

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. Confusing matters further, myriad competing answers and solutions are offered 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 what is the best pathway to a good future engulf and bombard our consciousness, attempting to influence and persuade us. Our conscious minds are on information overload and suffering from psychological stress regarding the problematic state of the world and what to do about it.

I would argue that the cacophony of perspectives and plans of action in contemporary times 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 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,

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

environmental degradation, continued economic inequality, ongoing population growth, the intensifying perceived threat of run-away A.I., and unrelenting military 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 uncertain and precarious planetary state with numerous competing solutions bombarding our frazzled and often despondent consciousness. The darkness appears to be encroaching upon us and multiple factions are screaming out different answers—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 correct pathway forward for creating a positive future is to heighten and evolve human consciousness. Although many different key terms and concepts are highlighted in expressing this general viewpoint, such as realizing greater “enlightenment,” “wisdom,” and “self-awareness;” enhancing our “collective intelligence;” strengthening our “critical and reflective thinking;” widening our “global or planetary consciousness;” advancing our “ethical evolution;” broadening our “cognitive or mental perspectives;” 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 an excessive consumerist way of life; hatred,

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* (2008), and in my online video, Lombardo “Contemporary Trends and Theories and Paradigms of the Future” (2014) - <https://centerforfutureconsciousness.com/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.

paranoia, and lack of empathy; authoritarian mindsets and practices; elitism and discrimination; rigidity and inflexibility in thinking; superstitious and delusional mindsets; excessive, often incapacitating 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 perspective on the human condition and how 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 the central causes of human misery and how to solve the challenges of human life. Calls for the enhancement, deepening, and expansion of conscious capacities in response to the woes of the world have been voiced across diverse cultures and societies since the beginnings of recorded history.⁴

Also, 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 still considerable room for further evolution in our conscious capacities. 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 an aspiration 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 thinkers and writers, 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 or physical

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

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 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 best pathway toward 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 the realistic and preferable pathway to emphasize and pursue, both for humanity as a collective whole, and for each of us individually within our lives.

The Central 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, more broadly, why is consciousness so significant in understanding human reality, our current conditions, and our potential future?

Before starting to answer these related questions, the meaning of the term “consciousness” should be explained.⁵ First, I should note that I use the term “consciousness” as synonymous in meaning with the terms “experience” and “awareness.” In my thinking, “to be conscious of,” “to be aware of,” and “to experience” all have the same meaning. Dictionary definitions of the term “experience” include: to personally observe, encounter, or undergo something, and also “to know,” as well as the totality of what is perceived and understood. Dictionary definitions of the term “aware” include: to know, to be alert, or to be conscious. Dictionary definitions of consciousness include: the fact of awareness by the mind of itself and the world. All in all, the terms consciousness, awareness, and experience all similarly refer to a state of observing, knowing, and/or personally encountering and apprehending some reality. To be conscious is to be aware and/or to experience.

I should, though, acknowledge that there is (and has been in the past) a level of diversity, disagreement, and ambiguity in how consciousness gets 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 introductory and basic conception of consciousness, it should be evident that consciousness is at the core of our personal human existence. We live our lives in

⁵ In addition to this opening definition of consciousness, I will say a great deal more about the nature of consciousness and the meaning of the term later in this book.

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. All that we believe we know is formed, articulated, and comprehended within our consciousness.⁶

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, and 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 our difficulties and realize our goals. The debate over the future and our assessments of our current reality are occurring within our consciousness. This exposition being presented is a creation of my consciousness. All in all, *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 anticipatory of the future. Moreover, through consciousness we are able to transcend the actual—of what is or has been—and speculate on the hypothetical and the possible. We create fiction; we create science fiction through consciousness. Our conscious imagination and 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, envision alternate realities, and ponder the deepest and most profound issues of abstract philosophy and science.

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 are attempting to describe and explain our knowledge to others, or 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 beyond what we (can) verbally express.

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 a 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 complex 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.

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 of 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 foundation to understanding consciousness. Equally fascinating, numerous theories of consciousness have proposed that 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 and reciprocally 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 advance and heighten human consciousness, we would profoundly transform and improve all of human reality. The core of our reality is consciousness; our contemporary difficulties reflect the current make-up, dispositions, and capacities of our consciousness; and hence, if we can evolve 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 viewed as a great philosophical and scientific mystery. 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 central to our existence, with which we are intimately acquainted, we can not seem to agree upon the origin, cause, and nature of these core realities of our existence.

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 of the nature of consciousness and the conscious self. Answers to these questions abound. The debates continue and grow more complex in subtlety and nuance over time. The mysteries and perplexities of consciousness persist in contemporary times.

Still, having studied 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 aware 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 better 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 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

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.

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 foundational 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 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 my theory of the nature of consciousness, I present my views on 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 consider both the short-term and long-term future of consciousness. For the relatively short-term evolution of our own personal consciousness, how can each of us in practical ways evolve our consciousness during our lives? Also I am going to look at the collective evolution of consciousness for human society as a whole, and consider the future of non-human forms of consciousness, technological and biological. In considering the long-term evolution of consciousness at a planetary and even cosmic level, informed by various science fiction visions, I speculate on 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 either 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, but I particularly focus on the latter issue.

It seems to me that the plethora of conflicting theories of consciousness and its future will undoubtedly continue to evolve and further diversify. In my mind this continued expansion of ideas 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 future evolution of consciousness. I consider how the evolutionary vision I present could co-exist and interact with other evolutionary visions in the future.

As stated above, I've studied 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

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/>.

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-biological 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, which seems necessary to our continued existence, both physically and consciously.

In addition, humans using the manipulative skills of their bodies (and their intelligence) 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 use an ever-growing assortment of physical technologies, informed by the medical, biological, and pharmacological sciences, to benefit the physical-biological states of our bodies.

The technological and physicalist perspective on the future is highly convincing and compelling, because it is perceptually bedazzling and mesmerizing in its imagination and psychological power. As an expression of our current collective immersion and fascination with new technologies, when we envision a positive future for humanity we

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.

frequently fill it with astonishing technological wonders and beautiful and magnificent physical constructions. Within this mindset a positive future for humanity is fantastical and beautiful architecture and towering heavenly city skylines; graceful hi-speed fully automated land and aerial vehicles; splendorous commercial light displays and incredible customized products galore; astounding animated virtual realities and radiant computer interfaces; a super-abundance and availability of all of life's physical necessities; wonder drugs and effective medical treatments for all human diseases and infirmities; technological enhancements and the genetic re-engineering of the human body; biological methods for vastly extended human longevity; incredible life-like animated robots (including pets and sex mates); hyper-intelligent AI systems, which envelop and coordinate the world; machines that instantly materialize food, drink, and all manner of physical luxuries; the exploration and settlement of neighboring planets and moons, and the harnessing of the vast energy and resources of the solar system and beyond; awe-inspiring interstellar space ships; wondrously preserved natural environments; and colossal and glittering cities in outer space. Within our contemporary technological mindset, spectacular imagined physical constructions and miraculous machines and gadgetry dominate our imagination and visions of the future. We are captivated and enthralled by such incredible techno-prophecies.¹¹

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 physical in nature, and require physical and technological solutions. It is also psychologically compelling to imagine a positive future built upon techno-physical advancements. I'll refer to this general viewpoint of human reality and constructive approaches toward the improvement of the human condition based on the perspective as a *physicalist* or *materialist* philosophy of human existence and our preferable future.

Both in human history and in contemporary times, physicalist/materialist views of the human condition have hypothesized that the major psycho-social problems and forms of distress experienced by humanity could be eradicated (or significantly reduced) if the physical environment and conditions of life were sufficiently improved for everyone; such physical transformations frequently involve the creation and use of new physical technologies. Just as advocates for the evolution of consciousness argue that physical problems are due to problems in consciousness, conversely, physicalists/materialists have argued that psychosocial problems (or problems of consciousness) have physical causes and physical-technological remedies.

The Mental and the Physical

¹¹ It's important to note that there have been and continue to be various imagined technological nightmares pertaining to the future, in which advancing technologies do not produce a positive future, but a decidedly negative one. Science fiction, for example, is filled with stories in which technologies of the future repress if not eradicate valued qualities of human life, such as freedom, intelligence, personal identity, interpersonal relationships, and emotionality. Classic early science fiction techno-nightmares include Wells' *The Sleeper Awakes*, Zamyatin's *We*, and Huxley's *Brave New World*. See Neil Postman's *Technopoly* for a more contemporary non-fiction critique of a techno-dominant human society.

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-materialist perspective on the human condition. In current debates there are many who advocate for a physicalist perspective on human life and physical solutions to human problems and challenges and creating a positive future, emphasizing technological, economic, and environmental remedies. Contrariwise, a second cluster of voices 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, as well as in everyday thinking, a very popular view has been to acknowledge the two realities of mind/consciousness and physicality, but to see these two realities as qualitatively different and distinct spheres of existence. Consciousness is viewed as inherently different than physical reality. Our physical-biological bodies are viewed as fundamentally different than our conscious minds and selves. Hence, even if we believe that the mental and the physical as essential features of human existence, these two dimensions can be (and often are) viewed 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*.”¹²

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 often been described as attempts to “solve the mind-body problem.”¹³ Are consciousness and the physical world as separate, different, and incommensurable as commonly supposed? Have theories that emphasize the evolution of consciousness versus theories that emphasize physical progress set up a false dichotomy, in fact, an ideological dualism of the mental and the physical?

¹² 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. Also, to note, dualism can take the form of “spirit-physical” dualism, but as I pointed out earlier, the term “spirit” invariably refers to qualities associated with consciousness.

¹³ The “mind-body problem” is the puzzle of how a conscious mind is connected and interactive 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.

In reviewing theories and paradigms 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 and paradigms 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.¹⁴ Just as with general theories of reality that have attempted to integrate the realms of consciousness and the physical world—thus rejecting ontological dualism¹⁵—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 and diverse 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 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 changes could have on our consciousness.¹⁶ On this last point, it seems to me that one of the major problems throughout human history—a significant cause behind many of

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ For example, philosophical *monism* attempt to explain and understand all of reality, including both the mental and physical, in terms of some underlying single principle or dimension. See Chapter Four in this volume for an examination of the different forms of monism.

¹⁶ We should also consider the impact of such physical changes on non-human (animal) consciousness.

our current difficulties—is to pursue physical-technological development without sufficient attention to the potential consequences on human consciousness.

Key Topics and Chapter 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 chapters and the main topics addressed in the book:

My starting point, 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.

Chapter One delves into the pervasive and foundational phenomenon of *cosmic evolution*, one of the central principles upon which the entire exposition of the book is based. The principle of cosmic evolution entails that the totality of the universe is evolutionary. Humans exist within this ubiquitous 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 Two focuses on the connected concepts of *purposeful evolution* and *future consciousness*. 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 (purposefully) directed the process of change in both ourselves and the world. This distinctive and empowering capacity of purposeful evolution in humans—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.

The capacity of future consciousness is intimately tied to purposeful evolution. As I have argued in numerous previous publications, future consciousness is a key dimension of consciousness, the most distinctive and highly empowering ability of human consciousness.¹⁷ 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

¹⁷ See, for example, Lombardo, *The Evolution of Future Consciousness* and *Future Consciousness: The Path to Purposeful Evolution*.

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 Three discusses the principle of *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 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. The principle of reciprocity was first clearly articulated in the ancient Taoist concept of the Yin-Yang.

The principles of reciprocity and cosmic evolution can be synthesized within a philosophy of *evolutionary Taoism*. Evolutionary Taoism is the over-arching framework of this book. One key illustration of the synthesis of evolution and reciprocity within a philosophy of evolutionary Taoism is the principle of *reciprocal evolution*. Reciprocal evolution provides a principle for understanding the co-evolution of consciousness and the physical world; consciousness and physical matter co-evolve interdependently. 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 Four presents an extensive review of theories of consciousness, both classical and contemporary and Eastern and Western. In order to articulate an informed theory of consciousness it is essential to understand and draw upon the wealth of ideas developed throughout human history regarding the nature of consciousness and its connection with the physical world. This review also provides a number of theories and ideas to critique in the development of my theory of consciousness, which is described in the subsequent chapters.

In Chapter Five I begin to outline my *ecological-evolutionary theory of consciousness*, beginning with a set of basic observations derived from a *phenomenological*¹⁸ study of consciousness. One key point presented is that consciousness, in perception, appears to directly interface with and apprehend the physical environment; perceptual consciousness is a form of interactive engagement with the physical world. Other key points include that consciousness impacts the physical world through purposeful behavior; appears to be necessarily embodied; and at least regarding human consciousness, appears personalized, possessing a conscious self. Building on earlier chapters, I further explain how perception, proprioception (consciousness of the body), and purposeful behavior are primordial and foundational forms of consciousness.

Turning from the phenomenology of consciousness to the physical conditions supporting consciousness, in Chapter Six I describe in succession cosmic-physical, environmental-ecological, and biological-neurological conditions associated with, if not necessary for the emergence of consciousness in the universe. I propose that life—a distinctive form of engagement with the environment—is a necessary pre-condition of consciousness. This chapter further reinforces my view that consciousness is intimately connected with the physical reality of the universe and our planetary environment.

¹⁸ See Chapter Four for an explanation of the concept of phenomenology. Basically, phenomenology is the disciplined effort to describe the content of consciousness.

Chapter Seven examines the *temporality* of consciousness, a central holistic feature of consciousness. Not only does consciousness have a temporal form—a ongoing temporal flow with a beginning and end—but consciousness apprehends its temporal form as well as the temporal form of its surrounding physical environment. Both historical consciousness (including memory) and future consciousness are important expressions of the ability of consciousness to apprehend the extended temporal form of reality. Consciousness of the flow and pattern of time not only informs our experience of the present, but provides the foundation for purposeful evolution.

Chapter Eight focuses on feeling, emotion, and desire/motivation, all features of consciousness that I propose are foundational forms of consciousness, arising early in the evolution of conscious life forms. Conscious feelings, which integrally contribute to both the experiences of emotion and desire, are necessarily tied to embodiment—a hypothetical disembodied consciousness could not feel, and hence could not desire or have emotions. Emotion and desire/motivation are also exemplar illustrations of the holistic and interactive nature of consciousness, with various conscious processes affecting each other in the manifestation of consciousness; for example, both thought and memory impact the experiences of emotion and desire. Emotion and desire/motivation also illustrate another sphere of consciousness that is a form of experiential engagement with the physical environment.

In Chapter Nine I examine a set of significant conscious processes that in my view emerge later in the evolution of consciousness—after sensory and behavioral consciousness, and feeling, emotion, and desire—and empower consciousness to *transcend* the limiting constraints of the sensed “here and now.” These capacities include memory, abstraction, thought, intuition, imagination, foresight, and the ability to contemplate the hypothetical and fictitious. Of particular note, through thought we can reflect upon and consider the entire multi-faceted content of consciousness, and the nature of the physical world and the totality of reality, and self-reflect on ourselves. Self-reflectively we can think about our thinking. These more highly evolved forms of consciousness greatly contribute to both our historical and future consciousness.

Chapter Ten examines a cluster of forms of consciousness, all of which involve forms of awareness pertaining to different key features of our human environment. In succession I delve into inter-personal consciousness, social-cultural consciousness, technological consciousness, consciousness of nature, and finally cosmic consciousness, this last form of consciousness concerned with our understanding of the universe and our place within it. All these forms of consciousness are highly important in thinking about the preferable future evolution of consciousness, since many of our most outstanding weaknesses in current human consciousness pertain to failings within this cluster of modes of consciousness. In this chapter I explain the concept of the wise cyborg, as one key ideal for the future evolution of consciousness.

Consciousness contains a *normative* or *prescriptive* dimension. In Chapter Eleven I discuss this multi-faceted dimension of consciousness. Throughout our long history, humans have consciously articulated and have attempted to put into practice a huge and diverse set of ideals and standards of excellence regarding both our conscious state of being and our various types of behaviors. We have embraced a host of values and types of moral and ethical principles and practices. Any vision of the preferable future of consciousness or human existence involves a normative-prescriptive

dimension: How should we evolve or develop? Any definition of a “good future” assumes some set of ideals and values. To purposefully evolve, we require ideals and values to define the aspired trajectory of our future evolution. Two forms of normative consciousness of central importance to our future evolution are epistemology and ethics, both forms of consciousness having various ideals and standards of excellence associated with them. How should we evaluate what we believe we know (epistemology) and how should we determine what is good (ethics)?

In Chapter Twelve I examine the *holistic* nature of consciousness, highlighting certain key holistic features essential to understanding our preferable future evolution, including the self; paradigms of consciousness; character virtues, and wisdom. In my view, the conscious self is the coordinative center and agent of consciousness, but in contemporary times is sorely undeveloped; humans adopt distinctive conscious ways of life, encompassing connected thoughts, emotions, values, and forms of behavior, which I refer to as “*paradigms of consciousness*”—integral to a positive future is profound transformation in our current dominant paradigms of consciousness; *character virtues*, as relatively stable and integrative forms of consciousness and behavior, provide a psychologically holistic concept for identifying and describing highly valued ideal traits in humans to aspire toward; and *wisdom* provides an overarching character virtue and ideal of consciousness to guide our preferable purposeful evolution of consciousness. I also discuss in this chapter the psycho-social power and significance of conscious narratives. In my view, the preferable future of consciousness should be envisioned as a “*wisdom narrative*, a psychologically empowering approach for purposefully facilitating the purposeful evolution of consciousness.

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.¹⁹ In Chapter Twelve I propose 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, I describe wisdom in an evolutionary and future-oriented holistic character virtue. I discuss how wisdom provides an over-arching ideal for understanding the evolution of ethics and epistemology 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.

Chapter Thirteen presents an overview and summary of the various central features and processes of the multi-faceted nature of consciousness. These diverse features of experience are described within an ecological-evolutionary framework for understanding consciousness. Covering perception/proprioception, behavior, emotion, desire, memory, thought, imagination, and other conscious capacities, this comprehensive outline provides a compilation of all the different aspects of consciousness that can be purposefully evolved. Equally, the outline provides an overview of all the different

¹⁹ See, for example, various articles in Lombardo, *Wisdom, Consciousness, and the Future*, and Chapter Eighteen in Lombardo, *Future Consciousness: The Path to Purposeful Evolution*.

dimensions in which our consciousness can be deficient and underdeveloped. Indeed, this outline provides a framework for identifying and describing both deficiencies and ideals of consciousness in the next chapter.

In Chapter Fourteen I present extensive and detailed reviews of both contemporary failings and weaknesses and future ideals of consciousness, providing a trajectory for the preferable 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 dimensions and processes of consciousness identified in the previous chapter. This extensive list of weaknesses and ideals can also be applied at the individual level providing an evolutionary trajectory for each of us in our future lives.

In its initial sections the final chapter of the book—Chapter Fifteen—provides a summary of the main points articulated in the previous chapters, providing a condensed big picture overview of my evolutionary Taoist theory of the nature consciousness and my ideas on the preferable future evolution of consciousness.

The second part of the chapter outlines a general narrative and action-plan to inform, guide, and facilitate the purposeful future evolution of consciousness. Using Isaac Asimov’s famous science fiction *Foundation* trilogy as a jumping off point, I refer to this new proposed “paradigm of consciousness” as the “Third Foundation.” In Asimov’s *Foundation* trilogy there are two imagined “foundations”, one pursuing physical knowledge and the development of physical technologies, and one dedicated to pursuing psychological knowledge and its practical applications. The mindset and action plan of my proposed Third Foundation transcends such a dualist split between the mental and the physical realms and spheres of knowledge.

My vision of a Third Foundation includes a proposed community of facilitators and co-developers to purposely guide both relatively short-term individual conscious evolution, as well as the collective evolution of consciousness in the longer term future.

In explaining the Third Foundation I highlight the significance of *science fiction* narratives in thinking about the future evolution of consciousness.²⁰ As a *narrative* and *mythic* mode of holistic future consciousness, personally engaging both thoughts and emotions about the future, science fiction can be described as scientifically informed and inspired stories about the possibilities of the future.

Contrary to the common stereotype, science fiction deals with more than just the future of science and technology. Rather throughout its history, science fiction has addressed the *future of everything*, which includes the future evolution of consciousness and mind, providing a wealth of illuminating and inspiring narratives on this topic.

Science fiction facilitates a cosmic long-term perspective on humanity and consciousness; through science fiction we can envision how consciousness fits into the big picture of the universe and consider the potential transcendence of human consciousness to more advanced levels of mentality and experience. In resonance with such an expansive perspective, the Third Foundation embraces a cosmic long term view of the evolution of consciousness.

²⁰ 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=PLIvBA8u8-18QzwxllJrz6OAKVAUYfNmS> .

One could plausibly argue that the future evolution of consciousness should be informed and inspired by an ever-evolving diverse array of science fiction narratives. The Third Foundation can be viewed as grounded in an over-arching science fiction narrative informed by the great plurality and diversity of science fiction stories throughout the ages.

Of special note, the science fiction narrative of the Third Foundation should be a wisdom narrative; the evolution of wisdom should be the central aspiration of the Third Foundation, of its paradigm of consciousness, its futures narrative, and its way of life, as practiced and pursued by its community members.

Concluding Opening Thoughts

Humanity faces many problems and challenges. In response, a huge array of different assessments and solutions for constructively addressing our contemporary issues have been put forth, offering various pathways forward into a positive future. Given the severity of problems dramatically highlighted in these various assessments and theories, it is understandable that many of us feel depressed, if not terrified over the future.

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” or “materialist” 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. These two perspectives can be (and often are) seen as expressing competing and opposing philosophies of human existence and plans of action for the future.

The view presented in this book emphasizes the purposeful 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 needs to be framed in an integrative fashion that rejects the *oppositional dualism* of consciousness and the physical world. In this book I present an *evolutionary Taoist* theory of consciousness, an integrative vision that explains the intimate connection between consciousness and physical reality and provides a framework for understanding their future reciprocal evolution.

The hypothesis that we can and should evolve our consciousness can be an unsettling and anxiety provoking proposition, a perceived threat to our personal identity, stability, and security. Evolving our consciousness is a journey into the unknown. Moreover, evolving our consciousness is a difficult and challenging task; both our personal and collective consciousness are constrained by innumerable deep, often entrenched habits of thought and emotion. Perhaps we believe that human nature, in general, and our personal conscious identity, in particular, are fixed realities; perhaps we are philosophically opposed to seeing ourselves as evolutionary beings. Yet embracing and pursuing the purposeful evolution of consciousness offers great promise and potential for creating a reality much 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.