

# Human isolation

BY NASIR SULMAN

Our present technological age is oriented towards the future. But it is a future arriving with such rapidity that people are losing touch with their finer human emotions and becoming increasingly isolated

INDUSTRIAL and scientific developments of the past century have made the life radically different from what it had been over the centuries. Until the nineteenth century (still in some countries including Pakistan), the world was largely agricultural. Men lived in rural communities, deeply attached to the land and to its perennial cycles, rooted in one location for several generations.

A family lived in the home of grandparents with three or four generations sharing the same household. In this 'three-layered' family, traditions were strong and their basic lesson, although seldom expressed, was that life had remained unchanged as far back as anyone could remember, and would remain so into the indefinite future. Even if there were wars or natural calamities to tear up the order of life, they too melded into the life-death, ever-recurring cycle of nature.

Later, as the Industrial Revolution replaced a rural populace with an urban two-generation family, far more aware of immediate changing social conditions than of the wisdom of the patriarchal grandfather, the interests and demands for 'the new change' increased. This existence contrasts sharply with our present lifestyle in which the typical urbanite lives quite independent of nature's cycle.

At the outset of the twentieth century, the essentialists took over the society. The essentialist is practical, a doer who has an optimistic conviction about the success of his procedure and goes about it quite pragmatically. Persistent effort works, and if it does not, another attempt

in another direction will. Competition is a part of his world and it increases his motivation and eliminates the unworthy and unworkable.

On the other hand, effort is combined and incorporated into a huge system in which each performs a specific task related only tangentially to the whole. The world is an institutional, corporate effort, and the individual's continuing task is to adopt his life to that corporate effort. Birth, the seeking of food, health and shelter, even death and burial, have all become institutional processes, far more efficiently and conveniently handled in comparison than it was by our older, family-oriented society. The essentialist man, then, is a corporate man as well as a competitive man.

The individual, then, sees himself as a member of this larger operation, and one that must be sufficiently productive to satisfy the demands of the corporate process. He is identified, primarily, by his occupation, since this also signifies his social worth and dignity. Basically, social value is influenced by the economy.

Following the perennial society, with its emphasis on the past, and the essentialist society with its emphasis on conserving the present, the

recreate any facet of nature, including life itself.

Through biology and medicine, man is now able to not only decide how many children he will have and when, but he may soon be able to decide their sex, intelligence, physical features and personalities. He can literally choose the next generation, and with this power of choice comes an awesome responsibility. For example, cloning, the possibility of exact replication of specific individuals, illustrates most clearly the complex choices that advanced technology has forced upon us.

The agricultural man, at home in rural society, was followed by the industrial man of an urban society. Now the technological man emerges into dominance in a 'suburban' society of white-collar workers — a middle class of technicians, organizational personnel, and service people of education, law, welfare, health and similar professions. This is new society of labourers who work with their minds.

This is not to say that we, today, exist in an era that is totally technological, but rather that our civilization is edging its nose into this new age. Civilizations do not march phalanx-style out of one age and into another. Our present society remains overwhelmingly industrial, particularly in its economics, politics and culture. In examining our present condition, one quickly sees people whose lifestyle is decidedly preindustrial and even some who have survived for centuries as pre-agricultural primitives.

Recently, the social scientists have expressed uneasiness about the progress of this info-techno-industrial age. According to them, the quality of man's 'better' life is being challenged. Progress and technology are spinning off unforeseen and unwanted side effects, particularly in an uprootedness of our families and an estrangement from the personal dimensions of life. The average urban and suburban family has become unbelievably mobile, packing up and moving to a new home. Lifelong neighbours are unheard of. Seldom do you find a home in which grandparents live with all their children due to the trend of the nuclear family concept and migration.

Further estrangement is taking place within the family; the father commutes greater distances to work and now spends very little time with his children. Those wonderful conveniences that freed his wife from her homemaking chores, have also forced her out of the house to acquire a second income to pay for this liberating higher standard of living. Children, now



technological society is oriented toward the future. But it is a future arriving with such rapidity that it is already penetrating our present industrial culture beyond imagination. Accelerated change, under the power of modern technology, sweeps the future into our laps.

As industrial society once replaced the energy of man and animals with the mechanical energy of oil, steam and electricity, so now technological society replaces the human mind with the mechanical mind of the computer. Its speed, accuracy and capacity makes possible the solution of highly complex technical and organizational problems. As the mediaeval man struggled to coexist with nature and the modern man rose to dominate it, so the technological man now has the power to imitate and even

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