



Wisdom: From Philosophy to Neuroscience

Stephen S. Hall

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A compelling investigation into one of our most coveted and cherished ideals, and the efforts of modern science to penetrate the mysterious nature of this timeless virtue.

We all recognize wisdom, but defining it is more elusive. In this fascinating journey from philosophy to science, Stephen S. Hall gives us a dramatic history of wisdom, from its sudden emergence in four different locations (Greece, China, Israel, and India) in the fifth century B.C. to its modern manifestations in education, politics, and the workplace. We learn how wisdom became the provenance of philosophy and religion through its embodiment in individuals such as Buddha, Confucius, and Jesus; how it has consistently been a catalyst for social change; and how revelatory work in the last fifty years by psychologists, economists, and neuroscientists has begun to shed light on the biology of cognitive traits long associated with wisdom—and, in doing so, begun to suggest how we might cultivate it.

Hall explores the neural mechanisms for wise decision making; the conflict between the emotional and cognitive parts of the brain; the development of compassion, humility, and empathy; the effect of adversity and the impact of early-life stress on the development of wisdom; and how we can learn to optimize our future choices and future selves.

Hall's bracing exploration of the science of wisdom allows us to see this ancient virtue with fresh eyes, yet also makes clear that despite modern science's most powerful efforts, wisdom continues to elude easy understanding.

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