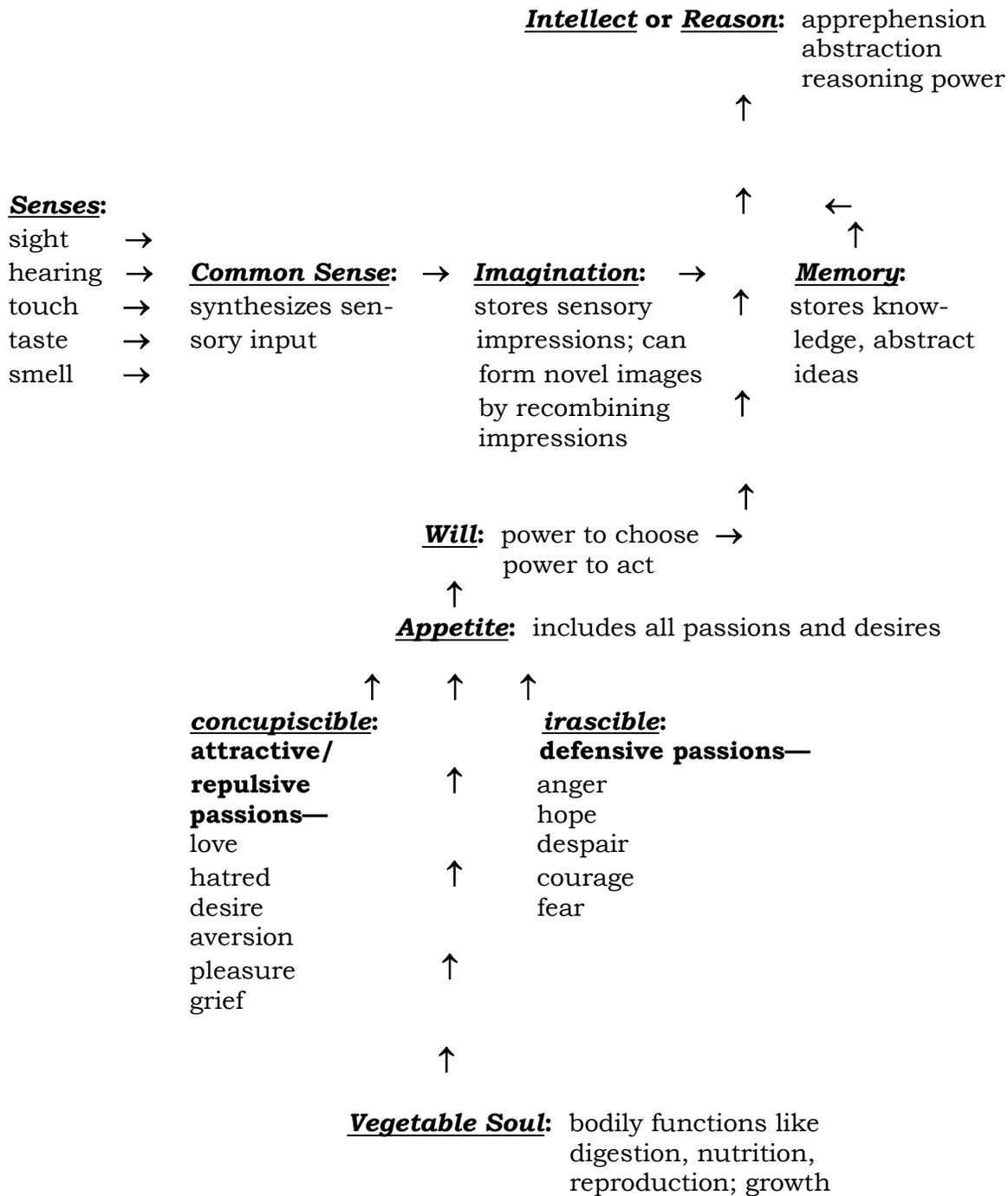


The Renaissance Soul in Diagram

Courtesy of Professor Vicki Silver, UC Irvine



The Soul in Renaissance Philosophy

Courtesy of Professor Vicki Silver, UC Irvine

According to Renaissance physiology and psychology, the soul had three powers, or man was said to possess three souls, corresponding to different levels in the faculties and functions of living matter. These three souls, or, alternatively, three powers of the soul, were:

1. The **vegetable**, or vegetable soul, which humans possess in common with plants and animals. It has three powers, or virtues:

- A. Reproduction
- B. Nourishment
- C. Growth

2. The **sensitive** (or, in Renaissance English, “sensible”) soul, possessed by humans in common with the animals. It has two faculties:

A. Knowing. The knowing parts of the sensible soul are two:

- 1. The *exterior*, consisting of the five senses.
- 2. The *interior*, consisting of the imagination (or fancy), the common sense, and the memory.

B. Desiring. The desiring part of the soul, sometimes called the sensitive appetite, has two powers:

- 1. The *concupiscible*, or desiring, power, which includes the passions of love and hatred, desire and aversion, joy or pleasure, sadness or grief.
- 2. The *irascible* power, including the chief passions of anger, hope, despair, courage and fear.

3. The **rational** soul, possessed by humans alone. It has two great powers:

A. The understanding (synonyms: *reason, intellect, judgment*), or judging power.

B. The will, or rational appetite, the power of inner motion.

Right action requires that reason and the will (which can move the intellect) cooperate to direct and control the activities of the sensible soul, especially the passions. Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, however, the predominance of passion and the senses has made such cooperation difficult to attain, as Lorenzo from *The Merchant of Venice* points out to his lover, Jessica:

There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls,
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it. (V.i.60-65)
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