

The Social Contract

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The Social Contract

is published quarterly

© 2019 by The Social Contract Press

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A Note from the Editor

Garrett Hardin: An Appreciation

In December 1968, Garrett Hardin (1915–2003) published an essay in the journal *Science*, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” wherein he called attention to “the damage that innocent actions by individuals can inflict on the environment.” This paper was widely translated, becoming one of the most famous essays written in the second-half of the twentieth century. Hardin, Professor of Human Ecology at the University of California at Santa Barbara, came to influence people in the nascent environmental and immigration reform movements. Many will recall Hardin’s First Law of Human Ecology: “we can never do merely one thing. Any intrusion into nature has numerous effects, many of which are unpredictable.”

Contributors to this issue of *The Social Contract* include environmental scientist Leon Kolankiewicz, former Colorado governor Richard D. Lamm, and immigration writer Brenda Walker, who draw attention to the vision of Garrett Hardin. We also include Craig Straub’s interview with Professor Hardin.

In “Smokescreens and Evasions,” first published in the journal *World Issues* (1978) and included in his book, *Naked Emperors: Essays of a Taboo-Stalker* (Los Altos, California: William Kaufmann, Inc., 1982), Professor Hardin observed:

I know of no thoughtful person who would (if he could) stop *all* immigration. The benefits of variety, of periodic fresh infusions of new peoples and new ideas are real. No adventurous, lively nation wants to forgo them. But how many immigrants are needed to secure these benefits? A thousand per year? Ten thousand? Surely no more....

In fact, the annual immigration into the United States exceeds the immigration into all 150-odd other nations combined. To reduce the U.S. immigration rate to a fraction of its present value would merely be to bring our country into line with international norms. Entry is rigidly and narrowly rationed by almost all other countries.

[For example, how] can we achieve anything like national unity if we lack the courage to insist that the language of the majority—the vast majority be it noted—must be the only language for exercising the franchise of citizenship? We have become a passel of poltroons who quail at the word “minority.” We have lost our common sense.

As Charles Munger, vice chairman of the board of Berkshire Hathaway, Inc., wrote in his foreword to Professor Hardin’s book, *The Immigration Dilemma: Avoiding the Tragedy of the Commons* (1995):

One does not have to agree with every word Hardin writes to be much better for being forced to think through consequences—and one is surely right to seek answers, as he rigorously does, to a standard question: “And then what?” ■

Wayne Lutton, Ph.D.