

Can a Brain Scan Tell What You're Thinking?

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Mind reading stands as one of science fiction's most enduring improbabilities, alongside light-speed space travel and laser guns. But unlike those latter two, mind reading actually has a whiff of reality: In a new demonstration, psychologists have shown they can figure out how far along someone's brain is in the process of solving a sophisticated math problem—a result that, more than anything else, indicates the promise of new brain-scanning techniques for understanding the human mind.

The issue, Carnegie Mellon University psychologists John Anderson, Aryn Pyke, and John Fincham write in *Psychological Science*, isn't really mind reading per se; it's figuring out whether brain-scanning technology like functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which tracks blood flow in the brain, actually tells us something about the way people think. Sure, some have argued, one part of the brain lights up in response to baby photographs or political messaging. But so what? Can that actually tell us something about humans emotions and cognition?

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