



# The Art of Worldly Wisdom (Unabridged Start Publishing LLC)

*Baltasar Gracián*

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**The Art of Worldly Wisdom (Unabridged Start Publishing LLC)** Baltasar Gracián

The remarkable best-seller -- a long-lost, 300-year-old book of wisdom on how to live successfully yet responsibly in a society governed by self-interest -- as acute as Machiavelli yet as humanistic and scrupulously moral as Marcus Aurelius.

## The Art of Worldly Wisdom (Unabridged Start Publishing LLC) Details

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**Baltasar Gracián**

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## From Reader Review The Art of Worldly Wisdom (Unabridged Start Publishing LLC) for online ebook

### Sarah Ansani says

I'm a little surprised by some ratings of this book. I understand that this isn't a book that you exactly "critique" because it's a renown oracle from the 17th century. However, I took the wisdom in this book less as HOW to be and more as HOW to watch out for people like this. I'll agree that it's all wisdom, but it's more something to UNDERSTAND rather than something to BE. A lot of the advice gears toward deception, vanity, and greed:

"Let someone else take the hit. You will shield yourself from malevolence: sound policy in those who govern. Having someone else take the blame for failure and be the butt of gossip does not spring from a lack of ability, as malice thinks, but from superior skill. Not everything can turn out well, and you can't please everyone. So look for a scapegoat, someone whose own ambition will make him a good target."

In my opinion, a wise person may not get into such a situation where they must blame someone else. And a wise person understands that mistakes are made and that they, themselves, are not perfect. I'd rather be wary of a person who would put blame on me rather than be the blamer.

"Do, but also seem. Things do not pass for what they are, but for what they seem. To excel and to know how to show it is to excel twice. What is invisible might as well not exist. Reason itself is not venerated when it does not wear a reasonable face. Those easily duped outnumber the prudent. Deceit reigns, and things are judged from without, and are seldom what they seem. A fine exterior is the best recommendation of inner perfection."

There are many more "aphorisms" throughout this book that encourage the reader to not only be aware of the deceit that is out there, but to also play the same game. And the focus is merely on aesthetic rather than essence. Seem this way, even if you're not that way.

This oracle is street-wise and takes the definition of "wisdom" to a place that seems wise, but in essence, is not very "virtuous" in my opinion.

Also, understand that this has been translated by many different people. I own Martin Fischer's translation and when I opened it up to read it, it made no sense to me grammatically or syntactically. Martin Fischer, I presume, is a literalist translator, for Gracian did have that difficult-to-understand writing style where sentences were incomplete and there was a severe lack in verbs. So, if you want to get someone's more understandable translation, Christopher Maurer is the translator you want.

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### 7jane says

This book wasn't quite what I expected, yet it was still a good experience. If you have - or will - read Machiavelli's "The Prince", Sun Tzu's "The Art Of War" and/or Castiglione's "The Book Of The Courtier", this is another good book to this type of books. There's is also some certainty that the author read "The Prince" (since it came out earlier than this book, which came out in 1647); the fact that the author of this present book was a Jesuit no doubt helped, since I do know Jesuits have been thought of as cunning, both in positive and negative sense.

So: this book is a series of 300 witty, thought-provoking aphorisms (which are nicely shown in the contents list), with some helpful notes at the end - you can't expect everyone to be familiar with Greek/Roman classic texts (including Aesop's tales) and the Bible. The name hints at the size of the first printing of this books - pocket-fitting and densely printed (sometimes hard to read because of this). It is for the 17th Century Baroque Spanish upper society, Spain being then in decline, away from being the world power, with France and Rococo soon taking their place.

Some of the text clearly shows that certain aphorisms can be grouped together, and some themes do pop up again as one keeps reading. The style is laconic, which I like since it keeps the message clearly floating. Translation keeps out most world-play and puns, since they don't translate well.

The author stresses the importance of taking ever-changing circumstances into account, as aphorism's tips may not apply on every occasion. In everything, though, prudence is the main key that keep one afloat in the changes and risks of the society. There is more value in difficulty than easy - there is challenge this way. Disillusion is sometimes good, it helps in looking behind appearances, where danger and opportunities may hide. One has to realise that others are playing the game, too.

There were a few standout aphorisms for me: 101, 110, 183, 249, 273, 297 really felt close to me. Sometimes making me think of the state of the world now, how to know when to fold 'em, not to hold to opinions too stubbornly, remember to already live and not leave living to old age, and the "act as though always on view" sounds interesting.

The last aphorism gives the whole lot a nice twist; it might make you read the text again, which may not be hard work since the book is quite slim :) The book is quite easy to read, even if you don't really notice that Christianity still sort of flows underground in the text, most of the time... it might feel like the book's general message veers very close to Machiavelli, yet in the end staying slight apart. A suprisingly good book, with something for everyone, even when not living like they once did.

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## Nick says

This is one of the great books of wisdom, dispensed in brief paragraphs with headings like "better to be intensive than extensive," and "reserve is the seal of talent." Gracian might best be described as an honorable politician; he advocates dealing with the world with rectitude, but keeping a close eye on how the world responds. You need to be ready for it to throw something unfair, unexpected, or unpleasant back at you. It's perhaps comforting to know that the book was written 300 years ago, and the world is still pretty much the same now as it was then.

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## Shyam says

*"Know a little more and live a little less. Others argue the opposite. Well-spent leisure is worth more than work. We have nothing of our own but time . . ."*(245)

One of the first books I remember adding to my "to-read" list many years ago, this was one of the few works that thoroughly exceeded any expectations I may have had.

Gracian's *Art of Worldly Wisdom* is a collection of 300 maxims containing excellent, practical advice; very

Senecan, and, at times, Machiavellian in sentiment (but much more applicable than *The Prince*.)

Personally, I noted around 50 which I would consider essential to read in their entirety, as well as many, many more containing nuggets of gold; for a collection of 300, there is an impressive amount of quality.

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*. . . when culture is lacking, perfection remains incomplete. (12)*

*There's much to know and life is short, and a life without knowledge is not a life. (15)*

*And if he gives up on people, this is not because he is fickle, but because they have given up on truth. (29)*

*Never sin against your own good taste. (33)*

*Truth is for the few; deception is as common as it is vulgar. (43)*

*To be able to choose, and to choose the best. (51)*

*Time and I against any other two. (55)*

*A truly deep mind achieves eternity. (57)*

*Self-knowledge is the start of self-correction. (69)*

*Fun must have its place, but seriousness must dominate. (76)*

*Let your manner be lofty, endeavour to make it sublime. (88)*

*People with only one concern and only one subject are usually boring. (105)*

*A good exterior is the best recommendation of a perfect interior. (130)*

*If one universally accomplished friend is enough to make Rome and the rest of the universe, then be that friend to yourself, and you will be able to live completely on your own. (137)*

*Whom will you need, if there's no opinion or taste greater than your own? (137)*

*Deformity of the mind is uglier than that of the body because it goes against divine beauty. (168)*

*Moderation is necessary even in our desire for knowledge so as not to know things badly. (174)*

*Take enjoyment slowly and tasks quickly. (174)*

*Either know, or listen to someone who does. (176)*

*Stupidity's faults are incurable, for since the ignorant don't know what they are, they don't search for what they lack. (176)*

*Recognise faults, whatever the approval they enjoy. (186)*

*Vices might be ennobled, but they are never noble. (186)*

*Others make it a policy to praise today's mediocrities more than yesterday's marvels. (188)*

*You should see and hear, but remain silent. (192)*

*A person has everything who cares nothing about what matters little. (192)*

*Everyone has too high an opinion of themselves, especially those with least reason to. (194)*

*To be truly wise, its not enough just to appear to be so, far less to appear so to yourself. (201)*

*There have been few Senecas . . . (203)*

*What seems a throwaway comment to the person making it can seem deeply significant to the person who catches and ponders it. (207)*

*Know how to divide your life wisely, not as things arise, but with foresight and discrimination. (229)*

*Spend the first part of a fine life in communication with the dead. We are born to know and to know ourselves, and books reliably turn us into people . . . Let the third stage be spent entirely with yourself: the ultimate happiness, to philosophise. (229)*

*But what is essential must come first and only later, if there's time, what is incidental. (249)*

*In acquiring knowledge, some start with what is least important, leaving the honourable and useful subjects for when life is at an end. (249)*

*For knowledge and life, method is essential. (249)*

*. . . everything should be great and majestic, so that all their actions, and even their words, may be clothes in a transcendent, grandiose majesty. (296)*

*But good taste flavours everything in life. (298)*

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## **Kimber says**

Astonishing how true Garcian's aphorisms remain hundreds of years later and how much the culture of Spain at the time seems so modern....A work to study and be studied again and again. This is timeless in its wisdom--I would add I don't agree with everything he says and that although he can be spiritual at times, this is a guide of "Worldly Wisdom" and something that as a Jesuit priest he was sometimes condemned for this worldyness...Much on the same level of "Art of War" by Sun Tzu.

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## **Mohammad says**

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## Luis says

Baltasar Gracián enumera 300 aforismos que constituyen las pautas para el hombre de referencia del barroco. Así como Castiglione propusiera al cortesano como modelo, Gracián opta por un ideal de persona que nombra como el discreto, y para el cual configura unas propiedades que se basan alrededor de la prudencia y virtud. De esa forma, Gracián lo que hace en este libro es exponer cómo debe actuar el hombre prudente de cara a la sociedad para tener relativo éxito y mantenerse estable. Entre varias de las ideas se puede subrayar el dar una apariencia coherente, el hablar lo necesario, reflexionar bien, rodearse de amigos y nunca excederse en el trato.

Lo notable de este libro es la actualidad que ha tenido para mí. El enfoque de Gracián en la época no tiene gran distancia con la que vivimos ahora, y muchos de estos consejos son perfectamente aplicables, tanto en la vida profesional como en la personal. Además resulta muy positivo el formato: un aforismo seguido de una ampliación breve de la idea. Hay aplicaciones, metáforas y referencias al mundo clásico y de la época. Me parece, de verdad tengo que decirlo, una joya que habría que regalar.

Una particularidad del libro que podría mejorar es que varias veces se hace referencia a las mismas ideas en distintos apartados, y resulta algo reiterativo. De todas formas, no le hace perder un ápice de interés. Atentos a la edición que se elige, pues una no adaptada haría que muchos se puedan perder al intentar interpretar las palabras, en vez de disfrutar de la enseñanza.

Es un libro que, en mi opinión, merecerá la atención de aquel que se interese por él y tendrá mucho que enseñarle. Y por cierto, ¿qué es esto de que Gracián esté tan olvidado? ¿Cuándo se le va a reconocer su talento?

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## Melina says

This book can not be over-estimated. I use this book the way others refer to the bible. (I DO also read the Bible, The Qu'ran and other religious books as well) However, the advice in this little book is invaluable. There are days when I am troubled and I will meditate on the problem, run my thumb over the pages and pick a random spot and it never fails to deliver some sage and relevant advice. EVERYONE should have a copy.

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## Justarius says

The Art of Worldly Wisdom by Baltasar Gracián is unlike any book you are likely to find on bookshelves today. Self-help books can be helpful, but they are usually focused on what to do after you have encountered certain problems. Business books are often a collection of case studies or “war stories.” The Art of Worldly Wisdom teaches the same sort of lessons (and more) in a much broader context. It is a manual on how to be successful at anything in life. Considering that it is still amazing relevant today despite being first published in 1647, it is a classic masterpiece.

Certainly there have been other books in the same genre, but I have yet to find another one as penetrating and

objective. La Rochefoucauld's Maxims(1660-80s) is insightful as well, but it is colored by a lifetime of bitter experiences. Though Gracián had his own troubles, perhaps being a priest allowed him to observe clearly without becoming jaded by the excesses and pitfalls of worldly life. Also, The Art of Worldly Wisdom contains only 300 aphorisms, considerably less than the Maxims while packing the same amount of substance or more.

Other notable thinkers have been influenced by The Art of Worldly Wisdom. Nietzsche wrote that "Europe has never produced anything finer or more complicated in matters of moral subtlety," and Schopenhauer considered the book "Absolutely unique... a book made for constant use...a companion for life" for "those who wish to prosper in the great world."

So read The Art of Worldly Wisdom; you will not regret it. I wish that I had many years ago. Perhaps I could have done things better, or perhaps I could have learned some lessons less painfully. In either case, it could only have helped!

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### **J.W. Dionysius Nicoletto says**

300 aphorisms over 300 years old by Spanish writer Gracian, born four years after the release of Quixote, vol 1. The slim Penguin volume is beautifully put together and if I can get even ten of these guidelines to being a better person straight this year it will be success. As it stands, the end of 2013 ended on a pretty turbulent note for me and only in the past day or two have I been piecing myself together to saner grounds. This is a great meditation on how to live simply, wisely. Something in here for everyone, from saintly grandmothers to the most outrageous nihilist, probably a little more for the latter. Yet the struggle for the down and out herein to believe in the wisdom would make it the more worthwhile text. These days would be one of millions of Self-Help books, Gracian writing before a time for that kind of Market. Here is just some great, condensed advice, from what I've read spot-on. Great translation by one Jeremy Robbins, a master on Spanish Baroque culture. One which would be on my Currently Reading shelf for a long, long time, if I didn't plan to tuck it away and just read a passage or two every so often. Reading ten, slowly, in a row started to remind me of my lesser qualities, the voluminous nature of them. Will pick up again when feeling a little better about myself.

Update:

Glad to have caught a mint condition copy out of the corner of my eye at the bookstore today. A necessity.

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### **Selin says**

"Gerçek kitaplar bizi gerçek insanlar yapar."

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### **Philippe Malzieu says**

"The contempt is the most subtle form of revenge"

Gracian was Jesuit. It did not respect many thing. He had the arrogance of those which know their talent. He published his books without authorizations. His visions sour and cynical terrified his superiors.

I was very mechant with Macchiavel by advising you to substitute Gracian to him. The form will undoubtedly appear less formal to you, more futile. But at the bottom it is a fine analysis of the social reports and way to evolve in society.

It is the book of someone which mixed with the power without practising it (like Macchiavel) and which knew to keep cold blood.

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### **Sevinc abbaszada says**

M?kt?bl?rd? d?rs kitab? kimi oxudulmal?d?r! O d?r?c? faydal? bir kitab oldu?unu dü?ünür?m.

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### **Pearce Hansen says**

I have friends who read The Prince like a bible, and its true that Machiavelli is worthy of repeated study, both as a period piece and window into the Renaissance Italian soul, and as possibly the most notorious treatise on Realpolitik ever written. Machiavelli, like Nietzsche, has been misused by the unscrupulous and decried by the ignorant; also, IMHO, both writers were actually better historians and analysts than they were philosophers per se.

Baltasar Gracian, in the Pocket Oracle, has accomplished what Niccolo never could, nor would have wanted to: a day to day primer of sage advice from a trained Jesuit mind who walked and worked in the highest halls of power in his time. The lessons are pithy and epigrammatic, both simple yet deserving of deep reflection and consideration and, most importantly, are eminently USEFUL in almost every interpersonal interaction in your day to day life, whether you are a dish washer or a senator -- his teachings are that universal.

Robert Greene strip-mined Gracian for 48 Laws of Power, but again IMHO, it's always best to refer back to the seminal source even after being presented with as good a digest as Greene presented. This is the Penguin edition, so you of course have the value added of their wonderful introductions, with historical references anchoring Gracian's life and the impact of the Oracle itself. Also, this translation is, I feel, much better than those I've seen marketed under the variant title Art of Worldly Wisdom.

I read this book everyday. I recommend it to every man woman or child that wants to live their very best. Gracian was one of the wisest men who ever lived, and this is the free distillation of his wisdom.

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### **Elisa Garcia says**

"Use human means as if there were no divine ones and use divine means as if there were no human ones."

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