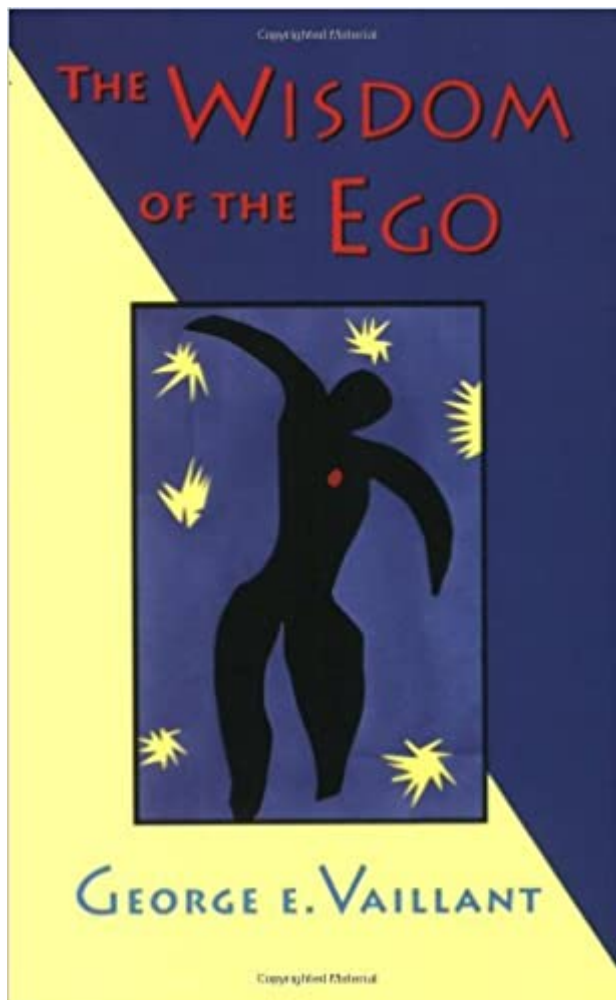


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The Wisdom Of The Ego



Synopsis

One of America's preeminent psychiatrists draws on his famous Study of Adult Development to give us an exhilarating look at how the mind's defenses work. What we see as the mind's trickery, George Vaillant tells us, is actually healthy. What's more, it can reveal the mind at its most creative and mature, soothing and protecting us in the face of unbearable reality, managing the unmanageable, ordering disorder. And because creativity is so intrinsic to this alchemy of the ego, Vaillant mingles his studies of obscure lives with psychobiographies of famous artists and others--including Florence Nightingale, Sylvia Plath, Anna Freud, and Eugene O'Neill.

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Customer Reviews

The rumor of the death of Ego Psychology is greatly exaggerated. As long as George Vaillant writes his engaging books extolling the wisdom of ego psychology it is destined to remain part of our theoretical landscape...The Wisdom of the Ego is written with the author's vivid, sometimes witty and consistently clear style, happily interspersed with numerous examples both from his longitudinal studies, as well as from biographies of well-known people...One need not agree with all of Vaillant's premises to appreciate and enjoy this colorful and many-faceted book. I cannot think of a better, more absorbing book to introduce clinical graduate students and clinicians in general to an up-dated version of the best ideas of ego psychology. (Sophie Freud American Journal of Psychotherapy) This is a remarkable synthesis of the best current thinking on ego psychology as well as a many-faceted picture of what Robert White would call 'lives in progress.' It makes on its

own not only a highly innovative contribution to ego psychology but an equally original and impressive contribution to longitudinal research. A remarkable and many-faceted work. (George W. Goethals, Harvard University) Vaillant tells us that ego defenses are not pathological formations or symptoms of mental illness. They are ingenious self-deceptions that serve adaptation...He is to be commended for bringing certain unconscious processes into focus and for illuminating the various ways in which ego defenses contribute to a person's adaptation to life. (Louise J. Kaplan Boston Sunday Globe) The thesis of *The Wisdom of the Ego* is most persuasively developed by the use of life histories, some of which derive from subjects in Vaillant's study groups but many of which are derived from life histories of famous individuals. The reader gets delicious insights into the way that life experiences shaped the ego's defensive repertoire and how these defenses then shaped the careers of characters as diverse as Beethoven and Emily Dickinson, Tolstoy and Henry Ford, and Gandhi and Josef Mengele...The illustrations offered by these famous lives result in a book that is entertaining and memorable. (John G. Gunderson, M.D. American Journal of Psychiatry) Mental health, social fitness, creativity, self-deception, success and failure are documented with uplifting humor and nobility. Medical and psychiatric understanding is eruditely conveyed with the good taste of a fine after-dinner story. (Canadian Medical Association Journal) A stimulating presentation of theory and research on ego development. (Choice) A richly textured, elegantly written, and humane book by the person who is becoming the Anna Freud of his day. Vaillant's sympathetic treatment of the defenses is itself wise and creative. (Robert Kegan, Harvard University and the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology) This is a brilliant, not to say unique, book. It brings to the study of the ego the same clarifying empiricism, animating passion, and illuminating insight that so strikingly characterized the pioneering investigations of the dynamic unconscious a hundred years ago. Behind *The Wisdom of the Ego* lies the wonderful wisdom of George Vaillant. (John C. Nemiah, Dartmouth Medical School)

This is a remarkable synthesis of the best current thinking on ego psychology as well as a many-faceted picture of what Robert White would call 'lives in progress.' It makes on its own not only a highly innovative contribution to ego psychology but an equally original and impressive contribution to longitudinal research. A remarkable and many-faceted work. (George W. Goethals, Harvard University) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Dr. Vaillant offers a scholarly work in his book, *The Wisdom of the Ego*, which examines in thirteen chapters, how the ego functions, how it matures or fails to do so. It is an excellent work because it

offers specific examples concerning abstract ideas: sublimation, suppression, etc.. In using Sylvia Plath, Anna Freud, and Eugene O'Neill as examples, Valliant shows readers how one can engage in behavior which finally leads to self-destruction (Plath) or ways which bring about human flourishing (Anna Freud and Eugene O'Neill). Valliant's language is clear and precise, regardless of one curiously dismissive (and frankly, mistaken) review. Valliant's book is not "self-help" material. It is a scholarly work which presumes some background in psychological concepts. Those looking for an easy read, steer clear. However, for those who are willing to dig deeper, this is a fine work. One of his most lucid chapters, Chapter 7, "Life Histories" focuses on "everyday" people who succeed or fail in adult development. This chapter is a good place for beginners to start and if one can read through these histories, then one might risk the rest of the work. The table of contents include: Introduction 1. Why Praise the Human Ego? 2. A Matter of Definition 3. Self-Deceptions in Everyday Life 4. Necessary Questions 5. How Can We Prove That Defense Exist? 6. The Ego and Adult Development 7. Life Histories 8. The Ego and Creativity 9. Sylvia Plath: Creativity and Psychotic Defenses 10. Anna Freud: Mature Defenses 11. Eugene O'Neill: The Maturation of Defenses 12. Disadvantage, Resilience, and Mature Defenses 13. How Does the Ego Mature Notes/Acknowledgements/Credits/Index

Wonderful book on how people go about overcoming psychological defenses and learn over time to make mature choices to become who they want to be and get what they want out of life. Real life examples are very instrumental in showing how others (often well known and famous) struggle to learn where they go wrong and how to take new steps to become more mature and responsible in their lives.

I picked this up as a way of understanding coping mechanisms and found it very enlightening. Highlighting the abilities of the mind to channel the negative into outlets to maintain balance was an easily understood representation of a complex ability of the mind. The life examples provided good inspiration and understanding.

This is an extensive report on information from 3 long term follow up studies on 3 very different groups of people. By looking at how people evolved, succeeded or failed they provide insights regarding resilience, defense mechanisms, erpsonality types, etc. A very useful tool for everyone who deals with other people and wants to gain insight.

I read the reviews on this and wound up buying it predicated on them. Mistake. If you are looking for any practical insight into, or self help techniques you are SOL out of luck. This is endless academic muscle flexing and pedantic verbalization that leads nowhere except to more grants to do more studies. Waste of money for anyone but another student or professor looking for a reference to put in his Phd paper.

This is a true masterpiece: a beautifully composed synthesis of many related domains of study. Some decades ago I came across one of Vallaint's earlier books - *Adaptation to Life* -, and it provided me with my first wedge of insight into how defense mechanisms color our lives. That book then led me to explore the broader world of psychoanalysis. Now we have *The Wisdom of the Ego*, which is light years beyond that earlier work in its elucidation of how the mind's executive functions operate behind the curtain of consciousness, like the wizard of Oz. *The Wisdom of the Ego* is a work that can be re-read with an increased appreciation and savored like a glass of vintage wine. If you can grasp Vallaint's paradigm, you will have a handle for interpreting your life experience (which, by the way, comes with a new set of conceptual tools for personal transformation). As a teaching tool for understanding life's complexities and challenges, this book stands alone: I have seen nothing that approaches it. Thanks for your contribution to our lives, Dr. Vallaint!

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