



Cultivating Conative Intelligence

B. Alan Wallace | Santa Barbara Institute of Consciousness Studies | March 20, 2015

Conation



the mental faculty of purpose, desire, or will to perform an action; volition.

Conative Intelligence

the ability to discern which desires and intentions truly lead to one's own and others' wellbeing and to then adopt them, while releasing desires and intentions that undermine one's own and others' wellbeing

The Enigma of Human Intelligence

Given the principle of parsimony that characterizes biological evolution, why do humans have more intelligence than we need for our survival and procreation?

Given our extraordinary levels of intelligence, memory, and imagination, why are we as a species and as individuals not becoming happier with each generation and with each year of our lives?

Flourishing in a World of Change

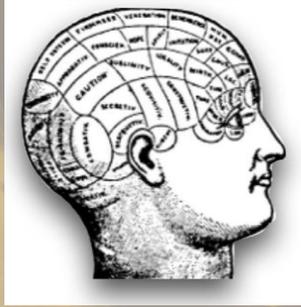
200,000 years of biological evolution since the emergence of our species as we have slowly adapted to changes in our natural environment

150 years of rapid changes in the social and natural environment, requiring rapid, conscious, psychological evolution to adapt to the environment so that the human species can not only survive but flourish

Innovating Inside: A Revolution in Mind Sciences

20th Century

1 Inflexible brains ...



2 ... only "fixed" by drugs.



21st Century

3 "Plastic" brains ...



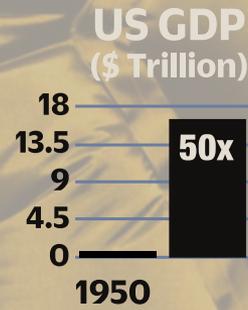
4 ... new frontiers of potential through **Mind Training**.



An Epidemic of Unhealthy Minds

DEPRESSION
IS THE
#1 CAUSE
OF DISABILITY
WORLDWIDE

RISK IS
32%
HIGHER IN
WEALTHY
COUNTRIES



CHANGE IN
WELL-BEING
(SINCE 1950):

0

INCREASE IN
DEPRESSION
(SINCE 1950):

10x

20%
OF HIGH SCHOOL-AGED
BOYS IN THE US HAVE
BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH
ADHD

30%
OF ALL US
VETERANS
HAVE
CONSIDERED
SUICIDE

22
COMMIT IT
EVERY
DAY

The Pursuits of Happiness

« I believe that the very purpose of our life is to seek happiness. Whether one believes in religion or not, whether one believes in this religion or that religion, we all are seeking something better in life. So, I think, the very motion of our life is towards happiness. »

HH the Dalai Lama

Albert Einstein

« Well-being and *happiness* never appeared to me as an absolute aim. I am even inclined to compare such moral aims to the ambitions of a *pig*. »

The Human Pursuit of Happiness

All animals seek pleasure, but humans aspire to not only be happy, but to be *happier*. That is, “we all are seeking something better in life.”

Is happiness the ultimate goal or a means to another end, such as wealth, power, and prestige?

With conative intelligence we find effective means to find fulfillment and genuine happiness.

Two Kinds of Happiness

Hedonic pleasure

Derived from what we can get from the world and dependent upon pleasant sensory and mental, and neural stimulation

Genuine happiness

Derived from what we bring to the world and not dependent upon pleasant sensory and mental stimulation

Dimensions of Human Flourishing

Wisdom

The diagram features three light green circles arranged in a triangle. Each circle contains a white rectangular box with a dimension of human flourishing. The circles are positioned at the top right, bottom center, and bottom left of the frame.

Mental Balance

Ethics

Dimensions of Human Flourishing

Social & environmental flourishing

Behavior that is conducive to one's own and others' flourishing is ethical.



Ethics

Dimensions of Human Flourishing

Psychological flourishing

Conative, attentional, cognitive, and emotional

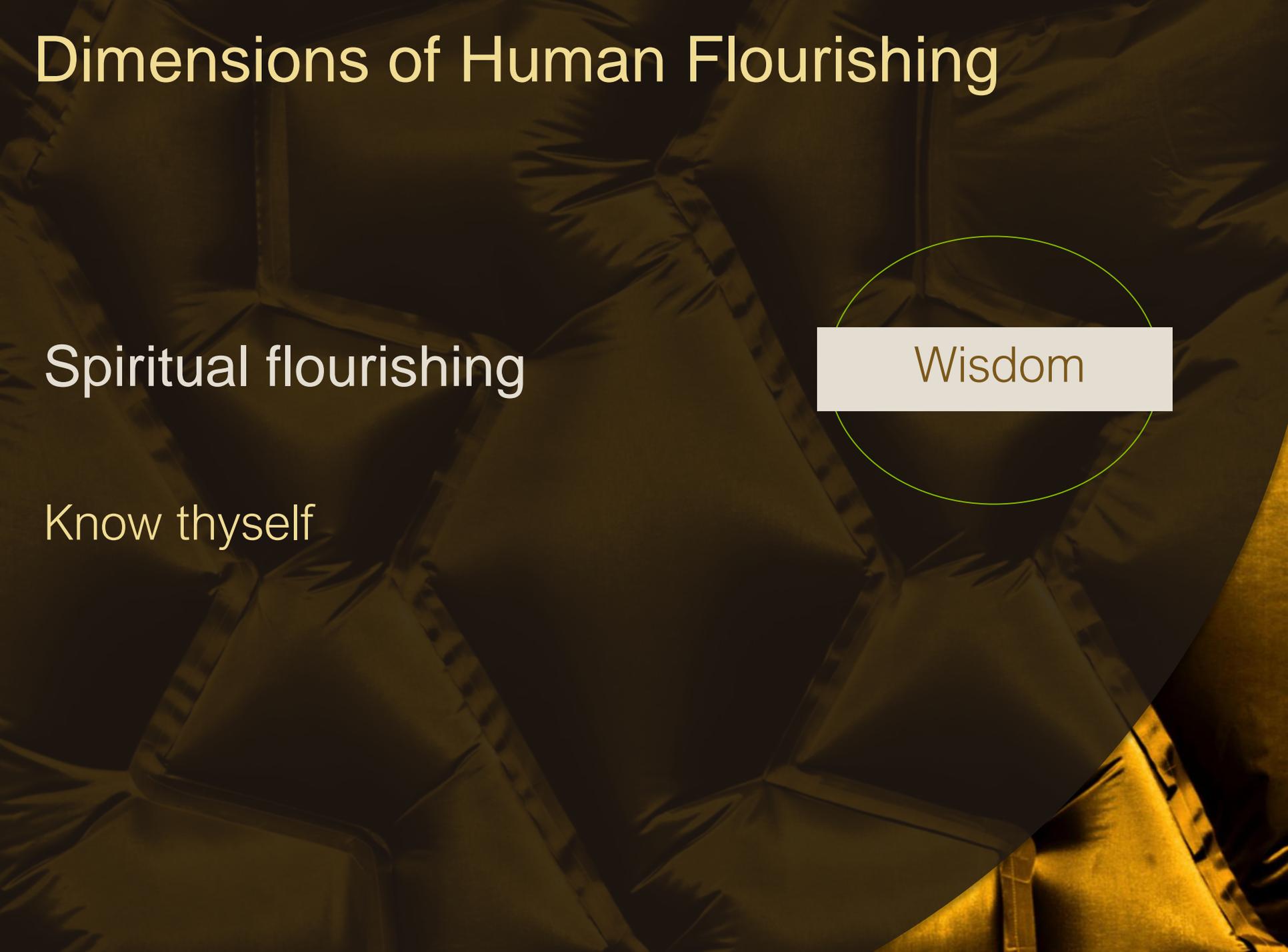


Mental Balance

Dimensions of Human Flourishing

Spiritual flourishing

Know thyself



Wisdom

Social & Environmental Flourishing

Harmony within the family, communities, nations, and international relations

Harmony with the ecosphere, maintaining a sustainable economy, without environmental degradation

A harmonious balance of unity and diversity

Psychological Flourishing

A sense of well-being that is not contingent on external or internal stimuli, and is qualified by serenity, joy, and contentment, rather than excitement and arousal

Cultivated with conative, attentional, cognitive and affective intelligence

Conative Imbalances

Conative deficit →

apathetic loss of desire for happiness and its causes, e.g. *acedia*

Conative hyperactivity →

obsessive desire that obscures the reality of the present

Conative dysfunction →

desire for things not conducive to one's own or others' well-being, e.g. addiction

Two Kinds of Unhappiness

Stimulus-dependent

Unhappiness that is triggered by misfortune or unpleasant circumstances, which the world seems to impose upon us

Stimulus-independent

Unhappiness that arises from within, without apparently being caused by outside circumstances

Causes and Conditions of Unhappiness

Virtually **any outer circumstances** could trigger unhappiness for someone.

The **true causes of unhappiness** are the imbalances and afflictions of our own minds, including craving, hostility, and delusion.

Types of Addiction

1

Addiction to sensory and intellectual stimulation

2

Addiction to obsessive, compulsive ideation

3

Addiction to activity

« When I have occasionally set myself to consider the different distractions of men, the pains and perils to which they expose themselves at court or in war, whence arise so many quarrels, passions, bold and often bad ventures, etc., I have discovered that all the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their own chamber. »

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

The Nature of Craving & Attachment

A kind of desire in which one falsely superimposes agreeable qualities upon an object, cognitively screens out its disagreeable qualities, and then desires the object as a true source of pleasure and well-being.

Common objects of craving → wealth, power, and fame

Fourfold Vision Quest

What would make you truly happy?

What would you love to receive from the world to help you find such well-being?

How would you love to transform and mature inwardly in order to realize such well-being?

In order to lead the most meaningful life possible, what would you love to offer to the world?

Between the Spark and the Flame

Mindfulness

the faculty by which we are able to bear in mind a chosen topic, without distraction or forgetfulness

Introspection

the faculty by which we are able to monitor our desires, attention, thoughts and emotions

Introspectively note the interval between “the spark” of desire and “the flame” of an intention and its resultant behavior.

The Cultivation of Free Will

Free will is the ability to make decisions to act in ways that are conducive to one's and others' genuine happiness.

The more the mind is dominated by afflictions of craving, hostility, and delusion, the less free we are.

Introspectively recognize desires before they manifest in behavior, and choose which ones to adopt and which ones to release.

The Perfection of Conative Intelligence



Having **the wisdom to desire only that** which is truly beneficial to oneself and others in life

Knowing what desires and intentions lead to **happiness beyond this life** and acting upon them

Knowing what desires and intentions lead to **liberation and spiritual awakening** and acting upon them

Spiritual Flourishing



A quality of well-being that carries one through all the vicissitudes of life and death

Derives from knowing ourselves and our relation to the universe – liberation through insight

Wisdom

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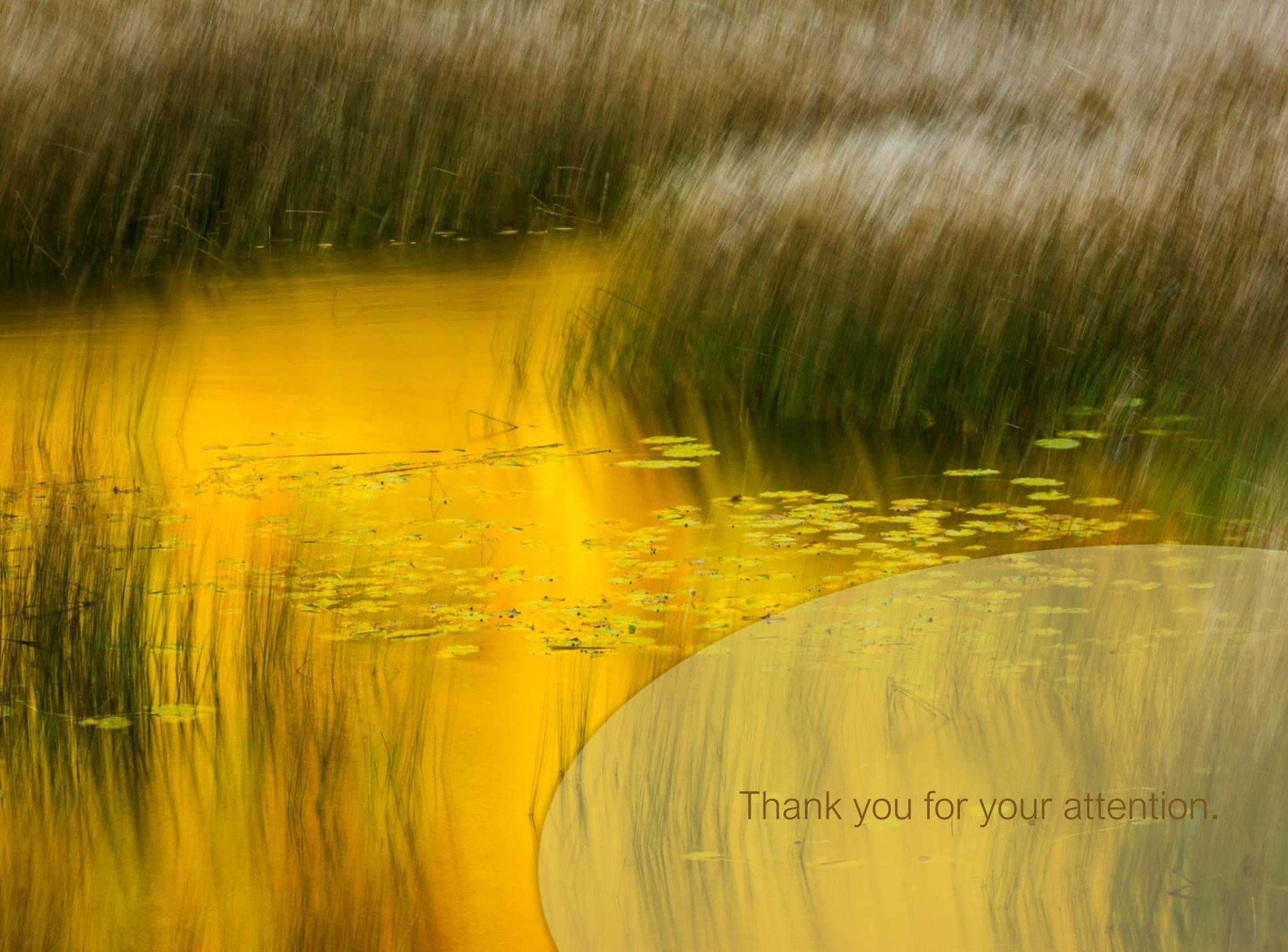
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