



Humility and Wisdom: A Reflection

We have all reached out to others—parents, grandparents, siblings, friends and colleagues—to ask for advice regarding issues important to each of us. When we do so, we are seeking an opinion, a reaction, or a point of view from someone we respect because we frequently benefit from others' wisdom.

In *The Road to Character*,¹ David Brooks, a writer, says, “Humility is the awareness that there’s a lot you don’t know and that a lot of what you think you know is distorted or wrong.” He continues, “This is the way humility leads to wisdom. Wisdom isn’t a body of information. It’s the moral quality of knowing what you don’t know and figuring out a way to handle your ignorance, uncertainty, and limitation. Wisdom is not knowledge. It is knowing how to behave when perfect knowledge is lacking.”

Humility leads one to seek the wisdom of others. Brooks says, “Humility is the awareness that your individual talents *alone* are inadequate to the tasks” that you face. Seeking another’s perspective (wisdom) is an act of humility.

Aristotle’s basic idea of practical wisdom² offers that, “Wisdom is not just one type of knowledge, but diverse. What a wise person needs to know and understand constitutes a varied list: the most important goals and values of life—what means will reach these goals without too great a cost; what kinds of dangers threaten the achieving of these goals; how to recognize and avoid or minimize the dangers.” Again, here we find the connection between humility and wisdom. Humility allows us to recognize that there is diversity in perspectives. Youth and intelligence, coupled

with diverse input and humility, bring wisdom to today’s challenges. The perspectives (wisdom) of those who have lived through many more experiences can have something to offer in shaping one’s own perspective.

The ability to write and immediately disseminate one’s perspective electronically has a major impact on communication today. Issues that one is passionate about frequently lead to the desire to share that perspective with others, often many others. Having humility and discipline allow us to be mindful and pause before sending a message to consider the value of seeking diverse perspectives before doing so. This, in turn, may lead to a change in one’s thinking or strategy or to affirm that one’s perspective is shared by others, including those who have had more or similar experiences. We can all benefit by approaching others with an attitude of humility, so that we may continue to learn and grow from one another, broadening our personal perspectives and adding to our wisdom, brick by brick, of living through life experiences.

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References

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2. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Wisdom as knowing how to live well. Available at: plato.stanford.edu. Accessed February 4, 2013.

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