

Title: What Is the Intellect? | It Is Not Always the Intellect Which Makes Humans Superior

H1 Does the Intellect Make Human Beings Superior to Animals?

If you were to provide a comprehensive and precise definition of the **intellect**, what would your answer be? **What is the intellect**, and what does it do?

Though almost all of us are familiar with the concept of the intellect and can distinguish between **rational** or **irrational** acts, it may be difficult to offer a precise, scientific definition of the intellect. We use it without knowing what this faculty or its origin is.

- Is the intellect the same as the brain, as some people think, or is it something inside the brain?
- Is the faculty of intellect unique to humans, or do other creatures also have it?
- Is it possible for the intellect to make mistakes, or does it always make the right decision?

The answers to these questions acquaints us with one of the most powerful dimensions of our existence, the intellectual dimension. The intellect is an extraordinary faculty. It can greatly contribute to the growth of our spiritual [human] dimension, as long as we recognize the factors which harm the intellect and manage them.

H2 What Is the Intellect?

In which part of your body is your intellect located? Can you see or touch it? Some people believe that the intellect is part of the brain or it is located there, but there are evident differences between these two. The brain is a material entity with weight, volume, and color. It has also physical and chemical interactions. But the intellect is not material or measurable, and no interaction takes place within it.

If the power and **ability to reason** was inside the brain, animals would also have it. But we know that animals have brains, but not intellect. So what is the intellect, and what is its origin?

We have already stated that, in addition to the material and physical dimension, we have an immaterial dimension called the **soul** on which our life depends. If the spirit leaves our body, we will no longer be alive. This is what happens when we die. The intellect is one of the **faculties of the soul**, so it is an immaterial element and has nothing to do with the body. This is while the intellect uses the brain as a tool for **cognition** and **analysis**. The faculty of intellect exists from the moment the spirit is breathed into the body of the fetus, but it is inactive. As a person grows and progresses through the vegetative and animal stages, his intellect also becomes active.

H2 What Does the Intellect Do?

Just like other faculties of the soul, the intellect is a means for cognition. We are all familiar with general concepts like love, beauty, injustice, fear, and so on. It is the intellect which **understands** these concepts and distinguishes between good and

bad, ugliness and beauty, good and evil, as well as truth and falsehood. Now, an important question arises: “Is it possible for the intellect to make mistakes in distinguishing between truth and falsehood?”

The intellect can **make judgments** without error only if all its input is **correct** and complete. But this is not possible because, as we know, the **intellect** receives its **input** from the five senses. These senses carry **information** from the surrounding world to the brain through the faculties of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. This data is analyzed, and the intellect makes the final judgement. As the input data cannot be flawless, the intellect cannot function without error. This is something that we experience in visual and optical illusion games: We see and accept something that does not exist in reality.

In addition to wrong information, there is another situation in which the intellect does not make mistakes, but it is unable to make the right decision. For example, when we give too much attention to our animal dimension, it grows too strong and can overcome the intellect. In this case, although the intellect can distinguish between good and bad, we continue to do the wrong thing. Therefore, if we could use the intellect independently of any other input, or not let the desires of other faculties interfere with it, we could be completely sure of the correctness of the decisions that the intellect makes.

There are numerous examples which show that the lower dimensions of being (inanimate, vegetative, and animal)¹ overpower the intellectual dimension. A simple and concrete example is when we leave the house to buy a necessary item, but after a few hours of wandering around, we will return home with a lot of

¹. From now on, we will refer to all these dimension as the animal dimension

unnecessary goods and an empty wallet! We often do not need any of the items we have bought, and we are fully aware of this fact. But the moment we lay our eyes on them, our desire for them takes over, and we find ourselves unable to resist this desire. Sometimes, we may not be hungry, but as soon as we see colorful food stuffs, our desire gets the better of us! Today, no one is unaware of the dangers of smoking, yet many people still smoke.

These were just a few typical examples which show the animal dimension can overpower the intellectual one. In most cases, it harms the person himself. But there are instances where the animalistic temperament of some people puts the lives of millions of people in danger. You can certainly provide better examples than we can.

H2 Is the Intellect Only Given to Humans?

The intellect is not limited to humans. Angels have intellect as well and are created from pure intellect. However, angels are non-material beings and the inanimate, vegetative, and animal dimensions have no place in their existence. So the harms of these dimensions do not affect them, and their intellect does not make any mistakes. In other words, angels are made of pure intellect, that is why they are innocent and make no mistakes.

As we mentioned, angels have intellect, but they lack lust. Animals have lust but no intellect. We humans have both of these faculties. Animal properties bring us to the level of animals, while intellectual properties make us similar to angels.

Some people believe that the existence of the intellect is what makes us superior to other creatures, but this is not true. Angels have intellect, so there is no difference between us and them in that regard. Our superiority over other creatures is related to the spiritual [human] dimension of our existence. This dimension is higher in rank than the intellect and does not exist in any other creature except the human being.

H2 The Dominance of Animal Properties over Intellectual Properties

The human being is a combination of the intellect and lust, and there is a constant conflict between these two dimensions of our existence. Sometimes the intellect overcomes lust, and sometimes lust overpowers the intellect. The dominance of lust is not limited to inanimate desires such as shopping, or vegetative desires such as eating, but it also enters the realm of intellectual properties.

Studying; scholarly work; becoming a **doctor, engineer, religious scholar, inventor, scientist, and professor**; and anything else in the field of **science**, knowledge, and thought, all belong to the realm of intellectual properties. Some people are not much interested in houses, cars, clothes, and food, but instead they have a passion for **scientific work and studies**. They love research, and publishing books and articles. Although intellectual perfections are more valuable than other perfections, they can lead to the same harms that we mentioned earlier. That is, they keep us so busy that we forget the spiritual [human] dimension of our existence altogether.

Gaining **knowledge** is a sacred act; all societies respect **scientists** and **thinkers**. However, it is important to note that acquiring **knowledge** is an intellectual perfection, not a spiritual one. Intellectual perfection, like other ones, must pave

the way for the **development** of the spiritual dimension, otherwise it will become a harm itself. There are many educated people, including religious scholars, whose lust for knowledge has kept them from attaining spiritual [human] perfection.

The intellective dimension is one of the main dimensions of our existence, and the properties associated with it are more holy and sacred than the inanimate, vegetative, and animal properties. Possession of the intellect is, on the one hand, the boundary separating us from animals, and on the other hand, the common boundary between us and angels. We are similar to angels in that we have the intellect, but if this intellect is under the rule of animal faculties, it deviates from its original path and becomes a tool to fulfill the desires of the animal faculties of the soul. So having the intellect alone cannot make us superior to angels. This **supremacy** is potential and will only be actualized if the human or spiritual dimension rules over all other dimensions of our existence. Otherwise, we will descend gradually until we are on the same level as, if not lower than, animals.