

Cultivating Cognitive Intelligence

B. Alan Wallace, Ph.D.

Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies

(<http://sbinstitute.com>)

Cognitive Imbalances

- Cognitive deficit: failure to perceive what is present in the six fields of experience
- Cognitive hyperactivity: conflation of conceptual projections with perceptual experience
- Cognitive dysfunction: distorted perceptions and conceptions of reality

The Real and Imaginary

- Pragmatically, the “real” is what can be directly perceived with any of our six senses, including mental perception.
- The “imaginary” is what we conceptually project upon the real.

The Impermanent and Permanent

- All that is directly perceived is impermanent in the sense of being in a constant state of flux, subject to change and dissolution.
- Our conceptual projections tend to be relatively static, so that we imagine that which is transient to be stable and enduring.

Real Sources of Joy and Sorrow

- We imagine that which is not a real source of happiness to be so, while failing to perceive real sources of happiness, e.g. a balanced, virtuous mind and behavior.
- We imagine that things that are not real sources of unhappiness to be so, while failing to recognize their real sources, e.g., mental afflictions that disrupt the mind and distort our perceptions of reality.

What Is Really “I” or “Mine”?

- We imagine that which is not really “I” or “mine” to be so, such as one’s profession, wealth, influence, and status.
- We fail to know who we really are and what it means for something to be “mine.”

Cognitive Deficit Regarding the Mind

- Philosopher David Chalmers: The Hard Problem is the the sheer fact of our first-person, immediate experience (qualia) and its relation to the brain.
- Philosopher Daniel Dennett: “There simply are no qualia at all.”
- Physicist Michio Kaku: “There is no such thing as the Hard Problem.” A thermostat has the lowest possible level of consciousness while humans represent the highest level currently known.
- Princeton neuroscientist Michael Graziano: “How does the brain go beyond processing information to become subjectively aware of information? The answer is: It doesn’t... there is no subjective impression; there is only information in a data-processing device.”

Cognitive Hyperactivity Regarding the Mind

B. F. Skinner (1904–1990):

“To agree that what one feels or introspectively observes are conditions of one’s own body is a step in the right direction. It is a step toward an analysis both of seeing and of seeing that one sees in purely physical terms. After substituting brain for mind, we can then move on to substituting person for brain and recast the analysis in line with the observed facts. *But what is felt or introspectively observed is not an important part of the physiology which fills the temporal gap in a historical analysis.*”

Cognitive Intelligence Regarding the Mind

- Biologist Thomas H. Huxley (1825–1895): “[H]ow it is that anything so remarkable as a state of consciousness comes about as a result of irritating nervous tissue, is just as unaccountable as the appearance of the Djinn, when Aladdin rubbed his lamp.” (*The Elements of Physiology and Hygiene*, 1869)
- Neuroscientist Donald Hoffman: “Now, Huxley knew that brain activity and conscious experiences are correlated, but he didn't know why. To the science of his day, it was a mystery. In the years since Huxley, science has learned a lot about brain activity, but the relationship between brain activity and conscious experiences is still a mystery.” (“Do We See Reality as It Is?” June 11, 2015)

Cognitive Deficit Regarding Introspection

Philosopher Alex Rosenberg, co-director of the Center for Social and Philosophical Implications of Neuroscience in the Duke Initiative for Science and Society:

- “We never have direct access to our thoughts.”
- “Self-consciousness has nothing else to work with but the same sensory data we use to figure out what other people are doing and are going to do.”
- “There is no first-person point of view... We have no privileged access to our own minds.”

(“Why You Don’t Know Your Own Mind” *New York Times*, July 18, 2016)

Cognitive Intelligence Regarding Introspection

William James:

“Introspective Observation is what we have to rely on first and foremost and always. The word introspection need hardly be defined—it means, of course, the looking into our own minds and reporting what we there discover. Everyone agrees that we there discover states of consciousness.”

Cognitive Hyperactivity Regarding Mental Disease

Neurologist Eric R. Kandel:

“The brain is a complex biological organ possessing immense computational capability: it constructs our sensory experience, regulates our thoughts and emotions, and controls our actions. It is responsible not only for relatively simple motor behaviors like running and eating, but also for complex acts that we consider quintessentially human, like thinking, speaking and creating works of art. Looked at from this perspective, our mind is a set of operations carried out by our brain. The same principle of unity applies to mental disorders.”

-

Cognitive Deficit Regarding Mental Disease

- Over the past 50 years, the creation, promotion, and use of psycho-pharmaceutical drugs has increased exponentially.
- During this same period, knowledge of the brain has similarly increased exponentially.
- During this same period, mental disorders such as depression, general anxiety, disorder, and ADHD have also increased exponentially, especially in the “developed world.”
- No psycho-pharmaceutical drugs actually cures any mental disorder, they only suppress the symptoms.
- The benefits of antidepressants are now known to be “nonexistent to negligible” in patients with mild, moderate, and even severe depression, and high doses of antidepressants are hardly more effective than low ones. “Antidepressant Drug Effects and Depression Severity: A Patient-Level Meta-analysis” *JAMA*. 2010;303(1):47-53

Remedies for Cognitive Imbalances

- Closely applying mindfulness to one's own and others' bodies, feelings, mental states, and phenomena at large, examining whether they are changing or unchanging, true sources of happiness or not, truly "I" or "mine" or not.
- Examining how they arise and the causes and conditions that give rise to them and that contribute to their dissolution

Modes of Knowledge

- Knowledge based on direct perception through the physical senses and mental perception
- Knowledge based on logical inference, such as inferring causes from their effects
- The knowledge of belief in the testimony of known authorities

Faith and Imagination

William James:

- “Where preferences are powerless to modify or produce things, faith is totally inappropriate, but for the class of facts that depend on personal preference, trust, or loyalty for actualization, “faith is not only licit and pertinent, but essential and indispensable. The truths cannot become true till our faith has made them so.”
- “In what manner do we espouse and hold fast to visions? By thinking a conception *might* be true somewhere, it *may* be true even here and now; it is *fit* to be true and it *ought* to be true; it *must* be true; it *shall* be true for *me*.”