

Wise Ways of Seeing: Wisdom and Perspectives

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Abstract: The capacity for perspective taking is thought to be linked to psychological development and to wisdom. This article draws from psychological, contemplative, cross-cultural, and philosophical disciplines to create an inventory of perspectival skills and their possible relationships to wisdom. The nature of perspectives is explored, as are the characteristics of healthy perspectives, and the factors—such as developmental stage, assumptions, and state of mind—that determine the number and kinds of available perspectives. The article then examines rare postconventional perspectival capacities such as the ability to integrate multiple perspectives, to adopt higher order metaperspectives, and to experience transperspectival “pure awareness.” Fifteen kinds of wise perspectives and perspectival skills are suggested. Finally, the article reviews psychological, relational, contemplative, philosophical, and educational methods thought to foster perspectival skills and wisdom.

Keywords: Assumption, development, perspective, perspectivism, transformational learning, wisdom.

Introduction

Wise individuals are aware of the fact that there are multiple perspectives on every phenomenon and they are interested in learning from new perspectives and from other people. (Glück & Bluck, 2014, p. 75)

Wisdom is many things. Yet it certainly includes one thing: the capacity to see in new, beneficial, and benevolent ways. What kinds of ways? Well, at least twelve ways that can be clustered into four groups. In general, wise ways of seeing will tend to be:

1. Nonconventional.
 - Novel: new, fresh, and often unexpected.

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- Insightful: productive of new insights and understandings.
 - Unconventional: beyond conventional assumptions, out of the box.
 - Postconventional: expressing exceptionally mature levels of development beyond the conventional.
2. Wise people will likely use and integrate multiple perspectives.
- Multiple perspectives: Able to look at things from multiple angles or points of view. Not limited to one perspective, but employing multiple perspectives.
 - Flexible and agile: able to move easily and quickly between multiple perspectives
 - Metaperspectival: able to adopt higher order perspectives.
 - Integrative: able to not only adopt multiple perspectives, but also to recognize relationships between these perspectives, and integrate them into a higher order synthesis.
 - Big picture: able to encompass large complex systems or communities, to encompass long time spans, and consider multiple factors. Also able to adopt both big picture and close up perspectives, to zoom in and zoom out.
3. Wise people will tend to recognize the limits of perspectives.
- All perception depends on perspective (perspectivism.)
 - Any (single) perspective is partial and limited.
4. Beneficial: Wise people will recognize ways of seeing that are helpful to both themselves and others.

A Central Hypothesis

The central hypothesis of this article is this: *Wisdom is a function of the capacity for taking skillful perspectives.* Of course, wisdom is also much more than this capacity but will certainly include this capacity.

I define a perspective or action as *skillful* to the extent that it minimizes suffering and enhances wellbeing for everyone involved, including oneself. So the hypothesis that wisdom is a function of the capacity for taking skillful perspectives implies that wisdom involves the capacity for looking at things in ways that lead to reduced suffering and enhanced wellbeing.

What evidence is there for a relationship between wisdom and skillful perspective taking? As yet, there is little, but growing, research on either wisdom or perspectives, so experimental research on their relationship is very limited. However, there is evidence that perspectival skills are related to psychological development, and there are suggestions that these skills are related to wisdom. For example:

- A close relationship between psychological development and perspective taking skills has been demonstrated in studies of child and adolescent development (e.g., Lapsley, 2006). Likewise, integral theorists often posit a close relationship between adult development and

perspective taking skills, although there is little actual evidence for this relationship (Fuhs, 2013; Martin, Sobel, and Elfers, 2008).

- Multiple fields that recognize the need for greater individual and collective wisdom in order to solve our social and global problems, also emphasize the need for broader integrative perspectives (Esbjörn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009).
- Researchers often suggest that wisdom is associated with maturation to postconventional stages and to greater integrative perspectival capacities (e.g., Kramer, 2003). For an analysis of the possible relationship between wisdom and development see Walsh (2011, 2012)
- The most prolific wisdom researchers, the Berlin School, emphasize two criteria of wisdom that seem closely related to perspectival skills. The first, *life span contextualism*, “considers the many themes and contexts of life and in addition, incorporates a lifetime temporal perspective” (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, p. 125-6). The second factor, “*relativism of values and life priorities*” recognizes the relativity of what is appropriate for different people and situations.
- Monika Ardelt’s Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale (3D-WS) measures reflective skills which she defines as “a perception of phenomena and events from multiple perspectives” (Ardelt, 2004, p. 275).

The Relationship between Wisdom and Perspectives: Key Questions

These ideas lead to four key questions:

1. What is a perspective?
2. What factors determine the number and types of perspectives available to an individual (and society)?
3. What are the characteristics of skillful perspectives?
4. How do we foster the capacity for skillful perspective taking?

These may be crucial questions for wisdom studies and also for integral theory (Cook-Greuter, 2010; Fuhs, 2010; Wilber, 2013). Unfortunately, there is little research on adult perspective taking and skills. Consequently what follows are largely hypotheses. These hypotheses are based on my reading in related literatures, clinical observations of psychologically disturbed patients, personal observations of psychologically mature and wise people; the practice and teaching of psychotherapy, meditation, and other contemplative disciplines; and considerable reflection on these issues. All the ideas in this article are presented, not as beliefs to be accepted, but as hypotheses to be tested. If they foster thinking and research about wisdom, perspectival skills, and their interrelationships, they will have served their functions well.

What is a Perspective?

The term perspective is used in psychological literature in several ways. Interpersonally or socially, it implies the capacity to see things from another’s point of view. Generically, it refers to points of view in general.

In this article I will mainly be using the term generically. In this generic sense, we need to consider two types of perspectives: physical/spatial and psychological/cognitive.

- A physical/spatial perspective is determined by the spatial location of the viewing point relative to the physical object observed.
- Within mental space, a psychological perspective is determined by the viewing location or vantage point with regard to a mental object.

I presume that psychological perspectives are largely determined by operative schemas and modes.

Schemas are mental models: conceptual networks and frameworks that serve to identify, categorize, frame, and interpret specific types of stimuli. As such, they determine the meaning and significance of stimuli, and the responses to them.

For example, Neo-Kohlbergian researchers see moral development as maturing, not from one stage to another, but from one schema to another. Each successive schema enacts an increasingly encompassing and nuanced metaperspective, worldview, and morality (Thoma, 2006).

“Modes are networks of cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral schemas” (Beck & Weishaar, 2014, p. 232). The schemas of a mode operate together to interpret stimuli, and then create emotional, motivational, and behavioral responses to these interpretations of them. Modes are presumably related to states of mind or states of consciousness (Tart, 2001) and to the ego states described by transactional analysis (Berne, 1964), ego state therapy (Watkins and Watkins, 1997), and by Genpo Roshi’s Big Mind process.

It is important to note that we respond, not to objects themselves, but to our interpretations of them. This is an ancient idea, and some 2,000 years ago the Stoic philosopher Epictetus (1899) warned that “Men are disturbed not by things, but the view which they take of them.” Or as Shakespeare put it, “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (Hamlet, II, 2).

A perspective is a selective perceptual stance which results when awareness is filtered through and constrained by mental schemas and modes. A perspective therefore functions as a perceptual and interpretive framework which biases and limits perception (as well as subsequent interpretation, understanding, and responses). For example, when anxiety schemas are operating, these schemas produce cognitive and perceptual biases that view experiences largely in terms of their threat potential. The anxiety modes then generate corresponding anxiety based emotional, motivational, and behavioral responses to threat. Very importantly, perspectives tend to be self-fulfilling. That is, we tend to find what we look for.

What Factors Determine Available Perspectives?

One important question is: What are the factors which determine the number and kinds of available perspectives? Three of the most important factors may be:

1. A person's developmental stage,
2. Their state of mind, and
3. Their assumptions or presuppositions.

Because the number and types of available perspectives are so important to perspectival skills and wisdom, let's examine these three determining factors more closely.

Development

We have seen in the description of peoples' development from one stage to another that each new stage brings a qualitative expansion in perspective taking. (James Fowler, 2000, p. 85)

A person's developmental stage may determine and limit the number, scope, and levels of available perspectives. This is a central tenet of a child and adolescent developmental psychology, and of integral theory. "From cognitive to interpersonal and affective to self-sense, development in many domains progresses in accordance with an individual's ability to take perspectives" (Fuhs, 2010, p. 273). For example, in childhood, when the capacity for taking other peoples' perspectives comes on line, this new capacity allows a shift from egocentricity to mutuality and ethnocentricity.

In adulthood, these capacities can expand further. For example, one's perspective can expand from identifying with, and thus being concerned for one's community (ethnocentrism—"my country right or wrong") to a perspective identified with, and thus concerned for, all people and all life (worldcentric). Temporally, one's perspective can expand from one's own short term benefits to a concern for the needs of future generations. This perspectival expansion is related to "the expanding circle" of care which is a central feature of ethical maturity (Singer, 2011), and has long been a central goal of Confucianism. "Learning to be human" for Confucians "is to learn to be sensitive to an ever-expanding network of relationships" (Wei-Ming, 1985, p. 175).

Postconventional developmental levels of perspective taking

Postconventional levels of development appear to offer four major advances in perspectival capacities:

1. An increase in the number of available perspectives,
2. Increased integration of perspectives
3. Adoption of metaperspectives
4. Breakthroughs into transperspectival pure awareness

1. Number of Available Perspectives

From childhood on, psychological development is often associated with a growing capacity to take a greater number of perspectives. This growth is thought to continue into and through postconventional, post-formal operational stages.

2. Integration of Perspectives

Development is associated, not only with a growing number of perspectives, but also with a growing ability to integrate these perspectives (Fuhs, 2010; Kramer, 2003). Likewise, some theorists such as Jean Gebser and Ken Wilber suggest that cultural evolution also involves a growing number and integrative capacity of perspectives. For Gebser, cultural evolution culminates in the “integral aperspectival mind” which is able to integrate multiple individual perspectives, evaluate their perceptions as a whole, and therefore hold no individual perspective as final (Feuerstein, 1987; Wilber, 1995).

Ken Wilber suggests that recognition of multiple perspectives can outpace the growth of integrative capacity. The result is two distinct early post-conventional stages.

The first stage is recognition of the multiplicity of possible perspectives. This results in pluralism but can also lead to relativism—a stance that there are no grounds for privileging one perspective over others. At its extreme, Wilber (2000) suggests this can devolve into “aperspectival madness” in which no perspectives or values are seen as better as or worse than any others (p. 170).

For Wilber (2006), relativism and aperspectival madness occur at the pluralistic-relativistic (green) stage of cognitive development which is the first post-formal operational stage (p. 68). This aperspectival madness underlies the excesses of deconstructive postmodernism and may also play a role, I would suggest, in existentialism’s groundlessness and the angst that it generates.

At the next developmental levels of low and high vision logic (Wilber’s teal and turquoise which correspond to Kegan’s Fifth Order consciousness), integrative capacities mature further. This allows not only a recognition of multiple perspectives, but also a meaningful integration and comparison of them.

Stages beyond these are rarely described. However, the Indian philosopher-sage Aurobindo (1970) mapped several rare postconventional stages beginning with what he called the Higher Mind, which Wilber (2000) categorizes as a form of vision-logic. According to Aurobindo (1970), the higher mind:

can freely express itself in single ideas but its most characteristic movement is a mass ideation, a system of totality of truth, seeing at a single view; the relations of idea with idea, of truth with truth are not established by logic but pre-exist and emerge already self-seen in the integral whole.... In the end there is a great totality of truth known and experienced but still a totality capable of infinite enlargement because there is no end to the aspects.... This is the Higher Mind. (pg. 940, 941)

3. Capacity to Adopt Metaperspectives

A third postconventional perspectival capacity is the growing ability to consciously adopt metaperspectives. This is a process where one disidentifies or disembeds from a previous

perspective and adopts a new perspective that is transcendent or *meta* to the previous one. One can then look back at the previous perspective, and thereby examine, assess, and relativize it.

As an example, consider people who mature from conventional to postconventional morality: from what neoKohlbergians call the conventional “maintaining norms” schema to the postconventional schema. At the maintaining norms level, people unreflectively accept conventional social norms, morals, and laws, and strive to maintain them. These norms are unquestioned assumptions through which, and from which, conventional people view the world. “For this schema, no further rationale for defining morality is necessary beyond simply asserting that an act is prescribed by the law, is the established way of doing things, or is the established will of God” (Thoma, 2006, p. 79).

However, when people mature to the postconventional schema, then they are able to look at, rather than only look from, the conventional moral assumptions, and are therefore able to evaluate them. That is, they can now adopt a metaperspective relative to the conventional cultural perspectives. They have moved from a first order to a second order (meta) perspective. The capacity for adopting metaperspectives is one aspect of metacognition which is the capacity for knowing, and sometimes regulating, one’s cognitive processes.

Now suppose that some of these people learn about developmental research. Using this research, they then look at their new moral perspective and the developmental jump they made. Now they may see “Oh, I was locked in a conventional schema and perspective, but then I matured to a postconventional perspective. However, that postconventional perspective is itself just one way of looking at moral issues.” These people have now moved to a third order or meta-metaperspective.

Perhaps a few of these individuals will even move to a still higher order perspective in which they recognize that all living creatures develop and all phenomena continuously change. Now they may recognize their own moral maturation as only one kind of development and as one expression of a universal law of change as described, for example, by Heraclitus, Whitehead, and the Buddha. These people have now moved to a fourth order or meta-meta-metaperspective from which they can view, situate, and interpret their earlier perspectives. Note that the adoption of higher order metaperspectives may not necessarily require or lead to higher order developmental stages (Fuhs, 2013).

The growth of metaperspectival skills may confer multiple benefits. First, each higher order perspective seems to provide a wider vision and a bigger picture. But it may also provide greater depth, a greater appreciation of complexity and interdependence, more psychological flexibility and freedom, and more opportunities for choice.

4. Transperspectival Awareness

There is a fourth, final, and radically different postconventional (or better, transconventional) perspectival potential. This is the ability to disidentify from all mental phenomena, processes, and perspectives, and to rest in pure awareness as the equanimous witness of all phenomena, processes, and perspectives. This is a transconceptual, transpersonal, and transperspectival state

which allows transconceptual intuitive apprehension and insight. The result is a *transconceptual wisdom* that is highly valued across multiple traditions as, for example, Hinduism's *jnana*, Buddhism's *prajna*, Christianity's *gnosis*, and Islam's *ma'rifa* (Walsh, 2012, 2014).

States of Mind

Less complex than development, yet still a major determinant of the number of available perspectives is a person's state of mind. The terms "state of consciousness" and "state of mind" are sometimes used synonymously. However, "state of consciousness" is less accurate since what changes is not pure consciousness—which is unqualifiable, transtemporal, and unchangeable—but rather mental contents and processes (Rock and Krippner, 2007).

Specific modes or states of mind are associated with specific dominant perspectives that determine one's way of looking at oneself and the world. For example, anxiety states result in fear of, and hypervigilance for, threats. Paranoid states view the self as special and under attack, while depression channels perception and interpretation of both oneself and the world in negative pessimistic ways. Conversely, healthy and higher states of mind are probably associated with more positive, healthy perspectives, with access to larger numbers of perspectives, and with a greater flexibility and fluidity in moving between them.

Assumptions

Assumptions constitute the third major factor determining the number and kinds of perspectives available to a person. Assumptions are beliefs or presuppositions that are accepted as true. Assumptions often operate unconsciously to produce specific biases of both perception (looking at things in specific biased ways) and cognition (processing information in specific biased ways).

When assumptions are unskillful they produce, not just biases, but also specific cognitive and perceptual vulnerabilities which can result in significant psychopathology. For example, a depressed person's perceptual bias and vulnerability is to look for the worst interpretations of themselves and life. This bias is rooted in three destructive assumptions which together constitute the so-called "cognitive triad of depression." This triad consists of the beliefs that "I'm bad" (resulting in unworthiness), "life is overwhelming" (resulting in overwhelm and despair), and "it's always going to be that way (resulting in hopelessness) (Beck & Weishaar, 2014).

Assumptions tend to operate as self-fulfilling prophecies both personally and interpersonally. What we assume to be true tends to become true. As Henry Ford said "whether you think you can or think you can't – you're right."

A similar principle operates interpersonally. Our positive assumptions about other people tend to elicit improved performance, a phenomenon known as *the Pygmalion effect* (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992). Conversely, negative assumptions about people tend to impair their performance (*the Golem effect*). These effects may play a role in class and racial performance differences, and they also operate in conflicts where, in worst case scenarios, "Enemies finally

become what they imagined each other to be” (Frank, 1982, p. 146), a tragic result that is played out in war after war.

In short, assumptions mold perspectives, perceptions, and behavior, and create worldviews (Hedlund-deWitt, 2013). Consequently, recognizing assumptions—a process which might be called *preduction* (Wilber, 2011), and may be as important as deduction and induction—is vitally important. Recognizing assumptions, assessing their value and validity, and modifying them as appropriate is essential for fostering skillful perspectives, as well as for psychological wellbeing and wisdom.

What are Wise Perspectives and Perspectival Skills?

We have already foreshadowed these wise perspectives and skills in the article’s opening section. There I suggested that wisdom includes the capacity to see in a variety of novel and beneficial ways. We can now describe these ways more precisely in perspectival terms. Specifically, I suggest that wisdom may be associated with at least fifteen beneficial perspectives and perspectival skills:

1. Novel perspectives: A wise person may be able to look at things in new, fresh ways that are unexpected and surprising.
2. Unconventional perspectives: Wise people will be able to disidentify from and grow free of conventional assumptions and perspectives. This will allow them to adopt unconventional perspectives and to think outside the box.
3. Postconventional perspectives: Wise people may adopt, not only unconventional perspectives, but also more developmentally mature postconventional (or even transconventional) perspectives. It is not only that wise people see things in new ways, but that these new ways may be unconventional, postconventional, and transconventional.

However, so far there is little research on relationships of wisdom to developmental stages. In fact, a study of ego development using the Washington University Sentence Completion Test found that the scores of wisdom nominees averaged only slightly above the highest conventional (Achiever) stage (Krafcik, 2011).

4. Insightful: novel perspectives will allow the recognition of novel insights, understanding, and solutions.
5. Perspectivism: A wise understanding of perspectives will recognize perspectivism and the limited and limiting nature of perception and perspectives. All perceptions reflect perspectives, and all perspectives are limited and limiting in that they are partial and selective in what they reveal. This is a venerable idea which was strongly argued by Nietzsche as perspectivism, and has long been a central tenet of Jainism.

In Jainism, the term *syādvāda* implies that all perspectives or viewpoints are conditioned, while the term *nayavāda* implies that they are partial. These ideas are integrated into the “one of

the most important and fundamental doctrines of Jainism,” *anekāntavāda*, which holds that there are always diverse viewpoints on any phenomenon. *Anekāntavāda* acknowledges that some viewpoints are more valid than others while simultaneously recognizing “that no single point of view is the complete truth” (Wikipedia). *Anekāntavāda* encourages tolerance, pluralism, and the search for common elements and integrations. These important Jain ideas may be insights which wise people of diverse cultures intuit to some degree. Perspectivism and *anekāntavāda* would presumably help in “seeing through illusion” which is one (limited) definition of wisdom (McKee & Barber, 1999).

Half a continent away, perspectivism found another early champion in one of the earliest and greatest of Taoist sages, Zhuangzi (also known as Chung Tzu, c. 369-286 BCE). Zhuangzi lived during a time of violent political conflict which was mirrored by vehement philosophical debates between philosophical schools, especially the Confucian and Mohists, each sure that they alone possessed the truth. Zhuangzi was not so sure.

In fact, he was not so sure of anything, because he saw that all perspectives and arguments derive from perspectives, and that “each perspective is trapped in its own standpoint” (Lai, 2006, p. 370). In short, Zhuangzi recognized perspectivism some 2,200 years before Nietzsche. Zhuangzi was a master of stories and parables and made his point with the following story:

You can’t tell a frog at the bottom of the well about the sea because he is stuck in his little space. You can’t tell a summer insect about ice because it is confined by its season. You can’t tell a scholar of distorted views about the Way because he is bound by his doctrine.... (Mair, 1994, p. 153)

Zhuangzi and many Taoists distinguish between small knowledge (*xiaozhi*) and great knowledge (*dazhi*). Whereas small knowledge asserts and argues, “Great Knowledge, by contrast transcends assertions of truth. Its wisdom lies in knowing the limits of small knowledge” (Lai, 2006, p. 373).

For Zhuangzi, wisdom requires the realization of perspectivism, and his philosophy aims “not to search for truth but to question its limits” (Lai, 2006, p. 371). Rather, “wisdom consists in *understanding* that individual perspectives are limited....For Zhuangzi wisdom lies in the realization that one’s individual insights and grand theories—however sweeping and inclusive they may seem—are ultimately perspectival” (Lai, 2006, p. 373, 371). This realization allows us to hold perspectives lightly.

When perspectivism goes unrecognized problems ensue. For example, to the extent that any perception is not recognized as perspectival—and therefore as partial, selective, and relative—it will tend to produce a corresponding experience, worldview, and self-sense that will be assumed to be accurate and correct. As such, this perception will likely:

- Go unquestioned
- Result in self-deception and delusion
- Reinforce one’s current belief system and worldview
- Foster dogmatism

- Serve a defensive “legitimizing” function (Wilber, 2005), i.e., defend and preserve the current self-sense and developmental level, rather than fostering further development
- Create suffering. Once one appreciates the power of perspective, one also recognizes just how many of our individual, social, and global problems are caused by the failure to recognize perspectivism (Walsh, 2009).

The challenge for all of us, and something that wise people may do exceptionally well and often, is therefore to continuously attempt to:

- Recognize unhelpful, partial perspectives, in both ourselves and others.
- Release and integrate these limited, harmful perspectives into more encompassing (contextually wider and developmentally deeper) metaperspectives.

Of course, recognizing, releasing, and growing beyond our current perspectives is not always easy. Yet it is rewarding, and Sri Aurobindo’s biographer gave a beautiful account of perspectival maturation as follows:

And yet we only knew how each loss of one’s viewpoint is a progress and how life changes when one passes from the stage of the closed truth to the stage of the open truth—a truth like life itself, too great to be trapped by points of view, because it embraces every point of view...a truth great enough to deny itself and pass endlessly into a higher truth. (Satprem, 1968, p. 84)

6. **Multiperspectival:** When people are locked into a single perspective they suffer from the pathology of *perspectival fixation*, and the painful results include close-mindedness, rigidity and dogmatism. In contrast, wise people will probably recognize and adopt multiple perspectives. Their multiperspectivalism, prospectival fluidity, and greater perspectival range will presumably be associated with qualities of greater open-mindedness and tolerance of ambiguity, and both these qualities have been found to correlate with wisdom scores (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Helson & Srivastava, 2002).
7. *Perspectival fluidity* is the ability to move easily and quickly between perspectives. This ability is probably related to the Buddhist psychology (*abhidharma*) qualities of mental pliancy and agility which are healthy qualities that are fostered by contemplative practices (Nyanaponika Thera, 1998).
8. **Coordinating perspectives:** Once people have grown beyond perspectival fixation and are able to fluidly move between perspectives, then they are likely to begin coordinating them. “Coordinating perspectives refers to the simultaneous consideration of two or more perspectives...” (Martin, Sohol, & Elfers, 2008, p. 294).
9. **Metaperspectival capacities:** Wise people may be able to adopt higher order metaperspectives. By being able to disidentify from earlier perspectives, and to then look back at, and evaluate them from a higher metaperspective, wise people will be better able to more accurately assess and integrate lower order perspectives.

10. Integration of multiple perspectives: A further developmental skill beyond simply recognizing, comparing, and coordinating perspectives is integrating them. With their capacity for adopting metaperspectives, wise people will be better able to recognize relationships between, and forge integrations of, individual points of view, including ones that previously seemed unrelated, incompatible, or conflictual.

Metaperspectives and perspectival integration have been recognized for millennia, and used to produce profound contemplative practices and philosophical syntheses. For example, Hua Yan Buddhism recognizes several perspectival levels described as the *dharmadatus* or worlds revealed by successively deeper perspectives on and insight into reality. Very simply, the first *dharmadatu* is our ordinary perceptual world of form, while the second is the meditative recognition that all phenomena are *sunyata* or empty. The third *dharmadatu* is the recognition of “nonobstruction,” meaning that form and emptiness are not conflictual or even different. As the Heart Sutra, which is chanted daily in most Zen monasteries, says “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.”

With the aid of these recognitions, Hua Yan philosophy and practice aim at recognizing and integrating multiple perspectivism. “The goal seems to be a type of perspectival flexibility, which corrects the obsessive—compulsive tendency to identify with a single perspective by acknowledging the multiplicity of perspectives available and by adopting higher-order perspectives that reconcile the inconsistencies present between lower order perspectives” (Fox, 2006, p. 738).

11. Big picture perspectives: The ability to recognize, adopt, and integrate multiple perspectives may allow wise people to recognize big pictures. They may be better able to see and think systemically and metasystemically, and to recognize and work with greater complexity (Commons & Richards, 2003).

These big pictures may be big both spatially and temporarily. That is, they may have both greater spatial scope and time span. This is one reason why wisdom may correlate with greater awareness of, and care for, larger communities such as all humankind and all life (a worldcentric perspective), as well as larger time frames such as a concern for future generations.

This principle is expressed exquisitely in the Native American emphasis on considering the welfare of “the seventh generation.” “One of the first mandates given us as Chiefs” wrote a Native American leader is to, “make every decision that we make relate to the welfare and wellbeing of the seventh generation to come....where are you taking them? What will they have?” (Lyons, 1994, p. 173).

12. Big picture and fine detail: When a capacity for seeing big pictures is merged with perspectival fluidity and perspectival integration, it yields the ability to zoom in and out. This is the ability to move fluidly between close up, fine detail perspectives and big picture metaperspectives, and to then integrate them.

Zoom skills have long been recognized as valuable by ancient philosophers such as Plato and the Stoics, by contemplative practitioners, and now by business leaders.

Some people prefer to see things up close, others from afar. Both perspectives—worm’s eye and bird’s eye—have virtues and pathologies. But they should be vantage points, not fixed positions. Leaders need multiple perspectives to get a complete picture. Effective leaders zoom in and zoom.... A failure to zoom can spell doom. As we have seen, problems arise when people get stuck at one end of the scale and are unable to move to the other for a different perspective. (Kanter, 2013, p. 99, 103)

Tibetan Buddhism recommends “a view as vast as the sky, but an analysis as fine as barley flour” (Surya Das, 2012). Clearly, zoom skills have been valued for thousands of years.

13. Beneficial perspectives: Since benevolence is a core characteristic of wisdom (Jeste, Ardel, Blazer et al, 2010; Walsh, 2014a), wise people will seek perspectives and consequent actions to enhance the wellbeing of everyone, including themselves. To focus only on themselves would be selfishness; to focus only on others would be sacrifice. Wisdom seeks a balance and win-win situation (Sternberg, 1998). This specific ability—indeed, all these perspectival abilities—will likely tend to make wise people exceptionally benevolent, helpful, effective, and skillful.
14. Reframing is the conscious choice of an alternate perspective. This shift—which is also known as cognitive reappraisal or reattribution—can sometimes produce remarkably rapid benefits, and is a central therapeutic technique in cognitive therapy and neurolinguistic programming. Several studies suggest that wise people are able to reframe challenging life events so as to eventually see them as valuable learning opportunities (Glück & Bluck, 2014, p. 90).
15. Metaframing is the conscious choice of a metaperspective. Metaframing offers the benefits of reframing plus the ability to look back, assess, and situate previous perspectives from a higher order perspective.

The Farther Reaches of Perspectival Maturity: Is there a Final Perspective?

So where does perspectival maturity culminate? There are three answers.

One answer is in a fluid openness to all perspectives: a capacity for adopting any and all perspectives that are helpful for experiencing, understanding, and responding to life. This is a way of seeing and being that is no longer limited to any one view but rather is open to all views. It is an ability to appreciate the boundless perspectival possibilities of life, and yet to spontaneously select those appropriate to the moment. We might call it panperspectival or omniperspectival. The American teacher Almaas (2014) describes this beautifully:

The view of totality is an understanding that allows and holds multiple views at once: the ego view, the essential view, the boundless view, the view of one or another realization, the Christian view, the Buddhist view, the view of nonduality, the dual view, the view of being an individual, the view of not being an individual, and infinite other views... So this view is totally open and open-ended. The importance of such a view is that when we fully understand the view of totality, we don’t need to stick to any one particular view. We can

acknowledge and include many different views and, at the same time, the perspective of totality gives us the freedom to take any one view at any particular time without having to adhere to that view as our ideology or as the final word on reality. (p. 92)

This understanding recognizes that there is no final experience or way of looking at it. As the quotation by Satprem described, there are always more possibilities, more perspectives, and more metaperspectives, and the result is, as Almaas (2014) subtitled his book, “a life of ceaseless discovery.”

A closely related potential is a higher order integration of perspectives. Almaas pointed to this. So did Aurobindo (1970) who claimed that in the higher reaches of postconventional development, the Higher Mind may be able to recognize and integrate all relevant perspectives, “seeing at a single view” and “capable of infinite enlargement” (p. 940).

And finally, all perspectives may dissolve into transperspectival awareness. From this awareness, perspectives can then be allowed to reemerge, beneficial perspectives can be selected, with their partial selective nature recognized, and their transperspectival, transpersonal ground remembered.

Fostering Perspectival Capacities and Wisdom

Can these perspectival capacities be fostered—and with them, wisdom—and if so how? Again there is very little research. However, two families of approaches may be helpful: general and specific practices.

General practices enhance overall psychological health and maturity, and thus facilitate multiple capacities, presumably including sapiential and perspectival capacities. These practices include a wide array of lifestyle, psychotherapeutic, and contemplative disciplines (for reviews see Walsh, 1999, 2011; Yalom, 2003). Specific practices or disciplines aim at fostering specific skills, in this case perspectival skills.

Specific Practices for Cultivating Perspectival Skills

At least seven kinds of specific practices may be helpful.

1. Learning about perspectives and perspectival skills. Learning about potentials, such as perspectival skills, as well as their benefits and the possibility of developing them, may inspire some people to begin doing so.
2. Social contact with, modeling by, and transmission from wise people who are perspectivally skillful. This is a specific example of the social learning theory principle that many skills are learned by observation and imitation of skilled exemplars.
3. Instruction: Active instruction in perspectival skills — such as recognizing, assessing, and consciously choosing perspectives—is a common element of coaching and psychotherapy.

It is especially common in cognitive therapy and neurolinguistic programming which emphasize reframing (Beck & Weishaar, 2014).

4. Reflective dialogue aimed at mutual learning, growth, and emancipation is a venerable and powerful technique. Varieties that have flourished for millennia include Socratic dialogue, Tibetan Buddhist debate, as well as Jewish Torah study where “one works in a dyad called a *chavruta*. The two partners learn together, challenging one another lovingly, sharpening one another, working toward truthful understanding...” (Boettiger, 2014, p. 18).

Dialogue can unveil the limitations of individual assumptions, such as those that fuel psychopathology, as well as of collective assumptions, such as those that support cultural hegemony, inequality, and injustice. Reflective dialogue is therefore a central element of several therapies, educational systems, and social movements. These include group psychotherapy, “consciousness raising circles” such as those of the women’s movement, “transformative learning” for adult education, and Paolo Freire’s “culture circles” aimed at cultural and social emancipation of the poor. Considerable research evidence supports the effectiveness of such groups and dialogue (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006; Mezirow, 1990; Yalom & Leczsz, 2005).

5. Novel experiences: Exposure to novel experiences has long been known to offer mental stimulation and foster creativity. Historically, regions of intercultural mixing have been notably creative, and travel was said to broaden the mind. The value of novelty is borne out by research suggesting that transformative learning is enhanced by “putting participants in unfamiliar and new situations, ... maximizing the diversity mix of participants, ... and repeated team opportunities balancing action and reflection” (Lamb, 2003, pp. 266-267). Presumably, novel experiences, ideas, and cultures call unrecognized personal and cultural assumptions into question, and promote the exploration of new perspectives.
6. Education: The proper goal of education is perennially disputed. At one extreme is the technical–economic goal of providing students with the information and skills to find jobs and fuel the economy. Very different is the developmental–cultural goal of fostering questioning and growth for individual and cultural maturation. Both goals are obviously necessary, though it is a perennial struggle to preserve the developmental–cultural goal against economic forces.

Adult education which aims for developmental goals is often called “transformational learning” because it aims, not just to fill learners with facts, but to transform how learners view themselves and their society. It does this in significant part by encouraging students to question their assumptions and broaden their perspectives. A central technique is “critical reflection” to question the validity of assumptions, and then “reformulating the assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective.... *More inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspectives are superior perspectives*” (Mezirow, 1990, p.14). Hopefully, this kind of assumptive and perspectival transformation leads to greater maturity and wisdom since “although wisdom cannot be taught in the same way as intellectual

knowledge and technical expertise, it can be taught indirectly by helping students to view and experience the world from many different angles...” (Ardelt, Ackenbaum & Oh, 2014, p. 288).

Three transformational learning programs have been especially influential. These are the German *Bildung* tradition of personal and cultural maturation, Paolo Freire’s social emancipatory education, and Jack Mezirow’s transformative learning.

A core goal of transformative learning is recognizing and growing beyond limiting assumptions and perspectives. Learning is thought to occur via four main processes: experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and then action to express one’s new perspective (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). “Probably more than any other approach, this [transformational learning] theory has captured the attention of educators over the last fifteen years” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006, p. 157).

7. Deliberately adopting other people’s perspectives may be beneficial (Bassett, in press). Clint Fuhs (2010) and his colleagues have developed a group exercise “The Meta-Practice” where members practice adopting each other’s perspectives and metaperspectives.
8. Adopting novel spatial or imaginal perspectives is a time honored philosophical and contemplative practice. Many traditions recommend reevaluating one’s life and priorities from a larger perspective, such as the infinity of space or the eternity of time (Hadot, 2002; Walsh, 1999). In *The Republic* (486A), Plato urged us to develop “a mind habituated to...the contemplation of all time and all existence,” a cosmic perspective which disentangles us from mundane obsessions. As the Stoic philosopher Seneca put it picturesquely, such a mind “casting a contemptuous glance at the narrow globe of the earth from above, says to itself: ‘so this is the pin-point which so many nations divide among themselves with fire and sword? How ridiculous are the boundaries of men!’” (cited in Hadot, 1995, pp. 98-99). Metaperspectives can be revealing and freeing.
9. Meditation has long been the cornerstone of advanced contemplative practice and is now the most researched of all contemplative and psychotherapeutic disciplines (Walsh, 2014a, b). It is widely held to foster wisdom, and the famed Rabbi Nachman claimed “One who does not meditate cannot have wisdom” (Buber, 1970, p. 37). As yet, there is no contemporary research on its effects on wisdom or perspectives.

However, certain meditation practices, especially mindfulness and analytic practices, may be helpful, both generally in catalyzing psychological growth, and specifically in enhancing perspectival skills. Mindfulness and analytic practices foster careful observation of experience and disidentification from mental processes, which are both probably central processes in perspectival and metaperspectival skills.

Conclusion

This article offers multiple varieties of evidence and lines of reasoning suggesting that perspectival skills may be central elements of wisdom and essential ways to foster it. As yet there is little research on either wisdom or adult perspectival capacities, and so the suggestions

presented here are initial forays into the relationship between these two important skills. These suggestions are hypotheses that will hopefully in time be tested, and thereby enhance both wisdom and perspectival capacities.

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