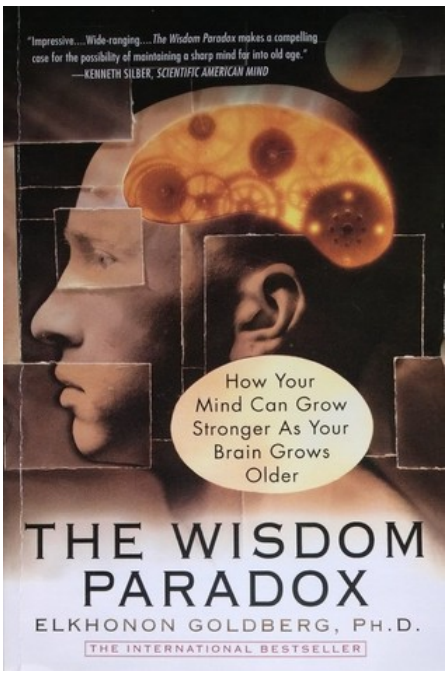

The Wisdom Paradox: How Your Mind Can Grow Stronger as Your Brain Grows Older

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The Wisdom Paradox explores the aging of the mind from a unique, positive perspective. In an era of increasing fears about mental deterioration, world-renowned neuropsychologist Elkhonon Goldberg provides startling new evidence that though the brain diminishes in some tasks as it ages, it gains in many ways. Most notably, it increases in what he terms "wisdom" the ability to draw upon knowledge and experience gained over a lifetime to make quick and effective decisions. Goldberg delves into the machinery of the mind, separating memory into two distinct types: singular (knowledge of a particular incident or fact) and generic (recognition of broader patterns). As the brain ages, the ability to use singular memory declines, but generic memory is unaffected--and its importance grows. As an individual accumulates generic memory, the brain can increasingly rely upon these stored patterns to solve problems effortlessly and instantaneously. Goldberg investigates the neurobiology of wisdom, and draws on historical examples of artists and leaders whose greatest achievements were realized late in life.

The Wisdom Paradox: How Your Mind Can Grow Stronger as Your Brain Grows Older Details

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From Reader Review The Wisdom Paradox: How Your Mind Can Grow Stronger as Your Brain Grows Older for online ebook

Phaedon says

I picked this book up, second hand, at a tiny bookstore in a random place on the Cape Peninsula. How it wound up there, I do not know, but I'm very glad that I found it.

Re-reading the many highlights I made in the book reminded me of just how much I had learned in the process of reading it. Admittedly the task was hard-going at times, but I was actually pleasantly surprised by the quality and accessibility of Goldberg's writing given his hard science background. At times it's even quite amusing, and I appreciated his occasional references to arts, culture and philosophy.

The book offers a cursory education in some of the most pertinent parts of brain function and mechanics. It also sheds light on what happens to the brain while it ages, and what you can do to go through that process more successfully.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone with a tendency towards a reflection, a reliance on their cognitive faculties for work, or just an interest in the mind. While Goldberg dedicated the book to middle-aged baby boomers, I think the best time to read it would be in your thirties or even earlier, so that you can take the learnings with you into those later stages in life.

Olatomiwa Bifarin says

Yet, some more evidences from a top neuropsychologist that we can change our brain: 'biology' is not fixed, it is a range; but more importantly - the message about attractors and aging give me some sort of relief, joy. Thank you Dr. Goldberg.

Johann Fourie says

Good read - even if you don't have any medical background

Tim says

I really decent read for the intermediate neurohack.

SooYoung says

Couldn't decide between 3 or 4, it's a solid 3.5. Basically it explores what wisdom is -- what wisdom means, how it's defined, and also a scientific view of it, where does wisdom come from within the brain? What role

does memory play in wisdom? etc. The author is a neuropsychologist, so it's certainly qualified to talk on the subject. It's very interesting, but then again, I find this topic in general pretty fascinating.

"...in order to make an impact, both genius and wisdom must be ahead of society, but not so far ahead as to be incomprehensible." p 75

Antoine says

Now this book took me about 3 months to read, and the reason is because, I one day found myself wondering around the bookstore not knowing what to read but I knew I wanted to read something intriguing so I stumbled upon this book, and it was a slow read but it put allot of things in perspective for me as far as the Brain Mind goes.

Yael says

A bit harder to read than I expected - it might have been easier in a paper version, in which you can browse to retrieve things read previously.
I wonder if there are new findings supporting his theory...

Will says

This is a much lighter book than The New Executive Brain (thank goodness), and a far more personal book. The author is 58, clearly worried about his declining mental faculties, and reviewing his options and his future in the wake about what he knows about the brain and the general competence of the elderly.

Surprisingly, the most touching parts of the book are not about people at all -- they're about his dog, and the process that he goes through every day in writing this book, and the reflections that he has in comparing his dog's mental acuity and general awareness with the humans around him. There are historical reflections on the heads of state, and their decision making abilities (fascinating in the details: did you know Yeltsin once got off a plane and immediately urinated on the runway, in full view of welcoming dignitaries?) and discussions of his older patients.

Then there's a discussion of the most fascinating theory from his last book: the theorum that the right and left lobes of the brain are "loose meshed" and "fine meshed", with the right brain used for novel topics and the left brain used for reacting to more specific situations. This is fascinating, because not only does he point out that children use the right brain for language (after all, it's novel to them) and that autistic people and well, nerds may try to use their left brains for social situations, which doesn't work because social situations are too fluid and must be dealt with "on the fly."

Finally, the author goes into his cognitive exercises, based around the theory of neurogenesis. This is a full topic in itself, but the book is good enough that I am going to give it to my parents to read.

Erik Champion says

*the flexibility of brain divided by habit vs strangeness

Ouroboros says

paradigmatic shift: mind opener to viewing fn of hemispheric lateralization [pulled me out of the viscous swamp of pop-psych fallacies:]

lorenz attractors: buffering for aging

pattern recognition: reinforcement thru repetition

Bryan says

A bit too materialistic in scientific thought. didn't include enough of the mind and brain dualism for me. Well written by a well respected neuropsychologist though....pretty interesting

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Rossdavidh says

Subtitle: How your mind can grow stronger as your brain grows older.

So, what is the equivalent of a midlife crisis for a clinical professor of neurology, with a private practice in neuropsychology? Getting an MRI scan of your brain. And then writing a book about what it means for your brain to get older.

This is one of several books I have read to compare the scientific study of the mind/brain today, to the study of the planets and stars in Galileo's time, just after the invention of the telescope. It's not that no one studied astronomy before Galileo's time, or that no one studied the brain before now. But once you have a way to look directly at what you're talking about, it can clarify your theories considerably (or completely discredit them).

What Goldberg found, when he had his brain scanned (Magnetic Resonance Imaging, or MRI, was the scan used), was that by and large he was in good shape. But, his brain had changed a bit, in the normal way for a man in his fifties (i.e. it shrunk), and this got him thinking about the phenomenon of wisdom.

Crudely speaking, why do we tend to think of old people as being wiser? We now know that the brains of older people, even when they are not suffering from Alzheimer's or any similar condition, is somewhat smaller than that of young adults. At the same time, we tend to think of an intelligent old person as being wiser than that same person when they were twenty years younger.

One possibility, of course, is that this is just society being nice. Maybe older people are actually dumber, and we just feel it's rude to say, so we use the term 'wisdom' to hide the fact that they are less 'clever'. But if that were the case, we would never think of a young person being 'wise beyond their years' in a positive way, and anyway words which begin as euphemisms quickly become negative (e.g. 'recession' in economics), and the term 'wisdom' has been regarded positively in all English-speaking societies we know of, and most other languages have a similar term.

Goldberg's thesis, which he develops methodically and in an unhurried style and which I will give a spoiler for here, is that the difference rests in how our brain hemispheres divide up the task of thinking. It should be said that there have been a lot of different theories on this, and most have been discredited eventually, but Goldberg's is that our right brain is in charge of processing novel information or learning new things, and our left brain is in charge of storing skills and knowledge that is no longer novel. When learning a new skill, our right brain (and to a lesser degree front left) do most of the work, and over time the work load for this skill shifts to our left brain (and to a lesser degree back right).

Unless, of course, your right brain has partially atrophied, or you are one of those left-handed people who divide up work differently between hemispheres than most of us do. But however the work is divided, Goldberg's contention is that different parts of the brain are dominant in early childhood (when most of what we encounter is novel) and later in life (when most of what we encounter is not novel). As we age, most of us begin to avoid topics which require us to use our right brain, and rely on the skills we have already built up. 'Wisdom' is our word for these already developed skills of recognizing a pattern which we already know how to deal with. If you're wise, you've memorized a lot of patterns, and at a high level of abstraction.

Goldberg's exposition, of course, is not nearly as simplistic as this, and he delivers a great deal of evidence from many different fields of study in support of his view. Then, we come to the part of the book where we may ask ourselves, "so what?"

The answer depends on whether you are a fatalist about this atrophy of the right hemisphere. If you are not, then the prescription is to intentionally put yourself into novel situations which you do not know well how to handle (e.g. learning a new language, or hobby, or career). The way to prevent any part of the brain (or for that matter, the entire body) from atrophying from disuse, is to use it. Take the stairs, not the elevator. Walk, don't drive. Read it in the original language, not the translation. Learn a new programming language every year. Travel in foreign countries. Join a book club where you read things you wouldn't normally choose on your own.

Such as, for example, this book!

Daniel says

a hard read unless you're a brain expert.

Sarah Milne says

My gosh, I love this book! I need to take the time to do a good review, but I just spent too much time blasting Franzen's new book, so perhaps later. Goldberg is awesome. This is not exactly a pop-neuro book,

but it is (I think) very, very accessible. Goldberg's work on the gradiential model (proposed opposite to a strictly modular model) is present in what he writes here, as well as other principles he expounds in less accessible forms in The New Executive Brain, and he is able to bring that down to a pretty dang readable level in this book. He makes, to my mind, an entirely convincing case for cognitive fitness and exercise. I get so excited about this idea. How liberating! How empowering! And this isn't some wishy-washy, feel-good, soft science idea. This is science - researched, elaborated, defended, explored, and packaged beautifully. Ya, I love this stuff.

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amberle says

leggendolo ho scoperto perchè diavolo perdo un sacco di tempo a somministrare il test degli occhi, quindi assolutamente promosso!
