



PATRIARCHY **as a** **CONCEPTUAL** **TRAP**

ELIZABETH DODSON GRAY

By patriarchy I mean a culture that is slanted so that men are valued a lot and women are valued less; or in which men's prestige is up and women's prestige is down.

A conceptual trap is to the thought world of the mind what the astronomers' black holes are to the universe. Once inside, there seems to be no way of getting out or seeing out. A conceptual trap is a way of thinking which is like a room that, once you are inside, you cannot imagine a world outside.

Reality has always been a seamless web of interrelated systems. Within patriarchy we have simply tried to superimpose our humanly generated hierarchical paradigms onto that reality in much the same way that we projected in earlier times a pre-Copernican astronomy upon the skies.

ALSO BY ELIZABETH DODSON GRAY

Green Paradise Lost (1979)

Sunday School Manifesto (1994)

EDITED BY ELIZABETH DODSON GRAY

Sacred Dimensions of Women's Experience (1988)

CO-AUTHORED WITH DAVID DODSON GRAY

Children of Joy:

Raising Your Own Home-Grown Christians
(1975)

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ELIZABETH DODSON GRAY

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*To my colleagues
in the U.S. Association for The Club of Rome—
who have been a nurturing environment
for my thinking on these matters;*

and—

*to my husband David
who has never confused
my ability to critique male culture
with my ability to love him.*

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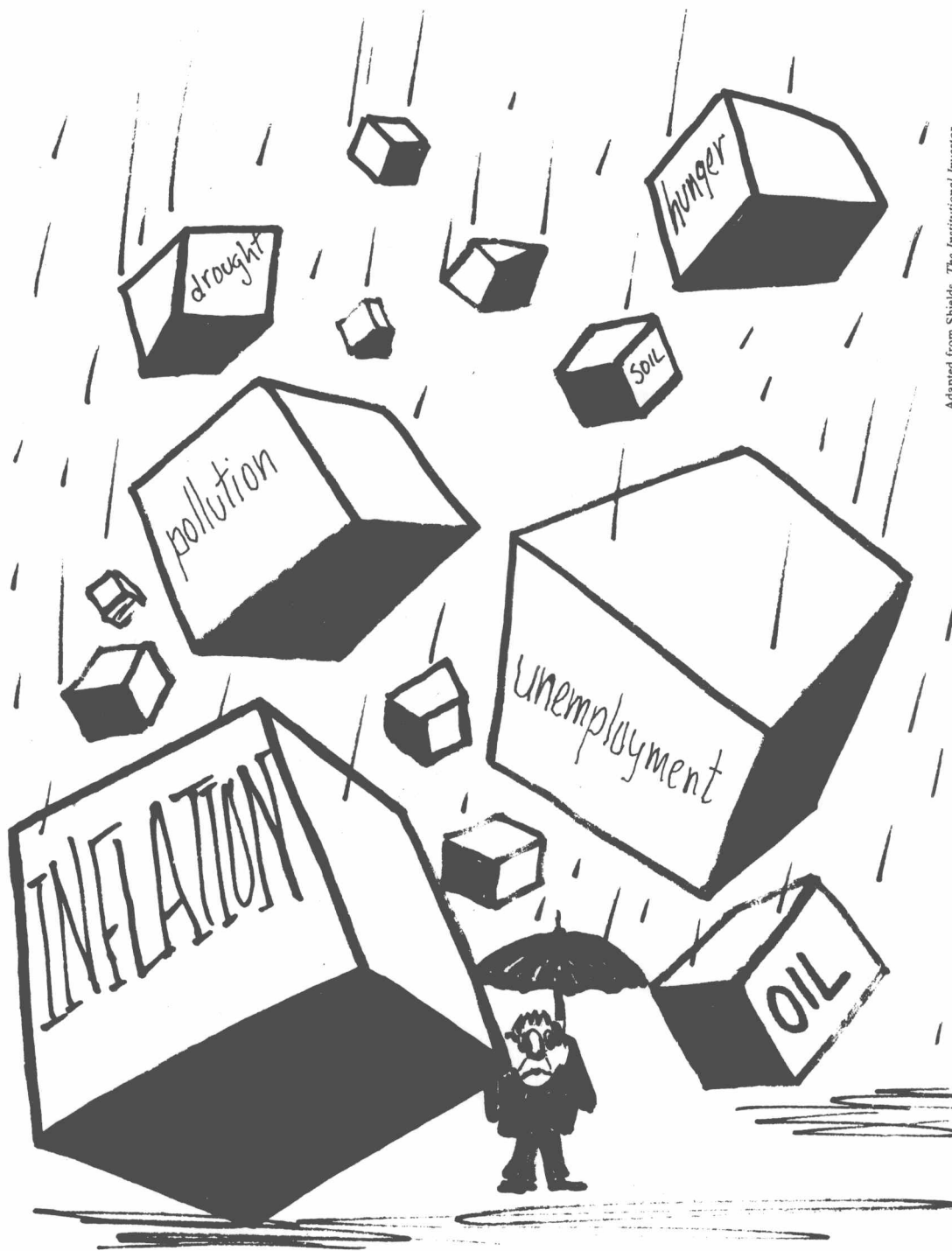
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"I still say there are no limits to growth."

About Conceptual Traps

By Thomas W. Wilson, Jr.

Our World-Future

There has been a remarkable increase in public awareness of the global predicament since *The Limits to Growth* first appeared in 1972. This awareness has been fed by a series of subsequent world models, by a scattering of national associations affiliated with The Club of Rome, by the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment, and by the emergence of something loosely known as the "futurist movement." And yes, there also has been a backlash against "gloom and doom."

Our compound global predicament normally is described in terms of its major component parts:

- population growth,
- pressures on natural resources and systems,
- energy shortages,
- pollution,
- threatened species,
- human impacts on climate and ecosystems, and
- capital requirements.

At the option of whoever is doing the describing, factors such as malnutrition, inflation, unemployment, and other contemporary ills may be added to this list. The founder of The Club of Rome, Aurelio Peccei, usually mentions nuclear weapons, although most globalists and futurists seem to believe that nuclear war is for somebody else to worry about.

The Smoothness of Our Predicament

The very wholeness of the Future Problem leaves the impression that it is round and smooth with no apparent handles to get hold of. There are no obvious places to start remedial action which have emerged. And no obvious strategies have been evolved, except to work away at some component, vaguely aware that this could so compound another piece of the problem as to be counterproductive.

Thus there is difficulty in getting much beyond an initial awareness and an ideological stand-off regarding all these interconnected global problems we face. And that difficulty has been aggravated by professional specialization, by the sharply defined focus of academic disciplines, by inherited patterns of organizations and functions, and by sectoral expertise dealing with some part of the overall problem. All these have mitigated against integrated analysis by public and private institutions involved in governance.

Somehow we must rescue the perception that there actually is a global predicament from such technical analysis and its quantification in economic terms. This is an important perception, and it must be related to the realm of political action and our current decision-making. We must try to identify and articulate the politics of the present predicament. Perhaps, to begin with, it can be reconceptualized in terms more conducive to political analysis.



The Task of Reconceptualizing

One way to go about reconceptualizing is to look behind the major trends contributing to the global predicament, identify the human behavior patterns that got us into this mess, and then examine, if we can, the dominant beliefs, ideas, and assumptions that influenced the behavior that brought us to where we are today.

It is obvious that this could grow into a vast academic research agenda. But for the sake of argument one might begin with a quick-and-dirty exploration of the following five ideas/attitudes/assumptions:

The assumption that—

- *A major mission of humanity on earth is to conquer nature.*

The assumption that—

- *The best if not the only road to social progress lies in continuous expansion of the gross output of material goods and services on a national and global basis.*

The assumption that—

- *Sooner or later science will provide solutions for social problems;*

and the related assumption that—

- *Accumulating knowledge from application of the scientific method and the rule of reason will abolish emotion and superstition from the political process.*

The assumption that—

- *Because of male superiority, societies are naturally organized along patriarchy lines.*

The assumption that—

- *The main business in international relations is the manipulation of military-based power in support of inherently conflicting national interests, especially those of the "great powers."*



"What a beautiful spot to build something!"

Each of these assumptions has influenced millions of decisions at all levels of social organization throughout the Western world during the past few centuries. Whatever merit any of these perceptions may have had in the past, it is evident that they have no basis in contemporary political, social, or strategic realities.

A Set of Conceptual Traps

In this perspective, the present global predicament can be described in terms of a set of outmoded beliefs—or *conceptual traps*¹—that have influenced endless decisions over a long period of time and have now become part of the global problem. In this perspective, the much-touted but seldom-detailed “transition” we are now in can be seen as a struggle for liberation from a set of malignant mindsets.

It is obvious that this struggle has been going on in this and other countries for the past decade or two. Indeed, the civil rights movement, women’s liberation, the environmental movement, conservation, decentralization, family planning, and other familiar social phenomena already have gone far enough to have produced a powerful backlash. It is conceivable that this, in turn, will lead to a synthesis that might resolve the sterile confrontation over the causes and cures of the global predicament.

In any event, I suggest it is by exploring the lively ferment in the field of ideas, beliefs, assumptions, and values—as distinguished from more of the technical analysis—that we can begin to see the political dimensions of the *problematique* and how to steer the political process of adaptation.²