

Michael W. Masters is the author of "The Morality of Survival," an essay to be published in the July and August issues of American Renaissance. Based in part on Garrett Hardin's 1978 book, *The Limits of Altruism*, it explores the moral flaws of universalism and their potential implications for the future.

# "Who Speaks For Posterity?"

A Book Review by Michael W. Masters

In his 1982 essay, "Discriminating Altruisms," Garrett Hardin describes an intellectual as "a person skilled in words but deficient in the imagination required to see the reality behind verbal counters." This exposes the great truth underlying the West's immigration dilemma — our immigration policies are largely based on the way we want the world to be rather than the way it really is. Western governments persist in basing policy on sentiment and universalism rather than on objective assessment of historically predominant factors such as social harmony, cultural compatibility and carrying capacity. The chimera of universalism remains a glittering mirage, forever unobtainable, for reasons that Garrett Hardin first wrote about in his classic 1968 essay, "The Tragedy of the Commons," one of many essays collected in his new book, *The Immigration Dilemma: Avoiding The Tragedy of the Commons*.

Our policies are rapidly destroying stabilizing social conditions that have endured for many generations. In times past, while great, unsettled regions of the world remained to be developed, the consequences of a flawed policy were likely to be local, and perhaps transitory as well. So long as sources of renewal existed, the damage caused by ecological and social misjudgments might heal in the course of time. Now, that isolation is gone forever. Today as never before, there are potentially enormous consequences for policy mistakes that fail to take the realities of human nature into account, mistakes with consequences that could haunt future generations forever.

A number of remarkably far-reaching themes run through Hardin's works, themes that have profound implications for the consequences of the profligate population and immigration policies practiced by the West. These themes form a seamless web. First, all ecosystems — from the common grazing lands shared by our herdsman ancestors to the homelands of nation states as they have existed for the past several centuries to the "great globe itself" — are finite. The numbers of inhabitants that each ecosystem can support is determined by its carrying capacity. Exceeding this carrying capacity inevitably results in an ecological

readjustment that may include not only severe, and possibly permanent, damage to the ecosystem but also a population crash as well.

Second, it is human nature for people to act out of self-interest. Self-interest leads to exploitation of resources that are held in common by all. Because of the nature of a commons, the full benefit of exploitation is gained by the exploiter but the cost is spread among all who share the commons. Thus there is a built-in incentive for each individual or cohesive group to maximize its gain from the commons. Hardin calls this the tragedy of the commons. It is a tragedy because, unless stopped, exploitation is likely to proceed until the carrying capacity of the commons is exceeded and the shared ecosystem is irreparably

damaged.

Third, a tension exists in nature between self-interest and altruism. In fact, there is a hierarchy of altruisms, ranging from the kinship altruism of family members to blind, universal altruism. Altruism toward one's tribe or one's nation (extended tribe) falls somewhere between. Altruism has evolutionary benefits at a less-than-universal scale. It helps insure the survival of the genes of those who practice it, though not necessarily survival of the individuals themselves.

## The Perils of Universalism

Much of the rhetoric favoring immigration is based on the ideology of universalism. While this ideology is appealing to intellectuals, it is widely unpopular with ordinary people. Since the founding of the UN in 1945, there has been much fissioning of nations, often accompanied by violence, but there has been no fusion. Current attempts to produce regional fusion by economic linkages such as NAFTA and the European Union are being marketed, and sometimes imposed, from the top, generally by universalists who favor emergence of a world-wide government.

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However, as Hardin demonstrates in "Discriminating Altruisms," universalism is an impossibility, at least among humans. Unlike simple organisms such as ants and termites, there is great natural variation among humans. Once variation is introduced, those who practice pure, unlimited altruism, unfettered by thoughts of self-preservation, will be disadvantaged in life's competition and thus eliminated over time in favor of those who limit their altruistic behavior to a smaller subset of humanity from whom they receive corresponding reciprocal benefits.

*Universalism is altruism practiced without discrimination of kinship, acquaintanceship, shared values, or propinquity in time or space. It is perhaps shocking, but entirely accurate, to call it promiscuous altruism ... To people who accept the idea of biological evolution from amoeba to man, the vision of social evolution from egoism to universalism may seem plausible. In fact, however, the last step is impossible ... Let us see why.*

*In imagination, picture a world in which social evolution has gone no further than egoism or individualism. When familialism appears on the scene, what accounts for its persistence? It must be that the costs of the sacrifices individuals make for their relatives are more than paid for by the gains realized through family solidarity...*

*The argument that accounts for the step to familialism serves equally well for each succeeding step — except for the last. Why the difference? Because the One World created by universalism has — by definition — no competitive base to support it ... [T]hose who speak for One World speak against discrimination and for promiscuity ... Unfortunately for their dreams, the promiscuity they hunger for cannot survive in competition with discrimination [emphasis in original].*

As used above, the word *discrimination* describes the act of making choices between competing alternatives, an unavoidable part of life. Universalists have succeeded in vilifying the concept of "discrimination." But if we cannot make choices concerning matters that affect our lives then, in fact, we are not free. We are well advised to ask of the vilifiers, "cui bono?" Who benefits from this vilification? Hardin adds

*[W]e must not forget that for three billion years, biological evolution has been powered by discrimination. Even mere survival in the absence of evolutionary change depends on discrimination. If universalists now have their way, discrimination will be abandoned. Even the most modest impulse toward conservatism should cause us to question the wisdom of abandoning a*

*principle that has worked so well for billions of years. It is a tragic irony that discrimination has produced a species (Homo sapiens) that now proposes to abandon the principle responsible for its rise to greatness.*

## "And Then What?"

The West is not exempt from natural processes, and we ignore them at our own peril. Just as it is possible to damage natural environments beyond repair, so it is possible to harm human ecosystems as well. Too often, the harm arises from our altruistic attempts to "do good." In his 1975 essay, "Carrying Capacity as an Ethical Concept," Hardin describes the impact of Western food and medical aid on Nepal. "[Nepal's] winters are cold. The Nepalese need fuel, which they get from trees. Because more Nepalese are being kept alive now, the demand for timber is escalating. As trees are cut down, the soil under them is washed down the slopes into rivers that run through India and Bangladesh. Once the absorptive capacity of forest soil is gone, floods rise faster and to higher maxima. The flood of 1974 covered two-thirds of Bangladesh." Tens of thousands were killed.

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In 1974, Garrett Hardin published "Living on a Lifeboat." This essay dealt with the ethical problems that arise in a finite world occupied by an ever-growing human population. Imagine many lifeboats floating on the ocean — each finite in its "carrying capacity" and each more or less filled with humans. Then suppose that occupants of lifeboats other than our own are leaping into the water because they have reproduced to a level that can no longer be sustained within their lifeboat. The ethical dilemma we face is what to do about these potential "immigrants" in the water. Hardin considers three possibilities.

First, "[w]e may be tempted to try to live by the Christian ideal of being 'our brother's keeper,' or by the Marxian ideal of 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.'" This choice will lead us to take in all comers. Since people in other boats are multiplying endlessly, our lifeboat will eventually be swamped and we will all drown. Second, we may take in only a few. But which ones? "How do we *discriminate*?" Third, we may decide to take in none at all and, in fact, be prepared to repel boarders. To those who object to this last alternative, Professor Hardin has the following advice: "*Get out and yield your place to others*" [emphasis in original].

To carry Hardin's argument a vital step further, consider carefully the fact that the lifeboats are not filled with arbitrary assemblies of strangers. The occupants are, in fact, largely family members, distantly related by virtue of the forces that created modern, ethnically-based nations. In reality, we are being asked to *throw our own children overboard* to make room for the strangers in the water. We are, in an act of self-

sacrificing altruism, reducing the West to a formless commons, open to exploitation by those unwilling or unable to live within their means. If, as many believe, the human condition reflects the nature of peoples and not transitory vagaries of circumstance, then our sacrifice will not change their condition, only ours.

The tragedy of the West's moral order, based as it is on altruism, compassion and conscience, seemingly humanity's most noble instincts, is that this moral system, particularly as it influences immigration policy, has become *the* threat to the survival of the West. Our "commons" is more than just land. It is the entire social and cultural fabric of the West — the prosperity and ordered liberty created by countless generations of ancestors. Exploiting this commons confers benefits here and now to all the exploiters: sentimentalists in search of a "feel-good" buzz, free-enterprisers in search of cheap labor, universalists in search of One World, and the "huddled masses" them-selves. But, what are the consequences for posterity? What about our children? Who speaks for them?

As is fitting, Garrett Hardin has the last word:

*Before we commit ourselves to saving the life of each and every person in need, we had better ask this question: 'And then what?' That is, what about tomorrow? What about posterity? As Hans Jonas has pointed out, traditional ethics has almost entirely ignored the claims of posterity. In an overpopulated world, humanity cannot long endure under a regime governed by posterity-blind ethics. It is the essence of ecological ethics that it pays attention to posterity. ■*