

The Conservation Of Diversity

GARRETT HARDIN

Since *diversity* is so highly praised these days, it would be well for us to examine the environment needed to foster and conserve this virtue. Many people think that *One World* — a single political sovereignty governing the whole world — will be achieved some day. For the sake of argument, assume that it will. Many Americans unthinkingly presume that such a brave new world would be democratically organized: “one person, one vote.” Is this presumption justified? Year after year the studies of Freedom House show that the great majority of the nations are *not* democratically run. In the formation of a single sovereignty, democracy would probably not survive the bargaining of the major non-democratic powers. Diversity of governance would actually be diminished in achieving One World. No doubt there are other virtues that the present majority of the world’s peoples would not support. For the foreseeable future, diversity can be sustained only if our world continues to be one of many nations. Unity within a nation requires considerable uniformity in beliefs and practices: note the official American motto, *E pluribus unum*. Unity within nations, coupled with diversity among nations, is surely the best recipe for evolutionary progress in the species as a whole.

Defending a nation means supporting the integrity of its borders and the legitimacy of immigration control. Enthusiastic One Worlders sometimes stoop to attacking the defenders of nationhood by questioning their motives. The air becomes polluted with shrieks of *racist, ethnocentric, isolationist, nativist, bigoted, prejudiced, and xenophobic*. But abuse is not argument: we must work out the probable consequences of alternative policies. Name-calling has to give way to analysis.

To ambitious reformers who want to tackle the whole globe at once, I recommend a passage written a generation before the United States came into official

existence. In 1759, before he was an economist and while he was what we today call an ‘ethicist,’ Adam Smith said:

The administration of the great system of the universe, however, the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings, is the business of God, and not of men. To man is allotted a much humbler department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers, and to the narrowness of his comprehension — the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, his country: that he is occupied in contemplating the more sublime, can never be an excuse for neglecting the more humble department...

This was far from being a new thought. Terence, a great Roman dramatist, said much the same thing more briefly in the second century B.C.: “Charity begins at home.” Though charity should begin at home, it need not end there. But should it extend so far as to admit an unlimited number of immigrants into a sovereign nation? Refusal to admit needy outsiders, while it may safeguard the interests of the citizens of the petitioned nation, often seems cruel to the petitioners and their sympathetic champions. Yet it will be maintained here that, in the long run, controlling the borders of our nation — indeed, of all nations — best serves the interests of the posterity of *all* peoples.

This is not an isolationist position: it presupposes the free interchange of information among all countries, as well as international trade of material things across borders. (Trade must not be confused with charity, for in trade there is always an obvious *quid pro quo*.) Visits for the purpose of increasing mutual understanding would also be encouraged, but every country would be granted the right to decide for itself which immigrants should be granted permanent residency. Though this position was once the orthodoxy everywhere, in the last century it has been under attack.... Exchanges of information, fair trade, visiting and minimal immigration — these are highly recommended. But a civilization is not sustainable if it is at the mercy of uninvited invasions, peaceful or otherwise.

Harm has been done to rational discourse by

Garrett Hardin (1915-2003), a professor of human ecology at the University of California, was the author of 27 books and over 350 articles. He received numerous awards over the course of a distinguished career.

camera-dominated journalism. Photography convincingly shows us the horrors of starvation; it is very poor at documenting the eventual results of displacing thousands of citizen-workers with fresh immigrants who can be bought for less. Conceivably, skillful journalists might depict the human consequences of immigration in a country that seems never to have cured the unemployment problem, but few journalists make the attempt. As members of what has been called the ‘symbolic class,’ journalists are under no threat of being displaced from their jobs, because it takes more than a generation to become a competent symbolist. Few writers and photographers have a sufficiently sensitive view of the needs of the larger community. Or of posterity. Journalism is dangerously myopic. Our civilization desperately needs to escape the tyranny of the camera.

“The future,” Dennis Gabor said, “cannot be predicted, but futures can be invented.” Statistical studies can correctly identify trends, but they cannot say which trends will be continued. No statement about society’s

future is true in the same sense that the prediction of a future eclipse of the sun is true. As we contemplate the possible futures for humanity we must all decide to what extent we are content to be like “the Man from Mars,” a frighteningly intelligent, purely objective being who, from a great psychological distance, “calls them as he sees them” and does nothing. In human affairs, apparent objectivity can easily lead to fatalism, and fatalism undermines the foundations of democracy.

The alternative is to be ‘participant observers’ of the earthly drama, conserving as much as we can of the best of our civilization for posterity to enjoy. Since reproduction mixes the posterity of many genetic lines, saving something for my posterity ultimately means saving it for all posterity. No matter how family-centered my motives may be, I cannot help but benefit (or harm) everyone’s posterity. ■

[From the Preface of *The Immigration Dilemma: Avoiding the Tragedy of the Commons*. Washington, D.C.: Federation for American Immigration Reform, 1995]

‘Tragedy of the Commons’ Author Dies

CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Garrett Hardin never minced words in presenting his unvarnished view of humanity’s impact on the planet. And he was no less direct in planning his death. On September 14, 2003, he and his wife took their own lives at their home in Santa Barbara, California. Hardin was 88, his wife Jane was 81. Both were in very poor health.

Hardin is best known for his 1968 article in *Science*, “The Tragedy of the Commons” (December 13, 1968, p. 1243). It argued that if everyone had free access to common property, the resource would be lost to all. But Hardin was immensely influential in a host of related causes, including environmentalism, population control, abortion rights, and restrictions on immigration. His hard-headed approach to the competition for resources won him notoriety as well as fame — as when he suggested that, if rich people let poor people into their “lifeboat,” all will sink. “The human species viewed as a whole has been a disaster for the Earth,” he said in a 1996 interview.

He “pushed very hard, was an innovative thinker, and is certainly somebody we’re going to miss,” says Stanford University biologist Paul Ehrlich, whose 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*, also stoked the debate over population and the environment. Herman Daly, an economist at the University of Maryland, College Park, says that Hardin showed a new breed of “ecological economists” the importance of “giving the welfare of future generations a weight in moral decisions.”

Hardin received a Ph.D. in microbiology from Stanford University in 1941 after studying zoology at the University of Chicago. He taught at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he was professor of human ecology, until his retirement in 1978. He remained active, however, and in 1986 he and his wife helped found Californians for Population Stabilization. His output totaled 27 books and 350 articles.

Friends said the Hardins practiced what they preached by collecting rainwater to drink, recycling, composting, and eschewing newspapers because they squandered newsprint. They were reportedly members of the Hemlock Society and their deaths occurred a week after their 62nd wedding anniversary. They leave four children. ■

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