



Abstract



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Consciousness matters: exploring the intellectual foundations of a co-creative society

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The Situation to Be Addressed: As the statement of the conference makes clear – caring human beings desperately need a hopeful and grounded understanding of the relationship of the present to the future. Or, in the words of the call for papers, we need "methodological and empirical support for action."

At least we know what does not work. First, we do not need even one more ungrounded vision of a supposedly idealistic future. We are awash in such statements. If they could save us, we should be saved by now. But we are not. Such visions have no power to increase our capacity to influence the course of history. Second, deterministic trend analysis, while illuminating, is depressing. Knowledge of what will happen without the ability to get out of the way is very much like an early diagnosis of an incurable disease – we must live everyday for decades knowing that face a deadly and unavoidable future.

The solution offered by the conference is to co-create human futures by focussing on "intergenerational collaboration and cooperation to generate futures that can lead to action in the medium-term." This strategy has some appeal. At least it avoids utopian and deterministic thinking. But this strategy begs the question of whether it is in fact sufficiently grounded to warrant hope and if so, how so? It is this question, the one on which all humanistic futures rest, that I shall explore.

My Proposed Paper & Presentation: I shall start with a brief statement of the challenge: providing an intellectually sound and satisfying account of the relationship of human consciousness to human action and human culture – an account that allows us to take seriously that consciousness matters in every sense of this phrase. The absence of such an account does not mean that human action is insignificant. However, it does mean that we cannot judge any one set of intentions and actions to be better than others, for we will not know how our actions actually shape the future. In the absence of such knowledge, meaningful strategic choice is impossible. In short, the aspirations of the conference and the WFSF rest on success with this project.

Second, I shall offer a coherent model of various levels of depth at which a culture can be understood. The model runs from the physically obvious to the ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions on which a culture rests; assumptions that are reflected and reinforced in all that the culture is and does. (See Change Gague, attached.) I will show how we can account for both the shaping of one's consciousness by the culture into which one was born and the embodiment of one's consciousness in the ongoing life of one's culture. This will allow me to show that this model can account for both change and resistance to change in human cultures.

Third, I shall offer a way of thinking about the human journey over the last 200,000 years that allows us to account for the following:

- No existing culture routinely teaches its citizens that they are co-creators of their own future and is organized to make good on this claim.
- There is some interesting evidence that some ancient tribal cultures reflected this view. But, since the evidence limited and no such culture exists today, it is of little help to us.
- The idea that social realities are social constructs is required if we are to take ourselves seriously as co-creators of the future. The emergence of this idea over the last three centuries in the West will be outlined.
- The idea is now growing among a small percentage of persons – it has not yet “gone critical” – that human beings are, in fact, co-creators of the future and always have been.
- AND no existing society, as yet, has undergone the kind of transformation that would enable its citizens to live such a life.
- THEREFORE, the juggernaut of Industrial Capitalism continues to roll on.

Fourth, I shall address the urgent question, “Is hope warranted – Hope that a society might actually emerge that is self-aware that its primary purpose is to socialize its citizens as effective agents of transforming change?” My own answer is, “Yes, but the odds are long.”

Finally, I shall offer some thoughts on what is to be done (Lenin's question) in order to foster the emergence of such a society and what progress with this project we might expect in the 21st century.