

# Critical Thinking and Emotional Intelligence

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Emotional intelligence is a topic that is attracting a considerable amount of popular attention. Some of the discussion is, in my view, superficial and misleading. In this paper, I shall focus on the problems inherent in the manner in which the idea of emotional intelligence is being conceptualized and presented. The main questions I am concerned with are: Does it make sense to speak of emotions as being intelligent or not? If so, is there such a thing as "emotional intelligence?" And if so, how does it relate to critical thinking?

I shall argue that it does make sense to speak of emotions as being, in some given context or other, "intelligent" or not, and, consequently, that it does make sense to speak of emotional intelligence. However, I will also suggest that the way the concept of emotional intelligence is now being popularized — by psychologist Daniel Goleman (1995), in his book *Emotional Intelligence* — is fundamentally flawed.

Once some preliminary distinctions are set out, I will focus on a conceptualization of the mind, its functions, and primary motivators, including a brief analysis of the relationship between thoughts, emotions and desires.

I will then develop a critical analysis of the primary theoretical views of Goleman.

## Some Preliminary Distinctions

What is intelligence? In Standard English usage 'intelligence' is understood as "the ability to learn or understand from experience or to respond successfully to new experiences"; "the ability to acquire and retain knowledge (Webster's New World Dictionary)." Its possession implies the use of reason or intellect in solving problems and directing conduct.

What is emotion or feeling? In standard usage, the term 'emotion' is used to designate "a state of consciousness having to do with the arousal of feelings (Webster's New World Dictionary)." It is "distinguished from other mental states, from cognition, volition, and awareness of physical sensation." Feeling refers to "any of the subjective reactions, pleasant or unpleasant" that one may experience in a situation.

Given these understandings, how might "emotional intelligence" be provisionally conceptualized? Most simply, emotional intelligence can reasonably be conceived as a measure of the degree to which a person successfully (or unsuccessfully) applies sound judgment and reasoning to situations in the process of determining emotional or feeling

responses to those situations. It would entail, then, the bringing of (cognitive) intelligence to bear upon emotions. It would encompass both positive and negative emotions. It would be a measure of the extent to which our affective responses were "rationally" based. A person with a high degree of emotional intelligence would be one who responded to situations with feeling states that "made good sense," given what was going on in those situations. Appropriately generated feeling states would serve as a motivation to pursue reasonable behavior or action. Emerging naturally out of "rational" emotions would be "rational" desires and "rational" behavior.

Now let us consider how critical thinking fits into this picture. What is critical thinking and how might it relate to "the bringing of intelligence to bear on emotions?" If we provisionally understand critical thinking as Robert Ennis defines it, namely, as "rational reflective thinking concerned with what to do or believe," then it clearly implicitly implies the capacity to bring reason to bear on emotions, if for no other reason than that our emotions and feelings are deeply inter involved with our beliefs and actions. For example, if I FEEL fear, it is because I BELIEVE that I am being threatened. Therefore, I am likely to attack or flee. More on this point later.

I shall argue that critical thinking cannot successfully direct our beliefs and actions unless it continually assesses not simply our cognitive abilities, but also our feeling or emotion states, as well as our implicit and explicit drives and agendas.

I shall argue, in other words, that critical thinking provides the crucial link between intelligence and emotions in the "emotionally intelligent" person. Critical thinking, I believe, is the only plausible vehicle by means of which we could bring intelligence to bear upon our emotional life. It is critical thinking I shall argue, and critical thinking alone, which enables us to take active command of not only our thoughts, but our feelings, emotions, and desires as well. It is critical thinking which provides us with the mental tools needed to explicitly understand how reasoning works, and how those tools can be used to take command of what we think, feel, desire, and do.

Through critical thinking, as I understand it, we acquire a means of assessing and upgrading our ability to judge well. It enables us to go into virtually any situation and to figure out the logic of whatever is happening in that situation. It provides a way for us to learn from new experiences through the process of continual self-assessment. Critical thinking, then, enables us to form sound beliefs and judgments, and in doing so, provides us with a basis for a "rational and reasonable" emotional life.

When searching for the ingredients necessary for a highly rational life, it is therefore crucial not to underestimate the role of the affective dimension of mind. To engage in high quality reasoning, one must have not only the cognitive ability to do so, but the drive to do so as well. One must feel the importance of doing so, and thus be driven to acquire command of the art of high quality reasoning. What is more, it is evident that to learn to solve problems effectively, one must have the desire to do so. One must be committed to it. Thus, the affective dimension, comprised of feelings and volition, is a necessary condition and component of high quality reasoning and problem solving.

Every "defect" in emotion and drive creates a "defect" in thought and reason. Intelligence on this view, then, presupposes and requires command of the affective dimension of mind. In short, the truly intelligent person is not a disembodied intellect functioning in an emotional wasteland, but a deeply committed mindful person, full of passion and high values, engaged in effective reasoning, sound judgment, and wise conduct.

## **A Practical Theory of Mind**

Given these foundational understandings, I will now provide a brief outline of my understanding of the mind and its functions. Before I do so, I want to point out that this theory of mind, as I conceive it, is an intellectual one, serving an intellectual agenda, and is not intended to compete with a psychological theory of mind serving a psychological agenda or with any other theory of mind serving some alternative agenda. I am ultimately concerned with developing a theory of mind that enables "ordinary" persons to effectively take charge of their thinking, intellectually speaking, and by that means to take charge of the quality of their lives.

The human mind, as I understand it, is comprised, at minimum, of three basic functions: cognition, feelings, and volition. The cognitive component of the mind includes mental actions we traditionally link with "thinking" such as analyzing, comparing, assuming, inferring, questioning, contrasting, evaluating, etc. The cognitive function is concerned with conceptualizing, reasoning, and figuring things out.

The feeling (or emotional) function is that part of the mind which is our internal monitor, which informs us of how we are doing in any given situation or set of circumstances. It is our gauge for telling us whether we are doing well or poorly. Because we are emotionally complex, humans experience a broad array of emotions from happiness to sadness, from enthusiasm to depression, from joy to sorrow, from satisfaction to frustration, and so on.

The third function of the mind, our ultimate driving force, is the formation of volition or will. Within this function lie our agendas, purposes, goals, values, desires, drives, motivations and commitments. This is the mind's engine, which revs us up and moves us forward toward some action, slows us down, or leads us to back away from some action. As our driving force, desires, volition, and play a key role in determining our behavior.

These three basic mental functions, albeit theoretically distinct, operate in a dynamic relationship to each other, ever influencing one another in mutual and reciprocal ways. Thus, although they serve different roles, they are concomitant. They function so intimately in our experience that it is only theoretically that we can regard them distinctively. Wherever there is thinking, some related drive and feeling exist. Wherever there is feeling, some related thinking and drive can be found. Wherever there is drive, thinking and feeling are present in some form.

Despite the fact that cognition, feeling and volition are equally important functions of the mind, it is cognition, or thinking, which is the key to the other two. If we want to change a feeling, we must identify the thinking that ultimately leads to the feeling. If we want to change a desire, again it is the thinking underlying the drive that must be identified and altered--if our behavior is to alter.

It is our thinking that, in the last analysis, leads us toward or away from some action, and in the last analysis sets us up for some given emotional evaluation of the situation. For example, if I THINK that the class structure I have designed for my students will enable them to thoroughly grasp the key concepts in the course, I will then experience an emotional evaluation of some kind when I try the structure out on my students. If it works, I will FEEL satisfied. If it doesn't I may feel disappointed. Furthermore, I will be MOTIVATED toward or away from some action based on the thinking that I do in the situation. If my classroom structure fails to lead to the thinking that I want students to be doing, I may be MOTIVATED to improve the structure so that it works better to achieve my original purpose. Such motivation is based on my THINKING that classroom structures can always be improved and that to develop as a teacher involves continually reevaluating my class plans.

On the other hand, if I THINK that students are generally lazy, and that nothing I can do will improve their ability to learn, I will be content with my old classroom structures (and not be MOTIVATED to improve them), and I will FEEL satisfied with my teaching methods.

## **Two Contrary Tendencies of the Human Mind**

While the human mind inherently includes cognition, feelings, and drives as basic inter-influencing functions, the triad itself can be under the sway of two contrary tendencies of the human mind, the tendency of the mind to gravitate toward egocentrism, or the tendency of the mind to take into account a more comprehensive, and more "rational" view. What do I mean by this? Let me explain.

Every human being enters the world with an initial motivation to have its way and to get what it wants, and thus "naturally" sees the world as designed to cater to its desires. This fact is apparent when we observe the behavior of young children. Their unflinching motto: "It's mine!" As we grow older, we learn methods for getting our way, which are much less blatant and thus less obvious to the untrained eye. These methods can be quite sophisticated, but are often still fundamentally egocentric or self-serving. Throughout our lives, our own desires and narrow interests are typically in the foreground of our thinking.

As we mature, we learn multiple ways to manipulate others, to influence or control others to get what we want. We even learn how to deceive ourselves as to the egocentrism of our behavior. We have no difficulty coming to conceptualize ourselves as fair-minded, empathetic, kind, generous, thoughtful, and considerate, as concerned, in short, with other persons. We recognize that it is socially unacceptable to be blatantly egocentric. Nevertheless, that outward appearance of concern for others is often just

that, an outward posture that enables us to think well of ourselves as we, in fact, pursue narrow selfish interests.

Nevertheless, however egocentric we may in fact become, we have, in addition, a capacity to go beyond it. For example, we unfailingly recognize the destructiveness of the egocentrism of others when in their selfish pursuits they violate our rights or needs. We can all therefore conceive of the considerate, the fair-minded, the "rational" person. We all approve of non-egocentric thinking in others.

The result is a kind of dualism in us: our selfish, egocentric side, on the one hand, and our capacity to recognize higher values on the other. These two sides each can have a role in influencing our thoughts, feelings, and desires. What is more, because we become facile self-deceivers, it is often not clear to us when we are acting in an egocentric manner.

Think of the husband who controls his wife through threat of physical force, and who deceives himself into believing that such physical punishment is "for her own good." Think of the wife who manipulates her husband to get what she wants, while deceiving herself into believing that "what he doesn't know won't hurt him." Think of the politician who claims to believe in one thing, but after being elected, behaves according to an opposing belief (who in the first instance deceives himself into believing that whatever half-truths he tells during the election campaign are of no consequence, that they are simply necessary evils for getting elected). Think of the student more interested in "getting an A" than in learning, who deceives herself into believing that getting A's in her courses is more important than learning. All of these are examples of egocentric thinking, thinking which is fundamentally driven by our selfish, self-validating desires.

In the pursuit of self-preservation and self-interest, egocentric thinking has certain identifiable hallmarks. It is often marked by rigid, inflexible habits of thought. Moreover, seeing the world in a self-serving way, it routinely distorts information and ignores relevant information when working through a problem or issue. In other words, it relates to the world according to an inherently self-validating structure, recognizing that which it wants to recognize and ignoring that which it finds "uncomfortable."

Certain predictable emotional reactions are typically a product of egocentric thinking. Emotions that are commonly egocentric include defensiveness, irritability, arrogance, anger, apathy, indifference, alienation, resentment, and depression. Of course, to determine whether a particular emotion is irrational or rational, one must look closely at the thinking that ultimately drives that emotion, not at the emotion in-and-of itself.

### **Tendencies Toward Rationality**

Although we often approach the world through irrational, egocentric tendencies, we are also capable, as I have suggested, of developing a "higher" sense of identity. We are capable of becoming non-egocentric people, both intellectually and "morally." Science itself exists only because of the capacity of humans thinking in a non-egocentric

fashion--intellectually speaking. Moral concepts, in turn, exist, only because of the human capacity to conceive of responsibilities that by their very nature presuppose a transcendence of a narrow moral egocentrism.

At a minimum, then, I envision the human mind as utilizing its three basic functions (thought, feeling, and desire) as tools of either egocentric or non-egocentric tendencies, both intellectually and morally. If I am correct, then, the human mind is easily "split" into contrary drives. However, the contrary drives that exist in people are not best understood as social stereotype often has it, between the "emotional" and the "intellectual." Rather, the contrary drives occur between egocentric and non-egocentric tendencies of mind.

### **Contradicting the Standard Stereotypes**

As you can see, the theory of mind I have been focused on is inconsistent with certain stereotypes and common misconceptions about the relationship between cognition and affect. For example, it is common for people to say things that imply:

- that their emotions and reason are often in conflict with each other,
- that emotion and reason function independently of each other,
- that it is possible to be an emotional person (and hence do little reasoning),
- that it is possible to be a rational person (and hence experience little emotion)
- that rational persons are cold, mechanical, and lack such desirable traits as compassion and sympathy,
- that emotional persons are lively, energetic, and colorful (though they are poor reasoners or do not follow their reasoning when making decisions),
- In this view one must give up the possibility of a rich emotional life if one decides to become a rational person,
- Likewise, one must give up rationality if one is to live life as a passionate, highly motivated person would.

These ways of talking do not, in my view, make sense of who and what we are. Rather they support a myth that is an albatross on all our thinking about who and what we are. They lead us away from realizing that there is thinking that underlies our emotions and the emotions that drive our thinking. They lead us to think of thought and emotion as if they were oil and water, rather than inseparable constituents of human cognition. They lead us to think that there is nothing we can do to control our emotional life, when in fact there is much we can do. I shall spell out my conception of that "control" as I critique Emotional Intelligence, by Daniel Goleman.

### **Critical Analysis of *Emotional Intelligence***

At this point let us turn to Daniel Goleman's book, *Emotional Intelligence*. My overview of the book is that it provides a useful reminder of the importance of emotions in human life and of the fact that our emotions are intimately connected with cognitive matters, with thinking, in short. However, it is also my view that in his rush to make sense of the

results of the data of brain research, Goleman inadvertently often becomes the unwitting perpetuator of social stereotypes about the relationship between emotion and reason.

To begin, Goleman's book is that of the popularizer, not that of the theoretician. He writes in a style that is zippy, catchy, and appealing. His book is written in the style of an experience journalist. On a casual first read, one might come away with the impression that it is well integrated and internally consistent. Unfortunately, however, it is not.

Despite his frequent appeal to "brain research," the bulk of his book is interpretative rather than "factual." Or to put it another way, he blends his own interpretations so much with data from empirical research that one is apt to think that his interpretations of the data implicit in the studies he quotes are equivalent to data themselves. Nowhere does he call to our attention that he is doing much more than simply reporting. Nowhere does he call attention to the fact that he is continually construing what he is reporting in a direction.

Before I go further, however, let me emphasize that there are genuine insights in his work. First, he is keenly sensitive to the important role that emotions play in our lives. Secondly, he recognizes, and rightly so, that there is an "emotional" dimension to intelligence. Thirdly, he articulates a number of useful strategies for improving our emotional lives, suggestions gleaned from the research he has canvassed.

### **The Problem of Translating From Brain to Mind**

Goleman is concerned to help us achieve insights into human emotions and their relationship to the intellectual dimension of human functioning. He is concerned to give us insights into our minds. However, the basis for his conclusions about how the human functions is almost entirely that of a variety of studies that could loosely be called "brain" research. At the outset, we should question the move from data and interpretations based on research into the brain to conclusions about the mind.

In the first place, we have almost an unlimited source of data about the human mind available to us--from the multiple products that the human mind has produced.

What am I thinking of? For one, all the human disciplines are constructs of human minds: biology, chemistry, geology, physics, mathematics, history, anthropology, linguistics, etc. Anything we can say about the human mind must be consistent with its being able to create such monumental constructs.

Secondly, the human mind creates such diverse things as poems, novels, plays, dances, paintings, religions, social systems, families, cultures, and traditions--a truly amazing array of constructs.

Thirdly, human minds routinely interpret, experience, plan, question, formulate agendas, laugh, argue, guess, assess, assume, clarify, make inferences, judge, project, create models, form theories--to mention a few of the myriad things that human minds routinely

do. Furthermore, the role of the affective dimension, of feelings and desires, in forming these mental constructs cannot be underestimated.

Fourthly, insights into the relationship between cognition and affect can be gleaned from intellectual fields such as sociology, anthropology and psychology, as well as from fields such as literature, through the great works of authors such as Jane Austin, William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens, to name but a few.

Recognizing something of this full range of things that human minds can do is essential before we come to conclusions about the human mind based on data from brain research alone. Or, to put the point another way, we should remember that however we translate from brain research data to functioning of the mind, the interpretation we come to must be consistent with everything we already know about the mind and its multiple modes of functioning and creating. This is precisely where Goleman fails. He talks about the mind as if brain research were somehow our best source of information about it. In fact, he states “the place of feeling in mental life has been surprisingly slighted by research over the years...now science is finally able to speak with authority...to map with some precision the human heart (p. xi).” Goleman shows no awareness of the massive quantity of information and knowledge already existing that is implicit in the existent products of minds.

## **Major Problems Inherent in Goleman’s Work**

In addition to Goleman’s lack of sensitivity to the brain-to-mind translation problem, and his failure to acknowledge that we already know much about the mind through its works and constructs, Goleman’s work is often inconsistent and sometimes incoherent. Let us look at some cases.

### **Two Brains Equals Two Minds**

Because Goleman’s “theory” of mind is based strictly on his interpretations of data from brain research, he comes to some questionable conclusions about the mind. For example, he states, “sensory signals from eye or ear travel first in the brain to the thalamus and then — across a single synapse — to the amygdala; a second signal from the thalamus is routed to the neocortex — the thinking brain. This branching allows the amygdala to begin to respond before the neocortex, which mulls information through several levels of brain circuits before it fully perceives and finally initiates its more finely tailored response (p. 17).”

Based on this description of brain activity (and other similar descriptions), he concludes “. . . we have two minds, one that thinks and one that feels . . . These two fundamentally different ways of knowing interact to construct our mental life (p. 8).” Or again: “In a sense we have two brains, two minds — and two different kinds of intelligence: rational and emotional (p. 28).” We want to “find the intelligent balance between the two, to harmonize head and heart (p. 29).”



Suppose we grant that "signals" to the brain proceed to the amygdala before they reach the neo-cortex, and that this fact allows the amygdala to begin to respond before the neo-cortex, it nevertheless does not follow that we should then interpret the brain to have "two minds — and two different kinds of intelligence; rational and emotional (p. 28)."

For either we grant that the amygdala has some cognitive capacity, or that it has none. If we believe it to have some, we should not conclude that the neo-cortex is the exclusive seat of "cognition" and "rationality." If we believe that the amygdala lacks all cognitive capacity, there would be no reason to believe the amygdala capable of generating specific emotions — all of which presuppose specific cognitive definition.

For example, if the amygdala generated "fear," it must of necessity have the cognitive capacity to interpret something to be a "threat," for fear as a human emotion presupposes some cognitive interpretation of "threat." Presumably, Goleman is not assuming the amygdala to be randomly generating emotions unrelated to the person's interpretation of their experience. Or again, if the amygdala generated "anger," it must of necessity have the cognitive wherewithal to interpret something in experience to be a "wrong to oneself," for anger as a distinctive emotion — rather than just a mass of undifferentiated energy--presupposes a sense of being wronged. To put it another way, it is unintelligible to make sense of an act of mind that fears without sensing threat or to feel angry without a sense of being wronged.

A similar analysis could be given for any other emotion (e.g., feeling rage, jealousy, shame, humiliation, fulfillment, excitement, boredom, apathy, etc. . . .). Furthermore, how could the neo-cortex (Goleman's "thinking" or "rational" brain) think or pursue a rational line of thought if it were not pervasively in touch with our goals, values, desires, fears, etc? In other words, if the neo-cortex is to be a kind of mind unto itself, then it is going to have to be informed with some of the affective structures of mind. Pure intellect (cognition without affect) is unintelligible, since as such it would have no motivation (which is affective).

All Goleman could do to resolve this problem, as far as I can see, is to postulate that the neo-cortex has nothing but higher motivation, desires, and values and the amygdala nothing but lower modes of cognition. But one way or another, for the neo-cortex to formulate thoughts, and the amygdala to generate emotions, they each must have, respectively, an emotional component and a cognitive component built into them.

The best Goleman can do here is to come up with the metaphor of "balancing" the rationality of the neo-cortex with the emotionality of the amygdala. But this makes no sense. One does not "balance" thoughts with emotions, one rather determines whether some given emotion is rationally justified or some given thought will lead to rational emotions. Hence, if I experience fear when there is nothing objectively or legitimately to fear, then I need my more (rational) thoughts to drive away my (irrational) fear. If on the other hand, I experience a fear which is well-founded and I notice that some part of my thinking is distracting me from dealing with the threat that underlies the fear, then I had

better follow my (rationally-based) fear and use it to drive away my (irrationally-based) sense of security.

In other words, once one recognizes that thoughts, feelings, and desires function as inseparable reciprocal sets in human life, then no theory of brain that separates them off into compartments will adequately account for the mind, as we know it. Of course, we can make sense of "balancing" two different lines of thought constructed by the mind looking at something from two different points of view. This "balancing" is the product of one cognitive-affective construct against another one. It is not a balancing of the cognitive (conceived as a thing in itself) with the affective (conceived as a different thing in itself).

Furthermore, once we recognize that any reciprocal set of thought--feeling--desire may be either rational or irrational, we recognize that there is no reason to locate rationality in thoughts in themselves, nor emotions in non-cognitive structures in themselves. To use traditional metaphors, our heads have a heart and our hearts have a head. Thus, since thoughts and feelings are inseparable it seems illogical to think of them as needing to balance one another.

If there is a good reason to think of the human mind having "two brains" or "two minds," then it is to delineate the difference between our egocentric drives (with accompanying egocentric thoughts and emotions) and our rational drives (with accompanying rational thoughts and emotions).

In short, Goleman's underlying idea is fundamentally flawed: that since there are two brains, there are two minds, the thinking (or rational) and the emotional. To come to such conclusions about the human mind is to understand the human mind/brain in far too simplified a manner. The truth is that a complex, intricate relationship exists between thinking and emotions, that for every thought we have, there is a reciprocal feeling. Furthermore, some of our thought/feeling combinations are rational while others are irrational. The mere presence of a thought need not imply that the thought be rational. The mere presence of an emotion does not imply the absence of embedded rational thought.

### **Feelings Prior to Thought**

Goleman asserts that feelings can, and often do, come before thought. He says "the emotional mind is far quicker than the rational mind, springing into action without pausing even a moment to consider what it is doing. Its quickness precludes the deliberate, analytic reflection that is the hallmark of the thinking mind (p. 291)." Furthermore, he quotes from Ledoux (1986, 1992), who says, "emotional mistakes are often the result of feeling prior to thought (p. 24)." Yet, as I have argued, it is unintelligible to think of emotions occurring prior to some cognition. For example, I will not feel joy without thinking that something in my life is going well. Every emotion has a cognitive component that distinguishes it from other emotions.

Otherwise all emotions would be identical. I worry when I think that there is some problem I will not be able to solve. I feel jealous when I think someone is trying to take or has taken something that is properly mine. Thus, the feeling state comes about because of the cognition that creates it. It follows then that it is impossible for feeling states to logically occur prior to some cognition.

Goleman says that the emotional mind is quicker than the rational, or thinking mind, springing into action without pausing even a moment to consider what it is doing. Moreover, he states, "the more intense the feeling, the more dominant the emotional mind becomes - and the more ineffectual the rational mind (p. 9). This seems to imply that all intense emotions are irrational. Is it not possible to be rationally passionate about something, to think it through rationally and to have strong emotions about it? If the "thinking mind" involves "deliberate, analytic reflection," can such thinking not also involve a highly intense emotional component?

### **Equating the "Thinking Mind" with the "Rational Mind"**

Because of Goleman's initial distinction between the "Thinking Mind" and the "Emotional Mind," he is led into a number of problems, as I have suggested. Based on this distinction, Goleman erroneously equates the "thinking mind" with the "rational mind." Are we to conclude, then, that all thinking is to be considered rational? How do we account for cognition that is irrational, or unreasonable? How are we to account for mistakes in thinking? Are they to be considered rational as well?

Goleman states that "the beliefs of the rational mind are tentative; new evidence can disconfirm one belief and replace it with a new one - it reasons by objective evidence. The emotional mind, however, takes its beliefs to be absolutely true, and so discounts any evidence to the contrary (p. 295)." Furthermore, he states, "actions that spring from the emotional mind carry a particularly strong sense of certainty, a by-product of a streamlined, simplified way of looking at things that can be absolutely bewildering to the rational mind (p. 291)."

It seems to me that Goleman, in both of these statements, is referring to emotional states and motivations that are driven by the irrational mind, or by irrational tendencies in the mind. Thus, the fault for such problems falls not on the shoulders of the "emotional mind," but result from logically unsound, somehow irrational thinking. A more realistic theory of mind would thus delineate not the "emotional mind" from the "rational mind," but the "rational mind" (with its related emotional component) and the "irrational mind" (with its related emotional component).

### **Do Emotions Have a Mind of Their Own?**

One of the significant problems in Goleman's writing is his lack of consistency. He contradicts himself, for example, in the major points he makes about the thinking that occurs in the "emotional mind." On one hand he states "The amygdala's extensive web of neural connections allows it, during an emotional emergency, to capture and drive

much of the rest of the brain - including the rational mind (p. 17).” This seems to imply that the emotional mind uses the “thinking mind” to achieve its agendas at times.

On the other hand, Goleman states, “Our emotions have a mind of their own, one which can hold views quite independently of our rational mind (p. 20).” This statement seems to mean that emotions can somehow think for themselves, rather than that the emotional mind uses the thinking mind (which, remember Goleman equates with the “rational mind”) to serve its purposes. Therefore, although he quotes Damasio (1994) as asserting, “the emotional brain is as involved in reasoning as is the thinking brain (p. 28),” we are unclear as to whether, in Goleman’s view, the emotional mind thinks for itself, or whether it uses the thinking mind to think for it.

### **The Problem with “Emotional Hijackings”**

One of the most often used metaphors in Goleman’s book is what he calls an “emotional hijacking (see Chapter Two).” In some places he refers to this as an “emotional emergency.” He contends that emotional hijackings occur when “a center in the limbic brain proclaims an emergency, recruiting the rest of the brain to its urgent agenda. The hijacking occurs an instant before the neocortex, the thinking brain, has had a chance to fully glimpse what is happening...this happens to us fairly frequently (p. 14).”

He uses an example of the seasoned burglar Richard Robles out on parole after having served a three-year sentence for more than 100 break-ins he has pulled to support a heroin habit. Robles, according to the story, decides to break into, and rob just one more home (because he “desperately needed money for his girlfriend and their three-year-old daughter [p. 13].)”) ”

He breaks into an apartment of two young women. While he is tying one of them up, she says she will remember his face and help the police track him down. In a frenzy he grabs a soda bottle and clubs both girls to the point of unconsciousness, then awash in rage and fear, he stabs them over and over with a kitchen knife. Looking back at that moment some twenty years later he says, “I just went bananas. My head just exploded (p. 14).”

Goleman states that this sort of behavior results from “neural takeovers (p. 14).” He contends that “the design of the brain means that we very often have little or no control over when we are swept by an emotion, nor over what emotion it will be (p. 57).” This statement, and the very idea of an “emotional hijacking” or “neural takeover,” seem to imply that there are times when we have little or no control over what our emotions might drive us to do.

If we have little or no control over when we are swept by an emotion or what that emotion might be, how then can we take command of our emotions? Furthermore, how can we fully take responsibility for the behavior that leads from that emotion? It seems to me that Goleman’s concept of “emotional hijacking” implies that when we experience highly intense emotions, those emotions drive our thinking (or lead us to action prior to

thinking). If our emotions are driving our thinking and, by implication, our behavior; how then can we be responsible for the actions we engage in? Can't we simply argue that we are experiencing an "emotional hijacking" when we engage in inappropriate emotion-driven behavior, that we cannot really do anything to stop such a "neural hijacking?"

It seems to me that the case of Richard Robles is not best understood as an "emotional hijacking." Rather Robles represents a paradigm case of a person engaged in egocentric, self-serving thinking, completely unconcerned with the rights of others. He used his cognition to rationalize his actions, leading him to believe that killing was necessary to avoid being caught. Therefore, his decision to murder was an unjustifiable self-serving act, an act for which, in the final analysis, he ought to take full responsibility.

### **Garden Variety Emotions**

Goleman doesn't concern himself with what he calls "garden-variety" emotions such as "sadness, worry, and anger." He says, "normally such moods pass with time and patience... (p. 57)." Yet it is precisely these everyday emotions that diminish the quality of most people's lives. There is no reason why everyday emotions cannot be understood, for they are inevitably the product of thinking that is ultimately under our control. Whenever I feel any emotion, I can analyze it. I can ask myself: what is the thinking leading to this feeling? How can I alter my thinking so as to alter this feeling?

What is more, Goleman's viewpoint inadvertently supports the "reason-versus-emotion" stereotypes. To him, "garden-variety" emotions are not emotions we need be actively in charge of. This seems to imply that we should simply allow them to run their course, to do what they will, to control our thinking and behavior until they fade away.

### ***Conclusion***

If we are concerned with developing our rationality in order to improve our lives, we must understand the powerful role that both emotions and thoughts play in our minds. We must understand the ways in which affect and cognition influence one another in determining both our outlook on life and our behavior. Most importantly, we must come to terms with those truths about the human mind that enable us to begin the process of taking charge of our minds: that thoughts and emotions are inextricably bound, that we have both egocentric and rational tendencies, that our inner conflicts are never best understood as a simple matter between emotion and reason, that self-command of mind takes both extended education and self-discipline, that our fullest rational development is dependent on the development of rational affect, that to bring intelligence to bear upon emotions we must take charge of the thinking underlying those emotions.

These important insights are more obscured than illuminated by analyses of the mind such as that offered by Goleman. To develop our awareness of the nature of the human mind and how it functions we must be careful not to over-emphasize the importance of "brain" research. Our most important knowledge of the human mind will always be, ultimately, knowledge drawn from the multiple constructs of the mind.

Any theory which we develop of the human mind must make intelligible how it is that minds could create such multiply complex phenomena as poems, novels, plays, dances, paintings, religions, social systems, families, cultures, traditions--and do such diverse things as interpret, experience, plan, question, formulate agendas, laugh, argue, guess, assess, assume, clarify, make inferences, judge, project, model, dramatize, fantasize, and theorize. All of these creations and all of these activities of minds are closely inter-involved with our emotional lives. We are far, very far, from accounting for these products, or their "emotional" connections, by the use of the data of brain research. I doubt we ever will.

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