

## HAROLD DWIGHT LASSWELL (1902–1978)

The death of Harold Dwight Lasswell, on December 18, 1978, brought to a close a career of tremendous contribution to the American Society of International Law, to international law, and to the common interests of humankind.

Lasswell was already recognized as one of the great scholars and great internationalists of this century when he joined the Society in 1948. He was president of the Society from 1970 to 1972 and an honorary vice-president from 1973 until his death. He contributed many important articles to this *Journal*. He was a vice-president of the Society from 1966 to 1970, and on the Executive Council from 1963 to 1966. He was the architect of the Board of Review and Development and a member from its inception in 1965 through 1969. He was an *ex officio* member of the board from 1970 to 1974. He was chairman of the Panel on Communications and Linguistics, which operated from 1966 through 1970, and a member of the Panel on Self-Determination from 1968 to 1970. His qualities of strong, wise, and inspiring leadership are known to all who were active in the Society during this period.

From the beginning of his studies, Lasswell focused his attention upon the world arena and the interactions between individual human beings transcending nation-state boundaries within that arena. He was trained in Chicago, London, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna and later spent important formative years in the Far East. In his first important book, *Propaganda Techniques in the World War* (1927), with a blend of intellectual innovation and political realism that is characteristic of all his work, he virtually invented propaganda analysis, a complex of techniques for studying the manifest and latent content of collective communication flows and an enterprise that later grew into the great fields of content analysis and communications theory. In his next book, *Psychopathology and Politics* (1930), in contraposed dimension, he adapted psychoanalytic methods to political analysis and brought the intensive study of individual personalities to bear upon inquiry about collective political behavior. Five years later in what he regarded as his greatest book, *World Politics and Personal Insecurity* (1935), he fused these two different, but complementary, approaches into a comprehensive working model, which he labeled “configurative analysis,” for inquiry into every aspect of the activities, political and other, of individual human beings in world social process.

Lasswell's entire career was dedicated to perfecting, developing, and applying his comprehensive theory. His overriding concern and commitment were for policy, in the sense of the consequences of choice and decision upon the values of individual human beings, and his increasing and wide-ranging quest for enlightenment was for guidance in action. His demand was for the development of a theory sufficiently comprehensive, yet capable of being made sufficiently precise, to facilitate performance of all the different intellectual tasks necessary to the rational clarification and implementation of individual and community policy. It was to this

end that he brought to bear all his early innovations relating to propaganda and communications, the psychopathology of politics and psychiatry of decisionmaking, and free association as an instrument of thought, as well as his later work upon developmental constructs and futuristics, the specification of a theory of values, the collection of trend data, functional as contrasted with conventional analysis, and so on. The culmination of his efforts came, of course, in his eventual conception and detailed elaboration of the "policy sciences."

The importance of Lasswell's contributions to multidisciplinary inquiry about man in society has been long and widely recognized. One eloquent, collective indication of this recognition appears in the terms of an award made to him in 1960 by the American Council of Learned Societies:

Harold Dwight Lasswell, master of all the social sciences and pioneer in each; rambunctiously devoted to breaking down the man-made barriers between the social studies, and so acquainting each with the rest; filler-in of the interdisciplinary spaces between political science, psychology, philosophy, and sociology; prophetic in foreseeing the Garrison State and courageously intelligent in trying to curb its powers; sojourner in Vienna and selective transmitter of the Freudian vision to his American colleagues; disciplined in wide-ranging inquiry; working against resistance to create a modern quadrivium of the social sciences that will make them truly liberal arts.<sup>1</sup>

The most important contribution made by Lasswell to international law derived directly from his major goal of creating a framework of inquiry about global social processes. For him law was not a body of static and ambiguous rules but, in an intellectual tradition extending far back into antiquity, a process of decision by which the members of a community clarify and secure their common interests. Whatever the realism in perception of its members, he observed that humankind as a whole does today constitute a community in the sense of interdetermination and interdependences. His initial interest as a political scientist was in one component of this larger community process, the process of effective power, also global in its reach, in which decisions are taken and enforced by severe deprivations or high indulgences, irrespective of the wishes of any particular member. He saw, however, in contrast to some statesmen and scholars, that many of these effective power decisions are taken, not from sheer naked power or calculations of expediency, but from what may be described as perspectives of authority: these decisions are made by the people who are expected to make them, in accordance with community demands about how they should be made, in established structures of authority, with enough bases in power to secure consequential control, and by authorized procedures. It is these latter decisions, those made in accordance with community expectations about authority and accom-

<sup>1</sup> American Council of Learned Societies Citation (Jan. 20, 1960), *reprinted in* H. LASSWELL, *POWER AND PERSONALITY* (Compass Books ed. 1962) (back cover).

For other evaluations, see *POLITICS, PERSONALITY, AND SOCIAL SCIENCE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY* (A. Rogow ed. 1969); Marvick, *Introduction to H. Lasswell*, in *POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY* (D. Marvick ed. 1977); and Easton, *Harold Lasswell: Policy Scientist for a Democratic Society*, 12 *J. POLITICS* 450 (1950).

panied by effective control, that Lasswell chose to describe as law; international, or better transnational, law was a continuing global process of decision in which authority and control are conjoined.

In closer examination of the whole flow of authoritative and controlling decision, Lasswell observed, further, that these decisions are of two different types. First, there are the "constitutive" decisions, establishing and maintaining the whole process, which identify and distinguish the different authoritative decisionmakers, specify and clarify basic community policies, establish appropriate structures of authority, allocate bases of power for sanctioning purposes, authorize procedures for the different kinds of decisions, and determine the various modalities by which law is made and applied. Second, there are the "public order" decisions, emerging as outcomes from constitutive process, which shape and regulate all the larger community's various value processes; these are the decisions that determine how resources are allocated and developed, and wealth produced and distributed; how human rights are promoted and fulfilled, or denied; how enlightenment is encouraged, or retarded; how health is fostered, or neglected; how civic responsibility is nurtured, or blighted; and so on through all cherished values. From this perspective, which infused all Lasswell's work, every feature of the earth-space arena, from the most pervasive ecological conditions to the internal dynamics of particular self-systems, was but part of an interstimulating whole; an appropriate model of the whole was thus indispensable to both effective inquiry and rational decision.

The preeminent contribution made by Lasswell was in the development of a theory, both sufficiently comprehensive and sufficiently selective to describe realistically the interrelations of law and other features of the larger community process in all their complexity. This broad framework of theory for empirical description he achieved by combining the value categories of ethical philosophers and other normative specialists—power, respect, enlightenment, well-being, wealth, skill, affection, and rectitude—with institutional or practice categories taken from cultural anthropologists—participation, perspectives (subjectivities of demand, identification, and expectation), situations, bases of power, strategies, and outcomes. By the assignment of appropriate operational indices to these categories, description could be generalized upwards to any necessary degree of comprehensiveness and specified downwards to the most minute detail required for inquiry and decision. The "cognitive map" Lasswell thus created, through value and institutional analyses, comprised a powerful intellectual tool for describing, and locating decision within, the whole dynamic flow of community, social, power, and authoritative decision processes at all levels of organization.

A second component of Lasswell's comprehensive theory, no less indispensable to his deliberate emphasis upon policy than his working model of community and social processes, was a praxis or methodology for the conduct and guidance of inquiry and decisionmaking. His aspiration did not stop with static, contemplative maps; the whole purpose of his comprehensive models was to focus attention upon context relevant to prob-

lem solving and policymaking. The praxis he recommended required the explicit postulation, from perspectives of identification with the whole community of humankind, of a comprehensive set of policy preferences, formulated at necessarily high levels of abstraction, and the systematic employment of certain distinctive, yet interrelated intellectual tasks in the more detailed clarification and projection of preferred policies. The more specific intellectual tasks he recommended, in contradistinction to traditional syntactic derivation, included the specification of goals, the description of past trends in decision in terms of approximation to preferred policies, the analysis of conditions affecting decision, the projection of probable future developments, and the invention and evaluation of policy alternatives in decision. For the better performance of these tasks, Lasswell sought in heroic multidisciplinary dimension, to bring to bear knowledge from all the relevant sciences and humanities, and he formulated systematic principles of content, indicating the features of context requiring examination, and of procedure, outlining an order and modalities of inquiry, for improving rationality in observation and choice.

Lasswell's emphasis upon goal specification derived from his conception of law and politics as purposive activities; the content of purpose became a preeminent consideration. With his conception of a manifold and integrated reality, Lasswell insisted that goals be specified, not for a single key variable, but for all values in his preferred public order of human dignity, for all phases of the constitutive process, and on through to the preferred psychopersonal organization of the self. Goal clarification became coterminous with the very limits of the earth-space arena. Goals were to be specified for each value and each phase and to be interrelated; the method was postulation rather than derivation. Once postulated, goals became susceptible to empirical testing by all relevant skills, for trends toward or away from their approximation, for the identification of conditioning factors affecting such trends, for projection of alternative future flows appraised for their degree of conformity to goal and their stimulus to the invention of alternatives. Thus, preference could be removed from a fantasy world and made into an effective instrument of social intervention and appraisal, major public functions of the lawyer.

Past trends in decision Lasswell studied to determine the extent to which particular goals have been achieved, for the factors that had conditioned them, and for securing springboards for extrapolation and invention. His demand for accuracy in understanding decision trends outstripped extant methodology. He reached into other disciplines and adapted and invented: propaganda and then content analysis, the adaptation of psychoanalytical methods to political science, the use of social indicators, and so on. He had no patience for the neo-scholastic fascination with a method, and the cultivation of virtuosity in it, for its own sake. Method was a means. The test of the quality of the tool, and of the skill of the hand of the craftsman wielding it, was in the product.

Lasswell had a special interest in the environment of conditions in which decisions were made. Trends in past decision were useful to the projection of future possibilities and the invention of alternatives only if

the factors that conditioned those decisions could be identified. Lasswell's contextual theory permitted him to avoid the sterile debate on "causality" and, building upon the maximization postulate, to reconstruct the complex of environmental and predispositional factors that had influenced past decisions.

Lasswell knew that the decision specialist bent on influencing trends in social process must develop some idea of what the future holds even if he mounts no intervention. Many scholars appeared to assume that there was such a thing as "the future," inchoate, in the wings, down the line, and they actually sought to prophesy this thing that would be. While Lasswell was interested in techniques for extrapolating past trends, his conception and methodology of the intellectual task of projection of future trends were radically different. He invented the method of developmental constructs, the conscious invention of a spectrum of futures, ranging from the most desirable future, approximating the goal values of human dignity, to the least desirable future. These possible futures were projected, providing artificial touch points against which the sonar of the decisionmaker could be beamed, as he moved through a continuous present, providing indications of the degree of success of particular strategies for achieving or avoiding particular futures and signals of when to change strategies to increase approximation to goals. Lasswell's constructs were designed as tools, but many have become important literary legacies of our culture. His construct of a public order of human dignity is at once a realistic and luminous vision of what the city of man can be. His construct of the garrison state has served as a frightening reminder of the culmination of certain tendencies in this century.

An indispensable task of the decision specialist is, Lasswell emphasized, the invention of alternatives that might lead to a greater approximation to preferred goals. Whether he was prescribing a system of "preventive politics" for an ailing democracy, sketching a rational sanctioning program to defend public order, or designing an improved constitutive process for the earth-space arena, Lasswell's inventions were marked by the soundness of good engineering and the refinement of great art. Yet he was not a man to sit and contemplate his own creations. Above all, he inspired others to create.

The more specific contributions made by Lasswell to international law, in application of his comprehensive theory, are too numerous and too well known to permit or require detailed itemization. In a vast flow of books, articles, reviews, and other papers he studied, and made recommendations about, many of the more important features of contemporary global constitutive process and public order. The particular problems with which he dealt, in more conventional description, range over an immense spectrum, including such items as the law of outer space, the interrelations of world organization and society, human rights, disarmament, aggression and self-defense, cooperation between contending systems, peaceful co-existence, the law of treaties, the international law of development, *jus cogens*, the legal framework of war and peace, and the impact of international law upon decision process. With respect to all these problems

and countless others, he sought always, whether working alone or in collaboration with associates, both to clarify common interest in relation to the particular problem and to afford a model for effective future inquiry.

It is an extraordinarily difficult matter, as the experience of centuries demonstrates, to make effective in the global arena the historic mission of law as a process of decision for clarifying and securing common interest. The achievement of this mission in any community must require both the careful articulation of symbols of shared demand and common expectation and the employment of many necessary intellectual procedures in a continuing exploration and assessment of potential decision outcomes for identifying those that promise greatest net advantage. The fundamental and insistent challenge is to make continual reference of the part to the whole in contextual consideration of every particular problem in the light of the overriding goals and characteristics of the larger community. When it becomes appropriate to assess the contributions of scholars in our era to development of the intellectual procedures indispensable to this task of clarifying common interest, it is probable that Lasswell will be accorded a position of preeminence. The legacy that he has bequeathed us about how to clarify and implement an international law, or any law, that embodies the values of human dignity is indeed a remarkable one, without many parallels. His dedication was to humanity, and humanity will honor his memory as long as it cherishes human dignity.

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