

6 The Triune Mind

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"The decisive question for man is: Is he related to something infinite or not?" C. G. Jung

Although the concept of the triune mind is not new, it is perhaps one of the most important psychological understandings for us to grasp, allowing us to create a true and solid foundation for our conscious evolution. It is essential to recognize that each person exists as the unity of three domains of mind: the subconscious, conscious and superconscious. It is a simple conceptualization, the terms are familiar to us and are common in psychological writings, yet it is not yet fully embedded in our understanding of the human psyche. It may be a disservice to our understanding of the self to ignore the triune mind construct. After all, how we perceive and understand the mind generates attitudes and choices which shape not only our experience of mind but of life itself.

The triune mind is the natural state of mind for humankind and is composed of three dimensions or domains of consciousness: the conscious, superconscious and subconscious. These three aspects can be seen to contain the full spectrum of any experience in consciousness from the most sublime mystical states (experiences of absolute boundless, changeless non-dual awareness), to our most primitive instinctual impulses and potentially destructive desires. The postulation of the triune mind is not a metaphor but a living reality that each person experiences. Evidence supporting the triune mind is rooted in the psychological research of the past 150 years. (Reference)

The triune mind perspective also allows for a resolution of the "mind-body problem," which questions the extent to which the mind and brain are related. In looking at the mind as a unification of various states of consciousness, we eliminate the need to differentiate between mind and brain. From the triune mind perspective, all sets of experience of mind coexist within the mind as a whole. Essentially, functions of the brain are subsumed by the mind and function as the mind. As the Philosopher John Searle suggests, to separate the dimensions of mind is false dichotomy and "there is no more a mind-body problem than there is a macro-micro economics problem." (*Joshua Rust (2009). John Searle. Continuum International Publishing Group. pp. 27-28.*)

The value of the triune mind perspective is that it creates a subjective experience of flow, harmony and balance by significantly reducing the need for resistance, suppression and repression of important elements of the psyche. The triune mind allows for integration in all areas of life. Living in the experience of openness to the three essential aspects of mind generates joy, unique currents of grace and, in time, a creative synergy. This is important because humankind tends to suppress either or both the superconscious and subconscious elements of our psyches. You may have felt this yourself, with a sense that something is missing from your overall perception of life.

An Historical Perspective

Given how natural a concept the triune mind is, it may seem odd that it has not taken deeper root in psychology. Unfortunately, this is because time honored teachings have neglected one or more of its parts.

The philosopher Plato was one of the first to delineate the triple nature of the human psyche in his tripartite theory of soul. He primarily wrote about his ideas in the *Republic* and the *Phaedra* where he used the allegory of the chariot. He viewed the psyche as having three parts: the logical (*logistikon*), spirited (*thymos*) and the appetitive (*epithymetikon*). These correspond and are generally analogous to the modern conception of the superconscious, conscious and subconscious dimensions of mind.



“Plato believed in an immortal soul that is able to exist in separation from the body.” (Mason 2010). This immortal or rational part (soul) found its source in God and he viewed it as immaterial and metaphysical in nature. It could not be perceived by the senses, much like the superconscious. The part corresponding to the subconscious was described by Plato as the animal part and the seat of bodily appetites, irrational passions and symbolized by a black horse. The part analogous to the conscious mind was spirited (*thymos*) seen as honorable and noble, having a moral impulse and depicted as a white horse. According to Plato, these two horses or aspects of mind were often in conflict. The charioteer (*logistikon*) was to tame the horses and guide the chariot to its destination, which was the realization of god.

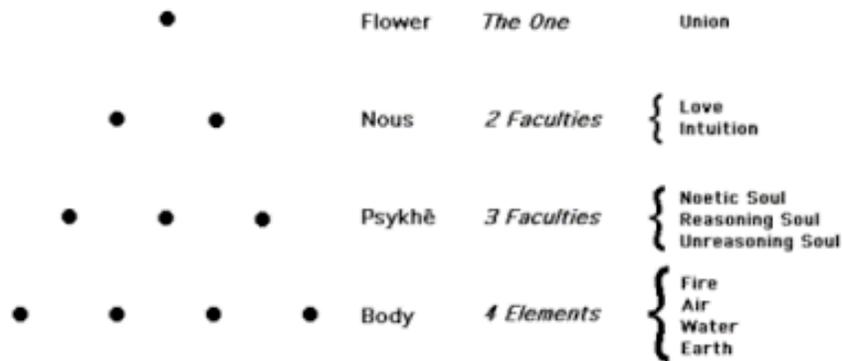
Plotinus continued the view of Plato of a triune mind with different language and described them as the noetic self, the dianoetic self, and the physical self.

“The first is the noetic self, which is the subject of intellection (noesis) and contemplation (theoria), and is experienced when we pursue the goods of intellect in the intelligible world. The second is the dianoetic self, which is the subject of discursive reasoning (dianoia, logismos) and practical action (praxis), and is experienced when we pursue the goods of the soul in the sensible world. The dianoetic self corresponds to Plato's "human being within," namely, the rational soul that is in charge of the many-headed beast. The third is the physical self, which is the subject of affections (pathe), and is experienced when we pursue the goods of the body in the sensible world. The physical self corresponds to Plato's "human being within plus the beast," namely the qualified body that includes the many-headed beast. Though the soul-body composite remains at the level of nature, the person can self-identify with the physical self, the dianoetic self, or the noetic self depending on the way of life he leads.” (D. M. Hutchinson 2008, Plotinus on Consciousness, Cambridge University Press, page 9)

A view of the triune mind can also be seen in this diagram (source is unknown). This is perhaps a Neopythagorean perspective of the human mind (Nous) with elements of psyche

including: 1) a noetic soul, 2) a reasoning soul and 3) an unreasoning soul. These correspond to the superconscious, conscious and subconscious mind.

Pythagorean Tetractys



Pythagorean Tetractys image retrieved October 8, 2019 from <http://pkdreligion.blogspot.com/2011/11/pythagorean-tetractys.html>

Plato was not the only philosopher of mind in the Axial Age to recognize the tripartite division of the mind. An interesting theoretical model of the triune mind was developed by Canadian Buddhist scholar [Suwanda H. J. Sugunasiri](#). His work on the [Triune Mind](#)^[1] attempted to clarify the three terms used by the Buddha for consciousness, namely, [Mano](#), [Citta](#) and [Viññāna](#). To formalize his definitions, he looked into the fields of [Pali](#) Buddhism, neuroscience, anthropology, linguistics, and embryology, among others. The overall thrust of this research moved toward scientifically refining our understanding of consciousness and assimilating functions of the mind with structures of the brain. His work not only supports the premise of a three-part consciousness, but also addresses the mind-body problem as we discussed earlier.

It is not being suggested that the concepts of consciousness of Plato and the Neoplatonists and Buddhists are the same as our contemporary psychological understandings. Rather, I mean to show that there is an analogous and corresponding relationship implied in these historical views of a human psyche composed of three distinct elements. There is something instinctual about this concept, that it has been around since man first began questioning such things and continues to be explored by scientists, philosophers, and theologians alike.

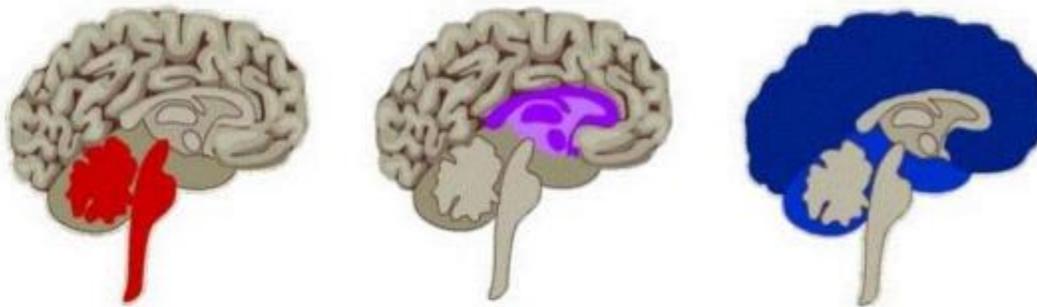
The Triune Brain

Let us also note that conceiving the human psyche as “three in one” was extended into the structure of the brain in the 1960s by neuroscientist Paul D. MacLean. In [The Triune Brain in Evolution](#) (reference) he formulated that the brain consisted of the reptilian complex, the paleomammalian complex or limbic system and the neomammalian complex or neo cortex which developed sequentially in the course of human evolution. There is not a clear relationship of the neocortex to the superconscious mind it was suggested by Glynda-Lee Hoffmann (The Secret Dowry of Eve 2003) that the prefrontal cortex function is very involved in the integration of brain functions and the personality which is often seen as a necessary

precursor to transpersonal awareness.

Triune Brain Theory

Lizard Brain	Mammal Brain	Human Brain
Brain stem & cerebellum	Limbic System	Neocortex
Fight or flight	Emotions, memories, habits	Language, abstract thought, imagination, consciousness
Autopilot	Decisions	Reasons, rationalizes



The Triune Brain in Evolution, Paul MacLean, 1960

Models of the Mind

We all have some understanding that there is more than one facet of the mind at that the mind as a whole performs a unique function in our lives. It is of interest to look at how these models of the mind were developed and what role they play in our understanding of the triune mind.

As you might imagine, the mind is a vast area of study. There are numerous systems, models, theories and philosophies of mind which have developed over several thousand years with the aim of helping us understand our states of awareness, our various mental capacities, and even that thorny issue of "What is consciousness?" We won't go into detail here on each of these, but if you're interested in learning more, you'll find an excellent historical overview and primer on this topic in *Philosophy of Mind* (Chalmers 2002). Chalmers explores what the mind is, the relationship between the mind and the brain, how the mind represents the world, and the nature of the self.

For the purpose of simplicity and clarity we will use the lens of two dominant paradigms for understanding the mind: **the psychological** and **the spiritual**. From these view of the psyche

we can gain insight into why the triune mind has not become a more predominate theory before now. What it boils down to is that many historical and contemporary views ignore one or more parts of the mind.

To put it simply, the psychological paradigm has tended to discount or repress the superconscious mind while the spiritual paradigm has tended to disparage or repress the subconscious mind. Fortunately, we now find ourselves in a time where these biases are beginning to dissolve and change. Afterall, we don't ignore a part of the body when it is sick or hurt. Likewise, we must take the entirety of the mind into account to understand it effectively.

The Psychological View

In the psychological view the emphasis historically has been on the conscious and subconscious mind as the domains in which to explore, understand and transform. With the emergence of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, this dual model has begun to shift with increasing focus on the superconscious mind as a valid dimension of human experience.

An enduring image of this dual model given by Sigmund Freud was "the mind is like an iceberg; it floats with one-seventh of its bulk above the water"(reference)... meaning that the conscious mind is a fraction in comparison to the functioning and potency of 85% of the unconscious mind. Some have suggested that Freud's model of mind was a "model that represented a tripartite division of the mental apparatus into three major structures or agencies, which he called id, ego, and superego" (Dare, 1997). This may look like a version of the triune mind at first glance. However, since the id and superego were both operating within the subconscious the model was basically a dual model of the conscious and unconscious mind.

In looking at dual-mind models, there is also the elegant and more lifelike metaphor from Johnathan Haidt (reference) that "The mind is divided into parts that sometimes conflict. Like a rider on the back of an elephant, the conscious, reasoning part of the mind has only limited control of what the elephant does." This image conveys a more cooperative and dynamic relationship between the conscious and subconscious mind as well as the raw power and awe at the might and strength of the unconscious. Yet the superconscious mind is missing in this metaphor as well.

It is not simply that Freud and Haidt ignored the existence of the superconscious. Freud in particular made noted references to the superconscious domain of the mind, but emphatically negated its importance. While he did not use the term *superconscious* directly, he wrote much on the religious experience, which he variously termed "an illusion"..."a childhood neurosis" (Freud, 1933 New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis) In *Moses and Monotheism* (reference) he wrote, "If one attempts to assign to religion its place in man's



evolution, it seems not so much to be a lasting acquisition, as a parallel to the neurosis which the civilized individual must pass through on his way from childhood to maturity."

The aversion to the superconscious was described by the French Psychologist Robert Desoille in 1945 with the term "repression of the sublime" which was explained and clarified by the Psychosynthesis writer Frank Haronian in a monogram of the same title (Haronian 1970). Unfortunately, this repression of the superconscious has been a notable feature of psychological perspectives up to the present day. This is perhaps due to the fact that psychology, rooted in the sciences, attempts to manage backlash from religious fervor. This idea was voiced by Albert Ellis, the father of rational emotive therapy, in *Why Some Therapies Don't Work: The Dangers of Transpersonal Psychology*. "Most transpersonalists honestly believe in the psychic phenomena they supposedly experience – including astral projection, extrasensory perception, encounters with people from outer space, and past-life experiences. Many of these devout believers are psychotic, but most probably neurotically deluded. Wishing very strongly to have supernatural experiences, they creatively manage to have them." (Ellis & Yeager, 1989, p. 44) Similar sentiments were expressed more recently by Martin Seligman. Seligman, the founder of Positive Psychology, emphasizes our capacity for love, courage, compassion, creativity, self-knowledge, self-control, and wisdom. Interestingly, these are arguably qualities of higher consciousness, yet Seligman also rejects humanistic and, by implication, transpersonal psychology. He describes them as "narcissistic, lacking a research tradition and being fundamentally anti-scientific." (Daniels 2013).

Most notably, this impulse to reject a "transpersonal identity" as a valid realm of human experience shows up today in the absence of a unique transpersonal psychology division within the American Psychological Association. Currently there is a division within the APA for the study of religious experience, but not a transpersonal psychology division per se. The purpose of APA Division 36 (Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality) is "to understand the significance of religion and spirituality in people's lives." This is an important and useful objective in understanding the mind and the scope of human experience but it is one step removed from recognizing and validating the study of the superconscious as an aspect of mind in individuals. More recently, however, a Transpersonal Psychology Special Interest Group was subsumed under *Division 32: Society for Humanistic Psychology*. It was instituted after a three-year effort to become a unique division failed in 1986, precipitated in part when Rollo May disputed the conceptual foundations of transpersonal psychology (reference).

Healthy apprehensions in the psychological paradigm to the superconscious mind

The foundations of the transpersonal experience are ostensibly found in religion. As such, psychology has been loath to cross too far into the realm of the superconscious for a couple of reasons. It could be that there resides in the collective subconscious of psychology a deep fear of the harm and dangers of dogmatism and cruelty associated with religion. Evidence of harm caused in the name of religion and within religious institutions over the past two centuries have done nothing to quell this apprehension. In reviewing the history of the explanation of the human mind prior to the renaissance, it is not a pretty picture but one of superstition, fear, and a profound ignorance of the nature of mind and consciousness. What the establishment of

psychology, as a unique scientific field, attempted to do was approach the knowledge and experience of the superconscious free of any religious remnants.

There was also the issue of how to even approach the superconscious mind scientifically. Historically the superconscious has been the territory of philosophy, metaphysics and religion. It is a vast and complex subject not readily available to measurable observation. In a recent article by Aryeh Lazar (2009), he asked “what is spirituality?” He concluded that “there is little agreement in the literature as to what spirituality actually is. However, almost all researchers appear to agree that spirituality is a multi-dimensional construct.”

Fortunately, the value of the superconscious mind is beginning to become more apparent in the psychological field. This is especially true with the increased popularity of meditation and mindfulness and the understanding that these transpersonal methods are tremendously helpful in healing the fractured and wounded elements of the psyche.

The Spiritual View

Different from the psychological view, the spiritual view acknowledges the transpersonal, but still presents a dualistic model. In the religious and spiritual paradigm of the mind, the focus is and has been on the divine self, the higher self, Buddha mind, Christ consciousness or *soul*, and then the personality or ego self. There is the superconscious mind and the conscious mind. The ego self and its reflection of subconscious elements of mind is typically seen as an illusion or fetter to achieving spiritual realization or communion with god and subsequently is disregarded as unnecessary or even harmful. One popular American spiritual teacher describes the personality as the “wretched lower self.” Historically the trajectory of spiritual development in major spiritual traditions has been to ignore or repress the subconscious as the “false ego” and to practice “divine indifference.”

Some examples of the view that the personality or personal self is intrinsically flawed, harmful and a sure impediment to realizing the higher or spiritual self can be seen in these passages from various spiritual teachers of different traditions. These views refer to the ego but intrinsically also refer to the subconscious life of a person. These attitudes highlight the often unintegrated, impulsive and destructive aspects of the psyche or in a word the “shadow.” This view that the ego is a reflection of subconscious elements is corroborated by research from neuroscience that what we refer to as our identity is almost entirely based on unconscious brain processes. (reference)

New Age

“Love and ego cannot go together. Knowledge and ego go together perfectly well, but love and ego cannot go together, not at all.” Osho Rajneesh

“Nature is always beautiful, ego always ugly.” Osho Rajneesh

Christian

“The ego is the father of all lies. It is a lie to begin with, for your ego is not real and does not exist.” Jacob Israel

“The ego is the enemy of what you want and of what you have” Jacob Israel

Vedic

“Happiness is the death of the ego.” Osho Rajneesh.

“the *ego*” must be put to shame, curbed or *killed*” *Yogannanda*

Buddhist

“The hallucination of separateness prevents one from seeing that to cherish the ego is to cherish misery. We do not realize that our so-called love and concern for the individual is simply the other face of our own fear of death or rejection.” Alan Watts

As you can see from these passages, the spiritual view tends to disparage the subconscious aspects of the mind for the sake of the transpersonal. The value of this view is that it has been useful and necessary in the past when humankind did not have the psychological resources to care for the subconscious. Although these statements about the ego (subconscious mind) are harsh, there is truth in them. There is a separative self which needs at times to be suppressed. However, now that we have the resources necessary to care for the subconscious, it is necessary to incorporate all aspects of the mind into our understanding. Only in doing so can we hope to learn from what the mind has to offer rather than preoccupy ourselves with exerting agency and control over it.

Metaphor for the Triune Mind

Now that we’ve seen what other models are lacking, it’s necessary to look at a more cohesive and holistic view of the mind’s dimensions. An imaginative metaphor for the triune mind is the Symphony Orchestra. The value of this metaphor is in its correspondence to the human character in its multiplicity, complexity and yet integral functioning. Like the triune mind, the symphony orchestra is able to create “works of art” so beautiful that their music is often a catalyst for transcendent and peak experiences.



In this metaphor, the subconscious mind is represented by the musicians playing their instruments. They are the generators and creators of the sound, and the quality of music created depends on their skillfulness and cooperativeness with other performers in the orchestra. The performers themselves correspond to the sub selves or subparts of the

subconscious. The conductor corresponds to the conscious mind and has the job of leading and guiding the players of the orchestra. The conductor functions in analogous ways to the conscious self, in that the conductor makes important choices for the entire orchestra and observes and evaluates the performance of the players. One of the most important functions of the conscious self is in deliberating and making choices for the personality as a whole and being aware of information and input from the subconscious parts in its deliberations. The conscious self orchestrates the life of the person and makes choices based on the experiences of both the subconscious and superconscious self. The superconscious is both the beauty and score of the music that can lift and transform the life of both the players and the listeners. (The Orchestra as Metaphor, Christos Hatzis, *Harmony* The Symphony Orchestra Institute, Number 11, 2000)

The Value of the Triune Mind Context

Allow me to suggest some significant benefits which can arise from this orientation to the human psyche. To begin it allows for a more integrated and stable personality with less internal conflict and polarization. The consciousness of a person is not actively ignoring or suppressing those mental and emotional currents of the subconscious or the superconscious (depending on the persons overarching orientation to existence.) It allows for the disparate parts and domains of human experience to coexist and co-create in a non-suppressive unity and the subsequent release large amounts of emotional and thought energies. The stability and freedom generated from this integration can contribute significantly to reduced levels of worry and melancholia and increased levels of clarity, insightfulness and self-regulation. With a decrease in subjective conflict there is increased potential for more stable and satisfying relationships and less need to project unresolved conflict into our human exchanges. This in turn contributes to more stable and integrative relationships in families, communities, societies and ultimately to the evolution of planetary consciousness.