

What is a Function?

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In the practice and teaching of what is currently, perhaps misleadingly, understood as personality type, “function” is a given construct, mostly appended to a type-associated questionnaire. Discussion or explication of what “functions” are usually presumes they are cognitive processes (undefined). Any debate consists of issues of order and direction, or statistical investigations seeking their location within the MBTI, notwithstanding transparent evidence to the contrary. But what did C.G.Jung say and what did he mean by it? In this paper, I examine the origins, presumptions, understanding and use of this term, in particular that of C.G.Jung and his contemporaries. Comments are made on more recent presumptions. No publications of Isabel Myers or Katherine Briggs are examined; Jungian and other “personality type” questionnaires are not discussed. This paper is intended as a contribution to the history of ideas and does not comprise a review or exposition of Jung’s *Psychological Types* and its contents.

Nothing is more real than an Idea to a person who thinks

A man may say “Apparently my book is incomprehensible, but it is perfectly clear to me”

C.G.Jung

As with other significant thinkers throughout history, C.G.Jung developed his ideas over time, and not always consistently. Today, in an age obsessed with the “backflip” and seeking consistency in behaviour for public figures almost from birth, this fact confuses both adherents or critics of almost any idea – psychological, religious, scientific or otherwise.

Curiously (or perhaps not), it is a behavioural interpretation of Jung’s ideas, rather than his own interest of psychological consciousness, that has captured most interest, or at least use.

Jung’s initial work on psychological types identified the opposites of extraversion and introversion presuming, as he later acknowledged, that extraversion was associated with feeling and introversion thinking (as defined). Neither feeling nor thinking were identified as “functions” at this stage.

It also appears the use of the term in both specific and general ways in Jung’s writings and presentations polarised contemporaries and is one of the reasons for experimental research emphasis on his earlier constructs of introversion-extraversion rather than his function-types (Geyer 2011a).

Psychology and its Categories or Constructs

Conferences, training courses and other meetings involving psychological type require some familiarity with a particular jargon for both understanding and participation. Outside the walls of such events, things can be quite different. Talking about the niceties of the auxiliary function or the orientation of the tertiary at a suburban barbecue is as unlikely a discourse as speculation about Bodhisattvas, the Hidden Imam, or the world of global finance, all equally arcane in their way.

In psychology, as in other disciplines, terms and definitions are constructed which can take on a life of their own, sometimes in contradictory ways. “Emotion” is a term hiding a minefield of interpretations, to say nothing of a brain location (e.g. Kagan 2007).

“Intelligence” of whatever kind is another example: people talk about “emotional” or “spiritual” intelligence, as well as IQ or “multiple intelligences.” None of these categories are real entities in themselves, but have been developed to express an idea, or sometimes an ideology.

The seminal work of **Kurt Danziger** (e.g. 1987; 2008) is centred on the development and use of psychological categories, most recently on memory. Some seek, or have sought to find, a physical locality for these entities, either forgetting or ignoring their abstract origin in language, or presuming that the significance (to them) of what has been identified demands a physical, physiological location.

Paul Rozin (2006) has commented on psychology's historical focus "in terms of processes or mental entities (e.g. learning, sensation, perception, memory), rather than domains of life (e.g. eating, work, leisure)...i.e. what people actually do." He attributes this to an 'early dedication to discovering general laws of the mind.'

Thomson Jay Hudson's *The Law of Mental Medicine* nicely encapsulates this view. It appears in 1903, when Jung is in his late 20s. He may not have encountered the book at all, of course, but the terms and language are contemporary. Hudson sets out "fundamental psychological propositions" upon which the "science of mental medicine" is based:

1. That man is endowed with a dual mental organism, or mind, – objective and subjective.
2. The subjective mind is constantly amenable to control by the power of suggestion.
3. The subjective mind controls the functions, sensations and conditions of the body (1903).

Jung, following this line of language use at the very least, refers to "the fact that general psychological laws are operative in every individual." in *Psychological Types* (1921/1938)

R.R.Holt, at a much later date, writes that "the notion that there are nomothetic (generalizing) and idiographic (individualising) branches, types or emphases of science" has been significant in psychological methodology,,nomothetic literally meaning "setting down laws." He comments on Gordon W. Allport in this manner and makes a general observation that problems in psychology as a whole "can, of course, be traced back to Plato and Aristotle." (1967).

What is most relevant for this particular inquiry, however is the understanding and use of the terms "faculty" and "function" and how they relate to Jung's propositions.

Faculties and Functions

In writing about concepts in psychology, **Elizabeth Valentine** states that in the 19th century a faculty psychology was one in which phenomena were attributed to *faculties* and motives to *instincts*. There were as many explanatory devices as things to explain. An advantage of this approach was the freedom to "exercise intuition" and various contributions made to psychological knowledge were thereby made. The disadvantage was "a lack of parsimony with consequent loss of explanatory power." There were "many circular concepts lacking independent operational definitions" i.e. the ideas were self-referential and so with limited validity (1992).

Woodworth and Sheehan, in a well-written and informative text on schools of psychology, state that a functional psychology is one that "attempts to give an accurate and systematic answer to the question, "What do men do?" and then goes on to ask the questions, "How do they do it?" and "Why do they do it?" (1964). They proceed to explain experimental functional psychology and its methods.

The compendious **A.A.Roback** dated faculty psychology back to Thomas Aquinas and identified pioneer psychologist James Angell and educational philosopher John Dewey as functionalists (1940). As an aside, the latter was apparently an inspiration for Isabel Myers' function-oriented decision-making method (Jane Kise, personal communication). **Sargent** wrote that Functionalisms aim in studying mental functions was to discover how thinking, emotion, and other processes fulfilled an organism's needs (1949)

Closer to Jung's period of formulation, two papers appeared in *The American Journal of Psychology* which sought to examine the origin and use of "function" as a term in psychology.

The first, by **Christian A. Ruckmich**, was a survey of 15 English language texts. 13 of these appear American. The author found that "every occurrence of the word 'function' in the literature means either 'service' [of which there were two kinds] or 'activity;,' or the approximate grammatical equivalent of either one of these." (1913). *Service* could be:

- a purpose to "make possible the successful operation of other 'functions' or processes dependent on it
- a defence or attack mechanism for the organism as a whole

Activity meant a function “whose purpose is its on acting...the assigned task...is an end in itself.” The activity may be “without serviceable direction” according to one author.

Functions of emotion, thoughts, feelings, agreeableness, and the unpleasant, the imagination occur in the text and J.M.Baldwin, author of one of the texts under examination, is reported at discussing “psychology as science of mental function.” William James is also quoted on “the *cognitive function* of different states of mind” [italics in text].

Ruckmich notes the use of the term “faculty” that appears almost interchangeable with “function” and indicates it’s not currently a generally used word. He concludes that overall “function” relates to mental or bodily activity that has some purpose or end and he thought that students would be better off if there was more consistency of definition.

K.M. Dallenberg (1915) references Ruckmich, whilst taking a more historical and philosophical approach to the issue. He observes there were several meanings of “Function” available, but was “interested only in one of those meanings, that of a special kind of activity” of which there were three usages:

- The activity of an organ (physiological use)
- The activity of the intellectual or moral powers or faculties (psychological use)
- The activity of things in general (general use)

Seeking function’s historical origins, he begins with a dictionary, finds the term’s first appearance in the 16th Century and uses quotes from Shakespeare, Milton and Coleridge as examples, but finds it absent from Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley and Hume.

The overall context for contemporary use he arrives at is that of *phrenology*, the association of shapes and types of human head and the brain within with human psychological or behavioural attributes (see e.g. Fig. 1 below), with a starting point the work of the 18th century British philosopher William Brown.

Surprisingly (to me) Dallenberg mentions the French philosopher **Auguste Comte**, associated with the origins of sociology as well as positivism and empiricism, as being a fan of the idea. He states that “in the phrenological works...functions of mind appear along with functions of body” and that Comte often used “such expressions as moral and, intellectual, affective, and phrenological functions.

The work of the Victorian-era philosopher **G.H.Lewes** is also examined Lewes thought that psychology was “the analysis and classification of the sentient functions and faculties revealed to observation and induction” and for the first time (according to Dallenberg) makes a distinction between function and faculty, calling the latter “the action, or class of actions into which a function may be diversified by the education of experience.”

Lewes makes functions a kind of mixed bag: “Instincts.. Emotions...Sensation and perception (sic)..., Logical combinations... ‘ Some functions are “simple, others compound”

The philosopher **Herbert Spencer**, coiner of the term “survival of the fittest” and a favourite of Katharine Briggs (Saunders 1991) and many of her contemporary Americans, used “function” but only in the physiological sense and disdained phrenology.

Alexander Bain, more or less his contemporary, favoured the idea and sometimes used “function” in a psychological sense e.g. “The functions of Intellect, Intelligence or Thought [all one category], are known by such names as Memory, Judgment, Abstraction, Reason, Imagination.”

For Bain, according to Dallenberg, all that was needed to be said about these “intellectual functions” was a further subdivision into “Consciousness of Difference,...Consciousness of Agreement...and Retentiveness.”

Dallenberg concludes by observing that much of the current ‘function psychology’ was due to William James, at a point where the term “mental functions” has come into general use regardless of affinity or knowledge of phrenology.

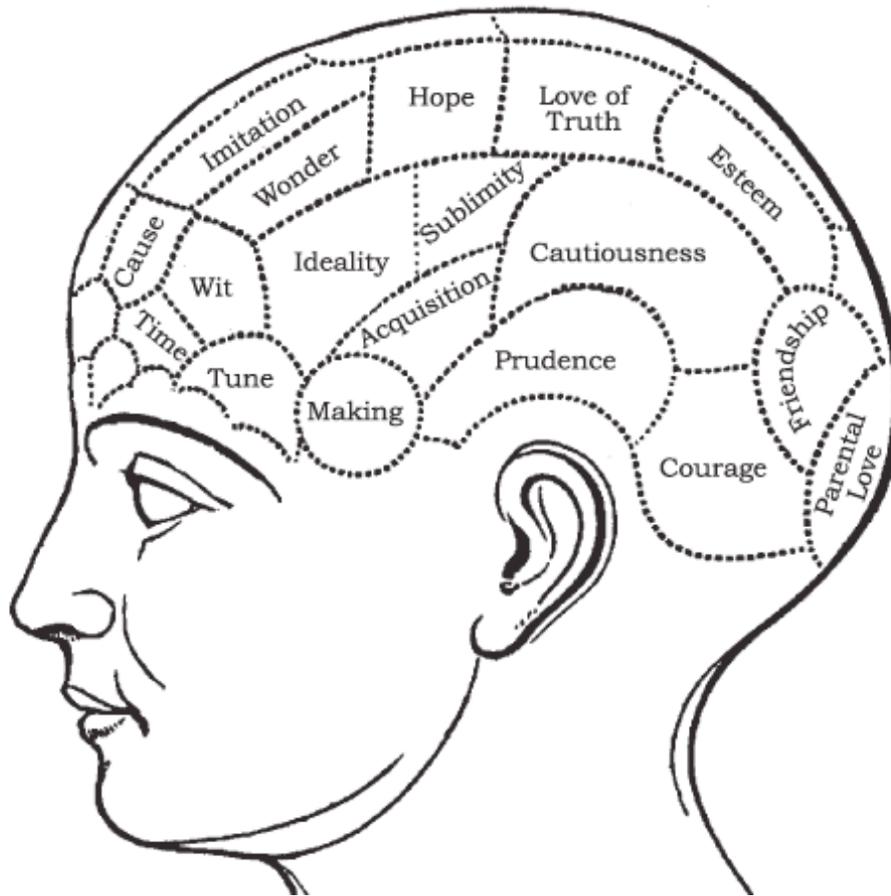


Fig.1 A phrenological map of the skull (Source: www.google.com)

Amongst the many other texts that referred to “function” in some shape or form both before and after Dallenberg and Ruckmich, **Lucien Levy-Bruhl’s** *Les Fonctions Mentales dans les Societies Inferieures*, (translated into English in 1925 as *How Natives Think*) is significant for this discussion in that Jung referenced the author’s ideas about “primitive mentalities” – a phrase definitely of its time. Jung used it quite liberally and not always with the same exact meaning. He also took the notion of *participation mystique* from his work.

Jung and “Functions”

Jung’s construct of function can be thought of in two ways: as a psychological or an energetic (libidinal) tendency to remain constant in order to judge the changing conditions of experience.

Joseph Rychlak

The psychological theoretician and practitioner, Joseph Rychlak (1998), writing some decades after Jung’s formulation and presentation of his typology and other relevant aspects of this thought provides two options for interpreting his idea, perhaps because energetic notions of personality, controversial for some even at that time and certainly outside the mainstream of thought about personality until the recent avalanche of biological discoveries.

The earliest use I have found for the term ‘function’ in Jung’s work is from 1916, some time before his exposition of his function-types, in a paper called *The Structure of the Unconscious* (1916/1966) a version of which also appeared in the second edition of the Constance Long edited *Collected Papers in Analytical Psychology* (1920).

Here, Jung writes that "...just as social functions or instincts are opposed to the egocentric interests of the individual, so certain functions or tendencies of the human mind are opposed, by their collective nature to the personal mental functions...the universal similarity of human brains leads to the universal possibility of a uniform mental functioning." which he identifies as the collective psyche and breaks down into components of *mind* and *soul*. Later, he comments that he does not deny "the close connection of psychic happenings with the physiological structure of the brain...and the body in general (1933)

The publication of *Psychological Types* contains a definition:

By psychological function I understand a certain form of psychic activity that remains theoretically the same under varying circumstances. From the energetic standpoint a function is a phenomenal form of libido which theoretically remains constant in much the same way as physical force can be considered as the form or momentary manifestation of physical energy.(1921/1938)

One might stop there and relate this statement specifically to the four functions and the eight function-types (see Fig. 2 below) as understood today, but Jung has a wider net of inclusion, and exclusion. For instance, he excludes the psychological ideas of *will* and *attention* by calling them "secondary." However, as the four functions are headlined as basic functions i.e. they are (as he says in this book's Introduction) "functions which are both genuinely as well as essentially differentiated from other functions" implying that there are other activities that can be labelled as such or that have a functional activity. The "transcendent function," for instance, has a particular role, but is not a basic function.

Elsewhere in *Psychological Types*, Jung writes that "engrams (imprints)...may be regarded as function-traces which typify on the average the most frequently and intensely used functions of the human soul" (p211) This appears to be a statement about archetypes.

He also describes two Hindu constructs in *manas* (mind) and *vac* (speech) as showing "the two principles [of extraversion and introversion] in their character of psychological function; "namely *manas* as introversion of the libido with the creation of an inner product; *vac* as the divesting function or extraversion." (p252)

Jung talks in many places about the many different kinds of psyches naturally leading to different approaches to psychology. In support of this perspective he states "I am also convinced that, had I myself chanced to possess a different individual psychology, I should have described the rational types in the reversed way, from the standpoint of the unconscious—as irrational therefore" in this way clearly alluding to his own type orientation. (p453)

He suggests also that "cognition" (undefined) is to do with the "rational function" i.e. thinking or feeling. and that the introverted type is "guided, therefore, by that factor of perception and cognition which represents the receiving subjective disposition to the sense stimulus." (p472) At any rate, this is a much narrower view than the current use, which may also be an overstatement in any case.

Consciousness is defined as "the function or activity which maintains the relation of psychic contents to the ego." Ideas of Jung's contemporaries Adler and Maeder are identified as being respectively analogous to the anticipatory or prospective function of the unconscious. Jung comments that "the practical character of unconscious tendencies, however, cannot be disputed *a priori*, if we are to accept the analogy with other psychological or physiological functions." (p536)

Jung confirms this in various places e.g.

The conscious psyche is an apparatus for adaptation or orientation, and it consists of a number of psychic functions. Of these we can distinguish four fundamental functions; and

It is hardly possible to speak of typical unconscious functions, although in the economics of the psyche we must attribute a function to the unconscious...a compensatory function in respect to consciousness.

(Semeonoff 1966 [1928])

In the same article, on his way to explaining the need for objectivity in classifying people, Jung identifies *affect*, or emotional expression, as a function. He states that the first typologies (i.e. the classical temperaments) were concerned with emotional behaviour and so are unsuitable for the task as affects hide the other functions a factor lost on the “unpsychological” person who judges others in that way, whilst denying that their own affects describe their intent. Such a person must develop consciousness in that he must “reach a condition where other factors are appreciated as valid besides affect.

He says:

In complete contrast to the old system of classification according to temperaments, the problem of a new division of types begins with the express convention, neither to allow oneself to be judged by affect, nor so to judge others, since, as a final statement, no one will admit himself to be identical with his affect. If, therefore, affect is used as the criterion, the general agreement which science demands can never be reached... Therefore...we must take as our criterion that condition or attitude which is felt by the object to be a conscious, normal state of mind.

Regarding the importance of objectivity, Jung wrote: “You wonder perhaps why I dwell so emphatically on the question of objectivity, but you would cease to wonder if you should ever try to classify people in practice.”

Another clear function exclusion in Jung’s view, was intelligence. “[L]ike stupidity, [it] is not a function, but a modality; the word tells us no more than *how* a function is working [i.e. intelligently or otherwise], not *what* is functioning.” He went on to say that “the same holds true of moral and aesthetic criteria. We must be able to designate what it is that functions outstandingly in the individual’s habitual way of reacting. We are thus forced to revert to something that at first glance looks alarmingly like the old faculty psychology of the eighteenth century.” (1931/1970 pp536-7). Interestingly, Jung doesn’t elaborate here on how much, or little, his approach is like this particular school, although an interpretation might be that it looks like it, but appearances might be deceptive.

Jung also speculatively extended his idea of psychic functions to other beings by saying “ It cannot, of course be proved that insects possess conscious knowledge, but common sense cannot doubt that their unconscious action patterns are psychic functions.”

Similarly, “Man’s unconscious likewise contains all the patterns of life and behavior inherited from his ancestors, so that every human child, prior to consciousness, is possessed of a potential system of adapted psychic functioning. In the conscious life of the adult, as well, this unconscious, instinctive functioning is always present and active. In this activity all the functions of the conscious psyche are prepared for. (Ruitenbeek 1964 [1933])

Jung also expressed the idea of his four basic or fundamental functions in various ways. Two examples from his 1925 seminars on analytical psychology follow:

- “We have considered four kinds of realities: (1) static reality that comes to us through sensation; (2) the dynamic reality revealed by intuition; (3) static images given us by thinking; (4) dynamic images sensed by feeling.” and
- “I assume that the fact of the discovery of the four functions is equivalent to a statement about the world: that is, that the world has these four aspects of reality...We can think of the possibility of the world changing in such a way as to bring another function, or other functions into existence: meantime I offer these conceptions as a possible point of orientation.” (1989p 125)

Prostitution is a function of marriage. According to the statistics the real supporters of brothels are the married men, not the bachelors

C.G.Jung

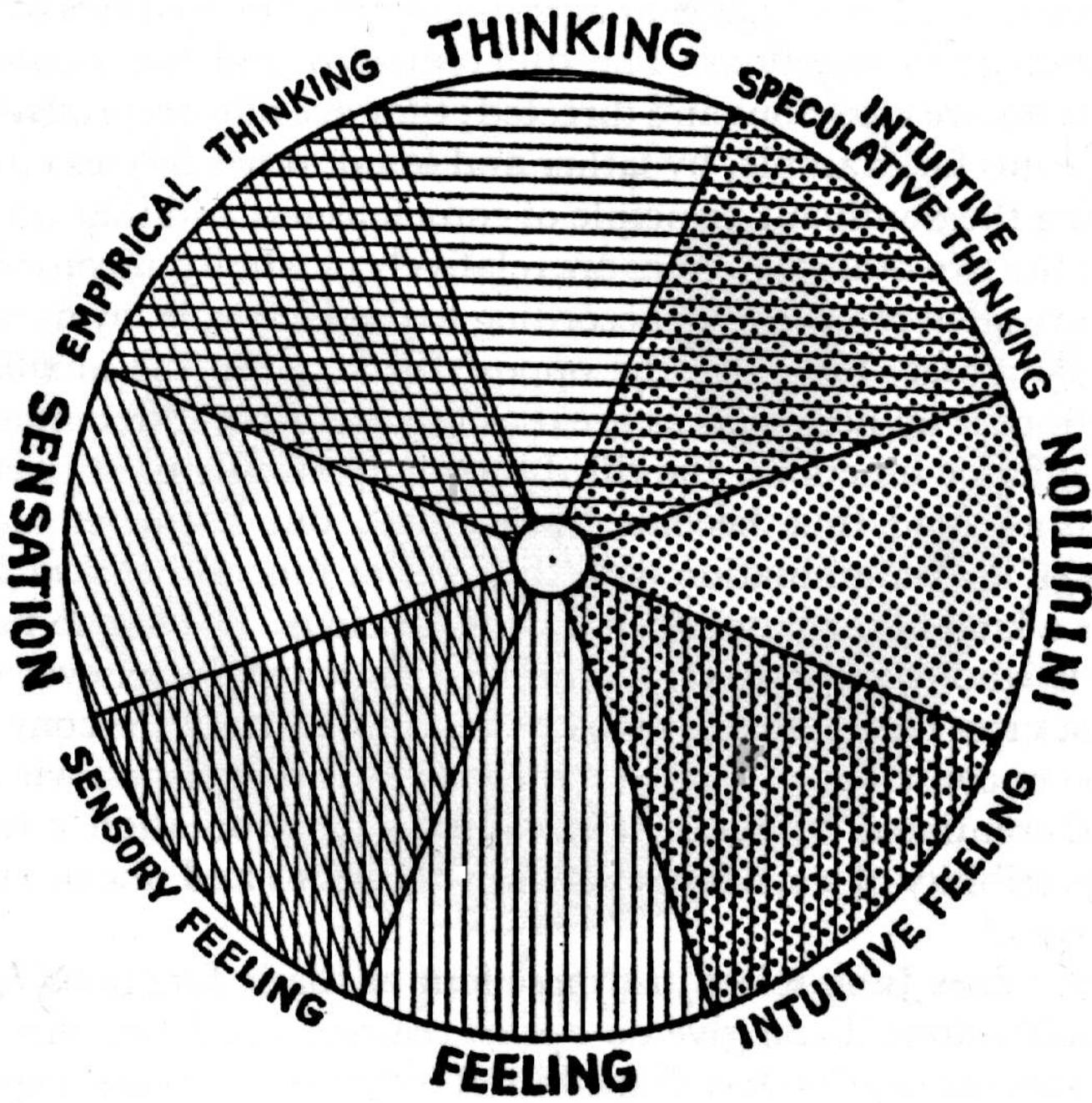


Fig. 2 Jung's Function Compass (Source: www.google.com)

Functional Responses and Comments

Much of the response to Jung's function-types related to either inclusions and exclusions, or questioning the whole thing altogether. For instance, although Jung excludes *will* from his four functions, others write about *conation* or *volition*, in that context which seems to be a similar idea (Roback 1931).

A.A.Roback discussed ideas about primary and secondary functions Heymans and Otto Gross..the primary function of ideas or other mental contents signifies nothing else but their mental efficiency as long as they are conscious, and their secondary function nothing else but their efficiency when they have sunk below the threshold of consciousness (1927)

William McDougall, in appraising Freud's idea of the *Id*, emphasised "the necessity of distinguishing clearly between mental structure [presumably brain localisation] and mental functions." Whilst appreciating the general thrust of Jung's ideas of introversion and extroversion [sic} he thought "Jung's later attempts to establish eight (or is it sixteen?) important types of personality...to have failed...chiefly

because it is based on the assumption of four distinct faculties [in the old sense of the word]"(1935), a view supported by E.B. Miller (1927). Frank Freeman assumed the various faculties and therefore the areas of the brain could be developed by exercise, a kind of muscular metaphor (1940)

J.H. van der Hoop disagreed with Jung about the functions, thinking they were more related, but doesn't really clarify what he means by this claim (1923; 1939). He uses the terms "mental functions" and "mental attitude." As his latter book was a key reference for Isabel Myers, it would be interesting to know what components of it were relevant for her. As she described herself as not being theoretically-minded, apart from the desire to implement that of Jung, she may have valued van der Hoop's type descriptions.

Joan Corrie, an authorised interpreter of Jung, explained Jung's types in a chapter entitled "The Mind and Its Functions" (1927)

Herbert Devine wrote about *The Function of Consciousness*, and contended that physiology dealt with the organic functions and activities necessary for maintaining life, whilst psychology dealt with the functions and activities concerned with the adjustment of the individual as a whole to their surroundings. The psychologist, interested in both functional areas, dealt therefore with "a biopsychic organism ." (1933)

W.M. Kranefeldt, in an interesting book containing an introduction written by Jung, calls *anima* and *animus* functions (usually these days referred to as *archetypes*). He mentions Freud and "functional illnesses" i.e. expressions of mental states which he contrasts to "organic" (a recognisable bodily basis) and quotes Jung referring to the "guiding function" of the unconscious. He thought that "modern civilized life – which is a sort of 'Taylor-system'– hardly ever permits a sufficiently harmonious exercise of all the functions, since almost all human beings are forced to lead a one-sided life," an observation that still seems pertinent. (1932)

He explains consciousness as "those functional parts of the psyche which characterize our adaptation, or attitude to the outer world." and that "function, as used in the expression "transcendent function" must not be confused with one of the four basic functions."

Morris Philipson, writing much later and outlining a "Jungian Aesthetics," comments on the "function of symbols" and that this depends on whether it operates as a siphon or transformer, the latter being linked to the transcendent function (1963). **Jolande Jacobi** explains that this function isn't metaphysical, but "creates a transition from one attitude to another." She also says that this function is not basic as with the four conscious functions, but "a complex function composed of several factors" (1957)

Writing elsewhere and about Individuation, Jacobi states that the four functions of consciousness are also called by Jung "modes of apprehension" She also uses the term "modes of Behaviour" to describe them (1967). **Josef Goldbrunner** in his book on the same topic, but a different emphasis, calls the four functions "spiritual energies." (1956)

Writers on psychology in the general period of the most recently-mentioned works had a number of responses to "function. **James Drever's** dictionary of psychology for Penguin presented a compact definition quite similar to Dallenberg's (1952); A larger *Encyclopedia of Psychology* provided a similar definition, but also includes several other sub-categories of which two, "Main" and "Principal" Function provided information from the ideas of Jung, and Jungians.

Eric Berne, founder of the Transactional Analysis therapeutic method answered the question of where human energy comes from by stating that:

" In order to understand anything in this world, we have to ask first, what parts does it consist of and how they are put together, and secondly, where does its energy come from and how is it conducted into the proper channels...the construction is called structure, and the working is called function. To understand the universe, we study its structure and function. If we now study the glands and the brain, we shall have the beginnings of an idea as to how the energy of a human being is controlled as he functions (1962).

Berne's comments are strictly methodological and appear to follow from the general discussions in the past about functions rather than anything to do with Jung or Jungian ideas. They also illustrate the need to differentiate between use of the term as part of general language, a non-specific energy activity and the specific use of the terms for Jung's function–types in the various places this idea is utilised, or considered. Aspects of this field of use will be examined in the next section.

Functions in More Recent Psychological Times

In more recent times, public and professional use of the term “function” (apart from the odd celebratory event) has been mostly restricted to Jungian-related discussions. These discussions have been predominantly conducted in various activities associated with the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator ® (MBTI ®) and (lately) other type questionnaires.

Behaviour or Consciousness? To an extent, the use of the term “function” in psychological investigation declined over time because of an emphasis on experimentally-based research and measurement based on a particular version of the scientific method which focused on external behaviours rather than internal mechanisms or processes, such as consciousness. This appears particularly the case in the United States.

In the texts consulted for this study, Jung argues against what he considers to be a narrow view of science, on several occasions. Essentially, his approach was considered by behaviour-oriented psychologists to be a little too metaphysical for their tastes and his version of “empirical” is not that of the behaviourist. Even the prolix A.A. Roback, who was not a behaviourist, identified him as “the Neo-Platonist of Psychology” at one point, a not-inappropriate label in many ways. The work of Jung that appears to last longest in journal and other references is his Word Association experiments, which fit this notion of empirical, experimental research.

Contemporary discussions about Jung's functions largely take place in an environment that appears to privilege outcome over idea, particularly as a method or model for use in professional settings, mostly in organisations. The context, one in which the author participates, is the use of a questionnaire, sometimes the accreditation or certification in its use.

Sometimes the results of such a questionnaire may be privileged over the reality of its completer. The availability of online completion and their resultant profiles may be a factor in this situation. Elegantly presented results are difficult not to defend. Those who privilege mathematics above all else might look for functions in the numbers and ignore a questionnaire's purpose and construction, including the nature of the items.

In these settings, a particular approach to Jung's function order is usually provided, together with ideas on development and consciousness. These may be without reference to Jung's position on either issue, or contemporary relevant research from outside. Jung's view might not even be given its contextual status, or its parsimony appreciated (Geyer 2011b). A complex model may be invalid on the basis of its complexity alone.

Rarely, though, is the prospect entertained that the inhabitants of the course or event (or even the presenter) might be psychologically unconscious: they might behave in a particular way associated with a type, but not consciously direct the energies associated with that orientation. Or, consistent with Jung's idea, one function only might be realistically available, a reasonable expectation, particularly (but not exclusively) when dealing with younger people.

This is a complex consideration unlikely to be ascertained in a few days, let alone in briefer sessions where the focus is on other attributes such as teams, communication, or leadership and where, naturally, attention can be paid to behaviours that might be associated with a type description more than anything else, leading to concretisation and literalisation, and occasional claims that a person can't be a particular type because of a particular behaviour or belief.

There appears to be a theological aspect to this discussion i.e. a method which users approach dogmatically, or literally, in the manner of a closed belief system, unaccompanied by relevant and available research, required if ideas are to be more than a very useful therapeutic method, as John Beebe's approach appears to be. Accordingly, attempts may be made to fit people into a framework rather than understanding the person themselves. The eminent scholar G.E.R. Lloyd has written about the difficulty of taking either a universalist or a relativist position where human beings are concerned (2007)

Of course Jung may have been less than accurate about his idea, something which might not have troubled him, or he was wrong about his own type orientation, as some have suggested.

Brain and Cognition. A part of this discussion also appears to privilege these functions in a way that might not be deserved. Jung didn't appear to refer to a physical brain location for his basic functions, for instance, probably because he made it clear that his theory was psychological, not physiological.

James Newman was one of the people who sought to both identify the functions as cognitive and also locate them in brain hemispheres (see Fig. 3) (1990). Although this approach is unsupported by current neurological knowledge, Newman was a significant person. A hemispherical approach was also used by Lenore Thomson and Walter Lowen to explain the functions in those terms. Localisation of brain activities can be seen as an extension of the phrenological view (Uttal 2001), particularly when its propositions are taken literally, or reductively as in hemispherical assertions. Dario Nardi's recent work, involving multiple methods appears to take into account the non-reductive aspects of brain processes (Geyer 2011c)

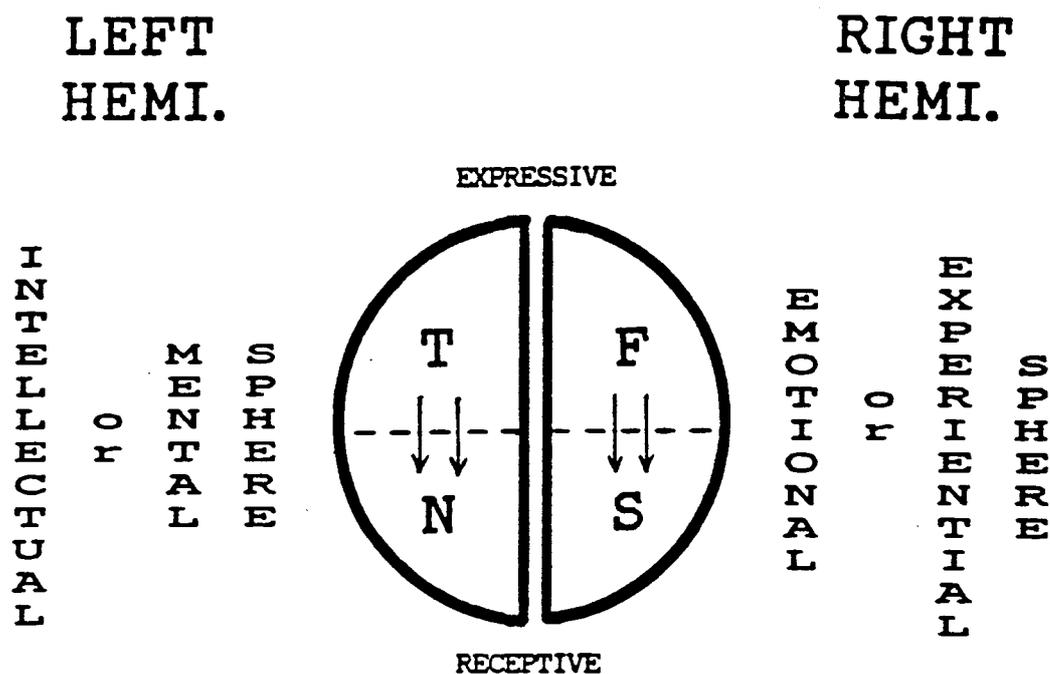


Fig.3. James Newman's cognitive idea of type and the brain (1990)

Social class often modulates the relation between genes and psychological functions

Jerome Kagan

Psychological Concerns. Although these issues are focused in the particular space occupied by Jungian aspects of personality type, they clearly have a relevance to the world of psychology as a whole. The core question(s) of what it means to be a person and/or to find out what people are like and be accurate about it. There is also a question of whether good intent is sufficient on its own where people are concerned, but that is not the current focus.

The developmental psychologist **Jerome Kagan**, has expressed concern over many years with where the field of psychology is, and where it is going. His most recent book identifies it as a “crisis.” (2012). Kagan is relevant to the issues under discussion for several reasons: he has researched the development of children’s personality for several decades; his writing shows an appreciation for both neuroscientific and social research; he demonstrates a wide and deep range of reading and experience not restricted to his profession and he likes Jung (in a restricted sense), but not self-report instruments.

Apart from the last criteria, there are some similarities with G.E.R. Lloyd including that both men appear to be looking for what might be the case, rather than attaching themselves to a particular ideology.

In an article from 2007, Kagan wrote that “the search for restricted neuronal clusters that may be the foundations of equally specific psychological functions or representations of knowledge is not a novel pursuit but is part of a continuing effort to assess the biological contributions to all psychological phenomena,” referring to phrenologists, Freud and others, as in this paper.

Kagan points out that, while “most neuroscientists...acknowledge that most psychological processes are accompanied by a cascade of brain states in circuits involving diverse areas of the cortex and brain stem” how they write about their research is very often quite different, for instance in localising a “fear state” in the amygdala. He doubts “the concept of an autonomous psychological system” (an attractive idea for some type users), but considers that “study of the correlations between brain activity and psychological phenomena is [not] without value.” (p.365)

The focus of Kagan’s critique on measuring personality *via* self-report instruments is the “Big Five,” considered by many to be the trait equivalent of the MBTI. He questions the reliance on words as indicators of personality categories – “the popular concepts in a language need not be valid theoretical categories” (p368), the reliance on samples of people [e.g. students; managers] predominantly of a particular social class and educational level, as well as cultural differences. This does not mean for Kagan that these questionnaires don’t have value, simply that there need to be other methods used as well, rather than one.

Although type questionnaires are not trait questionnaires, this criticism is pertinent to their use and effectiveness as well, particularly in the current post-literate age. Yet much of the literature on type relates to questionnaires, not the ideas of Jung in themselves.

Finally, Kagan observes that “the mind is attracted to ideas that refer to effects with single causes, possess a broad application, and are concordant with contemporary ethical premises. However, most psychological phenomena are not the product of a single cause” p372

This comment is particularly relevant for students and users of Jung’s ideas. In the case of this study, this involves what he understood functions to be and how he used the term. His energetic approach appears a much less concrete perspective than the tendency to say that a behaviour relates to a specific function, given that people do the same thing for different reasons, and it’s the “why” rather than any particular action that’s pertinent.

Of course, people often don’t know why they do things; some people can’t tell you anything about themselves. So perhaps emphasis should be directed more to consciousness – whatever that might be – than what sometimes appear to be overly mechanistic and materialist interpretations of behaviour.

I regard my theories as suggestions and attempts at the formulation of a new scientific concept of psychology based in the first place upon immediate experience with human beings

C.G.Jung

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