A Handbook of Wisdom

Psychological Perspectives

Edited by
Robert J. Sternberg
Jennifer Jordan

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List of Contributors

Monika Ardelt
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL
Paul B. Baltes
Max Planck Institute of Human Development
Berlin, Germany
James E. Birren
University of California
Los Angeles, CA
Susan Bluck
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL
Warren S. Brown
Fuller Theological Seminary
Pasadena, CA
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
Claremont Graduate University
Claremont, CA
Jessica Dörner
International University Bremen
Bremen, Germany
Lloyd S. Etheredge
Yale University
New Haven, CT
Howard Gardner
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Cambridge, MA
Judith Glück
University of Vienna
Jennifer Jordan
Yale University
New Haven, CT

Ute Kunzmann
Max Planck Institute of Human Development Berlin, Germany
Joel J. Kupperman
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Cambridge, MA
Paula Marshall
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Cambridge, MA
Charlotte Mickler
International University Bremen
Bremen, Germany
Jeanne Nakamura
Claremont Graduate University
Claremont, CA
Lisa M. Osbeck
State University of West Georgia
Carrollton, GA
Willis F. Overton
Temple University
Philadelphia, PA
M. Pasupathi
University of Utah
Salt Lake City, UT
M. J. Richardson
University of Utah
Salt Lake City, UT
Daniel N. Robinson
Philosophy Faculty, Oxford University, UK
Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Georgetown University
Jeffrey L. Solomon
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Cambridge, MA
Ursula M. Staudinger
International University Bremen
Bremen, Germany

Robert J. Sternberg
Yale University
New Haven, CT
Cheryl M. Svensson
California State University
Fullerton, CA
Masami Takahashi
Northeastern Illinois University
Chicago, IL

Foreword

Monika Ardelt
University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

Back in 1990, when I was a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I decided to investigate predictors of life satisfaction in old age as my dissertation topic. I was not convinced by the traditional sociological explanation that well-being in old age depended mostly on the conditions older people encountered, such as physical health, finances, socioeconomic status, social involvement, and residential situation. I was searching for a concept that would represent the internal strength of older adults, which enabled some older people to be satisfied with their life despite adverse circumstances. After studying the literature on lifelong psychosocial growth, it occurred to me that the acquisition of wisdom might hold the key to subjective well-being in old age. Although I now had the concept, I had no idea how to define and much less how to measure wisdom.

I remember going to the library to pick up another book on the life course and aging when, right next to it, I saw the edited book by Sternberg (1990) on *Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development.* It felt like a book sent by heaven, and it became instantly my "bible" on wisdom. Up to this point I had no idea that wisdom was actually a topic of modern scientific inquiries and that respected researchers had tackled this somewhat esoteric topic. Not that it made my life much easier at first. As Birren and Svensson mention in this *Handbook*, the 13 chapters in the 1990 edited *Wisdom* book resulted in 13 different definitions of wisdom. However, the 1990 book introduced

Explicit theories are the theories of an elite group of experts in the field. Yet, if wisdom is considered a highly advanced stage of human development that only very few individuals attain, wisdom experts might be extremely rare. Hence, one might argue that most wisdom theories are implicit theories since not many people, even among wisdom researchers, might be genuine experts in wisdom and an externally verifiable criterion of wisdom does not exist. That would mean that "explicit wisdom theories" are simply the implicit theories of wisdom researchers. Most explicit theories of wisdom researchers, however, show considerable overlap with implicit (lay) theories of wisdom.

Kunzmann and Baltes introduce the Berlin wisdom paradigm, an explicit theory of wisdom developed by Baltes and colleagues at the Max Planck Institute of Berlin and probably the most widely known contemporary model of the empirical study of wisdom to date. According to this paradigm, wisdom can be defined as expert knowledge in the meaning and conduct of life and in the fundamental pragmatics of life (i.e., life planning, life management, and life review). Wisdom-related knowledge is assessed according to five wisdom criteria: rich factual knowledge, rich procedural knowledge, life-span contextualism, value relativism, and uncertainty. Kunzmann and Baltes also give an overview of the antecedents, correlates, and consequences of wisdom-related knowledge.

The authors in Part I of the *Handbook* investigate the development of wisdom across the life span, using the Berlin wisdom paradigm. The questions that are addressed are (a) when and how does wisdom-related knowledge develop and (b) what is the relation between wisdom-related knowledge and age in adulthood? Pasupathi and Richardson report that wisdom-related knowledge increases during adolescence as the result of normative developmental changes in cognitive abilities, self/identity development, and personality development. In adulthood,

however, Jordan does not find any evidence that wisdom-related knowledge changes with age. Rather, the relation between wisdom-related knowledge and age appears to support the crystallized model of wisdom in adulthood: Wisdom-related knowledge tends to neither increase nor decrease during the adulthood years but remains relatively stable.

Because this result is based on cross-sectional data alone and on the assessment of wisdom as general wisdom-related knowledge, the evidence is not conclusive at this point. On the one hand, it supports the generally held assumption that wisdom does not *automatically* increase with age. On the other hand, longitudinal studies have shown that wisdom tends to increase during adulthood for people who might be particularly interested and motivated to pursue the attainment of personal wisdom (Helson & Srivastava, 2002; Wink & Helson, 1997).

The authors in Part II of the *Handbook* analyze the connection between wisdom and the person. Staudinger, Dörner, and Mickler start with the question whether wisdom is (a) a personality characteristic, (b) the result or correlate of specific personality characteristics, or (c) both. To answer the question, Staudinger, Dörner, and Mickler differentiate between general and personal wisdom, based on their notion that one can have general wisdom without being wise (personal wisdom). General wisdom (i.e., insight into life in general) is considered a precursor for personal wisdom (i.e., insight into one's own life). Even though not all researchers might agree with this distinction (Ardelt, 2004; Moody, 1986), it is useful to highlight some of the existing differences in the theoretical and empirical approaches to the study of wisdom.

Whereas Staudinger, Dörner, and Mickler believe that general wisdom precedes personal wisdom, Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura argue that a wise person is an individual who has sought and found general wisdom.

Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura are particularly interested in the emotions that accompany the pursuit and acquisition of wisdom-related knowledge. They conclude that both the pursuit and realization of wisdom bring forth positive emotions of joy and serenity through the transcendence of self-centeredness. This finding, however, is in direct contradiction to Staudinger, Dörner, and Mickler's viewpoint that personal wisdom does not result in subjective well-being because the development of wisdom has its costs. The question remains whether seeing reality more clearly is intrinsically rewarding and enjoyable or leads to the somber realization that life is suffering. A third possibility is that the mental clarity that accompanies wisdom illuminates not only the reality of human suffering but also the path to the cessation of suffering (e.g., Nanamoli, 2001).

Part IV deals with wisdom in society. Kupperman discusses the difference between knowing-how (e.g., to live) and knowing-that (e.g., knowledge and theories about the good life or the fundamental pragmatics of life). He argues that the "knowing-that" of wisdom by itself is meaningless unless it is applied in "knowing-how" to live a life that is good for oneself, good for others, and good for the larger society. In other words, wisdom is knowing how to live a good life, which must be exhibited in the life of a wise person. To develop wisdom, scholarly learning is less important than the realization of wisdom, which requires a personal transformation and good role models. Kupperman demonstrates that moral and ethical choices necessitate the knowing-how of wisdom.

Gardner, Solomon, and Marshall give an overview of their study on generative wisdom. They define generative wisdom as work (i.e., products, outcomes, and initiatives) by professionals that is intended to maximize the benefit and welfare of present and future generations. Gardner, Solomon, and Marshall present six case studies that illustrate the development of generative wisdom through

three mental models of boundary crossing: (a) going beyond conventional knowledge or understanding, (b) seeing beyond the here and now, and (c) going beyond traditional professional boundaries.

Etheredge states that wisdom in public policy includes good judgment and commitment to the well-being of all present and future members of society and, in international politics, also to members of other nations. He defines wise policies by eight values for human betterment: power, enlightenment (education and personal growth), wealth, (physical and mental) well-being, skill, affection, rectitude, and respect. Theoretically, political wisdom should lead to a better world, but as Etheredge shows, it is not necessarily clear how political wisdom might be implemented and how a better world might be attained.

The *Handbook* concludes in Part V with a discussion of the absence of wisdom. Sternberg opens the last chapter with the observation that "smart people can be foolish." Hence, intelligence and knowledge by themselves do not protect against foolishness. Sternberg introduces an imbalance theory of foolishness, which is a mirror image of his balance theory of wisdom (Sternberg, 1998). Five fallacies in thinking increase the likelihood of foolish behavior: unrealistic optimism, egocentrism, and illusions of omniscience, omnipotence, and invulnerability. Sternberg argues that the study of foolishness is important, because the costs of foolishness to the individual, others, and/or society can be great.

The different wisdom perspectives presented in the *Handbook of Wisdom* might remind the reader of Buddha's story of the blind men and the elephant. According to the story, a king gathered several men who were blind from birth around an elephant and told them to describe the animal to him. Each of the blind men gave a different definition of the elephant, depending on the part of the elephant he was investigating (Nanamoli, 2001). In some

sense, this might still be the stage of current wisdom research. We concentrate on certain aspects of wisdom, depending on the focus of our research interests, but the whole meaning of wisdom escapes us. Interestingly, Takahashi and Overton report in the *Handbook* that people's implicit theories of wisdom tend to correspond to an ideal self, which varies in different cultures. Could it be that lay persons' and wisdom researchers' theories of wisdom represent an ideal and desired image of (their own) perfect development? Yet, if wisdom (the "elephant") exists and is not just in the head of the beholder, it is to our advantage to describe and investigate as many of its parts as possible until a coherent and complete picture of wisdom emerges. I believe that the *Handbook of Wisdom* does just that; it contributes essential pieces to the overall puzzle of wisdom.

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1 Wisdom in History

James E. Birren and Cheryl M. Svensson

Wisdom is not a new concept that originated in the technologically advanced information age of today. Rather, wisdom bears the connotations of “ancient” and seemingly transcends time, knowledge, and even culture. All peoples, whether primitive or civilized, have sought to pass their *wisdom* on to following generations by means of myths, stories, songs, and even cave paintings that date back 30,000 years. Will Durant (1935) defined civilization as a social order that promotes cultural creation and that contains four elements: economic provision, political organization, moral traditions, and pursuit of knowledge and the arts. Civilizations and the written records thereof will be the basis for our explorations as we trace the concept of wisdom throughout history. This is not a definitive review of wisdom since that has been well documented by previous authors (Bates, 1993; Brugman, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Robinson, 1990). Rather, it is a brief overview of the ways in which the concept of wisdom has been interpreted over time and its relevance to contemporary studies of wisdom.

Even though wisdom is an ancient topic, our perceptions and definitions have not remained static and unchanged over the years. This chapter begins with the early references to wisdom and explores how the definitions and understanding have evolved over the ages. Next, we consider the history of wisdom in the psychological sciences. Following that, we explore the development of empirical studies of wisdom beginning in the late 1970s. Finally, we examine new research on wisdom and suggest

directions for the development of wisdom research in the future.

Ancient History

Among the oldest known civilizations are the Sumerians, who lived along the fertile valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in an area then known as Mesopotamia, now Iraq. More than 5,000 years ago, the Sumerians set up organized states, built cities, and invented writing (Durant, 1935). Sumerian writings were preserved on clay tablets and formed the basis of the earliest "wisdom literature." The wisdom literature consisted of philosophical reflections, such as, "We are doomed to die; let us spend," and "He who possesses much silver may be happy" (Readers Digest Association [RDA], 1973). In this context, wisdom referred to practical advice for daily living. The Sumerian culture was the foundation for the Greek and Roman cultures. The transfer of culture and "wisdom" is evidenced by the fact that in one of the Sumerian epic tales, "Gilgamesh," king of Uruk, met the survivor of a "great flood." One passage of this tale is so similar to the story of Noah and the flood told in Genesis in the Old Testament of the Bible that it is believed that the writers of the Old Testament may have drawn upon these ancient Sumerian texts (Kramer, 1959).

The Egyptian civilization flourished from 3200 B.C. to 300 A.D. Some of the earliest written teachings on wisdom are attributed to the Egyptians. Ptah-hotep in the 5th dynasty of the Pharaoh of Issi (2870–2675 B.C.) wrote texts on wisdom that concerned proper behavior (Brugman, 2000). The Egyptian wisdom literature contained universally popular precepts for good behavior and wisdom such as "Be not puffed up with thy knowledge, and be not proud because thou are wise" (RDA, 1973). It is believed that these and other writings from the early Egyptians were a source of Hebrew wisdom familiar to many Christians and Jews in the

books of the Old Testament.

Of all the ancient philosophers, the Greeks, the "lovers of wisdom," are best known to modern man. They were the first philosophers who sought to understand the world by using reason rather than by relying on religion, authority, or tradition (Magee, 1998). This was a major step forward in the intellectual development of mankind and formed the basis for rational thinking. One of the early Greek philosophers, often referred to as the father of philosophy, was Thales, active in the 6th century B.C. Along with his followers, he started the Milesian school (Magee, 1998). Thales was advanced in his thinking and believed that everything in the world was reducible to one element, but he mistakenly believed that element to be water. There were a number of other important philosophers prior to Socrates, but they all shared the common goal of understanding the nature of the world and to what all things could be reduced (Durant, 1926). Wisdom did not refer to precepts for living but, rather, to an investigation into the laws and constituents of the natural world. These broad theories from the early Greek philosophers paved the way for our later attempts to understand how our world functions.

Socrates (470–399 B.C.) was born in Athens. Following the *Sophists*, traveling teachers of wisdom, he changed the focus of the questions from what we need to know regarding the natural world to what we need to know to conduct a "good life" (Durant, 1926). Socrates focused on questions such as: "What is good?" and "What is just?" The answers to these questions would have a profound influence on how people lived. His method of questioning became known as the "Socratic method" and usually showed that those who thought they knew the answer to a given question did not. He taught people to question everything. Certain fundamental beliefs underlie Socrates' teaching and one of those is that no one knowingly does

wrong. That is, if a person fully understood that it was wrong to do something, then he or she would not do it. If, however, someone did it, then it was because that individual had not fully and completely grasped that it was the wrong thing to do (Magee, 1998). For Socrates, the wise did not seek wisdom, but the lovers of wisdom were somewhere between the wise and the ignorant. He believed only God to be wise and refused to call any man wise, rather, men could be "lovers of wisdom" (Adler, 1952).

Socrates left no written records, but his pupil Plato (428–348 B.C.) did and these have survived intact. Plato believed that Socrates was the best, most wise, and just of all men (Magee, 1998). Plato's early dialogues concerned the problems of moral and political philosophy as well as problems of the natural world. Two primary components of his philosophy concern his belief that the only real harm that could be done to a person is harm to his soul and also that people should think for themselves and never take anything for granted (Magee, 1998). For Plato, wisdom was the virtue of reason and not only contemplated the truth but also directed conduct (Adler, 1952). Thus wisdom was concerned with the ultimate meaning of life and the nature of both the physical universe and mankind.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) was a student of Plato, and like him, considered wisdom to be one of the most basic human virtues (Adler, 1952). According to Aristotle, wisdom belonged to philosophical knowledge, especially to the speculative brand of theology. Thus, a distinction was made between "practical" and "speculative" wisdom; practical wisdom was referred to as "prudence" and speculative wisdom as simply "wisdom." For Aristotle, wisdom connoted the highest form of knowledge and was thus more aptly applied to speculative rather than to practical wisdom. The writings of Plato and his students continued to dominate philosophy in the West for 600–700

years.

It is believed that the Hebrew people migrated from Ur in Sumeria to Palestine in about 2200 B.C. (Durant, 1935). The Hebrews added a theological component to the Greek's treatment of wisdom and wisdom became a divine enlightenment and revelation of truth from God (Bates, 1993). References to wisdom abound in the Bible's Old Testament, particularly in the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. The Bible is a model for behavior for many contemporary people. The book of Proverbs includes statements about wisdom that are intended as guides to behavior.

Proverbs 8

1. Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?
10. Take my instructions instead of silver
and knowledge rather than choice gold
11. For wisdom is better than jewels,
and all that you may desire
cannot compare with her.
12. I, wisdom, live with prudence and discretion.

Proverbs 9

1. Wisdom has built her house,
she has hewn her seven pillars.
9. Give instructions to the wise, and
they will become wiser still;
teach the righteous and they will
gain in learning.
10. The fear of the Lord is the
beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the
Holy One is insight.
(Proverbs 8: 1, 10–12, and Proverbs 9: 1, 9–10.

vaster, more intuitive understanding of the nature of life and death. The Upanishads remain today a revered creed.

Prince Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 B.C.) was born in India. He left his privileged life at age 29 to search for a higher truth (Dyer, 1998). After his enlightenment, he became known as the "Buddha" or Awakened One. His teachings form the basis of Buddhism and he taught through conversations, lectures, and stories. These were summarized into "sutras" or threads to prompt memory (Durant, 1935). The sutra of the Four Noble Truths is basic to Buddhism: (1) all life is suffering; (2) suffering arises from desire; (3) wisdom lies in stilling all desire; and (4) the eightfold path is the way to the cessation of suffering. The Buddha focused on conduct rather than theology, ritual, or worship. He taught, "Do not believe in authority or teachers or elders. But after careful observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason, it will benefit man and all, then accept it and live by it" (Dyer, 1998, p. 5). Thus, wisdom meant "knowing" something by personal observation and experience.

The exact age of Chinese civilization is unknown but it is estimated to be 7,000 years old. China has never been one homogenous nation but, rather, a "melting pot" of humanity from diverse origins, each with their own distinctive language and culture (Durant, 1935). China is the home of humanistic, nontheological philosophy. Lao-tzu was the greatest of pre-Confucian philosophers. The *Tao-Te-Ching*, or *Book of the Way and Virtue*, is attributed to Lao-tzu, but authorship of ancient texts is considered symbolic rather than historical (Cleary, 1991). The *Tao-Te-Ching* is one of the most important texts of Taoist philosophy. Literally translated, Tao means *the way* and teaches: "Sages minimize their affairs, which are thus orderly. They seek to have little, and thus are sufficed; they are benevolent without trying, trusted without speaking. They gain without seeking, succeed without striving" (Cleary, 1991, p. 26).

Lao-tzu rejected reason and believed intuition and compassion were the path to wisdom (Bates, 1993). For him, the secret of wisdom was in obedience to nature and refusal to interfere in the natural course of things (Durant, 1935).

Confucius (551–479 B.C.) wrote five volumes known as the *Five Ching*, which along with four books written by his pupils makes up the collection known as the *Nine Classics* (Durant, 1935). The chaos in China when Confucius lived forced him to focus on morality and right living. Confucianism stood for rationalized social order based on personal cultivation (Yutang, 1938). The goal was for political order based on individual moral order. Therefore, wisdom began with the individual rectifying his own heart. From self-development followed social development. Confucius said, "To know what you know and know what you don't know is the characteristic of one who knows" (Yutang, 1938, p. 138). The Eastern traditions replaced the focus of wisdom from the physical world to an enlightened understanding of the relationship between the natural world and the Divine. It should be added that Asian concepts of wisdom, although well developed, did little to influence the emergence of empirical science in the West and psychology as a field of study.

The Renaissance

During the Renaissance, the concepts of wisdom and virtue became intertwined. Montaigne (1533–1592) felt that practical wisdom implied that life should be lived in accordance with nature, self-knowledge, knowledge of world, and self-management (Brugman, 2000). Wisdom included a critical attitude and the truly wise person was always aware of his ignorance. He believed that to assume knowledge from others without total understanding and to make it one's own was inadequate for wisdom; . . . for though we could become learned by other men's learning,

a man can never be wise but by his own wisdom" (Montaigne, 1580/1952, p. 58).

Francis Bacon (1561–1626), both a politician and a philosopher, was born in Elizabethan England. In *Essays* (1597), he wrote short treatises on major issues of life that became the precursor to social psychology (Durant, 1926). Bacon is most often remembered for his book *Novum Organum*, or New Methods, which placed him on the cusp of the modern scientific age (Cottingham, 1996). He placed science as the point of highest order and introduced the concept of the scientific method. The very essence of science was written by Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning*, " . . . for we are not to imagine or suppose, but to *discover*, what nature does or may be made to do" (Eiseley, 1959, p. 179). Bacon proposed that man is subjected to four idols or obstacles to true knowledge: (1) "idols of the tribe," or human nature to mistake surface appearance for the true nature of things; (2) "idols of the cave," or personal preoccupations and obsessions; (3) "idols of the marketplace," or illusions stemming from language or the human tendency to rely on labels; and (4) "idols of the theater," or the fact that man gives power to the false system of traditional philosophy (Bacon, 1620/1996, p. 307). Thus, a wise man uses strict inductive reasoning along with systematic scientific inquiry to discover even the "underlying" forms or processes for all observed phenomena. For Bacon, "Knowledge is power" (Russell, 1945).

The Period of Enlightenment

Rene Descartes (1596–1650) was the first modern rationalist. He believed the sole basis of knowledge to be self-evident propositions deduced by reason, which arose from a doubting mind (Magee, 1998). According to Descartes, man should doubt everything until he reached the first principles that could not be doubted. The one thing

he said he could not doubt was, “cognito ergo sum,” “I think, therefore I am.” Wisdom was attainable as cognitive knowing by using reflection, reason, and ethical deliberation. Religious wisdom, however, was based on faith and revelation from God (Bates, 1993).

The English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) is best known for his book *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and as the founder of the empirical school of philosophy. Locke believed that sensory experience is the source for all of our ideas and that knowledge arose from reflection on, and abstraction from, the original sensory input (Cottingham, 1996). The basis for this understanding rested on the doctrine of primary and secondary qualities. Primary qualities are those that are inseparable from the body and are classified as solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number. Secondary qualities referred to everything else, for example, color, smell, sounds, and so on. Primary qualities reside in bodies, whereas secondary qualities are *only* in the perceiver (Russell, 1945). For Locke, reason consisted of two parts, an inquiry into what we know with certainty, and an investigation of propositions that we are wise to accept, even though they are only probable and not certain (Russell, 1945). When testing probability, we use our own experience or the assertion of another’s experience. In Locke’s writings, references to wise and wisdom are made in context with knowing God. In the *Essay*, he stated that the truest and best notions of God are acquired by thought and meditation. The wise and considerate man lives by a right and careful use of his thoughts and reason (Locke, 1690/1952).

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), born in East Prussia, is often regarded as the one of the most outstanding philosophers since the Greeks. His propositions included the concept of two worlds: the phenomenal world, where knowledge is possible, and a noumenal world, which is

transcendent and to which there is no access. For Kant, morality was founded on reason (Magee, 1998). Kant based his definition of philosophy on the ancient philosophia, or the desire for and love of the exercise of wisdom (Hadot, 1995). Kant believed philosophy to be the doctrine and exercise of wisdom. He wrote that men did not possess wisdom but only felt love for it. Wisdom remained the idea, the model, never to be attained but only to be sought after. Kant wrote: "The Idea of wisdom must be the foundation of philosophy, just as the Idea of sanctity is the foundation of Christianity" (Hadot, 1995, p. 267). Kant posited two ideas of philosophy, the scholastic concept and the worldly concept. The scholastic concept remained as pure theory, whereas the worldly concept was more cosmic. The cosmic philosophy of Kant referred to the search for wisdom, personified as the ideal philosopher or sage. The essential qualities of the sage were based on the laws of reason. For Kant, wisdom was in accordance with his categorical imperative, "Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Hadot, 1995, p. 269).

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) wrote the *World as Will and Idea* in 1818. He stated that in the noumenal world all beings are one, whereas in the phenomenal world we express ourselves as separate. He came into contact with Buddhist and Hindu texts that paralleled his beliefs (Magee, 1998). Schopenhauer felt that the empirical world was nothing and that one should not be taken in by it (Brugman, 2000). For Schopenhauer, genius was the highest form of will-less knowledge. The more a person knew his own desires, the less he was controlled by them. This allowed an objective view of the world without subjective bias (Durant, 1926).

Wisdom in the Psychological Sciences

The emergence of psychology as a research and scholarly

of men and women are to attain the state of being wise and this is expressed in their dreams and in the objects that artists create.

Further evidence of the absence of the topic of wisdom in contemporary psychology is that the *Handbook of General Psychology* (Wolman, 1973) does not include this topic, although it deals with "thinking and problem solving." The chapter by Dodd and Bourne on this aspect concluded with the view that "Finally, much of the new research may come to depend upon somewhat different notions of thinking. Such terms as strategy, rules, and principle seem to be replacing 'stimulus' and 'response.' The study of thinking seems more appropriately linked to such terms: current progress would suggest that they are less restrictive and no less 'scientific'" (1973, p. 565). This view would appear to invite access to the concepts of "wisdom" and "wise," although at present these terms remain relatively uncommon in the emergence of psychology and in contemporary research and publications in psychology.

Perhaps more pertinent is the contemporary book by Robinson (1995), *An Intellectual History of Psychology*, which has no indexed items to wisdom or wise. The book does, however, refer to knowledge, but in the ancient sense that eternal knowledge is the province of God and mankind can seek this knowledge by freeing itself from "sensory deceit" (Robinson, 1995, p. 77). It is also relevant that in another recent book, *Genius: The Natural History of Creativity*, Hans Eysenck did not include any reference to wisdom (Eysenck, 1995). Here, the question may be raised as to whether or not creativity is related to wisdom. In a sense, wisdom can give rise to new and creative solutions to old problems. Perhaps this is further evidence that the concept and the subject matter of wisdom has been avoided or neglected because of its past history in philosophy and religion. It appears to have been too far removed from the influential models of research of physics

and chemistry to explore more elementary processes of psychology that were the roots of psychology in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

A book on cognitive psychology deals with the use of knowledge in problem solving and introduces the idea of thinking with the idea that problem solving is both productive and reproductive: " . . . we have the ability to change and mould our prior experience selectively, in purely conceptual ways, to make it applicable in new and unexpected situations" (Eysenck & Keane, 1990, p. 412). In reviewing the literature of reasoning and decision making, the authors further state that, "Reasoning and decision making are central intellectual abilities in our cognitive repertoire" (Eysenck & Keane, 1990, p. 417). To this might be added that the next step should include recognizing that wise thinking involves more than just cognitive processes, including the ability to defer action despite an impulse to hasty action, and insight and control over impinging emotions. In a broad view, psychology appears to be on the threshold of dealing with the subject of wisdom, which perhaps represents the highest order of human ability. Through further research, it is likely that we will identify the nature of wisdom and the circumstances leading to its development and expression, a quality that the ancients thought was solely found in gods and goddesses.

Definitions and Concepts of Wisdom

Looking back over time, we can see that the meaning and understanding of wisdom has changed throughout history. Brugman (2000) describes this transition succinctly: "Throughout history a gradual change took place in which wisdom coincided with rules for proper conduct as the Egyptian books of wisdom, and with virtue and faith as advocated by the churchfathers, to definitions with skeptical overtones in the writing of Nietzche and Schopenhauer" (p. 246).

The concept of wisdom as a human attribute has undergone changes as societies have evolved. During the last quarter of the 20th century, it has become a topic of research in the social and behavioral sciences. In contemporary empirical science, wisdom has come to be regarded as a trait that is ascribed to persons making wise decisions. Thus, the trait of wisdom is expressed in the process of making decisions, or having an effective decision-making style. In this sense, wisdom is a very broad trait of the highest level of mental functioning. Wisdom requires that an individual must have experience, seek information, and weigh alternative outcomes of a decision through complex or dialectical reasoning. Furthermore, the concept has evolved in psychological literature to include control over one's emotions and over any tendency toward hasty conclusions or actions. In this sense, the contemporary use of the term *wisdom* in psychology suggests that high intelligence and knowledge are not sufficient in and of themselves to lead to wise decisions. Having the intention to rise above one's tradition or self-interest is required in making wise decisions. Thus, broadly defined, wisdom is a difficult trait to evaluate in experimental designs that use prearranged decisions to be made in problem solving contexts.

The range of differences in approaches to the study of wisdom is apparent in the 1990 book edited by Sternberg, *Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development*. In the final chapter of this book, Birren and Fisher (1990) set forth an overview of the contents of all the chapters and the authors' views of the development of wisdom, traits of a wise person, products of wisdom, and research methodology. The diversity in approach is shown in the fact that 13 chapters yielded 13 quite different definitions of wisdom. Table 1.1 lists the definitions.

Table 1.1. ***Definitions of wisdom (Birren & Fisher, 1990, pp. 325–326)***

Author	Definition
Robinson	Three historical definitions: Greek: an intellectual, moral, practical life; a life lived in conformity with truth, beauty. Christian: a life lived in pursuit of divine, absolute truth. Contemporary: a scientific understanding of laws governing matter in motion.
Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde	An evolutionary hermeneutical approach to the study of wisdom suggests that wisdom is a holistic cognitive process, a virtue or compelling guide for action, and a good, desirable state of being.
Labouvie-Vief	A smooth and balanced dialogue between two sets of attributes: outer, objective, logical forms of processing (logos) and inner, subjective, organismic forms (mythos).
Baltes and Smith	Wisdom is expertise in the domain of fundamental life pragmatics, such as life planning or life review. It requires a rich factual knowledge about life matters, rich procedural knowledge

	about life problems, knowledge of different life contexts and values or priorities, and knowledge about the unpredictability of life.
Chandler and Holliday	Contemporary philosophy of science limits conceptualization of wisdom to a technologic type of knowing. A more accurate description of wisdom may need well-defined, multidimensional, prototypically organized competence descriptors. It involves recovering age-old types of knowledge that have been forgotten.
Sternberg	Wisdom is a metacognitive style plus sagacity, knowing that one does not know everything, seeking the truth to the extent that it is knowable.
Orwoll and Perlmutter	A personologic study of wisdom suggests that wisdom is a mutltidimensional balance or integration of cognition with affect, affiliation, and social concerns. An advanced development of personality together with cognitive skills is the essence of wisdom.
Meacham	Wisdom is an awareness of the fallibility of knowing and is a

definition to embrace the concept of metabehavioral, an overarching of control and management of behavior that includes intention, purpose, and will.

New researchers have added their views to the investigation of wisdom with more recent and varied definitions (see Table 1.2). The definitions range from the inclusion of wisdom as a state of enlightenment to ordinary and extraordinary concepts of wisdom.

Table 1.2. ***Recent definitions of Wisdom***

Christine A. Bates	It is no longer meaningful or sufficient to see wisdom as a singular phenomenon or as a kind of entity, or as a body of knowledge that would be prone to generate a particular content of responses. Now the notion of wisdom must incorporate a process of arriving at a truth, which fits the needs and context of individuals, a community, a nation, or a people. (Bates, 1993, p. 411)
Gerard Brugman	(Wisdom is) expertise in uncertainty. It encompasses a meta-cognitive, an affective, and a behavioral component. (Brugman, 2000, p. 263)
Howard M. Chandler	The Vedic Psychology of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi . . . proposes that the unified source of all knowledge and experience, including affect and cognition, is a transcendental field of pure consciousness (the Self) that can be known by direct experience (Self-knowledge). Wisdom is described as a state of enlightenment in which

stabilized Self-knowledge results in a fully integrated personality. (Chandler, 1991, Dissertation Abstracts International, p. 5048B)

William Randall and Gary Kenyon

Ordinary wisdom is about finding meaning in life and suffering (spiritual–mystical dimension). It is about accepting, owning, and valuing our lives and our life stories, including both our unlived lives and our untold stories.

Extraordinary wisdom includes six dimensions: (a) the cognitive dimension involves a degree of intellectual understanding, (b) the practical–experiential dimension has to do not only with abstract ideas or theories but with everyday life, (c) the interpersonal aspect to wisdom entails a perception of the larger story we live with, (d) the ethical–moral dimension is concerned with what the ancient Greeks referred to as "knowing and doing the good," (e) the idiosyncratic-expression, concerns the appearance of as many faces of wisdom as there are human beings, (f) the spiritual–mystical dimension of extraordinary wisdom, or the special experience of, and/or insight into, the nature of the cosmos and the human place within it. (Randall & Kenyon, 2001, p. 12)

The Development of Empirical Studies of

Psychology of Wisdom

Theories of wisdom have been developed that attempt to understand and thus control the investigation of wisdom. Brugman (2000), in his comprehensive study *Wisdom: Source of Narrative Coherence and Eudaimonia*, not only reviewed the historical concepts of wisdom, but also the psychological theories of wisdom. He concluded that "The history of the study of wisdom in psychology is a short one. Only at the end of the eighties (1980s), and the beginning of the nineties, wisdom research really started. Before that time there were only some theoretical endeavors" (Brugman, 2000, p. 95). The recency of the development of theories of wisdom is shown in his table that cites 19 studies (see Brugman, 2000, Table 3.7, p. 109, for complete data). The earliest year of publication of a cited reference was 1959, with a median year of 1987, a relatively recent date in the history of psychology.

Erik Erikson provided an example of an early reference to wisdom as a component of a lifespan theory of development. He proposed that wisdom is a result of the eighth stage of psychosocial development, or the mastery of "ego integrity versus despair" (Erikson, 1950). This does not preclude the possibility that wisdom could be achieved at other periods in life; just that it is a natural outcome of a successful mastery over ego despair that normally occurs in late life. Thus, for Erikson, wisdom was not studied alone but, rather, as the outcome of the successful completion of the final life development stage.

Only in recent decades has the study of wisdom in and of itself been addressed by the empirical social-psychological sciences. It is obvious from a historical perspective that the concept of wisdom is multidimensional and defies easy definition or operationalization that meets the scientific criteria for control, replication, and prediction. Furthermore, many complex topics were neglected in psychology's earlier history. Aging, creativity, and love were usually

ignored as research topics. In other words, the psychology of wisdom was left unexplored. In the tradition of psychology, studies were built from the simple to the complex, rather than from the complex to the simple. This method emulated the success of physics in studying elemental particles and forces. In a sense, "wisdom" is the capstone of behavioral complexity. It leads to explanations of behavior from the top down, from purpose and intention to behavioral acts. Brugman (2000) reviewed six empirical studies of wisdom, reflecting the scarcity of research. The six studies largely concentrated on the question of whether or not wisdom increases with age. The findings suggest that there is not an increase in wisdom in later life. Brugman's conclusion is provocative, " . . . that one needs to be old and wise to see that wisdom does not come with age" (Brugman, 2000, p. 115).

It is significant that in one of the first empirical studies of wisdom, there were no references to prior publications of such work (Clayton, 1976). There were, however, references to components or contributors to wisdom, such as components of intellect, affect, and cognition. Additionally, there were references to such components that contributed to a working concept of wisdom. Wisdom " . . . was defined as a construct having underlying affective, cognitive, and cognitive style or problem solving components" (Clayton, 1976, p. 4).

Clayton and Birren (1980) encouraged the study of wisdom as a later life psychological competency of older persons. Their research examined the underlying structure of wisdom as perceived by differing age cohorts. They discovered that the concept of wisdom became more differentiated with an increase in age. There was an absence of a perceived relationship between the participant's own age and wisdom.

The Berlin research project (Max-Planck Institute for Human Development and Education) began in the late

1980s and developed a model that defined wisdom as "An expert knowledge system in the domain, fundamental life pragmatics (e.g., life planning, life management, life review)" (Baltes & Smith, 1990, p. 95). There are five components to the Berlin wisdom paradigm: rich factual knowledge, rich procedural knowledge, lifespan contextualism, relativism, and ability to understand and manage uncertainty. Wisdom, defined as synthesized intelligence, pertains to the pragmatics of life and adaptation. The five criteria allow the conceptualization and organization of expert knowledge in fundamental life pragmatics. They focus on wisdom as a body of knowledge and wise responses. The emphasis is on the pragmatic, on an expert knowledge system, and the goal is to acquire knowledge and become an expert. It is within the fundamental pragmatics of life that wisdom is manifest, and this includes matters of life, interpretation, and management (see Baltes & Smith, 1990, Table 5.2, p. 104).

Staudinger (1996) and her colleagues, working with the Berlin project, have defined the nature of wisdom as a social interactive product. In this approach, the genesis of wisdom is projected onto forces outside the individual in contrast to the "person centered paradigm." "On the basis of the extremely high demands that the elicitation of wisdom puts on knowledge and skill, one might even argue that wisdom by definition will hardly ever be found in an individual, but rather in cultural or social-interactive products" (Staudinger,1996, p. 276). Wise individuals and wisdom in this point of view become the product of interactions with wise environments. Wisdom is apparent in decisions that are shaped by social contexts. Her research showed that wisdom increases with social interaction. Staudinger concluded that wisdom cannot develop without both distal and proximal social interaction. Wisdom is a balance between interactive and individual cognition. Excluded in this research is the contribution of evolution to the genesis of wisdom and individual traits or behavioral

between "a priori," a definition not based on observation but intuitive insight, and "empirical," a definition based on observable phenomena. They suggested " . . . that wisdom does not lie in *what* one knows, but in *how* one knows" (McKee & Barber, 1999, p. 151). The essence of their definition of wisdom, or seeing through the illusion, was composed of three factors: clear insight that a belief is illusory; freedom from future vulnerability to the error or illusion; and empathy for those who remain subject to the illusion. Aristotle defined wisdom as knowledge of first principles, and "seeing through the illusion" is translated as knowledge of first principles. The knowledge of first principles suggests knowing the reality that is behind an unreal appearance. Thus, seeing through the illusion identifies wisdom as separate from knowledge.

According to Meacham (1990), wisdom required an understanding that knowledge is fallible and of maintaining a position between knowing and doubting. Since there is no limit to what can be known, one must understand what one does *not* know. Meacham developed the "knowledge context matrix" (1990, p. 184). One's position in the matrix is determined by one's perception of how much one knows, balanced with what one does not know, in relationship with all that can be known. Wisdom is not a set of beliefs or a fixed body of knowledge. Rather, the essence of wisdom is revealed in the way it is put to use. The core of wisdom is both knowing and doubting and the balance between the two. Dating back to ancient philosophers, the belief that one can see all that can be seen and know all that can be known is evidence of the *lack* of wisdom.

Kitchener and Brenner (1990) developed the "reflective judgment" model that described the development of epistemic cognition, the certainty for knowing, and the criteria for knowing. The model explained how individuals move from understanding when issues are certain through the process of reasoning when issues are uncertain. The

reflective judgment model was based on the assumptions one holds regarding what can be "known" and what can't, "how" one can know, and how "certain" one can be in knowing. Research based on the reflective judgment model has shown that reasoning in the face of the uncertainty of knowing and making reasoned judgments is not associated with youth or the young adult. Rather, reasoning is observed only after the early 30s in well-educated groups. The basis for wise judgment is the ability for complex reasoning with abstractions.

From their research, Chandler and Holliday (1990) concluded that wisdom needs to be considered as " . . . a well-defined, multidimensional, prototypically organized competency descriptor" (Chandler & Holliday, 1990, pp. 137–138). Wisdom consists of the following five factors: (1) exceptional understanding, based on learning from experience and understanding "the big picture;" (2) judgment and communication skills, based on the ability to understand and judge correctly in daily life; (3) general competence, based on general intelligence and education; (4) interpersonal skills, based on capacity to be sensitive and social; and (5) social unobtrusiveness, which refers to being discrete and nonjudgmental.

Ardelt (2000) defined wisdom as containing three components: cognitive ability to see the truth or reality as it is; reflective, to become aware and transcend one's subjectivity and projection; and affective or empathy that refers to empathy and compassion for others. All components reinforce each other and wisdom is the result of the combination of all three. In a recent study, she tested the hypothesis that wisdom resulted from early psychosocial resources in childhood and that wisdom would have a positive effect on aging well. Her results showed that wisdom is not determined by one's childhood, but wise individuals aged more successfully than unwise individuals. This is an eclectic approach that stresses

cognition, reflective, and affective components of wisdom. Her findings showed that wisdom had more impact on life satisfaction than did social relationships or objective life circumstances.

Brugman (2000) defined wisdom " . . . as expertise in uncertainty. It encompasses a (meta)cognitive, an affective, and a behavioural component" (p. 263). This clearly went beyond the ancient traditions of regarding wisdom as knowledge. In his research, he attempted to unravel the relationship between wisdom (eudaimonia), and the quality of one's narrative. He adapted the word "eudaimonia" from the Greek literature, because it was free from the implications of contemporary terms such as *life-satisfaction, happiness, well-being*, or *quality of life*. In his studies, the way individuals interpret their lives, or their narrative coherence, was related to wisdom and the good life, or eudaimonia. "Wisdom is the good demon" (Brugman, 2000, p. 247). Its measurement was determined by the "fraction of positive controllable (life) events of the total number of positive events reported and the fraction of negative controllable events of the total number of negative events" (Brugman, 2000, p. 242). In this train of thought, wisdom is accompanied by increasing doubt, with experience, with the graspability of reality. Wisdom is the product of a coherent self-account of life events. Wisdom also develops as a product of the integration and interpretation of life's experiences and also with the emergence and acceptance of uncertainty.

A 10-year longitudinal study of the effects of transcendental meditation on the development of wisdom was reported by Chandler (1990). In this doctoral dissertation study, "Wisdom is described as a state of enlightenment, in which stabilized Self-knowledge results in a fully integrated personality" (Chandler, 1991). Wisdom was operationalized by using Loevinger's measurement of ego or self-development, McAdams's intimacy motivation,

and Rest's principled moral reasoning. Over a 10-year period, the participants who took part in transcendental meditation increased significantly on ego development and on principled moral reasoning. As a result of his findings, Chandler concluded that transcendental meditation is a practical pathway to reducing stress and " . . . allowing awareness to effortlessly transcend the limit of representational thought and language" (1990, p. 169). His data supported the view that a quiet internal psychophysiological state encouraged the expression of wisdom.

Bates (1993) made a comprehensive review of the background literature on wisdom in her thesis, *Wisdom: A Postmodern Exploration*. She reviewed the various dictionary definitions of wisdom and concluded that "In most dictionary definitions there is the sense of wisdom consisting of a special mastery of life, demonstrated in the domain of understanding people, and making decisions and judgment" (Bates, 1993, p. 416). This does not preclude an illiterate person from being wise. She quoted Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde concerning wisdom, "If wisdom is a type of knowledge that tries to understand the ultimate consequences of events in a holistic, systemic way, then wisdom becomes the best guide for what is the 'summum bonum', or 'supreme good'" (Bates, 1993, p. 127). But wisdom appears to be more than just knowledge and includes an approach to the decision process and to action. Bates discussed extensively the underlying values of wisdom. That is, the values placed on the outcomes of decisions determined whether the individual displayed wisdom and whether the decision was a wise one. Her discussion extended into the process of adopting belief systems and their content. That is, by our intent and assent we adopt belief systems that provide a frame of reference for our decisions and actions. Furthermore, Bates introduced the idea that retrospection contributed to wisdom. In this context, she used a term from Jung,

"enantiodromia," meaning to flow backward (Bates, 1993, p. 182). Her thought is that a reworking of the past contributes to wisdom. This view is compatible with the work of Brugman (2000), who found that the quality of uncertainty emerges from a review of life's experiences and contributes to wisdom.

Future Research Directions on Wisdom

After many years of neglect or avoidance, the subject of wisdom is now attracting research interest. Many questions remain to be answered. Who is wise and who is unwise? What environmental conditions facilitate the development and expression of wisdom? What are the cognitive, affective, motivational, and other behavior components that contribute to the development and expression of wise behavior, and what is their relative contribution?

Because of the complexity of wisdom, answering such questions requires a wide range of research strategies and many different research designs. The long history of the development of research on intelligence suggests that research on wisdom, being more complex than intelligence, will take considerable time to evolve. However, significant improvements in research design, statistical procedures, and data-gathering methods will facilitate the study of wisdom and provide insights into this multidimensional concept. Measurements of wisdom can be added to contemporary longitudinal studies so that the relative contributions to the development and expression of wisdom can be determined. Also, advances in neuropsychology and brain scanning methods suggest that it will be possible to determine the extent of involvement of different brain areas in wise and unwise persons.

There are potential questions to be answered based on the ancient attribution of wisdom as being feminine in character. This suggests the inclusion of gender in relationship to wisdom, not only the difference in structure

wisdom and it should receive more attention in research on wisdom across cultures.

Many new areas of research on wisdom await exploration with the prospect of extending our knowledge and perhaps leading to avenues for the use of wisdom in the management of societies, groups, and individuals.

Summary and Conclusions

The history of wisdom is ancient and complex. Early religions and philosophies described wisdom in terms of the cultures of their times, based on available knowledge and expectations concerning the behavior of individuals. As cultures evolved, ideas about wisdom changed. A reading of past history leads to the conclusion that implicit or explicit values underlie the concepts of wisdom passed forward from ancient times. This legacy makes it difficult in the present context to define wisdom in such a way that it leads to operations or measurements not biased by culture. The values that underlie ideas about wisdom continue to evolve and determine the use of the term “wisdom” as a favorable trait. Decisions have different outcomes, some of which may touch on strong values in a society. A judge looked on as wise in one culture would be despised in another if he or she invoked the death penalty, a cultural value.

The Renaissance opened pathways to rational thought and the later Period of Enlightenment further encouraged empirical research and the founding of psychology as a science. However, early empirical research in psychology was patterned after the successes of physics and chemistry, and efforts were devoted to elemental processes. The background of the founding of psychology in America did not encourage the study of wisdom, a very complex, if not the most complex trait attributable to mankind. However, in the latter part of the 20th century, wisdom emerged as an area of scholarship and research.

The concept of wisdom that the present authors have developed during the course of their review of the literature led them to the view that wisdom is perhaps the most complex characteristic that can be attributed to individuals or to cultures. A wise culture is one that maximizes the pursuit, gathering, and passage of information to its members. Furthermore, a wise culture maximizes the prospects of developing a high proportion of wise persons. Encouraging the transmission of knowledge, learning, and discussion are assumed to be attributes of a wise culture. A wise person is one who maximizes the probability of wise decisions. In this sense, a wise person is one whose higher-level mental processes and knowledge are integrated and maximize the probability of productive decisions. In this view wisdom as a human trait has both "crystallized" and "fluid" components, or perhaps it may be defined as having both information and dynamic contributors. A wise person is likely to have relevant knowledge and experience (crystallized ability), seek information, discuss it with others, and use dialectical or complex reasoning in contrasting the outcomes of alternative decisions.

Psychology has been slow to initiate research on wisdom. As perhaps the most superordinating and complex form of human behavior, it has been neglected in favor of the study of traits that can be operationalized in terms of elemental functions, primarily those of cognition, which have been the main preoccupation of psychological research. Wisdom implies a high level of control and mastery of behavior in order that knowledge can be used or created to pursue valued goals.

Present-day studies of wisdom have a wide range of definitions and a wide range of measures that are used to operationalize it. Although at present wisdom appears to be in an early stage of sophistication in research and conceptualization, because of its importance, it is a topic

that seems destined to attract increasing interest and research.

There are prospects for future research on wisdom that can have wide ranges of purposes and methods in exploring differences in ways wisdom has been defined by diverse cultures and religions. There also are many possibilities for studying individual differences in the expression of wise decision processes (e.g., by occupation, gender, education, and life experiences). However, the growth of the subject matter should be accompanied by increased rigor in both the definitions and the measurements used to assess both the independent and the dependent variables. Presently there is a wide range of posited outcomes of wisdom, from solving daily life problems to constructing a view of the self that promotes a productive and happy life. The history of wisdom leaves us with these questions: How much has the attributed wisdom of older persons been the product of their experience and reasoning, and how much has been derived from their power and seniority status?

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2 Cultural foundations of Wisdom

An integrated developmental approach

Masami Takahashi and Willis F. Overton

We once asked an ethnically mixed group of college students to name "wise" persons. The responses varied from their personal acquaintances and family members to well-known historical figures from all over the world such as Socrates, Confucius, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela, to name just a few. These undergraduate students with diverse backgrounds clearly knew what was meant by "wise" and had concrete ideas of the concept in their own unique ways. Social scientists in the past few decades, on the other hand, have been debating over what exactly constitutes the concept of wisdom. Sternberg (1990), for example, stated in *Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development* that "Wisdom is about as elusive as psychological constructs get" (p. ix). Why are social scientists grappling with difficulty in defining the concept whose meanings seem already ingrained in our collective psyche?

The answer is probably multifaceted. For one, although wisdom is an ancient concept that has been adapted in different cultures, it remained mainly within the sphere of theology and religion throughout Western history (Robinson, 1990). As a result, it is a relatively new scientific construct that has been empirically investigated only for the past few decades. Second, because the concept has been around for so long in various parts of the world, it is extremely difficult to articulate and operationally define in a way that is cross-culturally acceptable. Third, in the climate of neopositivism that pervaded the behavioral sciences

during the first half of the 20th century (Overton, 1998), coupled with a generally negative view toward aging in many societies, the concept of wisdom and its historical association with older age was viewed as paradoxical at best and until quite recently was vigorously excluded from serious scientific investigation (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Birren & Fisher, 1990; Holliday & Chandler, 1986).

Since the early 1980s, the concept of wisdom has been attracting growing attention among social scientists. This surging interest is probably because of the changing circumstances in the scientific community that now emphasize lifespan development (Labouvie-Vief, 1990; Lerner, 1984; Woodruff-Pak, 1989) and positive psychology (Baltes, 1993; Lerner, 2004; Sinnott & Cavanaugh, 1991). However, despite its origin and history, existing conceptualization and empirical research on wisdom have primarily been conducted in the Western hemisphere, and have neglected non-Western accounts of the concept.

In this chapter, both the Eastern and Western interpretations are reviewed to establish a culturally balanced definition of wisdom. In particular, we focus on examining cross-cultural studies of implicit theories (or folk conceptions) and historical accounts of wisdom from the Eastern and Western traditions because these analyses help decipher the important building blocks of its psychological definition (Sternberg, 1990). Furthermore, we also present a culturally inclusive model, partially drawn from a broadly defined Eriksonian developmental tradition, followed by an empirical analysis of this model. Although it is preliminary, this analysis should provide a foundation for further cross-cultural empirical research of wisdom.

Historical Accounts of Wisdom

One approach to exploring a construct that is as elusive and ancient as wisdom involves what Holliday and Chandler (1986) call “intellectual archeology” – excavating

bodies of ancient literature to discover their traditional meanings. Although several such archeological projects have already been implemented, they often have limited their focus exclusively to the examination of ancient Western texts (e.g., Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991; Robinson, 1990). To date, only a handful of studies have investigated the historical roots of wisdom both in the East and West (Assmann, 1994; Clayton & Birren, 1980; Takahashi, 2000). It is important, therefore, to further excavate the ancient literature, especially the neglected soil of the East, to discern how wisdom has been treated there.

In this section, we briefly examine the meanings and historical roots of wisdom both in the West and in the East. Western tradition includes the ancient Egyptian, biblical, and Greek literatures, which had a significant impact on many branches of Western thinking. However, it is the Anglo-American tradition (e.g., logical positivism, neofunctionalism, etc.) that became the most influential and dominant heir in the Western scientific field (Kitchener, 1983; Overton, 1998). In the remainder of this section, therefore, "Western tradition" will refer only to the lineage between these ancient texts and Anglo-American tradition.

Following this section, we will describe Eastern interpretations of wisdom, paying particular attention to the ancient Vedic text and its later implications. Because the Eastern tradition is broad and consists of diverse microdoctrines, the present discussion limits its focus to the major teachings of the East, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. It must be noted that although we claim that the differences between these Western and Eastern traditions are fundamental, we also acknowledge that these differences are not exhaustive by any means, and that they exclude other influential traditions such as that of Native American and African cultures. Nor do we claim that the Eastern and Western traditions are mutually exclusive. Some general features of the Eastern systems

agree with some doctrines of the West (Sheldon, 1951). Thus, the following attempt is not to dichotomize our civilization into Western and Eastern cultures, but to describe normative characteristics of wisdom in the respective culture, which, in turn, lead to a fuller understanding of this concept.

Western Conceptualization of Wisdom

In the West, the concept of wisdom first appeared around 3000 B.C. in Egypt, and was expressed through song and parable as a sort of pragmatic tool to "make sense" or intellectualize human sufferings and the paradoxical nature of life (Bryce, 1979; Rylaarsdam et al., 1993). In this era, wisdom also referred to a set of socially accepted moral and religious codes. For example, the oldest Egyptian wisdom text, the *Instruction of Ptahhotep*, emphasized practical virtues like patience, honesty, and conformity while denouncing antisocial vice such as greed and selfishness (Bryce, 1979; Lichtheim, 1973–1980; Wood, 1967). Some investigators even claimed that the moral and religious codes portrayed in this ancient text were similar to those found in other ancient civilizations of different regions including Africa, Mesopotamia, and China (see Assmann, 1994, for review).

This ancient tradition was later incorporated into more organized documents known as the Hebraic wisdom literature (e.g., the books of Ben Sira, Solomon, Job, etc.) (Crenshaw, 1976). In addition to cultivating one's cognitive ability through formal education and parental guidance, the Hebraic tradition also emphasized a strict adherence to religious faith as an ultimate path to wisdom (Assmann, 1994). The Book of Job, a story about a man's struggle to find meaning amid a series of misfortunes, is illustrative of this point. In this story, wisdom entails one's recognition of his/her place in a Divine Order that is far beyond human cognitive capacity, and only the highest adherence to faith

1984), these aspects of consciousness are regarded as interdependent psychological processes necessary to the whole of wisdom and are meaningful only in their coaction in a given context (Sheldon, 1951). From this perspective, wisdom is a kind of understanding that is not mediated through reasoning by representational cognitive structure but as a more intuitive, personal experience. In other words, wisdom in the East refers to a process of direct understanding without overt intellectualization, and with a great deal of emotional involvement. Several Japanese expressions of "understanding" are illustrative of this point (Suzuki, 1959). When a situation requires an intense, emotion-laden understanding, instead of more formal and cognitive-oriented expressions such as *rikai*, Japanese tend to use expressions involving *hara* (or abdomen) to imply more direct, gut feeling understanding (Kawai, 1996). For example, "opening up each other's abdomen" (*hara wo waru*) refers to the cognitive as well as emotional experience of mutual understanding, and "accepting in the abdomen" (*hara ni osameru*) implies the generous understanding of emotion-laden issues.

This differentiation of representationally mediated and relatively unmediated understanding is important because Eastern teachings often deemphasize intellectual learning as a method of moving toward transformational and integrative wisdom. In the case of *Zen* Buddhism, for example, words – the primary vehicle of intellectual representation in the West – are neither necessary nor sufficient for wisdom but are thought of as an obstruction in the path to wisdom (Cragg, 1976; Nitobe, 1993). By the same token, the core of Confucius's teaching in *Analects* is not so much about truth finding through logic and knowledge, but about personal striving through a cultivation of one's moral, intellectual, emotional commitment to learning itself (Li, 2003). As a result, instead of instructing students "what" wisdom is through words, the Eastern disciplines instruct "how" to experience the transformation

and integration through such media as yoga and meditation.

Finally, it is important to note that the Eastern tradition equally embraces – not unlike the Western conceptualization – the pragmatic and cognitive components of wisdom along with the transformational and integrative. For example, in Japan, an accumulated domestic knowledge is referred to as "a sack of grandma's wisdom" and is treasured by family members for its practical utility. Although this pragmatic component of wisdom is often considered as a desired knowledge, it also can carry a negative connotation if it is used for evil deed or for self-serving purposes (e.g., *waru-jie* or evil wisdom).

To summarize the historical accounts, the Western tradition offers a detailed description of the psychological nature of wisdom, yet its focus is relatively narrow in its limitation of wisdom to mainly cognitive features such as possession of an extensive knowledge database and an efficient information processing skill to utilize it. The Eastern tradition, by contrast, avoids articulating the parts but emphasizes the transformative and integrative process of the whole of wisdom. In this view, wisdom is viewed not only as a pragmatic knowledge but also as a progressively high level of experiential realization that integrates various psychological domains. Although this realization, traditionally referred to as transcendence or spiritual emancipation, may sound magical and elusive – and some early religious dogmas may have given rise to these connotations – the Eastern inclusive notion of wisdom essentially implies a reflective understanding that emerges through experience and gives equal weight to cognitive, affective, intuitive, and interpersonal domains of consciousness.

Given the different conceptualization of wisdom found in the historical literature of the East and West, it is of interest to know how these traditional meanings may have had an

impact on the understanding of wisdom among contemporary culturally divergent populations. In the next section, we will describe the common-sense conceptualizations (implicit theories) of wisdom across cultures. Implicit theories are "pristine" theories that people maintain as a part of their day-to-day experience. The "discovery" of these theories occurs by simply asking people what the concept means to them (Sternberg, 1990). Because common-sense concepts reflect the dominant meanings of a culture, discovering these theories are useful in formulating a broad, inclusive definition of wisdom.

Implicit Theories of Wisdom

Several studies have been conducted with the aim of uncovering implicit theories of wisdom. These include studies that identify common factors underlying wisdom-related descriptors (Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Takayama, 2002; Yang, 2001) and their interrelationships (Clayton & Birren, 1980), make comparisons of wisdom with intelligence and creativity (Sternberg, 1986), and describe the characteristics of hypothetical wise people (Sowarka, 1987, 1989) or those of actual people who have been nominated as wise (Perlmutter, Adams, Nyquist, & Kaplan, 1988). Although, as one might expect, these studies failed to yield an identical set of implicit definitions, they all agree that (a) wisdom is not a unitary but a multidimensional construct and (b) is defined differently across various populations.

With regard to the research on the multidimensional nature of wisdom, several studies using different methodologies have so far identified a number of distinctive wisdom characteristics (e.g., Clayton & Birren, 1980; Holiday & Chandler, 1986; Sternberg, 1986). Although the number and nature of these dimensions are not identical across studies, these study findings suggest that wisdom is "a well-defined, multidimensional, prototypically organized

competency descriptor" (Chandler & Holliday, 1990, pp. 137–138).

Another common finding among studies of implicit meaning is that wisdom is often understood differently among different populations. This effect has been observed for gender (Orwoll & Perlmutter, 1990), age (Clayton & Birren, 1980), and occupational groups (Sternberg, 1986). However, although implicit definitions of several wisdom-related concepts such as intelligence and spirituality have been cross-culturally investigated (e.g., Nisbett, 2003; Yang & Sternberg, 1997; Takahashi & Ide, (2003a), only a handful of studies to date have attempted to generalize the implicit theories of wisdom beyond the conventional European American population. Valdez (1994), for example, interviewed 15 Hispanic Americans who had been nominated as wise by their peers. She found that their definitions of wisdom stressed the spiritual and interpersonal dimensions while deemphasizing the cognitive aspect. Similarly, Levitt (1999) interviewed 13 Tibetan Buddhist monks living in the Himalayan region of India who defined wisdom as an understanding of Buddhist notions of void (a belief in the radical devaluation of phenomenal world) and of nonself (an assumption that the self is "coeval" with Buddha) (Takahashi, 2000). Each of these studies presents additional evidence to the common-sense variability of the meaning of wisdom, and demonstrates specific ways that wisdom has been conceptualized across cultures.

In a large-scale study, Takayama (2002) examined the implicit theories of wisdom among Japanese men and women who ranged in age from their 20s to their 90s. In this study, 2,000 subjects rated 22 behavioral attributes of wisdom on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The ratings were submitted to factor analysis, yielding four distinctive factors: *knowledge and education, understanding and judgment sociability and interpersonal relationship*, and *introspective*

attitude. Takayama concluded that Japanese are more likely to define wisdom as a "practical" and "experience-based" competence but less likely to associate wisdom with reasoning ability and general intelligence.

In a similar study involving 616 Taiwanese Chinese, Yang (2001) also found four comparable factors: *competencies and knowledge, benevolence and compassion, openness and profundity*, and *modesty and unobtrusiveness*. In contrast to the Hispanic Americans and Tibetan Buddhist Monks, these results suggested that the Taiwanese Chinese defined wisdom in a less spiritual and less religious fashion, but as a more pragmatic concept expressed in daily life that brings "harmony" to a society as a whole (e.g., "Is able to transform an adverse situation to one's and everyone's advantage."). Yang also emphasized that *modesty and unobtrusiveness* appears to be a wisdom characteristic that is relatively unique to Chinese-originated cultures. Based on the idea that nature works wonders unobtrusively, several Chinese classics that depict a code of conduct (e.g., *The Analects, Mencius, Chuang Tzu*) instruct the individual to keep a low profile regardless of his/her accomplishment. In fact, many Taiwanese Chinese strongly disagreed with statements that described wise people as "Is showy; draws excessive attention to self," "Conceited and stubborn, with a sense of superiority; is proud and arrogant;" "Is too clever for one's own good" (p. 670).

In our own project (Takahashi & Bordia, 2000), we made a direct comparison of implicit definitions of wisdom among young adult (mean age = 21.17) American, Australian, Indian, and Japanese participants. In this study, the participants rated the similarity of the adjective *wise* to other related descriptors (i.e., *aged, awakened, discreet, experienced, intuitive*, and *knowledgeable*) that had been generated in a pilot study. The study also explored the preference for these descriptors by asking participants to

among Japanese and Americans from three generations of family members (young, middle-aged, and old). Participants were instructed to rate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the characterization of eight internationally known individuals as wise. These well-known individuals were preselected as a part of a larger study on spirituality (Ide & Takahashi, 2002), and included Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, John Paul II, Mother Teresa, Bill Clinton, Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein, and Shoukou Asahara. Nelson Mandela and Shoukou Asahara were excluded from subsequent analysis because more than a half of the participants in either the Japanese or American group claimed to "Know nothing about this person or what he/she has done."

The overall results demonstrated that, regardless of gender and age, across the three generations the Japanese rated Adolf Hitler and Saddam Hussein significantly "wiser" than did their American counterparts. Although the Japanese sample never perceived these two individuals as "wise" per se (the Japanese average was never higher than 3.0 in any of the groups and this score is "neutral" on the agree/disagree dimension), these results are interesting in the context of the role played by cultural meanings in the understanding of the concept. First, it is clear that distinct features of a universally "positive" concept such as wisdom do not entail the same degree of positive valence in all cultural settings. In the present case, the Japanese word *wise*, although generally regarded as positive, also can imply a negative characteristic (i.e., "evil wisdom") often used to describe a cunning strategist. Second, the finding may be accounted for by the cultural experience of the groups. Japanese participants quite possibly had significantly less emotional involvement than others with Hitler during World War II and Hussein during the Gulf War, while having had sufficient cognitive involvement to acknowledge their pragmatic skills for example, some of the American participants (and their

relatives) were Holocaust survivors and understandably had an extremely strong feeling toward Hitler. By contrast, although the Japanese participants, including the older cohort (mean age = 76.92), knew "who *Hitler* was" or "what *Hitler* had done," their lack of direct involvement in the European fronts during World War II may have prevented them from fully understanding Hitler's deeds. At any rate, the research findings suggest that both the theoretical and applied definitions of a psychological concept such as wisdom can vary significantly between cultures. As a consequence, when exploring wisdom – a concept relevant to both East and West – it is essential that social scientists avoid cultural egocentrism and acknowledge the broadest and most inclusive meanings entailed by the concept.

To this point we have argued that culturally differentiated intellectual historical accounts of wisdom have formed the context for the development of culturally differentiated common-sense definitions of wisdom. Given that formal psychological theories derive largely from the implicit or common-sense theories of the scientists who formulate these formal theories (Sternberg, 1990), it is not surprising that contemporary psychological models have deep conceptual roots in specific cultural traditions, and in intellectual traditions that have been influenced by these cultural traditions (Overton, 1998). From cultural–intellectual root to stem and branch there grows finally the flowers of theoretical disagreements concerning the nature and criteria of wisdom. Any reconciliation of these disagreements must necessarily entail the recognition of cultures and intellectual traditions, not as dichotomies, but as complementary points of views on the universal human condition (Overton, 2003). This recognition establishes a base from which to search for an integration of the complements. With respect to wisdom, we have found accepting the various definitions as complements leads to the organization of wisdom around a broad culturally inclusive and developmental synthetic–analytic framework.

In the next section, we will explore this framework and describe some of its implications in the context of an Eriksonian approach to personality development.

Culturally Inclusive Developmental Model of Wisdom

The synthetic–analytic framework considers wisdom as two moments or modes of the same psychological process. The analytical mode breaks down human experience into its simplest terms or elementary qualities, and examines the nature of their "part to part" relationship. This is a mode that focuses on the reduction or analysis of global systems into elementary qualities, and the exploration of the relations among these qualities. When exploring wisdom within the analytic mode, the "instrumental" or "adaptive" or "procedural" value of observed behavior and its variational changes become the focus of inquiry. As a consequence, inquiry within this mode examines specific knowledge content of individual differences in relation to several information processing functions and practical goals in life (e.g., solving problems, making judgments, etc.).

The synthetic mode focuses on experience as a holistic integrated "whole–part relationship," which is not derivable directly from an analysis of individual elements. Wisdom's synthetic mode entails the dialectic nature of the human mind (i.e., dialectic being defined as any system or structure that moves toward the states of increased integration) including the mind's momentary and developmental features (Basseches, 1984; Orwoll & Achenbaum, 1993; Sinnott, 1998). The dialectic principle assumes mind is a self-organizing system that, through experience, becomes transformed into more advanced, qualitatively new forms of integration across the life span (Overton, 1991). At any given point, the mind represents the integration of several domains of mental functioning (i.e., cognitive, emotional, motivational, intuitive processes);

developmentally the mind transforms itself through the actions of the person operating in the world (i.e., experience), and moves toward increasingly adaptive levels of integration (e.g., actualization tendency, enlightenment). When exploring wisdom within the synthetic mode, observed behavior or action is understood as an "expression" of some fundamental underlying psychological organization or system, rather than as an "instrumental" means to attaining a practical goal (Overton, 1997, 1998).

To the extent that this synthetic–analytic framework is rejected and complements are treated as dichotomous *either/or* alternatives, theories are created that conceptualize the synthetic and the analytic not as moments, but as privileged realities. When the synthetic is treated as privileged reality, wisdom can be represented as if the expressive phenomenological pole of human experience – including self-actualization tendency, transformation of consciousness, and self-transcendence phenomena – constitutes the whole of wisdom. By contrast, when the analytic is treated as a privileged reality, wisdom is understood as an instrumental behavior of observed action that only serves the means to functional goals.

With respect to empirical investigations, a relatively exclusive focus on the synthetic (Vandenberg, 1991; Yalom, 1980) has primarily yielded existential–phenomenological case studies. Analytic approaches have yielded a wider variety of empirical investigations and these have been offered at times as the only legitimate account of wisdom in the West (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990). Contemporary research approaches that explore the analytic–based instrumental dimension of wisdom have included an "expert knowledge system" (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 1998), a balance theory of wisdom (Sternberg, 1998), a high level of "epistemic cognition" (Kitchener, 1983), a problem-solving ability (Arlin, 1990), and a balance between "knowing and

doubting" (Meacham, 1990). Often these studies acknowledged the importance of a synthetic dimension of wisdom, but the research remains within a cognitive–behavioral analytic frame (Blanchard-Fields & Norris, 1995).

A common feature among contemporary analytical approaches to wisdom has been the differentiation of two analytical components: a knowledge database and a higher–level cognitive complexity that permits adequate utilization of the database. These two analytic components parallel those of the traditional Western definitions: possession of an extensive knowledge base (e.g., knowledge of religion, metaphysics, etc.) and an ability to utilize such knowledge (e.g., logical reasoning). From this perspective, Baltes and his colleagues, for example, identify two components of wisdom that they claim to be necessary for the understanding of life's central themes (i.e., lifespan contextualism, relativism, and uncertainty). These dimensions are: (a) factual/declarative knowledge and (b) procedural knowledge. The former represents a knowledge database about the fundamental pragmatics of life, whereas the latter is the strategic process involved in utilizing that database (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). Although expressed differently, other analytical theories of wisdom also take this two-tier approach. Thus, for example, both Kitchener and Brenner (1990) and Meacham (1990) claim that wisdom is knowing about the limit of one's knowledge, the claim that mirrors Socrates' definition of wisdom (i.e., σοφία). In Meacham's words, wisdom is a balance between "knowing and doubting," implying the importance of access to the knowledge database (i.e., "knowing") and of the meta-level monitoring ability of that knowledge (i.e., "doubting"). Furthermore, Kitchener and Brenner emphasize the meta-level ability of differentiating and integrating abstract concepts, and analytically define wisdom as "the ability to reason complexly with abstraction" (1990, p. 225).

detachment or a high level of meta-awareness of the self and situational contexts (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986). Similar to the Eastern tradition that expands the meaning of "understanding" beyond an experience mediated only by representational cognitive structures, this feature of wisdom denotes a direct, intuitive, and emotional experience. It may be helpful to distinguish "reflective understanding" from "reflective thinking" to further elaborate the psychological meaning of the former, as the two are often conflated.

Chinen (1984) articulates this distinction in his discussion of logical modality, entailing the concepts of "object awareness" and "modal awareness." Object awareness implies what we usually refer to as "awareness" in everyday language. The focus of this modality is on the content of a particular object, and experience is largely mediated by representations of that content. In contrast, modal awareness, which is equivalent to the synthetic/transformational reflective understanding that emerges during late adulthood, entails an explicit awareness of the manner in which the object is attended to. This modality operates at a heightened level of consciousness. It is an appreciation of how persons experience their lives. This mode, often described as transcendental experience, is emphasized in many Eastern spiritual regimens including Zen Buddhism and Hinduism. To illustrate, imagine being in a museum, standing in front of a statue. From an object awareness perspective, we focus on the statue itself by attending to its texture, the use of negative space, and so on. Here our attention is on the content of the statue or the object itself, and our experience is primarily mediated by representational cognitive structures. Other features of reflective thinking in this situation might be our thoughts about whether we are standing too close or too far from the statue, whether we appreciate the statue to the same degree as an art critic who may be standing next to us, and so on. In these situations, our attention simply shifts from one object (i.e.,