

***Age of Reflection* Interview with Tom Lombardo
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**Conducted by:
Mojtaba Mousavi
International Editor**

“*The Age of Reflection* is an Iranian magazine which covers issues related to the social sciences, culture and politics. *The Age of Reflection* is a new Iranian-based trilingual (in English, French and Persian) monthly magazine and although less than a year old has already positioned itself as a shining beacon for intellectuals and culture. The magazine with more than 12,000 circulation is read by all Iranian ambassadors and diplomats around the world as well as senior officials in Tehran.” Mojtaba Mousavi

The following interview was conducted online via email between Mojtaba Mousavi and Tom Lombardo

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Mojtaba Mousavi (MM):

We are faced with a lot of concerns in realizing the forthcoming situations of the world, and yet, our think tanks and centers for futurology cannot give a clear understanding of the future to their people. We know that, for example the future technologies influence the lifestyle, or energy and its fate have an impact on our hegemonic and geopolitical state, but we have never been able to analyze and vividly explain our role in relation to such current trends. The challenging point here is that we, as a religious state, are not willing to join the trends and situations promoting secularization, but we want to be able to deal with such trends. But we are more faced with being influenced by the global technology than being able to deal with such trends.

The Humanities: Some claim that the future without the humanities makes no sense. Nowadays the issues like medical humanities and the energy theology are significant. Some claim, however, that the humanities are experiencing the end of life and some would state that this kind of knowledge does not have the opportunity to have an impact upon the mankind's future world since the human brain will be alike in many ways due to the progress of the communications in the future.

With respect to the current trends in science, first of all, how do you see the future of the humanities considering the transition already discussed? Do the humanities play a

major role as the main disciplines of the interdisciplinary studies, or do they or even their titles change?

Tom Lombardo (TL):

If by “humanities” you mean those areas of human inquiry and consciousness which include philosophy (including ethics), literature, art, history, and religion, then such areas are indispensable for a comprehensive and holistic vision of human reality and the future. Global visions of human well being always include such features of human life and human consciousness. We should also though make a distinction between science (and scientific inquiry) and technology (which includes applications of science), and moreover, make a distinction between scientific inquiry into the physical world (physics, chemistry, biology) and its technological applications, and the psychological-social sciences, which study humans, both individually and collectively, and applications from these human-centered sciences. Again, a comprehensive and holistic understanding of human reality and its environment, from a scientific perspective, needs to include both the physical and psycho-social sciences. Hence, even at a scientific-technological level, we need to include human consciousness and human reality within our vision of both present and future. But the humanities can not be divorced or uninformed from science, either physical sciences or psycho-social sciences; science provides a progressive, advancing, and open vision into reality and the human condition, and even if science has its limitations, it stretches our understanding of the world beyond the constraints, traditions, and dogmatisms of the past. For example, our understanding of the universe has vastly expanded and deepened through science (astronomy and physics) in the last two centuries. All told, a holistic vision of humanity and preferable visions of the future of humanity can not ignore either science or the humanities, and both general perspectives need to be open and integrative with respect to each other.

MM:

Futurology (Future Studies): What requirements are the bases for futurology? What methods should we use in order to understand the future of the humanities in a developing society in which the characteristic of west-struck-ness (adoption of the Western criteria) and the mood of imitation fill the place of production and innovation?

TL:

The approach to the future I have been developing over the last two decades is the heightening of future consciousness guided toward the development of wisdom as the preferable and best approach to the future. As I would state: “We create a good future through the heightening of future consciousness, which is achieved by developing a core set of character virtues, most notably and centrally wisdom.”

There are numerous methods within “futures studies,” which tend to emphasize the cognitive-rational approach to life, but the creation of the future involves the integrative and holistic contribution of all the major dimensions of the human mind (and consciousness), including intellectual, emotional, personal, and ethical capacities. Any guidance system, whether practiced and taught by professionals, or embraced by the general population, needs to include all these psychological factors. I have identified a set of fundamental character virtues that cover “excellence” in the total holistic dimension of the human mind, and these virtues should be developed by both professionals and the general population to facilitate the good future. Wisdom and character virtues should have a “globally balanced” dimension, integrating perspectives from both East and West, and North and South. Synthesizing within the individual and society these character virtues produces wisdom, which importantly includes an ethical dimension. A viable global future should aspire toward an “Age of Wisdom,” transcending the much more narrow visions of today, which emphasize economic and technological progress above everything else. The list of character virtues, I would propose, generating heightened future consciousness and wisdom, are:

- *Self-Awareness, Self-Control, and Self-Responsibility*
- *Realistic Idealism (Belief in Value)*
- *Self-Growth (A Positive Personal Narrative)*
- *Love and Skill of Learning*
- *Love and Skill of Thinking*
- *Expansive Temporal Consciousness (Of past and future)*
- *Cosmic Consciousness (including Justice, Ecological-Global Consciousness, and an Inspiring Grand Narrative)*
- *Hope, Optimism, and Courage*
- *Love and Gratitude*
- *Tenacity, Discipline, and Deep Purpose*
- *Ethical Pragmatism (The Application of Ethics to Action)*
- *Creativity and the Adventurousome Spirit*
- *Balance & Temperance*

MM:

Future Society: We should move, in our society, towards paving the way for people to think of the future and talk about making the future society, for them to imagine the

tangible and clear elements of the various trends and situations, and at last for them to be able to perceive the available subjective images. How should we talk to people about the future? Where can we begin this process?

TL:

It is absolutely critical to both survival and more importantly “flourishing” that future consciousness is heightened (significantly so) within the general population (of all countries across the globe). Future consciousness is our most distinctive and empowering psychological capacity, and as such, the strengthening of it, generating wisdom, is of central importance to a positive future. For each individual within a society or group the most direct and immediate way forward is to address a person’s personal future, and their ongoing journey through life, and how through the heightening of future consciousness their life can improve and change. In this regard, a way to realize this goal is for a person to clarify and rewrite their “ideal future personal narrative” such that it takes the form of a “wisdom narrative.”

Similarly, for groups (inclusive of entire countries and cultures) it is important to examine (bringing to consciousness), re-evaluate, and re-write the grand narrative of the group, and then, of course, to attempt to live it.

Humans, everywhere, across the globe, have a natural psychological disposition toward story telling, and we both inform and inspire ourselves through stories (or narratives). People are motivated through stories. But as I noted above, the stories we tell ourselves should be wisdom narratives, incorporating the virtues of heightened future consciousness.

The significance of literature is apparent here; studying “stories of the future” (which includes notably “science fiction”) is a powerful way to heighten consciousness of the future (and of different possible futures, good and bad), in which the visions are placed within dramatic, narrative settings, which humans naturally resonate with.

MM:

The Future of Energy: We have been discussing the future of energy in Iran in the past few years, one branch of which is the issue of nuclear energy. Many analysts claim that the constructive elements of the geopolitical weight basically change, and such changes are totally dependent upon the power of a country in the field of energy. What will be, for example, our share in electricity generation? How far will we move away from the fossil fuel?

TL:

Although I would on first thought agree that we are moving toward a world of renewable energy resources (solar, wind, etc.) and this change is highly desirable (or preferable)

given the pollution and climate effects of using fossil fuels and the fact that energy demands at a global level just keep increasing requiring that in the long run we find a much more plentiful source of energy (for example, solar) than fossil fuels, technological innovations might still allow for some use of fossil fuels (or fossil-like fuels). But also, although any given country might desire to possess sufficient energy technologies to be able to independently supply all its energy needs without depending upon other countries, a future world of increasing interdependency and specialization might lead to certain countries providing energy needs for many other countries. Countries that have large areas of land with above average days of sunlight might become hubs of a global solar energy network.

MM:

Geopolitical Change: It seems that, with respect to the energy and geopolitical changes, the political science will have a new set of concepts and notions, and then the concepts used for the humans will essentially change. Energy has kind of civilizational impacts, and that is why now some talk about the energy civilizations and theology. We should have a different perception of the political science and civilization.

How do you predict the form of such changes? Do the energy-related changes transform the political science?

TL:

Two connected fundamental challenges that humanity faces are ethno-centrism (which includes nationalism) and anthropo-centrism; our consciousness tends toward seeing our cultures, our countries, and our species as too lopsidedly significant relative to other cultures, countries, and species/ecosystems on the earth. What we require is a more integrative (holistic) perspective that nurtures/supports diversity (both of human cultures and species/ecosystems) but without the aggressive, combative element of individualism (which includes nationalism) that has plagued humankind since the beginnings of recorded history. A dynamic balance of individualism and collectivism/communalism is needed.

In this regard, if we continue to progress technologically and human civilization continues to evolve, than our system of governance and our political system of collaboration and cooperation will need to evolve as well. There are numerous techno-scientific challenges (climate, environment, energy, communication) that require a more collaborative and integrated system of government and political management. The potential positive achievements of a more technologically and scientifically advanced human civilization require a more integrated form of human collaboration and management. (Keeping of course in mind the value of diversity, both human and more generally of all life forms.)

MM:

Collapse of Humanities: How probable is it for the humanities, either in the West or the East, to collapse? It means that it would be no longer practical, and none of the theories available for the change of the world would be no longer effective since the trends in politics, economics and the lifestyle all carry notions for which there should be organized certain plans.

TL:

Within the context of considering preferable futures, it is essential that the “humanities” does not collapse as an integral part of the guidance system for the future. Indeed, the preferable pathways into the future require that the human capacities of mind and consciousness, including art, ethics, wisdom, and enhanced modes of consciousness lead the way. Both economic and technological growth need to be guided by “wisdom.” As I have proposed, we need to increasingly evolve into “wise cyborgs,” using technology to facilitate the development of wisdom and guiding technological growth through wisdom. The same would apply to economics; at present, our economical system is not very wise (for example, generating too much waste, inequality, and materialistic obsession). The increasing role and presence of AI and robots should be seen as ways to augment and benefit our holistic psychological capacities.

MM:

The Future of Humans and Technology:

Lots of studies are carried out, nowadays, on the human and superhuman intelligence. If this technology progresses, all the current equations in the humanities will change, that is why some experts are worried about this future; worried about, for example, the fact that the intelligent robots or systems of the artificial intelligence would control future of the world. How significant shall we consider the artificial and superhuman intelligence areas if we tend to have an effective scientific power in the next decade? Will we be eliminated from the future map of the world if we do not achieve this technology? What are the dangers of the superhuman intelligence?

TL:

There is considerable and ongoing debate concerning the possibilities and limits of AI and superhuman intelligence. It is an open question at this point in time regarding whether AI will realize consciousness, personal self-identity, and a holistically rich and flexible mind (at least equal to humans). At this point, AI shows superior capacities in limited arenas of activity and expertise. But it should not be assumed that AI or conscious superhuman intelligence could not emerge; we do not scientifically (or

philosophically) yet understand how a biological brain generates consciousness; hence we can not say that machines won't be able to realize it also. Since humans have since the beginnings of recorded history been "cyborgs," functionally integrating the biological and the technological (the human is only complete with tools/instruments), then having new forms of "thinking/intelligent" technologies is only natural, given the nature of our species. Is it dangerous? As long as we guide the future evolution of intelligent machines along wise and ethical pathways, then we are doing the best we can to ensure for a positive future that includes machines as smart as or smarter than humans. This is a particular area where the value of science fiction comes into play, since science fiction literature has been thoughtfully exploring future possibilities of robots and superhuman intelligence for over a hundred years. I will though make a distinction between "pop cinematic science fiction" (the movies) and good science fiction literature, in which the former (the movies) is generally shallow and based on "fear of machines/computers" (such as The Matrix and Terminator).

MM:

The Future of Power: How will power be defined in the next one decade according to futurology?

TL:

The future of power should be guided by wisdom, heightened future consciousness, and ethics. Presently power is achieved and localized without sufficient concern for the above considerations. As desirable directions, we should: Achieving greater justice and equality (ethics), women should have potential equal power to men; long term consciousness should have equal power to short term consciousness; power should not be disproportionately localized in the rich (presently money=power); the ideals of enlightenment and wisdom as embodied in notable individuals should have equal popular power to those who excel in more shallow and juvenile areas (such as athletes and pop culture entertainers); we should rid ourselves of tyrants and royalty -- power should be much more consensual as opposed to dictatorial; and there should never be any individual group or mindset that wields power over others that goes unquestioned.

MM:

The End of the Newspaper and Book Era: The future of study rate in Iran is seriously in danger and it can be said that the cellphone applications have demolished the private life of the people. Once the books and magazines are put aside, the information transferred speedily to the users lead to the breakdown and death of their thoughts. The mobile networks in Iran endanger the academic arena in a serious manner. But it is predicted that the end of this epoch will also come true. Some claim that the Tablet and

Cellphone era will end in no time and the whole surrounding area of the humans will turn into the communicative tools.

In a country with a population of 80 million people the study rate is less than five minutes, that's why the publishers face serious threats. How do the future trends in the media arena influence us? What kind of approaches and solutions shall we find?

TL:

Concern over thoughtful literacy is a very important issue. Various studies seem to indicate that present information/communication technologies (such as smart phones) facilitate and reinforce fragmented, short-term, impatient, shallow thinking without extended, integrated, and thoughtful consciousness. Hence, your concern over "study time" and books is very valid. We can ask what values and economic interests are driving the trend toward an excessive use of technologies that do not encourage or support deep consciousness and thinking? Such devices get marketed as a means to create wealth in their producers/corporate owners, although the devices are marketed as providing for various increased benefits to the purchaser and user. Yet, technologies that presumably put us in closer touch with each other, often actually seem to create greater feelings of social isolation, and access to a "global information library" can make us less capable in both thinking skills and memory consolidation and retrieval. Books are a form of technology, as much as are smart phones and computers, and in all cases we need to ask if the tool benefits us or harms us, and through using general standards of excellence, ethics, well being, and wisdom we can make informed and thoughtful evaluations regarding the holistic benefit of various technologies, both good and bad. What is of great concern, it seems to me, is the fact that the creation of new technologies is frequently motivated more by economic greed than the betterment of humanity.