with an uncertain world. It provides a valuable framework for understanding supposing, yet it is crucial to distinguish supposing from mere fiction or imagination. Supposing, unlike imagination, operates closer to reality by engaging with the potential truth of a proposition. When we suppose, we act as if something is true, often with an implicit belief in its potential validity, even if provisional or incomplete. In contrast, imagining typically involves constructing scenarios or ideas that are explicitly not true, often with no intent to claim their factual or realistic basis.

Hans Vaihinger's "as if" philosophy is primarily concerned with the creation of useful fictions—ideas or frameworks that are consciously recognized as false or unverifiable yet serve as practical tools for understanding and interacting with the world. In contrast, supposing goes beyond the creation of fictions and involves engaging with hypothetical scenarios to explore potential outcomes, test possibilities, or challenge established ideas. Unlike the "as if" approach, which relies on knowingly false constructs, supposing does not necessarily assume falsity but rather suspends commitment to any particular truth. It is a process of inquiry that thrives on open-ended exploration and epistemic flexibility.

The purpose of Vaihinger's "as if" philosophy is pragmatic: It aims to simplify the overwhelming complexity of the world and enable effective action. For instance, the notion of "perfect justice" in moral philosophy is treated "as if" it exists, providing a guiding framework for ethical reasoning, even though such a concept is unattainable in absolute terms. Supposing, however, serves an exploratory purpose. It is not limited to simplifying reality but seeks to probe the unknown and expand

understanding. Supposing fosters the development of new ideas and approaches by engaging with uncertainty, potentiality, and doubt. Unlike the utility-driven “as if” constructs, supposition invites critical inquiry and transformative thinking, often challenging existing frameworks rather than relying on them.

Fictions, while removed from objective truth, enable practical engagement with the world. Supposing, by contrast, aligns more closely with phenomenology and existentialism, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between perception, imagination, and action. Thinkers like Husserl and Heidegger have explored similar themes, focusing on the intentionality of thought and the potentialities of human existence. Supposing reflects this orientation by embracing ambiguity and possibility as integral to the human condition, offering a more fluid and adaptive approach to understanding reality.

For Vaihinger, the validity of an “as if” fiction lies not in its accuracy but in its ability to facilitate action and comprehension. This perspective resonates with pragmatist philosophers like William James and John Dewey, who similarly emphasize the functional value of ideas over their correspondence to reality. Supposing, however, often maintains a closer relationship with truth. While it operates in the realm of the hypothetical and uncertain, supposing seeks to approximate or uncover truths through exploration and reasoning. It challenges the boundaries of established beliefs, striving to bridge the gap between perception and reality by entertaining possibilities that may lead to greater understanding.

The cognitive implications of Vaihinger’s “as if” philosophy and the concept of supposing differ significantly. The “as if” approach acts as a cognitive shortcut, providing simplified models that are static as long as they remain useful. These fictions offer stability and predictability, but they may hinder further exploration by solidifying into rigid frameworks. Supposing, on the other hand, is inherently dynamic and transformative. It thrives on movement, doubt, and hesitation, encouraging individuals to question and reinterpret existing ideas. Table 2 compares the two concepts in terms of their key characteristics.

Table 2: Aspect Comparison: As If vs. Supposing

Aspect	As If	Supposing
Definition	Acting based on fictions consciously acknowledged as false but functional.	Engaging with hypothetical scenarios to explore possibilities and potentialities.
Purpose	To provide practical tools for navigating complexities of life.	To enable exploration, transformation, and deeper understanding.
Orientation	Grounded in maintaining utility and pragmatic outcomes.	Oriented toward openness, doubt, and potential transformation.
Emotional Engagement	Limited emotional investment; focuses on functionality.	Potentially high emotional engagement, particularly in decision-making.
Epistemic Focus	Focused on utility, not concerned with absolute truth.	Explores plausibility and potential truths within hypothetical contexts.
Temporal Nature	Static or relatively stable constructs used for navigation.	Dynamic and forward-looking, adapting to new situations and insights.
Creativity	Encourages simplified frameworks for decision-making.	Encourages transformative and innovative thought.
Relation to Reality	Accepts the fictionality of constructs; does not aim for transformative engagement.	Acknowledges uncertainty and uses it as a basis for intellectual and existential growth.

Accordingly, the cognitive implications of Vaihinger’s “as if” philosophy and the concept of supposing differ significantly. The “as if” approach acts as a cognitive shortcut, providing simplified models that are static as long as they remain useful. These fictions offer stability and predictability, but they may hinder further exploration by solidifying into rigid frameworks. Supposing, on the other hand, is inherently dynamic and transformative. It thrives on movement, doubt, and hesitation, encouraging individuals to question and reinterpret existing ideas. Ultimately, while supposing and “as if” share commonalities in facilitating human thought and action in uncertain or complex scenarios, supposing leans toward uncovering or approximating truth, while the “as if” framework prioritizes the utility of knowingly false constructs. Both are indispensable tools of human cognition and address different facets of our interaction with the world.

Alfred Adler significantly benefited from Hans Vaihinger in developing his theory of individual psychology. Adler incorporated these ideas into his framework for understanding human behavior and motivation. He emphasized the functional role of such fictions in shaping individual and social life. A central element of Adler's individual psychology is the concept of a unique "lifestyle," which determines how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to the world (Adler, 1929). Drawing on Vaihinger, Adler proposed that people act "as if" certain beliefs or assumptions are true, even in the absence of objective evidence. For example, someone might behave "as if failure were catastrophic," leading to a perfectionist lifestyle. These "as if" beliefs structure their lives and influence their decision-making processes, underscoring the interplay between fiction and reality in human behavior. Adler introduced the idea of ideal goals or imaginary objectives that individuals strive for throughout their lives. These goals, though often unrealistic, are treated "as if" they are achievable, providing motivation and structure (Adler, 1925). Vaihinger's notion of fictions illuminates this concept by emphasizing their pragmatic utility rather than their factual validity. For instance, a person might pursue an ideal of "perfect success" or "absolute competence," and while these goals may remain unattainable, they serve as powerful motivators for self-improvement and personal growth.

Central to Adler's theory is the human drive to overcome feelings of inferiority through the "striving for superiority" (Adler, 1938). This striving often involves pursuing idealized and unattainable goals, such as perfection or completeness. Vaihinger's theory explains how individuals act "as if" such perfection is attainable, using these fictions as a mechanism for personal development. Although these goals are fictitious, their motivational power facilitates growth and resilience. Adler emphasized that humans are inherently social beings, driven by a need for community feeling (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*) and meaningful social connections (Adler, 1938). These connections, too, are shaped by "as if" beliefs and fictions. For instance, individuals may act "as if" they have an obligation to contribute to society or achieve social harmony. Inspired by Vaihinger, Adler recognized that such fictions give meaning to social roles and relationships, influencing how people perceive themselves and others. Adler also applied Vaihinger's ideas to understand how individuals confront life's difficulties. When faced with challenges, people often adopt "as if" fictions to maintain resilience. For example, they might tell themselves, I am strong enough to overcome anything, even if this belief is not objectively true. These strategies, rooted in Vaihinger's concept of