

GLOBAL MIND CHANGES with WILLIS HARMAN, Ph.D.



JEFFREY MISHLOVE, Ph.D.: Good evening. Our topic tonight is the psychological changes that we've all been experiencing in a global sense around us -- or as my guest, Dr. Willis Harman, would say, global mind changes. Dr. Harman is the president of the Institute of Noetic Sciences in Sausalito. He's also a member of the Board of Regents of the University of California, a professor of engineering at Stanford University, and the author of several books including *An Incomplete Guide to the Future* and *Higher Creativity*. Willis, welcome.

WILLIS HARMAN, Ph.D.: Thank you very much.

MISHLOVE: It's a pleasure to have you here. You're one of the people who has been thinking about the global changes that have been going on in our culture in the largest sense, and you know, I think when many people think about the large-scale changes, it's very frightening to them. They think about war, pollution. How do you view the large-scale changes?

HARMAN: Well, maybe we should think about war and pollution.

MISHLOVE: You're looking at another dimension.

HARMAN: You remind me of the fact that twenty years ago I moved from Stanford University over to SRI International -- Stanford Research Institute at the time -- to start a group of futurists looking at the changes that were taking place in the world, to help corporations and government agencies with their planning. After we'd been doing this for a couple of years, one of my staff came to me and said he had to resign because he couldn't stand it to

come in day after day and look at the future. So I guess maybe there's something behind your reaction. How do I see it? I see us going through a very profound change, more profound than we find it easy to recognize. What's at stake, I think, is not whether we will make the change or not, but whether we'll make it smoothly or whether we'll fragment into religious wars and the other kinds of things that have happened to societies in the past when they changed like this.

MISHLOVE: In other words, change is inevitable; our only choice is whether we're going to do it joyfully or painfully.

HARMAN: We've been pregnant a long time, and so it's a question of what kind of a birth.

MISHLOVE: What are the large trends that interest you the most?

HARMAN: Well, I don't know whether it's a matter of interest. There are certain trends that come to my attention because they have a good deal to do with the fact that this change is imminent. Some of them are trends that can't continue -- I mean, like the trend toward greater and greater armaments, more and more countries armed to the teeth. Or there are certain economic trends that I think can't continue, and there are certain environmental trends that can't continue. So that's pushing us toward the necessity of a change. On the other hand there are changes taking place in the way that we look at ourselves and our relationship to the universe and our relationship to our knowledge system. There's a new positive vision emerging, so that's one of the trends that is important too.

MISHLOVE: You headed a team at SRI International that wrote a very influential report called Changing Images of Man, in which you looked at the idea that human beings are beginning to conceive of ourselves in ways that are new.

HARMAN: That's true. That was almost fifteen years ago, and that was a very risky thing for the Kettering Foundation to do at the time,

or at least they viewed it that way -- to raise this question: is something happening that is so fundamental that you could say that the basic image of human beings is shifting from what it had been to something new? This was in the early seventies, and we came up with the conclusion that yes, there was a lot of evidence that that was happening.

MISHLOVE: The interesting thing for me, in looking at that report -- and perhaps I'm a bit unusual in having a background in parapsychology -- I was aware of my current image; I wasn't so much aware of what the image of man had been that was so different. Where do you see us going ultimately?

HARMAN: You know, that's not a question you answer in twenty words or less. Where I see us going is first of all, more and more recognition of the trends that really can't continue -- more widespread, sober recognition of that; but at the same time, more recognition that we have just been limiting ourselves, that we've got potentialities we haven't been using.

MISHLOVE: You mean we have the inner resources to cope with the problems in spite of their enormous magnitude?

HARMAN: You know, one of the analogies that's very important to me is the Alcoholics Anonymous twelve steps. The first two steps are recognized by everybody to be the most difficult, and the first one is, "We came to recognize that we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable." Everybody resists recognizing that their lives have become unmanageable, and we as a society resist recognizing that society has become unmanageable. The second step is, "We came to see that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." In other words, our own inner resources, properly recognized and used, could restore us to sanity, and sanity is the key word. That is, the issue on the planet is not the environment or the nuclear weapons or any of the other things we hear about. The issue is sanity.

MISHLOVE: So we're moving towards a higher level, perhaps, or at least potentially a psychological integration.

HARMAN: I think so. That is, we have had a set of assumptions that really served extremely well -- brought us technology until there's hardly anything you can imagine wanting to do that you couldn't do if you put in enough resources, even Star Wars. But now the question is, what's really worth doing? And we're very confused about values and meanings, and those issues science doesn't shed any light on, and so we have this ever-growing ability to technologically accomplish almost any goal we set our minds to, and an ever-growing confusion about where it is we're really trying to go. I recognize this going to Washington. I used to go to Washington -- in search of research contracts was the main reason I went -- and there was a sense that there was a plan, we were aiming at something; you knew where we were headed. When you talk to people in Washington these days, they're hoping we'll get through the next budget cycle, or that whatever it is that's likely to happen won't happen on their watch, and we'll make it through to the next election. There is no goal out there. There's no picture of a viable global future that everybody is shaping their policy by.

MISHLOVE: The New Frontier or the Great Society -- we don't have anything comparable today. But at the inner level, you've pointed out in your own reports and in your work that there are things that are happening, that people are recognizing values that are coming more at a grass-roots level.

HARMAN: I think this is a time to be really upbeat, if you see what's going on. I was a little depressed fifteen years ago, when we could see these problems coming, and you'd go around like a modern Paul Revere, shouting, "The problems are coming! The problems are coming!" Nobody wanted to hear that. Now I don't have to try to convince anybody in the world of business or finance or government that problems are coming. They can see them. Now the question is, is there something we can do?

MISHLOVE: So you're going around pointing to solutions now.

HARMAN: Well, at least to the change that might make the problems solvable.

MISHLOVE: I think it would be very interesting, Willis, considering your current stature on the Board of Regents and with the Institute of Noetic Sciences, to talk a little bit about two things. I'm sure our viewers want to know what in the world noetic sciences means, and what the Institute of Noetic Sciences is. But also what about your journey, starting out as a professor of engineering at Stanford University for twenty years, and then certainly one of the most eminent futurists in the world for twenty years in your work. And now you're doing this funny thing called noetics. What kind of a journey has that been for you?

HARMAN: Well, let me answer the questions in reverse order. Thirty-two years ago I had an upending experience in a summer seminar that started it all off. Most people have some sort of story like that; they began to see that something needed to change in their own lives. Well, then I floundered around a lot. I looked into all sorts of corners. Did the psychologists know anything? Did the group therapists know something? Who knows something that's valuable with regard to this personal journey? But then I began to get interested in the idea that some of the systems analysis tools we had in engineering could be applied to social problems, and so that was the occasion for moving over to Stanford Research Institute to try that out.

MISHLOVE: To be a kind of so-called social engineer?

HARMAN: Well, I don't like that term, and I don't think that was really it. It was focused on the future, focused on charting the alternative paths to the future so that we would be in a better position to choose one.

MISHLOVE: This work was widely read by corporations and various think tanks and universities.

HARMAN: I don't think so. I don't think it was even widely read by the agencies in government that gave us the first contracts. On the other hand, our reports got on the Xerox circuit, and they began to be talked about.

MISHLOVE: More at a grass-roots level.

HARMAN: Yes, even grass-roots bureaucrats. But as time went on, I got more and more convinced of something that really twenty years ago was a pretty preposterous story, and that was that we're going through a kind of mind change, especially in industrial society, but really all around the globe; it just takes different forms in the Third World countries. We're going through a kind of mind change that is as fundamental as the scientific revolution was, but it has more to do with the reassessment of values and meanings, whereas the scientific revolution had more to do with how do you find out knowledge and apply it to technology. And so as I became more and more convinced of that, I was softened up for what happened next, which was that Edgar Mitchell came by and said, "I set up this Institute of Noetic Sciences five years ago." He explained to me that the word noetic comes from the Greek word nous, and it relates -- originally it had two meanings, one more to the intellectual, rational, analytical side of the mind, the other one to the intuitive side. It was used, for example, by William James in *Varieties of Religious Experience* to connote the intuitive, the deep intuition, the deep mystical side of self.

MISHLOVE: The intuitive, religious experience.

HARMAN: Yes. And so that was really where Edgar Mitchell picked it up. He had to have a name, and that seemed like a good one that you couldn't shoot at too much because you didn't really know what it meant. But the function of this organization was to foster in various ways the development of a kind of missing area of science --

the exploration of our own minds, especially with the emphasis on the subjective experience.

MISHLOVE: Which is new, because in a sense much of science had thrown out subjective experience, the human mind as being even valuable for scientific inquiry.

HARMAN: And thereby hangs a tale. Yes, that's true.

MISHLOVE: The very tool of inquiry itself was ignored.

HARMAN: So it was an interesting experience for me to realize that I had all sorts of reasons for saying no, that I really had a pretty good position at SRI, and it was probably smarter for me to stay there. But I ended up saying that I really couldn't do otherwise; I was just pulled to this particular challenge. And so the Institute of Noetic Sciences, not because of me but because of changing times, went from a few hundred members to about twelve thousand now, and we have an annual budget that's approaching a million dollars a year. And yet we're supported entirely by gifts. We have hardly any contracts that ever come up; it's mostly gifts from foundations and from individuals.

MISHLOVE: And the thrust of this Institute, then, is to look at the role of the mind in science and in nature?

HARMAN: To look at the role of the mind in human life -- through science, but through a science that has expanded its methodology in whatever ways may be appropriate to that.

MISHLOVE: Maybe you could just summarize some of the areas that the Institute has been involved in.

HARMAN: Well, one whole cluster of them have to do with the role of the mind in healing -- first of all, the role of the mind in creating illness. It's a pretty remarkable capability that I have, that if I set my mind a certain way I can create stomach ulcers, or cardiovascular

disease, or something else. But the flip side of that, of course, is that I can create my own healing, and as a matter of fact that's the only kind of healing that ever takes place. Now, you may use various sorts of placebos to help bring it about, but we ultimately decide to heal ourselves if we heal. So there are all sorts of specific ways of trying to look at that -- for example, the role of positive emotions in healing, as contrasted with the role of negative emotions in illness. There are certain things you can learn from studies of multiple personalities. They're very fascinating special cases, because whereas you ordinarily think of yourself as one personality in one body, these are cases where the body is run by a committee, and in many cases the committee doesn't even get along with one another.

MISHLOVE: Or even know each other.

HARMAN: Sometimes they don't know one another, and they take over one at a time, ordinarily. But nevertheless, some of the members of that committee may have very special capabilities. One of them may know an extraordinary amount about healing, for example, and another one may know an extraordinary amount about fundamental questions, about the nature of reality. And so it's far from studying these as just pathology now; the new approach is to study them as really very interesting cases. And of course what brought this new interest around in considerable measure was the discovery that when the personality shifts, all sorts of body changes take place, in body chemistry. The same body may have allergies, for example, with one personality, and not with another, or diabetic tendencies.

MISHLOVE: Or different brain waves perhaps.

HARMAN: Yes. In one case one personality had astigmatism. The same eyes in the same body with a different personality in charge had perfect eyes with no astigmatism.

MISHLOVE: So what we're looking at is the mind-body relationship.

HARMAN: The mind-body relationship reexamined. It's been examined through the history of science, but always with -- see, we don't ordinarily think of science as having some cultural bias in it, some fundamental assumptions. Of course it does. The funding patterns would bias it, for example; you buy certain kinds of research that society is interested in, and not other kinds. But there are more fundamental biases than that. Anybody who's studied science knows that positivism -- that is, the assumption that what's real is what's measurable -- that's basic to science. So also is reductionism, the idea that you understand something when you understand how the atoms and the molecules are moving around. Now, those very basic assumptions are even being challenged today, because you can't deal with subjective experience without relaxing those somehow.

MISHLOVE: Willis, this seems extremely significant to me, in the sense that these strictures that you've been describing have in effect been the mainstream of a materialistic culture for five hundred years. We've been reacting in so many ways against the medieval religious viewpoint, and now it's as if the large-scale pendulum of history is swinging back again.

HARMAN: I think that's exactly right. I think it's important to remember what did happen in the time of the scientific revolution. It wasn't just a group of scientists that decided to have the earth revolve around the sun, or something like that. It was a whole cultural change in western Europe, and it amounted to a challenge of the old authority system.

MISHLOVE: Prior to the scientific period, it was the church and the cathedrals and the religious laws that virtually ran our whole society. I think there's certainly a whole element of society that is afraid if we look at the mind again too seriously we're going to bring back another so-called age of superstition.

HARMAN: I think there's something like that, and no doubt there will be some tendency to swing off to extremes, but it doesn't have to

happen that way. It doesn't look to me as though it is, actually. What you can see in the culture is something that really would have been quite unbelievable -- let's remind ourselves that the idea not just that the earth rotates and is spherical, but that it goes around the sun, that concept was just very hard for people in the Middle Ages to grasp. They also feared that the social values would disintegrate and dire things would happen if you challenged the authority system. Something of the same sort is going on. But if you listen to what people are talking about in the culture, the topics like reincarnation and karma and consciousness, things that they will talk about -- near-death experiences --

MISHLOVE: My favorite topics.

HARMAN: We didn't talk about those things a quarter of a century ago; we really just didn't. And you realize that there's permission to talk about a lot of things that there didn't use to be. But if you get underneath that, you see the most revolutionary thing of all. We have all been taught this picture of material evolution -- of the universe, the stars and the planets, and the life forms, and finally the human being. And finally at the culmination of that, here is mind/spirit/consciousness appearing in the human brain. Now, the new picture -- and you can find it all around you except very much among the scientists -- is that yes, the evolutionary picture looks OK, there was material evolution of stars and planets and life forms and human beings; but consciousness/mind/spirit/universal mind was there all along. It didn't wait for neuronal cells to develop in the human brain; and furthermore, each of us in the depths of ourselves taps into that whole thing. Now, that's the sort of picture that if anybody had believed that openly thirty years ago, it would have been assumed to be some sort of bizarre thing that they brought in from Eastern philosophical religions.

MISHLOVE: Now it's almost at the basis of our physics.

HARMAN: Well, it's also tolerable to talk about physics in a whole new way, in which you recognize that behind the world that physics measures there's something else.

MISHLOVE: But how is all of this going to be of relevance, let's say to the people who are watching this program right now? How can we bring this work back home, so to speak?

HARMAN: For one thing, the personal journey of everyone is -- you know, it's just important to people in ways that, at least if it was important, we didn't talk about it three or four decades ago. But not only that, there are changes taking place in the institutions. It's amazing to see the shift that's taking place in executive development, management training, where people are being encouraged to recognize untapped resources in themselves, to recognize that they are using intuitive abilities, and they're being encouraged to use intuitive abilities that not too long ago we would have said aren't things that tough-minded male executives use. Feminine intuition, yes, may be some spooky phenomenon, or maybe not; but intuition that seems to go beyond physical explanations.

MISHLOVE: In other words, instead of trying to make their people into better employees, corporations are now trying to make their employees into better people.

HARMAN: That's a big part of it. Or put it another way. Management used to be using the power of the manager to shape the resources, including the people, and focus them on the task that's to be accomplished, which of course is also decided by management. Now the new concept of management is totally different. Management is giving away power. Management in this new sense is helping people to discover their own creativity.

MISHLOVE: Empowering others.

HARMAN: Empowering other people. And then out of that the course of the institution will come. Now, that's happening mainly in small corporations; it's not happening in the tremendous ones yet.

MISHLOVE: Well, if you were to use this television interview as an opportunity in some way to empower the hundreds of thousands of people who may be viewing, what would you say? What would you do? How could you communicate that to a television audience?

HARMAN: Very simple. There's only one thing to do -- recognize the powers of the mind that you're not using. You have wisdom, knowledge, that you're not using. You make choices unconsciously as well as consciously, and you can get acquainted with those. And then make the intention to find out about that, and that intention will guide you to everything else.

MISHLOVE: That's very beautiful, Willis, and I presume that what you're saying in effect is the story of your own journey from, as you described it, an engineer who was sort of out of sorts for a while, to a person who is now a member of the Regents of the University of California.

HARMAN: Well, it's the story that you might like to have told. The actual story is that I resisted all of that every step of the way, and we all have a certain tendency to do that. I feared a lot. I didn't want to make those steps. I didn't want to declare that intention to myself. And some good friends pushed me here and there. Looking back, I ask, well, what on earth was I doing all that time? But nonetheless that seems to be a very familiar story. What we want most we also resist most, and that's our predicament, but once we recognize that, it becomes much more fun than misery. You recognize that you're playing a kind of game with yourself, and it's sort of like hide and seek, and that's a lot more fun than not realizing that you're playing a game with yourself and taking all the problems of your own life and of the world with deadly seriousness.

MISHLOVE: If there were viewers amongst our audience who are, let's say, just entering into college, as I'm sure there are, and you as a person who is really at the pinnacle of the educational system in California right now, what would you say to a young person?

HARMAN: That the most important learning comes from within. It's nothing that you will ever get from professors and be tested on in final exams. And that that kind of learning goes on all your life, and I can testify that it accelerates after age sixty. Beyond sixty-eight or so I can't tell you.

MISHLOVE: Is that voice being heard within the Board of Regents, within the university system? Is this a new voice within the establishment?

HARMAN: Here and there, in corners.

MISHLOVE: You're not just a gadfly.

HARMAN: I think I'll decline to answer that. In general, in the whole society, no, no. It's exciting. Everywhere I go -- I can go to another continent, I can go to developing countries, and if I search for it, if I look for it, I can find people who are very, very conscious that they're going through this search and discovery in their lives, and furthermore they know the whole world is, and they're a part of that network.

MISHLOVE: You've traveled all over the world, Willis. Is there any one thing, one movement, or one activity or project that really epitomizes this for you, that gets you the most excited?

HARMAN: Probably not, because I have a tendency to get excited with the piece of it that I saw last. Right at the moment that's what's going on in management development, because I've been spending some time with that. But also development of Third World countries, the peace movement, the Greens movements, the ecological movements, especially the deep ecology part of it -- all of those

things are going on, and furthermore in the Bay Area they're all obvious, they're right in front of us.

MISHLOVE: I think to many people, myself included, all of these things seem a little disparate, disconnected. I don't see the common thread that runs through all of these. Sometimes they seem antagonistic to each other.

HARMAN: Well, sometimes they're antagonistic within the same movement. You may have one group that thinks we have to attack all the environmental problems with higher technology and more management, and another group that says we have to change our relationship to the earth. And that's all part of the same movement. So yes, it is true. There are those among us who are trying to hold us back and get us back to the past when things worked. There are others who are trying to go ahead and use more technology and more management, bigger programs, solve the problems that way. And then there's this spreading, quiet group that says no, we have to change our minds about the whole thing, and that group has been getting bigger for a quarter of a century, and that's the one I'm betting on.

MISHLOVE: Well, coming back to the issue that we discussed at the beginning of this interview, the question of sanity -- it seems as if all of these voices going in different directions is an expression of maybe a cultural insanity, and the quiet, still voice, the group of people who seem to be tuning in to some current that you've been describing, maybe is that where our new sanity is working?

HARMAN: I was careful to avoid using the word insanity, but surely when you say the arms race is good for the economy, mass consumption of things that we don't even need is good for the economy and therefore good for the society, and we should make our social decisions on that, and a science is good for us when it denies the reality of the human mind and spirit -- that's not terribly sane.

MISHLOVE: Well, Willis, it's been a real pleasure having you with us tonight. We've covered some very interesting ground in a very wide-ranging interview. I think to tie it all together I'd come back to the statement you made earlier to people who may be viewing, about tune in to yourself, find the answers inside, not from the institutions. Thank you very much, Willis, for being with us tonight.