Cultural and Ideological Transitions: Beliefs, Value Systems, and Sustainability

Contributors to this topic included William Drayton; John Gardner, the Miriam and Peter Haas Centennial Professor in Public Service, Stanford University; Hassan Hathout, director of the Outreach Office of the Islamic Center of Southern California; Jessica Mathews; Lloyd Morrisett, president of the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation; Peter Ordeshook; and Alvaro Umaña. Bruce Murray was the panel moderator.

As the environmental trauma escalates, the actual outcome depends in large measure on the behavior of individual people throughout the world. Their behavior will reflect their values.

Which cultural and ideological values might be conducive to a sustainable world was a question central to the entire symposium. Stanford University's John Gardner, in his introductory remarks for the opening session, expressed his concern over "the disintegration of communities and the sense of community," as manifested in "family, school, congregation, workplace, neighborhood, because it is communities at that level that are the generators of values and value systems." He wondered what good it would do to "entertain lofty purposes at the highest level of national and international discussion if the foundations are crumbling." He thanked Murray Gell-Mann for touching on the problem of "achieving wholeness incorporating diversity," a problem that Gardner found haunting, and a problem that would crop up repeatedly during the symposium. How, after all, can wholeness incorporate diversity in a world of rising ethnic and religious passions—a subject, according to Gardner, that "our problem solvers vastly underrate"?

As Alvaro Umaña put it, also in the opening session: "The problem with the transitions—demographic, energy, technological, economic—is that they are all interrelated, and that they all have to take place simultaneously." This, he insisted, could only happen through a transition in values.

Bruce Murray made the question of values the centerpiece for the session on cultural and ideological transitions. "As the environmental trauma escalates," he remarked, "the actual outcome depends in large measure on the behavior of individual people throughout the world. Their behavior will reflect their values," which in turn "are usually influenced in some way by an ideology." Lloyd Morrisett, the first speaker, presented what he felt were the four key ideological concepts underlying industrial behavior in the West.

Morrisett first evoked the period around 1840–1860, a period, he pointed out, within the family memory of many of us alive today. This was the world of our great- and great-great-grandparents. More specifically he evoked the world of the Great Plains, the world re-created by O. E. Rölvaag in *Giants in the Earth*: the broad expanse "stretching away endlessly in every direction . . . almost like the ocean," where enormous herds of bison made possible the culture and economy of the Plains Indians. Between 1862 and 1900, an estimated 50 million bison were slaughtered by encroaching Americans. "The Indians and bison and the sea of grass yielded to the advancement of industrial civilization and the technology of the rifle and the plow," said Morrisett. "As the settlers from Europe and the eastern United States moved west to obliterate a previous world, a world that is hard for us to imagine, they carried with them a set of ideas, an ideology if you will, that gave them strength and justified their actions."

The first component of this ideology, according to Morrisett, is the idea that "nature is opposed to man," that nature is "an object separate from ourselves to be exploited and conquered." The second is social Darwinism, the suggestion that "the wealthiest and most powerful people in

a society are that way because evolutionary processes have brought them to the top" and that "the wealthiest and most powerful societies are obviously at the peak of the evolutionary pyramid." The third idea is that of progress, with its connotation of bigger as better, its evocation of accumulated wealth and conspicuous consumption as its measures of success. The fourth is that the modern state justifies itself in readiness for war. All four of these ideas are mutually reinforcing. War, for example, determines who has the right to exploit nature and demonstrates the accomplishments of progress; and victory is construed as evolutionary success. Morrisett presented some scenarios by which these core ideas could be changed—unexpected events, charismatic leadership, a new Darwin—but admitted he was pessimistic that change could come without a period of strong conflict.

The issue of culture and ideology inevitably arose many times during the "Visions" symposium. Bruce Murray's talk in the session on global governance, in particular, amplified Morrisett's pessimism regarding the ultimate consequences of industrial ideology.

For his discussion, Murray drew upon Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, which, though written in the thirties, nonetheless deals with many of the same issues facing us today. Drawing an analogy with Huxley's Alpha Pluses, Murray explored the likelihood that people with assets, technology, and education will have the cohesiveness to create enclaves for themselves and to sustain their lifestyle at the expense of nature and the rest of humanity. He wondered whether the beginnings of such a trend were already apparent in the tendency of some elites to sequester themselves in suburban communities behind locked gates. He speculated that such elites might use biotechnology—genetic engineering and pharmacology—to assure their survival, resulting in a society that would be the ultimate expression of social Darwinism and separation from nature. Murray then reminisced about his 1978 trip to China, a land long overpopulated. There were no songbirds, and he experienced a culture bereft of the idea of conservation, of connection with nature. His ultimate worry is a human civilization stripped of any sense of the importance of nature, a society from which the richness of cultural diversity and perhaps even individuality itself have been expunged.

We will have to change thought and behavior profoundly, but history tells us that that is certainly possible.

Such a society, in its oppressiveness, could prove the final justification of the war-preparedness mentioned by Morrisett. The deep-rootedness of the ideology of war was a topic that emerged several times during the discussion on culture and ideology. William Drayton pointed out that the military technology of Philip of Macedon swept away the city-states of the ancient world, including those with approximations of town-hall democracy, and made possible the great empires on the Roman model. And Hassan Hathout declared that, while a "peace dividend flows naturally downward to the poor and needy at home and abroad, the war dividend flows up against gravity to again feed the need and the greed of the war system whose beneficiaries hold power in most countries."

Jessica Mathews chose to explore the actual value transitions that might make possible a sustainable world. She identified three, and they contrast sharply with the four concepts—nature as enemy, social Darwinism, progress, and war-preparedness—discussed by Morrisett.

The first transition would require a fundamental change in our relationship to nature. Rather than Morrisett's "object separate from ourselves to be exploited and conquered" with an emphasis on Darwinian struggle, nature might be seen in the context of James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, which emphasizes ecology and the study of Earth as a living whole. From such a science, Mathews believes, "will come the realization that—despite technology and all its powers, and despite what the major Western religions have taught us, beginning with Genesis—man does not exercise dominion over nature." Given such a transition, she believes the easiest behavioral change will be in the realm of technology: we need only develop the appropriate rules and institutions. "We will have to change thought and behavior profoundly, but history tells us that that is certainly possible. It wasn't really very long ago that human slavery seemed essential to economic success, morally acceptable, even rather ordinary. And now it is unthinkable."

The second transition requires a change in our relationship to the future—"not how we think about it, but whether or not we care about it." Traditional economics doesn't deal with the long term; according to Mathews, the attitude of most economists is captured by the John Maynard Keynes axiom that, in the long run, we'll all be dead. Economists, she said, use discount rates that "effectively make anything that happens even 50 years ahead of no consequence." Mathews recently participated in a project called "The Earth is Transformed by Mankind," which examined 19 measures of human-induced change, including population growth, water quality, water quantity, atmospheric conditions, and the use of nonfuel minerals. The study concluded that there has been more change to the planet

since 1950 than in the previous 10,000 years. "We can no longer discount the future," she said, contradicting the logic of immediate exploitation that is central to the ideology described by Morrisett.

Economics as a value system was mentioned in several other sessions as well, most often in terms of the need for a change. Alvaro Umaña brought up the issue in both the economics session and the opening session. "Economists have taught us that there is no free lunch," he said in his opening talk. "But we still have to get through the message to them that there are also no free resources and that the era of free goods has to end." Hassan Hathout, speaking on the culture and ideology panel, expressed a certain impatience with the values underlying industrial ideology. "If exploitation was the essence of slavery, one wonders whether slavery is gone," he said. "The death of communism is no health certificate for our current capitalism."

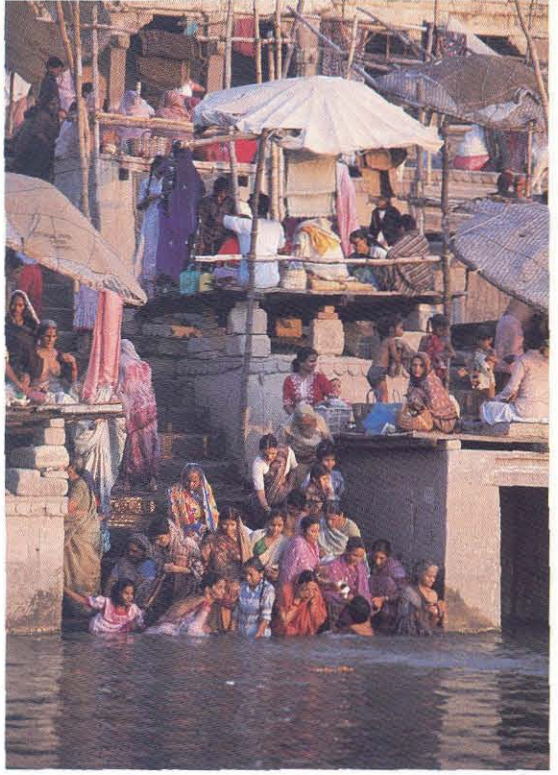
We find ourselves with unprecedented power to affect the planet and profound ignorance about the systems on which we depend.

As described by Mathews, U.S. industrial economics and the science that has evolved with it seem almost otherworldly. On the one hand there is that short time horizon, where, in our society, any span longer than 10 years "seems almost laughable." The Japanese, she pointed out, have released a 100-year environmental and energy plan. On the other hand, she said, one of the paradoxes of modern science is that we've paid so much attention to the very tiny—subatomic structure, molecular activities in the cell—and so much attention to the very large and the far away—space—while we're paying almost no attention to things on a planetary scale. "We find ourselves with unprecedented power to affect the planet and profound ignorance about the systems on which we depend." Harlan Cleveland alluded to this in the opening session, when he reminisced about wiping out mosquitos on Sardinia "in a demonstration that it could be done worldwide. We than started the malaria-eradication program without having the slightest idea at the time that the mosquitos would develop an immunity to DDT, or that DDT would have all the side effects that it later turned out to have." He saw this as a metaphor for the unforeseeable damage science and technology can wreak. Mathews, in her turn, saw the necessity for a shift in the burden of proof regarding proposed human activities. She saw the United States in particular as moving in the wrong direction when it comes to concern for the future. "I don't think it's a global trend. I think it's peculiar to us."

The third transition discussed by Mathews involved the relationship of individuals to nation-states. One of the most profound current trends, she maintained, is that of power and authority being delegated from nation-states to other actors—international institutions, individuals, and nongovernmental organizations. Changes of thought, she said, come from people, not institutions. The late Jean Monnet, father of the European Community, knew this precisely. "He said that his intention for European union was not to form coalitions between states, but union among people. And that dream is about to become reality next year."

This trend toward transnational cooperation and the delegation of sovereignty carries strong implications for the modern state described by Morrisett, which finds its justification in war. John Steinbruner in particular, in his presentation on governance, talked about what he called cooperative security. The idea of military power being regulated by agreement obviously puts a very different valuation on war-making power than that traditionally assigned by industrial ideology.

Concepts such as "cooperative security," "cooperative engagement," "wholeness incorporating diversity," and "integrated decentralization" were discussed several times throughout the symposium. They all to one degree or another represent the same core idea: the importance of empowering individuals and groups of individuals. Even cooperative security, while dealing with traditional nation-states, implies a new form of international governance that dissolves confrontation in favor of "mutual regulation for mutual benefit," a move away from the rigidity of



A 1974 plan to reduce India's growth rate emphasized more opportunities for women, such as these women on the banks of the Ganges in Rajasthan.

The greatest cultural change in our time is the increased potential role for women. What will be the role of women in the future and to what extent will value systems emerge that will bring women more into the mainstream?

collective-security blocs. The central question is whether ideological and cultural roadblocks can be removed, and whether human creative power can be both sustained and released while at the same time human values are being transformed from those of the industrial ideology outlined by Lloyd Morrisett, to the very different values advocated by Jessica Mathews.

Peter Ordeshook, during the session on governance, detailed the possible advantages of federal mechanisms in reforming global governance, and in doing so touched on several issues involving values. He pointed out that achieving a sustainable world would likely involve a certain redistribution of wealth. Any federal arrangement for carrying out a redistributive policy would in turn represent a contract requiring a central authority to enforce it, and Ordeshook expressed a certain pessimism in that he saw no nation capable of playing such a role; he also saw geographically based ethnic, religious, or racial cleavages as being a problem in maintaining a federal system. The only hope he seemed finally to see for removing roadblocks was in an appeal to individual self-interest.

So the question remains. Can a sustainable world be achieved without conducive cultural and ideological transitions? Harlan Cleveland, in the opening session, pointed to a long list of international arrangements that are working, involving areas such as weather forecasting, civil aviation, and international telecommunications, among many others. In all of them, he said, people in one way or another disregard sovereignty. Cleveland earlier in the same talk had said: "The most important lesson handed down from the history of human cooperation is that people can agree on what to do next together if they carefully avoid agreeing on why they're agreeing. But if you try to agree first on ideology and then on action, you never get to the action."

It would seem, however, that when ideology *is* involved, appeals to self-interest and action may not be enough. Cleveland went on to talk about the insistence of the United States government that population not be on the agenda for the Earth Summit in Rio. "Most of the other countries of the world know that it's impossible to discuss environment or development . . . without population being somewhere in the middle of the picture." According to Cleveland, the United States government—for ideological reasons having to do with abortion—has created "an intellectual impasse." So ideology is, sometimes at least, a roadblock to problem solving.

The problem of overpopulation serves to introduce a question of cultural values that appeared in several different contexts during the symposium: the status of women. As Bruce Murray said: "The greatest cultural change in our time is the increased potential role for women. What will be the role of women in the future and to what extent will value systems emerge that will bring women more into the mainstream?" During the culture and ideology session, Jessica Mathews discussed the two key steps of "access to reproductive control and to education," and how closely the two are linked because the lowering of fertility rates is so profoundly tied to education: "Even six years of pri-

mary education affects fertility rates profoundly."

Alvaro Umaña developed the same theme during the opening session. "It is only after people have reached a certain basic standard of living and have had certain basic needs met that population tends to stabilize. We have found in Costa Rica, for example, that equal opportunities for education and work for women have a tremendous impact on reproductive patterns and on population growth. As more options are opened to women all over the world, they tend to marry later and to have fewer children."

If the difference in status between women and men—and "women's work" and "men's work"—is one realm of values that will have a major effect in determining whether or not a sustainable world can be achieved, the difference in the trading status between nations is another. Umaña touched on this as well. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, or GATT, was put into effect in 1947 to regulate international trade, but, he said, "the word *environment* does not appear at all in this treaty. The treaty goes counter to any possibility of incorporating environmental issues, because it does not allow a country to discriminate based on the method of production of a good. If two countries have different environmental standards that make it necessary to have different methods of production, this treaty says that we cannot have any price discrimination or impose tariffs. Unless we start to consider trade and environment jointly, this is going to lead to even wider disparities in environmental enforcement and in environmental standards worldwide."

Now individuals by the billions are not only the cause of the problem, but the source of its solution.

Disparities in status, in education, in resources, in wealth and power form one of the chief obstacles to achieving a sustainable world. Moreover, those disparities in turn reinforce ideological and cultural obstacles. Poverty makes access to education more difficult, which reinforces the traditional status of women, which reinforces population growth. If federalism might have a potential role in redistributive policies, such policies themselves would run contrary to the social Darwinism of industrial ideology. The nation-state, another component of that ideology, resists any abrogation of its control over its wealth and resources. Alvaro Umaña, again in the opening session, stressed that while the East–West confrontation has become less acute, the North–South confrontation between rich and poor, between those who degrade the environment through overconsumption and those who degrade it through poverty, has sharpened. The two worlds "are critically opposed to each other," separated by the very disparities that define their respective triumphs and miseries.

Ideas such as cooperative engagement, federalism, and carbon taxes may prove important for the functioning of a sustainable world, but in the end no governmental or economic mechanism will work if the people who must live with it reject it. Several participants mentioned religious fundamentalism on the one hand and the upsurge of ethnicity and nationalism on the other as a backlash against what Jessica Mathews called the "movement toward globalization." Another form of resistance is what Bruce Murray termed protective apathy, and he expressed the hope that new belief systems and value systems would emerge to replace the apathy that seems to especially affect the affluent. "Poverty will produce community," he said, quoting sociologist Robert Nisbet. "Affluence seems not to."

So if Morrisett outlined the ideology that is a large part of the problem, and Mathews a potential ideology that might help bring a solution, and if new values and ideas in governance and economics make possible a degree of international cooperation heretofore unknown, what remains if not the human dimension? To a greater degree than others, William Drayton and Hassan Hathout addressed that dimension in regard to culture and ideology.

William Drayton saw the key issue as being "how we manage ourselves, both as societies and as individuals." He stressed that "the institutions we live in are our most important educational experience."

He went on to say that we must develop the institutional capacity to meet change with constructive adaptation. If we are going to live together in a world of enormous human diversity, we need ways of organizing ourselves, as individuals and as societies, that encourage us to work together. How we design and develop our institutions, how we run them, how we structure individual–institutional relationships, make up one of the most important dimensions of culture and ideology. Institutions need to be decentralized but integrated: one without the other does not work. What "integrated decentralization" attempts to do, he added, whether in a corporation, a government agency, a foundation, or some other institution, is to "release the energy of individuals and small groups in that institution."

Individuals are the key. "During the era of the Cold War," Jessica Mathews remarked, "individuals really were outside the key decisions that were being made. . . . Now individuals by the billions are not only the cause of the problem, but the source of its solution."

Drayton stressed behavior and how it can be

influenced. He bemoaned the fact that many schools are now cutting back on team sports, which he feels balance centralized coherence and discipline with individual energy. In the session on governance he expressed the need for *public entrepreneurs*. Responding to a question during the session on culture and ideology, he pointed out that every time such a person succeeds, he or she becomes a role model for others. "People learn by anecdote more than by theory."

Yet transforming institutions to release the energy of individuals, and changing the values and beliefs of individuals so that people become problem solvers rather than problems, requires leadership. But leaders are subject to the same values and beliefs as anyone else. Lloyd Morrisett expressed disappointment that, in the United States at least, so little leadership is being shown in using television to help generate new ideas; and American television, of course, is widely exported to the rest of the world. It was Hassan Hathout who responded shortly afterward: "It might mean a little loss of dollars for the media if they switch from being the media of pleasure to being the media of ideas and ideals, but if we want a sustainable world in the long term, I think that is what should be done."

What kinds of values and beliefs will determine the purpose of specific technologies, of the media, of governments and economies and the resources on which they depend? What induces leaders to change? What induces anyone to change? "We've become," said Drayton, "selfish people who take from the poor." Both he and Hathout expressed the hope for a spiritual rebirth.

"Legalities are not the answer," commented Hathout, "but attitudes. And that is when white and the colored, man and woman, rich and poor, North and South, developed and underdeveloped, victor and vanquished, feel that the other is an equal and endeared brother or sister." He quoted the Koran: "You people, we have created you from a single pair of a male and a female and have made you into nations and the tribes, that you might get to know and to cherish one another, not to despise one another."

Drayton expressed a similar desire to see a revival of empathy, of the insight to not do to others what we don't like done to us. "Empathy carries with it an unstated first principle of egalitarianism. . . . One can cause major change peaceably by holding up to people the fact that they are not behaving in an egalitarian way. That's what Gandhi and King did."

And yet . . . Alvaro Umaña in the opening session pointed out that it takes only an ignorant person with a chain saw to destroy a forest, while it takes tremendous knowledge to manage the forest in such a way as to preserve biodiversity and allow communities to develop on a sustainable basis. Will empathy alone open the doors of knowledge, of understanding? To refrain from doing harm requires a certain self-restraint and self-control, and the ideology of social Darwinism, progress, and the exploitation of nature has little to say about such things, let alone their role in understanding a forest.

Legalities are not the answer, but attitudes.

At the beginning of his presentation on governance, John Steinbruner quoted a U.S. senator's response to the suggestion that transnational solutions will be required to deal with the problems facing us: "All of history and most of human nature are against you. What have you got going for you?"

Hassan Hathout might have had something to say to the senator, when he emphasized self-restraint and self-control as vital values. "The current extolment of individuality," he said, "gives moods, desires, whims, inclinations, attractions, orientations, or whatever, the status of legitimacy. It is a moral obligation to consider harm to self and others while making our choices and to say no to one's self when no is indicated. For this indeed is the other side of the coin of freedom. That is why we Muslims fast one month of every year. Nothing by mouth from dawn to sunset just to train ourselves to say no when no should be said.

"It is," he added, "a matter of conscience, and what would humanity be without the moorings of the human conscience?" □