WESTERN TRADITIONAL WISDOM PHILOSOPHIES AND PERSONALITY: A PRELIMINARY STUDY[1]

Livia García
Vicente Pelechano

Universidad de La Laguna (Islas Canarias)

SUMMARY

There are several legitimate ways of conceptualising and studying wisdom. One is largely informed by Western philosophy and treats wisdom as an analytic theory of expert knowledge, judgement, and advice about difficult and uncertain matters of life. Another is more consistent with Asian philosophical non-secularised traditions and treats wisdom such a product of wise persons. The second approach is always an approximation to the analytically constructed utopia of wisdom. Wisdom, a concept rich in meaning and cultural history is introduced as a topic of psychological research. The results are discussed in order to propose a multidimensional model of wisdom. Questionnaires on Stoic and Epicurean wisdom approaches were fulfilled by two samples (291 and 397 adults). Each questionnaire was factor analysed with a monofactorial solution in the first case and tree factorial in the second, and then a common solution was carried out. Also the participants fulfilled various personality questionnaires. The main results are the following: (a) some com-

ponents of "traditional" wisdom approaches (Stoicism and epicureism), are present in contemporary ways of living, but there is not a coherent and different approach for each one; (b) we isolate a common factor pertaining to both traditions, and this factor has an acceptable alpha value (.80); (c) the wisdom factor is a source of individual differences for the usual categories (age, socio-economic level, civil status); (d) the coefficients among "wisdom" and personality factors are scare (this result suggests that wisdom and personality are different domains); (e) the isolated factors of "traditional" wisdom, are potential elements for a new theory of wisdom, as a set of adult competences close to practical intelligence. The results can be relevant for a new theory of adult competences.

Key words: *COMMON THEORY OF WISDOM, SAYINGS, WISDOM ASSESSMENT, INTELLIGENCE AND WISDOM, PERSONALITY AND WISDOM.*

INTRODUCTION

Historically, it has been mainly the fields of philosophy and religious studies that have served as the central forum for discourse about the concept of wisdom. At the current historical moment, however, renewed interest in the topic of wisdom is evident in a wide spectrum of disciplines ranging from philosophy and religious studies, to cultural anthropology, political science, education, psychology and the traditional idea of mentors of wisdom.

Psychological study of wisdom is recent. It was not until the 1980s that a more diverse group of psychological researchers began to engage themselves with this topic, although most work has been theoretical rather than empirical. Most of the proposed models give more theoretical suggestions than data. Sternberg (1990) is an example of the growing interest in wisdom, his model has restricted wisdom to cognitive elements, the isolated components are situated on different epistemological levels and its operationalization degree is not the same. The differences and referents of these proposed components of wisdom are not satisfactory.

One of the mainl problems that we found when we study the concept of "wisdom" is related to definition. There is not consensus

among different researchers on this topic, such as has happened with the concepts of health or personality. The study of wisdom is being introduced in psychology through different theoretical perspectives, focusing on the theoretical frame rather than the development of instruments directed to assess that phenomenon.

There are some theoretical lines in the study of wisdom which give the following definitions: (a) Wisdom is to be understood as a knowledge about the formal and deep structures of reality. This idea of wisdom is present in different philosophies (eg.: metaphysical and theological). (b) Wisdom is related to a knowledge based on a historical and developmental relativism. (c) Wisdom as in Sternberg view (1995, 1998), is a part of the "practical intelligence". This author (Sternberg 1998, 2001) initially defended a unitary definition of intelligence but later includes a two or three factor definition of intelligence (the academic intelligence; the practice intelligence, basically social; and "wisdom", practice intelligence, with implicit codes and values of solidarity and altruism). (d) Some authors understand wisdom as a knowledge with psychodynamic bases, that can be apply in humanistic and psychoanalytic therapies (Ciapini, 1999). (e) One different line has been follow by the Berlin group around Baltes who has been working over 20 years to obtain an experimental basis for the theory. For Baltes wisdom it related to basic and important questions of daily life (Smith & Baltes, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Baltes & Freund, 2003). Wisdom is understand such as one of the most fundamental components of human potential. This idea can be included among the option of the developmental theory known as SOC (selection, optimisation and compensation). (f) Finally, we can group different studies of wisdom that refer to a "popular psychology" used by "non-professional" persons and related to concepts such as wisdom, old age or intelligence (Clayton, 1975, 1982; Holliday y Chandler, 1986; Sternberg, 1985). This approach allows the isolation of the semantic conglomerates close to wisdom and thereby clarifying its meaning.

The above options include almost all the different formulations that represent the majority of the current theoretical proposals. Such options include in a different levels of theoretical and empirical development giving place to a non-coherent image. This situation

could enlarged to include the possibility of a belief in the existence of a different type of "wisdom", and would entail the existence of more than one factor to wisdom, or the existence of different models, and the possibility of more than one type of process implicated in the different wisdom. In this sense we can understand this research.

Among all the different authors and groups, the most active possibly is the aforementioned Paul Baltes. Our attention was centred on Baltes et al., option that had devoted the largest queerly of experimental data to the idea to analysing what happens with different samples. They have defined "wisdom" as an "expert knowledge system in the fundamental pragmatics of life". The term "fundamental pragmatics of life" refers to knowledge about significant aspects concerning the meaning and conducts of life, and includes knowledge about life planning, life management and life interpretation. Wisdom is not necessarily only a property of individuals. It can also be found in written material, such as religious or legal texts. Nevertheless, Baltes has focused on wisdom related knowledge as expressed in a person's thoughts and judgment. They consider "wisdom" as expert knowledge about life meaning and conduct to also include interpersonal, motivational, and emotional competencies. Empirical findings of these authors (Baltes y Staudinger, 2000) suggested that wisdom-related performance can be assessed reliably, shows meaningful relationships with measures of intelligence and personality and allows the identification of a theory-consistent group differences. These authors changed the theoretical view of wisdom in an integrative frame of human "potentialities", with the SOC model (selectivity, optimisation and compensation) proposed.

From a different focus, Pelechano is proposing a model where wisdom is understood as a plural concept. This wisdom has a cultural influence, it is present at an early age and includes a type of knowledge closely related to interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, oriented towards obtaining some happiness, connected with aspects of solidarity and different to the traditional concept of personality dimensions and academic intelligence.

A source of "Wisdom" can be found in proverbs (sayings); in the knowledge of the interpersonal world, which would give a certain success in society and in some Western traditional ways of thinking.

In this case, we will limit our study to Stoicism and epicureism. Stoicism and epicureism emerged after the death of Alexander the Great where the social situation changes. Human beings change from "citizens" of a town, to become "citizens" of an empire. Individual more than group solutions were used as a first attempt to globalisation.

Taking account of these aspects we try to find some determinants of the "secular approach". Some personality variables may be influence ways of "perceiving" and "grouping" those perceptions and expressions related with wisdom, reflecting in this case that there are not one but different ways to understand the phenomeno. In this sense and in our research different personality questionnaires and Stoic and Epicurean wisdom questionnaires were applied.

The objectives we want to achieve in this study are the following:

(a) To present the first results of internal validation of Stoic and Epicurean wisdom they are present questionnaires, to know if both ways of thinking are present today and how (level of coherence, independence or similarity).

(b) To study the relation between these questionnaires and traditional dimensions of personality to discover if they are the same or different elements of personal function.

METHOD

The questionnaires were completed by two samples, one of 291 adults, (70% of women, with ages between 15 and 80 (average 24.36), about 80.7% single and 74% university graduates.

397 adults of similar characteristics composed the second sample: 70.8% women, with a range of age between 18 and 83 (average 24.76), three-quaters single (77.7%) and one in five married or living togheter. From the overall sample, 73.3% were university graduates.

Different questionnaires were administered to each subject. To evaluate personality dimensions the Questionnaire NEOPI-R of Costa & McCrae (1992) (Spanish adaptation) was complete, which evaluates five factors: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness.

To evaluate Epicurean wisdom, Pelechano selected from this philosophy, 22 double items. The subject has to choose "the most truthful" of two affirmative answers. Which one of them agreed with Epicurean philosophy. For ejample: (A) "only the weak are influenced by rage or favors" and (B) "life is interaction among humans for this reason we are affected by those who criticize or praise us" (the Epicurean option is A).

To measure Stoic wisdom, Pelechano created 35 items with 4 answer options (according to the frequency it is put in practice) from Epicteto's philosophy. The subjects choose one of the four options in each item. An example of an item is: "It is useless to get angry when you are criticized. It is more important what I think about myself".

The questionnaires were voluntarily completed, individually or in small groups. This procedure was anonymouso on both occasions. The individual questionnaires were sent to a Psychological Department University of La Laguna.

The number of participants in each instrument and occasion were different. All "incomplete" questionnaires were omitted for the correlational analysis. Correlational, factorial analysis and multiple regression (stepwise) were made.

RESULTS

(1). The factorial composition of Stoic wisdom questionnaire.- A factorial analysis was made for the 291 subjects sample (SPSS version 11) with principal components and oblimin rotation. The factorial solution explains the 40% of variance and had three factors with items with factorial weight over 0.40.

These those factors are the following: (a) *Critical gossip* (examples of items are: "I believe I criticize others more than I should" and "When I talk to others, I finish talking about myself". (b) A factor name as *Self-demanding constructivism* (examples of items are: "Suffering is not caused by what happens but how we feel about them" and "Struggling for the impossible is noble, but one always loses". (c) A third and last factor was *Pragmatic mercantilism* (examples of items

are: "The more money the merrier" and "I suffer over things I have done or should have but do not").

A second order analysis (principal components and varimax rotation), which gave a monofactorial solution, was carried out (the weight of three factors are: 0.82. 0.75 and 0.66). The average relation between the isolated factors was 0.35. This factor is composed of a group of Stoic and anti-Stoic elements that are present in personal contemporary dynamics and could be named *Criticizes others, mercantilism and Stoicism* (primacy of emotional constructivism).

(2) The factorial composition of Epicurean wisdom questionnaire.- The sample consist of 397 subjects (70.8% women, average age 24.76 years, 77.7% single, 73% university graduates). The results were factorially analyzed. Eight first order factors reflected the large range of content (principal components, oblimin rotation, 58% explained variance, weight factorial > 0.40). The average correlation between them had been 0.31.

With these eight first order factors we made a second order (principal components, varimax solution) that gave three clear factors (weight factorial > 0.40) which were identified as: (a) *Pleasure based in knowledge and escape from pain.* The items are as following: "The greatest pleasures are those small uplifts in every day life" "What causes pleasure now and trouble later is negative". (b) *Kindness in itself* (not for a profit) *and refusal of power* (some examples of this factor are: "The things I do are good or bad depending on how they affect others" and "That some human being have more power than others is just as normal as walking"-negative sign-). (c) *Personal kindness highlighting wisdom and self-control* (examples are: "Luck does not exist, what exist is the knowledge when and how things happen" and "To make personal peace and this knowledge worth the effort, one must be kind-hearted and wish no one any harm").

3. The relationship between Stoic and Epicurean wisdom.- 276 subjects have fulfilled both Stoic and Epicurean questionnaires (71.4% women, average age 24.31, 81.4% singles, 75.8% university graduates). This allowed the fulfillment of a joint factorial analysis, using as variables the first order factors in both questionnaires.

A two-factor solution was obtained (principal components, oblimin rotation, 77.92% total variance). *The first factor* includes the Stoic
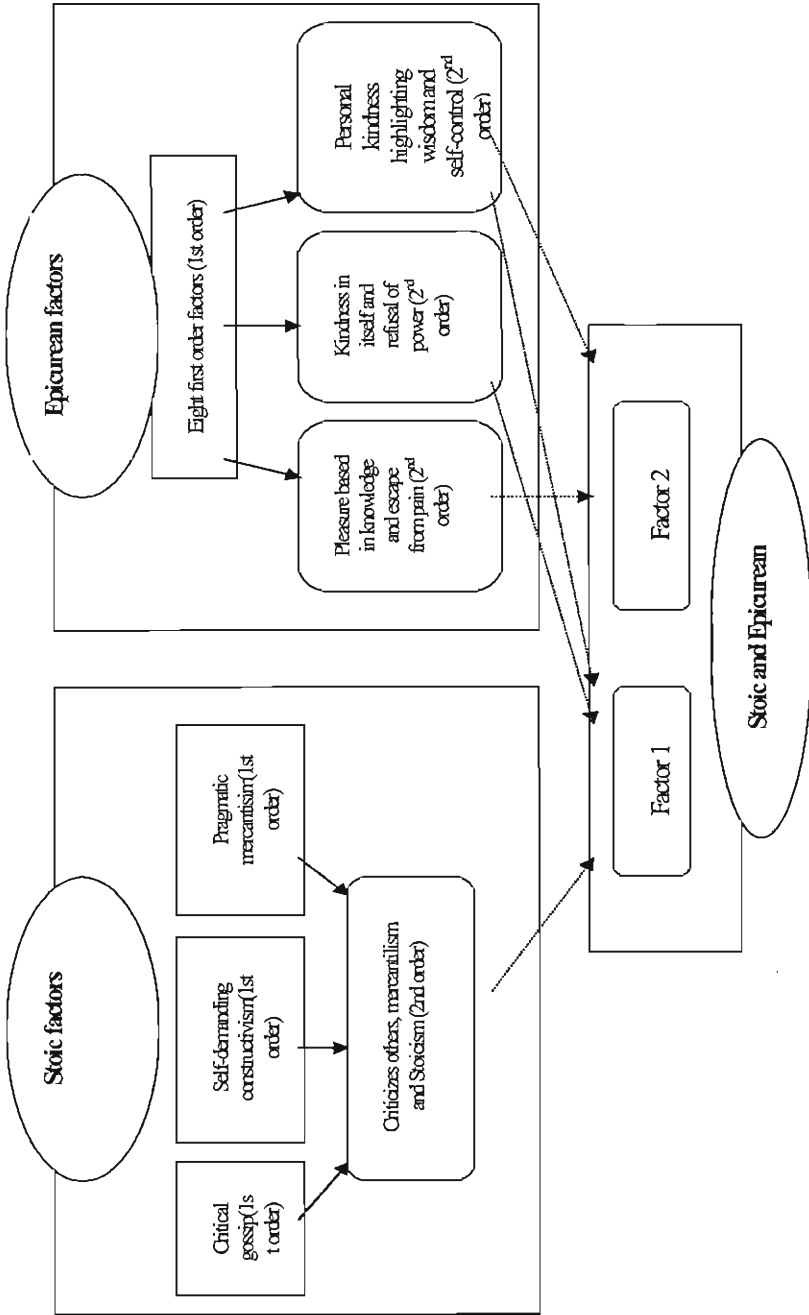
Figure 1.- Factorial analisys of the Stoic wisdom, Epicurean wisdom and relation between both factorization.

second order factor (criticizes others, mercantilism and Stoicism), the second Epicurean factor (kindness in itself and refusal of power) and the third Epicurean factor (personal kindness highlighting wisdom and self-control). This joint factor contains a great deal emotional constructivism Stoic components (although with a positive contemporary assessment of mercantilism). *The second factor* contains two Epicurean factors with predominance in intraception (pleasure based on knowledge and escape from pain), and besides this, the third Epicurean factor, which already appeared in the first factor, but with negative saturation (personal kindness highlighting wisdom and self-control).

4. Stoic and Epicurean wisdom and personality.- We investigated the relationship between personality factors and wisdom factors (Stoic and Epicurean factors) whit the idea of discovering if wisdom, which we considered is related with the practice intelligence, maintain relation with the area of personality dimensions. In order to check that idea, we made different correlations (Pearson product moment correlation) between the five personality factors and second order Stoic and Epicurean factors.

Table 1.- Correlations between wisdom factors and the *Big-five Factor Model*

	N	E	Op	Agr	Consc
Stoic	-0.34***	0.06	0.05	0.27***	0.24***
Epi1	-0.11	0.09	0.10	0.15*	0.09
Epi2	-0.09	0.15*	0.00	0.12	0.01
Epi3	-0.16*	0.09	-0.11	0.25***	0.32***

Note: Stoic= Criticizes others, mercantilism and emotional constructivism;
Epi1: Pleasure based in knowledge and escape from pain;
Epi2: Kindness in itself and refusal of power;
Epi3: Personal kindness highlighting wisdom and self-control;
N = Neuroticism; E = Extraversion; O = Openness; Agr = Agreeableness;
Consc = Conscientiousness; * = 0.05; *** = 0.001.

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The present analysis shows some interesting results. An over view allows us consider that the coefficient amount shows that there are some dis-similar relations between wisdom factors and any of the big-five.

Furthermore, The "new Stoicism" factor (criticizes others, mercantilism and emotional constructivism), a second order factor, has a positive and significative relationship with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (p > 0.001), a negative one with Neuroticism (p > 0.001) and having no relationship with Extraversion and Openness factors.

The third Epicurean factor, "personal kindness highlighting wisdom and self-control", has a similar correlations pattern, with significative and positive correlations with Agreeableness (p > 0.001) and Conscientiousness (p > 0.001) and with negative to the Stoic factor (criticizes others, mercantilism and emotional constructivism) although with less intensity than in the previous Stoic factor (p > 0.05).

The other two Epicurean factors show some significant relation but of less quantity: The Epicurean factor of "pleasure based on knowledge and escape from pain", shows only one singifican relationship with the factor of Agreeableness (p > 0.05); the second Epicurean factor, "kindness in itself and refusal of power", shows significant and positive relationship to Extraversion (p > 0.05). In the others cases there are no significant relationship between these Epicurean factors and personality dimensions.

Finally we can observe a general patron of relationship between the wisdom factors and the big-five factors. In all of them, the second order Stoic and Epicurean factors maintain a negative relatioship with the personality factor of Neuroticism. Whereas the relationship of these factors with the rest of personality dimensions (Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness), although are not significant in every case, they are   neverthelesspositive.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Wisdom has been a topic that although present in the Western thinking for centuries has been ignored in mainstream scientific inquiry

for decades. Wisdom has been thought to be an ideal endpoint of human development. The view of wisdom as something that is prized has been with us since antiquity.

The beginning of the empirical study of wisdom has been mainly a "secular approach" to wisdom, an implicit theory of wisdom and wise persons. Such implicit and folk psychological characterizations of wisdom are foremost the product of cultural history and its impact on current society. It is related with the analysis of qualifications made by "no professionals" about the psychology of these topics. In the same sense it happens with the lexical approach in the search of basic personality dimensions.

From explicit psychological theories of wisdom, the authors focuse on behavioural manifestations of expressions of wisdom and refer to theoretical constructions of wisdom that lend to an empirical inquiry in terms of quantifiable operationalization as well as the identification of relevant antecedents, correlates, and consequences of wisdom and wisdom-related concepts.

The conceptualisation of wisdom as an expert system dealing with the meaning and conduct of life is defended Berlin group (Staudinger & Baltes, 1994). During the last decade, the Berlin group around Baltes has developed a psychological conceptualisation of wisdom (Baltes y Staudinger, 2000), consistent with historical and philosophical conceptions and based on theories and methods developed in lifespan developmental and cognitive psychology. Wisdom represents a very selective and contrasted knowledge on human nature and "wise" behaviour (knowledge, sentiments, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour's prescriptions).

Another psychological theory of wisdom is the recent work by Sternberg (1998). Sternberg conceptualises wisdom as the application of tacit knowledge towards the achievement of a common good through a balance among multiple personal (intra-, inter-, and extra personal) interests and environmental conditions.

Focused on these lines of thought we try to analyse what is understood by "wisdom" and the degree of relationship with other concepts such as "intelligence" or "creativity". Wisdom is understood, in one of its forms as the ability to define and solve problems. We are defending the idea of wisdom related to interpersonal and

intrapersonal intelligence (Pelechano, 2000). Staudinger and Pasupathi (2003) founded in an adolescent sample that intelligence and personality emerged as the strongest unique predictors of wisdom-related performance. With differens results, Pelechano and González-Leandro (2004) found that in adolescents there is a clear differentiation between wisdom and intelligence.

The present study tries to clarify the concept of "wisdom", looking for the internal structure of this concept. In this case we centre our effort on trying to determine the multifactoriality of the wisdom concept or otherwise. And, in this case, to obtain the possible relationship between the different wisdom factors. The relations between wisdom and personality dimensions was analysed with the idea that we are talking about different worlds, and in order to sustain a multifactorial conception of wisdom, we anticipated the relation could be different depending on different wisdom factors.

Factorial analyses of Stoic wisdom show in a second order, one factor "criticizes others, mercantilism and Stoicism" whiles in the case of Epicurean wisdom appear three second order factors (pleasure based in knowledge and escape from pain, kindness in itself and refusal of power and personal kindness highlighting wisdom and self-control). This may reflect a different understanding of the two types of philosophies although when both were factorised, a common factor emerge which appears to have some related characteristics and another factor with isolated Epicurean characteristics.

Correlational results reveal a positive relationship between the different wisdom factors and most of the personality dimensions. One exception was found with the Neuroticism factor, with the overall negatives correlations. *Criticizes others, mercantilism and emotional constructivism* and *personal kindness highlighting wisdom and self-control*, are the two factors which maintain more close relation with personality, specifically with Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Neuroticism (negatives).

Some general conclusions are the following:

1. A Stoic wisdom belief exist in the contemporary world, although it is linked to a certain consumerism. A general factor would exist with these components to which we could add an Epicurean determinism factor.

2. An Epicurean wisdom belief is evident where the search for happiness in small pleasures highlighting intraception and escape from selfish position in search of happiness.

3. There is no great similarity between Stoic and Epicurean beliefs, despite the rational analysis found in philosophy literature comparisons. Only one of the three Epicurean factors seems to form part of Stoic belief.

4. The relationship between "wisdom" factors and the big-five suggest that they are negatively related to Neuroticism and in a certain way, seem to favour human cohabitation (Agreeableness and consciousness factors).

Finally, the results are understood in order to propose a multidimensional model on wisdom, in which there are different wisdom factors which maintain differential commitment each other and act differently to the different personality factors.

We suggest that adding the concept of wisdom to psychological inquiry is a worthwhile advance in the study of human relations and specifically in the study of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Wisdom is understood as a different concept of personality dimensions and academic intelligence. This study needs more empirical research in order to clarify this ancient phenomenon.

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