



ESRAD

European Society for Research in Adult Development

CONFERENCE 2023, May 12th to 14th

Stockwell Street Building, University of Greenwich

Provisional Programme

NB. All times shown as British Summer Time (GMT+1)

Session 4B: Discussion session on wisdom

Debating wisdom: There Can be No Psychology of Wisdom without Wisdom in Psychology

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Abstract: The highest forms of adult development have been called as “reaching of wisdom”, as E.H. Erikson for example put it. There are, of course, many definitions of wisdom, and many approaches, methods, and disciplines to study it. In its attempt to define itself as a science, psychology seeks to rely upon empirical means to identify or operationalize core terms. For example, many wisdom researchers seek to define wisdom “empirically” by identifying qualities that everyday individuals use when they describe people who they consider to be “wise”. Drawing on such studies, researchers have suggested that wisdom can be understood in terms of qualities such as humility, empathy, compassion, socio-cognitive-affective understanding, and the capacity for multi-perspectival cognition. Researchers who adopt this approach define wisdom in terms of qualities that are commonly understood to reflect successful development. However, the empirical analysis of wisdom and development raise difficult questions. Despite the desire of psychologist to ground their theorizing in empirical evidence, concepts like wisdom and development are not empirical ones; they are philosophical concepts with deep axiological connotations. If this is so, then philosophical analyses of these concepts is necessary to expose their value presuppositions and hidden

assumptions -- especially regarding claims of "better", "advanced", "more developed". From some viewpoints, these kinds of claims can be seen as discriminative, even racial, and unjust, as seldom the criteria of ranking have been explicated. What does it mean to say that a certain developmental level or stage is better or more developed? How are these concepts structured by ideological, philosophical, and axiological assumptions? To the extent that philosophy can be defined as the "love for wisdom", wisdom is deeply tied to philosophy. Philosophical reflection is a precondition for any attempt to understand wisdom and its development. The psychological analysis of wisdom cannot proceed as a value-neutral process. A psychology *of* wisdom must be structured by a psychology informed *by* wisdom.