

# WHAT IS A MIND?

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



## WEEK 5 – ASK MARK, QUESTION 3

Here comes the third question for this week. It goes like this, where does intuition fit into all of this? My understanding of intuition is that it's a process that gives us the ability to know something directly without analytic reasoning appearing in our consciousness without us being fully aware of the underlying reasons for its occurrence. So is it more related to our instincts than our reason, our thinking agency? In an article in psychology today it was suggested that intuition could bridge the gap between the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind as well as between instinct and reason.

Well thanks for that, in essence I agree with what you're saying. The core factors at work here are what is conscious and what is unconscious in the mind and then you've asked also about reason versus instinct. I think that intuition covers both instinctually derived knowledge and cognitively derived knowledge in both cases though there is no conscious cognition, no conscious awareness of where the reasoning comes from, where the conclusion comes from.

So the process, the thinking process is not available to consciousness but the outcome of that process is. In the case of instinct the conclusion is just given by the instinct so we don't have to think our way through the thing, it's hard wired into us that this is just the way we do it. I just know that this is something I should avoid. I just know that this is good for me. And in the case of unconscious cognitive reasoning, things we have thought through for ourselves, if we've thought them through unconsciously then all that we have is the outcome and we don't know where it comes from.

Now the important thing that sets intuition apart from other aspects of unconscious cognition and unconscious mentation in general is that gut feel. It feels right, and I must emphasise the feeling. That's the essence of intuition. It's not just unconscious cognition doing things without knowing why you're doing them, it's that you find yourself having a feeling that this is right, this is true, this is good, this is bad etc. That gut feeling. And here I'm referring to the fact the very important fact so frequently overlooked when we speak about unconscious cognition we are speaking about unconscious cognition, not affects.

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Affects are not unconscious, affects are conscious, affects are always conscious; it's in the essential nature of an affect that you feel it. It's an oxymoron to speak of an unconscious affect; you can't speak of an unfelt feeling. Feelings are always there, as long as you're conscious feelings are there. And in the case of intuition you have a feeling about something, you don't know where the feeling came from but the feeling is what guides you to do what you do.

That feeling may be instinctually derived, that feeling may be derived from your own experience but the feeling is the thing that guides you and the crucial distinction as I keep saying is that the feelings are conscious, the reasons, the cognitions, the thoughts, are not necessarily so. So intuitions are feelings derived from thought processes or from instinctual dispositions of which we have no conscious cognitive knowledge, that's how intuition works.

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And by the way those of you who are psychotherapists we have in psychoanalysis this concept of counter transference and what that refers to, for those of you who are not psychotherapists is that the patient comes into the consulting room and you just know something. The patient generates, it's a state of mind in you, the clinician, and you then have to account for this state of mind in yourself and why is the patient making me feel like this. And I think that that is the same as intuition. Counter transference is a special form of intuition.

And again it has the same basic structure which is that there is a feeling in the room, there is a feeling generated by the interaction with the patient and feelings are conscious. You just don't know why you're feeling this thing, and then the therapeutic task; in fact the essence of the therapeutic task is to find the thoughts that explain the feeling. Why do I feel like this in the presence of this patient? Why is this patient's state of mind generating this feeling state? What are the unconscious ideas the unconscious beliefs, desires, and what not, memories that exist in the patient of which the patient is unaware that is generating this feeling state?

I like to say our patients don't come to us and say doctor I'm unconscious of something can you please explain to me what it is, they come with feelings that they're only too conscious of. They say doctor I've got this feeling; can you please take it away? That's because of this distinction between what is unconscious being cognitive and what is conscious being affective in those states.



Mark Solms, 2016

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