Ideology, the Open Door, and Foreign Policy

FRANK NINKOVICH

A topic ripe for reassessment by historians of U.S. foreign relations, especially given the existence of a social science literature that makes possible a modest advance, is the role of ideology in foreign policy. Frequently used but inadequately defined, the term ideology has hitherto possessed only marginal analytical value. Generally speaking, those who have sensed its importance have only vaguely defined its meaning, while those who have sought to make systematic use of the concept have underestimated its significance.[1] Among the latter the Open Door scholars have achieved the most impressive results in their employment of ideology as a historical variable. Ironically, the very coherence and clarity of articulation that are the characteristic strengths of the revisionists' approach also make it easier to identify serious conceptual shortcomings in their viewpoint. Thus both the virtues and the defects of revisionism, not polemical intent, mark it as the logical foil for a discussion of ideological determinants in foreign policy. By defining, illustrating, and expanding upon the problematic aspects of the Open Door, a more precise conception of ideology should come into view.

According to the Open Door theorists, American geopolitical involvement is, at bottom, a function of economic imperatives. In its skeletal form the argument holds that the inherent tendency toward domestic overproduction and underconsumption requires a safety valve in the form of foreign markets. But trade, while solving some problems, creates others.

[1]See staple works dealing with the Cold War such as George Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900–1950* (Chicago, 1950), pp. 82, 87; Robert E. Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations* (Chicago, 1953), p. 438; John Lukacs, *A New History of the Cold War*, 3d ed. (Garden City, NY, 1966), pp. 321–22, 379; Herbert Feis, *From Trust to Terror* (New York, 1970), p. 4; and Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston, 1977), p. 8, all of which note the significance of the ideological factor but tend to equate it with an ill-defined idealism. Although Yergin speaks of the "world set" of U.S. leaders, his distinction between Riga and Yalta axioms bears a strong resemblance to the shopworn idealist-realist dichotomy.

Economic expansion leads to the creation of interests abroad that become the incubators of political and, ultimately, military involvement. According to William Appleman Williams, "conflicts in the market place automatically become political conflicts," while Walter LaFeber cites with approval Frederick Jackson Turner's warning that "once fully afloat on the sea of worldwide economic interests, we shall soon develop political interests." The result of economic expansion, as expressed by Milton Plesur, was that "political ties rather easily and neatly followed this commercial pattern."[2]

However, to state the argument so baldly, without any reference to the role of ideas, is to be unfairly reductionist. Recognizing the implausibility of directly linking all political involvements to immediate economic interests in such knee-jerk fashion, most historians of the Open Door persuasion adhere instead to an "interest theory" of ideological causation, originally propounded by Karl Marx, which consigns material interests to a less visible, if still dominant, role. According to this view, material causes are not self-evident or transparent, if only because interests are refracted by human perceptions and by the valuations that individuals and societies place on them—in short, economic interests are ideologically mediated. The very existence of human consciousness ordains that the proximate immediate causes of political involvement be ideological in form, while the ultimately decisive economic factors, like the great mass of an iceberg, remain submerged and hidden from view.[3]

The concealed role of material interests suggests an essential feature of ideology: its illusiveness. According to most theoretical writings on the subject, the distinguishing characteristic of ideology is its cognitive distortion. In the Marxist version, bourgeois values, because they are grounded in a historically transient and ultimately untenable class position, are inherently tainted by distorted perceptions of reality that consist in significant measure of "illusory representations." The entire intellectual superstructure of capitalist society, including its religious, esthetic, political, and even, by some accounts, its scientific conceptions, is thought to be a projection of class interests, and as a consequence of this narrowness, to suffer from falsehood. To the extent that it deviates from reality, as defined in dialectical fashion, it is chimerical. To be sure, this shortcoming is asserted to be a matter of degree and not of absolute falsehood, but when

[2]William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (rev. ed.; New York, 1962), p. 131; Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire* (Ithaca, NY, 1963), p. 70; Milton Plesur, *America's Outward Thrust* (DeKalb, 1971), p. 230.

[3]Brief descriptions of interest theories of ideology are found in Eric Carlton, *Ideology and Social Order* (London, 1977), pp. 24–25; and Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), pp. 201–3. The most trenchant definition by Marx of ideology is probably K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (London, 1977), p. 47. Realist interpretations of ideology are at times surprisingly similar. For example, Werner Levi, "Ideology, Interests, and Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 14 (March 1970): 1–31. Only the definition of what constitutes an "interest" is changed.

carried over to the revisionist framework, it has some interesting consequences for the manner in which foreign policy interests are defined.[4]

One possibility is that interests can be ideologically created where none may exist in fact, as policymakers become, in Lloyd Gardner's phrase, "architects of illusion." The most familiar example of argument in this vein holds that U.S. attachment to the myth of the China market led to a policy based on unrealistic rhetoric. Built on false expectations of limitless markets and buttressed by rationalizations about helping China to modernize, the Open Door outlook—a general ideological orientation that reflected more the expansionist needs of the economic system than of particular interests—was the proximate cause of U.S. involvement. Protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, once detached from specific interests to this degree, ideology verges perilously near to becoming an unpredictable independent variable. But whatever the logical difficulties of this approach the acknowledgment of the qualified autonomy of ideological causation represents, in terms of increased theoretical scope, a major advance over what Williams calls the "narrow, crude economic motivation or determinism" associated with vulgar Marxist interpretations.[5]

The sophistication of economic interpretation is further enhanced by defining ideology in a way that emphasizes the cultural nature of historical causation. Ideological beliefs are stretched to encompass not only ways of making money but also ways of life. As Bruce Kuklick notes, a properly formulated conception of ideology must include "the functioning of an entire political economy" as well as its economic features. From this perspective, ideologies are world views that contain within their boundaries a series of related political, social, esthetic, religious—in other words, cultural—values. Thus, Williams's view of ideology as "a nation's cultural value system" appears to be a representative definition. One example of the uses of this expanded conception should suffice to demonstrate its historical utility. In attempting to explain the centrality to American foreign policy in the 1940s of eastern Europe, a region decidedly peripheral to U.S. economic interests, Gardner argues that "what was at stake was an environment conducive to the survival of American—and

---

[4]For the illusory nature of ideology see the excellent Hans Barth, *Truth and Ideology,* trans. Frederic Lilge (Berkeley, 1973), esp. pp. 38–127; George Lichtheim, *The Concept of Ideology and Other Essays* (New York, 1976), pp. 3–46; Henri Lefebvre, *The Sociology of Marx* (New York, 1969), pp. 59–88; and Harry M. Johnson, "Ideology and the Social System," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,* 17 vols., ed. David Sills (New York, 1968), 7:76–85.

[5]For examples of China policy as illusion see Williams, *Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, p. 35; and Marilyn Blatt Young, "American Expansion, 1860–1900: The Far East," in *Towards A New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*, ed. Barton J. Bernstein (New York, 1968), p. 196. Realist interpretations on occasion make use of a related concept, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York, 1972), p. 352. The quotation is from William Appleman Williams, *The Great Evasion* (Chicago, 1964), p. 46.

American style—institutions." That is, the issues were viewed in more comprehensive cultural terms.[6]

One point of agreement among writers on ideology is that it "must 'make sense' and not result in logical absurdities." Although a degree of ambiguity and contradiction is unavoidable and even necessary if an ideology is to perform an integrative function, its values cannot be randomly associated but must be woven into a fairly coherent conceptual pattern or belief system. It is possible to insist that within this pattern economic values are of central importance, all others being peripheral. But if a measure of autonomy is conceded to the ideological sphere, and if the elements of ideology are agreed to possess a systemic quality, these cultural values take on a causal significance of their own. Because an ideology is a systematic and interdependent whole, noneconomic beliefs affect the economic as well as the reverse. One ignores them only at the risk of subverting, or hopelessly confusing, the conception of ideology as a belief system.[7]

Moreover, a large body of social scientists, including a sizable number of neo-Marxists, claim that these cultural elements are the source of unique and vital social characteristics that cannot be accounted for in economic terms. Perhaps the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins puts the case

---

[6]Bruce Kuklick, *American Policy and the Division of Germany* (Ithaca, NY, 1972), p. 238; Thomas McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire 1893–1901* (Chicago, 1967), p. 9; William Appleman Williams, *The Shaping of American Diplomacy*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1956), 1:ix; Lloyd Gardner, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy* (Boston, 1964), p. xiii. On eastern Europe see also Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War 1945–1980*, 4th ed. (New York, 1980), p. 29; and Thomas C. Paterson, *Soviet-American Confrontation: Postwar Reconstruction and the Origins of the Cold War* (Baltimore, 1975), p. 99. This conflation of culture and ideology assumes that the Open Door outlook was the brainchild of an elite stratum which, by virtue of its strategic social position, created a consensus that formed the conceptual core of American foreign policy. This concept of cultural control corresponds to the now fashionable notion of hegemony elaborated by the neo-Marxist theoretician Antonio Gramsci in the 1920s. William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life* (New York, 1980), pp. 10–14, offers an argument that corresponds closely to Gramsci's views. On Gramsci see also Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution* (Berkeley, 1980), pp. 170–79. This author personally sees more confusion than enlightenment arising from this equation of ideology with culture and recognizes also that the culture concept itself is extremely vague. Unavoidably, however, for the purposes of this essay terms such as culture, ideology, Weltanschauung, creed, and belief system will be used interchangeably. On the important question of conceptual boundaries see Willard A. Mullins, "On the Concept of Ideology in Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 66 (June 1972): 488–510.

[7]Ideologies as systematic constructs are discussed in Edward Shils, "Ideology," in Shils, *The Intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays* (Chicago, 1972), p. 24; John Plamenatz, *Ideologies* (New York, 1971), p. 15; D. J. Manning, ed., *The Form of Ideology* (London, 1980), p. 1; Louis J. Halle, *The Ideological Imagination* (London, 1972), p. 5; William E. Connolly, *Political Science and Ideology* (New York, 1967), p. 2; and Leslie White, *The Concept of Cultural Systems* (New York, 1975), passim. The quote is from Mullins, "On the Concept of Ideology in Political Science," p. 510. Compare the comment by Williams, *Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, p. 229, with respect to the Open Door ideology, that it was "very difficult—and perhaps artificial ... to assign priorities to its various facets"—which he immediately proceeds to do.

most clearly, arguing that "no cultural form can ever be read from a set of 'material forces' as if the cultural were the dependent variable of an inescapable practical logic." Applying this point to foreign relations, it follows at minimum that the many forms of capitalism, economic expansion, nationalism, and imperialism all need to be differentiated according to their cultural peculiarities. Regardless of whether one is a cultural materialist or idealist, once a simple reductionism is set aside these cultural forces need to be given serious consideration. It is precisely these "peripheral" aspects of foreign policy and their logical implications that the revisionist conception of the Open Door has neglected. Despite its professed concern with "the functioning of an entire political economy," its portrait of ideology to date has been largely one-dimensional, with its subjects inhabiting a cultural universe dominated almost exclusively by economic perceptions. Open Door man is little more than a misguided version of economic man—a stick figure.[8]

There has been enough work done to provide a partial inventory of cultural corollaries of the Open Door outlook. In a path-breaking study, James A. Field, Jr., explored the private side of American isolationism in the nineteenth century and described in detail the functioning of a flourishing religious and cultural as well as commercial internationalism. More recently the work of Michael Hogan, although it focuses on issues of economic diplomacy, highlights the organizational determinants of policy. Hogan emphasizes the pervasive suspicion among American businessmen of state planning in economic affairs and details the development of a private informal corporate approach to international economic relations. Stressed in this writer's own study of the genesis of cultural and intellectual diplomacy are the voluntarist tradition of cultural relations and the efforts of early policymakers to avoid the twin dangers of propaganda and centralized political control. The distinctions emphasized in these works between public and private, formal and informal, political and nonpolitical suggest, among other things, that the Open Door outlook was just as much concerned with structure and organization as with economics. Indeed, it is in the nature of the case that ways of life have just as much to do with how as with what and with form, structure, and style as with content.[9]

[8]Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago, 1976), p. 206. For the tendency of neo-Marxists to stress ideological rather than material factors see Martin Seliger, *The Marxist Conception of Ideology* (London, 1977), passim; Alvin Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (New York, 1980), pp. 32–60; Peter Golding and Graham Murdock, "Ideology and the Mass Media: The Question of Determination," in *Ideology and Cultural Production*, ed. Michele Barrett et al. (New York, 1977), pp. 202–5; Lichtheim, *The Concept of Ideology*, pp. 36–40; and Nicholas Abercrombie, *Class, Structure and Knowledge* (New York, 1980), p. 39. For expressions of the importance of the cultural variable in the classical sociologies of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim see Elvin Hatch, *Theories of Man and Culture* (New York, 1973), p. 179; H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (New York, 1977), pp. 316–18; and Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (Berkeley, 1977), pp. 43–46.

[9]James A. Field, Jr., *America and the Mediterranean World, 1776–1882* (Princeton, 1969); Michael Hogan, *Informal Entente* (Columbia, MO, 1977); Frank Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas* (New York, 1981).

From this perspective the Open Door, in addition to its economic aspects, was the extension to foreign policy of a domestic tradition of localism and decentralized power, one that relied on the informal workings of private interests to achieve national ends. With some twentieth-century modifications for the development of modern corporate institutions, this outlook was a faithful reflection of nineteenth-century liberalism. A more lifelike rendering of the Open Door incorporates the familiar elements of fair trade, minimal governmental intrusion in the affairs of the corporation and the individual, and the abhorrence of power politics that were so characteristic of the liberal outlook. Economic expansion, limited government, and political isolation were combined into an interlocking and internally consistent whole. Not surprisingly, then, the formal quietism of American foreign policy following the Civil War, in Morton Keller's phrase, "faithfully reflected the ambivalence toward the use of governmental power that pervaded the postwar American polity." This description could serve equally well for long stretches of twentieth-century American diplomacy.[10]

When viewed in relation to all its elements, the Open Door ideology was designed to encourage commercial and cultural expansion while avoiding political entanglements. It was intended, as Williams himself has remarked, "to win the victories without the wars." The absence of a political dimension resulted in a passivity that struck most thoughtful nineteenth-century observers as tantamount to the absence of a foreign policy altogether. Of the more influential analysts, Alexis de Tocqueville noted that American policy "consists more in abstaining than in acting," while Lord James Bryce mentioned America's external relations "as the traveler did the snakes in Iceland, only to note their absence." These assessments notwithstanding, the United States did have a policy, but it was one in which, as Akira Iriye suggests, "it preferred to play its role as a culture, not as a power, in the world arena." The predilection for "informal empire," or an "imperialism of free trade," much emphasized by Open Door scholars, also corresponds to this pattern of political celibacy.[11]

Quite apart from the freedom from political involvement afforded by the geographical gift of free security, this antipolitical bias was a logically necessary complement to the ideology's other components. More than

---

[10]Morton Keller, *Affairs of State* (Cambridge, MA, 1977), p. 98. The concurrent persistence of protectionism and parochialism suggests the existence of an alternative ideological framework and undercuts the argument for the identity of culture and ideology.

[11]Williams, *Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, p. 49; Williams, *The Great Evasion*, p. 42; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols. (New York, 1972), 1:234; James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, 2 vols. (New York, 1910), 2:565; Akira Iriye, "Culture and Power: International Relations as Intercultural Relations," *Diplomatic History* 3 (Spring 1979): 120. Arguments concerning the imperialism of free trade are conveniently summarized in Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Theories of Imperialism*, trans. P. S. Falla (New York, 1980), pp. 86–99.

that, according to Carl Schmitt, it was a trait that lay at the heart of liberal thought:

> The negation of the political, which is inherent in every consistent individualism, leads necessarily to a political practice of distrust toward all conceivable political forces and forms of state and government, but never produces on its own a positive theory of state, government and politics. . . . There exists a liberal policy of trade, church, and education, but absolutely no liberal politics, only a liberal critique of politics.

There was good reason, from a domestic institutional standpoint, for this antipolitical foreign policy, if one may call it that. If, in the standard Clausewitzian formula, war was an integral part of international politics, the consequences for a liberal polity were potentially disastrous. In the judgment of Tocqueville, there was no greater danger to democracy: "All those who seek to destroy the liberties of a democratic nation ought to know that war is the surest and shortest means to accomplish it. This is the first axiom of the science." L. T. Hobhouse, in a twentieth-century tract on the meaning of liberalism, arrived at the same conclusion in his discussion of foreign policy. "It is the essence of Liberalism," he claimed, "to oppose the use of force, the basis of all tyranny." In view of this abhorrence of things political, it might be suggested that this compulsive avoidance of political involvement constituted, for fear of its consequences, an implicit acknowledgment within the ideology of the primacy of political over economic forces.[12]

For all its elasticity the economic interest theory fails to account for the transition to power political behavior by the United States, a transition that is more assumed than explained. It simply will not do, as Tyler Dennett attempted, to define the Open Door as interventionist and let it go at that. The pursuit of economic expansion did lead to the potential for conflict, but there was nothing within the ideology itself that sanctioned conflict resolution by means of realpolitik. On the contrary, the creation of interests abroad was sanctioned on the assumption that trade meant peace. Commerce, like any human activity, can be interpreted in political terms, but it is useful to recall the point made by Max Weber that "economic action is a *peaceful* exercise of power." The Open Door doctrine constantly stressed the dangers to liberalism arising from the exercise of force and, if anything, it was perceived as the antithesis of aggressive nationalist

---

[12]Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (New Brunswick, NJ, 1976), p. 70; Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* 2:269; L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (New York, 1914), p. 27. Compare also the well-known remark by John Quincy Adams to Edward Everett, 31 January 1822, quoted in Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1949), p. 358, which warns of "the tendency of a direct interference in foreign wars, even wars for freedom, to change the very foundations of our government from *liberty* to *power*."

policies of economic expansion backed by military means. The implications of all this are clear enough: wars of commerce or entering into great power competition for commercial advantage marked the failure rather than the fulfillment of the Open Door policy. Indeed, because they could not logically be undertaken as part of the ideology, such departures amounted to its negation and abandonment.[13]

This being said, there is overwhelming evidence that American statesmen, from Woodrow Wilson to the Cold War presidents, indeed wielded American power in an attempt to create an "open world." This raises the problem—one that is not resolved by the invocation of irony or tragedy, or the assertion of necessity—of reconciling their undeniable Open Door aspirations with a series of interventions that appear to fly in the face of the ideology's integrity.[14] The relationship between values premised on nonintervention and intervention aimed at preserving those values is paradoxical: to defend one value is to violate the other. As Daniel Yergin, among others, has pointed out, "in order to achieve his goals, a Wilsonian must be a renegade Wilsonian." How, then, could the nation abandon the Open Door to create an open world? How can a belief system be internally consistent and self-contradictory at the same time? Avoided by revisionists and so-called liberal realists alike, this puzzling feature of liberal interventionism poses the logical point of departure for an investigation of the role of ideology in modern American foreign policy.[15]

The paradox cannot be resolved in logical terms, but its irrational historical resolution can be comprehended by an expansion of our conception of ideology. As an essential first step, we need to recognize that in twentieth-century American foreign policy there have been two open door ideologies in operation, and that historians have rather casually switched between the two without distinguishing between them or even recognizing their discrete existence. Although American policymakers were committed to constructing an open world, their ideology was neither part of nor

---

[13]Tyler Dennett, "The Open Door Policy as Interventionism," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 168 (July 1933): 78–83; Weber is quoted in Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York, 1949), p. 654 (emphasis in the original).

[14]Although William professes to be a nondeterminist, the title of his major work, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, as well as his economic theory, contributes to confusion on this issue. In classical terms a tragedy is an event that, being fated, had to happen. It is definitely not, as Williams implies, something that ought not have happened. This observation is owed to Barry Karl of the University of Chicago.

[15]Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, p. 10. Other realist writers have noticed this paradox. Kennan, in *American Diplomacy, 1900–1950,* p. 65, marvels at "a curious characteristic of democracy: this amazing ability to shift gears overnight in one's ideological attitudes, depending on whether one considers one's self at war or peace." Unfortunately, Kennan proceeds no further. Robert E. Osgood, in *Ideals and Self-Interest*, p. 439, argues that "compromising one's principles in order to promote them" is necessary but does not explain how this is accomplished. Joan Hoff-Wilson's *Ideology and Economics* (Columbia, MO, 1974), which recognizes "the discrepancy between action and theory" as a serious problem, is a pioneering attempt to grapple with these issues.

a logical consequence of the Open Door because for all their similarities, the Open Door and the open world were altogether distinct ideological orientations. True, they were linked to one another in the sense that they possessed what Ludwig Wittgenstein called a "family resemblance." Many of the same terms were used, many of the same values asserted, and without question one was an offshoot of the other. But in their meaning, their composition, and especially their consequences, they were fundamentally different forms of ideological experience. The problem is not only to define these ideologies but also to explain their interrelationships, for we are dealing here with a transvaluation of values.[16]

The literature of the social sciences contains numerous typologies of values, most of which enlarge upon the age-old dichotomy between means and ends. Clifford Geertz, in describing the conflicting goals from which developing nations must choose, makes a distinction between essentialism and epochalism, which represent, respectively, "the desire for coherence and continuity on the one hand and for dynamism and contemporaneity on the other." In a famous essay on "Politics as a Vocation," Weber explores the differences between an "ethic of responsibility" and an "ethic of ultimate ends," a distinction that contrasts the balanced appraisal of ends and means with the single-minded devotion to absolute values. And in a somewhat different formulation, Milton Rokeach distinguishes between instrumental values, which focus on desirable modes of conduct, and terminal values, which emphasize desirable end states of existence.[17]

These conceptual schemes are not perfectly compatible, but taken together they suggest that a belief system can be characterized by the way in which it defines its goals, assesses the consequences of action for the attainment of its ends, and chooses its methods. Although means and ends are often described as coexisting in a state of tension, it is more likely, to use Rokeach's terms, that under normal circumstances "they represent two separate yet fundamentally interconnected systems, wherein all the values concerning modes of behavior are instrumental to the attainment of all the values concerning end states." In the case of the Open Door, for example, the relationship between principle and practice was consistent: noninterventionist means were usually in accord with antipolitical ends, a combination that meshed nicely with America's decentralized institutional structure.[18]

---

[16]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York, 1952), pp. 31–32.

[17]Clifford Geertz, "After the Revolution: The Fate of Nationalism in the New States," in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 243–49; Milton Rokeach, *The Nature of Human Values* (New York, 1971), p. 5; Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York, 1958), pp. 120–28; Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York, 1964), pp. 115–17. By fitting them into a pattern not intended by their authors, my use of these distinctions will necessarily take some liberties with their original meaning.

[18]Rokeach, *Nature of Human Values*, p. 12.

But no ideology can hope to deal successfully with every contingency while maintaining a perfect logical consistency. There inevitably arise occasions when the relationship between means and ends becomes unbalanced, sometimes with significant consequences for the ideology itself. Indeed, the political scientist Martin Seliger argues convincingly that every political belief system, if it is to survive under the pressure of facts and political imperatives, must of necessity undergo a far-reaching internal transformation:

> When ideology is made to fulfill its function, to guide concerted action, it is relied upon to devise and/or justify specific practical measures and to pronounce on the topical issues of day-to-day politics. In the process, both the purity and the centrality of prescriptions based on the commitment to essentially moral principles are likely to become endangered by the requirements of political action.

Eventually, he insists, "the proponents of a doctrine must also face the challenge of changing the doctrine itself." Although some belief systems manage to preserve a monolithic integrity, the successful ones are not only conceptually supple but mutable. They have to be, for, as Seliger notes, "the maintenance of an effective body politic always becomes the prime consideration." Paradoxically, if an ideology is to survive as an effective political force, it must contradict itself.[19]

In most cases such contradictions provide a chameleon-like political camouflage and amount to little more than tactical deviations from ideological orthodoxy. At times, however, the divergence is more serious. If carried far enough, the result of political self-contradiction is "the bifurcation of political belief systems" into two distinct outlooks that Seliger calls "fundamental" and "operative" ideologies. This process involves not only ideological separation but also a metamorphosis in which the development of an operative ideology amounts, both in theory and in practice, to an articulated rejection and negation of central features of the fundamental outlook. Thus, one ideology gives birth to the other, but with the difference that mutant genes are introduced. Despite a host of affinities between the ideologies the process is logically discontinuous. The difficulty of discerning, much less describing, this de facto transformation is not eased by the fact that those initiating the conceptual revolution are usually those who most strenuously voice their allegiance to the fundamentals.[20]

Although the bifurcation of ideologies most often takes place gradually in the normal flow of political life—indeed, it frequently goes un-

---

[19]Martin Seliger, *Ideology and Politics* (New York, 1976), p. 108; Seliger, *The Marxist Conception of Ideology*, pp. 4–5; Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 237–38. For a similar argument concerning the disjunction between ideological principle and political behavior see Lewis S. Feuer, *Ideology and the Ideologists* (New York, 1975), p. 19. Lest this be considered an exotic way of saying that all human beings at times contradict themselves, the point is that it happens in a patterned ideological fashion.

[20]Seliger, *Ideology and Politics*, pp. 175–208.

noticed, taking the form of imperceptible variations from the norm that tend to accumulate and turn into what Alvin Gouldner has called "creeping transformations"—the process can be historically as well as logically discontinuous with traumatic effect. Cultural and social systems sometimes require significant alteration if they are to adapt successfully to changes in their environment. But ideological and institutional traditions can be very stubborn, making breaks with the past difficult to achieve, especially if the new policies require contravening some sacred elements of tradition. Nevertheless, radical departures in theory and practice that fall short of revolution or systemic disaster can at times be ideologically introduced.[21]

The case of World War I, where the United States took a sudden and massive plunge into the ideologically proscribed waters of power politics, furnishes one such example of historical discontinuity. At the time the United States possessed two basic foreign policy traditions: a Caribbean regionalism, which sanctioned the exercise of American military power in Latin America, and a liberal internationalism, which promoted global involvement on a commercial and cultural basis. The first tradition was political but regional in scope; the second, while universal in compass, was nonpolitical. Both were inadequate to cope with a rapidly changing and threatening international environment at a time when the problem of adaptation was particularly urgent. Within this context, American belligerency represented the jettisoning of a fundamental ideology, the Open Door, because of its impractical antipolitical canons. This repudiation was made possible by the articulation of a revolutionary new form of operative justification, the Open World doctrine of Wilsonianism, which incorporated the elements of power and coercion within a drastically revised liberal framework.

The emergence of competing ideological orientations in the views of two Open Door liberals—Jane Addams and Woodrow Wilson—exemplifies this process of ideological transformation. Addams and Wilson were Progressive reformers whose views on international relations were firmly anchored in the Open Door tradition. Besides harboring the customary liberal antipathy toward power politics, both subscribed to the gamut of liberal nostrums of the day: international public opinion, free trade, intercultural understanding, and a functional internationalism that envisaged a growing interdependence among peoples. As good Progressives both believed that wars, being largely economic in origin, were caused by special interests at the expense of the welfare of the larger society. Yet, for all their ideological affinities, their operative ideologies would come to differ dramatically. With the guidance of the value typologies mentioned

---

[21]Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," pp. 218–20; Seliger, *Ideology and Politics*, p. 175; Alvin Gouldner, "Some Observations on Systematic Theory, 1945–55," in *Sociology in the United States of America*, ed. Hans L. Zetterberg (Paris, 1956), p. 39.

earlier, a comparison of their value systems suggests how this ideological transformation took place.[22]

Addams maintained an ideological consistency throughout the war and into the postwar years, a consistency that was rooted in her decidedly pragmatic and conservative essentialist reform outlook. Her conception of internationalism grew out of her work at Hull House, the world-renowned social settlement, where a Babel of immigrant nationalities composed the bulk of her clientele. The creation of a sense of community from this cultural mélange confirmed Addams in the basic anthropological tenet that in human nature "nobody is altogether unlike anybody else." It soon struck her that the immigrants, despite their cultural diversity, had "already achieved an international understanding." Using her experience as a fixed point of reference, she came gradually to perceive her "cosmopolitan neighborhood" as a microcosm of a larger social reality and invested it finally with international significance.[23]

Immigrant internationalism was of more than local importance because the United States, with its mixture of nationalities and its federal principles of government, seemed to be informed by a similar cosmopolitanism, which Addams claimed was "the essence of her spirit." If the causes of the Great War then raging in Europe were rooted in a malignant nationalism, U.S. internationalism made this country the logical focus of an effort to reorient international relations along communal lines. "The United States, with its mixed peoples, is pre-eminently the country looked to to take the initiative in this emergency," Addams concluded, ignoring the possibility that localism and pluralism were not necessarily internationalist in thrust.[24]

An emphasis on the concrete also typified her thinking about larger international trends. Like many other liberals of her day, Addams took heart from the functional integration of the globe that was evident in the

---

[22]The author realizes that the analytical linkage of Addams and Wilson creates somewhat of a historically artificial "odd couple." But in life, as in art, sometimes the exceptional defines the normal. In addition to logical reasons for this pairing, it should be noted that Addams and Wilson were known to each other and, more importantly, participated in a common universe of discourse. These portraits are intended to be suggestive only as supplements to existing treatments. On Addams's foreign policy views to 1920 the essay by Sondra Herman in *Eleven Against War: Studies in Internationalist Thought, 1898–1921* (Stanford, CA, 1971), pp. 114–49, is as close as possible to being definitive. But see also Allen F. Davis, *American Heroine: The Life and Legend of Jane Addams* (New York, 1973); Daniel Levine, *Jane Addams and the Liberal Tradition* (Madison, WI, 1971); and Marie L. Dugan, *The History of the Woman's Peace Party* (New York, 1971).

[23]Statement by Addams, in U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Military Affairs, *Hearings to Increase the Military Establishment*, 64th Cong., 1st sess., 1916; Jane Addams, address delivered at Chicago Auditorium, 22 July 1915, Jane Addams Papers Project, Hull House, Chicago (hereafter cited as JAPP). The Addams Papers are not fully organized for microfilming, but they are chronologically ordered.

[24]Jane Addams, "Patriotism and Pacifists in Wartime," City Club [Chicago] *Bulletin* 10 (16 June 1917): 188; minutes, Committee on Special Action [September 1915?], JAPP; *New York Times*, 8 March 1915, p. 4.

slow but steady creation of a host of transnational institutions. She insisted that "the world can be organized politically by its statesmen as it has already been organized into an international fiscal system by its bankers or into an international scientific association by its scientists." All that remained was for politics and international law to catch up with the facts. Given this already functioning global harmony of interests, Addams was convinced that there was "forming at the very base of society a new conception of international relations." Thus, taking the road to heaven required only that one keep one's feet on the ground.[25]

For Addams, one of the tragedies of the First World War was that this functional internationalism was interrupted and placed in danger of destruction by the revival of national hatreds: "It is as if the mind of Europe were submerged under a great emotionalism, as if the love of country had inhibited all normal family affection and daily interests." At the same time primordial human sentiments, if given voice within the belligerent nations, provided a potential means of restoring peace. If an international public opinion could be established, she was convinced that "in the end, human nature must reassert itself." This conviction that ending the war required "a certain touch of human nature" formed the backbone of her untiring peace efforts during the period of American neutrality.[26]

Early in 1915, Addams chaired a meeting of an international group of female pacifists at The Hague, and from it eventually was formed the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). The most important proposal to issue from this gathering was a call for a conference of neutrals to sit continuously in discussion of mediation proposals. Its purpose would be to serve as a clearinghouse of opinion for groups in the belligerent nations presently cut off from the facts by a warmongering nationalist press. Although the women at The Hague sought official backing for their scheme, Addams preferred, rather than untrustworthy diplomats, an informal conference of "representative men" who would be more closely in touch with popular interests. Consistent with her Progressive belief in the problem-solving capabilities of human intelligence, Addams desired that the participants should be experts capable of proposing scientific resolutions to the questions that divided the belligerents.

---

[25]Addams, "Patriotism and Pacifists in Wartime," p. 185; Addams, address delivered at Palmer House, Chicago, 14 January 1926, JAPP; Addams, address delivered at Carnegie Hall, New York, 9 July 1915, JAPP, also reprinted as "The Revolt Against War," *Survey* 34 (17 July 1915): 355–59; Addams, "Labor as a Factor in the Newer Conception of Internationalism," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 7 (July 1917): 282–88; Addams, "Women, War and Suffrage," *Survey* 35 (6 November 1915): 148.

[26]Jane Addams, "The Food of War," *The Independent*, 30 December 1915, p. 430; statement by Addams, U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Commission for Enduring Peace: Hearings before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on H.R. 6921 and H. J. Res. 32, January 11, 1916*, 64th Cong., 1st sess., 1916, p. 15; Addams, foreword to "War and Social Reconstruction," *Survey* 34 (6 March 1915): 603; Addams, Carnegie Hall address, JAPP; Addams to Col. Edward M. House, 23 November 1915, JAPP.

Rationality and idealism thus reflected a proper appreciation of the facts of the matter.[27]

On the assumption that war aims were not a fundamental obstacle to a peace settlement, the principles proposed by the Woman's Peace party for ending the war were thought equally suitable as bases for a postwar order. These would shortly become stock-in-trade liberal prescriptions: democratic control of foreign policies, which implied an end to secret treaties and aristocratic diplomacy; removal of the economic causes of war through freedom of the seas, the globalization of free trade, and prohibitions against governmental backing for investors abroad; disarmament; and a concert of nations to supersede the traditional balance of power. Wilson received delegations from the women's peace movement on several occasions, listened with unfailing courtesy to their suggestions, and ultimately incorporated many of their proposals into his famed Fourteen Points. But for all his sympathy regarding ultimate ends, the difference between Addams and him on the question of means would prove to be insuperable.[28]

Addams's commitment to liberal solutions was driven by an ethic that ruled out the recourse to military means. She seemed instinctively to understand at least the first half of Weber's argument that "he who seeks the salvation of his own soul and of others should not seek it along the avenue of politics, for the quite different tasks of politics can only be solved by violence." Because she viewed war as destructive of the communal impulses in human nature, Addams opposed any American tendencies in this direction, especially the growing talk of preparedness. On her return from The Hague she remarked that "the talk against militarism and the belief that it can be crushed by a counter militarism . . . is one of the greatest illusions which can possibly seize the human mind," a view that she could never bring herself to alter. In testimony before a House committee shortly following the U.S. declaration of war against Germany, she stood by her conviction that fighting Prussianism would only prussianize the United States and described herself as "alarmed over the moral damage done by a war waged as this one seems to be, with all possible imitation of Old World methods."[29]

---

[27]Jane Addams, "A Conference of Neutrals," *Survey* 35 (22 January 1916): 495; Addams, "Peace and the Press," *The Independent*, 11 October 1915, p. 55; Addams to members of the Woman's Peace Party, 10 January 1917, JAPP; minutes of meeting at the Henry Street (New York) Settlement, 20 July 1915, JAPP; Louis Lochner to David Starr Jordan, 23 October 1915, JAPP: Woman's Peace Party *Yearbook*, 1916, p. 21.

[28]Jane Addams, "Women, War, and Babies," *Harper's Weekly* 61 (31 July 1915): 101; memorandum, "Tentative Proposals for Discussion," 1915, JAPP: "Jane Addams Sees Progressive Aims Attained Through President," *Cincinnati Post*, 3 November 1916, p. 1; Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, and Alice Hamilton, *Women at The Hague: The International Congress of Women and Its Results* (New York, 1915), pp. 150–59.

[29]Gerth and Mills, *From Max Weber*, p. 126; Addams, statements in U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Military Affairs, *Hearings*, 65th Cong., 1st sess., 14 April 1917, p. 21; and U.S., Congress, House, Committee on the Judiciary, *Espionage and Interference with*

The logic of this position led directly to pacifism and Addams soon found herself isolated from former comrades in the peace movement for whom the prospect of a German victory was intolerable. In her typically pragmatic fashion she made the best of a bad situation by delivering speeches for the Food Administration, in which she exhorted Americans to conserve food for the Allied war effort. Her motives, however, were not to be found in the desire for victory, or in the expectation of a utopian peace, but in her unique bread-and-butter view of human relations. Admittedly, the war represented a regression to barbarism, but she allowed herself to believe that some wartime activities, such as the task of feeding the Allies, possessed redeeming virtues. Food conservation required the promotion of a functional international cooperation and organic solidarity that might have permanent application. More importantly, however, the process of nurture appeared to provide the sympathetic basis for a new internationalism. Consequently, she concluded that "the making of a more reasonable world order is to some extent already under way, the war itself forming the matrix."[30]

As a result of her down-to-earth definition of goals and her realization of the necessity of maintaining intact the social conditions necessary to their fulfillment, Addams's choice of methods remained consistently moderate and practical. Nowhere was this more evident than in her approach to the League of Nations. Although a tireless promoter of the league, she had less confidence in the ability of its visionary leaders to organize an enduring peace than in the humdrum activities of the league's specialized agencies. She criticized the League of Nations for being too prone "to confound principles with people," and for too easily slipping into a "sterile idealism." It would prosper "not upon broken bits of international law but upon ministrations to basic human needs." Only by appealing to and strengthening man's basic communal impulses could the league construct a de facto internationalism, which ultimately was the only kind that counted. Addams was neither devoid of intellectual idealism nor lacking an appreciation of the potential of spiritual power and moral energy, but she doubted whether these were enough. "Perhaps the old folk-ways are the only ways we are fit to tread," she told the delegates to the WILPF's organizational meeting, adding with evident regret that "apparently we are not fit to come together on the higher plane."[31]

Neutrality: Hearings before the Committee on the Judiciary on H.R. 291, April 9 and 12, 1917, 65th Cong., 1st sess., 1917, p. 52; Addams, Carnegie Hall address, JAPP. See also U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *United States and the Orient: Hearings on H.R. 16661, December 12, 1916*, 64th Cong., 1st sess., 1916, pp. 10–12.

[30]Davis, *American Heroine*, p. 243; Jane Addams, "The World's Food and World Politics," National Conference of Social Work, pamphlet no. 128 (1918), p. 1; speech draft, "Conservation and the World's Food Supply," November 1917 [?], JAPP.

[31]Jane Addams, "Feed the World and Save the League," *New Republic*, 24 November 1920, p. 325; Addams, "Disarmament and Life," National Peace Council, disarmament pamphlet no. 2 (1921); address by Addams, 12 May 1919, *Bericht des internationalen Frauenkongress* (Zurich, 1919), pp. 195–98.

Whatever the realism of Addams's obsession with basic human instincts, her version of the Open Door ideology retained a remarkable uniformity during these years. Despite frequent moments of self-doubt, she always returned to what she saw as the basic facts of human experience. Unlike many of her former allies in the peace movement, she could never convinced herself that war furthered internationalism. Remaining ever skeptical of the possibility of creating a new world order based on glittering intellectual constructs, she was more concerned "to found human internationalism from experience and understanding rather than that formal thing that comes from philosophy." Her operating creed remained consistent throughout with her conception of the fundamentals.[32]

Woodrow Wilson's thought, on the other hand, developed along lines in which an operative ideology eventually burst forth. In his frequent calls for trade expansion he was the very model of the Open Door ideologue, but his brand of progressivism rejected the idea of basing government policy, domestic or foreign, on the defense of special economic interests. This position came out most clearly in his troubled dealings with the Mexican revolution, in which he was frequently at pains to disclaim any narrow economic motivation on the part of the United States. According to Wilson, U.S. policy was totally at odds with traditional diplomatic norms because "the Government of the United States has not the spirit of other Governments, which is to put the force, the army and navy of that Government behind investment in foreign countries. Just so certainly as you do that, you join this chaos of competing and hostile ambitions." He protested throughout that the United States was acting "in the interests of Mexico alone and not in the interests of any body of persons who may have personal or property claims in Mexico." But if these disclaimers were true, just what was the U.S. stake in foreign affairs?[33]

For Wilson, it was axiomatic that there were vital interests anterior to the economic. He told the Pan-American Scientific Congress that in "back of the community of material interests there is a community of political interests." By political Wilson meant ultimately political ideals, for he was convinced that "the one thing that the world cannot permanently resist is the moral force of great triumphant convictions." Although the number of occasions on which Wilson stressed the primacy of ideals is legion, he possessed a well-integrated ideology that saw no necessary

---

[32]Jane Addams, "Toward Internationalism," *Report on the Women's Auxiliary Conference in Connection with the Second Pan American Scientific Congress, December 28, 1915–January 7, 1916* (Washington, DC, 1917), p. 60.

[33]Arthur S. Link et al., eds., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 36 vols. (Princeton, 1966–), 28:110 (hereafter cited as *Wilson Papers*); Albert Bushnell Hart, ed., *Selected Addresses and Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (New York, 1918), p. 163. See also *Wilson Papers*, 24:125; 28:450; 33:245; 35:313. On Wilson's Mexican policy, see Kendrick A. Clements, "Woodrow Wilson's Mexican Policy, 1913–15," *Diplomatic History* 4 (Spring 1980): 113–36; and John Milton Cooper, Jr., "An Irony of Fate: Woodrow Wilson's Pre-World War I Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 3 (Fall 1979): 433–34.

separation between ideals and interests, or between thought and action. On the contrary, he held that "all boundaries that divide life into sections and interests are artificial, because life is all of a piece." Therefore, it was manifestly impossible "to separate the business of a country from the essential spirit of its life and people."[34]

But ideals and principles always came first: "We must seek the means which are consistent with the principles of our lives," Wilson insisted. In direct contrast to the socially grounded idealism of Addams, Wilson was forever concerned with "the translation of doctrine into life." Addams, the Aristotelian, started with things as they were; Wilson, the Platonist, with things as they ought to be. Whereas Addams could see the seed of a liberal future germinating before her, Wilson saw it flowering in his mind's eye. This was originally a mere matter of emphasis, representing two sides of the same liberal coin; but the same ends, defined in contrasting ways, under certain circumstances could make a big difference. Wilson's visionary bent predisposed him to take action to bring the facts into harmony with his ideals, while for Addams the ideals would take care of themselves if the facts were nurtured and encouraged to develop naturally. Although their later disagreements on the war centered on the question of means, it is important to recognize that it stemmed in part from the way in which they defined their ends.[35]

This is not to suggest that Wilson rejected a natural functionalist approach to achieving his objectives. As a believer in a harmony of interests, he visualized a peaceful world as "a perfectly running machine with friction practically eliminated due to the perfection of construction." But constructing the machine turned out to be another process altogether. Thus, while for much the same reasons Wilson agreed with Addams that the United States was the natural "mediating nation of the world," as a head of government he had a greater appreciation of the procedural difficulties that were scarcely considered in her proposals for continuous mediation. Even though it was his heart's desire to help arrange an end to the war, he decided finally with his advisers that a mediation attempt launched without the prior approval of the belligerents was foredoomed. A botched effort could only extinguish hopes for exerting American influence on behalf of a just peace. "I can't see it," Wilson wrote to his fiancée, Edith Galt, after mulling over Addams's proposals.[36]

Initially Wilson's assessment of the situation and of his responsibilities was more complex than that of Addams. It involved the balancing of political considerations alongside his liberal preferences. In very broad terms he realized that the United States was nearing a turning point in its foreign relations and would soon have to end its traditional policy of isolation. He told the Manhattan Club in 1915 that "we are thinking now

---

[34]*Wilson Papers*, 35:442, 444, 49, 321.
[35]Ibid., 35: 335; Hart, *Selected Addresses*, p. 101.
[36]*Wilson Papers*, 24:185, 33:38, 34:243, 246, 248.

chiefly of our relations with the rest of the world—not our commercial relations—about those we have thought and planned always—but our political relations." As a means of harmonizing this qualitatively different phase of U.S. foreign policy with Open Door traditions, mediating an end to the war on behalf of a liberal world order was, as Addams would have agreed, the only logical liberal course of action.[37]

On the surface the problem of mediation involved mere matters of timing, but Wilson soon faced more serious questions of method. The growth of the preparedness movement in 1915 forced him reluctantly to adopt a military program that compromised his deeply held Progressive notions concerning the antidemocratic implications of militarism. "We want a nation self-sufficient for self-defense, and yet we do not want a nation which submits to the military spirit," he explained to the Gridiron Club. Wilson was also sensitive to charges that preparedness would most benefit the great business interests. Given the necessity of mollifying a vocal domestic constituency, however, and finding it necessary also to command respect from the belligerents in his effort to maintain neutral rights, he saw no alternative to a compromise military program. As long as it increased American ability to bring about a liberal peace without entering the war, it seemed worth the risk.[38]

Wilson's ambivalence about preparedness indicated that he, too, was concerned with the cultural repercussions of the conflict. But if Addams feared the effects of American belligerency, Wilson was more attuned to the possible dangers of noninvolvement. From the first days of the war he realized, in balance-of-power terms, the profound consequences for the American polity of a Carthaginian peace dominated by Germany, a problem that Addams chose to ignore. The British ambassador to the United States, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, reported Wilson as saying that the nation would be "forced to take such measures of defense as would be fatal to our form of Government and American ideals." Similarly, in a long conversation with Col. Edward M. House, Wilson confided his belief that a German victory "would change the course of our civilization and make the United States a military nation." True, Wilson did on a few occasions wonder whether the United States did not have an obligation to enter the war on the side of the Allies. But despite the urgings from advisers like House to the effect that "no matter what sacrifices we make the end will justify them," he became increasingly confirmed in the desirability of staying out.[39]

If anything, this conviction was strengthened as the nation drew nearer to war. Early in 1917 Wilson told House on a number of occasions

---

[37]Ibid., 35:121, 339–41.

[38]Ibid., 35:340, 297, 147; Robert Dallek, *Democrat and Diplomat: The Life of William E. Dodd* (New York, 1968), p. 89.

[39]*Wilson Papers*, 30:462, 33:406, 34:472, 507. For Wilson's awareness of balance of power considerations see Edward H. Buehrig, *Woodrow Wilson and the Balance of Power* (Bloomington, IN , 1955), p. 272.

that it would be "a crime" for the United States to get involved, and that he was "willing to go to any lengths rather than to have the nation involved in that conflict." Even following the break in relations with Germany, his reluctance, bordering on revulsion, maintained its intensity. In his frequently quoted conversation with the journalist Frank Cobb, Wilson voiced the opinion that if war did come "the constitution would not survive it; that free speech and the right of assembly would go." Moreover, the nation "couldn't fight Germany and maintain the ideals of Government that all thinking men shared." The harm would be not only domestic but once engaged there also was less likelihood that the United States could preserve the essentials of "white civilization" as a base for international postwar reconstruction or for meeting the Japanese challenge, if need be. Finally, he told Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels that war would bring the end of Progressive reform at home and the enthronement of "autocracy." To Wilson, war meant the violation of his most cherished ideals and the way of life that went with them.[40]

Then why did Wilson decide finally on war? It was not because his Open Door principles dictated it. Once neutrality and mediation had failed, it became clear that his ideal of a liberal international polity anchored by the United States was equally threatened by staying out of the conflict. Having lost his freedom of maneuver, Wilson found himself saddled with the dilemma inherent in liberal ideology. The alternatives were merciless: either destroy militarism abroad and risk destroying liberalism in the process, or do nothing and risk the creation of a world in which militant nationalism was in a position, either through aggression or by forcing the creation of a garrison state, to undermine American liberalism. In either case, external adaptation could not be achieved without significant internal disruption. Confronted by this double bind, Wilson concluded eventually that abstention would damage American ideals and institutions far more than would intervention. He chose to risk serious distortions in the nation's political culture in the belief that the disturbance might pass quickly and cause no permanent damage. Besides, the illiberal features of intervention might be more than outweighed by the liberal settlement produced by an American presence at the peace conference.[41]

---

[40]*Wilson Papers*, 35:425; Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace* (Princeton, 1965), pp. 291, 294, 398–99; Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters*, 8 vols. (Garden City, NY, 1927–39), 6:506n. For a view that minimizes such considerations see N. Gordon Levin, *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics* (New York, 1968), p. 52.

[41]Because it focuses only on ideological background issues, this characterization of Wilson's decision does not pretend to be exhaustive. For differing versions of his dilemma see William E. Dodd to Addams, 29 January 1922, JAPP; John Milton Cooper, Jr., *The Vanity of Power* (Westport, CT, 1969), pp. 193–96; Ernest R. May, *The World War and American Isolation 1914–1917* (Chicago, 1966), p. 432; and David Trask, "Woodrow Wilson and the Coordination of Force and Diplomacy," SHAFR *Newsletter* 12 (September 1981): 17. In

As an explanation of Wilson's decision for war, his Open Door Weltanschauung is less a terminus than a point of departure. Wilson's agonizing is partly explained by the fact that given his fundamental liberal ideology, there was no self-evident course of action to pursue that was transparently mandated by principle. To this point the Open Door had served reasonably well as a value system and a normative system as well as a body of abstract beliefs and a guide to action, but now the ideology was mute with respect to policy. Worse yet, the war demanded choices that were not only not predetermined by the ideology but also were subversive of it. The wartime situation was characterized by an ethical murkiness and opacity in which any decision threatened to seriously unbalance the traditional Open Door value pattern. As Jane Addams fully appreciated, in part because she was facing the same dilemma, Wilson was trying desperately "to find the ethical content in a mixed situation." Because Wilson saw no escape or solution within the terms of the ideology, the only answer was to create a new one.[42]

In casting his lot for war, Wilson articulated a new ideological synthesis that made his momentous decision attractive and comprehensible in terms of traditional values. He responded by tearing liberalism away from its inert, nonpolitical, nineteenth-century moorings by transforming it into Wilsonianism, a politically dynamic crusading faith. This abandonment of political and military inhibitions, coupled with a commitment to the preservation and extension of fundamental principles, was accompanied by some memorable, yet distinctly strange slogans: the call for a war to make the world safe for democracy and a "community of power" to succeed the balance of power. The resort to oxymorons was as much a result of logical necessity as of rhetorical brilliance, for the crisis was, in part, one of articulation. The self-contradictory character of these phrases furnished an accurate reflection of the dilemmas that Wilson faced at the same time that they provided a means of escaping them. They epitomized Wilson's straining to provide a traditional legitimation for a situation that was radically untraditional.[43]

Given the circumstances, Wilsonianism could not be a logical statement of liberalism or Open Door principles. With her usual acuity, Addams addressed her critique of Wilson to precisely this weakness of his doctrine: "Was not war in the interest of democracy for the salvation of

---

evolutionist jargon the statement by Gregory Bateson, quoted in Carlos E. Sluzki and Donald C. Ransom, eds., *Double Bind: The Foundation of the Communications Approach to the Family* (New York, 1976), p. 83, bears an interesting resemblance to Wilson's situation.

[42]"Miss Addams Gives Intimate Glimpses of Woodrow Wilson," City Club [Chicago] *Bulletin* 17 (11 February 1924): 22–24. Gilbert A. Winham, "Complexity in International Negotiations," in *Negotiation: Social-Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Daniel Druckman (Beverly Hills, CA, 1977), p. 364, suggests that a high degree of complexity and uncertainty regarding issues favors an ideological decision.

[43]Although Wilson never actually used the slogan "a war to end war," which was coined by H. G. Wells, it was perhaps the most apposite of all in capturing the contradiction.

civilization a contradiction in terms, whoever said it or however often it was repeated?" The consequence of falling victim to Wilson's phrases—"great historic myths," she called them—was a "curious break between speech and deed" that ignored the fundamental practical truth that "social advance depends as much upon the process through which it is secured as upon the result itself." To Addams, it was "quite obvious that the processes of war would destroy more democratic institutions than Wilson could ever rebuild." But Addams did not stop to consider the illogic of her own position. If Wilson chose to ignore the risks inherent in the abandonment of traditional liberal methods, Addams refused to acknowledge the perils of their continued employment. She persisted unrealistically in her hope for mediation and never fully reasoned out the implications of a German (or entente) victory, as had Wilson. Even if she had done so, given her conservative presuppositions, she would probably have preferred that liberalism be slain by others than to have it die by its own hand.[44]

This contrast, then, between Addams's idealistic pragmatism and Wilson's pragmatic idealism, in the context of the war, results in two very different ideological orientations. While Addams clung to the essentialist belief that peace and domestic reform had to be rooted in man's daily ongoing functional activities. Wilson succumbed to his prophetic vision. By adopting an ethic of ultimate ends in contrast to Addams's more skeptical assessment of the social consequences of war, Wilson's program was utopian in a fashion that stressed transformation and transcendence, Indeed, in order to focus the nation's energies on the war effort and to justify inconsistencies between principle and practice, Wilson had little choice but to divert attention to the future. If Addams held ideals suspect as guides to action, Wilson's terminal values employed them, in the Hobbesian phrase, "as scouts and spies to range abroad and find the way to things desired." Ultimately, Addams retained a fundamentalist faith in the coherence and workability of the Open Door axioms, while Wilson's dilemma led him to explore a new operative universe.[45]

Ironically, although Addams's wartime pacifism earned her a reputation as a radical, Wilson was probably, in the last analysis, more deserving of the label. On the central issues—the conservative or idealistic definition of reform ends, the choice of traditional or radical means, and the judgments of the consequences—their final positions represented a nearly total reversal of the stereotyped roles normally ascribed to policymakers and intellectuals. In choosing to look forward and commit the nation to war, Wilson transformed America's role in the world. And by creating a new ideology that had staying power, one that continued to embody basic

[44]Jane Addams, *Peace and Bread in Time of War* (New York, 1922), pp. 60–61, 65, 98, 133, 142; Herman, *Eleven Against War*, pp. 131–32.

[45]Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York, 1964), p. 46. Compare the remark by Weber that "the more unconditionally the actor devotes himself to this [absolute] value for its own sake . . . the less he is influenced by considerations of the consequences of his action." Weber, *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, p. 117.

American ideals, he transformed America in the process. Another measure of Wilson's creativity is that he managed to confound the traditional classification of ideologies on the basis of whether or not they maintain or undermine social norms: his creed managed to do both.[46]

At first Addams was bewildered by what she interpreted as Wilson's desertion of the liberal faith and by his decision "to divorce his theory from the actual conduct of affairs." She concluded somewhat tentatively that he must have undergone some sort of conversion, and in a way he had, but this was more an instance of schism than of apostasy. While Addams's logic permitted only one conclusion, Wilson's apparent recantation highlighted an important feature of ideology normally neglected by interest theories: the element of choice. As Clifford Geertz has noted, "commonality of ideological perception may link men together, but it may also provide them . . . with a vocabulary by means of which to explore more exquisitely the differences among them." Within the Open Door framework, the contrast between the values of Addams and Wilson remained latent and ambiguous until the political demands of the war evoked more precise articulations, the emergence of differences being aided also by the fact that there was no logical or ideologically given choice to make. In any case, the Wilsonian reformulation of liberal doctrine demonstrated, in its peculiar way, what should be obvious: adherents of the same basic value system can make differing choices of the greatest importance.[47]

From a world-historical perspective, U.S. entry into World War I was a result of the nation's inevitable integration into the international system and of its growing interests abroad. Unfortunately, what passes for explanation at the social level of analysis is insufficient at the cultural plane. It is not possible to declare with absolute finality that the decision for war was ideologically caused by American interests because, as the conceptual impasse demonstrated, the form of involvement was indeterminate. Given the absence of signposts, other statesmen with similar fundamental outlooks might have responded differently, with altogether different consequences for the shape of U.S. diplomatic history. To continue to insist on the primacy of economic factors is to confuse the necessary with the sufficient and to deny the importance of the contingent in historical explanation. More importantly, it is to retreat to a simple reductionism that a cultural formulation was originally designed to avoid. If we must have an ideological explanation, it must do justice to the actual complexities of ideological experience.[48]

---

[46]Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, enl. ed. (New York, 1968), p. 272; Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York, n.d.), p. 40; Carlton, *Ideology and Social Order*, pp. 25, 240.

[47]Addams, *Peace and Bread*, pp. 60, 62–63; Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," p. 206.

[48]Here it may be helpful to recall the comment by Talcott Parsons in *Societies, Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1966), p. 113, that all "single-factor theories belong to the kindergarten stage of social science's development." If anything, this applies with greater force to the study of history.

The Open Door is a metaphor. Like all metaphors it draws its strength from the fidelity with which its imagery pictures the reality it seeks to describe. For the nineteenth century, a period of isolation in which the United States was preoccupied with a nonpolitical expansion, the metaphor retains its power. Nevertheless, the very descriptive simplicity that is the source of the metaphor's potency is also its greatest weakness, for it colors reality as it describes it. By absorbing essentially different varieties of ideological experience within the field of its imagery, it promotes confusion as well as clarity. Its very comprehensiveness tends to stifle analysis and to inhibit the posing of new questions. For all its virtues the Open Door conception of ideology conceals ideological departures in U.S. foreign policy and obscures the difficult choices, with all their portentous consequences, that Americans faced in times of crisis.

There are a number of advantages to treating dilemmas like Wilson's as crises in which the answers, although culturally bounded, are not ideologically given. Instead of interpreting the U.S. transition from isolation to world power as a continuous monotonous process of economic expansion that is the result of a narrow ideological perspective, a recognition of the interplay between the multiple elements of belief systems and an appreciation of the process of ideological transformation conforms more closely to the traumatic and discontinuous features of America's periodic forays into world politics. It clearly marks liberal interventionism as the policy departure that we have long recognized it to be. It also brings into relief the cultural and social strains experienced by the United States as a result of the occasional collisions between its liberal values and contrary global power realities. Beyond that, it restores the significance of the political as a crucial dimension of policy at the same time that it stresses the always problematic nature of political choice. It may be oversimplified, but it is nevertheless true that the making of choices, circumscribed as they are, remains at the heart of historical experience.

Most interestingly, perhaps, this expanded view of ideology suggests that the tendency to enlist in global crusades it not simply a function of misguided idealism, as the realists would have it, or of economic determinants, as the revisionists tell us.[49] These holy wars would appear, instead, to be a deeply rooted aspect of American political culture that serves as a historical safety valve for the venting of accumulated political pressures. For in a functional sense, one result of Wilsonianism was that the nation faced up, in a clumsy and excessive manner, to immediate balance-of-power imperatives. To be sure, by raising false utopian hopes it did so at the cost of evading future realities and responsibilities. But for all its illiberal and unrealistic features, it also provided a strange mechanism for liberal self-renewal. From what we have seen of "liberal disillusionment," one of the characteristics of Wilsonianism (and its successor

[49]For a few expressions of the view that making foreign policy is largely a philosophical or conceptual problem see Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston, 1979), pp. 61, 66; and Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest*, pp. 440–41.

ideologies) is that it is itself after a time rejected. The process of ideological transformation is reversible, as liberals face up belatedly to their deviations from first truths. Thus, the survival of the Open Door and of liberal institutions (and their modification) appears to be accomplished in part through periodic bouts of ideological self-denial.

If the open world begins where the Open Door leaves off, and if the two world views represent distinctive yet intertwined forms of ideological experience, then perhaps a recognition of their interrelationships constitutes a modest step toward the fusion of habitually segregated economic and political styles of interpretation. For all their important differences, some of which have been argued here, political and economic activities are both forms of power that are simultaneously in operation in foreign relations and are linked in fundamental ways as well. Life, as Woodrow Wilson insisted, *is* "all of a piece."[50] However, it should be stressed that this author's argument, since it is couched solely on the cultural level of analysis, does not touch upon the actual, as apart from the perceived, relation of economics to politics. Moreover, it does not directly address the enduring questions—those centering on the interplay between ideas and interests, culture and society, symbols and power—that are, in the last analysis, more fundamental and complex than those having to do with purely social or cultural matters. But if it can indirectly suggest new ways of looking at these issues, from the limited vantage point of ideology, perhaps that is sufficient. One of the most compelling features of these ancient questions, after all, is not that they resist being answered, but that they invite being asked in different ways.

---

[50]Ralph Pettmann, *State and Class: A Sociology of International Affairs* (New York, 1979), pp. 264–65, suggests that political and economic interpretations, despite their antagonisms, are not mutually exclusive, if only because the former fail to explain the dynamics of modernization while the latter fail to account for the balance of power. Abner Cohen, *Two-Dimensional Man: An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in Complex Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976), pp. 22–23, argues that the distinction between the economic and political "is often very arbitrary" since they comprise two different forms of power. The similarities between the two social forms are explored by Talcott Parsons, "On the Concept of Political Power," in Parsons, *Sociological Theory and Modern Society* (New York, 1967), pp. 297–354. Parsons treats power as an instrument of exchange analogous to money and describes the polity "as a functional subsystem of the society in all its theoretical fundamentals parallel to the economy."