

The Wisdom of Future Consciousness
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Introduction

It is wise to be conscious of the future. And reciprocally, if one wishes to enhance one's future consciousness, one should pursue the development of wisdom.

In recent years I have explored the nature of future consciousness: its historical evolution and its future possibilities; its psychological dimensions and its significance in our further evolution; and ways to enhance it through education and self-development practices.¹ During this same period I have also studied thinking and research on the virtue of wisdom, its connection to the ideals and goals of education, its impact on quality of life and psychological well-being, and, perhaps most significantly, its relationship to future consciousness.² Pulling these two areas of interest together, I have come to the conclusion that wisdom is the highest expression of future consciousness; it is the normative ideal towards which we should aspire in the development of future consciousness. Heightened future consciousness and wisdom go hand-in-hand.

In studying future consciousness, I have developed both a comprehensive theory of all the basic dimensions of this capacity, as well as a normative or ideal concept of heightened future consciousness.³ Everyone possesses some level of future consciousness but the capacity can be greatly empowered or enhanced. In formulating an ideal prescription for the development of future consciousness a number of parallels between contemporary descriptions of wisdom and my description of heightened future consciousness emerged.

In this article I describe the many parallels between wisdom and heightened future consciousness. I explain how the development of one capacity enhances the other capacity. I explain in detail what I mean by the statement that "wisdom is the highest expression of future consciousness." Finally, I argue that, whether we call it wisdom or heightened future consciousness, this capacity defines a desirable direction for our future psychological evolution.⁴

I begin by describing the holistic nature of both wisdom and future consciousness. Both capacities involve all the fundamental dimensions of human psychology, which I identify. This comprehensive overview provides a roadmap for the subsequent sections in the article. First on the list of fundamental psychological dimensions is consciousness and I describe how both wisdom and heightened future consciousness involve an expansive level of consciousness. Next I look at the knowledge base and cognitive abilities associated with each capacity, pointing out a number of parallels and connections. Next I turn to motivational and emotional components of wisdom and heightened future consciousness, an area that is often neglected or minimized but that, in fact, is quite important in understanding these capacities. Then I examine the ecological context of wisdom and heightened future consciousness, again pointing out

similarities. Wisdom and heightened future consciousness engage, interact with, and manifest themselves in the context of an environment, dealing with the challenges that need to be addressed and the goals that need to be achieved in life and the world around us. Neither capacity is realized in an existential vacuum. After ecology, I introduce a key feature of both wisdom and heightened future consciousness: both capacities are grounded in a set of character virtues; there is an ethical component to both wisdom and heightened future consciousness. From there I move to self-identity and personality, pointing out how each capacity impacts a person's overall sense of self. Having reviewed all of these various parallels, I summarize by presenting comprehensive descriptions of wisdom and heightened future consciousness, noting the overall degree of resonance between the two capacities. I conclude with some thoughts on the further evolution of wisdom and future consciousness, connecting these concepts with the theory of the new enlightenment.

The Holistic Nature of Wisdom and Future Consciousness

The science of psychology includes the following fundamental dimensions:

- Consciousness (Levels of consciousness; scope of consciousness)
- Cognition (Human knowledge processes and application, including learning, memory, thinking, and imagination)
- Emotion and Motivation (Feelings, desires, and goals)
- Behavior (Bodily movement and interaction with the environment; purposeful behavior)
- Ecology (The environment which supports and influences behavior; the environment humans interact with, including society, other people, and technology)
- Virtue and Values (Ideals, standards, character traits, and moral conscience)
- Self-Identity and Personality (The total character of a person, sense of self, and self-awareness)

These dimensions, though analytically distinguished in studying human psychology, in reality are highly interdependent in normal human functioning. This is an important general point to keep in mind as we look at wisdom and heightened future consciousness; any feature of either capacity invariably impacts other features within the human mind and human behavior.

My opening hypothesis is that all of these dimensions are integral to understanding the nature of either wisdom or heightened future consciousness. In each case the capacity involves a wide and integrative array of psychological abilities and features. Both capacities are psychologically holistic and cannot be narrowly circumscribed to only some dimensions of the human mind. For example, wisdom is character virtue and a form of consciousness involving cognition, emotion, types of behavior in interaction with an environment, and an overall sense of self. The same would be true for heightened future

consciousness. And further, these psychological dimensions are interactive and mutually supportive of each other. For example, the types of cognitive processes connected with wisdom require a certain emotional-motivational state of mind, just as the cognitive and behavioral capacities of heightened future consciousness require a particular set of character virtues in order to be realized.

Now, to provide an anchor point, I will provide succinct definitions of wisdom, future consciousness, and heightened future consciousness. I will add much more detail to each definition as I progress. As a start, the definitions help us to see the holistic nature of each capacity.

Wisdom was a topic of great interest and concern throughout ancient and classical history and within the last couple of decades there has been a significant resurgence of theoretical discussion and research on wisdom, especially within experimental psychology.⁵ Though a complex human capacity open to varying interpretations (which include Western and Eastern slants on the topic), I begin with a definition that captures some of the most salient features of wisdom as understood within contemporary psychological research and philosophical inquiry.

“Wisdom is the continually evolving understanding of and fascination with the big picture of life, of what is important, ethical, and meaningful, and the desire and ability to apply this understanding to enhance the well-being of life, both for oneself and others.”

As a start, it is worth noting in this definition that wisdom is not a static state, but ever evolving. One grows in wisdom – pursues it - rather than achieving it. This quality of dynamic openness and continual learning is captured in Andre Gide’s dictum, “Believe those who are seeking the truth; doubt those who find it,” as well as in the philosophical aphorism by Wang Yang-ming, “The sages do not consider that making no mistake is a blessing. They believe, rather, that the great virtue of a person lies in their ability to correct their mistakes and continually to make a new person of themselves.” Next, note that wisdom has a motivational - emotional component; at the very least, there is fascination, curiosity, inquisitiveness, and a desire to help others. At the cognitive and consciousness levels, wisdom involves holistic and integrative understanding; it is not narrow or specialized knowledge about the world but expansive and encompassing. Wisdom sees the forest and not simply the trees. It searches to the horizon and beyond, and identifies what is really significant in life. Further, bringing together the cognitive and the ecological, wisdom combines knowledge with practical application; it is useful rather than just theoretical. Finally, wisdom has an ethical dimension: it is not simply self-serving, but is applied to the benefit of others.⁶ Clearly, wisdom is a holistic capacity.

Turning to future consciousness, a simple definition distilled from my writings is:

“Future consciousness is part of our general awareness of time, our temporal consciousness of past, present, and future...It is the human capacity to have

thoughts, feelings, and goals about the future...it is the total integrative set of psychological abilities, processes, and experiences humans use in understanding and dealing with the future. Future consciousness covers everything in human psychology that pertains to the future.”⁷

All of the major dimensions of human psychology, from cognitive and behavioral to emotional and personal, are involved in future consciousness. We imagine and we think about the future; we have feelings and desires regarding it; we act with purpose and goals concerning the future; and we define the nature of who we are with respect to our personal trajectory and self-narrative through time. Again, as with wisdom, future consciousness is a psychologically holistic capacity.

What, then, is heightened future consciousness? In my workshops, I have described heightened future consciousness as including an expansive sense of time, of past and future linked together; an evolutionary or progressive optimism about the future; an expansive and informed sense of contemporary trends and challenges; creativity, imagination, and curiosity regarding future possibilities; courage and enthusiasm facing the adventure and uncertainty of the future; a strong sense of ongoing personal growth and purpose involving long-term goal directed thinking and behavior and a future-oriented self-narrative; and a strong element of self-efficacy and self-responsibility in determining one’s future.

Within this description, note first that heightened future consciousness is expansive in scope and has a broad knowledge base (similar qualities to wisdom); there are cognitive capacities connected with it but there are motivational, emotional, and personal features as well (again similar to wisdom). Finally, there are certain basic character virtues, such as courage, optimism, and self-responsibility associated with it. This last point is a unique feature to my theory of heightened future consciousness, and I will return to this thesis and develop it much further later in the article. For now, I should note that both heightened future consciousness and wisdom are strongly connected to various character virtues. Finally, there are other qualities included in this definition, such as optimism, courage, ongoing personal growth, and an appreciation of uncertainty, that I will later explain are also associated with wisdom.

Consciousness: Evolution and Holism

From the above opening definitions, one can see that both wisdom and heightened future consciousness involve a broad and expansive consciousness of reality. Let’s see, in more detail, what this means.

As Copthorne Macdonald, the creator of *The Wisdom Page*, notes, wisdom should reflect an up-to-date understanding of reality; wisdom can not be grounded in outmoded ideas or beliefs. This is not to discount past ideas, but rather to acknowledge that because wisdom is an evolving process involving learning and transformation, by necessity, it is always absorbing what new ideas are emerging. The knowledge base of wisdom must reflect our best understanding of things today. The same could be said regarding heightened

future consciousness; in fact, to be attuned to the future requires that one is aware of the ever moving wave of new theories, new technologies, and emerging social and humanistic issues.

What, then, are the most important new ideas in science, technology, and social thought that should inform wisdom and future consciousness? As futurist Rick Smyre, contemporary theoretical scientists, Sally Goerner and Lee Smolin, and many others note, the new ideas of science and philosophy emphasize dynamism and evolution, and holism and connectivity. Similar ideas can be found in Walter Truett Anderson's vision of "New Enlightenment" thinking and in Macdonald's description of the essential features of the knowledge base of wisdom.⁸ In contemporary times, we have come to realize that everything in reality is interconnected and interdependent – reality is not a set of distinct and separate things; and that reality is both fluid and progressive – reality is not static, but evolving in complexity.

I have already noted the holistic dimension of the knowledge base of wisdom. Wisdom attempts to get the big picture of things – the integrated whole. This is not simply seeing many things or seeing out to the horizon but seeing how all these things are connected and seeing what is basic and fundamental. In a similar fashion, heightened future consciousness requires a comprehensive understanding of contemporary trends and challenges facing humanity - seeing the big picture of ongoing developments in the world and the problems facing us. But again, this knowledge must be integrative. As Jerome Glenn of the *Millennium Project*, among others, points out, all the major challenges facing humanity are interconnected. Constructive efforts to address one challenge will positively impact other ones, and downward turns in one area will pull other things down with it. Both wisdom and heightened future consciousness, to use a key modern evolutionary and holistic concept, perceive reality in terms of interconnected "open systems".⁹

Understanding the world in dynamic evolutionary terms means seeing reality as transformative from past to present and potentially into the future. Modern evolutionary science and history reveal change, and furthermore evolutionary change – of progression and advancement in complexity both in nature as a whole and human civilization in particular.

Further, evolutionary theory brings with it an expansive and holistic temporal consciousness. One realizes a big picture of time – of patterns of change. From the futurist end, understanding contemporary trends means seeing patterns of change that originate in the past and move into the future; a trend is a temporal Gestalt – a direction across time.¹⁰

In summary, a dynamical and holistic picture of time is essential to both wisdom and heightened future consciousness. To see the whole and to see evolutionary change across time implies that neither wisdom nor future consciousness is narrowly locked into the immediate here and now. Consciousness stretches outward in space and time and then tries to pull it all together.

It is particularly significant that for heightened future consciousness, consciousness extends and expands outward into the future. Aside from a

comprehensive awareness and understanding of contemporary trends and challenges, heightened future consciousness naturally includes a sense of future probabilities and possibilities. Future consciousness fans out. Future probabilities and possibilities often are simply extrapolative consequences of contemporary trends, but given the surprise/novelty element to time, heightened future consciousness is creative and imaginative in envisioning the future.

Further, future possibilities and probabilities can be either negative or positive; beginning from an identification of present challenges and problems, one can extrapolate both negative and positive outcomes; we can solve the problem – a positive outcome, or the problem could even get worse – a negative outcome. Part of heightened future consciousness is seeing how things could get better and how things could get worse – seeing both sets of possibilities. This attitude is realistic and open to the full range of different possibilities, but it is also evaluative, judging future possibilities in terms of what is more or less preferable. Hence, this last point parallels a key function of wisdom: to evaluate different possibilities (for example consequences of different actions) and determine which would be most beneficial for oneself and others.

Now, when one thinks about the nature of wisdom and the nature of future consciousness, there may appear to be a difference in emphasis regarding temporal awareness. Wisdom brings the lessons of the past to the problems and challenges of today and tomorrow; heightened future consciousness sees patterns across time and extrapolates from past and present into future.

But though it may not seem immediately apparent, future consciousness requires an understanding of the past – an understanding of patterns of change, of trends and developments across time, to extrapolate into the future. At a psychological level, memory and anticipation are intimately connected as basic mental capacities; one can't think ahead without a sense of the past. In fact, within normal temporal consciousness, past, present, and future are not psychologically distinct realities; they interconnect and interpenetrate.¹¹

Further, from the perspective of wisdom, our goals, our challenges, and our problems – what practical wisdom is supposed to be all about - all have reference to the future. What do we want to achieve? What obstacles or difficulties need to be resolved or overcome? The pragmatics of life – the application of knowledge to practical ends – is always about the future, about realizing goals and solving problems. Hence, although wisdom is understood as grounded in experience and learning from the past, at a practical level it invariably deals with the future. How does one realize the best life – the most efficacious realization of goals and solutions to problems – for oneself and others? Hence, practical wisdom is really efficacious future consciousness; it is coming up with the best possible ways to create the best possible future; it is about competence in determining and creating preferable futures.

If there is a difference in emphasis in our understanding of wisdom and future consciousness, it is that our thinking on wisdom should highlight its future focus more, and our thinking on future consciousness should emphasize the importance of understanding the past more deeply. Extrapolating simply from the

present into the future is too narrow-minded, and creating present-focused solutions to our problems is too short-sighted and simply unwise.

Both wisdom and future consciousness grasp certain essential insights, the first of which is that reality is flow – an important shift in understanding from the ancient and classical emphasis on stasis and stability. Contemporary science provides a comprehensive framework for understanding flow: it is an evolutionary progression of increasing complexity and perhaps even intelligence.¹² Next, though there is a degree of relative persistence and stability across time, both history and our personal consciousness reveal a creative and emergent dimension to things. New forms appear across time; there is becoming and passing away. Each of us individually experiences life as an ongoing opening up of new things; the stream of consciousness perpetually moves into the future. Analogously, as scientists such as Kauffman and Davies point out, evolution is an ongoing act of creation.¹³ The unending novelty and creativity, inherent in our experience of time, indicates another important quality in both wisdom and heightened future consciousness. The future is an adventure; there is an element of uncertainty to life.

Another key feature identified in contemporary research on wisdom is the quality of humility and openness in wise people; wisdom is neither arrogant nor certain. Wisdom is a tempered balance of knowledge and doubt/uncertainty.¹⁴ With respect to the future, there is always an element of possibility, as well as novelty/creativity. It seems contradictory to assert that the person possesses heightened future consciousness and yet believes that he or she knows exactly what is going to happen in the future. Heightened future consciousness brings with it a degree of openness, a sense of possibilities rather than certainties, and in fact, an enthusiasm to experience the adventure and surprises which lay ahead. A sense of possibility is flexible and expansive; a sense of certainty is rigid and narrow. Fear of adventure circumscribes and limits consciousness – it closes the mind off from learning and growth; it closes the mind off from the future. As noted earlier, wise people are wise because they are open to learning and to growing. Heightened future consciousness has this same quality of embracing the adventure of the future. Fear of the different and the unexpected destroys both wisdom and future consciousness.

Hence, as a final point to this section, there is an openness of consciousness in both wisdom and heightened future consciousness. A person with this capacity sees the whole, sees the flow of past to future, sees and embraces the mysterious and unknown.

Cognition

Wisdom is not simply broad and expansive theoretical knowledge; it is the capacity to apply this knowledge to concrete and practical ends. This is a key feature of the cognitive dimension of wisdom. Looking at heightened future consciousness, it has been a central message of futurists and futurist organizations that thinking about the future and becoming aware of its possibilities has great practical benefit. One can make better informed choices,

be forewarned regarding potential dangers, and take advantage of emerging trends. In fact, one could argue that thinking about the future is the most practical thing one can do since we are going to spend the rest of our lives in the future. Better to be prepared, then to naively walk into tomorrow. Heightened future consciousness involves practical knowledge.

Aside from integrating broad theoretical knowledge with practical application, there are numerous other cognitive elements to wisdom. Some of the most important ones are good thinking skills, insight and intuition, imagination and creativity, problem solving, and decision making. These same cognitive processes are also important abilities in heightened future consciousness.

Wisdom involves good thinking skills; it is oxymoronic to talk about a “thoughtless wise person.” Wise people think about life and life’s problems and do so very effectively. In my workshop on wisdom, I highlight the principles of critical thinking (such as clarity, precision, relevance, breadth, and depth) as an essential component of wisdom. Good critical thinking skills are equally important in heightened future consciousness.

But to bring some necessary balance into the picture, Eastern theories of wisdom highlight the capacities of insight and intuition as essential qualities of wisdom. I would define insight or intuition as the cognitive capacity to understand something in a holistic and immediate fashion; to see the meaning of a fact or idea as a totality, all at once. Linear thinking conversely is coming to an understanding of something in logical steps. Following a balanced model of cognition (synthesizing Eastern and Western emphases), a wise person ideally shows a solid integration of linear rational thought and intuitive insight. Wisdom brings to bear on life the full gamut of cognitive capacities. In describing heightened future consciousness, the same argument can be made.

Although logic and rationality are important cognitive strengths, it is especially important that heightened future consciousness possesses a good dose of creativity and imagination. As I have described it, future consciousness involves possibility thinking, being able to imagine hypothetical realities, being able to imagine many different possibilities and not just one or two. Future consciousness involves flexibility and openness to the future. Interestingly, wisdom is also noted for its creative dimension; wise people can find solutions to practical problems that stymie most people; wise people can think outside of normal limiting mindsets.

In both cases – wisdom and heightened future consciousness - there are enhanced problem solving abilities. Life is a challenge; the future is a challenge. There is no way around this. To honestly and openly face the future is to realize that there are innumerable difficulties facing us, individually and collectively. The future will not be smooth sailing. In fact, an unwillingness to acknowledge or address problems is a classic way to avoid the future. A key element of wisdom is the capacity to solve problems; this is the essence of the practical dimension of wisdom. People who can not solve the problems of life are usually not seen as wise. Wise people, in fact, are noted for their capacity to solve real life problems, both for themselves and others.¹⁵

Decision making is another significant cognitive capacity connected with wise people. Wisdom involves being able to make good decisions in difficult situations; it is being able to thoughtfully commit to something, where others may become paralyzed or, conversely, decide impulsively. So too with heightened future consciousness. To realize future goals and to initiate purposeful behavior, a person must be able to make decisions as opposed to being unable or unwilling to make commitments. Indecisiveness is another classic way to avoid the future.

Emotion and Motivation

Neither wisdom nor future consciousness can be adequately understood without the inclusion of emotion and desire. The future is felt as much as thought or imagined. A cognitive or intellectual description of either capacity is not only empty but psychologically unrealistic. One's emotional state can amplify or severely dampen one's cognitive capacities.

Hope and fear are two of the most basic human emotions and both pertain to the future; in the former case there is an anticipation of something positive, in the latter case there is an anticipation of something negative. Although fear serves some important psychological functions, such as triggering caution, if not avoidance, to perceived danger, if a person's consciousness is ruled by fear, his or her life is severely constrained. Anticipating nothing but negative possibilities inhibits the mind and behavior, generates pessimism, and effectively shuts down future consciousness. Hope, on the other hand, generates optimism and approach behavior and enhances one's cognitive processes, such as thinking and imagination. Consequently, a sense of hope about the future is an essential element of heightened future consciousness. We are literally able to think better if we are hopeful rather than fearful. As has been frequently pointed out, optimism and pessimism are both right – both self-fulfilling prophecies – and hence, if one wishes to realize a positive future, one needs to be hopeful and optimistic.¹⁶ Enhancing future consciousness involves facilitating the development of hope in individuals.

Wisdom is also connected with hope. Wise people look for potential positive outcomes and work toward the realization of these outcomes. Wise people have optimistic attitudes about life and act from a sense of self-empowerment and self-responsibility. They believe that there are potential positive outcomes for life's problems and that they are capable of identifying and realizing these positive outcomes. They feel neither hopeless nor helpless.

Self-responsibility and its connection with hope leads into the topic of how character virtues connect with wisdom and heightened future consciousness. Later I will focus on the central importance of virtues, but for now, I should note that self-responsibility, grounded in the belief in self-efficacy, is one of the key character virtues necessary for heightened future consciousness. One must feel responsible (at least to a significant degree) for one's future and feel that one has the power to realize one's goals. Cultivating self-responsibility generates hope (positive feelings about the future), optimism, and an expansive, rich

consciousness of the future; the reverse mindset generates helplessness, depression, and a closed and limited sense of the future.

As a virtue, self-responsibility or self-efficacy not only impacts human emotion, it energizes and directs human motivation. Without this character virtue, there is little effort, little purpose, little tenacity and little discipline in life; the motivational dimension of future consciousness – the determination and follow-through toward the realization of goals – collapses.¹⁷

Hence, heightened future consciousness exhibits an emotional core of hope and optimism and a motivational component of determination and purpose toward realizing one's goals.

I should also note that the virtues of courage and love are also intimately tied to the emotional and motivational dimensions of heightened future consciousness and wisdom. Courage is needed to face fears, including fear of the unknown (a quintessential feature of the future) while love brings energy to life. Without love for something, what is the point of thinking about the future, of aspiring toward anything? Love also impacts wisdom in numerous ways; if nothing else, wisdom is guided by a love of life and others.

Wisdom also involves the emotional-motivational qualities of curiosity and wonder; empathy for others; a love and exhilaration in learning and thinking; and a generalized sense of happiness and well-being connected with the exercise and pursuit of wisdom.¹⁸ Heightened future consciousness also includes curiosity and wonder, at least with respect to the future, and in general, is associated with psychological well-being. (See below on personality and self-identity.)

The Environment and Ecology of the Future

We are beings-in-a-world. Our lives are realized in the context of an environment. And being aware of where things could head, both negative and positive possibilities, is critical to realizing our own future aspirations, whatever those aspirations may be. The future is not realized in a vacuum. A holistic understanding of past, present, and future provides an informed context in which to make sense out of the world we live in – to see the flow of things – and, consequently, to provide a foundation for making intelligent decisions regarding how to structure our lives.

There are many different theories about the future. Different perspectives, often coupled together with different values and evaluative interpretations of our contemporary conditions, present different predictions, prognoses, and preferable directions for humanity. Part of a broad understanding of the future involves knowing these different perspectives and being able to compare and evaluate their different assessments, predictions, and ideal directions. (This is one place where critical thinking is essential.) In essence, these are different solutions to the problems of life. There is a normative dimension to future consciousness – knowing the different ideals regarding the future and having the capacity to thoughtfully assess these different ideals.¹⁹

At the most fundamental level, we do not direct or create the future from some detached position, but rather co-create or participate in the unfolding of the

future within the world. We are, to a degree, responsible for what comes, but there is also adventure and external forces at work in the unfolding of our future. The future is an ecological interaction effect between us and the world. The effects of the world can be either positive or negative. The world provides both opportunities for action and obstacles and challenges toward realizing our goals. Heightened future consciousness involves the capacity to attune one's thinking and behavior to the circumstances of life and work out as best as possible (and modify if need be) one's goals and aspirations; it involves seeing the opportunities and the dangers.

What has all of this got to do with wisdom? The answer is everything. As noted above, wisdom involves a broad understanding of reality and the human condition and furthermore involves the capacity to apply this knowledge. To be wise, one needs to understand the flow of things – the trends which define the temporal Gestalt of our reality – and to see where these trends may lead, good and bad. But wisdom is engagement with reality and not just understanding. Wisdom is the capacity to make informed judgments and decisions based on understanding reality with the intent to guide one's life (and help others guide their lives) toward positive ends, rather than negative ones. Wisdom therefore involves making informed ethical or value judgments on possibilities and it acts on an assessment of these possibilities. Furthermore, wisdom shows a degree of flexibility and works with the world – it is participatory in spirit. And wisdom, in its practical mode, is always about the ecological future, for it is always about assessment and action regarding what is the best possible future – for us and the world - and how to realize it.

Virtue and Value

A central thesis I have put forward in my writings is that the development of character virtues is key to the enhancement of future consciousness. Although heightened future consciousness involves cognitive features - such as a broad understanding of past, present, and future, good imagination and thinking skills, and the capacity to apply knowledge to practical challenges and problems - there is an ethical and character dimension that supports, structures, fuels, and gives direction to these cognitive capacities.

A virtue is a value lived; for example, the value of truth if practiced leads to honesty and integrity as character virtues, and the value of freedom and self-determination leads to self-responsibility as a character virtue. Philosophers, as well as psychologists, have argued that the good life – a life of happiness, meaning, purpose, and mental health – is realized through the development of key character virtues, such as courage, honesty, love and compassion, and notably wisdom.²⁰

Creating a positive and evolving future for oneself and for others entails a key set of character virtues. The ones that I have most frequently listed are self-responsibility; discipline and commitment; transcendence; courage; hope and optimism; love; temperance/balance; and wisdom. Each of these virtues contributes to an enhanced understanding of the future and/or an enhanced

capacity for creating a positive future. For example, since the future is to a degree uncertain, courage is necessary in order to face future possibilities and act on goals. Without courage one becomes cognitively and behaviorally paralyzed in the past/present. Without self-responsibility, one sees oneself as a victim and incapable of influencing the future. Without hope and optimism, one becomes depressed, which is basically a failure of future consciousness. Without transcendence, one can not identify with anything beyond oneself and will not contribute to the future betterment of humanity. A holistic and socially conscious conception of heightened future consciousness involves the desire and capacity to contribute to the future benefit of humanity and not just oneself.

In the most general sense future consciousness should have an ethical dimension; evaluation, decision making, and action relative to the future should be geared toward benefiting both the individual and others. In futurist terminology, future consciousness identifies and pursues individual and collective preferable futures.

Throughout history, wisdom has been seen as one of the most important human virtues. Most broadly, wisdom should be seen as a character trait: a synthesis of a number of qualities that support the capacity to make intelligent and informed ethical decisions about the future. Furthermore, wisdom requires a variety of other character virtues in order to be realized. Wisdom requires the virtue of honesty and the value of truth if one is to seek knowledge and learn about life. Wisdom requires courage for, as many contemporary wisdom researchers have pointed out, the wise person recognizes his or her own fallibility and recognizes the irreducible element of uncertainty in life. To be wise requires action, albeit informed and thoughtful, in the face of humility and uncertainty. Wisdom requires love and compassion, for wisdom seeks holistic benefits rather than simply self-serving ends.

Hence, an important connecting link and underlying invariance of wisdom and heightened future consciousness is the dimension of virtue – of ethical character traits that give strength and a positive quality to these capacities.

Self-Identity

Heightened future consciousness impacts the total personality or character; indeed, a person is transformed by an enhanced awareness of the future. The sense of self is broadened and strengthened as is the optimistic visualization of goals, and purpose and direction in life. A feeling of freedom (self-empowerment) and a sense of possibilities for oneself emerge. Though the individual is connected into the self-narrative of his or her life, a sense of transcendence beyond the past and present develops.

At the personal level, wisdom, too, is associated with heightened self-awareness and self-reflection; the capacity for self-transcendence and the widening out from the egocentric; and a sense of connection with other people, nature, society, and the cosmos. The wise person is able to see him or herself in the context of the whole. The journey of the self is defined in the context of the journey of the whole.

As noted earlier, wisdom both reflects and impacts the total character of a person. Various contemporary researchers on wisdom have explored whether there are general personality traits associated with wisdom.²¹ Copthorne Macdonald has proposed that wise people exhibit those traits described in Maslow's theory of self-actualizing individuals. Wise people have a passion for life – for learning and thinking; wise people pursue personal growth. Wisdom is associated with a general state of psychological well-being.

Wise people have an overall sense of purpose and direction in life – a future focus – and this quality is especially interesting since it lines up with one of the central defining qualities of mental health. In fact, two of the six most important qualities of mental health are purpose and direction and a sense of ongoing growth. Two others connect with self-responsibility and self-efficacy: environmental mastery and control, and a sense of autonomy or being able to make decisions. Hence, at least four of the personality traits associated with mental health are also associated with wisdom and heightened future consciousness.²²

Synthesis

Summarizing the qualities of wisdom,

At the cognitive and consciousness levels, there is an integrative and expansive capacity to see the big picture, global and cosmic, and understand the connectivity of things. There is temporal expansiveness - an ever evolving synthesis of past and future, and a capacity to see the long-term consequences of things. Wisdom is a highly developed practical ability, applying general knowledge to concrete problems and challenges in life. Wisdom combines excellent thinking skills with other modes of understanding, such as insight or intuition. Wisdom is open to the world and multiple points of view. It is informed by contemporary scientific theory. It is a self-stimulating, dynamic, evolving, and contingent system of knowledge driven by questions, uncertainty, hope, and a passion for learning and thinking.

At a motivational-emotional level, wisdom involves curiosity, wonder, and a hopeful and optimistic engagement with reality; compassion and empathy for others; and a sense of happiness or well-being associated with the pursuit and use of wisdom.

At the virtue and ethical level, wisdom involves the application of knowledge, guided by values and ethics, to realize well-being both for oneself and others. Wisdom is supported by other virtues, such as courage, honesty and integrity, fair-mindedness, compassion for others, humility, optimism, and reverence for life. Wisdom is ethical thinking.

Finally, at the personal or character level, wisdom involves a synthesis of heart and mind. There is a sense of connection between the self and other people, human society as a whole, nature, and the cosmos. Wisdom implies exceptional self-awareness and the capacity for self-reflection; there is self-

transcendence and an ongoing movement away from the egocentric. Wise people are self-actualizing.

On a majority of these points, a strong case can be made that these psychological features should be included in a definition of heightened future consciousness as well. Wisdom is an appropriate and inspiring ideal to which one should aspire in the holistic development of future consciousness.

To summarize, the core ideas in my theory of heightened future consciousness that align with wisdom are: 1) Heightened future consciousness is a psychologically holistic capacity. 2) Heightened future consciousness involves a fundamental set of character virtues that define and facilitate excellence in all the major psychological dimensions; 3) Heightened future consciousness is connected with psychological well-being; an optimistic, hopeful, and constructive attitude; and a self-efficacious and self-responsible belief in the capacity to create positive outcomes in life. 4) It involves an open, evolutionary, and expansive consciousness of reality and time.

Psychological Evolution and the New Enlightenment

History reveals that there has been a general direction toward temporal expansiveness in the human mind. We understand both the past and the possibilities of the future increasingly better. This trend in human psychology and society mirrors a more encompassing trend in the evolution of life - sentience expands in both space and time. Consequently, one would expect that future consciousness, defined in the broad and holistic fashion presented above, should also expand in the future.²³

Many philosophers and futurists anticipate a significant jump in the collective mental functioning of humanity in the relatively near future. Some writers have described this new surge as a collective enlightenment. On one hand this jump forward could be seen as an adaptive response to dealing more effectively with our increasingly complex and fast-paced world; on another hand it could be seen as an expression of the predictable upward beat of human evolution. Perhaps it is both. A third possibility, not incompatible with the first two, is that accelerative technological growth is pulling humanity to a new level of mental functioning; technological augmentation and modification will transform us.²⁴

Whatever the causes of the new enlightenment, I believe that heightened future consciousness will be a core feature of it, which of course, given my theory of future consciousness, means that wisdom will be at the core as well. If we are to consider what qualities need to be enhanced to constitute a real step forward in human evolution, then the combination of qualities embodied in wisdom clearly provides an appropriate ideal and evolutionary direction. I intentionally place together the notions of the ideal and evolution, since human evolution in the future will increasingly be purposefully guided by human ideals.²⁵ As ideals, evolution should be psychologically holistic and ethical; evolution should be mind-expansive and enlightening; evolution should be a journey and not a

destination. Psychological evolution will occur ecologically in interaction with the world, provoked by real life problems, challenges, and opportunities.

Wisdom (or heightened future consciousness) satisfies such criteria. It is an evolutionary and transformative state. It is an expansive and expanding mode of consciousness. It is integrative, holistic, and ecological. It synthesizes the pragmatic, the theoretical, and the ethical. It stimulates the development of mental health. And as a fundamental character virtue – indeed a cluster of connected virtues - it is a purposefully pursued, self-directional, and self-responsible mode of consciousness.

This ideal future direction can only be realized if we ethically evolve, and it is clear that we will need to guide this process of self-development with wisdom and heightened future consciousness. We need to become collectively wise and enlightened enough to value wisdom.

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