

**The Psychology of the Future:
Flourishing in the Flow of Evolution
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The Wisdom Page & Center for Future Consciousness

1) Introduction: Wisdom and the Future

How do we create a good future?

This deceptively simple question is perhaps the central challenge within human life.

Each of us thinks about this question, in one form or another. Each of us attempts to answer it. And based on the answers we come up with, we all pursue the good future, however we define it.

But you might, adopting a more skeptical stance, ask, “Why should you care?” Why should you be concerned with creating a good future? You might argue that all we really have is the present. Shouldn’t we focus our attention and mental energies on living the best we can in the present moment? It is the now that is real; everything else is distracting fabrications of the human mind.

But to challenge this skeptical response, I will counter that the future, rather than the present, is the most important dimension of *the time of your life*. In fact, in a critical sense, the future is the only game in town. The past is gone, and the present is fleeting; we are perpetually moving into the future.

In my ongoing efforts to answer this question I have developed a theory and practical approach to *heightening future consciousness*: a way to describe excellence and enhanced mental capacities for creating a good future, along with a set of guidelines and activities for developing these capacities. The essence of this theory can be succinctly stated:

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

Compressing my thesis down to the essentials:

Wisdom is the means to a good future.

2) What is Real?

Reality sets the context and constraints on how we determine what the good life is and, thus, how we envision our preferable future. Answering the question of *what is real* precedes answering the question of *what is the good*. What is real does not determine what the good is, but the good is informed and realized in the context of what is real.

Reviewing the history of human thinking, scientific-secular and religious-spiritual, and Eastern and Western, humans have elevated and aspired toward what is eternal, stable, secure, and certain. Especially in ancient and classical times, ultimate reality (as well as the ultimate good) was identified as eternal and changeless. (The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, as one exception to this mindset, did argue that all is flow, and the only thing that stays the same is that nothing stays the same.) Furthermore, ancient and classical views generally posited a very limited and egocentric sense of reality and time, oblivious to the vast expanse and depth of both space and time.

Modern western science in the West began with the intent to discover the changeless laws of nature, assuming that reality, as it presently exists, has progressed unchanged since its creation by God. Yet with ongoing advances in our historical and scientific understanding of nature, including our ongoing human evolution, and our growing knowledge of the vast expanse of time, the contemporary scientific and philosophical consensus has emerged that the universe is thoroughly temporal and dynamic, future-directional, evolutionary, creative, and filled with possibilities.

Early modern philosophers such as Leibnitz and Kant argued that the universe was evolutionary; Hutton discovered “deep time” and unending transformation in the earth; Darwin argued that natural laws could explain the creation of the new (at least in the biological realm); thermodynamics ascertained an arrow, or directionality, to physical time due to increasing overall entropy; and Hubble, among others, determined that the cosmos was in an ongoing state of profound transformation (the expansion of the universe). In modern quantum physics, the future, rather than being set and determined, appears to be probabilistic and filled with possibilities. And in contemporary open systems science, increasing complexity and order appears to arise creatively and unpredictably out of chaos. All in all, the future (the ongoing flow of time) appears to be the act of creation itself. The dynamical vision of Heraclitus seems to have been vindicated.

Furthermore, human history, embedded and participatory in this general cosmic evolutionary reality, shows an accelerative growth in change leading up to and including contemporary times. There is a clear transformational rush to human existence, with multiple interactive trends and progress along multiple dimensions. All the dimensions of human reality (biological, psychological, social, and technological) are expressions of evolution and show ongoing evolutionary change within each sphere. The accelerative rate of change in human reality reflects an overall cosmic pattern of accelerative change

through its various historical epochs, with human and technological reality existing at the edge or pinnacle of increasingly rapid change within the history of the cosmos.

Evolution provides a new cosmic grand narrative, both informing and inspiring human consciousness and behavior. It is an “origin” story, as well as a story of the future. The theory of cosmic evolution has vastly expanded our temporal consciousness. It provides a framework for and explanation of the fundamental pattern of change within reality—past, present, and future—thus provoking humans into thinking about the future. Humans have awakened to this fundamental and pervasive dynamical feature of reality.

Similarly, human consciousness and our psychological reality are thoroughly temporal and dynamic, future-directional and purposeful, evolutionary, creative, and filled with possibilities.

Consciousness is bounded in time, with an experienced directionality of flow from the present (out of the past) into the future. Furthermore, our directional experience of time is past/present/future integrative, whereby our flowing conscious present is always contextualized by a remembered past and an anticipated future; it is psychologically impossible to live in an absolute present. There are relative stabilities (persistent features) in our conscious lives, but such stabilities are always contextualized in relationship to ongoing change.

Humans do show preferences in temporal orientation toward the past, the present, and the future. But individuals predominately oriented to the past tend to stay locked into the past and cannot change, while those oriented to the present tend to be impulsive and quickly bored with the pleasures of the moment. Individuals oriented toward the future tend to be the most successful and happy overall. In particular, a sense of deep purpose toward the future seems necessary for human happiness.

As a second major point regarding the nature of reality, in contemporary times we have come to realize that we live in a universe of interdependent realities; nothing stands or moves alone. We are all held up together in our relationships with each other. We see this general feature at the physical and cosmological levels, but also environmentally, socially, psychologically, and technologically. The term I use to refer to this ubiquitous fact of complementarities and interdependencies is “reciprocity.” Combining evolution with reciprocity, reality is motion, but it is a collective motion.

In summary, humans are dynamic and evolutionary beings that exist within and are interactive with a dynamic and evolutionary universe. Further, because we are embedded in a creative and evolutionary universe filled with possibilities, we are participatory in this dynamic reality and responsible to some degree for the future flow of events.

In conclusion, *what is real is that we are moving*, both within our own personal consciousness and collective psycho-social reality and within the world at large.

3) What is the Good?

Ethics is the study and practice of what is good, what is moral, and what is best. Everyone has values, and ethics could be described as the study of what we should value, or what the most important values are. Ethics could also be described as the study of how we should determine what is good, what is best, or what we should value. Within the histories of philosophy and religion/spirituality there are many competing theories of the good, such as absolutist versus rationalist, universal versus relativist, egocentric versus social, and hedonism of the present versus consequentialist.

One theory or approach to ethics is that the good (or the good life) is connected with well-being, the good presumably leading to or being grounded in well-being. Indeed, it has been argued that the good can be scientifically or empirically determined through determining what either leads to or constitutes well-being, where well-being is viewed as an empirical or factual set of conditions.

Well-being, though, is a complex issue, and throughout the histories of philosophy, religion/spirituality, science, and social-political-economic thought, there have been numerous and varied theories of what the most important factors that make up well-being are. Theories of well-being frequently emphasize different dimensions of human life, from the psychological and spiritual to the economic and materialistic. Well-being may be connected with mental health, physical health, freedom and self-expression, communion with nature, financial prosperity, or environmental health. Given the diverse set of dimensions highlighted in these different viewpoints, and convincing arguments for including each one as essential to a comprehensive picture of well-being, any viable theory of well-being should be holistic and integrative, incorporating and connecting the full richness of these varied dimensions of reality.

It follows, then, that any theory of the good (or the good life), factually grounded in well-being, needs to be holistic and integrative.

If nature, including human reality, is dynamical and evolutionary, then well-being should be conceptualized and contextualized in dynamical and evolutionary terms. Expanding on Martin Seligman's concept of "flourishing," I present the hypothesis that "to flourish" provides a dynamic, future-directional, holistic concept of well-being and "the good" that aligns with a dynamic and directional vision of reality. Because reality is dynamic and directional, well-being and the good are dynamic and directional. "Flourishing in the ongoing flow of evolution" fits this general requirement. A holistic, empirically grounded description of flourishing would include the qualities of directional growth and achievement, constructive engagement with the world, emotionally positive and cognitively expanding conscious states, material evolution (including the technological), and social interaction and contribution, including contributing to overall environmental well-being.

One influential approach to ethics within human history is the virtue theory of the good. Within this approach, the good life is defined as leading the virtuous life. Virtues are

defined as esteemed character traits which embody excellence and positive values across the varied aspects of human consciousness and behavior. Frequently identified human virtues include honesty, courage, wisdom, and compassion. Virtues are often distinguished from their opposites, vices, including such qualities as dishonesty, cowardliness, foolishness, and selfishness. Virtue theory provides a personalized and concrete conception of the good, because virtues, as manifestations of the good, are character traits realized in the unique minds and behaviors of individual persons. A common argument in virtue theory is that virtues facilitate or are the foundation of human happiness, success, and general excellence in all spheres of life.

Following similar arguments in Aristotle, Spinoza, and Seligman, virtues are personal accomplishments; they are realized through effort, practice, and achievement. The good (and the good life), therefore, is a personal accomplishment—it is not something that just happens. Moreover, if well-being is the foundation of the good, then well-being is an accomplishment as well. Humans achieve well-being.

Connecting the virtue theory of the good with flourishing, I propose that flourishing is realized through the development and exercise of character virtues; hence, flourishing is an accomplishment requiring effort and practice.

Because humans are embedded in a dynamic reality and consequently participatory in our own personal development and ongoing collective evolution, we are responsible for the conscious purposeful guidance of our personal lives and our ongoing further evolution. We cannot avoid this responsibility for we are influential agents within the dynamic reality in which we find ourselves.

Moreover, as self-conscious and self-reflective beings, we are aware to various degrees of how we contribute to the flow of events in which we are embedded, and we are aware to various degrees, as anticipatory beings, how different actions on our part could differentially influence the future flow of events within our reality. We see what we are doing now and we see what we can do in the future.

If flourishing is the good, realized in a dynamical reality, our primary moral imperative is to flourish (as best as we can) and contribute to the flourishing of others. We have this conscious power and choice. Further, we are responsible for purposefully guiding our future evolution to realize greater flourishing (or greater good). We also have this conscious power and choice.

To put it another way, because the good is realized in a dynamic, evolutionary reality, to be good involves guiding the evolutionary direction—the flow—toward increased flourishing. The good is not something static. Bringing in virtue, this purposeful directional guidance of the flow is achieved through effort and the exercise of virtues.

In summary, following the lead of many philosophical and psychological theories, purpose and direction, growth and achievement, and effort and accomplishment are

necessary for happiness, well-being, and the good. There are clear similarities between this secular and evolutionary theory and evolutionary spirituality and theism.

As a transition to the next section, I propose that there are a set of psychological capacities and associated virtues that have a growth-oriented, future-focused quality that facilitate flourishing. This holistic, multidimensional set of capacities is heightened future consciousness.

Summarizing this section, the good life, realized through the exercise of virtue, is flourishing in the flow of evolution.

4) Heightened Future Consciousness

Within the human condition, there exists a “primacy of the future.” Human consciousness flows into or toward the future (the experience of an arrow of time); human behavior is almost always purposefully directed toward the future, with intention toward the realization of goals; and happiness and the good are realized through growth and achievement (flourishing) into the future.

Future consciousness, which is a multifaceted and holistic normal human ability (including emotional, motivational, dispositional, cognitive, and personal identity factors), is defined as the total integrative set of capacities and processes humans use in understanding and dealing with the future.

Future consciousness is of central importance in understanding life and human reality: The critical evolutionary development in consciousness throughout the history of life is a growing expansiveness of awareness in space and time (the past and the future); having pivotal adaptive value, the central function of the mind and human brain is the acquisition of memory through learning to better anticipate the future; future consciousness, involving foresight, planning, and goal setting, is the key determining factor in the development of technology, agriculture, hunting, long term partnerships, trade, ethics, urbanization, religion, and war; and our future survival and ongoing evolution and flourishing (our vitality and longevity) is contingent on the further heightening of future consciousness.

The normal human capacity of future consciousness can be heightened or strengthened along numerous dimensions. Heightened future consciousness and its associated virtues can be described as involving the following thirteen psychological traits or qualities :

1. **Self-Awareness and Self-Responsibility:** A deep and accurate understanding of oneself; the capacity to self-reflect upon and assess one’s conscious states and general personality and traits -- the capacity of self-reflectivity; self-honesty; self-control (involving willpower), whereby one has the capacity to direct both consciousness and behavior toward desired or intended ends; recognizing and acknowledging oneself as the ultimate cause of one’s conscious states, behavior,

and life situation; and seeing the power within oneself to change oneself or one's life situation--the opposite of perceived helplessness. Encompasses internal locus of control and self-efficacy.

2. Realistic Idealism: The informed and thoughtful belief in and pursuit of the ideal and the good; the informed and thoughtful belief in standards of excellence and the distinction between virtue and vice--presupposed in the aspiration toward virtue; the informed and thoughtful belief in and practice of standards pertaining to learning, knowing, and thinking; the informed and thoughtful belief in the possibility of defining progress or improvement--presupposed in optimism; and the opposite of nihilism and absolute relativism.
3. Self-Growth: The belief in and pursuit of psychological growth and improvement; the aspiration and realization of self-transcendence; a deep sense of transformation and directionality in one's life and personal identity; the experience of life as a journey; an inspiring self-narrative, including an inspiring and efficacious ideal future self-narrative. Embedded within a general motivational disposition toward adventure and life transformation, as opposed to rigid stability and protective security.
4. Love of Learning: Curiosity and exploratory motivation; intrinsic motivation to learn (learning is experienced as a positive emotional state); the love of and motivation to acquire knowledge; valuing and pursuing truth; the pursuit of deep learning (learning that transforms fundamental beliefs, mindsets, or perceived self-identity); the pursuit of enlightenment (holistic insights); wonder, fascination, openness, and humility in the face of existence; and a deep desire and capacity to stay informed of contemporary issues and innovative thinking and ideas.
5. Love of Thinking: The desire and capacity to reflect and evaluate; seeing the value in thinking and self-reflection; motivation to "use ones mind" and positive emotional states associated with this activity; the pursuit and development of multi-faceted thinking skills and modes of understanding, including, but not necessarily limited to, analytical linear logic/rationality and holistic insight or intuition; aspiring to and practicing the standards and virtues of critical thinking and reflective thinking; and the love and exercise of wisdom.
6. Expansive Temporal Consciousness: A broad and informed temporal knowledge of human and natural history; an informed and rich understanding of the trends and possibilities of the future; a capacity to synthesize knowledge of the past with the possibilities of the future--to apply the past to the future; an informed and inspiring grand narrative of humanity, nature, and the cosmos; and the capacity to deeply connect one's self-narrative with one's grand narrative. The opposite of presentism--the inclination or motivation to focus on the present.
7. Cosmic Consciousness: Coupled together with expansive temporal consciousness, the motivated acquisition of "big picture" knowledge; a sense of the universe (the totality of everything) and one's place within it; the opposite of localism and egocentrism; includes both global and ecological awareness; seeing the connection and interdependency of all things--of oneself, other people, the world, and the universe as a whole; a consequent moral sense of reciprocity and justice (in opposition to self-centeredness, selfishness, or excessive self-importance); and transcendence, as a dedication to a higher good or more encompassing reality beyond the self.

8. Hope and Courage: Enthusiasm and positive emotional vitality about the future; approach motivation, as opposed to avoidance/escape motivation; the capacity to see positive possibilities for the future and actions or strategies for realizing these possibilities; the belief in and pursuit of constructive actions that solve or address problems and challenges; optimism about the future--the belief that life can improve; the opposite of pessimism and nihilism; the capacity to pursue goals in the face of uncertainty (about the future), potential fallibility, and fear; and faith and courage. Having inspiring and informed (realistic) self and grand narratives, such as evolutionary optimism.
9. Love: The capacity to see and feel the value of things--to have highly positive emotional experiences in the presence of existence; appreciation and gratitude; to experience compassion and concern for others; the desire and skill to cultivate positive interactions and experiences with others; and to see, facilitate, and/or create beauty in the world.
10. Tenacity and Deep Purpose: Purpose in life as opposed to apathy and lack of motivation. Grounded in the capacity and act of commitment; requiring willpower and self-control; cultivated through sustained discipline and persistence in the face of adversity; and motivated and anchored to long term goals (extended motivational future consciousness). The overarching intentionality and directionality in one's life and ideal future self-narrative--the higher good or reality creating transcendence in one's personal life.
11. Ethical Pragmatism: The desire and capacity for, and demonstrated realization of facilitating the good life for oneself and others in the context of the world; high practical knowledge or practical wisdom; engagement and constructive action in the world; the capacity to synthesize knowledge, ethics, and action; and concern with the problems and challenges of life and disposition to constructively address them.
12. Creativity: The future is the act of creation and everyone is participating within it. Creativity is a skill, but also a virtue that requires the cultivation of courage and optimism, the pursuit of learning and knowledge, a spirit of adventure and growth, a resistance to conformity (for the sake of conformity), an independence of mind, and well-developed thinking skills and modes of understanding. Creativity balances disciplined work and study with play and spontaneity. Wise people show practical creativity. Love is a creation; happiness is a creation; beauty is a creation.
13. Balance and Temperance: Key dimensions of balance and temperance include the intellect/mind and emotion/heart; logic and intuition; concern for oneself and concern for others; humility/flexibility/openness and conviction/determination; gratitude/contentment and desire; risk/change and security/stability; order and chaos; and the weighing of different, and at times conflicting values, pertinent to decision making.

Self-responsibility (which requires self-awareness and self-reflectivity) is listed as the first virtue, since it is foundational to the realization of any of the other virtues. All virtues are accomplishments based the belief and enactment of self-responsibility. Equally important as a foundational virtue is realistic idealism. One must believe in standards of excellence and the distinction between good and bad, or virtue and vice, and act upon these beliefs, or else the ideals of virtue and the good neither make any sense nor generate any motivational impetus.

Wisdom is not listed as a separate or distinctive virtue since it is the synthesis of all the above capacities and virtues. It is the highest expression of future consciousness, embodying all the virtues and consequent capacities involved in heightened consciousness.

In summary, heightened future consciousness is realized through the exercise and development of a core set of capacities and character virtues, most notably and centrally wisdom.

5) The Ecology of Future Consciousness

A key dimension of heightened future consciousness is the thoughtful selection and creation of environmental affordances that will support flourishing in the flow of evolution. To explain:

The holistic structure of human psychology is a basic reciprocity or complementarity of the individual and the ambient world. We find ourselves psychologically and physically surrounded and embedded in a world.

The contents of the conscious mind, the varied physiological activities of the body, and the overt behavior of the individual are all interaction effects realized between what the individual (psychologically and physically) contributes and what the ambient environment contributes.

Furthermore, consciousness is structured in terms of an analogous polarity involving awareness of the self and awareness of the world (environment), where each polarity is experienced and understood relative to the other. Hence, contrary to the theory of an autonomous separate self, the self is only realized in the context of a world, and the world is realized and understood relative to a self.

The ambient environment possesses a rich array of affordances, defined as relational properties of the world that provide uses, functions, and meanings for a living organism. Actions are realized within the world through the utilization of affordances and reactions to affordances. We realize interaction with the world through interfacing with affordances. Affordances can be discovered or created, the latter through the manipulation of the environment.

As active and purposeful beings, humans select, alter, and create the affordances through which they create their ways of life. Though the environment can be seen as setting the conditions of life and providing necessary resources, the environment is rich in varied opportunities or affordances, to be selected from or manipulated and altered. It is generally more correct to say that organisms use the environment to realize their way of life, than the other way around, that the environment determines the way of life of organisms. Hence, the philosophy of environmental determinism is misleading. Organisms (including humans) are not simply passive victims, reactive to external

factors, since we actively select, use, and manipulate the affordances that support our ways of life.

There are positive affordances that support the flourishing of individuals and negative affordances that interfere with or prevent the flourishing of individuals. A key dimension of ecological future consciousness is the thoughtful selection or creation of positive environmental affordances, as well as the elimination or anticipatory avoidance of negative affordances within an individual's life.

The social environment is a highly important, if not necessary, dimension of human existence. Other people are a rich source of affordances, both positive and negative, and the human self requires interaction with other humans for its normal development and expression; to some degree the self is a social creation and would not exist independently of others. Furthermore, most human activities require the social contribution of other humans. Specifically regarding the future, the future is a co-creation. Finally, positive social relationships are strongly connected (perhaps more so than any other factor) with mental well-being, happiness, and flourishing.

The quality of social relationships is a direct reflection of the development and exercise of social virtues, for example, being cooperative, trustworthy, compassionate, and nurturing. Hence, since virtues are active accomplishments, the quality of one's social environment, as well as the responsibility to improve or diminish it, is something over which individuals have power. We select and create a positive supportive social environment by cultivating a positive social self valued by others.

One's social environment can be either resonant (and supportive) or dissonant (and disruptive) with an individual's goals, plans, and life trajectory. It is critical to the realization of one's preferable future that one seeks out and cultivates resonant individuals and groups.

Cultures and groups can constrain or liberate individual human actions. As a general principle, cultures or groups can be static or transformative in their mindsets and modes of behavior. Human history exhibits an ongoing tension and struggle between advocates of the status quo and advocates of change. A culture or group can be judged on how well it supports and provides opportunities for the flourishing of its members. A culture or group can exhibit heightened future consciousness or the lack of it.

Technologies provide another rich source of affordances in the environment; clearly in a fundamental sense technologies and all their associated uses and meanings (their affordances) are a creation of humans. Technologies can also be seen as extensions and enhancements of humans and their capacities; and just as with the social environment, humans would not be human without their technologies. We are all cyborgs: a functional synthesis of the biological and the technological. Hence, just as with our selected social environments, we realize ourselves through the particular technologies we select to live our lives.

Technologies can be used for both positive and negative ends, and provide both positive and negative affordances. Though technologies, as part of the environment, do not determine human behavior, technologies provide opportunities, good and bad, for human action and modes of consciousness. A key feature of heightened future consciousness is the selection, creation, and utilization of technologies that support the flourishing of individuals. The wise cyborg (a vision of our future) is an individual who utilizes technologies to facilitate the pursuit and exercise of wisdom.

For both our technological and social environments, heightened future consciousness involves an expansive, informed, and thoughtful understanding of trends, challenges, opportunities, and future possibilities within the varied dimensions of human existence. Reality flows, and that flow includes both social and technological dimensions. To flourish in the flow requires understanding the flow. Knowledge is potential power, and it is critical that humans anticipate both positive opportunities and negative problems and challenges regarding the future of the environment. It is important to pursue anticipated positive affordances and to avoid or counteract negative ones.

In summary, the (future) self is realized in a self-guided, actively selected and created reciprocal relationship with the (future) world. Self-responsibility, reciprocity and justice, social love (including compassion), and a love of learning are key character virtues in realizing a flourishing life and self in the context of an environment.

6) Self-Responsibility and Self-Control

Self-responsibility is the cardinal virtue, since the realization of any virtue is a purposeful accomplishment of the individual, which presupposes self-responsibility. In developing any virtue the individual must believe in and act upon the conviction that their character is a consequence of their actions and efforts and consequently can be modified by them. Virtues require that a person see his or herself as responsible for who they are. Self-responsibility empowers the individual toward self-transformation and development.

The issue of freedom versus determinism is relevant to the topic of self-responsibility and self-control. Psychological determinism identifies causes and naturalistic explanations of mind and behavior. The most popular deterministic theories include: nativism (genes determine psychology); empiricism and environmentalism (learning, experience, and the environment determine psychology); physicalism/materialism (body and, in particular, brain activities determine psychology); and teleologism (destiny determines behavior and life). Such deterministic theories, alone or in combination, seem to imply that individuals have no freedom to choose among possibilities of thought, emotion, or action, and consequently have no volitional control over their mental states and behavior. Hence, individuals, viewed within a deterministic framework, are not responsible for what they do, since what they do is determined by internal and external causes. Deterministic explanations are frequently invoked as excuses or justifications for mental states or behavior.

The opposing view, the philosophy of freedom, contends that humans always have choices and the future is possibilities rather than determined sequences of events. Indeed, a popular view among many futurists is that the future is possibilities; what comes to pass is selected (or chosen) from among such possibilities. In this view, humans are seen as responsible for the future.

Yet it appears that humans (at times and to degrees) find freedom of choice aversive and try to avoid it, since choice makes one responsible for one's life and actions. One has to answer and be accountable for one's choices. Humans may seek authority figures to make decisions for them; authority provides security. Humans may seek out absolute rules of conduct to avoid having to make personal decisions. For the existentialist philosopher Sartre, humans often act in "bad faith," denying their own freedom of choice. In general, freedom and self-responsibility may be (and often are) frightening.

The principle of ecological reciprocity implies that humans always participate in the creation of their future and are never entirely passive victims. Humans have degrees of control (though never absolute) over the future and over their own self-development and further evolution. Life is an interaction effect.

Even if human psychology is entirely determined, humans should act as if they are free. In the concrete events and situations of life, they should see themselves as presented with possibilities and choices, and responsible for selecting from among the possibilities. Otherwise they will behave and think as passive victims and abdicate self-responsibility and accountability, finding excuses for whatever they do, or behave thoughtlessly, without deliberation regarding what they should do. The sense of self-responsibility is strongly correlated with positive psychological states and behaviors; the sense of victimization and passivity is strongly correlated with negative psychological states and behavior.

I propose two key hypotheses: Self-control and self-responsibility come in degrees and can be developed through increasing (self) knowledge and practice. Self-control and self-responsibility have evolved throughout human history and will, with increasing self-understanding, further evolve in the future.

Two critical factors in understanding self-control are: internal versus external locus of control and self-efficacy. Operating from a mindset of internal locus of control, a person conceptualizes events in his life as due to his own actions; operating from a mindset of external locus of control a person conceptualizes events in his life as due to external factors beyond his control. These two mindsets differentially influence human behavior: in the first case individuals behave as if they have power over their lives; in the latter case individuals behave as if they do not have power over their lives. Internal locus of control empowers the individual; external locus of control disempowers.

Along similar lines, self-efficacy is defined as a person's belief in his own capacity to produce desired effects (in the future) by his own actions. A person with low self-efficacy

feels powerless over the future, gives up easily, and is prone to depression, anxiety, and avoidance. A person with high self-efficacy feels (and acts as if) he or she has power and control over the future, sets more difficult goals, persists through adversity, and more frequently finds solutions to life's challenges. Self-efficacy is positively connected with a future orientation to life and psychological well-being, and negatively correlated with future fatalism, perceived helplessness, and presentism.

Internal locus of control and self-efficacy are necessary conditions for feeling self-responsible, since one can't feel responsible unless one feels one has power over one's life. Both internal locus of control and self-efficacy, which support the general trait of (realistic) confidence, can be enhanced through practice, effort, and goal achievement. Increasing a sense of internal locus of control requires a disciplined and ongoing reconceptualizing of past, present, and future situations, identifying how one contributes to the events and situations of life. Increasing a sense of self-efficacy involves building realistic confidence through achievements.

Willpower is the next key theme in understanding and developing self-responsibility and control. Based on the research and views of Roy Baumeister, willpower is the available generalized energy and capacity for self-control. For a given amount of time (such as an individual day), humans possess a finite amount of general willpower, which once used up, through decision making, impulse control, and effortful action, needs to be replenished through rest, relaxation, and nourishment. Humans can, however, exercise and strengthen their willpower over time. One can compare willpower with muscle power or physical health: Exercising momentarily depletes physical energy and strength, but through repeated disciplined exercise, interspersed with periods of rest, muscle strength and physical health steadily increase over time. According to Baumeister, strength of willpower is the biggest single predictor of success in life.

For Baumeister, there are four general functions of willpower: controlling thoughts; controlling emotions; impulse control (resisting temptation); and performance control (execution and perseverance of action). Willpower supports discipline and focus. According to him, there is a strong and necessary connection between self-awareness and self-control, for one can only control what one understands; knowledge is potential power. Furthermore, he argues that willpower and self-responsibility have evolved through human history; increasingly we have moved from "outsourcing" self-control to authority figures, real and imagined, to taking individual responsibility for our actions. Moreover, our growing psychological knowledge of willpower is increasing our potential to control and develop it. Finally, it is more important to emphasize self-accomplishment rather than self-esteem as a foundation for generating success and achievement in individuals; pushing for accomplishment motivates persistence, and actual accomplishment builds realistic confidence and real skills.

There are various ways to strengthen willpower: practicing the setting and achieving of simple goals; recurrently identifying important personal goals as one exercises discipline; identifying "lofty thoughts and elevated goals" as a motivator for discipline; establishing automatic and orderly habits and way of life (to minimize the use of

willpower); recording and monitoring one's behavior; sufficient rest; creating environments of external order; making strong commitments, publicly announced; setting clear goals, priorities, and principles; and steering clear of temptations. It is especially important to use one's willpower for realizing the positive as opposed to dealing with the negative.

Willpower and self-control, which focus on the future, produce more happiness in life than impulsiveness and focusing on the present. Through increasing one's willpower, one strengthens one's capacity for self-responsibility. Our personal development in life and our purposeful evolution in the future require our capacity and exercise of self-control and willpower.

In conclusion, key virtues that support the capacity and growth of self-control include self-awareness, self-responsibility, and self-discipline.

Self-responsibility is the foundational virtue of heightened future consciousness and a capacity that can be strengthened through (self) knowledge and disciplined, psychologically informed practice. At its core, heightened future consciousness requires that individuals take responsibility for their future, which includes their own personal development.

7) Emotion

Emotion is the foundational core or ambience of consciousness, and basic anticipatory emotions such as hope and fear are at the foundational core or ambience of future consciousness. Furthermore, emotion, following Damasio, can be seen as at the core of experienced self-identity. In the beginning, the primordial experience is "I feel, therefore I am." There is a set of basic human emotions, such as fear, anger, and happiness, and corresponding behavioral/facial expressions, that appear to be universal for all human beings.

Emotion is a psycho-physiological holistic reality, involving environmental stimuli; experienced feeling and sensation; cognitive interpretation and assessment; bodily arousal and behavioral expression; and underlying neurophysiological activity. Environment, feeling, cognition, behavior, and physiology form an interdependent reciprocal loop of activity in emotion, and emotions can consequently be modified or guided through appropriately altering any component in the loop.

Connecting self-responsibility, emotion, and the future, heightened future consciousness involves taking responsibility for guiding the future of our emotional life.

Positive versus negative emotional states have a differential and multi-dimensional impact on human psychology. In Fredrickson's "Broaden and Build Theory," positive emotions are resource builders, producing more expansive, sensitive, creative, and transformational experiences; positive emotion enhances cognitive functioning. Positive emotion empowers and energizes future consciousness.

Hope and enthusiasm, as fundamental positive anticipatory emotions, energize perception, imagination, thinking, and behavior, generating happiness and approach behavior. Hope involves seeing pathways of action, the desire to act, goal-directed thinking, and positive anticipation. Love also produces “broaden and build” effects; the pursuit and engagement of what one loves, which characterizes intrinsic motivation, is pivotal to the creation of the future, generating more happiness and goal attainment than extrinsic motivation.

Fear and anxiety, and depression and despair, are fundamental negative anticipatory emotions. Fear and anxiety dampen perception, imagination, thinking, and behavior; provoke escape and avoidance behavior; often lead to depression, nihilism, and fatalism; and generate stasis. Depression and despair also have psychological dampening effects and are associated with states of hopelessness and helplessness. Depression is a failure of future consciousness, at the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels.

There are numerous ways to maximize positive emotional states and minimize negative ones, through cognitive, behavioral, and environmental changes and activities. One basic point is that becoming an active agent and self-responsible for one’s emotions generates positive emotional effects.

Distinguishing between momentary happiness (transient pleasure and good feelings) and sustained authentic happiness, theories of authentic happiness throughout history emphasize the centrality of goal attainment, engagement, and growth and self-actualization. Hence, theories of authentic happiness are future-focused and accomplishment based. The capacity to realize authentic happiness can be seen as a character virtue. Happiness can be defined as inspiring, experienced purposeful directionality and achievement; in essence, happiness is the experience of flourishing.

Happiness can be also defined simply as the fundamental “good” and it is both possible and wise to pursue it. Yet, since happiness is an accomplishment, it doesn’t just simply happen—it needs to be achieved. It is wise to maximize happiness since the state of happiness positively impacts all aspects of human psychology and human life, and even enhances ones moral behavior. Authentic happiness, though, cannot be achieved in the moment or the absolute present; it is experienced through the act of progression, as misery and unhappiness are experienced through the transformative states of decline and regression. Happiness is a contrast effect across time. It is the nature of the journeys that makes us either happy or unhappy.

Although negative emotional states, as self-reinforcing habits, have numerous inhibitory and destructive psychological effects, including the weakening of future consciousness, and even though negative emotions instigate and amplify unethical behavior, there is both a psychological necessity and value in negative emotionality.

The Romantic view of life argues that misery and pain bring color and necessary richness to the human experience. The Yin-Yang (Contrast) theory argues that without pain, one could not experience pleasure. The “No Pain, No Gain” theory entails that without suffering one cannot grow. And from operant conditioning research, it appears that challenge and intermittent deprivation are necessary for the development of tenacity and discipline. Further, punishment coupled with reinforcement works better than reinforcement alone in the learning of new behaviors. In line with the Yin-Yang theory, psychological well-being, character strength, and wisdom—at least up to a point—seem to be correlated with the number of traumas (successfully dealt with) in life. Crisis and tragedy (with accompanying negative emotional states) can provoke positive action and psychological growth.

Character virtues which support positive emotion, happiness, and energized future consciousness include hope and optimism, self-responsibility, and discipline and tenacity.

In summary, although negative emotion is necessary and valuable, as a cultivated virtue, positive emotion (including hope, love, and happiness) is the energizing core of heightened future consciousness. Further, as a basic reciprocity, when one flourishes, one feels good and when one feels good, one flourishes.

8) Motivation

The central dimension of motivation is purpose. Motivation is the purposeful intent and effort to satisfy wants or desires through the achievement of goals. Since almost all human behavior is motivated or purposeful, motivation can also be defined as the fundamental future-focused directionality of the human mind, experience, and behavior. Motivated behavior is instigated, structured, and directed by imagined/intended/desired future states, i.e., by future consciousness. Motivation is the impetus and intention of consciousness.

Motivation is psychologically holistic, synthesizing emotion, desire, thought, and values, often provoking behavior. Motives can vary in strength, and different motives can reinforce or compete with each other. Motives can become habits, the behavioral expression of which becomes self-reinforcing. Human behavior and thought patterns develop and stabilize as a set of motive habits (or habit motives).

The purposeful intent of motivated behavior is goal achievement. Humans create or “set” goals; goals are a reflection of values, desires, learning, memory, thinking, emotional states, and perceived self-identity. Goals refer to the future and can vary in temporal reach, ranging from the very short-term to long-term and lifelong. The temporal reach of goals provides one measure of the expansiveness of a person’s future consciousness.

Various factors interfere with or facilitate goal achievement. Major interferences include lack of realism in goal setting, fear, and lack of effort. Major facilitators include setting

clear goals, establishing priorities, avoiding conflicting goals, self-monitoring, being realistic, and rewarding abstinence.

A fundamental dimension of human motivation is the oppositional drives (or dispositions) toward stability and security versus growth and change, the former being connected with relative safety and predictability of the future, and the latter being connected with relative unpredictability, adventure, and risk. The uncertainty of the future can provoke either fear or excitement, and correspondingly, either avoidance or approach. Approaching or confronting uncertainty requires courage.

As a general principle, humans require (and seek out) a relative balance of the new and the familiar, of chaos and order. Too much change (and chaos) produces stress and anxiety; too much stability (and order) produces boredom and lethargy. Humans need a framework of the familiar (providing a measure of stability) to accommodate to change. The deeply inexplicable and transformative are psychologically unsettling.

Having said this, the nervous system requires and seeks out information, where information is defined as changes or differences in stimulation. To varying degrees humans (and animals) show curiosity and exploratory motivation for the new and the different; it is the food or the fuel for an operational functioning nervous system.

The theme of stability and change is also connected with Maslow's bipolar theory of deficiency versus growth motivation. Satisfying deficiencies leads to stasis, whereas seeking out what is new leads to change. Along somewhat similar lines, motivation to avoid, defend, or escape leads to stasis, whereas motivation to approach or embrace leads to growth. The former motivated behaviors derive from habits learned through negative reinforcement, whereas the latter derive from learning through positive reinforcement.

There are numerous theories of what provokes change in humans and how it happens, as well as what causes resistance to change. Fear, habit, rigidity, closed-mindedness, impulsiveness, presentism, security, and a past time perspective are some of the factors preventing change. Growth and change can be provoked by either positive (seeking) factors or negative disruptive factors, and by either internal decision making or external forces (threats or opportunities). Often all these factors combine or interact, since positive and negative are contrast effects, and mind and the environment reciprocally interact.

Further, change can occur either cumulatively (piecemeal) or rather suddenly and holistically (a paradigm Gestalt switch). Traumas and "profound unsettling experiences" can catalyze holistic transformations. There are various two-stage theories of change, such as Bloom's pulsatory boom and bust cycle and Kuhn's normal (cumulative) and revolutionary (holistic transformation) science cycle.

Psychological change can be connected to evolutionary theory: Change is provoked (involving agitated trial and error and adaptive selection) due to threats to survival.

Psychological change can also be understood in terms of the evolutionary theory of punctuated equilibria: Life (or the mind) shows extended periods of relative stability punctuated by short periods of abrupt change. This rhythmic view of change is similar to Kuhn's two-stage theory.

It has been argued that deep personal change occurs when life narratives (self-identity) change. Change one's cognitive mindset and one's life and behavior will change.

And though sounding paradoxical, change can occur as a result of persistence, whereby tenacious, committed, and disciplined practice and behavior lead to deep transformations (and goal achievements) in a person's life.

Given that there are degrees of validity in all these theories of change, it is best to adopt a multidimensional and interactive theory of psychological change.

Optimism and pessimism are fundamental attitudes or mindsets connected with the anticipatory emotions of hope and fear that strongly affect human motivation. Optimism can be described as the general belief (and resultant behaviors) that one can positively affect the future, or even more simply that the future will be better than the past. Pessimism can be described as general belief (and resultant behaviors) that one cannot positively affect the future, or more simply that the future will be no better, or even worse, than the past. Seligman provides even more detailed and nuanced descriptions of optimism and pessimism, and argues that both attitudes are fundamentally habits of thought (interpretation) and hence, like any other habits, can be changed.

In terms of general character traits and behaviors, optimists are more confident and persistent and able to meet challenges. They have higher subjective well-being, experience fewer negative feelings when problems arise, are more reality focused, and are approach coping. Optimism is connected with believing in and acting upon positive future (self) narratives.

Pessimists are doubtful, hesitant, defeatist, avoid or don't address challenges, and are avoidance coping and susceptible to distraction. Pessimism is connected with negative future (self) narratives.

Optimism and pessimism are self-fulfilling prophecies, involving self-enhancing and self-defeating cycles of thought, emotion, behavior, and environmental effects. Optimists and pessimists provoke through their behavior the very expectations they hold about the future. Further, optimism and pessimism generate the "Matthew Effect": Success generates more success; failure generates more failure. Optimism and pessimism oppositely affect feelings of self-efficacy; hence, optimism strengthens and pessimism weakens feelings of self-responsibility.

Optimism is a character virtue requiring sustained cognitive and behavioral effort and courage. Pessimism is never superior to optimism; optimists are more prepared for

misfortune, more accurate in assessments of reality, and more capable at solving problems.

Evolutionary optimism is the belief that (human) reality shows progress through time and will continue to do so in the future; the theory of evolution justifies and inspires optimism. Though there is chaos, misfortune, and numerous other negative aspects to the flow of time, evolution (metaphorically speaking) uses such negative factors in the creation of progress along multiple dimensions of reality. Humans are participatory in the evolutionary process and through increased understanding can guide the process to even more positive ends. Again, knowledge equals potential power. For evolutionary optimists, such as Kurzweil, Kelly, and Bloom, we should identify with the evolutionary process and facilitate it; this is our fundamental human moral imperative. Flourishing can be seen as an informed, purposeful expression of the evolutionary process at a personal and collective level.

Hope and enthusiasm; approach, faith, and courage; self-efficacy; opportunity focus; and optimism are connected psychological states and processes. Conversely, depression and despair; avoidance, fear, and doubt; helplessness; defense focus; and pessimism are connected psychological realities. These oppositional configurations form a fundamental polarity of the human mind and behavior, and a fundamental polarity in future consciousness. The former cluster supports and moves one toward growth and a positive future; the latter cluster generates stasis and a diminished capacity for creating a positive future.

In summary, motivation, balanced between the needs for stability and change and the mindsets of optimism and pessimism, is the purposeful, future-oriented directionality of consciousness and behavior.

9) Purposeful Behavior

Set in the context of a hopeful and optimistic mindset, there is a set of critical factors supporting success in purposeful behavior. Following a rough sequential order, these factors are: commit, act, focus, flow, self-discipline, practice, persevere, and achieve.

Purposeful behavior is doing; one needs to move out of a thought mode (which is often a form of procrastination) into an action mode to realize success. Decision making and the initiation of action require courage, choice, and commitment. The future (the goal or intent) needs to be pursued (or realized) now, not tomorrow. Overpowering the force of stability—the membrane effect—involves having to take the first step from wherever you are now.

Realizing and maintaining focus on the object of one's intent involves short-term discipline and is oppositional to becoming distracted. There are always potential distractions. Focus is maintaining pointed attention in an ambience of chaos, both within one's consciousness and the surrounding environment.

Out of focus arises flow. The psychological state of flow emerges through focused engagement with sufficiently challenging tasks. Flow involves the diminishing of self-consciousness and immersion in the task. Flow is controlled and ordered consciousness. Flow involves self-rewarding and intrinsically motivated behavior. Flow creates the future and generates psychological growth. The amount of time in flow predicts a person's degree of happiness. Flow needs to be actively pursued and cultivated—it is an accomplishment. One should practice the mantra everyday of “Focus and Flow.”

Maintaining rhythm, regularity, or routine, is at the core of self-discipline, providing the cumulative building block foundation of success. Achievement and skill require sustained practice through scheduled repetition and over-learning. Habits of behavior should become intrinsically motivating; the habit becomes a motive. Following from the drive induction theory of motivation, the act of motivated doing reinforces the action and propels one to want to do it again. Impulsivity, distraction, emotional oscillation, lethargy, and the re-assertion of the past work against focused practice. Self-monitoring, “absolute implementation intentions”, and the regular reminding oneself of one's goals support disciplined, focused, repetitious behavior.

Regularly meeting and passing through adversity and opposition strengthens one's capacity for self-discipline. Tenacity is passionate long term discipline in the face of adversity and pain. Tenacity is critical to success.

Achievement is the multiplicative product of skill times effort. Skill is realized through time in effortful practice. Self-discipline (or self-control) predicts the degree or measure of effort to a task. According to Duckworth, self-discipline significantly out-predicts IQ on success, and “Grit,” which is high persistence with high passion in the face of adversity, generates effort and is the key to success. Furthermore, effort and skill interact: The more effort the greater the development of skill, and the more skill the greater the effort.

Grit is future consciousness in action, involving passion, motivation, long-term goals and thinking, discipline and cumulative effort, and resilience in the dynamical and disruptive ambience of the world. The opposites of Grit are lethargy, helplessness, defeatism, distractibility, impulsivity, and presentism (the need for immediate gratification). In particular, impulsivity entails acting without thinking of consequences and the lack of an executive function (reflective self-control).

Wisdom can be defined as the capacity and actual accomplishment of organizing one's life. Hence, wisdom is the key to time management, which is ultimately life management. And since a person needs to organize *the time of their life* in order to realize the “good life,” life management is really an ethical accomplishment achieved through wisdom.

Though humans have numerous goals and exhibit diverse streams of goal-directed behavior throughout the day, a key to life management is the prioritizing of goals. Of special note, it is critical to have a deep overall purpose for living, around which to

center and organize one's behavior and diverse subsidiary goals. Wisdom is creating a deep purpose to life and realizing it in action.

The key virtues supporting constructive motivated behavior and goal achievement include hope and optimism, self-responsibility, and discipline, tenacity, and commitment. Wisdom is required for the creation and realization of deep purpose.

10) Learning, Memory, and Habit

Across the history of life, the evolutionary thrust of mind and consciousness has been toward expanding temporal consciousness, of both the past and the future.

Learning, which is the acquisition of knowledge through perceptual experience, practice, thinking, and interaction with the environment, is the foundation of memory. Memory is not a simple record of the experienced past though. Memory is an active, interpretive, selective, value-imbued, meaning-seeking, continually restructuring, generative process providing an ongoing understanding of what has been learned from the past.

Memory provides the necessary context for making sense of the present and anticipating the future. Memory is the cognitive (knowledge) foundation of future consciousness, and more broadly expansive temporal consciousness; awareness of the past emerges together with awareness of the future.

The adaptive theory of human knowledge and the brain postulates that differences (information) are noticed relative to flexible adaptive norms, which serves as a foundation for anticipating the future.

The learning of basic behavioral habits takes place through operant conditioning, which involves the association of stimuli and responses through either positive or negative reinforcement; the development and sustainability of stimulus-response associations require reinforcement. Approach behaviors involve positive reinforcers; avoidance behaviors involve negative reinforcers. Operant learning is the foundation of "learning how." Operantly learned habits have a future consciousness dimension, since they involve learned anticipations of rewards (reinforcers) contingent upon the execution of specific behaviors.

Classical conditioning involves the association of stimuli, the foundation of "learning that." The association of stimuli can lead to the development of "cognitive maps," an understanding of the layout of the environment and the temporal regularities in the environment. Stimulus (knowing that) and response (knowing how) learning frequently occur together and form the basic components in the ecology of learning: learning the layout of the environment and how to interact with it to realize desired goals.

Though habits provide psychological stability and can lock one into the past, the accomplishment of goals and psychological change frequently involve the tenacious,

regular exercise of habits. Consequently, learning and memory provide the cognitive foundations for both psychological stability and change.

The distinction between instinctual versus learned motives and behaviors is dubious; the innate and the learned are inextricably tied together. The distinction between motives and consequent behaviors for satisfying motives is also dubious; ends and means mix together; motives become habits and habits become motives. The particular present and anticipatory future being lived and experienced (both positive and negative influences) is a reflection of a set of learned motive habits.

There are numerous theories of how to change habits, to transcend stability and the past: extinction; aversive conditioning; substituting new positive addictions; changing the environment; increased self-awareness; making plans, anticipating adversity, self-monitoring, and public commitments; increasing generalized willpower; empowering change through personal choice, self-efficacy, and optimism; and transforming one's self-narrative.

According to Piaget's theory of higher-order interactive learning, human mentality and behavior develop through the active testing and growth of conceptual and behavioral schemas within the environment. Abstract learning (transformation in conceptual and behavioral schemas) involves the complementary processes of assimilation and accommodation. The process of assimilation is the meaningful interpretation of experiences in terms of existing (present) mindsets (or conceptual schemas); accommodation is the periodic transformation of mindsets as a result of failure to successfully assimilate new experiences or events. Learning (accommodation) requires understanding (relative to a new schema).

Psychologists and educators distinguish between deep and surface learning. Deep learning is psychologically transformational, holistically impacting the human mind; surface learning is cumulative or additive, without deep psychological impact. Deep learning is active, involving synthesizing big pictures; penetrating core values and beliefs; thinking while learning; producing conceptual reorganization; and facilitating transference to new situations. It is self-reflective, intrinsically motivating, and generates positive emotional affect. Surface learning is passive, involving fragmented pieces; no deep personal transformation; no transference; learning through memorization without thinking; no self-reflection; and extrinsic and negative motivation and affect. Using Piaget's terminology, deep learning involves accommodation; surface learning does not.

The love of learning and thinking—a cognitive virtue that is grounded in the curiosity motive—drives deep learning and life-long learning. Deep learning generates the experience of enlightenment (of illuminating integrative insights) and is a necessary component in the development of wisdom. Deep learning takes place in “wisdom” or “evolutionary” narratives, where life crises or challenges provoke personal growth.

Deep learning can be facilitated through thinking about the subject matter; over-learning the material; comparison of different points of view; generalized wonder; love of

learning; creation and extrapolation of new ideas; challenges in life; problem solving; and teaching the material.

Ongoing learning, and in particular deep learning, is essential to flourishing throughout life. The ongoing acquisition of knowledge supports flexibility, creativity, the expansion of consciousness, personal growth, and dynamical future-focused wisdom. Wisdom is not static; wisdom lives through evolution. Mentally, we grow or we die.

In summary, memory of the past, acquired through learning, is the knowledge foundation for future consciousness. Deep learning is the key to life transformation and essential to a life of flourishing and the development of wisdom.

11) Thinking, Understanding, and Consciousness

Perception, the foundation of knowledge and consciousness, is highly selective (identifying affordances from an inexhaustibly rich environment) and perspectival (from a physical/ecological point of view). From this foundation, all emergent and developing knowledge and consciousness is selective and perspectival.

As noted by Piaget, but also clearly expressed by the philosopher Immanuel Kant, meaningful experience is made possible through a mental set of concepts/ideas, which provides a selective interpretive framework for understanding the world. Humans organize concepts into theories, providing interpretive descriptions and explanations of the world. Facts are always interpreted and given meaning in terms of concepts and theories. Hence, human experience (consciousness) and our factual knowledge of ourselves and the world is always selective, perspectival, and theoretical or interpretive.

People live within paradigms. Following Kuhn's thinking, a paradigm is a way of life, consisting of a theory of connected concepts, behaviors, values, instrumentalities, and supportive environmental niches (affordances).

People also adhere to world views, which are their general theories for making sense of and explaining the world. A world view is a person's big picture of reality.

People have a strong psychological disposition (or cognitive bias) to make sense out of the world, as well as themselves, in terms of narratives or stories. Theories, paradigms, and world views are embedded in core (or grand) narratives—the stories people adopt to explain the origin, transformation, and future of the world. Grand narratives provide meaning, purpose, and hope to the human mind.

People also develop and live by personal narratives (stories about themselves) that they connect with their grand narratives, giving the self purpose and meaning in the broader context of their world view and grand narrative. The grand and personal narratives are the fundamental mental structures for organizing past and future consciousness. Grand and personal narratives align with the bipolar or reciprocal structure of consciousness—an awareness of the world and an awareness of the self in relationship to each other.

Belief in the truth and value of narratives is critically important in motivating human behavior. “Lofty thoughts” and “elevated goals” empower the self. However, all human knowledge (belief systems) is contingent and fallible, and we have the moral obligation to evaluate on an ongoing basis the validity and value of our beliefs. Furthermore, ongoing efforts to articulate, compare, and evaluate belief systems is psychologically valuable; it invigorates the mind, improves self-awareness, amplifies creativity, and generates deep learning, enlightenment, and wisdom.

Grand narratives and corresponding paradigms and mental frameworks may have gone through a series of evolutionary stages within human history, and “culture wars” pitting traditional and status quo mentalities against advancing, transformative mindsets may be a long-term and continual feature of human societies and the human mind. The new is perpetually in a dynamic tension with the old.

As noted earlier, there also appears to be within human history an ongoing evolutionary expansion of consciousness from the relatively egocentric (me-here-now) to the relatively cosmo-centric (me within the universe/cosmos as a whole). Within this historical context, evolutionary questions regarding future consciousness include: What is the most efficacious and valuable mindset for understanding the future, and how might mindsets and values evolve further in the future?

A popular view is that there are multiple modes of knowing and understanding in the contemporary human mind; in particular, there are certain basic dualities of cognition, such as male and female, hierarchal and network, objective and subjective, and abstract and particular.

One of the most commonly cited dualities is linear/analytical versus insightful/holistic, which is often related to left versus right cerebral hemispheric functioning and/or Western versus Eastern modes of thought. Nisbett has argued that Westerners tend to think of reality as a line; focus on discrete objects; analyze into parts; emphasize individuality; and use a syllogistic either-or logic. Easterners tend to see reality as a circle; focus on context; think holistically; emphasize interdependency and community; and operate in a Taoist (Yin-Yang) logic of both/and and balance. A global vision of wisdom for the future should utilize and synthesize these two modes of understanding; we should think like evolutionary (linear/progressive) Taoists (reciprocity/balance).

Thinking is a sequential conscious process, embodying both reason and insight, often involving dialogue with oneself, that is a highly evolved psychological capacity. Thinking serves a variety of functions: facilitating understanding; problem solving; planning; the creation of new ideas; critical evaluation; and even fanciful daydreaming. Thinking involves a “standing back” and reflection upon perception and the world—even on the self. We can also engage in thinking about thinking. Thinking about the future is a fundamental feature of human future consciousness.

Although almost all humans think (to some degree), thinking is a skill with standards. Intellectual standards and virtues have been identified within “critical thinking philosophy.” Standards include precision, accuracy, breadth, depth, significance, and clarity. Virtues of good thinking include honesty, humility, courage, fair-mindedness, and open-mindedness. The opposite of good critical thinking is egocentric (self-serving) thinking. In summary, good thinking, though a skill, has an essential ethical or moral dimension; willful poor thinking is an ethical vice.

A popular theory of the development of thinking is that it begins with absolutism (certainty and conviction in right and wrong and true and false); moves (if it does move) to relativism (nothing is objectively right or wrong, or true or false); and finally (again if it happens at all) arrives at reflective thinking. Reflective thinking involves making tentative decisions and commitments and reaching tentative conclusions based upon evidence, reason, and comparison, acknowledging that one’s view could evolve or change in the future. Reflective thinking balances commitment and flexibility, a key virtue for future consciousness and the evolution of wisdom.

Just as we should take responsibility for our behavior and how we influence our environment, we should take responsibility for guiding (or controlling) our thoughts and consciousness. People do not control the flow of their thoughts and consciousness very well; there is both order and chaos, and limited preferable future directionality within the ecology of consciousness. Throughout history there have been numerous explanations for the lack of control and preferred directionality in human consciousness: the devil and evil spirits (possession); madness and fragmented or weak egos; distractibility and lack of internal locus of control; submission to and dependency upon authority figures, real or imagined; and lack of education and training in controlling consciousness. Following Baumeister, the increasing control of consciousness may signal an ongoing evolutionary direction, connected with the increasing development of self-responsibility and self-control.

There are three key factors in controlling consciousness: knowledge and understanding of the present flow and make-up of consciousness; goals for the transformation of consciousness (having clear future consciousness regarding the future of one’s consciousness); and practice. In essence, controlling consciousness involves the heightening of future consciousness, where the fundamental goal is the experienced self-determination (locus of control) of consciousness.

The principles and practices of strengthening willpower apply to consciousness as well as behavior. Engaging in flow increases focus and directional order. Cognitive therapeutic techniques and critical thinking practices improve the control of consciousness through reflective assessment of thoughts relative to standards of reason and evidence. Through practice of such activities, the self-control of consciousness improves in degrees.

Self-control can be seen as a general habit that can be strengthened through learning. Mindfulness and attentiveness improve control through increased self-awareness.

Meditation and peaceful environments facilitate control through slowing down and calming the mind. Sensory isolation tanks, similarly, facilitate “alpha” (relaxed) consciousness. Practicing self-reflection (thinking about one’s thoughts) facilitates increasing objectivity and centeredness in the mind. Standing back moves the locus of control toward the self, and away from externally driven inner dialogues with imagined others. Purposefully changing the self and grand narratives changes the content of consciousness in preferable directions.

That said, a certain amount (or balance) of chaos and adventure should be maintained or cultivated in the flow of consciousness since such features are necessary for flexibility and creativity. A balance of order and chaos is key.

Applied cognition and thinking includes foresight, goal setting, planning, and problem solving, all capacities of future consciousness. A basic distinction in this area is between thinking out “ends” (visions/goals) and thinking out “means” (strategies/plans). Decision making on both goals and plans should involve a balance of commitment and flexibility.

Foresight or visioning is the capacity to imagine futures, including preferable futures, and is facilitated through learning, thinking, motivation, values, and positive emotional states. Possibility thinking is the ability to imagine multiple hypothetical futures, which reflects the degree of freedom and expansiveness in one’s mind. One must, however, set priorities and get focused to realize goals. Scenario building involves imagining (and describing) detailed, complex, and realistic hypothetical futures, including possible, plausible, probable, preferable, worst-case, and wild-card scenarios. The more realistic the scenarios, the more their motivational power becomes. The strength of science fiction in this regard is its rich, detailed visions, including sensory, psychological, social, dramatic, and environmental dimensions.

Planning (or strategizing) is linear thinking, involving the identification of a hypothetical series of steps to realize a vision or goal. The “planning fallacy” is that, universally, plans take longer to complete than originally envisioned—even visions of worst case scenarios. Self-monitoring, big-picture planning, and anticipating problems all improve the probability of success of a plan.

Problem solving is a form of thinking and future consciousness in that it involves figuring out how to address a challenge or overcome an obstacle that is preventing the realization of a goal. Problem setting is also a significant dimension of future consciousness, since visions, goals, or preferable futures are frequently identified relative to, or in reaction to, presently interpreted problems.

Goal setting, planning, and action form an ecological loop, where thinking (goals and plans) are enacted and tested out, leading to environmental effects and feedback, which lead to reassessment of goals and plans and modifications in behavior, leading to new environmental effects, with the circular loop continuing till the goal is realized or abandoned.

A narrative involves describing within a temporally sequential structure the visions, plans, actions, consequences, problems and challenges, learning results, and reactions of an individual or group set in the context of interacting with an environment.

In conclusion, many character virtues contribute to excellence in the learning and cognitive dimensions of future consciousness: curiosity and the love of learning, thinking, and the pursuit of truth; the creative, adventuresome spirit; temperance and balance; self-reflectiveness and self-responsibility; and discipline and commitment, all of which contribute to and support the development of wisdom.

In summary, consciousness, understanding, and thinking are perspectival, contingent, and only partially controllable yet indeterminately self-reflective, self-evaluative, and self-improving; consciousness, understanding, and thinking exhibit levels of excellence and capacity achieved through the practice of a set of cognitive virtues.

12) Imagination and Creativity

Imagination is the ability to create and consciously manipulate mental images and hypothetical “perceptual-like” realities in the mind. Imagination, derived from but often transcending perception and memories, defines the possibility space and conscious freedom of the mind. There are individual varying degrees of creativity and open-mindedness in imagination. Imagination can be cultivated, strengthened, and guided; and there is a reciprocal amplification of imagination and thinking with positive emotion. There are though benefits to daydreaming and fantasizing—to allowing imagination to flow and wander unconstrained.

The modern artist Kandinsky argues that creativity in art is a manifestation of the creative process in nature, where order and harmony emerge out of catastrophe. Inspired by this hypothesis, a general theory of creativity is presented whereby human creativity is viewed as an outgrowth of the inherent creativity in the universe.

The ancients believed that creativity (the power to create) was an exclusive power of the gods. At best, humans received it as a gift from the gods. Also, one general ontological theory in ancient/classical times (for example, as found in Empedocles) was that creativity was an expression of a life force (Eros) and/or a death/destructive force (Thanatos/Chaos).

Early science searched for laws to explain stability and order in nature, not creativity and change. Later, Darwin rejected the idea that the creation of the new required god-like forces; for Darwin, biological nature (at least) was creative. Contemporary science views physical nature as evolutionary with new order (novelty) emerging (with a dimension of unpredictability) out of chaos through competition and symbiosis. Humans are a result of and participatory in this process, with creativity evolving, and through us becoming conscious of itself across time.

Understanding creativity leads to greater creativity. Contemporary science is searching for a logic or design to creativity in nature.

Psychology has revealed a four-stage process to creativity: preparation, incubation, illumination (a Gestalt switch), and verification. Studies have also identified certain characteristics associated with creativity: a balanced contribution of right and left cerebral functioning; personality characteristics such as courage, risk taking, an adventuresome spirit, and self-actualizing tendencies; a balanced contribution from both divergent and convergent thinking; the contribution of positive emotion; a positive connection between flow and creativity; the important process of bisociation, whereby two seemingly disconnected ideas are connected together; and the general creative dimension in much of human psychology, whereby various normal behaviors and mental activities (language, motor skills, memory) involve a generative component.

Theories of psycho-social creativity include the following: Kuhn's concept of normal versus revolutionary science, the latter involving collective Gestalt switches (paradigm shifts) with elements of chaos, death, birth, and incommensurability across successive paradigms; Bloom's theory that society embodies both conformity enforcers and diversity generators, producing an ongoing tension and dynamic of the old and the new; the general theory that innovation is accelerating (due to positive feedback loops) in evolutionary, including human, history; Bloom's "boom and crash cycle" theory, whereby there is a basic natural dynamic of expansion and contraction, exuberance and depression, and invention and selection (divergent and convergent thinking); and Ridley/Wright's theory that social creativity is produced through reciprocity and exchange of diverse products and ideas and communication and cross-fertilization.

Creativity in art involves (at the very least) the emergence of beauty in the form of unique Gestalts (harmonies). Art has ecological-technological origins, whereby humans create works inspired by nature and use materials and instruments constructed out of nature. Art exhibits human-technological syntheses, a dual creation of human mentality and artistic tools. Following the development of accomplished and creative artists, the unique (or unique styles) does not seem to emerge suddenly but through progressive evolution and refinement. The unique also involves (following the bisociation principle) apparent incongruous syntheses, such as in Dali's paintings.

Technological evolution is creative, an expression of the Law of Accelerating Returns, whereby progress feeds into more progress, creating a positive feedback loop. Technological creative evolution emerges out of combining technological "genes" out of the ecosystem of technological units producing synthetic and functional wholes. In general, technology does not evolve as a self-contained reality, but rather as part of emerging functional syntheses of technologically enhanced humans in a technologically enhanced environment. According to Kelly, technology is at the leading edge of creative evolution in the cosmos.

Connecting the human and the cosmic, the future is the ongoing act of creation, and we are all participating in it. The future is open, creative, and surprising, and consequently,

heightened future consciousness necessarily requires a creative dimension. Heightened future consciousness embodies and stimulates creativity in the following ways: It is open-minded and imaginative about future possibilities; motivated by curiosity, wonder, and a spirit of adventure; courageous, flexible, and open to uncertainty; hopeful, optimistic, and constructive (which fuels imagination and creativity); involves a love of learning and thinking (to stimulate new knowledge and ideas); is practical and problem solving, engaging the challenges of the world; and promotes a strong sense of personal growth, self-actualization, self-transcendence, and self-stimulation.

Building on many of the above themes, the following is proposed as a general theory: Creativity, involving a balanced synthesis of oppositional qualities, is the making of order out of chaos, which often involves as a prelude the making of chaos out of order.

To summarize the general theory: Creativity frequently begins with a challenge, a problem, and general dissatisfaction (negative emotions). There is persistent and disciplined hard work and self-criticism (and sometimes cross-criticism) in creative problem solving and the act of creation, and the capacity for creativity involves the acquired tenacious capacity to accomplish.

But the raw material for creativity comes through chaos (the ground of being), diverse connections and inputs, the unfamiliar, the seemingly irrelevant, and horizontal sharing and associations. Letting go, spontaneous play, and mind wandering can all feed into the raw materials of creativity.

Similarly, at a social level, loose networks of individuals that collide and spontaneously share are proportionately more creative and productive than tightly organized hierarchies. Hence, the nature of the surrounding group (and culture) can stifle or stimulate creativity. Are there, indeed, isolated creative individuals at all?

All told, there exists a set of reciprocities and Yin-Yang balances that support creativity: Right and left brain activity; ordered and chaotic consciousness; exuberance and play versus selection and discipline; divergent and convergent thinking; linearity and insight; positive and negative emotions; and individual and collective inputs.

Character virtues which stimulate the creative capacity include courage and an adventuresome spirit; discipline, tenacity, and commitment; the love of learning and thinking; temperance and balance; self-responsibility; and hope and optimism.

In conclusion, heightened future consciousness is essentially the desire and capacity to create the best possible future. This is wisdom, conceptualized as a future-focused, dynamical reality; goals (or visions) are something created (and continually and thoughtfully recreated) rather than something pre-existent that one moves toward.

13) The Self and the Self-Narrative

Is the self something one discovers? Or something one creates?

There are many different, and not necessarily incompatible, theories of the self: The agent of consciousness; the orchestrator of consciousness; the representational center of consciousness; the audience of consciousness; the holistic integration of mind/consciousness/body/and person; the thinker and narrator of consciousness; the reciprocal consciousness to consciousness of the world; as self-consciousness, a necessary condition of consciousness; a social and ecological creation; the focused and integrated “face/agent” to the world; the uniqueness of the person; the thoughts of “I am” (whereby there is really no self independent of thoughts); a multiplicity of selves (or nested levels of selves); and Atman (the individualized spark of Brahman, the cosmic mind/consciousness).

Common questions asked about the self include: Is the self a one or a many? Situational or intrinsic? Stable or transformational?

The nature of the self is clearly connected with evolution. The self reflects the evolving self-reflectivity of the universe; agency, purpose, choice, self-control, and self-responsibility have evolved and are continuing to evolve within nature. Individual and collective consciousness have evolved through human history. Modes of thinking, understanding, and values (expressed within the self) have also transformed throughout human history. There are developmental stages in the self throughout an individual human life, with the clear possibility/probability that new stages will emerge in future human evolution. The self is evolving ways that will enhance or further its own evolution; there is self-conscious, purposeful evolution of the self.

In general, the human self (and human nature) seems open-ended and evolutionary. The self is a dynamical rather than static reality.

Inspired by dynamical and evolutionary views of human nature, various theories have been proposed regarding a preferable vision of the future self, including: Maslow’s self-actualizing self; Rogers’ “person of tomorrow”; O’Hara’s transformative self; Csikszentmihalyi’s evolving self; the self-transcending self; Anderson’s pluralistic, postmodern self; Lombardo’s wise cyborg; the flourishing self; and Stewart’s future focused, self-evolving self. All these visions, containing both psychological and ethical dimensions, could be seen as hypothesized preferable futures for the human self.

Damasio has developed an evolutionary-biological theory of consciousness and the self. According to him, mind, self, and consciousness have emerged in degrees and evolutionary/developmental steps throughout the history of life; intelligence and purpose first emerged at the unicellular level, prior to the emergence of consciousness; and previous levels of mentality and the self within our evolutionary history are still embedded in the modern human self. For Damasio, the self has evolved to serve the basic biological function of sustaining the existence and life of the organism.

The brain, which serves and coordinates the entire physical body, brings the “body to mind” by making representations or maps of the body; the body self-reflects through the

brain and the brain is the central convergent-divergent locus of the body. The foundation of the self is the “proto-self” (feelings of the body) which is embodied in the lower level brain’s representations of the body. The proto-self and its representations are the foundation of the mind.

The “core self,” which is foundation of consciousness, involves awareness of the body (the proto-self) in interaction and relationship with the perceived world. The core self is personalized and a sensed protagonist (within the world). Consciousness is therefore defined as knowledge of one’s existence situated within existence of a surround or world. The conscious self (and consciousness) is ecological.

The autobiographical self develops through the faculties of memory and anticipation. The autobiographical self is the ongoing narrative of memories and anticipations (expansive temporal consciousness) contextualizing conscious pulses of the core self. The autobiographical self transcends the present. The evolutionary advantage of the autobiographical self (self-reflectivity through story telling) is that it brings deliberation and forethought (therefore going beyond immediate concerns of well-being) to the conscious self. The autobiographical self is the foundation of culture (the transmission of stories across time) and wisdom making.

In summary, personal identity and self-consciousness is an ongoing self-narrative (a dynamic process) interpreting a felt presence in the world. The autobiographical self connects past, present, and future, giving ongoing meaning, purpose, and order to conscious life. Further, it is a reflective, deliberative, anticipatory, goal-directed, future-focused process.

The autobiographical self is the ongoing application (and rewriting) of the personal narrative; along with the grand narrative, the personal narrative is the foundation (in story form) of a person’s mindset and theoretical perspective on the world, and determines a person’s behavior and consciousness. The personal narrative is ecological, dramatic, memory selective, and provides overall direction to life. Personal narratives exhibit degrees of unity versus fragmentation, clarity, inner conflict versus harmony, and positive versus negative emotional tone.

According to Wilson, long term personal change comes through editing and rewriting the personal narrative. There are numerous exercises and techniques for editing and rewriting the personal narrative, including wisdom editing (reflection on what one has learned through life); the Pennebaker exercise for articulating and assimilating traumas; the “best possible selves exercise” (creating a (new) ideal future self-narrative); and ongoing reflection and critique on the autobiographical self as it is being expressed in the experience of living.

Along these lines, a valuable exercise for increased personal awareness and potential transformation in the future is the “Your Life as a Book” exercise, identifying the major periods in your life through a series of chapter titles, looking for overall themes and meanings across the chapters, drawing learning conclusions, and finally asking what

you would change in your ideal personal narrative for the future. The logic of this exercise is to clarify and possibly reinterpret the past narrative as a springboard for creating a more positive future narrative. The way to the future is through the past.

A person's grand and personal narratives are normally connected, the former (the big context) giving the individual meaning and purpose in life. The collapse of the credibility and perceived value of the grand narrative, especially pertaining to the future, significantly diminishes the vitality of individual and collective lives. Grand narratives, as with all belief systems, should be routinely assessed for credibility and value.

There is special value in assessing and rewriting the ideal future self-narrative (the "best possible selves" exercise): It enhances self-consciousness and self-transcendence; it creates an action-oriented, self-empowered, narrative framework for the future; it provides greater coherence, meaning, purpose, and sense of growth to life.

In line with an evolutionary and virtue-wisdom based framework for heightened future consciousness, one can attempt to: Articulate an inspiring, informed, and thoughtful ideal future grand narrative and place oneself in this context; describe oneself as part of an evolutionary grand narrative, flourishing in the context of cosmic evolution; articulate an ideal future self-narrative centered on the pursuit and growth of wisdom, to benefit oneself as well as others; and create a new life based on the wisdom of a lifetime.

Describing and implementing a new ideal future self-narrative involves several steps: taking into account the lessons of the past; describing a vision, plan, and story; identifying possible challenges and problems along the way (giving drama to the story); describing a grand narrative and connecting it to the personal narrative; identifying the virtues (especially wisdom) that are embodied in the narrative and one's aspirations; and chronicling and monitoring actions and successes (working the program) as the narrative is enacted.

Central character virtues contributing to a flourishing, future-focused self include self-awareness and self-responsibility; courage and creativity; the love of learning and thinking; and self-transcendence.

In summary, I am (and will be) the ongoing, dynamical, and self-reflective story I tell (and will tell) myself about myself (the self-narrative) within the context of the story I tell myself about the world (the grand narrative). Transforming one's life, consciousness, and self involve transforming one's ideal future self narrative and grand narrative.

14) Wisdom, Enlightenment, and Transcendence

Wisdom is the central integrative theme of this book; it is the light toward which we should aspire. Wisdom is the integrative virtue synthesizing the psychological capacities and character virtues of heightened future consciousness. Conversely, heightened future consciousness centers on the pursuit, development, and exercise of wisdom. It follows that the ideal future self-narrative should center on wisdom. One should aspire

to living the life of a wise person because wisdom is the means to psychological well-being, the good life, and to flourishing in the flow of evolution.

In the conclusion of this final section, I will also argue that the pursuit and development of wisdom is the preferable future direction of the evolution of mind, self, and consciousness; it should be at the core of an ideal future grand narrative for humanity.

Synthesizing key themes in the numerous descriptions of wisdom offered across human history, wisdom can be defined as the highest expression of self-development and future consciousness. It is the continually evolving understanding of and fascination with the big picture of life, of what is important, ethical, and meaningful, and the desire and creative capacity to apply this understanding to enhance the good life, both for oneself and others.

There is a contemporary renaissance in the study of wisdom. Frequent arguments are presented in popular and futurist writings for the central importance of wisdom in creating a positive future for humanity. Indeed, our contemporary understanding of wisdom should highlight its evolutionary and future-focused dimension.

Illustrative of an evolutionary future-focused vision of wisdom: Wisdom connects the heritage and lessons of the past with the thoughtfulness, openness, and creativity needed for the future. It involves an expansive synthesis of temporal consciousness—the big picture of time—combating the excessive narrow “presentism” of today. Wisdom unites knowledge and ethics. It is the application of knowledge for the (future) good. Wisdom involves the capacity to think out and anticipate the broad future consequences of decisions and actions (in contrast to its opposites, foolishness and impulsiveness, which do not). Reflective wisdom acknowledges and embraces its evolutionary, transforming, and self-transcending nature; wisdom revels in learning. Wisdom is an open system of knowledge. Wisdom empowers and liberates the human mind, bringing enhanced self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-control. The pursuit of wisdom stimulates self-transcendence. Wisdom is informed and enacted hope. It is a purposeful journey—an activity as much as a state—with a future focus.

The Wisdom Page lists forty-eight positive human qualities that have been strongly associated with wisdom. Based on the major themes discussed in this book, to review, a more concise list of key characteristics of wisdom includes:

1. Self-Awareness and Self-Responsibility
2. Realistic Idealism
3. Self-Growth
4. Love of Learning
5. Love of Thinking
6. Expansive Temporal Consciousness
7. Cosmic Consciousness
8. Hope and Courage
9. Love

10. Tenacity and Deep Purpose
11. Ethical Pragmatism
12. Creativity
13. Balance and Temperance

This list of qualities can serve as an analytical self-assessment tool for gauging one's level of wisdom or heightened future consciousness.

Although the above list provides an abstract and analytical description of the virtue of wisdom, the reality of wisdom is that it is always manifested within a unique individual. (There are probably also wise organizations and groups as well.) Wise persons have their own special and distinctive personalities. They share personal traits (as listed in the virtues above) but each brings their own irreducible color and memorable quality to their expressions of wisdom. This personal and distinctive quality to wisdom is undoubtedly connected to the creative dimension of the virtue of wisdom.

The practical and very general question could be asked: How does one develop wisdom? First, it is important to note that within this book, wisdom or heightened future consciousness has been described in terms of a set of character virtues and capacities, with numerous guidelines and proposals for the development of each of these virtues and capacities. As an holistic and interdependent array of personal qualities, working on individual virtues and capacities will frequently have positive and growth promoting affects on other qualities. The virtues of wisdom to a great degree hang together -- they are mutually self-reinforcing. The whole emerges through an interaction of the parts. Second, the first two qualities on the list -- self-responsibility and realistic idealism -- are essential first steps toward the development of any of the other virtues. Accepting responsibility for improving oneself and believing in the concept of standards of excellence are foundational for the development of wisdom. Third, following from the ideas of Roy Baumeister (2011) on the capacity for willpower and self-control, as well as the age-old wisdom of Aristotle, one develops any skill or capacity through disciplined practice. It may seem overly simplistic but to develop wisdom one needs to self-consciously work on acting wise. Capacity follows from repeated action. As Gretchen Rubin (2009) states, "Do good, be good." Fourth, results emerge (when they do) from desire; one grows in wisdom from wanting to be wise. Wanting to be wise may not be a sufficient condition for realizing wisdom, but it is necessary. Philosophy is the love of wisdom; one realizes wisdom by loving the pursuit of it. To be wise, one needs to be a philosopher. And finally, along with self-responsibility, effort, and love, there needs to be hope and optimism (another one of the virtues); one needs to believe that one can realize or achieve wisdom. Hope, along with love, empowers action.

The answer to how to develop wisdom lies within the virtues of wisdom itself.

Wisdom and its development can be closely connected with creating an ideal future self-narrative: The pursuit of wisdom provides the central ideal for defining the good life in the future; the life of wisdom is a purposeful, self-aware life directed toward self-development, involving the pursuit and growth of the virtues of heightened future

consciousness; wisdom involves clearly integrating the personal and grand narratives—seeing oneself in the context of the whole; and a wisdom narrative should reveal a pattern of growth and transformation through deep learning that comes from meeting challenges. At the foundational level, a person should be wise in creating of an ideal future self-narrative. A question each individual should ask is this: What would it mean personally to live a life dedicated to the pursuit and development of wisdom? Asking this question, answering it, and attempting to “live the answer” will contribute to the growth of wisdom.

Just as with our personal self-narratives, wisdom should be at the center of a new collective grand narrative. At present, what are humanity’s grand narratives? Do we have any positive, credible, and inspiring visions for the future of humanity as a whole? Do we have a grand narrative centered on wisdom? Do we have any grand narratives similar in meaning and intent?

As one example, inspired by progressive and evolutionary developments in past human history, many writers and visionaries have called for a collective “New Enlightenment.” Advocates of the “New Enlightenment” (such as Anderson, Smyre, and Hubbard) have identified a set of central tenets (transcending past belief systems) within this futurist vision:

- Reality and knowledge are dynamical and evolutionary
- Reality and knowledge are ecological, holistic, and grounded in reciprocities
- Knowledge is contingent and reality is possibilities
- Chaos and crisis provoke evolution
- Humanity requires a new concept and reality of the self
- A new evolutionary stage in humanity is emerging

It is noteworthy that these tenets and fundamental beliefs align very well with the theory of evolutionary, future-focused wisdom articulated in these pages.

The theory of wisdom presented in this book though is more psychologically holistic, covering emotional, motivational, personal, and ethical dimensions as well. As a general point, the concept of wisdom envelops the concept of enlightenment. Hence, although inspired, in part, by advocates of a New Enlightenment, we should broaden and deepen our collective vision, envisioning an Age of Wisdom as our ideal future grand narrative.

One could ask why we need to aspire toward an Age of Wisdom. For one thing, our world problems and challenges (including our contemporary “Mega-Crisis”) are primarily ethical, psychological, social, and character related. We need to transform humanity along these dimensions, to evolve the human mind at psycho-social-ethical levels to address our problems.

Aside from addressing the negative aspects of our contemporary world, on the positive side, the concept of an Age of Wisdom provides an inspiring, informed, uplifting, and transcending vision. It is an approach vision, hopeful and optimistic about a progressive

future, in opposition to the nihilistic, depressive, stagnant, materialistic, and present-focused visions of contemporary times.

One can see an Age of Wisdom as a purposefully realized new evolutionary stage in the human mind and consciousness. As an evolutionary direction for our collective future, an Age of Wisdom points toward self-transcendence and increasing cosmic consciousness. Further, an Age of Wisdom would provide a context for our individual personal self narratives and our individual lives. It would provide an ethical framework in which to give our lives meaning and direction. Contributing to an Age of Wisdom would provide a central “Moral Imperative” for all of humanity.

The principles of evolutionary, future-focused wisdom can be constructively applied to such present challenges and issues as: personal development; the future of education; the future of humanity and technology (the wise cyborg); love and marriage; ecological consciousness and the future of the environment; globalization; the global mega-crisis and existential threats; future psychological evolution; and even the significance and value of space travel.

Of particular significance is the theme of cosmic consciousness within an Age of Wisdom. Cosmic consciousness involves connecting the personal, the human, and the earthly (involving personal self-narratives and human/earth-centered narratives) with grand cosmic narratives—to see oneself and humanity within the context of the universe. Our past psychological evolution, as well as our future psychological evolution, can be seen as a general trajectory toward increasing cosmic consciousness (with an ever-expanding understanding in both space and time of the whole). The quest for cosmic consciousness can be found in myth, religion, philosophy, science, and visions of space exploration.

As an expression of the ongoing evolution of consciousness and the human self, our own personal lives (self-narratives) should aspire toward increasing cosmic consciousness.

Moreover, as explained earlier, evolution provides a scientifically informed, general cosmic narrative. The universe is a dynamic, creative, progressive reality, in which we are situated and participatory. Cosmic consciousness, within such a framework, involves seeing ourselves, individually and collectively, in both the short and long run, as creative expressions and purposeful facilitators of cosmic evolution.

Evolutionary enlightenment and evolutionary spirituality, as such expressions have been used in contemporary times (Cohen and Wilber), involve the key ideas of empowering the human mind to purposefully participate in cosmic evolution, to personally identify with the cosmic creative process, and to see such personal identification and contribution as a moral imperative, indeed the ultimate moral imperative. This more spiritual approach to life agrees in many ways with the evolutionary, future-focused, cosmic vision of wisdom presented in these pages--it resonates with the futurist vision of an Age of Wisdom.

In summary,

A future focused, evolutionary vision of wisdom should be the guiding light for our personal development and our future psycho-social evolution.

At a personal narrative level, we should create and define ourselves within the big cosmic picture as follows:

“Through wisdom I am flourishing within, contributing to, and purposefully guiding the flow of evolution.”

This theory of wisdom, evolution, and the future leads to a final two-part conclusion:

The psychology of the future needs to be anchored to the future of psychology.
And in turn the future of psychology needs to be anchored to the future of the cosmos.

Synthesizing these two points, heightened future consciousness or wisdom at a personal level should be informed and inspired by both future human evolution and the future of the cosmos.

First, our personal sense of the future—of those ideals and aspirations needed to flourish in our individual future—should be set in the context of possibilities, probabilities, and preferred directions for the future evolution of the human mind. The ideals for the future of the human mind should inform and direct the sense of the future in the individual.

For example, if the fundamental directionality of the human mind is increasing cosmic consciousness, then the present and personal sense of direction should be anchored to this grand psychological narrative.

Furthermore, if human history shows an ongoing and multifaceted creative synthesis of the biological and the technological, then our own personal future should aspire toward the “wise cyborg,” integrating the ideals of wisdom with technological evolution.

And as a final example, if evolutionary history shows transformation and transcendence in the saga of life, then we should see ourselves, individually and collectively, as participating in the transcendence of humanity.

Second, our ideal future psychological evolution (the future of human psychology), in turn, should be seen in the context of (as an expression of) the evolution of the cosmos. Evolving cosmic consciousness (and cosmic participation) serves the end of cosmic evolution. We are the vehicle by means of which the universe is becoming self-conscious. Hence, the life of the self and the future life of the human mind are set in the context of the life of the cosmos. This is a pivotal insight within a coming Age of

Wisdom, a pivotal insight behind the realization of a preferable future and the good life for each of us individually and humanity as a whole.

Our journey now continues into a cosmically informed exploration of the future evolution of psychology and the capacities of consciousness and mind.