

# Intuition – Intellect: The Dialectic of Human Life

2022

Thomas A. Burns PhD.

Klamath Falls, Oregon

## Introduction

In most activities of human life, the intellectual and intuitive functions of mind are both active – just to different degrees depending on the task. In modern western cultures where the material-objective-rational worldview dominates, we significantly underestimate the role of intuition and overestimate the role of intellect. And, many do not even recognize the intuitive at all! In this essay I will attempt to identify the attributes associated with the intellectual and intuitive faculties and locate the zones of human activity where these two mental functions – and especially the intuitive function – play important roles.

### 1) Goal of Balance

The utilization of both intellectual and intuitive capabilities in a balanced and appropriate manner at all scales is critical to the success of humans in both their individual and social lives.

### 2) Analysis and Synthesis

Intellectual mental processing relies on analysis – taking things apart to determine the “laws” of the interrelationships of the parts. Intuitive mental processing relies on synthesis – connecting entities revealing their shared identity ultimately to the point of unification.

### 3) Separation and Connection

All phenomena are regarded as separate in the intellectual perspective, while all phenomena are experienced as connected in the intuitive perspective.

### 4) Visual vs. Verbal-Mathematical Modes

Language and Mathematics are linear sequences of separate words and numerical references collected into sentences and equations to reveal larger intentions and assertions. As such, the verbal and mathematical modes accommodate the intellectual function of analysis. By contrast, the visual medium is holistic and reveals the simultaneous connections among many entities. As such, it accommodates the intuitive function of synthesis. In both cases, the primary processing modes fit the related function.

### 5) Competition and Cooperation

The condition of separation associated with the intellect invites a competitive orientation among phenomena, while the condition of connection associated with the intuitive invites a cooperative orientation among phenomena.

a. Taking and Getting for “individual” benefit – individualistic values at any social or ecological scale – are essentially competitive behaviors justified by intellectual functions. Every time humans spank a “bad” child, push aggressively through a crowd, or cut down a tree, they do so from a perspective of being separated from their “target,” reflecting the intellectual orientation.

b. Sharing and Giving for “mutual” benefit – social and ecological values at any scale – are essentially cooperative behaviors arising from intuitive function. Every time humans assist a crying child, hug, or enjoy a flower, they connect and expand their sense of self in the direction of unification in line with the intuitive orientation.

c. In terms of modern American social institutions, economy tends to be competitive [capitalism] while polity and the judiciary tend to be cooperative [democracy and rule of law]. When these institutional forces are balanced in their influence, the results tend to be fair, responsible, and ecologically sustainable. When economy is allowed to “buy” polity – money in American politics – the results trend toward inequality, irresponsibility, and lack of ecological sustainability. On the other hand, when polity dominates economy [communism] in the name of ubiquitous equality, individual initiative and effort at all levels are suppressed, leading to apathy and stagnation.

6) Everywhere in human life where connection and cooperation dominate, intuition plays a major role. Everywhere in human life where separation and competition dominate, intellect plays a major role.

a. Intellect dominates in personal gain, strategic planning, science, technology, engineering, manufacturing, construction, finance, legal work, etc.

b. Intuition dominates in communal benefit, social service, friendship, love, celebration, recreation, entertainment, ritual, art, Psi and spirituality, etc.

c. Emotion energizes both intuitive and intellectual activities with purpose.

7) Many activities in human life reveal the presence of a strong element of both intellectual-competitive and intuitive-cooperative functions: team sports, warfare, group hunting and gathering, corporate internal cooperation with external competition, etc.

### Conclusion

When we look from one mental functional extreme to the other, we miss all the middle ground where the functions mix or wax and wane in their input along a broad and lengthy continuum. Separate-objective-analytical-rational science and connected-subjective-synthetic-intuitive spirituality are only viewed as incompatible when we fail to recognize that these extremes occur on a fully integrated and universally active continuum of human mental functioning. Revealing the continuum is important in relieving the unwarranted tension between these two equally valuable human mental functions and perspectives.