

Understanding and Teaching Future Consciousness

Tom Lombardo, Ph.D.

Introduction

What is future consciousness? Why is it critically important to improve this capacity in humans? And how can we, as teachers and educators, enhance this ability in our students? These are the three central questions I address in this paper. I argue that future consciousness is a multi-faceted capacity and is the most critical ability needed for the survival and growth of humanity and the flourishing of the individual. My central hypothesis is that the development of key character virtues, including personal responsibility and wisdom, should form the guiding framework for the enhancement and teaching of future consciousness.

As an introductory description, future consciousness is the human capacity to have thoughts, feelings, and goals about the future. It includes the normal human capacities to anticipate, imagine, and think about the future, to have hopes and fears about the future, and to have desires, set goals, and make plans for the future. Future consciousness includes evaluating different possibilities and preferable futures, solving problems about the future, and making choices and decisions concerning the future. Every normal human being possesses some level of future consciousness to function intelligently and with purpose in the world, but the capacity varies significantly across individuals.¹

To build upon this opening description, I first look at the evolution of future consciousness and then the underlying psychology. In reviewing the historical evolution of future consciousness within our species, a set of distinctive modes of understanding have emerged, all of which form general dimensions of this capacity. In reviewing the psychology, I identify the distinctive components of future consciousness.

The Evolution of Future Consciousness

Our ancestors clearly demonstrated practical-empirical future consciousness – the purposeful manipulation of the physical world toward some future end. The making and use of tools – instrumental future consciousness - which was an extension of practical-empirical future consciousness, involved an additional conscious step where the physical world was manipulated in order to create a tool that was then used to achieve a further end. All further technological capacities were built upon this foundational beginning.

Equally significant toward the evolution of our species, and coincident with tool making, social future consciousness emerged in collective hunting, food gathering and agriculture, negotiation in male-female bonding, and the development and enforcement of social norms to achieve tribal goals.²

Developing later in our prehistory, mythic narratives, connecting together past, present, and future, and involving both linguistic and graphical elements, provided dramatic, emotionally inspiring, personified, archetypal, and ethical features to future consciousness and gave coherence and collective purpose to

human life, individually and collectively. The future was part of an ongoing saga. Mythic and narrative future consciousness would form the foundation of religious future consciousness.³

Emerging later, rational – theoretical thinking provided an alternative to the mythic narrative mode of understanding.⁴ The rational-theoretical mode of future consciousness achieved great power and influence during the European Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution. Science combined the rational-theoretical and the empirical-practical modes of understanding. Scientific future consciousness involved the activity of predicting the future through scientific laws and was coupled with instrumental future consciousness in the development of modern technology. Enlightenment philosophers believed that the future could be controlled and directed through the application of science and technology, with secular ideals, specifically centering on the concept of progress, guiding the process.⁵

Beginning in ancient times and continuing up to the present, abstract theories of history, time, change, and evolution developed. For example, the two dominant theories of time through the ages have been the cyclical and linear/progressive views. How a person conceptualizes and connects together past, present, and future depends on his or her theory (implicit and explicit) of history and time. Since the Enlightenment, the West has favored a linear and progressive view of time, to be realized through science, rationality, technology, and secular ideals. In the East, the cyclical theory continues to hold sway.⁶

As a reaction to the rational and scientific, nineteenth century Romantic philosophy emphasized the emotional mode of future consciousness, rejecting the centrality of reason and science. Romanticism also highlighted the artistic and the naturalistic as opposed to the mechanical and logical. Finally, it was highly apprehensive, if not fearful over the future – especially regarding the secular promise of progress.⁷

Also, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries both utopian and dystopian stories of future human societies became popular, providing visions of the future engendering either hope or fear. Dystopian images frequently involved a mental retreat from the future and a desire to return to some idealized simpler past.⁸

Beginning in the nineteenth century, science fiction emerged as a way to integrate various earlier modes of future consciousness. It is mythic narrative, with archetypes, moral messages, and drama, but it is informed by scientific and technological thinking and projections/predictions into the future. It resonates with both rational and emotional future consciousness. Within its myriad stories we find optimistic visions, inspired by science, technology, and the Enlightenment, and pessimistic visions, often in resonance with the Romantic distrust of the future. Science fiction creates, through hypothetical scenario building, highly detailed and multi-dimensional descriptions of the future. Science fiction is the most influential form of future consciousness in popular modern culture.⁹

In the mid-twentieth century, future studies developed as a disciplined approach to both the study of the future and how to have an informed and constructive impact on the future. Future studies, at least according to

spokespersons such as Ed Cornish and Wendell Bell, models itself on science and reason, and has developed an array of thoughtful and creative methods for imagining possibilities, estimating probabilities, and evaluating preferable futures. For Bell, future studies is a combination of scientific methods and rational ethical decision making; for Cornish, future studies attempts to realize positive futures through scientific and empirical methods. Following Bell and Cornish, future studies can be considered an expression of scientific-secular future consciousness in the spirit of the Enlightenment.¹⁰

Especially within the East, but also in Western New Age thinking, a mystical form of future consciousness, connected with the spiritual quest for consciousness expansion and enlightenment, has been highly influential.¹¹ Writers such as Sri Aurobindo and Ken Wilber have attempted to integrate Eastern spiritual and mystical thinking on consciousness with Western secular and scientific modes of thinking. Clearly, if the psychologist Richard Nisbett is correct and there are noticeable differences between how Westerners and Asians think, then a globally comprehensive view of future consciousness must acknowledge these different cultural modes of understanding.¹²

A great deal of the complexity and breadth of contemporary future consciousness can be found in the immense variety of different modern theories of the future, both secular-scientific and religious-spiritual. Theories of the future either present predictions about the future or preferences for how the future should go or both. Theories of the future are sometimes warnings: Given some identifiable trend, some action needs to be taken to prevent a disaster. Theories of the future cover all the major dimensions of human reality, from science, technology, economics, and the environment to politics, culture, society, education, psychology, religion, and morality. The future is a vast and comprehensive topic; there is a future for everything. Different theories frequently highlight different dimensions, but taken as a whole, a comprehensive picture of contemporary human reality and possible alternative futures, good and bad, can be found within futurist theories. Some theories do attempt, though, to develop integrative and comprehensive schemes, often pivoting on some central concept, such as evolution, progress, the accelerative rate of change, the Second Coming, the dialectic, social or economic evolution, or the emergence of a new Enlightenment.¹³

The Psychology of Future Consciousness

Future consciousness is built upon the most fundamental of human capacities. The psychological foundation of our awareness of time (including past, present, and future) is our perceptual awareness of persistence and change, of becoming and passing away, of rhythms and patterns of change, and of a directionality to experiential time, demarcating past from future. A key point to draw from the perception of time is that our temporal awareness is relative, set within the context of experienced concrete events.¹⁴

Learning and memory expand both our awareness of the past and our capacity to anticipate and predict the future. Individuals routinely apply past

experiences and lessons to the future. Developing an understanding of patterns of change – of regular sequences of environmental events – allows us to predict the future, at least in so far as the future follows from the past. Further, memories, both good and bad, strongly impact our attitudes and feelings toward the future. We approach or avoid anticipated future possibilities based upon negative and positive past experiences.¹⁵ Finally, the distinction between surface and deep learning should be mentioned, since deep learning impacts and transforms the inner personality and transfers to new situations; deep learning strongly influences behavior and thinking in the future.¹⁶

As clearly emphasized by the Romanticists, future consciousness has an emotional dimension. In particular, hope and fear define the core of emotional future consciousness – an emotional uplifting experience of anticipated positive events versus an emotionally distressing experience of anticipated negative events. All intellectually complex futurist visions, whether of utopias or dystopias, come down to expressions of hope and fear. While fear and other connected negative emotions, such as anxiety, stress, despair, and depression, have been extensively studied within psychology,¹⁷ positive psychologists have also identified the major components of hope, providing a framework for understanding the different dimensions of our psychology and how the components can be assessed.¹⁸ Research in positive psychology also shows that our emotional states strongly affect our thinking capacities; we do not think as creatively and intelligently about the future when we are emotionally miserable as we do when we are hopeful and happy.¹⁹

Connected with hope and fear, people can learn mindsets and modes of behavior ranging from helpless and depressed to hopeful and proactive. Optimism is the mental disposition (or trait) of anticipating a positive future and believing that one has control over realizing it, whereas pessimism is anticipating a negative future and believing that one does not have any control over changing it.²⁰ The implications of how one's mindset is connected to future consciousness are not inconsequential. The feeling of helplessness, for example, is strongly correlated with depression, and I would suggest that depression is fundamentally a failure of future consciousness; it is a giving up on the future – on the belief that there is anything one can do about it to make it positive.²¹

Optimism and pessimism are self-fulfilling prophecies. From the study of futurist thinking throughout history, it appears that once a civilization loses its positive vision of its own future, it withers and dies.²² Individuals also wither and die without a positive vision. Pessimism is death. Contrary to popular belief, it appears that optimists are actually more realistic than pessimists. Whereas optimists look for solutions, pessimists avoid problems and challenges and use a variety of avoidance mechanisms to run from reality.²³

The concepts of self-efficacy and internal versus external locus of control are also relevant to this discussion. Self-efficacy is the belief that one can accomplish some goal; it is the belief that one has power over the future. People with low self-efficacy feel they have no power over things and give up easily. Obviously, optimists possess a sense of self-efficacy and pessimists do not. Internal locus of control means that a person sees him or herself as responsible

for the conditions of his or her life; external locus of control means that a person conceptualizes him or herself as a victim – that it is external factors that have determined his or her life conditions. If pessimists feel powerless, then they are operating within a mindset of external locus of control. People with high self-efficacy operate from a mindset of internal locus of control.²⁴

Not only can people look toward the future with either hope or fear, but their sense of control over the future can vary significantly as well. Without a sense of control, people can not act from a position of self-responsibility regarding their future. If I don't believe I can do something, I won't make any effort to do it and I won't feel responsible for what happens to me in life.

There are a host of motivational variables connected with future consciousness. People set goals regarding the future, and the goals they set can be short or long term, vague or clear, strong or weak, and habitual or creative; both emotional and cognitive factors impact these dimensions of goal setting. The expanse, strength, clarity, and flexibility of future consciousness depend upon the level of development of a person's future goals. Faith, commitment, and tenacity are critical motivational and behavioral variables necessary for the realization of one's goals. People with high self-efficacy in a task show much greater tenacity than people with low self-efficacy.

People show the complementary (or oppositional) drives toward stability, security, and certainty versus growth, risk, and adventure – the former drives are often connected with fear of change and the future, whereas the latter drives, connected with hope, are essential to future consciousness. People can also be reactive or proactive regarding their actions, and approach or avoidance motivated. Fear and anxiety trigger avoidance motivation; hope triggers approach motivation; proactive versus reactive are connected with external versus internal locus of control. Reacting with fear or anxiety places control out in the world; proactively approaching positive goals places control within oneself.²⁵

Turning to cognitive processes in future consciousness, first let us note an important link between cognition and emotional-motivational states. Just as emotional states impact cognitive functioning, cognitive states have a strong influence on both motivation and emotion. The thoughts that individuals express – the interpretations they place on situations – the beliefs they hold about their own abilities and character - impact and transform their emotional states and their goals and desires. The emotions of hope and fear, the general attitudes of optimism and pessimism, and approach and avoidance motivation, to site a few examples, all have characteristic ways of thinking associated with them.²⁶

There is a rich array of cognitive processes embodied within future consciousness. As noted earlier, learning and memory provide the foundation for anticipations and predictions about the future. Building upon memory, but not necessarily limited to it, foresight is the capacity to imagine the future; foresight can show degrees of creativity and inventiveness (thus transcending simple memory), degrees of richness and detail, and degrees of temporal extension into the future. Foresight can also show flexibility or breadth; how many alternative futures can one imagine? What futurists call “scenario building” is basically an exercise in foresight – imagining in great detail possible futures.

Thinking, which usually brings in imagination, as well as linguistic symbolization, can be either linear – involving a sequence of ideas that follow a line of reasoning – or it can be intuitive/insightful where there is an immediate and holistic experience of understanding. A person may attempt to think through a problem or challenge regarding the future (sequential reasoning) or a person may get a flash of insight – sometimes the latter follows the former, sometimes the reverse. The process of thinking has been studied extensively by psychologists and the normative principles of sound or effective thinking have been examined and outlined by philosophers and logicians. The standards and practices of critical thinking are essential for evaluating ideas and hypotheses. Critical thinking is the opposite of egocentricity and closed-mindedness – it is the principled evaluation and argumentation of ideas – it is “thinking about thinking while you are thinking to make your thinking better.” In evaluating the relative probabilities of alternative futures, in identifying goals and formulating plans, in considering the pro’s and con’s and making decisions, and in determining which future among the numerous possibilities and probabilities is the most preferable, critical thinking plays a central role in these future focused activities.

Planning is a future oriented activity, for it involves identifying a series of steps to be undertaken in the future to realize some goal. Planning is a linear form of thinking and there is logical and causal reasoning going on in the process. Planning can be flexible or rigid, long or short term. It is connected with the proactive mode of behavior and internal locus of control; in planning a person thinks out how he or she is going to behave in the future, rather than just allowing the future to take its course.

Problem solving and decision making are two other cognitive components of future consciousness; finding ways to deal with challenges and move forward and making choices regarding which path to take in the future. There are cognitive skills involved in effective problem solving and decision making, but there is a motivational-emotional dimension to these processes as well. People can become avoiders – not wanting to solve the problems of their life or make decisions – they stay stuck. Pessimists, for example, avoid trying to solve problems because they believe they will be ineffectual; depressives avoid doing anything because they feel hopeless.²⁷

Many of these cognitive processes can be subsumed under the holistic capacity or virtue of wisdom. Wisdom is built on deep learning from the past; it is an expansive state of consciousness and involves an integrative and broad understanding of the “big picture”; it is a thoughtful and creative process of applying this knowledge to problem solving and decision making, as well as planning and goal setting that is both practical and ethical – it is the skill for identifying and realizing preferable futures. Wisdom involves both intuition and reason, and contemporary theories highlight both Western and Eastern contributions. It is important to note the ethical dimension of wisdom; it is a virtue.²⁸

Self-identity and future consciousness are also connected. Following Antonio Damasio’s theory of self-identity, every person has developed during his or her life an autobiographical self – a narrative they have constructed regarding

who they are.²⁹ This self-narrative provides a temporal description of how the person has lived his or her life and identifies the key influences and experiences of that life. The self narrative provides a sense of continuity with the past and, based upon this past it also projects out into the future, providing an anticipated trajectory for the person into the future. (Without the sense of continuity there is no future.) The self-narrative, through connecting past, present, and future, gives coherence and meaning to a person's life. The self-narrative, though, is not static and set; it is dynamic and interactive. We are both the main character and the author of the story – we are also the audience as well. We listen and are influenced by what we tell ourselves about ourselves. Because the narrative is dynamical and interactive it is open to revision – both regarding the past and the future. Past events or experiences can be re-interpreted, and anticipated future directions can be changed.

The Value of Future Consciousness

There are many values associated with the enhancement of future consciousness.³⁰ Future consciousness is holistic and impacts all aspects of human psychology; it energizes, enriches, and benefits the total human mind. Thinking about the future exercises all the higher cognitive capacities, including imagination, critical thinking, intuition and insight, planning, decision making and problem solving. Future consciousness gives meaning and purpose to life. Our mental health is intimately connected with future consciousness. Our sense of hope, optimism, adventure, and self-efficacy work against depression, fear, apathy, and perceived helplessness. Future consciousness raises self-consciousness and expands mental and behavioral freedom, bringing greater self-control into one's life; it brings greater coherence to the self. Certain basic features of future consciousness – to have purpose in life and to experience one's life as a growing transformation toward the positive – are correlated with human happiness.³¹

At a social level, future consciousness is highly adaptive, especially in a world of rapid change, maximizing our chances of survival and evolution in the future. Yet for many observers it appears that modern society is becoming too present focused and has lost touch with both the heritage and wisdom of the past and the challenges and possibilities of the future. Given the uncertainty of our times and the rapid rate of change, it seems maladaptive for humanity to collectively bury its head in the sand. If life is relatively routine and stable, it is not so important to think about the future. But with the pervasive social and technological transformation of humanity occurring in contemporary times across the globe, we should be watching the road ahead rather than feeling good for the moment.³²

Hence, it is a critical challenge for our times to bring future consciousness into education and popular culture. Aside from significantly contributing to psychological health and development and combating the maladaptive quality of presentism, there are other reasons for emphasizing future consciousness in education. I have proposed that many of the specific problems we face today can

be constructively addressed through heightened future consciousness – a heightened future consciousness based on the pursuit and development of virtues.³³ Additionally, as I will explain below, the enhancement of future consciousness can be approached as an exercise in the development of important human virtues; hence, we facilitate the development of more ethical human beings through the enhancement of future consciousness. Finally, I have argued that future consciousness is the key distinguishing quality of the human mind and human spirit. Through our evolution it has grown in its expansiveness, power, and complexity – there are multiple modes of future consciousness. This evolutionary trend is something to embrace and self-consciously facilitate further into the future. It is an evolutionary wave to ride on.

The enhancement of future consciousness is both a very practical concern and a mind-expanding cosmic adventure in creativity and imagination. It is an issue of survival, of mental health, and of transformation and transcendence.

Teaching Future Consciousness

As a starting point, looking at the evolution of future consciousness provides students an understanding of the different modes of awareness of the future, from practical instrumentality and social cooperation to mythic narrative, rationality and scientific prediction, ethical prescriptions, emotionality and passion, intuition and spiritual practices of consciousness expansion and enlightenment, and systematic theories. One appreciates the full breadth of modes of understanding and is able to identify such capacities, mindsets, and dispositions within oneself and others. There are different ways to experience the future. Further, understanding the various theories provides a knowledge base from which to think, speculate, and even plan out one's own future.

Because of its specific powers, narration, using both language and graphics, should be a core tool in the teaching of future consciousness – students should be acquainted not only with mythic narratives of the future but with science fiction and utopian and dystopian stories as well, and they should be guided in the creation of personal self-narratives regarding the future.

To various degrees, students bring the scientific secular mode of future consciousness into the classroom, but it is clearly important to highlight its fundamental features and values and explain its impact on the world. It is also important to note that clearly not everyone in the world approaches the future in this manner.³⁴

Future studies provides techniques that can be learned for expanding one's imagination, creating detailed, realistic scenarios, making informed probabilistic predictions, scanning, identifying, and extrapolating on trends, estimating the impact of trends, and formulating strategies and plans of action for realizing goals and addressing challenges and problems. These methods often have a collaborative dimension and would contribute to the social future consciousness of the educational group.

Teaching future consciousness necessarily requires familiarizing students with a representative sampling of theories of the future. In order to think in an

informed and intelligent way about the future one should know the basic approaches and visions, the most significant disagreements and issues, and the most noteworthy trends, predictions, and warnings identified in futurist writings. In general, what the study of theories of the future provides is the mental content – the ideas and ideals, the “facts” and hypotheses - of future consciousness. It describes the conceptual space of possibilities and the different dimensions of future human reality; it identifies the primary conflicts over which futures are more probable and more desirable, and the various solutions for how to address the problems of today.

Understanding the big picture of the future, as through theories of the future, is critical for individual growth and development. When people think about their own personal future, it is important for them to place their individual vision in the context of the whole – of what could be happening around them in the years to come. An exercise I have done with students over the years is to ask them to provide some general predictions about the future in different areas, such as society, education, the environment, or biotechnology, and then to ask themselves how they could flourish within such a hypothetical future reality and what they need to do now to realize this ideal personal future.

Based on points raised regarding the psychology of future consciousness, since our understanding of time builds upon a framework of related salient events, teaching the grand panorama of history, to create a temporal framework for understanding the dynamics and structure of change is critical to developing an articulate and rich sense of the future. Getting students to develop temporal maps and narratives, in which key events or anchor points are identified and connected together, builds up their mental framework of time. The enhancement of future consciousness should be set in the context of expanding temporal consciousness, both into the past and forward into the future. The opposite of future consciousness is not so much historical or past consciousness, but living too much in the narrow present.

In teaching future consciousness, human emotions clearly need to be addressed. People’s visions, attitudes, capacities, and behaviors relative to the future are as much a product of emotional factors as cognitive ones – in fact, emotion affects cognition. Specific hopes and fears about the future are learned and can be changed. Psychotherapy addresses people’s fears and attempts to teach people how to face and overcome their fears and how to learn to hope with greater force and effectiveness.³⁵ Both optimism and pessimism, to some degree are learned, and as Martin Seligman has demonstrated, a person can be taught to be more optimistic. A key component in the enhancement of future consciousness is teaching and reinforcing optimism and to recall, teaching optimism is teaching realism about the future.³⁶

Turning to human motivation, I would argue that a key character trait necessary for heightened future consciousness is self-responsibility; hence it is critical in the education of future consciousness to reinforce proactive behavior, self-efficacy, and internal locus of control. Given the natural human tendency to waiver or give up when things get difficult, people need to acquire and use anchors, supports, and positive buffers to push through difficult times. Goals

need to be regularly re-visualized, felt, and fed. The future is created today – in working toward a goal, the technique of doing something everyday to realize the goal is important. People need to cultivate the desire for adventure and change; without these qualities, tomorrow will be the same as today – there will, in essence, be no future – no real concept of one. In fact, if we accept the dictum “Grow or die,” then stability and security leads to decay and death.

There are numerous educational techniques for developing critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, planning, imagination, and creativity. Cognitive therapy focuses on challenging and transforming thoughts and beliefs as a way to alter a person’s negative emotional states and defeatist or helpless motivational dispositions that dampen future consciousness.³⁷

Since the self-narrative (or self-identity) is the most encompassing psychological variable in the human mind, educational activities that modify or transform the self would affect everything else in consciousness, including future consciousness. As a central activity for enhancing future consciousness, I ask students or workshop participants to describe their self-narrative – contemplate its meaning - and to consider how they could modify it. Writing out one’s self-narrative is a growth promoting activity. Self-narratives can be fragmented, contradictory, sketchy, or opaque (a person may not consciously realize or grasp the main themes inherent in his or her self-narrative). Articulating and thinking through one’s self-narrative brings additional coherence and clarity to personal identity. As a way to face fears, inhibitions, and self-defeating thoughts, writing out one’s self-narrative seems to have a positive effect.³⁸

The self-narrative activity is not an end in itself however. Participants are provided with guidelines and a focus which basically consists of identifying important virtues to work toward in the future. My general hypothesis is that the central goal and most important factor in teaching future consciousness is the development of key character virtues, including wisdom. The way to enhance future consciousness is through the pursuit of virtues.³⁹

It seems to me that there are certain key virtues, which I identify in the self-narrative exercise, that clearly contribute (in fact may be necessary) to heightened future consciousness. I have already mentioned wisdom. I would identify wisdom as the highest expression of future consciousness, for it is a temporally expansive and integrative understanding of life that is effectively applied in a practical and ethical fashion toward the creation of a positive future.⁴⁰ But there are other critical virtues.

Self-responsibility is the cardinal virtue, for without it a person does not believe that he or she can improve anything in his or her life. While all of the virtues are accomplishments – they are realized through effort - if I don’t believe I possess the power to accomplish anything, I can’t develop any of the other virtues. The sense of self-responsibility ignites and empowers future consciousness.

Courage is another important virtue; the future is risky and potentially fearful, but without some level of adventure and challenge in life, people are not very happy. Courage is needed to overcome fears and fear is probably the strongest single impediment to the development of future consciousness.

Hope, optimism, and faith constitute another important cluster of related virtues. I list hope and optimism as virtues because they are not “givens” in life and may require great effort to cultivate and develop in the face of adversity. They generate positive effects (success and respect) in life, are correlated with growth and happiness, and often require courage (another virtue) for their realization. And clearly, in relevance to future consciousness, these virtues propel us into the future – into transformation and positive change.

Transcendence or the capacity to identify with something of great value or importance beyond oneself is another key virtue. Without transcendence, life is egocentric and selfish.⁴¹ Transcendence provides goals for the future beyond personal development and self-aggrandizement – it expands the range of concern of the self. In a general sense, the virtue of transcendence is necessary for wisdom.⁴²

Finally, I would list love and compassion. Compassion is needed for wisdom – I would not be concerned about the welfare of others without compassion. Love is a virtue because it requires effort and attention – people may fall in love but they do not stay in love without working at it. Love gives meaning, color, and emotionality to life – without love, the hopeful possibilities of the future would seem dead and lifeless.⁴³ Love, in the most general sense, involves immersion and fascination in the other (a form of transcendence); the psychologist Csikszentmihalyi refers to this general experience as flow. Flow propels one into the future; in flow there is intrinsic motivation for the activity – it is its own reward. Loving someone or something is its own reward, but it perpetually draws a person to seek more.⁴⁴

There are many other important human virtues, but I identify the ones above as the most significant ones supporting heightened future consciousness. This approach goes beyond traditional methods used in the enhancement of future consciousness. Within future studies, it is invariably cognitive skills that are emphasized as critical to heightening one’s ability to competently approach the future – this is clearly too limiting an approach to future consciousness; within psychotherapy, emotions, motivation, and self-identity frequently enter the picture as the therapist attempts to facilitate an opening and freeing of consciousness and behavior such that the client can move into a growth-oriented, forward-looking mental state – this is better, but still not enough; it is also essential to bring in character virtues – normative concepts regarding human excellence – and to specifically emphasize the value of these virtues. The enhancement of future consciousness requires both an empirical and an ethical dimension. Connecting the ethical and the empirical, it is my hypothesis that through the development of virtues, the cognitive, emotional, and personal dimensions of future consciousness will be strengthened.

Future consciousness can be conceptualized as a virtue. It can be conceptualized as a dimension of human excellence. In so far as I equate wisdom with the highest expression of future consciousness, then clearly it is a virtue. To strive for heightened future consciousness is to strive for wisdom. One way to describe virtues is that virtues are character traits that promote happiness. In Seligman, the important distinction is made between authentic long-term

happiness and short-term superficial happiness; virtues contribute to - are the essential foundation of - authentic happiness.⁴⁵

This general proposal closely aligns with certain essential principles of positive psychology. Positive psychology studies psychological health, strength, and well-being. Though it attempts to study such factors scientifically, collecting empirical data and developing theories to explain the data, the whole enterprise is built on a set of value judgments (ethical in nature) regarding what indeed is “good” versus not good in humans. Positive psychologists study hope, wisdom, optimism, happiness, self-efficacy, flow, and love, among other topics.⁴⁶

A key feature in teaching future consciousness is connecting together the personal and the global/collective. In writing an ideal self-narrative for the future based on the pursuit of key virtues, it is important to have people relate their individual self-development with humanity as a whole. How can individuals through their own personal pursuits also contribute to the collective or holistic evolution of humanity? This is the kind of concern reflective of wisdom. Not only should individuals consider how they can contribute to the future of the whole, they should clearly realize that they will only achieve their own personal ideals in the context of the whole; it is imperative to understand global trends and how such holistic factors will impact, and either help or interfere with one’s personal aspirations. Hence, part of a self-narrative educational exercise should include an identification of the challenges and possibilities facing humanity as a whole (which would include theories of the future), with the intent to raise consciousness in the individual on the future of humanity and identify areas of impact, importance, urgency, and potential value to which the individual could make a contribution, or at the very least, consider in making personal plans. Individuals should not only identify their personal preferable futures and ideals but their socially and globally preferable futures and ideals as well. The virtue of transcendence is practiced through this exercise.⁴⁷

As a way to summarize and add one final consideration to teaching future consciousness, how could the above ideas be applied to enhancing future consciousness in children and adolescents? To highlight just a few critical activities, we can begin by asking students to write a story describing their future lives, asking them to imagine their highest ideals and greatest dreams. This activity raises self-consciousness. But we should also ask them to imagine how they might contribute to solving the great problems and challenges of today. This activity gives them purpose and meaning for their lives. We should ask them to imagine what the future will be like – perhaps imagining multiple possible futures - and compare and debate their different answers. We should ask them to imagine ideal futures and compare, discuss, and debate with each other the pros and cons of different ideal images. Popular media presentations on the future (science fiction movies and TV series, for example) will help young students to “visualize” narrative futures. As virtual reality opportunities and capacities grow, we can ask students to create hypothetical future worlds or environments and place themselves within these realities. And this activity, as well as other ones cited above, can be pursued with adult learners as well.

We should teach young people about hope, beginning with history – describing the hopes and dreams of people from the past, as well as their fears. In so doing, we can introduce the attitudes of optimism and pessimism. (Again we can use visual media as a resource for different visions.) It is relatively easy to familiarize youth with some of the futurist visions of today, both positive and negative. We can take familiar contemporary themes, such as the environment, computers, space travel, or the electronic media, and ask students to extrapolate into the future, expressing both their hopes and fears and their wildest dreams. We can speak about the importance of courage and the value of adventure – again we can use history and great visionaries of the past as exemplars. It is critically important to expand the temporal consciousness of youth and work against the pop culture of presentism. We must emphasize, but also balance, imagination and critical thinking – of what is possible versus what is desirable. And self-responsibility, as a key virtue, needs to be reinforced in youth; blaming and excuse-making need to be counter-acted. Finally, following the innovative work of Robert Sternberg, we can introduce learning activities that support the development of wisdom related skills into the curriculum, even for grade school students.⁴⁸

Education should contribute to the ongoing evolution of human society. As many commentators on contemporary society have argued, we need a new way of thinking in order to handle the challenges of today and flourish in the world of tomorrow. Some have called for a “New Enlightenment” – one that is global in scope and reflective of the best knowledge we have about human nature and the world around us. I have suggested that the virtue of wisdom based on contemporary research and thinking, should serve as the center of gravity of this New Enlightenment. In this paper I would highlight the capacity of heightened future consciousness and all that it entails as critical to the New Enlightenment. A New Enlightenment will not just change how people think, but how they feel and what they want; it will change how they behave and how they behave toward each other; it will transform human nature. In this regard, the ultimate goal of teaching future consciousness is to contribute to the further evolution of humanity.⁴⁹

- ¹ Lombardo, Thomas *The Evolution of Future Consciousness: The Nature and Historical Development of the Human Capacity to Think about the Future*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2006a, Chapter 1.
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