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## **The Berlin Wisdom Paradigm: A Conceptual Analysis of a Psychological Approach to Wisdom**

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### **Abstract**

*The main purpose of this article is to undertake a conceptual investigation of the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm: a psychological project initiated by Paul Baltes and intended to study the complex phenomenon of wisdom. Firstly, in order to provide a wider perspective for the subsequent analyses, a short historical sketch is given. Secondly, a meta-theoretical issue of the degree to which the subject matter of the Baltesian study can be identified with the traditional philosophical wisdom is addressed. The main result yielded by a careful conceptual analysis is that the philosophical and psychological concepts of wisdom, though not entirely the same, are at least parallel. Finally, one of the revealed aspects of the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm, i.e. its relative neglect of the non-cognitive and personal aspects of wisdom is brought to the fore. This deficiency, it is suggested, can be remedied by the application of the virtue ethics' conceptual framework.*

### **Setting the stage: From ancient Athens to 20<sup>th</sup> century developmental psychology**

As far as the Western World is concerned the history of a systematic investigation into the phenomenon and the concept of wisdom begins with Greek philosophy and reaches its peak in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle (see Kekes 1983, Labouvie-Vief 1990, Osbeck & Robinson 2005, Robinson 1990; for non-philosophical and non-Western traditions of the study of wisdom see Baltes 2004, Birren & Svensson 2005, Kupperman 2005, Peterson & Seligman 2004). In the dialogues of the former and the treatises of the latter one may find a conceptually crucial distinction between kinds (species) of wisdom. Accordingly, there is *sophia* connected with searching for truth, especially a metaphysical one, and with philosophy. The people who “love it so” (Nozick, 1990, p. 267) are called philo-sophers. Next, there is *phronesis* related to practical life and a search for means to taken-for-

granted ends. It is a practical wisdom. Then, finally, there is *episteme* that can be, with all historical constraints, compared to modern scientific knowledge.

In the classical philosophies of Plato and Aristotle the status of *phronesis* and *episteme* was explicitly subordinate to that of the highest *sophia*. Accordingly, wisdom was considered as transcending the data and justification rules of science and as going beyond the concrete and contingent circumstances of practical engagement. At the same time, all investigation and exercise of wisdom was becoming more and more exclusively connected with professional philosophy, identified with a rational discourse centred around the concept of *logos*. This kind of perspective is usually taken, especially by philosophers, as obviously superior to the alternatives (cf. Kekes 1983, Robinson 1983). However, there is also a subtle but sustained current of critique that considers it as neglecting transrational, e.g. emotional, communal, bodily, and mythical, dimensions of being wise and, thus, as necessarily too narrow (cf. Labouvie-Vief 1990).

For the purposes of this paper the above philosophical tradition of wisdom study can be considered as dominant until the ascent of modernity that turned the whole perspective on wisdom upside down (Chandler & Holliday 1990, Robinson 1990). In short, it can be said that modern science together with the philosophical standpoint on which it was built led to a radical shift that can be identified with a reduction of wisdom to mere *episteme*: “technical knowledge of how things work” (Robinson 1990, p. 22).

While trying to delineate the particular forces that could account for this transition one may point to three possible sources of influence (Chandler & Holliday 1990). The first and most general of them can be subsumed under the heading broadly understood as empiricism; i.e. the epistemological position that claims that all human knowledge can be derived from, or even identified with, those data that can be obtained and/or verified by the empirical methods of natural science. Not only *sophia* in its classical sense but also value-laden *phronesis* could never have been justified in such a way. Secondly, the broad influence of empiricism was further strengthened by the common application of machine metaphors to the investigation of humans. The most straightforward criterion of the machine's value is its efficiency in producing well-defined and easily measurable results. The ability to produce these kinds of outcomes can be relatively well connected with general intelligence in its modern sense but not with the classical age wisdom. Thirdly, in psychology one can point to a more specific source of influence, which is “20<sup>th</sup> century psychology's romance with behaviorism” (Chandler & Holliday 1990, p. 126), leading to a strict caution about any central state notions. This kind of impact has been actually so strong and persistent, that it is still visible in modern cognitive psychology's concern with methodological and experimental rigour.

As a result of the above influences, the overall scientific worldview of the modern era eventually led to the abandonment of the concept of wisdom by all investigation aspiring to be

scientific, which obviously included modern psychology: “wisdom, along with God and other such arcane things, had been declared officially dead” (Chandler & Holliday 1990, p. 129).

At this point the history of scientific ideas is, not for the first time, becoming interestingly similar to the stories told by the religious traditions. Namely, wisdom, though once “officially” buried, seems to be rising from the dead nowadays. What is more, there are some who argue that it has already risen. The eminent representative of this point of view was Paul Baltes (1939-2006) who claimed that wisdom is “becoming a centre of transdisciplinary discourse” (Baltes, Glück & Kunzmann 2002, p. 329), in which he included cultural anthropology, political science, education, and, last but not least, psychology.

According to Baltes and colleagues, within modern psychology one can distinguish three main approaches to wisdom. The first one is connected with the consideration of wisdom as a kind of a trait, or a meta-trait. As such it is the most direct successor of the philosophical understanding of wisdom as a virtue of character. The most prominent representative of this perspective was Erik Erikson (1966, 1982). The second current of modern wisdom research is related to the evolution of Piagetian developmental theory and to the conceptions of post-formal and dialectical thinking identified with wisdom. Gisela Labouvie-Vief (1990, 1994), for example, attempts to supplement wisdom derived from *logos* with its organismic, expressive, personal, and communal counterparts that she subsumes under the heading of *mythos*.

The third current of wisdom research that seems to be one of the most prevalent and dynamic at the moment is connected with the so-called Berlin Wisdom Paradigm that was initiated by Paul Baltes and is carried on by the group of researchers connected with the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin. From this meta-theoretical vantage point, wisdom is studied as a kind of expertise in the matters of human life (see Baltes 2004, Baltes et al. 2002, Baltes & Smith 1990, cf. Chandler & Holliday 1990).

Since the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm is the major point of reference for this paper, the context in which this perspective originated is worth mentioning. Accordingly, its sources are classified by Baltes and his co-researchers as follows. At first, there was an “interest in the study of high levels of human performance, the kind of performance that can be labeled as exceptional and expertlike” (Baltes & Smith 1990, p. 87), which led the team to the concept of wisdom as potentially valuable. Secondly, there was the investigation into the aging mind and disappointment caused by the “wrinkles and failures” paradigm that drove the researchers to “the explicit commitment to understand what might be positive in adult development and aging” (Baltes et al. 2002, p. 329) and, finally, to “the once moribund topic of wisdom” (Chandler & Holliday 1990, p. 128)<sup>1</sup>. The last source of Baltes’

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1 This gerontological root of Baltes’ research may suggest that it is essentially confined to older people, which could have been applicable to the earliest form of it but is by no means true of its mature shape. The

team's interest in wisdom is the psychological study of intelligence that tries to be sensitive to "the contextual and pragmatic features of everyday functioning" (Baltes & Smith 1990, p. 87) and, as such, is very close to the theoretical perspective taken by the investigation of post-formal thinking (cf. above).

The Berlin Wisdom Paradigm in its final and mature shape is one of the most widespread currents within modern research on wisdom. At the same time it seems to be theoretically sophisticated and very rich in empirically obtained data (for a review see Baltes 2004). It is for these reasons that the work of Paul Baltes and his collaborators has been chosen for the analysis and evaluation. To begin with, one issue of meta-theoretical importance needs to be addressed. Namely, the very fact of the word "wisdom" being utilised both by the philosophical tradition and its Baltesian counterpart is not sufficient to claim that the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm studies the same phenomenon that Plato and Aristotle did. In order to evaluate if such a thesis is valid, a careful conceptual analysis will be undertaken. This analysis, in turn, will lead to the question discussed in the second part of the paper, which will focus on the overly cognitive character of Baltesian wisdom. It will be argued that the relative neglect of the personal and emotional dimensions is a deficiency that impairs the meta-theoretical potential of the project. As a final remark the conceptual framework of modern virtue ethics will be suggested as a promising inspiration for further development of the psychological, non necessarily Baltesian, approach to wisdom.

### **"What is Wisdom and Why Do Philosophers Love It So?"**

In order to assess whether the phenomena investigated under the heading of "wisdom" by the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm are identical, or at least parallel, to the wisdom of ancient Greeks, it would be very useful to formulate definitions of wisdom offered by psychology and philosophy, respectively. Unfortunately, at least as far as the latter is concerned the task does not seem to be easy. Namely, philosophers, who differ from each other on the majority of issues they are interested in, have on no account made any exception for the very object of their *philia*. Having this restriction in mind, however, it is still possible to refer to those of them whose conceptual views seem to be broader, rather than strictly limited to their own particular assumptions. Examples of such philosophers are Robert Nozick (1990) and John Kekes (1983, 2001), whose conceptual perspectives will be taken here as a reference point (cf. also Baltes 2004, Osbeck & Robinson 2005, Robinson 1990, Ryan 1999). The investigation of the philosophical concept of wisdom will be carried out along the lines of the traditional, Aristotelian definition; i.e. along the lines of *genus proximum* and *differentia specifica*.

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paradigm, in fact, was very quickly broadened to involve the whole life-span.

As far as the former is concerned, the very first point to make is to emphasise that philosophers usually consider wisdom as a cognitive phenomenon. It is a kind of “understanding” (Nozick 1990, p. 267), “a certain kind of judgement, evaluation, and knowledge” (Kekes 2001). The cognition in question, however, is very far from the descriptive, value-neutral and specialised kind of knowledge to which scientists and lay people of the modern era are accustomed. According to Kekes (1983, p. 278) wisdom is “a kind of interpretive knowledge” in which “one knows the significance of the descriptively known facts”. The emphasis put on “significance” makes this knowledge normative. As such, furthermore, it is intrinsically connected with the ability to make good judgements and to live a good life; wisdom can be classified as “understanding” only as far as “this understanding informs a (wise) person's thought and action” (Nozick 1990, p. 267). It is for this reason that good judgement and action can be taken as footprints of wisdom itself, especially where so called “hard cases” (Kekes 1983, p. 283) are concerned.

Once one knows that wisdom is a special kind of knowledge, the next step is to delineate its features: its *differentia specifica*. The first group of the characteristics in question can be called “content-related” and is related to the subject matter of wisdom. In brief, it can be said that wisdom is knowledge about “the issues of life” (Nozick 1990, p. 267), as far as these are taken from a meaning-related and normative standpoint. The problems involved will be obviously very wide in range and diverse; they will include questions about “the most important goals and values of life”, the means needed to reach these goals, the kinds of dangers that may threaten this attempt, as well as the “different types of human beings” that may be met (Nozick 1990, p. 269). In short, wisdom is this general and subtle kind of knowledge that provides you with all that “you need to know in order to live well and cope” (Nozick 1990, p. 268).

The subject matter of this knowledge, it should be emphasised, is on no account mysterious or esoteric. As a matter of fact wisdom is based on the “basic assumptions” providing “the most elementary form of descriptive knowledge” (Kekes 1983, p. 279). These “basic assumptions”, in particular, refer to “the human significance the universal and unavoidable limitations and possibilities have for living a good life” (Kekes 1983, p. 282); to every individual’s mortality, physical capacity, health, temperament, emotions, talents, as well as the society, culture, and historical period in which one finds him/herself living. In effect, “becoming wise is not a matter of learning new esoteric truths but one of rediscovering the significance of old truths that, at some level, everybody already knows” (Chandler & Holliday 1990, p. 134).

The kind of interpretive and normative knowledge that constitutes wisdom is also special in its formal features. First of all, it is distinctive in terms of thoroughness and profundity. Wisdom is “knowledge of priorities and depth” (Kekes 1983, p. 279). Being wise, accordingly, means “knowing the *deepest* story, being able to see and appreciate the deepest significance of whatever occurs”

(Nozick 1990, p. 276). Together with this kind of depth there comes generality and lack of any definite answers for the particular problems of a happy and good life. In the face of an individual question (a hard case), wisdom turns out to be open-ended and has to be supported by context-bound “intuitive judgement” (Nozick 1990, p. 278). Any such judgement emerges from the close relation to reality (Reality): the relation that cannot be reduced to the descriptively understood cognitive grasp. A wise man “knows and appreciates reality's many dimensions and sees the life he is living in the widest context” (Nozick 1990, p. 276).

Wisdom as presented above is obviously practical; it is “what you need to understand in order to live well and cope with the central problems and avoid the dangers in the predicament(s) human beings find themselves in” (Nozick 1990, p. 267). As such it has an evident and considerable instrumental value. At the same time, however, the majority of philosophical accounts will assign it also some fundamental intrinsic value. It was for this reason that ancient philosophers often insisted that it is not only sufficient but also necessary for human flourishing (*eudaimonia*). The fact that wisdom is considered an “important end, an intrinsic component of one's life and self” (Nozick 1990, p. 275), however, does not necessarily imply that wisdom is the final or the highest aim. As Nozick (1990, p. 275) puts it: “will not a wisdom which knows the limits of everything also know its own ... There is nothing inconsistent in wisdom's concluding that something else is more important”.

The formal features of wisdom can be interpreted as referring to wisdom as an individual's trait or condition<sup>2</sup>. If one realises that people differ from each other with regard to this quality, one can consider wisdom as a variable in the psychometric sense. As such wisdom can be understood as being continuous rather than dichotomised. At least in the opinion of the authors surveyed here, it “comes in degrees” (Nozick 1990, p. 268); “more of it makes a life better, less makes it worse” (Kekes 2001). Once one has a continuous variable it is possible to assess its distribution, which is skewed. Not surprisingly, the common opinion of philosophers is that wisdom is not “universally shared” (Nozick 1990, p. 267). At the same time, however, those of them that agree with the continuous perspective of Nozick and Kekes would also add that wisdom's opposite, foolishness, is not common either. The majority of people would be considered by them as “neither foolish nor wise” (Kekes 1983, p. 283).

### **Wisdom as a psychological concept**

As soon as the scrutiny of the philosophical notion of wisdom is completed, it is possible to proceed with its psychological equivalent, the definition embodied in the “five qualitative criteria” (Baltes et al. 2002, p. 33) of wisdom proposed by the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm. In order to make the intended

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2 The wisdom of the ancient Greeks is obviously attributable to individuals. However, it is not altogether clear whether the above realistic (reifying) reading of wisdom as a trait-like property is the only one possible.

comparison clear, the Baltesian concept will be depicted along the same lines as were applied above. Accordingly, after a delineation of its *genus proximum* both content-related and formal aspects of *differentia specifica* will be described.

As far as the general kind of wisdom is concerned, Paul Baltes seems to be as inclined towards the cognitive standpoint as was philosophy. Wisdom is once again explicitly classified as knowledge or, more specifically, as “an expert knowledge system (expertise)” (Baltes & Smith 1990, p. 87). The latter, though explicitly quite narrow, should not suggest that wisdom is considered here as knowledge of only a descriptive kind. It is “Integrative, Holistic, and Balanced” (Baltes et al. 2002, p. 342) and, as such, is intended to involve cognitive, social, personal, motivational, emotional and behavioural elements. Furthermore, the knowledge in question is again strictly connected with judgement and action. Accordingly, Baltes and Smith (1990, p. 95) characterise wisdom as “expert knowledge involving good judgement and advice” and associate it with three main tasks of life: planning (future), review (past) and management (present).

While trying to delineate the domain of such knowledge, judgement and advice (content-related *differentia specifica*), the researchers refer to a rather ambiguous concept of “fundamental pragmatics of life” (Baltes & Smith 1990, p. 96). In order to make it slightly less equivocal one may elucidate that it may refer to: “the conduct of life and the human condition”, “the course, variations, dynamics, and conflicts of life”, “important but uncertain matters of life” (hard cases), and, last but not least, “one's self and one's own life biography and goals” (Baltes & Smith 1990, p. 95-96). Such a broad domain can be the subject matter of both declarative and procedural knowledge. Accordingly, the first criterion of wisdom (*Rich factual knowledge*) is the possession of “an extensive data base about life matters” that “is likely” to contain “a wide scope of detailed scripts (specific knowledge) and an elaborate set of interpretive frameworks (generalized knowledge about the conditions of life)” (Baltes & Smith 1990, p. 100). The second criterion (*Rich procedural knowledge*), in turn, refers to “a repertoire of mental procedures (or heuristics) used to select, order, and manipulate the information in the data base and to use it for purposes of decision making and action planning” (Baltes & Smith 1990, p. 100-101).

Apart from the domain-related features of knowledge that constitute wisdom, there are also some formal qualities that are worth consideration. The knowledge in question is obviously very broad (cf. above) and deep; it is knowledge of “extraordinary scope, depth, measure, and balance” (Baltes et al. 2002, p. 330). As such it does not provide either any precise formulations of its problems or any definite answers. Quite the opposite: it can be labelled “an instantiation of an ill-structured and open system of expert knowledge” (Baltes & Smith 1990, p. 99) or, more simply, a metaheuristic.

The formal features mentioned above are defined in abstract and impersonal terms. As such, they require a further, strictly psychological interpretation or reformulation. An attempt to provide one

can be found in the statement that wisdom “focuses on the whole and the weighing and moderation of its parts” (Baltes et al. 2002, p. 342), playing psychologically integrative functions. This kind of functional hypothesis, though very preliminary and vague, is necessary for any further investigation into the relation between abstract wisdom and particular psychological dynamics.

The next important characteristics of knowledge constituting wisdom are emphasised by the third and the fourth wisdom criteria. According to the former (*Life span contextualism*), wisdom as related to “the many different themes and contexts of human life”, refers also to “their interrelations and cultural variations” (Baltes et al. 2002, p. 333). As such it implies “an understanding that life development and life events are embedded in multiple life span contexts (age-related, sociohistorical, idiosyncratic)”, the ones that are “not always coordinated but can also involve tension and conflict” (Baltes & Smith 1990, p. 101-102, cf. Erikson 1966, 1982). The fourth wisdom criterion (*Value relativism and tolerance*) is connected with the apprehension of relativity as well. Being specifically normative it refers to the “acknowledgement of individual and cultural differences” (Baltes et al. 2002, p. 333) in values, goals and priorities. In more operational terms, Baltes' team expects a wise person interpreting the life histories and decisions of other people to show “an awareness that all judgements are a function of, and are relative to, a given cultural and personal value system” (Baltes & Smith 1990, p. 102).

The third and fourth wisdom criteria investigated above emphasise the relativity of any wisdom's content. The relative standpoint taken by Baltes, however, is even stronger. Finally, it is directed towards wisdom itself, which leads to the fifth wisdom criterion named *Recognition and management of uncertainty*. Wisdom, according to it, is knowledge “about the limits of knowledge and the uncertainties of the world” (Baltes et al. 2002, p. 330), “about the relative indeterminacy and unpredictability of life” (Baltes & Smith 1990, p. 103)<sup>3</sup>. As such it is connected with acknowledgement of the fact that “one can *never* know everything about a problem or an individual's life” (Baltes & Smith 1990, p. 103) and with the special means provided to cope with this kind of permanent epistemic uncertainty.

Despite all its relativity and cognitive weakness, or rather exactly because of it, wisdom finally turns out to be a notion of strictly practical character, “a construct that, for all phases and contexts of life, offers the potential for defining the means and ends toward a good or even optimal life” (Baltes et al. 2002, p. 329). As such it gains an essential instrumental value. At the same time, however, it should be emphasised that there is no reference to its intrinsic value, which makes a noticeable difference in comparison with philosophical accounts (cf. above).

The last formal characteristics of wisdom that should be investigated are connected with the fact that psychological wisdom is quite literally and explicitly a trait-like individual variable. As such

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3 Cf. the humility principle in Ryan (1999).



it can be subjected to some basic psychometric analyses and descriptive statistics. At first, wisdom in psychology can be considered as at least an ordinal variable: the “behavioral expressions we observe in individuals can be ordered on a 'wisdom scale’” (Baltes et al. 2002, p. 331). As such it fulfills the rudimentary requirements of any qualitative research. The way this kind of research is actually conducted, furthermore, directly shows that wisdom is utilised as an even stronger, continuous variable. As soon as this is clear it can be added that its distribution is theoretically expected to be skewed. Baltes and his team, accordingly, consider wisdom as referring “to qualities that can be acquired only by very few people” and “expect most people not to be wise” (Baltes et al. 2002, p. 332, 331).

### **Towards a conclusion and evaluation**

The results of the analyses made above show that philosophical and Baltesian concepts of wisdom are at least parallel. Both are defined on the basis of the cognitive notion of knowledge (*genus proximum*) which is understood as much broader than the factual and descriptive knowledge that science is expected to provide. The knowledge in question is intrinsically practical, normative and interpretive. The specific features of this knowledge, its *differentia specifica*, involve both content-related and formal qualities. The former can be subsumed under the heading of general and most fundamental human life circumstances, which are identified with the subject matter of wisdom. The latter, in turn, refers to the wide scope, depth, and relativity of the wise person's knowledge.

The striking resemblance between philosophical and psychological notions of wisdom is crucial because it makes direct juxtaposition of the results yielded within these two distinct disciplines meta-theoretically viable. At the same time, however, one should not too hastily claim that discourse on wisdom did not change at all when it was transferred from philosophy to the psychology of Paul Baltes. Quite the contrary! The shift made might not have been a striking one, indeed, but it was by no means insignificant.

In order to emphasise the transition made, it may be useful to indicate the respects in which the similar philosophical and psychological notions of wisdom differ. First of all, it should not be left unremarked that the change in language, from philosophical to psychological, and, hence, in the meta-theoretical structure, had some crucial consequences. Probably the most important of them was the explicitly developmental and functional perspective on wisdom that quite naturally arose within scientific psychology<sup>4</sup>. Psychological wisdom, as a result, began to be amenable to studies considering it as an integrative force within personality (cf. Erikson 1966, 1982).

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<sup>4</sup>Philosophy, obviously, had not denounced any such perspective. However, it still lacked direct linguistic and theoretical means to address issues emerging when such a view is taken.

This broadening of the investigation of wisdom by a specifically psychological perspective was obviously beneficial. On the other hand, however, there were some changes made that were connected with the narrowing of the view. The first narrowing transition was related to the subtle but very significant substitution of an expert knowledge system (expertise) for the broad and polysemantic concept of knowledge usually utilised by philosophy. It should be emphasised that such a shift, though completely understandable within the theoretical framework taken by Baltes, was not free of any meta-theoretical costs. The second important constraint on the original philosophical approach was connected with the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm's lack of emphasis on the intrinsic value of wisdom. Such a caution, however, should not be automatically taken as the denouncement of any normative stance that philosophy could have proposed. Baltes and his co-workers, strictly speaking, did not take any philosophical position. Instead, as empirically oriented psychologists they quite naturally avoided any directly normative statement of the kind that the assignment of intrinsic value would have been.

The very short summary of the differences between philosophical and Baltesian accounts of wisdom makes a preliminary evaluation possible. The first point that can be assessed is the qualification of wisdom as a very specific kind of comprehension, an expert knowledge system. Gisela Labouvie-Vief (1990, p. 77), for example, quite openly suggests that “wisdom cannot be reduced to a cognitive theory of expertise”. The philosophical notion of knowledge, especially when connected with practice and active life, is very multidimensional and, thus, very broad. Its most striking example is the Socratic virtue that is a knowledge involving not only wisdom but also, for example, fortitude and piety. Expertise, on the other hand, has a quite specific meaning and, in effect, can be criticised as too narrow. Chandler and Holliday (1990, p. 133), respectively, would say that “the real problem ... is in learning how to avoid confusing truly wise persons with ... local experts, narrow specialists, and purveyors of esoteric information”. The risk of such confusion is certainly present. Another “real problem” to address is the question of whether that risk is only accidental to the paradigm based on expertise and, thus, can be at least reduced, or if it is a substantial and irremovable part.

The second issue to be discussed is strictly connected with the first and can be considered as one of its most crucial consequences. Namely, wisdom understood as a form of expertise, although theoretically playing an integrative function (cf. above), is not, in research practice, very easily studied from the perspective of the whole personality. Instead, all kinds of narrowly cognitive standpoints become not only most often but almost exclusively applicable. Orwoll and Perlmutter (1990, p. 160), for example, consider that the “primacy of cognitive explanations of wisdom in recent research has failed to incorporate personality prerequisites”. At the same time they claim that the thoroughly holistic view of wisdom can be achieved only as soon as researchers “begin to link definitive cognitive processes with definitive personality processes” (Orwoll & Perlmutter 1990, p. 175). Such a perspective, although a very natural potential of the psychological study of wisdom, may be difficult to develop conceptually within the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm.

The ability to take into account non-cognitive dimensions and holistic dynamics of wisdom is further confined by the – natural for science but still narrowing – non-normative perspective. In short, one may suggest that while it is very difficult to include the modern notion of personality in the cognitive perspective on wisdom, it may be impossible to do so with the old and value-laden concept of character. Chandler and Holliday (1990, p. 134), accordingly, indicate that the facts of wise men being tolerant, humble and moral are “difficult to account for in any system that defines wisdom only as a state of cognitive expertise”.

### **Virtue ethics' conceptual framework: a suggestion for the future**

The limitations of the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm are all focused around the non-cognitive (personal) and normative aspects of wisdom. The recognition of these dimensions, in turn, can be considered as the old insight that once present in the philosophical accounts has been lost on the way towards a scientific psychology (cf. Chandler & Holliday 1990). In such a case, it is philosophy that, once again, can serve as a conceptually and heuristically valuable inspiration that may help to recover the forgotten depth and complexity of wisdom.

The subdiscipline of philosophy where themes of wisdom have usually been discussed is normative ethics. However, not all kinds of it are equally promising from the psychological standpoint. Modern meta-ethics distinguishes at least three main currents of ethical inquiry: *deontology* based on the notion of duty or rule, *consequentialism* emphasising the results of action, and *virtue ethics* developed from the ancient perspective of personal virtues. Without any complex and deep analysis one can notice that the fundamental conceptual bases of deontology and consequentialism are, at least directly, incompatible with psychology. One cannot, of course, *a priori* judge that these ethical perspectives are essentially (ultimately) noncomparable with psychology. In order to make such a comparison possible, however, a serious and thorough meta-theoretical preparatory analysis would have to be made.

The conceptual framework of virtue ethics (see Annas 2006, Hursthouse 1999), on the other hand, is in a very straightforward way parallel to its psychological equivalent. Both psychology and virtue ethics are primarily concerned with people; with their actions (behaviour) and internal states, including those of both a cognitive and non-cognitive kind. Both of them are strongly directed towards individual differences, addressed, respectively, as personality traits or as virtues or vices of character that can be interpreted as kinds of meta-traits.<sup>5</sup>

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5 The Berlin Wisdom Paradigm obviously makes many references to the ancient Greek form of virtue ethics. These references, however, rarely go beyond a historical survey and have no far-reaching conceptual consequences. In fact, the central role played by the narrowly cognitive notion of expertise seems to seriously constrain the possibility of a holistic perspective that was once embodied in the ancient idea of unity of

The fact that the perspective of virtue ethics is easy to apply within psychology has already been exploited by Erik Erikson (1966, 1982), who very neatly and fruitfully incorporated virtues such as hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care and wisdom into his psycho-social developmental model. The major part of Eriksonian theory seems to be of only historical importance now. However, there is also a project that is both deeply rooted in the most up-to-date psychological accounts and explicitly based on the conceptual framework of virtue ethics. The project in question has been intended as positive psychology's response to the DSM and ICD-10 classifications and resulted in the classification of the “character strengths and virtues” proposed by Christopher Peterson and Martin E.P. Seligman (2004). This classification is very recent and, for obvious reasons, lacks the richness of empirical results that can be found in the Baltesian project. However, with its domain very broadly set as character as well as a well-defined and homogeneous conceptual structure it seems to be at least promising – not only for the psychological study of wisdom but also for the investigation of the remaining 23 strengths of character outlined.

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