The decades-old war on poverty and authoritarianism in the poor countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America has produced more disappointment and frustration than it has victories. The deprivation and despair that prevailed in the mid-twentieth century persist in most of these countries, even a decade after capitalism's ideological triumph over socialism. Where democratically elected chiefs of state have displaced traditional authoritarian regimes, a pattern most notable in Latin America, the experiments are fragile, and "democracy" often means little more than periodic elections.

What explains the persistence of poverty and authoritarianism? Why have they proven so intractable? Why have no countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America other than the East Asian dragons made their way into the elite group of affluent countries? The conventional diagnoses that have been offered during the past half century -- exploitation, imperialism, education and know-how shortfalls, lack of opportunity, lack of capital, inadequate markets, weak institutions -- are demonstrably inadequate. The crucial element that has been largely ignored is the cultural: that is to say, values and attitudes that stand in the way of progress. Some cultures, above all those of the West and East Asia, have proven themselves more prone to progress than others. Their achievements are reiterated when their peoples migrate to other countries, as in the cases of the British in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand; and the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans, who have flourished wherever they have migrated.

The conclusion that culture matters goes down hard. It clashes with cultural relativism, widely subscribed to in the academic world, which argues that cultures can be assessed only on their own terms and that value judgments by outsiders are taboo. The implication is that all cultures are equally worthy, and those who argue to the contrary are often labeled ethnocentric, intolerant or even racist. A similar problem is encountered with those economists who believe that culture is irrelevant -- that people will respond to economic signals in the same way regardless of their culture.

But a growing number of academics, journalists and politicians are writing and talking about culture as a crucial factor in societal development, and a new paradigm of human progress is emerging. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan captured the shift recently when he said, in the context of economic conditions in Russia, that he had theretofore assumed that capitalism was "human nature." But in the wake of the collapse of the Russian economy, he concluded that "it was not human nature at all, but culture" -- a succinct restatement of Max Weber's thesis in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.

A Dismal Record

In the 1950s, the world turned its attention from rebuilding the countries devastated by World War II to ending the poverty, ignorance and injustice in which most of the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America lived. Optimism abounded in the wake of the stunning success of the Marshall Plan in Western Europe and Japan's ascent from the ashes of defeat. Development was viewed as inevitable, particularly as the colonial yoke disappeared. Walt Rostow's hugely influential book, The Stages of Economic Growth, published in 1960, suggested that human progress was driven by a dialectic that could be accelerated. "The Alliance for Progress," John F. Kennedy's answer to the Cuban revolution, captured the prevailing optimism. It would duplicate the Marshall Plan's success, and Latin America would be well on its way to prosperity and democracy within ten years.

But as the century ended, that optimism had been displaced by frustration and pessimism, the consensus on market economics and democracy notwithstanding. Spain, Portugal, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and the former British colony Hong Kong have followed Rostow's trajectory into the First World, and a few others -- for example, Chile, China, Malaysia and Thailand -- have experienced sustained, rapid growth. Spain and Portugal finally opened themselves to the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution and the Western values that had driven the modernization of their neighbors in Europe. And like Japan before them, the East Asian dragons rode the Protestant Ethic-like features of Confucianism and export promotion policies to success.
But the vast majority of countries still lags far behind. Of the six billion people who inhabit the world today, fewer than one billion are to be found in the advanced democracies. More than four billion live in what the World Bank classifies as "low-income" or "lower middle-income" countries. The quality of life in those countries is dismaying:

* Half or more of the adult population of 23 countries, mostly in Africa, is illiterate. Non-African countries include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Haiti.

* Half or more of the women in 35 countries are illiterate, including not only those countries just listed but Algeria, Egypt, Guatemala, India, Laos, Morocco, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia.

* Life expectancy is below 60 years in 45 countries, most in Africa, but also Afghanistan, Cambodia, Haiti, Laos and Papua New Guinea. Life expectancy is below 50 years in 18 countries, all in Africa. And in Sierra Leone it is just 37 years.

* The mortality rate for children under 5 is greater than 10 percent in at least 35 countries, most, again, in Africa. Other countries include Bangladesh, Bolivia, Haiti, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan and Yemen.

* The population growth rate in the poorest countries is 2.1 percent annually, three times the rate in the high-income countries. The growth rate in some Islamic countries is astonishingly high: 5 percent in Oman, 4.9 percent in the United Arab Emirates, 4.8 percent in Jordan, 3.4 percent in Saudi Arabia and Turkmenistan.

Furthermore, the most inequitable income distribution patterns among countries supplying such data to the World Bank -- not all do -- are found in the poorer countries, particularly in Latin America and Africa. The most affluent 10 percent of Brazil's population accounts for almost 48 percent of its income. Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe are a fraction of a point behind.

Democratic institutions are commonly weak or nonexistent in Africa, the Islamic countries of the Middle East, and in the rest of Asia. Democracy has appeared to prosper in Latin America over the past fifteen years. Argentina, Brazil and Chile seem headed toward democratic stability after decades of military rule. But the fragility of the democratic experiments is underscored by recent events in several countries: in Colombia, where left-wing guerrillas, often cooperating with drug traffickers, control large parts of the country and threaten to topple the government; in Ecuador, where ineptitude and corruption in the Andean capital of Quito have contributed to a deep recession and to separatist sentiment in coastal Guayaquil; and in Venezuela, where Hugo Chavez, an officer who attempted two coups in the early 1990s, is now president and conducting himself in ways that leave one wondering whether he, and not Fidel Castro, may turn out to be the last Latin American caudillo. And there remains a weighty question: Why after more than 150 years of independence has Latin America, an extension of the West, failed to consolidate democratic institutions?

In sum, the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century is far poorer, far more unjust, far more authoritarian than most people half a century ago expected it would be, and the anticipated fruits of the post-Cold War democratic-capitalist consensus have, with a few exceptions, yet to be harvested.

**Explaining the Failure: Colonialism and Dependency**

As it became apparent that the problems of underdevelopment were more intractable than the development experts had predicted, two explanations with Marxist-Leninist roots came to dominate the politics of the poor countries and the universities of the rich countries: colonialism and dependency.

Lenin had identified imperialism as a late and inevitable stage of capitalism that reflected what he viewed as the inability of increasingly monopolistic capitalist countries to find domestic markets for their products and capital. For those former colonies, possessions or mandate countries that had recently gained independence, imperialism was a reality that left a profound imprint on the national psyche and presented a ready explanation for
underdevelopment -- particularly in Africa, where national boundaries had often been arbitrarily drawn without reference to homogeneity of culture or tribal coherence.

For those countries in what would come to be called the Third World that had been independent for a century or more, as in Latin America, "imperialism" took the shape of "dependency" -- the theory that the poor countries of "the periphery" were bilked by the rich capitalist countries of "the center." These countries allegedly depressed world market prices of basic commodities and inflated the prices of manufactured goods, enabling their multinational corporations to extort excessive profits.

The injustice of dependency was popularized by the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, whose phenomenally successful book, The Open Veins of Latin America, was first published in 1971 (it has since been republished sixty-seven times). The following lines capture its essence:

Latin America is the region of open veins. From the discovery up to the present, our wealth has been taken from us first by European capital and then by American capital and has accumulated in those distant centers of power. . . The international division of labor consists of some countries that specialize in getting rich and some in getting poor.

The Marxist-Leninist roots of dependency theory are apparent from another popular book published in the same year with the title Dependency and Development in Latin America. The authors were Fernando Henrique Cardoso, today the president of Brazil, and Enzo Faletto, an Argentine. The book, in stark contrast with President Cardoso's centrist, democratic-capitalist policies since 1993, concludes:

It is not realistic to imagine that capitalist development will solve basic problems for the majority of the population. In the end, what has to be discussed as an alternative is not the consolidation of the state and the fulfillment of 'autonomous capitalism' but how to supersede them. The important question, then, is how to construct paths toward socialism.

Neither "colonialism" nor "dependency" have much credibility today. For many, including some Africans, the statute of limitations on colonialism as an explanation for underdevelopment lapsed long ago. Moreover, four former colonies, two British (Hong Kong and Singapore) and two Japanese (South Korea and Taiwan), have vaulted into the First World. One rarely hears dependency mentioned today, not even in American universities, where not many years ago it was a conventional wisdom that brooked no dissent. Contributing to dependency theory's demise were, among other factors, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe; the transformation of communism in China into conventional, increasingly free-market authoritarianism; the collapse of the Cuban economy after Russia halted massive Soviet subventions; the success of the East Asian dragons in the world market; the decisive defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 Nicaraguan elections; and theretofore stridently anti-Yanqui Mexico's initiative to join Canada and the United States in NAFTA.

And so an explanatory vacuum emerged in the last decade of the century.

Explaining the Failure: Culture

Largely unnoticed in U.S. academic circles, a new, inward-looking paradigm that focuses on cultural values and attitudes is gradually filling the explanatory vacuum left by dependency theory's collapse. Recently, Latin America has taken the lead in articulating the paradigm and contriving initiatives to translate it into actions designed not only to accelerate economic growth but also to fortify democratic institutions and promote social justice. The culture paradigm also has adherents in Africa and Asia.

Of course, many analysts who have studied the East Asian economic miracles over the past three decades have concluded that "Confucian" values--such as emphasis on the future, work, education, merit and frugality -- have played a crucial role in East Asia's successes. But just as the flourishing of the East Asians in the world market -- so inconsistent with dependency theory-- was largely ignored by Latin American intellectuals and politicians until recent years, so was the cultural explanation for those miracles. Latin America has now for the most part accepted the economic policy lessons of East Asia, and it is confronting the question: If dependency and imperialism are
not responsible for our economic underdevelopment, our authoritarian political traditions, and our extreme social injustice, what is?

That question was posed by the Venezuelan writer Carlos Rangel in a book published in the mid-1970s, The Latin Americans: Their Love-Hate Relationship with the United States. Rangel was not the first Latin American to conclude that traditional Ibero-American values and attitudes, and the institutions that reflected and reinforced them, were the principal cause of Latin America's "failure", a word he contrasted with the "success" of the United States and Canada. Similar conclusions were recorded by, among others, Simon Bolivar's aide, Francisco Miranda, in the last years of the eighteenth century; by the eminent Argentines Juan Bautista Alberdi and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and the Chilean Francisco Bilbao in the second half of the nineteenth century; and by the Nicaraguan intellectual Salvador Mendieta early in the twentieth century. Anticipating similar comments by Alexis de Tocqueville twenty years later, Bolivar himself had this to say in 1815:

As long as our compatriots fail to acquire the talents and political virtues that distinguish our brothers to the north, political systems based on popular participation, far from helping us, will bring our ruin. Unfortunately, those qualities in the necessary degree are beyond us. We are dominated by the vices of Spain--violence, overweening ambition, vindictiveness, and greed.

Rangel's book earned him the enmity of most Latin American intellectuals and was mostly ignored by Latin American specialists in North America and Europe. But the book has proven to be seminal. In 1979 Nobelist Octavio Paz explained the contrast between the two Americas this way:

One, English-speaking, is the daughter of the tradition that has founded the modern world: the Reformation, with its social and political consequences, democracy and capitalism. The other, Spanish and Portuguese speaking, is the daughter of the universal Catholic monarchy and the Counter-Reformation.

One finds strong echoes of Rangel in Claudio Veliz's 1994 book, The New World of the Gothic Fox, which contrasts the Anglo-Protestant and Ibero-Catholic legacies in the New World. Veliz defines the new cultural current with the words of the celebrated Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, who asserts that the economic, educational and judicial reforms necessary to Latin America's modernization cannot be effected unless they are preceded or accompanied by a reform of our customs and ideas, of the whole complex system of habits, knowledge, images and forms that we understand by 'culture.' The culture within which we live and act today in Latin America is neither liberal nor is it altogether democratic. We have democratic governments, but our institutions, our reflexes and our mentality are very far from being democratic. They remain populist and oligarchic, or absolutist, collectivist or dogmatic, flawed by social and racial prejudices, immensely intolerant with respect to political adversaries, and devoted to the worst monopoly of all, that of the truth.

The recent runaway bestseller in Latin America, Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot, is dedicated to Rangel by its co-authors, Colombian Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza; Vargas Llosa's son, Alvaro; and Cuban exile Carlos Alberto Montaner, all three of whom identify themselves as "idiots" of the far Left in their younger years. The book criticizes those Latin American intellectuals of this century who have promoted the view that the region is a victim of imperialism. Among them are Galeano, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, pre-president Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Gustavo Gutierrez, founder of Liberation Theology. Montaner, Montaner and Vargas Llosa strongly imply that the real causes of Latin America's underdevelopment are in the minds of the Latin Americans:

In reality, except for cultural factors, nothing prevented Mexico from doing what Japan did when it almost totally displaced the United States' production of television sets.

In their 1998 sequel, Manufacturers of Misery, the authors trace the influence of the traditional culture on the behavior of six elite groups: the politicians, the military, business people, the clergy, the intellectuals and the revolutionaries, all of whom have acted in ways that impede progress toward democratic-capitalist modernity. A year later, a prominent Argentine intellectual and media celebrity; Mariano Grondona, published The Cultural Conditions of Economic Development, which analyzes and contrasts development-prone (e.g., U.S. and Canadian) and development-resistant (e.g., Latin American) cultures. Among the differences noted was a stronger emphasis on creativity, innovation, trust, education and merit in the former.
To be sure, Latin American values and attitudes are changing, as the transition to democratic politics and market economics of the past fifteen years suggests. Several forces are modifying the region's culture, among them the new intellectual current, the globalization of communications and economics, and the surge in evangelical/Pentecostal Protestantism. Protestants now account for more than 30 percent of the population in Guatemala and 15-20 percent in Brazil, Chile and Nicaragua.

The impact of these new-paradigm books and Montaner's weekly columns (he is the most widely read columnist in the Spanish language) has been profound in Latin America. But in the United States, Canada and Western Europe, they have gone largely unnoticed. A generation of Latin Americanists nurtured on dependency theory, or the less extreme view that the solution to Latin America's problems depends on the United States being more magnanimous in its dealings with the region, finds the cultural explanation indigestible.

However, one American of Mexican descent, Texas businessman Lionel Sosa, has contributed to the new paradigm. In his 1998 book, The Americano Dream, Sosa catalogues a series of Hispanic values and attitudes that present obstacles to achieving the upward mobility of mainstream America:

* The resignation of the poor--"To be poor is to deserve heaven. To be rich is to deserve hell. It is good to suffer in this life because in the next life you will find eternal reward."

* The low priority given to education -- "The girls don't really need it -- they'll get married anyway. And the boys? It's better that they go to work, to help the family." (The Hispanic high school dropout rate in the United States is about 30 percent, vastly higher than that of white and black Americans.)

* Fatalism--"Individual initiative, achievement, self-reliance, ambition, aggressiveness -- all these are useless in the face of an attitude that says, 'We must not challenge the will of God.' ... The virtues so essential to business success in the United States are looked upon as sins by the Latino church." At least in California, the Hispanic rate of self-employment is well below the state's average.

* Mistrust of those outside the family, which contributes to the generally small size of Hispanic businesses.

At least one African has come to similar conclusions about the slow rate of progress on his continent. Daniel Etounga-Manguelle is a Cameroonian who holds a doctorate in economics and planning from the Sorbonne and who heads a prominent consulting company that operates throughout Africa. In 1990 he published a book in France entitled Does Africa Need a Cultural Adjustment Program?, in which he attributes Africa's poverty; authoritarianism and social injustice principally to traditional cultural values and attitudes. The book evokes the new-paradigm literature in Latin America.

Etounga-Manguelle's analysis of African culture highlights the highly centralized, vertical traditions of authority; a focus on the past and present, not the future; a rejection of "the tyranny of time"; a distaste for work ("The African works to live but doesn't live to work"); the suppression of individual initiative, achievement and saving (the corollary is jealousy of success); a belief in sorcery that nurtures irrationality and fatalism.

For those, particularly in the international development community, who see "institution-building" as the way to solve the problems of the Third World, Etounga-Manguelle offers an insight: "Culture is the mother; institutions are the children.

Etounga-Manguelle concludes that Africa must "change or perish." A cultural "adjustment" is not enough. What is needed is a cultural revolution that transforms traditional authoritarian child-rearing practices, which "produce sheep"; transforms education through emphasis on the individual, independent judgment and creativity; produces free individuals working together for the progress of the community; produces an elite concerned with the well-being of the society; and promotes a healthy economy based on the work ethic, the profit motive and individual initiative.
How Culture Influences Progress

The idea of "progress" is suspect for those who are committed to cultural relativism. Some anthropologists view it as an idea the West is trying to impose on other cultures. At the extreme, cultural relativists may argue that Westerners have no right to criticize institutions and practices like female genital mutilation; suttee, the Hindu practice for widows to join their dead husbands on funeral pyres; or even slavery. Some Western anthropologists opposed the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But after a half century of the communications revolution, it is clear that progress in the Western -- and East Asian -- sense has become a virtually universal aspiration. I am not speaking of progress as defined by the affluent consumer society, although an end to poverty is clearly one of the universal goals, and that inevitably means higher levels of consumption. Over the almost two decades that I have been studying and writing about the relationship between cultural values and human progress, I have identified ten values, attitudes or mindsets that distinguish progressive cultures -- cultures that facilitate achievement of the goals of the UN Declaration -- from static cultures, which impede their achievement:

1. Time orientation: The progressive culture emphasizes the future, the static culture the present or past. Future orientation implies a progressive world-view: influence over one's destiny, rewards in this life for virtue, and positive-sum economics in which wealth expands -- in contrast to the zero-sum psychology commonly found in poor countries.

2. Work and achievement are central to the good life in the progressive culture, but are of lesser importance in the static culture. In the former, work structures daily life, and diligence, creativity and achievement are rewarded not only financially but also with satisfaction, self-respect and prestige.

3. Frugality is the mother of investment -- and financial security -- in progressive cultures; a threat to the egalitarian status quo in static, zero-sum cultures in which one person's gains are at the expense of others.

4. Education is the key to advancement in progressive cultures but is of marginal importance except for the elites in static cultures.

5. Merit is central to advancement in the progressive culture; connections and family are what count in the static culture.

6. Community: The radius of identification and trust extends beyond the family to the broader society in the progressive culture, whereas the family circumscribes community in the static culture. Societies with a narrow radius of identification and trust are more prone to corruption, nepotism and tax evasion and are less likely to engage in philanthropy.

7. The societal ethical code tends to be more rigorous in the progressive culture. Every advanced democracy except Belgium, Taiwan, Italy and South Korea appears among the 25 least corrupt countries on Transparency International's "Corruption Perceptions Index." Chile and Botswana are the only Third World countries that appear among the top 25.

8. Justice and fair play are universal, impersonal expectations in the progressive culture. In the static culture, justice, like personal advancement, is often a function of whom you know or how much you can pay.

9. Authority tends toward dispersion and horizontality in progressive cultures, which encourage dissent; toward concentration and verticality in static cultures, which encourage orthodoxy.

10. Secularism: The influence of religious institutions on civic life is small in the progressive culture; their influence in static cultures is often substantial. Heterodoxy and dissent are encouraged in the former, orthodoxy and conformity are encouraged in the latter.

Obviously, these ten factors are generalized and idealized, and the reality of cultural variation is not black and white but a spectrum, in which colors fuse into one another. Few countries would be graded "10" on all the factors, just as few countries would be graded "1." Nonetheless, virtually all of the advanced democracies -- and high-achieving ethnic/religious groups such as Mormons, East Asian immigrants, Jews, Sikhs and Basques -- would receive substantially higher scores than virtually all of the Third World countries.
This conclusion invites the inference that what is really in play is development, not culture. The same argument could be made about Transparency International's corruption index. There is a complex interplay of cause and effect between culture and progress. But the power of culture is demonstrable -- for example, in those countries where the economic achievement of ethnic minorities far exceeds that of the majorities, as in the case of the Chinese in Thailand Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and even the United States.

The ten factors I have suggested are not definitive. But they do at least suggest which elements in the vastness of "culture" may influence the way societies evolve. Moreover, the new-paradigm writers in Latin America and Africa attribute the slow modernization of their countries in large measure to just such traditional values and attitudes. Their views evoke the seminal culturalists Alexis de Tocqueville, Max Weber and Edward Banfield. Tocqueville's Democracy in America is particularly relevant for those who would adduce geographic or institutional explanations for democratic development:

Europeans exaggerate the influence of geography on the lasting powers of democratic institutions. Too much importance is attached to laws and too little to mores.... If in the course of this book I have not succeeded in making the reader feel the importance I attach to the practical experience of the Americans, to their habits, opinions, and, in a word, their mores, in maintaining their laws, I have failed in the main object of my work.

**Changing the Traditional Culture**

In part because of the influence of the new-paradigm writers, but in some cases because of life experiences that have brought them to the same conclusions, a growing number of Latin Americans and others have initiated activities that promote progressive values and attitudes.

Octavio Mavila was for three decades the Honda distributor in Peru. A burly self-made man well into his seventies, Mavila has visited Japan numerous times over the years. He came to the conclusion that the only significant difference between Japan and Peru was that Japanese children learned progressive values while Peruvian children did not. In 1990 he established the Institute of Human Development in Lima to promote "the Ten Commandments of Development": order, cleanliness, punctuality, responsibility, achievement, honesty, respect for the rights of others, respect for the law, work ethic and frugality. (In The Americano Dream, Lionel Sosa presents a similar program for success based on "the twelve traits of successful Latinos.") More than two million Peruvian students have participated in courses sponsored by the institute.

The Ten Commandments of Development are being preached outside Peru, too. Humberto Belli, Nicaragua's minister of education in two administrations, viewed them as central to his program of educational reform. Ramon de la Pena, rector of the Monterrey campus of Mexico's prestigious Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Studies, has also promoted use of the Ten Commandments.

The effectiveness of the evangelizing approach to cultural change needs to be evaluated. As Luis Ugalde, a Jesuit who is the rector of the Catholic University of Caracas, has observed, if children learn a progressive ethic in school and find it irrelevant to their lives outside of school, the impact may be scant. That is why Ugalde, who is convinced that values and attitudes matter, is promoting anti-corruption, pro-merit campaigns in government, business and the professions.

Corruption is in significant part a cultural phenomenon, linked to factors like limited radius of identification and trust that translate into a limited sense of community and an elastic ethical code. Corruption has become a high-profile issue in Latin America. In 1998 the Organization of American States adopted the Inter-American Convention against Corruption. Few expect that the Convention itself is going to dramatically reduce the incidence of corruption--five Latin American countries (Paraguay, Honduras, Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador) appear among Transparency International's ten most corrupt countries. But it is clear that corruption is today receiving far more attention than it once did, by, among others, the World Bank.

The gender issue has also come to the fore, challenging the traditional machismo culture. Latin American women are increasingly aware of the gender democratization that has occurred, particularly in First World countries, in recent decades, and they are increasingly organizing and taking initiatives to rectify the sexism that has kept them in second-class status. In several countries, laws concerning parental and property rights and divorce have been liberalized in favor of women, and nine countries have established obligatory quotas for women candidates in
elections. While these electoral laws are not uniformly effective, they are a reminder that the gender revolution, and all that it implies with respect to transformation of traditional values, is reaching Latin America.

**Integrating Values and Attitudes into Development**

With the notable exceptions of East Asia and Iberia, human progress during the half century since World War II has been disheartening. The principal reason for this has been the failure to take into account the power of culture to thwart or facilitate progress. It is, for example, the cultural contrast between Western Europe and Latin America that chiefly explains the success of the Marshall Plan and the failure of the Alliance for Progress.

This is not to say that addressing culture will solve all problems. Culture is one of several factors -- others being geography and climate, ideology, policies, globalization, leadership, the vagaries of history -- that influence progress. The limits of cultural explanations are obvious when one considers the striking contrasts in progress between North and South Korea, and between East and West Germany. But particularly as we view the longer run, culture's power becomes more apparent.

At a 1999 Harvard symposium entitled "Cultural Values and Human Progress", Nathan Glazer observed that people are made uncomfortable or are offended by cultural explanations of why some countries and some ethnic groups do better than others. But the alternative -- to view oneself or one's group as a victim -- is worse. As Bernard Lewis recently observed in a article about the Islamic countries, When people realize that things are going wrong, there are two questions they can ask. One is, 'What did we do wrong?' and the other is 'Who did this to us?' The latter leads to conspiracy theories and paranoia. The first question leads to another line of thinking: 'How do we put it right?'

A consensus emerged at the Harvard symposium that we need to understand a good deal more about the intricate relationship between culture and progress and what can be done to promote progressive values. A research agenda has been developed, the end product of which would be guidelines for governments and development institutions. The agenda would 1) define, analyze and weight the values that most influence development; 2) enhance understanding of the complex relationships among values, policies, institutions and development; and 3) enhance understanding of the role of agents of cultural transmission, e.g., parents, peers, schools, television. The research agenda would also extend the World Values Survey, which now covers sixty-five countries, further into the poor countries and tailor it to the results of the research on values. Finally, an evaluation would be undertaken of activities already under way that promote progressive values and attitudes, particularly through education, more effective parenting, promotion of entrepreneurship, promotion of civic responsibility, reduction of corruption and expansion of philanthropy.

Culture is not the only force that shapes the destinies of nations, particularly in the short run. Moreover, culture changes. An observation by Daniel Patrick Moynihan is apt: "The central conservative truth is that it is culture, not politics, that determines the success of a society. The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself."

But I believe that David Landes is right in concluding in his recent book, The Wealth and Poverty of Nations, "If we learn anything from the history of economic development, it is that culture makes all the difference." I believe that the same is true of political and social development. Yet the role of cultural values and attitudes as obstacles to or facilitators of progress has been largely ignored by governments and aid agencies. Integrating value and attitude change into policies and programs will assure that, in the next fifty years, the world does not relive the poverty and injustice in which most poor countries have been mired during the past half century's "decades of development."

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