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INTRODUCTION

We live in an era of unprecedented change. Scientific progress is accelerating, and we are at an important tipping point—one where it is no longer possible for any single person to have a grasp of all the latest developments in any major industry.

Some years ago, we passed another important threshold: We established that we now regularly used technology that no single human being could create within a single lifetime. For example, a single human could not create a modern car from scratch. This theory may seem counter-intuitive—surely a person could assemble a car in a lifetime. But assembly is not the challenge; creating the component parts of a modern car require creating complex technologies; which, in turn, require other complex technologies. Building the machinery, extracting the materials from the environment, turning those into useful components—and then building them into a working vehicle—are now outside the realms of a single human's lifetime effort.

We drive cars because we collaborate. Collective action produces the most dramatic changes and productivity—and allows our species to transcend our situation.

Every major outcome in the history of our species has been the product of cooperation—in fact, in a sense, all human endeavor is collaborative. At birth, we are not able to survive without nurturing, feeding and protecting. We have a relatively long period of parented development; and we now know with some certainty, that feelings of social acceptance and integration dramatically impact, not only our psychological well-being, but also our biological health.

This well-established fact is becoming increasingly apparent, as we move toward a fully connected, interdependent world—one in which so many individuals feel increasingly excluded and alienated. It is a non-trivial challenge to track and adhere to the many layers of accepted and validated modern social norms. This complexity, and the absence of clear guidelines, or even trusted guides, makes being human not just challenging—but in social terms—a kind of question one cannot understand. It is very hard to answer a question one does not understand. Our profound compulsion is to try, though; and this schism between the people setting the social trends—and those who are trying to understand them—is crippling for the human psyche.

A simplified analysis should resolve this challenge. Being socially well adjusted is not important because people are too soft—it is literally life and death—as the cases of depression and suicide increase; and desperate individuals, who no longer feel they can communicate, now regularly perpetrate violent acts.

But take heart—there is hope! We have every reason to be optimistic about the future of these worrying trends. As we will see in the emerging trends described in this book, almost nothing occurs in a social or technological vacuum. We are interconnected at multiple levels, and the many concurrent channels of communication we use every day are good examples.

Awareness is the first major step toward intentional change. The impact of biofeedback technologies, increasingly emotionally intelligent AI, and a deeper understanding of the human brain's mechanisms, are helping to develop a spectacularly detailed understanding of our own human nature.

We are seeing an expansion of the ideals of individual and collective freedoms. In fact, the feeling of control is probably the highest priority for the human brain—certainly more important than obtaining pleasures, or avoiding pain. The feeling of freedom with clarity, is an extraordinary form of control. Computer games creators, and the most successful social networking platforms, have understood it for a long time.

While our deepening understanding of human nature has led to constructive tools to help ameliorate emotional pain, improve education, and enhance teamwork, it has become abundantly clear that human beings are all-too-easily manipulated. We infer too much from too little; and we have a tendency to confuse subjective truth with objective truth.

Thinking well is hard work. It requires energy, and we are evolved enough to minimize energy use at every level of our biology. With the coming AI virtual assistants, which robotic successors will gradually replace, the need to think about logistics and details will reduce significantly. Perhaps we will re-dedicate our energies to personal growth. Will transcendence take center stage, in our efforts to self-improve? Or will we become indolent and disengaged?

Today, we get to choose. Importantly, those of us working on the framework for modern living have an opportunity to help. The technologies, social constructs, socio-political environment, and economic models; and the spiritual, philosophical, educational, environmental and nutritional structures that we grow into—on our journey from childhood to adulthood—are often thrust upon people. They are rarely chosen. People's thinking is shaped before they are old

enough to think independently, and the opportunity to influence that nurturing part of the nature/nurture balance brings a great deal of responsibility, as any kindergarten teacher will attest.

Just as our perception of beauty changes from age to age, and culture to culture, the way we manifest our sense of right and wrong evolves. The capacity to recognize our own behavior, and moderate it in response to our environment, may be the only measure of sanity we have.

Judging by our slow response to challenges in our ecological environment, we have work to do in this area. With so much debate taking place about whether climate change is manmade or not—perhaps we sometimes forget the more important and pressing question: Can we do anything about it?

How, in our ocean of information and understanding, can we begin to forecast trends that will impact our lives in 10 years? Which trends should we lean into, and which ought we guard against?

This book examines some of the trends that will make an impact on several important facets of our lives in the next 10 years. The list is so long, it would be impractical to explore them all in a single book. To me, the themes herein seem the most compelling and worthy of attention.

The examples, and the perspectives offered here, are unashamedly human-centric. After all, we are the ones who will have these experiences, and who have the privilege of choosing our own futures.

TO BE HUMAN WILL NOT CHANGE

Among the wildly transformative changes coming in the next 10 years and beyond, one thing is unlikely to change much at all: human nature. We remain an extraordinarily adaptable species—not just in our emotional and intellectual capacity for pattern recognition and mastery, but even in our biology. We can adapt to new environments, food sources and physical work incredibly quickly.

Each and every new technology that emerges will succeed, only if it serves some fundamental human need. Food, shelter, clothing, education, and so on, are obvious examples. But less obvious examples are inherent, too—human beings need feelings of connection, purpose and self-worth.

As our AI assistants become more nuanced, they may turn out to be very helpful at enabling us to fulfill our potential as individuals—and to better co-habit and engage with other people.

While the current iteration of social media technologies tends to alienate people, genuinely trustworthy AI virtual assistants may help us fulfill our natural needs. In doing so, they may have a bigger impact than we currently anticipate, in enabling us to achieve some of our highest goals.

As Noam Chomsky pointed out, every major achievement in the history of our species has been the product of collaboration. Technology cannot change our fundamental needs, though it does have the power to distort our expressions.

Ultimately, everybody loves to be loved. Everybody also loves to give love.