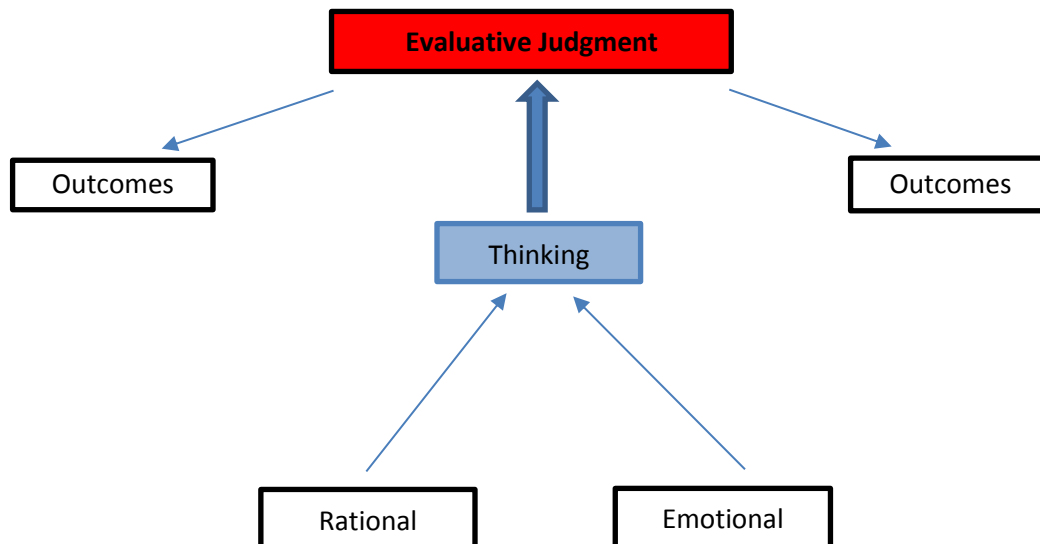


# Judgment and Thinking

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## Introduction

From the very beginning of our work with the Judgment Index™ tool, we have placed great emphasis on the distinction between “judgment” and “thinking.” We have always been very clear about making a strong degree of separation between our tool and tools that assess rational, cognitive ability. Typically, we have asserted that “judgment” is a *higher order activity of human beings* than “thinking.” To make our point, we have used the following diagram for many years:



Generally, we have commented that human beings have been seen as some combination of rationality and emotionality. In fact, many assessment tools weigh the proportion that a person is one or the other, and have used that proportion to predict success on certain kinds of jobs. Such predictions, according to the best validation and correlation studies, have not been very successful over time. We have insisted that being able to say that human beings are “a little bit rational and a little bit emotional” is roughly equivalent to the famous singers, Donnie and Marie Osmond, saying that we are “a little bit country and a little bit rock and roll.” The information derived from the association of rationality and emotionality is not very helpful at all.

We have then emphasized that wide agreement can be gained relating to the premise that all human beings can “think.” This statement seems like a simple tautology; of course humans can “think,” after all, that is the primary distinguishing characteristic that makes us “human” is many people’s estimations. It would also be fairly easy to establish that we have concluded that “thinking” is the highest achievement that we have as human beings. It is “thinking” that, following Descartes’ *Cogito ergo sum* / “I think therefore I am” that gives us the Enlightenment—the Age of Reason, the Industrial Revolution, and the Technological Society. We have plenty of useful tools and convenience devices that would prove the results of “thinking.” We tend to believe that any problem can be solved by better “thinking,” and the entire focus of twentieth and twenty-first century education has been to improve “thinking” ability. We are first and foremost a “rational” species, or so we “think.”

This set of premises and assumptions that we so quickly embrace can be easily questioned and probably negated in an astounding manner. For example, it is “thinking” that gives us Albert Einstein or Jonas Salk. But, it is also “thinking” that gets us Osama bin Laden. It is “thinking” that gives us cures for terrible diseases, but it is also “thinking” that gives us powerful IED (Improvised Explosive Devices) that can maim and kill. It is “thinking” that gets human beings on the moon, but also “thinking” that gets human beings into the sides of the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon on 9/11.

Very clearly, “thinking” is not the key as much as how “thinking” is guided and used. “Thinking,” by itself, can have wonderful or terrible outcomes. There must be something that is a *higher human activity* that determines the directions that “thinking” will take. Since “thinking” is always actualized with decisions and choices, it becomes fair to say that the truly highest activity of human being is “evaluative judgment.” Final outcomes are always driven by evaluative judgment.<sup>1</sup>

In his axiological constructions, Robert S. Hartman advanced the strong conviction that human beings are primarily driven by their values, their ability to evaluate and value. This ability is primarily manifested in a person’s “judgment.” Therefore, “judgment” is enough different from

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the Judgment Index™ is totally concerned with judgment. The assessment tool should, further, not be confused with psychological tools such as the MMPI or personality tools such as the MBTI, DISC, and other personality inventories. We do not try to “psychoanalyze” people using our tool, although many psychologists have used the tool to advance their work. Most significantly, we see “personality” as a situationally driven dynamic of human existence that is the result of choice. “Personality” is not seen, in our constructions, as some kind of psychic DNA that determines who we are. Rather, “personality”—instead of being a *leading* indicator, is a *lagging* indicator that follows from our values and judgments. I choose my “personality” much in the same way I go through my closet of clothing options and decide what is most appropriate for the activities and interactions I will be involved with on a given day. With great ease, I can list situations in which I am an extrovert, and turn right around and list situations in which I am an introvert. Those distinctions, therefore, are not very helpful.

“thinking” that the difference is not so much a matter of *degree*, but a difference that is a matter of *kind*. Such difference requires new emphases in how we give consideration to who we are as human beings, and new abilities to measure this more highly refined uniqueness that we possess. One fact of Hartman’s philosophy that is for certain: *values are not primarily manifested in what we “think” or what we “feel,” but rather in the “judgments” we make.* The role of *choice* comes to dominate “who we are,” and understanding better how we go about *choosing* is more vital to self-understanding and self-development than understanding better how we “think.” The Hartman assessment tool has proven to be very effective in helping to place metrics around how we choose, and has created a wonderful platform for the discussion of human existence from the perspective of human values and human judgments. The tool has also proven to be effective in helping individuals achieve positive successes in the development and improvement of their judgment capacities.

### **One Major Question**

In general, across the years, our basic presentation has been accepted, and people have tended to use our conclusions about “judgment” with fair ease. In our examples of outcomes, no one objects to the assertion that Bill Clinton, when he was President of the United States, could “think.” He had a wonderful record of dealing with all kinds of political issues, military matters, and financial challenges. However, no one hesitates to acknowledge that Clinton will be best remembered across history for his indiscretions with Monica Lewinsky. Such defining indiscretions are seen as the result of “*bad judgment*.” In like manner, Richard Nixon will likely not be remembered primarily for his epic bridging of gaps with China, but rather for the Watergate fiasco. Watergate, the defining moment in his political career, is seen as catastrophically “*bad judgment*.” Most people can even personally validate our conclusions in their own lives, realizing that most successes and failures have been the result—not of brilliant intelligence or stupidity—but of good or bad “judgment.” We might ask about someone who has exercised “bad judgment” the eternal question, “What were they *thinking*?”, but we know full well that the negative event would not have occurred if the person had stopped at *thinking*, or left it to remain in some kind of *thinking* status. If Clinton had only *thought* about his options with Lewinsky, or if Nixon had only *thought* about his options with Watergate, political history in the United States would be very different. That they had to *go beyond* “thinking” to making “judgments” that involved actions helps us see clearly that “judgment” is a critical dynamic that ranges beyond “thinking.”

One question has seemed to remain, in spite of the usually overwhelmingly positive response to the main points of our presentation: are we simply “splitting semantic hairs”? Is not “judgment” just “thinking” using slightly different words? Aren’t we doing the same kinds of processing in our brains with “judgment” that we do with “thinking”? It might be possible to see “judgment” as a higher or more complete form of “thinking,” but isn’t it “thinking” all the

same? Will brain scans look any different when a person is “thinking” as opposed to when a person is making “judgments”?

These are all interesting and totally legitimate questions, and I am not sure we have ever had the very best answers. We have pushed back to anecdotal examples like those used with Clinton and Nixon, and in doing so have established that there is some sort of “more” that is taking place, but some people are still only able to get as far as being able to see “judgment” as some *higher* form of “thinking.” Some have been able to use the constructs of “emotional intelligence” that have gained some prominence in the past few decades, and have decided that this must be something of what we are trying to describe. Our response that “emotional intelligence” is a closer synonym to what we are saying than is “thinking,” but it is not quite close enough...has helped a bit but has not comfortably settled the issue.

### **Finally: A Better Response**

Now, I am finally ready to provide what appears to me to be a better answer to the difference between “thinking” and “judgment,” an answer that now feels altogether obvious but clearly was not in my past teachings. It is also an answer that fits perfectly with Robert Hartman’s overall perspective on what the fullest, human engagement with life needed to be. He illustrated this in his own life, and speaks to this “fullest, human engagement” in critical indicators on his assessment tool. I even feel within the context of what we are about to say, that there would be differences in brain scans that would occur between “thinking” and “judgment” as we will now make our definition. I would enthusiastically invite studies along these lines, and believe that they would present interesting and confirming findings.

The difference is actually fairly simple: “thinking”—and even “feeling”—are primarily *passive* realities. They involve little or no *doing*, except to the extent that there is “something going on” in the brain primarily during the “thinking” or “feeling” event. While it is true, that “thinking” and “feeling” can lead to actions of one kind or another, they do not have to. Actual *doing* is not a necessary correlate of “thinking” or “feeling.” There may be phenomenal “aha” experiences of insight and realization that occur in “thinking” or “feeling,” but these wonderful experiences do not necessarily lead to anything more than a wonderful and powerful insight. For the insight to find further manifestation in the real world, something more has to take place. That “something more” will always, and of intrinsic necessity, involve “judgments,” decisions, and choices. There is some degree of the existential<sup>2</sup> reality that takes place with an

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<sup>2</sup> We will use the word *existential* several times in the essay. The word, common to the modern history of philosophy, is often misunderstood and overly interpreted. We are using the term to describe an event that has power of realness to it. It is not conceptual and theoretical. For example, many people would have been able to

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insight, and there is a further degree of the existential real that takes place in actual activity. The insights that led to the mathematical and logical concepts relating to the splitting of the atom and the creation of the atomic bomb were in a different realm of reality to the actual explosion of the bomb itself. There was a great deal of “thinking” and even “feeling” that surrounded the atomic bomb, but a different *kind* of reality is encountered in the “judgments” made to drop the bomb. “Judgment” is always—properly understood—an *active* reality, a reality only fully consummated in the necessity of *action*.

At this point of consideration, when we have been asked to define precisely what we mean by “judgment,” we have moved in the direction of that which is decidedly *active* rather than *passive*, although we have not made the connection strongly enough. We have said that “judgment” involves the mutually inclusive integration of three factors: (A) the ability to observe, to “take in” information in an event of real, situational awareness; (B) the ability to process, to “put together,” that information in terms of all past experience, education, and training, and then to come up—in your mind—with something that would make the situation better or respond to it in a way that is the “best”; and, (C) executing that making better or that making best. Point “B” is certainly where “thinking” and “feeling” come into play, but the play is not complete until there is execution. We have almost always explained the crucial integration in terms of: “to see,” “to determine,” and “to do.” There is no “judgment” until there is the choice, the decision to become actually—not virtually—engaged in real life. So, axiology—Hartman’s “science of value”—in its intrinsic and necessarily indispensable movement from “values” to “judgments” is always—at its best and highest—*existential*. Axiology is always seen by Hartman as resulting in an ethics and morality, not of concept, but of actions designed to make better.

Now, it is obviously clear that a “judgment” could be a *passive*, mental-only event in a person’s brain. At that point, “judgment” would be reduced to “thinking” and/or “feeling.” Here, “judgment” would be degraded, defamed, and turned into something it is not intended to be. It would be “stillborn.” In such a situation, “judgment” would cease to be authentic. To me, it could no longer be called legitimately a “judgment.” So, Hartman can “think” and “feel” that Hitler is bad. This can be a powerful thought in his mind. However, when Hartman moved to actively oppose Hitler, he is *active*, he is existentially engaged with his life on the line, and he has moved to the place of “judgment.” Clearly, as we always suggested with the original graphic chart shown above, outcomes are primarily driven by “judgment.”

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conceptualize the evil of Adolph Hitler. Hartman put his life on the line in opposition to Hitler. He barely escaped Nazi Germany with his life. For Hartman, the decisions and judgments he made relating to Hitler, and the actions he took as a consequence of these judgment were *existential*. A further investigation of existentialism would lead to such individuals as Kierkegaard, Sartre, Camus, Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Nietzsche. It should also be kept in mind that a primary, defining characteristic of existentialism as a whole is its emphasis on the commanding importance of *choice* as the defining feature of truly human existence.

Many ancient civilizations understood clearly the distinction we are making here. Often, there were words for “thinking” or mental events of examining findings and options. Then, there were other words for the higher, human activities. We find words such as *wisdom*, *discernment*, or *consideration*. *Sider* was an ancient word meaning *wisdom*. The ancient wisdom writers would never have been satisfied with self-edifying, cloistered “thinking.” They were interested in having direct and powerful impact on real life. Whether it is Jesus, Moses, or Zarathustra, it was never good enough to dwell on some mountain top of religious or philosophical ecstasy. There always had to be movement down into the valley where real people lived with real problems needing to be addressed.

Aristotle, who is seen as the father figure of rationalism, science, and logic in his emphasis on reason and the mind, did say that the highest activity of human existence was contemplation. That kind of statement certainly can sound like passive mental activity, but Aristotle absolutely saw contemplation as an *activity*. In fact, when he defined human happiness, the first word of his definition was *activity*.<sup>3</sup> Again, the clear emphasis is on *active* judgment and not *passive* thinking. While it is not the primary direction of this essay, I believe Aristotle’s concept of “contemplation” might best be explained and understood in terms Hartman’s concept of Systemic value/evaluation/valuation. Following Kant, the Systemic is the theoretical. Kant’s practical, then, is like Hartman’s Extrinsic, and Kant’s aesthetic is like Hartman’s Intrinsic. The Intrinsic, in Hartman’s “Hierarchy of Value,” is the most complex form of valuation and engagement, and therefore is also the most personal, human, unique, and existentially real. Our actions are always shaped and formed in the strategies of Systemic judgment and the tactics of Extrinsic judgment, but our actions are only finally consummated at their fullest and richest potential in *events* of Intrinsic judgment when we move ourselves into the arena of action. An ancient text reads: “We are to love, not in word and tongue, but in deed and truth.” Here, the highest form of human engagement and human “truth” occurs in *doing*.

## **Conclusion**

The major distinction should now be clearer than we have ever been able to make it in the past. “Thinking” is, of course, vitally important. We should do everything within our power to help “thinking” to be as efficient and effective as it possibly can be. “Thinking” can always be given its just rewards and positive attributes. However, “thinking” tends to be *passive* and “mental.”

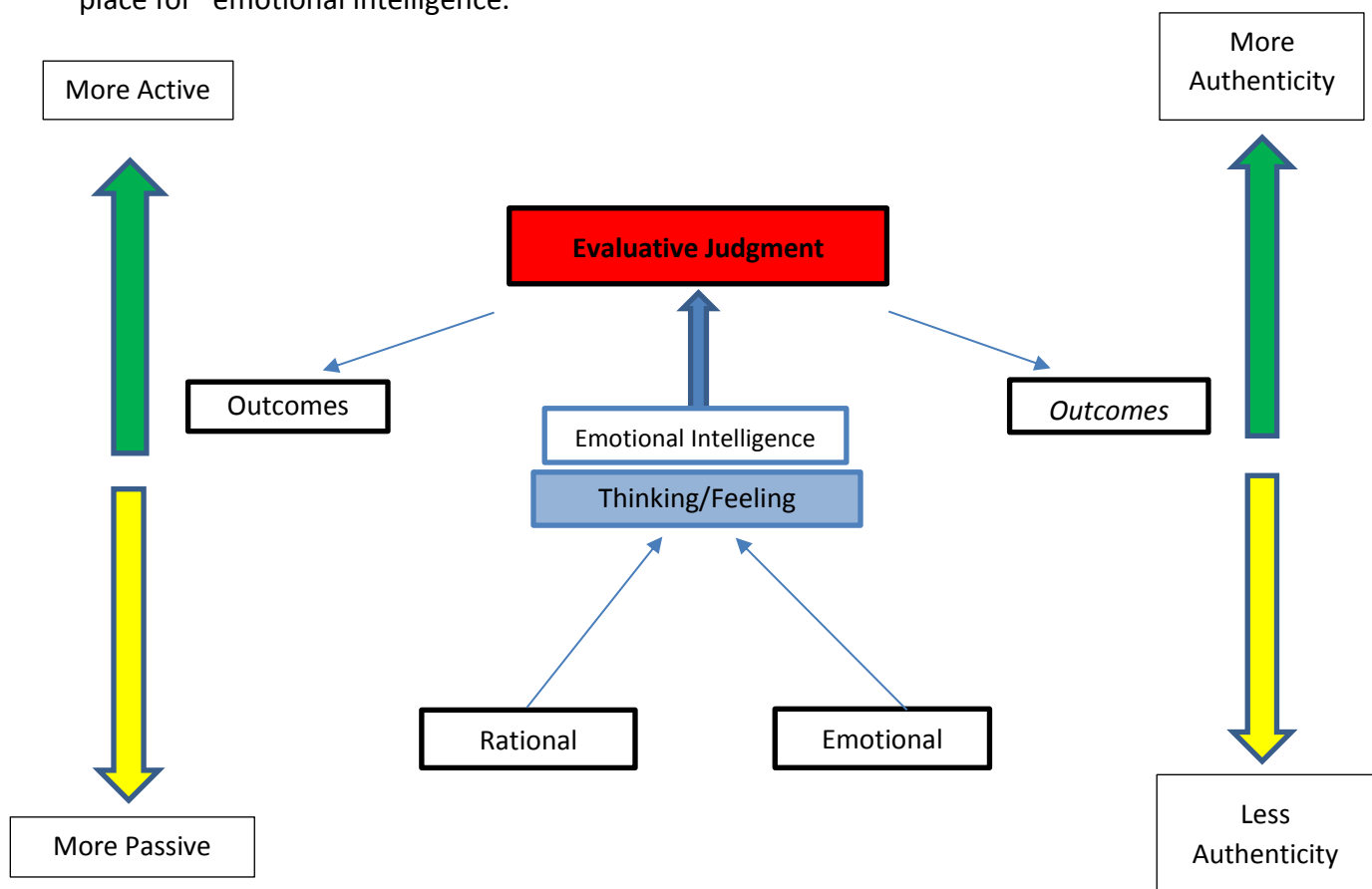
The movement to “judgment”—except when it is degraded and defaced of its power—is always *active*, bridging the movement from conceptualization to actualization to fruition and consummation. When “judgment” takes this form, it will—of necessity—be existential because it will always be uniquely situational. “Judgment” can even be seen as that element of

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<sup>3</sup> Aristotle defined *happiness* as “activity of soul in accordance with virtue.” A solid, modern reading of the phrase might be “activity of the whole person in keeping with a person’s appropriate excellence.”

consideration which moves actions from the generalization of norms and normative activity to unique, situational activity. Everything that has been written about the difference between deontological, rule-oriented ethics, and teleological, ends-oriented ethics, finds its parallel in “thinking” and “judgment.” Aristotle initially made these distinctions as well, although they have been better explained in more modern writers such as Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer. Perhaps we tend to lean more toward “thinking” because “thinking” is safer. “Judgment” can be costly, it puts our lives on the line, and we ultimately have to make what Kierkegaard called “leaps of faith” in the decisions we make. Such “leaps” that always involved “judgment” bring us both to the point of deepest engagement and to the horizon of deepest personal authenticity.

A new graphic explanation might now be appropriate, and—in creating it—we can also make a place for “emotional intelligence.”



Robert Hartman, in one of the most important leading principles of his axiology—the science of value—defined *goodness* in terms of “concept fulfillment.” In other words, something is *good* if it fulfills its concept, its ideal, and its potential to the highest level possible. What we have tried to do in this essay is to give a concept of “judgment.” We are then saying that when

“judgment” is fulfilled, when it comes to its highest fruition, that it moves in the direction of being “*good* judgment,” or—at least—an operative platform is created on which “*good* judgment” can take place.

Therefore, a fundamental and necessary dynamic of “judgment” that is truly fulfilled, truly *good*, is “judgment” that involves *action*. If “judgment” is passive, it does not begin to fulfill the basic concept, and so it cannot be “*good* judgment.” A retreat to inactivity and passivity is a retreat to inauthenticity, and “judgment” would be degraded to—by comparison—merely “thinking.” To stand the chance of being *good*, of fulfilling its concept, an authentic “judgment” must involve activity. This may not be the full story of “*good* judgment,” but without this vital part, the story does not even have a beginning point.