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## Natural Values

The world famous Sarvodaya Shramadana movement in Sri Lanka is one of the world's largest and most successful grassroots community organizations. A.T. Ariyaratne, its founder once said, "When we try to bring about change in our societies, we are treated first with indifference, then with ridicule, then with abuse, and then with oppression. And finally, the greatest challenge is thrown at us. We are treated with respect. This is the most dangerous stage."

Indeed, the growing respectability of sustainable development, the increasing number of corporations for whom sustainability is now on the radar screen, and its increasing political correctness concern John Ehrenfeld ("Being and Havingness," FORUM, Winter 2000). How deeply do corporate and political leaders grasp the real questions lying at the heart of sustainability, let alone the implications for our products and business models?

For example, many now embrace eco-efficiency or re-source productivity. But clearly,

eco-efficiency innovations alone cannot avert environmental crises. Business people are drawn to eco-efficiency for the same reasons they are drawn to all other types of efficiencies. Improved efficiency means improved profitability. But what will happen to those profits? They will be reinvested. In today's global capital markets, profits from improved eco-efficiency will flow into the most profitable new investment opportunities, most of which remain decidedly eco-inefficient. Moreover, most eco-efficiency improvements are in production technologies. These innovations do not affect what happens to products after sale, the waste created from their use, and their eventual disposal. Again, increased eco-efficiency profits will lead to more growth and more waste.

To put it bluntly, nature does not care how efficient our industrial system is; she cares how much waste it generates in absolute terms. At best, innovations in eco-efficiency offer a starting strategy. At worst, they serve to relieve the psychological stress of living in unsustainable ways and thereby enable us to

continue to live in these ways.

Despite his stature in industrial ecology and years of work with leading industrial designers, Ehrenfeld clearly eschews the naïve view that our environmental crises have technological roots and consequently technological solutions. Rather, he points to the cultural roots that shape the technology we create and use—specifically our substitution in the modern age of things for relationships, of possessions for quality of life, of "having" for "being."

Yet Ehrenfeld is no Luddite. His message is more subtle. He believes we can create a genuinely sustainable society by integrating three world views that have typically been at odds in the modern age—the rational, the human, and the natural. Efforts to resolve our current predicaments through only one dimension, like rationalistic technology or returning to nature, will fail.

In pointing in these three directions, Ehrenfeld reiterates the wisdom of the most successful cultures in human history, that mental, emotional, and physical principles are necessary codeterminants of true develop-

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ment. For the ancient Greeks, it was the true, the good, and the beautiful. For the ancient Chinese, it was Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, which are respectfully centered on the mental, interpersonal or social, and physical dimensions. In effect, Ehrenfeld is asking how we can rediscover these guiding principles and bring them back into the mainstream of the contemporary world.

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## The Future of Aging

**K**udos to Pete Peterson on identifying one of the great challenges of the 21st century—global aging—in “The Next Century’s Greatest Challenge” (FORUM, Winter 2000). Projected declines in the number of workers in most advanced nations reduce not just the tax base for Social Security-like programs, but overall the rate of growth of economic output as well. Tax revenues that go for education, health programs for the aged, defense programs for everyone, and other social needs are also projected to decline with less growth in economic output.

Peterson is sometimes accused of addressing this issue from a

Wall Street perspective, but that is an unfair accusation. However aging problems are tackled, few benefits are likely to accrue to Wall Street, and, even if some do, it will be long after Peterson is gone from that scene. Peterson recognizes that government can’t constantly promise more resources than can be found to meet society’s needs. And the principal resource involved is not savings or physical capital, but labor and what is sometimes called human capital. In the end, he reminds us, we must produce what we want to consume.

The aging label can be misleading, however. Aging of the population refers to two very different phenomena: longer lives and reduced birth rates. It is not clear that living longer is really aging at all. If, as President Clinton once suggested, some people born at the end of the past century can expect to live to age 100, does that mean they are old at 60 or 65? If being old is defined as closeness to death, then are people who retire with 15, 20, and more years of life expectancy really old? On the other hand, declines in birth rates do mean that a larger percentage of a population will be in later stages—in the last half or fifth of their lives. In that case, an increased share of societal resources will be required to meet the needs of the elderly.

Society can adapt, and adapt well, but only if institutions are reformed to allow that adaptation to take place. For over half a century, developed nations and some lesser developed ones as well have put up more and more barriers to work among those in late-middle age and beyond.

Some barriers are the result of public programs, some result from policies such as seniority pay scales that reflect poorly the relationship between productivity and age. Within a few decades, close to one-third of the population of the United States will be receiving Social Security, as people retire for more than one-third of their adult lives. This scenario, I believe, will be countered in part by a demand for older workers and, to some extent, for immigrants.

The notion that one gets educated for 12 to 16 years, except afternoons and Sundays, is a reflection of a 19th century farm economy. The industrial economy notion—that education stops and work begins for some span of middle years, while both education and work stop at a fixed age like 62 or 65—is also rapidly becoming antiquated. These views do not reflect either the demands or the wants of an information and technological society. Instead, society is already starting to find ways to integrate education, work, and leisure not just by age but by place. Thus, in the future, people will increasingly want to participate in all these activities at all ages and often at the same place, for example in the workplaces of a knowledge economy. But these adjustments require removing many institutional barriers, and it is to these tasks that Peterson correctly calls us. The challenge becomes a crisis only if we close our eyes to the possibilities.

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## Moving On

In “The Retirement Rush” (FORUM, Winter 2000), William H. Haas III and William J. Serow argue that the baby boomers may break the mold of retirement patterns. Retiring boomers may migrate differently from preceding generations not only because of the larger size of the birth cohort, but also because of differences in pension plan accumulations and a flat real estate market.

The baby boom, however, is extremely diverse, and that diversity may affect patterns of retirement migration. Because of greater educational achievement, the growth of the service economy, and dramatically rising numbers of working women, there will be more retired couples with two careers. This will create a complex set of retirement income streams. Some couples may receive two Social Security checks, one or two pensions, investment income of various kinds, and perhaps inherited wealth to boot. These two-career couples will represent the upper end of the income distribution scale. If they have traveled and vacationed widely, they may be even more likely to move upon retirement.

On the other hand, the higher divorce rate, greater economic independence of women, and the tendency for children to stay with their mothers after divorce mean more families among baby boomers consist of mothers and their children. Collectively, the per capita income of these households is relatively low. The baby boomer generation, therefore, is skewed toward the upper and

lower ends of income distribution, with fewer in the middle. As a result, there should be more, not fewer, affluent baby boomer retirees choosing to relocate upon retirement.

Yet more baby boomers will opt to retire later or launch late-life second careers, as Haas and Serow note, taking them out of the migration market. We are also likely to see more retirees move, and perhaps to unusual places such as Wyoming, Utah, and Colorado in the “new West,” and New England, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and Oregon, during the 2010s and 2020s. In addition, retired baby boomers may travel as volunteers or educators, rather than settle permanently in a retirement community. However, the flow into established migration destinations will continue to increase through the 2020s. On the downhill side of the baby boom, retirement migration is likely to constrict severely. Planners considering retirement communities as a development strategy should take the long view and envision this scenario as well.

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## The Rural Health Care Divide

Because of their lower socioeconomic status and greater financial and health needs, older Americans living in rural areas rely more heavily than their urban counterparts on governmental programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. In “The Graying of Rural America” (FORUM, Winter 2000), Carolyn Rogers reminds us of the importance of meeting the needs of the rural elderly. Until recently, however, neither federal nor state government policies have taken into account the special needs and circumstances of the rural elderly and of the health and social systems they rely upon. So where should we focus our attention?

Restructuring the Medicare program is likely to be high on the agenda in the new Congress as President Bush seeks to make good on his promise to provide prescription drug coverage for seniors. My colleagues and I have examined proposals for prescription drug expansion offered in the 106th Congress and have found that the designs of these varied programs could have very different impacts on rural seniors and rural health systems. For example, the significant economic differences between the rural and urban elderly mean that income eligibility levels and the level of cost sharing—premiums, deductibles and co-insurance—will be critical in determining the extent of this benefit for the rural elderly.

Moreover, many rural older persons rely more heavily on

Medicare and other government programs than do their urban counterparts, and so do rural health care providers. Medicare payment policies will have significant implications for the sustainability of rural health systems. The next Congress will continue to debate whether Medicare provider payment policies are adequate to sustain local rural health systems.

Since the mid-1980s, Congress has devoted increasing attention to the needs of rural health care providers. The most recent budget bill—the Medicare, Medicaid, and State Childrens’ Health Improvement Program Benefits Improvement and Protection Act of 2000—contains numerous provisions addressing the needs of rural health care providers. Yet, if significant shortfalls in Medicare funding occur, the underserved rural communities and populations could easily fall through the cracks.

In addition to assuring that Medicare policies support rural people and health care systems, we need to start discussing the long-term care needs of rural populations that have been largely ignored by state and federal policymakers. Rural elders have fewer resources to pay for long-term care services out of their own pockets and are therefore more dependent on Medicare, Medicaid, and other public programs. Numerous studies have shown that older people in rural communities are more likely to rely on nursing home care and generally have poorer access to home and community-based services.

A number of states, including Oregon and Wisconsin, have led

the way in developing long-term care systems that expand options for home and community-based services. Yet public funding of long-term care can’t meet the growing need. Assuring that underserved rural communities and older people receive their fair share of public funding for these services will be critical for improving the capacity of the rural long-term care system to meet the growing needs of rural seniors and their families.

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## Targeting Research

**W**e already have in place laws against practically every form of criminal use of a firearm. Most researchers, therefore, find the faith of gun-control proponents in legislative attempts to curb firearm-related crime misplaced. As Timothy Brezina and James D. Wright note in “Going Armed in the School Zone” (FORUM, Winter 2000), there is little more that legislatures can do—short of radically changing our notion of government—to get guns out of the hands of kids and adult offenders.

Gun-control advocates generally are bright, well educated, well-intentioned people. Why then do they propose legislation that simply replicates existing law or otherwise fails to put a

dent in the gun problem? Why do they not embrace the conclusion of their opponents—who are also generally well educated, bright, and of good intention—that we need less new law and more enforcement of current law?

First, contemporary anti-gun legislation is less about content than about achieving victory by passing laws. The symbolic value of breaking the gun lobby’s hold over legislators, in the view of gun-control advocates, is paramount. Second, as studies have shown, in any practical sense simply enforcing laws will not reduce levels of gun-related crime, at least not for very long.

Public opinion polls find most Americans favor some form of gun control and want protection from criminals. They leave it up to their legislators to determine how to accomplish this. What legislators propose, sometimes disingenuously, is generally dictated by the pro- and anti-gun-control lobbies. At one extreme are those who consider guns responsible for high levels of crime and accident-related injuries. They envision a society of relative peace achieved through banning ownership of most types of firearms. At the other pole are those who believe that if guns are outlawed, citizens will be impotent in the face of military occupation, will have no recourse to abuses of power by their own government, and will be unprotected from violent criminals.

Ironically, to accomplish either extreme’s vision would entail serious movement toward a Big Brother state. To scrub clean of guns a society that has permitted ownership on a

massive scale cannot be accomplished without ceding yet more power to government. To eradicate gun-related crime through stronger law enforcement cannot be accomplished without granting police nearly the powers of an occupying force.

Legislators cannot afford to ignore pressure by the lobbies in question. Researchers have a bit more freedom. We need not limit ourselves to analyzing the potential outcomes of the softballs that legislators continue to lob. Brezina and Wright correctly ask us to turn our attention less to the contentious issue of gun control and more to the obstacles to social and personal success. Social stress and personal antagonisms that provoke or escalate aggression are the conditions that lead to gun carrying and law breaking in the first place. This will require more-relevant, but clearly more-difficult and controversial, research.

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## Disarming Canada

**T**he right to defend oneself and one's family against violent attack is fundamental. In "Self-Defense: The Equalizer" (FORUM, Winter 2000), Linda Gorman and David B. Kopel succinctly explain why gun-control legislation does not improve public

safety but instead increases the chances of violent crime. The authors argue persuasively that gun control is a dangerous path to follow for democratic governments, as it is fundamentally inconsistent with individual freedom.

Gun-control advocates have a distrust of the typical person. The key assumption is that access to firearms will somehow cause otherwise law-abiding citizens to become violent. This is false and pernicious reasoning. Studies from around the world show that violent criminals are not normal people. For example, Canada's national statistical agency, Statistics Canada, recently found that the typical Canadian murderer, like his counterpart in the United States, has a long history of criminal violence.

The authors are on solid ground when they state that gun-control laws cannot abolish violent crime. There are no reputable studies in any country in the world that show that firearm restrictions significantly reduce violent crime. When the medicine doesn't work, the solution is not more of the same medicine. Rather one needs to rediagnose the problem.

There is good evidence that allowing people to defend themselves improves public safety. Over the past 20 years, many states in the United States have passed laws allowing responsible citizens to carry concealed handguns. The result has been that crime rates have dropped faster in those states than elsewhere.

In sad contrast, gun-control laws in countries such as Canada have made it more difficult for people who need firearms for

protection to have them available when they need them. Despite governmental attempts to discourage the use of firearms, at least 80,000 Canadians each year use firearms to defend themselves or their family against violent attack.

Governments find it all too easy to increase their powers by exploiting public fears. In Canada, the latest round of gun-control legislation not only introduced owner licensing and firearm registration, it also seriously eroded the legal rights of all Canadians. The new law gives police greater powers of search and seizure, and it allows a variety of new officials to enter homes without search warrants to inspect firearm storage or to look for unregistered firearms. Suspected gun owners are even required to testify against themselves.

Governments do not seem to know when to stop. Only weeks after Canadians were required to have a licence to keep previously purchased firearms, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police began confiscating firearms on the basis of anonymous complaints that they do not have the newly imposed licence.

Despite draconian restrictions, gun-control laws have not had a significant impact on criminal violence. One can only hope that Americans learn from the experience in other countries that gun control is a slippery slope to sacrificing individual liberty as well as personal safety.

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