

**Future Consciousness:  
The Path to Purposeful Evolution  
An Introduction**

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## Abstract

The central thesis of this article is that the creation of a good future is achieved through wisdom. Wisdom is a holistic capacity that is a synthesis of a set of key character virtues. A second main hypothesis is that wisdom should be understood as the highest expression of future consciousness. Future consciousness consists of all those normal human abilities and experiences, including emotion, desire, imagination, anticipation, thinking and planning, and purposeful action, involved in our consciousness of the future. Wisdom is heightened future consciousness which best makes possible the creation of a good future.

The good future involves the facilitation of purposeful evolution, which is maximized through wisdom. The fundamental dynamic principle in the universe is evolution, and the process of evolution itself is evolving. Through future consciousness humans have realized an evolution in evolution, involving thoughtful, informed, and purposeful evolution. Future consciousness is the most empowering and distinctive capacity of the human mind, both unique and yet expressive of the general cosmic process of the evolution of evolution.

Flourishing in the flow of purposeful evolution is a realistically grounded theory of the good future that aligns with our distinctive future-directional dynamic reality. Wisdom is the most ethical and efficacious means for realizing flourishing and the good future. The character virtues of wisdom or heightened future consciousness can be strengthened in numerous ways, including the development and execution of a wisdom-inspired ideal future personal narrative.

The ongoing development of wisdom provides a preferable direction for humanity's future psychological evolution. We should embrace a global *Age of Wisdom* as an ideal future grand narrative for humanity, setting this narrative within a cosmic evolutionary narrative. To best facilitate in others the realization of a good future, we should model ourselves on the ideals of wisdom; futurists should be wise people.

## **Future Consciousness: The Path to Purposeful Evolution An Introduction**

### **The Question of the Good Future**

In this essay I introduce my new book: *Future Consciousness: The Path to Purposeful Evolution* (Lombardo, 2017), outlining many of its main arguments and key ideas.

The book begins with the question: How do we create a good future? Although the question is simple to state, it is the central and most important challenge in human life, which we recurrently address in our personal lives and have collectively engaged and debated throughout human history. It is also the pivotal question that motivates the professional and disciplinary study of the future, and all manner of writings on the future, whether popular or academic, spiritual or scientific, or broad or narrow in scope (Bell, 1997).

Furthermore, in considering the ubiquity and significance of this question concerning human life, we are led to a deep insight regarding the nature of the conscious human mind and our own personal existence. Being able to meaningfully ask the question and come up with various answers to it is a reflection of our most distinctive and empowering mental capacity: to desire and imagine; to think about and assess; to plan and strategize; and to purposefully pursue preferable or good futures. Our minds are uniquely constructed to raise, address, and answer—in theory and action—the question of the good future. However well we exercise this complex mental ability, we are all futurists in how we understand, organize, and direct our consciousness and our lives.

Although many people would state that they do not think much about the future, let alone what the good future is and how to achieve it, I would counter that, if we attend to the flow and pattern of our experiences and behavior, we see that we all actively engage this question everyday, regularly and repeatedly so. However clearly formed and focused in our consciousness, we awake to some mini-version of this question every morning, even if our future horizon extends only to what we want to accomplish for the day. What do we need to do to make it a good day? What important priorities have we identified for our immediate future? And, based on the answers we come up with as our consciousness rises and blossoms in response to the morning sun, we all set goals, take action, and pursue the good future, however narrowly, vaguely, or piecemeal we define it for ourselves.

Yet beyond the mundane, routine, and varied aspirations of the day, creating a good future is the most encompassing practical question of human life, the central question we ponder and debate within ourselves and among ourselves, across the years of our existence on the earth. This is the pivotal challenge we are given as children: What should we pursue in our lives? What should we become? This is the question we strive to address as adults: What is the good life and are we achieving it? And this is the issue we reflect upon in our senior years: Have we succeeded or not in answering the question and living the values and achieving the goals that follow from our individual answers?

All told, our conscious minds generate and pursue innumerable goals, big and small, short and long term, that make up the fabric of our lives, and these goals identify preferable future states we aspire to realize. There are many pieces, strongly or loosely connected, to our individual views of the good future and the array of actions we engage to achieve our desired and valued aspirations for the future. But, taken as a psychological whole, our consciousness and our lives are orchestrated with an eye on defining and realizing a good future. The human mind and human behavior are *purposeful*, and this fundamental quality of intentionality within the human psyche is directed toward identifying and pursuing desirable, preferable, and good futures.

Given the centrality of the question of the good future as the ongoing concern of the human mind, it is not surprising that since the beginning of recorded human history, varied and often conflicting answers to this question—including entire philosophies of life—have been created, marketed, proselytized, and frequently forced upon human populations across the world (Lombardo, 2006a; 2006b). This is the meat and potatoes of world religions, cultural belief and value systems; businesses and governments; political and social ideologies and movements; grand narratives of the future—naturalistic or supernaturalistic—and all manner of pop philosophies and psychologies. The professional study of the future, of which there are many diverse expressions, offers a huge assortment of theories, concepts, ideals, and methodologies for thinking about the future and guiding humanity toward good or preferable futures. Indeed, if we examine any contemporary book dealing with organizational, social, environmental, or personal improvement and change, we will find, as central to their message, proposed answers to the question of the good future and how to create it. (We also see, as a necessary part of this mode of consciousness, answers regarding bad futures and how to prevent or avoid them.) We are bombarded everyday, explicitly and subliminally, with answers to this big question. Individually, what should we do with our lives? Socially, in what direction should we attempt to guide our collective actions and the future of humanity? What is the right or best course of action for all of us in the years ahead, and how do we go about determining this path?

Reflecting the great diversity of human perspectives on life—of what we believe is most important, distinctive, or essential to human existence—there are many different kinds of answers to the question of the good future and how to realize it, both individually and collectively. There are economic, materialistic, technological, social-psychological, rationalistic, religious-spiritual, naturalistic-ecological, romantic-aesthetic, and philosophical answers and proposed plans of action; answers also vary across cultures, and have varied across time (Lombardo, 2006b).

Yet, we are collectively united in creating and guiding our lives through our pursuit of the good future, however we understand it. This is the question that defines, structures, and motivates our existence; this is the fundamental interrogative framework and *modus operandi* within the psychological structure and dynamics of human consciousness and action. We are beings that envision and contemplate the future—indeed, multiple futures—and identify, plan, and pursue preferable directions and goals into the future.

Building upon this hypothesis that the distinctive function of the conscious human mind is to create and pursue in action ideas and visions of a good future, I propose the following:

*We create a good future, defined as flourishing in the flow of purposeful evolution, through the heightening of future consciousness, which is achieved by developing a core set of character virtues, most notably and centrally wisdom.*

Jumping into the contentious arena of answers and plans of action regarding the good future, I argue that this proposal is the most realistic, comprehensive, and empowering answer to the question of the good future. Following the main outline of my book, I explain in the remainder of this essay the reasoning behind this proposal and illustrate how this answer can be applied to our personal and collective lives. Finally, I explain how it provides a general ideal model for professionals engaged in guiding others toward a good future.

### **Reality and Cosmic Evolution**

As a starting point, we need to ground our concept of “a good future” in the most credible theory of reality, and in particular human reality, that we presently possess.

To explain: Our understanding of the *future* (or possible *futures*) should be consistent with our best understanding of the dynamics and structure of reality; the future is a subset and manifestation of the totality of reality. The future arises as a consequence of the nature of existence. Moreover, our understanding of what is *good*, which provides a preferential direction for the future, should also be consistent with our best understanding of reality. What is good is a selected (preferential) subset of all possible realities. In particular, our understanding of human reality—including the nature and capacities of consciousness and the human mind—should guide us in determining how humans can best realize a good future. We cannot understand what is good for us unless we understand what we are and what we are capable of achieving. (Similarly, we cannot realistically define what is the good for life on earth without determining the nature and reality of life on the earth.) In general, reality sets the context, constraints, and territory of thought and action for determining what the good life is, and how we envision and are able to realize a good future. The question of “what is reality?” precedes the questions of “What will or may happen in the future?” and “What is the good and how we can achieve it?”

So, what is the nature of reality, in particular, human reality? Although these questions have been debated since the beginnings of recorded human history (Tarnas, 1991; Solomon and Higgins, 2010), the contemporary scientific consensus has emerged, supported by numerous disciplines of study and an immense and growing amount of research, that the universe is thoroughly temporal and dynamic, future-directional, evolutionary, creative, and filled with possibilities. The universe is dynamic and continually transformative and has a multi-billion year transformative history—within the universe things change; there is an arrow and asymmetrical direction to time (and change) in the universe, defined (among other things) relative to the entropic flow of change; local areas of the universe, though, increase and evolve in complexity across time; moreover there has been an ongoing creation and proliferation of new forms within nature, if not new natural laws, in this dynamic evolutionary process; and at the micro-level (at the very least), quantum theory indicates that the future is a set of possibilities (multiple possible futures) rather than a singular deterministic pathway (Davies, 1988;

Gell-Mann, 1994; Smolin, 1997; Adams and Laughlin, 1999; Chaisson, 2005; Kaufmann, 2008; Carroll, 2010).

Of central significance, evolution, as a fundamental pattern of change within time, appears pervasive within the universe, encompassing a progressively emergent hierarchy of levels, including the physical-cosmological (both galactic and particulate); chemical; geo-ecological; bio-neurological; psychological; social; and technological, with more complex levels in the hierarchy building upon simpler levels across time. (The latter stages in this evolutionary process have, so far, only been observed on the earth, but with ongoing advances in technology there is a progressive discovery of higher levels of complexity throughout the observable universe.) Evolution generates (at the very least) growing complexity through the progressive stages of the hierarchy of levels of reality, and various evolutionists propose other developmental trends in evolution, such as increasing intelligence, energy density metabolism, and mutuality. Moreover, evolution, with its directionality of increasing complexity, (acknowledging necessary elements of chaos and destruction in this overall process) provides a temporal framework for understanding past, present, and future—the pattern of transformation across time. As with the past, the future will be evolutionary (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984; Kurzweil, 1999; Morowitz, 2002; Chaisson, 2005; Kelly, 2010; Phipps, 2012).

Additionally, throughout the history of nature, evolution appears to be accelerating (at least on the earth), with higher, more complex levels of reality in the hierarchal structure exhibiting progressively quicker rates of transformation and jumps forward in complexity. As an expression of the ongoing creativity of the universe, new principles of evolutionary change and increasing complexity seem to come into play, speeding up the transformative process. *Evolution is evolving* (Fraser, 1978; Anderson, 1996; Kurzweil, 1999, 2005).

### **Purposeful Human Evolution**

Human history, embedded in this cosmic evolutionary reality, shows an accelerative rate of change leading up to contemporary times. We can identify a series of significant transformational jumps in the complexity of human life, accelerating in succession at least since the “Great Awakening” of circa 50,000 BCE (Moravec, 1999; Morowitz, 2002; Lombardo, 2006a). Within present human reality, there is a clear transformational rush—to degrees a frantic and overloaded frenzy—with multiple interactive developmental trends along multiple dimensions, including the biological, psychological, social, environmental, and technological (Gleick, 1999). Humans are both “riding the wave” (or drowning at times) and participating in accelerative evolution. We are, with our ever-increasing array of new inventions, ideas, and modes of behavior and social interaction, the architects of accelerative evolution within our world (Christian, 2004).

Although the term “human” might suggest some static, determinate, and singular reality, history and science reveal that the human mind, embedded within a dynamic evolutionary universe, is not a constant but rather evolutionary (and perhaps a bramble bush of various pathways). Just as our bodies, our tools, our habitats, and our cultures and societies transform and evolve, so do our consciousness and mental capacities; ongoing transformations in culture, environment, and technology have influenced the

evolution of consciousness and the human mind and vice versa (Calvin, 2004; Lombardo, 2009, 2014).

I use the word “consciousness” as synonymous with “experience” or “awareness.” The content (and capacities) of human consciousness include sensory perception, emotion, desire, thought, memory, imagination, and a sense of a personal self. Although there are many theories of the nature of consciousness and its relationship with the physical world and our biological brains, including physicalist theories that identify consciousness as nothing but states of the brain, whatever it is and however it arises, consciousness is a primordial and central fact of our personally lived existence (Baars, 1997; Blackmore, 2004; Damasio, 2010; Koch, 2012; Tononi, 2012). Consciousness is the medium and arena in which everything that is meaningful to each of us—including our perceptual awareness of the physical world—is manifested and understood (Lombardo, 2011d, 2014). Our sense of self—the “I” we refer to when we say “I think, feel, or understand”—is a reality of consciousness. I discuss consciousness further, in particular, its relationship with the physical environment and the nature of “future consciousness” below, but at this point I contend that the content and capacities of human consciousness, including thinking processes, emotions, and the experienced sense of self, have transformed and evolved over historical time (Anderson, 1997). Even the consciousness of an individual person across a life span is dynamic, fluid, and evolutionary.

Reflecting similar features within the universe as a whole, both individual human consciousness within a life span and our collective historical psycho-social reality are thoroughly temporal and dynamic, future-directional, evolutionary, creative, and filled with possibilities. Additional features include being thoughtful and purposeful, whereby change, informed and guided by thinking, imagination, dialogue, and the progressive acquisition of new knowledge, is intentionally directed toward future goals or ends. Human consciousness and human society add new features into the dynamics and facilitative processes of evolutionary change.

In this regard, the conscious human mind is an evolution in evolution, in which informed and thoughtful goal setting, planning, and purposeful action are introduced into the evolutionary processes of the universe. Humans envision and engage in the *purposeful evolution* of their minds and ways of life (within and across generations); we consciously and intentionally guide change. Through the human mind, we achieve purposeful evolution, transcending the more primordial physical-biological processes of evolution, which at least by our present understanding of nature, do not involve conscious thought, foresight, or purpose (Anderson, 1996; Hubbard, 1998; Lombardo, 2014).

Yet, the purposeful and conscious human mind fits into the general pattern of change in the cosmos; the saga of the cosmos is an ongoing *evolution of evolution*, which is precisely what we realize with our purposeful conscious minds. Any coherent theory of consciousness within the evolutionary physical universe must demonstrate how consciousness naturally arises and evolves within such a physical universe and is a natural expression of the cosmos. It seems inadequate to simply assert that consciousness—being ontologically and qualitatively distinct from physical reality—“pops into existence” at some point in the history of evolution (Blackmore, 2004; Nagel, 2012). *At the very least the conscious human mind fits into the cosmos in so far*

*as it expresses in its unique fashion the general cosmic process of the ongoing evolution of evolution.*

First, at the collective trans-generational level, our beliefs, values, and ways of life transform across historical time through purposeful and informed directional guidance. We acquire new knowledge, formulate diverse views and competing beliefs, evolve our cultures and values, dialogue and debate, and apply the growing corpus of ideas, principles, and practices to transformations in our societies, our technologies, our environments, and even ourselves. Through such informed and purposeful guidance of change, involving multiple competing perspectives and intentional actions, there is an acceleration of evolution and change at the collective human level. Civilization grows out of this process.

Second, personal consciousness develops across the individual lifespan, guided by the goals, visions, and values of the individual (as well as influential others). There is purposeful future directionality to change within individual consciousness. At the foundational dynamic level, individual consciousness exhibits an experienced temporal directionality of flow from the present (out of the past) into the future—there is an experiential arrow of time toward the future within individual consciousness. Further, this directional experience of time is past/present/future integrative—that is, placed within a cognitive and interpretive context—whereby our flowing conscious present is always contextualized by a remembered past (memory and learning) and an informed and anticipated future. *There is no pure present in the conscious human mind; the fluid present is informed and guided by the past and the future.* It is within this experiential context, informed by learning and guided by intention and anticipation, that with various degrees of success we attempt to direct our consciousness and our lives within its future-directional flow toward preferable or good futures. We are swimming in the river of time—the “currents of change”—and attempting to steer the direction we are taking (Lombardo, 2007).

There is the view that a pure experience of the immediate present can be achieved in meditative, quiescent, or mystical states, but this view is counter-indicated for a number of reasons, including: The nervous system from its developmental inception is continually influenced and modified by ongoing learning interactions with the environment; the nervous system exhibits, as integral to physiological wiring and functioning, feedforward “anticipatory” and modulatory processes for all “input” transmissions; the brain and conscious mind are always active and stimulus and information seeking, rather than being passive receptacles; a conscious human mind cannot wipe out all its memories and decontextualize itself from its past; consciousness of time is structured in terms of relative stabilities and transformations—patterns across time—that produce temporally spread and demarcated experiences interwoven into the relative past and future—etc. See Gibson, 1979; Lombardo, 1987; 2017; Johnson and Sherman, 1990; Kurzweil, 2012.

In general, individual human consciousness and collective human reality, building upon learning and memory of the past, flow and grow with a purposeful trajectory toward the future—preferable futures—facilitating and further evolving the evolutionary process. Within human reality, the evolutionary flow into the future is informed, thoughtful, and purposefully guided, with various degrees and definitions of success. All the diverse efforts to realize good futures, big and small, are manifestations of this

general process of purposeful evolution within the human mind and human society. They are hypotheses and experiments in purposeful evolution.

## **Reciprocity**

As a second major point about the cosmos, in contemporary times we have also realized that we live in a universe of interdependent realities; nothing stands or moves alone. We are all held together in our relationships with each other, forming interdependent and interactive wholes. We see this general feature at the physical and cosmological levels, but also environmentally, socially, psychologically, and technologically. The term I use to refer to this ubiquitous state of complementarities and interdependencies is “reciprocity” (Lombardo, 1987).

One paradigm example of reciprocity within nature is the pervasive reality of open systems throughout the universe, in which not only are the constituents of nature “open” to interaction and influence from each other—through the exchange of matter, energy, and information—but this interactivity is essential for their continued existence and individual integrity. Nothing maintains or defines itself alone; the distinctive identity of an open system requires interaction with its ambient surroundings—we live in an “ecological universe” (Goerner, 1994, 1999; Sahtouris, 2000; Lombardo, 2002c).

The open system concept is especially applicable to life on the earth. The diverse population of living forms on the earth structures the overall dynamics and composition of the earth as a holistic system, and vice versa. Ecosystems are the holistic results of the interaction of their living parts (the multiplicity of inhabiting life forms) set in the interactive context of the surrounding geo-atmospheric-physical environment; indeed, life infuses into the physical, as the physical infuses into life (Lovelock, 1979, 1988; Sahtouris, 2000; Chaisson, 2005).

At the human level, there are numerous reciprocal relationships between human civilization and the natural environment of the earth; human civilization derives its sustenance from the environment and in numerous ways impacts and controls the environment. Further, there is a network of reciprocities among individual humans within a society, with each of us dependent upon others for our very existence, our complex ways of life, our social and professional roles, and our sense of personal identity.

The principle of reciprocity implies that we only realize our psycho-biological distinctiveness in the context of our surrounding environment—natural, social, and technological. If we were to take away our gadgets and tools, our fellow humans, and the life-supporting earth, quite literally our bodies and minds would evaporate into the void. Reciprocally, the varied contributions, good and bad, of individuals shape not only society, culturally and technologically, but also nature, in its overall form, functionality, and future direction.

Of special note, the conscious human self is ecological, embedded within and interactive with the surrounding world. We experience ourselves within a physical world and experience our conscious minds and selves as embodied within a physical-biological body that exists in the environment. Conscious minds are both embodied and ecologically contextualized (Clark, 2008). At the fundamental perceptual level of awareness, we experience (or are conscious of) ourselves and the environment in

relationship to each other—a reciprocity within consciousness (Gibson, 1979; Lombardo, 1987, 2011d).

There are many theories of the relationship of consciousness and the physical world, including physicalism, idealism, and dualism. None of these theories provides a coherent and satisfying explanation (Lombardo, 2011d; Nagel, 2012). Although numerous contemporary writers, such as Laszlo (2006), Damasio (2010), Tononi (2012), and Koch (2012) have proposed theories of consciousness and its relationship to the physical brain (and physical world), none of these theories resolves what Chalmers (1996) refers to as the “hard problem.” (How can the qualitatively distinct spheres of electro-chemical brain states and conscious experiences—of emotions, feelings, imagery, and thought—be intimately and understandably connected to each other?) Moreover, in writers such as Laszlo (2006) and others, consciousness is simply assumed as a given without any explanation of its emergence or explication of its nature.

Acknowledging the “mystery of consciousness,” as well what seems to be the central importance of evolution in understanding and explaining the conscious human mind, I propose, as *part* of a comprehensive theory of consciousness, that *the conscious self and the physical world can be understood in terms of the principle of reciprocity*; each is relatively distinct and yet interdependent (Lombardo, 1987, 2011d). As (self) conscious minds we are physically embodied and ecologically embedded, but reciprocally, the meaningful environment—which we experience and understand through perception and thought, and in which we purposefully orchestrate our actions and live out our lives—is an interpretative selection and perspective of our conscious minds.

Also, reciprocity manifests itself in the relationship between consciousness and both our body-brain systems and our technologies. Just as the physical conditions within our bodies and brains impact our conscious states, our conscious states have notable degrees of influence over our brains and biology. Humans can volitionally and consciously influence—through such activities as meditation, guided imagery, emotional management, and thought control—the biochemistry, physiological processes, and even anatomical structures of the body, including those within the brain. Clearly, using our growing scientific understanding we can, guided by the informed and thoughtful intentions of our minds, selectively influence through physical technologies our bodies and brains. Directly through our conscious minds, or mediated through scientific-technological creations of our minds, we are increasingly gaining control over our bodies and our brains; this is part of the process of purposeful evolution. And in reciprocity, through purposeful and informed evolution of our bodies and brains, we are influencing the ongoing evolution of our conscious minds. (Lombardo, 2002b; Garreau, 2005; Roberts, 2014 ).

We can view technologies as instrumental enhancements of mind and body for achieving specific conscious ends; the functions of mind and body are extended and amplified through our machines; as “natural-born cyborgs” we synthesize with our machines (Clark, 2003; Lombardo & Blackwood, 2011). As the human conscious mind manifests and expresses itself through the body and purposeful behavior, the conscious mind extends into its tools and instruments as well; through technology we possess “extended minds” (Clark, 2008). The creation and use of technologies is another

important expression of the purposeful evolution of ourselves and our world. Although to significant degrees tools mold the tool users, tools are created and guided in their utilization by the thoughts, future goals, and intentions of the tool users.

In general, *the purposeful, informed, and thoughtful conscious self and the physical ambience and embodiment of our conscious existence (including the environment, the body/brain system, and technologies) form a complex array of reciprocities, with the former guiding but also being shaped by the latter* (Lombardo, 2002a).

This brings us to a final question: What is the connection between reciprocity and evolution within nature and human reality? One important connection, alluded to above, is the process of *reciprocal evolution*. The cosmos as a whole, and among its varied parts, evolves interactively; new individual entities emerge in connection with other entities, and continue to develop as interdependent collectives. For example, life forms within ecosystems are co-dependent and interactively evolving. Humans evolve interactively and reciprocally with technological evolution, and human society, taken as a whole, evolves in interaction with the surrounding environment. In all of this, whether competently or incompetently, we are purposefully guiding the process. Of course, entering into this interactive evolutionary process—necessarily so—are competition and destruction. Whether other forces bring it on, or we are the architects of it, there is “passing away” within the collective evolutionary flow. In short, reciprocal evolution means that we are all participating, with diverse effects upon each other, in the evolutionary process. To quote Chardin, “We are moving.” (Phipps, 2012). Reality is a collective motion. The circle of interdependency and the line of evolutionary progression synthesize in the pluralistic interactive dynamism of the world.

### **Well Being and the Good**

Turning from reality to the nature of the good, within human history there are many competing ethical theories of the good (Lombardo, 2016c, 2016d). Ethical theories, however conceptualized, invariably present their prescriptions and ideals, informed and inspired by beliefs about the real and the particular conditions of human existence. Religious and spiritual theories, for example, which postulate higher or metaphysical levels of reality, significantly anchor their visions of what is the ultimate good to features of these higher postulated realities (such as God and ideal forms of the good), whereas secular views anchor their visions of the good to presumed important psychological, social, and physical naturalistic facts about human reality. Moreover, ethical theories reflect cultural differences—Eastern versus Western for example—regarding the nature of reality (Nisbett, 2003; Lombardo, 2016a).

One popular approach to ethics, which clearly depends upon beliefs about human reality, is that the good leads to or is equivalent with well being—well being understood as an ideal state of human reality. Well being is a complex issue, though, one that throughout history has been grounded in different theories of human reality. At the very least, well being has been associated with mental and physical health; spiritual or intellectual enlightenment; freedom, self-determination, and self-expression; love, intimacy, and social community; emotional vitality; communion with nature; deep purpose and a meaningful life; economic prosperity; education and self-development;

human equality and human rights; and environmental health (Hämäläinen and Michaelson, 2014; Ryff and Singer, 2005; *Quality of Life Index*).

Given that these biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors reciprocally interact within human reality, well being necessarily involves all the major dimensions of human consciousness (e.g., emotion and thought), as well as our relationships with other humans and nature as a whole. Any viable theory of the good and the good future that is grounded in well being needs to be psychologically holistic and socio-ecologically integrative in this regard. Well being and the good need to be realistically anchored to the principle of reciprocity.

It could be argued that true altruism—giving to the other without the expectation of reciprocation—is a higher and more revered form of ethical behavior than actions built on reciprocity. But my emphasis in grounding a theory of the good in the principle of reciprocity is intended as a counterpoint to the powerful human tendencies toward conceptualizing the self or a human society independent of the environment and, within this dualistic mindset, behaving and thinking in entirely self-serving ways. Who we are and the world that we live within are not totally separate realities; how we impact the world will impact us. We cannot disregard or trivialize the other (living or non-living) in our goals and behaviors.

Moreover, it could be argued (a view espoused in both spiritual practices and humanistic-psychological perspectives) that to most efficaciously contribute to the well being of others (including the natural environment), we need to develop ourselves, cognitively and emotionally. We best serve the other through the enhancement of our own skills and various character virtues; we cannot realistically separate the capacity for giving (altruism) from our own purposeful self-development. Our greatest saints and benefactors realized their powers of benevolence through tenacious efforts at self-improvement; serving the “I” and the “other” are not separate realities. We can go overboard in our own self concerns and personal aspirations (becoming too egocentric and selfish), but a realistic balance or temperance between the self and the other is the most effective way to benefit both reciprocal ends of the complementarity.

And as one final point, the argument has been presented in environmental ethics (Boylan, 2001) that the living environment should be seen as having intrinsic value independent of human concerns—analogously we could argue that other people should be seen as having intrinsic worth independent of what value they may have for us personally—but the capacity to perceive or understand the intrinsic worth of something, again, is cultivated through the enhancement of various psychological abilities, perceptual-emotional sensitivities, and reservoirs of knowledge within ourselves. All in all, reciprocity is key in understanding the nature of well being and the good.

### **Flourishing in the Flow of Purposeful Evolution**

In addition, and importantly so, any realistic theory of the good also needs to align with the evolutionary nature of reality and the distinctive evolutionary nature of human existence. We are purposeful, evolutionary beings existing within the flow of evolution; the flow of evolution is, indeed, within us. If nature, including human reality, is dynamic and evolutionary, then well being and the good for humans also needs to be conceptualized in dynamic and evolutionary terms. In particular, if our distinctive

capacity is to facilitate purposeful evolution with an eye on the future, then well being and the good for humans should align with this unique dynamic feature of our psychosocial reality.

Expanding on Martin Seligman's (2011) psychological concept of "flourishing," I propose that "to flourish in the flow of evolution" provides a dynamic, future-directional, holistic concept of well being and the good that aligns with an evolutionary and interactive vision of reality. As a starting point, flourishing can be defined as "to grow well or luxuriantly (with abundance)...to do well, to prosper, to thrive, and to be highly productive." I propose that to flourish within the evolutionary interactive flow of our existence best captures well being within our dynamic reality. Well being and the good cannot realistically be conceptualized as a static (stable/eternal), or individualized (self-centered/self-contained) quality.

Moreover, since it is our distinctive nature and capacity to engage in purposeful evolution, flourishing needs to be intimately connected with purposeful evolution. For one thing, flourishing is something we achieve purposefully; the good doesn't just happen to us; the good arises through purpose. For humans, the good (and well being) is to flourish in the flow of purposeful evolution.

Building on the work of Seligman and other positive psychologists (Keyes, 2002; Keyes and Haidt, 2003; Haidt, 2006), I propose the idea of "flourishing in the flow of purposeful evolution" as a general theory of human well being and the good. The good for humans involves qualities such as dynamism, growth, self-determination, purpose, interactivity within the world, creativity, and the psychologically holistic qualities of the conscious human mind. Importantly so, flourishing carries with it aesthetic, romantic, sensory, vitalizing, and inspirational features; the good life is holistic and elevating, engaging the heart and the senses as well as the mind. (Parenthetically, "growth" does not necessarily mean physical or economic growth; it can mean—most importantly so—psychological growth and the development of consciousness.) The following qualities, then, are those seen as central to "flourishing in the flow of purposeful evolution."

- Directional holistic growth
- Accomplishment and achievement
- Deep purpose and meaning in life
- Self-creation and self-determination
- Transcendence (social, natural, and cosmic)
- Emotionally positive conscious states (often with respect to others)
- Cognitively expanding conscious states
- Creativity, novelty, and adventure
- The experience of beauty; exhilaration in the senses and the sensual
- Psychological vitality; enthusiasm and zest for life; play
- Appropriate balance of peace and rejuvenation
- Active engagement and contribution, impact, and mastery with respect to the world
- Mutually beneficial social functioning and relationships
- Physical health and physical vitality
- Supportive, beneficial environmental conditions, which are in states of flourishing

Happiness, which has often been identified as the highest human good, can be understood as the conscious state associated with flourishing; we are happy when we flourish. Also, in line with Seligman and positive psychology, flourishing and long-term authentic happiness are accomplishments; such states don't just happen to us; they are achieved through purpose and effort (Seligman, 2002; Haidt, 2006; Rubin, 2009). Seligman describes this view of happiness and flourishing as "an active agency theory." Happiness and the good are purposeful accomplishments.

Flourishing can be applied as an ideal to both individuals and social collectives; societies, cultures, or humanity as a whole can flourish or flounder. A flourishing society defines what is a good society. Moreover, since individuals and societies exist interactively in states of reciprocal evolution with their environments, flourishing can also be applied as an ideal to human-environmental systems; we should aspire toward a flourishing earth, involving both human society and living ecological systems. Here it is important to note that the natural state of nature is evolution, and a flourishing living environment is not static (conserved or sustained) but transformative. For that matter, a good society should not be modeled on sustainability either, since human societies are dynamic and evolutionary as well. Static utopian visions are unrealistic (Lombardo, J.B., 2010).

The above list of qualities of flourishing finds its primary inspiration in psychology rather than social-cultural or ecological-environmental thinking. Consequently, in further developing the theory that flourishing provides a general and realistic vision of well being and the good, additional features of flourishing, specifically applicable to social or ecological realities, may be added. But the above list does incorporate many of the ideas on well being and the good, cited above, that developed in the history of social-political and ecological-naturalistic thinking.

One particular point to clarify is that flourishing as a basic criteria for the good does not simply apply to how we evaluate and guide our own lives, but also how we impact others. To do good means to flourish and help others to flourish (other humans and other life forms). As included in the list of qualities above, flourishing involves contributing to the whole (see my description of wisdom below as well). Hence, in this regard the social and ecological is included in my proposed list of qualities of flourishing. Indeed, referring back to my discussion of reciprocity and altruism, our contributions to others need not only include those humans or other living forms that are of perceived value to our own goals and interests. From a cosmic perspective, we can think in terms of how we contribute into the flourishing of the cosmic whole. We do run into challenges though, which brings in the importance of wisdom in balancing individual and collective-holistic concerns, in addressing situations in which social or bio-physical systems seem to be flourishing at the expense of other systems.

### **Holistic Future Consciousness**

We now come to the question of what facilitates flourishing in the flow of purposeful evolution. What do we need to develop in ourselves to realize well being and the good future in a purposeful, future-directional, interactive, and evolutionary human reality?

Purposeful evolution is a result of the human capacity of future consciousness, involving the abilities to desire and imagine, anticipate, think and plan, and purposefully act toward the creation of preferable futures. We are able to purposefully evolve because we possess the multi-faceted psychological capacity of future consciousness. Purposeful evolution through future consciousness is our most distinctive and empowering mental ability, connecting us with the evolutionary nature of the cosmos, yet providing a mechanism of transcendence and further evolution over more primordial processes of evolution. Within the imaginative space of our conscious minds we can envision and aspire toward the future, and in particular preferable futures.

Holistic future consciousness is a multifaceted normal human ability, defined as the total integrative set of psychological processes and modes of experience and behavior involved in our consciousness of the future. It includes our hopes and fears; our planning and our goals; our visions of the future; the stories we tell ourselves about the future; and our purposeful behaviors intended to create desired and preferable futures. All our psychological processes and modes of consciousness, including perception and behavior; emotion and motivation; learning, memory, and understanding; anticipation, thinking, and planning; intuition and imagination; self-identity; and social interaction are involved in future consciousness and our experience and creation of the future. (Lombardo, 2011a).

All humans necessarily possess, as integral to their overall psychological functioning, some level of holistic future consciousness. Without holistic future consciousness a person would seem aimless, lost, mentally deficient, passive, and reactive. They would not seem intelligent or even human. Imagine a person who showed no purpose, no intentions, or no planning and goals in their behavior; try to think of someone who cannot imagine future possibilities, or even conceptualize the future. Future consciousness is at the core of our distinctive human nature. Yet holistic future consciousness significantly varies in level of development among individuals and groups, and can be strengthened or enhanced through a host of different methods.

Looking at holistic future consciousness from a historical perspective—to drive home the central importance of it within human reality—*it is the development of future consciousness in humans across the ages that primarily drove the evolution of human civilization*, being integrally involved in the evolution of bonding, coupling, and child rearing; hunting and gathering; instruments and technology; graphic art; trading and negotiation; agriculture; habitation and urbanization; war and conquest; religion; ethics and law; and science. In all these cases, anticipation, prediction, and foresight; thinking and planning; visions of the good (or a better) future; memory and learning in the service of informed purposeful behavior; and goal setting were involved (Lombardo, 2006a).

Given such historical considerations, holistic future consciousness is the key “evolution of evolution”—supporting purposeful evolution—to emerge in the ongoing development of the human mind and human civilization. To restate and clarify further, it is an evolution of evolution because both our ongoing collective history and our individual life span streams of consciousness have been increasingly brought under *informed, self-reflective, prescriptive-ethical, visionary, and purposeful guidance* through holistic future consciousness. Holistic consciousness of the future makes possible purposeful evolution within human reality. Holistic future consciousness encompasses,

coordinates, and drives our psychological, social-cultural, biological, technological, and ecological advancements.

Since holistic future consciousness captures the distinctive capacity of the evolutionary, purposeful, and future-directional nature of the human mind, we could argue that excellence within this fundamental set of abilities provides a way to define what is good or best within humans. Following a similar line of thought from Aristotle, what is good is realized through the excellence of functioning of the distinctive capacities of being human.

Furthermore, as a second way to describe the connection between what is good and heightened future consciousness, flourishing in the flow of purposeful evolution is best served by heightening the capacities of holistic future consciousness, since holistic future consciousness is what makes possible and facilitates purposeful evolution. Flourishing in the flow of purposeful evolution *is* the good, and excellence in the capacities of holistic future consciousness maximizes this process—and consequently what is good.

### **The Virtues of Heightened Future Consciousness**

A distinctive set of holistic character virtues provide standards of excellence for defining heightened future consciousness. Developing and exercising these virtues of heightened future consciousness best facilitates flourishing in purposeful evolution and realizing the good future. The synthesis of these virtues is wisdom, conceived as a future-focused, evolutionary, and ethical process that maximizes the good future both for ourselves and others.

Virtues can be defined as esteemed character traits which embody excellence and positive values across the varied aspects of human consciousness and behavior. Virtues are positive values psychologically internalized and lived, whereby the good merges with desire and habit (Thiroux and Krasemann, 2009). Moreover, following similar arguments in Aristotle, Confucius, Spinoza, and Seligman, virtues are personal accomplishments; they are realized through effort, practice, and achievement based on the belief in and aspiration and practice toward excellence. The realization of virtues assumes an “active agency theory” of the human mind.

The character virtues of heightened future consciousness include:

- Self-awareness, self-control, and self-responsibility (an empowered personal narrative)
- Realistic idealism (the belief in and pursuit of excellence)
- Self-growth (a progressive personal narrative)
- The skill and love of learning (including honesty, wonder, curiosity, humility, and the quest for truth and understanding)
- The skill and love of thinking and multiple modes of understanding (including self-reflectivity, intuition and insight, and the virtues of critical thinking)
- Expansive temporal consciousness (a rich and thoughtful integration of history and the future—imaginative and visionary foresight—an evolved grand narrative)
- Cosmic consciousness (including awe, ecological and global consciousness, and a sense of reciprocity, justice, and transcendence)

- Hope, courage, and optimism
- Love (including gratitude, passionate appreciation, and compassion)
- Deep purpose and tenacity (including discipline and commitment)
- Ethical pragmatism (practical wisdom—knowledge and ethics in action)
- Creativity and the adventuresome spirit
- Balance and temperance (the integration of multiple values and virtues) (Lombardo, 2011a)

In summary and review, consider the connection between flourishing in the flow of purposeful evolution and the development and practice of the character virtues of heightened future consciousness. *Since the good is realized in an evolutionary reality, to be good involves purposefully guiding the evolutionary direction—the flow—toward increased flourishing.* Our primary moral imperative is to flourish and contribute to the flourishing of others and to purposefully guide future evolution to realize greater levels of flourishing. We unleash our distinctive conscious power to fulfill this evolutionary imperative through the ongoing purposeful development and exercise of the character virtues of heightened future consciousness.

### **Self-Control and Self-Responsibility**

We are not only in the river of time, we are participatory and cannot help but influence the flow of the river. Moreover, we are not simply passive or reactive regarding the conditions of our existence. We are anticipatory and purposeful agents embedded within the dynamic reality in which we find ourselves. Whatever the conditions of the environment in which we find ourselves—as well as the states and conditions of our own conscious minds—we regularly exercise the capacity to direct and influence our minds, our behavior, and the environmental conditions around us. As purposeful agents, we are psychologically constructed for and capable of—and consequently ethically responsible for—our self-evolution. Indeed, in various ways we are influential and responsible for the surrounding conditions of our existence and the interpretive meaning given such conditions.

At the center of consciousness is the self; the self is the conscious agent of purposeful evolution. Heightened future consciousness begins with self-control and self-responsibility. Self-responsibility is the cardinal virtue of heightened future consciousness, since the realization of any virtue is a purposeful accomplishment of the individual, which presupposes self-responsibility. In developing any virtue the individual must believe in and act upon the conviction that personal character (qualities of mind and behavior) is a consequence of individual actions and efforts and consequently can be purposefully modified and enhanced. Virtues require that individuals see themselves as responsible for who they are; the development of virtues don't just happen. Self-responsibility empowers, by assigning power to, the individual for their own self-transformation and development.

At its core heightened future consciousness requires that individuals take responsibility for their future, which includes their own personal evolution. Such a mindset is psychologically elevating and empowering—generating positive and

energizing emotional states—while the reverse is a psychologically depressing victim mindset.

As noted earlier, the conscious self exists in a reciprocal relationship with the world and is participatory in the creation and meaning-making of the environment in which the self exists. We are responsible, in various ways, for the world that we experience and in which we find ourselves. Self-control and self-responsibility are exercised in the context of a selectively guided and psychologically constructed environment. We need to take responsibility for the present and future world in which we live, for we contribute to its creation and its meaning for us.

Self-control is realized through the development of will power, a variable psychological capacity that can be strengthened through disciplined practice and increasing psychologically informed self-knowledge (Baumeister and Tierney, 2011).

### **The Ecology of Future Consciousness**

The conscious self purposefully evolves in a self-guided and actively selected reciprocal relationship with the evolving environment. We are open, dynamic systems existing within and interactive with a dynamic environment. The meaningful environment, interpreted, selected, and to some degree actively created by the conscious self, includes technological, social, natural, and cosmic dimensions.

For our social, technological, naturalistic, and cosmic environments, heightened future consciousness involves an expansive, informed, and thoughtful understanding of trends, challenges, opportunities, and future possibilities within these varied dimensions of human existence. Heightened future consciousness involves seeing ourselves and our future possibilities within the context of these enveloping reciprocal realities. We most efficaciously self-evolve through an understanding of the transformative and ambient reality in which we exist. Through understanding the environment we perceive opportunities of action.

To highlight a few key points: At the social level, there are a set of social virtues that the individual can self-responsibly develop, such as the character dispositions toward friendship, collaboration, mutual support, and altruism, that will generate a positive and rich social ambience of resonant persons for self-evolution and the co-creation of a good future. Our social ambience—and the future of our social reality—to a great degree is under our individual control through the exercise of social virtues (Ryff and Keyes, 1995; Keyes, 2002).

Regarding our technological environment, humans are cyborgs, a functional synthesis of the technological and the bio-psycho-social. Instead of abandoning technology because of its various presumed negative effects (Carr, 2010), we should pursue becoming “wise cyborgs” with an eye on benefiting our future evolution. A wise cyborg (which is a preferred vision of our cyborg future) is an individual who creates and utilizes mental technologies (technologies that support mental or psychological activities) to facilitate the pursuit and exercise of wisdom (Lombardo & Blackwood, 2011). The ideals of the mind, such as wisdom, self-responsibility, and virtue, should guide the uses and evolution of technology. In this regard, the ongoing exploration and development of what Roberts (2014), for example, refers to as

“mindapps” (technologies for expanding and enhancing the capacities of the mind) should be guided by the ideals of wisdom.

At the deepest and most profound level, we should see ourselves as both creations of nature and the cosmos, and evolved facilitators in the ongoing further evolution of the earth and the universe. We are both one with nature and the universe and transcendent. We are the evolutionary universe becoming self-conscious and increasingly self-directive. To quote Julian Huxley, “We are nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself.”

## **Emotions about the Future**

There are a set of fundamental psychological dimensions (or processes) involved in holistic future consciousness. For each of the following basic psychological dimensions or processes involved in future consciousness, such as emotion, motivation, and cognition, there are relevant character virtues that can be strengthened, and I highlight below one or two character virtues for each of them.

To begin: Emotion is a foundational dimension of the human mind, invariably coloring and influencing all states of future consciousness. It is a rationalistic bias and oversight to ignore or minimize the essential role of emotion in futurist thinking and action and the heightening of future consciousness. Connecting self-responsibility, emotion, and the future, heightened future consciousness involves taking responsibility for guiding the future evolution of our emotional life.

Hope is the primary positive anticipatory emotion, whereas fear is the primary negative anticipatory emotion. Hope generates approach behavior, happiness, and enthusiasm, whereas fear about the future generates despair and depression (Reading, 2004; Snyder, Rand, and Sigmon, 2005).

Following from Fredrickson’s (2005, 2009) “Broaden and Build Theory,” positive emotions (such as hope and love) produce more expansive, sensitive, creative, and transformational conscious states. In essence, cognitive abilities, inclusive of future-oriented capacities, are enhanced through positive emotions.

A predominately hopeful mindset and mode of behavior is a primary virtue of heightened future consciousness. A hopeful emotional attitude toward the future generates optimism; a fearful emotional mindset toward the future generates pessimism. Optimists are more confident, persistent, and meet challenges in life better. They show higher subjective well being, experience fewer negative feelings when facing problems, are “approach coping” (as opposed to avoidance coping), and in general are more reality focused than pessimists. Optimism and pessimism generate self-fulfilling prophecy effects with respect to the future (Seligman, 1998; Carver and Scheier, 2005).

Overall, hope and optimism are virtues requiring courage and sustained cognitive and behavioral effort. Hope and optimism, as well as other positive emotions, such as love and wonder, can be strengthened through a variety of behavioral and cognitive practices.

Although negative or painful emotion seems necessary and valuable in the development of both character and a deep appreciation of what is good in life (see the in depth discussion in my book, Lombardo, 2017), as a cultivated set of virtues, positive emotions (such as hope, love, happiness, and wonder) are the energizing core of

heightened future consciousness. When we flourish, we feel good emotionally, and when we feel good, we are stimulated into greater levels of flourishing and higher levels of cognitive-behavioral performance. Our psychological and ethical evolution necessarily involves an emotional dimension, energizing, enriching, and guiding our journey into the future.

### **Motivation and Growth**

The central feature of motivation is purpose. Motivation is the purposeful intent and effort to satisfy wants or desires through the achievement of goals. Since almost all human behavior is motivated or purposeful, motivation can also be defined as the fundamental future-focused directionality of the human mind, experience, and behavior. In so far as we are motivated, our mental energy is directed towards the future, whether short or long term. Motivated behavior is instigated, structured, and directed by imagined and desired future states. Motivation is the impetus and intention of future consciousness. Motivation is psychologically holistic, synthesizing emotion, desire, thought, and action.

A fundamental dimension of human motivation is the oppositional drives toward stability and security versus growth and change, the former connected with the desire for safety and predictability with respect to the future, and the latter connected with the desire for relative unpredictability, adventure, and risk in the future. The uncertainty of the future can provoke either fear or excitement, and correspondingly, either avoidance or approach. Approaching or confronting uncertainty requires the virtue of courage. As a general psychological principle, humans require (and seek out) a relative balance of the new and the familiar, of stability and change, although there is notable individual and cultural variability in this relative balance.

Although acknowledging the motivational need and value for a psychological balance of stability and change, there exists a fundamental oppositional polarity within the motivational-emotional dimension of future consciousness in which one end of the polarity contributes to purposeful evolution and the other end dampens the process. On one hand, there is the connected configuration of hope and enthusiasm; approach and courage; self-efficacy; opportunity-focus; and optimism. Conversely, depression and despair; avoidance, fear, and doubt; helplessness; defense-focus; and pessimism form a second connected configuration. The former configuration supports and moves us toward growth and a positive future; the latter configuration generates stasis, if not regression, and a diminished capacity for creating a positive future.

### **Purposeful Behavior**

Tenacity and deep purpose in life are key motivational virtues of heightened future consciousness, empowering the human mind and human behavior with a sustained, long-term sense of personal future direction.

Tenacity (also referred to as “grit”) is high self-discipline with passionate persistence in the face of adversity. Tenacity is fueled by passion for a personally important goal and is strengthened through practice in pursuing and realizing progressively longer term goals. Tenacity is more important than talent in predicting

success; tenacity, in fact, amplifies talent and skill, since the latter qualities increase as a consequence of committed practice (Seligman, 2011).

Deep purpose drives tenacity. Deep purpose is an overarching life direction, an expansive motivational temporal consciousness. According to Zimbardo (2008), deep purpose is necessary for authentic long-term happiness. Deep purpose frequently involves the quality of transcendence, of having a life cause that transcends individual concerns. Deep purpose involves connecting our personal future narrative—the story we tell ourselves about our future—with our grand narrative—the story we tell ourselves about the future of humanity, nature, and the cosmos. Deep purpose is an essential dimension of wisdom. With deep purpose, our envisioned individual future pathway contributes to and finds meaning within our grand future narrative.

### **Learning, Memory, and Habit**

Memory of the past, acquired through learning but selectively structured and interpreted in terms of personal perspectives, thoughts, and feelings, is the knowledge foundation for both present and future consciousness. (Normal human memory is not a literal record of the experienced past.) Learning and memory serve meaning-making, anticipation, and planning; the primary adaptive function of consciousness of the past is to serve consciousness of the future. Even the simplest forms of learning through behavioral conditioning involve a dimension of future consciousness, of the acquisition of learned anticipations and instrumental behaviors for achieving goals.

Deep learning is a form of learning and a key process in purposeful self-evolution; it is essential to a life of flourishing and cognitively expanding conscious states. Deep learning, which is distinguished from surface learning, is described as psychologically transformational, holistically impacting the human mind. Deep learning is an active process; it involves thinking while learning. Other qualities of deep learning include: the synthesis of big picture perspectives on reality; the penetration of new knowledge into the core values and beliefs of an individual; conceptual reorganization; and the ability for transference of learning to new situations. Deep learning is self-reflective, intrinsically motivating, and it generates positive emotional affect. Deep learning provokes the experience of enlightenment (of illuminating integrative insights) and is a necessary component in the development of wisdom. Deep learning takes place in “wisdom narratives,” where life crises or challenges provoke personal growth (Lombardo, 2006c).

The love and skill of learning—a cognitive virtue that is grounded in the curiosity motive—drives deep learning and life-long learning. There are many ways to facilitate deep learning, including purposeful thinking about the subject matter being learned, active teaching of the subject matter, and using newly acquired knowledge to solve practical problems.

The ongoing, deeply learned acquisition of knowledge supports flexibility, creativity, the expansion of consciousness, personal growth, and dynamic future-focused wisdom. Wisdom is not static; wisdom lives through ongoing deep learning and transformative self evolution. Mentally, we grow or we die.

### **Consciousness and Understanding**

Consciousness and understanding, beginning with perception, are perspectival, selective, integrative, and interpretive. Given that there is no absolute, objective, and omnipresent knowledge (for humans at least), our conscious understanding of ourselves and the world can continuously evolve in the future without end. Embracing the contingent, open-ended, and perpetually growing nature of human knowledge and understanding, humility, curiosity, and unending wonder is a key virtue cluster of heightened future consciousness (Lombardo, 2016e).

Humans selectively organize their conscious understanding in terms of concepts, theories, paradigms, world views, and both personal and grand narratives. In particular, humans have a strong psychological disposition (or cognitive bias) to make sense out of the world, as well as themselves, through narratives or stories, which provide meaning, purpose, hope, and drama to human existence. Narratives are emotional-cognitive structures with a temporal dimension. Grand narratives explain the origin, transformation, and future of humanity and the universe; personal narratives describe the history and meaning of an individual life. Our grand and personal narratives are the fundamental mental structures we use for organizing, in a temporal sequential fashion, past and future consciousness. Both types of narratives can be uplifting and empowering, or depressing and disempowering. Both types of narratives can be rewritten; the past is an act of interpretation and the future is an act of creation.

In comparing Eastern versus Western visions of enlightenment and wisdom, which are traditionally seen as ideal elevated states of consciousness and understanding, a basic polarity in emphasis exists between holistic, insightful, and a both/and logic of understanding in the former case, and analytic, linear, and either/or logic of understanding in the latter case. An ideal global vision of wisdom and enlightenment should integrate both modes of understanding and awareness. Heightened future consciousness should embrace the virtue of cognitive balance within its modes of understanding (Anderson, 2003; Nisbett, 2003; Smyre & Richardson, 2016; Lombardo, 2016b).

Just as we should take responsibility for our behavior and how we influence our environment, we should take responsibility for guiding (or controlling) our thoughts and consciousness. People do not control the flow of their thoughts and consciousness very well; there is both order and chaos, and limited preferable future directionality within the ecology of consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993). Following Baumeister and Tierney (2011), there appears to be an increasing level of individual control of consciousness throughout human history—an ongoing evolutionary direction—connected with the increasing development of self-responsibility and self-control within individual lives.

There are three key factors in controlling consciousness: knowledge and understanding of the present flow and make-up of consciousness; goals for the transformation of consciousness (having a clear consciousness of preferable future states of our consciousness); and practice involving numerous types of methods developed in psychology, meditative practices, and other disciplines. For example, the principles for strengthening willpower apply to consciousness, as well as behavior. In essence, controlling consciousness involves the heightening of future consciousness, where the fundamental goal is the enhancement of self-determination within our consciousness; the flow of consciousness becomes more purposefully directed.

## **Thinking, Imagination, and Foresight**

Thinking is a highly evolved sequential conscious process, embodying both reasoning and insight, and often involving inner dialogue with ourselves. Thinking serves many functions, and we can self-reflect through thinking on any feature of our consciousness, providing an overarching conscious guidance system for life and our minds. We can engage in thinking about thinking. Thinking about the future is a fundamental and critical feature of holistic future consciousness.

Although almost all humans think (to some degree), thinking is a skill with standards of excellence. Intellectual standards and virtues have been identified within “critical thinking” philosophy. Standards include precision, accuracy, breadth, depth, significance, and clarity. Virtues of good thinking include honesty, humility, courage, fair-mindedness, and open-mindedness. The opposite of good critical thinking is egocentric (self-serving) thinking. Good thinking, though a cognitive skill, has essential ethical and emotional-personal dimensions; the skill of good thinking is driven by the love of thinking and the exercise of the virtues of good thinking; willful poor thinking is a personal failing and ethical vice (Paul & Elder, 1999; Elder & Paul, 2002).

The standards and virtues of critical thinking should be applied to thinking about the future. Thinking about the future includes foresight; goal setting; problem solving; planning; and envisioning, evaluating, and comparing hypothetical futures, covering possible, probable, plausible, and preferable futures. A basic distinction can be made between imagining and thinking out “ends” (visions and goals) and imagining and thinking out “means” (strategies and plans), although in real life, modifying either means or ends often involves rethinking the other. Decision making on both goals and plans should involve a balance of commitment and flexibility. In thinking about and envisioning the future, multiple modes of understanding should be engaged, guided and evaluated through standards of cognitive excellence.

In summary, consciousness, understanding, imagination, and thinking (including thinking about the future) have evolved through time and continue to evolve, and although all are perspectival, fallible, relatively chaotic at times, and only partially under our present self-control, through the practice and application of a set of virtues, are all self-reflective, self-evaluative, self-expansive, self-motivating, self-improving, and self-evolving without any determinable upper limit in competence and achievement.

## **Creativity for the Future**

The future is the ongoing expression of the act of creation within the universe, and we are all participating in it. The evolutionary universe is creative and humans, through future consciousness and purposeful evolution, build upon this creative cosmic process.

Creativity has been a focus of interest in mythology, philosophy, physical science, biology, psychology, social thought, art, and the study of technological evolution. Various recurrent themes and principles have emerged across these different perspectives and disciplines, including the interplay of order (harmony) and chaos; birth and death; and competition and selection versus symbiosis and reciprocity. The psychology of creativity

has both identified creative personality types and provided a synthetic vision of the respective roles of linear rationality and holistic insight in creativity (Lombardo, 2011e).

Building on these diverse areas of study, I propose as a general theory that creativity, involving a balanced synthesis of complementary qualities, including discipline and play and logic and intuition, is the making of order out of chaos, which often involves as a prelude the making of chaos out of order.

The future is open, creative, and surprising—and so is evolution—and consequently, heightened future consciousness, to be in resonance with reality, necessarily requires a creative dimension. Heightened future consciousness embodies and stimulates creativity in many ways: It is open-minded and imaginative about future possibilities; motivated by curiosity, wonder, and a spirit of adventure; courageous, flexible, and open to uncertainty; and hopeful, optimistic, and constructive (which fuels imagination, thinking, and creativity). It also involves a love of learning and thinking (to stimulate new knowledge and ideas); and it promotes a strong sense of personal growth, self-actualization, self-transcendence, and self-stimulation. All of these qualities apply to wisdom as well, the synthesis of the character virtues of heightened future consciousness. Heightened future consciousness or wisdom is essentially the desire and enhanced capacity to imagine and create positive or good futures.

### **The Self and the Personal Narrative**

The nature of the self is connected with evolution. The human self reflects the evolving self-reflectivity of the universe; agency, purpose, choice, self-control, and self-responsibility have evolved and are continuing to evolve within nature (Kauffman, 2008; Damasio, 2010). The human self is not an archaic and constraining psychological reality, but an empowering emergent reality within consciousness and the universe.

Moreover, the human self is evolving ways that enhance or further its own evolution; through the contributions of diverse disciplines of study and perspectives on life, there is a self-conscious, purposeful, knowledge-informed, value-driven ongoing evolution of the self within human history. Inspired by dynamic and evolutionary views of human nature, there are numerous contemporary theories and approaches, coming out of psychology and related disciplines, proposing preferable visions of the future human self, and strategies and methods for realizing these visions (Lombardo, 2009, 2014).

The human self (and human nature) is open-ended and evolutionary. The self is a dynamic rather than static reality, both within the historical evolution of the human mind, and within the life span of an individual consciousness (Anderson, 1997).

The self creates and evolves itself as the coordinator of consciousness and human life through an ongoing, future-directional, self-reflective storytelling process, generating a relatively dynamic personal narrative of past and future, real and ideal (Damasio, 2010). The self creates purpose, identity, and meaning in life through a personal narrative set within the context of a grand narrative it tells itself about the humanity, the world, and the universe. Transforming our life, consciousness, and self-identity involves transforming and evolving our ideal future personal narrative and our ideal future grand narrative, and pulling the two more clearly, strongly, and self-consciously together (Wilson, 2011).

There is special value in assessing and rewriting the ideal future personal narrative: It enhances self-consciousness and self-transcendence; it creates an action-oriented, self-empowered, narrative framework for the future; it provides greater coherence, meaning, purpose, and sense of growth to life. Consciously working on our personal narratives for the future may be the most psychologically effective way to facilitate purposeful evolution.

As a central exercise for the heightening of future consciousness and wisdom, we should articulate and re-write, where necessary, our ideal future personal narrative as a “wisdom narrative” that embraces the development and implementation of the character virtues of heightened future consciousness in our future lives.

### **Wisdom for the Future**

Wisdom is the central integrative theme of my book *Future Consciousness* (Lombardo, 2017); it is the light toward which we should aspire. Wisdom is the integrative virtue synthesizing the psychological capacities and character virtues of heightened future consciousness.

Building on the work of contemporary wisdom writers and their definitions of wisdom, and attempting to integrate various descriptions of wisdom throughout human history, both Eastern and Western, I propose the following key features to wisdom:

- Wisdom is the highest expression of both self-development and future consciousness. Through the ages wisdom has been revered as the pinnacle of personal character, conscious enlightenment, and human excellence. Within my evolutionary vision of the human mind—acknowledging all these traditional points—wisdom is identified as the highest expression of our most distinctive and empowering psychological capacity, which is future consciousness.
- Wisdom is personally internalized knowledge; it is not surface knowledge but deep understanding that impacts, structures, and colors human personality, character, and behavior. In line with Eastern views, wisdom transforms the self.
- Wisdom is not a static or stable framework of knowledge but dynamic and continually evolving. True wisdom is open and inquisitive, acknowledging the limitations and fallibility of human knowledge, and embracing the joys of thinking and learning.
- Because wisdom thoughtfully embraces ongoing learning, the various standards of good thinking, and multiple modes of understanding, and stays attuned to contemporary affairs and new discoveries, wisdom strives toward the best understanding of reality and the good as presently conceived.
- Wisdom is both emotional and cognitive, involving fascination, awe, wonder, love, and hope, as well as deep understanding.

- Wisdom involves both big picture understanding (cosmic and global consciousness) and personal-interpersonal awareness and the ability to connect these two spheres of reality. Wisdom is seeing how we fit into the whole.
- Wisdom pursues the ethical and the good. Wise people not only attempt to understand what is good, but they apply this understanding in guiding their actions and their life.
- As internalized knowledge that impacts human character and action, wise people have both the desire and the creative capacity to apply their knowledge to life.
- Wisdom is used to facilitate and enhance what is good in life, both for oneself and others. Wisdom recognizes the importance of others and their well being.

Wisdom can be developed through the focused development of each of the character virtues of heightened future consciousness, but in resonance with the narrative disposition of the human mind, wisdom can be best cultivated through the creation and implementation of a wisdom narrative, as the ideal future personal narrative to guide and inspire us in our future.

An evolutionary, future-focused vision of wisdom, building upon classical and contemporary and Eastern and Western traditions, provides an empowering, ethical, holistic, and realistic ideal for our personal development, the achievement of authentic happiness and the good life, our collective future psycho-social evolution, and the future of education (Lombardo, 2011b, 2011c). Wisdom can be seen as the critical, most holistic human capacity for facilitating flourishing and the creation of a good future.

Wisdom should not be seen as static, predominately cognitive, or oriented toward the past; in line with both traditional and contemporary views, wisdom unites mind and emotion, knowledge and ethics, consciousness and action, belief and openness, and, combating the narrow presentism of today, past and future into an expansive temporal consciousness of life. Wisdom, properly conceived, is an open system that revels in learning and thinking, liberates the mind, and stimulates self-transcendence with an eye on the future.

An envisioned global *Age of Wisdom*, informed and inspired by such ideas on the nature and value of wisdom, can provide an ethical, pragmatic, and psychologically comprehensive ideal grand narrative for the future of humanity. Building upon contemporary theories of a “New” or “Second Enlightenment” that highlight the dynamic and evolutionary nature of human reality, the critical importance of interdependency and reciprocity, and the uncertainty of change and the future, the ideal of an Age of Wisdom provides a more holistic, ethically self-conscious, and action-oriented framework for envisioning an ideal future direction for human society (Anderson, 2003; Smyre and Richardson, 2016; Lombardo, 2006b, 2016b). Moreover, an envisioned new Age of Wisdom transcends in scope economic-materialistic and technological visions of the good future, placing central responsibility for the realization of a good future within ourselves and our psycho-social evolution. A purposefully realized Age of Wisdom can be viewed as the appropriate and credible new evolutionary stage in the ongoing history of human civilization. An Age of Wisdom is a constructive, hopeful, empowering, and

inspiring futurist narrative for all of us. As an evolutionary direction for our collective future, an Age of Wisdom points toward self-transcendence and increasing cosmic consciousness.

At a professional level, in the teaching of wisdom and consultation on creating positive futures, it is essential to be a personal and unique exemplar of wisdom. Wisdom (or heightened future consciousness) is psychologically holistic, and its meaning, value, and impact is communicated through the total psychological Gestalt, way of life, being-in-the-world, and presence of a person. Ideally, futurists should be wise people. Anyone involved in the guidance of humanity toward the good future should model themselves and their approach, including their theories, methods, and modes of social interaction, on the ideals of wisdom.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Within a cosmic evolutionary vision of reality, the psychology of the future— involving the development of heightened future consciousness—needs to be informed and inspired by our ideal visions of the future of psychology— involving an ideal narrative for the future of humanity. As proposed above, the ideal in both cases is the development of wisdom. In turn, our ideal future for humanity needs to be informed and inspired by our grand narrative of the evolutionary future of the cosmos. The life of the self and the future of the human mind should be set in the context of the life of the cosmos, and the life of the cosmos is evolutionary. An evolutionary grand narrative of the cosmos provides a realistic foundation for understanding ourselves, humanity as a whole, and the nature of the good future.

Seeing and understanding ourselves within the context of the cosmos is cosmic consciousness, one of the proposed component virtues of heightened future consciousness and wisdom. Purposefully evolving cosmic consciousness means becoming more informed and inspired by cosmic evolution and increasingly guiding the process of cosmic evolution. We are part of the whole, both influencing our ambient reality and being influenced by it; this is a key feature of reciprocity within human existence.

But we are also unique: We should see ourselves as an evolution within the evolutionary processes of the cosmos, endowed with the capacity for conscious, thoughtful, informed, and purposeful evolution through holistic future consciousness and wisdom. Given our unique nature we are in the position of psycho-social and ethical responsibility for guiding the ongoing process of evolution within ourselves and nature as a whole.

Guiding the process of evolution with wisdom, which I have defined in terms of the character virtues of heightened future consciousness, generates flourishing within the human condition, and flourishing should be the general ideal for determining the good future, for ourselves, others, and our living environment. As stated at the beginning of this essay, the good future needs to be anchored to the nature of reality, and the nature of reality at the cosmic, holistic level is evolution and reciprocity. At the human level, there is the noteworthy additional feature of purposeful evolution. Flourishing provides an ideal resonant with an evolutionary, holistic, and in the case of humans, purposeful future-directed reality.

These concluding points are key features of the mindset and values of the proposed coming Age of Wisdom, a mode of consciousness and action that embraces flourishing in the flow of purposeful evolution through wisdom and the virtues of heightened future consciousness. The cosmos is the ongoing saga of the evolution of evolution, and humans, in their unique and most empowering mental capacities, are an evolution in evolution, expressive of this general cosmic process. Grounding the good in reality ultimately means grounding the good in the reality of the cosmos and how we fit into it; the good is informed by cosmic consciousness. Although this view of the good future may seem a rather ethereal and impractical position to take on life, it is actually the most realistically grounded and self-empowering paradigm of life to embrace. Every other approach to the good future is to varying degrees unrealistic, disempowering, and incomplete.

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