

# Radically Normal

## A Centered Psychology of Virtue

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Draft 1.2 1/19/2007

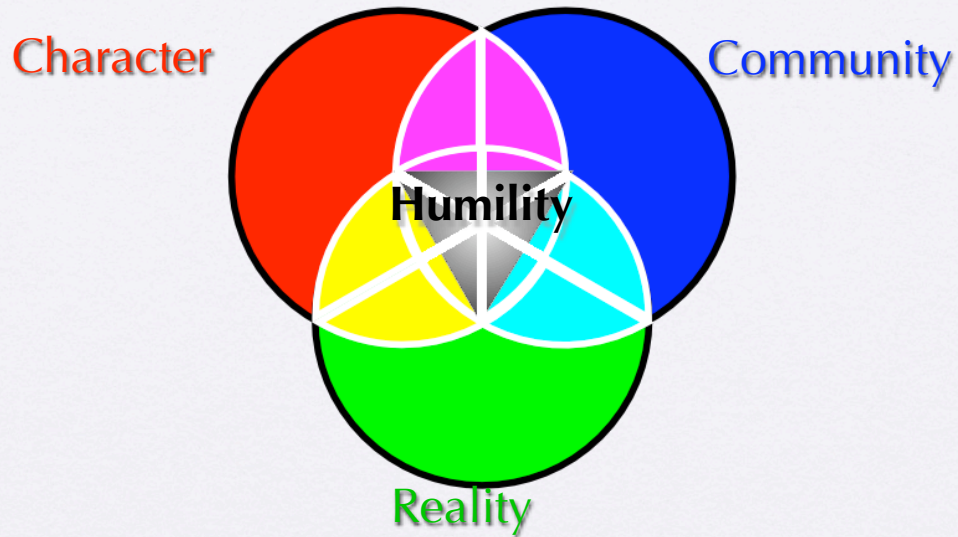
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Radical Centrism presents itself as a unifying paradigm of civil society. In particular, it attempts to answer the age-old question of “what is the greatest good?” in a way that facilitates understanding and transforming the institutions of modern life. Underlying that sociological goal, however, is a set of anthropological assumptions about what it means to be a healthy human being. Starting from those assumptions -- embodied in our Radical Centrist Manifesto -- we present a vision of psychological normalcy that is compatible with Radical Centrist values.

The ideas presented here are preliminary, and deliberately over-simplified. Our intent is not to have the last word, but simply to suggest a new way of looking at old problems.

# Radical Centrism

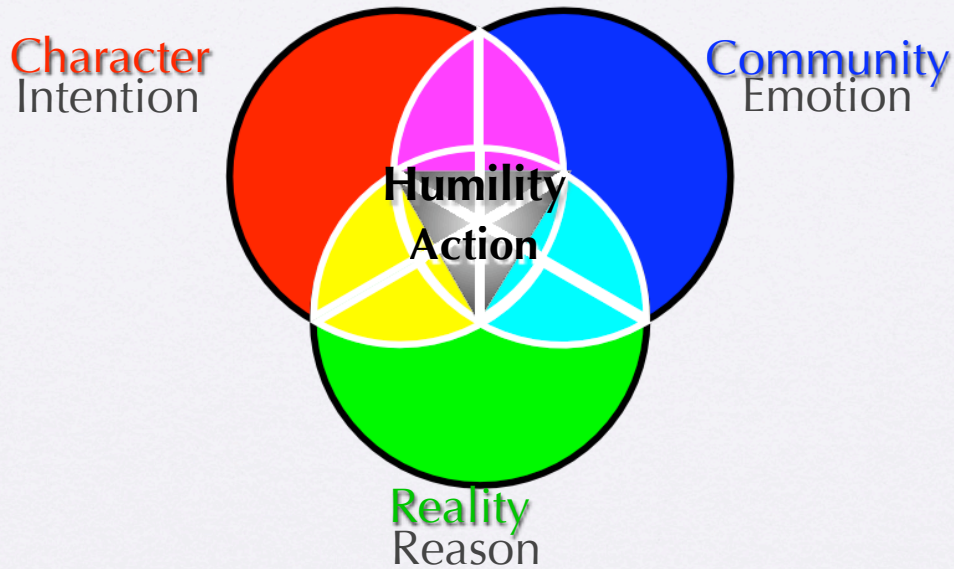


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Radical Centrism is built on the dynamic tension between Reality, Character, Community, and Humility, as expressed in our Radical Centrist Manifesto: Ground Rules of Civil Society. This can be expressed as the intersection of three overlapping circles, a mathematical construct conveniently known as the “radical center.”

# Radical Centrist Psychology



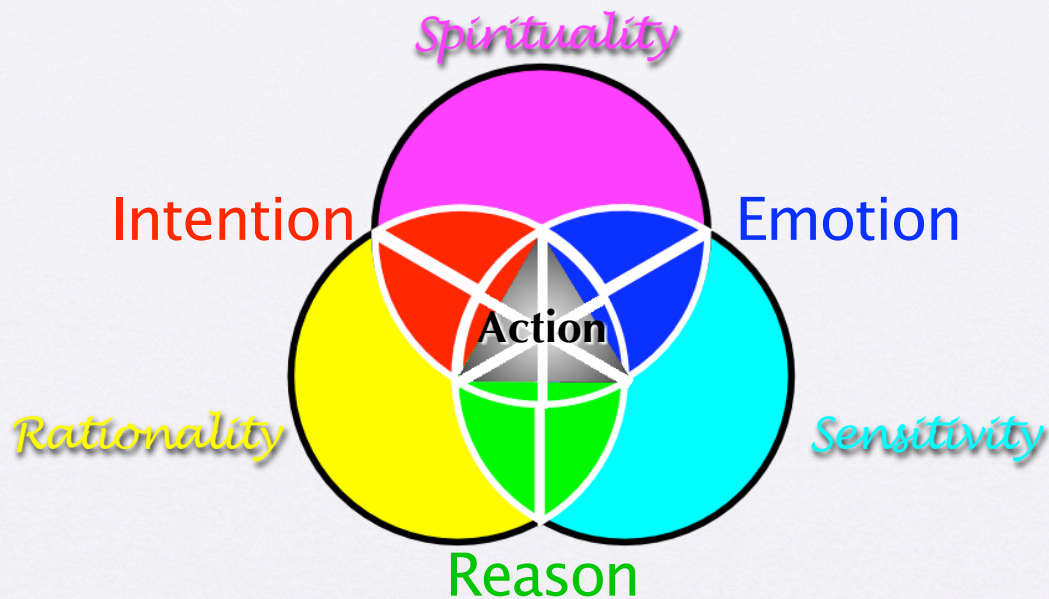
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Next, we can identify psychological aspects associated with each concept. Internally, we apprehend Reality through Reason, Character through Intention, and Community through Emotion. Action then grows out of the interplay between Reason, Intention, and Emotion -- and the imperfection of this dynamic is the reason for Humility.

As shown in the diagram, the three primary aspects are not entirely distinct, but neither can any one be subsumed by the others. In this sense, Radical Centrism can be considered a triadic philosophy (as opposed to monist or dualist), though it still affirms an underlying unity.

# Worlds of Experience



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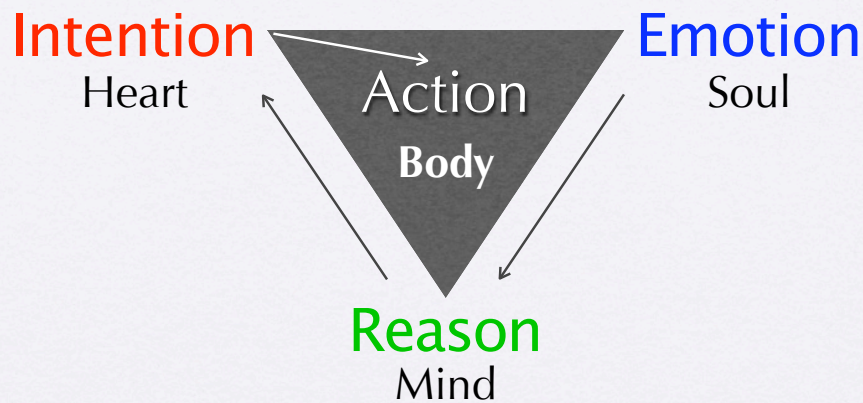
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Conversely, the three primary aspects can be viewed as the focal points of three different ways of experiencing the world.

- Rationalism links Reason and Intention.
- Intention and Emotion are bridged by Spiritual experiences
- To be Sensitive is to connect Emotion and Reason

To a Radical Centrist, all three of these are equally valid and complementary ways of experiencing the world, unlike the one-sided rationality of moderns, sensitivity of romantics, or spirituality of mystics. Put another way, we assert that all three worlds (material, logical, and spiritual) are equally real (and equally incomplete).

# Normal Behavior



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These four aspects - Reason, Intention, Emotion and Action - are the basis of Radical Centrist psychology, and can be roughly equated with the traditional notions of mind, heart (will), soul (feelings), and body. Or, equivalently: intellectual, volitional, emotional, and physical.

In this context, normal behavior is defined as starting with Emotion, being managed by Reason, crystallizing into Intention, and leading to Action. This differs from many traditional philosophies by affirming a primary role for Emotion, which is often dismissed as merely a source of irrationality. Emotion, as the conveyor of Community, also reflects the Radical Centrist belief that behavior can not be understood solely in terms of the Individual.

These aspects participate in what Radical Centrists call a value cycle - the means by which value is created, recognized, and normalized.

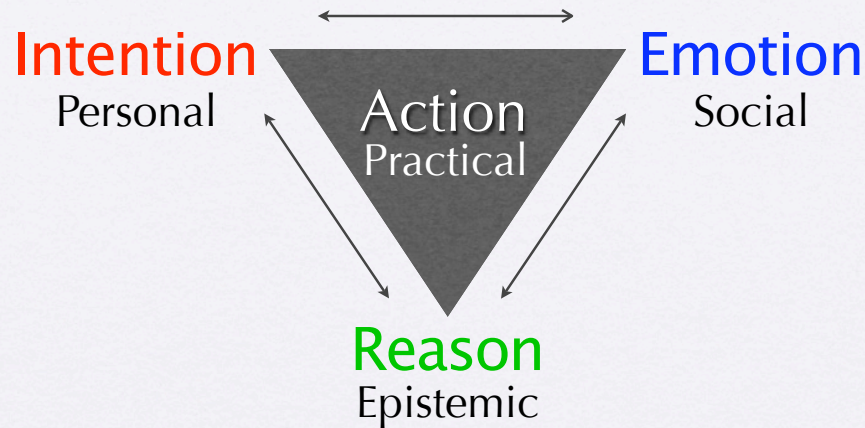
# Virtue

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However, not only does Radical Centrism assert a principle of “normal” behavior, it also denies that it *completely* exists (in pure form) in practice. This tension is manifested by the fact that our reasons, intentions, and emotions often conflict, and their relation to our actions is often unclear (even to us). Thus, psychological growth is seen as the struggle to achieve normal behavior. The ability to behave normally, in this sense, can be described as *virtue*.

# Radical Virtues

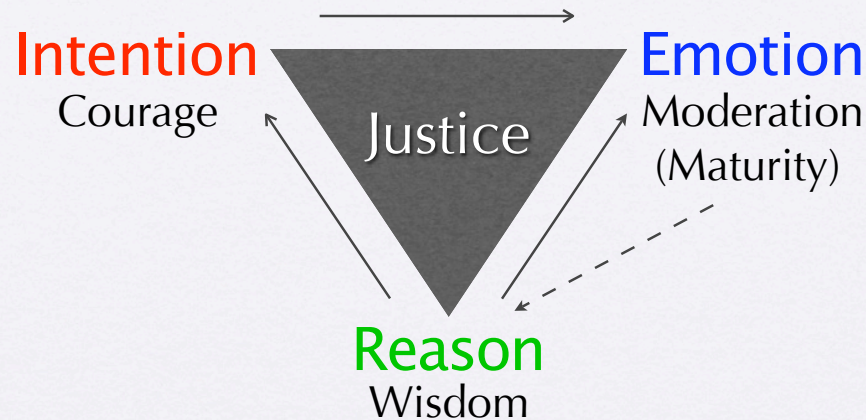


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In fact, we can identify at least four different aspects of virtue – Epistemic, Personal, Social, and Practical – corresponding to the different spheres of being. An important aspect of Radical Centrist thought is that equal weight is given to all aspects of Virtue. The practical skill of a craftsman is as valued as the epistemic rigor of a logician, and social compassion is no excuse for a lack of personal integrity (or vice versa).

# Cardinal Virtues



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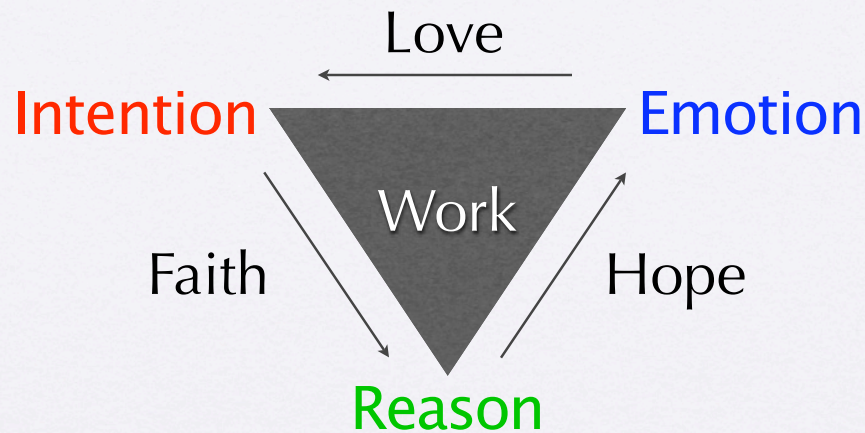
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In fact, this approach maps fairly well onto traditional definitions of virtue, though there are some key differences. The Cardinal (or Platonic) virtues, acknowledged from antiquity, are often interpreted in terms of this same underlying psychological model. Wisdom is the virtue of Reason, Courage of Intention, and Moderation of Emotion.

However, in the Platonic view Reason is king, and Emotion plays a purely passive role (as noted in feminist critiques). A Radical Centrist would argue that passion can often be as essential as moderation in Emotion, depending on the context, which might be described as the virtue of Maturity. In fact, this distinction may be the key differentiator between a Radical Centrist and a 'mere' moderate. Also, while Justice and Humility both imply an appropriate balance between different aspects, the former is usually seen as adherence to a static ideal as opposed to a dynamic search for improvement.



# Spiritual Virtues



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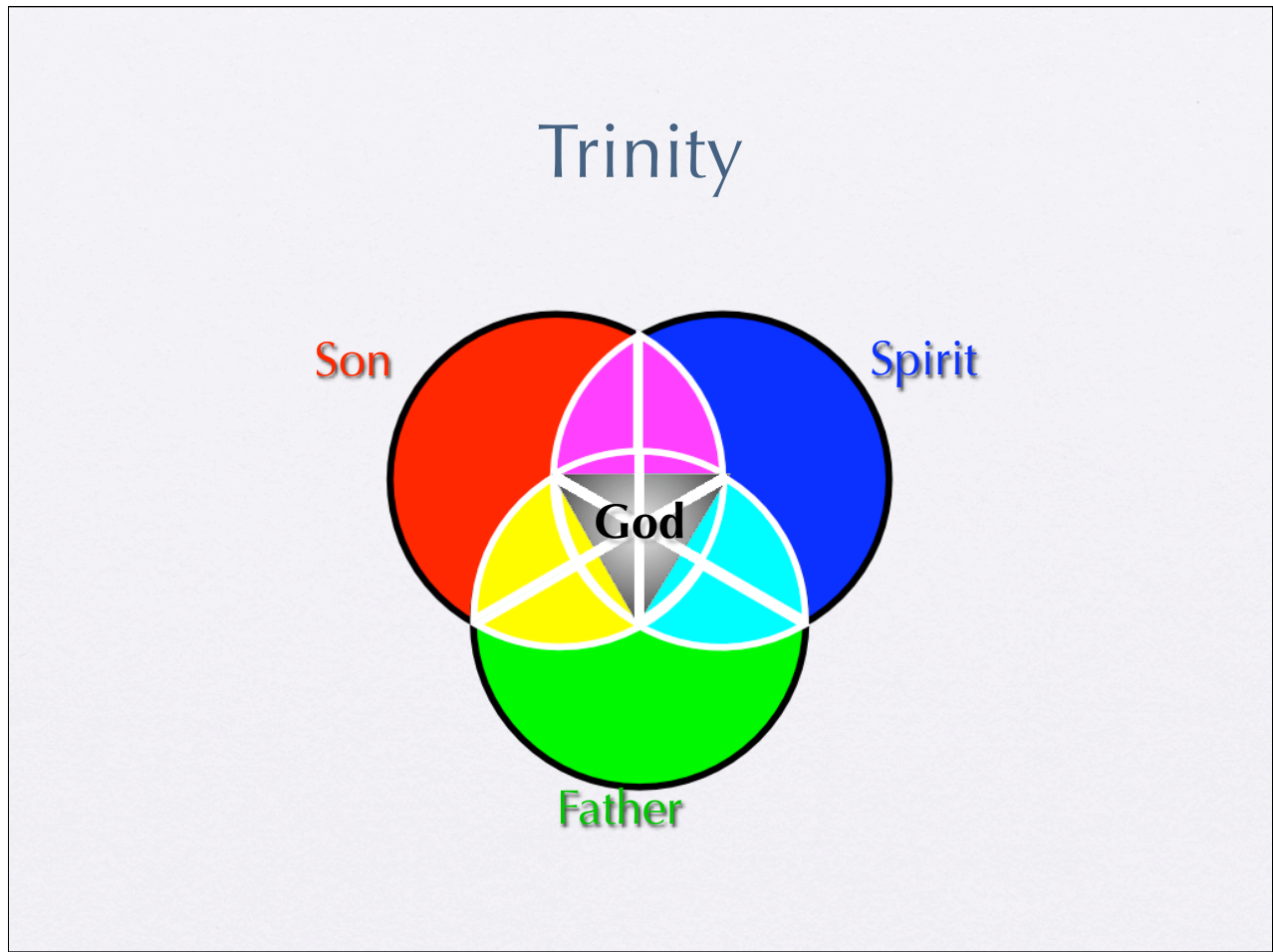
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The theological virtues of Christianity are a somewhat better fit, though with a twist:

- Love turns Emotion into Intention
- Faith is an Intention that forms the basis of Reason
- Hope uses Reason to nurture Emotion.

This creates a counter-rotating spiritual value cycle which may in fact help fuel the normal value cycle described earlier. Interestingly, the notion of Works -- often seen as diametrically opposed to Faith -- fits in naturally here as the counterpart of Action.

Further, these spiritual virtues appear to build up the cardinal virtues, which in turn enable normal behavior. This is ironically the exact opposite of the medieval view, where the cardinal virtues are the root of spiritually virtuous fruit. However, in Radical Centrist thought it is entirely possible -- even necessary! -- for both views to be correct (albeit in different contexts).



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On that note, it seems inevitable that we draw a parallel with the most famous triplet in philosophy, that of the Christian Trinity which has three persons in one Godhead. We must be cautious about rushing in where angels fear to tread, but there does seem to be a rough correlation: The Father is experienced through Reality ("being clearly seen from what has been made", Romans 1), the Son (Jesus) is expressed in Character ("We have the mind of Christ"), and the Spirit is experienced through Community ("the unity in the Spirit through the bond of peace"). Of course, other mappings may also be possible. Note that unlike in traditional philosophy, this trifurcation of divinity seems not merely natural, but essential, since we've already identified triunity in the human psyche.

Interestingly, this model implies that each pair of persons shares some attribute not present in the third, which would align it with the Catholics against the Orthodox with respect to the infamous 'filioque' clause.

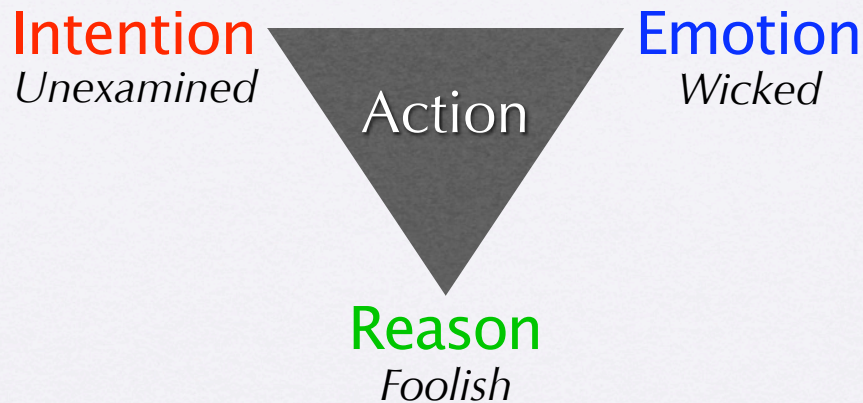
# Vices

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These virtues can be contrasted to the “two and half” vices described in the Radical Centrist Manifesto: Folly, Wickedness, and un-Wisdom.

# Radical Vices



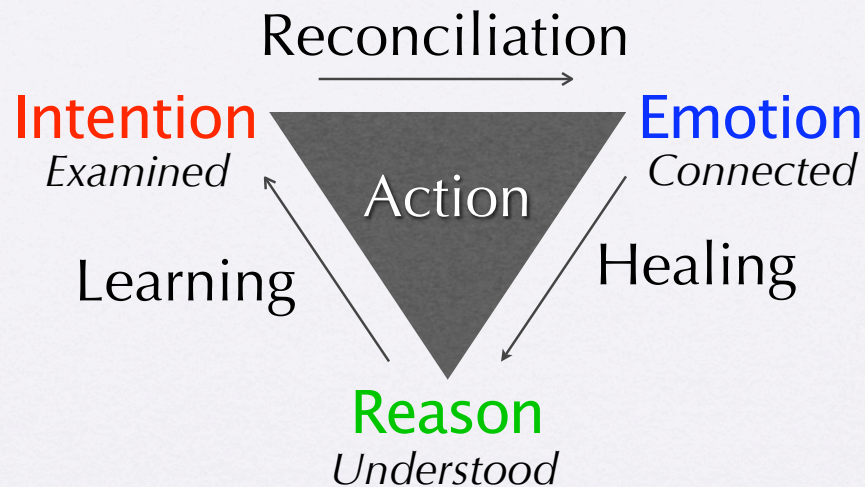
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Perhaps surprisingly, the primary vices in Radical Centrism (as contained in the Manifesto) are *Folly* (a denial of Reality) and *Wickedness* (a shrinking of Community) -- not Character flaws per se. Note that folly can often be equated with addictions, which can be considered the inability to effectively grasp the reality of negative consequences (e.g, anti-learning).

The half-vice of Character is simply lacking the Wisdom to examine consequences (reminiscent of Socrates' critique of 'the unexamined life'). It is considered a half-vice since it is not possible *a priori* to distinguish innocence (in the positive sense) from naïveté (in the negative sense).

# Radical Wholeness

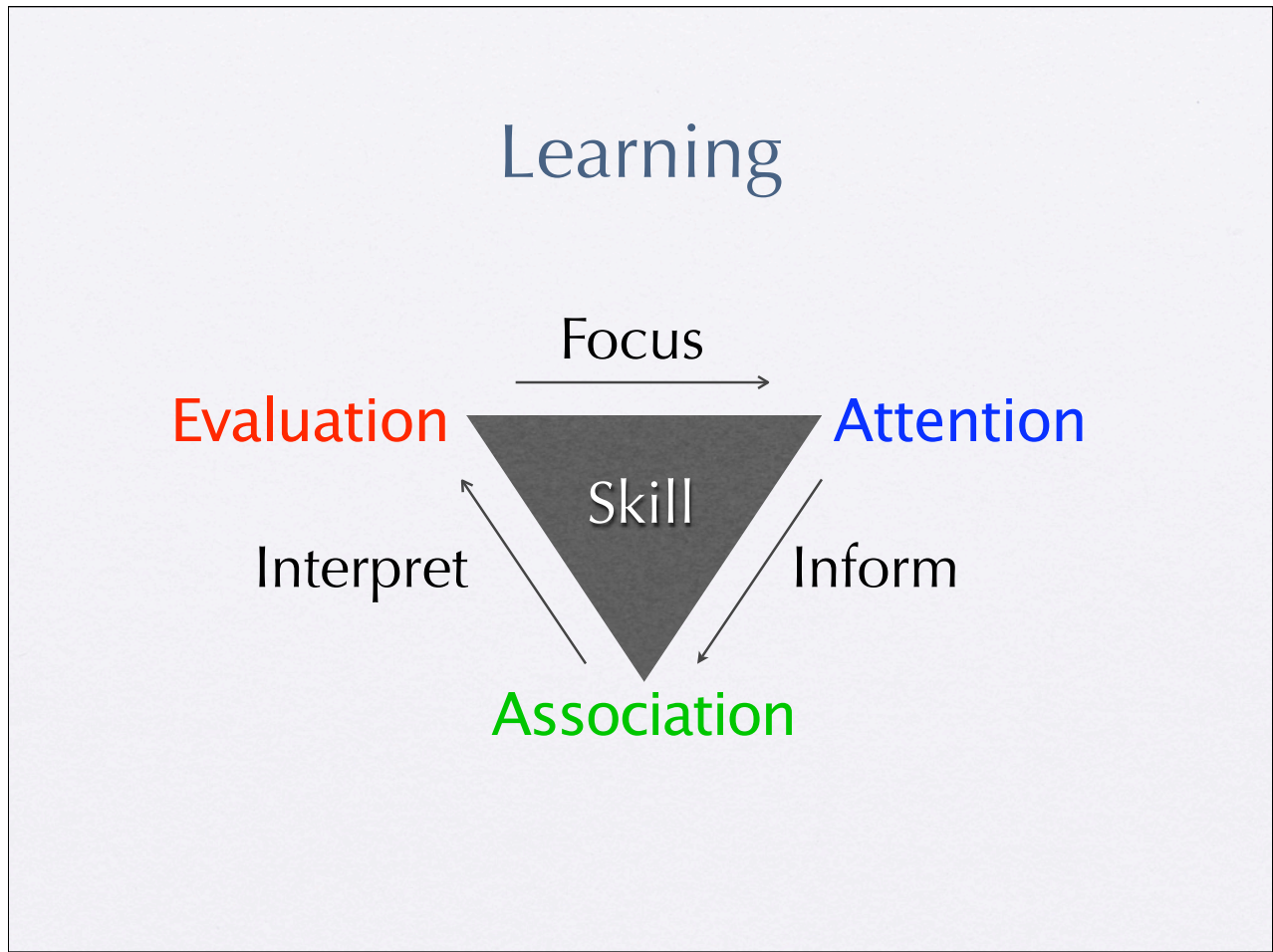


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Though these vices manifest in a particular sphere, they are arguably due to a deficiency in the prior sphere, which is also where the cure needs to start. Intention, through the process of Reconciliation, can connect communities. Emotional Healing enables understanding, which cures folly. Reason, through Learning, leads to examination of consequences.

We can then further expand each of these, to see how all these tasks require integration across the whole person.



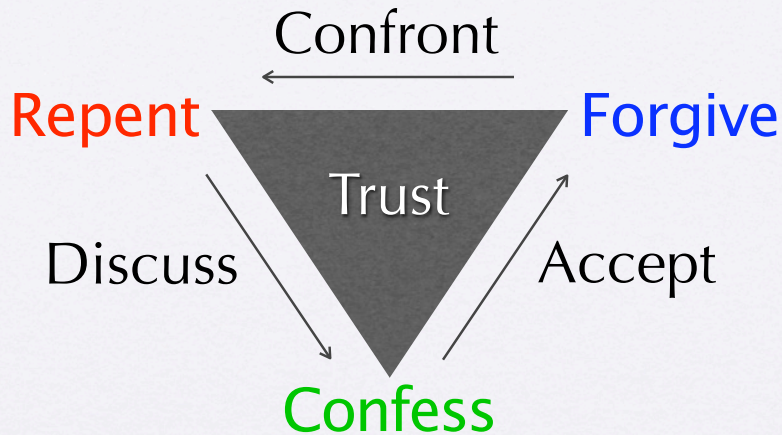
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Learning is not purely an intellectual feat, but requires an act of the will to Focus, generating the affective state of Attentiveness. In turn, relational connectedness generates a desire to Inform, leading to new mental Associations. Further thought gives rise to various Interpretations, which are then Evaluated as to their relative worth. Ideally, this whole cycle repeats numerous times to generate practical Skill, not merely abstract assent.

While not particularly revolutionary (and perhaps somewhat contrived), the primary value of this model is to recognize that true learning requires involving the whole person, and that improvements in the learning process can occur across any of the three dimensions.

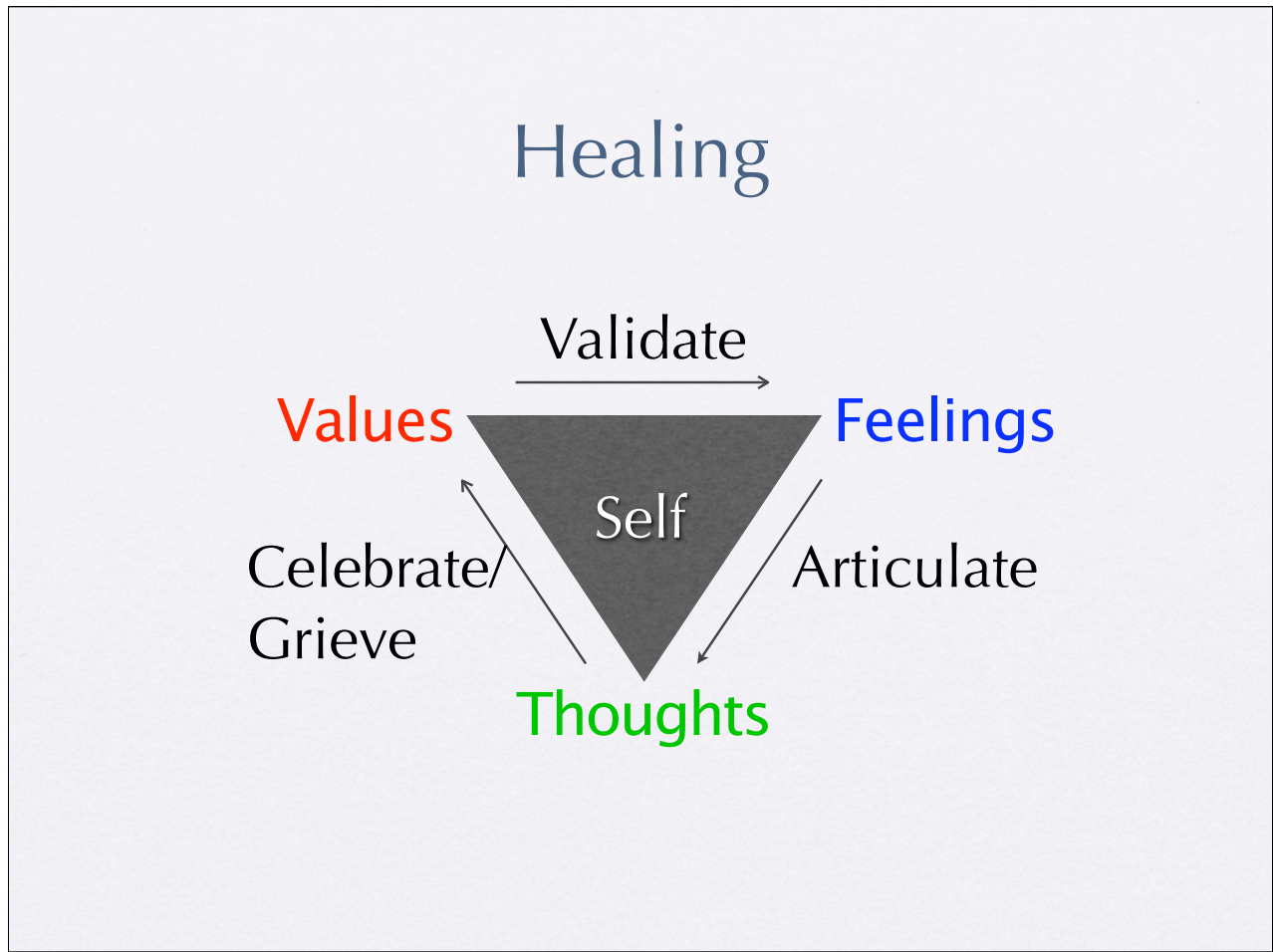
# Reconciliation



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The tripartite nature is perhaps more easily seen in the idea of Reconciliation. It starts with the act of Confrontation (usually out of a sense of “feeling hurt”). The goal is to bring forth a voluntary act of Repentance, that upon Discussion leads to a factual statement of Confession. This in turns enables Acceptance and Forgiveness, which restores Trust.



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Healing, as a bridge between Emotions and Reason, is seen here as essential for inner Healing. It starts with Validation, which connects Values to Feelings. Next, Articulation connects Feelings to Thoughts. Those are then either Celebrated or Grieved, aligning Thoughts with Values.

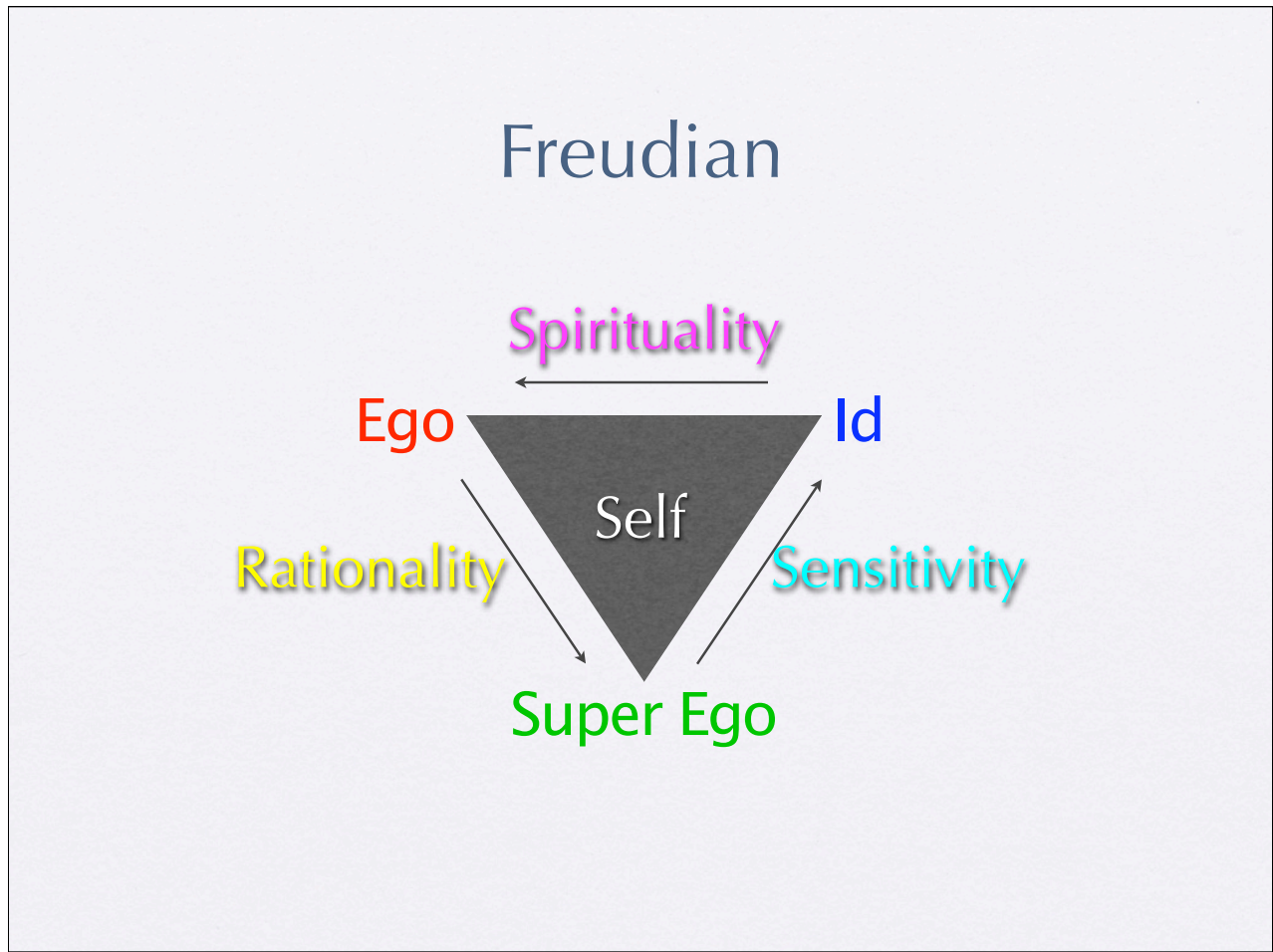


# Personality

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This same psychological model can also be used to interpret personality types, which from this perspective are seen as non-pathological deviations from normality. These mappings are perhaps even more speculative than the previous section, but may still offer some useful insights.

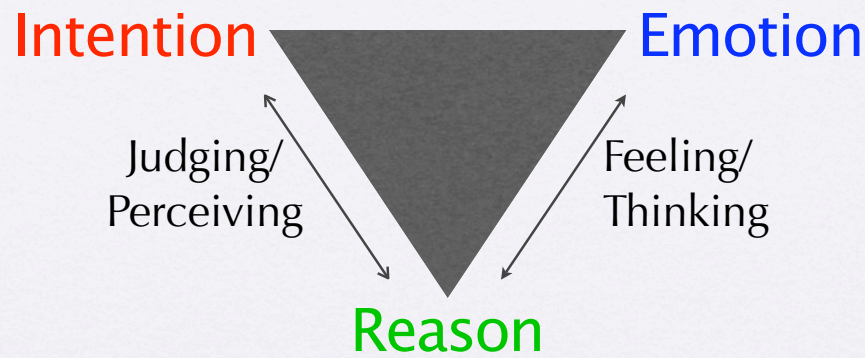


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In traditional psychology, we can equate Intention with Ego, Emotion with Id, and Rationality with Super Ego. However, this would imply that Freudian behavior - which is usually conceived as Id -> Ego -> SuperEgo - would run counter to what we are calling Normal behavior. This may just be a problem with the mapping (or my memory/interpretation of Freudian psychology), but might indicate a fundamental difference in the conception of self.

# Meyers-Briggs



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The most common modern assessment of personality is the Meyers-Briggs test, based on the Jungian dimensions. Of these, the Feeling/Thinking dimension maps readily to Emotion/Reason, as does Judging/Perceiving onto Intention/Reason.

# Meyers-Briggs



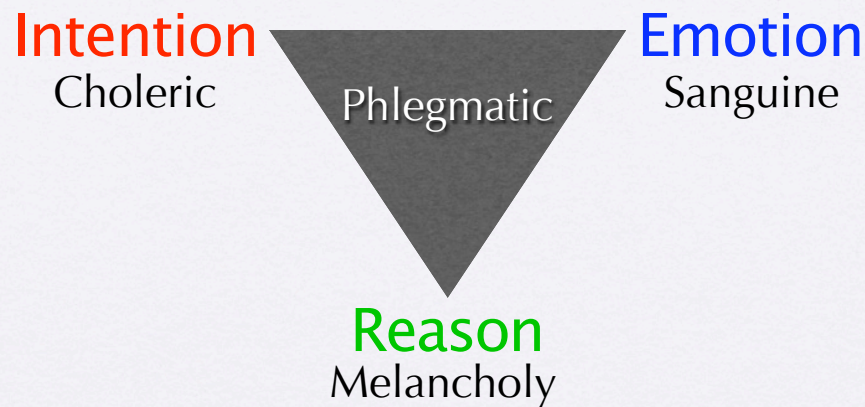
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Interestingly, the other two dimensions appear to map better onto the complements. Intuitive/Sensing seems appropriate for the Spiritual/Sensitive axis. This leaves Extrovert/Introvert aligned with Spiritual/Rational, which implies that an Extrovert links Intention with Emotion, whereas an Introvert connects it with Reason.

While this first approximation is perhaps not a perfect fit, the existence of even a partial mapping lends support to the hypothesis that personality types can be understood as imbalances from truly centered behavior -- and suggests ways that different personality types might need to grow in order to achieve centeredness.

# Temperaments

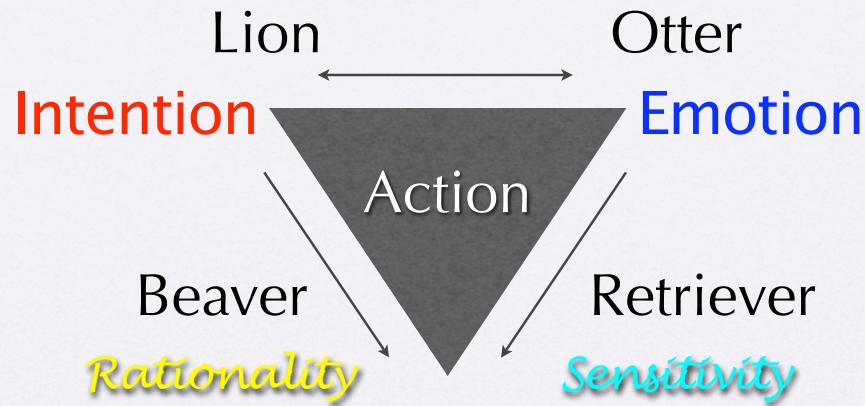


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Turning to the classical temperaments, we find an even simpler mapping. The hard-driving Choleric focus on Intention, the happy-go-lucky Sanguines live on Emotion, and the contemplative Melancholies dwell on Reason. This places the unflappable Phlegmatics in the middle, though they likely inhabit the passionless 'sensible center' rather than the dynamic Radical Center we are pursuing.

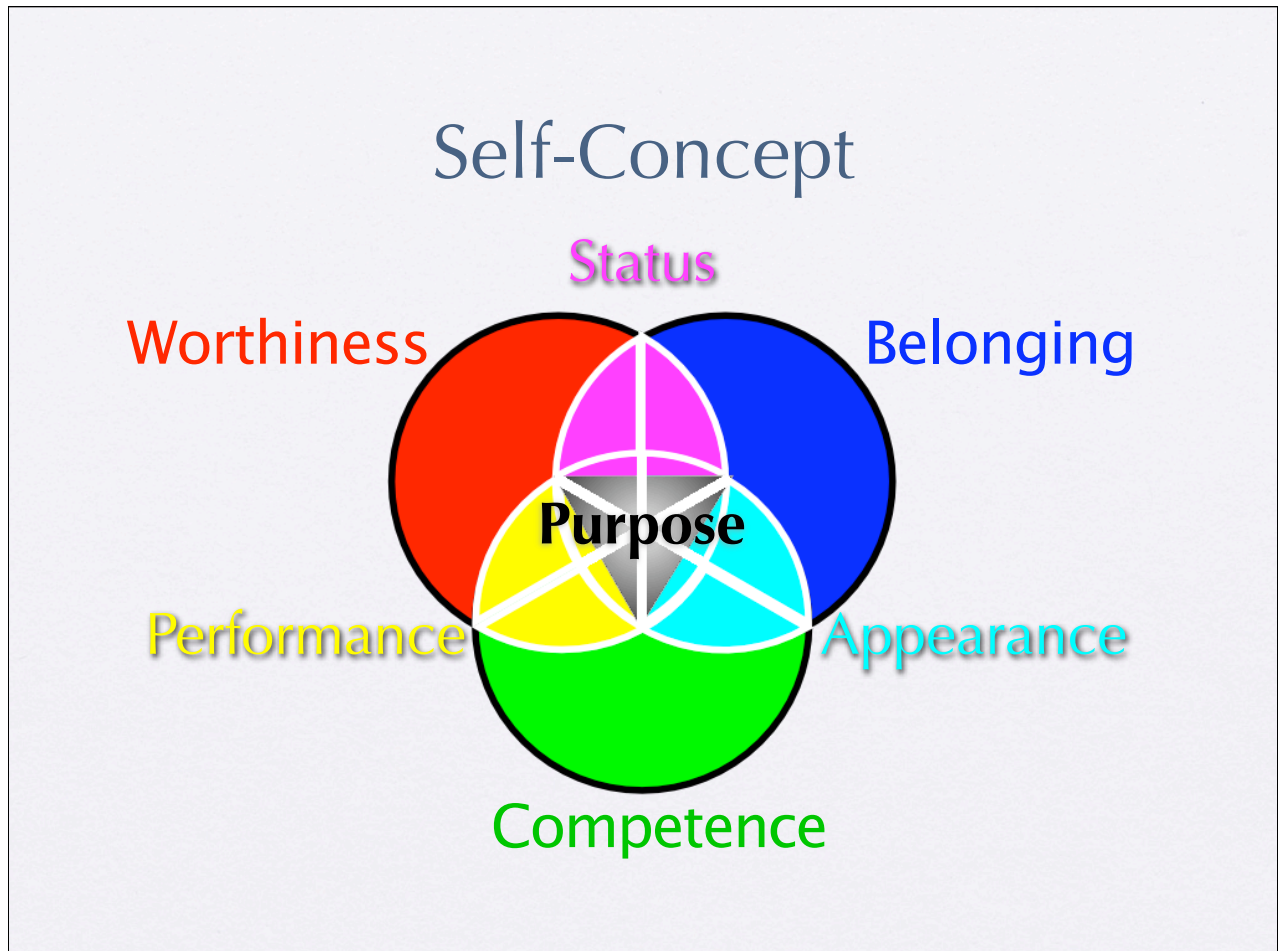
# Smalley-Trent



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Just for completeness, let us consider the 'animal' personality types recently popularized by Gary Smalley and John Trent in their marriage seminars. At the top, we have the dominating Lions who affirm Intention over Emotion, as compared to the playful Otters who stress Emotion over Intention. At the bottom, the industrious Beavers thrive on Rationality, while the sympathetic Retrievers focus on Sensitivity.



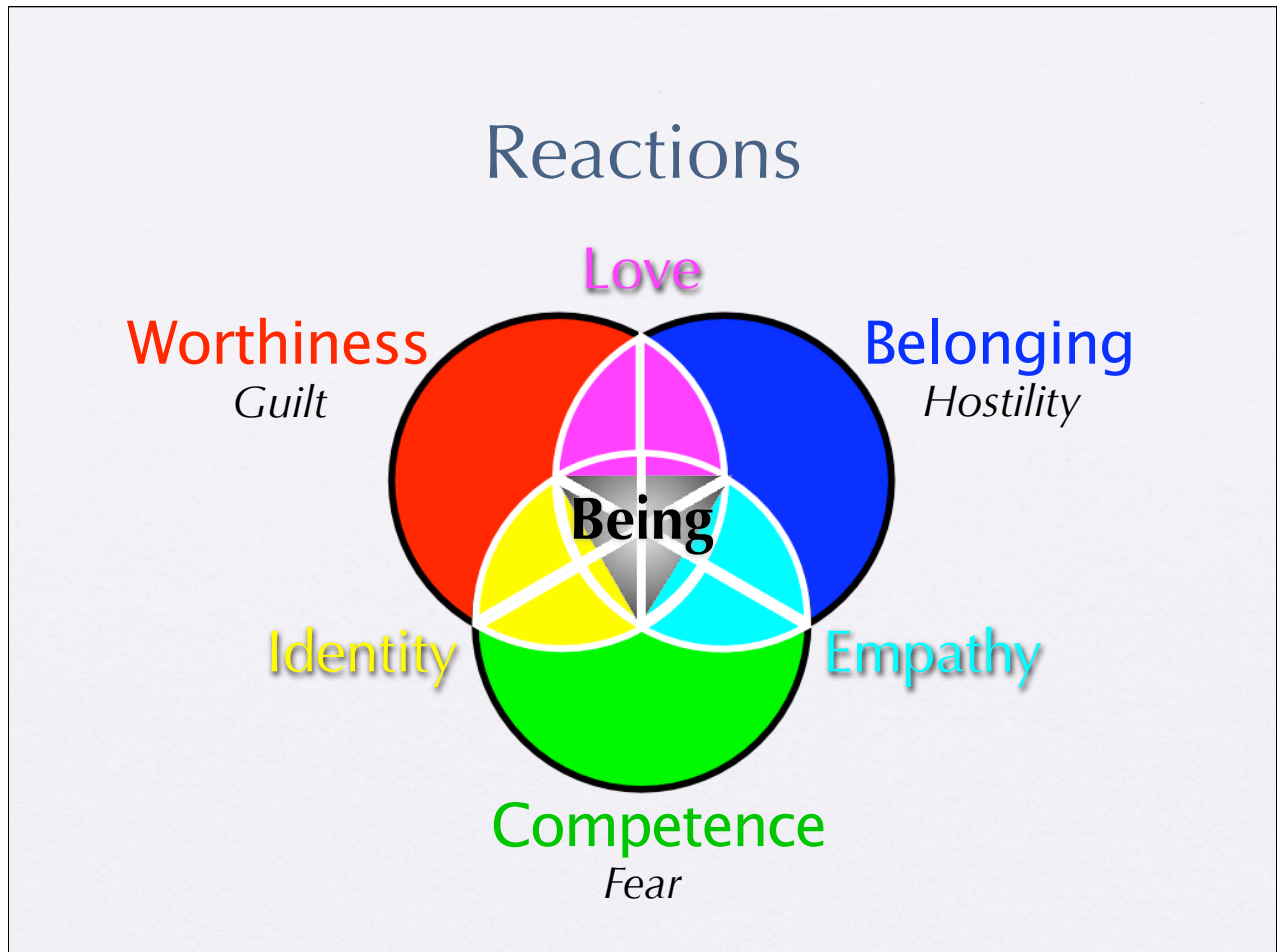
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This model also aligns well with the triads of self-concept articulated by Maurice Wagner's analysis in his book *"The Sensation of Being Somebody."*

For the three dimensions of our Purpose -- Status, Performance, and Appearance -- we can see that Appearance is perceived through Sensitivity, Performance is judged through Rationality, and Status is evaluated Spiritually (even if that 'spirituality' is sometimes merely Materialism :-).

Similarly, the feeling of Belonging is based on dealing with Community, Competence is based on coping with Reality, and Worthiness is based on handling Character.



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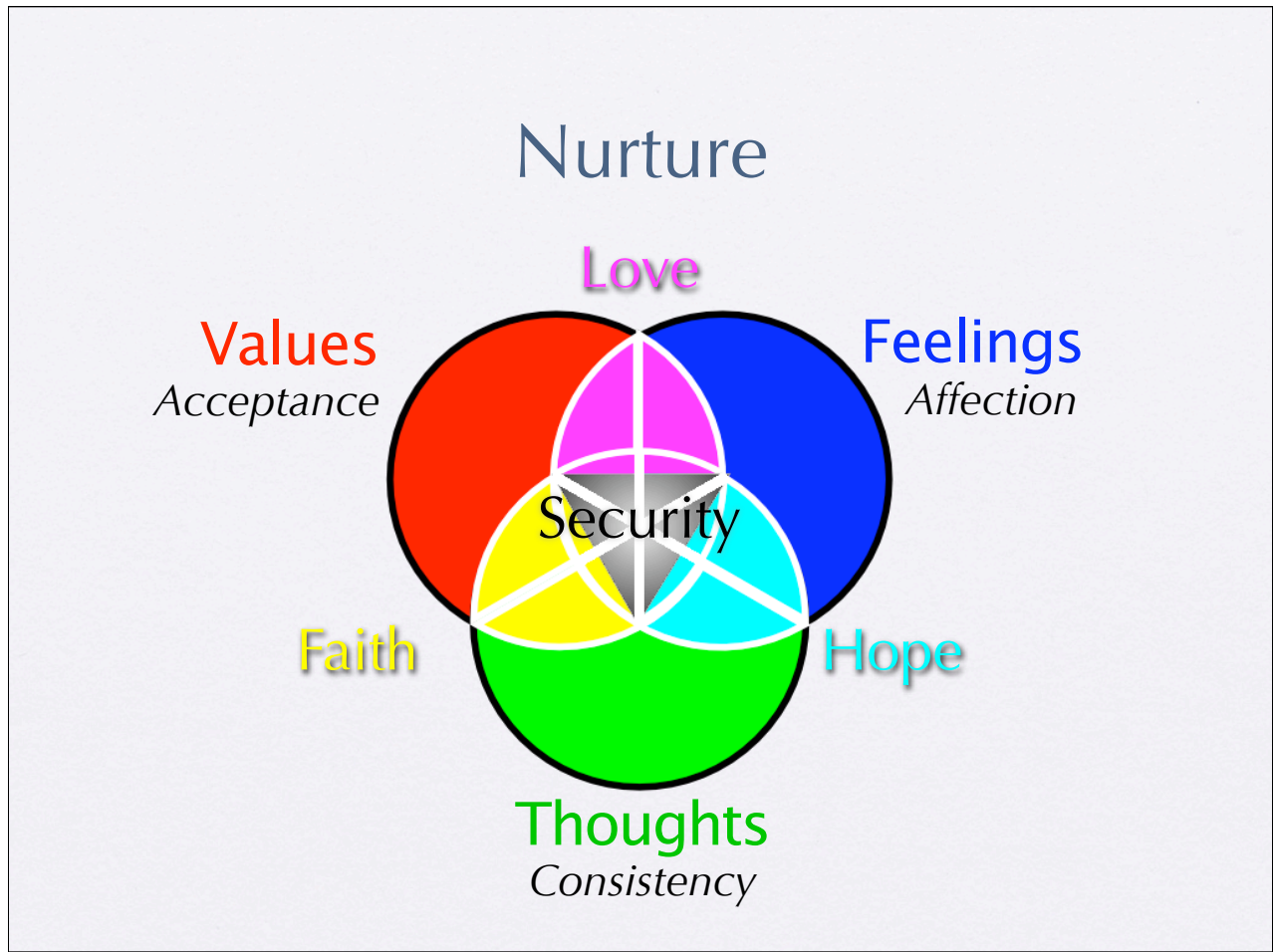
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On the flip side, we can similarly map his negative reactions: a failure of Character creates Guilt, a breakdown of Community creates Hostility, and alienation from Reality creates Fear.

More positively, we might see his three positive attributes as bridges: Love addresses Hostility and Guilt by creating both Worthiness and Belonging, Identity addresses Fear and Guilt by affirming Competence and Worthiness, and Empathy reduces Hostility and Fear by inspiring Competence and Belonging.

In Maurice's model, the outgrowth of a healthy self-concept is thus the ability to just 'be', rather than having to 'become.'





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Finally, can easily map his three dimensions of nurture to the three facets of personality: Values (Intention), Feelings (Emotion), and Thoughts (Reason), along with the corresponding felt needs: acceptance, affection, and consistency. Bridged by the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love, those three combine to create a sustainable sense of Security.

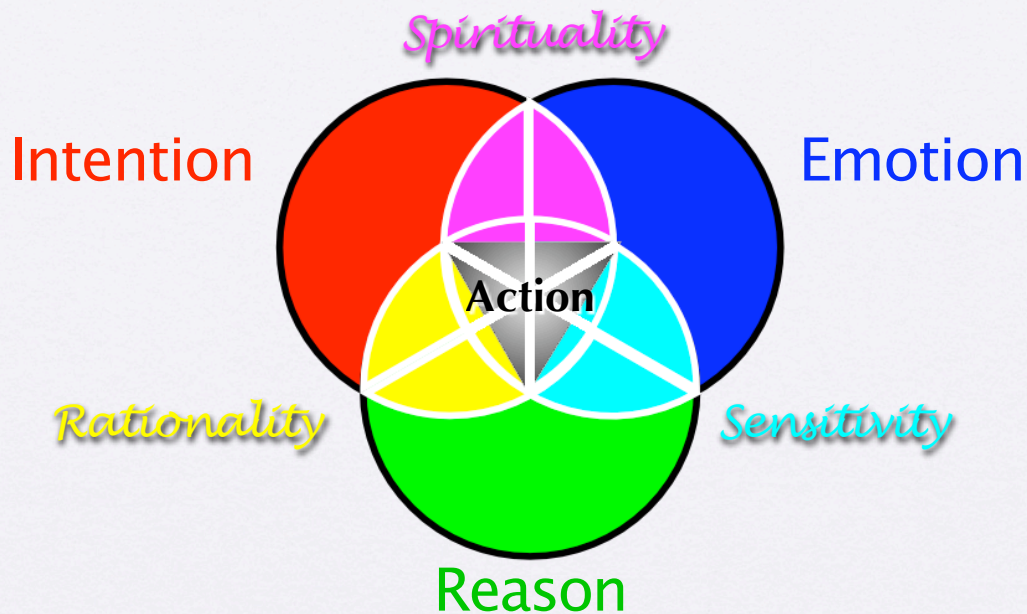
# Conclusions

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While this has been just a very brief taste of how Radical Centrist principles could be applied to psychology, there are still a few significant conclusions we can draw.

# Centered Psychology



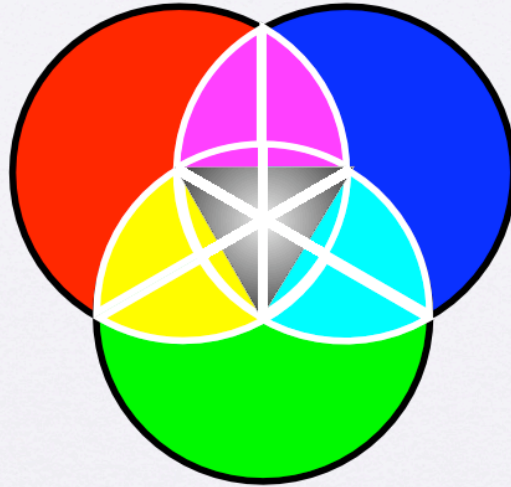
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By viewing Action as the dynamic result of the interplay between Emotion, Reason, and Intention, we appear to obtain a richer view of normal behavior, as well as of virtue & vice.

Combining this with the complementary view of Rationality, Spirituality, and Sensitivity seems to offer a useful framework for understanding different personality types as deviations from that centered ideal. It also hints at an underlying psychological bias behind what may be considered the 'uncentered' ideologies which Radical Centrism seeks to supplant.

## Q & A



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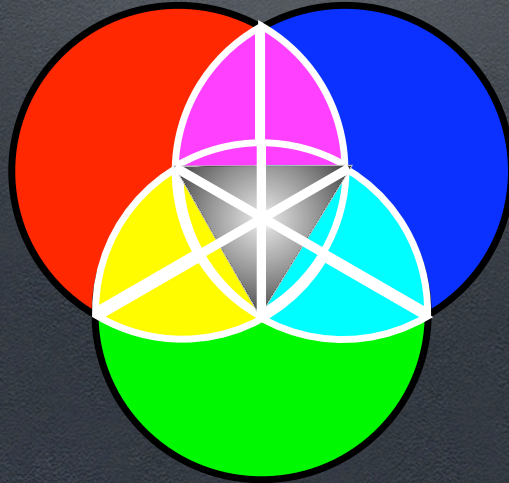
Of course, this brief survey can not do justice to the many complex issues involved in the field of psychology, but it does offer hope that a Radical Centrist viewpoint can in fact provide a useful lens for evaluating and understanding different psychological theories. Perhaps more importantly, it implies that the ideology of Radical Centrism is in fact compatible with -- and encourages -- psychologically healthy behavior.

If nothing else, we hope that this taste of Radical Centrist psychology will inspire you to pursue Radical Normalcy in your life and relationships. We hope to be able to join with you on that journey.

Sincerely,  
Ernest Prabhakar  
October 31st, 2003

# The End

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