

## Chapter 2

# The Philosophical Approach towards Wisdom

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to review how philosophy, which is the “love of wisdom,” developed theories of wisdom. In order to do so, four periods of civilization (pre-philosophy, ancient, middle ages, and modern) will be reviewed with respect to major philosophical contributions to the area of wisdom. Particular emphasis will be placed on what we can learn from philosophy about wisdom. One of the lessons is Aristotle’s model of wisdom, which will be graphically presented in order to better understand the philosopher’s contribution. Based on Aristotle’s claim that wise men can be

only such as one who knows his/her end of life, the hierarchy of life’s purposes in Western civilization as they are perceived in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will also be graphically presented to cast awareness of how the concept of life has changed since the ancient times, when great philosophers lived and spoke about life and its wisdom. Hence, all major Western philosophical contribution towards wisdom will be presented in a graphic model, which will be analyzed from its current practical point of view. Finally the question is raised: can philosophy deliver wisdom? The answer is provided together with solutions, which are not limited to philosophy.

This synthesis of philosophical contributions to the theory of wisdom is limited to Western

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-168-3.ch002

civilization. This approach is based on the premise that wisdom is the same in all civilizations, oriented by religions. However, the means to achieving wisdom (among them reasoning) differ in particular civilizations, as is clearly explained by Walter Benesch in his study of *Comparative Philosophy* (1997).

This study is conducted by the end-user of philosophy, who is interested in applying its contributions in the area of knowledge management systems, which are information technology-oriented.

## **THE BEGINNINGS OF WISDOM**

The book of Genesis is the first book of the Bible of Judaism and of Christianity, and the first of five books of the Pentateuch or Torah. It recounts Judeo-Christian beliefs regarding the world from creation to the descent of the children of Israel into Egypt, and contains some of the best-known stories of the Old Testament, including Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah's Ark, the Tower of Babel, and the biblical Patriarchs. For Jews, the theological importance of Genesis centers on the Covenants linking God to his Chosen People, and the people to the Promised Land. Christianity has reinterpreted Genesis as the prefiguration of Christian beliefs, notably the Christian view of Christ as the new Adam and the New Testament as the culmination of the covenants. Scholars believe that it reached its final form in the fifth century B.C., with a previous history of composition reaching back possibly to the tenth century. However, the content considers topics including the beginnings of heaven, the Earth, and human life on Earth.

The Bible is considered by many people as an important source of human understanding and moral direction based on wisdom. However, it is not human wisdom, but wisdom based on divine revelation and relying on prophecy. In this book, the beginning of wisdom comes not from wonder,

but from awe and reverence. Its goal is not understanding for its own sake, but rather, applying it as a right thing (Kass, 2003, p. 3). This book reflects the wisdom of Jerusalem, not the wisdom of Athens, which provided the foundation for the main stream of civilizations and their scientific achievements, based on searching for the truth through reasoning. Unfortunately, through the following centuries and millennia this truth-oriented search replaced the quest for human wisdom, which was substituted by Jerusalemian wisdom by many important philosophers. According to these individuals, humans are not wise; only God(s) have license for wisdom.

Science and technology-driven contemporary civilizations push humans towards the rat race for wealth, health, and pleasure with the help of moral relativism, cynicism, greed, or nihilism. These kinds of qualities cannot solve problems of gene engineering, overpopulation, ecological disasters, depletion of strategic resources, and the sustainability of civilization. Human knowledge is not good enough to solve these problems. Hence wisdom is needed, which to be successful, must be applied together with spirituality (beliefs and values). The latter has not changed much since biblical times; therefore, the Bible may still be the source of morality and some wisdom for some humans, if not for all. The right complementary combination of Jerusalemian and Athenian wisdom is perhaps the solution to current civilizational problems.

## **FIRST RECORDS OF WISDOM**

The first information about wisdom comes from Egypt after 3000 B.C. It was a period when a complex society emerged as the by-product of the Egyptian state formation based on the dynasty, military control, and hieroglyphic writings for economic and administrative purposes. Most of the evidence for early writing comes from a mortuary context, and its use was mainly as-

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