

Sept. 9, Intro. to Environmental Studies: Class Discussion Notes

Garrett Hardin: "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968, *Science Magazine*)

- 1- "A technical solution may be defined as one that requires a change only in the techniques of the natural sciences, demanding little or nothing in the way of change in human values or ideas or morality." (**Can you think of other environmental problems *can* be solved by technical solutions? Others that can't?**)
- 1- "Most people who anguish over the population problem are trying to find a way to avoid the evils of overpopulation without relinquishing any of the privileges they now enjoy. They think that farming the seas or developing new strains of wheat will solve the problem—technologically...the solution they seek cannot be found."
- 2- "Can Bentham's goal of 'the greatest good for the greatest number' be realized? No...it is not mathematically possible to maximize for two (or more) variables at the same time." (**Is this a fair critique?**)
- 3- "Natural selection commensurates the incommensurables." (**What does this mean? Do you agree with Hardin's thesis that 'man must imitate this process'?**)
- **What is the tragedy of the commons? To which policy issues does it currently apply?**
- 6- "Our epicyclic solution [to the problem of the commons as cesspool] is to augment statutory law with administrative law." (**What does this mean?**)
- 8- **Why does Hardin say that solutions grounded in appeals to conscience are "psychologically pathogenic"? Do you agree that "responsibility is a verbal counterfeit for a substantial *quid pro quo*."**
- 9 - "...mutual coercion, mutually agreed upon by the majority of people affected."

Lynn White: "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" (1967, *Science Magazine*)

- **Why does White open with the anecdote about rabbits in the British countryside?**
- 2- "There are many calls to action, but specific proposals, however worthy as individual items, seem too partial, palliative, negative: ban the bomb, tear down the billboards, give the Hindus contraceptives and tell them to eat their sacred cows...The "Wilderness area" mentality invariably advocates deep-freezing an ecology...But neither atavism nor prettification will cope with the ecologic crisis of our time."
- 3 - "we should try to clarify our thinking by looking...at the presuppositions that underlie modern technology and science. Science was traditionally aristocratic, speculative, intellectual in intent; technology was lower-class, empirical, action-oriented. The quite sudden fusion of these two" begs the question of "whether a democratized world can survive its own implications. Presumably we cannot unless we rethink our axioms."
- 6- **The Judeo-Christian legacy: humankind as dominator of nature. Do you agree that "Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen"?**
- "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects." **What is this saying?**
- 8- "Despite Copernicus, all the cosmos rotates around our little globe." **Is this bad?**
- 10- "I propose Francis as a patron saint for ecologists" **Do you agree? Disagree?**