

D 2. WHAT TRENDS ?

What sort of future are we headed for? Where would present trends carry us? What trends do we see that we might project into the future? Let us consider some economic trends and then some social trends for the U.S. and then for the world as a whole. We can project for a near future, for a very distant future, and for an intermediate period.

It should be easy to project a growing real GNP for the U.S. and for the world. The trend is clearly upward, though growth rates differ for different sections of the world. What inflation rates seem likely on the basis of recent experience in different countries and what do we guess as to the future political constellations? What can and what cannot be projected in the way of technological changes? What population growth rates would recent and present trends project, what reasons are there for thinking the absolute growth may stop at some level, and what level seems likely? What per capita real income is implied by the GNP and population projections?

What rates of pollution of various types are implied, and what depletion rates for various exhaustible resources are implied by GNP growth and present practices? What changes in these rates are likely, and on what are such estimates based? What are the prospects for sustainable yields from our life-support systems?

What is the future of human health, of famines, of AIDS and other serious diseases, of drug cultures? What if biological warfare occurs?

What is the likely future of the family farm, latifundia elsewhere, the economic role of government, labor unionism, profit-sharing, junk bonds, international trade, international capital movements, international migration, technology transfer, multi-national corporations, protectionism, big business and small business generally?

What are the futures of various injustices, intolerance, violence, race relations, ethnicity, religious fanaticisms, class relations, various nationalisms, internationalism and international institutions, present international conflicts, war, authoritarian governments, democratic structures and democratic political processes, human rights, the status of women, etc.?

How far will a common world culture develop, what will be its likely character, and what will characterize various national cultures? What ideologies seem likely to dominate the future?

We have both optimistic and pessimistic views as to where what are judged to be present trends will take us. On what do the various possibilities in each case seem to rest? When there are instances in which we can see trends, as with criminality, going in opposite directions at present, we have

the problem of deciding whether one trend is likely to dominate the other.

What sorts of combinations does all that add up to? What appears to be the best potential? What might be the worst? What in between seems most likely, and why? Where are we doing well or badly now? What are the action options if some prospects are unwanted and better outcomes desired?

The world, including this country, may be moving into a treacherous future. Kenneth Boulding in "THE MEANING OF THE 20th CENTURY" written in 1964 says that the world is in grave danger of falling into several terrible traps. Actually we are already in the traps he mentions: a war system trap, a population and poverty trap for much of the world, and an energy trap. The question is, can we escape those traps or is worse disaster in store for us.

How much serious thought have we given, individually and as peoples and nations, to the issues all this raises. Do we really know what we want in the long run, is it what we ought to want, and are we really prepared to try to bring about the kind of world that would be better than the present world?

Alas, most of our drives are for quite short run goals.

There has not been any excess of thought among the public, nor much attempt to develop a consensus on, what is worth aiming for, nor about what is needed to make it more likely. Nor has there been much serious thought about what might get much worse, and about what, if anything, could be done to avert very undesirable developments. We tend to get so fully occupied with daily tasks that we just muddle along. We do not take time to consider either what might befall us inadvertently, or what improvements in things could be made if we made the effort required.