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NATURAL ENERGY & SOCIAL POWER
METAPHORS FROM PHYSICS TO POLITICS

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INTRODUCTION

Although energy has fascinated man since the discovery of fire, it was not until modern times that it came to the forefront of scientific investigation. It was even more recently that energy became a public issue in the global scale and thus began to interest social as well as natural scientists.

The so called "energy crisis" of the contemporary world may only be a passing phenomenon, but it has triggered a popular debate and more serious thinking on the relationship between natural resources and human society. The pessimists, on the one hand, warn of the depletion of energy and materials and look to conservation or steady-state economies as the answer; while the optimists, on the other hand, believe in the coming of a new era of energy abundance through high technology.

Between these two views, of course, there are many grad ations and nuances which look upon energy in society from various vantage points. The point from which we shall regard this issue focuses on the relationship between physical energy and political power. Around this relationship are to be found many significant connections among natural and social systems which we shall present in this paper.

To begin with, we shall make explicit a conceptual framework which includes both nature and society by using a systems approach. In so doing, we define the scope of this study and put down the assumptions underlying it.