

The Future Evolution of Consciousness

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Introduction

The Contemporary World Dilemma

*“The central question of our time is what to do about the future.
And that question creates a deep divide.”*

Virginia Postrel

We live in a dizzying and tumultuous world of a multitude of anxiety-producing problems and existential crises, and myriad of competing answers and solutions to these challenges, threats, and difficulties. In contemporary times, a vast and diverse array of viewpoints regarding humanity’s problematic and complex current state of affairs—what’s going right and what’s going wrong—and our prospects for a good future engulf and bombard our consciousness, attempting to influence and persuade us. Many different theories are proposed and broadcasted across myriad communication channels concerning the key challenges and problems in our world, and what are the most desirable and effective pathways and solutions forward into the future. Our conscious minds are on information overload and suffering ideological stress regarding the best answers to the core problems of human life.

This cacophony of philosophies and approaches, I would argue, is an expression of humanity’s ongoing debate and struggle over our future. What is the best path forward toward creating a good future? What should be our priorities? What are the main problems that need to be addressed and hopefully solved? How do we solve them? And what are the central goals we should be reaching toward? As Virginia Postrel states in the quote above, such questions about the future create “a deep divide.” Indeed, I would add that such questions provoke multiple antagonistic divisions and divides.

Since ancient times, humanity has aggressively debated and fought numerous wars¹, both ideologically and militarily, over what are the best answers to such questions about the future. There have been and continue to be multiple competing perspectives on these issues, which revolve around how to navigate and guide humanity into a positive and preferable future. That’s what all the noise and ruckus is about today: the best way forward into future.

Given our current tenuous and tense state of global affairs, politically, socially, and environmentally, the question is even repeatedly raised and discussed over whether humanity has any viable future, good or bad, at all? As emphasized, often in a dramatic life-or-death fashion in the various contemporary assessments put forth in different

¹ I could argue that all wars have been fought over what is the preferable direction for the future.

theories of the future, there are a number of deep global problems that severally threaten the continuation of human civilization. Problems, such as climate change, growing economic inequality, continued population growth, and unrelenting wars, violence, and human cruelty across the globe, generate in us high levels of anxiety and fear, worry and stress, and depression, nihilism, and pessimism over the future of humanity. Hence, we find ourselves in what appears to be a very precarious planetary state with numerous theories competing with each other in our frazzled and despondent consciousness. The darkness appears to be encroaching upon us and multiple factions are screaming out different solutions—often contradictory—regarding what to do about it.²

The Evolution of Consciousness

“The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself - not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity.”

Julian Huxley

In this contentious global arena of multitudinous assessments of current human reality, both good and bad, and the plentitude of diverse answers for a positive future, one frequently voiced viewpoint—expressed in many different forms—is that the major cause for our current problems is failings or deficiencies in human consciousness, and the critical pathway for creating a positive future is to heighten and evolve human consciousness. Although many different key terms and concepts are emphasized to express this general viewpoint, such as realizing greater “enlightenment,” “wisdom,” and “self-awareness;” enhancing our “collective intelligence” and “critical or reflective thinking;” widening our “global or planetary consciousness;” advancing our “ethical evolution;” broadening our mental “perspective;” or achieving “heightened spirituality,”³ all these views cluster around the general idea that our consciousness (or conscious minds) needs to be sharpened, deepened, advanced, and expanded.

Numerous types of dysfunctions and weaknesses in current human consciousness have been identified that, to various degrees, it is argued, create or contribute to our contemporary troubles, such as self-centered egocentric thinking; short-sightedness and lack of foresight; impulsiveness and thoughtlessness; dogmatism and closed-mindedness; greed, gluttony, and selfishness; hatred, paranoia, and lack of empathy; authoritarian mindsets and practices; elitism and discrimination; rigidity and inflexibility

² Extensive reviews of “theories and paradigms of the future,” which invariably include assessments of the present and our current problems and probabilistic predictions and visions of preferable futures, can be found in my book, Lombardo, *Contemporary Futurist Thought*, Chapter Four, and in my online video, Lombardo “Contemporary Trends and Theories and Paradigms of the Future.”

³ My experience has been that when expressions such as “spirit,” “soul,” or “spirituality” are used, what is meant by such terms invariably includes some quality or feature of consciousness.

in thinking; superstitious and delusional mindsets; excessive stress, fear, and anxiety; pessimism, depression, apathy, and nihilism; and numerous forms of immoral and unethical mentality and behavior.

Even for those frequently identified serious planetary problems, such as: climate change and pollution; loss of natural ecosystems and species diversity; lack of fresh water and basic medical services; militaristic war and physical violence, destruction, and carnage; and poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth and resources, which have a clear physical dimension to them, the argument by advocates of conscious evolution is that these “physical” problems have arisen due to failings and flaws in our thinking, attitudes, emotions, values, and conscious goals and purposeful actions. The problems and failings of human consciousness not only have a negative impact on social, political, and cultural reality but also have numerous deleterious physical effects on the world and the physical parameters of human existence.

The above assessment of the human condition and how the failings of human consciousness centrally contribute to our deep world problems is not a new idea. Throughout recorded human history, across all cultures, there have been many religious-spiritual, philosophical, psychological, and social-political schools of thought that have emphasized this general point of view regarding how to solve the challenges of human life. Calls for the enhancement, deepening, and expansion of our capacities of consciousness in response to the woes of the world have been voiced since the beginnings of recorded history.⁴

Further, throughout history advocates for the further development of human consciousness have created innumerable and often highly effective practices to enhance the capacities of human consciousness. Humans have been striving to evolve their consciousness for millennia, and at least to some degree have succeeded in such endeavors. But given the unsettling and often disheartening state of current human affairs and the multiple looming crises threatening the survival of human civilization, advocates for the evolution of consciousness believe that there is considerable room for the further improvement in our capacities of consciousness. The message of conscious evolution has not had sufficient impact on the developmental history of the world.

The future evolution of consciousness is not just an important goal that we should aspire toward at a collective level to better address our global challenges and problems; it is a goal that many sages and writers have contended has great value and relevance at a personal level for each of us individually. Throughout history, advocates for the heightening of consciousness have particularly emphasized its critical value at a personal level. To lead a positive life and realize the best level of personal existence possible, both Eastern and Western, and ancient and modern sages, have argued that heightening personal awareness and achieving conscious well-being and wisdom is the key to a good life and achieving a positive future at an individual level. And even though many people seem to think and act as if they believe the primary causes of their personal problems and unhappiness are external variables and physical factors, advocates for the personal evolution of consciousness have long contended that the central cause of individual distress is not the external world or other humans, but the inner workings and failings of individual consciousness. All in all, the evolution of

⁴ See, for example, Lombardo, *The Evolution of Future Consciousness*, Chapters 3 and 4.

consciousness is just as important for our individual lives, as it is for our collective existence and future.

In resonance with this long-standing view that the solution to our current difficulties and the way to a positive future is through the further evolution of consciousness, the central thesis of this book is:

All of our current challenges and problems are due to weaknesses and failings in consciousness. The key strategy we should passionately and tenaciously be pursuing for constructively addressing our contemporary difficulties and creating a positive future is the purposeful evolution of our consciousness. The future purposeful evolution of consciousness is not only possible and plausible, but also a highly preferable pathway to emphasize and pursue, both for humanity as a collective whole and for each of us individually within our lives.

In the coming pages I explain why I believe the evolution of consciousness is essential to successfully addressing our current problems and creating a positive future. Why is the evolution of consciousness so important and central to our future? I describe how weaknesses and failings in human consciousness create our difficulties; what ideals we should aspire toward in evolving our consciousness; and how the realization of such ideals of evolved consciousness would create a better world for humanity. Although I see the central thesis of this book as an expression of a long-standing view in the history of human thought—that the key to a positive future is the further evolution of consciousness—I contribute a number of unique and new ideas to this long established philosophy of human existence.

The Centrality and Importance of Consciousness

In this introduction, as one key opening point to explain in more depth: Why is the further evolution of our consciousness, both individually and collectively, so centrally important for constructively addressing our current issues and for creating a good future? Indeed, why is consciousness so significant in understanding both our current conditions and our potential future reality?

Before starting to answer these related questions, the meaning of the term “consciousness,” at a rudimentary level⁵, should be explained. I use the term “consciousness” as synonymous in meaning with the terms “experience” and “awareness.” At the moment you are conscious, or aware of, or experiencing the reading of this sentence and its meaning—all three terms indicate the same reality. The term “experience” means to personally observe, encounter, or undergo something, and also “to know,” as well as the totality of what is perceived and understood. The term “aware” means to know, to be alert, or to be conscious. All in all, the terms consciousness, awareness, and experience all refer to a state of knowing and/or personally encountering some reality. I should though acknowledge that there is (and has been in the past) a level of diversity and ambiguity in how consciousness gets

⁵ There is a great deal more to be said about the nature of consciousness and the meaning of the term—to be examined later in this book—besides this introductory explanation.

defined and understood. But generally speaking, understanding consciousness as equivalent in meaning with experience or awareness is a common practice, and I will use these terms as meaning the same thing in this book.

Given this definition of consciousness, it should be evident that consciousness is at the core of our personal human existence. We live our lives in the ambient illumination of our consciousness. We awaken to the world and to ourselves through consciousness. We are aware of our surrounding physical environment through consciousness; we consciously see, hear, and touch the world. It is within consciousness that we experience emotions and desires and through which we think and imagine. Our personal identity, as we apprehend it, also appears to be a reality of consciousness; we are conscious selves and we are conscious of this conscious personal reality. The total temporal span of our personal existence, as we live it, from its beginning to its end, is encapsulated and manifested as a reality of consciousness. Consciousness is the medium through which all that is meaningful to us is revealed, known, and understood.⁶ All that we believe we know is formed (articulated) and comprehended within our consciousness.

Moreover, as a further indication of the significance of consciousness in human life, we create, shape, and guide ourselves and the world around us through our conscious thoughts, goals, plans, emotions, motives, and purposeful behaviors. We make and remake the world and ourselves through conscious intentions and conscious actions. Through the processes of consciousness we not only make sense of reality, we attempt to manipulate and create our reality. To a great degree the world around us is a creation of our conscious goals, planning, and purposeful actions.

Indeed, all our theories of reality and all our conceptualized solutions to addressing the challenges and problems of life, both great and small, are creations of our consciousness, are indeed fundamentally realities of our consciousness. It is within consciousness that we understand and identify our difficulties and our goals and figure out how to address difficulties and realize our goals. The debate over the future and our assessments of our current reality are occurring within our consciousness. *The limits of our consciousness are the limits of our world.*⁷

We also seem to be able to transcend time in consciousness, both being aware of the past, and visionary and anticipatory of the future. Moreover, through consciousness we are able to transcend the actual—of what is—and speculate on the hypothetical and the possible. We create fiction; we create science fiction. Our conscious imagination and

⁶ It can be argued that knowledge or intelligence does not require consciousness. There are numerous skills and abilities we exercise without being conscious of the processes involved in executing those capacities. We can also argue that information processing machines demonstrate levels of artificial intelligence and yet it is debatable whether such machines possess consciousness. Not everything that is known is known consciously. Still, when we are engaged in the active process of attempting to understand some idea or fact, or learn some new idea or fact, or attempting to describe and explain our knowledge to others, and think further about our beliefs and ideas, we are doing so consciously. See Richard Yonck's *Future Minds* (2020) for an extended discussion on intelligence, knowledge, and consciousness.

⁷ The modern philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein famously stated that "The limits of our language are the limits of our world." But our consciousness, and hence our world, extends way beyond what we verbally express.

thinking is able to soar beyond our perceptual consciousness of the here and now. Our consciousness can extend out to the far reaches of the universe, ascend toward the infinite, and ponder issues of abstract philosophy and science.

Of special significance regarding the centrality of consciousness to human existence, as introduced above, we each possess a sense of personal existence that at its core is a conscious reality. Our unique personal identity is manifested within consciousness; our distinctive selves are creations of consciousness. Each of us has an experience of an “I” (or a “me”) that exists at the center of our consciousness, and this “I” —this “me” —is that which is conscious both of the world and of its own existence and its own consciousness.

All in all, consciousness is a complex and personal phenomenon, and far-reaching capacity fundamental to the nature of what and who we are. We think, we remember, we feel, we desire, we perceive, and we imagine within the arena of our consciousness; such diverse capacities are all powers of our consciousness. Moreover, we experience a conscious personal self engaged within and executing these diverse conscious processes.

We may be in awe over the vast extent and intricacy of the universe, indeed over the sheer brute fact of existence, but it is even more astonishing that each of us is aware and knows of this universe and can contemplate, wonder over, and attempt to understand its existence. Although part of the fabric of existence, consciousness reflectively illuminates and apprehends existence. Reality may be extraordinary, but that we can consciously know of reality and of ourselves is even more astounding. At the core of human reality, consciousness is a wondrous and amazing phenomenon of existence.

In fact, to further underscore the significance of consciousness, throughout human history there have been numerous theories developed to explain the nature and origin of consciousness, and the connection between consciousness, the physical world, and the universe at large. What is particularly noteworthy about these various theories and ongoing study and research into consciousness is that thinking about consciousness and attempting to understand it seems to require that we understand more broadly the nature of reality as a whole. Theories of consciousness frequently delve into the nature of reality (or the cosmos) as an essential element in understanding consciousness. In fact, reciprocally, as argued in numerous theories, understanding reality seems to require understanding consciousness. There is much more to be said on these two points later, but it appears that consciousness and reality as a whole are intimately connected together.

Given the above considerations regarding the centrality and importance of consciousness in understanding human existence—if not reality as a whole—it would seem to follow that if we were to change and significantly evolve human consciousness, we would profoundly transform and improve all of human reality, inclusive of our individual selves, human society, and the world in which we live. The core of our human reality is consciousness; our contemporary difficulties reflect the current make-up, dispositions, and capacities of our consciousness; and hence, if we can evolve and improve our consciousness, we undoubtedly would realize a much better level of existence than in current times.

Theories of Consciousness and the Future of Consciousness

In thinking out how to go about evolving our consciousness, we immediately face a deep conundrum. Throughout human history, the origin and nature of consciousness has been one of the great philosophical and scientific mysteries. It has been a topic of great perplexity and debate. Many and often contradictory theories regarding consciousness have been proposed. What is consciousness and why does it exist? Equally each of our own personal conscious selves—that can consciously can reflect upon and ponder its own existence—has likewise been a great puzzle, wonder, and source of debate. What is the origin and nature of the conscious “I”? What am I and why do I exist? Although the phenomena of consciousness and our own individual conscious selves are so intimate and central to our existence, we can not seem to agree upon the origin, cause, and nature of these core realities of our existence.

In fact, a review of contemporary books, essays, and online sources—inspired by diverse scientific, philosophical, mystical, or religious-spiritual ideas—reveals an immense, ever increasing assortment of theories and solutions to the nature of consciousness and the conscious self. Answers abound. The debates continue and grow more complex in subtlety and nuance over time. The mysteries and perplexities of consciousness persist in contemporary times.

Having studied and both taught and written about a wide array of past and current theories of consciousness⁸ I have been enlightened and inspired in numerous ways by the great thinkers, past and present, on the nature and origin of consciousness. I have become more conscious of my own consciousness through the conscious thoughts of other explorers on this fascinating topic. The consciousness of others illuminates our own consciousness. Although there are still puzzles and questions regarding consciousness, there is much to be learned and pondered over in the diverse writings of other investigators of consciousness.

Yet, I have found these numerous answers to the mysteries of consciousness and the conscious self not totally satisfying in a number of ways. Of special note, I’ve found theories, past and present, explaining the relationship between consciousness and the physical world especially problematic. We are conscious beings with physical bodies existing in a physical world. And we know and experience this physical world and our physical bodies through consciousness. How is this possible? I do not think that we have plausible and convincing answers to such questions.

Precisely stated, the opening challenge we face in thinking out the future evolution of consciousness is that we need to understand the nature of consciousness if we are to intelligently and realistically consider how consciousness could evolve in the future. Understanding how we *can* and, moreover, how we *should* evolve consciousness, including our personal consciousness, is intimately connected with understanding the

⁸ There are a variety of previous publications in which I presented, as my ideas evolved over time, my thoughts on the nature of consciousness and its possible and preferable evolution in the future. In particular, there are discussions on these connected topics in my book *Mind Flight*, pp. 419-424, 651-654, and 745-752, and a number of essays in my books *Wisdom, Consciousness, and the Future*, pp. 190-212, 260-279, and 379-434, and *Essays on the Future of Psychology and Consciousness*, pp. 122-166, 215-244, 286-296, and 327-336.

nature of consciousness. Any valid approach to evolving consciousness needs to be informed and inspired by a credible and illuminating understanding of *what* we are attempting to evolve. What is it that we desire to improve? Knowledge is power, as ignorance is impotence, and any efficacious approach to evolving consciousness requires understanding the nature of consciousness.

As such, a critical initial step in articulating a credible vision of the future evolution of consciousness is grounding this endeavor in a sound understanding of the nature of consciousness. Consequently a central goal of this book, undertaken in the opening chapters, is to present in some depth and detail a theory of consciousness and the conscious self, and the relationship between consciousness and the physical world, our physical bodies, and the totality of reality. This theory is informed and inspired by a number of other thinkers and writers on these topics, but in some ways the theory I present is unique and runs counter to longstanding ideas on the nature of consciousness.

After explaining in the opening chapters my views on the nature of consciousness, I present in the subsequent chapters a theoretical framework for understanding the *future evolution of consciousness*. How might consciousness evolve in the future? What can we, as humans, do to facilitate and guide this process? What would be preferable directions to take in evolving consciousness?

I am going to look at the relatively short-term evolution of our own personal consciousness. How can each of us in practical ways evolve our personal consciousness during our lives? I'm also going to look at the collective evolution of consciousness for human society as a whole, and even consider the future of non-human forms of consciousness, technological and biological. Aside from the short-term future, I'll also consider the long-term evolution of consciousness at a planetary and even cosmic level. Informed by various science fiction visions I'll consider the future evolution of consciousness in the universe.

As a key distinction to note in considering the future evolution of consciousness, both individual and collective, we can ask how do we *realistically* envision consciousness evolving in the future, or we can ask how do we think consciousness should *preferably* evolve in the future. In the coming chapters I address both these questions. Additionally, we could draw a distinction between what is possible in the future and what is plausible or probable. These questions are also considered. Finally, it seems to me that the plethora of conflicting theories of consciousness and its preferable evolution will undoubtedly continue to influence the future evolution of consciousness. In my mind this is an integral part of the ongoing evolution of consciousness. In the coming chapters, I consider alternative evolutionary visions of consciousness and compare them with my own views on the preferable evolution of consciousness. I consider how the evolutionary vision I present would co-exist and interact with other evolutionary visions in the future.

As stated above, I've taught and written on the nature of consciousness for a number of decades. Additionally, I've published and given numerous presentations and workshops on the future evolution of consciousness, often focusing on the personal and practical issue of how each of us can heighten and develop our individual consciousness in our lives. My collected writings and many videos on these important topics can be accessed on my website, the *Center for Future Consciousness* (hereafter

CFC).⁹ This book is a synthesis and further development of my previous work on the nature of consciousness, its preferable future evolution, and the necessary and purposeful role we can play, both individually and collectively, in facilitating this process.

The Physicalist Approach to Human Reality, its Challenges, and the Future

Just as it seems obvious that humans are conscious beings with conscious selves, it appears just as self-evident that humans are physical beings. Humans have complex physical-biological bodies and our bodies have numerous physical needs that must be addressed in order for us to consciously stay alive and continue to exist. Moreover, humans exist within a physical world that contains a variety of physical resources and affordances integral and necessary for our existence and the satisfaction of our bodily needs. We move about and interact with this physical world through our physical bodies. We live in a physical world and our ways of life intimately require this physical world. Further, we appear to others, as they appear to us, as possessing physical bodies, as “embodied” beings. Our physical bodies are a relatively persistent and central presence within our lives.¹⁰ All in all, we clearly appear to ourselves as “physical beings” living in a physical world that is essential to our continued existence.

In addition, humans using the behavioral manipulative skills of their bodies have created an immense and intricate array of physical instruments, technologies, and complex physical structures—utilizing the physical resources and materials of our world—that both empower us and tremendously enrich and enhance our existence in numerous ways. Our physical technologies and constructions are used by us in innumerable ways to satisfy our desires and needs, realize our goals, and create a supporting ambience in which to live. Modern humans exist within an exceedingly complex network of physical technological systems of our creation, and in myriad ways this physical-technological reality is absolutely essential to support our current ways of life in the contemporary world.

Especially over the last few centuries, the creation and introduction into human society of new physical technologies has dramatically and repeatedly contributed to the improvement of the human condition. Many longstanding problems and challenges of the past, such as pervasive hunger and disease, have been significantly ameliorated through the creative evolution of physical technologies. Indeed, a great deal of modern progress in improving the human condition has been realized by using the ever-increasing knowledge of the physical sciences and its technological applications to modify and manipulate our physical existence. Of special note, we also use an ever-growing assortment of physical technologies, informed by the medical and pharmacological sciences, to benefit the physical-biological states of our bodies.

All in all, it makes great sense to argue that human existence is a complex physical reality and many of our current problems, challenges, and needs can be described as

⁹ All of my online videos, most of my published articles, and links to all my books can be found on the *CFC* website: <https://www.centerforfutureconsciousness.com/>.

¹⁰ In cases of deep thought and meditation the sense of our body—of having a body—may momentarily disappear, but by and large, through our everyday life, our physical bodies are a stable and central presence within our consciousness.

physical in nature, and require physical and technological solutions. I'll refer to this general understanding of human reality and constructive approaches toward the improvement of the human condition as a *physicalist* philosophy of human existence and our preferable future. Both in human history and in contemporary times, physicalist views of the human condition have proposed that the major psycho-social problems and forms of mental distress experienced by humanity would be eradicated (or significantly reduced) if the physical environment were sufficiently improved for everyone. Just as advocates for the evolution of consciousness argue that physical problems are due to problems in consciousness, conversely, physicalists have argued that psychosocial problems (or problems of consciousness) have physical causes and physical remedies.

The Mental and the Physical

As a reflection of these two different perspectives on the nature of human existence, one emphasizing the centrality of consciousness and one emphasizing the physical nature of human reality, a fundamental disagreement and tension in approaches to life has emerged in history between philosophies that emphasize “mind, consciousness, and spirit” and those philosophies that emphasize a physicalist perspective on the human condition. In current debates there are many who advocate for a physicalist perspective on human life and physical solutions to addressing human problems and challenges and creating a positive future, emphasizing technological, economic, and environmental remedies, and a second cluster of voices who emphasize consciousness in understanding human reality and the preferable pathway toward a positive future, highlighting psychological, ethical, and spiritual approaches to solving contemporary challenges.

One can, though, take the view that both consciousness and physical reality are equally significant and essential in understanding human reality and the challenges of life. Humans are a combination of both the “mental” and the “physical.” Yet, in the history of philosophy and science and in everyday thinking, a very popular view has been to see the reality of consciousness and the reality of the physical realm as qualitatively different and distinct spheres of existence. Consciousness is viewed as inherently different than physical reality. Our physical-biological bodies (inclusive of our brains) are different than our conscious minds and selves. Hence, even if we view both the mental and the physical as essential features of human existence, a common perspective on these two dimensions is to view human reality as a duality of incommensurable forms of existence. This popular view of two separate and distinctive realms of human existence has often been described as philosophical (or ontological) “*dualism*.”¹¹

Still, in the history of philosophy and science, many writers have attempted to find a way to theoretically or conceptually integrate the realms of consciousness and the physical world into a understandable and coherent whole, rejecting the dualist split of the conscious mind and physical matter. In philosophy, such integrative visions have

¹¹ In his extensive review of theories of consciousness in his article, “A Landscape of Consciousness” (2024), Robert Kuhn identifies this dualist view as the default position of followers of Abrahamic religions.

often been described as attempts to “solve the mind-body problem.”¹² Are consciousness and the physical world as separate, different, and incommensurable as we commonly suppose? Have theories that emphasized the evolution of consciousness versus those that emphasized physical progress set up a false dichotomy, in fact, an ideological dualism of the mental and the physical?

In reviewing theories of the future—which invariably include both assessments of the present, as well as predictions and aspirations for the future—there are indeed many theories that attempt to be integrative and holistic in scope, covering both the conscious realm (including psychology, ethics, and spirituality) and the physical realm (including technology, economics, and the environment) in thinking about the future.¹³ Just as with general theories of reality attempting to integrate the realms of consciousness and the physical world, this weaving together of the conscious and physical realms of human existence in theories of the future can take many forms. All in all, there are various theories of human reality, as well as theories of the future, that attempt to synthesize consciousness and physicalist perspectives.

Consciousness may be the medium in which all that is meaningful in human existence is manifested, understood, and orchestrated, and at our core we appear to be conscious beings, but it seems to me that we need to better understand how our physical existence is connected to our consciousness, and what does this intimate relationship entail regarding our future and preferable pathway forward in the evolution of consciousness and human society. In my view any credible view of human reality and the future needs to integrate “mind and matter.”

As such, a key feature of both the theory of the nature of consciousness and vision of the future evolution of consciousness presented in this book is to provide an integrative (or holistic) view of consciousness and physical reality. In imagining a preferable evolution of consciousness in the future we need to connect this vision with an understanding of the future evolution of our physical reality, including our physical technologies, our physical environment, and our physical biological bodies.

Still, though, I should re-emphasize that the main thesis of this book is that our preferable future evolution needs to center on the ideal of evolving our consciousness. Consciousness is at the core of human reality and our distinctive personal selves; our lives occur and are manifested in the flow of consciousness; our capacities of understanding, intelligence, and the purposeful guidance of events are all realities of consciousness; and meaning, happiness, and fulfillment in life are all equally realities of consciousness. Evolving consciousness is the key—the center of gravity—in creating a positive future. If we consider potential physical or technological improvements in human life, we should always assess the potential benefit or damage such physical

¹² The “mind-body problem” is the puzzle of how a conscious mind is connected with a biological-physical body (including a physical brain). The broader question though is the “mind-matter problem.” How is consciousness (inclusive of conscious minds) connected with physical reality (inclusive of our physical bodies and brains and the physical environment). See Lombardo, *The Reciprocity of Perceiver and Environment*, Chapter 1.

¹³ See Lombardo *Contemporary Futurist Thought*, Chapter 4, and my online video “Contemporary Trends and Theories and Paradigms of the Future”: https://www.centerforfutureconsciousness.com/cont_trends_video.htm.

changes could have on our consciousness.¹⁴ On this last point, it seems to me that one of the major problems throughout human history—a significant cause behind many of our current difficulties—is to overlay value and pursue physical-technological development without sufficient attention to the potential consequences on human consciousness. Such a mindset and mode of behavior is a reflection of a one-sided or lop-sided physicalist approach to human life and the future.

Key Principles and Outline of the Book

To provide a big picture perspective and orientation to the content of this book, the following is an overview of the main topics and key guiding principles examined in the book.

This book is divided into two volumes. Volume one introduces key ideas and principles central to understanding human reality and the nature of consciousness. Volume one also includes an extensive review of theories of consciousness, and informed by this review, an explanation of my theory of consciousness. Moreover, in this first volume, key weaknesses and failings and key future ideals of consciousness are described. An action-oriented narrative for the preferable future evolution of consciousness is also presented, and a final chapter in volume one focuses on the future evolution of the personal self.

Volume two covers in its opening chapters the many facets and dimensions of *individual consciousness* in the future, both cognitively and emotionally. The next series of chapters focus on *ecological, technological, interpersonal, and social dimensions of consciousness* in the future. The final chapters in volume two highlight the future evolution of wisdom—as a holistic ideal for the future of consciousness—and the future evolution of cosmic consciousness, with special attention being given to the role of science fiction narratives in facilitating this consciousness-elevating process.

To expand upon the above two introductory paragraphs for volumes one and two, my starting point in volume one, covering the first three chapters, is to explain a set of fundamental principles and concepts regarding the overall structure of reality that I believe are essential to understanding the nature and future evolution of consciousness. In order of presentation:

- The first foundational principle is *cosmic evolution*. The universe as a totality is evolutionary. Humans exist within this evolutionary reality and are a reflection and further distinctive expression of this dynamic reality. Consciousness is embedded within this evolutionary cosmos. The collective history and the individual histories of our consciousness are transformational evolutionary realities manifesting an ongoing direction of increasing complexity. An evolutionary perspective on humanity and consciousness undercuts various features of a dualist conception of the universe, human reality, and consciousness. (Chapter One)

¹⁴ We should also consider the impact of such physical changes on non-human (animal) consciousness.

- The second foundational principle is *purposeful evolution*. Humans throughout history have actively and routinely engaged in the purposeful evolution of both themselves and the surrounding physical environment. Guided by our goals and values and our anticipations of the future we have intentionally directed the process of change in both ourselves and the world. This distinctive and empowering capacity of purposeful evolution—an evolved expression of cosmic evolution—has driven the development of both human civilization and our personal lives. If we are to properly understand our potential future evolution, and the evolution of consciousness, in particular, we need to conceptualize it as a purposefully driven process. (Chapter Two)
- The third basic principle, intimately tied to purposeful evolution, is *future consciousness*. As I have argued in numerous previous publications¹⁵, future consciousness is a key dimension of consciousness, the most distinctive and highly empowering ability of human consciousness. Future consciousness makes purposeful evolution possible; future consciousness guides purposeful evolution. Future consciousness is the total set of mental processes and modes of experience humans utilize in approaching, understanding, and creating the future. Almost all humans possess future consciousness, but this capacity comes in various degrees. The further *heightening of future consciousness* in humans, as such, is a preferable future for humanity and the evolution of consciousness, since the enhancement of future consciousness will amplify our capacity for purposeful evolution. As such, as a guiding capacity it will amplify our abilities to evolve our consciousness in general. The way to evolve our consciousness is through the use and further development of our capacity for future consciousness. (Chapter Two)
- The fourth principle is *reciprocity*. We need a philosophy of reality and humanity that provides a clear alternative to dualistic philosophies that treat physical matter and consciousness as incommensurable and oppositional realities. The idea of reciprocity—of distinct but complementary interdependent realities—provides such an alternative theory of reality. Our conscious selves and minds and our ambient physical environment are not a dualism, but rather a reciprocity. (Chapter Three)
- The fifth principle, connecting together evolution and reciprocity, is *reciprocal evolution*. The concept of reciprocal evolution provides a theoretical framework for understanding the co-evolution of consciousness and the physical world; consciousness and physical matter co-evolve interdependently. The concept of reciprocal evolution provides a way to conceptualize the evolving relationship between humans (and consciousness) and technology, as well as the evolving relationship of individual consciousness and collective society. (Chapter Three)

Building on these basic concepts introduced in the first three chapters, the next chapter (Chapter Four) provides an extensive and detailed overview of traditional and contemporary theories of consciousness and then presents a comprehensive theory of

¹⁵ See, for example, Lombardo, *The Evolution of Future Consciousness and Future Consciousness: The Path to Purposeful Evolution*.

the nature of *consciousness*. Consciousness is a multifaceted reality. To understand the full breath of all the diverse ways in which consciousness could evolve in the future, in this chapter I outline a *holistic* description of the main features, components, and processes of consciousness, including perceptual, emotional, motivational, cognitive, individual, inter-personal, and social dimensions. In this chapter I present an (non-dualist) ecological and evolutionary theory of consciousness and physical reality.

In Chapter Five, I present extensive overviews of both contemporary failings and weaknesses and future ideals of consciousness, providing a trajectory for the purposeful evolution of consciousness. Where are we presently in our collective consciousness and where should we be preferably heading in the future? These weaknesses and ideals are grouped in terms of the main areas of consciousness covered in later chapters.

Grounded in terms of the key principles explained in the opening chapters and the set of future ideals explained in the previous chapter, in Chapter Six I outline a general philosophy and action plan for facilitating the purposeful evolution of consciousness. Inspired by science fiction, and in particular Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* novels, I refer to this "paradigm of consciousness" as the "Third Foundation." The mindset and action plan of the Third Foundation transcends the dualism of the mental and the physical. The Third Foundation is a paradigm of consciousness to guide both relatively short-term individual conscious evolution and collective conscious evolution into the distant future.

Chapter Seven delves into both contemporary weaknesses and future ideals pertaining general philosophy of life and general qualities of consciousness. What are the failings in our current general philosophical mindset and basic qualities of consciousness, and what future ideals should we aspire toward at the most fundamental level of our consciousness? I also examine how the basic dimensions of human life would transform as a consequence of evolving our consciousness for those features of consciousness discussed in this chapter.

In Chapter Eight, I examine the nature of the conscious self, contemporary weaknesses and failings in the human self, and the possible and preferable future evolution of the conscious self. I also consider the nature of the biological body and brain, the relationship between these bio-physical structures and consciousness, and the possible and preferable future evolution of the conscious body. Again I identify contemporary weaknesses and future ideals for these dimensions of consciousness, and consider how the evolution of consciousness for these dimensions would impact human life as a whole.

After Chapter Eight I provide a summary and concluding remarks covering the main ideas presented in Volume One.

The first chapters of Volume Two (Chapters Nine and Ten) delve into the many facets and dimensions of *individual consciousness* in the future, such as perception and bodily awareness; purpose, self-determination, and intention; emotion, desire, values, ethics, and motivation; thought, knowledge, and imagination; and pleasure and aesthetics. I examine current weaknesses and the possibilities and preferable directions for the future evolution of each of these main features of individual consciousness. These chapters continue the focus on the individual begun in the chapter (Chapter Eight) on the self and the body in Volume One. All these chapters, from both volumes, are

especially relevant to how each of us individually can best facilitate the future evolution of our personal consciousness.

Chapters Eleven through Thirteen in Volume Two focus on *trans-individual, interpersonal, and collective dimensions of consciousness* in the future, including the relationship of consciousness and technology; the relationship of consciousness and nature; interpersonal consciousness; and the collective consciousness of culture, society, and civilization. I look at current weaknesses and future ideals for these various dimensions and the impact on the dimensions of human life if we were to realize to some significant degree the proposed future ideals. I should note though that—in my mind—the individual and trans-individual dimensions of consciousness exist in a state of interdependency or reciprocity, and hence will reciprocally evolve in the future. Hence, although I have created separate chapters for the future of individual versus trans-individual consciousness, I consider throughout these chapters how these two broad dimensions of consciousness could and preferably should co-evolve.

In my writings I have identified the holistic character virtue of *wisdom* and its potential further development as a credible and inspirational over-arching goal to pursue in our purposeful evolution.¹⁶ Pulling together ideas from the previous chapters in both volumes on individual, technological, ecological, and social dimensions of the future of consciousness, in Chapter Fourteen I propose and argue in depth and detail that our preferable focus in the evolution in consciousness should be to purposefully strive for increasing wisdom; that is, toward cultivating a wise consciousness. Wisdom, which in classical times has been frequently identified as the highest state of human consciousness, is in my mind an appropriate and inspiring holistic goal for the future evolution of consciousness. In this chapter on wisdom, I outline my theory of wisdom. I describe wisdom in an evolutionary and future-oriented “paradigm of consciousness.” I discuss how wisdom provides an over-arching ideal for understanding the evolution of ethics and knowledge in human consciousness. I connect this vision of wisdom to heightened future consciousness, the future of education, the emergence of wise cyborgs, the pursuit of a wise society, and the personal evolution of consciousness in the immediate future. A key idea examined in this chapter is the *wisdom narrative*, a psychologically empowering approach for facilitating the evolution of consciousness in each of us individually and society as a whole. As one final note on this chapter, I explain how the evolution of wisdom fits within the Third Foundation as a key goal to pursue in thought, feeling, and action.

The last chapter of Volume Two (Chapter Fifteen) serves as both a summary and a concluding exercise in speculative imagination into the far future. The chapter further highlights the significance of *science fiction* narratives in thinking about the future evolution of consciousness and the place of consciousness in the cosmos.¹⁷ As a *narrative* and *mythic* mode of holistic future consciousness, personally engaging both

¹⁶ See, for example, various articles in Lombardo, *Wisdom, Consciousness, and the Future*, and Chapter Eighteen in Lombardo, *Future Consciousness: The Path to Purposeful Evolution*.

¹⁷ See, for example, Lombardo, *Science Fiction: The Evolutionary Mythology of the Future*, Volumes 1, 2, and 3, and *The Evolution of Science Fiction* webinar series: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIvBA8u8-18QzwxllJrzh6OAKVAUYfNmS>.

thoughts and emotions about the future, science fiction can be described as scientifically informed and inspired stories about the possibilities of the future, as well as alternate realities. Science fiction narratives also frequently reflect and critique contemporary trends and key social issues, pointing out current failings in the human mind and human society and potential future consequences of these failings, if gone unchecked. Contrary to the common stereotype, science fiction deals with more than just the future of science and technology, but repeatedly through its history has deeply delved into the future of consciousness and the human mind, and as such provides a wealth of illuminating and inspiring narratives on this topic. Especially so, science fiction facilitates a big picture cosmic perspective on humanity and consciousness; through science fiction we can consider the potential transcendence of human consciousness to some more advanced level of mentality and experience. All in all, science fiction addresses the *future of everything*, which includes the future evolution of consciousness in the context of the universe. One could plausibly argue that the future evolution of consciousness can be understood as an ever-evolving diverse array of science fiction narratives. As I explain in this chapter, as well as earlier chapters, the Third Foundation can be viewed as an over-arching science fiction narrative and inspired action plan informed and fueled by the great plurality and diversity of science fiction stories throughout the ages.

Concluding Opening Thoughts

Humanity faces many problems and challenges, and there is a huge array of different assessments and solutions for constructively addressing our contemporary issues, offering various pathways forward into a positive future. Our collective consciousness, in fact, is inundated with different perspectives and philosophies competing for our attention and support. Given the severity of problems dramatically highlighted in these various theories, it is understandable that many of us feel depressed if not terrified. A collective state of distress, if not anxiety and fear, exists within human consciousness over our current perceived global problems and the future of humanity.

Among the host of theories proposed to address our current difficulties are many which advocate for the further development of our technologies, economic wealth, and improvements in our physical environment. Such theories are “physicalist” in general mindset and preferred modes of action. A second cluster of views proposes that the solution to our difficulties requires the further evolution of consciousness. This second general approach could be described as “mental.” These two perspectives can be (and often are) seen as expressing competing and opposing philosophies and plans of action.

The view presented in this book emphasizes the central importance of pursuing the evolution of consciousness as the way to constructively address the problems of today and create a positive future. But as introduced in these opening pages, this vision of a preferable future, which emphasizes the evolution of consciousness, needs to be framed in an integrative fashion that *rejects the oppositional dualism of consciousness and the physical world* and explains the intimate connection between the conscious and physical realms and their future reciprocal evolution.

In the opening chapters of this book I describe a set of core principles that provides a general theoretical framework for understanding the nature and future evolution of consciousness and how the evolutionary development of consciousness connects together with the evolution of nature and the cosmos. After these opening chapters I present a general theory of the nature consciousness.

Next I present extensive analyses of both contemporary failings and future ideals of consciousness, providing a preferable sense of direction for how we should purposefully evolve out consciousness.

Pulling together the core principles of the opening chapters with the identified future ideals of consciousness described the previous chapter, I then present a “paradigm of consciousness,” which I describe as the “Third Foundation,” that provides a philosophy and action plan for facilitating the preferable future evolution of consciousness.

In the next chapters I examine all the major dimensions of consciousness and their potential and preferable future evolution, with a large variety of specific applications for the personal evolution of our consciousness in our own current lives. Covering both Volumes One and Two, I examine the contemporary failings and future ideals for individualized consciousness and trans-individual consciousness.

In the last chapters, I describe the virtue of wisdom and explain how wisdom provides a credible and inspiring central ideal for the holistic future evolution of consciousness. I also explain how science fiction narratives stimulate and expand our consciousness of the future of everything, providing a cosmic perspective on the future and empowering the ongoing evolution of our consciousness.

The hypothesis that we can and should evolve our consciousness can be an unsettling and anxiety provoking proposition—a threat to our personal identity, stability, and security—but it is also a view of the future of human existence that offers great promise and opportunity for a reality better than today. If we can significantly evolve our consciousness, we can both constructively address the problems and challenges of today and realize new heights in the future development of human reality.

The pathway for the advancement and even *transcendence* of humanity—a hopeful future expressed by Julian Huxley in the earlier quote—is to be found in the purposeful and wise evolution of our consciousness.