**THE IMAGE OF MAN AND SOCIETY**

**by**

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The image of man is rich and complex beyond expression. It is a curious paradox that although this very richness is a result of its symbolic character, symbols and language are incapable of expressing it to the full. There is always something in the image of man, even of the most intelligent and sophisticated person "beyond what words can utter." Nevertheless, it is possible to abstract from this richness and to discuss the human image in terms of a relatively few important dimensions. I have already given a brief outline of these in Chapter I. We may classify these aspects of the image in the following way; this classification is tentative but it may be helpful. We have first the spatial image, the picture of the individual's location in the space around him. We have next the temporal image, his picture of the stream of time and his place in it. Third, we have the relational image, the picture of the universe around him as a system of regularities. Perhaps as a part of this we have, fourth, the personal image, the picture of the individual in the midst of the universe of persons, roles, and organizations around him. Fifth, we have the value image which consists of the ordering on the scale of better or worse of the various parts of the whole image. Sixth, we have the affectional image, or emotional image, by which various items in the rest of the image are imbued with feeling or affect. Seventh, we have the division of the image into conscious, unconscious, and subconscious areas. Eighth, we have a dimension of certainty or uncertainty, clarity or vagueness. Ninth, we have a dimension of reality or unreality, that is, an image of the correspondence of the image itself with some "outside" reality. Tenth, closely related to this but not identical with it, we have a public, private scale according to whether the image is shared by others or is peculiar to the individual.

The spatial image can exhibit varying degrees of sophistication. This may have a profound effect on other parts of the image. All human beings, without exception, seem to inhabit a three-dimensional world, an image which is certainly shared by most higher animals. In his least sophisticated spatial image man probably pictures himself as occupying the approximate center of a flat plane with the sky above and the earth below. Only within the last few hundred years has there come general acceptance of the more sophisticated view of the earth as a ball suspended in almost empty space, rotating around a sun which is a star, a member of a galaxy of stars, which in turn is a member of a universe of galaxies. This change in spatial orientation from the old three-story universe, even of the Middle Ages, to the sophisticated universe of today, is a profound one, and has had a marked effect on man's image of himself in many aspects. It has, perhaps, deflated his self-importance, but it has led to serious problems in his image of his prevailing religions, most of which are phrased in terms of an unsophisticated cosmology.

All human beings, except perhaps the extremely mentally deranged, regard themselves as oriented in some way in a stream of time. There are some interesting questions regarding the different ways in which different cultures,; as evidenced by their languages, have oriented themselves in this time stream, but these we will have to leave with a brief mention. The picture which is common to Western civilization of a one-dimensional time stream flowing at a constant rate with a point, the present, dividing the past from the future, is by no means universal. In many primitive cultures, the time concept is more circular than linear. There is a time to do this and a time to do that, and this process repeats itself endlessly. In a very real sense, such a culture has no history. All summers are the same summer; all deaths are the same death; all births are the same birth. With the coming of history, however, and the closely associated written records,3 the tendency for the time concept to become linear and for history to be viewed as a one-way street, is almost universal. The more sophisticated concepts of space and time implied in the theory of relativity have not yet had much effect on popular images. There is a curious dilemma here. As science becomes more and more sophisticated, it becomes further divorced from the popular images and less capable of influencing them.

The relational dimension of the image consists in the supposed stabilities which may be put in the form of hypothetical sentences: if A, then B. The relational image varies greatly from culture to culture, and even within subcultures within the same general society. The stability of the relational image is one of the most interesting questions, not only for anthropologists and other students of culture, but for the philosophers of science. The relational images of primitive people contain many relationships which disappear in the course of sophistication. There are relationships, for instance, between ceremonial acts and the natural world. The belief in witchcraft and magic is all part of the unsophisticated relational image. Even in sophisticated societies, however, the relational image varies greatly from person to person, especially in the area of personal relationships. One of the universal problems here is, when is a message to be interpreted as having relational significance, and when is it to be interpreted as a chance or random event. This is a problem of no mean importance, even in science. Science, of course, represents the most sophisticated attempt to deal with the relational image. Even here, however, relational images arise through strong filtering of messages through the value structure of the scientific subculture. There are many areas of experience which are not respectable for scientists to study and which they investigate with grave risks to their reputations. An important aspect of the relational image is the image of the relation between the acts of the individual and their effects. We may regard this part of the relational image as consisting of a number of potential futures or time images, each of which is associated with some particular mode of behavior in the present. The image can be expressed in a series of sentences: if I do A, then B, C, D, etc., will follow in a definite time succession.

The value image is enormously important in its effects, but remarkably obscure in its origins. Incoming messages are not admitted to the image free. At the gate of the image stands the value system demanding payment. This is as true of sensory messages as it is of symbolic messages. We now know that what used to be regarded as primary sense data are in fact highly learned interpretations. We see the world the way we see it because it pays us and has paid us to see it that way. The value system is quite fundamental in motivation theory. We must think of the image of the individual as including a value ordering of potential acts and their consequences. The act which stands highest on the ordering will be the one performed, and as soon as it is performed, a new ordering comes into view, and a new act is selected. The study of the value image is made difficult by the fact that only a small part of it is usually accessible to the immediate consciousness; consequently, it is common to find that what looks like a change in the value image is actually a change in the position of the individual in the field of the image in general. Poor people and poor societies, for instance, are apt to seem highly materialistic. They lay great stress on the acquisition of material things. Rich societies and rich individuals are apt not to be concerned for material things, but to emphasize the "more spiritual" aspects of life. This difference may be much more the result of a difference of the position of the individual in the field rather than a difference in the value ordering itself. We all tend to value highly what is scarce in our own particular part of the field. The obsession of the poor, both individuals and societies, with material things, may be merely a reflection of their scarcity and not a reflection of a basic difference in value orientation. In a similar way, the sick make a religion of health, the violent make a religion of love; and the self-centered make a religion of objectivity.

The affectional image is closely related to the value image but is not necessarily identical with it. The image of the universe as we view it is colored deeply with affects and emotions. We like one thing; we dislike another. We hate one thing; we love another. We are indifferent to A; we fear B; we are overjoyed about C. It is not these affections and emotions, however, which govern our behavior but the value images which we place upon them. We cannot simply classify the emotions as good or bad, desirable or undesirable, as moving us toward or away from the object which inspires them. Man is deeply ambivalent between his affections and his values, and what is more, he values this ambivalence. Fear, pain, and even death itself have been highly valued by certain individuals and societies. There is almost infinite variation in the value systems which people have placed on the affections and emotions

Modifying all of the above, we might indicate two more possible dimensions of the image: the certainty / uncertainty dimension, and the reality / unreality dimension. Some things we are sure about, some things we are unsure about, and every aspect of the image (including the value and affectional image) is tinged with some degree of certainty or uncertainty. This is particularly true of the relational image. Closely related to this dimension but not perhaps identical with it is the dimension of reality and unreality. We are very sure that the house we live in, the furniture and utensils that we use, and the people that we know around us, are "real" in the sense that they are not products of our imagination, that they would continue to exist "outside" us, even if we disappeared from the scene. Similarly, dreams, imaginings, fairy stories, legends are perceived as unreal, as not having any existence outside of the human image. The reality / unreality dimension is quite independent of the philosophical question as to whether in fact there is a real world outside our perceptions. Reality or unreality here is a property of the image itself. We can afford to beg the whole philosophical question of idealism versus realism.

Finally, we have an important dimension of consciousness, unconsciousness, and subconsciousness. As part of the image there is something analogous to a scanning mechanism: we are not conscious of all parts of the image at once with the same degree of intensity. This is true even in the field of perception; for instance, in vision, we see only a very small part of our field of vision with anything like accuracy of detail. By scanning, however, we are able to obtain a clear mental image of the whole visual universe around us. Similarly, a very small part of our image is exposed to our internal view at any one time. On the other hand, we have the property of recall. This is a rather mysterious operation. How do we know what to recall before we have recalled it? Nevertheless, there is clearly some process at work whereby those parts of the image which lie in the unconscious can be brought into conscious view. We have a curious capacity for giving ourselves examinations. We know how to write the questions that we have answers for.

Freud has made it clear that in addition to the conscious and unconscious parts of the image, there is also a vast area of the subconscious. This may be defined as that part of the unconscious image which is not available by the scanning process and which cannot be brought into conscious view by any simple act of will. The mind of man is a vast storehouse of forgotten memories and experiences. It is much more than a storehouse, however. It is a genuine image affecting our conduct and behavior in ways that we do not understand with our conscious mind. It is one of the main objects of psychotherapy to bring the subconscious into consciousness or at least into the unconscious where it can be recalled at will. Only when our whole image, as it were, is capable of being spread before us, can we organize it as a unit. Extreme cases are known in which a single biological individual contains two images, two personalities which may alternate with each other.

The recognition of the existence of the subconscious image enables us perhaps to integrate the rational with the irrational. We can now see all behavior as governed by the image and its value system. Rational behavior is that which is governed by the part of the image which is accessible to consciousness. What is usually called irrational behavior, in fact, follows the same principles. It still consists in contemplating a set of future alternatives and the corresponding acts and selecting the highest of these on our value scales. In the case of so-called irrational behavior, however, both the expected consequences and the value scales may be hidden in the subconscious.

We turn now to the consideration of the place of the image in the dynamics of society. We must emphasize from the first that the image is a property of the individual person. It is only by way of metaphor and analogy that we can speak of organizations or of society as a whole as possessing an image. Nevertheless, there are images of some individuals in society, and parts of the image of most individuals which can properly be regarded as an image of the society itself even though the image is "in the minds of the individuals."

In thinking about the relation of images to society, therefore, we must first think of the inventory of the images of the individuals who compose the society. This may be thought of in the first instance as a simple list of the images of individuals a, b, c, etc. We next consider the dynamic processes by which these individual images are maintained an changed.

The stock of images in a society is changed in the first instance by all those things which change individual images, that is, by learning processes. If we want to study, therefore, the dynamics of the image stock of a society, we must first study the way in which messages change the images of the individuals in the society. The messages which impinge on the individual image come partly from "nature" and partly from other persons or other instruments in the society. In considering the dynamics of the stock of images the rise of writing and literary communication is of enormous importance. In a nonliterate society messages come from only two sources: from nature, that is from nonhuman sources, or from face-to-face contact with other persons, in speech or nonverbal communication. The invention of writing marks the separation of the communication from the communicator and enables individuals to receive messages from people that they have never met, will never meet, and could never meet. With the invention of writing, messages from individuals may penetrate the time space of the society far beyond the life span of the individuals concerned. In some degree, of course, this is possible in a nonliterate society through the transmission of an oral heritage. Writing, however, enormously magnifies this effect. In our own day we have seen the still further extension of the principle of the separation of the communication from the communicator through the development of mass media. Printing enables one communicator to communicate with millions of other individuals. The invention of the radio, the phonograph, the movie, television has still further separated the communicator from the communication. What this means is that all of the signals which proceed from any individual can now be disseminated literally to all others present and to come. We have established one-way, face-to-face contact through the mass media, between the communicator and millions of other persons. Through television3 for instance, an individual may be almost literally present in all the living rooms of the nation.

It is important, however, to notice that with all the developments of mass communication such communication is still "one way." In two-way communication there is still no substitute for face­to-face contact. Even letters and telephones are poor substitutes for the living presence. We shall develop this point further in the next chapter.

The stock of images in society is changed not only through the communication processes of the society. It is changed also by the turnover of individuals through birth and death and the succession of the generations. A society does not consist of a fixed stock of individuals. Individuals are added to the stock all the time through birth, through growth and maturation; and they are subtracted all the time through death. If we confined our view of the dynamics of the stock of images, therefore, solely to the processes by which the image changes in the individual, we would be seriously misled. In discussing the dynamics of the image in society, therefore, we must lay considerable stress on the problem of the relationships among the generations. The basic structure of the individual image is mainly laid down in early childhood and there is much to be said for the stress which has been placed in recent years on the close relationship between practices in the rearing of children and the personality types of a society.

This view can, of course, be carried too far. It is too much to attribute the whole personality of a society to its practices in the toilet training of children. The image continues to grow and develop long after childhood and, indeed, there is much to be said for the point of view that the years of adolescence are at least as critical in determining the major parts of the image as are the years of early childhood. In many important aspects, also, the image continues to grow and to change throughout life. Nevertheless, the relationships among the generations are of great importance in establishing the dynamics in a stock of images and in explaining the subtle shift in the "flavor" of a society from generation to generation.

A society consists not only of individual persons; it consists of organizations. Individuals are grouped into many "Leviathans" both large and small: states, churches, businesses, families, trade unions, universities, and so on. We have already defined an organization as a structure of roles tied together by lines of communication. The existence of such a structure depends on the presence of a "public image" among those who participate in its roles. This does not mean, of course, that every individual participating in any organization must have an identical image of the organization itself. The image of a great corporation which is possessed by the president of the company is very different from the image of the same corporation possessed by the janitor. Indeed, it is usually essential to the operation of an organization that there should not be the same image of the organization in the minds of the various participants. It is the image of the role: which is significant, not the image of the whole organization. But the images of the roles must be consistent with the over­all image of the organization itself.

The power of organizations to survive in a society depends largely upon the nature of the stock of images of that society. The General Motors Corporation, for instance, would be quite inconceivable in ancient Rome because the Romans did not possess the requisite set of images. It is true also, of course, that organizations require a certain material environment for their continued survival or existence. General Motors, for instance9 could not exist in our society, even with all our images as they are, if there were no iron ore or no rubber, and no substitutes for these things. Nevertheless, the artifacts, that is, the physical capital of a society must be regarded as the result of the structuring of the material substance by an image. There is a close analogy here between the image and the gene. The production of an automobile is a process whereby certain parts of the material structure of the earth are arranged into the form of a previous image. The genetics of the automobile is, of course, much more complicated than that of the horse. It is multisexual and, unlike the gene, the image does not merely exhibit random mutation but has a regular systematic and accumulative mode of change. Nevertheless, it is by no means fanciful to argue that the automobile and other human artifacts are produced as a result of a genetic process in which an image plays somewhat the same role as the gene does in the biological world.

It is instructive to consider both the similarities and the differences between social organizations and organisms in the biological world. Like the organism, the organization is an "open system" in the sense that it has a through­put of individuals occupying various places in a role structure much as a biological organism maintains a throughput of material substance in a constant structure. The organization, therefore, exhibits many characteristics of open systems. It has a kind of embryology, and it exhibits a certain degree of equifinality. The organization begins, shall we say, as a fertile image in the mind of some creative individual. Because of his powers of communication this individual is able to implant this image or at least appropriate modifications of this image in the minds of others. Insofar as the image involves the idea of a division of labor, as the organization grows, the division of labor itself begins and the various participating individuals begin to assume different roles. Just as in the development of the embryo, it is frequently the position in the structure which determines the future history of the part, so in the development of the organization, the role which is assigned to an individual often by chance determines his own development. As an organization grows certain significant changes in structure may have to take place. Large organizations must have a different structure from small organizations. In the growth of the business firm, for instance, there seems to be a critical stage below which simple face-to-face communication is feasible, above which it is not, and elaborate organizational structures have to be set up. The change from the informal to the hierarchical organization is not wholly dissimilar to the change from the single celled organism to the multicellular organism. In the organization, as in the organism, the complexity seems to be purchased at the price of mortality. We do not understand very well the processes of decay and death of organization, either in the biological or the organizational world. In both worlds, however, these processes can clearly be observed even though we do not understand them well enough to know whether they are absolutely necessary.

We must be careful, however, against being carried away by analogy. There are extremely important differences between organizations and organisms. The great difference lies in the nature of the image possessed by the constituent parts and by the whole. In the case of the organism, we must regard the image held by the central agent or the organism as a whole as greatly superior in complexity and in content to the image of any of its component parts. We have already seen that it is not illegitimate to regard the individual cell as having an image of some kind. The image of the whole organism, however, is much more elaborate and complete than that of any individual cell. In the case of organizations, the reverse is true. It is the cell which has the image, not the organization. The image structure lies wholly within the frames of the individuals composing the organizations. It does not lie in the relationships of these individuals.

The correct analogy to the image of the organization in the organism is what might be called the genetic image. As far as the genetics of organisms is concerned, it is the image of the cell that is important, not the image of the organization as a whole. Because to this fact, an organization, although it is an open system, is an open system of a very different and much more complex character than that of the biological organism. It is true, of course, that the image of the role to some extent imposes itself on the individual occupying the role. When a man becomes the President of the United States, he begins to behave like a President of the United States, whatever his previous character and behavior. The individual, however, never merely passively fits a role. He reorganizes the role itself through the operation of his own peculiar images. When a square peg is fitted into a round role it is true that the peg becomes rounder, but it is also true that the role becomes squarer. In the dynamics of society, therefore, this constant interaction between the role and the personality is a dominating characteristic.

In spite of the fact that an organization does not properly have an image of its own, curiously enough there is something analogous to the phenomenon of self-consciousness in the field of organization. This self-consciousness is the property of the public image of the organization which is shared by those who participate in it or are related to it. There is a profound difference, for instance, in the image of organizations which is held in primitive and sophisticated societies.

Primitive man is, of course, aware of the organizations in which he participates. He is aware, for instance, that he is a member of the tribe. The picture of his society, however, is an unself­conscious one. He accepts the representation of the society as it is handed down to him by his elders in an unquestioning and unself­conscious spirit. A visiting anthropologist, on the other hand, has a self-conscious image of the same society and even of his own society.

This rise in the self-consciousness of the image of society and organization is of great importance in interpreting the dynamics of social change and of the change in the social image. It is unquestionably the main element in the enormous increase in the speed of change and in the rate of mutation of the social image which has taken place in the last few thousand years. It is bound up, of course, with the increase in the image of the time span of the individual and his society which comes through the invention of historic records. It comes even more through the increase in the complexity of the image of relationship with the rise of science and of the social sciences. An extremely interesting example of the rise of self-consciousness of the social image is the development of nationalism, especially democratic nationalism in the last few hundred years. There is a great contrast, for instance, between the image of society as it existed in medieval Europe and as it exists today. This rise in national consciousness has not, of course, been an unmixed blessing , although it has important positive elements. The continued rise of self-consciousness of the image of society is as corrosive to nationalism, however, as it was of prenational images. The social image goes through three stages to disintegration. In the first stage, we find that people believe in it. This is the unself­conscious stage. People think of themselves, for instance, as Americans, or as British, or as Germans, without ever questioning the notion. In the second stage, people believe in believing in it. They see the world as divided into nations. They see, however, that they might just as well have been something else from what they are. Once the image has reached this stage it is a short step to not believing in it at all. The same history is repeated in many religions.

Another very interesting example of the importance of the idea of self-consciousness in the social image is to be found in Marxist theory. This time it is a class consciousness rather than a national consciousness which is regarded as the important part of the image. Marx himself regarded his principal contribution as the giving of class consciousness to the previously unconscious proletariat. He regarded the function of the intellectual in the historic process as the task of making manifest what is latent. The latent, however, cannot be made manifest without transforming it, and the acid of self-consciousness is even more powerful in attacking the idea of class than it is in attacking the idea of the nation.

In the idea of the self-consciousness of the image of the organization, there is something akin to the notion of a '"central agent" in the biological organism. An analogy, however, must be taken with extreme caution for reasons which have been outlined above. The organization, like the organism, has a phenotype and a genotype. A university, for instance, has a phenotype in the form of a campus, buildings, ceremonial, a schedule, a calendar, a program. Professors and students come and go, but the university goes on, almost forever. Nevertheless, in the case of organization, the image resides in the genotype, not in the phenotype. Because of the hierarchical structure, there may be some individuals whose images are of peculiar importance in an organization. The phenotype of a university moves more toward the image of the president than it does toward the image of the humble instructor. Nevertheless, in the dynamics of an organization all images are important and none can be neglected. We must always operate with the concept of an inventory of images and we can never replace this inventory by a single image, not even that of the most important person in the organization.

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