

# Wisdom and Futures Studies

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## Book Review

*Wisdom, Consciousness, and the Future* by Tom Lombardo. 461 pages. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2011. ISBN13: 978-1-4628-8360-8. US\$23.99 paper.

In a world where students feel outraged to see that illustrious professors were bought by the ultra-rich tyrant of Libya and his son to ghostwrite some intellectual book and dissertation; where the bridal industrial complex is profiteering from people's search for authentic happiness; and where analysts and experts work on quick yet unwise solutions to tackle global challenges—solutions that often backfire—Lombardo reaches out and asks you to wait a moment. He invites you to do a magnificent soul-searching, thorough uncovering of your life story with the purpose of monitoring how well you live a set of ethical virtues that can connect your personal future with the future of humanity.

Lombardo, a perceptibly liberal yet spiritual thinker, is well versed in cutting edge philosophy, anthropology, psychology, and high technology, all knowledge enterprises that can be integrated under the interdisciplinary discipline of futures studies. In his view, however, one thing missing from this growing knowledge enterprise is a synthesis of Western and Eastern schools of thought. While the former focuses on science, reason, and analytical thinking, the latter highlights insight, intuition, and holistic thinking. Lombardo's goal is to strike some resonance with the readers of his book, *Wisdom, Consciousness, and the Future*, (a collection of thematically connected essays written from 2004 to 2011) and help them embark on a secular Ark which may save them from the vast inundation of fragmented and senseless information chunks, bringing them to a land of integrated, ordered wisdom also identified as heightened future consciousness.

The future in Lombardo's view is all about the possibilities ahead. He helps readers apply this model to their own lives through one important tool—story telling. However, the readers may qualify to come on board if and only if they remain committed to a set of character virtues: self-responsibility; discipline and commitment; transcendence; courage; hope and optimism; love; temperance/balance; and wisdom. These virtues are shown to have a solid link with mental health, and clearly one target audience for this book is all people who feel unfulfilled living in contemporary society.

Two main themes connecting the essays in this book are wisdom and heightened future consciousness. Using a comparative method, he demonstrates that wisdom and heightened

future consciousness are almost identical. Wisdom traditionally is defined as a deep understanding of past and present patterns of change, but according to Lombardo it should be applying broad cognitive, emotional, and evaluative capacities to future possibilities and the progression of complexity as well.

The list of Lombardo's character virtues may seem too challenging that one must wonder if there have ever been or currently are any people who can qualify to be wise. Most of Lombardo's discussion on character virtues and wisdom is about rules, but when asked, outside of his book, to identify wise living futurists, he nominated notable futurist, Wendell Bell; *Wisdom Page* creator, Copthorne MacDonald; and renown feminist and cultural critic, Riane Eisler. Clearly Lombardo feels that wisdom and heightened future consciousness are within the grasp of real people.

Although you cannot spot any reference to the works of Nietzsche, and in particular the idea of the *Übermensch*, you can easily find a resonance with the book *Thus spake Zarathustra*, where it is said that "you must overcome yourself" and "let the future and the furthest be the motive" of your present. Yet again, even though there is a great deal of resonance between his definition and discussion of values and Keeney's *Value-Focused Thinking*, you cannot see any citation to it which is an important reference in the literature.

Pantheism and extrinsic finality also serve as the warp and weft of Lombardo's mystical carpet. The "wise cyborg," a concept he extensively discusses, seems the best possible update in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century of who will qualify to be Nietzsche's *Übermensch* in the future. A cyborg, as Lombardo envisions, is a "functional synthesis of biology and technology" and a wise cyborg, guided by the ideals of wisdom, will draw his or her extraordinary and potentially limitless power from "intellectual, informational, and communicational capacities of computer technologies."

In the hot contemporary philosophical debate on the mind-body problem, Lombardo rejects both idealism and materialism. However, he is not satisfied with interactive dualism in which both consciousness and the physical world are "individually self-sufficient". Instead, the fundamental ontological truth in Lombardo's framing of the mind-body problem is "Ecological Reciprocalism." In this "new theoretical scheme of inquiry" (new, of course, for the majority of Western scholars) it is presumed that the physical universe and consciousness are interdependent realities. In other words, "each realm literally requires the other for its existence." Such a philosophy is informed by the Eastern school of thought, and in particular, the Taoist Yin-Yang, a recurring theme throughout the book. Seen in this light, on the one hand, consciousness will remain always embodied and "locally situated within the physical universe"; and on the other hand, the meaningful manifestation of the physical world will always remain a "selective differentiation relative to an embodied consciousness."

According to Lombardo, in the coming decades we will witness a new collective enlightenment which many futurists describe as a "significant jump in the collective mental functioning of humanity". As expected by many writers, contemporary challenges and evolutionary forces will push humanity to a new level of "cosmic consciousness." And for Lombardo, a core feature of this evolutionary transformation is "heightened future consciousness." If you take into account that "the future will increasingly be purposefully guided by human ideals" as Lombardo

does, then it is obvious that this is going to be a wise evolutionary journey without any final destination whatsoever.

Such a new enlightenment resonates with *The Conference of the Birds*, a collection of Persian mystical poems in a religious context that captures the idea of why and how people should connect their consciousness to each other so that they can achieve a cosmic consciousness, or a transcendent totality, called mythical Simurgh (much like the mythical Phoenix.) Given my resonance with the Persian Sufi, I would say that all spirituality is but footnotes to Attar of Nishapur.

Also, according to the Quran you cannot achieve wisdom unless you have already passed the course of ethics and character virtues, of sanctifying: “Allah did confer a great favor on the believers when He sent among them an apostle from among themselves, rehearsing unto them the Signs of Allah, sanctifying them, and instructing them in Scripture and Wisdom, while, before that, they had been in manifest error” (3:164). This emphasis certainly sounds like a central argument in Lombardo’s discussion on character virtues and academic excellence.

But today most, if not all, of religious doctrines that are widely followed among the world populations do not favor at all open reciprocal evolution. Instead they often seek dominance and repeatedly claim universality. Lombardo, in his future works, should deal adequately and explicitly with this well-known big challenge in his call for an evolutionary journey of value systems. Otherwise, given their mind-set, potential religious audience may not find his excellent arguments engaging.

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