

## Wisdom

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This is a preprint. The final version appeared in *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology* (2011), eds. Sven Bernecker and Duncan Pritchard.

Men, in whom the principal part is the mind, ought to make their principle care the search after wisdom, which is its true source of nourishment.

Descartes (1931: 205)

First of all: why wisdom? Why should epistemologists theorize about *that*?

Well, there are several reasons. For one, people sometimes write about wisdom as if it were an epistemic good, and these people do not seem to be misguided. For instance, Wayne Riggs uses “wisdom” as a term of art for the highest epistemic good, whatever that good is (Riggs 2003: 215). This use of “wisdom” is telling, because it is no random selection. It is not strange to use “wisdom” as a term of art for the highest epistemic good, whereas it would be strange to use e.g. “toothpaste” as a term of art for the highest epistemic good.

The second reason for epistemologists to theorize about wisdom derives from connections between epistemology and psychology. As several theorists have pointed out, some parts of psychology study epistemically valuable phenomena such as intelligence, creativity, and rationality (Goldman 1986, Bishop and Trout 2004). It would behoove us epistemologists to pay attention to this work, since it addresses some of the very same issues as our own work. And as it turns out, there is a body of psychological work on wisdom, and that work widely recognizes the standing of wisdom as a particularly high-grade intellectual state (Sternberg and Jordan 2005). This

body of work may well be on to something. That is the second reason why we epistemologists should theorize about wisdom.

The third reason is that the history of philosophy features rich veins of material that take wisdom to be a central epistemic achievement. This material includes work by Plato and Aristotle, their medieval followers, and the moderns who followed them in turn. Strangely, though, it seems to have petered out by the twentieth century. It is as if twentieth century epistemologists inherited a big set of interconnected issues from the ancients and their followers, and arbitrarily chose to theorize about some of those issues much more than others. Wisdom falls into the neglected category, so our theorizing about it has some catching up to do.

The fourth reason for epistemologists to theorize about wisdom is that wisdom is connected to several issues in applied epistemology. For instance, it is connected to the design of educational curricula. In pursuing this connection, Goldman (1999) argues that educational curricula should be centered on the cultivation of true belief. But perhaps they should be centered on different epistemic aims instead, such as knowledge or understanding or *wisdom* (Norman 1996, Sternberg 2001). In trying to resolve this issue, it would be helpful to have at hand a theory of the nature of wisdom.

The fifth reason for epistemologists to theorize about wisdom has to do with certain large-scale debates about the structure of epistemic value. In *Virtues of the Mind*, Zagzebski claims that consequentialist accounts of epistemic value have difficulty making sense of the epistemic value of wisdom, and that her own virtue-theoretic theory does better at the task (Zagzebski 1996: 28-29, 50). It is worth getting straight on the merits of this claim, and theorizing about wisdom can help us do that.

For all of these reasons, epistemologists should theorize about wisdom. In this paper I will do as much, first by critically surveying the extant work on the nature of wisdom, and then by arguing for a particular view on the matter.

The philosophical literature features three main sorts of views about the nature of wisdom. In the *Apology* Socrates seems to view wisdom as some sort of epistemic humility or accuracy. Aristotle (and many of his followers) take wisdom to come in two forms, the practical and the theoretical, the former of which is a capacity for good judgment about how to act and the latter of which is deep knowledge or understanding. Others still follow Aristotle only part way, taking wisdom as a practical matter only. Let us call these three sorts of views *Apologetic*, *Twofold*, and *Practical* views. I'll survey the central views of these three sorts; then I'll argue for a particular version of the twofold view.

## **APOLOGETIC VIEWS**

In Plato's *Apology* the oracle says that Socrates is the wisest of all men; Socrates tests the prophecy; he finds his interlocutors deeply ignorant and unaware of that fact. Socrates alone *knows* he is ignorant – which shows, perhaps, that the oracle was right.

This story suggests that wisdom is some sort of epistemic humility or accuracy (Ryan 2007). Pursuing the humility theme, perhaps one is wise to the extent that one knows the facts about what one fails to know. Pursuing the accuracy theme, perhaps one is wise to the extent that one knows both the facts about what one knows, and the facts about what one fails to know. (These themes aren't restricted to ancient

philosophy; variations on them sometimes arise in contemporary psychology. See Kitchener and Brenner 1990 and Kunzmann and Baltes 2005).

How plausible are these themes? Not very. Suppose that a being has vast amounts of knowledge, indeed God-like knowledge. Such a being would not be epistemically humble (at least not in the sense we've just identified), but might be wise nonetheless. Now suppose that a person knows very little – just enough to barely scrape by in life – plus many or all the facts about what she does and does not know. Despite being epistemically accurate, such a being needn't be wise. Nor could we guarantee that she is wise by simply replacing her ignorance with knowledge. Suppose she knew a vast array of trivial facts, for instance the facts about the precise distances between each two grains of sand on the earth. She might know these trivial facts and additionally know the facts about what she does and does not know; but for all that, she might still be unwise. Wisdom is therefore neither epistemic humility, nor epistemic accuracy, nor even epistemic accuracy combined with large amounts of knowledge.

## **PRACTICAL VIEWS**

Lots of people have practical views about wisdom (Nozick 1989, Ryan 1996, 1999, Sternberg 1998). What makes these views *practical* views of wisdom is that they all take wisdom to be some sort of practical knowledge or ability. Let me clarify this by discussing some of the particular views.

Let's start with Sharon Ryan's views. In two illuminating papers she advocates one, and then later another, theory according to which wisdom is a compound state the

most central aspect of which is knowing how to live well. In the first of these papers, she argues that to be wise is to (i) be a free agent who (ii) knows how to live well and (iii) does live well, whose (iv) living well is caused by her knowledge of how to live well.

In the second paper, she drops the first, third, and fourth of these conditions. There are good reasons for doing so. A wise and free agent who is suddenly metaphysically enslaved does not thereby cease to be wise; therefore, wise agents need not be free. Wise agents need not live well either: it may turn out that, through ceaseless bad luck, their wise choices always bring about tragedies. Alternatively, wise people may be akratic or evil, and on those grounds fail to live well despite their wisdom (I'll say more about these possibilities momentarily).

So there are several ways in which wise people can fail to live well. And if wise people need not live well, then *ipso facto* they need not live well *via* their knowledge of how to live well. All that remains of Ryan's original account, then, is the epistemic condition - the condition according to which wise people know how to live well.

Her second paper combines this condition with another, and argues for the view that to be wise is to (i) know how to live well, while also (ii) having an appreciation of the true value of living well. The latter condition – the “appreciation condition”, we'll call it - seems to have it that being wise requires valuing or desiring the good life.

But why should we think this appreciation condition holds, i.e. that wisdom requires valuing or desiring the good life? Deeply depressed people may desire and value nothing other than sitting in dark rooms alone. But can't they nonetheless be wise?

Consider a wise person who knows how to live well and values and desires the good life. Suppose that at some point in this person's life, he is beset by a fit of deep depression due to a medication he had to take to cure an otherwise terminal illness. It seems unfair to this person to say that his medication destroys his wisdom. Isn't his depression bad enough on its own? Can't his doctor rightly avoid mentioning wisdom loss when discussing the medicine's risks?

Our unfortunate medicine-taker could still retain all of his knowledge, including all of his knowledge of how to live well. People might still go to him for good advice; and with poking and prodding, they might even get it. He might even be a stereotypical wise sage, sitting on a mountain and extolling deep aphorisms. Should his visitors feel slighted because he is deeply depressed? Should they think that they have not found a wise man after all, despite the man's knowledge and good advice?

*I* certainly wouldn't think that. If I ran across such a person, I'd take his advice to heart, wish him a return to health, and leave the continuing search for sages to his less grateful advisees. And I would think he was wise despite his depression-induced failure to value or desire the good life. So I think that wisdom does not require valuing or desiring the good life.

And just as this argument from depression sheds doubt on the appreciation condition, so too does a similar argument from evil. Consider Mephistopheles, that devil to whom Faust foolishly sells his soul. Mephistopheles knows what advice will bring Faust to lead a bad life, and that is precisely the advice that he gives him. But then, it stands to reason that Mephistopheles also knows what advice will bring Faust to lead a *good* life. So, it stands to reason that Mephistopheles knows how to live well.

Despite this knowledge, the life Mephistopheles lives is bad, and so is the life he brings Faust to live. Mephistopheles is sinister, fiendish, and wicked. But whatever he is, he is not a fool. He is, it seems, wise but evil.

If it helps, we can recall that the devil was once an angel (or so the legend goes, of course). Should we say that the devil was wise as an angel but, through no loss of knowledge, became unwise in his attempt to take over the throne and his subsequent fall? That seems no more plausible than the view that the depression-inducing medication destroys the sage's wisdom, despite not destroying any of the sage's knowledge. It seems, then, that wisdom can coexist both with depression and with evil, but that wise people who are depressed or evil do not meet Ryan's appreciation condition. The compatibility of wisdom and depression, and of wisdom and evil, shows that the appreciation condition does not hold.

Yet surely there is something right in the idea that wisdom requires some kind of practical knowledge, such as knowledge of how to live well. Thus we should consider views on which wisdom just amounts to as much, that is, on which to be wisdom is a kind of practical knowledge. One such view simply says that being wise is identical to knowing how to live well. Other such views theorize in terms of knowledge-that as opposed to knowledge-how. For example, some views might claim that to be wise is to know all the elements in some appropriate set of central moral and prudential truths. Other views still might claim that to be wise is to *believe*, or perhaps *justifiedly believe*, all of those same moral and prudential truths. And of course, some of these various views may be reducible to others, for instance if know-how is a species of knowledge-

that (Stanley and Williamson 2001). But regardless of whether any of these views reduce to any of the others, it is worth inquiring into whether any of them are true.

Views in this neighborhood have been advocated by Robert Nozick and Richard Garrett. According to Nozick, wisdom is that “knowledge or understanding” which “you need... 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 1989: 267-268). Similarly, Garrett claims that “wisdom is that understanding and those justified beliefs which are essential to living the best life” (Garrett 1996: 230).

So Nozick and Garrett both take Practical views of wisdom: they both take wisdom to consist in knowledge or justified belief, or understanding of one variety or another, or some combination of these things, where these things concern living well. But they both add an important twist: they take the relevant beliefs and understandings to be those beliefs and understandings that are *essential to* living well.

But plausibly, there are multiple sets of beliefs (or understandings etc.) such that possessing any one of those sets of beliefs (or understandings etc.) is sufficient for living well, given that all of the extra-doxastic conditions for living well are also met. And this entails that there *is no* set of beliefs (or understandings etc.) that is essential to living the best life. Nozick and Garrett’s views therefore render it impossible to be wise. The upshot is that the practical views we have considered thus far – Nozick’s, Garrett’s, and Ryan’s - are implausible.

Do any other practical views do better? Perhaps. If we drop the condition about essential-ness that plagues Nozick’s and Garrett’s views, and we also drop the appreciation condition that plagues Ryan’s view, then we are left with the view that



wisdom is a kind of practical knowledge or belief: knowledge of how to live well, or perhaps some sort of moral or prudential propositional knowledge or belief. Such a view captures much of the spirit of the other practical views we have considered so far, and it does not have their problems. We can thus reasonably take it to be the best practical view of wisdom.

But despite being the best practical view, it is problematic. To see why, pick what you think is the best sort of knowledge to have, except the know-how or knowledge-that featured in the best practical theory. This sort of knowledge may be fundamental metaphysical or epistemological knowledge; or it may be some more scientific sort of knowledge; or it may be any other sort of knowledge. Whatever it is, call it “the best non-practical knowledge”.

Now, consider two people, A and B, with equal amounts of the knowledge featured in the best practical view. Suppose that A has much more of the best non-practical knowledge than does B. Suppose, even, that A has all of the best non-practical knowledge, and that B has very little or none of it. Is A wiser than B?

I would certainly say so. But if in this case A is wiser than B, then wisdom cannot just be practical knowledge. Hence the best practical view of wisdom is implausible; it runs aground on the fact that we can gain wisdom without gaining practical knowledge.

But now let us ask another question: is B more foolish than A? B does, after all, have just as much practical knowledge as A. Why should lacking the best *non-practical* knowledge, be it deep scientific or philosophical knowledge or anything else, render him *foolish*? Doesn't everyone or at least almost everyone lack deep

philosophical and scientific knowledge? And aren't most people nonetheless not particularly foolish?

It does not seem right to call B more foolish than A. But this leaves us in a bind. For foolishness is in some sense the absence of wisdom. And if foolishness is the absence of wisdom, and foolishness is no more present in B than in A, then A is not wiser than B. Thus in taking B to be no more foolish than A, we ought to also take A to be no wiser than B.

But earlier, when we asked not about foolishness but about wisdom, we wanted to say that A *is* wiser than B. So it has turned out that different things happen when we ask different questions about the case of A and B. When we ask about "wisdom" we think that A is wiser than B, but when we ask about "foolishness" we think that A is not wiser than B. What is going on here? Is it that we tacitly hold contradictory beliefs about wisdom, or what?

The answer, I think, is that there are two kinds of wisdom, the practical and the theoretical. Theoretical wisdom is something like deep knowledge or understanding, and practical wisdom is something like knowledge of how to live well. Somehow, foolishness-talk in our case leads us to interpret "wisdom" as "practical wisdom", whereas wisdom-talk in our case leads us to interpret "wisdom" as "theoretical wisdom". Our responses to the case, then, are not so much contradictory as they are concerned with two different varieties of wisdom.

I'll say more about these two varieties of wisdom later. But first I should point out that Aristotle took wisdom to come in both practical and theoretical varieties, and

that many of his followers have done so as well. Maybe these theorists are on to something; let us examine their views.

## **TWOFOLD VIRTUE THEORIES**

Aristotle operated with at least two distinct concepts that are not unreasonable to express with the word “wisdom”. In several places (especially Book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*), he discusses the intellectual virtues, two of which are “sophia” and “phronesis”. These terms are typically translated as “theoretical wisdom” and “practical wisdom” respectively.

Aristotle views theoretical wisdom as the highest cognitive state or the best position one can be in epistemically. It consists in “episteme”, or what most translators call “scientific knowledge”, that is properly grounded in “nous”, which is something like immediate comprehension of the most fundamental principles in virtue of which all other principles hold. It seems reasonable, then, to call sophia “theoretical wisdom”.

Phronesis is a faculty for good practical reasoning. The person with phronesis - that is practical wisdom - has the ability to make good judgments. He therefore has a general knowledge not only of what ends are good for him, but also of what means are good for producing those ends. Phronesis is somewhat similar to knowledge of how to live well; and it seems to be quite reasonably translated as “practical wisdom”.

Zagzebski, following Aristotle, countenances something like phronesis as a faculty of good judgment and calls it “practical wisdom”; she also recognizes a more intellectualized form of wisdom, which she calls “theoretical wisdom”. She takes

practical wisdom to be a virtue consisting in good judgment about what to do and what to believe. She takes theoretical wisdom to be a particularly high intellectual good, and to be quite distinct from practical wisdom. It is, she thinks, a species of the sort of understanding that has to do with unificatory insight. On her view, this sort of understanding is not propositional, i.e. it is not any sort of attitude directed at any sort of proposition or propositions. It is instead directed at non-propositional structures in reality like paintings or domains of inquiry. She does not take theoretical wisdom to be *identical* to this sort of understanding. Rather, she takes it to be the species of this sort of understanding that “is a matter of grasping the whole structure of reality” (Zagzebski 1996: 49-50). Finally, she claims that virtue epistemologies are particularly well-positioned to make sense of the epistemic value of understanding and wisdom. Her basic reason for thinking as much seems to be that understanding and wisdom are literally properties of *persons*, not persons’ cognitive states, and that virtue theories take properties of persons as the primary objects of evaluation. Zagzebski thus uses her theory of wisdom, and theory of understanding in which it is embedded, to support a virtue theoretic approach to the whole domain of epistemic value.

But I don’t think it is true that virtue epistemologies are particularly well-positioned to theorize about wisdom. For, as we will see below, some theories of wisdom that are *not* virtue theoretic are superior to Aristotle’s and Zagzebski’s own theories. But before getting into that, it is worth exploring some of the details Aristotle and Zagzebski’s own theories.

First some remarks on Aristotle on theoretical wisdom. His *sophia* is a form of knowledge through deduction from first principles that one grasps via *nous*. This

“grasping” amounts to something like rational intuition. So for Aristotle, every theoretically wise person rationally intuits first principles. But that seems wrong. A person can be theoretically wise through deep empirical knowledge of physics. Such knowledge does not require rational intuition; hence we should reject Aristotle’s account of theoretical wisdom.

His account of practical wisdom does not fare any better. He takes it that people have practical wisdom if and only if those people are virtuous. And he takes it that akratic people are not virtuous. But consider the wise sage who is forced into heroin addiction. This sage’s practical wisdom is not destroyed by this addiction. But since addiction is a form of akrasia, Aristotle is committed to the view that this sage’s addiction *does* destroy his virtue, and therefore his practical wisdom as well. Thus we should reject Aristotle’s account of practical wisdom. (Of course, we could re-translate Aristotle’s terms “sophia” and “phronesis” instead of rejecting his theory. But I’ll leave that aside.)

In addition to rejecting Aristotle’s accounts of theoretical and practical wisdom, we should also reject Zagzebski’s account of practical wisdom. She thinks that all practically wise people make good choices most of the time. But the cases we discussed above concerning depression, evil, and addiction show that the choices of practically wise people needn’t be mostly good ones.

What about Zagzebski’s account of theoretical wisdom? About this account I have just two things to say. First, it would be nice to further develop her remarks about grasping the structure of reality – those remarks seem to be on to something. Second and more critically, it is wrong to think that this account of theoretical wisdom is of

particular help to virtue-theoretic approaches to epistemology. For, when we try to further develop Zagzebski's account of theoretical wisdom, we end up with a theory that does just as well at serving the purposes of those of us who take epistemic value to have a consequentialist structure. Or so I'll now argue.

## **TWOFOLD CONSEQUENTIALISM**

Virtue-theoretic accounts of wisdom entail that all practically wise people reliably act wisely. For if wisdom is a virtue, then no more could a wise person not reliably act wisely, than could a courageous person not reliably act courageously. In both instances, and with virtues generally, possessing the virtue guarantees reliably acting from it.

But, as I've argued, practically wise people need not reliably act wisely. Therefore, virtue-theoretic accounts of wisdom are mistaken. I'm going to try to replace them with a consequentialist twofold view. This view is consequentialist not in attempting to locate the epistemic value of wisdom in its consequences, but rather in taking wisdom to be partly *constitutive* of the epistemically good consequences. Various phenomena such as evidence gathering, research program design, library book acquisition policy, and educational curricula can be epistemically evaluated according to the extent to which they produce the epistemically good ends, one of which is wisdom. Wisdom is an epistemic end. Now to the nature of this epistemic end.

## Statement of the theory

There are two kinds of wisdom: practical and theoretical. To be practically wise is to know how to live well. To be theoretically wise is to have deep understanding.

Knowing how to obtain one's ends is not alone sufficient for practical wisdom, because if one can get whatever one wants but does not have any idea what to get in order to live well, then one does not know how to live well. Knowing what ends to obtain in order to live well is not sufficient for practical wisdom either. For even if one knows, of every set of ends the fulfilling of which is sufficient for living well, *that* its fulfilling is sufficient for living well, one may nonetheless not know how to fulfill any of those sets of ends. And, if one does not know how to fulfill any of those sets of ends, then one does not know how to live well. If one knows how to live well, then, one thereby knows both (a) of at least some of the sets of ends the fulfilling of which is sufficient for living well, that the fulfilling of those sets of ends is sufficient for living well, and (b) of at least some of the means sufficient for bringing about those sets of ends, that those means are sufficient for bringing about those sets of ends.

Theoretical wisdom is a form of understanding, and a particular form of it, namely deep understanding. Thus it is to be contrasted from understanding-that and also from unificatory-insight understanding of a shallow variety. It is a kind of explanatory knowledge, because it consists in knowledge of the principles that explain things in a relevant domain.

For instance, to have theoretical wisdom in chemistry is to have a systematic knowledge of the fundamental chemical structures, and of the laws governing their

interaction. In virtue of having such knowledge, one is able to explain a wide variety of particular, token chemical phenomena that occur in labs and in the real world. One knows the fundamental chemical principles in virtue of which these token chemical phenomena obtain, and one cognitively subsumes these token phenomena, or at any rate *can* cognitively subsume these phenomena, under the fundamental principles that explain them. It is this fundamental knowledge and ability to subsume particular facts under it that constitutes unificatory insight. The more fundamental one's explanatory knowledge in a domain is, then, the more theoretically wise one is with respect to that domain. (Here I gloss over complicated literatures on explanation and understanding; see Pitt 1988, Strevens 2008, and Grimm forthcoming).

That, at first pass at least, is what wisdom is. It is a twofold phenomenon concerning on the one hand knowledge of how to live well, and on the other hand explanatory knowledge of the fundamental truths in a domain. Let us call this theory "twofold consequentialism".

### **Argument for the theory**

In arguing for twofold consequentialism I'll lay out some adequacy conditions on theories of wisdom, and I'll make a case that twofold consequentialism does the best job of meeting those conditions, among the extant theories. The conditions are as follows:



1. **Advice**: Theories of wisdom should explain why wise people tend to be able to give good advice.

There is within popular culture an image of the wise man as the sage to whom we can go for deep insight about what we should do. The existence of this image suggests that wisdom and the ability to give good advice are importantly related. Furthermore, we generally think of wise people as good people to go to when we are in need of advice. So, the advice condition is a reasonable one.

And it is a condition that twofold consequentialism meets. If wisdom entails or is in some other significant way related to knowing how to live well, then it stands to reason that wise people are able to give good advice. For their knowledge of how to live well can, if combined with the right background information, bring them to know what their advisees should do.

Thus the view that wisdom features knowledge of how to live well explains why wise people are able to give good advice. And twofold consequentialism takes one kind of wisdom, practical wisdom, as identical to knowing how to live well. Therefore, twofold consequentialism explains why wise people – or better, *practically* wise people - can give good advice.

2. **Anti-Wickedness**. Theories of wisdom should explain why wise people tend to not be wicked.

Many theorists suggest that it is impossible for wise people to be wicked (Aristotle, Zagzebski 1996, Ryan 1996, Sternberg 2004: 88). The only argument for this view that I know of is the argument from the claim that wisdom is a virtue. According to that argument, virtues are reliably acted on by whomever possesses them, wisdom is a virtue by which one knows how to live well, and reliably acting so as to live well is incompatible with being wicked; put together, these claims entail that wise people cannot be wicked.

As I argued above, this virtue-theoretic line of thought is not persuasive. The devil is evil but nonetheless wise. He was wise as an angel, and through no loss of knowledge but rather through some sort of affective restructuring tried and failed to take over the throne. And mere affective changes accompanied by no loss of knowledge should not remove one's wisdom. So, wisdom and evil are compatible.

Nonetheless, every writer about wisdom that I know of subscribes to some sort of anti-wickedness condition, at least tacitly. Furthermore, it is hard to think of actual characters in the history of literature and film, or even in our own personal lives, who are both wise and wicked. Save sinister characters like Goethe's Mephistopheles and perhaps Machiavelli, I can't think of any such characters. I conclude from these observations that if one is wise, it is unlikely that one is also evil. Theories of wisdom should explain or at least be consistent with the fact that this relationship between wisdom and evil holds.

And twofold consequentialism does as much. For if one knows how to live well, then it stands to reason that one *will* live well, to the extent that one can. Of course, one may be so devilishly evil that one knows how to live well and quite

purposely does not do it. But this case seems unlikely, in the same way that it seems unlikely that a person who knows how to walk well would, through strange desires, nonetheless walk badly. Given the view that wisdom somehow features knowledge of how to live well, then, it seems unlikely that a wise person – or better – a *practically* wise person - would be evil.

3. **Anti-Foolishness**. Theories of wisdom should explain why foolishness is in some sense the absence of wisdom.

Theorists talk all the time as if it were true that foolishness is the absence of wisdom (Ryan 1999, Sternberg 2003). Furthermore, foolish action can be characterized as action that is not informed by wisdom. The view that foolishness is the absence of wisdom goes some way towards explaining why this is so. The anti-foolishness condition is therefore a reasonable one.

And, twofold consequentialism meets it. This is because knowing how to live well makes it likely that one in fact does live well, at least to the extent that one can, given one's circumstances. The view that wisdom, or practical wisdom, is knowledge of how to live well therefore explains why it is likely that wise people in fact live well. But the fool's life is not a good life. Thus the view that wisdom, or practical wisdom, amounts to knowledge of how to live well would lead us to predict that practically wise people do not live foolishly. And that, in turn, would lead us to predict that practically wise people are not fools; which itself helps explain why foolishness is the absence of wisdom.

4. **Difficulty**. Theories of wisdom should explain why wisdom hard is to get.

We don't think of ordinary people as particularly wise. Furthermore, there is empirical evidence suggesting that high degrees of wisdom are in fact a rare phenomenon (Kunzmann and Baltes 2005). So the difficulty condition is a reasonable one.

And twofold consequentialism meets it. Deep knowledge is hard to get. Therefore, theoretical wisdom is hard to get. Furthermore, it is hard to know how to live well, or at least, hard to have high levels of knowledge of how to live well. So practical wisdom, at least in high levels, is also hard to get.

5. **Explanation of other theories**. Theories of wisdom should identify what is plausible about the theories with which they disagree.

The folks who have theorized about wisdom are all quite smart and well-informed. It would be strange for such people to be totally off the mark. They ought to get at least *some* things right. A proper theory of wisdom should identify these things.

Twofold consequentialism does as much: it can locate something right within apologetic views, practical views, and twofold views of the virtue-theoretic variety. First of all, it is difficult for one to live well if one is bad at recognizing what one knows and what one does not know. People who are bad at recognizing these things are bad at decision making, which is itself an important aspect of living well. Twofold consequentialism therefore predicts that practically wise people should tend to be

epistemically humble and accurate in the senses suggested in the *Apology*. Furthermore, twofold consequentialism recognizes a certain kind of wisdom, practical wisdom, that is identical to the thing that according to practical theorists constitutes wisdom *simpliciter*. Practical theories are right in recognizing practical wisdom as a part of wisdom; where they go wrong is in thinking that it is *all* there is to wisdom. So twofold consequentialism identifies something right within Practical views as well. Finally, twofold consequentialism explains what is right in virtue-theoretic twofold views. It does so by sharing their recognition of two sorts of wisdom, and by countenancing similar views about both of those sorts of wisdom.

6. **Explanation of particular cases.** Theories of wisdom should explain, for each case in which one is wise or not wise, *why* one is in that case wise or not wise.

It is, at least in part, through explaining the facts about particular cases that theories give us insight and understanding. And giving us insight and understanding are what theories are supposed to do; it is what they are *for*. Thus, in order to do what they are supposed to do, theories should explain particular cases. Theories of wisdom are no exception; they should explain why one is wise, when one is wise, and why one is not wise, when one is not wise.

Now, a theory can explain only what it is consistent with. And every theory other than twofold consequentialism is inconsistent with the facts about wisdom in at least some case or other. As a result, every theory other than twofold consequentialism fails to meet the *explanation of particular cases* condition.

Twofold consequentialism, however, is consistent with the facts about wisdom in particular cases, as far as I can tell. Moreover, twofold consequentialism *explains* the facts about particular cases, as far as I can tell. For instance, it explains the facts about the cases of A and B we discussed above. And it explains why the epistemically accurate person who knows trivialities need not be wise – for this person need not have deep understanding, and need not know how to live well. With these cases and the others we discussed throughout the paper, twofold consequentialism explains why people are wise when they are wise, and why they are unwise when they are unwise. None of the other theories do as much. As a result of all this, twofold consequentialism meets the *explanation of particular cases* condition, and it is unique in doing as much.

What is more, twofold consequentialism does not do *worse* than any of the other extant theories on any of the *other* conditions I have outlined. Indeed, on some of those other conditions, including the anti-wickedness condition, it does even better than some of those other theories. On balance then, twofold consequentialism seems to be the best theory of wisdom we've got.

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Thanks to Allan Hazlett, Dan Howard-Snyder, Peter Kivy, Ned Markosian, and Duncan Pritchard for helpful comments on drafts of this paper.

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