

# The New Image of Man

By O. W. Markley

MENLO PARK, Calif.—It is now becoming clear that Western society lacks the conceptual tools needed to solve its most pressing problems. Environmental pollution, scarcity of energy and other resources and inflation-with-recession are among the problems involving interconnected systems that conventional approaches cannot solve.

When emerging crises first beset a society, there are calls to do a better job of following the ways of tradition. Large-scale tinkering with the system almost always follows. If this does not work, breakthroughs in basic approaches must next be sought. But making such breakthroughs inevitably involves a re-examination, and often a restructuring, of fundamental assumptions and mental maps that underlie conventional wisdom.

A number of premises taken for granted during the industrial era now need to be replaced. Three that appear particularly obsolete are as follows:

- Human progress is synonymous with economic growth and increasing consumption—a notion now challenged by shortages of various key resources and increased pollution.

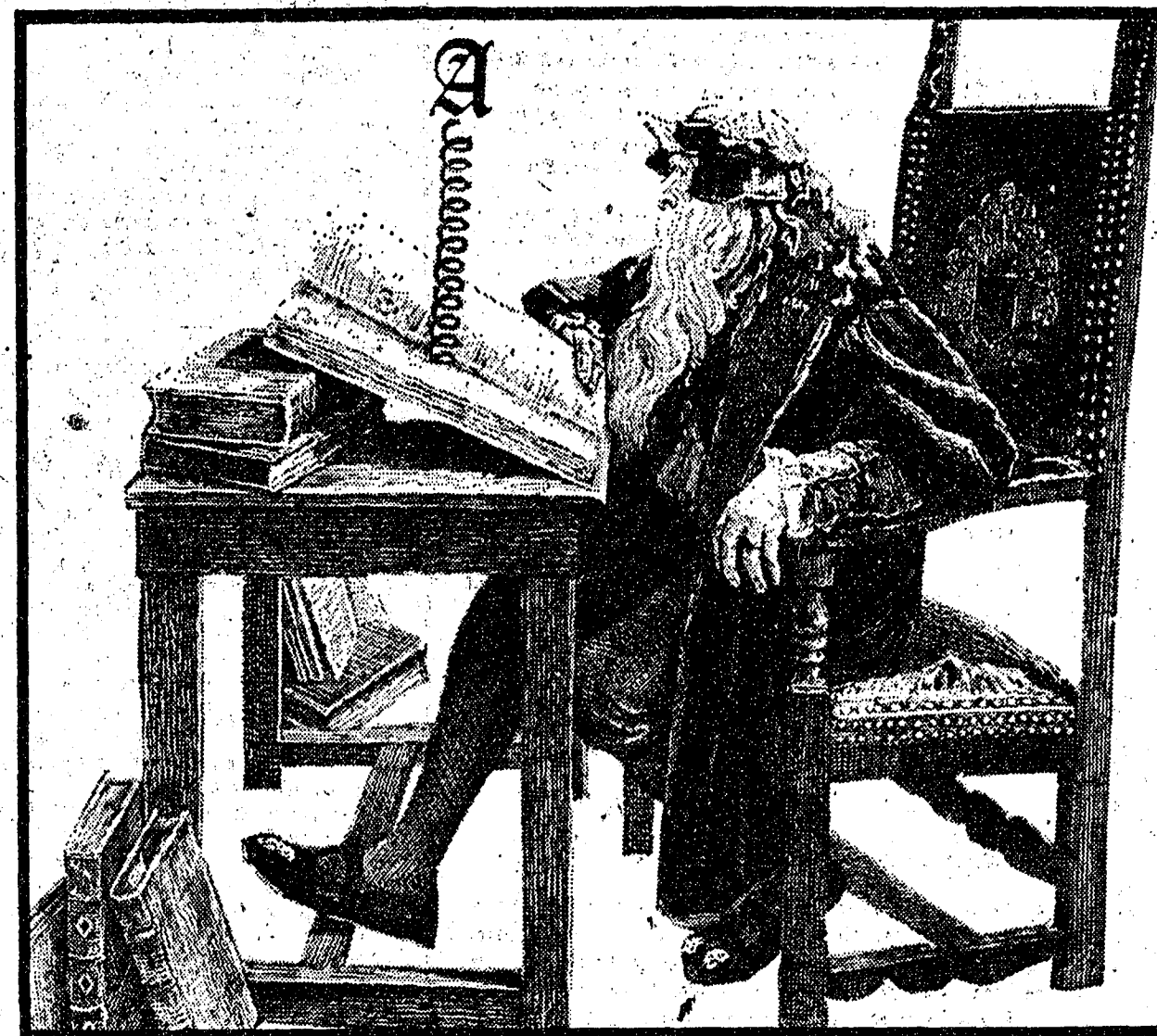
- Mankind is conceptually separated from nature and that it is the human destiny to conquer and exploit nature—an attitude at distinct variance with modern understandings of ecology.

- Economic efficiency, specialization and scientific reductionism are the most trustworthy approaches to fulfillment of human goals—concepts that have raised our living standards but are dehumanizing our way of life.

Those beliefs were adequate for dealing with basic survival concerns, but they cannot meet present needs.

If we try to endure the coming decades with industrial-era images and premises, effective governance may be within reach only at the price of what has been called "friendly fascism—a managed society ruled by a faceless and widely dispersed, complex of warfare-welfare-industrial-communications-police bureaucracies with a technocratic ideology," as one policy analyst put it. We have already begun to move into such a future.

Not so clearly under way, but nevertheless becoming visible, are some images and premises that contrast



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## Becoming an 'explicitly experimenting society,' encouraging many new institutions and life-styles

sharply with industrial-era concepts. They form an evolutionary vision in which the goals of growth in personal and collective wisdom would replace those of ever-increasing consumption and exploitation.

Though not fully shaped as yet, this new image of man tends to do the following:

- Entail an ecological ethic, emphasizing the total community of life as well as the oneness of the human race.

- Involve a self-realization ethic, placing the highest value on development of the individual.

- Convey a holistic sense-of-perspective of life.

- Balance and coordinate satisfac-

tions along many dimensions, rather than overemphasizing those associated with status and consumption.

- Be experimental and open-ended, rather than ideologically dogmatic.

The pursuit of this vision would require that a central function of all social institutions becomes that of human development and self-regulation, rather than of fostering bureaucratic efficiency and centralized influence.

But is it feasible? A variety of indicators would suggest so. Particularly encouraging are findings from two emerging sciences, one dealing with consciousness, the other with general systems.

Throughout history, mankind has

known of various ways to attain higher levels of human awareness, though most either have seemed unreliable or have taken years to master. Consciousness-researchers are now learning how to combine new tools (biofeedback training, learning theory) with such older techniques as meditation and autosuggestion. Their results suggest that we can unlock more rapidly the vast untapped potentials of the human mind, especially its powers of healing and creativity.

Mankind has also known that the physical, biological and human systems making up our reality are somehow organized and sustained. The science of general systems is now learning that similar patterns and

principles govern the processes of ecology, of economics, and of the human body and mind. These findings suggest that higher-order systems tend to evolve from lower-order ones, and that no single mode of governance can insure system stability through time.

More significant than the specific research findings, however, is the new emphasis itself that denies none of the conclusions of science in its contemporary form but rather expands its boundaries. As though in direct response to the present-day prophets of gloom and doom, it offers both a sound problem-solving approach and a new horizon for growth.

But to pursue this vision, we would have to become an explicitly experimenting society, one that would encourage a variety of new institutions and life-styles. Wrong choices would need to be acknowledged as necessary data for personal and societal management rather than as evidences of failure, to be hidden if possible.

Many of these ideas and ideals are not new. What is new is that we may soon have to take them seriously. If the American experiment with democracy is to survive, the United States may soon have to involve itself in an institutional transformation as profound in its consequences as the Industrial Revolution, and simultaneously a conceptual revolution as shaking as that created by objective science.

The prospect of such an evolutionary transformation is both challenging and frightening, for history gives us little hope of avoiding social disruption during times of either transformation or of unsolved crises. Either way, our nation faces a wrenching series of transitions as it enters its third century.

The next decade will be difficult for all of us, not only because of the problems it will bring but because of the controversies that are likely to surround proposed solutions to these problems. We cannot avoid the crises that face and await us, but by understanding the nature of our times we may do a better job of dealing with them.

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