

The Nature of Mind: A Baha'i-inspired Perspective

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Some themes we may explore:

- The Ontology of Mind – What kind of entity or phenomenon might the mind be?
 - The nature of evidence in science – “Hypothetical Constructs”
 - The relativity of existence (the concept of the “kingdoms”...)
 - How properties and capacities might exist...(Composition, emergence, and reflection)
 - Monism vs. Dualism (Non-physical phenomena affect physical things?)
 - Differences of Kind in contrast to Differences of Degree
 - The Ontological Equivalence of Human and Animal Minds...
 - Artificial Intelligence and “cyborgs”...
 - Subjectivity (the private nature of mind)...
 - Meta-Cognitive capacities (the ability to have knowledge of what I am like, what I know, and what I believe...
- The Brain as distinguished from, but intimately related to, the Mind
 - Evolution of mental capacities – reptilian, mammalian, and human brains...
 - The mind as a socialized brain... - Psychoneuroimmunology

Mind is an impenetrable Mystery

“Know, verily, that the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp and whose mystery, no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel.”

The human mind is special...

Duality of mind and body

René Descartes:

The mind is animated by intangible thought, while
the
body is tangible and perceptible...



Descartes' Proposal:

We are, essentially, our intangible minds:

I am therefore, precisely speaking, only a thinking thing, that is, a mind (a mind or in other words a soul), understanding, or reason, terms whose signification was before unknown to me. I am, however, a real thing, and really existent; but what thing? The answer was, a thinking thing.

But what, then, am I? A thinking thing, it has been said. But what is a thinking thing? It is a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses; that imagines also, and perceives.

Descartes' Proposal:

The mind can exist without a body

*From that I knew that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which is to think, and that for its existence there is no need of any place, **nor does it depend on any material thing; so that this “me,” that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body,** and is even more easy to know than is the latter, and even if the body were not, the soul would not cease to be what it is.*

Summary of Descartes' Proposal

Mind and Body are distinct

Mind is tied to perceptions of self

Mind can exist independently of the body

Mind-Body Problem

If mind and body are different in kind and substance, how then, do they interact?

What is the relation between mind and physical matter?

A Thought...

The mind-body problem may be an epistemological problem rather than an ontological one...

The Oneness of Existence

“...know ye that the world of existence is a single world, although its stations are various and distinct. For example, the mineral life occupieth its own plane, but a mineral entity is without any awareness at all of the vegetable kingdom...In the same way, a vegetable entity knoweth nothing of the animal world, remaining completely heedless and ignorant thereof...all this while animal, vegetable, and mineral dwell together in the one world. In the same way the animal remaineth totally unaware of that power of the human mind which graspeth universal ideas and layeth bare the secrets of creation...Of this power of discovery which belongeth to the human mind, this power which can grasp abstract and universal ideas, the animal remaineth totally ignorant...In the same way, the denizens of this earth are completely unaware of the world of the kingdom and deny the existence thereof...”

Principle: Reality is one but all minds do not have equal access to reality...Some aspects of reality are available or unavailable to us because of: a) the limitations of our senses; b) our location in space and time (consider the child in the womb who is in this world but unaware of it); c) because of the kinds of minds we possess or the particular stage of the mind's development; d) other aspects of reality are closed to us because we lack the concepts and experiences necessary to engage them.

“You ask an explanation of what happens to us after we leave this world: This is a question which none of the Prophets have ever answered in detail, for the very simple reason that you cannot convey to a person’s mind something entirely different from everything they have ever experienced.”

Baha’u’lláh’s Teachings on Spiritual Reality, p. 110, 21.4

Another Principle

Some Aspects of Reality Can Never Be
Known Directly...

As part of what I call "Project Eureka," a friend and I have designed and constructed a science exhibit in which one views a region of space filled with light. It is a simple but startling demonstration that uses only a carefully fabricated box and a powerful projector whose light shines directly into it. We have taken a special care to ensure that light does not illuminate any interior objects or surfaces in the box. Within the box, there is only pure light, and lots of it. The question is: What does one see? How does light look when left *entirely* to itself?

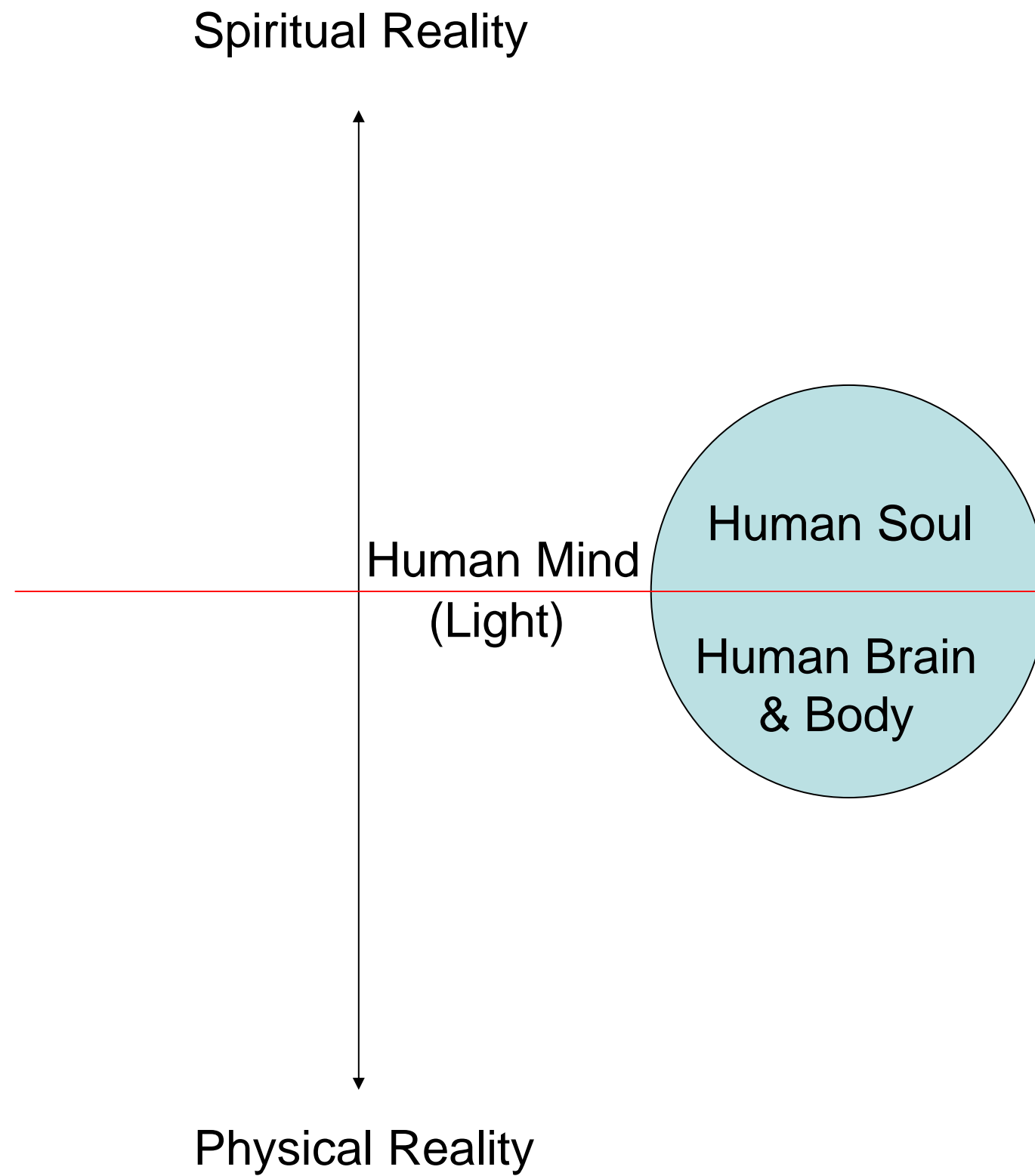
Approaching the exhibit, I turn on the projector, whose bulb and lenses can be seen through a Plexiglas panel. The projector sends a brilliant light through optical elements into the box beside it. Moving over to a view port, I look into the box and at the light within. What do I see? Absolute darkness! I see nothing but the blackness of empty space.

On the outside of the box is a handle connected to a wand that can move into and out of the box's interior. Pulling the handle, the wand flashes through the dark space before me and I see the wand brilliantly lit on one side. The space clearly is not empty but filled with light. Yet without an object on which light can fall, one sees only darkness. Light itself is always invisible. We see only things, only objects, not light.

The nature of evidence in science...

“...if you examine the human body, you will not find a special spot or locality for the spirit, for it has never had a place; it is immaterial. It has a connection with the body like that of the sun with this mirror. The sun is not within the mirror, but it has a connection with the mirror...The mind which is in man – where is it in him? If you examine the body with the eye, the ear or the other senses, you will not find it; nevertheless it exists. Therefore the mind has no place but it is connected with the brain...In the same way love has no place, but it is connected to the heart...”

~ Baha'u'lláh's Teachings on Spiritual Reality



"What the Bahá'ís believe is that we have three aspects of our humanness a body, a mind and an immortal identity — soul or spirit. We believe the mind forms a link between the soul and the body, and the two interact on each other."

Shoghi Effendi, *Arohanui: Letters from Shoghi Effendi to New Zealand*. Suva, Fiji Islands: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982. Print, p. 89.

"Human reality is the same reality which is given different names, according to the different conditions wherein it becomes manifest. Because of its attachment to matter and the phenomenal world, when it governs the physical functions of the body, it is called the human soul. When it manifests itself as the thinker, the comprehender, it is called the mind. And when it soars into the atmosphere of God and travels in the spiritual world, it becomes designated as spirit."

~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Star of the West* 7.19 (1917): 190.

A third Principle:

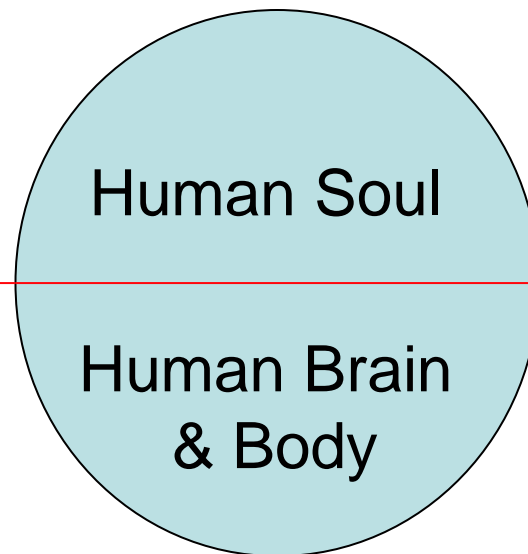
Three Ways that Properties or Powers Can Be Made Manifest

- By Composition (H_2O)
- By Emergence (Evolution, Development & Interaction of Complex Systems)
- By Reflection (An image as reflected in a mirror)

Spiritual Reality



Human Mind
(Light)



→ Reflection of the Soul or Self
in the Mirror of the Mind

→ Composition + Emergence

Physical Reality

Mind-Body Problem (Revisited)

All life depends upon signal detection and the movement of information between systems of various kinds. The human brain has the capacity to receive and use energy and information that is both physical and abstract – in the same way that seeds may use the physical energy of the sun as well as the special information that is associated with sunlight for development into plants. Abdu'l-Baha once said:

“Consider: this flower had life in the beginning like the life of the mineral; but by the coming of the season of spring, of the bounty of the clouds of the springtime, and of the heat of the glowing sun, it attained to another life of the utmost freshness, delicacy and fragrance. The first life of the flower, in comparison to the second life, is death.” - Baha'u'lláh's Teachings on Spiritual Reality, p. 109, 21.3.

Both the physical and the abstract information that the brain detects it uses to facilitate survival and development. Other animals do not have the capacity to detect abstract information. The mind-body problem is overcome, in part, when we realize that ideas are to the mind a kind of information that is like sensory information is to animals -- but this information has no physical dimensions...It does not carry knowledge of things, it carries “signs” of relationships that indicate processes and forces that are hidden from the senses. The rational faculty perceives and deciphers these signs and uses this information to guide both the senses and human behavior. When the mind has “true” beliefs about those aspects of reality that are often hidden from the senses, this is called “knowledge”. Knowledge cannot be sensed but it can be known...

....the mind proveth the
existence of an unseen
Reality that embraceth all
beings, and that existeth
and revealeth itself in all
stages, the essence
whereof is beyond the
grasp of the mind.

Abdu'l-Baha,
Tablet to August Forel

A Third Principle

Science, Religion & Philosophy may
each be required in order to make
sense of reality..

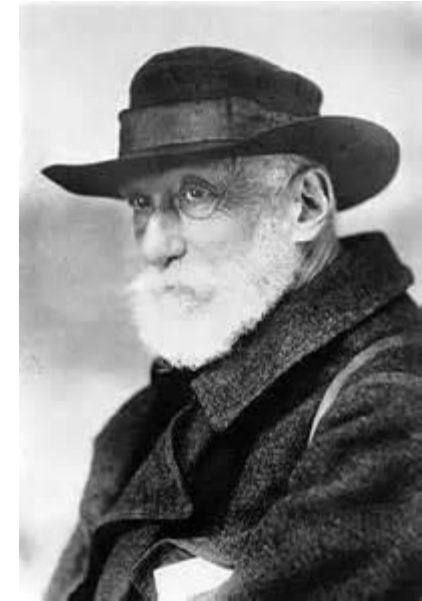
Mind & Matter

- Creation, in the natural world, requires an “active force” and that which is its “recipient”. “These two are the same, yet they are different.” Matter and energy are interchangeable...Neither can be created or destroyed, they can only be transformed...
- Matter is that part of reality that is relatively resistant to change...It is the “material cause” out of which an abstract idea may be given form and brought into being...“Out of the wastes of nothingness, with the clay of my command I made thee to appear...” Matter cannot have form and order without a cause (2nd Law of Thermodynamics)...

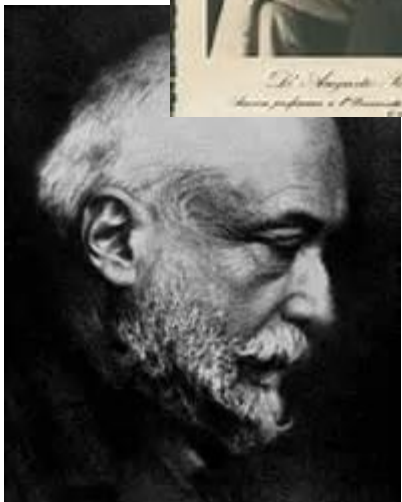
Mind & Body

The Birth of Psychiatry

Tablet to August Forel



“For the mind to manifest itself, the human body must be whole; and a sound mind cannot be but in a sound body...”



Birth of Psychiatry

In the 19th Century, a new concept of “mind” emerged. This new concept was the brain-child of Sigmund Freud, Pierre Janet and Joseph Breuer.

Medicine & Psychiatry

Early 1800s – there were only three Branches of
Medicine:

Internal Medicine

Surgery

Neurology

Le Salpêtrière Hospital









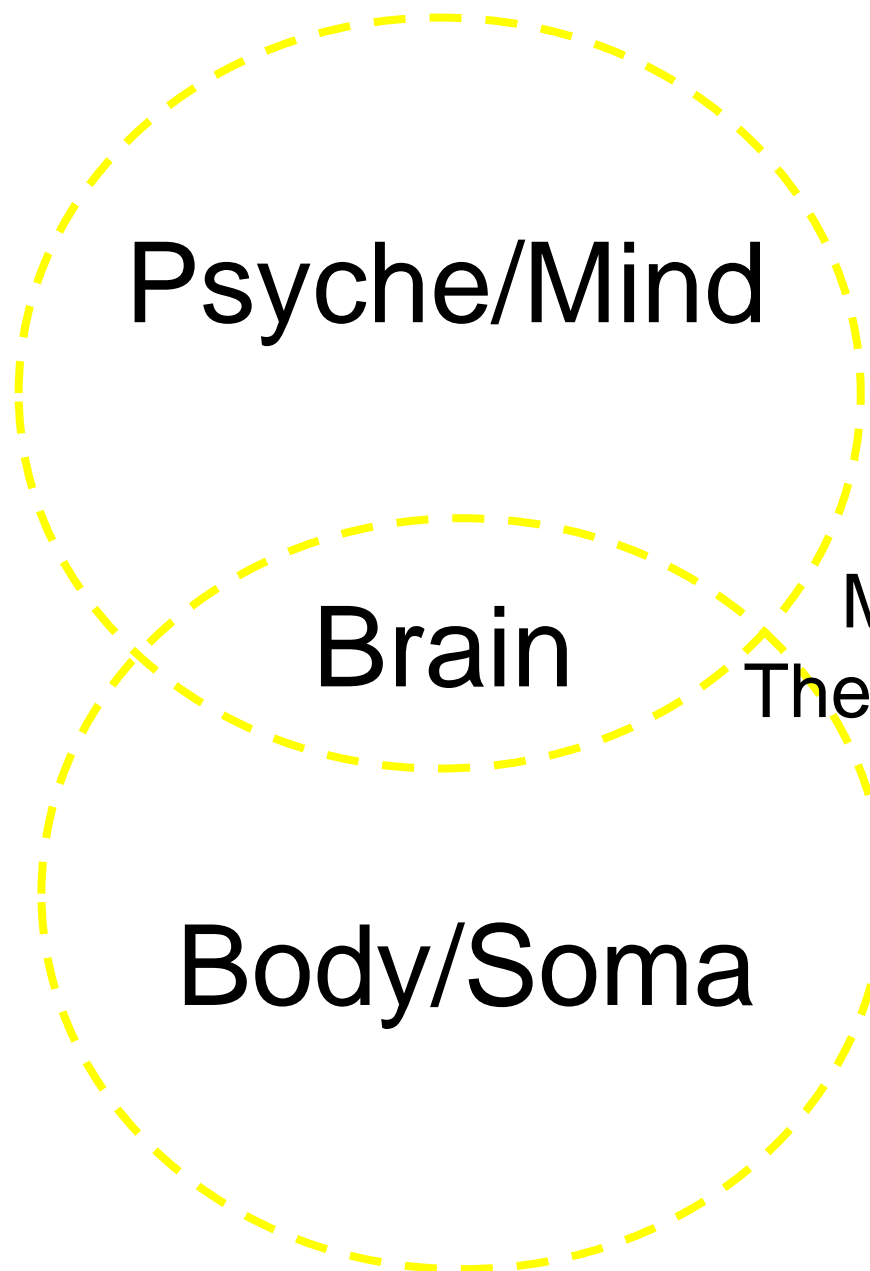
Key Concepts in the Emergence of Psychiatry

- Functional Delta – Discrepancy between:
 - Symptoms
&
–Pathophysiological Signs

In 1896 Freud announced to the world the results of his study on hysteria. In “The Aetiology of Hysteria,” he wrote:

I therefore put forward the thesis that at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood, but which can be reproduced through the work of psycho-analysis in spite of the intervening decades. I believe that this is an important finding, the discovery of a *caput Nili* in neuropathology.

HUMAN NATURE



Monism

Mind as Epiphenomenon:
The brain & body produce mind
as they produce heat...

There Were Four Advantages of this New Concept of Mind

- It established the psyche or the “mind” as a legitimate object of clinical concern.
- It defined the psyche in a way that rendered it free from the superstitious ideas that had hampered the development of a science of mental health and illness.

New Concept of Mind Continued

- It advanced us on the road to resolving the problem of Cartesian dualism.
- It enabled people with psychological disorders to receive treatment without being blamed for being in their condition; in other words, it enabled the “medicalization” of psychological problems.

Some Important Early Developments in Psychiatry

- 1) The notion that social relationships can either be beneficial or “pathogenic”.
- 2) The concept of “critical periods” during which unhealthy relationships can be particularly harmful.

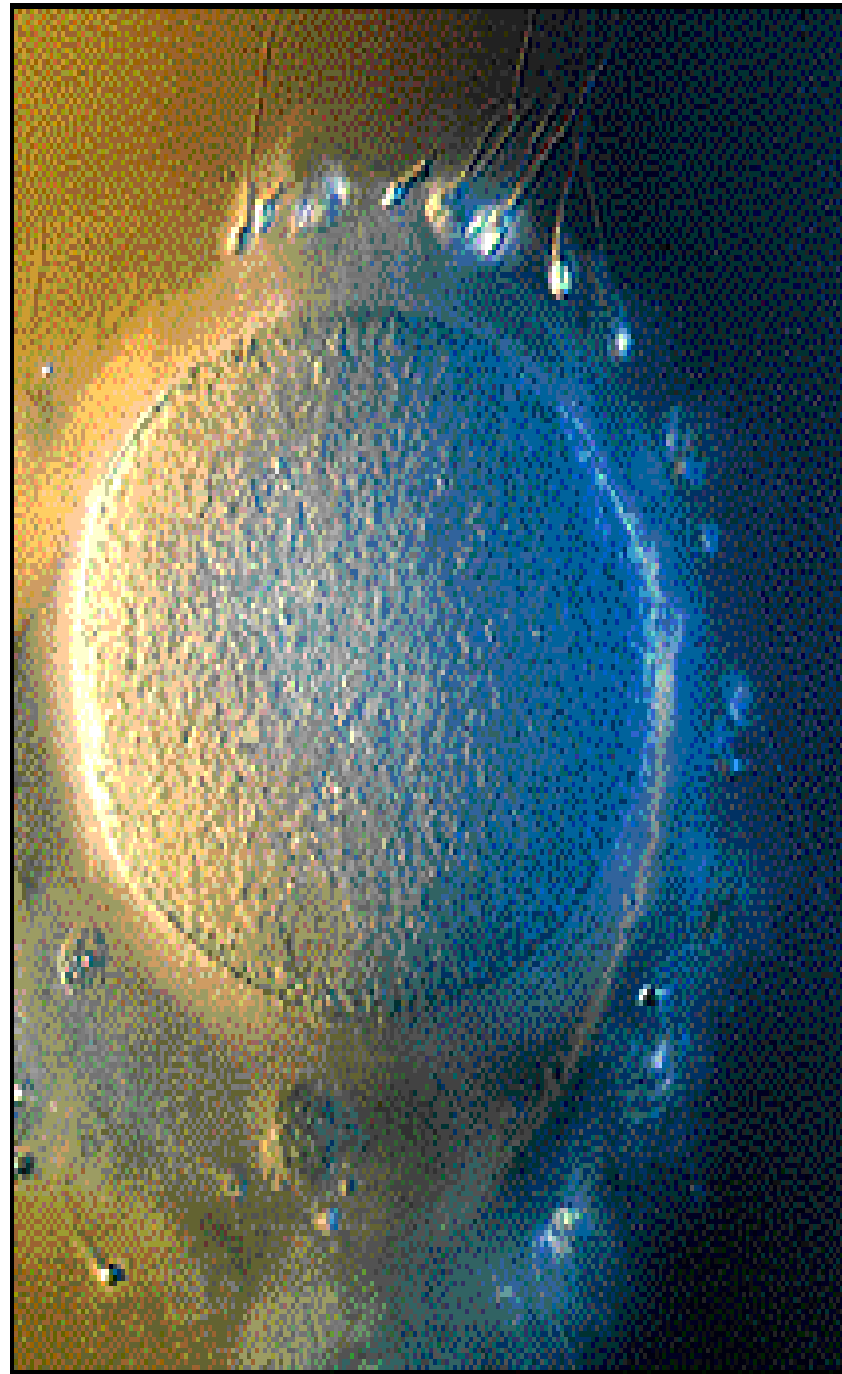
The Human Personality

“The personality of the rational soul is from its beginning; it is not due to the instrumentality of the body, but the state and the personality of the rational soul may be strengthened in this world; it will make progress and will attain to the degrees of perfection, or it will remain in the lowest abyss of ignorance, veiled and deprived from beholding the signs of God.”

Baha'u'lláh's Teachings on Spiritual Reality, p. 80, 16.7

Innate, Inherited, and
(Soul) (Genetic Endowment)

Acquired
(Experience)

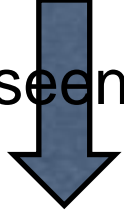


Physical & Spiritual
Capacities



Human Capabilities

The Unseen Realm



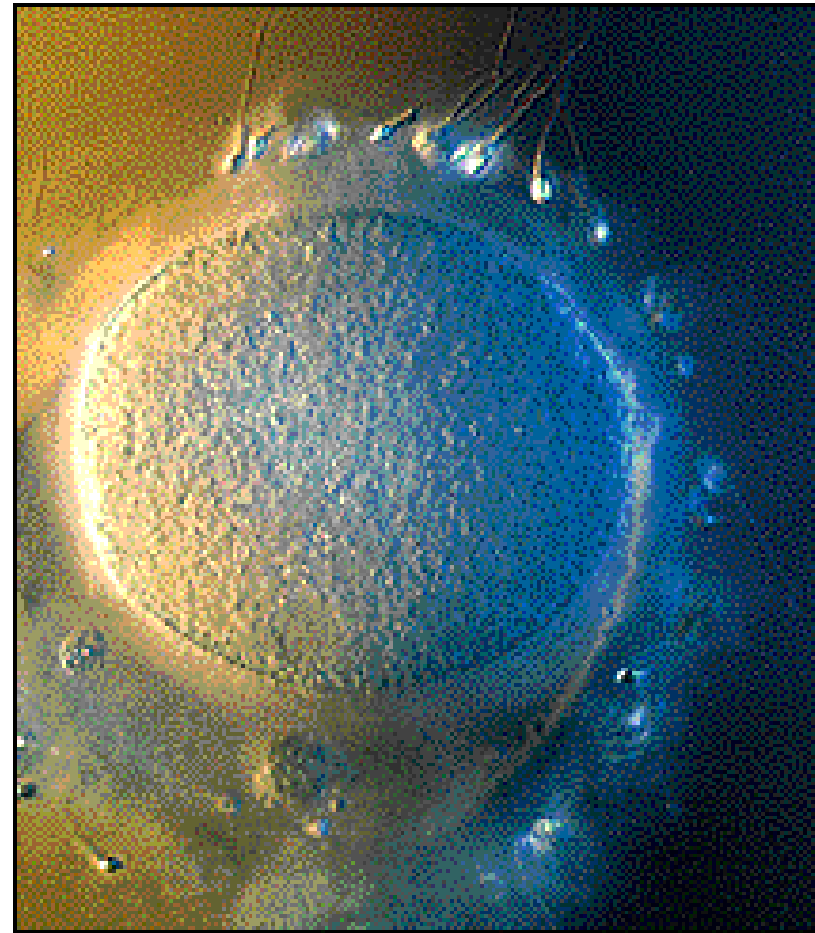
Human Spirit

Innate

Inherited

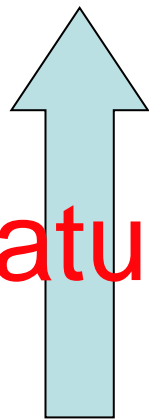
Genotype

(Capacities)

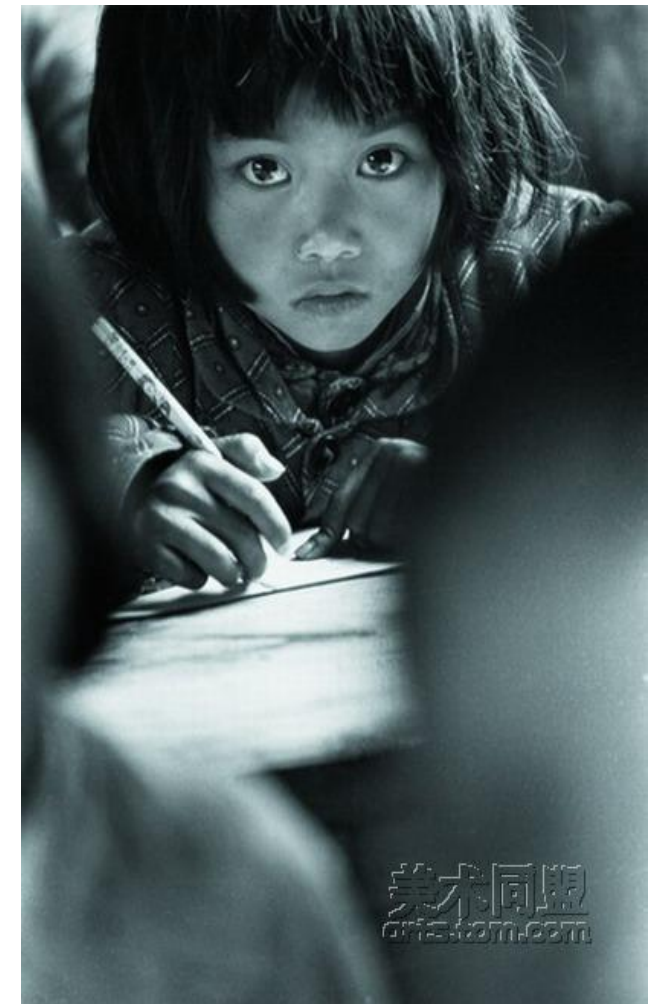


The Moment of Fertilization

Nature



Acquired



Phenotype

(Capabilities)

Development



Mind & Nature

Bertrand Russell: Denial of Mind in Creation

“That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins - all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.” (1903, p. 41).

Mind is at the Foundation of Creation

“Now, formation is of three kinds and of three kinds only: accidental, necessary and voluntary. The coming together of the various constituent elements of beings cannot be accidental, for unto every effect there must be a cause. It cannot be compulsory, for then the formation must be an inherent property of the constituent parts and the inherent property of a thing can in no wise be dissociated from it, such as light that is the revealer of things, heat that causeth the expansion of elements and the solar rays which are the essential property of the sun. Thus under such circumstances the decomposition of any formation is impossible, for the inherent properties of a thing cannot be separated from it. The third formation remaineth and that is the voluntary one, that is, an unseen force described as the Ancient Power, causeth these elements to come together, every formation giving rise to a distinct being.”

~ Abdu'l-Baha Tablet to August Forel


...all minerals, plants and animals are captives of nature. The sun itself with all its majesty is so subservient to nature that it hath no will of its own and cannot deviate a hair's-breadth from the laws thereof. In like manner all other beings, whether of the mineral, the vegetable or the animal world, cannot deviate from the laws of nature, nay, all are the slaves thereof. Man, however, though in body the captive of nature is yet free in his mind and soul, and hath the mastery over nature....

Humanity & Nature

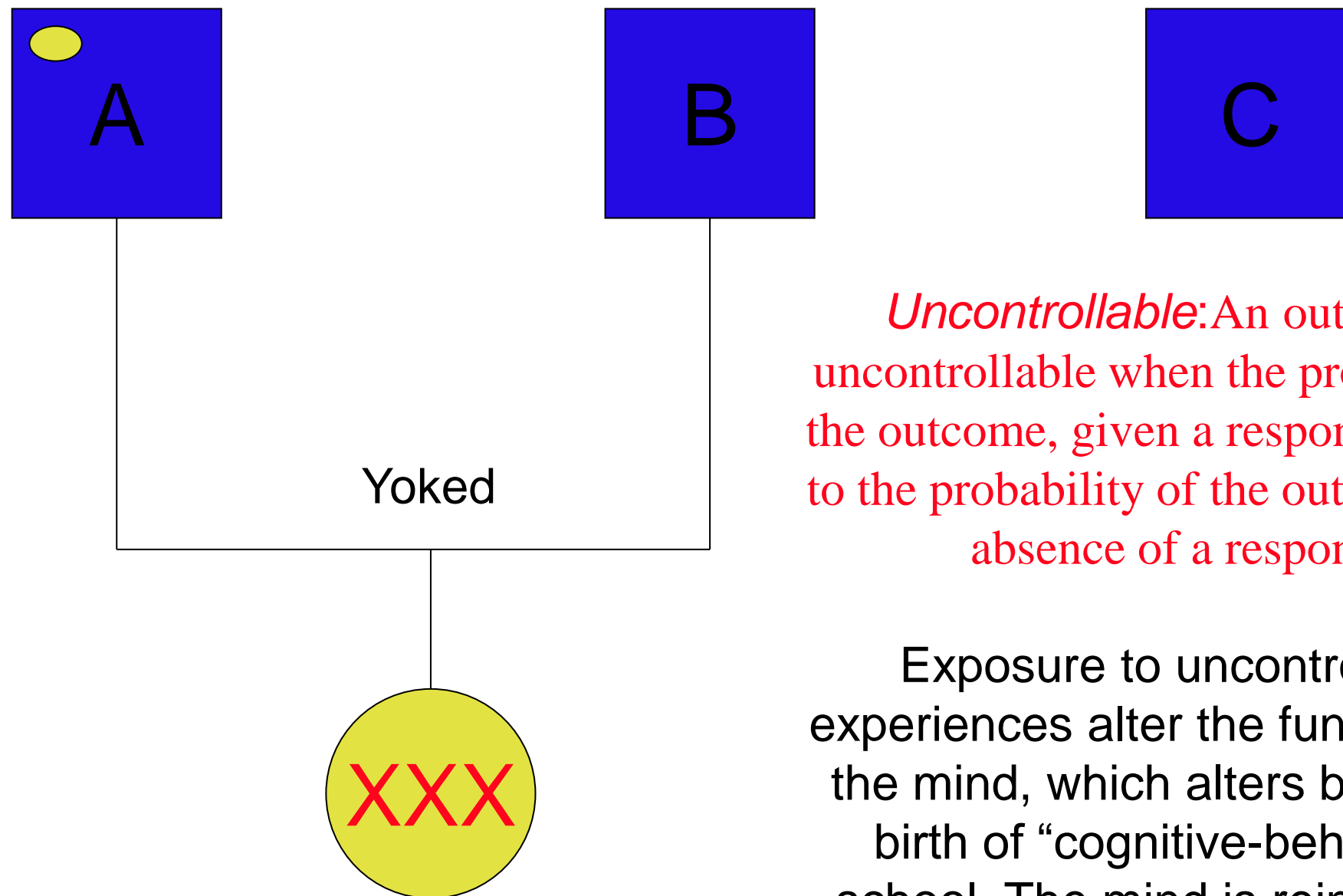
“Should any one suppose that man is but a part of the world of nature, and he being endowed with these perfections, these being but manifestations of the world of nature, and thus nature is the originator of these perfections and is not deprived therefrom, to him we make reply and say: the part dependeth upon the whole; the part cannot possess perfections whereof the whole is deprived.”

~ Abdu'l-Baha Tablet to August Forel

Behaviorism and the Denial of Mind

Stimulus  Response

Seligman's Triadic Design



Uncontrollable: An outcome is uncontrollable when the probability of the outcome, given a response, is equal to the probability of the outcome in the absence of a response.

Exposure to uncontrollable experiences alter the functioning of the mind, which alters behavior – birth of “cognitive-behavioral” school. The mind is reintroduced into Psychology.

Behaviorism and the Denial of Mind

Stimulus \longrightarrow Response

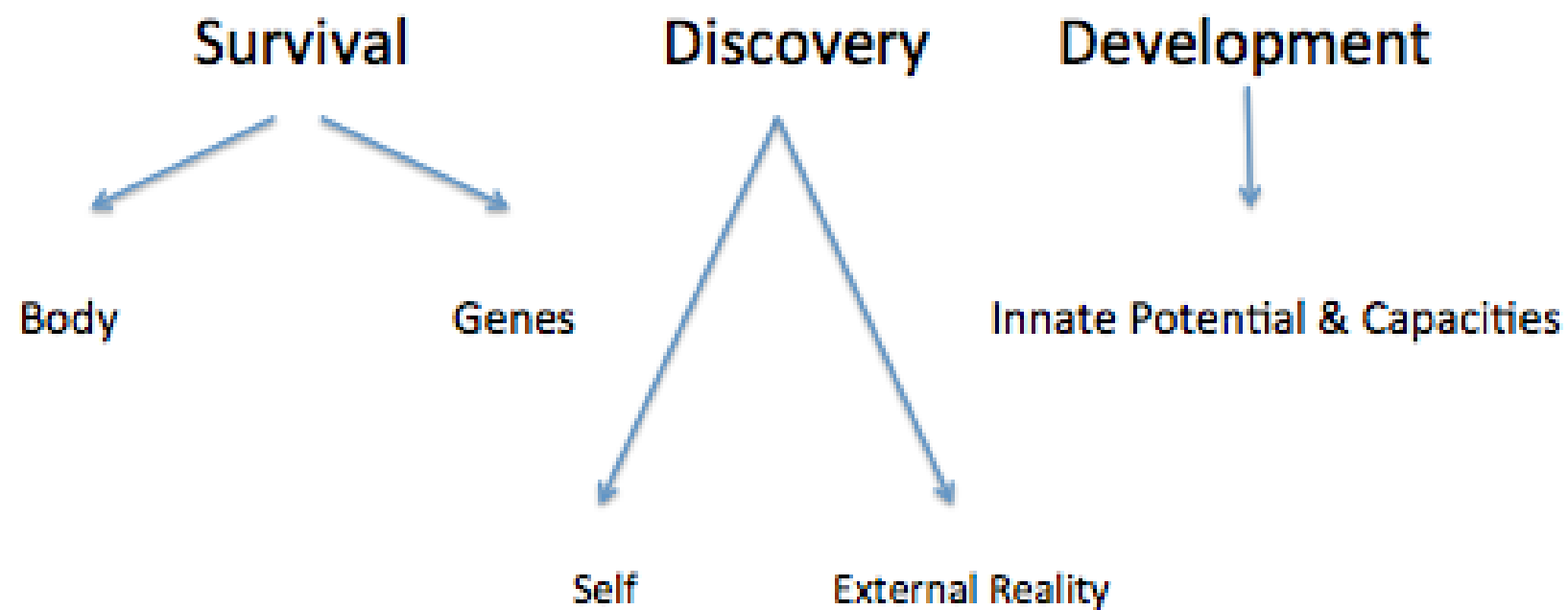
Stimulus → Beliefs/Attitudes (Mind) → Response

Four Kinds of Learning

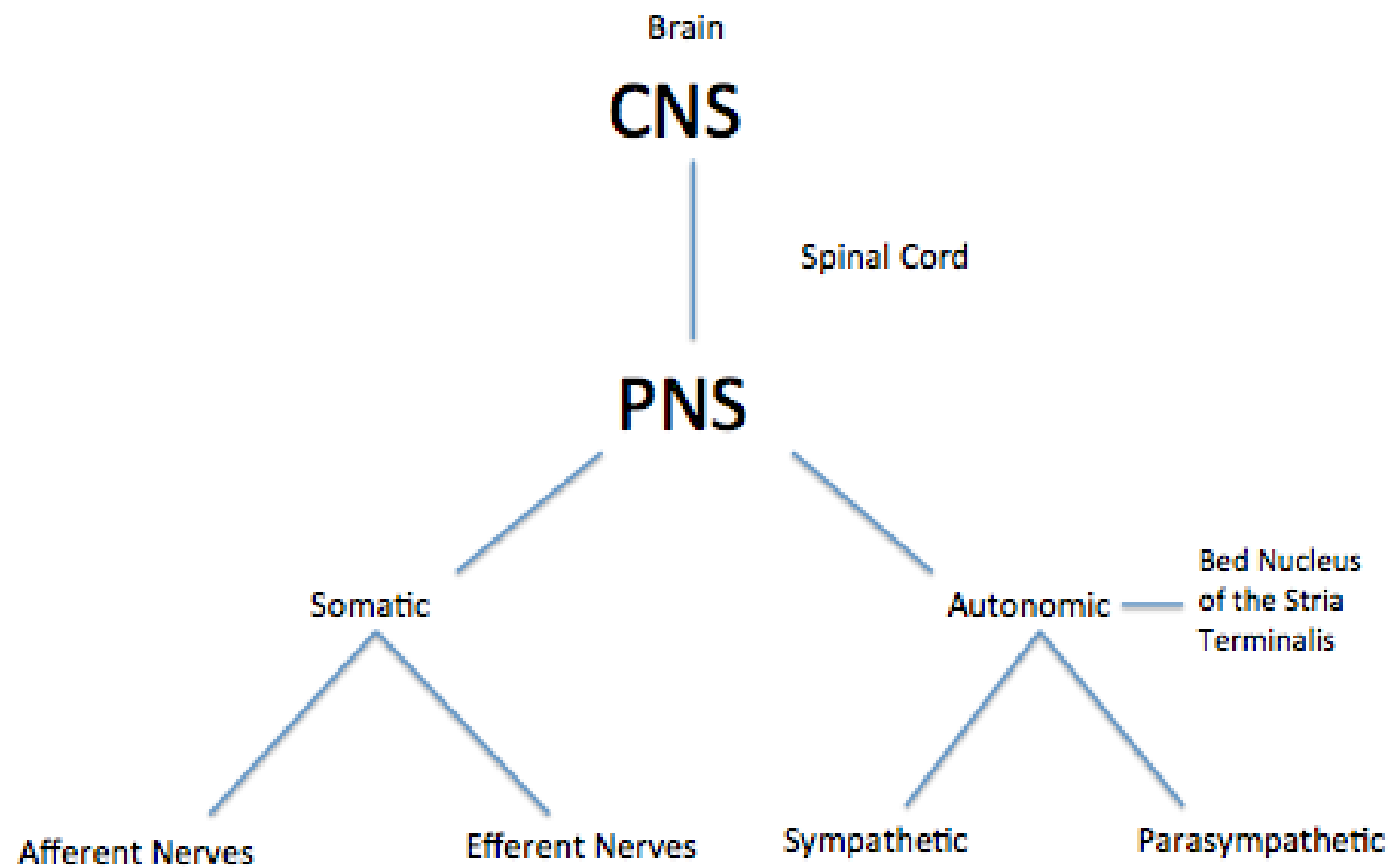
- Classical Conditioning (Unconscious & Automatic -- Psychoneuroimmunology)
- Instrumental (Conscious & Survival Related – Reward & Punishment)
- Moral (Rule Governed & Principle Based)
- Spiritual (Behavior governed by the Will of God)

Mind & Brain

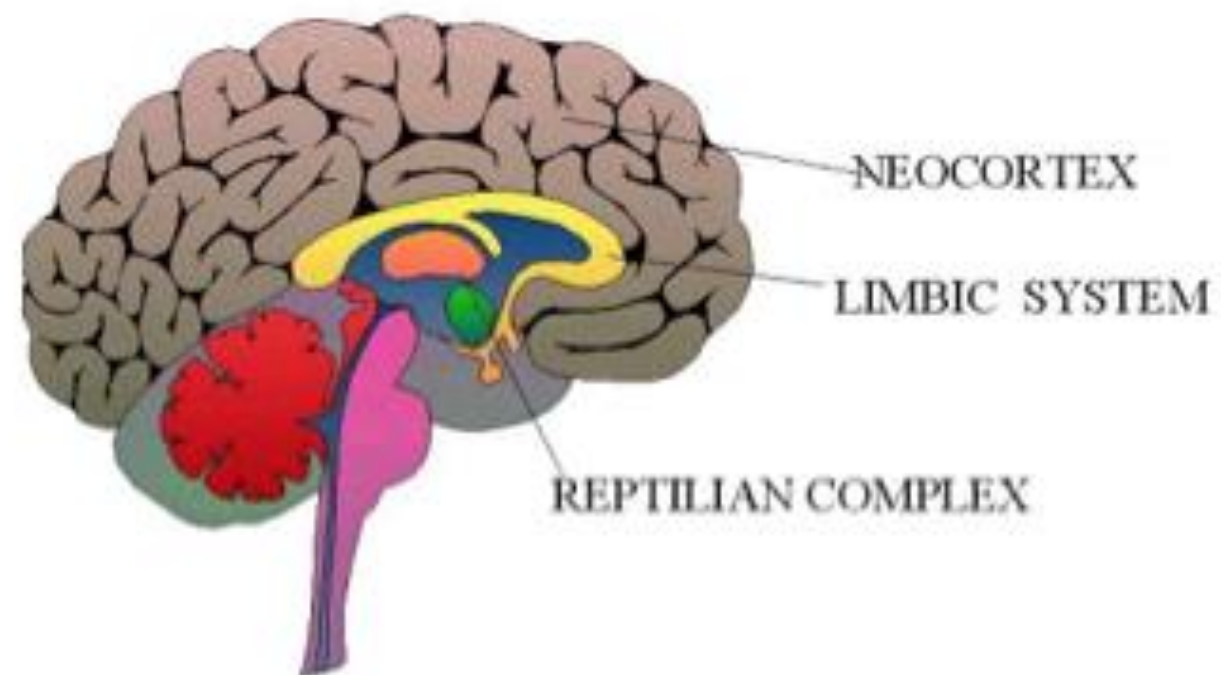
Human Brain's 3 Purposes



“The powers of the sympathetic nerve are neither entirely physical nor spiritual, but are between the two. The nerve is connected with both. Its phenomena shall be perfect when its spiritual and physical relations are normal.”



Triune Brain

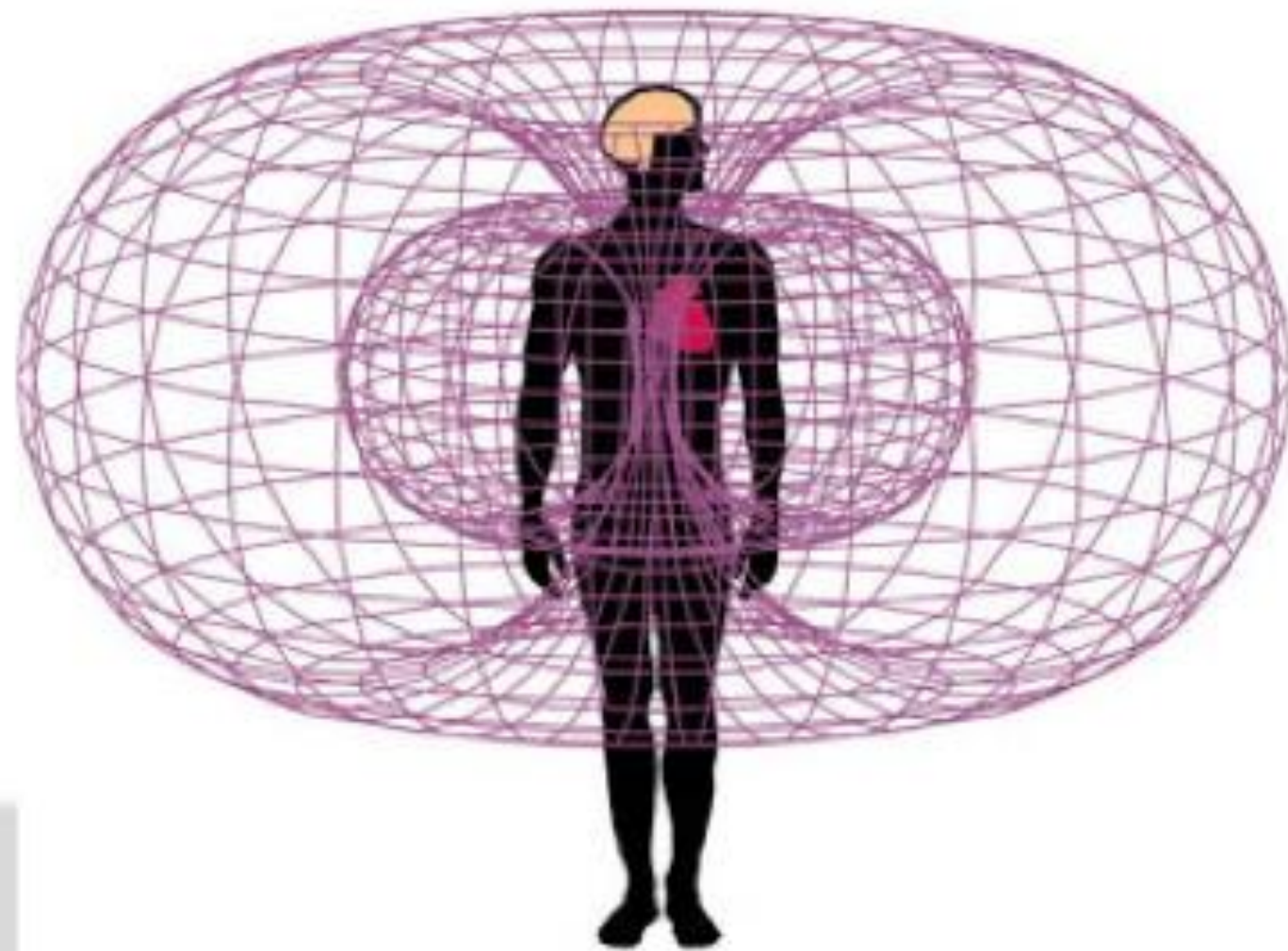


Heart Brain



A complex, independent nervous system lines the gastrointestinal tract.





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Basic Powers or Capacities of the Human Spirit:

- The Power to Know: The unique object of human knowledge is *truth*.
- The Power to Love: The unique object of human love is *beauty*.
- The Power to Will: The unique object of human will is that which is perceived to be *good*.

$$\begin{array}{r} \textit{Virtue} = \textit{Right Desires} \\ + \\ \textit{Right Beliefs} \\ + \\ \textit{Right Behavior} \end{array}$$

“Thou hast come by the command of God, hast been made manifest for His remembrance, and hast been created for the service of Him who is the Almighty, the Well-Beloved.”

Baha'i verse recited into the ear of the newborn.

Mind & the Phenomenology of Spirituality

- *Consciousness* of the Sacred (e.g., awe, humility and wonder)
- *Attraction* to that which is True, Beautiful and Good.
- *Attunement* to Spiritual Forces (states of prayer and meditation)
- *Compassion* for other living beings.

Paths to Spirituality

- Meditation
- Prayer
- Principle-Governed life
- Submission to the Will of God
- Service to others

*“I came forth from God and return unto Him, holding
fast to His Name, detached from all save Him, the
merciful, the compassionate.”*

Verse that appears on the burial stone of the deceased.