

*Information
Is Not
Knowledge...*



*...And
Knowledge Is
Not Wisdom*

Greg Albrecht

The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 to 1860) said “every generation, no matter how paltry its character, thinks itself much wiser than the one immediately preceding it, let alone those that are more remote.”

In these early years of the 21st century it seems that many are obsessed with dismissing those who have gone before and wiping away their legacy. It seems we are quick to judge others, and slow to realize we will ourselves be judged by the standards we use to repudiate and condemn.

In this century the prevailing notion is that wisdom is derived from access to information and the subsequent knowledge that applies that information. But just as **information is not knowledge, knowledge is not wisdom.**

One must wonder whether our current infatuation with information is helping make us and our world a better place. Is this passionate addiction to

information retrieval systems and our desire for electronic connection endangering wisdom?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.—Proverbs 3:5-6

In an article titled “Wisdom in the Age of Information,” Maria Popova, a Bulgarian-born writer and blogger who lives in Brooklyn, New York writes, “We live in a world awash with information, but we seem to face a growing scarcity of wisdom. And what’s worse, we confuse the two. We believe that having access to more information produces more knowledge, which results in more wisdom. But if anything, the opposite is true—more and more information without the proper context and interpretation only muddles our understanding of the world rather than enriching it.”

She says, “Information is having a library of books on shipbuilding.

Knowledge applies that to building a ship. Access to the information—to the books—is a prerequisite for the knowledge, but not a guarantee of it. Once you’ve built your ship, wisdom is what allows you to sail it without sinking, to protect it from the storm that creeps up from the horizon in the dead of the night, to point it just so that the wind breathes life into its sails. Moral wisdom helps you to tell the difference between the right direction and the wrong direction in steering the ship.”

The Information Age is not our savior. In fact, it may have taken us captive. It’s a familiar sight, isn’t it? Hundreds of millions are dragging an electronic ball and chain around with them—they are hunched over their devices, playing games, seeking information and even intimacy, searching for meaning on social media.

Fake News

This tsunami of information forcefully reminds us that data and information are no substitute for

wisdom. Wisdom seems buried in a swamp of “alternative” facts, false equivalences, political partisanship and conspiracy theories.

The Internet provides data and hosts websites and dispenses information indiscriminately, so that the user must exercise discretion and discernment about information to be believed and data to be discarded...but many lack any training or guidance in carefully discerning fact from fable.

The information society is now mired in what we know as “fake news.” Of course the primary use of the term “fake news” is by people who propose that news media is trying to twist and pervert and corrupt reality by presenting a false reality and a biased perspective.

But in its wider usage “fake news” seems to be information that contradicts and collides with the already established truth of the person who encounters it. **Fake news, in some ways, seems to be whatever one does not wish to believe.** It is foolish, the very antithesis of wisdom, to ignore clear

evidence, but as humans we are more comfortable with those “facts” that agree with our decisions and our behavior.

One of my favorite stories in this regard comes from the life of a man named Hack Wilson. In the early decades of the 20th century, Hack Wilson was a feared slugger for the Chicago Cubs while struggling with alcoholism—he eventually died of alcoholism at the age of 48.

One day the manager of the Chicago Cubs decided to illustrate how destructive alcohol was, and thus, hopefully, convert Hack Wilson from his alcoholic addiction. The manager set two glasses in front of Wilson. He filled one with water and the other with vodka. Then he took a worm and put it in the glass of water—the worm wiggled around and if you can say that worms swim, then it was swimming.

Then the manager took the worm out of the glass filled with water and placed it in the glass filled with vodka—the worm immediately started to disintegrate before their eyes. The manager looked at Hack Wilson and said, “Now, what did you learn from that, Hack?”

Hack Wilson looked at his manager and said, “Well...I see that if you drink vodka

you’ll never have worms.”

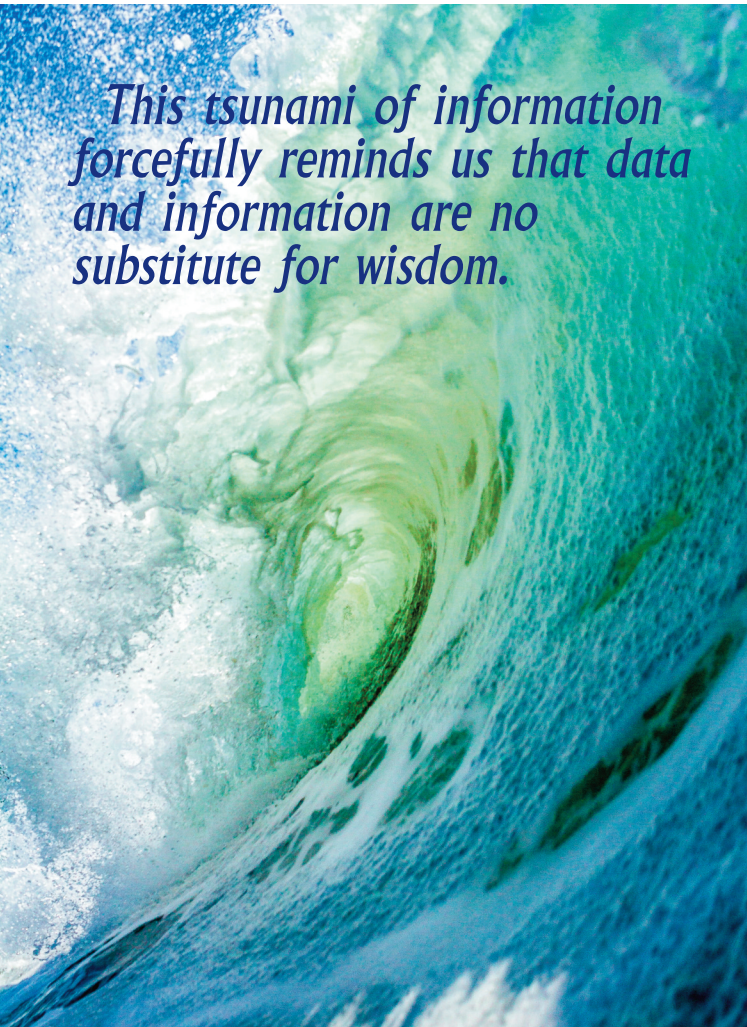
We can and we do make information mean what we want it to mean—thus the popularity of the term “fake news.” Information does not save us. **Information is not knowledge, and knowledge is not wisdom.**

Each generation battles with its own self-centered and self-serving desire to do what it believes to be right and appropriate, while failing, at some level, to respect the wisdom that can be gleaned from the past. Each generation thinks itself smarter and more clever than the ones before it, but being clever or smart is not at all the same as being wise. Let’s pause and reflect on the phrase “moral wisdom.”

Moral Wisdom

Wisdom is closely related to **humility** and **compassion**—one might say that **humility** and **compassion** are siblings of wisdom. Moral wisdom is accompanied by humility and compassion. On the other hand, pride and arrogance are the mortal enemies of moral wisdom—pride and arrogance are self-serving and self-absorbed.

Proud and arrogant people are not, by and large, wise. A person who cannot listen to others has



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difficultly learning and is prevented, in many ways, from serving and helping them. One who does not learn does not grow, change and adapt.

Proverbs 16:18 tells us, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” James 4:6 teaches, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Virtue and **goodness** are also close relatives of wisdom—of course the great lesson of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that no human is capable of perfect righteousness and goodness. **Virtue** and **goodness** are gifts of God, by his grace.

Thus, when one combines **humility** and **compassion** with **virtue** and **goodness**, one can see that moral wisdom is a gift of God. With humility, compassion, virtue and goodness in mind, as siblings and cousins of wisdom, we reflect on service and self-sacrifice, a part of loving our neighbor, so that one source of wisdom is the divine love that is the love of one’s neighbors.

The wisdom that is a gift of God, the highest form of moral wisdom, is based on love, mercy and grace. Such wisdom relies upon a higher morality and a more just and more loving source than humans are capable of innately generating.

Thus we read in Psalms 14:1 that a fool, who surely is the opposite of wise, says that there is no God.

No matter how much information is gathered and remembered, and no matter how much knowledge is accrued, without God all such attempts will end in foolishness. This is what Proverbs 3:5 has in mind when it speaks of leaning completely on our own understanding—the futile attempt to achieve wisdom by means of the human rational process.

It is in our humility before God, our submission to him and our trusting in him with all our heart, in our grateful yielding to him, that we receive moral wisdom from him. □

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