

SECTION II: The Questions

03. The Question of Our Time

For 5,000 years, humans lived in the past tense: "Yesterday was the same as tomorrow." For the next 500 years people lived in the present tense: "Today can be whatever we want it to be." But now, for the next 50 years we must start living in the future tense: "Tomorrow's social, economic and political constraints must become today's reality."

How to live peacefully and sustainably on a crowded planet in the 21st century is the question of our time.

To make the transition from our current state of affairs to living peacefully and sustainably in the world requires reconciling three ideological dimensions: economic, political and social (such as capitalism, nationalism and religion).

These approaches are now failing us. Up to the 19th Century ideology was all we had. But, we now live in the age of information. Science and technology have given us rationale methods for collecting and interpreting facts about how our economic, political and social systems work, and for making logical decisions about them. Ideological answers – ones

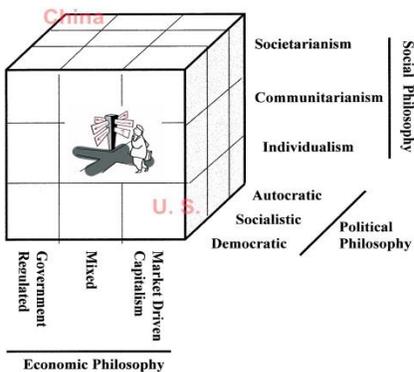
based simply on beliefs – are not appropriate in the 21st Century. Facts are non-negotiable, unlike ideologies that provide relative perspectives.

A perspective is a filter that selective provides a focus: religion on morality, economics on money, politics on power, and social on beliefs. Such focuses lead to hierarchical thinking in which one dimension assumes first order priority. If my primary focus is on increasing wealth through economic growth then the practical issue is what distribution of power and set of beliefs will support this objective.

This kind of ideological thinking leads to conflict when the different perspectives results in different conclusions about what are the appropriate policy decisions. The impasse misses the point that the conclusions are based on different implicit assumptions about what is the first order priority in a sequential thought process.

In fact, actual events do not owe allegiance to any particular ideology nor hierarchical perspective. The important components of the issues of our time are interactive and simultaneous. The high rate of incarceration of black men in the US has been sequentially treated as a political (failure of the justice system), economic (poverty) and social (dysfunctional family) problem. Sequential reform at the level of one perspective while the other two have not been simultaneously address have failed. Similar to multiplication, when one value is zero, the product is zero.

Likewise the answer to the question of our time is not political, economic or social. Rather, the interplay of power, wealth and belief must be simultaneously brought into balance. What combination of political, economic and social factors works best for whom and under what conditions? The solutions to the many issues of our time are to be found in the matrix in which the three elements of power, wealth and beliefs achieve a dynamic state of balance.



But, this picture is not good enough. To be testable each of the three factors need to be given a specific objective definition that can be measured. Only then is it possible to scientifically examine how the three components form a matrix to simultaneously interact with each other.

Toward this end I have selected two concrete reference points (issues that by most standards will pass as components of the question of our time) for each of the three dimensions. Others are possible, including very specific topics such as the incarceration rate of black men in the previous example. However, the six issues selected are arguably the critical elements for answering the question of our time. They provide a well-established empirical basis for simultaneously treating power, wealth and belief as interdependent components of a matrix.

1. Wealth and income disparity (Economic)
- 2: Societal collapse (Social)
- 3: The current state of the human condition (Social)
- 4: The role and function of government (Political)
- 5: National security (Political)
- 6: Ownership and control of knowledge (Economic)

Are each of the six an issue that must be addressed now, not later, in order to answer the question of our time: *How to live peacefully and sustainably on a crowded planet in the 21st century.*

Yes or No?

If the factual evidence is “Yes,” then the only matter for ideological debate is how, not whether, the interplay of the economic (wealth), political (power) and social (beliefs) are to be addressed.