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A Time for Wisdom (Introduction)

Mark R. McMinn

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A Time for Wisdom

Advance Praise

“McLaughlin and McMinn provide a sound review of what wisdom is and the context in which wisdom is understood. We live in an age of data and information, but little is written on the value of wisdom. For decades I have heard supervisors say that you manage people with data. There is some truth to that, but you make decisions about people with wisdom. We need more wisdom in our culture today. If you work with people (manager, teacher, supervisor, coach, pastor, etc.), you could benefit from this book. It will help you understand the importance of wisdom, what it is, and how to apply it in various ways.”

—**Clark D. Campbell**, PhD, senior associate provost and professor of psychology, Biola University

“When night falls, it is certain that I will be a day older. Does it follow that I will be one increment wiser? The likelihood of this desirable outcome increases when the virtue-enhancing strategies collected in *A Time for Wisdom* are absorbed and applied. There are pathways to train our inner selves—embodied souls—to embrace timeless principles of wisdom humbly. McLaughlin and McMinn supply an accessible primer on the psychological structures and processes to grow wiser no matter what the day brings. Why be satisfied with merely growing older? The time before us is to deepen our wisdom layers.”

—**Rev. Stephen P. Greggo**, PsyD, author of *Assessment for Counseling in Christian Perspective* (IVP).

“Integrating modern research with insights from the world’s religious and philosophical traditions, *A Time for Wisdom* shows us how to live ethically satisfying lives in a world that can at times cater to our worst instincts. The principles that McLaughlin and McMinn present are ageless and

universal, making their book a resource you can turn to whenever you need a restorative perspective on the ups and downs of life.”

—**Lisa Miller**, PhD, professor of psychology at Columbia University, director of the Spirituality & Mind Body Institute, and author of *The Awakened Brain*

“McLaughlin and McMinn weave together the best ideas from religion, psychology, and philosophy to engage the reader in wisdom. They do it with the lessons of wise mentors, sage spiritual leaders, gems of famous quotes, cutting-edge research, and current events that alone make the book worth reading. But then there are practical ideas for developing wisdom, broken down in simple ways for anyone to follow. From the scenarios the authors describe, I gained insights for applying concepts of wisdom to my life and relationships, and I learned how wisdom fits with other character traits like humility, joy, and peace. This book is not limited to the ivory tower; it is fully embodied in the real world. This is a wise book on wisdom.”

—**Jennifer Ripley**, PhD, professor of psychology and Hughes Chair of Christian Integration, Regent University

“In *A Time for Wisdom*, McLaughlin and McMinn bring a sober, careful, and hospitable study of wisdom that gathers folk intuition, philosophical reflection, and spiritual tradition and holds them up to the findings of psychological science. The result is a field guide for readers who seek wisdom. There are no false promises, no stepwise programs, and no simplistic answers. Instead, the authors suggest a definition of wisdom that takes long-standing religious traditions seriously, offering evidence-based interventions for guiding true philosophers—lovers of wisdom—along their journey.”

—**Evan Rosa**, assistant director for public engagement, Yale Center for Faith & Culture

“I applaud McLaughlin and McMinn for their outstanding and aptly titled book, *A Time for Wisdom*. They make a lively and compelling case for cultivating the virtue of wisdom during these highly anxious and polarizing times. Drawing on an amazing array of disciplines and literary voices—both ancient and contemporary—this highly textured book makes the development of wisdom an inspiring and practical goal. As a psychologist, I have read many books on this general topic, but *A Time for Wisdom* makes a wonderfully unique contribution that weaves together some of the best science, philosophy, and spirituality. The authors invite us to become grounded, quiet our egos, gain perspective and accurate understanding, and grow in compassion, humility, and other strengths of human wholeness. The insights and practices they offer will foster healthier individuals and communities.”

—**Steven J. Sandage**, PhD, Albert and Jessie Danielsen Professor of Psychology of Religion and Theology, Boston University

“In a historical period of deep political and religious polarization, what is desperately needed is wisdom. That is exactly what McLaughlin and McMinn give us in their new book. They bring together the best of scientific research alongside ancient sources to both define wisdom and to model how to become wise. Their wisdom model (Knowledge, Detachment, Tranquility, and Transcendence) is neither simple nor easy, but it is immediately practical and implementable. This book is like a training manual on becoming wise, and it should be read in academic, religious, and political settings. Engaging with the model presented in *A Time for Wisdom* might make us not only a wiser culture, but a kinder, humbler, and more hospitable one as well.”

—**Brad D. Strawn**, PhD, Evelyn and Frank Freed Chief of Spiritual Formation & Integration, Fuller Theological Seminary

“In our time of divisiveness and polarization, this book is a clarion call for wisdom. Wisdom is perspective—the ability to identify what

matters most—and I believe this volume provides a way for its readers to do just that. It encourages an attitude of tranquil listening, even to those voices that make us feel uncomfortable. As the authors point out, ‘Wisdom sees common ground for a common good,’ and I believe this book can help readers identify what matters most in their lives and in the lives of others. In ‘such a time as this,’ we ought to listen to the lessons *A Time for Wisdom* offers us with a quiet and receptive heart.”

—**Philip Watkins**, PhD, professor of psychology, Eastern Washington University

“A Time for Wisdom, by Paul McLaughlin and Mark McMinn is simply a great book. Excellent treatment of research. Practical suggestions. New insights. Fresh metaphors. Fantastic writing. Buy and read this book. It is a wise choice.”

—**Everett L. Worthington, Jr.**, PhD, Commonwealth Professor Emeritus, Virginia Commonwealth University

A TIME FOR WISDOM

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KNOWLEDGE, DETACHMENT,
TRANQUILITY, TRANSCENDENCE

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To my parents,
*for your steadfast and
unconditional love*

—Paul

To Bruce and Di,
*who guided me in paths of wisdom
at a time when I had so little*

—Mark

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A TIME FOR WISDOM

INTRODUCTION

Whoever came up with the term “ideological bubble” was an optimist. Bubbles are soft, pliable, transparent things, but in today’s world it seems more fitting to say we segregate into our ideological fortresses, or bunkers, or armories, or silos. Inside, it seems safe and comfortable as we interact with like-minded souls who share our basic worldviews, assumptions, and beliefs. These souls become our Facebook friends, confidants, and exemplars. We join them for dinner and drinks while enjoying stimulating conversations, we worship beside them, and we offer help when their plumbing clogs. These neighbors and friends provide us with all the affirmation we need to know that we are good people with solid values, even as others outside are poorly informed and less virtuous.

These days fortress interiors even come with tailored advertisements, newsfeeds, and Google searches so that we can easily see how correct we are about matters of ultimate importance. We can rally together and celebrate that we are not much like those who live in the fortress across the way, or maybe we forget the other exists at all—a peaceful *Truman Show* life. Sheltered, confident, and strident in our convictions, we find safety in knowing our ideological communities are strong and amply supplied. If we pop our head outside at all, it is for the purpose of lobbing a grenade. But then again, why risk that when we can launch those grenades from inside the safety of our own fortress, in 280 characters or less?

Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt warns that, “team membership blinds people to the motives and morals of their opponents—and to the

wisdom that is to be found scattered among diverse political ideologies” (2013, p. 318). Yet it seems that today we are increasingly pressured to be part of a team and to trumpet the virtues of our team’s ideologies without considering that other perspectives might also have merit.

In earlier days, a free press could stand outside the fray, glance inside the transparent enclaves, and report something that seemed like transcendent truth-telling. This was the backbone of a healthy democracy, being able to challenge and scrutinize ideas freely without fear of control by the government or other powerful organizations. Similarly, universities were places of relatively free exploration and inquiry, housing researchers and professors who enjoyed enough academic freedom to make their students ponder new and exciting frontiers. Many faith communities were also able to function above the bubbles as people met in synagogues and temples and churches throughout the world to explore and celebrate the possibility of a Truth that transcends human squabbles and differences.

In today’s era of ideological fortresses, media outlets are increasingly recruited to set up shop inside whatever sanctuary will increase their ratings and pay their bills. And today’s university is under siege, facing intense scrutiny to raise the banner of safety above critical analysis and free thinking. Faith communities also feel the pressure to align with particular political ideologies. Transcendent Truth is increasingly seen through the lens of polarized human experience.

Where are the truth-tellers now? Who will dare to move outside of their fortresses to have genuine curiosity and conversations with other daring souls? How many are willing to choose wisdom over safety so that we can learn to truly listen to one another, to consider multiple perspectives, to endure messy places, to hold ideas with humility and openness, and ultimately to offer the world a better way to live?

This is a dangerous book. Put it down now and send it back to Amazon, or take it back to your local bookstore if you are not willing to step outside the door of your fortress. Wisdom calls us out—out of our comfort zones, out of preconceptions, out of the constant flow of media

enabling us to believe we are always reasonable and others always crazy, out of our self-complacency, out of our natural circles of conversation. And then wisdom calls us in—into a long tradition of those who have walked in humility and grace in complicated times, into a fellowship of diversity and disagreement and growth, into a place of tranquility and peace with ourselves and others that transcends our differences, into a place of curiosity and awe and wonder at how complex and beautiful and amazing this life can be.

Few concepts allure and baffle the mind as much as wisdom does, yet few are as worthy of pursuit. Wisdom is the apex of intellectual and moral judgment, experienced in the orchestration of emotions, desires, and life-experience. It calls us to a higher self and a more noble way of existing in the world, and if there has ever been a time where we need higher selves, it is now.

We have good news for all who hope for wisdom. In spite of its complexity and elusiveness, wisdom has been studied by social scientists for quite some time, and there is now a substantial body of evidence uncovering the inherent qualities and function of wisdom. Today's research allows for a fresh approach to an ancient virtue by placing wisdom in a contemporary framework and familiar language.

We are big fans of wisdom science, but for us the most exciting thing about studying wisdom is the adventure of it. How can wisdom propel us forward into new frontiers and understanding and growth? How might wisdom expand our consciousness, bringing a deep and abiding curiosity that ultimately leads to new discoveries and insights with potential to heal fractures in the self, interpersonal relationships, and society?

If you are feeling suspicious about science and wisdom, that seems reasonable. We value the science of wisdom and hope you will, too, by the end of this book, but we will be the first to acknowledge that science does not automatically clear the path to a life full of wisdom. Still, scientific knowledge can clear the brush a bit, making paths of wisdom a little easier to traverse than they might otherwise be.

We conducted a scientific study a few years back to see if young adults in a faith community could become wiser through a mentoring program. They could, and they did, as we will explain later, but for now it is better to ponder the story of one of the mentors in that study. Marcile, in her late seventies at the time of the study, is the sort of woman who exudes grace and peace. Just being in her presence is healing. Her life has not been easy. She lost a husband in a tragic plane crash early in her life and dealt with a serious health crisis around the same time. Somehow, rather than becoming bitter, she learned to walk quietly and faithfully through life, holding tightly to friendships and faith communities where she served and allowed others to serve her. When she agreed to be a mentor in our scientific study on wisdom, she could not have known that just a few years later she would face Stage 4 melanoma, a crisis in her faith community, a pandemic, and wildfires unlike anything ever experienced in her home state of Oregon. Not surprisingly, she has faced all this with grace, tranquility, and hope. Did the young people she mentored become wiser because they were participating in a standardized wisdom curriculum based on the latest social science of wisdom, or maybe just because they were in Marcile's presence, in her home, sharing meals with her? Science cannot answer that particular question, but we suspect it was both. Wisdom is both a virtue out there to be explored and attained, and an embodied presence that we experience through relationships with those who have found wisdom through their years of living and suffering and loving.

This example raises various questions. Does one need to be old to be wise? Not necessarily, as we explore in Chapter 8. Does wisdom require suffering? Probably. We explore this more in Chapters 5 and 6. Is wisdom a spiritual task? Perhaps. We explore this in Chapters 10, 11, and 12. Can we learn to be wiser with intentional effort? We think so. How does a person go about gaining wisdom? Well, that is the point of the whole book. It is a journey, and we have four steps to suggest and practical strategies to help you grow in wisdom.

WHO ARE WE?

Believing wisdom has a relational dimension, as does writing, it seems proper to tell you something about us and how this book came about.

One quality of wisdom is the ability to hold multiple perspectives as simultaneously true. The story of this book starts in a faculty office in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, and requires embracing two different perspectives. Consider this the first practice exercise of this book on wisdom—holding both Paul’s and Mark’s perspectives of how this came to be.

Paul’s perspective. I approached my education with the hope of gaining more than mere information and knowledge, and while I am not sure I gained wisdom to anywhere near the degree I gained student loan debt, I remain stubbornly persistent that seeking wisdom is not a bad way to spend one’s time. At the beginning of my doctoral work in clinical psychology, I was asked to consider topics to study for my dissertation by my mentor and advisor, Mark. After a rather brief reflection, I knew I wanted to pursue wisdom. Up to that point in my life I had been a student of religion, philosophy, and theology, so the chance to investigate wisdom—an idea more commonly at home in the humanities than in the social sciences—through a scientific lens was exhilarating.

Mark’s perspective. Yes, I always have my doctoral students ponder topics for their dissertations early in their training. I especially encourage topics connected to my interests in positive psychology and the integration of psychology and faith. After considering this for a short while, Paul came to my office announcing that he wanted to study wisdom. My response was quite dismissive: “Paul, that sounds like a great topic, but psychologists do not really study wisdom.” So, he went to the library and proved me wrong. It turns out many psychologists have been studying wisdom for quite a long time.

Paul’s perspective. Once I got the green light from Mark on wisdom, I began pondering such questions as, *What are the psychological components*

of wisdom? Can wisdom be taught? What are the attributes of wise people and how might they think and feel differently from the rest of us? How does the science of wisdom relate to philosophical and religious views of it? In addition to finding answers to these questions, I was motivated by another factor. As someone interested in the relationship between religion, spirituality, and psychology, could the science of wisdom further explicate the view that faith and reason are complementary? I believed so.

In my own religious tradition, theological truths based on faith and divine revelation provide knowledge beyond, but not opposed to, reason, and this knowledge can be used to explicate and enhance our understanding of the natural world. With this background, I approached wisdom from a multidisciplinary perspective and undertook a dissertation that integrated the current psychology of wisdom within a Christian context. As I dug into the literature on wisdom, I found a rather shocking absence of religion and spirituality in psychological studies of wisdom. This may appear obvious to some, considering these were scientific journals, yet it appeared that in their attempt to create a secular field of wisdom they stripped wisdom from its natural environment and overlooked the importance of the transcendent. My dissertation involved putting the pieces back together again.

Mark and I worked with religious leaders from a local church to write a faith-informed curriculum for promoting wisdom. The curriculum included religious and spiritual practices, community mentorship, and psychological exercises intended to increase cognitive flexibility, detached objectivity, and problem solving—precursors to the four steps toward wisdom we describe in this book. We took academic theories of wisdom and brought them into the actual lives of people. Once the curriculum was developed, my research was not conducted in a laboratory or any university ivory towers, but right in the community. In relation to a comparison group, the young adults who participated in our wisdom-mentoring program showed increases in practical wisdom, daily spiritual experiences, life satisfaction, and the ability to see complexity beyond abstract concepts.

The project was a success, and I graduated with a deep sense of gratitude and satisfaction with it.

After finishing my doctorate I began working as a psychologist and continued pondering the research on wisdom, following up on academic literature, news articles, and books. But studying wisdom and practicing it are sometimes different. A series of career decisions—some of them beyond my control and some not—brought me to a job I loathed. My education felt useless, and I felt trapped, isolated, and doubtful of myself. I struggled to see beyond my tainted vision of despair and helplessness. All that I had learned about wisdom in over a decade of studying theology, philosophy, and psychology helped alert me to just how far adrift I seemed to be. Wisdom does not prevent difficulties, but it does help provide an internal alarm system for times such as these. I needed to turn the head knowledge I had accumulated toward my heart and my own life. How is wisdom accessible to the real-world struggles people face? How might the science of wisdom come off the shelves and work to improve the everyday lives of people?

After making some necessary changes in my career trajectory, I landed happily in a psychology practice where I regularly have opportunity to walk alongside people as they navigate the challenges of life. One of those people I will call Jason. My work with Jason helped cure me of the disillusionment I had felt. It reinstalled the belief that this work of psychotherapy can work, that insight can light the flame of change.

Jason was a highly intelligent young man I treated for depression and anxiety. His life was plagued with past traumas. An only child, he grew up with very strict and aloof caregivers. Over the years he internalized a deep sense of resentment, became obsessively paranoid at times, and often battled addiction issues. The world appeared an unpredictable and cold place. He struggled to manage a sense of safety and healthy dependency. Our work included building basic trust as relationships of any sort had often been a cause of much pain and disappointment. Early sessions included extensive time in silence. Jason would likely be considered to have

what is known as a schizoid personality style, which is characteristically found among people with a low tolerance for intimacy and closeness, and who often seek solace in a solitary life and fantasy. Slowly we were able to make contact, and he allowed me to see to a certain extent some of his deep sadness, yet he remained sullen and disconnected.

Jason often talked about one area of enjoyment in his life, that of taking long walks through a local graveyard. He found solace being in the cemetery both day and night. With time, Jason came to realize that knowledge of his own story and life was deeply connected with his graveyard musings, that thinking about his past represented confronting an unknown realm where the grief for what could have been resided. The work staggered along. Then one day he told me that he came to see something during one of his most recent cemetery strolls that had surprised him. He went on to describe a sense of awe and amazement at the simple presence of the life of trees that had apparently evaded his awareness. Something changed for Jason, treatment flowed much easier, and Jason seemed to have expanded emotionally; his own presence felt lighter and at ease.

William James, the father of American psychology, in writing about religious conversion stated:

To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. (1902, p. 186)

I doubt Jason would say he had a religious conversion, but this description by James is not far off from the changes that seemed to follow. The relationship between psychology, wisdom, and spirituality continued to intrigue and haunt me, ultimately compelling me to develop the four-level model presented in this book. But before getting to the four steps toward

wisdom, let's muddle through the challenging task of defining what we mean by wisdom.

WHAT IS WISDOM?

We are about to offer a definition for something that cannot be defined. Wisdom is beyond definition in at least two ways. First, scholars cannot agree what it is. This is not for a lack of effort, but still, after decades of science and over two millennia of philosophy we still do not have precise words to capture the essence of wisdom. An international group of researchers who recently met described wisdom as “morally grounded excellence in social-cognitive processing” (Grossmann et al., 2020, p. 103). In response, one of the world's leading scientific experts on wisdom, Judith Glück, wrote:

Having studied wisdom for over twenty years now, I think I have learned quite a bit from my own research. If someone describes a difficult life problem to me, I can produce a response that would probably be scored as wise. I consider myself as rather morally grounded, and I have become quite skilled at considering different perspectives, balancing interests, appreciating broader contexts, and knowing the limits of my knowledge. Yet there are moments in my life—family conflicts, endless and useless meetings, interactions with difficult students—where I yell, slam doors, and curse (or at least would like to do so) and where I am neither wise nor act wisely. How is that possible . . . ? (Glück, 2020, p. 144)

Glück's point is that social-cognitive processing is not enough; emotional regulation needs to be considered also. Perhaps the larger point is that any definition slips through our fingers because wisdom is elusive, multifaceted, and too big to capture with words.

Glück's words also hint at the second way wisdom is beyond definition: it is even harder to live wisdom than to describe it. Her humble admission resonates with how real life feels. Reason and analytical thinking

do not ensure or fully capture the lived, embodied, relational reality of wisdom.

Here is a checklist to underscore Glück's point. In the last month, how often have you . . .

- Slipped into a frantic or anxious place rather than maintaining peace of mind?
- Acted in a way contrary to your values?
- Failed to listen well to another person's perspective?
- Run away from conflict, or raged through it, rather than looking for creative solutions?
- Lost track of your values?
- Chosen not to ask for help when you really needed it?
- Taken yourself too seriously?
- Given poor advice to another?
- Filled your life so full that you lacked time for deep reflection?
- Spoken words too quickly, without considering the impact they might have?

Each of these are inverted self-report items that show up on scientific tests of wisdom (Webster, 2019, pp. 302–304), but who among us could possibly answer never to all of these? These are common human struggles that undermine wisdom for most of us, at least from time to time. You will notice the subtitle to this book is not, “Four Easy Steps to Wisdom.” That is because wisdom is not easy. Still, we believe it is a virtuous and important journey, especially in today's cultural moment where it seems so difficult to listen well to one another, hold complexity, and work toward Shalom in our divided and contentious societies.

Wisdom is beyond definition for both of the reasons we have just described, but we are about to offer a definition anyway. Why? Because it can still be helpful to wrap words around such a vital virtue. We offer this definition with empathy, knowing life is messy and living in wisdom is more difficult than any of us might have imagined earlier in life. And

we offer it with humility, knowing it is only an approximation because any words we offer fall short of the fullness of wisdom.

*Wisdom is an (1) embodied (2) disposition or act involving (3) critical contemplation, (4) purgation and purification of knowledge with practical implications, (5) leading to self-transcendence, tranquility, and elevated insight.*¹

Embodied

Wisdom is more than an academic topic for textbooks. It shows up in our bodies, pulsing from our brains toward our fingers and thumbs as we toss our tweets out into the world, type Facebook and Instagram posts, and leave comments in response to others. It resides in our hearts, as surely as in our brains, as we communicate with our partners and friends, seek mutual understanding in difficult times, delight in blessings of life, and strive to press forward toward maturity and virtue.

The embodied nature of wisdom is true from the earliest moments of life. Jerome is a 6-year-old who likes to bake with his father. When the bread comes out of the oven on a particular Saturday morning, his father warns him not to touch the bread pan because it is very hot and could hurt him. But remember, Jerome is 6, and being 6 entails a deep curiosity about the world and some persistent questions about how authority structures work. Not surprisingly, Jerome waits until his father is turned away, washing up some dishes in the sink, and then sneaks a quick touch of the bread pan. Drama ensues. So does wisdom.

We learn wisdom through engaging our whole selves, all of our senses, in the world around us. Sometimes this leads to wonder and delight, and sometimes it leads to struggle and pain. When Jerome touches that bread pan as a 6-year-old, he grows in wisdom even as he shrieks in agony.

Fortunately, we do not have to learn everything through trial and error, because wisdom also shows up in others we watch, observe, and admire.

¹ See Appendix for how this relates to other prominent definitions of wisdom.

Whom do you know, or have you known, who is extraordinarily wise? Take a moment and allow that person's face into your visual mind. Set the book down a moment and quietly ponder the face of wisdom. How would you describe this person to others? What relational and emotional qualities do you notice in this wise person? What is it like to be in this person's presence? What other virtues (e.g., humility, kindness, grit, hope, gratitude, forgiveness) describe this person? What emotions well up in you as you consider all this?

Without exemplars of wisdom, we would know very little about how to confront the complex world around us. Teenagers do not learn as much about driving by reading the driver's manual as they do by watching others drive. By the time they get their learner's permit, they know what happens when a brake pedal is pressed, which way the car turns when the steering wheel is turned clockwise, and what a signal light means. These skills are learned through relationship and observation, and not so much through semantics and written descriptions. Of course, teenagers also need to practice, make mistakes, enjoy successes, and try driving on their own before we consider them good drivers. So also with wisdom, we learn by knowing people who are wise, observing them, practicing what we learn, experiencing successes and failures, and trying out what we know in new situations.

But if we learn wisdom by observing others, we still need to consider *which* others we observe. Our natural tendency is to observe and learn from those who are like us, hold our same values, see the world as we see it. It is likely that when you pictured an exemplar of wisdom a few moments ago you chose someone quite similar to yourself. It may have been a family member, a teacher at a school you attended, a close friend, someone with the same skin color as yours, or a person in similar socioeconomic conditions. There is nothing wrong with learning wisdom from exemplars who share our life experiences, but if we only learn from like-minded souls what wisdom might we be missing as a result?

Disposition or Act

Is the capacity for wisdom some enduring quality we are born with (a trait), or something that shows up in particular times because of lessons we have learned in life (a state)? Those arguing for a trait perspective, also called an *essentialist* view of wisdom, argue that it exists more in some individuals than in others. Just as some people are more intelligent than others, so also some people are naturally wiser than others. Scholars offer interesting evidence for this perspective, including the finding that wisdom correlates with other well-established personality traits such as openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness (Ardelt et al., 2019). Some have started studying the neurobiology of wisdom, which argues strongly for a trait perspective (Jeste & Lee, 2019). For example, the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system, both of which have implications for wisdom, have been “implicated in the neurobiology of character, and . . . linked with temperament studies in personality” (Jeste & Lee, 2019, p. 131).

Others prefer a state perspective, sometimes called a *constructivist* view, which suggests people can learn acts of wisdom with training and practice. In this view, wisdom is not so much a quality we are born with as a set of state-specific patterns that are developed over time and applied in particular situations and specific sociocultural contexts (Grossmann et al., 2019). This is supported by a number of studies showing people who exhibit wisdom in one situation are not necessarily inclined to show wisdom in unrelated situations.

We argue that wisdom exists as both a trait and a state (Grossmann et al., 2019). As a disposition, some people naturally have more wisdom than others. But whether or not we are generally wise, our actions vary widely from one situation to another. Sometimes wise people do foolish things, and foolish people do wise things. The good news about wisdom involving a trait or disposition is that we can hold up exemplars, as we did earlier in this chapter, and learn from those who are naturally wise.

And the good news about it being a state or set of actions is that we can grow in wisdom with thoughtful, repeated practice.

Wisdom can be learned. This is the premise of the model we present in this book, that people can become wiser with time and practice.

Critical Contemplation

In Paul's dissertation we found that young adults can grow in wisdom, and in a reasonably short period of time (McLaughlin et al., 2018). One might assume that a religiously based program to promote wisdom would try to instill answers to life's quagmires, but that is not what we did. We were more interested in promoting thoughtful contemplation than in providing a set of answers.

Imagine being a young adult coming to the first small-group meeting and being confronted with this situation:

Your friend has been diagnosed with a serious form of cancer that will require difficult treatment with an unknown outcome. You want to remain hopeful and encouraging to your friend, but inwardly you are worried and sad. Your friend mentions that the cancer has been difficult for her faith. She wonders how a loving and powerful God could allow such a thing. You have been pondering this, too, and are not sure how to respond to your friend's questions about faith.

Can you notice inner tension in response to this scenario? Wouldn't it be nice to wrap up wisdom in a tidy package of words or advice? It might be helpful to pray or read books about why God allows bad things to happen, and while there is nothing wrong with these responses, they do not reach down into the depth of uncertainty and despair evident in this situation. It is important to let wisdom be bigger than words, and bigger than any answer that might be offered.

We selected mentors who themselves were able to navigate complexity in life without resorting to simplistic solutions. In the leader's manual, right after we had them present this scenario to their small groups,

we wrote: “Please do not try to resolve the tension participants are feeling or answer the difficult questions they are asking. Allow participants to feel the discomfort and uncertainty of this situation.” Mentors then ushered participants into a place where they could hold hard questions, asking them to notice their internal stirrings and desires to move toward quick answers. Leaders reminded the young adults that the shortest verse in the Bible, “Jesus wept,” occurred because Jesus was so deeply stirred by emotion when his friend had died. They asked participants to sit in silence.

Rinse. Repeat. This happened for six sessions over two months. We wished it could have been more, but dissertations have timelines so the small group mentoring was a fairly brief intervention. Still, we found positive results and growth in wisdom for our participants in relation to a comparison group that did not participate in the wisdom mentoring. Why did this work?

One of the reasons we think it may have worked is because participants learned to engage in critical contemplation. At first glance, a phrase like “critical contemplation” may seem quite cerebral, but it is much more than that. Richard Rohr, founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation, puts it this way:

Regardless how we practice . . . contemplation calls the ordinary thinking mind into question. We gradually come to recognize that this thing we call “thinking” does not enable us to love God and love others. We need a different operating system that begins with and leads to silence. (Rohr, 2020)

Similarly, our participants may have learned to think better about life’s messiness, but even more, they learned how to sit quietly in the tension of complexity. Wisdom calls us to a full-bodied contemplation that involves a balance of thinking, feeling, quiet, and seeking the transcendent.

If our tendency is to retreat into ideological fortresses with likeminded people, contemplation pushes against this, compelling us to look both cognitively and empathically at multiple perspectives and varying opinions.

Critical contemplation requires balance and openness to differing perspectives, even in areas where we hold firm convictions.

The word “critical” may seem confusing at first. Shall we just post more vitriolic comments on YouTube and call it critical contemplation? Please, no. We are not advocating criticism of others. Instead, this is about carefully considering and weighing an idea or belief in relation to alternative views. In a sense, we are learning to be peacefully critical of our own thoughts and open to the possibility that they could change over time and in different contexts.

Sometimes the outcome of long contemplation is advocating for change. Jesus—normally peaceful and loving—once walked into the temple where money-changers were making an outrageous profit from weary travelers who had no other options and expressed his displeasure by flipping over the merchants’ tables and driving them out with a whip. But notice this is not being critical out of personal inconvenience or offense, but a response to abusive power, corruption, and distortions of truth that work against wisdom.

Critical contemplation engages our emotions and bodies, and not just our brains. Rosa Parks sat at the back of the bus for years, and all that time she must have been pondering and imagining another world—one where Black people have the same rights and privileges as White people. Out of that long contemplation, on December 1, 1955, she let wisdom move her body to the front of the bus. On the one hand, it did not work out too well for her as she was arrested and prosecuted. On the other hand, it precipitated the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which brought attention to overt racism and systemic injustice. The struggle against oppression continues, but people like Rosa Parks have made society wiser as a whole.

In Rosa Parks’s case, her critical contemplation moved her to believe and do something different from what she had done before. That is often the case with wisdom, but not always. Sometimes we continue to hold our same perspectives, but with greater awareness and compassion for the other. In her renowned *OnBeing* podcast (2013), Krista Tippett once interviewed Frances Kissling and David Gushee about their Pro-Choice

and Pro-Life perspectives as part of the Civil Conversations Project. To hear Kissling and Gushee talk and truly listen to the other is a moving experience. When Tippetts asks each of her guests to describe something they find important in the other's perspective, Gushee acknowledges:

One of the things I'm attracted to and have really learned a lot from in dialogue with Frances and others in the pro-choice community is the sustained knowledgeable commitment to the well-being of women. And this issue, no progress can be made on it without that commitment.

With a similar humility, Kissling notes:

I'm generally troubled by the one-value approach to the question. . . . What I get back from my movement is if the woman wants an abortion, there is no other factor or value that should be considered. . . . And I don't think you can make the fetus invisible in the abortion decision. I think abortion decision is a conflict value decision.

Neither changed their minds or their positions as a result of the conversation, but both demonstrated a beautiful capacity to consider the other's view. Listening to Tippetts's podcast may not change your mind either, but it might change your heart, and it provides a great example of critical contemplation and civil engagement.

Consider the embodied face of wisdom we invited you to picture earlier in this chapter, or perhaps your own face as you journey toward wisdom. Is this a face that contorts in anger at the first sign of disagreement? Does this person rush to judgment without considering alternative views? Is this a tweet-first-think-later sort of person? Or is this the face of prudence, capable of anger and firm conviction but always considering other viewpoints and perspectives? James, the brother of Jesus, admonished his readers in the Christian New Testament to "be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger" (New Revised Standard Version, James 1:19). Critical contemplation begins with excellent listening—considering

multiple perspectives and viewpoints while recognizing the possibility that I may be wrong about a thing or two in life. Just as good listening affects our emotions and connections with one another, so too does critical contemplation.

Two exercises might be helpful. First, take a moment to imagine one of the most cognitively or emotionally rigid people you have encountered. What do they do when confronted with an idea different from their own? How do they respond relationally to those in a different camp, whether it be political, ideological, or religious? How do they express emotions when disappointed or frustrated? And now ponder the differences between the face of wisdom you identified earlier in this chapter and the face of rigidity that you just imagined. In which face are you most likely to find critical contemplation?

Second, consider a somewhat-controversial value or belief that you hold strongly. Perhaps you believe a certain way about second amendment rights or religious liberties or the role of the federal government vis-à-vis state governments. When thinking about your beliefs, you probably find it quite natural to think about why your views are better reasoned than the views others hold. Take some time in silence and try something that Krista Tippett did on her podcast with Frances Kissling and David Gushee. Ask yourself to identify the weakest argument for the view you hold and the strongest argument for the view someone else might hold. The goal is not to change your mind, but simply to sit silently with whatever tension arises in this act of critical contemplation.

A Process of Purgation and Purification of Knowledge

Imagine a cup of coffee brewed in a standard coffee machine, but without the filter in place. Life without filters is filled with messy grittiness. The process of purgation and purification assumes a lifelong filtering process that moves us toward living into our best selves, more authentically and congruently with our values, more attuned to others and the needs of a complex world. Purgation involves emptying out toxic thoughts in order to make space for clarity and peace of mind. Purification is a cleansing of the knowledge that reflects wisdom.

In Buddhism, the first step of the Noble Path is called “Right View.” Hanh (2015) describes this as deliberately fostering the wholesome seeds in our character so that they might outgrow the unwholesome ones. “If you act in a wholesome way, you will be happy. If you act in an unwholesome way, you water the seeds of craving, anger, and violence in yourself” (p. 52). Right View also involves holding our perceptions lightly because many of our perceptions are incorrect and lead to suffering. Ultimately all views are at least partly wrong and fall short of reality.

Jared came to psychotherapy for help with a stifling depression, and it turned out the key to unlocking his dysphoria was helping him to hold his rigid perceptions more lightly. As a pastor, he had spent years teaching parishioners that faith is sufficient for any problem life brings us, including so-called mental health problems, so our first task was to confront the shame he felt about his own depression and to loosen his grip on these inflexible views about spirituality and mental health. At the beginning of treatment, he thought doubts about his faith reflected spiritual weakness and a lack of faith, so we worked on helping him hold his doubts with more tenderness and care. Jared viewed his marriage as the greatest jewel in his pastoral crown, believing that any flaws in this relationship reflected poorly on his ministry and his leadership, so we needed to normalize how common it is for relationships to encounter seasons of stagnation and struggle. In all these ways, psychotherapy helped Jared grow in wisdom, and to see how life is more nuanced than what he had once imagined and how we all live as deeply complex souls. As he came to terms with his depression and rigid assumptions, he experienced greater compassion toward himself and others, and learned a new gentleness as a human being and a faith leader.

Wisdom requires knowledge, as we explore in Chapters 1–3, but it also involves purging ourselves of incorrect knowledge. Just as we inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide, so wisdom calls for a rhythm of absorbing and releasing, holding conviction and relinquishing unmerited dogma. This is a purifying process, learning to be wise as we traverse life holding our ideas humbly and being open to refining experiences. Wisdom involves holding up our ideas, beliefs, and emotional responses and

viewing them in a mirror. How do they look to us? How do they look to others in our current time? How might they have looked to those in earlier times and different cultural contexts? How can we learn from our mistakes and misjudgments?

This is not easy. We simply do not like looking at our mistakes and misjudgments. It is far more natural to hide them (from ourselves and others), to pass them off as someone else's error, to simply deny or ignore them. Wisdom is excruciatingly difficult at times because of the brutal honesty it requires when looking at ourselves.

Self-reflection is considered an essential part of wisdom (Weststrate, 2019). Glück and colleagues found people in the general public view self-reflection and self-criticism as essential for wisdom (Glück & Bluck, 2011). Similarly, those who study wisdom as scholars see self-reflection as central to the concept (Jeste et al., 2010). On a scale of 1 (definitely not important) to 9 (definitely important), wisdom experts rated "Recognizing limits of one's own knowledge" at 8.8 and "Self-reflection" at 8.6 when rating characteristics of wisdom. Both were among the highest rated items in the survey (p. 672).

At this point we must confront a difficult question. We have argued that wisdom involves holding our views lightly, with humility, filtering our understanding and perceptions along the way. But doesn't this imply that some perspectives are better and more virtuous than others? And is not this an offensive thing to suggest in a pluralistic, diverse society? Yes, and yes.

It is an offensive thing to suggest some values might be better than others, but this is the basis of civil society. Allowing all people to sit in the front seat of a bus is better than allowing only White people to sit there. Treating a neighbor with respect is better than killing a neighbor in a fit of anger. Respect is better than hostility. Compassion is better than selfishness. Knowledge is better than ignorance. Love is better than hate. Exceptions could be argued, but generally these value assertions have been tested and refined throughout history in countless cultural contexts. We are not suggesting our beliefs (Paul's and Mark's) are perfectly correct and

that everyone who reads this book should conform to them, but to fully embrace wisdom as a process of purgation and purification we need to hold the possibility that some perspectives truly are better than others.

Leading to Self-Transcendence, Tranquility, and Elevated Insight

Versions of the three-parachute story are posted all over the internet, so some variation of this will be familiar. Four people are on a descending, broken airplane with only three parachutes remaining. One person—usually a medical doctor or philanthropist—has a good rationale for being saved, so grabs a chute and bails. The second—typically a lawyer or a politician—proclaims himself to be the smartest person in the world and so grabs a parachute and jumps. That leaves just an old priest and a young child. The priest does the altruistic thing, offering the final chute to the child, at which point the child announces, “We can both have one because the smartest person in the world just took off with my backpack.”

Humor emerges from familiar tensions—in this case, it is the tension of self-interest in relation to genuine care for others. Self-interest is complicated—and is not the point of this book—but we should note that it is hugely controversial among those who study this. Some degree of self-interest seems to be necessary for individual survival and for society to function, but when it goes too far it creates massive inequalities and injustices in a world with finite resources. This tension gets played out every day in various ways. Should I have my child vaccinated when I have serious qualms about doing so? If I ask for a larger pay raise, will this mean my co-workers may have less? When choosing what to eat, am I obligated to consider animal welfare or the effects on climate change? Should I apply for a federally subsidized program because I am eligible, even though I do not actually need the help? Is it best to look for every viable tax deduction? Wisdom allows us to raise these questions because nonwisdom (foolishness) marches forward without even considering an alternative to self-interest. This is what makes the joke work, because the incredibly smart man ends up being both morally and mortally foolish in his self-interest.

Self-transcendence is the ability to stand apart from vested self-interest, to see others, to recognize that something bigger than ourselves is at play in the universe. When you imagined a face of wisdom early in this chapter, was it a person capable of standing outside of herself or himself to see the needs of others, and the broader needs of a hurting world? It seems likely the wise person you imagined also had (or has) other virtuous qualities, such as kindness, generosity, humility, altruism, gratitude, love, and forgiveness. All these speak to an ability to transcend, to pursue something bigger and ultimately more noble than self-interest. We consider this more in Chapter 3 when we discuss the transcendentals (truth, beauty, goodness).

Maybe the more important point, instead of asking how much self-interest we need to survive, is whether self-interest drives us into small places of isolation and obsession or into rash and foolish decisions, such as grabbing the backpack, thinking it is a parachute. Wisdom calls us into large spaces where we can see and appreciate multiple perspectives and ultimately make informed decisions.

In our polarized political world, it is not difficult to imagine a political leader who pays attention to polls suggesting popularity while disregarding polls that seem more dire, perhaps even discounting them as “fake news.” Inside this selective silo of desirable news, the leader can construct a narrative of unsurpassed excellence and approval, but it is not real and it will not lead to wise thinking and acting. Or let’s say you get a performance evaluation at work every six months and you choose to only look at the positive comments while ignoring the growth edges your supervisor suggests. Over time, this will not go well. Those content with an isolated, egocentric vision lose touch with their truest and best selves.

I (Mark) recall a haunting memory from high school when our literature teacher assigned Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado.” Poe, always a bit of a gruesome story teller, spins a tale of a mason who gets revenge on a fellow nobleman by getting him drunk, chaining him to a wall, and then building a permanent brick encasement around him. As Montresor—the narrator and the murderer—walks away, he pro-

claims, “Rest in peace.” As an overly empathic teenager, that story penetrated my soul and has caused me many anxious reflections over the years as to what it might be like to live out one’s final hours in a brick closet with no exit.

Being permanently trapped in a small space makes us claustrophobic, and rightly so because we intuitively know that we need space, relationships, perspective in order to function at our fullest. In isolating, we lose touch with our truest and best selves. We say this compassionately, knowing this isolation almost never comes from a desire to be self-focused or alone, but typically emerges out of being hurt, from finding the world unsafe and dangerous. We both see this as clinical psychologists where it seems our work is often helping clients emerge from entombed places of pain into the vast world of hope and possibility.

And so it is with wisdom—moving from small to large vision. This can be true for both individuals and collectives. Just as individuals can be foolishly self-focused, so too we can become entrapped in social collectives that are bound up in a small vision. When this happens, we often polarize ourselves and segregate into our ideological fortresses. The world closes in around us, and before we know it we are obsessing about a political leader or issue, a particular theological interpretation, a sports team, or financial returns. Outside views are quickly dismissed as uninformed or even stupid. Those inside the social collective feel wiser than others because they know the truth, but it is a self-protective version of the truth that deliberately shuts out those beyond the perimeter of the fortress. Social psychologists call this groupthink, where agreement is required and creativity is stifled. History is replete with examples of foolish decisions made in these circumstances.

So how is it that we learn to self-transcend, to move beyond our own self-interests, and what does this have to do with wisdom? This is one of the steps in the model we present, and will be the main focus of Chapters 10 to 12. And yes, it is hard to do.

But what about slamming doors and cursing? Glück’s provocative quotation that began this section gets our attention because it feels so

honest and familiar. Shouldn't wisdom actually change the way we live in the world so that we can have some emotional balance in perceiving ourselves, others, and the world around? This is where tranquility becomes so important.

As we grow in wisdom, we not only learn new things, but we also understand and manage our emotions better, and our relationships evolve and flourish. It is not that we become perfect, as Glück so adeptly points out, but we at least start to notice where we are being wise and where we are struggling. We begin to see how difficult wisdom can be in the nitty-gritty stuff of life, and we feel challenged to improve however we can. Tranquility is one of the four steps toward wisdom that we will introduce soon.

Elevated insight is tricky because at first glance it may sound like quite a narcissistic claim, that one person can learn to see the world better than another. But rather than viewing others as the comparison point, which seems sort of pointless and arrogant, we find it more useful for each of us to use our own personal histories as the comparison. So if I can see the world differently today from the way I did a year ago, or a decade ago, because of growth in knowledge, detachment, tranquility, and transcendence, then I am becoming wiser over time.

Imagine you are in a situation, such as the one I (Paul) found myself in, where you dread going to work each morning. You wake one particular Monday morning and entertain the thought of quitting. Maybe, you think, I will just call and tell my supervisor right now that I am done. Or maybe I will not even call and let the proverbial chips fall where they may. Then you remember the work ethic instilled in you as a child, so you begrudgingly shower, pull on your work clothes, and take on another day. And now the wisdom alarms are blaring. What should I do? How should I manage my dissatisfaction? Isn't there more to life than this?

Elevated insight—and the moral grounding it entails—involves seeing yourself embedded in shared humanity. The reason you get out of bed and manage to get to work on this particular Monday is because you recognize the humanity of your supervisor and of all the others who rely on

you to show up each day. Following up our commitments is a wise choice in most circumstances, in part because it is prosocial, making the world a more reliable and honorable place for all of us.

But let's make this a little more complicated. Perhaps one reason you do not like your job very much is that you feel the company you work for does not always deal ethically or truthfully with the public. You wonder if making a living the way you do contributes to greater dishonesty in the world. This also will be a factor in making wise choices because pursuing truth is also part of elevated insight. Now we have a dilemma. On the one hand, the most empathic and prosocial thing is to follow up on your commitments, to be a reliable and consistent employee. On the other hand, the desire to pursue truth and live consistently is precisely what makes your work so uncomfortable for you. How will you choose? The point of this illustration is not really to tell you what to choose, but to show how wisdom requires a high degree of insight.

This definition of wisdom sets a high bar, calling us beyond mere cognition to full-bodied living, beyond self-interest to the betterment of shared humanity, beyond simple solutions to holding complexity and nuance. There is no easy formula for this sort of wisdom, but there is a path forward. Yes, it is a difficult path, but walking it calls forth the best of what we have to offer ourselves and one another.

A FOURFOLD PATH TO WISDOM

No definition fully captures wisdom, but one reason to try is that defining wisdom helps us break it down into component parts, and then it starts to seem attainable. Maybe wisdom is not just a result of living a long life. Perhaps it is a virtue that can be developed, just as one can learn to be more forgiving or grateful or resilient. We believe so, which is why we offer a specific model for growing in wisdom. The fourfold path to wisdom that we outline in this book contains four ascending levels, each with its own specific purpose. The *KDTT* model is knowledge, detachment, tranquility, and transcendence.

Receiving Knowledge

We believe that any school of wisdom requires knowledge. In order for growth to occur, the soil has to receive the seed and allow the root to hold. Maddie is wise beyond her years. Diagnosed with Crohn's Disease at age 13, she has lived half a decade with this debilitating disease, already enduring more invasive medical procedures than most of us have in a lifetime. For long periods of time, her disease required her to abstain from solid foods and instead use a nasogastric tube to pump nutritional formula into her body. This is a stark and tragic reality for a teenager whose friends gather at pizza parlors and ice cream shops. Suffering is always difficult, and Maddie could have easily sunk into despair and self-pity, but with the help of a loving family and effective medical providers she chose a wisdom path instead. She began cooking and baking, even though she could not eat anything she made, and she soon became an artisan who loved to give away her art. I (Mark) have benefitted from many loaves of Maddie's amazing bread since she and my wife (four decades her senior) became unlikely friends. Maddie writes, "Giving food to other people also gave me a chance to explain my illness and to form new relationships with people. In this way, creating food was emotionally sustaining for me" (Huwe, 2018). Now in college, where she is preparing to become a health care provider, Maddie is evidence that growing in wisdom does not require old age.

The first part of wisdom is knowledge—holding the end in mind. Maddie, at age 13, needed to learn about her disease before making any steps toward wisdom. Think of this as remembering the map and destination of what is most important in life. All paths to wisdom start from some basic fundamental premises, certain principles that need to be ingrained in order to judge and discern the inevitable dilemmas and conflict of human life. This first level serves as the foundation for the development of wisdom by acknowledging the reality of a fundamental human nature and emphasizing transcendent values such as truth, beauty, and goodness. Knowledge also helps us consider what it means to grow into

our fullness as humans and how this relates to the coordination and ordering of human values toward the common good. We consider this level of wisdom in Chapters 1 to 3.

Practicing Detachment

Negative capability, a term first used by the English poet John Keats, is the ability to hold contrary notions in mind without resorting to simplistic solutions. This requires a degree of detachment, being able to stand back from immediate circumstances and emotions, to refuse to be swallowed up in emotion, and to discern a larger perspective. When Maddie faced Crohn's Disease at age 13, her world was turned upside-down as she confronted challenges unlike her peers—ones that will never fully be resolved. It would have been easy to slump into helplessness. The path of wisdom called her elsewhere.

Or consider the ideological fortresses we began this chapter with. We may be tempted to doggedly defend our beliefs rather than acknowledge the possible veracity of others. Detachment from our most familiar ways of being and thinking requires us to consider the ironies and contemplate the messy and complicated parts of how we live and what we decide. This step protects against a rigid self-idolization and narcissism as we learn to refrain from myths of certainty. We discuss detachment in Chapters 4 to 6.

Experiencing Tranquility

The purpose of this level is finding equanimity, learning to regulate emotions amidst life's vicissitudes. Let's be clear: life is upsetting at times. When confronted with new ideas, conflicts in relationships, frightening medical diagnoses, or other personal tragedies, we naturally enter into places of worry, fear, depression, and alarm. Becoming wise does not numb us to these feelings, but it helps us move through them into places of peace. We still notice our unwanted feelings and intense desires, but they do not have to run our lives. The image of the Buddha under the Bodhi Tree at the moment he achieved enlightenment beautifully

expresses this idea. After successfully defeating the demon Mara, a symbolic representation of desires and passions, the Buddha attains enlightenment. The image of awakened serenity found on the face of the Buddha remains an icon of psychological and emotional tranquility. This example also exemplifies the intimate relationship between detachment and tranquility, and the development from level 2 to level 3. Tranquility is found in balance, calm, and radical acceptance of the present moment. It follows from possession of deep knowledge and nonattachment to the outcomes of our actions. On this level, thoughts and feelings can be cleansed and purified. Tranquility is the focus of Chapters 7 to 9.

Cultivating Transcendence

The aim of this final level is stepping outside ourselves into some higher or elevated insight. To obtain wisdom requires a breakthrough of human consciousness that highlights the transcendent nature of existence. This final level represents an encounter with an absolute (e.g., the Divine, Tao, Brahman), and the goal is gaining new perspective from this encounter. Here is a spoiler alert: this is where we feel something is missing from current scientific definitions of wisdom. We spend the final portion of this book considering wisdom and transcendence.

THE HOPE OF WISDOM

We live in a time in which esoteric ideas historically reserved for a small number of elites are now being explored and facilitated by people of all walks of life. Consider the current surge of books, talks, and seminars involving the notion of mysticism—a term traditionally denoting years of religious devotion and ascetic practices often involving a mysterious transfer of knowledge not meant for mass consumption. Methods of mystical practice and development are now as readily available as cookbooks. It is easy to miss how strange this would appear to our ancient ancestors. This egalitarian dissemination of knowledge owes much to the social and

natural sciences in their ability to break down and translate ideas into language easier to comprehend. In the chapters to follow, we communicate the language of wisdom from a psychological, scientific, and spiritual perspective, demystifying it and facilitating an approach that is informative and helpful in everyday life.

These are challenging days of polarization and vitriol. How can we start mending the wounds of the earth and those who inhabit it? Will political muscle solve the problem? It seems unlikely and has been well-tried. Will exhortations to love one another bring about harmony and peace? Apparently not. Will religious proselytizing and spiritual transformation bring us all together with a common vision and heart for justice? It does not seem likely. There is no panacea to today's quandary, but the best strategy forward seems to be the pathway of wisdom. Along this path we learn about ourselves and the other, we detach ourselves from the passions that drive our irrational ways of being in the world, and eventually we experience a degree of calm amidst the storm. This is a path that calls us outside of our silos, outside of our preconceptions and little ways of searching for truth, and into a broader flow of lived humanity, and perhaps even beyond humanity to some awareness of transcendent Truth.