

Alan Law and Ursula M. Staudinger

Wisdom has long been considered an ideal endpoint of human development, attracting the attention of scholars for thousands of years, with the result that our thinking remains heavily influenced by the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers in particular. In more recent times psychologists, especially those interested in individual development across the lifespan, have ventured into empirical investigation of wisdom. This has been a rather courageous undertaking given the fact that there is probably no phenomenon richer in associations and ideational history. Although there has been general agreement that wisdom is not easily attained, there remains some disagreement about what wisdom is and how it should be studied.

In this chapter we outline psychological approaches to investigating wisdom and its development. We review findings relating to a view of wisdom as the perfect integration of mind and virtue: it is highly relevant to any discussion of ideal human development. Indeed it has been discussed as an important outcome of the good life

(eudaimonia) and also as a means to achieve a good life (e.g., Baltes, 2004; Brugman, 2006; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006; Schwartz & Wrzesniewski, Chap. 8, this volume). We understand eudaimonia as the kind of well-being that arises when practicing wisdom (phronesis) to solve the existential conflicts and dilemmas that occur in everyday life and thus leading a “good life” irrespective of the emotional states coming with it (e.g., Baltes, 2004; Höffe, 2007; Staudinger, 1999a). This chapter is presented in light of the challenges put forward by Nussbaum (2008), who argues that psychology has paid too little attention to eudaimonia in particular, and in general to subjective states relating to well-being: we contend that the psychological study of wisdom has already garnered a range of findings that address many of her concerns.

In psychological terms, eudaimonia may be described as productive self-actualization, as growth towards an ideal kind of mental health. In this tradition, Ryff and Singer (2008) defined eudaimonia as “self-realization, played out individually, each according to his or her own disposition and talent” (p. 17). This is in line with the earlier understanding of good psychological health as consisting in more than just the absence of symptoms of psychological ill-health (e.g., Jahoda, 1958; Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1962). It is also understood as the feelings experienced alongside personal expressiveness (in the sense of expressing one’s true self) by Waterman (1993).

---

A. Law (✉)  
Bremen International Graduate School of Social  
Sciences, Bremen, Germany  
e-mail: [law@bigsss-bremen.de](mailto:law@bigsss-bremen.de)

U.M. Staudinger  
Columbia Aging Center, Columbia University,  
New York, NY, USA  
e-mail: [umstaudinger@columbia.edu](mailto:umstaudinger@columbia.edu)

Similar ideas are discussed in relation to Csikszentmihalyi's "flow," which focuses specifically on subjective states experienced during rewarding activities (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Waterman, 1990).

While these approaches tend to emphasize a flourishing that is individualistic and autonomous in nature, this is different from our understanding of eudaimonia, which combines this notion of ideal self-actualization with a striving towards the practice of virtues (e.g., honesty, concern for others, justice). It further involves bringing to bear our mind, in the sense of moral-practical judgment and prudence, when we attempt to solve the fundamental issues of our lives to reach the ultimate good, which we define as reaching beyond the individual and including the good of others. Balancing individual goals with a concern for the greater good and the good of others in our view is the essence of eudaimonia as it relates to wisdom (see Staudinger & Glück, 2011; Sternberg, 1998). Such balance is a lofty goal, often requiring transcendence of social constraints, and resistance to self-actualization in the more limited sense of hedonic satisfaction.

To elucidate our view of wisdom, we first present findings clarifying its definition and psychometric location and then explore its relation to the good life. Next we consider the path of normative human development through the lens of psychological conceptions of person maturation and present a model of positive person development that positions wisdom as separate from such typical lifespan developmental trajectories.

---

## 9.1 Recent Developments in the Psychological Definition and Study of Wisdom

One of the most important recent developments in the increasing body of literature regarding the psychological study of wisdom is the demarcation of more specific fields of inquiry. Defining two subtypes of wisdom, general and personal (Staudinger, 2013), has helped to reconcile some of the inconsistencies in earlier research. Personal

wisdom refers to knowledge, judgment and insight relating to one's own life, while general wisdom is focused on the lives of others and life in general.

Personal wisdom was first investigated by asking laypeople to rate adjectives as to their relevance for wise persons, revealing some broad agreement: in 1976, Clayton found that wise people are typically considered to be relatively strong on affective characteristics such as empathy and compassion, reflective processes such as intuition and introspection, and cognitive capacities such as experience and intelligence (see Sternberg, 1990). Further work summarized in a review by Bluck and Glück (2005) shows that lay conceptions can be captured by five subcomponents: cognitive ability, insight, reflective attitude, concern for others and real-world skills.

In actually measuring personal wisdom, researchers such as Ardel and Webster (e.g., Ardel, 2003; Webster, Taylor, & Bates, 2011) have emphasized the personality and attitudinal components of wisdom identified by laypeople and have used those to construct self-report scales of personal wisdom. Such measures have yielded contradictory findings in comparison with the performance-related approach to personal wisdom, which involves the rating of verbal responses to fictitious or personal life dilemmas in an interview situation (e.g., Mickler & Staudinger, 2008). For example, measures of subjective well-being appear to have a relationship with self-reported wisdom (e.g., Ardel, 1997; Bergsma & Ardel, 2012) while no relationship was found with a performance measure of wisdom (Mickler & Staudinger, 2008). As such, a research focus on an inward-turning reflection and the development of affective skills in support of mastering one's environment and a positive attitude towards one's own experience, as captured variously by Ardel's Three Dimensional Wisdom (e.g., Ardel, 2003), Whitbourne's Ego-integrity, based on Erikson's maturational theory (e.g., Whitbourne & Waterman, 1979), Wink and Helson's transcendent wisdom (1997), Ryff's personal growth dimension (e.g., Ryff, 1989, this volume) and Webster's Self-Assessed Wisdom Scale (e.g., Webster, 2003),

yields information about personal wisdom (Staudinger & Glück, 2011).

In contrast, general wisdom is defined in terms of the knowledge, insight, and judgment a person has about life in general. General wisdom has been studied using the Berlin Wisdom paradigm, originating from the Max Planck Institute in Berlin (e.g., Pasupathi, Staudinger, & Baltes, 2001; Smith & Baltes, 1990; Staudinger, Lopez, & Baltes, 1997), and also by Sternberg (1998) and Neo-Piagetian researchers who have focused on the development of advanced forms of adult thought (e.g., Kramer, 1983). To date, there is only one performance-based measure of general wisdom, that of the Berlin paradigm. In this case, participants are asked to respond verbally to the challenging life situations of a fictitious character (for example, *a 15-year-old girl wants to get married right away. What should one/she consider and do?*), and their response is coded by trained laypeople according to five criteria of general wisdom: factual knowledge, procedural knowledge, lifespan contextualism, value relativism, and awareness and management of uncertainty. A participant's mean score for the five criteria across all tasks is referred to as his or her wisdom-related performance (WRP). Note that there is no attempt to measure whether such performance is also evidenced in actions, as discussed in Staudinger, Dörner and Mickler (2005), and the criteria are assumed to be domain-general rather than variant across domains. Reliabilities of these ratings have been found to be surprisingly high, across five criteria around 0.98 and for individual criteria ranging between 0.7 and 0.85 (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Staudinger, 1999b). Research using the Berlin Wisdom Interview has found wisdom to be an advanced integration of cognitive and personality characteristics with characteristics at their interface playing a major role: while crystallized and fluid intelligence both are necessary but not sufficient, the Big 5 personality characteristic of openness to experience, as well as social intelligence, thinking style (judiciousness) and creativity as well as life experiences contribute uniquely to the overall variance in WRP scores (Pasupathi & Staudinger, 2001; Staudinger et al., 1997;

Staudinger, Maciel, Smith, & Baltes, 1998; Staudinger & Pasupathi, 2003). While there is a relationship between age and WRP from early adolescence to young adulthood, there is no relationship thereafter (Pasupathi et al., 2001; Staudinger, 1999b). Thus in adolescence, aging plays an important role, as it is typically accompanied by physiological and psychological changes such as increases in empathy and the ability to think abstractly and show reflective judgment (see Brugman, 2006). These may set important foundations for the development of skills in life review, which are, in the Berlin model, considered crucial for the development of wisdom. While exploration and internal conflicts are to some extent expected and encouraged for young people in their journey towards becoming contributing members of society, continued developments in such insightful thinking are non-normative (i.e., rare). It can be argued that while a socially constrained self is ideal for the pursuit of one's own subjective well-being, it is only by transcending that self that we can evidence higher levels of wisdom. Below we address the importance of such transcendence for our conception of wisdom.

---

## 9.2 The Importance of Self-Transcendence for the "Good Life"

While much of the psychological work on eudaimonia mentioned above is implicitly connected to concepts of individual flourishing or self-actualization, psychologists studying wisdom have tended to include some component of other-directedness in their conceptions of a good life, whether this involves compassion (e.g., Bergsma & Ardel, 2012), or both interpersonal and extra-personal interests (Sternberg, 1998). What role such orientations have in wisdom has been an important question for philosophers. John Kekes, for example, emphasizes that wisdom allows for the prioritization of ideals, and that the good life will become possible from following some paths and rejecting others according to their perceived appropriateness for meeting one's goals (1983).

As it does not specify the nature of these goals, this position appears to relate more to the self-actualization notion of eudaimonia than our notion of personal wisdom. Kunzmann (2007) notes, however, that Kekes in his later writings refers to the importance of developing in this way without violating others' rights and with a concern for encouraging others to develop. Although there is a strong tradition of associating wisdom with the practice of other virtues (Baltes, 2004), there are challenges to this position, such as Whitcomb's proposition that an evil person can be wise (see S. Ryan, 2014). Obviously such a notion of wisdom is at odds with our approach, which requires that wisdom by definition is oriented towards balancing one's own good with that of others. If one has brought to bear their knowledge of how to act, with the limitations of the human condition in mind, but acts without compassionate consideration of others, this cannot be considered wise action but rather clever at best. It is clear therefore that in order to develop wisdom, it is not sufficient either to build a body of theoretical knowledge about how best to act, nor to act only towards self-actualization goals irrespective of what they are. It is only with a highly developed appreciation of the needs of others and a strong understanding of the contexts (e.g., temporal, cultural) in which actions might occur that one might show wisdom.

It can be expected that insight into the difficult and uncertain matters of life in general is more easily developed by those who are exposed to certain professional contexts, such as family judges, ministers or priests, and clinical psychologists, as they are more exposed to the fundamental challenges of other people's lives and receive training and mentorship in dealing with them, and indeed there is empirical evidence that this is so (Smith, Staudinger, & Baltes, 1994). Of course it may be the case that such professional contexts are sought out by individuals with a predilection for intense scrutiny of the lives of others, but regardless, certain professional contexts provide fertile grounds for developing theoretical knowledge. Similarly, in a nomination study in

which journalists, using a delphi technique, were asked to nominate contemporary public figures whom they considered wise, and who were then interviewed according to the Berlin Paradigm, an emergent pattern in the biographies of the higher scoring nominees was a series of challenges and threats that contribute to nominees' life experience. In particular, the older wisdom nominees faced these challenges and threats within a context that appears to have been conducive to wisdom development: life under the Third Reich in Germany preceding and during World War Two, many having faced the threat of imprisonment for their actions to benefit others (Staudinger, 1999a). If professional and historical contexts can provide the opportunities (direct or vicarious) for growth that increase life insight among those who have the personal orientation to learn from them, then, as Staudinger (1999a) suggests, there may be an increased potential for high levels of wisdom in younger people of recent generations as technological advances increase our exposure to life and life problems, through the proliferation of the internet and various uses of social media. Whether the increased accessibility of such information alongside the availability of a range of new social tools amounts to a new historical context conducive to the development of wisdom or not remains to be seen.

This is not to say that learning what is necessary to display wisdom is a satisfying process. Similarly to the subject of Wordsworth's happy warrior, from whom Nussbaum (2008) draws inspiration for her critical challenge to psychology, or more particularly to Kahneman's approach to subjective well-being (e.g., Kahneman & Krueger, 2006), among participants in studies using the Berlin paradigm, attaining high levels of insight into life is clearly not associated with high levels of hedonic satisfaction (e.g., Staudinger et al., 1997; Wink & Staudinger, 2015). Later we address some reasons for the absence of subjective well-being as a correlate of wisdom by later life but first review findings we associate with a more typical understanding of maturation.

### 9.3 Sad But True: Wisdom Is Not a Result of Typical Maturation

In the early days of a developmental psychology considering the whole life span, the study of the maturation of a person was most notably addressed by Erik Erikson (e.g., Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Erikson placed wisdom as a possible outcome attainable in the last phase of human development: within his framework of person development as a sequence of psychosocial crises, wisdom and integrity (vs. despair) would be achieved only after successful resolution of the conflicts of earlier stages in life and under appropriate social conditions. As such, it reflected an adaptive maturation within the confines of one's own culture and was associated with an ability to integrate one's past life and, in acknowledgement of the approaching end of one's lifetime, a sense of satisfaction with one's role in what has already happened. His alternative outcome in the eighth stage of a person's life, despair, occurs with the realization that, as the end of life approaches, one's goals from younger days are left unachieved and are now rendered unachievable. The pursuit of hedonic and eudaimonic forms of well-being in later life now can be seen as quite distinct activities: on one hand, we may attempt to adapt to increasing losses, by seeking to feel satisfied with what is left after we discard goals that are no longer possible; and on the other hand we may maximize gains, by refreshing our sense of purpose in life and being open to new experiences. Not only are these distinct activities, but pursuing Erikson's notion of integration may actually undermine progress in personal wisdom as a recent study suggests (Mickler & Staudinger, 2008).

Although there has not been a great deal of empirical work to support Erikson's ideas, other work seeks to look beyond dichotomous outcomes (i.e., integration, despair) in the manner of Marcia's (1966) identity status approach to adolescent identity outcomes. In this framework, a bipolar conception of outcomes in later life is as insufficient as in adolescence (Hearn et al., 2012). Marcia's approach to identity formation in ado-

lescence identifies four categories to account for the different types of progress that has been made towards the achievement of identity. The basic distinction between identity achievement and diffusion is bolstered by the alternatives of moratorium and foreclosure, and there is by now a large body of evidence that supports such differentiation both in the structure of outcomes and in terms of the processes by which these are achieved (see Luyckx et al., 2008). Recent work describes four types of later-life Integrity: *integrated* persons are socially mature, open to experience, and tolerant of ambiguity (reflective of wisdom as previously discussed), and *despairing* persons do not share such characteristics and are more prone to negative emotions. *nonexploring* persons are high on social maturity and emotional positivity (reflective of hedonic pursuits), and *pseudointegrated* persons are low in social maturity and well-being but fairly high in openness to experience (Hearn et al., 2012). Also studying identity development through adulthood, Helson and Srivastava (2001) found that their sample could be categorized as *achievers*, high in personal growth and environmental mastery, *depleted*, with low scores on both dimensions, *conservers*, with high environmental mastery but low personal growth, or *seekers*, with high personal growth but low environmental mastery. While achievers appeared to be higher in terms of two typical indicators of maturity, the Competence scale of the California Personality Inventory and Peterson and Klohnen's measure of generativity (1995), only seekers showed high levels of intrapsychic differentiation as demonstrated in their scores on a composite wisdom scale.

Employing a combined neo-Piagetian and psychodynamic perspective, Gisela Labouvie-Vief has reached complementary conclusions in the affective domain. By categorizing individuals as high or low on two separate dimensions referred to as affect optimization and affect complexity, she describes four "personality" types. Affect optimization involves the automatic deployment of skills to limit individual emotional experience to the positive in order to maintain well-being, while affect complexity rather

involves being able to postpone positive emotions to allow for differentiation and coordination of one's own current feelings and synchronization with those of others (Labouvie-Vief & Medler, 2002; Labouvie-Vief, Diehl, Jain, & Zhang, 2007). Those who are *integrated* in this typology are also functioning optimally, open to experience and socially mature, with high levels of positive affect, but such individuals are contrasted with a *dysregulated* group, who show low levels of both positive affect and complexity, a *defended* group, who use denial and repression to maintain positive affect with low complexity, and a *complex* group, who are open and tolerant but not experiencing high levels of well-being.

That identity development, cognitive-affective development and personality development have been found to vary each along at least two dimensions in a compellingly similar manner suggests that there are indeed latent trajectories guiding adult development. In addition, such differentiation of pathways through development makes it problematic to designate one or other as, in and of itself, leading to an ideal form of maturation, even if a typical pattern of maturation can be observed. In particular, the groups labelled above as complex, pseudointegrated and seeker are of special interest in the context of wisdom development because of their close associations with openness to experience. As explained earlier, this personality characteristic is one of the strongest unique contributors to wisdom-related performance in the Berlin Paradigm (Staudinger & Pasupathi, 2003). Although openness alone is not sufficient for the development of wisdom, we must recognize its role in orienting individuals towards more differentiated life experiences. The existence in typologies of groups that are not well adjusted but who seek new experiences is no surprise, but the possibility that the outcome of developing in this way is not always suboptimal has seldom been acknowledged.

Thus, we maintain that the typical kind of person maturation can be described to incorporate elements of identity, cognition and affect, and this is generally targeted towards hedonic well-being at the exclusion of eudaimonia-related development. This is not always associated with

happiness, which is one of Nussbaum's (2008) key criticisms of psychological approaches to studying well-being. However, the psychological study of wisdom as an optimal outcome of an atypical developmental trajectory has addressed many of the characteristics of eudaimonia that Nussbaum calls attention to. Proceeding from the understanding that there is more than one form of positive person development, below we consider two such pathways, the more typical, adjustment, and the atypical trajectory, growth, which encourages the development of wisdom. In contrast to Nussbaum, we do not bemoan the fact that maturation towards adjustment and well-being exist. Rather, we even argue that this developmental trajectory serves important functions for the functioning of a given human collective.

---

#### 9.4 Growth and Adjustment as Two Trajectories of Positive Person Development

Drawing on such developmental traditions as outlined above, Staudinger and colleagues (e.g., Staudinger & Kessler, 2009; Staudinger & Kunzmann, 2005) have distinguished between two types of positive personality development they have labelled as *adjustment* and *growth*: the former comprises elements of social maturity and competence, while the latter is associated with progress towards personal wisdom.

The first trajectory, adjustment, results in mastery of "the demands of everyday life and its various roles (work, family), that is, social and practical competences, reliability, and emotional stability" (Dörner, Mickler, & Staudinger, 2005, p. 279). It is one of few areas of human competence that show age-related increase, rather than decline. Adjustment reflects a prioritization of developing skills to develop and then maintain subjective well-being in the face of age-related increases in constraints, such as difficulties with movement, hearing, or finances and social status. The typical personal resources accrued include professional skills and increasing competence in everyday problem-solving, emotional balance, or

social relations (Dörner et al., 2005). The related concept of social maturity (Helson & Wink, 1987) has been described in terms of “outward orientation” implying that both the demands and successes are primarily experienced socially, by means of the prescribed roles and norms for behavior present in one’s socio-cultural environment (Dörner et al., 2005). By their very nature, societies depend on a rather high “prevalence” of adjustment as one means of maintaining themselves (e.g., in the conservation of values). Thus, progress towards social maturity or adjustment is reinforced and guided by social institutions, such as education and legal systems (e.g., Staudinger & Kessler, 2009; Staudinger & Kunzmann, 2005). Although in the earlier stages of life, socially determined, age- and history-graded goals seem to be the motivation for individuals to make progress towards reaching adjustment, in later life, roles and expectations are less clear and developed. It may be that an awareness of the finitude of life is a prime motivator for further adjustment-related progress in the later stages of life (Staudinger & Kunzmann, 2005).

The normative trend towards adjustment is reflected in the developmental patterns of the Big 5 personality model (Costa Jr., McCrae, & Dye, 1991): emotional stability increases (the reverse pole of neuroticism), as do conscientiousness and agreeableness (Costa Jr., McCrae, & Dye, 1991). Usually this pattern is combined with high levels of environmental mastery, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance, which are dimensions of Carol Ryff’s (1989) Psychological Well-being Scale (Staudinger & Kunzmann, 2005).

In contrast, the second trajectory, growth, is characterized by the employment of critical self-reflection, complex emotion regulation, and a striving towards transcending constraints, whether social, psychological, or biological (Dörner et al., 2005). Personal growth, in this sense, however, reaches beyond the individual and includes the goal to balance one’s own good with the good of others.

More specifically, three facets characterize this notion of growth: firstly, it involves cognitive insight into oneself, others and the world; secondly, it requires complex emotion regulation as

indexed by a tolerance of ambiguity, and thirdly, a motivation that transcends self-interest and is focused on the well-being of others (Staudinger & Kessler, 2009). Despite the possibility that subjective well-being can be experienced alongside gains on a growth trajectory, achieving subjective well-being or hedonic happiness is not the target; instead, the ideal endpoint of progress on the growth trajectory is high levels of personal wisdom. Personality growth is not typical: it is rare, and will frequently put individuals at odds with their social context as they emancipate themselves in thinking and feeling and transcend the social structures and constraints that are embraced by those pursuing adjustment (Dörner et al., 2005; Staudinger & Kessler, 2009; Staudinger & Kunzmann, 2005).

Thus, personality growth is prototypically indicated by a high level of openness to new experience, and high scores on the Ryff scales of personal growth and purpose in life (Staudinger & Kessler, 2009). Autonomy is also an indicator of growth as it is likely to be required to transcend the given social structures (e.g., Wink & Staudinger, 2015). Although Ryff’s Psychological Well-being Scale is intended to capture the eudaimonic side of well-being, at least in later life, we suggest that only these three scales are truly indicative of the kind of eudaimonia we associate with wisdom, and there is empirical evidence for this (Wink & Staudinger, 2015).

---

## 9.5 Growth, Adjustment, and Subjective Well-Being

Research has demonstrated that age-related increase in indicators of personality adjustment is typical (e.g., Field & Millsap, 1991), reflecting an increasing importance up to mid-life in finding an acceptable role and fitting in to one’s social milieu. Thus, higher levels of adjustment are accompanied by high levels of hedonic well-being, reflecting satisfaction at mastering the developmental tasks largely prescribed by the given socio-historical setting: empirical evidence supports this association (Seiffge-Krenke & Gelhaar, 2008; Staudinger & Kessler, 2009).

The search for personality growth and eudaimonia, in contrast, cannot be reduced to the quest for hedonic happiness, as Nussbaum (2008) suggests. Rather, a certain amount of subjective well-being seems a necessary precondition to provide the motivational energy to venture on the pathway towards personal wisdom. Hedonic well-being may be experienced along this pathway, but probably at different times than during adjustment-related progress, and it is itself not the motivating goal (Staudinger & Kunzmann, 2005). That meeting different kinds of goals results in different emotional experience appears at first to sit neatly with Ryan and Deci's (2000) suggestion that hedonic experiences occur in response to achieving relatedness and competence, while autonomous, self-determined goals are eudaimonic (see also Ryff & Martela, this volume). However, one of the key features of our notion of growth that distinguishes it from self-determination theory or Ryff's notion of personal growth is that following this trajectory leads towards the development of personal wisdom, which entails that self-determined goals are aimed to balance the needs of the self and others and aim to increase the greater good (Staudinger & Kunzmann, 2005).

Thus, personal wisdom is not synonymous with successful maturation, in the sense of adjustment, nor necessarily accompanied by high levels of subjective well-being, nor directly linked with the achievement of self-related goals. Indeed, following a growth trajectory, transcending extant societal demands (if needed) and seeking the kind of challenges that seem necessary for making progress on the wisdom pathway will frequently be linked with challenging experiences and negative emotions. This supports Nussbaum's (2008) assertion that she would report dissatisfaction with her life as a whole if she caught herself experiencing satisfaction (like Aristotle's dumb grazing animals), because she attaches value to "striving, longing, and working for a difficult goal" (p. 587). Although Nussbaum presents this as something of a paradox, it is less of a contradiction than she suggests if we consider a distinction between growth and adjustment as outlined above: the reflective

dissatisfaction of being confined to adjustment-related goals that she describes, in fact may be important in promoting the quest for growth-related goals. Such dissatisfaction with hedonic outcomes has been discussed in other literature as well (e.g., Kringelbach & Berridge, 2009; Vittersø & Sørholt, 2011; Vittersø, this volume), and it may be the case that such dissatisfaction is one motivator for new goals and activities that might later contribute to the development of wisdom. The consideration of emotions experienced during certain kinds of activities, whether these are pleasurable and satisfying or challenging and interesting, is clearly important for drawing a distinction between eudaimonic and hedonic well-being. However in the broader timeframe of a whole life, we would argue that it is not that which is experienced at the time, but rather one's interpretation of these after the fact that is important for one's cognitive and affective experience of living a good life. We consider the process of life review to be essential for the development of wisdom (Staudinger, 2001), and it is partly because of the inherent temporal distance between event and review that the subjective state at the time of the event becomes less salient in our perspective.

---

## 9.6 Life Review: A Crucial Social-Cognitive Process on the Road to Wisdom and Eudaimonia

Life review, constructing, reconstructing, interpreting and evaluating an individual's life course (whether one's own or someone else's) is a process that we engage in across the lifespan (Staudinger, 2001). The ability to engage in life reflection or life review emerges in adolescence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000), as we become aware of ourselves and the gestalt of our lives. Life review is a crucial social-cognitive process when it comes to making sense of our experiences and potentially transforming them into insights into life, and therefore this social-cognitive process is at the heart of the development of wisdom (Staudinger, Smith, & Baltes, 1992). Butler's



early work on life review (1963), in line with Erikson, suggested that life review was a process through which one could develop both negative (e.g., terror and suicide) and positive (e.g., serenity) outcomes. Research into life review has shown that it is no more difficult for older people than younger: indeed it may be an important skill developed over the lifespan to assist in preventing negative outcomes and maintaining subjective well-being, used by some but not by others (see Wink & Schiff, 2002) as a way of coping. In fact older adults may be better able than others to find meaning through review of personal experiences (Pasupathi, 2001). Like other skills, these may be facilitated through training interventions, as findings from early studies involving intervention suggest that there is significant plasticity, for example in terms of increased scores when knowledge relevant to value relativism is activated, and when dyads can work on tasks (Böhmg-Krumhaar, Staudinger & Baltes, 2002; Staudinger & Baltes, 1996).

Work on *autobiographical memory and reminiscence* (Bluck & Levine, 1998) suggests that there are two distinct outcomes of reconstructing memories of one's life: self-acceptance, which we have associated above with adjustment and subjective well-being in a more hedonic sense; and self-change, which Bluck and Levine (1998) define as changes to one's self-concept. Looking back on one's life experiences with a goal of self-change may be associated with eudaimonic well-being, for example in the case of eudaimonic resilience. Eudaimonic resilience is a response after a difficult event that involves an exercise in meaning-making and thereby growth, not only a return to baseline levels of affect, as is typically the result of resilience (Bauer & Park, 2010; Bauer, Chap. 10, this volume). The process of review inherently involves evaluation, and here we are reminded of Erikson's (e.g., Erikson & Erikson, 1997) concept of integrity in the final stage of life: it is not an objective goodness of action throughout one's life that is indicative of wisdom: successfully navigating through the conflicts of prior stages equips one with the ability to make sense of previous experience in a manner supportive of continued mental health.

Rumination, for example, as opposed to reflection, consists in passive dwelling on subjectively negative aspects and may be both a cause and a consequence of lower levels of well-being (Staudinger, 2001). An ability to actively review lives with sufficient emotional detachment to engage with previously experienced emotions without being consumed by them should be considered a necessary condition for development along a growth trajectory towards wisdom. This resonates with Nussbaum's reminder of the Socratic suggestion that happiness requires self-examination, which she claims is missing from contemporary subjective-state psychology (2008): we consider such skills in reflection to be more characteristic of growth towards wisdom rather than towards happiness per se. As stated earlier, in our view, both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being can be experienced along the path towards wisdom. However neither hedonic nor eudaimonic well-being, experienced separately or together, is sufficient for the development of wisdom. On the contrary, at least as far as hedonic satisfaction is concerned, the pursuit of well-being may well interfere with a person's development towards wisdom.

---

## 9.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have used the psychological study of wisdom to demonstrate that, in contrast to Nussbaum's (2008) assertions, there is a substantial body of psychological literature that, for quite some time, has looked beyond the simplistic notions of happiness limited to hedonic pursuits (cf., Diener, 2000; Kahneman & Krueger, 2006). In presenting a definition of wisdom that is heavily dependent on an understanding of the good life as involving self-transcendence and a concern for the good of others, we hope we have shown the depth of investigation already available to review. Although there remains disagreement about how to define and measure wisdom (Staudinger & Glück, 2011), the increasingly comprehensive body of work associated with these endeavours has indeed provided substantial reason for the consideration of eudaimonic

pursuits as, at the very least, worthy of more attention. In particular, we have addressed a distinction between two trajectories of person development, adjustment and growth. Although adjustment is the more typical pathway and is strongly associated with the pursuit of hedonic satisfaction in life, it certainly does not encompass the full range of positive outcomes available and in this sense we agree with the criticism that an attempt to measure well-being only with indicators of adjustment will fall short. However, we have also illustrated through our presentation of findings in wisdom research that the growth trajectory, while bearing many similarities to eudaimonia, is not synonymous with it. This is in particular because the typical psychological understanding of eudaimonia tends to emphasize the pursuit of self-related, self-actualizing goals, while growth towards wisdom is characterized by a balance of such goals with a concern for the welfare of other people and society as a whole.

## References

- Ardelt, M. (1997). Wisdom and life satisfaction in old age. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, *52B*(1), P15–P27.
- Ardelt, M. (2003). Empirical assessment of a three-dimensional wisdom scale. *Research on Aging*, *25*(3), 275–324. doi:10.1177/0164027503025003004.
- Baltes, P. B., & Staudinger, U. M. (2000). Wisdom: A metaheuristic (pragmatic) to orchestrate mind and virtue toward excellence. *American Psychologist*, *55*(1), 122–136.
- Baltes, P. B. (2004). *Wisdom: Orchestrating mind and virtue*. Manuscript in preparation.
- Bauer, J. J., & Park, S. W. (2010). Growth is not just for the young: Growth narratives, eudaimonic resilience, and the aging self. In P. S. Fry & C. L. M. Keyes (Eds.), *New frontiers in resilient aging: Life-strengths and well-being in late life* (pp. 60–89). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bergsma, A., & Ardel, M. (2012). Self-reported wisdom and happiness: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *13*(3), 481–499. doi:10.1007/s10902-011-9275-5.
- Bluck, S., & Glück, J. (2005). From the inside out: People's implicit theories of wisdom. In R. J. Sternberg & J. Jordan (Eds.), *A handbook of wisdom* (pp. 84–109). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bluck, S., & Levine, L. J. (1998). Reminiscence as autobiographical memory: A catalyst for reminiscence theory development. *Ageing and Society*, *18*(02), 185–208.
- Böhmig-Krumhaar, S. A., Staudinger, U. M., & Baltes, P. B. (2002). Mehr toleranz tut not: Lässt sich wert-relativierendes wissen und urteilen mit hilfe einer wissensaktivierenden gedächtnisstrategie verbessern? [In search of more tolerance: Testing the facilitative effect of a knowledge-activating mnemonic strategy on value relativism]. *Zeitschrift Für Entwicklungspsychologie Und Pädagogische Psychologie*, *34*(1), 30–43. doi:10.1026/0049-8637.34.1.30.
- Brugman, G. M. (2006). In J. E. Birren & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), *Wisdom and aging* (pp. 445–475). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Elsevier. doi:10.1016/B978-012101264-9/50023-9.
- Butler, R. N. (1963). The life review: An interpretation of reminiscence in the aged. *Psychiatry*, *26*, 65–76.
- Costa, P. T., Jr., McCrae, R. R., & Dye, D. A. (1991). Facet scales for agreeableness and conscientiousness: A revision of the NEO personality inventory. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *12*(9), 887–898. doi:10.1016/0191-8869(91)90177-D.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999). If we are so rich, why aren't we happy? *American Psychologist*, *54*(10), 821–827. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.54.10.821.
- Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *American Psychologist*, *55*(1), 34–43.
- Dörner, J., Mickler, C., & Staudinger, U. M. (2005). Self-development at midlife. Lifespan perspectives on adjustment and growth. In S. L. Willis & M. Martin (Eds.), *Middle adulthood: A lifespan perspective* (pp. 277–317). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Erikson, E. H., & Erikson, J. M. (1997). *The life cycle completed*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Field, D., & Millsap, R. E. (1991). Personality in advanced old age: Continuity or change? *Journal of Gerontology*, *46*(6), P299–P308. doi:10.1093/geronj/46.6.P299.
- Habermas, T., & Bluck, S. (2000). Getting a life: The emergence of the life story in adolescence. *Psychological Bulletin*, *126*(5), 748. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.126.5.748.
- Hearn, S., Saulnier, G., Strayer, J., Glenham, M., Koopman, R., & Marcia, J. (2012). Between integrity and despair: Toward construct validation of Erikson's eighth stage. *Journal of Adult Development*, *19*(1), 1–20. doi:10.1007/s10804-011-9126-y.
- Helson, R., & Srivastava, S. (2001). Three paths of adult development: Conservers, seekers, and achievers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *80*(6), 995–1010. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.80.6.995.
- Helson, R., & Wink, P. (1987). Two conceptions of maturity examined in the findings of a longitudinal study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *53*(3), 531–541. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.53.3.531.
- Höffe, O. (2007). *Lebenskunst und moral [Art of Living and Morals]*. Munich, Germany: C.H. Beck.
- Jahoda, M. (1958). *Current concepts of positive mental health*. New York: Basic Books.

- Kahneman, D., & Krueger, A. B. (2006). Developments in the measurement of subjective well-being. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 20(1), 3–24. doi:10.1257/089533006776526030.
- Kekes, J. (1983). Wisdom. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 20, 277–286.
- Kramer, D. A. (1983). Post-formal operations? A need for further conceptualization. *Human Development*, 26(2), 91–105. doi:10.1159/000272873.
- Kringelbach, M. L., & Berridge, K. C. (2009). Towards a functional neuroanatomy of pleasure and happiness. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 13(11), 479–487. doi:10.1016/j.tics.2009.08.006.
- Kunzmann, U. (2007). Wisdom: Motivational and emotional dynamics in old age. In R. Fernández-Ballesteros (Ed.), *Geropsychology: European perspectives for an ageing world* (pp. 224–238). Gottingen, Germany: Hogrefe & Huber.
- Labouvie-Vief, G., Diehl, M., Jain, E., & Zhang, F. (2007). Six-year change in affect optimization and affect complexity across the adult life span: A further examination. *Psychology and Aging*, 22(4), 738–751. doi:10.1037/0882-7974.22.4.738.
- Labouvie-Vief, G., & Medler, M. (2002). Affect optimization and affect complexity: Modes and styles of regulation in adulthood. *Psychology and Aging*, 17(4), 571–588.
- Luyckx, K., Seiffge-Krenke, I., Schwartz, S. J., Goossens, L., Weets, I., Hendrieckx, C., et al. (2008). Identity development, coping, and adjustment in emerging adults with a chronic illness: The sample case of type 1 diabetes. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 43(5), 451–458. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2008.04.005.
- Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3(5), 551–558. doi:10.1037/h0023281.
- Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. Oxford, UK: Harpers.
- Mickler, C., & Staudinger, U. M. (2008). Personal wisdom: Validation and age-related differences of a performance measure. *Psychology and Aging*, 23(4), 787–799. doi:10.1037/a0013928.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2008). Who is the happy warrior? Philosophy poses questions to psychology. *The Journal of Legal Studies*, 37, S81–S113. doi:10.1086/587438.
- Pasupathi, M. (2001). The social construction of the personal past and its implications for adult development. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(5), 651. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.127.5.651.
- Pasupathi, M., & Staudinger, U. M. (2001). Do advanced moral reasoners also show wisdom? Linking moral reasoning and wisdom-related knowledge and judgement. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 25(5), 401–415. doi:10.1080/016502501316934833.
- Pasupathi, M., Staudinger, U. M., & Baltes, P. B. (2001). Seeds of wisdom: Adolescents' knowledge and judgment about difficult life problems. *Developmental Psychology*, 37(3), 351–361. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.37.3.351.
- Peterson, B. E., & Klohnen, E. C. (1995). Realization of generativity in two samples of women at midlife. *Psychology and Aging*, 10(1), 20–29. doi:10.1037/0882-7974.10.1.20.
- Rogers, C. R. (1962). Toward becoming a fully functioning person. In A. W. Combs (Ed.), *Perceiving, behaving, becoming: A new focus for education* (pp. 21–33). Washington, DC: National Education Association. doi:10.1037/14325-003.
- Ryan, S. (2014). *Wisdom*. Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/wisdom/>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069–1081. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069.
- Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. H. (2008). Know thyself and become what you are: A eudaimonic approach to psychological well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9(1), 13–39. doi:10.1007/s10902-006-9019-0.
- Schwartz, B., & Sharpe, K. E. (2006). Practical wisdom: Aristotle meets positive psychology. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 7(3), 377–395. doi:10.1007/s10902-005-3651-y.
- Seiffge-Krenke, I., & Gelhaar, T. (2008). Does successful attainment of developmental tasks lead to happiness and success in later developmental tasks? A test of Havighurst's (1948) theses. *Journal of Adolescence*, 31(1), 33–52.
- Smith, J., & Baltes, P. B. (1990). Wisdom-related knowledge: Age/cohort differences in response to life-planning problems. *Developmental Psychology*, 26(3), 494–505. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.26.3.494.
- Smith, J., Staudinger, U. M., & Baltes, P. B. (1994). Occupational settings facilitating wisdom-related knowledge: The sample case of clinical psychologists. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 62(5), 989–999. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.62.5.989.
- Staudinger, U. M. (1999a). Social cognition and a psychological approach to the art of life. In F. Blanchard-Fields & T. Hess (Eds.), *Social cognition and aging* (pp. 343–375). New York: Academic.
- Staudinger, U. M. (1999b). Older and wiser? Integrating results on the relationship between age and wisdom-related performance. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 23(3), 641–664. doi:10.1080/016502599383739.
- Staudinger, U. M. (2001). Life reflection: A social-cognitive analysis of life review. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(2), 148–160. doi:10.1037/1089-2680.5.2.148.
- Staudinger, U. M. (2013). The need to distinguish personal from general wisdom: A short history and empirical evidence. In M. Ferrari & N. Westrate (Eds.), *The scientific study of personal wisdom* (pp. 3–19). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

- Staudinger, U. M., & Baltes, P. B. (1996). Interactive minds: A facilitative setting for wisdom-related performance? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *71*(4), 746–762. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.71.4.746.
- Staudinger, U. M., Dörner, J., & Mickler, C. (2005). Wisdom and personality. In R. J. Sternberg & J. Jordan (Eds.), *A handbook of wisdom* (pp. 191–219). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Staudinger, U. M., & Glück, J. (2011). Psychological wisdom research: Commonalities and differences in a growing field. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *62*(1), 215–241. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.121208.131659.
- Staudinger, U. M., & Kessler, E. M. (2009). Adjustment and growth: Two trajectories of positive personality development across adulthood. In M. C. Smith & N. DeFrates-Densch (Eds.), *Handbook of research on adult learning and development* (pp. 241–268). New York: Routledge.
- Staudinger, U. M., & Kunzmann, U. (2005). Positive adult personality development. *European Psychologist*, *10*(4), 320–329. doi:10.1027/1016-9040.10.4.320.
- Staudinger, U. M., Lopez, D. F., & Baltes, P. B. (1997). The psychometric location of wisdom-related performance: Intelligence, personality, and more? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *23*(11), 1200–1214. doi:10.1177/01461672972311007.
- Staudinger, U. M., Maciel, A. G., Smith, J., & Baltes, P. B. (1998). What predicts wisdom-related performance? A first look at personality, intelligence, and facilitative experiential contexts. *European Journal of Personality*, *12*(1), 1–17.
- Staudinger, U. M., & Pasupathi, M. (2003). Correlates of wisdom-related performance in adolescence and adulthood: Age-graded differences in “Paths” toward desirable development. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *13*(3), 239–268. doi:10.1111/1532-7795.1303001.
- Staudinger, U. M., Smith, J., & Baltes, P. B. (1992). Wisdom-related knowledge in a life review task: Age differences and the role of professional specialization. *Psychology and Aging*, *7*(2), 271–281. doi:10.1037/0882-7974.7.2.271.
- Sternberg, R. J. (Ed.). (1990). *Wisdom: Its nature, origins, and development*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1998). A balance theory of wisdom. *Review of General Psychology*, *2*(4), 347–365. doi:10.1037/1089-2680.2.4.347.
- Vittersø, J., & Sørholt, Y. (2011). Life satisfaction goes with pleasure and personal growth goes with interest: Further arguments for separating hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *6*(4), 326–335. doi:10.1080/17439760.2011.584548.
- Waterman, A. S. (1990). Personal expressiveness: Philosophical and psychological foundations. *Journal of Mind and Behavior*, *11*(1), 47–73.
- Waterman, A. S. (1993). Two conceptions of happiness: Contrasts of personal expressiveness (eudaimonia) and hedonic enjoyment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *64*(4), 678. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.64.4.678.
- Webster, J. D. (2003). An exploratory analysis of a self-assessed wisdom scale. *Journal of Adult Development*, *10*(1), 13–22. doi:10.1023/A:1020782619051.
- Webster, J. D., Taylor, M., & Bates, G. (2011). Conceptualizing and measuring wisdom: A reply to Ardel. *Experimental Aging Research*, *37*(2), 256–259. doi:10.1080/0361073X.2011.554514.
- Whitbourne, S. K., & Waterman, A. S. (1979). Psychosocial development during the adult years: Age and cohort comparisons. *Developmental Psychology*, *15*(4), 373. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.15.4.373.
- Wink, P., & Helson, R. (1997). Practical and transcendent wisdom: Their nature and some longitudinal findings. *Journal of Adult Development*, *4*(1), 1–15. doi:10.1007/BF02511845.
- Wink, P., & Schiff, B. (2002). To review or not to review? The role of personality and life events in life review and adaptation to older age. In J. D. Webster & B. K. Haight (Eds.), *Critical advances in reminiscence work: From theory to application* (pp. 44–60). New York: Springer.
- Wink, P., & Staudinger, U. M. (2015). Wisdom and psychosocial functioning in later life. *Journal of Personality*. doi:10.1111/jopy.12160.