

In things biological, "diversity" is generally a good thing. More species and more complexity in a given area usually lend stability to the system, protecting it from booms and crashes. Does this same situation apply to human populations? We asked biologist Garrett Hardin for an opinion.

HOW DIVERSITY SHOULD BE NURTURED

By Garrett Hardin

The word "diversity" has become, as Shelby Steele says, one of the "golden words" of our time--words like motherhood and apple pie that we are supposed to accept unthinkingly as sound coinage. But doubt-free acceptance is always dangerous.

Biologists are partly responsible for the prestige of "diversity." Seeking the highest yields, American corn-growers at one time greatly reduced the genetic diversity in their hybrid cornstocks. "Monocultures"--pure stands of grains--became the rule.

Unfortunately, monocultures are a standing invitation to the evolution of new plant diseases. In 1970 a mutant fungus suddenly appeared and almost wiped out the U.S. corn crop. (A few more days of warm, humid weather and it would have.) Then agricultural scientists backpedaled fast and introduced more genetic diversity into the stocks (even though it meant somewhat less productivity in the short term). "Diversity" became a golden word in agriculture.

Now some critics are saying we need more diversity in human populations--specifically, in the American population. But even the most casual inspection of our people reveals an amount of variety that greatly exceeds that in cultivated crops. Uniformity is not our problem. Why, then, this cry for more diversity?

It's safe to say that most of the proponents of diversity are emotionally opposed to racism. But are their actions anti-racist *in their effect*? The non-racist way to assign jobs to people is to distribute them according to individual merit. Unfortunately, of course, the problem of ascertaining merit is a difficult one; it is easily warped by prejudice. Seeking to thwart prejudice fair-minded people evade the problem by distributing positions on the basis of the relative frequencies of identifiable groups.

For awhile the mandated numbers were called "quotas." Then sensitive people dropped "quotas" and used the golden phrase "affirmative action." As the second term became recognized as the equivalent of the first, a third golden term was adopted: "diversity." But whatever term is used (and no doubt there will be others) the operational meaning is clear: society is asked to assign positions on the basis of group membership rather than individual merit. Whatever words one may attach to such a policy, operationally it amounts to racism.

What irony--that emotional anti-racism should

end in operational racism! (In the same way anti-sexists, by calling for job-assignments by the numbers, promote sexism in practice.) An old saying warned us of such tragedies: "We become what we hate."

It would be a mistake, however, to pursue this line of argument further: it could easily degenerate into a war of golden words. Instead, let's see what the actual consequences would be of promoting diversity in our already very diverse population by greatly increasing the amount of immigration.

Promoters of more diversity maintain that the more immigrants the better; and the greater the variety the richer America will become. Many of these promoters are "Europhobic"--fearful of, or revolted by, European civilization and values. They say we should stop taking in North Europeans, urging us instead to solicit the Filipinos, the Taiwanese and the Salvadorans. "And why not more Sikhs, more Turks, more Somalis, more Chileans, more Maoris, more Ibos, and more Malaysians?"

Diversity triumphant! How exciting! Anyone who opposes such proposals risks being called a racist. But possible genetic differences are not the issue. Even if there are no significant genetic differences there are formidable cultural differences. When we admit a Sikh or a Muslim, for instance, we are admitting more than a human body. We are admitting a person imbued with cultural values that are significantly different from our own.

All across central Africa there are people who believe in the justice of "female circumcision," that is, the mutilation of the genitalia of young women. The object is to make intercourse painful to women so that wives won't be tempted to be unfaithful to their husbands. Were we to admit large numbers of central Africans would they not insist on continuing the practice here? Some of them might even justify it on religious grounds. Are we really so tolerant of other religions and other cultures that we would permit the transplantation of female mutilation into our own country? I doubt it. Moreover I don't think we should be that tolerant. I submit that many increases in diversity should be rejected at the outset.

But that dreadful scenario has not been enacted here yet. Let's look at a story that developed recently in England--the Rushdie affair. The novel, *The Satanic Verses*, written by Salman Rushdie, an expatriate Indian, has much disturbed the Muslim

world with its alleged blasphemy of the Koran. Muslims are not willing to allow extra latitude to the expression of obnoxious sentiments by fictional characters. In 1988 the Ayatollah Khomeini, the ruler of Iran, condemned Rushdie's book, and soon a non-governmental Iranian organization offered \$3 million to any true believer who assassinated Rushdie *anywhere in the world*. The threat was taken seriously because there were thousands of Iranians and other Muslims living in Europe and the Americas. The author went into hiding in England and the British government assigned agents to protect him. The expense of protection must have been considerable. Worse, the Muslim threat must have had a chilling effect on the creativity of other authors and artists.

Muslim and non-Muslim logics met in a fascinating clash. Muslim governments are theocracies: religion and state are Siamese twins. What religious leaders decree in Islam, secular leaders execute. In such a world there is no freedom of religion or speech because an anti-religious act is an act of treason. It was, therefore, not surprising when a Muslim association in England called upon the local judiciary to invoke the existing English laws against blasphemy to punish Rushdie.

An English court pointed out that English laws against blasphemy refer only to blasphemy against the official English religion, protestant Christianity. There is no world state, no global religion, so there can be no such thing as "global blasphemy." If a Muslim state wants to kill Muslim blasphemers within its own borders, that is its own business. But Muslims must not expect to be allowed to reach across borders and kill Muslim blasphemers within other sovereignties. Such action is tantamount to an act of war.

Nations differ greatly in their attitudes toward tolerance. Here we encounter a paradox. *A tolerant government can survive only if it is intolerant of intolerance*. It cannot stand idly by while intolerant visitors agitate against tolerance. Tolerant people must live with this apparent inconsistency, otherwise tolerance will be destroyed.

Among the many nations much diversity should be permitted, for several reasons. For one thing, since we cannot be sure that we have all the right answers to social problems it is desirable that the human species carry out different experiments in different countries. Each country can then observe the results of experiments elsewhere.

***"...the rate of admission
should be slow enough to allow
assimilation of immigrants
and ideas to take place peacefully."***

Conceivably, the Muslim ideals of the theocratic state and criminal blasphemy might produce more happiness in the long run than our Western ideas of free speech and the separation of church and state. Allowing for this possibility we permit Muslim states to govern themselves (while we watch), and we expect them to allow us to govern ourselves (while they watch). This is not an isolationist position. We have not forgotten that much harm was done by the complete isolation of Japan during the Tokugawa period. From 1624 to 1867 Japan "went it alone" and fell further and further behind the rest of the world in technology. When Japan finally reopened her doors it took her almost a century to catch up. We don't want to repeat that error.

What every progressive nation wants from others is ideas and information. But ideas don't have to be wrapped in human form to get them from one place to another. Radio waves, printed documents, film and electronic records do the job very well indeed. There is no need to risk the civil disorder that can so easily follow from mixing substantial bodies of human beings in the same location, when these beings bring with them passionately held beliefs and practices that are irreconcilable with those of the receiving nation. Perhaps really small numbers of immigrants of almost any belief are safely admissible, but the rate of admission should be slow enough to allow assimilation of immigrants and ideas to take place peacefully.

Any proposal to limit diversity in the population is sure to be criticized as provincial, parochial or chauvinistic. In a sense, it may be. But notice that diversity-limitation passes this test of a good policy: "Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

Should, for instance, a theocratic Muslim country admit large numbers of American immigrants who believe passionately in free speech and the separation of church and state? Should a central African country that practices "female circumcision" admit large numbers of immigrant American feminists?

Should a polygamous country admit large numbers of outspoken Christians who condemn polygamy? Should a country that practices animal sacrifice admit large numbers of immigrants who belong to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals?

The answers to these questions should be beyond dispute. Diversity is the opposite of unity, and unity is a prime requirement for national survival in the short run. In the long run, beliefs must be susceptible to change, but massive immigration is a dangerous way to bring about change in ideas and practices.

To nurture both unity and progress a double policy should be embraced: *Great diversity worldwide ; limited diversity within each nation*

* * * * *