WISDOM
An Integral View
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ABSTRACT Wisdom is vitally important to individual and collective well-being yet has been almost completely ignored in the modern Western world. This article uses the Integral framework to integrate Western, cross-cultural, and contemplative perspectives in exploring topics such as the nature and definition of wisdom, whether there are different types of wisdom, the relationship between wisdom and development, and contemplative methods for cultivating wisdom. An argument is made that people's abilities to acquire, recognize, and utilize wisdom depend on their developmental stage as well as the range of states of consciousness they can access. Finally, using an integral approach, the article demonstrates how philosophical, psychological, religious, and contemplative strands of wisdom studies can be woven together.

KEY WORDS epistemology; ethics; human development; ontology; wisdom

> Happy are those who find wisdom….
> She is more precious than jewels,
> And nothing you desire can compare with her….
> Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
> And all her paths are peace….
> Get wisdom, get insight: do not forget.
>   – *The Bible* (Proverbs 3:13, 17; 4:5)

The enormity and variety of the threats confronting humankind are all too obvious, and responding to them successfully will require all our resources, both inner and outer. One of the most fundamental and important responses will be to better understand and develop human virtues: qualities and capacities such as ethics, care, compassion, and wisdom. For the remarkable thing about our current global crises is that most of them can be traced to a lack of just these qualities.

Given the importance of virtues—in our times and in all times—you would assume that researching them would be a high cultural and academic priority. But you would be wrong! With certain exceptions, such as the philosophical investigation of ethics, the virtues have usually been regarded as too "soft" and fuzzy to be respectable research topics. Wisdom in particular has suffered remarkable neglect. In fact, when I asked the chairman of philosophy at my university for reading recommendations, he gave a startling reply: "Well, we made a great start 2,500 years ago, but the topic has been pretty dead for the last 2,000 years." That is a remarkable statement, given that we are talking about one of the most profound and important of all human qualities, and given that its presence or absence may decide the fate of both our species and our planet.

Fortunately, things are beginning to change, and in the past two decades psychological research on wisdom has finally begun. Yes, the research is limited in many ways; ways that will be described later, but at least the process has begun.

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The Goals of this Article

This article has eight goals. The first is simply to encourage the renaissance of interest in wisdom. The second is to integrate integral and wisdom studies. Current research on wisdom consists of a patchwork of disparate approaches, and we have also inherited diverse philosophical, psychological, religious, and contemplative contributions. Integral Theory therefore offers a much-needed overarching conceptual framework that can compare approaches and begin to situate and integrate them into a larger picture.

A third aim is to clarify assumptions about the nature of wisdom, since many studies describe and define wisdom rather fuzzily, leaving crucial assumptions unarticulated. A related aim is to provide and explicate a new definition of wisdom.

Another major goal is to identify and differentiate the varieties of wisdom. We are heirs to a 2,500-year-old Western philosophical division of wisdom into two types: *sophia* and *phronesis* (theoretical and practical). Contemporary researchers seem to have implicitly accepted this category system, even though it has major problems. For example, the exact nature of *sophia* and *phronesis*, as well as the distinctions between them, are unclear. The terms have not been precisely defined and have been employed in different ways by different philosophers (Curnow, 1999, 2011). In addition, the Western philosophical tradition has given little account of the mental processes, such as intuition and conceptual analysis, at work in the development and expression of different kinds of wisdom. A further and extremely important problem with our inherited category system is that contemplative traditions point to an additional, and radically different, kind of wisdom: a transconceptual seeing into the nature of self and reality.

A sixth goal for the article is to clarify the relationship between wisdom and development. Many researchers assume that it is associated with higher levels of development, but the nature of this association remains rather vague.

The seventh goal is to introduce cross-cultural and contemplative perspectives to Western studies. Contemporary researchers have relied almost exclusively on Western perspectives and approaches. Yet wisdom has been a worldwide pursuit throughout history, and religious-philosophical systems such as Judaism, Vedanta, and Confucianism, as well as psychologies such as Buddhist Abhidharma, have examined wisdom for thousands of years (Walsh, in press).

Even more importantly, the world's contemplative traditions have developed systematic disciplines to cultivate several kinds of wisdom. The eighth and final goal of this article is therefore an encompassing one: to point toward the possibility of a global and integral theory of, and approach to, wisdom.

Historical Approaches To Wisdom

So what is wisdom? This is an ancient question, and the earliest recorded answers are found in India's Vedas and the proverbial advice of Egyptian, Hebrew, and Mesopotamian literature (Crenshaw, 2010). In later revealed traditions, a recurrent theme is that wisdom is revealed as a divine gift, and can be cultivated by pondering and aligning one's life with it. For example, in traditional Islam, "Wisdom derives from placing the revelation from God at the center of one's life, reflecting on it, and making it the basis of one's action" (Thomas, 2006, p. 439). Likewise, in Christianity, "Christians are thus considered to be 'wise' to the extent that their words and actions reflect and conform to the teaching and practice of Jesus…" (Dysinger, in press).

However, revelation-centered wisdoms are only one form of religious sagacity. All authentic religions—including revealed traditions such as Christianity and Islam—contain contemplative or mystical branches. These are crucially important because they practice contemplative disciplines (e.g., meditation, contemplation, and yoga) that foster an array of psychological and spiritual skills such as concentration, insight, emotional maturity, and wisdom (Walsh, 1979, 1983). When these skills mature, they result in maturation to transpersonal states and stages that can culminate in a direct insight into reality. This insight yields a

radically different (transrational, transconceptual, or transcendental) kind of wisdom known, for example, as *jnana* (Hinduism), *prajna* (Buddhism), *ma'rifah* (Islam), or *gnosis* (Christianity) (Walsh, in press). For Ken Wilber (2005), the degree of a tradition's *authenticity* is a function of its effectiveness in fostering transformation to transpersonal levels (Walsh & Vaughan, 1994). Presumably, a tradition's authenticity would therefore be related to its effectiveness in cultivating transrational wisdom.

With the emergence of philosophy came the first systematic analyses and divisions into different kinds of wisdom. The most influential have been the Greek distinction between *sophia* (knowledge of first causes) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom) (Curnow, 2011), as well as the analogous Buddhist distinction between *prajna* (transcendental insight) and *upaya* (skillfulness in serving and enlightening others). The recent emergence of scientific, and especially psychological, research has birthed new perspectives and definitions of wisdom. Not surprisingly, these tend to focus on mental processes and capacities, on what can be measured, and therefore on *phronesis* rather than *sophia*. Unfortunately, there is little overlap between contemporary definitions or between them and earlier views (Trowbridge, 2011). This is hardly surprising considering the wide variety of eras, cultures, approaches and perspectives, and given that sagacity "is perhaps the most complex characteristic that can be attributed to individuals or to cultures" (Birren & Svensson, 2005, p. 28).

Ontological And Epistemological Queries About Wisdom

This embarrassing richness of ideas about the nature of wisdom raises two families of philosophical questions: ontological and epistemological. Ontological questions ask, "What is the nature of wisdom?" while epistemological questions ask, for example, "How do we best investigate it?" or "How does our way of investigating affect what we find?"

Ontological Questions

The first and crucial question is, "Is there such a thing as wisdom simply waiting to be discovered and described?" Integral practitioners will be well aware that the short answer is no, and that to believe otherwise is to fall into "The Myth of the Given," otherwise known as, for example, "the philosophy of the subject" or "the philosophy of consciousness" (Wilber, 2006, pp. 175-177). This is the mistaken belief that reality is simply given to us to uncover and discover. Yet the central thrust of postmodern philosophy is that all experience is in part a construction and interpretation: what we find reflects the methods of observation, the characteristics and capacities of the observers, as well as the cultures which form and inform them.

But there is a still deeper "no" to the question of whether wisdom is simply something waiting to be discovered. "Wisdom" is simply a concept—an intellectual abstraction drawn from numerous experiences. As such, it is an example of the central thesis of Mādhyamaka Buddhism which argues that all phenomena are *shunyata*, which is usually translated as "empty" of inherent existence and characteristics (Garfield, 1995). What we actually experience are such things as thoughts, sayings, behaviors, and books that we deem "wise." Even these "wise things" are constructed or enacted by our methods of observation and are themselves *shunyata*. Yet from them we abstract the concept of wisdom.

These enactive and abstractive processes are rarely acknowledged in contemporary research. Consequently, researchers often implicitly attempt to discuss "Wisdom"—the Kantian "thing in itself"—without acknowledging that all we can investigate are phenomena enacted or constructed by, among other things, our methods of investigation. Philosophical discussions of these kinds of issues can get very deep very quickly (e.g., S. Esbjörn-Hargens, 2010a; Wilber, 2006). However, for our purposes, we can simply note the above points and allow them to inform our subsequent discussion of wisdom(s).

One key implication is that different methods of investigation (different epistemologies) will yield different enactments of wisdom. The next question that emerges is whether these enactments are most fruitfully

considered as a single cluster or as multiple clusters. Speaking simply, the question becomes, "Is wisdom most fruitfully considered as one or many; as one family or multiple families of wisdom(s)?" If sagacity is considered multiple then the next questions become, "What is the relationship between these kinds of wisdoms? Are they overlapping or discrete? And if discrete, are they incommensurate or can they be integrated?"

Let us try to ground these questions in specific examples. Yoga claims to culminate in transconceptual wisdom (*jnana*) that is radically and incommensurately distinct from wisdom based on conceptual understanding (Feuerstein, in press). This is a claim for two discrete and incommensurate kinds of wisdoms. There also seem to be varying degrees of conceptual wisdom. For example, a contemplative's conceptual wisdom will (hopefully) be greater after 30 years of practice than after 5. Yet these different degrees of insight and understanding can probably be ordered in a developmental hierarchy. Principles for ranking them include the sequence in which they emerge, the richness, range, and depth of the understandings they encompass, as well as the degree of integration of these understandings. Conceptually based wisdoms, then, would be overlapping varieties that can be integrated developmentally.

So on one hand, there may be distinct, incommensurate kinds of wisdom. On the other hand, there may also be varieties and levels of sagacity that can be recognized as variations of a single kind of wisdom.

Epistemological Questions

Key epistemological questions include the following:

1. *Are contemplatives, sages, scholars and scientists talking about the same kind of wisdom?* In other words, to what extent are the different disciplines and methods of investigation enacting and exploring different wisdoms? Certainly a contemplative's introspection, a philosopher's conceptual analysis, and a scientist's objective measurements are very different methods, will yield different data, and may imply different "wisdoms."

2. *Does the apparent variety of wisdoms reflect different epistemological capacities in the people and cultures exploring it?* The short answer is yes. Later I will argue that people's abilities to acquire, recognize, and utilize wisdom depend on their developmental stage as well as the range of states of consciousness they can access. In other words, sapiential abilities are stage and state dependent.

3. *A third group of epistemological questions concerns contemporary research methods.* A crucial methodological issue is that much contemporary research—with notable exceptions such as the Berlin group of Paul Baltes and Ursula Staudinger—seems to be what Abraham Maslow (1971) called "means oriented" rather than "problem oriented." That is, some researchers use whatever means or tests are simple and easy rather than those most appropriate to the problem. Consequently, it is not clear that some studies of "wisdom" have much to do with it. Clearly, questions about methods are going to be crucial to the future of wisdom research. As will be discussed later, research methods will need to extend beyond experimental studies to include, for example, contemplative, cross-cultural, and phenomenological approaches, and ideally Integral Methodological Pluralism.

Integrating Integral Theory and Wisdom Studies

Integral Theory offers valuable advantages and implications for our understanding and research of wisdom. In what follows I will offer a large number of ideas, all of which represent hypotheses to be tested. However,

rather than turn the text into a tedious list of qualifiers, I will often simply state or suggest ideas, with the understanding that all of them are provisional hypotheses to be tested.

Let us begin by examining wisdom studies in light of the Integral model's five major elements: 1) domains of reality (the four quadrants), 2) levels, 3) lines of development, 4) states, and 5) types.

The Four Quadrants and the "Location" of Wisdom

The four quadrants offer one answer to a recurring research question, "Where is wisdom found?" Is it a characteristic of individuals only, or can cultures, societies, and institutions also embody wisdom? Integral Theory suggests that aspects of wisdom are found in all four quadrants.

In individuals, sagacity appears as, for example, subjective insights and understandings, as well as objective behavior and neural activity. In collectives, wisdom is embedded intersubjectively in the cultural ethos: the innumerable shared beliefs, values, ethics, and ideas of a culture. These cultural elements embody the insights and understandings of countless individuals past and present. In turn, these collective cultural expressions form and inform (the wisdom of) individuals, so that "Cultural memory is the mother of wisdom" (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, p. 123).

Sapience is also expressed in collectives as (inter)objective constructions that materially embody and institutionalize individual and collective wisdom. Examples include legal, educational, and political systems, contemplative institutions, as well as art and books. For Paul Baltes, who saw wisdom as rare in individuals, "In general, wisdom is foremost a cultural product deposited in books of wisdom rather than in individuals (Baltes et al., 2002, p. 331).

Of course, collectives embody not only wisdom, but also much foolishness. The amounts of wisdom and foolishness, as well as their ratio, reflect the past evolution and present maturity of cultures, and are probably of monumental importance in deciding their fate. The ratio of wisdom to foolishness—what we might call the *sagacity:stupidity ratio*—may well be one of the most important cultural factors determining individual and collective well-being, as well as how much cultures support or suppress the search for wisdom (i.e., to what extent cultures are *sophiatrophic* or *sophiatoxic*). Most importantly, the sagacity:stupidity ratio will likely determine the fate of societies, our species, and our planet.

In summary, Integral Theory suggests that we should look for expressions of wisdom in all four quadrants. And that means that we need to use multiple methods, and ideally Integral Methodological Pluralism. Further implications will become apparent after we examine other dimensions of the Integral model, beginning with levels of development.

Development: Levels and Lines

Both ancient contemplatives and contemporary researchers imply that wisdom is related to development. For example, the original Buddhist term for meditation was *bhavana* (literally, mental development), while in Taoism the term is *lien-hsin* (refining the mind) (Wong, 1997). Likewise, some researchers link the emergence of wisdom to the development of postformal operational cognition (Kramer, 2003).

Postconventional, postformal operational, and transpersonal stages are important for many reasons. First, they point to our developmental potentials. Second, contemplative traditions suggest that transpersonal stages and states are intimately linked to wisdom as both cause and effect. Wise insights and behaviors are said to foster transpersonal development, which in turn fosters further insights. For example, the first practice of Buddhism's Eightfold Path is "Right Understanding," because without some understanding of the nature of life and our existential dilemmas, people see no reason to undertake contemplative practices. However, once begun, these practices then foster understanding and wisdom through successively deeper stages.

The crucial point is that contemplative disciplines have discovered insights, lifestyles, and practices

that can catalyze development in general, and wisdom in particular, to postconventional and even transconventional levels (Alexander et al., 1991; Walsh, 1999; Walsh & Shapiro, 2006; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993; Wilber, 2000b, 2001, 2005, 2006). This, of course, is a discovery of enormous significance, especially since Western culture and education struggle to bring people up to conventional levels and, at best, to early postconventional levels. As Jacob Needleman (1990) puts it, "All the teachings agree: our capacity to live meaningfully, wisely, and compassionately depends entirely on our openness to the higher reaches of the inner world" (p. 14).

Lines of Development

But of course people and minds are not unitary entities. There are multiple mental functions or mental modules, and over time these develop and are then known as developmental lines. Examples include cognitive, moral, ego, and perhaps wisdom lines. Developmental lines are only loosely linked and can therefore develop unevenly. One way of portraying this is by what Wilber (2006) calls an Integral Psychograph. This offers a graphic portrayal of levels of diverse lines and the extent of developmental imbalance between them (V. Esbjörn-Hargens, 2010).

This raises an obvious question: Is there a characteristic psychograph associated with wisdom, and if so, what is it? As yet we have few clues. For example, wisdom scores seem to be associated with higher levels of intelligence and reflective thinking (Ardelt, 2009; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). However, it is unclear to what extent these high scores actually reflect higher developmental stages rather than simply strengths or intensities.

What is the Relationship Between Development and Wisdom?

The exact relationship of wisdom to development may be complex. In fact, researchers have suggested several distinct kinds of relationships. The best-known example of linking wisdom to a specific stage (or age) is Erik Erickson's suggestion that wisdom emerges most readily in life's final stage. However, there are problems with this conception, as well as with the general approach of tying wisdom to one stage. Importantly, it suggests that sagacity can't be much expected in prior stages. Yet tying the birth of wisdom specifically to life's end runs counter to the painful fact that this is exactly when crucial energetic and social resources are waning. Moreover, counter to popular opinion, researchers find little improvement on wisdom scores with age (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000).

Erickson ruefully confessed in late life that his younger pronouncements on the growth possibilities of old age now felt overly optimistic. In his eighties he lamented that "the demand to develop Integrity and Wisdom in old age seems to be somewhat unfair, especially when made by middle-aged theorists—as, indeed, we then were" (as cited in Hoare, 2000, p. 79). Eventually he came to see the final goal or achievement of life not as wisdom, but as faith (Brugman, 2010).

Indian perspectives offer instructive comparisons. By contrast with Erickson, the Buddha lamented the limited progress possible to people taking up contemplative practices late in life: *ars longa, vita brevis*. In Hinduism, wisdom is esteemed as a lifelong pursuit, though the pursuit takes different forms at different ages (e.g., student, householder, and renunciate) (Feuerstein, in press).

Does Wisdom Increase with Age?

Why should wisdom, which intuitively seems so closely linked to life experience, not seem to increase significantly as one ages and acquires ever more life experience? This question has puzzled researchers for years (Sternberg, 2005). Yet the finding makes sense if we consider (at least parts of) wisdom as a form of expertise,

and if we consider exactly how expertise is acquired. What kind of expertise might wisdom be? Well, according to Paul Baltes and Ursula Staudinger (2000), wisdom is "…expertise in the conduct and meaning of life" (p. 124).

In recent years researchers have developed a rich understanding of how expertise is acquired across domains ranging from athletics to academics. One of the central findings is that mere experience or practice does not necessarily lead to improvement. You can play golf or chess, teach, write, or practice a profession such as psychotherapy for decades without necessarily improving. Just because you walk for decades doesn't mean you improve at it. What is required is not just practice but what is called "deliberate practice." With deliberate practice, you consciously seek to improve, focus on tasks you don't do well, carefully assess your performance, obtain feedback and mentoring, and sustain these efforts over time (Ericsson et al., 2006; Ericsson et al., 2007).

What might this imply for the cultivation of wisdom? I suspect what it means is that wisdom requires a strong, lifelong commitment to reflecting on and learning from all life experiences. Certainly this idea accords with recommendations from sages. Confucius described his own path as beginning when "At fifteen I set my heart on learning" (as cited in Lau, 1979, p. 63), while the Buddha stated that "He who would, may reach the utmost height—but he must be eager to learn" (as cited in Smith, 1991, p. 391). Likewise in Judaism, "The wise man learns from every phrase he hears, from every event he observes, and from every experience he shares" (Hoffman, 1985, p. 94). This is a very different attitude from much contemporary conventional living, which involves hours of passive intake of television or tranquilization by trivia: a conventionality that existentialists denigrate as, for example, "automation conformity" (Erich Fromm) or "everydayness" (Heidegger) (Walsh, 2001). Small wonder, then, that for so many, age increases wisdom so little.

Another possible relationship between wisdom and development is that wisdom is linked to the development of a specific line, especially cognition. Piaget identified formal operations as the highest stage of cognitive development. However, higher postformal operational stages have been suggested by both contemplative practitioners, such as Aurobindo, and by contemporary researchers such as Bruner, Flavell, Sinnott, and Wilber. Some researchers have gone further to suggest that wisdom is associated with postformal operational cognition (Kramer, 2003).

There are three problems with tying wisdom to a specific cognitive stage, even an advanced one such as postformal operational:

1. First, it ignores the role of other developmental lines. Due to developmental imbalance, one could exhibit, for example, mature cognitive development but immature ego and moral development (Wilber, 2006). Yet mature levels of all three may be essential for wisdom.
2. It suggests that wisdom won't emerge prior to the appearance of a specific cognitive stage, in this case postformal operational thought. This places a floor on wisdom, and means that it cannot appear in less mature stages and forms.
3. It overlooks the possibility of still higher stages such as Aurobindo's (1982) "illumined mind" or Wilber's (2006) "violet cognition." Thus it sets a ceiling on wisdom.

If these arguments are correct, then they suggest that postformal operational cognition might be a major facilitator of wisdom. Yet it might not be required for less mature forms, nor be sufficient for more mature forms.

Wisdom as the Product of Interactions Between Psychological Capacities

A recurrent idea in research literature is that sagacity arises from an interaction among psychological capacities, and that the strength or developmental level of the capacities is crucial. Three kinds of interac-

tion are frequently mentioned—combination, balance, and integration—though none have been specified precisely.

1. Wisdom as a Combination of Capacities

These theories suggest that wisdom emerges from a combination of capacities. For example, Monika Aldelt (2009) defines wisdom as a "combination of cognitive, reflective, and affective personality characteristics" (pp. 11-12). However ,"combination" is a vague term, and tells us little about the nature of the relationship or interaction between capacities. The choice of a vague term is certainly understandable at this early stage of research, but will hopefully yield to more precise terms as research matures. However, other researchers have suggested particular kinds of relationships between capacities, specifically *balance* and *integration*.

2. Balance Theories

Balance theories imply that sagacity emerges when two or more capacities are at optimal proportionate levels. For example, James Birren and Laurel Fisher (1990) suggest that, "Throughout life, wisdom develops as a balance of cognition, volition (conation), and affect" (p. 321). Three questions immediately emerge:

1. A balance of what? For example, what kinds of capacities need to be in proportion? Are they invariably other virtues? Or can they also be neutral capacities such as concentration that can be used for good or bad?
2. What aspects of the capacities are crucial? Is it their strength, their developmental level, or both?
3. What does balance really mean? Presumably it implies that some sort of proportion between two or more capacities is crucial for the emergence of wisdom. But what kind of proportion? Obviously many balance theories are as yet imprecise.

The current imprecision of balance theories does not mean that they are wrong. In fact, there are venerable philosophical and contemplative examples. For example, "the interdependence of virtues" is an ancient philosophical idea of the Stoics who held that "every virtue requires other virtues to complete it" (Murphy, 1992, p. 558), while Christian contemplatives claim that "the virtues are linked one to another…" (Nikodimos & Makarios, 1993, p. 160). However, balance theories are proposing more than an interdependence of virtues; they are proposing an interdependent emergence of an additional virtue. Are there any specific examples of this kind of emergence? There are, and Buddhist psychology (Abhidharma) offers two.

The first example is the "seven factors of enlightenment": seven qualities or capacities that are crucial to fostering mental maturation, wisdom, and enlightenment. These are comprised of three calming factors (tranquility, concentration, equanimity) and three energizing factors (effort, energy, rapture), and a superordinate factor of mindfulness. The calming and energizing factors need to be of comparable strength to balance each other and to avoid the disabling extremes of sleepiness and agitation. Moreover, when all seven are strong and balanced then there is the possibility of a breakthrough into transconceptual awareness known as "cessation" and its resultant transconceptual wisdom (Kornfield, 1993; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006).

The second example from Buddhist psychology is "the five spiritual faculties." These consist of mindfulness and two pairs of mental qualities that must be in balance: energy/concentration and faith/wisdom. Energy unbalanced by concentration leads to agitation, while concentration without sufficient energy produces lethargy. Likewise, faith devoid of wisdom collapses into blind belief, while wisdom without faith is said to result in egocentric cunning (Nyanatiloka, 1980). As the *Visuddhimagga*, a 1,500-year-old classic Buddhist text (Buddhaghosa & Nanamoli, 1999), puts it:

> For one strong in faith and weak in understanding has confidence uncritically and groundlessly. One strong in understanding and weak in faith errs on the side of cunning and is as hard to cure as one sick of a disease caused by medicine. With the balancing of the two a man has confidence only when there are grounds for it. (Ch. IV, §47, ¶1)

When all five qualities are sufficiently strengthened and balanced they are said to become "unshakeable" and are then known as the "five spiritual powers." Like the seven factors of enlightenment, they facilitate spiritual maturation and the cessation experiences that are central to classical Buddhist enlightenment. So as these examples from Buddhist psychology demonstrate, balance theories can be venerable and valuable, but to be really fruitful they need to be more carefully specified than contemporary research has done.

3. Integration Hypotheses

A further kind of interaction between developmental capacities is frequently suggested as essential for sagacity: integration. For example, wisdom is said to result from the integration of emotion and cognition (Shedlock & Cornelius, 2003) and from an "unusually integrated personality structure" (Orroll & Perlmutter, 1990, p. 160). But what does "integration" mean here? Once again, the hypotheses are not very specific. Presumably, integration implies some sort of harmonious, facilitative interaction between capacities. But so, too, does balance. So does the idea of integration add anything to the idea of balance? If so, none of the integration hypotheses seems to suggest what this addition might be. However, one possibility is that a mental function might foster (or cease to inhibit) other functions and/or beneficial interactions between them. For example, let us consider the possible role of defense mechanisms in integration and wisdom. Defenses can repress emotions, distort cognition, and redirect motivation in unhealthy immature ways. They can also dissociate mental functions so that they are no longer readily available.

As an example, consider the case of a talented woman with high postformal intelligence, idealistic motives, and a strong tendency to love. But let us also assume she has a poor self-image, severe insecurity, and "normal neurotic defense mechanisms" (Vaillant, 1977). Consequently, she *displaces* her love away from people (who are too threatening) onto animals, *represses* her idealism (which is incongruent with her poor self-image), and uses her powerful intellect to *rationalize* her suboptimal behavior. Consequently, her positive emotions, motives, and intellect function suboptimally, and keep her locked into unhealthy, unsatisfying, and unwise ways of being and living.

Now let us assume that she enters psychotherapy. There she gradually improves her self-image, releases insecurity, and adopts more mature defense mechanisms such as humor, altruism, and sublimation. Now her idealistic motives can be acknowledged, her love expressed, and her intellect used in the service of these healthy, mature motives and emotions. As her motives, emotions, and intellect are increasingly aligned toward a common goal—for example, loving and serving others—we can say they are becoming increasingly integrated. Over time, she may well learn how to achieve her goals more effectively and thereby grow in practical wisdom.

This case example suggests two possible ways in which capacities might become integrated and thereby foster practical wisdom. The first is through healthy psychodynamics, and the second is through an alignment of capacities toward a common goal. As an aside, the absence of psychodynamics from discussions of wisdom research seems a major oversight, both because of their power and pervasiveness, and because both ordinary defenses and higher level meta-defenses can inhibit exceptional functioning (Maslow, 1970), quite likely including wisdom.

There has been an implicit assumption in combination, balance, and integration hypotheses that all varieties of wisdom require the same kind of balance or integration. However, different varieties of wisdom may

well differ in their requirements. For example, practical wisdom may require far higher levels of interpersonal sensitivity than does subjective wisdom. At the very least, when discussing facilitative capacities, we need to specify the kind of wisdom.

Wisdom as an Emergent of Higher Levels of Multiple Lines

Here the idea is that wisdom may emerge when two or more mental capacities become sufficiently mature and/or healthy. For example, this is an implication of the Berlin group that describes wisdom as excellence in mind and virtue (Baltes, 2004; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000).

A similar emergence principle is also found in contemplative disciplines. For example, they suggest that when multiple capacities and virtues are cultivated sufficiently, then a variety of insights into the mind and life can emerge and yield intuitive, conceptual, or transconceptual wisdom. Contemplative traditions differ in their emphasis on specific capacities and virtues (e.g., the "six perfections" of Buddhism). However, there is widespread agreement on the importance of seven interdependent capacities: mature ethics, emotions, motives, concentration, generosity, wisdom, and sensitivity of awareness (Walsh, 1999, 2010). Cultivating any subset of these capacities tends to cultivate others. This is yet another example of the recurrent idea of the interdependence of virtues.

My own suggestion is that wisdom is a function of the maturation of multiple developmental lines. Which lines? Well, central ones probably include the cognitive, worldview, ego, moral, motivational, emotional, interpersonal, and perceptual lines. In other words, the amount and level of a person's sagacity will be a function of the extent that these lines (and doubtless others) mature. Moreover, the relative maturity of different lines will probably vary from one kind of wisdom to another with, for example, interpersonal maturity being more important for practical than for conceptual wisdom.

Wisdom as a Distinct Developmental Line

Just as we consider cognition, affect, and motivation as largely separate capacities, so too we might consider wisdom. Confucianism may offer an example of this view. The Confucian idea, originally suggested by the sage Mencius (372–289 B.C.E.), is that wisdom develops from a "seed" which is the capacity to discern right from wrong (Kalton, in press). In opposition to the suggestion of wisdom as a single developmental line is the fact that wisdom is doubtless dependent on many other capacities such as cognition and motivation. But of course these other capacities are also complex and interdependent. The psyche functions as an organic whole, and to tease out one capacity is in part an artifact of our focus and methods.

What are the implications of considering wisdom as a distinct developmental line? One is that we would expect to find not a sudden emergence of wisdom at a specific developmental stage, but rather a continuum or spectrum, though perhaps, like cognition, with quite different processes and expressions at different stages. Perhaps we might expect a range of expressions from say, survival skills and street cunning at the lower end, to mid-level interpersonal skills and existential insights, through to high-level transpersonal understanding and transconceptual insights at the upper end.

Summary of Levels and Lines

When we apply a developmental perspective to different hypotheses about the nature and genesis of wisdom, we can recognize seven major families of hypotheses. These are, first, *specific stage hypotheses* which see wisdom 1) as (an emergent of) a specific developmental stage, e.g. Erikson, or 2) as a specific higher stage of a specific developmental line, e.g. post-formal operational cognition. Then we have three *interaction hypotheses* which see wisdom as the result of interactions between two or more developmental capacities. These

interactions are: 3) wisdom as a combination of capacities, 4) wisdom as an emergent of balance between two or more capacities, and 5) wisdom as an emergent of integration between two or more capacities. Finally, we have 6) wisdom as a function of higher levels of multiple lines, and 7) wisdom as a distinct developmental line. These seven hypotheses echo Wilber's (2000b) definition of spirituality in *Integral Psychology*.

So which hypothesis is correct? Well, that may be the wrong question. First, because what we see and measure as wisdom depends on our perspective. Second, because wisdom is doubtless the product of multiple developmental processes and so several of these hypotheses may offer parts of the answer. Finally, there are likely several distinct kinds of wisdom, and different processes may contribute differentially to each. However, what is clear is that we will need to sharpen our thinking about the developmental nature of wisdom.

States of Mind

States of mind (SOM) can be ranked relative to the ordinary waking state according to their functional capacities (Tart, 2001). When we do so, three major classes emerge:

- *Lower states* of reduced function such as delirium and intoxication
- *Functionally specific states* in which some capacities are enhanced and others reduced (e.g., meditative states of great concentration but diminished perceptual sensitivity)
- *Higher states* which retain usual abilities while including heightened or additional capacities (e.g., meditative mindfulness with its heightened introspective and perceptual sensitivity)

Contemplative disciplines make several radical claims about SOMs. First, they suggest that all of us potentially have available to us whole families of functionally specific and higher states, and that contemplative practices can foster these (Walsh, 1993a). Examples from yoga include functionally specific states of intense concentration, such as *nirvikalpa samadhi,* and higher states such as *sahaj samadhi.* Moreover, they claim that many of these contemplative SOMs—also called altered states of consciousness—can offer multiple psychological, somatic, and spiritual benefits. These states may heal, catalyze development, cultivate specific capacities such as positive emotions, as well as produce insights, understanding, and wisdom (Goleman, 1996). In other words, contemplative disciplines suggest that certain kinds of insight, understanding, and wisdom are more likely to occur in specific states of mind, and some may occur *only* in specific states. For example, "It is axiomatic in the yogic tradition that 'knowledge is different in different states of consciousnesses'" (Shearer, 1989, p. 26). Likewise, In Taoist contemplation, it is only by reaching a state of stillness and stability through practices such as "entering stillness" or "fasting the heart-mind" that a person can attain "The Great Pure Realm" in which one recognizes their role as an integral part of the Tao (Wong, 1997).

It must be noted that contemplative traditions aim not just to glimpse altered states and higher perspectives, but to stabilize them. The goal is to transform transient states into enduring traits, higher states into higher stages, peak experiences into plateau experiences, and epiphanies into personality (Goleman, 1996; Tart, 2001). The religious scholar Huston Smith (n.d.) put it poetically when he suggested that the goal is "to transform flashes of illumination into abiding light." The result is that brief glimpses extend into continuous vision, novel perspectives become permanent meta-perspectives, and new insights develop into enduring understandings.

In short, certain functionally specific and higher states may be doorways through which wisdom—in the form of valuable insights, understandings, perspectives, and resultant ways of life—can emerge and find expression. Equally important, contemplative disciplines have developed specific practices and inner technologies to cultivate these states and their insights.

Limitations of Recognizing and Comprehending Wisdom

The insights and wisdom of higher developmental states and stages may not be fully comprehensible to people at earlier stages. For example, some forms of sagacity may well be dependent on advanced cognitive capacities such as those of postformal operational cognition, Aurobindo's illumined mind, or Wilber's violet cognition. An obvious implication is that aspects of this sagacity may be incomprehensible to people at earlier cognitive stages. This is the phenomenon of *stage-specificity*. Likewise, the insights of higher states may not be fully comprehensible to those of us without direct experience of them due to *state-specificity* (Tart, 2001).

In contemplative terms, higher wisdom remains "self-secret" (Tibetan Buddhism) or *sod* (hidden, Judaism) until one "opens the eye of contemplation" (Christianity) and develops the necessary "*adaequatio*" (Schumacher, 1977; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). As E.F. Schumacher (1977) asserts, "When the level of the knower is not adequate to the level (or grade of significance) of the object of knowledge, the result is not factual error but something much more serious: an inadequate and impoverished view of reality" (p. 42).

The crucial implication is that wisdom may be partly stage and state dependent and consequently may be hard for many people to fully recognize, understand, and appreciate. And this suggests that two of the foremost researchers, Baltes and Staudinger (2000), were half wrong when they claimed that "wisdom, although difficult to achieve and specify, is easily recognized when manifested" (p. 123). Yes, it is certainly difficult to achieve and specify. However, wisdom (and perhaps especially transconceptual wisdom) can also be difficult to recognize. In fact, a central point of Georg Feuerstein's (2006) book, *Holy Madness*, is that history is filled with accounts of people now recognized as sages—most famously Socrates and Jesus—whose unconventional views and lifestyles were mistaken for heresy or insanity and resulted in persecution and execution.

These state and stage limitations on comprehending wisdom can also be understood in terms of Integral Post-Metaphysics. In *Integral Spirituality*, Wilber (2006) points out that any experience will be a function of the interaction between the "Kosmic address" of both the perceiver and of the perceived, and that Kosmic address is determined in significant part by "altitude" (developmental level) and state of mind. The implication is that a person's comprehension of wisdom phenomena—such as wise ideas and behaviors—will be a function of the interaction between the developmental level and state of the wisdom being observed (e.g., teal or turquoise altitude, subtle or causal states) and the level and state of the observer (e.g., orange or green altitude, gross state).

So not only will wisdom itself mature with later developmental stages and more experience of states of mind, but also the sophistication of one's understanding of wisdom. As a general principle, with higher developmental stages we might expect to find views of wisdom that are more complex, deep, differentiated, nuanced, encompassing, integrated, and contextualized. Hopefully, we will one day see, not only maps of the way wisdom matures across developmental stages, but also maps of the ways in which understanding of the nature of wisdom matures.

Types

The final major element of Integral Theory is types. Within the Upper-Left quadrant, these are relatively stable orientations such as Jung's introversion and extroversion, and the "big five" personality factors (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism).

An obvious question is whether wisdom may be correlated with, or even intimately linked to, certain personality types (e.g., the five Buddha Families; see Rockwell, 2002). For example, could wise people simply be open-minded introverts? In fact, some personality types—such as highly intelligent and open-minded people—do display modest correlations with wisdom-related performance (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). Yet sagacity is clearly not simply a (function of) type, and so we need not consider it in detail as we examine the varieties of wisdom.

The Varieties of Wisdom

For thousands of years, philosophers have distinguished two kinds of individual wisdom: subjective and objective, *sophia* and *phronesis*, and similarly in Buddhism, *prajna* and *upaya*. However, there is an obvious question: are these two categories sufficient or do we need to add further and more refined distinctions? Let us turn to practical wisdom first, and begin by offering a definition that is a subset of the more encompassing definition of general wisdom presented later.

Practical Wisdom

Practical wisdom is a function of skill in responding to the central existential issues of life effectively and benevolently. Life presents us with a wide array of existential issues that range from survival to personal meaning, interpersonal relationships, and politics. An obvious question is therefore, "Is practical wisdom significantly domain specific?" In other words, can we be relatively wise in one area of life, and less so, even foolish, in others?

It certainly seems so. For example, political wisdom is not always accompanied by parental wisdom as Gandhi—who is widely revered as a saint on the basis of his political activities—painfully demonstrated. He announced that, "All of India is my family….But he never quite learned to be a father to his sons." Rather, he expected them to be "junior saints," even to the point of denying them a formal education "on the grounds that character was more precious than learning" (Fischer, 1954, p. 127, 128). The results were less than optimal.

So what accounts for domain differences in practical wisdom? Personality and proclivity, to be sure. But a further factor is probably the different amounts of time and attention given to them, with resultant differences in domain-relevant knowledge and skills. Gandhi gave enormous amounts of time to his political work and significantly less to his family. Yet the cognitive processes involved are probably similar across domains. Therefore, it seems reasonable to think of practical wisdom as a single type with multiple expressions.

Subjective Wisdom

Subjective wisdom is a different matter. The exact nature of *sophia* and how it differs from *phronesis* was ambiguous throughout Greek history, and when I sought clarification from Trevor Curnow (1999), author of a major book on the history of wisdom, he responded that "tidiness is not out there to be found in the case of *sophia*" (personal communication, 2010). Aristotle described *sophia* as knowledge of first principles or causes. However, it is not at all clear exactly what kind of knowledge it entails or how it is acquired (Curnow, 1999, 2011).

One way of acquiring it may be intuition, and there is certainly widespread public belief in its importance. In fact, when I have spoken on wisdom, a common audience response is, "These intellectual ideas are all very well, but I've met some amazing people, such as grandmothers and tribal people, who wouldn't understand any of this. They can't tell you how they do it, yet everyone turns to them with their problems and they are respected as wise elders." This, of course, is tacit knowledge that cannot be easily verbalized or communicated; Robert Sternberg (1998) considers "tacit knowledge as the core of wisdom" (p. 351), or at least of practical wisdom. This is consistent with two central ideas of intuition, both of which are supported by considerable research. Namely, that we can know much more than we can conceptualize, and that we can know much more than we know (Meyers, 2004; Vaughan, 1979).

Yet some wisdom can be communicated, otherwise there would be no wise books or teachers. So subjective wisdom may be comprised of both tacit and explicit knowledge, of both intuitive and conceptual processes. And this suggests that we need to distinguish two kinds of subjective wisdom: *intuitive apprehen-*

sion and *conceptual understanding*. Intuitive apprehension may well be sufficient for acquiring much subjective wisdom and expressing it as practical wisdom. Yet conceptual analysis and understanding can enrich intuitions in multiple ways, such as by examining, extending, and articulating them, drawing out implications, and linking them into networks of insights and ideas. In fact, at postformal operational levels, intuition and analysis may merge so that one "sees" the interconnections of networks of ideas, which is why Wilber (2001) describes this level of cognition as "vision-logic." For Aurobindo (1982), this capacity for vision logic emerges at the transpersonal developmental stage which he called the "higher mind" which "can freely express itself in single ideas, but its most characteristic movement is a mass ideation, a system or totality of truth-seeing at a single view; the relations of idea with idea…" (p. 940).

So far we have differentiated *sophia* or subjective wisdom into two kinds of knowledge and two corresponding cognitive processes for acquiring it. Yet there may be further distinctions to be teased out of *sophia*. For contemplative disciplines insist on the possibility and importance of a radically different subjective wisdom.

The contemplative claim is that specific states of mind permit a direct transconceptual insight into the fundamental nature of reality and self. This insight is said to be neither a conceptually mediated understanding, nor even a cognitively mediated intuition. Rather, it is said to be transconceptual and transrational, a direct apprehension of consciousness by consciousness, Mind by Mind, Spirit by Spirit. Examples of one family of such states—states of pure awareness or pure consciousness—include "cessation" (Theravadin Buddhism), *Ayin* (Judaism), "mindless awareness" (Christianity's Meister Eckhart), "no mind" (Zen), *nirvikalpa samadhi* (yoga), or what Robert Forman (1990) calls a "pure consciousness event." The result is a transconceptual apprehension and wisdom known as, for example, *jnana* (Hinduism), *prajna* (Buddhism), *ma'rifah* (Islam), or *gnosis* (Christianity) (Walsh, in press). The reason that transconceptual apprehension is essential is that, as the *Tao Te Ching* puts it, "Existence is beyond the power of words to define" (as cited in Bynner, 1944, p. 25). In the words of the great Indian philosopher Radhakrishnan (1940), "The real transcends, surrounds and overflows our miserable categories" (p. 43). In short, the very nature of reality is said to be inherently transconceptual, and so a transconceptual apprehension is essential for deep insight and wisdom.

So widespread is this claim of a contemplative apprehension "higher than discursive reasoning" that Aldous Huxley (1972) named it "The Second Doctrine of the Perennial Philosophy" and claimed that "it is to be found in all the great religions of the world" (p. 15). Transconceptual apprehension has also been an important part of Western philosophy and its understanding of wisdom, though a part almost entirely lost to contemporary academics (McDermott, in press; Trowbridge, 2011). So radically distinct is this epistemological mode and the wisdom it yields that it is said, "The wise are completely free from all concepts about the true nature of reality" (Gyamtso, 2003, p. 42). However, like intuition, this transconceptual wisdom or gnosis can subsequently be partly elaborated into concepts, and even inspire whole psychologies and philosophies such as Buddhist Abhidharma psychology and Vedantic philosophy.

Not surprisingly, these radical epistemological claims have sparked fierce academic debates about their validity. The best known debate is between constructivists such as Steven Katz (1983) and contemplatively sympathetic philosophers such as Robert Forman (1997). Katz argues that all experience is necessarily constructed and limited by historically and culturally situated cognition, and so any and all claims for transconceptual knowing are necessarily false. Yet, the philosopher Donald Rothberg (1989) points out that Katz's argument is itself historically and culturally limited, while Wilber (2001) points out that it is self-defeating.

However, the important points for wisdom studies are the following: Across cultures and centuries, contemplatives have claimed that it is possible to cultivate transconceptual insights and that an extremely important and powerful kind of wisdom ensues. This wisdom is radically different from ordinary intuition and conceptual understanding in both its nature and results. For it is not only illuminating, but also potentially liberating, being capable of significantly healing, deconditioning, and freeing the mind from its conventional

"consensus trance" (Tart, 2001). Such wisdom is said to help catalyze an "awakening" of the mind to radically more mature, healthy, and veridical states variously described as, for example, enlightenment, liberation, introversion (St. Augustine in Christianity), *Ruach Hakodesh* (Judaism), *fana* (Islam), *satori* (Zen), or the Jade Pure Realm (Taoism) (Goleman, 1996; Walsh, in press; Wong, 1997).

Equally important, contemplatives claim to have developed mental disciplines—sapiential and soteriological technologies—to realize this wisdom. In fact, some of these disciplines recognize and foster all three kinds of subjective wisdom through a specific sequence of practices. For example, in yoga, one first listens to (*sravana*) and reflects on (*manana*) teachings to develop conceptual understanding. Then one meditates on them (*nididhyasana*) to gain a deeper intuitive apprehension, and finally one enters a state of intense concentration (*samadhi*) in which transconceptual insight (*jnana*) emerges (Feuerstein, in press; Free John, 1988). An analogous process occurs with the Christian contemplative practice of *lectio divina*. Here reading (*lectio)* leads to conceptual reflection (*meditatio*), and culminates in interior silence and insight (*contemplatio*) that becomes "too deep for words" (Hall, 1988). An important implication, as with virtues in general, is that different kinds of wisdom may be mutually facilitating.

The Varieties of Sagehood

If there are different kinds of wisdom, then this implies that there may also be different types of sages. A sage might be remarkably sophisticated in one kind of sagacity, less so in others. What kinds of sages might we expect? One way of answering is to suggest exemplars.

For an exemplar of *practical wisdom*, Mother Teresa would certainly rank high on many people's list, because of both her remarkable altruism and practical skill in creating a worldwide charity. Yet while achieving all this, she suffered a decades-long existential despair, a prolonged dark night of the soul (Kolodiejchuk, 2007). An exemplar of *transconceptual wisdom* might be Ramana Mahashi (1988), who is widely revered for his deep realization and is generally regarded as one of India's greatest 20th-century sages. Yet he showed little interest in conceptual analysis, and chose a monastic life where practical wisdom, other than occasional teaching, was little needed. Aurobindo, on the other hand, is considered one of India's greatest philosopher-sages: a person who combined transconceptual and *conceptual wisdom* to extraordinary degrees. For *intuitive wisdom*, a perennial archetype is the wise grandmother: an elder who may have little education, analytic skills, or contemplative experience, yet who everyone turns to for comfort and advice with life concerns.

A master sage would embody high degrees of all four wisdoms. Are there any such people? Hopefully so, and one well-known possibility might be the Dalai Lama. He has done decades of intense contemplative practice and intellectual training, is widely regarded as having deep *prajna* and impressive intuitive sensitivity, and possesses remarkable existential and philosophical insight (I once saw him debate the chair of philosophy at Harvard University and hold his own). He also displays remarkable interpersonal skills. Many people, including Western scientists, report that their lives were permanently changed by brief interactions with him. The psychologist Dacher Keltner (2009) gave a moving account of the effects of one such brief encounter in which:

> Goosebumps spread across my back like wind on water, starting at the base of the spine and rolling up to my scalp. A flush of humility moved up my face from my cheeks to my forehead and dissipated near the crown of my head. Tears welled up, along with a smile…. For several weeks I lived in a new realm. My suitcase was missing at the carousel following the plane flight home—not a problem, I didn't need those clothes anyway. Squabbles between my two daughters…[produced] no bristling reaction on my part, just an inclination to step into the fray and to lay out a softer discourse and sense of common ground. (p. 175)

This is an example of what contemplatives call "transmission"—the induction of a sage's state of consciousness by contact or encounter. And this is one reason why contemplative traditions the world over regard spending time in the company of the wise as one of the best means for cultivating wisdom (Walsh, 1999).

Conclusions about the Varieties of Wisdom

The traditional Western philosophical lumping of all wisdom into only two categories—*sophia* and *phronesis*, subjective and practical—is insufficiently precise. We can retain the category of *phronesis,* or practical wisdom, for now. However, we need to distinguish at least three epistemologically, cognitively, and phenomenologically distinct modes of subjective wisdom: intuitive apprehension, conceptual understanding, and transconceptual insight. These loosely align with body, mind, and spirit.

Are there further distinctions to be made? Probably so. The above is only an initial exploration and future studies will doubtless add further refinements, such as distinguishing different kinds of intuition. Moreover, there are doubtless multiple levels of wisdom(s). Conceptual, intuitive, and practical wisdom probably mature as people develop through both stages and states. For example, the wisdom that emerges at third-tier developmental stages is presumably different and deeper than that at second tier. In fact, contemplative teachers routinely assess students' insight and wisdom, usually intuitively, but sometimes with formal tests such as Zen koans.

In summary, it seems that:

- There are distinct kinds and levels of subjective wisdom
- There are methods to cultivate all of them
- Investigating these methods should be a high priority
- Combining contemplative, phenomenological, and experimental approaches as part of an Integral Methodological Pluralism may be an optimal way to research the varieties of wisdom

Conclusion

So this brings us back to our original question: What is wisdom? And that leads to the considerable challenge of defining it. Defining anything adequately is challenging, and philosophers lament that "no problems of knowledge are less settled than those of definition…" (Abelson, 2006, p. 664). In fact, for Derrida, all terms, when closely examined, end in *aporia*: irreducible puzzles. Moreover, in wisdom we are exploring one of the most profound of all human capacities. It may also be what we might call a "self-demanding capacity," which I would define as a capacity that requires itself to comprehend itself. Examples include intelligence, wisdom, and mindfulness.

No wonder that there are almost as many definitions as there are researchers (Trowbridge, 2011). Unfortunately, many definitions seem insufficiently sensitive to the many challenges and complexities involved. Therefore, I want to offer a new definition in hopes that it will be more adequate to these challenges, and will encompass the novel attributes, complexities, and varieties of wisdom that our previous explorations have revealed. This definition is: *Wisdom is a function of deep, accurate insight and understanding of the central existential issues of life, plus practical skill in responding effectively and benevolently.*

I had intended to finish this article by examining this definition and using it to examine and explicate the nature of wisdom. However, the more I examined, the more nuances and implications emerged, until eventually I recognized that it would need a separate article. Consequently, here I will simply point to a few key ideas. First, this definition allows us to extract definitions of the subcategories of wisdom. For example, the first half is a definition of subjective wisdom: *Subjective wisdom is a function of deep, accurate insight*

and understanding of the central existential issues of life. Likewise, it provides a definition of practical wisdom that has already been defined as: *Practical wisdom is a function of skill in responding to the central existential issues of life effectively and benevolently.*

Notice that the definitions of subjective and general wisdom are deliberately ambiguous. They can be read in two ways as:

1. Wisdom is a fruition of deep, accurate insight into, and understanding of, the central existential issues of life. Yet the definitions can also be read as:
2. Wisdom is a function of deep, accurate insight (into oneself), and also of understanding of the central existential issues of life.

This ambiguity allows the definitions to embrace both self-knowledge as well as insight into, and understanding of, the central existential issues of life. Both are clearly crucial for wisdom. "Know thyself" is a central idea and goal of ancient philosophy, contemporary psychotherapy, and contemplative disciplines. So too is the idea and goal of deep, accurate insight and understanding of life's central existential issues. Of course, one of the most central of all existential issues is the nature of self. Others are issues such as mystery and mortality, meaning and purpose, suffering and limitation, relationship and aloneness, and the fundamental nature of reality (Yalom, 1980). Such issues are inescapable challenges of human existence, and a wise person is one who sees deeply and accurately into them, understands them, and then responds effectively—and where others are involved, benevolently—to them.

The inclusion of benevolence in the definition recognizes the intimate link between wisdom, benevolence, and ethics (Kalton, in press). This is an ancient recognition the world over, and more than 2,000 years ago, *The Wisdom of Solomon* observed that "wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul" (NRSV 1:4). This link is another example of the interdependence of virtues.

The Basic Moral Intuition

I hypothesize that the depth of wisdom will be reflected in both the scope and depth of benevolence. That is, the deeper people's wisdom, the greater will be the scope or span of their care, and the more they will specifically seek to enhance the deep well-being of others (i.e., their developmental depth). This suggests that wisdom is informed and motivated by what Wilber (1995) calls the Basic Moral Intuition: the intuition and motive to "protect and promote the greatest depth for the greatest span [number]" (p. 613). For Wilber, this is the fundamental intuition underlying all morality at all developmental levels ranging from childhood egocentricity (where the span of concern extends only to oneself) to ethnocentricity (where it extends to one's clan) to transpersonal levels (where span can encompass all conscious life).

But this still leaves a fundamental question: "What specifically motivates wise people to be benevolent and ethical?" What do they see that makes benevolence and ethicality appear appropriate and important? This is a variant of the question that Lawrence Kohlberg faced when he suggested six developmental levels of morality but was still left with the fundamental question, "Why be moral?" His answer was what he called a "metaphorical stage seven," which grounded moral motivation in mystical unitive experience (Kohlberg & Ryncarz, 1990).

Kohlberg's formulation may provide part of the answer, at least for those few people who have such experiences. Such people, including sages, recognize their inherent unity with others and are motivated to treat them accordingly. This is the basis of statements such as those of Jesus, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31, NIV) and of Ramana Maharishi (1988), "All that you give, you give to yourself. If this truth is understood, who will not give to others?" (p. 8).

Sages are also likely to have another postconventional insight. Namely, that ethics and benevolence are

beneficial to oneself as well as others. This is the ancient Indian idea of reaping good karma, or of the contemporary vernacular of "doing well by doing good." To quote the Dalai Lama, "If you're going to be selfish, be wisely selfish—which means to love and serve others, since love and service to others bring rewards to oneself that otherwise would be unachievable" (as cited in Hopkins, 2001, p. 150). Wisdom sees that ethical actions and benevolent service to others are not self-sacrifice but rather enlightened self-interest.

Acknowledgement

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