

QUATERNITY

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1. Core Definition and Jungian Postulate

The term **Quaternity**, within the framework of Analytical Psychology established by Carl Gustav Jung, refers fundamentally to the fourfold structure observed across various psychic and symbolic domains. Most prominently, it describes the four primary psychological functions of consciousness--Thinking, Feeling, Sensing, and Intuiting--which Jung postulated form the basis of the individual's ego operation and personality structure. The Quaternity is not merely a classification scheme but represents a dynamic, holistic structure necessary for psychic equilibrium and completeness. Jung observed that structures organized into three (the Trinity or Tria) often required the addition of a fourth element (the inferior function or the shadow aspect) to achieve wholeness, transforming the incomplete structure into a complete Quaternity.

This fourfold model stands in contrast to dualistic or triadic systems of psychological understanding prevalent in other schools of thought. For Jung, the number four possessed immense archetypal significance, appearing spontaneously in dreams, myths, philosophical systems, and religious iconography across disparate cultures throughout history. The Quaternity, therefore, serves as a universal archetype of wholeness (or the Self) and order, providing a conceptual framework through which the chaotic nature of the unconscious can be mapped and integrated into consciousness. The complete psychological function of the ego necessitates the interplay and balance of these four functions, organized into two rational functions (Thinking and Feeling) and two irrational functions (Sensing and Intuiting).

The significance of the Quaternity extends beyond the functional operations of the ego; it illustrates the inherent tendency of the psyche to structure itself around four cardinal points. Jung noted that wherever he looked--in philosophical systems, in the four elements of ancient science (earth, air, fire, water), in the four points of the compass, or in the four dimensions of space and time--the schema of four emerged as a foundational organizational principle. In psychological terms, the four functions are viewed as fundamental tools employed by the ego to orient itself in the world and process reality, encompassing the perception of objective reality and the subjective evaluation of that reality.

2. The Four Functions of Ego

Jung identified the four functions as specialized activities that provide different modes of apprehending the world, essential for a complete psychological existence. These functions are arranged into two complementary pairs: the perceiving functions and the judging functions. The irrational functions--Sensing and Intuiting--are modes of perception, detailing how information is

acquired. The rational functions--Thinking and Feeling--are modes of judgment, determining how that information is evaluated and used to make decisions. The fundamental tension and required integration among these four constitute the core dynamic of the Quaternity in personality structure.

The **Thinking** function is the rational process concerned with objective truth and logic, seeking to understand the world through intellectual analysis, categorization, and logical consequence. It strives for objective principles and impersonal criteria. Conversely, the **Feeling** function is also rational, but it is focused on subjective value judgments, dealing with acceptance, rejection, and emotional weighting--determining what is important or valuable to the individual and their social group. Thinking and Feeling operate as polar opposites; when one is dominant, the other tends to be repressed or underdeveloped.

The irrational functions deal with concrete reality and possibilities. **Sensing** is the function of immediate, concrete perception, registering what is actually present in the external or internal world through the five senses. It is concerned with facts and details, operating in the here and now. In opposition, **Intuiting** is the function of perceiving possibilities, potentials, and underlying meanings that are not immediately apparent to the senses. It grasps the whole picture or future outcomes via unconscious processes. Like the judging functions, Sensing and Intuiting exist in a compensatory relationship within the psyche.

In any given individual, one function is typically developed as the **superior function**, forming the primary mode of adaptation and operation for the conscious ego. The function diametrically opposed to the superior function is known as the **inferior function**. This inferior function remains largely unconscious, primitive, and often characterized by emotional intensity and lack of control. The inferior function is crucially important because it acts as the gateway to the unconscious and the source of psychic renewal, compelling the individual toward the integration of the repressed quarter of their personality.

3. Quaternity in Psychic Structure and Typology

The Quaternity provides the scaffolding for Jung's expansive theory of psychological types, formalized in his influential 1921 work, *Psychological Types*. By combining the four fundamental functions with two basic attitudes--Extraversion (orientation toward the external world) and Introversion (orientation toward the internal, subjective world)--Jung derived the eight main personality types. Each type is defined by its superior function and attitude (e.g., Extraverted Thinking or Introverted Feeling). This system illustrates the myriad ways individuals utilize the basic four tools for adaptation.

The functional quartet--consisting of the superior function, two auxiliary functions (one rational, one irrational, both less developed than the superior), and the inferior function--is the true representation of the Quaternity in action within the ego complex. The auxiliary functions serve to

support the dominant function and provide some degree of balance, ensuring that the individual is not entirely one-sided. For instance, a Thinking dominant type must have either Sensing or Intuition as an auxiliary function, but not both, and the opposite rational function (Feeling) remains inferior.

The Quaternity emphasizes the inherent incompleteness of the conscious ego. Consciousness, by its very nature, tends toward specialization and differentiation, prioritizing one function and repressing the others, particularly the inferior function. This repression creates a deficit, demanding that the individual eventually confront the underdeveloped aspect of their personality. The pressure to integrate the unconscious material, represented by the inferior function, is often experienced through dreams, symptoms, or crises, propelling the individual toward greater psychological maturity and the subsequent stages of individuation.

4. Symbolic and Archetypal Significance

Jung viewed the Quaternity not merely as a descriptive model of personality but as a powerful **archetype of order** and totality emerging from the collective unconscious. The appearance of the number four in symbolic forms--such as the square, the cross, the four cardinal directions (North, South, East, West), or the four seasons--reflects a universal human need to structure and stabilize experience. This archetypal significance lends immense weight to the psychological model, suggesting it is not an arbitrary construction but a mirroring of intrinsic psychic architecture.

The most important symbolic representation of the integrated Quaternity is the mandala. Jung studied mandalas across various cultures, recognizing them as symbolic representations of the Self--the striving for wholeness. Mandalas frequently feature a central point surrounded by a square or four distinct segments, symbolizing the ordering and unification of disparate elements of the psyche into a cohesive whole. When an individual actively engages with the meaning of their own Quaternity through analysis or active imagination, the unconscious often compensates by producing mandala images in dreams, signaling the process of integration.

Furthermore, the Quaternity highlights the necessary presence of the rejected, dark, or inferior aspect--the fourth element--to achieve perfection. If the psyche were structured as a Tria (three elements), it would remain unstable and inherently flawed, lacking the necessary opposite to anchor it to reality. The addition of the fourth, often characterized by its unconsciousness and primitive nature, ensures that the structure encompasses the full spectrum of reality, including the irrational and shadow aspects, thereby establishing a complete, self-regulating system.

5. Quaternity and the Process of Individuation

The concept of the Quaternity is intrinsically linked to the central goal of Analytical Psychology: individuation. Individuation is the lifelong process by which an individual becomes a differentiated,

whole entity, encompassing both conscious and unconscious contents. The psychological functions serve as the instruments through which the ego navigates this journey, and the integration of the Quaternity marks a critical milestone in this developmental process.

For individuation to progress, the individual must bring the inferior function into conscious awareness and learn to use it constructively, rather than being constantly overwhelmed by its primitive eruptions from the unconscious. This integration involves painful confrontation, as the inferior function is often associated with personal weaknesses, vulnerability, and the contents of the personal shadow. By consciously struggling to differentiate this neglected area, the individual expands the scope of the ego and moves closer to alignment with the Self, the archetype of wholeness.

The culmination of integrating the Quaternity is often described as the transcending function--the emergence of a new attitude or understanding that incorporates all four psychic modes. This synthesis is not merely a balance where all four functions are equally strong, but rather a state where the individual can access and utilize the appropriate function as demanded by the internal or external situation, without being rigidly confined to the dominant mode. The achievement of this fourfold integration represents a significant step towards psychic maturity and self-realization.

6. Philosophical and Alchemical Contexts

Jung's interest in the Quaternity was profoundly influenced by his extensive studies in alchemy, Gnosticism, and comparative religion, where he found countless historical precedents for the fourfold structure. In alchemical texts, the process of transmuting base matter into gold frequently involved four stages (e.g., Nigredo, Albedo, Rubedo, Citrinitas), symbolizing the psychological journey of integrating the unconscious material. The alchemists' attempt to transform matter was interpreted by Jung as a projection of the inner quest for psychological wholeness, where the four stages corresponded to necessary psychic transformations.

A key observation Jung made regarding historical structures was the recurring exclusion of the feminine or material aspect from sacred systems, often resulting in a Tria (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Jung argued that the Quaternity, by including the fourth, dark, or chthonic element (historically represented by matter, the body, or the feminine principle), restores the necessary balance to the structure. This emphasis on integrating the excluded element--the inferior and often despised aspect--underscores the psychological necessity of accepting the shadow and material reality.

The appearance of the Quaternity in cosmological and philosophical schemas reinforces its archetypal nature. Jung noted that ancient observations of reality--including the four points of the compass, the four cardinal elements, or the division of the lifespan into four stages--demonstrate a spontaneous tendency of the human mind to organize the world into stable, interconnected foursomes. This universality confirms the Quaternity as a fundamental blueprint for both external

orientation and internal psychological mapping.

7. Debates and Criticisms

While Jung's Quaternity model remains central to Analytical Psychology, it has faced criticism, particularly concerning its empirical verifiability and the rigid application of its typology. Critics from mainstream empirical psychology often argue that dividing personality into only four or eight discrete types (when considering the attitudes) oversimplifies the complexity of human behavior and cognitive processing. The model is sometimes viewed as being too abstract or philosophical, lacking the operational definitions favored by contemporary psychological measurement.

Furthermore, the strict partitioning of the functions into rational (Thinking/Feeling) and irrational (Sensing/Intuiting) has been questioned. Modern cognitive science often sees these modes of processing as intertwined rather than strictly oppositional. While the model is highly effective as a phenomenological tool for self-understanding and therapeutic application, some researchers find its reliance on archetypal symbolism rather than statistical validation problematic for a strictly scientific psychology. Nevertheless, the Quaternity continues to be highly influential, providing a deep, complex framework for understanding psychic imbalance and the path toward psychological integration.

Further Reading

[Analytical psychology \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Mandala \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Individuation \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Jungian types \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Albedo \(Alchemical Term - Wikipedia\)](#)

[Trinity \(Theological Concept - Wikipedia\)](#)