

Are We Still Evolving?

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"Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles, but misguided men."

Martin Luther King

If you start a discussion about human evolution, you are likely to end up talking about the past, about the history of evolution. And if you start a discussion about the future, you are likely to end up talking about the future of technology, or the future of society or the future of the planet. You are very unlikely to end up talking about the future of evolution or the future of the human being. In this short piece I outline why I believe that we are still evolving, that we still have a long way to go, and that there is much that we could, and should, do to shape the pace and direction of our individual and collective evolution.

Are we still evolving?

There is no *a priori* reason to suggest that we have stopped evolving. If our evolution has stopped, did it stop suddenly, in 1956, for example? In any event, how would we know? On the other hand, there are compelling signs that we are still evolving in two important respects – consciousness and intelligence – and that we still have a very long way to go. When I say consciousness, I am talking about three things. We know more, we are more awake, and we experience in new ways. When I say intelligence, I am talking about wisdom and effectiveness right across the whole spectrum of human ability.

Clearly, we are not all evolving at the same pace or in the same ways. Indeed, some of us seem stuck. But I do feel that, taken as a whole, humanity is

definitely evolving in consciousness and intelligence, and that we will eventually reach levels of consciousness and intelligence that we can barely imagine today.

The continuing evolution of consciousness

Human consciousness is evolving both collectively and individually. At the collective level, we have experienced three significant shifts in the last 100 years or so - "human race consciousness", "Nature consciousness", and "planet Earth consciousness". These are clumsy terms, I know, but please bear with me.

First, we gradually became aware of the idea of the human race as a whole, as a single entity. This awareness has taken many forms, such as the emergence of the United Nations, the concept of the human family, and in many other interesting ways. Second, we developed an awareness of Nature as a whole. This has taken the form of our interest in wildlife, threatened species, the environment, ecology, and the fact that we are all part of the web of life. Third, and thanks to pictures of Earth taken from space and to writers such as James Lovelock, many of us now see the planet itself as a single, unified entity. Some of us even think of it as an intelligent, living being - Gaia. Three things, above all, have accelerated this collective consciousness in the last 25 years – the internet, globalisation, and David Attenborough.

So, yes, many of us are more aware, more conscious, in this collective sense. At the same time, many of us are more "awake" at a personal level, more aware of ourselves, of others, and of what is happening in the world. Our individual consciousness has evolved. But there is even more, because some of us have been able to experience forms of consciousness that are just not part of the normal daily diet of modern life. I will say a few words about two forms with which I am familiar. I call them "teleconsciousness" and "paraconsciousness".

Teleconsciousness is knowing at a distance, through space or time, without any physical means. It includes basic intuition, telepathy (literally "feeling at a distance), and precognition – knowing something in the future. Although many people have had these kinds of experience, they do not happen often, and they are not regarded as part of normal life. And there is a widespread misconception

that that they are “gifts”, available only to a few. If they are gifts, then so are our eyes and hands and legs! I believe that teleconsciousness is part of our birthright, available to anyone who makes the effort to develop and use it.

Paraconsciousness (“knowing beyond”) is direct experience of the transcendental aspects of the world and ourselves, the aspects that can never be perceived by any of our five physical senses. As with teleconsciousness, I believe that the ability to perceive the transcendental aspects of the world and the human being is also available to all of us, should we choose to develop and use this faculty. But it does not come easily, because we are conditioned to believe that the physical reality is the only possible reality. However, if we developed this form of consciousness, it would change our knowledge base completely. Science, for example, would cease to be science of the physical, which it is at present, and become “science of the whole”, because it would be the whole human being looking at the whole world.

What has all this to do with our future evolution? I believe that, if some of us are able to awaken and use these forms of consciousness, this suggests that, in time, all of us will be able to. I am convinced that the evolution of our collective and individual consciousness is central to our future. Indeed, I cannot imagine a viable human future if we do not evolve in this way.

The continuing evolution of intelligence

Although some of us continue to insist that we human beings are the most intelligent species on this planet, the uncomfortable fact is that we have become the most dangerous and destructive. We kill and damage our own species with a ferocity that is unrivalled anywhere. And we are destroying the biosphere at an alarming rate. It may be true that we have the *potential* to be the most intelligent species, but we have a long way to go before this becomes a fact. Meanwhile, all other species put us to shame by the ecological, intelligent ways they live their lives.

As for human knowledge, an important part of our intelligence, it is true that we know a lot about ourselves and the universe. We have clearly come a long way.

But a little humility is in order. If we think about how far we have come in the last hundred years, for example, it should give us a sense of how far we can go in the next hundred, and the next thousand. We still have a great deal to learn and understand about ourselves and the universe. When some people tell us that we already know nearly all the important things there are to know, or that we are getting close to the “mind of God”, this simply does not ring true.

Intelligence is notoriously difficult to define, so I prefer to point to its qualities. When we meet highly intelligent people, we are usually impressed. There is something compelling about the way they look, the way they speak, and even the way they move. They tend to be economical in their use of words and their use of energy. They seem to be able to get things done without really trying. And it is reassuring to have them around, because they always know what to do when something goes wrong. We feel good when we are in their company, because they are cheerful and friendly, but also because they seem to understand us at least as much as we understand ourselves. If we were able to look inside highly intelligent people, we would see that they are acutely sensitive to the world around them. They notice a lot and miss very little. And we would see that they are masters of their feelings, and are able to tune into, and empathise with, the feelings of others. They have exceptionally good minds, which enable them to think clearly, communicate simply and effectively and see, at a deeper level, why things are the way they are and how they are likely to be in the future. They have learned to trust their intuition, and they have learned to transcend many of the conventions and beliefs that restrict human development and creativity. They are very obviously mentally and emotionally intelligent, but it goes far beyond that. *Everything* about them is intelligent. We have a sense that everything they do and say makes the world a better place. And they seem to have ascended to a higher order childhood.

I recognise that all this may sound too good to be true. It is rare that we come across the kind of people I am talking about. But there are good reasons for this. We live in an age of specialisation, with a strong emphasis on technology and on the skills and knowledge that can be used profitably in the economy. The few places that do offer a “whole-person” education are so rare that they have to

make a special point of advertising their unusual offering (see, for example www.wellingtoncollege.org.uk).

As you can see, I understand intelligence to be the whole range of human behaviour – the way we are, the way we move, the way we speak, the way we feel, the way we think, and so much more. For me, a truly intelligent person is *good*, in every sense of the word. It goes without saying that there is much that all of us could do to become *better*, in every sense of the word. When I think of the evolution of our intelligence, it is this that I have in mind. If large numbers of people worked on themselves to be more intelligent, in this fuller sense, I believe that the world would change out of all recognition.

A route map for shaping our evolution

Some of us may believe that evolution happens of its own accord, as part of the natural order of things, and that there is nothing we can do to change it. If that is true, then why do so many of us put in the time and energy to develop ourselves in one way or another? We educate and train ourselves in a huge range of knowledge and skills. We have literally millions of initiatives to make the world a better place. And many of us engage in some form of therapy or spiritual practice to nudge forward our own personal evolution. Although we may not think of it as such, many of us are already influencing the pace and direction of our own evolution and that of humanity as a whole.

It is by no means easy to prescribe a route out of the deep hole of materialism that we continue to dig for ourselves. But I can think of a few things that might help.

1. A new central purpose

There can be little doubt that the current central purpose of humanity today is material growth. For nations, this manifests as perpetual economic growth. For businesses, it manifests as ever increasing profits. And for large numbers of individuals, it manifests as having more money and things. Although economic growth has been useful in some respects – it raised the living standards of billions of people – it is well past its sell-by date, because it now brings more

problems than benefits. As Clive Hamilton points out in his book *Growth Fetish*: “Growth not only fails to make people contented; it destroys many of the things that do. Growth fosters empty consumerism, degrades the natural environment, weakens social cohesion and corrodes character.” It is clear that we urgently need a new central purpose. Imagine how different things would be if the central purpose of society was to develop people to their highest potential and to care for this planet as if it really mattered. If this was our central purpose, our whole lives would change, as would the way we work, the way we govern ourselves, and the way we relate with each other. It would be a very different world. There is important work to be done here, in developing and promoting a new central purpose.

This is no idle matter. The central purpose of any system, be it a society, a company, a health service, a tree or a galaxy, determines everything about that system, because all aspects of the system have to serve the central purpose. Indeed, the most effective way to change any system is to change its central purpose. If, for example, the main purpose of a business is to make as much profit as possible, then everything about the business will be in service to money. But if its main purpose is to provide excellent services to its customers, then it will be a very different business and attract very different people to it. If we want shape the pace and direction of our own evolution, as I believe we must, then our central purpose needs to reflect this desire explicitly.

2. Systematic work on our consciousness and intelligence

In the last 12 years or so, I have given many courses in intelligence and in consciousness, to individuals and to organisations. I have learned a lot. Above all, I confirmed to myself what I already sensed to be true, that all of us have the potential to become much more intelligent and much conscious. Just to be clear, they are not the same. Although consciousness may be the necessary precursor of intelligence, it is not the guarantor. Knowing something does not guarantee that we will act on that knowledge! I am sure many of us can recall, with some embarrassment, situations where we knew something but did not act on that knowledge. We all know about climate change, for example. But how many of us can put our hands on our hearts and say that we do nothing to cause climate

change? So, *intelligence is as intelligence does*. It has meaning only in the doing. And, for many of us, the doing can be very challenging. For most of us, being more intelligent and more conscious requires regular, systematic work on ourselves. This will not come easy, because it can be difficult to give up the habits, beliefs and behaviours of a lifetime, especially if they feel like our source of security. And it can be doubly difficult when faced with pressures from employers, and from society in general, to believe certain things and behave in certain ways. That said, change we must if we are to have any hope of a decent human future.

Interestingly, there seem to be no upper limits to intelligence and consciousness. There are practical limits, yes, such as time and laziness, but it appears to be that, the more we work on our intelligence and consciousness, the more intelligent and conscious we become. This has far-reaching implications, but that discussion will have to be for another time.

3. A liberating worldview

Do we believe that we are basically higher animals, alone in the universe, and separate from it? Do we believe we are here only because life evolved by chance on this planet? Do we believe that we do not exist after death? Do we believe that the physical reality is the only possible reality? And do we believe that the universe has no deeper meaning or higher intelligence? If we believe these things, then we are likely to give high value to material things and temporary pleasures. And it would not be surprising if we did not care much about people and the planet.

If we believe these things, then any attempt to make "progress" will end up being some variant of materialism. It could "fair materialism" (social justice, equality, human rights etc.) It could be "ecological materialism" (economic growth as usual, but with a weather eye on the environment). Or it could be the latest fashion, "happy materialism" (e.g. the Happiness Project www.happiness-project.com) where we are all cheerful on the surface, but not much is changing at a deeper level.

Alternatively, do we believe that we are much more than higher animals, that we are not alone in the universe, and that we are intimately connected to it? Do we believe that we are here for reasons that have nothing to do with chance? Do we believe that we continue to exist in some form after death? Do we believe that the physical reality is just part of a much greater reality that we have yet to experience? And do we believe that the universe is packed with deeper meaning and higher intelligence? If we believe all, or most, of these things, then our values and behaviour would reflect this, and we would be more likely to care for each other and the planet. We would also be more likely to be engaged in some kind of conscious evolution.

Afterword

It is not easy to do justice to this topic in a few words. I have, for example, said nothing about the evolution of the human body. I will note, however, that while many of us seem finer, more beautiful, large numbers of us are clinically obese. Nor have I mentioned the evolution of “human capacity”, which interests me greatly. I believe that, as we continue to evolve, especially in unusual forms of consciousness, we will eventually develop the capacity to do some things that we can do now only with the aid of technology. But that will have to be another discussion.

If I have stimulated you to think about the future of human evolution, yours and society’s, and to wonder how you might influence this, then my purpose has been served.

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