# Thinking Whole: The Fundamentals


## John Krubski and Alexandra K. Camus, Psy.D.


The theoretical background for this issue of Curated, can be traced back nearly two decades. It has been a very expansive journey; one which connects to some of the major breakthroughs in thinking about human thinking. The studies of learning, thinking, creativity, enlightenment, neuroscience, and behavioral economics began to converge spectacularly since the beginning of the 2000's. It has been a virtual explosion of thinking about thinking.

## Background

You could say that it began with the very public recognition of a psychologist for his work in a field for which he had absolutely no qualifications nor experience – or so he believed. In 2002, the Nobel Prize Committee awarded Daniel Kahneman the prize in economics for his work with Amos Tversky in the field of Prospect Theory. Tversky had died and the Nobel prizes are not awarded posthumously.

Prospect Theory changed everything; upending most of what was known before in thinking about thinking and laying down the foundations for a new field – behavioral economics. In 2011, Kahneman added a cherry of his making to the Prospect Theory sundae with a book of his own – *Thinking, Fast and Slow.* In the following year, Michael Lewis further popularized the thinking behind Prospect Theory in a book called "*Moneyball*," which eventually made its ways to the movie screen. At the time he wrote the book, Lewis did not know about the connection to Kahneman and Tversky. He later wrote *The Undoing Project* – 2016), to make up for it.

In 2005, Malcolm Gladwell took all this thinking very much more public in *blink; the Power of Thinking Without Thinking.* In the same year, Howard Gardner's book, *Five Minds for the Future*, argued for the five different disciplines of the mind that it will take to create the collective future we deserve. All these brilliant insights related to making decisions with the information you already have. But what about things that involved innovation, creativity, even genius – how do we manifest things that are yet to be known? Nassim Taleb (*The Black Swan* - 2007*)* added that dimension to the discussion. The subtitle of his book (*The Impact of the Highly Improbable)* argued for allowing a space for what we might not yet know into the thinking mix.

In that same period, authors such as Nancy Andreasen (*The Creating Brain; The Neuroscience of Genius* - 2005*)* and the Dalai Lama himself *(The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality* - 2005*)* further expanded what we know about the full potential of the mind versus the brain the concept of enlightenment. The most recent voice added to the conversation being – Ricard & Singer (*Beyond The Self: Conversations between Buddhism and Neuroscience* – 2017)

We would like to think that adding *Thinking Whole* to Kahneman's systems model and providing a prescriptive process (*Thinking Whole*) for actualizing *The Third Way*, constitutes a substantive forward advancement to the discussion of thinking about thinking; on the one hand, and providing you, our readers, with an actionable form of using all this theory, on the other.

# What It Means to Think Whole

Any time a group of people get together in a team or an organization, they are being given an opportunity to create the future they deserve; whether it's next week's future, next year's future, or the long-term future That future can be arrived at with a bold, sweeping vision or it can be the product of dozens, even hundreds, of little moments. Wouldn't it make sense to make sure that every such moment rises to the level of genius; if you can find a way to make that happen?

## Enacting the Future

Abraham Lincoln once said: "The best way to predict the future is to create it." Old Abe not only said those words, he lived by them right to the very last day of his life. By so doing, he literally, and also nearly single handedly, created the America we know today. More accurately, he prevented others from creating an America along the lines the European model. If the South had successfully seceded from the Union, we would likely have ended up with any number of separate, and competing, nation states on the American continent.

Think of the likely wars that might have been fought between a German America, a British America, a French America, an American America, a Spanish America… and so on; endlessly replaying the old European scenarios on a vast new gameboard. The truth is that Lincoln was on pretty shaky ground to insist that secession was not an option for any state; especially as the American Declaration of Independence clearly states:

"Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive…it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

The point here is not an object lesson in history but, rather, a moment of insight into how the future is created by a concentrated force of mind and will. What Lincoln did on the grand historical stage is something each of us is capable of precipitating in our own personal or organizational setting; our little corner of the universe.

The operating principles for creating the future you deserve are, have been, and will continue to be, essentially the same.

> One, you need a clear and actionable vision of what you see to be the desired destination.
>
> Two, you need a sound, realistic, and unvarnished appreciation of your starting point.
>
> Three, you need a roadmap and an action plan that will take you from the first reality to the second.

Lincoln was hardly the only one to do what he did. Churchill's one-man stand against Nazi Germany is a prime 20th Century example. Churchill had had almost no army. He had no natural resources. He had virtually no armaments. So, what made him successful against cold steel and superior technology? Winston had the single-minded vision of the future he believed free peoples deserved. He also fully appreciated his precarious circumstances. Most importantly, he understood that England's future lay in how he maneuvered between the to Titans of the time – Roosevelt in the West and Stalin in the East.

Our own country was preserved and founded on a little appreciated and little-known moment of genius on the part of a fellow named George Washington. With the far inferior and far weaker American forces at his disposal, Washington took on might of the United Kingdom with a truly genius strategy. Early enough in the game, Washington realized that he did not have to beat the English. He just had to not lose to them. He executed that brilliant strategy so well that even the British generals gave him full credit for sometimes miraculously extracting his troops from imminent defeat and capture by forces many times the size of his own. In the end, the Great Retreater won the field; in his time, on his ground. The rest is history.

Sometimes you create the future you deserve because you hold all the cards. At other times you win by knowing how to play them like the genius you can be so as to make the most of whatever you are dealt. The former is a view that makes sense in western culture but may not be quite as well received and understood in the east; which is more likely to appreciate the latter. In the west, creating the future and effecting innovation are dynamic, aggressive, even demolishing activities.

### West and East

The western model of the future is all about subverting the status quo, precipitating dissonance, and replacing "what is" with "what should be" – never mind that the very nature of "should" is subjective and personal. They see things differently in the east. Their view is that the future is what the future will be. As innovation is the natural order of things that pass from one reality to another, the future is the product of an inherently transitory and well-ordered universe.

In the east, everything proceeds according to a perfect symmetry and cyclicality. Railing against the present is futile at best. As Lao Tzu observed: "To the mind that is still, the whole universe surrenders." In that mindset, it would seem, the best way to effect change is not to try to make change happen but rather to perceive the way of the universe and fit into its flow. There is both a Taoist name and a practice for this approach. It is called "*wu wei*" which loosely translates as "the action of inaction."

The practice of *wu wei* cultivates a mental state which, once achieved, aligns our actions effortlessly with the natural flow of life. Where the western mind insists on dissonance and precipitating change, the eastern mind seeks to unblock the natural flow of change and harmoniously embracing its energy to maximum benefit. Each culture can achieve its goals – but the way of getting there will necessarily be different. The manifested results are equally likely to be different, if not in substance than at least in nuance. When it comes to thinking, nuance matters.

In writing about Thinking Whole, we have sought to achieve the elegant balance between the way of the east and the way of the west because – clearly – in their own way, they both work. With a slight nod to the east, we have chosen a solution that is founded on "west AND east" rather than on "either west or east."

## Pathways to Best Thinking

Whether you choose the western way or the eastern way, or a blend of the two, to manifest the future you want there is a process. The central part of that process is thinking; something which we understand less than we should and to which we devote considerably less time, energy, and attention than we might.

Most of the time, when we say we're going to "think about" something, we actually don't know what that means, and we are rarely aware of the process as it occurs. If you don't understand something that you do often and which can be of high importance and value to you, then you have little hope for getting good at it; much less - better, or exceptional. And in the same way that we physically operate at different levels and each level has a different way of doing things.

The same goes for thinking. Just as a naturally good athlete can become an exceptional champion by developing and building on what nature put in place, so it is with our thinking. To get better at tennis, or golf, or fly fishing - you first learn the fundamentals. Then you learn the fine points. Then you practice, practice, practice. It's no different with thinking.

If our future is the product of things we do or fail to do well, decisions we make or fail to make correctly, or dreams we actualize or fail to actualize consciously, what are the practical steps we can take to get where we want? There are three potential pathways to achieving a vision:

Calculation - which is essentially an exercise in arithmetic aiming to determine the "weight" of one argument versus another.

Choice - which is about identifying the best out of several possible alternatives.

Perception – which is the "fuzziest" and most challenging way of thinking, and often the most rewarding, once it "happens."

## Calculation

Calculation is defined by the lexicographers at Oxford Dictionaries as: "A mathematical determination of the amount or number of something." In the judicial system, calculative thinking aims to assess the preponderance of evidence as the best way to come to a verdict about something. In practical thinking, calculation is about how much "weight" (be that in terms of believability, or usefulness, or actionability, you might assign to each thing being considered.

It's difficult to do that kind of assigning unless a) you first establish the criteria or criterion that will serve as the basis for assessment and 2) that the criterion is somehow measurable or at least assessable. There's no point calculating things that have no intrinsic measurable value.

When meaningful measurement of each thing being evaluated is neither feasible nor possible, we tend to default to binary lists to make a judgment. One such mechanism would be listing the Pro's and Con's (literally translated as "for" or "against") the choice we seek to make.

In the absence of "weighting" criteria, the longest list "wins." The truth is that calculation is not as "clean" as we would like it to be because, all too often, there exists the probability of subjective weighting in addition to, or in place of, objective value.

## Choice

Choice is defined in the Noah Webster Dictionary as: "The voluntary act of selecting or separating from two or more things that which is preferred." Yogi Berra, the great Yankees baseball team catcher, and oft-quoted sage, once said: "If you see a fork in the road, take it." At its simplest, making such a decision

is pretty much a matter of choosing the best of two possibilities; the one which seems to promise the probability of the better outcome.

Such binary choices make up the fundamental underpinnings of computer logic. Programming is based on setting up a sequence of yes/no (more appropriately if/then choices leading to a desired outcome The string of questions posed, and attendant choices made, literally leads to the most appropriate master decision. That final decision is the product of having excluded all of the lesser possibilities in each question of the decision tree. That's how computers … compute. People, on the other hand, operate with a broader set of parameters and permissions.

### Perception

Perception is defined in the Cambridge English Dictionary as: "someone's ability to notice and understand things that are not obvious to other people." If you take the time to think about it, the notions of "ability," "notice, "understand," and "obvious," are elegantly imprecise. This might be the ideal point at which we might insert a discussion on the difference between the brain and the mind; and why that matters.

The brain is essentially an electro-chemical device whose prime directive is to respond to external stimuli so as to ensure the survival of the organism in a demonstrably hostile environment. As such, its central operating principle is the calculation of threats and initiation of a selection of appropriate responses.

The relationship between threat and response needs to be symmetrical as an imbalance here is like to lead to termination of the organism. The brain job is to perceive physical threats and generate physical responses in a natural, life-sustaining rhythm; else all is lost.

When it comes to perception, the mind operates with a broader mandate than the brain. The difference between the brain and the mind is a parallel of the difference between natural connections and unapparent connections.

Natural connections extend to responsiveness to stimuli. "Unapparent connections" embrace "something more." That "something" is that which manifests intellectually rather than merely physically. In the realm of human consciousness, such manifestations are every bit as "real" as reality itself. Moreover, that level of perception is creative rather than responsive.

## Thinking, Metaphysiology, and Consciousness

At the risk of tremendously oversimplifying a wide-ranging and multidisciplinary perspective on human consciousness, please allow the proposition of a simple, yet potentially profound, point of view. Human consciousness operates at three levels, Ordinary Consciousness, the Subconscious, and the Supraconscious.

In this case, Supraconsciousness is defined simply as something "above and beyond the ordinary;" and meaning neither more nor less than that. We ask you, the reader, to take this idea at face value or to imbue it with whatever superstructure of spirituality, religion, or morality you might deem appropriate or desirable.

For our purpose, staying with the concept of Supraconsciousness in its simplistic understanding makes the conversation more viable and generally more acceptable regardless of your cultural context; and that makes it part

## Ordinary Consciousness and Subconsciousness

Here's how we see this consciousness conversation playing out. Ordinary Consciousness is the way we perceive our common experience. The truth is that we can't be certain whether this perception is, in fact, of a separate stand-alone universal reality.

It is equally possible that "reality" only extends as far as our reality; personal, individual, cosmically subjective – or not. No one has ever conclusively resolved the difference between perception and reality.

It's really anybody's guess, but without ordinary consciousness we would not be able to experience nor interact with any "others out there." As a matter of necessity and convenience, we generally accept that what we perceive to be reality… must be reality.

In the case of subconsciousness, what we have to work with is our impressions of reality. That is to say, it has more to do with how we feel and react to things than it does about what we actually experience. Consequently, our subconscious mind is defined to emotions and feelings such as fear, anger, resentment… along with their positive counterparts; the largely intellectual constructs that drive our values, attitudes, and behaviors.

The field of psychology is the product of inquiries into the subconscious; how it comes to be, how it can affect our lives, and how we can consciously alter the impact of the subconscious… or not. Both ordinary consciousness and subconsciousness are largely reflexive in nature. They are responses to our minds (more so than merely our brains) at work.

## Supraconsciousness

Then there is the matter of getting to Supraconsciousness. The prefix "supra" comes from the Latin root and means "above and beyond." Supraconsciousness, as we said earlier, can be thought of as a state above and beyond the other two levels. That is because it is here that we are somehow able to perceive and visualize the nature and shape of otherwise unapparent connections between things.

You know you have entered into supraconsciousness when something, usually quite suddenly, transforms itself (more on that later) from the complex and uncertain into the crystallization of wholeness in utter simplicity.

Achieving Supraconsciousness is at once an exhilarating, sometimes slightly frightening, and equally humbling moment; not to mention a uniquely creative and productive one as well.

As the creator and host of THE TWILIGHT ZONE television show of the 1960's might have described this moment: "[it is] … a dimension not only of sight and sound, but of mind…." Which brings us back to the understanding that the third, and highest, form of consciousness embraces more than the brain and extends our thinking and ideation a whole another capability.

If you can see, as we have seen, that supraconsciousness is a category of understanding that is different from ordinary consciousness and subconsciousness, you can begin to appreciate the richness and potentiality of this part of our thinking; this part of the power and the utility of the mind.

In its own turn, Supraconsciousness can express itself in one of three forms:

1. Intuition
2. Insight
3. Enlightenment

### Intuition

Intuition is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as: "the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference." In other words, you "suddenly and inexplicably" understand something without understanding how you got to understand it… AND in such a way as to be unable to explain to anyone else how you got to this incredible knowledge and/or wisdom. Intuition is a situational outcome.

### Insight

Insight is defined by the Collins English Dictionary as: "an accurate and deep understanding of something…" That definition makes no mention of how you might have arrived at such an understanding. It only recognizes that what you have is defined by accuracy and depth. Insight is a situational destination.

### Enlightenment

The website, Yogapedia.com defines Enlightenment as "a state of awakened understanding." Enlightenment is a new and continuing state of mind that is not limited to context or specificity of topic. Presumably, once achieved, your "enlightened" awakened understanding extends to any, if not all, of your contemplations.

### Innovation

According to Wikipedia online:

[Innovation is:] "the application of better solutions that meet new requirements, unarticulated needs, or existing market needs." We would place innovation at the entry level of actionability when it comes to superior and exceptional thinking. This is mainly because innovation is, essentially, more in keeping with continual improvement than it is with creating something wholly new.

By our definition, innovation is all about providing better solutions.

### Creativity

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines Creativity as "the ability to produce or use original and unusual ideas." If you can produce original or unusual ideas, you are being creative. Likewise, if you are able to put original or unusual ideas to use, you are also being creative. It would seem that the defining factor of creativity would be originality in terms of conception or execution.

### Genius

In the Merriam Webster Dictionary, Genius is defined along two dimensions: “Extraordinary intellectual power especially as manifested in creative activity” “[and/or] a person endowed with extraordinary mental superiority. Clearly, Merriam Webster recognizes the polarity of genius. At one extreme, there exists a person who is gifted with extraordinary intellectual superiority. At the other pole, genius is seen as a power which manifests through creative activity.

The latter definition allows for the fact that the person in question may or may not be a genius but that which they manifest has about it the nature of genius. This definition should give hope to all of us who may not be celebrated for being geniuses but who, nonetheless, prove capable of doing “genius things’ from time to time.

## The Future of Your Genius

While it may at first feel neither natural nor intuitive to juxtapose the future you deserve with Genius, the idea is actually “brilliant” – if we may so say.

### Why Mix “Future” and “Genius”?

According to the Advanced English Dictionary: “Genius is very great ability or skill in a particular subject or activity [or moment].” In the first place, consequently, who other than you is most likely to be the singular specialist in the pursuit of your own future? In the second place, why would you want to create your future with anything less than the highest level of thinking of which you are capable? I will bet my life on the fact that you are capable of far more than you imagine, if you will let yourself soar.

Time and time again we have witnessed people come up with truly “genius ideas.” In most cases, these same people would have protested (and often did) that they were uniquely under-qualified in the genius department. Yet, under the right circumstances, and with the right guidance, direction, and support, they repeatedly disproved their own worst evaluations of their own intellectual capacities.

### Doing Genius v Being Genius

The commonly accepted definition of genius is that of a person, gifted in some way, with an exceptionally high IQ. On the other hand, we “know” that Mozart was a genius. Did he have above average intelligence? Not that anyone every measured. Did Leonardo DaVinci score high on any standard tests of intelligence? Did Einstein?

The truth is there were no metrics for intelligence when these folks did their best work. The reason we attribute genius to these people is because, on at least one occasion, they created something which itself was a work of genius. The Free Dictionary provides a definition that tells us it may not be the person but the circumstance that defines genius as a: “particularly inspired, clever, or innovative act, idea, or decision.”

When you think about it, have you ever heard of a genius whose only qualification was being one; without the benefit of some action, idea, or decision by which that moniker might be validated? In this context, it’s not much of a reach to perceive that genius knowable by and because of a moment; a moment, at the conclusion of which, something tangible was manifested that had not existed earlier.

This is what we would call a moment of genius. We further maintain that, while not everyone can be a Genius; everyone can have a moment of genius, repeatedly and on demand. This series of essays concerns the creation and facilitation of these moments of genius.

## Conditions for a Moment of Genius

At any one moment or another, every individual, team, group, or organization will hope for an actionable moment of exceptional insight; something which may significantly affect the rest of their personal or business lives. But we can do better than hope. We can do better than settle for exceptional moments. The truth is that every one of us can reach for and achieve moments of genius; genius literally, repeatedly, and on demand.

Genius is a moment of brilliant crystallization and clarity that results from perceiving a fresh alignment of unapparent connections; an alignment that leads to new levels of actionability and opens up new universes of possibility.

It is such moments that define and manifest what we commonly refer to as genius. Some people have a talent, a gift, for precipitating moments of genius. We call them geniuses. But you don't need to become a genius to achieve moments of genius.

How would you recognize a moment of genius?

1. It must be something above and beyond the expected, the usual, or the ordinary.

A moment of genius is not the extension of something. It is not the destination of a journey. It is not the end of a process. A moment of genius is the start of something new. It is the place from which we go forward because what has come before no longer matters.

2. Once manifested, it must speak for itself.

Once expressed and communicated, a moment of genius must appear to be so obvious in hindsight that it is surprising it did not occur before. No matter how complex or complicated, the essence of it must somehow feel simple, clean, and complete in itself.

3. It must leave behind a tangible, communicable artefact; one which inspires, energizes, and guides. It can be a work of art or music, a theory in science, a formula in math, or it can be an exceptional solution to a common problem. It can also be a strategic plan, a vision for the future, or even a sleeve that keeps coffee in a paper cup from burning your hand.

Whatever the moment of genius is, it has to "live on" independently of moment in which it was conceived, designed, and executed. As "lofty" and "grand" as all of the above sound, they describe dimensions that can be found and sustained in even the "littlest" moments of genius in our lives. Those moments that range from how we resolve unsolvable scheduling conflicts to creating the future we deserve.

## The Essence of Genius is Brevity

A good quote is the essence of genius as it spans a universe of truth with an economy of language. It is no accident that Albert Einstein, along with his equals in science, literature, medicine, art, music, and other pursuits conducive to genius, have left us with so many quotable quotes. The core of a moment of

genius is getting to the absolute heart, the conceptual core, of something. The proof of having “gotten there” is that you understand it well enough to be brief.

As E.F. Schumacher, the great British economist, and author of Small is Beautiful, once observed: “Any intelligent fool can make things bigger and more complex... It takes a touch of genius - and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction.” And that’s all we have to say about that.