



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM - UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA
Scuola Superiore di Studi Umanistici

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Counterfactual Thoughts: Reasoning and Imagination

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Abstract

In everyday imaginative thought, people often create alternatives to reality and imagine how events might have turned out if only something had been different. They create counterfactual alternatives to reality to explain and excuse past performances, as well as to learn the causes of bad outcomes and prevent them in the future.

Counterfactual thoughts modulate emotions such as regret, guilt, relief and hope; and they support moral judgments such as blame, responsibility, and fault. In this talk I discuss recent experimental evidence about the cognitive processes that compute counterfactuals by mutating aspects of the mental representation of reality to create an imagined alternative.

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