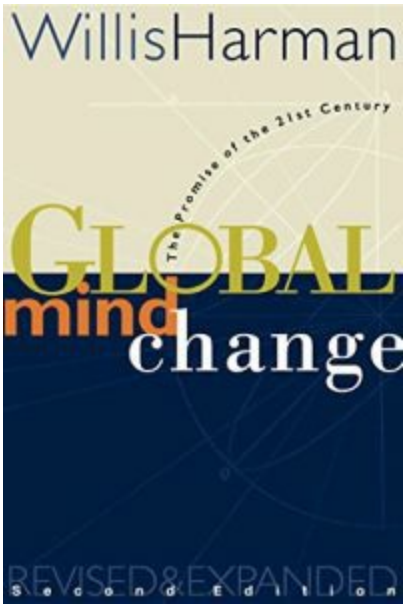

Book Global Mind Change

The Promise of the 21st Century

Willis Harman
Berrett-Koehler, 1998

Recommendation

From Galileo to the Wright Brothers, mankind's most significant scientific discoveries have come from thinkers who challenged the assumptions of the day, often earning the scorn – or worse – of their contemporaries. Esteemed futurist Willis Harman reminds us of this fact early and often in the second edition of *Global Mind Change*, which is enhanced by a foreword by acclaimed author Hazel Henderson, but otherwise maintains the original's insights and flaws. In terms of insight, Harman speaks eloquently about the changes in human perspective that accompanied – and, he says, ultimately caused – such radical shifts as the fall of the Roman Empire and the demise of slavery in the United States. He extends this analysis to modern scientific thought, which he identifies as a societal foundation currently in the first stages of a paradigm shift in which many concepts now viewed as "New Age" will gain acceptance. *BooksInShort* recommends this book to any armchair futurist but urges all readers to bear in mind one caveat: For every free thinker who upended science with brilliant insight, there have been untold thousands of quacks, madmen and charlatans.

Take-Aways

- One of the biggest shifts in history is occurring now.
- Western society's belief structure is changing.
- A mind change precedes physical changes.
- Paradigm shifts such as this one are difficult because people fear change.
- Social disruption accompanies all such changes in history.
- The 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s are most critical decades in the current paradigm shift.
- This global mind change will cause science to be more open-minded, whether it wants to or not, just as such paradigm shifts have in the past.
- Science will begin to embrace the power of the unconscious mind, alternate ways of knowing and intuition.
- The dogma vs. dogma wars both inside and outside science will have to cease because societies can no longer bear their destructive toll.
- Worldwide systemic change will include environmental, cultural, political, economic and technological challenges.

Summary

Changing the World

The power of a change of mind is far greater than any economic, military or political power, because when people change their images of reality, they automatically change the world. The belief structure of western society is changing now, in one of the most astounding cognitive shifts in history. This kind of global mind change has occurred before, during the transition from the Roman Empire to Medieval Europe, the transition from the Middle Ages to modern times, the establishment of democratic governments in England and America, and during the end of slavery.

These paradigms shifts, as such changes are called, are not easy to navigate, because people feel threatened by impending change, even changes that are clearly for the better. The idea that familiar truths might be replaced by new beliefs is particularly unsettling, so people fight back. But today, change itself has become a way of life.

> "Perhaps the only limits to the human mind are those we believe in."

Sociological and historical research shows that during revolutionary changes, social disruptions increase, including violent crime, terrorism, mental illness, religious cultism and other responses, all symptoms of an underlying anxiety about the unconscious threat of change. These signs are quite visible today and are likely to intensify before they normalize.

> "Societal change implies individual change, and it is that which brings on the sharpest anxiety."

Societal change implies personal, individual change, and that brings on the most anxiety. The 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s are particularly critical years in the current paradigm shift. When dealing with change, the challenge is to avoid resisting it and to avoid instigating it prematurely. If the members of society can understand the nature and necessity of the change, then society can undergo that change with mutual cooperation and caring, with as little misery as possible. This change is historical growth. During such uncertain times, communication is essential. Promoting dialogue and contributing to understanding these changes will go a long way to smoothing out the transition. Evidence is clear that society is in the midst of a structural transition, but no one knows yet how major that structural change will be. The components of this global mind change include:

- An alteration in the way people interpret science.
- A drastic modification of the concepts of healthcare, education, business and finance.
- A delegitimization of war.
- A total rethinking of the means of achieving national and global security.

Science: Transformations

In Transformations of Man, published in 1956, Lewis Mumford wrote, "Every transformation has rested on a new metaphysical and ideological base; or rather, upon deeper stirrings and intuitions whose rationalized expression takes the form of a new picture of the cosmos and the nature of man."

Historically, new scientific ideas and theories have never been embraced at first. Instead, they've been viewed as downright crazy or as threats to the status quo and to the power and egos of fellow scientists, thinkers and leaders in the political, cultural and religious realms. Some of these new ideas have resulted, ultimately, in a successful challenge to an entire system of authority, requiring complete change in the philosophical conception of the universe. In previous centuries, such change has literally been considered heresy. But, ultimately, these "scientific heresies" have won out. Looking back, history now sees them as significant, positive, evolutionary steps in scientific and philosophical understanding.

> "The philosophy of science is about as useful to scientists as ornithology is to birds." [Anonymous]

Every society has basic assumptions about who we are, what kind of universe we are in and what is ultimately important to us. These are unquestionably accepted as given, obvious and true. When these assumptions are challenged, the paradigm shift begins. While

open-mindedness and objectivity are necessary for growth and further scientific understanding, unconscious protectiveness may cause behavior to be otherwise. Those who oppose change may include scientists, who psychologically can't afford to see conflicting evidence. Even more powerfully, societal opposition stems from the issue of being objective in the face of the unconscious assumptions shared by one's entire culture or scientific subculture.

> "Throughout history, the really fundamental changes in societies have come about not from dictates of governments and the results of battles, but through vast numbers of people changing their minds - sometimes only a little bit."

History is filled with examples of such behavior, but what about more recent responses? In one example, scientists who take seriously persistent reports about unidentified flying objects (UFOs) have been harassed and ridiculed, just as were those who dared to suggest centuries ago that the universe did not revolve around the Earth. The basic argument against taking UFOs seriously seems to be that it would be extremely difficult to account for such phenomena within accepted cosmological frameworks, hence the thousands of investigated phenomena must not have occurred. The photos must have been faked and the corroborating data must be part of a deceptive conspiracy of lunatics. Most scientists still find it unsettling to consider that perhaps the problem actually lies with the "accepted cosmological framework." That would require embracing considerable change and objectivity, and being open to exploring ideas outside today's limiting framework. Yet, that is the lynchpin of all new discoveries.

The little-understood processes and powers of creativity, unconscious knowing and intuition lead today's scientific paradigm shift. For instance, medicine is just beginning to accept the power of the mind to affect the body, though that is far from being integrated into medical practice or research. As the paradigm shift continues, so will such integration.

Legitimizing the Transpersonal

Unlike previous societies in history, modern society teaches a fear of death. That fear, in turn, underlies many other modern fears and permeates society today, disguised in a multitude of ways in which we seek "security."

> "Most of us are hesitant to fancy that we might be living through one of the most fundamental shifts in the history of Western civilization. There is a certain reluctance to appear arrogant about our own times: Doesn't every generation think it is living in a unique historical period?"

The perennial wisdom of the world's spiritual traditions, however, has always asserted quite another view - that the death of the physical body is merely a prelude to something else. Many serious attempts have been made to explore the concept of life after physical death, and the evidence disturbs both scientists and religionists because it doesn't conform to either group's preconceptions. But, when that evidence is explored with humility and an open mind, it seems to point to something quite different from the prevailing worldview.

> "However we view it, the present-day world situation is hazardous for civilization."

Today, scientists object to the idea of personhood after death - to disembodied intelligence - because they can't imagine that consciousness and memory can exist without a physical brain. But science in its present form is not in a position to deny that possibility, because the current "rules of evidence" of Western science omit considering consciousness as a causal reality. The way current science understands causality does not include anything resembling a self or a personality, complete with reason, will and a valid sense of value, "either before or after death." This is a fundamental flaw in current scientific reasoning. Keep in mind that science resisted accepting the unconscious mind a full half-century after it became widely accepted as a basis for psychoanalysis and other psychotherapies.

Science can be slow. After all, science has a long history of rejecting anything that doesn't fit its current theories. Evolving out of restricted current theories takes many, many years (often at the expense of scientific reputation). Those difficult steps have always been essential to the furthering of scientific understanding, no matter how long they take and how much resistance must be overcome. Current theories are not absolutes. They are just a part of the picture, and often offer a completely untrue assessment. Remember that experts decreed for centuries that man could not find a way to fly. In the 20th century, humans did indeed fly, first in airplanes below and then above the clouds, and then in spacecrafts to the moon.

> "Attention is more important than it may first appear to be, for how I attend will affect what I perceive, and what I

perceive will affect how I interpret my experience."

One of today's paradigm shifts involves taking a holistic view rather than a reductionist view. The holistic view looks at the big picture, while the reductionist view looks at tiny parts. The holistic view incorporates the whole and its parts, while the reductionist view seeks to understand things by merely their parts.

> "We 'know' in the unconscious mind much that is not ordinarily accessible to the conscious mind. This unconscious 'knowing' is a far more pervasive aspect of experience than is ordinarily taken into account."

Scientific inquiry is a dynamic cultural process that changes as it proceeds. It changes because it accumulates more knowledge and better theories, and because paradigms shift, but primarily it changes by reassessing the metaphysical assumptions that have guided it so far, a reassessment conducted in the light of a changed historical and evolutionary context.

Modern society gives enormous prestige and power to science, its official knowledge system. No other knowledge system - from philosophy to theology - is in a comparable position. Thus it is critically important - to an unparalleled degree - that our science is adequate. People cannot create a well-working society based on knowledge that's fundamentally inadequate, seriously incomplete and mistaken in basic assumptions. Yet, that is exactly what the modern world has been trying to do.

> "Unconsciously we 'know' how to operate this remarkable organism called the physical body. We know how to produce peptic ulcers or alleviate them; to produce migraine headaches or be relieved of pain; to heal wounds and restore damaged tissue, stopping with appropriate quantity."

Given that western science is an artifact of western society, the primary impetus for a fundamental change in science's underlying assumptions will not come from scientists, but from the surrounding culture. Such a force may be gathering as indicated by evidence accumulated over the past quarter century.

> "It is impossible to create a well-working society on a knowledge base that is fundamentally inadequate, seriously incomplete and mistaken in basic assumptions."

The cost of past "dogma-versus-dogma" conflicts, both within and outside science, has been too high. Societies can no longer afford it. The modern world's most urgent need is to deal with the taboo issues in science. This is preferable to the continued conflict over evolution, metaphysics, holism vs. reductionism, science vs. religion, and so on.

The World System Change

Four challenges present themselves in the midst of worldwide systemic change:

1. The challenge of environmental sustainability - Today's social and economic order isn't sustainable, in terms of the Earth's ecology and life-support systems.
2. The equity and justice challenge - Power concentrates. Those who have economic, technological, and political power are always in the best position to gain more power. Without some kind of effective countervailing force, democratic tendencies are thwarted.
3. Increasing marginalization of people and cultures - The world is pushed toward Western industrial culture and a growing segment of the world's population is considered superfluous to the needs of the global economy.
4. The worldview challenge - At a basic level, the worldview of the most powerful institutions, which are highly influenced by science, is increasingly challenged as being flawed, misleading and destructive of humane values and meanings.

Around the world, society is currently in a transition period. The old order shows signs of decline. The shape of the new society is not yet clear, but elements of it can already be seen - entrepreneurial enterprises, new forms of community, alternative economies and other social innovations uphold the more humane values of the new paradigm.

About the Author

Willis Harman (1918-1997) remains widely recognized as a practical visionary. He was the president of the Institute of Noetic

Sciences until his death, and for 16 years was senior social scientist at SRI International, a global futuristic think-tank. He was also emeritus professor of Engineering-Economic Systems at Stanford University, and a member of the Board of Regents of the University of California. His books include *An Incomplete Guide to the Future*, *Changing Images of Man*, *Higher Creativity*, *Paths to Peace*, *New Metaphysical Foundations of Science* and *Biology Revisited*.