

The Cambridge Handbook of Wisdom

This is a comprehensive review of the psychological literature on wisdom by leading experts in the field. It covers the philosophical and sociocultural foundations of wisdom and showcases the measurement and teaching of wisdom. The connection of wisdom to intelligence and personality is explained alongside its relationship with morality and ethics. It also explores the neurobiology of wisdom, its significance in medical decision-making, and wise leadership.

How to develop wisdom is discussed and practical information is given about how to instill it in others. It is accessible to a wide readership and includes virtually all of the major theories of wisdom, as well as the full range of research on wisdom as it is understood today. It takes both a basic-science and applied focus, making it useful to those seeking to understand wisdom scientifically and to those who wish to apply their understanding of wisdom to their own work.

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This volume is dedicated to the memory of the late Professor Paul B. Baltes, who, more than any other individual, originated the exploration of wisdom in psychological research.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page x
<i>List of Tables</i>	xi
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xii
<i>Preface</i>	xiv
Part I Foundations of Wisdom	1
1 Race to Samarra: The Critical Importance of Wisdom in the World Today	
ROBERT J. STERNBERG	3
2 Philosophical Foundations of Wisdom	
JASON SWARTWOOD AND VALERIE TIBERIUS	10
3 Sociocultural Foundations of Wisdom	
RICCA EDMONDSON AND MARKUS H. WOERNER	40
4 Neurobiology of Wisdom	
ELLEN E. LEE AND DILIP V. JESTE	69
Part II Conceptions of Wisdom	95
5 Wisdom of the Crowd: Exploring People's Conceptions of Wisdom	
NIC M. WESTSTRATE, SUSAN BLUCK, AND JUDITH GLÜCK	97
6 Wisdom As Self-Transcendence	
CAROLYN M. ALDWIN, HEIDI IGARASHI, AND MICHAEL R. LEVENSON	122
7 Wisdom As a Personality Type	
MONIKA ARDELT, STEPHEN PRIDGEN, AND KATHRYN L. NUTTER-PRIDGEN	144
8 Why People Often Prefer Wise Guys to Guys Who Are Wise: An Augmented Balance Theory of the Production and Reception of Wisdom	
ROBERT J. STERNBERG	162

9	The Distinction between Personal and General Wisdom: How Far Have We Come? URSULA M. STAUDINGER	182
10	Wise Reasoning: Converging Evidence for the Psychology of Sound Judgment HARRISON OAKES, JUSTIN P. BRIENZA, ABDO ELNAKOURI, AND IGOR GROSSMANN	202
11	Practical Wisdom: What Aristotle Might Add to Psychology BARRY SCHWARTZ AND KENNETH E. SHARPE	226
12	Wisdom As State versus Trait IGOR GROSSMANN, FRANKI Y. H. KUNG, AND HENRI C. SANTOS	249
	Part III Measures of Wisdom	275
13	Performance-Based Measures of Wisdom: State of the Art and Future Directions UTE KUNZMANN	277
14	Self-Report Wisdom Measures: Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions JEFFREY DEAN WEBSTER	297
	Part IV The Development of Wisdom	321
15	The Development of Wisdom during Adulthood JUDITH GLÜCK	323
16	Educating for Wisdom MICHEL FERRARI AND JUENSUNG KIM	347
17	Teaching for Wisdom ROBERT J. STERNBERG AND EMILY S. HAGEN	372
	Part V Cultural Perspectives on Wisdom	407
18	Cultural Differences in Wisdom and Conceptions of Wisdom MICHEL FERRARI AND FATEMEH ALHOSSEINI	409
19	Non-Western Lay Conceptions of Wisdom SHIH-YING YANG AND ALI INTEZARI	429
	Part VI Wisdom and Other Psychological Constructs	453
20	Creativity, Intelligence, and Wisdom: Could versus Should SARAH F. LYNCH AND JAMES C. KAUFMAN	455
21	Giftedness and Wisdom DON AMBROSE	465

22	Low Levels of Wisdom: Foolishness BALAZS ACZEL	483
23	The Mirror of Wisdom: Self-Reflection as a Developmental Precursor and Core Competency of Wise People NIC M. WESTSTRATE	500
24	Identity and Purpose in Life As Building Blocks for Wisdom KAYLIN RATNER AND ANTHONY L. BURROW	519
25	Wisdom, Morality, and Ethics ROBERT J. STERNBERG AND JUDITH GLÜCK	551
26	Wisdom and Emotion UTE KUNZMANN AND JUDITH GLÜCK	575
27	Wisdom and Well-Being MONIKA ARDELT	602
28	Relationship between Wisdom and Spirituality: An Expanded Theoretical Model with Mysticism and Gerotranscendence MASAMI TAKAHASHI	626
	Part VII Wisdom in Action	647
29	Wise Leadership BERNARD MCKENNA AND DAVID ROONEY	649
30	Professional Wisdom: Functions and Processes of Psychotherapeutic and Judicial Wisdom HEIDI M. LEVITT AND LAUREN M. GRABOWSKI	676
31	Wisdom in Medical Decision-Making LAURIS C. KALDJIAN	698
32	Wisdom in History and Politics LLOYD S. ETHEREDGE	721
33	The Urgent Need for Social Wisdom NICHOLAS MAXWELL	754
	Part VIII Conclusions	781
34	Why Is Wisdom Such an Obscure Field of Inquiry and What Can and Should Be Done About It? ROBERT J. STERNBERG AND JUDITH GLÜCK	783
	<i>Index</i>	797

Figures

4.1	Putative neuroanatomy of components of wisdom (adapted from Meeks & Jeste, 2009)	page 78
10.1	Example characteristics of wise reasoning in everyday life, represented by frequently co-occurring aspects of cognition (adapted from Grossmann (2017a))	207
12.1	Malleable vs. fixed beliefs about wisdom across cultures (from 1 = <i>not at all</i> to 7 = <i>very much</i> ; as reported in Grossmann & Kung, 2018)	254
12.2	Variability and malleability of social and cognitive features of wisdom (adopted from Santos et al., 2017)	257
15.1	Age and the reversed cognitive dimension of the 3D-WS. $N = 170$; for details, see Glück et al. (2013)	327
22.1	The Tripartite Model of Mind (based on Stanovich, 2012)	488
22.2	The Astrologer Who Fell into a Well. Fable by Jean de La Fontaine. Illustration 18th century. Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/78/Chauveau_-_Fables_de_La_Fontaine_-_02-13.png	490
22.3	The relationship of the level of observed stupidity of the action with the seriousness of the consequences of the described action (a), and the responsibility of the actor for the action (b)	493
22.4	“The Age of Reason; or, the World turned Topsy-turvy exemplified in Tom Paine’s Works!”, a cartoon by George Cruikshank. Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4f/CruikshankPaine.jpg	495
23.1	Charles de Bovelles’ (1510) depiction of Lady Fortuna (left) and Lady Wisdom (right) appeared as the front piece in Bovelles’ <i>Liber de Sapiente (Book of Wisdom)</i> . Reproduced with permission from the Bibliothèque nationale de France	501
27.1	Rating and scale measures of general and personal wisdom	607
32.1	Effects of data restrictions on macroeconomic science. Source: Congressional Budget Office	742
33.1	Aim-oriented empiricism	771
33.2	Aim-oriented rationality applied to the task of creating a wiser world	774

Tables

1.1	Kinds of wisdom	<i>page</i> 5
1.2	Kinds of non-wisdom	6
1.3	Kinds of foolishness	7
4.1	Abbreviations used for specific brain regions	72
6.1	Measures of self-transcendence	127
10.1	Philosophical perspectives on wisdom	203
12.1	Essentialist portrayals of wisdom in social sciences and humanities (Grossmann, 2017a)	252
14.1	Summary characteristics of self-report wisdom measures	302
15.1	Single-item Spearman correlations of three wisdom self-report scales with age (only correlations above 0.20 or below -0.20 are listed)	326
16.1	Overview of current definitions of wisdom (augmented from Glück, 2015)	354
19.1	Similarities and differences in dimensions of non-Western conceptions of wisdom until 2017	441
19.2	The Middle Eastern conceptions of wisdom in the Persian traditions	449
27.1	Bivariate correlations between wisdom and psychological well-being indicators of personality growth	610
27.2	Bivariate correlations between wisdom and psychological well-being indicators of personality adjustment	611
27.3	Bivariate correlations between wisdom and indicators of subjective well-being	613
32.1	The “borderline” syndrome	735

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Preface

We live in a world that is in serious need of much greater wisdom than it now shows. It is a world of enormous economic inequality in the richest countries, with illiberal populists and autocrats coming into power throughout parts of Europe, Africa, South America, and North America, terrifying climate change that is being ignored by many governments, and nuclear weapons that could bring destruction to the planet and most, if not all, of its human population.

The study of wisdom should have something – perhaps a lot – to say about why the world is where it is and what could be done to change it. What is wisdom, how can we study it, and most importantly, how can we make humanity wiser? Increasingly, however, much of psychological research has tended to focus on narrow problems that can be investigated in great detail in elegant experiments with few real-world implications. The study of wisdom is close to the opposite. Wisdom is complex, rare, hard to define, and even harder to measure. Moreover, the situations in which it manifests itself do not easily lend themselves to tight experimental methodologies. Over the past 20 years, however, more and more researchers have taken up wisdom. When Robert J. Sternberg and Jennifer Jordan published the last edition of the *Handbook of Wisdom*, it had thirteen chapters.¹

Since 2005, research on wisdom has burgeoned. Now, in 2018, this new volume includes thirty-four chapters by twenty-three different research groups from different fields of psychology as well as philosophy, sociology, political science, economics, and medicine. These researchers have studied wisdom from various perspectives and in a broad range of contexts.

Perhaps there is hope – at least, more and more people seem to understand that we need to understand wisdom and, more importantly, to act wisely. While this volume will not perhaps have an immediate effect on the state of the world, it might provoke new ideas and spark new research both in academia and in real-life applied contexts. And perhaps, sooner or later, this volume and others like it will inspire people, especially policy-makers, to act more wisely. Maybe we, the editors and authors, can contribute a few small steps to the transitions that humanity needs to make if it wants to survive.

1 Sternberg, R. J., & Jordan, J. (Eds.). (2005). *A handbook of wisdom: Psychological perspectives*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Our handbook is written not only for students of wisdom and researchers in the field but also for anyone who seriously wants to understand wisdom and how it has the potential to change the world. We hope that, after reading this volume, you will want to contribute to those changes that make the world a better and more humane place.