

The Future Evolution of Consciousness II¹

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We need to evolve our consciousness. Watching the news; listening to the media; reading essays, books, and reports on current world affairs; contemplating projections of looming existential threats and dire predictions about our future; and observing and puzzling over the beliefs and behavior of people across the globe, the most striking and pervasive problem I see, greatly contributing to all of our major difficulties, is weaknesses and failings in present human consciousness.

Both individually and collectively, our conscious minds seem too self-centered; narrow in perspective; irrational; defensive; entrenched, authoritarian, and tradition-bound; anxious, pessimistic, and depressive; deceitful and dishonest; anti-intellectual and thoughtless; opinionated and delusional; fragmented, shallow, and muddle-headed; and irresponsible.

We embrace new technologies, gadgets, pills, and assorted consumer goods and products and we worship wealth and economic solutions as pathways to a good future, but in so doing miss the key point that it is our beliefs, values, desires, emotions, and modes of thinking and understanding within our conscious minds that have created our present human world and generated our problems.

We are the cause of our troubles and the solutions lie within us. We need to evolve our consciousness.

It is no surprise that consciousness and its further evolution is critically important to our future. Consciousness is the medium in which everything that is meaningful to humans is manifested and understood. We awaken to existence through consciousness. To be conscious is to be aware and to experience. Although humans possess physical bodies and live in a physical world, our understanding of the physical world, including our own physical bodies, comes through consciousness. Through perceptual consciousness—seeing, hearing, and touching—we know the world. Our unique selves—the “I” we experience at the center of our awareness and our lives—is a reality of consciousness. It is through conscious intention that we make and remake our human world.

At the core, humans are conscious beings with conscious selves that perceive, think, feel, desire, remember, anticipate, imagine, and initiate actions with their conscious minds. Indeed, all our interpretations of the present and its problems, and all our proposed solutions for a better world are creations of our consciousness. The accuracy and depth of our understanding of the world and the efficacy of our actions depend upon the wisdom and acumen of our consciousness.

All in all, through consciousness we experience and know the world and ourselves, and through consciousness we evaluate our present conditions and purposefully interact with reality, attempting to change it through consciously directed behavior. Consciousness is the arena in

¹ Previously published in *Human Futures*, December, 2021. See the accompanying video “The Purposeful Evolution of Consciousness” at: <https://cfc-school.thinkific.com/>.

which the future is envisioned, understood, and created; it is critically important that we further evolve it.

I have had a long fascination with the nature of consciousness. The reader is referred to a number of my previous publications cited in this paper, plus some additional articles listed at the end of the essay. Recently I began a series of new essays in my online publication *Future Consciousness Insights*² on “The Purposeful Evolution of Consciousness.” My goal is that these essays will grow into a book. What follows are highlights of some key ideas in this emerging book:

We live in an evolutionary universe and on an evolutionary earth. The cosmos and the earth have evolved and continue to evolve. Humans, as well as all other life forms on the earth, are evolutionary beings embedded in this evolutionary universe. Psychologically and physically, humans have transformed and evolved through time. Human nature is not static, but transformative and evolutionary. Human consciousness has evolved across time.

As a distinctive expression of evolution in the cosmos, humans have developed a powerful and unique mode of evolution, which involves consciously and intentionally guiding the process of change both within us and around us. Everything in nature evolves, but humans engage in purposefully guiding the process of evolution, and since learning to control fire and the invention of tools we have been doing so for hundreds of thousands of years.

Purposeful evolution is made possible through our capacity of future consciousness: We can consciously anticipate and imagine possible futures, identify values and set goals for the future, and purposefully implement plans and actions for realizing our values and goals. Because we can be conscious of the future and its myriad possibilities we can intentionally with thought and motivation make choices and direct the ongoing flow of events toward envisioned and desirable futures. With a conscious “eye on the future” we guide evolution and change.

Purposeful efforts by us to intentionally *evolve our consciousness*³ stretch back at least thousands of years. As conscious beings that engage in purposeful evolution, we have been attempting, at least since the beginnings of recorded history, to purposefully evolve ourselves. Diverse practices and disciplines of study, from spirituality and religion to psychology and philosophy, have aspired toward this goal in many different forms.

As evidenced in historical records, since ancient times humans have demonstrated the capacities to: Engage in self-assessment and self-consciously and introspectively observe and evaluate the content and flow of their consciousness; based on self-improvement goals, values, and desires, and techniques of thought, meditation, and imagination, modify and enhance their consciousness; and communicate and teach ideas on such aspirations and practices to others. Sages, spiritualists, and philosophers have attempted to model such practices of self-evolution for others to observe and learn from.

Moreover, for both the past and present, the purposeful evolution of our consciousness has been a normal and pervasive activity within human life. Evolution, in fact purposeful evolution,

² *Archived Future Consciousness Insights*:https://www.centerforfutureconsciousness.com/archived_newsletters.htm .

³ Humans apply purposeful evolution both to the world and to themselves. In this paragraph I highlight our capacity to apply purposeful evolution to our own consciousness.

reveals itself in the individual streams of human consciousness. All of us, to various degrees, engage in purposeful efforts to evolve our own consciousness, and in many ways attempt to direct the evolution of consciousness in others. The stream of individual consciousness is an ongoing flow of personal efforts to guide our own thoughts, feelings, and states of mind in the direction of the goals, ideals, and values we embrace for ourselves. In essence, we regularly apply future consciousness to guiding the flow and direction of our own conscious minds.

Knowledge is power and an important first step in enhancing our capacity to further evolve our consciousness is to better understand the nature of consciousness. As some fundamental facts about consciousness: In normal human consciousness we appear to ourselves as embodied (possessing physical bodies) and personalized conscious beings (possessing unique personal selves); we are conscious of ourselves (we have the capacity for self-consciousness) as localized and situated in a surrounding environment; in a multitude of ways we are conscious of our relationships with the surrounding environment (we require this capacity in order to survive); our consciousness is always from a point of view (a personal perspective) and mentally framed within a set of concepts and theories; human consciousness, though, has the capacity to transcend the perceptual here and now through abstract and hypothetical thinking, memory, future consciousness, and imagination; moreover, human consciousness has the capacity to strive toward increasing objectivity through standards and practices of good thinking and knowledge acquisition⁴; consciousness is multi-faceted, involving perception, emotion, desire, thought, imagination, memory, and conscious resonance with other conscious beings; and the rich and diverse tapestry of consciousness also possesses an integrative quality. Although acknowledging that there are chaotic and fragmented features of consciousness, all the elements come together as a whole with an ongoing relative sense of one person, or self, experiencing this whole.

Moreover, consciousness is also dynamic, flowing with new thoughts, perceptions, emotions, and images that appear and replace old ones from moment to moment—there is perpetual “becoming and passing away” within consciousness; the dynamic flow of consciousness is directional from the present into the (becoming of the) future—the flow of consciousness is future-directional; and the directional flow of personal consciousness is evolutionary. As conscious selves we attempt to guide our thoughts and emotions, and attempt to cultivate and develop a sense of who we are—of increasing maturity and growth—and a sense of where we are heading in the future.⁵

Although we all engage in the purposeful evolution of our consciousness, we often do so haphazardly, half-heartedly, incompetently, and resistantly. It is difficult to initiate and generate personal change; personal growth and evolution require effort⁶. We may focus more on surviving, or protecting our present self-identity and the status quo, rather than attempting to

⁴ See my essays “A Brief History of Western Epistemology” and “A Brief History of Thinking About Thinking.”

⁵ Many of the above points in the previous two paragraphs are explained in much more depth in *Future Consciousness: The Path to Purposeful Evolution*. See especially chapters 3, 14, and 15, and sections of chapters 7 and 13. See also my essay “Historical Evolution of Consciousness and Human Understanding.”

⁶ See my essay “To Evolve or Not to Evolve”.

grow as a conscious being. Humans show the dual motivational dispositions toward stability and change, and in multiple ways people attempt to preserve and maintain what is familiar and constant, finding change aversive. Change requires imagination and frequently we only grow and change if forced to. Frequently we try to change others rather than evolve ourselves. Often we slight our own self-evolution in favor of attempting to change the physical world through inventing new machines, devices, contraptions, and technologies.

Still across our lives and across the great panorama of human history, human consciousness does change and evolve, and our theories and practices regarding how to evolve our consciousness keep developing. The evolution of consciousness is both possible and highly desirable.

As noted above, consciousness is multi-faceted and there are many dimensions and capacities of consciousness that we can either personally or collectively further evolve; the future evolution of consciousness is not simply intellectual. We can evolve our bodily and perceptual consciousness; we can evolve our conscious behavioral skills. Also, we can evolve: our motivational and emotional consciousness; our memory abilities and historical and future consciousness; our thinking, reasoning, and intuitive abilities; our aesthetic and ethical consciousness; our creativity and imagination; and our personal self-identity and interpersonal consciousness.

In evolving our consciousness, we can identify a set of pervasive problems and weaknesses in contemporary human consciousness that we can focus on minimizing or even eradicating. Among key failings of contemporary consciousness are excessive presentism and egocentricity; anti-intellectualism and anti-rationality; relativism and subjectivism; authoritarianism, dogmatism, and closed-mindedness; irresponsibility; fear and depression; apathy, nihilism, and a floundering state of being; paranoia, defensiveness, and violence; lack of empathy and concern for justice and equality; consumerism and passive consumption as a way of life; excessive media immersion and addiction; and flighty short-term attention and mental fragmentation. These problems in human consciousness are root causes of our current social, environmental, political, economic, technological, and inter-cultural contemporary challenges.⁷

We can also take a positive approach and focus on the enhancement of key ideals to pursue in the future evolution of consciousness. One central holistic ideal is to more enthusiastically and diligently embrace personal growth, increasing our desire and capacity to evolve our consciousness. (We won't evolve unless we believe it is possible and highly desirable.) Other ideals of evolved consciousness include: Greater perceptual attentiveness to the world and others; increased self-awareness and the evolution of more distinctive and empowered selves; greater self-responsibility, especially regarding our future; enhanced realistic hope and optimism; increased positive emotionality (including love, gratitude, joy, and life enthusiasm); expanded temporal consciousness (of the past and future); enhanced ecological and global consciousness; the heightening of the love and skills of learning and thinking; improved participation in the

⁷ See Lombardo, Thomas (2019) *The Pursuit of Virtue: The Path to a Good Future*. Kelowna, BC, Canada: Woodlake Publishing, as well as my essays "Anti-Science, Freedom, and Human Hypocrisy" and "The Darkness Looming on the Horizon."

creation and appreciation of beauty; the development of character virtues and authentic ethics; strengthening deep purpose and meaning in life; and greater interpersonal resonance with others.

Based on such specific ideals for the future evolution of consciousness, certain key general values and goals can be identified: We should heighten our future consciousness, since future consciousness is the overarching guidance capacity for the evolution of consciousness⁸; as an integrative character virtue we should pursue and develop wisdom and attempt to live a personal wisdom narrative for our future⁹; since we are evolving cyborgs, as functional syntheses of the technological and biological, we should aspire toward being wise cyborgs, in which we create and use technologies to serve the pursuit and exercise of wisdom¹⁰; collectively we should aspire toward a wise society, consciously identifying with a grand wisdom narrative for humanity as a whole¹¹; and as a fundamental expansion of our consciousness, we should strive for both planetary and cosmic consciousness, understanding ourselves in the big ecological picture of the evolution of the earth and the universe.¹²

A thought-provoking and stimulating approach to envisioning the future evolution of consciousness is to examine science fiction. Science fiction is not just about the future possibilities of science and technology. Science fiction offers a huge array of cosmic and far future possibilities regarding the evolution of consciousness. In a number of his fictional novels, the renown futurist and science fiction writer H.G. Wells strongly advocated that the key to a better world in the future was the collective psychological evolution of humanity.¹³ Although imagining wondrous and diverse galactic-level scientific and technological advances in the far future, the great science fiction writer Olaf Stapledon focused more on potential evolutionary developments in conscious minds, ethics, and wisdom in the epochal saga of humanity and intelligence in the universe.¹⁴

As some possibilities explored in science fiction: Both biologically and psychologically we may transcend our current species (*Homo Sapiens*), and humanity may diversify into multiple descendent species; we may redesign our bodies, brains, and minds; we may greatly enhance our symbiotic relationships with machines, the latter perhaps also achieving consciousness in the future; we may evolve into virtual minds living in highly complex virtual realities; through

⁸ See my essay “Future Consciousness: The Path to Purposeful Evolution - An Introduction.”

⁹ See my essay “Choosing Wisdom.”

¹⁰ See Lombardo, Thomas. and Blackwood, Ray Todd. (2011) “Educating the Wise Cyborg of the Future” in Lombardo, T. (2011) *Wisdom, Consciousness, and the Future: Selected Essays (WCF)*. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris.

¹¹ See numerous essays in *WCF*.

¹² See the section “The Cosmic Self and Cosmic Consciousness” in the essay “The Future of Human Psychology” included in this collection and “The Future Evolution of the Ecology of Mind” in *WCF*.

¹³ See Lombardo, Thomas (2021) *Science Fiction: The Evolutionary Mythology of the Future - Volume Two: The Time Machine to Metropolis*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.

¹⁴ See Lombardo, Thomas (2021) *Science Fiction: The Evolutionary Mythology of the Future - Volume Three: Superman to Star Maker*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.

technology and redesigned biology we may develop the capacity for mind-to-mind communication (telepathy) and networked communal consciousness; we may realize (with or without technological augmentation) the power to manipulate and directly create physical objects through thought and imagination (telekinesis); increasingly we may communicate and collaborate with other types of consciousness, including plants, animals, and alien intellects—contact with alien forms of intelligence and consciousness could teach us a great deal about the possibilities of consciousness; superior alien minds could “uplift” human consciousness to more advanced levels of mentality; we could develop multiple selves (many conscious selves in one body), or distributed consciousness and Gestalt minds (one conscious self supported by many bodies); we may vastly extend human longevity and live multiple conscious lives; we may find ways to travel with our conscious minds through time and become trans-temporal forms of consciousness; and finally, we could develop “space minds,” transcending planetary-based consciousness, and create distributed group consciousness that spans the universe, becoming cosmic minds in the far distant future.¹⁵

Although it appears that we face numerous grave challenges today, both within the world at large and our own present limitations psychologically and ethically, the purposeful future evolution of consciousness can provide constructive and efficacious pathways for transcending our current disturbing state of planetary reality and the disquieting and impoverished state of perception and mentality within ourselves. Evolving heightened awareness and understanding can take us on a journey that will be immensely inspiring, enlightening, and empowering. It is not enough to cure our present problems; the elimination of illness is not the same as health and vitality. We need to pursue a guiding light that uplifts and vitalizes our spirits. Consciousness is the light of our world and we need to purposefully evolve our consciousness.

Additional publications on consciousness not cited in this final essay

“The Future Evolution of Consciousness” *World Future Review*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Fall, 2014. Included in this collection of essays.

"Consciousness, Cosmic Evolution, and the Technological Singularity" *Journal of Futures Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, December, 2012. Included in this collection of essays.

“The Ecological Cosmology of Consciousness” *Journal of Cosmology*, Special Issue: “Consciousness and the Universe”, Vol. 14, April-May, 2011. In Thomas Lombardo (2011) *Wisdom, Consciousness, and the Future: Selected Essays*. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris.

¹⁵ Aside from the above cited *Volumes Three and Two*, also see Lombardo, Thomas (2018) *Science Fiction: The Evolutionary Mythology of the Future - Volume One: Prometheus to the Martians*. London: Changemakers Books for discussions of all these science fiction possibilities regarding the evolution of consciousness. See also my review of Yonck’s *Future Minds* included in this collection.