



Wisdom

The world is simultaneously facing many crises that humanity is failing to solve. Yet, at the same time, humans are smarter (with IQs on average thirty points higher than a century ago) and more knowledgeable (with the world's knowledge base at our fingertips), and scientific advances are accelerating. However, intelligence and knowledge are not enough: wisdom harnesses these strengths to serve the common good. Education is focused on acquiring knowledge, but schools would do better also to teach and test for the development of wisdom. To a lot of people, wisdom is an abstraction, but there is a growing body of scientific research into what wisdom is and how it works. This introduction sets out why wisdom is so important. Drawing on insights from psychology, philosophy, science, and common sense, this book provides a complete account of wisdom and how we can develop it throughout our lives.

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Robert J. Sternberg , Judith Glück
Frontmatter
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Wisdom

The Psychology of Wise Thoughts, Words,
and Deeds

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We dedicate this book to our children: Bob to Seth, Sara, Samuel, Brittany, and Melody; and to the memory of Julian and Justin; and Judith to Jonas and Lena.

They have been, for us, our greatest teachers of wisdom. If there is to be any hope for this world, it must be through our children, your children (if you have any!), and all the children of the world.

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Preface

During the twentieth century, intelligence quotients (IQs) increased, worldwide, by roughly thirty points. Such gains, according to James Flynn, reflect the greater cognitive skills needed to adapt to the environment as it evolved over the course of the century. The gains may result from changes in education, parenting, nutrition, and other factors. On this view, IQs might rise or fall over time, depending on the cognitive skills that a particular environment requires.

Impressive though these gains are, they might leave one baffled regarding how *maladaptive* people have been to their environment. The failure seems to go beyond intelligence of any kind, because a common feature of many of these problems is *intelligent* people failing to exert *wisdom*.

The goal of this book is to present a brief introduction to wisdom, primarily but not exclusively, from a psychological point of view.

Motivation for This Book

The basic motivation for this book is that *wisdom* is the essential psychological attribute that, more than any other, is needed to understand and solve the problems facing the world today. The unique mission of this book will be to present to educated readers – students, laypersons, and experts alike – in brief and readable form what is known about wisdom and why it is important to both individuals and the world.

Wisdom has been defined in many different ways, but a common feature of many definitions is a focus on the balance of not only cognitive but also emotional and motivational elements applied to achieve a common good. Wisdom serves well not only in the kind of individual problem-solving measured by existing tests of intelligence but also in collective problem-solving for the various problems facing the world.

The intended audience for this book is students, educated laypersons, and professionals interested in wisdom or just in how the world can take a better approach to solving the problems confronting it.

Our book is divided into eight chapters plus an epilogue.

In Chapter 1, “What Is Wisdom?,” we discuss what wisdom is. We especially emphasize the importance of seeking a common good by finding a balance among intrapersonal (one’s own), interpersonal (others’), and extrapersonal (larger) interests.

In Chapter 2, “Why Is Wisdom Important and Why Doesn’t Society Always See It That Way?,” we discuss the great importance of wisdom to society and why society’s other priorities not only overshadow wisdom but, sometimes, actually work against wisdom.

In Chapter 3, “How Has Wisdom Been Studied in Psychology?,” we show how the way psychologists have conceptualized and studied wisdom has evolved over time. We review various psychological approaches to wisdom.

In Chapter 4, “How Is Wisdom Measured?,” we discuss the major approaches to measuring wisdom, both self-report and performance-based. The chapter gives examples of the types of questions used and how responses to the questions are scored.

In Chapter 5, “How Does Wisdom Develop?,” we review theories and empirical findings on the development of wisdom over the life span. The chapter looks at how wisdom is related to age and which individual resources foster the development of wisdom from experience.

In Chapter 6, “How Do We Cultivate Wisdom?,” we review attempts to teach for wisdom, both general and discipline-specific. The chapter also discusses principles of teaching for wisdom.

In Chapter 7, “How Is Wisdom Related to Other Psychological Characteristics?,” we review the literature on the relation of wisdom to other psychological characteristics, focusing on intelligence, personality, emotions, well-being, and morality.

In Chapter 8, “Am I Wise?,” we present a self-assessment whereby readers can assess their own wisdom and consider as well how they might increase their wisdom.

In the Epilogue, we briefly discuss why wisdom, perhaps more than any other psychological construct, is important for the future of the world. Without it, the future of the world, or at least the role of humans in it, will be very much in doubt. We also discuss what the

world can do to focus more on developing wisdom in young people as well as adults.

We are grateful to our editors at Cambridge, David Repetto and Steven Acerra, for their support of this book project, and to Emily Watton for her assistance in editing. We also wish to express our gratitude to our many past collaborators in our research on wisdom for their contributions to our thinking. Finally, we wish to thank our families for their patience while we worked on this book.

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