

The Miniature Guide
to
The Human Mind
How It Learns
How It Mislearns

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Based on
Critical Thinking Concepts & Principles

The Foundation for Critical Thinking

Dear Reader:

To live well is to live as a reasonable and ethical person.

Yet humans are not by nature rational or ethical. Humans are predisposed to operate in the world in narrow terms of how it can serve them. Their brains are directly wired into their own pleasure and pain, not that of others. They do not inherently consider the rights and needs of others.

Yet humans have the raw capacity to become reasonable and ethical persons, to develop as fair-minded skilled thinkers. But to do so requires:

1. Understanding how the mind works.
2. Using this understanding to develop skills and insights.

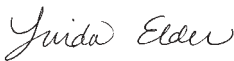
This guide addresses the first of these requirements. It lays the conceptual foundations necessary for understanding the mind, its functions, its natural propensity toward irrationality, and its capacity for rationality.

It is designed for those interested in developing their potential to be fair-minded reasonable persons, concerned with how their behavior affects the lives of others, concerned to develop their full humanity, concerned with making the world a more civilized and just place.

It is designed for those willing to transform their thinking to improve their decisions, the quality of their lives, the quality of their interpersonal relationships, and their vision of the world.

It is intended to provide an initial map to help interested persons begin to free themselves from the traps their minds have constructed. It points the way toward mindfulness and self-understanding through critical thinking. It is, in any case, a beginning place.

Sincerely,



Linda Elder



Richard Paul

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As humans
we live
in our
Minds

Understanding The Human Mind: The Big Picture

*The mind is it's own place
and in itself
can make a hell of heaven
or a heaven of hell*
John Milton

Everyone thinks. It is our nature to do so. But much of our thinking left to itself is biased, distorted, ill-founded, or prejudiced. Much of our thinking leads to problems in our lives. Much of our thinking leads to cruelty and injustice. Of course, the mind doesn't just think, it also feels and wants. What is the connection? Our thinking shapes and determines how we feel and what we want. When we think well, we are motivated to do things that make sense and motivated to act in ways that help rather than harm ourselves and others.

At the same time, powerful emotions or desires influence our thinking, help or hinder how well we think in a situation. At any given moment, our minds (that complex of inner thoughts, feelings and desires) can be under the sway of our native egocentrism or our potential reasonability. When we are ruled by our egocentric tendencies, we see the world from a narrow self-serving perspective. We are not truly concerned with how our behavior affects others. We are fundamentally concerned with getting what we want and/or with validating our beliefs and views.

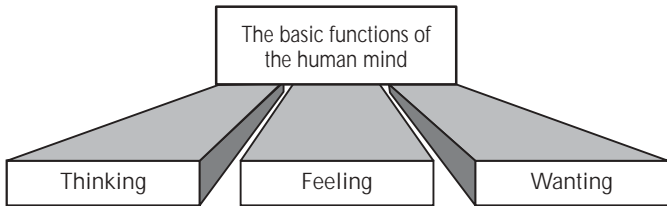
The key to understanding human thought then, is, to understand its essential duality: its capacity for egocentrism (being trapped in self-delusion, myth, and illusion) and its capacity for reasonability (freeing itself from self-delusion, myth, and illusion).

Though thinking, feeling and wanting are, in principle, equally important, it is only through thinking that we take command of our minds. It is through thinking that we figure out what is going wrong with our thinking. It is through thinking that we figure out how to deal with destructive emotions. It is through thinking that we change unproductive desires to productive ones. It is fair-minded reasonability that frees us from intellectual slavery.

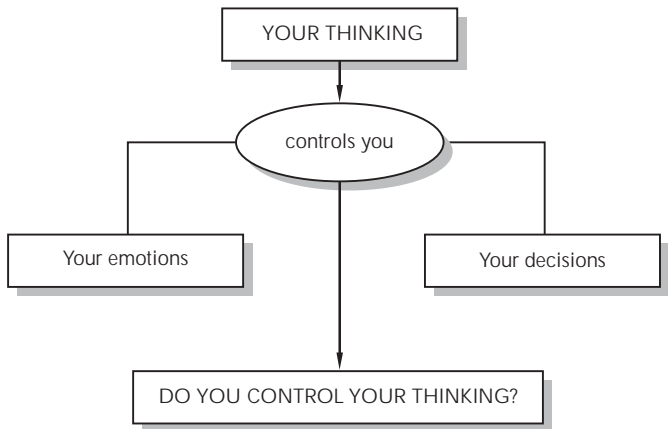
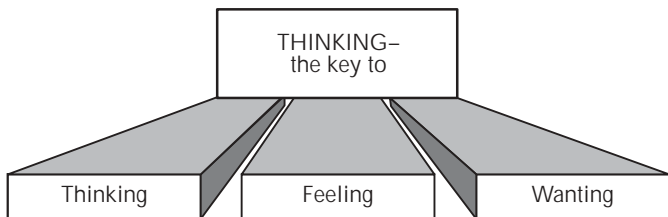
If we understand our mind and its functions, if we face the barriers to our development that egocentrism represents, if we work upon our mind in a daily regimen, we can take the steps that lead to our empowerment as thinkers.

The Mind's Three Distinctive Functions

The mind has three basic functions: thinking, feeling, and wanting.

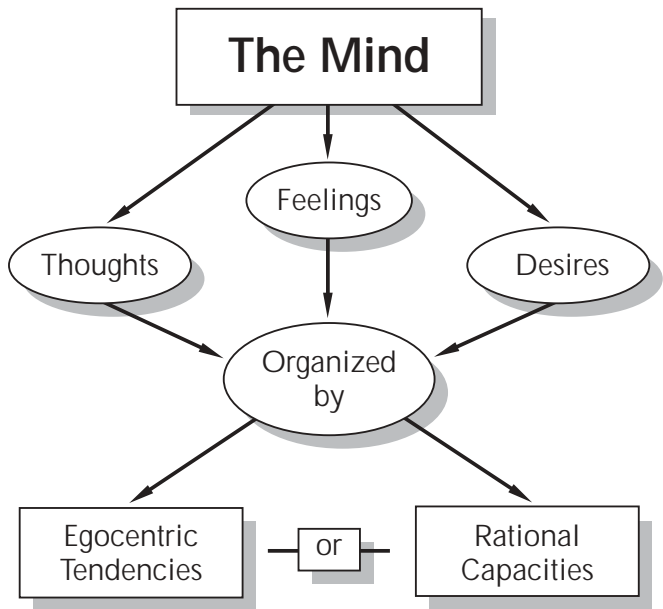


- Thinking is the part of the mind that figures things out. It makes sense of life's events. It creates the ideas through which we define situations, relationships and problems. It continually tells us: This is what is going on. This is what is happening. Notice this and that.
- Feelings are created by thinking — evaluating whether the events of our lives are positive or negative. Feelings continually tell us: "This is how I should feel about what is happening in my life. I'm doing really well." Or, alternatively, "Things aren't going well for me."
- Our desires allocate energy to action, in keeping with what we define as desirable and possible. It continually tells us: "This is worth getting. Go for it!" Or, conversely, "This is not worth getting. Don't bother."



Rational Capacities or Egocentric Tendencies Control the Mind

The three functions of the mind — thoughts, feelings and desires — can be guided or directed either by one’s native egocentrism or by one’s potential rational capacities. Egocentric tendencies function automatically and unconsciously. Rational tendencies arise only from active self-development and are largely conscious.



Feelings That Accompany Egocentrism

These are some of the many feelings that might accompany egocentric thinking. They often occur when egocentric thinking is “unsuccessful.”



Essential Idea: When egocentric thinking is successful in getting what it wants, positive feelings accompany it. But when egocentric thinking is not able to achieve its purposes, negative feelings result.